Steven Lukes and the ‘Three-Dimensional’ Power of Neoliberal Discourse:
A Case Study of Australian Policy Documentation

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by
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Statement of Authentication

I declare that:

This Master of Research thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, original, and has not been submitted previously, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

The content of this thesis is the result of research which has been undertaken since the official commencement date of the approved research program, and all sources of information have been duly cited in the text. All support (editorial and otherwise) by third parties has been also been acknowledged.

Billy Pringle

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Abstract

Steven Lukes’ ‘three-dimensional’ theory of power offers an empirical, process-oriented and discourse-focused framework for studying ‘power over’ and the manipulation of interests in the context of political power. Despite receiving a lot of attention and critique in the immediate wake of its publication in 1973, Lukes’ second edition, which expands, revises and defends his theory in response to this critique, has been all but overlooked in recent studies of political discourse and neoliberal hegemony, with many authors instead favouring Marxist or Foucauldian approaches. This thesis tests the usefulness of Lukes’ framework, by applying it to the use of discourse in the Australian Government Response to the Competition Policy Review. In particular, it focuses on the processes by which interests can be influenced, shaped or determined: an issue that Lukes only briefly discusses, but that critically informs his theoretical approach, by focusing on a particular moment of policy formation. The Response is a recent piece of pro-competition policy documentation, and is informed by a history of neoliberal and economic rationalist rhetoric. While Lukes’ framework has seen numerous case studies, most of these focus on the impact of domination, and are therefore retrospective. As a recent document, most of the policies the Response discusses have not yet been enacted, therefore it represents an attempt to influence the interests of readers, while not yet having a broad impact. This provides a new perspective on Lukes’ framework, and expands it to allow for analysis of prospective cases of domination.
Introduction

This thesis is the culmination of a long held interest in Steven Lukes’ theory of power. I was introduced to this theory early in my undergraduate study and was immediately struck by its simplicity and readability. In addition, as an actor-centred account of power through the manipulation of interests and beliefs, Lukes’ theory seemed able to explain a wide variety of circumstances where peoples’ actions do not seem to conform to the interests one might ascribe them. This was particularly intriguing to me in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, when voters continued to elect governments that opposed large-scale regulations of the financial system and espoused the neoliberal values that led to the collapse (Aalbers, 2013). Clearly, these values of deregulation, marketisation and entrepreneurship were so pervasive, and appealed to so many, that even a massive failure of the system they supported could not disrupt them.

Lukes himself, in the second edition of his book *Power: A Radical View* (2005), cites the ubiquity of neoliberal values, assumptions and policies – “a mega-instance of ‘hegemony’” (2005, p. 10) – as justification for the continued relevance of his theory. However, few studies (if any) have answered the call to arms to explore the ‘three-dimensional’ power of neoliberalism. While the rise of Euro-scepticism in much of Europe, and the ultranationalist and protectionist ‘Alt-Right’ in the US represents a chink in the armour of neoliberal hegemony to some, these movements retain much of the individualistic, econocentric and small government language of their predecessors (Peters, 2017). The rhetoric of neoliberalism remains prevalent as ever, and so too does the importance of understanding its many manifestations.

Lukes’ theory of power asserts that “A exercises power over B... by influencing, shaping or determining his [sic] very wants” (2005, p. 27). He argues that what seems on the surface to be willing compliance to authority may actually be the result of subtle
manipulation and ‘shaping’ of beliefs, values and ‘interests’, which can lead people to support circumstances (or figures) that render them disadvantaged or powerless. The term ‘shaping’ is used by Lukes 11 times in his text, but he only ever alludes to what it might mean, instead relying on commonly held understanding to ground this central process of his theory.

This thesis seeks to explore ‘three-dimensional’ approach to analysing neoliberal hegemony. It will also address the ‘black box’ of ‘shaping’ within Lukes’ theory, by exploring the discourse of government policy documentation. It argues that policy documents discursively construct agendas, interests and priorities, and that policy authors attempt to facilitate certain readings of their documents, while impeding others. This use of discourse can be understood as an attempt to ‘shape’ the beliefs of readers. By understanding this process, it is possible to better explore Lukes’ theory.

**Power Through Policy**

As Ball (1993) notes, policy “changes the possibilities we have for thinking ‘otherwise’” (p. 15). I would argue that policy attempts to change these possibilities, and that the effectiveness of this attempt is determined by how the policy is interpreted and acted upon, and the contexts in which these occur. In either case, it is a useful focus to explore how actors attempt to gain compliance and support from those over whom they have power. For any theory of political power to be valid, it must be able to consider the power of policy, and Lukes’ approach is no exception. By exploring how actors, issues and agendas are represented in policy (through analysis of discourse in policy documentation), it is possible to highlight how policy authors and governments attempt to facilitate certain readings and responses to policy while impeding others, and therefore, how they attempt to influence the opinions and values of the audience. This audience may include other policy makers, bureaucrats, community or industry groups, or members of the public, all of whom will
interpret, respond to, and contest this influence in different ways. Therefore, selecting a 
single group and attempting to retrace a clear process of influence cannot properly explain 
the initial ‘shaping’.

I have chosen to analyse the Government Response to the Competition Policy Review (hereafter ‘the Response’), as this document engages with contemporary policy initiatives – many of which rely on neoliberal values and assumptions – while also responding to, and reformulating, the recommendations of the Australian Competition Policy Review (hereafter ‘the Harper Review’). As a recent document (published in 2015), many of the policies that it forecasts have not yet been enacted, therefore it represents a clear attempt to ‘change the possibilities for thinking otherwise’, while not yet having a broad impact. This provides a new perspective on Lukes’ framework.

**Why Lukes?**

This question has been posed to me numerous times throughout the course of my research, and is usually followed by the question ‘why not Foucault?’. After all, while Lukes’ theory was well regarded after its initial publication, it is significantly less well known today, and has been criticised for its narrowness in the wake of the work of Michel Foucault (Lukes, 2005). The short answer to this question is simply that I am very interested in Lukes’ theory and have been for a long time, and this thesis will hopefully offer the chance to explore the strengths and weaknesses of his approach, and build on his framework to include a more thorough account of the attempt to exert power, not just the impact of power. The long answer is as follows. Lukes’ theory offers a clear and concise account of power as domination, that draws in to question the concepts of ‘compliance’ and ‘interests’, while retaining a focus on actors. It conceives of power as a process, which allows it to be effectively applied to other social and political processes: in this case, the development of policy. Foucault’s work is useful to understand the role of discourse in producing social
actors, and to see knowledge not as neutral but as a structure of power that in turn structures the realities of those constituted by it. However, it conceives of power very broadly: “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). This makes it difficult to interrogate more specific relationships, without seeing them as the product of a broader network of power. After all, if both A and B are constituted by the social realities in which they exist, then exploring the way in which A affects B seems like a far less significant venture (Dowding, 2006). It is not that A dominates B but that the social realities of power constitute B as subject to A. Similarly, this sees power as less dynamic, not as a process through which one person affects another, but as a structure in which both people are situated.

Despite this, there is much that a Foucauldian perspective offers that is present, but less explicit, in Lukes’ framework. In particular, a focus on discourse is crucial in looking beyond overt displays of power to understand the subtle ways in which people understand their interests and roles in society, and how this can be manipulated.

**A Discursive Approach**

This thesis utilises a discourse analysis approach to explore the articulation of neoliberal discourse, and the representation of interests, actors and agendas in policy documentation. Discourse analysis explores the way that language and representation conveys, reproduces and constructs meaning, and in doing so, challenges or reinforces ideas and beliefs (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 2011). Lincoln argues that: “Discourse supplements force in several important ways, among the most important of which is ideological persuasion” (Lincoln, 2014, p. 2). To properly understand ‘ideological persuasion’ one must understand discourse.

Discourse analysis looks beyond the actions of powerful groups, and the positions that they occupy, to the language, values, traditions and symbols through which their power is
conveyed. It explores the way in which these discursive practices are repeated and normalised to construct social realities (Lincoln, 2014). For example, Kahu and Morgan (2007) discuss the construction of women’s identities in New Zealand government policy documentation, finding that the discourse consistently treats motherhood as “inevitable and undesirable” while treating employment as “essential to individual well-being and a duty of citizenship” (2007, p. 134), thereby attempting to improve women’s productive capacity as workers.

This thesis takes a broad approach to the methodology of discourse analysis, striking a balance between ‘hard’ linguistic analysis, and ‘soft’ analysis of power, values and assumptions. This has facilitated the use of work by Fairclough (2013) and Gee (2011) to engage in a close reading of text and examine how actors are represented by both the language and the syntax of the text, while also considering these linguistic events within a broader context of power relationships, that sees values, ideologies and beliefs as affected by language and communication (Lincoln, 2014). In the Response, economic forces are given agency and abstracted from the people and groups who enact them by filling the position of the subject in the structure of sentences. In addition, the specific interests of different groups are made invisible by ‘framing’ them as ‘consumers’ or ‘producers’, and ‘recontextualising’ social issues as economic issues (Gordon, 2015). I have identified these discursive themes as the ‘consumer/producer’ theme and the ‘agency of economy’ theme.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter 1 explores Lukes’ theory and engage with other authors who have made use of his approach as well as those who have offered critiques of it. It also highlights the relevant strengths of Lukes’ approach for this work, and identifies the shortcomings that this work seeks to address. It begins with an account of the one-, two- and three-dimensional views of power, and a case study used by Lukes to illustrate the three-dimensional view. It
then explores three main critiques of Lukes’ work, and his responses, before presenting a fourth critique, that this thesis addresses: the ‘black box’ of ‘shaping’. Finally, it discusses the strengths of the framework and highlights its applicability to the policy process.

Chapter 2 examines the history of neoliberal discourse and policies in Australia and focuses on the way in which this discourse has attempted to represent different actors and issues. It traces the use of managerial and econocentric rhetoric through the adoption and promotion of ‘economic rationalism’ in the 1970s and 1980s, into the period of ‘economic reform’ in the 1990s and 2000s. It also discusses the centrality of ‘competition’ in the years following the Hilmer Review, and how this informs both the Harper Review and the Response. Finally, it problematises the ‘neoliberal-ness’ of Australia, suggesting instead the concept of “neoliberalization” (Aalbers, 2013). This concept helps to explain the seemingly contradictory robustness of Australia’s welfare state and marketisation of its non-economic spheres, through a processual understanding of neoliberal discourse. Chapter 2 also provides the discursive themes that are used as lenses for analysis in Chapter 3, namely the ‘consumer/producer’ theme, and the ‘agency of economy’ theme.

Chapter 3 engages with policy theory to justify the choice of documentation and the discursive approach of this thesis. It argues that policy is a process and that the Government Response to the Competition Policy Review can be seen as a single ‘moment’ within this process. It then undertakes a discourse analysis of the Response using the themes highlighted in Chapter 2. This analysis shows that the Response overwhelmingly constructs the public in economic terms, and therefore constructs their interests in this same light. It also shows that economic forces and processes are given agency in the document, which treats them as self-regulating and also makes invisible the actors who implement these processes.

Chapter 4 explores the implications of the findings in Chapter 3, focusing on the way in which the Response attempts to foreground certain actors and issues, while backgrounding
others. It relocates the Response in a broader history of neoliberal discourse and power, noting that the document ‘translates’ this discourse to achieve the specific agendas of its (invisible) authors. It also argues that, in foregrounding some interests and backgrounding others, the Response attempts to ‘shape’ the beliefs, values and desires of its audience. Chapter 4 then discusses the way in which this case study can be understood using Lukes’ framework, and offers ways to expand the framework so that the complex processes of ‘shaping’ are given more focus. The thesis concludes with a summary of its core arguments and its additions to the field before discussing possible ways to expand on the research herein.
Chapter 1: Three Dimensional Power

This chapter explores Steven Lukes’ ‘three-dimensional view’ of power and its applicability to the study of the policy process. This theory emerged out of an ongoing debate in U.S political theory during the mid 20th century, about how best to study political power. Lukes argues that power is not only exercised through overt decision making and covert “non-decision making” (Lukes, 2005, p. 22), but also through the “influencing, shaping or determining” of people’s beliefs, values and opinions (Lukes, 2005, p. 16). While Lukes and others have used this approach to problematise the concept of prima facie consent to power by identifying and explaining instances of domination\(^1\) in which those who are dominated become complicit in their own powerlessness, the process through which this occurs, and particularly, the nature of “influencing, shaping” and “determining”, is never clearly illustrated. This is significant, as one of the great advantages of Lukes’ approach is its capacity to see power as a process, rather than merely a structure or ‘state’. By leaving this part of the process unexplained, Lukes relies on a common-sense understanding of his terms, which weakens the analytical capacity of his theory.

This chapter begins by summarising Lukes’ theory before exploring several uses and critiques of his approach to highlight its strengths, weaknesses and shortcomings, and to

\(^1\) Lukes primarily uses the terms ‘power’ and ‘domination’ to refer to this phenomenon, but notes in his second edition that he is describing a narrow subspecies of power, and that powerlessness does not necessarily equate to domination. I will use these terms as Lukes does for the sake of brevity, and to remain conversant with his work, however I do so cautiously, as they are obviously simplistic terms.
contextualise this thesis. It then discusses the way in which this thesis seeks to expand Lukes’ approach and address some of these shortcomings.

In its original context, Lukes’ three-dimensional view applied Gramscian concepts of ‘hegemony’ and manipulation to expand on two other theories of political power: that of the self-proclaimed ‘pluralists’ (referred to by Lukes as the one-dimensional view), and that of their critics (referred to as the two-dimensional view).

**The One-Dimensional View**

This approach, first asserted by Robert Dahl (1961) came about as a challenge to the position of many Marxist theorists of the early to mid 20th century, who asserted that US society was governed by a ‘ruling elite’ (Lukes, 2005). In his case study of political decision-making in a US city, Dahl attempted to empirically map the distribution of power among different political actors by determining the ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ of various ‘key’ (as opposed to ‘routine’) political actions (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). He found that, because different groups were successful in different issue areas at different times, no single group could be considered ‘ruling’. In addition, because of the plurality of positions and ideologies held by the many different groups, Dahl asserted that every voter could find some form of political representation, and that the system was therefore pluralistic. By focusing on actual observable conflicts, Dahl argued that his approach was empirically verifiable, rather than merely being theoretically sound (Lukes, 2005).

**The Two-Dimensional View**

Bachrach and Baratz critiqued this view, which they saw as being too narrow, and reproducing the biases of the system to which it is applied (1962, 1970, cited in Lukes, 2005). They argued that power is expressed not only through decisions made in the political arena, but also through decisions about which potential issues are *allowed* into the political arena, and which are kept out, which they refer to as “non-decisions” or decisions made to avoid or
suppress conflict (Lukes, 2005, p. 22). This ‘second face’ of power, as they called it, is active when potential grievances are suppressed or undermined before they are able to enter a public forum, which in turn maintains a sanitised and ‘safe’ political agenda, that presents an illusion of pluralism without ever risking real challenges to the status quo (Lukes, 2005, p. 20). They also argued that this second face can be empirically studied by observing issues that are present in public discourse (either through protests and demonstrations, or simply in fora that are not politically ‘recognised’), but are absent from the political agenda, thereby meeting the same standard of verifiability as the one dimensional view. They conceded, however, that if no grievance could be found in either the ‘official’ discourse or the ‘unofficial’ discourse, then the observer has no evidence on which to operate and must therefore accept that there is genuine consensus. The three-dimensional view attempts to solve this problem.

**The Three-Dimensional View**

Lukes’ theory expands on the two-dimensional view in three major ways. First, it finds both the one- and two-dimensional views focus too much on overt or ‘actual behaviour’ (Lukes, 2005, p. 25). The two-dimensional view notes that power is often exercised beyond the realms of overt decision-making. But according to Lukes it still attempts to construct the second face of power as the active and conscious efforts, by powerful agents, to suppress dissident opinions and protect the endemic structures of power. This ignores the structural aspects of this power that are reinforced and normalised through repeated compliance and patterned behaviours which, rather than being a product of individual actions, are in fact maintained by factors on a systemic level and are often manifested through individual inaction (Lukes, 2005, p. 26).

The second point of difference is the question of overt and ‘observable’ conflict. Lukes asserts that, while power is indeed expressed through the process of undermining and
suppressing certain debates to maintain a ‘safe’ political agenda, it is also present in the subtle process of influencing and shaping the concerns and desires of a group or individual so that their opinions more closely reflect one’s own. This can be seen in the way that climate change debates are often redirected by discussing job loss or the impact of energy divestment on national economies. Not only does this maintain a ‘safe’ discourse, it also attempts to shape public opinion towards environmental solutions by constructing them as a ‘cost’ on the economy (Goodstein, 1995).

Lukes’ third point of concern comes from the proponents of the two-dimensional view (namely Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, cited in Lukes, 2005) who suggest that, if an issue is not present in either the political agenda or in the public discourse, then it cannot be meaningfully observed. This relates to the second point, as it reinforces the focus on ‘observable’ conflict and assumes that the absence of observable conflict is equivalent to consensus. For Lukes, however, the most interesting and insidious form of power is manifest when people are prevented from realising their own grievances by having their concerns and desires so deeply influenced that they accept their own domination and even become complicit in it, either by believing that it is natural or by believing that it is in some way beneficial. Lukes maintains that, while this may resemble consensus, there is in fact a latent conflict (which may never actually arise) between the interests of the powerful and the “real interests” of the people they dominate (Lukes, 2005, p. 28, original emphasis). Moreover, he argues that these ‘real interests’ are empirically recognisable to researchers even when they go unnoticed by those who possess them.

This feature of Lukes’ theory is a target of extensive critique from himself and others, and therefore warrants closer inspection later in the chapter. In his original body of work, Lukes only goes as far as to say that any discussion of interests requires some amount of normative moral and political judgements, and that these judgements are undertaking as
much by the proponents of the one- and two-dimensional views who suggest that interests are the domain of personal wants or desires, even when these are systemically suppressed, as by Lukes himself who suggests that wants or desires may be a product of a dominating system, and that ‘real interests’ refer to what people would prefer were they capable of deciding freely (Lukes, 2005, p. 37-38). Lukes argues that this can be empirically studied. This conception of interests highlights the ‘impact’-centred approach taken by Lukes. While interests are indeed important, it is also crucial to consider the way in which powerful actors represent the interests of those over whom they exert power, and that this focus does not require an account of which interests are ‘real’.

**Case Studies of the Three-Dimensional View**

Despite the assertion of empirical value, Lukes does not undertake his own case study to support his theory. Instead, he expands on Crenson’s *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution: A Study of Non-Decisionmaking in the Cities* (1971, cited in Lukes, 2005). While Crenson’s case study seeks to prove the validity of the second face of power, Lukes argues that it also supports the third. In the book, Crenson undertakes a comparative analysis of two neighbouring cities in the US state of Indiana: Gary and East Chicago. While both cities are comparable in employment rates, major industries, average income etc., they passed air pollution control ordinances 13 years apart: East Chicago in 1949, and Gary in 1962.

According to Crenson, the major difference between the two towns is the presence of US Steel in Gary. While Gary is a one-company city with strong party organisation, East Chicago has several smaller companies, and no strong party organisation (Crenson 1971, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 45). Crenson’s thesis is that US Steel effectively prevented the issue of air-pollution being raised, despite never entering the political arena, simply by the strength of its powerful reputation. He also notes that when anti-pollution activists would campaign for action, US Steel executives would avoid debate and simply agree that air pollution was an
issue, thus undermining activists’ attempts to galvanise political opinion against them.

Crenson reinforces this thesis with comparative analysis of interviews with political leaders from 51 cities. He finds that the issue of air pollution is less likely to arise in cities with strong industry representation, and less likely again in situations where industry does not take a clear stand. (Crenson 1971, p. 145, 124, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 46).

Lukes notes that Crenson’s case study goes beyond the two-dimensional view in several ways, and thus provides an empirical basis for his own view of power. First, it seeks to investigate “‘things that do not happen’” (Crenson, 1971, p. vii, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 44), and is thus not constrained by ‘actual behaviour’ (Lukes, 2005, p. 25), whether overt or covert. Second, it is concerned with the systemic deployment of power, rather than the behaviour of individual agents. Third, it focuses on ways in which demands are prevented from being properly articulated, not merely kept out of the political agenda: “‘Local political forms may even inhibit citizens’ ability to transform some diffuse discontent into an explicit demand” (Crenson, 1971, p. 23 cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 47-48).

While Crenson’s case study does not clearly articulate Lukes’ argument (and in particular, stops short of asserting that the citizens of Gary have been dominated or manipulated into advocating against their interests) it does meet the two core requirements of Lukes’ framework (as it exists in the first edition). It identifies and justifies the existence of a “relevant counterfactual” (Lukes, 2005, p. 44) scenario in which the citizens of Gary would have acted differently were they not subject to the influence of US Steel. It also identifies the mechanisms by which US Steel exercises power over the citizens and politicians of the city, specifically through the implicit threat of job loss, the preemptive responses from policy makers and voters and the abstention by US steel from a robust debate on air pollution.

In the second edition of *Power: A Radical View* (2005), Lukes notes several other case studies undertaken in the intervening years that support his theory in pursuit of their own
conclusions. Nussbaum (2000, cited in Lukes, 2005) and Sen (1984, cited in Lukes, 2005) both use the example of survey data carried out by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in 1944, a year after the Great Bengal Famine. The survey asked widows and widowers affected by the famine to describe their health. Despite the significantly worse rates of health and nutrition among women, only 2.5% of widows described their health as ‘ill’ or ‘indifferent’, compared to 48.5% of widowers (Lukes, 2005). Nussbaum also cites examples of other Indian women to illustrate the compliance in domination. One who, after being violently abused by an alcoholic husband, did not acknowledge that she had been wronged (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 21, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 137). While another worked at a brick kiln with no chance of being promoted or taught new skills, but nonetheless saw her position as natural (p. 140, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 137).

Lukes also cites several case studies from Foucauldian theorists who, in attempting to explore Foucault’s approach to power, also articulate the sort of domination which Lukes investigates. In discussing the works of Bordo (2003), Donzelot (1979), Flyvberg, (1998) and Hayward (2000, all cited in Lukes, 2005), He has this to say:

I have cited these various examples (from among countless others) of Foucault-inspired work with two purposes. The first is to show that they begin to explore subtle forms of the securing of willing compliance, in which people are enlisted into wider patterns of normative control, often acting as their own ‘overseers’, while believing themselves, sometimes falsely, to be free of power, making their own choices, pursuing their own interests, assessing arguments rationally and coming to their own conclusions.

Lukes, 2005, p. 106

While these case studies were undertaken with various theoretical approaches, there were also several works carried out that utilised Lukes’ perspective (see Komter, 1989; Vogler
Most notable among them is Gaventa’s (1980) *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*.

Gaventa’s book examines the history of the Tennessee-Kentucky Cumberland Plateau in the Appalachian region of the US. The region was ‘colonized’ in the late 19th century as a coal mining area by a London based company, which was still very influential in the area at the time of publication (1980). Gaventa discusses the numerous bloody skirmishes between miners and company enforcers and local police that occurred over demands for workers’ rights. These clashes were interspersed with long periods of negative peace and some non-violent acts of resistance. Gaventa engages with the events from a one-, two- and three-dimensional perspective to show how these views reveal and conceal certain aspects of power and how the three dimensions can inform and reinforce each other (1980): a point to which Lukes himself only alludes.

Gaventa’s methodological approach involves historical analysis, which allows him to contrast relatively ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ periods over the region’s history, and thereby justify the relevant counterfactual scenario to the presence of three-dimensional power. It also provides a clear example of the processual nature of the three-dimensional view. He concludes that the severe punishment suffered by the mining communities in response to their attempts to resist the power of the company, or negotiate better conditions, worked to make change seem impossible or too costly. He argues that the long periods of negative peace in the valley’s history were not out of compliance, but out of a sense of powerlessness and defeat that begets acceptance in the face of no alternatives. In this sense, the dominated workers of the valley are not ‘complicit’ in their powerlessness, but they begin to see it as unchangeable (1980). Gaventa’s methodology of historical analysis makes for a useful addition to Lukes’ framework by revealing more ‘observable’ evidence of three-dimensional power through the contrasting of periods of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’, while
foregrounding the processual nature of power and focusing on specific ‘moments’ within this history. This shows the way in which one dimensional power can lead to two- and three-dimensional power. The overt power of the company (for example, to quell rebellions) can limit the possible actions of the community, and affect how they perceive their capacity to resist. However, Gaventa focuses on these overt actions rather than any discursive aspect of this relationship. In addition, like the other aforementioned case studies, Gaventa contrasts the interests and behaviours of the ‘powerless’ group with a priori interests that he attributes them. The first set of interests is then retroactively attributed to the choices (including actions and inactions) of the powerful. This focus on the ‘powerless’ overlooks the way in which the ‘powerful’ represent interests and agendas in the first instance, and therefore simplifies the ‘shaping’ processes, as Lukes does.

In the decade since Lukes’ second edition, others have also broadened his framework. Hathaway (2016), in drawing from Gaventa’s more recent ‘Powercube’ project (also based on the three-dimensional view), seeks to build a clearer evaluative framework that remains faithful to the key theoretical themes of Lukes’ approach. In doing so, he incorporates elements of Foucauldian theory that recognise the potential for discourse and social structures to empower actors, while retaining a focus on how these actors then utilise this power to achieve their goals. For example, he argues that a party is not responsible for the structures and discourses that see elected governments as legitimate, but upon being elected the party uses these structures and discourses to legitimise their agenda and actions, while delegitimising the agendas and actions of others, such as dissidents (Hathaway, 2016).

Hathaway outlines several discourse-focused approaches for identifying and analysing three-dimensional power (‘invisible’ power in the powercube lexicon). These interrogate the “logical or empirical fitness of a belief that empowers, or is used by, an actor” (Hathaway, 2016, p. 127), rather than judging these beliefs against the ‘real interests’ of the
powerless. In addition, he favours a historical approach that emphasises “the contribution of an actor to formal rules, informal rules and societal outcomes over time” (Hathaway, 2016, p. 123) as a way of interrogating discourse. This too highlights the processual potential of the three-dimensional view, and makes it a focus of the framework.

While not providing a case study of his own, Hathaway’s historical and discursive emphasis expands Lukes’ (and Gaventa’s) work, and begins to explore the role of ‘shaping’ in the power process. He takes a broad, theoretical approach, but notes the importance of analysing specific discursive moments in order to better understand the development of power over time. His “regime evolution” approach (Hathaway, 2016, p. 122) is beyond the narrow scope of this study, but the work herein can be seen as a close analysis within a broader historical landscape. While this thesis was not inspired by Hathaway’s work, it is generally cooperative with his approach and could be used by future projects that attempt to chart a longer history of policy discourse in Australia.

These aforementioned works have applied Lukes’ theory (whether deliberately or not) to a variety of cases, and in doing so have highlighted the versatility and strengths of the approach. However, there has also been significant critique of the three-dimensional view.

**Critiques and Shortcomings**

Lukes’ theory has seen many contestations, few of which can be addressed fully within the scope of this thesis. Instead, I will address three critiques that are materially useful for this work, and that exemplify three common criticisms of Lukes’ approach.

In his work, Peter Morriss (2006) highlights some important issues with the ‘intuitive idea’ of power on which the one- two- and three-dimensional views are based, that “A has

\[\text{Footnote: I began my case study before discovering Hathaway’s work, so my methodology is not directly based on any of these approaches. However, Chapter 2 of this thesis coincidently addresses the historical use and evolution of discourse in a similar way to that which Hathaway recommends.}\]
power over $B$ to the extent that he [sic] can get $B$ to do something that $B$ would not otherwise do” (Dahl, 1957, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 16). While Lukes’ theory uses the vocabulary and assumptions of the debate with which it engages, these criticisms are nonetheless constructive. In fact, Lukes accepts and responds to many of them in his second edition. Morriss (2006) argues that this underlying concept of power, falls short on several accounts. First, it only analyses the exercise of power, ignoring the capacity of power, thus committing the “exercise fallacy” (Morriss, 2002, pp.14-7, cited in Morriss, 2006, p. 130-131). He states that those who have power to make decisions that affect others have this power whether the decision is made or not. To assume that power is present only when $A$ affects $B$ is to ignore $A$’s capacity to affect $B$.

Second, it disregards ‘power to’, instead focusing only on ‘power over’. Whereas ‘power over’ is the zero-sum power involved in dominating, coercing or manipulating another person, Morriss argues that there must also be consideration of productive power: “the ability to affect outcomes, not the ability to affect others” (Morriss, 2006, p. 126), and that this approach is “our primary understanding of power” (Morriss, 2006, p. 126).

Third, it represents power as a narrow relationship between two actors, $A$ and $B$. While it is a useful hypothetical position to take, rarely is power only exhibited by one person over another. In the real world, we are subject to constant attempts to influence us from every direction, from politicians garnering our support, to advertisers attempting to convince us of our need of their product. We are also affected by positive power: ‘power to’. This is exhibited through the collective action of voters, community groups, NGOs and businesses. Morriss notes too that, if we are powerless, this is often due to the social structures that we are part of, rather than the actions or inactions of others (Morriss, 2006).

Lukes accepts much of Morriss’ critique, stating in his second edition that the underlying concept of power is “plainly, entirely unsatisfactory in several respects” (Lukes,
2005, p. 109). He concedes that, rather than addressing the concept of power, his theory addresses the narrower concept of domination and, even more specifically, the question of how the powerful “secure the compliance of those they dominate” (Lukes, 2005, 110). In response to the charge of ignoring ‘power to’, Lukes accedes. He argues against the position held in his first edition, stating instead that ‘power over’ can be understood as a subspecies of ‘power to’, however he notes that the focus on ‘power over’ was a supposition of the debate to which he contributed, and thus a requirement, at least in part, of his contribution (Lukes, 2005). Despite accepting Morriss’ position on ‘power to’, Lukes nonetheless holds that ‘power over’ remains the more important and interesting site of analysis, and that ‘power to’ “does not yet correspond to what, in common parlance and in the writings of philosophers, historians and social scientists, ‘power’ is commonly taken to identify” (Lukes, 2005, p. 73).

Similarly, he accepts that he has committed the ‘exercise fallacy’, but maintains that his approach still useful interrogates the exercise of power, even if it fails to catch the complete essence of power.

While Morriss’ critique is instructive, it primarily highlights the fact that Lukes’ theory addresses a narrower subspecies of power than he initially asserts. It also raises some empirical challenges that Morriss does not address, namely, how one studies both the capacity and the exercise of power. However, he is right to note the significance of ‘power to’. He argues that ‘power over’ is often a ‘means’ to the ‘ends’ of ‘power to’. That is, if A manipulates or coerces B, this is likely in pursuit of some other goal, not merely the subjugation of B. This is crucial, as it highlights the importance of understanding A’s agenda setting and use of discourse without necessarily assessing its impact on B.

The second group of critics target the core thesis of the three-dimensional approach: that we can be compliant and even complicit in our own domination. James Scott (1990) offers an interesting account of this. In his book, Domination and the Arts of Resistance:
Hidden Transcripts, Scott uses studies of disempowered groups such as slaves, serfs and prisoners to argue that what may appear to be quiescence or acceptance of domination in the “public transcript” (1990, p. 2) – that is the more studied, open interaction between subjects and subjugators – often belies a quiet but ever-present resistance that is expressed in private, through a “hidden transcript” (1990, p. 4). This resistance, Scott argues, can take many forms, including songs, humour, ritual, stories and the celebration of martyrs and outlaws (1990). Similarly, compliance may in fact be a calculated act to improve the circumstances of the subject. For instance, a prisoner who constantly rebels, resists the orders of the guards and attempts to escape is punished by further and more secure incarceration, fewer privileges and greater supervision. Whereas the prisoner who is compliant may receive preferential treatment and a reduced sentence at best, or benign neglect and less strict supervision at worst. While the second prisoner could be said to be ‘accepting’ of their domination while the first rejects and resists it, the second also benefits from their compliance, and so could not be said to be wholly ‘dominated’, or acting against their ‘interests’ in the three-dimensional sense. While Scott’s argument is certainly persuasive and sheds new light on historical perspectives of domination, I share Lukes assertion that the existence of the sort of resistance that Scott observes does not preclude the third dimension of power, it merely highlights the importance of critiquing the ‘official’ narrative. After all, Lukes notes that “power is at its most effective when least observable” (2005, p. 1), and the power relations in Scott’s studies – that of master and slave, lord and serf or warden and prisoner – are hardly subtle.

The focus of this study, by contrast, is far more mundane. The response is neither a piece of legislation nor a media release. Rather, it is one of a number of small, translational documents that exist in longer processes of policy development. But its importance lies in its mundanity. The overt processes of power, such as policy implementation and legislation, are made up of many smaller moments of consultation, conflict drafting and redrafting. By
looking beyond the ‘big’ issues, events and documents, and scrutinising these ‘everyday’
documents like the Response, it is possible to explore the assumptions and covert assertions
that underpin the more ‘legitimate’ exercises of power. It is precisely because the audience of
the Response (whomever they may be) are not visibly ‘dominated’, that this relationship may
constitute power in its third dimension.

The third category of critique is perhaps the most common, though I will cite
Bradshaw (1976) as emblematic. This critique holds that the concept of ‘real interests’ is
overly simplistic, uses a normative account of values and ideals, and comes dangerously
close to employing a concept of ‘false consciousness’, without relying on the Marxist
assumptions to back it up. As Bradshaw notes:

Lukes’ argument suffers from employing a Marxian notion in a very non-Marxist
way. Whereas Marxists are able to justify the terms ‘real interest’ and ‘true
consciousness’ of individuals as objectively ‘real’ and ‘true’ by their appropriateness
to what Marxism considers to be the inevitable, transcendent course of history, Lukes’
usage lacks the Marxian dimension of objective social inevitability, retaining instead
the merely subjective aspect of personal preference.

Bradshaw, 1976, p. 122, original emphasis

Lukes accepts this critique. He notes that, in reality, people have many interests, some of
them better articulated or more ‘rational’ than others, and some which are also contradictory,
and it is therefore far too simplistic to assert that an observer can access some objective truth
about what is best for the subject, or that this can be based on some ‘ideal’ circumstance of
autonomy.

This recognition becomes even more important, the less ‘tangible’ interests are. For
example, an atheist might assume that, in giving up their earthly possessions and taking vows
of poverty and celibacy, a devout catholic monk has been manipulated into giving up their
autonomy in service to the church. However, if the monk genuinely believes that they have a relationship with God that is strengthened by their service, then this will likely have positive impacts on their self-esteem, while giving them a sense of purpose, meaning and belonging. Similarly, a Marxist might argue that a factory worker who spends their life in physically demanding labour for the prospect of one day having a relatively comfortable retirement is manipulated by the factory owner into accepting a narrative of a working life that is akin to serfdom, however if the worker eventually retires in comfort and derives identity and pride from their work, is this narrative still illegitimate?

Despite this critique, Lukes maintains that interests are still a crucial indicator of whether or not someone has been dominated in the three-dimensional sense. However, rather than arguing as he did in his first edition that ‘real interests’ should not be determined by A, but by B exercising relative autonomy (even hypothetically) Lukes instead takes the view that it is up to the researcher, through their explanatory framework, methods and purpose, to justify which interests are fabricated by domination, and which actually serve the subject. This is of course, a value judgement that should be open to scrutiny from critics, however if this judgement is properly justified then this should not compromise the analysis.

This critique, and Lukes’ response to it, highlights the way in which he has approached the issue of power. Lukes focuses on the interests of the powerless (whether ‘real’ or just ‘unrealised’). However, this can reveal only whether or not someone has been manipulated, not how this manipulation occurs. By analysing the behaviour of the powerful and the representation and construction of interests, beliefs, agendas and values, it is possible to meaningfully interrogate the mechanisms of manipulation. The ‘real’ interests of the powerless, whoever they may be, is secondary to this focus. This particular issue is the focus of this thesis.
‘Influencing’, ‘Shaping’ and ‘Determining’

The assertion that preferences can be influenced, shaped and determined by powerful actors is core to Lukes’ theory, and separates the three-dimensional view from its two predecessors. He asks: “How... is one to identify the process or mechanism of an alleged exercise of power, on the three-dimensional view?” (Lukes, 2005, p. 52). But it is only the fact of the ‘identification’ of the process that Lukes registers, not the detail. In referring to this process, Lukes only alludes to what it may entail, seeming to rely instead on general conceptions of those terms. This is indeed effective; while many critics disagree with the existence of the third-dimension of power, I am unaware of any who quibble over Lukes’ meaning. Nonetheless, what is hidden within the black box of ‘shaping’ is, I argue, a complex idea that can involve a series of processes and histories, and can engage the first, second and third dimension of power. Lukes notes this too, making the omission ever starker. He states that: “power in its more overt one- and two-dimensional forms has all kinds of three-dimensional effects. These are often misperceived as merely the effects of some impersonal process of ‘cultural transmission’” (Lukes, 2006, p. 121-122).

This ‘cultural transmission’ is complex and can take many forms, none of them neutral: the inclusion or exclusion of certain discourses; the ‘translation’ of meaning from one text or ‘moment’ to another; the revaluation of certain issues, ideas and behaviours. In addition, its effects might not be apparent for a long time, and may only be seen through close scrutiny of people’s values and opinions. After all, the examples that Lukes employs – that of Crenson, Nussbaum, Sen and others – are not cases of binary relationships between individuals, they are cases of structural influence in which the actions of individuals or groups (such as US Steel) are mediated by numerous other bodies (local government, the media, unions), and are contextually interpreted by those whom they effect (the population of
Gary). To trace the impacts and interpretations of these effects through multiple actors, representations and contexts is, needless to say, no simple task.

Rather than attempt to follow a ‘complete’ process of power from the beliefs or articulated interests of B to the actions, inactions or reputation of A, I will instead take a narrow view of the attempt to exert power, that is, the complex process by which discourses are articulated, interest groups are represented and agendas are formulated with the intention of ‘shaping’ the opinions of an audience. In doing this, I hope to open the black box of ‘shaping’, while also expanding Lukes framework to better explore prospective, rather than retrospective, cases of three-dimensional power. Key to the investigation of ‘shaping’ is the recognition of its processual nature, as a series of articulated moments, and the process of power more generally.

**Power as Process**

The longevity of Lukes’ work and the analysis and critique that it inspired is evidence enough of the impact of his theory, though, some of its strengths are not immediately apparent. The obvious advantages of Lukes’ work are its accessibility, clarity and brevity compared to many other theories of power. Even critiques of his approach note that “it was commendably clearly written” (Morris, 2006, p. 124), though by some accounts, this brevity comes at the cost of a more thoroughly conceived framework (Edwards, 2006). However, one of the most important aspects of Lukes’ approach for my analysis is what I call the ‘power as process’ feature.

In his article, *The Concept of Power* (1957), Dahl lays out some conditions of a power relationship. The first is that there must be some passage of time between the actions of A and the response of B. While this seems to be an obvious point to note, doing so highlights a key feature of the ‘intuitive idea’ of power with which the one- two- and three-dimensional views engage. When power is represented as a structure or a state – when someone is said to be ‘in
power’ or ‘under the power of another’ – or when it is represented as a capacity – when someone ‘has power’ – the processual nature of manipulation, influence and domination is ignored. Power, in this conception, has temporality. Its process can (notionally) be observed from the actions of A through to their impact on B, and B’s response to that impact. By employing this conception, Lukes’ theory therefore lends itself to the study of processes rather than simply observing static relationships based on social positioning.

This is crucial for my thesis, as I will use Lukes’ approach to explore the use of discourse and the articulation of interests in the policy production process. In particular, I will be focusing on one ‘moment’ in this process (in the form of a single document) to engage more deeply with this specific use of discourse. By looking closely at one document – the Response – I can situate the discourse within a longer process of policy production, while attempting to discover what the document attempts to do. Policy is a process of formulation and reformulation of ideas and agendas. What seems static in a single document is in fact a short history of consultation, debate and ‘agenda setting’ that reflects the process of writing, as well as a long history of discourse, power, values and ideology that underpins the ‘knowledge’ of the document. It is contemporary in that it relies on, and reconstructs an image of what society looks like now. It is backwards facing in how it interprets the successes and failures of past policies, and the discourses and values they articulated. And it is forward facing in its agenda, its proposals and its view of what an ‘ideal’ society might look like. A document like the Response may seem insignificant, but it exemplifies the ‘steps’ in the policy process and therefore provides a window into the ‘everyday’ of policy development.

Interestingly, while Lukes’ framework certainly lends itself to this more temporal analysis, many of the case studies that employ it do so retrospectively to explain situations of domination that have already occurred, or to retroactively justify people’s beliefs and values
as evidence of three-dimensional power, thereby seeing them in a more relational sense. While these are of course important and effective uses of the approach, they ignore the prospective capacity of Lukes’ theory and lose sight of attempts to influence, shape and determine people’s desires.

**Conclusion**

Lukes three-dimensional view of power suffers from some theoretical shortcomings such that many, including Lukes himself, have described it more narrowly as a view of domination. While it is true that Lukes addresses only one form of power, I argue that he does so very effectively. His framework has been usefully expanded by several other theorists, providing a robust approach to the concept of domination. However, some areas still lack focus. By capitalising on the capacity of Lukes’ theory to see power as a process, I hope to explore the role that ‘shaping’ has in this process by focusing on a very specific and seemingly mundane moment in policy formation. In Chapter 2, however, I set up this analysis by exploring some of the broader expressions of neoliberalism in Australia, and map a discursive trajectory to highlight the way in which this rhetoric has attempted to foreground certain groups and values while ignoring others.
Chapter 2: Neoliberalism and government discourses of economics in Australia

Analyses and critique of neoliberal ideas, discourses and policies, including in Australia, have become increasingly more frequent in the past few decades (Cahill, 2013). While the labelling of any state as ‘neoliberal’ can raise issues of the limits and applications of the term, a focus on the rhetoric and logic of neoliberal ideas can highlight the influence that they have had on economic and political discourses more generally. In this chapter I will engage with critical academic literature on the history and manifestations of neoliberalism in Australia, in order to map its discursive trajectories, and show how such discourse attempts to centre certain issues while relegating others to the periphery. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Lukes frequently uses the terms ‘influencing’, ‘shaping’ and ‘determining’ in his work, but he only alludes to the complex processes that these terms refer to. By exploring the way in which neoliberal discourse has been used to represent different interests and actors, I argue that it is possible to better understand this process of ‘shaping’. My provisional definition of neoliberalism – based on numerous works cited in this chapter – is a political economic theory that emerged in opposition to Keynesian policies of market regulation, and attempts to reify liberal tenets of ‘rational man’ and individual entrepreneurial freedom, through privatisation of public services, deregulation of existing markets and the implementation of new markets where they did not otherwise exist (Harvey, 2005). I argue that this definition is provisional for several reasons. First, it does not take adequate account of specific, context-bound policies and arguments that, while not always yielding all of these effects, depend on (and often proliferate) a neoliberal discursive framework. Second, it does not allow enough space for what Aalbers (2013, p. 1084) refers to as “neoliberalization”, or the ‘process’ rather than ‘state’ of neoliberalism. Third, it focuses on the economic face of neoliberalism and ignores the atomising effect that it can have both socially and culturally (Brown, 2015).
Fourth, it presents neoliberalism as a class-based theory, and therefore ignores how thoroughly masculine, colonialisit and ableist the culture, discourse and structures of neoliberalism can be, though this point I will leave for others to discuss (Pusey, 1991; Harris Rimmer & Sawer, 2016; Connell, 2013; Yu, 2014). Throughout this chapter I will analyse the discursive components of neoliberalism in Australia to provide more depth and nuance to this definition, while also highlighting the way in which this discourse attempts to construct a certain image of society. I will use these discursive components as themes for my analysis in Chapter 3, in which I will explore the use of neoliberal language in government documentation as an attempt to ‘shape’ the readings of the Response.

**Economic Rationalism**

In Australia, neoliberal ideas and policies historically emerged under the banner of ‘economic rationalism’ in the late 1970s and early 80s (Harvey, 2005). While this term took hold in Australian political discourse before the large-scale adoption of neoliberal policies, it was the ‘economic rationalists’, (most of them Labor politicians) who, in the late 70s, espoused the principles of free-trade and regarded themselves as unfettered by emotion, ideology or a commitment to economic practices on the basis of tradition. They held that theirs was a position based on reasoned analysis, scientific evidence and, as the name suggests, rationalism (Quiggin, 1999). While economic rationalism was by no means the first political economic framework (in Australia or elsewhere), to tout a foundation of reason, it was advantaged by being named for such an assertion; as the rationalists were rational, their opponents, by definitional fiat, were irrational (Gates & Steane, 2007).

In the wake of a decade characterised by the oil crises of 1973 and ‘79, the recession of 1973-1975 and a long period of ‘stagflation’, many countries had lost faith with Keynesian policies of market regulation, which had been largely unable to mediate high levels of unemployment, wage stagnation and inflation (Harvey, 2005). As free-market policies gained
support throughout the 1980s, and the economic mainstream moved further in the direction of what is now regarded as neoliberalism, the ‘rationalist’ position moved with it, and began to espouse more strongly and more ideologically, the virtues of the market (Quiggin, 1999). Rather than relying on the scepticism that they had previously championed, the rationalists, Quiggin (1997) argues, increasingly based their arguments on “supposedly self-evident truths, which were effectively immune from any form of empirical testing”. Supporters of the framework used the term ‘economic rationalism’ as an expression of approval, thereby reinforcing the rhetorical assumptions that economic rationalists were indeed rational (Battin, 1992), while other proponents eschewed labelling altogether, claiming instead that they merely applied mainstream economic principles to policy (Stokes, 2014). Throughout this period however, many of those politicians and commentators who supported a more laissez-faire approach, also supported a strong welfare state, although this was often qualified by workforce casualisation and tax cuts, and so did not conform wholly to either a Keynesian or a Neoclassical (or neoliberal) approach (Stokes, 2014). While the term was occasionally deployed in critical contexts throughout the 80s, it was used primarily as a pejorative after the publication of Michael Pusey’s *Economic Rationalism in Canberra* in 1991, when critics used it to refer more and more to a framework of small government, privatisation and a rolling back of social welfare such as healthcare and tertiary education (Gates & Steane, 2007). Eventually, ‘economic rationalism’ largely gave way to the term ‘neoliberalism’ among detractors in the early 2000s (Stokes, 2014). While ‘economic rationalism’ is still occasionally used as both a pejorative and a supportive label, it receives less attention than it once did (Stokes, 2014).

While proponents did not always label themselves as economic rationalists, their criticisms of opponents and praise of themselves, relied on the same rhetorical dichotomy between ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’. Upon gaining office in 1983, Prime Minister Bob Hawke
stated that his would be a government based on “consensus” (Battin, 1992, p. 12), rather than the previous era of party politics. This set the discursive tone of much of the decade, which saw politicians on both sides of politics more frequently adopting a rationalist position on different issues. In a 1992 newspaper article, former National Party Senator John Stone advocated for the framework, stating: “economic rationalism is not basically about political ideology at all (and hence, not about cultural or moral positions either), but chiefly about what works” (Weekend Australian, 1992, cited in Battin, 1992, p. 13-14, original emphasis). The corollary of Stone’s assertion is of course that opposing positions are ideological, and do not work. To the rationalists, government intervention and regulation was equivalent to “‘ideologies of mindless nationalism and selfsufficiency [sic] [and a] fear of the rest of the world…”’ (Whitwell, 1986 p. 259 cited in Battin, 1992, p. 14). This rhetoric could be seen in arguments within academic community as well. As Stokes (2014) notes, the development and normalisation of economic rationalism was superimposed onto an existing conflict between Marxian political economists, and orthodox economists who favoured more liberal (and eventually neoliberal) policies. Those academics from various heterodox schools often challenged the amorality of the orthodoxy, and in particular, its disregard for economic and social inequality. Orthodox economists on the other hand, championed the impartiality and scepticism of their position, and, in some cases accused their heterodox colleagues of not being ‘real’ economists (Quiggin, 1999). The conflict then, was about the legitimacy of their various positions, on one hand, and the ethics on the other.

In addition to relying on an image of impartiality, the rationalists also attempted to reframe the ‘public interest’ (Battin, 1992). Battin asserts that economic rationalism sought to construct the economy as the ‘general interest’, while painting interventionist opponents as ‘self-interested’, or acting on behalf of some other ‘vested interest’. Whitwell echoes this in his analysis of Treasury policy and documentation (1990). He suggests that, implicit in
Treasury policy was the belief that “governmental initiatives which try to mould the nature of economic change will ultimately and inevitably serve to protect existing, or spawn new, interest groups” (Whitwell, 1990, p. 133, cited in Battin, 1992, p. 16). As I discussed in Chapter 1, a key element of Lukes’ theory of power is the centrality of ‘interests’, and how these interests are represented and ‘shaped’. Battin’s and Whitwell’s arguments show that, for economic rationalism, ‘the public interest’ is an important metric of success, and so the capacity to define ‘public interest’ is even more important. I will revisit this in Chapters 3 and 4.

Beyond the name itself, ‘economic rationalism’ brought with it a range of rhetorical tools that helped to legitimise the positions of its proponents, and bring economic issues to the centre of the political stage. Stokes (2014) notes that, during the consecutive Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating (1983-1996), economic policy debates often relied on this discourse. He states that:

government ministers, journalists, commentators and ordinary citizens became accustomed to using a new rhetoric that included references to ‘competition’, ‘level playing fields’, ‘price signals’ and ‘picking winners’

Stokes, 2014, p. 195

This not only presented the economy as a ‘fairer’ determinant of prices and spending, but also a more ‘scientific’ one. ‘Efficiency’ also became an important goal and measure of successful economic policy. Exposing businesses to the ‘discipline’ of the market was believed to force them to deliver better, cheaper products and services in order to have an edge over their competitors (Whitwell, 1990, p. 132), and while markets were held to be inherently efficient, intervention of any sort was inherently inefficient (1990). As Quiggin (1997) notes, groups like the Business Council of Australia maintained that competition energised businesses to “‘work harder and work smarter’” (Quiggin, 1997), while critics of
such rhetoric rightly identified that harder work for the same wage equates to a pay cut (1997). Though these policy trends had come out of debates over trade barriers and industry protectionism, they began to increasingly support industrial relations reforms and the privatisation of public assets in the late 1980s and early ‘90s (although some of this support came from conservative think tanks rather than government itself) (Stokes, 2014).

This rhetoric impacted how some politicians presented their duties. Battin describes a speech given by Nick Greiner to the Liberal Party’s Federal Council in October, 1990. Battin summarises Greiner’s claim that: “there was no longer any fundamental differences between the major parties…. Elections in the future would be fought over who had claim to be the better managers” (Battin, 1992, p. 12). This assertion removed political values and ideologies from the equation, focusing only the parties’ credentials of economic management. This, in turn, was treated as a social good, not merely an economic one, as evidenced by the Greiner Government’s motto: “The N.S.W. Government: Putting People First by Managing Better” (Battin, 1992, p. 12).

A focus on economic management could also be seen within Canberra bureaucracy throughout the 1980s, both structurally, in the dispersion of qualifications through different departments, and symbolically in the attitudes towards different personnel, as explored by Pusey (1991). He notes that, while the central agencies of Treasury, Finance, and Prime Minister and Cabinet were populated by a high proportion of so called ‘Senior Executive Service’ (SES) officers with higher qualifications, the program and service agencies had a far lower proportion, with the department of Aboriginal Affairs having the lowest (1991). Pusey also asserts that these central departments tended to have a younger staff who were overwhelmingly male, many of whom had come from higher socio-economic backgrounds and a handful of esteemed private schools, and who held (or came to hold) a more econocentric world view (1991). The program and service agencies on the other hand, were
by and large staffed by older employees with a history of public service and more socio-
economically diverse backgrounds, and with a more equal (though still majority male) gender
ratio.

In addition, many of these employees, rather than being university educated, had
learned on the job, and were therefore less inclined to adopt the rationalist perspectives of
their young professional counterparts. To the younger staff, these older employees were seen
as being “‘too close to their clients’” (Pusey, 1991, p. 9), a sentiment which reflects the
‘vested-interest’ claims outlined by Battin (1992) and Whitwell (1990). They older staff are
also seen to be incapable of being “‘hard-nosed’” or “taking ‘the broader view’” (Pusey,
1991, p. 9). By contrast, the older employees from the program and services agencies saw the
younger central agencies’ officers as “‘intellectuals’” with little real-world experience
(Pusey, 1991, p. 9), who were “‘ruthless’” (p. 86) and had little regard for the practicality or
impact of their recommendations. They were also seen to by their colleagues to be primarily
cconcerned with power and influence, and to enjoy having the ear of the Prime Minister.

Interestingly, the central agency officers were, themselves, also concerned with
power. Pusey notes that these officers were “‘nearly four times more likely to mention the
satisfactions of political influence than were their counterparts in the program departments’”
(1991, p. 87), and that this figure was even more concentrated among those who had attended
conservative private schools. This suggests that, with the rise of economic rationalism
(whether coincidentally or causally), the ethic of public service began to shift in Canberra,
towards a younger, male, more affluent, more highly educated workforce with an
increasingly individualistic and econocentric mindset.

‘Microeconomic Reform’

As previously noted, the publication of Pusey’s book in 1991 proliferated a
significantly more negative usage of the term ‘economic rationalism’ than had previously
existed (Quiggin, 1997). At around the same time, the Liberal-National Coalition under John Hewson, brought to the 1993 election a policy package described by some as “the epitome of economic rationalism” (Stokes, 2014, p. 210), but lost the election in large part because of a proposed 15% consumption tax which became the target of criticism by the sitting Labor government (Stokes, 2014). Stokes notes that, in the wake of the election Prime Minister Paul Keating leaned away from economic rationalist rhetoric, focusing instead on concepts of citizenship and civic engagement, and developing Australia’s national identity in the face of a growing discourse of, and interest in globalisation (2014), however, Quiggin asserts that, rather than being a shift away from rationalism, this period instead saw a shift towards a more technocratic approach to economic policy (Quiggin, 2005, p. 29). Meanwhile, policy continued along more or less the same trajectory, with centrally fixed wages giving way to “‘enterprise bargaining’” (Stokes, 2014, p. 212), and a continued reliance on markets to determine best practices (Beeson & Firth, 1998).

The 1996 election saw the end of 13 years of Labor Government, and the election of Prime Minister John Howard, whose campaign focused primarily on the length of Labor’s term in government, combined with its perceived mismanagement of the early 1990s recession (Hollander, 2008). In the years that followed, the Coalition Government under Howard reiterated a commitment to what they referred to as “economic liberalism” (Hollander, 2008, p. 93), escalating many of the previous government’s rationalist policies through privatisation of the national telecommunications service (Telstra, formerly Telecom), a consumption tax and a new set of ‘enterprise bargaining’ policies that gave more power to businesses in their capacity to set wages and dismiss staff (Stokes, 2014). The election of the Coalition to government also saw a change in the tenor of economic policy from the Labor years. While Labor’s economic policy was tempered, for the most part, by a commitment to a strong welfare state and a reliance on the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) for
support, the Coalition quickly sought a reduction or modification in many aspects of
government service provision, usually applied under the euphemistic label of
‘microeconomic reforms’ (O’Neill & Fagan, 2006). Tuohy (2012), explores the rhetoric of
‘reform’, noting that, while marketisation is often described in lucrative terms of ‘growth’,
‘production’ and ‘expansion’, social spending is rarely described as ‘development’ or
‘improvement’ within this rhetoric, and is instead cast either euphemistically (with public
sector job cuts regarded as ‘reform’ or ‘cutting red tape’), or negatively, with social spending
treated as a ‘cost’. For the Coalition, these ‘reforms’ came in the form of significant
reductions in public spending, the implementation of work-based welfare programs and a
While the Howard Government made some reductions in the welfare state, its tenure was also
characterised, interestingly, by numerous subsidies for education, child care and medical
care. However, these were all targeted at private services. This had the effect not only of
improving the Coalition’s base of support, but also reducing the appeal of public services,
which in turn lead to more people using private services, and justified greater cuts to public
funding (Cahill, 2007; Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid & Keating, 2010).

**Competition Policy**

The vast majority of ‘microeconomic reforms’ followed on from the establishment,
by the previous Labor Government, of a National Competition Policy framework (NCP). In
1992, the Government commissioned an inquiry into the existing competition legislation in
Australia, with a view to developing policy more in line with its rationalist position. The
National Competition Policy Review Report (nicknamed the Hilmer report, after the chair of
the committee, and the policy forebear of the Harper Review) was published in 1993, and
made broad recommendations across a range of policy areas, designed to abolish government
monopolies and avoid practices that were seen as restricting competition between businesses
While the federal government had already made many policy shifts in favour of competitive markets and privatisation, most of these policies did not have jurisdiction over the states, which had ownership over enterprises that had moved towards more market oriented activities (King, 1997). As well as impacting policy design in many government departments at both state and federal levels, the report influenced the discursive framework of economic rationalism, giving life to a new language of economic rhetoric. The review and its recommendations came to be known by the shorthand ‘Hilmer’ among economists and bureaucrats, with the term being used both for the policy package as a whole, and for the individual recommendations, particularly in regards to the public sector (Quiggin, 1997). It was also used by some to express their opposition to the recommendations or the method of their implementation. Because of the terms of the report and its implementation through the newly formed Council of Australian Governments (COAG), few of the recommendations were subject to any feedback from public sector employees or members of the Canberra bureaucracy. Quiggin notes that:

'Hilmer’ is seen by many as a policy imposed from above without consultation, and competition policy is regarded as a codeword for increased work intensity and reduced job security.

Quiggin, 1997

As Quiggin’s analysis shows, this rhetoric was deployed by both supporters and opponents of the review. On a more general level, Kolsen (1996) explores how the terms ‘microeconomic reform’ and ‘National Competition Policy’ quickly developed a sort of capital beyond their deployment in actual policy realms, such that any microeconomic reform, and all the Hilmer recommendations were seen by some people as positive in their own right, rather than being assessed in terms of their likely outcomes (Kolsen, 1996). A rhetoric also evident in the
Government Response to the Competition Policy Review, which I will analyse in the following chapter. He elaborates:

NCP is an important part of microeconomic reform; however, the theory which lies behind the concept of economic efficiency does not yield simple, unambiguous conclusions which can be applied to policy.

Kolsen, 1996, p.83

This is evidenced by the numerous bodies of oversight that were established to ‘facilitate’ competition at different levels of the economy. Kolsen asserts too that, because the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) attempted to follow the core principles set out in Hilmer as closely as possible, circumstances were likely to arise where absolute faith in the efficiency of competition would produce less efficient scenarios, because of what he describes as “the characteristics of duopoly structures” (Kolsen, 1996, p. 84). Ambiguities also lay in the specific wording of aspects of Hilmer. In particular, the provision of ‘access to essential facilities’ stated that conditions of access must be “‘fair and reasonable’” (Kolsen, 1996, p. 84), but provided no metric for assessing this reasonableness. The effect was to reproduce the biases of fairness and reasonableness in the reader, and potentially lead to conflict over different readings (1996). While these issues are by no means catastrophic failings of the report, what they indicate is a move away from the rationalism espoused by the earlier generation of ‘rationalists’, towards an ideological approach that give prima facie importance to certain concerns (competition being chief among them), without properly interrogating the circumstances under which these can be beneficial or detrimental. As Valentine (1999) asserts, the Hilmer review, “is both a blueprint for change and an ideological statement on competition reform” (p.26).

In part then, the role of NCP can be seen (whether intentionally or not) to have legitimated the existing ideologies of the rationalists, through both structural adjustments and
discursive changes to the role of government. Increasingly, the economy and the market were treated as self-regulating ‘actors’. Valentine (1999) explores this in detail. Central to NCP was, of course, the role of competition. Because competition was seen as being the best driver of production and efficiency, policy dictated that it should be introduced, wherever possible, to replace government monopolies, particularly in the areas of utility delivery, education, aged care and healthcare, all of which had been seen, before the adoption of economic rationalism, as an extension of the responsibilities of government to its citizens (Valentine, 1999). As Pusey (1991) notes, this was particularly characteristic of Australia, and was a foundational ethic at the time of federation. In the wake of rationalism, and particularly NCP, the role of government changed in economic and policy discourse. Increasingly, the market was seen to be the best service provider, while the duty of government was to protect private wealth (through law enforcement and military), protect the freedoms of the market (by challenging organised labor and restricting collective bargaining) and neutral analyst of regulatory action (to ensure that, competition is only restricted if doing so can be shown to provided public benefit that outweighs the cost of losing competition) (Valentine, 1999). Valentine further argues that, if the role of the government under NCP was to be a neutral judge, advocating for neither public nor private ownership of an industry, and thereby discounting its own role, it would also be discounting its capacity to advocate for the public good through service provisions (1999). This was reflected in the ‘The Principles and Guidelines for National Standard Setting and Regulatory Action’, one of the three documents that made up NCP. These guidelines set out criteria for assessing the costs and benefits of anti-competition regulation, but only allowed for assessments to be made in “economic terms” (Valentine, 1999, p. 28). No criteria were provided for qualitative assessment of social costs, beyond the economic costs that these social impacts may have.
This also had the effect of presenting citizens as responsible for their own welfare, through their role as consumers. Valentine identifies this trend in NCP documentation, where citizens are, overwhelmingly, referred to as consumers, and are atomised through the representation of individual relationships with producers, rather than collective relationships with other citizens (1999). He asserts that this representation tied the value of citizens to their economic capacity. Successful producers were valuable because of their contributions to the market and their inclination to turn a profit, while consumers were valuable because they provided a market for consumers, but because of the lack of tools to analyse the qualitative aspects of value, citizens who did not fit this economic framework were largely invisible from documentation. The economic focus of NCP and the government masked both the social fallout of policy changes, and the citizens who were disadvantaged by them (Valentine, 1999). This is a core theme of neoliberal discourse and can be seen as an effort to redefine the role of the individual and their interests. I will explore use of this theme in the Government Response to the Competition Policy Review in Chapter 3.

**Neoliberal Australia and the Welfare State**

The Hilmer report influenced government policy throughout the Howard Government’s tenure, and helped to shape many aspects of Australia’s current political and social landscape, perhaps most notably in the abandonment of full employment, and adoption of low interest rates, as policy goals (Mitchell & Muysken, 2008), reflecting a mindset that sees citizens as being responsible for their own wellbeing, and governments as being responsible for guaranteeing an economic environment that facilitates entrepreneurship (Battin, 1992). Wilson, Spies-Butcher, Stebbing and St John (2013), describe this as the “hollowing out” of Australia’s welfare state. They note that, income support in particular has been radically changed under the regime of economic rationalism. While Australia’s welfare state remains strong in comparison to many other OECD countries, unemployment support
has failed to keep up with living costs, and ‘workfare’ programs, welfare waiting periods and increased supervision of recipients have contributed to a perception of unemployed people as being responsible for their own circumstances (Wilson et al., 2010; Stonehouse, Threlkeld & Farmer, 2015). In addition, the increased funding of private industries has led to what Cahill (2007) describes as “state subsidization of the already privileged” (p. 226), coupled with a system that increasingly conforms to a ‘user pays’ framework. Because of the lack of centralised wage setting, and diminished collective bargaining, these changes have, according to Wilson et al., (2010), primarily affected wage earners, whose position is already made precarious by an increasingly casualised workforce. The remaining welfare state is increasingly regarded on its costs and benefits to the economy, rather than to society more broadly. This is particularly evident in funding cuts to disability services and frontline services for domestic violence, which are more difficult to justify on a purely economic basis (Harris Rimmer & Sawer, 2016). Nonetheless, and despite rising levels of inequality since the beginning of economic rationalist policy formation, Australia’s welfare state has suffered, but endured (Spies-Butcher, 2014).

The deep roots of the Australian welfare system, as well as the public backlash against sudden and serious threats against it, complicate the narrative of neoliberalism, and present challenges for applying this label to Australia. Spies-Butcher (2014) describes instead the “dual welfare state” of Australia (p. 186). He notes that, despite funding of private service delivery and cuts to the public system, Australia still has a relatively strong welfare state. However, these public services exist alongside a developing system based on a liberal, rather than egalitarian ethic of delivery. This second system of privately operated services receive government subsidies, while offering a non-means tested delivery of service. In other words, their services are equally available to the lowest, and higher income earners. Meanwhile, the public system has remained means tested, but has become increasingly paternalistic and
supervisory (Higgins, 2014). Spies-Butcher concludes that, while this dual welfare system emerged as an attempt to reconcile rising inequality, an economic rationalist ideology and Australia’s existing welfare state, it has resulted in a system that applies a supervisory and paternalistic regime to more marginalised groups, while essentially rewarding the wealthy (2014). This dynamic is at risk of intensifying in the future.

‘Neoliberalization’ and the invasion of neoliberalism into non-economic spheres

If Spies-Butcher’s (2014), and Wilson et al’s (2010) analyses highlight the problems in applying the label of neoliberalism to Australia, then Aalbers (2013) concept of ‘neoliberalization’ provides a more useful approach to understanding Australia’s political, economic and social layout. Two years after his election in 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, having taken office on the eve of the financial crisis, wrote an essay which blamed the crash on the failure of global markets and, notably, on the ideology of “neo-liberalism” (Rudd, 2009, cited in Stokes, 2014, p. 211). Despite this indictment, many of the policies that Rudd proposed and implemented throughout his term, conformed to a neoliberal standard. For example, in an effort to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse emissions, Rudd proposed an ‘emissions trading scheme’ (ETS), which would allow businesses to buy and sell ‘carbon credits’, rewarding low emitters and leverage a cost on high emitters through the ‘discipline’ of the market. This non-linear trajectory of neoliberalism reflects Aalbers’ (2013) principle. ‘Neoliberalization’, he notes, presents neoliberalism as a process, rather than a condition. Even those policies that operate against the logic of neoliberalism, such as many of the Keynesian solutions to the financial crisis that bailed out many firms and protected them from the ‘discipline’ of the market, are often deployed in an effort to protect existing structures, values or theories of neoliberalism (2013). The focus of Aalbers concept is the underlying ideological aspects of neoliberalism, rather than just neoliberal policies or
institutions. While Australia does not clearly conform to a neoliberal model, there is, a
durable undercurrent of neoliberal values; one that allowed Rudd to speak out against the
ideology, then implement its principles.

These values of neoliberalism stretch beyond the limits of economic policy rhetoric,
permeating many different facets of society. In particular, it has demanded that individuals
and families engage with global financial trends and complex economic phenomena in their
day to day life (Allon, 2011). Increasingly, middle-class Australians are expected to manage
an economic portfolio that can include multiple loans, assets and investments. Not only does
this reflect a shift towards individual relationships between citizens and markets, external to
the role of the state, it also echoes the responsibility that individuals are expected to take over
their retirement and social welfare, rather than relying on dwindling public services (Allon,
2011). This culture of “‘citizen-speculator’” (Allon, 2010, p. 366) has been thrown into stark
relief in the years following the financial crisis, particularly in the U.S. In the years leading
up to the GFC, individuals and families were encouraged, throw low interest rates and loose
loaning practices, to buy houses, both as first homes and as investments. After the crash,
these investors were portrayed both as the hapless victims of the crisis, manipulated by
greedy banks and irresponsible loan agencies, and as the naïve, selfish perpetrators, who, in
an effort to climb up the housing ladder or make a quick buck, overextended themselves and
paid the price³ (Allon, 2010).

Home ownership and the household are by no means the limit of this trend. McGloin
and Stirling (2011) recognise the impact of competing discourse of the economy and service
provision, on the culture of academia. They note that, while governments have attempted to
implement strategies within universities to improve accessibility for indigenous students,
migrant students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers and staff are required to interpret these initiatives alongside a rhetorical focus on financial viability and commodification of degrees, which often leaves qualitative metrics such as student experience and inclusivity by the wayside (2011). Similarly, Wardman (2016) examines the discursive construction of school students as ‘productive’, ‘disciplined’ members of society, and how this reflects similar discourses of economic citizens (2016). Numerous other studies explore the same theme, from immigration (Yu, 2014), to medicine and the clinical space (Plastow, 2010), Reflecting a discursive trend that interprets more and more social spaces through an economic lens. Increasingly, neoliberal discourse has been used to reimagine social issues as economic issues, and social actors as economic actors.

Conclusion

While Australia’s deployment of neoliberal policies has been erratic and uneven across different areas, the discourse of neoliberalism is ever present. It has historically been used to construct economic interests as the public interest, and challenge the ‘vested interests’ of unionism, industry protectionism and government intervention into the market. More recently, this rhetoric has canonised competition as a core determinant of public and private ‘good’ through increased consumer choice and lower cost products and services, and fairer markets for businesses. It has also presented economies and markets as self-sufficient ‘agents’ that operate most efficiently without intervention. These discursive trends attempt to construct a certain image of society which is econocentric and atomised yet made ‘more efficient’ and ‘more equal’ by the governance of competition. In the following chapter I will apply these discursive themes as lenses for analysis to explore the specific use of rhetoric in the Government Response to the Competition Policy Review.
Chapter 3: Exploring the articulation of neoliberal discourse in government policy

As Chapter 2 shows, government discourse in Australia has undergone a process of ‘neoliberalization’ (Aalbers, 2013) over the past three decades, that foregrounds some issues and groups, while largely ignoring others. Although this has not always reflected the realities of Government policy – Australia has retained a relatively robust welfare state compared to many other ‘neoliberal’ countries (Spies-Butcher, 2014) – it has nonetheless changed the way many aspects of society are represented and discussed. It has also arguably stifled the emergence of competing discourses, or forced them to be framed in economic terms (Yu, 2014). As I discussed in Chapter 1, analysing these discursive techniques – ‘framing’, recontextualising, translating etc. – provides a valuable opportunity to explore Lukes’ theory of power and refocus his conceptual lens while developing a deeper understanding of the power of policy documentation. In this chapter I will undertake a case study of the the Response to explore the articulation of neoliberal discourse in policy documentation. I will also examine the role of policy and the ‘policy cycle’, and discuss my choice of documentation. This case study lays the groundwork for Chapter 4, in which I will explore how this analysis illustrates the concept of ‘shaping’ in Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power, and discuss whether this case study can meaningfully add to his framework.

Reading Policy

Making assertions about the discursive ‘impact’ of policy is contentious: treating policy documentation as simply a blueprint of the intentions of Government neglects the multiple readings that different audiences will produce (Codd, 1988; Ball, 1993). Moreover, to claim that the discourse deployed in a document like the Response will have a direct and hegemonic impact on the public imaginary is to ignore the way in which such discourse is
sharpened, qualified, challenged and interpreted through various peak bodies, NGOs, advocacy groups and media organisations. After all, the Response, while being far briefer than the Harper Review is still unlikely to be read by the general public, and so the influence that it has will be tempered by a variety of readers with a variety of readings; as Ball notes, “Some texts are never even read first hand” (1993, p. 12). Of course, this is not to say that such a document cannot have an impact on the public, nor that this impact cannot be subtle or even invisible. Rather, it means that this process will not necessarily be straightforward or direct.

Codd (1988) offers an insight into one of the ways to think about policy documentation. He begins by critiquing what he identifies as the “technical-empiricist approach to policy analysis” (p. 235). This approach, according to Codd, treats policy documents as “expressions of political purpose” (p. 237), that indicate a plan of action for governments and other participants in the enactment of policy. The role of a technical-empiricist policy analyst is therefore to attempt to discern the ‘real’ intentions of the ‘author’ of the document – separating the ‘correct’ interpretations from the ‘incorrect’ ones – and to evaluate the likely effectiveness of the proposed policies (1988). Codd rejects this approach. He argues that reading a document through what the reader perceives are the author’s intentions, rather than the text of the document itself, relies on an idealistic relationship between text and meaning that ignores the context of reading. In other words, by shackling the meaning of a document to the author’s intentions, the analyst denies the validity of different interpretations of the text. Identifying a single ‘author’ or a single ‘intention’ is a problem in itself, but I will return to that shortly. Codd suggests that: “Instead of searching for authorial intentions, perhaps the proper task of policy analysis is to examine the different effects that documents have in the production of meaning by readers” (1988, p. 239). This echoes Barthes’ concept of the ‘death of the Author’ (1977, cited in Codd, 1988, p. 239).
focus therefore, is the many ways in which a policy document is read, rather than the narrower context in which it is written.

While I think Codd is right not to give primacy to authorial intentions, I think he goes too far in the other direction, largely neglecting the complex role of the ‘author’ when analysing the meaning of a document. Policy can be thought of as a process rather than simply a set of institutions and actors. It involves stages of issue identification, drafting and redrafting, resource management, implementation and impact analysis (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis, 2013). In addition, there may be numerous authors at different stages of the process with competing intentions, and these authors may be hidden from the final product, or subsumed under a departmental masthead.

Codd is right to assert that these stages involve significant amounts of interpretation on the part of readers, but he himself notes that “policies are produced in response to the failure of other policies” (Codd, 1988, p. 237). This means that, if a policy document is not interpreted and implemented ‘correctly’, it is likely that the ‘reading’ intended by the authors will find its way into a new document. Of course, this is not to say that such a reading should be treated by analysts as correct simply because it conforms to the author’s interpretation, only that this interpretation should not be discounted altogether. Ball sums this up concisely: “…authors cannot control the meanings of their texts – policy authors do make concerted efforts to assert such control by the means at their disposal” (1993, p. 11).

Ball’s approach provides an opportunity to consider the importance of both the author’s and readers’ interpretations, while giving neither side the final word. He agrees with Codd, that policies are read in multiple contexts by multiple audiences, producing multiple interpretations. However, he also notes that these contexts and audiences are determined at least in part by the efforts of the author, often through the use of particular rhetorical styles or jargon, or through the representation of different interest groups and, importantly, the
omission of others. Simply put, policies “...create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed” (Ball, 1993, p. 12). In addition, while it is perhaps too simplistic to treat policy documents as blueprints of Government intent, they can be considered to be evidence of what Ball calls “the micropolitics of legislative formulation” (1993, p. 11). They indicate (or more often, try to conceal) the debates and discussions that take place within and between government departments about whose interests will be represented and prioritised in the document, and how this will take place. This can produce not only a plurality of readings among readers, but also a plurality of readings among authors.

There is an opportunity, therefore, to analyse policy documents neither as the material expression of Government policy initiatives, nor as interpreted and challenged readings of audiences, but as an attempt by the author – or more likely, authors – to produce certain readings, to include and exclude certain audiences, and to prioritise certain interest groups. Analysing a document of the policy process in this way also foregrounds this processual characteristic of policy. Whereas focusing on ‘reading’ can see a document as a ‘static’ artifact, a focus on ‘writing’ highlights the steps that come before and after the ‘moment’ of the document. It also highlights the processual nature of power in policy. This case study therefore explores Lukes’ third dimension of power in prospect, rather than in retrospect; the impact of the document can tell us whether an attempt to exert power is successful, but the discourse itself can tell us whether the attempt has been made in the first place.

**Why choose the Response?**

How then can an analysis of Government Response to the Competition Policy Review explore this process? And why choose the Response rather than the Harper Review itself, or more specific policy papers? These are important questions. After all, and despite my discussion of ‘policy documentation’, the Response is neither legislation nor an analysis of
existing policy (like the Harper Review). Despite this, it plays an important role. In ‘responding’ to the Harper Review, the Government is engaging in a sort of knowledge translation. This can be seen in a number of ways.

First, the Response takes a 548-page review and trims it down to a tidy 52-pages, while still managing to address each of the recommendations made by the Harper Review. This makes the Response far more accessible for many readers, while retaining the ‘most important’ parts of the review, and canonising them as such by reproducing them within Government documentation.

Second, the Government has excluded the vast majority of the arguments and justifications for each of the recommendations to produce a document that reads in a more ‘managerial’ way; it has done the job of interpreting the arguments and weighing the evidence for each recommendation, so the reader need not.

Third, by omitting the arguments of the Review and ‘filtering’ sections that do not conform to the Government’s position, the conclusions of the Response are made more difficult to interrogate, as the ‘thought-process’ of the author(s) is concealed. This presents these conclusions as self-evident.

Fourth, because the Response is authored by members of the Government, rather than merely commissioned by it, it necessarily represents the Government’s interests, but it also represents the Government’s view of others’ interests. This means that even those parts of the Response that are close or identical to the Review are reformed within this new context, and are therefore part of an attempt by the Government to shape the ‘reading’ of the document, and the beliefs, opinions and possible responses of readers. This also conveys them governmental legitimacy.

While I refer to ‘the Government’, it is important to remember Ball’s point that, the Response does not represent a single, cohesive point of view shared by all members of the
Government, nor the view of a single author. Rather, it was likely written by multiple people through numerous processes of consultation, debate and redrafting, and probably represents a compromise of numerous conflicting perspectives that have been deliberately hidden from view in a document that attempts to present an otherwise uniform narrative. This in itself would be an interesting topic for investigation, but, for my purposes, I will continue to refer to the Response as having been authored by ‘the Government’ for the sake of brevity. After all, and despite any conflicts that took place during its composition, the Response has still been published on behalf of the Government as a whole, and therefore is read ‘through’ the legitimacy of the Government.

Because of the transitional nature of the Response – it translates the Harper Review into several more specific future policy documents – it is likely to be overlooked by other analysts. After all, once these specific policy documents are released its purpose will have been served. These smaller ‘steps’ tend to disappear from view when the policy process moves past them, which is another reason why the Response should be scrutinised now while it is relatively recent, and before focus is shifted to the legislative documents that stem from it.

Commission of the Harper Review and Context of the Response

In the lead up to the 2013 federal election, the Liberal-National Coalition included in its electoral platform, a promise to review of Australia’s competition policy (Our Plan, 2013). After winning the election, the Coalition Government made its announcement of a “root and branch” review (Billson, 2013), releasing the Terms of Reference and announcing the review panel early in 2014. The panel consisted of four people, Professor Ian Harper, Peter Anderson, Su McCluskey and Michael O’Bryan, QC. Their experience ranges from academia, business government and competition law, with McCluskey and Anderson having worked with various industry peak bodies, and Harper serving as the former chair of the
Australian Fair Pay Commission (The Harper Review, 2015). The panel released a draft report in 2014 and, after a round of consultation with business, community and consumer advocacy groups, published the final report in 2015 (The Harper Review, 2015). The Government released its Response to the Competition Policy Review towards the end of 2015, supporting 39 of the 56 recommendations in full or principle, 5 in part and noting or ‘remaining open’ to 12 recommendations (The Response, 2015). While the Response does include any policy outlines itself, it indicates areas where the Government intends to implement policies, and points to other white papers, committees and reviews in which some of these policies are covered in more detail. In this sense, it looks forward by discussing future policy plans, as well as backwards, by responding directly to the Harper Review. This highlights the specific role that it plays in the policy production process, and shows how such a document can be seen as a ‘moment’ within this broader process. By focusing on this document, I hope to provoke others to look more closely at individual documents within longer policy narratives, as this sort of close analysis will be able to complement existing studies that follow Codd’s approach, while considering the ways in which authors attempt to exert control over the readings of their texts.

**Recommendations of the Harper Review**

The Harper Review was commissioned to highlight areas of microeconomic reform and to evaluate Australia’s 20-year-old National Competition Policy. In contextualising its recommendations, the Review identifies several challenges that it sees as potentially impacting the Australian economy and affecting the suitability of competition policy in the future. These challenges are: the economic growth of Asian countries, the ageing Australian population and new advances in digital technologies that upset existing modes of service delivery, or existing markets. It argues that in order to adapt to these changes, Australia’s policies have to be ‘fit for purpose’ based on the criteria of:
- making markets work in the long-term interests of consumers;
- [fostering] diversity, choice and responsiveness in government services;
- [encouraging] innovation, entrepreneurship, and the entry of new players;
- [promoting] efficient investment in and use of infrastructure and natural resources;
- [including] competition laws and regulations that are clear, predictable and reliable;

and

- [securing] necessary standards of access and equity.

The Harper Review, 2015, p 23

These criteria establish the goals of the Review.

The Harper Review makes 56 recommendations grouped into 5 different areas of reform. Recommendations 1 to 21 refer to areas of reform in competition policy including in human services, transport, ride-sharing, intellectual property, zoning and planning, utilities and retail regulations. Recommendations 22 to 42 refer to areas of reform in the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 including simplifications and the removal of sections that the Review argues are redundant or limit competition unnecessarily. Recommendations 43 to 52 refer to changes to institutional structures to sustain enduring reform, including recommendations for the establishment of new institutions, combining existing institutions and abolishing roles that the Review sees as limiting competition. Recommendations 53 and 54 refer to reform in areas of concern raised by small business during the consultation period of the Review process including the capacity for collective bargaining among small business. Recommendations 55 and 56 refer to the implementation process for the other 54 recommendations. Of these 56 recommendations, the government supports 39 in full or in principle, 5 in part and (somewhat euphemistically) ‘remains open’ to the remaining 12 recommendations (The Response, 2015). A close analysis of the discourse in the Response is necessary to look beyond these recommendations to the subtler aspects of the document.
**Themes of Analysis**

In Chapter 2 I explored the concepts of neoliberalism and “neoliberalization” (Aalbers, 2013), and discussed the discursive history of neoliberalism in Australia. As I asserted in that chapter, this discourse has produced an image of society as consisting of interactions between ‘consumers’ or ‘customers’, and ‘businesses’ or ‘producers’. Not only does this ignore all social interactions that have no economic component, but it also conceals the economic roles within these interactions. Most notable is the absence of the ‘wage earners’ that facilitate these relationships. In addition, neoliberal discourse constructs markets and economic processes as productive agents, or affords them primacy over non-economic processes and structures. This image that can be seen in assertions such as “competition energises enterprise” (The Response, 2015 p. 1). When these economic structures and processes are presented as the subjects of sentences, they are also presented as having agency and therefore not requiring human (or more importantly, government) intervention and oversight (Brown, 2015). In this case study I will use these components of neoliberal discourse (the ‘consumer/producer’ theme and the ‘agency of economy’ theme) as lenses for my analysis.

**Analysis of the Australian Government Response to the Competition Policy Review**

While the details of which recommendations the Government plans to enact offers some insight into the agenda present in the Response, it is important to engage more closely with the discursive features of the document. As Codd notes, treating the text as a transparent communicator of meaning belies the multitude of readings that different readers will produce (1988). By looking beyond ‘what’ is said to ‘how’ it is said, it is possible to explore the attempts made by the authors to produce certain readings, and in doing so, to assert power over the readers that shapes their opinions and values.
‘Consumer/Producer’ Theme

It is to be expected that, as a document that addresses competition policy, the Response is econocentric in its use of language. However, this language is not neutral; it implicitly foregrounds some interests and some groups – or more specifically, some representations of these interests and groups – while ignoring others. This can be seen in several ways. First, the response renders the public in economic terms only. Categories such as ‘seniors’ or ‘senior citizens’, ‘parents’, ‘children’, ‘family’ or ‘families’, ‘citizens’ and other social groups are absent from the document.4

Second, the actors that are discussed in the Response are constructed not only in economic terms, but in transactional terms: as ‘consumers’ of goods and services on the one hand, and the ‘businesses’ who produce these goods and services on the other hand. Indicative of this is the frequency with which the term ‘consumer’ appears in the text, compared to ‘wage’, ‘employee’ or ‘labour’ (or their declensions). ‘Consumer’ appears 33 times, excluding in the titles of Government acts or advocacy organisations, and ‘business’ appears 48 times as a noun, excluding in the title of positions (such as Small Business Commissioner). By contrast, there are zero mentions of ‘wage’, 1 mention each of ‘employees’ and ‘staff’, and zero mentions of ‘labour’ outside of the phrase ‘labour productivity’ (mentioned twice). The Harper Review explains this use of terminology. It states that:

Consumers in this context are not just retail consumers or households but include businesses transacting with other businesses. In the realm of government services, consumers can be patients, welfare recipients, parents of school-age children or users of the national road network.

4 The term ‘citizens’ appears once, in reference to the Response’s focus on “the economic welfare of Australians, not citizens of other countries” (The Response, 2015, p. 21).
This explanation highlights the overt econocentrism of the Harper Review; various different groups are literally redefined as consumers. However, the absence of such a statement from the Response treats this redefinition as an assumption: it is already latent within the document.

Third, references to the public in collective terms are accompanied by assertions of how they will benefit from increased competition. For example, the ‘Foreword’ states that the reforms discussed in the response will promote: “more dynamic, competitive and well-functioning markets for the benefit of all Australians” (The Response, 2015, p. v), this constructs the ‘public interest’ as primarily (if not purely) economic.

Fourth, and following on from the previous three points, this reference to ‘all Australians’, ‘the public’ or ‘the community as a whole’ is not an indication of the inclusivity of the document, but is in fact an extrapolation of the economic individual – the consumer – to the economic collective – the public. The discussion of consumers and business only, coupled with the frequent references to the public benefits of ‘competition’ highlights the lack of focus on groups and interests outside of this framework. ‘All Australians’, then, does not refer to a diverse group with diverse interests and concerns, but a homogenous group of consumers and businesses with singular, economic interests. I will discuss the implications of these representations in the following chapter.

The primacy of consumers and consumer interests is clear throughout the response. Aside from the numerous mentions of ‘consumers’ compared to other groups, the ‘competition principles’ outlined in ‘Recommendation 1’ of the Harper Review and supported in the Response state that: “Competition policies, laws and institutions should promote the long term interests of consumers”, and that “Governments should promote consumer choice when funding, procuring or providing goods and services and enable
informed choices by consumers” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 33; The Response, 2015, p. 3). Similarly, in describing previous reforms to human services, the Response states that: “These examples are models of consumer choice which can lead to better outcomes for individuals and the community” (The Response, 2015, p. 4). These two excerpts illustrate a concept present throughout the Response: that which benefits consumers, benefits the community.

The exception to this is the ‘public interest test’, which is the metric provided in both documents, against which restrictions to competition must be measured. It states that restrictions should only be put in place if: “the benefits of the restriction to the community as a whole outweigh the costs”, and “the objectives of the legislation can only be achieved by restricting competition” (The Harper Review 2015, p. 45; The Response 2015, p. 9). The inclusion of this ‘test’ is the only indication in the Response that the community’s ‘interests’ can lie outside of competition. And even then, these interests should only be pursued if there is no other way to achieve them than the restriction of competition.

The ‘public interest test’ illustrates an important aspect of the Response’s ‘translation’ of the Harper Review. When discussing the ‘public interest test’, the Harper Review also references the community consultation that took place as part of the review process. It notes two submissions that take issue with the wording of the ‘test’. The first, from Marsden Jacob Associates suggests that in the second limb, the word ‘best’ should replace the word ‘only’, to read “the objectives of the legislation can [best] be achieved by restricting competition” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 97). Similarly, the second submission, from The Pharmacy Guild of Australia suggests that the word ‘only’ should be replaced by the words ‘most efficient’. While the Harper Review concludes that the test does not need to be changed, the inclusion of these submissions reveals the conflicting interests that exist in the policy process.
By ‘filtering out’ this content, the Response presents the ‘test’ as an unproblematic guarantor of efficiency, and ignores the very real ‘interests’ that seek to change the ‘test’.

When discussing the merits of competition (whether to consumers, business or the community), the Response generally refers to two main benefits. The first is greater efficiency in business, leading to high quality, low price goods and services. ‘Efficiency’ and its declensions appear 23 times in the text, excluding the titles of reports. The second is greater product choice, driven by a plurality of providers competing over market share. ‘Choice’ appears 13 times in the text, ‘flexible/flexibility’ appears 5 times and ‘innovate’ and its declensions appear 14 times. In addition, these benefits are placed at the forefront of the document, as can be seen in this excerpt from the ‘Foreword’:

Effective competition encourages businesses to pursue efficiencies, rewarding the most innovative and dynamic that provide the best services at the lowest cost. It also benefits households by giving them more and better products and services to choose from at lower prices.

The Response, 2015, p. v

The foregrounding of these benefits often shifts others to the periphery, or treats them as byproducts of either choice or efficiency. ‘Recommendation 2: Human Services’ states that: “User choice should be placed at the heart of service delivery”, and “Innovation in service provision should be stimulated, while ensuring minimum standards of quality and access in human services” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 36; The Response, 2015, p. 4). In supporting this recommendation, the Response is both reframing the human services sector in economic terms (by assessing it through the metrics of competition) and making user choice a central focus of the sector. In addition, while ‘quality’ and ‘access’ are both mentioned, the use of ‘minimum standards’ frames them as regulatory requirements of ‘innovation’, rather than goals or values in their own right.
Once again, this is made clearer by noting what has been removed in the ‘translation’ from Harper Review to Response. The Harper Review notes that:

Access to high-quality human services – including health, education and community services – is vital to the lives of all Australians. Good health makes it easier for people to participate in society; education can help put people on a better life pathway; and quality community services, including aged care and disability care and support, can provide comfort, dignity and increased opportunities to vulnerable Australians.

The Harper Review, 2015, p. 34

In this paragraph, ‘access’ and ‘quality’ are given clear value without mentioning ‘choice’, ‘innovation’ and ‘efficiency’. While these latter values are (unsurprisingly) the focus of the following paragraphs of the Harper Review, this paragraph reveals a recognition of interests beyond ‘user choice’. Its omission from the Response is therefore significant. Similarly, the Harper Review states that: “Special consideration is also needed to empower people with multiple disadvantages or severe disadvantage to exercise effective choice” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 235). This statement, too, is absent from the Response, but presumably it is this to which ‘minimum standards of quality and access’ refers. Of course, ‘equality’, ‘affordability’ and ‘accountability’ are absent from the ‘human services’ sections of both documents, so ‘innovation’, ‘choice’ and ‘efficiency’ remain clear priorities. It is notable, for example, that neither document states that quality, affordability and access should be placed at the heart of service delivery, while maintaining minimum standards of choice and innovation.

As the second quote above illustrates, ‘choice’ is also presented in both documents as ‘empowering’ people. Similarly, the Response states that simplifying competition laws will strengthen “incentives to innovate, empowering consumers, and promoting better use of an
investment in infrastructure” (The Response, 2015, p. 1). This treats the ‘consumer’ role as fundamental to people’s identities, such that exercising their choice of products and services is seen by both documents as a form of self-actualisation.

The references throughout the Response to ‘the public’, ‘the community as a whole’ and particularly ‘all Australians’ reflects the use of a ‘national interest’ discourse as well as the more managerial, economistic discourse that permeates the document. At times, these discourses come into conflict. This is most notable in the Response’s rejection of ‘recommendation 5’, which suggests a removal of the restrictions on air and cabotage along many flight paths. This would allow international airlines to pick up passengers on routes currently only serviced by Australian transport companies. The Response ‘notes’ this recommendation, but adds “The Government does not have immediate plans to ease aviation cabotage arrangements” (The Response, 2015, p. 7) without offering an explanation as to why there are no plans to take up the recommended actions. The Harper Review argues that cabotage restrictions remain in place even in situations where Australian-flagged airlines are unavailable to service the required route. It states that “foreign-flagged ships can apply for permits to engage in coastal shipping where there is no Australian-flagged vessel to undertake the task, but this is not available to foreign-flagged airlines” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 209).

Because the Response omits both the Harper Review’s argument, and any reasoning of its own, it is difficult to understand why this recommendation has been rejected. Certainly, the Harper Review argues that air cabotage restrictions hinder the choice and affordability of transport for domestic passengers, so by taking a more protectionist stance towards Australian airlines, the Government is at odds with the pro-competition stance that is espoused at the outset of the document.
This alludes to the challenges that competition can pose to businesses, and highlights a contradiction in the rhetoric of the Response. As the foreword states: “competition encourages businesses to pursue efficiencies, rewarding the most innovative and dynamic…” (The Response, 2015, p. v). Elsewhere, it states that competition law reforms will “reduce barriers to entry for new businesses” (2015, p. 1), and that “Excessive intellectual property protection can result in higher costs for Australian businesses and consumers” (2015, p. 8).

What is absent from these statements is the notion that competition also punishes those businesses that do not adapt or innovate. Absent too is any suggestion of how this punitive competition will affect the employees and business owners who do not succeed, or how they will be supported if they are unable to compete. While there is extensive discussion of the options for businesses that have been subject to misuse of market power by their competitors, there is no such remedy for businesses that are simply unable to remain in the game. In discussing the ‘benefits’ of competition, the Response alludes to this more hostile side of the market – after all, the nature of competition is success or failure – but avoids ever addressing it directly. However, the structure of the clause ‘competition encourages businesses’ indicates that businesses are at the whim of competition: ‘competition’ is the subject, and ‘businesses’ the object. This is a trend throughout the document, as seen in the sentence: “Excessive intellectual property protection can result in higher costs for Australian businesses and consumers” (The Response, 2015, p. 8). When presented this way, economic forces, regulations or policies ‘impact’ consumers and businesses, and are therefore seen as having agency in the sentence, while actual actors like governments and oversight bodies are made invisible.

‘Agency of Economy’ Theme

Within the document, economic processes are consistently given primacy over stakeholders. This is clear in both the content of some of the recommendations that are
supported, particularly those that favour deregulation, and the syntax used in the Response. These processes are often framed as the subjects of sentences, filling the role of ‘actor’ in the structure of the sentence.

The opening sentence of the ‘Overview’ states that: “Competition is one of the surest ways to lift long-term productivity growth” (The Response, 2015, p. 1). By making competition the subject of the sentence, it is presented as the ‘actor’: it exerts an effect (‘to lift’) on the object (‘long-term productivity growth’). While describing it as “one of the surest ways to lift long-term productivity growth” might either suggest that there are other ways to bring about the same effect, or that ‘competition’ is a method that must be used by someone, rather than being a determinant of ‘long-term productivity growth’, these other choices and actors are absent from the sentence. The following statement: “Competition energises enterprise…” (p. 1) reinforces the primacy of competition. In this sentence, it is not ‘one’ of several choices that energise enterprise, nor is it a method or ‘way’ to achieve this goal, it is the actor rather than the action. Instead, the relationship between competition and enterprise is presented as deterministic and automatic; the lack of any qualifying modal verb in the sentence (may/might, can/could) suggests that competition achieves this effect unless operated on by an outside force.

It is not only competition that is constructed this way. In discussing resale price maintenance (RPM), the Response states that: “RPM may be beneficial to competition and consumers…” (The Response, 2015, p. 27). Similarly, “Excessive intellectual property protection can result in higher costs for Australian businesses and consumers and inhibit innovation” (The Response, 2015, p. 8). Importantly, neither ‘resale price maintenance’ nor ‘Excessive intellectual property protection’ are actors, yet by constructing them as subjects of the sentence, the real actors who utilise and regulate them are made invisible.
When real actors are removed from the sentence, economic processes are presented as being capable of achieving desired outcomes on their own, and therefore not requiring government oversight or mediation from any other body, such as a union. The sentence “Competition energises enterprise” is stated without qualification, suggesting that the natural state of competition is to energise enterprise, and it does so without any outside influence. To intervene in any way would therefore be likely to compromise this process. By constructing competition as natural, the sentence is presenting regulation as unnatural.

This is also reflected by the ‘public interest test’ discussed earlier. By placing the onus of responsibility on government to prove the merits of regulation, both the Harper Review and the Response establish competition as the status quo, and present government intervention as being suitable only when it can be proved to be necessary. This discursively relegates the Government to a caretaker position, responsible only for ensuring the unfettered operation of the market and safeguarding competition.

This is, however, inconsistent throughout the document. In other sentences, the Government is presented as the subject. For example: “The Government is committed to ensuring that aviation is safe, reliable, efficient and competitive” (The Response, 2015, p. 7). And again, when discussing the National Competition Policy (NCP) changes ushered in by the Hilmer Review in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Response states that: “The reforms delivered by the NCP are a strong example of how all governments can work together and utilise competition to increase economic growth” (the Response, 2015, p. 1). In this sentence, ‘competition’ is the object of the clause “all governments can work together and utilise competition”, and ‘governments’, the subject. It is ‘governments’ that ‘utilise’ ‘competition’. Competition is no longer presented as an actor, but as an action or ‘tool’ that must be ‘utilised’ by governments. Unlike the previous examples, this sentence presents competition as a tool to be used by government, rather than a force that produces its own results. In
addition, the use of ‘can’ suggests that the result of increased economic growth is a possibility, rather than a certainty. Once again, this highlights the way in which the Response reformulates the language of the Harper Review to set its own agenda.

Despite this shift, competition is still given primacy throughout the Response. In the earlier sections of the document, competition is more frequently constructed as the sentence subject, and the focus of these sections is on the benefits of competition. This establishes a shorthand in the Response so that in later sections, restrictions on competition are automatically seen to also restrict the many benefits previously outlined in the document, while actions that encourage competition, also facilitate these benefits. For example, the sentence “These reforms introduced greater competition into electricity generation, gas supply arrangements and encouraged more retail competition” (The Response, 2015, p. 17) is discursively coded as a positive. Whereas in the sentence: “the Government… will consider how best to effectively capture conduct that harms competition” (The Response, 2015, p. 22), ‘harming competition’ is coded as negative. This is also assisted by the use of the verbs ‘encouraged’ and ‘harms’.

This shift from subject to object also illustrates a change in the way competition is portrayed in the Response. In the early sections, competition is a means to and end: it ‘energises enterprise’ and ‘encourages businesses’. Later, competition becomes an end in itself: reforms are assessed on the strength of whether they increase or reduce competition. The ‘translation’ process from the Harper Review to the Response is important yet again. The Response details two submissions that discuss the ‘competition principles’ of the document. The first, from CHOICE argues that “competition and consumer choice are means of improving consumer welfare rather than objectives in and of themselves”. The second, from National Seniors Australia calls for “competition policy to focus on making markets work in
the long-term interests of consumers” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 96). The omission of this section makes the transition from ‘means’ to ‘end’ far less visible.

This theme not only shows the way in which competition is naturalised and given agency within the Response, but also how some human actors and interest groups are hidden in the document. In the sentence “Secondary boycotts are harmful to trading freedom and therefore harmful to competition” (2015, p. 29) the Response discusses human action, without mentioning human actors. Secondary boycotts are not ‘things’, they are ‘practices’, but by removing the ‘practitioners’ from the sentence, the Response conceals these groups. This is particularly important, as these boycotts tend to be carried out as part of industrial action campaigns by unions. While some actors are present throughout the document (most notably, consumers and businesses), ‘union’ does not appear a single time in the response. It is clearly not prioritised as a stakeholder in the document. It is clear, then, that economic processes, particularly competition are the primary focus of the document, and are often presented not only as actors, but as ends in and of themselves.

**Conclusion**

By engaging in discourse analysis of government documentation, it is possible to look beyond the meaning intended by the authors, and explore the ways in which they attempt to shaping the readings of the audience. In this way, neither the writers nor the readers have total authority over the meaning of the text, instead, the variety of readings can be seen as a product of both the context of the readers and the power asserted by the writers. In exploring the Government Response to the Competition Policy Review, I have highlighted two discursive themes in the document that illustrate the ways in which it constructs particular representations of interests, groups and agendas. These two themes, the ‘consumer/producer’ theme and the ‘agency of economy’ theme, show how the Response prioritises some representations of groups over others, while ignoring some representations altogether. In
addition, these themes naturalise economic processes, particularly competition, affording it a \textit{a priori} value, while treating regulation cautiously, as something whose benefits must be proved. In the following chapter I will discuss my analysis and explore this ‘shaping’ through the lens of Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power.
Chapter 4: Discussing the Response through the Lens of Lukes’ Three Dimensional View

As Chapter 3 indicates, the mobilisation of neoliberal rhetoric within the Response can be understood to produce and reproduce a specific political and economic agenda: one which reduces citizens to economic, rather than social or political actors, and within that narrow economic representation reduces their roles to that of consumers, rather than wage earners. In addition, it constructs the economy as the central structure of society and the primary focus of governments, as well as treating economic processes as natural, self-regulating forces.

But can this analysis be understood as an exercise of power and the ‘shaping’ of interests in the three-dimensional sense? Or does it move too far beyond Lukes’ theory? A core argument of his approach is that “A exercises power over B... by influencing, shaping or determining his [sic] very wants” (2005, p. 27). However, I argue that it is possible to explore discursive power without focusing on its ‘impact’ on B, by focusing instead on the actions of A, and understanding these as an attempt to shape interests and agendas. After all, Lukes argues that: “the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place” (2005, p. 27). This can surely be achieved by working proactively to establish and reinforce normative interests and agendas, rather than reactively trying to suppress existing grievances.

This thesis has sought to explore the discursive processes of ‘shaping’. Lukes’ terminology simplifies a far more complicated series of processes as well as the different contexts and actors through which the actions and inactions of the powerful are interpreted. Lukes himself asks “How… is one to identify the process or mechanism of an alleged exercise of power, on the three-dimensional view?” (Lukes, 2005, p. 52). This chapter attempts to identify and explain this “mechanism”.
The chapter explores the implications of the discursive representations of actors and interests identified in Chapter 3, and relocates them in a broader history of neoliberalization so that they can be understood as attempts to ‘shape’ interests, agendas and social realities, and exercise discursive power. It then discusses the specific ‘techniques’ that have been used in the Response to illustrate the different processes involved in ‘shaping’. Finally, it returns to Lukes’ framework to discuss whether this case study can meaningfully add to a three-dimensional view of power, or whether it moves beyond such an approach. It concludes that, despite engaging in a narrower analysis than other proponents of Lukes’ theory, this case study has lent useful analysis to a core concept of the three-dimensional view. It has also reoriented this view to see on ‘everyday’ and ongoing exercises of power such as the policy production cycle, without requiring a focus on ‘impact’.

**Implications of the Response**

As the analysis in Chapter 3 shows, the Response reframes citizens in economic and transactional terms; as ‘consumers’ on the one hand and ‘businesses’ on the other. By doing so, it also attempts to frame the interests and behaviours of citizens as that of consumers and businesses. This is not a new phenomenon; it conforms to a long running trend of econocentrism in neoliberal discourse (Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler & Westmarland, 2007). Clarke *et al* discuss the representations of the “citizen-consumer” (2007, p. 1). They note that these two identities are both key figures in “the liberal social imaginary of Western capitalist democracies” (2007, p. 2). However, they are also, in many ways, contradictory figures. “The citizen is an egalitarian figure, lodged in a republican imaginary of liberty, equality and solidarity” (2007, p. 1-2). The consumer, on the other hand, “is located in economic relationships…. engaged in economic transactions in the marketplace, exchanging money for commodified goods and services” (2007, p. 2). The citizen forms bonds of egalitarianism with their peers, and has a relationship of “mutual obligation” with
government (2007, p. 2). The consumer, too, forms bonds of egalitarianism (of a sort), but these are characterised by “mutual indifference” (2007, p.2) and the equality of the market, which (ideally) does not discriminate on the basis of character or identity. Similarly, whereas the citizen is a public figure, the consumer is a private one. “The citizen is associated with the rise of a ‘public realm’ in which both citizens and public institutions are more or less insulated from private interests and passions” (2007, p. 2).

By redefining citizens as consumers, the Response also restructures these identities and relationships. It reduces the ‘mutual obligation’ to its simplest form: consumers obey the law and governments guarantee the safety of private property and the freedom of the market. This in turn makes ‘consumers’ self-reliant and self-interested. They are free to make their own choices, but responsible for the results. In addition, the ‘public figure’ of the citizen disappears, and is replaced by the previously ‘private figure’ of the consumer. The ‘public realm’ is therefore populated by self-interested figures with an economic focus who interact by means of exchange. Their interest – the public interest – becomes economic.

Social and political issues that cannot be rendered economically also disappear from this representation of society, reflecting Battin’s assertion from Chapter 2, that: “there was no longer any fundamental differences between the major parties…. Elections in the future would be fought over who had claim to be the better managers” (Battin, 1992, p. 12). Brown (2015) discusses this in a US context through an exploration of Barack Obama’s 2012 State of the Union address. She states that:

While Obama called for protecting Medicare; progressive tax reform; increasing government investment in science and technology research, clean energy, home ownership, and education; immigration reform; fighting sex discrimination and domestic violence; and raising the minimum wage, each of these issues was framed in terms of its contribution to economic growth or American competitiveness.
These issues that are on the surface, questions of morality, equality and sustainability, only become politically ‘valuable’ when they can be quantified economically. In addition, Brown’s argument echoes Kolsen’s (1996) evaluation of the Hilmer Report, discussed in Chapter 2, notably its demand for quantitative evaluations of social policies, whose outcomes rely largely on qualitative expression.

By reframing these issues as economic, rather than social, environmental or moral, it also opens them up to economic critique. Policies or actions that address these issues can be dismissed if they are not ‘affordable’ or ‘economically sound’, while those that support them are presented as ‘naïve’ ‘idealistic’ or ‘poor economic managers’ (Yu, 2014). This ‘sanitises’ the discussion around these issues to maintain a relatively ‘safe’ agenda, which can be understood as an exercise in two-dimensional power, and as Lukes notes, “power in its more overt one- and two-dimensional forms has all kinds of three-dimensional effects” (2005, p. 121-122). In turn, those who have a reputation for economic success are afforded authority and legitimacy when discussing non-economic issues. The election of US President Donald Trump is perhaps the clearest example of the real impact that this discursive shift can have (Kellner, 2016).

Even within this econocentric representation of the public, some roles remain less visible than others. While ‘consumers’ and ‘businesses’ enjoy first billing, ‘employees’, ‘staff’, ‘wage earners’ and ‘labour’, are relatively absent from the document. ‘Employees’ and ‘staff’ each appear once, ‘labour’ appears twice and neither ‘wage’ nor ‘earner’ is present in the Response. In the context of competition and repeated references to ‘efficiency’, this omission is potentially significant in its implications. As Shaikh (2016) notes, while competition can have the (in this case, desired) effect of lowering the prices of goods and services, improving the final product or increasing efficiency throughout the process, there is
also a likely cost to workers. He argues that “Costs can be lowered by cutting wages and increasing the length or intensity of the working day, or at least by reducing wage growth relative to that of productivity” (p. 14). The apparent trade-off for this is more and better products and services, which further entrenches the role of individuals as consumers first and foremost, and employees second (if at all). Given the lack of attention paid to wage earners in the Response, it is clear too that their interests are not represented. In fact, one of the Harper Review’s recommendations, which receives full support in the Response, advises removing regulation on retail trading hours. While the Response encourages state and territory governments (whose jurisdiction this falls under) to consider whether these regulations can be removed “without imposing undue pressure on retailers to remain open when it is uneconomical to do so” (2015, p. 12), there is no mention, in either the Response, or the excerpt from the Harper Review, of how this may affect wage earners, or how to ensure penalty rates and existing work hours remain in place. As the Fair Work Commission’s recent proposal to reduce Sunday and public holiday rates shows, this is an area in which wage earners are particularly vulnerable, and one in which their interests receive little representation (Jericho, 2017).

These representations often appear in the Response in service of greater ‘choice’ for consumers. The section on human services makes this apparent, by stating that “User choice should be placed at the heart of service delivery” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 36; The Response, 2015, p. 4). As noted previously, Clarke et al (2007) highlight the fact that ‘citizens’ have a ‘mutual obligation’ with governments. But this focus on choice, particularly in the realm of government provisioned services, undermines the Government’s obligation to its citizens. By placing ‘user choice’ ‘at the heart of service delivery’, the Government also gives citizens the responsibility of choosing their services. After all, if a wide choice of
services and providers exists and a user is still unhappy with their service, then surely it is up to the user to choose a better service.

This is compounded by the representation of government as inherently less efficient than private providers. ‘Recommendation 2’ also states that: “Governments commissioning human services should do so carefully, with a clear focus on outcomes” (the Response, 2015, p. 4; the Harper Review, 2015, p. 36). In a sense, this statement says very little: there is no further indicator of how outcomes should be identified or measured, and so as a sentence it functions as little more than a truism. However, the use of rhetoric in the statement speaks volumes. First, it implies that human services are at the outer limit of what governments are capable of delivering, and so any attempt should be undertaken with caution. Second, it implies that most government commissioned human services are flawed, establishing a precedent that justifies the warning. Third, it suggests that human services are often delivered frivolously, or without a ‘clear focus on outcomes’. This conforms more broadly to neoliberal attitudes towards human services, and particularly healthcare. Smith and Lipsky highlight the appeal of this argument: “Which would you choose to safeguard your health: a federal government bureaucracy, or yourself?” (Herzlinger, 1991, p. 81 cited by Smith & Lipsky, 1992, p. 235).

The discourse of “responsibilisation” is prevalent in neoliberal policy (Stonehouse, et al, 2015, p. 295), and attempts to erase government culpability over social issues. Stonehouse et al highlight this in the context of housing risk and homelessness in Victoria. They argue that, by constructing homelessness as an issue of personal responsibility, attention is moved away from the highly inflated housing market and funding cuts to public housing (2015). These discourses serve to protect the existing structures of neoliberalism.
Techniques of ‘Shaping’

It is clear that the Response attempts to promote particular representations of interests, groups and agendas, and in doing so reinforce an image of neoliberalism that compliments the goals of the Government. However, the methods by which these representations are created and perpetuated should not be overlooked. This ‘shaping’ represents a key concept in Lukes’ theory of power, and can involve many complex discursive processes, some of which can be seen in the Response.

As previously discussed, the Response is a translational document: it interprets the recommendations of the Harper Review and repurposes them into policy forecasts. While the Response includes many direct excerpts from the Harper Review, there are other sections that are ‘filtered’, or removed altogether. This colours the way in which the Response is read, and turns many overt arguments or statements into less visible assumptions, which in turn makes them seem natural, or more difficult to scrutinise. As discussed in Chapter 3, this process can be seen in the way the two documents represent ‘competition’. Throughout both documents, competition is given primacy and is treated as beneficial to other aspects of society, particularly consumers. The assertion in the Response that “Competition is one of the surest ways to lift long-term productivity growth” (The Response 2015, p. 1) is a clear example of this. However, the inclusion of submissions from community groups, industry groups and peak bodies in the Harper Review indicates the need to see competition as a means to an end, that is only beneficial if it in turn improves “consumer welfare” (The Harper Review, 2015, p. 96). By omitting this section, the Response suppresses these qualifying views of competition, and makes its asserted benefits seem automatic.

In referring to citizens as consumers, the Response redefines these terms, and redefines the interactions and interests that they might have. The ‘consumer’ goes from being a private figure, to replacing the ‘citizen’ as a public figure. And while citizens obviously
have many interests and concerns beyond the procurement of goods and services, this redefinition makes them invisible, or else serves to also redefine them as economic interests. Referring to individual ‘consumers’ and the collective ‘public’ or ‘community’, reinforces this redefinition by treating ‘the community’ as a community of consumers.

The omission of other groups and identities also contributes to this redefinition. Unlike the representations that are ‘filtered’ from the Harper Review to the Response, these groups are absent from both documents, and therefore absent from this discourse more generally. Wage earners, unions, families, seniors, children, teachers and numerous other groups are all affected by competition policy changes, but by omitting these groups or redefining them as consumers, their specific interests and concerns are made invisible in the discourse.

By discussing issues like human service provision in economic terms, and prioritising ‘choice’ in these discussions, the Response also recontextualises these issue areas. The provision of human services is, ostensibly, a social issue. It is affected by questions of equality, access, dignity and quality. The inclusion of this area within a document addressing competition policy, moves this issue from the social sphere to the economic sphere. In doing so, it exposes the issue to economic scrutiny and authority, and treats the above concerns as byproducts of ‘choice’ and ‘innovation’, if mentioning them at all.

This confers responsibility of service choice from government to the individual, and in doing so revalues self-interest as a positive attribute. Independence, personal responsibility and even shrewdness in business are treated as more desirable traits than interdependence, solidarity and compassion. The latter set become the traits of the naïve and idealistic.

As Van Dijk (1993) notes, the representation of certain interests is a key aspect of discursive power. While the Response is not primarily intended to be a publicly read document, it nonetheless translates the significantly longer Harper Review into a ‘sharper’,
more readable document that more accurately forecasts government policy intentions. This translation comes in the form of many smaller processes that each serve to ‘shape’ the issues in the document. Though it may not have a large, direct impact on public or media discourses, its representation of different interests indicates the way in which these interests are understood and perceived by the authors, and how these authors attempt to produce or highlight these interests in its audience. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Battin (1992) and Whitwell (1990) argue that a goal of neoliberalism is to represent the economy as the general interest, while representing regulation or government intervention as the manifestation of ‘vested interests’. This serves to benefit those who are economically powerful, while impacting those who are not.

**Applying Lukes’ Framework**

As this discussion has begun to suggest, this case study does not clearly conform to Lukes’ analytical framework. Rather than identifying a case of compliance and exploring the mechanisms of power involved to attempt to justify it as power in its third dimension, I have engaged in a close exploration of discourse in a single document, that represents a ‘moment’ within the process of policy development. While the Response produces a discursive representation of neoliberalism (albeit one that is modified by other agendas and policy priorities) it is unlikely that it was written with the goal of directly influencing public opinion, compared to, say, a campaign advertisement, speech, or national press club address. Nonetheless, it was written deliberately to express and further an agenda, and it was written to be read, to convince readers of this agenda whether they are members of the public, the media, industry, Government or any other organisation. If “A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (Lukes, 2005, p. 27), then it is crucial to understand what “influencing, shaping or determining” involves. I argue that this is not an
‘action’ or even an ‘inaction’, but a complex series of choices – both to act and not to act, to include and to omit – which is then interpreted, reframed and responded to by numerous other actors before producing an ‘effect’ in B. The Response offers one example of what this ‘shaping’ can look like at its inception; it is an attempt to ‘shape’.

But does this ‘shaping’ constitute three-dimensional power? At the time of writing this thesis, the Response is still a relatively recent document. While it has begun to affect policy debates and broader government discourse such as speeches and press releases (Hutchens, 2016), it is still too early to hope to identify any meaningful impact on voter or community ‘interests’. This also means that the first test of Lukes’ theory, the “relevant counterfactual” (p. 44), does not apply. As Lukes notes, in order to assert that A has exercised power over B, eliciting from B some action or opinion that favours A, we must be able to describe a plausible situation in which, had A not exercised power over B, B would have not acted (or held that opinion), or acted differently. Because this case study is focused on the actions of A, and not the actions of B, there is no relevant counterfactual to justify.

However, the second test of Lukes’ theory remains valid. It asks, “How… is one to identify the process or mechanism of an alleged exercise of power, on the three-dimensional view?” (Lukes, 2005, p. 52). In order to answer this, it is important first to address the issue of ‘interests’ in the Response, as this plays a key role in Lukes’ theory of power, and in the power of discourse as it is conceptualised elsewhere (Van Dijk, 1993, Fairclough, 2013). As my analysis has shown, the Response articulates a relatively narrow set of interests. While it makes frequent reference to ‘the public interest’ and the interests of ‘the community as a whole’, it includes no metric for judging what these interests may be, stating only that they should be judged “on a case by case basis” (the Response, 2015, p. 8). The public interests that are clearly articulated are economic ones, namely the interests of consumers and business. For consumers, the interests described in the Response are lower priced goods and
services, more choice, and better quality service delivery. For business, the interests are fairer markets and less regulation. The Response also implies the interests of the Government. These seem to include a retention of its managerial role in the economy, and a reduction in its role as a commissioner of human services.

Given the absence of so many interests in the Response, it may be useful to think about this lack of representation as a form of inaction on the part of the Government. In other words, the Government has failed to represent (and possibly conceive of) interests more broadly in the Response, and in doing so, has silenced these interests. In this sense, the mechanism of power is, at least in part, inaction. As Lukes notes in his revisionary chapters (2005), interests are often manifold and contradictory, and so by representing the interest of some groups but not others, (or even some of a group’s interests, but not others of that same group’s interests) the Response can be understood as an attempt to influence its audience, whether consciously or unconsciously, to sacrifice some interests in favour of others.

However, this approach is still focused on ‘impact’. In order to meaningfully analyse the findings of my case study, it is important to move past this, but the question remains whether this can be done while remaining faithful to the themes of Lukes’ theory. While Lukes’ articulates his theory by focusing on the impact of power, that is, the domination of B, his theory can be used to analyse scenarios in which B has not been identified, or impacted, and that this analysis can still be empirical. If we consider the order of operations in Lukes’ theory as: A attempts to affect B, this affecting is successful, B complies to, and reproduces the conditions of A’s domination, then Lukes’ focus can be seen to be on the successful affecting of B, and the complicit reproduction of these conditions by B. However, it should be possible to focus on the initial attempt of A, or even A’s earliest articulations of this attempt, as a locus of power. In this scenario then, the process of domination begins with A constructing a version of B’s interests, that is at the same time capable of receiving support
from $B$, but covertly compromising some aspect of $B$’s other interests, and supporting $A$’s interests. In the context of the Response, this conceptualisation can be interpreted in a number of ways.

Let us observe the difference between the representations of wage earners’ and consumers’ interests. The Response repeatedly refers to better choice, cheaper and better goods and services, and more freedom to change between providers of human services. These are likely to be in the interests of both consumers and wage earners. However, wage earners are likely to also be interested in job security, a strong social safety net, high wages and fair work: interests which are all but omitted from the Response. Revisiting Shaikh’s (2016) observation about the way in which competition marginalises wage earners suggests that there is some degree of mutual exclusivity between these interests, particularly if the former set is to be reached through heightened competition. This is complicated by the fact that, wage earners need to buy food, homes and services: they are consumers. In addition, most consumers are employed and would therefore benefit from higher wages and greater job security. This means that under a more competitive economic system, these groups are likely forced to choose between these different interests. Certainly, the increase in casualisation under economic rationalist governments in the 1990s and 2000s had this result (Cahill, 2007). By representing only one of these two sets of interests, the Response telegraphs the Government’s preference. As a right-wing party, the coalition Government is likely to benefit less from a population that identifies increasingly as wage earners and workers, than it will from a population increasingly concerned with cheaper goods and services. The prioritisation of consumers’ interests over wage earners’ interests can be seen therefore as an attempt to inculcate this priority in its audience, and meaningfully affect economic discourses, and discourses of competition, to reflect this prioritisation and produce this result.
Regardless of whether or not this ‘proves’ that the Government exerts, (or attempts to exert) three-dimensional power through the Response, this analysis has clearly shown that the discourse of the document foregrounds specific representations of groups, interests, issues and agendas while backgrounding others. By focusing on the ‘everyday’ processes of governance, the more covert assumptions and assertions of government discourse can be explored and understood. This understanding is crucial to any study of discursive power, particularly one that focuses on the ‘shaping’ of interests, as Lukes’ does.

**Conclusion**

Lukes’ theoretical framework, while receiving useful additions from other works – notably Gaventa’s ‘powercube’ project and its expansion by Hathaway (2016) – remains somewhat limited in the relationships it can observe. Its focus on the impact of power, while providing an accessible site for empirical observation, relies on a retrospective analysis of events that have either already happened, or that are continuous. It therefore does not make the most of its temporal nature that has the capacity to analyse processes of power, both at the broad, historical level, and at the specific level of textual ‘moments’ in this history. The policy production process is one such history that this approach should be able to study. After all, it is crucial for a theory of power to understand the ‘everyday’ discursive power of policy.

Similarly, Lukes’ use of the terms ‘influencing’ ‘shaping’ and ‘determining’ relies on common assumptions about what these words mean, and therefore conceals the complexities of these terms. Because my case study of discourse in the Government’s Response to the Competition Policy Review (2015) focuses on this ‘influencing’, ‘shaping’, and ‘determining’ – on the actions and inactions of A rather than the responses and attitudes of B – I have had to look beyond the framework presented by Lukes, Gaventa and Hathaway. Despite this, I argue that the framework can be expanded, and the focus shifted, without compromising the core theoretical principles upon which it is based. This ‘shaping’ can be
understood as numerous discursive processes. Among them are the ‘filtering’ and ‘translating’ of language from one text to another, the ‘redefinition’ of terms and ‘recontextualisation’ of actors and structures, and the ‘revaluation’ of concepts and ideas. This is by no means an exhaustive list: the processes by which discourses and ideas can construct social realities requires more investigation, but this work provides an important addition to the task.

By focusing on the conceptualisation of interests by actors who may or may not attempt to dominate, manipulate or influence others, it is possible to preemptively assess the nature of future exertions of power, and better understand the black box of ‘shaping’. In the case of the Response, I argue that the selective representation of public interests, both collective and individual, can be understood as operating within the framework of Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power. They attempt to construct the agenda of the authors as that of the ‘public’, while presenting contentious concepts as self-evident. While this may or may not meet Lukes’ requirements for an exercise of three-dimensional power, it is clear that the Response nonetheless seeks to influence the discursive representation of actors and interests in society.
Conclusion

Lukes’ three-dimensional theory of power includes a temporality that makes it effective in exploring social and political processes as sites of domination and compliance. However, he only briefly alludes to the complexities of ‘influencing’, ‘shaping’ and ‘determining’ the wants, values and beliefs of the powerless, instead relying on common conceptions of what these terms describe. By engaging with the discourse of policy documentation, I argue that it is possible to understand how powerful actors attempt to shape the beliefs of others through specific representations of different interests, issues and groups.

The Government Response to the Competition Policy Review refines and repurposes the content of the Australian Competition Policy Review in order to portray the public as either consumers or businesses, while also foregrounding economic issues at the expense of other issues, and treating economies and markets as self-regulating. This echoes a longer history of neoliberal discourse in Australia, that has seen Government take a more managerial and supervisory role in the economy and the provision of social services, where it once actively regulated the economy and invested widely in the welfare state. These changes have often been justified through a focus on competition, which proponents argue is responsible for introducing lower cost, higher quality goods and services, and a wider choice of providers.

This thesis usefully explores the way in which this discourse can be understood as an attempt to exert power in its third dimension. In addition, by focusing on the attempt of power, rather that its impact, it expands the parameters of Lukes’ framework and allows it to explore prospective, as well as retrospective, cases of three-dimensional power. While it does not completely conform to Lukes’ framework as it has been used in his work and the work of others, it is nonetheless makes a valuable addition to the three-dimensional view by exploring
the ‘black box’ of ‘shaping’, and demonstrating the processual analytical capacity of his approach.

The close textual analysis of this study can meaningfully add to both Lukes’ ‘three-dimensional’ view of power, and Hathaway’s ‘regime evolution’ approach to power. Both of these theories take broad approaches to power and therefore risk overlooking the ‘everyday’ processes through which power can be attempted and exercised. Further work could usefully expand my thesis by engaging in close analyses of other documents in this same policy network, such as the Harper Review itself, or any future documents that stem from the Response.

This work also highlights the importance of examining the ‘everyday’ processes of government. Other analyses interested in the articulation of neoliberal discourse in Australian government documentation could look at specific policy areas such as education, healthcare or immigration to explore how these issue areas are permeated by the concepts found in this thesis.

The discursive focus of this work also highlights the value of bringing in aspects of other power theories in order to compliment Lukes’ approach. While my work includes a Foucauldian influence in its use of discourse as a site of power, closer attention to Foucault’s ‘productive’ approach to power may help to move beyond the limited concept of ‘power over’ in the three-dimensional view. Lukes’ own theory expands on Gramscian concepts of ‘hegemony’, so comparative analyses of other theories could usefully highlight the strengths and weaknesses of his approach and expand on the discussions of temporality and ‘shaping’ in this work.

This thesis has added to Lukes’ theory by deepening the conception of ‘shaping’ that underpins the three-dimensional view. It has also demonstrated the capacity of this view to
meaningfully analyse power as a process that is reflected both in longer histories of
discourses, ideas, actions and inactions, and in specific ‘moments’ of text.
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