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Book Review

A Historical Analysis of Media Practices and Technologies in Protest Movements: A Review of *Crisis and Critique* by Anne Kaun

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Abstract
Dr. Anne Kaun's book, *Crisis and Critique: A Brief History of Media Participation in Times of Crisis* (London: Zed Books, 2016, 131 pp., ISBN: 978-1-78360-736-5), is a concise but comprehensive analysis of the changing media practices and technologies in protest movements. The book overviews the topic within the context of major economic crises and scrutinises three richly detailed case studies in the United States: (a) the unemployed workers' movement during the Great Depression in the 1930s, (b) the tenants' rent strike movement of the early 1970s, and (c) the Occupy Wall Street movement following the Great Recession of 2008. Kaun begins her book with an introduction to economic crises and protest movements and highlights the relationship of crisis and critique to media practices. She goes on to investigate historical forms of media participation in protest movements from three different perspectives: (a) protest time, (b) protest space, and (c) protest speed. The book contributes to the recent discussion on the emerging role of social media in protest by providing a historically nuanced analysis of the media participation in times of crisis. As a whole, the book is valuable to anyone interested in media and social activism.

Keywords
critique; economic crises; media history; media participation; media practices; media technologies; protest movements

Issue
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Media play an important role in times of crisis. The media operate as platforms during crises, enabling critique and assisting with the organisation and mobilisation of activism and protest movements. Many crises arise, develop, and live out their lives mainly through media—either traditional or social media. Media also take part in defining what situations, events, or circumstances we call crises. Thus, media do not simply inform us of ongoing crisis situations; media name, rename, and label crises. Consequently, one could argue that media construct—present and represent—crises.

Media are strongly linked with activism and protest movements. However, media are not only a separate means of sharing protest-related information or a space for coming together and crowdsourcing. Media practices and technologies are present in everyday life of protest movements—and actively shape them. Dr. Anne Kaun's inspiring and timely book, *Crisis and Critique: A Brief History of Media Participation in Times of Crisis*, focuses on the topic and investigates the changes which have occurred regarding media practices and technologies in protest movements.

Innovations in media, such as recent developments in social media, have affected protest throughout history. As Kaun notes, the emerging and multifaceted role of social media in activism and protest movements has recently become a widely-studied research subject (e.g., Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012). However, at the same time, there is a lack of studies focusing on the historical aspects of media participation in protest movements. How has the media work of protest movements changed over the time? What kinds of impacts have media inno-

vations and changes in media ecology had on protest? Furthermore, what are the consequences of changes in protest practices to political, economic, cultural, and social states of affairs?

Anne Kaun's book attempts—and manages—to fill these gaps, adding to the current discussion on the impact of media technologies on society by providing an in-depth historical analysis of the role of media practices and technologies in protest movements. One of the particular strengths of the book, among many, is that Kaun does not take the role of media for granted but remains analytical and critical throughout the book. Thus, she considers not only the ways that prevailing media practices and technologies have shaped activism, protest movements, and resistance to capitalism but also how changes in the methods and forms of protest and protest practices have affected media practices and technologies.

The book explores the topic through three case studies of American protest movements, all in the context of major economic crises. The case studies are as follows: (a) the unemployed workers' movement during the Great Depression in the 1930s, (b) the tenants' rent strike movement in New York that emerged in the context of the 1970s oil and fiscal crisis, and (c) the Occupy Wall Street movement in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008. Comparing three actual case studies from three different eras makes historical changes apparent and hence the abstract topic concrete. The case studies are described thoroughly, using both archive documents and interview data. This makes Kaun's arguments easy to follow, even for a reader without an in-depth background knowledge of the cases.

The book is divided into six sections: (a) introduction to economic crises and protest movements, and to book itself; (b) overview of the theoretical framework, main concepts, and the relationship of crisis and critique to media practices; (c) the temporality of protest media practices, i.e. protest times; (d) the production of space in events of contention, i.e. protest spaces; (e) resynchronising fast capitalism, i.e. protest speeds; and (f) conclusion, summarising the book from the perspective of protest technologies and futures of protest media. Analytical categories of protest time, space, and speed provide a common thread throughout the book.

The first of these, *protest times*, investigates media technologies' temporalities and changing time regimes of media technologies. As Kaun argues, the role of time and timing is essential in protest. Media technologies have many temporal consequences and they allow, for example, "common public time, namely the experience of a shared timeframe" (p. 11). However, even though media technologies are often considered to be purely resource- and time-savers in protest, Kaun points out that the temporality of media technologies does not always make things easier for activists.

The second main category, *protest spaces*, describes changes and continuities in the spatial practices and the spatial consequences of media technologies. Kaun shows that space—or the disappearance of it—is highly important to protest movements. Even though all three protest movements discussed in the book share some spatial practices and the spatial protest work on the ground has not changed that dramatically, the symbolic production of space has transformed and new media technologies have enabled protest movements to reach larger, global scales and made it possible to connect over vast distances.

The third of Kaun's analytical category, *protest speeds*, brings together categories of time and space as protest speed describes "the movement through space in a certain amount of time" (p. 13). Media environments which activists are navigating have become increasingly fast, and activists may either resist the changes or adapt to them. Kaun describes the new challenges media immediacy has generated for protest movements and, for example, how media ecology has sped up and created a constant need to produce new content to attract external attention. In addition, Kaun's notion of protest speed assists in tracing the increasing desynchronization between immediate media practices and rather time-consuming political practices of decision making and participatory democracy.

Kaun's book proficiently illuminates a major shift from effortful "mechanical speed in the 1930s to perpetual flow in the 1970s towards [effortless] digital immediacy nowadays" (p. 97). The other interesting theme concerns the changes in activists' media production, distribution, and consumption.

In the 1930s, protest media ranged from radio talks to printed materials, such as various bulletins, leaflets, brochures, and shop papers written by unemployed workers and distributed in factories. Thus, during that time, media technologies brought people together as the workers spent plenty of time together while producing, distributing, and consuming content.

By the 1970s, media ecology had become more complex, including newspapers, radio, and television. In addition, tenants were drawing posters and banners together and producing content for media outlets. Thus, media production and distribution were still quite often collective actions. However, because television had become more common, the consumption of media was individualised.

By 2011/2012, social media had become crucial. In addition to the camping and campaigning at Zuccotti Park, within Wall Street's financial district, activists were mobilising online, composing a constant flow of tweets, memes, films, images, and texts as well as live-streaming events and activities in the camp. Generally, media production, distribution, and consumption were individualised.

Anne Kaun provides a fascinating illustration of this change in media production, distribution, and consumption, from it being collective to it being more individualised. In addition, she gives an interesting description

of how these changes in media practices and technologies have affected the bonds between people and activists' identities.

No book is without some limitation. Even though Kaun's "big three" (p. 10), protest time, space, and speed, are extremely inspiring and stimulating, the reader misses more detailed information on why and how has she settled on these three analytical categories. In the book, it is said that "these come very close to what Michel Foucault once considered as the big three, namely territory, speed and communication" (p. 10), but this relationship could have been described more explicitly.

In addition, even though all the choices Kaun made during her ambitious and engaging research project were appropriate and reasonable, some other choices could have been justified more clearly. For example, why were these three case studies selected, not some others? How were the data collected? Why were these particular archive data used and how were the informants selected and interviewed?

The book mentions it draws on the work of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), and Raymond Williams (1921–1988). As a matter of fact, the name of Kaun's book, Crisis and Critique, is the same as Benjamin and Brecht's planned journal, *Krise und Kritik*, which was, however, never published. This topic could also have been described in greater detail. How have these theorists affected the book? To summarise, the book might have benefitted from justifying all the major choices made during the research project more profoundly and from more explicitly illustrating the connections between the book and "its philosophical roots".

Every book has its limitations—and word limits. Thus, it is understandable that none of the books can answer all the questions. As a matter of fact, one can argue that while good books answer the questions, the best ones stimulate questions. If everything could be solved and fixed by reading a book, wouldn't life be boring? How would that further the development of research or promote scientific, analytical thinking?

As an American writer, Nancy Willard (1936–2017), has put it: "Sometimes questions are more important than answers". Anne Kaun's book proficiently shows the changes of media practices and technologies within protest movements but also leaves many questions unanswered. First, the book concentrates on protest movements in the context of major economic crises. This makes a reader question what the significance of this context is to the conclusions drawn. Do media practices of protest movements vary in other contexts? Second, all the case studies discussed in the book are American, even though the latest movement, Occupy Wall Street, spread globally. Are there any geographical or cultural differences in protest media practices? If so, what are the most significant similarities and differences?

In complex media ecologies, activists need specific communication strategies. For example, in the 1970s, the Metropolitan Council of Housing arranged workshops to improve tenants' professionalism in media practices. What kinds of competences are beneficial for participation in today's media environment, and how are these competences built in the context of protest?

To conclude, one of the strengths of Kaun's fascinating book is its heuristic, thought-provoking nature. Readers are provided with a deeper understanding of the topic, as well as with plenty of new, inspiring questions. Thus, I recommend the book to everybody interested in new perspectives on media and social activism.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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