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Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics

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Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics. Jonathan Alexander, et al., editors. U of Pittsburgh P, 2018. 326 pp.\$32.95 paperback.

This edited collection of fifteen essays grapples with the potential value and ramifications of unruliness as a rhetorical method for efficient activism. Jonathan Alexander and Susan C. Jarrett propose “that ‘unruly’ might be one word that, while hardly totalizing or encompassing all political striving, marks how speech, action, and bodies coalesce in time and space, enacting the works of politics in the ways . . . rhetorical critics have imagined” (13). Asserting that the potential reception of unruliness hinges primarily on the various definitions of democracy, they suggest that protests, uncivility, and unruliness are not necessarily antithetical to democracy but rather permeate the foundation of it (8–13). Divided into three sections, *Unruly Rhetorics* aims to illustrate how scholars can better understand unruliness and how it can initiate democracy for all.

Contributors to “Part I: Bringing Back the Body” examine the relationship between the body and unruly practices. The topics that they discuss include the following: how activists visually represent the body to circulate their position (36–37); indigenous forms of protest, such as using a dance, a hunger strike, or one’s body as a force of resistance to halt the colonization of one’s land (49–56); the sounds protestors create to convey their social action (62–69); a social media platform to allow people to enter and challenge dialogue concerning the well-being of exploited bodies (78–85); and marches against sexual exploitation and degradation to ideally increase awareness of the effects of a patriarchal culture and high-light the benefits of a more intersectional approach by these activists (88–102).

Contributors to “Part II: Civility Wars” focus on civility and uncivility across a broad spectrum. These concepts concoct a socially constructed but real division between themselves, forcing such marginalized voices as the homeless to circulate their “truer story of poverty” through newspaper outlets like *Hobo News* (135–39) and encouraging academics to reexamine how “norms of academic civility” can and do affect the careers of public intellectuals, such as Steven Salaita (183–84). Since civility can constrain discourse and encourage people to label specific actions as uncivil, civility can restrict access to the public sphere. A democracy,

therefore, should aspire to remain civil but also welcome uncivility when change is necessary, especially when civility coerces people into acquiescing to what passes for normality. In “Part III: Limits and Horizons,” contributors explore the interconnection between unruliness and other means of communication, such as literature, language, and digital video, calling for new rhetorical and pedagogical strategies that relate not only to activism but also to its evaluation. In addition to investigating how the Marxist layers of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* can augment our understanding of Black Lives Matter as a social movement, Deborah Mutnick also emphasizes both the literary and rhetorical value of rap music, music which “can provide bridges to connect with youth and critical insights into local crises and their systemic causes” (209–27). Considering current social movements, linguistic practices, and methodology, the authors in Part III deliberate on how academics can potentially foster unruly rhetoric as a future area of study.

Although the academic disciplines of the authors (including communication, culture and technology, English studies, and rhetoric and composition) reflect a spectrum across rhetorical studies, the artifacts they study and the topics they cover possess an interdisciplinary value, particularly the exigency for advanced methods of analysis in an isolating political climate. Considering how political ideologies influence our interpretation of democracy, succumbing to civility or enacting unruliness warrants acute consciousness not only of how rhetorical acts are unruly but why they are necessary. While even the editors acknowledge that many of the examples in this book are “left-leaning and progressive,” the authors restate how anyone can employ unruliness to prompt change (14). As a result, this text is a stellar resource for academics who do research in or teach courses related to protests, publics and counterpublics, and social movements.