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'DOES ANYONE KNOW I OWN A HOUSE IN CHARLOTTESVILLE?': DONALD TRUMP'S EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

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ABSTRACT

Epeideixis is commonly defined as rhetoric that seeks to attribute praise or blame, and reaffirm or reformulate community values. Key to its rhetorical 'success' with media audiences is its ornamental function and performative power rather than its informative content.

This case study focuses on Donald Trump's rhetoric following the Charlottesville protests in 2017, along a short narrative timeline of a few days. His style might be designated as a distinctive 'populist rhetoric', contravening some political speechmaking norms. The paper integrates analysis of sample sections of the Charlottesville speeches with Celeste Condit's (1985) 'functional pairs', namely, definition/understanding; shaping/sharing the community; and display/entertainment.

The study concludes that Trump's media performance following Charlottesville represents a presidential evasion of the explicit requirements of epideictic rhetoric, and thereby, a consequential failure to provide non-partisan comfort and social unity at a pivotal political moment.

Keywords: epideixis/epideictic ▪ Trump ▪ Charlottesville ▪ rhetoric ▪ dramaturgy

1. INTRODUCTION

On August 12, 2017, a crowd of hundreds far-right, neo-Nazis and white supremacist activists marched through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, towards the statue of Civil War confederate General Robert E. Lee. In the southern United States around that time, a deeply acrimonious debate had been taking place regarding the existence of confederate memorials, street names, flags and statues, and the inherent racism of the historical events that they continued to commemorate. The 'Unite the Right' marchers carried swastikas, weapons and torches and chanted deeply racist slogans such as 'Jews will not replace us', 'You will not replace us', 'Blacks will not replace us', 'Immigrants will not replace us', 'Blood and soil' and 'White lives matter'. The

demonstrators were met with an anti-fascist counter-demonstration, and violence occurred, resulting in many injuries. A counter-protester, Heather Heyer, was killed by a far-right activist driving his car into the crowd. Two state troopers on duty were also killed in a helicopter accident.

It is typical that when crisis events occur, citizens look to a trusted public figure, such as a president or other head of state, for some formal statement that may provide reassurance and the promise of stability; it is in these situations where epideictic rhetoric is expected as part of the repertoire of political communication.

In the years following Donald Trump's election as President of the United States, journalists and their audiences witnessed numerous situations that challenged public expectations of 'presidential behavior'. Much media reporting during his term seemed to focus on characterizing him as a populist, undermining many norms, rituals and practices that characterize political office. The aim of this paper is to explore, from a critical perspective, Trumpian epideixis (or epideictic) in the light of the Charlottesville tragedy; and thereby, examine the former President's self-styled media persona as a populist plain-speaker. Working with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) interpretation of Aristotelian rhetoric and Condit's (1985) conceptualization of the epideictic genre, this paper will examine the extent to which Trump's rhetoric after Charlottesville marks a deviation from long-established norms of political behavior on epideictic occasions. In conclusion, the paper aims to consider the implications for the US and elsewhere of far-right inflected political discourse.

Epideictic speeches form part of the public speaking repertoire of almost any political leader, typically comprising formal scripted speeches for relevant political 'fields of action' (see Girth, 1996, in Wodak, 2009), such as ceremony or commemoration. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Katherine Hall Jamieson (1990: 50), in their important study of American presidential rhetoric, maintain that all speeches in all contexts are 'vital functions for the preservation of the presidency as an institution'. Indeed, many epideictic presidential speeches delivered by Trump have stylistic parallels with similar speeches by his predecessors. Within the epideictic genre are the many regular events in any presidential schedule: inaugural speeches, State of the Union and Memorial Day addresses, commemorations of key anniversaries, etc. However, epideictic also comprises other less predictable situations outside the schedule, such as speeches, statements and eulogies following mass shootings. It is worth noting the tragic frequency of this latter sub-genre: Barack Obama, for example, delivered some 18 such media addresses following mass shootings during his time in office. Scholars also point to the eloquence of epideictic addresses by Abraham Lincoln on the battlefield at Gettysburg; Ronald Reagan following the Challenger space shuttle crash in 1986; Bill Clinton following the Oklahoma bombing in 1995; and George W. Bush following the attacks of 9/11.

Warning signs of normative idiosyncrasies appeared early in the Trump presidency. Incongruous comments were made at an annual celebration of the Boy Scout movement. An unscripted attempt at epideixis followed Trump's failure to attract

most of the Super Bowl-winning NFL team to the White House in 2018; the event was turned into a face-saving 'celebration of America' with patriotic songs. Conversely, the absence of epideixis is also notable. Epideictic memorializing was not forthcoming, or only cursory, for example, on the death of Republican Congressman John McCain in August 2018. Opportunities for presidential words of comfort, a fundamental manifestation and objective of epideixis, were also missed following the multiple deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police officers during his time in office.

The primary focus of this paper is analysis of Trump's words delivered in the immediate hours and days following the Charlottesville protests in August 2017. The purpose is to provide a snapshot case study of Trump's reaction in light of the norms of epideixis. Many existing analyses of Trump's rhetorical style focus primarily on the micro-linguistic (mainly lexical) level (see, for example, Sclafani, 2017). This paper also acknowledges the important contribution by Perry (2018) who discusses what he calls Trump's 'uncivil mourning' regarding Charlottesville in the broader context of American white supremacy. The aim of this case study is to consider linguistic features of a president's epideictic remarks, but set against the performative and verbal norms deployed following public tragedy.

Further to arguing that Trump's epideixis is anomalous within American presidential practice, it is prudent to acknowledge shifts and innovations in available media in different eras that affect the context, delivery, message and reception of political speeches. To illustrate, I have included some contemporaneous material from Trump's Twitter feed to provide illumination on the supplementary role played by social media. The discussion and concluding sections also engage briefly with some of the implications of shifts in political rhetoric in general, and the rhetoric of far-right extremism. The limitations, but also the potential positive and progressive value of epideictic rhetoric in times of moral crisis among socially diverse populations will also be acknowledged.

Research questions:

1. In what ways does Trump's rhetorical handling of Charlottesville represent a departure from the epideictic norms typically deployed on occasions of public moral crisis?
2. To what extent does epideixis play a significant role in the dramaturgy of modern politics, and why should it be upheld in the interests of democratic discourse?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUALIZING RHETORIC AND EPIDEIXIS

How important is epideictic rhetoric in the political repertoire? A revival of interest in Aristotelian rhetoric and its relevance to modern political discourse has been aided by, for example, the canonical work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), and

later, for example, by Condit (1985), Sauer (1996), Reisigl (2008), Slavičková (2013, 2014) and Atkins (2018). Briefly, Aristotle (1924) identified three principal modes for persuading audiences, namely *logos* (deploying rational argument); *ethos* (drawing attention to the speaker's personal authority and charisma); and *pathos* (expressing and engendering emotional reactions, etc.). Aristotle also defines three *genera* of oratory. Firstly, the forward-looking deliberative genre (*genus deliberativum*) is oriented to future policy and debate. Secondly, the forensic genre (*genus iudiciale*) investigates events of the past, and is closely related to judicial discourse. Thirdly, the epideictic genre (*genus demonstrativum*), is perhaps the most conceptually opaque. The norm for presidential epideixis is that the *ethos* of the presidential orator is conferred by that person acting as the deictic centre [or *origo*]. If we think of political discourse in dramaturgical terms, in acknowledgement of Goffman (1959) and also Sauer (1996), public figures carrying out their duties are analogous to actors on a stage. The epideictic speaker is the animator, the mediator, the performance vehicle, but not necessarily its author. A dramaturgical perspective renders many political routines predictable and ritualistic, as citizens have *a priori* expectations of genre: what is to be done according to the field of action.

Epideictic speeches may be viewed by some communication analysts as being without intrinsic interest, lacking not only significant informative content, but also performative drive. On the surface, they tend to be predominantly ornamental, platitudinous, euphemistic, controlled and aesthetically pleasing. These features also intersect with some of the affective (*pathos*) qualities of populist rhetoric (see Rowland, 2021), and are unlike the dynamic deliberative and forensic genres which are more conspicuously a part of the rough and tumble of political life and the demands of modern media.

Epideixis is commonly defined as rhetoric that attributes praise for citizens to follow (encomium), or blame (vituperation) for them to reject. A thorough discussion of epideictic rhetoric and its subtle role in public discourse in the modern era is provided by Condit (1985); her framework, based on a critical reworking of Aristotle, underpins this case study. Drawing on earlier theoretical studies (such as Chase, 1961; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Oravec, 1976, and Beale, 1978), Condit designates three possible perspectives: (a) message-centered, (b) speaker-centered and (c) audience-centered (Condit, 1985: 285-7), each impacting on the other. She cautions that the familiar association of epideixis with praise or blame regarding the object of the speech may only serve to simplify its purpose. A unifying rhetoric can also, conversely, be a tool for otherization and discrimination. Condit correctly asserts that many other speech genres also seek to impart praise or blame, concurring with Beale (1978) that these are highly unspecific designations. Function is significant as well as form: praise and/or blame can also be imparted implicitly, without sincerity, or using irony.

Condit elevates the complex framework of epideixis beyond its perceived orientation to the spatio-temporal present, as expressed, for example, by the words *We*

are gathered here today.... Indeed, epideixis goes beyond the here and now, to prepare the ground for audience acceptance of future argumentation and to accept changing realities. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) concur in the notion of a long-term future, deliberative, orientation in epideixis, in their earlier seminal work linking rhetoric, argumentation and persuasion:

Epideictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation because it strengthens the disposition towards action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 50)

An experienced epideictic orator has the strategic skill to ‘create a reassuring communal definition [of events and actors] that can be shared by all active members...’ (Condit: 1985: 292), hence the need for universal themes and arguments, as citizens are guided to position themselves on the side of good against evil.

Condit’s framework acknowledges the range of possible functions of epideixis, suggesting that the three perspectives outlined above can be aligned with three possible functional pairs and deployed as a single pair, or combined:

1. definition/understanding (of the community and its values or challenges)
2. shaping/sharing of community
3. display/entertainment.

Condit (1985: 288)

(The first item in each pair indicates the function for the orator and the second, the function for the audience – thus acknowledging the dialogic, pragmatic relationships inherent in formal, scripted language use.) These three perspectives will be applied to Charlottesville.

Epideixis is deployed in situations where ritual, ‘display’, sincerity and the artfulness of the speaker are on show for critical evaluation by an audience. Here, content may be seen as secondary to the speaker’s oratorical style and ethos, but may be significant in presenting argumentation to be taken up at a future point. At the moment of delivery, however, audiences may experience pathos (positive and negative emotions), the co-presence of a shared experience with other audience members (even at a distance, via mass media), the poetry of their lexical, metaphorical, allusive and even phonological choices, and the physical presence of speakers and their ethos (including their presidential status and charisma). The interaction of ethos and pathos are thus key aspects of populist rhetoric.

Quintilian (1920), in his *Instituto Oratoria*, argues that whatever political expediency is being exercised, the speaker’s oratory must convince the audience they are in the presence of someone who is morally upright. The epideictic genre might usually be a bastion of poetic civility in modern societies where political discourse is often characterized by prosaic dysphemism. However, given the hard cognitive work of *logos* is backgrounded, the *pathos* and, most notably, *ethos* orientation of epideictic discourse also permit the politically convenient elision of truth. As Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) attest, the ornamental nature of the genre helps orators to elide or defer ideological messages; its analysis therefore is of interest.

The complexity of political argumentation and politicians' deployment of a nuanced range of rhetorical strategies to persuade citizens is discussed at length by, for example, Finlayson (2007). His paper advocates for an articulation of linguistic and political study, using rhetorical political analysis (RPA). This approach involves not only attention to argumentation, or stylistic aspects of persuasion, but also analyses the varied roles of context, rules and norms; what is designated by Bitzer (1968) as the "rhetorical situation". Politics scholars are encouraged, therefore, to advance beyond arguments as discrete elements, to focus on the situatedness of the political utterance, and thereby its linguistic manifestations. Finlayson urges political analysts to engage more fully with "genealogies" of argumentation and their contribution to affective commonalities and *topoi*. The affective dimension of political argumentation is also taken up by Martin (2015), who proposes an overtly psychoanalytic approach to political argumentation, stating that:

The canny orator is thus not one who crudely 'stirs emotions' but, more precisely, one who articulates desires in terms that permit audiences to grasp a situation and place themselves in it (Martin, 2015: 158).

The rhetorical 'success' of an epideictic oratory is thus predicated not only on its ornamental verbal artistry (see Jakobson, 1960) but also on its performative power (see Goffman, 1959). A modern audience's expectations of what comprises an effective speech are nurtured by exposure to the cumulative repertoire of rhetorical situations. Epideictic speeches may be crafted (using linguistic and non-linguistic signs) to appear uncontroversial, non-partisan, and to reach the widest possible audience. Whatever the content, the overarching, often understated, goal of the epideictic genre is upholding, for strategic purposes, not only the illusion of unity and communality among the audience, but contributing also, perhaps, to the foundation of a new one. For example, there is no doubt that Barack Obama's epideictic speeches following mass shootings and endemic murder levels during his incumbency urged national unity in grief, but they also link to the deliberative (and more partisan) political objectives of gun control and civil rights. Obama has expressed frustration with the institutional constraints on presidential rhetorical freedom, that 'he 'constantly struggled' with translating the passion and concern around some events - like the shootings of [Trayvon] Martin and [Michael] Brown - into political action'.¹ The key dilemma of epideictic rhetoric is adherence to the dramaturgical norms of universality while seeking, implicitly, to persuade.²

1 See <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/26/politics/obama-ferguson-trayvon-martin-justice-department/index.html>

2 An excellent (fictional) example of this can be found in Mark Anthony's funeral speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

3. CASE STUDY AND DISCUSSION: THE CHARLOTTESVILLE NARRATIVE

The text extracts described and discussed below take the form of written and spoken language used by Trump from 12 to 15 August 2017. The data represents extracts from all of his public output referencing Charlottesville in those first few days. Trump's comments on the protest illustrate familiar narrative (and lexical) issues that are found in much of his political repertoire, but which appear stark when set against the normative stylistic range of epideixis. In different rhetorical situations, such as a presidential address to Congress, other genres (forensic and/or deliberative) might be deployed, but it is important to recognize that epideixis is a common first reaction by an orator to an unexpected crisis (as was the case here), before the message is shaped and (re-)contextualized (e.g. within a wider discussion about racial inequality, or gun control).

This body of text comprises 3 text types:

1. Two short speeches separated by two days. The second of these (612 words) is a reformulation of the first (573 words), which was criticized in parts of the media as inappropriate to the epideictic moment.
2. An unscripted press Q and A (approx. 15 minutes) which confounds the epideictic style of the second reworded speech.
3. 9 tweets on Trump's Twitter account (original transcripts including typographic idiosyncrasies, from the online Trump Twitter Archive³) some of which will also be drawn upon below. (3 tweets from the total of 12 sent in this time period do not relate to Charlottesville.)

12 August 2017: President Trump is at his golf course in Bedminster, New Jersey and informed of the Charlottesville violence. He sends out consecutive tweets:

We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Lets come together as one!

Am in Bedminster for meetings & press conference on V.A. [veterans' affairs] & all that we have done, and are doing, to make it better-but Charlottesville sad!

We must remember this truth: No matter our color, creed, religion or political party, we are ALL AMERICANS FIRST.

Text 1 (12 August 2017): Trump delivers the first of two epideictic speeches. The introductory sentences reveal a reluctance to engage with the ongoing Charlottesville crisis, and to foreground it with distractions. He praises local officials and himself, mentioning that the Virginia state governor thanked him for federal support in handling the aftermath. Throughout the short speech, references are made to the nation's

³ The data remains available at <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive>

economic and social improvement: 'My administration is restoring the sacred bonds of loyalty between this nation and its citizens'; '[O]ur country is doing very well in so many ways'. There are claims that '[racism]'s been going on for a long time in our country'. He fails to denounce white supremacy, claiming 'hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides...'

Thank you very much. As you know, this was a small press conference, but a very important one. And it was scheduled to talk about the great things that we're doing with the secretary on the veterans administration. And we will talk about that very much so in a little while. But I thought I should put out a comment as to what's going on in Charlottesville. So, again, I want to thank everybody for being here, in particular I want to thank our incredible veterans. And thank you, fellas. Let me shake your hand.

They're great people. Great people. But we're closely following the terrible events unfolding in Charlottesville, Virginia. We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides...

... We have to come together as Americans with love for our nation and true affection-- really, I say this so strongly, true affection for each other. Our country is doing very well in so many ways. We have record -- just absolute record employment. We have unemployment the lowest it's been in almost 17 years. We have companies pouring into our country, Foxconn and car companies and so many others. They're coming back to our country. We're renegotiating trade deals to make them great for our country and great for the American worker.

Two days later, public and media pressure is mounting for the President to openly denounce neo-Nazis, white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan (whose leader and other members were present in Charlottesville), and to distance himself from the 'many sides' remark. There is strong media criticism of Trump's failure to mention Heather Heyer's death or characterize the attack as domestic terrorism.

In response to the controversy, the business community reacts swiftly. The CEO of Merck Pharmaceuticals resigns from the president's manufacturing council, followed by others. Walmart's CEO posts a lengthy tweet expressing condolences; a statement on the company's website laments the missing of 'a critical opportunity to help bring our country together by unequivocally rejecting the appalling actions of white supremacists'.

Text 2 (14 August 2017): Now back at the White House, the President delivers another short speech, similar in content and style to Text 1, but this time it is noted by journalists present that the speech is scripted and he is reading from a teleprompter. He begins again with self-praise and distraction by celebrating his economic

successes - unemployment, American business, job creation. Later, he moves on to discuss Charlottesville:

As I said on Saturday, we condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of bigotry, hatred, and violence. It has no place in America. And as I have said many times before, no matter the color of our skin, we all live under the same laws; we all salute the same great flag; and we are all made by the same almighty God. We must love each other, show affection for each other, and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry, and violence. We must discover the bonds of love and loyalty that bring us together as Americans. Racism is evil, and those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans. We are a nation founded on the truth that all of us are created equal. We are equal in the eyes of our creator, we are equal under the law, and we are equal under our constitution. Those who spread violence in the name of bigotry strike at the very core of America.

Two days ago, a young American woman, Heather Heyer, was tragically killed. Her death fills us with grief and we send her family our thoughts, our prayers, and our love.

In this reformulated version, Trump repeats more than once the tricolon of ‘hatred, bigotry and violence’ (whose rhetorical impact is perhaps weakened with each repetition), but he does also refer to ‘racist violence’, ‘racism is evil’, ‘violence in the name of racism’ and ‘violence in the name of bigotry’. For now, the reference to blame ‘on many sides’ has been removed. Here, despite the unrelated and distracting opening remarks, we can argue that praise for the values of those killed and blame for those espousing racist ideology and provoking violence, seem to be appropriately assigned. This is recognizably, in part, an epideictic speech.

On 15 August, Trump obfuscates the previous day’s message using Twitter. He retweets a cartoon showing a personified image of news network CNN being run down by a Trump train, and another tweet from a critic that in fact stated ‘he [Trump]’s a fascist’; these are quickly deleted. He substitutes his own, more self-oriented tweets, targeting perceived adversaries in the media and business:

Made additional remarks on Charlottesville and realize once again that the #Fake News Media will never be satisfied...truly bad people!

For every CEO that drops out of the Manufacturing Council, I have many to take their place. Grandstanders should not have gone on. JOBS!

Text 3 (15 August 2017): Later, in Trump Tower in New York City, the President holds

an abrasive Q and A session with the press. He repeats his condemnation of ‘this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence’. However, many responses throw into sharp relief the scripted, measured epideictic of the words spoken the day before. Below are some extracts (Q: assorted journalists, A: Trump).

Aiming for positive self-representation in varied ways, Trump defends his initial reticence regarding Heyer’s killing. There is finally a moment of praise for her, but it is the self-praise that is foregrounded (see underlined text):

Excuse me. Excuse me. Take it nice and easy. Here’s the thing. When I make a statement, I like to be correct. I want the facts. This event just happened. In fact, a lot of the event didn’t even happen yet, as we were speaking. This event just happened.

Before I make a statement, I need the facts. So I don’t want to rush into a statement. So making the statement when I made it was excellent. In fact, the young woman, who I hear was a fantastic young woman, and it was on NBC — her mother wrote me and said through, I guess, Twitter, social media, the nicest things. And I very much appreciated that. I hear she was a fine — really, actually, an incredible young woman. But her mother, on Twitter, thanked me for what I said.

...

I wanted to see the facts. And the facts, as they started coming out, were very well stated. In fact, everybody said, ‘His statement was beautiful. If he would have made it sooner, that would have been good.’ I couldn’t have made it sooner because I didn’t know all of the facts. Frankly, people still don’t know all of the facts.

In a later section of the press meeting, he returns to the issue of blame, targeting the media:

Q: *Mr.President, are you putting what you’re calling the alt-left and white supremacists on the same moral plane?*

THE PRESIDENT: *I’m not putting anybody on a moral plane. What I’m saying is this: You had a group on one side and you had a group on the other, and they came at each other with clubs — and it was vicious and it was horrible. And it was a horrible thing to watch. But there is another side. There was a group on this side. You can call them the left — you just called them the left — that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that’s the way it is.*

Q: [Inaudible] *both sides, sir. You said there was hatred, there was violence on both sides. Are the —*

THE PRESIDENT: *Yes, I think there's blame on both sides. If you look at both sides — I think there's blame on both sides. And I have no doubt about it, and you don't have any doubt about it either. And if you reported it accurately, you would say.*

Q: *The neo-Nazis started this. They showed up in Charlottesville to protest —*

THE PRESIDENT: *Excuse me, excuse me. They didn't put themselves — and you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides. You had people in that group.*

The following discussion applies Condit's (1985) framework.

3.1. Defining and Understanding the Event

Jamieson (1973) describes how the generic classification of a rhetorical event, and hence its framing, nurtures audience expectations of message style and structure. This is in accordance with long-established traditions. In the case of the epideictic genre, the speaker is expected to 'explain [a] troubling issue in terms of the audience's key values and beliefs' (Condit, 1985: 288). This is where the framing is paramount, and a presidential speaker is in a position to use ethos and the expectation of being 'comforter in chief' to this end. The 'troubling issue' here is, in fact, racism, bigotry and white supremacy (via 'replacement theory') which provoked the march, and which resulted in the murder of a protester. However, in the Trump narrative, the issue is presented as a literal manifestation of two opposing, but equal viewpoints, with equal rights to free speech and equal *modi operandi*. The framing of the circumstances of Heyer's death is rhetorically problematic, because Trump avoids explaining it via universal principles or an overarching, unifying message. The message, particularly with regard to praise and blame, is mixed (hence, 'there were very fine people, on both sides').

In all three speech events, we can observe Trump's repeated attempts to foreground his personal connection to the economic successes for which he is seeking praise (thereby attempting to turn the focus onto positive self-presentation). This represents a serious obfuscation of the epideictic message.

3.2. Shaping and Sharing the Community

A more subtle underlying function is that of shaping/sharing the community's/nation's values. As Condit observes, drawing on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969:

...a focus on partial interests is anathema. When speakers violate this rule and make arguments which do not gain general assent audience members feel a sense of misuse of an occasion...For, we create epideictic occasions...in order to have opportunities for expressing and reformulating out shared heritage.

(Condit, 1985: 289).

When used in a funeral oration or following a natural disaster, epideixis is sometimes arguably intended to provide a publicly 'managed' forum, and sometimes even, a vocabulary, for more individual-centered emotions such as grief and anger. This is a typical feature of any kind of mass 'comfort' discourse. Trump is not celebrated for his oratorical eloquence (over-using, for example, the singular personal pronoun *I*, avoiding the universal present tense, using dysphemism, extensive repetition and hedging). However, in the more controlled, scripted, Text 2 there are a few stylistic elements that acknowledge the unifying drive of the genre, and this is revealed in some of its ornamental norms, such as the double tricolon (one embedded in another): *'We must love each other, show affection for each other, and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry, and violence'*.

Condit argues that 'shaping the community' often entails drawing a picture of shared experiences to promote unity of purpose within a diverse audience. However, the Charlottesville speeches are just as likely to entail the construction of in- and out-groups, and it is certain that Trump's presidential framing power invoked cultural, gender and racial divisions. The dilemmas of expressing universal values at the expense of personal opinions have been experienced by previous presidents, of course: most notably in recent years, as mentioned earlier, by Barack Obama, for example, in regard to gun control, but also referring to environmental legislation and immigration. Trump's populist instincts (in the sense of ignoring or subverting the norms of rhetorical situations) led him to circumvent the 'institutional constraints' of the epideictic situation that frustrated his predecessor on parallel occasions, facilitating a 'both sides' tolerance of the intolerable.

3.3. Display and Entertainment

Trump's cultivated persona as non-politician, deft at evading the tedious norms of presidential office, came into conflict on numerous epideictic occasions with the demands of ceremonial traditions where eloquence is expected and valued:

'Eloquence' is the combination of truth, beauty and power in human speech, and is a unique capacity of humanity.' (Condit, 1985: 290)

We might argue that Trump entered office with the deliberate intention as a populist to entertain (and seduce?) his audience by shattering these 'elitist' norms, and we can see the verbal consequences of his struggle with normative expectations in terms of the rhetorical hybridity of the two Charlottesville speeches (contrasting Text 1 and Text 2).

Strictly speaking of course, the Q and A and the tweets are extraneous to the

norms of Aristotelian epideixis. However, in a modern multi-media environment, all these speech events should be viewed together as narrative segments of the epideictic whole. The tweets seem to be aimed at provocation of Trump's opponents and the entertainment of his base, by rupturing the normative expectation of eloquence. The relationship between the two speeches, the unscripted remarks to journalists, and the 'unfettered Trump' comments on Twitter reveal much about the President's unpredictable rule-breaking performances. With hindsight, observers may choose to speculate on the deliberateness of this narrative cacophony: perhaps they reflect little more than a reality TV-inflected conscious effort to secure ratings.

The political significance of this most sensitive, and controlled, of rhetorical situations is challenged in the Charlottesville case by a tendency towards ad hoc diversions, contradiction and distraction. The Q and A exposes not only the President's anger and frustration with journalists, but also, if we consider it as a narrative that we would, normally, expect to complement the previous, more epideictic, speech (Text 2), there is a lack of coherence in the overall message. The remarks to the press on 15 August erase the possibility that the relatively 'presidential' epideictic focus of the previous day's narrative will stand as worthy of the genre, or as a correction to hasty remarks made in Text 1. Perhaps the primary motivation was little more than the guarantee that supporters and opponents alike will be united in their curiosity to watch the spectacle.

4. CONCLUSION

It is possible to summarize some significant types of departure from the norms of epideixis in Trump's performance; all of these are clearly interconnected and overlapping, with divisive repercussions. All may also be considered familiar populist tropes, foregrounding *ethos* and *pathos*.

4.1. Praise, Including Self-praise, Aggrandizing Own Successes

I want to salute the great work of the state and local police in Virginia. Incredible people. Law enforcement, incredible people. And also the National Guard. They've really been working smart and working hard. They've been doing a terrific job. Federal authorities are also providing tremendous support to the governor. He thanked me for that [my underline]. (12 August)

The statement I made on Saturday, the first statement, was a fine statement. (15 August Q and A)

4.2. Irrelevant Distractions and Unpredictability

We have companies pouring into our country, Foxconn and car companies and so many others. They're coming back to our country. We're renegotiating trade deals to make them great for our country and great for the American worker. (12 August)

I own a house in Charlottesville. Does anyone know I own a house in Charlottesville? Oh boy. It is the winery...I know a lot about Charlottesville....great place, I own actually one of the largest wineries in the United States in Charlottesville. (15 August Q and A)

4.3. Dysphemistic Co-Synchronous Use of Twitter, Distortion of Praise/Blame

Now that Ken Frazier of Merck Pharma has resigned from President's Manufacturing Council, he will have more time to LOWER RIPOFF DRUG PRICES (14 August Twitter)

Made additional remarks on Charlottesville and realize once again that the #Fake News Media will never be satisfied...truly bad people! (15 August Twitter)

In keeping with Goffman (1959) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), epideictic actors are normatively empathetic narrators of a message that in effect transcends their individuality, thus, never foregrounded talking about themselves and their achievements. The epideictic script is external to the speaker, analogous to an actor speaking lines; in that moment, a good actor uses passion and sincerity to inhabit and 'own' the text. The normative choreography of the epideictic drama must convince an audience (which may be skeptical) of the speaker's role as conduit for the values of a community rather than simply as the opinions of a private individual.

Regarding the dramaturgical model applied to modern political communication, one should be mindful of significant variables underlying the political performance. Jamieson (1988), for example, insists that attention be paid to relationships between speakers, the technologies they use, and the 'ghosts' (i.e. the real, invisible authors of political speeches, who may be many, varied and unknown to audiences). Often in Trump's presidency, observers may have gained the impression from tone of voice that he was bored by ceremonial discourse; that Twitter was his 'authentic' voice, the real window into his personal and ideological mindset. There were many documented occasions when sentiments expressed in tweets, and during interactions with the press, directly contradicted the official statements and speeches. This may well be in keeping with the unpredictability that maintained entertainer Trump on center stage, whatever the occasion, with the power of a populist to shape values.

Perhaps the most startling departure from normative epideixis lies primarily in

President Trump's failure to focus the narrative on a death. Although Jamieson (2013) reminds us that mistakes can be made by all presidents in their choices of rhetorical genre and dramaturgical conditions on specific occasions (pointing to epideictic errors made during the Obama presidency), it is hard to imagine similar behavior by others. Narrative focus on the victim would be done firstly, of course, as an act of decency and respect; secondly, to take the opportunity, as the genre demands, to provide moral leadership in the face of a hate crime; thirdly, to rhetorically reinforce the nation's core self-image: of goodness, tolerance and democracy. Surely, an unequivocal stance on racism is essential to a modern democratic presidential repertoire, which is why, amongst the other deviations surrounding Charlottesville, the 'many sides' trope was so disturbing. Trump's performance over those several days, comprising scripted and unscripted rhetoric and moral equivocation, represented a strong contrast to normative epideictic discursive consistency, and undermined the poetic gravitas of the moment.

The increasing complexity surrounding the sources of information available to the public can also be mapped onto this picture. Of course, social media and the smartphone are relatively new contributors to political discourse, adding a further dimension to the dramaturgical repertoire. The media events following Charlottesville represent what might be seen by some as a (deliberately) missed opportunity for Trump to assert presidential and moral authority by distancing himself from accusations of sympathy for white supremacists and the rhetoric of violence. By failing to do so, on this and other occasions, he potentially reopened and re-legitimized a discursive space for proponents of hate speech. This seems to have been borne out by subsequent events, such as the storming of the US Capitol by pro-Trump activists and white supremacists in January 2021, as well as a growing adherence to conspiracy theories within the Republican party. Understanding the significance of this failure also allows us to identify an intersection between rising anxiety regarding a shift towards linguistic dysphemism and disrespect in the public sphere in recent years, and actual acts of violence. The causes of this shift are undoubtedly complex and varied, but clearly the accessibility of hate speech via new technologies and media (including Twitter⁴) must be factored in as a global issue under scrutiny in our age (see, for example, Shepherd et al., 2015). Furthermore, violent discourse has already translated into actual ideologically-motivated physical violence, not only on Heather Heyer in the US, but also in the form of attacks on politicians in Europe; for example, the murders of British members of parliament Jo Cox and Sir David Amess in 2016 and 2021 and the mayor of Gdansk Pawel Adamowicz in 2019. The global reach of social media's dark side is also implicated in communicating acts of violence to mass audiences in real time, such as the massacres in mosques in New Zealand and churches in Sri Lanka in 2019, and the attempts by a far-right extremist to livestream the shooting dead of Black citizens in Buffalo, New York in May 2022.

4 The extent to which social media can be relied on to monitor itself for hate speech continues to be uncertain.

Historically, as Martin Medhurst (2004) reminds us, US presidents are temporary occupants of the White House institution; they are tasked to fulfil the established traditions and rituals of office in upholding the Constitution. This also includes the requirement to interact with voters. In the mainstream of democratic political fields of action, the broader issue of respect and inclusiveness has to do with the role of any leader or president at any time. Dramaturgically speaking, an individual has been elected to act as the primary representative/mediator/ animator of a nation state, to be a role model for all its citizens, however diverse they may be, and it is for this reason that scripted rhetoric according to historical norms is often necessary if the nation is to hold together conceptually.

In one sense, Condit (1985) recognizes that the notion of epideixis acting to manage and shape national consensus may seem a somewhat conservative proposition. Indeed, we might therefore take a negative view of epideixis as a politically convenient and illusory sticking plaster concealing real and intractable social differences. However, Condit herself goes on to argue that there is an alternative, positive perspective within the civic framework. Well-delivered and sincere epideictic rhetoric can, conversely, also fulfil a more progressive, constructive function in providing a basis and opening up a reluctant public mindset to new ideas and realities⁵. The genre has therefore, at least potentially, a fundamental social importance. For all its possible manipulative characteristics, the epideictic event can be regarded at its best as a forum for diverse entities to come together and affirm those cultural values that underpin a nation's self-image as a force for good. This seems particularly urgent at this moment in history when historically cohesive value-communities are seen to be fragmenting in the face of structural inequality, populism, misinformation and racism. In times of cultural crisis, the epideictic ritual space and the affective power of its visual and aural poetry may help a society to resist vulnerability to civil war or terrorism, and to shore up social stability. If nothing else, respectful, debate-based, democratic striving for consensus must be preferable to a chaotic, divisive, violent alternative. In this spirit, Condit (1985: 297) concludes her discussion by celebrating the dialogic message engendered by epideixis as 'an awesome humane tool' that offers benefits to orators, opinion leaders, audiences and society as a whole, in equal measure.

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5 This may, indeed, have been the central message of Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

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