



Journal of European Periodical Studies

an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research

Review of Andrea Chiurato, ed., *The Last Avant-Garde: Alternative and Anti-Establishment Reviews (1970–1979)* (2019)

Leanne Rae Darnbrough

Journal of European Periodical Studies, 6.1 (Summer 2021)

ISSN 2506-6587

Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: Leanne Rae Darnbrough, 'Review of Andrea Chiurato, ed., *The Last Avant-Garde: Alternative and Anti-Establishment Reviews (1970–1979)* (2019)', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 6.1 (Summer 2021), 187–189

Reviews

Andrea Chiurato, ed., *The Last Avant-Garde: Alternative and Anti-Establishment Reviews (1970–1979)* (Milan: Mimesis, 2019). 160 pp. ISBN 9788857552705

The Last Avant-Garde: Alternative and Anti-Establishment Reviews (1970–1979) marks an important contribution to the field of periodical studies due to both its relatively niche subject (French and Italian revolutionary periodical publications) as well as the wide scope covered within said niche. Edited by Andrea Chiurato and prefaced by Irene Piazzoni, the book is the culmination of efforts begun from a panel presented at the Sixth International Conference of the European Society for Periodical Research.

This collection of essays is predicated upon the premise that the many subversive and alternative publications which characterized the post-1968 cultures of resistance in France and Italy functioned as both a last breath of the avant-garde and as precursors to the digital era. Unfortunately, a concise definition of the flexible term ‘avant-garde’ is not prominent within the volume; however, the work remains informative and readers should consider it a valuable intervention in an ongoing debate on the nature of the avant-garde in late twentieth-century European culture. Given the unique position in history of the period chosen for examination (one rife with protests, manifestations, theorizing and even outright violence, yet still decades from the mass dissemination possibilities of the Internet) the subject of the periodical is of critical interest.

Laurent Martin offers the first chapter with his taxonomy of French newspapers. Martin uses case studies (*Les Cahiers de Mai*, *Actuel*, small provincial newspapers and *Libération*) to demonstrate that the Far Left Press of the era falls into four main categories: doctrine press with a political agenda; counter-culture press with a cultural agenda; amateur press with a social agenda; and information press

with a journalistic aim. Continuing with the French press, Luc Lefebvre gives an in-depth investigation of the revolutionary and counter-cultural aims of *Tel Quel* wherein he argues that the publication’s liminal position between conservative, traditional production (conventional format, individual rather than collective works, disdain for popular culture) and revolution (performative conferences and an uncomfortable affinity for Maoist China) make it a unique example of the genre with long-term ramifications in both academia and the intelligentsia.

The remaining five chapters are devoted to the Italian situation. Irene Piazzoni begins with a lively case study of the Italian journal *Ombre Rosse* and its attempts to redefine society according to class-consciousness in contradistinction to bourgeois values. To this end Piazzoni claims the journal was not only concerned with a ‘new anthropology’ freed from the fetters of the traditional nuclear family and gender roles, but was also attenuated to its role in curating and disseminating cultural production.

Thereafter both Luca Falciola and Danilo Mariscalco offer their perspectives on the Italian Movement of 1977. This was a Movement that culminated in violent protests and clashes between frustrated Left youth and law enforcement; cities such as Bologna, Rome, and Turin saw multiday riots, kidnapping, and even murder. Falciola proffers a quantitative investigation into the representations of violence in the periodical press, seeking to discover in what proportion these publications expressly encouraged violence, gave a more nuanced or guarded critique of violence, glossed over or ignored the topic entirely, or finally, outright and totally rejected it. Ultimately, he concludes

that the majority of journals avoided a full condemnation of violence, a stance which may be attributed to ambiguity about the progression of authorities' methods of repression, the ease of targeting a bumbling police force with claims of incendiary violence, and the fact that members of the anti-establishment culture were nourished on a diet of Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Situationism — all of which took a favourable view of violence. While Falciola is concerned with opinions and representations of violence, Danilo Mariscallo applies a very twenty-first-century term, 'fake news', to the publication praxis of the new, young proletariat of the 1970s. The offset printer, Mariscallo claims, offered unprecedented opportunities for the alternative press to experiment with forms of collage and *détournement*. These experiments became an artistic production of counter-information. Unlike the more elitist project of *Tel Quel*, these publications appealed to the working class and unlike similar fake news creations from outside Italy, those of the Italian Movement of 1977 were participating in a broader social collective operating in a politically dissident manner.

For the penultimate chapter Fabio Guidali provides a thorough exploration of the role music magazines played in the propagation of alternative culture in Italy. Using the case studies of *Re Nudo*, *Muzak*, and *Gong* Guidali illustrates three different periodical approaches to alternative music culture in 1970s Italy. While *Re Nudo* strove to democratize music concerts and circulate information on inexpensive services in an effort to invigorate and inspire the 'Lumpenproletariat' to subversive action, *Muzak* turned to the possibilities inherent to national folk and popular songs as appealing Marxist alternatives to commercial music. Overtly opposed to the cultural imperialism of American rock and the soft drug use extolled by *Re Nudo*, Guidali finds that *Muzak* was a Communist periodical resigned to compromising politically

with the Christian Democrats to oppose fascist authoritarianism. Finally, Guidali contrasts both *Re Nudo* and *Muzak* against the longer-lived *Gong*, a magazine which did not devolve into Oriental mysticism like *Re Nudo*, nor take a blatant political position like *Muzak*. Ultimately, Guidali finds that the 1977 Movement ended the proletariat music scene and heralded an era of wealthier, less politically engaged consumers.

In the final essay, Andrea Chiurato delves into the world of science fiction magazines of the period. Noting that science fiction was a genre unto itself, and one lacking in intellectual appraisal at that, Chiurato tracks the progress of the genre from the late Sixties and through the Seventies. This was a period of intense technological progress and space exploration yet paradoxically, also a nadir of public opinion for the science fiction genre. The technological fantasizing of the future rampant in science fiction was viewed suspiciously by those who feared it did not address concretely enough the tribulations of current society. However, the successful lunar landing provoked an inward focus for science fiction, which then eventually took up arms with the disenfranchised and thus became politically subversive.

The Afterword to this volume, written by Chiurato, highlights the function of the periodical in positioning concepts such as movements and individual authors in a more nuanced orientation than postmodernist criticism has traditionally set them. He also points to the comparativist approach of the book as being not exhaustive, yet fruitfully suggesting possible future lines of inquiry. This last claim is perhaps the only real criticism to be levelled at the volume: due to the weighting of chapters in favour of the Italian scene, and the lack of interdiscursivity inherent to volumes of collected essays, the comparative aspect is perhaps not as explicit as it might have been. It would have been helpful if the relations between the essays had

been further emphasized in the fore or afterwords. Nevertheless, the volume offers a surprisingly broad spectrum of topics under the rubric of alternative periodicals of the 1970s in France and

Italy and readers will certainly find new material with which to engage.

Leanne Rae Darnbrough
KU Leuven