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Review: Climate Change and Post-Political Communication: Media, Emotion, and Environmental Advocacy

By P. Hammond

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

Québec, Canada

Hammond, Philip. *Climate Change and Post-Political Communication: Media, Emotion, and Environmental Advocacy*. London: Routledge, 2018, 149 pp. ISBN: 9781138777507, paperback, US\$44.95.

This overlooked, interdisciplinary book focuses on one central question which could be reformulated as such: how did environmental issues become relevant matters — that is, considered as “important news” — in the mainstream media? To put it simply, Philip Hammond argues within our Manichean scheme of things framed by most of the media, ecological and environmental problems have often been linked with left-wing protestors and uncontrolled social movements, categorising environmental activists with opponents of all kinds, plus anti-capitalists, and a variety of individuals depicted as “troublemakers”. Of course, this is an inaccurate and exaggerated representation which lacks nuance, since, in reality, things and situations are usually not so easily separated and categorized. So, when did people in the mainstream media begin to give some credit to environmentalists and their cause? And when did the mainstream media choose to send messages arguing that environmental issues matter? (p. 20). What were the agenda-setters thinking then?

Philip Hammond’s *Climate Change and Post-Political Communication* is not a history book, but rather an interdisciplinary analysis that bridges environmental studies and media studies, with a focus on social representations of environmental issues. The first chapters raise many relevant topics. According to Philip Hammond (who convincingly draws on a variety of authors), there is a precise historical moment when this shift unexpectedly occurred, at least in the United States: it was U.S. President Nixon who, in his 1970 State of the Union address, had pragmatically seized this growing issue to make it his own. Philip Hammond explains: “Environmentalism’s apparently simultaneous emergence in both radical protest and mainstream politics suggests that, right from the outset, it raised the question noted above regarding the relationship between élites and the public emerged” (p. 20). Of course, this unpredicted shift in terms of social perceptions of the environment was neither unanimous nor undebated.

Throughout the first half, Philip Hammond aptly concentrates on the unforeseen effects of ideologies and the framing of public opinion within environmental studies and inside the mainstream media; therefore, he even criticizes some Green movements whenever they position themselves for or against technologies such as nuclear power. For most

environmentalists aware of propaganda strategies, the misleading argument of legitimising nuclear power against traditional carbon energies has always been dangerous, and politically loaded (p. 83). Here, Philip Hammond concentrates on some of these debates. Among many original dimensions in his book, Philip Hammond analyses the recent advocacy movements and also the role of U.S. celebrities to create awareness about some environmental issues: “celebrity campaigning follows formats and conventions which are part of current media and celebrity genres” (p. 99). In order to explain this credibility and surplus of authority given to celebrities in the realm of public opinion, Hammond adds that many high-profile celebrities have gained, through their artistic achievements and media exposure, an overstated power of influence for the masses: “in a context of declining political authority, celebrities’ enactment of personal and emotional authenticity fills a gap of political legitimacy, not with a politicisation of emotion, but with a therapeutic sense of transcendence” (p. 99).

As such, *Climate Change and Post-Political Communication* seems to rely very much on the British media (*The Guardian* is about everywhere here); but readers from elsewhere can try to transpose and recontextualize Hammond’s core hypotheses within their respective nations. Neither for undergraduates nor for public libraries, *Climate Change and Post-Political Communication* will find its readership among scholars in environmental studies and media studies. Philip Hammond writes clearly, with wit and discernment.

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