El Trabajo Cultural

Miller, Toby (2018). *El Trabajo Cultural.* Barcelona: Gedisa.

Over the last 20 years, social sciences have studied different cultural transformations worldwide, such as the creative industries, the new digital platforms, and their contributions to social and economic development, although in a climate that oscillates between optimism and celebration, leaving gray areas that are rarely explored or exempt from critical address. *El Trabajo Cultural*, that puts together Miller's writings and some others in collaboration, takes a valuable step towards fixing this problem. It's carried out from a perspective based on two traditions of critical thinking regarding culture, such as political economics and cultural studies, via the analysis of a diversity of sources and documents to recognize a new global economic order in the production, distribution, and consumption of culture. Such analysis by Miller is performed focusing on the labor issues on a global level based on the concept of the new international division of cultural work (NITC).

The book can divide itself into two large sections: the first discusses its theoretical focus, classifying it into a specific field of study and goes about building the main problematic themes it addresses. The second part focuses on the concrete impacts that the NITC has on its workers and the environment, and con-

cludes with the perspective of an in-depth ecology in terms of cultural work.

The first chapter starts by recognizing that analysis of present-day culture cannot take for granted the dimension of labor, after having been thought of during the recent past as having three key players: companies, states, and consumers, leaving out the workers as players in this field. In such, there is the responsibility of the political economy, that highlights the global processes of concentration of ownership on a large scale, in addition to that of cultural studies, that aimed to focus their attention on the people and audiences, so as to analyze their empowerment or their constitution as producers of meaning. Miller concludes the chapter by recognizing that although the culture worker in our era is celebrated as free and autonomous, we must be attentive to the role that organizations begin to play in a context in which it seems less evident that this is done in a positive correlation between innovation and labor flexibility.

Miller's theoretical aim for a NITC is presented in the second chapter, where he recovers the perspective of the theory of the dependence to create a new world order. Without limiting the definition of cultural work to that which produces meanings, he proposes understanding it also as that which provides the tools with which these are produced, distributed, stored, and consumed, thus separating it from the exceptional space in which it is often placed. In his perspective, there is a transformation in terms of the northern hemisphere capitals taking ad-

vantage of the southern hemisphere's low wages, facilitated by digital technologies as well as an association between work and pleasure, that, as posed by Tokumitsu (2017), creates a hegemonic order of world capitalism. Miller, however, identifies the capital in terms of its national belonging, which becomes problematic in the sense that it does stem from global capital in its entirety, whose manifestation are the individual capitals, but rather it focuses on these, despite recognizing that today, trade between companies surpasses trade between nations and that outsourcing is what connects them globally. In addition to that, the NTIC calls us to think about the poor conditions and about how jeopardized workers have gone about organizing lately in the context of a "new labor phenomenology and global production horizon", whose key aspects Miller discusses in the following chapter.

The third chapter is certainly original in its analysis of creativity, which Miller proposes be done, recovering the notion
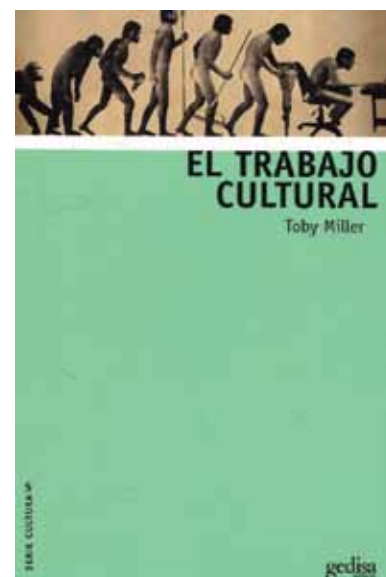
of "hegemony", proposed in terms of the logic of accumulation that gives meaning to these conceptual constructions. Thus, the phenomenon of "cybertarianism" is understood, whose libertarian character and technological determinism aim at "empowering" consumers and small producers of culture, scorning corporate domination in the digital globalized world. For the author, in this sense there is a romantic-individualist fantasy of freedom at play that is not foreign to cultural studies themselves and that must be addressed critically starting with understanding the context of the NTIC that underlies the mediatic convergence, one of the largest contemporary fetishes and not as clean or novel as announced.

The second part of the book begins with a chapter written in collaboration with Bill Graham, in which they address work borders, migrant minorities, and cultural differences in the context of the NTIC. After considering the case of London, one of the world's "creative" capitals where they warn of a sort of divided subjectivity that challenges multiculturalism, particularly in regards to migrants coming from non-imperialist territories (like Latin countries), there is a need for a new framework of coexistence that would facilitate "wellbeing for minorities, social peace and freedom of expression" beyond that merely discursive. Then, Miller goes about analyzing the audiovisual arts production model from the perspective of the political economy in the study of cultural work, to recognize the triple pillar of the cultural hegemony of Hollywood: suppression of labor laws, outsourcing and exploitation of

the global work division and linguistic colonialism, in virtue of which its model of exploitation, based on a "global network of subcontracted companies and people", is currently exploited by many other industries.

The following chapter, written by Shin Joung Yeo, goes into the work conditions of this exploitation model, where uncertainty, commercial risk, and instability are transferred to the workers, in an intentional distancing of the capitalist wage ratio radiated towards the entire global process of accumulation. This is illustrated via the clusters of technology and artists formed in the large cities of the northern hemisphere, where the policies tending to turn them into creative industry capitals in reality contribute to promoting dynamics leading to poor working conditions, feeding real estate speculation, and expulsion of the poor and working class. Here lies one of the Miller's main points: conceive those who work in the culture and arts as part of a process that, under this system for development or forming creative *clusters*, compromises, deregulates and impoverishes the entire working class.

The last chapter delves into one of the least critiqued issues of media and culture: its relationship with the environment. Miller proposes profound ecology; a viewpoint that, guided by cultural materialism that today seeks the seeds of times to come (Cevasco, 2013), requires the consideration of the complete process of "birth, life and death of the media and its devices and artifacts used" in regards to future generations. In this proposal, the author points to an

inter-generational eco-centric interest, although it, as we understand, shows a limit linked to a certain idealist and abstract strate with which the profound ecology conceives capital accumulation processes as foreign nature, as condition to be able to conceive a link not governed by them or, even worse, to imagine their viability in the context of the capitalist accumulation whose objective it is and in virtue of which the capital becomes subject to the social process (Iñigo Carrera, 2003). Beyond this, Miller's contribution lies in his critique of the supposed cleanliness of the technologies linked to cultural work and the creative industries, using an analysis of its energy consumption, carbon emissions, global distribution of electronic waste as well as its impact on health, especially for workers in the southern hemisphere.

We ask ourselves about the future of creative consumption, the potentiality of the digital world in regards to new jobs or a supposed democracy of consumption in order to critically analyze the forming of global media conglomerates, their poor work conditions or their effects on health and the environment using an interdisciplinary proposal, does not seek concrete answers, but rather calls for our concern in regards to the many hegemonic realities based on which we define and recognize ourselves. Miller, in summary, makes us ask ourselves about that which, as analysts and —finally also— culture workers, makes up part of our platforms and conditions of existence and proposes a path for critique not exempt from difficulties, yet powerful and useful to the cultural studies field.

Bibliography

Cevasco, M. E. (2013). *Diez lecciones sobre estudios culturales*. Montevideo: Trilce.

Iñigo Carrera, J. (2013). *El capital: razón histórica, sujeto revolucionario y conciencia*. Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi.

Tokumitsu, M. (2015). *Do what you love*. New York: Regan Arts.

Guillermo Quiña
CONICET y Universidad
Nacional del Comahue
contact.guillermo@gmail.com