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New Zealand’s Pop Renaissance:
A creative industry as ‘after neo-liberal’ social policy

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

University of Auckland

2009
Abstract

This thesis argues that the popular music policies of New Zealand’s fifth Labour government can be understood as a form of ‘after neo-liberal’ social policy. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the literature on the state and popular music, work and entrepreneurship in the creative industries, and the sociology of cultural policy.

On coming to power in 1999 Labour signalled both a renewed interest in supporting the arts and culture and a new enabling role for the state in the market economy. An explosion of national cultural production ensued. Popular music was at the forefront of this ‘arts and cultural revival’ as sales, airplay, and exports rose dramatically. This thesis investigates the macro-micro dynamics of this state-supported pop renaissance.

At the macro-scale how Labour brought popular music into a strategic policy to address economic growth, employment, and national cultural identity is examined. How the state constituted an audience for Kiwi pop while simultaneously working to facilitate artists into global music markets through new institutional innovations is also explained. These policies illustrate emerging ‘after neo-liberal’ practices whereby the enabling state becomes another player in existing markets.

At the micro-scale this state facilitation of pop production sees its agencies come to act as cultural intermediaries. This feature constructs a competitive game for pop producers who seek state support. Using Bourdieu’s sociological concepts of fields and alternative forms of capital this thesis analyses how pop producing creative entrepreneurs – as entrepreneurs sans economic capital – use mostly non-market modes of exchange to construct the symbolic capital necessary to access state support.

The ‘after neo-liberal’ state also seeks to repair the social dislocations of earlier neo-liberal reform. Using Bourdieu’s concepts of new petit bourgeois and social trajectories it is argued Labour’s music policies offer a way to include and provide meaning to an increasing number of potentially marginalised youthful agents and is thus homologous to the inclusionary pyramid of the earlier welfare state. Moreover it is argued music policy as social policy offers youthful creative entrepreneurs a belief that they may reconvert their alternative forms of capital – via the state – into an upward social trajectory.
Acknowledgements

Above all, I wish to thank my wife, Hayley, who has provided unerring encouragement during the research and writing of this thesis and has been an indefatigable companion on the intellectual and spatial travels it has taken us on. I would also like to thank my parents, Brian and Anne, for providing not only life’s necessities but also a foundational interest in economy and society. Nor could this thesis be at this stage without the support of my extended and blended family. Therefore I would like to thank Rob and Margaret-Ann, and Hugh and Julia for all their support.

This thesis would not be possible without the work of David Craig (main supervisor) and Nabeel Zuberi (co-supervisor). I would like to thank David and Nabeel for acting as academic guides and keeping me on track when things could have easily been derailed. Due to their timely advice and insights, moral, technical and administrative backing I can now write this page. A special thanks to David for his interest and patience in guiding me through post-graduate study.

I want to extend thanks also to the numerous interviewees who contributed their own personal stories, knowledge, and insights.

I wish to acknowledge that this research and writing was supported by a University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship. Crucial financial support for seminar attendance and research costs were also meet by the Department of Sociology and Faculty of Arts.

I would also like to thank the contributions from conference attendees at the: National Institute of Labour Studies Seminar Series, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, 14 October 2008; TASA/SAANZ joint sociology conference, University of Auckland, Auckland New Zealand, 4-7 December 2007; Creative Industries colloquium, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, 11-12 November 2006; Economies of Culture/Culture of Economies, Centre for Critical Inquiry, University of Auckland, 10 November 2006; Fourth International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, Vienna, Austria, 12-16 July 2006; Politics and Policy conference, Bristol, United Kingdom, 6-7 July 2006; Department of

Any academic journey is not taken alone. I would especially like to thank the academic staff at the University of Auckland for advice, conversation, and encouragement over the past eight years. Nick Lewis, Claudia Bell, Lane West-Newman, Wendy Larner, Peter Roberts – and Bill Martin at Flinders University – have all offered timely insights. I have also benefitted greatly from conversations with fellow students. In particular, Gerry Cotterell, Peter Skilling, and Sean Sturm all have contributed in unknown ways. Special thanks to the Bourdieu reading group - Rebecca Miller, Stephen McTaggart, and Michael Stevens - for an invaluable and insightful start.

The Swah deserves special mention for providing company and moral support during the writing process.
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