STRATEGIC CYBERBULLYING AND THE REORGANISATION OF POLITICAL CULTURE
INTERFACIAL REFRAINS, AFFECTIVE CIRCULATION AND @RealDonaldTrump

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ABSTRACT

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES DONALD TRUMP ENGAGES IN ONGOING TWITTER-ATTACKS ON (PERCEIVED) POLITICAL OPPONENTS SUCH AS NAMED POLITICIANS, CELEBRITIES, NEWS CHANNELS AND NAMED JOURNALISTS. IN JUNE 2015 THE NEW YORK TIMES BEGAN TO COMPILE A LIST OF TRUMP'S INSULTS ON TWITTER. BY JANUARY 2020 THE LIST COMPILES THE "598 PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS DONALD TRUMP HAS INSULTED ON TWITTER". IN THIS ARTICLE, WE MAKE USE OF THIS LIST AS AN ARCHIVE OF CONDENSED AFFECTIVE EXPRESSIONS THAT ALLOW US TO ANALYSE THE WAYS IN WHICH TRUMP USES TWITTER TO MOBILISE POLITICALLY IN MANNERS WHICH WE WILL TERM 'STRATEGIC CYBERBULLYING'. CYBERBULLYING IS OFTEN DISCUSSED AS A PHENOMENON THAT ARISES AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, YET WE SUGGEST THAT BORROWING AN ANALYTIC LENS FROM CYBERBULLYING RESEARCH ALLOWS US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF TRUMP'S USE OF TWITTER FOR POLITICAL MOBILISATION. THROUGH A CATEGORICAL MAPPING OF THE NEW YORK TIMES ARCHIVE, WE SHOW HOW POLITICAL OPPONENTS ARE DISCREDITED STRATEGICALLY AND A NEW KIND OF POLITICAL TERRITORY IS ESTABLISHED THROUGH AN AFFECTIVE CIRCULATION OF INTERFACIAL REFRAINS THROUGH TWITTER. THESE REFRAINS TRAVEL BETWEEN ON- AND OFFLINE CONTEXTS TO EXTEND THE REACH OF THE CAMPAIGN THROUGH ESTABLISHING A NEW FORM OF WE-NESS THAT INCLUDES AND EXCLUDES COMMUNITIES. WE SHOW HOW THIS WE-NESS IN TRUMP'S AFFECTIVE POLITICS IS SHAPED (ALSO) BY THE TWITTER INTERFACE AND HOLDS THE POTENTIAL TO ALTER THE DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC AND THE THRESHOLDS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION.

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Introduction

President of the United States Donald Trump has been called the god (Carr, 2015), the king (Chasmar, 2016; Hüttl, 2016) and the emperor of social media (Gabler, 2016) and his following is extensive. Trump's original Twitter account @realDonaldTrump has currently (January 2020) sent out 47.2K tweets and has more than 67.6 million followers. This is more than the official @Potus account (President of the United States) and the @WhiteHouse, which have 27.3 million and 19.6 million followers respectively. Trump is also present on other forms of social media, with more than 24 million followers on Facebook, but Twitter is the pre-ferred medium for Trump to take his message "directly to the people", potentially reaching an audience easily exceeding the reach of any news programme or television show. A common trait in the many tweets originating from @realDonalTrump is that they insult named people, places and things. In June 2015 this trait made the New York Times compile a list. By January 2020 the list compiles the "598 People, Places and Things Donald Trump has insulted on Twitter" (Lee & Quealy, 2019). In this article, we use this list as an archive of condensed affective expressions that allow us to analyse the ways in which Trump uses Twitter to engage in what we will term 'strategic cyberbullying'.

Figure 1
Tweet. 15 June 2016

The use of social media – and in particular Twitter – as a way of bypassing established media outlets has been an ingrained part of the campaign from its very beginning and constitutes a central part of the online political mobilisation and affective politics more generally. If anything, this has intensified after the election, where the war on allegedly biased (see figure 1) and "fake news" – most often 'the mainstream media', CNN and the NY Times – has gained momentum. Indeed, it seems that the limitation of characters to 280[1], the real-time nature and (perceived) authenticity of the communication, the repetition both in forming the tweets and the retweeting and the temporary nature of the updates are features of Twitter that are uniquely tailored to such politics. Importantly, though, we are not arguing that there is an inherent drive in the interface itself towards 'cyberbul-lying', but rather that Twitter, as an interface, holds potential for affective mobilisation and circulation, and that this potential has successfully been harnessed by the Trump campaign. In this regard we understand affective politics as a kind of boundary work that seeks to tie the individual life of human beings to different forms of collective communities (Reestorff, 2017, p. 18). In the affective politics of the Trumpian campaign, visceral and visual imaginaries and insults become figures of transformation that facilitate the boundary work that creates or displaces intensities and affective connections – a specific we-ness that we will return to later – between individuals and the Trump campaign and presidency.

Political communication has traditionally been initiated and managed by specific actors, e.g. politicians, companies and journalists (Chadwick, 2006). However, social media challenge the hierarchies within political institutions and between spe-cific actors and they also increasingly serve to shape public opinion and mobilise support for candidates running for public office (Wattal et al., 2010; Zeng et al., 2010). In fact, "in a very short space of time, politicians in modern democracies across the world have eagerly adopted social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialogues with citi-zens and enabling vivid political discussions (Hong & Nadler, 2011)" (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In an American context the 2008 presidential election has been labelled the Facebook-election due to Barack Obama's utilisation of social media

to mobilise grassroots support and fundraising (Sandvoss, 2012), to enhance comprehensive storytelling strategies (Gupta-Carlson, 2016), and to "craft the narratives of our lives" (Rettberg, 2009). The political use of social media suggests that a new campaign model has emerged: personalised campaigns (Vergeer et al., 2013) that rely on social media networks and ongoing mobilisation of followers. Grusin (2017) has described how the Trump campaign used "cutting-edge marketing techniques to categorize Facebook users' personalities according to an established psychometric model of personality typing and influence the Facebook feeds of voters with different personality types without them realizing it" (p. 94). It is in the context of this campaign model that we study the emergence of an affective politics which can be seen as borrowing from strategic cyberbullying in a reorganisation of political culture that creates and or displaces intensities and affective connections between individuals and the Trumpian we-ness.

Social Media, Affect and Cyberbullying

The presidential campaign and presidency of Donald Trump is hence in prolongation of a general development, but it also appears to introduce further alterations to political communication on social media. Many politicians use Twitter throughout the year as a kind of permanent campaign tool, but their Twitter communication increases considerably during election campaigns (Larsson, 2014; Vergeer, 2015). Trump, on the contrary, has not reduced the number of tweets since he was elected, and while he now has access to the @Potus and @WhiteHouse accounts he continuously tweets from @realDonaldTrump. In addition, as documented by Pancer and Poole (2016) in their study of the popularity and virality of the 2016 U.S. presidential nominees' tweets, Trump's tweets are popular because they resemble "brief word-of-mouth transmissions" in that they rarely use the normal Twitter language: #hashtags, @usermentions, and http://www.websitelinks.com. While these features are intended to increase exposure and circulation, they "make the message less visually clear (perceptual disfluency) and require the translation of symbols and text strings into meaning (orthographic disfluency)" (Pancer & Poole, 2016, p. 259). Pancer and Poole's (2016) findings also reveal that when a candidate "talks less about the issues facing a country or positivity (i.e. hope, change, and/or perseverance) and more about undermining their opponent's inability to lead, the messages are more popular and viral" (p. 269).

It is apparent that the Trump campaign and presidency reflect alterations in political communication on social media and that negative tweets (Pancer & Poole, 2016) and the affectivity of "evil mediation" (Grusin, 2017) are crucial aspects of understanding how these alterations occur. We suggest that borrowing an analytic lens from cyberbullying research allows us to scrutinise these negative tweets further in order to better understand how the affective politics of Donald Trump unfolds on social media. Through a categorical mapping of the NY Times archive, we show how political opponents are discredited strategically and a new kind of political territory is established through an intentional circulation of particular interfacial refrains through Twitter. These refrains travel between on- and offline contexts through establishing a new form of we-ness that includes and excludes communities. We show how this we-ness in Trump's affective politics is shaped (also) by the Twitter interface and holds the potential to alter the democratic public and the thresholds for democratic participation.

The present article adds to already existing explorations of Trump's use of social media and the role it has played in his political mobilisation by specifically focusing on the affective dynamics and interfacial refrains of the insulting tweets. In doing so, we show how the NY Times online archive can be seen as an "archive of affect". Rather than ascribing to any fixed affect-scholarly approach (which seems to already be an increasingly impossible endeavour), this paper cuts across and recombines a number of affect theoretical contributions and investigations. As such, it draws on and contributes to current ongoing explorations of affect as a form of intensity (Clough & Halley, 2007; Deleuze, 1970; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002) that can be related to various forms of media proliferations/amplifications (Hillis et al., 2015) and political mobilisations (Papacharissi, 2016; Reestorff, 2017). The paper attempts to synthesise and reflect this multiplicity through analysis, where affect can be seen as an autonomous force, as something which persists in more representational forms of discourse and as something that has actual effects (although such effects can be difficult to determine).

Rethinking (a Kind of) Cyberbullying

'Cyberbullying' refers to the phenomenon of bullying practices in which social media/technologies/apps are involved and virtually or technologically mediated social processes with exclusionary effects "where certain subject positions are annulled and derived of intelligibility. These practices include the exchange of harsh, threatening or abusive messages" (Kofoed, 2013, p. 361; Kofoed, 2014; Kofoed & Stenner, 2017). Cyberbullying most often involves offline as well as online activities, which entangle into what is recognised as a 'case'. Cyberbullying thus 'lives' in and through interfaces and is most often studied among children and young people in education (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012).

In scrutinising Trump's tweet, we take off from a particular understanding of bullying, i.e. bullying is fundamentally community-based and it takes place within an organisational community (a school class, the workplace) where "a range of different forces are central in bullying: teachers, school principals and parents, classroom culture with its particular experiences and histories, and the virtual experiences of children" (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014, p. 10). Many forces are thus entangled in the shaping of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, where the basic tenet is that bullying takes a community to be excluded from. Belonging to a community makes you, so to speak, vulnerable to exclusion. Belonging and potential exclusion are thus intrinsic partners in cases of bullying (Canty et al., 2016; Hansen, 2011; Hansen & Kofoed, 2018; Horton, 2011; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). This goes for cyberbullying, too.

In relation to the Trumpian tweets, we do not suggest that Twitter compares to a school yard, nor do we suggest that Trump is merely a bully. Rather, we borrow the analytical insights from school-based cyberbullying research to scrutinise what happens in the tweets collected in the affective archive of the NYT. We thus make a move from micro to macro; from the classroom to the nation and national election. We find that some aspects of Trump's presidential campaign on Twitter bear similarities to the micro-processes of belonging and exclusion we know from classrooms. Similar to classroom bullying, for instance, extreme name-calling and exposure of named journalists and politicians exhibits who is in and who is out. Analytically, such exclamations can be read as *systematic* exclusionary processes – which is an important core trait of (cyber)bullying (Hansen, 2011).

However, such an analytical move from micro to macro is far from simple.

Methodology: Archive, Categorical Mapping and Refrains

As mentioned, the outset of this study is the New York Times' list of Trump's insults on Twitter. We study the list in the period between June 2015, when it was initiated by the NYT, and June 2018 when the number of people, places and things insulted was at 487. By January 2020 the number had reached 598. One might expect such a collection to be an archive characterised by tweets concerning political issues, and to some extent it is, but in addition, we find that this particular archive bears witness to politically informed affectivity. It does not map any political event in particular, but provides insight into what Kuntsman (2012) labels "the affective fabrics" of everyday internet engagement.

The tweets are uploaded under the name @realDonaldTrump, but the tweets are authored by both Trump himself and his staff members.[2] Throughout the paper we refer to the sender of the tweets as 'Trump', while knowing that a larger group of people tweet on his behalf. Furthermore, we are aware that the tweets compiled by the NYT are harvested and archived in a way that emphasises and enlarges the affective fabrics (of insults).

We have followed the NY Times's site and the regular updates of insults online until the version dated 10 July 2018. This period stretches from the presidential campaign into the Trump presidency. The archive consists of links to original tweets, and it is thus possible to follow the links and the retweets, and how the content of the tweets travels from Twitter to other social media sites, particularly Facebook, where numerous status updates either use tweets directly or use the same wording. However, even though the archive makes it possible to follow the travelling tweets, it also makes the amount of data overwhelming. To illustrate: On 1 November 2016 @realDonaldTrump tweeted "So terrible that Crooked [nickname for Hillary Clinton] didn't report she got the debate questions from Donna Brazile, if that were me it would have been front page news!" This tweet has been liked 80,778 times and retweeted 32,734 times. The archive thus opens up to vast empirical data, which we almost feel seduced into networking our analysis into. However, in order to provide stringency to the analysis we have chosen not to include network,

participatory or receptionist analysis. Rather, we will conduct a *categorical mapping* in which we reorganise the archive based on the most frequently used insulting words and the categories of people and groups who are the targets of the most insults. After this initial mapping we choose the three most targeted people, groups, places and objects from each category and allow our analysis to follow these tweets.

In Adele Clarke's methodology of mapping and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), she works with three analytical maps: situational maps, maps on social worlds and maps of positionality. In order to study the online affective archive of insults, we have reworked Clarke's analytical 'take' so that we do not focus on situational maps, but on what we term *categorical mapping*. By categorical mapping we mean the exercise of laying out visually what is in the archive by focusing on categories of insults. This mapping is necessary to grasp what is in the archive, and to open what is at stake in our data. By means of mapping, the forms and extent of the insults become visible and the otherwise intangible Twitter-stream becomes tangible. The mapping is a hands-on approach that allows us to identify patterns in the empirical data. The NYT archive is organised alphabetically by whom or what has been insulted. The categorical mapping reveals the extent of the insults and has made it possible to reorganise the insults into categories. In the first analytical step we identify the twenty most frequently used insulting words. We have counted the number of insults, what insults are used most, whom/what is being insulted, with what adjectives and how many times they/it are being named (see figure 2). This study is done systematically based on the categorical mapping of whom and what is being insulted. After this initial mapping we have chosen to focus on the three most frequently insulted people, groups or things in each of the twelve categories (see figure 2).

Using a compilation of data that we have not collected ourselves is of course a methodological challenge and it raises the question: What is *not* in the archive? Why did the New York Times compile the list and what do they gain from it? After the election they have, after all, become the news agency subjected to the most insults. The categorical mapping thus inhibits the challenge that we cannot double check whether more or other insults were tweeted – the archive of tweets is simply too extensive – and thus we cannot counter-analyse what is not in the archive. This means that we run the risk of missing tweets that were insulting in ways different from those harvested by the NYT. The limitation of our study is thus that we do not study Trump's use of Twitter in general, but specifically the insulting attacks as these are documented by the NYT. Yet, at the same time, the archive gives us a privileged entry point to study the specific affective structures of the insults Trump uses and how he uses them.

Insult	Frequency	Often used about:
News/fake/false/fakenews (variations of "fake news")	619	The mainstream media, CNN
Crooked	285	Almost exclusively used about Hillary Clinton
Failing/fail/failed	175	Repeatedly used about the NYT, but also about e.g. Jeb Bush and the Des Moines Register
Bad	167	*Generally applied word*
Dishonest	127	Primarily about the mainstream media, but also about e.g. the NYT and NBC News
Lies, lyin', liar, lie, lied	119	Ted Cruz, James Comey, Hillary Clinton
Weak	80	Jeb Bush, Barack Obama, Ben Carson
Phony	71	Allegations of collusion between Russia and members of the Trump campaign, The mainstream media, Elizabeth Warren
Witch hunt	67	Primarily about allegations of collusion between Russia and members of the Trump campaign
Worst/worse	67	*Generally applied word*
Terrible	56	James Comey, George Pataki, Iran Nuclear Deal

Sad	52	*Generally applied word*
Rigged	52	The American Delegate System, Early voting in Florida, Election
Disaster	51	Primarily about Obamacare
Dumb, dummy, dumbest	48	Clare O'Connor, Don Lemon, Mika Brzezinski
Biased, bias	47	Mainstream media, Gonzalo P. Curiel, CNN
Losing, loser, losers	39	Karl Rove, Islamic State, CNN Panellists
Lightweight	34	Mario Rubio, Ted Cruz, Megyn Kelly
Disgrace, disgraceful	33	Democrats, U.S.-Mexico border, Catch and release
Dopey, dope, dopes	32	Karl Rove, Charles Krauthammer, Alwaleed bin Talal
Crazy	32	Megyn Kelly, haters, Bernie Sanders

Figure 2 *The twenty most frequently used insults (21 because there was a draw between dopey and crazy).*

The initial mapping of insults was followed by an identification and mapping of the categories to which the insults were connected. Figure 3 below lists the twelve categories we identified. In each category we identified the three people, groups, places or things that are most frequently the targets of the insults in each category.

As the categories show, the tweets cover more or less emotionally laden evaluations of other presidential candidates, journalists, media outlets etc. and they pair selected persons with a quite limited range of derogatory characteristics that only indirectly refer to political issues (e.g. border control and Obamacare). Interestingly, after the election the pattern of insults shifts. During the time of campaigning, there was a considerable overload of insults addressed at politicians, whereas after the election an increasing number of insults are addressed at the media.

Category and number of people, groups, places and things in each category	Number of insults for the 3 most named people, groups, places and things in each category
77 politicians	• Hillary Clinton (520) • Ted Cruz and a Ted Cruz speech (112) • Jeb Bush and the Jeb Bush Campaign (95)
34 political consultants, public workers, lawyers, judges etc.	• James Comey (60) • Karl Rove (47) • Andrew McCabe (13)
45 political organisations, groups and processes	• The electoral process (23) • F.B.I. (17), the F.B.I. investigation into Hillary Clinton's email server (1), and investigation of Hillary Clinton's emails (1) (19) • The American delegate system (17)
49 news agencies, news and TV programmes	• The New York Times and 4 specific articles from the New York Times (215) • CNN (144) • The Washington Post (51)
87 journalists, TV hosts and writers	• Megyn Kelly (36) • Chuck Todd (22) • Glen Beck (18)

30 people, groups and organisations from the cultural/media sphere	• National Football League (12) • Penn Jillette (7) • NFL players who knelt before the national anthem (6)
41 cities, states, countries, foreign political leaders and international collaborations	• United States (16) • Kim Jong-un (8) and North Korea (7) (15) • Mexico (12) and U.S.-Mexico border (3) (15) • New Jersey (15) • Iran (10)
27 companies, organisations and business leaders	• Macy's (17) • Amazon (10) • Bob Vander Plaats (7)
28 more or less unspecified groups	• Mainstream media (443) • Democrats (173) • Members of Robert Mueller's team (22)
29 specific political issues *Since 11 out of 29 issues were related to immigration, we chose to count these as one category. *Since 3 out of 29 issues were related to healthcare, we chose to count these as one category.	• Healthcare (72) • Obamacare (65) • Health insurance individual mandate (6) • Single-payer health care (1) • Immigration (37) • U.S. immigration policies (14) • Court order halting immigration ban (6) • Alterations to President Trump's travel ban (5) • Catch and release (3) • Chain migration (3) • Groups of would-be immigrants approaching the border (1) • Illegal Immigration (1) • Laws pertaining to "sanctuary cities" (1) • Sanctuary cities (1) • U.S. immigration lottery system (1) • U.S. visa system (1) • Nuclear deal • Iran Nuclear Deal (23)
13 objects	• Leaked D.N.C. emails (4) • New 747 Air Force One (2) • Microphone at the first presidential debate (2) • A podium in the oval office (2)
21 issues concerning Donald Trump and his presidency (incl. 7 authors, books and documentaries about Trump)	• Allegations of collusion between Russia and members of the Trump campaign (132), the Steele Dossier (12), and investigations of the Trump presidency (9) (153) • Assault allegations (11) • Protesters at Mr. Trump's rallies (7)

Figure 3 *Twelve targeted categories.*

The maps – and the processes of mapping – made it possible to browse the data and understand the patterns in the archive. For one thing, mapping made it evident that Trump is disproportionately occupied with news media and journalists. Thus, not only are 49 specific news agencies, news and TV programmes and 87 journalists, TV hosts and writers targeted, mainstream media also get the top score, with 443 insults, in the "more or less unspecified groups" category. Similarly, Trump is concerned with the allegations of collusion between Russia and members of the Trump campaign (153 insults), and this also means that even though he insults 34 political consultants, public workers, lawyers, judges etc., two of the top scores in this category belong to James Comey, whom he fired as director of the FBI, and Andrew McCabe, who was Deputy Director of the FBI. The FBI is also the second most targeted out of the 45 political organisations, groups and processes. Thus, if we scrutinise the most frequently targeted groups, people, places and things, it becomes apparent that while Trump's insulting tweets are vast, the scope of his political focus is limited. Moreover, this limitation also points to an important aspect of Trump's use of Twitter – although singular tweets might seem transgressive, contradictory or impulsive – they are indeed highly strategic in their continuous attacks on selected opponents (be they politicians or media outlets) and in creating a general affective atmosphere.

Refrain-like Repetitions

Categorical mapping allowed us to understand discursive patterns in the material, but it also reveals that the affective propagation, initiated by Trump, relies on a refrain-like repetition and circulation of key affective powers and tonalities. In attempting to identify refrains in the material, we aim to show how the very concrete name-calling and the different insults become part of larger assemblages that ultimately establish new (political) territories in a non-deterministic, yet directed, way. The concept of the refrain, which we take primarily from Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2002), functions as a conceptual motor. According to Bertelsen and Murphie (2010), the use of the refrain is a way of sidestepping a more direct analysis of signs and discourses to orient the analysis towards understanding the role of the refrain in the emergence of new territories, new functions within this territory and the further refraining of this new territory and new functions. The concept of refrain allows us to look at (almost mundane) repetitions in the empirical material, to grasp social media like Twitter and its infinite loops of retweets, to overcome the distinction between the on/offline proliferations of the tweets, and it gives us a conceptual tool to extend the analysis into the political (de/re)territorialisation that is also happening. The concept thus enables us to follow the intentional – or strategic – dynamics, and the ways in which these strategic and intended aspects sometimes explode and become saturated with affective overspillings that cannot always be fully predetermined or planned. This was for instance the case when the Trump campaign ran ads quoting Trump's tweets about an 'invasion' on the southern border. Afterwards the militia group "United Constitutional Patriots" established a camp at the New Mexico/Mexico border. On social media the group documented how they, without legal authorisation and in full military fatigues including handguns and assault rifles, claimed to be border patrol and detained immigrants. The group argued that they would not leave until Trump's wall was built (Shoichet & Murphy, 2019). Acts such as these cannot be predicted and they transcend the initial intention of the single tweet, but, nevertheless, they can be analytically linked to some of them. In this regard refrains not only refer to the actual words being used, but also to the more general affective mobilisation and political territories catalysed and maintained on and via Twitter.

The refrains connect to rhythms that allow the affective tensions to rise and to fade. In our material, this dynamic is initiated in a variety of ways and on a number of levels: words, phrases, name-calling, catch lines. We identify refrains in repetitions of core insults, which, for instance as we saw in figure 2, are fake news (619), crooked (285), failing (175), bad (167), dishonest (127), lying (119) and weak (80). These categories occur across the tweets, generating a particular affective tonality, exceeding the content of the singular tweet. Here, we find examples of more targeted uses of refrains, for instance the word 'crooked' which is almost exclusively used in relation to Hillary Clinton – who is most commonly entitled 'Crooked Hillary Clinton', or simply just 'Crooked'. As such, the refrains move rhythmically and become repetitious mantras that are circulated through Twitter, and also across other social media platforms (e.g. when Trump retweeted a meme that showed him hitting Hillary Clinton in the back with a golf ball – 17 September 2017) to sustain the affective mobilisation vis-a-vis the opponent. More importantly, we also see how particular refrains are established as an integral part of Trump's rallies, where large crowds regularly have been chanting "Lock her up" with reference to Hillary Clinton. Clearly, this type of name-calling of political opponents breaks with the traditional rules about how to conduct a political debate. However, it mimics the dynamics of cyberbullying where the refrains build seemingly new norms for whom to blame and how to build exclusionary communities and allow for belonging.

Cyberbullying or Not?

Trump's tweets most clearly resemble what we know from cyberbullying research when they target named others and use derogatory content of ridicule and exposure. The use of insults seems to serve a strategic purpose of outmanoeuvring particular political opponents, named journalists and news media. Cyberbullying thus finds a new shape when it leaves the classroom and the sphere of children and youth and enters into – not only adulthood – but political campaigning and presidency. We suggest that this new shape adequately could be termed 'strategic' cyberbullying. 'Strategic' here refers to the *how* of cyberbullying. Strategic cyberbullying differs from cyberbullying in schools because it has a directional manner to it, where it becomes a means in affective politics.

Trump's tweets indicate how cyberbullying, when relocated to the realm of politics, takes the shape of strategic bullying of political opponents, news agencies and journalists in a field vacant of clear policies, but full of derogatory evaluations of others. The strategic aspect of cyberbullying adds a layer of purposefulness and opens the possibility of cyberbullying being a strong player in winning the 'game of winning' embedded in the 'affective fabrics of everyday lives' (Kuntsman, 2012) and affective politics.

As mentioned, cyberbullying research focuses on how the everyday lives of children and young people can be undercut by extreme processes of exclusion. In these cases, cyberbullying concerns the exclusion of members from school. In these processes of inclusion and exclusion social media play an active and agential part (Horton, 2011; Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; Kofoed, 2014; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Shariff, 2009). In the case of Trump, social media are in a similar manner used to employ harsh talk and derogatory evaluations of named persons. In many ways these derogatory evaluations become an extraordinary and spectacular row of events.

The tweets are trigger texts that serve to frame affect via such strategic use of cyberbullying. In the tweets, affects are being expressed directly in manners that leave little room for interpretation - *Hillary **is** crooked, Ted Bush **is** lying, NYT **is** fake.* Zizi Papacharissi (2016) argues that "there are countless stories of how media serve as conduits for affective expression in historical moments that promise social change" (p. 308). Possibly, the presidential campaign and the first months of Trump's presidency have been such moments. The openly derogatory content of Trump's insults seems closed for definition, in ways that are closely appropriated by specific content and affectivity in ways that leave little room to negotiate its meaning. Papacharissi (ibid.) argues that hashtags serve as "framing devices". We argue that name-calling – such as crooked, goofy, liar, dishonest – serves as similar framing devices. As framing devises the insults establish a particularity to the public as "these networked publics come together and/or disband around bonds of sentiment", and are "affective, convening across networks that are discursively rendered out of mediated interactions" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 308). Twitter seems a suited platform for this kind of affectively charged expression. The intangible nature of the tweets can thus be grasped by the terminology of charged expressions where affect seems to become the driver that keeps the insults going and plays an important role in the formation of new publics and political territories. The harsh tonality afforded by Twitter seems to infuse the intangibility of the affect.

Furthermore, the intangible nature of the tweets and their overload of insults are not just provocative. The insults strategically allow political content to be less articulated or pass by less noticed as the affectivity of shaming catches attention. In this regard the tweets both serve to *depoliticise* and *hyperpoliticise*. They depoliticise because political content is subsumed by the inflammatory content and they hyperpoliticise because they accumulate affective value and because signs "increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 45). In this simultaneously depoliticised and hyperpoliticised affective politics, Twitter is important because it offers an interface for political horizons of hostility, aggression and shaming.
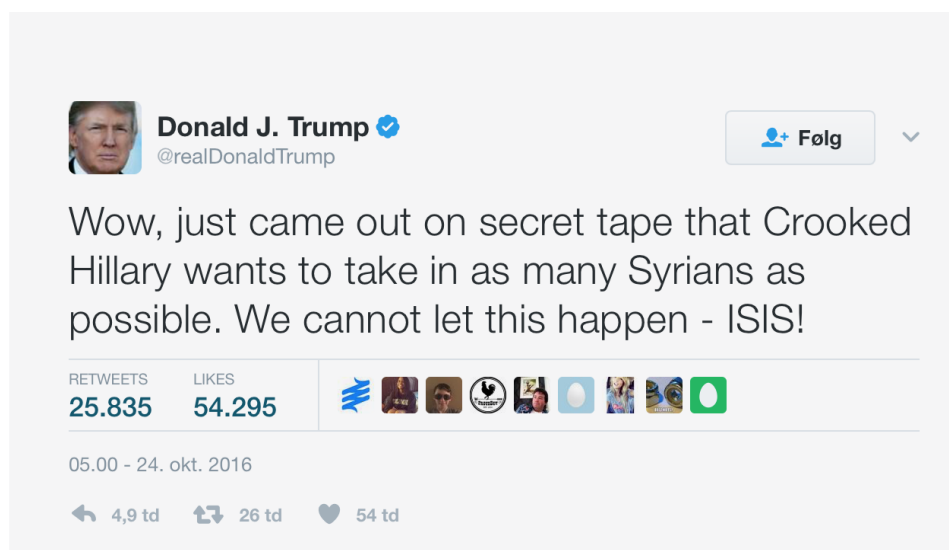
Interfacial Circulation

Figure 4
Tweet. 24 October 2016

Trump's tweets are trigger texts that serve to frame affect via the strategic use of cyberbullying. This framing is only rendered possible via the Twitter-interface and the particular media-specific relation between particular patterns of repetition and the refrains. Figure 4 exemplifies how the interfacial circulation results in an overwhelming number of tweets, retweets and replies. The tweet has received 54,295 likes and 25,835 retweets; each opening up for new lines of communication and engagement. Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2002) state that "from chaos, Milieus and Rhythms are born" and that "The milieus are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythms have in common is the in-between - between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos" (p. 313). In the case of Trump, rhythms seem to order the unorderly tweets into affective milieus. By understanding the tweet's 'milieu', we can start in the middle (of the tweets) and to grasp the rhythms of the affects to comprehend the circulation of affect as both transitive and inexplicable.

The replies to the tweets take a number of different forms and they come from both supporters and opponents. The collage below, figure 5, presents some of the replies to the original tweet, and it gives an indication of the affective intensity circulated interfacially.

Figure 5

Collage of replies

The responses vary from making fun of the ISIS exclamation with reference to popular culture and cartoons, to collages showing child victims of the Syrian civil war, allegations that Trump is himself getting sued for child rape, a more general comparison of Trump and a pumpkin and accusations of Trump being racist. In support of Trump, and against Clinton, we see allegations that Clinton is supporting terrorists, and that she is responsible for both the refugee crisis in Europe and for child abuse committed by illegal immigrants, and that this abuse is legitimised by Ayatollah Khomeini with reference to the Quran. In addition, tweets are claiming that Clinton wants to destroy America, and that God must soon intervene to prevent this. These are just some examples of the nature of the replies to the tweet.

The original tweet utilises refrains that collapse Clinton, terrorism and ISIS. Some of the replies relate directly to the refrains activated in the wording of the tweet, whereas others follow the affective intensity mobilised by the event of the tweet in a more general social setting, shaping and intensifying the affective political environment. This illustrates how the interfacial engagement and distribution and the travelling of affect are transitive (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012), yet referring to a shared vantage point (the initial tweet). The intensity rises and travels and apparently seems to escape being pinned down. A vantage point can be identified, yet the intensity both gathers and evaporates in refrains of recognisability traversing on- and offline contexts, mobilising different affective tensions and venting. The replies to the tweet show how the support of the immediate online social environment allows the tweeters to pursue their affective politics on either side of the political spectrum (Reestorff, 2017). Yet, at the same time we must keep in mind that a number of people have been blocked from following @realDonaldTrump and thus excluded from pursuing their affective politics.[3] Therefore, it is important to consider the different temporalities at stake in the interfacial engagement with Twitter and how the "here & now"-immediacy of the concrete tweet always intensifies the general social and cultural context in which it is being posted.

We thus argue that when tweets are used as trigger texts that frame affect via the strategic use of cyberbullying, their circulation and refrain-like character connect – to a certain extent – otherwise disconnected elements. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasise how refrains have the ability to form organised masses – territorial assemblages – out of normally disconnected elements. The refrain has "a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form

organised masses" (p. 348). This is essential to understanding the affective power of Trump's tweets in forming new territorial assemblages and publics that transcend the existing way of 'doing politics'. When cyberbullying becomes strategic and politically intentional, the affective messiness simultaneously blurs the business of politics and directly concerns the issue of political participation and agency. One of the consequences is that politics in the public sphere is radically transformed towards the formation of new territorial assemblages and this might, in fact, be a core achievement of Trump's use of Twitter.

The We-ness of Cyberbullying

In line with our definition of strategic cyberbullying, Trump's tweets designate a community that excludes the people, organisations, places and things being insulted in the tweets. Cyberbullying is, as mentioned earlier, community based. It takes place within an organised community from which each member is potentially vulnerable to exclusion. It seems that the we-ness of the nation that Trump addresses parallels the 'we-ness' invoked through cyberbullying. However, it is quite different than the 'we-ness' invoked in more ordinary forms of public communication. Michael Warner (2002) argues that while the nation state "includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose", publics are different because they exist only by virtue address, and thus "must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members" (p. 87). The we-ness of the nation is thus – in many ways – different from a school class, which must predicate a degree of attention. Nonetheless, the tweets somehow bypass the characteristics of both publics and nation states as we know them. The tweets rely on a nation-based Twitter-public and thus on attention. The tweets thus seek to gain attention and to establish a 'we-ness' based on the process of exclusion in which their targets' legitimacy within the nation are denied. This is evident in the explicit attacks on Trump's political opponents, but also, for instance, when tweets attack American corporations or military offensives.
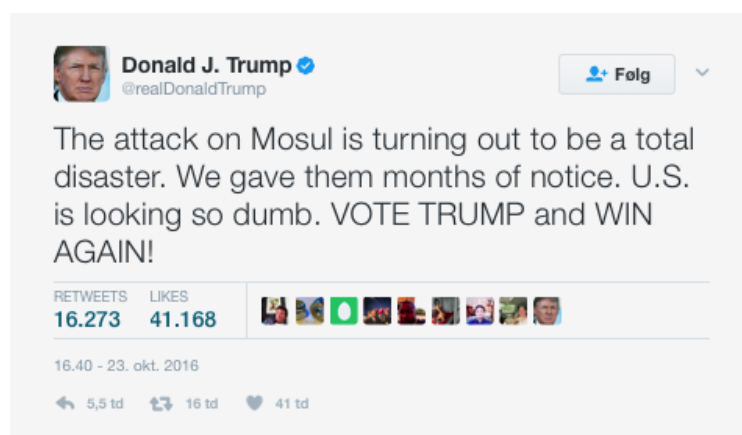

Figure 6
Tweet. 23 October 2016

In October 2016 Trump insulted the American-backed Iraqi military offensive to recapture Mosul from ISIS, which the tweet stated was a "total disaster" that makes U.S. look 'so dumb' (figure 6). The exclusionary effects and intensions are often explicit, when the tweets for instance accuse their targets of being 'dumb', 'sad' or 'stupid'. Yet, at the same time, they provide an invitation: "VOTE TRUMP and WIN AGAIN". This indicates that the 'we-ness' is articulated through the processes of exclusion. The tweets appear to create a distinction between those who happen to inhabit or derive from the nation state and those who qualify as deserving to be part of the nation. A taken-for-granted we-ness of the nation is, thus, necessary for insulting tweets to work in instances where strategic cyberbullying seems to allow a community to 'feel their way into politics' (Papacharissi, 2015) and to make up and intensify the community 'needed' for cyberbullying to work. In this regard, the community that people are invited to feel their way into is the we-ness of an American-based-Trump-community that relies on an affective politics of inclusion and exclusion in order to be sustained.

During the processes of inclusion and exclusion, national sentiments are invoked. For example, during the Democratic

national convention, Trump tweeted in outrage that there was no American flag on the stage (figure 7) – even though there was a huge video board with American flags present. The tweet does not concern the politics proposed or debated at the convention, but it accuses the democratic party of not partaking in the ordinary flagging of the homeland (Billig, 1995). The tweet indicates that in order to be recognised as a legitimate political player you must exhibit the flag and celebrate the national community. This is affectively potent because the emphasis on the national symbolic 'aims to link regulation to desire, harnessing affect to political life through the production of "national fantasy'" (Berlant, 1991, p. 5). The tweet thus governs what affects (and objects) are deemed appropriate in relation to an intensified 'Trumpian' we-ness.

The tweets clearly indicate who is excluded and who is cherished within the we-ness promoted by Trump. Trump for instance thanks Steve Bannon and tweets that Breibart News, a news and opinion site known to embrace ideas on the extremist fringe of the conservative right, is much smarter than NBC's "sleepy eyes @chucktodd". Such processes bear much resemblance to cyberbullying among children and young people, with the clear difference being that these processes of inclusion and exclusion are embedded in affective politics. We-ness, as we also see in cyberbullying in schools, affectively governs who is in and who is out; inclusion and exclusion of membership and belonging (Hansen, 2011; Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). Trump's tweets address a less easily demarcated public than school: a public that subscribes to Trump's vision of a we-ness and taps into and borrows from the American nation. As such the tweets function as affective politics that tie together the individual life of human beings or deny access to a collective community (Reestorff, 2017).

Figure 7
Tweet. 27 July 2016

Libertarian Authoritarianism and the Reorganisation of Political Culture

When studying tweets, such as Donald Trump's, one is often inclined to consider their value in relation to concrete policy making. Yet, as we have already established, Trump's insulting tweets rarely concern policy making such as for instance suggestions for new legislation. The strategic aspect of Trump's tweets can thus easily be overlooked, because their sensational character is rarely considered in research on political conflicts, simply because this kind of research often focuses on instances where new policies have been made (Bob, 2012, p. 5). As we have established, the strategic aspect of the tweet serves a political purpose, but this purpose retains not to politics but to "the political" that is "the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies" (Mouffe, 2008, pp. 95–96). Thus, we argue that while Trump's insulting tweets are highly visible, their political significance are difficult to 'capture' because they constitute a specific part of the political that transcends the existing way of doing politics.

The fact that the tweets transcend the well-known way of doing politics is evident in the ways in which the 'people' and the 'homeland' are configured. In a critical discourse analysis of Trump's tweets, Ramona Kreis (2017) has shown that Trump uses an informal, direct, and provoking communication style to construct and reinforce the concept of the homogeneous people and a homeland threatened by the dangerous other. But the political significance of the tweets is more extensive. Affect and the strategic use of cyberbullying transform the way in which political culture is organised, we argue. By emphasising the reconfiguring

of political culture, it becomes apparent that the overload of insults in the tweets is not just provocative; the insults strategically transform political culture and they allow political content to be less articulated or pass by less noticed as the affectivity of shaming catches attention. Furthermore, the blatant and spectacular name-calling, (slut-)shaming, and derogatory evaluations of named persons opens for a diffuse, yet highly affective mobilisation of the Trumpian we-ness.

The reorganisation of political culture is also evident in the viral name-calling of news media and named journalists, which serves to affectively 'charge' the political space. This virality and mobilisation of affect are afforded by the interface of Twitter. The interface allows for political virality, which for instance is evident when Trump declares that "The FAKE NEWS media" is "the enemy of the American People" (figure 8) – a tweet that is shared more than 51,000 times. This does not entail that a specific political initiative is promoted. Rather, it creates a "process that raises the intensity of *various* positions in that space, even if they may become signified and oriented in different or oppositional ways" (Kølvraa, 2015, p. 195). This kind of contagion can be seen as a process that provides a matrix of feedback to the face (Gibbs, 2001), or rather to Trump as a sort of "crowd leader" (Le Bon, 2002). Affect is simply intensified around Trump's tweets and oriented towards the media that he insults. This, again, confirms that strategic cyberbullying is highly dependent on the interface of Twitter, which allows for the networked experience to modulate the circulation and intensification of insults and affects.

Figure 8 & 9

8) Tweet. 27 January 2016

9) 17 February 2017

Trump's tweets *do* politics exactly because they, as mentioned, mobilise a we-ness that serves to include political supporters and exclude perceived opponents. One of the ways in which perceived opponents are being excluded is by pointing out their affiliation with the political system that Trump – even after becoming president – distances himself from. This distancing is evident when he tweets "We are all tired of incompetent politicians and bad deals!", Jeb Bush is "Just another clueless politician!", and that Ted Cruz is "just another dishonest politician". Tweets such as these and their emphasis on the alleged misguided, failed and "out-of-touch political elites" (Art, 2013, p. 134) are part of the reason why Trump's politics is often referred to as populist. In many ways the tweets mimic the right-wing populism and elite democracy that are an ingrained part of American history (Eiermann, 2016). The tweets and the we-ness that they establish simply borrow from a tradition of right-wing protests that find "a common identity in being opposed to power, as they consider themselves in opposition to the political establishment" (Peters, 2015, p.137). However, the concept of populism does not capture the significance of the interfacial refrains and the affective dynamics that are at stake in the tweets. Furthermore, populism is in itself a problematic term. Foster, quoting Andrea Mammone, argues that historically 'the terms populism and national populism' were deliberately introduced in order

to 'replace fascism/neofascism as the used terminology' and 'provide a sort of political and democratic legitimisation of right-wing extremism' (Foster, 2017, p. 4). Thus, if we merely describe Trump's insulting tweets as populism, we fail to acknowledge the ways in which political culture becomes organised around logics known from cyberbullying. When cyberbullying occurs in and around a classroom the culture of the classroom becomes organised around the community of bullying. In a similar manner, Trump's tweets are indicative of a political culture organised in and around the practice of strategic cyberbullying.

The organisation of political culture in and around cyberbullying implies a doubleness when it comes to affective political mobilisation. On the one hand, as argued above, the tweet allows the tweeters to pursue their affective politics on either side of the political spectrum. Yet on the other hand, the use of strategic cyberbullying governs affect and can be understood as part of a specific libertarian authoritarianism. Wendy Brown (Brown & Littler, 2018) suggests that libertarian authoritarianism applies a very "strong *statism* that works to secure, essentially, the deregulated public sphere that neoliberalism itself generated". Thus, libertarian authoritarianism, writes Brown, trumpets a paradoxical freedom that "attacks social bonds and obligations, social conscience, and social welfare", "disintegrates society and disinhibits individuals" and produces "the need for strong authority to secure order" against "what a declining middle and working-class experiences as ravaged ways of life for which it blames 'others.'" These others are often, as we see in the tweets below, Mexicans and immigrants more generally (figures 10 and 11). In this regard the political culture and the we-ness generated through the affective politics of cyberbullying simultaneously rely on a diverse affective mobilisation and a strong statism, which includes the disintegration of social bonds.
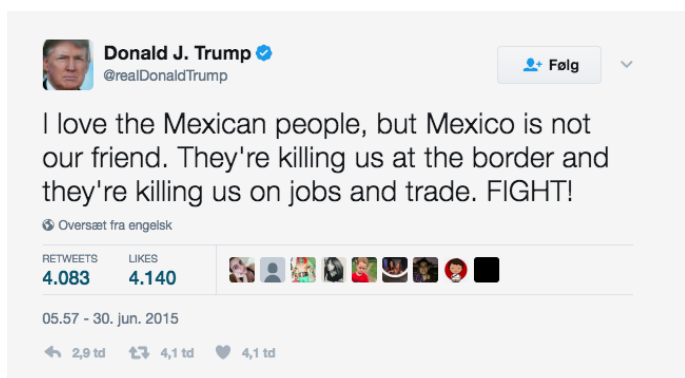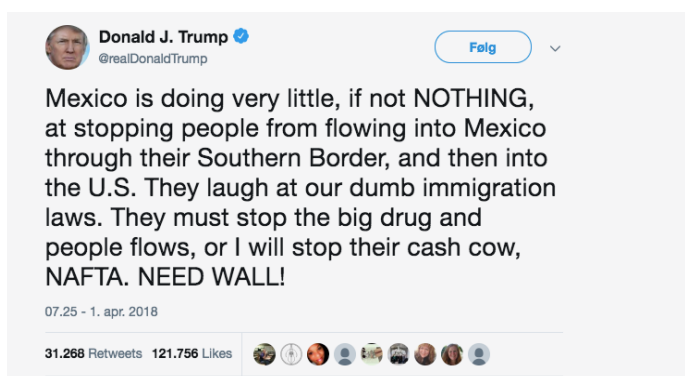

Figure 10 & 11

10) 30 June 2015

11) 1 April 2018

When political culture is organised around strategic cyberbullying it is indicative of how an affective politics governs who – individuals and groups alike – has access to and agency in the nation state (Reestorff, 2017). Governing of agency has different consequences for different people and groups. Trump for instance tweeted that he will not call the journalist and commentator Megyn Kelly a 'bimbo', but a 'lightweight reporter' (see figure 9). Trump's attacks on her are unpleasant attempts to deny her agency within the nation state, but the significance of the attacks also concerns the role of journalism within the Trumpian we-ness. Manuel Castells (2004) has argued that power "does not reside in institutions, not even the state or large corporations. It is located in the networks that structure society" (p. 224). Thus, through the exclusion of named journalists and media networks, Trump challenges news media's role in the structuring of society. In a similar manner, but on an altogether different level, the

numerous attacks on immigration and immigrants serve as a way to ensure that they do not obtain the agency that would allow them to influence the structuring of society. Trump, for instance, writes "groups of would-be immigrants approaching the border" and that democrats want to "flood our country with Syrian immigrants that we know little or nothing about". This articulates an "ethnically restrictive notion of 'the people'" (Kazin, 2016) – of the Trumpian we-ness – but it also destabilises the social bonds that would otherwise allow immigrants to be considered a part of society. This, again, highlights how a political culture, when organised in and around strategic cyberbullying, reinforces the statism of libertarian authoritarianism.

Conclusion: Twittering a Public of Uncertainty

Throughout this article we have scrutinised the NY Times archive of Donald Trump's insults on Twitter in an attempt to understand the ways in which Trump and the Trump staff & campaign systematically use insults, name-calling and derogatory comments about perceived opponents. The fact that Trump calls Hillary Clinton 'crooked', Elizabeth Warren 'Pocahontas' and Chuck Todd 'sleepy eyes' highlights that mobilisation of affect is "twittering" politics. While the tweets blur the business of politics, they do not dissolve politics. Rather, they transform the ways in which politics is conducted. Thus the "twittering politics" directly concerns the 'affective governmentalisation' of who has 'access and agency in the democratic public', who belongs to what 'we' and who are kept out. In this regard the tweets are an important political tool, because they become trigger-texts for affective intensifications and mobilisation and transmissions of refrains. The tweets serve as a specific kind of affective and transgressive boundary work in which the limits of agency and participation are being negotiated. Brian Massumi has argued that we must understand affect in a time of crisis as the way in which our "bodies and our lives are almost a kind of a resonating chamber for media-borne distresses that strike us and run through us" (Massumi in Fritsch and Thomsen 2012). This notion of crisis is crucial in understanding Trump's tweets and their affective politics, because it situates the individual in the midst of a field of uncertainty and of a contested we-ness.

The uncertainty and everyday maintenance of who belongs with whom are – though easily overlooked – integral to grasping what the phenomenon of strategic cyberbullying consists of and not least to grasp how democracy is transformed when political culture is organised in and around maintaining Trumpian we-ness. Here belonging to this we-ness of the (white) nation is marked with derogatory affective refrains that by repetition work their 'truth'. In such a political culture there is quite a risk involved when expressing oneself, because you are always already the potential victim of name-calling, cyberbullying and expulsion of the we-ness.

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Endnotes

1   Before 2017 – where a part of our data was gathered – a tweet was limited to 140 characters.

2   Data Scientist David Robinson (2017) has analysed the RealDonaldTrump-account to explore whether Donald Trump himself is actually tweeting; using advanced data analytic algorithms. Robinson reaches this conclusion: "My analysis, shown below, concludes that the Android and iPhone tweets are clearly from different people, posting during different times of day and using hashtags, links, and retweets in distinct ways. What's more, we can see that the Android tweets are angrier and more negative, while the iPhone tweets tend to be benign announcements and pictures. Overall I'd agree with @tvaziri's analysis: this lets us tell the difference between the campaign's tweets (iPhone) and Trump's own (Android)."

3   In 2019 a federal court ruled that Trump's blocking of people whose views he disliked from his Twitter account was unconstitutional, because the first amendment does not permit a public official who utilises a social media account to exclude persons from an otherwise open online dialogue. The case is Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University et al. v Trump et al., 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, No. 18-1691.