

CHAPTER SIX

WE ARE ALL DYING

Is it possible that in their voluntary communication and expression, in their blogging and social media practices, people are contributing to instead of contesting repressive forces?

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*

*Silicon Valley calculates with, and not against, the Apocalypse.
Its ever-implicit slogan is: 'Bring it on'*

Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss*

Humanity rocks!

Elon Musk to Sam Harris, [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com)

I.

'I'm going to kill all Muslims,' he shouted, as almost a dozen worshippers and pedestrians lay injured and, in one case, dead. Almost as quickly, he retreated to a more grimly realistic declaration: 'I did my bit.'

Darren Osborne killed one Muslim, fifty-one-year-old Makram Ali. But he wanted to kill them all. He was psychologically fuelled for genocide.

He had rented a van and driven it to Finsbury Park Mosque, in a working-class north London community. He arrived at quarter past midnight, on 19 June 2017, driving up Seven Sisters Road without much of a plan other than to kill. The night before, he had bragged in a pub that he was a 'soldier', and that he was going to 'kill Muslims'. It is unclear what he would have done, had he not happened on a group of Muslims who had just performed night-time prayers and were attending to a man who had collapsed at a bus stop.

Like other 'lone wolf' attacks that had taken place over the previous two years, this one was chaotic, low-tech, disorganized. He simply drove up the road, ploughing the van into the crowd. When the van struck, he was driving at 16 mph. In the moment of his supposed triumph, he was heard saying, 'kill me'.

Finsbury Park Mosque is a hate symbol for the British far right. Indeed, on the day after the attack, British fascist Tommy Robinson called it a 'revenge attack', blaming the mosque for producing terrorists.

In fact, the mosque hadn't seen a jihadist cadre for almost fifteen years, when the leadership of the Islamist preacher Abu Hamza was ousted. Even if Osborne was the 'avenger' that he desperately wanted to be, no one at the mosque, or huddled at a bus stop outside it, could have given him anything to avenge. Nonetheless, Robinson's claim echoed Osborne's own incoherent self-justification, that the attack was revenge for an earlier massacre by jihadist militants on London Bridge.

It had taken only weeks for an unemployed man living in Wales to become an ideologically obsessed murderer. According to his relatives and estranged partner, Osborne had never before exhibited any racism. He had been troubled, alcoholic, violent, abusive, depressed - he had even attempted suicide, and made a failed attempt to get himself committed. In fact, according to a neighbour, he had always been a 'complete cunt', but never a racist. He was barely politically aware. He wouldn't even know who the Prime Minister was, according to his sister.

But then Osborne started consuming content made by fascist group Britain First, and far-right activist Tommy Robinson, chugging it like antidepressants. From alcoholism and drug dependency, he went straight to the 'red pill'.⁴ Only then was all of this misery politically weaponized.

Osborne had, a few weeks before the attack, seen a BBC docudrama about a child-grooming scandal in the northern English town of Rochdale. Like most such scandals, it involved middle-aged men, some hitherto respected, taking advantage of underage girls. The girls were often particularly vulnerable because of their class, or because they were in care or in foster homes. In this case, the men were Muslim and the girls were white. And for Osborne, their being Muslim must explain their evil. Indeed, it was as if he had concluded that Islam explained all evil: a universal theodicy.

Nor was Osborne arriving at this conclusion in isolation. In Britain in 2018, Islam had long been a punching bag for politicians and the

⁴ The 'red pill' is a metaphor used by right-wing activists for the process of ideological conversion. Taken from the movie *The Matrix*, it ostensibly entails making people aware of harsh, painful realities. As in the movie, however, the real promise of the red pill is that it is both an escape from a depressing life and the beginning of an adventure.

press, the all-purpose bogey-scapegoat comparable only to those other anti-nationals, immigrants. The psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni once remarked on the surprising numbers of Europeans who, having never been to the colonies or seen a colonial subject, dreamed of them. The same could be said of many Britons who had encountered Islam only as a manifestation of their own unconscious. The propaganda of Twitter Nazis and YouTube fascists tuned into this dreamwork and turned the volume up by several orders of magnitude. Tellingly, on the day after the murder outside Finsbury Park Mosque, Tommy Robinson took advantage of an ITV platform to say that the Quran was an incitement to violence. For Robinson, having never demonstrated any expertise on the Quran, this too was dreamwork.

It is not difficult to imagine the compensatory, antidepressant effects of consuming such racist propaganda. It puts a name to an otherwise nameless misery and rage. It identifies a specific evil, points to a remedy and a community to which one might belong. It tells its audience – often white men younger than Osborne – that their seething sense of resentment is rational and justified. And it is exciting, and briefly empowering. The eagerness with which the ‘red pill’ is swallowed, and cult figures made of manipulative fascists like Tommy Robinson, is not in that sense hard to explain. Redpilling is, for many of its users, potent self-medication, better than any combination of cognitive behavioural therapy and prescription drugs.

To that extent, fascist propaganda works well on the Twittering Machine, which, among the many things it is, is a pharmacological device. Its economic model presupposes a surplus of misery which, Rumpelstiltskin-like, it spins into gold. As endless correct but point-missing liberal critiques maintain, the social industry does not deal in truth. Of course it doesn’t; it deals in addictive substances, which it administers to the melancholic.

II.

What are the politics of the simulacrum? In cyberspace, the great ‘consensual hallucination’ as William Gibson called it, what

we experience as social and political reality is increasingly a graphic representation of digital writing. Whoever masters the rapidly evolving idioms of this system of writing has a share in the production of virtual reality.

Fascists have proven to be avid early adopters of new technologies. They were among the first to use email in order to organize without being disrupted by the authorities. A 1993 march by German neo-Nazis in commemoration of Rudolf Hess eluded an official ban by using email communication. Throughout the early 1990s, far-right, Holocaust-denying groups used bulletin board systems and, later, the emerging ecology of 'alt' areas within Usenet.

This colonization of new technologies was not just an imperative for such groups, weakly rooted, their supporters scattered, unlikely to gain sympathetic coverage without subterfuge as to their politics. It was a far-sighted attempt to build a space for white-supremacist and Nazi ideologies within the new mediascape almost before anyone noticed. For example, Stormfront, a hub of far-right activity, was launched by neo-Nazi and former grand wizard of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan, Don Black. He learned his computing skills while in prison for attempting a coup in the Dominican Republic. What began in the early 1990s as a small bulletin board was relaunched as a website in 1996, then evolved into a web forum with roughly 300,000 users. Its ratings on Alexa, the website ranking service, were comparable to commercial media outlets. This is despite the fact that the forum is outmoded in its features and appearance, having changed little since 2001.

In the subsequent settling of the platforms, the far right has arguably been most successful with YouTube. Alt-right broadcasters have been 'monetizing' like microcelebrities, and 'influencing' like beauty bloggers. Fascists like Richard B. Spencer, Stefan Molyneux and Tommy Robinson are celebrities of the 'intellectual dark web', helped along by outriders such as the libertarian Joe Rogan and conservative Dave Rubin – and, often enough, broadcast media.

And they don't merely leverage the techniques of microcelebrity and 'influencing'. They benefit from specific features of the YouTube business model. Journalist Paul Lewis and academic Zeynep Tufekci have each

gone down the rabbit hole of YouTube's 'up next' recommendations algorithm. The algorithm is there to keep users glued to the screen with content likely to be addictive. As with the other social industry platforms, the priority is time on device or, in the case of YouTube, 'watch time'. Each found that no matter the viewing history of the dummy accounts they used, the algorithms kept pointing them progressively towards more 'extreme' content: from Trump to neo-Nazis, from Hillary Clinton to 9/11 Truth.

But what is so addictive about 'extreme' content? Part of the answer is that much of what is characterized as extreme in this context is conspiracy infotainment: for example, in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the algorithms were promoting anti-Clinton conspiracy stories. When so many distrust the news, and find it frustrating and confusing, infotainment seems to be less 'hard work'. It offers what can feel like critical thinking in a recognizably digestible and pleasurable way. In the face of official agnotology – the practice of deliberately producing mass ignorance on major issues – it can feel empowering. But it may also be that the algorithms pick up on dark yearnings simmering below the supposedly consensual surface of politics.

So not only do far-right YouTubers network, collaborate and signal-boost one another's brands, driving their collective content up the viewing charts. Not only are they careful enough to avoid trigger words likely to be caught by an anti-hate speech algorithm. They can expect the platform to promote them precisely because of how riveting their content is supposed, by the algorithms, to be. Zeynep Tufekci argues that 'YouTube may be one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century'.

'In the old days', wrote Irish academic John Naughton, 'if you wanted to stage a coup, the first thing to do was to capture the TV station. Nowadays all you have to do is to "weaponize" YouTube.' A coup, of course, is a very twentieth-century technology. And one which, as yet, would be beyond the wherewithal of the networked far right. Nonetheless, it would be foolish to discount the aggregate impact of propaganda. Like advertising, it has to work on someone, otherwise the industry would die. YouTube's liberal critics have a point when they

underline the reality-bending effects of this kind of simulacrum. As former Google engineer Guillaume Chaslot put it, YouTube 'looks like reality, but it is distorted to make you spend more time online'.

From Twitter revolutions to YouTube coups, technological determinism is attractive because of the way it simplifies problems. But if we succumb to the lure, we miss the real story. The obvious question is, why should neo-Nazi material, or conspiracist infotainment, be so riveting? When pundits complain of 'radicalization', the assumption appears to be that it is sufficient to be exposed to far-right material to be conveyed along an escalator belt towards 'extremism'. Yet, of course, most of the pundits who have viewed this material don't claim to have been 'radicalized' by it. And YouTube isn't deliberately promoting an agenda. Rather, the platforms, by their nature, are magnetically drawn to drama, whether political or personal. The user becomes, in China Miéville's term, a 'dramaphage'.

The content agnosticism of computational capitalism has political valences, but the algorithm's effects go well beyond political content. The artist James Bridle has written of the surprisingly outré and noir YouTube content for kids, which involves erotic or violent content: Peppa Pig eating her daddy or drinking bleach, for example. This material was created to meet a demand identified by the algorithms – in other words, it reflected data coming from users: searches, likes, clicks and watch time. In this respect, it was not unlike the algorithm-driven merchandise of previous years: t-shirts with such slogans as 'Keep Calm and Rape a Lot', 'Kiss Me I'm Abusive' and 'I Heart Boiling Girls'. And platform behaviour obeys what the ethnographer Jeffrey Juris calls a 'logic of aggregation'. It herds users together in temporary groupings based on this data. It establishes correlations over whole data populations between certain types of content and certain behaviours: stimulus and response. It works only because of the response. There has to be something in some viewers waiting to be switched on. The algorithms, by responding to actual behaviour, are picking up on user desires, which may not even be known to the user. They are digitalizing the unconscious.

The platforms thus listen intently to our desires, as we confess them, and give them a numerical value. In the mathematical language

of informatics, collective wants can be manipulated, engineered and connected to a solution. And new technologies have only been as successful as they have been by positioning themselves as magical solutions. Not just to individual dilemmas, but to the bigger crises and dysfunctions of late capitalism. If mass media is a one-way information monopoly, turn to the feed, the blog, the podcast. If the news fails, turn to citizen journalism for 'unfiltered' news. If you're underemployed, bid for jobs on TaskRabbit. If you've got little money but own a car, use it to make some spare money on the side. If you're undervalued in life, bid for a share in microcelebrity. If politicians let you down, hold them to account on Twitter. If you suffer from a nameless hunger, keep scrolling. The business model of the platforms presupposes not just the average share of individual misery but a society reliably in crisis.

III.

Why does the far right thrive on YouTube? Why, by the same token, does Donald Trump win Twitter? Why is it that none of his clever online interlocutors, though often more knowledgeable than he is, ever lay a glove on him? What about the Twittering Machine is so congenial to Trump's performance art? Isn't trumping the enemy half the pleasure of being on the machine? We should begin to take seriously the possibility that something about the social industry is either incipiently fascistic, or particularly conducive to incipient fascism.

The 'networked individualism' of the internet is both social and a machine. It binds social interactions to protocol. Information, far from wanting to be free, as Californian folk wisdom has it, desires control. It wants hierarchy and infallible instruction: the smack of firm leadership. How the protocols are designed reflects social and cultural values, in a way that is obscure to users. And these values have a distinctly antisocial thrust. Alice Marwick, an academic and former Microsoft researcher, has shown that the culture of the Northern California tech scene where the platforms are based is deeply committed to competition, hierarchy and social status. The most admired, cult-like figures among the largely affluent white men who predominate in the scene, are successful businessmen.

In the 1990s, when the net was being built, the purview of Silicon Valley was essentially that of the Republican right-winger, Newt Gingrich. Gingrich lobbied hard for an internet run along 'free market' lines. The aim was that it would result in innovation driven by start-ups, tech geeks and bold venture-capitalist pioneers, and the techno-idealists lapped it up. So did the Clinton White House, an early evangelist for the globalization of the net. In practice, predictably, it resulted in an internet dominated by tech giants and Wall Street. When Marwick says that social media tools 'materialize' neo-liberal ideology, therefore, she's describing the way in which the tech teaches users to think of themselves as the kinds of 'entrepreneurs' that tech geeks and Silicon Valley businessmen idealize. The Twittering Machine, organized as a competitive like-hunt, status-hungry and celebrity-obsessed, ideally suited to marketing and commerce, is the technical version of a social machine that preceded it: a stock market of status. This is one of the things that cultural critic Jonathan Beller is getting at when he calls the machinery of computational capital 'formations of violence'. It is the abstract technical expression of unequal relationships produced by complex histories of political violence: racism and riots, class struggles and countercultures, mobsters and McCarthyism. This violence was coded into the machine; presupposed by it.

The machinery produces, industrially, a social life bent around the imperatives of states and markets. As a technology, it is almost custom-designed for a post-democratic age, for the rule of technocracy and cruelty. To that extent, it builds on existing patterns. The 'if . . . then' logic of algorithms is not in itself a new machinery. It is used all the time in policymaking, often without the aid of computing: if the passenger has been to x country, then a further search will be carried out; if the applicant has savings, then unemployment benefits will be docked. Many forms of algorithmic control are too complex, thus far, to be handled entirely by machine: border controls and immigration law, for example. However, what big data enables is an extension and depth of control-by-protocol that has never before been seen. It enables the corporate clients of the platforms to algorithmically size up their targets and customize each user's experience. It permits governments who use the data to scale

their bureaucratic action down to the most minute level of analysis, thus improving their efficiency in everything from traffic control to aerial bombardment.

Post-democracy was well advanced in most of Europe and North America well before the digital platforms appeared. As the political scientist Colin Crouch defines it, a post-democratic society is one that retains the institutions of mass democracy, but where these have negligible effects on policymaking. It reduces elections to a spectacle of stage-managed debates and poll-driven simulations of 'voter demand'. Whereas mass democracy means that popular desires and interests have to be taken seriously, post-democracies are in the business of population management. Like cybernetic systems, post-democracies are far less interested in consent than in moderating the behaviour of elements within the system. Like the algorithmic protocols of the digital platforms, they hit below the intellect, working underneath the surface of persuasion, building realities into our everyday experience. It doesn't negotiate with our wants, it shapes what we are capable of wanting. And, as the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta once put it, 'everything depends on what the people are capable of wanting.'

The underground persuasion of reality-shaping is what big tech does really well. It is quite different from what used to be called hegemony. Hegemony is a strategy of obtaining leadership of a broad civil society coalition to achieve political goals. It means building alliances with other groups by taking their interests and desires seriously, rather than just coercing them. It means offering moral leadership rather than simply material incentives. At their most successful, ruling groups are able to explain their own interests in terms of an 'historic mission' for the whole society. In the Cold War era, the struggle against communism was this sort of mission. While it surveilled and repressed communists, left-wing trade unionists and radical civil-rights activists, it also won broad popular consent.

What the platforms have done is far more subterranean. The Twittering Machine proposes nothing, declares nothing good or bad, but works on the infrastructures of everyday life. It might be called a sub-hegemonic practice.

IV.

This is clearly an emerging form of techno-political regime. And it is not the participatory online democracy, or agora, that has been vaunted. But nor is it yet clear what that regime will look like in ten or twenty years' time.

As John Naughton has written, comparing the internet with the printing press, faced with world-changing technologies we always tend to overstate the short-term consequences and underestimate the long-term consequences. How could, for example, the early book readers have known that the technologies they wielded would inspire the Reformation, let alone forming an indispensable basis for the modern industrial nation-state? The spontaneous assumption might instead have been that the Catholic Church would be empowered. The first mass market created by print was in standardized indulgences.

The values that have shaped the creation of the Twittering Machine don't necessarily determine its destiny. Skinner's fantasy of a utopia without conflict or human authority broke down. The early hope of cybernetics, to design a system of control by means of organizing communication, turned into its opposite. It helped create, as Justin Joque put it, 'a globally networked system so complex that no known model could ever describe it, let alone regulate it'. And by the same logic, the neo-liberal values that aligned Silicon Valley bosses with the Obama White House are not necessarily the same as the real ideological effects of the machine. We might say that if the machine has its conscious uses, it also has an unconscious. We feign omniscience at our peril. One of the pleasures of the 'backlash' style is to be a Cassandra, seeing it all so clearly, yet so impotently. 'I told you so' is a dubious consolation. What is more, hasty denunciations risk leaving us with the misapprehension of knowing what we've got ourselves into, while injecting an unhelpful nastiness, condescension and paranoia into the conversation. There has been a bonfire of digital vanities, bromides stacked upon platitudes, 'digital democracy', 'the networked citizen', 'Twitter revolutionaries' all going up in smoke. We, who stand in its glare, should be sceptical of provisional analyses being offered with too much certainty.

We should nonetheless take seriously the fascist potential of the social industry, or its potential to intensify and accelerate proto-fascist tendencies already at work. The forms of fascism that we see in the twenty-first century may not resemble those of the past. The fascist movements of the interwar period were rooted in imperialist ideologies, popular militarism, paramilitary organizations and a world system run by colonial empires and menaced by socialist revolution. These circumstances will not return. The colonies are dead, most armies are professional and there isn't an abundance of popular organization of any kind, let alone paramilitary organization. Nonetheless, liberal capitalism shows itself to be vulnerable, crisis-ridden and open to challenge by the racist, nationalist far right. And what, in such circumstances, are the cultural valences of the social industry that produces so much of our social life now? Which tendencies would it select for, and which would it mute?

There is something about the way in which we interact on the platforms which, whatever else it does, magnifies our mobbishness, our demand for conformity, our sadism, our crankish preoccupation with being right on all subjects. Ironically, this despotic rectitude is allied with exactly the kind of 'swarm' propensities that were once idealized as the basis for a new kind of grass-roots power. The 'swarm', which began as a metaphor for conscientious citizens holding power to account, might well become a metaphor for the twenty-first century version of fascist street gangs.

The mistake would be to see this as someone else's problem, a problem affecting only obvious villains like trolls, hackers and alt-right bullies. Take, instead, something as simple and everyday as the critique-by-quote tweet. Holding aloft a specimen of a really degenerate opinion, we mock it for having the quality of being an opinion, which is that it gets something wrong. Inviting others to join in, we treat disagreement, not as constitutive of any society, but as malevolence, idiocy or the cry of the loser. It is to be settled by group humiliation, sudden orchestrations of mob fury, the stiletto-stab of sadism. This is the context in which, Deborah Baum argues, it's suddenly as if being wrong is the most intolerable thing in the world and being right is almost like a

human right. The troll, the witch-hunter, the celebrity, the snowflake who can't stand being disagreed with: this is all of us, every day. We are not all so, equally, but insofar as we are on the platforms, we are all involved.

We are denizens, not citizens, of a machine that keeps us addicted, amid endless boring scrolling, with sudden volatile rages, excitements, adrenaline rushes of hate – charmingly euphemized as ‘variable rewards’. A machine that makes wannabe celebrities of all of us, enjoining us to worship those above us in the status ecology while in the same move harnessing our sadism and rage, and directing it with laser-like focus to the schmuck-of-the-day. A machine that reduces information to meaningless stimuli which it jet-sprays at us, much as Trump bombards us with exclamation marks and block capitals. A machine that habituates us to being the manipulable conduits of informational power. There is, in this, a fascist potential.

V.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. The new platform technologies were supposed to be liberal, modern, participatory. The second wave of cyber-utopianism had been much like the first, headlined at the zenith of global power by a Democratic administration in Washington evangelizing for tech, for the globalization of the ‘free and open’ net built in Silicon Valley, and for the ‘new economy’ as a modernizing upgrade.

If the Clinton administration sought to hardwire as the universal framework for online social interactions a very parochial and eccentric Californian culture of rich white men, the Obama administration wanted to bring tech into the White House. The digital giants were essential, both for Obama and Hillary Clinton's State Department, to the modernizing of the government and the economy, and to achieving US foreign policy objectives. The White House met Google representatives more than once a week during Obama's tenure, and he was the first president to host a Twitter ‘town hall’ meeting. Eric Schmidt of Google, Jack Dorsey of Twitter and Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook all supported Obama and had close ties to the White House.

Clinton, in a major 2010 speech, attacked the usual enemies like hackers and repressive regimes, in defence of an 'open' internet. She milked the last dismal vestiges of Californian hippy idealism: alluding to the hoary old sentiment that 'information wants to be free', as the hippy entrepreneur and Silicon Valley legend Stewart Brand didn't quite say. She also took to task, as enemies of openness, those countries who didn't trust the global regulatory oversight of ICANN, an industry-aligned Californian non-profit. Championing an open net was, in addition to being congruent with Washington's liberal self-image, both a projection of American power and a logical political alliance. Democrats had always been close to telecommunications capital. The wave of monopolization taking place in mass media, resulting in six corporations controlling approximately 90 per cent of the flow of information, had been helped along by Clinton's 1996 Telecommunications Act. What is more, unlike the old economy giants allied with the Bush administration, such as Halliburton, these new economy giants were clean-cut, had no coal under their fingernails. They seemingly traded a mysterious substance – communication, the cloud – of which everyone was in favour, and which was pristine and high-status.

However, it was also complicated. It was easy enough for the White House to gloat about free information if it inconvenienced Iran. It was easy for the State Department to lobby Twitter to hold off maintenance work during Iran's Green Movement, telling them that a 'Twitter revolution' was happening. But when WikiLeaks shared a virtual library of classified State Department documents, the results were embarrassing. It was hardly mind-blowing that US diplomats fawned over dictators like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. But these revelations came as the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt were about to fall to popular revolutions. Similar movements would then appear in Bahrain, Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Syria and even Saudi Arabia.

And suddenly information didn't want to be free any more. Abruptly, the US had to conduct a series of foreign policy pivots. At first, it tried to defend the Egyptian dictatorship, with Vice President Joe Biden telling Tahrir Square protesters that Mubarak was no dictator but 'an ally of ours'. This proved unavailing; it tacked briefly in the wake of

the demand for electoral democracy before swerving behind a new, blood-bath-inaugurated coup led by General Sisi. The US supported the Saudi invasion of Bahrain and aerial assault on Yemen, crushing both of those uprisings. It used limited military force to intervene in the Libyan uprising and to pilot a pro-US leadership to power, with ultimately disastrous results.

And amid its embarrassment and its perplexity, the administration sought to indict everyone associated with the WikiLeaks revelations. This, for the old Washington establishment, exemplified the bad, irresponsible side of the internet. It was the net as Assange or Pirate Party activists fantasized it could be: a stateless anarchy, without intellectual property rights. The fact that they made leaking 'sexy', as security experts put it, and that the enormously modish trolling group Anonymous had joined the war on secrecy, raised the stakes and demanded examples be set. Private Chelsea Manning, blamed for the leaks, was held in solitary confinement at a supermax prison and subject to what the UN special rapporteur on torture called cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Justice Department demanded access to the Twitter accounts of WikiLeaks volunteers, dismissing privacy and free speech concerns as 'absurd'.

It appeared, for a moment, as though the White House had misunderstood the real potential of the social industry, skewered by its own hype about 'Twitter revolutions' and the advantages of tech. Indeed, there was and is a tension here, and it revolved around the politics of information management. The security state's ancient dream had been that it would monopolize the management of information. The cutting edge of encryption, storage and control should be in the gift of the National Security Agency. This twenty-first century Leviathan would have unique 'back door' access to any information system. That is not how the tech giants see it. For them, their monopoly over content and over the management of user information is part of a system of private property from which they profit. User information and data is itself valuable property, whose value diminishes if it is not secured.

Washington thus found itself in a number of direct battles with the tech giants. Twitter fought the Justice Department on its demands for

the account information of WikiLeaks volunteers, in a case brought jointly with the American Civil Liberties Union, which it ultimately lost. Yahoo fought the National Security Agency in a secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court case over the latter's demand for user account details under its PRISM program. Google resorted to internal encryption to evade surveillance when it was revealed that both the NSA and GCHQ had wiretapped the firm's communications. Apple fought the FBI to a standstill over encryption on its phones. The FBI wanted to force Apple to unlock an iPhone belonging to Rizwan Farook, one of the shooters in the San Bernardino massacre in December 2015. Apple resisted in the courts, and ultimately the FBI backed off when it used third-party software to hack the phone, revealing nothing of pertinence. FBI director James Comey complained that Apple allowed 'people to hold themselves beyond the law'. This was revealing, suggesting that he expected there to be no area of life not potentially scrutable by the law. If the internet was nothing but an elaborate surveillance mechanism, the law should be the beneficiary. The American state had been a vigorous champion of tech, its property regime and its global commercial success. Yet their property claims were now disrupting the security state's fantasy of omniscience.

Washington nonetheless continued to champion the tech giants. Indeed, the government found that it was able to hijack the features of the social media platforms to extend its surveillance, building the biggest domestic spying programme in US history. It used Facebook to launch cyberwar programmes aimed at enemies, implanting malware and stealing files from personal hard drives. It was this attack on the security of the platform that led to an incensed Mark Zuckerberg calling the White House to complain about the lack of transparency in NSA programmes. He said that such secretive, counter-security measures not only put users at risk but would also incline them to 'believe the worst' – and, he implied, disconnect. The security state was threatening the informational property of the platforms. Despite such tensions, the platforms remained close to Washington. Theirs was not a battle over values, but a turf struggle over informational control. It was platforms like Google, Facebook and Twitter which, in the first place, had created

this unprecedented surveillance, presenting ample legal and illegal ways for government agencies to exploit the resulting data.

The social industry monopolies have duly been evolving ways to cooperate with the security state, suggesting lines for a potential fusion. This calls into question the cyber-futurist notion of 'cloud' logic displacing sovereign power, breaking up sovereignty into the politics of data packets, dissipating it in networks criss-crossing borders and territories. Rather than networked flows of information bypassing centralized bureaucracies, the flows are bureaucratically regimented and organized in such a way as to augment the traditional power of governments and corporations, at least in the short term. It also suggests that the emancipatory hopes of the era of Occupy, Anonymous and Pirate Parties pinned to such claims were at best wildly premature. Networks, which were expected to outflank the old sovereigns, have also extended their power.

And yet, as the philosopher Gilbert Simondon pointed out, we learn most from a technology when it breaks down. It is breakdown that stimulates scientific research and new knowledge. And the platforms have induced a crisis in an older machinery of governance and control. The Washington establishment, in its globalizing zeal and technological modernization drive, didn't quite anticipate what it was embracing. Whether it is Facebook's notorious motto 'Move Fast and Break Things', or Google's practice of never asking for permission, this was a force that could and would disturb the old, embedded alliances of state and media. That meant it could and would disrupt Washington's power.

VI.

Did Twitter make the 'Twitter revolutions', or did they make Twitter? From the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 to the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013, the social industry was reported on as if it was a primary driver of unrest. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were not just the digital media of the story. They were the story, the technological vanguard of dramatic, world-changing events. They were associated, by connotation, with progress, youth, the new, the next big thing.

It would be impossible to quantify the commercial value of the 'Twitter revolutions' for the social industry. It is in the nature of the medium to massively complicate causality. The bare data shows that from the inception of the Green Movement to the end of the Gezi Park protests, Twitter's active user base had increased sevenfold from 30 million to over 220 million. Facebook's already much larger user base had increased from almost a quarter of a million to 1.2 billion users. How much this was due to these earth-shaking events and how much to other commercial strategies and 'network effects', is not clear. But the growth was conditioned, and probably very strongly conditioned, by the insertion of the platform brands into a captivating story of a global youth uprising.

The term 'Twitter revolutions' had, of course, always glossed over salient realities. Whether in Iran or Tunisia, the numbers of users connected to social media were a small and disproportionately middle-class share of the total population. In Tunisia, there were just two hundred active Twitter users. Most social industry users, still a minority of the population, were on Facebook. In Egypt, where the social industry had much deeper penetration, with 60 per cent of under-thirties using it, the April 6 Youth Movement was able to use Facebook as a communications hub. Other activists, however, found that mobile texting was far more important for organizing. Nonetheless, when the desperate Tunisian market seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after being harassed by police, it became known only because the images were shared on Facebook and resonated with an existing mood of fury with the regime. When the Tahrir Square protesters flooded timelines with the riveting detail of their audacious actions, they not only increased the costs of repression for the regime and weakened the position of its overseas backers, but gave confidence to others to join in.

Whatever the political purposes to which users put them, however, the most successful users are those who understand the informational politics of the platform. The infamous Facebook experiment, published in 2014, on 'emotional contagion', built on the well-known fact that sentiment is catching. By manipulating users' moods, it found that this contagion can now be orchestrated on a massive scale by networks. The

virality and celerity of the information economy piggybacks on this tendency, aggregating and herding sentiment, assembling makeshift alliances around a mood, building towards a euphoric climax and then dissipating. The experiment also showed that it is possible for the medium to fabricate and manipulate the mood of users, which of course Facebook already does on a molecular level through its management of feeds. But it doesn't necessarily need to mass-produce emotional hype: opportune sentiments will arise as a matter of course.

In 2011, what went viral was a model of protest. In Tahrir Square, a coalition of Islamists, liberals and Nasserists had built a city-within-a-city, a mini-metropolis managing lighting, accommodation, waste disposal, medicine, food, water, security checkpoints to guard against frequent government attacks, and inter-communal protection for Christians and Muslims at prayer. It would be tempting to say that, with opportunity came competence in the techniques of self-government, cooperation and mutuality. But the organizers of Tahrir Square were veterans of past struggles, from anti-war protests to the 2008 general strike. They had built coalitions and acquired their repertoires of protest and social media publicity over the course of almost a decade. What is more, the symbolically central revolt in Tahrir Square had to spread to other parts of the country, including to armed sectors of the population, in order for the dictatorship to be overthrown. In retrospect, even then it bypassed huge swathes of the population which later became the popular constituency for General Sisi's armed coup.

Nonetheless, Egypt's revolutionaries were giving other people ideas. They suggested a format of protest that could be taken up by anti-austerity and pro-democracy activists from New York to Nepal. It was not even just a protest. Tahrir Square was also an organizing hub at which other actions could be discussed and the diverse components of the movement tentatively federated. More importantly, it prefigured the self-rule that protesters wanted to achieve. It was, in embryo, an alternative way of organizing legitimate power. This gave rise to #Occupy, not so much a movement as a brand, a hashtagged franchise, a repertoire of symbols and tactics available to Indignados in Spain, labour activists in Nigeria, democracy protesters in Malaysia.

The digital swarms descended, from Puerta del Sol, Madrid to Oakland. The global core of this movement was Occupy Wall Street. There, heteroclitic alliances of anarchists, Anonymous trolls, communists and libertarians shot a populist arrow across the bow at the One percent. They attempted new model communes, prefiguring a more democratic and egalitarian social order – although with little agreement as to what that might actually mean. Indeed, the absence of agreement was regarded as a virtue. They emphasized consensus over ideology, in the spirit of 1990s anti-capitalism and the Zapatista ethos: ‘Many Yeses, One No’.

Organizationally, these protests looked very little like Tahrir Square. In some cases, the #Occupy brand and repertoire was worked into an existing social movement with its own tactics and traditions, as in Spain and Greece. But most of the time, #Occupy involved small groups of experienced activists setting up camp and relying on digital connections to attract otherwise scattered, disconnected participants. In New York, for example, the organizers of Occupy Wall Street were veterans of another recent alliance, New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts. In London, they were activists from the environmentalist movement Climate Camp. These were the handfuls of activists with the skills, resources and free time to organize. To their momentary advantage, they were tech-savvy and could exploit ubiquitous smartphone and platform use. And for a period of time in 2010 to 2011, it seemed as if all that was needed was to set up an event on Facebook, share it across the platforms, hashtag it, meme it and wait: build it, and they will come. Activists were flush with apparent success, surfing the crest of a viral wave.

#Occupy adopted the abstract schema of Tahrir Square’s insurgency, without being able to emulate its substantial organized base, while tailoring it to fit with cyber-libertarian ideologies about the emancipatory possibilities of the ‘network’ and horizontal organization. They were emboldened in this approach by a flurry of academic and journalistic clichés celebrating the networked individual, the swarm and the reduced costs of collective organizing entailed by digital democracy. Such boosterism recognized real tendencies but underestimated the fragility of any organization so cheaply had.

The reduced costs of organizing also reduced the costs of quitting – as well as the costs of infiltration and disruption. Moreover, the proprietary algorithms were designed to advance individual networking, not collective organization. At most, because of their surging towards hype, they could generate a quick, expedient aggregation of individual sentiments. And, as Paolo Gerbaudo's analysis in his book *The Digital Party* recognizes, far from encouraging horizontal organization, digital networking tends to promote charismatic leaders and shallow forms of 'participation' and 'feedback' from within a largely passive layer of supporters. Insofar as these structures do translate into more sustained organization, as is arguably the case with Italy's populist Five Star Movement, they lend themselves less to democratic empowerment than to a business model. The digital euphoria generally passed and was replaced by demoralization. Occupy, emanating from a political mood that was suspicious of parties, was, organizationally, the meatspace equivalent of the shitstorm. It attracted giant bursts of feeling, energy and confidence, galvanized moments of unity and conviction and generated some impressive actions – most of which turned rapidly into passive despair.

The state didn't wither away; Occupy did. Beyond a few places where #Occupy was linked to already powerful social movements, the protests proved impossible to sustain, being more steam than piston, and not much steam at that. The enthusiasm for the network vanished like a trending topic. The 'movements of the squares' either dissipated into parties aimed at taking electoral power, as in Greece and Spain, or melted away and empowered authoritarian states, as in Turkey after the Gezi Park protests. The fate of the 'Arab Spring' would soon demonstrate just how exceedingly difficult it is to achieve lasting social and political change, even with much more sustained organization behind it.

And by 2014, a malevolent twist on the political mobilization of hip young digital natives was about to appear. Benefiting from civil war in Iraq, and outright carnage escalating to a state-orchestrated *Götterdämmerung* in Syria, it would add an obscene irony to every wholesome net-utopian cliché.

VII.

‘Put down the chicken wings and come to jihad, bro.’ This was the wry, savvy voice of an ISIS recruiter on Twitter. On Ask.fm, another recruiter answered questions about his favourite desert, his beard, life in the battle. Images circulated of jihadists cuddling kittens, eating Snickers, playing video games, beheading their enemies.

Five years after the Iranian Green Movement and three years after the ‘Arab Spring’ birthed such a brief reprise of cyber-utopianism, here was a ‘Twitter revolution’ that was actually in the middle of taking power. Here was a makeshift theocratic state, of all things, assembled with the logic of the swarm, occupying and keeping public space. Here was a right-wing, networked social movement, a reactionary guerrilla campaign, a band of mercenary adventurers, a brand, a hashtag, which had fully mastered the idiom of the platforms.

The Islamic State had emerged from a hard core of jihadist combatants affiliated to the ‘Al-Qaeda’ franchise during the occupation of Iraq and the ensuing civil war. At first dominated by ‘foreign fighters’, in the years since 2006 they had developed social roots in parts of Iraq’s Sunni population. It had become a far-right social movement, armed and intent on challenging the territorial authority of the state bequeathed by the occupation. By 2012, as Syria descended into civil war, and jihadists, released from prison by Assad to sow chaos amid the opposition, opened a new front in the civil war, it gained its first territorial footprint, rebranding itself as the ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’ (ISIS). By 2014, as the Iraqi government suppressed Sunni protests against their political exclusion with the use of death squads, ISIS was gaining political support even from hard-core secular Ba’athists. Indeed, many ISIS recruits were former Ba’athist soldiers. Moreover, the Iraqi army would not have disintegrated so rapidly in the face of ISIS assault were it not ushered in by a civilian uprising against the troops regarded as agents of a sectarian regime.

In the summer of 2014, as they began their invasion of Mosul, ISIS deployed a sophisticated social industry strategy. Far from trying to leverage surprise, they sought to inspire dread, broadcasting and live-tweeting

their coming with the hashtag #AllEyesOnISIS. Through the Twitter-linked app, Dawn of Glad Tidings, they used supporters' smartphones to disseminate messages, carefully tailored to avoid triggering spam filters. The app was downloaded ten thousand times, permitting sophisticated Twitter-storming operations. As their forces marched towards Baghdad, the number one search result for 'Baghdad' on Twitter was an image of a jihadist contemplating an ISIS flag flying over the city. They successfully hijacked World Cup-related hashtags to spread links to their propaganda video. By February 2015, it was estimated that there were anything from 90,000 to 200,000 pro-ISIS tweets on Twitter every day. By mid-2015, Twitter had come under pressure from the US government to delete pro-ISIS accounts, and had to take down some 125,000 of them. They shared slick videos aimed at Western millennials, some most likely produced by the former German rapper turned jihadist, Denis Cuspert. Jihad was being marketed, very efficiently, as the epitome of masculine cool.

Sedimented into this barrage of self-publicity was a stream of snuff videos, as members braggingly broadcast images of the beheadings and war atrocities they had been party to. Although this initially alarmed the ISIS leadership, worried about its effects on Muslim support and the criticisms it was drawing from the Al-Qaeda leadership, it didn't slow down or reduce the flow of recruits. If anything, ISIS became known for the extravagance of its displays of violence and its pointed refusal to acknowledge limitations. It is even possible that these irruptions of obscenity demonstrated for some supporters the authentic commitment of these 'lions': their #nofilter reality, as opposed to the pervasive fakery of online celebrity.

In the first six months of the US-led bombing campaign to oust ISIS, the Pentagon reported 19,000 new recruits to the organization, most of them from outside the Middle East, 3,000 from Europe, North America and Australia, and a surprisingly large number of them religious novices - including at least one recruit whose entire training in the religion came from a copy of *Islam for Dummies*. International combat tourists filtered into training camps, ostensibly to avenge the humiliations of empire by enslaving Yazidi women and beheading infidels, perhaps just as attracted

by the prospect of survivalist nirvana. The morbid fascination with the group, sanctioned by lurid news coverage of the ISIS 'way of life', was akin to the Nazi or satanic fixations of ostracized American teenagers contemplating a school shooting. It self-consciously incarnated the antithesis of everything liberal modernity stood for.

Twitter did not create the sumps of misery from which recruits could be found in small Welsh towns, among Swedish teenagers or from put-upon Muslim minorities in the suburbs of the Île-de-France. No more than it had created the injustices giving rise to Occupy. Far less did it create the sorts of feelings that would lead to surprisingly widespread passive support for the group. At the height of the group's notoriety, it was more popular in Europe than in the Middle East. Polling controversially suggested that 7 per cent of British citizens and 16 per cent of French citizens responded favourably to ISIS, a share much larger than the entire Muslim population in each society. Nor did Twitter create the patterns of state breakdown allowing ISIS to gain territorial footholds, or induce the Iraqi government to unleash death squads to quell a restive Sunni population, thus making them briefly receptive to ISIS rule. Nor did it build the torture chambers during the anti-occupation insurgency in Iraq, or the television shows modelled on twentieth-century show trials in which terrified and beaten 'guests' were interrogated for supposed terrorism offences, all of which had helped mint these hard-boiled jihadists.

Nonetheless, it is hard to see ISIS spreading terror among its opponents, and excitement among its members, so efficiently without the social industry. The tens of thousands of demoralized Iraqi government troops who fled Mosul without a fight were prompted in part by the belief that an overwhelming armed force was coming. In fact, the invasion forces consisted of just two thousand jihadists, compared to thirty thousand government troops. And it afforded ISIS a new means of ideological dissemination, quite different from the hierarchical, vanguard model of Al-Qaeda communications. ISIS instead made short propaganda clips modelled on Hollywood fare, and games like its own ripped version of *Grand Theft Auto* exploited the volatility of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, deploying crowdsourcing, apps, bots and

hashtag-hacking. It used the logic of the Twitterstorm to insinuate its short, digestible bites of propaganda into popular culture.

ISIS did not propose anything like the global, millenarian political philosophy of Al-Qaeda, but it disseminated a ready-to-hand narrative about emancipation from the 'oppressive Tawaghit' – the system of regimes bequeathed by the colonial partition of the Middle East. It leveraged the free labour of users of its app, in the congealed form of smartphone data, the better to orchestrate its tweetstorms. It asked users to participate in its propaganda by sharing hashtags, articles and videos. At one stage, ISIS accounts asked followers to video themselves waving the ISIS flag in a public place and share it on social media. It created a sense of identity and belonging. Its promise – as the chicken wings tweet showed – was that users would find greater meaning and value in life by migrating to the sunny Wilaya of Raqqa and building the Islamic State. It focused, to that end, on recruiting not just for military purposes, but potential citizens for what they claimed was a flourishing earthly utopia living as God intended.

ISIS was a franchise with a central hierarchical structure, not an autonomist collective. Its utopian fantasies were not cyber-utopian. It therefore exploited social media far more efficiently than the protest movements of 2011, without unconsciously mimicking or depending on the model of association found on the platforms. It harnessed the medium's viral and swarming properties, using digital connections to encourage unpredictable acts of terror beyond its territorial grasp, as in Beirut and the Bataclan. But it didn't rely on networks to outflank centralized power. Centralized power was already collapsing, and ISIS was building a new regime in its place, taxing a population of some seven or eight million subjects and controlling profitable oilfields. It was armed and disciplined, internally coercive and seeking ideological homogeneity. It tacitly recognized that the forms of association on the platform are not 'horizontal' but built around complex informational hierarchies that could be manipulated.

US counter-insurgency, confronting ISIS, was likewise opportunistic in its use of the medium. While the greatest emphasis was placed on coordinated aerial bombardment, racking up tens of thousands of bodies

according to the US Military, the Obama administration began to talk cyberwar. This was already in vogue in the administration. It had used cyber-sabotage against North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. It cooperated with Israeli intelligence in writing code for the Stuxnet worm – a viral attack that shut down Iran's nuclear power facilities in Natanz. In 2015, State Department counterterrorism official Alberto Fernandez argued that the US, in a break from the 'marketplace of ideas' rhetoric, needed its own 'troll army' to combat ISIS. Later the same year, the US Air Force bombed a 'command and control' building discovered by combing ISIS's social media streams and associated metadata. By 2016, they were vaunting their ability to use 'cyberbombs' to hack and disrupt ISIS computer networks. ISIS, for its part, allegedly responded by using the social industry to accumulate background information on a hundred US Military personnel and posting a 'hit list' for supporters to target. But in an example of the *mise en abyme* of online trolling, wherein one never knows for sure who the enemy is or what game they're playing, the Associated Press later suggested that the threat was actually the work of Russian trolls. The logic of the online network thus superimposed itself on the more conventional logic of asymmetrical war.

ISIS's territorial control was ended by factors extrinsic to its use of the social industry. Its brutality undercut its social basis and eroded the cooperation of notables in Iraqi, Syrian and Libyan territories that it held. Its early successes had come easily, in a lightning streak, conferring on it an image of divine omnipotence. The first serious military setbacks blew away that aura and recruitment slowed down dramatically. And, of course, its fantastical project of building a theocratic state while conducting an asymmetrical war with the powers that had already devastated Iraq, was in its own terms a huge overreach. It created more deadly enemies than its tens of thousands of recruits could fight. It's difficult to believe their project was ever anything other than a grandiose delusion.

Yet the technological basis of ISIS' international recruitment still left them with an added weakness. Most of their recruits, as the UN reported in 2017 after ISIS lost Raqqa, were either irreligious or knew nothing about the fundamentals of Islam. Still less did they grasp the elaborate

political ideologies emanating from Islamist thinkers like Syed Qutb, the Egyptian theologian and Muslim Brotherhood member who so strongly influenced this strain of jihadism. They were largely young men, socially marginalized, economically and educationally disadvantaged, travelling to Syria or Iraq without really understanding what they were getting into. Many of them, the study suggested, were criminalized men seeking redemption. Another study by George Washington University found a recruit from Texas who moved to the Islamic State looking for a role as an English teacher. The ideological thinness of the attraction to ISIS among those reached by Twitterstorm and hashtag-hacking is likely to be part of the reason for the rapid outflow of recruits as the war turned harsher.

The Islamic State has fallen, with fighters controlling just 4 per cent of the territory they once did, but the organization known as ISIS remains. It is, among other things, a form of twenty-first-century fascism. Its use of the platforms shows us something about how new fascisms will work, in terms of their culture, communications and ideology. It is, to use Jonathan Beller's phrase, a form of 'fractal fascism'. If the spectacle is a social relationship mediated by images, what Guy Debord called the concentrated spectacle of Führer celebrity worship has given way in the social industry to the diffuse spectacle of commodity images. In the social industry, it's one, two, three, many Führers.

From ISIS to the alt-right, new fascisms are emerging around microcelebrities, mini-patriarchs and the flow of homogenized messages. If classical fascism directed narcissistic libido investments into the image of the leader, as the embodiment of the people and its historical destiny, neo-fascism harvests the algorithmic accumulation of sentiment in the form of 'identification-by-Twitterstorm'. If the image of the fascist mass was once best captured by the bird's-eye view of aerial photography, it is now available in a much higher-resolution bird's eye view as metrics. And if classical fascism built its organization through recruitment from social organizations, such as veterans' clubs, germinal neo-fascism recruits from the loose associational practices of the platforms. The networked social movement has acquired jackboots.

VIII.

Is Donald Trump the future, or a transitional tremor? A great deal of alarm about the social industry has been concerned with its effects on electoral systems: the dark arts of the algorithm propelling 'populists' (or, according to taste, 'authoritarians') to power.

The world's first 'Twitter president' is indeed a natural social industry star. And as a Twitter celebrity, he was constructing his political profile from his first real tweet in 2011, when he signalled his participation in an online campaign claiming that Obama was not born in the US and was not eligible to be president. He has proven to be excellent at riding the waves of aggregated sentiment, far more effective than his opponents. As a presidential campaigner, Trump used digital media to orchestrate mass media interest. The campaign's tactic, according to one of his former digital strategists, was to keep saying 'off the cuff' apparently crazy things, that would compel the media to give him coverage. He succeeded, gaining 15 per cent more coverage than Clinton, despite the media being largely hostile to him.

Twitter also enabled him to shape the campaign as an exciting duel with his enemies. An analysis of Trump's tweets during the election found that they effectively substituted for campaign position statements. Most of his tweets attacked the Washington establishment, blaming it for uncontrolled migration, terror and job losses, rather than advocating a policy position. He limited public access to his governing agenda. Clinton's online campaign struggled, by contrast, to build hashtagged enthusiasm with #ImWithHer and such memes as the #pantsuit, soliciting the enthusiasm of upwardly mobile career women struggling against sexism. Some of her tactics downright failed, including a listicle identifying her with 'your abuela', where 'abuela' is the Spanish word for 'grandmother'. Latin voters, far from being impressed, began to post criticisms of her support for militarized border controls with the hashtag #NotMyAbuela quickly going viral.

As President, encircled by a hostile media and Congress, subject to investigation and hamstrung by intelligence leaks, Trump used Twitter as a refuge of uncompromised sovereignty. There, he could announce

policy, denounce his enemies, praise his own record and attack the legacy media (with the exception of the sunny, far-right morning show, *Fox and Friends*) as #fakenews and #fraudnews. It is clear that Trump has been able to use the platforms to consolidate a political base in a way that would not have been possible if the old set of relations between mass media and the liberal state remained intact.

Nonetheless, as with such figures as Narendra Modi of India, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Trump has benefited mainly from the political weaknesses of his opponents. While Modi, Duterte, Bolsonaro and Trump have all used the social industry and messaging services effectively to bypass legacy media, they have each benefited from the (perceived and actual) corruption and stalemate of the political establishment.

In office, Trump has thus far mainly demonstrated the weakness of the nationalist right. On trade, despite repudiating the potentially lucrative Trans-Pacific Partnership, he has been unable to propose a serious alternative to the institutions of liberal globalization. On foreign policy, despite his public deference to Putin, he has largely acceded to the lines of action demanded by the Pentagon in Syria and North Korea, albeit that he has freed them to pursue that agenda in a more radical way than they were able to under Obama's micromanagement. On his promised massive structural investment, he got nowhere. On his trade war with China, he has raised tariffs, but the total levels still remain historically low. Much of what he has achieved required the connivance of Congressional Republicans, such as the standard Republican tax cut for the rich, or the promotion of a hard-right Federalist Society judge to the Supreme Court. Unsurprisingly, by the summer of 2017, Trump's ousted ally Steve Bannon lamented that the presidency the far right 'fought for, and won, is over'.

The difficulty faced by the far right is that political success has outrun social and political organization. Historically, the far right has succeeded by building roots in thick networks of civic associations, from fraternal organizations in the US South to veteran and military clubs in Germany. It has, in this context, developed a 'grass-roots' paramilitary presence to control the streets. Such civic organization is far more patchy and thin

today. The technological harvesting of sentiment can briefly aggregate electorally sufficient crowds, given a crisis of the establishment. But it is a poor substitute for the kind of organized and armed power that could actualize the YouTube coup that Naughton describes. And if this was the sole basis for fascism in the future, it is more than likely that the traditional governing centre would reassert its dominance. The latter's entitled cry of protest in the face of failure – per Wilde, the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass – would, and will, give way to a hard-headed and resourceful campaign to stabilize the relationship of the medium to political power.

The fascist potential of the social industry doesn't necessarily lie in its short-term electoral consequences, ominous and damaging as these may be. Rather, far more lethally, it may be indicated by the phenomenon fashionably known as 'stochastic terror'. This concept, anonymously minted in 2011, refers to the way that communications can be used to incite random violence and terror. The violence, though statistically predictable within a given population, is individually unpredictable. The Twittering Machine is designed for just this kind of stochastic influencing. The use of algorithms to customize user experience depends on the idea that, statistically, x content will generate y number of z behaviours over a given population. Though someone must choose, in some way, to act on the stimulus, the machinery bypasses the question of individual responsibility by administering a data set.

Currently, part of the strategy of the rump ISIS group is to use social media campaigns to work on and put to motion existing reservoirs of sentiment, existing capacities for murder. Just as it once encouraged supporters to wave the ISIS flag, it now asks them to extend its physical reach and project violence into otherwise unreachable states. Most of the attacks are in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the jihadists have their own forces. But from stabbings in Marseille, Westminster and Edmonton (Canada), and vehicle attacks in New York, Nice, Barcelona, Ohio, Stockholm and London, to shootings in Toronto, Paris and Orlando, ISIS has claimed a global body count. It has used its hashtagged franchise model to motivate disparate, random attacks by lending them an appearance of global coherence, direction and belonging.

The networked far right, from its 'gendertrolling' MRA wing to its overt white supremacists, has generated its own share of 'lone wolf' desperadoes: far more, in the United States, than the jihadists. In the decade from 2008 to 2017, according to the Anti-Defamation League, 71 per cent of fatalities from individual terror attacks were caused by the far-right. The tactical repertoire ranges from disorganized and low-tech, such as the neo-Nazi James Fields' vehicular assault on anti-fascist protesters in Charlottesville resulting in the death of Heather Heyer, to more planned armed assaults, such as the mass shootings at the Quebec City Mosque and the Tree of Life Synagogue. Media commentary has begun to argue that the internet is partly to blame. For example, the Quebec shooter Alexandre Bissonnette avidly consumed racist content from right-wing activist Ben Shapiro and neo-fascist Richard Spencer. Robert Bowers, who shot up the Tree of Life Synagogue during a Shabbat service, was an active user of the alt-right Twitter epigone, Gab. The so-called 'MAGA bomber', who tried to bomb George Soros, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, had recently threatened a Twitter user with death: Twitter's moderator had declined to take action, explaining that the tweet didn't violate Twitter's community standards.

Blaming social media activity for the actions of these murderers in any direct and individualized way would simply beg the convoluted question of cause and effect. To what extent, for example, was Alexandre Bissonnette a fan of Ben Shapiro's content because he was already on the road to becoming a racist killer? How much did whatever he saw on Gab enable Robert Bowers' belief that the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, by helping settle refugees, was bringing 'invaders' that 'kill our people'? In what way, if at all, did it tip him over the edge, leading him to declare: 'I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in'? There could, by definition, be no answer to this. The effects of content in the social industry, as with advertising, are collectivizing: they are designed to work across a population.

We are, to some extent, working in the dark. At present, there is no single dominant far-right brand or franchise capable of aggregating and shaping these attacks as part of a global narrative. There is no armed right-wing hub of attraction able to draw a swarm of like-minded

warriors: no fascist answer to Occupy. Fascism, in most cases, dares not speak its name. Fascist terror is 'stochastic' because fascism is still fractal: the armed shitstorm, a material possibility of the medium every bit as much as the meatspace troll, has yet to materialize. But these are early days for the networked fascism of the twenty-first century.