**Felipe Cala Buendía, Cultural Producers and Social Change in Latin America (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. xii + 186, £59.50, hb.**

The interconnection between cultural production and social change is certainly not new. In a region like Latin America the development of cultural and artistic activities oriented towards social inclusion and political engagement dates back to the 1970s and 1980s when, in the aftermath of military dictatorships, culture occupied a fundamental role in the regaining of a repressed public sphere. What Felipe Cala Buendía offers in *Cultural Producers and Social Change in Latin America*is an engaging, contemporary insight into creative, artistic and performatic initiatives from the late 1990s and early 2000s. These are examined in response to processes of urban transformation, violence and political resistance in the context of global, neoliberal capitalism. The book offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of the region’s cultural policy field, complementing scholarship such as Rubim’s and Rubens Bayardo’s (2008) edited collection *Políticas Culturais na Ibero-América* *Políticas,* on the state of cultural policies in Peru, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Colombia and Brazil.

Engaging with the so-called ‘happiness of pursuit’ – the emotional benefits that lie in participating of collective action – the book is a study of culture-based advocacy, looking at examples of collective culture concerned with citizenship. It has five chapters and is organised around the case studies, rather than following a geographical or thematic axis. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study of cultural production in Latin America, engaging with debates about citizenship, particularly the works of Miller, Yúdice, McGuigan and Habermas. The author stresses the role that cultural activities play in affecting what he calls ‘the political variable’ by re-activating citizenship. The chapters that follow offer an in-depth analysis of cases of cultural initiatives in Latin America: a public policy package (Cultura Ciudadana) in Colombia (Chapter 2), cultural activism during the transitional justice movement in Peru (Chapters 3 and 4), and an alternative publishing house (Eloísa Cartonera) in Argentina (Chapter 5).

A crucial question runs through these cases: how have different instances of cultural activity throughout Latin America imagined alternative understandings of citizenship in their creative responses to urban violence, human rights abuses and neoliberal policies? The author sheds light on the political economy of ‘culture-based advocacy’, initiatives that make political claims through art and creativity. He shows how cultural initiatives, by engaging citizens in taking active part in public life, can strengthen the ties that bound people together as well as improve communication channels between citizens and the state; they are crucial to the endurance and thriving of democratisation processes in Latin America. The creative impulses that result from discontent in conjunctures of crises offer an opportunity for the exercise of political voice in new forms of protests – an art in itself that reveals civil society’s imagination and creativity and becomes an alternative to failing institutional mechanisms for the expression of dissent.

This book tells a number of compelling stories about collective cultural action, foregrounding its potential for social change. Cala Buendía combines his knowledge of engaged practices in the field with theoretical insights into citizenship, transitional justice and cultural policies. Following García Canclini’s work, he offers an understanding of citizenship that is ‘more than a bundle of rights and responsibilities accumulated through time’ (p.6), a network also of aspirations where cultural activists can imagine and plan their futures in the ‘land of disjunctions’, hit by authoritarianism, neoliberal policies, poverty and crime. These aspirations constitute the affective or emotional dimension of citizenship, tapped into by ‘*performing* other alternatives and possibilities through artful, creative and symbolic devices’ (p. 140). Although the term ‘cultural producers’ is used in the book title, the analysis focuses on the productive work that artists make in public space – conceptually different from the figure of the cultural producer (or the *gestor* or *productor* *cultural* in Spanish). Be that in the case of the official resort to culture or the grassroots cultural interventions, interpreting them in relation to global urban trends, such as culture-based city branding or the rise of creativity, examined by urban studies scholarship, could complement Cala Buendía’s argument. The book relies mostly on secondary sources and this is, perhaps, where it falls somewhat short of its ability to make a stronger argument about the social impact of the cultural interventions under study. The lack of data on the actual impact of policies such as Cultura Ciudadana in Bogotá signals both a knowledge gap – which the author deals with effectively by resorting to existing secondary data sources from focus groups and surveys – and the need to produce primary research that can inform evidence-based cultural policies in Latin America.

A key strength of the book is its methodical approach to the analysis of cultural production. Rather than focusing either on policy processes or grassroots practices, Cala Buendía conducts a meticulous study that is, above all, relational. It is in these relations arising from the complex social fabric of cities such as Bogotá, Buenos Aires and Lima, that culture is produced, reproduced and enacted. For readers unfamiliar with Latin America seeking to learn about cultural production in the region, this book is an excellent entry point. While it speaks to the genre of cultural policy studies, its scope and level of analytical insight renders it a sociological piece of critical thinking that offers a thought-provoking history of present cultural interventions in Latin America. This is a much needed book that shows the fundamental role that culture plays in re-activating citizenship practices (i.e. through enhancing state embeddedness, oppositional voices or a moral economy of production and consumption) during the ‘third wave of democratisation’. In doing so, it acquires particular relevance in the light of the region’s rapid urbanisation and the recent political shift towards the centre-right, for ‘what are art and creativity about if not disruption and rupture to imagine new horizons of possibility?’ (p.140), that is to say, to offer new prospects for the emergence of alternative forms of citizenship?

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