Towards an ecology of political mindfulness

Phil Cohen

‘Bringing together the joyful wit and steely wisdom of his writing over recent years, this book is nothing less than brilliant.’

Lynne Segal.

Author of ‘Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy’
WAYPOINTS: 
Towards an ecology of political mindfulness

by Phil Cohen

We are living through disturbed and disturbing times in which the maps drawn by political scientists no longer make sense of what is happening on the ground. Against this background the propagandists of neo-liberal individualism urge us to cultivate ‘resilience’ and ‘mindfulness’ as a way of seizing and surviving the present moment. Mindfulness in particular has been popularised as a way of promoting well-being by enabling people suffering from anxiety or depression to become more aware of internal mental states and their relation to external circumstances.

But what if this concept is applied not just to the adaptive strategies of an individual psyche but to the state of health of the body politic? It might then help us focus more precisely on how the stresses and strains of our everyday lives are connected to the social structures we inhabit. It might, for example, help us understand more concretely how issues, of race, gender, generation and class shape the most intimate registers of our being in the world.

From this starting point, the book charts a journey, at once intellectual and existential, across the fault lines of our conflicted society and divided selves. It brings together writings occasioned by recent political and personal events in an attempt to grasp their inter-connection in what is flashing past before it disappears into a fog of reminiscence or rhetoric. Many of the pieces collected here are this kind of auto-ethnographic reportage. Others, more essayistic in form, step back to think more strategically about some of the deeper processes at work in our increasingly uncivil society.

The first part of the book traces the seismic shifts taking place in the landscape of British politics, culminating in the Brexit vote, focussing on their cultural and ideological underpinnings. This is followed by a series of engagements with actual, mostly urban, landscapes, as they change underfoot, and suggests some possible ways of notating that encounter both at home and away. The next section explores personal memoryscapes of love and loss and their implications for understanding the dislocated times we are living through. The book concludes with a series of essays about the contemporary conditions of cultural production as these inform the poesis of singular arts practices.

Across these topics, Phil Cohen begins to map out an ecology of critical awareness as a timely antidote to the mindlessness currently being promoted through our political culture with its knee jerk responses to the multiple crises we face.

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CONTENTS

Introduction: On Being ‘Woke’

Part One - Changing Political Cultures
Brexit and the Island Story – A Fatal Attraction
To Vote, Perchance to Dream: Moments in the Great Moving Left (or Is It Right?) Show
Mad Dogs and Englishmen: The EU Referendum and Its Other Scene
1968’ and the Politics of Memory
On Translating Politics: The Legacy of French Situationism

Part Two - Thinking Places, Travelling Stories
Crossing the Borderlands: The Dialectics of Trespass
There Goes the Labourhood: An Urban Triptych
A Twisted Thread: Imagining the Working-class City
Glass Ceilings: In Memory of a Pioneering Urbanist
Living the Dream: A Letter from Paris
Pictures from a Not Quite Gone City
In Search of the Antipodean

Part Three - Counter Finalities
To Seek Within the Inferno That Which Is Not
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Threnody for Stuart Hall
Our Dear Icarus
In Place of Kaddish: A Letter for Ste
Two Funerals and a Strange Conjuncture
For Those Orphaned Late
Santa with(out) Clause IV : Or, Socialism Is Not Just for Christmas
Atishoo, Atishoo, We All Fall Down: Some Reflections on Body Politics
Waiting Games People Play

Part Four - Cultural Formations
Living with Painting
Graphologies
Are We That Name? An Essay on Pseudonyms
Black Atlas: The Poetics of Counter-Mapping
The Occasions of Poetry

End notes and Index
How Many Lightbulbs
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Edited by E. Haines, A. Woodhan, J. Wallett

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Waypoints
*Towards an Ecology of Political Mindfulness*

By Phil Cohen

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