

OurSpace: Resisting The Corporate Control of Culture.* Christine Harold. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 232 pp.

Reviewed by Mark Hayward

There is much to recommend Christine Harold's *OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*. It offers a comprehensive and insightful discussion of many recent social movements that have emerged in struggles around information and communication issues. The texts and contexts studied range from the evolution of Situationist techniques, like *détournement* and psychogeography, in contemporary venues like *Adbusters* to the open source and Creative Commons movements that have developed around the struggle against the corporate control and exploitation of information technologies. Of course, one of the dangers when it comes to writing about contemporary social movements (and their relationship to new technology) is the rapid pace with which things change. There are elements of *OurSpace*—completed in late 2006—that clearly speak to another time (even if only five years ago.) The title itself, a reference to *MySpace*, is evidence of this. The internet *zeitgeist* (2010) has clearly moved onto (and perhaps beyond) *Facebook* and other social networking sites and the continued prominence of *Google* and its transformation into the major global information broker were not foreseen in this text. In this, Harold's text confronts the inevitable problems of writing about the contemporary moment. Nonetheless, the book remains a useful resource for explaining the potentials (and limitations) of these movements. It is a text that I would highly recommend for use in upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses that focus on social movements and communication.

This is not to say that the book does not have its limitations. *OurSpace* is deeply indebted to the traditions of rhetorical criticism, a relationship that may be hard to understand for some readers not well versed in this tradition of work. Indeed, there are many points in the text where the focus shifts from the struggle over control of the media and the right to communicate towards a justification for the study of the rhetorical nature of these practices. I do not wish to deny that many of the phenomena that Harold discusses in the text are indeed “rhetorics,” but there are times where her discussions of rhetorical concepts seem out of place, or overwhelm her discussion of particular social movements. However, as I already mentioned, this aspect of the book makes it particularly well suited for use in a course looking at the rhetoric of social movements. In this regard, it helpfully updates the repertoire of cases that might be studied and productively transforms the critical vocabulary in ways that move that particular strain of social movement studies beyond the old stand-bys of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s or women's struggle for the vote at the turn of the last century.

If there is one critical oversight in Harold's project that would have made her argument about the new stakes in contemporary struggles for liberation stronger, it is that she pays almost no attention to questions of labor and the human costs of the symbolic productions that she maps with such care and intelligence. The theme of rhetorical invention is one that circulates throughout the text. It is at the core of her compelling re-reading of the classical concept of *kairos* (expanded from referring simply to a rhetor's sense of “timing” to the constitutive

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moment subjective and textual co-creation.) It returns in her discussion of the creative commons movement, where the reformation of copyright restrictions are advocated in the name of increasing the circulation and sharing of texts in order to augment the ability of artists and others to create. Yet in all of these cases, there is a strange dislocation between these acts of invention and the labor that was involved in such inventions. While there are occasional references to bodies that produce and the embodied experience of mediated texts, Harold's discussion offers a mostly friction-less portrayal of the work of resistance. Recent work on the changing nature of labor as organized around the concepts of precarity raise these issues in particularly relevant ways, suggesting that the *kairotic* inventions of activists and artists also require greater attention to the bodies behind the text.

Indeed, this text raises many questions about the labor that produces and supports these new struggles against control and exploitation through communication, doing so both through its content and its form. When this book was first released, the publishers supported and managed a wiki where readers could share and comment on their feelings about the book and their own experiences. Updating and transforming the published work, such a wiki could serve to actualize the kinds of energies and potentials discussed in the text itself. Sadly, coming to the book three years after its publication, the wiki no longer exists. I do not mean to chastise Harold for not keeping the wiki up, but I think it is a telling sign of the gaps between the momentary manifestations that challenge corporate control over media and the development of a sustained movement for change. This is a point that Harold herself makes in contrasting the postmodern agit-prop of *Adbusters* to the Creative Commons movement. And it is one that we should take to heart as these issues and effects of the movement Harold outlines are taken up in the university, transforming the ways that we think about knowledge and productivity.

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