



Student Activism in Higher Education

The politics of students' role in hegemonic university change

by

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Abstract

Student participation and activism in higher education has faced successive challenges in its recent history, including Voluntary Student Unionism, state legislature removing student representation, and in response to the stark global challenges of COVID-19. In 2021, student participation has risen again, coupled with an increasing imperative for global democratic governance revisioning. In response to this context, this doctoral research makes several significant original contributions to knowledge in light of this change. First, it examines the largely unexplored landscape of student participation in governance through ethnography. Moreover, it deploys an increasingly displaced methodological frame of Gramscian social science and philosophy of praxis. Finally, through its acknowledgement of the ongoing cultural significance of activism and hegemony, it summons the possibility for fundamentally repurposing higher education.

This thesis is nestled in the context of a rapidly shifting higher education sector, where the position of students is continuously reimaged. Situated in accelerated late-stage capitalism, powered by neoliberal impulses and managerialist institutions, the role and position of the student is narrowed. In Australia, the ongoing revisioning of university purpose and politics has enabled a burrowing in of ideologies about what and who students are and can be, what purpose higher education and academia serve, and what the production of citizens can and will look like. In this context, the complexity of the relationship between student politics, student power and student activism should not be understated. Despite varied responses from students, under the weight of globalising hegemonic political forces, tighter control mechanisms vice-grip the university sector. Student politics, student power and student activism emerge as distinct and situated responses to and for the institutions themselves. In this regard, at Flinders University, the context for this ethnographic study, student politicians have circled back to a point of owning the controlling interest in the 'student voice' from inside the University's

structures. Here, student politicians chosen for their conformity with the hegemonic ideologues are rendered ineffectual and antithetical to the radical golden age of the 1960s. The 1960s and 1970s student radical period is examined for context and clarity, and to position the differential movement of students' political positioning inside higher education. Detailing and examining this context, this thesis draws from situated ethnographic research, more than 24 in-depth interviews with current and past students, and on the nexus of literature and praxis necessary for understanding the social world of a university and its dissidents. Understanding the context at Flinders University in terms of its culture, politics and economics over time are an essential part of this study. Moreover, earnest empirical research provides the necessary building blocks to create praxis which lasts longer than the flash in the pan of the 1960s radical moment.

This thesis combines, in an innovative form, Marxist sociology through applied and embedded ethnographic praxis, and the political theory of Antonio Gramsci as a fundamental and underpinning support for the ethnographic work. Each section draws together a range of theory, practice and possibility in a motivating and challenging form. Political by design, the thesis works to robustly support, through an understanding of quality theory, a serious and enlightened praxis of possibility that challenges the position of the student in higher education. The tropes of public good, freedom and integrity are now found decayed and embodied in new modes, reinforcing the position of the CEO-dictator. This doctoral research, jutting from this cacophonous background, reasserts praxis and provide a meaningful case for understanding university student activism and politics. It does this through a contextualised, historically informed and robust critique of students' relative positions and their ability to perform initiative under hegemony, which is necessarily political. In so doing, it contextualises the student career-politician as the embodiment of state corruption and hegemonic reproduction and identifies the role and possibility for the organic intellectual activist. This realises a Gramscian imaginary of student *qua* class leader. Indeed, regardless of the level of agreement on epistemic

frameworks, the deployment of Gramscian theory provides a shared space to intellectually dwell and labour over students' positionality and politics in the time of COVID-19 and gives some hope that a post-COVID campus might emerge that values the voices of students and staff in the academy. The mythical 1960s imaginings of broadening curricular model, emergent pedagogic process, and new forms of inclusion and robust discussion may once again surface. This educative movement may again activate new modes of interjection, injection and interference that enable a new form of grassroots educating and collegial social uprising that harnesses universities as spaces of possibility which may create conditions for enlightened social revolution and a collective saving of the planet and its human inhabitants. This is an education not simply for knowledge's sake, nor for the reproduction of a select elite, but a realisation of the power for education to enlighten social groups on their social conditions and the culture of their society. The organic intellectual is a direct reimagining of the hegemon's traditional intellectual, towards a location for the production of a better culture, society and planet. This thesis not only provides an intellectual challenge but is positioned as a motivator for cultural change and conversation.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature 

Date 18 October 2021

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Finally, and importantly, I wish to acknowledge that this thesis was produced on the lands of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide plains. I pay my respect to the cultural, heritage and living beliefs, knowledges and understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I wish to honour those who walked before, Elders past and present. Australia always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

List of previously published works and appendices

Appendix 1: Brabazon, T., & Cornelius-Bell, A. (2020, June 24). *Student Partnerships and Activism* [Podcast]. <https://tarabrabazon.libsyn.com/student-partnerships-and-activism>

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Appendix 3: Cornelius-Bell, A. (2021). University Governance, Radicalism and the Market Economy: Where Student Power Gave Way to Economics and Educative Possibility to the Corporate University. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 8(2), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v8i2p76>

Appendix 4: Cornelius-Bell, A., & Bell, P. A. (in press). The academic precariat post-COVID-19. *Fast Capitalism*.

Appendix 5: Brabazon, T., Cornelius-Bell, A., & Armstrong, E. (2021). The Pandemic PhD programme Reading and thinking about the Celebrity Intellectual (and COVID-19). *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 8(1), 212–235.
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Prologue

A restructure?

What is that?

The word came up in conversation with some fellow students, PhD candidates in the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law; an alien word attached to an abstract series of paragraphs not meant for us, which would soon herald the end of our blissful ignorance to the structures of the University. A proposal, sent to academic staff, saw radical shifts to the structure and purpose of academic roles in the University, roles which had stood like stewards of ancient empires overlooking the plight of working people for decades. The unshakable ground of academia suddenly felt a little less stable as we realised on reading that what was to be done would disrupt all that we knew of those safe formal structures embodied in the stoic academic.

Visions of corduroy and tweed with a billiard reclined in a dilapidated fabric sofa for one, piles of books and manuscripts adorning the tables with a few long-haired students leaning or sitting in a circle, would no longer suffice as a vision of academic life. The new order, a palpable, troubled modernity had arrived. Even without yet understanding the nature and meaning of the changes to come, it was clear that something had disrupted the University. Where previously there had been a subdued hustle and bustle, occasional muffled conversation, or overwhelmingly loud gaggle of undergraduate students gave way to an eerie silence. A new feeling of fear and shock in a kind of acknowledged resignation gripped the institution. Professors who had seemed so noble and powerful in their command of knowledge, their understanding of the world around them while simultaneously existing outside of it, quickly grappled to deploy theoretical understandings of what had hit them. None provided consolation. Indeed, little logic or rationality could be applied to what was to be done, an organisational disestablishment of nearly every staff member in the faculty, mirrored in its horror across the entire institution.

I realise now that we had been long in line for a shake-up. Even after experience of the public sector's many organisational changes, private organisation's acquisitions and vanishings, there felt to be something impenetrable about universities. I had attended three of South Australia's universities leading to the point that I had finally enrolled in my PhD. Each one had its own speciality, its own feeling. Adelaide had a hallowed, ancient forbearance. South Australia had a modern, upbeat, professional edge. And,

Flinders had a knowing, but respectful, community landscape. It was at Flinders where I made my academic home, though it was an uneasy coming to higher education. Now, this space which felt not quite old enough to be sacred, but not young enough to be disrupted, was to be turned upside down – and I was not on the inside. Originating in study of screen and media, minoring in sociology, and developing an interest in the sociology of education through an Honours degree, I was not a respected member of the academy. While my academic achievement had been respectable, the community feeling of the University was just that: feeling. There was a pretention amongst the academic staff in the faculty, one which did not easily melt away, even in the face of losing their positions. I was an outsider, in ethnographic terms, but nonetheless empathetic to members of my then aspirational home. While empathy is not to be sneezed at, it does not action make. I was certainly an unlikely respondent to any monumental shifts in the academy, having never meaningfully engaged in processes of organisational change, nor ‘activating’ against much beyond the occasional climate rally or refugee protest to which I had been engaged mostly by political friends. There was something, though, in that early moment – reading the email not meant for me, looking over a proposal which would disestablish many who I had held with respect – something which said this was wrong. Maybe a sense of personal injustice in that these academics had their chance and where was mine? Or perhaps a feeling that the role of academia should not be challenged in this way. Regardless, I had decided that investigation was needed. One could not make rash decisions in the academy; a thoroughly researched position was required.

Naturally, I printed the forwarded copies of the ‘Change Proposal’ documents on the staff printer. Perhaps two of my first acts of real resistance. Printing confidential documents on a printer meant for workers of a job I did not have. In these early days there was little to go on but a series of staff identification numbers and a statement of ‘affected’ or ‘not affected’. Fortunately, having some tech savvy, locating staff by their ID numbers was not too great a challenge. A third act of resistance. I was soon the first in the School of Education with a complete list of ‘affected’ positions, while I had not been quick to advertise this fact – still feeling that I had been just a little naughty – my fellow PhD students had caught wind that something big was happening. Quickly, supervision meeting after supervision meeting, PhD students were coming to me to figure out if they needed to send kind words to their supervisors, or perhaps more mercenarily, if they would need to make contingencies for their supervision. It was not long until staff were coming to me too. Indeed, staff from across the faculty had started to recognise that I was a holder of information. While I am sure that other staff had done some piecing together, there was something easier in going to a PhD student for help. After all, I was a student, not an academic.

Knowing something quickly became knowing a lot. That was when the axe fell and suddenly, I knew too much, not just about affected positions, but about deals which were being cut, trades which were being made, and most interestingly letters which were being written. At that stage, my then primary supervisor had become quite 'active', himself writing to Deans, collating information and at the most extreme staging a coup. Models of academic activism were beginning to surface. A kind of primordial response to a shattering shift in the systems of the University. Here came my first experience of unions. It seemed, little to my knowledge, that there were issues of procedural fairness. This felt right, but was procedure the only problem? A response was to be mounted. And I had information. Suddenly I was talking to union leaders and sharing stories which were definitely not anonymised enough. Fellow students were beginning to say things to me about my position in all this, that I needed to be careful, but that I was doing good work. I suppose I was too far in, though I do not remember after those first few acts of resistance giving way to a threshold of 'bad deeds'. I was helping, and I had begun to write meticulous letters, often spending hours of the nights researching and writing prose. It felt as though I had been writing a second PhD: empirically researching legislation, arguments, university systems and structures. This was a trial by fire and it felt as though everything was at stake. I had written, and received acknowledgment, to the Dean of School, Executive Dean, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Deputy-Vice Chancellors, Vice-Chancellor, Secretary, Chancellor and Minister. I wanted to stand up for what I knew of higher education, what I knew of the purpose of universities, and what I believed I had in my future. I had been told my letters were powerful combinations of emotion and fact, and even compelling (though often in a patronising way). I started to meet up with other students who were also writing and organising. A powerful connection was to a fellow Faculty student who decided that a letter to the University's Council was in order, and it was to be signed by everyone.

Questions of what an organisational restructure was became clear. Ideological attacks from a neoliberal Liberal Federal Government, enacted by the embodiment of corporatism, our Chancellor. Process, which had been injunctioned and changed many times, it seemed was just a stumbling block on our way towards radical organisational shift. A new language of managerialism was replacing the fabric of our university. This was the enemy. But how could students, or staff for that matter, contend with the awesome might of hegemonic ideology? An answer surfaced in an unlikely form of a student who had, she professed, been an activist 'her entire life'. She knew, at least she claimed, about the forces of neoliberalism and how to rally against them. At this point I had become quite well known at the University, even to members of the senior executive team. Popularity, or perhaps infamy, was now my hallmark. Strategic organisation was my

objective, yet strangely hopeless we all felt. New tactics seemed like a godsend, and after consulting with my fellow academic activists, we decided to follow the advice of this new student. After all, we had tried the academic part – writing with dissenting voices – and little had seemed to hold.

Suddenly, energies that were focussed on offering powerful institutional critique, targeting and building support from faculty, and engaging with students who had a basic intellectual framework to engage in academic activism was diverted. Rather than targeting students who wanted to change things – within, through writing, or without, through lobbying – and offering them support through networks of information and strategy, we had begun to embody the radical student of the 1960s. Engaging the networks we had built was easy, and summoning rooms full of students and staff was no challenge. I should have registered that there was a polite scepticism of our new trajectory from the academics who were just a little guilty of ivory tower critique, but I took it as that, a hesitation to getting their hands dirty. Little did I realise that their hesitation came against the radical and loud action proposed.

At one point we had gathered the union president and vice president, student association leadership, experienced activists from Socialist Alternative, a Trotskyist student political group, and students from across the state, of international relations, education, science, history, politics, data science and engineering. This room contained the most diverse clustering of students and staff from across the institution. The reason for such an eclectic gathering? A discussion of protest action and a way to get to the University Council meeting to deliver our complaints in person, a true abandonment of the academic ideals we had set out in the early days. Suddenly, the room full of experienced protestors were suggesting placards and slogans, actions that had included chaining ourselves to the doors of the executive offices, defacing cars in the car park and various other, equally radical, anti-establishment protest. Fortunately, none of the latter ever eventuated. It was decided, then, that we would gather as many as possible to the next meeting of Council – and non-violently stand in protest during the delivery of speeches. A toning down of that radical, if hijacked, general ferment. Suddenly my house became the site of organising: paint, placards, and large swathes of cloth emerged. It really did seem that this was a good course of action – after all, it was productive. Given none of us had real experience in organising activism why wouldn't it? And we definitely produced some pretty signs.

It would prove to be a waste.

Protest day came sooner than you could have imagined. Then the wheels fell off.

Speeches to Council, which had been contested until the last minute, were approved – and the bite of our ‘silenced student’ action was removed. The support of more than 285 people eventuated to being less than 20. The students, who were to be the body, the organising force, were fewer in number than the staff. Ultimately, our strike action fizzled. Successfully, maybe, the Vice-Chancellor came – though I suspect it was not to protest the restructure. The day ended in screaming, as our eager activist, come organisational saviour, broke down shouting at the Chancellor. It had ended. They had won.

Introduction

Governance, radicalism and the market economy:

Where power gave way to economics and possibility in the corporate university

Students are actively denied access to the tools and resources of cultural change under hegemony as universities fail to engage students in democratic processes. This thesis begins with a bleak picture of the current landscape in higher education and students' role under hegemony. Starting from an understanding of Gramscian social theory and developing through a conceptualisation of students' initiative during the formative 'radical' years of the 1960s, I postulate that our contemporary higher education spaces are not only turbulent, but destined for a slow death: academics are under increasing pressure, students are facing constant change and global uncertainty, and the ugly face of state hegemony is continually threatening to the very *being* of higher education in nature, purpose and action. It is in this context that this thesis emerges: a study positioned *after* organisational reform that sees students in disarray under new configurations and conceptions of hegemonic forces affecting the very nature of student capacity to take initiative. Here, the politics of students' role in hegemonic (university) change becomes an essential microcosm of broader moves which disestablish the student position in contemporary, capitalistic, corporatised and neoliberal institutions. This thesis provides a configuration of students' position under university hegemony, as an extension of the state, and examines through empirical data the current possibility and politics of students' ability to *change* hegemonic forces.

This introduction serves two purposes. First, it introduces the thesis in robust terms, with an introduction to the original contribution to knowledge and a description of the organisation of the thesis. Second, it provides overarching detail on the necessity of hearing students through interviews and the substantive contribution that student voices make to this

thesis. It offers an elaborated introduction, drawing on data used throughout the thesis, to contextualise and position students by drawing from their own voices.

This thesis makes several original contributions to knowledge. Through methodological developments, a configuration of cultural studies and substantive and long-term field work, it establishes students' positions and a detailed account of students' role and positionality in the manifestation and harnessing of political power for initiative under what has become a strong hegemonic force of Gramscian fears. It does this through a cultural studies paradigm, employing sociological methods and robust theoretical complications, which modernise and support the contemporary use of Gramscian theory. Moreover, through the use of methods similar to Gramsci's own, this thesis positions itself in contemporary higher education, in particular at one South Australian university in Bedford Park, enduring a serious commitment to ethnographic fieldwork in which data are presented both in narrative form, per the prologue, and from rich in-depth interview data with participants in the field. In parallel, the thesis examines a changing political landscape; first broadly, in particular in Australian higher education, and then specifically, turning to an examination of the changes and developments to the hegemonic forces of universities since their 'radical era' during the 1960s. Later, leveraging this situated understanding of higher education, it draws on the voices of 24 students living and acting in various modes and roles across the studied University in positions of relative agency under university hegemony: from student politicians, through to organic intellectuals expressing communality and strength against hegemonic change, namely after the turn of strong neoliberal, managerialist and capitalist change. This thesis develops to an understanding of the *production* of organic intellectuals, the role of students in university governance, the training grounds of student politics, the departure from a radical spirit in the 1960s, and a conceptualisation of the university through its *Acts* from its bloody colonial roots. Here, the thesis offers two, further, substantial contributions to knowledge. First, it presents an

exploration of the emergent positionality of students under hegemony, which ultimately, still, provides opportunities for initiative, community building, and radical change. Second, it offers an understanding of the necessity for change, for both students and staff, in higher education to avoid the catastrophic consequences of a disinterested, irrelevant, bleak and dead university in late modernity.

This thesis is organised around a central spine of theory, reanimating theoretical developments from the early 1900s that had a deep and important impact on the *New Left* social theory of the 1960s. The deployment of Gramscian theory is of particular significance and requires detailed explication and operationalisation. In conceptualising the role of state and ruling class hegemony and its affective reign over civil society through combined methods of *position* and *education*, it enables a powerful understanding of the conditions *under* which students (and academics) may be conceptualised in the role of state hegemonic reproduction (Gramsci, 1996). This is explored in a thorough Gramscian methodology both in terms of theoretical explanation and deployment of a (modernised) Gramscian social science, but also in terms of Gramsci's own modality of historical and contextual necessity in the 'case' of any theoretical explication and development. In this regard, Chapter 1 activates two purposes in this research. First, it introduces Gramsci *qua* activist, scholar and prisoner in the Italy of the 1910s, placing him in a rich, brief, history of the politics surrounding and *containing* him during his relatively short but influential life. Second, it turns to a robust understanding of Gramscian social theory and its legacy. Gramsci is explored through an understanding of Italian socialism, specifically its relationship to Gramscian social theory and Marxist orthodoxy. Gramsci's cultural moment provides a contextual introduction to his *organic intellectual*, a cornerstone conceptual piece of necessity. The chapter then turns to an examination of Gramsci's organisation of society and the role of *enforcement* in maintaining stratified civil and state society, a brief exploration of the revolutionary period, and the role of (post)modern theoretical development.

Necessarily, the thesis then turns to an exploration of the *fall* of the *New Left* and the emergent contextual development propelled by fifty years of history since the emergence of anglophone revolutionary moments. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of Australia's political landscape, particularly in the face of current leadership and the era of recent waves of crisis. Subsequently, it turns to an exploration of fractured common sense¹, and the anti-intellectual turn cultivated by lax right-wing leadership, itself a further enabler of the grim conditions facing higher education. The chapter then explores the landscape of *late-stage capitalism* after the rise of the neoliberal subaltern and its capturing of mainstream hegemony, the positioning of subsequent divisive and dangerous turns in the politics of the state and corruptions and mutations of the ruling class, which ensure hegemonic reproduction at further expense to civil society. The position, here, of common sense as a method of maintaining the structure of social order is essential, as it positions and configures humanity, and human initiative, under hegemony as allies and, worse, champions of neoliberal, accelerated, divisive and populist politics. Moreover, Chapter 2 explores what this thesis is *not* through an exploration of the (post)modern, (post)structural, (post)neoliberal, (post)colonial and (post)everything era, positioning it squarely in the theoretical terrain of the *New Left* reimagined under late stage accelerated, devastating, capitalism. Ultimately, the chapter paints university hegemony in a new light, expanding Gramsci to see the new management class of universities as an extension, by their very nature, of state society and ruling class hegemony. Here, students' positionality under hegemony is particularly key, as the thesis explores the role and possibility of students' *political* initiative. Building on the methodological roots of Chapter 1, the subsequent chapter

¹ Throughout this thesis 'common sense' refers to Gramsci's definition of the term: '... there exist multiple elements of "conscious leadership", but no one of them is predominant or transcends the level of a given social stratum's "popular science" – it's "common sense" or traditional conception of the world.' (Gramsci, 1996, pp. 196–197). In this regard, the 'common sense' refers to the 'sense' developed *under* hegemony and thus inherently not liberatory *nor for* that social group. 'Common sense', juxtaposed with 'good sense' *as for* a social group, is positioned as a tool of hegemonic enforcement as is explored in Chapter 1.

also parallels the method of Gramsci's own writing, explicating the use of a *modern* yet faithful reproduction the philosophy of praxis.

Drawing on ethnographic tools, the thesis then moves to an articulation of method. Building on an understanding of Gramsci's social theory, which itself is an orthodox embrace of Gramscian method, Chapter 3 examines the role and work of the substantive data collection and mode of presentation for the remainder of the thesis. Here, the thesis draws from the ethnographic, historically situated, and praxis-informed work of Gramsci himself in articulating a method whereby the field is painted in context, the societal conditions are explicated in detail and robust, *conscious* work can take place to understand, interpret and develop the field. In this sense, the methods for this thesis draw from a considerable variety of sources. Triangulation is offered through the use of ethnographic field notes, narrative interpretations, interviews and grey literature. Of note in this chapter, is the nature and purpose of interviews, with a specific focus on the value of a wide variety of interview participants who were situationally connected to the research context in Bedford Park and had commonalities and connections to the researcher during the study. The interviews themselves were essential parts of capturing multi-perspectival and thorough conceptions from the field. In this way, they form a compelling *spine* to the thesis as a salient navigability throughout. The method, overall, connects both the historical modality of Gramsci with the empirical and high order data collection of sustained and purposive ethnographic field work. In this sense, the production of this thesis has been uniquely informed by both a rich understanding of the history and context of the study itself, and by substantial and valuable empirical research, which has been conducted alongside it. Moreover, the chapter explores the use of interviewing, during and after the writing of this thesis. I probe how accuracy and interpretation entwine when presenting rich ethnographic and interview data. This thesis, throughout, draws on the voices of participants offering their experiences in an informed and ethnographic mode alongside the voice of the singular

researcher, which provides simultaneous triangulation and robust exploration and notation of the use of *context* in this configuration of the philosophy of praxis. Finally, Chapter 3 turns to an exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 global health crisis on the empirical data collection and writing of this thesis. In particular, it explains the emergency response to COVID-19 and the necessity for ethical continuation of the data collection during the pandemic, ultimately leading to higher quality and rich contemporary data informed by a globally changing scene.

The deployment of the philosophy of praxis requires substantive commitment to historical and contextual understanding of the research field. In this regard, Chapter 4 examines the manicured history of Australian universities, and their ivy imaginary origins, against the vestigial colonial exploitation which positions them. The chapter offers serious attention to the erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's knowledge and a literal violation and murder of them under the banner of hegemony, informed partly by the recommendation of colonial 'researchers'. Subsequently, the chapter turns to the uneven and, in some instances, unwanted development of Australia's universities. At first, the uneasy and privileged development of the University of Sydney, which was a protracted and difficult political battle with colonial government, against the wishes of the populous, to develop a university modelled on Oxbridge. In particular, while it explicates the development of the University of Sydney, it pays attention to the development of the University Act, its governance structure and position in society. The *Act* interestingly positioned Australia's fledgling institutions as areligious and, to an extent, of novel governance structure. By contrast, the University of Melbourne is depicted, importantly, as the first university in Australia that was desired by its constituents and developed on principles of novelty and a commitment to educative ends for the ruling class. Next, the chapter discusses the development of the first South Australian university, itself a conjuring of Oxbridge and further developed on the physical and governance structures of Australia's extant universities. The development of the

University of Adelaide provides particular bearing on the development of the university, which is the context of this study, as Flinders University was, in its original form, a campus of the University of Adelaide. Here, the old and the new are further explored as one of Australia's newer universities first comes into existence. Then, the unblemished history of the development of Flinders University is presented, a telling of its history as an experimental university proposed for the influx of new students entering universities during the 1960s. Finally, Chapter 4 attends to the changing landscape of the higher education sector, from its first 'boom' in the 1960s through to the age of continuous reform and change. Attention is given to the major reforms adopted under successive Labor (centre-left) governments in Australia and the forward march of neoliberal managerialism in its reconfiguration of universities.

An alternative history is then provided, situated in the context of Flinders University. Building from the manicured history of the glossy marketing book and *flat* naturalised history of the university, Chapter 5 provides a people's history of the new university. Drawing from a variety of sources, importantly including student publications and the voices of four students who attended the university during its founding years, from 1966 to 1975, this chapter depicts the nitty gritty of being a 'student radical' of golden age memory. Here, students' role in the institution is explored in detail, understanding the movements of students under then university hegemony, the initiative expressed, and the activism of students as a necessity of *being in* higher education. Attention is paid to the foundation of student media, an essential development at the time as South Australian press remained under tight singularly-Murdoch owned control, and, through examination of grey literature retrieved from both private collection and special collections, the thesis examines the establishment of the Empire Times student publication. Moreover, it explores students' early struggles for representation in faculties and schools at the Bedford Park campus. It then turns to a seminal moment in the University's history: the weeks of the student occupation of the Registry building, the University's main administration space,

and students' discovery of classified military relationships between the then Vice-Chancellor and the United States Department of Defence. Next, the chapter examines the work of female students in their activism, creation of space in the institution, and struggle for authentic recognition and equal rights, both during the occupation of the Registry, and in parallel to the 1960s and 1970s struggle of students to position workers as the harbingers of revolution. The treatment of women by fellow students, the police and national surveillance organisations is explored in detail; further, and a tale of particular significance is visited in the development and democratisation of Australia's first women's studies courses and the organic intellectual organising of the development of women's centres and collaborative learning and support spaces. Finally, the chapter explores some of the key patterns of student activism during the 1960s and early 1970s and from this basis it is asserted that spaces and patterns of organisation developed at Flinders University *then* hold with student activists *now*, albeit in new configurations and suffering from various political corruptions.

Student participation in activism and governance shifted into new political modes in the intervening years between the 1960s and the late 2010s. In this vein, Chapter 6 spends significant time instantiating several key changes in student politics as its own discrete development, a distortion of the 1960s student activism, and a political proving ground, which feeds servants of state hegemony. Importantly, this chapter builds atop three major themes, asserting that there are discrete groups of students who may be involved in a combination of (1) student politics and representation, (2) activism and protest and (3) student power. This chapter, however, asserts that these spaces have been largely colonised, with the support of university hegemony, by the student politician. In caricature, the student politician acts as a denizen of state ruling political strata, with a particular interest in their own eventual election in state or federal politics, without real concern for the needs or interests of students. The chapter also explores the concomitant development of student politics and student activism

from the 1960s and explores the narrative of a *reformed* student politician in their migration out of student politics and back into student activism in a pure form. This movement between politics and activism, while not necessary nor sufficient as explanatory power, provides an insight into the positionality of students under university hegemony. Students were found in positions of *politics* even when they bring genuine issues of representation and ideals of democracy. This chapter provides a bridge between both the spaces of 1960s activism, and contemporary student activism and politics, and a commentary on the limitations on students in politics in contemporary university spaces as a configuration under hegemonic control, no longer capable of the expression of initiative. In this manner, the chapter also serves to provide a basis for the exploration of further issues of concern in student activism, starting with a robust, ethnographic exploration of student politics at a national level, then of the role of students in university governance, and ultimately to a conception of the *organic intellectual*.

From this theoretical focus and foundation, the thesis then shifts to its empirical research on student politics in action. In Chapter 7, the thesis turns to the movement of students from local student political ‘offices’, as university staff within their institutions, into national positions held in the National Union of Students. This movement is tracked ethnographically, from the researcher position as an elected office bearer for postgraduate students, and in the field following a small group of Flinders University students to Melbourne for the National Conference of the National Union of Students. This chapter identifies several tropes of student politics and discusses the aspirations and interests of the student politician in the context of university hegemony. It also examines the relationships between student politics and the state, as well as state and federal political parties, in a novel capturing of ‘party politics’ rife in the space. The ethnographic capturing of two critical incidents provides a narrative backbone to the chapter, enabling a reflexive and robust exploration of the kinds of *fame* students in student politics seek, and the *masquerade* of representation, which occurs nationally. Students in these

spaces are quick to present their ‘representation’ as authentic by reminding staff of their elected status as a legitimator, though this may be more accurately understood as grandstanding and posturing at authentic representation. Importantly, the chapter does not position these students as malicious. Indeed, it acknowledges that students in political positions on university campuses are often purposively funnelled into positions which they do not, or cannot, understand due to the constraints of their affiliation and roles in political parties. The exploitation of these students is simultaneous: they are positioned both in (or under) university governance and in (or under) national political structures. Several of these students, from the empirical study, went on to serve roles as unpaid members of the Australian Labor Party, and have been subsequently exploited for their labour as ‘novice’ members of the party. The unfortunate consequence of positioning these students under hegemony is that they become a tool for a lack of genuine progress in the *politics* of student representation. In this regard, they are deliberately positioned as ineffectual and created, in vice-chancellor imaginary, under a folk law of uncontrollable outbursts and political posturing.

The thesis then turns to another empirical chapter in the exploration of the position of students on committees. In contrast to the preceding chapter, these students are often chosen for their positions by the university management hierarchy for their ability to ‘fit in’ with the common sense view of the student as a silent customer. Here, students are positioned on committees deliberately to be a silent face of all students so that decisions may be justified by a student voice rather than for their affective positioning for the creation of conditional change. Again, students in these positions are positioned under the power of hegemony, often as high performing students whose interests lie in pleasing management-academic staff and graduating with commendation. These students, similar to student politicians, are frequently played to enable a particular depiction of studenthood, a particular modality of being a student and a way of reinforcing the imaginary of students’ position in the university. Moreover, through in-

depth interviews, students voice their own concerns with their performance under university hegemony, with several claiming that they are unable to genuinely speak to their own issues out of a combined intimidation by the members of committees and working groups and the perception that decisions brought to governance spaces have a predetermined outcome to which objection seems pointless. In this regard, Chapter 8 dives into an understanding of students' conceptions of their ability to take initiative from *within* hegemonic spaces. While several of the students recount times where they have provided input, none pointed to lasting changes. Ethnographic observations have been added to the examination of these students' recounts. Here, while students may slowly gain confidence and opportunities to provide input, there is a lack of authentic possibilities for students to engage in prolonged and important decision making and to 'pass the baton' to their colleagues. In this sense, the students of this chapter are also at a disadvantage as compared to their activist forbears of the 1960s golden era. Moreover, new hegemonic imaginings of students' positions in classrooms are examined in the form of 'Students as Partners' projects, which may go some way towards providing opportunities for students to *understand* hegemony, but do not provide the authentic and necessary tools for the production of the organic intellectual.

In the penultimate chapter, the transformative form of student activist is considered, not in a vainglorious conception of student megaphone wielder, but in the organic intellectual form originally proposed by Gramsci. Here, the lineage of student activism is conceptualised, though not *fully* realised amongst participants in my study. Indeed, in purporting to *be* an organic intellectual activist, I deliberate on my own action and inability to affect lasting change, as a demonstration of the relevance of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis in late modernity. Here, drawing on several organic intellectuals, who played the role of *activist* in the context of the Prologue's tale of an organisational restructure, the real potential and power of student activism is explored. Indeed, the conception of student activism as a form of organic intellectuality

provides, in itself, a novel contribution to Gramscian theory and to the extant research literature. Importantly, students' positions in governance are essential as mechanisms of learning about, and responding to, the changing nature of state hegemony, though are not themselves the objective of organic intellectuals. In a reassertion of Gramsci's organic intellectual as an actor for one's social group, Chapter 9 probes the possibility of being an organic intellectual in the face of substantive organisational change. Moreover, to reach a robust and rounded conception of the student qua organic intellectual, the chapter also draws on the voices of two students who identified with severe physical disability. In this regard, these students are depicted as, not only an organic intellectual, but as students who *must* take initiative under hegemony, which is by nature political, in order to even be *recognised* as participants in higher education. This establishes an imperative for change on two levels. The first relates to a reconceptualising of students as equals, positioned within civil society, that may take on higher education as a catalyst for social change. The second imperative for change is the necessity for the teaching and sustaining of students *as* organic intellectuals to fight the death of higher education. In this penultimate chapter, the necessity of hearing and enabling students to make an impact is detailed. In particular, attention is paid to the nature and role of student participation in governance, activism and broadly in societal politics in order to save the future of higher education, and ultimately the planet, from the accelerated decay and death of late-stage capitalism.

Finally, the thesis turns to a conclusion which reconceptualises student positions in governance, reconsiders study in late modernity under the conditions of changing democratic spaces, identifies the decay of choices under singular hegemonic forces, and turns to a positioning of the future. In particular, the final chapter pays close attention to the positioning of students *for* the future of higher education. In this sense, it rearticulates the importance of understanding students as the future of higher education and harnessing higher education itself

as a tool of democratic social change and transformation, rather than reproduction. The necessity for changing curriculum, power, and understandings of student and staff positions in education are asserted as essential. Without an allegiance between students and staff, the grim landscape of higher education and the globally decaying education ecosystem and politics cannot be averted. It is from this space that change must emerge, else the demise of higher education's 'freedoms' will be the ultimate demise of the sector, and ultimately these same hegemonic forces will position the global leadership of the planet in the same decaying positionality. By drawing from the still-relevant Gramscian philosophy of praxis, through an ethnographic and rich data-laden exploration of the contemporary context of being a student drawing on the rich context of history of universities both in formal and alternative modes this thesis positions higher education in a reinvigorated light, following Gramscian imaginary, as a space for the production of counter-culture, systemic change, and the betterment of humanity. This space is political, relevant and necessary, for both the sector and for the equality, progress and flourishing of *all* members of society.

With the structure of the thesis now clarified, I turn to an exploration of university-governance hegemony, from the early depiction of bearded academic fellow, through to contemporary suited CEO-man. This section examines the gradual, yet certain, journey of the disestablishment of students and staff in the very *act* of being a university. This is a detailing of the transformation of higher education through governance into action and sets the contextual scene for the thesis.

Australia maintains academic governance which involved 'the public'. At Sydney University this included a religious minister and a politician or their delegate (Horne et al., 2012). At Melbourne University, the Council had a relatively even split of academics and 'the public' (Selleck, 2003). Since their origin, Australian universities, from the crumbling sandstone through the recent monstrosities of glass and steel, have had a 'public' influence. This public

influence takes the form of corporate economic interest, with business owners, CEOs, corporate lawyers and economic thinkers at the helm. In alignment with the general political sentiment of Australia, as a *productive colony*, whose economy holds centre stage surges into university ‘acts’ *qua* the parliamentary legislation which incorporates the university, with the State seeing fit to appoint members with business interests, or worse delegate appointment of these members to the business interests themselves. In statement form, this often included a configuration of the words ‘demonstrated commitment to *educational advancement*’ two key words in order of ascending importance. In practice, this is (not) enforced by the councils themselves. Historically, the ‘appointment’ of academics was a by-the-academic-community model or, at Oxbridge, by-the-church-community model, that involved a senior academic cycling into a leadership position, then out. This formed a collective passing of the baton between old white men with long beards, ensuring continuous control of their institutions – the upper-class white male *hegemon* – while maintaining a healthy connection to the academic community they served. In what can only be seen as a radical shake up, since the 1990s the make-up of governance structures which *appoint vice-chancellors* have been weighted more towards what this ‘public’ demands and less towards academic governance, management of academics by academics, or democratic structures. Saving value judgements, there is a definite shift in what constitutes governance in Australia’s universities. These shifts, change the values of what it means to lead a university, and what it means to be, *or act as*, a university in late modernity. The control of universities originates in hegemonic roots, susceptible to capture by new dominant social groups, but viewing itself as ‘outside of politics’ (Gramsci, 1996). In this regard, Gramsci termed many old-world institutions’ workers ‘traditional intellectuals’: those who saw their role as a public service, separate from political think-tanks, bound to serve the community, as long as the community they spoke about was of the hegemon’s liking² (Gramsci, 1996). In current times, hegemonic

² In this context, meaning those that appear ‘like them’: idealised as successful, white, male appearing, able bodied, people of relatively wealthy backgrounds.

ideals are espoused from the top by the Vice-Chancellor CEOs themselves, in a steady eruption of virtues inherited from the populist (re)positioning of capitalist market economics as the *singular* road to advancing public institutions (W. Brown, 2015; D. Harvey, 2005). No longer is a university to be ‘won over’ by the dominant social group, it is instead led from within by a politician – not by democratic appointment, but on the appointment of a group of legal, corporate and economic interests – by the University Council itself.

Universities have a multitude of governance mechanisms which serve a variety of purposes. Flinders University deploys a Council, as the peak governance body of the university, incorporated by the State in an ‘*act*’ of parliament. In this capacity, the University *act*, through the State, sets forth several inanimate structures and procedures to be followed by appointees and electees of the University infrastructure. Upon the *act*’s animation by humans, with particular values, powers, interests and agendas, surface ways of *being* and *doing* through governance and through a reciprocal arrangement, these powerfully appointed ‘members’³ hold a sway over the State, as the State holds over the document form of the University Act. At *Flinders*, in its original form, the University *act* set out a peak governing body which saw what voices from inside and outside the institution would be *valued*. At *Flinders*, the configuration of Council, though somewhat ambiguous, included members of parliament, at least eight academic staff appointed from within, up to six students, some *ex officio* from elected roles others specifically elected for the positions, and four *external*, ‘public’ members (Flinders University Act, 1997; Karmel, 1968). These shifts were mirrored both in terms of the learning and teaching interface of the University, and at broader political scales, with a general departure from a broad ranging and critical education, towards a market ready graduate, and from the general public valuing universities as a space for productive ideation to ‘capitalist fodder’ (Forsyth, 2020). This configuration changed in meaningful ways across the history of the university’s *act*.

³ Purportedly representative of the public, but in recent times mostly comprised of CEOs, entrepreneurs, lawyers, economists, and market traders.

Momentously, in 1997, the act was changed to remove the members of parliament, and reduce the academic representation from eight to two, increase general representation from one to two and reduce the number of students from five to three. In conjunction with this change, a *selection committee* was established to appoint the now ten external members under act which could be autonomously selected *by* the very Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor who lead the Council, ostensibly providing control of the appointees of Council to the directors of the Council themselves, with only two overarching but connected conditions: a commitment to higher education, and a value for ‘equal opportunity and social justice’ (Flinders University Act, 1997, p. 4). The fundamental changes here were amplified in 2017 when the representation of staff and students was reduced to two and two members respectively (Flinders University Act, 2017, p. 5). These changes mirror shifts to universities around Australia. As Marginson and Considine (2000, p. 11) highlight:

Without exception the university leaders in our study saw collegial forms of decision-making as an obstacle to managerial rationalities. ... a more recently created democratic tradition in universities, expressed through reforms that created increased staff and student representation on councils and committees ... followed the ‘student power’ era of the late 1960s and early 1970s. ... The democratic tradition in governance provided greater space for young academics, students, general staff and women in all categories. ... Nevertheless, along with the collegial tradition, in the present period this democratic tradition is also being pushed aside, and most of its gains are being reversed. (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 11)

Here, the undoing of the sentiment of student power in the 1960s and 1970s, marginalised through a managerial trend, saw structural reforms and shifts to the constitutional *acts* of the universities themselves. Rather than valuing academic, student and general staff voice, the institutions made way, first, internally for a managerialist agenda, then, through their external influence on governments to modify their founding *acts* to enforce the hegemonic model of administration through managerialism throughout the institutions (Marginson & Considine, 2000). This was a marked departure, not only from the academic management of institutions

for those institutions – granting that they were almost entirely wealthy, white and male – but a turn away from the victories of student power movements into a new culture and the emergence of the ‘economic rationalist model’ into neoliberalism in the university system (Giroux, 2002; Shore, 2010; Sims, 2019). The importance of the changing structures, governance and associated legislation during the late 1990s and early 2000s cannot be understated. The very possibility for an academic contribution to be made to senior university governance, critical or otherwise, a perspective from the culture of the institution, or *truly* of ‘the public’ no longer sits at the table. During this time, *Flinders* suffered a minimum of a 37% reduction in community ‘representation’ from a possible 14 of 20 seats to just 5 of 15, generously including the head of academic senate as an academically aligned senior leader (Flinders University Act, 1997; Flinders University Act, 2017).

Governance conversations turn from the late 1990s until the late 2010s, from being about the *work* of the university to a conversation about performance, appearance, and position in the ‘education market’ (Ball, 2012; Batabyal, 2006; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). It is important to note that during this time, globally, students were not silent about the changes occurring in universities. While many ‘golden age’ discussions of notable decline of universities in a hyper-capitalist era linger over the momentous victories of student power movements, the vocal activism of students has continued across several *modes*. Indeed, student activism of the 1960s in Australia was not necessarily always about student power in the institutions:

The moratorium movement was driven too by the philosophy department then, which was a hotbed of angst and all kinds of things. Professor Brian Medlin was a prime mover in the moratorium campaign and there were several lecturers within the philosophy department who formed the thing called the Worker-Student Alliance, and they had trade union connections within the car industry basically. And they were right out there. When they attended moratorium marches, against the law, one of their ambitions was to assault police. Basically, what they did, and if we had political rallies here in the hall and talked about things they would, generally speaking, feel quite relaxed about beating up people who disagreed with them. (Huberto)

The institutional politics, brought in part by students, in part by academics, as a confluence of cultural struggles and a university as a facilitator of relative enlightenment, was a space of significant dissent, consciousness and pushing boundaries. Between physical violence and illegitimate printing, the university landscape of the 1960s, 1970s and today are drastically different. As Huberto recounted:

At one stage, the SRC [student representative council], were printing off copies of graduation parchments – and, well, they looked absolutely correct and, you know, well, the inference was clearly the value of your graduation process – this is as it should be. There wasn't even a disclaimer. (Huberto)

This era faced its own challenges, and while it is remembered fondly in Marxist imaginings and student publications, there was a current which came to light late in the 1970s which heralded the end of the radical student-staff partnership, and the allegiance around workers' rights. Specifically, the second wave Feminist movement had every right to 'shake up' the university sector, and continues as a strong political force today:

I think there were also things about the university culture that that were reprehensible even then. I mean some of the academics, for example, became far too engaged with students in a variety of ways that I thought were less than ethical. I think the whole feminist movement slowed all that down. I mean, that was, that was the other side of politics. It's clear that international feminism focussed people's attention on sexual assault, on domestic violence on child abuse, no doubt. And that was, that was beyond challenge here even in the mid-70s that was in full flight. So, there was, there was more than just political politics. No, there was all the other important rights movements as well. (Huberto)

Cultural changes, including a movement towards acceptance of feminist demands for equality were, perhaps unremarkably, mirrored in the University act – both in its response, and in amendment to the legislature. Naturally, this lagged significantly behind necessity for change highlighted by feminists in 1970s and 1980s, arriving towards the end of the 1990s with the fifth amendment made to the *act* stating that 'the appointing authority must recognise that the Council is, as far as practicable, to be constituted of equal numbers of men and women'

(Flinders University Act, 1997, p. 4). In the same period, following the Dawkins reforms, the number of women in higher education in Australia rose drastically to over 54% of the bodies present in institutions nationally in 1998 (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Yet, the governance landscape continued to close to a plurality of perspectives, edging closer to a single model of top-down governance, suspicious of its own origins and with an agenda which positioned the university towards the global economy, rather than educational outcomes, that may not offer an economic return. In echoes of student power movements, the anti-deregulation and fee increase arguments against the 2010s Liberal National Coalition government's Christopher Pyne saw massive student resistance in protest activism to what threatened, in some instances, to cost students 14% more per topic taken with some degrees costing students upwards of \$40,000 (Briton, 2014; Gough, 2014). The chant 'No cuts! No fees! No corporate universities!' is permanently burned into my mind as a 2014-15 milestone of student outrage and ultimately a victory for students against fee deregulation. Part of the demands of students across this critical period included a seat at the table, both in national politics and in their respective universities, to ensure that anti-student moves would not occur.



Image of students in Sydney protesting 'attacks on students' (National Union of Students, 2014).

Following the voluntary student unionism legislation changes of 2005, which saw student ‘unions’ lose their funding mechanisms and bargaining power with the institutions, the Australian federal political system has enjoyed relatively unchecked autonomy in decision making for, and about, universities without student voices (Rochford, 2006). The demand for students to be included in dialogue has not ended and continues through contemporary campaigns against fee hikes in the humanities (J. Brett, 2021; Daly & Lewis, 2020; Norton, 2020), as the recent student response to the ‘Job Ready Graduates’ package has demonstrated. Though, as explored below, the response was considerably stifled compared to the 2015 movement, partly due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and partly due to lack of Labor Party rejection of the package. Across this recent period, since 2017, changes at *Flinders* have been substantial. The ebbs and flows of student voices and echoes of student power have resurfaced, and governance has taken on a new landscape. Particularly with the changes in modality for delivery of topics and education through COVID-19, the way that students interact with academics, with the institution and with the issues facing them has changed.

A student I interviewed for this doctoral research had a salient comment on the state of student involvement in university governance. As a postgraduate student, he had seen several changes to the way that the University elicited student input into decision making and posed that his College was moving in a positive, authentic, direction with regard to listening to students. The change in the *feel* for student inclusion in governance has not been echoed in the University Act, but the possibilities for students are increasing.

I think academic governance at Flinders has opened back up. There was a really quite a long period where there was basically no possibility of students being involved in governance. There was probably some superficial play at students having a say, on certain issues, as long as they’re, aligned with the decisions that have already been made, so they were not authentically engaged in governance opportunities. But there has been a bit of a move back to at least having a student presence – I know in my college, we have execs who want to make sure that there are at least two students on every

committee, on every working group, and are present whenever big and small decisions are being made about the future of courses, topics, about the future of research, the quality of education, and a whole range of other sort of, I guess, quality assurance measures. So, students are starting to be included in those four, particularly well, at least at least in pairs. So, you know, it's usually some configuration of one undergraduate and one postgraduate, but there are some quite senior forums in our College that are, you know, three undergraduates and two postgraduates, they're, they're getting more diverse. Recently, we've also had a student forum. So, the students are brought together a couple of times a year, to participate in sharing their values, um – probably their thinking about Flinders and the College. And those, those forums, where students are consulted on a range of decisions that are about to be made ideas for things that could be done. And students are asked to authentically give their input into the decisions of the college, which are then filtered back up to the University. I don't know how far back up they actually go, but at least students are being asked, they're being invited to – to input their ideas. And, they're being asked to genuinely contribute to the governance landscape of the College, and you know, hopefully, eventually to the University. (Niall)

Questions of filtering the decisions of governance bodies, which as part of their normal interaction include students, upwardly towards those closer to organisational executive raises questions about the general lucidity of discussion in those fora. Indeed, if decisions made in Colleges are given governance airtime 'up the chain', it is unlikely that the student input will be particularly acknowledged. At the more senior committee levels student politicians still grapple for the power to make decisions, appoint student members, and whether or not to act on information that they are provided. Deeper issues of party politics plague Student Association⁴ decision making, an issue which has persisted in student governance since the 1960s. On prompting about the role of student politicians in governance, Niall noted:

Oh yeah, I know that on the more senior committees, it's still predominantly the Student Association, the student politicians that get to say what students, students think and do and feel and are interested in, which I don't really think

⁴ Notably, these structures are not present in the same configurations at all universities in Australia. Some universities have looser configurations of clubs and societies, others retain formalised 'unions' for students which are independent from the university administration complex. At Flinders the Student Association is an integral part of the university structure – referred to internally as the 'Student Engagement' portfolio. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

is representative of the vast student body. But, it's a bit, there *are* still students present in those forums. Whether or not they speak up is another question and whether it's politically relevant, or whether their political dictators are saying that they're allowed to speak out on certain issues, you know, that certainly plays into it. I think for those people on those, those student politicians in those more senior forums, but definitely at College level, we're starting to see more students included and authentically valued for the kinds of contributions that they can make. (Niall)

Another student I interviewed, who was aware of governance opportunities in the University and had participated in a few niche governance spaces including sexual harassment working groups at a university level, spoke to the kind of input the student politicians would make. Importantly, at Flinders, for the last three years our Student Association has been led almost entirely by student members of the left-leaning faction of the Australian Labor Party. In this sense, decisions that go against the national platform of Labor will not be raised. However, populist issues that increase attention to the association garner much support:

like he was trying to do a couple of kind of radical things, but it seemed that the second that he got in – it's like, he had no concept of reality. So, he really – he was whinging about things as opposed to actually trying to fix them. He stopped doing any of those meetings [sexual harassment response]. He was like, in lockdown, as though that was what everyone else was doing: 'in a war zone'. And whatever cause he was talking about seems to not be important anymore because we have corona now. I guess, like right now, [redacted], is on his parking fees mission. That's appealing to the common student, in that it's like tax. Like, we'll get taxes down, if you vote us in. ... I think they [student politicians] dropped the ball. But, I think that's just matched to what the University's done, because I would say that the University itself has fallen apart, and no one is driving, it's just gone off the road. And so, it's had an effect that is going to eventually have to have an effect on students. (Odette)

The complexity of the relationship between student politics, student power, and student activism should not be understated in this regard. Student politics, and student politicians, have circled back to a point of owning the controlling interest in the 'student voice' in university governance structures. While the representation is not 'wide open', often limited to just two representatives, these structures at *Flinders* have been established to allow the Student Council

members *ex officio* positions. These student politicians, who for the last two years have been entirely Labor Party affiliates, control input at the highest levels of governance, and will direct student ‘voice’ towards alignment with the party’s national platform: a win for student politicians, not for the students they purport to represent:

Student politicians don’t have access to the normal community, and universities are not a normal community. And yes, you can talk about how mature age and a mix of gendered students will make for a diverse student pool – but it’s not. It’s a bunch of mostly white, split 50/50 gender people that, yes, are probably left-leaning, and its people that care about student matters: student debt, parking, affordable living or access to services on campus, right? All they can really appeal to is their audience. Their audience are mostly the same age, from the same backgrounds, from the same area. Even the degrees are kind of limited, because we don’t offer particular degrees or topics anymore and it really does narrow the field of who is available to vote for you. When you start going, okay, what can I get people to vote for me for, it has to be popular issues because you’ve got this incredibly narrow field. The point is they have to appeal to something in order to get voted in, that simple. And it’s not compulsory voting! (Odette)

Student politicians play for power. They balance popularity with making demands, if they make demands. Students who find their way onto committees and working groups who have a genuine issue of representation, or at least ‘an axe to grind’, sometimes find ways to have their voices heard. Unfortunately, amongst my participants, this mechanism was not the governing body itself, but the networks around them. Margie recalled when her biggest wins were made:

(Aidan:) from those governing bodies or from those, you know, bigger decision makers, is there an interest in fixing things?

(Margie:) No, not as far as I know. I mean, I’ve kind of learned rather think systemic wins, that it will work better to have side conversations with people. I’ll go to professor so and so and I’ll just have a little quiet conversation with them about ‘these are of the things that I’ve observed, could you kind of nudge a little bit?’ Then they will send an email to so and so. And then they will respond. But if it’s a professor that does it they respond totally differently to when Margie, ‘Miss Margie Martinez’ who is complete nobody, you know, I’m just a PhD candidate. And they kind of allow that there’s a different kind of authority. I kind of think I’m learning to network with a few people.

The question of ‘authority’ and ‘power’ are a consistent challenge. Not only were those students I spoke to feeling undervalued, or as though they could not make an impact, they saw themselves as inferior and not having much to say. While they had small victories in personal networking and advocating for their and others’ causes at a micro scale, presenting at committees did not herald success, and little support was provided. During my interviews, conversations would often return to the *value* of having students contribute to governance, decision making and even university politics. The resort to expressions of activism as picket protest, or written word, instead of authentically being given presence to speak out was a central concern. In conversations about what would enable students to feel heard, some of the following commentary arose:

At the moment, there is an opportunity to maybe use COVID as a doorway because everything is online at the moment and it won’t be forever. Maybe there’s an opportunity to say ‘listen’. It’s the principle of designing for input. A kind of universal design, I suppose. But leverage our moment now to make it right. (Orsa)

There is a real opportunity to actually listen and work with us. And it’s going to take work on both sides, right? Students can’t do this alone. We need academics to work with us to give us a voice. For those of us that aren’t as confident, who don’t speak out or ask the questions. For those of us who don’t really know what to ask. There needs to be training, there needs to be support. But I think for academics, and particularly for executive, there needs to be the question asked of what’s the value of having the student at the table. Because if we’ve got good representative structures, maybe we don’t need all of that bullshit market research. Maybe we can actually authentically run the institution with the students, or at least give them a meaningful say, and then maybe the students won’t be such a goddamn pain in the ass. Because they’ve got an actual outlet to work with their institution to make a place that works better for everybody, not just able bodied middle-class white men. (Niall)

Opening what exists in our university, beyond enrolment, and moving into a new space where representative structures work, cycle through, expose multiple perspectives, go along with training and payment for work done, draws a hopeful future for the plurality of voices

desperately needed in our university systems. Drawing into a conversation about the avenues ahead of students, Dyane raised that student partnership – recent ‘students as partners’ movements in governance abound our institution (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020) – could actually be a weak avenue forward and that conversations with students about involvement in strategic and organisational *governance* could pose as a real future for higher education participation at

Flinders:

I think that’s a word that’s missing in the rhetoric. Educational governance ... I’ve been involved in many committees and boards. When we look at education, governance, there are some things that you have to, you know, be careful of, because it’s a legal entity, but if you – if you were to drill down ‘governance’ into lecture theatres it would look like a very different place. Governance is almost like a better term than partnership. Because that suggests immediately involvement in decision making. And then that’s where the difference is made. When I get to say: ‘yay’, ‘nay’, how about not just a contribution, but it’s actually part of the decision-making structure. That’s where I guess the partnership space falls down a little bit. Partnership suggests a little bit of skipping down the road together, you know, and it’s not skipping down the road together. We might fight about something we might have conflict. We should. Because that is the point where innovation happens, where someone goes, ‘hey, don’t you know when every time you present that particular lecture and you do it this way, we don’t like x’ and then you can change. So, it’s like the UK students, when they go: ‘hey, don’t change curriculum without letting us know!’ (Dyane)

Posing university governance, legislature and policy as the nexus of radical change in the university sector seems inappropriate, particularly as these spaces are seen as completely hegemonically controlled by corporate managers. Even amongst academic staff I interviewed, conversations about where the power lies in the institution became questions of governance – and my interviews included no explicit questions on governance. The power imbalances in the corporate university offer the opportunity to question power in its place, and to exploit it to make a meaningful place for students’ perspectives, to make things better for students. Though, with a lack of ownership of governance for any student or staff member, there is a long journey ahead.

I was a bit older and wiser, still a bit naive about the system. But I was much more willing to push back on the academics because I had a bit more experience behind me. So, I felt maybe I was going to stay on a level playing field yet, perhaps a bit more on a level playing field because I had worked as a casual academic. I felt that there wasn't that power difference between a tutor and myself. So, I could raise some of these ideas without kind of fear of being put back in my place. (Cthrine)

Cthrine felt strongly about the power dynamic between academics and students, in particular that there would always be a power imbalance, but that through working together there is a possibility to build relationships that value diversity, perspectives and act on student input. From the background of having experienced the 'level playing field', she had shifted her perspective on what worked with students and had a keen interest in providing space for them to experience this background. Cthrine had two hats: a recent PhD graduate and an academic staff member in a large Flinders' College, she had the ability to bridge different experiences and experiment with programmes that created equity for her students, using her experience as a springboard:

I'm now the college representative, the liaison, for that [student representative] program. So, the idea of that is to give students a bit more power to talk about their experience of being students within topics. And then they've also got something similar at the course level. But to have – as much as we don't like to think academics are scary, they are no matter what, there's that power difference. So, this opens up just another channel where students can talk to their peers and then those nominated representatives can meet with the topic coordinators and discuss things about the topic, which, so far, we've seen some fantastic changes – not everywhere. But I think opening up those doors makes it so much easier. Just provides more opportunities for students to actually voice any concerns that they're having, or good things as well. (Cthrine)

Initiatives such as student representation in every topic of study may pave the way for student's entry into governance structures. In Cthrine's College, students are being more actively included in governance structures, as well as at topic and course level conversations about what they will learn, what they want more, or less of, and what the future of their degrees look like.

These conversations about students' involvement in the structure, content and delivery of their courses has direct lineage to the student power movements of the 1960s (Cockburn, 1969; Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020; G. S. Jones, 1969). With real support, students might face the hegemonic might of the governance machinery in universities and speak back against the 'god professors' (Forsyth, 2014) or the vice-chancellors as 'CEO-Dictators' (Bonnell, 2016). There may emerge sufficient political pressure from university students, that politicians have no choice but to consider instating perforce onto their university's councils and senates. Alternatively, the mighty weight of hegemonic market rationalist education, played out through those governance systems, might crush the spirit of contemporary student power and activism, or become an instrument of further political replication through singularly empowering the voices of student politicians. The future remains in the hands of the students and academics who work together to forge new relationships, educate at the grass roots, and build resistance to the destructive, crushing weight of global capitalism and permutations of economic logics. From this complex backdrop, this thesis emerges and a focus is rendered.

Epistemological questions jut from cultural systems, dependent on our subjectivity as students, academics, authors, thinkers, teachers, friends, lovers, fighters and activists. In the product of thinking seriously on a subject an author, be they a PhD student or a poet, takes on in novel and meaningful ways questions which have gone unasked. The process of systematic research inquiry, particularly in the form of cultural studies, political philosophy or sociology, will always, by its nature, start from a 'position' which involves the student-academic's extant position in ontological reproduction of the world. By our very nature as thinking beings we are ensnared in this reproduction, but through an activist praxis depicting, critiquing and understanding the relations and reproductive impulses of culture and society we might bring new ways of thinking and asking in culture which takes for granted many frames, forms and practices. Through analytical engagement with the subject of student activism this thesis is

inculcated with particular cultural knowledges and practices, and as an ethnographer, I am intimately implicated in the systems of knowledge reproduction which surround contemporary activist practices. The ethical and political questions raised in this thesis, then, come from *a* subjectivity, *a* positionality, *a* human interpretation of the real world comprised of a plurality of ways of doing, thinking and being and by its very nature seeks to exemplify critical praxis and a serious look at my own involvement in systems and ways of being in activism from a post-student politics, post-organised activism positionality, with the benefit of reading from, and drawing on the spectres of enlightened scholars of generations gone by.

This doctoral research now turns to a historically situated and robust examination of Antonio Gramsci's contributions to political philosophy and cultural studies. Gramscian social science provides a powerful articulation of state hegemony and the possibility, and political necessity, of action taken under the state apparatus and its extensions. Moreover, the subsequent chapter develops Gramscian social theory in the intervening 50 years since his passing. The first chapter contextualises and introduces the essential methodological spine for this thesis.

Chapter 1

Gramscian theory:

Framing politics, contextualising the post-Marxist predicament and theorising accelerated global capitalism

Antonio Gramsci's substantive theoretical developments across *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (SPN) and *Sections from Cultural Writings* (SCW) have left a sustained imprint on western political philosophy and sociological praxis (Anderson, 1976b, 2016, 2017; Cox, 1983; Crehan, 2002; Kurtz, 1996; Thomas, 2009). For cultural studies and ethnography, the applications of Gramsci's theory are obvious. Even his own deployment of a kind of anthropological (come-ethnographic) praxis across his writing holds with contemporary methods, though this cannot be accepted without problematisation (Crehan, 2002, 2016; Mayo, 2015; Pizza, 2012; Spencer, 2007). Within the fifty-year span between Anderson's early writing on Gramsci, in an essay for the first wave of the *New Left Review* published in 1976, he asserted '[i]n principle every revolutionary socialist, not only in the West—if especially in the West—can henceforward benefit from Gramsci's patrimony'; however, at the time he warned of the possibility for 'multiple and incompatible interpretations of the themes of the Prison Notebooks' (Anderson, 1976b, pp. 5–6). In the period since, there has been dramatic proliferation of uses of Gramsci's writings across a wide variety of sociological, economic and philosophical fields. Fifty years later in 2016, Anderson, who had spent a great deal of time working in the old and 'new' left theoretical spaces, ultimately asserted that Gramsci was now, in theoretical circles, 'universally respected in the West'. In particular, Anderson applauded the possibility of applying Gramscian theory in a 'multi-dimensional' mode, and a lasting 'magnetic attraction' emanating from his 'patrimony'. Still, he held to a caution that theoretical developments were 'highly individual constructions', particularly those emerging out of the 1980s through 1990s, though centring on a common theoretical interest in Gramsci's hegemony (Anderson, 2016, pp. 71–72).

Anderson's revisioning of hegemony, itself elaborated in his 2017 book *The H-Word*, was heavily influenced by Gramscian depictions (Anderson, 2017).

Before turning to Anderson for elaboration and clarification of hegemony theoretically, and for a modernising and diversifying of the concept, there is necessity to examine Gramsci's life, as the origins of his theoretical work. Indeed, for this work, a development of a comprehensive picture of the context and nature of Gramsci's theory is required in a fulsome commitment to contextualising and understanding Gramsci's social science. This requires serious attention and holds particular relevance in elaborating the ethnographic research of the chapters that follow. This necessary work recontextualises Gramsci's corpus, a complex task, to fully understand his positionality, thinking and relevance in contemporary society (Morton, 2007). Importantly, this chapter aligns the context and theoretical contributions made by Gramsci, as this holds great significance for the latter chapters of the thesis. This is not decontextualised theory. My goal is to understand the development of the theory in context and then move it – with precision and reflection – to a distinct time and place.

This work turns now to a brief history of Gramsci's Italy and his life in and outside of the scrutinised, occasionally censored, history. Subsequently, it looks to his theoretical developments as originary, seminal contributions to hegemony beyond early conceptions as 'leadership' towards a liberatory philosophy of praxis underneath capitalist regimes (Hoare, 2007; Kurtz, 1996). Following this, the chapter moves to an examination of Marxist theory insofar as it is relevant to Gramscian elaboration, which is closely followed by an exploration of life after Marx, and how the 'left' mobilised around Gramscian ideals. The chapter then moves to elucidate key elements of Gramsci's organisation of society and theory of education. Penultimately, the chapter turns to an exploration of the rise of postmodernism and the 'ethics' emerging from student movements in the 1960s as a bridge for understanding how social movements influence theory.

A brief political history of Gramsci's Italy

Gramsci lived a largely destitute life during his early years. His father, Francesco, was charged with embezzlement and imprisoned, though these charges were likely owing to his political background and opposition to local leaders (Hoare, 2007, pp. xviii–xix). By 1897, with Antonio only six years old, the family had lost their land, home and livelihoods. Gramsci's mother, Giuseppina, was left to raise seven children, working as a seamstress. Antonio's health was also a concern for the family. He lived with a deformation of his spine, as well as successive health problems as a young man which 'were accompanied by nervous complications' (Hoare, 2007, p. xix). While Gramsci received a partial primary education, it was interrupted by periods of work where he supplemented the family's income. Ultimately, following his father's release from prison, he was able to return to school in a new town. In 1908, he passed his formal examinations and commenced a collegial education. By this stage, he had already begun writing about the political and social context of Italy. This was amplified by his migration to Turin, where Gramsci stayed with his brother who was politically involved in the local workers union. He became increasingly interested in the rights of workers, particularly in the city as changing working conditions put pressure on his friends. The critical nexus of Gramsci's early activation as a young working class man enmeshed in new revolutionary attitudes brimming from the city, enabled a newfound class-intellectuality for him. He started to produce socialist pamphlets with his friends, influenced by workers' protests across Sardinia. Several months later, Gramsci made his way to Turin University, where he began forming an intellectual foundation for his early socialist ideals. It was in this context he took to the study of literature and linguistics (Joll & Kermode, 1977). Gramsci built further friendships with several scholars whose relationships to the socialist movement throughout the country fuelled his thinking about the possibility and problems with revolution, politics and leaders, the organisation of society, as well as with education. From this space, with a growing experiential background in union and

political organising, he began forming his arrangement of ideas around the ‘philosophy of praxis’ (Hoare, 2007, p. xxi). Gramsci was influenced significantly by his time in Turin, both in terms of intellectual development and in terms of political involvement. Turin, itself a mainland Italian city, was home to large industrial manufacturing plants, including *Fiat*, who produced tractors, cars and aeroplanes. Due to its large industrial complex, as compared to much of the rest of Italy, Turin’s economic spirit was contented with industrial booms and economic growth (Duggan, 2006; Hoare, 2007). Whilst Gramsci was writing for the socialist press, Benito Mussolini entered Gramsci’s social circle as a key contact. Mussolini was the leader of the Socialist Party at the time, and lead editor of the Socialist Party’s (PSI) newspaper, the ‘*Avanti!*’.

Political conditions in Italy had endured instability through the late 1800s, and by 1877 anarchists summoned a climate of revolutionary politics in the country. There had been ongoing interest in disrupting state hierarchy. Up until that point, while Italy was constitutionally governed by political parties and a senate apparatus, it was under sovereign rule with constitutional powers to dissolve government and make political moves in a state of emergency. The anarchist insurgence, which was characterised by conservative political forces as a form of domestic terrorism, had the ultimate aim of disestablishing the then newly crowned king and upsetting government political balance (Duggan, 2006). Ultimately, after broad unrest across the anarchist movement and various interactions with socialist and conservative interests, the government worked to ‘steer the discontent into constitutional channels’ (Duggan, 2006, p. 163). While this did not see an end to the socialist/anarchist activism against the state, it provided avenues for legitimised political discourse and also legitimised much of the discourse and leadership of the fascist groups. The working conditions in the country had been severely impacted by long standing economic issues and middle-class workers were *activating* to facilitate political awareness amongst their rural and working class counterparts (Duggan, 2006). During this period, the Vatican had become hostile to activity of the government and added a new

vector of religious angst to the growing disquiet and disillusion with standing powers (Bosworth, 1983). These powers did not reach stability, and although the political actors themselves changed over time, the unrest and economic issues in the country continued.

During this enduring period of political unrest, in 1913 Gramsci joined the Italian socialist party, an established party with multifarious views about socialism. Following a political trajectory, Gramsci, now an experienced writer, continued writing on working class issues, many of which conflicted with the party's ideas. Conflicting views did not stop their distribution nor wide readership, and Gramsci was frequently published in the party newspaper (*l'Unità*), which reached a wide base of socialist interests across the country.

Gramsci frequently drew from Croce, a prominent Italian political philosopher, which led him to an understanding and critique of Hegel, Engels and Marx. Indeed, Gramsci himself was not hesitant to render critique where necessary upon each of these works. The Marxist perspective took root in Gramsci's writing, particularly with a Marxist acknowledgement of 'history as the intellectual activity which dominated and embraced all others' (Joll & Kermode, 1977, p. 33). As his studies continued, he was increasingly drawn to Marxist thinking, wandering further from Croce's European Liberalism and nationalist spirit. Croce had offered Gramsci an appreciation of the limits of positivist science, however, Croce, as indeed with Hegel and Marx, had stopped short of Gramsci's own perspective that in the final analysis culture was of far deeper resonance in understanding society (Joll & Kermode, 1977).

In 1915, Italy joined the First World War, and after a series of deals which would have seen Italy take on a substantial new territory in the Austro-Hungarian region, they ultimately failed and increased tensions along Italy's border (Bosworth, 1983). By 1916, Gramsci's ideals saw him separated from the Socialist Party leadership, away from Mussolini (Hoare, 2007). He founded his own newspaper, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which focussed on social-democrat issues, but with a particular bent toward the Marxist-Leninist ideals which had lost him traction in the socialist

party. These ideas were particularly popular with many of the socialists and sat well in the general culture of wartime economic depression. Toward the end of the war, mounting social conflict in the country had created significant political tension, fissures in the socialist party, and a fracture which saw a socialist leader split with the party (Bosworth, 1983). With the end of the war and resulting post-war economic crash, the demobilisation of soldiers and the shutdown of the war support industry, the country faced deep recession and malcontent with the political-economic hierarchy. This period led to cultural conditions retrospectively labelled the *biennio rosso* or two red years 1919 through 1920 (Hoare, 2007, p. xxxv). The period saw massive worker strikes, political action and even violent insurrections. In the political arena, Italy saw a further increase in the demand for action over working and economic conditions, with a favouring of socialism as a method of economic-relations, even to the point of near revolutionary industrial action to achieve *something different* (Bosworth, 2006). By 1921, the socialist revolutionaries and leaders successfully created a large political body aligned with Marxist-Leninist communism and were increasingly seen as a threat to extant conservative political power structures in the country. Gramsci, as one of the leaders of the newly (re)founded party, continued to work on disseminating an alternative economic and social view, which he and the Communist Party saw as a new way forward.

At the time, another political response emerged. This group was diametrically opposite the political views held by the Communist Party (PCI). This rival party, home to former leader of the socialist party, Mussolini⁵, turned fascist instigator, became known as the ‘Black Shirts’ (Hibbert, 2001). Mussolini had resolved, with the foundation of the fascist regime, to end the ‘tyranny of socialism’ and bring order back to Italy. While he had been a strong supporter of the socialist movement, after his disembarkation from the party and through fighting for the Allied Forces (Entente) in the Great War, Mussolini had developed a stronger distaste for the

⁵ Mussolini was removed from the party by vote after supporting Italy’s entry into the war, against party interests (Corner, 2012).

‘orthodoxy’ of the socialist movement desiring more total power (Hibbert, 2001). Moreover, his experience as a pro-war propagandist through 1917 saw him well equipped to create a sentiment amongst the people. Through recruitment of Great War veterans, the Black Shirts were able to create hostile internal conditions and instantiate fighting with socialists throughout Italy. Giovanni Giolitti, the then conservative prime minister of Italy, was concerned with the growing political forces in the country and had significant interest in silencing the internal fighting. Giolitti believed that by offering the Black Shirts a form of legitimate political power he could control and minimise the fighting. He called an election with the aim of formalising the power of the fascist party, and legitimising his leadership in the country, through an offer of seats in the house of deputies (Bosworth, 2006). The country had seen successive failures of government to fix the social and economic problems, and while the Communist Party were not responsible for these successive failures, the incumbent conservatives had languished which gave the novel Black Shirts an advantage: ‘the failure of successive governments to deal with Italy’s social unrest and manifold problems allowed the Fascists to put themselves forward as saviours of their country, the only force by which Bolshevism could be checked and strangled’ (Hibbert, 2001, p. 326). While Giolitti’s newly called election succeeded at providing seats for the fascists, he also lost seats to the Communist Party. Eventually, Mussolini was able to legitimise himself, and through favour of the King, installed himself as a dictator of Italy. Here, he acted as enforcer of state hegemony in a reconfiguration of *common sense* subsuming all other political currents through force. After falsified accusations of assassination attempts, Mussolini declared Gramsci as an enemy of the State and imprisoned him in November of 1926 for, in essence, the rest of his adult life, released only to die ‘at a clinic in Rome in 1937’ (Bosworth, 2006, p. 329).

Before turning to Gramsci’s theoretical work, it is significant to highlight several variables specific to his life, which makes his work challenging to mesh with contemporary

culture and problems. Importantly, the contextualisation of Gramscian theory requires a thorough commitment to hold with the empirical work below. As suggested above, Gramsci wrote largely from prison. In this time, there were obvious constraints on his ability to communicate theoretically articulate work across spacetime, not only due to controlled and censored access to source material – and indeed, controlled and censored publication of his own work – but Gramsci’s theoretical development itself was constrained by language due to his placement in prison. He had been a linguist, and the use of language and sophisticated prose were central in his demarcation of theoretical developments. His intimate theoretical knowledge was with the works of Marx, Hegel, Croce and Machiavelli. This added layers of complication to Gramsci’s writing, and immense theoretical depth, but also possibility for misinterpretation and reinterpretation. Highlighting the intricacies and relatively underexplored nature of Gramsci’s work, particularly during the 1970s, Anderson issued ‘a warning against all facile or complacent readings of Gramsci: he is still largely an unknown author to us’ (Anderson, 1976b, p. 6). This applied even in Britain, where Gramsci’s thought hooked into local conditions and imperatives. Indeed, Britain’s own political *left* development had a vague harkening to the PCI with the *New Left Review* as the parallel for, by way of example, *l’Unità*. It was not until the early 1970s that Gramsci’s work was even accessible in English. Until this point there had been much contest about the use of Gramsci’s work, and a great deal of cautioning for those seeking to interpret it (Anderson, 1976b). In light of this, the following section explores Gramsci’s theoretical developments with a careful view of the original developments in light of contemporary theory and engaged in the historical context in which the documents were written. The methodological imperative for such contextualised and thorough examination is clear. There is a need to engage with a theorist’s origin and experience as well as their theoretical work. This is particularly critical for modern uses of Gramsci directly, as confirmed by Anderson (2017).

Gramsci's activist-scholarship in political philosophy

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is his best-known contribution to Marxist science. Other notable developments include his configuration of 'organic intellectuals', distinctions between civil and state society as stratified (above and related to) but not determined singularly by the mode of production, and his critiques of historicism, economic determinism and pure philosophical materialism (Crehan, 2002; Joll & Kermode, 1977). A prolific writer, activist and progressive, albeit largely from the confines of a prison cell, Gramsci conceived of many adaptations and novel perspectives for the political philosophy of the time with lasting contributions globally. Given that much of the theoretical work for this thesis originates with Gramsci, additional time must be spent exploring his original contributions to political philosophy. It is significant to note the impact of Gramsci's access to materials and writing tools in much of his referenced material. He refers extensively to recollected material, with astounding accuracy, but from memory nonetheless (Hoare, 2007; Joll & Kermode, 1977). Indeed, many of Gramsci's writings from prison were preserved somewhat out of order, and in some instances, it has been difficult to track their chronological and epistemological theoretical development (Joll & Kermode, 1977). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that Gramsci, in his depiction of his philosophy of praxis, notes that his articulation of philosophy and theory should never be divorced from the grounded real experience depicted in his writing (Gramsci, 1996). Gramsci illustrates his theoretical development and philosophical understandings through a capturing of contemporary events, and warns against any depiction of his theory without the concrete events attached (King, 1978). Of course, it is not possible to rearticulate all of Gramsci's examples, or the work of identifying important developments would be mere reproduction⁶.

⁶ I have continued to refer to Gramsci's social context, and theoretical articulations, throughout the development of this thesis. My ultimate pursuit has been to align my articulation of Gramsci's theory faithfully with his *intentions* and to connect my empirical illustrations with his theoretical development.

The re-evaluation and recontextualisation of Gramsci's prison notebooks in this thesis probes how these theories can operate in understandings of politics and change, deliberately following his own pattern for establishing key ideas. While not all of these ideas are necessary for understanding and deploying the philosophy of praxis from Gramsci's political philosophy, there are reasons beyond completeness for covering the substantive developments in a condensed form, as parallels between theoretical developments are echoed across history and built upon by subsequent scholars. By developing a corporeal understanding, there are benefits in mapping subsequent empirical data against varying historical contexts.

The socialist spirit

Gramsci was heavily influenced by contemporary socialist scholars; keenly, however, he turned his attention to the works of Marx and Engels and particularly drew from their developments in a *Critique of Political Economy*. As a scholar of linguistics, Gramsci engaged with German language in reading and translating the ideas of Marx and Engels to disseminate them amongst the Italian population (Joll & Kermode, 1977). Marx, himself, was influenced by the work of Hegel, later departing Hegel's idealist philosophy to develop his own, commonly known as Historical Materialism (Marx, 1990). Gramsci elaborates Marx and Engels' work in the philosophy of praxis (Hoare, 2007). Those responsible for collating and editing Gramsci's prison works initially characterised this as an anonym for 'historical materialism', used to avoid prison censorship. However, they later identified that Gramsci carried this as an interpretation and a movement of historical materialism into praxis. Two critical features of Marxism are necessary to understand Gramsci's early theoretical developments. The first is how Marx understood history (*vis-à-vis method*). The second is how he understood capitalism (the root of: *culture, politics and society*). It is important to note, before exploring these features of Marxism, that Gramsci's intellectual lineage provided what has come to be called 'cultural Marxism' or,

directly, ‘Gramscian Marxism’, as an altern to classical/orthodox Marxism, which is not Gramsci’s own work, but a later English/French conception brought into (post)modern space.

Marx wrote much of his work as an analytical *critique* of what he saw as the dominant mode of production in then contemporary European society. His most notable work, *Capital*, provides a critique of the political economy which, amongst a plethora of important metaphysical developments, literally provides the assertion that capitalism was, and continues to be, the most fundamental *modus operandi* in the anglophone West, and was markedly increasing its grip globally (Marx, 1990). In producing his critique, Marx employed a mode of philosophical operations retrospectively referred to as historical materialism. Drawing from Marx’s writings in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1974), praxis can be interpreted as labour – thinking and doing. In the final analysis, praxis is human activity. This contains all conscious, creative and productive activity by human beings. Marx would extend this to explain that humans alone, through their praxis, are capable of creating new knowledge. This mode, Engels maintained⁷, was a dual philosophical theory of *nature* and *history* (Marx & Engels, 1975). In broad terms, Engels continued that Marx had maintained and expanded the terrain of Hegel’s dialectics, while developing a materialistic basis therein⁸. Marx’s own conception of

⁷ Notably, Engels elaborated much of his, and Marx’s, method across *Anti-Dühring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* making remarks about the quality of philosophy until his time, with a particular criticism of the inability to mobilise philosophical practice qua praxis.

⁸ Other theoreticians added to Marx’s work, and Engels’s extensions. Perhaps one of the most robust assessments, and extensions, of Marx’s method was Ollman, while not directly germane to this thesis his notes about Marx’s method provide some important *sociological* rigour when endeavouring to understand concepts like ‘cultural relativism’ and ‘generalisability’. Ollman (1993) argues that Marx’s processes of abstraction include an abstraction of generality. In this sense, Ollman is extending that Marx’s method can provide avenues for generalising, in as far as the mode of production, in general, is capitalism. In particular, he provides elucidation on how the tools Marx employed may identify ‘whatever it is that work in all societies have in common – chiefly the purposive activity of human beings in transforming nature to satisfy human needs’ (Ollman, 1993, p. 53). The important abstraction, here, is when Marx moves from a critique of capitalist production, to say, a general understanding of production he provides explication of ‘[h]ow a particular branch of industry – car manufacturing, for example – appears and functions involves a set of conditions that fall substantially short of applying to the entire capitalist epoch’ (Ollman, 1993, p. 54). To be precise, a capitalist mode of production, and production in general terms, both have relations to society generally. While the production, in general terms, might change the relations *vis-à-vis* capitalist relations remain in a principal form. In this sense, an historically situated truth about *a kind of production* may provide explication of capitalism as the broader mode of production, as it equally might under other modes of production (Ollman, 1993). Moreover, in addition to generality, Ollman claims that Marx moves in vantage point, as with generality, the *object of study* may be ‘viewed from different sides, or the same process in different moments’ (Ollman, 1993, p. 68). A vantage point, then, presupposes ways of understanding particular phenomena

historical materialism was, however, somewhat more flexibly constituted. He had aimed to provide a science for socialism, with a practical aim of creating momentum for moving to better systems for the social order through study (Bottomore & Rubel, 1973). In this space, Marx examined the then extant social order. In making the assertion that capitalism formed the economic ‘base’, he brought positionality to the analysis, in the sense that from *within* capitalism there is only capitalism as the basis of all kinds of *relations* (Marx, 1990). Capitalism forms both an epistemology and an affected ontology in this regard. Precisely, Marx’s philosophical tools are used to understand, in European capitalism, the connection between the relations of production (relationships between humans, in any form: social and economic) and production (equipment, factories, land, food), which ultimately, for Marx, determine the organisation of that society (Kotakowski, 1978). Marx was primarily concerned with what he termed the ‘base’ of society, which comprised the necessary economic forces of a society (physical access to materials, tools or land). Emerging from this base, Marx saw a range of interconnected, ontologically high order⁹ structures, or ‘superstructure’, which subsequently comprised culture, politics, philosophy, art and ideology. While the superstructure was seen as an important, epistemologically singular way to systematically examine the base, Marx’s chief concern in *Capital* was the relations of production and the forces of production in capitalist society. Society, for Marx, was to be seen in terms of ‘individuals in their interrelations or interactions’, in which he had focussed on ‘those taking place in the sphere of “material production” or, in other words, the social process of human labour’ (Bottomore & Rubel, 1973, p. 18). Here, Marx supposes a dialectically linked, but irreducible and inseparable relation between the base and

or objects of study, and, as with a literal vantage point, different views give rise to different shapes, perspectives, and sizes (Ollman, 1993). This is an important movement in Marx’s historical materialism, as he sketches the changing positionality and composition of various products, and modes of production.

⁹ Vis-à-vis an ontic stratification of societal structure (superstructure) above a mode of production (as base).

superstructure. Surmising this theoretically, in perhaps the most quoted passage from Marx's text, in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* he asserts:

In the social production which men [sic] carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

(Marx, 1904, pp. 11–12)

The critical features that Marx identifies, and Gramsci would have read to scaffold his own theorising, are the economic structure of society as a foundation, and the legal and political superstructures which arise from that base (Marx, 1904). It is here that Marx spends most of his time in *Capital* and while he provides several key revelatory theoretical developments, they are not key to the developments Gramsci would go on to produce. Amongst a handful of shortcomings is Marx's predicted revolutionary transformation of the economy (or 'base'). This is the founding node of Gramsci's departure from an orthodox holding with Marx's theory. Many of Marx's central ideas about capitalism, the organisation of society, and his philosophical method are central to Gramsci's Marxism. However, the essential difference is that Gramsci focussed on culture, as an element of superstructure which reinforces the base, positing, contra Marx, that culture was the key reagent to social change, not a failure, fissure or disruption of the base, and its associated relations (Crehan, 2002). Marx represented the

superstructure as a set of conditions which arose from the base, but for Gramsci's revolutionary political project to take effect he needed more pragmatic tools for creating revolutionary change from within culture itself. Gramsci's tools depend on action and animation, not the inevitable collapse of the economy or a spontaneous worker revolt. It is worth a diagrammatic look at the base and superstructure relation, which are usually represented in a pyramid:

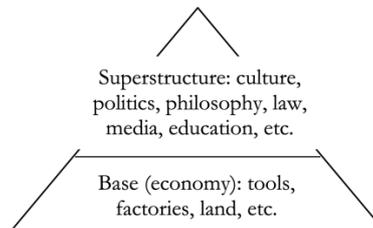


Figure 1 – Base and Superstructure (created by the author for the above)

Some final variables configure the foundational knowledge Gramsci drew on in his theorising. While this thought originates with Marx, it evolves as Gramsci's own Marxism transforms¹⁰. Gramscian revolution, in this light, depends on a *revolutionary* 'good sense', independent of a necessity for workers to seize the means of production. Gramsci supposes that more work is required to create a more intellectual and educated worker who might conceptualise the possibility for a new society. It is worth considering the lifecycle for a revolution, or indeed a microscopic change, in the form of disruption of subaltern common sense. In the first instance, Marx might pose that when a human is born, they enter into social relations: they are dependent on others for food, shelter, a means of subsistence; as they grow, they inherit or adopt necessary relations in accordance with their material conditions, which may change *culturally*. Humans, ultimately, find modes of manipulating nature to benefit from it, and the sets of modes, or tools, we adopt when being born into our existence shapes yet more of our relations and dependencies. In this sense, the totality of our relations forms our understanding *qua episteme* of, at least in rudimentary forms, of the economic base. Resultantly,

¹⁰ Indeed Marx acknowledged the need for evolutionary theory in his writing, and encouraged development as well as acknowledging how his theoretical frames had changed over time (Bottomore & Rubel, 1973).

the superstructure, comprised of our preordained relations, is instrumental in determining our thought processes, relationships, and class status. As a theory of *work*, it is possible to assert that Marxism would view *how* human beings work together as informative of the basis of all social relations. Marx sees the collapse of these relations in the base, depending entirely on the needs emerging from the base to align for production via a means of subsistence and thereby ‘classed’ as workers as those closest to the material means of production (Marx, 1904). Moreover, in our primary activity of producing, we work together, and this determines how opportunities may arise for individuals informing their relative position in the superstructural diaspora or structuratum. In literal terms, those who must spend more time producing have less time for other activities. Engels provided some clarity in this relation asserting that:

the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life ... [w]e make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one. (Engels, 1972, p. 1)

Engels highlights the deterministic element of Marxist theory. Marxism, in its classical sense, provided a range of useful tools for theorists and practitioners, and enabled the work of Marxists, socialists and communists the world over. This work informed, for Gramsci, a basic understanding of society, which he applies throughout his work, allowing for evolution into a new kind of revolutionary praxis, a substantive departure from Marx’s originally proposed methods.

Life after Marx

Through the 1960s and 1970s, anglophone political and intellectual life was a melting pot of socialist and communist theorists, aspirants and political parties, which had incredible influence over thinkers and politics in the global-*left* ferment. This particular spacetime is also worthy of a more detailed investigation in terms of activism later in this thesis. In particular,

the *alternative history* of Flinders University provided below examines briefly the South Australian response to the failed worker (and student) uprisings of the 1970s as a response to global Marxism. It is in this period, where a flourishing of new Marxist ideas emerged, where before there had been, essentially, a singular communist canon, vis-à-vis *the communist manifesto*, now a plurality of texts and ideas were emerging, translated from a plurality of languages (Therborn, 2008). The work of Marxists, most of whom post-date Marx, produced after 1883 until the late 1960s, were bundled into and considered part of the historical Marxist spine, though less influential than Marx himself. This Marxist canon provided new conceptual and philosophical space for humanity. The new emergent theoretical imagining took a new form and coincided with, what is now commonly referred to as, the *New Left*. Stuart Hall, an influential (post)Marxist theorist¹¹, in the 1980s referred to a resurgence of interest in Marxist thought in a concerned mode. He highlighted that ‘Post-Marxism remains one of our largest and most flourishing contemporary theoretical schools. The post-Marxists use Marxist concepts while constantly demonstrating their inadequacy’ (Hall, 1986, p. 28). Indeed, Hall flags a kind of ‘life after death’ spirit in (post)Marxism’s imaginings and situates many of the problems with extant Marxist theory in terms of its use of ideology. This is an interesting turn and introduces some important figures both adjacent to, and part of, the (post)Marxist trend of the time, including Perry Anderson and Jacques Derrida. Anderson, in observing a divide between orthodox dogmatism through Communist Party structures and various schools of Marxist thought, which evaded this orthodoxy, painted a picture of capitalist crisis and revisioning which enabled new Marxist theory (Anderson, 1976a). However, as Hall configures, Anderson highlighted some key departures from Marxist thought in their attempts to address issues of ‘philosophy, epistemology, ideology and the superstructures’ (Hall, 1986, p. 28), which cause fundamental

¹¹ Addressed in detail below, though non-canonical for the Marxist orthodoxy. The relationship between Hall, Anderson, Derrida, Marx, and Gramsci are uncomfortable. Hall himself prescribing to Marxist orthodoxy, Anderson in the same tradition, Derrida in a markedly post(structural) Marxism. In this regard, this thesis employs a bracketed form of (post)Marxism(s) to highlight the tenuous relation against the original canon.

issues in (post)Marxist thought. Hall's primary preoccupation in *The Problem of Ideology* arrives in the title of the paper, but some complications from Anderson are needed first to provide critique and clarity in the Marxist field of the time.

Anderson's critique and suggestions towards (re)interpretation of Marx in his essay, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, may be surmised in a handful of key observations. Critically, he notes that Marxism 'acquires its proper contours only in direct relation to a mass revolutionary movement. When the latter is effectively absent or defeated, the former is inevitably deformed' (Anderson, 1976a, p. 111). The argument both he and, later, Hall carry out pertains to this deformation with specific reference to an emergent conception of Marxism as a revolutionary praxis when deployed *sociologically*, rather than philosophically. Anderson emphasises that 'an "activist" reading of its [Western Marxism's] theses that could be scientifically untenable and politically irresponsible' (Anderson, 1976a, p. 111). Moreover, Anderson contends that Marxism itself is not and cannot be inherently *revolutionary praxis*, due to its defined preoccupation with the past and a philosophical understanding of social order and economics post-mortem. Its own method acts as an undoing for such a sociological understanding: 'Marxist theory is thus not, despite every laudable temptation, to be equated with a revolutionary sociology' (Anderson, 1976a, p. 111). To repair the divide between theory and praxis, Anderson argues that the *historiography* of historical materialism should be separate in a practical sense to evade pollution or diluting the revolutionary, or 'active' politics of Marxism in the classical *communist* sense (Anderson, 1976a). Contextually, Anderson's critique and examination of Western Marxism is positioned in its time though not without fair reference to Hall's 'dogmatic' (post)Marxism, where Anderson warns of an almost bourgeoisie requirement for understanding classical Marxist study in an appropriate context: 'classical Marxism today needs a combination of scholarly knowledge and sceptical honesty that it has not yet received' (Anderson, 1976a, p. 113). Importantly, this message impacts the heart of this

thesis, an attempt itself to create a communicable platform for the relative positionality of students in hegemonic change. Hall, returning to the ideological problem in (post)Marxism, raises some features which had drawn the attention of the theorists in their time, particularly mass consciousness and cultural industry, and the consent of the working class for advanced (or advancing) capitalism. Hall asserted that orthodox Marxism falls short in its interpretation of ideology, in that consent cannot be maintained by ‘mechanisms of ideology alone’. Importantly, for Hall, Marxism in its ‘(post)’ form fails to give a robust account of how ‘social ideas arise’ (Hall, 1986, p. 29). Here, Hall, in a useful moment, turns to Gramsci for elaboration on how ideas unite a *bloc* from the inside. Before turning attention to Gramsci’s view and elaborating the production, maintenance and understanding of ideology and hegemony, additional capture of the debate in the ‘ghostly form’ of Marxism is necessary.

The (post)Marxist theorists extended far beyond what Anderson and Hall may have found contentious. They took to the core of Marxism’s arguably historical position through a critique of features that limited Marxism from what they saw as the avenue to revolutionary praxis. As noted, Anderson and Hall in this arena had already identified issues with (post)Marxist thought. Marxism had been animated and elaborated with the aim of improving and building on the ideas of Marx, Engels and associated theorists like Gramsci. While a turn through (post)Marxist theoretical development is not theoretically necessary for the argument advanced in this thesis, a visitation of some of Derrida’s ideas, markedly his (post)Marxism, is worthy of some exploration, if only in an acknowledgement and rejection of the areas for further expansion and discovery in Derrida’s critiques.

Derrida was a post-structural theorist whose theoretical development varies drastically from the direction of this thesis, though he was clearly influenced by Marxist theory and (post)Marxist extrapolation therein. Importantly, much of Derrida’s work in the *Specters of Marx*

focussed on the hauntology of theory more than Marxist orthodoxy itself¹². Indeed, in observing (post)Marxist theory, he suggests the ‘spectres’¹³ of Marxism haunt the theoretical developments of the late 1900s, even in indirect ways. In a recognition that the *revolution* as predicted in Marx’s work had not taken place, Derrida advances that the broken Marxist spirit affects theoretical works in three abstract terms: through mourning, in an attempt to ontologise or make concrete and localise and present the ideas of Marx in contemporary theory; through spirits of language in the use of Marxist method and terminology; and, through the power of transformation, specifically transformation of self (Derrida, 1994). Usefully, Derrida provides some more concrete messaging around his revisiting of Marx. He suggests that Marx and Engels themselves highlighted a need for revisioning, and that they were, in themselves, irreducibly situated in historicity (Derrida, 1994, p. 13). Derrida also provides a timeframe for the theoretical *haunting*, noting that the world still bears an inheritance of political (in the communist sense) and philosophical (in the historical materialist sense) Marxism which, he asserts, had ended with the fall of Socialism in Europe¹⁴. In an attempt to understand the social-economic world, in a mode of Marxist modernising he deemed necessary, and asserting his ‘new international’, Derrida provides several features of capitalism that are absent from Marx’s critique; these features, which arrived posthumously and which were counter to Marx’s predictions, offer a concrete variation of the failing of a *socialist revolution*. Some of Derrida’s new features for Marx’s capitalist critique include contemporary social problems worthy of some brief examination: a global arms trade and black market, which is not meaningfully controlled; the spread of nuclear weapons as knowledge rather than physical goods; inter-ethnic wars with

¹² Indeed, Derrida’s corpus is nearly entirely devoid of Marxist theorisation – while *Specters of Marx* spends a brief visiting with Althusserian Marxism, like much of Derrida’s work, it does not deeply engage the Marxist canon or orthodoxy.

¹³ In the sense of the Manifesto’s *Spectre Haunting Europe*. Here Derrida’s interest in death and post-life theoretical animation becomes an interesting footnote. With commentary on the post-life use of theory Derrida’s preoccupation with hauntology overrides the theoretical applicability of his work.

¹⁴ Importantly, not the end of Marxism itself but a theoretical departure from Marxism as new logics and theories proliferated.

‘mythic’¹⁵ (class) national identities; international law, which is used to exploit poor nations; and, deportation of immigrants, underemployment and various trade blocs (Derrida, 1994, pp. 80–84). What these features, and the general conclusion on the haunting of Marxist theory across much of Western philosophy and sociology provide, is a useful insight into the kinds of extension and debates around the value and historically bound use of theory, though substantive contextual modernising is required. Further investigations into variations from Marxism fall outside the scope of this thesis, however the clarity of identification of contradictions and fundamental problems with orthodox Marxism are worth contemplating, particularly in a replication of the social-political theory of Antonio Gramsci and (post)Marxists utterly linguistic turn and claim to poststructural Gramscian theory.

Many of these developments were made before serious English-speaking engagement with Gramsci’s work was possible. Indeed, many of these debates occurred substantially before the first English translations in the 1970s. The debates precede Gramsci in that much (post)Marxist thought neglects Gramsci theoretically, or acts retroactively to accommodate Gramscian theory. While there is some intersection, the debates, as captured above, sit outside their relative chronology, regardless of reference to Gramsci (as Hall makes) due to the relative theoretical ‘bubble’. Anderson’s commentary provides necessary and sufficient warning on theoretical interpretation. It is worth highlighting that much orthodox Marxism and (post)Marxism focusses on the shortcomings of Marxism not Gramscian social theory. Here, Gramsci’s revolutionary theory, in political philosophy and social science terms, cannot be ignored for meaningful contributions to an enlightened model of activism, and academia, not as a tool of state society, but to see education as a civil space.

¹⁵ Myth *qua* common sense war of position supporting the war of manoeuvre.

Gramsci's intellectuals

The revolutionary aspect of Gramsci's theoretical contribution to political philosophy cannot be understated. It was the key foundational theorisation for cultural studies. Indeed, cultural studies could not exist without Gramsci's contributions. However, the simplicity of the movement is elegant and robust for such a dramatic turning point in Marxist and socialist thinking of the twentieth century. To arrive at his conception of the 'organic intellectual', the famous theoretical perspective which forms a functional basis for examination of his theory of hegemony, Gramsci first tours through a brief historic exploration of the role of the intellectual. He starts by noting that everyone has and operates intellect at some point; especially by economic function (vis-à-vis essential to the continuation of capitalism [base]), a person may be more or less an intellectual in terms of their role in the productive function of a society. Those that perform closer to the essential level of capitalist reproduction in society, Gramsci argues, are those whose function as organisers, or delegates to the organisers, of a society's mode of production. Within a capitalist mode, they are allocated more power (Gramsci, 1996). In Western capitalist countries, there is a need for these intellectuals to contribute to the creation (in terms of production) and maintenance of the conditions that are favourable to the expansion of their *ideology* and *culture*, which form state society and ultimately inform culture and common sense in civil society. Notably, these are *dominant* class intellectuals; as themselves members of the dominant class, or delegated in capacity to act on behalf of the dominant class, they seek to reproduce the conditions that first brought them to the position of dominance, and to maintain that dominance (Gramsci, 1996). This seats them in hegemonic ruling status atop state society. Therefore, it is possible to further stratify the state into its operatives and 'rulers'. Expanding from this point and, importantly, developing a distinction between *class mobility* and delegated intellectual *operation*, Gramsci supposes that each social group (or 'class'¹⁶) in a society by virtue

¹⁶ Gramsci refers to social group as a measure to avoid prison censors, which is complicated by the fact that Marxism uses social group as a subset of class in several instances. For instance, a social group may in fact form a

of its existence creates *organically* a stratum of intellectuals which belong to that social group. These are more or less able to operate independently depending on their own class position and background. Thus, while the traditional intellectual, in the sense of, say, a lawyer, entrepreneur or banker, are or are delegated some power by their class to create and maintain their class's position in society, other classes, equally, may have intellectuals which emerge organically from their being, maintaining a similar function to the ruling class intellectual, except for *their class*. Vis-à-vis, each *intellectual*, organic or traditional, has the role of maintaining, reproducing and creating spaces for *their class's* expansion. An important distinction arises here for those of the historically peasant class, or working class, where through training or other forms of identification and credentialling, a working class 'intellectual'¹⁷ may rise through the class structure to employ loaned power from the ruling class; however, in this move they are no longer organically intellectuals of their origin class, but instead class transient. In this way, they operate for the ruling class. Gramsci provides the example, historically, of members of the Church who:

had equal status juridically with the aristocracy, with which it [ecclesiastics] shared the exercise of feudal ownership of land, and the use of state privileges connected with property. But the monopoly held by the ecclesiastics in the superstructural field was not exercised without a struggle or without limitations. (Gramsci, 1996, p. 7)

In a sense, while clergy were not specifically *of or in possession of* control of the material means of production, they shared in the power of the dominant class by delegation and provided maintenance of ruling class hegemony as *its* intellectuals. Contrary to the delegative power of the ruling class intellectuals, the *organic intellectuals* provide homogeneity and awareness of their class's function and operate beyond the economic base in social and political fields insofar as

stratum as opposed to a fully-fledged class, such as the instance of the *petty* bourgeoisie; a subset (middle class) between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat adopting characteristics of both groups.

¹⁷ Gramsci draws parallels between peasants and their positionality in Civil society, but now more people exist in this space without 'land' or 'skill' and with need of monies.

they operate in the superstructure *as* providers of a class order which exists outside current hegemony. The ecclesiastics, however, offer further insight as a traditional intellectual class, as they carried their own set of privileges, at a superstructural level, provided their own purposes, had their own administrative function, and often contained other intellectuals in service to them, including lawyers, scholars, theologians or scientists. This class, historically, was in popular belief more connected to ‘God’ than whichever political force was dominant at the time, though complicit in ruling class hegemony. Gramsci asserts, by way of example, that a philosopher may claim primal connection to Aristotle in terms of intellectual lineage, but will be more responsible to dominant political forces and expected to work as part of the ruling class hegemony (Gramsci, 1996). In sketching the role of intellectuals, some attention should also be paid to the mobility of classes.

Whole-of-class mobility occurs when the expansion of the given class cannot be rejected by the dominant class, in the uprising of a critical mass of a *new way*. Talking in terms of social groups, Gramsci notes that a group could enjoy upward movement if the expansion of that group was intellectually encompassing of, or by sheer number denser than, the ruling class hegemony¹⁸. Particularly, if new *logics* were controlled and understood by a social group, it could be upwardly mobile, as its ideology, and its maintaining intellectuals, controlled or understood more of the intellectual field and could produce new means of production or provide a better *way of living* in a philosophical sense that was understood as the ‘right way’ by the broader society (Gramsci, 1996). The ‘good sense’ here is key to genuine upward mobility. A social group could be more successful or faster in this ‘manoeuvre’ if they also capture the interest (or take control of the ability to capture the interest) of the dominant intellectuals, thereby not momentarily seizing power but maintaining a new hegemony. Critically, the possibility of strike action and picket protest becomes clear. While it disrupts hegemony,

¹⁸ Notably this does not require intellectual upheaval, rather a minor change, to be precise, minor change is typically more successful than total upheaval.

through disruption of the mode of production, it does not create sustained hegemonic change as it does not capture the traditional intellectuals, or the interest of the ruling class as it counters their interest.

In any movement, or maintenance, of a social group or class position, there is a pivotal role for education. As the world came into its modern understandings of societal organisation, with room for movement and interpretation *qua* capitalism, an index was developed of the role of ‘intellectual functions and categories’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 10), which schematically laid out the valued intellectual work of a class, specifically the ruling class. Should there be a need for hegemonic change, or even minor deviation from the schema, a social group would need to, essentially, convince the traditional intellectuals of their position, thereby superseding or dominating the traditional intellectual’s position. Through education, Gramsci supposed much of this micro-movement, and indeed the schema, for class maintenance could be elucidated. Asserting that while the role of education should be to deepen an individual’s intellectual development, there is an undercurrent which sees the multiplication and narrowing of the traditions and specialisations of the traditional intellectual themselves, growing and deepening knowledge in terms of the intellectual field distracting from social (class) change; the deepening specialisation provides need for specialising intellectuals in the field, a symbiotic deepening of knowledge in an *episteme*. The evolution of this *episteme* over time gives rise to not only specialised systems of education, but a model of maintenance for the knowledge system itself, literally embedding accepted knowledge as its own hegemonic force¹⁹.

In this field, two significant superstructural spheres have been identified. The first is civil society, in which the majority of people exist and operate the living hive of culture. The other, the hegemonic *state* power, as stated above, is connected to both coercive influence through

¹⁹ A form of knowledge, or knowledge system, which deepens itself as a justification for its own existence. Rather than moving through epistemic epochs, holding to a particular and dominant form of knowledge which, in itself, encompasses epistemologies.

judicial and consented power and through direct domination by force – noting the latter is less easily deployed in late modernity as a proliferation of human beings *en masse* usually outnumber any physical force established by a political power. The norms, culture, knowledge and behaviour of the former is informed by the latter (Gramsci, 1977). Here, it is useful to raise two key features that Gramsci identifies of the ‘modern’ political party and provide a theoretical bridge to situating the base/superstructure relation in Gramscian terms: (1) a political party *qua* class’s elaboration of its own intellectualism or politicism, and (2) a political party which carries out, in the civil domain, the same function as the state (as the ruling party), which welds together its *dominant organic intellectual* and the ‘state’ *traditional intellectual* in the sense of authority or power (Gramsci, 1996). A linguistic hint provides value in contemporary Australian politics, where the ruling political party is referred to as ‘the government’. The current non-ruling party is then termed ‘the opposition’. The government, and its ideology, are in fact an elaboration of a political party, which at that time the populace has consented to enabling the fusing of their organic intellectual (whichever class they may be from) with the traditional intellectuals. Importantly, while democracy enables citizens to elect the agents of the ruling class, this process is entirely contained within the ruling class hegemony and in the majority of instances does not pose threat to the mode of production or ruling class hegemony. In continuity of society, politicians act largely as agents of the ruling class, reinforcing and stabilising the position of the ruling class elites which masquerade *as* members of civil society in their presentation of themselves. Neither of these parties, in the sense of the Liberal National Coalition (LNP) or the Australian Labor Party (ALP), would be identifiable in origin of discrete class, though the ALP may be more, optically, aligned with the proletariat. It is worth pausing in dissection of Australian politics now to continue the sketch of Marxian-Gramscian society.

Gramsci's elaborations on Marxist imaginings

In broad terms, Marx divided the human world in two main parts, that of the economic base, the required minimum in a given society to *produce*, and that of the superstructure containing everything emerging from those means, including culture and politics, which itself maintains and informs the base. For Marx, these parts are dialectically related: changes to the base affect the superstructure and vice versa. These changes, however, are not straightforward to initiate, though continue to occur in a cycle that reasserts the base. Gramsci provides more analytical depth both in clarification and elaboration on the relationship between the base and superstructure. Indeed, Gramsci replaces a great deal of Marx's philosophical assumptions, disconnecting the dialectic in dissection of the power of a demonstrably *failed* base on a population (vis the base's effect on the superstructure)²⁰. For Gramsci, hegemony is a broader, more encompassing tool, more than for Marx where mode of production (as the base) is as fundamental, if not more, than the superstructure. For Gramsci, hegemony exists and is contained superstructurally (independently of the mode of production²¹), as Williams confirms: '[hegemony] even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure' (R. Williams, 1973, p. 8). In a sense, the propulsion of ruling class hegemony explains the globalist embrace of capitalist *ontology*, as hegemony acts to a fundamental level on the knowledge and intellectuality of civil (and state) society. Supporting this contention, Gramsci asserts two new features which exist in the superstructure, critical to understanding contemporary capitalist democratic nations. The first

²⁰ This is not to suggest that capitalism has failed as a ruling mode of societal *exchange* indeed in terms of encompassing the global spaces in which it operates, capitalism is one of the most successful expansionist regimes in human history. But capitalism's promise to liberate society has not accompanied superstructural development or 'freedom' for workers.

²¹ In this way, postmodern theorists detach Gramsci's work from the ontological *realism* of Marx, as Gramsci suggests that hegemony and the organisation of society is relatively independent from the *base*, it is thus taken as licence to confine Gramscian theory to linguistics. This slide cannot be reconciled with Gramsci's own theory, and importantly negates the (weaker) connection between base and superstructure.

feature is a division between two kinds of power in the superstructure, the division between civil and political society of the ruling class (the state) (Gramsci, 1996). The former Gramsci characterises through ‘spontaneous consent’ in that the civil society receives logic from the dominant group (ruling class) and accepts the *logics* therein, based entirely in the (ontological sub-) stratum of mode of production which creates value for the capitalist ruling class (or accelerates such creation of value). This consent, or hegemony, caused historically, produces ‘prestige’ and emanates confidence. In so doing, it produces a common sense, accepted by its very virtue, that reinforces, simultaneously, the ruling class’s position and culture, mode of production, and other norms which benefits them. Gramsci corresponds the assertion of common sense to coercive power (direct domination), as it takes a judicial and forceful mode which disciplines those in the subaltern who do not comply with the common sense (*consented*) hegemonic view (Crehan, 2016; Gramsci, 1996). Common sense is an indirect, self-maintaining modality; the power present in hegemony, belonging with the state, not only corrects for those that depart from or alternate from the consented view, but it also enforces itself through its situatedness. It sits latently in the citizenry *qua* common sense as an understanding that, should crisis occur, the forceful modality of power may be exercised. This threat simultaneously works to maintain the hegemony (*status quo*) and the ruling class’s power. These structures are under continual change, or perhaps adaptation, which metamorphosises with changing political interests (R. Williams, 1973). Here possibility emerges for change from *without*.

From the organisation of society through to the combination of coercion and self-maintenance of hegemony, there emerges a ‘natural’ yet strict division of labour amongst citizens of such a society, including a hierarchy of qualifications or a set of delegated responsibilities and functions that support to maintain either the civil or political forces. The higher level, or the workers in the state, are stratified based on their necessity to function for the state itself (King, 1978). This is an entirely different stratification to the division between

the state and civil society and implies that the ‘traditional intellectual’ is already captive and a unitary part of the state²². Indeed, Gramsci identifies that intellectual activity holds intrinsic characteristics for a given state, which places value on their function (Gramsci, 1996). He asserts that a high-order function, such as systems of science or philosophy, is more autonomously valuable and identifiable as intellectually rigorous, while a low-order function like a state’s administrative official inherently requires less rigour or understanding necessarily. Interestingly, however, he does not draw the conclusion that this hierarchy acts itself as a maintainer of intellectual order. In a democratic-bureaucratic society, vis. much of the anglophone West, many functions are justified by political necessity descending from the ruling class, defined in Marx as unproductive labour, but importantly serve a *social* function in the superstructure, thus becoming indispensable, while often simultaneously exploiting their own relatively privileged position for financial or positional gain from the state itself (Gramsci, 1996). The massification of the mode of production is a critical feature also present in the replication of intellectual structures. Gramsci posed that mass production also gave rise to a standardising of individuals, who could, like trade of raw materials, be pitted against one another, be subject to overproduction, be exported (through emigration) and who may fall prey to underemployment if they were the recipient of intellectual ‘training’ for their position. This also gives way to the hierarchy of class backgrounds in the traditional intellectual space. A hierarchy, then, emerges in between the stratum of traditional intellectuals, the capitalist (landed

²² A complicated movement is occurring here, where *time* implies dissolutions of features of Gramsci’s “model”. This is why Gramsci cautions against taking his theoretical work out of context. Here I will briefly elaborate, in terms of *spacetime* the processes that may have occurred to establish capitalist hegemony. The idea of *capital* as an economic means of production required deployment. In a sense, either entrepreneurs qua business owners or politicians qua beneficiaries of the capitalist mode devised a system of governance for *the economy*. To give life to this theory they devised a political caucus that could wield power across a plurality of spaces and bring to life the ‘common sense’ view of the economy. In the act of ‘bringing to life’ the theory, the caucus captured the imaginary of the traditional intellectual of their time, and thus created some ‘new’ intellectuals and converted the existing into the new system of thinking and operating in the economic sphere. Then, when exploring the capitalist hegemony, it is necessary to consider these intellectuals *as* intellectuals of capitalism, regardless of their ‘age’ in that system. Of course, this is a massive simplification of the process, but highlights as part of the process of asserting hegemony, the organic intellectual captures the imaginary and propulsive power of the traditional intellectuals in whatever arena they worked.

aristocracy) class and the ruling class ‘organic’ intellectual in the form of the entrepreneur and civil society’s organic intellectuals and the working class. Fuller explication of the hierarchy of intellectuals requires examination next.

The hierarchy of intellectuals

Historically, schooling operated as an exclusive, class-serving filter whose primary concern was the training of a class of intellectuals, which Gramsci termed ‘traditional intellectuals’. This group, he asserts, continues to exist as descendants of the landed aristocracy (in Europe), usually situated as a small subgroup of the ruling class or wealthy landowners, who can afford to learn, through a classical education, about history, philosophy, literature and the arts in their foundational education and are rewarded through intellectual service to their (new) class (Gramsci, 1996). In this way, education operates as a space which creates and reproduces class organisation and the construction of work in civil society (Gramsci, 1977). By nature of this privilege, or affiliation with the *petit bourgeoisie*, the traditional intellectual is aligned ideologically with the *capitalist* class. The intellectuals of this class are then able to specialise into functions which are situated above working class roles and maintain a form of specialised intellectuality about their role in the form of training and continued professional affiliation while functioning somewhat below the capitalist class. As above, the traditional intellectuals in contemporary society are perhaps most visible in their affiliation with the hegemony and maintenance of bourgeoisie hegemony typical of the upper-middle (*petty bourgeoisie*) class. The traditional intellectuals, who also encompass those thinkers who arrive in high-level positions with a wealth of privilege, are not necessarily, in capitalist terms, explicit enforcers of ruling class ideology or tradition, at least not consciously. They do not, necessarily by nature of their societal purchase, act to replicate hegemony, but are instrumental²³ in the function of

²³ As non-conscious agents of replication of the social order, given their ‘[c]ulture is [of] a privilege. Education is [of] a privilege’ and their ‘work’ is as privilege inherited from the hegemonic social order, replication is in their ‘best interest’ (Gramsci, 1977, pp. 25–26, 27–28).

society and thus maintain and replicate the current economic *base*. The traditional intellectual takes the form of, for instance, a lawyer, scholar, scientist or doctor, and by nature of their particular function and space in society, believe that they are, in their intellectualism, separate from the ‘cultural bloc’ of the ruling (political) class in state society. Through the nature of their existence, they continue to replicate whichever that ruling class ideology is. In some instances, the traditional intellectual may be a party member for one of the state’s political parties. However, when a traditional intellectual breaks from their role as a functionary in the sense of moving from performing their surgery into acting as a party promoter, or acting as an elected official, they cease their unconscious traditional intellectual labour (Gramsci, 1996). This traditional intellectual bloc performs important functions in capitalist society (vis-à-vis for civil society), but it simultaneously performs necessary functions of state society. The traditional intellectual, then, is hierarchically poised above other social groups or *class* forms (be they explicitly classed as intellectual or otherwise²⁴) in a democratic society, except perhaps in terms of the ruling class, of which they may form a discrete subordinate and constituent part.

The organic intellectual of the given social group positioned in civil society sits in relative opposition or lower position to the traditional intellectual, particularly those originating in the lower-order social groups (classes): ‘[i]t can be observed that the “organic” intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development, are for the most part “specialisations” of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 6). This intellectual, whose acknowledged role is the expansion of their class’s interests, who necessarily starts at a lower position than the traditional intellectuals must, Gramsci argues, win over the traditional intellectual bloc if they are to be successful in their expansion and the creation of a new hegemony. To enact hegemonic transformation, Gramsci instantiated two main ‘wars’ that

²⁴ Again, noting Gramsci’s identification of all people (‘men’) as *intellectual*, though not necessarily functioning as intellectuals.

could capture a society: the first is a physical positioning requiring armed strength to instantiate, the second is an amassing of ideological force.

War of Position / War of Manoeuvre

Gramsci sets out two main ‘wars’, which are perhaps best understood as possible paths for cultural change and enforcement. The two paths are the ‘war of manoeuvre’ and the ‘war of position’. The war of manoeuvre comprises of some distinct characteristics commonly associated with war(s), which might be depicted in historical and contemporary forms of warfare through strategy and domination²⁵. To be precise, the war of manoeuvre requires physically overwhelming an enemy and is captured in terms of a coercive apparatus of the conquering state. Importantly, Gramsci refers to the ‘proper relation between civil and state society’, a culmination behind the state (Gramsci, 1996, p. 238), drawing the state into civil and political connectivity. The war of manoeuvre, then, is entirely dependent on state hegemony to be officious in literal war, and depending on the scale, must hold an overwhelming majority of support (Gramsci, 1996). In this sense, in contemporary society²⁶, the war of manoeuvre would require absolute bipartisan political acceptance and broad societal consent as well as resourcing. The war of manoeuvre employs force, so for one *culture qua society* to achieve domination over another in this sense would require physical armaments as indicative of imperial warfare.

As a counterpoint, the war of position has a more tenuous connection to war (historical or cultural). It is concerned with cultural dominance from within or outside (Gramsci, 1996). Position, though, as Gramsci notes, has its own connected drawbacks and involves production of resistance to tyranny through a cultural avenue rather than through might such as manoeuvre requires. Importantly, the intellectual fight for position requires: ‘social structures

²⁵ Importantly these forces may be conceptualised as enforcers of social order after the capture of a society, for example police, military, and enactment of judicial systems.

²⁶ At least in a majority of cultures and nations.

[which] were of themselves still capable of becoming heavily-armed fortifications' (Gramsci, 1996, p. 237). Fortifying and maintaining such social structures were then the foundations of any 'new state', or the expansionist habit of an extant state also employed in globalisation (and colonialism after a war of manoeuvre). In this regard, both manoeuvre and position can be considered contrasting temporalities in a political struggle (Crehan, 2002). Gramsci effectively provides a focus for this thesis in the understanding that *manoeuvre* could not be successful against hegemonic Western Europe and its colonial decedents; rather, through a war of position, it could be possible to build 'up the strength of the social foundations of a new state ... an alternative state and society upon the leadership of the working class means creating alternative institutions ... within existing society' (Cox, 1983, p. 165) describing expansion, capture and overthrow of any non-capitalist hegemony. However, this conception still provides hope as a *possible* route to the disruption of a state's hegemony through consciousness-raising. This is arguably a more versatile route, both for the replication of state hegemony amongst civil society, but conversely for the organic realisation of class power through counter-hegemonic education.

Gramsci highlights that a war of manoeuvre would require substantial resourcing and a strong hegemonic position of the ruling class. Indeed, following his theoretical modelling, a *war* of this kind would likely fail rapidly, as conditions worsened for the *warriors*, though small scale maintenance of hegemony through para-militarised forces, even against some small scale activists²⁷ continue to be employed (Gramsci, 1996). In addition, with developed hegemonic systems such as the expansionist global capitalism, there is an innate subsumption of the war of manoeuvre which accompanies the war of position as a mechanism of assertion of hegemonic dominion. Following this by way of example, it is possible to see advanced capitalist nations employ 'force' as a *spreader* of the *hegemon*, but typically it would be seen that the forceful arm of the *state* be deployed to enforce *its* values or rules upon its own citizenry, for example,

²⁷ Of recent note, Black Lives Matter protestors as attractors of serious para-militarised police forces.

deployment of armed forces to maintain authority in a violent protest. In this limited sense, the war of manoeuvre is perceptible, part thereof an overextension of the war of position, or where through the war of position the *state* is unable to enforce, reinforce, or instate *its* own hegemony deploying force to suppress counter-hegemonic forces. In this sense, economic forces work more effectively to maintain the hegemony, in education, as a form of ‘civilising’ (for civil society but also to maintain social order, decorum, participation in hegemonically accepted modes). Here, the role of education requires serious examination as it pertains to the argument of this thesis and to the organisation and replication of society and (non-)production of citizens and activists.

The role of education

Education plays a role in the organisation for society, be it as a technicist institution to train or reproduce workers and thinkers, or as a model of elite pontification and reflection to shape the future for the hegemony. The Graeco-Roman education tradition served to attract the best intellectuals and to train the next generation of thinkers, a narrow band of wealthy elite who had the support or landholdings to support their educational venture, or in some instances a handful of religious clergies chosen for their strategic importance in the organisation of their church (Gramsci, 1996). Interestingly, the basic modern Western education tradition mirrors the organisational hierarchy of the organic *qua* proletariat intellectual versus traditional *qua* educated elite intellectual. The role of education, particularly in Britain, shifted significantly around industrialisation and the increasing need for cooperation between economic interests, corporate development and the training of specialists for these purposes. Historically, in this space, landowners (or landed aristocracy) maintained their politico-intellectual primacy through allegiance with the emergent dominant (ruling) class. Allegiance with capitalist entrepreneurs ensured the landed aristocracy’s survival, and the entrepreneurs with *capital*. This serves to keep entrepreneurs, arguably an ‘organic intellectual’ of ruling class origin, aligned with the provision of increasing capital (*vis-à-vis* through ‘venture capital’). While these features

are less prominent in Australian history, as Australia did not feature an aristocracy with the ability to side with capitalist interest²⁸, there were, exported descendants of the landed aristocracy with a moral-intellectual agenda of elitism. This brought a parallel hegemony to the country. It is now possible to see subtle changes to the hegemony of education (education's purpose) towards adaptation and reproduction of skilled labour and entrepreneurial behaviour (at least for the *elite*).

The role of (post)industrial education

In the setting of changing forms of intellectualisms amongst social groups (classes), the imperative for thorough education increases. Central to a Gramscian understanding of the organisation of society, precisely the development of intellectuals in both organic and traditional forms, is the role of education. Gramsci complicates education in his era through identifying the role of a social groups' *learning about class* in what might be considered an informal mode. The informal education of organic intellectuals is required to truly understand the relative position, culture, function and knowledge systems of their class before they might lead any kind of social change or transformation based on their relative position (Gramsci, 1996). By way of example, in contemporary society the phrase 'school of life' or 'street smart' – clichéd though these terms may be – refers to a kind of *getting to know* one's own position and social class, race or gender as forms of consciousness which are less likely to be raised in a formalised system of technical education, particularly in terms of primary and secondary education. While there are post-secondary education opportunities for some students that enable a reflexive understanding of the positionality of their own social status, these opportunities are limited, particularly for those of non-dominant groups (traditionally white, male and upper-middle-class) and are increasingly deemed superfluous to capitalist requirements directly by the state

²⁸ Indeed, even knowledges that did exist on the island were ignored in favour of the British expansionist colonial agenda.

and increasingly in common sense. Here, Gramsci's articulation of the formation of the organic intellectual is particularly important, as a person who emerges from their class (social group) through a class-bound enlightened sense, or critical consciousness that permeates the common sense of the ruling class *for* other members of the class²⁹, is able to, ultimately, move the subaltern social group (or whole class) closer, relatively, to the ruling class sphere (Gramsci, 1996). An education, for such a group, must include both a sophisticated knowledge of the organisation of society and the understanding and leadership of their social group. In this regard, Gramsci illustrates a trade-union leader as a possible source of organic intellectual for the working class. Thinking through the formation of the traditional intellectual, as a separate but dependent social group, is also of critical importance, particularly in considering (post)industrial education and its role in sustaining the supporting structures of traditional intellectuals.

The (post)industrial education model saw an increase in the number of students and the general focus of education pivot towards the production of human 'resources' for increasingly specialised labour (W. Brown, 2015). Gramsci captures this movement towards specialisation and the necessary intellectuals therein: 'each practical activity tends to create a new type of school for its own executives and specialists and hence to create a body of specialist intellectuals at a higher level to teach in these schools' (Gramsci, 1996, p. 26). This was a departure from a relatively broad, though exclusively elite, royal or religious, education that had dominated in years past for the traditional intellectuals. As capitalism advanced, the system of education moved towards increasingly technical and specialised models of education into what we today refer to as the industrial model of education, with a focus on making education into a production line, which serves *human* capital (or 'resource creation' for industry). Such an

²⁹ It is not sufficient for a social group's organic intellectual to identify (and subsequently liberate) themselves in their *oppression* or *relative status* in society, they must formulate a new way of thinking – for Gramsci this is primarily considered in the sense of producing a communist insurrection to replace the ruling class view, or by the capitalist class to replace feudalism, etc.

education sheds all unnecessary or formative aspects in favour of what produces value (Gramsci, 1996). While further features of industrial education remain, to an extent, relevant in contemporary society, it is worth pausing here to observe the features of education which were surfacing and focussing traditional intellectuals through Gramsci's life. There was a disestablishment of the traditional school, or the school with a relatively humanistic agenda, though often exclusively for the aristocracy, and an increasing interest in the production of undifferentiated graduands who would serve specific industry purposes, a capitalist seizing of education which has continued to intensify. In terms of dividing schools, in Gramsci's time, there would have likely been three or four substantive groups of levels of education (early learning, primary, middle, secondary, vocational or university learning) which different class-background students would have had varying levels of access to. Under the Mussolini regime in particular, the focus of education pivoted to an instrumentalist narrowing towards professional-serving schools of a plurality of disciplines in ever increasing specialty (Duggan, 2006; Gramsci, 1996). The classical, humanist, school producing 'the fundamental power to think and ability to find one's way in life' (Gramsci, 1996, p. 26) was rapidly compressing into specialist schools. Here, importantly, Gramsci notes that those students who may learn about their social group's positionality, particularly in training for the medical/legal/political profession, lose their 'organic' intellectual status through attendance at a specialised school and stratification into being a traditional intellectual. The regime of education, which may prepare a student for some specialised decision-making in their field, is, for Gramsci, designed to remove or focus the individual attention on *agency* in their field rather than *freedom* in the sense of elaborating their class's needs. This breaks, for example, the working class student's loyalty to their class in a simultaneous act of transcendence and realignment of interest with the traditional intellectual group, though serves to strand the traditional intellectual in total dependence to state hegemony. While this marks ascendancy into a new stratum, indeed an

entirely separate strata of intellectual *class*, it simultaneously acts to separate and inspire members of the, from the same example, working class student's contacts in the sense of *that could be me, my child, my friend*. Gramsci stated here that the traditional intellectuals, after the process of breaking from their original social group, 'experience through an *esprit de corps* [in] their uninterrupted historical continuity ... thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group' separate from their social class (Gramsci, 1996, p. 7). The traditional school, in the humanist sense, is not the professional, technical education which may invoke transience from class origin into the traditional intellectual stratum, and it is not the generalist or specialist education for any other subaltern social group. The Graeco-Roman education tradition, then, is retained only for the smallest subgroup of the dominant social groups' elite, perhaps including universities of the period which still allowed some 'humanist learning', but only for the upper stratum of the elite (Gramsci, 1996).

The grim, reproductive view of education still fits with specialised education in contemporary Australia. As will be explored later in this doctoral research, Australian education after the 1970s saw an opening up to more social groups dropping its elite status, simultaneously slowly losing its humanist model and migrating into the 2010s towards further reductionist, technical education which accelerates the production of traditional intellectuals in a competitive marketised space. It may be observed in contemporary society, that education continues to provide some social-groups with a false hope of whole-of-class ascendancy, in the sense that education, particularly higher education, provides an avenue for membership into the traditional intellectual stratum. This social force acts to keep the middle-class, women and people of colour in their social groups at a higher rate than typically white male students. In addition, the revolutionary view of education which Gramsci leads toward, as a place of potential social group realisation and transience has not been realised, and organic intellectual movements are subsumed into dominant group hegemonic 'blips' at an alarming rate. Even

executors of counter-hegemonic movements in education are increasingly colonised and appreciated as 'future administrators' or 'learning' to work in the institution in an overwhelmingly patriarchal sense. With an understanding of the movement of education from (elite's) humanism to (the mass's) reproduction for capital, and understanding the wars of position and manoeuvre, it is now possible to elucidate social organisation in depth.

Clarifying Gramscian social organisation

It is now possible to further elucidate Gramsci's model of social organisation, having explored the role of intellectuals, traditional and organic, and depicting the narrowing and bleak role of education in advanced capitalist societies. Gramsci diverges from Marx in his depiction of society, though draws strongly on Marxist philosophy in an articulation which is arguably robust historical materialist praxis. This is separate and intertwined into a sociology for political philosophy and advancement of socialism. Based abstractly on the Marxist sketch above, it is possible to conceptualise Gramsci's order of society, and the organisation and relative position of intellectuals, to depict the social order, education and how class (order) might operate in the superstructure. Figure 2 (below) depicts the economic base, in the Marxian sense, as the physical requirements for economic life. Gramsci's complication of the superstructure rests atop this. Gramsci divides the superstructure into dominant and subaltern classes, where each has a relative purchase in the daily activity of society. Civil society comprises proletarian classes. Gramsci places all classes not in the dominant state in the *subaltern* (not including, for example, the middle class). At the top of the triangle sits political society, which comprises the dominant (hegemonic) social group of the 'ruling class' (bourgeoisie). Importantly, though, the ruling class may retain its own subaltern, who hold a different ideology which is not yet capable of capturing the consent of the traditional intellectuals. Such a gradual 'overturn' or modification of state hegemony occurs from those who still retain membership with the ruling class. At any given time, the dominant group are those with current control over

the traditional intellectuals of the society in addition to their coercive or dominating power over the subordinate classes. The model also depicts the movement of ‘enforcement’, or the combined powers of traditional intellectuals, and coercive/dominating power, in relation to enforcing both the social order and the mode/methods of production. Contra Marx, the superstructure, specifically political society, may be responsible for the modification or overturn of the base without substantial disruption of the superstructure.

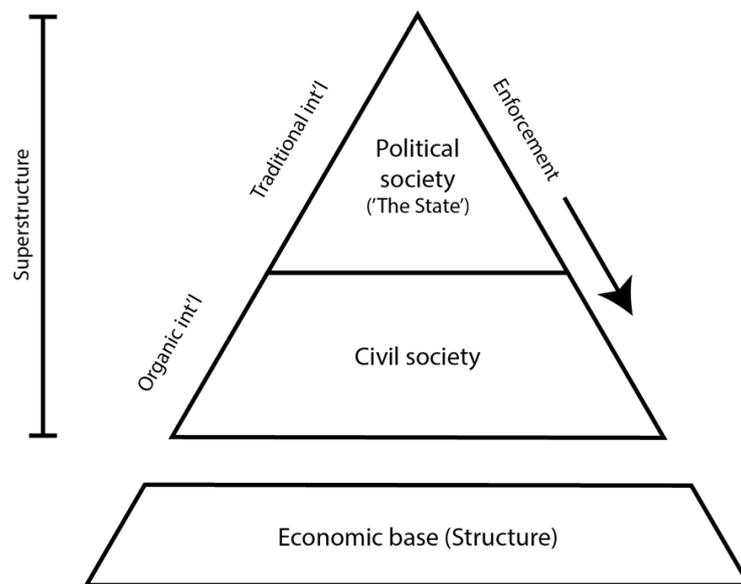


Figure 2 Gramscian organisation of society (created by author)

In civil society, any action taken against the state hegemony, or against common sense, is necessarily political and works from beneath the state power, as it is naturally not situated with political society (Thomas, 2009)³⁰. Its outcomes, however, may be more or less subsumed by the hegemony. In this sense, attention must be paid to ‘revolution’ and its politics, as it takes *action*, which may be radical, that creates outcomes or arguments which are more or less congruent with state hegemony.

³⁰ The subaltern of political society may also struggle against common sense though they are not subject to the same disciplinary action from the enforcing arm of state society as *political society’s* subaltern.

Revolutionary politics, socialism and the postmodern development

The organisation of society, drawn from Gramsci, holds in contemporary capitalist societies and provides an understanding of education *and* activism as expressions of state and civil society. Gramsci's theoretical lineage in 'modern' theory and its bifurcation between orthodox and (post)modern spaces is not without complication. Philosophical developments can have substantial ripples across culture, both in terms of vertical (in a sense of social group mobility) and horizontal (in terms of *mass* of population), but to characterise Marxism as the only political philosophy with an arm of praxis would be inaccurate. The ripple across left politics globally that Marxism brought was largely undone by the 1940s, when a new social theory was surfacing from its own origins, influenced by its time and resulting from changes to global politics and globalising philosophic interest (Anderson, 1998). The departure from (anti-)socialist movements toward new features of political philosophy, and across civil and political society, is notable and particularly important for its social and political significance. While translations of Gramsci's work were yet to surface in the West, theoretical spaces progressed rapidly from the 1940s and accelerated in the 1960s without Gramscian translations. By the time Gramsci's theory had fully arrived in the English speaking West, postmodern theory had a grip across Europe, leaving Gramsci's work open to interpretation in a new frame (Anderson, 1976b, 2017). A brief exploration of the challenges and tectonic shifts in postmodern political philosophy as it relates to historical political development is necessary. To mirror the exploration above, it is useful to wind this story together with the cultural narrative at the time of *May '68*. This perspective is presented as an alternative view to the rise of socialism, which postdates the height of Marxist theory during a stage of critical development of hegemony in Western nations.

The period of mass industrialisation, through which Gramsci lived, was also subject to the rise of political-economic forces globally, including two world wars and dramatic cultural

changes. In the Western world, arguments were raised that industrialism and nationalism, as powerful political forces, had played a crucial role in shaping the anglophone West (Anderson, 1998). The advancement of these forces, however, had resulted in destruction and conflict between them and the *people* living in those times. Noting a corollary advancement in the clash of these forces and the historical advancement of *philosophy* and *social theory*, Anderson highlights a key shift that occurred theoretically: the movement of postmodernism to an ‘epochal rather than aesthetic category’, particularly in relation to the post-World War II period (Anderson, 1998, p. 5). This development is of particular significance to Anderson as a theorist who deals with philosophy and political theory originating in the pre-postmodern³¹. The ripple from the social-political world in political philosophy, which saw a descriptor of *artistic works* applied to *philosophical tradition*, created divisive ‘camps’ and which called for firm allegiances for scholars of the time. In the post-War War II period, the fracturing of the left, as explored below, was not yet visible in the *superstructure* beyond political works; however, by the 1940s, *modern* theorists were beginning to characterise the dominance of Western culture through the Western nations as a ‘universal’ political authority, which emanated hegemony through *force* by a promise of global nuclear destruction (Anderson, 1998). Here, the West was asserting new global political authority from its relatively secure bourgeoisie hegemony, which was being asserted through force if slowly transforming into a coercive establishment of belief throughout the anglophone world (Anderson, 1998). Establishment of a *globalised* capitalism installed through colonialism in the eighteenth century and earlier was now predominantly maintained through immense economic coercion. From this political space came theoretical responses, including new work that emerged as a *fusion* of poetry and politics beyond the aesthetic character of art and life toward an ontological understanding of life *through* poetry following loosely in the Heideggerian

³¹ This simultaneously occurring *alongside* the postmodern turn.

tradition³² (Anderson, 1998). In the 1950s, the work of the *New Left* recommenced the advancement of the postmodern moment. Importantly, attention should be drawn to the acceptance of the failure of communism, perhaps not amongst political philosophers, but broadly amongst Western nations where the prospect of a socialist regime had all but ended. Dividing from this space, North American social theory, then, began a turn amongst their political left which was itself subject to increasing class division and problems of advanced capitalism towards stark(er) postmodern theory. This refocus on postmodernism could be conceptualised as a justification of the state, rather than a turn towards *conservative* political philosophers (Wolff, 1996). This American transformation was but a ripple ruptured across from the European philosophic movement which saw a starker turn in theoretical transformation. In fact, globally a fracture from the radical politics and theory of Marxists, the postmodern turn was ultimately *supported* by the general analysis that Marxism had failed and that socialism was no longer either a threat or in need of analysis. By the 1960s, revolutionary attitudes had begun to emerge. As Anderson described them, ‘cultural mutants whose values [could be described as that] of nonchalance and disconnexion, hallucinogens and civil rights’ (Anderson, 1998, p. 13). This was a departure, substantively for the American nations, from relative conservatism and a new movement finding a theoretical footing in the strengthening postmodern theoretical world (Anderson, 1998; Bourg, 2017). Indeed, as Bourg argues, the symbiotic relationship between cultural development and postmodern theory was substantial. While the foundations of postmodern theory did not originate in the 1960s social movements, the relationships between theory and practice, were substantially strengthened through this period and the novel and experimental nature of much postmodern theory gave rise to a new *interest* in theory which cannot be ignored (Bourg, 2017). A handful of works produced through the 1960s theorised about the revolutionary student movements of the period, but many with

³² Anderson focusses on Olson’s *aesthetic manifestos* among other important works as a bridge between ‘aesthetic theory’ and ‘prophetic history’ connected with ‘poetic innovation and political revolution’ (Anderson, 1998, p. 12).

postmodern roots acted as ahistorical and depoliticised texts, which are drawn out in Bourg's work on productions of student activists rather than in their theoretical work (Bourg, 2017). It is worth momentarily departing the emergence of the postmodern movement and uniting it with the above in terms of its juxtaposition, and *political* positionality in *political philosophy*, vis as a separate tradition worth observing, but not deploying in this thesis. Importantly, some postmodern theory draws from Marx and Gramsci's theoretical legacy, and Anderson's contemporary development, which would see such a postmodern turn as descent into linguistics and, thus, ontologically shallow with inattention paid to the material conditions of society. Attention must also be paid to the politics of 1968, particularly in relation to the postmodern turn.

Global political influence of France's May 1968

Elton John writes a hit. A nuclear submarine sinks. French student protests come to a head which results in dramatic legislative changes. May 1968 is particularly significant for political and theoretical reasons in France and has had rippling impacts around the world on student movements and progressive ideals (Bourg, 2017). Politically, socialists and communists had united to create a single party *bloc*, which aimed to replace president de Gaulle. Civil society had reached a point of revolution. This is significant to Gramscian method, as (contained in civil society) class-intellectuals rose to the leadership of a united group of students, workers and 'peasants', who 'had begun to move from passive grumbling to direct action, fearful that the end of agricultural tariffs in July would further depress their hard lot' (Mendel, 1969, p. 3). A confluence of political pressures and growing unrest created special conditions, particularly on the back of an election in the country. Leading intellectuals were heavily influenced by new French social theory that had given voice to the artists and poets in a new formalised kind of scholarship in an art-imitates-life theory taken to new extremes. Though the theoretical lineage is perhaps more *literally* voluminous, the effervescence of the revolution, short lived as it was, is

still discussed in contemporary politics in France and still has impacts on social movements today (Bourg, 2017). For student activists/militants of May 1968, the mode employed for a victory of the proletariat was predominantly one of *force*. While the movement had its ideological precedents, indeed almost its own class-intellectual leadership in a handful of instances, and astute political allegiances, it found the conditions which saw the largest coalition of *activist* and *worker* forces with an extant party of communist persuasion in post-war European history (Bourg, 2017). Ultimately, internal friction saw the Communist Party³³ disavow the revolutionary, militant insurgency by students and works across the country (Mendel, 1969). Only a few weeks later, the nation voted in a referendum on the de Gaulle government, which resulted in them taking further control over the unsettled country, signalling the defeat of the Communist Party (Bourg, 2017). These were conditions which, to an extent, mirrored Gramsci's some 50 years prior. While there remains some debate about the specific reasons for fracture in the French Communist Party of the day, there are three strong lines of argument which are worth momentary consideration. The first is that party leaders had become comfortable, bourgeois, and lax to the communist cause and had little interest in external forces, either swelling their responsibility or disrupting their extant position of power. The second is that the party had lingered on ideas of a Moscow-serving Communist Party whose main interest was preserving foreign interest's priorities in the country. Finally, as Mendel advances, the communists simply saw a longer road ahead for an institution of socialist ideals in the nation, and that allegiance with militants would act as a discrediting force (Mendel, 1969, p. 6).

While the political forces played out, there was a simultaneous revolutionary current in the French universities of the period. This was a questioning of the university as the domain of the traditional intellectual, toward a counter-power, a space of political *consciousness*. Universities

³³ Or the uneasy and direct alliance of communists and socialists in the country.

were forced into becoming spaces which could not only be captured for the production of organic intellectuals, if only briefly, but also as a space for the production and replication of knowledge by the organic intellectual (Lopes, 2014). As would happen in institutions around the world, France's universities had 'opened its [their] doors to non-traditional students' (Lopes, 2014, p. 31). This gave rise to an unprecedented period of *student mobilisation* and new opportunities for *values* to enter the hegemonic episteme. While prominent authors, such as Althusser, largely dismissed the intellectual progress of students as a happy arrival of 'the death-agony of imperialism', which 'created the conditions for an attack by petty-bourgeois youth on certain capitalist apparatuses of the State'. Fortunately, he acknowledged the attacks on capitalist educational *systems* as an ideological revolt, stopping short of political revolution, but providing a foothold for examination of the new ways of thinking emerging from universities (Macciocchi & Althusser, 1973, p. 314). Indeed, as Lopes advances, while Althusser was dismissive, Foucault and various retroactively labelled postmodern theorists in conjunction with student activists and a special clustering of political conditions had briefly created a 'French university [which] challenged the tenets of capitalist society and sought to reinvent itself, becoming one of the strongholds of a culture of democratic participation and of valorisation of the human being' (Lopes, 2014, p. 32). Before the eventual succession of the Communist Party, resulting from a stand-down of striking workers and students and a retreat from the militant student groups, with its new allies in the socialists, had created among the strongest calls for *left unity* in the anglophone West. While the ultimate goals, and the party itself, were 'unsuccessful' they had started another trend which continued in left politics until the 1990s. They had created a *left unity* of socialists, communists, and other movements. This was an intellectual movement which united various social groups across the left of most Western countries. Indeed, France's moments of solidarity across 1968 continued to affect social unity and change for years. These movements made their way to Australia in the form of anti-imperialist protest and saw

movements in Australian left politics that created a more compelling ALP, throttling the LNP and propelling Australia into a ‘worker’ allied society (Hansen et al., 2018). Australian students were equally swayed by political forces, emanating from Europe and the Communist Parties. Though Australian students had little affiliation with the Communist Party, the New Left wave in Australia was nevertheless enjoying new power (Hastings, 2003). By 1969, in South Australia, Flinders University had its own ‘revolutionary’ new left student group, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)³⁴, which ran a newspaper in the fashion of the communist parties on ‘censorship, democracy in the university, student power, control of course content and assessment in the Humanities’ (Hastings, 2003, p. 28).

This toolset, incorporating stratification of society, intellectuals and hegemony, are essential parts of understanding the role of human *action* under hegemony. Gramsci’s unique and lasting contribution to political philosophy and social science poises his work for a revolutionary view of student’s activism and provides a basis for understanding the organising and resistance to hegemony (or compliance thereto). While the more recent postmodern turn provides some modernising of the theory contextually, the deviations which see hegemony constructed entirely in language overextend and dilute the core strength of Gramsci’s praxis. To provide an orthodox modernising, a revitalised look at student activism from a Gramscian perspective is required. Further, an operationalisation of the philosophy of praxis is needed to provide clarifying and robust analytical examinations of the necessarily political action under hegemony. First, however, a bridge to contemporary politics is required, particularly considering the more recent complications of identity politics and populism as potentially major stumbling blocks in a deployment of the philosophy of praxis in late modernity. These spaces test and challenge the limits of hegemonic theory and the theory of intellectuals and must be shown as continually relevant to modern society in order for them to be reintegrated,

³⁴ Amongst other revolutionary, radical, and at times destructive anarchist groups, such as ‘the Weathermen’, ‘the Worker Student Alliance’, etc.

understood, or redeployed in an operational manner in this thesis. In this vein, the thesis turns in the next chapter, to an examination of the role of contemporary politics, with particular attention paid to its relation to Gramscian social theory and the philosophy of praxis.

Chapter 2

After the fall of the New Left: Neoliberalism to populism, Gillard to Morrison, and vanishing unity

Globally, politics has shifted from a general form of *united left* against *united right*, in varying forms of liberalisms against conservatisms, to a new politics of identity, division and competition, fracturing politics under hegemony. These conditions did not emerge ‘overnight.’ Though the pace of political change has accelerated in contemporary times, the path from post-war economic growth and accelerating capitalism, radicalism and *laissez-faire* economics, through neoliberal capitalism to contemporary fractured and divisive politics and increasingly authoritarian collapse-embracing market economies has taken nearly 100 years to arrive. These conditions, while not linear and staggered across the world stage, have catastrophised and super-sized post-COVID-19 pandemic era, with increasing insecurity on multiple fronts, and a world begging for people to *get off*. This grim global *climate*, denied or embraced, fuelled activism, politics and economics from 2010 to 2020. This new politics of late modernity has split, leaving in its wake fractured global political scenes, incomparable and yet robustly un-theorised terrain for contemporary cultural studies. In this post-theoretical space, a re-evaluation of historical methods of the old-new left should be considered, as the *pace* of change bares echoes of the past. Theoretical bridging between Gramsci’s 1900s and the 2000s is required to position this thesis in sound, stable theoretical waters. To accomplish this bridging, several conditions must be paid attention. First, the move in the late twentieth century to neoliberalism, its influence on politics through to populist politics and accelerated late-stage capitalism will be discussed. Second, a brief exploration will be presented of the changing political landscape in Australia as a signal for changing activism and student politics, in particular the Gillard to Morrison period of the last ten years. Finally, there will be an

exploration of the vanishing unity on both the left and right which gives way to new political conditions, anger, opportunism, dangerous ‘leadership’ and the loss of representation which is mirrored across cultural institutions. While a great deal of Gramsci’s theory ‘holds up’ in contemporary economic and social conditions, the *cultural* work of the 1900s is in need of a re-focussing in keeping with the original promise of the *philosophy of praxis*, a unitary piece bringing contemporary culture into the meta-theoretical spine which sits across Gramsci’s work, is required. Attention must first be given to Australia’s political landscape and leadership in 2021.

Australia’s un/popular political landscape

The last two years in the anglophone west have been watermarked with extreme right-wing outbursts, from the riot in the United States Capitol, to the amplification of the ‘anti-masker’ as an expression of freedom. This is a clear continuation of the political conditions present over the last 20 years. In Australia, the federal Liberal National coalition (LNP) government acts in the name of the people to, against popular view, to invest in environmentally destructive industries such as coal and fracking, detain refugees offshore for years of ‘processing’, and routinely fails to make salient decisions about conduct and policy in Canberra. Recently, a multitude of women have come forward from the LNP and Australian Labor Party (ALP), highlighting the poor practices and sexual misconduct by and against staff in the nation’s capital (Remeikis, 2021). The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has continued to make unpopular and damaging decisions about allegations of misconduct by his staff and ministers. Indeed, Morrison has a tendency to act in an entirely unpopular mode, preferring to holiday out of the country during the massive national bushfires of early 2020 and heading to a football match with the ‘lads’ during the height of a sexual assault scandal. Surprisingly, his popularity is largely unaffected. During the bushfires, with a nation glued to their broadcast televisions again even in a streaming age, a video surfaced of Morrison attempting to shake the hands of firefighters who had worked around the clock across the nation’s eastern states. Even the refusal

of the firefighters to shake his hand was not enough to seriously and sustainably damage the LNP's reputation. While our hard right-wing parties have gained traction in recent years, particularly the populist and racist One Nation, the surfacing of *popular* leaders from the major parties has been forestalled by an un/popular leadership. Morrison is a leader who is more concerned with maintaining appearances and potentially appealing to a positionally dominant yet subaltern masquerading hegemonic hypermasculine audience rather than facing the outpouring of anger and distress over procedure and serious criminal matters which, in spite of ongoing denial, it is clear he knew about. Rather than Weller's (2007, p. 10) assertion that a prime minister 'may become more experienced, more skilful at the same time as becoming tired, distant and removed from public contact ... their image later becomes jaded, as each election becomes harder to win', the collapse before the finish line of contemporary politicians only magically lifts them over the finish line. The new un/popularism in Australia, concomitantly with right-wing leadership, has created unique conditions for government and has obvious trickle-down effects on our institutions' governance. Further explanation of the un/popular is required, especially for its application in conceptualising Australian federal politics and its onward effects in universities and other social institutions.

Australian politics has endured a decade of 'knives out', 'backstabbing' and self-destruction (Dyrenfurth et al., 2011; Kent, 2010; Patrick, 2013). From the political assassination of Kevin Rudd by Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, followed by the political assassination of Gillard by Rudd only a few years later, partly by the public and (social) media and partly by the party which supported her leadership, there has been a hard swing *right* back to LNP government which had held strong the decade before (Patrick, 2013). The flash in the pan of ALP leadership in the country invited a handful of social and infrastructural changes which could quickly be repealed or para-privatised by the again incoming LNP, namely the National Broadband Network, a travesty of infrastructural 'uplift' which was hammered

particularly hard during the lockdowns of COVID-19. The political landscape has seen the self-destruction of the ALP when it takes national office, and the victory of radically unpopular LNP PMs – almost as if the slogan “anyone but him” trundled out by the Liberal party against the Labor leadership was taken literally internally. Un/popularity worked for LNP government, while the un/popularity of the ALP leader, in recent times Bill Shorten followed by Anthony Albanese, led to replacement and further downfall following an unpredicted return of LNP leadership to Canberra after the 2019 election. The uninterrupted examples of starkly *unpopular* decision making by Morrison has awarded him an almost untouchable status, protected by a corporate, sole-owner, traditional media structure. Here, theoretical frames of identity politics, populism and basic democratic principles fall apart, as a profoundly unpopular series of decisions disembodied from the leader himself which only amplifies his popularity. While populist frames would see Morrison turn against the wealthy elite, to unite fractions of the public over issues he himself is partly responsible for, and turn towards singular ‘representation’ of the people, he has demonstrated an allegiance to the elite. Here he seeks to prop up the economy over the people through ‘Job Keeper’, maintaining a semblance of conservative unity through economic rhetoric and relative safety from COVID-19; though, he can be given little credit for the success of Australia’s health systems, and through holidaying away from ‘representation’ consistently denies any decision-making, even amongst his own party. Morrison’s profound un/popularity is a movement between making *bad decisions* and ignoring their presence in public fora, either through flat denial or side-stepping from the questions. Here, a right-wing *popularity* emerges as the perception of Morrison’s ignoring of women’s calls for justice over sexual assault is taken by right wing groups as a silencing of women and an excuse to justify their ultra-hetero-masculinity, or his holidaying away as a justification for ignoring problems in their own lives. Indeed, in hegemonic media, as in Australia with the singularly Murdochian press, advertisement and articles about masculinity

are pitched at a particular, hegemonic, way of being. In this way, even advertisement builds an allegiance with (almost lazy) masculine tropes and imagery (Ouellette, 2002, 2003), which Morrison leverages in his 'leadership' (Peace, 2020; Steel, 2019). While the Left sees these decisions as deeply *unpopular*, along with fractions of the right, particularly those women of the Right advocating against rape, rally to the Left for support, there is an implicit acknowledgement of how the politics of un/popularity plays out. Rather than traditional conservatist or liberal responses, which would still see a democratic response reaching the light of day, the new un/popular politics has colonised the thoughts of the politically engaged in the country. While images of Morrison's vacation or his trip to the footy may be used at the next election as a reminder by the centre-left of the implicit acceptance that the LNP is led by a *fallible* leader whose decisions are frequently incorrect, damaging and unpopular, seems only to add credibility to the leadership.

This un/popular pattern of government and 'leadership' is profoundly hegemonic: the acceptance that the State's patterns of decision making are implicitly in our best interest and can somehow be reconciled with representational democracy. These are tested patterns of traditional intellectual capture and reassertion of State authority. In particular, the LNP supporting Murdoch Press' monopoly of journalism only serves to reproduce and reinforce the decisions of the State, making popular the unpopular and reinforcing the leadership and power of the State apparatus. Following Brabazon (2021), if we understand un/popular culture as 'low popular culture', there is an inherent embrace which 'revels in the domestic, the messy, the funny, the uncomfortable, the frightening, and the odd', a structure which is easily (re)emphasised by the media and produced piecemeal to reinforce dominant structures, un/popular culture, then 'confirms the speed of movement between categories and how unpopular topics, subjects and ideas can infuse the dominant environment' (Brabazon, 2021, p. 12). Here, the movement from a relatively unstable government of the self-destructive ALP in the 2010s, the relatively stable

government of the 2020s has the feeling of a ‘natural progression’ located in popular consent (Gramsci, 1996). While the stability is emphasised by the hegemon’s press, the unchanging leadership of the LNP provides a qualifiable stability to the party: even when the decisions are *unpopular*, they are still more *stable* than the unpopularity-backstab cycle of the previous ALP government.

Capitalising on the era of instability, which was in part produced by the LNP affiliated press, a new un/popular culture has emerged supporting the decisions and justifying state positionality as hegemon to ensure enduring stability as necessity. The affective repercussions are seen through ‘leadership’ of public institutions around the country. In universities the un/popular decision making of Vice-Chancellors in flitting between strategy limited to ‘shiny new building’ or ‘staff restructuring’ still offers a semblance of consistency. This consistency keeps the hegemon responsible for the appointment from ousting them over poor decision-making in the name of stability while demonstrating none. In a time of increasing global instability, the craving for stable leadership comes at the expense of democratic and fair representation in a desperate bid to see a return to stable times, a conservative impulse which aligns with the LNP core messaging, but a corruption of the powers of government and governance at a fundamental level. The implications for this stability are clear in hegemonic theory: there is a comfort in stable leadership. Processes of government which converge on predictable outcomes are important for maintaining a citizenry which accept the ruling class. This goes some way towards countering the rising power of populist leaders. Indeed, the falling popularity of small parties in the 2019 federal election saw gains to LNP positions, perhaps due to victories of extant un/popular decision making. The ALP’s alternative, himself relatively un/popular and deemed by the Murdoch press as ‘unelectable’, may not enjoy the same level of consistency and comfort as a leader, due to his fractured identity politics entrenched left base, seeking less stability and more radical social, economic and cultural change. Reconfigurations

of common sense in these times is naturally part of the hegemonic reinforcement cycle which sees these governments (re)elected. There is a continual fracturing and reorganising of common sense, a separating from the enlightenment era, and a splitting and ‘hanging on’ for neoliberalism in the digital and global world (Redhead, 2011). A further exploration of common sense is now needed to see un/popularity through to its connection in Gramscian theory.

Fracturing common sense for unpopular times

The project of radically redefining common sense government and governance has taken time and successive attacks from various ultimate holders of hegemonic values/power (*hegemons*) as a project of the hegemonic subaltern positioned in ruling class circles. Some of these key ideological advancements and their affective changes to the landscape of governance in institutions will be considered below, however first it is worth drawing attention to the relationship between the ‘products’ of the state as the ‘acts’ they produce. Considering the documentation as governance which are left behind as living artefacts after each era of governmental reform, political change, and the *movement* of government/industry relations, it is easy to see how the rapid pace of change has left the average citizen between bewilderment and disbelief. Accepted normalities which used to be considered common sense for governance are now distant memories. Rather than accountable leaders, taskmaster ministers and blockades of bureaucratic expectations, there is a new autonomy granted for the capitalist impulse in governing the people and institutions. This is the fundamental positioning of capitalism as an epistemological lens for decision making. The accelerated global economic frame, the super- and post-everything world, sees economic and social catastrophe as ‘par for the course’ in the consumed ‘super-city’/‘super-country’ of Gramscian nightmare (Gramsci, 1996, p. 287). The capitalist lens and its accompanying landscape has infected the common sense at a deep level.

Now, economics takes a ‘naturalised’ primacy over, for example, population health³⁵. This changes the fundamental nature of what government and governing is *for*. While the tools of the state have long been instruments of capitalist reinforcement, their slide into capitalist epistemology has thrown out the remaining semblance of *humanitarian* or *socially just* governance which, in spite of its hypocrisy, was a strong mode of supporting social institutions and socialised services established across the post-war pre-1980s period. This slide has been closely followed by cultural adaptation and new sense-making logics which rewrite political narrative to ‘maintain’ and ‘adapt’ through reassertion of hegemonic dominance. This is disconnected from the real sources of ‘control’ of the population (*vis-à-vis* judicial systems), living entirely in ‘academic’ or ideological terms ‘in capital’. Returning briefly to the introduction’s sketch of the ‘acts’ of the public institutions in Australia, we can see a commitment to a kind of governance for the institutions which emerges in the act of incorporating them, as well as the actions of those animating them. In this regard, it is possible to consider universities in Australia as ‘of the state’ in their very foundation in a perpetual relation contained within the act of breaking the ground and appointing the executive, providing funding and (not) supporting the research and teaching agenda. The twisting of the institution’s governance in un/popular times, then, is a natural reflection of the broader societal movement towards un/popular leadership in the country (Brabazon, 2020, 2021). This is not a new phenomenon; as Chapter 4 explores, the university structure in Australia, while borrowing in image from its historical counterparts across Europe, owes much of its structure and form to government, not academia, enabling contorting and reforming by and for new ideologies. The spreading of the hegemonic ideal *qua hegemon* requires attention to the ideology brought to bear on institutions of government, governance and indeed culture. Achieved through a serious reconfiguration of the institutions

³⁵ Discussions of death-toll from COVID-19 rapidly turned to concerns over economic cost; millions of hectares of forest burnt in Australian bushfires quickly gave way to doubt over insurance payouts and tourist industry damage.

of the country in a fast-paced hyper-capitalist modality, embroidered with a new common sense which emphasises the ability of individual ‘governors’ and ministers to rewrite, literally, the institution:

You tell me it’s the institution. Well, you know. You’d better free your mind instead. (Lennon & McCartney, 1968, track 2/8)

With the institutions directed by hegemonic *government-industry* (elite) leadership, susceptible to new ideologies, and captured completely in the economic *mode*, the realisation of Gramsci’s view on the state-culture nexus in common sense conditioning is complete (Gramsci, 1996). Indeed, Gramsci’s contention is that in the context of religion *qua* ideology, that the connection between these powers is inseparable holds true: ‘[t]he three elements – religion (or ‘active’ conception of the world), state, party – are indissoluble, and in the real process of historico-political development there is a necessary passage from one to the other’ (p. 266). Using the broadest definition of the state, directly from Gramsci, it is possible to consider administrative officials with a party affiliation as pivotal parts of this triangle. Indeed, Gramsci’s consideration of the relationship between the citizenry and the state holds in this configuration, rather than as a bewildered public as a public with little understanding, by necessity, of the state in a self-fulfilling un/knowing: ‘revolutionary and of internationalist, in the modern sense of the word, is correlative with the precise concept of the state and of class: little understanding of the state means little class consciousness’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 275). Importantly, in parallel to Gramsci’s then conditions, he elaborates that even in light of a ‘crisis of authority’ – whereby consensus or sheer strength govern, that the ruling class remains only ‘dominant’ through coercion: ‘the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.’ (pp. 275-6). Here, Gramsci highlights the weakness to wavering and changing ideology

in the dominant class's structure, which still allows for a cementing of their position of power. Attention must, then, be turned to the ideological changes that have swept the ruling class in enduring changes, both to the 'acts' of parliament and governments, but to the ideology of the *hegemon* as it rules, governs and creates common sense.

Accelerated capitalism & neoliberalism

The colonising force of global capitalism has been the subject of ongoing discussion and debate. From a comprehensive critique by Marx (1990), through the mapping of the concomitant social and political world atop the capitalist system with Gramsci (1996), this thesis has already provided some sketches of the organisation and hegemonic *mode* of the global economy. The globalising impulse of capitalism, growing from the anglophone world to take hold globally with brutal social, political and economic overturn, it turned to an expansionist modality, favouring the subsumption of systems and spaces previously thought to be social and communal. In its colonising, capitalism has expanded both globally and locally as a hegemonic logic which annexes a plurality of spaces beyond the 'market' in its traditional sense. This concentration and proliferation of global capitalism coincides with, or perhaps more precisely started with, the new market logic of neoliberalism (W. Brown, 2015; Giroux, 2014; D. Harvey, 2005; Humphrys, 2019; Marginson, 1999; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pusey, 1989; Redhead, 2011; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Thurbon, 2012). Influenced, to an extent, by the thought and action of socialists, the development of neoliberalism borrowed from the best of socialism's organising; the capitalist state subsumed the impulse of freedom in a mutated form towards a propaganda for the reproduction of capitalism's central aims. As Connell (2013b) depicted, in particular relation to capitalism's endurance and permutation:

Neoliberalism is the latest mutation in a sprawling world-wide regime, which forged a new settlement between military, political and business elites in the global periphery, and their counterparts in the metropole. The most dramatic expressions of this changed relationship were the Structural

Adjustment Programs of the 1980s and 1990s. These were imposed by the World Bank, IMF and transnational finance capital, on those countries of the global periphery which had got into trouble servicing loans.

(Connell, 2013b, p. 101)

Several characterisations of neoliberalism exist, perhaps most frequently cited amongst the Marxist tradition is Harvey's holistic tracing of the ideology's origins in *A brief history of neoliberalism* (2005). Harvey asserts that neoliberalism is best defined as 'a series of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (p. 2). Here, the state, under leadership from a party or person who holds with the ideology captures the interests of traditional intellectuals empowering neoliberal principles. The capture and subsumption of extant market logics then takes a new form organised around neoliberalism. It uses its powers to ensure liberatory practices which encourage markets. It enforces private property and maintains this through judicial and police systems, with its only interventions being to establish markets in places where there are none, then to promptly withdraw. An unmaking of 'public' spaces can be seen with the emergence of neoliberal leadership, in particular across the late 1970s into the 1980s. However, the principles of neoliberalism do not end with a freeing of the market; they require a marketisation of all life – boardroom to bedroom – which, as Harvey characterises, entails "creative destruction" of the systems, processes, people and environment which were held for the public good. Harvey highlights the changing common sense, the hegemonic aspect of the neoliberal sprawl, beyond merely a project animated around beliefs that the market will advance human wellbeing, the neoliberal hegemony required popular consent to and adoption of the language and nature of economic focus (D. Harvey, 2005). Beyond the sinister marketisation required for neoliberalism's success, a broad redefinition of what was seen as an (economic) benefit to the 'the public' was required. This required installation from leaders – both economic and political – to recentre the economy after the

laissez-faire economics of the 1960s and 1970s. This project is amongst the biggest hegemonic changes in recent history: the popular consent that the economy takes primacy in society which advances all humanity. Indeed, this is far from the case. In the traditional sense of hegemonic division, the subaltern is drastically disadvantaged in the dominance of the neoliberal ruling class. Further examination is required here of the installation of a new common sense, and the changing nature of economics and politics as neoliberalism gripped both the politico-economic and cultural scene from the late 1980s until its permutation in politics in the 2010s, an accepted underwritten and consented mode of economic management that persists in its most damaging forms today – the continued primacy of the economy³⁶.

The previous waves of economic thought prevalent since the 1900s – laissez-faire economics – takes the form of ‘deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts. Consequently, laissez-faire liberalism is a political programme, designed to change the economic programme of the State itself’, a self-aware agenda of politico-economic change (Gramsci, 1996, p. 160). Gramsci warned that laissez-faire economics had the ability to supplant the genuine representational needs of the people from their political ‘representatives’ in a perceptively banal set of ‘liberatory’ practices towards market freedom. In this sense, rather than laissez-faire economics as a subaltern group working for hegemonic capture, it is conceptualised as a route from within the economic elite which sees good sense ‘sacrificed to the intellectual hegemony of the ruling class, since precisely theoretical syndicalism is merely an aspect of laissez-faire liberalism – justified with a few mutilated theses from the philosophy of praxis’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 160). It is a masquerade of human values under an economic banner for the advancement of a fraction of the ruling class. The parallels between the installation of laissez-faire economics and neoliberalism are many,

³⁶ Particularly damaging in the context of the COVID-19 global health pandemic, where political messaging has remained focussed on the *economic* impact of ‘not/work from home’ rather than a focus on the population’s health and social welfare conditions which is desperately needed.

with a particular emphasis on the methods of hegemonic capture of the ruling class under the banner of economic reforms; there is not an advancement of human values, but a facade of humanitarian ends through market advancement. In its truest form, there is an enabling of the wealthy to position themselves as the rightful rulers of the state in a move that enables individual consent under the belief that doing right for the ‘economy’ means doing right for the whole populous (and worker). Configuring neoliberalism under the banner of ‘freedom’ enabled economists and the state to perform acts on behalf of *people’s freedom* which advance economic interests. Harvey captures the 2000s war on the Middle East as fundamentally about the economic advancement of the United States under the banner of ‘freedom’: ‘What the US evidently sought to impose by force on Iraq was a state apparatus whose fundamental mission was to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital’ (D. Harvey, 2005, p. 7). It was a war of manoeuvre where the giant military power of the US installs a beneficial politics and economics in a country – a pattern repeated across history by dominant forces. Indeed, the ‘first experiment’ of creating conditions for a neoliberal state emerged in a US-backed political coup in Chile. Here, a free market was also created by a wealthy elite who forestalled a socialist leader, and the social structures of the Chilean state were overturned to marketisation and ‘freedom’ of labour, foreign policy and business interest (D. Harvey, 2005, pp. 7–8). Importantly, these ideological projects had both been based on instances where the extant systems and economy had, at least by the US, been seen to have failed. The socialist regime of Chile had lagged in economic ‘development’ of the nation, and the Iraqi government had been lagging on foreign trade, *particularly export of its oil*. The conditions which enabled the installation of neoliberalism in these countries was profoundly one of ‘failed management’ by a past regime, a failure of a past state hegemon to successfully create ‘value’. In this sense, the conditions for success and successful conditions are dually set by neoliberal ideology whereby the state must be economically successful in order to

be considered a success, and the success which is valued is simultaneously economic as opposed to population health, wellbeing, happiness or social support measures. The yard stick of success is as neoliberal as the ideology itself. This was an appealing move, since the laissez-faire management strategy had been seen to create insecurity in the economy and a loss of stability in the job market – both of which had been relatively stable since the Great Depression. In its haphazard development across multiple states, in different corners of the planet, neoliberalism emerged as much a project as an economic logic. Through experimental implementations and a gradual perfecting of the system, it was able to assert itself as a successful system of economic management and political rule (D. Harvey, 2005). Naturally, however, neoliberalism did not emerge without animation by human actors and as Gramsci characterised with the laissez-faire economics of his time, this was a small group of the already ruling-class elite, whose interests lay in economic growth for their personal benefit.

The bourgeoisie origin of neoliberalism is fitting. The Mont Pelerin Society, named after a spa in the Swiss alps, is where the project began to take intellectual form in the 1940s which saw the thought experiment expanded and tested in a range of modes. Developed by economists and philosophers, neoliberalism was posed as a solution to the world's problems. After recognition that the 'values of civilization are in danger' (Butler in D. Harvey, 2005, p. 20) neoliberalism was proposed in earnest as a solution to problematic 'creeds' which stole freedoms from the 'western man'. A surprisingly self-aware statement which privileged the hegemonic, white, male way of life. It was designed, no less, by several prominent ruling class white men, including Von Hayek, Friedman and Popper, who deemed themselves the solution to extant economic modalities predominantly in the form of anti-interventionist thought against the popular modality of Keynes (D. Harvey, 2005). Though, following Humphrys, neoliberalism is more than a philosophical reconfiguration of neoclassical economics. Rather, it involves a deep remaking of the understandings and practices around capitalist production.

In this sense the theory is infectious, mailable and does not necessarily adhere to a particular doctrinal system, but rather aims for the restoration of *profit* above all else (Humphrys, 2019). The theory took on this infectious form, tested in the 1940s, and taken to its limits in the academic circles of the US. Not until 1979 did the theory become practice as Thatcher and Regan were elected in Britain and the US respectively. Each politician took their own unique hallmarks: Thatcher worked to break trade union power, deconstruct the welfare state, and privatise public services; Regan worked to cut taxes, deregulate the economy, reduce professional power, and ultimately reduce ‘big government’ in favour of ‘big enterprise’. These projects saw the start of serious neoliberalism in the west and these features (cuts, breaks, deconstructions) persist as the hallmarks of neoliberal governance today (W. Brown, 2015; D. Harvey, 2005). However, perhaps the most damaging aspect of the neoliberal ideology is its reconfiguration of common sense, a simple move from human centric to economy centric ‘sense’, and requiring of further investigation as it not only reconfigures economic discourse and praxis, but transforms the political conversation towards an economic based society. Without descending into linguistics, it is possible to see how an economic primacy changes the fundamental nature and virtue of conversation from being about human ‘wellness’/’success’/’life’ into human ‘value’/’capital’/’production’, a turn in-keeping with capitalism as the fundamental mode of production (W. Brown, 2015). Here, politics itself contorts to fit with productive conversation, human value becomes human capital, and services and society are turned over to economics and markets. The management of these spaces becomes economics, the value of all life becomes economics, the conversation centres on economics. The infectious common sense displaces extant narratives about human value, the nature of life, and the ‘worth’ of the world in an epistemological re-writing – no longer about democracy and ‘freedom’ but economics and ‘capital’ (W. Brown, 2015).

The manifestation of neoliberalism in Australia took a slightly different path and is worth examining briefly in the context of this thesis. Indeed, in the use of Harvey, a contradiction emerges in the painting of Australian neoliberalism: a development predominantly of the political left, rather than Harvey's depiction of the right (D. Harvey, 2005; Humphrys, 2019).

Neoliberalism's uneven development meant that it did not emerge in Australia until later than its global northern counterparts, and through an entirely different mode to the *manoeuvre* of the *right* seen elsewhere. Though its pattern of emergence is similar, and its arrival was heralded by many of the same contextual counterparts. Similar to the US and the UK, Australia's adoption of neoliberalism coincided with a de-professionalisation and anti-union attitude, but also stood with specific circumstantial elements and a deep context around the ALP and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The contextualised arrival of neoliberalism is the unique mark of the robust tracing of Australian neoliberalism present in Humphry's (2019) book *How Labour built neoliberalism: Australia's accord, the labour movement and the neoliberal project*. The Australian worker's union membership was dwindling as neoliberalism landed and, as the ALP formed allegiances with the workers namely through unions, this posed a problem. As a solution, an accord was struck between the ALP and ACTU. From the mid-1980s, the ALP worked to institute measures which would benefit the ACTU. With the ALP Hawke government, a landslide victory in 1983 against the LNP, came a raft of new reforms purportedly with the worker at their heart. The ACTU promised that it would act to restrain 'wage demands to the level of inflation' and through a continuation of the working relationship between the ACTU and ALP, Australia was positioned as a progressive alternative to the Thatcher regime (Humphrys, 2019, p. 6). While the accord between the ACTU and ALP was wide ranging in its original design, it had the eventual effect of focussing conversations and political action on wages, though its real affects are still subject to contention (Humphrys, 2019).

Indeed, the depiction Humphrys advances, which itself is consistent with Gramsci's configuration of state and ruling class powers confluence to create perceptive cultural change in the *name* of the subaltern, states that the relationship, and the state, are a:

hegemonic state-centred project to restore accumulation after the 1970s economic crisis. The relationship between the Accord and vanguard neoliberal transformation in Australia as one of concord, not opposition, which I describe as simultaneously deepening corporatism and advancing neo-liberalism—where those processes are aspects of a unified moment of class rule. (Humphrys, 2019, p. 8)

In Australia, the advancement of neoliberalism was not a single-sided conservative movement advanced by its counterparts to the Tories or Republicans, but a relatively centre-left party whose core values involved worker trade unionism. This was conveniently represented in the common sense narrative as 'working class sacrifice in the national interest' (Humphrys, 2019, p. 9). Indeed, the Australian emergence of neoliberalism, in yet another reconfiguration of its multifaceted implementations and subsumptive ability (D. Harvey, 2005) saw it emerge through corporatism (Humphrys, 2019). Australia's unique economic conditions had meant that its 'commodities faced increased competition on the world market, partly due to the winding down of the Commonwealth trade preference systems'. Here, alongside stagnation in the colony's industry through the 1970s, came 'restructuring of manufacturing production, which had profound impact on the scope for worker's struggle' – effectively confining concerns to growth of, or perhaps simply stability of, wages (Humphrys, 2019, pp. 80–81). In 1975, ALP leader Gough Whitlam argued that there was a need to restructure the economy to recreate profitability and employment in the country. The dawn of neoliberalism was upon Australia. Subsequently, rapid shifts to the fabric of the *welfare state* gave way to privatisation and other economic issues arose: 'Between 1991 and 2006, the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas, and Telstra were sold off. As well as the high unemployment rate for young people, they were now

forced to pay for private profits for services which were once publicly owned' (Davidson, 2020, p. 3).

The neoliberalising of Australia has continued; while now politics again drifts away from the deregulatory attitude, the emphasis on the economy and managerialism continues. An appetite for privatisation is still rife amongst parliamentarians today, however new political positions spring to life in the post-Trump era. Indeed, the union collapse of the 1970s which saw the ALP reposition itself amidst neoliberal reforms to capture the public imaginary are still and again straining in tough economic times. The next important vanguard for neoliberalism is the public sector in Australia, for a reconfiguration of the public sector to operate in a business modality is an important one, particularly in the strengthening of neoliberal ideology and managerialism, amongst the politicians and public service. Here, heads of public departments (ministers, vice-chancellors, school principals) are encouraged to operate in a business mode, seeking profit and cost efficiency over public *service* (Pusey, 1989). Amongst the capturing and conversion through the production of consent of the public service arises perhaps the most enduring aspects of this insertion of new hegemony with the *public*: the managerialist regime arising from an incessant need for streamlined service and excess profit.

Neoliberalism is still the contemporary modality of public sector governance – or at least in as far as it can be permuted without being directly privatised. The stranglehold on administrative officials has become so tightly ingrained that for the purposes of this thesis, I argue that the administrative strata of universities are entirely *of the hegemon* rather than being, following Gramsci, traditional intellectuals capable of hegemonic ideological capture. Indeed, the administrative class is frequently more closely aligned with the political ruling class and its ideologies than the people they serve. Considering the marketisation of education in Australia, and the continued emphasis the *export* of education plays in the economic narrative in the country, there is a clear relationship between neoliberal ideology, managerialism and the

university and technical education sectors. If universities are seen as an ‘export’ then their leaders should be economists as much as thought leaders. The flowing logic is that a university should operate at a surplus, competing in an open market, and it should be cutthroat in its attraction and retention of highly skilled academics (Connell, 2013b). This seems common sense to many in the higher education sector in Australia, and in a contemporary landscape where students pay fees, particularly international students where fees can be extraordinary, the competition to be ‘the best’ repositions itself as the primary function of the sector³⁷. In this regard, the administrative strata, particularly its most senior leadership, are configured as politicians who embody the ideological paradigm set forth in the Mont Pelerin Society. The focussing of managerial power and the singular decision-making of vice-chancellors positions them uniquely above the ministerial (in government) roles acting as a para-private organisation with neoliberal intent and managerial preclusions.

It is in the remaking of common sense about *economics*, *society* and *culture* that neoliberalism has left a great legacy. In the new political systems gripping contemporary society from populism to un/popular leadership, through the continuation of dictatorships and monocacy, the economic logics of neoliberalism, largely, hold true. The project of remaking common sense has been endlessly successful, accepted as natural and privileged in global society. Indeed, neoliberal theory and thought are held by those in economic positions of power, in the ruling class, in common with the subaltern class. Of course, a unique victory of neoliberalism is its ability to command the dominant power, while equally being named and understood as a *correct* logic: ‘a civil society that, in the midst of its divisive particularity and subaltern interpellation by the existing political society, assumes consciousness of its own

³⁷During the COVID-19 pandemic the reliance on these fees paying international students has led to additional restructuring in alignment with ‘productive’ courses, research and administrative areas in the university. This pincer movement between a global pandemic limiting international student access to ‘the market’ and successive government cuts to funding have created untenable situations for many of Australia’s universities. This has triggered restructures and cuts to those areas that do not directly align with the capitalist technicist interest.

contradictions; but not in order to cancel them in a universality that hovers above it in a political society' (Thomas, 2009, p. 190). The arrival of these logics connects with the Dawkins Reforms to higher education, discussed below, brought systemic change and neoliberal logic which opened higher education to 'the market', simultaneously encouraging mass growth in student numbers and forcing universities to compete for students, academics and research funding (J. Bessant, 2002; Connell, 2013b; Harman & Meek, 1988). While neoliberalism was brought to Australia with the allegiance of union forces and a centre-left party, the acceleration of neoliberalism, particularly in its privatising impulse, was brought by the LNP (Connell, 2013b). The Howard era (1996-2007) in Australian federal politics saw the mass privatisation of the public sector through a range of mechanisms including divestment, withdrawal, outsourcing, liberalisation and user-pays modes (Aulich & O'Flynn, 2007a, pp. 370–371). Though, following Aulich and O'Flynn (2007b), the privatisation of Australian public assets and services would likely have continued under the ALP as the Hawke-Keating governments had set the tone for modalities and appetites for privatisation well before the LNP was to be involved (Aulich & O'Flynn, 2007b). While Dawkins, under the ALP, had set a tone of marketisation, through liberalisation and a user-pays mode in higher education, universities in Australia remained publicly funded. While moves in federal politics have successively investigated, and come very close to, deregulating fees and further opening competitive aspects of higher education, these could be argued to be out of keeping with neoliberal theory in the sense that these are not directly privatising impulses, rather an effort to outsource the debt facility of higher education students. In 2020, some deregulation was accepted as part of the 'Job Ready Graduates Package' which sees humanities and social sciences topics uncapped to domestic students, more than doubling the cost of some topics (Tehan, 2020).

While arguments have now emerged that we are now post-neoliberal, in terms of governance, politics and in organisations (Christie & Hargreaves, 1998; Larner & Craig, 2005;

Lister, 2003; Redhead, 2011; Simon-Kumar, 2011), there is still a central necessity to highlight the positioning of neoliberalism from the 1980s until the 2010s, if accepting that post-neoliberalism offers a particular view of events which is not necessarily congruent with neoliberal theory itself. As explored above, neoliberalism was subject to uneven development across geopolitical regions and subject to substantial political differentiation in its implementation in various countries (Humphrys, 2019). In this sense, neoliberalism should not be conceived as a theory fixed in time, but rather a common sense project (D. Harvey, 2005). While it shares a central philosophic tendency and value set, it is *not* a fixed point – it adapts and morphs with the common sense alongside which it is installed. In this way, any ruling class ideology can be adopted to varying degrees, applied in varying ways and open to substantial variance in its deployment and maintenance. In this regard, while we may in fact be ‘post-neoliberal’, ideology and terraformed institutions remain in its wake, and reconfigurations of market hegemony constantly resurface and re-present themselves for those conscious or otherwise. In this sense, the reintegrative nature of neoliberalism as a conduit for strengthening capitalism may be marked as a *successful* project, one which now enters the dominant epistemic perspective and continues in historic form in capitalist/post/neoliberal ideology. As hegemonic theory advances, a hegemonic project is never complete, and continues to amorphously subsume subsequent ideology and transmute into ‘new’ ideas and new spaces. However, theoretical development adjacent to neoliberalism continues and, in this regard, further exploration of the ‘post-neoliberal’ is required below.

Post-neoliberal, postmodern, post-identity?

Post-neoliberal spaces are bifurcated. For postmodern theory, new spaces may be symbolised as a ‘third way’, where classical Marxist theorists may see an affected state vying with private industry for meaning and purpose in a new wave of managerialism akin to meddling with the free market (Redhead, 2011). Accepting a post-neoliberal politics *qua*

purpose, and perhaps permitting extension from politics into the private sector, would enable a view of the ripples of political modality as influence into the public and private sector, essentially noting incursions of changes between modes of governance in politics into the economic (private and public) sectors over time. In seeing a post-neoliberal state, a new vision arises of the state as an apparatus of self-important imperatives to remain relevant after, in many instances quite literally, ‘selling off’ most of the *directly* controlled infrastructure. In this sense a similar divide between position and manoeuvre occurs and the direct control of public infrastructure *qua* manoeuvre is substituted for an indirect hegemonic control both *via* and *qua* position. The state then, in this moment lacking relevance in the *interventionist* model of democratic governance, seeks new authority to assert control after years of laissez-faire economics and the sharp turn to neoliberal rule (Redhead, 2011). The new control takes new forms, with the state reinventing itself in its everchanging and necessarily unstable form (Gramsci, 1996). The deregulated and privatised economic sphere inherited from an era of neoliberalism hangs over democratic government which fast worked itself out of its originary relevance, with the state now working to contend with, as Brown argues, through extension of Foucault’s, ‘Homo Oeconomicus’ (W. Brown, 2015, p. 79). The remnants of neoliberalism, here, may be the most significant feature as they rippled across the economy, post-neoliberalism or otherwise, the hallmark features of neoliberal governance and management are ingrained into corporations, public institutions and individuals alike (Humphrys, 2019). While new political moments emerge, or battle for attention, the acceleration of industry and the concomitant acceleration of *culture* as a lasting effect of the last thirty years of capitalism must be considered and contended with in important ways. Neoliberalism also heralds important shifts for the higher education sector that fit *after* the democratising moves of opening higher education to many in the 1950s and 1960s (Giroux, 2014; Marginson, 1999). The postmodern question, then, still remains unanswered. If post-neoliberalism is a configuration of

postmodernity, then some answers must exist in postmodern theory, particularly for Gramscian theory to hold relevance in that world. Moreover, the post-1960s positioning of culture and politics requires some attention in the ‘ethical turn’ partially resulting from student power movements (Bourg, 2017). The relevance of these turns is explored below.

An emergence of what has been described as a fractured left has seen mass cultural drift across the left-wing of politics. After the united left movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the mass ramifications of a new fractured left had affected politics in deep structural ways and affected culture globally (Hobsbawm, 1996). The fractured left and the grip of neoliberal hegemony coincide deeply, indeed some have considered this to be a more deliberate tactic than sheer coincidence enabling neoliberalism to occupy hegemony in contemporary left thought (in LGBT theory Drucker, 2011; in contemporary politics N. Fraser, 2019; in political progress Mudge, 2018). The first fracturing arrives, as Laclau and Mouffe declared, in a *crisis of the left* in Europe, and is situated after what they identify as ‘the dissolution of that Jacobin imaginary’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 2). The classical Marxist moment, or ‘old left’ (McGuigan, 2006, p. 93), had contributed a great deal to the political, and highly activist, left from the late nineteenth century through to the late 1970s. The deviation away from the Marxist ‘orthodoxy’ had shown the viability of sustained global left-politics, but in a limit of the moment to its existence and no further (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). While Laclau and Mouffe provide a new vision of ‘radical democracy’, they also purport to offer a post-Marxist *stabilising* of Marxist theory, and Gramscian extensions therein. In a fractured Left in the anglophone sphere, reclaiming the end of the ‘grand narrative’, condemning ‘normative epistemologies’ and the claims of universalism by empiricist social science (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

The (post)modern theory, here, employs an extension of Gramsci’s Hegemony as a model for instating a new vision. Their capturing of the left in the historical moment of their writing is useful, though only retroactively might be considered an examination of what we

know as 'identity politics'. While the fractured left may appear as a defeat of a unitary communist utopia propelled strongly forward across Europe for many years by various communist parties, this did not herald the end either theoretically or in practical terms to left movements or, at least in facsimile, progressive activism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; A. M. Smith, 1998). The important shift in the attendant emergence of identity politics, is the loss of strength and repeated political attacks on trade-union movements, a defeat of orthodox Marxist roots which saw workers as origin of revolution and a spur for unity around working class rights amongst a plurality of perspectives on the left (Kołakowski, 1978; Mendel, 1969; A. M. Smith, 1998). Here, Laclau and Mouffe invoke post-Marxism and, to an extent, a post-Gramscian mode, positioning their work in contrast to work of the era in which Marxism was viable and strong *left politics qua praxis*, offered a unitary spirit (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 4–5), predating much of the thought which specifically invokes post-Marxism. Post-Marxism contains its own theoretical complications and post-structural turns (Butler, 1997). Neo-Marxism, which is frequently deployed alongside a (postmodern) Gramscian imagining of hegemony. This builds on Gramsci's theory that there can be relative superstructural independence from the economic base, away from determinant economics (Au, 2006). However, this breaks from Gramsci's own differentiation of base and superstructure and draws from an extension which orthodox Marxists take issue with, particularly the use of Althusser's theoretical complications of Marxism. This is a common hallmark of neo-Marxist practice though relatively independent of the (post)modern movement (Althusser, 1977). Here (post)Marxism is to be confined to its new spaces, not sidelined or ignored, but its complications to be held apart from the orthodoxy offered in Gramsci's texts. Importantly, their theoretical contributions should not be immediately dismissed in understanding the 1980s, and onwards, left movements.

Returning to the fractured left, in a post-*Marx* theoretical imagining and perhaps post-*communist* era, there is a refocussing of theoretical and political attention, moving class analysis

out of the spotlight. The 'new' left now comprises a disillusioned abstract cluster of left-leaning groups with similar *issues* but a loss of common values and abandonment of unity on political causes (Hobsbawm, 1996; McGuigan, 2006). Values, here, are important, as the late 1970s began to see the rise of movements that aligned with specific values of individual groups of identity. These are aligned around groups which are still very much in a fight for rights, significance, and recognition in most countries around the world, though *unitary* and *of the same values* can no longer be said for what are now strongly identified as the left issues of: '[f]eminists, peace activists, environmentalists, lesbian and gay activists, and the movements of people of color' (A. M. Smith, 1998, p. 1). These new clusters of people and politics, while not exclusively *left*, are occupying spaces and tactics traditionally in the left. Furthermore, the emergence of identity politics marks a significant turn in *politics* in the anglophone west (Hobsbawm, 1996). Or, as McGuigan invoking Hobsbawm notes: it is 'important to appreciate some of the tensions that arise in Left politics when "identity" and "difference" displace "universalistic" identifications and considerations' (McGuigan, 2006, p. 93). The tensions that arise create charged schisms between groups which would have traditionally unified under the *left* banner. Now, 'identity' takes precedent over class. The features, then, of 'identity politics' or 'collective identity' are valuable to elaborate, as they grip a broad spectrum contemporary political alignment in society, acting divisively and situated entirely within superstructural civil society. Importantly, these spaces also provide clear, exploitable, benefit for political actors.

Identity politics, in stark rise across the anglosphere, must be examined in its detail to situate it in civil society and hegemonic theory. Hallmark features of *identity* in identity politics include negatively defining any collective identities, 'identity' as interchangeable and expression therein as fluid, and identities themselves as highly contextual entities (Hobsbawm, 1996). Identity politics is highly individualistic and requires individuals to deny their plurality of identities. These politics benefit political parties, as they can be exploited in the form of positive

discrimination, and through identity mobility, disadvantage can be used to secure personal gain. In *joining* an identity group, individuals act on and concrete strongly held beliefs under the overpowering feeling that there is ‘no choice’ but to align with the identity group, and its subsequent (fight for) rights for expression (Hobsbawm, 1996). In defining collective identity negatively, a literal othering of the non-identity group, identifying what is different from ‘me’ – a process of some introspection to identify the difference in what is often not based on objective physical difference, a loss of power amongst class-based political parties emerges (Hobsbawm, 1996). The other major features of identity in identity politics are largely intertwined. Identity politics assumes, for instance, that a feminist is a woman or the gay movement is made up of homosexuals, in a reductive focus on singular (subscribed) characteristics. This means, for members of these identity groups, that there is a concomitant shedding of additional sources of identity because they are incompatible with the individual identity mould (or, ‘you’). Hobsbawm is quick to note that there is nothing essential about these states of identity that precludes other characteristics. He uses the example that, while it may be frowned upon by the religious orders, it is *physically* possible to be a member of the Jewish and Catholic faith at the same time. In addition, identity expression should not be deemed as *fixed*. Identities, by nature, change over time and can incorporate, in their movement(s), ‘others’ if those others are not automatically precluded through othering. Identity politics, however, forbids plural identity expression, not in a real sense, as alternative expression is *possible*, but in belonging to identity groups it is an offence to act in a different mode. Finally, identity itself is highly contextual, expression changes across spacetime and in various scenarios. While identity politics belongs with just one identity and transgressions are punished by the collective (Hobsbawm, 1996). Here, identity politics takes a hegemonic form and the type of identity is reinforced by the social group (the identity group) as a common sense. This alternative common sense seeks to replace the dominant hegemony, which excludes it, but is not politically situated to do so. To further

examine this complex space, it is necessary to explore the ‘unitary’ left impulse and its relationship to identity politics.

Historically, mass social and political movements on the left were unitary, and combined coalitions of varying interests, and forged alliances making promises or arrangements with groups with values that were close *enough*. Until the emergence of identity politics the left had been united around some core values, be that a democratic urge, or a communist movement. The socialist and labour movements, however, were never about one identity. Indeed, they never conformed with orthodox Marxism in their diverse origins (Hobsbawm, 1996). As can be seen in what was actually a very small minority, the industrial working class, holding an idyllic power in Marxism, if you wanted the revolution, you sided with the workers. In this regard, the left could never be seen as only ‘for’ a small group of people. It was not comprised only of, nor did it seek the benefit ‘for’ a small group. While the left made deals and concessions, it upheld interests around core values – a kind of theoretical limit is inherent in the traditional left, in that should it be pushed to an extreme, deviating from its broad agenda, it would no longer hold the same values in common. A self-defeat. Identity politics, as described by Hobsbawm, enables exploitation, fracture and is often dangerous to those which comprise it and others. Still, there are poignant arguments that portray ‘identity’ politics as inevitable, due to *some* groups’ basis in visible characteristics and a new politics of difference. Yet, this is possible to harness, as Alcoff, a feminist continental philosopher of Panamanian descent, recounts in depicting her father’s interaction with US army forces:

Two solderos estadounidenses peered into our car, and then had my father get out and show them his papers. He was not on U.S.-owned Canal Zone property, just in a neighbourhood close to the one he’d grown up in, stopped by two white foreigners in front of his daughter and grandsons and asked to prove he had a legitimate right to be there. ... That afternoon, my father’s identity had nothing to do with the fact that he was a professor of history at the Universidad de Panama, had published six books, or even that he still loved and followed U.S. baseball. He was a brown-skinned man driving a car

with Panama plates. I knew he was humiliated to have this happen in front of me, and I was wishing he would also be angry, but he betrayed no emotion as he stood there in the sweltering sun while the soldiers chatted with each other in English while checking his car and papers. (Alcoff, 2006, p. vii)

The inevitability of identifying individuals, particularly from ethnic groups, with a particular response and orientation is a condition arising, at least in the western world, from white masculine majority hegemony embodied in the hegemon of leaders of public institutions, CEOs, or politicians. In itself, the story above is an artefact of imperialism and colonialism and, when demonstrated by the hegemonic group, a show of racism. This emotive story frames the beginning of Alcoff's book as a 'crystallisation of social identity', and for her a demonstration that capitalism has a controlling determinism over meaning of identity, possibilities for interaction and 'formations of difference' (Alcoff, 2006, p. viii) which contains powerful effects over non-hegemon power in any given context. This, itself, is not rise to identity politics but rather an opening possibility for understanding race, ethnicity and gender in capitalism in a tight relationship to *class*.

In the 'ontology of identity', there is a deliberate unitary impulse, at least for groups within that identity cluster. In building this model, Alcoff extends that while 'functionally linguistic', '[r]acism and sexism have also played a critical role in the low level of unionization and the lack of a viable left' (Alcoff, 2006, p. x). In a critique, akin to Hobsbawm, Alcoff highlights that identity politics, which has been used as a divisive technique, has fractured the left. Indeed, she broadens her explanation, indicating that much of the thrust of academic 'identity politics' has been extended out of context beyond the academic community and used to discredit antiracist, feminist and class-hierarchy critique (Alcoff, 2006). Here, it is evident that both orthodox Marxists and postmodern theorists *can* agree, an identity politics that divides on the basis of the colour of skin, perceived gender, or other *visible* characteristics is fundamentally flawed and, when excluded *prima facie* from 'left politics', will shatter and divide the left into singular issues. This is additionally complicated by the use of emotion in identity

politics, often activated and manipulated by political figures and employed to evoke guttural reactions amongst a changing political landscape (Hobsbawm, 1996; Müller, 2016; Woodward, 1997). In this sense, a fractured, identity-focussed left must constantly react to attacks on identity groups rather than ever mounting a unitary movement for the benefit of *most* of its constituent parts. The leveraging of emotion, and the use of fundamental, often biological, characteristics to divide humanity serves as a tool to distract unitary movements that could threaten capitalist hegemony and, as such, may be conceptualised as a tool of hegemonic maintenance ensuring/affirming extant hegemony. With theoretical agreement *possible*, though not taken as necessary or adoptive of theory³⁸, it is necessary to turn a Gramscian lens to the possibility of ‘hegemony’ in an age of populism and identity politics, and the relationship to un/popular leadership and culture. While, demonstrably, the politics of identity distract and serve as a tool of hegemony maintaining *culture* in civil society the deeper problems for politics require further examination. The next section turns attention to contemporary discrete, yet interconnected, trends in politics.

Populism and identity politics

Perhaps the most damaging political times have emerged in the last ten years. The election of Donald Trump in the United States, the vote for Brexit, and constantly changing political conditions globally have dramatically altered the realm of possibility in the contemporary political imaginary. This has had substantial effects on theoretical work, particularly in cultural studies where this doctoral thesis is positioned. Importantly, the turn in cultural studies towards identity politics as an accepted theoretical/political position, which occurred due to the influx of US scholarship, which ‘colonised’ the politics of identity and with

³⁸ While theoretical agreement may come to the same ends, the processes and understandings of onto-epistemology, the configuration of culture and society, and the most fundamental understanding of the organisation of society are deeply incompatible between orthodox Marxism, Gramscian theory, and Postmodernisms.

its colonising caused a fracture and degradation which meant cultural studies, focussed on these new politics allowed ‘all its complexity and explanatory power [to be] was slopped into the bucket of identity politics’ (Brabazon et al., 2019, p. 191). Here, attention must be paid to avoid ‘slopping’ and a lucid, analytical perspective on populism and identity politics must be offered. In this regard, this thesis deploys a variation on cultural studies that acknowledges and critiques the turn to singular focus on identity politics. In a return to orthodox Gramscian politics and social praxis that identifies possibility in contemporary culture for the reestablishment of *organic intellectuals* and through identification of hegemonic power, reified in *political hegemons*, moves beyond difference that divides, to a conception of binding values and an understanding of the common elements of the new (new) *left*. However, real work must be done to map the possibility of such a return to explain and understand the relationships between populism and identity politics. Moreover, particular consideration must be given to the methodological implications of deploying a Gramscian model of society and culture in a contemporary culture riddled with pluralistic conceptions of politics, identity and human action. Here two functional explanations are required before a fuller explication of the relationship between populism, identity politics and hegemony. Only through discrete understandings of these more recent political phenomena can Gramscian social theory be applied to contemporary contexts. Below, three main moves are followed through theoretically: first, an exploration of Gramscian theory in late modernity; second, an understanding of un/popular culture and identity; and, finally, a theorisation into university hegemony. These are necessary methodological features for this study and form essential parts of a contemporary Gramscian social science.

Populism is a set of political practices, modes and ideas that are fundamentally anti-elitist, anti-pluralist, a form of identity politics, and enable a ‘populist’ to govern other populists (Müller, 2016). Populism’s connection to identity politics clarifies its *singularity* it is about vainglorious leadership of a small group of people which fans out to broader and stronger ideals

through a conversion-style ripple. There is a focus on issues of being against a perceived elite, though this elite often has no direct connection to the ruling class, while a ‘populist’ can be of the elite themselves. Populism is anti-pluralist in that there can be only one leader, indeed it is quite counter-democratic in this regard, rather than representational democracy – by the many for many more, it is singular. However, as Müller warns, this ‘exclusive representation is not an empirical one; it is always distinctly moral’ (Müller, 2016, p. 3). Moreover, the anti-pluralism extends into constraints that enable the partisan continuation of monocratic leadership. However, populism is more complex than can be surmised in a few sentences. Indeed, the term, contrary to this straightforward depiction, is itself polemical and conceptually contested, particularly in the way that it is *deployed* in politics and political philosophy. Among its several forms are its use as an insult of politicians and leaders, as a term embraced describing ‘representation’, or perhaps as a bastardisation, or ‘shadow’, of representative democracy (Müller, 2016). In tracing the origins of the use of the term, Kazin describes political power which ‘sought to free the political system from the grip of “the money power.” ... Its activists ... hailed the common interests of rural and urban labor and blasted monopolies in industry and high finance for impoverishing the masses’ (Kazin, 2016, p. 18). Indeed, Kazin suggests that the lineage of populism in this ordinary sense can also be applied to US Senator Bernie Sanders’ rallies around ‘democratic socialism’. In establishing populism, Müller also highlights US politics as fertile ground for populism from 2015, and highlights the role of emotion in populist leaders: ‘populists are “angry”; their voters are “frustrated” or suffer from “resentment”’ (Müller, 2016, p. 1). Populism, of course, extends beyond the US left, and in summoning emotion the brutal, narcissistic and polarising politics of Donald Trump which hypocritically critiques the global elite, though in a different direction, by establishing false dichotomies of ‘us vs them’ for, by way of example, job losses to immigrant workers (Kazin, 2016) comes almost immediately to mind. The rhetoric of populists, then is also an important

function. Both Sanders and Trump were able to unite people to a cause through the use of powerful language, in the case of Sanders towards a positive view of the welfare state, a difficult feat in the US, and for Trump rallying around hate and xenophobia through the use of anti-elitism and people-centric language, even if only *for* a small fraction of people, and a smaller fraction of elites (Stockemer, 2019). Indeed, Trump has been the focus of many commentators and academics exploring populism on the right, where invocation of Müller's conception of *populism as a shadow of representation in democracy* takes on a new, twisted, meaning, following Brabazon et al. (2019) in the context of Trump: 'Populism is important, as it formulates a corrosive fracture in the body politics, summoning a fiction of "the people" against "the elites" and "radical Islam"' (p. 85). In this description, populism then, captures politics as reduced to a series of slogans, tweets, buzzwords, rallies and vocalisations. Rather than authentic representation, populism is about being anti-something, or providing something, often negative, which can be led, saved, and escaped from reality. From this position an assumption could be made that populism gives way beneath genuine political *work*; however, there is a deeper catastrophic nature to much populist governance. Beyond its appeal to an identity group, there is something in its nature which enables a destruction of the *state* in that it is no longer interested in capturing multifarious sources of power. Rather, it focuses on the elevation of a singular leader and to do so often corrupts and suppresses established elements of society (Müller, 2016). Of course, given an allegiance to the populist's cause, these effects may seem more like wins than attacks to foundational systems of governance and democracy. For instance, in the case of a left leaning audience, their perceived 'benefits' through electing a Sanders-style president would have seen a corruption of what the right valued as fundamental values of 'democracy', while edging towards a reinstatement of the welfare state, or careening towards socialism.

Gramscian theory in late modernity

This thesis deploys Gramscian theory in a relatively orthodox method. Drawing on empirical events, both through examination of mainstream history, a counter-view particularly centred on the eruption of student power and activism in the late 1960s in Australia, and through comparison and critique of contemporary student politics, activism and political necessity. The method for this thesis follows Gramsci as historiographical and ethnographic, occurring around a single *lived* context with shared understandings and meaning with participants (Crehan, 2002), but narrower and focussed in its critique and theoretical advancement, enabling a methodological and method alignment. Here, interpreting Gramsci is particularly key. In discussing the ever-pending Marxist working class revolution, Gramsci put forward additional principles for the effective ‘rule of the working class’ or denizens of civil society. These are particularly relevant to activism(s) in current times. Gramsci posited, in essence, that the working class would never be in a position to self-rule or find power should it not understand and rewrite the basic cultural principles of societal organisation, even down to the ownership of the laws and practices which make up society. Moreover, the primary concern for Gramsci, of the workers in any working class revolution – or the primary preventative roadblock to such revolution – was the provision of supplies, both human and essential, outside a market economy³⁹, troubles of scarcity and access at a basic *needs* level:

The immediate problems of the working class boil down in the last analysis to this single problem: how to get enough to eat, and how to establish a political system in which the supply of provisions is no longer left to the free play of the market, to the mercy of private property, but is linked to the demands of labour and production. The proletarian principle: “He who does not work does not eat!” is daily acquiring an increasingly concrete, historical significance. (Gramsci, 1996, p. 171)

³⁹ Vis-à-vis the conception of society out of hegemony and the ongoing weight and power of continued hegemony.

Gramsci takes a 'big step' to the self-organising, governing and regulation of a post-capitalist society. This end point must be worked back from, with class organisation occurring in the first instance. While the basis of contemporary activism, particularly when considering identity groups' activist tendencies, in the form of protest activism for social group rights, there is no singular revolutionary end point. There is relevance to the drivers of activism at needs levels. Gramsci's choice of words here is important for the theoretical development of this thesis. In relation to this need – the need to eat – he continues:

The proletarian principle is the explicit recognition of an immediate, organic necessity for human society, now that society itself is in danger of disintegrating and falling apart along with the bourgeois state.

(Gramsci, 1996, p. 171)

This is of particular significance, as 'the immediate, organic necessity for human society' can be seen as the driver for action and change in society. In this sense, any action taken *below* the hegemonic ruling class is initiative *for* the subaltern and is *necessarily* a political action against the dominant civil society. While this need is superstructural, it is contingent on the mode of production, for Gramsci, as it is about the work of the working class, though its superstructural domain is far more significant. Particularly, he highlights:

Production is a necessity, and to produce, there must exist a working class that is physically and mentally capable of mounting a heroic work effort. ... The type of government required could only be a workers' government, a government or the working class turned governing, ruling class. There can be no workers' government until the working class is in a position to become, in its entirety, the executive power or the workers' State. The laws of the workers' State need to be executed by the workers themselves: only in this way will the workers' State avoid the danger of falling into the hands of adventurers and political intriguers or becoming a counterfeit of the bourgeois state. Hence the working class must train itself and educate itself in the management of society. It must acquire the culture and psychology of a dominant class, acquire them through its own channels and its own systems - meetings, congresses, discussions, mutual education.

(Gramsci, 1996, pp. 171–172)

In essence, Gramsci suggests that without a unitary and fundamentally necessary action against the hegemony of the ruling class, and without appropriate structures, alternative modes of operation and organic knowledge of the needs and demands of the class which are to be represented, there can be no authentic revolution. Moreover, the acceptance that self-government is required, the acknowledgement of the danger of becoming a ‘counterfeit bourgeoisie state’ is an implicit recognition of the need for organic intellectualism and representation of the social group whose *prima facie* needs are not met by extant hegemonic systems. In this regard, while not explicitly connected to ‘activism’, to actualise the implicit connection to a revolutionary spirit demands organic intellectuals who act against ruling class hegemony and who unite and support their social group in their efforts towards a new organic ruling class, or perhaps a Marxist utopia, for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The former, a more powerful and diverse conception which challenges the ‘common sense’ in an *organic* mode, here again which recognises Gramsci’s conception of philosophy *qua* the philosophy of praxis as the ‘elaboration of a form of thought superior to common sense’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 330) which, as such, must start in the critique and critical understanding of the extant cultural order to create new ways contra hegemonic ‘common sense’. While this appears as a simplistic rendition, the path to the production of organic intellectuals is much more complex, as explored above, however an understanding of activism as *necessary organic action* gives particular weight to the argument that authentic *activism* is born of need of the social group. Dangerously, this could be extended to justify both left and right extremism and requires significant bounding to be held for a genuine *good sense*.

The political action of the hegemon, or the action of a group of the hegemonic ruling class, may be perceptively activism, in the sense that it falls in the *action* of activism – picket protest, chants, rallies – though such action is controlled and deliberately propelled for a particular enforcement of hegemonic ends. More precisely, the social action, conceived as

activism or ‘acts’ of government, of the hegemonic class is of common sense origin and works to reinforce the hegemony. Therefore, it is necessary to divide the actions of activism *qua* common sense and activism *qua* good sense on their value driven nature⁴⁰ in extension of the former Gramsci highlights: ‘destinies of an epoch are manipulated in the interests of narrow horizons of the immediate ends of a small group of activists – and the mass of citizens know nothing’⁴¹ (Gramsci, 1977, p. 17). While interruptions of the ideology held by the ruling class have transpired, these are not disruptive of the hegemony, as they are subsumed as part of it and allowed to continue to ensure hegemonic continuity (expected continuity of ruling class *nuevo* normality). The depiction of neoliberal theory above is a key example of supplanting ideology in the hegemonic class. A traditional intellectual group, philosophic and economic, worked to produce a new system which would increase the wealth of the ruling class within the capitalist system, supposing several important features alongside it which act as new common sense: human wellbeing as economically supported, or markets being for the good of the worker (D. Harvey, 2005) which simultaneously appeal to the capitalists, as they see an increase in wealth, and the workers in the depiction of increased ‘opportunity’ and in the Australian context, as an increasing wage stability (Humphrys, 2019). The action to install neoliberal hegemony was multifarious, including in some instances a war of manoeuvre for the installation of new dictatorial governments, where in others an activist form employed and heralded as the saviour of the working class wage.

It is necessary here to highlight that the political action of the ruling class, or of the state, is not organic or for the working class. While the subaltern *of* the hegemonic ruling class may use methods similar to the subaltern *class* to create a new ‘sense’, it is only the organic

⁴⁰ An extension of ‘common’ action, and ‘good action’, as following Gramscian ‘sense’ as *sense work* that enables expression of common/good sense in picket protest, letter writing, etc. In this regard, considering activism as an expression of a kind of sense enables it to remain integrated as expression of sense, rather than an externality to *sense work* holding with Gramscian necessity seeing the organic intellectual as an operative of their class.

⁴¹ This may also be extended to lobbying of the State by special interest groups (in ruling class society) for the interest of politically aligned groups within State hegemony.

intellectual or the *organic* activist, whose social group consciousness may create *good* sense for their class. Put precisely: working class action, based on ideas and causes of necessity to the proletariat, may become through *peer* support, organic causes to rally behind. The resultant political action is bifurcated; either it is necessary, as it is born of oppression under hegemony, or, it is purely *political* and born of the subaltern of the ruling class. It is not based on proletarian class consciousness, nor destined for political revisioning or hegemonic change. From here it is possible to conceptualise and reintegrate the contemporary political movements, both in terms of what has been described, above, as un/popular leadership from Australian politicians, as well as configuring populism and identity politics into hegemony. Moreover, extant literature positions these in a (Gramscian) hegemonic frame, though from varied post/Marxist perspectives.

Un/popular culture, identity politics and hegemony

Un/popular leadership is a model for hegemonic performance in the ruling class's subaltern culture. In this configuration, un/popular leadership, in the unpopular mode, is critiqued by the hegemonic ruling class as it is not in cultural *keeping* with the expected norms and behaviour of ruling class persons. In the popular mode, however, this may be a configuration of identity politics whereby a member of the ruling class, in a position of extreme political privilege is able to exercise demonstrably unpopular acts in its reference to hegemonic culture, thus being recognised as a leader in their performance. An un/popular leader, then, though not appealing to a broad social group, is positioned to act reliably in a mode which appeals to a demographic, and against the political demands, or other politicians demands, who are 'just part of the immoral, corrupt elite, or so populists say, while not having power themselves; when in government, they will not recognise anything like a legitimate opposition. The populist core claim also implies that whoever does not really support populist parties might not be of the proper people to begin with' (Müller, 2016, p. 20). While Australian un/popular

leadership goes against the ‘populist’ moniker, the teleology holds. A populist leader is a leader of a fractional group of people, whose popularity grows as they ‘point out’ and ‘act for’ the people they claim to represent. Usually this is through a critique of the ruling class, of the wealthy or elite, yet in Australia, un/popular leadership is actions by politicians whose actions are fundamentally anti-elite, in that it breaks the perception of the hegemon’s held ideology as an infallible ruling class. For example, by vacationing during the Australian bushfires, Morrison created a deeply unpopular image, however his fundamental approval was not shaken to its core. Indeed, his adoption of nicknames which arose from the vacation period indicates an ownership of the act of leaving the country to burn (Gleeson, 2020; Murphy, 2020; Oxford Analytica, 2020). The adoption of ‘ScoMo’ affords Morrison a popularity for his identified unwillingness to perform his duty and govern the country, or at least to provide support and strategies to those in need. In essence, an act which might be interpreted as a ‘sending up’ of traditional leadership of the country. Moreover, in his more recent ‘offence’ by attending a photo shoot at a football game during the height of a sexual assault scandal, Morrison has provided toxic masculinity a referent, a champion in leadership whose actions are not swayed by the voices of outraged women (Remeikis, 2021; Sheppard, 2021). This is played out in Albanese’s opposition, who worked on the ground with firefighters during the bushfire period, and who attended the rallies against Morrison’s governments’ handling of the assault allegations, though neither of these acts gained particular attention from the hegemonic press, his ‘popular’ appeal has not dramatically shifted. Instead, Morrison has held relative ‘popularity’ in the traditional sense. This un/popularity requires examination in the context of rising global populism, particularly given the endemic nature of populism and un/popularity which *may* be situated within it.

Populism describes a mode of political leadership which has increased in frequency across recent times, and through connection with far-right politics has amplified a kind of

aggressive and dangerous politics globally. The populist politician claims to morally represent their constituents in an exclusive mode that ‘works’ for *the people* while often, in truth, they enjoy personal privilege (Müller, 2016). In this sense they are deeply entrenched members of the ruling class or *the elite*, in varying denominations of *ruling* they sit in the hegemonic class or, at least, within the subaltern of the ruling class which is aligned with a base of supporters, and their purported political *subjectivities* and relationship to their leader or sovereign. The populist leader, then, is necessarily of the hegemonic elite, one who is part of the political ruling class, or an aspirant. The populist will hold to their ability to singularly represent, lead and ‘unite’ people even against the empirical failing of their claims (Müller, 2016). In recent history, Trump’s refusal to admit defeat in the US election is a key example, to the point of inciting riot on the capital, the populist claim that they hold power, they represent, and they are infallible, trustworthy and competent are key features. Among the easiest examples of populist leadership remain Trump, Johnson, Sanders, Le Pen or Syriza. While populism is often attached to right-wing politicians, there is no specific theoretical reasoning to specify this position. Certainly, the key features of populism mesh with right-wing leaders, particularly in their ability to make fallible claims which are held up as ultimate truths, or even attempts at action, however left-wing leaders are as easily attached to populist theory. As Brabazon et al. (2019) highlight in the context of Trump and rising anti-Islam sentiment:

When a political figure becomes populist, particular attributes follow, such as criticism of “the elites,” antipluralism and a reified and simplified version of identity politics. ... Populism is important, as it formulates a corrosive fracture in the body politics, summoning a fiction of “the people” against “the elites”.

(Brabazon et al., 2019, p. 85)

Here, on the left, Sanders’s (and recently Ocasio-Cortez) critique of the ruling class from a position within that class has been highlighted as a populist claim (Müller, 2016). Amongst the defining features of populist leaders, Müller (2016) suggests that a populist leader will fail to:

concede that representation is temporary and fallible, that contrary opinions are legitimate, that society cannot be represented without remainder, and that it is impossible for one party or politicians to permanently represent an authentic people. (Müller, 2016, p. 40)

It is possible to identify the problems and the supposed solution populism offers, the ability to unite people over a dislike of the elite, the ruling class in almost Gramscian modality though virtueless and apolitical, the failure of representational democracy (for some), and the problems and corruptions of contemporary political systems. However, populist leaders are in theory and practice, for the most part, too indolent to authentically change the systems of government which are in place. While they may claim to singularly represent and be able to affect change for a group of people, their actions fall short of systemic overthrow into dictatorship or authoritarian regimes (Müller, 2016). Moreover, while the claims made, laws introduced, and acts made may follow extremism, these are often presented within the extant political systems, as the system itself supports capitalism from which the populist leader benefits. As members of the hegemonic elite, they may have desire to change regulatory rulings, enact open markets, bias and redirect financial conditions to their favour (Brabazon et al., 2019; Müller, 2016), but short of holding a complete, organic, subaltern perspective of the organisation of democracy the populist is destined to hegemonic reinforcement by virtue of their positionality. Reintegrating this theory of populism into Gramscian hegemonic theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, however the theory is not oppositional to hegemony, nor Marxist social theory. Recently, in a turn away from the orthodox positionality of this thesis, post-structural post-Marxist theorists have worked to reconcile populism and hegemony.

In dividing the people and the elite, in a binary mode whereby the people are led and the elite lead, populism effectively reinforces the nature of hegemony. While this manifests as a new formulation of representative politics, the relatively anaemic binary of the state and the civil society remains. Moreover, in conceptualising this space albeit in a post-structural mode, in Europe in particular, there is a deliberate adoption of Laclau and Mouffe's reinterpretation

of Gramscian social theory, both by social theorists and cultural studies, but also by the populist leaders themselves in an ‘enlightened’ cry to appeal to their ‘people’. Some of this relatively incompatible, partially linguistic, work offers insight to a mapping of populism and hegemonic theory (Andreucci, 2018; Eklundh, 2018; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Thomassen, 2016). Moreover, as populist leaders *themselves* have ascribed to the political theories of Laclau and Mouffe in Europe on the left, this creates an interesting bridge between hegemonic theory, post-structuralism and populism directly (Eklundh, 2018). Through European populist left party’s employment of political theory, *qua* political philosophy, directly towards, purportedly liberatory ends, they aim to appeal to an educated demographic whose own engagement with literary and post-structural theory has intersected with their party’s literature (Eklundh, 2018). Indeed, the deployment of hegemonic theory alongside a left populism appears to have occurred in several places across the European Union in recent times (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). However, the (post)structural conception of the relation between populism and hegemony quickly collapses into linguistics and discourse theory, as Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014, p. 122) demonstrate:

emphasis on the political and often antagonistic character that different discourses acquire through their articulation around distinct nodal points (such as “the people”) and their differentiation from other discourses in a bid to hegemonize the public sphere and to influence decision-making. Here, the term “discourse” does not refer merely to words and ideas, but denotes all “systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects” through the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers. (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 122)

This is far from an enlightenment of members of civil society. Instead, an appeal to an educated petit bourgeoisie, or educated middle class (aspirant), to influence the outcomes of political cycles. While not an authentic engagement, this has significant bearing for the ruling of universities in contemporary times, particularly how rhetoric and discourse are leveraged to subdue academics and students in the university. This is explored in detail in the next section,

particularly identifying the relationship between political influence and the ‘ruling’ of students and academics in a stratified university system.

University hegemony, politics and leadership

In the context of changing modalities of political authority, the fragmentation of democracy, and the devolution of culture in late modernity, the question of hegemonic leadership arises in the context of cultural institutions. Universities themselves may be conceptualised as tools of social reproduction, spaces of corporate capture and progress, political training grounds, or liberatory new spaces. In Australia, the university sector is in increasing peril. Instability and precarity have replaced the stable promise of employment, scarcity of funding and access to international students have created immense financial pressures, and the institutions themselves are narrowing in focus and losing many talented staff and students, including opportunities for students to develop positional, social group informed, ‘consciousness’. Concomitantly, new governance has emerged and wave after wave of new modes of operating universities have struck and retreated. In contemporary times, universities are ruled by the *hegemon*, at least a member of the ruling class elite. Here, there is significant need to investigate how these institutions have been controlled historically, who has held power and what the role of academic or student may have been or become possible. This can be demonstrated theoretically and empirically through thorough examination of contemporary times in contrast to the past. This section now turns brief attention to a theoretical examination of the role of the ‘academic’ management in the hegemonic university structure⁴², before the thesis turns to an empirical, historic examination of the structures of the institution and the *student’s* positionality within it.

⁴² It is necessary to understand universities as made up of students and staff and the institution as hegemonic tools of ruling those citizen-academics/students.

University ‘leadership’ is stratified. Universities are comprised of academics, students and professional staff. Together, these groups *make* the university. Inside each of these groups are people of many different origins, social groups, identities and class status (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). The university itself may be productively considered as two organisms and is commonly spoken about in these terms: it is configured as a researching institution and as a teaching institution. The connective tissue is the students and staff who straddle teaching/researching modes across the institution⁴³. In their work, they set a direction for the university. In their idealised form, the academy researches on the cutting edge of science and society, and it teaches from its research the newest and best information through curricular and importantly *teaches* the methods used for the production of that research. In this way, researching in a university sets a tone for the future of that institution, and while this space is complicated by more recent developments of teaching/research only academics, the general possibility for leadership in the academy is still grassroots in the sense that the academic workers set a research direction for the institution. While this is a relatively naïve conception ignoring the funding and ranking mechanisms of the academy, particularly as conditioning externalities which direct university research and teaching towards hegemonic ends, it remains possible, yet complicated, to lead from research from relatively low positions in the academic hierarchy. This is complicated, substantially, by metrics and measurement of academic outputs from research projects (Ewart & Ames, 2020). Frequently these do not include teaching outputs or alternative communication and dissemination modes, favouring ‘Q1 journals’. The originary conception of academic ‘leadership’ has been superseded by a new form of direct hegemonic coercive control. As academics refused to follow the tone set by the external bodies – often tools of the state – and starting with the revolutionary period of the 1960s, academics began to act

⁴³ Increasingly academics struggle with immense workloads and time pressure. Even those designated to have a ‘research load’ are placed under high levels of teaching pressure (Ames, 2019). Managing the balance between teaching and research, for those in a balanced position, can be incredibly challenging.

with a class consciousness towards revolutionary ends. Here, it becomes apparent that external coercive influence was no longer sufficient for the control of academics and the direction of the university *qua* control of students (Gollan, 1975). From the early 1970s, at least at Flinders University, the appointment of successive vice-chancellors whose interests were largely more *corporate* began to see the installation and *creep* of new management logics. In recent times, the institution's vice-chancellors are appointed by corporate-controlled boards whose interests lie in the creation of market value. In this regard, the vice-chancellor and university's senior leadership are appointed according to their political ability, rather than any proven leadership capacity in the traditional sense of academic leadership. In this way, academic leadership is bifurcated, on one branch is the actual research leaders, those who are often themselves an elite of the academic body with strong connections to profitable industries and grant providers (traditional intellectual), and on the other branch the senior executive of the institution whose purpose is to politically *steer* the institution (*hegemon*). The former is often highly capable of political navigation and relative agency within the ruling class. The latter is driven financially and motivated ideologically by funding and shifts in politics (Bonnell, 2016). While both hold to relative autonomy, internally suggesting that their actions are their own and conducted for the purposes of leading the academy, both academic leadership in a traditional sense motivated by externalities and the new class of corporatised CEO-academics are subject to, or agents of, the state hegemony in the institution. Here, an important distinction arises between the university as an institution and the 'academy' as a clustering of academics and students working on educational and research ends. Institutions, animated by human actions, are capable of governance, structures can condition and produce certain behaviours, and individuals can be responsible for the coercion or enforcement of types of activities, through incentive structure or through discipline for noncompliance (Gramsci, 1996). The academy in the communal sense is the allegiance of interests around a common core of various *modus operandi*. Here, academics

and students work together to pursue a common good for their community. The latter is an idealised form of the university, a view that universities were once golden spaces which provided free and robust discussion, who were not regulated or subject to state rules or the conceptions of civil society. In Australia, this idyllic university is the subject of imagination. There has never been a 'free academy' in the European sense, the knowledge structures which existed in the country long before British colonisation may have held to more liberated ideals, at least for the men of the societies, but since their inception Australia's universities have been colonial instruments (Forsyth, 2014). In some cases, the instrument of enforcement of state hegemony over the Indigenous people, and in other cases as the perpetuator of colonial governance and training for the wealthy elite (Maynard, 2007). This complex space sits above students at least in undergraduate spaces and creates conditions for their learning, but also their living and being in the stratum of civil society.

In this system, students can be considered as members of the lowest strata of knowledge and positional power. Indeed, building from the above it is possible to conceptualise universities as spaces of hegemonic control whereby the state hegemony is played out through university management and its forerunner researchers, and the 'civil' or perhaps 'academic' society becomes the students and working staff of the institution. Yet these spaces are deeply stratified with academics as high wage earners, and in many instances petit bourgeoisie, and students increasingly impoverished and disadvantaged, even by their study fees. In students positioning within the 'working class' of the university it is possible to conceptualise their labour as work, their position as worker/learner, and their lofty superiors to be akin to state hegemony (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). While an extreme and indirect interpolation of Gramscian theory, it is not a novel reconceptualisation. Indeed, inside such a depiction, the academic society may have subaltern actors, including subaltern groups of identities, classes or backgrounds, for example, international students whose relative positions are held to be lower than the domestic students

as Kim argues ‘studies of foreign students’ adaptation fail to show how the global hegemony of American universities forms in the micro processes of education’ and in positioning students in this relation, Kim continues:

To Korean students, the process of earning this academic capital in American universities involves endless struggle, negotiation, and achievement, a tension exacerbated by the ambiguity that accompanies their in-between position as they move from Korean to American universities. Perceiving themselves as inferior subjects while they attend classes, fulfill teaching assistantship (TA) and research assistantship (RA) work obligations, and perform research, Korean students develop the image of a superior America opposed to an inferior Korea as they experience the excellence of American universities and their cultural leadership and as they meet the leading experts in their fields. At this point, I emphasize the fact that this hierarchy is formed through active and voluntary consent, which takes place in everyday life (Gramsci, 1988, p. 194). At the same time, the academic relations between Korea and the United States reinforce global hegemony because of systemic and cultural problems prevalent in Korean universities.
(Kim, 2012, pp. 456–457)

Positioning international students as a subaltern of the academic class provides insight into the conceptualisation of students within university hegemony. While this does not limit the *possibility* for their action, it provides a theoretical positioning of the student in the stratum of university (leadership) hegemony and in some relation to their situatedness in civil society, be that in ruling class or working class. If some groups of students occupy a subaltern positionality in their position of *relative privilege* in their ability to attend university, while holding to relatively working class ideals, or at least allegiance with the working class, students can be positioned as *within* civil society and positioned under state hegemony, making any action they take against or below the structures and systems of universities *political* (and *activist*) (Gramsci, 1996).

The development of a robust method is required to conceptualise, test and understand the current landscape of students’ positionality in the everyday *politics* of universities. Moreover, it is essential to, through a historical mode, explore and demonstrate the changes to university hegemony and the role of state hegemony in university management. In particular, through an

examination of the position, in/action and consequences of student engagement with the state (university) over time. In particular, a method which draws on the empirical experience of students in a university as they do/not engage with the structures and systems of the institution is required that enables rigorous exploration of students' understandings of the institution, but which allows a conception of the university which may be compared to its historical existence to demonstrate the (un)changing hegemony as it affects students. Indeed, even with the dramatic shifts in government, the ramifications for members of state society are largely differentiated. In this vein it is necessary to analytically question the fundamental nature of the institution to determine if, even under changing conditions and regimes, the possibility for action remains – if action can be meaningful – and if initiative under hegemony can genuinely create conditions of social change. This doctoral thesis now turns to an exploration of method in light of Gramscian social theory. Through an expansion of the relatively ethnographic analytical method Gramsci himself deployed, the empirical research for this project drew from observations, extant literature, robust interviews, and other grey literature to support the development of the argument. The next chapter turns serious reflexive attention to the methods employed for this thesis as necessary to explore and understand the nature of students' roles under hegemonic university change fully and empirically.

Chapter 3

Methods:

Contextual embedded ethnographic praxis

This thesis draws on an ethnographic and cultural studies mode of research data collection, analysis and presentation. A complex web of extant research literature is used to inform this perspective: participatory in-field observation (Gans, 1999; Tedlock, 1991) and journaling presented as storytelling (Belbase et al., 2013; Denzin, 2014; Holt, 2003); analysis of historical documents for perspective and voice (Brewer, 2000; Vine et al., 2018); importantly, ethnographic interviews with participants from the field who lived and breathed student activism and power alongside me (Spradley, 1979); finally, a handful of life history interviews to inform the nature of and relationship between historical and contemporary student power and activism (Forsey, 2010). With a stylistic relationship to the work of Antonio Gramsci, this thesis draws on the contemporary culture of students and compares the progress, struggles and lived experience to the historical moment remembered clearly as *the* period for student activism in the 1960s. This thesis offers an original contribution, drawing both on the historical and literary analysis of the Marxist tradition but also, by adding participatory research methods to the eclectic conversation, it extends the scholarship of the *New Left*. Here, these methods complement much of the political philosophy which emerged around the post-Marx Marxist work, particularly of Gramsci and Anderson. In Gramsci's own writing, the use of experience and current events as a point for analysis is deemed a central anchor. Indeed, as Gramsci highlights, his theory if divorced from observation and critique would be largely meaningless (Gramsci, 1996). Scholarship on the participatory methods and use of Gramscian social theory are far from novel; as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Crehan's ethnographic and participatory compliment to Gramscian social theory is an essential examination of the relationship between contemporary anthropology and ethnography and the philosophy of

praxis (Crehan, 2002). Importantly, Gramsci's philosophy of praxis includes, by necessity, an ontic relationship with the societal *mode* of production. While his analytical target was much broader than a single social institution, his acknowledgement and connection to a struggle against, from within, the hegemonic social order and mode of production are central to his praxis and, in particular, his acknowledgement of the transcendence of the social order atop the *means* of production as far as an economic base bears significance to his analysis and method. Here, in a sense, there is a supposition that ontologically anyone in capitalism then embodies, views and colours any interaction, analysis and discussion with a compatible and capitalist modality, an epistemology of capitalism. While methods, especially when combined, may provide some triangulation, a default *state* requires the view that capitalism forces a particular perspective. In this regard, deploying Gramscian praxis as an encompassing extension of his philosophical linguistic work in *a* field requires substantive consideration of *the* field for study and how through *counter* narrative, or activist narrative, an alternative possible future may emerge. The methods employed and the presentation of the resulting work thus require careful consideration in their own right. This chapter takes a pragmatic approach to the articulation of the methods used throughout and, given the moves between historiography and popular culture, narrative forms and interview data, requires a systematic form to present these methods, permitting that some chapters deploy a combination, and provides acknowledgement of the *thinking through* and *taking seriously* of the data for each chapter.

Entering the field

The initial interaction between researcher and their field of research in any ethnographic data collection is essential. In these early stages, the ethnographic researcher is engulfed in new relations and a hyper-vigilance and care about the field in which they are arriving (Brewer, 2000). Indeed, ethnographic work is never 'easy or quick' and, as Brewer notes, 'smash and grab' ethnographies are ultimately 'worthless'. Thus, each stage of the

ethnographic process requires consideration (Brewer, 2000, p. 61). Every new experience the researcher encounters, then, provides a new *entering* and a learning opportunity for the ethnographer, an important documentary opportunity. While the traditional anthropological researcher may be depicted frantically writing in a leatherbound notebook at the back of the room, practical ethnographic experiences often require at least some level of covert observational behaviour. Having a strong memory is definitely a key capacity of the ethnographer, who often must hold on to their initial impressions and early learning until later in the day when access to a notebook is less conspicuous (Brewer, 2000; Tedlock, 1991). For me, as a scholar of higher education studies notebooks are, fortunately, an acceptable social norm for the recording of lectures and transcription of conversations. However, the arrival in these novel spaces takes a particular and perhaps more difficult form, as a PhD student is generally well educated and at least somewhat familiar with the social norms of higher education before they commence their graduate studies. In this sense, as a PhD student my undergraduate and Honours studies preceded me, creating particular ways of knowing and understanding the higher education landscape. While not directly *entering the field*, these early experiences of higher education are somewhat conditioning for the burgeoning ethnographic researcher and must be kept reflexively in mind (Brewer, 2000).

The induction into the possibility of research in academia delighted me. I saw possibilities of a formal space to push boundaries and communicate about issues that mattered. It was not until my PhD that I was once again to reconsider the relationship between scholarship and activism, and not in a model of ‘communicative power’. As depicted in the Prologue, my experiences of organisational change coloured my perspectives on higher education and positioned me in such a way to be able to write this thesis. Indeed, without the Flinders University Academic Restructure I would still, likely, be writing on STEM

Education⁴⁴. Not until I met my now doctoral supervisor, Professor Tara Brabazon, did I discover an intellectual framework which facilitated activist communication: a revitalisation of ‘student power’ and Gramscian social theory. In Appendices

Appendix 1, I speak with Tara from a position of early entry into the field of Higher Education Studies, the nexus of scholarship and research into which this thesis rests. In the appendix I present some excerpts which discuss my early thoughts about the *scene*, transcribed from a podcast (Brabazon & Cornelius-Bell, 2020).

In conjunction with the work of the story presented in the Prologue, this constitutes my initial thoughts entering the research field, both as a ‘younger’ student and as a scholar of higher education in more contemporary times (Brabazon & Cornelius-Bell, 2020). I am fortunate in that this section aspires for readership from a fellow scholar. While our terminology may differ, our fundamental understanding of *doing* education is common across, at least, the Anglophone world. Above, and throughout the remainder of the thesis, I have endeavoured to capture the novel expressions, the meaning behind the narratives which I present to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding, but the fundamental frame from which we work in higher education is remarkably Anthropocene. The above has briefly communicated my view on what higher education is, does and could be. And this, I believe captures the spirit of a good ethnographic narrative. Indeed, if we are to do cultural studies well, our own narratives should be present in the way we capture and communicate our research. The subsequent sections turn their attention to more empirical aspects of data collection. Noting the ephemeral and fortunate ability to capture a diverse group of human subjects’ perspectives at a given time, I believe an acknowledgement of their own relative perspectival shifts is necessary. If this thesis is read in 2021, or 2041, human knowledge and perspectives change, as my own have shifted since

⁴⁴ In recent conversation with a Science professor, I was told this would be a much more useful PhD to pursue. I firmly disagreed. Student activism, power and potential, I believe, are the only way to save our crumbling sandstone, and corrupt monoliths of steel.

entering the field, from activist to consciousness concerned scholar my participants and those whom I read, interviewed and observed for this study will have shifted, grown and changed. It is in this way that ethnographic research is fundamentally human, capturing a moment in time, a cultural moment from the perspective of the immersed culture, but it also means that the experiences and communication must at least in aspiration, transcend just the moment they present. In that vein, this thesis presents work across two definitive periods in the consideration of student activism. It also bridges theoretically two distinctive periods. A theory propelled forward in the 1900s and an activist moment in full flourish in the 1960s examined in comparison to contemporary political and cultural moments.

Cultural studies and methods of data collection

Cultural studies, in particular cultural studies enfolded within higher education studies, is an uncomfortable fit with many methods of data collection. The higher education studies space is rife with quantitative, empiricist, ‘objective’, statistical, market-driven research emerging from various positions in university administration and from higher education workers whose frame of reference for research is typically ‘empirical measurable’, often its most humanist form being a word frequency analysis (For various examples: Alnawas, 2014; Alsharari, 2019; Cantwell et al., 2020; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Moogan et al., 1999; Norton, 2013; Skilbeck & Esnault, 1993; R. Smith, 1993). Cultural and critical studies in the higher education landscape is limited, but far from non-existent (For example: Ahmed, 2012; Connell, 2019; Giroux, 2002; Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Reay, 2004). In particular, the return to an embedded ethnographic exploration bears some relation to Little’s study of *The University Experience* in Australia. While the broad scale of the data collection for his work eclipses this study, the mode of communication, particularly about student activism and students experiences maintains significant relevance (Little, 1970).

This thesis presents a multi-modal collection of experiences, both from the normalised history of higher education in Australia, through the people's history of the university, from student politicians' adventures, through those living with a disability. In particular, my data collection shied away from structured interviewing and quantitative methods for the analysis of human behaviour. Here, the alternative methods surface, such as life histories and ethnographic and participatory methods for data collection. Below, a brief discussion on participatory methods, in the context of the university, are explored. In addition, the methods of data collection for this thesis are also explored. As Gramsci highlights, the divorcing of methods from theory, or theory from methods, creates decontextualised and confused writing, thus each of the below is situated in a context. Throughout the thesis, as each method is used, a brief comment is also provided on them to give clarity to the purpose of use and the situation/conditions under which they have been used.

There is a growing crisis of representational democracy and growing disaffection towards our 'representation' in politics and society (Newton, 2001; Torcal & Montero, 2006). The age of Trump in the United States, Johnson in the United Kingdom and other populist leaders around the globe has created schisms between people and leaders, voices and outlets (Brabazon et al., 2019; Kazin, 2016). Officially recognised and formalised actions in democracy are shifting. The opportunities to speak to, and against, power are changing, diminishing and metastasising with new collective forms and positions emerging in populist-led power structures (W. Brown, 2015; Hajer, 2005; Koch, 2013; Müller, 2016). Critical social research is required, which gives voice to participants, franchised and disenfranchised, by semi-formal processes which must avoid being coercive, subvert hegemony, unsettle knowledge and authority and position the researcher in a space to critically engage and reflexively value what matters: hearing participants' voices, even in new models of social and participatory research (Enria, 2016; Higgins et al., 2020; Söderström, 2020). Research in this age must draw out lived

experience and honour participants voices especially when they conflict with the constructed, natural, narrative of history, particularly when working with women, people of colour, and those with disability (Ackerly & True, 2019; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Behrendt, 2019; Brewer, 2000; Brulé, 2016; Schensul & LeCompte, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2019). Ethnographic research emerges at this nexus, though not without its own complications, in particular, ethnographic research as a socio-linguistics or (post)modern approach (Adler & Adler, 2008) and autoethnographic methodologies which contravene the Marxist/Gramscian basis of this thesis (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; S. H. Jones et al., 2016). In this thesis, ethnography complements the Gramscian theoretical space as depicted, in some instances through Gramsci's own notes on his data collection, and fits in an analytical/Marxist ethnographic style (Banfield, 2004; Brewer, 2000), though presented in several instances through narrative forms (Tedlock, 1991) without an adherence to the interpretive or (post)structural modes prevalent in narrative *autoethnography* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Employing this hybrid, yet trusted, collection of methods enables a Gramscian understanding of the research field, though communicated in language which enables the 'opening' of the sociological field (D. Gordon, 2014). Centrally, this thesis employs participant observation in conjunction with my observations and notes drawn from participant interviews (Gans, 1999). Each of the methods for this study are employed in an attempt to provide a rounded, multi-perspectival 'look into' students in activism, power and their position in the institution (state) and civil society (Gramsci, 1996). Here, it is also worthwhile highlighting that understanding of civil society is not limited to sociology or cultural studies, as Gordon highlights: '[T]here are numerous critics of inequality and of capitalism spread across all the humanistic and social scientific disciplines. Civil society is not a category unique to sociology but is the common property of history, cultural studies, institutional economics, political science, and numerous other disciplines' (D. Gordon, 2014, p. 124). In centring this research in *civil society*, a contribution can be made both to the research field and

broadly commentary on the society under study, as Gramsci's work did. This thesis, as highlighted, employs ethnographic research as the base of the empirical work. This was a thoughtful and deliberate choice to be a part of the culture and activities of students in an engaged and meaningful way sustained over a two-year period. The selection of *covert* participant observation, in particular, was a central choice in making the empirical work of this thesis *work* as both an appreciation and critique of student politics (Homan, 1980). The ability to be embedded and contextually aware *as a researcher* required reflexivity and constant thought, and while qualitative research may be considered as 'learning' (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), attention to detail and understanding influence, power and dynamics in the field is paramount to high quality ethnography (Brewer, 2000). Thus, it is important to consider the time and care requirements for completing an ethnographic project and each method in detail. First, however, this section must turn to a consideration of research ethics in light of the chosen methods.

Research ethics

This section discusses the research ethics and protocols for the data collection presented in this thesis. The empirical data collection for this research was proposed (Oct. 2019) and accepted (Dec. 2019) by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC p.n. 8505). This ethics process included a robust examination of the methods of advertisement and recruitment of participants, the methods for the study itself, and the use of observational and extant secondary data retrieved from archival materials. Considerations of ethics were additionally important for the research contained in this thesis, as large sections of ethnographic materials, presented from field notes and interviews, require careful handling. While ethnographic data, primarily participant observations, are non-intrusive in nature, beyond the presence of the researcher a care to ethics is required to ensure authenticity of representation and the anonymity and security of participants (Gans, 1999; Li,

2008). This section both explicates the protocol of ethically collecting, handling and presenting data, and demonstrates an adherence to national research standards which require, amongst other standards: '[t]ransparency in declaring interests and reporting research methodology, data and findings' (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, p. 2). Li notes the on-balance challenge and reward of embedded ethnographic fieldwork which employs formal and informal interviewing: 'more detailed, contextualized findings than consent interviews and other overt qualitative data collection methods, the distinctive contribution of this embedded fieldwork should be recognized' (Li, 2008, pp. 101–102). Importantly, ethics committees frequently lack adequate 'options' for ethnographic researchers. At Flinders University, the Committee provides an application form with options for researchers undertaking standard qualitative research processes and emphasises ethical conduct in the recruitment of participants. In the 2018 form, ethnographic methods were not present as options on the formal data collection methods list; while interviews and observations were present, their assumptive use was in 'formal semi-structured or structured interviews' and 'classroom settings' respectively. In this sense, while the project received full ethics approval, and disclosed use of field notes, there were not full formal processes established around the data collection methods, centring instead on recruitment options and emphasising the optional nature of participation in research. Moreover, there are specific considerations for ethnographic researchers in the field, depending on context, who may encounter professionally challenging conditions or ethically questionable scenarios and the implications therein for data collection and faithful representation of research data (Moore & Savage, 2002).

During the course of several of the interviews conducted for this project, participants highlighted instances where they faced confrontation with authorities and in some instances had been detained and charged with criminal activities. Moreover, some participants recalled both emotionally and physically traumatic experiences, and in one instance asked for details of

this incident to be obscured. In representing this data, I have chosen to allow my participants to speak the truth of their experience and preserve their voices in a *relatively* unobscured nature, remaining clear about the bounds placed on me under the *National Code* and university's ethics process in such a way that keeps their participation anonymous, and to avoid contextual reidentification by obscuring dates, key details, and redacting information, names and other participants who were not party to the observations or interviews. More details on the process used to anonymise participants in the interviews is detailed in the section below. Ethical conduct by researchers, and participants particularly in focus group settings, is essential to the continued function, trust and experience of research. In this regard, I have paid close attention to the protocols and processes required of me during this research, remaining true to my described methods in my approved ethics application, adhering to the *National Code* and being honest about my presentation of the research data, clear about the processes used to present data from participants, and keeping a close watch on retaining anonymity and confidentiality for those details which may be revealing of personal details. Below, ethical conduct, presentation and discussion takes a *front of mind* position as each method is explored in further detail.

Field notes

This project generated over 400 pages of field notes: experiences I documented, places I attended, people I spoke to. During the two and a half years of embedded culturally informed creating of this project I became deeply embedded in the research context. Indeed, as I write today, I take considered pauses to read over an agenda for Academic Senate, which occurs tomorrow afternoon, an important governance space in my university, which I attend as a student member in utility form to ask questions of our most senior academics and question the decisions that are driving higher education. Living in 'student power' and participatory spaces for my university's governance gives me an insight otherwise impossible in writing and researching for this PhD. The notetaking I have conducted for this project would have been

impossible with other social research methods, and rather than valuing the contribution of being in the culture, methods such as interviewing and life histories often attempt to mask the experience and knowledge of the researcher in the field. In this regard an ethnography is a powerful acknowledgement that the researcher is alive, active alongside the participant. That the voices of those they interview, the informants they talk to and the notes they take are worth something, and that the participation in the research field is essential to functional research. Not as a cold, outsider, but as a known insider. This summons questions for reflexivity, and importantly takes the researcher to task on decolonising the knowledge, allowing other voices to shine through and honouring what is said, even if it does not agree with them. The relationships, all of which take time to build, are thus more important, and the time taken to ponder and honour the voices of participants build on the relationships. In addition to time, in any working relationship, trust is a crucial element this is significantly 'stretched' for an observer-participant, as they are dually required to develop their role, as relevant to their research, and collect data which may be seen as risky, time consuming or otherwise problematic to participants (Brewer, 2000). Thus, the researcher's ability to integrate into the community is critical and the ethical behaviour of the researcher is paramount. The remainder of this chapter explores the methods of data collection. It values the principles established to this point, and centres on the participants voices across the spine of this thesis. As I spoke to people, engaging in thoughtful listening, the argument and narrative for the thesis emerged. In this regard, the thesis was not possible without the people to whom I spoke. In addition, the access to secondary sources and documents provided important 'triangulation' and offered alternative perspectives. This project could not be what it is without robust ethnographic methods, which comprise people; and, to the people that contributed to my research, I am forever grateful.

Interviews

The empirical field-work research for this project involved in-depth interviewing with participants who had shared experiences of the field or who brought historical perspectives on the research field. There were three primary modes of interviewing for this research. The first mode consisted of in-depth interviewing in a semi-structured mode for up to one hour and forty-five minutes. The second mode consisted of in-depth focus group interviews in a semi-structured mode for up to two hours. The third mode was a configuration of life history interviewing which involved a particular focus on alumni's experiences of historical student power and activist moments in *Flinders'* history. For this project, ethnographic interviewing forms a key cornerstone of the data collection and is one important method of building context and gathering rich and significant data. Following from traditional qualitative interviews, ethnographic interviewing aims to gather in-depth descriptive and experiential narrative data from participants toward understanding points of view, illuminating perspectives and understanding interpretations (Spradley, 1979). Ethnographic interviews are uniquely situated to enable shared experiences to create a bridge to meaningful dialogue with participants. However, this is not without complication for the researcher and participants. The context and shared experience provide a common 'starting point' for interviews (Cohen et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2014), but also complicates relationships and can position the researcher in the position of necessarily determining meaning of contextual language from their participants (Spradley, 1979). This complication and the relationship between the methods and the data collected require further exploration in the section below.

This research included 24 original interviews, across the two-year period, with participants from a variety of study backgrounds and experiences. The interviews took place across each month of 2020. Each participant was uniquely positioned to explore specific experiences and understandings of student activism, including historical and contemporary

perspectives. Eight participants were current Doctor of Philosophy students in varying disciplines; of these, one had recently completed their studies at the time I interviewed them. Six were current undergraduate students across nursing, chemistry, women's studies and education. Seven were current postgraduate students in a variety of degrees, which included studies in philosophy, education, engineering and public health. Four were historical alumni, with experiences specifically of the foundation of Flinders University in the 1960s and the activist period which occurred between 1968-1975; of these, one was also undertaking doctoral studies at Flinders University. Seven participants were also employed academic staff, of which several were in precarious employment. Several of the participants identified as having a disability, a majority identified as women, one was an international student and two identified as people of colour. Notably, this demographic information was only freely offered, not asked, and thus may not be representative in understanding all participants⁴⁵.

Throughout this study each participant is deidentified. Moreover, where participants have made reference to others not included in the study, their details have been redacted in square brackets inside any quotes and substituted for appropriate context, clearly demarcated as a modification of the quote. Participants did not choose their alias. While reidentification of data may be possible for some participants, and cross-identification of participants in focus groups is possible, all efforts have been made to preserve anonymity of participants. A detailed table of participant number, alias, study type, and their interaction in the research is presented in Table 1 (below). In some instances, a short interview was conducted as data approached saturation or participants were under time constraints, shy, or less able to contribute to an interview. Some additional conditions apply to the interviews which are discussed below, which is done deliberately separately to the table to maintain anonymity.

⁴⁵ I did not ask any participants to disclose their gender identity, race, or disability. They have done so voluntarily and without prompting.

#	Participant alias	Participant's study group	Research interaction
1	Niall	PhD candidate	2x in-depth interviews
2	Derick	Undergraduate student	1x short interview
3	Lonnard	Undergraduate student	1x in-depth interview
4	Addeline	International postgraduate student	1x in-depth interview
5	Gwynne	Postgraduate student	1x in-depth interview
6	Retha	PhD candidate	1x in-depth interview
7	Orsa	Postgraduate student	1x in-depth focus group interview
8	Kelcy	Postgraduate student and academic	1x in-depth focus group interview
9	Dyane	Postgraduate student	2x in-depth interviews
10	Juliana	Undergraduate student	1x short interview
11	Huberto	Postgraduate student and historical alumni	1x in-depth life history
12	Evelin	Undergraduate student	1x in-depth focus group interview
13	Elly	Undergraduate student	1x in-depth focus group interview
14	Kalila	Undergraduate student	1x in-depth focus group interview
15	Cthrine	PhD candidate and academic	1x in-depth interview
16	Odette	PhD candidate and academic	2x in-depth interviews
17	Margie	PhD candidate and academic	1x in-depth interview
18	Augustin	PhD candidate and academic	1x in-depth interview
19	Roscoe	Historical alumni	2x in-depth life history
20	Clair	Postgraduate student	1x in-depth interview
21	Archer	PhD candidate and academic	1x in-depth interview
22	Cass	Historical alumni	1x in-depth focus group life history
23	Bellanca	Historical alumni	1x in-depth focus group life history
24	Anica	PhD candidate and academic	1x in-depth interview

Table 1 Participant alias, study type, and interaction in the research

Each interview, focus group and life history focussed on ‘student activism,’ and how this phrase resonated in the participant’s conception. This was a particularly difficult subject to broach and requires explanation, as participants often initially did not identify with ‘activism’, instead considering their actions as normal parts of being a student. In order to address this difference in definition, my invitation protocol needed updating to avoid lengthy ‘back pedalling’ with prospective interviewees, adding a qualifier of what I felt activism might include. This elicited more positive responses from participants, though may have had the effect of leading them to a particular way of thinking, which I was originally intending to avoid. The modification to my protocol, in my invitation to prospective participants, included a sentence clarifying my conception of possible kinds of ‘activism’:

I wonder if you would be willing to talk to me about student activism. The starting point could be a time where you, were perhaps made to, respond to the institution in something of an activist mode in an awareness of the institutional structure – i.e., through letter writing, picket protest, collegial

support, networking and discussions, attending meetings. In that regard there's no specific question I'm asking which relates to your 'activism' but starting from a place of experience with being in/under the institution in an aim to understand your analysis, interpretation and actions arising from those moments.

Importantly, two of my early interviews carried on without this change in recruitment strategy and their responses remained congruent with the later participants. While there is a potential that by highlighting my thoughts on activist *types* had an impact on my participants' thoughts, I hold that this resulted in a higher quality discussion and a more diverse participant pool as, on average, those who declined interviews did so thinking that they were distinctly *not activist*. Subsequent interviews turned up similar results, though upon examination of their behaviour, particularly for results presented in Chapter 9, activism was at the heart of being a student for several participants.

Interviews were conducted in two 'waves', with the first focussed on initial data collection and triangulation of understandings. In this regard, the initial interview rounds were based on shared understandings of the field, though added significant perspective in the process of 'listening' to their perspectives (Atkinson et al., 2000; Brewer, 2000; Forsey, 2010). Moreover, the first wave of interviews guided the presentation of data, not in a prescriptive 'backfilling' mode, but in an open way which enabled participant stories to come to the fore. While my ethnographic experience provided substantial additional detail with the participants, their stories guided my production of the argument and narrative for the thesis below. The second wave was a confirmatory round; with some participants being repeat interviewees in more of a telling and responding mode, I was able to theoretically test my ideas in a transparent and accountable way *with* participants. In addition, some participants were included for their first time in a split of listening to their stories, listening to mine, and constructive repeatability of stories. I was fortunate that my participants were very open to providing confirmatory, or in some instances constructive, commentary on the analytical work I had produced. By splitting

the interviews across two distinctive waves I was able to test my theory, literature and repeatability/reliability in a transparent mode which enabled additional rigour in the context of telling of their stories and building my theory. Participatory research of this ilk enables high quality, rigorous and open research which ensures the researcher has not diverged from the realities of the social spaces in which the research was conducted (Brewer, 2000; Enria, 2016). Furthermore, through interviewing participants who lived through the 1960s and 1970s, with regard to Chapter 5, enabled the robust telling of an alternative history where empirical research was thinner. The context, then, of the University is significant both to the research and as a site of political and social actions, and it is thus useful to consider the metadata of a university space.

It is worth considering the current high level statistical compilation of the university in which this study took place. The student population at Flinders University is comprised of over 26,000 people. Of these, more than 5,000 are international students, 17,000 are undergraduate, 7,000 are postgraduate and 900 are higher degree research candidates. In addition, 400 are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students. There are 2,300 staff, of which 1,000 are classified as academic (Flinders University, Planning and Analytical Services, 2021, rounded to nearest 100). Importantly, in spite of the student numbers, the number of students involved in governance positions is low: by a generous, educated, estimate there may be 150 students in governance positions. Just 25 students are in ‘student politics’ elected positions. Far more students *may be* activists; however, indications of activism would be substantially challenging to ‘measure’, especially given students’ own conceptions of their engagement with activism.

Ethnographic data are of course not generalisable. However, experiential representations of data collected for this project will resonate with students and academics alike across the sector. The power of ethnographic work is in the pedagogic elements of its depiction (Brewer, 2000); in a truly Gramscian sense, using powerful voices – from participants or the

ethnographer themselves – creates opportunities for experiential ‘bridges’ between differing worlds of understanding. Where such a resonance occurs, even setting aside strength of underlying argument, there is the possibility for experience to inform, connect and explain something deeper about the structure, organisation, actions and possibility of student and staff action in the academy and beyond. In this regard, there is a unique power in the use of singularly qualitative methods, and in particular the use of ethnography, as they are a conduit for high quality interpretation, narrative, connection and context.

Due to the COVID-19 global health crisis, modifications were required to the ethical protocol for this study. While the project was initially approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC p.n. 8505) with all interviews to take place in a location on the Bedford Park campus of the University, the pandemic’s disruption to ‘business-as-usual’ operations required moving several of the interviews to an online mode. While this initially abstracted the interviews from their intended contextual markers, the modification of protocol ultimately enabled more flexible arrangements to be made with participants, enabling more interviews and focus groups to be conducted, as well as in inspiring the reach to additional interviewees from the 1960s and 1970s period who now live interstate. The modifications to the protocol were approved by the special convening of the low-risk ethics committee under a new project number (SBREC p.n. 1967). Consciously, online interviews in several instances were *shorter* in an effort to reduce potential strain on participants due to proliferating online meetings.

Secondary sources, texts and documents

This project also made use of several pieces of *grey literature*, including student publications, newsletters, unpublished manuscripts and archival material. Data collection for this portion of the project took place in 2019. Data were retrieved from Flinders University

Special Collections in the Flinders University Library⁴⁶ and digitised and catalogued for the project. Ultimately, over 70 documents were digitised as part of the archival access, with more than 500 pages scanned and partially catalogued, themed and noted for Chapter 5. While these materials were invaluable for informing the context and direction of the project, peer-reviewed and first-party accounts largely superseded the historical materials. There are several key scans which corroborate the life histories discussed above, in the chapter below, which provide an augmentation and visual representation of the discourse and imagery of the 1960s and 1970s. In itself the ability to read through the original productions of students during the often-recalled revolutionary period in the University's history was immensely helpful for me as a researcher, having not lived that period myself. Use of secondary data such as scanned material and other grey literature ultimately ensure integrity of historical data in the presentation of *alternative* narratives about the history of place. By drawing from student revolutionary's perspectives on the context of Flinders University, this thesis benefited from triangulation, particularly with participants' historical recall of events upward of 45 years ago. The verification of key facts, dates and information was essential to accurately depict the alternative narrative presented in Chapter 5.

COVID-19 and this research

The COVID-19 global health crisis created unique problems for empirical data collection during 2020. This included various impacts on the timeframe of this project, but also created sweeping problems for students broadly. Fortunately, uniquely, I was positioned to hear from students about the challenges and changes to their studies through the COVID-19 global health crisis, both embedded in the academic context as a casual tutor, and through engagement with students and staff interviewing throughout. Students face a particularly

⁴⁶ Special thanks to Jess King, Pixie Stardust and Kylie Jarrett for their support and retrieval of copious materials from the library archives.

unique set of challenges with COVID-19, and there are some interesting developments which are relevant to the scope of discussion presented here, specifically. At Flinders University the statistical ‘picture’ of student retention, as a limited measure of success, was surprisingly good. However, I believe based on my numerous conversations with students, these results were the tip of the iceberg in terms of engagement and *bona fide* learning. Engaging with learning in an emergency, remote, online mode when much of the world around you appears to be ‘going up in flames’, in Australia quite literally just a few months earlier, has serious impacts on mental health, sense of belonging and students’ understanding of their power.

Interestingly, student politicians would argue that they won great battles with university management in encouraging forward an opt-in non-graded pass system for all undergraduate topics, though the truth of the matter is substantially different. Most of the non-student politics students I engaged with had little time for, or saw value in, the boasts of student politicians over grading. Indeed, they were more immersed in their studies – in many instances achieving better grades and applying themselves to richer, more immersive project-oriented learning experiences to ensure that they were making the most of their studies during a trying time. Here, the departure of student politics from what the common student appeared to desire is an interesting shift. Historically, student politics is a kind of distorted mirror, over imaginative, but faithful to at least some of the core messages left leaning students were pursuing. In this instance, however, I believe students felt further disconnected from their ‘Union’ than they had before. In fact, several of my students commented that they had not heard of, or engaged with, any student politics until the non-graded pass ‘campaign’ was launched through our University’s popular Facebook group ‘Overheard at Flinders University’. At such times, they grew concerned for the impact such a grading system may have had on their degree’s reputation. During the worst of COVID-19 in South Australia, it became clear that students were engaging in more of what we might refer to as ‘slacktivism’: using technology to share petitions, posting

on social media sites and variously screaming into the void. Tangible impacts, of course, were felt in this project too. Students, who I had hoped would be abundantly on campus, and chomping at the bit to participate in interviews were suddenly scarce. Indeed, of course, even leaving the house was scantily a possibility. Method and ethics changes had to be made.

COVID-19 led to some significant changes in research method. What was previously designed to study students' experiences in the context of campus life, eventuated in, in most cases, interviewing via video conference. Online meetings have proliferated and replaced much human-to-human contact across 2020 as a 'safe' mode of communication (Hodder, 2020). An emergence of new language has accompanied this shift of work, study and socialising online, in itself a quasi-marketing tactic, the rise of 'Zoom Fatigue' (C. R. Wolf, 2020) as a compliment to hyper-capitalism's burnout is a sad reality for many still able to engage with their workplace from home (Walker, 1986). The move to Zoom for work has also been mirrored in higher education globally, with higher education workers – academic, professional and students alike – moving rapidly to online conferencing tools to replace face-to-face interactions (Serhan, 2020). The move afforded some benefits around scheduling and access, but also included its own unique challenges. Immediately, it is obvious that *une bonne* ambiance became harder to establish. Building a rapport with interviewees without the obvious queues of body language, and a general reticence when it comes to lengthy online meetings, posed substantial issues. In addition, for an ethnographic project, where student actors, through no fault of their own, lose their relative positioning and context on *étape*, there can be significant cultural loss. However, as alluded to above, with all students facing this new disembodied university experience, there are certain realities and pragmatism in the use of technology to facilitate interviews. Fortunately, I knew almost all of my research participants through my own participation in governance and representation. In this regard, their stories triangulate⁴⁷, or in some cases

⁴⁷ In these terms, identifying three sources of the same or similar information through interpretation.

counter, my experience. This adds an authenticity to the data collected, which in spite of the challenges for ethnography through the lockdown age, positions this research in a unique space.

The other challenges faced including the need to modify my Human Research Ethics were, fortunately, swift. In less than 72 hours an ethics modification to the project was approved, and the continuation of interviewing in a whole new online world could begin to take place. I conducted seven interviews, of approximately two hours each, through Skype and Zoom. With fortuitously low COVID-19 case numbers in South Australia, I was able to conduct the remainder in person and on campus in the University context from which they had been separated. As I made initial analysis of my data it appeared that there had been no significant ‘cultural loss’ in the interviewees’ depiction of the campus and university life. They dwelled fondly on being *on campus* but had not forgotten their interests, duties and responsibility for student representation, activism and politics. Questions of the transience of student-scholarship in a post-campus world perhaps dwelled at the back of my mind were allayed as I was able to finish the remainder of my interviewing without a ‘third wave’. Questions of culture and context which inevitably informed conversations with participants over critical incidents would often return to COVID-19 though, fortunately, the anchor of the university ‘campus’ (be that physical or an online space) provided more clarity than problems in changing times. With a ‘bog standard’ methodology it is entirely possible that I would have lost some of the experience, meaning and value of the interviews I conducted. Fortunately, shared experiences matter and they have been (re)presented below. The power, here, of ethnographic texts to polemise, challenge and stretch our thinking, regardless of our level of agreement on epistemic frameworks, provides a shared space to intellectually dwell and labour over in the time of COVID-19, and gives some hope that a post-COVID campus might emerge that values the voices of students and staff in the academy once more. This is the final justification for me of ethnographic research in cultural higher education studies; as story unites, and the pandemic

divides, we meet again in the middle between analysis and story to create new meanings and a shared future for our universities. To arrive there, however, requires serious consideration of the university of the past in historiographic method, perhaps pausing to think fondly of the universities of old whose own pandemics came and went, and subsequent pondering an alternative painting of the university of the 1960s and 1970s, which depositions the rose-coloured view.

Chapter 4

A revised history of the Australian university: Colonialism, pretention, and knowledge erasure

Universities fall under a banner of promise, a promise of scholarship, learning, teaching, and bettering *themselves*, and in so doing, bettering their communities. The notion that universities serve a public good, be that through scholarly contributions or teaching, is taken as a fundamental underpinning of the nature and purpose of the institutions by a great many scholars. Indeed, founding purposes of universities in the Middle East, Europe, America and, to a lesser extent, Australia and New Zealand, have been to increase and share knowledge. While, in their origins, universities were largely home to male students, predominantly of middle and upper-class backgrounds, there was a communality in the scholarly worlds which universities created. Throughout recent history in anglophone western universities there have been multiple incursions into higher education in a democratising of studenthood. Governments and, to a lesser extent, institutions internally shifted from elite structures allowing a few empowered members into their ranks (*hegemons*) to the application of a widening participation agenda beyond secondary schooling. Concomitantly, this increased the industrial and technical nature of higher education. While this was a relatively new turn in European and Oceanic universities, in non-Western countries universities have served many purposes. Indeed, institutions that serve secular function around the world have been educating women and men from a variety of class backgrounds for centuries. In this chapter, I turn attention to the history of the Australian university system. This exploration is presented chronologically. The chapter first considers the teaching and learning work of the First Nations people. A substantial extant *institution* of cultural and social knowledge and an exploration of this space is included in stark contrast to Australia's copied Eurocentric colonial institutions. It is worth then,

first turning attention to the foundation of universities in Australia, and the implicit, or indeed forceful and explicit, erasure of Indigenous knowledge as a valid epistemic form.

Indigenous knowledges and erasure (1788–present)

There are manifold issues in the telling of histories of colonisation within the context of universities. As a student educated in and through Eurocentric knowledge, it is first important to acknowledge my positionality in this account. I have been fortunate to have many experiences working with and for First Nations Australians and my respect for Indigenous people and culture must be noted, just as my understandings of the hundreds of cultures which make up Australia are limited. Understanding Indigenous knowledge, however, is not the primary purpose of this section; indeed, purporting to know the episteme of First Nations People would be to fundamentally *miss the point* in this section. There are other theoretical complications, however, which are necessary to elucidate in following this timeline and making inroads to an initial understanding of the kinds of knowledge which have been damaged, exiled or lost. That is, until much more recently, there has been a complete prohibition by Western knowledge influence of any alternative telling of history. At first, and during period of particular interest for this section, around 1850, the predominant view of *history* both as academic discipline and political tool saw First Nations people as inferior. Following Attwood (2005), ‘It [theory of history] played a major role in determining the historical and legal narratives that colonisers used to justify seizing the lands of aboriginal people and/or ruling them’ (p. 138). Particularly relevant to this thesis, is the use of a kind of common sense which emerged from a state hegemonic bloc. This knowledge bloc invalidated other perspectives, based on the scholarship of predominantly British academia, whose war of manoeuvre on Australian people installed a physical and knowledge hegemony which ruled as a pass ticket to commit genocide and enslave thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. As West has captured,

The assumption of sovereignty over a savage people is justified by necessity—that law, which gives to strength the control of weakness. It prevails everywhere: it may be either malignant or benevolent, but it is irresistible.
(West, 1852, p. 92)

Here, the power of hegemonic knowledge is clear: the murder of thousands under the banner of ‘civility’ and the subsequent justification of these practices in knowledge systems.

In this context, a Westernised history of the academy is a sensitive issue which should be treated with some concern. While what is recognised in the anglophone world as an institution of knowledge preconfigures certain modes of operation, thinking and doing, what constitutes knowledge and systems of knowing and understanding for First Nations people is substantially different. The arrival of the colonial university in Australia heralded, alongside the physical violence of European immigrants, another system of invalidation which positioned thousands of years of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, understandings, narratives and practices *outside* academic bounds, at best as the object of study and at worst as a system for the justification of continuing racism and oppression. First Nations peoples have long been the custodians of Australia, caring for country and people, ensuring the continuity of life in the nation and creating sophisticated and *real* understandings and systems for maintaining life and culture. Moreover, systems of agriculture, aquaculture, medicine, spirituality, law, construction, and language have been pivotal parts of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of life for decades, in many instances well before their counterpart development in European nations. As Pascoe explores, in the context of colonial arrival:

He counts the houses and estimates a population of over one thousand. He’s disappointed that nobody’s home, it’s obvious they have only just left, and the evidence is everywhere that they have used the place for a very long time. ... at the Victorian Grampians in 1836 he saw “a vast extent of open downs ... quite yellow with Murnong” and “natives spread over the field, digging for roots”. Captain John Hunter, captain on the First Fleet, reported in 1788 that the people around Sydney were dependent on their yam gardens. In Sunbury, Victoria, in 1836 settlers, including Isaac Batay and Edward Page, observed that people had worked their gardens so well and for so long that

large earthen mounds were created during the process.

(Pascoe, 2014, pp. 20–23)

Importantly, the systems for the erasure of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and skills are profoundly hegemonic. As the early British arrivals to Australia often testified in their journals and reports, there was sustained and sophisticated life in Australia long before any European colonisation. What emerged was an epistemic hegemony in which colonisers and crown manipulated common sense to dichotomise 'us' and 'them' to justify what would otherwise have been classified as invasion. This hegemony is so powerful that it persists today in conversations of 'Australia Day' where annual celebrations of colonising brutality overwhelm reasonable and robust discussion of celebrating an, albeit unjustly and unequal, unified country (Darian-Smith, 2017). The systems of laws, cultural organisation, relationships, spirituality and cultural knowledges continue to be of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and these understandings continue to be erased, ignored and politicised by parliament and academy alike (Pascoe, 2014).

Turning to conversations of culture and societal organisation requires serious and meaningful engagement with the hundreds of cultural groups across Australia. However, a reconceptualising of First Nations people outside the colonial hegemonic narrative requires only positioning their significant culture and monumental history in a fulsome way, breaking with the mainstream conception to take First Nations peoples earnestly. Importantly, much Western scholarship on Indigenous peoples discusses and focusses solely on the grief and pain which colonialism created, rather than sharing and highlighting knowledge and practice systems which predate colonisation, and which often continue. It is important to recognise that Aboriginal people had techniques and abilities which place them in the category of *advanced* civilisation. These included systems of construction, but also systems of relationships and government. In addition to advanced networks of production and cultural exchange, trade and trade-relations were a key development by Indigenous peoples before colonisation. Indeed,

geographical networks existed which delineated territory, often separated by patterns of seasons and features of plant and animal life, dynamic inter-national trade proliferated which saw the exchange of goods, services and knowledge between mobs. While moments of conflict existed, particularly when systems of law were breached, the majority of the time, according to archaeological record, Aboriginal people lived in peace (Pascoe, 2014). Recently, conversations about the future of archaeology in Aboriginal countries across Australia have introduced discussions of ownership and use of Western practices for the cultural reidentification and expansion of Indigenous knowledge, in a reconciliatory sense:

The archaeological record can be used to address racist assumptions or misconceptions. From a personal perspective, when I work as a fencer, I still come across people who think Aboriginal people are on a handout and not able to have a profession. Their ignorance can be satisfied if you are an Aboriginal person with enough information and cultural knowledge. Today, we have the documented evidence that has been collected by archaeology and anthropology, so when you come across people who say something ignorant, you can say “That’s not right”. You can defend your culture knowing that everything that you say is documented and is 100% proven true. There is enormous variation in Aboriginal cultures. Some of that variation depends on the level of colonisation in the area where archaeology is taking place. The colonial impact is different for different groups of Aboriginal people. (Pollard et al., 2021, p. 36)

The full extent of the culture and structure of First Nations peoples across Australia are beginning to surface inside systems of western knowledge and to be ‘academically’ verified. By researchers and Indigenous peoples working together, the immense achievement of First Nations peoples may come to be known within anglophone episteme.

While small steps towards reconciliation are being taken, more concerted efforts by students and academics must be taken to reassert the importance of Indigenous cultures. It is in a context of great shame that Australia’s institutions were born, and only through the exploitation and deceit of First Nations people were the construction of our universities possible. This chapter now turns to the nature of the colonial university, the value of education in the

new founded colony, and the acts of creating contrived hallowed halls. Importantly, Indigenous knowledges are absent from nearly all accounts of university history in Australia. White, ruling class, elite hegemonic men were at the forefront of colonial institutional production, and their disregard for Indigenous people created the possibility for these institutions.

Aspirations towards the colonial university (1830–1850)

Early colonial governors of the newly found Australia had grand aspirations for an inaugural university on the island. Colonists had attempted to establish universities however, though private colleges⁴⁸ existed, no *university* had yet come to exist (Horne et al., 2012; Sherington & Horne, 2010). Mounting interest in establishing colleges and pressures to provide further training either for soon-to-be governors or clergymen predominantly expounded from the Churches (Forsyth, 2014; Tregenza, 1996). Early movements in South Australia indicated an interest in incorporating St Peter’s Collegiate School into an Anglican university, a religious venture established in other British colonies serving as a college for colonists and ‘natives’ (Tregenza, 1996). While not the first, South Australia’s proposal showed promise. The aspirational naming of the original school as ‘Collegiate’ was in the hope that the school could function both as a ‘grammar school and a college for the training of clergy’ (Tregenza, 1996, p. 17), a far cry from a fully-fledged university and indeed focussing more on what would now be considered middle school. These religious colleges were of particular interest to colonists around the globe; a model of religious conversion as much as education. Fatally, these private colleges in Australia were not to be supported by colonial government in the emergent State. In Tregenza’s history of South Australian college establishment, many private schools and colleges failed due to lack of funding and stability of founders⁴⁹. While competing interests saw

⁴⁸ The nomenclature in the higher education sector in Australia across many institutions continued to use college rather than university until the Dawkins reforms, addressed later in this chapter.

⁴⁹ The ultimate failing of one such College in inner Adelaide was attributed to the founder’s loss of income and mounting challenges with debt (Tregenza, 1996).

the rise and fall of a plurality of religious and secular schools and colleges across the colonial nation, interests continued to brew towards a university modelled in the architectural grandeur of Oxbridge, but attracting new ideas about the purpose of universities.

The collapse of several private colleges in New South Wales in the late 1840s allowed political interests to congregate around a new educational project for Australia (Turney, 1991, pp. 31 – 33). After troubles with attrition, lack of new students and the imminent demise of a semblance of further education in the State, W.C. Wentworth was successful in attracting State and British interest, coalescing public funds for a university in Australia (Horne et al., 2012; Turney, 1991). These complicated conditions in fledgling New South Wales enabled a new vision of education, towards a *public* university (Turney, 1991). However, contrary to common belief, the fundamental origin of the State's university rested in changes in admission into 'legal and medical professions' as well as a demand for locally training ministry and clergy for churches (Turney, 1991, p. 27). Not from any reasonable form of public demand for such a university instead originally a rebuke was made that first the State needed a reputable grammar school (Turney, 1991). Importantly, during the proposal process, the 'university' took on a range of forms, moving from a graduate school, to an incorporated college model, which became contested by the Church of England⁵⁰, through to ultimately a structure more reminiscent of contemporary Australian universities. Thus, Australia's first public colonial institution of 'higher education' was founded in the University of Sydney in 1850⁵¹. With it began a new era of education and scholarship in Australia, attracting quality scholars with high salaries⁵², and drawing male scholars from across Europe, typically younger men with 'energy to start something new halfway around the world, and with exceptional intellectual credentials

⁵⁰ Initially a lack of primacy amongst other educational requirements was a key issue. After the production of the 'Affiliated Colleges Act' the various churches involved in the university protested the mandatory attendance requirement on professorial lectures (Turney, 1991, p. 28).

⁵¹ Initially it was founded as a professorial senate, which would have governing control over colleges and schools.

⁵² The logic of attracting scholars with high wages was not new at this time, though it was a particular challenge for early colonial nations.

to ensure high standards of education' (Horne et al., 2012, p. 1). This founding promise indicated a broader move than simply founding Australia's first university institution, it was also a stark departure from the founding history of most European universities, and in particular, from British universities⁵³ which, until around the 1830s were substantively connected to or controlled by religious interests (Sherington & Horne, 2010). In spite of early notions of religious affiliation with the Church of England, and later to denominational control of Christianity, the university was stabilised around professorial control. While Australia's new university was far from the first to depart from religious ownership and direct affiliation, it was a hallmark as a newly founded institution in the nation without serious dependence on religious examination for those 'preparing for holy orders' (Sherington & Horne, 2010, p. 38). In contrast, all subsequent establishments of public universities, starting with the University of Melbourne (est. 1853), were without consideration of religious affiliation (Sherington & Horne, 2010). Notably, at this time in Australia's history, governance was still conducted remotely through the United Kingdom. While early States enacted governance in the country, Australia itself remained under direct British control until 1901. My State and context of this study, South Australia, was founded 'free'⁵⁴ only a few years prior to the Australia's first university in 1836. Colonial Australia's infancy in this time cannot be overstated, even governance from 1810 through the 1850s was under continual contestation and weakly subject to rules:

Under the Crown Colony constitution inaugurated in 1824, the governor was required to work with a Legislative as well as an Executive Council—but he remained the seat of political and administrative power until the constitutional changes of the 1850s. (Boyce, 2007)

⁵³ Scotland's universities were amongst the first to divorce from religious influence. While historically connected to Presbyterianism, Scotland made moves towards generalist degrees, democratic and professional traditions, and generalist 'university studies'. In England, the University of London acted as an independent examiner for attached colleges, by 1836 it was operating as an assessor of degrees divorced from church imposition (Sherington & Horne, 2010).

⁵⁴ As opposed to the other States and Territories, established over a period of 30 years, who served or had served primarily as penal colonies.

This flexibility in governance demonstrated weakly held positions, weakly reinforced positions, and a general lack of vertical hierarchy common in contemporary political structures. While colonial governance was susceptible to being quashed by Crown forces, its ideological infancy is an important characteristic. It might be said that here Australia gains much of its national identity as an infant, trying new things without serious consequence. Not until much later have these decisions come to carry the weight they carry now and have formed the foundational basis of what is now considered a ‘golden age’ (Connell, 2019; Forsyth, 2014; Taylor & Pellew, 2020), if sedately rebellious to its empire’s influencers, in universities and the establishment of the nation.

Australia’s first (1850 – 1855)

The newly found University of Sydney boasted an impressive footprint, both in terms of land occupied and in broad terms from its financial support from the Crown. While in its early forms it struggled with identity, attracting any public interest, and, to an extent, with secular and non-secular interests in the Colleges it came to be established in 1850, and just five years later began commencing students (Turney, 1991). Interestingly, the radical vision for the University largely related to its diverse disciplinary focus and its governance structure. In light of its professorial control, through a *senate*⁵⁵ mechanism, and its relative freedom to simultaneously appoint scholars and ‘examination [of] the persons who shall acquire proficiency in literature, science and art and of rewarding them by academical degrees as

⁵⁵ The senate was a uniquely *Sydney* attribute. Governance of universities, at this time, in the empire had largely consisted of religious governance, or in perhaps its most similar format governmental governance. At the time the Universities of London were establishing their structures, reconstituted in 1836 (Horne et al., 2012, p. 19), though it had some specific unique properties that differentiated it from Sydney. *London* was an examining body only. Its tuition was outsourced to privately run, privately funded, Colleges. While *London* as a university was guided by scientists and academics, they were at the mercy of government for their ultimate decision-making processes. *Sydney* differed, in that it was to examine/grant degrees and teach. To be successful, the Senate had to make budgetary decisions across a broad scope of issues including the day-to-day operations of the university. The key difference was the operational control of the Senate in the University context. *Sydney* made decisions about its operations and governance, all the decisions. Contrastingly, *London* advised government on decisions. While the colonial government had the ability to overturn decisions at *Sydney* historically this mechanism was not activated. Moreover, the Senate itself was comprised of educated men, scholars, and professionals with an interest in administration, education and, conceivably, the ability to finance projects of the university (Horne et al., 2012).

evidence of their respective attainments' (An Act to Incorporate and Endow the University of Sydney, 1850, p. 1279), the University stood out as a new *radical institutional gallimaufry*. An amendment to the *Act* saw the University allowing only 'laymen' to administer, operate and teach, and while Wentworth, the originator of the bill, claimed this was not anti-religious, there was much contestation in the founding of the institution's secular roots. After being granted substantial land holdings, the University's construction commenced. For the purposes of this chapter this is largely unremarkable except that the new institution drew substantial architectural influence from Oxbridge. In addition to its architecture the University modelled itself on imported organisational design, though rather than following its architectural inspirator, *Sydney* followed the Universities of London model (Forsyth, 2014; Pietsch, 2015). Leading to this eclectic combination of university appliances Forsyth (2014) notes colonial governors rarely had experience of university education themselves, and the founders at *Sydney* were no exception (Turney, 1991). Regardless, something in the history of the Oxbridge institutions clearly appealed to the designers of the University, however superficial these choices were⁵⁶.

Innovative governance, ostentatious architecture and esteemed academics are worth naught when public reception is unfavourable. During the prolonged deliberation over the establishment of the University there were several attempts by the media, notably the *Sydney Morning Herald*, to draw public attention to the suspicious and taciturn decisions of the *Senate*. Accusations were rendered that Wentworth had funded a job for himself, and that insomuch he had cut out religious officials. In addition, periodicals of the time had called into question the value of a university (Turney, 1991). This spoke to broader issues which colonial universities faced as they 'came under growing pressure from rapidly developing colonial societies to

⁵⁶ Turney (1991, p. 63) labels these as 'preoccupation with the models of the ancient universities and their relevance, or lack of it, to colonial conditions'.

demonstrate their relevance,' still needing to establish a purpose, legitimacy and, importantly, student numbers (Pietsch, 2015, p. 24).

There is a handful of special characteristics emerging through early Australian universities that speak to the broader purpose of this thesis. In some ways the founders of these institutions were considered rebels, even activists, of their time in breaking away from religious jurisdiction and in their scrutiny of the structures and processes that led to establishing higher education in Australia, as these were materially non-traditional. As a start, colonial Australia's universities were established proportionately later than universities of other colonial nations (Auchmuntz & Jeffares, 1959). In doing this they benefited from time in what can only be described as political shifts both in the empire and in the colonies away from religious institutions towards secular establishments. This shift affected Australia's colonial establishments but was not accepted in all the nation's institutions as they came to be. Interestingly, in this space debate emerges in the historical sense of colonial university establishment. Some argue that the original decision by Wentworth to establish secular institutions with no room for religious officials inside their walls, or on their governing bodies, was short-sighted, and that the overturn of this ruling by the Legislative Council was a benefit to the fabric of the university (Auchmuntz & Jeffares, 1959). Others, however, see Australia's emergent universities as a new way of conceiving educational institutions, away from the powers and structures of religious institutions, in particular the Church of England (Forsyth, 2014; Horne et al., 2012; Turney, 1991). Ultimately, the University of Sydney created a template for the construction, governance and maintenance of most of Australia's universities, a new blueprint built on eclectic accumulation of components of Loxbridge and other historical European universities and a new layer of professorial governance.

Victoria's ambitious origins (1850–1858)

The newly established State of Victoria in 1851 had from its inception intentions for establishing a university. Contrary to the situation in New South Wales, there were multiple interested parties in the early work of creating a new institution to educate the State (Selleck, 2003). The conditions in Victoria were starkly different from those in New South Wales. Victoria had a series of dramatic population surges and, thanks to a changing economic landscape, the city of Melbourne was becoming increasingly wealthy (Blainey, 2013). Its expansion also heralded demand for educational institutions. Unlike in New South Wales where there were significant gaps in the State's educational system, Melbourne was set to have a complete educational system from elementary through postgraduate training. Early discussions of the State's emerging educational systems began as early as 1839 (Selleck, 2003). One of the final encouragements was the establishment of the University of Sydney in a kind of inter-colonial vie for educational prowess. Indeed, *Melbourne's* rapid establishment was a far cry from the drawn-out process of legislative debate in Sydney; the State allowed a £10,000 establishment grant and included statements in support of a flourishing university (Selleck, 2003). The University of Melbourne would draw many structural queues from its counterpart in New South Wales (Horne et al., 2012). As a considerable counterpoint, however, the University's governance mechanism would be a *Council*, which initially appointed members of the colonial societies' bourgeoisie and had been particularly discriminating in their selection, drawing from members of the *Melbourne Club* amongst other select organisations, and was founded with men whose wealth predated the gold rush⁵⁷ (Selleck, 2003). As with the eventual fabrication of *Sydney's* Senate, the *Melbourne* Council also gave way to several members of clergy, though the institution itself remained non-denominational, and the Council included men who had been educated at Oxbridge. The Council was to oversee the strategic and operational

⁵⁷ An importantly *elite* distinction from the new wealth of gold rushers.

ventures of the university, while the Senate would be the academic check-and-balance responsible for governing academic affairs and identifying replacement Chairs of Council when needed⁵⁸. Finally, for comparison, the University itself did not directly specify a class-based hierarchy for admission. Rather, it predominantly admitted middle-class men, women were not granted entry. In this sense, the requirements established for admission could be read as democratic and open, though in practice this took much longer to institute. The University came under fire on several angles resulting from media criticism, largely originated in its narrow curriculum and lack of applicability to jobs in the new colonial nation, though the lack of wide-ranging access to the institution was of brief note too (Selleck, 2003).

In these early discussions, the *purpose* of higher education in the colony comes under question. The function of the institution, in its ultimate form, was viewed in two ‘camps’: the first, seeing a university as an instrument of aristocratic reproduction particularly as the narrative of foundational colonial universities globally; the second, conceiving the university around the demand from the Colony for skilled workers and traditional intellectuals to perform roles of governance, economics and trade. These debates were further complicated by trouble with enrolments and necessity for certain studies in the fledgling Colony. Enrolment requirements in these institutions poses some concern to this study, though the level of merit required for admission to either *Sydney* or *Melbourne* are far outside the scope of this chapter, the elitism of the institutions sets a structural baseline for the consideration of the *type* of person who may be admitted to a university. Though these lines have moved meaningfully since the university’s inception, there will be considerable discussion of *the student* and the requirements to *become* a student throughout the remainder of this chapter and the thesis itself. Indeed, understanding where Australia has come *from* in terms of its universities, processes and societal

⁵⁸ This senate-council model for strategic and academic governance forms the basis of most of Australia’s Universities (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020). Though the names are often, and confusingly, used interchangeably as with Melbourne and Sydney’s Senate. Indeed, in later configurations Board is often used, too (J. Barnes, 2020; Zipin, 2019).

expectations for education will form an important focussed, foundational piece in understanding the sector currently. In this vein, it is worthwhile spending some time discussing a division amongst educational historians, as raised by Forsyth (2014), specifically on entry requirements for Australia's burgeoning universities. Horne and Sherington contend that *Sydney's* enrolment was largely a meritorious process and then governors saw the university as a space which sought to share knowledge rather than harbor it in exclusivity as perhaps the olden British institutions would (Forsyth, 2014; Horne et al., 2012). Selleck, on the other hand, paints *Melbourne* as an institution of the establishment and contrarily responsible for harbouring and reproducing institutional knowledges (Forsyth, 2014; Selleck, 2003). Arguably, the latter perspective fits with both the institutions, the endeavour to support the middle class, and the future aristocracy in their educational pursuits would naturally preclude those of proletarian origin, even if not explicitly designed to do so. In some regard, a merging of these two 'ideals' for who can attend a university has occurred since, a meritorious inclusive process for those in a class-position to 'successfully' complete school education, and an exclusivity for the rest.

A final historical arc is worthy of constructive consideration in its role in the education landscape. South Australia offers a yet different perspective on educational developments, and the State itself provides a substantively different setting for institutional development. As noted above, early endeavours to establish an Anglican university in the State had fallen short. In a sense, South Australia sat *out of action* for a period while politicians considered the educational possibilities offered to them as well as benefiting from witnessing the establishment of *Sydney* and *Melbourne*. In 1856, South Australia founded a Teachers' College (SACAE)⁵⁹, the first of a series of technical colleges that had emerged nationwide. Victoria saw the emergence of a

⁵⁹ Now part of the University of South Australia.

second university, in the University of Ballarat⁶⁰. Eventually, the University of Adelaide was founded in 1874.

South Australia's late bloom (1873–1878)

South Australia took a relaxed and conservative approach to the development of educational institutions across the sector. The State had taken a principled stance against non-private enterprise, considering schools the dominion of the church, or other wealthy influencers (Tregenza, 1996). Indeed, the State, which itself was established in 1836, had been against establishing any religious institution, or providing any subsidies therein, and no punishment for those who did not worship. A progressive stance on religion and a stance which extended to education, where the State founders, who at the time would have seen education and religion as bracketed institutions, had refused to instantiate any general schools, in favour of enabling private providers to undertake the work. However, in supporting Crown legislature to 'educate Aborigines' the then government instituted a 'Native School Establishment' (Tregenza, 1996, p. 3). While this school was a government-run body, it was, unlike other State schools, only open to young Indigenous students. The stance of its Legislative Council continued to afford no special considerations to any religious organisations or school alike⁶¹. It would not be a stretch to say that South Australia had been largely apathetic to the role of education or rather a repudiation of its responsibility. As private education systems came and went and the State stayed quiet on the educative front. Only through the work of primarily religious scholars in the State was the University of Adelaide made possible as early as it was in 1874.

The initial idea of constructing the University of Adelaide arrived at a meeting between Baptist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches, who themselves had founded a Union College for the training of men into ministry. In addition to the religious education afforded to

⁶⁰ Recently renamed to Federation University.

⁶¹ The sole exception was a 'colony chaplain' an adaptation of government required of the state by the British Government (Pike, 1967).

select ministerial students, the college offered courses in ‘the Classics, in Philosophy and English Literature, in Mathematics and Natural Science’ (Duncan & Leonard, 1973, p. 2). From this foundation, and after a donation of £20,000, the College could expand. In similar fashion to the extant universities across Australia, the pioneering work of establishing the university was left to a handful of influential men. They decided that Unity College should remain a College of a broader university, which itself would be secular (Duncan & Leonard, 1973). The grand vision was snagged with funding. Where in Sydney Crown investment and colonial government support enabled the acquisition of lands and the construction of property, and in Melbourne where an enthusiastic government pursued the construction of the corporeal university, Adelaide was dependent on donation. While the initial investment had been generous, it was not adequate to establish the University. Following lengthy discussion with aristocracy, landowners and government, there was agreement to found the University of Adelaide under the proviso that government offer an additional £10,000, and that sum be matched by public investment, which would ensure the establishment of the institution on North Terrace, the Bill to parliament and ongoing funding (Duncan & Leonard, 1973). Importantly, as with the introduction of the University of Sydney, the Adelaide Bill saw little interest from politicians or indeed from the public. The ‘Members [of the House] seemed to know little, and to care less, about universities, regarding them as little more than a colonial status symbol’ (Duncan & Leonard, 1973, p. 4) in a similar circumstance to *Sydney*. After debate, the University found its cumbersome way to incorporation. The University Council undertook detailed planning and began issuing appointments to discipline chairs; a similar governance structure to *Sydney*, though its composition more closely aligned with *Melbourne’s* Council, which would oversee and orchestrate all university activity was established, and after some work the campus was constructed (Duncan & Leonard, 1973). The newly founded University of Adelaide offered only one formal degree, the Bachelor of Arts, similar to its interstate counterparts. Officially, students

commenced in the degree in 1876 with a standard Eurocentric academic curriculum comprising Philosophy, English and the Classics (N. Harvey, 2012). Through some colonial complications, and obligation to the empire, *Adelaide* could not offer other degrees as established in its charter due to protestation from the Colonial Office of London. Eventually, in 1882 *Adelaide* began offering broader curriculum, through the adoption of the Bachelor of Science (N. Harvey, 2012). The uneasy start to the University was soon forgotten as its enrolment increased, its graduates filled positions in skilled work and high society in the State, and its need for additional space to meet the needs of those enrolled came to a head some 90 years later.

Flinders University (1966–present)

Flinders University was born as a radical upstart in the south-eastern suburb of Bedford Park, a sparsely populated hilly space far from the city and surrounding suburbs. The Flinders University of South Australia⁶² was opened to students in 1966, and following with its name, was a relative latecomer to the landscape originally divined as a detached southern campus of the University of Adelaide. In the years leading up to the establishment of *Flinders* the LNP had a substantial influence in devising growth in the State, with conditions nationally beginning to turn towards an increase in places for students, and expectations of demand for certain kinds of graduates. The original vision saw the LNP attempting to pre-empt the need for growth at the *Adelaide* city campus responding to economic change (Hilliard, 1991). While the two institutions were connected through planning, there was no long-term intention of *Flinders* operating as a campus of *Adelaide*. After substantial political debate about the physical placement of the University⁶³, the planners and university bodies settled on the its establishment

⁶² As it was eventually established in its dividing founding act, changed in 2016 to “Flinders University”.

⁶³ The Liberals had envisioned the university taking its place outside of the city, though *Adelaide* scholars had disagreed, citing that the elite would never come to live in an Australian country town lifestyle. Conditions which enabled the site to take shape in the south of Adelaide, in an expedient way, ultimately negated the concerns of the scholars. The Labor party then contested the site at Bedford park, with Dunstan noting that South Australia’s growth trajectory saw more suburban establishment to the north (Hilliard, 1991). These conditions did not affect *Flinders*, however ultimately led to the establishment of the University of South Australia in Mawson Lakes.

in Bedford Park (Stephenson, 1964) with particular reference to physical space limitations on North Terrace and the near 40% growth in student numbers between 1954 to 1959 (Hilliard, 1991). In its original model, *Flinders* would be made of several concomitant parts, including a Teacher's College, at that time still a separate entity from the university sector and occupying the 'Sturt campus', and as the future site of a public teaching hospital at the bottom of the hill. The University itself, as of particular interest to this chapter, and as the contextual home of my research, provides itself as a unique space for conceptions of governance and then-contemporary thinking around universities. Interestingly, there had been some hesitation by the then ALP government to allow the University to establish, particularly with regard to the funding model to be employed at the institution (Hilliard, 1991).

Peter Karmel, then Principal-Designate soon to be the founding Vice-Chancellor, recounted that the Bedford Park campus would 'constitutionally ... be a part of the University of Adelaide [and that] North Terrace, the Waite Agricultural Research Institute and Bedford Park will be governed by the one University Council' (Karmel, 1964, p. 29). This structure enabled the establishment of an Academic Senate at Bedford Park, which would see the campus deliver its own curriculum and establish a principle value of difference (novelty) from its relatively *old* sister university whose curricular, teaching methods and management were much more orthodox (Karmel, 1964). The model of governance at Bedford Park was substantial. Its Academic Senate would enable academic leadership from professors as department heads. Karmel insisted that the institution should have six departments, that these should offer courses from first-year through postgraduate level⁶⁴, and that the academics should have control over syllabi (Hilliard, 1991). Karmel saw this as a way to attract valuable talent to the fledgling

⁶⁴ Added in a staged mode to enable new first year, and new postgraduate students, with a curricular rollout that would follow students' progression (Karmel, 1964).

campus (Hilliard, 1991; Karmel, 1964). The governance of the ‘schools’ within the new campus was distinct from the *Adelaide* model:

It is envisaged that each School will have its own Board which will be comprised of all the academic staff of the School. The Board will supervise academic matters concerned directly with the School and with the courses given and students enrolled within it. The first Chairman of each School will be appointed by the Council, but subsequently the chairmen will be appointed on the recommendation of a committee of the appropriate Board.
(Karmel, 1964, p. 30)

A departure from the top-down governance of its forebears, *Flinders* would be home to distributive governance and rotating department chairs. While this model did not endure, its founding status as a space of governance novelty gave its students and staff relative autonomy and experimental curricular unhindered by governance procedure, a problem which had plagued *Adelaide*’s development of new courses.

In its departure from the *Adelaide* model, *Flinders* envisioned new modes of academic work, aspiring towards cross-discipline collaborations and away from a siloed approach to sciences. Perhaps more radically, Karmel also conceived of students’ relationships to the Schools as a sense of belonging, but also of close relationships between students and staff (Karmel, 1964, 1968). In this regard, *Flinders* would be different to its elder in offering a view of collegiality and ‘levelness’ between students and staff (Karmel, 1968). This flexibility and open nature toward students played into the view of student during the 1960s as student power movements grew (Hastings, 2003) though, *Flinders*’ offerings remained a still-distant second to the egalitarian demands students had for university governance at the time⁶⁵. After a great deal of ideation, a quasi-utopian model for university management was espoused, the planning committee acquired a four-wheel drive vehicle to survey and mark out the site, and construction commenced (Hilliard, 1991). In this visiting of *Flinders*’ history, it is valuable to the purposes of

⁶⁵ Discussion of students’ role in governance belongs with the history of Activism in Australian universities, covered below.

this chapter to mention a particular function of early curriculum drafts for the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), which was not taught in the form proposed in planning, but would have been a revolutionary come rebellious curriculum if it had. During the construction of the campus, Keith Hancock, an economics lecturer at *Adelaide* was commissioned to produce a detailed proposal for the three-year B.A. with a particular focus on ‘human affairs’ and a structure which saw students undertaking topics from ‘cognate disciplines’ to receive a rounded form of higher education (The University of Adelaide, 1965). This liberatory curriculum became a point of ongoing contest for students of the 1960s and 1970s. It was ultimately abandoned. Architecturally, the Bedford Park campus took on a characteristic of contemporary North American universities: through its establishment around a central ‘core’ and by nature as a planned development which would be built all at once, it was developed in a contemporary architectural style featuring a spacious physical and biological sciences on the ‘south ridge’, and more compact schools of social sciences and language and literature on the ‘north ridge’, divided by a parkland which would later be home to an artificial lake (Hilliard, 1991; Karmel, 1968; Stephenson, 1964).

Adelaide received high praise on the system of planning and development from the Crown when the then visiting Queen Elizabeth made a statement on the establishment of the new university, citing it as ‘no rival institution but ... a development planned by its elder sister, the University of Adelaide ... the best of both worlds’ (as cited in Hilliard, 1991, p. 7). Interestingly, *Flinders*’ establishment, though coming substantially after the second institutions of both Victoria and New South Wales (Marginson, 1993) may be considered part of the first wave of new institutions in the country it was very late in this wave. The opening of the University itself gave pause for question of the ideals proposed by founding vice-chancellor and other academic heads. Indeed, here *Flinders*’ revolutionary beginnings begin to show. Either through neglect or conscious choice students had not been invited to the inauguration of the

University. This was not taken kindly by the new enrollees and a petition signed by most of the 400 students was circulated. During the launch, where students had been told there was ‘nothing to see’, several stayed behind to engage in ‘commencement pranks’ including the setting off of firecrackers, the appearance of a toy Russian submarine, and ‘dunkings’ (Hilliard, 1991, p. 7).

There had been substantial talk of *Bedford Park* becoming the University of South Australia, Charles Sturt University of South Australia, the Matthew Flinders University of South Australia, or a myriad of other names before 1966, however many of the talks had fallen short of converting the campus into its own university. LNP Premier, Playford, was against the establishment of two competing universities in the State, and in particular disliked the idea of competing vice-chancellors (Hilliard, 1991, p. 24). Ultimately the State ALP supported the establishment of *Flinders* as its own institution as they believed that *Adelaide* had ‘too much influence’⁶⁶. The University was separated by joint motions of *Adelaide’s* Council and the South Australian parliament in the form of a new university *Act*⁶⁷.

Adelaide, both on North Terrace and at Bedford Park, had been established on the lands of the Kaurna people and indeed each subsequent main campus currently resides on Kaurna lands. This land remains of great significance to local Indigenous people. Prior to the British invasion in the 1830s, the land which South Australia’s universities now stand on were home to people who had lived on the continent for more than 65,000 years. The City of Adelaide was established on what was ‘a broad, open, well-grassed, wooded plain’ (Linn et al., 2011, p. 1), a place which would have been used, migratorily, by more than 15,000 people. The Kaurna

⁶⁶ A long running tradition amongst Labor ministers, who saw competition being established in State university systems as a way of enabling better education of professionals, in particular. While there had been substantial discussion of campus separating from *Adelaide* it was up to State government to split the campuses and instantiate *Flinders* own Council (Hilliard, 1991).

⁶⁷ A recent change of government to a Labor premier had facilitated the Parliament bill and majority support from politicians to enable the separation. Playford, leader of the opposition, opposed the split, and particularly viewed the modifications of the *Adelaide Act* (to be adapted for *Flinders*) which enabled union representation and business organisation representatives as problematic. Ultimately bipartisan support of the separation was reached and in March of 1977 the university was established.

people continue to have strong metaphysical connection to the Adelaide region as a place which provides, teaches, breathes, and grows. Shamefully, in Australia, it was not until 1967 that Indigenous people were recognised in colonial constitution⁶⁸. Educational discrimination and knowledge erasure continues to date.

South Australia's other universities

The subsequent establishment of the University of South Australia in 1991 saw the State's final bricks and mortar institution established. While other universities have been constructed in Adelaide, the State's 'big three' are the University of Adelaide, Flinders University, and University of South Australia. Adelaide's CBD is also home to Carnegie Mellon University, Torrens University and Central Queensland University, though these are smaller offshoots of interstate and international institutions. The competitive landscape of higher education in the State generally talks in terms of the big three, though the relative closeness to the state of Victoria provides additional interstate appeal for some students. Big drawers of South Australian students include Monash University, Melbourne University, La Trobe and RMIT⁶⁹.

Alongside the development of Australia's universities emerged forms of activism which engaged with the state from civil society. Early forms of political debate date back to the beginning of the colonial nation, but the power of particular movements of social forces mounted across the 1911 war period, through to the 1960s and 1970s where immense activism and social change built. It is worth turning brief attention to these periods here as a background

⁶⁸ See (Constitution Alteration (Parliament) 1976 and Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) 1967 Referendums: The Arguments For and Against the Proposed Alterations Together with a Statement Showing the Proposed Alterations, 1967)

⁶⁹ It is in the relatively competitive, commercialised and neoliberal context which the universities operate in the State. However, recent political conversations dwell on mergers and super-universities. Both the LNP and ALP have discussed combining the institutions in South Australia as their 'international performance' by corporatised ranking systems (Ball, 2012; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2015) continues to atrophy. The university landscape nationally is dangerously close to a collapse, particularly for the humanities and social sciences, while the long history of Australian universities relatively diverse educational platforms lingers, political movements would see a narrowing, focussed and commercialised university landscape.

to some of the activist movements occurring across the nation which predate the traditionally held 'radical period' in addition to a brief discussion of the 1960 and 1970s radicals. While these have varied relationships to the nation's universities. The exploration of student activism, and broad societal activism and change hold relevance to the social and political fabric of universities particularly as they started to diversify and broaden their intake towards the 1960s.

An emergence of (student) activism (1911–1965)

Early accounts of student activism commenced in 1911, as Australia began announcing its intent to join the World War. Activism in this forum takes multiple angles, both peace advocates and debate of the place and positioning of war in then contemporary society. It is here that some initial student activism emerges, connected with learned institutions now past their infancy, that young, typically male, students began intellectual engagement with issues facing society. The social organisation of students in protest and organisation during this time would not be considered picket protest in the same formation as we are now familiar. Indeed, while the 'young intelligentsia' have often organised and made concerned statements about the state of civil society and its relationship to the state, the early Australian 'protest' was more formalised in lobbying and opinion writing than in megaphones and banners. Between 1911 and the 1960s, activism continued to take on new forms, eventually arising in the radical politics of students still remembered today. Much 'activism' before this period was religiously motivated (Howe, 2001) or born from necessity of action, particularly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people as they struggled with issues of representation, government, fairness and legal process. Significantly, this included issues of liberty, freedom, land rights and human rights (Maynard, 2007). Indeed, Indigenous peoples were on the alternative side to the 1911 war protestors, advocating for their ability to fight for Australia in the war (Horton, 2015). So structural was the racism in Australia, that even in the desperation for soldiers, Indigenous peoples were excluded by writ as not of 'substantial European origin' (Horton, 2015). The

struggle of civil societies' subaltern is worth consideration, particularly the impact of their social organisation and development of a form of social group consciousness which eventually infected the later radical student movements of the 1960s. Indeed, Indigenous rights activists were amongst the most well organised, vocal and highly intelligent movements of Australia's 'pre-radical' organising. Unfortunately, the nature of subaltern organising is to be precluded from mainstream press and political conversation. In this sense, much academic discussion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism has come much later than the analytical discussion by white people in the 1960s era.

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA / APA) was a large body established to advocate for the rights of Indigenous peoples, in particular for citizenship status with State assimilatory ends (McGregor, 1993). There were members of the association across a range of countries in Australia and the association was regularly under commentary in various state newspapers (Maynard, 2007). In other states, there were varying configurations of the Association by title, including in Victoria under the name Australian Aborigines League (AAL) (McGregor, 1993). For the purposes of this thesis, and simplicity, these groups are to be collected under 'Association', though their actions are irreducible and often distinct. The Association and its members valued the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in Australia's constitution; this was a group interested in the advancement of Indigenous people's participation in state and civil society, a project of hegemonic interest, to enable their inclusion in the economy, 'Western' productivity and societal standards. For the Association, the aim was simple: 'the attainment of civilisation [as] the essential prerequisite to the awarding of citizen rights' (McGregor, 1993, p. 556) and that, to reach this aim, the incentive of full citizenship for 'civilized' peoples should be provided by government. While this general aim seems both assimilatory and contextually problematic, there was a great number of people involved with the early work of the Association and a prerequisite for membership was Aboriginal descent.

While later Indigenous activism moved towards a preserving and place-finding modality, the early actions of the Association was centred on ‘ability to attain the status of civilisation was vitally important to the Aboriginal activists precisely because this capacity had long been denied by white Australians’ (McGregor, 1993, p. 558). Indeed, this was a matter of some contention among both Association members and white Australians, as captured in *The Advertiser* newspaper: ‘I have lived among the blacks for many years and I find that all of them are longing for some little place in their own country that they can call their own’. Though this became the platform for the Association, a proposal advanced to create ‘an Aboriginal state’ (Maynard, 2007, pp. 83–84). While *on paper* the conversations between the Association, the State’s ‘Aborigines Protection Board’⁷⁰ and the public appeared relatively academic and somewhat reconciliatory, the actual experience of Indigenous people continued to be unsustainably damaging. Across 1927, the Association undertook significant work to design, consult with communities and petition for the rights of Indigenous peoples in New South Wales. The petition, a comprehensive statement made a clear request of the State:

Our requests are few and their equity cannot be denied. We confidently anticipate your kindly endorsement of this request, feeling sure that it is your desire to give our people and their children every reasonable opportunity in our own land. We are only asking to be given the same privileges regarding our family life as are being freely offered to people in from other countries.
(Maynard, 2007, p. 99)

In spite of the resolutely reasonable requests of the Association, the State worked to undermine the requests of the people. Ultimately, a fundamentally racist response was received by the Association for their request suggesting that Indigenous people were extremely privileged in comparison to European invaders, as they were provided with ‘free resources’ and that their request for equal consideration in citizenship was denied. Fred Maynard, the leader of the

⁷⁰ A deceptively named State portfolio primarily concerned with maintaining imperialistic control over Aboriginal people.

AAPA, crafted a powerful written response highlighting that the Association's request was reasonable and, had the State legitimately engaged with the request, that they would have endorsed the recommendations. While the assimilatory nature of Maynard's original request, and his response, have been critiqued in later years, this early activism – engaging with the State through thorough reasoned debate and systematic processes of conversation and advancement – highlights the enlightened nature of early Indigenous Australian activism. While it took substantially longer for *some* of the rights of Indigenous people to be recognised, the early work of the Association was essential in laying foundations for rigorous debate over the conditions and rights. Importantly, for this chapter, amongst these requests were those which sought for Indigenous people to be able to attend university, a previously denied ability (Attwood, 2005; Maynard, 2007).

The long-term engagement of Indigenous people in activism highlights the organic form of activism and advocacy of Gramscian theory, in the truest form of the organic intellectual and intellectual leadership of a movement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism took the form of high-level discussion, analytical engagement with the state and its statutes, political conversations and, importantly, a connection to community and country which situated the requests of the Association in the heart of the desires of the social group, put plainly the Aboriginal people represented themselves (Maynard, 2007; McGregor, 1993). Ultimately, Indigenous activism continued to grow in strength and number, challenging and transforming the consciousness and world view of settler Australians and diverse migrant communities. (Post)colonialism transforms the configuration of the nation state. Indeed, Indigenous activism met with student activism in the 1960s particularly as other nations began to recognise their first nations populations and the Black Rights movements in the United States created international ripples. It is worth considering, then, the globalising political ferment and the movement of protest methods from the world over into the Australian spaces in the 1960s.

While not directly germane to this chapter's exploration of university history, the 1960–70s protests have substantive bearing on the student culture of the time and have real impacts on the governance and structures of the universities.

The radical era (1965–1975)

The 1960s brought an opening of foreign correspondence and high levels of internationally connected communities. Relatively privileged students around the world had begun to become aware of the global political conditions facing them and comrades in all corners of the globe. Not only were political tensions globalising, but the methods to change government towards progressive and radical ends were emerging, a turn from the scholarly protest of the AAPA towards the placard waving of the 1960s student idol (Murphy, 2015a). Universities had a role to serve in the revolutionary atmosphere, opening spaces for student debate, politics and engagement with the global world through analytical and critical thought. Indeed, across the 1960s and 1970s, academics and students drew close together in student power movements which saw radical protest take a significant uptick (Cockburn, 1969; G. S. Jones, 1969). For the university sector, this heralded the import of new knowledges and ways of being for students. The long haired radical clad with a peace sign was not simply an imagination, but a reality for the staff and student body of the still relatively exclusive universities. Student power was the new banner cause of the radical student and with it came expectations about university structure and openness to student involvement. Indeed, the New Left's student power movements in the 1960s had substantial success in opening up the structures of university governance, though the students of *Flinders* expected more of a 'fight' in this process. The activism of students, particularly focussed in moratoriums against the Vietnam war, race tensions with the apartheid in South Africa and later the Aboriginal Rights movements, Students for a Democratic Society, and the ultimate allegiance with workers over

working-class rights peppered the period's revolutionary spirit (Murphy, 2015b; Piccini, 2016; Taylor & Pellew, 2020).

The broad range of issues students focussed on during the 1960s and 1970s might be considered a 'once in a lifetime'. While student activism has not disappeared since the famous period, its diversity has narrowed (Bourg, 2017). The cultural conditions which made the student revolutionaries possible have since disappeared, though there were lasting effects from the period on the university sector. This is particularly the case at *Flinders*, where the founding vice-chancellor was known for his inclusive interaction with student radicals and his calm ability to integrate student demands into the university structures and processes. Moreover, the broadening of curricular materials and processes which enabled for greater inclusion during the time had lasting impacts until the mid-1980s. While student power rapidly 'pissed off' after students eventually graduated from their degrees, the politics of the youth and community in Australia eventually led to the election of a relatively radical government in 1972. However, the impacts on education were not as long lasting. While Prime Minister Whitlam reinforced free tertiary education for the elite and provided scholarship opportunities⁷¹ to nearly all Australian students and the subsequent early 'opening' of the universities created the opportunities for increasing numbers of students to attend a higher education, the fall of the radical spirit was to come quickly in Australia. In its opening of institutions, Australia invited a standardising and gentrifying of the structure and content of education, essentially ensuring that workers had access to higher education – though realistically only a wealthy elite therein – which meant that the *conditions* for Australian students differed from the rest of the West, and that the structures of the universities could quickly default to new ideologies. Contrary to much of the West, Australia's spirit for revolution was relatively tempered, and while particular student and activist groups had been very vocal (Murphy, 2015b) there was an allegiance to the

⁷¹ In some instances, offering as little as \$8 per week in stipend.

Australian ‘way of life’, which essentially enabled the creep of neoliberal hegemony into its institutions in the long term (Humphrys, 2019).

The 1960s and 1970s revolutionary period is worth greater depth of consideration, particularly in its relationship to the Australian university sector. In this regard, the following chapter, Chapter 5, deals in substantive detail with the activist history of Flinders University. It deals with empirical, reflective and interview data collected for this project which demonstrates the role of the institution in activism in a novel way. While there are important structural changes to higher education as a result of student’s activism, there is a necessity to understand the structures *first*. In this regard, the chapter now turns back away from student activism to the consideration of broader political changes through to 1995. Indeed, the context of growth and social change that emerged in the 1960s set a tone for the development and diversification of the institutions themselves. While not necessarily activist, and in many instances contrary to the imaginary of the global New Left, the subsequent policy developments pertaining to education in Australia were influenced by political decisions of the 1960 to 1970s period.

Predicting the oncoming storm (1985–1995)

In the early 1990s, the Department for Employment, Education and Training convened a conference to discuss the massification of higher education and to acknowledge changes to the higher education landscape since the 1970s (Skilbeck & Esnault, 1993). The key issues of focus were based in student attendance and completion of university, a turn in itself from the 1970s simply ‘opening’ of higher education to a more diverse student body. Between 1950 and 1985, a time in which ‘participation rates for industrialised countries for the 20 to 24 year age cohort increased from 6 percent to 25 percent’ (R. Smith, 1993, p. 25), most Australian universities were founded. The increasing participation in education, starting in secondary education and continuing into post-secondary education in the form of universities and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) created a ‘high growth’ space, predominantly

originating in demand from advanced industry (R. Smith, 1993). In his talk, Smith (1993) made substantial reference to Trow's (1973, pp. 7–8) classification and categorisation of higher education growth. Trow proposed that when universities provide opportunities for enrolment to less than 15% of a relevant age group, they be considered elite; he conceptualised 'mass systems' as those with more comprehensive offerings, though at the time of writing this was not the case, rather the percentage would be around 35%; and finally, following mass systems, would signal 'universal access' to higher education, an interesting statement on the purpose of such a universal education is revealed:

They [universities] are training not primarily elites, either broad or narrow, but the whole population, and their chief concern is to maximize the adaptability of that population to a society whose chief characteristic is rapid social and technological change. (Trow, 1973, p. 8)

This reconceptualisation of the purpose of higher education in the early 1970s, and enacted in Australia in the early 1990s, sees a fundamental shift to massified higher education and a sector whose responsibility would contain an education of *all* future workers.

Trow's predictions have been contested, particularly in recent times. Indeed, even in the 1990s conference, Smith put forward a critique of Trow's predictions. In essence he argued that change in higher education has predominantly been 'based on structural reform' (R. Smith, 1993, p. 26) rather than industry focussed. He suggested that changes to open higher education in Australia during this period had been moves which dismantle structural barriers to entry into education systems. While Smith acknowledged that increasing demand for access to higher education, coming both from potential students and from industrial forces, he suggested that some of this need might be better addressed through a 'limited number' of institutions offering narrower solutions. In the 1990s, we might ask whether such institutions need to be universities at all. It is clear that even in the mid-1990s, the purpose of Australian universities was under question and the challenges and changes to and of the institutions have

created a plurality of responses to the future of higher education. Indeed, continuing with Smith, he suggested that universities are constituent to a ‘failure of adaptation’ (R. Smith, 1993, p. 29). This rethinking of higher education did not lead, however, to a more equitable education system, or indeed by the measures posed above, to a ‘*universal*’ system. The door was opened for a new economic rationalist model of higher education. The dawn of neoliberal institutions in Australia had arrived.

Dawkins reforms (1980–2010s)

Higher education’s economic role had been largely contested through the foundation of Australian universities. Though it had historically served as a utility for the education of a class of elites, politicians, royals and landowners, or as a tool of indoctrination and in the training of clergy and ministry, the sector had not been considered specifically for its economic benefit. While establishing the importance of the sector in Australia, consideration was made to the utility of higher education, though, as noted, this consideration was largely towards the interest of an elite few rather than the practical utility of the education institutions themselves. In the 1960s, initial inquisitions surfaced into the nature and role of higher education as a service industry for the industrial forces of the time, though these did not see explicit reform in the sector⁷² (Marginson & Considine, 2000). The 1980s brought a momentous turn in the Australian university sector; an era marked globally as a *shift* toward economic liberalism, which would see universities as inexorably linked to the economy (Marginson, 1993). This shift came substantially after the establishment of the universities themselves. Indeed, by the early 1980s most Australian universities had strong footholds in their particular corner of education. The narrowing of educational focus saw universities which were capable of both coexisting with other institutions in their states and supporting a greater number of students focussed on

⁷² The main ideological force at the time prioritised a connection with industry due to emergent economic reasons and demand, however it was primarily envisaged as a way of securing prosperity for the country, rather than as a treatment of universities as a business (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

specialty areas. While this pattern had largely emerged during the 1960s, the university sector was still itself an elitist institution, at least under then political parties' eyes (Jack, 2016; Marginson, 1993, 1999; R. Smith, 1993; Trow, 1973). Bipartisan support for the university sector to be tied to economic ends had already emerged by the 1980s, and with a growing public sentiment towards a newfound fiscal responsibility, political will was arising with it (J. Bessant, 2002). Perhaps surprisingly, it was the election of an ALP government in 1983 that began inexorable changes in the landscape of Australian universities⁷³. This heralded a new era of educational reforms which, owing to the Federal Minister in charge of education, came to be known as the 'Dawkins Reforms' (B. Bessant, 1995; J. Bessant, 2002; Marginson, 1993). The common sense shifted towards reformed financial responsibility and away from perceived progressivism. The nation began to see its first appearances of economic paradigms, market-based logics, models and values, and an increase of language rooted in entrepreneurialism and economics (T. Barnes et al., 2018; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pusey, 1989). These new logics and management strategies rapidly infiltrated higher education and, with Dawkins' reforms, were built into policy and decision-making replacing what had existed as a relatively utopian system of university governance for the 'right kind' of scholar. This dramatic shift can only be described as an incursion of hegemonic forces into higher education, the beginning of a shift from elite control and a kind of self-governance towards a *reformed* institution, *restructured* into a liberal market space. With the language reformed and changed for market logic and increased public interest in fiscal responsibility came a new insidious form of public administration: 'managerialism' (Barnett, 2005; Connell, 2019; Davies, 2003; Luescher-Mamashela, 2010; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Shore, 2010; Welch, 2016).

Cultural shifts through the 1980s saw a call for the return of conservative economic management. The populous broadly had reacted against the rise of perceived laissez-faire

⁷³ Forsyth and Sherington recently published a Conversation article about the ALP's policies opening the door to further corporatisation (Forsyth & Sherington, 2021).

economic governance⁷⁴ and after successive drops and then-record low confidence in economy and global financial security, politicians in concert with business leaders and economists identified possible changes to be made (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Interestingly, at the time, as Pusey (1989) highlights, ‘Australian men ... enjoyed the highest standards of living of any nation on earth’ (p. 1). Following the ‘Australian experiment’, some serious adjustments to such a way of life were made (Pusey, 1989). In this arena, Pusey notes that a class of intellectuals accompanies public servants and politicians who produce a rhetoric of crisis and ungovernable democracy. These shifts were responded to with force. These changes infected public institutions with the economic rationalist logic of business (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pusey, 1989). Particularly, during this time, changes to universities were under discussion which would see the reintroduction of fees. This *logic* affected public institutions as a perceived form of *fairness* insofar as services were offered and ‘what might be fairer than having to pay to access or use a service,’ providing provisions are made for poorer people (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

In the period between the 1960s and 1980s there was a rise of what is often referred to as the ‘golden age’ of Australian universities (Connell, 2019; Forsyth, 2014). During this period, however, a range of economic policies began to take shape in government and across varying forms of university governance: the view of human capital. In literal terms, human capital refers to the economic value of an individual person. In this sense, education and training are a form of value development for the human asset, when acceptable training is undertaken the person will be worth more in economic terms (W. Brown, 2015; Marginson, 1993). Friedman’s ideation of human capital, as articulated in *Capitalism and freedom*, saw the full benefit of the free market captured by an educated individual and while their education would carry non-human capital value, it could nevertheless be mathematically represented in market terms (Friedman & Friedman, 1962). Indeed, Friedman argued that education at its core should be applauded

⁷⁴ Ironically, this form of economics replaced the extant system which was arguably more regulated and narrowly controlled; though power rested in the hands of governments, rather than corporations.

for its ability to advance the 'student's future earnings' (Marginson, 1999, p. 36). As Brown (2015) puts forward, human capital is marked with a favouritism of those educational ends with tangible market use-value. While the human capital view of education may not, as some assert, progress education towards a singularly technicist view of learning, it does lend to neoclassical economic views of education enabling, through policy gateways, a de-democratising of possibility in higher education. Both in terms of stripping participatory rights in education with little or no market use-value, but also in terms of establishing a competitive, individualised and isolated education sector controlled not by government, but by economic demand. It is within this backdrop, and the slow contamination of Australia's governmental sector from globalising forces that the Dawkins Reforms emerge. Not directly a decedent of the human capital theory but enabling of an ascendancy of neoclassical economic reform into the higher education sector. As Bessant (1995) argues, the neoclassical economic view of higher education began to take control of the sector well before the Dawkins Reforms. Though the reforms confirmed the spreading and cementing of the rationalist view of higher education, they did not *ipso facto* produce the behaviour as they spread. Nor can they be held to blame for the spread of neoclassical economics through higher education. These logics, many of which originated in the public sector, made their way into education with the Dawkins reforms. Precisely, per Marginson (1993) and Bessant (1995), economic rationalism crowds existing economic practices and spaces and colonises areas which previously had little direct relationship to economic relations. This also heralds new core ideological shifts, supporting 'cuts' and 'restructures', 'mergers' and 'acquisitions', and unprecedented growth as a basic *morality*. Importantly, these shifts assert the dominance of the market *qua* politics producing a hegemonic view of what education *must* be. These *logics* remain in place in Australian universities to date.

Superficially, the Dawkins Reforms were presented as enlarging institutional funding and freedom. For academics, the reforms heralded a shift in the way that higher education

thought of itself, rather than specifically damaging as a policy bundle (J. Bessant, 2002). Indeed, these reforms were largely critiqued by the sector due to their use of economic language rather than educational or academic language (Marginson, 1993). To the heart of the policies built during the reforms were an overwhelming emphasis on numbers: increasing student enrolments and graduations, introducing or at least modifying fees and increasing income from them, and an attachment of education to economic values and production. These were literally an enforcement of the key features of neoclassical economics already burgeoning in universities. The first of the reforms came in the form of a *Green Paper* circulated by the minister to higher education institutions, foreshadowing global impetus for higher education sector change and local shifts to the economy, many of which he himself had installed during his term as Minister for Finance (Dawkins, 2013). It begins, in this context, with an ambiguous statement that, ‘it is essential to develop attitudes, practices and processes which are positive in their response to change and which capitalise on the opportunities that it presents’ (Grant & Dawkins, 1987, p. 1). This claim itself, which is unremarkable in contemporary policy landscapes, at the time collected critique for the shallow assumptions about the nature and value of higher education. Precisely, this nebulous response to ‘uncertainty and volatility’ of domestic and international spaces through a reform of higher education is a problematic premise and a tenuous harbinger of change to the higher education sector in the country. The discussion paper is premised in sector growth, promising research and quality graduates, though it conceals a critique and inflexibility, or inability, to respond to change. Grant and Dawkins (1987) assume education’s responsibility in teaching skills necessary for professional life importantly positioning higher education as a sector which constructs and supports the development of the nation’s economy (Marginson, 1993). The substantive work of the *Green Paper* is a repositioning of education from a social and public good towards an economic rationalist view of the ‘value’ of higher education to the population. It does this, as it was subject to critique for, through the normalisation

market-oriented language and through a fundamental change process in education funding and monitoring of ‘production’. While claiming that the sector was not singularly responsible for economic problems, the paper asserts that universities provide the prominent skills in the labour market and they thus have a responsibility ‘in restructuring the Australian economy’ (Grant & Dawkins, 1987, p. 8). Chief amongst the concerns raised in the *paper*, and by the subsequent reforms, for university administration was the subject of growth⁷⁵ (Harman & Meek, 1988). Ramsey summarised that the new ‘profiles’ proposed in the *Green Paper* took into account, first, ‘the broad range of functions now required of higher education institutions’ in light of the new economic conditions facing the country. Second, that ‘not all institutions can perform a full range of functions’ and thus, a specialist and technicist focus may emerge to serve the needs of the economy. Finally, that institutions would only be ‘subject to basic accountability requirements’ and were well placed to be able ‘to manage their affairs without excessive intervention from outside bodies’⁷⁶ (Ramsey, 1988, p. 30). Marginson provides summary to the contention that the institutions’ control was lost or under fire through a succinct capturing of the more discrete change of control that the institutions would see under the profiles:

higher education institutions have gained “process control” but lost “product control”. This means that government intervention in sources of financing, management and the internal distribution of resources has been reduced. But through mechanisms such as ... performance indicators and accountability arrangements ... influence over the type of graduates and research has been increased. (Marginson, 1993, pp. 125–126)

⁷⁵ There were perceptions that the paper’s aims were to detract from university decision making autonomy (Ramsey, 1988), and the returned critique to these assertions was largely that the policy itself did not provide a mechanism of control over the institution. Perhaps, however, the academic concern over the change to the funding mechanisms themselves, now about numbers rather than activity, as a single bulk income stream could be manipulated by flows of enrolment numbers, rather than actual educational activity. Not to mention the new mechanisms by which research would be funded.

⁷⁶ The unregulated approach to higher education continued for some time after the initial installation of these measures, though new forms of external accountability have surfaced they have little to do with the educational or research ventures of the university systems.

These changes were instituted and had rippling effects to university governance, though the more damaging aspect was the concomitant ideology which accompanied them.

The reforms did, however, bring concrete changes with them. The *White Paper*, a policy document, called for wide ranging reforms in the sector, established a dramatic overhaul to management structures in the institutions (B. Bessant, 1995), introduced payments and income-tied loans in the form of Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), and a variety of mergers and ‘upgrades’ of institutions into universities (Harman & Meek, 1988; Marginson, 1993) to encourage competition, and to consolidate universities legitimating capitalist hegemony, and concreting and perpetuating control of universities by markets. In addition, as part of the bundle of changes came reforms to research funding and prioritisation, now linked to the needs of *industry*, or the market, rather than the interest of academics and, perhaps a more severe, change which saw academics competing with each other for a scarcer form of funding (Goldsworthy, 2009; Marginson, 1993). Insidiously, the Dawkins reforms read, particularly in a contemporary policy climate, as unexceptional, however it is important to emphasise the pivot to education’s role towards technicist and economic servitude. Dawkins has stated that since the reforms he has revisited the papers and motions produced to change university education in the country: ‘by the standards of today, unexceptional’ (Dawkins, 2013, p. x). By their own measures, the Dawkins reforms were successful. They attached higher education to the economy in an almost irreversible way. They oversaw dramatic and sustained growth in student numbers across Australia, and even the emergence of new higher education institutions to meet the growing demand for an educated *workforce*⁷⁷ (J. Bessant, 2002; Dawkins, 2013; Marginson, 1993). In addition, the reforms set the landscape for the current systems of university governance, establishing a system of institutional control that, in many ways mirrored the

⁷⁷ An adoption of the language of the market which appears both in the Dawkins papers, and now in education institutions nationally as a ‘career ready’ language which has taken hold.

foundational Council at the University of Sydney and enabled the eventual redistribution of control of university councils and senates (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

These reforms framed an economic rationalist education in the nation which would prove irreparably damaging to the foundational view of the university, be that a *public* education or an *elite* education. Significantly, particularly for the hegemonic theory advanced in this thesis, Australian universities post-1980 can largely be considered, in Marginson's (1993, p. 56) terms, as a revisioning of the nexus of 'social, economic and cultural' education towards a reproduction of the political economy. At its heart, an acceptance of free market hegemony and a promise to reproduce extant divisions of labour which directly create and perpetuate inequality. The new commitment then becomes producing 'professionals', a social class who direct the working class in the interests of capitalists – a *petit bourgeoisie*.

Indeed, since Dawkins' reforms, the university sector has been steadily classed, but also become more exploitative of staff and students as forms of capital (Hush & Mason, 2019). In extension of this, it is also possible to reconceptualise universities at their most fundamental level as not only systems of 'reproduction' or, perhaps worse, systems for the production of agents of subjugation under capitalism, towards an emanating centre of bourgeois economics and culture in Australian society. It is reasonable to depict university systems as elitist, masking market based decisions as supposedly meritorious selection processes, however Australia's education landscape in comparison to international higher education has relatively high rates of acceptance and attainment (Norton, 2013). Until being superseded in 2009, the 1970s Commonwealth Supported Places saw a specified number of *places* for students in every degree, once the number of places were met, the Tertiary Admission Centres (TACs) controlled admissions against students' entry score (Tertiary Entry Rank [TER], later Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR]), thus courses with high demand required high scores, and vice versa (Norton, 2013). This system has since been replaced by the demand-driven system in current

times (Dow, 2014), a further increase to the possibility of student admission and encouragement of competition and sector growth, though subject to esoteric rules. Battles between public and elite education, and the various conceptions of what education *could* and *should* be, therein have persisted across much of the university sector's history in Australia. From their early days in contest over the value of their establishment, through to current arguments over the pace of institutional change, purpose and role of students and staff within them.

Pyne and Tehan reforms (2016–2021)

In 2016, during Minister Christopher Pyne's term, moves were made to further deregulate university funding, removing fee caps and other price controls installed by the ALP government. These controversial reforms came after an ALP move in 2009 to enable demand-driven higher education which served as a gateway to soothe the demand for fee deregulation amongst LNP parliamentarians (Norton, 2015). This was a Gillard government move to dramatically shift university funding towards paying for new policy developments in primary and secondary schools (Heath & Burdon, 2013). These emerged among other substantive changes originating in government and universities themselves including reduction of representation by academics, general staff and students in university governance (Government of South Australia, 2016). While shifts to the landscape and the general cultural position on education have continued to slide towards technicist education for the attainment of employment, there had been few fundamental changes to the scale of the Dawkins Reforms until Pyne's attempts at deregulation in 2016. Interestingly, Dawkins commented on the state of his reforms during Pyne's term, stating that '[t]hey have lasted for 30 years ... actually a bad thing' (Dodd, 2016). He called for an increase in speed of change in the sector, a move at the heart of his reforms, and for support from LNP Ministers to increase competition as a central issue in higher education. While the LNP reforms failed at the time due to a lack of support from the ALP in the House and Senate, the sentiment of increased competition and structural

changes to degrees and funding of universities continued to be part of popular political discourse. Conversations about the value and nature of higher education reform continued through successive LNP terms until ministerial changes saw new legislation tabled that would change the face of the demand-driven higher education sector on a scale almost as grand as Dawkins. Ultimately, the user-pays system proposed by Pyne was defeated after strong student protest, though the remnants in the form of higher fees for humanities students passed the House and Senate in 2020 are now a stark reality for students in Law, Liberal Arts, and Business (Daly & Lewis, 2020).

A running theme

Australian universities, since their inception in the 1850s, have been dependent on the institutional credibility, structure and value systems of other countries. At first, the dominant influences were British universities, particularly an amalgam of Oxbridge's stately architecture and London's governance and progressive secular view of education. In recent times, however, attention has turned toward the progress of North American universities in their quests towards competitive elite institutions informed by market logic (Giroux, 2002). In American universities, *vertical hierarchies*⁷⁸ were established to enable comparison between institutions. Fairly or otherwise, comparison of diverse institutions further enabled competitive ranking systems across nations (Cantwell et al., 2020). These rankings have infiltrated higher education globally and have had such an impact in Australian higher education (Connell, 2019) that the ALP government enabled competitive league tables for schools (Hardy & Boyle, 2011; Redden & Low, 2012). In essence, an exaggerated rendition of American universities' economic *logics* has had a remarkable effect on Australian higher education. This almost neo-colonial incursion by the *free market* has altered and warped institutions around the globe, beyond higher education to an alteration of the fabric of *culture* in the global north, but also into non-western countries

⁷⁸ Literally mirroring the vertical management structure of corporations, instituted in terms of global league tables.

(Marginson, 2016). This project, an *economic* project, under the banner of neo-classical economics has seized most, if not all, public institutions globally. Through a *common sense* project of prioritising the economy over human value. This has enabled production, in Australia, of universities funded by the public which at their foundational value have been public universities⁷⁹ which were run under neoclassical economic regimes through the *logic* of profit and efficiency for market-value. These have recently shifted towards managerialism and profit-gone rogue. With these changes comes a range of implications for the structure and content of education, and pedagogic implications⁸⁰ of teaching under this model run deep. These ideas are worthy of further explication, however as they run in parallel to the development of higher education in Australia, they will not be considered in their historical terms, but as an overlay to the history as presented above in particular note of the emergence of economic rationalist models in higher education in the 1960s.

Economic rationalism, free market economics and the ideology of neoliberalism are aligned. Neoliberalism in contemporary Australia is now hegemonic, serving to prioritise market logics across a plurality of sectors but brings important cultural/political changes to those systems (D. Harvey, 2005). Importantly, for higher education in Australia neoliberalism qua *hegemon* has produced major structural changes in the governance, management, and decision making of universities (Blackmore et al., 2010; Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020; Gumport, 2000). In addition, it has led, over time, to changes to the composition of academics roles in the institution, casualisation of staff, and shifts to the role and conception of the student (T. Brown et al., 2010; Connell, 2013a, 2013b). On other fronts, as noted in the reforms above, shifts have been made to how and what revenue is afforded for research, and who and how research is

⁷⁹ Putting aside their role in class reproduction and other requirements to entry which prevent admission from students of working class, non-male and non-white backgrounds, universities in Australia are by-value fundamentally designed to allow for 'merit selection' and are considered throughout this thesis as *public* institutions. Especially in consideration of 'public' or 'politics' as a result of culture.

⁸⁰ Specifically towards a didactic, 'banking model' (Freire, 2014) of education.

governed globally (Marginson, 1993; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Inherently neoliberalism purports to be value free, seeking only to enhance and assert the value and primacy of capital (D. Harvey, 2005), however the *hegemon* of neoliberalism acts as a normalising force replacing *common sense* views of education as a value *ipso facto* with the view that education must be valuable *on the market*. Coinciding with the view of human capital development of the 1960s (W. Brown, 2015; Marginson, 1993) neoliberalism has steadily replaced views of economy, education, and value. Though not without its dissidents, neoliberalism has a firm *hold* of political and economic culture. Importantly, as Harvey (2005) argues, the project of neoliberalism is not a *fait accompli*, indeed while it is a growing and amorphous project it can be understood in terms of any *hegemon*. A continuing struggle for supremacy from a system of understanding and governance which, as with any hegemony (Crehan, 2002), has flaws and can be corrupted or disrupted through a multitude of systems and responses, not least of which is an academic understanding of the impacts and reasons for its grasp as *hegemon* (Plehwe et al., 2007). While the Australian university sector has found itself embroiled in politically motivated, and politically enacted, ‘league-tables,’ fee increases and corporate funded research (Connell, 2013b). Largely, scholarship in higher education, particularly and interestingly in the humanities and social sciences, which find themselves heavily *under attack* from neoliberal shifts, critique has not been absent. Indeed, university reforms, noted above, are not the work of the populace – students or academics, but of a non-discrete *hegemon*, a ruling class which itself is subject to the ideology of free-market capitalism. To achieve the reforms efforts were first made to undermine the management of universities, notably during the early days of Australian universities there were moves to have those with landowning and high economic status sit on governing boards, along with scholars and governors. These moves were not motivated, at the time, by contemporary neoliberal hegemony, yet they did enable Australian universities to be on the ‘front foot’ in terms of accepting *management* by new managerialism and accepting managerial executive power

(Marginson & Considine, 2000). The internally protective nature of the *neoliberal hegemon* creates an ideal of intellectualism which paradoxically displaces intellectuals from positions of power, and trains a new class of intellectuals⁸¹ to disseminate and ideate avenues for neoliberal subsumption (Hull, 2007).

This doctoral research now pivots. Theory has been granted a context and a history. It has been moved – with care – into the new environment of Australian higher education. To infuse the second half of this thesis with this theory in context, I temporarily disrupt this thesis with a red wedge.

⁸¹ Such a class was deliberately established alongside the neoliberal hegemony, in the original neoliberal project through the production of Gramscian ruling-class intellectuals qua economists (D. Harvey, 2005). In 1947, think tanks were established (Mont Pèlerin Society) to advance the neoliberal project.

A red wedge

Juxtaposed against the expectation of mainstream historical accounts, outside the comfort of institutional structures and beyond the methodological turn this thesis offers, an institution sits. The students and workers of the university themselves sit starkly in contrast to the expected *rationalised* histories provided in the narrative above. Meaningfully, particular histories actively exclude alternative perspectives. Moreover, institutional narratives and mythologies about students and academic workers preclude certain ways of knowing and contextualising participation, action and politics. This wedge serves to demonstrate the pivot between the mainstream historical account above and the radicalised alternative below. These two sections sit in stark contrast to one another. One, the colonial institution as a space of high culture and society, stratospherically located in the organisation of society. The other, the home to social change, transformation and diversity, a thorny and actively political space brimming with potential.

Beyond inactive participation within institutional bounds (Mendes & Hammett, 2020) and over and above the empty promises of active democratic citizenship following graduation (W. Brown, 2015), a modern deployment of Gramscian social theory offers possibility for the excise of political initiative through hegemony. In higher education, now, rests a dormant possibility for the (re)centring of student power, briefly realised in the 1960s (Eaton, 2002; G. S. Jones, 1969), with a growing imperative for action to short-circuit the active denial of access to the tools and resources of cultural change. In the context above, natural histories erase student possibility, powerful social theory remains without contemporary contextual empirical realisation and universities fail to engage in democratic processes. For students and for staff there are few choices but to succumb to hegemony. Genuine commitment to progressing modes which enable Gramscian organic intellectuals to thrive can yet create conditions

necessary for social change desperately needed on the verge of social, economic, ecological and systemic collapse. This thesis now moves from contextualising and contemporising a Gramscian social theory *for* social change, to an empirical examination of student participation in higher education deploying ethnographic method and exploring the possibility for organic intellectuals in higher education under new formats of hegemon.

The radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s is captured in myth, in a Barthesian sense, and contrasts against contemporary reimagining of the student's position in universities (Macfarlane, 2020; Partington, 2020). From the mind of the vice-chancellor to the student politician, student's participation is clearly conceptualised as a sort of folk law (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Mendes & Hammett, 2020; Palma, 2020). This colours students' interactions with higher education, prescribing historical modes onto contemporary engagements. For students, learning to leverage these myths to their advantage is a serious journey, and arriving in a place where they can speak out against hegemonic decision making is of ultimate importance if societal change is to occur originating with the *organic intellectual* student. The conceptualisation of students as radical, noisy and disruptive originating in the 'golden age' of student participation creates immediate issues for students' participation in higher education and requires serious attention below to understand how students *actually* interact with their universities. To do this, an operationalisation of Gramscian theory is required, drawing from the above.

The theoretical developments advanced in this doctoral thesis hold significant weight when examining possibilities for student action under hegemony. The detailed examination of context, method, and politics until this point form an essential spine for examining and exploring possibility in a grim cultural and social landscape. The methodological developments above, a configuration of cultural studies, provide an important bridge to the substantive and long-term field work to establish students' positions, and a detailed account of students' role

and positionality in the manifestation and harnessing of political power for initiative under what has become a strong hegemonic force of Gramscian fears. In this sense, the work above sets the stage and world of possibility for the empirical exploration below. Holding with Gramsci's theory and his own mode (Crehan, 2002) the thesis now explores political *possibility*. The serious commitment to ethnographic fieldwork undertaken below was explored in detail in Chapter 3. The data, now, are presented both in narrative form, per the prologue, and from rich in-depth interview data with participants in the field. Importantly, the thesis uses this juncture to turn to an *alternative* history to that presented in Chapter 4. A peoples' history of Flinders University, the empirical context of this study. Below, Chapter 5 begins to operationalise and animate Gramscian theory through *a* history which enables clarity around the 'radical era' during the 1960s.

Chapter 5

An alternative history of Flinders University: Activism, misogyny, and a young radical spirit

Flinders University's history is rife with activism, misogyny and a 'young' radical spirit. It has moved with the tides of history, sometimes at the forefront of revolutionary change, sometimes dragged behind as it responds to socio-political changes. Accessing this history requires a serious consideration of the voices of the students in the institution. Of these, the most vocal are student radicals and, when captured in documents and 'history', are also many student politicians. In this light, this chapter presents *a* version of the dissenting voice, often a singular, but alternative history of the university initially introduced above. In doing this, I aim to show a deliberate dichotomy between the pristine history presented in books produced by white, male historians for and about Flinders University; this includes a plurality of perspectives which are deliberately *left out* of the conversation as they do not contribute to the marketable image of the institution (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017). Importantly, as this chapter highlights, the dissenting voices *make* the institution just as much as the clean neutral history makes the institution, though the painting of the people which animate the structures and fabric of Flinders University are certainly painted in a duller colour in the latter. To access an alternative history of the University requires a diversity of sources, including lived experiences, documents, publications and in particular a substantial amount of *grey* literature. This chapter draws on a variety of source historical material retrieved from the Flinders University Special Collections archive. This includes a substantial number of historical Empire Times magazines, the periodical publication of the Flinders University Student Union (FUU). The union became defunct as a result of Voluntary Student Unionism (Rochford, 2006) and brought the end of the student newspaper in 2006. The newspaper has since been revived as a short form magazine and offers a small fraction of its former radical contributions in a dramatically reduced

circulation and readership. The original Empire Times forms a touchstone for this chapter in constructing the alternative history, as a long running, radical, student operated paper. While student radicalism suffered much the same fate as the University in the late 1980s after successive attacks of *rational* economics and suppression by managerialism, the radical impulse at *Flinders* had its own *hegemonic* spaces. In the early days, this took the form of student politicians and activists vying to lead a student body which had its own ideas about what an education could, or should, be and, in extension, what culture and society could, or should, be. The attempts to lead the student body of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw many uneasy relationships formed, backs ‘knifed’ and ideologies capitulated.

Radicalism, workers and students have not always maintained an easy relationship. Indeed, in contrast to contemporary tertiary students, the relationship between work and higher education was much less pronounced. Students in the period leading to the 1960s had often been born to wealthy families who sponsored their studies. Indeed, in the early colonial history of Australia, a relatively aristocratic class of student-as-future-governor dominated the sector. Once universities began to welcome more working class students in the 1950s and 1960s, and after successive booms in the number of students since end of the Second World War – with an increasing emphasis on technical training for the workforce – the demand for students with *skills* rose starkly. As noted above, the very necessity for *Flinders*’ foundation at Bedford Park originated in the inability for *Adelaide* to hold the predicted number of students enrolling across 1965 to 1969. These students, while not aristocratic or necessarily originating in wealthy families, were often educated in private schools and had highly skilled work in their futures. This establishment view of education was being disestablished across the 1960s period, with *Flinders* explicitly aiming to attract students of various social classes and, importantly, more female students (Flinders University, 1968; Hilliard, 1991; Karmel, 1968). Still, these relatively privileged students were not required to ‘pay their way’ through an undergraduate degree, and

in many instances were *paid* to undertake their degrees without any expectation of additional work. During the 1970s, the State paid students to attend university across a wide variety of study areas, and from 1974 through 1986 students were offered the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme (TEAS), a fortnightly payment for students in undergraduate and a small selection of graduate degrees. This now abolished scheme supported more students than ever before to attend university, contributing partly to the increasing diversity of student views on campus. However, schemes like the TEAS and its precursors, which also accompanied free higher education for Australian citizens, had the effect of separating students and workers. Perforce students were involved in breaking picket lines for striking workers and having generally detrimental effects on working peoples unrest during the 1950s and 1960s (Armstrong, 2001). However, late in the 1960s, particularly in South Australia, there had been new allegiances formed between the workers and students. With Bedford Park's proximity to the Tonsley manufacturing precinct reparations had been made, particularly led by the more radical student presence already emerging on the Bedford Park campus. The soon-to-become Socialist Alternative, in conjunction with some of the more radical faculty of the University, had started a major political force on the campus, the 'worker-student alliance' (WSA) (Armstrong, 2001). The general unrest of the period, particularly around the Vietnam war and associated moratoriums, sit ins and strike action, and during the rising semi-militant forces of the WSA, created conditions of polarisation at *Flinders* amongst the students and their views on allegiance with workers and the state (particularly in terms of shunning militaristic practices).

Alongside this radical period, the formation of the university at Bedford Park had taken its almost brutalist shape and the metaphysical structures were also forming. New ways of governing, teaching and learning, and engaging with students were informing the foundational set of principles for the new university. With renowned progressive educational governance director Professor Karmel at the helm conditions could have been perfect for a student-faculty

alliance of historic proportions. The University's establishment itself was open to new ways of interacting with students. While perhaps not as radical as the students' diversifying perspectives, the 'pedagogical experimentation' of *Flinders* as a new university was met with its own dissidents (Forsyth, 2020; Hilliard, 1991). Radicalism and experimentation were being embraced as an image for the new campus, a space for trying new forms of university governance, including transforming structures and processes which could have otherwise been merely inherited from its parent university at *Adelaide* (Karmel, 1964). The new campus was situated in a unique cultural ferment compared to its colleagues at *Adelaide*, its youth and new departments creating a different kind of atmosphere, and when combined with the broader cultural scene in the state, it was a powerful alternative space for new students:

The first intake of students at Flinders, it was wonderful, 400 people in the whole university. The science people were together with the undergraduates in arts and shit. I thought it was terrific. The lingua franca was based around an evolving awareness of what was going on philosophically and politically. ... I went to Flinders to do plasma physics. Wasn't terribly impressed by the physics of Adelaide. So, I went up to the University of Adelaide at Bedford Park, as it was for the first year. But Flinders, it was absolutely fabulous. We knew everybody. I got to know a lot of people in in the arts, and that was quite interesting. Then the politics started – actions and protests, and I started becoming interested in critiquing student politics as well. (Roscoe)

Universities were facing an age of uncertainty and rapid change, often criticised from outside the university sector, which in Australia had a history of being viewed as an ivory tower, a bygone self-serving tool of the wealthy elite, and through an anti-intellectual lens a place of pointless pontification. The 1960s, though, heralded a new era of introspection and self-criticism, which Karmel claimed needed to be taken seriously if the future of the university sector was to be stabilised. Criticised by his peers for his 'radical' vision for universities, but remaining true to a relatively progressive view of university governance across his whole life, Karmel made a public proclamation about 'the role of the university' in the *Canberra Times*:

I do not accept the concept of the university as an agency of social reform. This does not mean that I am not interested in social reform, both staff and students should be interested in social reform, that the university should not offer courses about politics and society and social reform, that the university should not contribute to an understanding of the values and problems of society. Quite the contrary; but it does mean that the university should not be an active agent for a particular set of values embodied in a particular programme for society. To do that would, in my opinion, destroy the university in its essential elements. (Karmel, 1969, p. 2)

The refusal to commit to a radical ideology was enough to rile up the radical students already appearing on the campus. The Vice-Chancellor had set himself against the students, whose new view for society included a dictatorship of the proletariat, a radical revisioning of the economy, and a new social order. While the promise Karmel made to an openness in curriculum and structure to diverse views could read as promising in the current age of Vice-Chancellors' managerialist agendas, for the then radical Marxist/Trotskyist students of *Flinders*, this was an oppositional statement. Parallels naturally continue in the proclamations of contemporary Vice-Chancellors, whose preoccupation with progress, serving the new 'public' interest and ensuring university accountability to the state often supersede their actual interest in the function and business of their universities. Karmel's interests may not have been broader than his own image, however at the time his vision of the new Flinders University was important for its promise for relations with students. He had envisioned governance models that facilitated significant student contribution, making eight seats available on the University's Council for a mix of student union members, undergraduates and a postgraduate (Karmel, 1964). From the earliest issues of the *Empire Times* student newspaper, issues of student representation and governance in university decision making had been a preoccupation, perhaps set by the Vice-Chancellor or perhaps partly due to the general culture of students since the 1960s. In the first formal printed issue of the *Empire Times* (ET), drafted late in 1968, only two years after the University had opened its first undergraduate programmes to students, Rod Boswell contributed commentary on the recent progress toward student-staff participatory governance:

the first students attended a school board meeting at this university. The School was Languages and Literature, soon to be changed to Humanities and the students were in the position of observers. Nevertheless, this was the first step in the long march to student-staff participatory government of the university. (ET 1.1, 1969)

Indeed, Boswell highlighted the superficial nature of the permission created in the formal structures of the University to *authentically* enable student engagement. In language common for the early issues of ET – laced with gentle profanity – he captured the scene and tensions between students, staff and governance at the University:

Student involvement at Flinders at present seems to be of the “turn up, tune in, piss off” variety which very soon leads to alienation of those staff members who look forward to this kind of unity. The line of ‘student power’ appears to have burnt too brightly and rapidly to sustain itself leaving only the dying embers of a few interested students and an ideal disappearing at 186,000 miles per second. The excuses from the students are well founded and often repeated and correlate, strongly enough, with reasons put forward by staff members for the exclusion of students from the bureaucracy. (ET 1.1, 1969)

Boswell himself had been a prolific character in the establishment of the ET, an advocate for students in university governance, and a PhD candidate and later researcher of acclaim at the Australian National University. Informally, accounts of Boswell’s role in the founding of ET were essential, as he ran a liberated offset press in his home producing the entire first year of ET publications. The student press was a critical part of communicating and organising activism and, in particular, offered a way of disseminating information which had been previously inaccessible to students. Having access to a printer *created* opportunity for dissent in the new university.

Students’ analysis and critique of peers in debates and heated discussion were amongst key issues in the early ET. Though these were far from the only hallmarks of the early ET issues, and certainly not the only issues faced by increasing numbers of student activists at *Flinders*. At this stage, South Australia’s relatively progressive State politics, in conjunction with proliferating radical views, contributed toward development of a strong culture and an

increasingly *Leftist* culture at that, in no small part contributed by its fledgling university's students:

South Australia is way ahead of stuff. I mean, we were out the streets. It was really happening in '68. And then '69, we started Empire times. (Roscoe)

The arrival of a student operated press at Bedford Park cannot be understated. For students to communicate on key issues, and to organise campaigns, access was needed to a free press. Even at the time the State's press was singularly operated by the Murdoch establishment, a markedly conservative organisation. This spawned several instances of competition between student publications and the State paper, including students replacing internal copy of *The Advertiser* and *The News* with pirate versions of ET content at newsagent shelves.

In one of many student-staff debates over the WSA key objectives and the peace movement, a debate was held. The early ET, in an almost Gramscian imaginary, captured a second-hand image of Brian Laver, a progressive student, who had 'held his own' in a discussion of the realities of the progressive new left politics in Adelaide, or lack thereof. The debate had been against prolific philosophy staff member Professor Brian Medlin. Here, the intellectualism of early student activism in the State emerges in an editorial commentary in a 1969 issue of the ET:

Laver believes that he and other student leaders are largely misunderstood concerning revolution. This revolution, he believes, will be the natural result of the existence of a number of subjective requirements which will create an intellectual climate sympathetic towards social revolution. He stressed that this change will not be the result of a back-room conspiracy by a small clique of saboteurs, but would evolve out of the new social mentality which people would be educated into. (Editorial, ET 1.2, 1969)

Medlin, himself an activist instigator of grand scale, while critiqued by some students, played an essential role in consciousness-raising at *Flinders*. Moreover, he supported several student

movements to reform the assessment and teaching practice and was at least partly responsible for the possibility for the instantiation of the women's studies courses at *Flinders*. As he recalled:

we learnt enough to introduce the first women's studies course to be taught in an Australian University, to maintain it unfunded for over a decade, and finally, when the Grey Powers seemed likely to starve it out, to make the moves that produced a public campaign which eventually shamed the university into properly establishing a proper discipline. We also learnt enough to introduce, in the face of enthusiastic opposition, methods of teaching and, especially, of assessment that are now widely practiced in the University. (Medlin, 2021, p. 48)

In addition, Medlin was deeply concerned with the mode and content of teaching in universities. His own course design followed the generally progressive attitude towards pedagogy and curriculum in the new founded campus, though there were holdouts, and his commitment to enabling students to develop self-understanding and, ultimately, to self-assess was central in his opposition of failed, and tried assessment:

many of the courses at Flinders had become heavily social and political in content as well as fairly experimental with respect to teaching methods, to course design and conduct, to assessment. They were widely perceived as radical in these respects. I hope that perception was largely correct. Yet it reflected the poverty of educational thought in universities and the hysteria of the times as much as the nature of the courses. ... [My main concerns] First, that students should learn to take initiatives with their own education ... second that they should take seriously the fact that action as well as thought is subject to rational assessment ... third that they should become capable of realistic self-appraisal ... fourth that they take seriously the fact that more is involved in self-appraisal than having a good or bad opinion of oneself... [fifth] They should come to realise how learning is most usefully a cooperative enterprise ... they were required also to contribute systematically... The hope, often realised, was that they would learn by teaching one another. (Medlin, 2021, pp. 33–34)

The policy of assessment at *Flinders* had been a matter of serious contention and with thought leaders like Medlin providing alternative modes for student assessment, tensions in the traditional assessment continued to grow over the succeeding years. Medlin himself acted as a

progressor of new and experimental education and, notably, left a lasting impact on the teaching methods employed at *Flinders* for years after his departure. Importantly, as an activist, Medlin had been a key figure in the moratoria and had himself come into conflict with police and military on several occasions and ended up arrested and detained.

Conflict with the Vice-Chancellor's messaging of universities as a space independent from society, the Gramscian imaginary of universities and scholars as homes to the traditional intellectual would be replaced during this time of radicalism (Gramsci, 1996). Laver envisioned universities as a tool of educative, conscious socialist education, beyond 'reproduction'. He saw the university's role as creating analytical minds and societal leadership amongst the educated. This attitude is largely congruent with the work of much of the new left of the period: a belief that grassroots education and social uprising would create necessary conditions for social revolution. The salient point here was the posing of universities as a place which would educate on the social conditions, or the 'culture' of the society in which they were positioned – a more direct reimagining of the role of traditional intellectuals, towards a location for the production of the organic intellectual. Though the relationship between the traditional intellectual of the academy and the students themselves, was closer at *Flinders* in its early days,

We had Karmel, Peter Karmel, at the time at Flinders, and he was a very different kettle of fish to the majority of cretins that Flinders has had after that. I do remember having a big demo on stage. The first one to get student representatives on the Council. And we're all jumping up and down outside Peter's office ... and he says "golly, come in, let's have a cup of tea and talk about it". So, we all walked in and sat around in his office, you know, which could take 30 or 40 people. Basically, he said "you want a council representative? Oh, that should be alright, how about two or three?" (Roscoe)

Not only were students closer to their Vice-Chancellor at this time, but access to academics was also more communal, particularly as classes often took a small form with a large class holding ten students in an office. Medlin, as a philosophy professor, considered himself more aligned with the liberal reformist school of thought, preferring revision rather than revolution. Though

not characterised as a liberal, his reasoning seemed to be in opposition to the more radical amongst the student body:

Professor Medlin questioned this revolutionary mentality. He considered himself a political and social reformer, rather than a revolutionary innovator. Laver argued that the present system is not capable of reform and is not susceptible to reform. The only solution was a restructuring of society, starting with individuals questioning their role in society and what part they actually play in the power game. (Editorial, ET 1.2, 1969)

Laver emerged as a 'victor' in the student radicalism arena, though a short-lived leader of thought at *Flinders*. The radical conversation was to continue for another 20 years, played out on campus and in the circulated papers of the two university's student bodies. With a strong commentary, political debate and a vigorous shower of naughty imagery, the ET became a student staple, a leftist publication of the dreams – and on occasion nightmares – of the State's Communist Party membership. The cultural landscape for the early ET was to appeal to a student body concerned with the liberal arts:

I think I must have read about 10 books on the Russian Revolution, ... and a whole stack of others, including Trotsky, a bit on Marx and Lenin. Then I got involved in general literature. So, I went through the whole of bloody Dostoevsky as one does ... Zola, and then all of the French Sartre. That was fascinating for me. And the only reason I did that was that you had to keep up with people in the arts, and that's what they were doing. No one gave a shit about physics. (Roscoe)

The entirety of *Flinders'* student body, numbering in the low 400s, was thrown together in a melting pot of ideas and attitudes. At the time, the students of the arts were those with the cultural currency in the institution. This was significant as it set the progressive of the student body as a hegemonic force (amongst the students) against the hegemonic force of university administration; though administration, at the time, was far less structural and concerned with governance, and the radical student hegemony probably had more in common with the university administration qua the State than it cared to admit.

Conversation rapidly turned back to the increasing radical protest praxis of the student body. As Hastings characterised, ‘the real shift ... did not occur until 1969, a year later than its Eastern state counterparts, but it did so in dramatic fashion’ (Hastings, 2003, p. 32). Amidst the student strikes against the ‘conscription and crimes act’, a national day of action (NDA) protest with 400 students from *Flinders* and *Adelaide* present, police ‘assaulted’ the student body. The momentous headline of *ET 1.3* ‘Police Disembowel Student Body’:

police punching and kicking, waded into them [the students]. This assault was unnecessary and unjustified. The doorway could have been cleared without violence merely by slowly pushing demonstrators away. The police then seemed to go berserk. They singled out S.D.A. [Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees’ Association – a union and key Labour party affiliate] leaders Peter O’Brien and Garry Searle. ... A girl who knew one of the officers said to him: “Chris, I can see you’re a real bastard now”. She was smashed to the ground and 3 other students who tried to help her were also knocked down. (Cover, *ET 1.3*)

Brushes with police were commonplace during the radical period and often resulted in violence. Several of my participants characterised these events as ‘punch ups’ and were a normal part of relating to the state at the time. The response from the State press was to highlight how radical students were *out of line* and needed to attend to their education rather than *clog the streets* (Hastings, 2003).

Adelaide was enduring its own revolutionary protest, transformation and consideration during 1968 and 1969. Student radicals were recounting the victories of student power movements in France as the kind of stark revolution required to fix the ‘problems’ with Australia, while simultaneously denouncing the ‘ethical turn’ in the theorisation of the era (Bourg, 2017) in favour of classical Marxist traditions (Armstrong, 2001). Strong Trotskyist and Maoist impulses existed in South Australia’s New Left organisations across the period. Accompanying the period of growth in higher education, for the New Left seen as another capitalist expansion, came the revolutionary reconceptualisations. As characterised above, the

New Left had taken the world by relative storm, though the Australian media was relatively quick to dismiss the young radicals as ‘manic young men and their solemn joyless girlfriends [who] seem little more than a self-pitying coterie working out the aggression of their delayed adolescence’ (The Age as cited in Hastings, 2003, p. 9). Many of the radicals, characterised as hippies, drug taking escapists and out-of-line youth, were rapidly described into a box with the counter-culture seen as acting out against society for no *real* purpose by the older generation. It was here that the ET took form, and its growing circulation and increasing ‘pirate issues’ had created a broader readership than just student radicals. The small group of students who had established the ET to convey their own narratives and to talk about what mattered to them had decided that it was time to be revolutionary:

In ‘69 we were trying to get stuff done. I was living out in Kenilworth Road. We had a house. I think [redacted] was with me there and a few other rag tags. I thought, okay, I’m going to buy a [printing] press. You know the Student’s Union are always conservative, even if they’re left wing, they’re afraid of what’s going to happen to their career, unfortunately, I’ve never had that problem. ... So [redacted], [redacted] and I got a press. We generally wrote the whole fucking thing. Made up stories, tried to provoke people. And then we went across to the guy who made the plates, but he refused to do anything until the end of Star Trek. So, at about 10:30 or 11 at night, which, you know, you’re not terribly chipper, and we finished an issue at about three in the morning. (Roscoe)

The liberated press of the ET ran conversations which raised the level of consciousness amongst the student body, though the authors remained relatively sceptical about the actual impact, or the possibility for a student led revolution. On reflection on the early radical period of the ET’s circulation, Roscoe noted:

I think I was you know, I always frightfully privileged to be able to live through that. ... but we did get representation – we had the Student Representative Council, representing the students and you’re cross at them, because they’re not moving forward in a progressive manner. In fact, they are representing the students who couldn’t give a fuck. So, they’re doing their job. Democratically. (Roscoe)

The press provided a starting point for conversations amongst the students, and it did a reasonable job of providing critical food for thought amongst the students. It also ran critiques of the mainly conservative press in Australia. There were meaningful and progressive conversations to be had, and the envisioning of the ET's purpose was to keep politics, and student politics, focussed on the cultural issues of the time. As time went on, students' conversations increasingly centred around the freedom of press, access to radical sources of information and outlets for progressive content in the State. The issues of control were central:

It's incredibly pertinent to university politics that if you're going to get information out to people, you need a real friendly printer. You need somebody who's gonna assist you without judgment. (Cass)

The realities of a singularly-controlled corporate-State press were contra students' views on information dissemination as consciousness raising efforts. The struggle to bargain for access to appropriate technology to print *en masse* was constant.

The cultural commentary across student press was wide ranging. As an example, by the early 1960s before *Flinders* had opened its doors to students, new left movements began to target political movements which were seen as racist. Indeed, across the period student revolt against the adoption of the 'White Australia Policy' in Melbourne saw some of the earlier student activist activity of the new left and this large scale action had yet been seen in Australia (R. Gordon, 1970). Later, key political issues such as the Policy were critiqued by 'radical' student papers, as an attempt to raise consciousness. An early article in the ET employed empirical data to highlight the views of student attitudes toward the Policy which had been instituted for some years at the time:

Do you think all non-whites should be excluded from Australia?

Yes 5.0% No 93.6% Inf. 1.4%

(ET, 1.2, 1969)

By the late 1960s, as *Flinders* opened its doors to students, the students rallying for ‘Student Action for Aborigines [*sic*] (SAFA)’ had taken force. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s issues of the 1960s had paralleled the civil rights of the United States, fuelling a period of unrest over the apartheid flourishing in Australia. During the same period, a slow rise in the number of protestors against the ongoing war in Vietnam made connections into the student unions. Small moratorium movements had taken hold across the mid-1960s, but until meeting with student interests and taking on a new form post-May-68, the mass protest movements had remained yet relatively dormant. These peace movements were well attended and critically situated, reaching their target audience through a nonviolent praxis:

I remember being in a couple of demos. And it was quite interesting. The moratoria. It was all pretty polite. I remember halfway through one moratorium, and there’s a guy that I think might have had a soldier’s uniform on and says “boy, you don’t even know what moratorium means” and I said, “it means just let’s calm down quietly and chat about it”. He conceded “All right, fair enough”. And it’s all fairly polite. Of course, there’s the normal 1 or 2 percent of thugs who just want to punch up, but you just leave them in Rundle Street. ... The game was, I think, different. They didn’t have guns. So, if there’s going to be a punch up, okay, you had a punch up, but, you know, nothing really violent. Perhaps the fanaticism was different, or perhaps the communist at 20 banker at 40 was an accepted paradigm of thought.

(Roscoe)

The ‘parties’ comprising student movements, particularly during the moratoriums, were concerned and relatively enlightened about the world. Brushing against political and philosophical thinkers and being connected to workers created conditions for consciousness raising. As one of my interviewees who was completing undergraduate studies in *Literature* at *Adelaide* at the time recalled:

While I was at Adelaide University, I ended up president of the Student Christian movement there, which sounds unassuming and not even slightly dangerous. But it was; it was one of the radical student groups before people were talking about Marxism and Worker Student Alliances and all those sorts of things. And we had, we had an international interest and connections; it

was a worldwide movement. And part of that was the process of political engagement. And so, we – we invited people with dissonant views to talk to us about things, for example, like the Vietnam War, which was kind of then, and we're talking mid-'65, '66, '67, the Vietnam War was, was kind of escalating. Now, of course, most of us have grown up post World War Two, and most of us believed that what the government did, was usually right. And if the government had decided to join America, in South East Asia fighting a war, then probably that was okay. But what happened was we had conversations with people who deeply disagreed with that, and who not only had opinions, but supported them. And so that was an area within Adelaide Uni at that time, which was politically critical in ways that weren't necessarily the case. Politics, state politics was a different thing, you know. The premier was, had usually been in the job for 100 years. Everybody loved him. Nobody, seriously, argued and I think politics back then was probably less divisive. ... anyway, all that happened, and we talked at length with people about Vietnam, and then had some contact with the ANC. They had people travelling the world talking with students, for whatever reason. And so, we heard stories about apartheid. And of course, we hadn't known the details of all that. That was just the way it was. And not only did those people turn up and talk to us, but they maintained connections with us. And I think as the – as the youth culture developed so did the beginnings of that new political activity. (Huberto)

The period prior was not of dissent and vocal anarchy, but of social order, a particular kind of respect and conservatism. The values society changed as rapid as the issues that united youth rallied against. From the slow start of the moratorium movements, through to the new disruptive campus politics, the new left had taken Australia by force. As Hastings recalled, 'it would be the Vietnam movement and the fight against conscription that would harden many Australian student activist views from civil rights to revolution' (Hastings, 2003, p. 15). Interestingly, much of the politics of protest and social revolution had been seen as distinct from the movements of university students seeking 'student power' in the form of student-staff partnership and equality at universities.

The political action of students over the major cultural forces around the anti-Vietnam War protests and the connection to a politics of campus control was largely a separate matter. Many students who had a great deal of time for protest and strike action had little time for the

work of engaging with student power on campus. The resistance to the National Service conscription grew across student movements on many campuses (Hastings, 2003), while the level of engagement with the origins of student power dwindled. In July 1969, ET ran an issue called 'Don't Register' in which Fabinyi and Giles published:

Conscription in any form is the most extreme denial of basic civil rights, the conscription of an individual to fight for the state means he can be taken against his will and trained to kill in the most efficient and merciless way; and could possibly die for a cause he knows nothing about or may not believe in. No government should want to have this much power over its citizens. The Australian Government has implemented a policy aimed at crushing popular peoples' movements in Asia. ... This morally bankrupt Government must be resisted! It has been unable to enforce the National Service Act and had to introduce harsh penalties for those conscientiously rejecting the act. ... Refuse to accept the authoritarian National Service Act. Demonstrate your repugnance with the Australian Government's attitudes. Refuse to kill Vietnamese people. Don't register. (Pull out, ET 1.5)

The resistance to National Service eventually escalated to massified student protest in the streets of Adelaide city. Uniting students, workers and concerned citizens, the rallies to end the Vietnam War, conscription and imperialism remain some of the largest global student mobilisations in history, and some of the least *covered* by State media (Boyle et al., 2005; McPhail & McCarthy, 2004; Morse & Peele, 1971). During this time were ongoing progressive fights for the control of the Student Representative Council and the Student Union at *Flinders* as the locus of control for student rallying forces.

Immediately following the first SRC elections in 1969, the ET ran a series of satirical issues, assumedly protesting the election results and the change in management hierarchy for the ET editorial and staff. The ET was subsumed in 1970 under the Student's Union and an overarching editorial liaison was appointed to the SRC who had final word to 'stop press'. After sustaining critique, following those issues, of obscenity and Karmel raising issues of bias, editorialisation and exaggeration with the editors, the ET published yet further 'radical' press in its final independent issues. Between the full-scale critique of the SRC elections both in

process and appointment, and the process by which the University was then involved in setting an agenda for the SRC, the ET progressed to a new point of flatly, sexualised imagery and provocative text. A proudly activist paper, though with the virtue of hindsight, it was an occasionally sexualised and quietly patriarchal publication. While the ET continued, its alignment with the University's agenda had corrupted it for many of the radical student groups on campus. These groups, themselves, require further examination as they pertain to the types of power and activism students were exercising, and subsequently able to exercise, under university hegemony. The change to the SRC process was, in essence, a shift from student-organising to university-service, and the agendas and interests of the (always conservative) Union were served through connection with the SRC, or ignored and defunded.

Student activism in the late 1960s was a deeply fractious space, with some groups vying for radical independence and others for reintegration into the university itself. Here, three distinct social orders of students emerged, commencing in 1968 and reaching a legitimised 'club' by 1971. While student rebellion and publication, recalled singularly as 'student activists' in Hastings' work, proliferated, salient themes emerged which require attention. The meta-organisational level of broad interests of students, captured in articles and interviews herein, included: (1) student politicians and representatives, (2) student activists and protestors, and (3) student power interests. Many students were members of at least two of these interest groups. There was substantial overlap between the groups and the overwhelming majority of regular students involved in any way with these groups were members of the student activists and protestors groups. Indeed, there was a hegemonic or 'peer pressure' to be involved in the activist ferment while on campus – to fit in was to protest. While male students, in particular, were less inclined to be engaged in the 'front lines' of activism, there was a general attitude *towards* any activism, perhaps a hegemonic imperative amongst the students a necessity to participate in the activist moment as a powerful form of expression and meaning or as a counter-cultural response

to state hegemony itself. For female students, being an ‘activist’ was not necessarily considered a choice. To be at a university was a *statement*, but the general culture of the institution *was* activist:

The atmosphere that surrounded us and the different kinds of activism, you know, because we would distinguish between different, if you like, flavours of resistance that was common for you to identify the perspective from which somebody was coming, and everyone had some ... you had to do the activism because of what it gives back. If it didn’t give back, I wouldn’t hang out. I sacrificed other things, and risked ways of being but ... I felt very allied very involved, very immersed. I don’t think you could avoid it. I was also involved in political organisations beyond the University, and producing papers and publications ... which, bizarrely was illegal for a period of time. (Cass)

Complicating matters for women, especially under examination conditions in the more conservative disciplines, was the unfairly weighted assessment and patriarchal overtones in some spaces. Bellanca recalled being told she would fail an assessment before she had started it on the basis of gender. Moreover, the female students were seen, particularly those who were vocal, as an embodiment of radicalism or, more overtly, as shrill and out of place:

it was so, you know, real. It was that coming together at time of really extreme conservatism which [was] faced down by radical activists, including academics and students. That – was just going to be a head-on crash, no matter what, you know, even if you took Roger Russell out of the equation, the history assessment thing, standing on its own... I think there was a lot of angst going on, you know, amongst all sorts of people at that time about what education should look like and what we’re actually teaching people and you know, what was going on in society at that point. There were some real problems. This concept, you know, of “the old guys know what they’re doing”, they have an, I like to call it, “the Father Knows Best syndrome”... It’s like “I say and therefore it is”, you know, because I know everything and I’m a white guy. It was prime patriarchy. (Bellanca)

The treatment of female students deserves further attention below, but it is important to note that at this junction, female students felt less empowered to ‘opt out’ of the activism than their male counterparts. Though, in broad terms, students felt more engaged with the activist

moment on campus, regardless of gender, my participants suggested that the *consciousness* did not automatically accompany the *action*.

Student power continued to vie for attention, though representation and student issues continued to slide into activism. The decay of student power as student politicians and representatives filled the spaces of co-governance and self-determination was rapid. Spaces that had been created by student power promoters, predominantly thanks to *Flinders'* lineage from *Adelaide*, seemingly slid into the background along with promises from the VC for productive talks with students about their continued involvement in committees and governance structures. *ET 1.6* spoke to the issues of students in governance, with input from Karmel: 'The university must be prepared to fight any threat to free, critical and rational inquiry within the University, whether the threat comes from within the institution or from without' (p. 2). Editors responded, reinforcing the message fading in the dying embers of student power at *Flinders*:

the University offers the opportunity for students to grow in mind and spirit, to develop questioning and critical facilities, and to develop independence in outlook and belief ... Education at Flinders means more than the endless repetition of lectures, tutorials, and practicals ... it is not hard to imagine that the political power of students will continue to strengthen in the coming year or so. (ET1.6, p. 2)

While student activism continued to rise, the hard-fought student power was already beginning to dwindle by the early 1970s. Students were not taking up the call to enter the spaces for governance and had begun to lose the view of the university as a tool of resistance and transformation. The grouping of students and their relations to the structures of the institution were interesting. At this point, students who may have been protestors were not necessarily in student representative positions. Moreover, those that were in representative positions were not necessarily active in community protests or issues. Student 'clubs' emerged from the very early days at *Flinders*, ranging from radical to conservative. In their own ways, these groups were

involved in protest, student power and other student issues, but were not vying for the relative power of the SRC:

Did the students care much about the representative council? Not very much.
I think it was a training ground for political people. It was an elite itself.
(Roscoe)

Those that comprised the SRC were strongly critiqued by the various clubs and societies on campus for their inaction and relative disinterest or disdain for other students. Amidst other issues of not being funded appropriately, or not sticking up for one club or another. The political alignment of these students saw them more interested in constructive conversations with management than the actual issues that mattered to students, or to the broader culture. However, even the student clubs were at an unobtainable level to many of the 'regular' students:

I didn't realise this until I talked to people long after. This girl married one of the physics lecturers, that was a bit of a scandal, and she was there at the same time as me. She started in '66 in the arts – I said, "I didn't come across your path". She said, "you wouldn't you were in the elite group of students" ... So, my vision of stuff is a bit different to perhaps people who weren't in the "club". I think now it was a club. But at the time I thought it was open to everybody. This is one of the great mistakes one makes. This is why you have democracy that, so that the elites that we were, don't simply take over because we will. Unfortunately, democracy allows all the rest of the people to vote in people are not overly competent or interested. But it gives a good reflection of what's going on and stops certain things happening, which is what democracy is. Therefore, it's not to allow people like us to take over it's there to stop people like us taking over. I don't think the SRC did much apart from stop a lot of things happening that I think should have happened. So, we were very cross with them, but that's democracy. You can't have both things.
(Roscoe)

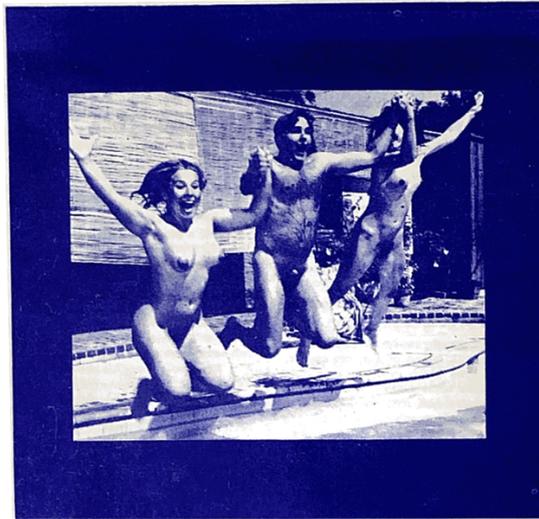
Roscoe highlights the divide between the *student power* activist and the students for democratic governance. While hard work and campaigning won the relatively open positions on university boards and committees, they were quickly filled by 'popular vote' with students who had little time or interest in being there. This self-sabotaging cycle meant the positions were disestablished and that students were no longer 'represented'. Part of the main critique of the

then ET was to try and direct general students' interest away from the occasional rally towards a sustained modification of the fabric of the institution. Shifting the student body from a 'go with the flow' to a 'critical consciousness' ultimately proved too difficult in the 1960s, though it was not long after that the conditions once again surfaced for students to seize power and rally against unfair assessment methods in the schools of the University. Though the critique rendered in ET of the SRC was relentless, in spite of a general acceptance that it was a democratic and *relatively* useful body, there were obvious shortcomings, not least of which were problems with the election processes. These had begun to be influenced by forces inside the University which sought to appoint politically oriented students to leadership positions – students who would happily agree with the management hegemony already emerging by 1970.

SRC: we'd rather change than fight



Figure 3 'We'd rather change than fight' ET 1.4



OBSCENITY?

MENTAL HEALTH, SATANISM, OPEN DAY

Figure 4 'Obscenity? Mental health, satanism, open day' ET 1.7

Commentary on the quality and rigour of the student election processes was rife across the 1969 to 1970 period, with a handful of students increasingly concerned with the way that representation and politics was playing out on campus. Alongside this came more commentary about the control and ownership of universities themselves. Questions of governance, politics and political climate were entering popular culture and the circulation of terms and knowledge of the organisation of society was growing rapidly. Knowledge diversification was affecting students in novel ways; access to highly educated, radical thinkers in their professors and peers had created a relative melting pot for the male students at *Flinders*, and they were concerned with the effort some of their peers brought to the unrobust processes of university student government.

I noticed with dismay that none of the candidates for the recent S.R.C. by-election were prepared to give any sort of policy speech. How do they expect students to elect them? On their good looks? Or do they bribe students with

Coca-Cola before the elections, hoping that this will be enough to elect them? Judging by the puerile number who voted their hopes were justified. The trend in university elections has always been to vote for personalities and not policies. (Williams, 'Flat Coke', ET 1.7)

Commentary continued between problems with student voting numbers and issues of university structure and purpose. This period was the ultimate height of student power interest at *Flinders*, though the commitment to understanding and critiquing activism and protest continued to take headlining positions in the student paper:

One danger – in Australia, in Adelaide – is that, while universities and the communities of which they are part have their specific structure and specific problems, the account of what is wrong and where we are going is too often imported from outside, from San Francisco or Paris or Berlin. Student power claims often contain a large element of fantasy. Two views of student protest (1) arises from legitimate grievances over university and community structure and behaviour (2) arises from manipulation of dupes and the semi-educated. (Duncan, ET 1.7)

The implication was, particularly during the election cycle, that too many of number 2 were making their way to positions of representation in the University. While it is possible to perceive this configuration as an early anti-activist sentiment, there were still strong supporters across the academic, student and political populations who valued the power of protest action, especially those protests supported by students. The size of protests continued to grow across the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Increasingly, a spirit particularly among the WSA students and later the socialist movements amongst them drew attention to more radical impulses amongst the student body. These radical impulses led to *Flinders*' first affiliation with the national representational body, the national union, which saw the University take on new national activist platforms and issues.

Flinders' student's relationship with the national union of Australian university students (NUAUS) had strengthened since the University's inception, national representation was on the rise and the collective power of students was ever increasing. Though the conduit between

Flinders' student union and the national body was already waning. Ian Yates, a prominent figure in the union, the General Secretary for the SRC, heavily criticised for his connection to university administration and organiser of protest and student rights, began contributing regular columns in ET on 'education & welfare' imploring students to bring forth their issues:

Whatever your problem, question or complaint; if it concerns your education and welfare we exist to try and do something for you. Whether personally, through contacts, or by the supply of information we can do something about most things. (Yates, ET 2.3)

While student politics and student power had a tendency to blur and conflate, there was a continued effort from the student power advancers to create fora for discussion of student involvement in governance. While these issues had originally appealed to the 'establishment' – the young university's governors, – the tide had turned against representation at the high levels of the University by the early 1970s as students were seen as increasingly irresponsible and unable to have a say in their own affairs. A dually cultural and local problem, student radicals – and increasingly violent radicals – were increasingly believed to be structurally damaging to the established social order and, in a kind of retaliation, opportunities for young people tightened.

The student activists, led by a blend of WSA, Weathermen and Christian students, continued to demonstrate for social change. The 1971 arrival of the Springbok rugby team, a South African team which at the time was in strong support of the apartheid, drew new tensions in South Australia. After a long period of social organising, teach-ins and communication between Adelaide, New Zealand and South Africa, there was growing anti-apartheid sentiment and in particular the parallels to Australia's own racial segregation – particularly of Indigenous people – was drawing attention at the time. The night of the game was a flurry of student activity, as Hastings recorded:

On the night the tiny neo-Nazi group, Nationalist Socialist Party of Australia was outside Norwood Oval pamphletting. Their pamphlet said that “National Socialism welcomes white South Africans” and urged Australians to “join the only party in Australia that confronts and opposes the Moratoriums and anti-tour campaign in the streets”. ... The game went ahead at Norwood Oval ringed by police and white-coated rugby officials around the boundary facing the crowd. As the Springboks ran onto the pitch, they were faced with a barrage of smoke bombs, flares and firecrackers. Black and white balloons waved ... Soon the 500 police present began moving against the protestors on “The Mound”... Twenty minutes into the match the first protester managed to beat the security cordon and run onto the pitch. He was soon followed by others. (Hastings, 2003, p. 36)

My interviewee, Huberto, an organiser and participant in the protest, recounted in some detail the affairs of the night of the rugby game, including police activity, wire taps and dodging surveillance to organise against the racist visitation. He had been a long-term participant in the social organising around anti-racist movements and, though an opponent of the methods of the WSA, he had some dealings with the group. Indeed, the connection of student activism and Indigenous rights here intersects, as while students organised for anti-apartheid movements, Indigenous peoples continued to organise and work for land and human rights (Perheentupa, 2020). Huberto worked with the anti-racist campaigners and local Indigenous organisers during his time at *Flinders*. His story of the Springbok campaign speaks to the passions of students in their anti-racist attitudes, against the then popular perspective in Australia.

When the AUS [Australian Union of Students, a rebrand of the NUAUS] decided, as part of student organisations right around the world, that we would oppose the touring Springbok rugby team, then that gathered momentum quickly. And because I'd been on the committee, and I think for some quite considered political reasons, the students here asked if I'd organise that aspect of the Flinders protest. And Flinders had the reputation across the country of being radical. And we were much more radical than Adelaide, of course, in being a bit more ivy than we were. I just took that on, I must say, much to the consternation of many of my brother clergy, and many members of the Methodist Church. And we'd learned a lot of really important lessons from the Vietnam stuff, which we just transferred straight across, and there was a huge amount of student interest in it because it was focused because we knew when they were coming. The media loved it. They'd been missing

taking photographs of Brian Medlin after being arrested. And so, the focus shifted to this stuff. And I think Australia, if you can talk about Australia, generally, people either didn't know anything about the nature of apartheid or didn't care. We engaged with ANC people. Some of the same people that I'd talked to way back when I was at Adelaide Uni turned up again, and we went and, in a sense, it was a completely different level of protest because we focused on one event. And our clear intention was to shut it down, or at least make it farcical – The other different thing we did was we, we basically wanted to make sure that there was a huge response to this. So, we actually talked to the police in advance about what we intended to do. And I can remember they were really surprised about that. And, you know, we said, "look, we're going to get five or six thousand students to the ground. Our intention is to invade the pitch. We want to stop the game". And the cops went, "oh..." you know. So, the level of cooperation between us and Adelaide Uni it was zero. They didn't trust us. We didn't know what they were intending to do. We found out afterwards that their attentions were a bit on the bizarre side anyway. We ended up organising smoke bombs and flares and all the usual things. We actually started mixing smoke bombs on my desk in my office, in the religious centre, under strict advice from the chemistry people over on the main campus, who'd worked out what the smokiest combination might be. And there was a lot of media. I did a lot of media up here. – On the night, I think around six or seven thousand students turned up and we outnumbered the crowd, two to one. And there were some lovely ironies about it. It was in a way – it was, in a way a bit less serious than the moratorium stuff. I had bodyguards, which consisted of four Aboriginal blokes. I can't remember how that was organised, or whose idea it was. As we walked in, I remember some of the rugby crowd yelled out to my bodyguards [that] they should get back to where they came from, which they thought was amusing. Anyway, the whole thing was quite effective. I knew that as I was identified, I was going to be arrested. So, I worked my way down the crowd as the police came in to get me and ran on to the field and was arrested. And somewhat mishandled, I gotta say. And underneath the grandstand were all the students who had been arrested. They were being processed, and turned out that they'd already had 25 people who claimed to be me. And again, I didn't have any idea why they would have done that. Clearly, an 18-year-old wasn't me even then. So, the cops were really pleased to have finally discovered me. We were processed and held for a while and then asked to leave, basically. And that that was basically that, that – the game I think, reached full time, but it was a complete shambles you couldn't see it. But the other thing, of course was, when you went over the fence to run on the field, your objective was not to reach the players, because that would have been a bit dangerous. The coppers themselves were fairly frisky, but that was all right. The other thing worth saying about that was that Flinders organised a shift roster, which meant that there were 50 or 100

students outside the motel where the Springboks were staying, around the clock. We didn't want them to get any sleep. And the chant, basically it was "paint them black and send them back", which is a bit dubious anyway. And we had a moment of enormous satisfaction when a couple of the South African rugby players lost it completely and attempted to attack us. And the coppers stopped them, so that was fantastic. Really good. ... The level of surveillance during all this time was extraordinary. My phone was tapped when I was doing the springbok stuff, ... quite some time later we found out the police commissioner misled the State Government around the existence of Special Branch, which was within SAPOL, and which conducted covert surveillance of people like me during the formative student activist years. And the commissioner denied that it existed. And Premier found out that in fact it did, so sacked him. Considering the separation of powers, that's a reasonably radical thing to do. Anyway, five years later, minding my own business in crisis care, and I get this phone call from a very senior copper who says, we're destroying all the Special Branch files. And I said, "that's nice" and he said, "we wondered if you'd like to have a look at yours". So, I went – went to police headquarters, and here was this bloody great Manila [folder] and it had transcripts of telephone, completely innocent telephone conversations, and some not so innocent, I must say. And photographs at my house and my children while leaving the school, just extraordinary. And when I joined the public service, you know, you have to have this interview thing. And the interviewer asked if I had any criminal record, and I said "oh, yeah, a little bit". And as I was filling out the form, I said, "there isn't enough room here".

(Huberto)

The organisation of students still formed around student 'clubs' more than by or with student politicians, and while there was some overlap between the SRC and Union, the more radical and progressive actions were undertaken by the student clubs. Huberto's brushes with police were common across all of my participants, particularly the surveillance by Special Branch and in some instances Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). This requires further exploration below, particularly as it pertains to women.

There was a kind of separation which had occurred, where issues of cultural importance became necessary to respond to as a kind of student *culture*, rather than a student *political* necessity⁸². This has important bearing for the understanding of students' organisation during

⁸² This trend continues in activism today, while student politicians often claim responsibility for organising, the activist are often independent of the student political framework.

the time. Rather than being explicitly decried as political acts, protests were just part of the culture. Indeed, the protest culture amongst the students was so strong that it often carried the academics and university general staff along with it.

In terms of the politics of it all, it transcended any form of party politics. I mean, the Whitlam thing was heading in a bad direction by then, but the State political environment was left wing anyway. And of course, by then, Bob Hawke was sort of organising industrial unions around the country to do what they did. ... I mean, that, that was a pretty clear example, I think of what – what students thought they could achieve back then in the context of the other things they were doing. That level of, of engagement, I think was kind of built in, and most academics would have would have made allowances for that. Sure, they did with me, because I was studying the same time. ... there was a sense in which it sort of spilled over as well into Aboriginal politics cause I was approached by a group of people who wanted to shut out the Aboriginal legal rights movement, and sat on the organising committees for that until it happened. And I served on that committee for 12 months. And then it was suggested, as I was white, it might be nice if I pissed off. So I did that. They made the point that the Aboriginal people that were involved in the protest with us ... well, this is lovely that you're doing this about South Africa, but how about a local focus. So, that, that was basically the politics of it. There was, there was significant conflict within the University. There were other radicals, moderates and conservatives. But it was pretty clear, that, that the agenda was thoughtful and it wasn't about politics. (Huberto)

The demographics of the city of Adelaide were also changing, as increasingly students chose between the two universities. The diversification of Adelaide University started to change its political climate and as the two universities increasingly networked, there were yet more diversification of the issues that faced the student culture.

When I went to Adelaide Uni, it was the province of comfortable middle-class kids who, who went to university because they thought it was important to their human development. Although, I mean, in my recollections of some of the academics at Adelaide Uni, they were brutal, not necessarily physically brutal, but confrontational. ... sort of rapid social change that occurred in the next decade or so. It's a question itself I think, fairly directly through universities. But I mean the impression I had here. Before I decided to get involved deeply in the politics, was that these people were serious. And from,

from what then was a kind of theological perspective, I couldn't see any or any alternative to what I thought I should do. That was then and there's nothing like winning in those environments. I mean, if you commit yourself to a process and the outcome, from your perspective is positive. ... the whole, I think the whole point of university education has changed. You know, we, I was grateful that I wasn't paying for university fees. I was surprised that I'd matriculated. I think, although I wasn't the first in our family to go to uni, my father was. (Huberto)

Student power and activist tensions rose as successive Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors were appointed with an interest in military and police research. This created conditions for students to turn strongly against university administration, which had until that point been relatively agnostic if condescendingly supportive to the 'experimental years' of students. However, the radicalism of the hard-left division of the Labour Club and the WSA was not without its dissidents. Indeed, the level of activism and angst amongst members of the radicals on campus which led to violence and militarism themselves amongst their ranks, created a reaction back towards stability.

It all got too serious, we thought. We set up a student association called fusspots – the Flinders University Student Society for the Promulgation of Outrageous Temerity and Subterfuge, which was aimed directly at the worker-student alliance people who we thought, at that stage, needed a sense of humour. And so, we organised some really outrageous things. One of them was that we invited the Army's Central Command Band and Police Band along to the campus to play during orientation week, and we set them up on each end of the campus playing. The worker-student alliance just bloody totally outraged, and nobody cared by then. (Huberto)

By this stage, in 1973, there had been further division between the radical students of the WSA who had aimed to continue the 'volume' of protest alive from, in their minds already the bygone era of the late 1960s, in an ever-increasing angst. The broad student body themselves more concerned with changing social conditions, had started to consolidate around particular social issues. While still markedly activist, the almost rowdy activism of the hard left was beginning to grate amongst the student populous. In addition, other activist currents were surfacing in the

period: new organisation around democratisation of universities and rumblings of a new feminist movement had begun (Hilliard, 1991). Though, the most radical on-campus action was yet to occur, taking some years after the early radicalism of 1968 and 1969.

Occupation of the registry

In 1974, tensions between university administration and the student body had escalated to a remarkable level. Students, still riding the blazing embers of student power, had been heavy opponents of the militarisation of the University campus, and the investment into military research. Having themselves been subjected to the militarisation of police some years earlier, and indeed for many being subject to wire taps, observation and police harassment, the University's new focus on military research had become a thorny issue for many of the student activists. The informal learning of teach-ins and consciousness-raising efforts had taken over classroom structures in many instances, with students now educating other students on the problems with universities, the reproduction of the destructive and grossly evil capitalism, and the still increasing imperialist impulses of the anglophone west. It was not, however, the militarisation that grew into the iconic student occupation of *Flinders'* Registry Building. Indeed, much to the WSA's dismay, it was an issue of student power and a dispute over history exams which drew the students to the occupation. Students were, primarily, dismayed that their entire semester of study would be evaluated by a multi-hour single examination, rather than through applied methods they felt were more relevant to the history discipline⁸³. The University configured as a tool of social reproduction and an accelerant for capitalism begat concerns for social justice and ending the oppression of knowledge. A democratising of knowledge was now

⁸³ Notably, however, there was not one consistent view about what the new type(s) of assessment should be. Other schools in the university had implemented new pedagogies, such as peer-assessment, which were of increasing interest to the students who felt the examination was an unjust form of assessment.

on the agenda, and an occupation of the centre of organised knowledge in the University seemed a good place to start.

The growing student unrest, the growing frustration of the low-income earner and the associated oppressive actions by governments and big business are all associated with the recognition – by the oppressed and the oppressor alike – that this basic right of self-determination of the individual has been abused for too long. Why else is the so-called growing militancy of unions met with the calling for of vigilante groups etc by various elements of the community, strangely enough including businessmen and government officials? ... Eventually this stranglehold of knowledge was broken, and students began to learn from the masters they selected and followed, in order to learn from them. The idea of a university grew from this, a hierarchy of masters, or disseminators of knowledge, was set up and formalised institutionalised learning was born. Universities have changed a great deal since then but the correlation between the modern university and the university of a hundred years ago is slight. Knowledge is accessible to anyone who has the basic skills of communication ... The vast majority of knowledge available is stored in books, and not as used to be the case, with an elite of persons. (McHugh, ET 6.5, 1974)

Until 1974, *Flinders* had largely ignored its bubbling student power group, more concerned with participation in radicalism and protest than in changing or controlling the University. While Boswell had made comment in the early ETs on the state of student's role in governance, the current had never been serious enough to enact change. While *Flinders* had a relatively liberal approach, at the time, toward student observation and participation in committees and boards, it still lacked the force of its eastern State counterparts (Hilliard, 1991). This came to a head with the struggles over the History I exam, with students recently cut out of negotiations over assessment, as Hastings revisited:

The events of the first day of the occupation developed spontaneously. The trigger for the occupation was the assessment issue. There was no shadowy Maoist conspiracy to wreck the campus, despite the fact that several other campuses followed the Flinders lead and embarked on their own occupations during that month. The students just wanted the situation resolved and were to be repeatedly surprised as the occupation unfolded at the refusal of the department and the university to find a reasonable compromise... At 7.00

pm, students climbed through the ceiling to extend the occupation to include the adjacent Vice-Chancellor's and Registrar's offices [in addition to the council chamber]. Decisions by the occupiers about how to proceed were made at what were soon to become endless meetings of all the occupiers, the General Occupation Meetings. As the following day was the 1st day of term the occupiers decided to bring matters to the brink quickly by using the Vice-Chancellor's files in the occupied offices as bargaining points the next morning. ... the Pro Vice-Chancellor refused to negotiate unless the Vice-Chancellor's office was vacated. The occupants responded by declaring that they would open up one filing cabinet an hour unless negotiations began. (Hastings, 2003, pp. 89–91)

Across the period of occupation, further fuel for the anti-imperialist and anti-military WSA emerged, with evidence found of then Vice-Chancellor Professor Russell shown to be in correspondence with Washington's National Security Agency over confidential military research to occur or occurring on *Flinders'* main campus. Interestingly, the student politicians of the period had not been involved alongside the activists now occupying the Registry. The students negotiating, or at least in attempts to negotiate, with the history department had been of the general student body discussing the general conditions of their learning. In this sense, this was a true 'student power' move to occupy the Registry, transitioning into an activist front to establish and maintain control over assessment. While it had become interesting to student politic groups as the occupying students turned over files on the military relations and other secret files of the Vice-Chancellor and senior administration, it had started as a more grassroots initiative.

The Executive of the Flinders University Union Board also met that night and strongly supported the occupation. ... The statement was endorsed by all members of both the outgoing and incoming Union Boards with the exception of the Registrar, Howard Buchan, and the Treasurer, Kevin Millen. The Union Board Executive was most definitely not a radical body, instead, some of its members had been involved earlier in the year with bitter disputes with the "rads" in the Labor Club but the occupation united a wide range of students. ... The turning point in escalation of the occupation at Flinders University came with the "Doorstep" draft report prepared by occupants chosen to research the Vice-Chancellor Russell's personal files.

The report was presented to a General Occupation Meeting at 9.00 pm that Tuesday evening. The meeting decided to publish copies of some of the more damning documents and also the “Doorstep” group’s final report. Three thousand copies of the report were printed and collated. They began to be publicly distributed (on and off campus) from 8.00 am on Thursday, August 8. University Council members were sent copies. A lunchtime General Occupation meeting attended by about two hundred students voted to broaden the struggle to include US War Research.
(Hastings, 2003, pp. 93–97)

The general attitude of the occupiers was one of democratic spirit. Holding court in the council chamber the group acted more like an orderly body of the University than a group of rabble rousers. By acting to ‘free’ information the students in the occupation had worked to share the plans and secrets of the University with both their peers and the public in an attempt to show that the University was not operating in the public good.

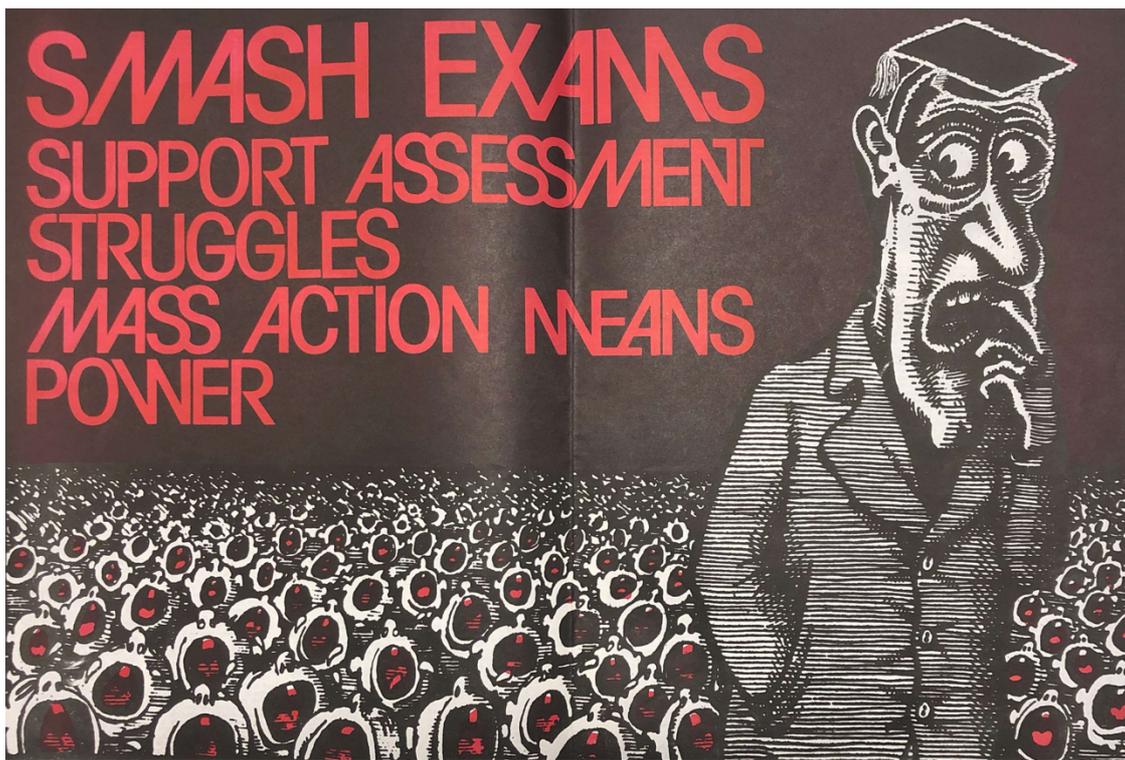


Figure 5 ‘Mass action means power’ *ET* 6.5, 1974

The occupation ultimately ended in negotiation. It left a lasting impact as the longest student occupation of a university in Australia (1 August – 28 August), and the originator of many copy protests across the nation (Hastings, 2003). While neither the history department

nor the University administration escaped unscathed, the students had failed to secure their demands in broad terms. While the negotiations were reopened with assessors, the exams were completed by that cohort of student occupiers in the form they had been originally designed. While the demands were not met, a democratising of the secrets of the University in its relation to imperialist external states had created enough current to change the Vice-Chancellor in the short term (Hastings, 2003; Hilliard, 1991). Importantly, while the student occupation was not successful in terms of its demands for power, it left a lasting impact in terms of reinstating students in positions of negotiation⁸⁴. Negotiatory committees were established alongside student consultation processes which were formalised across the University. These created avenues for lasting change amongst the University's processes and saw staff begin to appreciate students' input once more. However, not all voices were received equally during the occupation.

Women's voices in patriarchal press

The voices of women had remained largely absent from the (published) conversation, particularly in regard to their rights for student power. The women had not been, of course, silent on campus, but the historical material available is strongly weighted towards the men of the political, social and power causes of the era. During the occupation of the Registry, a new era surfaced, an era in which women spoke out against oppression, though not against the men of the occupation, but the patriarchal systems and institutions of the period. In particular, women during the occupation pushed to disseminate information about women's access to consciousness-raising tools in the form of printing access. Though there was a notable problem with access and skills, a University staffer filled the gap:

I was a girl and I was really, wasn't supposed to be printing ... [the University printer] probably trained generations of young people in that work in the

⁸⁴ Moreover, the tactics of 'occupation' informed generations of student action, from Wollongong to the Australian National University (Briedis, 2019; Murphy, 2019).

whole, understanding how propaganda works, how to, how to use it, how to source it, how to pay for it, he probably taught countless people that skill. No one really probably paid very much attention to all of his mentoring from an “official” University point of view. (Bellanca)

Access to printing was a recurrent theme across the period. The State press continued to be controlled by conservative media moguls, and the student press had largely failed to give reasonable voice to women. Even during the occupation, where ‘democratic’ discussions were occurring daily, women were provided less time to speak to their views. While this view shifted, it was not a fast change and required many women to fight the patriarchal model of university education. Moreover, flatly sexist overtones were exuded from the Russell administration during the period, giving rise to more problems to debate.

At the time, though unrecorded in the publications and outputs of the mainstream writers, was the discovery of sexist hiring practices, scholarship awards and additional expectations on female students. Even contemporary authors looking back at the occupation have missed deeper components of the structural sexism and misogyny by University administration and patriarchal student publications of the 1960s and 1970s. Though some acknowledgement has begun to surface, as, on revisiting the occupation, the ET pressed in 2019:

The occupation was orderly and tidy, with nothing intentionally trashed. At one point, several of the women claimed that sexism was occurring in the occupation – their voices were heard, and women began to play a more active and leading role. The acting VC, Max Clarke, listened to student demands and instructed history staff to come to the negotiation with students. However, the head of the history department called staff late the night before, and told them not to attend the meeting. (Wood, 2019, p. 9)

The significance of the turn amongst the occupiers is demonstrated in the front-page appearance of claims of sexism in students’ pirate publications and the growing voicing of need for unity around gender equality. This was particularly visible on the front page of the pirate

issue of On Campus (the University's magazine). The printing of a pirated issue was to serve as a gesture that women were no longer to be silenced by the University's official press:

The sexist nature of the occupation is not something that can be ignored, denied, confined to the background, or viewed as the instigator of some ideological split. The struggle of the sexes is fundamental to any revolution concerning the overthrow of the professor --- in the Flinders University situation it is the oppressed minority of students fighting for freedom of women and men alike, without the oppression from the academic administrative minority --- and the contradiction between men and women is again between the oppressed and the oppressor.
 (Anonymous student, pirate copy of 'On Campus', issue 999, 1974)

Women had begun to stake their claim in the struggle for fair assessment, too. However, this had not been the first emergence of commentary on women's rights at *Flinders*. The female students of Flinders University had made several statements on the flatly sexist behaviour both of University administration, and of other students. In a 1973 issue of ET, women editors took over the paper and published figures on the gender balance of employment at the University:

Patriarchal Hierarchy		Women	Men
ACADEMIC STAFF			
Professors	- - - - -	0	34
Readers	- - - - -	0	14
Senior Lecturers	- - - - -	4	62
Lecturers	- - - - -	6	62
Senio Tutors/Demonstrators	- - - - -	4	9
Tutors(full time)	- - - - -	13	30
Total	- - - - -	27	221
Administrative Staff	- - - - -	3	20
Library Staff(Professional)	- - - - -	15	8
Research Fellows	- - - - -	1	7
Research Assistants/Technical	- - - - -	18½	22
Staff Architect Office	- - - - -	0	4
Health Centre/Liaison Service	- - - - -	1	3
Secretaries/typists/clerks	- - - - -	149	33
Technical/Computing Staff	- - - - -	21	75½
Refectory/Cleaners/Stewards	- - - - -	37	7
Cleaning/ Caretaking/Maintenance	- - - - -	12	45
Others, includes :			
Child Care Centre, Hall of Residence	- - - - -	30	10½
Total	- - - - -	315½	458

A glimpse at the figures would indicate that most of the females employed at this university are Secretaries and that most of the males are academic. Right On Sister!!! Men hold all the positions of authority (power) - all the status jobs (best paid) - Women are the underdogs. A closer look at these figures makes the situation even worse. 9.7% of females are employed are academics, 48.1% being tutors. 47.8% of males employed are academics - 13.6% of these being tutors.
 (Burns, C. Yates ET 5.10, Woman's Day)

Calling out gender imbalance had an effect on the university administration, though it was not until the occupation a full year later that any real action was promised. Since 1972, the University had offered an interdisciplinary women's studies programme, which itself did not

require an enrolment to enter, and had been unpopular with the conservative administration presiding on the Council. By opening the course up to non-enrolled women, it had attracted healthy numbers, with the official enrolment reaching over 100 in 1974. This programme offered an entry point to women who may not have met the formal requirements for a B.A. at the time and was maintained for many years by the philosophy department. As part of the actions of occupation protestors, the women's studies course was entered into formalised spaces in the B.A. and, eventually, the additional entry requirements for female students were removed.

While women students had raised concerns about the inbuilt patriarchal nature of the university as an institution, their biggest challenge was interacting with external authorities. Indeed, the University had been subject to significant surveillance of activist activity since the late 1960s, and while the male students spoke of 'punch ups', the female students were more concerned not with the behaviour of their fellow student activists, but the nature of the State enforcement:

[during the occupation] we had very robust discussions about appropriate behaviour, about Feminism versus Marxism ... in fact, I felt safe with those people too, because I could pull people up. But I didn't feel safe in other environments on campus. And I actually had some really bad incidents happen. One, when I was running away from one of the barricades that we built. These were roadblocks we'd made because the cops were after us. And we needed to get somewhere where they couldn't find us. And that put me in great danger; but not with anyone from the occupation, that was someone else off campus. It makes me reflect back on the behaviour of those men that we hung out in the building with, as they were, it was pretty good most of the time. And we were up all night, you know, guarding doors, and finding files ... (Bellanca)

The Special Branch officers, and ASIO⁸⁵, were involved in surveilling the student activists and on regular occasions during the course of their activism, they harassed the students' community

⁸⁵ The knee-jerk over response from Australia's federal police and intelligence agencies towards Australian women's actions during the 1970s feminist movements, Aboriginal rights movements, and anti-war protest has

and families. This surveillance was particularly targeted at the women of the activist movements (Cahill, 2008; E. Smith, 2018). While this theme was raised by my two male interviewees, the female interviewees centred back on the harassment of family as a key and ongoing issue which affected female students. While they professed some of their peers, often male peers, were bound up in illegal action the level of retaliation was stark in contrast. The conversation between two of my female interviewees captures the level of observation and, to an extent, the harassment:

(Bellanca): They knew that we could rally a lot of people in a hurry to come to an action. We could disappear just as readily as we appeared because Flinders is a great campus for being able to hide. The cops who, although they did gain access to the campus later on, I'll never forget the day they left their car parked out the front of Belleview Heights, and the car got well ... it was someone who had never done a karate kick in his life, he did a karate kick and smashed the windows. And then people just jumped all over the car and pinched all this stuff out of it and [the cops] came back to this completely trashed police car, with a whole lot of students staring over Belleview Heights giving nothing away ...

(Cass): I will say, that entire crowd was photographed from hell to breakfast time.

(Bellanca): Oh, yeah, they would have been – happened a lot.

(Cass): The federal police went through the department store my mother worked at. They took a photograph with me standing on top of the car park. I was identified as one of the occupation people, not one of the generals. You know, like one of the junior standing at the top of that cliff face, it's the front carpark we're talking about, Aidan, where the registry building is. The police had parked their visiting cars right up against that little cliff face next to the building. And so, people were standing on top, that kind of grassy bench with me looking at what had happened to the cars with great mirth. ... People kind of go, "oh, those paranoid Maoists", you know, being terrified of all of these people wanting to kill them and do things all the time. Well, back then they were trying to do things to us. ... Not long after the occupation, when Special Branch went to my mother's work. They knew where she worked.

been documented extensively (Fox, 1979; Hastings, 2003; Kovac, 2015; Medlin, 2021; E. Smith, 2018) and demonstrates state hegemony overcorrecting for deviations from the *hegemon* or a reassertion of state authority in a situation 'out of (state) control'.

They knew the department, they knew the counter she worked at, no problem. You could find it very publicly. But instead, they went from the front door, asking for her by name from counter to counter identifying who they were, identifying me. All so Mum's store knew that South Australian Police Special Branch were trying to find her because her daughter was this troublesome person, this kind of activist harridan. Thank God I didn't tell my mother where I was. I wasn't being nasty to my mum. But I knew somebody was going to come looking for us. And she didn't need to be able to tell anyone. ... So, the surveillance you kind of got used to.

(Bellanca): Yeah, they went to my mother's house to serve me a warrant. Yeah, a warrant, which is complete overkill. ... And they stood over mum and tried to get an address out of her. And I'd already warned her this might happen. I just gave her a script of things she could say: "I've got a really irresponsible daughter", "I don't know where she lives", "I don't know where she is now". Well, the fact that mum was able to lie so effectively did shock me, but she just thought it was overkill too. She thought this is ridiculous, she hasn't done anything really bad. But that, that was two Commonwealth police officers spending a whole lot of energy. And they weren't just doing it for me, they're obviously tracking down any of us that they thought they could harass – or worse. And of course, once you got hold of some of those Special Branch files, when they folded the Special Branch, decades later, we found out all the stupid activities they were sent on. Like, I found out they were involved in massive operation following us and doing all that sorts of inappropriate photographs and stuff. ...

(Cass): It would also be fair to say that student involvement in matters that really did concern them like bloody assessment procedures, were not as removed from the response of what happened when it escalated. You know, like, people kind of go, "oh, that was obviously a pretext for people to take the direction", but in retrospective look at it, the reality was the history students had really tried very hard to combat a very draconian assessment system.

The issues of surveillance, harassment and the reflexive connection between being a student and being an activist to have appropriate rights seemed natural to my interviewees. They referred several times to learning about the patriarchy, but also about learning how to take control of a situation, assess an 'enemy' and organise effectively - lessons they said were more important than many they learnt during their actual studies:

These huge meetings, democracy gone crazy, where everyone would sit in the big council chamber. You, you'd learn about meeting procedure, but you'd learn how to speak and make the most of the two minutes you might get, especially if you're a woman, you get less time to speak than the men. So, you had to be very economic in what you said and you had to be able to back it up with evidence. ... that learning, those skills, and learning how to debate, how to get up and speak to a pretty intimidating audience. They have lasted me my whole life; it means that I just don't get freaked out. I can get up and speak at a rally or a big meeting of very hostile people and – I am at home. And I don't think I would [have] some of those skills, but I also don't think I would have had the courage to know that it's possible to win, if I hadn't been through that experience of occupation and the stuff on campus that followed after that, you know, to learn how you were gonna survive, like, who you could ally yourself with or who we're gonna stay clear of. I mean, as young women, it was a pretty risky environment to be in. (Bellanca)

Learning to navigate student activism was seen, by my participants, as part of being a student and something that they needed to participate in. This was not just *prima facie* studenthood, but an engaged intellectualism required of a university student at *Flinders*. To work against the patriarchy, the hegemonic State and the antithetical 'good' of the Administration were just natural parts of being a student at the time.

The female students were also keenly involved in process of networking and establishing support networks for other women who had been in bad situations. Indeed, the early activist networks in South Australia formed spaces for caring for women after dealing with violence, abuse and sexual assault, as well as post-abortion care, amongst other supports:

There was a kind of explosion of an active, real feminism. I suppose actually on the ground, socially, as a kind of study group and consciousness-raising, you know, but, it wasn't a silent thing. As Bellanca said, the way – the number of debates we had, we formed women's caucuses to caucus inside the occupation, as well, deliberating on the significance of these issues to women. And in a lot of the other things that we did, if we needed to have a women's caucus, we had one. You know, Bellanca was referring to knowing that you weren't alone, it was actually followed through that way from the women, you know, because it wasn't, there wasn't a – a men's caucus. But you know, and amongst the people in those networks, were people who established the very, very first refuges in Australia. [redacted] happened to found some of the first various women's refuges, and it was in Adelaide. But simultaneously,

these things were being established interstate as well ... but it was very, very strong, you know, and there was a very strong Women's Health Network, all of a sudden, you know, came to prominence out of the women in different parts of these organisations. ... If somebody needed to escape and go, you know, we would say "go speak to her". Have your bag packed, have someone keep an eye on the place there, you know, like it was at that level. And so that was blossoming at the same time. I mean, you're never far from anybody really, the networks very much overlapped ... So, for example, if there was a serious problem with, say, a refuge situation, it wasn't unfeasible that somebody could reach out to a whole group of people and say, "look, we need to build the extension on this building in the next month". It wasn't unfeasible to do something like that for someone. (Cass)

These networks were formed as a response to keep female students, and by extension, women of the community, safe in Adelaide. The organic organisation of female students in the 1970s became formalised in structures of the State to support women fleeing domestic violence amongst other patriarchal societal problems⁸⁶. Without the grassroots activism, organising and protest of women, these structures would have remained absent, or at the least ineffectual. Women's organising during this period at *Flinders* was a microcosm of the feminist movement broadly, though the networks established in the women's studies course were undeniably progressive and organic, in the Gramscian sense. Women were organising around class issues as much as around feminist issues and building networks to support other women was part of their *organic activism*. Moreover, this activism extended into networks which affected all branches of education, including teachers, '[t]he Women's Studies Resource Centre was set up in Adelaide by feminists... [t]hey sent out boxes of non-sexist resources to teachers in the country' (Gaskell & Taylor, 2003, p. 159). Indeed, the educated activism of consciousness-raising and support networks remains a highlight of *Flinders'* historical activism and education footprint to date, appearing in several internal marketing materials but more officiously in *Flinders* headlining women's studies department.

⁸⁶ Though in this subsumption much of the security of the communal work was lost.

A pattern of student organising

Across the 1960s and 1970s, student organising mobilised in a distinctive form, with grassroots organisations of students taking varying levels of power; on top were an elite of predominantly white men who created a political landscape in which the others either engaged or ignored. While the *bona fide* political alignment of these various groups was differentiated across the political spectrum, the game was similar for all of them. Their aim was to raise fellow students' awareness about the state of the world and the power of students. On the successful introduction of the SRC, after the negotiation with Karmel, new avenues of representation opened which enabled students from outside the clubs' elite access to high level conversation. While this diminished the forward momentum of the student groups across the period, it was an opening of democratic process to the student body and a demonstrable win in the history of student organising. Indeed, in the creation of the SRC, clubs were able to continue in a relatively continuous mode. They had not won the power they had hoped for, in securing a dictatorial advance, but they had created a space for democracy in the institution. Social organising continued to take shape and grow, and the clubs continued to recruit members to their various causes unscathed by the vainglory of SRC membership. The allegiances of the SRC came and went, and students' genuine grass roots activity, while organised by an elite of the students, continued as it had. The student press provided powerful commentary on the student political scene, for as long as it remained independent, though, as Roscoe notes, it rapidly degenerated after the 1970s:

It's interesting to watch the Empire Times from the first one with Superman.
Going through and then becoming nicely student bourgeois quite rapidly.
You know, very much zap comics then. Pretty scattered and all sort of shit.
(Roscoe)

The 1960s and 1970s offered an opportunity for a very short period for the idyllic elites to experiment with political personas, learn about the organisation of society and make something

of a mess. This culturally permitted revolutionary moment was understood as such, with the expectation that the students would eventually *settle down*. The structures that were produced by students during the period, however, were largely maintained until the Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) of the 2000s which abolished all mandatory union structures for students, led by the LNP in federal government. Indeed, even after VSU, the structure of the Student Representative Council and student clubs still exists today, though the political motives and alignment of membership of the councils and clubs have changed dramatically.

Students in positions of governance at the time were never considered to be on the front edge of politics, particularly enlightened, or even particularly good at what they did. What mattered to the students of the day was that democratic structures existed, that the student groups could critique and direct those students in representative roles, and that their efforts could make at least some difference to the nature and structure of the institutions and their courses of study. The dramatic shift between the 1960s and 2010s is the loss of students' interest in maintaining democracy and voice in universities. This is not to suggest that students lack democratic impulse, but that the fundamental democratic nature has departed from the structures of the universities. The hard-fought battles of students against their institutions, or in several instances the calm cups of tea in the Vice-Chancellors office have given way to a new form of university management which paints students as customers and disempowers them in representative positions. In this complex structural over mythologised space, the students who were once developing critical consciousness, creating new spaces for students to occupy, represent, and be. There is a collapse into students playing at federal political reproduction, no longer in the clubs and associations, but right in the heart of 'representative' politics in the university. At *Flinders*, the SRC, now conceptualised as the 'student association' has become the political playground for ideological students whose aspirations are towards federal politics, not authentic student matters. While not a stark change, the loss of other modes of democratic

representation coinciding with student politics' take-over of the SRC means fewer students than ever have the opportunity to organise from a 'grass roots' level – authentically operating in a mode which raises consciousness, fights for their social group, or subverts extant privileging hierarchies and classed, raced and gendered social structures. Finally, the absorption of the liberated press, the Empire Times, into the institution itself in 2006, resuming in 2013 as a publication of the University *not* the student body, has created conditions which allow hegemonic control of the student union by the left faction of the Australian Labor Students Association in close conjunction with the University's Administration. With the ET no longer home to critique and political debate, but degraded into vague identity politics, promotional vignettes and pet photos, the critical edge of the mainstream, structural, student association has been lost, in part by hegemonic forces at higher levels within the University, and in part due to student elites themselves repositioning and capitulating to demands of the University and state politicians to hold onto a dreg of power⁸⁷. This is a losing game. In a world where student politicians, clubs and organisations are as strongly ideologically and hegemonically aligned with the state and the vice-chancellors, opportunities for students' organising seem relatively hopeless. However, the demand for organic organising has not diminished. Students still face difficult conditions and with the massification of higher education, more students seek avenues to share their voices.

This thesis now turns to a critical examination of the student politicians. Drawing on ethnographic field work, I examine the highly political, hegemonic work of student politicians in their elected and paid roles, more akin to University Staff than a counter-culture or revolutionary force *for* their social group. This exploration follows its own, relative, entering 'the field' in joining a student politics national conference. Only by comparing the origins of *Flinders'* student activist and political history can the true nature of the University and its

⁸⁷ A subsumption of those purportedly interested in class-conscious student power back into the common sense hegemony.

constituent parts be examined in a meaningful mode. Moreover, to avoid a conceptualisation of students which is entirely negative, additional exploration is required to highlight the real actions and role of students in the institution. While the political motivations of student politicians remain as *dicey* as they were during the height of student power movements, the need for students' democratic representation and grassroots organisation has not diminished. Nor has the need for authentic person-to-person organising around issues that matter to society.

Chapter 6

Trying on daddy's suit:

The failure of student politics for representation and relevance in late modernity

A reimagining of the 'philosophy of praxis' is needed. Higher education and global politics are enduring catastrophic and fundamental changes to their core being. Only through novel research and a new conception of 'praxis' in the twenty-first century can politics and cultural studies progress toward a fuller/deeper understanding the systematic shifts of power, ruptures of being and ontological shifts of contemporary society. Beyond merely understanding, an urgent task for research now is to consider an agenda for those speaking back and empowering more voices to reposition politics and culture for systemic change at the edge of collapse. This is a mighty task. Here, in this empirical chapter, this thesis aims to provide a conception of politics, a theory of culture, and a bounded understanding of student activism based on the theoretical and historical work above, in a sense progressing towards a new conception of student activism and politics which holds at its core the values of radicalism, epistemic understanding, and political unity. This includes a post-1960-student-uprising reimagining of the current political landscape, and possibilities for new organic intellectuals in the 2020s. Here, empirical and theoretical research is required to investigate the context since the 1960s hallmarked as the years of 'student radicalism' when it was momentarily centre stage. Importantly, a desperate need has been signalled for new ways of being and doing in culture, politics and economics – from theorists, as above, but also from students themselves.

This chapter works to identify *a* sketch of the contemporary student politician come occasional activist. This does not seek to represent a comprehensive framework of student activism but rather intends to provide one view on how student activism and politics emerge and are connected. *Flinders* has a strong tradition of radicalism, yet in recent times it has given

way to largely political ‘dress up’. The latter part of this thesis will play two kinds of activism against each other to form a stronger understanding of what being an activist is and can be in an Australian university in 2021: the first is the political show pony and the second is the organic intellectual. This work takes on character from my lived experience as a student activist, then academic activist, momentary student politician, and student representative and committee member. Three distinctive roles for students emerge in this broad student activist, advocate and representative space. These non-exclusive types hold with the historical moment explored above:

- (1) student politicians and representatives;
- (2) student activists and protestors; and
- (3) student power interests.

Each of these types of activism and politics are captured below ‘in the moment’ of performing their activism, in the telling of narrative through my experience therein, and through interviews which offer a ‘frozen moment’ for examination, reflection and analysis. None of these upcoming sketches are designed to ‘overextend’ or to paint a picture of all students, and none are conclusive.

There are several extensions of activism present in the loosely organised groups above, though they share common modes of expression: picket protest, letter writing, reflection, consciousness-raising, or educative meetings. The distinction comes down to motivators. In some instances, these originate extrinsically, as will be explored in this chapter and Chapter 7, as State political motives which see students progress into membership of political parties, eventually to serve as functionaries for the state. Alternatively, as explored in Chapter 9, students’ progress in and *out* of activist expressions (for example picket protest, sit-ins, letter-writing), but continue to serve akin to Gramsci’s organic intellectual. These students are motivated from concern for their social group. These individuals, contra the student politicians

of Chapter 6 and 7 and contra the underdeveloped activist/intellectual of Chapter 8, serve an educative, organisational and intellectual purpose in elevating their class's consciousness (Gramsci, 1996). A more complete consideration of the organic intellectual activist is reserved for exploration until the end of this doctoral thesis, as while it has been partially elaborated in the history above, the far dominant group, in terms of raw numbers, are students who participate in an aspirational, not fully realised, activism which does not yet bear the requisite features of organic activism. Considering the theory explored in Chapter 2, the complication of identity politics and populism, the gap between theory and practice, and the continued annexation of 'culture' for the advancement capital, then, serious problems face students who might otherwise act as organic activists. In this regard, none of the students whose experiences form the basis for the data in Chapters 6, 7 or 8 can be held (at least singularly) accountable for their failure to convert into an 'intellectual'. Ultimately, this is reserved for a small few, who in their own ways often 'fall out' of being an activist in the long term which still fails to position them in Gramsci's imaginary as the 'organic intellectual'. While this thesis argues that some *organic intellectuals qua activists* perform the function of intellectual class leadership, bestowed upon them by comrades, the realisation of this model of activism in 2021 for students is far from realised. This chapter, instead, sees political populism and performative 'activism' rife amongst the student body⁸⁸, an embodiment of 'action for personal gain', itself a rhetoric of the right's politicians who often critique 'the activists'. These actors, in many instances in a literal sense, employ activism to raise a set of political values amongst a group of people as a tool for reproducing state hegemony, while left leaning ideas are cited at the core of the student politician, would be activist, ultimately the bent toward upward mobility in extant political systems gives way to acritical reproduction and ripples through the state political apparatus as highlighted in the new politics identified in Chapter 2.

⁸⁸ A narrow group of students itself. Most students mirror the above evocative 'turn up, tune in, piss off' type.

Student politicians: Trying on daddy's suit

At a point in the 1960s, left politics fit students like a glove. Rather than universities accepting only traditionally rich white men, suddenly a diversification enabling working class white men to enter higher education created a political force *of the working class* with access to intellectual spaces (Barcan, 2011; Forsyth, 2014; Marginson & Considine, 2000). This was particularly the case in the anglophone west university landscape. Here, student politics erupts from entanglement with theoretical education, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, where students with an interest in praxis were politically mobilised (Armstrong, 2001; Murphy, 2015a; Pellew & Taylor, 2020). As the working class youth of the 1960s began to enter universities, they brought with them ideas from the cultural ferment of the time, including Marxist ideas of worker-student alliances, an advancement of trade unionism, and somewhat progressive liberatory ideals (Armstrong, 2001; Brooks et al., 2015; Eaton, 2002; Rochford, 2006; Squire, 2020). The characterisation of student activism, particularly student power movements, falls into the mass action resulting from class-based eruptions led by organic intellectuals and belongs with Chapter 9. However, the important feature of this historical legacy is what it left behind. As Barcan (2007) demarcated, by 1978 Australian student revolt had 'expired'. What was left behind after the end of the radical moments of student power and mass participation were systems and structures of political animation which, now, lacked popular interest from bodies outside of immediately political circles. In particular, these now had their allegiance directly with state political parties. While a contingent of students had always been *political*, the systems which structurally fought for students' *place* were animated by the broader student body, not those state political groups. Now, fractured identity politics, individualistic action, neoliberal institutions and the failing of student unions proceed. A new political animal emerged from the ruins of the old student power space. This saw an annexation of student power into student politics and a collapse of the goal of the *new left* to create unity

and class consciousness. In particular, the *power movement* of the time languished and the new turn to performance over commitment to class-struggle saw a ‘betrayal of the “authentic” political moments of 1968 and 1976’ (Brabazon, 2005, p. 11).

Education systems, from a Marxist perspective, had long been seen as systems of cultural reproduction which condition new generations for *work* and *participation* in the capitalist system (Bourdieu, 1998; Bunn et al., 2020; Katz, 2001; Persell & Cookson, 1985). However, the conceptualisation of education as the tool of social reproduction is inadequate in the Gramscian perspective. Indeed, *all* interactions are contained within a set of dispositions and ideologies which comprise hegemonic thought. Any perceivable interaction in society may contain reproductive tendencies for the continuation of that hegemony (Gramsci, 1996). It is then possible to extend assumptions about the education system to engulf many aspects of the *bloc* of young students lives⁸⁹. In an important way, what is left of *positioning* of youth is a superset of conditioning and fundamentally capitalist modes of *learning about the world* (Brabazon, 2005; Knopp, 2012). The view that a young person is necessarily incomplete in capitalist systems can be extended to studenthood and forms a fundamental key in understanding the reproduction of state hegemonic power in universities and broader education systems (Freire, 2014). Moreover, the very nature of ‘learning to be’, put precisely as developing an *epistemology of capitalism*, is frequently exploited by the *hegemon* in attacks on the students who are not, per the rhetoric, fully formed, and who do not enjoy the relative autonomy of a middle-class adult. The positioning of students as inferior in higher education has contributed starkly to the rise of a fractional group of student politicians. These politicians simultaneously vie for political hegemony over their peers and are exploited and disenfranchised by broader national political apparatuses. In extension, the national political parties work as operatives under and for

⁸⁹ Most being under 30. A specific, frozen, conceptualisation of youth culture is unnecessary in this context as it is safe to say any person *over 30* in a university at some point was young and has existed through relations of cultural reproduction. Their current participation in the education system would see them in some part of this relation, too.

creation, expansion and reproduction of state hegemony through their manipulation of the student politicians of universities⁹⁰.

The fracture of student power and student politics, as it emerged through the 1960s and 1970s, gave way to a loss of popular support for organic student political campaigns and saw a departure from student politics *qua* the politics of students towards ‘student politics’ *qua* performativity: an identity-making space for future politicians, literally ‘student’ + ‘politics’. Importantly, this largely anglophone western move has had a much longer tail across countries in South America, Africa and Asia, where student power is still closely linked with the politics of the students and is more *organically* connected to the movements to progress education towards consciousness-raising and equitable fair societies (Atilés-Osoria, 2013; Melchiorre, 2020; Tshishonga, 2019). Yet, even in these regions, a decay of student power as connected to student politics is occurring, particularly as *partially democratised*⁹¹ states begin to capitulate to the hegemony of the Anglophone institutions and move student politics in universities toward political training spaces (Javid, 2019; Kuttig & Suykens, 2020; Snellinger, 2018; D. S. O. Wolf, 2019). Indeed, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the global move toward populism poses a significant threat to liberal democracies (Stockemer, 2019). Moreover, it has rippling effects into education institutions, where elements of populism are gripping the already performative arena of student politics and making their way beyond the realm of the student into the arena of university leadership.

We are living in an age of *popular* activism, particularly amongst young people who moved into adulthood during the 2010s. Indeed, ecological concern has been a key feature of young peoples’ protest for the better part of 15 years (N. Fraser, 2021). They are a successful

⁹⁰ Though, of course, these relations are not equal. In fact, the vectors of political ‘power’ present here are not even on the same plane. One, the student, relegated to an experimental exploratory space. The other, an instrument of systemic power and control to be captured by the hegemonic political group.

⁹¹ Political ‘training’ takes on different forms in countries with governments who are not based on fundamentally democratic principles. Indeed, politics itself is radically different in other states where power is decided by the minority in explicit form.

drawer of crowds, but an ineffectual form of hegemonic state transformation. Moreover, ‘climate action’ has failed to be *enough* of an issue to vote out a government (Leichenko & O’Brien, 2019; Moor et al., 2020; O’Brien et al., 2018; Pirgmaier & Steinberger, 2019). It could in fact be the case that there is not yet a populist leader of a climate party, though Greta Thunberg often comes close to being an ideologue⁹² for all things environmentally progressive (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020; Jung et al., 2020). Young people now are increasingly well versed in the anatomy of activism as those who enter universities now are frequently of an age where throughout much of their young lives, activism abounded, having participated or not. Here, students come with a literacy of activism as a kind of bread and butter for political action. The ‘millennial’ now has a mode of coping with their bleak political, economic and environmental outlook. The question then, of what kind of political opportunity a young person has, enters the lexicon of politics, activism or ‘nothing’. Indeed, as Fraser (2021) advances, in contrary to the bleak view above, young people today have generated a unitary movement in the form of wide ranging ecological activism, which draws together feminists, LGBTQI+ peoples, anti-racists and anarchists alike. This new literacy of unitary politics feels something of a new hope for drawing together what has been a fractured, dissident and polarising political space. However, while Fraser’s outlook is hopeful, the structures and systems of identity politic activism still stand strong. Political training for students still sits at the forefront of the student politics arena, and a reunification with student power seems like a distant dream.

⁹² Be it in caricature on the right (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020), or in a kind of forgetful haze after the rise of COVID-19 (Jandrić et al., 2020), while Greta’s thought leadership in this space has incited ecological revolt, young and old alike, the dominant political powers of the world remain hegemonic, in calm ‘control’ of the situation. Indeed, ecological activism is considered a fringe outside identity politics, as the unitary group transcends political boundaries (Hobsbawm, 1996). Indeed, the weak ecological form of climate activism is enough to discredit the movement from inside – an insistence that corporations and government are the soul originators of the ‘climate problem’ is farcical and a negation of personal action as *one* component of the global picture – indeed, a misguided ‘I’ll take time off school, because I won’t have a future’ in a kind of self-fulfilling cycle owing partly to a lack of responsibility, and partly to a lack of radicalism. In an unintended *Trash of the Titans*: ‘can’t someone else, do it?’ bonanza.

Global politics of disruption

Global politics is enduring an era of disruption (Hawkins et al., 2019; Müller, 2016). The core strengths of liberal democracies globally are being eroded by the rising tide of populist movements. As ‘ordinary citizens’ feel empowered through a rhetoric of ‘reclaiming control’ and disestablishing elitist old-world institutions which hallmark politics the world over, the foundations of democracy shake (Kazin, 2016; Mudde, 2004). Increasingly, politicians disconnected from the public – by their own rhetoric, or through the enlargement of others – are turning into public enemies: profiteering, scandalous and self-interested. The end, for these politicians, is in sight; not as the end of the corrupt, corporatised and self-serving politics, but from the threat of the rise of populism, a debauched and twisted form of political leadership which threatens the fundamental nature of political organisation, towards constitutional dictatorship (Hawkins et al., 2019). The authoritarian adjacent politician, yet singularly important and representative, heralds a rekindling of the monocratic vision no longer incompatible with capitalism (Müller, 2016). In the anglophone west, democratic politics has contorted itself in a snap back against ‘welfare state’ policy (W. Brown, 2015). The era of installing broken neoliberal policies (D. Harvey, 2005) in new arenas is an overtly conspicuous prime-time drama piece masquerading in the guise of importance with reference to seemingly ancient institutions. This depiction of politics as a tweet, a prime-time drama programme, or punchy slogan, captures the short-lived emotional nature of populist politics (Brabazon et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 2019). However, in spite of its seeming responsiveness to new media attention spans (Grasso, 2019; Watson & Barnes, 2021) and the continued swell of emotionally charged identity politics (Hobsbawm, 1996; Moffitt, 2017), populism is not a configuration of a democratic impulse in late-capitalist society. Indeed, ‘mythological’ production of individual ability to the end of radical popularity and the politics of emotion play a much larger part in the populist politics of the twenty-first century (Campanella & Dassú, 2019). Moreover, during

the COVID-19 global health crisis, the spaces occupied by executive decisions in democratic nations grew, and executive power and authority expanded. In less democratically secure nations, footings were gained by new political powers and groups with unknown impacts (Afsahi et al., 2020). Considering and defining populism is a fraught space, with multiple interpretations and several authors identifying a binary nature, and others a spectrum. As raised in Chapter 2, and as Moffitt (2017) argues, in Australian politics there would be next to no contenders in the populist arena should we hold to Mudde's (2004) depiction.

To fully understand activism, and specifically why student activism and education are clearly linked historically, a conception of an individual's capacity for action is required. Theorists of activism have cited both natural 'structural' responses at the borders of immense obscured ontological structures which govern human action and a need for *understanding* culture and politics *to be an activist* as an expression of human agency (Altbach, 2007; Klemenčič et al., 2015; Murphy, 2015b). Indeed, much recent theorisation about activism tends to be an agentive understanding of human behaviour without serious engagement with theory (Klemenčič, 2020; Klemenčič et al., 2015). The atheoretical work of recognised scholars in the activist space is a serious problem for those analysing the structure and nature of activist work and the nuance of student activism – as beyond a nexus of education and exercise in agency. Further, much extant theorisation of activism takes on a particularly anti-Marxist character in the United States, where a proliferation of activist theorisations occurs. While Altbach provides useful context, seeing student's politics as a microcosm in higher education – indeed, exclusively in higher education – there is a focus then on contemporary ideological currents (Altbach, 1989; Altbach & Cohen, 1990), rather than a deep theorisation of activism as process of responding to hegemonic state forces in society. Complicating this space is the neo-Marxist turn, which tends to claim Gramsci's writing as a post-Marx, (post)modern, linguistically inclined series of discourses as explored in Chapter 1 and 2 (McNally, 2015). While some useful

theorisation of ‘agency’ in political contexts emerges from this (post)modern turn, the texts are limited in their explicatory power due to a preoccupation with discourse and a collapse of culture into language. On the other hand, a strong determinism, an often-evoked impulse in Marxism, plagues extant political interpretations of Gramsci’s work. It is important to centre, here, that Gramsci proposed, in earlier work, an understanding of how individuals may develop, through *struggle*, a profound nuanced new consciousness *with* their social group. Gramsci proposes a ‘critical consciousness’ arising from natural processes of class engagement, an early formation of the organic intellectual, or at least a key perspective in the development of the organic intellectuals. Acknowledging the ongoing process of development, noting that in some instances organic intellectuals – *qua* class leaders – may take many years to emerge, Gramsci depicts a kind of ‘agency’ which speaks to economic determinism, a current in Marxism, and equally responds to collapses of ontology into epistemology (Gramsci, 1977). Indeed, the reproduction of hegemony is also presented as a part of this complex process, explored fully in *Sections from the Prison Notebooks*, initially captured in a discussion on the (re)formation of a state:

it is not the economic structure which directly determines political activity, but rather the way in which that structure and the so-called laws which govern its development are interpreted. These laws have nothing in common with natural laws—even granting that natural laws too have no objective, factual existence, but are the constructs of our intelligence, designed to facilitate study and teaching. Events do not depend on the will of a single individual, nor on that even of a numerous group. They depend on the wills of a great many people, revealed through their doing or not doing certain acts and through their corresponding intellectual attitudes. And they depend on the knowledge a minority possesses concerning those wills, and on the minority’s capacity to channel them more or less towards a common aim, after having incorporated them within the powers of the State.
(Gramsci, 1977, p. 49)

Here, Gramsci characterises political action *qua* activism as initiative under hegemony, conditioned through their interaction with pre-existent social structures. This is an important

point to reemphasise, as, by Gramscian definition, student politicians' action does not emerge out of their development of knowledge within state hegemony. This is explored further below.

Importantly, Gramsci is highlighting four key features of the organic intellectual and societal organisation in general terms: (1) economy does not determine behaviour; (2) interpretations of structures, via laws, provide the base of *discipline* which enforces hegemony; (3) the laws which determine the enforcement of a given hegemony are constructs, and thus may be challenged, particularly in education contexts; and (4) mass action, for example protest action or mass education, can have real effect on these constructed laws particularly if opportunities are offered to subaltern classes to analyse and critique them (Gramsci, 1977). A new understanding of student activism can emerge here, which does not disregard the extant agentive theorisation in the literature, but builds from a stronger understanding of society broadly in the Gramscian tradition. Indeed, the relation between education and critical consciousness, in a *freedom* from economic determinism, gives rise to an understanding of why activism occurs frequently in student contexts. Across history, as Gramsci had observed, those in positions to learn – formally or through community – would often provide basis for social group action in the form of protest or other dissident behaviour as a form of class-based political action. In a sense, education provides the opportunity for class consciousness to develop, which Gramsci suggests, through formalised structures, facilitates a likely impulse towards traditional intellectualism as an individual is elevated. For the development of an organic intellectual, following the passage above, social group consciousness must be raised concomitantly (Gramsci, 1977).

Lessons from the politicians: A post-mortem

Student politics is rife with power struggles, diplomacy and play. In this complex learning landscape, where there are real stakes, students vie for political power over their peers after having relative status afforded to them by their institutions. They are given the opportunity

to access relatively large sums of money and distribute services and ideas as they see fit, provided they have majority control of the institutions SRC. At *Flinders*, the Flinders University Student Association was established by the University and remains a wholly owned and controlled entity of the University itself. In this sense, student politicians are working within the university structure, and are dependent on it for the continuation of their positions. They rely on the state's good will to make provisions for their actions and afforded positionality. Many student politicians are passionate, care about their communities, or have particular issues they wish to see addressed in the student community. Importantly, however, there are drastic and ineffectual qualities to student association structures which prevent democracy at *Flinders*. Indeed, while this study is bound to an examination of *Flinders*, Chapter 7 explores the national student political arena in a broader demonstration of some of this dysfunctionality. Informant Clair provides a bridge, an illustration of the changes from historical forms of student associations into contemporary contexts. Those like her have found it difficult to make a real impact and have opted out of the politics. Here some student politicians make their work to leverage their limited power to make other's lives difficult and to prevent real systemic change:

I couldn't do it anymore. And I just went, you know what, this is not worth my sanity. But look, many of them were passionate and engaged and I think that's really important. ... I come from a family who has worked in government. ...there's an ethics [of] "if you have a problem instead of just complaining about it, you should do something about it". ... I just started spending a lot of time down at the Oasis, the Student Cultural Centre. And a lot of students would have issues and they come talk to me, and you know, at first, I'd be astounded but then I'd be trusted, I'd be a friend. And that was great. But I realised that there were lots of students who were falling through the cracks, who weren't as vocal. I've also got friends with disabilities, and because ... I do a lot of things ... I guess I over commit and under promise... Yeah, I sort of started working with [redacted – guidance councillor] and that was when people started noticing me like, from politics. I had this one sort of moment where my life wasn't going the way I wanted it. ... And the Be a Better Human campaign [a student politics campaign against sexual assault on campus], I guess I really took that campaign on board, in a deep sense. So, you could almost say that was the moment I decided to start

actually getting involved in the student politics. I was drawn into some of their effective projects, and I decided was just going to keep doing projects.

(Clair)

The recruitment of student politicians often follows a less organic emergence; while Clair's involvement started through community engagement in a cultural scene, most of the student politicians I met at *Flinders* had been recruited by friends from their High Schools or their classmates. The Flinders University Student Association (FUSA) runs several staff-maintained student-led campaigns and projects and had been quite successful with the production of mental health and anti-sexual assault campaigns, which had been adopted nationally. While these projects were conceived as student ideas, the execution was almost entirely staff effort. Many university projects involving students follow this pattern. Indeed, many do not involve the students themselves at all, particularly those in marketing spaces. Here, the eager student is an enthusiastic ally in the production of campaigns which increase the University's market presence and image, though it might have the by-product of supporting students along the way. Significantly, the University benefits from having students 'in elected positions', who they can use for marketing and affirmation on their decision making which they offset through paying 12 'student' salaries⁹³. The transition into representation, from community liaison and project supporter, is not linear, but many FUSA student politicians described leadership happening to them all at once. Indeed, as Clair continued:

From there, it kind of moved into a new space, a bit of an uncomfortable one, I was a bit of a reluctant leader. And I think that it was a problem in that I didn't feel like I was a leader in student politics, not the way that say some of the others were like, for example, [student president, name changed:] Marlon is a really great example of someone who knows he's a leader. [former student president, name changed:] Mella, she was the same. And Marlon definitely got that from [former student president:] Ollie. And I think Ollie didn't know how to use us all effectively. Saying that, Mella did care, she had a better

⁹³ At *Flinders*, student politicians are paid between \$10,000 and \$32,000 p.a. by the university for their work. At other universities this ranges between \$4,200 and \$88,000, typically stipulated as an honorarium as a percentage based on the total Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). Moreover, students in national positions are sometimes paid top-up funds either by their institution, or by the organisation.

rapport with her people. And she was able to work both sides, both factions, which was fantastic in that there was that wonderful negotiation. I was expecting that with Ollie and when that didn't happen, that's when I started realising that, at that level, the student politicians of the Student Association, that was too abstract for me. I couldn't actually represent my colleagues – the quieter students. And that was really getting to me. To address [this] I started trying to do focus groups and finding out what students really need. I had all the “sales data”, but I had no actual data from students.

(Clair)

The stratification of student politicians, as connected with elected roles in the Association, above the student body here clearly emerges. Student politics acts at, as Clair says, an abstract level driven by ‘sales data’ and the relative political power afforded them by the institution. This is, though, a generous characterisation of the actual work of student politicians during her term, particularly as many of those took *no* action. Moreover, at *Flinders*, those who claim to represent their colleagues are small in number, and fewer still have any real democratic impulse or desire to hear from the students themselves – in any mode. This struggle is evident in Clair's attempt at obtaining empirical data to operate from as a representative:

After the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Authority [TEQSA] conference, I realised that the Student Association needed to have case studies, numbers and interviews, to draw from, to represent from. We are responsible for big cohorts as politicians. Mine, as “over 25s”, is a really big cohort and it goes across all of the other offices. So having the data was essential – in my view, and I wonder if that was a bit of a threat to them [other politicians]. I just needed them to be honest with me and talk to me openly, and I think that's a problem in student politics. At a really high level a lot of it is just politically driven, rather than authentic student activism. And that's the two separate definitions for me: student activism, a student is going and be active in their communities, doing things to benefit their communities, change their communities, drive the communities. I love Students as Partners [SaP] as a way forward through that. But at student politics – that high level of politics is driven by state and federal party politics, which drives student politics. I feel like a lot the other voices, the quieter achievers, they get lost in voice, they get lost in student politics. I think that's been a big problem with

Activate and Unite⁹⁴, I should note, I ran with both of them. You know, the problem is that there's those years of entrenched competitiveness. (Clair)

Here, the bifurcated nature of student politics is explained, driven partly by the election cycle and partly by state and federal politics. At *Flinders*, the dominant groups are both divisions of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the competition between the 'Activate' and 'Unite' factions is fierce. While collected under a singular banner party, their views differ on a range of economic and ecological issues, which pit them against one another. These political groups of student politics will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Student politics serves a particular function in the University as a space for students to compete and practice political behaviours. The Student Representative Council established in the late 1960s is now inhabited by the Young Labor Club, rather than being an open body for the election of students from the broad student body. While the elections are open to regular student nominees, the federal parties sponsor student politicians to run campaigns and advertising for their candidates which prohibits all but the most financial from running 'independently' against a party. At *Flinders*, not holding to a particular allegiance in the politics landscape is also a death warrant, with the recourse from the party being to block your 'motions' and prevent your expenditure on initiatives:

There was a point with Ollie. I just said, look, I'm putting my hands up. ... I will vote with you when I can, I'll vote for things that I believe in. I won't actively vote against you. But at the same time, this is making me completely ineffective. I can't make any motions because I'm not attending those secret cabal meetings that happen in Humanities. There was an insinuation that I was trying to spy on them. There was no way, I would never. ... I went from being a general member to Mature Age Representative and then into being a student representative for the People and Culture Committee. So, that's who I am this year. I find that's really great. At the moment, we have a meeting tomorrow, and we've just been doing unconscious bias training. And that's really the sort of space that I want to be in, is where people are actually doing things that can help students in my immediate community. And I think

⁹⁴ These constitute two dominant parties of student politics in Australia. These parties are explored in detail in chapter 7.

that was the problem for student politics. Where I came from was that I like in that dig on a community level, not come at it from a top-down political model. (Clair)

The size of the Association has grown since its re-inception, following a dismantling of the Flinders Student's Union with Voluntary Student Unionism, and since 2013 has been exponential. Initially delegated some representational power and authority over Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF) monies from students, the FUSA has grown to control all Clubs and Academic Associations in the University and employs more than 10 professional staff members. While it is an official entity of the University, the student politicians govern the body in a limited sense. In this regard, they have a 'filter' of control over what is approved for expenditure and decision-making for every other club and association in the University⁹⁵. As such, seemingly perpetual issues arise around student politics, particularly as they retain substantive control of students' affairs:

In the Postgraduate Students Association⁹⁶ (PSA), we had a Unity president. Activate kept trying to interfere in the PSA. I was secretary. I was taking minutes, and I was getting frustrated because the undergraduate president would interfere, they would stop us from doing things with their higher level of influence. They effectively rendered clubs and societies who are not favoured, or endorsed, completely useless. Whereas the [prominent association], they're a group that had real support from politics on high. But the PSA, we had all those hands and could do nothing with them. Because if we weren't doing what, you know, Activate wanted us to, we weren't allowed to do anything. And we had so many postgraduates who were coming to us, and they didn't want to talk to the FUSA president because they knew he was blocking postgraduate work. So, I set up a meeting with him and said to him, "look, this is ridiculous, what can we do to change things?" and he said, "well, I'm running again next year, do you want to run with me?" and I went, "sure". Then, because then – you – I didn't know enough, or I guess, it was driven by that sort of annoyance that I couldn't get anything done. ... But

⁹⁵ This has led to significant in-fighting between the majority political party and the opposition, in 2019 the Activate (National Labor Students) group successfully moved a motion to disaffiliate Student Unity (Young Labour): see agenda item 7.16 Disaffiliation of the Bob Hawke Appreciation Society: <https://1hkfri2zglk7386vvq1bw1wgs24-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ammended-Provisional-Full-Student-Council-Minutes-02-12-19.pdf>

⁹⁶ The 'FUPSA' is a subsidiary of FUSA, while it receives extra monies from the university for its work it is dependent on FUSA to authorise its activities.

really, in the end, it kind of got to a level of bullying and gameplay that I just – that was just over the top. It got to the point where every last person on the committee had to resign. ... And I think, you know, and I've always said this about our student elections, is that we have many creative, engaged, interesting, forceful personalities, but not enough positions for them all. And that competitiveness has gotten stupid. And I think that is getting in the way of progress. What we're seeing is that a lot of those people had great ideas, but they were unable to endorse them and get them moving because of student politics. And that's kind of why I went back to the university governance. I was like, "well, if I can understand the tertiary landscape, maybe I can do something over the top of FUSA". But no, that didn't happen. Really, for me, that was the level that I got stuck at and I think that's where politics at Flinders is stuck at – primordial, playing at politics. I don't know about other universities. ... but my moment was literally they're not respecting your position, that was it. Even after them saying, "you want to rerun? I will support that". (Clair)

While not every student faces the same frustration, those who have a desire to do something outside the purview of the party, or enact something which threatens the platform of the party, are actively undermined. In some instances, the students are bullied by their peers and pressure is put on students by staff of the Association to quit. The landscape of student politics nationally is not necessarily as troublesome as it is at *Flinders*: a dysfunctional, politically charged and treacherous space. Chapter 7 provides some further exploration at a national level to understand the role and function of student politics in the actual lives of students.

The micro-level politics, that which plays out in the Association, is hierarchically similar to Australian government (Dyrenfurth et al., 2011), where nationally aligned parties formed create and group-think decisions which dictate party actions in parliaments. The student politics arena nationally is much less organised than State politics, and the stakes are often lower, however the structure of the National Union of Students⁹⁷ and the parties which comprise its members are worth further exploration.

⁹⁷ Itself a post VSU reconfiguration of the NS/AUS remodelled in the late 2000s after the UK model of national union politics.

In this chapter, the currents of contemporary politics have been explored, a former student politician has given voice to the effects of power in student politics and highlighted the stratification of student politics over the regular student body. Moreover, the question of representation and ability to comprehend, interpret and democratically structure governance has been raised in an informal sense. This will be explored further in the following chapter. To understand the nature of student politics, representation and the nexus of students' real issues at political levels, an exploration of the party structures and the real experience of attending a national conference for student politics, is needed. This is presented in the context of an ethnographic exploration, but builds on the themes presented in the theory and analysis above. In particular, the themes here, which show how student 'representation' or power and student 'politics' are often disparate paradigms, are substantial for the remainder of this thesis and highlights a dichotomy between politics and faux representation and the actual organic needs of students in their activism.

Chapter 7

Politics in the dumpling house:

How student politics becomes a fantasy of fame and masquerade as representation at a national level

The corporate university sees students, not as people engaging in the learning community, but as mere consumers or customers who are paying through the nose just for a piece of paper or qualification something that might increase the prospects of getting a job. And of course, it's important, as that tells me what students are really seen as. As a result of this student representation and student unions are also on the decline.

NLS leader of the National Union of Students at a campaign

There is a prevailing unconsciousness amongst student politicians. These politicians use the contemporary language of social scientists and philosophers to explain the apparent rapid decomposition of universities, borrowing credibility from the traditions whose critique of social institutions makes its way to the very mouths of the critiqued⁹⁸. While university students from the 2010s and onward are certainly party to discussions of the problems facing our institutions, the borrowed language takes on a new vitriolic, politically naïve come motivational form, when used to indoctrinate a sea of multidisciplinary urban-Melbournian university students. The adoption of language is not always so grandiloquent. The above quote is a demonstration of contextual awareness and use of conceptual and theoretical understanding demonstrated by just one of those urban-Melbournian students. The then president of the National Union of Students, in this instance at a campaign launch, was often well spoken and thoroughly researched in her addresses. At first glance, this speech professes to an enlightened sociological realisation propelled by many contemporary theorists of higher education. Harnessing this message to elucidate, for the *masses*, the problem facing Australian university students – their painting as consumer or customer – and to consolidate the fermenting need to protest further

⁹⁸ At a recent address, our Vice-Chancellor labelled himself a user of 'neoliberal management speak'.

changes on the doorstep for every student of higher education is an admirable piece of work. The interpretation needed to convert theory into practice at this level would make any Marxist activist proud. However, while the speeches of student politicians are often admirable, even essay-like, there is a distinct lack of mobilising around *a praxis* in the student body, even around the core issues actually facing students. Rather, efforts in the student politics arena tend to be focussed instead on political campaigning and practicing for union leadership and political party membership. Indeed, amongst those groups, with which I was ethnographically embedded in 2019 and 2020, there was an almost complete lack of interest in unitary politics and, perhaps worse, a lack of interest in students' issues, even when presented to them directly by the body which 'voted for you'.

In this chapter, I explore a pivotal scene during my time as an observer come 'student politician'. This narrative follows my early steps into student politics, out of activism, through the entry to the field, or perhaps indoctrination *en scene*. As a participant, I was party to much of the 'all bark no bite' in rallying the troops involved in student union⁹⁹ organising. In addition, I seek to connect the student union leaders to the archetype developed above of *inorganic* activist for the state through a detailed exploration of the presentation of student union leaders' roles in 'student politics'. In doing so, I will forge a strong connection between student politics' inaction and the role of a 'political training' in sustaining a culture of political disingenuity and severed intellectuality, which only forms the purpose of masquerading as *organic intellectual*, instead repackaging common sense to the students. As such, the chapter is presented in two parts. The first is an ethnographic, reflective 'set up' and the second is a recollection compiled from field notes, in which I joined seven student politicians from *Flinders* to Melbourne for a series of student politics events, including two national conferences and a national campaign

⁹⁹ In Australia only 8 student unions remain as independent bodies of their universities, and of these one represents only postgraduate students. The Student Guilds of Western Australia and Queensland take on a slightly different form to the 'union' lineage in other universities which have been largely disbanded.

launch. Woven through and complicating this field, as with the opening quote, is the voice of the then (2019) national union leader who had mastered, in her term, the language of ‘university administration’ for the propulsion of positive change. While the student politician themselves may be an ideologue for state hegemony, there is also possibility in the politics to cut through and provide salient commentary:

Higher education should, and can, be equitable and accessible to all and strong student voices and strong student unions and budding student activists will be at the forefront of this. Students have a vision for universities that serve the public good, not private interests, or private profits. A higher education sector that values students, and the learning as part of learning community as active contributors to university, not merely fee-paying customers.

NLS leader of the National Union of Students at a campaign

This complex interplay is examined further later in the chapter. However, for the most part, students in politics are not those who are organically aware of issues which face their social groups (for instance class, race or gender interests) they are *for the most part* amongst those I met, motivated by their Party’s view of the state.

An agenda emerges, woven into the fabric of the discourse presented by student politicians, that has an unconscious politics or bias that promotes the idea of unionism as a basic function of studenthood¹⁰⁰. The NUS President demonstrated engagement with the political and sociological discourse surrounding higher education studies imbued with a vision for solving the issues of the field with an educated and responsive student body. This language would be immediately apparent to those familiar with union functions: there is often a self-promoting eminence in communication, accurate or otherwise. At their heart, there is truth in these borrowed messages, particularly in the student politics arena, and this clearly explains

¹⁰⁰ Contra current Australian government policy, which under the Howard (Liberal) regime abolished Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees. Often referred to as voluntary student unionism (VSU), the changes made it possible for students to opt-in to union membership, which led to a rapid decline and eventual failing of most independent student unions across Australia. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2005B00048> Several years earlier the Government had passed a bill increasing the mandatory Student Services and Amenities fee (SSAF) which is now the primary mechanism for funding ‘student unions’ however this financial lifeline is controlled primarily by universities and is a form of tied funding. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2013C00782>

popularity amongst those students who already subscribe to the ideals of student politics¹⁰¹. The centring of ‘student activists’ as a kind of enlightened scholar and saviour of the higher education landscape in speeches like these is somewhat ironic, optimistic, idyllic or utopian. While several of the ‘high office’ positions in the various political factions of student politics have clear, almost learned, engagement with the area, this understanding is not spread effectively to the members of the student political groups, let alone their membership (the students of the universities). While there are glimpses of Gramsci’s utopia of organic intellectuals as union leaders, the dissemination of the message back to even fellow members of the political groups falls drastically short. Indeed, across my two years with student politicians at *Flinders*, we had only one ‘teach-in’. This leaves only superficial engagement with the *real* politics of being ‘a person’ in higher education, and while it employs the language of higher education scholars, it only ends as empty gestures¹⁰².

An encounter with politics

Many of the students involved in ‘StuPol’¹⁰³ at *Flinders* had bragged to me about their lack of engagement with their academic study. Indeed, on my first meeting of several of the ‘2020 Student Council’ (in 2019), two first year undergraduates fronted up to me to say, ‘I could never do a PhD, I haven’t even passed a topic’; the senior among them, Ollie, shot them *a glance*¹⁰⁴ and confessed, ‘we often let our studies take a back seat so we can put students’ needs first’. This admission of disconnect is an important piece to connect StuPol to the role and life of the student. While not true for all students, there is an aspirational path which presents itself

¹⁰¹ It is not an organic *truth* as it originates externally to the student politician due to their way of learning about it (akin to indoctrination).

¹⁰² Importantly, I do not mean, here, to place blame on individual student politicians. This is to identify that hegemony prevents more enlightened sense-building exercises or the dissemination of good sense amongst students. Indeed, in many instances student politicians are prevented by their institutions from distributing good sense in the limitation of activities they are permitted to provide to students.

¹⁰³ Once described to me as a concatenation of stupid and politician; though more colloquially, and obviously, a joining of student and politics.

¹⁰⁴ There is a distrust of new members in the political factions, as a new entrant to the field, and possibly a threat, given I was undertaking a PhD in the area – a fact they knew up front, I was subject to some initial suspicion.

in many student politicians that sees university studies as a fundamental distraction from the path to career politics. Indeed, Ollie, the *senior* student from the former quote, was romantic partner to a campaign manager for the ALP and openly confessed his interest in entering State politics. While this may seem an obvious pathway, it was not obvious to the newly recruited student politicians at *Flinders* in late 2019. They were enticed into membership of the National Labor Students (NLS) group under their banner causes: ‘democracy, socialism, unionism and feminism’. It was a way to stand up for their rights and represent their fellow students in a platform that – they were told – gave them the opportunity to take real action *for* their peers.

In establishing this narrative, it is important to capture the differences between the researcher entering the field, and the student politician entering the field for the first time. As a reflective ethnographer, I note that I entered this field in October 2019, with my eyes more open and more critical than my would-be student representative colleagues. While I could not have anticipated the resolutely confrontational process of ‘becoming’ a student politician, I was certainly aware of theoretical work in the area, and unlike my peers, had a healthy scepticism and a knowledge of the history of ‘independent’ activism. Unfortunately, this independence posed a threat to party-aligned StuPol. While this did not prevent me from entering the field initially, the acknowledged ‘experience’ – and qualified observational nature of much of my work in the space – prevented me from progressing through the full gamut of indoctrination that may perhaps befall a ‘clean slate’ entering student politics in an Australian university. Attention should, then, be turned to the entering of the field. Bearing in mind that the entrance I undertook was complex and multifaceted, the below turns to the note I had titled ‘entering the field’ in a journey to Melbourne early in my StuPol career. I intended, of course, to conduct observational work as an analytical way to highlight ‘becoming’ a student politician, but also to earnestly ‘become’ a student politician and document the process. The becoming/being in ethnographic fieldwork is a complex turn, as was examined in Chapter 3. Ultimately, I was

fortunate to be able to capture, in just one sustained incident, the process of entering the field as a postgraduate student, with some prior activist experience at *Flinders* ahead of a national conference and as an ethnographer establishing a rapport with a social group. The following representation of the ‘critical incident’ is presented in narrative form to convey the ‘experience’ of a sceptic’s first encounter. This is drawn from sustained ‘field work’, which has been, and continues to be, elaborated in various chapters of this thesis. It is important to note reflexively at this moment that the substantive work of this chapter is *not* to cast a disparaging or sceptical eye over ‘student politicians’ themselves, but to present a focus on the construction of becoming a ‘student politician’ in a structured and prescriptive mode. Indeed, I must note, this is not set out as an anti-student moment. Of course, much great work has been conducted by student politicians over the years. There is, however, significant benefit to offering a polarised view of student politics to show the contrast between contemporary ‘student politicians’ and their historic student activist counterparts¹⁰⁵. It is also a denotation of accelerated culture and politics that these students live ‘in’ as part of their daily lives. Students are, by nature, learning to be themselves, and this narrative captures a handful of relatively privileged students in a moment of relative, theoretical, weakness. This depiction has a prejudice towards re-presenting the almost populist ‘play’ of *state hegemon* inherited directly from the state politics that some of these students seek to mimic, and which is played out in microcosm by the ideological student politician come leader of a political group – in all its levels and configurations.

After functioning as, what I can only describe, as an independent activist for higher education for a prolonged period of time, I was approached by a tentative and doe eyed senior member of student politics at Flinders, Ollie. This was not unexpected. I had experience with the humans of student politics through independent campaign organisation, though had not become familiar with the structures and processes of organising in student politics in a serious way and thought that through ‘announcing’ my intentions to run for a role on the Student Council to a group of peers, I might attract

¹⁰⁵ It also shows the ‘inorganic’ nature of their activism, coming to be through indoctrination rather than appropriate social-group responses.

some interest from the politicians. At the 2019 Annual General Meeting of the Flinders University Student Association (FUSA), the then General Secretary – Ollie – approached me to discuss running under the National Labor Student ticket for the next FUSA election. Intrigued, at first as to why I would consider this, I agreed to meet the Secretary, privately, in the student council rooms. The council room was a short walk from the Tavern (a pre-COVID hive of student activity). It presented as one might expect, a modern but very small office with a desk, an old computer, and an assortment of broken furniture, overlooking a car park and decorated with stacks of University Council and Senate papers, walls covered in slogan stickers, from Queer Pride, through Antifascist Action, and printed copies of the Vice-Chancellors tweets, this is the student union office of dreams.

There was a clear signalling of the kinds of people welcome in these rooms. While I fit the type of person that *represented students*, being a white presenting, male, ‘experienced’ student, this space felt out of character for our largely modern and clean campus. Even the walls signalled the kind of behaviour that was welcome here; this was a *new* new left. Here, LGBTQI+, disabled, and non-male students were considered in a special light, held up as heroes of studenthood, as the embodiment of the identity politics. One sticker-slogan, particularly, signalled the kind of people that were certainly not welcome: ‘Racist, sexist, anti-queer, Liberals¹⁰⁶ are not welcome here.’

The conversation started similarly to the approach in the Tavern. Neither the president – Mella, nor secretary – Ollie, were particularly sure of my motives in joining student politics. In hindsight, I was not clear on my motives in that space myself. While it was clear they were unsure of my motives, they had an agenda. They wanted me to run on their ticket as the Postgraduate Officer and presented this fact to me in plain light. After expressing my interest in running, though not accepting the inherit offer, Ollie launched into what became a half an hour teach-in session explaining the problems plaguing student politics in contemporary universities. I admit that this struck me as out of character; there was an admission that student politics was not all that it was cracked up to be, and that there would be a lot to do in order to make Flinders a place where students could be heard. This ran contrary to all of the messaging the NLS party had published about their success in winning for students. This picture was bleak. Indeed, the outlook seemed bleak. After talking my way out of a description of neoliberalism, the conversation turned to party values. Without a hint of subtlety, Ollie stated, as much as asked, ‘are you a member of the Labor party?’ And, with a short pause, ‘you’re not part of the Greens, are you?’ Then Mella chimed in, ‘unlike Unity, we don’t actually require you to join the party. Just join the

¹⁰⁶ Liberals, in this context, denoting members of the Australian Liberal National Coalition, a right wing national political party.

Faction.’ This language had come, to me, out of left field – *who and what was Unity, and what was a faction?* It was quickly made clear that Unity was the opposition. Unity was the right wing, the enemy, the anti-progressive faction. They must have recognised the dumbfounded look on my face and digressed back to an explanation of student politics and its parties, albeit in a value-laden mode. They explained the role of the national political parties in student unionism, making parallels between the ‘grassroots independents’ and the Greens, the National Labor Students and the Australian Labor Party, and the Student Unity group and centre-right. They were quick to skip to a dismissal of Liberal involvement in the student politics arena ‘some Libs run on independent tickets at the neoliberal unis, but they rarely get elected and their party doesn’t support them.’

Through this testimony, some fundamental facts about student politics emerge. These are necessary to the narrative of this chapter, but also to understanding some of the features of communicating about student politics to both would-be student politicians, and the student body generally. The above depiction of the parties of StuPol is not wildly inaccurate, though deliberately omits a key fact about the *right* that they, too, are affiliated with, as supported by the ALP, and are merely more centre aligned than NLS.

While an in-depth exploration of the national political parties played out in student politics is nongermane to this thesis, there is a need for clarity in the factional *battlefield* of student politics clearly visible through a robust presentation of the affiliations between student politics’ factions and State political parties. Furthermore, at time of writing, the following data presents a novel contribution to research literature in Australia, as a mapping of faction to party exists, primarily, in articles of student magazines. Thus, for clarity, Table 2 presents some of the key political groups, affiliations, and a brief description.

Faction / group	National party	Description
Socialist Alternative (SAlt)	No stated affiliation	SAlt are often described as a ‘hard left’ party, holding to Trotskyist ideals ¹⁰⁷ . SAlt are, however, often criticised for their magazine sales tactics in events they organise. These students are closer in nature to the organic intellectual, though lack numbers and funding required to become elected in most universities.
Grassroots Independents (‘Grindies’)	Australian Greens and other minor parties	A generalist ‘left’ group, collecting independent students who run in student councils which are too small to attract national attention, or whose candidates choose to opt-out of affiliation with specific parties. In the national arena, however, the Grindies hold 22% ¹⁰⁸ of the ‘student vote’.
National Labor Students (NLS) / Activate	Australian Labor Party (‘Left’)	NLS have held the National Union presidency since their inception, however they hold a smaller number of total representative seats. NLS was also subject to a fracture in 2013, which saw a drastic decline in membership in the party ¹⁰⁹ .
Young Labor / Student Unity	Australian Labor Party (‘Right’)	Unity work under the banner of progressivism, though are criticised of collaborating with the Liberal student. This dichotomy of ‘left vs right’ is one of the main political battlegrounds of StuPol at <i>Flinders</i> . Nationally, Unity holds the largest total representative seats at approximately 45%.
Australian Liberal Students’ Federation (ALS)	Liberal National Coalition	The Liberal party are largely absent from student politics at the National Union level. Speculatively, this is due to their malignment of unions. There is some national representation of the Liberals, though they hold less than 1% of the national representative seats. There were no ALS members on <i>Flinders</i> tickets in 2018, 2019 or 2020.

Table 2 StuPol factions and affiliation to national political parties

My crash course in student politics, however, was not to be complete until after the election. In the lead up to the election there was substantial organising to do. Much of this involved the painting of banners, training in communicating about the value of participating

¹⁰⁷ A further capturing of SAlt’s values are available here:

<http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/biogs/E000506b.htm> In addition, SAlt publishes a website with a value statement where they state their affiliation with ‘revolutionary Marxism’: <https://www.sa.org.au/node/3924>

¹⁰⁸ *Where’s democracy? NatCon 2020 Wrapped*. (2020, December 11). Honi Soit.

<https://honisoit.com/2020/12/wheres-democracy-natcon-2020-wrapped/>

¹⁰⁹ *Stupol 1002: A brief history*. (2018, September 3). Honi Soit. <https://honisoit.com/2018/09/stupol-1002-a-brief-recent-history/>

in voluntary elections to fellow students, and a limited spattering of values that needed to be communicated to would-be voters. These sessions were convened at Ollie's house, where there were regular visits from the factions' many political hopefuls. Interestingly, there was a culture of *control* by those experienced in the faction, particularly from Ollie and Mella. The candidates were not to put forward their nomination's *personal statement* until it had been approved by the faction leader. Indeed, there were certain messages in the *personal statement* that were to be included. This included messaging about belonging to the faction, representing itself to students as 'Activate your FUSA'. In fact, while there was a clear *party* running, there was a deliberate exclusion of any affiliation with national political parties. This was due to it being explicitly prohibited by election regulations, not to mention unspoken internal party guidelines. While the 'election prep house' saw regular visits from Members of Parliament, there was a running disclaimer from ALP MPs that while they enthusiastically remembered their days in student politics, they could not support our efforts directly or publicly. Rather, they simply extolled their values and provided pointed advice on campaigning.

In the markedly upper-middle class urban home of our would-be president, Ollie, we were gathered in a spacious modern living room, arranged for maximum seating area for the candidates. Hastily organised to sport a projector and room for expression, the space felt almost like a rally – though one would dare not sit on a couch during a rally. In a hurried gathering of the potentials our leader spoke, introducing in a surprisingly nervous tone two members of the Labor party: one, an elected federal MP, the other, a candidate who had failed to secure a position in Government. They were here to tell us about their experiences in student politics, and to recount the times they had worked together to campaign for their student positions. They explained that they had sat where we sat – I wondered if they meant literally, as it was clear this was a Labor household – and heard stories from seasoned politicians. They recalled how valuable it was to hear the stories of campaigns, both successful and failed. Ironically, the would-be MP spoke to us about how to campaign successfully. I was immensely uncomfortable in this session, and after speaking to some fellow student council candidates, they shared my concerns. What exactly was our relationship with the Labor Party? How would door knocking assist our strictly on-campus campaign? As the values of the Labor party became more explicit, the connection to our

Faction's values – Democratic Socialism, Unionism and Feminism – became clear. While this was not new to any of us, there was a kind of weight in the air. An unlikely admiration from our would-be president, an almost adorative attitude, towards the speakers continued in affirmative nodding and silent emphasis of key points. However, the familiar values seemed to have an alternative meaning to these 'experienced' politicians. It appeared that they saw themselves in a position of superiority over the cluster of hopefuls. Confirming this worry, they stated that, for the lucky few that succeeded, as a first step, student politics would eventually lead to an internship supporting Labor staffers. As proud testament to this, a former student politician come Labor intern was trotted out to explain her journey from student presidency to unpaid intern in the Labor ranks as a letterbox dropper. The condescension was not lost on those I spoke to in debriefing after the event. To our minds, this had been a banner painting session, not an information session on 'getting an internship'. The tactless presentation had off-sided some of those present. Others, however, seemed encouraged or at least unphased by the State politicisation of the student campaigning. This was a glimpse into the positionality of student politics as viewed by the Labor members, a literal space of learning to be in politics. They said so themselves, 'use this opportunity to experiment with your style of leadership and public speaking', emphasising that 'while it may feel like this is an important opportunity, there will be others, and you will have the opportunity at real politics later'.

The subjective view of 'the politicians' who positioned student candidates as learners was, realistically, a valid perspective. While student politics did 'feel like' it mattered to many of the candidates, it ultimately proved itself an exercise in political training, public speaking, and, at best, grandstanding. However, I still feel that this exercise, likely repeated for the other politically *attached* parties, sets up negative entrenched feelings towards the value of the work to be done. With hindsight, it seems clear that this was an effort in installing fear amongst those with lofty ambitions for their roles. This approach to student politics, and politics broadly, starts *outside* higher education, in an installation of values and attitudes by members of a major political party – a literal indoctrination by the State by experienced politicians setting the tone for the future. Following the early encounter above, with an attitude of disregard for education, it could ultimately be deduced that this cycle feeds student politicians into State politics without any formal academic education on politics, sociology or science. The replication of values that

are installed both by leaders of the faction and members of the ALP, however, do little more than mockery of *real politics*. At best, the State politicians see student politics as a training ground and, by their own admission, as a space to masquerade as a politician. At worst, even the leadership of the faction see StuPol, and indeed students' interactions with universities as spaces of sham interaction as preparation for the *real world* which, to them, contains only politics. While this is a bleak painting of student politics, it is now possible to present a scenario in which the *real politics* of StuPol emerge.

Immediately prior to the National Conference (NatCon) of the National Union of Students, there is an annual event which sees representatives from student unions across Australia, gather and debate policy instituted at local and national levels. This gathering is of monumental significance in the context of positioning student politics between mockery and training, or performative politics and for-show wars of position toward exclusive realities in the *state* arena. While a formalised faction meeting¹¹⁰ occurs some time briefly before the conference, the event of interest to this chapter is what takes place in the *dumpling house*.

The dumpling house

In the heart of Melbourne's China Town is a dumpling house. The 'Shanghai Village' is a three-story white stone building, offering a relatively ordinary menu. Once a year this space transforms from the otherwise ordinary Chinese restaurant into a home for the gathering of

¹¹⁰ These caucus meetings are used to decide how the party will vote at the actual meeting. During my time in the NUS national circuit, I was aware of binding caucus meetings of Unity, NLS, SAlt and the Grindies. While not purposive to this chapter it is worth noting that there is a communicated fear, in these meetings, that members will perceive their own caucusing as unfair. While I only have direct experience of the NLS caucus, I can gladly say that there is a bloc of political interest which is firmly represented. Indeed, to break from the bloc is seen as a disavowing of the core values - frailly held – and met with hostility. It is assumed, by the point at which the student reaches the caucus room, that they are on the same page as the rest of the faction's members. In practice, for NLS, this looks like standing up for its stated values, however on dissection of policies it is clear that there are serious problems in caucused decisions, including failing to hear the voices of all on policy decisions. Several NLS members I spoke to felt that they did not have the opportunity to speak their mind on policy decisions which would affect them, not those voting on them. This is not an indictment on the party mechanisms themselves, as these appear to follow patterns which allow women to speak on women's issues, students with a disability to speak on disability issues, etc. but that party-seniority plays a far firmer role in the party room than voices of those with lived experience.

student politicians¹¹¹ hailing from across the nation prior to their travel to Federation University's Mt Helen Campus for the union conference. Interestingly, the gathering itself provides a keen insight into the role of exhibition in student politics and the nature of factional politics in Australia's student body. In this annual tradition, both factions of the ALP book a 'floor' in the *Village* to eat, drink and, essentially, gossip. The gathering of each faction is a kind of 'show of force' in the war of position, funded by student money, which acts simultaneously as a rite of passage for new attendees and a passing of the baton from retiring members of StuPol from around Australia.

I had already been in Melbourne for some weeks at this point, having attended the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) student summit and conference, and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) Annual General Meeting. There were murmurs amongst the CAPA attendees, an annual meeting of postgraduate association presidents from across the country, of 'the show' that NUS put on each year. I was particularly attentive to the discussion of the NUS National Conference ('NatCon') and the 'nightmare of screaming reprobates and dogmatic espousers' which, apparently, saw 'student representation take a slide back into the primordial ooze'. Clearly, I was not sure what I was in for. In for a penny, in for a pound, as a keen 'innovator' of student politics and hopeful for substantive change of practice in the realm of StuPol, I largely tuned out any warning signs or alarm bells. It should have dawned on me that we were essentially set to attend a 'school camp lock in'. The NLS seniors had organised our accommodation, the transport, our food, and set a schedule of events that we were not to deviate from. Having already acclimatised to travelling on university funds, this was a stark change of pace. In addition, as someone who had almost always needed to 'go home' from school camps in the past, this whole experience was very novel – not to mention having significant travel and life experience on my undergraduate colleagues. I thought, treat this like field work – this is your field work – but I was barely prepared for what transpired.

On Saturday, 7th December 2019 at 7pm, the Flinders group of the National Labor Students faction received a Facebook Message summoning us to a dinner to occur at 9pm in China Town. We weren't told exactly what we

¹¹¹ In 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, students did not travel to Melbourne for the NUS conference. The period of data collection for this thesis fell inside the 2019 cycle. In 2018 NLS was subject to a group photo in the venue:
<https://www.facebook.com/shanghaivillagedumpling/photos/pcb.2428272803869080/2428272750535752>

were going to, however secrecy was idolised amongst the faction leaders, and none of the greenhorns were actually ‘party members’ at this stage – not to be trusted with important information. It would be a shame, it was said, if The Right, or worse still SAlt, were to learn of our plans. Having not yet joined the rest of the Flinders faction in the Backpackers Hotel, and not really knowing what the plan was, uneasy about attending a dinner this late, I decided that I should eat first. Indeed, I was increasingly glad that I was staying in a hotel after hearing stories from my informants come friends in the backpackers. A string of messages instructing us on the ‘where and when’ of the event, what we should prepare, and what limited information we were to be privy to, slowly filtered in. I made my way towards Little Bourke Street. I am unfailingly early to events, and here I was fortunate to pick up some ethnographic insight. An avid walker, I have a tendency to ‘walk the block’ when I am early for an event. As an observational scientist, I cannot help but note and remember people, actions and customs, particularly rooted amid study. It was not a huge surprise to me, then, to see at 8:30pm a very large group of Student Unity members making their quite meaningful way towards, what appeared, a large white colosseum-style building in the middle of China Town. I felt that a confluence of factors must have been on my side that night; not only was I narrowly escaping a potential, supposed, altercation with Unity, but I was able to get a bit of a head start on where ‘they would be’ should there be any post-dinner ‘discussions’ – sheer luck had rewarded the early bird. I was tipped off, particularly, to their presence when I saw my student from earlier in the semester. He had identified himself as a proud member of Unity, and had, at that time, intended to change up a stagnant FUSA. While he ran for a position on FUSA’s student council, he was unsuccessful – so here, in Melbourne’s heart, was a Unity member without an elected position, attending NatCon. Of course, as much as it was clear I could see him, he could see me. Having been collegial – in as much as a tutor-student relationship normally allows – we exchanged subtle nods and a hushed ‘hello’ as he continued in orderly form with his faction entering the building. I felt more out of place than before. Questioning myself about my participation in student politics, and my reasons for undertaking fieldwork on this expedition, I continued pacing. Not long after, some NLS leaders arrived. Unlike my student, they did not recognise me, but they definitely played their best spy film impression looking around for snipers come rats before they, too, entered the towering colosseum. By around 8:50pm, some Adelaide University NLS members arrived: friendly faces who had clearly decided to come to Chinatown early for a smoke and a chat. There was a small distance between them and I, but I rounded the corner and gave a feign of surprise, ‘oh, am I early?’. Unshaken by my arrival, the leader of their group, and a national office bearer for the NUS, responded ‘nah, we’re going in there in a minute, just having a smoko’, gesturing towards the white building, which was now illuminated in neon and bright spotlights, and

presented itself as the Shanghai Village dumpling house. Pretending not to know ‘more than I should’, we chatted. I stood my distance; as an asthmatic, smokers are something of a trade-hazard. Moments later, our President-elect arrived. He was obviously flustered by my presence, but was in the company of his seniors and it seemed he felt he needed to account for my mere existence, something which felt entirely alien and unnecessary given the actual optics of the circumstances.

It quickly became apparent that the towering roman building masquerading as a Chinese dumpling house was to be our destination, too. Very slowly, then all at once, members of NLS appeared from out of the woodwork, forming a soldierly queue outside Shanghai Village. It was clear to me, after witnessing the leading events, that this was a deliberate staging of a kind of battle: that Unity had arrived first, seniors had exchanged words, and that NLS had quite deliberately orchestrated meeting in the same building not half an hour later. As we entered, we were hurried by restaurant staff past the regular customers on the ground floor, up an incredibly narrow and surprisingly slippery staircase at the side of the sparsely decorated raw timber-clad building. Aside from the occasional Chinese lantern, there was little sign that this was, indeed, a dumpling house, except perhaps for the tell-tale smell. After climbing in a middle of the pack position, and pausing on the – what I later determined to be beer-soaked – slippery steps for what seemed like an unreasonable amount of time, hurried instructions came back down from the top of the stairs. We were to sing.

Sing? There was only one NLS tune that I was even becoming aware of at that stage, a bastardised version of Pete Seeger’s Solidarity Forever, though there had been no demand on us to actually learn the tune. That was of no matter, as it was clear that the seniors were well aware of the lyrics and needed only the hum of the emergent members to support them.

Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For the union makes us strong

When the union’s inspiration through the workers’ blood shall run
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun;
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one
But the union makes us strong

It was after this verse that I finally emerged from the stairs, faced by a second-floor room full of Unity members booing and jeering back at us as we crossed, what was clearly their dinner, to get to the next staircase on the other side of the room. After a clear and deliberate bottlenecking of the room by NLS

seniors, we began to cross Unity's floor, to my surprise, this time Unity sang back:

Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For the union makes us strong

Cause you don't believe in Unions and you don't believe in rights,
You couldn't win a working class electorate if you tried;
You only win a seat because it's middle-class and white,
Cause you're dirty, greeny, scum.

It dawned on me that this was not an attack song, but indeed under its intended purpose, a song of solidarity repurposed to align Labor's two factions against the 'rest' – SAlt and the Grindies. Finally working our way up the final set of stairs, as the song continued, I could not help but drop into a kind of meditative state pondering the relationship which had been set up as strongly oppositional. Indeed, a vitriolic bitterness had been instilled during our early meetings and election cycle, which all of a sudden seemed to be taking a back seat as the two factions under one Party came together. Speaking to other newcomers at the 'vego' table that night, it became clear to me that their universities' NLS had led them to believe that Unity was, indeed, the enemy. Towards the end of the night, however, it became clear that through the drunkard singing and general rabble rousing for restaurant staff, that the leadership of NLS, through their 'farewell speeches' fully intended this event to not see the light of day. There were assurances made that our positions would become unstable, our terms made difficult, and that our stipends would disappear, should we speak to Honi¹¹² about the gathering.

Student politics offers a particular view, a particular insight, into the organisation of national State political parties. The organising of students, the ability to organise a party, the confrontation and the learning indirectly about war of position are all necessary features for the government of a country, at least in Gramscian theory. However, this is not designed as a counter-hegemonic experiment. Student politics organises around a set of values which sees state political hierarchies reproduced amongst a diverse student body. In some senses, this has the literal endpoint of students moving into state politics. However, for the most part, student

¹¹² Student media.

politics ends up with disappointed students with incomplete transcripts and deficient studies, who are destined to letterbox drop for the state. Student politicians are, as detailed above, inevitably aligned with the political whim of state and federal politics in Australia (Rochford, 2006).

An understanding of student politics as a space of reproduction for state hegemony adds a new light to the nature of students' positions of relative power and authority. In this regard, universities offer students paid opportunities to travel to national conferences, where large scale political narratives are played out 'for show' to train students into undertaking political positions. This is not a space which creates the organic intellectual, nor one which authentically supports representational politics; this is a space which reinforces, even rewards, the disconnected, flashy, populist politics at work in the State. Indeed, this microcosm of State politics could certainly be seen as the grim future of State politicians, as increasingly demonstrative, performative and dictatorial leadership establishes 'for show' confrontations, and leverages student monies to act as a purported functionary for students that has no bearing on students' actual needs. Importantly, from my experience, University administration are entirely cognisant of the processes involved in NatCon and students near hazing-level indoctrination into State politics, as will be explored in the opening vignette of the next chapter. Fortunately, this narrative represents only part of the whole picture of being an elected student representative in Australian universities. Moreover, opportunities for genuine representation *of the students* emerge more frequently in organic opportunities and structural offerings than they do through StuPol. The next chapter turns attention to two different forms of representation, bridged through further ethnographic fieldwork somewhat later than the sketch of student politics above. Here, the role of students in more authentic levels of university governance will be explored and the subsequent issues students face in committees and against powerful hegemonic forces which desire for them to be 'seen, not heard'.

Chapter 8

Narcs and Marx:

Silent members of university committees and a narrative of overzealous protestors

University Council (UC) elections are a faux representational democratic selection process; a thin attempt at encouraging student participation in the university governance hegemony. The UC represents our university's peak governance body, whose student positions, one undergraduate one postgraduate, are called for every two years. At this time, I was just holding on to my membership of the NLS contingent at Flinders. On announcement of nominations, the party scrambled to organise campaign materials, though to say 'organise' would be putting it strongly. The entire process, from preselection to election, was a sham. In fact, it seemed that it was an uninterested sham, unconcerned with its miscarriage of 'the rules' and obsessed process, and indifferent to the ultimate outcome. The interest from the party in this cycle was markedly less than its previous effort aiming to win over the broad student body for a political prowess. Of course, a member on UC would wield much stronger powers than a student politics post, and NLS members knew that it needed to be tightly held to prevent other students from securing the position. As the nominations were called, before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, the party sprung to action.

In a flurry of activity, the NLS chapter at Flinders organised a preselection. This was part of the student election cycle they particularly delighted in and take pains to ensure it is designed to perfection: preselection rules and election rulings are trundled out, an 'external' returning officer is appointed, and each candidate is asked to make a statement amongst party members. As part of the preselection, it is emphasised that 'quotas are considered'¹¹³, particularly for those with gender diverse backgrounds – over and above students with a disability, experiencing financial hardship, or even experience for the position. The party would organise a 'ticket', with preselected members as their only entrants. Indeed, to break from the preselection and enter the bona fide poll without the support of the party was a terminable offence. There were two entrants into the undergraduate preselection and four entrants into the postgraduate preselection for the 2020 UC election. Amongst the undergraduates, one was of diverse gender background and also identified with a disability; the other, the student president, was a white male.

¹¹³ To be clear, quotas here are not under the common definition of quota in politics. This is an impostor to quotas which enables the party to change the numbers, weightings and requirements to influence the outcome of their 'elections'.

In the postgraduate corpus were three women, one with a disability, and one man.

The preselection, to my eyes, was largely a sham. The student president needed to win the undergraduate poll to confirm absolute power over the student council, and thus the undergraduate woman was illuminated before polling commenced under accordance with the rules of the quotas. This actually meant that the postgraduate male candidate was eliminated, even though this was a separate poll. The justification given was that two men could not run on an NLS ticket or something would look ‘suspect’. The actual motives remain a mystery. As something of a governance obsessive, I raised the question of procedural fairness with the returning officer. I was assured that the decision was in keeping with the election guidelines – though the voyage I was sent on to understand this ‘policy’ ended in a Labor Party members portal. I was not a member. It was decided, then, ‘by popular vote’ the student president would be allowed to nominate to run in the main UC poll, and that the postgraduate representative would need to be a woman and should, for continuity purposes, be the woman who had held the position in the previous cycle. The pontification and obsession over process and procedure would all prove naught as the president and the standing postgraduate member for UC demonstrated their true organisational skill and interest in the process. It was late in the afternoon, some time after the main nomination window had closed at 11am, when I received a call from the returning officer confirming if I had, in fact, entered into the poll for UC – scandal, a coup for power! I told them I had not. I was not pondering the question for long after the first call, when an instant message appeared from the president: ‘is this a good time to talk? We need to have a conversation urgently’.

I could not help but roll my eyes. The urgency of requests could only mean one of very few things: either someone was about to be ‘headkicked’ or there had been some kind of screw up. It turned out to be the latter, much to my surprise. While the list of nominees had not yet been released for UC, the NLS members would have been surprised to find my name on the ballot. The call came in, and something I had not heard from any of the party members before advanced: ‘I am really sorry, but we have really fucked up the UC poll’. In a moment of disbelief, I chimed in, ‘what happened? Maybe we can talk to the UC returning officer?’. Of course, it emerged that the president and his postgraduate counterpart had neglected to actually nominate for the UC poll, and what would otherwise have been a head-kicking became a moment of possibility, and in a foresightful moment after what appeared to be a genuine apology, he asked, ‘have you nominated?’ Taking only a moment to consider my response, I told him, ‘I haven’t pulled my nomination’. A second of silence, then, ‘thank god’. More calls were

made, and it surfaced that another of my postgraduate party-mates had ‘left’ her nomination in the poll as well. Now we were back in business. We returned to preselection polling to see who NLS would back for the single position. It turned out in raw votes that I had succeeded, and that therefore, in this instance, given I was the preferable – more ‘stable’ – candidate, that I should be the one supported for the position. There was a lot of back and forth between the party seniors. Indeed, I made contact with my newly found competition to determine her position on the poll. It seemed she was determined to stay in the running. Of course, my mind had long been made up to run regardless of NLS support. While I had a moment of thought about how much easier life might be without this responsibility, I had developed a strong commitment to academic governance and changing university administration for the better.

The voting opened and closed in three days. The fortunate use of electronic polling meant that results were both transparent, and nearly immediate. With under 300 students voting in the election, I had won my position with over 80% of the vote. In the undergraduate poll, with no NLS, Unity or SAIt campaigning, the undergraduates voted to appoint a medical science student without StuPol affiliation. Whether the NLS campaign materials, a rush job just days before the election, made any real difference I will never be able to say objectively. I’m sure it helped to notify my postgraduate colleagues that the election was happening – though the postgraduate body was notably better at actually reading candidate statements, particularly when they had to make up their minds up to vote.

The next week was surreal. The University’s Secretary and Chancellor wrote to congratulate me, both of whom I had written lengthy activist letters to during the 2018 restructure. There appeared to be an absolution of my ‘sins’, or at least a deliberate ignoring of the problematic past of their new UC member. I was to be greeted with a meeting with the Deputy Chancellor and inducted into the conduct for UC, a meeting which occurred just one week after being appointed. This felt more like a job interview than an induction – being asked questions of background, study, governing interest, politics and personal conduct. I am quite sure that many of the probing questions asked were to ascertain if I would be a particularly problematic member of UC, one who may need to be ‘seen to’. Apparently, I passed whatever tests were involved, though I could not help but feel some neoliberal jargon escape my lips as I spoke with the Deputy. There is a feeling of palpable tension in the presence of senior businesspeople. This feeling – akin to the hair on the back of your neck standing up – is hard to shake when you know the history of the institution, its decision-making processes and knowing the people who make them. I knew amongst these people I would never be an insider, for a student with political background was to be a constant threat vector, someone who

may burst out with Marxist rhetoric, anti-weapons research, and perhaps worse, a Greenie. My StuPol affiliation had not helped this relation. I gather from early conversations with my newly elected apolitical undergraduate counterpart that such conversations were not on the menu for her. After passing a screening meeting, it seemed, it was time to meet with the big guns: a grand tour of the senior executive of the University – the Chief Financial Officer, Vice-President (Corporate Services), Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Research), and heads of people and culture (HR), work health and safety, and property. By this stage, in the interest of time, my undergraduate counterpart and I had been lumped together. These meetings felt like others I had experienced at the University – senior staff who knew at least something of the operational nature of the University. The final meeting, though, was to be the most interesting. We would be meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, and the appointment would be 45 minutes long. It started with his usual, skilful, filibustering¹¹⁴:

‘You are now officially University Council members, aren’t you? And we will have our first meeting in about a week. I normally have that emblazoned in my mind, because Council meetings come up with a certain cadence, and they’re very important. This is a little opportunity for us to have a chat, and for me to tell you a little bit about Council and the University’s strategic direction from my perspective.’

While much of the conversation was benign marketing, the deliberate positioning of us as ‘members’ of UC was of particular interest. We were here, not to represent others, but to be our own voice on UC. We were not to represent the interests of the students, not to put forward party positions (with a directed glance at me), or to push for certain ways of operating. No. We were to be integral members of UC, to work with the other ‘members’, to act and behave professionally, to share our own views, and to be considerate of the broader strategic picture that was presented to us. It wasn’t long before the discussion of values shifted to conduct, remembering my address to the Academic Senate:

‘I remember it was very articulate. It was really very good. We have been through three waves of substantial change in about the last two years. We did a structural change, we did a professional change, then, the one that caused all the fuss, the academic changes. Now, we have been through all of that. And what I have said is that, I have no plans, and this is classic Vice-Chancellor speak, I have no plans for any further university disruption.’

¹¹⁴ These conversations are not direct transcriptions, but notes captured hurriedly on notepads after the meeting during the height of fieldwork.

Later in the conversation, the discussion pivoted to our reasons for membership with UC: why would we run for such a position? The question of motive and association now surfaced:

‘Are either one of you involved in FUSA?’

‘Yes, I am the postgraduate representative’

Turning deliberately to the undergraduate member, the Vice Chancellor asked, ‘so what made *you* stand for the role then?’, and without waiting for an answer, he continued, ‘the Chancellor will emphasise that while you are elected as a representative of the student body, because you’re a member of it, what’s important is that you are yourself on the board. You’re not there to just repeat other’s views. You can take other views, you process them, and then you represent *your* view at Council.’

This chapter considers students who are located outside the hegemonic war of position, but who are unable or unwilling to take initiative for systemic change. For these students, initiative poses threat or, perhaps a lack of knowledge and confidence, positions them in a way that makes considered responses impossible. Moreover, the ‘narc’ may be a student who, due to their relative privilege, lacks the contrary opinion to that provided by the university governance hegemony. Two main modes are considered in this chapter for further discussion. The first, student members of university committees and working groups who are frequently a ‘hybrid’: a high achiever and embodiment of a glossy marketing slogan¹¹⁵ who has, almost entirely through what appears to them as an accident, found themselves ‘representing’ their peers in forums of governance. The second is the *uneasy* student partner. This chapter shall pose that these students are deliberately placed, through a combination of *folklore* and deliberate planning, in positions that forbid them to ‘speak out’ and that prescribe certain modes of silent ‘contribution’. The narc, and the student partner, find something appealing in academic culture, subscribing to the image of tweed jacket, mountain of books, and esoteric research and that, their contribution to the committee, may bring them closer to that ultimate ideal. For

¹¹⁵ Itself a fabrication for student choice (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017), and in spite of appearances, these students rarely feature on the brand or television commercials.

others, these committees serve as a torture chamber, where the issues that face them are deliberately silenced and new *modus operandi* are instituted across the university which harm them and their peers in their study conditions.

To access these two complex groups, this chapter employs interviews with both students on those committees, and the academic staff who attempt to provide conduits for student 'voice'. Importantly, the latter are not management academics and are not committee chairs. Rather, they are teaching staff at the coal face whose genuine interest in increasing student visibility and audibility is laudable. There is an important difference that is worth considering between these staff and students which sit beyond any perceptible ideological differences: their presence. Students are frequently *left out* of discussions, meetings and spaces in which decisions are made about them and which concern them. While staff are not always part of the decision-making process, there *is* a kind of staff presence in all spaces animating the *act* of the university. In this sense, students are perforce disadvantaged in the decision-making process, as they are not privy to all decisions as they are made, nor their conceptualisation or strategy. Even the high achieving 'narc' students, to be characterised below, who are more prevalent in formalised university structures, are not included in the *back room* deals of senior executive meetings. Here, university hegemony reveals itself in a near tangible form. The real decisions are made between the elite of the state and the ruling class of the university; the rest is *trickle down* and *piecemeal*. That is, this is how the university management hegemon captures and rejects the image of the student politicians, to invert itself into believing that student voice and presence can be understood and valued at its essentialist level: the presence of 'a student' on 'a committee'. What arises here is the expectation that the quiet, up and coming, academically minded student will 'represent' all of their peers. Even student politicians are unable to contend with the machinery of institutional reproduction:

It is very expensive and time consuming. Like y'all have communication like unit departments that are like hundreds of people wide, but you expect us with the tiny budgets that we have to be engaging with students at the same level if not more that you are. (Juliana)

In the complex field of multi-million-dollar marketing departments, an established agenda, and unwitting students, the committee scene is a minefield. Moreover, students' access to training, resources and support for their participation in these spaces is lax. The voices of these students, then, requires authentic investigation. I am fortunate to have sat on many committees across *Flinders*, and the interviews below are with students whose participation I have *seen*. In this regard – something of a pincer move – I can confirm their honesty about level of interaction as conditioned and as *possible* under domineering hegemonic power.

This thesis has explored the relationship of student as 'activist' (Chapter 3), as 'power' (Chapter 5) and as 'politician' (Chapter 5, 6 and 7). While these might be considered discrete functions of studenthood, and certainly not universal, there is a necessity to explore power and representation as functions of being a student that are related, though not dependent (Klemenčič & Park, 2018). Thus, the *related* nature of what university hegemons describe as 'representation', against what students describe as *being a student on a committee* which sometimes coincides with either 'activism', 'power' or 'politics', though more often amounts to 'helping out'. Notably, these spaces are not always inhabited by students who *choose* 'activism', or 'power'. In some instances, 'activism'/'power' become a form of labour, either from privilege or disadvantage. These students are not, by necessity, of the *organic* type, though some stumble into a robustified form of representation which embodies a *kind* of 'student power' to progress issues of concern for the student body. Even those that find this voice tend to remain quieter and more detached from the rest of the student body than the *organic* 'activist' might. Importantly, my research has explicitly excluded consideration of students with a disability from this section and saves their fight against systems and processes which are established to their detriment in an ableist mode (Linder, Quaye, Lange, et al., 2019; Linder, Quaye, Stewart,

et al., 2019) for Chapter 9, considering them *organic intellectual activists*. Rather, students end up in positions of relative power and situational influence, often silently, underneath university hegemony, preventing genesis into an *organic intellectual*.

If presented with ‘the stage’, student politicians gladly discuss, sometimes *ad nauseam*, the state of the *union* in higher education. While there are some questions about the legitimacy of the statements made, many draw on sociological and political research studies¹¹⁶ and a vast tranche of social media platforms to base their relatively well-informed arguments (Rheingans & Hollands, 2013; Theocharis, 2012; Tinati et al., 2014). At the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA¹¹⁷) conference in Melbourne in 2019, the first to ever include a student presence¹¹⁸, the then National Union of Students President, in discussion on the issues facing students in higher education, made a remark on the state of the institution as an imperative to act¹¹⁹:

I think it points to this logic issue around the sector, where higher education is increasingly corporatised and commercialised. I think this has a range of impacts on the student experience at university, with that being the number of resources that “we are going to provide”, you know, the size of classes and level of one-on-one engagement with our staff who we might be paying less than previously. ... At the end of the day, one of the other consequences of this commercialised university approach is that the fundamental idea, that universities were established [under], they were learning communities with students and teachers had an equal say¹²⁰ ... Student representation is losing out as a result of the commercialisation and corporatisation of universities,

¹¹⁶ The relationship between knowledge/learning and activism/representation is largely unexplored in empirical terms. The philosophy of praxis, per Gramsci (1996), would encourage the activist, or representative, to act from a position of organic knowledge and understanding – while this does not explicitly include ‘research literature’, itself a Western-imperial-hegemonic device in many respects, a knowledge of the institutions of the traditional intellectual is key to meaningful engagement and social change. Arguably ‘academic activism’ considered below is a synthesis of research/knowledge and practice/activism. Indeed, arguments over the ideas of the academics of academic activism were internally as heated as the ‘activism’ was externally (as Wohlforth, 1989 captures in their review).

¹¹⁷ TEQSA is the government statutory body in charge of regulating higher education in the country, it also provides metrics and incentives to ‘providers’ for good market behaviour. On the opposite side, it is charged with overseeing academic governance and ensuring responsible action to breaches.

¹¹⁸ I was a paid student representative for Flinders University at this conference.

¹¹⁹ The panel discussion is available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GgJD8lMuIo>

¹²⁰ It may be safe to assume that this statement is either incorrect, or in particular reference to the *new campuses* of the 1960s, rather than the traditional sandstone institutions in Australia.

and it goes towards the idea of student customers or students as consumers in this degree factory, you know, all these things are the things that students are feeling on the ground, their feelings or experiences, you know. Is it any surprise that the issue of academic integrity and contract cheating is so big if we challenge students, and you're just paying through the nose, though all the qualification becomes is the paper? (Cai in TEQSA, 2019)

This is a salient example of a student politician who was provided with a high-level platform for discussion of issues *actually* facing students. Granted, these would be a particular sect of students involved in student unions, associations and politics, but they are in fact real issues and barriers to authentic engagement in higher education. Cai presented a response against the corporatised university, against cuts to student support and exorbitant student fees. This type of student is mythologised by university management as 'disruptive', 'ignorant' and 'unable to get on the agenda', and thereby in many instances barred from participating in fulsome modes on committees (Macfarlane, 2020). Though a democratising of the students with access to committees can hardly be deemed a negative, the result, as highlighted above, is the silent student, ill-equipped to give even meaningful contributions to committees. Indeed, more problems plague student politics at the nexus of representation at *Flinders*.

Students with the platform, holding power in the student association, are rarely the students with the knowledge and skills to communicate effectively about issues facing them – unionists or otherwise. In fact, far more common at *Flinders* in the two years of this study, is the 'narc' – the single student positioned on a committee to nod and remain silent. While the politician, or perhaps the Trotskyist, would gladly attack these students' seeming inaction, there is something more mystifying at the root of the position of such students, particularly as these students are chosen *for* service under the hegemony of university governance. While the student politicians would never admit it, their own position on committees, at conferences and in promotional opportunities would often render them as narcs, too.

Students in governance

Narcs are neither inherently damaging to their peers, nor are they in any position to affect change. While some of them hold to a particular core of values, others are selected based on their academic achievement and perceived likelihood of agreement with a committee's decision-making ethos. In many instances, the narcs are selected for these committees because they are seen to be 'good learners', which is almost code for 'good listeners' in the university context. In this sense, the expectation on these students from the hegemony is very low. If they do contribute, in an agreeable way, they are seen as going beyond the requirements of their position – from the SRC and hegemon's position. Most students who have held these positions to whom I have spoken described themselves as good listeners or learners. One student, who sat on their College's Education Committee emphasised the diversity of 'listening' they had done in their time:

I think for me, just learning to hear what, you know – how lecturers respond – lecturers saying, “I have issues of academic integrity” and how they deal with [those] issues. It's also listening on how the University is promoted. It's given me lots of insight on how you talk with people. I think listening to people, you know, listening and just listening to how people that would be the marketing – how they sell the uni ... there's impact on international students. I think for me, it is just a whole, this uni. I've learned so much about the Uni, that if I had the chance, I'd want to work here. (Lonnard)

For students, with Lonnard as the example, who have the opportunity to listen there is often an implicit allegiance with the University's values, perhaps excusably because they have no authentic reason to engage with any alternative. There are those, however, who have started in more organic activism – from leadership in time of threat to their course of study, their peers, or the conditions of the institution and learning from, working with and *activating* with their peers – to an abandonment of their values in the true form of the narc. In particular, the mental gymnastics a narc goes through to position themselves as allied with the hegemon is profound. Indeed, one of my participants, himself a vehement activist in the introduction's organisational

restructure, who suddenly found himself ‘representing’ an entire organisational unit (College) made a statement to the effect that ‘only some of us cared’:

The rest of the uni students really couldn’t give a toss, its apathy, “I’m here to do my degree”, not thinking of the implications of a restructure, any changes – at the particular time. The other thing I’m a great believer in is networking – you talk to your lecturers, and you find out and your tutors ... people are more interested in survival than they are in politics at the moment. And I, maybe that’s a conclusion that people were not interested in, in getting involved in FUSA, or not interested in getting involved in any of the clubs, because let’s be honest, I want to get my degree done. Get out of the place. Not thinking of the implications of budget cuts. (Derick)

Arguably, the reason the ‘other students’ have lacklustre effort, or do not care, engage or retaliate is that they lack the *organic* knowledge of their position underneath hegemony. They act as would be expected in the event in question, silently as the radical change to the organisational structure took place during the semester break and positioned by the hegemon in communiques as progress ‘for the students’ while the undergraduates would have had little contact with their lecturers directly. The tightly controlled glossy image of the University run by the marketing department would never actively promote the kind of radical organisational change that had been taking place. While there is an attitude of ‘being a customer’ (Alnawas, 2014; Bunce et al., 2017; Gravett et al., 2019; Molesworth et al., 2009), in actuality many students think of themselves as ‘learner’, ‘partner’, ‘early career psychologist’ and many other forms rather than merely as a ‘paying customer’. For a substantive period at *Flinders*, the rhetoric of management academics positioned student as consumers, from the Academic Senate through to college committees. The adoption of this language, by my participant Derick, is a true simulacrum of the listener. By contrast, other narcs turn on their activist peers in the committee setting, for their allegiance with the University’s values positions them against their peers who may be fighting against degree changes or topic cuts.

I know the SWSU [Social Work Student Union] have actually had a voice on the big college committee. It is quite organised, but who really cares about this stuff? ... We want our pub crawl! – Not that I see the point of it, spew everywhere. (Lonnard)

There is an internalised ‘anti-union’ spirit amongst many of the committee narcs that I have interacted with. The pitting of students against one another makes it less likely that a student committee member will respond to something they have questions about, let alone genuinely disagree with, as they fear the possibility of other students turning on them. This is actively promoted in some instances by committee chairs.

The actual impact of students’ decisions on these committees, though, is ultimately questionable. Outside of committees which regulate, decide and govern educational and academic decisions, however, there is a perception of impact, as students see physical manifestations of decisions on which they were asked for ‘input’.

We have a lot of people in motorised wheelchairs. We have a number of students who are vision impaired. So that’s something that is practical that the SVG [Student View Group] does look at – how can we make the Uni better for students? I have a friend who can get from here to the Education Building through every lift he knows. But there isn’t actually a list of where or a map of where all the lifts are. (Derick)

These specific committees, established to encourage students’ perspective on marketing decisions, are relatively well attended, as these positions are often paid for their time. However, they bare little significance in terms of organisational structure or educational matters.

I got roped into a session that I thought was about “student view”, but was really just a marketing session. I thought it was going to be sophisticated, but it ended up being putting post-it’s on the wall and talk to a running video camera, rather than actually be engaged in partnership. This was all marketing, and this had nothing to do with university change. I cried. (Odette)

Academic committees, then, are the basis for inquiring into university management hegemon. For, if students are themselves honorary members of the ideological casting on such

committees, the structures and systems of university governance must have strong hierarchical power so much that it casts students in a particular mode, or at least engages in processes of recruiting particular students (such as consumer: Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2020; Wong & Chiu, 2019).

Here, a momentary departure from the data is useful to sketch the attributes of a student committee member which are sought after – these are ‘employed’ by the hegemon. I have been involved in both the recruitment for and the recruitment onto such committees at the highest levels at *Flinders* and speak with relative authority on the decision-making processes from one perspective. There is an ideological intellectualism in the sketch cast to *capture* a student for a committee. All at once, there is both a resistance to honouring the student voice, often accompanied by statements that students would simply not be interested in participating in this project or on this committee, and a value-driven urgency for student representation in the need to have a student to fill the role, but for them to be agreeable to the predetermined, budgeted or requisite policy outcomes under decision (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020). Here, students who are already members of other academic committees are prime candidates (Varnham et al., 2016). They are likely academically minded and usually members of the majority class, race and gender on campus. Indeed, like Derick, they have a belief that they represent their peers because they *are* academically minded. They may think their peers are less engaged, but usually genuinely want the best for themselves and maybe others of their social group. This is small pool in any given College, with usually no more than 12 students as representatives on several committees. The pool should always be divisible by two, as policy ruling enforces two students per committee – a well-intentioned policy aimed to bring *support* for the students in collegiality to the committees. At *Flinders*, the typical membership consists of: a Student Consultative Committee (CSCC) group, usually made up of either elected student representatives from clubs or students who stood out to teaching academics who had input into the committee (literally

high achieving students); the College Education Committee (CEC), responsible for a herculean volume of course and topic approval, modification and termination forms and regulatory requirements; a Student Complaints and Appeals Committee (CSCAC); a Research Degrees Committee (CRHDC); and, the College Student Retention and Success Committee (CSRSC) among other College specific, acronym laden committees and working groups. A feature, then, is that these students are often under such opuses of agendas, minutes and documents that responsibly dispensing their duties to provide input would be its own full-time job – one for which they are not paid. One of my participants recounted being invited into the representative space and on to her first committee:

I got an email from [redacted], the Dean of the college, and he was like “we are thinking of having you as our college rep, would you be interested?” I was like, “okay, pretty interesting opportunity, but what would, what does a college rep need to do?” He said, “just pass by an office anytime and we can chat.” I went to his office, and mostly it was having the student involved in all the committees, whether it is student related or research related, or like working groups, all those things. I just need to be present as a student representing students and, you know, give my voice and represent students, what students would want, or what would benefit them and interest them. So yeah, first I was like, “okay I’ll probably get to know more once I start attending the meetings.” So far, I think have attended about four or five. I’m involved in two committees. One working group, which is a research working group. It’s all about the students. (Adaline)

This high achieving international student, an example of one who does not stay *silent*, was targeted as an exemplar student, someone who could speak for the ‘customer’ perspective. This is particularly complicated in Australia’s international higher education landscape, where students as customers is even more direct. Focus on standards, and academic performance¹²¹ (Devos, 2003), growing enrolments and mobility (Choudaha, 2017), demand for institutions to ‘recruit’ internationally to sustain their teaching and research (Bonnell, 2016; Cantwell, 2015;

¹²¹ In addition, a recent focus on preventing ‘contract cheating’ (Bretag et al., 2019) has gripped the international student space as students are under increasing financial and familial pressure to succeed.

Marginson & Considine, 2000; in the US and Europe: Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012) and commodify students (McCrohon & Nyland, 2018) are among the issues which commodify and marketise international student presence in universities. In this sense, Adaline's *consumer* voice is dually hegemonic, falling into both a local positioning as customer, and an international customer of market higher education. If university management see students as consumers, and in particular see international students for commodity value alone, then performing to or being a customer of higher education is both the expected behaviour and the reality of speaking to the institution:

Now I've got a communication from the international office, they want me to be involved in the marketing campaign for recruiting new students for 2021. ... They want to do like photography and filming sessions. I'm not sure what there are they going to have – a video or what exactly they're doing. Like, I know what a recruitment video would probably look like. They don't want me to speak or anything, it is pretty much going to be silent. I'm sure that there's going to be someone narrating in the background. But I feel like it's cool that the Uni is knowing who the reps are. They're getting them involved in things. ... it has been pretty full on. I'm really occupied – but I've been happy being occupied in those things. I mean, I think of myself as a pretty social person. So, it's just giving me that experience that I came here for. I mean, I think, I think I'm the only international student who is a college rep [nb: Adaline was not the only international student in this position].

(Adaline)

Using international students for marketing and promotional purposes is not a novel idea. Indeed, perceptions of prevalence of an existing body of international students of like culture or origin has been part of market strategy in universities' international campaigns since the 1990s (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Moogan et al., 1999; Shanka et al., 2006; Stewart, 1991). The request for a silent international student is significant in this context. While not inconsistent with *Flinders*' marketing to domestic students¹²², there is a symbolism between the image of the silent international student and the desired student – silent except when called upon, then

¹²² For example, 'Flinders University - Step into Your Future': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ka1fhabaTQ>

agreeable. While this is a caricature, in practice the ‘agreeable’ nature of international students, particularly in committee settings, aligns with the customer serving ethos of the hegemon in universities. Why would an international student work against their best interest in experience improvement, additional funding, or more opportunities? The experience, then, of international students departs from their domestic counterparts on similar committees as they are presented with opportunities to speak, though usually to support a financed development that is seen to assist them and their peers. In Adaline’s case, the representative experience has been positive, and has given her opportunities to work with international students facing a variety of challenges. However, she also recalled other students’ passivity on committee positions:

I’m happy that as an international student, I’ve gotten these opportunities. Because, I mean, we as international students may sometimes be a bit more vulnerable, a little bit more isolated, because, I mean, we’re leaving our families behind and coming to new place making friends from scratch. ... I know that the rep role is really, they pick just like, the – they’ll pick the quietest student almost, you know, just the one that sort of goes with the flow. And it’s all – it’s all hunky dory, whatever. ... Honestly, with the, with the committee with the staff, nothing has happened of the sort [negative experience]. But with some students, they kind of don’t know where the line is. ... They expect a lot I mean; I know I’m college rep, but I’m not like a social worker or specialist that I can, you know, solve people’s personal problems. ... Obviously with Corona and everything we were limited to Zoom, couldn’t do stuff and now restrictions are being lifted, we want to give people a little bit of more, you know, happy events and stuff just to socialise a little bit. (Adaline)

Here, perhaps, expectations of social experience management and social support become an additional burden on representatives. While there are no formal supports for student representatives in the form of training, counselling or payment for their labour, there is an expectation from other students that they will provide support and channel their voice ‘up’ to committees. In addition, for international students, particularly during the COVID-19 global pandemic, additional pressure to create community experiences has surfaced. It has affected

students, particularly those who were members, or executives, of clubs and societies for international student country-groups, as the Australian Government provided few/no formal supports (Blackmore, 2020; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020; Supiani et al., 2020). While *Flinders* offered support packages to international students (Stirling, 2020), economic and emotional impacts were still deeply felt.

Special conditions for international students considered customers might be considered another ‘indoctrinating’ element of hegemonic control of university committees. Juggling between a ‘consumer voice’ and the lived realities of being an international student, and meeting their own needs as their representative, remain a struggle for those with whom I have spoken. The similarities here between international and domestic students are more profound than the university sector, which itself is split in half as a twisted public-private-partnership, can see. If governance, particularly academic governance, drives the framework of teaching, learning and research in institutions, and the address of international students is confined to a consumer approach, then silent *or* ‘consumer’ students are created as much as naturally exist. Here, students who are ‘owed something’ (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2010, p. 343) have the most input in academic governance spaces which have accepted marketisation to their core¹²³. Students selected to act in these spaces, then, show promise for meeting the imaginary of the governance hegemon. They see themselves as a consumer with rights and seek to have their demands met in governance forums. However, this rarely plays out. During my participation in over 85 committee, Senate, Council, and working group meetings, not including my own participation, I recorded just 17 instances of a student ‘speaking up’. Many of these followed direct prompting from members in the room, the conversation usually followed a pattern which: (1) starts with a discussion of an agenda item (2) moves to a question from a member (3) moves into a theoretical conversation about how a decision might affect the students (4) another

¹²³ This characterisation of the institution will be interrogated below.

member calls for a students' perspective (5) the original requestor, #2 above, notes the students in the room, (6) the first student gives their perspective, (7) the second student echoes the first student's statements. While this was not always the exact precession, the vast majority of the 17 times students remained silent until called upon. It is worth reflexively noting that my presence in several of these meetings may have had an impact on my fellow students, as a relatively (and acknowledged) *senior* attendee of university governance spaces, there may have been an affect¹²⁴. While my participants, all of whom had been on committees/working groups which I had observed or been a member of, recounted high levels of participation through 'listening', for the most part the students did not elaborate on times in which their contributions had shaped the flow of the meeting. Indeed, none of them raised formally contributing to agendas through submissions or requests to contribute. In particular, Gwynne recounted her contribution to a college committee:

Honestly? Not very much. Which is probably not very useful. But I kind of – we, me and the other student reps, ... another post grad rep, and another undergraduate rep, we meet a fair bit and talk about ... what students are worried about and talking about. And so we'll often kind of meet and talk about things. We often go into it [the meeting] kind of with a united sense of what we're going to talk about, because I think, especially when you're in a room with all these very, you know, venerated and respected professors, it can be hard to bring your own points and ideas – we'd like to kind of meet and figure out what it is [contribution], if we had anything. Often, we don't really have anything, because a lot of stuff is either already kind of decided, and then just ticking it off, or it's like, you know, wording changes to topic curriculums or whatever. But the stuff that I kind of generally speak up about are things like – there was a lot of talk last year, particularly about retention, and what that means in terms of how we get students to enrol, especially. There was a lot about the first few [first year] topics, how assessment is done. So, a lot of that I kind of spoke up about because there was this kind of talk about whether assessment should be in these huge chunks, you know, like 40% 50% 60%, or, you know, whatever. Or if they should be kind of trickled

¹²⁴ My own participation was well over and above these numbers, while I am usually relatively vocal – particularly on issues facing students, I am not representative of the 'average' student committee member at *Flinders*. In the majority of instances where I recorded interaction, I was either present as a staff member or a student *observer*, not member and while I had a right to speak, it was not my place to introduce questions or deviate discussion.

out over the course of a semester. And I was quite kind of vocal about that, because I felt like, if your interest is retention, then you don't want to be giving students big 50% essay when its first year first semester, because it's going to freak them the hell out. (Gwynne)

Here, the essential nucleus of the problem emerges: for students, decisions presented in committee fora seem decided on. These spaces are not the decision-making hub of promise. Rather, they are perceived as a box-ticking exercise which does not invite student perspectives. In addition, while they may be asked to speak, there is a troubled power imbalance between the students and the 'professors' of the committees. The matter Gwynne speaks about for the revision to the University's assessment policy is of obvious and direct impact on students, and the process by which the policy was interrogated and consulted involved travelling roadshows of policy working group members to various university committees. They literally called for student and staff input on the policy modifications. This gave Gwynne and her peers the opportunity to speak to policy changes which were to directly impact students. Moreover, students selected for the representative spaces are often of a particular background, where speaking to issues is not their strong suit:

But the problem in student government is the noisiest, perhaps shiniest, vocal students get the attention. The problems are twofold. They don't represent, and they don't actually speak out. And I want something for someone who is struggling. And that's why I think, not necessarily the best students should be on college committees. Like, if you've got three fails, if you know how to talk about that, or if you can be helped to talk about your experience, I think that actually qualifies you to be on a student committee simply because you know, the bad as well as the good. (Clair)

The issues connect not only with preparedness, but back to training and support for students, as raised in Chapter 6. While currently these options accompany an attitude of ignoring student perspectives, meaningful input requires substantive training. The world of academic governance is alien and multi-dimensional, especially for undergraduate students who may not have working experience in decision-making, business, governance or professional roles. To

meaningfully engage with students and to support them to speak, training to understand processes and ongoing facilitated discussions is required. Indeed, while the students I spoke with felt that they had opportunities to *learn* about academic governance, they felt that this was the heart of their representative experience, not the start:

A huge part of that, for me, at least last year coming into it was I just didn't know about how the structures work. And I didn't have the vocabulary or the experience. (Gwynne)

There is so much that goes on that as a student you have no idea about. I just have always found it strange up until this year. Um, they've kind of offered not a lot of training, because the student positions, because that's a big part of it too, um, you don't feel qualified to say, to kind of speak on behalf of students, even though that's what you're there to do. (Retha)

Maybe FUSA can do a bit more promoting. Because I know FUSA does provide training for people. I know that that the clubs like the Business one and the Psych one, they give them funding, and they have to do educational stuff. So maybe give the training there? (Lonnard)

People that are interested in being involved at that higher level will be in training and all that. For me? None. ... If as students we have an opportunity for, to impact the future, and see, my impact is not for the now, we need support to see that. Participate, get involved. (Derick)

The normal students are not being the ones that are being heard. Those that are, they actually did a course on leadership and how to get things done. That's kind of all the training I thought I would get through student leadership, but we didn't – at all. I actually found as a student politician, I was actually more hobbled and less effective. (Clair)

Training? I don't know if there is any, actually – I don't think there is any for HDRs, I know there is for undergrads and people on, like, the education committees. (Adaline)

Governance training is clearly an ambiguous space, who offers it and who it is for. Indeed, I have never received any formal committee training and while FUSA offer limited training to their incoming student council members, the vast majority of committee members fall outside FUSA's student council. Students who, legitimately, seek to do their best, achieve well and

make a contribution are silenced, perhaps accidentally in the well-meaning imaginary, due to a lack of support and training for their positions of relative influence and power¹²⁵.

The reinforcement of the image of the student as a passive consumer then surfaces, for if they are invited to participate in governance and committee structures with the hegemon's assumption that they will be silent, interested in 'consumer affairs', and speak up only when called upon, then they will likely perform to those standards. After all, these high achieving students aim to please, and perhaps in the long term create a space to be heard in the institution. Here, the characterisation of the narc is complete – a student who is unsupported, marginalised, and silent, not because of any cultural marginalisation particularly, but because their service to the committee or working group is to reinforce the image of the student as consumer in the model of state hegemony. When they break this mould is when the realities of being *in* a committee can be seen. Eventually, students on these committees develop confidence and, like the opening statements, can speak back to the stereotypes and make meaningful statements about the state of the institutions. Unfortunately, this is not the majority of cases, and in the instances I have seen, the development of this level of confidence takes too long, with many decisions passing students by without valuable input or questions raised. This creates a schism between the narc, the unapologetically silent, typically white, and middle-class, and the politician, the unapologetically loud, often white, from a diversity of class, gender and race backgrounds. Perhaps understandably, the politician would demand the narc take more action, though conversion from politician to narc, once their turn for membership comes, is not infrequent.

¹²⁵ Recently, in Portugal, students are being appointed as “ombuds” – intermediaries to support one another – though these are appointed by the equivalent of student government, the governance framework is explicit and ‘activity of the ombuds is regulated by an official set of regulations’ (Palma, 2020, p. 14). Providing spaces for students to legitimately represent each other through formalised channels may provide a more adequate, robust training ground for representing student issues in governance structures.

There should be no question of students' participation in university governance. Since the 1960s, student power movements have demanded students hold a seat at the table for the governance of institutions often as a result of well-founded arguments and thought (race protest: Ballantyne, 2020; university leadership: Cini, 2016; unionism sustaining power: Eaton, 2002; motivation: G. S. Jones, 1969; influence on policy: Klemenčič, 2014). Students in institutional governance who are authentically provided opportunities to give input, who are supported, trained and included from the outset, make meaningful contributions to the academy, to their peers and to the university's strategic position (Klemenčič et al., 2015). Unfortunately, within the consumerist (modern capitalist) regime of universities, students are reduced to their role as consumer. Within the framework of hegemonic governance and management of the university, this perspective proliferates from the peak to the lowest order working groups in the institution. In this sense, those recruited, be they staff or students, are assumed to agree with the 'agenda' (hegemony of the university), which coincides with the student as consumers approach. Beyond their appearance of agreement at the surface, even in those instances at which the students are seemingly agreeable with the corporatised consumerist agenda, there is a deep discomfort with the way that committee input is provided, both from the members of the committee and the students themselves. The reproduction of the university management *hegemon* is an uncomfortable 'coming into' student governance spaces. Governance initiatives should not fall under contorted banners of partnership, though there are merits to student voice appreciation and students as partners in learning and teaching, their pollution of advancing student unionism, or positioning students singularly in the classroom, has negative effects on students understanding of their role in higher education.

Students as partners

Students as Partners, an international movement of academics and students, purports to reconsider engaging with students in learning and teaching for globally increasingly diverse

student bodies and more constructive, value-centric modes for working with students (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Some of these have markedly institutional origins as a tool of engaging students in learning and teaching. The emergence of Students as Partners (SaP) is worth some consideration, as a tool itself for staff to leverage when working with their students, simultaneously conversely for reinforcement of hegemonic views of students. The SaP approach could be naïvely accepted as a tool for marketing and a play at ‘student engagement’, or more deeply viewed as an opportunity to raise consciousness with students by education practitioners. In reality, the presentation of SaP opportunities is a spectrum which shifts across institutions that adopt it (in superficial modes: Begley et al., 2019; in authentic modes: Matear et al., 2018). The question of hegemony sits invisibly under the surface of SaP agendas without posing the theoretical question to the adopters: is this a mode of operating which enables students to challenge the hegemonic position of the institution, even in the context of curriculum and pedagogy, or a flaccid space for compliance and hegemonic reinforcement? In this regard, the bifurcation of practice in SaP spaces is similar to the split between the organic and political (hegemonic) activist, where in one mode there is an organic engagement with the social group (students) and in the other there is an indoctrination and social coercion into the hegemonic spaces of the university as politics.

Student partnership (or ‘voice’), then, might be best conceptualised separately from SaP as an organised institutional approach to engaging with students¹²⁶, particularly for those students and academics for whom the outcome is a shared consciousness and systemic ability to ‘change the system’ through authentic democratic citizenship (W. Brown, 2015). Ultimately, while *Flinders* has embraced the SaP approach, at least at surface level, there is little buy in or

¹²⁶ Indeed, student partnerships in ‘quality’ (SPIQ) where students support or act as regulators and supporters of quality education (by metric standards) (Jensen & Bennett, 2015; Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland, 2019) can be considered in an entirely different frame – while a student power space, SPIQ enables state hegemony through its attachment to corporate standards practices. This is a complex area, particularly given the power and prevalence of the UK’s NUS, and is worth further investigation elsewhere. In the Australian context, partnerships between the NUS and Student Partnership programmes are few and far between and have little bearing on the ‘union’ activity in the country.

systemic movement to actually *deploy* a strategic SaP approach. Though this is not for a lack of trying by the academics in positions responsible for it:

If we think about SaP as culture change, then it is going to take a long time. You know, I think that's where the whole idea of partnership falls down. But it might just be chipping away and normalising it in existing structures and curriculum. Because students don't just speak for themselves. You could try and explain the philosophy of it [SaP], but it often falls into "student centred learning". I think a lot of conversation that happens around student partnership is really basic and motivated from a bad place ... it's just politics.
(Kelcy)

The dichotomy of meaningful *partnership* in the sense of being engaged, together, as equal members in a joint venture, against a 'student centred learning' (Flinders University, 2016) approach is powerful and problematic. In contemporary classrooms, students are more reliant on academic guidance, who are themselves frequently insecure about their academic ability and often disengaged with education in the broadest sense. However, much of this dependence can be conceptualised as a mythology around students' actual engagement and experience (Fulford, 2017; Macfarlane, 2005, 2020; J. Williams, 2012). Moreover, even 'student centred learning' requires care, attention and resourcing to create and sustain. To elevate to the position of a *radical* student partnership, more time than academics often have access to is required. However, academics who do have time and feel institutionally supported *are* able to exercise modes of working *with* students – reserving value judgement – to productively influence the structure of their classes, which was particularly amplified during the COVID-19 global health crisis:

We were constrained, so rather than having a meeting where you're all sitting around a table, maybe it's actually just been a bit more accessible. But also, I think that notion of, but we need to find out what their experience is. So, we have to actually ask this time rather than just making assumptions. I think a lot more academics now have asked, and they wouldn't normally have bothered, they just said, "well, I think this is what's going on, I'm going to run with it". Whereas now, being forced to move so much into the online

space, and they've recognised that that's what we're gonna have to stay for a while, they better find out whether it's working or not. Not a bad thing.

(Cthrine)

In a time where the student 'experience' is more likely to be qualitatively unknown, learning from students about their experience becomes more meaningful for decision making. Opening the conduit between students and academics is not a novel idea, however its relevance in a disconnected age is abundant. Indeed, at a practical level even having accessible communication channels is an important first step to enable meaningful engagement between students and academics. Cthrine noted that the channels for communication opened opportunities for stronger student peer representation in their college at a *topic* level¹²⁷:

the idea ... is to give students ... more power and communication opportunities to talk about, to voice, their experience of being students within topics. And then they've also got something similar at the course level. ... But to be honest, as much as we don't like to think it, academics are scary – they are no matter what, there's that power difference. So, this opens up just another channel where students can talk to their peers. And then those nominated representatives can meet with the topic coordinators and discuss things about the topic. So far, we've seen some fantastic changes – but not everywhere. I think opening up those doors makes it so much easier, just provides more opportunities for students to actually voice any concerns that they're having, or good things as well.

(Cthrine)

These localised efforts at *Flinders* are beginning to proliferate, with more segments of the organisation adopting approaches which enable students to speak about their learning experiences. Constructively, this may be considered as a model of participatory engagement, though ultimately its capacity to support students towards true citizenship remains to be tested. While not specifically germane to this thesis, consideration of the level of student engagement is important in an organisationally driven project, such as SaP, and a framework emerges which is typically used with children as a reference point for total engagement with the university structure. Hart (1992) proposed a 'ladder of participation' whereby children are engaged with

¹²⁷ This is a learning/teaching partnership programme run in their College.

various 'steps' of participation in their education. While Hart has encouraged more critical scholarship beyond his initial proposal, the ladder motif has held theoretical water in student voice conversations (Hart, 2008). Hart's ladder starts in non-participation, and steps 'up' to full participation and ownership. In this sense, SaP approaches are perhaps what Hart (1992) would describe as 'consulted and informed', whereby students are positioned in a place to 'have a say' on their experiences and are informed about new initiatives or structures which may, or may not, have been influenced by their input thereby participating, but not in a fulsome way. In the more authentic modality, where 'student partnership' is considered *prima facie* as any initiative where academics and students work together more as *equals*, likely positions students 'up' Hart's ladder, with some imagination to bridge it into adult education and enable genuine responses to student's perspectives, 'academic initiated, shared decisions with students' (Hart, 1992, p. 12). The positioning of students in partnerships has also accelerated in Australian schools under the same banner, 'students as partners', with school students now providing input into the structure and content of their educations. In this sense, use of Hart's ladder as a tool for children, is congruent with the partnership and 'voice' initiatives of schools. The unfortunate commentary on higher education, is its role as follower in partnership initiatives, coming behind the schools in their development of partnership, voice and democratic citizenship in the education ecosystem (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Perhaps reconceptualising SaP as a pre-tertiary learning opportunity for students to explore possibilities for interacting with learning, teaching, governing and being in education and democracy would position university students with a better starting place for serious engagement with society. Institutions and academics squander opportunities for meaningful, structural, sustained engagement with institutions and their bounds in state society when they relegate meaningful engagement to 'projects' and opportunities for consciousness raising to SaP. As it stands, SaP is too easily a banner for marketing and 'user' experience:

[A]ll the meetings around the changes that have happened around COVID, etc. particularly student experience: “we take care of the students”. You could from the outside think that that’s all about the student in centre. But it’s certainly not partnership. It’s more or less – student experience – it is a marketing term. It’s not a partnership term. And so, in that conversation, “oh the students, let’s take care of the students”. This was coming from high level – my question was, you know, and we’re gonna cut this topic and cut that topic and do this and slash that, and burn that. And did anyone think to ask the student what topic they might like to do. And has anyone ever done so? Because student “experience” isn’t cuts, it’s working with them to find what works. Constructively. (Dyane)

These spaces too easily fall to conversations which simply advance the hegemonic decisions, rather than being open to genuine collaboration. Universities have faced immense financial pressure during COVID-19. Student *partners* in an authentic sense would ask the students what to do with the budget constraints, and perhaps team up with economists, sociologists and philosophers to consider what to do with the university in a time of crisis.

Decentralising institutional decision-making requires *critical* engagement with the structures and systems of the academy, and by necessity requires student/staff alignment and *partnered* dialogue to advance an enlightened conversation. Unfortunately, the majority of SaP work remains acritical, supportive of structural inequity and neoliberal. Being involved in SaP projects at *Flinders*, one of my participants, Derick, commented on the lack of diversity in the initiative:

When I think who the student partners are – when that we’re being asked our opinion or our points of view on what we see, only what is good. It’s both positive and negative. ... I see it as an opportunity for a voice for students to be involved, especially international students ... because they [the University] rely a lot on international students. They can bring cultural aspects to the conversation. If that makes sense. But we [partnership initiative] don’t have the diversity, and actually understand the culture. (Derick)

The level of change students experience resulting from their perspectives and their ‘voices’ in partnership initiatives is also of significance. While those who are engaged with the initiative

themselves are limited in number and background – tending to be more from the privileged class of high performing students, a natural privileging of *hegemonic types* – the outputs from those engagements are limited too. As *Gwynne* highlighted:

I guess for me, ... and I don't know how much this is already the case, but actually having mechanisms whereby the Uni has to take that feedback on board, you know, I think there's always an endless loop. And it's the same with the SETs [Student Evaluations of Teaching]. When I was an undergrad, I always thought it was so bizarre how we did these SET surveys, and then we never saw if that feedback was being applied. (Gwynne)

In likening partnership initiatives to the SET feedback cycle is perhaps a cynical positioning on the university's ability to adapt to students' perspectives. Indeed, individual academics are responsible for responding to the commentary of the student evaluations of teaching and making any relevant changes to their topic curriculum. Undergraduate students' perspectives in particular are interesting in this area, as they are currently experiencing education *at the front*, and while scarcely involved in partnership initiatives they are aware of the cycle of feedback and what the purpose of their education is:

the HECS [higher education contribution scheme] debt is obviously coming out of government money that somebody, and though they will eventually, they pay that back, you know, someone's paying for it. So, I'm going to university right now, right? We all are, someone's paying for this course, even though we were able to get in on [redacted – specialised funding scheme] somebody you know, to pay for [redacted – lecturer's] salaries and to put these lectures and classes forward, like somebody's paying for it. With the hope that we will then continue on with our study, and then contribute back to society. (Evelin)

I feel like a person who's putting themselves into debt, or who wants to do a university course, they're going to be aware of what jobs they are hoping to take. They're going to have really thought about, and they're going to have spoken to their university. And they care, and they want what they do [with their degree] to be meaningful. (Elly)

In alignment with Macfarlane's (2020) assertion that students are painted in a negative light in stories about them, and that realigning narratives about students (folklore) is a necessary part

of facilitating meaningful collaboration and high quality learning, I asked student-participants about their views of the nature of the role of higher education. These students were new first year students, whose untainted perspective on university was refreshing, and interesting:

higher education is to, you know, pull people up out of their, for lack of better words ignorance or, or misunderstanding, or lack of understanding, and make it make it so that they have a better future (Kalila)

if somebody is participating in university level education, they're clearly thinking about the future, especially if they're passing, they're trying to apply – they're trying to apply themselves. So, I feel like that characteristic, and that higher level of commitment to it shows character. ... Let's be real, all of us are going to have a different idea of how, you know, the government money should be spent. But my biggest thought processes, if you look back in history, the biggest thing for people and like, you know, just humans in general, is education. And I think it's very important that education is spread, and accessible. And especially because we live in such a, you know, wealthy and comfortable society. (Elly)

it's maybe a little bit neglectful to think of education as anything other than a right. Because if you leave someone uneducated, there's something wrong. ... let's just look at the example of Malala Yousafzai. She was talking about education, and she talks about education as if it's the most important thing, and I would agree with that. I think education is the most important thing to humans. So, I think, even if somebody doesn't pay back for an education, I feel like it was still important to give it. (Evelin)

Involving students in conversations about the structure and nature of their education does not require a high bar of intellectual discovery or rigorous research. There is a requirement that students *engage* with their studies and show commitment to their education, but the involvement of students in their education, and in the structure of the institutions that deliver that education, require only good will and support. Fundamentally, the current conception of SaP is unnecessary, particularly when it originates in spaces which tokenise and delegitimize students in governance, but partnership between students and academics is utterly essential for the future success of the academy.

In some instances, student partnership has been reasserted as a counter-hegemonic project, the reimagining of student power¹²⁸. Others have attempted to bridge students input in learning and teaching to provide students with meaningful positions in governance (Bonnell, 2016; Cini, 2016; Klemenčič, 2014; Lopes, 2014). However, and perhaps unsurprisingly, in the partnership space, conversations about student voice/choice in their learning have usurped the very possibility for positioning students (power) in governance positions. As Clair discussed, the power balance in SaP initiatives is often askew:

I think that as Students as Partners, it's important to remember that partnership bit of it. You know that means students and staff together, maybe community. I think when it swings too far as students or staff as dictators the power imbalance of what's best for the rest of the student body, the other students, versus what's best for that core the politicians, and the cabal of evil wizards or something. But the idea of that – that inside outside function again, and I think there are people that do function in those indeterminate positions. The issue is that Students as Partners is so often tied to student governments, and because student governors, you know, have a very limited lifespan, so will Students as Partners. Otherwise, it's not partners, it's just staff, outsiders, pushing it. (Clair)

At *Flinders*, staff drive partnerships and, primarily management academics, have positioned students deep in the classroom relation, not in governance, with an overt dependence on students' voice as an input into evaluation, marketing and reform. This is rather than authentically positioning them as partners capable of making systemic change in governance positions. Indeed, the *International Journal of Students as Partners* has an exclusive focus on students' position in learning and teaching, rejecting robust discussions of the necessity of students in governance (for privileging example see: Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Moving students out of the silent corners of committee rooms, and positioning students at the centre of what higher education is and does, requires serious commitment. This is a commitment which is seldom

¹²⁸ In fact, I co-authored a position paper on this subject (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020).

seen at *Flinders* for genuine partnered, conscious and meaningful conversations about teaching and learning and the power, structure and nature of education today.

Currently, students come to positions of governance and power through cherry-picking or by accident. Where the former often falls inside SaP spaces, where the best or ‘shiniest’ students are selected to participate – and in some instances are paid for their work – in the re/design of teaching and learning resources, the latter are born from a deep necessity. This final mode of students who demand power, or who find their way to governance, academic activism and protest might be conceptualised as the organic intellectual activist, the student whose *raison d’état* is an *organic* social group-based motivator for ‘activism’ as a response to an injustice, a deep-seated problem of being a student in higher education. Here, while a fine line between student politics, student partner and student activist is walked, a handful of students choose, or are forced due to no other option, to react in an activist mode to institutional boundaries. The experiences and felt presence of these students is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

The organic intellectual activist:

Positionality, power and persuasion and the imperative of the organic response

The organic intellectual activist maintains a subaltern position in the corporate university. They operate from an interconnected place in response to shifts across *societies*, be that in response to changes in state society¹²⁹ or civil society, as it collides against hegemonic norms established in the state stratum (Gramsci, 1996). The organic intellectual activist dissents, provides opportunities for others voices to be heard, and resists and rebukes transformation which harms their communities. Moreover, the organic intellectual student, through a social group consciousness, campaigns for the rights and needs of their student class¹³⁰. These student intellectuals, who harness the organic intellectual of Gramscian tradition in combination with dissenting initiative under hegemony (Gramsci, 1996; Thomas, 2009), operate primarily out of necessity, recognising the struggles of their community and providing a conduit to respond to the collapsing conditions of the institution above them. Occupying this position is challenging for the intellectual, often requires fighting against institutional discrimination and is not taken lightly by those who perform the function. During my study, two main groups of organic intellectual activists appeared. The first is a group concerned with organisational change, but primarily the *humanity* of organisational transformation in higher education. These students deemed the institutional transformation damaging to their communities (in some instances, exclusive of themselves) and fought from a position of necessity to preserve these spaces. The

¹²⁹ As relative to the university *qua* state and the student body *qua* Civil. This use acknowledges that these are not direct, mutable parallels, but bare enough resemblance between the key features of state and civil society for Gramscian theory to hold for the purposes of identifying *organic intellectuals* in this chapter (Gramsci, 1996).

¹³⁰ Noting, in this parallel, that students may also be stratified between proletariat and bourgeoisie planes, the organic intellectual activist responds to issues of *their* social class (or, perhaps, identity group) *under hegemony*. In this sense, the elite student – infrequent at *Flinders* – is excluded from *organic* activism, perhaps located in the strata of the student’s association in that they are literally paid by State political parties for their campaigning, and by the university for their ‘service’.

second is a pair of students whose responses against the institution were directly counter-hegemonic and born of necessity. Both these students identifying with different disabilities, spoke to their fight to be present, respected and heard in the formal places of the institution. Together, these two groups form different *perspectives* on organic intellectualism in contemporary university spaces: one group fighting for relative preservation of, or inclusion within, *status quo*, though a more profoundly intellectual *status quo* – itself counter hegemonic – and the other fighting for an upheaval of the *status quo*, as it inherently disadvantaged them and their immediate social group. Importantly, these organic intellectuals, as they surface under varying conditions at *Flinders*, are not members of the Student Association¹³¹ and are not collectively organised by a union or external force beside the institution and their community, which is not formalised pressure. While this distinction is not explicitly necessary for the emergence of the organic intellectual, as discussed in Chapter 8, the dissolution of student unions (Rochford, 2006) has not had a lasting impact in the form of an entire deconstruction of individual ability to collectively organise.

This chapter attends to organic intellectuals in the context of *Flinders*, as an important point of difference to student politicians as outlined in Chapter 7, and in some respects student activists as outlined in Chapter 6, and those students who are chosen for committees as outlined in Chapter 8. While there is some overlap between these groups, the conditions which enable a rise of the organic intellectual is special and does not depend on the presence of formalised political party and its structures or the student association. Here, by extension of institutional exclusion or transformation, students engage with hegemonic university change from below, taking initiative (*vis-à-vis* activism) to create conditions which support their peers and building networks of comradery to support students through challenging engagements with the

¹³¹ Notably, Gramsci highlighted that then modern American unions were predominantly extensions of ‘corporate expression of the rights of qualified crafts’ (Gramsci, 1996, pp. 286–287) which extends to the role of voluntary student associations in the university as expressions of hegemonic normality and designed to meet the needs of the petit bourgeoisie students as conforming with expressions of university normativity.

institution. The extension into students' activism follows a Gramscian mode, drawing on understandings of the intellectual, organisation of society and hegemony. Importantly, students' engagement with *activism* does not automatically take on organic characteristics, as explored in the previous three chapters, though student's activism can take organic form when facing superstructural issues in state society. Here, activism does not necessitate or require student power, nor do student power movements automatically take form of organic activism. Indeed, power remains a central struggle for students participating in governance, as raised in Chapter 8, and initiative under hegemony, as will be explored below, (Ledwith, 2009; Mayo, 2014, 2015) even in instances of relatively 'enlightened' contributions to scholarship (Shear, 2008). The possibility, then, for organic activism as contingent on a connected social group's consciousness and as initiative under hegemony, in many instances *requires* students to seize power to be heard, respected and recognised. This is explored below in particular reference to students under hegemonic change, and for students for whom merely participating in their education in a full sense is precluded from normative spaces.

The possibility of organic activism

The organic activist, one who responds to a community threat or need with the aim of supporting and ensuring equity, has a drive to do something good in the world¹³². This can take many forms, and walks many blurry lines, from the response of writing a letter or opinion piece in a newspaper, all the way to painting a placard and chanting in unison to lobby government. The feeling of being part of something bigger than yourself is, at a human level, significant. Those who are able to extract themselves from that, knowing their communities so well that they can advocate and create change for that community, are rare. The capacity for that action,

¹³² Throughout this section, particular attention is paid to the actions of students struggling for their communities during the opening prologue's organisational restructure. This diversity of responses was a *necessary* response for continuity of learning and teaching for many students. This was not carried out by student politicians, but by regular students at the university. Moreover, it was an otherwise traumatic experience in changing higher education landscape for many student and staff onlookers.

however, is imminently possible in human behaviour, and as Gramsci would argue, fundamentally necessary to creating social change that *does the work* for the communities in which it originates. The organic intellectual, or the organic intellectual activist as I would depict them by default, does not seek validation from the state, or those positionally/directionally higher, rather they seek the support of their communities themselves. They build capacity, share knowledge and create common spaces to work together. In this way, Gramsci saw a new way forward for *humanity* as a collaborative spirit; indeed, a bent towards the overthrow of the oppression of capitalism, but united in the creation of a new *modus operandi* that worked for the ‘social groups’ that made the *numbers* of society, not for a small handful who were responsible for systemic oppression and the extraction of value from people¹³³. Actualising Gramscian theory is, of course, increasingly perilous in contemporary academia, in particular as the academic precariat, encompassing students and staff alike, increases, financial stability decreases and the ability to have a voice, to rise up for a community, becomes a vulnerability and a danger to livelihood¹³⁴. The organic intellectual activist, however, does not waver in the face of this peril, nor are they adopting the banner of activism by *choice* or *privileged position*¹³⁵. They choose activist ‘tools’ for more fundamental, ontic, reasons. The structure of human society, particularly in late-stage modernity with accelerated global capitalism, is geared towards increasing forms of performativity, intellectualism, and slides into common sense (Ball, 2012; Brabazon, 2020; Crehan, 2016; Redhead, 2011). This system fundamentally privileges certain ways of knowing and doing. Moreover, it arguably positions human knowledge *as* capitalism: an epistemology of capitalist logics, ever changing as common sense prevails and

¹³³ In this regard, Gramscian extension is still required of the organic intellectual below, while the tools of activism may be employed in an ‘overthrow’ of capitalism, in the Gramscian revolutionary, this extension was not natural or conceived by the organic intellectuals of this chapter as they sat within the bounds of institutional activism.

¹³⁴ Academic freedom is related to this point, in Australia recent debates have seen changes to the code which create less stability for the *academic activist* (as a part of the *organic intellectual*) (Evans & Stone, 2021; French, 2019; Rhodes, 2017).

¹³⁵ Privilege is taking an increasingly front of mind position in contemporary activist studies literature, even to a point of discussing the privilege of members inside activist groups (Briziarelli & Guillem, 2016; Case et al., 2012; Darmon, 2014; Lewis, 2012; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

permutes to produce new areas of profitability which exact further human suffering. It offers new epistemologies for hope, against capitalism (Alcoff, 2011; Amsler, 2016; Brenner & Schmid, 2015). In response to this position are those with analytical consciousness and those who can no longer listen to their community's plight without *action*. This action can be small or revolutionary, but it is born of community necessity and seeks to change things for a social group. The organic activist, then, is the activist who *tries* to better their community. Importantly, nothing in the 'organic' moniker suggests perfection or an ultimate form, but for these intellectuals, for better or worse, it seems like the only way to change things for their community:

There's a possibility to it. A feeling that if you do this, something good may come. It's not driven by the desire to benefit personally – though that may come as a side effect. In fact, you don't really think of yourself. When your community comes under threat, there is an impulse to respond. I guess it's kind of fight or flight, right? Someone with power over you, or the power over your position, they tell you "that's it, you're done" I guess many people take stock and move on, but when it's mass, well, literally, disestablishment of positions, there's a communal feeling to the shock – when it is that. ... I knew what I had to do, my supervisors were good people, and they had fought for me, supported me to be in this position, and now it was our turn to fight for them, too. ... Lesson learned, in the end, that fighting may not amount to much – actually I think a lot of hurt came out of those moments – not the institution but the people. When you think there is a place for you and your community in, well, for us, the academy, that's something worth fighting for, because there is possibility in it ... there is a future for those that do the good, that stand up for it ... even if that means you might lose something, or just doing what you can in your capacity to do things, you know, to different ... emotional levels or actions or whatever. Honestly, the community might not even benefit, but at least you can try. ... Now, looking back, I think I've become a bit bitter. Some of the community we were fighting for were really selfish, privileged, but I knew if I was in that position, if I was an academic, and I saw the grim future for my students, that's what I would have done, so that's what I did as a student. (Niall)

Niall's lucid capturing, on reflection on this thesis's opening incident, speaks to the 'activation' of a community during a period of dramatic institutional change. Indeed, the power of the

organic activist, as Niall recounts, may be nothing in the end, but their actions – knowing that they were doing right by themselves, and being backed and understood by their community – is where the expression of *organic* activism thrives. There is an inherent necessity for the *organic* intellectual to have knowledge, not just an awareness of their own social groups relative position, but an understanding of institutions, class or hierarchy.

neoliberalism and managerialism as its handmaiden [are deployed] to implement this system whereby everything has to be able to prove what it's worth, according to numbers and dollars, so anything about quality of education, for instance, that's not seen as an end in itself. That's only seen as "well, is it going to make us any more money?" And that's at the same time as people needing to prove themselves every time they get into an administration position by making savings you know, it's like an easy way for a manager, and not necessarily an academic, but a manager is expected to make savings. That's what has happened at universities. It's all part of the same thing that, you know. I'm so old fashioned, I still believe in the greater good, but I don't think universities are working towards it anymore. And the government's not helping. (Anica)

While a working knowledge of structures may serve the intellectual to contextualise action, such as an understanding of managerialism, it does little to ease the challenges of working *politically* against the hegemony. Indeed, the confrontation of working from within a university system which appears only to be doing its best to exclude you is a significant challenge. The working conditions for PhD students, for example, as a continuation of the organic activist, or the possible organic activist, deter many from continuing in their path, or activating against the institution out of worry over employment prospect:

I know how to work hard, but I don't think it's fair to treat people in such a precarious employment situation so badly and so dismissively, especially when they've got families, and you know, living from pay packet to pay packet, it is just so poorly organised. And I thought, well, hell, if that's what you've got to go through, in order to – to become some sort of official academic, then that would drive me mad and I couldn't perform well under those sorts of conditions. So, it became like a workplace conditions issue for me. (Anica)

Issues of retention arise around PhD students in particular. Those students who have been activists, even organic activists, through their journey are slowly disparaged by the weight of knowledge of the system. The diversity of student backgrounds, from undergraduate through PhD study, however, provide diverse opportunities for connection across social group boundaries and enable a new enlightened form of ‘action’.

The background of the organic intellectual is diverse. My research, specifically, has mostly been positioned between the working-middle class and the hegemony’s subaltern. This has often been with the organic activist developing a ‘cultural capital’ of understanding working class logic and the intellectuality of the institutions to act as a navigator or sage for their community, though not without substantive knowledge development:

I guess I had, I feel, I had like a grace year and then some of the significant changes came in. Part of that was a number of new staff in, you know, the high positions at the University. But also, you know, when you can look at when the [Liberal/National] Coalition is elected, as well. ... So, some significant changes to funding and significant changes to culture that were happening at the University. I think it was – it was a strange thing in the sense that I think I sometimes I feel as though I’m quite naïve. Just because of the background I’ve come from. You know, my dad never went to university. He didn’t finish high school, because he had to go out and work for the family. My mum came through when Gough Whitlam was the Prime Minister, so ended up in a, in a funded position to train as a teacher. ... I don’t come with, like, you know, I come with a foot in both camps, you know, kind of like having some cultural kind of capital, but also having none. As well, I think I’m a bit of a tourist in that in that respect. I guess I’d say, you know, often you come into an institution like a university with an idea of what it is, which can be, you know, miles from what it is in, in practice. (Archer)

Being able to navigate between the university structure, and the expectation of *getting a qualification* is a tricky space, particularly when the spaces of universities are novel. For beginning students, navigating the university’s formal structures and culture are a sharp learning curve; indeed, the expectations of academics and students are often substantially different. Even in

cases where the institution stipulates a particular code, or way of being, the actual experience of students and staff can be qualitatively different:

And then when I got into university, it was a bit of a shock. ... I believe that they are kind of, they'd have to live in the formality of how universities operate, which is everyone has to be treated fairly. (Margie)

While this statement may be interpreted as an expression of agency, some policies are instituted to the benefit of students in challenging circumstances, and academics are not the quickest people to change – they are, after all people. Students must learn to navigate the structure and the students and staff of the institution, though some are more ‘naturally’ adept at doing so, particularly those whose parents attended university and those who have been supported to develop an ‘academic literacy’ in the sense of understanding the structures of higher education.

One of my parents had been to university, but it was a really long time ago. I knew university was a place I could go, like, I wouldn't be totally ridiculed even if I failed a bit. Actually, it's now a place that I finally feel comfortable in. But university was so different from school – and I did that a while ago, too. In fact, this place is really different from any other education I've ever done and that first arrival – learning about it, that was pretty hard. I was in with a bunch of other students and I didn't know very many of them. Not many people from my school ended up going to uni at least at the same time as me ... yeah, so, there was a lot of meeting new people and then meeting all these teachers and people that I didn't know or didn't really have the language to talk to or interact with, and that can be really hard. But it can also be really rewarding and I can imagine that, for some people, that's a lot harder than others. ... [I think if you] have your heart really set on a particular outcome, then you can make university work for you. But it's probably harder for some than others, and it probably doesn't work the same way for everybody – I think it's only now starting to feel like a home and I'm going in to my second year. I've started to make those networks and I've started to understand how this place ticks. (Elly)

Indeed, supportive academics can help students find their ‘home’ in academia and support the development of student's ‘literacy’ about the institution itself. Representation programmes offer opportunities for students to learn about the structure of the institution and how to ‘get things done’. This can take many forms, from the use of lectures to informal conversations and

mentorships. This is an extension on the SaP programmes of Chapter 8. Rather than formalised institutional models, these prefer enhancing students' capacity for institutional engagement at a grassroots level: a modern teach-in by the academics. Indeed, supporting students to develop their understandings can be a reciprocally rewarding process:

I think opening up those doors makes it so much easier, just provides more opportunities for students to actually voice any concerns that they're having, or good things as well. So, "hey, this is working really well", but also shows them – shows them that they actually have a voice and that that voice is valued. But it also gets some of those topic reps on other committees. So, they can see how the university structure works, which is super important. Because there's so many times when I've been sitting on a committee, and there's a bunch of academics talking about the "student experience", but we don't have a student to tell us what the actual experience is. With this, that's starting to change, which is fantastic. (Cthrine)

Beyond this is the leveraging of the knowledge of the place, its rules and its people, to do something for others, to create an avenue where students are heard, valued and feel safe to contribute, not just in the tutorial/lecture room, but in meaningful ways to the core of the institution.

Academics who want meaningful change to the institution, who partner with students and share their knowledge of how the institution operates, have the ability to support students to create the conditions for change. Unfortunately, the influence of corporatism and managerialism at the heart of universities, corrupts the ability to work genuinely with students with any form of knowledge and understanding, preferring to hold with old views of ivory tower *knowers* rather than open learning communities, as the marketing may suggest. This becomes particularly apparent facing activists against structural changes:

By the time I started at Flinders, every institution I'd been through, had gone through restructures. And so I'd seen how they could be handled. You know, they're never easy, you don't expect it to be smooth at all, they're going to be tumultuous. But my experience was that the, the administrators who were conducting these changes or planning these changes, were conscious of how

tumultuous it was going to be and bent over backwards to assist and be open to questions, to recognise that people are going to be having trouble translating new hierarchies or new processes. But I just felt, well, I didn't just feel it I observed from different people's experience, that they didn't welcome any sort of questioning – and this was academia! ... [I] stuck [my] hand up to, not so much question why are you doing this? But okay, this is happening, what the hell are we supposed to do now? One who just, you know, asked those sorts of questions and we were treated really quite poorly. And that didn't help an already confronting situation of doing a PhD. And, yeah, I found it really patronising. (Anica)

The struggle against the shifting structures, the hegemonic change, in a university is far from an inviting space, and the perception that new management is flatly incapable of understanding and enacting change in a reasoned and appropriate way is at the core of institutional activism¹³⁶. In this sense, the tectonic shifts of university governance, structures and processes towards managerial ends are even worse suited to academic spaces than they are to the corporate boardroom. Academics, those with little or no management training, are suddenly expected and judged by their ability to perform salary savings. The opportunity then for students to ask questions, and to make their presence felt in the face of systemic change, is largely irrelevant to the institution:

You know, unless you're, sort of, one of them, or one of those students that they like to call on, there's just no way that they will ever really value what you're saying, particularly when they're doing some kind of change. Like when they're – when they're really moving, or changing the employment for people, or they're trying to institute some new thing, like a new degree, and they need to bring on new staff and maybe let some others go, they're really not keen to hear from you, because they've done their market research. They, they understand their targets, and they've set their KPIs. And it's just sort of down to these people below them to enact these changes. And so those people don't know anything. And when you talk to them, you know, some of them are, you know, relatively friendly. I remember going to a college forum during our restructure. And, you know, they answered our questions pretty clearly and succinctly, but basically, their motivation was, “well, I've been

¹³⁶ The institutional transformation, rapid and disestablishing change, flagged in the prologue was *not* about changes in staffing. The transformation was a fundamental reconfiguration of the purpose and nature of the institution itself, a national pattern in Australian higher education.

tasked with doing this, and if I don't do it, I'm out of a job". You know, like, they didn't really – they didn't really have like, a core reason for doing anything. And so, I guess, we [students] were just sort of lost in this space, because it's like, these people are, like the cronies of the organisation that are doing the work for the devil, and they don't really understand, themselves, what they're being asked to do. And so even when you do have the opportunity to speak back to them or ask something of them, they can't respond because they're trapped in a situation where they're being held hostage, basically, by their employment. And so, as a student, it's – it's incredibly challenging to do anything or say anything against this that would actually be meaningful. And so, I guess our role in this change, in this systemic change, is really sidelined by its nature of, you know, where it's positioned. It's like students are irrelevant because all you care about is the market. You don't actually care about the student. (Niall)

The development of an institutional knowledge is a hallmark in the development of the organic intellectual, and the catalyst of change creates activism. However, the power of being in an institution and having a political thought under a shifting hegemony is minute. Moreover, the students' perspective on their knowledge of the institution's structures was overall *limited*. While they understood the institution on a deep level, even to the point of helping their fellow students, this knowledge was profoundly limited in application:

I seem to be the only one following the policies and the systems that have been put in place. It was meaningless, because they did what they wanted to do anyway – it was ultimately just the boys club getting shit done, and all the policy in the world made no difference to them. They didn't even say I was wrong about the policy; they just ignored the reference I made to them and carried on anyway. (Odette)

I've got like this useless catalogue of knowledge about, like, my university now. And I don't know what I'll ever do with that, because it's not like, once I've finished my PhD, I'm really gonna get a job, or if I do get a job, it's not gonna be there and you know, is it even going to be an academic job? Who knows, because the future is all, so, you know, precarious and unsure and pretty grim, honestly. But I've got this immense knowledge of like, how these committees are structured and how things get approved and where people go to get help for various issues – and how people act and respond to those issues. And it's been really useful, I guess, in my community, you know, amongst other students, other PhD students or any other, you know, honours and postgrads to be able to point them in particular directions. Like, that's

been quite useful, I think, but now, it's like, well, you know, I'm going to finish ... in about a year. And I guess it's, you know, at that point, I, you know, I don't know what use it is going to have – and it hadn't really helped me all that much, you know? The problems I faced were ignored. Sure, like, I can learn about another institution, and I can, you know, probably, maybe it won't take as long, but really, that understanding that's come out of the structure and the order of, you know, the institution and how it works. And its relationship with government and its relationship with students, you know, both sort of both ends, you know, at one end, is the relationship that, you know, exercises to get its money, you know, from government. And the other end is its relationship to attract students who, you know, through the government pay its money. You know, all it's really about is the money and so, you know, all these structures in between, even though they're written in the name of, you know, like, acting as student-centred. They're actually just really about the money and they're about customer satisfaction, you know, and so it doesn't, it just, it's just not getting anywhere. The hopeful thing that I take away is that community that I've built, is those people that I know, is those connections that I've made, and that's really got nothing to do with the – the University at all. And that's pretty sad, because, you know, that's what I thought a university should be. (Niall)

Two issues surface: the inability for the University's leadership to follow policies they, supposedly, design and the inability for students to leverage institutional knowledge. Indeed, many postgraduate and research students I have spoken with and interviewed identified alike the 'smart people jammed in a room' theme. The coincidental nature of combining many smart, well educated people and the catalyst of change and necessity for comradeship created a hopeful spark for community building and development. These skills appear to be transient for organic activists across generations. The students I interviewed in contemporary contexts raised the same transferability as those I had interviewed who undertook education in the 1960s and 1970s:

All those community organising skills that we learned in that occupation. I've used them more than any other skill set, even more than psychology. In the welfare sector, I learnt how to run campaigns and how to actually get people active, how to give people voice who didn't have voice, how to analyse the enemy. Like they're invaluable skills. They really do last your whole life. (Bellanca)

While the work of being an organic activist – supporting community, disseminating information, staging acts of rebellion – may be more or less successful depending on the conditions confronting the activist, the skills which transfer from this organising are important. Hegemonic change, enacted by administrative staff, works accidentally to create conditions for the emergence of organic intellectuals. This theme exists in activism under hegemony in multiple locations (Altbach, 1989; Barnhardt, 2012; Klemenčič, 2014; Larner & Craig, 2005). The sudden need to resist the institution which educates the activist creates conditions of class awareness. In this enabling, communities form and skills are developed. The longevity of such communities remains a question; while the skills developed gain transience, the communities continue to shift and change in the wake of organisational change. While institutions continue to transform under hegemony and increased managerialism, there is increasing opportunity for organic activism. Indeed, even amongst ecological activists, the necessity to *save the planet* rebukes an inadequate institutional response (N. Fraser, 2021; O'Brien et al., 2018). The sustainability of the organic activist, however, should be considered by students and educators alike. While students' position in the institution morphs under changing institutional/educational expectations, opportunities arise, though the narrowing and acceleration towards industrial education models in higher education continue to limit student participation, and continue to subsume opportunities for genuine *organic* engagement, preferring hegemonic reintegration.

Increasingly, neoliberal globalised universities seek the input of students in their decision-making. They seek input from students that 'sound like them', enabling those students to further feed the hegemonic ideology of the institution. Fortuitously, this serves a purpose for some organic intellectual activists. Unfortunately, only those who meet the standard of hegemonic conceptions of studenthood are in a position to utilise these opportunities as they surface. The positive message is that 'the corporate university is listening to students', which

forms the basis of promotional material, though rarely offers itself as genuine opportunities to engage. By subsuming ‘voice’ into corporate structures, the neoliberal space maintains hegemony and power over students. Students, on the other hand, continue to struggle to maintain social group consciousness and engage in a collective ‘passing the baton’ with the high level of churning students. While the conditions of being a student enable students to speak back to the institution, or even to their lecturers, there is a *possibility* for voice. Taken to an extreme, in disruptive institutional change, there are instances to be seized to speak back, though effectively employing these opportunities takes more preparation than many students are willing to engage with.

During the height of *Flinders’* restructure, I was able to leverage such an opportunity to speak to the governance interface directly, to deliver a speech to the University’s Academic Senate, a high-level committee in the University’s structure, about the impacts of the restructure on higher degree research students (depicted in the opening of this thesis). While the discussion of my speech was sealed into the confidential section of the Senate minutes, I was given a ‘canned’ response by our Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Knowing I could address the Senate was in no small part due to the support of fellow students and academics across the institution who were concerned about their continued ability to research and supervise. Admittedly, this was a bourgeois problem, but a very real issue facing many students and academics today, with research under threat federally, and the corporate university perpetuating the hegemony of ‘valuable’ research by its marketability. My address, read shakily from paper, was thus:

I wish to make four main points concerning the 2025 agenda, and the proposed academic restructuring, acknowledging the recent Fair Work Commission¹³⁷ outcome, in relation to the terms of reference for the Senate.

¹³⁷ A tool of the State to regulate, in the interest of the State, decisions about employment.

I will also make reference to a survey of over 150 students conducted by a group of HDRs:

On Integrity: 139 students reported they have been affected by 2025-agenda related changes – this number may well increase with the FWC outcome. This is concerning, as there is already significant out-of-field supervision and lecturing, not something that should be increased. Can academic staff, in their multiple supervisory roles – working with students’ projects, who must publish high quality original research, and draw in significant external research funding really maintain the highest standard of academic integrity across all of their work?

On Freedom: 14 students have reported that that they have been asked not to discuss the restructure and the impact on them by university management. Most of those students were facing a loss of primary supervision under the proposed restructure, and this will only continue to be problematic – perhaps now for a different group of students, this remains uncertain. How can the university maintain academic freedom for PhD students, let alone for those in pathway degrees, when students are not allowed to speak out about things that impact on their projects?

On a related matter, higher degree students are being mentored into academia... but where is the academic freedom for higher degree students to ‘experiment bravely’, when they are only able to work with a select group of academics with particular, externally funded, industry aligned research interests?

For our international student colleagues, who come to Flinders for specific expertise, supervisors being displaced by ongoing agendas and restructuring has very real effects on their visas, scholarships and trust for this institution.

On Standards: Higher degree students are increasingly concerned with the rising publication requirements. While we acknowledge we are not specifically advised to target Q1 journals, if we are to be competitive for future postdoc work, we need competitive research expertise – especially if we are chasing a smaller number of balanced research/teaching roles. We need the support of our existing supervisors, those who we have formed meaningful relationships with over many months, to support our work – and our future careers – this is a traineeship, not a ‘stand and deliver’ course where on-mass-scale drop-in replacements may be suitable.

Finally, I would like to raise that higher degree students should be brought into conversations about the future direction of research – particularly in regard to the Academic Senate terms of reference – as this is our shared future, we would like to be a meaningful part of decisions about it. We

desperately want to help shape the future of this institution. But we need meaningful consultation, consideration and respect so that we can build this brighter future together.

Students must be allowed to speak. Students must be noticed. We must be consulted. We must be heard. And we must be included in steering this university. Thank you.

I was fortunate to be granted an ‘audience’ with senior staff at the University for this speech. This opportunity did not come without a fight. For most students at the time, the ability to speak about what faced them was beyond their capability, as they dwelled in the shock of losing their teachers, supervisors and community. While I too value the skills of community building, collegiality and organising, this capacity has largely fled *Flinders* after the offer of only increasingly precarious work. Undergraduate students are less aware than they were pre-restructure, and the ability to functionally create *learning* communities, let alone raise consciousness and provide a *critical education* are now largely absent from the institution. Indeed, my post-mortem reflection would be the corporate university has reigned victorious and that our efforts were reabsorbed into the hegemonic force of the institution’s forward march. However, this is not the gloomy message I wish this thesis to deliver. Pockets of enlightened academics, thorough research and high-quality thought remain at *Flinders*, and students are beginning to work alongside staff, once again, to find opportunities to exercise power and make a positive difference for their communities. Importantly, the skills and knowledge I have gained, and I know many others, too, in interacting with corporate, global, neoliberal institutions such as the university, creates a genuine groundswell for changing the institutions themselves. While the post-restructure behaviour of many of the affected academics is loathsome, there is hope in the corporate university for real *change*. That change comes from community, from education, and from using *research tools* to create *good sense*. Articulating arguments about the state and nature of society take time, and exact a toll on the authors, but messages of hope are ultimately more powerful. Moreover, the understandings which may be drawn from the collegiality and

mutual respect of working together as organic intellectual activists might inform *our* new ways of working as organic intellectuals. While we were ‘forced’ into responding to the sweeping changes at our university, the tools we have learned have lasted and will create opportunities for genuine change.

Tools of social organisation and community development are not controlled by the hegemonic ruling class. They are positioned in civil society with what might be corporately re-branded as ‘change makers’, the organic intellectual whose strong community connection is unshaken¹³⁸. The relevance of Gramscian theory holds in this University and offers a powerful way of reflecting on the opportunities for creating hegemonic change and restructuring state society in such a way that reasserts the importance of *organic* intellectualism. Cultural change remains necessary, and as long as institutions offer a ‘proving ground’ for students to fight damaging institutional change, there is hope:

I think one of the big things that we were noticing, in the restructure, and part of it is, you know, a result of federal policy, but part of that is, you know, the cultural changes that were happening. There was a sense that a lot of the grassroots stuff, so you know, back in the day you could go to the office and talk directly to the Vice-Chancellor, but now, this postgrad association ... it started in one department, it started in English and Creative Writing, and sort of grew to cover the other disciplines in, in the Humanities. And that was student led. Grassroots. And there was a sense that when you took on a role, you know, you’re kind of given this little Word document, which, which was like, “this is what we’ve done in the past, this is, this is what works for us, this is what hasn’t worked”. And, that kind of, that the stuff that is important to me, I’ve been out of the institution for a little while, you know, increasingly I get the feeling that, you know, universities are not places for particular people. And, and I guess, when you’re given that little, that little bit of information from students who have been there in the past, and, and that sort of thing there is this, you know, there’s this grassroots thing going on. And there’s this sense of continuity and kind of sharing of knowledge and, you know, community building, really, that you tap into. And I think, I guess I assumed that that’s what universities were good at, and what they might

¹³⁸ I was struck at this point at the size of this document – this PhD which provides an argument for working with communities to create social and institutional change, far from what I expected to spend four years of my life doing – but worth every second.

have – been for. A few years out, I think I’ve got a different view. It is, I was thinking about it this morning, and I was thinking as a, as a post grad student, you are in a position – you don’t have a lot of power. Realistically. And you’re also engaging with people who sometimes they’ve been, you know, if they’d been an ongoing position, they’ve, they’ve been there for a long time and might have come through with a different understanding of the real politic, and you’re both engaging with management structure, which is, at the minute in Australia, I think it’s ideologically driven a lot of the decisions. ... So kind of being in a space where the most valuable thing for me from being in that environment was, you know, the community, the collaboration, that sort of stuff, which happens, because you cram a batch of people who are interested in something to one room. And then you have, you know, academics who were, who had, you know, potentially gaming their workload or not, you have management trying to implement a number of policy, you end up in a really weird place, because you, you might assume that people in those positions are interested in what’s best for students when they might be more interested in whatever their KPI is, or, you know, how to, how to, how to do well in their research. You know, points, because funding is tied with research now. Rather than teaching or other – parts of the contribution to knowledge, it’s a really fraught environment. And students are often, you know, not earning hundreds of thousands of dollars like these other people are. A lot closer to a precarious existence than a lot of these employed people. So the decisions that are being made, and the relationships that are being formed, the significance is different. The pace of life is different. The process is different. The impact of the policies is very different. (Archer)

University spaces cannot be altered by idle activity. It is not reducible to the ‘discourse’ of power or the ‘possibility’ of individual agency. Systemic change occurs below hegemony. It occurs in Gramsci’s social groups, the proletariat, and those positioned as the subaltern of civil society (Gramsci, 1996). The tools which constitute activism – picket protest, opinion and article writing, lobbying, networking, informal conversations – are not easy in any form. While the vision for the institution from these individuals becomes a bleak space, they see the value in the propulsion of education:

It is really grim. But as long as these, these corporate institutions need to have students coming through the door, there is still going to be a need people to provide them with information. And you know, I wish people who can make it through that sausage machine, the very best. (Anica)

Those with a commitment to change must enact the hard work of acting for a better place for themselves and their communities. Even when there is no other choice, a commitment to action in the interest of *relatively oppressed* communities is essential.

Together, students have power. Together, with academics, the world changes. Unsettling education from its comfortable home in the reproduction of hegemony is a monumental task, but through collegiality it can be shifted. Indeed, it must be for the inclusion, change and betterment of our societies. Here, it is important to turn attention to those social groups for whom ‘organic activism’, supported by a hardened intellectuality, becomes a must. For those who identify as having a disability, the tools of activism and advocacy are not a choice or a conscious decision, but to find spaces, particularly in the ableist, racist, hegemonic higher education of the twenty-first century. These students, this community, must fight against extant understandings and identity stereotypes.

The imposition of organic activism

Counterposed to identity politics, though nuanced and requiring further discussion, is the fight of disabled students in university life. As explored above, identity politic groups often seek specialist status in their communities in a collective individualising and arrangement around certain, often visible, characteristics. In this sense, several identifiable groups emerge as those who seek a specialist status for personal gain that can also be exploited by political groups (Hobsbawm, 1996). In the vast majority of cases, on the other hand, inclusion, equality and a fundamental reframing discourse become primary political fights for people with a disability¹³⁹ (Ellcessor, 2016; Howson, 2004). This is compounded in educational experiences, particularly *for* those students who have *visible* characteristics which see them identified as ‘disabled’

¹³⁹ Howson (2004) provides the apt example of a slogan from the disability rights movement: ‘rather than ‘special rights’ ... acknowledges the diversity of experiences of those associated with the movement. For instance, a [T-shirt] slogan ... exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution in 2000 claims “same struggle, different difference”.’ (Howson, 2004, p. 27).

students. Politics, for these students, takes on a huge variety of new forms which can have substantial ramifications on a student's mental and physical health and their ability to progress within an educational institution.

Chief amongst these is the way that education in western countries perpetuates, or arguably replicates, epistemologies across a variety of fields (Linton, 1998). Even curricular arrangement can have substantive impacts, not only on students with a disability who may be studying *in* higher education settings, but for *communities* whose traditional intellectuals, and indeed to an extent organic and community members, will have been conditioned by a curriculum with a particular epistemological perspective. From the literal 'steep steps' (Dolmage, 2017) of higher education institutions, to the studies and people that comprise these spaces, there is a 'restricted access' for anyone whose body does not 'fit' traditional moulds (Ellcessor, 2016). In considering the politics of students with a disability in a higher education context, there are some specific parameters which require explication. Importantly, it is worth highlighting that 'disability', as a societal *stigma*, is distinct from 'impairment', as a loss of anatomical capacity of some kind (Goffman, 2017; Howson, 2004). It is here that a social spectrum of societal 'immersion' or 'participation' emerges for those identified with a disability (Oliver, 1996). In acknowledging this background, there are several features for an organic intellectual *for* people with a disability which must be examined, moving through education and into broader societal structures. First, attention must briefly be turned to the role and nature of higher education's curriculum in the area of disability studies. Subsequently, an examination of the kinds of encounters students with a disability might face in a higher education context. Finally, this section turns to a speculative analysis of an imperative to rebel, to be seen and understood, in the ableist normative spaces of universities. This will be explored in concert with the voices of two disabled students interviewed at *Flinders* for this thesis, two who uncomfortably

identified with the ‘activist’ label but were more engaged with the ‘organic intellectual’ label. Without their exceptional support, this section could not ‘speak for itself’ from lived experience.

The curriculum of higher education is a contested space (Barkas et al., 2020; Dixon, 2006; Liasidou, 2014; McRae, 2020; Shay, 2015; Speight et al., 2013), particularly for those people, and their knowledge systems, which are non-hegemonic or subject to ‘social oppression’ under capitalism (Abrams, 2014, p. 145). As Linton (1998) argued, disability studies *prima facie* arrived as a response *to* social exclusion and oppression in the higher education space. Here, as students with a disability are excluded, the social model, at least in the background, becomes useful for understanding concepts of inclusion and participation as a structure of western hegemonic thought (Howson, 2004; Oliver, 1996). The categorisation of people based on their perceived (dis)ability, based on physical ability and appearance, has ‘stigmatising’ effects on a person (Zola, 1993, pp. 170–171). In the *social model’s* space, there is a recognition of the medicalisation of disability, away from the emphasis on a medical model for disability, towards understanding the social effects of disability, with medicalisation as one part of the picture and as a product of the social, come educative, order (Oliver, 1996; Zola, 1993). In recognition of this, a new model of understanding disability has emerged and along with it, new ways of conceptualising education spaces emerging from research *for* people with disabilities. Indeed, this relates closely to the picture of disability in higher education as a nexus of research and education. As Abrams (2014) advances, ‘disability research is “emancipatory research”: its goal is the elimination of these exclusionary relations’ (Abrams, 2014, p. 145) and as such responds to the extant curricular and research conversations in higher education with a new epistemic perspective (Linton, 1998). However, disability studies (as a combination of research and curriculum as praxis) is more than a corrective, or radical, response to normative paintings of the teaching, researching and learning space. The emancipatory impulse of the teaching, learning and research in these spaces is invaluable, particularly in its role of reconfiguring and

enabling *new ways* of understanding the complex fields inside ‘disability’, as a *label* itself with incredible complication and depth. The spaces of disability studies, in particular, which Linton demarcates can be used to empower those with disabilities, also enlivens new knowledge systems amongst previously ‘general’ curriculum areas, which can move the onus for ‘accommodations’ back to the originators of the social order¹⁴⁰. Amongst Linton’s (1998) progression of new responses to higher education curriculum exists an interesting spark for this thesis: the identification of students with a disability, as positioned within hegemonic curriculum, traditionally viewed as an ‘isolable phenomenon’, which depicts their disability as *a problem* (Linton, 1998), can be revised to exclude those ‘isolable’ aspects of human identity in favour of a wholistic curriculum/research paradigm which has an obvious connection to undoing identity politics. In this instance, in a sense, the isolative impulse of identity politics is in stark contrast to the field of disability studies, a tradition embodying emancipatory positionality and reframing of curricular and research discussions for *equitable* and *just* education, society, medicine or jurisprudence. Moreover, as Barnes (1996) advances, contemporary ‘market driven’ higher education standardises curriculum, even in postgraduate and research programmes, towards generalist methods that do not account for those students with a disability or any gamut of non-‘normal’ requirements. Here, it seems clear that an alternative is required, and Australian universities are, purportedly, beginning to embrace these changes¹⁴¹ (Goodley et al., 2019; Slee, 2013; Slee et al., 2019; Symeonidou, 2020; Trollor et al., 2018).

Disability Studies, as a course, trope or topic, is not necessarily or automatically accessible, open and viable for those students with a disability. Disability Studies is confined to those who wish to study in an area which provides support to, policy for, or research into disability itself, as a self-sufficient area. Though admirable as the critical Disability Studies space may be, it cannot encompass all students’ interests. Indeed, while there is an assumption that

¹⁴⁰ A notably ‘liberal’ move of modifying extant systems.

¹⁴¹ Partly from the work of the organic intellectuals recessed in higher education spaces.

‘mainstream’ areas of study are progressing towards accessibility, there is a lack of equality even amongst those areas which, should, by virtue of their purported epistemologies (Linton, 1998; Oliver, 1996), be more open to accommodating students from diverse backgrounds, let alone various disabilities and students who may study in those spaces.

I’ve come from Disability Studies, and within Disability Studies, obviously as someone with a disability, I have the lived experience. I thought, well people advised me, that it would be an accessible course to get into ... even within Disability Studies, which you would assume is a very accessible course, I found it very – that people didn’t have an awareness of disability and how it played out for students when they’re having to navigate university systems.
(Margie)

[I] did a course on computer science. The lecturer was a real redneck said, “I can’t let you get away with it” – I’m disabled, but I get away with it? He said he “knows you people just get away with all that; you’re just like the overseas students”. I feel like I have a right to it [an education]. It took me about half a semester to get the lecturer to realise that I’m not after a free ride. I do good work.
(Augustin)

The logic of ableism, as a construct of ‘late capitalist society,’ grips the institution at fundamental levels (Oliver, 1996, p. 40). While individual staff in higher education may be open to shifts in their perspective, even after a substantial period of time, the hegemonic view is substantively ableist. The social stigma of being a disabled student is then reinforced through structures and processes (Goffman, 2017) which, while they act as confidential services, are a clear marker to teachers and the processes of the university that have access to the services, that *this student is different* (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012). While fundamentally these services are *about* inclusion, they can have long lasting negative effects, especially when they are staffed by those without training and resourcing, and when working against the view of the ideal student as ‘able’.

I found it that people didn’t – people did not have an awareness of disability and how it played out for students when they’re having to navigate university systems ... they have a ‘disability service’ where you go and it’s almost like a

one stop shop – you get your Access Plan, and then you have to go back to your topic coordinators and lecturers ... but disability services are totally underfunded and stretched to the limit so that access to them is really challenging. It will take weeks. Then, on top of that, you will have all the topic coordinators and lecturers who ... I believe that they have to live in the formality of how universities operate, which is everyone has to be treated fairly. You can't give people special attention or unfair advantage ... there were times when I felt that I was being accused of being using my disabilities as an advantage – to get an Access Plan for extension lots of times when I'd have to ask [for that help] in order to navigate through university. (Margie)

to have someone paid by the Uni to help support at home ... when they found out, like, what they would be paying for, they would try to get it dismissed. “This is too risky”. Insurance. It was a battle and in the middle of the PhD too. ... So the Uni paid an agency. They probably paid a lot more too. ... I mean, like even now, like when I have engagements with the Uni, some of them already know that there's a certain level of expectation that I need to have, whether it be in paid work or the resources, that I know that I would need. A certain support allocation or something like that – they've started [to] come in with that mindset. (Augustin)

Even after these students struggle to engage with the systems and processes of the university, in terms of being *recognised*, these processes, literally ‘battles’, take a toll on the students¹⁴². Indeed, their experiences over time contribute to their understanding and interpretation of events, and the long-lasting impact of their battle scars of enduring structural ableism is clear. The entirety of the educational experience for these students in a variety of instances, and beyond the case at *Flinders*, in any engagement with structures of education is a ‘struggle’, ‘fight’ or ‘battle’ to be heard, understood, included and respected (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017; Leake & Stodden, 2014; Matshedisho, 2007). The response, which is often considered ‘being difficult’ by university staff, comes as a response to historical conditions and a lack of being thought of as ‘a student’ (instead of ‘a problem’) (Linder, Quayle, Lange, et al., 2019).

[I] had lots of negative experiences in education in the past. Because it's not just university, it goes back further than that. Through primary school, high school, there were lots of moments of discrimination and exclusion from

¹⁴² These ‘battles’ operate theoretically and metaphorically through the war of position.

teachers in general. I went to mainstream school. Within that mainstream school, as someone with a disability, teachers would often see it as a burden that you should be in a special class – over there. There were lots of moments of having to educate. (Margie)

It's difficult to learn the system. Try and play the game. And also make sure that you're not being ripped off. And also building up relationships. ... I started my PhD at UniSA. My student advisor, she had different ways of doing what I did, had different ideas. It was a perfect storm. I don't know what happened, but it all happened at once. I was put in a position where if I had stayed at UniSA, I would have to do something that I didn't want to do. I had to argue with my supervisor. I know that this is not the way it's normally done, but it needs to go this way. She didn't always listen. So, I had to push harder. Then she realised that, you know, what I am doing is nearly always right. I had crossed boundaries though. She would have [to continue to] help me cross boundaries. (Augustin)

Even the structural accommodations for those students who do not fit the ideal of the hegemon only adapt to an extent. This extent is extremely limited in many cases; even if we are to take 'disability services' as a useful and productive service, there is simply a lack of funding and institutional interest in universal design and accessibility of education, even when such accommodations benefit all.

There is a perception, through the Marxist lens (Oliver, 1996), that those students that cannot 'fit' the education systems are excluded as they cannot make the same economic contributions to society as an able-bodied peer. This is a curse of capitalist-informed normativity, and a clear expulsion of those who do not or cannot be a mirror of the hegemon. Politics, then, takes a turn for students with a disability. In many instances, historically – in a Marxist sense of including the present moment – there have been no students with a disability, only 'disabled people' who are structurally prevented from accessing higher education. To bring about social change there has been a progressive *battle* from those with a disability to find a purchase in the politics of universities and be recognised (M. Brett, 2016). In a deep sense, Augustin's boundary crossings are a political struggle, though it is important to reflexively note he did not identify himself as an 'activist'. Even after substantial discussion, his opinion of

himself as an activist did not develop. He was just *himself* and indeed, the activist label, for him, brought negative connotations instead preferring to be ‘very willing to fight for my rights and what I feel like I deserve to have, or need, and hoping it will leave a residual effect. Creating a new baseline.’ The resetting, as part of a fight for inclusion in the ‘baseline’, is a necessary struggle for a person with a disability who seeks inclusion in the institution for its utility purposes. They do not, unlike the student politicians above, have the choice of ‘activism’ or of ‘fighting for my rights’. Rather, they must literally fight to be included and access what able-bodied students receive ‘naturally’¹⁴³. Indeed, the process of fighting becomes second nature: ‘Conflict is an interesting concept. I don’t want to be put the same basket. But in a way, I can use it, if I need to’ (Augustin). The fight becomes naturalised to the extent that ‘people say that I’m a real advocate and a real change maker – if you talk for people with disability problems, you’re really being an activist’ (Margie). Indeed, Margie made parallels between her depiction as a ‘change maker’ or ‘fighter for my rights’ and other *visible* groups that are marginalised:

I do think if you’re a white, able, middle class man, and you challenge a convention or you disagree with something, or you question someone’s activities, or a decision that’s been made by the University for whatever reason, you’re more likely to be listened to and respected. They might feel a bit uncomfortable, but [that] doesn’t disrupt your opportunity – you’re protected in a way. Whereas if you are an Aboriginal woman and you come from a history of feeling – like academics, and professionals don’t understand the impact of racism, and then those people question something they’re often seen as angry or offensive or aggressive – that kind of stuff. That’s what I’ve seen. If I say, if I call something out, I’m seen as aggressive. Whereas if someone that doesn’t have a disability says the exact same thing, they’re not seen as aggressive, they’re just a peer, a colleague, just having a discussion about something ... there’s something about being that person that’s representing a marginalised identity. When you say something, it could be interpreted differently, people see it as an attack. (Margie)

¹⁴³ In itself a flawed concept when considering students access to education – as an elite institution of the middle and upper class.

Here, the activist identity, an uncomfortable analogue at best and a negative label as perceived by my participants, shows the difference for someone who has had no choice but to ‘be activist’ and to stand up for what they need at the most fundamental level, which is just a part of their daily life. This, to them, is not activist – it is just part of living. The changes that they request, fight for, argue for or ‘attack’ people for, are *for* people who do not fit the identity of the ‘white middle-class’ institutions, but who, with some accommodation and basic respect, have as much potential as an able-bodied person. The fight, an *emotional* positional struggle for their rights, perhaps paralleled in race rights, highlights the nature of contemporary university student activism as a colonised space owned by identity politics and empty gestures of so-called ‘solidarity’. This goes on while those who fight to exist in the spaces of higher education are excluded by space occupied with *traditional intellectuals* that should be, by rights, allied with the fight of those students with a disability.

There are deeper structural problems with the university institutions when framing and engaging with people with a disability, particularly in the structure of the academy for researchers and teaching staff. Even in fields that purport to be emancipatory, such as Disability Studies, in being *geared toward* equality through education, the research conducted is valued by the institution in flawed ways. Even when the university itself claims to act as an inclusive environment for students from a spectrum of disability backgrounds, there is still a systemic ableism in the research-teaching space. As Barnes (1996) highlighted in the 1990s, academia is based on systems which elevate scholarship of a particular model and mode. The dominant, ‘valuable’ research for the corporate university is produced *en masse* as typically quantitative, longitudinal and positivist, which follows a formula. There has been a recent complication towards ‘industry connected’ research, which for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields has its own body of connected research around improving the ‘transfer’ (or export) of university knowledge to private, for profit, firms (For example: Bruneel

et al., 2010; Mascarenhas et al., 2018; Rybnicek & Königsgruber, 2019; Siegel et al., 2003). Precisely, academics are incentivised to ‘write for other university based researchers [rather] than ... for their research subjects – disabled people’ (C. Barnes, 1996, pp. 108–109). While there are moves towards ‘inclusive research’ (Johnson & Walmsley, 2003; Nind, 2014) whereby research dissemination is made possible through accessible channels, including popular publication, the structures of academia have not shifted in a meaningful way. Considering the increasing focus on the teaching-research nexus, or linking of teaching and research (For example: Brew & Boud, 1995; Geschwind & Broström, 2015; Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Neumann, 1992; Tight, 2018; Visser-Wijnveen et al., 2009), right or wrong, the dissemination of accessible research *for* students with disabilities seems lacking, and institutional barriers, along with individual inclination, play a large part in the space. Moreover, while at *Flinders* there appears to be an interest in student *voice* and *partnership* in the production of learning and teaching materials, a superficial impulse, perhaps to ‘get the work done’ replaces the fulsome interest in values of co-creation:

We’ve been talking a lot about co-design. And it seems to me that suddenly, all these academics have jumped on it and they’ve gone, “co-design, that’s my thing” ... But they’re actually talking about consumer consulting, where they just go and consult with “consumers” ... It matters when someone who doesn’t have a disability gets stuck in and says, “hey, why aren’t we talking to so and so about this”, “why haven’t we thought about XYZ in terms of access and inclusion?” – because it’s very likely that there are so many people who are not even in the room. That don’t even have that chance to do that: “hey, by the way”. So, it really matters that we even have that beginning point but... then it can become a brand or some sort of identity for them as the saviour.

(Margie)

The displacement of disabled students is not always visible in terms of explicit prejudice, indeed structural constraints which obscure inherent ableism can be difficult to identify for those for which the systems were built. Both Margie and Augustin spoke of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (EOD) and accommodation ‘groups’ (committees and formal structures) across the

University which, effectively, fail to make a difference either due to resourcing or because the membership is comprised of largely able-bodied, white, often male people, who cannot see the issues in a system built for them.

If the Uni turned around and said, “no one is allowed to be in a wheelchair on campus”, I would probably be right up there holding a banner, not just for myself but for everyone. ... In doing that [response], it’s not always about my individual benefit. Like, I’m disabled, but I’ve got an equal right to be at this table and other people with disabilities have an equal right to be at this table. ... Thinking about having an insider, someone [who] would advocate on my behalf? I [would] hate to be left on the outside, not having a seat at the table. But, being an insider, you have a different set of power. Sometimes that’s more powerful – or less powerful. (Augustin)

If you go to a professor, and then a head of discipline, and they both say “oh, you’re being oversensitive” – it can start to get in your head ... When the continuous message in university is that you don’t belong, or you don’t fit here, you shouldn’t be here, you’re too difficult for us, that kind of stuff, then it fractures that sense of being able to do whatever it is [your degree, etc.] ... there’s a kind of confidence that comes with not being questioned about why you’re there. Or you can just go to a class and you sit in a lecture theatre, or you met with your academics or whatever – and it’s not questioned, there’s no awkwardness, there’s no negativity, there’s no deflection. (Margie)

Indeed, Margie gave a further example of an equity issue that arose as part of a recent process in her doctoral study. She is fast to note that this is her depiction of the story, admitting that there are multiple sides, but that equal access, ultimately, should not only be a right but it is the law. Interestingly, the University’s structures, sitting deeply engrained in the consciousness of workers across the institution, has a visible effect on students with a disability in the form of exclusion. As Margie explained,

I was going to withdraw. I couldn’t hear anything in the lecture, in the like the big public lecture theatre, in Health Sciences, you know, the fancy new building? And the hearing loops are really dodgy. It was like one of those old mobile phones – you hold it up just to find the right spot for reception. You literally had to walk around the lecture theatre to try to hold it up to find that right spot. And then once you’d found it, you’d have to hold your hand up for the two hours to try to get it. ... So, anyway, I had asked for captioning

on all of the videos because I couldn't hear, and I wanted to know what other people were talking about – they came back and said, they wouldn't. “It would be an equity issue, if we gave you captioning now”, but “it wasn't in the first round, because the international students needed captioning – we can give your video [a] caption, but we can't do it on anyone else's videos”. It was kind of like, “I don't need captioning on my own videos, I already know what I'm saying. I want to hear what other people are saying. I want to be part of the learning” ... That's the whole reason I'm doing three-minute thesis. It's not to win. I want to be part of the experience of meeting other PhD students. ... Some of the judges had commented that my speech is a little bit difficult to pick up on, so they were willing to caption it for the judges, but they weren't willing to caption it for me as a deaf person. (Margie)

Despite the repeated discouragement and discriminatory responses, she continued to work for equity in the structure of the 3MT competition. After continued back-and-forth, demonstrating that the 'able judges' could be accommodated for, but not the disabled person, she had progressed:

I actually wrote back to them and just said, “I would like to be part of the process and listen to the videos and to hear what other people are doing. This is a really great opportunity for Flinders University to lead the way in access and inclusion”. You know, I had to – I kind of put my foot down a little bit – then they did action it, and it was all fine! You know that there's lots and lots of examples like that, where people come back and you hit a wall, and then you have to kind of put your foot down a little bit and push them to do better. (Margie)

Recognised as a student who was willing to 'put her foot down', Margie was recruited for student committees where there was a responsibility for access and inclusion by delegation. Here, beyond perhaps the superficiality of *co-creation*, was a delegation of responsibility by the institution for enhancing access and for being *a* voice for other students with a disability.

Varying forms of student participation, student voice and student membership on committees have been explored above, however the research literature, specifically on students with a disability participating in governance structures, or delegating responsibility for 'the voice' of students to representatives, is not explored in great depth. Beauchamp-Pryor (2012) drew from the United Kingdom's NUS to discuss how students with a disability were often left

out of conversations about courses, co-creation and committees systematically. Critically, she raised questions around ‘genuineness’ and ‘effectiveness’ of approaches employed in UK universities to engage with students with a disability for representative purposes (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012, pp. 289–290). Margie’s committee experience provides a novel account of ‘participation’ in governance and policy structures:

I sat on the advisory group for the disability committee – I was the student representative for students with disabilities. I had to sit in this room as the student advocate, in a room full of professors and academics from each discipline. Sitting around a huge table (University Council room) and often they’d be talking about limits in terms of issues they were having with students with disabilities. I’ll never forget they were talking about this ... student in legal studies who was autistic. And as part of the legal studies degree, they have to pass an exam where they’re a victim, like a mock interview exam. That’s one of the topics that they have to do. And this autistic person has really struggled with that. They basically had this whole discussion about “oh, I think she should drop out of university or go to different discipline. She’s not going to do very well as a lawyer”. I remember thinking at the time, “how ableist” – that is so ableist! Because you can go through the legal studies degree and you might not do very well with one-to-one interviews. But you might use those skills in another capacity – as a researcher or a policymaker, you know, there’s all sorts of other ways of being able to use that discipline [’s knowledge]. I found that was a very typical conversation where often they’d be talking about all of the students that didn’t meet the criteria of the University. When, you know, and at the time, I actually didn’t have a lot of a say, in these conversations. I kind of felt like I was the token student sitting on the advisory group. And I didn’t really push the margin, because I felt that I didn’t want to be a troublemaker – at that time. I never really said anything. But I still look back on it, I think that was wrong, you know, that student should have been given support. ... They’ve kind of got the structure of what a nurse should be, or what a lawyer should be, what a doctor should be or whatever – and, you know, like it’s not that linear! You could end up anywhere. (Margie)

Student tokenism in committees, as discussed above, is not a novel factor when considering a student with a disability. Indeed, while the general rule at *Flinders* requires two students present on a committee or governance board, in practice this rarely occurs. For most students, they will be the solitary voice in the room. Adding the complicating factor of, in

essence, deciding the fate of students with a disability, without any formalised support, in a tokenised mode as a member of a large committee power imbalances are immediately obvious. For a student with a disability to, by qualification of their own disability, be able to provide genuine insight into the needs of another student is clearly a shortfall of resourcing and adequate support. This is not to say that students should not contribute to such committees, indeed in many cases this is better than a ‘behind closed doors’ approach. The students on these committees, however, need adequate resourcing, training and support to be able to be *heard* and make meaningful contributions. As an ‘outlet’, committee membership falls drastically short of the needs of students with a disability, and the careful and ethical decision-making about them, without them, for their futures. This chapter now turns to its final conceptualisation in an exploration of the imperative to ‘rebel’ just to be heard, as an extension of Gramscian social theory.

Being heard and making an impact

The significance of being heard cannot be understated. Even the cathartic release of a ‘sigh’ heard by another can be a conversation opener for good change or, perhaps more commonly, bad change. The act of ‘sighing’ at a proposal or an idea which goes against a core belief can be the starting stomp which leads to the avalanche. The avalanche can easily swallow the individual whole, but a community together might hold back the barrage, only through careful planning and powerful collaboration. In this sense, the student power, in its originary in the 1960s failed through a disconnect with the scholar. The possibility, as Brabazon (2016) highlights, is in the partnership nexus: ‘excellence is founded on more than rules, regulations, protocols and procedures. It is based on rudimentary, daily, consistent and careful conversations, negotiations and authentic partnerships between supervisors and postgraduates. The relationship between a supervisor and doctoral candidate is a determinant of a successful PhD’ (p. 14) and, arguably, for successful creation of a better society through self-chosen

intellectual leaders. While PhD candidates are not often of working class origin, as Gramsci would have imagined his organic intellectual, many have a powerful connection to their community, they know their *spaces* so well they can communicate them to anyone. It takes a commitment to analytical thinking to produce conditions for social change, and this must be fostered in any study. Students come to higher education for an intellectual *broadening* and the ability to know, do and understand something different. But they also already know things, they are connected to a community, and they have valuable ideas – even if they do not yet know how to communicate or acknowledge them. It is in education where students find their voice at first through learning language, then by necessity due to the structure, or through learning to see the inequities. The marriage of student activism, student power, organic intellectualism, and teaching and learning is uneasy, problematic and difficult, yet entirely possible.

The hegemonic ‘shape’ of the institution needs to be changed, and voices and possibilities of difference must be made possible. As organic intellectuals, there is a profound ability to understand our worlds and be too comfortable in doing so. We must remember, together, that our work is not just what we do for *money* but that what we do, collectively can make a difference. If it is in being ‘heard’ that we find our first spaces, then it is in listening, staying analytical and alert, and sharing our relative *power* that we (students and academics) may thrive as community. I end this chapter with the voices of my participants who have shaped and now may reinforce this point:

A playwriting mentor of mine said, “the only difference between an emerging and established artist is whether or not they stopped”. The way that you go about it, the way that you practice these things, your advocacy, your research, whatever it happens to be. We assume there’s a mould to fit into. I’m not sure; more and more, I’m less convinced. I mean, there’s, you know, there are trajectories which you can follow to have a really successful academic life. But often the people that I’ve met who’ve made that choice, I kind of think, “oh, man, you need to get outside and do some gardening”. And we can’t go to one world to get everything either – there’s more out there, a bit anyway, you’ve got me while it’s, it’s sunny outside. (Archer)

Not like the fruit, right? Look, I think there's something to be said in being part of a community. And I think there's really something to be said for standing up what your community believes in. That's the crux of it for me like – there's no other reason to make a stand or to, you know, write a letter or to, I mean, submit an article for peer review, other than to make a difference for the positive ... whether you've got your fist in the air out on the street, or whether you are, you know, submitting senate submissions, regardless of your response, it's working for your community, and creating a space where people are heard, people are valued and power is shared. And together, we create a new and better society and a new and better culture to live in. I think that's the thing that people forget is that we actually have the power to do this together. ... you know, the elite, the bourgeoisie, you know, that group, they, they derive power from us. And so, you know, our collective power, that's where it's at. ... but also, just being able to do something in your own life that gives you satisfaction, you know, to create and to think, and to do that when others don't have the opportunity to do that... you know, kicking back on your – on your lawn chair there's something wrong there. If people don't have the opportunity to have the same opportunities as you ... [there is] something wrong and we have to stand up against it. We have to fight. (Niall)

The best way is to try and get some democracy. Just having the committee of people is not democracy, as you know. So, you might get back to the relatively anarchist concept, which is just bunches of town hall meetings. That certainly brings up arguments. I know that when I've had board meetings back 15 years ago, we filled a hall of 150 people, with people from the school and then here's a few good things to think about, what is democracy? Who gets a vote in the University? Just the people who are tenured? The people who are non-tenured and desperately trying to be tenured? The students? People only there for two years who gets a vote? Unless you can answer that, you're on a bit of a lost cause. You need to be able to answer that. You cannot have separate levels of freedom. (Roscoe)

We're not in student politics for the hell of it, right? I think I'm here because I think students have something real to say and too often, they're not given a chance to say it. So, I see my role really differently, like yes, I've done the political to get to president, but I'm pushing our SRC to really think about how to listen to students and how to position every student in a place where they can speak back, they can do something more, you know, like, they can – they can be a valued contributor on a board, and have a say in the decisions, and it's got to be diverse – it's got to be everyone not just the political, not just the outcasts either. (Juliana)

I've had to advocate, or poke actively. And, you know, kind of like poking a line and not knowing when to say enough is enough. I had to get on people's

nerve a lot. And so, when – when that happens, and there’s kind of this... continuous fracture and repair and fracture and repair. Where you break, something happens. And it destroys your trust a bit in the way that university works, in the way that community works, because universities are a section of community in how community operates. It does go with how governments operate ... it’s all intertwined. ... But there’s a lot of people out there that don’t have [the resources they need] they drop out, they fail. ... You know if you have a disability, you have to fight so hard to be where you are. (Margie)

The community power realised through rallying behind a cause created lifelong skills for these intellectuals. Having understood the qualitative and important difference between a striving organic intellectual and the being of student politicians. This leaves real questions about bridging gaps in engagement in *politics* and tertiary educations which create *real* democratic citizens and change. The conclusion turns to a final examination of the university, as the essential piece for understanding and making the future. Drawing on the context painted in the thesis, it describes an aspirational end. The possible is examined in the closing against the narrowed and dystopian ends facing late-stage capitalist institutions. Rather than seeing the institution as a space which creates compliant workers, the conclusion serves as a reassertion of democratic principles which enable the public good through the fulsome production of organic intellectuals.

Conclusion

The future of the hegemon, universities and activism:

Reconceptualising governance, work and study

In late modernity, universities are subject to new forms of governance and decision-making (J. Barnes, 2020; Blackmore et al., 2010; Bonnell, 2016; Cornelius-Bell, 2021; Houlbrook, 2019; Marginson & Considine, 2000). From the activation of neoliberal tropes and accelerated forms of global capitalism, markets have seized control of the university sector in a meaningful way (Ball, 2012; Brabazon, 2016; W. Brown, 2015; H. Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Giroux, 2002; Heath & Burdon, 2013; Humphrys, 2019; Rogers et al., 2020). The terraforming of higher education, particularly in Australia, has seen a departure from the old-form colonial institution, with its interest in service for the ‘publics’ of the hegemon (Boland, 2005; Connell, 2013a, 2019; Cornelius-Bell, 2021; McMahon, 2009; Molesworth et al., 2009; Palma, 2020; Tutterow & Evans, 2016). In this space, universities no longer serve as home to the traditional intellectual of Gramscian theorisation (Fontana, 2015; H. Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Gramsci, 1996; Shear, 2008). The academic staff and student populating the university has shed its conservative keeping with the hegemonic order of colonial origin, and while the institution briefly flirted with a radical flare during the 1960s and 1970s, the successive reconstituting of governance towards a system that fundamentally *acts* for profit has gripped the very core of higher education in Australia (Barcan, 2007, 2011; Brooks, 2017; Buckley, 2014; Forsyth, 2014, 2020). New models of direct-control become evident, as the university’s senior governance bodies increasingly mirror the corporate board, controlled by the capitalist interest and bodies singularly receptive to the ruling class’s common sense (B. Bessant, 1995; Blackmore et al., 2010; Bonnell, 2016; Crehan, 2016; Filho & Coutinho, 2019; Gravett et al., 2019). This reconfiguration, demonstrated above, has significant impacts on students and the positioning of citizenship for the future. This thesis has shown that students are once again effectively, and

actively, denied access to the tools and resources of cultural change. These are tools of hegemonic disruption when universities fail to engage them in democratic processes. Importantly, these include a failing to realise students' important role in governance, curricular participation and activism, as well as the importance of delivering educative opportunities beyond the hegemonic curriculum (Ahmadi, 2021; Barkas et al., 2020; Bovill, 2019; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Davies & Bansel, 2010; de Bie, 2020; Gravett et al., 2019). Student perspectives hold a broad range of expressions of their 'voice', 'views' and 'values' in the university system. However, only when these are supported, scaffolded and structured towards a *bona fide* understanding of democracy as a citizen does higher education serve its purported purpose of *acting for a public good*. Students' various engagement in higher education has taken many historical forms, from full blooded protest against university administration, and at times its academics, through to solidarity with academics in the Vietnam war period, and even into partnership with the institution for quality and reform (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020; Hastings, 2003; Marginson, 2011; Morse & Peele, 1971; Saunders, 1977; Theocharis, 2012). Responses from students vary depending on the changing contextual decisions. There is a constant barrage of new challenges facing politics, ecology, systems and people. The permutations of activism, in such a time, are endlessly varied in late modernity and offer little stability for students or academics. There are three final pivots worth further consideration in the closing of this thesis, which offer a considered resting place for the history, concepts and theory of this thesis: a theory of praxis in the twenty-first century, or *an* application of Gramscian science towards class consciousness and positive ends. Three moves will be considered after a painting of the backdrop and structure of the thesis herein. Here, an assertion of a departure from the governance structures of universities as they currently stand – spaces of corporate capture and prolonged hegemony – into new ideas for working democratically as a praxis is needed. This is not for the ruling class, but for the subaltern, the diverse members of civil society. Here, a

reassertion of the necessity of *study* for class consciousness and the emergence of the organic intellectual, again conceptualised as producible inside university bounds.

This doctoral thesis has made several original contributions to knowledge through methodological developments, a reconfiguration of cultural studies in relation to higher education studies, and a detailed account of students' role and positionality in the manifestation and harnessing of political power. It has enacted this process through a cultural studies mode, employing sociological methods and robust theoretical complications which modernise and support the contemporary use of Gramscian theory. Throughout the two major *moves* of this thesis, a series of robust, empirical developments have been made. In the first *part* of the thesis, the contemporary scene for higher education was set. This was deliberately supported through a plurality of students' voices, creating a robust cacophony to set the scene of still-diverse student interests. The drive, now, for student participation, remains evident across the entire thesis. Not since the 1970s has student participation seen such focus, both in the literature and by students in the field. This has been demonstrated in novel way through the employment of Gramscian social science, which was explored in depth in the first chapter of the thesis. Reasserting the necessity for engaging with Gramscian social sciences required robust attention to the changes to the contextual field surrounding cultural studies, a field itself which could not have come to exist without Gramsci.

Drawing on key theoretical reassertions by Anderson, the thesis was able to operationalise Gramscian social science. Particularly, across Chapter 2, the modernising work of bringing hegemonic theory and Gramsci's intellectuals into the twenty-first century has been demonstrated. Careful attention was paid to the structure and nature of the organisation of society and the changes between the 1900s, 1960s and 2020s. This novel development enabled a clear and necessary *setting of the scene* for the methods of the thesis. Chapter 3 explored, employing interviews and enduring ethnographic field work, where the thesis benefitted from

the rounded communal input, and in particular through its mode of presentation, demonstrated throughout, was able to draw from rich data complementing and constructing the narrative form. Through an attentive consideration of participants' voices, the thesis was able to operationalise Gramscian praxis, adding theoretical implications and constructing the voices of participants *in situ*, considering their position beneath university (as an extrapolation of state) hegemony. Here, understanding students' own narratives and purposes for action enables an examination of *cui bono* in the field of student *initiative*. Ultimately, the organisation of society, in particular the tools of hegemonic control, common sense, and the stratified field of the intellectual remains applicable and, in partiality, consistent with the contemporary politics of being a student. Action, then, is understood above as necessarily political and when *mass organisation means action*, students challenge and transform hegemonic institutions. However, as shown through this doctoral research, the forces and dimensions of power prevalent remain overbearing and preclusive of action. Moreover, as universities continue to operate into the neoliberal capitalist fray, they configure themselves to actively deny the alternative possibility and deny students the tools to change their future. Across Chapter 8 and Chapter 9, the alternative was shown in students demonstrating as able to organise, to take initiative, and to make *an* impact in their own and others' lives.

The imperative to systematise these developments is far from realised. Only in the act of working against university hegemony were students able to find spaces for resistance and transformation. Without a serious reconceptualisation of the nature and purpose of higher education, even limited to a revisiting of the original purpose of the institution, students are destined to be silenced by institutional hegemony. Across history, various levels of engagement have existed at Flinders University, mirrored in global literature that saw students taking an active and constructive role in the nature and purpose of higher education. Across Chapters 6, 7 and 8, the deviation from this active initiative was explored. Only by considering the past, as

activated through Chapter 5, and the possibility of organic intellectuals through Chapter 9, is it possible to understand how institutions might serve *the people* as active centres for producing organic intellectuals – those who may, genuinely, change the world¹⁴⁴.

This thesis has demonstrated that student attitudes toward, their understandings of, and participation in, civil society, with forays into capture and configuration of state society, have changed over the years, particularly since the 1960s. While the structures and places students are able to occupy have changed, as higher education has undergone dramatic shifts in its position in society, as new ideologies have emerged and captured the hegemonic leadership of the institutions, and as students and staff themselves are captured, reconfigured, and (re)understood in light of new hegemony, activism and advocacy from students, for students and by students stands the test of time. With Flinders University as the home of this substantive study, I have traced students' activism and positionality within governance and the structures of the institution since the 1960s, the university's inception, and through a weave of data collection methods, including historiography and alternative history, participant observation and interviewing, and document analysis, this thesis has toured the political nature of students' role in hegemonic change, particularly in light of the institution of the university in a single place across spacetime. While student politics, itself a complicated and contested field, has largely stagnated as a space for students' eventual pathway to political institutions, the *bona fide* activism of students whose situations *force* political action, continue to build community, negotiate, rebel, write, think and protest. This takes on new forms in the age of Web 2.0, in particular social media, but forms a fundamental tool belt required of the organic intellectual. Developing understandings of the position of others, through advocating for peers, creating genuine networks for social change and in coming to understand the structures and processes of the state as they pertain to the university institution is important learning. Alas, as has been

¹⁴⁴ Beyond a marketing slogan, strategic plan buzzword or student catch phrase (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017).

highlighted, not all students are afforded, or forced into, understanding the structure of civil and state society, and are relegated into conditions which enable the acritical perpetuation of ruling class hegemony through (re)production of a 'petite bourgeoisie', the traditional intellectuals of Gramsci's original theorisation. In an increasingly complicated global health, economic, political and (in)human context, the issues of 'student's engagement' come to the fore for political actors across the spectrum. *Education*, informal or otherwise, remains a crucial point in human understanding of the structure of society, including state society, and the development of *consciousness*, as Gramsci argues, can only be attained through an understanding of position in connection with an individual's social group origin (Gramsci, 1996). To realise utopian Gramscian possibility in late modernity, an analytical, transformative and robust education is required through higher education institutions. A space which still offers the potential to create the conditions to share the knowledge and tools of social transformation. This space, however, is narrowing as higher education becomes increasingly technicist and silences diverse perspective and initiative, though there is hope yet for the production of the organic intellectual, concomitantly in and out of higher education; not just for the relatively privileged student, but with the diaspora out of the university into the communities, workforces and spaces of *informal* learning to create a real conduit to necessary social transformation.

Students' relative position in society, their (in)activism, their (in)advocacy, and their 'engagement' are subject for critique, but are equally spaces for hopeful new realisations about the social order and human progress. While students often 'cop' criticism – particularly younger students – for being lazy, disengaged, disinterested, non-contributory, students are in a unique position, as has been shown across a confined history, as agents of social change. In some cases, radical shifts and realisations have occurred with students at the heart of the decisions, as the drivers of change, and as actors of and for their generation(s). While conditions shift around younger people today, they still find new, and often tested, forms of activism, be it academic,

political or novel and ‘organic’, their ‘political’ engagement – in terms of civil society – positions them in a flux of initiative under state hegemony. This political relation which has seen many configurations throughout history, and throughout this thesis above, is of paramount importance in understanding *social change* be it *left*, *right*, or otherwise. If culture is ‘of us’, then students’ almost unique ability to create rebellion and activism, as well as advocacy and academic engagement, is a culture of studenthood. This is a vitally important space for the future and requires serious contemplation and arguably (re)positioning of students. In this vein, this thesis now turns briefly to conceptualisations of university governance as a starting point which enables an authentic *listening* to student voice in a democratic structure; not a radical (re)conceptualisation, but a progressive structural order which envisions students *in* the process of ‘acting’ as/for civil society in a university. While such a move is perhaps more likely to originate in *left* politics, the act of positioning students *to act* is fundamentally a question of democracy, not of political spectrum. Thus, a relatively agnostic approach is taken.

Conceptualising students in governance

New governance is required to break cyclical recreation of students’ positioning in civil society. This thesis has demonstrated the myriad ways ‘active’ students participate in university structures. Moreover, it has shown, through historical positionality, the role and possibilities afforded to certain students – students of hegemonic status – and the conditions which may facilitate or enable activism or be reconditioned into hegemony through a subaltern movement. Throughout, new menacing forms of governance, management and democracy have arisen, often from the burnt ashes of the previous social order. With progressive thrusts towards corporate managerialist economics across the public sector, and with global futures increasingly narrowing with the decaying global ecology, the systems of governance as they stand *must* shift. In higher education, spaces are filled with possibility for reimagining social order, creating new shared worlds, and acting democratically. However, more than a mere maintenance of

democratic values is required to create a sustainable future for people and the planet. Students are increasingly aware of, and concerned for, global health, economies, relationships, people, or animals, and through education there is a real possibility to foster these understandings and guide students to analytical, robust and possible futures. The ultimate power of education is not in students 'seizing the means of education' or in overthrowing university hegemonic management structures, nor is it solely in the relationship between student and teacher in the classroom environment.

New governance enables a radical possibility which students seize through their, nearly accidental, organic engagement with people from diverse backgrounds. In this regard, I propose, as a starting place, institutional governance which, built on fundamental democratic principles, and fair compensation, for more students to participate in, guide, and relate with the structures of universities. Where power relations foster inequity, consideration must be given to the voice of the majority in the university sector – the students themselves. Rather than a sole focus on the vice-chancellor and their senior executive, the institution should (re)value students as critical to the continuation of their 'core business', positioning students in the most fundamental positions of the university's acts. There should not be a reduction in students' power, in an attempt to control and direct the institution towards further performative measurement tools, but a sharing of power and responsibility with students, to ask them 'what do you think, how would you proceed' and work through the consequences of such a direction. Senior executives I have spoken to suggest such a modality takes too much time, but I counterpose 'how else might the institution be positioned for the future' and 'how else can it stay at the edge of contemporary culture and connected understanding that responds to the needs of community and the needs of people'. Universities serve the public good and in Australia, it is specified so in their *acts*. Students have a powerful role to play in this relation, and they are already crying out for a voice. The retort is often that only the political students

will engage, yet, as I have explored above, students who come from a diversity of political, socioeconomic, ability and regional backgrounds *have something to say*.

We are living in an age where gender, race, disability and class matter more than ever, where identity politics grips society and challenges traditional politics, where new populist leaders emerge to triumph over the world of the disconnected corrupt elite, and where right-wing extremism poses serious threats from inside civil society. All people need to be equipped with the tools to negotiate, engage, navigate, debate, protest, write, rebel and speak out when they are facing oppression or struggles. In an increasingly disconnected society, these tools come from fewer places. Students bring voice, students have power, and students wish to be involved in the future; it takes academic engagement to (co)create that future together, not in a meaningless struggle for curriculum centricity, but in a fundamental and democratic repositioning of the student and the academic in higher education.

The nature of academic work shifted during the COVID-19 global health crisis, disproportionately affecting the academic precariat: importantly including the student as perhaps most precarious of academic labourer. The continually accelerating conditions of global capitalism have created increasingly precarious employment for workers of the knowledge economy (Aronowitz, 2004). Alongside issues of mental health, instability and a denial of the possibility of a stable future, the precariat are also those who are ‘expected to have a level of education that is greater than the labour they are expected to perform or expect to obtain’ (Standing, 2014, p. 10). In this way, students studying now are denied possibilities in their futures before they even ‘earn their degree’. The conditions for work have changed dramatically as a result of the pandemic, with wide-ranging social and economic impacts. Global capitalism continues its destructive appetite for adaptation and subsumption of human energy and labour, pausing only briefly for localised lockdowns, which has created increasingly dangerous and tenuous working conditions for the precariat. The continued neoliberalising and

capitalist creep into global higher education has created conditions of extreme surplus labour; labour which is highly educated, capable and anxious *to* work, study and participate (Standing, 2014). Alongside this slide into almost pre-Fordist employment conditions comes a polarisation towards ideological extremism, a twisted commitment to managerialism, and a hyper-focus on ‘job ready graduates’ has crept in to the structures and core nature of higher education (J. Brett, 2021; Giroux, 2014; Norton, 2020). There is an obsession for politicians-come-vice-chancellors through the entire senior leadership of universities in a march towards ‘profit’ through the production of flash buildings and fast paced organisational change into a zombification of higher education. Amongst this corporate-political class, as Brabazon (2020, p. 131) has characterised, ‘There is always another Key Performance Indicator, change management initiative, and restructure.’; a moving feast for students, academics and professionals who all labour in the higher education sector, and a necessity for a constant re-evaluation of the conditions rife in civil society, which deny participation and possibility to all but the most elite.

In late-capitalism, university qualifications are aggressively repositioned towards market objectives, from political rhetoric through to university advertising campaigns (J. Brett, 2021; Connell, 2013b; Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017). There is an obsessive and accelerating focus on the use of emergent technologies including virtual reality, blockchain and big data, made to fit with teaching and learning in undergraduate, science, technology, engineering, maths, humanities, arts, social sciences, education, law, government, medicine and nursing qualifications, regardless of authentic benefit or even relevance (for example: Eijnatten et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2015; Kitchin, 2014; Rooksby & Dimitrov, 2019; Skiba, 2017). A subsequent adaptation of teaching and learning towards convenience, a ‘McDonaldization’ of degrees (Nadolny & Ryan, 2015), and the decaying value of a qualification *for* learning or as a fundamental pillar of engaged, critical democracy, erodes the very purpose and nature of the scholarly promise in universities. Australian universities find themselves trapped in a self-harm

cycle, managerial university executive driving itself towards rapid technological and educational change, driving the cost of the 'campus' up, chasing enhanced research outcomes that ignore any actual cultural, social, health, environmental or political benefit, and a federal political system which continues to catastrophically cut, reimagine and redistribute funding and models of higher education. An endless cut, shift, restructure, recreate, move and divide between the soft sciences and hard sciences, the pitting of academics against one another, an increasing scarcity of jobs, and an endlessly unstable and increasingly mentally draining and damaging university landscape has emerged. This is a frightening environment for students, academics and professional staff. While it is important to acknowledge that not all students will necessarily continue beyond an undergraduate or masters qualification, those that do are increasingly taking what is *of value* from the research process and exporting it into private enterprise to produce more private profit as the only space with the possibility of stability for the factory production line of quantitative skill PhD holders (Brabazon, 2016).

The promise of higher education as an institution of learning, sharing knowledge, and democratisation briefly realised in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s after the dramatic social upheaval and student power movements of the 1960s, are but a flash in the historical pan. Now, universities actively give up on democracy and possibility in favour of corporatisation, market competition, deregulation, mergers and fee hikes, against students' best interests. The university suffers in an era of students seen singularly as consumers, valued for their market use-value (W. Brown, 2015). A reconceptualisation, then, is necessary in order to reposition education and universities in contemporary culture. A move towards a *new way* is needed, which acknowledges the problems, exploitations, and failures of the university institution of the past, which allows for a radical, yet necessary, new university.

In this closing section, I pose four recommendations to re-centre education as a pathway to change universities, civil society, politics and the ecosphere for the better:

1. Reposition democratic values at the heart of teaching and learning, enabling genuine participatory educative potential for students to engage with community and society;
2. Use ‘Students as Partners’ approaches as a runway to student community building, grassroots action and student governance participation for enhanced democracy;
3. Tailor research-pathways for students (from undergraduate up) that necessitate engagement with good governance and democratic principles; and
4. Incentivise publication collaboratively with students that shows meaningful, consultative societal output nested in a high-context rationale.

Overarchingly, the singular recommendation is to grant students a seat at the table in governance dialogue. Valuing student contributions in research and teaching work, by providing secure pathways to permanent work, goes a long way towards building sustainable culture. However, to ensure *everyone* has a voice in governance, a radical rethink of the way that university governance is currently operated in Australia is required. There is a deep need to identify students’ views on areas for innovation, improvement and change. In this vein, universities have, distressingly, progressed towards increasingly consumer-focused market research tactics in a marketing and market research head spin (Batabyal, 2006; Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017). In order to meaningfully direct higher education for the future, the students must be included in meaningful ways in the strategic decision-making of their universities. Vice-Chancellors, Deans, teaching program directors, and teaching staff should use every opportunity to listen to student views, but also to involve students before strategic decisions are made in matters that affect them – ‘nothing about them without them’ (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020). Rather than focussing on reporting on the ‘good job’ the university has been doing politically and in its research agenda, it should create a culture of ownership amongst undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral students and workers. If everyone can feel

responsible, secure and valuable to the institution, the culture of the institution will rocket forward.

As it now stands, students in disparate, asymmetrical political groupings come to realisations that the structure and organisation of society fails them too late and with too few tools to exact change. Students are precluded from the tools and effective systems of systemic cultural change by being denied possibilities to engage with their world, social standing, class and context actively and analytically. As the hegemonic university races towards a reassertion of the capitalist model of the Manchester textile mills, in a top-down governance rhetoric inherited and *acted* directly by executive leadership, the bottom falls out of the effectiveness of student organising. Relying singularly on students' ability to assert political initiative underneath crushing weight of capitalist hegemony is to allow initiative to be crushed. Standing idly by waiting for the revolution is not sufficient, the production of tools and political powers amongst the broad student body is required to address the bleak higher education, and societal landscape, which has been demonstrated as developing above. No longer can academics 'opt out' of *bona fide praxis* in favour of singularly academical critiques; a learned good sense must be co-developed with students for the betterment of the individual, sector, and globe.

Higher education globally is in a grim state. Successive attacks of corporate governance structures, neoliberal managerialism, economic rationalism and metric chasing has left the university sector in ruins. The COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated the exploitation and damage of the university sector to students and workers alike, and as long as it continues to affect the nature of work, the damage will continue. Students still speak to the mental damage of social distance, the global insecurity of health, the inability to access healthcare, the insecure workplaces, worries about the climate and planet, and the world they are inheriting. Alongside students, academics, particularly early career academics, struggle with insecurity and anxiety over their work, taking on too much, never knowing if they might lose their job, or be exploited

by a supervisor or colleague. In order to make a meaningful difference in late-capitalism, serious intervention into the governance, priorities, and pathways in universities are needed. Across the political economy, the degradation of the nature of work, the boundaries between work and leisure, the security of employment, the access to adequate mental and physical resources, failure of rapid technological advancement to solve societal problems, wealth concentration and climate change pose significant and wide-ranging problems for students and scholars. There are hopeful ways toward the future, but they require a serious and sustained rethink of what higher education is and does, how culture and representation work, and the nature and future of work in a global era of insecurity, anxiety and disruption.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Excerpt from podcast transcript (Brabazon & Cornelius-Bell, 2020):

(Aidan:) I guess it comes from my own view of pedagogy, we would already sort of frame the student as someone who's not just an empty brain to be filled, but as someone who brings experiences and knowledge to our classroom, or to a university ... you can't possibly think of the student as just a customer. And you can't think of them as just a consumer of education, because then it brings a whole raft of extra issues along with it ... it's also quite deliberate, because it aligns with my own view of what the student is, isn't, can be and should be. ...

(Tara:) So you're also critiquing the commodification of knowledge on the other side post-graduation. The language like 'transferable skills, translatable knowledge' does your narrative stop at graduation? Are you also seeing education in that wider context? ...

(Aidan:) I think it's got to be that the higher education sector as an as an educational institution has to be the start place or maybe even just a middle place for learning journey that continues both ways in all directions. ...

(Tara:) This is a really hard question, and a tough one that is keeping me up most nights, considering you and I are living through COVID, social unrest, the whole nightmare, who knew would be doing your thesis through this? But is this a thesis of identity politics?

(Aidan:) It's a challenging question, because I think it plays there's certainly a role for identity politics in the space. But I think ultimately, the messages the sort of the key things that come away from this are not just – it's more than that. ...

(Tara:) So you can obviously, everyone's heard me say that you can obviously be a bloke and be a feminist, you don't need a vagina to be a feminist. And, and in terms of black politics, which is so powerful on the planet at the moment, white men and women, non-binary identifying white crew have a role and function in that you can be anti-racist and white. But also that creates some very complicated spaces. I think they are productive spaces. But they require a fair amount of intellectual precision. ...

(Aidan:) That's the role of the university, surely, must be to look at those kinds of moves, those things that are happening, and give – give? I don't know, work with establish, a critical baseline of cultural understanding with students

so that they can engage with that precision in an intellectual way out in society. So that, you know, I mean, even just like consciousness raising in that basic sense, there are things going on that you should be aware of more than just 'industry connected'. ...

(Tara:) So it's a very small part of education, but a very large part of publishing. So, what drew you to higher education studies? And do you consider it a discipline or a post disciplinary area? Where are you on that at the moment? ...

(Aidan:) What drew me here I guess was structural shifts to higher education as we know it, and being in that and experiencing it, so I mean, like my own original PhD for a variety of reasons, but including changes to the institution, was disrupted. The original project went out the window and I had to start again. I think just by nature of being in a moment like that, of being I think mostly being subject to changes that now I understand the implications of in the broader picture that sits around that. But at the time, I didn't, and I just knew what was happening to people around me. And that, that sort of gave me a bit of – a bit of drive to be a bit activist in the space, and to be loud about what I thought should be happening. And that sort of made me ... got me thinking in a way that, you know, there must be a body of literature here, right? It's like I sort of default back all the time, whenever some kind of confrontation comes up or something happens. I always default back to what's in the research, what's the literature saying? So, I guess that's where my journey started, was through, you know, a structural shift, and then looking at, well, what's here and what's in this space? What do we know? And then, I think, importantly, looking through a sociological lens at ... [those] systemic changes and what's happening for people to sort of unpack and understand that, and so that I guess that's, that's how I got into it. ...

(Tara:) Can something be rendered political or as you have already suggested does it exist in an environment or a frame, that the frame renders it political?

(Aidan:) it's almost like a chicken and egg situation. It's like, I can't be like 'this is now political'. But my set of dispositions, my understandings and attitudes towards the world would inform in an interaction the kinds of politics present. So just by nature of being in a space, I suppose you it's not as though I'm bringing into a room a set of politics that other people can feel, but it's through expression and exchange, that you've come to understand each other's sort of attitudes or positions. ...

(Tara:) we get people to talk about their PhD, but how did you get here? How did you decide this was the thing?

(Aidan:) ... looking back at my experience, it's like, organising protests through to now looking at ways to consciousness raise. It's a journey through this sort of, I would say, almost, and there's always a time and place for protests. But I would almost say that protest in and of itself, is a primitive way of dealing with problems that come up. Being mindful of protests that are currently happening. Like, it's certainly not to say that those shouldn't be happening, because they absolutely should. And when you come to, you know, like, there's no other choice, and you come to this sort of this end point where there's, you don't have another option to express your agency over what has happened. Protest is one way that tension can be resolved. But arguably, if we look at the systemic causes of things, I mean, even take Black Lives Matter, as an example, if you look at the causes of that, you, it always comes back to me, about being about education. It's like if we can educate people sooner if we can produce critical consciousness in every single student, be the primary school or TAFE, or university, doesn't matter. If we could build a critical consciousness in a way of understanding the world that was critical, respectful, enlightened, ... lots of these problems would sort of fade away. And if, I guess, democracy functions in the way that it's supposed to or purports to, and we had citizenry that were equipped, educated and could deal critically with situations as they occur, there would be far less need for protest. And so, you know protest is sort of a primitive form of dealing with these problems. But ultimately, it's a forced expression that we wouldn't have arrived at if education had done its job. ...

(Tara:) Tough times, I use the word brutalising a lot at the moment, I've realised that a word I have been using, I think it's because it feels like the skin of the surface of our civilisation has been rubbed off. So it feels brutalised. But how does writing a PhD in a time like this impact on what you're writing? So what is the relationship between the form and content and your context? And your research?

(Aidan:) I think that's the PhD itself, I think takes the form of it, I really want it to be something that people read, for starters, which I think is the struggle of all PhD students. I don't want it to be a dusty tome on a shelf. But I want it to be something that does capture the moment now. But it's also something that will be relatable in 5, 10, 20 years' time. Because just like I'm reading things from those 60s period, those nostalgia periods, looking at that stuff now is really interesting to unpack what I guess they were being activists about, that what was going on in those cultural moments, I want to be able to capture something similar now with an acknowledgement of all of the quite unique, new challenges that go along with ... being even remotely political in contemporary spaces. But also capture the education aspect of it, because I think that's something that's sorely missing from activist literature and student publications.

Appendix 2

Carbon copy of: Cornelius-Bell, A., & Bell, P. A. (2020). Partnership as Student Power: Democracy and governance in a neoliberal university. *Radical Teacher*, 118(1), 21–30.

Appendix 3

Carbon copy of: Cornelius-Bell, A. (2021). University Governance, Radicalism and the

Market Economy: Where Student Power Gave Way to Economics and Educative

Possibility to the Corporate University. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational*

Studies, 8(2), 76–87.

Appendix 4

Carbon copy of: Cornelius-Bell, A., & Bell, P. A. (in press). The academic precariat post-

COVID-19. *Fast Capitalism*.

Appendix 5

Carbon copy of: Brabazon, T., Cornelius-Bell, A., & Armstrong, E. (2021). The Pandemic

PhD programme Reading and thinking about the Celebrity Intellectual (and COVID-

19). *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 8(1), 212–235.