From Microfascism to Joyful Affects: A Posthuman Approach to Social Media Redesign

J.J. Sylvia IV [1]

Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the micropolitical fascism latent in social media platforms' algorithmic designs, which, according to Deleuze & Guattari (2009) and Crano (2022), foster desires for uniformity and control that may escalate into authoritarianism, threatening democracy and free speech. It considers the paradoxical nature of social media in enhancing connectivity while potentially inducing loneliness, an emotional state Arendt links to fascism, and their role in amplifying negative emotions, spreading disinformation, and conspiracy theories, such as QAnon. Delving into the mechanics of such designs, the paper leverages a monist informational ontology to dissect subjectivation processes and envisage overcoming these microfascist inclinations. It suggests a radical redesign of social media platforms that eschews analytics-driven narratives in favor of fostering joyful affect and novel subjectivities. This reimagining aims to detach social media storytelling from analytics and data exploitation, promoting a posthuman model for platform design that resists the generation of microfascist desires.

Keywords: *Microfascism; Informational Ontology; Posthuman Media Studies; Processes of Subjectivation; Social Media*

Introduction

This paper scrutinizes the micropolitical fascism latent in social media platforms' algorithmic designs, which, according to Deleuze & Guattari (2009) and Crano (2022), foster desires for uniformity and control that may escalate into authoritarianism, threatening democracy and free speech. Social media emerged prominently onto the world stage in the early 2010s, hailed as tool of democracy wielded by protestors around the world, but particularly in the Middle East as part of the Arab Spring movement (Hermida et al., 2014; Howard & Hussain, 2013). The role of platforms like Twitter and Facebook in these movements seemed to signal their use in ways that went beyond merely connecting friends or creating a Marshall McLuhan-esque global village. For a brief moment, social media was envisaged as a liberatory tool that had the potential to connect multitudes. However, authoritarian regimes around the world took note of how these tools were used for protest and relatively quickly found ways to both block those types of uses as well as leverage social media platforms for their own political gain, often in the form of dis- and mis-information campaigns (Tucker et al., 2017). Social media is now embroiled in academic debates about fake news, post-truth, authoritarianism, and media literacy (Farkas & Schou, 2020; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017).

This paper extends the debate on social media's role in fostering microfascist desires by examining the very architecture of social media platforms. It contends that the design and operational logic of these platforms are not neutral but are imbued with ideological biases that shape user behavior and desires in profound ways. By combining the insights of posthuman media studies (Sylvia IV, 2021b**)** and critical theory, the paper aims to unpack how the algorithmic cultures of social media platforms contribute to a form of microfascism by rewarding uniformity and penalizing deviation from the norm.

The paper will explore how the interface and algorithmic structure of social media platforms create a constant drive for uniformity, not just in terms of content but also in the actions and interactions they elicit from users, impacting their processes of subjectivation. It argues that this drive for uniformity is a manifestation of microfascist desires, subtly conditioning users and reinforcing a homogenized digital environment. In this context, the paper will also examine the broader societal implications of these microfascist tendencies, such as the stifling of diversity, the suppression of individuality, and the reinforcement of power structures (Noble, 2018).

Furthermore, the paper will delve into the potential of posthuman media studies to offer alternative frameworks for understanding and interacting with social media. By embracing the posthuman call for the co-creation of change and the acknowledgment of non-human forces in our networked existence (Braidotti, 2013; 2019), the paper will argue for a reconceptualization of social media platforms that prioritizes ethical interactions, diversity, and the fostering of non-fascist desires. It will propose a shift from a user-experience driven by algorithms that promote microfascism to one that encourages creativity, dissent, and a multiplicity of voices.

In conclusion, the paper will offer a critical reflection on the need for continuous vigilance and critique of the digital spaces we inhabit. It will advocate for an active engagement with the design and function of social media platforms, aiming to cultivate a digital ecosystem that resists the allure of microfascist desires and instead promotes a more inclusive, diverse, and democratic form of digital engagement.

Posthuman Media Studies

This project adopts an approach to posthuman media studies as explicated by Sylvia IV (2021b). This approach foregrounds a shift in media studies to incorporate a posthuman framework, which heavily integrates the ethical, epistemological, and ontological dimensions inspired by critical posthuman theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles (1999) and Rosi Braidotti (2013; 2019). This new direction advocates for an affirmative approach to critical and cultural theory, encouraging the reconfiguration of subjectivities through a relational ontology. It underscores a move beyond deconstructive critiques towards practical, constructive theoretical work that actively engages with political composition and public discourse.

The field emphasizes nomadic ethics and the co-creation of change, focusing on the material and the environmental responsibilities of subjects in their interactions. It fosters the idea of subjects as 'desiring machines', interconnected through a network of non-human forces, technology, and societal structures. It extends into political and ethical domains, highlighting the interdependence across mental, social, and environmental ecologies, drawing inspiration from Félix Guattari's (1989b) ecosophy and urging a reimagining of societal relations and a redefinition of subjectivation processes.

Posthuman media studies should involve a methodological shift to processes rather than fixed entities, focusing on becoming and deterritorialization. It calls for a methodological innovation in media studies through the use of counter-actualization, modulation, and counter-memory, advocating for a media studies that is experimental, actively engaging in the creation of future possibilities through the exploration of untapped resources and connections.

Media holds an important role in this approach, as "understanding the role of media in such assemblages becomes a priority for understanding the subject," (Sylvia IV, 2021b, 149). However, posthuman approaches to social media have been relatively under-explored.

Microfascism

While only a small portion of the vast writings of Deleuze and Guattari, both together and individually, directly addresses the question of fascism, it can in many ways be seen as an underlying theme or concern of nearly all their work. Rosi Braidotti has argued that Deleuze's philosophy "is committed to detoxifying the practice of philosophy from the appeal of methodological nationalism and authoritarianism," (Braidotti, 2019, 51). Further Deleuze's anti-fascist work aligns with multiple different definitions of fascism, including "Erich Fromm's definition of fascism (2001 [1941]) as the abdication of personal responsibility and Wilhelm Reich's (1970) idea of a popular, eroticized desire for a strongman to relieve us from the freedom to make our own choices," (Braidotti, 2019, 184).

However, for Deleuze and Guattari (1972), the underlying, and perhaps more important, question that they collectively raise is *why* people desire fascism. Deleuze and Foucault have discussed the importance of understanding fascist desire. Deleuze claimed that:

> We must be willing to hear Reich's cry: No, the masses were not fooled, they wanted fascism at a particular moment! There are certain investments of desire that shape power, and diffuse it, such that power is located as much at the level of a cop as that of a prime minister. (Deleuze, 2004, 212)

Foucault responded:

> When fascism comes into play, it happens that the masses want particular people to exercise power, but those particular people are not to be confused with the masses, since power will be exercised *on* the masses and at their expense, all the way to their death, sacrifice, and massacre, and yet the masses want it, they want this power to be exercised. (Deleuze, 2004, 212)

Here we see Deleuze and Foucault noting that the fascist desire goes so far as desiring one's own death or massacre. Why? Deleuze and Guattari's rather unique answer, as outlined in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), is that this desire is connected to a micropolitics of desire for uniformity and control. Importantly, there is a connection between microfascism and the macro-level fascism that is most often discussed in politics. In short, microfascism can take hold in one's own subjectivity and makes one more susceptible to fascism writ large: "Fascism as a political movement connects all the tiny fascisms of self, of race, of control and makes them resonate together," (Adkins, 2015, 132). Considering this, even though every microfascist desire does not lead directly to fascism, it is important nonetheless to root out these microfascisms before they have a chance to resonate with one another. It is worthwhile exploring this concept in-depth to understand its relation to our processes of subjectivation, and ultimately, what role social media plays in those desires.

In an interview about their *Anti-Oedipus* book, Guattari notes that their project as a whole is indeed a warning against rising fascism (Deleuze, 1990). Their collective project, which involves finding new lines of flight[2], creating bodies without organs[3], and the methods of schizoanalysis, are all strategies for identifying the potential dangers of fascism and seeking alternative paths. They end that interview by noting that, "if you take *délire*, we see it as having two poles, a fascist paranoid pole and a schizo-revolutionary pole. That's what we're interested in: revolutionary schisis as opposed to the despotic signifier," (Deleuze, 1990, 24). Writing during the post-World War II era, Deleuze notes that while fascist governments may not have been entirely eliminated, microfascism may be even more concerning in the long term:

> Old-style fascism, however real and powerful it may still be in many countries, is not the real problem facing us today. New fascisms are being born. The old-style fascism looks almost quaint, almost folkloric… compared to the new fascism being prepared for us. It is global agreement on security, on the maintenance of a "peace" just as terrifying as war. All our petty fears will be organized in concert, all our petty anxieties will be harnessed to make micro-fascists of us; we will be called up to stifle every little thing, every suspicious face, every dissonant voice, in our streets, in our neighborhoods, in our local theaters. (2007, 138)

Braidotti (2019) argues that Deleuze is referring to the Cold War period when he writes about the peace that is just as terrifying as war. But this process of harnessing our anxieties into forms of surveillance can help us better understand the microfascist connections to social media. Foucault's (1975) concept of the panopticon, which describes a disciplinary mechanism that induces a state of constant visibility and self-monitoring, can also be applied to the surveillance culture fostered by social media platforms. Joshua Reeves (2017) has traced the way American organizations have built a long tradition of surveillance culture, most recently in the form of civil defense against terrorism ("if you see something, say something"). In the era of frequent mass shootings in the U.S., the social media accounts of these mass murderers are often scoured for signs that might have foretold their terrible actions ("what could we have seen?"). This form of constant alertness or vigilance for such signs is only one extreme in which we are encouraged to actively take the role of monitoring others. Further, the very use of social media requires that we constantly monitor and stifle *ourselves* as part of our use of such platforms, as the next section explores in further detail.

Social Media's Microfascism

In this section, I argue that the very design of most of today's social media platforms are inherently microfascist, owing to their algorithmic imperative to conform in order to garner likes or other interactions on posts. Ricky Crano (2022) has previously argued that there is a microfascist element to social media, though his argument focused primarily on the joy of following and the aesthetics of images produced and viewed on platforms. He argues that this aspect of microfascism is actually rooted in the pleasure of affiliation and goes beyond the negative affects of hatred: "This is what Sontag, interrogating the appeal of the Third Reich, calls the 'joy of followers', a joy in fascist belonging," (2022, 277). My posthumanist argument goes one step further, arguing that the need to comply to the underlying algorithm actually supports and extends microfascist desires for uniformity and control. This is an argument about platform design and logistics rather than content.

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[2] A concept that refers to a path of escape or a way to break free from constraining structures and patterns.
[3] A term used to describe a state of being that is free from constraints and limitations imposed by societal norms and expectations.

Exploring this question has been not only a practice in theoretical methodology, but also a personal undertaking, taking seriously Braidotti's imperative that we must seek out the fascist inside each of us: "Importantly, the fascist has to be traced not only in the 'other', but also within yourself… One can undo the fascist inside by acknowledging one's attachment to dominant identity formations and power structures," (Braidotti, 2019, 179). Social media has been and remains a significant part of personal and professional life, so striving against its microfascist elements is also of personal importance to my own anti-fascist work.

At first blush, we can begin to understand the uniformity that arises from regular social media use through Hannah Arendt's analysis of loneliness and its connection to totalitarian movements. In her work "The Origins of Totalitarianism", Arendt (1973) argued that loneliness, as a profound sense of abandonment and lack of connection to the world, rendered individuals susceptible to the grandiose promises of fascist ideologies which offered a manufactured sense of belonging.

Arendt distinguished loneliness from mere solitude or being alone. It was a more existential condition of rootlessness and alienation from others and society at large. This inner vacuum, she posited, created a breeding ground for the appeal of totalitarian propaganda and its mirage of collective purpose. Social media, with its curation of idealized virtual worlds and emphasis on performance metrics such as likes and shares, can induce a similar state of loneliness, one disconnected from authentic human bonds yet perpetually hungry for validation within the platform's constraints (Turkle, 2011).

Just as totalitarian regimes actively cultivated isolation to achieve compliant masses, socially mediated interaction governed by proprietary algorithms funnels us into microbubbles tailored to our quantified selves. This atomization of experience mirrors the erosion of public spaces and plurality that Arendt warned against. Under the illusion of connectivity, we are alienated into individualized bubbles, our digital traces endlessly segmented, made void of real worldly relation. The self is doubled into metrics to be incessantly gamified and optimized, residual facets of human essence reduced to inputs constantly craving feedback loops of validation. We become strangers even unto ourselves, our sense of identity increasingly mediated through the platform's coded gaze.

It is important to note that social media's impact is not solely negative. Platforms have also been used for collective action, social movements, and fostering genuine connections (Tufekci, 2017). The aim is not to paint a one-sided picture, but rather to critically examine the specific ways in which social media's algorithmic design can nurture microfascist desires, particularly among lay users who may not be as savvy in navigating these digital landscapes.

The very mechanics of algorithmic feeds enshrine conformity as a prerequisite for visibility and ephemeral belonging. To pierce through the content avalanche, we must model the types of posts, emotions, and perspectives that trigger the highest engagement within our isolated silo. Divergence from these programmed trajectories of predictive modeling relegates us to silence and obscurity. Arendt recognized such stifled pluralism as the precondition for totalitarian domination. In this way, social media's fundamental operating architecture conditions a modern reformulation of loneliness primed for microfascist control - an algorithmically-induced self-alienation bombarded with individualized media injecting normative currents, yet bereft of the public spaces that could counterbalance this descent into solipsistic performance for an audience of code and quantified selves.

It is important to explicate the connection between microfascist desire and social media. Sideeq Mohammed (2020) has explored this in a fascinating article that links microfascism to the emerging

genre of works created by management guru genre. In this text he argues that "fascism is not only an organized political philosophy but a stifling of thought, of otherness, of difference; an aggregate destructive yearning for power here understood as manifested in the profound desire for and proliferation of homogeneity, uniformity, and control," (2020, 6). While he argues that management gurus design simple rules to follow to achieve desired outcomes ("the four-hour work week!"), we can see how a very similar logic operates through social platforms. If the goal is to have one's posts seen by others, then one must conform to the algorithm. What this conformity entails is, of course, always shifting. Facebook's algorithm, for example, has at times emphasized the inclusion of photos in a post before later shifting to videos hosted directly by Facebook, rather than linked through another platform. Brent Adkins explains how continuously changing layers of algorithmic rules can connect to fascism:

> Here [referencing a cancerous body without organs] we can imagine an organization that continuously spawns new layers of management that increasingly micro-manage every situation. Or, on a smaller scale we can image a person constantly generating new rules to live by, rules of conduct, driving, diet, that stratify life to an ever-greater degree. The danger here is that we give the fascist inside us the power to increasingly organ-ize our lives. (2015, 106)

This proliferation of ever-spiralling rules is cancerous because it consumes everything else. Rather than following a new line of flight that emerges out of moments of subjectivation, these layers of rules foreclose those possibilities, sticking them within a closed loop. For social media platforms, the ever-evolving algorithm takes on the role of these new rules to live by—for one's account to continue to get views and reactions, they must make sure they stay abreast of the latest trends being emphasized by the algorithm. As an example, this might mean creating content that makes use of the currently trending sound clip, so it is more likely to show up in people's feeds. This algorithmic conformity, as explored by Adkins (2015), creates a loop in which it is at least significantly harder, though not impossible, to follow new lines of flight. But more importantly, this capitulation to the algorithm nurtures the fascist in inside us that craves this conformity. Follow the algorithm, create new content, pitch products through affiliate partnerships, and consume more and more. This process is deeply intertwined with issues of digital labor, commodification, and neoliberal logic that pervades social media platforms (Duffy, 2017; Srnicek, 2017). Feel rage at the fascism you see in the news headlines on your feeds but go no further than the headlines. Laugh at the cat meme. Buy a "smash fascism" mug on Etsy that features a cat image. Scroll more. Scroll more. More. Let the algorithm guide and manage you as the hours slip by. Fall asleep with the phone in your hands. "Technocratic fascism assembles, negotiates the relations between interests and desires at a small scale, in a much more subtle way… Manipulated as they are by the *mass media*, people stick to the right path all by themselves," (Guattari, 2016, 89). Wake up. Scroll. Consume.

We can understand this process even better through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of binary segmentation[4]:

> Ultimately, their goal is to give a new account of fascism. Binary segmentation functions on the basis of a series of exclusive disjunctions. It is a flow chart that assigns us a discrete position in relation to other discrete positions. Are you male or female? Are you rich or poor? Are you an adult or a child? Are you straight or gay? The middle term is always excluded. There is always a price to be paid for deviance. Circular segmentation organizes

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[4] A process of dividing and categorizing individuals and groups based on rigid either/or distinctions.

us according to ever-larger circles of engagement. There is a private circle, a familial circle, a social circle, a community circle, a national circle, and a global circle. (Adkins, 2015, 128–129)

In this description of segmentation, we can already see echoes of how social media platforms filter us into bubbles and serve ads based on these segmentations. The short-lived Google+ used a circle model that nearly mimics this: "Most people begin their Google+ Circle usage by setting up Circles around relationships and interests. You might have a 'Friends' or 'Family' circle, and other circles for different hobbies and topics you're interested in," (Allton, 2013). All social networks segment like this, Google+ just happened to be a bit more explicit about this and give users more control. This segmentation along molecular lines could potentially introduce new lines of flight, but also features dangers. At one extreme, this can lead to microfascisms arising through resonances, while at the other extreme: "Instead of the great paranoid fear, we are trapped in a thousand little monomanias, self-evident truths, and clarities that gush from every black hole," (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, 228). Mircrofascism and monomania[5] lurk around every corner of social media.

Toward a Micro-antifascist Social Media

Imagining social media that takes a micro-antifascist approach will require thinking about this from both the level of content and the platform design. Ultimately, these two approaches must converge, as both are needed if any success will be possible. Thus far, existing work has approached this question of microfascism almost exclusively through the lens of content, which is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient. So how can we move forward? It may be helpful to start with a warning from Guattari:

One must not forget, of course, that all left-wing organizations had already been destroyed in Italy and Germany—but why should they all have collapsed like card-houses? They had never presented the people with any real alternative—certainly not with anything that mobilized their will to fight or their force of desire, anything that even tempted them away from the religion of fascism. (1977, 226)

This alternative is of vital importance. To take a pressing contemporary example, many have argued that it is a lack of a vision of something to build *toward* that contributed to Russia's collapse into Vladimir Putin's fascism after the end of the Soviet Union. In *The Invention of Russia*, Arkady Ostrovsky argues that, "If you have no real vision for the future, nostalgia for an idealized past is more appealing than the reality of the present," (2017, xx). This is the trap of social media – because of algorithms, hate and disinformation spread faster than affects of joy (Vosoughi et al., 2018). We see these same affects with Donald Trump in the U.S.—a nostalgia for an imagined better past and the joy of simply spreading hate toward others. Jack Bratich has explored this in detail in *On Microfascism:*

Within digital culture, microfascist subjectivity is performed as freedom, irony, and fun transgression. The network plays a key role not just through education and information, but by initiating others and creating a (de)sensibility. This subject forms a body that is sealed, armored, and numbed in order to act against others. (Bratich, 2022, loc. 1162)

The irony and fun transgression–the "I was just joking" approach–is combined with training in tactics that were used by elite spies only a generation ago. In *This Is Not Propaganda*, for example,

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[5] A pathological obsession with a single idea or subject

Peter Pomerantsev explains how far-right forums train users in "how to use the values of your enemies against them," and how to crack consensus using fake personas arguing opposing views (Pomerantsev, 2019, 159–160). But even more than that, the far-right has gotten extremely sophisticated at digital storytelling. The *Reply-All* podcast explored how QAnon uses methods like random information drops, cliff-hangers, and encouraging the sharing of individual interpretations of information as a way to engage their audience (Vogt, 2020). In many ways, they are doing some of the best and most sophisticated storytelling on the internet, at least in terms of the methods. It can be difficult not to be taken in by this approach, especially if one is not aware of it at a theoretical level.

Our current approaches to media literacy in the U.S. focus rather narrowly on the skill of identifying bias, which largely makes students untrustworthy of all information sources and leads to paranoia if they don't also have detailed instruction in how social media platforms work (boyd, 2018; Carrigan & Sylvia IV, 2022). Putin's troll factories have easily appropriated this post-truth narrative, encouraging others to question everything and mixing in memes and humor as part of their disinformation warfare (Sylvia IV & Moody, 2019). BreadTube, a group of loosely affiliated leftist YouTubers, has tried to appropriate the algorithmic methods of cultural production mastered by the right to attempt to spread more leftist ideals (Sylvia IV & Moody, 2022). However, this approach has led to significant in-fighting, with many of the channels closing amid conflict. Using the same tools in the same way, even when aiming toward a different ideological goal, still leads to the same outcome. Following the algorithmic rules nurtures our inner fascist.

A micro-antifascist approach will ultimately require a social media platform that allows a constructive approach to offering an alternative to fascism. Being antifascist cannot only mean being *anti* – there must be an affirmative and joyful alternative that is co-constructed. Bratich notes something like this in his recommended strategy:

> Information-based antifascism has a role to play but it reduces "platforms" to message delivery devices. Micro-antifascism is less interested in epistemological claims and speech statements and more on the shaping of reality through memory and myth, initiation rites, mobilizations of desire, self-sealing subjectivities, desensitized bodies, and affective investments. The cultural sphere, as the production of subjectivity with all the ways we have been examining here, attunes itself to something more subtle, such as affects and other micrological interactions. Micro-antifascism deprives microfascism of the conditions of becoming compositionally activated. (2022, loc. 3,362)

This is certainly on the right track, but many of Bratich's suggestions remain at the level of rhetoric – the use of squads wielding humor, for example. These are mostly focused on ways to counter fascist communication.

What must be combined with this approach is adjusting existing platforms or creating new ones that are micro-antifascist by design. For this we should consider an informational ontology[6] approach. Spinoza's philosophy suggests that an individual's capacity to act is influenced by the stability of their environment, such as a city (Sylvia IV, 2022). A city's identity emerges from the collective minds within it, including non-human ones. It functions as a large composite being whose actions are shaped by the emotions and interactions of its members. This concept relates closely to Spinoza's idea of "transindividuals," which are entities that exist within a network of relationships

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[6] An ontological framework that emphasizes the primacy of information and its processes in the constitution of reality.

and are constantly evolving through the exchange of influences. Spinoza's concept of an affect refers to the impact of interactions between entities, which alter their state of being. His ontological framework, which deals with change and interaction within a collective context, prefigures the informational ontology that Simondon would later develop. Spinoza also considers the political dimensions of this ontology, an aspect with which Simondon does not extensively engage.

Later philosophers, such as Deleuze, Guattari, and especially Rosi Braidotti, expand upon these ideas, linking Spinoza's ethical and political insights to the philosophical discourse on ontology in the context of technology and society. Rather than thinking about this from the level of the city, we can instead analyze it at the level of social media platforms. I argue that the synthesis of Spinoza with Deleuze and Simondon forms a comprehensive monistic ontology that not only grasps the essence of being in a technological era but also addresses the ethical and political ramifications inherent in such a worldview. For Guattari, this further means that we must leave the realm of the discursive regime and consider affect and a-signifying enunciations – or rather, micropolitics (1989a, 2015).

Spinozan ethics argue for the need of joyful affects through increased connections, but unfortunately give us very little guidance in how to do that. This is largely because there can never be a single correct answer, these connections require constant experimentation. It is in this spirit of experimentation that I offer ideas for experimenting with platform design, rather than definitive solutions. Some of these recommendations are already being tried by various platforms, but no single approach will make enough impact on its own – we need further experiments that offer different combinations of these suggestions.

Nonprofit: Suely Rolnik (2018) has argued that the colonial-capitalist regime micropolitically pimps out our life. We must find sustainable alternatives to social media that aren't fully entrenched in these capitalistic frameworks. This is a core requirement and must be combined with any other experimental approaches. This could take multiple forms, such as donation based federated servers run by volunteers or government funded digital public infrastructures (see below).

Remove algorithms: On one hand, this seems like the easiest and more obvious change, but it has proved controversial. Users have very mixed feelings about whether they like algorithmic as opposed to chronological social media feeds, and shifting to chronological feeds means people spend less time on a platform (Sunstein & Reisch, 2023). This could potentially drive users to other platforms that use algorithms. The Mastodon platform currently only has chronological feeds, but this has been a barrier to entry for many users who sign up and then are faced with nearly empty timelines that are rarely updated. Some have argued that rather than removing algorithms, an important step could be exploring new and more transparent ways of designing algorithms that are biased toward something other than engagement for profit (Ovadya, 2022). Another alternative could be finding new methods of engagement for platforms without algorithms. This might include better guidance for new users in building their timeline (by using lists, to give one example) or engaging them with groups or communities that offer a different form of engagement from the standard timeline. This can be envisioned as a path away from connecting individuals and toward connecting groups. Removing or significantly altering algorithms would go a long way toward preventing the microfascist joy of conformity and control.

Remove favorite and comment counts: In much the same way as users attempt to create content in a way that allows their content to be algorithmically spread, measuring interaction on content through analytics offers a similar path to normalization. The dopamine hit users get with every new

"like" reinforces a particular type of posting as a way to chase future likes. These are relatively new features in the history of social media and do not inherently need to be a part of the experience. Instagram has made efforts to hide like counts on posts, but this feature is optional and can be turned on and off by users (Warren, 2021).

Community Governance: One of the challenges in combating fascism is that even many of those who live in democratic societies feel quite removed from the process of governance, which can lead to hopelessness or apathy. But building social networks that are designed to require community governance can subjectify users in new ways, by letting them experience the messy complexity of governance themselves. Nathan Schneider (2024) has advocated widely for this approach and offers strong suggestions for how to go about this that include ideas like elections for group chat leaders and juries for controversial posts. It also matches community-engaged teaching practices which require students to mediate conversations that allow for civic approaches to complex societal issues rather than trying to determine a correct answer or single truth (Sylvia IV, 2021a).

Digital Public Infrastructure: Scholars like Ethan Zuckerman (2020) have argued that much like roads and water are key aspects of public infrastructure, social media platforms might benefit from an approach in which governmental agencies offer these services as a form of infrastructure. One benefit is that these could be scaled to community levels – each city or even neighborhood might have a public social media platform for its local users to access, just like they do the local library, for example. Importantly, these would be designed in ways that encourage civic engagement as opposed to the sale of ads.

Inclusivity and Diversity: Platforms can be built with features that nudge users toward greater inclusivity. There is a significant room for exploration of best practices in this area, but one small example would be requiring alternative text for images that can be used by a screen reader for those who cannot see an image. If a post features an image that doesn't have this alternative text included, the post button could simply be disabled. To take another example, drawing on a community moderated database, sentiment analysis might flag potentially biased language before it is posted, as a warning to the user, with a notification that will it be submitted to the community moderation queue if submitted as is. Diverse approaches might mean intentionally popping filter bubbles. This could take the form of something like Twitter's community notes, or even a feature that inserts opposing views for controversial posts. There have been experiments in this direction with features like the *Wall Street Journal's* Red Feed Blue Feed project (Keegan, 2019).

Beyond the Human: Censors and other forms of automated reporting could be used to create social media accounts for aspects of the world beyond the human. Perhaps you can follow your neighborhood park to get updates about current pollution levels or your local pond to get regular reminders of the water conditions. Moving up to further ecological levels might mean each user is given an ecological budget that considers things like energy use, allowing them to use the site for only so long each day or week.

Emphasizing Imagined Futures: Bringing together function and content, we might completely re-envision the traditional social media approach in which one user authors individual posts. How might we integrate this with more collaborative approaches? What would a social media platform look like if it featured spaces, groups, or pages that could be collaboratively edited, much like Wikipedia or even Google Docs? Let us explore how these spaces might allow us to think and tell stories collectively, while developing positive visions of our collective future?

Importantly, **t**hese changes are meant instead to impact how we engage with platforms through their design. Further, the suggestions shared here begin to build on efforts and ideas that are in some cases already under way. It will be necessary however, to combine these approaches and continue generating new experiments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has illuminated the insidious ways in which social media platforms, through their algorithmic imperatives, engender and capitalize on microfascist desires, steering users towards uniformity and control. It advocates a reimagining of these digital spaces, drawing from posthuman media studies to foster an ethical restructuring that honors diversity and nurtures anti-fascist modes of being. By challenging the prevailing architectures of desire that shape our digital interactions, we open avenues for a radical reconstitution of social media as sites of resistance and emancipation. This work serves as a clarion call for ongoing vigilance and critical engagement with our mediated environments, urging a collective endeavor towards platforms that not only resist fascist impulses but also celebrate the cacophony of democratic life and the generative potential of diverse subjectivities. It posits a future where digital spaces empower users to co-create a multiplicity of narratives, fostering a vibrant tapestry of connections that resist the seduction of uniformity and control, and instead, thrive on the chaotic beauty of unfettered, posthuman expression.

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