CHAPTER 9

Authoritarianism, Discourse and Social Media: Trump as the 'American Agitator'

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9.1. Introduction

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx citing Hegel famously writes that history repeats itself, 'first as tragedy, then as farce' (1972, 10). Donald Trump's ascent to power, as the forty-fifth President of the United States, in the most powerful post on earth, can be perceived as a moment in history when tragedy and farce overlap.

The farce aspect is obvious and is illustrated in the ongoing White House circus: Trump's demagoguery, oblivion, the blunt and effortless ignorance that he exudes in every context, his immeasurable narcissism and his sense of entitlement. The American public is slammed daily with fragments of his ignorance, often through his Twitter account that, nevertheless, exudes a sense of 'false familiarity.' Trump puts forth for his audience an 'act – something between a tragic recital and a clownish pantomime' (Löwenthal and Guterman 1949, 4).

While the 'farce' side might seem amusing, at times, where analyses focus on his gaffes, psychological instability, Twitter ranting and inability to carry out the smallest task as president, his administration is still delivering on his

campaign promises to 'make America great again': a mix of racism and white supremacy, corporatism, and militarization, to the degree that it is not an exaggeration to speak about the embodiment of a neofascist administration. It is Trump administration's discourse and policies that now openly legitimize a backlash on immigration (the Wall on the Mexico border, the travel bans, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and deportations); a renewed nationalism and trade protectionism (America first, import restrictions); an attack on social welfare (his budget is distributing wealth upward, slashing social programs and dismantling any social safety nets); a form of Social Darwinism, and the most reactionary and violent policies in healthcare, education, and labour, that adversely affect the lives and existence of ordinary people. In Trump's world, the fittest and richest will survive.

The elite class in the United States and worldwide is having a field day. While Trump constantly makes a fool of himself, making 'House of Cards' a parody where art imitates life, a capitalist restoration is under way, giving even more power, wealth, and control to the top 1%. The American people voted the poster child of the capitalist system, a member of the elite, as anti-systemic, where the system, according to Trump, stands for the corrupt Washington professional politics. Trump is, according to *Forbes Magazine,* the 156th richest American (Forbes List 2016). His idea about politics is, according to Christian Fuchs (2017) 'to substitute the political elite by the economic elite so that the latter has direct influence on policy making' (4). Contrary to his public persona purporting to be the guy-next-door bringing to Washington a non-elitist people's politics (a classic presidential candidate narrative of the Republican Party), he is rather 'the illustration of how the capitalist class directly rules and dominates politics' (4).

It is important, therefore, to state upfront that Trump is only the symptom, but capitalism is still the disease. Politics, like everything else in the United States capitalist mecca, has a planned obsolescence and Trump seems to be the system's new wild card to maintain its hegemony that was recently shaken, as the onset of a global financial crisis had ripple effects even for the capitalist classes. The moment is not coincidental: as Max Horkheimer and Samuel Flowerman (1949) noted more than sixty-five years ago, in their introduction to the book *Prophets of Deceit*: 'demagogy makes its appearance whenever a democratic society is threatened with internal destruction […] its function has always been […] to lead the masses towards goals that run counter to their basic interests' (in Löwenthal and Guterman 1949, xi). Trump's rise to power is not disconnected from the general strengthening of the extreme right, and the rise of neofascist leaders worldwide, as a larger percentage of the population now lives in conditions of 'social malaise'[1] and experiences the consequences of immiseration capitalism.

In this chapter, I am discussing authoritarianism in the United States after Donald Trump's election, in order to create a context where I will address a shift in discourse and a normalization of racist, nationalistic and nativist narratives

in the public realm. I contend that what we are witnessing is not simply right-wing populism and its ensuing discourses but rather, a neofascist authoritarian turn. I discuss the function of social media, particularly Twitter, President Trump's favourite online platform, as an instrument of discourse production, reorientation and social control.

9.2. Authoritarianism 'U.S.-style'

'I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody. And I wouldn't lose any voters, OK. It's like incredible.'(Presidential candidate Donald Trump during a campaign rally in Iowa, 23 January 2016)

Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman in their 1949 book *Prophets of Deceit: The Techniques of the American Agitator* sketched the portrait of the authoritarian populist 'agitator,' in a truly prophetic study; they described the 'unserious' populist who blurs ideological lines, exploiting the state of discontent, the 'social malaise' of working and middle classes; the 'prophet of deceit' who creates and demonizes the different 'Other', promoting conspiracy theories. The 'leader' who banks on an audience of 'dupes' – 'people who bear the world a grudge because they feel it has cheated them, and who are therefore insecure, dependent, and bewildered' (21). They ascertained that, at the time, agitators attracted small audiences and that some agitators 'have occasionally come fairly close to the national political scene' (4). Löwenthal and Guterman foresaw both the recent upsurge of neofascism, and the rise of populist leaders across the globe and, in a strange turn of fate, sketched Trump's rise to power some sixty-eight years later. The current rise of authoritarianism and neofascism in the United States and across the globe is not disconnected from the ways neoliberalism has failed humanity on multiple levels. And these developments need to be connected to 'the structural crisis of monopoly-finance capital – that is, to the regime of concentrated, financialized, and globalized capitalism' (Foster 2017). As Foster correctly points out, historically, like Italian and German fascism, neofascism arises from interrelated crises of capitalism and the liberal-democratic state, undermining the latter while seeking to shore up the former.' He insists that:

> like all movements in the fascist genus, neofascist ideology combines racist, nationalist, and culturalist myths with economic and political proposals aimed primarily at the lower-middle class (or petty bourgeoisie) in alliance with monopoly capital—while also seeking to integrate nationalistic working-class supporters and rural populations (2017).

Fascism and its authoritarian politics are bred and maintained by a violent economic structure, namely capitalism. Fascism at different historical moments

ensured that capitalist classes will maintain their power and control when eve-rything else had failed. As Curry Malott puts it, fascism is the system's wild card, 'the capitalist class' last resort to control or regain control of the bourgeois state and the working class when bourgeois, democratic channels no longer function in that capacity' (Malott 2017, 126).

The particular brand of U.S. authoritarianism is interesting because it at-tempts to make fascism relevant again, albeit in new conditions of capitalism. The following six features operate on both a material and a symbolic level:

1. *A high degree of concentration and centralization of economic and po-litical power*: Trump operates as a monarch, mostly trying to transfer powers of legislation and the judiciary to the executive power of the president. One does not need to look further than his disregard for the constitution and his forty-nine executive orders to this day (more than any other president in his first year, the last fifty years) that enabled him to circumvent Congress in order to pass unpopular legislation, his fights over federal judges, and his nominee for the Supreme Court.

2. *Doing politics through fear and terror while demonizing the different 'Other' and inciting racism.* This, in turn, brings more militarization and material and symbolic violence. The agitator/Trump presents the 'threatening chaos as unavoidable and inexorable' and through the ex-ploitation of the fear of this impending chaos, he 'succeeds in appear-ing as a radical who will have no truck with mere fragmentary reforms, while he simultaneously steers his adherents wide of any suggestion of a basic social reorganization' (Löwenthal and Guterman 1949, 34). The Trump/Breitbart campaign spoke to the fears and resentments of a deci-sive section of the lower-middle and working classes. The politics of fear 'instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political mi-nority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and as a threat to "us", to our nation' (Wodak 2015, 2). Trump has created an 'enemy' category where he adds any group or individuals who threaten his political agenda. However, the image of the ostensible enemy is inflated out of all propor-tion to reality because 'what is at stake is rather the continued stability and growth of a system which is threatened by its own irrationality – by the narrow base on which its prosperity rests, by the dehumanization which its wasteful and parasitic affluence demands' (Marcuse 1967). The agitator creates a threat for every fear, much in the same way advanced capitalist societies create a need for every product. Those fears superim-posed upon the individual, aim at creating a state of repression where consolation will usually come in the form of more repression that will, in turn, ensure safety from harm. Thus, people become complicit with more repressive measures and surveillance, such as the curtailment of

civil liberties if their narrow interest regarding safety appears to be met by the unconstitutional measures (Gounari 2009). Despite the constant manufacturing of imaginary dangers and threats and their ensuing fears, there is a conscious effort to suppress real fears that would stem from the unavoidable connection between economic policies and their human consequences; that is, fears from the imposition of neoliberalism as a program destined to destroy the welfare state and those collective and state structures that safeguard and hold together a vibrant social net. Part of the agitator's work is to prevent his following from making these connections and from looking for structural changes.

3. *The creation of purposeful ideological confusion* in order 'to enlist mass support through racist and nativist appeals to lower-middle class insecurities, while allying with core elements of the ruling class' (Foster 2017). Trump needs both the support of the elite political circles and the corporate media possibly more than he needs the support of the people who voted for him. His appeals to traditionalism and classical American values aim at creating a homogenized common American imaginary: 'Make America Great Again!' The rebirth of American exceptionalism came with nativist and racist undertones since America has never been 'great' for Native Americans, African-Americans, Latinos, immigrants and other 'minorities,' women, and the poor.

4. *The emergence of the authoritarian leader*, who relies on personal politics as an individual brand, what Ruth Wodak calls 'personalization and commodification of current politics and politicians'. These 'leaders employ front stage performance techniques that are linked to popular celebrity culture' (Wodak 2015, 21). Trump, further, embodies many characteristics of the 'authoritarian personality,' (Adorno et al., 1950); power and 'toughness' are promoted as virtues while the binaries 'dominance–submission', 'strong-weak', 'leader-follower' are central in his persona and discourse. There is an overemphasis on the conventionalized attributes of the ego and an exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness. Despite all of the leader's material and symbolic power he still uses a narrative of victimhood for himself (as is, for instance, the case with Trump's treatment of the press). Finally, he demonstrates 'destructiveness and cynicism' manifested as generalized hostility and vilification of humans.

5. *The emergence of a propaganda machine* that distorts reality and historical facts, produces fake news stories, and is at war with intellectualism and scientific knowledge – what Wodak terms the 'arrogance of ignorance' (2015, 2). This includes the emergence of a network of media that support Trump and legitimize his existence, discourse and policies. The Trump spin machine[2] is particularly interesting because there is a degree of unapologetic bluntness that is constantly used. Spin as political

communication that shapes the way news are presented, disseminated and interpreted has changed the way media stories work. It is not important what one says, but rather how it is spun in the media. In the case of Trump, he the monarch, his mere institutional role legitimizes information and knowledge. The press that challenges him is wrong, everybody else is wrong, the president holds the ultimate Truth. Trump's Twitter platform plays an important role as an integral part of the current administration's spin machine. The systematic manipulation and control achieved through the propaganda machine aims to 'reconcile the individual with the mode of existence which his society imposes on him' (Marcuse, 1967).

All of the above characteristics usually develop in what Marcuse (1967) calls a 'sick society,' where 'surplus-repression,' is needed, in order to maintain the established social order. Such surplus-repression works to put additional strains and stresses on the individuals: 'In the contemporary affluent society, the discrepancy between the established modes of existence and the real possibilities of human freedom is so great that, in order to prevent an explosion, society has to insure a more effective mental coordination of individuals: in its unconscious as well as conscious dimensions, the psyche is opened up and subjected to systematic manipulation and control' (Marcuse 1967).

   Researchers Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler, in their attempt to understand popular support for authoritarian leaders, following Adorno et al. study on the authoritarian personality, had identified back in 2009 a revival in authoritarianism in the United States. In their book at the time, they concluded that the Republican Party, by positioning itself as the party of traditional values, law and order, had unknowingly attracted what would turn out to be a vast and previously bipartisan population of Americans with authoritarian tendencies (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Taub 2016). These tendencies were ultimately expressed in the 2016 US election.

9.3. Doing Politics through Social Media: One-Dimensional Discourse

The use and proliferation of digital and social media has radically changed both the way we are using language and the way we are 'doing politics' these days. Virtual space has now become the 'natural habitat' of an increasing number of individuals around the world; a space where they engage in discussions, work, shop, bank, hangout, relax, vote, find love partners, conduct their day-to-day activities, and so forth. KhosraviNik and Unger stress that 'a large proportion of day-to-day verbal and visual communication has migrated to various participatory web platforms' (2016, 230). Social media have been hailed as either emancipatory tools contributing to a more participatory democracy, creating

instant awareness about different social issues, a new public space of sorts ('Arab Spring' and the 'Occupy' movement are two widely cited examples) or just another tool of control and containment, a 'profoundly depoliticizing' arena that fetishizes technology leading to a 'disavowal of a more fundamental political disempowerment or castration' (Dean 2005). Fuchs (2014) defines a public sphere in a Habermasian framework as a space of political communication and access to resources that allow citizens to participate in it. In this sense, given the exclusionary and commodified character of social media, they cannot be considered as public spheres nor should they raise our hopes that revolution will be tweeted. Fuchs insists that the web is dominated by corporations that accumulate capital by exploiting and commodifying users and this is why they can never be truly participatory (2014, 179–207).

One can realize the magnitude and impact of the medium if they consider that in the famous 'Russia meddling,' posts from a Russian company had reached the newsfeeds of 126 million users on Facebook during the 2016 US election and hundreds of thousands of bots posted political messages during the election on Twitter alone (Frier 2017).

Drawing on Marcuse's work on one-dimensional thought in advanced industrial societies, I want to look at social media as a new kind of symbolic 'machine', an effective political instrument that, in the context of advanced capitalism, both dehumanizes politics and struggles and absolves people from the guilt of inertia in the face of major social and economic crises. Marcuse notes that the road to inertia does not lead to an instinctual nirvana of satisfaction but 'it may well reduce the stress of intelligence, the pain and tension which accompany autonomous mental activity – thus it may be an effective aggression against the mind in its socially disturbing, critical functions' (Marcuse 1967).

'Effective aggression against the mind' is achieved through the fetishization of technology where 'autonomous mental activity' is severely inhibited. Social media, as tools for producing and consuming different kinds of texts in the context of 'communicative capitalism'[3] (Dean 2009) promote a *one-dimensional discourse*. Here I am particularly interested in the characteristics of Twitter's one-dimensional discourse:

Operationalism/Instrumentalism. Language used in Twitter is short, fragmented and decontextualized: it is a language that 'tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function' (Marcuse 1964, 85). This is a central characteristic of the 'closing of the universe of discourse' where language, neutralized and purged of its historical meanings and significations, is operationalized in the service of capitalist significations (Marcuse 1964). The content authored on Twitter promotes the development of meaning, as 'natural' and 'neutral.' Often language in fragments is used to talk about violence, conflict and struggle in the most innocent and non-threatening way. More importantly, this constructed neo-liberal-dominated universe of social media discourse closes itself against any other discourse that is not in its own terms.

Brian Ott in a recent article argues that Twitter demands simplicity, promotes impulsivity, and fosters incivility (Ott 2017).

Discourse as commodity. Social media as products of the capitalist culture industry, and illustrations of technological progress 'are deeply embedded in capitalism's commodity logic and therefore reflect individual private property, individualism and structures of exploitation and domination' (Fuchs 2016, 114). Digital media as tools of the capitalist imaginary 'are modes of reification and therefore expressions of instrumental/technological rationality' in that they 'reduce humans to the status of consumers of advertisements and commodities' while as cultural commodities they are 'produced by cultural wage-workers that are bought by consumers and audience commodities that the media consumers become themselves by being sold as an audience to capitalist media's advertising clients' (Fuchs 2016, 132). In addition, tweets are fragmented (Twitter has a limit of 104, recently increased to 280 characters) which further impoverishes language use and reduces human communication to 280 characters.

The self as a brand. Social media as cultural commodities articulate and produce familiar discourses that resonate with other products of the culture industry. Trump's tweets are an illustration of a 'politics of the self,' illustrative of a 'promotional culture' (Fairclough 1995) where language is simple yet pompous and flashy. At the same time, as the leader, he articulates a specific authoritarian discourse where we can identify the use of simple, impoverished language, the kind that Umberto Eco notes can be found in the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks 'an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning' (Eco 1995). It is also interesting to note that Trump truly believes in the value and currency of his brand to the degree that after his inauguration, he continued using his personal Twitter account and not the official POTUS Twitter account.

Discourse of amusement. An additional layer of complexity is the fact that social media are marketed as entertainment – an entertainment that is accessible 24/7. The ideology behind this type of 'amusement' is hardly new. Facebook, Twitter and other sites serve as 'the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1994, 137). Horkheimer and Adorno insist that 'pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1994, 137). Adorno and Horkheimer's remarks point to the malady of our capitalist, mechanized, consumerist societies: involvement through inertia that creates a false sense of participation, security, homogeneity and consensus. Social media seem to be ideal platforms for a politics of inertia as one's networked contributions seem to matter when in fact, as Jodi Dean notes, '[u]nder conditions of intensive and

extensive proliferation of media, conditions wherein everyone is presumed to be a producer as well as a consumer of content, messages get lost. They become mere contributions to the circulation of images, opinion, and information, to the billions of nuggets of information and affect trying to catch and hold attention, to push or sway opinion, taste, and trends in one direction rather than another' (Dean 2009, 24).

Dehistoricization. An important aspect of the discourse produced in Twitter is the erasure of the historical context. While there is around-the-clock exposure, constant access, and immediacy (all content is immediately available for reading and commenting), the message is often decontextualized. The context is always that of-the-moment, limiting broader interpretations, connections and exploration of ramifications. Tweets have a planned obsolescence, as the next tweet will now draw even more attention, commentary, visibility, and currency. A tweet's history is the here and now, as an ongoing critique of reality. Technological rationality as embodied in the new digital technologies becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe. In this universe meanings are contained, fragmented and dehistoricized.

It comes, then, as no surprise that social media have been serving as the ideal medium for populist parties and their leaders since they are marketed as 'non-hierarchical and democratic.' They constitute an alternative to the mainstream media, which many supporters of populist parties strongly distrust. The perception is that since we all contribute, 'the content is generated by us – the honest, hard-working, ordinary citizens – exactly those people who the populists are defending. Indeed, populist parties are far less likely to trust mainstream media sources than the typical citizen' (Bartlett cited in Kreis 2017, 4). Both the upsurge of right-wing populist parties, as well as the promotion of their respective agendas has been possible through the increased mediatization that, in turn, has been normalizing their narratives and messages (e.g., Wodak 2015a,b; Link 2014; Krzyżanowski 2013b; Forchtner et al. 2013; Mazzoleni 2008).

Political campaigns started using social media as early as fourteen years ago, but it was with Barack Obama's 2008 campaign that their use was taken to the next level. Montgomery (2017) notes that 'the public sphere of a presidential election amounts to a kind of discursive laboratory in which the words and sayings of candidates are recorded in detail, in which we also have much lay commentary and reaction regarding their import, and in which a fair amount is known about which section of the voting public found particular words and sayings persuasive' (1). Most political figures and organizations use social media platforms to disseminate their agendas and this has largely changed the way politics is conducted (Kreis 2017, Bartlett 2014). This is a time when politics is 'branded' through social media, as different pages give voice to ideas, ideologies and political agendas. However, if Marcuse is correct in claiming that '[p]olitical liberation would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over

which they have no effective control' it seems that social media have a firm grip on a large percentage of the world's population, while people, in turn, have no control over social media.

There is an important and valuable body of literature that explores the ways 'right-wing populist' discourse is articulated in European countries and, more recently, in the United States (Wodak 2015; Wodak and Krzyzanowski 2017; Reisigl 2013). Wodak & Krzyzanowski (2017) insist that there is a high degree of complexity and elusiveness in trying to define right-wing populism but they stick with the term and offer the following definition citing Betz and Immerfall (1998):

> a hybrid political ideology that rejects the hegemonic post-war political consensus and usually, though not always, combines laissez-faire liberalism and anti-elitism or other, often profoundly different and contradictory ideologies. This ideology is considered as populism because of its appeal to the 'common man/woman', as to a quasi-homogenous people, defined in an ethno-nationalist way (Betz and Immerfall 1998, 4–5 cited in Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2017, 5).

Wodak (2015) further acknowledges that 'populist elements have always also appealed to and appeared in far-right authoritarian or fascist movements.' Many academic and popular articles have avoided using the term fascism or neofascism, opting instead for right-wing populism (RWP). Throughout this chapter, I have opted to use the term 'neofascist' and authoritarian to talk about the politics and discourse of the particular political formations. I believe that the choice of 'right-wing populism' (RWP) over 'neofascist/authoritarian' (NFA) misses the opportunity to name, not just the ideology behind these political formations, but also the material conditions, that is, the ways right-wing populist ideologies function as a superstructure vehicle for a fascist regime to strengthen the capitalist classes. Fascism has historically done this as accurately captured by Foster (2017):

> right-wing populism is a euphemism introduced into the European discussion in the last few decades to refer to movements in the 'fascist genus' (fascism/neofascism/post-fascism), characterized by virulently xenophobic, ultra-nationalist tendencies, rooted primarily in the lower-middle class and relatively privileged sections of the working class, in alliance with monopolistic capital. […] The same basic phenomenon has now triumphed in the United States, in the form of Trump's rise to chief executive (Foster 2017).

Nowhere is this more striking and evident than in the American phenomenon now termed Trumpism (Wodak 2017, 474).

9.4. Trump's Discourse

'I went to an Ivy League school. I'm very highly educated. I know words, I have the best words. I have the best, but there is no better word than stupid'

(Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump,
Rally in South Carolina, 12/30/2015)

The forty-fifth president of the United States is a standalone object of study on many levels. However, it is mostly his language use that has drawn fascination, confusion and interest. A good number of academic and popular media articles have already discussed his literacy skills, language level, vocabulary, stylistics, and rhetoric, among other aspects of his social media presence. There is, further, a body of literature that has been looking at populist discourse as it manifests in President Trump's output of different sorts including speeches, statements, interviews, tweets and so forth (Kreis 2017, Enli 2017, Montgomery 2017, Wodak 2017, Chilton 2017, Ott 2016). In this section, I will discuss his language use in Twitter and identify some patterns that support the idea that his tweet discourse embodies one-dimensional thought, operationalism, and neofascist/authoritarian traits.

Donald Trump has tweeted/retweeted 2,114 times since his January 2017 inauguration and until the moment these lines were written. According to Twitter stats, '@realDonaldTrump' is a casual user, with an average of 7–10 tweet(s) per day which is 'pretty consistent with a total of 36,368 since @realDonaldTrump joined in March 2009.' Trump's 'audience attentiveness score is 71%, which stems from being tracked on 79,504 Twitter lists and normalized to their 42,014,822 followers' (Twitter Counter, November 2017). Reading through President Trump's sea of tweets one cannot help but think of it as a 'harangue [that] may appear simply as the raving of a maniac' consistent with the image of a populist authoritarian leader (Löwenthal and Guterman, 4). Trump, however, uses Twitter as a strategic instrument of power politics (Kreis 2017) to sell his own authoritarian brand of politics.

Returning to the characteristics of US-style authoritarianism that I presented earlier, I will now identify some discursive themes found in Trump's tweeting. Data used in this section has been largely drawn from the online platform TrumpTwitterArchive (http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com), a searchable database of Trump tweets that updates in real time and lists some 32,451 tweets from his personal account. Tweets have been cross-referenced with Donald Trump's personal Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump).

Concentration of power/centralization of power. Discursively, Trump does this in an interesting way, tweeting more often in the first person singular (I am, I have, I can) rather than using the collective 'we.' He is the sole source of solutions, ideas and action. By presenting state affairs as broken objects that need

fixing, he instrumentalizes important social and political questions. Trump himself has espoused this instrumentalist dogma when he said that, '*America doesn't need more 'all-talk, no-action' politicians running things. It needs smart businesspeople who understand how to manage. We don't need more political rhetoric – we need more common sense. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' – but if it is broke, let's stop talking about it and fix it. I know how to fix it*' (cited in O'Brien, 2016).

During his election campaign, on 1 November 2015, Trump tweeted: '*Jeb's new slogan – 'Jeb can fix it'. I never thought of Jeb as a crook! Stupid message, the word 'fix' is not a good one to use in politics!*' ('@realDonaldTrump, Twitter 11/1/2015, 08:48:26 AM). This is after Trump himself had used the same slogan on Twitter some fifty times already. After this, he went on to use the word 'fix' in a similar context at least forty-eight more times. As seen in Table 1, Trump claims to be able to fix everything: America's problems in general, our great country; our broken education system, social security and Medicaid, Obamacare; our military; the economy, the debt; jobs, unemployment; ISIS/terrorism, immigration; Washington. Just name the issue and he will fix it.

This pragmatic approach to social issues is very much in line with the type of instrumentalism/operationalism the work of the Frankfurt School so strongly critiqued and epitomized in one-dimensional language. Operationalism, in theory and practice, becomes the theory and practice of containment (Marcuse 1964, 17) and, in turn, society becomes a static system of life. In the tweets above, 'the linguistic form militates against the development of meaning' (Marcuse 1964, 86) and what is lost are the complex and layered social relationships, the relations of production and the struggle over them. The use of simplistic language to talk about complex social issues where 'the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations' (Marcuse 1964, 13) is an attempt to downplay the importance of these issues. How one chooses to talk about social problems shapes to a large degree the solution. Human relations are not engines to be fixed, unemployment is not a broken machine and the government is not a corporation.

'Doing politics' through fear. Löwenthal and Guterman use the term 'Charade of Doom' to talk about the agitator's technique of evoking catastrophe and producing fear among his audience. Trump has been on a crusade against the 'foreign' intruders as illustrated in the tweets about ISIS, the Mexico Wall, and terrorism. His alarmist tweets are characterized by destructiveness and cynicism: a generalized hostility, and the vilification of human beings, a typical characteristic of authoritarian aggression: the tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who 'violate rules' and conventional values (for example, enter the country illegally). Playing with the identity of opposites 'in the mouth of the enemy, peace means war, and defense is attack, while on the righteous side, escalation is restraint, and saturation bombing prepares for peace. Organized in this discriminatory fashion, language designates

Date/Tweet
(1)   May 13, 2015 TRAIN WRECK just the beginning. Our roads, airports, tunnels, bridges, electric grid - all falling apart. I can fix for 20% of pols, & better
(2)   May 29, 2015 Wow, the economy is really bad! GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT down 0.7% in 1st. quarter - and getting worse. I TOLD YOU SO! Only I can fix.
(3)   Jul 3, 2015 05:12:24 PM Our Southern border is unsecure. I am the only one that can fix it, nobody else has the guts to even talk about it.
(4)   Jul 24, 2015 01:18:28 PM It is time to send someone from the outside to fix DC from the inside. Let's Make America Great Again!
(5)   Dec 10, 2015 07:00:15 AM Our VISA system is broken, like so much else in our country. We better get it fixed really fast. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!
(6)   Dec 25, 2015 03:15:25 PM We have many problems in our house (country!), and we need to fix them before we let visitors come over and stay. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!
(7)   Dec 28, 2015 07:42:06 AM Many of the great jobs that the people of our country want are long gone, shipped to other countries. We now are part time, sad! I WILL FIX!
(8)   Mar 24, 2016 10:52:11 AM Just announced that as many as 5000 ISIS fighters have infiltrated Europe. Also, many in U.S. I TOLD YOU SO! I alone can fix this problem!
(9)   May 20, 2016 04:58:47 AM Look where the world is today, a total mess, and ISIS is still running around wild. I can fix it fast, Hillary has no chance!
(10) Jul 28, 2016 04:56:33 PM As President, I WILL fix this rigged system and only answer to YOU, the American people!
(11) Jul 25, 2016 10:04:56 PM Sad to watch Bernie Sanders abandon his revolution. We welcome all voters who want to fix our rigged system and bring back our jobs.
(12) Jul 1, 2016 08:29:25 PM When you can't say it - or see it—you can't fix it. We will MAKE AMERICA SAFE AGAIN! #ImWithYou #AmericaFirst https://t.co/Vd2A747L29 Jun 21, 2016
(13) 11:55:41 AM I am 'the king of debt' That has been great for me as a businessman, but is bad for the country. I made a fortune off of debt, will fix U.S.
(14) Jun 16, 2016 11:54:39 AM The trade deficit rose to a 7yr high thanks to horrible trade policies Clinton supports. I will fix it fast- JOBS!

Table 9.1

a priori the enemy as evil in his entirety and in all his actions and intentions' (Marcuse 1967).

Trump's incoherent and contradictory utterances provoke and play on 'feelings of resentment and disdain intermingled with bits of fear, hatred and anger' (Kagan cited in Fuchs 2017, 33). His targets: 'Muslims, Hispanics, women,

Date/Tweet
(15) 12/17/2015 There is no question who will handle the threat of terrorism best as #POTUS. #Trump2016
(16) 6/28/2016 We must do everything possible to keep this horrible terrorism outside the United States.
(17) 10/20/2016 If elected POTUS - I will stop RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM in this country! In order to do this, we need to #DrainTheSwamp!
(18) 2/4/2017 Because the ban was lifted by a judge, many very bad and dangerous people may be pouring into our country. A terrible decision
(19) 2/5/2017 Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!
(20) 4/23/2017 The Democrats don't want money from budget going to border wall despite the fact that it will stop drugs and very bad MS 13 gang members.
(21) 4/24/2017 The Wall is a very important tool in stopping drugs from pouring into our country and poisoning our youth (and many others)! If . . . the wall is not built, which it will be, the drug situation will NEVER be fixed the way it should be! #BuildTheWall
(22) 2/9/16 We will stop heroin and other drugs from coming into New Hampshire from our open southern border. We will build a WALL and have security.
(23) 4/27/16 Heroin overdoses are taking over our children and others in the MIDWEST. Coming in from our southern border. We need strong border & WALL!
(24) 15/9/27 We have made more progress in the last nine months against ISIS than the Obama Administration has made in 8 years. Must be proactive & nasty!

Table 9.2

Chinese, Mexicans, Europeans, Arabs, immigrants, refugees [people with disability] – whom he depicts either as threats or as objects of derision' (Kagan cited in Fuchs 2017) as Table 2 illustrates.

The president is ready to circumvent the constitution in order to make his constructed enemies real. Enemies go through a dehumanization and demonization process that is discursively violent and aggressive: he has called gang members 'animals' in a speech to law enforcement officials in Long Island in July 2017 encouraging police to use violence. At the same time, Trump has a double standard when it comes to foreign and domestic terrorism: for white males committing crimes, he focuses more on the crime itself and the victims; for terrorist acts by non-whites, he focuses on the perpetrator with ad hominem attacks. His goal is to funnel fears towards a specific direction rather to protect people from any impending danger. His racist, white-supremacist ideology has emboldened extremist groups and increased physical violence against minorities in the USA.

Creating ideological confusion. Trump's use of 'I'm with you' hashtags in many of his tweets, implies that he is with the people. However, his alliances are certainly strange, particularly that with Alt-Right Breitbart. His tapping into Steve Bannon as a White House senior adviser, his reluctance to condemn the Ku Klux Klan or white supremacist violence in the Charlottesville rally (for which he gets congratulations from former KKK member David Duke), and his equation of Alt-Right white supremacists to anti-fascists, raise the inevitable question 'with who among the American people is he really?'

His central campaign slogan 'Make America Great Again' (that has its own hashtag on Twitter, #MAGA) creates a dystopian vision where the present is terrible, and social malaise imposes upon us a return to a glorious past, a return to tradition when America was great. Trump makes reference to the 'great American values' as an overarching value system shared by all Americans. While he is demonizing the rotten political system and claims to 'drain the swamp' in Washington, he is eliminating most federal regulations for businesses, privatizing education and healthcare, abolishing environmental protections, and reforming the tax system to benefit the rich. His #MAGA slogan is the epitome of ideological confusion as it clumps together people across the lines of class, race, gender, ethnicity, an imagined community of Americans under the umbrella of patriotism, most specifically the white European Anglo-patriotism. Nationhood and homeland is the utmost identity in his message, where class lines are erased. Trump is capitalizing on the 'growing sense of disillusionment with ideals, values, and institutions' and 'skillfully works on this disillusionment by simultaneously damning and praising the accepted ideologies. On the one hand, he likes to give the impression that like most other advocates of social change, he is against certain social conditions because they violate universally accepted values. On the other hand, he often concurs with and reinforces his audience's suspicion about those values' (Löwenthal and Guterman, 29). The word 'again' in his famous slogan creates an imaginary of a harmonious country once upon a time when, I guess African Americans were not sitting in the back of the bus or lynched, for instance.

Authoritarian Leader.

'My use of social media is not Presidential - it's MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again!' (Twitter 7/1/2017)

The ideological confusion is further strengthened by Trump's self-branded persona: he is the guy-next-door who happens to live in a gilded loft in Manhattan. The billionaire businessman in the expensive suit with the cheesy truck-driver red baseball cap with MAGA initials who claims that his experience in government stems from his own professional endeavours managing businesses. In his tweets, he creates a clear dichotomy between a 'crooked' politician and a

successful businessman and implies that running a country amounts to managing a corporation.

As Montgomery (2017) points out, Trump's campaign discourse rested ultimately upon a simple overriding claim to be a vernacular authentic voice of himself and at one and the same time to be the voice of the people (18). While belonging to the top 1% Trump managed to market himself as the 'embodiment of a particular version of the people' and thus laid claims to his authenticity and sincerity. As he declared at the end of his acceptance speech at the Republican convention 'My pledge reads, 'I'M WITH YOU – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.' I am your voice' (Montgomery 2017, 18). He is the 'outside insider,' his claim to transparency lies with the fact that he has not been a politician and yet he is part of the capitalist elite that has maintained the same political system and taken advantage of it for as long as he lived. He employs an 'authentic style' which corroborates his constructed position of an outsider and legitimate representative of the people distancing himself from the establishment (Ott 2017): 'Even his username (@realDonaldTrump) indexes authenticity and closeness to the people because it supports his claim that his tweets come from the 'real' Donald Trump and are not sent by his staff … He thus leverages the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter (Kreis 2017).

Trump always tweets about himself and the things he does in the superlative. He presents himself as the victim of criticism and attacks, and likes to refer to his enemies as 'haters and losers.' He may have gone to an Ivy League school and claim that he has 'the best words' but an analysis of President Trump's tweets demonstrates that 'his language is simple and direct and his messages are succinct and polarizing, which is a common strategy of right-wing populist discourse. His use of capitalization and exclamations further reinforces his messages' (Ott 2017). Ott stresses that Trump's lexicon is simple, repetitious and 'relying heavily on monosyllabic words such as "good" or "bad" and "sad"' while 'he makes frequent use of exclamation points and all caps' (Ott 2017, 64).

Date/Tweet
(25) 5/8/2013 Sorry losers and haters, but my I.Q. is one of the highest -and you all know it! Please don't feel so stupid or insecure, it's not your fault
(26) 7/21/2014 'Many people have said I'm the world's greatest writer of 140 character sentences.'
(27) 3/23/2016 'I will be the best by far in fighting terror'
(28) 1/23/2016 'I will be the greatest job-producing president in American history'
(29) 5/13/2015 'I am the BEST builder, just look at what I've built'
(30) 9/20/2015 'I am attracting the biggest crowds, by far, and the best poll numbers, also by far.'
(31) 6/11/2016 'I am least racist person there is'

Table 9.3

'His particular communication style and his use of a participatory web platform as a major tool of communication further index how he views himself in relation to the people: the leader who, on the one hand, returned sovereignty to the people and, on the other hand, protects the nation and homeland from the dangerous "Other"' (Kreis 2017, 9).

Propaganda Machine.

'The Press is the Enemy,' Richard Nixon, 1972

Trump's Tweets are overwhelmingly negative and insulting. Failing to offer any incentives for meaningful dialogue, his communications are meant to do exactly the opposite: to shut down any discussion and promote his ideas and thoughts as the Truth. Trump's assault of independent journalism and free press amounts to a neofascist stance where journalism is the enemy of his regime. Trump has been a champion of insults; his list of people and situations he has attacked and degraded is very long. As a matter of fact, the *New York Times* have been keeping a detailed list of 'The 389 People, Places and Things Donald Trump has insulted on Twitter.' His lexical choices include words like 'moron' (52 times), 'haters and losers' (64 times), 'pathetic' (72 times), 'dope or dopey' (117 times), 'stupid' (183 times), 'clown' (45 times), 'crooked' (304 times) and others.

Since becoming president, Trump has often used Twitter as his own private spin room, shaping developing stories and discrediting mainstream media outlets. His 'fake news' construct has taken spin to a whole new level as he has used it so far more than 120 times. His attack on the press includes discrediting news media as well as personal attacks on journalists. He has over 300 tweets since 20 April 2015 attacking the press and insulting journalists. His lexical choices for insulting the press include 'totally biased,' 'fake news,' 'such dishonesty,' 'low rated,' 'poorly rated,' 'one-sided coverage,' getting to the point of even threatening news outlets for not providing favourable coverage: 'Network news has become so partisan, distorted and fake that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. Not fair to public!' (Twitter 11 October 2017). The insinuation that federal authority could be used to restrict freedom of press is beyond dangerous and raises important questions about this administration's character and ideology. In Table 4 there are some representative tweets from his war with the press:

9.5. Conclusion

Trump's brand of authoritarian, corporate capitalism has a large dissemination platform and is further carried via his out-of-control Twitter account, rallies and press conferences and, of course, through his proxies and mouthpieces in friendly media networks and opinion shaping outlets. Mass culture and digital media play mostly a fundamental anti-pedagogical role: instead of producing

Date/Tweet
(32) The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!February 17 at 4:48 PM
(33) The fake news media is going crazy with their conspiracy theories and blind hatred. @MSNBC & @CNN are unwatchable. @foxandfriends is great! February 15 at 6:40 AM (34) No matter how much I accomplish during the ridiculous standard of the first 100 days, & it has been a lot (including S.C.), media will kill! April 21 at 6:50 AM (35) The Fake Media (not Real Media) has gotten even worse since the election. Every story is badly slanted. We have to hold them to the truth! April 17 at 8:17 AM (36) If the people of our great country could only see how viciously and inaccurately my administration is covered by certain media! March 29 at 7:21 AM (37) FAKE NEWS media knowingly doesn't tell the truth. A great danger to our country. The failing @nytimes has become a joke. Likewise @CNN. Sad! February 24 at 10:09 PM

Table 9.4

critical analyses and interventions in the public sphere, these sites of public pedagogy 'have become the organizing force of neoliberal ideology. […] Such sites operate within a wide variety of social institutions and formats' (Giroux, 2010, 487). These new sites of anti-pedagogy have the force not just to counter knowledge, but to produce and legitimize new knowledge. Twitter and other social media create the illusion of active participation when in fact, what is mostly happening is a closing of the universe of discourse and independent thought. In the context of 'communicative capitalism,' Dean poignantly notes that '[c]ontestations today rarely employ common terms, points of reference, or demarcated frontiers. In our highly mediated communications environments we confront instead a multiplication of resistances and assertions so extensive as to hinder the formation of strong counter hegemonies. The proliferation, distribution, acceleration, and intensification of communicative access and opportunity result in a deadlocked democracy incapable of serving as a form for political change' (Dean 2009, 22).

The rising authoritarianism and the legitimation of its discursive and material aspects by the United States president creates a fertile ground for a dangerous situation where, in the end, history will repeat itself as tragedy.

Notes

1 'Social malaise' is a term used in Löwenthal and Guterman.

² For a detailed discussion on the history and evolution of 'spin' see Leighton Andrews. 2006. 'Spin: From Tactic to Tabloid.' *Journal of Public Affairs,* 6: 31–45.

³ Dean defines communicative capitalism, as the 'materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism' (Dean 2009, 2).

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