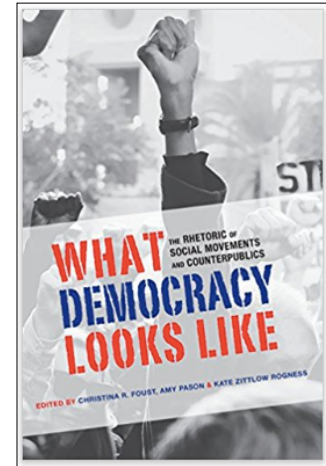


Christina R. Foust, Amy Pason, and Kate Zittlow Rogness (Eds.), **What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics**, Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2017, 296 pp., \$34.95 (paperback), \$27.99 (ebook).

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It would be an almost unimaginable understatement to suggest that the topic of social change has been much in the spotlight recently. Any number of efforts toward social change claiming the mantle of “movement” have been thrust into public consciousness in the last several years, from the Arab Spring, to #BlackLivesMatter, to #MeToo, to whatever Trump calls his particular coalescence of interests, to the affecting efforts of Parkland High School students for more sensible gun policy. Moreover, students, at least at my institution, have newfound interest in the subject as well. Enrollments in a departmental elective, “Persuasion and Social Change,” have nearly tripled this year, and the students, at least in my experience, seem genuinely curious and remarkably engaged in examining the rich variety of approaches communication and rhetorical scholars have developed to examine this most intriguing of subjects.

Therefore, it is our great good fortune that at a time when social change seems to demand our scholarly attention that we have this remarkable collection of essays to anchor our discussions, provide frameworks for dialogue, and in many ways completely reorient our understanding of social change. In **What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics**, Christina R. Foust, Amy Pason, and Kate Zittlow Rogness have accomplished the remarkable feat of bringing into productive dialogue the two preeminent frameworks for understanding social change: social movement theory and the theory of counterpublics. Divided into three sections covering theoretical foundations, applications, and future prospects, this volume brings an impressive array of scholars to bear on McGee’s (1980) challenging and ever more urgent question: What moves the social?

Following an introduction wherein the editors identify the major problematics that define the study of social change, the collection’s first section delves into the theoretical and historical underpinnings of both social movement and counterpublic scholarship. Featuring essays by Raymie E. McKerrow on movement scholarship and Daniel C. Brouwer and Marie-Louise Paulesc on the global reception and modification of the notion of counterpublic, the highlight of this part of the collection is, to my mind at least, Christina R. Foust’s essay tracing the emergence of counterpublicity and its eclipse of social movement rhetoric as explanatory frameworks for understanding social change. Situating both of these accounts of social change within the broader neoliberal assault on higher education and the attendant job crisis that stemmed from it allows the antinomies of both projects to recede and for their common foci to become more apparent. Indeed, this genealogical approach to understanding what amounts to a kind of paradigm shift in our understanding of the mechanisms and meanings of social change elucidates not only

these two theories and their relationship to moving the social but also the intersections of academic labor, theoretical fashion, and the possibilities of intellectual intervention into social issues. As Foust argues, "while concept proliferation is not an ill in and of itself, when it is coupled with the neoliberal imperative toward singular, original readings, it threatens to dilute rhetoric's critical project" (p. 63).

The applications that make up the second section of this work seem uncommonly aware of this possibility, and the authors chafe, to a greater or lesser degree, under the constraints imposed by the "neoliberal imperative toward singular, original readings" (p. 63). I should hasten to note that my undergraduate students liked these essays best and that in them the theoretical chapters came to seem less arid and more in tune with the lived possibilities that inhere to the study of social change. The chapters by Amy Pason; Catherine Helen Palczewski and Kelsey Harr-Lagin; Kate Zittlow Rogness; and Karma R. Chávez, with Yasmin Nair and Ryan Conrad, are exemplary critical interventions into some of the more pressing social issues of our time. In them, the theoretical stakes involved in both counterpublic theory and social movement rhetoric take on a new sense of urgency as they illuminate, respectively, social issues including the foreclosure/housing crisis, abortion rights, sexual assault, and queer activism. Collectively, these essays reorient both counterpublicity and social movement rhetoric by reorganizing their analyses under the sign of social change and thereby produce a unique and insightful synthesis.

The weakest of the three sections that make up this volume concerns the "new directions" that such scholarship might take. In part, this is because such tea-leaf reading inevitably encounters the realities that its future has, by the time of publication, already come to pass. And so it is difficult, for instance, to read Catherine Chaput and Joshua S. Hanan's essay on the WikiLeaks collective without calling to mind the role that it played in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Indeed, in the aftermath of this event, it is particularly difficult to imagine WikiLeaks as a "nonhierarchical model of power and resistance" (p. 246). When the collective rather definitively put its finger on the scale of one side, it ceased to lay claim to the mantle as a kind of equal-opportunity trickster, and while none of that truth was apparent at the time that this essay was penned, the knowledge of what transpired inevitably colors our perception of the claims offered. Likewise, Kevin Michael DeLuca and Elizabeth Brunner's essay on the "irruption of China and social media" (p. 225) seems, even at this early juncture, to speak to another time altogether.

However, the larger cause for this final section to fall a bit flat is that it identifies the "new directions" of a text already deeply concerned with new directions. Bernadette Marie Calafell and Dawn Marie D. McIntosh's essay on Latino/a discourse embodies precisely this organizational redundancy. It could easily have been incorporated into the applications section and taken its place as an instantiation of the possibilities of bringing together social movement and counterpublic theory. In other words, the editors of this volume have succeeded in identifying a new direction by synthesizing the contemporary in unique ways, and devoting a section to a "new, new" comes up a bit short. This is not a criticism necessarily but rather an acknowledgment of what this volume has otherwise accomplished.

If there is a criticism to be made, it is likely a familiar one. There is an overarching focus in this collection, as in so much of the literature on social change in the field of communication, on changes whose provenance is somewhat left of center. In and of itself this is not particularly troubling as such

movements and counterpublics have the ability to drive social change and alter prevailing discourse. However, when they occupy so much of our scholarly imaginations that we fail to foresee the rise of the kind of revanchist, Brexiting, Trumpist movements that have recently roiled our culture, it is time to start asking ourselves some serious questions regarding not just understanding social change but our own efforts in creating, sustaining, or resisting it. One of the delights of this present volume is that it provides a framework for just such an analysis to proceed. My students were as much concerned about the Trumpist insurgency as any of the more sympathetic efforts to move the social analyzed in these pages. What was remarkable was that they found in this book a vocabulary and framework to understand that rhetoric as well as to resist it.

Reference

McGee, M.C. (1980). Social movement: Phenomenon or meaning? *Central States Speech Journal*, 31(4), 233–244.