The larrikin subject: hegemony and subjectivity in late nineteenth century Sydney

Kylie Smith
University of Wollongong


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Abstract

The problem of social disorder has figured prominently in Australian historiography and in contemporary social theorising. However, the traditional categories of historical analysis provide a limited set of tools through which to understand the complexities of human behaviour in the past. By writing a social ontology into history, it is possible to rethink how ‘ways of being’ in the world are both constructed and represented, and to reconsider the consequences of this for our understanding of both history and the present.

The way in which certain types of social disorder have been analysed in Australian history has meant that some social groups, or behavioural types, have been marginalised and excluded. This is the case with the figure of ‘the larrikin’, a common type in Australian historiography, yet represented in such a way that our understanding of them today bears little resemblance to the way in which they were understood in their own time. This discrepancy has been brought about through the tendency of some historical approaches to focus on the institutions and structures of nation building, or on the recognisably political forms of ‘organised labour’. This type of analysis can only take our understanding of human behaviour so far.

Psychoanalytic theory as developed by Freud and Lacan helps to show the way in which ‘civilised society’ relies on the repression and sublimation of ‘instinctual’ types of human behaviour, but that in so doing, a part of the human self is excluded. This exclusion occurs at both the personal and the social level, as the ‘civilised’ self, the ‘civilised society’, can only exist against what it has excluded. This psychoanalytic theory is linked with the work of Antonio Gramsci to show that what is excluded, and the process of exclusion, is related to the process of establishing hegemony, and that the resultant exclusion is the basis of subalternity.

In late nineteenth century Sydney, the term ‘larrikinism’ came to represent a particular set of behaviours which were considered problematic for the development of ‘civilised society’. An examination of the hegemonic mechanisms by which the exclusion of larrikin behaviour could occur, demonstrates that the imagination of a civilised society in late nineteenth century Sydney was centred around certain hegemonic principles which required a particular kind of human self – a disciplined worker, a desiring consumer – and suggests that larrikins resisted this process. Larrikins were made subaltern because they were a form of ‘subjectivity’, or a way of being in the world, that sought to challenge the making of a kind of human self considered necessary for industrial capitalism. In this way, larrikin behaviour can be understood as a type of ‘excess’, a frontier in the battle for hegemony around notions of youth, respectability and discipline.

This historical process did not stop in 1899 but continued into the twentieth century and beyond, and continues to have ramifications for the way in which we think notions of politics and agency, and for the ways in which subaltern groups in contemporary society continue to be marginalised and excluded.
Acknowledgements

This has been a long and difficult project that has taken a path significantly different to that which was originally envisioned. While this has made the process at times extremely stressful, often exacerbated by the external pressures of ‘life’ and all its demands, the end result has been an exciting and stimulating intellectual journey. While all of the problems, inconsistencies and errors are my own, there are many who have contributed to this project’s eventual completion.

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But most of all, this project is for Trent. It would not have been started, nor finished, without his love, encouragement, support and determination. He alone knows what this has cost, and what it really means. I will be forever grateful.
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Introduction

The early twenty-first century in Sydney, Australia, was marked by outbreaks of ‘gang violence’ and an attendant media frenzy which sought to lay the blame for the anti-social behaviour of Australian youth anywhere other than at the foot of social conditions. In Sydney’s inner-west an alleged ‘crime wave’ was unproblematically attributed to gangs of ‘ethnic origin’ (mostly middle eastern) and this therefore demonstrated the incapacity of migrants to assimilate into Australian culture (especially when the migrants were of middle eastern extraction). This was further exacerbated by the allegedly racially motivated gang rape of a young girl by four brothers in 2002. The consequences of this attack have been severe and long running, especially for young men of ‘middle eastern appearance’. In Sydney’s outer-west around Macquarie Fields, the week-long confrontation in February 2005 between police and groups of young people was readily explained in terms of ignorance, stupidity and lack of respect for authority. In late 2005, clashes between groups of ‘middle eastern’ young men

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1 This assessment does not include the riots of indigenous Australians occurring as the result of the death of an aboriginal boy in a police chase in Redfern in February 2004, for example, as social conditions are quite readily cited as the cause of indigenous ‘problems’ in Australia, while nothing continues to be done about those conditions. Indigenous Australians however, and their forms of social protest, do not fit the usual stereotype of gang-related violence with which the media and this thesis are concerned.


3 Interestingly, this ‘riot’ was also ostensibly about the death of a young person involved in a police chase, a factor much more readily dismissed in this scenario than in the Redfern situation. See reports listed below.

4 See for example, “Carr reinforces support for the police”, “Premier supports officers” both from The Daily Telegraph March 1, 2005 and “Enough is Enough – Moroney’s ultimatum on violent street riots” The Daily Telegraph, March 7, 2005. The Sydney Morning Herald editorials attempted to take social conditions into account but these were dismissed by the politicians quoted in the reports. See, for example, “Not disadvantaged, just bad, says Carr” March 1, 2005;
and local Anglo surfers on Cronulla Beach complicated matters further. A long debate ensued about the racist nature of the riots, where violent behaviour was again framed in terms of cultural difference stemming from a problem of assimilation. Most conservative commentators mentioned race and values, or attributed the behaviour on both sides to ‘criminality’, less conservative commentators raised issues of culture, public space, or political ‘dog whistling’ and fear mongering.⁵ The coverage of these riots has had long term consequences for the perception of middle eastern youth in Sydney and the tensions have not been resolved in any meaningful way.

These events, and the coverage of them, were influential in the direction of this thesis. In the course of some earlier research, I had come across references to gangs in Sydney from the mid 1800s and when the events of early 2000 described here were reported, I was struck by similarities in the language used to describe them and their participants. That is, most descriptions seemed to have no sense of socio-historical context – not only were the participants abstracted out from their social circumstances⁶, but they were taken out of the broader history of white Australian society more generally. In newspaper reports, gangs became the manifestation of some new scourge of criminality specific to the present, as though Sydney had an unblemished, non-criminal past and these events were

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⁴“When rage hits boiling point” March 5, 2005 and “Parents to blame for riots: Carr” March 8, 2005.
⁵ These issues are covered extensively in the Sydney daily newspapers throughout December 2005 and into the New Year.
⁶ In the case of Macquarie Fields the premier of NSW, Bob Carr explicitly stated that he would not hear of social circumstances being to blame. Quoted in The Daily Telegraph, March 1, 2005 and The Sydney Morning Herald, March 1, 2005.
some kind of pathological aberration, rather than part of a long history of ‘gangs’ in the city. The use of the term gangs was itself interesting, designed to breed fear and imply menace, when in reality young people have always gathered in groups in public spaces (and have been vilified for doing so). The most striking aspect of this language of vilification however had to do with the notion of ‘values’ and ‘Australian-ness’. Participants in social disorder were readily vilified as “unAustralian” (except perhaps for the nationalistic flag-waving white surfer boys of Cronulla), their behaviour taken as a lack of respect for Australian culture and values. However, nowhere were these values actually articulated, apart from the usual claims to fairness and equality. Why were ‘gangs’ so readily seen as unAustralian when history so clearly said otherwise? Why were individuals blamed for their behaviour on a personal character basis, and social circumstances so easily written out of the picture? How had our understanding of gangs in Australian history come to contribute to this contemporary understanding of social disorder more generally? Why in particular were some kinds of national character (the quaint anti-authoritarian larrikin, for example) more socially acceptable while the so-called violence of today’s youth so quickly abhorred? It was these questions that sparked the initial concerns of this thesis, which began as an interest in the origins of social disorder in Australia more generally and moved to a specific concern with the idea and figure of the larrikin in particular.

7 The only people to mention the longer history of violence in Sydney where the ex-pat feminist Germain Greer (as quoted by The Daily Telegraph in ‘British tinge to riots’, December 16, 2005) and Prof Richard Waterhouse, who framed the riots in terms of the longer history of conflict over public space in Sydney. Interestingly, Prof Waterhouse listed larrikins as part of this history (Illawarra Mercury, December 13, 2005). This does not take into account the vast body of scholarly, academic, work that has been sparked as a result of these events, and the many complex issues they raise. Rather, I am trying to make the point that the assessment of these issues in the popular media, and therefore in the mind of the general public, is simplistic and sensational, and has served merely to fan the flames of fear in a post 9/11 environment.
The ‘larrikin’ emerged as a distinct sphere of analysis for a number of reasons – firstly, the demands of managing a research project that was not too broad in scope (as opposed to the rather amorphous category of ‘social disorder’), secondly the availability of evidence (while not necessarily plentiful or unproblematic, the larrikin was a distinct social phenomena that could be located in time and place), and thirdly the way in which the idea of the larrikin had become so bound up with the national psyche. Why had this particular expression of social disorder come to be an acceptable kind of ‘Australianness’ while others had not? And had this always been the case?

This thesis then, takes the larrikin as its initial site of investigation to explore broader questions about Australian history and contemporary Australian society. Specifically, larrikins are seen as a case study, through which an analysis is developed about the ways in which people come to develop a sense of themselves in relation to the society in which they live, and the implications of this for human agency and the possibilities of resistance.

While this thesis has as its primary ‘object’ of analysis the larrikin, or larrikinism, as it is understood to have occurred in the late nineteenth century in Sydney, Australia, this is not the sole purpose of this project. In the process of researching it became obvious that the idea of the larrikin has been a site of contested meaning in Australian history and this indicated a number of issues with the writing of that history. More specifically, the original idea that larrikins could be understood as part of Australian labour history did not survive long past the
realisation that labour history as it has been traditionally practiced was potentially problematic for the understanding of the marginalised in Australian history. In the course of this research, I quickly discovered that to stay within these boundaries would not have led to any greater level of understanding about a phenomenon such as larrikinism.

This became apparent particularly because I was interested in exploring the connections between identity and agency. My concern with larrikins was not to come to some final “truth” about who they were or what they did, but rather, to understand the significance of the behaviour that was attributed to them, especially in relation to how it was interpreted and represented. For example, I was not interested in a history of ‘crime’ as an act, or an effect, so much as understanding how notions of criminality have changed over time, and how the ways in which some people react to social change becomes ‘criminal’ while other ways do not. In other words, this became not an ‘ontical’ project, so much as an ‘ontological’ one. That is, the purpose is not necessarily to uncover some hidden history of a particular group, but to analyse the processes by which that group came into being as a discursive entity and the longer term significances of those processes. In this sense then, it became a project concerned with writing a ‘social ontology’ back into history and its categories which I do not consider *a priori*, but

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believe instead should be analysed for the way in which they are themselves constructed and operate, and how this becomes significant for the ‘subjects’ of history. This is a social ontology that seeks to understand the ways in which people in the past came to understand themselves in the context of their lives – how was meaning and experience constructed in history, what affect did this have on possibilities for action? In some ways this is a project that resonates with the broad philosophical aims of post-Marxism, but it is not specifically a post-Marxist project because it does not seek to develop a recognisably political ‘program’ for the present or future.9 Rather, by writing social ontology back into history, the purpose is to critically analyse the way in which historical categories themselves are constructed over time and how this affects the ways in which we come to understand past behaviour and the possibilities for human society. This raises the broader question of the nature of human resistance, especially to the processes of capitalism, and in my reading about larrikins I started to think that this resistance could, and did, take forms outside of those usually recognised by the various categories of historical inquiry. In this sense, I became acutely aware of the possible politics of subjectivity and the need for a radicalisation of the concept of agency.

In 1959 C. Wright Mills wrote that

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9 This term is now used to refer to the work developed in Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. London. Verso. 2001., which specifically seeks to critique and expand the categories of traditional Leninist-Marxism in light of contemporary social and political practices. This is a program that has its own limits, not least because its conception of politics and of ‘radical democracy’ itself is still grounded in ‘rational’ conceptions of human behaviour. This is, of course, a simplistic critique, given the vast amount of debate post-marxism has provoked, and this issue is taken up in greater depth in Chapter Two and Six of this thesis.
the problems of our time – which now include the problem of man’s very nature – can not be stated adequately without consistent practice of the view that history is the shank of social study, and recognition of the need to develop further a psychology of man that is sociologically grounded and historically relevant. Without the use of history and without an historical sense of psychological matters, the social scientist can not adequately state the kinds of problems that ought now to be the orienting points of his studies.¹⁰

Despite great advances in the theory and method of historical studies, nearly fifty years later it is still the case that history as a discipline sometimes struggles to address the ‘problem’ of human nature, too often still reading the psychology of humans as determined by the structures within which this psychology occurs. This approach has limited our understanding of the possible avenues for human agency, and relegates as insignificant, or unproblematic, the ways in which people develop a sense of themselves in the world.

This thesis seeks to address these concerns in relation to one particular historical phenomenon, larrikinism, which, although in context was localised and short lived, has had serious consequences for our understanding of an allegedly particular Australian psychology, and more broadly, the way in which human psychology – human nature – is understood in the context of the development of Australian and global capitalism.

It is often the case in Australian history that matters of psychology are not perceived as relevant to an understanding of human activity in the past – by this I mean that there is still at times an underlying assumption that understanding the

structures of society in the past is enough to tell us what people were thinking and feeling and thus explain their intentions and motives. In other words, intentions and motivations are read off unproblematically from behaviour, or from the structures of society at a particular time. Behaviour, thoughts and feelings are often considered as merely reflective of those structures. Given the traditional methods of historical inquiry, this is perhaps not surprising, as the Western, white, male emphasis on the written record automatically privileges particular forms of story telling, where chaos and indeterminacy are transformed or excised to produce a neat, clean narrative. The nature of record keeping itself means only certain types of ‘facts’ are readily available to the historian, and to move beyond them is challenging and confronting. The influence of theory on history has gone some way to stretching these traditional methodological boundaries and there is at least now a ready acceptance that most written records of the past can not simply be taken at face value. There is now a rich body of work in other types of history which seek to look beyond the traditional categories of white, male narrative history to encompass areas of concern such as gender, race, culture and emotions.  

It is still often the case however, that the persistence of empiricism, the search for the ‘truth’, the belief in grand narratives and the imposition of order continue to produce history which is too easily used as an ideological weapon, whether by the Right or the Left, to make connections with a past that naturalise and rationalise the present and the future. In this sense then, history becomes “a fantasized narrative that imposes sequential order on otherwise chaotic and contingent occurrences”. For some, there seems a very real reluctance to address the idea of history as a construct, as a form of fiction, in large part because of the fear of a so-called post-modern relativism. Not only is this a simplistic and ill-informed reading of what post-modernism actually is, but it facilitates the avoidance of asking ourselves the hard questions about history. I readily accept that things did actually happen in the past, that structures changed, wars were fought and court cases won or lost, but in and of themselves what do these ‘facts’ tell us? They only become history when someone decides to write about them, and in that writing imposes an order that comes from the writer’s own belief in what was significant. Central to this writing of history appears to be a belief in cause and effect and an assumption of the linear progression of human society, which at the very least creates absences and silences in the stories that we tell ourselves about our past.

It was at least in part in response to these concerns that the genre of ‘labour history’ emerged. Designed to challenge the narrow vision of traditional narrative history with its emphasis on the concepts of development and ‘progress’

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synonymous with the rise of the middle class, labour history sought to address issues pertinent to the lives of the great majority of the population who did not figure in this history, and to whom it was irrelevant. Labour history as a genre has been extremely important in broadening historical concerns out from mainstream narrative history’s overtly nationalistic focus. It has opened the door to a way of thinking about Australian history that questions the triumphalism of white, male, capitalism, and has made it possible to write about the oppressed and their experience. Yet labour history itself is plagued with many of the problems it sought to avoid, not least of which are the categories of analysis valorised by its own canon. It is still the case that labour history has taken a particular focus on the formal, organised structures of resistance to oppression that have privileged a certain kind of working class consciousness. This kind of labour history holds that resistance to capitalist social relations occur first and foremost through the organised labour movement. This is where workers express their agency. It also assumes that workers see themselves first and foremost as a worker, which is their identity, and it is through this prism that we should understand them. In this sense, labour history focuses on workplaces, or the institutions of organised labour versus organised capital – arbitration courts, strikes, unions – as the locus of resistance. Studies of culture remain confined to sport, or pubs, or housing co-operatives. Studies of identity remain confined to gender or ethnicity, as add-ons to ‘worker’.¹³ These are important studies, they have bought a much deeper understanding of the intricacies of working life in Australian history. At times

however, they appear to rest on assumptions about people who lived in the past and about the categories of historical analysis; assumptions stemming at least in part from the belief that the economic is determinative.

Marx wrote that men make their own histories but not in circumstances of their own choosing.Labour history focuses too exclusively on these circumstances—the structures of capitalist society—and sees them not only as determining of worker identity, but as existing in history with the clarity of hindsight, rather than with the chaos and confusion which has always marked human history. In this sense then, labour history creates its own gaps. It can not and does not account for the people who exist outside these categories, who exist in the margins of society, who can not be accounted for neatly or linked to particular economic categories. Similarly, it can not account for ways of being in the world that do not relate to class position. In this sense, labour history does not provide a better way of understanding human psychology than does traditional narrative history. We may understand the structures of human life outside of the grand events, we may even have some idea of what life looked like from the outside, but labour history gives little guidance to accessing the experience of life in the past, given that it believes that everything we need to know about human experience, and human nature, is related to and reflective of the experience of life as a worker in the workplace.

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15 This is a point well made in recent work which seeks to address these gaps, for example, Beasley, Margo. *Sarah Davus and the Coal Lamplers: Absence and Presence on the Sydney Waterfront 1900-1917*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. School of History and Politics. University of Wollongong. Wollongong. 2004., and Frances, Raelene. *Selling sex: a hidden history of prostitution*. Sydney. UNSW Press. 2007. This is also a point made in much of the feminist critique of labour history.
It is not that we can expect any particular type of history to be all-encompassing, but the consequences of the traditional forms of history writing are seriously problematic not just for our understanding of the past but for an analysis of the present. This is especially so when it comes to questions of agency and identity. If it quickly became obvious that the traditional categories of historical analysis were insufficient for a meaningful analysis of larrikinism, it was not quite as easy to formulate an alternative. This is because the difficulty of knowledge gathering about larrikins led me to ask these fundamental questions about the nature of history. These are not questions that I have been the first, or will be the last, to ask, indeed all good historians struggle with them at some point. And neither does this thesis attempt to answer these questions. Rather, in struggling with these questions, I have been led to formulate a particular way of thinking about and writing history, and this has set the framework for an analysis of this thing called larrikinism. In this sense, the development of the framework itself became a large part of the purpose of this thesis.

This is a framework that came to be centred on the notion of the subject. At one level this is because the evidence led me in this direction. What I could find out about larrikins did not reveal one certain truth about them but showed the extent to which the meanings of larrikin and larrikinism were debated in their own time. Further, the nature of this debate seemed to be about selfhood especially as it related to youth – complaints about larrikins consistently related to the type of young people they were (or were at risk of becoming) which was in stark contrast to an accepted or desired type. This debate was about more than just larrikins, it
was a debate about the nature of Australian society, about ‘civilisation’, about
sexuality, about discipline and respectability, about work, about ‘morals’, about
what kind of person you were, and how you thought about yourself in the world.
At another level the subject became important because larrikins raised the
question of agency in history. Were larrikins determined by their surroundings, a
mere epiphenomenal response to poverty, inequity, labour discipline? The theory
and method of ‘traditional’ history seemed inadequate to answering this question.
Given this, the rest of this thesis reframes these terms within the discourse of
subjectivity. It argues that in understanding larrikins at the level of the subjective
(the level of the self), we can rethink our approach to the question of agency, and
to see resistance as operating at levels other than the structural. The problem of
human nature then becomes a matter of historical enquiry – how is human nature,
the many forms of human nature, ‘structured’ at given points in time, in relation
to the social context within which it is born, yet how does it transcend these
structures so that human nature is not simply determined, but rather,
‘overdetermined’16.

To make sense of larrikins in this way of thinking required an extensive and
complex theoretical framework. I have already indicated that I started from a fairly
straightforward Marxist approach which I have not completely abandoned, but it
became obvious that this was an approach that was in need of some reconfiguring

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16 This concept will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two, briefly it refers to the Freudian
idea that people develop a sense of self based on the multiple circumstances of their lives and
there is not one primary cause of that sense of self. It is an idea that Althusser sought to come to
grips with in his work on *Contradiction and Overdetermination* and from which he developed the
concept of ‘interpellation’.
if it was to bear fruit. There is no real capacity to account for the level of the self
in traditional Marxist thought, especially when it came to the theorising of
resistance.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, there seemed to exist a very narrow definition of what
constituted the political, and because of this, subjectivity was most often dealt
with in terms of identity politics, and characterised as a rather unfortunate
distraction from class politics.\textsuperscript{18} The theoretical framework I have developed stays
grounded in the Marxist tradition (that is, sees capitalism as the prevailing
structural circumstances within which humans make themselves in the late
nineteenth century), but uses the Marxism of Gramsci to expand the way we think
about the way capitalism works. In many ways, this relies on an overturning of the
primacy of the economic, and focuses instead on the centrality of a hegemony
based on leadership and consent, not on domination and determinism. For
Gramsci, the economic is only possible because of the social, that is, economic
structures can not be separated from the imagining of those structures – it does
not come before or after them, rather they are ineluctably entwined. Ideology does
not originate from the base but exists alongside it, reinforcing and reconfiguring
it.\textsuperscript{19}

This is significant because it says that human nature, the way people think about
themselves, is not determined by an economic base, or structure, but is influenced

\textsuperscript{17} Chapter One of this thesis deals with the literature in this vein in more detail.
\textsuperscript{18} An example of this form of theorisation is Burgmann, Verity. "From syndicalism to Seattle:
1-21.
\textsuperscript{19} The particularly Gramscian approach to these issues is covered in more detail in subsequent
chapters, but this conceptualisation is taken largely from Buttigieg, Joseph A. "Gramsci on Civil
by that structure, as well as the many other structures of human life, and that this in turn influences those structures themselves. The way people think about themselves then, is not a reflection of ideology (either Right or Left) but is formed at the intersection of the many factors that constitute human consciousness – for Gramsci this is not just class-related. People who do not think or act in recognised class terms can not be dismissed as ‘falsely conscious’ but need to be understood within their own specific historical context. It is this context in all its complexity that influences human behaviour.

In many ways, this is not a particularly radical or original idea. Where Gramsci begins to expand our thinking is in the implications he draws for ‘politics’, for ‘resistance’. While never abandoning the primacy of overt class-conflict specific to his own time, Gramsci was aware that he did not speak for all people in all times and places, and he was also aware that possibilities for resistance lay outside the realm of organised labour politics. In part this thinking came from his experience in the factory council movement in Turin, and from his experience of party politics. Thus, when Gramsci talks about subalternity being a position to be overcome, he does not mean that political revolution is the only way to achieve this, nor does he mean that the only form of subalternity is class-based. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter Two, Gramsci laid the foundations for a theory and practice of resistance that was not bounded by the traditions, laws and rules of established politics. Similarly, he developed a way of thinking about human consciousness, through his theory of hegemony, that did not demarcate between right or wrong thinking, but sought to understand the formation of
common sense in a way that was free of value judgements, in order to find within that thinking the potentials for radical resistance. For Gramsci then, politics was intensely personal, and relied on the engagement of a self-critical and self-aware mind.

It is still the case, however, that for all his innovation, Gramsci can only take us so far. It is important to remember that Gramsci was an absolute historicist: he was not interested in developing a theoretical paradigm that could be applied to all situations in all times, in fact he was actively opposed to such a practice. Given this, we should not feel compelled to adhere to his ideas as though they were set in stone, but should instead endeavour to stretch his ideas so that they relate to the specific historical context of the phenomena being analysed. The point here is to do as Gramsci himself directed, to look for the *leitmotif*, “the rhythm of thought as it develops”\(^{20}\) in his work and to find ways that this can be connected to specific and concrete historical circumstances. He stresses the importance of thinking that does not make assumptions based on preconceived categorisations, that requires “the most scrupulous accuracy, scientific honesty, and intellectual loyalty and without any preconceptions, apriorism or parti pris”\(^{21}\) but more than this, it is a way of thinking that seeks to go beyond appearances:

> The same ray of light passes through different prisms and yields different refractions of light: in order to have the same refraction, one must make a whole series of adjustments to the individual prisms. But not a mechanical, material representation: the adaptation of each basic concept to diverse peculiarities, presenting and re-presenting it in all its positive aspects and its traditional negations, always ordering each


\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*. p. 382.
partial aspect in the totality. Finding the real identity underneath the apparent differentiation and contradiction and finding the substantial diversity underneath the apparent identity is the most essential quality of the critic of ideas and of the historian of social development.\textsuperscript{22} In this way of thinking, even perceived truths and realities must be themselves critiqued. There is much about this theorisation of hegemony that has stood the test of time, and it has grown and expanded through repeated application in many fields of academic enquiry. Some of the best work in this vein is that which moves beyond a perceived Gramscian ‘orthodoxy’.\textsuperscript{23} In order to continue this expansion and more importantly, in order to develop a set of tools that helps to analyse the phenomenon of larrikinism, the theoretical framework of this thesis draws on some concepts from psychoanalytic theory and connects these with the theory of hegemony. The purpose here is to develop ways of thinking and talking about historical phenomena that are usually unspoken, and to find new ways of talking about old problems.

It is not readily accepted in mainstream thinking that social disorder, ‘crime’ and violence can be considered radical forms of subjective agency or resistance. It is my contention that this is one way in which we can understand larrikins. Other work has been done that explains them in other ways, and while there is nothing wrong with that work per se, it seems to miss the point, to gloss or slide over the


very radical potentials of larrikinism, to slip back into cultural or economic or
social forms of analysis, seeing larrikin behaviour as protest of some kind, but
rarely protest at the level of the self. Perhaps this is because of a hesitance to
speak of the way capitalism itself seeks to transform human nature.

This is the abiding and central argument of this thesis, that capitalism seeks to
create a particular kind of human person, with a particular kind of ego, a particular
self of sense, which is then played out in behaviour, and that larrikinism is a deep
and profound resistance to this process.

It is with this problem in mind that Chapter One surveys the existing literature
about larrikins in Australian history as well as the main bodies of work within
which such groups have historically been situated. As such, it discusses the
development and legacy of the concept of the lumpenproletariat and how this
relates to the idea of the residuum. The chapter is particularly interested in
exploring the possibilities and limitations of the body of work emerging out of
English social history starting with Thompson and Hobsbawm and how this has
been affected by the shifting theoretical approaches exemplified in the work of
Joyce and Stedman-Jones and the 'linguistic turn'. More recent work which looks
at the idea of transgression and carnival is also surveyed for its usefulness, and
there are potential avenues of fruitful theorisation in all of this work, but the
chapter argues that there is still a normative focus that limits the usefulness of
these approaches, in that they still take for granted that poverty was the main
criteria of marginalisation and as such can not account for an exclusion that is based on a contested notion of the self.

Chapter Two takes up this gap to explore the possibilities of a theory of the self for historical enquiry. It argues that in order to understand human activity, it is necessary to attempt to understand human thinking, and if the categories of analysis of the past, such as the lumpenproletariat, do not account for the complexity of human thought and action, then what other categories are available to us? The chapter suggests that subjectivity is a vital part of this analysis because it relates to the processes by which people come to develop a sense of themselves in the world, which is not determined by one particular structure but is overdetermined by the multitude of influences to which we are subject from birth. Given this, the chapter sets out the key concepts of the theoretical framework of the thesis which begins with Freud and his work on the relationship between civilised society and human psychology and the way in which ego development is so intimately linked to particular social requirements, especially through the processes of sublimation and repression. The chapter then expands Freud’s ideas through the work of Jacques Lacan, whose theorisation of subjectivity shows the processes and effects of repression in particular for the development of society’s ego (or the Symbolic Order). This is a particularly powerful theory because it gives us the concept of the real, through which a theory of exclusion can be developed that does more than assume that people are excluded because they are poor, but suggests that people are excluded from society in the same way that particular behaviours are excluded from the self, and that there is a radical potential in the
disruptive nature of these behaviours. In this sense, particular psychoanalytic concepts can be related to a theory of hegemony, which grounds the development of the self into specific time and place. The chapter argues that through a theorisation of hegemony as a process which acts on the human self at the level of desire, Gramsci’s concept of subalternity can be related to subjectivity where particular behaviours or personality types are made to be pathological in order to defuse their socially disruptive or critical potential.

Chapter Three takes these ideas about subalternity and subjectivity as a starting point to show the way in which the symbolic order of late nineteenth century Sydney was constructed around certain hegemonic principles that sought to act at the level of the self. It shows the way in which the material structures of society were developing to bring about the normalisation of capitalist social relations, and argues that these structures were not sustainable without the development of a hegemony that operated at the level of a very particular kind of human self. It shows the way in which the organised working class was an active part of this process and that in its attempts to modify capitalism it accepted some of the attendant consequences, including particular kinds of behaviours and values of which larrikins came to represent the antithesis. In this sense then, the working class repressed and excluded a part of itself in order to take its place within the symbolic order. In doing so it, it was complicit in the creation of larrikin subalternity but also reinforced its own.
The behaviours and values that were excluded from the symbolic order came to fall under the catch cry of the ‘social problem’ of larrikinism. Chapter Four sets out how these behaviours and values were imagined in the form of the larrikin, referring to popular and official sources for the way in which larrikinism was represented. This chapter does not analyse these representations but merely presents the larrikin as drawn at the time in order to give a basic understanding of the phenomenon as it was described and the nature of the ‘problem’ to be analysed.

It is the task of Chapters Five and Six to analyse these representations in line with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two of the thesis. Chapter Five relates the discourse of larrikinism to the creation of subalternity, showing the way in which hegemonic social practices excluded larrikins as a problem. The chapter explores the way in which popular and official sources focussed on either the causes of or cures for larrikinism, revealing that in this discourse larrikins are constructed as pathological and criminal, and that this discourse facilitated ever more repressive state responses including acts of physical violence. In this way, the chapter demonstrates how subalternity is produced and reproduced within social relations that privilege particular behaviours and demonise others, and that this process has been continued by the writing of Australian history itself.

Chapter Six takes a deeper look at the discourse surrounding larrikinism and relates the creation of larrikin subalternity to the processes around the formation of subjectivity. This is not an arbitrary connection, but one that has emerged from
the evidence itself which can be readily interpreted as situating larrikin behaviour as a problem at the level of the self. While the previous chapter looked at the way in which that problem was related to specific social conditions, this chapter shows that contemporary commentators were most concerned about larrikin behaviour that threatened to undermine the developing hegemonic principles about what sort of person was required for life in a capitalist society. These are issues that Gramsci identified through his work on Americanism and Fordism, and the chapter takes Gramsci’s observations about the way in which capitalism can only be hegemonic if it operates at the level of the self as its starting point. The chapter then goes on to relate larrikin behaviours to the psychoanalytic concept of the real, and its connection to the production and reproduction of desire. It is argued here that the problem with larrikins is their refusal to sublimate libidinal drives into acceptable forms of social practice, for example work, family or consumption, and that their insistence on enjoyment, and the problems that this caused, are symptoms of the trauma and conflict experienced by the act and demands of repression. More than this, their behaviour can be seen as a kind of ‘radical agency’ – a conscious act of refusal or an alternative way of being in the world that can be considered political to the extent that they existed at a frontier around the concept of ‘youth’. Larrikins can be seen then as a site of conflict over what sort of young person was required for twentieth century Australia. Although their eventual repression serves as the real against which the symbolic order is created, it is the case that their behaviour, and the responses to it, helped to shape the way we now think about the category of youth in Australian society.
The way in which Australian history was subsequently written in the twentieth century continued to reinforce the marginalisation of larrikins, to distort our understanding of that term and thus history itself came to serve capitalist hegemony. There are some contemporary considerations in this as well, because the de-historicisation of the development of the human subject has serious consequences for the way we think about human behaviour today, enabling the continued exclusion of particular forms of behaviour and thus limiting our ability to think about radical resistance. This is not to say that there is a true history of larrikins which needs to be uncovered, rather it is to argue that close attention must be paid to the link between history and the present, and in this way history can act as a tool of critique, denaturalising that which should never be taken for granted.
Chapter One

Representing the ‘Residuum’: larrikins and the lumpenproletariat.

‘The larrikin’ is now considered a quintessentially Australian phenomenon and references to larrikins appear relatively frequently in the Australian historical and literary tradition. However, they do not appear to have received a great deal of substantial academic attention. The issue of larrikinism and its relation to the Australian working class presents particular problems and challenges which have not been sufficiently taken up by either Australian or labour historians to date. This chapter starts by surveying the established history of Australian larrikins in particular, arguing that while standard works contain useful information, they all suffer from an assumption that larrikins are merely a surface response to changing social or economic conditions, and that this assumption has had long term consequences for the representation of such groups in Australian history. The chapter then situates these representations in the larger body of international work which has sought to understand the ‘residuum’, of which larrikins can be considered a part. Much of this literature has been based on the notion of the ‘lumpenproletariat’, taken unproblematically from Marx and Engels. This has presented particular challenges for historians. The chapter looks at the limitations and possibilities of these histories, from Hobsbawm, Rediker and Thompson to Joyce and Stedman Jones, exploring these for the connections they make between consciousness, culture and class. It surveys more recent work on the notions of transgression and carnival to explore the possibilities for the understanding of ‘low’ cultures and the constitution of subjectivity at the intersection between class
and culture. The chapter concludes by arguing that categories of analysis such as the lumpenproletariat do more to sustain bourgeois attitudes towards people on the margins of history than to challenge them, and suggests that an alternative approach to the theorisation of the Australian residuum generally, and the larrikin in particular, is required.

The History of Larrikins

The term larrikin is a common one in the Australian lexicon because it is assumed that it is an essentially Australian characteristic – a kind of mischievous anti-authoritarianism born out of our convict heritage. The word has become a descriptor of particular kinds of renegade behaviour in contemporary society and is applied to businessmen, politicians, poets, artists, sportspeople and other ‘likeable rogues’ with reckless abandon. It is usually synonymous with the stereotypical “Aussie”, hard-working, heavy-drinking, rough-talking, rule-breaking, but always in a likeable way. Former leader of the Australian Labor Party, Mark Latham, suggests that it was this aspect of himself that made him such a misfit within his own party.¹ But this kind of larrikin has little to do with the larrikin as they appear to have existed in the late nineteenth century. This is a curious fact, but not necessarily surprising – as loveable and non-threatening as larrikins are today, they were the opposite in their own time. The process by which this transformation occurred will be explored in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis, but what is significant here is that this ‘other’ history of larrikins remains largely hidden. This is despite the fact that there are mentions of them in most of the

major summary histories of Australia and that they are the subject of walking
tours through the Rocks area in Sydney supported by the State and Local
governments. They have featured in novels, plays, poems and books throughout
the last century. However, despite their appearance in short academic pieces as
explored below, they have barely been the subject of serious, lengthy scholarly
research in their own right, in the same way that some other Australian anti-
heroes, for example Ned Kelly, have been.

There are only two pieces of work which deal with larrikins at any length: a 1950s
MA thesis by Noel McLachlan, and James Murray’s book Larrikins: Nineteenth
Century Outrage. Murray’s book, while descriptive and entertaining, is a scattered
collection of unreferenced sources and anecdotes that provides a sympathetic
portrait to some degree, but ends up seeing larrikins merely as a doomed form of
social protest.

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McLachlan’s thesis is more useful but limited because of its older-style sociological approach, and its focus almost entirely on Melbourne. It uses Durkheim’s theory of anomie to suggest that larrikinism was the result of the increasing isolation of a group of colonial youth, left out of the various collectives emerging in late nineteenth century Australia, and resorting to a lifestyle of aggressive individualism to express their antagonism.5 While the thesis provides some excellent descriptions of larrikins, their costumes and behaviour, there are some obvious problems with McLachlan’s analysis. While he attributes the behaviour he describes to social and political change, he never explicitly details the nature of this change, referring instead to the ‘democratic tradition’ which larrikins have inherited from both their convict ancestors and more recent democratic tendencies in Australia, from which larrikins are now being excluded.6 This is a problematic suggestion, firstly because McLachlan provides no evidence that larrikins in the main are in fact direct descendents of either convicts or currency lads and lasses – this is simply assumed and secondly because it is a too-simplified analysis of this ‘democratic tradition’ and the processes by which it came to be altered in the Australian setting.

McLachlan does suggest that there are particular environmental factors which give the opportunity for larrikinism to occur, and cites among them the conditions of work in the industrialising Australian cities.7 However, the only industrial condition he concedes may be related to larrikinism is the ‘tedium’ of modern

5 This position informs most of the thesis and is summarised particularly on pages 110-131.
7 Ibid. p. 85-109.
work but he gives no specifics about what this tedium is, or what it is caused by, and then goes on to dismiss this factor altogether: “Unless the tedium of work already discussed... be included, there is not the slightest evidence of a direct causal connection between working conditions and larrikinism, however”.8 It seems curious to mention a causal factor and then dismiss it out of hand. However, McLachlan has not really looked for this link, this not being his focus and there being no attempt to explore workplace records. Without a thorough analysis of new forms of work, however, and their impact on social and personal life, McLachlan manages only to suggest that larrikinism is a reflexive response to a generalised ‘increasing industrialisation and urbanisation’ of Australian cities.

Shorter studies of larrikins exist in the form of several journal articles and book chapters where larrikins are not necessarily the sole focus but used as examples of particular social processes occurring in late 19th century Sydney.9 Hogg and Golder analyse larrikins as part of the urbanisation phenomenon, as does Lynette Finch. Hogg and Golder do suggest that larrikinism can be seen as “a protest against their own submission to labour discipline throughout the week”10 however, they do not explore this idea in any detail, preferring instead to focus on the idea that larrikins are the result of the breakdown of traditional workforce

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8 Ibid. p. 109.
10 Golder and Hogg. "Policing Sydney in the Late Nineteenth Century" p. 67.
communities due to changes in urban geography. This is despite the fact that they see quite clearly that the police in the new suburbs of Sydney at this time were “not so bound up with the suppression of crime so much as the management of the social order”\(^\text{11}\). What kind of social order this is, however, is not explored. The authors suggest that “the police are merely the instrument of a power located elsewhere”\(^\text{12}\) but do not go on to tell us where this ‘elsewhere’ is, so there is no specific political context within which larrikins are occurring. In this paradigm, larrikins are seen as ‘victims’ of circumstance, their behaviour given only negative and reflexive connotations.

Lynette Finch suggests that ‘larrikins’ per se did not in fact exist, but were a constructed problem to facilitate bourgeois control over public space and attempts to commodify it.\(^\text{13}\) While this explanation accounts to some degree for the urgency with which larrikins were swept from the street, and their virulence about remaining on it, it is ultimately an inadequate explanation. Methodologically it is problematic in that the thing that Finch says doesn’t exist is then talked about as if it did, and as if we in the present have some privileged understanding of ‘what was really going on’. In this sense, this explanation is much too dismissive of any reality of larrikin life, and appears arrogant in its assumption of the ‘constructedness’ of larrikinism without any real attempt to get beyond the bourgeois representation of the problem as it was perceived. Again, Finch appears

\(^{11}\text{Ibid. p. 70.}\)
\(^{12}\text{Ibid. p. 70.}\)
\(^{13}\text{Finch. "On the streets" p. 75.}\)
to suggest that whatever caused larrikins was external to them and so they are in
many ways, determined by those externalities.

This equation of larrikins with public space is a recurring theme of the work of
Richard Waterhouse. In the wake of the race riots on Sydney’s southern beaches
in late 2005, Waterhouse was quoted as suggesting that these kinds of
disturbances were not new to Australia, but were part of the history of masculinity
which could be traced to larrikins in the 1880s. While the 2005 riots were about
race, larrikins, he said, were “about public space”. Waterhouse’s work is of some
interest in relation to larrikins, especially his analysis of the development of
popular culture in the nineteenth century, and his work on masculinity in this time
period. These will be dealt with in more detail in later chapters, but it is enough
to note here that neither masculinity, popular culture nor debates over public
space occur in a socio-economic vacuum. The fact that these three factors can be
seen to converge in larrikins is significant.

George Morgan and John Rickard have both written short pieces which attempt
to connect the historical larrikin to the way the phenomena is understood and
used today, and in this sense they are useful studies which will be referred to at
greater length in Chapters Five and Six below. As historical studies of larrikinism
itself their usefulness is, however, limited. Morgan’s study uses the model of the

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15 Illawarra Mercury, December 13, 2005.
'moral panic’ to study the role of the press in the representation of larrikinism. He suggests that this moral panic was bourgeois in origin, but only to the extent that larrikins could be seen to be threatening ‘civic values’ of order, politeness and respectability. He does not critique these values at all and in fact connects them to the project of ‘nation building’ in the late nineteenth century. Where there is any attempt to provide an explanation for the rise of larrikinism itself there is only the suggestion that poverty might have had something to do with it. It appears as though Morgan is not particularly concerned with the reasons for larrikinism emerging in the first place but only in the responses and reactions to it.

This is also true of John Rickard’s article which sketches the main characteristics of larrikins as they have been handed down, without attempting an analysis of what gave rise to them. However, Rickard shows clearly that the way in which larrikins were discussed in their own time bears little resemblance to the ways in which they appear in Australian culture today. Interestingly, Rickard makes the class origins of larrikins explicit: “it went without saying, of course, that larrikins were working-class: they were the dark underside to the working man’s paradise.” He also suggests that these are not the mythical Australian prototypes of Ward’s “Australian legend” – that their violence, aggression and suggestion of criminality make them a difficult legacy for proponents of an Australian national type. Again, however, Rickard takes too much at face value the descriptions of

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19 Ibid. p. 21.
20 Ibid. p. 22.
21 Rickard. "Lovable Larrikins". p. 79.
larrikins which the bourgeois press made about them, and his article raises more questions than it answers.

Larrikins also appear in works of Australian history that are ostensibly about something else. Works of ‘popular history’ about Sydney or New South Wales mention larrikins as an undisputed fact of Sydney life. For Frank Clune, they were responsible for the gang rape of Mary Jane Hicks (known as ‘the Mount Rennie outrage’) occurring in Sydney in 1886. Clune calls the crimes perpetrators larrikins because they were “a mob of unemployed teenage lads who lived in the crowded Sydney suburb of Waterloo” and because the press who covered the crime often referred to them as such. While Clune is ‘scandalised’ by the Mary Jane Hicks case, his attitude towards larrikins is relatively sympathetic, if only because his book, which is a kind of popular biography of some of Sydney’s notorious lawyers and journalists, is in itself part of the body of literature which romanticises the ‘lovable rogues’ of Australia’s past, turning them into a national type. He does not appear to have conducted any independent research about larrikins but repeats what appear to be accepted truths about them: “they prowled in gangs known as pushes. They fought with rival pushes and among themselves. They got into mischief. They were vandals, occasionally, but not systematic criminals. Most of them soon grew out of the larrikin stage and became decent citizens…the exploits of the pushes were usually ‘larks’ done on the spur of the moment, out of flashness. Tolerant people said ‘Boys will be boys. Let them have

22 Clune. Scandals of Sydney Town.
23 Ibid. p. 1.
their fling!”. While he condemns them for their involvement in the Hicks rape, he also says “it is not their fault that they were ignorant, undisciplined, out of work and left to make their own ‘fun’. A civilised community has the duty of providing education, moral training, work and recreation for young people. The adult, respectable, prosperous citizens of Sydney had only themselves to blame for allowing larrikinism to develop in the slum suburbs of the city.” His subsequent coverage of the investigation and trial of the Hicks’ rapists strongly suggests that the men who were hanged for the crime may in fact have been innocent, and that the trial itself was flawed. Yet the unquestioning attribution of blame to ‘larrikins’ for particular types of crimes has done much to cloud our understanding of who these people were.

This is a problem reinforced by other popular histories of aspects of city life. Cyril Pearl’s book _Wild Men of Sydney_ (which interestingly deals with the same lawyers and journalists of Clune’s book - William Crick and John Norton), states that “the larrikin was a coward and a brute. He hunted in packs. His weapons were the boot, the broken tumbler, the butt of the bottle, the chunk of blue metal. His diversions, when he was not making war on rival pushes or dancing with his donah, were bar-wrecking, window-smashing, breaking up a picnic party, or giving a policeman a Bondi – an expression that derived from a particularly exuberant larrikin demonstration that took place at Bondi NSW in the ‘nineties.” Again, however, there is a note of sympathy: “but he was the product of the acute social

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Pearl. _Wild Men of Sydney_.
27 Ibid. p. 8.
inequality, the class bitterness and the frustration of his times, and it is not surprising that he had his sympathisers and his apologists.”

Kenneth Roberts, writing about the boxer Larry Foley, is not such an apologist. He uses a poem called “The Bastard from the Bush” to describe the world of the pushes along Sydney’s waterfront which Foley inexplicably made his home:

“Knowing Foley’s background as we do, it is difficult to understand what attracted him to such a regrettable place and such regrettable company. Intelligent, fearless and fresh from the service of a Wollongong priest, his character must have been quite out of sympathy with the pushites, who were mostly cowardly morons hunting in packs. Foley undoubtedly held them in great contempt. Nonetheless he became leader of toughest of all the pushes. Possibly he was drawn by the exciting opportunities to indulge, freely and often, his great passion for bare-knuckle combat, with a single opponent, or at all-in street brawling.”

The rest of Roberts’ book is a moralistic account of how Foley rose above his surroundings to become a great boxer and a respectable citizen, but the book is fraught with the tension caused by needing to romanticise Foley, to not admit what other passions he may have been able to indulge among the pushes, and to excuse his obviously pushite behaviour. Another tension caused by Roberts’ book is the conflation between larrikins and the pushes – are the violent gangs he describes here the same thing as the larrikin nuisance documented in other

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28 Ibid. p. 9.
29 There has been some suggestion that this may in fact be a more vulgar version of Henry Lawson’s poem “The Captain of the Push”. Lawson’s writings on and experience with larrikins, and ‘pushes’, will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six below.
30 Roberts. Captain of the Push. p. 5.
sources? Books like Clunes, Pearls and Roberts’ get us no closer to being able to answer this question.

The extensive interest in Australia’s criminal history means that larrikins often appear in studies which seek to document or to analyse changing patterns or meanings of crime, especially in relation to the rapidly changing urban environment. In this sense, larrikins are analysed as a criminal problem, related to the problems of vagrancy, drunkenness or ‘offensive behaviours’. Grabosky notes in particular that ‘larrikinism’ was a term of contested meaning, usually “applied very loosely to young males with delinquent inclinations…whose activities varied widely in type and intensity” and that these activities “included the traditional pastimes of loitering on street corners and making suggestive remarks to passers-by…(which) tended to offend the sensibilities of more ‘respectable’ members of society”. In this sense, Grabosky suggests that they were not a particularly significant historical phenomenon, yet the amount of debate surrounding them and the enactment of legislation to get rid of them suggests otherwise. Grabosky may be dismissive of them but his comments are interesting because he recognises that the nature of the debate about them at the time was

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mostly related to the issue of what caused them, and thus what should be done about them.\textsuperscript{33} Grabosky points out that attitudes towards criminality in this period “was strongly grounded in the dominant climate of Victorian morality”\textsuperscript{34} which was particularly concerned with sexuality: “preoccupation with sex constituted the most strikingly visible theme of the period...while parliamentarians could not legislate it away, they did their best to regulate or repress it. Sexual deviance and other forms of criminal behaviour with sexual overtones were viewed with unusual indignation by public officials.”\textsuperscript{35} Grabosky does not really attempt to analyse why this was so, or to link these concerns with attitudes towards larrikins, but this thesis will take up these points in Chapters Five and Six below.

Stronger links between larrikins, crime and class are made by Davidson and Connell and Irving in their critical assessments of the processes of state formation in Australia.\textsuperscript{36} For Davidson, the significance of larrikinism lies in the bourgeois concerns with creating stable family and home environments from which stable citizens could emerge. Thus, the concerns with larrikinism are part of the project to ‘hegemonise’ the population into patterns of work and consumption.\textsuperscript{37} While Davidson does not analyse larrikins in detail, likening them to “juvenile delinquents”, he does show that the concern with this type of delinquency, especially that which expresses overt contempt to social mores, was held to be

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. pp. 88-91.\\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p. 91.\\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. pp. 91-92.\\textsuperscript{36} Davidson, Alastair. \textit{The Invisible State: The Formation of the Australian State 1788-1901}. Melbourne. Cambridge University Press. 1991; Connell and Irving. \textit{Class Structure in Australian History}.\\textsuperscript{37} Davidson. \textit{The Invisible State}.}
very serious in its time, partly for its capacity to breed a new ‘criminal class’ but also for its potential to undermine the hegemonic ‘morality’ being espoused at this time. Davidson shows quite clearly that attempts to eradicate larrikins sprang from this concern with morality which was in turn linked to the creation of capitalist civilisation in Australia.

This is a link that Connell and Irving also make in their seminal *Class Structure in Australian History*. Connell and Irving show the multitude of ways in which the new middle class in Australia established their hegemony which was not just founded on economic or political domination but permeated all aspects of social life. It is in this context that larrikinism emerged, and was eradicated: “In the depressed, inner-city suburbs, a distinctive working class youth culture emerged in the larrikin push. It frightened the respectable by its indifference to the sanctity of property, but was channelled into serious crime mainly by police harassment. In fact, the larrikins diverted working-class energy from a frontal attack on property and class relationships into skirmishes with the police and soldiers.” This is an attitude symptomatic of much labour or left history towards marginalised groups (a critique which will be developed later in this chapter) but Connell and Irving also note that “diversionary the pushes might be, but they were still culturally the least tractable section of the working class.” This is an interesting observation, it makes explicit the link between larrikins and the working class which most

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histories either ignore or deny, and also stresses the importance of ‘culture’ for both larrikins themselves, and for the eradication of them: “To prevent working class politics assuming the cultural resistance of larrikinism, it was more effective to replace state persecution of the pushes with an attempt to persuade the ‘respectable’ section of the working class that ‘we are all larrikins’.” This is a significant point which will be taken up in greater detail in Chapters Five and Six below.

Manning Clark also situates larrikins in Australia’s working class, suggesting that they are the poor cousins of more radical political revolutionaries occurring in the worlds great cities at the same time: “Melbourne and Sydney had a social problem, but not a threat of proletarian revolution. London, Paris, New York, Moscow, St Petersburg and Chicago were living on the edge of a volcano. Melbourne and Sydney had a boil in their social system: they had the larrikin.” He does not really analyse them however, rather he repeats contemporary assessments of them, suggesting they were “finding some subterranean satisfaction, some devilish pleasure, in destruction for destructions sake” and that “not restrained by any teaching on the difference between right and wrong and ignorant of all the canons and conventions of civilized behaviour, (they) behaved like wild beasts.” This assessment of larrikins, which dismisses them for their violence and animalism, is common, and the implications of this will be taken up in later chapters. In this instance, Clark takes all his information about larrikins from the newspapers and

43 Ibid.
works of popular fiction that actively sought to demonise larrikins and this has proven seriously problematic for an understanding of both larrikins and Australian history.

Nevertheless, there is much in these studies worth considering, and they all use theories and descriptions of Australian society that are no doubt valid ways of understanding larrikins and their milieu. If there is one criticism of all of them that I would make however, it is that they all have a tendency to decontextualise larrikins. By this I mean that they aren’t specific about the social and historical context of the world in which larrikins existed. This is because in these studies, and in others like them, individual or collective acts of ‘defiance’ are often explained in generalised terms as ‘resistance’ to power, authority or society. While there is an implicit criticism of bourgeois representation and an assumption that we should read critically their attempts at social control, there is still a tendency to talk in the very terms of the bourgeoisie itself, to not relate larrikins to any specific socio-historical crisis that they may have been actively responding to and so there is a sense of larrikins as pawns on a broader stage, victims of the machinations of a ‘power’ they do not understand. In this sense their behaviour is seen as simply reflexive, and so the deeper significance of larrikins, what it was in particular they were reacting to and more importantly why they reacted at all, is overlooked.

If, as Connell and Irving, Davidson and Manning Clark suggest, larrikins were working class, how is it that they have not figured more prominently in the vast body of work that is Australian labour history? Apart from the criticisms of that
discipline which I have made in the Introduction, I would argue that the absence of scholarly attention to larrikins springs from a theorisation of marginal groups in left history which has its roots in the concept of the lumpenproletariat. This is not usually an overt theorisation, however, perhaps because of the perception that Australia was ‘born modern’ and so it is assumed that the class forces that gave rise to the idea of the ‘lumpenproletariat’ in European history (and to the debates surrounding the terms meaning) are not seen to apply to the Australian setting. Nevertheless, the way in which larrikins are dealt with reveals an embedded attitude of dismissiveness that comes from the idea that the lumpenproletariat, or the groups and people who make it up, operate outside of the accepted paradigm of class relations and are therefore not likely to tell us anything about those relations. This is not always the case with the international literature, which shows clearly the importance of groups labelled ‘lumpenproletariat’ both in their own right and in what they can tell us about changing social relations.

The History of the Residuum

There has been a great deal of attention paid to the notion of the ‘residuum’ in histories of nineteenth century England in particular. It is not that there had never been poor people in England before but that from the eighteenth century in particular with increased enclosure and the intensification of industrial manufacturing, the ‘residual’ population in England’s towns and cities came to be of increasing political concern. Why they existed, what form they took and why they were considered so problematic is the subject of much primary and
As early as 1861, Henry Mayhew attempted to argue that the ‘problem’ of the residuum was a problem related to changes in the economic structures, whereas most other contemporaries had argued, and continued to argue, that the problem was a moral one. This notion of morality is one that has come to pervade histories of the residuum which theorise them as a lumpenproletariat.

The notion of the lumpenproletariat has a long and complicated history, which has come to influence the way in which marginalised groups are dealt with by ‘traditional’ left labour and social histories. Most historians and theorists acknowledge the term came from Marx and Engels but there are differences of opinion over how they developed it, who it was meant to apply to and how it changed over time. All agree that the definitions are many and varied, often

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contradictory. Its relation to the residuum is in one definition which comes from the *Communist Manifesto* which states that “the ‘dangerous class’, [lumpenproletariat]” are “the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society”, that is, residues of older forms of social relations, the left-overs of the new battle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Yet this immediately contradicts Marx’s own theorisation of society comprising two distinct and diametrically opposed classes. Hayes contends that Marx and Engels revised this two-class theorisation into a ‘circular’ notion of class structure based around their analysis of the ‘class struggles’ in France, which admits that class structure in historical context is not as clear cut as conceived in theory.

Regardless of whether Marx and Engels were right or wrong about their analyses of class structures in particular historical contexts, Hayes suggests that contradictions in the definitions of the lumpenproletariat and their relation to class structure can be solved somewhat by the circular theory of class structure which is based on defining classes by their attributes and aims, some of which may be common to different classes. Attributes refer to a class’ level of property ownership and its level of ‘productivity’ - its relations to the means of production. Aims refers to the class’ willingness to engage with social relations based around productivity, or their desire to disengage – their level of ‘degeneracy’. Thus the
bourgeoisie and the proletariat are similar in that they are non-degenerate and productive, but the ownership of property separates them. The finance aristocracy and the section of the surplus population labelled ‘lumpenproletariat’ are the same in that they are non-productive and thereby degenerate, while the ownership of property is what separates the finance aristocracy. In this model, the ‘parasitic’ nature of the finance aristocracy and the lumpenproletariat are what make these two classes degenerate.\textsuperscript{53} While Hayes argues that this paradigm of formulating class structure allowed Marx to develop a flexible theory that could fit actual historical circumstances,\textsuperscript{54} it was still the case that this is a theory that is limited by Marx’s own “political beliefs, objectives and rhetoric”.\textsuperscript{55}

In a large part these are the beliefs of Marx and Engels’ own class and time. Bussard, Hayes, Stallybrass and Bovenkerk all argue that the etymology of the term lumpenproletariat shows quite clearly that it had well known connotations to Marx and Engels and their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{56} Bussard in particular argues that they were not immune from the prejudices and ideologies of their own society:

Ideas emerge from specific social contexts, as Marx and Engels taught us so well with their own concept of ‘ideology’...Marx and Engels’ use and development of the concept of the lumpenproletariat, when examined in the context of early-nineteenth century European thought, shows them to be perceiving the world in traditional emotional categories…they portray, perhaps consciously, but certainly

\textsuperscript{53} Hayes. "Marx's Analysis of the French Class Structure". pp. 105-106.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. pp. 116-118.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. p. 118.
subconsciously, an attitude of condescension, combined with aversion and even fear, towards certain elements of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{57} Thus, the creation and treatment of the lumpenproletariat as a category is clouded by moralistic and conservative overtones: “the words ‘proletariat’ and ‘lump’ were moral categories, and not analytical concepts…If we now view the term lumpenproletariat as a derogatory word for everyone who violates bourgeois moral standards, then a large number of hitherto enigmatic passages in the works of Marx and Engels suddenly become quite clear.”\textsuperscript{58}

More specifically however, it can be argued that Marx and Engels’ political beliefs and aims limit the usefulness of the concept of the lumpenproletariat. If their objective was the overthrow of capitalist society through a revolutionary proletariat, then certain core beliefs about this group prevailed – that they were hard-working, respectable, disciplined, organised, reflective and progressive.\textsuperscript{59} When they failed, as they did after 1848, the explanation for Marx and Engels could not lay within the privileged proletariat itself, but must lie in factors external to it. To explain the reactionary or even overtly counterrevolutionary behaviour of certain groups in the class struggles in France, (if they were indeed that),\textsuperscript{60} “Marx and Engels developed the idea of the lumpenproletariat as a tool to explain what they saw as the existence of a non-revolutionary, or even counterrevolutionary – group within the lower strata of society. Using the term \textit{das Lumpenproletariat} to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} Bussard. "The 'Dangerous Class' of Marx and Engels". p. 687.
\item \textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid}. p. 686; Bovenkerk. "The Rehabilitation of the Rabble". p. 36-37.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Bovenkerk. "The Rehabilitation of the Rabble". pp. 37-38.
\end{itemize}
label these disreputable, frightening (and perhaps, from their revolutionary point of view, even embarrassing) ‘social elements’, they were able to make a clear distinction in their own minds between the ‘good’ or ‘conscious’ proletariat and the ‘bad’ or ‘unthinking’ proletariat.”

Some attempts have been made to rescue the lumpenproletariat from this characterisation, and some have gone as far as to suggest that it is in fact among the lumpenproletariat that true revolutionary potential really lies. Yet in arguing this, the too simplistic binarisation of the proletariat vs. the lumpenproletariat continues, and the debate remains centred around the political potentials of the group, so they are made to fit again a pre-existing political aim, which may or may not correspond to the historical reality, or the lived experience, of the group itself. To romanticise the lumpenproletariat for its undiscovered revolutionary consciousness is as unproductive as dismissing them for their false, counterrevolutionary consciousness.

Whether or not the lumpenproletariat are revolutionary in the context of socialist politics is not, in itself, of great concern for this thesis. Yet there is something in Marx and Engels’ development of the concept which speaks to a radical way of understanding marginality in history, and this is in the depiction of heterogeneity. If we temporarily overlook the polemics implicit in their depiction of the lumpenproletariat, there is a lot to be learned about this group as an historical phenomenon. Marx’s most famous depictions of the lumpenproletariat are in his

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historical works *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In *The Class Struggles in France* he calls the lumpenproletariat a mass clearly distinguished from the industrial proletariat in all large cities, a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the refuse of society, people without a fixed line of work, loiterers, *gens sans feu et sans aven*,\(^{63}\) differentiated according to the degree of civilisation of the nation to which they belong, but never renouncing their *lazzaroni* character; at the youthful age at which the Provisional Government recruited them, thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption.\(^{64}\)

It is a matter of historical debate as to whether the lumpenproletariat of the Mobile Guards are the same thing as the lumpenproletariat which ensured Bonaparte’s rise to power, but there are, according to Marx, notable similarities between the groups:

> Alongside decayed roués of doubtful origin and uncertain means of subsistence, alongside ruined and adventurous scions of the bourgeoisie, there were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged criminals, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, confidence tricksters, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, sleight-of-hand experts, gamblers, *maquereaux*,\(^{65}\) brothel-keepers, porters, pen-pushers, organ-grinders, rag-and-bone merchants, knife-grinders, tinkers, and beggars, in short the whole indeterminate fragmented mess, tossed backwards and forwards…\(^{66}\)

\(^{63}\) People without hearth or home.
\(^{65}\) Pimps.
In other places, Marx adds that they include the casual dock labourers of the world, domestic servants and hotel staff; yet in *Capital* this is different to the “real lumpenproletariat” which consists simply of “vagabonds, criminals and prostitutes”. For Engels, in *The Peasant War in Germany*, they are the “scum of the decaying elements of all classes, which establishes headquarters in all the big cities…It is absolutely venal, an absolutely brazen crew.” Yet by the time of writing *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels was more sympathetic to “those who are always down on their luck, who have become professional starvelings, a mass of broken down humanity who are drifting towards total ruination” because they had taken part in the dock worker strikes. “This motley crowd…” Engels wrote, “has managed to unite 40,000 strong, to maintain discipline and strike fear into the hearts of the mighty dock companies. How glad I am to have lived to see this day!” This motley crowd may not necessarily be exactly the same social group who formed the Mobile Guard or Bonaparte’s rent-a-crowd, but these descriptions are telling because they indicate firstly the difficulty of definition – the slippages in definition within the work of Marx and Engels reflects not only their own conceptual and theoretical difficulties but the reality of a rapidly changing social system, the fluidity between groups, the shifting alliances and politics, the slipperiness of meaning itself. Secondly these descriptions speak to what is continuous or the same in these groups – they are a ‘mob’ and they are ‘motley’.

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67 These remarks appear in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* and are cited in Bovenkerk, "The Rehabilitation of the Rabble", pp. 20-21.  
These contradictions and complexities have continued to present challenges for historians and theoreticians attempting to describe and analyse groups existing outside the margins of recognisable class structures. Not all see the heterogeneity in ‘the mob’ as a positive. For the eminent historian of ‘primitive rebels’ Eric Hobsbawm, groups who exist outside the structures of organised class relations are primitive and archaic, they are pre-political because they “have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world.”\footnote{Hobsbawm, Eric. 	extit{Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries}. New York. W.W. Norton & Co. 1965. p. 2.} Having said this, Hobsbawm argues that the city mob in particular “always was directed at the rich, even when also directed against something else such as foreigners” but that “it possessed no firm or lasting political allegiance except perhaps to its city or symbols. Normally it may be regarded as reformist, insofar as it rarely if ever conceived of the construction of a new order of society, as distinct from the correction of abnormalities and injustices in a traditional world order.”\footnote{Ibid. p. 7.} Even so, it “may be defined as the movement of all classes of the urban poor for the achievement of economic or political changes by direct action – that is by riot or rebellion – but as a movement which was as yet inspired by no specific ideology”.\footnote{Ibid. p. 110.} These two things appear to contradict each other. It has clear aims and objectives and a clear sense of what it wants, yet it is not self-aware because what it wants is archaic, primitive or backward looking. This is further complicated by Hobsbawm’s ideas about who constitutes the mob. At first he suggests that the mob are the 	extit{lazzaroni}, who in their specific historical context were highly militant, highly articulate: “The
lazzaroni of Naples, the quintessential mob, were passionate defenders of Church and King, and even more savage anti-Jacobins in 1799...they sang songs against all the upper classes...and defined as Jacobins and enemies of the king any owners of property, or more simply anyone with a carriage.”

Hobsbawm defends the lazzaroni against the categorisation of lumpenproletariat, because he considers the term a pejorative, a word which unsympathetic observers would use. For Marx the terms were interchangeable but for Hobsbawm the lazzaroni were organised and aware of themselves as such – the mob then consists more of what he calls the menu people, or ‘little people’. This is quite distinctly not the lumpenproletariat, who are more like beggars, looters, the demoralized and opportunistic criminals.

In this sense, Hobsbawm differentiates between Marx’s ‘real lumpenproletariat’ of the vagabonds, criminals and prostitutes, although he admits it is possible these were a part of the mob (in some instances, a large part), and the pre-political mobs associated with food, or ‘Church and King’ riots. For Hobsbawm, the heterogeneity of the mob is unsettling and uncomfortable, it can not easily be accounted for and it undermines movements towards a ‘progressive’ and unified political consciousness. In this sense, the mob fails Hobsbawm’s test of self-consciousness because what it wants is not articulated in the language of socialist revolution – “the implicit revolutionism of the mob was primitive; in its way it was the metropolitan equivalent of the stage of political consciousness represented by social banditry in the country-side.”

Its disappearance may have

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meant “a loss of colour” but its “horrifying spectacle” is not something that historians should be sorry has disappeared.80

The notion of the motley has been taken up by historians Rediker and Linebaugh in their book *The Many Headed Hydra*, which radically blurs the orthodox distinction between the lumpen and the proletariat. For them, the proletariat of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, upon whose back capitalism was built, are the very groups Marx listed with such distaste. But it had always been distasteful:

It was described as a monster, a many-headed hydra. Its heads included food rioters… heretics…army agitators…antinomians and independent women…maroons…motley urban mobs…general strikers…rural barbarians of the commons…aquatic laborers…free thinkers …and striking textile workers. Nameless commentators added peasant rebels, Levellers, pirates and slave insurrectionists to the long list. Fearful of the energy, mobility, and growth of social forces beyond their control, the writers, heresy hunters, generals, ministers, officials, population theorists, policemen, merchants, manufacturers and planters offered up their curses, which called down the Herculean destruction upon the hydra’s heads: the debellation of the Irish, the extermination of the pirates, the annihilation of the outcasts of the nations of the Earth.81

While Linebaugh and Rediker are specifically concerned to show that capitalisms working class was connected and conscious in ways not usually told in the story of modern labour history’s “white, male, skilled, waged, nationalist, propertied artisan/citizen or industrial worker”82 in doing so they show that the privileging of a particular section of the working class has clouded our understanding of the

80 Ibid. p. 125.
82 Ibid. p. 332.
worlds ‘proletariat’. For Linebaugh and Rediker, this is a proletariat not defined by how it behaves in relation to a pre-existing political philosophy, but how it behaved in its own time, in response to the particular circumstances with which it was faced. In this sense, the multitude, in its heterogeneity, is implicitly subversive because it unsettles what we think we know about the past, and should make us rethink what we know about the present. This is an important point for this thesis, because it speaks to the importance of thinking outside pre-existing categories of analysis, leaving aside ‘moral’ judgments about good or bad, true or false consciousness, and looking to the past for what it can tell us about the potentials for other ways of being in the world. While Rediker and Linebaugh focus on particular instances of explicit rebellion to highlight the hidden revolutionary potential of people usually overlooked by labour history, their overarching concern is with the ways in which capitalism seeks to dehumanise its workers, and how people in the past resisted that process.

This is also true of much of the work of E. P. Thompson, whose influence in this area can not be overstated. His writings have done much to expand our understanding of notions of the mob and of ‘culture’, and their relationship to changing class structures. For Thompson, the terms mob or riot have too often been used to “conceal what may be described as a spasmodic view of popular history” where the mob is seen as an episodic “intrusion” which is considered “compulsive, rather than self-conscious and self-activating: they are simple responses to economic stimuli. It is sufficient to mention a bad harvest or a down-
turn in trade, and all requirements of historical explanation are satisfied”. He is critical of historians and theorists who, he argues “are guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, function and behaviour.”

Instead, he argues that what have been called ‘food riots’ can be seen as organised and coherent protests against the intrusion of market forces on traditional and customary notions of reciprocity and fairness, and while, in this sense, this kind of ‘mob’ “cannot be described as political in any advanced sense, nevertheless it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal”. While Thompson does not pretend to be analysing all riots or mobs in all situations, what is most interesting about this approach is the idea that there is not one correct way of being political, of protesting, rebelling, or revolting, and that what is considered a rational or normal way to behave, or to think, from the historians point of view, was not always thus. In this sense, a crowd, riot, mob or culture may have its own ‘moral economy’ that legitimates its existence to its participants, and we ignore these factors at our peril. Thompson is impatient with those who would dismiss the mob for their lack of political consciousness, for whom “the trouble is, once again, the vulgarity of the crowd. They were not philosophers,” he argues, but

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84 Ibid. p. 187. It is interesting to note that he lists Hobshawm among his criticisms here.
85 Ibid. p. 188.
this does not mean they did not know what they were doing, or that they should be dismissed for being ‘vulgar’.

It is this concern with the arrogance of twentieth century historians that pervades much of Thompson’s master-work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. As a work of history alone it has much to offer, but in this context, it is again the overarching philosophical approach which is of interest. Firstly this relates to the ‘subjects’ of historical analysis, and secondly it relates to the particular ways in which these subjects are to be understood. In relation to subjects, Thompson is concerned that “prevailing orthodoxies” have negatively shaped who is considered worthy of historical study, so that “working people are seen as passive victims of laissez-faire, with the exception of a handful of far-sighted organisers” or they are of interest only to the extent that they are “a labour force...migrants…the data for statistical series”89. These approaches are problematic because “they tend to obscure the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of history”.90 Worse than this however, is the approach which he calls “the Pilgrims Progress orthodoxy, in which the period is ransacked for forerunners-pioneers of the Welfare State, progenitors of a Socialist-Commonwealth, or (more recently), early exemplars of a rational industrial relations.”91 This is particularly problematic, because “it reads history in the light of subsequent preoccupations, and not in fact as it occurred. Only the successful (in the sense of those whose aspirations anticipated subsequent

evolution) are remembered. The blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves are forgotten”.92 This approach is guilty of an “enormous condescension of posterity” because it judges those in the past against a pre-determined set of criteria of worthiness, and assumes that these criteria are the only ways of understanding both the present and the past.93 In many ways, this is the legacy of a narrow conceptualisation of both the working class and of the structures of class itself, which we have seen in the debates about the lumpenproletariat, and, more specifically, about the nature and making of class consciousness.

Thompson explains it best himself:

There is today an ever-present temptation to suppose that class is a thing. This was not Marx’s meaning, in his own historical writing, yet the error vitiates much latter-day Marxist writing. ‘It’, the working class, is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which ‘it’ ought to have, (but seldom does have) if ‘it’ was properly aware of its own positions and real interests. There is a cultural superstructure, through which this recognition dawns in inefficient ways. These cultural ‘lags’ and distortions are a nuisance, so that it is easy to pass from this to some theory of substitution: the party, sect, or theorist, who disclose class-consciousness, not as it is, but as it ought to be.94

Yet for Thompson, class and class-consciousness can not be separated from each other, and neither of them can be separated from the notion of culture. If class is not a category or a structure, but is experienced through human relationships, than “class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in

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92 Ibid. p. 12.
93 Ibid. p. 12.
94 Ibid. p. 9.
cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms”.\textsuperscript{95} In other words, culture exists in the myriad of ways that people understand and represent their experience of their lives. This is a Marxist approach to the extent that it seeks to find particular connections between the cultural expressions of life and the material conditions within which these occur. It does not mean, however, that culture is determined by these conditions but that it necessarily interacts with and corresponds to them. This is an approach that is concerned with the notion of human agency because it assumes that people in the past had some idea about what they were doing and that human activities are not just blind reflexes to invisible structural forces. Whereas some condemn certain kinds of ‘working class cultures’ for their backwardness (as if ‘bourgeois’ ones are not), Thompson argues instead that ‘cultures’, through which consciousness is expressed and developed, are not born overnight but emerge over time, just as capitalism does, and that they maintain links with past ways of thinking and doing. For Thompson this is important because the nature of life under capitalism is not itself taken as the norm by which human behaviour should be measured. Rather, he shows the way in which capitalist methods of social organization evolved historically in contradiction to customary work and life habits. He stresses that human beings have lived and worked in alternative ways in the past and that they dream of new ways for the future.

Even so, Thompson’s studies are concerned with cultures which, it can be argued, are overtly and recognizably political. “The poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper,\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver, the ‘utopian’ artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott" are not the tinkers, beggars, vagrants, criminals and prostitutes of Marx’s lumpenproletariat, or of Rediker’s motley crew. It is not, of course, necessary that they should be, and the fact that they aren’t is not reason to criticize Thompson. But the fact that these are people still missing from one of the most important analyses of class and culture speaks to the difficulty of documenting such groups, and the continued difficulty of “writing against the weight of prevailing orthodoxies”.97

Some attempts have been made to document and to analyse those existing on the margins of recognised class relations. Most notably, Patrick Joyce and Gareth Stedman Jones have written excellent histories of ‘the people’ and of ‘Outcast London’. Joyce suggests that there was no homogenous working class in nineteenth century England and that to fully understand social relations we must move beyond class and engage with the language of populism. Stedman Jones provides a great deal of detail about the social and economic conditions which affected the ‘casual poor’ in London in the nineteenth century and analyses the way in which bourgeois representations of this ‘problem’ stemmed from fear and hysteria surrounding the Other, ‘the dangerous classes’, disease and disorder. There is a particularly excellent analysis of the role of morality and discourse in

96 Ibid. p. 12.
97 Ibid. p. 11.
98 Joyce. Visions of the People.
100 Joyce. Visions of the People. pp. 1-12.
the construction of ‘the problem’ and in the proposed solutions to it.\textsuperscript{101} Yet in neither study do we really get a sense of these groups being anything more than a ‘victim’ of circumstance, constructed and deconstructed by the bourgeoisie, with no real sense of their own experience, of their agency in their own lives. They may not be a lumpenproletariat, but they are still ‘objects’, not yet active subjects in their own right.

Some interesting studies have emerged around the idea of transgression. Bryan Palmer’s epic book \textit{Cultures of Darkness} explores the idea that throughout history subversive cultures have thrived under cover of the night and free from surveillance; that culture itself can be subversive. These are cultures of prostitution, crime, pornography, witchcraft, race, sex and violence; cultures of identity or subjectivity. He sees these cultures operating in direct opposition to capitalism’s attempts to constrain and oppress, and recognises that these are cultures which seek to express an “I” not possible in the bright day of capitalism.\textsuperscript{102} He argues that “one needs to understand this and seek out the remnants of experiences cherished for what they were, for what they promised, and for what they could become…One purpose of this book is to emphasise the long resilience of everynight resistance and refusal which remains underappreciated in a world capable of canonizing ideas of the great tradition but blind to the dark doings of the marginal and the transgressive.”\textsuperscript{103} He suggests that

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\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.} p. 455-456.
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it is “appropriate to savour the particularities of the range of subjective experience traversed in a centuries-long walk through the aesthetics and activities of the night. Pornographers and pirates, bandits and beats, communards and crack dealers were undeniably agents whose understanding of their historical selves seldom met on anything approximating common ground.”

It is this perceived lack of common ground that Palmer ultimately finds problematic, however. He suggests that to concentrate only on the particular, on the subjective, is to “limit the meaning of dark cultures to that of self-definition and subjective sensuality, to condemn them to a permanent state of marginality, and to refuse to look nights restraints in their evil eye.”

This is because these cultures are condemned to night by the ‘day’ of capitalism, which, by staying fragmented and subjective, transgressive cultures can not challenge. Perhaps so, but surely this is not the only criteria by which ‘cultures’ can be judged worthy of study, or considered subversive? If, as Palmer suggests, transgression, despair, difference, dreams “are situated within the rise and transformation of global capitalism, the determining and foundational feature of human experience in the modern world” then surely ‘the self’ is also a site of capitalist activity and contestation? Subjectivity and political significance are not mutually exclusive, despite Palmer’s problems with “postmodern identity politics”.

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104 Ibid. p. 455.
105 Ibid. p. 456.
107 Ibid. p. 456.
This is a point made by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in their book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. In many ways, it is in this book that the concepts of the lumpenproletariat and the notion of subjectivity come together. In their attempt to understand the discursive construction of the high/low hierarchy in the “symbolic domains” of “psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order” they draw on the connections between culture and subjectivity. They argue that it is through these connections that oppression and power are produced and reproduced. They draw particularly on the notion of carnival as explored by Bakhtin and applied by theorists since then to explore the discursive demonisation and Othering of ‘low’ culture and to move beyond debates about whether carnival is political or not. Theirs is a complex and challenging approach:

If we treat the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression we move beyond Bakhtin’s troublesome folkloric approach to a political anthropology of binary extremism in class society. The transposition not only moves us beyond the rather unproductive debate about whether carnivals are politically progressive or conservative, it reveals that the underlying structural features of carnival operate far beyond the strict confines of popular festivity and are intrinsic to the dialectics of social classification as such. The carnivalesque mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such.

While this thesis is not about “carnivals” in and of themselves, this work is useful because of the connections it makes between carnivalesque behaviour, subjectivity and social relations. Bourgeois attitudes towards the grotesque, which, as we have

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110 Ibid. p. 3.

111 Ibid. pp. 5-6.


seen, played such a large part in the history of the lumpenproletariat, continued in other forms and other places, and continued to influence ideas about the norms of subjectivity, by which individuals and groups were despised, demonised and excluded.

Conclusion

The works surveyed in this chapter have been analysed around two central problematics, firstly the role and significance which they attribute to marginal groups in history, and secondly, the connections they make between class, culture and consciousness. Their assessments of these problems depend to greater or lesser extents on the way in which they theorise marginalisation, and their ability to problematise the original meaning of the concept of the lumpenproletariat. Australian histories that deal explicitly with larrikins all see them as, to greater or lesser extents, operating outside of explicit class relations, whether this is because they focus on other factors such as public space, family, alienation or identity, or because they implicitly accept a theory of the lumpenproletariat which valorises a correct or true consciousness over a false one, thereby relegating larrikins to the margins. International histories are more useful in this vein, as they argue that marginal groups in history can be considered more than just reflexive responses to economic changes, that consciousness is not determined by these changes, and that culture is an important tool of analysis. The best of these histories explicitly seek to go beyond the limited theorisation of class relations of orthodox Marxism, eschewing notions of false consciousness and recognising that the experience of
class is not the same across time and place, and that it is in this experience of class that consciousness is embedded.

In the Australian histories, larrikins are not seen as anything other than the victims of circumstance, or as ‘class traitors.’ It is significant that even in these latter analyses of larrikins, the word lumpenproletariat is rarely used. This invisibility does not necessarily signify a greater level of theoretical sophistication, although it is possibly the case that the term lumpenproletariat is considered out of date and inadequate. I would argue however, that the invisibility of the term reflects the invisibility of the marginal itself, that the lack of attention paid to marginal groups in their own right indicates an inability to even speak their name, there is no word for them in the accepted versions of Australian history, Right or Left. In the tradition of left history which this thesis initially stemmed from, the pervasiveness of a particular conception of the Australian working class as an organised, coherent, disciplined and respectable whole, the almost synonymous representation of the working class with the trade union movement, means that there is no language by which to describe larrikins that does not either exclude or demonise them. We can not understand why this is the case without attempting to understand what it was about larrikins in particular, as people, that has caused such a reaction. The clues to this do not lie in the realms of class and culture alone, but in what larrikinism embodied, what it was seen to represent in its own time, that caused it to be transformed into something other than a subversive and transgressive ‘culture of darkness’. The true nature of the transgressive and subversive potential of larrikinism does not lie in politics so much as in
subjectivity. However, unlike Palmer, this thesis does not operate from the assumption that these things are mutually exclusive. To understand the connections between class, culture and the radical (un)consciousness of larrkinism, a more complex theory than we have dealt with in this chapter must be developed. This is the task of Chapter Two.
Chapter Two

Theorising the larrikin: subjectivity and hegemony

The argument of this thesis is that larrikinism can be understood as a particular kind of subjectivity created by and in opposition to an historical attempt to create another kind of subjectivity, specific to the time and place of late nineteenth century Sydney. This chapter sets out the theoretical framework by which this argument can be made and defines the conception of subjectivity which will be applied to the study of larrikinism. Subjectivity is understood broadly as the processes by which norms of personal behaviour are produced and reproduced in social relations and more specifically as the processes by which one comes to make sense of oneself and one’s position in the world. Given that particular conceptions of the self go on to inform the choices and actions of the individual, the formation of subjectivity is, then, the problem of consciousness. To build this argument, this chapter starts with Freud because his ideas about the importance of the dynamic unconscious for the formation of subjectivity are related to the needs of ‘civilised’ society, while simultaneously recognising that repression can be counter-productive and cause social problems and mental illness. The significance of repression in individual and social conceptions of subjectivity is expanded in the work of Lacan, whose argument that the subject and the social are inextricably linked offers possibilities for a radical reworking of the idea of subjectivity through a reclaiming of the split or lack caused by the repression of jouissance (the pleasure principle) by the reality principle. Instead of suggesting that the dominant social order is normal, and marginalised groups are deviant or forms of collective neuroses, Lacan argues that the symbolic order is itself Other and that what it...
excludes is the Real. Along with Freud, Lacan argues that repression of unconscious drives/jouissance, or at best its sublimation, is the foundation of the social order, but that there is a radical potential in the space of the Real (existing as it does outside of the symbolic order, outside of discourse) for a reshaping of the nature of the subject. These aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis can be connected to key concepts in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. In this thesis, hegemony is understood as a process, rather than static domination, which is then produced and reproduced through the constant interplay between social, economic and political relations and that human existence occurs at the intersection of these relations. This idea connects with Freud’s notion of overdetermination to suggest that subjectivity is not determined by one particular category or set of relations, but is made in the links and relationships which exist in material and psychic life.

A theory of hegemony that is centred around the idea of process implies the possibility of human agency in the making of subjectivity, rather than assuming that subjectivity simply exists in and through social categories. In order to flesh out this aspect of hegemony more fully, the psychoanalytic concepts of repression, exclusion, lack, jouissance and the Real are worked into a theory of hegemony not because this thesis seeks to psychoanalyse the larrikin but because it seeks to understand the way in which a larrikin subjectivity came into being in its own history, how this related to the rest of society at that time, and then how it was dealt with in that society. As such, it seeks to make the connection between individual and group behaviour and social structures, arguing that these are not
divorced from each other but are not simply determined one by the other. It can not answer the question of whether larrikins were conscious of themselves as such, but it can investigate the links between the discursive construction of larrikinism, and the group behaviour that gave rise to and was shaped by this discourse. This relationship is the essence of a theory of hegemony.

Because the theoretical argument of this thesis is synthesised in a theory of hegemony, Gramsci is dealt with last here, but it must be noted that his writing was at least contemporaneous with and in some instances predated some of Freud’s major theoretical writings, and certainly predated Lacan. Indeed, Gramsci was well aware of Freud and hinted at some implications of Freud’s work for his own¹, but the overtly social and political project with which Gramsci was concerned stopped short of individual psychology. Freud’s work, however, is heavily social, and much of his psychological theories sought to make sense of the connection between the social and the individual. There is much that can be gained from bringing a theory of hegemony into Freud, which is implicit in Freud’s own idea of overdetermination.² More specifically, there is a common thread that runs through Gramsci, Freud and Lacan and this is the idea of exclusion or lack. In this chapter, this is explored first through Freud’s concept of a split self through the conscious/unconscious tension, developed in Lacan’s work through


the idea of subject-as-lack in both a psychological and social sense. Lacan's notion of the Real is explored because it speaks to the radical and progressive potentials of the idea of lack (that is, lack is not necessarily a negative in the formation of subjectivity). This can be radicalised further using Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, and his conception of subalternity, where subaltern groups are formed, and form themselves, through their active exclusion from political autonomy.

The explication of these linkages begins with Freud, examining his ideas about the dynamic unconscious and the effect of repression on individuals within civilisation. The lack, or exclusion, created by civilisation is the starting point for the conception of subjectivity utilised in this thesis because it is argued that it is in this exclusion that we can make sense of larrikin behaviour and the construction of larrikinism as a social problem.

**Freud: the dynamic unconscious and civilisation**

The problems and limitations of Freudian theory are well documented, and debate continues about the applicability of Freud for understanding the nature of the self and its relationship to society. This chapter does not pretend to be a complete

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analysis of the works of Freud, nor to be a participant in the wider philosophical
debates about the limits of Freudian theory. It is with these limits in mind that this
thesis uses particular concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis in order to develop a
framework by which to understand the relationship between the self and society.
It does this by situating Freud in the field of critical theory, embracing his
overlapping with social and moral philosophy⁴, rather than viewing him as a pure
scientist from a clinical perspective. The framework then does not stop with
Freud but it does begin there.

Most theories of the self reference Freud in one way or another, and they do this
for at least two primary reasons. One is that Freud was intensely concerned about
the relationship between the self and society – his psychoanalytic theories are
firmly rooted in his social and neither can nor should be understood without
reference to the other. Secondly, not only was he the father of the psychology of
the individual, but his theory of the unconscious, central to his conception of
subjectivity, has had a profound impact on the way Western thinking theorises the
nature of subjectivity.⁵ While it is not exactly the case that prior to Freud the

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nature of subjectivity was unquestioned, it is true that conceptions of ‘the subject’ were taken to be far less problematic than they are today. The emphasis on Enlightenment reason with its privileging of the rational and the scientific argued that the subject was a knowable, controllable entity, not a separate sphere from action but controlled totally by self-will and self-knowledge. Freud’s theory of the unconscious unsettled this conception profoundly. His argument that there was an unknowable aspect to the self which actively influenced thought and action, ruled by drives and passions which were not easily reconcilable with ‘reality’ posited the idea of a subjectivity multi-layered and potentially non-rational.

What then, is the relevance of Freud’s conception of subjectivity for this thesis? The concepts that make up Freudian social and psychological theory are necessarily interconnected and to separate them for individual analysis is difficult and potentially problematic. To provide a comprehensive treatise on the theory of the unconscious is beyond the scope or capacity of this thesis. This section then, refers primarily to Freud’s later works and concentrates on the key components of Freud’s theory of subjectivity, that is, the implications of the dynamic unconscious and the role of repression in the formulation of a ‘civilised’ subjectivity.

_Dynamic Unconscious, Repression and Sublimation_

Central to Freud’s conception of subjectivity is the theory of the instincts, or drives, which are organised through the ‘dynamic unconscious’ via processes such

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6 The notion of drives, central to Freud’s work, has become synonymous with the idea of ‘instincts’ as a result of a mistranslation in the Standard Edition. Although instincts is now the common use term, I am using predominantly ‘drives’ here as it helps to avoid the biologically
as aim-inhibition, repression and sublimation, and that this gives rise to the
development of an ego which is signified by a split between a conscious and
unconscious self, a split that is heavily influenced by external or social pressures.
In its simplest form this is the transformation of the pleasure principle into the
reality principle. If ‘pleasure’ is the satisfaction of drives (manifesting in different
forms within individuals), this must be negotiated by the reality of the world in
which we live. Freud himself explains it best:

Under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation, the
pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle. This latter
principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining
pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the
postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of
principles of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of
unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure.7

Central to this transformation of the pleasure principle into the reality principle, is
the process of repression which works to remove from conscious thought (and to
actively keep removed) those desires which, over the years and under the
influence of both external and internal pressures, become too impossible to
accommodate. Associated thoughts, desires and wishes are continually added,
making repression not an instant occurrence but a life-long phenomena, the
central process of the dynamic unconscious as it constantly arranges and
rearranges psychic ‘energy’ in line with the reality principle:

deterministic, or essentialist, connotations of a word like instincts which Freud himself was wary
“Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)" On Metapsychology: The Theory of
The process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place once, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and from that time onward is dead; repression demands a persistent expenditure of force, and if this were to cease the success of the repression would be jeopardized, so that a fresh act of repression would be necessary…the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure.8

In a practical sense, repression involves *aim-inhibition*, or the modification of the ways in which the drives are satisfied. In the pleasure principle, as we have seen, drives have the aim of being immediately satisfied, and their satisfaction causes pleasure or happiness. Central to Freud’s theory of subjectivity, however, is the notion that we can not live by the pleasure principle alone, indeed that attempts to do so in fact bring unpleasure. He argues that “an unrestricted satisfaction of every need presents itself as the most enticing method of conducting ones life, but it means putting enjoyment before caution and soon brings its own punishment”.9 Therefore, the aims of the drives for satisfaction must be inhibited and this is achieved primarily through their repression into the unconscious, which forms who we are by its very invisibility – by its active exclusion from our consciousness. It is the ‘other’ against which we define ourselves, and in this sense, mirrors the social processes that bring this split about.

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Aim-inhibition is also made possible through the process of sublimation. Freud argued that sublimation “consists in the sexual trend abandoning its aim of obtaining a component or a reproductive pleasure and taking on another which is related genetically to the abandoned one but is itself no longer sexual and must be described as social”.¹⁰ Not only can repressed libidinal energy define how we think of ourselves in an egoistic sense, but its sublimation can make us who we are in the world. Freud suggested that some people have the capacity to sublimate some of their repressed energy outward into creative activity. Importantly, however, this is not a process accessible to all: “the weak point of this method is that it is not applicable generally: it is accessible to only a few people. It presupposes the possession of special dispositions and gifts which are far from being common to any practical degree.”¹¹ Freud therefore had a rather limited view of what constituted sublimated activity, confining his analysis of it to freely-chosen professional activity, artists and scientists¹².

Freud was also cautious as to how effective sublimation could be in the long term: “even to the few who do possess them, this method can not give complete protection from suffering. It creates no impenetrable armour against the arrows of fortune…”¹³ In general, Freud was wary about the potential of aim-inhibition through repression and sublimation to be effective in creating personal or social

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happiness in the longer term. Most of his psychoanalytic case work revolves around the neuroses and other illnesses caused by the repression of drives and the continued tension between the conscious and unconscious, and he laid the blame for what he saw as an increase in nervous illness firmly at the foot of ‘civilisation’.

The super-ego and ‘Civilised Sexual Morality’

Since the 1920s Freud had amended his ideas about the working of the mind, adding a new element to the theory of ego-formation: the super-ego. It is in the theory of ego formation that Freud seeks to stabilise the relations between the conflicting psychic forces and the material – the body, sense of self, other people, culture and society. In developing the notion of the super-ego, Freud argues that the ego is in itself split – while it appears to regulate the passions and drives stored in the id, it does not do so wholly consciously, but is affected by another force, the super-ego or ego-ideal. What Freud is suggesting here is that when the ego regulates the id, it does not do so within a vacuum – its own ideas about what needs regulating are also related to primary unconscious processes derived from the first voice of authority, the Father, which is replicated in social relations, in civilisation. The super-ego is not simply an internal psychic force but is in many ways an echo of a harsh, criticising external voice. In the super-ego ‘civilising’ forces are internalised (becoming self-regulatory most often through guilt) and then externalised, producing and reproducing the values, morals and taboos of a particular society.

The social, rather than purely clinical, effects of the super-ego, and of aim-inhibition, are dealt with most notably in *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Here Freud wrote:

At this point we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilisation and the libidinal development of the individual.…Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilised life. …it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilisation is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts. This ‘cultural frustration’ dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings…it is the cause of the hostility against which all civilisations have to struggle….It is not easy to understand how it can become possible to deprive an instinct of satisfaction. Nor is doing so without danger. If the loss is not compensated for economically, one can be certain that serious disorders will ensue.17

This is especially so in the realm of sexuality and it is here that Freud sees most clearly the detrimental effects of civilisation. This is so central to Freud not simply because he sees the organisation of human psychic life centred around the management of sexual drives but also because “the sexual life of a human being often lays down the pattern for all his other modes of reacting to life.”18 Yet the civilisation in which a person lives, (for Freud, and in this thesis, this is Western ‘modern’ civilisation), seems to demand the complete suppression, repression or sublimation of this sexual life. The creative energy of civilisation is dependent on this psychic process: “it places extraordinarily large amounts of force at the

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disposal of civilised activity.” Its sublimation into other forms, including onto the objects of consumption, make civilisation possible. Yet the renunciation, or exclusion, of the free expression of sexuality has the potential to undermine that civilisation in a number of ways.

What he perceived as an increased prevalence of nervous illness was of concern to Freud because it seemed to speak to some underlying ‘illness’ in society – not so much that society was pathological, but that the constraints of civilisation were causing a proliferation of personal mental illness which spoke to the unsustainability of those constraints, if only because the suppressed libidinal energy was not being re-directed into creative or progressive social avenues. In this instance, the constraints are in fact proving unsuccessful, and a culture can therefore be considered out of synch with its members – worse, it becomes an impossible culture. This is, for Freud, a culture based on social injustice, where the demands of normative sexuality (sex for purely reproductive purposes and within monogamous, heterosexual marriage) encourage at best hypocrisy and double standards, at worst the criminality, or outlawing, of those deemed deviant. The hypocrisy of normative sexuality affects women and young people most obviously; women because they are not in a social position to subvert sexual constraints through extra-marital affairs as men so easily are, and young people

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19 Ibid. p. 187.
22 Ibid. p. 189.
23 Ibid. pp. 191-192. Some would argue that this idea reflects a negative attitude of Freud towards women and while he does suggest that women are constitutionally ‘weaker’ he is in fact arguing that the suppression of sexuality for women is damaging personally and socially. And while his arguments about the difficulties for women of expressing their sexuality might seem confined to
because their sexuality is at its most powerful and they can be irreparably harmed by its suppression.\textsuperscript{24} The criminalising of sexual deviance does not only relate to homosexuality but can be brought to bear on any kind of sexual expression that seeks to flaunt the normative form of sexuality.\textsuperscript{25}

It is in this addressing of sexuality that the Freudian conception of subjectivity is formed. If subjectivity is formed through the management and organisation of the sexual instincts, on both a psychic and social level then subjectivity, for Freud, is over\textit{determined} and \textit{lacking}. The Freudian ego, as an individual ‘sense of self’ or as a social subject, is not determined by civilising forces but is over\textit{determined} by them, that is, there are two or more simultaneously determining elements.\textsuperscript{26} The ‘cause’ is in the multiplicity of forces that act on a person within social relations, and their own ‘reaction formations’ or the unique individual ways in which they respond to their family and social situations.

Key to this conception of subjectivity is what is \textit{excluded} from the ego. Although Freud himself does not explicitly hypothesise subjectivity itself as split, he did theorise the ‘splitting of the ego’ through the conception of the dynamic unconscious,\textsuperscript{27} where there is a radical decentring of the self between the conscious and unconscious, implicit in the idea that there are limits to what we can ever know about ourselves. The ego is defined by what it excludes from itself,
what it keeps repressed, what it cannot recognise, what it keeps unconscious, what it lacks. This is a social process, not just because what is excluded in the subject is influenced by social constraints, but because the unconscious is created in direct opposition to a socially defined ‘normative’ consciousness. Subjectivity, in the Freudian sense, is created against what is excluded. It is also in this way that society creates its own sense of its self. If society is rational, ordered and civilised, it is so because it has excluded from itself the non-rational, the disordered, and the uncivilised. But it has not eradicated these elements, it has merely repressed them. The consequences and possibilities for the subversion of this repression are expanded in Lacan’s conception of subjectivity in society.

**Lacan: jouissance, the real and desire.**

It is an impossible task to do justice to the complexity of Lacanian theory within the confines of this project. As with Freud, this thesis does not pretend to be an extensive elaboration of Lacanian theory, rather, it draws only on particular key concepts from Lacan, and only as they pertain to the extension of the Freudian conception of subjectivity, its construction within society, and obviously, its relevance to a study of larrikinism.

If Freud’s conception of the subject was personified by its split and overdetermined nature, Lacan’s subject is even more radically so. However, it is not simply that Lacan expands on Freud’s ideas, but that he extends the link between the self and society. It is not just that society requires certain drives to be repressed and sublimated, creating a split, or exclusion, in the self, but that in this
process, *society itself* becomes split and lacking and that ‘subjectivity’ is in fact the process of negotiating this split. This is a process that is mediated in the realm of the symbolic and is a process that is never fully resolved. In the Lacanian sense then, the subject is radically unstable, available only through symbolic identifications (rather than stable identities) which are always already impossible. This is because the subject can never be separated from the social and its discourse, or the symbolic order. If Freud stressed the overdetermined nature of subjectivity, and the strong influence of the social on the individual psyche, Lacan contends that subjectivity is made possible only by and through engagement with the social but that this is deeply problematic. In order to understand why this is significant for this thesis, the following section of this chapter concentrates on the central concepts of this theory: *jouissance* and *the real*, relating them to the construction of subjectivity through individual and collective exclusion and desire, and the implications of this for social relations.

*The symbolic order and jouissance*

Lacan has become synonymous with the idea that the subject is structured like a language, and this has proven fruitful ground for theorists seeking to understand the way in which reality, especially on an individual psychic level, is constructed and deconstructed through language.\(^{28}\) However, this thesis is more concerned with the idea of language as ‘discourse’, or as the means (verbal and non-verbal) by which the symbolic order is articulated. If the symbolic order is the chain of

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symbols, the signifieds and the signifiers, by which meaning is conveyed, then subjectivity is embedded in the symbolic. Lacan’s conception of personal development stresses the importance of the symbolic order for an understanding of self, beginning with the mirror stage and progressing though life as the process of identifications.29 There can be no subjectivity without engagement with this symbolic order. Yet this very act of engagement proves immediately problematic for subjectivity, because the symbolic order is Other, that is, it is something imposed from the outside, and it is organised around what Lacan calls the master signifier, or the Name of the Father.30 This is a similar conception to the Freudian superego and is problematic for subjectivity because it is based on a lack, or exclusion: “there is a fault, hole of loss therein.”31 Just as the superego is the critical voice that regulates what can or can not be thought, so the symbolic order is structured around specific, historical ideas about what it means to be human at that point in time, what behaviours, thoughts and feelings are normal or acceptable.32 To construct this normalcy, the symbolic order relies on repression and for Lacan this is the repression of jouissance.

Jouissance is central to a Lacanian conception of subjectivity33 and is one of his most important concepts for this thesis. Yet it is almost impossible to categorically define jouissance, not simply because Lacan and subsequent theorists use it in

various ways, but because it is a concept that, by definition, resists symbolisation.

Its most direct translation comes closest to the meaning which will be used in this thesis and this is the idea of ‘enjoyment’ or ‘excitement’ – similar to Freud’s notion of the pleasure principle in that it is connected to bodily and psychic satisfaction. In psychoanalytic terms, it is the fullness derived from complete connection with the Mother, which will always be interrupted by the Father, embodied in the entry into the symbolic order where a sense of self as a separate entity begins to form.

Given that ‘growing up’, or entering the symbolic order, is inevitable, jouissance is lost or at least repressed. Yet its very existence forms the essence of subjectivity, because the subject is now formed against and around this lack, seeking always to refind it, to reconnect with it. In this sense, subjectivity is always ‘imaginary’, elusive. In many ways this is the same process as embodied by Freud’s conception of the dynamic unconscious, where what is repressed remains still an active part of ego-formation. In simplistic terms, for Lacan, the unconscious is called ‘the real’.

**Jouissance and the real**

34 The concept has different applications in critical psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice, and in literary and cultural theory following the significant impact of Slavoj Žižek. The difficulty of definition lies in the various ways in which Lacan himself used the term, best summarised in Stavrakakis. *Lacan and the political*. pp. 41-54 and note 4 p. 150. See also Fink. *The Lacanian Subject*. pp. 60-61.


As an analytic concept, the real serves multiple functions – as Glynos and Stavrakakis have demonstrated it has both negative and positive implications. In individual psychic terms it is the lack or loss around which subjectivity forms – the pre-linguistic or extra-symbolic space of being; it is “the part of ourselves that is sacrificed/castrated when we enter the symbolic system of language and social relations”. In social terms it is the limits of signification, remaining “outside the field of representation, what remains impossible to symbolise”. In these senses it is a negative, an absence, something that is not there. Yet it is an important critical concept because it alerts us to what is being excluded in the creation of the symbolic order. The symbolic order continually defines and redefines itself against the real and in this sense the real is never completely lost to us, it remains as a reminder of what has been sacrificed, of what else might be possible.

The real makes itself felt in the same way that neuroses and ‘social problems’ were a symptom of failing repression for Freud. Either through traumatic crises, or as individual or social symptoms, the real acts as a dislocation, a destabiliser of the ‘social order’. In other words, Lacan argues that where there are social or personal tensions, where there is a disruption or dispute over what constitutes normalcy, for example, then the real is in play, as symptom, as trauma. Tensions and conflicts are a symptom of potential ruptures in the repressive process. In this sense then, the idea of the real it calls into question the idea of normalcy itself, suggesting that what is considered normal or acceptable at anyone point in time is

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not only largely socially constructed but constructed around specific ‘nodal points’, or what will be called in this thesis, hegemonic principles.\(^{41}\) Socially, the eradication of the real will result in the exclusion of those behaviours, or those people, who represent threats of some kind to these principles. This process of repression and exclusion has significant implications for the way in which subjectivity is formed.

Subjectivity as process: identifications and desire

In the same way that repression in the dynamic unconscious is never a fully accomplished process but requires a continual expenditure of psychic energy, so for Lacan the exclusion of the real is an ongoing and complex process. If the Lacanian subject is personified by the lack of the real, it is also personified by attempts to fill this lack. Subjectivity is, in fact, the process of attempting to cover over the lack created by the exclusion of the real, of jouissance; the process of finding replacements or sublimations for this lack.\(^ {42}\) For Lacan, this is the process of ‘identifications’ which stands in contrast to the idea of subjectivity as ‘identity’ in a number of ways. Firstly, the concept of identifications undermines the notion of subjectivity as being related to one primary cause or one stable life-long identity. Identification suggests that people change the way they think about themselves, or act in the world, as they change and grow. There is nothing particularly revelatory about this idea, but Lacan suggests that the external markers

\(^{41}\) This term will be explicated more fully in the next section of this chapter. It is a concept taken from Howson, Richard. *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. London, Routledge. 2005. which expands on the idea of nodal points as used by Laclau and Mouffe, which they themselves draw from Lacan’s idea of ‘point de capiton’. See Laclau and Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. pxi.

of subjectivity – the publicly available identities – are multiple and varied throughout a lifetime, sometimes existing within the conception of self at the same time, sometimes contradictory to each other. More specifically however, this process of identification is significant because it is centred around desire. Not only is subjectivity created through multiple and complex attempts at identification in the quest to suture the lack caused by the repression of jouissance, the exclusion of the real, these attempts at identification are doomed to fail. Because all identifications are accessible only through the symbolic order, they are themselves incomplete. They can not contain the real, or jouissance, because it has been excluded. Identifications gained in this way will only prove inadequate, creating a subjectivity that is at its core always desiring. Thus, the Lacanian subject is marked not only by what it lacks, but by the desire to suture this lack. Identifications are the process through which this desire searches for the thing that will make the subject whole again, only to fail, giving rise to a new desire. The symbolic order provides identifications for this desire, substitutions and sublimations, processes, behaviours, commodities, that act as objects of desire, (what he called objet petit a) promising to fill the emptiness at the centre of human life, but they are always already impossible: “That’s not it is the very cry by which the jouissance obtained is distinguished from the jouissance expected.” This process is central to the creation of subjectivity in a hegemonic capitalist system.

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43 Ibid. pp. 29-35.
It is because the Lacanian theory of subjectivity stresses the importance of the social that it is so significant for this thesis. It remains the case however, that it is an abstract theorisation of individual ontology, unless it is actively connected to the specific historical context which forms the symbolic order at any point in time.

Lacan made this clear himself when he said that

Psychology is neither a Weltanschauung, nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to this signifying dependence.\textsuperscript{46}

The relationship between the individual and their ‘signifying dependence’ (the symbolic order, or system of language within which they exist), and the implications for collective politics, is an issue that Laclau and Mouffe tried to address in their work on ‘post-marxism’ through an engagement with Gramsci.\textsuperscript{47} Debate continues about their success or otherwise in this venture,\textsuperscript{48} and it is not for this thesis to engage in those debates, but it does take their lead by referring directly to Gramsci whose theory of hegemony provides a possibility for the mediation of a potentially deterministic materialism.

Gramsci: hegemony, philosophy and human nature

The tendency to suggest that people, as individuals, are determined in not only their social position but in their sense of themselves, by the structures into which they are born, is a major point of contention in many structuralist or materialist theories.\(^4^9\) It is possible to ameliorate this tendency within historical materialism, without abandoning it completely, through an engagement with the work of Antonio Gramsci. While it is difficult and dangerous to isolate particular Gramscian concepts out from the whole body of work, especially as it is developed in the *Prison Notebooks*,\(^5^0\), this section does so briefly for analytical purposes, but then attempts to return these concepts to their place in the complexity of Gramsci’s corpus. In both the method and the concepts, it is possible to make strong connections between Gramscian theory and psychoanalytic theory, especially given Gramsci’s concern with the nature and problematic of consciousness, providing a nuanced and complex framework for the analysis of particular historical phenomena.\(^5^1\). This is not to suggest that

\(^{4^9}\) This is not, of course, true of all Marxist, or historical materialist approaches to history, given that many are well aware of Marx’s own thoughts on the primacy of individual autonomy and the underlying principle of the Marxist project which is the *increased* liberty and freedom of the individual. This comment is directed most specifically at those kinds of histories which study the structures of class organization as though they are the only prisms through which working people, or their ‘oppressors’ can be understood.

\(^{5^0}\) The majority of references to Gramsci in this thesis are from the *Prison Notebooks*, if only because they came at the end of Gramsci’s life and could be argued to represent a ‘maturity’ of sorts in his thinking, and because they develop his concepts in connection with each other, whereas anthologies and collections tend to group together, and thus take out of context (or leave out entirely) small notes that may seem irrelevant yet serve very particular purposes. Where possible, references are to the critical editions edited by Joseph Buttigieg because this represents the least mediated, yet critical, version of the notebooks available to English speaking readers, and also where possible, reference is made to the original notebook and note number from the *Quaderni del carcere*, edited by Valentino Gerratana, notated as Q for notebook and § for note number.

Gramsci was a closet psychologist,\(^{52}\) but when he argues that the relationship between the individual and the social can not be understood purely within the realm of economism, he opens the door to an analysis of the particular, of language, of the construction of desire and exclusion, of subjectivity and the possibility of radical agency. This section deals first with some ‘methodological criteria’ arguing that there is much in Gramsci’s very method that can help to make the link between structures and subjects, and then moves on to look at particular concepts and their relation to the theory of hegemony.

‘Methodological Criteria’: from the particular to the general

Much has been made of the alleged ‘fragmentary’ nature of the *Prison Notebooks*,\(^{53}\) and of the tendency of many scholars to bemoan this fact, or to assume it is a negative.\(^{54}\) Yet Gramsci’s choice of form for his prison writings was deliberate and purposeful, designed to avoid the dogmatism and idealism of the meta-narrative of which he was so wary.\(^{54}\) The style of the notebooks allows him to avoid making over-arching, grand-thematic types of analyses, and “enables him to attend to ‘small things’”\(^{55}\), so that the concepts themselves are never complete or

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completed; they are always in a fluid, increasingly complex relation to other
generalisations or concepts; they always point to different synthetic combinations,
but without ever settling into a final definitive synthesis; and they always call for a
return to the particular details, the fragments which retain their historical
specificity even as they induce new and more complex concepts that are linked to
one another in an increasingly dense and ever more extensive shifting network of
relations.56

Rather than imposing a pre-determined theory of meaning upon human action,
Gramsci seeks to let action speak for itself, making connections that are often
overlooked, paying attention to the seemingly irrelevant, the unimportant, and the
ephemeral. In this sense, meaning remains unstable, decentred, focussed on the
particular, in the same way that psychoanalytic theory does.

The notion of particularity has perhaps become synonymous with the politics of
post-marxism where it is accused of diffusing the possibility of collective anti-
system action.57 In a Gramscian sense, however, the idea of the particular relates
more to a research imperative, which is the importance of not discounting the
seemingly non-rational in human society. The non-rational, and the particular, are
like the accidental or occasional that emerge in psychoanalytic practice:
“everything is useful, although such ‘accidental’ or ‘occasional’ material does not

57 Geras. "Post-Marxism?" ; Elliott. Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition. ; Morton. "A
Double Reading of Gramsci".
in and of itself provide an explanation.” What appears non-rational to the analyst or researcher is significant in its very existence and can therefore not be discounted, and this is true of Gramsci’s approach to the study of human society:

At the same time as he poses general questions about philosophy, history and politics, he uses small pieces of information to lead to some profound and original approaches to social and historical analysis and, in contemporary terms, to go beyond the box of accepted political thinking, to make new connections. The pieces, some ‘larger’ than others, that do not fit pre-conceived schema are treated as seriously or even more seriously than those that do.

This movement from the particular to the general suggests that even rationality is itself a historical construct, specific to time and place. The emphasis on the particular is central to Gramsci’s concern to take seriously the way that people lived in the past, the way they expressed themselves, how they understood, and continue to understand, their world. It is in this way that Gramsci understood ‘culture’, as the expression of the particular, the importance of the everyday. It was only in this understanding of the particular that the general of society, of history, of human behaviour, could be understood and related to a program for change.

This methodology is particularly important for historical analysis. Gramsci’s concern with the particular is grounded in his historicity – his concern for understanding the specific historical context of human behaviour in time and place. There can be no general laws of history that are absolutely determining; he was highly critical of “an erroneous interpretation of historical materialism that is

59 See also Buttigieg. "Gramsci's Method" and Spanos. "Cuvier's Little Bone".
made into a dogma and its quest is identified with the quest for an ultimate or single cause etc.” Instead, he suggested we look to “The history of this problem in the development of culture” arguing that “the problem of ultimate causes is, in fact, dispelled by dialectics”. In historical analysis, this can be a dialectic between the particular and the general, the totality of lived experience which can be understood only through the patient piecing together of detail and the discovery of the relationships between details. It also encompasses the notion of ‘becoming’ - that current society (and attendant social practices) contain the traces of all past history, so that human history, human society, even human nature, is never finished, it is always in a state of ‘becoming’. Thus, it is impossible to develop a theory or a practice of hegemony that does not take into account the specific, the particular, located firmly in time and place. Gramsci described it thus: “the experience of historical materialism is history itself, the study of particular facts, ‘philology’… ‘Philology’ is the methodological expression of the importance of particular facts understood as definite and specific ‘individualities’”. It is not that all meaning resides in the particular, in the ‘individualities’ but rather that meaning starts here, and is explored through the relationship between the particular, the individual, to the general, and not the other way around.

This concern with the particular then, informs Gramsci’s choice of his material of analysis. David Ruccio suggests that the Prison Notebooks overlook the issue of

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62 Ibid.
64 Q7 §6, quoted in Buttigieg. "Introduction” p. 59.
political economy as it is explored in traditional Marxist texts\textsuperscript{65}, and that Gramsci’s, and our own on-going, work is incomplete in this regard. I would argue two things in response to this: firstly that, as Ruccio acknowledges, this is a purposive ‘overlooking’ on Gramsci’s part, concerned as he was in the Notebooks with issues of culture, politics and intellectuals.\textsuperscript{66} This is because he was concerned to avoid the economism and determinism of those traditional Marxist texts with which he was familiar, and of which he was so critical.\textsuperscript{67} Secondly, however, I would argue that Gramsci’s form of historical materialism does not privilege ‘political economy’ over categories such as culture, politics and intellectuals because he sees them as indelibly connected – they are not separate spheres of analysis but form the ‘complex network of relations’ that constitute and are constituted by human lived experience. Political economy is not that something that stands separate, as a distinct theory of the world which can be used to explain human action. To do so would be to work from the general back to the particular, to run the risk of imposing pre-determined categories of analysis on the multiplicity and indeterminacy of human behaviour.

Nevertheless, there is a strong thematic which runs throughout all of Gramsci’s notes and this is the continued concern with the ‘philosophy of praxis’. Nothing Gramsci analysed was done so without the intention of understanding the role it played in historical and existing social relations, and how it contributed or not to the project of social change and the cessation of repression. It is in this vein that

\textsuperscript{65} Ruccio. "Unfinished Business: Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks".
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. p5.
\textsuperscript{67} Morton. "A Double Reading of Gramsci". pp. 447-448.
Gramsci developed the concept or theory of hegemony. This is not a theory that was developed explicitly but is embedded in his writings on common sense and civil society. It is to these concepts that we now turn.

**Hegemony: leadership or domination?**

The term hegemony has recently come to be synonymous with the idea of the domination of one group over another, especially in the field of international relations. It is also most frequently linked to Gramsci’s work on the political relations emerging out of the revolutionary ferment of early twentieth century Europe. Yet these are not the only contexts in which Gramsci deployed the term, and more often than not it is now used in ways that are far removed from the original complexity with which Gramsci developed the concept. While it is true that there is no one place in which Gramsci defined and developed the term, nor is there one articulation of a ‘theory of hegemony’ as a coherent whole, it is the case that the concept informs most of Gramsci’s wide-ranging philosophical, political and cultural prison writings. Early in the notebooks he gives a clear indication of how he understands hegemony operating:

> The politico-historical criterion on which our own inquiries must be grounded is this: that a class is dominant in two ways, namely it is

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leading and dominant. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) lead even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant but it also continues to lead.\(^{70}\)

This emphasis on leadership stems from the term’s original meaning of which Gramsci was clearly aware.\(^{71}\) Fontana suggests that the key to understanding Gramsci’s conception of hegemony lies in the use of the Ancient Greek ‘hēgemoniā’ (or ‘egemonia’ in Italian) meaning leadership\(^{72}\), as different and distinct from domination.\(^{73}\) This does not mean that Gramsci used one definition of the term consistently; in fact he appears to use it in several different ways and on several different levels which sometimes appear to contradict each other.\(^{74}\)

Given this, it is an almost pointless task to attempt to unravel this complexity and come up with one categorical definition. However, for the purposes of this thesis a particular conception of hegemony is necessary if we wish to more deeply understand the connection between the individual and society (between the particular and the general) and if we want to argue that this relationship is a complex process. In this sense, a conception of hegemony that provides a framework of analysis that does not depend on deterministic categories, especially when it comes to the problematic of consciousness and subjectivity, is essential.


\(^{72}\) It should be noted that most dictionaries do still use ‘leadership’ as the definition of hegemony, while others use dominance, or influence, especially of one state over another. Regardless, all dictionary entries consulted here refer the root of the word back to the Greek hegemonia, meaning leadership. Dictionaries consulted: Macquarie Concise Dictionary, the Oxford English Dictionary and the Compact Oxford English Dictionary Online, which interestingly defines hegemony simply as dominance.


Gramsci’s theory of hegemony makes this possible when we conceive of it as a process, and based in civil society.

*Hegemony as process*

The idea that the theory of hegemony is process-oriented is implicit in the dialectic approach which pervades the *Prison Notebooks* in both its method and content, exemplified by the previously discussed concern with the nature of the relationship between the particular and the general. The exact nature of Gramsci’s dialectical method is a matter of debate; however it is most evident in his insistence on understanding the relationships between objects of analysis to critique the basis of knowledge. The notion of hegemony as a process is also implicit in his rejection of deterministic economism; if lived experience is not simply determined by the categories of social analysis as imposed by abstract and idealist theorising, then the theory of hegemony necessarily implies a conception of ‘reality’ constructed through multiplicity and indeterminacy.

There are two ways to understand the idea of hegemony as process: one is in the elaboration of a theory of hegemony and the other is in the elaboration of the practice of hegemony. Of course, Gramsci would not, and did not, separate the two, but many writers since Gramsci have been keen to do so, especially in an attempt to clarify the distinction between domination and leadership. If we agree, however, that hegemony does refer to leadership, then thinking of it ‘as a process’

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75 For an extensive analysis of the dialectic in Gramsci see Finocchiaro, Maurice A. *Gramsci and the history of dialectical thought*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1988.
is immediate. A useful way of understanding this is in a ‘Tripartite Model of Hegemony’, elaborated by Richard Howson. This model clearly differentiates between ‘types’ of hegemony, that is, detached, dominative and aspirational. Detached and dominative hegemonies operate around crisis and are always regressive, involving elitism and disconnection, or coercion and inequality. Aspirational hegemony however is a progressive force, based in leadership, operating around consensus and producing unstable equilibria. It does not close down the system around privileged ‘nodal points’ or ‘hegemonic principles’ but encourages openness and the expression of interests. This involves a continual process of conversation, negotiation and connection between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘the mass’, the imperative being organic and expanding social change. This is hegemony as ethico-political leadership and in many ways it is the only ‘real’ hegemony as Gramsci described it.

This is because, for Gramsci, the practice of aspirational hegemony is nothing other than the waging of a war of position. If Gramsci’s main thematic concern was an understanding of the philosophy of praxis, then the conception of hegemony developed in the Prison Notebooks stems from his consideration of the failures of revolutionary Marxism. He saw clearly that a frontal assault on the state bought only disaster, in fact it served only to reinforce and strengthen the

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77 Ibid. pp. 9-33.
79 See Figure 2.1 on page 27, Ibid.
80 Ibid. p. 23.
81 Ibid. p. 31.
82 Ibid. p. 129.
repressive apparatus. The war of position, in contrast to the frontal assault or ‘war of manoeuvre’, is “the whole organisational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the rear of the army in the field”. A war of position, must be carefully considered, carefully planned. It is “concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness”. And, as Howson argues, it is never really complete. If a war of position leads to a situation of ethico-political hegemony, then the maintenance of this hegemony is an on-going process, an ‘organic becoming’. If aspirational hegemony, or ethico-political leadership, occurs through consensus, then this is a consensus won in the realm of ideas as much as through material practice. In this sense then, hegemony can not be separated from civil society.

**Hegemony in civil society**

Like all Gramscian concepts, ‘civil society’ and its relationship to a theory and practice of hegemony is a contested notion. In many cases, the focus on the relationship between civil society and power at a formal state level has resulted in an abstraction of the concept out from the theory of hegemony as a whole. In the worst case, the tendency to theorise civil society as a separate sphere from the

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83 This idea forms the basis of most of the analyses of Gramsci’s political thought and is expressed particularly well by Gramsci himself in Gramsci. *Prison Notebooks Volume I* pp217-220. Q1 §133,134. See also Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* pp. 229-246.


87 For a summary of these debates as well as an excellent exposition of the concept itself, see Buttigieg, "Gramsci on Civil Society". See also Bobbio, Norberto. "Gramsci and the conception of civil society" Chantal Mouffe (Ed.). *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul: 21-47. 1979.
state results in the valorisation of neo-liberal conceptions of freedom. In Gramsci’s notion of the ‘integral state’ however, civil society does not sit separately from political society, but is rather an essential component of the making of power, and thus, the challenging of that power – the institution of a new, alternative ‘power’. If hegemony is the result of ethico-political leadership, then civil society is the site of that hegemony. Gramsci’s concern then is to expand the terrain of civil society, to “develop a revolutionary strategy (a ‘war of position’) that would be employed precisely in the arena of civil society, with the aim of disabling the coercive apparatus of the state, gaining access to political power, and creating the conditions that would give rise to a consensual society wherein no individual or group is reduced to a subaltern status”.

The major innovation that Gramsci makes to our understanding of civil society, which make it so important for a theory of hegemony, is the way in which he reconfigures the concept of the ‘superstructural’. Whereas Marx posited a base/structure conception, with civil society being the ‘superstructural’ site of historical development (but ultimately ‘determined’ by the base), Gramsci extends the distinction to argue that civil society is more than just superstructural, but is the essential terrain of historical development. Instead of justifying ideologies emerging from the base into the realm of civil society, for Gramsci the ‘ideas’ are

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88 Buttigieg. "Gramsci on Civil Society". pp. 4-6
contemporaneous, emerging in civil society, so that man acts on structures rather than structures acting deterministically on man. Bobbio argues that “it is the active subject who recognises and pursues the end, and who operates within the superstructural phase using the structure itself as an instrument. Therefore the structure is no longer the subordinating moment of history, but it becomes the subordinate one.”\textsuperscript{92} In Gramsci’s words: “Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to himself and make him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the ‘cathartic’ moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting point for all the philosophy of praxis.”\textsuperscript{93} This is the practice of hegemony, a hegemony that occurs in the realm of ideas, in the “minds of men.”\textsuperscript{94} Thus, man is an active subject, and the structures of human life do not exist separately from the thinking of them, and so the question of consciousness, the nature of human subjectivity, is essential to understanding society as it is, and what it can become.

\textit{Hegemony and common sense}

If hegemony is constituted in civil society, and if civil society is superstructural, than the means of civil society is language. Peter Ives’s recent work on language and hegemony has shown the complexity of Gramsci’s thought on the topic of language, on linguistics, on its relation to social practices and to the creation of a

\textsuperscript{92} Bobbio. "Gramsci and the conception of civil society" p. 34.
\textsuperscript{93} Gramsci. \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks} p.367. Q10I §61
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}
national-popular ‘sentiment’. This section can not be a comprehensive analysis of Gramsci’s varied approaches to the ‘questione della lingua’ but it does seek to make particular connections between language and hegemony, linking language back through civil society to the psychoanalytic notion of the symbolic order and its role in the construction of subjectivity.

In a way, Gramsci makes this link himself:

We have established that philosophy is a conception of the world, and that philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the ‘individual’ elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular ‘mentality’ and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be ‘historically true’ to the extent that they become concretely – i.e. historically and socially – universal. Given this, the question of language in general and of languages in the technical sense must be put in the forefront of our enquiry.

Three themes emerge from this paragraph. Firstly, that seemingly incoherent and non-rational conceptions of the world are not to be dismissed in the analysis of society and history. Secondly that these conceptions of the world, including the nature of self-identity, are constructed and contested on the terrain of civil society, through language, discourse, the symbolic order. And thirdly, that this is the essence of the hegemonic process – the struggle over meaning, over conceptions of the world, over what is normal, acceptable, truthful, ‘universal’ in social relations. Of course, in an ethico-political hegemony, this ‘truth’ exists in the form

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96 Gramsci. Selections from the Prison Notebooks p348. Q10I §44. The editors of the SPN have noted that ‘language’ for Gramsci here has two meanings, lost in the English translation, which is the differentiation between language as a system of verbal signs and language as the ‘faculty to transmit messages, verbal or otherwise, by means of a common code”. Note 32, p. 348.
of unstable equilibria, where meaning is never settled, nor even universal, but firmly grounded in the specific and particular conceptions of the world. In the philosophy of praxis, where the aim is the ‘hegemony of the proletariat’ this is the process of ‘war of position’, the careful and patient articulation of a conception of the world which does not disconnect groups or individuals from power, where interests can be expressed and commonalities uncovered, without the imposition of one corporate interest over all.

In historical ‘reality’, language does not always operate in this way. Gramsci’s ideas about the power of language and its role in hegemony are complex, reflecting the complex way it operates concretely. On one hand, there is no possibility of an ethico-political hegemony without a common language that serves to unify the particular and the incoherent. Yet the creation of a ‘standard’ language is problematic for the expansion of civil society because it can so easily be used to exclude – to create elitisms and subalternities. In his writing about language, “Gramsci is formulating a distinction between those normative grammars that truly express or succeed in creating a ‘national popular collective will’ – those that create a language in which everyone can produce meaning – and those grammars that do not succeed and instead require imposition and enforcement.”

This issue of language is bound up with Gramsci’s thinking about the nature of philosophy and its relation to what he called ‘common sense’, and the problem of how people made sense of themselves, and their place in the world. In this sense

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97 Ives. Gramsci’s Politics of Language. p. 49.
then, there is a ‘subjective’ element to the theory of hegemony which often gets overlooked, but with which Gramsci was intensely concerned. Gramsci saw clearly the potential for capitalism to reach right into the heart of the human self, and his emphasis on the importance of understanding hegemony through civil society is because he recognised the implications of hegemony for personal, social and political life.

In his note on the “Problem of Collective Man”, for example, Gramsci wrote that the aim of the state “is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization: of adapting the civilization and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production: hence of evolving even physically new types of humanity.”98 This was not a simple process, firstly because Gramsci saw quite clearly that people were not determined simply by the economic circumstances into which they were born, rather people were made at the intersection of many different influences on thought and action: “man cannot be conceived of except as historically determined man – i.e., man who has developed, and who lives, in certain conditions, in a particular social complex or totality of social relations”99 and that this social totality consists of the variety of influences and associations which are sometimes contradictory100 but which all contribute to the formulation of a particular conception of the world.101

Secondly he argued that people were still free to choose their way of being in the world and that this complicated the matter further, that is “the will and initiative of men themselves can not be left out of account.” In the same way that Marx argued that men made themselves but not in circumstances of their own choosing, so Gramsci was aware of the tension between structures and human agency. But for Gramsci, the situation is more complex because of the importance he gave to the dialectic in hegemony. While it may be the case that a particular hegemony may require a particular kind of person, it is also true that people themselves shape hegemony: “Every man, in as much as he is active, i.e. living, contributes to modify the social environment in which he develops (to modifying certain of its characteristics or to preserving others); in other words, he tends to establish “norms”, rules of living and of behaviour” and in so doing “reacts upon the State and the party, compelling them to reorganize continually and confronting them with new and original problems to solve”.

In some notes on “The Study of Philosophy”, Gramsci differentiates however, between ways of thinking and being which he classifies as common sense as opposed to philosophy. If common sense is the world view which a person takes uncritically from their environment, philosophy is the ability to be self-reflective, self-critical:

\[\text{is it better to think, without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way?...to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by some external environment, i.e., by the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the}\]

\[\text{Ibid, p. 244. Q15 §10.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, p. 265. Q14 §13.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, p. 267. Q17 §51.}\]
moment of his entry into the conscious world…or…is it better to work out consciously and critically one’s own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one’s own brain, choose one’s sphere of activity, be one’s own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one’s personality? 105

Gramsci shows here an understanding of the complex forces that go into the making of human subjectivity. More than this, he recognises that subjectivity, consciousness, is key to action. Through questioning the range of possible identifications presented to individuals from the outside, Gramsci sees here the potentials for the questioning of normativity, and for a radical re-energising of the human self. The individual must start from this level of self-knowledge, self-awareness, and move outwards in ways that challenge neat categorisations. In a detached or dominative hegemonic situation, challenges to meaning are always closed down – transformed or eradicated. Conceptions of the world are restricted and limited by the grammar of the dominant group, creating exclusion and subalternity. For this reason, Gramsci was intensely interested in groups that were considered problematic for the dominant, or mainstream, society, and this emphasis on collective alternative subjectivity formed the basis of his work on subalternity.

It was often the case that subaltern ‘rebellions’ were articulated through a discourse of religion or populism, but in their particular historical contexts they may have had strong socio-political implications that were deliberately ignored or misrepresented. Thus the radical potentials of subalternity are transformed,

eradicated, sanitised “by giving explanations for the individual outbursts of this discontent that were restrictive, particularist, folklorist, pathological, etc.” This is why “every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should therefore be of incalculable value for the integral historian”.

In psychoanalytic terms this act of sanitisation is the act of repression into the collective dynamic unconscious, the exclusion of the real. The dominant symbolic order sets the very parameters of what is normal, of what can be spoken, and when groups or individuals behave in ways that can not be admitted into this order, they are actively excluded. Thus, the ‘norms’ of social relations are set against what is excluded, what is lacking, and this informs the very nature of subjectivity within that order. Attempts at identification, or ‘identity’ that conform to the symbolic order, that use its symbols of signification, will themselves always be lacking. In subalternity then, we can find the real. It this knowledge of the radical potential inherent in subaltern subjectivity that makes it so dangerous to a dominative hegemony, which will seek to close it down, either discursively or through force.

Conclusion

The point of this chapter has been to explore ways of thinking about the self, about the nature and construction of subjectivity, that transcend the usual boundaries of both pure psychoanalytic and social/political theory. That is, it has

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107 Ibid. Q25, §2.
argued that there is nothing either biologically essential or economically deterministic about the way in which people come to develop a sense of themselves in the world, but rather that subjectivity is formed from both within and without, at the intersection of both psychological and social processes. Neither psychological nor social processes themselves exist independently of the ‘thinking’ of them: they exist only in the minds and words of people themselves and are bounded by the limits of language and established meanings. This is the case with notions of subjectivity itself – it is neither a natural given nor structurally made but rather is a process occurring at the intersection of nature and structure, mediated by the language of the society within which nature and structure are understood.

In *Capital*, Marx argues that the ‘elementary form’ of capitalism appears to be the individual commodity.\(^{108}\) His attempt to explain this appearance is in many ways also the concern of this chapter (and of this thesis): how does the commodity form of capitalism come to prevail? What are the processes by which it is fetishised? Perhaps on a tangent from Marx, however, this chapter implicitly argued that the commodity form is an appearance to the extent that it conceals that the elementary form of capitalism is the individual person – the desiring subject – who is made by and makes themselves within the structural and superstructural forces that fetishise not just the commodity but the processes surrounding its production and reproduction, and the further fetishisation of the

processes that make this production not just possible but normal. The creation of a particular kind of human person is essential to this process.

It would be simplistic to say that Marx saw these processes as happening first in the realm of the structural, ‘backed up’ by ‘ideology’, but it may be the case that in the effort to expunge ‘idealism’ from his philosophy Marx may have opened the way to a simplified reading of the importance of the ‘idea’. Structures themselves, as already argued, do not occur independently of the thinking of them: rather they are made as a result of human thought, of human activity. In Gramsci, we see the importance, the primacy, of the realm of the idea. Capitalism and its commodity form, the social relations that this entails, can not exist by structure alone but must find a hold in the ‘hearts and minds’ of all the people who make it possible, from the State to workers themselves. This is not possible without the creation of a particular kind of human nature, as both Gramsci and E.P. Thompson observed: a human nature that would adapt itself to the demands of life and work under capitalism, that would repress and sublimate ‘natural drives’ and find alternative ‘incentives on which to bite’,\textsuperscript{109} a human nature that would submit to the nightmare of production in exchange for the dream of consumption.\textsuperscript{110} This is a psychological transformation, which can not be wrought at the level of the structural but must be evoked at the level of the individual itself. Knowing this, Gramsci and many other Marxist historians are rightfully wary of the rhetoric of the individual, but if we do not seek to understand the way in which capitalism


acts on the individual, on the ‘subject’, we can not hope to account for the complexities of human behaviour, or for the strength of capitalist hegemony.

Freud demonstrates that the central process in the formation of subjectivity is the repression and sublimation of the ‘natural’ into the newly fashioned categories of the civilised and that the myriad of forces bringing about this repression (internal and external, family and society, psychology and materiality) make for a subjectivity which is not determined but overdetermined. Lacan takes this idea further and shows that the subject in society is set within and by the discursive limits of the symbolic order and that what this symbolic order excludes from the self, and thus from society, (Freud’s drives which have for Lacan become jouissance) constitutes the real - the lingering absence at the heart of the self which desire attempts to fill. Thus, a desiring subject becomes the elementary form of the capitalist symbolic order and subjectivity becomes the process of satisfying an insatiable desire through objects and identifications. In a Gramscian theory of hegemony, the symbolic order, civil society, is of primary importance in the production and reproduction of the complex of social relations. People are not determined by the structures within which they find themselves, but make themselves through civil society, in relation to those structures. This making of the self is the key to hegemony because the experience of hegemony is in itself subjective – some may chose to submit to the nightmare, to buy the dream, others may choose alternative ways of thinking, acting and being. For Gramsci, some of these alternatives are permitted by the symbolic order because they do not challenge the hegemonic principles of that order. But some alternatives must be
excluded completely, and in this sense the subaltern is the real, it is what can not be permitted to exist, what must be excluded from politics, from discourse, yet it must remain for the symbolic order to define itself against. Hegemony is this process of exclusion, the sublimation of desire into civilised forms, the repression of jouissance into the real, the pressure of the real against the symbolic, the struggle over meaning, over being. It is at this point of pressure, of conflict, that larriks existed.
Chapter Three

Symbolic Sydney: imagining the civilised subject

The previous chapter set out a theoretical framework for this thesis which argued that ‘modern’ western society requires the repression of drives or jouissance, and that it is in this context that subjectivity is formed. In Lacan’s system, those aspects of the self which must be repressed represent the real. The real is created by its exclusion from and in contrast to the symbolic which is produced and reproduced, or at least imagined, through civil society. As Gramsci has shown, it is on the terrain of civil society that the battle for hegemony is fought. This chapter, then, explores the ways in which a symbolic subjectivity was imagined and expounded through the discourse of civil society of Sydney in the late nineteenth century. The chapter begins by exploring the available data that gives some idea about the sort of people living in the city, and then goes on to explore the way in which the changing nature of material life in Sydney in the late nineteenth century privileged, and promoted, a particular way of being in the world. This ‘way of being’ related primarily to the hegemonic principles of capitalism as it was evolving at the time, which relied on the establishment of a stable and disciplined work force, the normalisation of consumption and commodification, and the attendant lifestyles and values. These principles were not challenged by the organised labour movement in any meaningful way, which, despite a long history of conflict and resistance, was, by the 1880s, a largely well organised, disciplined and respectable political force. The chapter how these factors combined to imagine the ‘civilised subject’ against which larrikinism would be opposed.
There are some serious considerations to note when dealing with historical ‘reality’. The statistical/official categories through which life in Sydney was measured are inherently problematic, suffering from biases and agendas particular to the political climate of late nineteenth century Sydney, and the influence of the official government statistician.¹ Too often these numbers are used in Australian historiography with an authoritativeness which they may not deserve. Given their integral role in and their use of the language of the symbolic order itself, they did not seek to present an open and unadulterated picture of Australian life but sought actively to exclude as much as include. It is with a critical eye that we use them, recognizing official categories to be part of the system that sought to control and exclude sections of the population. It can be argued then that they are as informative in what they do not say as in what they do. Moreover, official categories do not ostensibly deal with the subjective but with the ‘objective’ and in this sense they seek to normalize particular categories of human existence and thus create the framework through which people would come to measure and understand themselves. These are the very categories of a white male capitalist society and thus can not account for those people who do not sit neatly within particular categories but inhabit the margins or exist in the slippages between categories.

This is also the case with public rhetoric concerning the nature of life in Sydney at this time. The number of column inches dedicated to debates and comments about what sort of society Sydney should be, and what sort of people its

inhabitants should be, do not indicate that Sydney was as its commentators
described, but indicate instead an absence which needed to be filled. Thus, we can
not take at face value the plethora of commentary about the nature of life in
Sydney but must consider the public sphere as inherently problematic, not simply
plagued with the usual problems of elitism and access, but as part of the very
symbolic order which sought to actively exclude certain behaviours and to
normalise others that were not disconnected from economic and structural
changes occurring at this time. It is with these caveats in mind that I seek to
recreate some idea of what this symbolic order was like, what ‘reality’ it
represented, and to extrapolate from this the implications for the formation of
subjectivity.

Population

There are some generalizations that can be made about Sydney as a city at this
time that will be seen to be significant for the debate over subjectivity. Sydney in
the late nineteenth century was in many ways much like other growing urban
centres around the world at this time, that is, it was characterised by rapid
economic and population growth with their attendant social and infrastructural
issues. Yet, in many ways, Sydney was a city of contradictions. While it was an
‘instant city’, in the sense that it had grown in area in its one hundred years to be

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larger than ancient cities such as London, Paris or New York, it was an old city in the sense that it was ‘European’ in sensibilities and haphazard in design and planning. It was contradictory in that those who governed it saw it, often from afar, only as a means to an end, a place through which the much more important colonial resources such as wool could pass to the rest of the world, while within its bounds lived more than thirty per cent of the entire colonies population involved in pursuits that had little to do with the everyday production of wool, to which they gave little thought. Despite its increasing urban sprawl it was a vastly under-developed city in terms of infrastructure such as sewerage and public transport and so it was still the case that most of the industry was located central to the city and the harbour, and that industry and housing intermingled.

The majority of the working population were found in the main in places that we know now as Millers Point (or The Rocks), the east side of Darling Harbour, areas of the Central Business District extending from Circular Quay down to the Haymarket and west across Chinatown and around Ultimo, and in the east across Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst and south to Redfern and Waterloo. In the late 1800s these areas were identified by their city ward names of Gipps (Miller’s Point), Brisbane (the western city and waterfront), Bourke and Fitzroy (Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo), Phillip (Ultimo) and Cook (the newer industrial areas of Alexandria, Redfern and Waterloo). There are several things of significance about these areas – they were close to the major waterfront,

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manufacturing, industrial and retail zones of the city, they were crowded and the housing was in very bad condition. Statistics about these areas, however, are not entirely clear. Most statistics seem to relate to the amorphous larger ward areas rather than smaller specific suburbs, and area boundaries were subject to change due to council boundary shifts and electoral subdivisions, but they are constant enough to provide some meaningful data about who lived where in Sydney.  

By 1881, there were 751,468 people living in the colony of NSW, with 110,112 living in the innermost city area and 138,119 in the joining ‘suburbs’ as covered by the boundaries of Gipps, Philip, Brisbane, Bourke, Fitzroy and Cook. Of these quarter of a million people, more than half lived in the western city districts of Gipps, Brisbane, and Phillip (Ultimo) – as Fitzgerald has shown population density depended on where the major industries were located and housing was often clustered together because large areas were still taken up by brick works, tanneries, flour and timber mills, printeries, foundries, and chemical works, along with tobacco, biscuit, boot, clothing, sugar and confectionary factories. For working class people, the imperative was still to be close to work in affordable housing, and this meant living in clusters of crowded, poorly built and badly serviced tenements, terraces and lodging houses. In 1891, the inner city’s population density was about 37 people per acre. Adjoining residential suburbs

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were much worse - Paddington now housed 44.1 people per acre, Redfern 46.9 people per acre and Darlington 61.9 people per acre. This is in comparison to the metropolitan average of 5 people per acre, given that the greater metropolitan area of Sydney constituted an area of 120 square miles, or 76,417 acres.

Electoral divisions show that there was an intense concentration of people along the waterfront, not only because this is where many of Sydney’s main industries existed, but because the vast networks of docks, warehouses, stock and produce agents and freight companies were also located here. In the late nineteenth century, Sydney was no longer some small colonial outpost but a major trading centre and a bustling international port. This positioning of Sydney as a port city was significant for the sort of people it contributed to Sydney’s population. Often unmentioned in descriptions of Sydney was the ethnic composition of the population. As debates intensified about Australia’s move towards Federation and the implications for (trade) relations with Britain, it became essential to present a picture of Sydney as more British than Britain. While it was necessary to distance the city from its convict origins, it was also necessary to present a picture of racial harmony – a city devoid of the (often racially based) political conflicts of the old world. Thus, descriptions and assessments of Sydney, particularly those designed to encourage the immigration of British entrepreneurs and skilled workers, were at the very least silent as to the ethnic composition of the city. In many ways, so are the official statistics, again under the influence of the

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9 Ibid. Table 1.1, p. 21.
government statistician, but there is enough evidence to suggest that Sydney was not exactly a bastion of white middle-classness.

By 1881, of the 110,112 people living in the city of Sydney itself, it was estimated that almost 34% were born overseas. This would be about 37,438 people. There is, however, no actual breakdown of the ethnic origins of city people. In the entire colony of NSW in this period it is recorded that 149,232 people were from England, 75,051 from Ireland, 36,821 from Scotland, 13,157 from China, 4,997 from Wales, 3,379 from the USA and 1,074 from Canada. These are at best conservative estimates that do not take into account the amorphous and transitional population resulting from Sydney’s position as the world’s sixth largest port. In the month of January 1870 alone there were 93 ships recorded arriving in Sydney – half were from Brisbane, Melbourne and Hobart but the rest are from ports as diverse as New York, San Francisco, London, Tahiti, Liverpool, Foo Chow, Maryborough, Auckland, Glasgow, New Caledonia, Mauritius and the Philippines. They are listed as whalers and sealers, cargo and passenger ships, but of most interest is their crew. Most of them have multi-ethnic crews, attesting to the practice of picking up crew members as they travelled. Many of them have boys as young as 15 working on board and crews are listed as coming from cities like Birmingham, Baltimore, New York, London, San Francisco, Dublin, Aberdeen, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, St Petersburg, Manila, Belfast and Bristol, and countries like Prussia, Finland, Singapore, Denmark, Portugal, Peru, Norway, the West Indies and Jamaica. Ships like the Ionica from Tahiti where listed as

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12 See Maddison, “The Day of the Just Reasoner”.
carrying ‘7 natives’ from Tahiti as crew, and the *Avoca* from Galle, carrying ‘11 natives’ from Singapore as crew and ‘9 natives’ as servants. Also significant is the fact that in the thirty years from 1870 to 1900 there were recorded at least 4000 deserters from Royal Navy and Royal Marine ships alone.14 These were mostly young male crew members, many of whom had been pressed into service either forcefully or through circumstance. Official records show very few of them were ever caught, and we can only imagine the ideas and culture they bought with them. Along with the sailors who came on shore after long stretches at sea, with money and energy to burn, they are, in many ways, the last vestiges of Rediker and Linebaugh’s motley crew stretching into the Pacific.

Despite efforts to encourage migration that would foster the agricultural industries of the interior, the government statistician made it clear that the majority of British migrants preferred to stay in the city, largely because they had come from cities in their countries of origin and bought with them skills suitable for city, not bush, work. We can suppose then, that it is possible that considerably more than the suggested 34% of people in the city were born overseas. In fact, other historians have shown that a large percentage of Irish migrants, especially women, remained in Sydney because of their employment as domestic servants.15 If even half the Irish population remained in Sydney then that would be the entire estimated urban migrant population. Given the desire of the government

bureaucracy to portray Sydney as a flourishing centre of civilisation, free of the
class divisions and ghetto-isation of the old country, it is not surprising that they
remain deliberately silent, even misleading, on the exact ethnic composition of
Sydney.

It is also significant to note the age and gender balance of this population. In
1881, there were 301,630 males and females under the age of 15, and a further
261,348 under the age of 35, out of a total NSW population of around 750,000.\textsuperscript{16}
This represents a colony with over 75\% of its population under 35. There are no
breakdowns for ages by suburbs, however it is fair to assume that this percentage
was repeated in the city, with perhaps even more young people residing there.
Apart from those under 15, the biggest age group was males aged 20-25, with 40,
056 in this group alone. If there were 110,112 men and women in the inner city
of Sydney in 1881, and we assume the age distributions are at roughly the same
ratio as per the wider colony, it likely that 35\% of the city population was aged
between 15 and 35, or a possible 38,539 young men and women. In the 15-25 age
group, there were 150,271 men and women colony wide, which is 20.25\% of the
total population. This would mean at least 22,297 people in this age group in the
inner city itself. If 75\% of the colonies population was under 35, there is no real
reason to assume that this ratio was not at least repeated in the city itself, given the
tendency of younger people, especially new arrivals, to stay close to the urban
centres for employment purposes. From the uncertain data available, we can
assume that there were around 180,000 people under the age of 35 in the greater

\textsuperscript{16} Coghlan. \textit{The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales}. 1887, p. 147.
metropolitan area of Sydney. The Government statistician Coghlan, thought that this made for a “perfect community”\textsuperscript{17} in terms of the required man power for colonial growth. Of note in this area is the categorisation of age itself. Statistics relate primarily to large groupings, usually starting from 15, indicating that it is at this age that ‘childhood’ ends. Usually age groupings are in five-year lots (e.g. 20-25, 25-30) etc, and there is a general tendency to create larger groups with an age range of 15-35. This indicates a lack of differentiation between those ages, which could be taken as an indication that adulthood is considered to start at 15, and that a 15 year old is not viewed significantly differently to a 35 year old.

In general, the proportion of males to females overall in the colony continued to slightly favour the male.\textsuperscript{18} The ratio for the colony remained fairly consistent throughout the seventies and eighties with the population sitting around 54 percent male and 46 per cent female.\textsuperscript{19} The relative inequality in the male/female population can be largely attributed to the arrival of male immigrants, as the ‘native’ new-born statistics show males and females born in the colony as being almost equal (for example, 11, 791 new male children compared to 11, 507 female children born in 1875).\textsuperscript{20} However, Coghlan made the point that the disparity in gender was more pronounced in the country areas, while it was a less obvious distinction in the city. In 1881 there were 56, 793 men and 49, 785 women in the inner city, which compared interestingly with 67, 629 men and 70, 490 women in the suburbs, suggesting that some suburbs were more likely to be the preserve of

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 145.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} NSW. New South Wales Statistical Register. 1875, p. 13.
married women who did not work outside the home. The general gender imbalance, Coghlan suggested, was the result of “the large influx of males in the prime of life, both from the neighbouring colonies and the British islands.” In summary then, we have a young, crowded and multi-ethnic population, most of whom have arrived in Sydney through either a history of enforced transportation, or looking to escape the hardships of their places of origin. While some other parts of Australia may have been dominated by the interests and ‘culture’ of landed gentry, or free settlement, this was not the case in Sydney, which was comprised chiefly of layers of government officialdom, merchant capital, and working people of either migrant or convict origin.

The changing nature of work

If Sydney’s was predominantly a ‘working’ population, documenting the type of work done by whom in Sydney has proven historically difficult. It has been well recorded that the census data is inadequate for many purposes relating to urban occupations, not the least of which is in trying to cross-match occupation type with age and location. Serious deficiencies are caused by a lack of collation consistency, so that categories shift from one census to the next. Particularly misleading is the categorisation of occupation in the 1891 census which puts occupation into ‘industry’ groupings such as Professional, Semi-professional, Commercial 1 and 2 and Industrial. This has the effect of not only hiding certain job types within larger categories, thereby giving the impression that everyone’s

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22 Ibid. p. 145.
work was equal, but of diffusing any clear class structure based on occupation type, in other words creating the idea that ‘we are all workers’.\textsuperscript{24} It is possible, however, to gather some information about what sort of industries are located in Sydney and how many people they employed, and from this to give some sense of what work was like and how it impacted on social and personal life.

Because the public transport system was still relatively undeveloped in Sydney (and expensive where it was in the outlying areas), workers still needed to live within walking distance of their work.\textsuperscript{25} Hence it is safe to assume that the people who lived in the areas mentioned above worked in them as well. Many of the cities industries were still centrally located, and it was within these industries that most city dwellers worked. While there are not exact breakdowns of industries per suburb, there is a clear indication that most of the major manufacturing in NSW was carried out in Sydney. As Coghlan says, “The facilities for the establishment of large industries in and around Sydney are considerable – a commanding position as regards communication with the outside world, propinquity to the coal fields, easy communication with the chief seats of raw production in the colony, density of the population and abundant water supply – these have tended to centre in the metropolitan district all the chief industries.”\textsuperscript{26}

According to Coghlan then, at the beginning of the period under study (1875) there were 810 ‘manufactories’ established in the metropolitan area of Sydney.

\textsuperscript{24} See in particular the categorisation as tabulated in \textit{Ibid.} p. 112.
\textsuperscript{26} Coghlan. \textit{The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales.} 1895, p. 738.
This meant industries employing more than 5 people. These 810 establishments employed 10,488 men and 3,070 women. In 1881 this had grown to 995 establishments employing 15,671 men and 2,222 women – a total of 18,893, which represents 17% of the available population working in industries such as food and drink preparation, clothing and textiles, building materials, metal works, furniture, printing, tobacco and laundries. The majority of these industries may still have been small, with many operating on a workshop scale, but it is also the case that during this period some of Sydney’s major employers were born, and that they quickly expanded to employ hundreds of people at the same time and in the one place.

While the nature and scale of industry may not have undergone rapid or revolutionary transformation in this period, there were significant technological and social changes that impacted the structure and make-up of the work force. The greatest increase of workers over the next ten years was in the ‘unskilled’ section. By 1891 unskilled or semi-skilled labour accounted for 27% of the total workforce, while skilled labour accounted for 29% (34,389 skilled, 12,247 semi-skilled and 19,937 unskilled). 10.8% of the workforce was employed in clerical pursuits (12,913 men) while 21.6% were listed as Commercial 2 and this accounted for 25,765 men. Within these categories are hidden people employed in retail including shop assistants, storemen, errand boys etc, and in 1891 this was

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27 All figures from *Ibid*. 1887, Table 283 – Number of Works and Hands Employed in Each Year 1877-1886, p. 474.
as many as 3250 employed in the big stores alone, increasing to 7,000 shop assistants in 1907. This does not appear to include the young people employed as seamstresses, tailors and associated ‘behind the scenes’ workers in retail who were kept largely separate from shop floor staff. Outside of manufacturing, there were 16,000 employed in building and construction, and 13,000 employed in transport, with 2,000 seamen and 1,600 wharf labourers.

Fry and Fitzgerald both suggest that there were about 70,000 people employed in these skilled, semi and unskilled fields. I would suggest that these 70,000 constitute the majority of the 112,000 living in the inner city and there may also have been a section of the 25,765 people employed in the ‘Commercial 2’ category living in the city. The 22,993 people employed in Professional, Semi-professional, Commercial 1 and Clerical almost certainly lived in outer, probably eastern suburbs, and the large number of people not counted as workers in the suburbs could safely be considered married women and children, as the nature of women’s work, in laundries, small factories and stores or as outworkers, meant that it was equally essential that they were close to their employment.

If industry was still small scale, and labour management was still “simple…and largely ad hoc and informal”, controlled by personal relations between foremen or

31 Ibid. p7.
32 Fry. The Condition of the Urban Wage Earning Class. p. 66.
33 Ibid.
34 Fitzgerald. Rising Damp, Sydney 1870-1890. p. 41.
36 Fitzgerald. "Sydney Women and the Workforce 1870-90"
bosses and employees\textsuperscript{37}, it was also marked by increasing technology, some moves towards centralization into small factories and the increasing division of labour.\textsuperscript{38} These moves were exacerbated by the depression of the 1890s and the consequent ‘rationalisation’ of small industries, which meant the move to value-add to exports and the beginnings of larger enterprises.\textsuperscript{39} These developments contributed to the ‘deskilling’ and casualisation of a large percent of the city’s workforce, which had a significant impact at both the objective and subjective level.

The concept of skill is a slippery one; it has been noted by others that it is as much a social construct as a real technological change.\textsuperscript{40} It is also true that work of any kind requires some kind of skill, however in the late nineteenth century in Sydney it is the case that the traditional concept of the skilled artisan, who made an item from beginning to end, and thus could identify himself as, for example, a bootmaker, was in decline. The increasing mechanization and division of labour meant that not only skill but this process of identification with work was being eroded. Many of the labour disputes in this period were to a large extent attempts to intervene in this process and to retain customary rights and traditions, as they had also been in England.\textsuperscript{41} Many public protests were also about the right to


\textsuperscript{41} Thompson. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" ; Thompson. "Time, work discipline and industrial capitalism"
work, and these were increasingly virulent in the face of cycles of depression, unemployment and seasonal work. But it was the nature of industry in Sydney especially that made casual work so central a feature, given that the port city largely turned on the fortunes of the primary producing hinterland. Employers were also able to avoid factory inspection legislation especially in the clothing industry by contracting out work into private homes, which increased the amount of women working on demand and with no regularity of employment. Fitzgerald has shown that this entrenched casualisation made for difficulty in occupational mobility and contributed to a ‘deskilling’ of the workforce.

At a structural level, casual and unskilled labour in this period were also marked by poor working conditions. The very factors that led to casualisation and deskilling were also those that meant that workplaces remained largely unregulated by the state, which to a large extent was the result of the ‘free trade’ policies of New South Wales’ political leaders. The belief in pure market forces (that is, a commitment to the development of industrial capitalism), meant that the state also refused largely to intervene in the way in which workers were employed and how they were dealt with in workplaces. This changed very late in the century partially in response to the Great Strikes with the subsequent establishment of arbitration and conciliation tribunals, but before then NSW was largely able to

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45 This is a very short summary of a long and complicated process which has been the subject of the bulk of Australian labour history from early in the twentieth century, for example, Childe, Vere Gordon. *How labour governs: a study of worker’s representation in Australia*. London. Labour. 1923; Fry. *The Condition of the Urban Wage Earning Class*. ; Gollan, Robin. *Radical and working class politics*.
avoid the regulatory mechanisms being put in place in the neighbouring, protectionist, state of Victoria. Thus, Victoria introduced Factory and Shop Inspection Acts but these were ignored in NSW until 1896 despite the damning findings of inspectors under the Census and Industrial Returns Act (1891) and Select Committees into the conditions of the working class, and the employment of children held decades earlier (1859 and 1875 respectively).\textsuperscript{46} Despite these reports, and for some time despite the Factory Acts, working conditions for Sydney’s most marginalized remained poor. Work was often performed under sweating conditions, especially for women in the garment and laundry trades, and long hours could be demanded with no notice. The main employment for women, domestic service, was disliked because of the high level of surveillance and interference with personal life, so the rate of female employment in manufacturing was relatively high\textsuperscript{47}, making negotiating over wages and conditions more difficult. Facilities for both men and women in these workplaces were crowded and unsanitary, and reformers expressed concern over the close proximity of male and female workers.\textsuperscript{48} Casual workers in manufacturing were easy come, easy go in this period, so there was little personal connection between worker and boss and they

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\textsuperscript{46} Walsh. "Factories and Factory Workers". pp. 14-16.
\textsuperscript{47} Fox. \textit{Working Australia}. pp. 66-72.
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were not usually the recipients of company loyalty and welfare schemes, these being reserved for the more ‘respectable’, ‘skilled’ and permanent employee.49

Outwork meant that families, including very young children, were enlisted to help, and children as young as 8 and 9 were regularly employed in factories. In general, work in Sydney for the ‘unskilled’ was difficult – physically exhausting and mentally unsatisfying.

**Building capitalist social relations**

The facts of working life in Sydney did not prevent the rise of an organised labour movement however, in fact, it is more likely that they actively facilitated it. It has already been noted that there were extensive protests about the right to work, protests along the line of Thompson’s moral economy which argued that the state had the responsibility to provide work to people who wanted it and should do more to offset the shifts in employment practices being brought about by new forms of market capitalism.50 These protests turned into something else late in the nineteenth century however, and a series of formal strikes by pastoral and maritime workers gave birth to the organised labour movement in Australia.51 This was a long and complicated process and was made problematic by contesting notions of what form this organisation should take and what should be its goals.

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50 See in particular Scates. *A New Australia*.
51 This is obviously a very brief description of much longer events, and there is extensive evidence to argue that working class politics was alive and well long before the 1880s, but it is still the case that the trade union movement in its current recognised form emerged particularly from the great strikes of the 1880s-1890s. See Fry. *The Condition of the Urban Wage Earning Class*.; Gollan. *Radical and working class politics*.; Fitzpatrick. *A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement*. ; Wells. *Constructing Capitalism*.; Fox. *Working Australia*.; Patmore. *Australian Labour History*.; Connell and Irving. *Class Structure in Australian History*. 
Given this, it is still a movement with varying factions, philosophies and approaches, and it is simplistic to say it took one particular form over another. However, the very formation of this movement, and the formal organised structure which it took, necessarily involved the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. Just as the movement chose to participate within the structures of democracy rather than anarchy or revolution, so was it effected by, and continued to effect, changes in the nature of work which were related to the imagining of subjectivity. Both unskilled and casual work were surrounded by a discourse which sought to exclude the unskilled and casual worker from the mainstream, to make both an aberration stemming from the personalities of the workers themselves. Central to this discourse were the notions of respectability and discipline, which helped primarily to bring about a spilt between the ‘respectable’ and the ‘non-respectable’ working class.

As has been noted earlier in this thesis, Australian labour history has traditionally concerned itself with the institutions and culture of what has been called the

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52 See in particular Gollan. Radical and working class politics. pp. 110-127. Recent work suggests that it was in fact ‘disruptive’ elements that helped pave the way for political democracy long before the Eureka Stockade. See Irving, T. H. The southern tree of liberty: the democratic movement in New South Wales before 1856. Annandale. Federation Press. 2006.

‘respectable’ working class. While I do not wish to discount the importance of respectability, or self-respect, for the maintenance of personal dignity, or the achievement of real material improvement in the face of capitalist exploitation, it is the case that the issue of the division between the respectable and non-respectable elements of the working class is significant because it indicates the strength of bourgeois hegemony in this period.\(^54\) I do not mean that the respectable working class, including the union movement, was simply “embourgeoised”\(^55\) but I do mean that there existed a large element of the working class who found in respectability a way to cope with or to make sense of the impositions of capitalist life, and that they have been too often considered the ‘proper’, or only, model of working class formation.\(^56\)

The problematic of a respectable working class has, however, a longer history than this. As Engels noted of the British working class “The most repulsive thing here is the bourgeois ‘respectability’ bred into the bones of the workers. The social division of society into innumerable gradations, each recognised without question, each with its own pride but also its inborn respect for ‘betters’ and ‘superiors’ is so old and firmly established that the bourgeois still find it pretty easy to get their bait

\(^{54}\) The ability of the ‘middle class’ to present itself as the rightful builders of the nation and to create alliances in this project has been well documented in Connell and Irving. *Class Structure in Australian History.*

\(^{55}\) McCalman accuses Marxist historians of attributing this fault to what she calls the ‘labour aristocracy’ but this is different to a respectable working class as a whole, labour aristocracy traditionally meaning the highly skilled and organised artisans, to which I am not specifically referring here. See McCalman, Janet. "Respectability and Working Class Politics in Late Victorian London", *Historical Studies.* 20 (74). 1980. 108-124.

accepted.” Engels is referring here to the lingering aspects of the concept of the Great Chain of Being, which had historically divided English society into its constituent parts based on occupation and the relations between them, which firmly fixed social position. This way of describing society was still used in Australia, especially when it was in the interests of concealing more direct class conflict, but it could no longer disguise the economic gap between more distinct social groups. In Australia, in this period, the respectable working class took on a much more visible existence because it was also used as a construction against which the non-respectable citizen was juxtaposed. Thus, those members of the working class who displayed aspirations towards home-ownership, intellectual self-improvement, patterns of consumption and thrift, cleanliness, temperance and family ties became articulated as “the only working class”. While this group did exist, and they did aspire to a ‘better’ life, it is more significant that their aspiration was also used in a discursive sense by the middle class to continually set the limits of what was acceptable class behaviour, against which both themselves and the non-respectable were defined.

If hegemony is based on the dissemination of the interests and values of the ‘dominant social group’ as ‘everyone’s’ interests and values, then the notion of respectability had long been central to this process. The rhetoric of respectability had long been central to this process. The rhetoric of respectability


can be considered a hegemonic mechanism in that it specifically advocated and actively encouraged and coerced a set of behaviours and ways of thinking and being that facilitated the development of capitalist social and economic relations. However, this was a tenuous hegemony and it needed to be continually reproduced through social relations in such a way as to close down, or to disarticulate or subsume, any challenges to the building of that hegemony.

Hence, the changing nature in the structures of work, especially in relation to skill and casualisation, were used discursively to perpetuate this split along the lines of the subject. McCalman has shown that in England stability of income (along with a ready identification of self with a skill or trade) was a definer of respectability. The full implication of casual work however, was more in its significance for the ‘character building’ nature of work. If full time work, for the middle class, was an essential component of respectability, it was so “by ingraining habits of fortitude, self-control, and perseverance, and in part by systematic exhaustion.” Casual work then, by definition, created too much leisure time, not enough identification of self with work, and the subsequent impossibility of successfully repressing or sublimating the drives.

Structural forces such as the seasonality of work, the dependence on the irregular routines of shipping and the vagaries of overseas investment meant that casualisation was in many ways its own disciplining device. Labour discipline in

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60 McCalman, "Respectability and Working Class Politics".
domestic service was severe – the expectations of Sydney’s middle and upper classes were high and continued past the front gate. In most other workplaces, for casual labour, disciplining methods varied, and the lack of records in this area makes analysis difficult. We do know that many of the larger industries and stores relied on foremen or supervisors, often accused of bullying and abuse, and that these workplaces had long lists of rules and regulations covering punctuality, sobriety, theft and demeanour. Smaller firms and workplaces relied on the immediate surveillance of the owner-manager who had complete discretion to hire and fire, and this ‘simple control’ was the main form of labour discipline in the late nineteenth century. It would not be until the twentieth century, and most forcefully after World War I that Taylorism, Fordism and scientific management made their full impact on the Australian workforce, however some of Taylor’s ideas were finding currency in the late 1890s and some employers were experimenting with his ideas in relation to productivity and cost-cutting, prefacing later developments.

When the labour market favoured workers, the ‘problem’ of an unruly and undisciplined workforce became more pronounced but it is fair to say that in this period, labour discipline occurred outside the actual workplace and appeared

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63 Wright. The Management of Labour. pp. 18-19
64 Reekie. "Humanising Industry".
couched in more general terms related to the disciplining of the ‘self’. It is in this context that the primacy of work emerged. Work was the key to the ‘survival of the fittest’, it was because the middle class worked that they were successful and it was this work discipline that made them ‘good’ and ‘noble’. As Young suggests, “To the new middle class, the daily grind of earning an income took on the valorised mantle of correct behaviour, conveniently integrating necessity and honour. Making a virtue of necessity, the emerging middle-class ennobled work for its expression of duty, responsibility and right-mindedness.”67 It gave self-respect and earn respect from others. Especially for men, work was about vigour and energy, to be idle (of mind or body) was to be weak. Work both required and enabled the repression of the base instincts and passions and was the respectable way to expend human energy, as it contributed to the nation, to the economy (including your own personal economy) and to the perfectibility of the human race.68 Discipline and respectability connected to work became a closed, self-fulfilling circle, you could not have one without the other, and without either, you were not entirely human.

**Respectability and subjectivity**

By the 1880s, the alleged animalism of the many thousands of people living in the city’s now crowded and unsanitary ‘slums’ had become increasingly problematic and a source of much public concern. However, it was not so much that a young, racially diverse, working class population was considered problematic in and of

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itself but because of what it signified at the level of the subject. That is, it was not so much who the inhabitants of Sydney were, but what ‘values’ they represented that mattered. Given this, it was not just in relation to work that the concept of respectability found purchase. In many ways, in the late nineteenth century, it was a kind of shorthand, or catch-cry, for the imagined subject. Thus all facets of personal and social life were measured against the yardstick of respectability. But what exactly did respectability mean? It is almost impossible to separate respectability in particular in this period out from its longer history. It has a long enough history in Australia itself,\(^69\) which is not disconnected from the need to reformulate the image of the nation in a post-convict, post-gold and post-Eureka society. In this sense it is also connected to the extension of the franchise, which became possible largely because it was perceived that the interests of the working classes in Australia were not, at that time, so different from those of the emerging bourgeoisie.\(^70\) But respectability as a central organising idea stretches further back because of its heritage as part of a British way of thinking. In this broader sense it can even be connected to Enlightenment thinking which valorised reason, civilisation and progress, and connected these with the rationale for capitalism.

From the mid 1800s, however, ‘respectability’ and ‘discipline’ appeared as part of the most prevalent form of social thinking loosely called ‘Victorianism’, the main concepts of which can be categorised as “the gospel of work, the ‘seriousness’ of character, respectability and self-help.”\(^71\) These concepts took on a special significance in this period as the emerging middle class sought to differentiate

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\(^69\) See for example, Roe, *Quest for Authority*. Clark, *A History of Australia: Volume IV*.


itself from both the aristocracy and the ‘lower classes’. Given that they were ‘self-made’, and usually involved in business or trade, in contrast to the leisureed indulgence of the aristocracy, the middle class attempted to set themselves apart from the more mundane manual labourer. They thus appeared to adopt a tightly regulated life-style which in some elements emulated the aristocracy, and turned the less-aristocratic aspects of middle class life into virtues.\(^72\) This was a process essential to the emergence and maintenance of middle class, or bourgeois, hegemony.\(^73\) This operated in two ways, firstly by defining what it was to be middle class (and hence, normal) and thus setting the ostensible goal posts for entry into and exclusion from the bourgeoisie and secondly, through the reinforcement of behaviours, norms and beliefs that were compatible with, even essential for, the maintenance of capitalism.

While some historians are quick to equate the new middle class in this period with an abiding concern for ‘respectability’,\(^74\) it is necessary to ascertain exactly what this meant in its own time. Just because contemporaries in Sydney talked about it a lot does not mean it existed. In fact, it has been suggested that the cornerstones of Victorian society “were often proclaimed not because they were conspicuous but because they were absent.”\(^75\) They can be considered, then, an exhortation to a particular moral standard, hence the insistent emphasis on ideas of self-control,

\(^{72}\) Young. *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. pp.71-72.


‘gentility’, cleanliness and consumerism. These were key concepts in a symbolic order designed to imagine a “society ordered by the values of the successful and respectable people, those committed to a program for civilisation.” This then, was a different respectability to that which had gone before, because it did not come from being born into the aristocracy, which did not exist in Australia, but came from an appearance of personal and social industriousness and discipline. In Australia, this ‘moral wealth’ was a necessary appearance to justify and legitimise the quest for ‘material wealth’ which had always been the driving force behind the Australian colonies. Michael Roe has called this in an earlier period “moral enlightenment”, which sought to transform Australia from a penal colony into a civil (and capitalist) society. In a post-colonial society, however, when the forces of the state were expected to retreat to make way for the individual entrepreneurial capitalist, the ‘program for civilisation’ was a program which cut right to the heart of the self.

Family and sexuality

If this moral wealth was considered personified in the institutions and rhetoric of an imagined middle class life, then it rested on the foundation of the family with its tightly defined codes of femininity and masculinity. Michael Cannon has characterised the Victorian family in Australia in the following manner:

In a ‘traditionless’ society like Anglo-Saxon Australia – one whose origins were best forgotten – what guidance and advice could the middle class pass on to its

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76 Young. Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain.
78 Ibid. p. 34.
79 Roe. Quest for Authority.
marriageable sons and daughters? Only to preserve the half-remembered customs of Britain, to defend the sanctity of private property, to marry within one’s own class, and never to forget that the continued making of money was the only way to avoid being cast into the imagined abyss of lower-class animalism. These were the fears and goads which drove the middle class into becoming ever more like itself, and self-perpetuating.  

The family was central to the pursuit of material wealth. Family life was considered a settling force, historically an essential ingredient for the overcoming of the convict origins of Australian society. It was a structure in which the ‘animalism’ and passion of youth was tempered and redirected into the basic unit for the organisation of capitalist society, not just in the purchase and maintenance of private property and consumer goods, but in the strong sexual division of labour. Respectable family life relied on strong sex role differentiations. It was from here that masculinity personified as the energetic entrepreneur emerged, and respectable women’s work was confined to the private sphere. Yet women’s work was considered central to the stability of society. This came from her dual role as moral guardian and mother of the ‘nation’. The ‘cult of True Womanhood’ proclaimed that “It was most important that at this period of the country’s history its women should stand clearly for the highest standards in everything. The responsibility of keeping up such standards lies always very largely with the

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81 Young. *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. p. 72.
82 Ibid. pp. 73-76
women of any land”. In this sense, the family was “the guardian of moral
responsibility” not just through the moral guidance of its wives and mothers but
through the outward behaviour of all of its members, who were expected to show
restraint and discipline in all the family affairs. In true Victorian fashion, the
children were imagined as seen and not heard, the men were ‘gentlemen’,
providing responsibly for their children and wives, exercising their sexuality only
inside the family, and the women were the ‘angels in the house’. As Twopenny
noted, “the first social relation…begins in the family circle” and the family unit
was considered the foundation of and model for all other social relations. From
the stability of the family, capitalist civilisation marched proudly forth.

The moral creed of the imagined respectable family was in many ways a new
Puritanism. While church-going was still considered an outward indicator of
respectability, Australian life was largely secular. However, it was still Christian
values of the Protestant kind which informed the moral codes of this imagined
life. As Twopenny noted, “Australia is indebted to the middle-class Protestant
sects, who form the most important element in the community; but to them also,
in a large measure, it owes its political and social stability, and all those standard
moral qualities which are the only safe foundation for a superstructure of
intellect.”

83 Lady Beaumont, Address to the Women’s Club, 1901, cited in Dixson, Miriam. *The Real
85 Young. *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. p. 81.
88 Ibid. p. 71.
This was a type of Puritanism concerned primarily with the regulation and repression of the instincts, exemplified in the plethora of social and moral reform projects which sprang up in this period. Particularly virulent were movements aimed at sobriety and sexuality. The world famous Christian Women’s Temperance Union active in Sydney from 1891 and temperance as a principle rather than a reality was considered such a cornerstone of respectability because it signified seriousness of mind and character, a clean body and mastery of temptation. In the face of much official concern about the ‘problem’ of public drunkenness, it was most important for the respectable to show their ability to discipline themselves through the inhibition of the passions which could be let loose with excessive drinking. Later in this period, women were involved in the temperance movement because drunkenness was considered a central component in the oppression of and violence against women, and undermined the stability of the family. In reality however, moves to regulate the sale of alcohol were largely aimed at the working classes who paid little or no attention, not least because they were well aware of the hypocrisy of such attempts given the tendency of social elites to not practice what they preached.

Linked to the concern with drunkenness was a concern over the expression of sexuality. If alcohol was problematic for its effect on family cohesion, so was sexuality. Any sexual activity or expression that did not contribute to the

91 Young. *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. p. 121.
production of the next generation was a waste of energy, energy that should be channelled into work. The strength of male sexual energy was readily recognized and facilitated the establishment of more formally organized sports designed to teach not only competitiveness and team work but to direct into acceptable activities excessive sexual energy. The principle of the ‘clean mind, clean body’ gave rise to a particular concern with athleticism, but only in forms which “instilled discipline, team spirit and a sense of fair play [which] were critical in the cultivation of moral character.” The concern here is to create an Australian masculinity which is strong and energetic, mentally and physically equipped for the competitive world of business, and, importantly, to act as a kind of safety valve for male sexual aggression. Female sexuality was decidedly more problematic – it either did not exist, was appropriately expended in motherhood, or led simply to prostitution. Any woman engaged in any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage ran the risk of being labelled a prostitute, and the psychological and social implications of this kind of repression did not take long to make themselves felt.

96 Ibid. p. 105.
98 There is a large body of work, which I can not do justice to here, in the field of women’s sexuality in Australian history especially in relation to the reproduction of nationalist or capitalist values. The most famous example is Summers, Anne. Damned whores and God’s police: the colonization of women in Australia Melbourne. Allen Lane. 1975. See also Dixson. The Real Matilda.; Windschuttle, Elizabeth, (Ed.) Women, class and history: feminist perspectives on Australia 1788-1978. Melbourne, Fontana/Collins. 1980.
Desire and consumption

It is no coincidence then, that the same period which saw the rise in emphasis on respectability and discipline, the emergence of a plethora of moral reform programs and an aggressive campaign for the repression of drunkenness and sexuality, should also see a commensurate rise in the spectacle of consumption and commodification. If human desire was so problematic for the imagination of a civilised society, it is not surprising to see that this desire was redirected away from the expression of drives, or jouissance, and onto external objects which became the identifiers of self. Intrinsically linked to the campaign for respectability was the campaign for private property and consumption. This manifested in one way with an increasing concern over the appearance and use of public space in the city itself. Despite the rhetoric around Federation and nationalism, the tendency among Sydney’s ‘elite’ was still towards an attempt to be more British than the British itself, thus public life consisted of the same rituals of ‘society’ as were observed in English ‘society’ including the ritual of promenading through the streets of the city. With the growth of consumer capitalism, the city streets took on a new significance for a newly emerging middle class. This was their territory now, a place to see and be seen and more importantly, a market place. It was not just a centre of finance capital and banking but a place of retail trade where women were now encouraged to take up

shopping as a form of leisure.101 Thus, the city’s streets served multiple functions in the “development and spread of consumer-oriented capitalism.”102

It was not just that the streets became the stage for the performance of the spectacle of consumption, but that the streets themselves became valuable. They were valuable in a symbolic sense, and hence law reform in this period is increasingly concerned with the policing of public spaces and the imposition of order to facilitate shopping and to convey an image of the city as a controlled and civilised place. Part of this concern can be linked to a terror of revolution, or disorder, and the subsequent widening and surveillance of the streets. This fear of the back alley found expression in the flurry of sanitation programs which the city council undertook in this period.103 But the streets were also valuable in a material sense. Sanitation and beautification programs were designed at face value to improve the lives of people who lived in the city, but were really concerned with creating a workable central business district, given over to warehouses, offices and shops, and to realise the value of inner city land for property owners and investors and to reinforce the identification of the self with the products and places of capitalism.104

102 Finch. "On the streets" p. 76.
Consumption also became a public spectacle, a kind of performance, and is linked to the changing uses of, and debates about, public space in this period. Emerging at the same time as the temperance movement was the moral reform program of sabbatarianism. At first glance, sabbatarianism seemed to be a religious reaction to the flagrant use of Sunday as a kind of holiday where the parks and beaches of Sydney were full of people enjoying the sun in sometimes loud and vulgar ways, instead of attending church. Those attempting to keep Sundays respectable argued that “There is far more freedom on Sunday than there used to be. It is not considered a flagrant breach of Sunday laws to ride a bicycle on that day, or to go for a drive, or even to have a picnic”. On closer analysis it appears that the actual problem was that it was often the case that the ‘respectable’ members of society found themselves in the same space as the ‘rounder’ elements of society. In the Domain on Sundays “soldiers and sailors mingle with the crowd, and the dark-skinned coolies in their white, flimsy garments and gaudy Indian sashes afford a striking contrast to the folk clothed in more civilised garb”. For the more civilised, Sydney’s rather wild public parks were “a haven of undesirables and a standing menace to security, owing to [them] being a resort of questionable characters of all descriptions.” This brought about a taming of the wilderness of Sydney’s public spaces, making them into orderly, well-designed places suitable for the respectable to promenade in. It also initiated a movement to regulate what could be done in these public spaces, especially in the Domain and Hyde Park,

106 Ibid. p. 151.
giving rise to a whole set of laws governing public behaviour and redefining the use of public spaces in the city.\textsuperscript{109} This attempt at the regulation of public places would have the most impact on young people living in the crowded inner city who had nowhere else to socialise, let alone to have some fun. The problem here is that the same commentators who wanted to keep certain areas of the city ‘clean’ and ‘respectable’ where also those who favoured the condemnation of the depraved and unhealthy home environments of the city’s young people. The question that remained here was where exactly were poor young people to disappear to? As will be demonstrated later, the increasing criminalisation of many public behaviours ensured that those excluded from these spaces eventually found themselves institutionalised or incarcerated.

A common theme in all of these endeavours is the idea of human discipline over nature. Unquestioned religious belief was being challenged by the rise of scientific theories of evolution, which helped facilitate a belief in human social progress from ‘slavery’ into ‘freedom’.\textsuperscript{110} This was a kind of social Darwinism, helped along by the popular theories of Herbert Spencer, giving fuel to ideas about the perfectibility of the human race, and justifying the belief in economics as a ‘science’, with the gap between the rich and the poor taken as proof of the theory of ‘survival of the fittest’.\textsuperscript{111} In a society that had begun as a penal colony then, a great deal of energy was spent on articulating an image of the required population. The emphasis was on the need for self-discipline to overcome any trace of

\textsuperscript{109} Waterhouse. \textit{Private Pleasures}. ; Hoskins. "The Core of the City". For the significance of Sundays for the working class and radical politics see Seates. \textit{A New Australia}. pp. 26-37.
\textsuperscript{111} Cannon. \textit{Life in The Cities: Australia in the Victorian Age Vol 3}. p. 89.
heredity. Man could master nature and the ‘vicissitudes of the instincts’ through manipulation of his environment and mastery of the self. The repression of sexuality was central to this process. As both Freud and Gramsci suggest, a ‘civilised’ work force required the repression and sublimation of the sexual energies if only because they were central to self-discipline more generally. The respectable knew this clearly: “Despite public silence, the repression of sexual desire underpinned the entire apparatus of self-control.” It was not just that modern industrial capitalism required that human energy be directed into work, but that the sexual energies needed to be sublimated so that the ‘meaning of life’ could be found in something other than the animal pleasures – the pleasure in life was to be gained from transcending bodily desire for things of the mind and sublimating this desire onto the objects of production and consumption. Self-control bought pleasure in its own right through the status of respectability and through access to the institutions of private property and consumer goods.

This issue of personal choice was central to the construction of deviance in the non-respectable working class. The fact that there were still elements in society that refused to participate in the ‘civilising’ project could only be explained by blaming the individuals themselves. The respectable emphasis on work had served the purpose of differentiating between the useful and the idle, and in this way separated the structural from the individual. By this I mean that the separation between the respectable and non-respectable sought to normalise one over the

114 Young. *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. p. 96.
other, and had the effect of removing any class content from the existence of the non-respectables. They were an individual problem, a choice made wilfully, a deviant ‘other’ against which the ‘normal’ was defined.\footnote{Finch. \textit{The Classing Gaze}. pp. 47-48.}

If a respectable and disciplined appearance were the criteria for inclusion, and the gatekeepers of exclusion, the concern was with applying these notions to those seemingly most resistance to them. By virtue of their status, rather than of their behaviour, social elites assumed that they represented the norms to which others should aspire. More than that they should be the principles around which society organised itself. In this sense then, they were not just ideas, but became programs of practical action, most of which were designed, on one level, to define and control a distinct and non-compliant other. On a deeper level, they were programs which were intended to bring about a transformation in this ‘deviant’ working class self, specifically so that it could be made compliant for life under capitalism. Social respectability hinged on personal respectability – it was both an individual and an individualising project. It was in particular aimed outward, the goal being to change the behaviour and thinking of the working classes.

In this sense, there was no real challenge to a system which enshrined the poverty of some for the benefit of others. Instead a strong distinction was made between the respectable poor or working class and those members of the ‘lower orders’ who seemed to wilfully refuse to ‘participate’ and who thus posed an ever growing
threat to the stability and comfort of respectable society.\textsuperscript{116} This working class life was usually an invisible world, an out-of-sight out-of-mind mentality existed towards it, but from the 1870s concern grew that the existence of an established lower class who had experienced generations of poverty would not only come to destabilise social harmony, but also would undermine the image of Australia as a progressive, modern nation in which equal opportunity existed for all who were prepared to work hard.\textsuperscript{117} This is because, despite all their talk about ‘civilisation’ and ‘progress’, the driving force behind these social and moral reform programs was capitalism based on an industrial wage earning labour force.

**Conclusion**

The urban larrikin emerged only 40 years since the cessation of transportation. Continuous attempts at social engineering designed to eradicate the convict stain, or any traces of convictism in the population, had met with some success but had never been totalising. From the 1870s onwards, the growth of the idea of Australia as a self-sufficient nation necessitated the creation of a stable labour market with stable patterns of production, consumption and acquisition.\textsuperscript{118} That this required more than just a work-ethic was obvious to those attempting to organise Australian society. Anyone could be made to work but they could not be made to like it or the way of life it entailed, to embrace or advocate it, until it appeared to be the normal way of social organization. The hegemonic processes, occurring in and through civil society, that accompanied the creation of a

\textsuperscript{116} Mayne. *Fever, Squalor and Vice*. p. 105-106.
\textsuperscript{118} Davidson. *The Invisible State*. 
particular kind of wage-earning labour force (compliant, self-regulating, punctual, thrifty, sober and individualised) were essential then to the normalisation of life in all its forms under capitalism in this period.

Given the animalistic history of the Australian ‘proletariat’ the repression of the drives was paramount to this process. In this sense then the factory was everywhere. Social and moral reform programs can be seen as attempts to instil factory discipline right into the heart of the self. If a respectable appearance was the definer of normalcy, then disciplining of the self was essential. This was not just a disciplining of external behaviours (which anyone could ‘fake’ from 9 to 5) but was a psychological process which sought to bring about self-discipline in thoughts, motives and understandings. It required a complete identification of self as a particular kind of worker and of human being, and in making work respectable work itself became normalised and idealised. So did the disciplines required to ensure stability in the work force and in capitalist social, economic and political relations. In this sense, some sections of the working class became their own moral police force, imposing self-discipline which did not really make them respectable enough to be middle class, but kept them hoping that perhaps they could be, or at least that there was some kind of meaning and purpose to their lives. A failure to adopt this way of being in the world became an abnormal, individual pathology, or a crime. It is from this context, and as resistance to this process, that larrikins emerged.
Chapter Four

The Larrikin Imaginary

The previous chapter showed the way in which the changing nature of material life in Sydney in the late nineteenth century privileged, and promoted, a particular way of being in the world. This ‘way of being’ related primarily to the hegemonic principles of capitalism as it was evolving at the time, which relied on the establishment of a stable and disciplined work force and the normalisation of consumption and commodification with its attendant behaviours and values. It was from this social, economic and political milieu that the phenomenon called larrikinism emerged. This chapter sets out the way in which this phenomenon was narrated, or imagined, in its own time, drawing on examples from official records, the press and popular culture to show the representations of culture, behaviour and character that came to personify the larrikin in the late nineteenth century. Later chapters will analyse these representations in relation to the theoretical framework of this thesis, and will argue that the way in which larrikinism was imagined by its contemporaries bears little resemblance to the way in which it is understood in present day Australian life. No imagining of larrikins is unproblematic, providing us with undisputed truth or fact about the larrikin, but for analytical purposes this chapter will present the ways in which larrikins were imagined in their own time, in order to provide some base-line understanding of the phenomenon being analysed in subsequent chapters.
A Note on Sources

As previously noted, the primary sources from which our knowledge about larrikins come, are complicated in a number of ways. There are usually two distinct types of sources – the official, and the popular – and they each bring their own challenges. This chapter focuses primarily on the ‘popular’ sources such as newspaper and magazine (or journal) articles, poems, works of fiction and other literary pieces. The popular sources from which knowledge about larrikinism is gathered is by its nature, necessarily sensationalised and melodramatic and a more in depth analysis of the problems posed by these sources and their implications for current understandings of the larrikin phenomena, will be provided in a later chapter and in the conclusion, but it is noted here in order to make clear that although the rest of this chapter uses these sources to present the larrikin, as it was described, this is not done so in order to discover some ‘truth’ about larrikins which exists above and beyond these sources. However, the knowledge we have about larrikins is made in and through these descriptions of them, they can not be dismissed because they are problematic, rather it is the nature of that problem which needs analysing. This chapter, however, puts that analysis to one side momentarily in an attempt to gather together as much information as possible about the nature of larrikinism, in order to draw a picture of the phenomenon as it was understood in its own time, from which a critical analysis can proceed.

For all the problems with primary sources, they are all unanimous in their descriptions of larrikin language, dress, and activities. These descriptions belie the unique ‘Australian-ness’ of the larrikin culture, rather, they demonstrate that
larrikinism has its ancestry in the ‘flash’ street culture of cockney England, with Irish cultural overtones and a liberal dose of an international maritime influence. This is supported by the demographic data in the previous chapter which shows the concentration of working class English and Irish migrants in the inner city areas within which larrikinism is said to have occurred, and in debates about the ancestry of the term ‘larrikin’ itself.

There are a number of possible etymologies for the word ‘larrikin’, and although there is no proof that any or all of them are ‘correct’ they are all plausible and are all connected in that the derivation seems to be Irish in one way or another. For example, James Murray prefers the idea that the word is the Irish pronunciation of the word ‘larkin’ as in ‘larkin’ about’,1 (applied to street kids by Irish beat policeman John Staunton), which referred to the shipboard practice of ‘skylarking’ or swinging off the ropes. This has an interesting connection not only to the maritime culture so prevalent in the waterfront suburbs from which larrikins emerged, but also to the practice of bonding the cities wayward or abandoned youths to the Industrial School Ships anchored in Sydney harbour, where skylarking was an approved activity for good behaviour.2 Noel McLachlan is slightly more circumspect, and suggests instead that it is again an Irish pronunciation of the words ‘leery kid’ or ‘leery kin’, leery being the word used to describe the sneering look on the faces of street kids in Melbourne.3 This

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derivation is given more weight when we consider the longer history and connotation of the word ‘leery’ – as McLachlan points out it could be related to the term ‘Leary Man’ in common use at the time because of the popularity of such songs as “The Leary Man”, a direct descendant of English ‘flash’ culture. The song comes from a collection of popular songs and poems, two verses of which run along the lines of:

Go first to costermongery  
To every fakement get a-fly,  
And pick up all their slangery,  
But let this be your plan,  
Put up with no kieboshery,  
But look well after poshery,  
And cut teetotal sloshery,  
And get drunk when you can.  
And when you go to spree about,  
Let it always be your pride  
To have a white tile on your nob,  
And a bull dog by your side.  
Your fogle you must flashly tie,  
Each word must patter flashery,  
And hit cove’s head to smashery,  
To be a Leary Man….4

McLachlan claims that young working class people in Melbourne were heard chanting this song in the late 1860s, and that it marks a long connection with an English working class popular culture.5 The derivation of the word larrikin is further complicated by the use of the word ‘lair’ or ‘lairy’ to describe not only fashion but to denote ‘idleness’, or the English definition of ‘leary’ as a “look in which fear, defiance and cunning are mixed together.”6

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However, this is not to say that there is a direct and unproblematic link to English flash or cockney culture. As Murray correctly notes, the larrikin did not emerge suddenly but was connected to previous instances of social disturbance in Australian cities themselves: “From the middle of the century there are hints of trouble, a kind of social undercurrent, murmurs, envies, tensions…The first ‘push’ appearance is often claimed for The Rocks in Sydney, where a freed convict, Slick by name, and by practice, is said to have gathered a group of malcontents as early as 1841…There are suggestions of pushes much earlier than the larrikins themselves. The Cabbage Tree Mob was distinctive, its flamboyant use of the cabbage tree hat marking it out.”7 As Manning Clark describes it, they:

were not mobs goaded to madness by starvation, nor were they mobs fired with political disaffection, but rather mobs of giddy boys rioting for riotings sake, for whom midnight violence was an amusing pastime… The ticket-of-leave men were also corrupting free men and women and congregating at dusk on street corners much like the cabbage-tree men of Sydney, asking respectable maidens such suggestive questions as whether they had the time, and if so, whether they had the inclination, and generally behaving in that overbearing, threatening way of the Australian when offended or incensed at being treated as a social inferior.8

Yet it is possible they were not uniquely Australian at all. Ajax writes “the Arab of London, the hoodlum of New York and the gamin of Paris resemble our larrikin very closely”9 while The Bulletin marks him apart: “We believe the larrikin is peculiar to Australia. He differs from the American ‘hoodlum’ and the English ‘rough’ in that the two latter, though equally desirous to rob you, are willing to

fight you, man for man, for what you are worth.”¹⁰ Pratt drew a link more distinctly to (often Irish) convictism:

There undoubtedly still survives among the lowest classes in Australian cities a flavour of the old bitter convict spirit which originally sought expression in the formation of bandit gangs of predatory bushrangers. In the traditions of the various pushes the most desperate of these long-departed outlaws occupied positions of heroic eminence and many larrikins claim them as ancestors, probably not without reason.¹¹

Thus, the origin of the larrikin is already blurred – part convict, part currency, part English, part Irish, – like the hoodlum or the hooligan, but possibly predating them¹², like the rough, the street arab – but not like any of them. This ‘mish-mash’ of influences is particularly present in the representations of the distinctive dress and behaviour of the larrikin.

Dress seems to be the primary definer of the larrikin, firstly because it was the most obvious and visible aspect of their existence, and secondly because the wearing of it was such a performance. Of most significance was the footwear, tight, high heeled shiny boots, with pointed toes and intricate craftsmanship, they were apparently, his ‘pride and joy’. The symbolic importance of the boot was not lost on authors such as Louis Stone who made his larrikin Jonah into a boot maker - they attracted attention for the amount of money spent on them, the fact that they gave the larrikin a particular way of walking that was either a swagger or a source of ridicule, or the fact that the pointy toes made them into weapons.

They were likened at times to the boots worn by sailors, especially where they

¹¹ Pratt, "Push' Larrikinism in Australia". p. 31.
included silver buckles and there were comments that the shininess of them meant they came in handy for looking up women’s skirts, and that the height of them was a compensation for the otherwise puny or ratlike stature of the larrikin.\footnote{Manning Clark asserts that larrikins put mirrors on their shoes for this purpose in Clark. A History of Australia: Volume IV. p. 360, and references The Bulletin January 10, 1885 but this article makes no mention of mirrors on shoes, and I can not find any other reference to such an activity.}

A maritime influence was also evident in other components of the larrikin dress. Firstly there were bell-bottom trousers, tight across the thighs, as well as short jackets with no waistcoat and neckerchiefs in place of shirt collars. The shirt itself was always white and attracted comment for its surprising cleanliness. Topping off the outfit was the hat, as significant as the boot. It is portrayed as either small and round (could be hard or soft), or wide brimmed and ‘slouchy’ (this last variant most clearly resembles the hats worn by sailors) but either way, it was distinctive for being pushed back so far on the head as to contribute significantly to the ‘leery’ look of its wearer. Henry Lawson described the look as “a gallows-tilt, that no one, save a larrikin, can give”\footnote{Lawson. "The Captain of the Push"} which had the further effect of revealing the unfortunate ‘greasiness’ of his hair beneath:

The delightful larrikin – the gorgeous haymarket swell – clothed in peg-top trousers, high-heeled and very tight boots, short coat, frilled shirt, and greasy – aye, very greasy hair – which lies plastered down upon his head.\footnote{Unreferenced source, quoted in Murray. Larrikins. pp. 36-37.}

In 1885, The Bulletin described him as ‘Lovely’, noting that

You know him from his soft felt hat, dinted in a way solely peculiar to his class, to his high-heeled shows turning over on the outside. You also know him from his coat, nearly always black, and his nether garments, suggestive of a debauched jockey, also black….You know him too, from his white shirt (it is a most peculiar thing, but
nevertheless true, that this, the dirtiest moral section of civic humanity, affects white shirts – without collars, or with paper ones, be it said), with a few gewgaw studs in front, exposed as much as possible…16

As John Rickard has pointed out, “the whole ensemble, with its suggestion of violence and flaunting of sexuality, mocked the image of the respectable male bourgeois”.17 So while there was nothing particularly shocking about the outfit, it was the way it was worn, what it symbolised, that seemed to be most problematic for contemporary commentators. They were offended by its ‘flashiness’, the ‘garishness’ of it, the fact that it ‘imitated’ more respectable fashions but was so obviously ‘shabby’ or worn with so much ‘cockiness’. This is particularly so in relation to the fashions of the women, who were portrayed as terrible eyesores, wearing clothes from last season dressed up with wild feathers and too-bright stockings under layers of garish petticoats. Their flashy shabbiness was widely bemoaned, yet her boots too were her pride and joy…

her hair is disordered, and her clothing, which is of a semi-seedy character, is – well hardly clean. The skirts reach to just above her ankles, and a very discoloured stocking appears above a stylish pair of boots – about the only object upon the girl not hideously repulsive.18

*The Bulletin* described her thus:

we were going to describe the Female Larrikin, with her draggle-feathered hat and her frequent black eye – affectionate testimonial from her masculine mate – her trapesing (sic) walk and tossing head, but it is unnecessary. She is in every respect a counterpart of her mate of the other sex and quite as lovely an ornament to society.19

It is doubtful whether the objections to what larrikins wore would have been so forceful if they had not been accompanied by particular public behaviours. The

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17 Rickard. "Lovable Larrikins". p. 79.
most garish of larrikin costumes were reserved particularly for the dance hall, because, as Pratt described, “larrikins love dancing above all other human pleasures.” Social and political commentators bemoaned the prevalence of the ‘dancing saloon’ and tried in vain to legislate them away, but they would return in informal ways – a deserted warehouse and someone with an accordion was all that was required. There is not a great deal of information about what sort of music was played here, but Murray cites the poem “Fanny Flukem’s Ball” as a description of a typical larrikin dance:

…Twas in Conky Bob’s old stable,
Who had lent it to the boys
On condition that they’d not get juiced
Or kick up any noise…

They had lancers, waltz and polka,
Fitzroys and Alberts too.
And Fat Mag performed the barn dance
With a bloke from Woolloomooloo

One of the major problems with these dancing saloons was their public nature, that they brought larrikins out of their suburban cottages and into the public domain – they became inescapable. If they were not inside dancing, then they were loitering on the street, making ‘disrespectful’ and suggestive comments to passers-by, especially women, and, having drunk too much, necessarily getting involved in brawls and fights. Even without this activity, their very presence was problematic. In 1884 Ajax’s lengthy article in the *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* asserted that

the disreputable section of our fellow citizens, popularly termed “larrikins”, thrives apace, and boldly asserts itself in open undisguise.

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20 Pratt. *"Push' Larrikinism in Australia"*.  
Sheridan’s suppositious monster…might almost be said to have found its embodiment in our ruffian brothers whose zeal in tainting and corrupting our social life is almost beyond description. As one meanders through the streets by night, wheresoever our brilliant city gas fails to shed its luminous rays, he may behold untidy groups of similarly qualified lads and men.\(^{22}\)

It is usually impossible to find descriptions of larrikin dress or behaviour that is not damning of them in some way. Some of the best examples of this tendency appeared in poems, usually published in *The Bulletin*. This one is attributed to Oscar Hughan and appeared in 1880, only six months into the journals publication:

*The Larrikin*

Standing at the corner
Of each thoroughfare
Rampant, ribald scorer,
Tainting social air.
By his obscene chatter,
By his senseless whoops,
By the smoke and spatter
Of his vile cheroots.
Shuffles cards for winning
But his straightest tip
Is the art of spinning
Pennies on a chip.
Fond of polished leather
Weak in point of dress,
Aping in all weather
Famous R.B.S.
Manner light and airy,
Not averse to drink,
So ‘tis drawn by Mary,
Costing but a wink.
Brave as wounded bison
When no strength is nigh,
Weak as a twice-used Hyson
When there’s danger by.
Votes the Randwick ticket,
Good at scull and bat,
Cross ‘tween Spoff and Trickett,
Land and water rat.

\(^{22}\) Ajax. “Larrinkinism” p. 207.
Shrewd to spinal marrow,
Calculating gains
At the stall or barrow –
So much for his brains.
Seldom wholly idle,
Seldom toils for bread,
Save where prison bridle
Ornaments his head.
Dozing in the sunshine,
Brawling in the dark,
Down the streets and tramline,
Thro’ the dismal park….23

And so on. As far as editorials go, this excerpt from *The Bulletin* is typical:

larrikinism…includes idleness, destruction of property, acts of violence, obstructing the highway, bad language, the assumption of an aggressively disrespectful attitude, noise, dirt, profanity, ignorance, an unshaven aspect, a retreating forehead, a fishy eye, a braided coat, a soft black hat, bell-bottomed trousers, high-heeled boots, and a general and promiscuous cussedness of demeanour.24

There was a common perception then, that larrikins were ‘immoral’ in a number of ways, and that they engaged in heavy drinking, fighting, and sexual and other activities that were considered deeply undesirable:

the term larrikins has been applied to fast rowdy youths who seek their amusement in all kinds of vicious larking. They are the young blackguards of the streets, pleasure reserves and places of public resort and amusement, whose chief pleasure is derived from making themselves disagreeable to others by the utter looseness and grossness of their demeanour…noisy, rowdy, vicious, smoking, drinking, gambling, daring young blackguards…25

Larrkings were often associated with the Chinese in Sydney, and thus with a plethora of other unsavoury activities including opium, prostitution and illegal

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24 *The Bulletin*, September 10, 1892.
gambling. While the respectable citizen developed a taste for team sports such as cricket and rugby, the larrikin was known for his participation in bare knuckle boxing, often with gambling associated. Any form of gambling was said to be a favourite of the larrikin: “he is cursed with an intense mania for gambling” and it was often his undoing. In Louis Stone’s *Jonah Chook* makes a complete mess of his life because of his belief that gambling, especially two-up, would solve his financial problems as he struggled to become respectable:

All his life Chook had lived from hand to mouth. He belonged to the class that despises it neighbours for pinching and scraping, and yet is haunted by the idea of sudden riches falling into its lap from the skies. Certainly Chook had given Fortune no excuse for neglecting him. He was always in a shilling sweep, a sixpenny raffle, a hundred to one double on the Cup. He marked pak-a-pu tickets, took the kip at two-up and staked his last shilling more readily than the first. It was always the last shilling that was going to turn the scale and make his fortune. Well he would try his luck again…arguing with the blind obstinace of the gambler that after his abstinence fate would class him as a beginner, the novice who wins a sweep with the first ticket he buys, or backs the winner at a hundred to win because he fancies its name.

The logical progression from drinking and gambling was fighting, and it was a well recorded fact that the larrikin was quite the pugilist. Fighting as sport or entertainment was a regular occurrence, usually between gangs in the street:

it is no uncommon experience for chaste and refined citizens to behold in many public parts of our city pot-valiant knaves in pugilistic *recontre*, foul-mouthed courtesans asserting their impious importance…bands of genuine larrikins ‘swollen with insolence and wine’ - forming opposing parties, and contending with infinite spirit by means of stones and fists.

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29 Stone. *Jonah*.
As Pratt reports:

a bitter rivalry often exists between two different pushes, which finds expression in a yearly or bi-yearly combat between them, the members of either society being armed with sticks and stones. On such occasions they fight a pitched battle until one side is completely routed, and not infrequently individuals are killed or seriously injured.31

Neither did he hesitate to punch his way out of a confrontation with police. The complex nature of the larrikins relationship with the Law will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, however, it was common knowledge that there was no love lost between larrikins and the police. It was not an animosity exclusive to larrikins, as Murray remarks, “lampooned in the more scurrilous papers, and knowing it [the police force] was disliked in a society which had begun with an anti-authority bias, it sometimes arrested the wrong people, and put others into classes of offenders to which they did not belong”.32 This perceived incompetence on the part of police was compounded by a lingering stigma attached to them, so that they did not find a great deal of sympathy in the popular press. However, neither was there much sympathy for the particular forms of expression of animosity towards them that became synonymous with larrikinism which was marked by its violence. Pratt illustrates one particular confrontation which he says represents the “feeling of mutual and remorseless animosity” between larrikins and the police:

the pushes…sank for the moment their private quarrel, and amalgamated to engage the common enemy. After an hours struggle three of the police fell desperately wounded and the remainder, finding themselves outmatched, fled for their lives, taking with them, however, two prisoners. There ensued the extraordinary spectacle of two score

31 Pratt. "'Push' Larrikinism in Australia". p. 28.
blue coats running like hares before a mob of yelling lads, not one of whom could have been more than twenty-two years of age.33

The popular press took special delight in detailing this relationship. For example, cartoons in journals such as *Bird O'Freedom* and *The Bulletin* show hopelessly bumbling and outnumbered constables running from throngs of blue-metal throwing 'larrikins', or show them being stabbed, robbed or made fun of while asleep at their posts. Journalists and writers detailed the nature of the violence, for example:

> The police were...just as fearful and powerless, because armed only with truncheons, weapons which the larrikins regarded with insolent amusement; they were accustomed to patrol such districts in company, and even so were often roughly handled, and sometimes brutally murdered.

The lengthy poem quoted earlier from *The Bulletin* ends thus:

> Policeman X grows tricky
> Makes the business dull
> Moses, Bill and Mickey
> Batter in his skull.34

And Henry Lawson agreed:

> ‘Now look here’ exclaimed the captain to the stranger from the bush
> ‘Now look here, suppose the Bleeders let you come and join the push,
> Would you smash a bleedin’ bobby if you got the blank alone?’35

Not everyone found this amusing of course, and attitudes changed as time went on36, especially considering that larrikin animosity was not restricted to those wearing blue coats. Even otherwise peaceful public encounters often ended in violence:

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33 Pratt. "'Push' Larrikinism in Australia", p. 28-29.
35 Lawson. "The Captain of the Push"  
36 These changing attitudes, and the reasons for them, are detailed in the next chapter.
Another favourite pastime is the push picnic. Accompanied by their donahs, they proceed on Sundays and other public holidays to some choice resort by water or rail, and there arrived, light monster fires, boil their ‘billies’, feast themselves to their hearts’ content, and afterwards dance upon sward or sand wherever they may be. Woe however to the unwise curious who may venture to spy upon such gatherings! The pushes resent the slightest approach at interference, and, construing the term liberally, penalise all attempts to pass across their sphere of operations with showers of “gibbers” – i.e. sticks and stones. Should the wayfarer exhibit a retaliatory disposition, he is chased; if caught, belaboured, ad sometimes, though of late years very rarely, kicked to death.37

Fighting can be considered so much a part of the culture that larrikins are said to have produced world famous boxers in the form of Larry Foley and ‘Griffo’, who started off in illegal bare knuckle brawls in the street as ‘Kings’ of pushes, and went on to ‘respectability’ via now commodified and professionalised ‘Queensbury Rules’ prize fighting, with legal gambling enabled.38

Synonymous with all this drinking and fighting was a rather overt display of sexuality. Many observers commented on this aspect of larrikin behaviour, which was visible on the street, in back alleys, and in parks and picnic spots:

The larrikin takes his and her pleasure madly. At Clontarf, it was not an excursion – it was an orgy. Large ocean steamers discharged cargo after cargo on young Australians. Young men, young women, lads, girls and, still more sad, children, thronged through the ground, crowded the dancing pavilion…and jostled at the drinking bars. As their blood warmed by dancing, and their passions became inflamed by liquor, the scene within and around the hovels which serve for dancing and drinking became indescribable. Horace has no descriptions more revolting. The dancing was that of satyrs and bacchantes, but of satyrs and bacchantes in soiled tweed suits and squalid finery or rumpled gowns that had at first been stiffly white. Depravity of physique thrust itself upon notice… amidst the flushed, panting, bevy of young girls, clinging in romping abandon to promiscuous partners, were some

38 See for example, Murray. Larrikins. pp. 56-59 and Roberts. Captain of the Push.
unworn childish faces with the devil’s mark not yet stamped on their foreheads…As the orgy grew, and drink, desire and jealousy inflamed the participants, young girls…flew wild-beast fashion at each other, boxed like men, and anon scratched and bit like cats…The males barely restrained themselves to a semblance of decency – the females resented no familiarity.40

This ‘depraved’ world of drinking, gambling and fighting was the lamented haunt of the larrikin, and as such put him at but one remove from hardened criminality. For many commentators, this was personified by the gang-like organization of larrikin life. In the late 1800s it was commonly reported that larrikins moved in groups, in fact some commentators went so far as to say that it was only in groups that larrikins found their identity, purpose and courage, when on their own they were cowardly and quiet:

If he meets you when he is alone, he slinks aside like a beaten hound. Sometimes, if you happen to be a very small and weak-looking man, an invalid, say, or lame or blind – he may attack you single handed; but anything like a show of resistance cows him immediately. He in only courageous in numbers.41

In slightly later representations of them, these gangs were given the title ‘Pushes’ and each Push was named after, or known by, its geographical location, eg the Gipps St, Liver, Rocks, Botany, Pyrmont, Balmain, The Glebe, The Woolloomooloo.42 In Louis Stone’s Jonah, the larrikins were part of the Cardigan St Push in Waterloo and his description of them is classic:

it was Saturday night and Waterloo, by immemorial habit, had flung itself on the shops, bent on plunder…The Push was gathered under the verandah at the corner of Cardigan Street, smoking cigarettes and discussing the weightier matters of life – horses and women. They were all young – from eighteen to twenty-five – for the larrikin never grows old….Here they met nightly, as men meet at their club – a terror

to the neighbourhood. Their chief diversion was to guy the pedestrians, leaping from insult to swift retaliation if one resented their foul comments…

He continues:

The Cardigan Street Push, composed of twenty or thirty young men of the neighbourhood, was a social wart of a kind familiar to the streets of Sydney. Originally banded together to amuse themselves at other people’s expenses, the Push found new cares and duties thrust upon them, the chief of which was chastising anyone who interfered with their pleasures. Their feats ranged from kicking an enemy senseless, and leaving him for dead, to wrecking hotel windows with blue metal, if the landlord had contrived to offend them. Another of their duties was to check ungodly pride in the rival Pushes by battering them out of shape with fists and blue metal at regular intervals…. The police, variously named ‘Johns’, ‘Cops’ and ‘Traps’, were their natural enemies. If one of the Push got into trouble, the others clubbed together and paid his fine, if that failed they made it hot for the prosecutors. Generally their offences were disorderly conduct, bashing their enemies and resisting the police.

Whether or not larrikins organised themselves in more formal ways is a matter of debate, but some at the time believed they did. “Is there a larrikin organisation?” asked The Bulletin, and answered itself in the affirmative:

That is exactly what there is, as strange as it may sound. In Woolloomooloo there is a perfect specimen of the kind. This band has its passwords like any other kind of society. The police are known to it, the detectives are known to it. Not a member of it but knows either better than either know him. It is a Vehmgericht of villains. If one gets into trouble, the rest make up a subscription and employ a lawyer to defend him. If he is fined, they pay the fine – if he goes to gaol, he comes out a hero. And in their wicked way they are true to each other. You could not open the mouth of one of them with a chisel and a mallet, if he thought you wanted to draw evidence from him that would incriminate another of the band.

Ambrose Pratt, who was a solicitor by training, in particular went on to perpetuate the idea that Pushes were highly regulated, semi-criminal organizations. His first

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chronicle of push larrikinism appeared in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* published in Scotland and England in July 1901. In it, he sets out his own alleged encounter with push larrikinism, how he saw a larrikin wrongfully arrested and sympathised with him, only to find he was the ‘King’ of a Push. This friendship gave Pratt access to information about larrikins and pushes which he says not even the police knew about, and he went on to detail push organisation in this article and two works of fiction entitled *King of the Rocks* and *The Great Push Experiment.*

According to Pratt, this was an organisation bound by strict rules, membership books, loyalty, and codes of conduct, financed by semi-respectable business interests, and sometimes attached to political parties or causes. His accounts of push organisation are problematic, as self-confessed ‘pot boilers’ his novels are works of complete fiction, and present information about larrikins that sometimes upholds and sometimes contradicts, other accounts of the phenomena. However, they are works that had some impact at the time, and for subsequent accounts of larrikinism, and the responses to and consequences of Pratt’s writings will be dealt with in the next chapter. It is generally agreed by other sources that Pushes did exist, that they were named after the street or suburb in which they occurred and they were bound by a loose code of ethics usually related to loyalty to other members above all else. There is little serious evidence to suggest they existed in any form other than these. Nevertheless, Push Larrikinism was seen as a major social problem in Sydney in the late nineteenth century.

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Conclusion

It was generally agreed that there was a class of young people in the city of Sydney, emerging from working class backgrounds, who were rude, lewd, and disrespectful, drank too much, and could be called immoral, violent and possibly criminal. They dressed garishly, they swore, were lewd and suggestive, and entertained themselves through vulgar activities such as dancing, boxing, and gambling. In and of themselves, none of these characteristics or behaviour mean anything outside of the context in which they occurred, and in which they were considered problematic. That is, what constituted immoral behaviour in the late 1800s was different to what is considered immoral today, and the charge of immorality does not necessarily make it so. However, if a behaviour was considered immoral in its own time, this can not be dismissed as wrong but should form part of our understanding of the thinking of the time. This is the same with an assessment of what was considered criminal. Even so, it is possible, indeed, necessary, to think critically about the labelling of behaviours in history and to take into account such factors as who is doing the labelling, the context of that labelling, and the consequences of it, as well as the significance that is attributed to specific behaviours. For women, the risk inherent in the larrikin way of life was a loss of innocence, leading to ‘depravity’ and thence to prostitution. For men, the road from larrikinism led to theft, rape and murder. For many commentators, they were one and the same thing. The significance and consequences of this process of unproblematically attributing all sorts of behaviour, social disorder and crime to larrikinism is the subject of subsequent chapters. The next chapter specifically moves beyond the surface descriptions of
larrikins to look in more detail at the nature of the complaints against them, the ideas about their causes and the proposed remedies. This analysis is then linked to the theoretical framework of this thesis within which larrikins are being understood.
Chapter Five

The Subaltern Larrikin

The previous chapter outlined the main characteristics of larrikins as they were represented, or imagined, in their own time. This chapter returns to those representations with a more critical eye, analysing the imagining of the larrikin in relation to the theory of hegemony and its relationship to subalternity.

Subalternity, as Gramsci developed it, was both a state of being and a method of analysis, and these twin strands are applied to both the content and the form of the presentations of larrikin touched on in the previous chapter. The chapter begins with an overview of the concept of subalternity as Gramsci developed it and moves on to apply this theorisation to the imagined larrikin, showing the way in which debates about the ‘causes of’ and ‘cures for’ larrikinism demonstrate hegemonic social practices in action. In this way we can see ‘what happened’ to larrikinism and how this has come to affect our knowledge about and application of the term today. The chapter concludes by setting out some theoretical links between Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and subalternity with the theories of subjectivity which take our analysis of larrikins to a deeper level in Chapter Six to follow.

Hegemony and Subalternity

It is through the prism of subalternity that the theoretical concepts pertinent to an analysis of larrikins in this thesis begin to come together. In the construction of subalternity we see hegemony working through civil society, language and the
symbolic order, the repression of drives and the exclusion of the real, and the radical potentials of subaltern subjectivity.

Like the other Gramscian concepts explored here, the concept of subalternity is a contested and appropriated one¹, for some authors coming to be synonymous with either the peasantry or the proletariat.² While it is true that Gramsci did refer to the proletariat as ‘subaltern’ this was not the only group he analysed under this rubric. His most famous analysis of subalternity is the millenarian sect of Davide Lazzaretti and the way in which bourgeois journalists like Bulferetti and the criminologist Lombroso dealt with this group, which he saw as the epitome of ‘intellectual’ attitudes towards subalternity. That is:

instead of studying the origins of a collective event and the reasons why it spread, the reasons why it was collective, the protagonist was singled out and one limited oneself to writing a pathological biography, all too often starting off from motives that had not been confirmed or that could be interpreted differently. For a social elite, the members of subaltern groups always have something of a barbaric or pathological nature about them.³

Particularly annoying to Gramsci is Lombroso’s ‘scienticism’, or the biological determinism with which he analysed ‘criminality’. This is particularly disturbing considering Lombroso’s “leftist” orientation, which is indicative to Gramsci, and should be for us, of the state of leftist intellectuals whose valorisation of reason,


rationality and science contribute to the construction of subalternity. This is an important point – in a hegemonic process that is based on consent, the ‘reformist’ attitude of left social and political groups can make them actively complicit with a hegemony operating through civil society, thus closing down avenues for the expression of alternative hegemonies that are articulated in subalternity.

When it comes to the representation of subalternity, Green argues, “Gramsci was concerned with how literary representations of the subaltern reinforced the subaltern’s subordinated position…In historical or literary documents, the subaltern may be presented as humble, passive or ignorant, but their actual lived experience may prove the contrary. Hence, the integral historian has to analyse critically the way in which intellectuals represent the conditions and aspirations of the subaltern.” It is for this reason that the study of subaltern groups, in all their particularity, is of such importance for Gramsci. Thus, his interest in them is threefold: “he was interested in producing a methodology of subaltern historiography, a history of the subaltern classes, and a political strategy of transformation based upon the historical development and existence of the subaltern.” In concrete historical situations, most hegemonies create and maintain subalternity, especially in the protection of hegemonic principles. Yet there is no possibility of an alternative hegemony without the involvement of subaltern groups. If Gramsci’s project was to involve subaltern groups in a war of

6 *Ibid*. p. 3.
position on the terrain of civil society, then he was particularly concerned as to how subalternity was created through civil society in the first place.

We can start to see this process at work in the ways in which larrikins were dealt with in their own time, and how they have been dealt with by subsequent authors and historians. The previous chapter focused on descriptions of larrikins in relation to their appearance and behaviour and although the chapter took these descriptions ‘with a grain of salt’, it was obvious that there was enough consistency between them to suggest that there was a distinct group of people, or set of behaviours, causing anxiety. It is in the nature of this anxiety, and the ideas about the origins, causes and cures, that the significance of the different views on larrikins becomes apparent. Regardless of how diverse these views are, however, they all contributed to the continued subalternity of those people called larrikins.

This is not an accidental process but was a deliberate attempt to write subalternity onto the bodies of larrikins and to inscribe upon them their exclusion from ‘respectable’ society. As we have seen in Chapter Three, this was a society that was actively fostered from below by particular sections of the working class as well who had no intention of being excluded themselves. The aspirations of the respectable working class meant that there was an anxious urgency to separate itself from the elements of society who were obviously being tagged as failures, and failures of a personal and moral type. Even so, the debates about larrikins show an uneasy awareness with the ‘structural’ factors that ‘caused’ them which conflicts with an unwillingness to discuss the need to challenge those structures.
Given this, the next section of this chapter presents the debates over larrikins beginning with popular sources such as the Press or literary works, and moving on to official government sources such as Police and Prison records. It was in the press that larrikins found their initial fame, and it was because of the Press that government officials acted against larrikins, but they did not do so with uniformity of opinion or approach, and when they did, their reactions also became the source of popular reflection and agitation. In this to-and-fro-ing we can see the way in which hegemony was negotiated through civil society.

The Causes of Larrikinism

Without doubt the single most vociferous commentator on ‘the larrikin problem’ was *The Bulletin*. We have already seen that they were quick to describe the larrikin in terms of a distinctive dress or set of behaviours, but it was the significance of these behaviours and their causes that garnered the most coverage. This is so much the case that most of the information we now have about larrikins comes directly from its pages, to the extent that Manning Clark’s descriptions and analysis of them read as his own but are almost verbatim repeats of descriptions and analyses printed in the magazine. Clark acknowledges that *The Bulletin* played a major and specific role in the analysis of larrikinism, a fact also acknowledged by George Morgan’s analysis of this process. Other historical sources also rely heavily on *The Bulletin* for information about larrikins, especially James Murray and

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Noel McLachlan\textsuperscript{10}, and this repetition down the ages has had serious consequences for our understanding of the phenomenon. This is because \textit{The Bulletin} had a very specific axe to grind in late nineteenth century Australia. As Morgan argues, \textit{The Bulletin} “promised ‘vigour, freshness…a new departure in journalism’. The other Sydney newspapers of the time…contained little to trouble the imperial ruling class. \textit{The Bulletin} by contrast sought to grapple with the problems of an emerging nation free from the crusty inheritance of empire and to represent a distinctively Australian culture”\textsuperscript{11} This was not a culture it saw embodied by larrikins, or other city dwellers more generally. In fact, \textit{The Bulletin} “cultivated a muscular nationalism based on the archetype of the resourceful, rugged, laconic and irreverent (male) bush pioneer. He was the very antithesis of the city folk”\textsuperscript{12} so it comes as no surprise that in their responses to larrikins, \textit{The Bulletin} was “little different from more conservative publications”\textsuperscript{13}

Morgan’s article is an excellent analysis of the process by which a popular magazine transformed a social problem into what he calls a ‘moral panic’, “stripping the actions of any political significance which they may have had.”\textsuperscript{14} As far as \textit{The Bulletin} was concerned, there was no political significance in larrikinism, although there were some ‘social’ and ‘moral’ ones. This is most evident in the editorials and letters it published which sought to lay the blame for larrikins at the feet of several factors including family, environment and working conditions.

\textsuperscript{10} McLachlan. \textit{Larrikinism: An Interpretation}. ; Murray. \textit{Larrikins}.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.} p. 21.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.} p. 17.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.} p. 21.
As the site of primary socialism for the next generation, the parents of larrikins were the first and most obvious target. When the reporter from *The Bulletin* observed the larrikin ‘orgy’ at Clontarf described in the previous chapter, he “looked for parents and discovered – bawds.”15 Four years later it had no hesitation in stating “It is the father and mother who are to blame, first, last and always.”16 For this author, the problem was two-fold depending on class. The “better-class” larrikin had been over indulged as a child, allowed to develop and express his own opinions, been spoilt and made too much of: “It will be postulated to a certainty that the child who will not reverence his parents will not, when he grows up, reverence himself.”17 The author continues:

> In the families of the poor, things are even worse. The children are allowed to run riot. The fact that Billy has turned upon his mother and that his mother has beaten him, is the signal for Billy’s father to now down the lady in question and perform popular dances upon her prostrate body. And so the play goes on, till the boy, fearing no authority at home, fears none abroad, meets with others of his own kidney, thieves, gets into gaol and is turned out of that institution a ripe young ruffian.18

Other sources agreed with *The Bulletin* about the lack of parenting skills evident in many Sydney homes:

> The parties most culpable, and most deserving of rebuke, are the parents who permit their children to grow up without any proper control, or without proper and sufficient control...Fathers and mothers have a heavy and serious responsibility resting upon them with reference to their children, boys and girls; and if ‘larrikinism’ and the ‘social evil’ are to be suppressed, it must primarily and mainly be by home influence – the good instruction, good advice, good influence and good example of their parents.19

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Ajax, writing in 1884, argued that one among many of the “conditions and practices that contribute liberally to the production of these ill-favoured youths, we find that of parental neglect…Were one half of the youth of our country thoroughly and capably trained by his parents, much of the social disorder that now prevails would be speedily effaced.”20 This emphasis on youth and family is significant because it points to the recognition that the first site of the reproduction of the symbolic order should be the family. Larrikin families are found lacking because they do not produce children who have been adequately ‘socialised’ in this sense. The emphasis on larrikins as young is also telling – there is a sense of urgency in this rhetoric stemming from a recognition that if the symbolic order does not take hold on a young subject, it will cause significant disturbances later.

As Ajax commented, “it was not the man who introduces into the world the greatest number of children, but the one who efficiently rears his young children to a competent manhood, who confers the greatest benefit to his race.”21 In the inner-city slums, however, children were plentiful and ‘swarmed’ around the sanitation inspectors who lamented their filthy appearance and cheeky demeanour, and feared for their physical and mental health in such an environment. If they lived beyond 12, they were sure to become the criminals of the future – everywhere the inspectors noted “embryo larrikins… revelling in dirt and abominations”22. The fact that large amounts of children ran around

21 Ibid.
22 The Evening News, 27 May 1880.
unsupervised, not in school and often begging or selling matches and newspapers, outraged respectable sensibilities because it indicated a lack of parenting skills and an unchecked profligacy: “young and old larrikins and their families...disport themselves at their own sweet will, as any police-office can testify”\(^\text{23}\), living in “lanes reeking with filth and swarming with population, crowded together in pest-houses which disregard every condition of health and common decency”\(^\text{24}\), creating “cradles of disease and crime.”\(^\text{25}\) Concern that their environment was giving birth to a criminal class too easily linked to Australia’s criminal past justified several legal and social programs which sought to forcibly remove children from these environments or to remove those environments altogether because it was argued that “it was impossible to effectually put down violence and larrikinism generally unless such dwellings as these were demolished.”\(^\text{26}\)

The daily tabloid press spent a great deal of time in the 1880s discussing and documenting the progress of the sanitation inspectors who strode across the city condemning entire streets. In these reports, the juxtaposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ types of people was articulated through the markers of decency, or respectability, such as decorations, cleanliness and certain types of work:

> The building was the most wretched hovel, the rooms close, with a stifling atmosphere, not improved by the steam from numerous tubs of clothes undergoing the process of washing and ironing, for the tenant, an industrious respectable woman, carries on the occupation of laundress.

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\(^\text{23}\) *The Evening News*, 28 May 1880.
\(^\text{24}\) *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 May 1881.
\(^\text{25}\) *The Evening News*, 28 May 1880.
\(^\text{26}\) *The Evening News*, 28 May 1880.
Thus, she is ‘respectable’ because she works, thereby defying the ‘moral decay’ so prevalent in this environment. It was made clear that ‘depraved’ lifestyles were not always the norm, and that people could attempt to live ‘decent’ lives even in deplorable conditions. For example, in one part of The Rocks the inspectors noted that:

   In nearly every house entered, and the exceptions were very few, every room, even under the most disadvantageous circumstances, was scrupulously clean, and in many attempts at refinement and ornamentation were very marked. Flowers, pictures and nic-nacs were placed wherever an opportunity offered, and bore evidence of being carefully tended.27

When this was not the case, the problem became one of personal choice, of an evil or immoral character, of an internal disposition towards crime and vice, a person of lazy or idle intent.28 The fact that some people showed it was possible to meet ‘bourgeois’ standards of morality or respectability, even amongst abject poverty, was used to berate those who did not meet these standards, and to justify the condemnation of them and their subsequent exclusion.

It was not just that the family was failing to raise properly socialised children, but their immediate social environments, as the site of secondary socialisation, were also inadequate. If parental neglect and oppressive living spaces forced young people out onto the street, then it would be wise to provide more formal avenues for their energies and provide direction for them in this way: “Other abodes than

27 Daily Telegraph, January 7, 1881.
28 For an excellent analysis of these reports as a performance of othering, see in particular Chapter Four (pp. 84-124) in Mayne. Representing the Slum. This idea of choice in relation to living conditions is explored in more detail in the analysis of Chadwick’s sanitation reports in London in Childers. "Observation and representation:”. See also Stedman Jones. Outcast London. and Crossick. "From Gentlemen to the Residuum"
that of the streets...must entice the young before we shall be able to boast a city
free from this malignant evil” 29 lamented the Australian Journal as early as 1874,
although it did not suggest what these abodes might be. Others suggested that
one factor of the larrikinism now so prevalent is undoubtedly the lack
of wholesome recreation for the lower orders in the larger centres of
population...the means of wholesome recreation, not only in the
shape of parks, but in that of music halls and dancing-saloons, must be
bountifully purveyed to the lower orders if larrikinism is ever to be put
down.30

While it was complained that young people were neglected by their parents, it was
also said to be the case that they were over-indulged: “the licence that is allowed
children in this country is simply scandalous…” 31 groaned The Bulletin. The
Australian Journal agreed: “there can be but one opinion as to the natural tendency
of colonial youths to undue freedom in both speech and action...”32 These ideas
represent the beginning of a change around conceptualisations of youth itself;
where once children had been either at home and school, or then at work,
larrikins emerged at a frontier, a moment of transition, in this relationship. Their
families were subject to external pressures and influences that meant they were
not adequate sites of primary socialisation, and neither was the still tenuous
education system. They were too old for the symbolic order to fully reach them
through these spheres, yet too young for work itself to take their place. Given the
rapid changes happening in the structures of work in Sydney at this time, there
was little chance for the symbolic order to reach larrikins through the workplace
itself. While larrikins pre-dated the modern concept of the ‘teenager’, it is a fact

that this is what they were. The significance of this new frontier was evident to those most concerned by the larrikin.

Again, *The Bulletin* was at the forefront of the attack, arguing that the broader Australian physical and working environment induced freedom and laziness in some sections of its young people:

“In these colonies, where the struggle for mere subsistence is a condition scarcely known…the idle and thriftless come more prominently into view than elsewhere. Our larrikins are as much the outcome of the prosperity of the labouring classes as anything else. …Wealth is achievable with more rapidity than decency of ideas and conduct can be arrived at. …The peculiar prominence which they attain is clearly attributable to the comparative ease with which they, as compared with the same class in the old world, can acquire the means for indulgence and idleness. Under the mild skies of Australia little is needed in the way of house-shelter. Here too, while a shilling goes further towards maintenance than in most parts of the world, it is infinitely more easy to procure….“  

This is a particularly telling assessment. It undermines other commentaries that unproblematically relate larrikinism and criminality to poverty, and begins the process of placing larrikins in a hierarchy of social groupings. Earlier in the article the author made it clear that he was not talking about all young Australians:

we emphasised…the splendid opportunities which are open to young Australians, the influence which they may exercise upon the political management and industrial development of the continent which is their heritage….young Australia is, on the whole, we believe, equal to the situation. Industry, energy, and a keen appreciation of the value of activity and sustained effort are attributes commonly possessed by him.”

In contrast, larrikins are posed as a “demoralised residuum whose actions give occasion for keen anxiety, and whose influence, if not checked and controlled, 

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34 Ibid.
threatens to be burdensome and offensive to the community as it expands.”35 In this way, larrikins are differentiated from other groups in Australian society and the reasons for their existence are made into individual ones. Even though they are idle and ignorant because of their parents, or their easy lifestyle, they are still a ‘deviant other’, separate from and different to the majority of hard working, plain living, Australians: “the larrikins who demonstratively display their evil propensities and outrageous proclivities in full public view do not as a rule belong to the well-to-do classes.”36 By ‘well-to-do’ The Bulletin does not necessarily mean the wealthy, as in upper or middle classes, but it does mean that larrikins are not like the rest of society because “they are the idle, the uncared-for, the wilful, the depraved.”37 Even though commentators were quite clear that larrikins were ‘working class’, it was also clear that they were somehow different - they were not the ‘good’ sort of working class, they were not, in fact, good ‘workers’. More broadly, this is symptomatic of a process by which there came to be a differentiation between the ‘respectable’ and the ‘disrespectable’ working class in Australia, the first delineated by its acceptance of work as a natural fact of life, and by its association with overt political or trade union organisations which sought to reform and ameliorate the conditions of working class life, rather than to overturn or to threaten the basis of the capital-labour relationship itself. The disrespectful working class came to be those people more likened to the ‘lumpenproletariat’ of the old world, the ‘residuum’, or ‘underclass’, delineated by their reliance on casual or seasonal work, or more usually, by their behaviour which displayed an antipathy

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
towards the principles of the evolving capitalist self.\textsuperscript{38} Thus, while larrikins were young, they were still supposed to be workers. The problem here was that they were not going to make good ones. By describing in detail the horrors of the world from which they came and the threat they posed to the ‘rest’ of society (in the form of illness or even revolution), popular commentators and, later, fiction writers, wrote the larrikin undoubtedly as a problem.

This was not, however, true of all popular sources or commentary on larrikins. The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} paid little attention to the larrikin phenomena until articles about them appeared in the British press. In response to Pratt’s characterisation of the larrikin, the \textit{Herald} wrote:

\begin{quote}
the article ‘Push Larrikinism in Australia’ in last month’s Blackwood is an ingenious contribution to the magazine fiction of the day. Not since the world was enlightened as to the flying habits of the wombat, or the usefulness of the ordinary turtle of commerce as ‘a common carrier’ has so much information of the fancy kind been unloaded on a startled world…\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

The \textit{Herald} compares Pratt’s characterisation of larrikin life to the fantasy of \textit{Gulliver’s Travels}, as its main concern was a desire to downplay social conflict in Australia. This was especially so given the move away from colonialism and into Federation, so as not to encourage bad opinion of the new ‘nation’ or discourage migration from Britain, especially as Pratt’s claims pointed to a city rife with violence and crime and an inadequate and bumbling police force. The \textit{Herald} protested:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{38} This delineation along the lines of behaviour especially as it relates to subjectivity is the subject of the next chapter. The difference between respectable and disrepectable working class behaviour is outlined in McCalman, "Class and respectability". and Metcalfe. \textit{For Freedom and Dignity}.  \\
\textsuperscript{39} “Pushes in Sydney” \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, August 10, 1901.
\end{quote}
Those of us who have lived in Sydney for years, and have traversed her streets by day and night, can testify to the ability with which the police force is administered, and to the general high character of its members. But really it is hardly necessary to treat the matter seriously. Good persons in the old country who feel disturbed about these ‘disclosures’ may rest assured that the whole thing is the production of a fertile imagination.40

The Herald had previously published letters from its readers complaining mildly about ‘larrikin nuisances’, but it had refrained from comment about them until now. It felt compelled to play down the phenomena:

We have our larrikin in Sydney – young men mostly with an exuberance of vitality and a deficient supply of common sense. They are more mischievous than malicious, and they are in no sense the danger to the community which the fanciful “Blackwood” article supposes them to be.41

Of course, this attitude is not the result of any particular sympathy towards the larrikin as such, but it is a significant attitude because it represents a shift in the way of thinking about young people, and a recognition that the dichotomy of child/worker was becoming increasingly unsustainable into the early twentieth century. It was an attitude shared by others. In a manuscript of a letter addressed to The Bulletin, which does not appear to have been published, and also in response to Pratt’s characterisation of larrikins, X writes:

Pratt has come in at the heel of the hunt and is kicking a dead dog and a lot he has heard of which happened years ago plainly goes to make up his view of what is today…the finished garrotter, bludger and potential murderer remains and Pratt saddles 10,000 men with the common character of these comparatively few persistent criminals…As to the power and viciousness of the pushes, Pratt must have been reading some of the old time attacks on Freemasonry. If all the mysterious disappearances and undiscovered murders in Australia are credited to the pushes they would not give a kick a piece to Pratt’s thousands of dangerous criminals. The pushes however having a bad

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
name get the blame of everything committed and the blame also of things never committed...²²

X claims instead that pushes are little more than the remnants of school yard rivalries and that larrikins themselves are nothing other than young people entertaining themselves in public whereas the ‘respectable citizen’ has private clubs within which he does much the same thing:

As to the push let me say a word in defence. The Push meets in a corner and intermittently adjourns to its dance, or two-up school or pub. It even goes to the theatre and reads papers. It tells one another blue stories in shocking language, and ogles at passing femininity....it drinks, gambles, swears, fights...and goes on the racket...The higher class men meet in a private bar, club or smoking room and tell the same stories in perhaps more cultured language, they swear also...they gamble, drink, Don Juanise, pass remarks on the fillies passing by, ogle them...Different classes, same men.

This very radical view of the situation was never made public, and it was not repeated by any other source, but by the time of X's writing, some forms of public sentiment around attitudes towards the treatment of larrikinism had begun to change. To some extent this slight shift in thinking was because the larrikin was not disappearing and as the economic conditions in the colonies became more difficult later in the century, social inequality and conflict along class lines became more overt, engendering some sympathy towards those at the margins of society.³³ However, in other cases, attitudes shifted as a result of actions taken by certain government bodies to ‘cure’ the city of larrikinism. This is at least ironic – it was *The Bulletin* in particular who had advocated harsher legislative and police powers to deal with larrikins and when these powers came into force, it was *The Bulletin* who complained about them. Ten years after it had first discussed larrikins,

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³³ This was particularly so for some social reformers who began to see character reform rather than pure punishment as not only more ‘humane’ but as likely to have more long-lasting consequences. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.
The Bulletin rather sarcastically noted that it was tired of the continual diatribe from conservative commentators about the nature of larrikinism, which had now been attributed to “short hours, high wages, manhood suffrage, original sin, the displeasure of the Almighty – said to have been aroused by Sunday trading – ‘trades-unionism’ and the fact that the ‘lower classes’ are not sufficiently ‘kept down’.”44 This particular article, written in 1892, begins to reflect a growing awareness of some of the ‘class content’ in the actions taken against larrikins, especially as The Bulletin saw that changing legislation regarding criminality and forms of punishment could have wider implications. In many ways, this was the direct result of a controversial rape case, known as the ‘Mt Rennie incident’, or the ‘rape of Mary Jane Hicks’. Many commentators, both past and present, unproblematically ascribed the crime to ‘larrikins’ and at the time, nine men were sentenced to death despite problems with evidence and judicial process. In its prosecution of this case, the colonial government showed its willingness to use the full extent of its power and condemn to death working class men who may very well have been innocent of the charges against them. The outrage was intense on both sides of the case, but The Bulletin saw this case, and the continued advocacy of both corporal and capital punishment, as problematic for the increasingly resistant working class more broadly. For The Bulletin, this was a legacy of convictism which needed to be erased before Australia could call itself ‘civilised’:

Owing to the early circumstances of N.S. Wales the feeling among the ruling classes in favour of capital and corporal punishment is still strong. The idea that without the rope and the cat-o’-nine-tails society would fall to pieces, has a firm hold on the colonial mind….Just as

decline of barbarous punishment is the sign of a nation’s advance, so their growth is the sure symptom of a people’s decay.\textsuperscript{45}

Yet it continued to call for an increased police force to deal with the problem of social disorder on the city’s streets, and this is exactly what it got.

Given the failure of the family, and of workplaces themselves, to create the required working self, the problem of larrikinism for government officials was one of individual behaviour, which quickly became incorporated into notions of criminality. Given this, the most references to larrikins are found in the records of the Police and Prison Departments respectively, although they are both hesitant to label the phenomena as such. The first use of the term larrikin does not occur in these records until 1878, which is at least 5 years after their first use in popular sources and even then the use of the term is hesitant and appears in ‘quotation marks’:

\begin{quote}
No-one can read the complaints and comments in the press respecting the increasing annoyance suffered from the public from the disorderly conduct and petty misdemeanours of youths who assemble together in large numbers…without being aware that the nuisance of the so-called ‘larrikin’ element is greatly on the increase and becoming almost insupportable …\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Edmund Fosbery, the Inspector General of Police, here admits that he acts because the Press are ‘forcing’ him to, demonstrating the reflexivity between civil society and government in the formation of the Australian state. His response also indicates several assumptions, or ways of thinking, about larrikins that are significant. Firstly, they are not really guilty of more than ‘disorder’ or ‘petty

\textsuperscript{45} ‘The Lessons of Mount Rennie’ \textit{The Bulletin} December 18, 1896. p. 4.
misdemeanours’ which he later admits he is powerless to do anything about.

Secondly, he differentiates ‘the larrikin element’ from ‘the Public’ more broadly, thus designating them as something alien and external to Australian society itself. Over the next ten years he continually refers to them as a separate social group, ‘an idle, dissolute and lawless class”47, a “disorderly class of youths who idle away their time and are a constant nuisance to the community”48 of which they are clearly not a part. The most obvious cause for their nuisance behaviour, for Fosbery, is the prevalence of dancing saloons and too many public drinking houses which promote “disorderly, immoral and obscene behaviour”49 and he constantly requests increased police powers for the regulation and inspection of such places. Yet, he does concede that this ‘immorality’ can be related to a complex set of social relations:

The idle and dissolute habits of many of the youth in large cities may I think also be attributed to a change in the tone of social organisation and an absence of restraint upon the young, especially exemplified in the discontinuance to a great extent of the practice of apprenticing boys to a trade or handicraft, in substitution of which large numbers of young people of both sexes can now find employment in factories where they can earn good wages, giving them a command of money and long hours of leisure, unrestrained by parental control.50

At no point, however, did Fosbery suggest that larrikins were to be treated with any sympathy. This obvious failure of both primary and secondary socialisation of the city’s young people needed to be dealt with quickly and severely. It became instead the fault of the larrikin himself for continuing to indulge himself in such a manner, rather than learning to ‘straighten up and fly right’. This is demonstrated

47 Ibid. 1884.
48 Ibid. 1885. Emphasis added.
49 Ibid. 1884.
50 Ibid. 1880. p. 138.
more forcefully in Fosbery’s ideas about what to do about larrikins, which then
generated an extensive debate about the rule of law, its uses and abuses, and
concepts of punishment and correction. In this scenario then, it is not that ‘the
State’ acts against larrikins first, and in a determinative way, but it is the case that
‘the State’ acts because there is a perceived social problem, articulated through
civil society. When the institutions of the State respond to larrikins, their actions
are more cause for debate, and this relationship between civil and political society
constitutes a negotiation around who will be included or excluded within the
developing hegemony.

There was then, no real consensus on the major causes of larrikinism, but rather
an often contradictory and ambiguous set of ideas about where they came from
and what needed to be ‘done’ about them. Some of these ambiguous attitudes
about larrikins can be explored further through an analysis of some of the cures
for ‘the problem’ that were put forward by various social commentators.

**The Cures for Larrikinism**

As we have already seen, embedded in some of the commentary on the causes of
larrikinism were some ideas about how to cure it. For the most part, these took
the forms of improving certain social conditions, in large part the places and
activities (the sites of socialisation) within which larrikins lived and found
entertainment. If the problem was that larrikins had too much free time on their
hands, then the most obvious cure for some was the organisation and regulation
of their entertainment. If amusements were more organised, they could be then be
regulated and education about ‘correct’ behaviour provided: “Great reforms are calling for earnest and universal attention, and one of the principal is the organisation of outdoor life….Properly supervised open-air concerts and moonlight demonstrations in our parks and gardens should be initiated on a large scale…” \textsuperscript{51} “A well-conducted concert-hall and dancing-saloon, where propriety was insisted on and where cheap refreshments could be procured…” \textsuperscript{52} was the answer for many.\textsuperscript{53}

It is interesting to note that no commentators in the popular press believe that education of a more formal type would be of any assistance, even though one of the most frequent charges laid against larrikins was their ‘ignorance’. While a minimum level of schooling had been compulsory for some time, school attendance was not actively enforced, and many commentators felt that there was little or no point in pursuing this course of action. As \textit{The Bulletin} noted, “Primary education does not promise to meet the case, for the larrikin, as a rule, has been to school – some, alas! are actually at school.”\textsuperscript{54} The problem was not only the “bad and inefficient systems of education”\textsuperscript{55} but was exacerbated by the fact that children were not there long enough, and that they returned to the same environment from which they had come:

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{53} For ideas about the commodification of public space in the late nineteenth century see in particular Finch, "On the streets" ; Hoskins. "The Core of the City". Debates about the condition of housing and their relation to the development of waterfront real estate is also covered in Mayne. \textit{Fever, Squalor and Vice} ; Mayne. \textit{The Imagined Slum}.  
It is naturally enough expected that the present liberal education scheme will do much in the way of reform; but that children should attend school all day to return in the evening in many cases to haunts of infamy seems nothing else than that precepts for the future are being written on the sea shore, to be obliterated by the advancing tide. Education does not deliver our children of good society from vice, not will it of itself serve to demolish larrikinism. Our education is said to be compulsory...[but] people can conform to the compulsory clause by sending their children to school for 140 days in the year. This would leave 225 days in the year when the children would have ample time to forget the greater portion of their previously acquired school knowledge, and abundant opportunity for assimilating their natures to the degradation and crime which form their native environments.56

As we have seen, there was enough interest in this last issue (including an increasing interest in land value) to take action against particular physical environments, and it is the case that large sections of substandard housing were eradicated in the last years of the nineteenth century.57 But it was not just this concern with the home environment that made education seem a waste of time. It was also, at least in part, linked to an awareness that the larrikin was an outdoor type, and there was potential here for 'reforming' his character: “we need to...organise rational, elevating, out-door amusements...great reforms are calling for earnest and universal attention, and one of the principal is the organisation of out-door life... ...Cultivate his taste for music and athletic sports by band-contests and demonstrations in the open air...Under the open canopy of heaven – with the

56 Ajax. "Larrikinism".
57 Some authors have tied this activity to broader processes of consumption and commodification, including the gentrification of commercial and shopping areas in the city of Sydney. See, for example, Fisher, Shirley. "An Accumulation of Misery? Late nineteenth century Sydney slums". Labour History. May 1981 (40). 1981. 16-28; Mayne. Fever, Squalor and Vice. ; Fitzgerald. Rising Damp, Sydney 1870-1890. ; Finch. "On the streets" ; Hoskins. "The Core of the City".
free ocean breezes fanning his temples – the Australian larrikin can be inspired and elevated.”

The other factor leading to a dismissal of education as potentially transformative was the deeper belief that larrikins were born to work, not to think, and thus, work itself should be the means of transformation. As one letter writer to the Herald suggested “the social status of a portion of its youth requires to be looked after and directed by those in authority, in order that on reaching manhood they may permanently join the ranks of the ‘horny handed sons of toil’ in the various industrial pursuits open to them.” This was not just any kind of work, however – indeed it was often lamented that the ease with which casual work in factories could be found was at least part of the problem. The emphasis here is on physical work: “the handling of a crosscut saw, axe, spade, hoe or pick would enable a youth to acquire sufficient skill in their use as would inspire him with a confidence that it is within his power to become a useful and industrious colonist.” This way of thinking about a remedy for larrikinism may have been informed in part by a belief in the redemptive capacity of exhausting physical work, but it was also informed in large part by particular class interests including the continued reproduction of enough rural labourers to sustain the agricultural industries upon which white Australia was built. This was a long running concern and had often been a motivating factor in the remedies put forward to deal with the cities unemployed and abandoned youth, where children as young as six or seven could

59 Macintosh, J. “Our Larrikins” Letter to the Editor, Sydney Morning Herald December 1887.  
60 Ibid.
be forcibly removed from deficient families and drilled in the values and behaviours necessary for work.\textsuperscript{61}

In contrast to this way of thinking was \textit{The Bulletin} which displayed a much more complex attitude towards work and young people in the city. While on one hand it was busy condemning the larrikin for their laziness and idleness, and blaming poverty and misery for their existence, on the other hand it was quite clear that they were able to obtain plenty of work and earn good money in the cities factories. It could not condemn larrikins for doing this kind of work without condemning the rest of the urban working class, and while it was concerned that conditions in factories were problematic, it was not specifically interested in advocating on behalf of urban workers. Like most popular commentators, it did not want to look too hard at the structures of colonial economic life and tended to gloss over the relation of larrikins to work. The most it was capable of was talking about ‘social conditions’ more generally, and the need to temper the greed of capitalist land lords and to ‘balance’ the conditions between capital and labour more generally.\textsuperscript{62} In this sense then, larrikinism remained an individual pathology, possibly connected to certain social conditions, but in the last instance, reliant on the larrikin himself to change his own character – a problem of ‘morality’ rather than ‘society’.

For the majority of popular commentators, the most obvious cure for larrikinism was the eradication of the larrikin by whatever means necessary. For most this

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Scrivener. \textit{Rescuing the Rising Generation}. ; Smith. "Labour Discipline".
\item \textsuperscript{62} See in particular the article, ‘Larrikinism: Its Cause and Cure’, \textit{The Bulletin}, April 23, 1886. p. 15.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
meant legislation, policing and imprisonment, with particular types of punishment and remedial programs. In the first instance, it required an extended police force and the more rigorous application of punishments by the courts:

the first step towards its suppression is to catch the offender…It is impracticable to lay poison for larrikins, or to trap them, so they must be run down by manual labour in the old fashion. And the only way to afford any reasonable certainty that they will be captured is to quadruple the police force…there is no earthly reason why the police force should not be made eight or even ten times as strong as it now is…with such a force there is at least reasonable chance that every outbreak of larrikinism would be promptly suppressed and the offenders captured.63

The Bulletin suggests that a police force this size could then act as a sort of army reserve when not required elsewhere, but it would be useless against larrikins unless magistrates were willing to convict and imprison them. It was a common complaint that larrikins were not scared of the police or the law they sought to uphold, given that magistrates were more likely to fine them a small monetary amount, which their friends quickly collected, or to imprison them for a few short days in the general population which introduced them to more hardened criminals and made them heroes upon their release.64 Some stronger deterrent was required, and The Bulletin argued that:

A simple and effective way to arrive at this result would be to enact that every individual convicted a second time of violence should be imprisoned without any option whatever. It is only necessary to pass such an enactment in cases of violence; the criminal who offends against property never gets any option. Solitary confinement on a bread-and-water diet with a plank bed by way of luxury would be a very efficient deterrent…also if the sentence increased in length according to a certain fixed ratio with each succeeding offence the

64 Pratt. "'Push' Larrikinism in Australia". ; Murray. Larrikins.
horrors of hunger and loneliness would presently render this variety of crime practically extinct.65

What is the most ironic about this article is that it begins with a defence of larrikins against the tendency to blame all of society’s ills upon them, and is written in response to proposals to introduce flogging as a mean of punishment for larrikinism. It argues that this action would be barbarous and medieval, and not a practice that a civilised nation should endorse. Yet in that same article, it is lamented that larrikins can not be poisoned or trapped, and suggests solitary confinement and restricted diet as somehow redemptive. This is a contradiction not unique to The Bulletin.

Almost all of the articles in the popular press that deal with larrikins display the same sorts of contradictions where there is some attempt to name particular social conditions that might give rise to larrikins, but then return to blaming the larrikin himself, and then find the solution for larrikinism in increased regulation, legislation, surveillance and discipline. For some this meant a regulation of almost every facet of working class life:

The answer is – naturally enough – legislation. Special enactments to ensure good drainage; enactments to do away with the unhealthy tenements; enactments for State interference to take from degraded and abandoned parents their children; and above all, stringent measures to punish with the utmost rigour careless or unnatural parents, as well as laws to bestow punishment on the drunken and immoral.66

In many ways, government was happy to comply.

66 Ajax. ”Larrikinism”. p. 212.
Since 1867 a system had been in operation whereby the cities wayward or abandoned youth could be committed to a term on board a ship anchored in Sydney Harbour. This ‘Industrial School Ship’ as it was called, was ostensibly a place to teach children skills so that they could be apprenticed out to farmers in the interior, a bridge between ‘family’ and ‘work’ but the scheme was so open to abuses by farmers looking for semi-slave labour, that the practice was stopped and the children were drilled in a kind of naval discipline instead.\textsuperscript{67} So there was already in place in Sydney a belief in the reformative power of institutionalisation, but the persistence of larrikinism brought about a rethinking of the nature of those institutions. The Inspector General of Police was the first to agree that larrikinism demanded changes to both policing and criminal legislation. In 1878 he wrote in his annual report:

\begin{quote}
The police are naturally appealed to provide a remedy but nothing can be done efficaciously in the present state of the law. The Police Act fixes a penalty for riotous or indecent behaviour in towns, but the misconduct so frequently complained of can scarcely be deemed to come within the above category. It is rather ‘disorderly behaviour’ which should be made, in my opinion, an offence by enactment…the increase in the constabulary would partially suppress the nuisance, but with such extensive beats much disorder may occur before constables can be present to check it.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

In 1880 the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police force wrote:

\begin{quote}
the number of arrests by the police is very considerable indeed, but the penalties now inflicted are wholly inadequate to meet the offences or to act as a deterrent. What dread is there of a fine of a few shillings, promptly subscribed by the defendants comrades, or a few days simple imprisonment, which is deemed by the offenders to be no disgrace and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} Garton. "Frederick William Neitenstein". ; Scrivener. \textit{Rescuing the Rising Generation}. ; Smith. "Labour Discipline".

but little punishment?...I have little hope for any improvement until more effectual legal means of repression are provided.\textsuperscript{69}

The answer, it was suggested, was not only an increased police force and a change in the legislation under which larrikins could be arrested, but also in a different sort of punishment once they were captured. \textit{The Bulletin}'s idea for a bread-and-water diet and a plank bed was tame compared to Fosbery’s ideas for ‘whipping’\textsuperscript{70} and the treadmill:

> When such offenders are sent to gaol, it should be made a punishment, not simply incarceration. It would be better to revert to the treadmill than to be without means of punishment altogether, but I believe that the only thoroughly efficacious means of suppressing what has become a serious public nuisance and a social blot will be the application of the lash to the incorrigibles.\textsuperscript{71}

On this point, Fosbery had the support of the then-Comptroller General of Prisons, Harold MacLean, who had been arguing for extensions to the Prison buildings so that he could expand his program of ‘separation’ or solitary confinement. His rationale for separation was the belief that young offenders imprisoned for relatively minor offences should not be allowed to associate with more hardened ‘criminals’, but his repeated requests appear to have fallen on deaf ears. As a result, life inside Darlinghurst Gaol (the main repository of larrikin offenders) became increasingly harsh. This was made even more so by the apparent recalcitrance of some offenders, who did not submit lightly. In 1879 McLean wrote “in respect of conduct there have been, and continue to be, exceptional instances of violent and mutinous conduct, causing trouble and punishment to the prisoners themselves…in all these instances the


\textsuperscript{70} Fosbery. \textit{Police Dept Report} 1878. p. 566.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibid}. 1881. p. 995.
commencement of the disturbances can be traced to the withdrawal of the authority to use the gag…”. 72

‘The gag’ was it was called, had been a controversial disciplinary device within the NSW penal system, and a Royal Commission following a riot at Berrima Gaol had recommended that its use be re-adopted. A lengthy parliamentary debate about it ensued and it was officially reinstated in 1894, but only after extensive debate.73 The main benefit was considered to be the inability of the recalcitrant offender to speak, and thus to incite his fellow inmates to riot. In the case of larrikinism, MacLean was keen to reinstate it not only for its alleged deterrent effects but because it was somehow more humane than either the solitary confinement or corporal punishment he was currently authorised to use. In 1880 he wrote:

> there have been outbreaks of individuals and small combinations, seriously interfering with the order and discipline of the establishments, which have been only finally repressed by reluctant recourse to the threat of, or actual resort to, corporal punishment…These disorders usually have their commencement in audacious and frequently most filthy language, sometimes kept up day and night, audible throughout the smaller prisons, so that the well disposed prisoners suffer almost as much annoyance as the officers are subjected to embarrassment and feelings of disgust. There is not an officer in charge of a prison who would not unhesitatingly express the conviction that the existence as formerly of the authority to use, apart from the actual use of, the gag, …as the most immediate and humane means of repression… 74

MacLean was forced, however, to resort to more traditional methods of imprisonment practices, so that despite public opinion, a stint in Darlinghurst

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74 MacLean, H. “Prisons Department Report”, 1880. pp. 923-924.
Gaol was destined to be neither reformatory nor corrective. George Miller took over as Comptroller-General of Prisons from 1889 and tightened the regime of solitary confinement, restricted diet and corporal punishment, including the use, or threat of the use, of the gag, believing that this ‘sharp punishment’ would convince larrikins that they were criminals, and that a flogging would cause them disgrace in their communities upon release.75

However, twenty years of the same ideas had failed to diminish the larrikin nuisance, so it was with the hope of a different approach that a new Comptroller-General of Prisons was appointed in 1896. This was none other than Frederick Neitenstein, who had been the second, and very successful, superintendent of the Industrial School Ship System. Neitenstein brought with him an extensive knowledge of international prison systems and some of the latest penological theories, as well as strong views on the issue of larrikism. He was more tempered in his assessment of the problem, blaming the press and popular fiction for perhaps overstating the issue:

No doubt…some exaggeration occurs when the assailed tell of their woes. Quarrels occur, and the defeated parties magnify the number of their assailants, while every street disturbance is put down to larrikism.76

This does not mean the Neitenstein did not believe larrikins existed, indeed he knew they did, but he believed the current prison regime would do little to put an end to their behaviour. Accordingly, he amended the harsh physical punishment

75 These ideas are repeated in consecutive Prison Department Reports from 1890-95.
system and, while keeping the inmates separate, set them on a course of physical and moral improvement “on the principle of ‘the sound mind the sound body’ theory”. However, Neitenstein was also quick to point out that prison was not the answer for larrikinism:

In the suppression of larrikinism, too much has been left to the police and to the prisons; but other measures should be taken before the disease is allowed to attain full development. … In most cases there is no real vice or harm about the majority of these lads. They have the spirits and virility natural to their age. Society should consider that it has some obligation to them, and should not neglect its duty.

The appointment of Neitenstein seemed to coincide with some broader changes in thinking about social issues and the move to medicalise some types of behaviour problems, including drunkenness, mental illness and youth. Neitenstein shows the beginning of an awareness of ‘youth’ as a transitional stage, something different to both child and adult hood, and thus requiring its own particular mechanisms of care and control. As a result, new reformatories and asylums were built, existing charities and ragged schools came under closer regulation and children began to be dealt with in a more ‘social’ and less ‘criminal’ fashion. This is not necessarily a matter of ‘progress’, rather it can be seen as a deepening of the individualisation of the social, contributing to the diversion of

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
attention away from the ‘structural’ causes of social problems and making them
into a matter of individual pathology. For larrikins, this was further exacerbated by
the severe tightening of criminal legislation including the increased police force,
increased surveillance and increased incarceration periods. Not only was the
larrikin a pathology, he was now clearly a criminal.

It is this last factor that most obviously contributed to the physical ‘eradication’ of
the larrikin, and facilitated a now clear differentiation between ‘larrikins’ and
‘criminals’. But he would not have disappeared at all without a change in the very
idea of the larrikin, and this was most easily achieved through his and her
‘sanitisation’. Given that it could not continue to exclude larrikins without running
the risk of bringing the entire working class under such scrutiny, The Bulletin in
particular began a campaign of incorporating larrikinism into the respectable
working class. Significantly, however, for The Bulletin, this was a working class
emerging from the Bush. By valorising the radical politics emerging from the
mines and shearing sheds of the interior, and by celebrating the masculine type
that came with it, The Bulletin could develop a different type of larrikin, hard
drinking, rough talking, but independent and anti-authoritarian. In its attempt to
create a distinctively Australian nationalism that was distinct from an old world
emphasis on empire and class, and seeing that the material form of larrikinism was
not on the decrease, The Bulletin took the line that “we are all larrikins”.80 In this
way, it transformed a potentially subversive subculture into a harmless aspect of
national character.

and the Larrikin". ; Rickard. "Lovable Larrikins".
This was a process continued by the subsequent literary works dealing with ‘larrikins’. The contemporary work on larrikinism which dealt with them in their urban settings, such as Louis Stone’s *Jonah*, or Edward Dyson’s *Fact’ry ‘Ands*, never achieved the iconic status of the rural based works such as Ethel Turner’s *The Little Larrikin*, C.J. Dennis’ *Sentimental Bloke*, the ‘larrikinism’ of *Dad n Dave*, or later, even of *Ginger Meggs*. The advent of World War One saw the larrikin type transformed into the national hero of the Digger and the Anzac, and the urban ‘rough’ came to be something separate from the Legend of the Australian National Type, personified by the rural labourer who had forged the glorious Australian Working Class from the Great Strikes of the 1890s. This continuing process has been largely facilitated by Russel Ward’s famous *The Australian Legend*, which presents as a study in national character but does not make a single reference to the larrikin; and the subsequent work which draws on Ward’s characterisation, work which writes them into silence because they disrupt the comfortable mythology of an Australian masculinity based on physical labour, emotional reservedness, and the sacred vessel of ‘Australianness’ - mateship.81 In these approaches to larrikinism, we can see clearly the processes of subalternity operating at both the material and the symbolic level. In the case of many of the popular commentaries about larrikins, we can see the workings of the organic intellectuals of the new age, laying the ground work for the hegemonic principles that would be aimed at the creation of a new common sense, a new way of being in the world.

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81 There has been an extensive critique of Ward’s work and I do not wish to dismiss its importance, or to deny that there was a bush worker who has contributed to the idea of an Australian national character. However, there are problems and longer term consequences of his work which will be dealt with in the Conclusion to this thesis.
Conclusion

There are various ways in which subalternity is created and recreated in Gramsci’s analysis of the process and we can see many of them at play in the discourses of larrikinism. That is, while larrikinism may have existed as a particular set of behaviours, exhibited by a particular group of people, they were ‘created’ (and created as subaltern) by the various structural and superstructural processes outlined in this chapter. However, it is not simply the case that the superstructural flows from the structural, or the ‘ideology’ from the ‘base’, but rather that there is a reflexivity between the spheres, so that one is not possible without the other. Given Gramsci’s emphasis on understanding social phenomena in their specific historical context, it is safe to say that the development of a nascent industrial capitalism in Australia in the late nineteenth century created a set of social relations within which many different types of social groups were formed, and that the way these groups related to each other went on to inform the nature of capitalist hegemony. It is within this set of social relations that larrikins as subaltern can be understood.

Gramsci’s ‘methodological criteria’ of subalternity is useful here, because it demonstrates the ways in which subaltern groups are formed and subsumed within a developing hegemony. For Gramsci, all subaltern groups (including the bourgeoisie) go through stages of development. The first major phase is the ‘objective formation’ of various social groups in relation to changes in the economic sphere, some elements of which are always conserved. The second phase is where groups start to either actively or passively (through political or
other means) attempt to press claims of their own. The third phase is where the dominant groups respond to these formations and either co-opt them into assent or ‘control’ them.\textsuperscript{82} Some groups go on to assert hegemony of their own, historically the bourgeoisie, for example. But it is at this historical moment that groups are either ‘allowed’ to continue or are stamped out, depending on the level of threat they pose to the developing hegemony. This is significant because it helps to explain the way in which structural responses to larrikinism were formulated – they were not just random or arbitrary changes in legislation reflecting wider changes about the nature of incarceration, discipline and punishment but were active components of a nascent capitalist hegemony, responding to the actions of a subaltern group, which in turn affected the very nature of that hegemony. Larrikins may not have been an active political group that consciously sought to challenge that hegemony, but their actions did have consequences, in some ways ‘negative’ ones given that the responses to them brought about their own exclusion and resulted in a tightening of hegemonic mechanisms more generally. However, this is not something for which larrikins themselves should be blamed – in the first instance these are processes that can only really be seen and analysed once they are complete, and in the second instance, they could not realise the extent of the threat that they posed. If larrikins constituted no real system challenge, there would have been no need for their active repression and exclusion.

\textsuperscript{82} Gramsci, \textit{Quaderni del Carcere} Q25 §1. See also Green. "Gramsci Cannot Speak".
We can see then that in Gramsci’s schema, larrikins are in a state of ‘becoming’, existing somewhere between the second and third phases of subaltern development. While this conception is usually used to relate to the development of groups around particular forms of politics, it can be argued that larrikins inhabited this schema as a transitional type, refusing to grow up and into the symbolic order, and thus creating a new frontier for hegemony to be fought around the concept of youth. Although they might not have done so in recognisably political forms, it is the case that larrikins did press claims of their own and these claims could not be accommodated in the nascent capitalist hegemony of late nineteenth century Sydney. This is because these were claims about what it meant to be human, that sought to challenge capitalist hegemony at the level of the human subject. The analysis of this aspect of larrikinism is the object of the next chapter.
Chapter Six

The Real Larrikin

Gramsci’s concept of subalternity is most often used for an analysis of group behaviour, and in these analyses subalternity is usually assumed to be a negative condition, based on a lack, that needs to be overcome by a confrontation with the structures of power. Yet the previous chapter showed that there was more to subalternity, and to a Gramscian conceptualisation of relations of power more generally, than this. Gramsci was keenly aware of the ways in which people were made, and made themselves, in relation to the circumstances in which they were born, and that in so doing they immediately affected those circumstances. Subalternity was not always a state of victimhood but was made so more often by historians or theorists who sought to impose pre-existing categories of analysis onto situations. In this scenario, subaltern groups are depoliticised or decontextualised. This way of thinking overlooks the subtleties in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, in which, if real social change is to occur, subalternity must be understood in its specific historical context, and the processes by which it is produced and reproduced exposed. To do so, it is essential to understand the ways in which people come to see themselves as subaltern, and to look for the ways in which they resist these sorts of power relations in everyday life. Gramsci made some headway in this line of thinking with his ideas about common sense, philosophy and personality formation, but there are limits to how far he could, and would, push his theories in this direction. This chapter explores some of the more specific work that Gramsci embarked on in relation to personality,
subjectivity and human nature in the context of industrial capitalism, and reveals some of the tensions in his thinking. These tensions are linked to the more specific subjectivity theories explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, and show the way in which these theories can combine for a specific analysis of larrikin subjectivity. While the previous chapter dealt with the construction of larrikinism as a social problem, this chapter goes into more detail about what the exact nature of this problem was, and links these discourses with the theoretical framework of this thesis, showing the way in which larrikin subjectivity can be considered a form of resistance in the face of a new symbolic order centred on the hegemonic principles of developing industrial capitalism, which sought to bring about changes to ‘human nature’ itself.

If this thesis project is an attempt (conscious or otherwise) to construct a historical social ontology, then larrikins are an excellent example of the processes by which the very idea of human nature itself is open for contestation. It is the case however, that this thesis accepts that there are some fundamental essentials to human nature, which Freud would call instincts or drives but that these are repressed or sublimated into socially acceptable, or civilised behaviours. Thus, it is not simply that larrikins were made subaltern because they were poor, or criminal, or deviant, or a lumpenproletariat, but because they were becoming the wrong sort of people: the wrong sort of youth, the wrong sort of worker. It can be argued then, that there is a strong link between subalternity and subjectivity, and this is particularly evident when we study in detail the way in which subaltern groups are classified and analysed in their own time. While Gramsci warned against making
subaltern groups into individual pathologies, he was also aware of the ways in which subalternity could be constructed around particular personality traits and that values, or morality, were strongly related to changing social and economic circumstances. This link, and Gramsci’s own interest in the psychology of capitalism, is most clearly spelled out in his work on *Americanism and Fordism*.

**Americanism and Fordism**

Written in 1934, the notes on *Americanism and Fordism* are observations and questions arising from the processes of increasing mechanisation of work, workplaces and the consequent flow on to social and personal life. Gramsci wrote these notes at a time of transition, and as such, acknowledged that he was yet to see the longer term consequences, but he did place these processes in the longer history of industrialisation and was particularly perceptive about the effects they were likely to have on human beings. What is most interesting about these notes is his explicit acknowledgement that industrialisation requires the repression and sublimation of ‘instincts’ and that in this process, a new type of human nature is being developed. In fact, it had always been so, but the latest developments, which were having increasingly drastic affects at the level of the self, brought with them new problems and new potentials:

The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle (which today takes an even more marked and vigorous form) against the element of ‘animality’ in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development. This struggle is imposed from
outside, and the results to date, though they have great immediate practical value, are to a large extent purely mechanical: the new habits have not yet become ‘second nature’. But has not every way of life, in the period in which it was forced to struggle against the old, always been for a certain time a result of mechanical repression? Even the instincts which have to be overcome today because they are too ‘animal’ are really a considerable advance on earlier, even more primitive instincts...Up to now all changes in modes of existence and modes of life have taken place through brute coercion, that is to say through the domination of one social group over all the productive forces of society. The selection or ‘education’ of men adapted to the new forms of civilisation and to the new forms of production and work has taken place by means of incredible acts of brutality which have cast the weak and the non-conforming into the limbo of the underclasses or have eliminated them entirely.¹

The immediate problem was one of hegemony – while these changes stemmed from the “need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process”, they were changes that were still “idyllic...there has not been, except perhaps sporadically, any flowering of the ‘superstructure’. In other words, the fundamental question of hegemony has not yet been posed.”² This is important, because change for Gramsci was only meaningful if it was organic, self-directed. It was not that people could be tricked by ideology into adopting certain ways of being in the world, but that they saw something in these changes that would benefit them, and chose to act accordingly. That is, “the new methods of production and work have to be acquired by means of reciprocal persuasion and by convictions proposed and accepted by each individual.”³ Given this, the success of ‘Americanism’ or ‘Fordism’ was dubious, especially so given that they were processes that sought to act so rigorously on aspects of the self. It was at this

¹ Gramsci. *Quaderni del Carcere* Q22§10. Most of the notes on Americanism and Fordism have been published as a complete ‘essay’ in Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* pp. 279-318. The following footnotes refer directly to the *Quaderni* unless specified otherwise.
² Gramsci. *Quaderni del Carcere* Q22§2.
level that Gramsci saw the most resistance to the demands of industrial
civilisation.

These were demands that sought to transform human nature at some of its most
fundamental and personal levels. Issues around the regulation of sexuality,
reproduction, alcohol use, morality, family structure, skill and intelligence – all
came under the broad rubric of the ‘training of the gorilla’. The single most
significant area requiring ‘training’ was sexuality, because “the new type of man
demanded by the rationalisation of production and work can not be developed
until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been
rationalised.” Sexuality was important in a number of ways and for a number of
reasons. At the most basic level, the ‘sexual question’ appeared to Gramsci to be a
question of population reproduction, as an “economic function”, that is, the
rationalisation of demography to sustain the means of production. In this sense,
sexual instincts were ‘regulated’ into heterosexual married relationships for not
just the reproduction of the population, but for the education of the young: “Life
in industry demands a general apprenticeship, a process of psycho-physical
adaptation to specific conditions of work, nutrition, housing, customs, etc. This is
not something ‘natural’ or innate, but has to be acquired, and…passed on by
heredity or rather…absorbed in the development of childhood and adolescence.”
This ‘normative’ function of family life is complicated however by the changing
role of women, which was complex and problematic:

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4 Ibid. Q22§11
5 Ibid. Q22§3.
6 Ibid.
The formation of a new feminine personality is the most important question of an ethical and civil order connected with the sexual question. Until women can attain not only a genuine independence in relation to men but also a new way of conceiving themselves and their role in sexual relations, the sexual question will remain full of unhealthy characteristics and caution must be exercised in proposals for new legislation.7

The apparent ‘progressiveness’ of his thinking here is complicated by seemingly contradictory attitudes about sexuality more generally. While he saw that sexual repression of sorts was part of the industrial-capitalist project, Gramsci did not think that this was entirely a negative thing. He argued rather that the ‘crisis of libertinism’ emerging from the First World War was a largely bourgeois, or middle class, luxury, made more problematic by the appearance of a reactionary ‘Puritanism’ which sought to regulate working class sexuality, while middle class sexuality remained unchecked and predatory. Options for middle class women (which the rest of the population was encouraged to emulate) narrowed, turning them into “luxury mammals”8 especially prey to the objectification of the beauty industry and the entailing neurosis, personified in the identification of women as either ‘brood mares’ or ‘dollies.’9 Gramsci lamented this shift, for women and for society more generally, preferring instead a female sexuality that was self-assured and stable, which he felt was personified in the peasant relationship:

The peasant who returns home in the evening after a long and hard days work…loves his own woman, sure and unfailing, who is free from affectation and doesn’t play little games about being seduced or raped in order to be possessed. It might seem that in this way the sexual function has been mechanized, but in reality we are dealing with the growth of a new form of sexual union shorn of the bright and

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid. Q22§11.
9 Ibid. Q22§3.
dazzling colour of the romantic tinsel typical of the petty bourgeois and the Bohemian layabout.\textsuperscript{10}

This type of relationship was more attractive to Gramsci not only because of his own upbringing and the prevalence of strong, self-assured women in his life, but also because it represented the stability and discipline which he recognised as some of the potential benefits of Americanism or Fordism. It was not just the discipline it promised, but also the potential to overcome superstition and romanticism in common sense, and provide people with the tools necessary for the development of a critical self-awareness that might bring about organic social transformation. This included the tools required for intelligent, political collectivity.

However, it was also the case that Gramsci recognised that this kind of monogamy was synonymous with the economic reproductive function, and was therefore potentially problematic:

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the new industrialism requires monogamy; it does not want the working man to squander his nervous energies in the anxious and unruly search for sexual gratification. The worker who goes to his job after a wild night is not a good worker; excitement of the passions does not go with the timed movement of machines of productive human motions.\textsuperscript{11}
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The problem here is twofold. Firstly, there was the hypocrisy of this ethic being promoted by a middle class who flagrantly ignored the very values that they espoused. This ‘moral gap’ was the result of coercive pressures being brought to bear, rather than of a hegemony operating at the level of superstructure, and

\textsuperscript{10} Ib\textit{id.} Q22§11.

\textsuperscript{11} Gramsci. \textit{Prison Notebooks Volume II} p. 217. Q4§52. See also Gramsci. \textit{Quaderni del Carcere Q22§11}. 
would result only in crisis. Secondly, there were the potentially dehumanising effects of this increased mechanisation or automatism:

which is also the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man...developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work...and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect.

Despite their claims to a concern with issues of morality, for Gramsci it was obvious that industrialists were “not concerned with the ‘humanity’ or the ‘spirituality’ of the worker, which are immediately smashed.” Rather, “…it is precisely against this ‘humanism’ that the new industrialism is fighting. Puritanical initiatives simple have the purpose of preserving, outside of work, a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents the physiological collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production.”

While Gramsci noted that there may be benefits in this system for workers, not the least of which was higher wages, he also realised that these benefits would be a ‘double-edged sword’. Firstly it was the case that higher wages did not automatically translate to ‘rational’ expenditure, so this would require more superstructural projects, including the prohibition of alcohol, which again would require coercive measures, making life more regulated, more scrutinised:

Thus the struggle against alcohol, the most dangerous agent of destruction of labouring power, becomes a function of the state. It is possible for other ‘puritanical’ struggles to become functions of the

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12 Gramsci. *Quaderni del Carcere* Q4§52. and Q22§11.
state if the private initiative of the industrialists proves insufficient or if a moral crisis breaks out among the working masses…15

Worker resistance was also possible in response to increased automation in the physical workplace, if only because men were not, in fact, machines, or gorillas either:

Once the process of adaptation has been completed, what really happens is that the brain of the worker, far from being mummified, reaches a state of complete freedom. The only thing that is completely mechanised is the physical gesture…one walks automatically, and at the same time one thinks about whatever one chooses. American industrialists have understood all too well this dialectic inherent in the new industrial methods. They have understood that ‘trained gorilla’ is just a phase, that ‘unfortunately’ the worker remains a man and even during his work he thinks more…and not only does the worker think, but the fact that he gets no immediate satisfaction from his work and realises that they are trying to reduce him to a trained gorilla, can lead him to a train of thought that is far from conformist.16

While there is a radical potential implicit here, it remained the case that it was not entirely possible for Gramsci to rid himself of his own ‘rational’ belief in human progress, at the very least he saw potentials in Americanism for overcoming the parasitic element in European class relations, especially in relation to bringing Italy into the modern world. He did, however remain ambiguous about the long term success and consequence of these processes, given that he understood that they were not ‘hegemonic’ until they were ‘second nature’. Interestingly, he also noted that the increase in psychoanalysis could be seen as “the expression of the increased moral coercion exercised by the state and society on single individuals and of the pathological crisis determined by this coercion”17 So while he may have seen some value in these new habits, he noted that resistance to them was normal,

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. Q22§12.
17 Ibid. Q22§2.
part of the usual historical process. But more than this, he suggested that the amount of pressure and coercion they exerted was more likely to bring about a crisis of some kind, not least a crisis of hegemony because the demands were so intense and so impractical, so obviously coercive and applied with such hypocrisy, that they could not help but fail at the level of the organic. In this sense then, the message of Americanism and Fordism, for Gramsci, may have had some promise in it, but its method was intrinsically incorrect.

There are some surprisingly direct links between Gramsci’s analysis here and the processes of developing industrial capitalism in Australia. Although Fordist methods of factory organisation and Taylor’s ideas about scientific management were not current at the height of larrikinism, the processes that Gramsci describes here have a longer history – neither Fordism nor Taylorism were born overnight, but formed part of the ongoing process of the rationalisation of production and its attendant methods of social organisation. A great deal of the rhetoric that Gramsci describes in 1934 was already in play in Australia in the late nineteenth century and came to bear significant influence on the way larrikinism was thought and treated.

The idea that larrikinism was a form of instinctual behaviour was expressed by many contemporary social commentators, indeed, for most this was the exact problem with it. It is true that the Comptroller General of Prisons, Neitenstein, was aware of this fact, arguing that while “it is an undoubted fact that there is a great deal of undisciplined animalism on the part of certain of our young men” it
was also the case that “there is no real vice or harm about the majority of these lads. They have the spirits and virility natural to their age.”\(^{18}\) For Neitenstein, the remedy should not take the form of imprisonment or corporal punishment alone (he felt that neither imprisonment nor a ‘sound thrashing’ would do anything other than more harm than good). However, he had no doubt that larrikinism was “a very great social evil” which needed to be suppressed, because he recognised in this form of youth a way of being in the world that would not conform to the demands of industrial capitalism. They might only be ‘young’ and doing what was ‘natural’, but there was a very real fear that they would not grow up, that there was subversive potential in their ‘fun’ that could threaten the stability of industrial hegemony. The answer then, given that they were young and still malleable, was in prevention rather than cure.\(^{19}\) If both primary and secondary socialisation in the form of both family and school, had failed to instil the necessary values for capitalist hegemony, than the state would step in and ensure that it made its young people into the type of worker it needed. To this end, as he had done with the industrial schools, Neitenstein sought to institute reform programs in prison that would provide some form of basic education and provide ‘moral instruction’. By this he meant teaching prisoners who could not already do so to read, write and do basic sums, but only if they were under 35, and to provide reading material that would occupy prisoner’s minds “in absorbing the healthful teachings of a standard work than in pondering over and conjuring up evils and \textit{libidinous} ideas. To refine such minds would not tend to lessen the punitive effect of imprisonment, but


\(^{19}\) \textit{Ibid.}
would probably increase it by raising the moral perception to a higher level.”

The point then, was to have prisoners find ways to sublimate or repress their instincts, especially of a sexual or violent kind, and thus realise the error of their ways. But reading alone was obviously not the answer. Neitenstein may have disavowed flogging but he was a firm believer in the “sound body sound mind” principle, and recommended in his reports that a trial involving certain types of physical activity at Darlinghurst Gaol be extended:

Those subjected to the new departure have two intervals of physical drill daily, one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon…the movements are of a vigorous character, and they are at once work of a hard nature, when required, and exercise; in the latter respect superseding the old circumambulatory walk.

In support of the project, he quotes from Doctors reports which give him “much reason for hoping that the new departure will be a success”:

…from a medical point of view the men have undoubtedly improved…while formerly they were listless and apathetic…they are now bright and alert…they contrast very favourably with the undrilled men, and can readily be picked out from them. Men discharged from prison in such condition have a good chance of obtaining employment, and of escaping from their previous environments…with the physical improvement which is taking place it is hoped that an almost corresponding advance will take place morally.

The aim here is to construct a mind and body fit for work: to provide physiological strength that can cope with exhaustive physical labour, and a disciplined mind that would support this project. Neitenstein knew that force alone would not do it, and so prison programs could only hope to be successful where they were reinforced by social programs of the same nature: “it is not of

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20 Ibid. p. 54. Emphasis added.
21 Ibid. p. 63.
22 Ibid. Emphasis added.
much use shutting him up in prison and applying curative treatment of a moral and physical nature, if he is exposed, on leaving gaol, to precisely the same conditions which led to his original fault.”

Even though Neitenstein blamed “defective social conditions” for larrikinism, it was not society as a whole that needed to be transformed. Rather, the nature of the problem was a psychological one, where parents in the first instance were not providing the direction, discipline and control that was required in order to ensure that their children conformed:

Larrikinism...is chiefly brought about by the neglect of parents to rear their children properly...when parental obligations are neglected, and boys are allowed to ripen into manhood, with no idea of self restraint, what wonder is there if the promptings of their undisciplined natures causes them to give way to excess? The State has a right to demand from fathers and mothers that they should bring their children up properly and train them for the duties of citizenship. If they neglect this duty, then, in the interest of everybody, the State should use its best endeavours to act in loco parentis for its own protection.

Given this lack of boundary setting (or primary socialisation) at home, the larrikin child went out into his immediate local environment, including schools and other places of secondary socialisation, where he mixed with others of his ‘type’, compounding the problem:

The conversation indulged in by these uncared for youths is precisely of that nature which might be expected. They are at that dangerous age when character is being fixed, and when the primal passions are very strong. In such congregations, there are always one or two leading spirits who can only maintain their following by an excess of daring. This generally takes the shape of brutality and obscenity of sometimes an incredible kind. A bad ideal is thus established, and the

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
imitativeness of the younger leads them to acquire depraved habits, which exert an influence – more or less pronounced – all their lives.\textsuperscript{26}

This is an interesting assessment. While Neitenstein is prepared to admit that larrikin type behaviour is normal, natural, to be expected, he also reveals that these traits are not socially desirable in the long term, and become classified as ‘depraved habits’ where they are not successfully repressed or sublimated. More specifically, he did not critique the fact that it was modern civilisation, and its attendant forms of work, that required this repression. His concern was not to change the system itself, but to transform the youth to fit the system. In his analysis of larrikins, he revealed that this was a change that needed to take place at the level of the self, and where it did not, the state had a right (in order to ‘protect itself’) to step in and enforce that change, either through education, moral persuasion, or material coercion.

It was certainly these ‘depraved habits’ that concerned the rest of society about larrikins more than anything else. For Ajax, they were “imperfect specimens of manhood” because they have not yet grown up. The lack of self-restraint, the indulging instead in “the love and the allurements of pleasure” personified by their “drunkenness and libidinous conduct”\textsuperscript{27} is a refusal of the immediacy of the transition from youth to work. \textit{The Bulletin} made it clear that it did not think there was anything natural about this type of behaviour, but argued instead that larrikinism was so problematic because of the type of non-person it represented. He was “idle…thriftless…wilful…depraved…lazy” guilty of “outrageous

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 64.
\textsuperscript{27} Ajax. \textquotedblright Larrikinism\textquotedblright.
proclivities”\textsuperscript{28}. They were described as animals, like “rats” or “cats”, they were not “manly”.\textsuperscript{29} In fact, “we regard the larrikin, of whatever age, not as a man, but as a disease”, something not quite human: “It comes with something of a shock to think that decent citizens – you and me, dear readers – are of the same race as these creatures. Surely we have no instincts in common? Yet where did they get their evil instincts?”\textsuperscript{30} Like Neitenstein, \textit{The Bulletin} blamed the family first, and made some vague gesturing at social conditions which it had no real inclination to change. And while it had no hesitance to ‘individualise’ larrikins by making them into a deviant personality abstracted from social conditions, it was not as articulate in its assessment of larrikin psychology as the government official.

Neitenstein’s assessment of larrikin psychology is particularly revealing in that it suggests the processes of ego-formation and identification. The emphasis on the family in the contemporary analysis of larrikins is so strong because it is recognised that socialisation must occur first and foremost in that primary environment. This should be an environment that replicates the normative values of a particular social structure, but in this particular situation, they are values that have not been fully set – as a society in transition there is debate and contestation over personality types and what constitutes normal behaviour. Added to this, it can be argued that larrikins, or ‘wild’ young men, have not been subject to the ‘civilising’ effects of a harsh super-ego, and do not learn, are not taught, to substitute a reality principle for a pleasure principle. The nascent capitalist

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{The Bulletin}, January 8, 1881. p. 1.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Bulletin}, January 10, 1885. p. 13.
hegemony refused them a transitional moment between childhood and adulthood, and attempted to force them straight into the identity of ‘worker’. Instead, they find others like themselves and form collectives of sorts (the Pushes) and continue to act in ways that disregard or conflict with the ‘acceptable’ forms of identification offered by the symbolic order. The fact that this process was refused speaks to the fragility of the moral and intellectual aspects of this developing order. While contemporary commentators assumed that the larrikin refusal was the result of ignorance, or stupidity, or drunkenness, this is not a mistake that we should repeat. It is entirely possible that there is a deliberate choice inherent in this way of being. Freudian theory is, in its own way, normative, because it assumes that ‘socialisation’ (repression and sublimation) is what should happen, and that neurosis results when it does not. Thus Freud is, in his clinical or practical sense, concerned with resolving these neuroses so that a person may better function in the world as it exists. It is not until very late in his writing that Freud suggests that the world as it exists is in fact dysfunctional, that the point is no longer to resolve neurosis but to expose the impossibility of a society that requires the complete denaturalisation of the human personality. It is not that larrikins were neurotic, then, but that they did not buy the avenues to repressed and sublimated ‘happiness’ offered to them by the new symbolic order. To ignore this element in Freudian theory is to limit the ways in which we think about human agency, and therefore to close off avenues of potential and radical resistance.

In some ways, this is also a problem with the way in which Gramsci theorised alternative ways of being in the world. As sensitive and nuanced a thinker as he
was, Gramsci still privileged the rational over the non-rational. In his writings about subalternity, he makes some very good points about the intellectual errors that can be made by judging some forms of social organisation by their appearances, rather than by attempting to discover their root cause, but it is still the case that he saw subalternity as a position to be overcome. As the American academic Frank Wilderson notes, the Gramscian subject is, by and large, the white male worker. Relations of oppression are seen to happen largely within the paradigm of the capital-labour relation, and thus forms of resistance which occur within this paradigm are automatically privileged. He suggests “exploitation (wage slavery) is the only category of oppression which concerns Gramsci: society, Western society, thrives on the exploitation of the Gramscian subject. Full stop.”

While we can not exactly chastise Gramsci for what he did not write about, Wilderson’s point is a valid one to the extent that it points out that there is an absence in the theory of hegemony as resistance because not only is it based on white rationality (the articulation or organisation of consent) but it does not account for the silent, or non rational forms of resistance. Given the immediate historical and political situation with which Gramsci was confronted, the focus on class struggle means that there is a limit in Gramsci as to what might constitute human freedom.

We can see some of this tension in his work on *American and Fordism* where he can not hide a quiet admiration for some of the civilising or progressive effects of industrial capitalism. While the alienated worker may think non-conformist

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thoughts, the discipline to which he is subject will, Gramsci hopes, make possible an alternative, progressive collective based largely around the principles of politicised class struggle. Yet his own work on subalternity demonstrates that this is not always the case. To understand why this is so, we need to add a number of theoretical elements to our Gramsci-Freud paradigm.

Hegemonic Principles and the Self

Chapter Three of this thesis set out the basic ‘hegemonic principles’ required by developing industrial capitalism in late nineteenth century Sydney. As that chapter explained, these were hegemonic principles to the extent that they were the central defining features in the organisation of the means of production and the social relations that made this organisation possible. They were hegemonic principles to which there was no real resistance from the organised labour movement or the working class more generally given that they did not seek to change the basic features of that system but sought rather to ameliorate its effects and to ensure equality of access. That is, there was no real questioning of the idea of wage labour, or of capitalism itself, indeed, these were already well accepted forms of social organisation by the late 1800s. There was of course an active radical political scene in Sydney, but it was limited in its reach and effectiveness, and, as with most movements of its kind, saw the answer to social inequality in the reform or reversal of particular social categories rather than in the elimination of them altogether.32 More fundamentally, there was little meaningful resistance to the idea

32 Gollan. Radical and working class politics. ; Fitzpatrick. A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement. ; Wells. Constructing Capitalism. ; Davidson. The Invisible State. ; Connell and Irving. Class Structure in Australian History.
of a capitalism that made material success the basis of human life. In some of the commentary about larrikinism, it is noted that the excessive emphasis on materialism in Sydney sets a bad example for larrikins, but when these critiques come from conservatives who also advocate the imprisonment of larrikins for their failure to work, the critique rings somewhat hollow. Neither do these commentaries suggest that materialism should be abandoned, rather they advocate that the state should work harder to provide the education, environment and moral training whereby larrikins might be more fully inculcated with these values, the values of citizenship. So while this was a citizenship based on the practices of work and consumption, and the too ready acceptance of the commodification of most accepts of human life, it would be necessary to ensure that these were values that came to be accepted as normal. Specifically, it required a particular kind of thinking, developed early enough in life, so that the creation of a particular kind of working self would become possible. This is the way in which hegemonic principles operate – they are the central ideas of a particular project that become normalised and naturalised, and more so, non-negotiable. There may be room for reform or amelioration, there may even be room for variations and expansions over time, but it is still the case that the core principle is protected. If, in late nineteenth century Sydney, emerging industrial capitalism aimed to be hegemonic, that is normal and natural, it would need to be accepted at the level of the self. No amount of coercion could bring about changes to society or to the self if they were not accepted by the majority of the population. And if they were accepted it

was not always because people were simply brain-washed, but rather that there were real material benefits to be had. In this sense, consumption serves a very particular purpose, and it is here that we see clearly the link to psychoanalytic theory, in particular Lacan’s concept of the real.

Hegemony and the real

It is the case however, that attempts to understand larrikins at the clinical level of psychoanalysis will only get us so far. The clinical basis of Lacan’s theory presents, as its first priority, the analysis of the processes by which subjectivity is developed, rather than the analysis of the socio-historical context of the subject itself. It is, after all, a theory of individual psychology, emerging out of the advanced post-industrial capitalism of the late twentieth century, and is at this level difficult to apply to a historical group phenomena, in its pure form. It is still the case however, that Lacan’s subject is inherently a social one; subjectivity can not be understood, can not even occur, without reference to the social situations within which the subject is ‘interpellated’. For some ‘post-marxists’ who draw on Lacan, the solution in translating the insights of individual clinical psychoanalysis to the social lies in referring to a theory of hegemony. This is especially important if we are looking at historical social subjects. The significance then, of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in particular, is its emphasis on the social nature of

37 These connections are made explicitly in Laclau and Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. See also Glynos. "The grip of ideology". pp. 199-200.
the subject. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the real is that part of the ego which is left behind, or cast off, as part of a ‘normal’ socialisation process. In terms of ego formation, the ‘Big Other’ acts as the super-ego, setting limits on what can or can not be included in the formation of the self. Both Freud and Lacan argue that this ‘external’ guiding force is a combination of all the ideas, values and behaviours that one is subject to from birth. For Lacan, this is the Symbolic Order – “the collection of codes and distinctions embodied in language and culture, and Lacan insists that human subjectivity can be sustained only within the limits of this framework”. To enter it, to function within it, automatically requires a loss of part of oneself, the real. But the real can continue to manifest itself in symptoms of disturbance, disquiet, dissatisfaction. In attempting to ‘suture’ this loss, the self seeks identifications (i.e., a sense of self from outside, the reflection in the mirror, or the image of self that others see as appearance), but it also seeks closure through ideas, objects, things – what Lacan called objet petit a. These are the embodiments of desire, they can be spiritual, psychological, material – other people, religion, art, work. In a capitalist system, they can come to be personified by commodities themselves. As Marx wrote, the central form of capitalism is the commodity, but it is in and of itself meaningless without the desire for it. For Lacan, desire is central. It is the way in which we are kept looking outward, for external satisfactions to fill the void left by the excising of the real, it is aspiration itself. As Kirschner describes it:

the inability of the symbolic to totally encompass its referents and to represent fully what has been lost creates a constant gradient of desire, a perpetual reaching out for the pure reality behind representation. In

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38 Kirshner. "Rethinking Desire". p. 86.
the Lacanian formula, desire insists in the signifying chain of human speech, straining towards dimly perceived goals and the deferred promise of complete satisfaction. Because achievement of this is impossible, we substitute fantasies of sexual, romantic, narcissistic, or material accomplishment that stitch desire to the fabric of social reality, and we convince ourselves that we will be satisfied by realising them. Desire thus becomes libidinised, and diverted to existing symbolic objects.40

Desire and the real are related to jouissance (enjoyment)41 because they are both ways in which jouissance is avoided. Desire is enjoyment unfulfilled, the promise of enjoyment, which is always already impossible. To be desiring means to be always desiring, because the real is where enjoyment resides but it has already been sacrificed in order to enter the symbolic order. It is, by definition, unattainable, but ‘socialised’ subjectivity is centred around the aspiration of attainment.

There are a number of ways we can relate larrikins to this process. At the level of the personal, they can be considered a transitional, perhaps even liminal, type of subjectivity. At the very least, they do not represent a ‘socialised’ subjectivity and in this sense are an interesting object of analysis. If Lacan insists that subjectivity is only possible within the limits of the symbolic order, or through Freud’s more biological emphasis on repression and sublimation of drives, then larrikins can be seen as resistant to this process, as an alternative type of subjectivity, as the real. The violent and overtly sexual nature of their behaviour can be understood as drives fulfilled, if we agree with both Freud and Lacan that immediate bodily satisfaction is the essence of enjoyment. Kirschner suggests that jouissance is in

41 See Chapter Two of this thesis for a more detailed explanation of these concepts and their relation to each other.
fact bodily - “what constitutes jouissance is the constant presence of the real biological body as the substrate of human life.” However, Lacan argues that the attainment of jouissance in this way is already impossible because the body itself has been subject to the constraints of symbolisation, and there is no encountering of it separate from the effects of the symbolic order within which it exists. In other words, from the moment of birth one's relationship to one's body, to enjoyment, has already been mediated by the symbolic order, by the Big Other. If the Big Other is the voice of the Father, acting in the first instance within the family as “the delegate and spokesperson of a body of social law and convention” it is possible that larrikin families do not themselves follow this pattern of socialisation. Given the emphasis on the lack of parental discipline from contemporary commentators, this conclusion had already been reached in their own time. The problem with larrikin behaviour was its insistence on not ‘growing up’, on happiness as jouissance in action, a representation of the real, a symptom of unregulated or ‘uncivilised’ drives. At the very least, it is without doubt that larrikins are represented as ‘enjoying’ themselves, as always defiant in the face of authority, so they can not be labelled as neurotic in the traditional psychoanalytic sense. It is only when people present as suffering internally because of their conflict over socialisation that they are considered clinically neurotic and can be ‘treated’ in some way. Larrikins resist treatment at every level, but the meaning of their behaviour takes on more significance if we deepen our sense of

what we mean by resistance, and explore the implications of this for ideas about politics and agency.

The politics of radical agency

While it is the case that the idea of resistance is implicit in the theory of hegemony, it is still also the case that Gramsci, and many contemporary theorists, privilege certain types of resistance over others. Previous chapters showed the way in which the emphasis on organised political collectives has resulted in these coming to be taken as the only legitimate form of resistance, and that those who do not resist in this way are not seen as resisting at all, or are seen as taking energy away from a ‘true’ revolutionary cause. It is a valid point to argue that real social change seems only possible where there is collective action, but this should not negate the power of the individual, who is ultimately the first site of resistance, nor should it negate actions that do not fit in with a predetermined idea of what resistance looks like. If hegemony operates at many levels of personal life, then it is important that we consider that resistance can take place here as well. In this sense, we need to deepen and reconfigure what we mean by resistance and to broaden our understanding of the possible forms of human agency.

As early as 1967, one of the fathers of Australian labour history Robin Gollan made a clear distinction between the idea of working class and radical politics, knowing that they were not always the same thing.44 While his concern was still with organised politics, he was well aware that working class collectives were not

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44 This differentiation is both implicit and explicit in various places throughout Gollan. Radical and working class politics. See in particular pp. 5-32 and pp. 110-127.
especially radical, if radical was taken to mean a viewpoint that sought to
challenge the system at its foundations, rather than at its periphery. It is with the
same distinction in mind that some contemporary theorists pose the question of
radical agency – what is agency, first, and how can we shift our thinking to
account for human action that falls outside the dominant discursive paradigms?45
By drawing on Foucault’s notion of power, Vighi and Feldner show that where
there is power there is necessarily resistance, in the same way that where there is
the symbolic order there is also necessarily the real.46 They extend this thinking by
drawing on Zizek’s notion of radical agency which argues that the only authentic
acts are those that come out of the real, that act as symptoms, or disruptors, of the
repression required by the symbolic order. Zizek refers to this as a kind of
“troubling excess”, where transgression itself is the only free act, that is, “I do not
merely choose between two or more options within a pre-given set of coordinates,
but I chose to change this set of coordinates itself.”47 In this sense then,
identifications that are disallowed are, by their resistance to repression, true acts of
defiance: “an authentic act occurs only when the subject risks a gesture that is no
longer ‘covered up’ by the big Other.”48 This act may be only momentary, it may
be quickly covered up again, it may even serve to reinforce the symbolic order at
some point, because if it is truly transgressive it can not be allowed to continue to
exist. For Lacan, and Zizek, these transgressive acts are best exemplified by acts of

45 For this idea, I draw primarily on the work of Vighi and Feldner, in particular Vighi, Fabio and
Feldner, Heiko. "Resistant and Radical Agency: Traversing Foucault with Slavoj Zizek". Journal for
Lacanian Studies. 4 (2). 2006. 300-324. See also their work in Vighi, Fabio and Feldner, Heiko.
Zizek: Beyond Foucault. Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan. 2007. and Vighi, Fabio and Feldner,
Publishing. 2007.
46 Vighi and Feldner. "Resistant and Radical Agency". pp. 304-305.
excessive enjoyment or moments of violence which “disturb the demarcation line between the field of legitimate antagonistic confrontation (say the parliamentary logic of party confrontation in today’s liberal democracies) and what from that point of view is considered illegitimate…” 49 The psychoanalytic significance of violence is more complex than presented here, but it is enough to note that acts of violence can be considered transgressive and resistive – for Zizek, it is where ‘pure subjectivity’ lies, because it is violence that has been made so illegitimate, and violence against either the self or the state can be seen as an attempt to break with the fundamental disciplining relationship of master-servant that underlies capitalist society and is reinforced by the symbolic order. 50 In this sense, subcultures that exist around acts of transgression, rather than overt organised counter-cultures are of deeper political significance because they continue to exist on the margins and thus continually refuse disarticulation. 51 The importance of excess for radical agency is signified most clearly by the discomfort it causes, by the immediate reaction of the ‘moral majority’ to cover it over again, to disarticulate excess, to exclude the excessive in whatever form they take. It is not simply that violence itself is always transgressive or revolutionary, however, but the processes by which it has been excluded from acceptable human behaviour that are significant.

It is in the reactions of larrikin’s contemporaries that we see the way in which the real, especially where it is connected to jouissance, undergoes this process of exclusion. For Glynos and Stavrakakis, the socio-political significance of the real is

49 Vighi and Feldner. "Resistant and Radical Agency". p. 313.
50 Ibid. p. 310.
51 Ibid. p. 308.
located in the ‘hatred’ it engenders in others, a hatred based on the excess of jouissance (or plus-de-jouir)\textsuperscript{52} being experienced by someone else, “a mode of jouissance which is represented as excessive and thus threatening for the social order.”\textsuperscript{53} Miller describes the way in which hatred of the Other is justified through a “focus on the way in which the Other obtains some plus-de-jouir that he does not deserve; either he does not work, or he works too hard, or he eats smelly food, or he has too much sex, etc.”\textsuperscript{54} For Zizek, this manifests as an intolerance that becomes hatred through resentment and jealousy at the sight of this excess of enjoyment, and a belief that the Other has somehow stolen “what is essentially ours.”\textsuperscript{55}

This attitude is exemplified in the shock and the shame inherent to the discourse surrounding larrikinism. When newspapers, journals and government officials spoke of larrikinism, they did so in terms of complete moral outrage, complaining that larrikinism threatened to bring undone the very social order itself. Yet the events and behaviours they described were little more than young people ‘having fun’. Even government officials recognised this element in larrikinism, but at the same time recommended their complete eradication, by whatever means possible, including imprisonment and physical punishment. It is not that there was anything new or unusual or even particularly shocking about larrikin behaviour but at the point in time and place at which they occurred they were words, behaviours and

\textsuperscript{53} Glynos and Stavrakakis. "Encounters of the Real Kind" p. 212. For an analysis of how this relates to nationalism and racism in particular see Zizek. \textit{Tarrying with the Negative}.
\textsuperscript{55} Zizek. \textit{Tarrying with the Negative}. p. 206.
symbols that were seen as representing a part of the social ego, as much as the personal one, that needed to be repressed. They signified the potential for a way of being in the world that would radically undermine the success of the hegemonic project aimed at the creation of a particular kind of working self. In this way larrikins became the real against which the symbolic order of ‘civilised’ Sydney was created, and larrikin behaviour became the real against which respectable citizenship was posed.

**Conclusion**

The hegemonic principles of developing industrial capitalism in Australia were based on the creation of a particular kind of citizen – a wage worker, a consumer, a private property accumulator. These principles relied on a transformation at the level of the self – the sublimation and repression of animalistic behaviour, the internalization of discipline required for capitalist processes, the creation of desire for the products of capitalism. This is nothing other than the processes Gramsci observed taking place under Americanism and Fordism – the rationalization of capitalist ways of being as a new form of morality requiring the transformation of animalistic energy away from sexuality, violence and drunkenness and into the productive and social relations of industrial capitalism. In Australia, resistance to this process was linked with the creation of subalternity. If these principles were not negotiable, they created a discourse in Australian society where people who did not comply were made subaltern but at the level of the subjective – they were the wrong sort of *people*, there was something inherently wrong with *them*, not with the system, or the society in which they lived.
In some of the work that has been written about subalternity, there is a tendency to attribute the capacity for critical self-consciousness only to particular elements of society, for example the organized working class or the Party, and therefore to denigrate subaltern conceptions of the world as common sense, to assume that the personality of the subaltern is uncritical, passive, determined. While larrikins may not be conscious of their behaviour as political, in the way we think politics today, it can be argued that their politics lay in the forging of a frontier for new conceptions of youth, and of a way of being in the world, that threatened the very foundations of capitalist hegemony. In the Australian situation the creation of larrikin subalternity was clearly connected to the attempt to close down society around hegemonic principles, to expunge the real of a particular way of being so as to create a symbolic order for a new age. This process took place at the level of the subjective because it was here that hegemony was aimed. The creation of a new type of human nature, the restructuring of human desire, was a central part of this hegemony. Not only was larrikin subalternity created around subjectivity but the very behaviours they were seen as representing came to be the real, that part of the human self that would need to be sacrificed if growing up, or functioning in the symbolic order of a capitalist nation-Australia was to be possible. While it is not the case that all larrikin behaviours have remained confined to the real, it is the case that the contemporary Australian symbolic order has appropriated the concept of larrikinism in order to devalue it, to defuse it, and to keep the behaviours with which they were associated in their own time, especially those that challenged the hegemonic principles of capitalism, in the unspeakable domain of the real.
Conclusion

To complete the analysis of larrikinism as presented in this thesis, it is necessary to address the issue of what became of larrikins, and to relate this outcome to the theoretical considerations with which this thesis has been concerned. This thesis has argued that the story of larrikinism is not just an interesting historical anecdote, but can be seen as a case study of the way in which hegemony acts on human nature. More specifically, the thesis has argued that hegemony must act on human nature, that it must act at the level of the subject, before it can be really be considered hegemony. This is significant because it is overlooked in both historical and political analyses, especially those that purport to understand capitalism. The idea of subjectivity and class struggle have been taken as antithetical, when in fact they are intimately related, given that class struggle hangs first and foremost on the question of consciousness. How is consciousness structured in particular times and places? Why have some groups in Australian history reacted in some ways to capitalism, while others act differently? Further, what is the significance of this difference? In the modern world, there is little argument that many people no longer identify in traditional class terms, and while this shift is lamented by some, it is celebrated by others. The point here, however, is that debates about the nature and significance of this shift have, at times, missed the connections to history itself. That is, it is not the case that stable forms of political or social identity have been lost, but rather that they may have never existed in quite the way some analysts like to think they did. To be sure, it is the case that at times in Australian history class struggle has played an overt role in
social relations, but the interpretation of that class struggle has been so focused on particular ways of being that it has overlooked the contingent and marginalised, and has portrayed a unity and fixity in Australian class relations that romanticises one history at the expense of others. In this sense, both national and labour history have contributed to the marginalisation of the larrikin in history, and to their sanitisation in the present. This thesis has argued that a psychoanalytic approach to larrikins, grounded in the theory of hegemony, has implications of both historical and contemporary significance.

At the most obvious level, it is the case that larrikin behaviour can be considered a symptom, their existence as a symptom, of the processes by which subjectivity is constructed within the social. In other words, the processes by which subjectivity at the individual level is formed are mirrors of the social processes with which the individual will relate. These are not easy or automatic processes, and in many ways, larrikins are a symptom of the trauma that is a result of the excising of the real, the trauma of repression.¹ In broad terms, as we have already seen in Chapter Two, society itself is formed like an ego in the Freudian sense, with certain types of behaviours or thoughts made taboo because they relate to drives and instincts which it is considered must be repressed or sublimated to facilitate the normal functioning of civilisation. Whether this is done consciously or not, the belief here is that without these processes, society would become some sort of chaos as everyone sought to fulfil their own pleasure principle. As Gramsci noted, the

history of human society is the history of the repression of various drives and the evolution of new ways of being.

At every particular time and place then, the accepted ways of being in a particular hegemony, operationalised through the symbolic order, will take on particular and specific characteristics. Some behaviours may be problematic for some hegemonies but not others, they may have been taboo one hundred years ago and not so today. In this sense then, the hegemonic symbolic order is never fixed or static, and is in a constant state of being produced and reproduced as it reacts to the reactions of the subjects which make it. That is, hegemony and its attendant symbolic order does not exist separately of human thought and action but is constituted by it, and is constitutive of it. In late nineteenth century Sydney then, the symbolic order with which larrikins engaged was arranged around particular hegemonic principles (or Master Signifiers, as Lacan would call them) that affected the very nature of the human self. These were principles that advocated the structuring of desire around consumption and commodification, the acceptance of structures of wage labour and private property and the identifications that this acceptance offered. In his article which deals with the Lacanian approach to ideology, Glynos raises the central question of how particular symbolic orders achieve their ‘grip’, recognising that it is only when people internalise the values and behaviours the symbolic order promotes that it becomes hegemonic.² In all human history, and in the present, this is a contested process.

In Gramsci’s work on *Americanism and Fordism* and in Freud’s work on civilisation, it is made clear that modern Western societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries required the repression and sublimation of particular human drives if capitalist society was to function successfully. But both Gramsci and Freud saw clearly that not everyone would be able to undergo these processes, that they placed a great deal of pressure on human beings and potentially caused a great deal of suffering. For this suffering to be endured there must be benefits to such a system at the individual level. At the very least was promised inclusion and acceptance, otherwise the system worked at the level of desire, the sublimation of primitive desire (the pleasure principle, or jouissance) into the delayed gratification of new objects and forms of desire, material wealth, possessions, commodities, new forms of physical activities and competition, new type of identifications, new forms of collectivities (the reality principle). Yet even this process is a ‘fantasy’ - it promises fulfilment knowing full well it is impossible:

the aim of fantasy is not to satisfy our desire, something that is ultimately impossible. It is enough to construct it and support it as such: through fantasy we learn to desire. As far as the final satisfaction of our desire is concerned, this is postponed from discourse to discourse, from fantasy to fantasy, from product to product. It is this continuous displacement that constitutes the essence of consumer culture. The important 'by-product' of this process is, of course, the structuration of our desire.3

In every aspect of larrikin behaviour, this process was resisted. They worked, but they did not seek stability in their workplaces or in their careers, they did not identify as workers, and refused to be part of and were actively rejected by the organised labour movement which came to represent the worker identification so

prevalent in Australian society even today. They were physically active but not in organised ways, they did not play team sports, and did not channel their aggression into acceptable forms but rather ran through the streets and fought each other. They did not play by any rules or wear gloves to do so. They were heterosexual, but not yet married and did not hide their sexuality; they were brazen and overt and spoke their desire in words that shocked and affronted. They did not save their pennies for a deposit on a house, or a sum in a statement book from the bank, but spent it on clothes and alcohol and gambling and dancing. They were connected to their bodies and did not appear to be ashamed of this fact. The shame that they were told to feel was not their own but stemmed from the discomfort and the disruption they caused: it was a shame that sought to excise the real. In other words, they were young. In many ways, they exhibit behaviours and values that we take for granted today as the normal signposts of youth, of experimentation, of that phase between childhood and adulthood where happiness and fun are a right to be enjoyed before the final acceptance of responsibility. In a way, this transition is the ‘pay-off’; society agrees to overlook the indiscretions of youth so long as they are eventually tempered and sublimated or repressed appropriately.

Freud made it clear that repression was not a one-time event but a life long process. In the same way, Lacan argues that the symbolic order is not made once and for all time, but must be continually reinforced and that the real is essential to this process. If there is not one eternal form of the symbolic order, so there is not one eternal form of the real. At this precise point in Australian history, the
symbolic order was in a state of transition, in the same way as the emerging capitalist hegemony. New symbols, new signifiers, new identifications, were in the very process of being created and negotiated. In one way, larrikins represented an ‘older’ way of being in the world, perhaps a more ‘primitive’ or childlike one, but one that resisted the particular sense of self required by the new system. There may have been advantages in this system for some but there were also great losses entailed, human freedoms curtailed, new forms of discipline, control, surveillance and violence enabled. Yet they also represented a new way of being in the world, a new frontier on which to fight hegemony, a new form of youth that did not go directly from child to worker, but lingered a while, free of responsibility and discipline. The new symbolic order of a nation in transition required something different from those it would call citizens. Larrikins threatened to disturb this process, representing a point of conflict over what form this citizenship could be allowed to take. In this sense, they were the real that needed to be cut off, the part of ‘Australian-ness’ that must be sacrificed in order for the nation to take its place on the world stage.

In many ways, the purpose of this thesis has been an attempt to unravel certain theoretical questions in relation to both the discipline of history and the nature of social being itself, especially in relation to young people. These are twin concerns because ‘being’ is also historically contextual, and this seemed particularly so in relation to the ways in which young people are constructed in contemporary society. Thus, the nature of Australian history itself – the way in which it is used and abused for particular political or social purposes – seemed significant. This is
especially so in the case of larrikins, where returning to the original documentary
evidence about their historical existence painted a picture that stood in stark
contrast to the way in which that term is understood today, but also revealed a
startling parallel to contemporary social practices around the demonisation and
marginalisation of certain ways of being in the world. This is not to say that it is
possible to develop a theoretical framework that explains the nature of social
being, or the nature of ‘youth’, for all times and places, but the theoretical
framework that developed as a way of analysing larrikinism has the capacity to be
applied to contemporary Australian society, given that this is an advanced and
intensified version of the capitalist society within which larrikins emerged.

In the existing literature about larrikins, there is no real clue as to what happens to
them, other than circumstances changed and they faded away. The most obvious
circumstance is the increased coercion at the level of legislation and
imprisonment, which continued to add behaviours to those deemed criminal,
enabling the state to remove more and more ‘offenders’ from society, thus
creating a permanent underworld of organised crime. The demolition of many
inner city suburbs as living spaces following the sanitation inspections and the
outbreak of plague early in the 1900s facilitated the dispersal of larrikin subculture,
and the commodification and gentrification of waterside or inner city living spaces
forced the city’s working people further afield. There was increased legislation and
surveillance as well at the level of education and health care, and larrikins came
increasingly under state control through many of its hegemonic mechanisms
disguised as charity, or treatment.
Perhaps more significant however is the role the new nationalist hegemony played. Along with the development of industrial capitalism came the rhetoric of Federation and the new discourse of Australian nationalism. As we have already seen, popular journals and fiction played a large part in the creation of particular Australian national types and this came to be exemplified by the bush worker.

Russel Ward has described this transformation in detail in his book *The Australian Legend* which many have taken to be a kind of gospel about the Australian national type, when Ward himself is careful to point out that he means only to discover the foundations of a stereotype.\(^4\) Ward described the stereotype thus:

> According to the myth the ‘typical Australian’ is practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing ‘to have a go’ at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is ‘near enough’. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is ‘the world’s best confidence man’ he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a ‘hard case’, sceptical about the value of religion and intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great ‘knocker’ of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong...he tends to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss.\(^5\)

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Ward’s characterisation has been roundly criticised, not least for its romanticisation and gender bias, and of course, it is just a stereotype, but Ward suggests it is one based in some reality. While the bush worker may have existed in some form as described, Ward also argues that this bushman was influenced by many other factors, including his convict ancestry and his seasonal work in the city. It is in this sense that we can see the way in which particular characteristics of larrikins were subsumed into the national type. All of the things that larrikins were abhorred for – drinking, gambling, language, mateship – became acceptable through their adoption into the symbolic order of the national hegemony, once it became obvious they could not be eradicated in any other way, and so attached to the bush worker identification. In contrast to the city dwelling larrikin, the bush legend was as different to his English ancestor as night is to day, and in this way found purchase in the popular imagination. By the time of the outbreak of World War One, this national type was easily transformed into the larrikin hero in the trenches, and his connection to a racist nationalism made complete. It is in this way that larrikins were eradicated more successfully than any other, to the extent that the people who are called larrikins today bear no real similarity to their forebears.

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This is particularly evident in the book *The Larrikin Streak* edited by Clem Gorman, which starts with an open admission of confusion as to what actually constitutes larrikinism, and a recognition that who we call ‘larrikin’ today are “larrikin only on the surface,” bearing little resemblance to their ancestors, and treated with a great deal more compassion and reverence than nineteenth century larrikins ever were. Thus, one short article by Manning Clark giving the historical context for larrikinism is surrounded by articles about authors, artists, sports people, politicians and businessmen who now wear the epithet with pride. This is not to say that they should not, or can not, call themselves larrikins. It is a fact of life, if not an effect of hegemony, that types, national or otherwise, change over time, and the purpose here has not been to find some truth about larrikins which needs to be unquestionably preserved. Rather, the purpose has been to use the concept of larrikinism as an example of how some particular types are made more acceptable than others, and to discover what, in that process, has been excluded from both personal and national memory. Even more so, it is to find links between past and present ways of being in the world, so that a historical analysis can act as a form of critique about how broader social processes act on the human self and thus come to be normalised. Gorman makes this link himself when he says:

Are larrikins an endangered species? It will probably become harder, as economic pressures increase, to maintain the outward show of laughter and defiance. But the pressures of modern life may make larrikinism, as a form of release, more necessary… I have been cheered, in my research, to see how many young people continue to display the signs and symptoms of larrikinism, even when, sometimes, they are not familiar with the term. Larrikins have long shown a propensity for

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survival and adaptation, and I suspect that, beneath the bland masks worn by so many younger people these days, that the larrikin spirit lives on, gone underground temporarily, like a river out the back o’ beyond….It seems then, that larrikins are alive and well, endangered perhaps, but difficult to wipe out and capable, like a scrub fire, of bursting forth again just when it seemed they had been stamped out by the more earnest among us.8

It is interesting to note that Gorman says he sees this behaviour occurring among young Italian migrants in the city, and on this note, we are brought full circle to where this thesis began. It is the case that larrikinism as it has been analysed here is most evident today in groups of young people living in what are labelled as Sydney’s western suburbs. Important work has already been done on the othering of migrant youth in the city, especially those of middle eastern origin since the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre.9 That young people of ethnic origin are demonised and marginalised in such a context is disappointing but not surprising. However, it is not just their ethnicity, in and of itself, that is at issue but rather specific behaviours and attitudes that can be considered a more direct link to larrikinism. This is further highlighted by the attitudes that are displayed towards these young people by white mainstream society, where they are considered most obviously problematic for an appearance of ‘gang’ subculture, its apparent links to criminality, its overt and potentially violent sexuality, and its disdain for white authority, especially at the level of culture and values. It is more than just religious difference, but a perception that ethnic youth do not adhere to

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8 Ibid. pp. xi-xiii.
particular ‘Australian’ values, although no one can really articulate how this is the case. Is it that they prefer soccer to cricket? Is it that instead of saving up to buy houses they spend money on inappropriate objects such as ‘hotted up’ cars and related ‘hoonish’ behaviour. The recent campaigns against car hoons is symptomatic of a society troubled by overt displays of sexuality and aggression and is not confined to ethnic youth, given that they are not the only ones who indulge in such behaviour. In some ways they are not the best example of the exclusionary practices around larrikinism because they are so easily excluded through other categories of ‘difference’ and this exclusion is justified by the increasing hysteria around the fear of terrorism.

It is more the case that in the discourse surrounding contemporary problems of social disorder we can draw parallels with the processes surrounding larrikins in the late nineteenth century. This is particularly so in relation to the issue of violence. There is an almost knee-jerk reaction to the issue of violence in Australian society. It is barely questioned that the state should feel free to use it in whatever form it deems necessary, especially since the ‘war on terror’ began, by which all kinds of civil rights are being eroded. Yet when violence forms part of popular culture, the response is complete outrage. It is instantly assumed that the ‘perpetrators’ are purely evil in some way, being painted as the worst kind of criminals, animals even. It appears to be irrelevant if they were provoked, let alone perhaps having something to be angry about. Yet if the officials of the state are provoked, retaliatory violence is widely acceptable. The significance of violence in

10 There is some emerging research on this subject, see for example Redshaw, Sarah. "Driving culture: cars, young people and cultural research". Cultural Studies Review. 12 (2). 2006. 78-89.
the context of this thesis, however, goes beyond the level of social protest. The Lacanian conception of subjectivity gives the possibility of a different interpretation of violence. In the analysis of larrikins provided in Chapters Five and Six, it was suggested that if one of the effects of ‘civilisation’ is to sublimate and repress the aggressive instincts, then the refusal to do so was a conscious point of departure for larrikin subjectivity, an active refusal to sublimate and repress, and an insistence on an unmediated connection with the body. The issue is not so much anger as it is enjoyment although the two are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to argue that this is still the case today, especially when we consider the urgency of attempts to silence the discourse around violence. There is no language with which to account for ‘popular’ violence as it occurs at riots like the ones at Macquarie Fields or Redfern, or even the violence of every day life. Even political protests are marred by the spectre of violence before any even happens, and when it does, it serves only to delegitimate any political content. At the most immediate level it is obvious that when debates about violence are shut down, this is an effect of the coercive element of hegemony. But beyond this, it is a sign of crisis. If hegemony is actually leadership and not domination, violence should not need to be repressed into the real, so that it is only legitimate when wielded by the state. Closing down debates about violence, and repressing violence and aggression through a rhetoric of civilisation, discipline and respectability, serves only to delegitimate popular violence and legitimise state violence against the populace. This is a populace that has been dehumanised, because if violence is always already uncivilised, then what sort of a society would
resort to use it against its own people if it had not already made those people somehow less than human?

In a Lacanian sense, it is a split society. As has been argued throughout this thesis, in order to create the civilised, disciplined, desiring social subject of Western capitalism, certain aspects of the human self need to be repressed, sublimated or excised. This has been a largely successful project, to the extent that Western capitalism flourishes and its hegemony remains largely unchallenged. Violence and transgression can be considered symptoms of this excising, instinctual behaviours that will not quite go away, symptoms of the trauma caused by their exclusion. Sometimes they are involuntary, or unconscious, but it is also the case that at times violence and transgression are freely chosen, an act of will, an act of defiance. It is not that violence for its own sake should be advocated, but rather that we must be critical of the discourse that surrounds it, especially in relation to who gets to use it. But more than this, to disavow violence can be considered an act arising from our uncomfortability with our own potential for violence, our inability to admit that it is, at some level, an act of enjoyment.

In an attempt to reconcile these issues of violence and enjoyment with the concept of identity, this thesis has emphasised the idea of subjectivity. Rather than relying on the structures and institutions of economic relations to tell us how people are ‘made’ in the world, a psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity adds depth and complexity to the ‘problem’ of identity. The point here is to see what we can learn about history, and therefore the present, by shifting the lens slightly from an
emphasis on the politics of collective action to that of the personal. While new approaches to history emerging out of post-modernism have encouraged historians to take into account the multiple forms of identity within which people make sense of their lives\textsuperscript{11}, and which go on to form avenues and possibilities for human action, it is still the case that there is not a great deal of literature which deals with the ways in which these identities are themselves formed at the level of the personal. Subjectivity is more than just the outward manifestations of a sense of self – this thesis has argued that these are what Lacan would call identifications, the attaching of parts of one’s self to particular forms of symbolisation. In this sense, they are ‘fantasy’ because they rely on the acceptance of these forms of identification by the hegemonic symbolic order. They are accepted by that symbolic order because they do not seriously challenge any of the hegemonic principles in operation at that point in time. In contrast, there is the process of subjectivity by which the individual comes to either accept or reject any (often multiple) of these particular identifications – some examples in the modern world may be ‘worker’, ‘feminist’, ‘conservative’, ‘greenie’, ‘goth’, etc – or, as is the case with larrikins, attempt to construct a different identity that exists outside of these parameters.

There is a tension in the Lacanian theory of subjectivity here however, because it appears to present the symbolic order as a *fait accompli*, a done-deal in a way, and thereby identifications are only possible that already ‘fit’, that can be articulated. It presents as a closed system in which the real has already been excised and is kept at bay through the repression of certain other forms of subjectivity. Perhaps at certain points in history this is more the case than at others. But it is also the case that repression, as Freud made clear, is an on-going process. Symbolised subjectivity is only possible against that which can not be symbolised, yet symbolisation is itself a process. It is not the case that the symbolic order is born intact overnight but that what can be considered symbolic, versus what will constitute the real, is the product of a process of on-going negotiation and contestation. This is nothing other than the process of hegemony itself – if hegemony relies on particular types of individuals, or subjectivities, this too does not happen overnight, but is the process of many years of debate and conflict. In this sense, certain types of subjectivities are temporary, or liminal, elements of the old in conflict with the new, remnants and trace memories of past ways of being in the world that resist being completely subsumed into the modern. This is not to say that ‘real’ subjectivities are the only resistant ones – or that resistance itself is something to be always automatically valorised. There are many creative potentials released by the processes of repression and sublimation, including important artistic and technological advances which, as Freud has argued, would not have been possible without the channelling of libidinal drives into the making of civilisation. The purpose here has not been to declare modern civilisation itself either pathological or innately problematic, but to argue instead that to live in the
modern world requires or encourages particular kinds of selfhood and that this process has been contested historically, with particular effects and implications for the way we live today. More specifically, it has been the intention to highlight the types of subjectivities which are excluded by this process, because the deciding of who is in, or who is out, should not be taken as a given, but should be explored for the potentials in this exclusion, and what the inclusion really entails. It is in this sense, then, that the understanding of subjectivity in history, as a historical process, is so significant. If one of the intellectual gifts of postmodernism is the ability to think outside essentialism, then this should be extended to the way we think human nature itself.

Subjectivity as an object of analysis can be related to broader issues of social formation through a theory of hegemony which does not consider hegemony as mere domination, but explores the multiple influences on human thought and action, as Gramsci suggested. That is, human beings are made at the intersection of various social relations which include family, location, religion, work and culture. In more recent times this can be expanded to include relations along axes such as sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, age and subcultures, or specific cultural interests or identifications. In this sense then, people are not determined by a particular set of social relations, but are overdetermined by a number of causes, none of which can be separated from each other, nor can one be pinpointed as decisive. While at certain points in history, the range of identifications may have been smaller, or more limited, and ‘decisive’ points perhaps easier to identify, we should be careful about assuming that people in the past were more ‘simple’ than
we are, or did not struggle about a sense of self in the way that we do. The forms
in which they did so may have been different, but I do not believe that the
processes were vastly different, that is, it is not simply the case that people were
more easily determined by ideology in the past than they are today. Historical
‘evidence’ itself tells us that hegemony has always been a process of conflict and
struggle, and that this conflict often took place at the level of the subjective. If
capitalist hegemony relies on the cultivation of desire for consumption, this in
itself is a historical process. Human nature, the human self, has always been the
terrain of conflict because it is first and foremost human beings who constitute
social relations – these relations are not made by some invisible hand of god, or
even of capitalists, without either the consensus or coercion of people themselves.
In this sense then, the greatest battle of hegemony has been on the terrain of
consciousness, and it is because of this that Gramsci spent so much of his
intellectual energy on attempting to understand language, culture and common
sense. It is only possible for a system of social relations to become truly
hegemonic, not merely dominative, if it has been successful in winning the hearts
and minds of people at an everyday level. This is not simply the determinism of
the means of production which people do not understand, or the determinism of
ideology operating as false consciousness. If this were the case, there would be no
conflict and groups like larrikins would never have existed. The fact that there was
resistance points to the capacity of humans in the past to see clearly the choices
with which they were faced, and to act accordingly.
It is often the case that left-leaning academics lament the lack of overt class consciousness in contemporary society. It is indeed the case that capitalism as a system has been very effective at individualising and separating people from each other. There is no denying that this has had serious consequences for the possibilities of collective social transformation. This thesis has not sought to argue that larrikins in either the past or the present are prime agents for such transformation. Rather, it has sought to show the ways in which focusing exclusively on particular forms of collective action, especially those based around class, is at the very least problematic. At certain moments in Australian history, it was sometimes the organised working class as much as any other group, who advocated for a disciplined and non-violent working self, thus helping to legitimise capitalism and often helping to pave the way for the use of state violence through an acquiescence with changing notions of criminality. It was, at times, the organised working class itself that helped to deliver the worker to the factory door, and that continues to assist with the deliverance of the human self to the constructed desires and aspirations of capitalism. By continuing to exclude parts of its own history and parts of its contemporary self, the idea of what is truly radical has become severely circumscribed. A progressive society would seek to open up debate about the ways in which social relations affect the very heart of the human self. It is the responsibility of history as a discipline to remind the present that nothing in contemporary life should be taken for granted, that there is nothing eternal or fixed or ‘end of history’ about any method of social organisation. If the goal of capitalism is the ever increasing commodification of all aspects of human life, it should be the goal of critical thinkers to remind us that we are not
machines, nor trained gorillas, but human beings, diverse and complex. Similarly, if the goal of democratic societies is that of expanding human freedom, this is not a goal that can come at the expense of some, in either history or in the present.

It is in this sense that the analysis of larrikins made in this thesis is of particular significance. On one level, larrikins show the way in which capitalist social relations created a casualised and deskilld work force, and that the creation of larrikin subalternity maintained the ‘deviant Other’ against which norms of behaviour and morality could be naturalised. In response, larrikins can be said to represent a form of conscious resistance, but it is resistance of a different kind, at the level of the self. This was a self that was not for sale, and was made subaltern because of this, because it would buy neither the nightmare of production nor the dream of consumption. It is at this deeper level that larrikins can be said to represent what we have all lost, what has been repressed or excised, the capacity for fun, for carefree reckless enjoyment, for desire that is not constrained nor constructed, that can not be brought. They remind us of their existence in the people we seek to exclude today, and they should continue to remind us that we must face our own uncomfortabilities and have the courage to speak what has become unspeakable.
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