

Enough is Enough!

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Cultural Policy, Toby Miller and George Yúdice, Sage, London 2002, 246pp.

Rethinking Cultural Policy, Jim McGuigan, Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, Maidenhead 2004, 171pp.

Cultural policy—we get word of it frequently: in the bar of Santa’s Ghetto, the post-punk-comix art gallery that popped up on London’s Charing Cross Road in December, stuffed with artists discussing arts council funding; or on TV’s Ceefax, when the announcement that scrapping museum entrance charges has led to a 75% increase in visitor admissions. Cultural policy effects various actions, from library opening hours in the UK, to the destruction of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan, the banning of Kurdish in Turkish schools to Albrecht Dürer’s promotion of perspectival and geometric relationships. Cultural policy is diffuse, ranging from the banal to the fatal. Its all too vast scope, lightningly touched on in just about all its aspects in Toby Miller and George Yúdice’s *Cultural Policy*, did not prevent Tony Bennett, the leading Australian proponent of Cultural Studies, insisting, back in 1992, that Cultural Studies stop being so useless and become practical. It should engage in policy, recommending cultural strategies to managers and governments. This specific form of Cultural Studies’ turn to the practical is analysed by Jim McGuigan in *Rethinking Cultural Policy* as symptomatic of late capitalism. It adapted itself in the face of neo-liberal economics with its rhetoric of choice. This seemed to gel with Cultural Studies’ long-standing promotion of cultural populism. For McGuigan, such a practical turn produced nothing but what he cattily calls “would-be management consultants who could only operate, however, as administrative researchers in a beleaguered public sector and with precious little credibility in the burgeoning private sector”. (p139)

But, doesn’t a formula such as ‘cultural policy’ clang on the ears? Isn’t it a contradiction in terms or a yoking together of two things of different orders? Adorno balked at the semantic horror of the mismatch in *Kulturkritik*—a Latin word grafted onto a Greek word—but the hitching of culture to policy or, more specifically, to politics in a governmental sense is a far more monstrous act. That the free development of culture, of creativity, could be wedded to the instrumental demands of policy damages, or even negates, culture and always reflects poorly on politics. Real art is always elsewhere. Both books under review here remind us of the monsters ‘cultural policy’ has bred, most graphically in the Third Reich where not only was all cultural production subjected to government review and censorship, but also that which was rejected was vilified in mocking public displays such as the touring Degenerate Art Exhibition, before being destroyed or sold for hard cash abroad. Both books reveal how behind the phrase ‘cultural policy’ lurk the machinations of power wielded by sinister and oppressive forces.

Miller and Yúdice’s suspicion of cultural policy takes shape through Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality. They tell us how, from the eighteenth century onwards, the state has always troubled itself about its individuals, initiating public-health campaigns or compulsory education. The modern state and its values enter deep into the lives of citizens, moulding a ‘social body’ that should be fit, docile and industrious. Cultural policy is not invented in this process of making modern citizens—the imposition of

certain languages, for example, pre-dated the rise of the modern state—but along with the rise of the state comes the establishment of bureaucratic institutions able to recommend and even enforce cultural policies. Miller and Yúdice cite as instances: governments, trade unions, judicial systems, schools and colleges, arts organisations, community groups, foundations, charities and businesses. These bodies, which make or deliver cultural policy, instrumentalise culture, seeing it as the medium through which appropriate behaviours can be encouraged. And so, for example, in Matthew Arnold’s Victorian vision, through education, the self is harmonised with the national bloc and its aims, and through theatre and novels, the liberal, reasonable individual is created who repudiates anarchy and populist excess. In their introduction Miller and Yúdice trace this moulding operation into the current day. Their arguments swell and muddy as a genealogy of cultural policy turns into a history of theorizing culture and matters of taste and then flips onto the well-worn contours of high versus low culture, only to move on to notions of citizenship in a ‘postnational world’, before briefly outlining the history of cultural policy studies. For Miller and Yúdice cultural policy is a slippery thing, and they are fighting a battle for its good soul, against its evil implementations. They state: “Our book seeks ... to articulate knowledge with social reproduction, with governments as primary *loci* of power, authorization, and responsibility.” (p5) If there are primary loci of power, then there must be secondary ones too. They identify two types of cultural policy: one is transformative of the social

order (on the side of angels, the oppressed, the disenfranchised) and one is functionalist, replicating the social order, imposing middle-class values on those who never wanted them. Cultural policy is no one thing, then, for these two writers, indeed it presents a terrain worth fighting on, and in the following chapters—on command cultures and the post-colonial, a history of museums, transnational cultural policy, the cultural industries, the US and the National Endowment for the Arts—they track not only cultural policy’s oppressions, but also its contradictions and the micro-struggles that take place in its orbit. Miller and Yúdice, true to the governmentality model of Foucauldian resistance, assert possibilities of counter-hegemony or micro-shifts in administrative policy, which can be pushed through by ‘women and people of color’. For them, the state is all—it “monopolizes both violence and national representation, even as its legitimacy depends on a space for its subjects to appeal to it for redress on both these scores.” (p185) “Resistance goes nowhere”, they pronounce, “unless it takes hold institutionally”. (p34) But they don’t mean a Leninist seizure of the state, as first stage in abolishing it. This is infiltration and gentle reformism directed by a politics of identity. Hence their approving quotation of U2’s Bono on how the glamour of barricades palls besides the real business of sitting with briefcase-carrying men in suits and sorting out the world. (p185) Hopeful reform at an administrative level is the remedy. ‘The world can be made good, if we just get our identities bureaucratically represented’, would seem to be the vain cry. Miller and Yúdice



acknowledge the compulsions of commerce and the exigencies of the free market, but again and again they return to fashionably political rather than economic categories, insisting on work on ‘cultural citizenship’ and identity, democratic representation in cultural policy, global citizen and worker rights, and ‘renegotiations of the citizen-consumer couplet’. For all their well-meaningness, they have succumbed to a language that is familiar in cultural policy wherever it manifests itself, including in its most pernicious market-friendly forms.

McGuigan’s expository textbook (including a useful glossary of jargon terms) is more cogently suspicious of the ends of cultural policy—dividing it into three types, state (now superseded, in the main, in the west), market (the prevalent model) and, the oppositional variant, civil/communicative. In contrast to Miller and Yúdice, McGuigan discerns a tangible impulse behind the dominant contemporary trend of cultural policy making: the economy, or more specifically economic policy. McGuigan’s book sets cultural policymaking firmly within the efforts towards neo-liberalism or privatisation of the economy over the last twenty years. More generally, *Rethinking Cultural Policy* sets itself within a world altered by globalisation and the ‘NICL’, the new international division of cultural labour, and subjected to criticism by anti-capitalists (the book’s motto is ‘Ya Basta!’, the Zapatista slogan of ‘enough is enough’). McGuigan stridently dissects and historically specifies the terrain of cultural policy. He attacks the ‘governmentality’ model, accusing it of insufficient distinction between the state and the market, politics and economics. For governmentality, all government is the same shade, and government, through the administrative functions of the state, is the driving force of modernity. Capitalism and the economy are written out of the equation. The governmentality model results, McGuigan claims, in an insensitivity to political and economic distinctions, e.g. that the welfare state was a real gain won by organised labour, and public funding of the arts was a democratic achievement, even if it also imposed certain cultural models deemed to be beneficial to individuals. McGuigan returns to something more akin to a Marxist framework, as parsed through Raymond Williams. This entails a shattering of the rhetoric of much cultural policy as just so much ideological hot air or consolatory compensation, at best, and, at worst, partner to the economic remodelling of the entire cultural front, akin to IMF restructuring to make economies functional for neo-liberal capitalism. McGuigan is fascinated in how the dominant ideological discourses of capitalism contaminate the language of theoretical explanation and diagnosis. He traces a shift from public to private finance through various topics: museum policy, eco-tourism, and branding. McGuigan prefers empirical research, frustrated as he is by the post-Foucauldian and post-Situationist speculations about spectacle, exhibitionary-complexes and disciplinary gazes. The extended empirical case study here compares the 1851 Great Exhibition to the Millennium Dome of 2000, and insists, in the course of this, on the “value of multidimensional analysis of culture and cultural policy” (p5), that is to say, that there is more to the museal experience than disciplining and the gaze. To this extent, this book is not simply about cultural policy. It is a question of the proper definition of culture and how cultural analysis should be carried out. The twin dangers to avoid, he suggests, are instrumentalizing culture, for example, in order to embellish the nation-state or reducing it, or its value, to exchange value. In both processes cultural autonomy is lost. But McGuigan is actually less interested in autonomy than in articulating culture as a component of a

Habermasian public sphere, as enacted in revolutionary and reformist practices such as Culture Jamming or the Cultural Environment Movement.

The motor of the book takes its cue from a significant discussion document on ‘desetatization’, a French term which translates as ‘privatization’ or ‘autonomization’. This document stems from a round table discussion on museums in Amsterdam in the late 1990s. Here, principles of privatization relevant to public-sector culture were drawn up. They included ‘divestiture’ (selling off public property), free transfer of property rights (giving it away), the change of state organization into a more independent organization, the agency model of giving internally more discrete power to the public manager, contracting-out of work such as cleaning and catering, use of volunteers, private funding, individual patronage and corporate sponsorship. Just as in other sectors of the state (health, utilities), the shift in cultural policy amounts to sundering cultural institutions from the state and attracting private money. For McGuigan, such development is contradictory, involving a mix of privatisation (a bad thing) and a devolving of power (which might give more power and accountability to local managers or audiences). But the essential drive of the desetatization policy is economic in the sphere of culture as elsewhere. Where for Miller and Yúdice everything has become a cultural question in a post-Baudrillardian world of signs and codes, McGuigan’s sense is that even culture, or at least cultural policy, has less to do with culture in these neo-liberal times and more to do with economics. Where once cultural value was deemed sufficient justification for art-oriented activities, now cultural value is subsumed into economic value. Everyone has to justify culture’s marketability—culture becomes valuable only because, as Cultural Studies gurus such as Angela McRobbie have gleefully announced, in the guise of ‘cultural industries’ it contributes to the (UK) economy.

McGuigan’s efforts to rethink cultural policy are useful in that they allow a novice into the discourses and lay out the arguments with some vigour and in a combative tone. The book suffers occasionally from its textbooky and academic format—offputtingly the introduction reads like a book proposal. It improves after that, as the explicitly critical and political drive comes to the fore, and McGuigan’s trademark bitchiness lashes out satisfyingly at points. If we have to have cultural policy—which it seems currently we do, for where would all the artists and galleries and magazines be without their lovely lottery money—then McGuigan is a good historian and judge of its priorities. But, despite the efforts of these books concerning an area that Cultural Studies has deemed a necessary part of the curriculum, a feeling lingers: culture happens despite policy works, even in the most hostile circumstances. And any culture that assumes or bids for its policy-usefulness isn’t worth the lottery ticket.