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O'Brien, D. **Cultural Policy: Management, Value and Modernity in the Creative Industries**, Routledge, 2014, 166pp, £65.00 (hardback) £29.99 (paperback).

This book from Dave O'Brien focuses on the processes of cultural policy-making and skilfully synthesises a range of debates within the sub-discipline of 'cultural policy studies'. This is a field which has diverse roots in the arts and humanities tradition, but which has also been shaped by particular tensions within and between cultural studies and the sociology of culture about the values and risks of practical, applied, 'useful' forms of knowledge in relations between the academy and the state. It is also a field, as O'Brien argues in his introductory scene-setting, with less solid or worked out connections with those academic disciplines – such as political science and public administration – which have the production and practice of policy as their primary concern. While the book convinces about the continued fertility of this field for sociological inspired speculation, it also acts as a key platform from which to view a specific epoch of cultural policy-making, the New Labour years, at a time when some of the certainties and assumptions of that epoch are now being revised and re-considered, if not quite yet rehabilitated. As such it also provides some important co-ordinates through which to navigate this field of study as cultural policy-making evolves and develops in a post-economic crisis, austerity-oriented political context. It is British in its focus, but given the global reach that, for better or worse, the British cultural policy model has claimed and also given the global circulation of key concepts and problematics in the field, including from Australia and the US and to the emerging economies of the global South, it might act as an exemplar for understanding similar processes in other nations or regions.

Crucial to its success in this regard is the ambition of the book to use its specific focus of interest as a case study through which to explore and reflect on questions of broader sociological and

theoretical concern about how 'cultural' stuff is made and circulated and about how contemporary societies are governed. In doing so the book usefully conceptualises the sphere of what we might call 'actually existing cultural policy' as somehow emblematic of a range of tensions within modernity. These tensions are around the ideas of the individual and their cultural practices, the particular, perhaps peculiar role of the cultural and 'creative industries' within economic life and finally around the practice of government (and governance) itself. The sphere of cultural policy-making, and the scholarly debates that have informed or been inspired by such policy-making, represent, in O'Brien's analysis, a convincing model of how the values of modernity are present and active in the practices of governments.

Through a series of examples, including policy concerns with cultural participation, work in the creative economy and the rise of culture as a policy lever through which to inspire urban regeneration, O'Brien reveals the extent to which cultural policy exists as a distinct – but not too distinct – arm of the state, subject to all the political contingencies of public life as they emerge from the machinery of think tanks, consultants and academic research and subject to the needs of the machinery of government itself. These characteristics have sometimes sat uneasily within the strategies of governments of the recent past, especially those which have claimed to base their decision making on the forms of knowledge generated by the methodologies of social science and emphasis on this latter aspect is a compelling and recurrent theme of the book. Drawing on recent debates about the social life of methods, O'Brien productively reflects on the role of the techniques and technologies of social science in bringing 'culture' into being as a potential solution to a specific set of problems that government can solve. Such problems include participation and engagement in relation to access to publicly funded culture, or the creation and measurement of a role for 'the arts' and 'creative industries' in economic growth. Each of these examples provide insights into how processes of policy making have contributed to and reflected the bracketing off of 'culture' as a specific type of stuff with varying forms of

properties, ranging from the ineffable to the magical, to the apparently coldly economic and rational. The pragmatic and practical world of policy making, it seems, is where the problems inherent in Raymond Williams oft quoted assertion about the complexity of the word 'culture' are crystallised. Government might not know much about art, but it knows what it likes, and it has some increasingly certain positions on what culture ought to do.

At the same time as critiquing these processes as they are evident in the last thirty years or so of cultural policy making in the UK, O'Brien also provides us with the tools through which to continue to productively reflect on how they might be played out in the future. As a result, whilst the book is likely to become a key reference in any curriculum addressing these specific topics for students, it also acts as a significant point of orientation for sociologists and other researchers exploring issues of culture. It provides a clear path with which to explore the field with some thoroughly convincing indications of where the traps and dead-ends in such exploration might be located.

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866 words.