

Book Reviews

Book Review 1

Title: Mental long waves. An outline until 2021 [Mentale langegolfbewegingen. Krijtlijnen tot 2021]. By Helmut Gaus (2010). Gent, Academia Press, 155 p. ISBN 978-90-382-1570-9.

Reviewed by: Christ'f De Landtsheer, University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Nothing seems more exciting than works that pretend to look into the future of our lives. We run into them, unfortunately far too less, these macro-frames of reference that allow to explain many of the events that occur in our everyday life reality, as most of these appear to fit in the outlined pattern. Social scientists are familiar with the model by Ronald Inglehart about the changing values and political styles among Western publics first described by him in "The silent revolution" (1977) and afterwards refined and improved. But there are other authors who dare to explore the paths of our future, but who are for some reason, very often the language in which they publish, far less known than Inglehart, even though their work deserves our attention because it is inspiring and original. This review, therefore, will focus upon the work by the Belgian-German historian Helmut Gaus who made prognoses about human behavior at the macro level the trademark of his lifelong research. We will discuss here his latest publication that until now was only published in Dutch, but which draws upon his earlier work (e.g. 1980, 1982, 1992, 1996, 2004, 2009) of which a good resume can be consulted in English (*Why Yesterday tells of Tomorrow. How the long waves of the economy help us to determine tomorrow's trends*. 2001, 2nd edition 2003) and in German (*Warum Gestern über Morgen erzählt*, 2001).

Let us first summarize here the most recent version of the provocative theory and a model by Helmut Gaus, of which the earlier *Why Yesterday tells of Tomorrow* certainly allows getting an impression. The theory says that human behavior, in all its dimensions, varies according to waves that resemble the Kondratieff cycle in world economy. These economic cycles of approximately 50 years were, at least since the 1789 French revolution, found to be constantly repeated. In the original opinion held by Gaus, it was the Kondratieff cycle itself, with periods of 25 years of recovery and prosperity, followed by 25 years of recession and crisis, that severely influenced human behavior in its various

forms (political, cultural, social...). Gaus 'changes horses' in his most recent work as he completely reverses his scheme: it is now the 50 years long "mental" wave itself that provides for the particular "recession" and "crisis" versus "recovery" and "prosperity" pattern in human behavior and in the economy. The vocabulary is equally adapted because the terms "recovery" and "prosperity" are replaced with spring and summer, while "recession" and "crisis" have become fall and winter. Apart from this essential distinction Gaus kept the essentials of his theory identical over the years.

Having summarized the underlying idea, it is worthy to take a closer look at the "crisis" and "non-crisis" pattern itself, not in the least for the information this prognosis may give us about the good and evil we can expect. And it should be admitted that for most of us the majority of prospects with the very exception of one may sound attractive.

After the 1988-1992 deepest mental "valley" or crisis, recovery and thus spring took a start to transcend somewhere now into the prosperity or summer phase, that will last until 2021. Fashion already reveals the first signs of this special summer in its programming of summer colors red, orange and yellow, that will gradually take over the blue and green spring pallet. Crisis or winter colors black and grey will no longer dominate our dressing codes, and neither will the brown, white and violet shades of autumn. During the up going part of the mental wave, the level of anxiety tends to be low, and this has impact upon most of our everyday reality, including the interiors of our homes and the scientific paradigms we prefer.

At the turn from spring into summer that we now experience, courage is becoming increasingly popular and gets its rewards. At the political level this means the occurrence of populist politicians, protest, a lot of aggression, and the likeliness of wars. The severe conflicts that are byproducts of Hubris certainly exemplify the darker side of spring and summer waves and they urge our cautious attention. This so-called Lust aggression should be distinguished nevertheless from the Anxiety aggression. This last type of aggression belongs to recession and crisis, or fall and winter. Anxiety aggression makes people intolerant toward minorities and immigrants, it encourages them to cling to the traditional conservative values (nationalism, normativity,...) at the one hand, or to seek escape from crisis reality on the other hand, in romantic ecologism, peace movements and animal parties, apocalyptic and catastrophic thinking, or even religious fanaticism and terrorism. The author presents us with the examples of the election as a president of Barack Obama (a black intellectual) and Angela Merkel (a woman) as a prime minister for announcing that "the times they are changing" into summer.

Spring and especially summer not only provide us with less formal dressing codes and a decreasing need of rituals, but also with more tolerance and less normativity. Marriage, monogamy, and heterosexuality have generally lost their exemplary function. Together with Permissive society, Consensus society approaches its climax, ideologies move towards the Centre and gradually, as a whole even move to the Left. Again the fellow-human being is perceived as an interesting subject to learn to know instead of as something to hide for. Individual contacts gain importance to the cost of collective activities in which the individual person vaporizes such as choir singing and (militaristic) scouting or excessive sporting. Dieting will become less important and people will care much less about how they look. Self-expression and confidence will have taken over from calculated impression management or fearful self-compensation through irrational behavior and over

emotionalism. By 2021 a bright idea written down on a dirty piece of paper will again have become a bright idea (instead of a dirty piece of paper), but the neatly typed and carefully lay-outed report, submitted and planned far in advance of the deadline will, depending upon its contents, have been reduced to its real significance.

Gaus has until now only partly been able to empirically validate his theoretical outline with quantitative data. Other scholars are hereby encouraged to take the challenge to test his range of exciting hypotheses linking human behavior in various domains to both psychological and economic factors at the macro-level.

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Book review 2

Title: *Radio goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II.* By Gerd Horten (2002). University of California Press, London, 218 p. ISBN 9-780-520-24061-2.

Reviewed by: Dennis Hegmans¹

In 'Radio goes to War' by Gerd Horten, the importance of radio during the period 1920-1940 is finally being outlined explicitly. The fact is that at that time – in the pre television age – the radio was by far the most important (news) medium. Most of the cultural genres of nowadays television programs originate in early radio programs. This book goes a step further as the author states that the radio is not only the founder of contemporary cultural genres, the radio provides us also with new and intriguing aspects of the American role in World War II (WW II). Moreover, it is almost impossible to determine American society in the 1920-1940 years without considering the impact of radio, since no other medium has affected the mainstream American life as strong as the radio. The power of this medium increased in the early 1940s, when it provided the American people with national and – most importantly – international news and kept the people informed as good as possible in those turbulent times. Additionally, the government used the radio to spread important precautions to the people in case of emergencies, i.e. when war would break out (an example is the call to collect and store tin).

At that time, radio was the most important medium, whereas 90% of the American people owned at least one. American families used their radio on an average of 3 to 4 hours per day. The radio was daily company, the window to an outside and unknown world, the messenger of information and news, and finally, a pleasant distraction and a source of entertainment. Americans living in the 1930-1940 days could simply not imagine a life without radio.

The book 'Radio goes to War' wants to examine the impact of radio during the years of war and specifically the role of radio as one of the many propaganda media.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is focusing on radio news and non commercial state propaganda through radio broadcasting from late 1930 to early 1940. It considers the role of the radio in the political landscape at the time that American politics was changing heavily. The two most important aspects of these changes were the accep-

¹ Note by the editors: Some parts of the original review are omitted or adjusted in order to abbreviate the review. Edited and translated from Dutch by L.D. Kalkhoven.

tance of Keynesian economics and the belief in the expansion of the welfare state. Besides, in those early war years the close relationship between a free market (and free enterprises) and the government became far more clear.

In the second part the privatized political culture in the United States during the war is being defined. This part elaborates the fact that the second World War was a privatized war, with a call for personal sacrifices and the demands of the American consumer. In the late 1930s the radio was certainly not a young medium anymore: over the previous ten years the radio had become a popular entertainment medium throughout the whole country. Over the years the radio also changed due to (and depending on) the upcoming war. This was especially noticeable by the increased number of news broadcastings. Although during the Great War (WW I) the radio did not have a latent presence or function, in the pre WW II years it definitely did fulfill this function, as it was used during a major catastrophe: the Great Depression. Moreover, the one giant lesson the American society had learned after WW I was that it would never drag itself into war again only based on propaganda, various corrupt stories and forced moral duties. This was made explicit for example, when the French empire was forced to surrender to the Germans in 1940, and the American people would not openly join the Allied countries, because of the fear that WW I would repeat itself all over again. Despite the fact that they supported the Allies in mind, they did not allow themselves – at that time – to be dragged into the war.

Nevertheless, that the importance of radio increased every day was something president Franklin Roosevelt was quite aware of. Whereas Roosevelt was re-elected as president in 1936 mainly based on interviews and speeches that appeared in newspapers, it were his interviews and speeches on the radio that increased his popularity in the following years. As a consequence, the number of non commercial state programs on the radio rose. However, several American critics disapproved this evolution, since they argued that it resembled the way Hitler and his propaganda machine “educated and informed” the citizens, with far-reaching consequences as we know. Notwithstanding it was clear that the American radio became the number one state propaganda machine at that time, similar to European fascist regimes. The Roosevelt administration interfered not only for the first time in history with economic (private) affairs, they mingled with American cultural business as well. The state aimed at its people by the use of news-flashes, documentaries, theatre and radio. This went in Europe even further: certain state governments adapted its country’s art and entertainment, and added them to their own propaganda machine.

The real news about (the upcoming) WW II came in the air in the United States not until the Munich crisis. Hitler wanted to incorporate and annex *Sudetenland* in Czechoslovakia to make it part of the German Empire. From then the radio started to expose news broadcasting and comments on the European events to the American listeners. This kind of radio programs was totally new and it contained the suspense and tragedy of a Hollywood thriller movie, with the only difference that this was for real. The networks inserted lots of money and commercial programs were often interrupted or replaced by bulletins with up-to-date news. American journalists were located in the major European capitals and were present to bring the latest news at any time. The American people appreciated this new kind of news reporting, considering the high listener ratings and great amount of positive mail correspondence the radio networks received. The American radio

audience especially favored the simplicity and clearness of the language that the radio used, instead of the complex language one was used to find in newspapers. Radio revealed to be the generation's next – trustworthy – friend.

The American radio broadcasting positioned itself – with a little governmental help – into the interventionist side (the pro American participation to the war side), especially due to the lively and persuasive reports of certain journalists. The most famous example is the work by the journalist Edward Murrow who, describing the 'Battle of Britain', created a connectedness of sympathy between the American radio listeners and the London inhabitants. England, and above all Winston Churchill himself, of course encouraged this kind of news reportage by providing total access to all journalists, in order to convict the Americans that Britain fought a war not for their own good, like colonization, but for freedom of the West and European civilization as an ideology. President Roosevelt had his own ways to gain support to American intervention among the American people. He comforted the people with restful and charming speeches and used his personal popularity. When this appeared to be not sufficient, his advisers started a real political campaign: tricks were used to cover the horror of the war (shocking images and photos were filtered), and radio listeners were given the feeling that they actually participated in the war action yet (by using the so-called "you-technique"). The *personalization* of the war was a fact.

It became inevitable, eventually, that the Americans would participate in the war. The next step, however, was to clarify which enemy they had to fight. In spring 1942 the radio directors started to describe 'the enemy' more often, whereas the war propaganda was most of all directed to Nazi-Germany as 'the enemy'. This was rather remarkable, as in the American public opinion feelings of aversion and hate were mostly directed towards Japan, which just before had attacked American soil at Pearl Harbor (and thus the American people directly). Nevertheless, Roosevelt and his advisers had decided to 'help' Europe and fight Germany first. To justify this approach it was necessary to launch a series of radio propaganda against Germany. This propaganda had above all the purpose to show that a Nazi victory over Europe would sincerely affect the American economy and the free market. Moreover, it showed the destruction of family life and the torturing of women in the Nazi regime. In September 1942 Roosevelt and his followers achieved their goal: research showed that a slight majority of the people believed that the US should attack Germany prior to Japan.

Based on the book 'Radio goes to war', it will be interesting to compare the role of radio to another mass medium in war situations nowadays. The later rise of another mass medium, television, has not changed war reporting as radio did. The Gulf War was the first war in which the audience was informed about the war events by live television coverage. However, these live images resembled more a kind of technological spectacle, by the means of night vision and satellite images. As a consequence, the war lost its human side and it was perceived as a war of machines against machines. The reality, like the fact that many humans lost their lives, was partially neglected. The distinction between reality and fiction became blurred, for example because real war images were used for the direction of war movies. Television had become, similar to radio, the source for both entertainment and information (Solomon, 2007).

People's limited ability to distinguish reality from fiction in mass media was already proven by the radio. The most famous example is Orson Welles' radio play 'The War of

the Worlds' in 1938. The American radio program *Mercure Theatre on the Air* brought an audio play version of H.G. Wells' science fiction novel *The War of the World* (1898) as a Halloween special. Director Orson Welles tried to make the play as real as possible. The radio broadcast started as a normal show, with a regular music program, but it was suddenly interrupted with alarming news about an alien invasion from Mars. This message caused a lot of panic among many listeners, who actually thought that America was under attack by aliens. Although the audience was told at least three times that the broadcast was a fictional remake of H.G. Wells' novel, the images in many people's heads – especially those who did not follow the show from the start – appeared to be very realistic. The result was that certain people were scared to move and waited quietly for disaster to come. Some tried desperately and unsuccessfully to reach family members. Others ran in full panic on the streets or hid in churches to escape the 'danger'. The number of these frantic people was relatively small, but the panic was nationwide spread and at certain places these panic attacks were certainly very real. Although the outburst of this sort of medieval apocalyptic fear psychosis did not last for long, when people were aware that they had been victims to – what most of them experienced as – an evil joke, the anger and hate mail against Orson Welles and the broadcasting network CBS was rather big (Evensen, 1998).

Clearly, people had felt the impact of this "radio" medium. However, it should be clarified that people in general trust the news that is given by the media. It is our source of information on which we base our world understandings. Besides, it was 1938 and everybody was aware of the possibility of a war in Europe. Since other radio reporters regularly brought news from Vienna or London about Hitler's plans, it is plausible that anxiety among civilians was common. As a consequence, a new media law was introduced that stated that fiction should be distinguished from reality more explicit in media broadcasting (Wolfe, 1998).

However, the disturbance in reality versus fiction in mass media does not belong to the past yet. An example could be found on Belgian television in December 2006. The francophone Walloon television network RTBF scared lots of French-speaking Belgians, when it interrupted the television programming with a special news broadcasting, in which was announced that Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) had declared its independency. The broadcast also stated that king Albert II had left the country out of dissatisfaction. A number of Belgian politicians were involved in this conspiracy, including the chairmen of the federal Belgian and the Walloon Parliaments. After about half an hour the show announced the hoax of the broadcasting. Other politicians, however, including the Belgian Prime Minister (Guy Verhofstadt), the Secretary of Defense and the Walloon (regional) P.M., expressed their displeasure with the show. The American network CNBC had already adopted the news and people in the streets already initiated certain demonstrations against the (fake) plans. The political future of Belgium has been a delicate subject for years, since the Flemish part requests for more extensive (or total, according to some political parties) independency than Wallonia. "RTBF with this fake broadcasting, tried to show the importance of Belgium's future", stated RTBF's Head of Information. To a certain extent this example can be seen as a modern variant of Orson Welles' 'War of the Worlds'.

These and other examples of major effects that radio and television had (or have) on the public – mostly caused by a government who decided which information did need to

reach the public and which information did not – can be explained by certain acquainted paradigms in the political communication: framing, agenda-setting and priming. These paradigms are based on the idea that mass media have strong attitude effects, whereas these depend on the perception, mental schemes and other characteristics of the audience. Both media, politicians and the public attempt to define which news or information is brought on the agenda of the others (agenda-setting) and when (priming) and how (framing) it occurs.

The difference between the three models is the intention of the effect. Agenda-setting is aiming at making a selection of a whole story as a determinant of the public perception and thus determines which topics are important to this public and which are not. Framing, however, is not focusing on the selection of topics, but is aiming at the presentation of these topics: how a topic is perceived. This distinction causes two different effects on the public. Agenda-setting and priming cause rather accessibility effects: media have the ability to provide access to certain topics to the audience, which influences people's way of thinking and judgments about, for example, policy issues. Framing causes rather an awareness effect. However, these effects cannot be isolated from each other and they do have a mutual influence (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

In present-day agenda-setting still occurs. Certain wars receive less attention than others because they do not pursue the required economic or strategic goals (Heneau, 1998). The majority of the people is still being informed through television. Nowadays there are a lot more television channels and networks than before, so people get informed in a much broader perspective and have in general a more balanced view. Besides, during the first Gulf war, in 1991, the airtime of news was limited, whereas we have now more (and more often) news broadcastings (e.g. through new media channels). Furthermore, back in 1991 governments and armies controlled the television networks mostly (Venhwei & Chingching, 2006). Consequently, the media failed to place the battle between Kuwait and Iraq in its right context, as they limited themselves into just repeating the official Bush (sr.) administration's points of view. This resulted in a situation in which the American public was badly (or selectively) informed and let itself carried away by propaganda, which made them approve a military intervention. The state's and army's monitoring of the media ensured that American politicians and military commanders determined the imaging of the war (McQuail, 2006).

In our Western world there is a broad consensus about the place and role of the media in our society: they ought to be the link between politics and public. Concretely this means that the media should provide an information exchange between both groups. Politicians should be able to present and justify their policy actions. At this point they are the gatekeepers of information: politicians provide media access to this information only when it somehow benefits, because multiple interest are at stake. That is why it is necessary that media are more than just a politician's hatch, they have the obligation to handle the released information with care and a critical eye. Moreover, the media should always actively search for alternative information sources. Only this path leads to fulfilling the expectations of the public: news media as the 'watchdog' of politics and society.

When we link this to Holsten's book 'Radio goes to War' about the role of the radio earlier and what we have learned about the role of television these days, we can conclude that there is still a lot to gain regarding the objectivity of media. The role of the radio may

have been outdated, television can still fulfill this task. The internet has proven to be the 'new medium', and it would be interesting to assess the web's role in today's wars.

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