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Review of James L. Baughman, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, and James P. Danky, eds, *Protest on the Page: Essays on Print and the Culture of Dissent since 1865* (2015)

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Reviews

James L. Baughman, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, and James P. Danky, eds, *Protest on the Page: Essays on Print and the Culture of Dissent since 1865* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015). xv + 259 pp. ISBN 978-0-299-30284-9

As per Gil Scott-Heron's famous line that 'the Revolution will not be televised, the revolution will be live', protest is usually seen as an ephemeral time of public manifestation, that needs to be experienced in the flesh, rather than at a remove. However, the edited collection *Protest on the Page* clearly shows that revolutions are often printed, and can be reconstructed based on their material remains. The book demonstrates the benefits of a longitudinal perspective on protests — not as singular experiential events, but as long-term efforts in community building through education, critique or satire. Print sources allow us to reassess these efforts, and to chronicle the dissemination and articulation of the revolutionary ideas underwriting Heron's moment of collective action.

Protest on the Page showcases the diversity of printed material that has supported dissent in US culture, and outlines the varied publics of protest mapped across age, gender, religious orientation, and ethnicity. This book draws on a wide range of archival material rarely explored outside of the confines of library science, print sociology and book history. *Protest on the Page* will appeal to media and book historians, as well as to literary critics with an interdisciplinary interest in the sociology of print. Its treatment of archival material will be of interest to scholars from other disciplines that use new historicist and distant reading methodologies, as well as to those working on collective authorship and genetic studies. The fields addressed in the book — periodical studies, genetic approaches

and book history — have all been growing steadily in complexity and scope over the last ten years.¹ This is partially the result of the push to increase the accessibility of archives belonging to public institutions through digitization, and of the progress made in big data-parsing techniques in the humanities.² The present edited volume is part of these recent trends. It collects a number of conference contributions to the 2012 conference 'Protest on the Page: Print Culture History in Opposition to Almost Anything* (*You Can Think Of)' organized by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture. The conference explored the multifarious and indeed multi-medial shapes that US protest has taken over the past two centuries and aimed 'to trumpet the Center's commitment to as broad a series of topics and methods as possible' (p. viii). Indeed, this aim is abundantly reflected in the material, which ranges from periodicals with limited or closed readerships such as underground newspapers and bulletins, to magazines with significant circulation figures and a national audience; from marginal religious presses to transnational socialist print enterprises distributing translated pamphlets. The material dimensions of the archival objects differ significantly too, from the artistically illustrated to the hastily Xeroxed.

Bringing together established figures in the history of US print cultures such as James L. Baughman and Carol Tilley with emerging scholars, the collection is subdivided into three

1 Patrick Collier, 'What is Modern Periodical Studies?', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 6.2 (2015), p. 93; see also Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', *PMLA*, 121.2 (2006), 517–31.

2 Collier, pp. 530–31.

broader headings: 'Revolt and Reaction', 'Consensus Contested', and 'Dangerous Print'. These headings, despite seizing on descriptive threads in the material analyzed, have less explanatory power than expected as far as the thematic unity and ordering in the volume is concerned. This lack of thematic unity, however, does not distract from the high quality of the individual contributions. Part 1, 'Revolt and Reaction', covers four chapters, each dealing with the topic of protest. The first of these, 'Writing Redemption: Racially Ambiguous Carpetbaggers and the southern Print Culture Campaign against Reconstruction' by Adam Thomas, describes the dissident reactionary press of the Southern US States that successfully discredited proponents of Reconstruction after the Civil War. In the second and third contributions — 'The Inky Protest of An Anarchist Printmaker: Carlo Abate's Newspaper Illustrations and the Artist's Hand in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' by Andrew D. Hoyt and 'Spanish-Language Anarchist Periodicals in Early Twentieth-Century United States' by Nicolás Kanellos — trace the importance of small scale, often hand-printed periodicals in consolidating anarchist identities amongst immigrant Italian and Spanish factory workers in the early twentieth century. The fourth contribution, 'Pamphlets of Self-Determination: Dissident Literature, Productive Fiction' by Trevor Joy Sangrey looks at the importance of pamphlets and translation in articulating socialist views of race in the 1930s and 1940s through recourse to communist ideology and propaganda.

One wonders whether the first section would have been better served by a reflection on techniques of dissemination and patterns of consumption in a small theoretical introduction that framed the rest of the articles. Moreover, since these are the only articles in the collection engaging directly with the role of language, and specifically immigrant dialects and translation practices in the creation of US

political identities, more unifying threads on the challenges of multilingualism in US publication practices at the turn of the century would have been welcome. Constructions of masculinities in print also seem to provide a salient thread connecting all four articles, while the gender and ages of protest seem to be of great importance throughout the collection.

The second section, 'Consensus Contested' maps a number of counter-cultural practices where protest enters the political sphere from more unexpected quarters and widens definitions of oppositional discourse. Laura J. Miller and Emilie Hardman's chapter, 'By the Pinch and the Pound: Less and More Protest in American Vegetarian Cookbooks from the Nineteenth Century to the Present' is an excellent overview of the evolution of vegetarian cookbooks. These went from closed-circle home-use publications on the fringes of society to fanzines which collected these earlier publications with the rise of vegetarian subcultures in the 1960s and 1970s in the US. Finally, the authors contrast the fanzine cultures and their radical politics to the mainstream publication of vegetarian cookbooks as part of environmental and health initiatives. Daniel Vaca's 'Meeting the Modernistic Tide: The Book as Evangelical Battleground in the 1940s' recounts the history of evangelical book printing in the 1940s that served as tools for the presentation of radical opposition to the godlessness of modern book practices. In this way, religious publications usually associated with the establishment come to symbolize the force of newness and subversion. Tilley's chapter, 'Children and the Comics: Young Readers Take on the Critics', is possibly the most original contributions in the volume. It analyzes the outspoken defense of the cultural relevance of comics that was set up by children and young adults in response to Fredric Wertham's controversial thesis that violence in comic books causes infantile delinquency in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*.

The means of asserting individual and collective agency and expressing controversial opinions in the public sphere in the face of censorship and repression are the threads connecting the articles in the third and final section of the book, 'Dangerous Print'. Derek Seidman's 'Paper Soldiers: The *Ally* and the GI Underground Press during the Vietnam War' analyzes the underground press mechanisms supporting GIs protesting the Vietnam War, while Micah Robbins's 'The Clowning of Richard Nixon in the Underground Press' charts the cultural impact of caricatures and abject oppositional discourse opposing Nixon's second term-re-election and subsequent impeachment. In the final article in the collection, 'Off / On Our Backs: The Feminist Press in the "Sex Wars" of the 1980s', Joyce M. Latham discusses a 'periodical war' between two embattled feminist positions regarding the pornography debates of the 1970s. While this section is more interconnected thematically, radical and conservative definitions of gender and sexuality could perhaps have been highlighted more clearly as significant factors in the identity constructions of underground publications in the first two contributions.

The volume features distinct methodologies ranging from the predominantly qualitative as, for instance, in Tilley's careful analyses of the rhetorics in letters to editors contesting the criminal influence of comics on the upbringing of children, or in Robbins's mapping of the dissemination of visual and textual gags about Richard Nixon in underground newspapers, to the quantitative and mixed methods studies covering longer time periods as in Miller and Hardman's survey of the evolution of vegetarian cookbooks over a century or Vaca's outline of modernist printing practices and the oppositional culture of evangelic presses that employed its own means of dissemination and moral packaging. The inseparability of the visual and verbal in books and periodicals from the mid

nineteenth century to the fanzines and feminist periodicals of the late twentieth century can be glimpsed in a number of the articles, such as Thomas's use of Northern carpetbagger caricatures in the Reconstruction period or the visual humor crucial to Nixon 'clowning' or, in Sangrey's reproductions of illustrations on communist pamphlets arguing for the Black Nation Thesis through very strong visual representations of the Scottsboro Nine.

Still, with the exceptions of Hoyt's excellent analysis of the vital importance of illustrations in creating a sympathetic audience and Miller and Hardman's reflections on the changing aspect of vegetarian recipe collections, the contributions in the collection do not reflect sufficiently on print practices from a media-narratological perspective, and they rarely comment on the more explicitly technological dimensions that make print culture so effective. Even though the vagaries of distribution and dissemination are considered more directly, an overarching theoretical perspective would be useful here. Reflecting on the nonhuman side of technologies and media of dissent would perhaps draw out compelling points about the evolving communication tools that support protest in the Western world.

Furthermore, while the strength of the present volume lies in the remarkably diverse and original print matters explored, its weakness is also, paradoxically, its heterogeneous conception of protest that ultimately lacks staying power. Despite the careful introduction by Baughman that maps out the social and historical points where print generated change in the US public sphere, there is a need for a more unified set of reflections on the future of the disciplines under the umbrella of periodical studies, and a careful analysis of the larger trends that determine reaction and reform in the public sphere. Other books published by the Center for Print and Digital Culture in the same series such as *Religion and the Culture of Print*

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in Modern America edited by Charles L. Cohen and Paul S. Boyer or *Women in Print* edited by James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand seem to adopt more narrow, theoretically coherent definitions of their subject and are therefore more likely to reform their respective thematic fields.

All in all, this collection is an original and significant contribution to periodical studies and book history, offering many exciting insights into the workings of US printing practices supporting communities

of dissent across a broad social board. Its theoretical apparatuses and its reflections on the state of the discipline could be more thoroughly articulated throughout. This relative blind spot is more than compensated for by the large number of compelling first-hand archival materials that the chapters draw on, as well as by their use of innovative, thorough, and rich methodological tools.

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