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Tensions, Strategies, and Expectations: Neoliberalism and Community Arts Agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand



A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology
at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand

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2018

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the opportunity and the privilege to complete this thesis.

Thank you to; my supervisor Dr Warwick Tie, to Dr Trudie Cain, my family and friends, and the community arts organisation who were my case study.

A special thank you to my son Blake who has tread this journey with me one foot at a time.

You have all been part of this adventure. Your insights and collaboration have been invaluable to this project.

I hope that the work presented here does justice to the contributions you have all made.

Abstract

This research explores the relationship between neoliberalism, political artistic practice (artistic formalism), and organisational form. It identifies the emergence of a new kind of organisational form as being significant for the mediation of neoliberal governance and political art: the community-based cultural organisation (Aimers, 2005). A case study is presented of this new form of art agency. That case study builds through a research design involving the thematic analysis of interviews undertaken of key personnel in such an agency. The findings of that case study suggest that neoliberal policy has changed how the agency organises itself to meet its goals and the goals outlined in the sector policy. The implications of those findings include; increased awareness about the new arts agency and the socio-politico-economic position they occupy; a call for sector participants seeking change to consider the role of form in how they organise; and, for there to be greater consideration of how the arts and culture sector is organised through policy in light of the impact of neoliberalism.

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Chapter One: Introduction

On a grey wall in London, a black and white graffiti image of a young girl appears. Her arm is stretched up in the direction of the end of a piece of string. At the other end of the string, floating up towards the sky is a red heart-shaped balloon. No text accompanies the image and the artist gives no explanation for its appearance. The image could represent multiple stories; maybe it captures lost dreams where the balloon is floating away or, it is potentially an innocent child letting her balloon go symbolic of releasing love into the world. 'Girl with Balloon' was created by the stencil graffiti artist Banksy. Banksy has created images in public spaces worldwide as a means to speak publicly about contemporary political events. Banksy believes that art can speak. This interpretation of their work can be derived from the anti-war, anti-establishment rhetoric of the Banksy images.

Banksy's works exemplify a tension between creative processes and the commodification of artistic output. Through the medium of their artistic creations and a few interviews, Banksy has affirmed their personal political stance. However, the reproduction of Banksy's pieces in posters and the like (the commodification of their work) suggests that the economic system has the ability to absorb any criticism made of itself through those images. In other words, the art is co-opted by the very thing it tries to push against.

The hope that art might spark political transformation lies deep within radical left-wing thought. One challenge for this body of thought is to understand how social transformation occurs, a process that can be non-linear and, as such, difficult to articulate. A number of radical-left authors have analysed the prospects of working with artistic form, as compared to content, as a source of socio-political transformative power. Bertolt Brecht, for example, in his theory of *Epic Theatre*, did this in a way that pushed the boundaries between actors

and audience by employing the physical architecture of the theatre as a forum for conveying political ideas (Squires, 2014). Brechts' methods were driven by collaborative working practices; such that theatre evolves as a collective experiment. Walter Benjamin (1935), as another radical-left author, argued that the analysis of art in the context of the prevailing mode of production of art develops new political roles for the artistic object. He focused on the mass production of artistic images, where the ability to reproduce at will illustrates the capitalist market commodifying culture for its own purposes; namely for the survival of capitalist markets where mass consumption is a vessel for the making of financial profit.

Along with the (now) long-standing understanding that transformative power can lie with the form(s) taken by artistic objects, *with how creative pursuits are now organised*, the arena of local arts agencies becomes a focus for understanding how transformative power might presently be understood and employed.

Jenny Aimers (2005) indicates, in this regard, that a new kind of arts organisation has emerged under neoliberalism. Aimers calls these organisations community-based cultural organisations. These community art agencies combine two methods for engaging in creative pursuits; the use value of creative processes, and the exchange value of the product post-production. In doing so, they have developed "organisational goals that place equal emphasis on process and product" (p.1). This is part of a response to the "commodity/public good split in cultural policy" (p.1). Aimers' work shows that recent policy has had a direct impact on how community art agencies organise themselves to achieve their goals.

This form of organisation reflects the tension between the non-commodifiable domain of creative processes and the commodifiable nature of artistic objects. Most community arts organisations rely on funding to survive but they are also expected to be economically viable

entities in order to receive this funding. In this regard, they are left straddling a gap between the idea of being economically viable members of 'the creative industries' (CI) and of providing something like a social service warranting public subsidies. Creative industries focus on the commercial production of cultural goods and services through the logic of exchange value whereas, alternatively, the community arts enable people to engage in creative processes and to thereby experience the use value of art. In other words, CI is organised around the development of artistic product (commodities), and community arts organisations emphasize the social benefits of artistic processes. The capitalist character of the neoliberal project means that the new community arts organisations face an impossible task of bridging the incommensurability between the use value of artistic process and the dynamics of exchange value associated with commodity production.

Understanding of this new form of organisation enables insights to be developed into the restructuring of art under neoliberalism. Notwithstanding the licence with which the logic of neoliberalism has reformed the art world (as a nest of 'creative industries') neoliberalism has a tendency towards crisis. That tendency becomes visible through the optic provided by Marxist political economy. It demonstrates points of disconnection amidst the relations by which the social is seemingly knitted between the work of government administration, capitalist economics, and democratic politics.

This tendency towards crisis affects the roles played by this new kind of community arts organisation in the social facilitation of creative pursuits. That tendency turns upon the mythological and utopian dimensions of the ideology. In utopian terms, neoliberalism elevates the capitalist market, based on the assumption that economic "freedom" can and will solve economic and social issues. This produces an expectation that, in their attention to the social use value of artistic processes, community arts agencies will manage themselves

in ways that align with the market-based logic of exchange value. In mythological terms, neoliberalism expects that economic solutions can resolve social issues and that these organisations can meet the goals set for them by neoliberalism, and their own goals, irrespective of the contradictions and crises inherent to neoliberalism.

The contradictions of neoliberalism and its tendencies towards crisis point to spaces where hope can develop (Harvey, 2014). These spaces are potential places where other ways to organise society might be found.

The contradictions of neoliberal political economy and associated tendencies toward crises explored in relation to a local community arts organisation display the characteristics of ‘new organisational forms’ as described by Aimers. Specifically, the case study identifies the existence of a set of strategies used by the agency to negotiate tensions induced by the neoliberal context in which it functions. Those tensions form in relation to the following: geographies of engagement; structure and organisation; process and product; use value and exchange value; the role of empty signifiers.

A set of questions is asked of the agency in relation to these tensions:

- What strategies does the arts organisation employ to manage tensions in the structure of its operation, and what drives these strategies?
- What implications follow for the infrastructural, discursive, and affective elements of the community arts organisation from the strategies it employs to manage tensions, in conjunction with its status as a community art organisation?
- How does this relate to the wider political economy?
- And, could insights from the case study potentially be useful for other organisations with similar experiences?

Chapter Two critically lays the foundations for this inquiry. It examines the impact of neoliberalism. More specifically, it creates a framework for understanding the contradictions of the project and the environment neoliberalism has fostered for those organisations required to organise themselves in terms of its administrative logics. This chapter provides insight into how tensions arise when organisations hold values that conflict with the external agencies from which legitimacy and funding are derived. The literature reviewed suggests that tensions will become problematic when organisations are beholden to external agencies through bureaucratic processes that limit organisations' abilities to achieve goals formulated in their own terms.

Chapter Three explores the historical development of political artistic practice in twentieth-century European art, prior to the hegemonic rise of neoliberalism. It provides a context in which to understand the counterhegemonic political aspirations of the new community art agencies. This development comes with the tradition of reflective artistic practice associated with the works of friends/associates Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodore Adorno. They each argued, in different ways, that art has a value that cannot be reduced to administrative or economic imperatives (its 'aura') and that this element enables art to raise politically unpopular issues and debates. Art then, has the potential to hold open space for new social and political narratives to form and to ignite change. Of analytic significance for this thesis, the works of Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno highlight a productive tension between form and content and of the political uses to which artistic form, in particular, can be put. As a school of aesthetic political analysis, this came to be known as Aesthetic Formalism (Audi, 1995).

Chapter Four analyses contemporary government policy in Aotearoa New Zealand's arts and culture sector and identifies problems for the field of community art that arise in

conjunction with the neoliberal project, and for those trying to achieve its goals. The policy promotes the dispersal and devolution of responsibilities for the coordination of arts-related activities, which means the field comes to be governed by a disconnected set of agencies.

These agencies include the following: the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH); CreativeNZ; Auckland Council (AC); and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). These organisations are responsible for making sure the economic goals envisaged for the sector are met, and for the regulation of the industry (including the field of community art).

Discussion identifies the implications of that dispersal and devolution upon those agencies' regulatory impacts upon the sector, including the economic outcomes, with particular attention to the spaces occupied by the new arts agencies.

The fifth chapter outlines the research design by which this set of analytic parameters will be applied to the case study of a specific exemplar of these new community arts agencies.

The tradition of co-design informs the approach used in that case study.

Chapter Six introduces the subject of the case study, it being a multi-disciplinary community arts organisation in a gentrified suburb of a New Zealand city. This specific suburb has a strong history of community engagement, politics, and art, which resonates with the organisation. The organisation's motto conveys the idea that creative processes take precedence over the production of artistic objects. This contrasts with the precedence given to the logic of market-exchange within neoliberalism, and with problems associated with the tendency towards the commodification of the social in general.

Chapter Seven is a discussion of the strategies, and their implications, which emerged from the themes identified in the case study data. The strategies are discussed in terms of their infrastructural, discursive and affective forms. This is done in relation to the context in

which the agency operates; the arts and cultural sector and neoliberal policy. The implication of the agency's strategy sees it trying to bridge gaps in sector policy through using form as means to organise itself whilst trying to achieve its goals and the goals of its stakeholders.

The final chapter brings together the themes of neoliberalism, the political activism of aesthetic formalism, the Aotearoa New Zealand arts and culture, with the findings of the case study. Coming to the fore in that discussion are the tendencies towards crisis across international, national, and local scales, associated with the neoliberal project, their impact upon the domestic arts sector, and the implications of those impacts for the new community arts agencies now functioning in that field.

At the level of governance, the systems and ideologies that govern our everyday lives are forms of social, political, and economic organisation. Central to the work of this thesis is organisation. In contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, capitalism, neoliberalism, and democracy play a key role in socio-politico-economic organisation. Of these three, neoliberalism is by far the youngest. In the wider scope of historical change neoliberalism appeared almost overnight, from "several epicentres, revolutionary impulses seemingly spread and reverberated to remake the world around us in a totally different image" (Harvey, 2005). Given that neoliberal policy has come to play a defining role in how Aotearoa New Zealand is organised, an exploration of its development is required to understand how neoliberalism emerged. Pivotal to the research in the following chapter is the socio-historical narrative explaining the emergence of neoliberal administration of the social in capitalist terms.

Chapter Two: Neoliberalism

This chapter defines neoliberalism and its historical context and explores the impact neoliberalism has had on the organisation of the social in general. This work is done by examining contemporary sociological literature from the political Left about neoliberalism as an ideology and as a political project. Mapping the contemporary state of knowledge regarding neoliberalism reveals how neoliberalism operates, its patterns, and points of tension. Consideration of these matters occurs through the following: an exploration of the international context in which neoliberalism has emerged; and the operation of neoliberalism as a field of myths that normalises ideas and political practices that recode social relations in capitalist terms. The implications of neoliberalism are then demonstrated across the sectors of education, health, social welfare, and the meaning of citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Toward a Definition of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism proves difficult to define. In part, the definitional challenges come from the variation of the phenomenon across places and through time. A brief outline of neoliberalism's historical context will highlight these matters.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey (2005) discusses the impact that the implementation of neoliberalism has had, and the major events that have occurred as a direct result. Whilst this work is predominantly located in the United States of America, Harvey discusses events from around the globe to demonstrate the issue of spatial scale, and to draw attention to neoliberalism's uneven geographical development. He exposes an inextricable relationship between neoliberalism as a political project and capitalism as an

economic system that has developed in the contemporary West. Harvey's work cements the argument that neoliberalism is the dominant modality by which the West now operates.

The pairing of neoliberalism and capitalism changes the roles of the citizen, the corporation, and the government. The citizen becomes the consumer whose purpose is to accumulate capital and purchase commodities. The corporation becomes the dominant player through whose actions the commodification of objects becomes normalised, enabling the trade of an increasing range of goods and services for profit and capital gain. Lastly, the state is responsible for ensuring the success of corporations, whose operation is facilitated by the creation of business-friendly policy and privatisation. Harvey (2005) is critical of this global economic and political system, and of the instability and unsustainability of a system fraught with contradictions on a finite planet.

A typical account of neoliberalism is that it emerged in the first half of the 20th century when nations and people were broken and devastated by disasters of war, famine, and disease. In the 1930s, after the 1929 stock market crash and the great depression, neoliberalism emerged, first, as an intellectual movement. The stock market crash and the great depression had a global impact and have been attributed to a crisis of overproduction (Hickell, 2012). This is a concept drawn upon in Marxist theory where the crisis is the overproduction of commodities in a measure unequal to capital investment in industry (Easterling, 2003; Marxists.org, 2017). The second half of the 20th century witnessed attempts to recover and rebuild from this destruction. In the aftermath of World War II, the victorious Western nation-states continued to reject communism and socialism, along with fascism, turning instead to a market-oriented capitalism for economic growth. To rebuild morale, governments pushed consumerism and expanded the welfare state and contributed to the development of human rights and aid organisations.

However, these actions alone were insufficient, and a new form of economics and politics were desired. Post-WWII through to the 1970s saw Western industrialised nations employ Keynesian economics in the pursuit of growth (Mudge, 2008). Keynesian economics is a macroeconomic theory characterised by fiscal policy to regulate and reduce the scale of business, and monetarism to control the supply of money and stabilise the economy (Jahan, Saber, Mahmud, & Papageorgiou, 2014). Several factors, including the 1973 and 1979 oil crises (Prasad, 2006; Small, 2009), increasing rates of unemployment and disappointing gross national product rates across the 'developed' economies (Nobbs, 2014) prompted the shift away from Keynesian economics.

Difficulties associated with the pursuit of large-scale growth came to be defined, within the neoliberal tradition, as related problems of finite money supply and uneven economic development across the globe. Fiat money, then digital currency, was seen to enable infinite growth in the banking and finance sectors. People with monetary wealth could easily move large monetary sums and accrue high interest and compound growth without any labour. Those without money, however, accumulated debt trying to be commodity consumers.

Whilst this was occurring, neoliberalism in political terms was gaining traction amongst economists, and first emerged in practice as a political project through military violence, in the late 1970s in South America. Western governments adopted neoliberalism in the 1980s; notably the Fourth Labour government of Aotearoa New Zealand, along with Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher, becoming 'the Washington Consensus' in the 1990s (Chomsky, 1999; Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Humpage, 2015; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Scholte, 2015). Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has grown to become the dominant ideology shaping today's world (Harvey, 2005; Hickell, 2012; Peck & Tickell, 2002). The employment

of neoliberalism has meant that states are to favour privatisation, fiscal austerity, reduced government spending, market deregulation, free markets, free trade, and the promotion of private (corporate) sector involvement. These policy settings seemingly offered solutions to the economic problems associated with social democratic governance under capitalism.

Capitalism

Capitalism, itself, predates neoliberalism, emerging during the enclosure movement in Britain between 1450-1800 (Wood, 2002). It is a “system in which goods and services, down to the most basic necessities of life, are produced for profitable exchange, where even human labour-power is a commodity for sale in the market, and where all economic actors are dependent on the market” (Wood, 2002, p.2). Private individuals or corporations own, administer, and invest in, the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth, which sits outside of state-owned means of wealth. Marx (2013, ed.) indicates that capitalism works through primitive accumulation, where the accumulation of capital originates from the privatisation of the means of production, the expropriation of productive land (Newmann, 2006, p.233), and that the crises endemic to capitalism are caused by levels of production that cannot be matched by consumption (overproduction).

This trajectory results in destructive outcomes of which only hindsight can afford us the ability to see the contradictions from which crises continually emerge (Harvey, 2015). A state of continually emerging crises in the absence of visible alternatives produces images, at least, of deep and systemic instability. Such imagery changes how understanding forms about the world, so as to “shake our mental conceptions of the world and of our place in it to the very core” (ibid, p. ix-x). This situation, caused by capitalism’s drive for accumulation, neoliberalism’s insistence on market elevation, and the tendency towards crisis, are the connecting key principles that entwine neoliberalism and capitalism.

Contradictions

Harvey (2015) identifies a set of seventeen contradictions that are intrinsic to capital, several of which are important to the development of neoliberalism. He categorises these contradictions into three interlocking sets (p.89). The first seven are foundational contradictions which “capital simply could not function without” (ibid, p.14), that are “constant features of capital in any place and time” (ibid, p.90). The contradictions are states of irreconcilable tension between: use value and exchange value; the social value of labour and its representation by money; private property and the capitalist state; private appropriation and common wealth; capital and labour; capital as process or ‘thing’; and the contradictory unity of production and realisation. Foundational contradictions are so intertwined with one another that it is not possible to remove or change any of them without removing or changing them all.

There are four foundational contradictions pertinent to neoliberalism. The first concerns the tension between use value and exchange value because it highlights “the fundamental inequality between commodities (use value) that decay and a money (exchange value) form that does not” (Harvey, 2015, p.35). In neoliberalism, the use value of a commodity is only recognised for the contribution it can make to the economy. Second, the social value of labour and its representation by money indicates that the social value of labour through which economic value is produced is, itself, represented by its value in the market. This is important for understanding how neoliberalism determines the value of organisations that provide services considered as a social good. The third pertinent contradiction within neoliberalism is that which exists between capital and labour. It is in this contradiction that the exploitative relationship between labour and capital is represented through the notion that a relationship of ‘fairness’ exists regarding the market value of labour. It is taken for

granted that workers are paid a monetary value equal to the labour involved with their employment whilst still generating “the surplus value [profit] that capital needs to survive” (ibid, p.63). Lastly, the contradictory unity of production and realisation consists of two moments: “first production in the labour process and, second, realisation in the market” (ibid, 79). This is a contradiction because what is realised in the market is not necessarily representative of the cost of production. The cost of production relative to the market price fluctuates depending on the rate at which commodities need to be produced in order for profit to be possible.

The second category consists of eight ‘moving’ contradictions. They are “interactive and dynamic... [a place where] multiple alternative political projects are to be found” (Harvey, 2015, p.219). Harvey identifies this category of ‘moving contradictions’ as generating potentially fruitful spaces of hope, for anti-capitalist politics to construct alternatives through already existing resources (ibid, p.219). The moving contradictions relate to: technology, work and human disposability; divisions of labour; monopoly and competition: centralisation and decentralisation; uneven geographical development and the production of space; disparities of income and wealth; social reproduction; and, freedom and domination.

Four of these ‘moving’ contradictions are relevant to neoliberalism. The first concerns divisions of labour, as this relates to sectorial division, such as, the separation of organisations into “cultural and knowledge-based industries” (p.113). These are separated under neoliberal policy into public sector (community organisations) and private sector (creative industries). The second contradiction concerns the dynamic between monopoly and competition. Within the field of neoliberal administration, this takes the form of a tension between centralisation and decentralisation, where government policy encourages

market competition to demonstrate value, the narrative behind this is that doing well in the market equates to being successful; and, significantly, market success is visible and can easily be measured. The third contradiction concerns uneven geographical development and the production of space. This is where neoliberal policy silos capital to areas determined to have the best return on investment. The uneven distribution of capital leads to disparities in income and wealth. Moreover, as neoliberal policy recognises this to be a problem, part of its claim is that its policy can reduce the effects of capital disparities. The fourth contradiction concerns tensions relating to the sustainability of social reproduction under capitalism. Without the biological reproduction of the workforce there is no one to do the work. This highlights the “contradiction between the conditions required to ensure the social reproduction of the labour force, and those needed to reproduce capital” (ibid, p,182). It is here that neoliberal policy influences how people come to understand their role as citizens. Lastly, for neoliberalism, comes the contradiction between freedom and domination. This last contradiction is central to neoliberal policy because it is the place where the language of neoliberalism works to achieve its goals. This manifests in narratives that speak of individual rights and freedoms, while at the same time an expectation being reinforced that people respect the authority and domination of the state.

The last three contradictions are time-place dependent. Harvey (2015) labels them as ‘dangerous’ because they pose a serious threat to capital/capitalism but are not necessarily fatal. Contradiction number fifteen is endless compound growth, where the use of debt creates capital wealth, and accumulation of capital via rents. The drive to accumulate capital puts pressure on resources which lead to contradiction sixteen; capital’s relationship with nature. This contradiction establishes that capital may no longer be able to continue its “long history of resolving its ecological difficulties” (p.246-253). Just like compounding and

exponential growth in the financial sector, the productive practices of capital (industrial and post-industrial alike) have long-term adverse effects on the environment. If these effects occur faster than the environment can recover, then capital cannot resolve its environmental issues. If environmental issues are not resolved, then the ability to produce becomes problematic.

The seventeenth contradiction is the revolt of human nature and universal alienation. This contradiction could be fatal were the rentier class to appropriate all the wealth, which would have an “isolating and individualising social effect” (Harvey, 2015, p.261). Or, through an “alienated human response” (ibid, p.261) where people lose the ability to produce and their use value is removed, predominantly through the automation of work. Here, people become alienated and unnecessary and this could motivate them to react with resistance and/or revolt. For this to occur a process would be required that would call into question the cost to society of capital enduring its contradictions and the neoliberal policy that supports capitalism. All three ‘dangerous’ contradictions are relevant to neoliberalism because they have the potential to stop the wheel of capital turning.

To summarise: ten of Harvey’s (2015) contradictions in capital are pertinent to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism supports the goals set by capitalism through its policy, ideology and language. Moreover, contradictions found in capital also become problems for neoliberalism. As neoliberalism is the political ideology charged with creating policy that governs the economy vital to capitalism, it then falls to neoliberalism to try to resolve these contradictions on capitalism’s behalf. This demonstrates the intricate relationship between capitalism and neoliberalism. Part of this intricate relationship sees a shared set of contradictions that exist as tendencies towards crises across a series of fields.

Crisis

Crises are moments of transformation, endemic to capital, and can potentially lead to change (Harvey, 2015, p.4). However, solutions to crises can lead to the creation of new contradictions, meaning contradictions are moved around rather than resolved. Harvey argues that the inadequate resolution of crises facilitates the emergence of new crises, simulating Schumpeter's (1942) notion of creative destruction. This process masks underlying or systemic issues and reveals the most important of all the contradictions; the juxtaposition of reality and appearance (Harvey, 2015). Reality/appearance is where what appears to be the issue resides on the surface masking the reality or systemic issue. This contradiction plays out through the embodiment of fetishes. Fetishes have a narrow focus and can become points of obsession, such as money, and how money comes to be attributed with value to the point where its presence has material force.

Solutions for exiting crises are often a continuation of neoliberalism or a diluted form of "Keynesian demand-side and debt-financed expansion" (Harvey 2015, p. xi). Both of the latter keep the status quo, favouring the 'billionaires' club. A prime example is the 2009 financial crisis, where central banks bailed out bankers, thereby showing disinterest in the wellbeing of the people (ibid, p. xi). Harvey additionally postulates that the pivotal role technology is often assumed to play in exiting crises is not determinate, and that hope of technological solutions associated with 'the knowledge economy' is misplaced. From this Harvey concludes that no solution, argument, or opposition force arising thus far has been strong enough to remove or exit the negative implications of global capitalism (ibid, p. xii).

For Harvey, like Marx, "the future is already largely present in the world around us and ... political innovation (like technological innovation) is a matter of putting existing but hitherto isolated and separated political possibilities together" (ibid, p. 219). In order to identify

major internal contradictions in capital circulation and accumulation, Harvey treats crises as closed systems. These closed systems have a cyclical nature that often have latent points of tension in seemingly opposing ideas, which offer space for transformation and innovation in capital. This form of analysis explores the mechanics of crises and establishes that alienation is potentially fatal to the system. Here, alienation is the absence of a social or moral setting that creates meaning in a person's life. Work is no longer fulfilling because people cannot see themselves in the outcomes of their labour. The ideology of entrepreneurship and individualism is exemplary in this manner insofar as it suggests that if people work hard they will inevitably prosper (and, if they do not prosper, it is because they did not work hard enough).

To summarise: defining neoliberalism, and capitalism, as having a tendency towards crisis stems from the uneven distribution of wealth and access to resources which lead to inequality in people's living standards. Using Harvey's (2015) work and framing neoliberalism through its crises allows for a politically productive identification of tensions within the logic of neoliberalism and its administrative mechanism, and of points of rupture. This provides the opportunity for exploration and reflection of neoliberalism and the emergence of possible trajectories. As it stands there is a skewed concentration of wealth resulting in social and economic inequality. This macro-level analysis emulates the situation of New Zealand's economy, understood in political terms.

A Field of Myths

The difficulties surrounding the definition of neoliberalism are amplified because it is constituted, in part, in and through a field of myths. These myths pivot upon a belief that politics should use economic solutions to remedy social inequality, positioning market mechanisms as the best way to organise society. The process of this transformation has

been driven by what the OCED (2005) labels as 'the modernisation of government'. Such 'modernisation' operates through a promotion of the following elements: open government; enhancement of public sector performance; the introduction of comprehensive systems of accountability and control; policy reform and restructuring through "the use of market-type mechanisms to provide government services" (p.129); and, the organisation and restructuring of employment where types of employment come to be defined as different from one another; specifically between public sector and private sector forms of employment (OCED, 2005, p.158). This transformation was driven by the belief that market competitiveness would cement nations at the apex of global markets, and that the key to competitiveness in those marketplaces turns upon large-scale domestic economic growth. A set of tenets now associated with neoliberalism then became the vehicles through which such growth would be pursued: the promotion of free-trade agreements; the extension of property rights; deregulation of markets; and the privatisation of public services (Harvey, 2005). In the context of this situation, a key myth of the neoliberal project becomes evident, that continuous economic market growth is sustainable and that it will produce a competitive economy, and that these competitive economies will lead global development.

A further set of myths then follow from the drive for economic growth (Wrenn, 2016). These include the following: that everything can and should be commodified; that the market mechanism of consumer demand is the most effective way to determine the distribution of social goods, including culture; that excellence in private sector performance in the market will lead to 'trickle-down' economic success for individuals; that the individual should be solely responsible for their success or failure; and, that inequality can be eradicated in a

system that promotes competitiveness and individualism by pitting people against one another in the name of market success.

In order for the goals of these myths to be realised, productivity, trade and general increases in consumption levels need to be at the forefront of government agendas.

Deregulation and privatisation have become primary policy mechanisms for enhancing competitiveness, from which it is believed that greater levels of efficiency and productivity will come. Increased productivity supposedly leads to greater financial gains, making the measurement of product-output the best way to determine the success of an entity operating in the market. An additional policy mechanism has been the deregulation of labour markets, as seen through the eradication of compulsory union membership and facilitation of a transnational migrant workforce. The goal of this mechanism has been the development of a flexible labour structure. This mechanism also normalises non-standard work forms including temporary and fixed-term employment. Free markets and flexible labour structures presume that sustained economic growth will occur and this is predicted to reduce inequality and create more jobs. The flexible nature of work and employment, in theory, liberates people from the strictures of set work conditions and increases their ability to change their socio-economic positions to accumulate capital.

With regard to the mechanism of privatisation, a myth exists that the private sector runs more efficiently and cost effective than state-operated services (Wrenn, 2016, p.454). The logic of privatisation extends to the commercialisation of social welfare services through processes of outsourcing in the belief that the introduction of market disciplines into those fields will reduce government spending. This coincides with the push to reduce numbers of welfare recipients, that will also reduce costs. The logic of welfare reduction also serves neoliberalism's normative foundation of individualism (Wrenn, p. 261). It does so by pushing

welfare recipients to become productive independent individuals who will thereafter ostensibly participate in the market economy to the benefit of the general society.

Neoliberalism assumes that to be a useful member of society you must be operating in a manner that has measurable economic benefit.

Myths of neoliberalism are perpetuated through the operation of empty signifiers in political discourse (Bruff, 2017. Para. 8). Neoliberal policy for deregulation, privatisation, and the extension of individual property rights need to be sold as beneficial to all. This is needed so that people will accept and support neoliberalism as the most logical, effective, and natural means by which present difficulties in the modernisation of societies can be overcome. As a consequence, neoliberal language needs to appeal to the goals and hopes of individuals on a large scale. As people's desires are diverse, empty signifiers serve this purpose because they are simultaneously loaded with meaning and meaningless. The contradictory nature of empty signifiers (such as, freedom, accountability, and community) means people can project their own vision onto what is being said without feeling like they are being homogenised.

New Zealand's Neoliberalism as Political Economy

When framed through the notion of political economy – as a set of contradictions and a field of mythology - the neoliberalism of Aotearoa New Zealand emerges as a politico-economic project with a perpetual tendency towards crisis. This state of tendency can be seen in the policy reforms introduced by the Fourth Labour Government, from 1984, and sustained by subsequent administrations of both left and right persuasion (Janiewski & Morris, 2005). This period marked the beginning of rapid and significant large-scale economic and social reform of New Zealand's social institutions (Boston et al. 1999; Kelsey,

1993, cited in Humpage, 2011). The market was largely left to run and regulate itself, and large areas of state assets became privatised and reworked into commodities, rather than public service goods.

The impact of the 1980s policy reforms have been particularly prominent in the fields of education, healthcare, and social welfare. Reform in these fields demonstrates how the provision of core state services was shaped in ways which promoted crises within the relations between democracy, capitalism, and the administration of society. Analysis of policy reforms from the education sector exemplifies these matters. Neoliberal educational goals sought to “bring educational policy into line with the new way of organising society” (Small, 2009, p.2). This was approached through a ‘one size fits all’ framework and the ideological concepts of individual choice, freedom, and rights. These goals conflicted with the educational sector view that education is “the primary vehicle for promoting social mobility” (ibid, p.3; The Authors, 2014, p.173) and knowledge transfer. Neoliberal policy thereby “gave rise to competitive, individualized models of social and economic organization... [negating the] central aim of social democracy, to promote equality or at least minimize inequality” (Small, 2009, p.2). Education under neoliberalism became more inefficient and less productive (The Authors, 2014). The result was the formation of a divisive environment between schools instead of a situation of collaboration in which work might progress towards a wholly educated society.

Healthcare policy reforms yielded similar results to those seen in the education sector. Healthcare reforms included “cost-cutting for efficiency, decentralizing to the local or regional levels rather than the national levels and ... [setting] health care up as a private good for sale rather than a public good paid for with tax dollars” (McGregor, 2001, p.2). In this form healthcare becomes a commodity traded by private companies, geared toward

equity and profit. The examples from education and healthcare demonstrate the effects neoliberal policy has had on values that promote universalised access to knowledge and well-being – particularly those who struggle to afford education and healthcare costs.

Policy reforms also saw forms and levels of state welfare dramatically reduced. In Aotearoa New Zealand, a hybrid form of welfare provision developed. Social services were now viewed as commodifiable, and welfare reforms saw the privatisation of parts of the sector where many social services were out-sourced. In a drive for a kind of efficiency that can be measured by market mechanisms, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) began to purchase outcomes (MSD, 2016) from organisations, rather than employing their services. Fitzsimons (2000) argues that “the ‘new’ approach to social policy depended on reinventing community through their version of social capital” (p.2), to pacify people into accepting neoliberalism. He draws on the idea that the drivers behind the policy came from good intentions. These good intentions were designed to reinvent the relationship between the state and civil society, in a way that was believed, by the advocates of neoliberal reform, to have positive results for both parties. However, the reforms failed because conceptions of community have long-standing associations with the idea of collective life, as opposed to perceptions of community grounded in the privatised idiom of economic interest. Neoliberalism pushes the individual to be centre stage in a move towards a user pays model and argues that this will create community because of the economic benefits of people paying for services. The individual is now responsible for their own well-being and success. The example of state welfare highlights conflict and the disjointed relationship between neoliberal theory and social realities.

It was not just on social institutions that neoliberal policy left its mark, but also on notions of citizenship. Historical changes in the concentration of income and wealth used to analyse

the evolution of inequality show that wealth grows faster than economic output, leading to the unequal distribution of wealth causing social and economic instability (The Authors, 2014). The resulting instability is likely to impact how people perceive their role as citizens.

The public role of neoliberal citizens is to be active, accountable, autonomous, and entrepreneurial (Woolford & Nelund, 2013). This means they engage in innovative ways to be independent and responsible for their role as a citizen. And, as the driver of neoliberalism is the elevation of the market, it is through market participation that the citizen can best fulfil their role. To this end, the impacts of neoliberal policy can be seen in changes to conceptualisations of citizenship. In Aotearoa New Zealand, between 1987 and 2005 there was no “paradigmatic shift in thinking about social citizenship rights” (Humpage, 2011, p.11). However, by 2008 significant changes had occurred to how people understood concepts of citizenship and belonging, with those ideas implying market participation rather than connection with local spaces and with nation (Humpage, 2010). The impacts of policy reforms left many people “feeling undervalued [meaning that] social cohesion at the society level will remain vulnerable” (Humpage, 2010, p.21).

Summary

Neoliberalism is a political project that is entwined with capitalism. Both are rife with contradictions and exhibit tendencies towards crises. Neoliberal myths elevate the social role of the market, leading toward the commodification of the social. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the impact of neoliberalism can be seen through the extensive policy reforms that began in the 1980s including the areas of education and healthcare. Such reforms have consequently affected how New Zealanders conceive of how they belong to the nation, and of their citizenship.

The next chapter presents a potted history of how the field of art emerged within twentieth-century European thought as a means by which socio-political critique could attune itself to the capitalism of its time and to the associated political projects. The chapter demonstrates that those who were involved in this movement – Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno – perceived that such critique favoured not simply the projection of critical content into public debate but the use of artistic form as a vehicle for transformative change. It is this notion that the political value of artistic expression lies potentially with its forms more than its content – and of the potential role within critical inquiry that *artistic formalism* might thereby play – that will be taken into the case study that follows, of the social organisation of artistic expression.

Chapter Three: Artistic Formalism and Organisation in the Field of Art

This chapter introduces the historical context in which the organisation of artistic expression (artistic form) developed as a field of practice for political critique. That history is approached through the work of a small group of twentieth-century European academics: Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. I identify the ways in which each argues for the centrality of artistic form and of how each of these approaches reflect their respective concerns with the capitalism in which they lived.

Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno were all German/Jewish aesthetic formalists. Aesthetic formalism is the view that interactions with art should place precedence on form (Audi, 1995). These three men wrote from a Marxist perspective and knew one another personally. The complex relationship that existed between them impacted significantly on the texts they each produced (Adorno et al, 1997; Arnott, 2016). Livingstone, Anderson, and Mulhern (Adorno et al, 1997) indicate, in this regard, that:

If contact with Brecht tended to inflect Benjamin towards a more direct Marxism than he normally displayed, communication with Benjamin tended in turn to inflect Adorno towards a more revolutionary materialism than he otherwise revealed - in part, no doubt, precisely to counteract the influence of Brecht (p. 102).

Benjamin emerges here as a kind of bridge between the work of Brecht and Adorno and establishes the dynamism of their interactions. Some of this movement demonstrates agreement and some shows ideological tensions. The tensions come through particularly in

the letters they wrote to one another, as well as in the works they have penned in response to one another's published writing.

For Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno, their issues with capitalism are linked to the political project through which the logics of capital were being actioned in mid-twentieth century Germany – the fascism of National Socialism. In this regard, Brecht wrote that “capitalism impoverishes, dehumanizes, [and] mechanizes human beings” (cited in Adorno et al, 1997, p.68). Benjamin described capitalism as a cult-like religion driven by the utilitarian nature of its operations and blindly subscribed to by people without their questioning the mechanics of its operation. In a similar vein, Adorno focused critique upon the social effects that follow from the fetishisation of commodities and reification of objects. Nazism amplified these logics through the privatisation of state assets, the protection of private property, and through its emphasis on increasing the production of local goods. The focus of National Socialism upon “the growth of modern Germany” (Pascal, cited by Sohn-Rethel, 1987, p.67) was enacted by using a protectionist approach to the idea of the nation and its productive sectors, and an authoritarian system of social control.

Another commonality between Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno is the friendship they each had with Ernst Bloch. *The Spirit of Utopia* (Bloch, 1923) and *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch, 1954) were both influential in the writings of all three. This is evident in that they all wrote from the normative calling of utopia. This lens produced hope that the field of art could be organised in a way that leads to civic engagement. Underpinning this view is the special status their writings attributed to works of art as objects that sit outside the realities of daily life whilst nevertheless being comprised of that same reality.

Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno argued that artistic methods ought to be used to garner public participation in debate about social issues. As we shall see shortly, they had quite different views on how the matter of artistic form could be organised for such purposes. They also differed on what vehicle might best demonstrate the importance of artistic form, over content, and as to how form might be best organised. These differences demonstrate a wide scope of possibilities when employing aesthetic formalism as a means for thinking about the use of creative pursuits for the initiation of social change.

Across their writings, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno argued for a kind of artistic practice that would induce social change in public and accessible ways, and that would function through decodable narratives. Foundational to achieving these effects is attention to the forms in which content is presented. The ability to decode artistic form is the means by which the public might be able to extend the range of meaning for themselves, of artistic works. As such, the public might come to understand that shifts in artistic form might affect the meanings with which a given message can be ascribed.

The exposition of works by Brecht, Adorno and Benjamin that follows, has at its core a particular trajectory of writing between them. Brecht was first a practitioner of art whose practice and writings centred on theatrical works and on the matter of alternative physical arrangements of the theatrical space. Benjamin found himself heavily influenced by the work of Brecht. His essay *Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction* (2008) was born, however, from Benjamin's interaction with both men. His close friendship with Adorno, coupled with Adorno's disagreements with the views of Brecht, lead him in that work to acknowledge a deep tension between the domains of theory and practice. Adorno was first and foremost a theorist whose works relating to art drew heavily on music and avant-garde art and their relationship to culture and social pathologies. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is,

then, a direct response to Benjamin's tendentiously (for Adorno) populist response to the matter of art and its purposes (2008). It is this moving set of exchanges which sets the texture of the discussion which follows on their approaches to the organisation of the artistic field.

Brecht

Theatre is one of the oldest forms of artistic communication and can be traced back to early ceremonial rituals. Bertolt Brecht (2001) wanted to create theatre for the scientific age. In this idea he is arguing that each time-period needs a form of theatre that is relevant to the audience (society) to which it wants to speak. This means that the creators of theatrical works should consider the historical context of their creation(s). For Brecht, art should also be political. The political aspect of theatre could be understood through the arrangement of spaces in the relation of stage performance to the audience. Experimentation with those spaces would be coupled with interventions in the narrative forms that stories took. The alteration of space and a shift from traditional forms of theatrical storytelling was a key aspect of how Brecht believed the interventions at the level of artistic form could present the content of artistic works anew.

Brecht (2001) saw theatre as having regressively become a space for entertainment rather than political engagement. In his mind, this removed its ability to speak to the issues of his time. When experiencing theatre, he believed the audience should not be subdued into a state of complicit absorption, lost in what happens on stage. For Brecht the purpose of theatre was not to create an illusion of reality but to develop a construct through which the transformative purposes of a play could be highlighted. Brecht thereby rejected an idea associated with Aristotle, that dramatic art would have a cathartic effect on the audience, instead arguing for the removal of illusion from all parts of the show. This line of thought is

situated in the boundary between aesthetics and politics and his development of a condition he called *verfremdungseffekt* (the 'Alienation' or 'V' effect). The alienation effect makes the familiar seem strange and unfamiliar (ibid, p.192). It is through this intentional organisation of artistic form that an alienating effect can be achieved in the audience, through the telling of a story. His techniques are designed to prevent the audience from identifying too closely with what they see so they are led to question their own practices, beliefs, and social narratives. Brecht presents each story as containing episodes and argues each episode in a story should create the V effect. Episodes are then knotted together to speak to the issues experienced by the people for whom the theatre production is intended.

Brecht (2001) called this form of theatrical intervention 'Epic theatre'. Epic theatre is about movement, where there is a constant shifting and development of story and practice to match the time of its production. In his mind, this enables theatre to be a catalyst for change. A common experience speaks to this: the viewing of the same theatre show more than once quickly indicates that no two shows are the same. Brecht's point in bringing this simple insight to the fore is to indicate that it is very difficult to reproduce theatre in a way that fits with models of mass production for mass consumption. Even an exact replica of the script, easily reproduced and sent to others using modern technology, will be altered to suit the purpose of its new possessor. Even if it remains substantially unchanged, the delivery of the script will be altered during each delivery. The nuances that eventuate in each performance show the adaptability of form in theatre.

Form, in Brecht's work, related to the ability of spatial elements to be remoulded at will, so as to effect significant changes to the theatrical environment. An example of this is the '12 techniques' (Brecht, 2001) he used in his theatrical productions to dissolve 'the fourth wall' - a metaphor for the separation of audience and show. Intrinsic to the 12 techniques is the

practice of making visible to the audience back-stage processes and to thereby present, for public viewing, the contradiction between the theatrical practices involved in the presentation of a narrative and the content of the narrative being told. Brecht calls this contradiction the demonstration (acting)/ experience (audience) contradiction (p.194). In reflecting reality, actors would thereby become enabled to develop characters in the moment, in the same performative way that members of a community might develop and shape each other as a collective, learning together, through an awareness of their immediate positioning toward others (p.201).

For Brecht, a narrative does not have to resonate with a particular class for it to impact upon them. In suggesting this, Brecht argued that theatre should be produced to reflect the lives of a diverse range of people. Story is accessible to all fractions of society and “art addresses all alike ... just as the oppressed can succumb to the ideas of their oppressors, so members of the oppressor class can fall victim to those of the oppressed” (p.278).

Brecht was acutely aware of the problem of reification upon critical work, including his own. In his view, the very idea of Epic theatre had become too formalised. An alternative style, shared across montage, Cubism, and Dada art, inspired him to rethink the meaning of artistic political engagement in ways that led him to present his theatre anew as ‘dialectical theatre’. Behind that idea was a conviction that the dominance of narratives, such as fascism or capitalism, could have long lasting and damaging effects on a nation, its people, their culture, and that this impact was not restricted to spatial elements such as geographical borders but to the cognitive structures by which they are understood.

Benjamin

In his noted essay *Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction* (2008), Walter Benjamin argued that the effects of capitalism could be seen as having permeated culture and that, as a consequence of that enlargement, was in the position to be reassessed with new critical instruments. To this end, his focus became the conditions of capitalist production in relation to variations in human perception. For Benjamin, a work of art was a lens that always represents a particular form of perception and that the form of that perception provides cues as to what it has meant to be a human being in the period of its creation. For Benjamin, moreover, art represents culture but it is also always an artefact, an object produced using the most popular methods at the time of its production. He was thereby also interested in new forms of artistic pursuit and the ability for art to be reproduced en masse, using mechanical/technological means. The context of Benjamin's work became the "development of art under the present conditions of production" (2008, p.19), specifically exploring the dialectic of these conditions. He argued that understanding the Marxist dialectic between socio-cultural superstructure and the material conditions of the production of art could inform and extend the dialogue of the political struggles of his time. The technological reproduction of art, something supposedly free of the factory assembly line, is analogous, in Benjamin's mind (2008), to the mass expansion of the proletariat class. While the proletariat found themselves having to work under exploitative conditions, those in political power were able to use aesthetics for sectarian/nationalist ends so as to ignite an appetite for war (through propaganda films). Even though Benjamin knew about the impact of the Nazi's popularisation of propaganda through film (Koepunick, 1999) he found value in the idea that film as a form of art could be produced for mass distribution. What sparked Benjamin's curiosity was the connection between the anesthetisation of politics and

modern industrial culture and how its popular form (like film) could be used to subvert that state of socio-cultural numbing from within itself (ibid, p.23). He wanted to take the very tools that were helping to fuel fascism and use them for a contrary purpose.

The developmental tendencies of art that neutralise creative processes – associated with the increasing proliferation of technological reproduction – were opening doors to swathes of people and aligning them with regressive ideologies including fascism (Benjamin, 2008, p.20). Given this, for Benjamin, technological reproduction has a negative effect because he identified it with the abolition of tradition, of authenticity, aura, context and history from works of art. Art was now being produced quite consciously as a commodity for exchange in the capitalist market. Moreover, he saw that this kind of production alienates the artist from the artistic process and from the creation of meaning through artistic activity. In his terms, what was being lost was the capacity of objects to be imbued with ‘aura’ – with “a strange tissue of space and time” coming from a relation of authenticity with tradition (p.23). To borrow Benjamin’s idiom, aura is the affective result of a sensory experience pertaining to the atmosphere of an object or subject through its uniqueness. Technological reproduction of the art-work does not offer this experience. Viewers might still recognise the object being shown in the reproduction as if they have seen it, and if they were to see it they would have visual recognition before a complete sensory experience. Reproduction in this sense can only offer a state of cursory recognition, one that is visual. The eradication of aura in the mass reproduction of artworks introduces a new quality of sameness to objects that, in their original form, would have stood relative to one another in a state of uniqueness.

Against this line of critical insight, Benjamin argued that the loss of authority in art and the loss of aura and traditional ritualistic value was also a positive development because it signalled a new kind of production of art based on politics. He believed that the same

apparatus being used for war propaganda could be used to stop the war. His hope was that in the same way that capitalism exploited the proletariat, the proletariat could turn capitalism on its head and seize the means of production propelled by the socio-cultural freedom they experienced in art.

By the latter half of the twentieth century it was evident that Benjamin's vision had not been realised. Part of this was the problem of ownership in media production; the equipment used to create and produce film was expensive. Significantly, it has only been with the invention of digital technologies, including the internet, that the ability to produce and reproduce film can be achieved with little cost to the individual user. This potential space of hope, however, has been stifled by 'information overload' in the digital age.

Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with the transfer of Benjamin's theory to the digital age, his understanding of the role that processes of technological reproduction play in the projection of political messaging remain useful. That said, for Adorno, the fact remains – with regard to Benjamin's intervention – that artworks become commodities produced for mass consumption and that his friend's analysis is at risk of reproducing – rather than disrupting – the logics of capital. It is to Adorno's contribution of the role of artistic form in political practice, to which we now turn.

Adorno

In comparison to Benjamin's work, Theodore Adorno more directly takes artistic formalism toward the issue of the role that organisation (of artistic activity) might play as political practice. When considering *Aesthetic Theory* (1997) and *Negative Dialectics* (1973) more broadly, as our starting point with his work, a picture of hope and warning emerges. In the former, Adorno (1907) traces the history of art in order to understand the relationship

between a society and the art it produces. In the latter text, he discusses the dialectical process as an open-ended system, and unpacks how something is what it is because of what it is not (his 'negative dialectics'). Importantly, what it is not is plural. Adorno's dialectics is not about the workings of a binary code or the production of a result that is known in advance to be positive. For Adorno, the trajectories of dialectical movements are not preordained and therefore the result of the dialectical process cannot always be predicted until arrival at said result. These two works from Adorno framed the culture industry as impacting negatively upon society through its drive to produce art as a commodity geared, in a non-dialectical manner, towards entertainment.

Having been exiled from Nazi Germany, Adorno travelled to America – the supposed land of freedom and liberty. Adorno experienced America as a place founded on myth, conformity, and a politically regressive interest in consumption. It is through exile from his home and the expectation of arriving somewhere better, that we can understand Adorno's concern; that myth and conformity on a large scale has the potential to be extremely dangerous. The theme of acceptance comes to the fore when contemplating the effects of Nazi fascism and of a consumer culture where art is created for entertainment rather than engagement.

Granted, one is in aid of violent acts in the name of politics and the other in distraction from that which is political, however, in each there is a generalised level of acceptance by members of a society of the narratives they are told. It is the seemingly unquestioning nature by which ideas take hold and illicit action (or in-action), that is of serious concern for Adorno.

Whilst Brecht (2001) and Benjamin (2008) thought art that was overtly political could counter the muscle of capitalism, Adorno believed that it could not (O'Neill, 2008). It is in this regard that Adorno wrote *Aesthetic Theory* as a response to Benjamin's *Art in the Age of*

Technological Reproduction. Benjamin's work sits somewhere in between the writings of Brecht (as a practitioner) and Adorno (as a theorist). Brecht had argued that the dismantling of barriers between audience and the mechanics of production could compel people to engage and to act. Adorno's contrary thoughts on the role of art were nicely captured by O'Neill when she wrote "that [for Adorno] it was [only] autonomous creative works, from society's foundations, which could compel the change of attitude which committed works merely demand" (p. 120). Adorno believed that the issuing of demands for social change does not affect the fabric that knits society together. For Adorno it is art that comes from an authentic place, and through an employment of negative dialectics, that can provide the tools for change. The authentic place Adorno speaks of is part of the processes undertaken by the artist in bringing a work into being. Adorno's assertion is that "the artwork is a process [of becoming] essentially in the relation of its whole and parts... [and is not] reducible to one side or the other" (AT, p.235).

Attempts to reconcile tensions between concepts from Adorno's major works (1973; 1997) or to reduce them to a simple linear process do not fit, which provides a significant insight into his concept of negative dialectics. The emergent insight is that reconciliation is not what is required. Adorno's work argues that we are not supposed to be able to harmonise the cultural facets of society for a positive end. In fact, to seek harmony is an attempt to remove possible disruptions to social norms and narratives. Disruption is vital because it helps us to question what is accepted. From Brecht's perspective (2001) this is to be done by alienating the socially accepted norms through shock but for Adorno, shock just becomes another accepted part of what was coming to be considered amusement/enjoyment. If we experience shock on a regular basis, we become immune to its effect. Once this occurs, it has been absorbed into the fabric of the system and its presentation in creative works is

unquestionably accepted. In these circumstances the incorporation of elements such as shock can then also be commercialised in the form of cultural commodities. Adorno is not saying that every cultural artefact has to be engaging and thought provoking. What he calls for is recognition that a massification of form occurs, and that it perpetuates a decline in works that do not ask members of society to question the social norms and politics of the systems that govern.

It would be easy to frame Adorno (1973) as a pessimist given his harsh critiques of the culture industry. Yet, he was an optimist. Adorno wrote from a place of hope. His dismay came from having fled the persecution of Nazi Germany to what he believed would be an environment of cultural freedom in America. Upon experiencing the American culture industry as oppressive, he was led to question how cultural liberation can emerge through forms of cultural expression – through art more particularly. Given that both Nazi Germany and America were capitalist societies we can understand Adorno's view; systemically, capitalism is capitalism where ever it is present, regardless of the political façade it shows on the surface (democracy, fascism). Adorno's critique is, therefore, about finding alternative modes of cultural expression as places from which civil society can engage to inaugurate change.

For Adorno, political change does not come from people being explicitly told that what they are seeing has a specific political message that they should adopt. Political change birthed by art comes from the intent of the artist, coupled with the processes by which the work is created, and combined with the message implicitly laid bare when a person experiences the work. This stance does not expect the participant to have prior knowledge, but suggests that if the work speaks to the cultural signifiers and symbols of the era then the chance of it being understood will increase. This goes some way to explain why works considered to be

of great importance in earlier time periods do not resonate with people on the same scale today. For example, the watercolour *The Field of Waterloo* by Joseph Turner (1818) would not have the same effect today as *Guernica* by Picasso (1937). The latter is an example used by Adorno to highlight the ability of art to speak. Demonstrating Adorno's insight, this work is still relevant. As recently as 2003 "Iraq war proponents were so scared of its power they ordered it covered up" (BBC, 2013). Picasso reportedly said of *Guernica* (ibid.):

If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are.

This returns us to the idea that art has the ability to speak, to cause an emotional reaction that is latent in the intention of the artist. This is a kind of intention that comes to the fore when the audience attributes their own interpretations to their personal experience of the art. Part of their experience is personal and part draws on a repository of shared meaning between the artist and the audience. This demonstrates what Adorno means in *Aesthetic Theory* (1997) when he discusses form being the anti-thesis in respect to the other content of that work.

The anti-thesis comes from the condition of *mimesis*, which is about expression through form. It is form that determines how the content is organised and it is form which has the ability to influence the impact a work of art can have. In the work of Plato, *mimesis* is about the imitation of reality; for Aristotle it is the representation of reality; for Adorno, *mimesis* "ties art to individual human experience, which is now exclusively that of being-for-itself" (ibid, p.38). In *Guernica*, *mimesis* is created through the artist's interpretation, which is a

fantasy presentation of a real event. This is what, according to Adorno, makes artworks crackle: “the friction of the antagonistic elements that the artwork seeks to unify” (ibid, p.234). The antagonism within the artwork itself creates an affinity between what is seen and what is experienced, giving the painting its aura, its sense of intrinsic value. The intrinsic value of an artwork, then, is achieved by organising the artist’s vision into a narrative that speaks to human experience.

Summary

To understand the works of Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno, it is important to acknowledge the contexts in which they were writing. They are all university-educated men, from reasonably well-off families. They were each identified as Jewish by Nazi Germany, and therefore considered enemies to the place they called home. These men witnessed the atrocities of war, the impact of following social norms and the danger of not questioning social and political ideologies, and lack of discussion about the kinds of society desired by a given group of people.

A shared dimension of their works is their use of form (of ‘Epic’ theatre, mass produced images and mimesis, respectively) as a lens for thinking about how the field of art could be organised to ignite engagement in the social and political issues of their time. Time and space are at the forefront of their considerations when they consider the various ways the field of art could be organised. It is the organisation of form that becomes a political practice when the goal is to create art that aims to facilitate political discourse and action beyond audiences’ experiences of the art. For Brecht, it was the organisation of theatrical techniques that removed cathartic experience encouraging people to participate and engage beyond passive viewing. For Benjamin, it was the contemporary form of modes of production that he believed could resonate with people enough to garner a desire for

change. For Adorno, it was form that brought the aura inherent to a work through *mimesis* that could best speak to the audience. Significantly, they show the field of art can be organised and in doing so, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno elucidate a tradition of organisation in the field of art and creative pursuits.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, people (artists) and organisations operating in the arts and cultural sector are governed by public policy. They also often rely on some form of funding or a benefactor. Being a capitalist country, the funding of such endeavours through the lens of capitalism makes sense if those pursuits have immediate economic value. Determination of economic value depends on the ability to measure what these artists/centres offer the market by using market mechanisms of measurement. Here the tension of form and content and the organisation of art as a vessel for change takes another shape. It is the administrative mechanisms used to organise the arts and culture sector, and the content of its operation, that take centre stage. This shift was identified by Jenny Aimers (2005) who observed the emergence of new community-based arts organisations under neoliberal policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. The new organisations are the result of groups trying to provide a social good amidst the demands of capitalist ideology. In the next chapter I analyse the policy of the arts and culture sector to better understand how the field of art under neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand is organised.

Chapter Four: Organisational Formalism and Arts and Culture Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Chapter Two illustrated the contradictions and tendencies towards crises of neoliberalism and the impact that neoliberal policy reforms have had upon a variety of sectors, including the concept of citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand. Chapter Three has explored the potential for the organisation of art, through artistic form, to fashion new social and political narratives. It was through radical-left academic literature that the challenges involved in the organisation of creative pursuits for counterhegemonic socio-political goals were first outlined.

This chapter identifies that these challenges are also experienced in the contemporary field of community art as structured by the neoliberal policy that governs the arts and culture sector. The impact of neoliberal policy has already been discussed, identifying neoliberal ideology as a kind of 'policy conservatism'. In the language of form/content, this approach to policy formation can be framed as a politically regressive use of form. Through its identification of arts and culture policy as a kind of artistic formalism, this chapter argues that *organisational formalism* is what characterises the idiom by which the sector now functions. The concept of *organisational formalism* provides a framework for understanding how the sector is organised through neoliberal policy.

The following analysis is of the policy context in which the field of community art operates in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such policy is generated through four agencies across central and local government: Manatū Taonga, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH), which is the central government representative; CreativeNZ, as the primary Crown entity responsible for allocating funding to organisations and individuals, and to recognise and facilitate the

MCH vision; local councils as creators of regional policy, plans, and strategies, and that govern local boards which manage and fund activities under their jurisdiction (the Auckland Council is the body most relevant to the present study); and the Ministry for Social Development (MSD) which funds community organisations that provide social services that align with the functions which MSD performs.

Analysis of this field proceeds through a mapping of policy in relation to funding. This relationship is significant because the community organisations which receive funding from government agencies are beholden to these agencies and the conditions upon which funding is granted. The conditions for funding are determined by arts and culture policy, informed by wider governmental goals. The strategies employed by government agencies in the sector to achieve neoliberal goals reflect the contradictions of that logic, its tendency towards crisis, and the perpetuation of its founding myths as means by which those crises are contained.

The Organisations

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage

MCH is charged with “creating culture” and preserving heritage to “enrich the lives of all New Zealanders by supporting our dynamic culture”. MCH funds “many of New Zealand’s arts, media, heritage and sports organisations; advises the government on cultural matters, and provide[s] research and resources for everyone to access” (MCH, 2017b). MCH works with thirteen other government agencies (MCH, 2014, p.11). Curiously, for reasons discussed later, MSD is not one of them. The broader MCH ‘family’ are twenty arts, heritage, broadcasting, and sports, organisations, and eleven national cultural sector agencies which have government-appointed boards. There is “no single piece of legislation relating to

cultural policy” because MCH was established by Cabinet minute (MCH, 2017a), but there are seven key documents pertaining to the strategies MCH employs to achieve the unachievable tasks set by neoliberalism, these are: *Statement of intent; Strategic Intentions; Governance e-manual; Performance review framework; Annual report; Four-year plan; and, Ministers report on non-departmental appropriations*. MCH has responsibilities to twenty-two parliamentary acts (MCH, 2017a). The Ministry places importance on the expansion of New Zealand’s international cultural profile through the economy, through trade, tourism, diplomatic and cultural interests, and through international agreements (MCH, 2017a). MCH believes the ideal future state is where the “cultural sector is recognised as intrinsic to our national identity, fundamental to our social wellbeing and is a growing part of our economy” (MCH, 2014b, p.6).

Creative NZ

Creative New Zealand (CreativeNZ) is the national arts development agency pledged to the development of, investment in, and advocacy for and on behalf of the arts, to central and local government and to other interested parties. Their purpose is to “encourage, promote and support the arts in New Zealand for the benefit of all New Zealanders through funding, capability building, our international programme and advocacy” (CreativeNZ, 2017a). Their vision is to see ‘dynamic’ and ‘resilient’ New Zealand arts valued nationally and internationally. CreativeNZ is the trading name for the New Zealand Arts Council, and subject to the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 2014 (New Zealand Legislation, 2014). They are the Crown entity most relevant to the field of community art and are responsible for upholding sectorial policies (MCH, 2017a), and for the development of arts in Aotearoa New Zealand; including the development of national and international markets. Funding for these projects comes from the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and the

Ministry for Culture and Heritage (CreativeNZ, 2017a). There are three strategy documents guiding how they operate: *Statement of Intent 2016-2021*; *Creative New Zealand Strategic Direction: Discussion Document 2016*; and, *Statement of Performance Expectation 2016-17* (CreativeNZ, 2017b). These documents outline their purpose, vision, and strategies, and they position CreativeNZ as an intermediary between the government and the arts sector, responsible for ensuring the fruition of projects that promote sector-specific economic development.

Auckland Council

Auckland Council (AC) states “its core purpose is to meet the current and future needs of communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses” (Auckland Council, 2015b, p.11). The Council’s outline of the creative sector includes community groups and societies, education providers, and funding organisations. Auckland Council supports arts and culture through strategy and policy; facilities (local and regional); programming and events; investment and funding; regulatory and operative frameworks; facilitation; and advocacy. The Council goal with regard to the arts sector is that “Aucklanders understand that arts and culture are fundamental to a healthy society and a good quality of life” (p.3). They developed *Toi Whītiki - Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan* (2015) “to make arts and culture part of our everyday lives, everywhere in our region” (p.3), on the basis that “arts and culture play a key role in the cultural, social and economic life of Auckland, making it a more dynamic and attractive place to live, work and visit” (*Toi Whītiki*, 2015, p.5). One interpretation of this vision is that if a place looks aesthetically pleasing people will want to spend time there, and that if they spend time there it is assumed they will spend money and contribute to the economy. *Toi Whītiki* has been

developed in collaboration with the arts and culture sector to increase citizen participation so all Aucklanders can access and participate in arts and culture. Arts and culture are framed as fostering strong communities and a strong economy, and they are also seen as benefiting education and learning, and health and well-being.

There is no specific budget for arts and culture set by AC, but of the \$18.7 billion capital spending, \$3.8 billion has been allocated for arts and culture under three categories: Auckland Development; Economic and Cultural Development; and, Community and Lifestyle (Auckland Council, 2012). Along with *Toi Whītiki*, the *Community Facilities Network* (2015a) and the *Action Plan* (2015b), there are four policies which outline funding for arts and culture: Public Art Policy; Grants Policy and Programmes; Events Policy; and, Local Board Funding Policy. When determining the “asset-based fair value” of works of art, AC is guided by market-based evidence of the value of an object, and it defines the value appreciation of art as being indefinite (Auckland Council, 2012c, p.20-21). There are 21 Local boards under the AC umbrella and they are expected to work within the 2012 Auckland Plan designed to guide Auckland over the next thirty years. The local board under whose jurisdiction the case study for this thesis falls supports five local arts and culture facilities, and eight local arts and culture initiatives and local events. In 2012/13 costs for these activities were \$762,254 (Auckland Council 2012d, p.36).

Ministry of Social Development

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) supply funding for arts organisations to provide mentoring and support to unemployed creatives seeking work, and funding from this programme is integral to the operational costs of these arts organisations.

Whilst MSD is not involved explicitly in the arts and culture sector, the crossover in government department funding for arts organisations warrants an exploration of the strategies MSD employs. MSD advise central government on social policy and state their purpose as being to “help New Zealanders to help themselves to be safe, strong and independent” and to “help build successful individuals and strong, healthy families and communities” and support those who are vulnerable (MSD, 2016c, p.8).

The two-sub areas of MSD relating to community arts organisations are to reduce long-term welfare dependence (Better Public Services, 2016b), and to fund community service providers (Community Investment Strategy, 2015). These goals directly relate to investment in social services that produce MSD desired outcomes (MSD, 2013) and the reduction of long-term welfare dependency (MSD, 2012). This takes place through work programmes (MSD, 2016a) which use a results-based accountability approach (MSD, n.d). The target results of service providers are measured by population and performance accountabilities “to ensure appropriate responsibility” (MSD, n.d, p.5). The secondary measurement of these programmes is an assessment of their ability to enhance the “well-being” of the communities they service (MSD, n.d, p.7). The key stakeholders they work with are other government departments in addition to public and private sector partners, in a “multi-agency view across the social sector” (MSD, 2016c, p.19) for the development and growth of business education, and most significantly, the economy.

Strategies in aid of neoliberalism

In their contributions toward the mitigation of neoliberalism’s tendency towards crises, the four government organisations have four strategies in common that bear upon the shaping of the arts and cultural sector. These strategies are: the devolution of structure; reliance upon market mechanisms for purchasing and selling; the use of outcomes as a measure of

performance; and the use of empty signifiers to elicit participation by external bodies. The argument being made here is that the strategies become a kind of institutional framework through which public artistic content is produced. Attention to the institutional form within which the creative industries function is being made for two reasons. The first is to reveal its ideological function relative to the content of artistic works – the policy field has the potential to frame the meaning of public art. The second is that the existence of an *organisational formalism* in the sector provides a site for political activism in the name of art's transformative potential. It is in the terms of the latter that the case study is to be understood.

The devolution of structure. All of the sector's governing agencies use a devolved model that operates through a state of administrative separation between sections of the respective organisations. In addition to this, the model delegates policy-related functions, roles and responsibilities from the centralised state agencies to external agencies. This dispersal of functionality complicates the mapping of the sector, including matters relating to lines of accountability for the sector's performance. MCH describe the devolved model as a means, however, by which to facilitate best practice and good governance, and MSD label this strategy as a "multi-agency" approach to service provision (MSD, 2016c). CreativeNZ and Auckland Council also operate by this model. An example of how this model works is that government agencies are now responsible for creating their own definitions of cultural well-being and their own understanding of what it means to facilitate cultural well-being. MCH states, for example, that cultural well-being definitions should include: "the vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through participation in recreation, creative and cultural activities, and the freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage and traditions" (MCH, 2017a, para.1). This contrasts with the idea that the sector is responsible

for the preservation of culture and heritage through the formation of a cohesive body of governance, as it places responsibility squarely on the shoulders of individuals and local community organisations.

The use of market mechanisms under the conditions of administrative devolution gives the impression that the strategy works. Further analysis shows, however, the sector to be disjointed (Allan, Grimes, & Kerr, 2013; Stroombergen, 2015). Fragmentation occurs partly because these mechanisms struggle to measure and account for the dynamic in art of use value. This difficulty is highlighted by Jenny Lawn (2006), who traces the “rapid convergence of the cultural sector with corporate values in New Zealand” (p.5), and the governmental push toward participation in the global economy. The government in the 1990s encouraged arts agencies to behave more like businesses and, in the mid-2000s, to promote Aotearoa New Zealand as creative and innovative. The purpose of these directives was to mask the shifting and changeable nature of the field being governed, that of artistic practice (ibid, p.2). The neoliberal doctrine has instead presented arts agencies in the static terms of businesses and “culture producers of the nation” (ibid, p.2). This, in turn, creates a stable identity for citizens (ibid, p.2) whose value can, itself, be monetised across a myriad of industries. Here Lawn points to the film industry, in which the ease and relatively low cost of film distribution, coupled with the merchandising of related paraphernalia (such as Hobbiton in Matamata), leverages off the apparently given nature of (calculable) consumer choice.

The framing by the state of creativity in measurable (economic) terms hides sector instability. Economic statistics give the impression of sector stability, and creativity of this kind is, significantly, fit for global market innovation. The production of new objects for the market and participation in the global market are taken as axiomatic benefits for the

national economy. The purpose of this perpetual presentation of 'the new', Lawn (2006) argues is, "to acclimatise the population to the continual shocks of technological change, instability, and cycles of self-refashioning in the era of deregulated markets and global competition" (p.3). This is neoliberalism under the façade of nationalism. It is a form of nationalism that says, 'we are creative, diverse, innovative, and entrepreneurial'. In the process of creating this narrative, the state's role shifts from "protector and controller to facilitator" (ibid, p.4), passing responsibility on to community organisations and businesses. In effect, "capitalist production, in general, comes to resemble cultural production" (ibid, p.10) and "creativity heals the wounds of alienated labour, as all work becomes intrinsically satisfying and self-motivated no matter who owns the means of production" (ibid, p.11).

The second strategy is the use of *market mechanisms*, of supply/demand in particular, to project likely directions for policy development. This strategy is employed by both MSD and MCH and helps them determine the focus of government interventions in the cultural and social sectors, respectively. Their goal is to ensure that funding is invested as effectively and efficiently as possible, and that government priorities are met (MCH, 2014c; MSD, 2016c). In this vein, each Ministry funds, monitors, and supports a range of cultural agencies, in addition to delivering a range of cultural products and services.

Market mechanisms are used to determine the success or failure of the sector through the market value of products, the measurement of sector services, and the achievement of sector goals. This plays out in the prioritisation of the exchange value of artistic works over their use value, on the assumption that market-level success will result in a better place for New Zealanders to create better lives. If it were to be employed, the idea of use value belies quantification because this kind of value is determined by the user. Alternatively, market value is connected to the dynamics of supply and demand. Neoliberalism, through its ability

to adapt and absorb new ideas, reformulates use value as a mechanism of market exchange. Where use value appears in the guise of a market mechanism of exchange, it becomes the exchange value that is proportionate to the public knowledge of the means by which an artistic object was produced; its perceived quality/luxury, the skill involved in production, and the potential social status of ownership. This new form of use value represents the commodification of 'soft' objects and becomes the justification for the market value with which the objects are thereby attributed. In market terms, the use value of a commodity is still only relevant, however, if it can be measured in terms of market-based exchange value.

Market mechanisms are also used to measure the operation of agencies operating in the sector, in ways that might ensure the sector's economic priorities are met. This can be seen through the sector's 'operating model' for economic measurement: this is held up in the Ministry of Culture and Heritage as the sector's "primary unit of analysis and engagement" with agencies (MCH, 2014c, p.5). The objectives of the MCH operating model are: to understand opportunity costs; make trade-offs transparently; balance short term and long-term investments; take a 'managed risk' approach to encourage innovation; and to make recommendations on disinvesting in low return investments (ibid, p.6). These objectives are geared toward achieving economic success. However, trying to measure art and culture is complicated because much of what the sector produces – artistic works – is geared by the producers towards that form of value which turns upon non-commodifiable qualities – those associated with use.

The third strategy sees an *outcomes-driven approach* used to measure sector performance, development, and impact. This strategy pertains to a framework built upon a process/product couplet, which uses the idea of high-level outcomes (economic growth and efficiency) to judge sector success and validity. As a consequence of attention falling upon

the calculation of productivity, and not upon the social effects of the creative process, labour power is at risk of being alienated from the artistic effort. This focus on high-level outcomes is demonstrated through the *Ministry for Culture and Heritage Four-year Plan 2016*, in which the government priorities are: responsibly managing the government's finances; building a more competitive and productive economy; delivering better public services, and rebuilding Christchurch. This is designed to work in conjunction with their *2015/16 Annual Report* which identifies the aforementioned sector priorities. In this same vein, this report states "the Ministry continuously improved its service delivery and provided value for money. The efficient and effective delivery of the Ministry's services contributes to the Government's policy objective of lifting the performance of the public sector" (p.40). For example, the role of MCH is to fund and monitor, advise, deliver, and regulate (MCH 2014c, p.7). MCH funds agencies which are then measured in relation to whether they contributed to four categories to create, preserve, engage, excel (MCH 2014c, p.25-26).

This 'outcomes' driven focus on product is designed to achieve a more competitive and productive economy, to better public services, and to rebuild Christchurch. MSD has a similar framework; they use results-based accountability (2012) and the purchasing of outcomes from service providers as their market-based mechanisms for assessing the product produced from their services. These are entangled in the neoliberal drive for efficiency and the continued belief that the more efficient a system, the better it must be.

The *use of empty signifiers* is the fourth (and last) strategy outlined here. Empty signifiers, words and phrases that have no referent or agreed upon meaning, populate government agencies' websites and their corporate documents. These words give the impression that the sector runs smoothly with minimal issues. Empty signifiers are embedded in short

statements such as the goal to provide 'better public services'. These slogans are empty vessels carrying promises to fulfil the impossible task of catching the ever-changing movement of society. This language is scattered in the same way information about policy and funding from ministries, government bodies and crown entities are readily available, but separated into multiple documents in different parts of their website. The latter mirrors how funding is spread across the diversity of sector functions. The language used is loaded with meaning, yet it is ambiguous.

The language used describes funding as being given to many projects that are of value to New Zealanders, but what is of value is measured by economic frameworks for profit and is not explicitly stated. The strong parallels in the language between the MCH and MSD demonstrate neoliberalism's strategy for selling its economic imperatives, especially given that the two ministries do not coalesce. The language of neoliberalism is also present in the corporate documents of CreativeNZ and Auckland Council and is based on the prerogatives of broader government objectives. It has filtered down and become the discourse by which the organisations have come to understand their role, purpose, and position in relation to the impossible task of finding economic solutions and attempting to commodify even that which cannot be commodified.

The language of empty signifiers creates a tension for community-based cultural organisations who are straddling the community sector and the creative industry under the MCH. This is the tension of whether they are providing a community/public service or are an industry producer. MCH (2017a) lists the cultural industries, none of which cover the visual and applied arts, indicating community-based cultural organisations are viewed as community agencies and not part of the creative industry, yet these organisations need to be economically viable to be viewed as relevant by the bodies which fund them.

The emergence of an alternative organisational formalism

The emphasis on 'product' over 'process' that characterises the field of public policy, positions community-based art organisations between the worlds of artistic production and the field of the 'creative industries'. Aimers' (2005) research demonstrates how such agencies have morphed in ways that "combine the community orientated objectives of community arts practice with the commercially oriented creative industries" (p.1). These are what I am here calling community art agencies. The location of these agencies between the worlds of art and of neoliberal administration has resulted in the development within them of "organisational goals that place equal emphasis on process and product" (ibid, p.17). That said, the goals do not appear to sit easily with one another, as "their commercial activities categorise them as commodity producers for the creative industries, while their charitable or non-profit philosophy classifies them as a 'public good'" (ibid, p.7). Given that these agencies "are neither wholly viable financially as businesses nor well catered for in current arts and cultural policy or funding" they remain in economically vulnerable states (ibid, p.3). Moreover, these agencies remain invisible within the existing policy frameworks. The case study of this present research brings to the fore the existence of this new form of agency and of the challenges their 'in-between' status brings for their work. Prior to the presentation of that study, a diversion will be taken into the research design and methodology by which knowledge of this new form of agency has been developed.

Chapter Five: Methodology

This thesis started with the idea that neoliberalism tends towards crises. The identification of tensions locates this research in the critical dialectical tradition of sociological theory. As the research developed, the understanding that these crises are played out through a field of myths emerged. The literature about neoliberalism, art theory (*aesthetic formalism*), and the arts and culture sector (*organisational formalism*) in Aotearoa New Zealand provide the framework for understanding the project's starting point; that neoliberalism (and capitalism) have tendencies towards crises and these crises are spaces of hope for change, and art when organised through form has potential to effect political and social change. However, this potential is stifled by the way the arts and culture sector is organised through policy, leading to the emergence of a new kind of arts agency. To explore how concepts in the literature were represented in practice, this qualitative research engaged a single community arts organisation as a case study. The case study was employed to explore potential tensions experienced by the organisation and the strategies it uses to operate within a neoliberal context.

Research Design

In this thesis, three principles have significantly influenced the research design; context, collaboration, and transparency. Context, here, refers to how organisation forms in relation to historical narratives about spaces, places, and time. This meant firmly locating the research in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand and drawing on canons of knowledge that formed a timeline which chronicles the emergence of neoliberalism, the development of aesthetic formalism on the political left, and the contemporary context of the Aotearoa New Zealand arts and culture sector. Collaboration refers to a recognition that the use of multiple lenses in order to understand context and experience provides a wider spectrum

for information gathering that potentially enables a wider scope of information and ideas to come to the fore. Transparency refers to a process of enhancing the visibility of processes through which knowledge is produced and allowing the insights that result from these processes to be shared with those who have interests in the research. To achieve these three principles this research used a co-design approach for the gathering of information (Huybrechts, Benesch, & Geib, 2017) and employed an interpretivist approach for the analysis of data (Silverman, 2006).

Co-design is “a well-established approach to creative practice, particularly within the public sector” (Chisholm, 2016). It also goes by the names of ‘co-production’ (Lam, Zamenopoulos, Kelemen, & Hoo Na, 2017) and ‘participatory’ design (Huybrechts et al, 2017). The roots of co-design are grounded in participatory forms of research that promote discussion, engagement, and power-sharing (Goodyear-Smith, Jackson, & Greenhalgh, 2015). Co-design has been used in a variety of fields such as healthcare (Donetto, Pierri, Tsianakas, & Robert, 2015), education (Matuk, Gerard, Lim-Breitbart, & Linn, 2016), community development and policy (IPANZ, 2016; Blomkamp, 2018), and arts and culture (Gilchrist et. al, 2015; Claisse, Ciolfi, & Petrelli, 2017). In Aotearoa New Zealand co-design has been used in community development and is gaining traction as a practice and methodology (Mules, Pekepo, & Beaton, 2017; Boffa Miskell, 2017; Hagen, 2016). As this research is concerned with the critical responses of a community organisation to political and economic programmes not of its making, co-design is a suitable methodology for the generation of material.

A notable effect of the co-design methodology occurs in the management of the interview data. The content of the interviews conducted for the research was not chronicled using audio recordings, as is common – and from which transcripts might then be written – or from note taking during the interviews themselves. Instead, content from the interviews

was documented in a set of 'reflections', one of which was written by me in the period immediately after each interview. Each of the reflections were then sent to the respective interviewees. It was anticipated that the 'reflective' character of the texts – in contrast to the 'representational' character of transcripts – would encourage a continuation of discussion over points arising in the interviews. Moreover, it was anticipated that such discussion would have the potential to range more broadly than might be expected were the interviewees simply being asked to comment on the accuracy or otherwise of transcripts. The principles of co-design were thereby important because of the potential they created for the co-construction of knowledge. This also aligned with the values of the particular arts organisation engaged for this study.

In enabling the co-construction of knowledge, co-design also provides the potential for Theodore Adorno's (1973) negative dialectics to be enacted. In Adorno's negative dialectics there is a continuous development of the object that is being brought into being. Here, this means that the content of reflections could be built upon and added to by multiple parties, potentially through contestation of the points as they sat, leaving the space open for the potential of continuous narrative revision and growth. The benefit of such an approach is that a story is formed through an iterative process between story tellers (researcher and participants) in a way that is not determined by the state in which a text presently sits at any one time. David Simon (2017) argues that whilst the dominant practice in research is the "conventional expert-led approach to knowledge production ... institutional structures and systems of academic organization and evaluation generally perpetuate or even reinforce narrow disciplinarity" forms of research (p.1). The transcription of recorded data could be read as one of those practices where the 'narrowness' of the 'expertise' gets inadvertently reproduced, as transcription unavoidably sees the researcher code the spoken words in

accordance with a range of ontological and epistemological convictions not necessarily shared by those interviewed. Alternatively, co-design prioritises co-construction and collective creativity (Fischer & Vassen, 2011). These concepts are valued by myself as the researcher and the research participants, and therefore it was important that collaborative methods were included in the research design of this thesis.

The next component of design used in this research is an exploratory interpretivist stance. This stance seeks to understand the potential trajectories for organisations such as the one in the case study. Interpretivism is also used to identify and analyse tensions and strategies used by the arts organisation in the case study, for navigating crises it experiences in its operation. The motive for this method is an assumption with which I began, that there would be no single solution to the crises and tensions being faced by the agencies and that, instead, multiple potential trajectories might exist by which the agency may achieve its goals. An interpretive approach would enable the multiple nature of those possibilities to come to the fore in the interview. Moreover, the interpretive approach has the performative potential for ideas of consequence to move; meaning that discussion is more than a space for reporting what is already known – it is a space which can enable the recognition of multiple perspectives in the construction of potential trajectories. If reality is in part, at least, socially constructed, then there is the possibility for the construction of change through the potential trajectories. This is an important aspect of the research design and for answering the research questions because it frames the rationale behind the methods used in the collection and analysis of the data and for the presentation of findings.

Research Questions

This research asks: what tensions does an arts organisation experience where its roles correspond with those of the ‘community arts agencies’ that have emerged under

neoliberalism, and what strategies does the organisation use to manage, negotiate and mitigate these tensions? In considering the complex relationships that operate within an arts organisation, I sought to explore three elements of the strategies that might be developed: discursive; affective; and, infrastructural. To this end, I was particularly interested in the 'talk' of agency members in relation to the purposes of the organisation, the manner in which emotional buy-in occurs of people working in the organisation, and the environments in which practices of the organisation take place.

The specific research questions were:

- What strategies does the arts organisation employ to manage tensions associated with the neoliberal context in which it operates?
- What implications follow from the discursive, affective, and infrastructural elements of these strategies?

The Case Study

A case study approach has the ability to illuminate the bigger social issues of tensions, contradictions, and strategies faced by community arts agencies, as they pertain to New Zealand's economy understood in political terms. The case study was theory-generated (Leavy, 2014) meaning the information sought from the case study was informed by prior theoretical knowledge about socio-political context, which has been discussed in the preceding chapters. The case study for this thesis is a grassroots community arts organisation located in a gentrified suburb, which self-identifies as a multi-disciplinary creative community.

The organisation for the case study in this research was chosen, in part, because of an existing relationship between the organisation and myself. The value in choosing this

organisation also came from the manner in which it represented, in part, the new community arts agencies as noted by Aimers. Second, its value as an exemplar of the new community arts agencies increases in light of its identification with the progressive Left, meaning it might arguably have commonalities to the broader political Left theory upon what the present analysis builds. Third, it was an appropriate choice because of the reflexive self-awareness its members demonstrated of the position the organisation occupies within the arts and culture sector. It was assumed that the agency had developed strategies for navigating tensions and contradictions arising from the neoliberal administration of the economy in general and of the arts and culture sector more specifically.

After the organisation agreed to take part in this research, I set about finding a way to work with them to generate materials through which analysis could build. This task involved critically analysing the knowledge I already possessed about the organisation and the people who worked there. The analysis showed that the information I was seeking would be best acquired through interviews which led me to a qualitative approach.

Interview Questions

To identify the organisation's strategies, I employed semi-structured interviews with eight paid staff members. Semi-structured interviews require a small number of questions to be asked to generate data and enable further lines of dialogue and inquiry to unfold during the interview process, potentially allowing a broader range of data to be collected. I chose five questions to form the base of each interview. One of these questions came to reflect a 'critical moment' observed in my early interactions with the agency, at a staff meeting. The moment was significant because the organisation's founder made a speech about the potentially tenuous position the organisation currently occupies: I interpreted this as a

potentially troubling moment in the life of the group, upon which people might wish to comment.

The interview questions were:

- How did you come to be at the organisation and why do you work here?
- What is your role/ what do you do here?
- How does the organisation make decisions?
- What has happened since the speech at the staff meeting I attended?
- Did my presence impact upon the situation?

These questions were chosen to build a picture of each participant, their relationships with their co-workers, and their conceptions of the organisation. Together these accounts helped to form a picture of the organisation as a collective. Furthermore, the combination of the three drivers behind the questions (the quest to understand the agency, to understand the affective dimension of organisational life, and to understand the environments in which the practices of the agency take place) helped to form a picture of the organisation in relation to the tensions, contradictions and strategies it embodied.

Interviews

I used a constructionist style of interviewing (Silverman, 2006). Constructionism explores the “way in which accounts are part of the world they describe ... [and] how participants actively create meaning” (Silverman, 2006, p.129). This approach approaches interviews as co-constructed events, between interviewers and interviewees. This is important because the questions asked in the interviews thereby become elements of the research itself, shaping the range of information generated and, in themselves, being sites at which contestation and resistance might be mounted.

Silverman (2006, p.110) states that the performance of semi-structured interviews requires the use of three important techniques. The first is the use of simple probing statements such as, “tell me more ...”, to encourage the interviewee to continue speaking. The second is that it is important to establish a rapport with interviewee so that they feel comfortable about the interview and the information they share. The third is that researchers need to understand the aims of their project to enable them to guide the interview in a way that will result in relevant data.

Prior to commencing the interviews, I had two meetings with the organisation’s founder to discuss the research and the organisation’s involvement. To help make decisions about who to interview, the founder emailed me a list of staff contacts. Prospective participants were emailed an information sheet (Appendix A) and given my contact details to help them decide if they wanted to take part.

I interviewed the eight staff members who were involved in either the management of, or everyday decision-making processes at, the arts organisation. The original proposition was that each person would be interviewed at least once, and interviews would continue until theoretical saturation occurred (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p.61). However, I found that one interview with each participant was sufficient.

At the start of each interview, participants were asked if they had any questions before we began, and asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B). The staff I interviewed were the programme managers, or the person in charge of each function: Creative Director; Business Manager; Gallery Curator; Work Programme Manager; Administration Manager; Sound Studio Manager; Sound Engineer; and, Media Manager. At the time of interviewing there were fourteen staff, eleven of whom were listed on the organisation’s website; two

employees were not included in the research, one employee left the week before interviews commenced, and when I asked about interviewing the staff omitted from the organisations website, I was told they did not hold managerial positions. There was, however, one non-management participant who was included in the interviews at the founder's suggestion, given their long-standing association with the organisation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Immediately after completing an interview I wrote a comprehensive reflection that reviewed the elements of the discussion that related to neoliberalism, to arts and culture policy, and to organisational processes. These reflections were influenced by my interest in the relation between the political aspirations of aesthetic formalism and the organisational formalism that the 'new community arts agency' has come to express. The reflections also contained concrete, practical details about the different rooms and the layout of these settings, and about unexpected events such as interruptions to the interviews. Moreover, I could record events that took place before and after each interview. This was important as staff members would often greet me or ask questions beyond interview interaction.

The content of the reflections was developed using principles from co-design methodology. After the interviews were complete, I emailed the individual participants the reflection pertaining to their interview. The purpose was twofold; firstly, it engaged the participants in the process and created a collaborative approach to the examination of the organisation's internal workings; and secondly, it was a way of validating the data as they had one month to contact me or correct any information (for example, dates, names, places etcetera), or make any comments. Significantly, if a participant felt they had been misinterpreted or misrepresented it gave them the opportunity to clarify. Four of the participants contacted

me which was important for validating the data because it meant they knew how they had been interpreted and were privy to the data post interview.

Discovery of the strategies used by the organisation to counter demands arising from external sources occurred through analysis of the reflective pieces in light of the literature on the systemic crises associated with capitalism. This method led to the identification of techniques used by the organisation to identify tensions internal to itself that require mediation and then, secondly, to analysis of the strategies used. Thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were both used as techniques for these two steps.

Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns and meanings in data and the identification of how these patterns and meanings came about. Theme identification in this research relates to what Clarke (2017) calls a storybook theme, where there is “a patterning of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept or central idea” (2.25 min). In this process, it is the ideas underpinning the patterns which become the central focus and which have the ability to bring parts of the data together that may, at first, appear disparate.

Thematic analysis “offers an accessible and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (Braun & Clark 2006, p.2). It is Braun and Clarke’s “inductive latent” genre of thematic development, where both form and meaning are central, that enabled the identification of the themes pertaining to the affective, discursive, and infrastructural dimensions of the agency’s strategies.

Four themes emerged in this way from the material generated through the interview/reflective process: structure and organisation; environments of engagement; systems of measurement; and, language. First, ‘structure and organisation’ are connected to

how policy structures and organises the arts and culture sector in a way that sets repertoires of possible action for those operating in the sector. Organisational formalism shows the impact form has at the level of policy (Aimers, 2005; Lawn, 2006) and the artistic formalism of Benjamin (1936) and Adorno (1973; 1997) demonstrates how form works at the level of the organisation. For the agency this is the structure and organisation of roles and the agency's various functions. Second, 'environments of engagement' concerns the matter of space and the impact of physical environments upon the kinds of actions that can be performed and the goals that can be achieved. The significance of space is evident in Harvey's work on the macro-, regional movements of capitalism (Harvey, 2005; 2015) and, on a micro- scale, within the use of space in radical theatre to disrupt prevailing ideologies (Brecht, 2001). In the context of the case study these spaces are specifically related to its physical location and use of cyberspace to produce presence.

Third, 'systems of measurement' encompass the elements of process and of product, along with use value and exchange value (Harvey, 2015). It is from a location within the tensions generated by these antinomies that the agency is required to produce measures of its performance and to be measured by government funding bodies. In turn, the antinomies of process and product, and of use value and exchange value, shape how the agency's membership perceives itself and how it perceives itself viewed by other community agencies. The value that the agency places on process and on the use value of artistic expression conflicts with the neoliberal injunction to produce a product which has market value. Fourth, 'language' is the discourse of neoliberal administration, the myths that are perpetuated by neoliberal narratives (Wrenn, 2016) and a series of empty signifiers whose presence naturalises the myths, keeping them alive. The language of empty signifiers that is

used by government organisations to define sector operators, is paradoxically adopted by the agency as a way of understanding itself.

Research ethics

This research passed through the Massey University Ethics committee as a low-risk project.

From an ethical stance, my aim was to minimise potential harm, to respect people's autonomy, to preserve participant privacy, and ensure informed consent (Leavy, 2014).

Therefore, it was important for me to work with the organisation toward knowledge that was co-constructed. This meant that the organisation was believed to be the best source of knowledge and representation of its operation and experiences in relation to its operational context. Finding a method suitable for my engagement with the organisation was important because I was aware that the research had the potential to raise sensitive and difficult points of discussion. I was also cautious that a 'wrong approach' could see the project finished before it had taken off.

My ethical stance did not necessarily transfer to the mitigation of ethical issues in the field.

In the research process, there is potential for sensitive information to arise (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). My research at the organisation bordered at times on participant observation, insofar a small series of critical moments occurred that, while oblique to my interviews, nevertheless had the potential to impact upon people's perceptions of their roles. To navigate these moments, I leaned heavily on the reflective process I was using for the interviews and engaged in a critical decision-making process which enabled me to navigate the moments without harm to the participants and without jeopardising the research.

Chapter Six:

Case Study of a New Community Arts Agency

The case study for this research is a community arts agency comprising a group of artists: those members understand the organisation, in itself, to be a form of creative communication. It is by virtue of this shared perception that the agency obtains the condition of *aesthetic formalism*: the form that the organisation of the agency takes extends the socio-political reach of the creativity that comes to be generated through its production of marketable artistic objects.

The mix between the tradition of aesthetic formalism and the organisational formalism of the new community agencies produces a complex, tension-filled situation. Those tensions relate to the agency's environments of engagement, its structure and organisation, the incommensurability of process-related outcomes relative to products, of use value to market value, and of the adoption of a selection of the very same empty signifiers by which the neoliberal project naturalises its existence. The purpose of this study is to identify the agency's strategies by which those tensions are negotiated (discussed in the following chapter).

The Arts Agency

The case study for this thesis was a grassroots community arts agency which self-identifies as a multi-disciplinary creative community. The agency is situated in a gentrified suburb of a main city, with a strong history of engagement in community life, politics, and arts. The suburb's history resonates with the agency which, through a legacy of self-published works and community engagement has facilitated social and political changes beyond the context of colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The suburb has played important roles in women's

voting rights, anti-nuclear protests, rejection of amalgamation into regional council frameworks, and successfully barring local retailers from selling legal synthetic cannabis. Because the primary functions of the agency and the areas of operation that make up its constitution do not seamlessly fit with the goals and expectations of external organisations, tensions emerge. The agency has developed strategies for managing and negotiating the tensions that come with its operational context. These tensions are simultaneously external and internal to the agency's operation and need to be managed in order for the agency to achieve its goals.

To facilitate its goals, the agency needs to account for the goals and expectations of those who contribute to its financial viability, these being: the agency itself (staff, buildings, programmes); the artists; art consumers; the local community; and the government as regulators and funders. The pursuit of its goals requires that the agency strives to be sustainable, which entails strategies for the social, political, and economic areas of its operation. Socially and politically, it is important for the agency to understand the communities, people, and organisations with which it engages and identifies. The agency also needs to meet the expectations of these groups otherwise it risks losing the relationships. This, in turn, affects its economic position and the necessity to generate revenue and cover expenses.

Significantly, as the agency is a benefactor of city council funding and tenants in a council building, in many ways it is beholden to council's bureaucratic processes and neoliberal ideologies. Moreover, it is subject to the policy and regulation of the arts and culture sector because this is its industry of operation. This is where the need for strategies arises. The relationship between the agency and external organisations can cause tensions in relation

to how the agency can best meet its goals. This is because each external organisation has its own vision of the agency and what purpose it serves. These tensions play a large role in how the agency functions and what it can achieve.

Prior to conducting the research interviews, I was invited to attend a staff meeting to introduce myself and speak about my research, and to observe the dynamics of staff relationships. At this meeting, the agency's founder made an impassioned speech about the agency's identity, its direction, and its values. The delivery of this speech became an important moment in the research, providing a key question for the individual interviews. It was also a critical moment in the research because it was at this point that it became apparent to me that the agency had its own expectations as to the outcomes this project would produce. Whilst I thought the desired outcomes related to an enhanced level of understanding about the agency's relationship with external organisations, the founder told me that she hoped the research would help the agency reflect and understand itself better. This demonstrates the agency to have a level of self-awareness regarding its circumstances and the tensions it experiences and connects to the strategies it uses to form its identity.

Tensions

The tensions faced by the agency become visible when using dialectical analysis to interpret the fabric of the agency's operation. The tensions found through this analysis mirror those of the arts and culture sector, and the challenges faced by the agency are emblematic of the challenges found with aesthetic formalism more generally. Tensions arise from conflict between what the agency wants to achieve and the ability it has to achieve those goals within the framework of its operation. This is a tension between how the arts and culture sector is organised through neoliberal policy and the goals of the agency. Identification of this tension began from analysis of the agency's motto, which is about the use value of

facilitating spaces to provide an environment that encourages artistic expression. The focus on use value occupies a space that is contrary to the market exchange focus required of the agency by its funders. A motto reveals, in part, what drives an organisation. Use of the agency's motto as a start point, alongside the tensions of neoliberalism, helped in the identification of tension experienced by the agency.

The rest of this chapter explores four themes (tensions) that emerged during the research interviews. Discussion of the strategies the agency uses to manage and navigate these tensions will follow in the next chapter. These tensions are connected to the contradictions and myths of neoliberalism, to the challenges neoliberalism poses for the political Left, to the prioritisation of form as a method of organisation (aesthetic formalism), and to the arts and culture sector. The four tensions are as follows. First, the structure and organisation of the agency and the different roles of its separate departments, which relates to the arrangement and configuration of how the agency is governed. Second, the role and impact of environments of engagement, that refer to the physical and online spaces used by the agency for its various activities. Third, is the systems of measurement where the value the agency places on use value and process conflicts with the neoliberal drive to produce products for the market and for these products to have market value. Fourth, is the language of empty signifiers that is used by government agencies to define sector organisations, which the agency adopts as a way of understanding itself.

Structure and Organisation

The first tension, structure and organisation, is infrastructural in kind because it relates to how the elements of the agency are arranged and configured. The agency seeks to use organisation/devolution to be structureless in terms of power and hierarchy. This sees the agency navigating a tension between the requirement for 'good' management (hierarchical)

and devolution. The distribution of power through the use of organisational structure exemplifies the agency's self-conscious use of form for the advancing of artistic activity.

In its daily operations the agency uses a devolved model to function. The devolution of the agency at the level of organisational management mirrors the devolution observed across the arts and culture sector. In the latter, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH) act as the umbrella for CreativeNZ, City Councils, Local Boards, and then other sector organisations sitting underneath.

In the arts and culture sector, policy development and managerial responsibility are split across multiple organisations. Ultimately, in the same way, MCH drives the arts and culture sector, it is the founder and business manager who drive the agency in terms of its vision and with regard to the achievement of its goals. This functional alignment of the agency with the arts and culture sector suggests that the agency may organise itself in a way that relates to, and is thereby easily recognised and understood by, external organisations.

Importantly, it is a form of organisation which funding bodies that are external to the agency believe to be good operational practice. And whilst the agency is not completely without internal power dynamics a mixture of small staff numbers, the separation of organisational functions, and the differentiation of staff members in terms of roles means that there is a relatively low differentiation of organisational power.

On paper, the agency has a three-tier level of power distribution. The founder and the business manager oversee the creative and business aspects of the agency, respectively, and consult other staff for input about their decisions. In decision-making, they work most closely with the in-work programme manager and with the sound studio manager, who occupy the next two largest roles. These four staffs are responsible for the agency's largest

departments (functions) and regular meetings occur between these four for consideration of the agency's operation. Beyond these four roles, the distribution of organisational power within the work-space is relatively equal. This is in part because each function only has between two and four staff and each person has a different job in one of the agency's seven key areas of operation.

As part of the devolved model, the agency's seven key areas of operation, its functions, operate as separate services. This has caused tension for the agency because staff have also been separated from one another through both the individual roles they have within the agency and the kinds of activities they each carry out. The separation of staff means that they largely work in isolation from each other and that the projects they complete are also disparate from one another. This is problematic for the agency as they value the co-construction of knowledge and collaborative forms of work. To navigate this tension the agency finds itself needing to develop ways to foster an environment of collectivity and shared projects. This becomes important where the agency seeks to expand its activities as an organisational entity, rather than operate a widely distributed set of functions under a what would effectively become a trading name.

The tension between hierarchy and devolution is most prominent when considering the agency's goal to expand its operations – an intention that aligns with the goals of the arts and culture sector. However, with the agency's current structure and the resources at its disposal it would be difficult to scale-up the operation, meaning this form of organisation could become problematic for the agency. The intent to expand raises the issue of the limit-points of the form chosen by the agency. One of these is the threshold at which the management of tasks through the devolved model becomes ineffective. Another is the juncture where accountability is called for on a scale beyond the agency's separate

functions. If the agency continues to seek expansion, these matters will need to be addressed, especially considering that the agency runs at near full capacity in terms of its physical space.

To summarise: thus far, the agency has not been able to achieve a state of structurelessness, but it does have a low power distribution amongst staff. The separation of the agency's functions also separates staff and isolates them in their work which could be problematic if the agency expands its operations.

Environments of engagement

Tension arises from the agency's geographical location and the various other environments in which it operates. This tension relates to how the agency can organise itself to function within these environments. The largest impact is in three areas of the agency's operation.

These are: the environments in which the agency operates – the location of its premises and the ability to draw people in, and the agency's online presence; the impact the agency's location has on the objective of its work programme to help unemployed artists find employment; the agency's operational capacity and its ability to scale-up the size of its operations.

The location of the agency's premises and the ability of the organisation to draw people in from the street have presented problems because the agency is located on a cul-de-sac away from foot and vehicle traffic. This affects the kinds of visitors they receive. The main visitors to the agency are tourists exploring the area. Problematic for the agency is that the tourists, generally, only visit once. On the upside, if their experience is positive they may encourage others to visit. The next frequent group of visitors are friends of people at the agency, artists, and art buyers. The visitors in the two groups enable networking to take

place through personal interaction. The problem with this form of networking is that the agency has little control over whether these people then speak of its existence after they have visited. The founder informed me that to combat this issue of location a sign advertising their existence used to be placed on the main street. However, a change in council regulations means this form of advertising is no longer allowed.

The agency can expand the range of its interpersonal connections through 'networking' but its premises are running near capacity. This means it must strategically plan and prioritise what kinds of events and activities it engages in/with. The business manager stated that the agency likes to take on new and diverse projects and does not like to turn projects down. To try to accommodate this desire, the founder informed me that the agency was rearranging the physical spaces at its premises. The practice of reorganisation offers limited potential for the agency to expand within its current means and with the resources it has available. The issue being that it is unable to expand the physical building or afford market rent at another site in its locality. Reorganisation has allowed the agency to find some space, nonetheless, but this is only a temporary solution and if it wishes further expansion, it will need to find a suitable strategy.

The operational capacity of the agency and its attempts to scale-up the size and range of its projects are tied to the fundamental ways in which the agency informs people of its existence. Information is spread through a range of ways: by word of mouth; through the processes of bidding to host travelling exhibitions (exhibitions that will show in multiple locations) or big-name exhibitions; and engaging in local events, such as festivals and community days outside of the building premises. These actions draw on the local city council's concepts of community building and community participation. Through engaging in activities in public spaces, the agency uses networking and communication skills to facilitate

contact with a public that might not otherwise know it was there. As an arts agency, it is well suited to these forms of engagement. Its activities in public spaces are creative and artistic which fits with the city council's drive to create aesthetically pleasing urban spaces. Commissioned works of art nearly always accompany the Council's urban spaces. These kinds of spaces are designed to attract people, which leads to the assumption that these people will spend money and contribute to the local economy.

Another function of the agency is the in-work programme to help unemployed artists find work. This programme is enabled through a contract with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Whilst the agency states this programme to be successful, they identify their location to have a twofold impact on the work programme. First, the agency is situated in a wealthy suburb, which means the people it seeks to help cannot afford to live in the area, and that the majority of work programme participants come from other locations. This leads to the second issue of transport, where accessibility is further hindered because of limited public transport to the area. This makes travel to the agency difficult for the people for whom the agency's programmes are intended. To mitigate the increased travel costs incurred by those who attend courses, MSD provide a travel allowance to partially offset the travel costs of programme participants. This is helpful but does not mitigate the transport issues of which resolution is also beyond the agency's remit. Suffice to say the agency's own strategy to help alleviate transport issues is to be as accommodating of participants' schedules as possible.

To counter some of the issues experienced by its geographical location, and to expand visitor numbers, the agency has increased its online presence. The agency's online presence mainly consists of a website and social media accounts. These platforms are a tool for sharing news, events, and information about the agency and its services. There are two

limit-points with online engagement. The first is that to appear at the top of online user searches the agency relies on click traffic or paid advertisements which move it up the search engine algorithms. As the agency is small and less known, and it does not have large amounts of revenue to spend on advertising, it is further down the results list. Second is the time it takes to manage the sometimes-inappropriate content that gets posted (e.g. sexual) and the particularities of some people who engage with the agency online. The media manager noted that sometimes people would place links and comments on the agency's social media sites that were not appropriate. The result is that online presence consumes considerable work time, and alone is not sufficient for attracting visitors. Even though the online engagement is helpful it is secondary to the benefits of the agency's face-to-face networking. These issues demonstrate the challenges of expansion to increase revenue in pursuit of being successful in a neoliberal context, where expansion is considered the most beneficial way to increase product output and profit for the pursuit of economic independence.

The tensions found in the agency's environments of engagement centre upon the capacity of the agency to increase the number of physical spaces it has available or can acquire, and its ability to network both online and offline. Time, space, and funding are components that the agency has to factor in when considering what strategies will be most beneficial. Being adaptable in these environments plays a big part in whether the agency is able to achieve its goals and the goals of external organisations.

Systems of Measurement

The agency's third point of tension, systems of measurement, relates to the discursive areas of the agency's operation, to the requirements for receiving government funding, and to the different discourses that co-exist between them. Systems of measurement chiefly pertain to the concepts of process and product, of use- and market- value. Process and product refers to the distinction between the processes and purposes involved in the creation of artistic works and the final product. Use value and market value refers to the engagement of market mechanisms to measure two kinds of value attributed to objects as a means to ascertain their worth.

When the agency applies for funding, government bodies expect the agency to demonstrate a capacity to generate market value through their products and through their social status (brand) as a community arts agency. Having value in the market requires the production of objects that can be quantified, but this is challenging because not everything produced in and by the agency is commodifiable. In the economic market, processes and use value are difficult to measure because artistic processes are often intimately connected to the artist(s) and use value is dependent upon the value attributed to it by the user. It is much easier to attribute market value when engaging the product side of the process/product tension. This means in market terms a commodity (product) is only valuable if it has market value, therefore, its use value beyond this is superfluous. Moreover, when value is placed on the finished product then the product is understood in terms of its ability to possess market value. Alternatively, if the emphasis is on the process, then the intrinsic value is attributed to the artistic process involved in the creation of the work.

The prevailing stance of the agency is towards the use value associated with the creative process over the exchange value associated with the final product. In contrast, the city

council's chief concern lays with product output, that becoming a means by which to create measurements enabling the allocation of funding. To receive funding the agency needs to meet the requirements of the funders around what gets recorded. To meet the requirements, volunteers at the agency's reception desk record the gender and the total number of visitors each day. This system focuses on the agency's product output for market value in a manner that marginalises the role of process and the use values associated with its projects. The impact of the contrasting views and need for funding see the agency take on forms of organisation that, in general, see it measure its functioning using the same mechanisms, market performance indicators and statistical data collection, as the arts and culture sector.

The application of market value and requirements for funding also cause tension because they define the agency in ways that conflict with how the agency defines itself. As a tenant in a council building, the agency has lower overheads than if it was paying market rent in the gentrified suburb of its locality. Whilst this is beneficial to the agency, it is also a site of tension because, in many ways, the agency is beholden to council's bureaucratic processes. The resulting tension is that of use value/ market value. This sees the agency straddle its operation as both a community organisation and as a business in the creative industry. Effectively, it is oscillating between being a social service provider and an economically viable entity. As a social service provider, it is able to keep operational costs and the prices it charges for its services lower. Significantly, if the agency were financially independent the charges for its services would increase. And, it is likely its operational costs would also increase and its status as a council tenant could become unstable.

The contrasting views of the agency and council cause tension. Part of this tension is that items/services produced by the agency can be difficult to commodify. Another aspect of this

tension is that determining market value by measuring process(es) and use value is tenuous. Therefore, to receive funding the agency must concentrate on increasing visitor numbers and bookings, and boost sales.

Not only does the agency experience tension in the creation of a product for sale but as an organisation that acts as a service facilitator. During interviews, four staff members identified funding acquisition as one of the agency's biggest challenges. This illuminates two levels of tension. As the agency is primarily a service facilitator dependent on funding, it is the agency itself which must become a commodity. To receive government funding the agency must frame itself as a product and demonstrate in a measurable way the product output of its functions. As a service facilitator, the process of measuring its services can be challenging. The agency also offers mentorship for artists; has a recording studio; hosts exhibitions with other galleries; participates in arts festivals; produces literary works through its press division; and, works on projects with other local organisations. All these activities require revenue. The gallery is important here because it is the primary means through which local council funding is granted: it is also an important space of measurement for the agency. Gallery success is measured by how many people visited, how many people hired the gallery, and how many works were sold. However, the agency's funding needs stretch beyond the sale of art and engaging artists to hire gallery space.

Government funding for services beyond the agency's gallery is highlighted through the in-work programme contract with MSD. MSD purchase outcomes from the agency, by way of a finder's fee. The agency receives a base amount for the contract and is then paid an additional sum for each client (artist) who finds work. The latter fee is larger than the base amount. This reflects MSD priorities of putting clients in jobs to fulfil its goal to help New Zealanders be successful individuals in their commodification as labour power. The MSD

contract causes tension for the agency because it wants the clients to find sustainable work related to their artistic expertise. The agency negotiates this tension by offering extra support to clients in pursuit of their creative skills. For example, it facilitates contacts for the artist in the field of their expertise and offers opportunities to work with the agency on projects, to exhibit in its gallery, or use the recording studio. Whilst the offering of services beyond the MSD contract puts a strain on the agency, there are potential benefits such as the opportunity to increase its network and gain revenue from the hiring of its services. This increases the measurable level of the agency's product output, whilst still supporting artists in pursuit of their creative work.

The agency's founder had observed that an increasing number of artists (as clients) were creating artwork specifically as products for sale and noted this was problematic because this kind of art is often more challenging to sell. This observation caused tension for the agency and the artists in terms of revenue, demonstrating that an emphasis on the product can have an adverse effect. Significantly, this exemplifies that the neoliberal idea that everything can be commodified, and that increased product output reflects success is a myth. When an artistic expression has been captured by neoliberalism, art becomes a commodity more than an expression of a process which has personal meaning in relation to the author's artistic endeavours.

Systems of measurement related to attributing market value cause tension and detract from the agency's goal of providing spaces for artistic works to be created, through processes that are meaningful to the artists. The emphasis on product puts pressure on the agency's resources as it tries to meet the goals for government funding without losing the meaningfulness of creative processes. When viewed through the lens of neoliberalism the agency is a commodity with economic value. This conflicts with how the agency frames

itself, as it believes it is the process of what it does and how it engages with people that has a greater impact than how much they do.

Empty Signifiers

The fourth and final tension impacts the agency on both the affective and discursive levels and pertains to the use of empty signifiers to define the agency and to develop connections between that identity and the staff. The government agencies use a particular kind of language on their websites and in their official documents. Some of this language has been adopted by the agency and at times creates tension. This can be seen in two examples.

First, empty signifiers used by both the agency and government organisations are: dynamic (MCH, 2014b); diverse (MCH, 2015); flexible (MCH, 2015); engagement (MCH, 2014b); and, empower (MSD, 2013). Government agencies use these words as projections of how the state operates, its purpose, and what it does. Empty signifiers are employed as part of the production of a hegemonic 'common sense' to reach a variety of people because they have no explicit referent. The agency uses these words for the same purpose. At the time of the interviews, the agency was in the process of exploring its identity and redefining its values, goals, and purpose. This is an ongoing process for the agency and is a strategy for understanding its role and what is expected of it by staff and by the external organisations with which it engages. By employing the language of government, the agency is forming its identity using government organisations as a referent. This highlights the influence of neoliberal language on how the agency has come to define itself in the same way neoliberalism impacted conceptions of citizenship (Humpage, 2010; 2011).

The second example of empty signifiers in the creation of tension is the word 'community' and its role in defining the agency. The agency defines itself as a creative community, and

importance is placed on the people who make up that community. The word community is used by the agency and government organisations, and tension lays in the word's referent. For the agency, 'community' is an integral part of its identity that represents its relationships and shared projects and purpose. For government agencies, it is an external projection used to bring people together to foster a stronger economy. This government strategy works on a national level as can be seen through Anderson (1983) who defines a nation as "an imagined political community" (p.49). The reason he argues communities are imagined is that no person can know all or most other members of the nation, so they create an image in their minds that can never be fully realised. Alternatively, he defines a community as people who are in direct contact with one another and with a collective identity. This is in line with the agency's perception of community.

However, collective identity is itself an empty signifier based on myths, it is an abstract concept that is meaningful enough to be a reference for what that collective identity might be (Giesen & Seyfert, 2015). Significantly, although community is an empty signifier even those in direct contact with a collective identity are not homogenised because the interpretation of that identity is not universal (p.118). The use of community by both the agency and government agencies is difficult to discern and unpack and serves different purposes. For the agency, community is experienced directly: for government agencies community is an idea which it seeks to enable in the pursuit of economic goals. What is significant here is that the use of empty signifiers is part of the neoliberal strategy for selling neoliberal myths. Neoliberalism strives to commodify and quantify everything, yet paradoxically, the language it uses is itself hard to quantify.

Summary

The agency employed for this case study identifies as a politically Leftist creative community. The case study revealed that neoliberalism causes four key tensions (themes) for the agency. These tensions relate to structure and organisation, environments of engagement, systems of measurement, and language. These tensions impact upon the agency's primary goals and relate to sector policy and the means through which the organisation receives government funding. Having a reliance on external funding means the agency is, in many ways, beholden to external organisations, the bureaucratic processes of these bodies and their expectations of the agency, and the role the organisations envisage the arts agency to play.

To manage and navigate these tensions, the agency has developed strategies from which common threads emerge. It is to these strategies that we will now turn. The next chapter discusses the strategies used by the agency, the implications of these strategies and how they fit with the expectations of the agency and external organisations with which it engages.

Chapter Seven:

Discussion: Strategies, Implications, and Expectations

This chapter discusses the strategies as articulated by the research participants, which have emerged in relation to the tensions experienced by the community arts agency. The implications of the strategies are explored in terms of the conditions required for a given strategy to succeed, through an evaluation of the agency's situation relative to those conditions. These conditions see the agency caught between the competing logics of process/use value, and product/market value. Navigating the tensions it experiences is integral to the agency's attempts to meet its own goals and those of its external stakeholders. This is especially so since the agency favours the form of being a social service provider and its funders favour the form of the agency as being that of an economically viable entity. Part of the agency's challenge is to foster engagement in meaningful activities beyond what is easily accounted for in the terms of market-based measures.

In their contributions toward the mitigation of neoliberalism's tendency towards crises, the four government organisations, discussed in Chapter Four, have four strategies in common that bear upon the shaping of the arts and culture sector. These strategies are: the devolution of structure; reliance upon market mechanisms for purchasing and selling; the use of outcomes as a measure of performance; and the use of empty signifiers to elicit participation by external bodies. The discussion of the case study in the previous chapter indicates that a degree of overlap exists between the sector-wide strategies and the tensions experienced by the agency when navigating the context of its operation. Those areas of tension concern structure and organisation, the agency's environments of engagement, the systems of measurement, and, the prevalence of empty-signifiers as expressions of identity and purpose. The agency's strategies have been derived from the

tensions (themes) identified in the case study. The strategies are: horizontalism; accommodation/flexibility; networking; expansion; increasing market participation; fostering collectivity; networking; and, identity formation. Rather than discuss them sequentially, I present the strategies in terms of characteristics they share at the level of their form, as to whether this is primarily infrastructural, discursive, or affective in kind. It is important to note that some of these strategies do not fit neatly into a single category. At times a strategy's role is twofold.

Infrastructural Strategies

The infrastructural dimension of organisational strategy relates to the basic facilities or administrative systems a structure requires in order to function. The areas of tension identified in the case study that relate to the infrastructural dimension are those associated with structure and organisation, systems of measurement, and environments of engagement. Three strategies emerge from the case study in relation to these challenges: horizontalism; expansion; and accommodation/flexibility.

For the community arts agency, horizontalism was expressed in relation to an aim to be structureless and through a desire to separate its various functions into what are essentially separate services. The infrastructure is to be 'devolved'. Whilst structurelessness was not achieved during the period of the research, it was apparent that a precondition for the possibility of devolved structure existed, that of a relatively low power differentiation between staff. The separation of roles means that each person has responsibility for the tasks and outcomes associated with their field of activity and this helps to give them a voice in decision-making processes. Staff meetings and collaboration on projects help to combat the isolation of staff that might flow from the separation of functions within a small community organisation. This strategy occurs at the level of form where the agency adapts

its organisational model in order to pursue its goals. Whilst this strategy mitigates issues for the agency in relation to its current scale of operation, if it were to expand its structure, the fulfilment of organisational functions could prove problematic under the logic of horizontalism.

Moreover, the drive to meet government sector-specific requirements position community-based cultural organisations as oscillating between the status of social service providers and of being economically viable entities in the creative industry. For the agency, part of their approach in combating the challenges around the devolution of functional responsibilities across an increasing number of roles is to have flexible working hours and schedules for staff. This means staff can adjust their calendars to meet project completion times and helps when organising to meet with artists (clients).

Environments of engagement relate to the different kinds of physical and online spaces with which the agency engages and the impact this has on their infrastructural operations. These environments, the agency's premises, off site activities, and online forms of engagement present challenges to the agency in its goal to expand. The drive to expand is reflected in the increasing amount of activities in which the agency is involved. The reorganisation of space for the maximisation of effectiveness helped the organisation to run at capacity, meaning the ability to take on more projects is becoming limited. However, the limited capacity of the agency's premises hindered its ability to expand its services so as to increase revenue. Networking is another strategy used by the agency to expand. The agency builds relationships in person through the on-site gallery, and through the hosting of events outside of the agency's permanent premises with external organisations.

This networking strategy also includes online engagement, through a recent redesign of the website and through increased activity of the agency's online social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The agency's participation with online fora, whilst helpful, appears to not be sufficient by itself to produce the growth it desires. The agency faces challenges with monitoring the content posted to its social media accounts and also the amount of click traffic it can generate. Click traffic is when a post or webpage is 'clicked on' by users and is important because the more users that click on a link for a website and/or social media post determines the likelihood of other online users also seeing the content. To navigate these tensions, the agency was reorganising its physical space to allow for increased activity, actively seeking partnerships with other organisations, and participating in activities outside of its main premises. The agency participates in several local cultural festivals and has strong ties with a number of local and national organisations. The partnerships that help the agency to be more financially independent from funding, and which promote its existence, are important for the agency's goal of being financially stable.

A set of strategies related to the infrastructural aspects of the agency have emerged in this case study, and each of these relate to the matter of organisational scale. The strategies are embedded in the agency's drive to organise in ways that enable it to expand because the achievement of growth is equated with success. The individualisation of functions, of services and of people demonstrates the impact neoliberalism has had on multiple levels.

Discursive Strategies

The discursive strategies pertain to the big ideas used by the agency to bring order and purpose into the variety of possible plans and programmes that develop as a consequence of those ideas. The discursive strategies identified in the case study are collectivity and

community, and market participation. These strategies are characterised by contradictions, some of which reflect the contradictions of the neoliberal project.

The first discursive strategy has as its object the fostering of collectivity and community within the agency. For the agency's founder, the organisation is "a dynamic place for developing community". As identified in the previous chapter, the term community is always an empty signifier because its meaning in relation to a group of people is open to interpretation. For the agency this strategy is about creating an environment of inclusiveness where staff have knowledge of each other's projects and, where appropriate, can work together. These activities take place in the talk between staff in the weekly meeting. The agency's founder informed me that the weekly meetings were started as a way to help staff connect with one another; for sharing information about current projects and as a space to help facilitate opportunities for staff to collaborate on projects.

Community, for the founder, is about fostering truth and authenticity. There are two dimensions; the first is connections people have and second the spaces they share. The projects that staff work on are a foundational factor to creating a sense of community, it is in this way the founder sees the agency as dynamic – projects are continually developed as the opportunities arise and are created. It is in the name of community that the continual process of identity formation takes place for the agency. Working together in a collective way, where possible, helps the agency to create and recreate what community means to them. The process of maintaining a sense of community and of ensuring collaboration on projects can be challenging in the face of the agency's reliance on funding. Part of this challenge comes, in the views of agency personnel, from the bureaucratic processes related to City Council and the arts and culture sector. These views are often in conflict which means when

the agency is defining what it does, it is beneficial if there is clear separation between each of the agency's services and projects; this leads to the next strategy.

The second strategy pertains to the pursuit of increased market share. This requires the use of very particular systems of measurement by the agency, in keeping with funding requirements, that estimate the value of the agency in market terms. The agency does not use the term 'market participation' but instead talks about data collection for funding, and of the requirements placed upon it by potential funders to measure itself in ways relating to exchange value that indicate its eligibility for funding. The systems of measurement are problematic for the agency because of the emphasis it places, itself, on creative processes, on the formation of projects 'organically', and of the specific forms of value developed in that way.

Because this is not ideal, in the eyes of the agency, it uses a strategy to reduce its reliance on said funding. This strategy involves fostering external relationships with other community organisations, mentoring artists, and exploring potential new sources of revenue which help increase the agency's autonomy and control its market participation while reducing its reliance on funding grants. These partnerships help the agency to navigate these tensions and enable the agency to engage in projects it believes to be meaningful. Whilst this puts pressure on its resources and sees staff work hours beyond their contractual obligations, it is believed to be a small price to pay for engaging in activities they are passionate about.

Systems of measurement highlight a tension between the agency and the government bodies which require the agency be measured to receive funding. The kinds of activities the agency engages in can be difficult to measure. The separation of the agency's functions into

a set of services has become a means by which the agency meets its requirement to measure in the mandated ways. This separation of services indeed allows for easier measurement of the agency's activities. However, this also separates the roles of staff at the agency in ways that work against collaborative work, which is why the first strategy of community- and collectivity-building has become so important for the agency.

The agency also experiences a state of tension as a consequence of government policy that defines the field of community art in general and the role of community organisations, in particular. The resulting tensions, for the agency, can be seen through the contradictions of process and product, use value and market value. These contradictions subject the administration of the agency to the disciplines of the marketplace. For example, by producing products specifically for their market value means there is less ability to focus on use value in the artistic process. Second, the agency spends time collecting data and measuring itself in ways that do not easily fit with the kinds of services it provides. This means the organisation itself and what it produces are similarly commodified. The organisation and its products must be given exchange value in order to be fit for the market. This is how the organisation is measured and its outcomes deemed as either a success or failure by government agencies. In order to keep the separate parts of the agency in contact with one another, finding ways to foster a sense of community and project collaboration are vital to fight external forces that promote separation (individualisation) of the parts (the services) that make up the whole (the agency). Significantly, the strategy of community and collectivity is also related to the agency's affective strategies.

Affective Strategies

Affective strategies refer to the cultural practices and processes of the agency by which emotional buy-in occurs to its 'big ideas' and infrastructural requirements. The manner in

which this occurs impacts upon how members understand and enact their organisational roles. Just one strategy emerged from the interviews, that being an ongoing process of identity formation. This occurs on multiple levels and is a task that involves a series of processes. It is the input of the individual staff that comprises the identity of the agency. Staff input comes from individual ideas, ideas that form through staff group discussions, and feedback from the agency's stakeholders. The interviews highlight that this is a specific process based on discussion. Discussion, usually at staff meetings and initiated by the founder, sees the agency ask questions of itself that relate to its values and beliefs; forming definitions about who they are and what they do; what the agency's goals are; and, what these aspects of consideration mean for the agency. From these processes, the language used by the agency to describe itself and what it does comes to hold significant importance. The agency's founder is a key driver of initiatives that enable the processes of identity formation to occur. These processes place emphasis upon the use of language. An example provided by the founder was of the long process and many discussions that took place in choosing five words for the agency's motto. Each of these words were carefully included to ensure the sum of the words represented the vision for which the agency stood. When staff talk about the agency, a set of frequently used words emerge: dynamic; creative; authentic; adaptable; community; family; connected; supportive; and environment. Most of these phrases are empty signifiers where meaning is attributed by the user, and therefore, can be understood in a myriad of ways. It is through the use of words of this kind that a pattern of interaction makes visible how meaning is attributed to what the agency does, how it defines itself, and how staff can find a sense of belonging in the ideology that has come to characterise the agency.

Significantly, staff appear to enjoy the identity forming processes because it helps with the development of bonds between colleagues and indicates that their opinions matter which, in itself, fosters a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging ties into the agency's identification of values and beliefs and the formation of identity. This approach to the production of purpose and identity occurs in recognition of the demands coming from the state's regulatory framework over the arts and culture sector more broadly. Staff at the agency are aware that what they do and how they do it comes with demands from external organisations. As the services of the agency are mostly separated off from one another, demands on one area of service provision do not tend to affect another. By staff actively seeking out discussion and support from their colleagues, new ways to navigate demands often appear.

Summary

The strategies used by the agency to navigate tensions, as identified in the previous chapter, show that the agency actively participates in trying to achieve its own goals and those of the arts and culture sector more generally. Implications arising from the agency's position and the strategies it employs sees time spent on the reorganisation of space, the continual development of new external relationships, the management of stretched resources, of staff working beyond contractual obligations, and on a constant reformation and definition of the agency's identity. Discussion of the agency's strategies highlights the challenges caused by being positioned within the gaps in sector policy. This sees the agency oscillating between the statuses of social service provider and business in the creative industry.

The agency relies on a combination of strategies to navigate the tensions that arise in relation to its environments of engagement. The key finding is that these strategies are about the reorganisation of physical spaces, and networking and communication, mostly

through interpersonal interaction. Combined, these generate enough funding but not enough to expand to the point where the government funding is no longer a necessity. The drive for expansion to receive funding, and expansion to operate without funding, are constrained by the environments in which the agency attempts to organise itself to meet arts and culture sector goals, and the resources it has available for making these attempts.

The agency's strategies call for an increased awareness about the following matters: the form that arts agencies take in light of funding requirements and the socio-political-economic position they occupy; for sector participants seeking change to consider the role of form in how they organise; and for greater consideration to be given of how neoliberal policy impacts upon how the arts and culture sector is organised. The next chapter consolidates the discussions of the previous seven chapters.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This final chapter brings together, with the case study, the themes of neoliberalism, artistic formalism, and organisational form. Each of these discussions have highlighted the impacts of neoliberalism through its contradictions, its tendency toward crises, and the myths used to circumvent contradictions and crises. The areas of discussion in this thesis have demonstrated the different levels at which neoliberalism operates; the international, the national, and the local. The contradictions and tensions at the national and local levels are visible in the domestic arts and culture policy of Aotearoa New Zealand. The contrast between expectations expressed through arts and culture sector policy and the expectations of the agency in the case study further highlight strategies that can be used to navigate these kinds of tensions. What follows is a framing of those discussions through the relationship between neoliberal policy and artistic practice, and the impact of this relationship on community agencies operating in the arts and culture sector.

Chapter Two has defined and discussed the characteristics of neoliberalism. This task highlighted the historical context in which neoliberalism became prominent as a political project and the breadth and depth of its expansion. Neoliberalism is entwined with the economic system of capitalism, necessitating an exploration of the relationship between the two. A dialectical reading of that relationship shows neoliberalism and capitalism to have shared tendencies towards crises, which are seldom resolved. This is because, capitalism, in particular, has the ability to integrate crises back into itself, typically through the development of new products that promise resolution of the issues. This results in a constant state of self-revolutionising, within and of capital. These resolutions are band-aids

and the myths of neoliberalism mask the new problems until they too rupture into a state of crisis.

Of the contradictions identified by Harvey (2015), four foundational contradictions (use value and exchange value; the social value of labour and its representation by money; capital and labour; the contradictory unity of production and realisation) and, four moving contradictions (divisions of labour; monopoly and competition; uneven geographical development and the production of space; sustainability of social reproduction under capitalism) help identify tensions experienced by the community arts agency at the centre of the case study.

Chapter Three has explored the idea that art has transformative power and that the tradition of artistic formalism could be a potentially fruitful field for the initiation of social and political change. This exploration focussed on Marxist scholarship into how artistic forms, as creative pursuits in themselves, can break down barriers in the creation of new narratives for social and political change. The lens through which the work of Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno was viewed is the theoretical framework of aesthetic formalism. This body of literature shows a tradition of organising the field of art primarily through the form taken by artistic objects rather than through their content.

Chapter Four, has analysed New Zealand government policy for the arts and culture sector. That field of policy exemplifies the tensions that come with neoliberalism. Neoliberal market mechanisms and decentralisation have resulted in complex networks which tend toward ineffectiveness in the achievement of their missions, and value comes to be recorded in terms of market exchange. The bodies holding responsible for financial management ensure that those receiving the funding are beholden to their ideas of how the funded should or

should not be defined. This has seen these organisations oscillating between the provision of social goods and the attainment of commercial viability. The organisation of policy to achieve sector goals is labelled, here, as *organisational formalism*.

Chapter Five, the discussion of methodology, has provided the rationale and framework for the research project and has set the stage for analysis of the case study. Central to the research method have been the principles of co-design.

Chapter Six has outlined the case study. Data from the research interviews saw the emergence of four key themes that related to the impact of neoliberal policy on the agency involved. These themes are: structure and organisation; environments of engagement; systems of measurement; and, the language of empty signifiers.

Chapter Seven has outlined a series of strategic responses the agency makes to the tensions it experiences. They were categorised in terms of their infrastructural, discursive, and affective characteristics. The discussion took into consideration the context of the agency's operation; environments in which the agency engages in; the big ideas at work within the agency; and the construction of emotional attachment to those. The strategies adopted by the agency to navigate the context of its operation reveal a greater tension – that the agency straddles the space between being a community art organisation and an economically viable business. Information from the case study and strategies used by the agency demonstrate a need for there to be an increased awareness about the form taken by these new arts agencies and the socio-politico-economic position they occupy.

It is hoped that the findings of this research project will enable the agency to -reflect further on its practices and the effectiveness of strategies used in light of the socio-political context

in which it operates. Moreover, it is hoped that the results of this investigation could be used by other community art organisations who encounter similar challenges.

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Appendix A

Participant Information sheet:

Tension, Strategies, and Expectation: Neoliberalism and the Creative Community in Aotearoa

My name is Sarah Teideman and I am conducting research as a postgraduate student for the completion of an MA (Sociology) at Massey University.

My research is concerned with how creative communities such as [REDACTED] (and the people who work there) negotiate a neoliberal environment.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research. Linda has agreed for [REDACTED] to be involved and has also agreed for you to be involved if you wish.

Taking part involves meeting with me on at least one occasion to talk about your role in the organisation. Each meeting will take approximately 1 hour.

Our conversation will be written up by me as a reflective piece of writing and I will send this to you for comment. This reflection will form the basis of my analysis and will inform my Master's thesis as well as additional publications.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used in any written publications from the research unless you give permission (bearing in mind that the Depot might be recognizable due to the limited number of galleries of this kind in the area); and
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.¹

¹ This project has been evaluated by me and my supervisors and judged to be 'low risk' (it is not expected to cause any harm to you or [REDACTED]). Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher or the project supervisors, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about this project, you are welcome to contact me or one of my supervisors: Warwick Tie or Trudie Cain.

Sarah Teideman

Researcher

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone number: [REDACTED]

Dr Warwick Tie

Supervisor

Email: w.tie@massey.ac.nz

Phone number: (09) 4140800 extn 43477

Dr Trudie Cain

Co-Supervisor

Email: t.cain@massey.ac.nz

Phone number: (09) 4140800 extn 43903

Appendix B

Tension, Strategies, and Expectation: Neoliberalism and the Creative Community in Aotearoa

Participant Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree for my real name to be used in the Master's thesis and any other publications.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

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