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Review of *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics*

Edited by Christina R. Foust, Amy Pason, and Kate Zittlow Rogness.
University of Alabama Press, 2017. \$34.95, ISBN-13: 978-0817358938.

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This collection of essays challenges conventional frameworks of social movements and counterpublics. By putting the two fields of rhetoric and communications in conversation with one another around the topic of social change, Foust, Pason, and Zittlow Rogness expand the potential for academic study of the interconnection between movements and counterpublics. Typically, communication scholars have attended to movements, while rhetoric scholars labor with meanings of publics and counterpublics. This collection, *What Democracy Looks Like*, successfully bridges a research gap between the two fields to demonstrate why, how, and to what extent movements and counterpublics work together to affect social change. This collection is easily accessible to the new scholar and yet still compelling to the experienced social movement veteran.

The editors construct easy movement within the collection as readers encounter creative and forward-thinking themes that remain grounded in historical scholarship. One common thread running throughout the essays is the idea of flexibility and fluidity between movements and counterpublics as the book progresses through three clearly focused sections: problematizing the past research of social movements and counterpublics, distinguishing counterpublics and movements through case studies, and looking at new directions of rhetorical studies within these contexts. Another emerging theme is globalization and its impact on counterpublic

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theory as each section provides at least one article addressing social change in a non-Western context.

The collection begins with a solid foundation in the history of social movement studies and counterpublic theory as Section I, “Problematizing the Past of Social Movement Rhetoric and Counterpublic Research,” presents three articles that explore past scholarship and ponders the future role of rhetoric and movement studies. The editors set the framework for further conversation between the two fields and find common ground. The first article by Raymie E. McKerrow reviews the great debate between Simons and McGee of “movement” as a noun and “rhetoric” as a verb. By revisiting this debate, McKerrow recommends not a choice between the two but a pluralistic approach, where movements can be both phenomenon and meaning, providing potential to gain more insights into how social movements and rhetoric work together. As McKerrow complicates our view of social movements, asking us to move beyond traditional expectations of social movements, Daniel C Brouwer and Marie-Louise Paulesc push the conversation further by exploring the globalization of counterpublic theory. Though the authors see the potential benefits of using Western theory of counterpublics to name and theorize in non-Western settings, they also caution scholars to be cognizant of the possible harm, in that Anglo/European ideas of public spheres could “recolonize” communities by way of Western scholarship. Brouwer and Paulesc consider how “local” context and culture can aid in theorizing the effects of counterpublics. As rhetoric and communication studies continue to expand in a rich global sphere, the authors emphasize that scholars must remain open to diverse and culturally relevant approaches to social movement rhetoric.

The conversation moves from a global to a domestic discussion in the four chapters of section II, “Distinguishing and Performing Counterpublics and Movements through Case Studies.” This section engages diverse topics: from the “Occupy Our Homes” movement to anti-abortion picketers to SlutWalks and, lastly, to examining movement within rhetorical criticisms such as the collective Against Equality. The authors in this section are connected by a shared theme of conceiving movements and counterpublics on a continuum of phenomenon-meaning. Amy Pason explores this idea in chapter three as she posits that both the *verb* and the *subject* functions of movements and counterpublics can coexist. This complication of terms offers of new lens of study that doesn’t require an “either/or” binary. In chapter 5, Catherine Helen Palczewski and Kelsey Harr-Lagin write a provocative essay that removes the standard counterpublic-versus-establishment struggle. Through examining the two divergent and contentious rhetorical collectives of anti-abortion picketers and abortion clinics, both of which have been labeled as publics and

counterpublics respectively, the authors create a sophisticated argument of counterpublic-public divisions. Counterpublics, such as their examples, can become entangled in a power struggle outside of the public debate. This battle for power and disruption of the other creates intriguing discourse between the counterpublics that offers new insights into motives and moves toward social change.

Social change in the context of diversification of social movement rhetoric comes to fruition in section III, “New Directions for Studying Social Movements and Counterpublics Rhetorically.” Scholars in border studies will appreciate Bernadette Marie Calafell and Dawn Marie D. McIntosh’s essay, “Latina/o Vernacular Discourse.” The authors demonstrate how performance movements and vernacular rhetorics can work to disrupt social perceptions as seen in Gómez Pena’s work as a performance artist who uses visual and physical tactics to subvert dominant ideologies. By using his body as a location of resistance, Pena illustrates how Latino/a bodies are already labeled as sites of *other* and therefore ignored. This chapter emphasizes the usefulness of counterpublics in making social change and theorizes that the vernacular can be used as a modality for the counterpublic, once again showing the concept’s fluidity and flexibility.

Despite the global focus of this book and attempts to push the boundaries of social change theory, one area that needs more development is the inclusion of non-Western scholars. I applaud the efforts of the editors to think beyond the Western context when discussing movements and counterpublics, but they tended to rely on Western scholars to assess, problematize, and question applications of these theories in a global milieu. I believe non-Western scholars would expand our privilege-centered discourse on social change via their culturally unique frameworks of movements and counterpublics.

Overall, this collection of essays successfully enlarges the scholarship on counterpublics and social movement by examining the mutability and elasticity of social movement rhetoric. Foust, Pason, and Zittlow Rogness wisely ground this collection in an historical perspective as they present a contemporary look at rhetoric and social movements. In their goal to enjoin the conversation between the two camps of movement and counterpublics, the editors created a solid framework for future scholarship that can approach social change rhetoric through diverse settings. They also demonstrate that we can find common ground between counterpublics and social movements. The boundaries between these two areas of scholarship prove more permeable and flexible than we may have thought.

About the Author

Jennifer Keizer is currently pursuing her M.A. in English at the University of Texas at San Antonio, with specific focus in the areas of Rhetoric and Composition and Linguistics. As a Teaching Assistant II, she is an instructor of Freshman Composition in UTSA's Writing Program. Jennifer is an Army Veteran and holds a B.A. in English and Spanish from South Dakota State University.

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