

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW 1

TITLE: Truth Seeking by George E. Lowe (2006). Philadelphia, PA: X Libris Paper, 651 pages. \$25/€20 and hardcover \$35/€28.

REVIEWED BY: Russell F. Farnen, Storrs, CT, U.S.A.

This hefty volume is over six hundred pages long, which gives the reader a bargain in that it amounts to two volumes for the price of one. It is such a large book that it could just as easily be in the same format as Lowe's other and recent book *It Can Happen Here* (2000) X Libris 2 Vols. This is a study of the likelihood of a fascist Christian American Gotterdammerung, dangerous political and societal trends that were then seen and predicted.

George Lowe is a former U.S. Foreign Service officer who also worked as a speech-writer for the Secretary of Education. His previously published works on national security matters appeared in naval intelligence and affairs journals as well as in a mayor study published in 1964 called *The Age of Deterrence* by Little, Brown, Inc. This book was part of the now classic cold war scenario then underway between the hawks and the doves or the Rand Corp. versus the Center For Defense Information over matters such as Vietnam, first missile strikes, MIRVing, massive retaliation, and the balance of terror. Lowe has also been a teacher at all levels of education from elementary to the university levels. His current cosmopolitan life style includes worldwide travel expeditions and living half the year in Florida and the other half Nova Scotia, where he also has a summer home.

The subtitle for Lowe's book is "travels in a time of terror, war and religious fundamentalists, 2001-2006". Here he mixes with his running political commentary travel stories and itineraries to many points in the U.S. and Canada as well as to Trinidad, Tobago, Ireland, Tuscany, Wales, Scotland, France, Belize, and the West Indies. Lowe weaves his travel and birding narratives into his political themes. He explores what he calls "memes" or ideas and "synchronicities" and how they interact with his own life forces and imperatives. These lifelong themes and strains occur together but not accidentally, he claims. These critical interactive moments produce a kind of Gestalt or Eureka moment when contrary (or even contradictory or a-synchronous) events, occurrences, and/or ideas produce historical parallels over different generations despite the passage of many years. For example, see pp. 569ff. in juxtaposing of Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) with his own book in 2000 or Phillip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) or Robert Stone's *Damascus Gate* (1998) with this new book itself.

These synchronicities themselves are interesting phenomena ranking high along with the author's favorite birding spots and recipes at key junctures in the book itself. Along

with these travel and other reports (various tour providers are critiqued, evaluated and recommended) Lowe reflects on the current state of political affairs. He also discusses the Holocaust legacy, other books to read, observations on the neo- and theo-cons, Christian Fascists at loose in the Amerikan homeland (vaterland), religious fundamentalists, hard core Republicans, global warming, the “Busheviks”, Armageddon, and other so called conservative, but really right wing radical ideas, such as the resurrection of Ballistic Missile Defense or “Star Wars,” whether it works or not. He also speaks of Bush ad preventive war and the forthcoming new American imperium/empire with its quaint features such as first strike/preventive war doctrines. The (former, ed.) U.S. President also has some scary and novel ideas reminiscent of the eerie Ronald Reagan when he discussed the prospects for a forthcoming nuclear war with the “Ruskies”. Bush, for example, gladly admits his religious conversion after a life of mental, physical, and psychological dissolution. Post-saved disciple Bush believes and speaks about the impending second coming of the militant Christ revealed in Revelations 16:16 in which even the nearly destroyed Jewish remnant in Israel play an important or essential role. Lowe discusses these themes as well as the Bushites hoaxes and lies spread by other members of the Bush “cabal”, including members of the military- industrial complex or those once labeled “merchants of death”. As Lowe says, these Bush theocrats who are in charge in Washington and run all three branches of the government as well as the bureaucracy and the press believe in the so-called “end signs” with an impending WW III. Bush has pushed this second coming agenda despite the U.S. tradition of free exercise and freedom of speech supporting a faith based initiative which gave government money and support to churches (if not so much to mosques or synagogues) in violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Bush has also put his war-fighting, war winning doctrines into the nuclear (which he maddeningly pronounces as new-cue- lar) arena along with a modernized and transformed U.S. professional military, one not associated with an unpopular draft army of conscripts against which Americans would likely revolt.

The primary goal of the Bush administration is the creation of an oil rich empire while reaching the impossible goal, namely, democratizing Afghanistan and Iraq. In this case the democratizers do not either know what democracy is or if they do, do not believe a bit in it (e.g., they endorsed the undemocratic electoral college and the Supreme Court which chose Bush as President in 2000 despite the fact that he had fewer popular votes) as an idea or practice. In this scenario, the demotees are not at all prepared for democratization in that in Iraq and Afghanistan no one believes in the central tenets of democracy such as separation of church and state and minority toleration. Both of these countries are essentially client states with basic laws the U.S. has written to ensure American dominance for the foreseeable future.

“Dubya” Bush’s trifecta of terror, war and religious fundamentalism to ensure U.S. global domination is described in the appendices to this book as well as in the body of the text. Lowe describes terrorism, wars, and religious strife in what has become an “Orwellian nightmare society.” In a final chapter of this book, Lowe reaches some conclusions, which are continued in an Epilogue. He predicts, for example, as he did in his previous book, that for the radical right to come to power they must do so covertly or illegally or as a direct result of a second failed war in Asia, a massive depression a’la the 1930’s or a successful terrorist attack on a U.S. city. He finds that the authoritarian fascist spirit is

strong enough for rightists to seize power in the name of religious fundamentalism and corporate fascism while routing the retreating forces of reason and enlightenment.

Lowe ends the major part of his analysis while quoting a passage from Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 which talks of the race not necessarily being won by the swift of foot nor the battle to the strong "... but time and chance happen to all of them." And he adds another less familiar quotation (also from Ecclesiastes 9:12-13) which he finds especially applicable to American's leadership, namely, "For man does not know his time: like fish that are caught in an evil net, or like birds caught in a snare, so are the sons of men snarled in an evil time as it falls upon them suddenly." Then he adds (Ecclesiastes 10: 1-3) "the wise man's mind makes for his successes: the fool's mind makes for his failure. Also when a fool goes on his way, his mind is lacking, and he shows everybody that he is a fool".

What he seems to be saying here, permitting some interpretation, is that we are indeed caught in an evil snare today when we have a fool for a president (whose grinning Alfred E. Neumann face graces the cover of this book) and his cabal have been ousted by a new majority who are, as Lowe said, the "last part of the terminal generation." The country is led by nuclear gladiators such as Cheyney and Rumsfeld of Rand and Halliburton fame. To avoid the perils of this forthcoming Christian Commonwealth, America's vital center must be organized to battle and overcome the prospect of a fascist Christian American Reich.

"American democracy is in need of a spiritual rebirth but not one based on Moses, Mohammed, Christ, or other ancient prophets who were totally oblivious of the Holocaust, the H-bomb, or 9/11. Instead we need to look for strength within ourselves while working for justice in group efforts within our respective local, state, regional and national/international civil societies in our separate countries or through the U.N. and other global entities."

It is well to remember, as we soldier on, in this vale of tears, the advice Shakespeare provided us in Julius Caesar, when he said, "The truth, dear Brutus, is not in our stars. It is in ourselves." It is here that each of us must look for an antidote to this Weltschmerzen that Bush and company have visited upon us and the world. All we can hope is that, as in the past, this trial, too, will also pass as it always has before.

Finally, to sum up, this book is highly entertaining, well researched, very interesting, and factually based. I recommend it highly for the reading pleasure of thinking people everywhere regardless of their political leanings and loyalties.

BOOK REVIEW 2

TITLE: *The Microanalysis of Political Communication. Claptrap and ambiguity* by Peter Bull (2003). London and New York: Routledge. 220 pages. ISBN 0- 415-27382-X (hard cover).

REVIEWED BY: Christ'el De Landtsheer, Political Communication Research Unit, University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Perception politics gains territory every day. Perception politics involves factors often referred to as "modernization" or "Americanisation" - commercialization, globalization, visual culture, or the development of new technologies such as the Internet. The dramatic trend of perception politics encourages citizens to form intuitive impressions of political candidates based on certain cues. These include their language style, appearance and non-verbal behaviour instead of a well-considered opinion based on logical arguments. The fall in political involvement means, in terms of the 'elaboration likelihood model' of Petty and Cacioppo (1984), that voters tend to use "peripheral" (cues) rather than the 'central' (arguments) route in processing information. These cues guide the perception of politicians' personality and their qualities. This trend magnifies the role of style, appearance and personality. It thereby turns politics into perception politics.

Rhetorical skills are at all times crucial for politicians. Speeches at party conferences are more successful when they spark both invited and uninvited applause. But now television interviewers put questions that are designed to destroy "political" lives. Political leaders are more than ever in need of skills to defend themselves against "violent" questions and to save "face" on the television screen. Like movie stars, they entertain, move around on the (political) stage and seek the approval of the audience. Voters used to be very loyal to their political party. Today now people vote for a politician with whom they feel connected. Again the media co-create the political personalities and carry an appropriate responsibility. Since politicians are performers, the best often win the crowd's approval!

Political marketers do not underestimate the role content plays (Palmer, 2004a, 2004 b). Nevertheless, the actual political message is pushed to the background. Many voters base their choice on the impression that politicians leave them with and no longer on this/her opinions, values or political parties. Nowadays, voter preferences are mostly based on a number of peripheral cues, which all together create an image. Relying on this image, voters decide. The underlying structures and methods determining the construction of political images need to be revealed.

This evolution is not the least important for scholars in electoral marketing and leadership studies. The question now becomes how to rearrange rhetorical styles, physical appearances, perceptions of personalities, and party websites so that more attractive political images are projected into the minds of citizen-electors. Some studies retrieve those personal qualities that the public appreciates in political leaders. The calculation of general impression scores makes it possible to compare the appreciation of political leaders (De

Landtsheer, De Vries & Vertessen, 2005). The current study by Peter Bull investigates politicians' communicative skills.

Is it ethical to teach politicians how to resound better with the audience and to adequately "save face" in political interviews? Peter Bull assumes it is, because this is exactly what the author of *The Microanalysis of Political Communication. Claptrap and ambiguity* is doing. Bull's analysis offers politicians some very useful advice on how to improve their communicative skills. Is it not true, after all, that communicative skills politicians employ may enhance democracy, just as they may liven up citizens' participation in politics? In the media-audience-politics triangle, Bull does not demonize politics and mass communication. Instead he discusses the sides of both the politicians and the audience. If the media are blameable or excoriated, Bull definitely does what he can to help politicians to survive, and he shows the reader and the audience just how successful political communication works. Indeed, this volume makes communicative strategies which political leaders and journalists use recognizable to citizens.

In the debate over form versus content, Peter Bull takes the stand that delivery is important for political leaders, but that content matters as well. His book is, first and foremost, a thorough analysis of propaganda and it makes a significant contribution to the classical and important domain of propaganda studies. But the book is certainly modern in its neutral or even positive approach to the subject of propaganda. Where traditional approaches emphasize the danger and effects of mass communication, Bull carefully demonstrates certain micro-level effects in the interaction of politicians the audience, and political interviewers.

The subject of the volume consists of politicians' behaviour at party conferences and during television interviews, in relation to audience and journalistic reactions. This subject is certainly both exciting and original. The book is written not only with scientific precision, but also with common sense. It concerns an in-depth analysis of the subject that is based upon a number of well-documented empirical case studies. The book's two parts respectively detail political speeches (Part I) and televised political interviews (Part II). Scientific accounts of the refined procedures that were used in this study are very detailed. In the first and the second parts of the volume, sophisticated procedures and methods are used. Methods in the first part include the Conversation Exchange Analysis (CEA), to perform content analysis or the Body Movement Scoring System (BMSC) to describe hand gestures. In the second part of the volume, refined methods are used for coding facial expressions: the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), or for marking interruptions, the Interruption Coding System (ICS).

The Microanalysis of Political Communication, nevertheless, at times reads like a detective story. The reader is turned into a voyeur of unexpected pauses in speeches, particular rhetorical devices that provoke applause, hand gestures that pick out important elements, unsuccessful journalistic interruptions and politician's equivocations that can present a substantive threat for themselves or their party. The scene in this story is filled with first class British politicians from over the past few decades: Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Paddy Ashdown, Charles Kennedy, William Hague and Neil Kinnock. Through the "micro-analytic eye" of Peter Bull, we follow the political leaders of the three principal British parties during their speeches from party political conferences and interviews to general elections. The author's observations are based upon recordings

of film, audiotape and video. David Dimbleby, Jonathan Dimbleby, Sir David Frost, Jeremy Paxman and Peter Sissons are equally prominent television figures in the story as well.

Of particular interest is the introductory chapter that discusses various approaches to the analysis of communication, including structural and sociological views, speech act theory, discourse analysis, and ethnology that consider communication as a skill. Some of the reviewed studies conclude that personal factors such as age, gender and physical appearance affect the way in which people behave towards one another. When people share similar views or social roles in a group, they often tend to express this while adopting similar postures. Other studies investigate whether particular nonverbal behaviours are associated with particular personality traits.

The method that is used in *The Microanalysis of Political Communication. Claptrap and ambiguity* is the micro-analytic approach. This approach is said to be a social psychological one, in which communication is seen as a "skill". Communication, however, is studied in naturalistic situations, in real political speeches and in interviews, not by way of experiments in a social psychology laboratory. Bull applies "interpersonal communication analysis" to the speech and interviews, in which the interest is in both speech and nonverbal behaviour.

Bull comes up with some very topical conclusions based upon empirical studies and the professional literature. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is (according to his opponent William Hague) successful because of three communicative skills: his skill for ambiguity, his broad direction, and his use of language. It was a distinctive feature of Margaret Thatcher's style to make personal attacks on interviewers and to put them on the defensive. And, yes, politicians are evasive. This can be concluded from Bull's study of equivocation for which several forms are distinguished. Neil Kinnock performed ineffective equivocation while reflecting on a question and giving negative answers and John Major, who practiced literalism and declined to answer questions put. Paddy Ashdown replied more transparently than did John Major.

Of particular interest is face-threats typology with which Bull measures the possibility of losing credibility. If the public poses fewer "face threatening" questions, politicians will reply more openly to their questions. These "not necessarily threat" questions correlate with replies. Politicians with good communicative skill adequately address both "face-threatening" and "no necessary threat" questions. But some of them are treated better than others. Paddy Ashdown got the softest interviews; Major the toughest ones; and Kinnock is treated intermediately.

Many see these developments as a dangerous evolution and an opportunity for evil minds to gain political advantage. The truth is nobody knows how far the personalization and manipulation of political impressions will go. What we do know is that this new political communication dynamic has been underway for several years now and there is no sign that it will disappear in the near future. Impressions have never been more omnipresent and important (Tedeschi, 1981). Politicians these days are aware of this phenomenon and spend a lot of time, money and effort to construct the impression they want to make on the public.

One firm conclusion in this book is that delivery is important. "The how to" dimension is an unexpected but, nevertheless, prominent dimension of this book. How can poli-

ticians present themselves in the best possible light? The book can be used as a propaganda manual or as a handbook on political impression management. Either way, the aim is to evaluate interview skills and styles of politicians and journalists. This scientific dimension can best be described as the *media centric focus* on language.

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BOOK REVIEW 3

TITLE: *Liberal Nationalism In Central Europe* by Stefan Auer (2004).
 London and New York: Routledge Curzon. xii, 232 pages. Notes.
 Bibliography. Index. \$95.00, hard bound.

REVIEWED BY: Russel Farnen

As the author says, "The principle (sic.) aim of this book was to investigate whether nationalism in central Europe poses a threat to the liberal democratic project, or whether under certain circumstances it can, in fact, enhance the chances of consolidating the new political order." (p. 170)

In his study of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Stefan Auer considers and rejects as "too simplistic" the often used stereotypical and false either/or dualisms such as: "two types of nationalism" or 'two types' of "civilizations", "post-communist transition", "liberal or illiberal", "Western or Eastern", "progressive or backward" (p. 170) formulations. Instead, his case studies indicate that contemporary nationalism is more advanced, dynamic, competitive, and changeable than we realize. Each of these nations has both illiberal, ethnocentric, particularistic, exclusive, authoritarian, and extremist figures, parties, and movements as well as liberal democratic, universalistic, humanitarian, liberal, tolerant, and inclusive strains of nationalism. In this regard, prominent spokespersons, such as Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia, and Vaclav Havel in the Czech Republic, respectively, represent these views. Their followers and co-ideologues looked to supporting national traditions, popular figures, and historical selections to under gird their claims to having the true essence of the respective nationalistic core at the base of their worldview.

Each of the protagonists invoked national and ethnic "purity," anti-national chauvinism, anti-Semitism, or anti-Roma hatreds, on the one hand. Or, alternatively, they cited the virtues of ethnic diversity, limited multi-culturalism, conflict amelioration, and/or social justice, on the other. They also explored the "darker parts of their national history" (p. 171), espoused ethnic accommodation, "foreign friendliness," and a healthy form of celebratory patriotism (that did not demean "the other").

Stefan Auer is particularly well suited to undertake this task because of his personal background and experience. He has lived and worked in these three countries, is fluent in their languages and literature, has many close contacts in the region and is much more than an ordinary academic or theorist. Instead, he is more like a social scientist having a sociological vision as well as an anthropological bent: a kind of participant observer. In fact, although we can admire his personal accomplishments and experiences, he sets a very high bar for the rest of us who are limited to English translations or reports in the one or two non-Slavic languages we may understand. Auer also legitimately criticizes macro-theorists who have not gotten their hands dirty in on the ground researches where nationalism is manifested in sounds, symbols, language, anthems, songs, poetry, election posters, slogans, group names and other significant minutiae.

To illustrate both of these points, Auer says that the lessons learned from these three cases are applicable to all of central Europe. The methodology employed requires, as he says, the use of “political anthropology,” which entails an “intimate familiarity” with relevant societal intricacies in combination with “macro social and political theory”. This certainly sets the bar high enough that relatively few among us evidence these credentials. But, then again, perhaps we can be partially redeemed if we read enough of these expert political anthropological reports about nationalistic manifestations in countries x, y, and z.

Liberal Nationalism clearly has its own positive, optimistic and unique approach to this topic. I have described its methodology above as well as its major interpretive themes. I also approve heartily of its engaging writing style and its exhaustive, expansive, and detailed scholarships. This book is not arcane or overly sophisticated. It will serve the average reader well while satisfying the highly critical eye of the Central European specialist.

As for its limited and strengths, the book as a whole has no weak points; it is an integrated whole consistent in its messages. The scholarship is excellent; the message is balanced and clear, as well as optimistic. So, I have just a few suggestions to make. Next time around, since he is a political theorist, I suggest that he consider as a unifying principle (for the post-communist fascism, totalitarianism, and undemocratic trends he observes) the working concept of social, political, economic, and psychological authoritarianism. Auer uses this concept a few times as a synonym when referring to these phenomena, but a better way to address this problem is to group them under the larger and more empirically grounded concept of authoritarianism, current since publication in 1950 of T. Adorno, et al's *The Authoritarian Personality*.

I can certainly recommended this book as being informative in content, novel in approach, and extremely useful as a reference for nationalism scholars. It will especially happen to those interested in Central European prospects for liberalization and democracy through the growth of a humanitarian, cosmopolitan, and more universal form of nationalism.

