

Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics, edited by Jonathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, and Nancy Welch. U of Pittsburgh P, 2018. 336 pp.

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Scholars of rhetoric and composition may be inclined to ask: what is the role of the unruly in public discourse? *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics* answers this question in a series of essays that challenges the notion that the unruly has no place in civil discourse, and, indeed, that what is thought of as civil discourse is even particularly civil. Editors Jonathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, and Nancy Welch apply the theories of Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler to build an unruly rhetoric, citing Rancière and Butler's claims that protest is not caused by temporary disenfranchisement and inequality, but persistent and fundamental inequality under which marginalized groups are expected to endure (29). Rhetoric concerning protest is, therefore, by its very nature unruly, because it disrupts a hegemonic status quo that consistently, not temporarily, fails to enfranchise citizens.

The essays within *Unruly Rhetorics* claim that the unruly not only has a place in discourse but that it is vital in a world of rampant inequality. *Unruly Rhetorics* examines the role of the physical body in discourse, not just as a tool of protest, but a reminder of what is at stake: the very lives and rights of those who are driven to protest. The body as a tool of protest also serves to illuminate the lived realities of those who are engaging in unruly rhetorics. In other words, how are they to avoid being unruly when their bodies are treated by the hegemony as being unruly by their very existence?

Contributors Jacqueline Rhodes, Dana L. Cloud, Diana George, Paula Mathieu, Joyce Rain Anderson, Londie T. Martin, and Adela C. Licon in particular reveal the ways in which the words of those in power villainize or pathologize the bodies of the disenfranchised. In chapter five of this volume, Jacqueline Rhodes examines the way Constable Michael Sanguinetti, while speaking at a safety forum at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, indicated that women should avoid dressing "like sluts" in order to prevent violence against their bodies. Widely circulated reports of Sanguinetti's claim led to the birth of the SlutWalk protests (126). And though Sanguinetti cast himself as the voice of reason among unruly women who are complicit in the violence against them, readers will see the reclamation of a word used to degrade women through a protest that shines a light on the reality that women's bodies are frequently deemed unruly and problematic.

In chapter one, "Feminist Body Rhetoric in the #unrulymob, Texas, 2013," contributor Dana L. Cloud shines a light on women's responses to attempts to

more stringently govern their bodies. In this case, a draconian Texas abortion bill was met by protesters who fashioned hats and accessories out of tampons. This was not just a symbolic and satirical protest, but a direct response to the ban on tampons in the state Capitol building (enacted, ostensibly, due to fear that protestors could use them as projectiles or lighters for Molotov cocktails).

These examples of bodies becoming action illustrates what contributor Kevin Mahoney argues is a vital component of rhetoric in action. Mahoney describes the practice of protesting as “the practice of occupying physical space, of throwing one’s body on the gears” in order to effect social change (213). The metaphor of society as a system of gears illustrates that society functions regardless of whether the rights of all citizens are upheld, and that change occurs only if one puts his or her body on the line to disrupt the status quo functioning of the machine. Dissent and protest are then, by their very nature, unruly.

Diana George and Paula Mathieu’s chapter, “Rewriting the life of James Eads How and *Hobo News*,” underscores the inequities that exist even in a society with a free press. *Hobo News*, which circulated among the people James Eads How was attempting to organize, provided a dissenting voice that stood in stark contrast to the narratives of the mainstream press about “the fiction of poverty as personal choice” (175). These mainstream narratives, of course, were belied by the reality of economic inequality that perpetuates the precarity of life for many citizens (175). George and Mathieu analyze the ways in which the press pathologized poverty by framing How’s choices as the actions of an eccentric rather than an activist. How threw his “body on the gears” by rejecting his inherited fortune and living among the homeless in order to organize for action. In this way, he put his body behind his words and his calls to action, a choice that illustrated his sincerity as much as it cast him as unruly in the eyes of the press.

Authors in *Unruly Rhetorics* consistently reveal hegemonic uses of language that cast marginalized peoples into “unruly” roles. In chapter two, Joyce Rain Anderson discusses how Indigenous Americans who protested the Dakota Access Pipeline were deemed “protesters” by the media and their hunger strikes were reconfigured as “liquid diets” (78). But Indigenous Americans identify as water protectors, and the unruliness of their rhetoric and action is a response to colonialism and an assertion of Indigenous Americans’ rights to exist through a coalescing of bodies, speech, and action.

The coalescing of bodies, speech, and action is perhaps most salient in Londie T. Martin and Adela C. Licona’s chapter, “Remix as Unruly Play and Participatory Method for Im/possible Queer World-making.” In their examination of youth-produced digital videos coming out of the 2011 Nuestra Voz social justice summer camp, Martin and Licona reveal youth who are responding to the fundamental inequalities placed upon them, namely the

marginalizing effects of abstinence-only sex education on queer youth and the school-to-prison pipeline (320). Of particular interest is how the youth use their already-unruly bodies to protest and reclaim speech that is used to define them: by writing troubling statistics about youth and sexuality in black marker directly on their skin (325). The ephemerality of the written numbers serves as a statement, a resistance of the reductive nature of treating groups of people as numbers.

Unruly Rhetorics doesn't sidestep the question of whether unruliness, particularly when considered uncivil, can reach the audience one is trying to persuade. Matthew Abraham, in examining Steven Salaita's controversial tweets criticizing Israel during the Gaza war, makes the claim that incivility can be utilized to highlight the manner in which the powerful have the privilege of defining incivility, and thus the ability to justify their own incivility. Specifically, Abraham makes the claim that Salaita's tweets were rhetorical choices that responded to military aggressivity and the discourse of historical anti-Semitism with linguistic aggressivity (113). These tweets enacted an unruly rhetoric that challenged the accepted hostility of military action by mirroring it. This example challenges the unruly/uncivil relationship and also returns to the recurring thesis that unruliness in rhetoric arises from consistent disenfranchisement.

Rhetoricians may take particular interest in chapter ten, where John Trimbur critiques James Berlin's criticism of the rhetoric/poetics binary and his own criticism of CCCC and NCTE's silence on the University of Illinois withdrawing an offer of employment to Steven Salaita based on the series of tweets discussed in the Abraham chapter. Trimbur asserts that relegating poetics in literary studies to a spiritual or ahistorical domain leaves no room for unruly poetics such as graffiti, hip hop, punk, reggae, Black Lives Matter, the Occupy movement, Dada, Brecht, and surrealism (256). These examples of poetics, given that they are not easily governable or definable, provide evidence that speech and action, performed by bodies that are deemed unruly (either by their existence or by stepping outside of the bounds of what is considered civil discourse), creates an unruly rhetoric.

Unruly Rhetorics was timely when it was published in 2018. At the time of this review writing in 2020, protesters continue to put their bodies on the line to decry the way the bodies of Black men and women are treated as unruly and expendable; others, also protesting, choose to put their own and others' bodies at risk to decry being required to wear protective masks. *Unruly Rhetorics* therefore remains highly relevant in light of this struggle for the power to put bodies on the line. It is a valuable resource for academics interested in the study of rhetoric and composition and an engaging book for instructors and students in these areas, particularly those who are interested in the area of social justice.

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Works Cited

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