

Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: Reading the Ideas and Ideals of the New Student Left.

The Process of alienation of Intellectuals is well underway. The established revolutionary bodies are competing for their allegiance. The result of this process will determine the extent and direction of the future development of mass politics of protest in Australia.

Australian Security and Intelligence
Organisation Report, 1968.¹

If Marxism is the opiate of intellectuals, then the sixties was a time of both intoxication and withdrawal. The New Left sought to redefine the very essence of what constituted “the political” by challenging the rationality of the authoritarian right and also the verities of the Marxist, proletarian orientated Left. This dynamic and heterogeneous New Left, which was partly constituted by and related to the counter-culture, the anti-war and civil rights movements, sought to reorientate society and themselves, which involved new ways of thinking about society, politics, protest and perhaps most important of all, of being. Students who took part in the “Great Refusal”, viewed their life-world as dominated by instrumental rationality and systemic injustice, although, despite their rejection of materialist values, the class-based concerns of the Old Left still lingered. Whilst the Vietnam War which epitomised all that was wrong with society was a major politicising catalyst, the New Left was also concerned with what immediately confronted them, such as their universities and demands for participatory democracy. Largely synonymous with youth and the student movements, the New Left became the driving force behind an imaginative cultural and political rebellion, demonstrating its adherents discontent, not only with established patterns of power, but also with the traditional means of contesting this power.

This essay explores the ideas which characterised the student movement and the currency of those ideas. As the above introduction indicates, generalisations are largely unavoidable when discussing an essentially imagined community not of the oppressed, but of the affluent, privileged and enraged.² Most histories of the sixties appear to tap into the prevailing zeitgeist, as if they had privileged access to the ideas and feelings of a movement, without actually examining the concrete manifestations of those ideas. This approach homogenises differences, both between and within nations, ignoring the particularity, contingency and contradictions which characterised the New

¹ Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, “Trends and Developments in Australia of Counter-Subversion Security Interest and Significance”, (December, 1968). In Australian Security Intelligence Organisation NAA/A12389/A30/Part 9, Canberra: National Archives of Australia

² Verity Burgmann uses the expression “imagined communities” derived from Benedict Anderson. Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p. 15.

Left. This essay seeks to counter this historiographical trend by exploring the intellectual fervour of the student movement, including its intellectual basis and how ideas were communicated and debated.

First, the relationship between the New and Old Left will be explored, through an examination of how they defined themselves at the time, through New Left journals. I will argue that despite their differences, many links remained both in ideas, and in its institutionalised form as the New and Old Left debated the vexed and unresolved identity of the revolutionary actor. Secondly, the ideas which characterised and motivated the student Left, will be examined, through an exploration of student media, principally through two particular debates which occurred in the publication of *The National Union of Students*; *National U*.

Thirdly, I will turn to the actual ideas of the student moment, derived from the above analysis, by focussing on the thought of Herbert Marcuse and Antonio Gramsci in order to understand why they resonated with the student New Left, as an incipient intelligentsia. The New Left's appropriation of these thinkers, which was by no means automatic, encouraged new forms of expression, and redefined what constituted "the political", as they explored in practice and in theory ideas of counter-hegemony, participatory democracy and student vanguardism. Rather than a relationship of simplistic causal intellectual influence, there was an elective affinity between these thinkers and the New Left, as students rather than crudely adopting wholesale systems of thought, interpreted "student bibles" in their own manner, reinterpreting the gospel to suit their concrete realities. Lastly, I will turn to an analysis of culture. This was the main divide, both in theory and practice between the Old and New Left, and dominated debate, both then and current historiography on the sixties. The ideas of the New Left and the counter-culture, problematised the obfuscatory dichotomy between cultural and political reactions to prevailing social conditions, as both could be viewed as legitimisation problems to the established capitalist order. The counter-culture and the New Left combined with issues like the Vietnam war and class inequality, with an aesthetic and expressivist dimension to create an imaginative and playful political choreography which redefined what was regarded as serious politics.

It will be argued that the New Left presented an unprecedented political and cultural challenge to both the form and content of the existing society. It was a heterogeneous phenomenon, espousing contradictory aims and practices. It will be argued the student Left was versatile and volatile, responding to intellectual currents with a detailed and self-reflexive analysis. The student media both exemplified these currents in the New Left, and form a fascinating study in their own right, whilst also revealing much of the elusive character of the New Left.

The New Left

In the above introduction, the New Left was loosely defined, almost equated with the counter-culture and student radicals. The New Left is difficult to define as it was neither inspired by a common ideology, nor led by a homogenous party. Rather, it was fragmented, at times inspired by intellectuals like Marcuse and Sartre, and at other times by the leaders of guerrilla warfare such as Fanon, Debray and Guevara.³ Marcuse celebrated this fact, when addressing a cheering political rally:

I want to add one thing here that may appear almost heretical – no primitive unification of strategy. The Left is Split! The Left has always been split! Only the right, which has no ideas to fight for, is united!⁴

While some theorists have sought to define the essence of the Left, in terms of a romantic or expressive sensibility, any definition of the New Left must recognise its lack of unity or coherence, both in terms of ideology and practice.⁵ The New Left were partly defined by its aims, but also by its practice which was constitutive of its very identity.⁶ A nuanced understanding must take note of the origins, constituency, aims and ideas of the New Left and recognise there can be no grand narrative of the sixties.

As John Sonbanmatsu notes,

In theory at least, participating in the New Left did not demand adherence to any particular ideology. All beliefs, tactics, and modes of self and group expression were welcome.⁷

Nevertheless, the process of defining the New Left is a useful heuristic exercise. In accordance with the historicist approach of this essay, it is pertinent to turn to the very definitions

³ K. L. Julka, "Herbert Marcuse Messianic Humanism; Politics of the New Left" *Social Scientist* 7, no. 12 (1979), p.15.

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, "On the New Left," a talk given at the twentieth anniversary celebration of *The Guardian* newspaper, reprinted in Massimo Teodori, *The New Left: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: BobbsMerrill, 1969), p. 472.

⁵ Theodore Roszak who popularised the term the counter-culture observed that just as the earlier romantic had challenged the spiritual emptiness of the early capitalist modernity, the latter-day romantics of the New Left counter-culture similarly opposed the alienation and inhumanity of modern society. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 91.

⁶ Verity Burgmann makes a similar point when exploring New Social Movements, but it can be equally applied the Sixties New Left, "A symbiotic relationship exists between movement and participants; they make each other, A movement is defined by the aspiration of its supports, yet the image of the movement becomes part of the self-identity of its adherents, a common self-identity." Burgmann, *Power and Protest*, p. 16.

⁷ John Sanbonmatsu, *The Postmodern Prince: Critical Theory, Left Strategy, and the Making of a New Political Subject* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), p. 29.

offered by the New Left at the time. The first component of any understanding is the relationship between the Australian New Left its international manifestations. Richard Gordon and Warren Osmond in a key publication, *The Australian New Left*, discussed the “pitfalls of mechanically applying overseas analyses and schemes to the Australian case,” which “should be obvious to those within the movement and outside it.”⁸ Gordon and Osmond in this prescient observation prefigure two features of contemporary historical debates. Firstly, it raises the question as to the derivative nature of the New Left. Gordon and Osmond argue that the student movements of the 1960s are better understood as in continuity with the Australian radical tradition, than as a local parallel to overseas developments.⁹ Les Tanner, in a cartoon in *The Age*, comically challenges this view, by depicting the revolution arriving from America ‘by airmail subscription.’¹⁰ The cartoon also highlights both the importance of the Vietnam War to the commensurate rise of the New Left.¹¹ Curthoys notes that the anti-war movement and the New Left was “significantly influenced by the American movement, freely borrowing ideas, images, slogans and organisational practice.”¹²

Appreciating this perspective need not entail accepting the proposition that the Australian New Left was either imitative or derivative. Instead, the New Left was responding to similar issues which motivated American counterparts, such as the Vietnam War, and the changing role of the University in society. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Australian New Left, drew inspiration from a variety of sources, local and foreign, but adapted these concerns to the peculiarity of local conditions, often transforming them into something quite unique.¹³

The second question Gordon and Osmond’s observation raises is historiographical: how should historians conceptualise the New Left? Generalisations must be treated carefully, as local conditions evinced vastly different tendencies, to say in France, Britain or the United States. While

⁸ Richard Gordon and Warren Osmond, “An Overview of the Australian New Left”, in *The Australian New Left*, p. 6.

⁹ Gordon and Osmond, “An Overview of the Australian New Left”, p.10.

¹⁰ Cited in Donald Horne, *A Time of Hope* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980). Whilst this is a humorous example, it is worth noting the revulsion that some historians feel when this is suggested. Rob Watts writes in a review of Gerster and Bassett’s *Seizure of Youth*, ‘it is both gratuitously insulting and inaccurate to suggest that the local anti-war movement was both derivative and brought into existence at the behest of foreign examples.’ Rob Watts, “Bringing them home’: Vietnam and the sixties revisited”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 16, no. 34 (1992), p. 84. Barry York provides some historical backing to this emotional response, noting that it is a pity that the near-obsession of most commentators with the ‘derived’ nature of the Australian student movement has blinded them to the centrally-important political catalyst within Australia.” York points to amendments to the National Service Act which marked the turning-point in campus activism within Australia. Barry York, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University, 1967-73*, (Canberra: Nicholas Press, 1989), p. 8.

¹¹Curthoys “The Anti-war Movement”, p. 102. Whilst the importance of Vietnam war as a catalysing agent, in mobilising support for the New Left is of vast importance, it will not be examined in this essay, which is primarily focussing on the ideas of the New Left.

¹² Curthoys “The Anti-war Movement”, p. 98.

¹³ Both Christopher Rootes and Jennifer Clarke come to a similar conclusion that The Australian experience of the sixties must be seen as the local expression of a transnational phenomenon. Jennifer Clarke *Aborigines and Activism: race, Aborigines and the coming of the Sixties to Australia* (Adelaide: UWA Press, 2009), p. 12. Rootes, Christopher, “The Development of Radical Student Movements and their Sequelae”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 34, no. 2, 1988, pp. 185.

transnational approaches to the counter-culture are useful in demonstrating connections between movements and the global nature of protest, they have the tendency to slide past or reconstruct the actual histories of political and culture dissent from a global norm.¹⁴

Rex Mortimer in an article "The New Left" in *Arena*, a Marxist Journal which played an important role in theoretical debate, compares the American with the British New Left, positing two dichotomous extremes:

The one is primarily theoretical in approach, the other activist; the one conceives itself as part of a tradition in the labour movement, while the other is remarkably self-conscious about its separateness; one explicitly ideological and Marxist, the other predominantly anti-ideological and based on moral commitment; the one coherent in organisational form, the other diffuse.

Mortimer argues that the Australian New Left stands between these two poles, involving both student radicalism and non-Communist intellectuals, but still regarding the Communist Party of Australia as a relevant frame of reference.¹⁵ However, this conclusion may reflect Mortimer's membership of the CPA, as there is also a anti-Communist tendency in the New Left, exemplified by Anthony Ashbolt's comment that in order to understand what drove the New Left of the late sixties "it was a decided advantage never to have belonged to the Old Left." John Murphy notes that the point was a shrewd one, as the Australian New Left was of a different generation, and little preoccupied with the orthodox Communism of the "New Left" of dissident Communists like John Saville or E.P. Thompson.¹⁶

An exploration of the New Left publications may elucidate an understanding of the differences between the Old and New Left. Andrew Wells states that:

¹⁴ Jeremi Suri work is a prime example of this. Jeremi Suri, "The Rise and Fall of an International Counter-culture, 1960-1975," *American Historical Review* 114 (2009), pp. 45-68. However, it may be unfair to single out this work, as Suri himself noted that in order to understand the international counter culture we must avoid the urge to ascribe coherence to the era, p. 50. Moreover, whilst this essay does not seek to undermine the important contributions which can be made by addressing the transnational nature of the new Left and counter-culture, it is important to realise that it can ignore vast differences in the local manifestations of what was a global phenomenon. This point was made recently by Terry Anderson in a letter to the editor, where he noted that "Of course there was an international counter-culture, but it arrived in local forms and took on local and global issues." More importantly, Anderson notes that "The counter-culture Suri draws is from the top down – presidential adviser sand the "wise men" – and not from the bottom up. Kissinger is mentioned five times, but not one hippie." This demonstrates the problems evident in this approach. *Terry Anderson*, "Letter to the Editor", *American Historical Review* 117 (2009), pp. 45-68.

¹⁵ Rex Mortimer "The New Left" *Arena* 13(1967), pp. 16-25.

¹⁶ John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993.), p. 219.

In a kind of ritual, the journals of the New Left – *Arena*, *Intervention* and even the CPA's own theoretical journals like the, *Australian Left Review* – provided the forum where almost the entire Old Left became the subject of intense criticism.¹⁷

However, a closer reading of these journals indicates that instead of being characterised by hostile antagonism, it was rather marked by confusion and reciprocal development. The New Left did not simply celebrate, nor the Old Left simply grieve, the crises of Marxism. Both the Old Left and New Left engaged in a persistent anti-hegemonic intellectual struggle.¹⁸ *Arena* itself was formed by intellectuals who remained inside the CPA after 1956, rather than 'deserting' it, and still maintained some commitment to Communism. It was not until 1968 that it took into account greater developments outside the party, including students, which provided a new anchorage for the magazine. The early history of the magazine serves to clarify historical understanding of the movement away from the Old Left towards the New Left, a movement which did not sever connections.¹⁹ Furthermore, Bentle argues that when the CPA relaunched its party theoretical journal *The Australia Left Review* in late 1966, it was aimed at the student Left.²⁰ This may have partly achieved its aims as, John Playford noted in *Lots Wife* that "Many students will conclude that *Australian Left Review* is simply the successor to the now defunct *Communist Review* – but it is premature to jump to such an easy conclusion," although Playford concluded that *Arena* was the better journal.²¹

A cursory examination of the content of the journals reveals similar themes. For instance, at the conclusion of "the New Left", Mortimer extends a Communist blessing to the New Left, noting "there is no doubt that the parties need the theoretical freshness and vitality of the New Left," and calling for the mutually beneficial bridging of the two.²² These personal and institutional links are further demonstrated by Doug White's discussion with Eric Aarons, a member of the CPA's Central Committee on the Congress of the Communist party of 1967. This demonstrates a political and

¹⁷ Andrew Wells, "the Old Left Intelligentsia 1930 to 1960", in Brian Head and James Walters, (eds.), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 229. The ASIO report, "The Role and the Significance of Protest Action in Promoting New Left political trends and developments in Australia" came to a similar conclusion noting that "The exodus of intellectuals from the CPA was the main factor in leading to the appearance of New Left activity in Australia." (undated). In Australian Security Intelligence Organisation NAA/A12389/A30/Part 9, Canberra: National Archives of Australia.

¹⁸ Andrew Wells, "the Old Left Intelligentsia 1930 to 1960", p. 230. Indeed, Osmond and Gordon turn this very definition into a critique, arguing that in "we have not yet seen in Australia the emergence of a qualitatively New Left; instead, the Old Left patterns of politics reproduce themselves."¹⁸ Gordon and Osmond, "An Overview of the Australian New Left", p. 9.

¹⁹ Gordon and Osmond, "An Overview of the Australian New Left", p. 17.

²⁰ Mervyn Bentle, "The Origins of Radical Intelligentsia in the Sixties", *National Observer*, 25, (2007/2008), pp. 25.

²¹ John Playford, untitled Review, *Lots Wife*, (July 1966).

²² Mortimer "The New Left", p. 28. Whilst ruminating on "vexed and unresolved question of the major revolutionary actor" Mortimer also wrote in "Student Action out of Nihilism" *Australian Left review* (April/May 1970) that "The achievements of the student New Left are already prodigious", p 75.

intellectual cross-over between the New and Old Left, as intellectually speaking, the New Left had not fundamentally rejected the role of the worker or at least some degree of economic determinism in their political analysis.²³ Finally, it was not only student media such as *Honi Soit*,²⁴ and New Left publications like *Arena*²⁵ that carried articles on the ostensibly New Left phenomenon of the “Free U” located near Sydney University, but *The Australia Left Review* even carried advertisements for it.²⁶

Finally, in terms of the ideas that underpinned the Old and New Left, the work of Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse represented a point of intersection, both in theory and in actual discussion in Left media. Gramsci's thought was introduced in a series of articles by Alastair Davidson in *Australian Left Review* throughout 1966 and 1967 and were then republished as *Antonio Gramsci, The Man, His Ideas*. Although it was savagely condemned by Humphrey McQueen of the extreme Left²⁷ it was developed by Victorian Communist leaders such as Rex Mortimer, Bernie Taft and Dave Davies and also spread by those of the New Left such as Dan O'Neil and Peter O'Brian.²⁸ Gramsci's emphasis on the role of intellectuals and human agency particularly “organic intellectuals” resonated with the New Left.²⁹ Moreover, Alastair Davidson argues that despite some internal opposition, the CPA rapidly adopted the cultural interpretation of Gramsci. Eric Aarons of the CPA, even suggested that ideological work had to precede any revolutionary activity, an idea that would lead to later splits in the CPA.

The thought of Herbert Marcuse, held to be a prophet of the New Left student movement, was discussed heavily by the “Old” Communist Left, demonstrating the flow of ideas within the Old and New Left. An article by Franz Marek, “The Political World Scene According to Herbert Marcuse”, with the editorial by-line “The writings of Marcuse are not so well known in this country, but his influence in young Left student circles is growing,” as published in *Australian New Left*, as well as being republished in a separate booklet by the CPA.³⁰ The discussion of Marcuse'

²³ Doug White, “The Communist Congress: Two perspectives” *Arena*, 13, 1967. Indeed ASIO comes to a similar conclusion in a report entitled, “The New (Young) Left’ in Australia: Recent Trends In Theory and Strategy”, the report concludes after a close reading of a socialist article that “the young Left, despite its alleged radicalism and active ideological fervour was still seen to be an integral part of the general Left movement and to be affiliated with policy-making adult political organisations, e.g. the A.L.P. and the C.P.A.

²⁴ Terry Irving, “The Free University,” *Honi Soit* 40, no. 21(14 September 1967).

²⁵ Ann Curthoys “The end of Free U?”, *Arena*, no. 20, (1969).

²⁶ Back Page of *The Australian New Left Review*, (February-March, 1968)

²⁷ Humphrey McQueen, “Antonio Gramsci, The Man, His Ideas” (Review), *Arena* 18, (1969).

²⁸ Alastair Davidson, “Antonio Gramsci and Australia”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 19, no. 2 (2007), p 165

²⁹ This is a particular interpretation of Gramsci, and debate over his inversion of the Base/Superstructure in Marxism is beyond the scope of this essay. This is discussed by Texier “Gramsci, Theoretician of the Superstructures” in Chantal Mouffe (ed.) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London, Routledge, 1979).

³⁰ Originally translated from *Weg and Ziel* no 10, 1967,(Vienna), published in *Australian New Left*, (August-September, 1968) and reprinted as *Marcuse*, (Communist Party of Australia, 1968).

thought in both the new and old left demonstrates a degree of integration in theory as well as action, which is often looked over.

New Left developed in an antagonistic dialogue with the Old Left, but the relationship between the two was hardly simple as the New Left helped transform the Old Left in a dialectical manner. This exploration has focussed principally on drawing out similarities and connections between the Old and New Left, focussing around the ambivalence caused to both sides resulting from the objectively explosive power of the proletariat refusing to perform in the manner in which Marx predicted. The following sections will highlight the differences.

The *Student* New Left

The New Left is often equated with students, as Peter O'Brian remarked in 1970, 'like the Anglo-American New Left, the Australian variant is largely a student phenomenon.'³¹ This view, held in 1970, has not shifted greatly in the subsequent sixties literature. Ann Curthoys explains that "the rise of the New Left was almost entirely student based," and notes its simultaneous rise with anti-war movement, which clearly was a formative aspect in mobilising support for Leftist issues that were not class-based.³² Moreover, the objective importance of students, both to the New Left, and to society at large can be addressed in a number of ways. Christopher Rootes argues that whether or not it is explicitly recognised, students in all societies have political significance because they constitute an incipient, if not always actual intelligentsia.³³ Bob Birrell makes a similar point arguing that "I believe that these attitudes [discussing two studies at Monash University] are consistent with the interpretation that the traditional students studied here constitutes an aspiring intelligentsia."³⁴ As political actors and as producers and consumers of culture, students are both elites-in-training and actual elites. One does not have to fully subscribe the "post-industrial society" theories of Daniel Bell or Zbigniew Brzezinski, who actually views the student revolt as essentially an anti-modern rebellion, "The last gasp of a Romanticism soured by rancour and disgust",³⁵ to admit the importance of theoretical knowledge, which is greatly controlled by educated elites, granting students a political salience out of proportion to their numbers. Hence, as Rootes argues,

³¹ Peter O'Brian "Some overseas comparisons in Richard Gordon (ed.) *The Australian New Left: Critical Essays and Strategy*, (Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970).

³² Ann Curthoys "The anti-war Movement" in Grey, Jeffrey and Doyle, Jeff, *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p. 103.

³³ Christopher Rootes, "Student Radicalism: Politics of Moral Protest and Legitimation Problems of the Modern Capitalist State", *Theory and Society*, 9, no. 3, 1980, p. 480.

³⁴ Bob Birrell "Students Attitude to the Left" *Arena*, no. 24 (1971), p. 67.

³⁵ Cited in Christopher Rootes, "Student Radicalism: Politics of Moral Protest and Legitimation Problems of the Modern Capitalist State", *Theory and Society*, 9, no. 3, 1980, p. 489.

student radicalism poses legitimation problems to the capitalist order by challenging the instrumental ideology that sustains the normal politics of capitalism.³⁶

It is arguable, that students could be constituted as Organic Intellectuals, in Gramscian terms. Gramsci wrote that “The popular element ‘feels’ but does not always understand or know the intellectual element ‘knows’ but does not always understand and in particular ‘feel.’”³⁷ Considering the aesthetic or expressivist tendency in the counter-culture and student Left, then it could be argued that this criteria is met. Gramsci’s “traditional” intellectuals functioned within the university structure, despite having this proximity in common, students were not the disinterested scholars of this “traditional” type.³⁸ Verity Burgmann explores the more extreme position that in some sense radical intellectuals can be considered a class. Despite their lack of relation to the means of production, intellectuals can be regarded as a class with class interests, despite not being on “the road to class power.”³⁹ Finally, the importance of students to the New Left revolves around the Marcusean idea that students may be the revolutionary actor, rather than the proletariat. This idea will be examined in more detail in the following sections. Evidently, when discussing the New Left, it is not misleading to equate them with a student based movement.⁴⁰

The Currency of Ideas in the Student New Left

The vitality of debate which characterises the student media in the sixties flies in the face of common conceptions of Australia as an anti-intellectual society.⁴¹ Students, as an incipient intelligentsia were almost as critical of their own intellectual abilities as their conservative contemporaries who charged them with dogmatic obedience to doctrines such as Marxism. This

³⁶ Hannah Forsyth presents a compelling analyses of the way in which ASIO viewed the threat of University knowledge which one ASIO report claimed would lead to the overthrow of parliamentary democracy. Hannah Forsyth, “Knowledge and Intelligence: why ASIO thought university knowledge would undermine parliamentary democracy, 1968-1973, Forthcoming PhD, The University of Sydney, (2010).

³⁷ Cited in Dan O’Neil “Abstract and Real World Intellectuals and Radical Social Change” in Gordon, *The Australian New Left*, p. 267

³⁸ Antonio Gramsci, “School and Education”, *Australian Left Review* (August-September), 1970, pp. 79

³⁹ Burgmann is referring to G. Konrad and I. Szelenyi *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* trans by A. Arato and R.E. Allen, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979). Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner in “Intellectuals and the New Social Movements” in Rick Kuhn and Tom O’Lincoln, (eds.) *Class & Class conflict in Australia* (Melbourne : Longman Australia, 1996), p. 118.

Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner in “Intellectuals and the New Social Movements” in Rick Kuhn and Tom O’Lincoln, (eds.) *Class & class conflict in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1996), p. 118.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the role of high school students should not be overlooked either in this analysis. As noted in the Asio report “The Significance of Militant Developments Among Secondary School Students in Australia” (December, 1968-January 1969 [handwritten date]). In Australian Security Intelligence Organisation NAA/A12389/A30/Part 9, Canberra: National Archives of Australia

⁴¹ Brian Head explores this in detail in the introduction to Head and Walter, *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, particularly, pp.12-17.

very self-reflexivity demonstrates a marked ability to debate political views and analyse their own shortcomings. This section does not seek to celebrate this fact, but rather to explore the currency and movement of Leftist ideas within the student media. It is by turning away from a unitary focus on major thinkers and texts towards an examination of the play of ideas and the bearers of ideas, conceiving students as 'organic intellectuals' that our understanding of the function and meaning of ideas will be clarified.⁴²

The New Left has been seen as a movement of ideas both because of its intellectual origins as well as its failure to coalesce into a traditional political platform.⁴³ The New Left was marked by a diverse array of ideas that held currency primarily within the printed form, although the importance of sit-ins, teach-ins, rallies, protests and conferences should not be overlooked. The sixties saw a veritable explosion of print media, from academic journals to broadsheets and to other university publications from student magazine to leaflets.⁴⁴ Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner argue that magazines and newspapers provide the clearest instance of this affinity between intellectual life and radical politics. Publications provide a vital means by which to circulate cultural products for Australian intellectuals, which inevitably included expressly political products.⁴⁵ Thus, although it may appear reductivist, in a sense, the student New Left cannot only be explored through the print media, but in a certain sense was constituted by such publications.

This bold claim presents problems: utilising student publications as an historical source in order to explore the ideas which held sway in the student politics is highly problematic as it fails to adequately determine the relationship between a text and the impact upon its audience. It is important to ask how the views expressed in such media were accepted, rejected, debated, or even read. On this latter point, despite being held as the high point of student activism in Australia, there were still those who decried student apathy. Those on the Left were also more vocal than the majority of students and Gerard Henderson noted that when analysing the intellectual currents that have an effect on students, one can only uncover evidence of those who verbalise their political

⁴² Furthermore, James Walters argues that in decrying the absence of major thinkers, this perspective ignores the play of ideas and bearers of ideas in Australian political history. James Walter in "Intellectuals and the Political culture" in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, p. 241.

⁴³ Editorial *New Left Review* 1 (January/February, 1960), p. 1. The failure to form a traditional party platform has been turned into a conservative critique by some commentators. Ambrose, whilst discussing the U.S. context laments the failure of radicals in the sixties to establish a political party of the Left, instead "it took its opportunity to print a licence to riot, to scandalize, to do drugs and group sex, to talk and dress dirty, to call for revolution and burn flags, to condemn parents and indeed anyone over 30 years of age, in an excess of free will and childish misjudgement selfdom matched and never exceeded." Stephen Ambrose "Foreword" in Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Anti-war Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1995). However, this conservative critique not only misrepresents the New Left and the Counter-culture, but entirely misses its central point.

⁴⁴ John Playford notes in a comprehensive bibliography on the New Left that "The main source of material on the New Left in Australia is the increasingly lively university Press, notably, National U." John Playford "The New Left; A Select Bibliography" in Gordon, *The Australian New Left*, pp. 278-304.

⁴⁵ Burgmann and Milner in "Intellectuals and the New Social Movements" p. 118.

position by whatever means. This is limited to those who are to some extent active, who are inevitably on the Left and in no way represent the vast majority of students.⁴⁶ Whether or not this argument is purposefully conservative is unclear, but it does point to the difficulty in determining to what extent these texts were read. Indeed, Bob Birrell noted in 1971, that:

We know something about the leaders of the student movement in Australia, but very little about their followers, or potential followers. Studies such as *The Australian New Left* have been able to cite little or no survey research on this issue.⁴⁷

Birrell questions what the rank and file of the student movement believed in and whether they were predominantly Old or New Left in orientation. To some extent polls can address this question, but not only are they few and far between, but furthermore, they are unwieldy in providing detailed and nuanced information about students beliefs.⁴⁸

However, as the scope here is limited to analysing the flow of ideas, these methodological issues largely miss the mark. Moreover, the very contestation which occurs in the student publications, such as that of The National Union of Australian University Students', *National U*, suggests a lively atmosphere of argumentation and dispute.⁴⁹ Indeed as Barry York notes, in 1969 "it achieved considerable political sophistication, with polemical exchanges and analyses seeking to critically define the Australian student movement." *National U* had a circulation in 1968 of 50,000, leading York to claim that more than any other factor it helped to achieve a "sense of a national student movement." The newspaper brought to the most isolated campuses reports of what students elsewhere in Australia and overseas were doing, such that it became "a virtual encyclopaedia of student unrest in Australia."⁵⁰

However, by assuming that student publications give privileged access to the real meaning of the student Left, many voices are likely to remain unheard, particularly when many student

⁴⁶ Gerard Henderson in "A Symposium of Intellectual Influences on the student Left", *National U*, (4 August, 1969).

⁴⁷ Bob Birrell "Student Attitude to the Left, *Arena* no 24, 1971, p. 57-67.

⁴⁸ Mick Armstrong claims that the sharp shift to the Left at Sydney was reflected in polls conducted by the SRC that showed support for the Vietnam war falling from 68% in 1966 to 48% in 1968 to 41% in 1969 to 35% in 1970. Meanwhile support for the liberals fell from 47% in 1968 to 20% in 1970. Armstrong, Mick, 1,2,3,4 *What are we fighting for? The Australian student movement from its origins to the 1970s* (Melbourne: Socialist Alternative, 2001), p 83. Similarly Alan Barcan turns to polls to indicate that In September 1966 the SRC conducted a poll of 5,547 student on their attitude to the Vietnam war; 68 in favour of sending troops, 59 supported conscription in Australia. but only 34 support presence of Australian conscripts in Vietnam. *Honi Soit*, (7 July 1966). However, these polls are of limited utility, by their very nature they fail to express exactly what students felt or to what degree, and sacrifice qualitative over quantitative data.

⁴⁹ Whilst it is beyond the scope of this essay, it worth exploring the political nature of NUAUS, in order to determine whether *National U* reflected only sectarian interests. Graham Hasting explores this in "Believers and Deceivers: National Unionism in Australia since the 1920s" in *It Can't Happen Here*.

⁵⁰ York, Barry, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-73* (Campbell: Nicholas Press, 1989) pp. 40 and 71.

publications were often run by ruling cliques.⁵¹ Barcan notes an example of this, stating that when Trotskyist Hall Greenland edited *Honi Soit* in 1966, those who believed that a literary-cultural clique had dominated the journal for too long welcomed the change.⁵²

Nevertheless, an exploration of *National U* reflects a public sphere in which reasoned debate and articulation of ideas flowed. A focus on *National U* is justified, due both to the extent of its nationwide readership, and moreover to the prosaic fact that it lifted many of the best article from university based journals such as *Honi Soit*, *Rabelais*, *Farrago* and *Lots Wife*. This section will explore two particular debates which occurred within the pages of *National U*.

The first of these debates was instigated on the 17 March 1969 edition, Kelvin Rowley and Terry Counihan contributed an article “Radical Student Politics: some critical notes” where they stated at the outset that

We are both Marxists, and believe that not only is a revolutionary transformation of society desirable, but in a long term view, possible. We thus sympathise with the student insurgents and our criticism, however harsh these may be, are intended to be constructive.

With this caveat Rowley and Counihan proceed to critique the “intellectual poverty” of the Melbourne based Students for a Democratic Society, by asserting that despite its claim to have no ideology, they are really espousing a confused form of participatory democracy. Despite sympathising with SDS’ distrust of the Old Left, they view the “non-ideological activism of SDS like boarding a train and without knowing what direction it is headed.” Moreover, they view the demands for participatory democracy, as “so wide as to be rendered vacuous and unrelated to the concrete reality in which this is rooted.” Rather, they seek to relate democracy to a Marxist analysis tying into a social and economic framework.

What is most notable in their review of radical politics is, first, their Marxist orientation: the Old Left still held some sway. Secondly, Rowley and Counihan also focus on the university as the site where student should focus their dissent, condemning the University as a conservative institution which extolled the values of the capitalist society where knowledge is regarded as a commodity. Further they claim that universities are characterised by instrumental rationality,

⁵¹ Indeed this may be a micro example of a parallel concern that Bendle noted with society in general, namely that there was a fundamental disjunction between the popular culture on one hand and the nation’s intellectual culture on the other. However, this concern is largely mute if we limit the scope to analysing the ideas on the New Left. Bendle, “The Origins of Radical Intelligentsia in the Sixties”, p. 23.

⁵² Alan Barcan, “Student Activists at Sydney University 1960-1967: A problem of interpretation’, *History of Education Review*, 36, no.1 2007, p. 68

capable of absorbing radical dissent.⁵³ This shift towards a focus on the university is neither unique to either the New nor the Old Left.⁵⁴ However, their critique of participatory democracy as a “corporative ideology as opposed to a counter-hegemonic ideology” fundamentally challenges one of the core tenets of New Left theory, demands for which can be seen on almost every campus in Australia at that time. However, despite their ostensibly Marxist analysis, the part bring to light the importance of building a counter-hegemony, relying on the thought of Gramsci, demonstrating the importance of cultural analysis in what appears to be a traditional Marxist analysis.

Henry van Moorst in a reply called “Pipe Dream Revolutionaries”⁵⁵ presents what appears to be a New Left perspective. He argues that Rowley and Counihan in “their attempt to appeal to the common experience of students, rather than other issues” is an attempt to contrive a revolution as it legitimises the dichotomy between curricular and extra-curricular activities and ignores concern for other as a prerequisite for building up a revolutionary movement.” Indeed, van Moorst notes that “it is about time that the materialism and tactics of most Marxists was replaced by concern and morality” and that “social change becomes an issue as important as economic and political change.” This is not to appeal to students’ self interest, but rather to make them realise that “human dignity and human rights are a concern to all.” One is reminded of Hannah Arendt’s prescription that students “did not simply carry on propaganda, but acted, and, moreover acted almost exclusively from moral motives.”⁵⁶ What is most important, however, is van Moorst’s point that “advocates of radicalism must be personally experienced and felt to have any real meaning. It cannot be passed on solely through books.” Here we see the expressivist and counter-cultural tendencies of the New Left are made evident, which will be explored in the following section

⁵³ This view is similar to that of York who perceives the root cause of the student protest movement in the crisis in educational philosophy. This crisis was caused by a rapid expansion in tertiary education necessitated by a post-war society which demanded increasingly educated workers. Crudely speaking, Australia’s university planners, cognizant of the second industrial revolution were torn between two different models. On the one hand the Newman model, which emphasised the cultivation of intellect for its own sake, and on the other hand, Kerr’s “Multiversity”, which viewed the university as a servant of the economy. York produces convincing evidence for this tension in the Murray and Martin Committee reports, whereby “Education should be regarded as an investment which ruled direct and significant economic benefits through increasing the skill of the population.” York argues that student unrest resulted from an awareness by radical students of the contradiction of universities persisting with the myth of the ‘community of scholar’s whilst in reality viewing students as ‘units of human capital.’ York, *Student Revolt!*, p.33.

⁵⁴ John Docker when discussing Dennis Altman’s article “students in the Electric Age”, and in light of views similar to those put forth by York in the footnote above, notes that “their first target of attack then is the university itself,” John Docker, “Those Halcyon Days’: the Moment of the New Left,” in Head and Waters, *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, p. 291. Similarly, Cahil and Irving argue that that “Sooner or later student movements are going to focus on the university, and eventually a movement for university reform will emerge.”, and analyses it in light of Marcuse’ notion of repressive tolerance and the ability of the university to absorb Dissent. Rowan Cahil and Terry Irving in “Sydney University” *Dissent* no. 23 (Spring 1968), p. 19. Moreover this is a very prescient analysis in light of the Events that were to occur in the Philosophy and Economics Departments in the Early Seventies.

⁵⁵ *National U* (14 April, 1969)

⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” in Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 203.

Students, much like academics were not above one-upmanship. Bob Connell writes in another reply to Counihan and Rowley that:

Counihan and Rowley made the obvious point that revolutionary activism without revolutionary ideas leads only to a victorious counter-revolution. I was startled to observe that they did not place an acknowledgement to Marcuse. But one can excuse the Old Left for not having read up on the New Left.⁵⁷

This point highlights the inherent difficulties involved when tracing ideas in Student publications. Students often do not pay heed to intellectual debts, as they synthesise the teachings of various Leftist thinkers. This exchange between the students indicates firstly a lively discussion of Old and New Left ideas, which despite their ostensive antagonism fertilised each other.

A second significant debate took place in *National U* on the 4 August 1969, entitled "Symposium on the Intellectual Influences on the Student Consciousness Today". The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation even used it as a basis for the report "The 'New (Young) Left' in Australia: Recent Trends in Theory and Strategy."⁵⁸ *National U* invited submissions from radical students Douglas Kirsener and Peter O'Brien, a "moderate"⁵⁹ Gerard Henderson, and a University lecturer Patrick Morgan.

Both Morgan and Henderson present negative views of the student Left. Morgan asserting the familiar anti-intellectual trope that the Left can have no mentors, "because nobody is able to define the nothingness peculiar to Australian life."⁶⁰ Henderson makes a similar argument that "one cannot analyse the intellectual influences on student activists, as there are no intellectual mentors." Henderson instead identifies three types of Leftist figures. First, "Heroes" to be admired, but not necessarily followed, who include Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Guevara, Castro and Fanon. Secondly, "Slogan suppliers" such as C. Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse, from where students derive slogans such as the "power elite", "repressive tolerance" "alienation" and "one dimensionality". The third group is that of "Trend Setters" such as American and Western European groups based around journals like *New Left Review*, *Rampart* and the *Berkeley Barb*.

⁵⁷ *National U*, (April 14, 1969). In the last right of reply, Counihan and Rowley counter that this point "common wisdom long before the septuagenarian New Leftist Marcuse was writing" in "Pipe Dream Revolutionaries: a Rejoinder" *National U* (12 May 1969). What this final rejoinder demonstrates is that for many it was the ideas that were important and adopted, rather than any particular subservience to any one thinker or creed.

⁵⁸ The 'New (Young) Left' in Australia: Recent Trends in Theory and Strategy" 1969 in Australian Security Intelligence Organisation NAA/A12389/A30/Part7, Canberra: National Archives of Australia.

⁵⁹ When using this term one is reminded of the satirical definition of a "moderate" provide by Michael Hyde, "A right-winger who moderates his views in order to gain credence. When speaking at student meetings he will support a principle that he opposes in order to later oppose the action over that principle." Michael Hyde, (ed.) *It is Right to Rebel*, (Free Association Press: Sydney, 1972).

⁶⁰ Patrick Morgan's comments is reminiscent of Patrick White who stated a decade earlier, "the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possession." Patrick White, *Australian Letters*, cited in Head "Intellectuals in Australian Society", p. 14.

Kirsener and O'Brian, both Communist Party members both had little positive to say about the student Left. Kirsener viewed it as “essentially populist”, favouring “participatory democracy,” similar to the above discussion argument put forward by Rowley and Counihan. However, Kirsener presented an interesting analysis predicated on a metaphor of “Masters”, “Interpreters” and “Actors”, whereby most student leaders are interpreters preaching the gospel of the Master’s word, and the rest are Actors. Crucially Kirsener notes that “it is not what the Master says which is important”, but rather how it is mediated by the Interpreters and Actors.⁶¹ Indeed, Kirsener argues that although Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, has been readily and cheaply available, few have read it. Evidently, what is particularly striking about this analysis is that students generally will “pick and choose” aspects of philosophers and Leftist thinkers, rather than subscribing wholesale to systems of thought. It is worth turning to Marcuse’s thought in order to explore the manner in which the interaction between ideas and students occurred.⁶²

An Elective Affinity and an Inclusive Agenda: Marcuse and the New Left.

Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* was one of the defining texts of the late sixties, whether or not students read its often rarefied and esoteric prose.⁶³ Student of the New Left identified with its description of the flattening of everyday existence, his notion of false consciousness and needs and repressive tolerance. After decades philosophical work, almost overnight Marcuse became a radical celebrity. In fact, his fame almost exactly paralleled the rise and fall of the student movement.⁶⁴ Marshal Berman noted that Marcuse was the philosophical text for the Che Guevara posters, and had the ability to silence a noisy concert hall simply by his presence.⁶⁵

⁶¹Rowan Cahill posits a similar view noting that the socialist intellectual must act as the interpreter of alienation, and involved other as creators, distributors and administrators of culture. Rowan Cahill, “The Role of the Socialist Intellectual” *Left Forum* (March 1969).

⁶² As the New Left drew on and was inspired by a diverse array of thinkers, there is an implicit danger of historical bias associated with focussing on a single thinker, abstracted from the intellectual milieu of which they formed a part., a unitary focus on a single thinker. Nevertheless, isolating the thought of one intellectual can help in understanding why these thinkers resonated so strongly with the Student Left.

⁶³ Dan O’Neil attacks the esoteric and abstruse language of Marcuse’ thought, arguing that “it is simply no longer sufficient and it is becoming actually ridiculous to go on with the Marcusian or anti-Marcusian rant about the masses (what masses anyway?) whose ‘subjective’ experience is ‘false’ while their’ objective’ condition which is ‘true’ remains one of ‘alienation’. This is abstract rubbish.” Dan O’Neil ‘Abstract and Real Worlds: Intellectuals and radical Social Change’, in Osmond, *The Australian New Left*, p. 266. This attack is rather ironic as Marcuse was a philosopher of praxis; he was forever searching for the openings for revolution and believed that theory was intimately linked to action. Scholarship which did not fulfil this purpose, was in his words “Scholarshit.” Stanley Aronowitz “The unknown Herbert Marcuse” *Social text* 58, no. 1, (1999) p. `45.

⁶⁴ Moreover, aside from a narrow circle who teach in Critical theory on the Frankfurt school, his work is now largely passé and out of fashion. Sarah Hornstein however, presents an impressive argument on the continuing importance of his thought. Sarah Hornstein, “On totalitarianism: The Continuing Relevance of Herbert Marcuse” in Gurminder

Marcuse provided one of the first notable articulations amongst radical intellectuals of the suspicion that other sections of society, “the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colours, the unemployed and the unemployable,”⁶⁶ might be better qualified than the working class to serve as the midwife of history. However, as Ross Fitzgerald points out, Marcuse was entirely unclear about just who the radical agents for change were.⁶⁷ Alastair MacIntyre asks “which minority are to rescue the majority by transforming them: the same Old ratbag of students blacks, flower-power or an educational elite?”⁶⁸ John Fremstead argues correctly that *An Essay: On Liberation* directly addressed the student movement,⁶⁹ affirming the counter-culture and the student movement as the manifestation of a “new sensibility.” However, *On Liberation* also contained thoughts like “the working class is still the historical agent of the revolution.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, in an interview Marcuse stressed that “I don’t think I have ever maintained that the student movement as such is a revolutionary movement.”⁷¹ Evidently, within Marcusean thought, students could not simply be regarded as the proxy for the proletariat and thus the driving force in history.⁷² Nevertheless, as Denis Freney noted at the Left Action Conference: “the students bear a vanguard role here”⁷³ and students interpreted Marcuse thought in this manner. It was precisely because of Marcuse’s ambivalent conclusions, that the students were able to take what they wanted from these views.⁷⁴

Bhambra and Ipek Demir (eds.) 1968 in retrospect : History, Theory, Alterity (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.), p. 87.

⁶⁵ Marshall Berman, Review of *One-Dimensional Man*, *Partisan Review*, 31, no. 4 (1964), p. 617. Cited in Suri, “The Rise of the International Counter-Culture”, p. 59. Mike Marqusee, even goes as far as to analyse Bob Dylans lyrics in terms of Marcusean concepts, showing a remarkable similarity. Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), p. 64.

⁶⁶ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man, Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (Boston: Beacon, 1964) p. 200.

⁶⁷ Ross Fitzgerald, “Human needs and politics’: the ideas of Christian bay and Herbert Marcuse.” *Political Psychology* 6, no. 1 (1985) pp. 87-108.

⁶⁸ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Marcuse* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 88. Fred Alford notes that “Sometimes one has the impression that Marcuse (1969, 1972) looked too hard for a proxy for the proletariat, placing too much hope in the denizens of the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s, who in hindsight seem to have been even more readily co-opted than the proletariat. Fred Alford *Rethinking Freedom: Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save it*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2002), p. 11.

⁶⁹ John Fremstad, “Marcuse: The dialectics of Hopelessness”, *Political Research Quarterly*, 30 (1977), p. 80.

⁷⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 16. Hastings argues that unlike many interpretation of his work, Marcuse did not claim that blacks, students and the counter-culture were the new agents of revolution. Students and universities played a strategic role in society. Graham Hastings, *It Can’t Happen Here: A Political History of Australian Student Activism* (Adelaide: The Students’ Association of Flinders University, 2003), p. 9.

⁷¹ “Interview with Herbert Marcuse”, *Australian Left Review*, (December 1969), p. 36. First appeared in *der Spiegel* (28 July, 1969).

⁷² C.F. C. Fred Alford *Rethinking Freedom: Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save it*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2002).

⁷³ Dennis Freney, “Strategies for Action” paper delivered to the Left Action Conference (Sydney, Sunday 6th April, 1969), cited in ASIO, ‘The New (young) Left’ in Australia: Recent Trends In Theory and Strategy”, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Jansen, Peter-Erwin, “The Frankfurt school’s interest in Freud and the Impact of *Eros and Civilization* on the student protest movement in Germany: a brief history”, *PhaenEx* 4, no. 2 (2009) 78-96. This is clear from his many ambivalent

Despite actively courting the student movement in America and Europe, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse nonetheless always declined the distinction of being known as the “father” of the student movement, claiming never to have known a single student of the May 1968 uprising.⁷⁵

I reject the father or grandfather nonsense. I am neither the father nor the grandfather of the New Left. It is true that a large degree of coincidence has arisen between my ideas and the experiences which students drew independently from their practice and from their thinking. I am very happy about this harmony.⁷⁶

This response is particularly insightful when it comes to analysing how ideas flow in society. Michael Lowy argues that:

it is not the ‘influence’ of these thinkers that explains the spirit of 1968, but the other way round: the rebel youth looked out for authors who could provide ideas and arguments for their protest and for their desires. Between them and the movement there was, during the 1960s and the early 1970s, a sort of spiritual ‘elective affinity’: they discovered each other and influenced each other, in a process of reciprocal recognition.⁷⁷

This notion of an “elective affinity” aptly describes the currency of ideas of the student New Left, as demonstrated in student media. It reflects the dialectical relationship which problematises any conceptual analysis such as Kirsener’s notion of “Masters” “Interpreters” and “Actors.” Marcuse responded to events of the students making and the students adopted his thought in a kind of symbiotic intellectual praxis.

Culture: The Difference between Old and New

A contemporary savant called Marcuse

Said; ‘Culture gave birth to the blues.

What chases depression

Is surplus repression;

conclusions: for example, that this society is capable of preventing qualitative change for the foreseeable future. Yet forces still exist that can break through this paralysis and break open society

⁷⁵ Stanley Aronowitz “The unknown Herbert Marcuse” *Social text*, 58, no. 1 (1999), p. 135. Aronowitz notes that Marcuse rarely refused the invitation to speak at a student movement. Moreover, Marcuse tried even to bring the two of the Atlantic together, in a cosponsored SDS 1966 Congress Between students from the United States and Germany. “. Martin Klink *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States In the Global Sixties* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2010), p. 95.

⁷⁶ “Interview with Marcuse”, *Australian Left Review*, p. 17.

⁷⁷ Michael Lowey “The revolutionary romanticism of May 1968” *Thesis Eleven*, 68, (2002), p. 96.

*Without it, I think I'd enthuse.*⁷⁸

What has been largely absent from the preceding discussion of the New Left is a discussion of the connection between politics and culture, which Peter O'Brian notes "has always been the poor cousin of radical theory, especially Marxist Theory."⁷⁹ Dennis Altman posed this same question at the Sydney Scholars Conference at Sydney University in May 1970, asking, "Would it be true to suggest that this is what divides the New from the Old Left?"⁸⁰ Subsequently, in a review of the Draft Programme for the Melbourne Socialist/Scholar/Activist conference, John Docker laments the mere "perfunctory nod at culture."⁸¹ The emancipatory potential of the counter-culture was much debated within the New Left and highlighted in the seminal study *The Australian New Left*, which focussed on the importance of developing a counter-hegemony. Nearly two decades after its publication, John Docker returned to the Dennis Altman/Kelvin Rowley debate which appeared first in *Arena*, and was reprinted in *The Australian New Left*. Docker argues that despite Rowley's hard edged criticism of Altman's celebration of the counter-culture in favour of an Adorno-inspired critique of mass culture, and the co-optive potential of capitalism, there are large "grey areas of agreement." The working class was no longer the liberators of humanity and both Rowley and Altman turn to the Frankfurt School mode of analysis revolving around domination of the underlying population and creation of false needs.⁸²

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to return to this deeply nuanced debate, it is worth noting that an emphasis on culture dominates student media. Returning to the debate in *National U*, "Symposium on the Intellectual Influences on the Student Consciousness today", Kirsener argued that:

As both a political and cultural phenomenon, the New Left has developed a more total revolutionary strategy, challenging at once the cultural and political hegemony of the dominant classes. Only the counter-culture can transcend the limits of a dominant culture by developing new values, new possibilities as well as new ways of social organisation.⁸³

⁷⁸ Francis Castles, "Pontificating on the first Reading of Eros and Civilization" *Arena* 21, (1970) p. 82. Note the mispronunciation of "Marcuse" required for the poem to rhyme.

⁷⁹ Peter O'Brian "A Comment on Dennis Altman's 'The Politics of Cultural Change'", in Gordon *Australian New Left*, p. 162.

⁸⁰ Dennis Altman "The Politics of Cultural Change" Socialist Scholars Conference: Sydney University May 21-24 1970, in Ann Curthoys personal archive, Sydney University.

⁸¹ John Docker "Depressing Simplicity" *Old Mole*, no. 7 (26 October 1970).

⁸² John Docker, "'Those Halcyon Days': The Moment of the New Left" in Head and Walters, *Intellectual Movement and Australian society*, p. 300.

⁸³ Doug Kirsener, "Mentors of the Student Mind: A Symposium on Intellectual Influences", *National U*, (4 August, 1969), p. 6.

Marcuse's "Great Refusal" could and did take many "weird and clownish forms." Martin Matustik argues that, "In the face of the gruesomely serious totality of institutionalised politics, satire, irony and laughing provocation becomes a necessary dimension of the new politics."⁸⁴ Ralph Summy expresses a similar celebration of the aesthetic elements of the counter-culture noting that one can assault the one-dimensionality and repressive culture of the world exposed by Marcuse, by building an enclave culture, an expanding island of deviant meanings within the sea of capitalist society.⁸⁵ However, Peter O'Brian argued against this expressivist strain as "it is not possible to drop out of the capitalist totality; 'to live' as Gramsci points out, 'is to be committed.'"⁸⁶

This tension between an aesthetic and expressivist outlook on the one hand and an overt political response on the other, dominated the student media then, as it does sixties historiography today. In both instances, an emphasis is placed on the co-optive powers of capitalism to absorb the threat from the counter-cultural elements of the New Left. Donald Duclow wrote in "Herbert Marcuse and Happy Consciousness", that even Marcuse books are published by Beacon Press, and dissent is channelled and contained, its explosive power diminished: "Sucking-in, always sucking-in: advanced industrial society acts as an orally fixated vacuum cleaner."⁸⁷ Nearly four decades later, Anthony Ashbolt explores the critique posed by Leftist scholars that the counter-culture was simply a moment in the growth of consumer capitalism as well as modern critiques of the expressivity or aesthetic tendencies of the counter-culture.⁸⁸ Marcuse whilst embracing the student New Left and the counter-culture was aware that political power did not grow from the stem of the flower, and that the task for radicals is to transform the counter-culture into a revolutionary culture. Marcuse noted the need to translate the millenarian and antinomian aspect of the Great Refusal into political action, sensing the danger of expressivism that renders itself unintelligible. Desublimation

⁸⁴ Matustik, Martin J, *Spectres of Liberation: Great Refusals in the New World Order* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁸⁵ Ralph Summy, "Prolegomenon to Strategy" in Gordon, *The Australian New Left*, p. 261. It is important to realise that those who defined themselves as the New Left had many personal responses to the crises they perceived. John Burnheim characterises these as the protester, the drop out and the hippie. John Burnheim, "The Death of Student Politics?" *Vestes*, XI, no. 2 (1969), p. 132.

⁸⁶ Peter O'Brian, "Some Overseas Comparisons" in Gordon, *The Australian New Left*, p. 164-165. Christopher Rootes argues that both aesthetic withdrawal from a system. And overt political protest create legitimation problems for the capitalist order, Rootes, Christopher, "Student Radicalism: Politics of Moral Protest and Legitimation Problems of the Modern Capitalist State", *Theory and Society*, 9, no. 3, 1980, pp. 473-502.

⁸⁷ Donald Duclow, "Herbert Marcuse and "Happy Consciousness" \Liberation (October, 1969, New York)

⁸⁸ Anthony Ashbolt, "Hegemony and the Sixties: Observations, Polemics, Meanderings" *Rethinking Marxism* 19, no. 2 (April 2007). A facile critique of the counter-culture is perhaps best demonstrated by Robin Gerster and Jan Basset who argue that capitalism was quick to seize the protest culture, Robin Gerster and Jan Basset *The Seizures of Youth: The Sixties and Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991) Similarly, Peter Cochrane notes that "Difference was marketable. Rock-and-roll music and blue jeans were new sources of profit as well as identity. Peter Cochrane "At War at Home" in Pemberton, Gregory (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p. 169. A more nuanced analysis is offered by John Sanbonmatsu who explores the romantic sensibility of the new Left, in an illuminating exploration of the debate between Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown. "Romancing the Left" in John Sanbonmatsu, *The Postmodern Prince*.

could be repressive, rather than liberating.⁸⁹ Whilst Marcuse recognised this ambivalence, the New Left was able to draw upon both strands in a contradictory way, highlighting the manner in which the Student Left adapted the thoughts of contemporary thinkers in unique and personal responses. Some of these emphasised a cultural, romantic sensibility, whilst others veered towards overt political protest. Both of these strands characterised the New Left.

⁸⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, p. 7.

Conclusion

The New Left evinced many similarities with the Old Left: in ideas, institutions, publications and individual cross over. This essay has explored New Left media, both general, and student based, which elucidates the key ideas and thinkers who influenced the New Left. Media such as *National U*, helped foster a flow of ideas between students around the nation, cross-fertilising both the Old and New Left, linking local national and international contexts.

The students of the New Left, embraced intellectuals such as Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse, in a dialectical manner, developing an “elective affinity.” Rather than turning to these bibles of the student movement, student adopted the gospel in their own uniquely antinomian and millenarian manner, appropriating ideas to fit the peculiarities of their concrete reality, which manifested itself as both a response to global conditions like the Vietnam war, but also in local confrontation with universities. Jeremi Suri argues that figures such as Marcuse provided the New Left with a language of dissent, a new vocabulary for articulating and acting out their anguish.⁹⁰ If this is true of the international counter-culture, then the New Left in Australia produced their dialects of dissent, which differed between universities. *National U* fostered a national language which saw lively debates and contestation of views.

Despite the similarities between the New and Old Left, what these publications reveal is a renewed emphasis on the importance of cultural analysis and expression, of building a counter-hegemony and a new emancipatory sensibility. Whilst some on the New Left turned to traditional political parties, most transcended the boundaries of parliamentary democracy, but emphasised the need for participation and involvement. Equally, some manifested their “Great Refusal” by eschewing political expression altogether in favour of a romantic sensibility.

The ASIO report “The “New (Young) Left” in Australia: Recent Trends in Theory and Strategy” concludes with the following observation

The New Left has not yet succeeded in fashioning a comprehensive, coherent and pertinent theory and strategy acceptable to its various elements and factions. Left to themselves, many student and other minority ‘New Left’ movement would serve their respective local purpose and then pass away.⁹¹

In one sense ASIO were correct as the liberating task of the New Left, just as the proletariat failed before it, remained unfulfilled. However, this ignores the impact that the New Left had upon

⁹⁰ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of detente*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 130.

⁹¹ ASIO “The “New (Young) Left” in Australia: Recent Trends in Theory and Strategy”, p. 36.

society. The New Left, by the fact of their very disunity and multiple forms of expression, both cultural and political, redefined the essence of politics, despite its failure to bring about a crude revolution. Yet the aim of the New Left was not a communist orientated coup d'état, but rather change in the entire structure of society. The New Left sought to build a counter-hegemony, not only as an instrumental means to a revolution, but as an end in itself.