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Confrontational rhetoric: President Trump goes off-script on the Green New Deal

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What does the use of language in context we call
'political' tell us about humans in general?
Chilton (2004, 11)

President Trump's persona: anything goes?

- 1 Since February 2019, when Representative Ocasio-Cortez (left wing of the Democratic party¹) submitted her plan to the House of Representatives, the Green New Deal has become a heated debate in American politics. In March, President Trump overtly mocked the plan during his remarks at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference. Best known as CPAC, this four-day conference is the largest annual gathering of conservative leaders and activists. The American Conservative Union was created in 1964 to promote conservative ideals and candidates. And in 1974, the first CPAC took place at a time when the party was experiencing rough times, while the Democrats controlled the Congress.
- 2 The chosen excerpt² comes from this two-hour long speech. An article released by NBC News speaks of "the longest speech of his presidency"³, during which Trump is described as running off-script on several occasions, trying to entertain his audience mostly because:

With the 2018 midterms behind him, Trump foreshadowed issues he hopes to focus on in his re-election campaign. The green New Deal was front and center on Saturday.⁴
- 3 Trump ridicules the Green New Deal and its supporters who are associated with the Democratic party. It should also be noted that the President of the United-States has never missed a chance to insult Ocasio-Cortez:

The Green New Deal. Proposed by a wonderful young bartender. 29 years old. No, I like her.⁵

- 4 According to Darweesh and Abdullah's work on Trump's sexist ideology, this passage corresponds to an illustration of "covert sexism":

(It is) a type of usage in which speakers express sexism whilst at the same time deny(ing) responsibility for it, as in the use of sexist terms tied with humor or irony. Indirect sexism both challenges direct sexism and keeps it in play. This type of sexism is sometimes called "subtle sexism" or "new sexism". (Darweesh & Abdullah 2016, 87)

- 5 It is a well-known fact that President Trump has been criticized for his unprecedented lack of political correctness in the history of the American presidency. Yet:

Though mocked by critics for his rough mannerisms, plain talk, and avoidance of big words, Trump has demonstrated a keen employment of the power of rhetoric. Trump uses the power of words to strengthen fear, hate, and anger, fueling his political career and driving a wedge in U.S. society. (Saramo 2017,9)

- 6 In his non-fiction work entitled *White* (2019, 144), the novelist Easton Ellis chooses to sum up, tongue in cheek, the anti-Trump comments he has heard over the past two years in the United-States by the statement: "That's so not presidential!"

- 7 Still, a great number of citizens responds well to it, and this is partly why this "unexpected" presidency happened. People know that President Trump shapes his vision of the world via fake news and tweets, that since he has been elected he constantly runs off-script, that his remarks – regardless of the topic – often rest on sexism, racism, homophobia, and climate-skepticism, among others. In *White* (2019, 144), Easton Ellis refers to Trump as "the Disruptor", because the novelist states that this is precisely how the media cover Trump's public persona:

[...] I found it distracting to be living in a country whose press had become so biased and highly corporate. Instead of trying to figure out and dismantle Trump intellectually [...] it seemed they preferred to hang on to a journalistic status quo that offered an outmoded consideration of a brand-new world that was flowering before their eyes. (Easton Ellis 2019, 151).

- 8 Based on a theoretical approach which combines classical rhetoric, cognitive linguistics and contextual data, in the spirit Critical discourse analysis, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the main rhetorical devices at work in this one-minute long excerpt. As underlined by the press, this passage was not prepared in advance. Therefore, which discursive means does Trump use spontaneously to ridicule the Green New Deal?

Context: A definition of the Green New Deal

- 9 Although the Green New Deal is almost exclusively related to Representative Ocasio-Cortez, the term was first used in 2007 by *New York Times* journalist Friedman⁶. It was discussed and supported by various politicians, most notably by Senator Sanders. The Green New Deal, an expression which is explicitly reminiscent of President Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, is a plan which addresses climate change, as well as social and economic inequality. It advocates the following⁷, over a ten-year mobilization:

(1) it is the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal—

(A) to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers;

(B) to create millions of good, high-wage jobs and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States;
 (C) to invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United States to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century;
 (D) to secure for all people of the United States for generations to come—
 (i) clean air and water;
 (ii) climate and community resiliency;
 (iii) healthy food;
 (iv) access to nature; and
 (v) a sustainable environment; and
 (E) to promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historic oppression of indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth (referred to in this resolution as “frontline and vulnerable communities”).

- 10 The expression “Green New Deal” was borrowed by the French environmentalist Jadot in March 2019, in the course of the European election campaign. The plan, as adapted to Europe, is described by this politician as:

Un Green New Deal (...) pour les énergies renouvelables et l'isolation des logements
 (un) projet de paix (pour) dépendre du vent, du soleil, de l'eau ou de la géothermie
 plutôt que de Poutine, de Trump ou des pétromonarchies.⁸

Storytelling dethroned by a new communications technique?

- 11 When their function was designed in the 1980's with President Reagan (Salmon 2019, 48), “spin doctors” resorted to various tools to embellish the image of politicians. The devices they used to convey an ideology during a presidential campaign, for instance, were numerous. Among them, one specific device they resorted to was narrative structure. It became so popular that “spin doctors” got gradually replaced by “story-spinners” under Clinton in the 1990s, and by “storytellers” under Presidents Bush and Obama (Salmon 2019, 51). Salmon throws light on the four successive advisors who contributed to the evolution of political communication in the United-States under Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump: Carville, Rove, Axelrod and Bannon (Salmon 2019, 52). At the turn of the century, political communication therefore experienced a radical shift towards a new paradigm (Salmon 2019, 80), in reference to the importance of entertainment to human life. The arrangement or *dispositio* in classical rhetoric is made of five canons, the most central one being the statement of facts or *narratio*:

C'est sur [la narration] que l'on se repose et s'appuie pour établir la conviction [...]
 On trouvera de l'agrément aux narrations qui présentent des passages qui étonnent, qui captivent, des dénouements inattendus, par endroits des mouvements pathétiques, des dialogues, de la douleur, de la colère, de la crainte, de l'allégresse, des passions. (Cicero, 1924 (46 av J.-C.), 14-15)

- 12 Storytelling made its first appearance in the world of management in the mid-1980s, then entered the domains of marketing and advertisement, before becoming the cornerstone of political talking. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the narrative of the “War on Terror” shaped by the media and by politicians probably remains the first global example of storytelling, as Silberstein (2002, 61-89) illustrates in her book *War of*

Words. Language, Politics and 9/11. Cognitive linguists studied this device extensively, although the power of narrative structure had already been thoroughly explored by Propp (1928), Todorov (1969), Greimas (1973), Bremond (1973) or Ricoeur (1984). Yet in the 1990s, cognitive linguists took this research one step further by analyzing it as a structure that could undergo a mapping process and thus be projected onto the target domain. Besides, the way the cognitive linguist Talmy (2000, 417-482) describes the existence of the narrative as part of the human mind is groundbreaking. The linguist posits that the generation and experiencing of a narrative is only possible *because* cognition possesses a narrative cognitive system on its own, even though related to the other cognitive functions i.e. language, perception, reasoning, affect, memory, anticipatory projection, cultural structure. Hence this capacity to form a narrative structure, which implies “pattern formation” and “temporal specialization” (Talmy 2000, 420), is key to human understanding, learning, sharing, etc.

- 13 In her analysis of storytelling in protest and politics, sociologist Poletta explains:

Stories are commonly viewed as persuading through their appeal to emotion rather than reason, through an affective identification that supersedes logic and evidence. If that is true, then does storytelling jeopardize fair and effective political decision making? In one view, it does. Storytelling produces mobilization rather than deliberation, galvanizes the mob rather than guiding the citizenry. (Poletta 2006, 82)

- 14 Although Poletta supports the idea that storytelling “jeopardize(s) fair and effective political decision making” and “galvanizes the mob rather than guiding the citizenry”, Bonnefille and Mamère (2016) broach the subject of storytelling in the field of climate change several times in *Les Mots verts*, and former congressman Mamère underlines that without an inspiring political narrative which forms a coherent whole, and to which as many citizens as possible can identify, it might be arduous for our country to transition (which is the verb now mostly used to refer to a green economy model) fast and efficiently. In the same vein, Alduy stresses the central role of stories in politics:

Il ne s'agit pas ici de dire que les politiques “nous racontent des histoires” et de le dénoncer: c'est leur rôle de *représentant* que d'offrir un miroir et une représentation où les Français peuvent se lire et se comprendre en tant que peuple qui se construit par la mémoire de ce qu'il fut et à travers l'idée d'un avenir commun. La fonction épistémologique et cognitive du récit [...] ne saurait être minimisée [...]. On peut même soutenir que le récit politique [...] répond à un besoin anthropologique du récit – et l'exploite. (Alduy 2017, 77-78)

- 15 And yet, Salmon who wrote *Storytelling, la machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits* (2008), posits in *L'Ere du clash* (2019) that if President Macron's communications aides still resort to storytelling, President Trump's advisors abandoned it to the profit of what Salmon calls: “le clash”, a behavior which is mostly “verbal” and whose aim is to generate conflict:

Nous sommes passés de la *story* au *clash*, de l'intrigue à la transgression, du suspense à la panique, de la séquence à la suite intemporelle de chocs. La vie ne s'ordonne plus en séquences, et n'est plus rythmée par l'intrigue mais par le choc. (Salmon 2019, 344)

- 16 Although updating one's story (“sa *story*”, in French) on Facebook to get as many “likes” as possible is still topical in the digital realm of social networks, Salmon states that stories are no longer needed the way they used to in the political arena. In a connected world made of “smart objects” (phone, electrical devices etc.) and ruled by social networks and big data, infotainment needs to work fast. Yet, creating narratives

require time on the sender's part. And chronologies, characters, plots often now take too much time to process for the audience. A much faster way to reach out to the audience and have the citizens react physically is to start a fight, as Saramo (2017) explains when studying the violent eruptions which took place during Trump's presidential campaign:

With Trump's strong words and the spread of Trumpist violence, many have asked whether Donald Trump can or should be held accountable for inciting violence through his speech. (2017, 8)

- 17 From a cognitive linguistics framing perspective, when the speaker starts a verbal fight, the audience gets divided into those who enjoy the show (the assailants by proxy), those who suffer the blow (the villains) and those who refuse to take part in this script.

The narrative of the Parexit

- 18 According to Salmon (2019) then, the confrontational strategy⁹ has become the predominant discursive strategy adopted by Trump. Yet, on a broader scale, we may wonder about the difference in communications strategies between (i) Trump's delivery of a speech and (ii) his going off-script. A distinction which is not established in *L'Ere du Clash*, and which could favor the intertwinement of both techniques, rather than "the clash" taking over from the storytelling.

- 19 In June 2017, Trump delivered his most well-known speech in the field of climate change when he announced that the United States of America would exit the Paris accord of 2015 mainly because:

(...) under the agreement, China will be able to increase these emissions by a staggering number of years — 13. They can do whatever they want for 13 years. Not us. India makes its participation contingent on receiving billions and billions and billions of dollars in foreign aid from developed countries. There are many other examples. But the bottom line is that the Paris Accord is very unfair, at the highest level, to the United States.¹⁰

- 20 Similarly to other speeches where he refers to this topic, Trump has always stuck to the same narrative, which we will refer to as the "climate skeptic narrative". At the heart of this narrative is the plot; climate change does not exist, it is a conspiracy against the United-States' economy, a "hoax" in Trump's wording¹¹. As early as 2012, the conspirators were first identified as "the Chinese" who were accused of wanting to stifle America's economy – a statement Trump denied four years later, in one of the presidential debates. But when Trump decided to exit the Paris accord in June 2017 – a promise made when he was running for presidency – he clearly stated that the conspiracy was actually global:

The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country's expense. They don't put America first. I do, and I always will.¹²

- 21 During an interview for the talk show "60 minutes" on CBS in October 2018, where he threw suspicion on the climate change scientists' potential hidden agenda, Trump added:

I think something's happening. Something's changing and it'll change back again. I don't think it's a hoax, I think there's probably a difference [...] But I don't know

that it's man-made. I will say this: I don't want to give trillions and trillions of dollars. I don't want to lose millions and millions of jobs. I don't want to be put at a disadvantage.¹³

- 22 Through the protection of a “strong economy” and the creation of millions of jobs, the narrative not only reassured the American citizens but it also triggered a sense of patriotism which echoed Trump’s presidential campaign mantra: “Make American Great Again”. Yet the narrative of this passage was altered in an unexpected way: The President did admit “something’s happening” (i.e. climate is changing), instead of rejecting the whole assumption. In other words, the Anthropocene (although Trump doesn’t make use of this word) is what the American President now denies: climate change is *not* man-made. When we take the context of this statement into account, this shift no longer appears as unexpected as it may have seemed: Trump admitted “something’s happening” a few days before midterm elections – one way to reach out to another category of voters (Republicans who actually believe in climate change).

Main rhetorical devices at work

- 23 Although the aim of this analysis is to sketch some features of Trump’s spontaneous speech in this short excerpt related to the Green New Deal, the features which will be analyzed cannot replace the results obtained from a quantitative approach. Nevertheless, they back up the results of previous works such as García’s (2018, 51-57) in the field of critical discourse analysis. The linguist found out that several devices are systematically displayed in Trump’s speeches: simplicity or “the use of very simple words”, repetition, parataxis (independent clauses and juxtaposed sentences) to avoid “complex reasoning”, frames or “fixed beliefs”, informality, punchy words, deictics, intensifiers, inarticulation, and hearsay evidence. We note that 1. *all* the features described by García are displayed in the 131word excerpt under study and 2. sarcasm and antiphrasis are not included in this list, although they may be considered recurrent features as well.

Sarcasm as a violent blow

- 24 In this video clip, Trump humiliates and hurts the supporters of the Green New Deal (while galvanizing its opponents) through sarcasm, which is the most obvious device at work. This new type of rhetoric, which is said to be Trump’s trademark, finds itself half way between fist fighting (the ancestor of rhetoric, Gardes-Tamine 1996, 13) and verbal expression. Sarcasm is a subtype of irony, although the difference between the two might sometimes be difficult to pin down on a pragmatic level. But irony differs from it in that sarcasm is directly connected to violence. It is made to hurt and can often qualifies for verbal abuse:

Irony is a form of humour, or an indirect way of conveying meaning, in which you say something in such a way that people realize that you really mean the opposite of what you say.

Sarcasm is speech or writing which actually means the opposite of what it seems to say and which is usually intended to mock or insult someone. (*Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, 1987, 772 and 1285)

- 25 It should be noted that irony and sarcasm share common features, as Togeby (2016, 424) underlines: “the expression is an indirect way of conveying meaning” and “the

communicated meaning is the opposite of what is literally said". Nevertheless it should be noted that many linguists and rhetoricians have demonstrated that irony is a much more complex process than solely consisting in a reversal of meaning (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 123-145).

- 26 The term comes from Greek *Sarkasmos* with the meaning "bitter laugh", and prior from *Sarkazein* which has a much more bodily sense: that of "tearing flesh" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 480). Even if sarcasm is performed verbally, its impact on the target remains physical, a process which is aligned with the physical violence triggered by "Trumpism" over the campaign, as Saramo highlights:

I frame Trumpism as a social movement characterized by populism, strongman politics, and identitarianism. (...) during the 2016 (...) campaign, political tensions resulted in outbursts of physical violence and aggression. More often however, election violence took on more discrete forms. Trump utilized subtle and not-so-subtle rhetorical violence, which served to mutually strengthen populism and cultural violence. (Saramo 2017, 8)

- 27 Similarly to physical violence, verbal violence creates a physical reaction; an overactive sympathetic nervous system which combines with faster heart beating, face turning red, potential stomach ache, etc.
- 28 Sarcasm, like irony, leads the audience to compute inverted inference via antiphrasis – a device which semantically conveys the exact opposite of what it is made of lexically (Molinié 1992, 180). In this excerpt, when Trump states that "(The Green New Deal is) something that they should promote", the modal "should" is to be understood as its opposite: "should not promote", or even "must not promote". And when Trump repeats that he "encourages" the Deal, the audience makes the appropriate inverted inference: he will do whatever it takes to smother it. When Trump claims that "(The Green New Deal is) something our country needs, desperately", Trump actually means "something our country does not need *at all*".

Repetition brought to an extreme

- 29 Repetition is considered the most prominent rhetorical device in political discourse and it can take many forms (syntactic, phonological, etc.). In this passage, it surfaces with numerous lexical repetitions, which are generally employed to make the audience memorize a concept, an ideology, etc. The (subconscious) aim of the repetitions made here is also to create amplification. But these are not altered by a different determiner or by an adjective. The abnormal frequency of repetitions in such a short passage should be brought to the fore:

I look at what's happening **on the other side**. I **encourage it**. I say **no, no...** I-I **think** the... **New Green Deal** or whatever the hell they call it... The **Green New Deal** right ? **Green New Deal**. I **encourage it**. I **think** th- I **think** it's really **something** that **they should** promote, **they should** work hard on. It's **something** our country needs, desperately. They have to go out and get it.

But I'll take **the other side** of **that argument** only because... I'm **mandated** to. I'm **manda-** but they should stay with **that argum-** **never change**. **Never chan-** No planes. **No energy**.

When **the wind** stops **blowing**, that's the end of your electric. let's hurry uh-:

"Darling? Darling, is **the wind blowing** today? I'd like to watch television, **darling!**" (131 words, our emphases)

- 30 These are carbon copies, which corresponds to the most basic use of this rhetorical device. Tools such as gradation, elaboration or variation are left out. Not only do most terms lack specification, but they are also repeated to create a sort of double-story¹⁴ semantic emptiness. And yet, given the audience's reaction (laugh), the whole passage manages to trigger a perlocutionary effect. The orientational metaphor "the other side" is pronounced twice but with a different meaning. We assume that the first occurrence "on the other side", even if very confusedly defined via this metaphor, refers to the supporters of the Green New Deal and to the Democratic party as a whole, in order for Trump and most conservatives to make the public opinion believe that all the Democrats support this plan, which is far from being the case. As a matter of fact, the speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi herself is not in favor of such a plan¹⁵. Besides, a recent poll¹⁶ revealed that the citizens who have heard the most about the Green New Deal are not the Democrats, but the Republicans. The Green New Deal was in fact used by Trump as a weapon against the Democrats. He used the deal as an unpatriotic symbol which puts the country in danger.
- 31 The phrase "on the other side" echoes Trump's use of the deictic "they", which never has a clear antecedent: "they call it"; "they should"; "they have to". Subsequently, "the other side", as well as "they", is to be computed as "the bad guys, the villains":
 In populist political discourse, opponents are a crucial theme. They are not only conceptualized as 'others' with a different agenda and values, but they also tend to be seen as a threat [...] the dichotomy of 'we versus them' is meant to influence the audience's mental model [...] (Pilyachuk & Onysko 2018, 114)
- 32 The notion of otherness (as related to the issues of immigration and economy) is also explored by Bonilla (2018), who analyses Trump's conceptualization of self/other as businessman and as a President. In terms of implicatures, Bonilla concludes that:
 Trump as a businessman implied that the economy was not going well as a consequence of other countries blaming those countries for the economic depression. [...] However, Trump as a president implies that the economy is not nourishing as a consequence of the immigration system as if the immigrants were the culprits of the economic situation. (Bonilla 2018, 410)
- 33 Interestingly, the villains ("them") who were held responsible for the economic crisis shifted from "other countries" (Trump as businessman) to "immigrants" (Trump as President).
- 34 The second occurrence of the noun phrase "the other side" refers to Trump's position regarding the Green New Deal: "I'll take the other side of that argument". The expression turns the argument into a double-orientation object: one can take it one side, or the other. Obviously, the citizens referred to as "they" take it one way, and Trump decides to take it the opposite way. In passing, the President reminds Americans that they gave him the authority to act a certain way with the passive: "only because I'm mandated to".
- 35 One key repetition appears three times and, contrary to the others, undergoes a certain degree of elaboration: "Green New Deal".
 I-I think the... **New Green Deal** or whatever the hell they call it... The **Green New Deal** right? **Green New Deal**.
- 36 The first occurrence is wrongly put as the two epithets are inverted, and is post-modified by a coordinated clause which contains a direct attack expressed with a slippery register. As opposed to sarcasm which would imply inverted inference, here

lexicon and meaning are perfectly aligned. Hence the inference on the audience's part is "direct", as opposed to inverted. The pause, smile and direct look at the camera emphasize the inflammatory clause ("the hell"), as well as the coordinator *or* in "or whatever the hell they call it". As Quirk and Greenbaum explain (1985, 932): "typically, *or* is exclusive – it excludes the possibility that the contents of both clauses are true or are to be fulfilled".

- 37 The second occurrence, within a rhetorical question, corresponds to a phony correction on Trump's part, where the adjectives now occupy their correct slots: "The Green New Deal, right?". The President pretends that he wants to right a wrong: "right?". His facial expression and intonation orient us towards this interpretation which deviates from the lexical content.
- 38 The last occurrence is accompanied by a surprisingly rising intonation. This tone is *a priori* not justified in this semantic context; a falling tone is expected. More than a feature of "uptalk" New York, we analyze this pattern as classical rising intonation: a pattern used for questions or for non-final statement. This tone thus carries the meaning: "there's room for discussion and compromise". Such as in very basic reaction "Really?" + rising intonation for instance, which means: "I'm genuinely surprised because I didn't know that. Please tell me more about it, etc." Trump goes as far as accompanying this rising tone with a softening of the voice. Therefore, sarcasm is of course not solely restricted to the lexicon. Prosody may also require inverted inference on the part of the receiver. There is naturally absolutely no room for compromise or further discussion on the topic of the Green New Deal.
- 39 In light of the logic of pre-modification ordering, we may wonder what to think of the inversion of modifiers ("New Green" vs "Green New"). Is Trump's mistake real or feigned?
- 40 Since the expression "New Deal" forms a cultural fossilized whole (where the adjective lost its "adjectiveness"), could the link to President Roosevelt's concept not be mastered? Could this mistake be interpreted as disrespect towards history, which is yet another way to make the audience laugh? Another option could be that, by misplacing the epithet (New Green Deal), Trump avoids giving the adjective "green" a prominent position. This applies to the level of syntax as well as to that of prosody, as the first adjective ("new" in Trump's faulty version vs "green" in the correct version), bears the primary stress.

Apostrophe as stand-up comedy

- 41 At the end of the excerpt, Trump adopts the style of a stand-up comedian whose aim is to keep the audience entertained.
"Darling ? Darling, is the wind blowing today? I'd like to watch television, darling!"
- 42 He sets up a middle-class daily routine where he impersonates the patriarch, and where the wife seems to be at her husband's command. In this worldview, gender equality never happened. We can picture the male character on the couch, sitting in front of TV and getting impatient. His wife is in a different room or outside, and is asked (or rather yelled at) to check for the weather and report back to her husband. The noun "Darling" is used three times as a softener to accompany the authoritarian request, more than to signal the husband's tenderness towards his spouse.

- 43 In this scene, the use of metonymy (the wind stands for wind farms) enables Trump to ridicule wind turbines which could be considered the prototypical example of the category “renewable energy”. Hence by contiguity, Trump also manages to ridicule all types of (more peripheral, less representative) renewable energy. Yet, there is a basic flaw in the scenario, as President Trump misrepresents (or intentionally lies about) the functioning of wind turbines. They do store electricity, the same way dams store water. In his parable, the actual television could work even though the wind is not blowing. This misrepresentation makes the sketch all the more ludicrous and dangerously disconnected from basic scientific reality.

Chaotic speech cohesion and histrionic prosody

- 44 How are the clauses and sentences interconnected and, more broadly, how does cohesion work to create a sense of coherence and causality?
- 45 Overall, cohesion is chaotic. It creates a jarring effect. Nonetheless, as previously noted, the message gets through. The recurrent theme of these sentences is often the subject and deictic “I”. The sentences are mostly juxtaposed (with the presence of asyndeton for certain clauses), without any use of logical connectors that would indicate a search and justification for causation. Nonetheless, there is one passage where connectors are used for causal linkage in the audience’s mind: “But I’ll take the other side of that argument only because I’m mandated to”. The conjunction “but” establishes a sharp contrast with what Trump has just stated: that “they” should defend the Green New Deal. This contrast is duplicated when Trump adds: “But they should stay with that argument”. Nevertheless, the contrast established is forced and ironical. The combination of the adverb “only” and the conjunction “because” creates a euphemism which is also to be connected to inverted inference processing. The meaning could be paraphrased by: “I’ll take the other side of that argument *precisely because* I am the President”.
- 46 On a broader scale related to causation, when looking at Trump’s policy proposals, Lakoff (2016) explains that Trump always opt for “direct causation” rather than “systemic causation”: “Direct causation is dealing with a problem via direct action (Immigrants are flooding in from Mexico – build a wall to stop them).” And whereas, “direct causation is easy to understand” and “can be represented in the grammars of all languages”, “systemic causation” is complex and “has to be learned”. While connecting direct causation to the Strict father model (Lakoff 1996, 33) where the child or spouse is supposed to immediately respond to an order or else be punished, the linguist (2016) goes as far as stating that, in general, “conservatives tend to reason with direct causation” and progressives via systemic causation.
- 47 On the suprasegmental level¹⁷, Trump interrupts himself several times. He also sometimes makes the end of a sentence overlap the next. As confirmed by García’s analysis:
- Trump sometimes behaves in an erratic way. His ideas are not completely consistent and his style is also chaotic. Inarticulation is an example of this behavior. At times his prosody sounds awkward as he interrupts himself constantly and does not end [his] sentences. (García 2018, 57)

- 48 Both phenomena contribute to an unsettling feeling of ventriloquism, or split self. This sense of arrhythmia is reinforced by tone unit contrasts which take the audience by surprise, such as in:

/It's something our country needs **desperately** they have to go out and **get** it/

- 49 Although this passage is made of large number of syllables (18), it is made of one tone-unit only. And the disjunct of evaluation “desperately” bears the sentence stress, or nucleus. This gives the impression that Trump is out of breath (the tail of the tone unit is too long); it emphasizes his state of anger. A much more composed way to pronounce the passage would be to divide it into two tone units, which would mean a nucleus in the second one as well (as suggested in bold). But then the sense of anger and emergency is lost:

/It's something our country needs **desperately**/They have to go out and **get** it/

- 50 The pronunciation of this adverb is accompanied by a clenched fist that looks as if it were going to hit the lectern. This unexpected rising tone on “desperately” seems to leave room for negotiation in the statements made. And once more, there is none. Trump makes an ironic use of intonation patterns again; or when rising tone means falling tone.
- 51 Even if anaphoric patterns are encouraged to hammer a point home, the overuse of repetition weakens the process of cohesion instead of reinforcing it. In such a short span of time, ellipsis and substitution should have been called upon. But triggering a physical reaction through violence is prioritized over the search for content and causality. And spontaneous remarks seem to block the possibility for any kind of elaborate rhetorical device. The afore-mentioned background content related to wind turbines also disrupts the semantic coherence of Trump's statement.

Framing what Americans live for: “plane”, “energy” and “television”

- 52 In Trump's climate-skeptic worldview, fossil energy (oil and coal) has to be promoted regardless of the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the climate. This constraint is precisely what Trump's fight is about. He is ready to accept that “something's changing”, but he rejects the theory of Anthropocene altogether. This enables him to tell the citizens that no one is guilty, that climate change results from the natural course of events. And as Trump asserts: climate change “will change back again”. Therefore, neither energy consumption restrictions nor new habits should be implemented in America.
- 53 In four words, Trump gives the audience a foretaste of what life would turn out to be in America if the Green New Deal was signed:
- No planes. No energy.
- 54 This minimalist syntax manages to frame (as defined by cognitive linguists) the consequence of the Green New Deal as the worst-case scenario. What if Americans can no longer travel across their country, be it for business purposes or family reasons? What if these people who believe (or want to believe) that climate change is a conspiracy can no longer drive their cars or power their homes and offices freely with all the necessary energy for electrical appliances, or twenty-four hour a day light and air-conditioning? The word “television” also belongs to this list of symbolic possessions which frame a certain standard of the American way of life, from Trump's viewpoint.

When the wind stops blowing, that's the end of your electric. [...] is the wind blowing today? I'd like to watch television [...]

- 55 In Trump's framing process of the middle-class American way of life, planes correspond to the most convenient transportation in the United States, energy consumption has to be unlimited to power all that needs to be powered at home; television symbolizes the main channel American families rely upon for information, infotainment, entertainment, education etc. Unexpectedly, cars and oil were left out of the frame.

Trump's ethos: a caricature of the Strict father Model

- 56 This analysis has trodden the path of inverted inference several times. Sarcasm is at the heart of the President's verbal behavior. And going one step further than Pilyachuk and Onysko (2018, 109) when looking at how the Strict Father model is triggered, we state that the frequency with which it manifests itself turns Trump, or rather Trump's ethos, into a caricature of Lakoff's "Strict Father model" (1996, 65-66), as it is brought to its paroxysm. In this model, where the metaphor THE NATION IS A FAMILY entails two different types of framing, the conservative worldview is analyzed as a metaphorical family where the father plays the lead role.

[The Strict Father] teaches children right from wrong by setting rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment. The punishment is typically mild to moderate, but sufficiently painful. It is commonly corporal punishment – say with a belt or a stick. (Lakoff 1996, 66)

- 57 In this excerpt, not only does the metaphorical father behave authoritatively, but he also publicly humiliates the metaphorical children that do not behave as told; the supporters of the Green New Deal.
- 58 The etymology of sarcasm reminds us of the violent bodily dimension of such a device, which dovetails with Salmon's confrontational strategy. The rhetorical device of apostrophe illustrates another aspect of the Strict Father model, where the wife is advised not to trespass her rights:
- The mother has day-to-day responsibility for the care of the house, raising the children, and upholding the father's authority. (Lakoff, 1996, 66)
- 59 Why choose inverted inference – at various linguistic levels, as seen above – as a means of communication? The main discursive strategy is to build up connivance with a kind of secret code: "you and I know that I mean the exact opposite of what I'm saying". Besides, saying the opposite of what one thinks qualifies for lie and fake, which are Trump's main communications strategies; or at least those the media choose to remember and comment upon.

Concluding remarks

- 60 The stylistic features we have dealt with are "so *not* presidential" (Easton Ellis 2019, 144) because they rather belong to a reality-TV program such as "The Apprentice"¹⁸. And other features, such as performatives "I think", "I encourage", or blunt negation of the type "no plane" and "never change", are often called upon in these shows. Humiliating the participants to create tension during the show is part of this genre as well.

- 61 On the level of political strategy, hyperbolizing his position about the Green New Deal enables Trump to use it as a weapon against the Democrats: they act like children who don't know what they are doing. By contiguity and metonymical reasoning, Democrats are not reliable. Paradoxically, Trump also uses the Deal to divert the citizens' attention from the responsibilities which must be shouldered regarding the global issue of climate change.
- 62 As to Salmon's hypothesis which states that storytelling is agonizing and being replaced by the confrontational strategy, it has to be nuanced. At a time when Barack Obama –whose speeches made extensive use of storytelling – has signed a multiyear production deal with Netflix¹⁹, rhetoricians should wait before concluding that the influence of narratives in the political sphere has become a thing of the past.
- 63 The confrontational strategy as described by Salmon has certainly entered the history of presidential talk in the digital era. The political wish to operate on the “come together” mode has been replaced by that of rift and divide. The frame of the fight has become predominant: an assailant who now embodies the figure of the hero, a villain who takes the (almost physical) blow in front of everybody (as would the participants of “The Apprentice”), and victims who support the hero and get addicted to brutal interaction.
- 64 Yet, one may wonder about Coleridge's “willing suspension of disbelief” in the case of this peculiar presidency; a billionaire who once was an inspiration to the narrator of *American Psycho* (Easton Ellis, 1991), back in late 80's analog America.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix: transcript

I look at what’s happening on the other side. I encourage it. I say no, no... I-I think the... New Green Deal or whatever the hell they call it... The Green New Deal, right? Green New Deal. I encourage it. I think th- I think it’s really something that they should promote, they should work hard on. It’s something our country needs, desperately. They have to go out and get it!

But I’ll take the other side of that argument only because... I’m mandated to. I’m manda- but they should stay with that argum- never change. Never chan-

No planes. No energy.

When the wind stops blowing, that’s the end of your electric. let’s hurry uh-:

“Darling ? Darling, is the wind blowing today? I’d like to watch television, darling!”

(131 words)

YouTube CPAC, 2 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UApAo2KPvOI>, accessed 1 July 2019

NOTES

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14. To be taken in the sense of "storey", here.
15. *RollingStone*, 27 February 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/nancy-pelosi-trump-interview-797209/>, accessed 4 November 2019.
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17. The author would like to thank linguist Jean Albrespit from Bordeaux Montaigne University, who kindly accepted to double-check and comment my findings in the field of prosody.
18. YouTube New York Magazine, 16 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZzwPBlPweo>, accessed 25 June 2019.
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ABSTRACTS

In a cognitive rhetoric approach, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the main rhetorical devices at work in this video clip extracted from the annual CPAC 2019 conference. In this one-minute long excerpt (131 words), President Trump mocks Representative Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal. Based on the assumption that Trump is running off-script in this passage, the paper analyses the discursive means he spontaneously uses to ridicule the Green New Deal among which: sarcasm and inverted inference, repetition, theatrical prosody. It also questions the possible death of the "storytelling" in the realm of politics.

Cet article propose d'analyser les principaux mécanismes rhétoriques à l'œuvre dans une vidéo extraite de la conférence annuelle de 2019, organisée par les conservateurs américains et connue sous le nom de CPAC. Lors de ce court extrait, le président Trump tourne en dérision le projet de

Green New Deal soutenu par la représentante Ocasio-Cortez. Partant du principe que, lors de cet extrait, la prise de parole de Trump est spontanée et s'écarte donc du discours officiel, cette analyse choisit de mettre en exergue les moyens discursifs convoqués spontanément par le président pour ridiculiser le Green New Deal : le sarcasme, l'inférence inversée, la répétition et la prosodie théâtrale. L'article remet également en question la mort annoncée du « storytelling » au profit de la rhétorique du « clash » dans l'univers de la politique.

INDEX

Mots-clés: cohésion, figures de rhétorique, frame, Green New Deal, inférence inversée, président Trump, prosodie, récit du Parexit, rhétorique cognitive, sarcasme, stratégie du « clash », storytelling

Keywords: cognitive rhetoric, cohesion, confrontational strategy, frame, Green New Deal, inverted inference, Parexit narrative, President Trump, prosody, rhetorical devices, sarcasm, storytelling

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