

“Populism: Content and Form”

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I

At times, it seems as if we are condemned to try to understand our own time with conceptual frameworks more than half a century old. Since the financial crisis, many economists have been reduced to recycling the ideas of John Maynard Keynes, notably about the relationship between government deficits and aggregate demand. Analysts of international relations seem to be stuck with terminology that dates from roughly the same period: realism or idealism, containment or appeasement, deterrence or disarmament. Likewise, confronted with populism, writers on American and European politics repeatedly confuse it with fascism, as if the era of the world wars is the only history they have ever studied, Hitler the only demagogue. Yet Keynes died in 1946. George Kennan’s “Long Telegram” was dispatched just two months before Keynes’s death; Hugh Trevor Roper’s *Last Days of Hitler* was published the following year. All this was seventy years ago.

Our own era is profoundly different from the mid twentieth century. The near-autarkic, commanding and controlling states that emerged from the Depression, World War II, and the early Cold War exist today, if at all, only as pale shadows of their former selves. The bureaucracies and party machines that ran them are defunct or in decay. The administrative state is their final incarnation. Today, the combination of technological innovation and international economic integration has created entirely new forms of network—ranging from the criminal

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underworld to the rarefied “overworld” of Davos—that were scarcely dreamt of by Keynes, Kennan or Trevor Roper.

In this short paper, I make a simple argument: what is distinctive about populism in the English-speaking* world today is not its content, which is familiar, but its form, which is novel.

II

There is very little in the content of today’s populism that is new. As I have argued elsewhere, populism can be understood in part as a backlash against globalization. It has five ingredients: a significant rise in the absolute and relative level of immigration, an increase in inequality measured by the distribution of income and wealth, a perception of corruption within the political establishment, a major macroeconomic shock such as financial crisis, and the arrival on the political scene of a demagogue capable of exploiting these grievances.¹ At the same time, populism is a backlash against multiculturalism: it is not just as an economic threat that immigrants are stigmatized, but as a threat to some notional set of traditional values, and it is not just immigrants but all minorities who are represented as alien to the majority culture. To illustrate that the content of today’s populism is, in these respects, far from unprecedented in western history is not difficult.

Few today recall the name of Denis Kearney, the leader of the Workingmen’s Party of California and author of the slogan “The Chinese Must Go!” Himself an Irish immigrant to the United States, Kearney was part of a movement of nativist parties and “Anti-Coolie” clubs that sought to end Chinese immigration into the late nineteenth century United States. The report of

* I focus in what follows on the United Kingdom and the United States, where populist movements achieved unexpected and significant successes in 2016. A similar argument could be made about populist movements elsewhere, for example on the European continent. But electoral systems there are different and populists have thus far achieved much less.

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the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration in 1877 gives a flavor of the times. “The Pacific coast must in time become either Mongolian or American,” was the committee’s view. The Chinese brought with them the habits of despotic government, a tendency to lie in court, a weakness for tax evasion and “insufficient brainspace ... to furnish [the] motive power for self-government.” Moreover, Chinese women were “bought and sold for prostitution and treated worse than dogs,” while the Chinese were “cruel and indifferent to their sick.” Giving such inferior beings citizenship, the committee’s report declared, “would practically destroy republican institutions on the Pacific coast.”²

The realities were, it scarcely needs to be said, very different. According to the “Six Companies” of Chinese in San Francisco—corporate bodies that represented the Chinese population of the city—there was compelling evidence that Chinese immigration was a boon to California. Not only did the Chinese provide labor for the state’s fast developing railroads and farms; they also tended to improve the neighborhoods where they settled. Moreover, there was no evidence of a disproportionate Chinese role in gambling and prostitution, while statistics showed that the Irish were more of a charge on the city’s hospital and almshouse than the Chinese.³ Nevertheless, a powerful coalition of “laboring men and artisans,” small businessmen and “Grangers” (who aimed to shift burden of taxation onto big business and the rich) rallied to Kearney’s cause. As one shrewd contemporary observer noted, part of his appeal was that he was attacking not just the Chinese but also the big steamship and railroad companies who profited from employing them, not to mention the corrupt two-party establishment that ran San Francisco politics:

Neither Democrats nor Republicans had done, nor seemed likely to do, anything to remove these evils or to improve the lot of the people. They were only seeking (so men

thought) places or the chance of jobs for themselves, and could always be bought by a powerful corporation. Working men must help themselves; there must be new methods and a new departure. . . . The old parties, though both denouncing Chinese immigration in every convention they held, and professing to legislate against it, had failed to check it . . . Everything, in short, was ripe for a demagogue. Fate was kind to the Californians in sending them a demagogue of a mean type, noisy and confident, but with neither political foresight nor constructive talent.⁴

Kearney may have lacked foresight and "constructive talent," but there is no gainsaying what he and his ilk were able to achieve. Beginning in 1875, with the Page Law prohibiting the immigration of Asian women for "lewd or immoral purposes," American legislators scarcely rested until Chinese immigration to the United States had been altogether stopped. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 suspended immigration of Chinese for ten years, introduced "certificates of registration" for departing workers (effectively re-entry permits), required Chinese officials to vet travelers from Asia, and for the first time in U.S. history created an offense of illegal immigration, with the possibility of deportation as a part of the penalty. The Foran Act (1885) banned "alien contract labor," which meant the practice of corporations hiring Chinese "coolies" and paying for their passage to the United States. Legislation passed in 1888 Act banned all Chinese from travel to the United States except "teachers, students, merchants, or travelers for pleasure." In all, between 1875 and 1924, more than a dozen pieces of legislation served to restrict and finally to end altogether Chinese immigration.⁵

The lesson of this episode is very clear: populists should be taken both seriously and literally.⁶ For all his coarseness and bombast, Denis Kearney and his allies effectively sealed the U.S. border along the Pacific Coast of the United States; indeed, one cartoon of the time depicted

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them constructing a wall across the San Francisco harbor. In the 1850s and 1860s, as many as 40 percent of all Chinese emigrants had travelled beyond Asia, though the numbers arriving in the United States had in fact been relatively small. (Between 1870 and 1880 a total of 138,941 Chinese immigrants came, just 4.3 percent of the total, a share dwarfed by the vast European exodus across the Atlantic in the same period.)⁷ What exclusion did was to ensure that Chinese immigration would not grow further, as it surely would have, but dwindled and then ceased.

The European empires, led by the British, had made globalization a reality by the late nineteenth century. With distance “annihilated” by the new technologies of steam transportation and the telegraph, international movements of goods, people, capital and information reached unprecedented volumes. Yet the networks that came into existence in the age of empire—in particular, the networks of migration that created with such speed a “Little Italy” and a “Chinatown” in so many cities around the world—had unforeseen effects on indigenous politics. We give the generic name “populism” to the backlash against free trade, free migration and international capital that was such a striking feature of American and European politics. But each country, and indeed each region, had its own distinctive populist flavors. If the Chinese were resented on the West Coast in the 1870s, the Irish were the objects of Eastern scorn, while German and French populists alike directed their fire against the Jews migrating westwards from eastern Europe. By the 1890s and 1900s, with the surge of Jewish emigration from the Russian Pale to the United States, anti-Semitism spread across the Atlantic. Paradoxically, opponents of immigration simultaneously disparaged the poverty of the newcomers and exaggerated the power of their supposed leaders. The Chinese in San Francisco were simultaneously bestially indigent and monopolists of the laundry business. The Jews in New York were at once verminous and the string-pulling masters of the global financial system.

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Where did the populism of the *fin de siècle* lead? It is a common misapprehension to think that the populist backlash of the late nineteenth century had something to do with the origins of World War One. The two are in fact almost wholly unrelated. The catalyst for populist movements on both sides of the Atlantic was the financial crisis of 1873. In terms of electoral success, the populist era was largely at an end by the middle of the 1890s. By that time, the various populist policies and preoccupations—protectionism, immigration restriction, bimetallism, anti-Semitism—had been absorbed wholly or partially by established political parties (most obviously, the Democrats in the United States and the Conservatives in Germany). The populists in their original form had not been imperialists—on the contrary, they had regarded empire as a project of the cosmopolitan elites they disdained, and correctly identified the intimate links between imperialism, free trade, free migration, free capital movement and the gold standard. The populists’ problem was not their diagnosis: in a globalized, networked world, inequality really was increasing because immigrant labor was eroding the wages of native-born workers, while the profits of the great concentrations of industrial and financial capital were flowing to a tiny elite. The problem was that the populists’ remedies seemed insufficient: like the tariffs imposed on imports, the exclusion of Chinese migrants had a barely perceptible impact on the lives of working Americans. Meanwhile, criticisms of the gold standard lost much of their force as huge new gold discoveries—notably in South Africa—eased the deflationary pressures in the world that had been propelling populism by driving down agricultural and other prices. By the turn of the century, the initiative had passed from populists to progressives, or Social Democrats as they were known in Europe, where organized labor was much more susceptible to the theories of Karl Marx and his disciples. The progressives’ remedies—which included progressive taxation, state pensions, increased regulation of the labor market, weakening of

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private monopolies, and public ownership of utilities—were ultimately more compelling and politically marketable than the populists’ had been. A second lesson of the late nineteenth century is that the half-life of populism is relatively short.

III

In terms of the arguments they made, the populist leaders of 2016 were essentially reincarnations of Denis Kearney. On immigration, Donald Trump directed his fire against Mexicans and Muslims, promising to build a wall and ban Muslim entry into the United States. On trade, he directed his fire against China. He accused the political establishments—Republican and Democratic alike—of both incompetence and corruption. He successfully exploited the economic resentments engendered by sixteen years of stagnation in median household real income, widening inequality and financial instability. He also tapped into the cultural resentments of the millions of Americans—by no means all of them white or working class—alienated by the virtue-signaling antics of liberal elites. There was, in short, nothing Donald Trump said in the course of a year and a half of campaigning that was not, in essence, an echo of the rhetoric of the post-1873 populists.

The novelty is not the content but the form that populism has taken. No doubt the significant jumps in support for populists of both the left and the right were due partly to the revolution of falling economic expectations described above.⁸ No doubt a cultural backlash against multiculturalism was complementing the revolt against the economics of globalization.⁹ But the decisive variable—without which the populists would have been much less successful—was the structural change in the public sphere that had occurred in the decade before 2016. To state the obvious: as recently as 1998 only about 2 per cent of the world’s population were

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online. Today the proportion is two in five. Google started life in a garage in Menlo Park, California, in 1998. Today it has the capacity to process more than 4.2 billion search requests every day. In 2005 YouTube was a start-up in a room above a pizzeria in San Mateo. Today it allows people to watch 8.8 billion videos a day. Facebook was dreamt up at Harvard just over a decade ago. Today it has more than 2 billion users who log on at least once a month. The scale of Facebook's success is especially staggering. Two-thirds of American adults are Facebook users. Just under half get their news from Facebook. It used to be said that there were six degrees of separation between any two individuals on the planet. On Facebook there are just 3.57 degrees of separation, meaning that any two of the 2 billion Facebook users can get in touch by taking fewer than four steps through the network. The world is indeed connected as never before. We are all friends of friends of friends of friends.

It is not merely the penetration of social networks that is remarkable. It is their addictiveness. Many people in developed countries are now online every waking hour of their lives. More than two fifths of Americans say they check their email, text and social media accounts constantly.¹⁰ Already in 2009, the average American had mobile-phone contact on 195 days of the year, text-messaging contact 125 days a year, email contact 72 days a year, instant messaging contact 55 days a year and contact via social networking websites 39 days a year.¹¹ By 2012 Americans were checking their cell-phones 150 times a day. By 2016, they were spending an average of five hours a day on their phones. More than 80 per cent of American smartphone users have Facebook's app installed on their phones. This explains why American users spend, on average, more than 50 minutes a day on Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger.

No theory of the populist revolt that swept Europe and the United States in the years after 2008 is complete if it fails to include this astounding transformation of the public sphere, which

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may legitimately be described as an all-out invasion of the private sphere. As Renee DiResta has argued, the digital crowd of the 2010s was fundamentally different from the crowd of the 1930s that had so fascinated and appalled Elias Canetti:

1. The crowd always wants to grow—and always can, unfettered by physical limitations.
2. Within the crowd there is equality—but higher levels of deception, suspicion, and manipulation.
3. The crowd loves density—and digital identities can be more closely packed.
4. The crowd needs a direction—and clickbait makes directions cheap to manufacture.¹²

Those who had pinned their hopes on the “wisdom” of crowds, fondly imagining a benign “crowd-sourced” politics, were in for a rude awakening. “In the presence of social influence,” as two scholars of networks have observed, “people’s actions become dependent on one another, shattering the fundamental assumption behind the wisdom of crowds. When crowds follow their interdependence, they can be leveraged to spread information to the masses, even if it’s incorrect.”¹³ I have argued elsewhere that network science should have made it easy to predict the disruptive consequences of creating vast social networks. But the architects of the network platforms were either too naïve—sincerely believing that they were building a “global community”—or too greedy—as they raked in billions in advertising revenues from sources too numerous to scrutinize—to foresee these.¹⁴

Viewed from the vantage point of 2017, the U.S. presidential election of 2008 seems to have happened in the distant past. John McCain, the defeated Republican candidate, had just 4,492 Twitter followers and 625,000 Facebook friends. He admitted that he had no email account and did not use the Internet.¹⁵ He was overwhelmed not only by a financial crisis for which his

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own party was bound to be blamed, but also by the first socially networked campaign. Barack Obama had four times as many Facebook friends as McCain and 26 times as many Twitter followers. His website (www.barackobama.com) was the work of Chris Hughes, a co-founder of Facebook, and proved to be a vital engine not just for messaging but also for fundraising. Liberal elites on both coasts gloated over McCain’s defeat: an elderly, white veteran with years of experience in Washington laid low by a young, cool, African-American “community organizer” and one-term senator. Only a few noted two disquieting features of the contest. First, homophily in social networks seemed to result in polarization when politics became the topic of discussion, with individuals’ views becoming more extreme in the “echo chamber” of shared bias.¹⁶ Second—though this was not formally demonstrated until the 2010 mid-term elections to Congress—Facebook was a highly effective tool for political mobilization, especially when used to target local non-digital networks.¹⁷

The implications were not lost on Dominic Cummings, the architect of the “Vote Leave” victory in the 2016 referendum on British membership of the European Union. Almost uniquely in the British political class, Cummings had long been interested not only in history, which he had studied at Oxford, but also in complexity and networks. With only a limited budget (£10 million) and limited time (ten months), Cummings had to fight not only “decision makers at the apex of centralized hierarchies,” who nearly all opposed “Brexit,” but also the undisciplined politicians on his own side. The odds were stacked against Leave. Amongst the keys to its narrow victory, Cummings argued, were “nearly a billion targeted digital adverts,” experimental polling, a data science team of “extremely smart physicists” and a “baseball bat marked ‘Turkey/NHS/£350 million’”—an allusion to the largely untruthful slogans that “experiments had shown were most effective” in persuading people to vote Leave. For Cummings, Brexit was

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not a victory for the populist right at all, as his campaign had deliberately combined right-wing and left-elements (the threat of more Muslim immigrants if Turkey joined the EU, the promise of more money for the National Health Service if Britain left). As David Goodhart had pointed out years before, opposition to immigration and support for the welfare state were in fact complementary positions.¹⁸ Rather, Brexit was a victory for the healthy and effective system” of “the English common law[, which] allows constant and rapid error-correction” over “unhealthy and ineffective systems like the EU and modern Whitehall departments ... [which] are extremely centralised and hierarchical,” and therefore incapable of effective problem-solving.¹⁹ Brexit, in short, was a victory for a network—and network science—over the hierarchy of the British establishment. While David Cameron and George Osborne had conducted a conventional campaign, concentrating all their fire on the economic risks of leaving the EU, Cummings had used his “Voter Intention Collection System” (VICS) and Facebook to communicate the viral message that it was worth paying some economic price to “take back control.” As Cummings recalled, “We ran many different versions of ads, tested them, dropped the less effective and reinforced the most effective in a constant iterative process.”²⁰ It has been suggested that these techniques were made available to Cummings by the American hedge fund manager Robert Mercer’s data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica.²¹

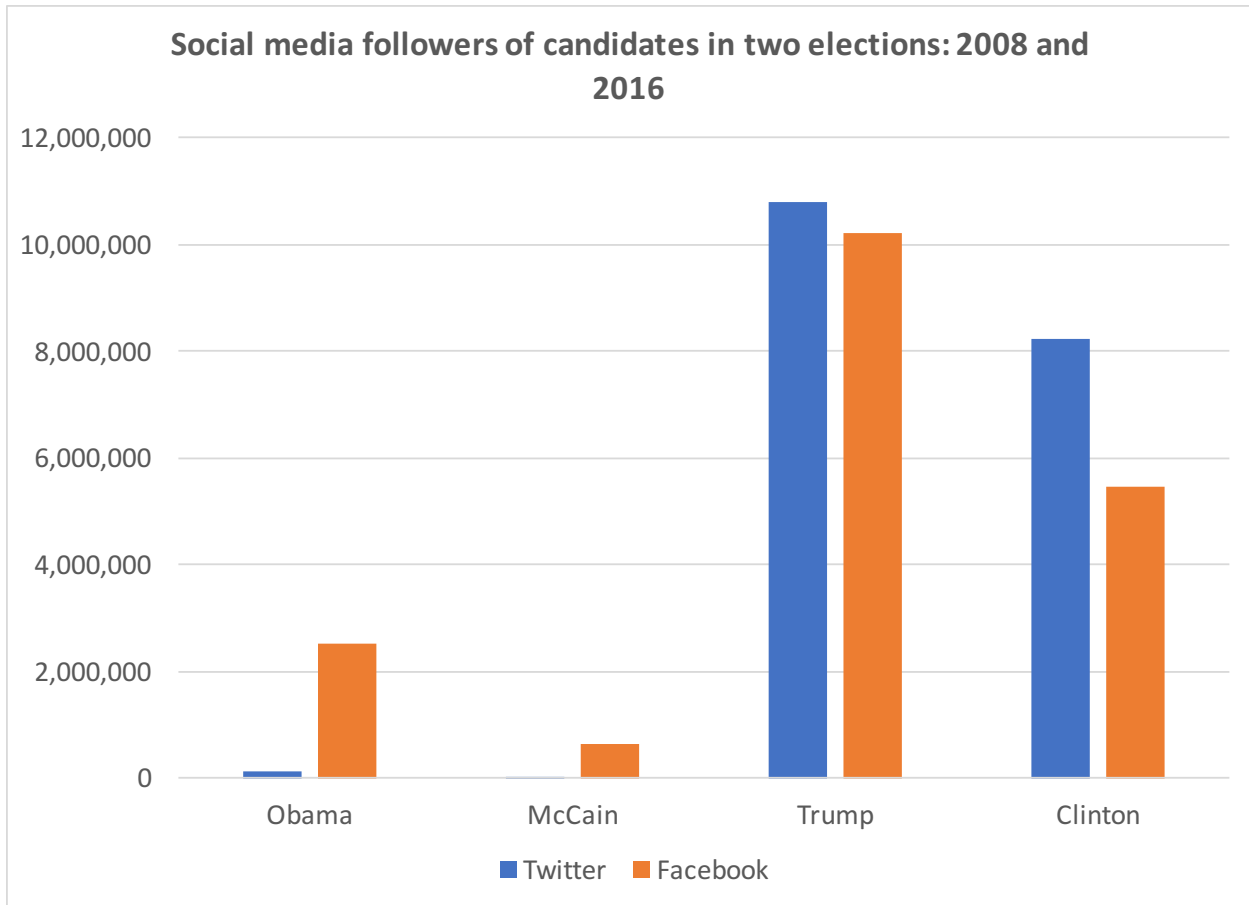
IV

Brexit was thus a dress rehearsal for the U.S. presidential election of 2016. As in Britain, so in the United States, the political establishment took it for granted that the old ways would suffice. Despite the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars on conventional advertising, the campaigns of Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton struggled to establish any connection with large

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sections of their parties’ supporters. In the early months of 2016, it was a disreputable New York real estate magnate and an elderly Vermont socialist who connected. Once again, relatively unstructured networks challenged old-fashioned hierarchies: not merely the established parties that political scientists said “decided” such contests, but also the dynasties—Bush and Clinton—that had been so politically dominant since the 1980s. Significantly, both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders campaigned as outsiders, expressing hostility to the Washington hierarchy and articulating ideologies—nativism, protectionism and socialism—long considered beyond the pale of American democracy. With Sanders thwarted by a system of “super-delegates” designed to maximize elite control of the Democratic party, the stage was set for a cathartic confrontation between Clinton—the personification of the established political hierarchy—and Trump. The reason that the necessary number of voters took him seriously, if not literally, was that Trump’s scale-free network, based on a combination of self-organization and viral marketing, beat Clinton’s hierarchically organized but over-complicated campaign. It was not that the Clinton campaign lacked networks. It suffered almost from a surfeit of them. There was a “network of donors, friends, allies, and advisers”—a “monster fund-raising network”—dating back to her husband’s heyday. There was “Ready for Hillary,” which built grassroots enthusiasm ... [and] gave Clinton a network across the states.”²² There was also “vast network of unpaid advisers and professional skeptics,” policy wonks with the degrees from Yale Law School, busily churning out bullet points of minimal electoral appeal.²³ Yet Clinton’s campaign manager Robby Mook shut down “Ready for Hillary” and axed locally based state directors. Although the senior political operatives sent to plug gaps in the states were nicknamed “ubers,” this exaggerated the overall effectiveness of the campaign.²⁴ Lost in all the complexity was the simple reality that the candidate was connecting with key voters far less effectively than her most dangerous rival.

That social media played a crucial role in the 2016 election now seems clear, even if television remained more important for the average voter.²⁵ Roughly half of Americans used Facebook and other social media sites to get news on the subject, with usage especially high amongst voters under 50.²⁶ And around one-third of social media users commented, discussed or posted on the subject of politics, despite a widespread view that social media discussions were less civil than those in other venues.²⁷ The crucial point, however, was that in the final phase of the election (after the party conventions) one candidate had a significantly greater presence on social media than the other. Trump had 32 percent more Twitter followers than Clinton and 87 per cent more supporters on Facebook.²⁸ A few days before the election Trump had 12 million Facebook “Likes,” 4 million more than Clinton.²⁹ Trump also dominated Clinton by the more important Facebook measure of “interest”—and he did so in every single state. (People in Mississippi were nearly 12 times more interested in Trump than in Clinton, but even in New York people found him three times more interesting than her.) The crucial swing states in the Midwest all signaled their intentions clearly through Facebook. Twitter data told a similar story. From May 11 to May 31, 2016, Trump’s posts on Twitter were retweeted almost 6,000 times on average while Clinton’s tweets were retweeted only 1,500 times.³⁰ The Trump campaign also made effective use of YouTube, for example for its final campaign attack ad directed against the global elite: Clinton, Soros, Goldman Sachs.³¹ Above all, the Trump campaign, like the British Vote Leave campaign, made full use of Facebook’s ad-testing capability, trying tens of thousands of variants to establish what worked best on the voters being targeted.³²



Social media followers of the leading candidates in two presidential elections, 2008 and 2016.

This was a richly ironic state of affairs, as from an early stage Silicon Valley had aligned itself with Clinton. Google employees gave \$1.3 million to her campaign, compared with just \$26,000 to Trump's. Eric Schmidt's start-up Groundwork provided data support for Mrs. Clinton's campaign.³³ Mark Zuckerberg faced an internal revolt when Trump posted his call for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" on Facebook, and the technology blog Gizmodo alleged that Facebook was manipulating trending topics to limit Trump's prominence.³⁴ Zuckerberg himself made no secret of his personal disdain for Trump's views.³⁵ Yet the networks he and Schmidt had done so much to build were now being used to promote ideas both men and their co-workers found abhorrent, as well as to help the Trump

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campaign raise money.³⁶ And even if Google and Facebook had somehow been able to ban Trump, they would merely have diverted more traffic to other networks, such as the anonymous message boards of 4Chan and 8Chan, the birthplace of the “alt-right” movement. Alt-right trolls such as Matt Braynard, Charles Johnson and the British-born Breitbart writer Milo Yiannopoulos later boasted that they and their network had propelled Donald Trump into office by “shitposting” memes like the cartoon frog, Pepe, and the insult “cuck” (short for cuckold).³⁷ Certainly, there was close coordination between the Trump campaign and the alt-right network: a team in Trump Tower used TheDonald subreddit as a conduit between 4Chan and the mainstream web. It was through these channels that Clinton was smeared as the “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever” and her campaign manager accused of involvement in a non-existent pedophile ring centered around a Washington pizzeria.³⁸ There continues to be heated debate about how big a role Cambridge Analytica played in Trump’s victory.³⁹ Probably its “psychographic” profiling of individual voters was less important than its chief executive Alexander Nix implied.⁴⁰ What is hard to dispute is that the Trump campaign’s involvement with the alt-right brought anti-Semitism back into American politics in a way not seen since the 1930s.⁴¹ That, however, was not why Trump won.

Perhaps the most painful aspect of the 2016 election for the masters of Silicon Valley was the way their networks were used to disseminate untrue stories—the “fake news” that Trump repeatedly complained about, even while spreading myriad untruths of his own. In September Facebook relayed the bogus story that Trump had been endorsed by Pope.⁴² In November Google inadvertently gave top placement to a false claim that Trump had won the popular vote.⁴³ This also helped Trump. Of the known fake news stories that appeared in the three months before the election, the anti-Trump stories were shared on Facebook 8 million times; the anti-

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Clinton stories 30 million times.⁴⁴ Nearly a quarter of the links tweeted by a sample of 140,000 Michigan-based users during the ten days prior to November 11 were to fake news stories.⁴⁵

V

The 2016 election was one of the closest in American history—and closer than the Brexit referendum result, too. If fewer than 39,000 voters in three swing states (Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin) had cast their ballots for Clinton rather than Trump, she would have won the Electoral College as well as the popular vote. Historians will debate endlessly which of an infinite number of variables was the decisive one, as if all other things would have remained equal if just one variable had been changed.

We now know that before (and after) the election, Russian trolls with bogus identities bought more than 3,000 Facebook ads. Even though only \$100,000 (£75,000) was spent, the ads could have been seen, by Facebook’s own admission, by as many as 126 million people—compared with 139 million who voted. Moreover, the Russians also used Facebook Events to organize phony political protests, including an anti-immigrant rally in a small Idaho town known for welcoming refugees. It was to be “hosted” by “SecuredBorders,” a Facebook group exposed in March as a Russian front. Twitter was used in a similar way. In response to congressional investigations, the company has admitted that it had identified about 200 accounts linked to Russia, and that the Kremlin-backed news site RT had spent a quarter of a million dollars on Twitter ads last year. It seems too much to conclude that Russian use of social media decided the election. However, we probably can conclude that social media decided the election. It seems that the Russians were aiming more to widen U.S. political divisions than to get Trump elected. The Trump campaign was aiming to get its man elected—and it spent far more than \$100,000 on

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Facebook. About \$90 million went on social media, most of it on Facebook. Shortly after the election, Brad Parscale, the Trump campaign’s digital director, said: “Facebook and Twitter were the reason we won this thing.” He may well be right. If the social media platforms had not existed, Trump would have been forced to conduct a more conventional campaign, in which case the greater financial resources of his opponent—who outspent him by more than two to one—would surely have been decisive.

One puzzle remains. An electoral map of the United States shows that Trump won “Trumpland”—the counties he won account for 85 per cent of the U.S. land surface—while Clinton won what might be called the Hillary Archipelago. Her support was heavily concentrated in the major metropolitan areas of the two coasts, whereas his was spread across the heartland of provincial cities, towns and rural communities. This suggests a paradox: Clinton ought to have had an advantage in a networked election, in that her supporters were more densely concentrated, as well as younger. There was a similar paradox in the case of Brexit: victory was delivered to the anti-EU campaign by older voters, predominantly located in the English and Welsh “shires,” not in the big cities. If social networks were the key to the politics of populism, why were groups less likely to be on Facebook—elderly country-dwellers—more likely to vote populist?⁴⁶ There is, however, a possible explanation. Social media were undoubtedly used more effectively by Cummings and his counterpart in the Trump campaign, Stephen K. Bannon, than by their opponents. But the populist campaigns would not have been successful if the memes they disseminated had not been spread further in the non-electronic forums where ordinary people meet, and where friendships are real rather than (as on Facebook) fake: pubs and bars. And this, in turn, would not have happened if those memes had not resonated.

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In that sense, the content of the populist message mattered, just as it had mattered in the 1870s. My point is not that content did not matter, but simply that it would not have sufficed to deliver victory to either Brexit or Trump without the new forms made possible by the rise of the network platforms. In that sense, the correct lesson to be learned from history is that changes in the structure of the public sphere (a phrase first used by Jürgen Habermas in his seminal study of eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois culture) have been undervalued by modern political commentators too eager to draw misleading analogies with the mid twentieth century. An interesting question is to what extent the public sphere created by today’s network platforms resembles the famously unregulated, scurrilous and often mendacious press of the 1870s and 1880s. Perhaps Denis Kearney’s populism also depended for its success on the proliferation of fake news. But that is a subject for another paper.

Notes [full titles to come]

¹ Ferguson, “Populism as a Backlash against Globalization.”

² United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Special Committee*, iv-viii.

³ Gibson, *Chinese in America*, 281-373.

⁴ Bryce, “Kearneyism,” vol. II, pp. 385-406.

⁵ See Lee, *At America’s Gates*, ch. 1.

⁶ Salena Zito, “Taking Trump Seriously, Not Literally,” *Atlantic*, September 23, 2016.

⁷ Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 25.

⁸ Funke et al., “Going to Extremes.”

⁹ Inglehart and Norris, “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism.”

¹⁰ Deena Shanker, "Social Media are Driving Americans Insane," *Bloomberg*, February 23, 2017.

¹¹ Hampton, Sessions, Her, and Rainie, "Social Isolation and New Technology."

¹² Renee DiResta, "Crowds and Technology," RibbonFarm, September 15, 2016: <http://www.ribbonfarm.com/2016/09/15/crowds-and-technology/>.

¹³ Brinton and Chiang, *Power of Networks*, 207.

¹⁴ Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower*.

¹⁵ "Mobilising Voters Through Social Media in the U.S., Taiwan and Hong Kong," Bauhinia, August 15, 2016.

¹⁶ Pentland, *Social Physics*, 50f.

¹⁷ Bond et al., "61-million-person Experiment."

¹⁸ Goodhart, *Road to Somewhere*.

¹⁹ Dominic Cummings, "How the Brexit Referendum Was Won," *Spectator*, January 9, 2017.

²⁰ Dominic Cummings, "On the Referendum #20: The Campaign, Physics and Data Science," Oct. 29, 2016: <https://dominiccummings.wordpress.com/2016/10/29/on-the-referendum-20-the-campaign-physics-and-data-science-vote-leaves-voter-intention-collection-system-vics-now-available-for-all/>.

²¹ Carole Cadwalladr, "Revealed: How U.S. Billionaire Helped to Back Brexit," *Guardian*, February 25, 2017.

²² Allen and Parnes, *Shattered*, 256-257, 566-569, 599-601, 804-806.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2902-2904.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3261-3273, 3281-3285, 3291-3301.

²⁵ Allcott and Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News."

²⁶ Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin and Maeve Duggan, "Social Media Update 2016," Pew Research Center, November 11, 2016. See Mostafa M. El-Bermawy, "Your Filter Bubble is Destroying Democracy," *Wired*, November 18, 2016.

²⁷ Maeve Duggan and Aaron Smith, "The Political Environment on Social Media," Pew Research Center, October 25, 2016.

²⁸ "Mobilising Voters Through Social Media in the U.S., Taiwan and Hong Kong," Bauhinia, August 15, 2016.

²⁹ Erin Pettigrew, "How Facebook Saw Trump Coming When No One Else Did," *Medium*, November 9, 2016.

³⁰ Pew Research Center, "Election Campaign 2016: Campaigns as a Direct Source of News," July 18, 2016, 15.

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