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## Everybody Wants to be a Fascist Online: Psychoanalysis and the Digital Architecture of Fascism

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**Volume 24 Issue 4 (September 2022) Article 6****Anthony Faramelli and Imogen Piper,****"Everybody Wants to be a Fascist Online: Psychoanalysis and the Digital Architecture of Fascism"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol24/iss4/6>>

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**Abstract:** Félix Guattari and Franco Berardi have both argued that media ecologies and psychic ecologies are intimately intertwined and as such, any exploration of the collective unconscious must engage with how the mind is formed with and through media. This understanding of networks of interdependence necessitates an exploration of how platformization has impacted users' collective psyche. Drawing from psychosocial theory, psychoanalysis and the work of Félix Guattari, this article analyzes the micropolitics of desire of digital platforms, with an explicit focus on how algorithmic structures amplify extreme Right content, allowing fascisms to metastasis throughout digital spaces. It will first examine the algorithmic architecture of social media platforms, demonstrating how these digital spaces lock in and over-code desire through recursive feedback loops that amplify extremism. Following this will be an exploration of the excess of desire that is cut off and left as a remainder partial object, termed the "fascist abject," and what role this process plays in the production of subjectivity.

**Anthony FARAMELLI and Imogen PIPER****Everybody Wants to be a Fascist Online: Psychoanalysis and the Digital Architecture of Fascism****Introduction: The Platformization of Fascism**

Margot (pseudonym), a middle-aged devout Christian from the Netherlands, professed a relatively widespread and media induced "fear" of refugees in her YouTube comments in 2015. Continuing to watch and comment on related videos throughout the year, her rhetoric became more hateful and Islamophobic. In 2016 Margot's focus had shifted further to the Right, as she watched videos produced by alt-right creators like the anti-feminist *Sargon of Akkad*, the Islamophobic *Rebel News*, and reactionary far-right Stefan Molyneux. Whilst continuing to watch alt-right material and adopting their rhetoric within her comments, in 2018 Margot started to consume more extreme white nationalist and antisemitic content. Her later comments make clear her ideological shift to the far-right, proclaiming that those racialized outside of whiteness are pursuing "white subjugation and the destruction of white heritage," and that "white people should be proud of their race" (Bahara et al.).

In response to recent issues of far-Right radicalization online, YouTube updated their algorithm, with the intention that it maximize engagement over time, steering users to different kinds of content by predicting what recommendations may expand their tastes and lead them to watch more videos. The new algorithm quickly altered users' behavior; however, it continued to propagate far-right content, promoting the cross-genre videos that far-right channels often produce, seeking to red-pill viewers by putting far-right discourse in conversation with unrelated content (Roose). A study by Mozilla published in July 2021 found that YouTube's algorithm promoted videos that violate its own policies. Volunteers for the study downloaded a browser extension to monitor their viewing, and would report when they encountered a "regrettable" video—essentially a video they regretted watching, with the most common categories being violent/graphic content, misinformation, hate speech and spam/scams. Mozilla found that 70% of "regrettable" videos were recommended by Youtube's algorithm, and that the rate of recommended "regrettable" videos was 60% higher for non-English speaking countries (Roose). YouTube's algorithmic architecture functions as an immanent force in radicalizing assemblages; propagating far-right content intent on the persecution of those racialized outside of whiteness, and disproportionately exposing non-anglophone individuals to "regrettable" content.

Stories of extreme Right / fascist radicalization online have become very familiar to people in recent years. This article will consist of a psychosocial exploration of how this form of radicalization in digital spaces occurs. However, before progressing it is important to first clarify how the term "fascism" is being deployed. The title of this article is a reference to an essay by Félix Guattari titled "Everybody wants to be a fascist." In the essay Guattari defines fascism as the unification of love and death, of Thanatos and Eros (169). It is the formula which dictates that to love a life, you must exterminate life.

For Guattari the problem of fascism is as diffuse as power itself. Within all macropolitical formations there is the relative status of all kinds of institutions, each of which may engender its own forms of despotism. To quote Guattari, "Fascism, like desire, is scattered everywhere [...] within the whole social realm; it crystallizes in one place or another, depending of the relationships of force" (Chaosophy 171). Whether or not it emerges as a macropolitical formation (such as Nazi Germany or the fascist government in Italy or Spain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) depends on the arrangement of desire (171). Different types of fascism produce different formulas for taking hold of and over-coding collective desire (163). As such, Guattari argues for a system that will help analyze the "micropolitics of desire" that would allow us to make visible the "*genealogy and permanence* of certain fascist machineries" (162 emphasis in original). This would enable us see how what historical fascisms set in motion yesterday, continue to proliferate in other forms today (163).

If we are to stay true to Guattari, an analysis of fascist radicalization online has to, by necessity, examine the micropolitics of desire engendered by digital platforms, the technological infrastructure which allows for users and business to build content, and the "platformization" of economic, social and cultural life, the way digital communication technologies facilitate the information economy. Nieborg, Poell and van Dijck define platformization as the process by which governmental, economic and cultural institutions are re-shaped by platforms (4-6). The process penetrates all spheres of life and results in, "*the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around platforms*" (6, emphasis in original). Financial, social and psychic ecologies have always been closely interrelated (Berardi 27), but the platformization of the economic sphere, with its reliance on short and easily digestible pieces of

information and "flexible" (precarious) working conditions, has intimately married untethered and destructive economic flows to the collective psyche (see Faramelli 2015 and 2018). Platforms have, in a real way, joined together psychotic destructive forces to our collective understanding of and drive for life. This is to say that platformization has created the bridge between Eros and Thanatos, between the drive for life and the death drive.

The remainder of this article will analyze the micropolitics of desire of digital platforms. It will first examine the algorithmic architecture of social media platforms, demonstrating how these digital spaces lock in and over-code desire through recursive feedback loops that amplify extremism. Following this will be an exploration of the excess of desire that is cut off and left as a remainder partial object, termed the "fascist abject," and what role this process plays in the production of subjectivity.

### Digital architecture

Algorithmic architectures never enter the representative domain, yet they are ubiquitous in the signifying world; producing, reproducing, displacing, augmenting and proliferating representative entities. Neurological, corporeal and subjective assemblages are also continually formed and shaped by these non-representative, non-human intensities; their intersection producing particular subjectivities and resultant sociopolitical relations. The algorithm is a computational process contriving a finite, but often iterative, operation of step-by-step instructions of calculation. Critical theorist Luciana Parisi argues that algorithmic cognition is produced in the iteration of these finite asignifying interactions with the infinite incomputable complexity of the world. Andrew Goffey likens the algorithmic operation to a Foucauldian statement, an enunciative action which carries a command function (Goffey 17). Statements are asignifying, that is to say that in isolation they do not convey meaning, however when multiple statements are linked in a discursive chain, meaning is produced. In their discursive intersection with the infinite signifying chain, the algorithmic statement produces meaning, affects subjectivity, and produces what Parisi argues is a mode-of-thought autonomous of human cognition and rationality (Parisi 217).

The interface is the point of contact between the human user and the algorithmic operations of digital networks and, as such, it is the prime aesthetic representation of the web. An interface is primarily concerned with cohesion between the user and the digital network, or what Galloway refers to as *continuity* (Galloway 64). To quote Galloway, continuity is, "the set of techniques practiced by webmasters that, taken as a totality, create [a] pleasurable, fluid experience for the user" (Ibid.). Moving across the web would be an extremely unsettling experience for most, but an interface's continuity ensures that the phenomenological experience for the user is settled. A common example of this is the way in which the browser's movement is experienced as the user's movement, giving the user an embodied experience of the web. It does so by drawing together two incompatible entities into a compatibility through feedback loops. These feedback loops connect the interior state of a condition (digital distributed network governed by protocols) and an exterior means of reference (the user interface) that models the interior condition (Hookway 11). This continuity is what makes many-to-many communication possible, that is to say communication with digital technology as well as with multiple other users (Galloway 68).

The interface is what Hookway describes as a *dispositif* of power, an apparatus through which a relation of power coincides with a relation of knowledge that determines what may be seen and what may be spoken. To achieve continuity, the feedback loops will module between positive feedback, which produce an overall amplification, or negative feedback loops, which in cybernetics are specifically designed to modify and guide behaviour (Hookway 106-108). The feedback loops form a container around both the mechanics of digital media and the desire of the user (101).

An analysis of how extreme Right radicalization occurs in digital space must proceed by foregrounding the role of first interface effect, the recursive (positive) feedback loop and its self-perpetuating and potentially unlimited growth. Opposed to the stability resultant of a negative feedback loop, the positive loop moves and makes systems volatile, accentuating perturbations and tending to result in instability. One common example is when a microphone connected to a speaker picks up and amplifies sound from its own speaker, resulting in the familiar screeching sound called feedback. When a recommendation algorithm suggests a video or product to a user and they then proceed to watch or buy said recommendation, the algorithm will then base its next recommendation on its previously recommended watch or purchase. This positive feedback operation affects the signifying world of the user, recursively relaying its own recommendation back into its operation and leading the user down an unstable and exacerbating watch or purchase trajectory.

*4chan*, the imageboard forum popular with the alt-right, modulates user desire through the recursive positive feedback of its "bump" algorithm. Christopher Poole, known initially only by his online moniker "moot," founded *4chan* in 2003 at the age of 13. Poole remarked on the forum's lack of official archive and therefore inbuilt ephemerality in an interview noting that this contributes to the perpetual reproduction of content; "the joke is that 4chan post is a repost of a repost of a repost [sic]". Once a thread reaches the bottom of page 10 it is deleted from the site permanently, "threadlife" on popular boards is as little as a few minutes. In order to sustain their lifespan, threads rely on *4chan*'s bump algorithm. The operational process of the bump algorithm is very simple; it determines the order of threads on the forum by placing new threads or existing threads responded to, to the top of page 1, deleting any threads pushed beyond the bottom of page 10 and removing any that have received more than 300 bumps. It is a recursive algorithm, continually recalling its own function in a positive loop that results in the production and dissemination of extreme content and subjects. Threads that include extreme content are more likely to be responded to by other users on the site and *bumped* to the top position; this leads to the situation where 4chan users deliberately tailor their posts to be extreme in order to obtain the top position on the forum for the longest amount of time. The algorithm's positive reinforcement loops perpetually; every iteration pushes at the border of acceptability, users continually trying to outdo the most recent extreme they observed.

The way in which the bump algorithm captures and moves users enacts a power dynamic best understood as control. In his analysis of digital media, Deleuze famously understands control as a form of coercive power that is counter-intuitively experienced as freedom (3-7). Alexander Galloway explains this with the analogy of the American highway system (Galloway 7, 35). For many, if not most, people, driving on the so-called "open road" is experienced as a total freedom of movement. However, the driver is nevertheless guided by the highway itself. They do not have the freedom to drive in any direction they want nor are they free to drive off the road. As such, despite feeling as though they are free, their actions are highly regulated. This form of regulation is analogous to the way in which users move through the Internet. While they may feel as though they have the freedom to browse any content that they want to, their actions online are in fact highly controlled by the algorithmic architecture. Both the experience of driving on a highway and the experience of surfing digital platforms may offer side roads and detours, but the movement is nevertheless regulated in a way that is not immediately apparent. Control, therefore, is not only the final product, but also the means by which digital space is internally organized and by which it functions (Hookway 24). As such, digital media is not inherently political. However, it is populated by augmented subjects in search of a Master, allowing political actors to co-opt and manipulate the medium. In other words, it becomes a matter of form (the distributed network, interface, control) which shapes the process of subjectification and content (the information ecosystems that populate the net) which arranges desire in subjectification.

### **The Collective Digital Unconscious**

Google's Artificial Intelligence division *Google Brain* began updating YouTube's recommendation algorithm in 2015 according to a neural network AI (Roose). Neural networks were designed with the intention of mimicking the way in which the human brain's neurons signal each other, building pathways between different digital entities through pattern recognition. YouTube's resultant recommendation algorithm could instantaneously draw connections between every video on the site in what is evidently a non-human form of cognition. In our preciously mentioned example of extremification, Margot observed that YouTube's recommendation feature would regularly lead her to watch extreme content. YouTube's algorithmic architecture drew users into niche corners by recommending videos based on adjacent relationships that a human brain could never identify. In many cases, like Margot's, users were coerced by the algorithm along a path of far-right extremification, taking them from relatively alt-lite content, through a series of recommendations that ultimately led to extreme far-right material. Google Brain conducted a review into recommendation algorithms in 2019, concluding that "the decisions made by these systems can influence user beliefs and preferences which in turn affect the feedback the learning system receives - thus creating a feedback loop" (Jiang et al. 2019: 383-90). Its feedback loop acts as an autonomous agent feeding its own extreme productions back into itself and radicalizing users in the process.

Tony Sampson responds to the schema of digital media as modelled on the human brain with the theory of the "collective nonconscious" and the conceptual persona of the sleepwalker to explore how social media generates an internal organization of the user's mind where racist and fascist processes function underneath consciousness (2020). Conversely, Patricia Ticineto Clough turns to psychoanalysis to explore the unconscious mind for an analysis of how the Internet impacts users. Her concept of the

"user unconscious" explores how affect is generated by social media, shedding light on the relationship between the psyche and the heterogenic other-than-human (2018: xxxi).

The idea that the mind is structured by processes that are heterogenous to the individual psyche and that these processes fundamentally impact the mind's internal organization is far from new. In the 1950's and 1960's S.H. Foulkes, the father of group analysis, argued that the community is the ultimate primary unit for consideration as to the mind's internal processes and that the network of individual processes – which Foulkes termed "the matrix" – is a construction analogous to the individual mind (Davids 9; Foulkes). However, it was Félix Guattari who radically broke with psychoanalytic orthodoxy to argue that a new "machinic" schema for the unconscious is needed because, "*the modern unconscious is constantly manipulated by the media*, by collective apparatuses and their cohorts of technicians" (Guattari, *Chaosophy* 197, our emphasis). The machinic unconscious is not opposed to the psychoanalytic model, but expands it to radically open the model up to new psychotic flows in finance, media, politics, etc. (197-198). The unconscious is machinic insofar as it is not necessarily centered on human subjectivity, but involves diverse social systems and material fluxes (197). In this way the unconscious is like a factory that assembles heterogenic parts in the production of subjectivity.

At the end of his life, Guattari began to further develop his long-term engagement with the mediatized unconscious in multiple short pieces of writing in which he began to articulate his concept of "post-media." An exact definition of post-media remains elusive, but it appears as though he was looking for a path out of totalizing systems of power, writing, "Only if the third path/voice takes consistency in the direction of self-reference – carrying us from the consensual media era to the dissensual post-media era – will each be able to assume his or her processual and, perhaps, transform this planet – a living hell for over three quarters of its population – into a universe of creative enchantments" (Guattari quoted in Goddard 45).

Through exploration of the free radio movement in Italy and his fascination with the Minitel machines in France, Guattari looked to how networked media systems can contribute to a new collective enunciation of desire, a new post-media subjectivity. Writing in 1990, one year before the World Wide Web came into existence, Guattari looked to the radio as a small and mobile form of media that can establish a *self-referential feedback loop* of communication between producers and receivers that would trend towards dissolving the distinction between them (*Chaosmosis* 48). Through this, Guattari hoped that a, "transformation [of] the classical triangulation – the expressive chain [*chaînon expressif*], the object of reference [*l'objet référé*] and the meaning [*signification*] – will be reshaped" (*Schizoanalytic Cartographies* 27).

Despite the utopic character of the post-media era, Guattari was nevertheless cautious about its potential pitfalls as well, noting that digital networks would trend towards a strong machinic subjugation, leaving the user "enslaved like a robot" (Genosko 23). Gary Genosko elaborates on this point, writing that,

Subjugation catapults the user to the status of an integrated, intrinsic, component part. Feeding data into Google's constant refinements of its page rank algorithms with every initiated search is a more contemporary way of framing machinic enslavement in the digiverse. [...] The diminishment of subjectification occurs within a field of so-called decisions about choices generated in advance on the basis of extrapolations from aggregated prior choices (23).

This impacts the collective digital unconscious in two significant ways. First, the networked structure of the digital (post-media) systems means that desire will always flow within a confined circuit. Building off of his own clinic experiences and the theoretical work of Fanon, Foulkes and Klein, M. Fakhry Davids argues that the offline mind is structured by social forces and has an internal organization that incorporates social and cultural values and norms. Davids uses this schema to explore how this ultimately means that the social unconscious is also populated by social prejudices, specifically racism. This effectively overcodes the mind, giving the unconscious an internal racist organization. Within this structure, racism acts as a defensive function to help the subject feel as though they have a form of control in the face of existential anxiety (30-31; 37-39). Plugging a mind with an internal racist organization into a closed loop system creates the conditions for the same racist organization to metastasize within the network, overcoding the collective digital unconscious with the same racist defensive function and organization.

Guattari's machinic unconscious, "implies a proliferation made up not only of typical "part objects" – the breast, the faeces, the penis; or mathemes like Lacan's "a-object" – but also a multitude of singular entities, fluxes, territories, and incorporeal universes, making up *functional arrangements* that are never reducible to universals" (Guattari, *Chaosophy* 199, emphasis in original). This brings us to the second

significant meaning the post-media era has for the collective digital unconscious, how it evolves with history and incorporates external flows (200). Integrated World Capitalism has induced volatility into networked systems and the collective psyche. As modes of production are deterritorialized, forms of repression are equally molecularized (175). Guattari argues this produces a kind of anguish that resurrects the predominance of religion, myth, and conspiratorial belief (166-167), not unlike the current recidivism to QAnon, which draws from evangelical thought and a deep libidinal resistance to liberal systems. The architecture of digital media and its impact on the process of subjectification further facilitates the rearrangement of desire so that it is more available to attach to (micro)fascist assemblages (Faramelli 30-34). Today's despots, Trump, Bosinaro, Modi, etc., are not maverick politicians, but rather manifestations of digital cultures. They are empty signifiers through which fascistic arrangements are produced.

### **The Formation of Subjectivity Online**

The modulation between positive and negative feedback loops has an immediate implication for the formation of subjectivity. Subjectification happens first through a positive feedback where the user is working through the interface, within which the user is confined. This produces a fragmented subjectivity in which partial aspects of the user are identified and enhanced (Hookway 17). The second movement in subjectification is the negative feedback, where the user faces outward and adapts what Hookway terms an "augmented subjectivity" (17-18). Here the user internalizes and makes unconscious the sense of confinement (18).

The bump algorithm iterates a semiological interaction between the signifying and asignifying; and concerning, its cyclical interplay is also enacted in the subject. We can inquire into this looping semiological process of subjectification through the Guattarian concepts of Social Subjection and Machinic Enslavement, and their expansion by philosopher, Maurizio Lazzarato. Lazzarato traces the cartography of subjectification within capitalism through Guattari's semiological power apparatuses, social subjection and machinic enslavement. Social subjection is the *dispositif* brought about by signifying semiologies. The signifiers of the representative world work upon the subject, individuating them according to particular identifications and forming around them an inescapable representational web (Lazzarato 24). Social subjection regulates the informal division of social roles that benefit the capitalist system, assigning a gender, profession and nationality, amongst others (13). Machinic enslavement is a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept, borrowed from cybernetics and automation; enslavement meaning the management and regulation of a system's components (25). Whilst social subjection individualizes, machinic enslavement *disindividuates*. It is the organizational mechanism brought about by asignifying semiologies that disperses and manages subjects as individual cogs in wider machinic assemblages. In *The Grundrisse* Karl Marx precedes and exemplifies Guattari's machinic enslavement whilst analyzing the worker-machine entanglement and its effect on the subject;

It is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it (...) The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself (Marx 693).

Marx theoretically and poetically entwines the human and machine; he speaks of the machine's soul and limbs, attributing it the person-like qualities of skill, strength and virtuosity. Yet what is most pertinent is the subject's machinic coercion; Marx proposes that the asignifying science which conceives the machine—arranging its engine, pistons, valves and cylinders—transcends the machine itself acting directly upon the worker as an "alien power." The worker is alienated, estranged from their humanity amongst a mass of "mechanical and intellectual organs" (Marx 692). They are dispersed as mere "conscious linkages" grasping the limbs and soul of the machinic assemblage (692).

Similarly, the bump operation's looping semiological interplay socially subjects and mechanically enslaves users on the forum, affecting their subjectivity. Users gain a sense of gratification and belonging with every thread response they receive, leading to the situation where many will prioritize posting provocative content over content they have a true interest in sharing. Therefore, users will often deliberately post extreme signifying material, knowing it will gain the most responses and be bumped by the asignifying algorithm more frequently. Accordingly, these types of posts proliferate, and increasing numbers of users are exposed to their extreme signifying content; which in turn perform a social subjection upon them, individuating them according to extreme identifications. With every iteration, the user will likely identify themselves even more closely with the extreme, each social

subjection building upon the last in a process of extremification. This newly extreme subject may also engage in producing and posting extremes, feeding them back into the bump loop and socially subjecting others.

Just like YouTube's recommendation algorithm, the bump algorithm recursively feeds its own extreme recommendations (bumps) back into itself, using the subject as a carrier. The bump algorithm mechanically enslaves users, employing them as component parts in its positive loop towards extremes. However, unlike the alien power of the machine that acts upon the worker in *The Grundrisse*, the algorithmic process flows out of the machine and onto the subject, mirroring its extremification operation within the user's subjectivity. The bump algorithm is a very simple computational mechanism, yet its looping semiological interaction is instrumental in the production of increasingly extreme content and subjects. Because positive feedback loops lead to potentially unlimited growth and system instability, their intersection with far-right content is of clear concern. If the bump is left to loop without intervention, the border of acceptability will continue to be pushed back into ever more violent and hateful territory, moving far-right discourse and subjects down more niche, extreme and tumultuous trajectories.

Within this system, the human is a component part of the machine, in constant and dynamic communication with the algorithmic architecture of digital systems that presupposes social machines based on associations with Oedipal triangulations. Guattari argues that this techno-structure "takes on a fascist hue" insofar as it implies political, economic and, most importantly, libidinal investments that are turned towards the oppression of desire (Guattari, *Soft Subversions* 108). Desire, which Guattari understands as the generative force that creates subjectivities, is turned back on itself through so that desire desires its own repression, the principal danger of (micro)fascism (Deleuze and Guattari). This closed loop of repression displaces desire and gives rise to a consequent form of desire that is predicated on lack (Faramelli 18). This results in a "superegoification," an identification with a repressive apparatus where the drive is now turned against an imaged outside "other" (Deleuze and Guattari 62). With every iteration, the user will likely identify themselves even more closely with the extreme, each social subjection building upon the last in a process of extremification. This newly extreme subject may also engage in producing and posting extremes, feeding them back into the bump loop and socially subjecting others.

### The Fascist Object

As demonstrated above, digital space is an autopoietic system that folds in users as heterogeneous objects, ensuing that desire remains trapped within feedback loops. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is a productive force instigated by the lack of total *jouissance* instilled from infancy as the price for entrance into the symbolic order.<sup>1</sup> The subject continuously tries to fill this lack by metonymically displacing their desire from one signifier to another. Lacan denotes this metonymical displacement by the term *objet petit a*. Intentionally left untranslated to evoke an algebraic quality, *objet petit a* embodies the lack of total *jouissance* alongside the impossible pursuit of its filling; it isn't an object in itself but marks whichever object desire displaces onto (Stravarakakis 49-50). In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari describes *objet petit a* as the object that "marks the automatisation of the components of unconscious subjectivity" and proposes the *objet petit a* category be expanded to encompass the full range of subjective nuclei that contribute to the subjectification process (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 12-13). These include those extra linguistic intensities and machinic enslavements that affect the signifying plane, fundamental to Lacanian theory.

Building off of the Lacan's formulation of the partial object, Julia Kristeva argues introduces the concept of the *abject*, the "monstrous" remainder that haunts the unconscious. Kristeva defines the abject as, "the jettisoned object, [that] is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). It is the anguish of the maternal (Ibid.: 12) and, as such, the theory of the abject is fundamentally a theory of the unconscious as structured by psychosis, not neurosis, insofar as psychosis is situated as a "*rejection (repudiation)*" that splits the ego (7 emphasis in original). Kristeva goes on to note that the, "'unconscious' contents remain here *excluded* but in strange fashion: not enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established – one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration" (7 emphasis in original). It is the "object" of "primal repression," the ability for a speaking subject to "divide, reject, repeat" (12).

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<sup>1</sup> This relates particularly to Lacanian theory of the late 50s and early 60s



The abject is the destructive drive that arises after the maternal object (the nurturing object) is subsumed by the paternal law through the imposition of language. It is a "maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father" (Kristeva 6). That which was nurturing has turned against the structured order of the mind and become a destructive drive for death (3). The elaboration of the abject as having had a relationship with Eros (life / birth), but has since been turned against itself and towards Thanatos (death) (160) allows us to see its intimate relation to fascism. In much the same way as Kristeva understands the abject as the remainder after the maternal object has been cut away by the imposition of language, the abject of the collective digital unconscious is the remainder that has been cut away by the production of subjectivity in digital space. The fascist abject travels alongside the digital mind, unnoticed but amplified by the recursive feedback loops.

Within an autopoietic system, the fascist abject proliferates with the potential to be reproduced *ad infinitum*. Sampson's concept of the "Dark Refrain" is a useful tool to think through this process in order to understand how the fascist abject moves through and over codes digital spaces with extreme Right content. The Refrain in Deleuze and Guattari is the rhythmic process of movement from one milieu to another, introducing difference into the milieu. This can have a territorializing effect. Deleuze and Guattari define a territory as "the product of the phylogenetic evolution of an instinct of aggression, stating at the point where that instinct becomes intraspecific, and turned against the animal's own kind" (*Chaosmosis* 367). They go on to state that, "A territorial animal would direct its aggressiveness against members of its own species; the species would gain the selective advantage of distributing its members throughout a space where each would have its own place" (367).

This gives us a better understanding of the Alt-Right and their predominate concern of "white replacement," something which was a key motivating factor in the January 6th insurrection and the storming of the US Capitol. A study investigating the motives and demographics of those convicted of storming the Capitol found that close to 90% had no links to organized far-right groups, and were dissimilar to those previously prosecuted for far-right terrorist offences. They were instead a generally older, more nebulous group of people loosely brought together by a shared belief that the election was stolen coupled with a sense that their social status was under threat from racialized groups. The study found those arrested for storming the capitol predominantly came from those states with the most significant declines in the non-Hispanic white population. The study concluded that they represented a new still congealing mass movement that can't be confronted through existing methods for investigating far-right groups (Pape and Ruby 4-33).

The Dark Refrain is a way of conceptualizing the rhythmic movement of the fascist abject that aids an understanding of how extremist Right thought has territorialized social media platforms. We see the rhythmic movement of how the Alt-Right territorialized the /pol/ message board on *4chan*, moved to other mainstream platforms like Facebook and Twitter, were amplified offline by Fox News and other mass media platforms, and returned in an amplified form back in mainstream social media, mimicking the positive feedback loop of the bump algorithm. This movement shows how the fascist abject is continuously amplified with each journey through the feedback loop.

A milieu is always in the middle, it is always imminent to the social field. Because it is always in the middle, the fascist abject is able to reterritorialize the collective semiotization of digital cultures. That is to say, it reterritorializes the language of digital cultures, mutating irony into cynicism. A good example of this is the neo-reactionary and accelerationist movement. Neo-reaction grew out of the digital cultures of the late 1990s and early 2000s and used the language (both visual language as well as vocabularies and the ironic lol style of speech) to propagate by infection fascistic and racist ideologies. Neoreactionaries oppose the progressive and egalitarian policies of left-wing politics for the reason that they are counter-progressive to the only form of progress they deem necessary: acceleration towards capitalist singularity (Beauchamp). These semiotic machines decode the realities of former territories and reorganize desire around models of exploitation (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 175).

## Conclusion

In May 2021 Frances Haugen, a former Product Manager at Facebook who was hired to help protect against interference in the 2020 United States presidential election, quit her job and secretly removed documents detailing internal studies the company conducted which show the harmful effects that Facebook and its satellite apps have on societies around the world. Haugen leaked these documents to the *Wall Street Journal*, which from 13 September 2021 began to publish their findings in an ongoing

series titled "The Facebook Files."<sup>2</sup> Haugen has since gained international notoriety following an interview she gave on the 4th of October 2021 on the US magazine TV show *60 Minutes* and her subsequent testimonies before the US Congress and the British Parliament. The content of the reporting, as well as of Haugen's testimonies, focuses on how much Facebook knew about the role their digital platforms play in, amongst other things, extreme Right radicalization.

The media and political discussions that followed Haugen's leak have largely focused on issues of regulation and content moderation. However, this article has argued that the problem lays in the very architecture of digital platforms. Through an analysis of the micropolitics of desire of digital platforms, this article has sought to examine the psychosocial processes involved in online radicalization and how digital platforms facilitate the formation of a collective unconscious with an internal fascist organization. Whilst the findings are undeniably bleak, it is perhaps important to conclude by reflecting on Gilles Deleuze's 1992 essay "Postscript on Societies of Control." Deleuze ends this short but significant essay by noting that he is not advocating for a nostalgic politics that fetishizes the repressions of yesterday. Nor is he saying that digital control is any better or worse than the disciplinary societies of the 19th century. Rather, he notes that the way in which power functions has changed. Therefore, it is not a matter of advocating for a return to discipline, as if such a return were either desirable or even possible. Deleuze concludes his essay and his career with a call for us to find new tools to resist digital structures of power and repression. It is in this spirit that we reiterate Deleuze's call to find "new weapons" that can resist the proliferation of fascism online and help to realize Guattari's hope for the post-media era, resistant networks that would proliferate minoritarian becomings that are able to diversify the factors of subjective autonomy and self-management within the social field.

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<sup>2</sup> The articles published within this series can be accessed here: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-11631713039>

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