

# Liebesraum

## Social media as a space for the ontological (in)securitisation of the far-right

**Pasko Kisić-Merino**

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden

✉ pasko.kisic-merino@svet.lu.se

### Abstract

The co-constitution of social media and the Symbolic Order – the system of norms, law, culture, and language conditioning intersubjectivity – has generated an unprecedented political ontology marked by commodified performativity under neoliberalism. This ontology displaces the experience of *the political* in favour of its consumption as a spectacle. This spectacle expedites the misrecognition of far-right discourses as anomie rather than central to the neoliberal Symbolic Order. This paper explores how the relationship between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order sustains the normalisation of the far-right as an ontologically-securitising fantasy. I develop a Lacanian framework entangling the concepts of antagonism and ontological security. Through it, I examine the architecture of social media in terms of programmability (the mutual influence between users and algorithms) and homophilic networks (neighbourhoods of ‘love for sameness’). Based on the transition from ‘hate of the other’ to ‘love for the same’, I synthesise this framework and social media architecture into the novel notion of *liebesraum* or ‘space of love’. *Liebesraum* constitutes a spatial-affective apparatus that mediates the occlusion of traumatic encounters with anxieties of sociocultural collapse by situating them in a deceptive homeostasis of commodified antagonism on social media. Through the politically-stunting oscillation between transgressive enjoyment and corrective ‘love’, and in fostering *faux* agency, *liebesraum* reinforces neoliberalism’s ideological grip while simultaneously hollowing it by algorithmically mainstreaming ideologies of exclusion, supremacy, and brutalisation. I illustrate *liebesraum* in two political crises in the US: the 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection and Donald Trump’s 2024 electoral victory.

Keywords: social media; ontological security; far-right; homophily; psychoanalysis; Lacan; antagonism

### 1. Introduction

‘Today is 1776’. This line was tweeted on the 6th of January 2021 – the day of the US Capitol Hill insurrection by MAGA (‘Make America Great Again’) supporters – by far-right Republican Congresswoman Lauren Boebert (USA Today, 2021). The allusion to the US’ founding and its

signification as ‘free’ and ‘resolute’ was not isolated but accompanied by tweets by politicians across the political spectrum. For instance, ‘what’ and ‘who’ belong to the US was conveyed in a tweet by Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer: ‘Those who performed today’s reprehensible acts were rioters, insurrectionists, thugs, domestic terrorists. They don’t represent America [but] tonight Democracy will triumph’ (Arkin, 2021). This uproar was constituted by antagonistic discourses aiming to narratively control the Capitol storming and was constrained by the affordances of social media spaces, norms, and logics.

Social media are semi-public spaces where antagonisms are waged under the modern liberal order. These spaces have become performative battlegrounds for ‘heroic’ antagonisms interacted with by millions of users. For Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, antagonism is the irreducible possibility for social conflict rooted in intersubjective differences, which shape exclusion and thereby how identities are politically formed and contested (Mouffe, 2005). Antagonisms are the socio-symbolic boundaries and relations demarcating society and thus cannot be neutralised by liberal rationalism and consensus politics which, paradoxically, rely on segregating those marginal to the consensus (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, pp. 70-71). *The political* – the condition of antagonism permeating society (Mouffe, 2005) – and *politics* – how antagonisms are organised into institutions – are conditioned by complex market-oriented systems of mediatised socialisation. Understanding this technosocial structure is critical to analysing how the political emotionally manifests and is organised amid the retreat of the modern liberal order. This structure recasts the phenomenon of far-right normalisation as paradoxical, since the latter shapes the dislocation of this order while performatively safeguarding its neoliberal component. In this article, the modern liberal order should be understood as the global governance superstructure of late modernity, while neoliberalism constitutes the predominant ideological framework – focused on deregulation, privatisation, and welfare dismantling (Wilson, 2017) – underpinning this order.

In the context of the modern liberal order’s retreat, core antagonisms, like those between liberal Democrats and far-right Republicans in the US, become spectacles (Debord, 1983) or commodities – fetishised objects obscuring the social relations and labour behind their production, embodying the ‘virtual soul’ of excessive capitalist desire (McGowan, 2025; Vighi & Feldner, 2007). These commodified antagonisms operate in two inextricable dimensions. First, they provide subjects with an illusory sense of stability and belonging to symbolic structures and political communities – i.e., fantasies of ontological security – by reinforcing ‘us vs. them’ dichotomies in ‘neighbourhoods of sameness’ on social media. Second, they embody the excess promised by neoliberalism – that we can ‘have it all’, yet obstacles remain (McGowan, 2025). The commodification of antagonisms relies on reducing intricate categories of existence (e.g., class, race, gender) via schemes of othering, i.e., producing a ‘whole’ self against an essentialised, threatening Other. This process generates ‘authentic’ yet illusory senses of agency, purpose, and fixity bound to the ‘neighbourhood’ and shaped by the social imperatives of liberal modernity. This was evident in adversarial narratives during the Capitol insurrection on social media (e.g. ‘support democracy’ vs ‘stop the steal’). These narratives reinforce ontological security fantasies of belonging (‘I am a progressive / patriot!’) while being constrained by the algorithmic affordances and spaces of the attention economy (‘like’, ‘share’). They produce agency experienced in post-political<sup>1</sup> spectacles and bolstered within comforting spaces of sameness.

Globally, liberal and far-right discourses contest belonging and identity by tying idyllic pasts to troubled presents and anxiety-inducing futures. This contestation produces dystopias – imaginaries oscillating between hope and anxiety – that frame the recognition of the threatening Other in online neighbourhoods. Consequently, the normalisation of the far-right becomes central to the modern liberal order, performing a paradoxically stabilising-yet-excessive threat that co-constitutes the identity and feelings of agency of the liberal subject. Commodified antagonisms occlude the emotional and material conditions set by neoliberalism that enable the far-right by reinforcing ‘sameness’ on social media,

<sup>1</sup> ‘Neutral’, a-political, consensus-based, technocratic (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014).

twisting hatred, fear, and anxiety of the Other into ‘love’ for the ‘same’. This transition, experienced in a continuum of excessive enjoyment (*jouissance*) and Symbolic ‘correction’ against this transgression (‘love’), is structured by an ever-expanding technosocial system that organises subjectivity and ideology (i.e., an apparatus) through which the far-right becomes normalised: the ‘space of love’ or *liebesraum*. *Liebesraum* situates the far-right as central to the stability of the liberal Symbolic Order, thus simultaneously revealing the latter’s inadequacy and organising its dismantling. This preliminary articulation of *liebesraum* serves as a conceptual provocation, guiding its theoretical development illustrated through examples of electoral *loss* for US Republicans in 2020/2021 and Democrats in 2024.

This article explores how far-right normalisation emerges from the interplay between social media and the modern liberal order by asking: how do commodified antagonisms ontologically securitise supremacist othering through comforting belonging? This is complemented by asking: how does social media’s influence on political belonging drive the retreat of the modern liberal order and the transmutation of neoliberalism within far-right ideologies? These questions entail examining social media in terms of *logics* (how they organise social traffic) and *space* (how they manufacture belonging) using a Lacanian framework.

Commodified antagonisms between liberals and the far-right illustrate how far-right normalisation occurs in and sustains *homophilic networks* – i.e., networks of ‘love for sameness’. Wendy Chun (2018, 2021) conceptualises network homophily as a predominant principle in neoliberal social media ecosystems by which ‘similarity’ between users begets connection or ‘love’ which, consequently, tends to frame segregation as *objective* difference between subjects. Homophily stems from big data analytics, which appear to cater to users’ individual demands but, instead, segregate them into neighbourhoods and train them to expect, recognise, and naturalise these essentialised categories of being and belonging (2018, pp. 60-61). This homophilic structure entails carefully dissecting mediatic content (antagonistic narratives), emotional structure (ontological security), and sociosymbolic frame. I argue that, through homophilic ‘love’, social media situates traumatic prospects (e.g., ethnocultural replacement) in a *faux* homeostasis of commodified antagonism between liberal and far-right discourses. This apparent inertness safeguards neoliberalism by producing the conditions for, paradoxically, consuming dystopias as enjoyable, excessive fantasies of ontological security. The post-political space of love normalises the far-right as a counter-hegemonic affective force, transfiguring the modern liberal Symbolic into a structure of exclusion, supremacy, and brutalisation.

Four clarifications are in order. First, the Symbolic Order is the psychic registry of language, norms, laws, and culture conditioning intersubjectivity and fantasies. Its examination in this article is grounded in the modern liberal order. Second, social media will be referred to both as a singular phenomenon and in the plural for specific platforms or corporations. Third, while far-right spaces, discourses, and emotions vary across contexts and cannot be reduced to their manifestation on social media, this analysis focuses on how these technologies contribute to far-right *normalisation* and reveal its link with the modern liberal order. Fourth, the prefix ‘(neo)’ in ‘(neo)liberal’ signifies the degenerative relationship between neoliberalism and the modern liberal order. This nomenclature is occasionally used to reiterate their inextricability while simultaneously maintaining an ontological particularity.

The structure of this article is as follows. I begin by overviewing the literature on the link between social media massification and far-right normalisation, highlighting contributions from psychoanalytic media studies. These contributions both inform the development of the Lacanian conceptual framework and allow for a direct application of the latter over social media. Next, I provide a background on the key co-constituted phenomena framing the Symbolic Order: far-right normalisation, the modern liberal order, and neoliberalism. Further, I develop the Lacanian conceptual framework by articulating the concepts of *antagonism* and *ontological security*. Using this framework, I then analyse the interplay between social media and the Symbolic Order, examining the former in terms of *logics* (programmability) and *space* (homophilic networks). Guided by this Lacanian reading, I introduce *liebesraum* as a novel synthesising concept. Finally, I offer some concluding remarks on the consequences of *liebesraum* over liberal

modernity. Throughout this article, I illustrate these arguments by examining the *continuum* between emotional transgression and ‘correction’ in two instances of political defeat for US Republicans and Democrats.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Literature review

Scholars have addressed various dimensions of the emotional and political consequences of social media massification, focusing on the relationship between social media and the ‘decline’ of the Symbolic Order (Flisfeder & Willis, 2014; Johanssen & Krüger, 2022); emotional and behavioural consequences of social media’s neoliberal structure (Chun, 2018); the techno-mediatic enabling of far-right normalisation (Cammaerts, 2020; Krzyżanowski, 2020); and the production of ontological security through social media dynamics (Areni, 2019; McDonnell et al., 2023). Johanssen and Krüger (2022) offer views of the Symbolic Order as both declining due to and reinforced by social media in how they shape our desires and fantasies. Chun (2018) further argues that neoliberal homophily constitutes a perverse incentive system of social identification through consumption.

Neoliberalism’s transition into the far-right can be understood in terms of the decline of Symbolic authority on social media. This decline (Dean, 2010; Žižek, 1998) is addressed by Johanssen and Krüger (2022), who discuss Žižek’s visions on early cyberspace (1998). Despite cyberspace’s evolution, Žižek’s psychoanalytic approach remains relevant considering social media’s nudging to ‘*enjoy!*’ even during the retreat of the modern liberal order. Two visions – ‘cyberspace as symbolic authority in crisis’ and ‘traversing the fantasy’ (Johanssen & Krüger, 2022, pp. 72–76) – are particularly relevant. Social media can be understood as possessing a ‘formal structure of symbolic prohibition’ (*ibid.*, p. 73) but lacks the enforcer: the big Other – the authority embodying language, norms, and laws (i.e., the Symbolic). As legacy media’s grip weakens (i.e., the big Other retreats), subjects seek a symbolic authority to manage their ontological insecurity. In the context of a symbolic realm ‘without consequence and binding power’, this drive leads to a culture of perversity (*ibid.*), where individual practices, discourses, and performances vie to ‘become the new law’ (*ibid.*, p. 74).

Žižek’s vision of ‘traversing the fantasy’ frames social media as a ‘sphere of adherence to self-imposed rules and laws’ (*ibid.*). Social media sustains the perversity of the illusion of agency, shaping and responding to the subject’s desire through ontological security fantasies. Yet, Žižek suggests this very dependence on fantasy can allow the subject to ‘take a step back’ and recognise their investment in fantasy (e.g., self-conceptualisations as/of ‘real Americans’ vs. ‘invading hordes’) – and, thus, their existential incompleteness, generating resistance (cf. Chun, 2018). Further, Johanssen and Krüger (2022) argue that it is precisely the incompleteness of fantasies that prevents us from full self-recognition. This lack fuels a quest for identity through phantasmatic narratives (e.g., the ‘American Dream’) that temporarily satisfy our need for symbolic authority yet simultaneously curtail resistance (Dean, 2010).

Flisfeder (2021; with Willis, 2014) offers a complementary take on the relationship between the Symbolic Order, desire, and social media from a Žižekian perspective. Flisfeder rejects the idea that social media signifies the decline of the Symbolic, instead viewing it as ‘renewed widespread belief in, and wish for, the existence of the big Other’ (*ibid.*). Social media ‘captures’ people by catering to algorithmically-curated desires, ‘showing and teaching what to want, how to want and how to be wanted’ (*ibid.*, cf. Debord, 1983, para 44-45). Subjects turn to the Symbolic for a sense of existential coherence and for this structuring of desire – desire which, for Lacan, is always mediated by the big Other. Within homophilic networks we seek to ‘satisfy the desire of the Other in the form of likes, shares, comments, follows’ (Flisfeder, 2021, p. 67; in Johanssen & Krüger, 2022, p. 81). Social media invokes the authoritative ‘gaze’ of the big Other, which subjects constantly seek to impress. This encounter involves not just consenting

<sup>2</sup> The empirical sources used in these examples and illustrations can be found in the **Appendix** located after the reference list.

to the big Other's demands ('*like and subscribe!*') but also an enjoyment in transgressing its norms – an act that paradoxically sustains desire by reaffirming the Other's presence and the subject's relation to it.

Other scholars have focused on the discursive and psycho-political dynamics of far-right normalisation on social media. Krzyżanowski (2020) analyses how far-right discourses on social media become mainstream through *naturalisation* and legitimisation. He finds that strategic 'civilising' or pre-legitimising patterns in social media distinguish far-right rhetoric, shaping the public sphere to accept radical agendas as natural. Areni (2019) argues that ontological security is central to why and how subjects engage with social media. Social media operates as an ontological-securitising mechanism, allowing subjects to nostalgically engage with the past to cope with anxiety-inducing futures and a content-saturating present (ibid.).

The role of social media neighbourhoods – homophilic networks – on identity-shaping crises like the Capitol insurrection is also discussed from a political communications perspective. Munn (2021) argues that homophily in echo-chambers on Parler created a heuristic middle point between mainstream platforms and 'legacy hate havens' like 4chan and 8kun (ibid., p. 4). These networks allowed for a preparatory mobilisation of a right-wing coalition, bridging 'ordinary' conservative narratives with redemptive violence, reinforcing and amplifying pre-existent beliefs. Karel et al. (2023) note that Parler, lacking gatekeeping, legitimised and visibilized far-right influentials, reinforcing echo-chambers. Gilmore et al. (2023) posit that engagement with far-right networked spheres reinforced political grievances, generating a narrative of far-right insurrectionist legitimacy. This far-right solidarity and 'heroic' recapture of the nation is influenced by the design, policies, and market incentives of social media platforms (Jakubik et al., 2022), crystallised in curation and recommendation algorithms that reinforce networks of right-wing sameness (Arora et al., 2022).

This critical scholarship provides valuable insights into the co-constitution between social media and the Symbolic under neoliberalism. This article complements them by developing a Lacanian conceptual framework entangling the notions of antagonism and ontological security to analyse this relationship concerning the normalisation of the far-right. This phenomenon is understudied in psychoanalytic media accounts, particularly when integrating ontological security as a fantasy both animating and produced by social media. This article not only analyses far-right discourses but broadens 'normalisation' by linking them with liberal homophilic networks, as developed by Wendy Chun (2018). It complements Chun's critical analysis on the relationship between (neo)liberal online networks, segregation, and supremacy by interrogating the political consequences of this link in terms of anxiety, enjoyment, desire, and fantasy. Thus, I contribute to the scholarship on far-right normalisation and Lacanian ontological security by exploring social media as neoliberal-shaped space. This article recasts social media's technosocial qualities as a perverse, *ever-expanding body* of hierarchies, segregation, and exclusion disguised as love, connectivity, and freedom: *liebesraum*. Next, I discuss the backgrounds and connection between far-right normalisation, the modern liberal order, and neoliberalism.

### 3. Not-so unlikely partners: (Neo)liberalism and far-right normalisation

The relationship between the far-right and the modern liberal order has been sold by liberal narratives as anathematic and even an irreconcilable civilisational struggle stemming from the horrors of World War II. However, this link is more intricate in its composition since these ideologies and material projects have been mutually reinforced throughout history (Davidson & Saull, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2020), a process blurred and amplified by the ontologically-securitising spectacle of neoliberalism.

The normalisation of the far-right refers to the process by which erstwhile disavowed radical right-wing ideologies become mainstreamed, legitimised, and naturalised (K. Brown et al., 2023; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). The far-right is a *continuum* (Norocel, 2024) of interconnected organisational forms, sites, and ideologies encompassing discourses of nativism, xenophobia, exclusionary populism, genderphobia, ultranationalism, and authoritarianism aimed at societal reshaping (Kisić-Merino, 2025;

Kisić-Merino et al., 2021). Its normalisation is similarly a non-linear and non-static process (Newth et al., 2025), occurring when liberal subjects may disagree with far-right content but do not question the validity of their participation in the public sphere (Mondon & Winter, 2020).

Wodak (2020) argues that social media has amplified this process of normalisation (see also Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023). Social media allow the far-right to produce and disseminate content that mass media would vet, revealing how these discourses remain embedded in liberal polities despite their purported ostracization (Seymour, 2024). Merrill (2020) and Price (2025) note that far-right normalisation extends beyond formal politics to social media, where memes and 'moods' are mobilised to exploit nostalgia, e.g., in empty signifiers like Vikings and *folkhem* in Sweden (Kølvraa, 2019). This normalisation reflects the tension between antagonistic ontological security and *insecurity* fantasies, seen in the anxiety over how far-right mainstreaming unsettles liberal ideals; and in belongingness to a 'White nation' stemming from nostalgic fantasies (Krzyżanowski, 2020).

The relationship between liberalism and neoliberalism is intricate and central for this article. The former is viewed as a broad political, civilisational, and imperial capitalist project, evident in the latter's ubiquity. Although neoliberalism and the modern liberal order are deeply intertwined, with the former hijacking the ontological, moral, and ethical structure of liberalism (Wilson, 2017), they should not be equated. While the liberal order's core political signifier – liberal democracy – is retreating as evidenced by far-right normalisation, neoliberalism represents a neurotic fantasy and cancerous metamorphosis of the former (Ibid.). Neoliberalism is not retreating but mutating and reemerging within 'alternative' right-wing and far-right discourses like techno-feudalism and neo-fascism (Cammaerts, 2020). Neoliberalism superficially retreats alongside liberalism while transcending and cannibalising it, mutating, adapting, and metastasising in far-right fantasies it produced and normalised (cf. W. Brown, 2018). Neoliberalism reveals the traumatic *Real* – that which evades symbolisation, language, control, and prediction (Lacan, 2006, p. 324) – at the core of its liberal origins. It inverts and repackages liberalism as a commodity catering to Western sensibilities in online spaces of political pseudo-activity (Žižek, 2002, pp. xxxi–xxxii). The dual process of liberal dislocation and neurotic neoliberal 'clinging-on' is central to far-right normalisation, which becomes accelerated and occluded by AI-fuelled social media.

Following Wilson's (2017) characterisation of neoliberalism, I conceptualise the (neo)liberal order as a similarly obsessional neurotic fantasy. I expand Wilson's conceptualisation by highlighting both the difference and connection between neoliberalism and liberalism since the former is self-perpetuating at the expense of the latter's decay. The neurotic fantasy involves an unceasing cycle of dislocation and attempts to safeguard the Symbolic Order, stabilising the ontologically-insecure subject's battle for selfhood and agency. Wilson argues that by repressing neoliberalism's social harm and disavowing criticisms, the obsessive neurotic frenetically attempts to maintain its stability as a *naturalised* Symbolic Order to avoid encountering the *Real* (e.g., the ideological obsolescence of the US Democratic party). The cyclical nature of obsessive neurosis shows that stabilising strategies invariably fail to hold the Symbolic fabric (Ibid.; Žižek, 2009). Wilson, channelling Žižek (2009), argues that neoliberalism's pragmatic and post-political stance paradoxically reveals it as pure ideology (2017, p. 166). (Neo)liberalism's backgrounding of the political is the reality-structuring function of fantasy, protecting the subject against the *Real of Capital*.<sup>3</sup> To ontologically securitise the subject against this *Real* (e.g., in rampant inequality resulting from class stratification), neoliberalism projects itself as a stabilising, 'natural' reality rather than an imposed ideology (ibid., p. 167).

Neoliberalism's refusal to address its historical contradictions as un-desired and obsolete rearticulates the *Real of Capital* to the *political* (Jameson, 1981, p. 35; Žižek, 2002, p. 101). The inevitable invasion of the *Real* – most prominently experienced in the erosion of the modern liberal order – reveals neoliberalism's limits to organise reality, jeopardising its power and legitimacy (Žižek, 2002, pp. liv-lv).

<sup>3</sup> The Real elements of Capital, like the Real of the political, are what animates the neoliberal Symbolic and yet what the latter forecloses to provide subjective stability. This is seen in how e.g., 'class relations [i.e., the Real of Capital] are obscured by freedom of exchange [i.e., the neurotic fantasy of neoliberalism]' (Wilson, 2017, p. 167).

However, neoliberalism clings on, futilely attempting at neutralising the Real by transforming its contradictions into fuel for ideological reinforcement, avoiding political change in favour of an ontological-securitising ‘shambling-on’. This shambling-on, animated in the exhausted form of the modern liberal order, enables and nurtures far-right normalisation. It constitutes the fantasy of ontological security animating the anxiety of irrelevance or dislocation, offering an equally excessive, enjoyable sense of belonging (*jouissance*) to the ‘neighbourhood of sameness’ through commodified antagonisms. The 2024 US Democratic electoral defeat, where ‘betraying’ Muslim and Latino minorities were extensively abused and scapegoated online, offers a glimpse into the political weight of this ‘shambling-on’. This phenomenon manifests in how party strategists sought performative answers to structural issues. Rather than confronting their inability to offer a meaningful project tackling structural socioeconomic maladies, they resorted to covertly hiring highly-followed influencers to promote the party in an attention-saturated mediascape (‘we need a Joe Rogan of the left’; Marcus, 2024; Lorenz, 2025).

The retreat of the neoliberal order, sustained by sublimating the political and occluding the Real of the far-right, is signified not in its structural erosion but in becoming a dystopian fantasy tied with the far-right. The danger to pluralist democracies stems from this naturalised shift and its technosocially-infused decay into far-right civilisational projects masked as neoliberal fantasy. In what follows, I develop the Lacanian conceptual framework with which I will analyse social media’s role in generating belonging and agential fantasies sustaining neoliberalism and normalising the far-right.

### 3. Conceptual framework

Understanding how social media and the (neo)liberal Symbolic Order co-generate far-right normalisation as an ontological security fantasy involves discussing two concepts from a Lacanian approach: antagonism and ontological security. Antagonism constitutes the key relation and content consumed through social media, reinforcing political identities and senses of agency. While antagonisms are phantasmatic and symbolically-conditioned, their structures carry the Real, i.e., the uncertainty, instability, and threat of social collapse embodied in the threatening Other. Ontological security operates as the affective mechanism organising this framework, a fantasy with which to manage the incursion of the Real. This fantasy manifests in the tension between antagonism and belonging – i.e., securitising against the threatening Other –, conveying meaning to political life. Ontological security is closely tied to Lacan’s Imaginary register, where fantasies provide meaning to the Symbolic’s inscrutability and sustain narratives of a coherent self against the Real’s traumatic disruptions.

#### 3.1 Antagonism: The relation and content of political life

Antagonism, an ‘ever-present possibility’ in society, is central to Chantal Mouffe’s Lacanian-inspired work on the political and subjectivity under neoliberalism (2005). It is a constitutive yet pernicious dimension of the political often veiled by post-political discourses and subjects. Antagonism’s role in politics is rooted in the relational nature of subjectivity, relying on the ‘us vs. them’ distinction to generate stable identities and categories of belonging, shaping society by signifying the threatening Other (Mouffe, 2005, p. 15).

The interplay between intersubjectivity and power is framed by antagonisms, as ‘the creation of an identity implies the establishment of a difference, a difference which is often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy’ (*ibid.*). Mouffe questions the logic of liberal conflict-solving, which tries to ‘rationally’ merge opposed perspectives, leading to incoherent political discourses and the marginalisation of dissent. Given the antagonistic nature of intersubjectivity, any form of political consensus excludes the other’s perspective, evidencing the limits of rational consensus and the omission of antagonism as *constitutive of* liberalism (*ibid.*, p. 12). The repression of antagonism in liberal politics paradoxically leads to their deterioration and the rise of increasingly-violent iterations, like those the far-right (*ibid.*, pp. 10-12).

The erosion of the modern liberal order is evident in the rise of right-wing authoritarian discourses in 'Western' democracies (Jee et al., 2022), pushbacks against globalisation (Kinnvall & Kisić-Merino, 2023), and declining support for liberal values like human rights and tolerance (Auer & Schaub, 2024). Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'antagonisms are not *objective* relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity' (2013, p. xiv, emphasis in original). Antagonisms are potentially disruptive since 'society is constructed around these [antagonistic] limits' (ibid.), threatening the liberal order's rationalistic consensus base. Gómez Camarena and Juárez-Salazar (2022) contend that repressing antagonisms under liberal capitalism is a hegemonic project of self-substantiation, reshaping the political as artificial, undesirable, and harmful. For instance, the post-defeat Democratic mobilisation of influencers in 2024-2025 (Lorenz, 2025) aimed to quell the intra-party vitriol spouted online against ethnocultural minorities (García, 2024), redirecting it to perform 'proper' liberal politics for the era of social media.

Neoliberalism's drive towards self-perpetuation and antagonism's unavoidability raise a key question: if antagonism persists, and its omission results in social strife, how does the neoliberal order cope with it? I argue that antagonisms themselves – as windows into the traumatic Real of the political – have been partially sublimated into the structure of neoliberal fantasy, turned into an ideological-reinforcing commodity. I turn to ontological security as a concept linking antagonism with the ideological fantasies that stabilise the security-seeking subject.

### 3.2 Ontological security: Animating antagonism

Ontological security is a fantasy of categorical closure, providing the subject with a partial sense of stability. Initially, Laing (1965) and Giddens (1991) saw ontological security as a fixed, continuous self-experience of being or 'wholeness' enacted through societal rituals and practices. The Lacanian turn (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020) argues that subjects are perpetually *becoming* instead of 'being', constantly attempting to stabilise against their constitutive *lack*. This lack stems from the subject's entry into the sociosymbolic realm, binding it to unrealisable desires and fantasies of reattaining long-lost fullness via ontological security narratives.

Ontological security fantasies are positioned in the registry of the Imaginary, where the interplay of ideal images of the self, others, and the world are co-constituted with meaning according to the Symbolic Order. Fantasy stabilises the lacking subject, allowing the ego to be constituted through identification with the *Other* (Evans, 2006, p. 84). Lacan (2006) argues that the subject's lack marks the loss of primordial 'wholeness' (*jouissance*), producing a drive to recapture it through the big Other. The subject's desire is to satisfy or seek the approval of the *jouissance*-withholding big Other – i.e., it desires the big Other's desire (Hook, 2017). The primordial 'loss' of enjoyment ('wholeness') implies both its 'theft' and 'prior ownership'. As seen in far-right anxieties of 'replacement', enjoyment mobilises the aggrieved subject towards reclamation through ontological security fantasies, which constitutes a key affective component of reactionary politics.

Enjoyment or *jouissance* is a painful mode of intensity organised through ontological security fantasies. It manifests in socially-disavowed, transgressive emotions and attitudes like elation, anger, *schadenfreude*, self-righteousness, and sadism (Hook, 2017). These expressions manifest during socio-affective upheavals against 'threatening' Others deemed as obstacles for attaining lost wholeness, revealing contradictions with our 'rational' sociosymbolic commitments (Glynos, 2001). For instance, the 2021 Capitol storming involved the emotionally-charged, violent incursion of Trump supporters to prevent the allegedly fraudulent confirmation of Democrat Joe Biden as President. This insurrection was a 'festival of excess' (Hook, 2017), where Republicans' symbolic commitments to 'law and order' receded in favour of violent anger, elation, and self-righteousness against perceived threats – the Democrats, the 'elite', the state, the immigrant.

*Jouissance* transgresses against imaginary others (e.g., Democrats) and the big Other (e.g., the state, the algorithm, or ‘American identity’). This transgression responds to ontological insecurity fantasies of supremacy and belonging, serving as a bond sustaining social cohesion (Browning, 2019). In this sense, *jouissance* paradoxically reinforces Symbolic authority (e.g., ‘Stop the Steal’) by trespassing its conditions. It entails enjoyment for loyal subjects gripped by ideology (e.g., that of ‘law and order’) through its transgression (the insurrectionist ‘take America back!'; Glynn & Stavrakakis, 2008). Thus, enjoyment also stems from upholding the social order and subject-affirming fantasies ‘in contempt of Others who “illicitly” enjoy in our/my stead’ (McGowan, 2021).

The desire to recapture lost enjoyment is productive insofar as the subject believes in this possibility, crystallised in the *object-cause of desire* (e.g., the ‘American dream’) (Eberle, 2019). The object-cause of desire sits at the interstice of the orders of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, both driving and causing desire. It is ‘the name we give to the [subject’s] lack, i.e., a specific signifier that comes to represent social fullness’ (Vulović and Ejodus, 2024, p. 127). Fantasies that feed this quest inevitably break and fail, leaving ‘the subject to turn to the Symbolic [...] to find a way to secure its desire for an ideal image’ (Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023, p. 57). This *return to the Symbolic* is co-constituted with ontological security, producing new Symbolic articulations (e.g., ‘White America’) that renew ideology’s bind on the subject by signifying threats to attaining its object-cause of desire. For instance, via Twitter/X, Donald Trump engaged with his MAGA followership during the late stages of the 2021 insurrection, affectionately calling for ‘peace’ while attacking the ‘thieving’ other, enacting the ontological security-insecurity dyad around Symbolic *law*:

‘I know your pain. I know you’re hurt. [...] We had an election that was stolen from us. It was a landslide election, and everyone knows it, especially the other side, but you have to go home now. We have to have peace. We have to have law and order. We have to respect our great people in law and order. We don’t want anybody hurt.’ (Herb & Cohen, 2022)

Threats to neoliberal fantasies of ontological security involve antagonisms and, thus, the Real’s incursion. To cope with the Real of traumatic encounters (e.g., ethnocultural ‘replacement anxiety’), the subject generates essentialising selfhood categories, producing and substantiating *otherness*. The Real is not only traumatic but crucial for creating political fantasies and new Symbolic structures to address its incursions. Recognising the threatening other shapes identities reinforced by ontological security narratives (Vulović & Ejodus, 2024). The recognition–antagonism dyad mirrors the structure of ontological security: Ontological security fantasies are co-constitutive with *insecurity* ones. As seen in Rep. Taylor Greene’s Twitter/X call to resist the 2020 ‘fraudulent’ election that should ‘terrify every American’ (Dale, 2021), ‘saving America’ depends on ‘stopping the steal’. This structure reflects how recognising myself in/by the Other entails their radical difference, which constitutes the antagonism at the heart of the political (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2024).

This theoretical framework can elucidate the co-constitution between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order as signifying and signified in far-right normalisation. Under this framework, *social media* acts as a convection space for Lacan’s three orders: the Symbolic, pertaining to the algorithmic imperatives of neoliberalism; the Imaginary, in reproducing identity-forming ontological security fantasies; and the Real, in situating uncertainty and dislocation in commodified antagonisms. Thus, the co-constitution between social media and the Symbolic Order has two interdependent dimensions: i) social media shapes and is shaped by the symbolic structure and imperatives of the modern liberal order; ii) social media forces the subject’s encounter *with* and comforts it *against* the Real of the political through the oscillation between ontological security and *insecurity*.

In what follows, I explore social media’s political architecture through this conceptual framework. This framework is applied to prevalent conceptualisations of social media, itself a vast term and phenomenon encompassing dimensions that exceed the purview of this article (Fuchs, 2021; Lindgren, 2020). Hence, I focus on two dimensions concerning the formation of political subjectivity: the symbolic and material *space* that produces fantasies of ontological security and enjoyment and, thus, belonging and

antagonism, *homophilic networks*; and the techno-affective mechanism reinforcing the illusion of agency and coherent self that substantiate these networks, the logic of *programmability*.

#### 4. Social media as the technosocial dimension of neoliberalism

Programmability and homophilic networks compose the architecture of social media that condition the Symbolic possibilities of the neoliberal spectacle. This architecture reveals social media's complexity in affecting the political algorithmically. Social media *logics* (van Dijck & Poell, 2013) are organisational forms of social traffic responding to corporate imperatives. Logics like programmability mirror the neoliberal order in 'exporting' their functional and ideological principles to public life while retaining a semblance of post-political naturality (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). *Spaces* are networks where logics perform and attain significance. These dimensions condition the affective weight of antagonisms as commodified forms of ontological securitisation through the material operation of algorithms.

*Algorithms* – coded instructions structuring social traffic and spaces on social media (Fuchs, 2021; van Dijck & Poell, 2013) – substantiate social media platforms and set the coordinates for producing of fantasies of agency. In social media politics (Fuchs, 2021, p. 56), the *jouissance* of ontological security gravitates towards satisfying the 'omnipotent' gaze of 'the' neoliberal algorithm, embodied in the big Other. Wiehn (2023) highlights social media's bonding capacity, since algorithms shape everyday life by facilitating connections, categorising results, and organising identities through homophilic 'connectivity through sameness' (ibid., p. 120). Fuchs argues that algorithms 'determine how we perceive reality' (2021, p. 7) according to market imperatives. This governance influences intimacy<sup>4</sup> and identity, directing them towards commodity consumption and ideological formation (Fuchs, 2021, p. 56). This governance replaces human decision-makers and the political, exalting algorithms as symbolic authorities of late capitalism. Algorithms perpetuate commodification via increasingly intimate user-fed knowledge, nudging affective commitments and desires. They categorise reality as 'target' or 'waste', reifying existence to a spectacle based on our input. These segregating practices, masked as neutrality and 'efficiency' to improve user experience, dehumanise by reducing human complexity to quantifiable, 'predictable' variables (Chun, 2018). The 'learning' leading to this knowledge of the subject follows the first dimension of social media's architecture: the logic of programmability.

##### 4.1 Programmability and the fantasy of agency

Social media logics are organisational principles and critical perspectives that recast platforms as non-neutral, corporate-enacted technosocial architectures undermining democratic institutions. Van Dijck & Poell (2013) argue that social media's ubiquity and decentralisation have reshaped information organisation. Defined as 'processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and [...], how they channel social traffic' (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5), social media *logics* permeate all spheres of life (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). This 'seeping-in' marks the 'platformization of cultural production' (Poell et al., 2021), naturalising media logics that elude societal scrutiny. Thus, social media logics are core to the neoliberal order, shaping 'the conditions and rules of social interaction' (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 4; cf. Lindgren & Kaun, 2024).

The logic of programmability bridges technological and socio-affective dimensions of social media. Traditional media's top-down approach to audience maximisation attention has shifted to a code-and-user 'horizontal' iteration (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). This shift transformed passive consumers into active users who influence and are influenced by information flows on social media. For example, hashtags, originating in informal settings (Dobrin, 2020), now amplify political visibility, evidencing user influence on coded practices. Meanwhile, algorithmic curation (Lewandowsky et al., 2020) tailors feeds that reinforce preferences with engaging, often antagonism-producing content. Van Dijck and Poell's

<sup>4</sup> The 'subjectiveness of closeness that algorithms evoke' (Wiehn, 2023, p. 120).

emphasis on user agency is complicated by corporate imperatives and symbolic drivers like popularity and virality. This is exemplified in Twitter's/X's reinstatement of far-right accounts and suppressing Elon Musk's critics (Auten & Matta, 2024), and in the US Democratic party's dismissal to address systemic issues in favour of gaining popularity through influencers (Lorenz, 2025).

Van Dijck and Poell distinguish between technological and human programmability. The technological dimension focuses on AI and algorithms governing social media experiences (2013, p. 5), whose influence is obscured by constant adaptation to corporate imperatives and user practices (Verdegen, 2023). The human dimension refers to user agency, influencing algorithms through content, norms, or even resistance (ibid., p 6). Platforms adjust interfaces and policies to optimise engagement, creating a feedback loop which hybridises social and traditional media logics (cf. Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). Programmability merges crowdsourced AI learning with traditional editorial legitimacy (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 6), as seen in news media adopting TikTok aesthetics via editing tools and popular interface elements like GIFs and posts (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). The expectation of hybrid editorial legitimacy rests on post-political fantasies of accountability that social media 'must' perform to sustain the neoliberal spectacle. Ironically, these fantasies also enable the enjoyable transgression of the liberal order.

#### 4.1.1 Programmability and ontological security as phantasmatic agency

While programmability is co-constituted between platforms and users, this relation is not inherently democratic. The agency it conveys functions as a neoliberal mechanism of ontological security and fuels commodified antagonism. Social media thrives on interactivity, captivating subjects via the spectacle of meaningful participation. In ontological security terms, programmability mediates emotions, providing a phantasmatic sense of coherence and belonging. It operates as a function of fantasy and technosocial affordance sustaining the pursuit of the object-cause of desire within neoliberalism.

Yet, the limits of agency brought forth by programmability – e.g., in the far-right discursive hijacking of progressive terms like 'woke' – drive the anxious subject back to social media as a graspable embodiment of the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic's overwhelming nature is mirrored in the invisible algorithm, a veiled governor akin to the big Other, holding together the sociosymbolic fabric while withholding lost enjoyment and the object-cause of desire. Lacan's question *chè vuoi?* ('what do you/desire want/s?') frames this pursuit. Subjects need the algorithm watching over and enjoying in their stead, withholding *jouissance* and guarding the 'key' to our object-cause. Programmability feeds this quest by, e.g., allowing subjects to gain visibility, 'crack the algorithm', and responding to ideal combinations of prompts and affordances (e.g., 'hit "like" and "subscribe"!'; Flisfeder, 2021). It generates the *faux* sense of satisfying or resisting the punitive algorithm/big Other, integrating subjects in the (neo)liberal Symbolic as self-gatekeepers and system justifiers.

Resistance – a potential manifestation of the Real of the political – can alter norms *when* sublimated by the algorithm and internalised into the affective structure naturalising neoliberalism. As seen with Republicans during the Capitol insurrection, *resistance*, when reduced to phantasmatic agency, helps justify the modern liberal order's system of commodification. US Republican short-lived 'rebelliousness' or resistance against 'the state' on social media is a case in point. Rep. Boebert claimed on Twitter/X that the 6th of January was their '1776 moment' (USA Today, 2021), with Rep. Gaetz echoing this sentiment during a far-right rally: '[I will be] joining with the fighters in the Congress!' (Touchberry, 2020). The fantasy of agency is thus ephemeral yet *central* to the neoliberal subject's ontological security. Agency and resistance hence incorporate a heroic character subsumed in anxiety and the quest for *jouissance*.

Programmability positions social media as technosocial, political, and psychological ontologies. I expand on van Dijck and Poell's conceptualisation by viewing user participation as furthering algorithmic governance rather than an accountability practice. Further, programmability governs social traffic and antagonisms in specific spaces, homophilic networks. Their co-constitution reinforces the illusion of full agency and composes antagonistic ontologies occluding deeper political urgencies.

#### 4.2 Homophilic networks: Turning hate into love (of the same)

Social media logics operate in fluid loci, which have generated theories like filter bubbles and echo chambers (Bloom, 2023). Expanding these theories, Chun (2018, 2021) critically explores homophily to understand how social media spaces reproduce prejudice, supremacy, and neoliberal imperatives. Chun frames these networks as ideological structures, not solely neutral materiality. ‘Homophilic networks’ merge *homophily* – ‘the axiom that similarity breeds connection’ (2018, p. 60) –, with cyberspace’s ‘spirit’ of democratic networked openness, constituting neighbourhoods of ‘love’ for/in sameness, mutating cyberspace into curated echo chambers that promise fulfilment.

Homophilic networks relentlessly attempt to *expand* by ‘fostering and predicting the likelihood of ties’ (ibid., p. 76), relying on naturalised segregation and ‘similarity’. Homophily essentialises sociopolitical life to grow, transforming individuals into ‘neighbours’ presumed to prefer ‘sameness’ (ibid.). This logic naturalises the reproduction of the neoliberal Symbolic by gatekeeping the neighbourhood’s borders and rendering far-right ideologies commonsensical through algorithmically-produced ‘authenticity’ (cf. Price, 2025). In examples of electoral ‘loss’, these logics manifest differently under a similarly perverse structure. Far-right Republicans like Gaetz, Taylor Greene, and Boebert used their authenticity self-portrayal in their online echo-chambers to stoke insurrectionist affects around a ‘real’ US and a promise of ‘justice’ (Moline, 2022; Place, 2022). Meanwhile, Democratic strategists responded to electoral ‘market’ logics, scrambling to produce a *simulacrum* of authenticity and relatability through hired influencers (Lorenz, 2025). Homophilic networks essentialise subjects as quantifiable transactions, erasing ‘historical contingencies, institutional discrimination and economic realities’ (Ibid., p. 76), sustaining neoliberal ‘ethics’, and privileging spectacular politics over democratic plurality.

Homophilic networks are veiled spaces of commodified antagonism, simulating the ‘constitutive outside’ (Mouffe, 2005) shaping political subjectivity based on the misrecognition of others that become essentialised as metadata. Social media mask segregation as constitutive of homophilic spaces through algorithmic logics (e.g., programmability) that train users to ‘expect and recognize this segregation’ as *natural* (Chun, 2018, p. 61), perverting cyberspace’s promise of freedom, democracy, and plurality: ‘Instead of ushering in a postracial, postidentitarian era, [homophilic] networks perpetuate identity via “default” variables and axioms’ (ibid.). Segregation is co-constituted with pattern discrimination – techniques ‘to manage, prune, and predict’ behaviour in terms of ‘love for the same’ (Chun, 2018, pp. 61-62). Homophily ‘launders hate into collective love, a transformation that [...] grounds modern white supremacism’ (Ibid., p. 62). Algorithmic principles (e.g., curated feeds) naturalise segregation by producing fantasies of ontological security that reinforce neoliberalism: ‘Homophily [...] is a tool for discovering bias and inequality and for perpetuating it in the name of “comfort,” predictability, and common sense.’ (ibid.).

Homophilic networks function as algorithmic fantasies reinforcing discrimination. For Chun, these systems generate ‘worlds’ representing intertwined fantasies of belonging and segregation, legitimised by beliefs in algorithmic objectivity, efficiency, and neutrality. Their power lies in inferring data from subjects’ behaviours and neighbourhood positions. ‘Controversial’ intersectional categories like race, religion, ethnicity, or gender are inferred and repackaged into post-political classifications predicting ‘manageable’ traits (Chun, 2018, p. 65). Thus, homophilic networks’ representation of the ‘world’ and the political’s legitimacy rests on segregationist fantasies of algorithmic efficiency.

Post-political purging of *difference* does not imply its erasure but rather subsumption under ‘unimpeachable’ algorithmic classifications of worth and merit. Homophilic networks aid in foreclosing democratic alternatives by trying to domesticate the political. When identity formation is subsumed into this logic, antagonisms align with neoliberal principles of *habitus*, becoming naturalised sociality enshrined with post-political unimpeachability. Antagonisms are thus reduced to heroic individualism within the righteous neighbourhood, where heroism becomes the algorithmically-sanctioned and

ontologically-essentialised expression of subjectivity. Similarly, the political's post-political commodification and ceaseless expansion become fundamental to stabilise neoliberalism.

#### 4.2.1. Homophilic perpetuation through phantasmatic production

Chun's analysis of homophily elucidates how social media perpetuate power and ideology under neoliberalism, however identifying a 'space for political action and agency' (2018, p. 67) within this structure. Applying the Lacanian framework to homophilic networks, this subsection expands on her theory while highlighting the limits of agency due to its embeddedness in ontological security fantasies.

Homophily resonates with neoliberal fantasies of ontological security, which stabilise the subject in comfort or conflict. Chun's metaphor of homophilic networks as a portal – 'an elaborate façade that frames the entrance to an enclosed space' (ibid.) – mirrors the structure of fantasy, generating belonging while binding us to ideology. As seen in the social media engagement ('herding') of MAGA supporters around their senses of grievance during the 6th of January, this interplay transforms the antagonistic formation of liberal and far-right identities into civilisational quests animated by dystopian imaginaries. Chun argues that segregation in homophilic networks depends on the subject's reflexivity, i.e., to *expect* and *recognise* segregation as 'love'. While some degree of reflexivity is possible regarding reified online antagonisms, I complement Chun's argument by pointing to its limits. Our unconscious structures are related to yet escape reflexivity, and are able to destabilise the fantasies of fixity constituting homophilic networks. Segregation thus is also manifested through *unconscious* othering, which crucially shapes the subject's identity and belonging.

Since 'networks perpetuate segregation [because] segregation in the form of homophily lies at [the networks'] conceptual core' (Chun, 2018, p. 62), homophily is the spatial condition for *producing* commodified antagonisms. The manufacturing of 'commonsense' ontologies in homophilic networks (e.g., identities, inequality) responds to the neoliberal imperative to uphold its constancy in the face of the Real of the political. In Laclau and Mouffe's terms (2014), homophily stagnates progress since it promises and conveys as possible ('whole') the *impossible society* marked by antagonisms. Chun argues that the 'comfort' and 'predictability' stemming from segregation stabilise the neoliberal order. In complement, I emphasise 'difference' and 'borders' as signifiers of the anxiety caused by the misrecognising online Other – in other words, antagonism and its substantiating anxiety are, paradoxically, essential for temporarily stabilising the subject. Homophilic networks reproduce this oscillation between comfort and conflict, reminders of what 'we are/have' and what threatens us. Chun argues that they essentialise political complexity, eliminating 'politics, conflict, and deliberation' (Brown, 2015, p. 179, in Chun, ibid., p. 75). I problematise the 'fullness' of this elimination, conceptualising homophilic networks as dynamically appropriating, cannibalising, and commodifying politics and antagonism. The Real of the political cannot be eliminated or integrated into the neoliberal fantasy, only *masked* as self-representation oscillating between comfort and conflict. For instance, the US Republican conflict in transgressing 'law and order' is conditioned and enjoyed through the comfort of the *promise* of a return to a 'real America'. In this oscillation, the subject experiences its Symbolic attachment through heroic antagonisms. Homophilic networks become the arena where the object-cause of desire is heroically wrestled from would-be thieves by endlessly producing its anxiety-inducing theft.

Regardless of the intentionality of tech overlords, policies, and programmers, our return to the Symbolic (or 'correction') reinforces and is reinforced by neoliberalism and its means of production. The gap between algorithmic prediction and reality marks the space for political action (Chun, 2018, p. 67) yet also perpetuates the political as spectacle, conditioning antagonisms as commodities. While potentially a space of emancipation, this gap is a neoliberal spatial-symbolic artefact performing as homophilic *hope* – a site of ontological security fostering illusory political belonging and resistance. It grants the subject a coherent narrative of struggle against the big Other and the imaginary other, mobilising the oscillation between anxiety and hope of recapturing lost enjoyment. For instance, neighbourhoods are constituted by algorithmic predictions based on interactions; however, these often

fail, revealing their limits in ‘figuring us out’, providing a sense of individuality and uniqueness. This failure is affectively repurposed via ontological security as hallucinations of agency, where antagonisms sustain politically-paralysing neoliberalism rather than enabling radical democratic alternatives.

The laundering of hate into love under homophilic networks reveals deeper dynamics between identity formation and political action, distinguishing the antagonistic tension between far-right and liberal discourses. This laundering reflects love’s status as an ontological-securitising fantasy. The algorithmic structure prevents us from confronting far-right’s normalisation in-depth, nudging us to consume its performative, stupefying spectacle to satisfy the neoliberal order’s imperatives. Next, I examine *love* as a political factor in social media through the Lacanian framework and develop the concept of *liebesraum* or ‘space of love’.

## 5. *Liebesraum*: The expanding enjoyment-love continuum

The issue of how the co-constitution of social media and the Symbolic Order condition the normalisation of the far-right has focused on the architecture of social media via their logics (programmability) and spatial characteristics (homophily). This architecture, driven by neoliberalism, generates self-sustaining spectacles of antagonism. However, the ontological (in)security they produce is bound to political entropy. While the modern liberal order is crumbling, the Symbolic Order will persist in new paradigms, hybridised with neoliberalism’s attempts at self-perpetuation through spectacular antagonisms, leading to the contemporary Symbolic Order’s phasing-out alongside the normalisation of the far-right.

This process is simultaneously a dislocation and a reallocation perpetuating neoliberalism while shedding its liberal kernel, a mutation into a new political articulation stemming from its technosocial predecessor’s spatial and affective conditions. This shift is marked by the far-right as a paradox that, via neoliberal fantasies, delimits both the fringes and the ‘centre’ of the liberal order’s Symbolic structure. The far-right carries on neoliberalism’s perverse material and discursive legacy while serving as the vessel for its affective metamorphosis. In this context, *liebesraum* constitutes a novel theory resulting from the Lacanian reading of programmability and homophily. *Liebesraum* is an analytical window to explore the techno-affective conditions of possibility (e.g., in normalising the far-right) and foreclosure (e.g., in commodifying antagonisms) towards a post-neoliberal Symbolic.

### 5.1 What is love?

Before discussing what the ‘space of love’ entails, it is crucial to explore the key concept of *love*. For Lacan, love originates in the subject’s demand for the Other to satisfy its needs, and this relational structure constitutes the ‘proof’ of the Other’s love towards the subject (Evans, 2006; pp. 35-36). This demand has a double function: it articulates need and becomes a demand for love, a symbolic dimension eclipsing its real function (*ibid.*). Evans argues that this dual function produces *desire*, as ‘the craving for love is unconditional and insatiable, [persisting] as a leftover even after the needs have been satisfied; this leftover constitutes desire’ (*ibid.*, p. 36). The lacking Other cannot grant the unconditional love craved by the subject, resulting in leftover dissatisfaction that constitutes desire, whose only drive is self-reproduction. While love operates through language (i.e., the Symbolic) it is also directed at the imaginary other since ‘to love is to want to be loved’ (Lacan, 2006, p. 723), i.e., love implies the desire for the Other’s desire or ‘love for what the subject imagines as existing in the other’ (Demandante, 2014, p. 102). For Demandante, the phantasmatic dimension of love resides in the belief in ‘completeness’ or ‘wholeness’ that the subject craves in recognition and promises to the desired-other (*ibid.*, p. 116). In this belief of/towards wholeness, love can also be understood as a fantasy of ontological security managing long-lost *jouissance* in seeking the ‘missing piece’ or organising desire.

For Lacan, love intricately relates to the Real of *jouissance*. Love, due to its intersubjective nature, deceptively moderates enjoyment in service of desire: ‘love [...] is the fruit of an intersubjective

agreement imposing its harmony on the rent nature on which it is based' (Lacan, 2006, p. 265). The Real of *jouissance*, experienced in anxiety, challenges the Imaginary and Symbolic aspects of love. Love is not a 'natural occurrence' but the result of an agreement with the imaginary other, of managing disruptive *jouissance*: 'only love allows *jouissance* to condescend to desire' (Lacan, 1999). *Jouissance*, opposed to desire's stability (Hook, 2017), is fundamental for love as its transgressive incursion is the moment of subjectivity, without which love lacks an object of completion. For Žižek (2009), love deceptively attempts to fill the gap of intersubjective desire (*ch' vuoi?*). He argues that love is 'the interpretation of the desire of the [fundamentally lacking, unknowable] Other' and that its deception is a double operation: 'the subject fills in his own lack by offering himself to the other as the object filling out the lack in the Other' (ibid., p. 130). Love is deceptive because in mutual completion lack is obliterated (ibid.), ending desire and thus subjectivity, forcing the anxiety-inducing encounter with the Real of de-subjectification. Thus, love both manages the *jouissance* of 'what do I/desire want/s?' and produces it in the deceitful promise to obliterate lack.

Applying the structure of love to the techno-social architecture of neoliberal social media showcases how homophilic networks, through their dehumanising algorithms and commodified antagonisms, produce promises of 'wholeness' in the guise of the post-political. Following Žižek, this promise of obliterating lack entails an anxiety-inducing encounter with the Real of the political and the *jouissance* destabilising yet providing it with direction. Programmability and homophily organise love's deceitful, seductive, and paradoxical structure. They permit transgressive enjoyment (e.g., racist *jouissance* against 'threatening' minorities) while committing to a stabilising 'correction', a return to the Symbolic's embrace. For example, the sparking insurrectionist vitriol mobilised by US congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene against the 'thieving' left ('Stop the Steal!') was 'corrected' yet provided with a narrative-affective backdoor to the *loving* promise of 'recapturing' enjoyment. Taylor Greene insisted on Twitter/X that she 'did not call for violence' (BBC, 2022), condemning the insurrectionist's violence alongside that of ANTIFA and BLM (i.e., antagonising the Other), while reiterating the QAnon hashtag '#FightForTrump' (Kunzelman et al., 2021; @RepMTG, 2021). This discussion now turns to the political significance of the affective-spatial apparatus of these deceptive technologies of love – *liebesraum* – grounded in the phenomenon of far-right normalisation and experienced in 'heroic' antagonisms.

## 5.2 Liebesraum: The technosocial architecture of love and enjoyment

*Liebesraum* is an ontology and interpretive framework to understand far-right normalisation as a neoliberal-sustaining spectacle, merging the spatial concepts of homophilic networks and *lebensraum* ('vital' or 'living space'). *Lebensraum* is a racist geopolitical ideology of exclusion and imperial expansionism, later assimilated into Nazism to justify the territorial expansion for German supremacy (Smith, 1980). Smith's analysis of *lebensraum* resonates with Chun's (2018) view on the power of homophilic networks and Wilson's (2017) approach to contemporary neoliberalism. This ideology's grip on German right-wing discourse and practices stemmed from its legitimising basis in 'objective science' and the 'common good', aligning with the rise of reactionary politics (Mondon & Winter, 2020) during prolonged crises (Smith, 1980, pp. 51–52).

Nazi Germany's *lebensraum*, in psychoanalytical terms, frames the quest for the object-cause of desire and recovering stolen enjoyment (i.e., the pride of Empire) to become a whole nation again. This quest imbues 'struggle' with a drive to enjoy transgressing the 'thieving' Other's space, masked as a righteousness (e.g., 'take America back!', 'Stop the steal!'). Heilbronner (2021) argues that *lebensraum* is about the celebration and *enjoyment of utopia*. However, this utopian enjoyment is bound to dystopia since *jouissance* is painful, insofar as its excessive experience relies on reenacting the loss against the thieving Other.

*Lebensraum*'s affective structure, binding enjoyment to hatred, anxiety, hope, and love can be analytically transposed under neoliberalism into *liebesraum* (space of love). In *liebesraum*, the Real of

the political is backgrounded in favour of the ‘righteous’ quest for the object-cause of desire and programmed ‘love’ for ‘the people’. Antagonisms are foregrounded when sustaining neoliberalism by manufacturing *jouissance*. *Liebesraum* organises the political experience of homophily, constituting i) a *space* of anxiety masked as love for the fantasy of self, group, nation, or ‘people’ that procures subjectivity; ii) a *mechanism* of emotional governance through commodified antagonisms; and iii) an ontological security *narrative* of righteous expansion promising wholeness (*jouissance*). In the contexts of political loss for US Democrats and Republicans, social media market imperatives generated a violent site of grievance production and dissemination. They relied on algorithmic assessments of social traffic and networking value in detriment of rigorous editing, surveillance, and fact-checking.

The expansionist drive of *liebesraum* is seen in the online US Republican self-portrayal of rebelliousness and ‘heroism’ during the 2021 Capitol insurrection, in contradiction to their alleged deeply-held beliefs in ‘law and order’. This crisis was associated not only with ratifying the 2020 election results, but also with the purported theft of national *jouissance* away from ‘righteous Americans’ perpetrated by the incongruous amalgam of ‘the left’, conflating all actors ‘left’ of far-right Republicans. The *jouissance* of righteous ‘rebellion’ was mobilised on Twitter/X by far-right Reps. Lauren Boebert, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and Matt Gaetz around Donald Trump’s infamous 6th of January speech. Trump’s *jouissance*-triggering and algorithmically-viralised *promise* of wholeness – ‘we will stop the steal’ (BBC, 2021) – and directive to ‘fight like hell [or] you are not going to have a country anymore’ targeted ‘emboldened radical-left Democrats [and] fake news media’ (Naylor, 2021). These grievances, loss, and antagonisms were amplified in and as homophilic networks on the day by Boebert’s ‘today is 1776’ claim, a metonym of the primordial *jouissance* of rebellion, agency, and wholeness distinguishing the US’ ‘spirit’ and ‘righteous’, heroic patriots (USA Today, 2021).

*Liebesraum* epitomises the ideological yoke of the neoliberal Symbolic Order and provides a window into its demise by pandering to the far-right politics it seeks to assimilate via post-political mechanisms. Re-addressing neoliberalism’s ideological ‘naturalisation’ (Wilson, 2017), *liebesraum* emerges as its techno-spatial effectuation, an algorithmic machinery of ceaseless ideological-emotional expansion based on co-constituted illusions of agency, enacted through programmability, and belonging to homophilic networks. It is an algorithmically-mediated space of deceptive love and enjoyment sustaining the Symbolic Order by disavowing yet permitting transgressions, subsequently re-organising or ‘correcting’ them according to sociosymbolic imperatives. *Liebesraum* governs and occludes the normalisation of the far-right through co-performative antagonisms, tightening neoliberalism’s ideological grip on subjects addled by yet emotionally-bound to the anxiety of ‘permanent crises’ (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023).

The case of Democratic loss in 2024 is illustrative in this instance, both in terms of *liebesraum*’s *continuum* as well as its reliance on (and construction of) the commodified political. The Muslim and Latino minorities targeting by Democratic commentators and supporters on social media revealed a core contradiction with their purported values of rationality, progressiveness, plurality, and multiculturalism. For instance, Muslims were targeted for not voting and criticising Harris’ campaign over the Democratic support for the genocidal atrocities committed by the Israeli state on Palestinians in Gaza (Harb, 2024a, 2024b; Seitz-Wald, 2024). This Liberal-Democratic *jouissance* manifested in sadistic comments concerning Gaza by users on Twitter/X, for instance, stating: ‘Fuck Gaza at this point! And I mean that from the bottom of my ass! They at harris rally screaming every time she speak and never at a trump rally! Good! Let Israel run wild on them.’ (Mustafa, 2024). The *jouissance* manifested in these algorithmic festivals of excess requires a scapegoated Other – the Muslim, Latino, or woman ‘stealing’ *jouissance* and enjoying instead of ‘true’ liberal/progressive Americans – threatening the liberal-Democratic project.

Akin to Trump’s ‘corrective’ plead to MAGA insurrectionists – ‘we have to have law and order’ (Herb & Cohen, 2022) –, Democratic *liebesraum* entailed the symbolic return to the ‘rationality’ and ‘plurality’ that purportedly distinguishes the party. It manifested in highly-mediatized, post-political ‘post-mortems’ focused on performative shortcomings rather than structural failings – i.e., perpetuating the commodified

political – culminating in the informal slogan ‘we need a Joe Rogan of the left’ (Marcus, 2024). The ‘problem’ and trauma of *loss* was excarnated from socially-disavowed expressions of racist and genderphobic *jouissance*, recontextualised within the post-political logic of markets, algorithmic attention, and popularity and grounded in the appeal of social media performativity and affordances (McHugh, 2024). Democratic strategists associate Rogan’s political appeal with ‘style’, bypassing the ‘ugly’, visceral, *jouissance*-infused structure of politics animating the *liebesraum* that this podcaster expertly exploits. A subsequent tactic by these actors was to, clandestinely (i.e., recognising social disavowal), fund influencers to directly support the Democrats under strict conditions of content creation and moderation (Lorenz, 2025) – i.e., through the exploitation of programmability. Here we can appreciate the expansionist movement of *liebesraum*, the post-political application of ‘love’ to the antagonistic excess produced by the Real of loss, and the renewal of the ontological (in)security of a wholesome future (*jouissance*) within the homophilic neighbourhood.

Under *liebesraum*, homophilic networks suppress political difference by essentialising subjects into programmatic, ‘neutral’ data configured by their actions rather than identity traits. This positive classification reinforces essentialised difference, situating it away from the political into programmable neighbourhoods of sameness. However, far-right normalisation exposes the ‘cracks’ in the modern liberal order. By ceaselessly expanding and commodifying difference (Chun, 2018), *liebesraum* erodes this order, hollowing the Symbolic authority to which ontologically-insecure subjects can return to when fantasy inevitably fails. The subject is left with the traumatic encounter against the Real of the political, reconfiguring its dystopias as new Symbolic horizons of ontological security. *Liebesraum* ties our experience of love, identity, and ontological security to sustaining the craved-for Symbolic, obscuring power structures and nudging us to ‘*enjoy!*’ the ever-commodifying, algorithmic spectacle. It ties social media affordances to the waning liberal Symbolic order, revealing the unconscious allure of far-right pretenders emerging from the sublimated Real that exposes the fall of Empire.

The notion of *Liebesraum* reframes social media’s role in far-right normalisation especially during crises, revealing neoliberalism’s simultaneous decay and clinging-on. In crises, *liebesraum*’s continuum of love and *jouissance* manifests on intense emotions, antagonistic othering, and in the Symbolic ‘correction’ of enjoyment (Kisić-Merino, 2025). These excessive emotions and contexts fuel *liebesraum*’s expansion, paradoxically exposing a core contradiction in the techno-supremacist discourse critically examined by Chun (2018) and Lindgren (2020): the commodified political strips technο-objectivist and solutionist claims about AI of their perverse veneer of ‘neutrality’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘rationality’ and, in Wilson’s (2017) terms, reveals social media’s operation as pure ideology. It is, however, through the movement produced by this contradiction – *liebesraum*’s continuum – that the far-right becomes normalised as neoliberal fantasy.

## 6. Coda: Into the void

This article explored how the co-constitution between social media and the Symbolic order influences the far-right’s normalisation amid the (neo)liberal order’s retreat. The Lacanian-articulated conceptual framework merging antagonism and ontological security guided this exploration. This framework was deployed to analyse social media in terms of logics (programmability) and space (homophily) concerning their role in sustaining neoliberalism through commodifying antagonisms. From this analysis the co-constitution between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order was framed under the novel concept of *liebesraum*, highlighting the centrality of far-right discourses within liberal modernity and conditioning its erosion.

Analysing the *jouissance*-love (transgression-correction) continuum of *liebesraum* helps investigate far-right normalisation in liberal democracies by i) scrutinising liberal and far-right engagement with social media politics, i.e., responding to the algorithmic big Other’s demands; and ii) underscoring the process of breakage or entropy of *liebesraum*’s Symbolic structure, i.e., showing how the neoliberal order

cradles supremacist civilisational projects through commodified antagonisms. For instance, in the US, the Symbolic breakage of Republican *liebesraum* lies in pandering to dislocatory far-right ideologies beyond Symbolic correction, while the Democratic iteration resides in frenetically sublimating the Real of the political. *Liebesraum*'s dialectical structure, effectuated through ontological (in)securitisation, lies at the heart of far-right normalisation and provides an analytical window into neoliberalism's metamorphosis.

While Republican and Democratic *jouissance*-correction dialectics coalesce into far-right normalisation, they showcase important differences. Far-right Republicans focused on the liberal establishment, the broadly-defined 'left', and ethnoculturally-coded beneficiaries (e.g., BLM); while Democrats targeted ethnocultural others more directly and underscored the threat of Republicans to the 'soul of the nation' (Lauter, 2024). The corrective, 'stabilising' buffers of their vitriol could be located in each other, yet their *jouissance* exposed the 'true' source of ontological insecurity: the ethnocultural Other outside their *liebesraum*. Their symbolic 'return', the algorithmic fulfilment of the perverse arc of love, exposes the ontological-securitising foundation of neoliberalism, White supremacy (Davidson & Saull, 2017), manifested in commodified spectacles of political difference, purpose, and morality. This ideological fruition becomes evident in the 'moment' of *jouissance* and in political leaders' efforts for Symbolic correction on social media. These processes co-legitimise *liebesraum* as the neoliberal semi-public architecture of post-political modernity.

Both libidinal phases of *liebesraum* – transgression and correction – denote social media as 'the' space for the fantasy of political agency. Interactions in social media, carriers of the fantasies of agency and ontological security, tailor the ever-expanding homophilic networks that compose our intersubjectivity and fantasies of political belonging. *Liebesraum*'s expansion is not limited to increased interactivity and usage volume. Instead, it should be understood as the neoliberal Symbolic's demand for love to sublimate the traumatic Real, the insatiable spectacle of post-political modernity enacted through hollow antagonisms.

*Liebesraum*'s expansion is inherent excess and bonding capacity through exclusionary yet corrective encroachment – i.e., love. In entropy's metaphor, expansion implies eventual decay – politically, a moment of Symbolic unravelling where sovereignty yields to new forms of power. In line with McGowan (2025), under neoliberalism, this 'yielding' to the Real of historical contradiction is not only engaged with but gorged and regurgitated as pure excess – i.e., an *excess* that does not recognise the affective, material, and spatial constraints that condition its own possibility. The normalisation of the far-right is the product of neoliberalism's algorithmically-afforded shambling-on. Converging Brown (2018) with Žižek (2002; 2009), far-right normalisation resembles Frankenstein's monster: it is besieged by *jouissance*-conditioning lack, demands love, and is animated by the combination of techno-libertarianism and neoliberalism's hubristic ontological securitisation. *Liebesraum*'s expansive yet entropic structure is one of paradox, driving the oscillation between *jouissance* and love that normalises the far-right, thus constituting a tragic perversion of the techno-political promise of modernity.

## Acknowledgements

I want to extend special thanks to Ted Svensson, Annika Fredén, Andrés Abugattas, Christoffer Kolvraa, Catarina Kinnvall, and Malin Rönnblom for their constant and constructive feedback on the various iterations of this article. I also thank Rachael Garrett for her support and patient readings, which greatly helped streamline this piece. Finally, I would like to thank JDSR's editor-in-chief, Simon Lindgren, and the two anonymous reviewers for their patience, encouragement, and pinpoint suggestions.

## Funding

The work of Pasko Kisić-Merino was funded by the European Union (Horizon Europe, PLEDGE: Politics of Grievance and Democratic Governance, project number 101132560), and partially funded and supported by The Wallenberg AI, Autonomous Systems and Software Program – Humanities and Society (WASP-HS) through a Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg project MMW 2019.0251.

## References

Areni, C. (2019). Ontological security as an unconscious motive of social media users. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(1–2), 75–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1580306>

Arora, S. D., Singh, G. P., Chakraborty, A., & Maiti, M. (2022). Polarization and social media: A systematic review and research agenda. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.121942>

Auer, D., & Schaub, M. (2024). Mass Emigration and the Erosion of Liberal Democracy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 68(2), sqae026. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae026>

Auten, T., & Matta, J. (2024). Retweeting Twitter Hate Speech After Musk Acquisition. In H. Cherifi, L. M. Rocha, C. Cherifi, & M. Donduran (Eds.), *Complex Networks & Their Applications XII* (pp. 265–276). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53503-1\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53503-1_22)

Bloom, P. (2023). The danger of smart ideologies: Counter-hegemonic intelligence and antagonistic machines. In S. Lindgren (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical Studies of Artificial Intelligence* (pp. 33–42). Edward Elgar.

Brown, K., Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2023). The far right, the mainstream and mainstreaming: Towards a heuristic framework. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 28(2), 162–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1949829>

Brown, W. (2018). Neoliberalism's Frankenstein: Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century "Democracies." *Critical Times*, 1(1), 60–79. <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-1-1.60>

Browning, C. S. (2019). Brexit populism and fantasies of fulfilment. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(3), 222–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1567461>

Cammaerts, B. (2020). The neo-fascist discourse and its normalisation through mediation. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 15(3), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2020.1743296>

Chun, W. H. K. (2018). Queering Homophily. In C. Aprich, W. H. K. Chun, F. Cramer, & H. Steyerl (Eds.), *Pattern Discrimination* (pp. 59–97). Meson Press.

Chun, W. H. K. (2021). *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*. MIT Press.

Davidson, N., & Saull, R. (2017). Neoliberalism and the Far-Right: A Contradictory Embrace. *Critical Sociology*, 43(4–5), 707–724. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516671180>

De Vos, J. (2021). Psychoanalysis, a psychology of the masses for these digital times. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 19(3), e1597. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1597>

Dean, J. (2010). Affective Networks. *MediaTropes*, 2(2), Article 2.

Debord, G. (1983). *Society of the Spectacle*. Black & Red.

Demandante, D. (2014). Lacanian Perspectives on Love. *Kritike*, 8(1), 102–118. <https://doi.org/10.25138/8.1.a.5>

Dobrin, D. (2020). The Hashtag in Digital Activism: A Cultural Revolution. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 5(1), 03. <https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/8298>

Eberle, J. (2019). Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: Fantasy as a factor in international politics. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22(1), 243–268. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0104-2>

Evans, D. (2006). *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Routledge.

Flisfeder, M. (2021). *Algorithmic Desire: Toward a New Structuralist Theory of Social Media*. Northwestern University Press.

Flisfeder, M., & Willis, L.-P. (2014). Introduction: Žižek and Media Studies, Beyond Lacan. In M. Flisfeder & L.-P. Willis (Eds.), *Žižek and Media Studies: A Reader* (pp. 1–14). Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuchs, C. (2021). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Polity.

Gilmore, J. N., Hamer, M., Erazo, V., & Hayes, and P. (2023). "Whose house? Our house!": Streaming Revolution During the US Capitol Riot. *Lateral*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.25158/L12.2.3>

Glynnos, J. (2001). The grip of ideology: A Lacanian approach to the theory of ideology. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6(2), 191–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310120053858>

Gómez Camarena, C., & Juárez-Salazar, E. M. (2022). Politics. In C. Soto van der Plas, E. M. Juárez-Salazar, C. Gómez Camarena, & D. Pavón-Cuellar (Eds.), *The Marx Through Lacan Vocabulary: A Compass for Libidinal and Political Economies* (pp. 162–176). Routledge.

Heilbronner, O. (2021). Großer Raum Europa: The Nazi Concept of 'Greater European Space' in Recent Literature. *The English Historical Review*, 136(583), 1574–1594. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceab211>

Hook, D. (2017). What Is “Enjoyment as a Political Factor”? *Political Psychology*, 38(4), 605–620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12417>

Jakubik, J., Vössing, M., Bär, D., Pröllochs, N., & Feuerriegel, S. (2022). Online Emotions During the Storming of the U.S. Capitol: Evidence from the Social Media Network Parler (arXiv:2204.04245). *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2204.04245>

Jameson, F. (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell University Press.

Jee, H., Lueders, H., & Myrick, R. (2022). Towards a unified approach to research on democratic backsliding. *Democratization*, 29(4), 754–767. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2010709>

Johanssen, J. (2021). *Fantasy, Online Misogyny and the Manosphere*. Routledge.

Johanssen, J., & Krüger, S. (2022). *Media and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Introduction*. Karnac Books.

Karell, D., Linke, A., Holland, E., & Hendrickson, E. (2023). “Born for a Storm”: Hard-Right Social Media and Civil Unrest. *American Sociological Review*, 88(2), 322–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224231156190>

Kinnvall, C. (2017). Feeling ontologically (in)secure: States, traumas and the governing of gendered space. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), 90–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716641137>

Kinnvall, C., & Kisić-Merino, P. (2023). Deglobalization and the political psychology of white supremacy. *Theory & Psychology*, 33(2), 227–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09593543221138535>

Kinnvall, C., & Mitzen, J. (2020). Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics: Thinking with and beyond Giddens. *International Theory*, 12(2), 240–256. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175297192000010X>

Kinnvall, C., & Svensson, T. (2024). ‘Hunger for certainty’: Misrecognition, masculinity and agentic action in India’s and Russia’s desires for neocolonial subjecthood. *Global Discourse*, 14(1), 116–140. <https://doi.org/10.1332/20437897Y2023D000000032>

Kisić-Merino, P. (2025). The role of right-wing enjoyment in the normalisation of the far right. *Review of International Studies*, 51(3), 449–471. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000895>

Kisić-Merino, P., Capelos, T., & Kinnvall, C. (2021). Getting inside ‘the head’ of the far right: Psychological responses to the socio-political context. In S. D. Ashe, J. Busher, G. Macklin, & A. Winter (Eds), *Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice* (pp. 74–91). Routledge.

Kisić-Merino, P., & Kinnvall, C. (2023). Governing Emotions: Hybrid media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies. *Alternatives*, 48(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754221123467>

Kølvraa, C. (2019). Embodying ‘the Nordic race’: Imaginaries of Viking heritage in the online communications of the Nordic Resistance Movement. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(3), 270–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1592304>

Krzyżanowski, M. (2020). Discursive shifts and the normalisation of racism: Imaginaries of immigration, moral panics and the discourse of contemporary right-wing populism. *Social Semiotics*, 30(4), 503–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1766199>

Krzyżanowski, M., Wodak, R., Bradby, H., Gardell, M., Kallis, A., Krzyżanowska, N., Mudde, C., & Rydgren, J. (2023). Discourses and practices of the ‘New Normal’: Towards an interdisciplinary research agenda on crisis and the normalization of anti- and post-democratic action. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 22(4), 415–437. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.23024.krz>

Lacan, J. (1999). *The Seminar XX of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; B. Fink, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Lacan, J. (2015). *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*. Polity.

Lacan, J. (with Fink, H., & Grigg, R.). (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). Editions du Seuil, Parigi.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2014). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (2nd edn). Verso.

Laing, R. D. (1965). *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Penguin Books.

Lewandowsky, S., Smillie, L., García, D., Hertwig, R., Weatherall, J., Egidy, S., Robertson, D. E., O’Connor, C., Kozyreva, A., Lorenz-Spreen, P., Blaschke, Y., & Leiser, M. (2020). *Technology and Democracy: Understanding the influence of online technologies on political behaviour and decision-making* (EUR 30422 EN; JRC Science for Policy Report). European Commission, EU Science Hub. <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/technology-and-democracy>

Lindgren, S. (2020). *Data Theory: Interpretive Sociology and Computational Methods*. Wiley.

Lindgren, S., & Kaun, A. (2024). Programmable politics in the aftermaths of the pandemic. *Media, Culture & Society*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241301616>

McDonnell, T. E., Neitz, S. M., & Taylor, M. A. (2023). Armchair citizenship and ontological insecurity: Uncovering styles of media and political behavior. *Poetics*, 98, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2023.101764>

Merrill, S. (2020). Sweden then vs. Sweden now: The memetic normalisation of far-right nostalgia. *First Monday*, 25(6). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i6.10552>

Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2020). *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream*. Verso.

McGowan, T. (2021). The bedlam of the lynch mob: Racism and enjoying through the other. In S. George & D. Hook (Eds), *Lacan and Race* (pp. 19–34). Routledge.

McGowan, T. (2025). *Pure Excess: Capitalism and the Commodity*. Columbia University Press.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political*. Routledge.

Munn, L. (2021). More than a mob: Parler as preparatory media for the U.S. Capitol storming. *First Monday*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i3.11574>

Newth, G. H., Brown, K., & Mondon, A. (2025). Researching and Understanding Far-Right Politics in Times of Mainstreaming. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2025.32>

Norocel, O. C. (2024). Gendering the Far-Right Continuum in Europe. In K. Kondor & M. Littler (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Far-Right Extremism in Europe* (pp. 288–299). Routledge Taylor & Francis.

Poell, T., Nieborg, D. B., & Duffy, B. E. (2021). *Platforms and Cultural Production*. Wiley.

Price, C. W. (2025). Ketchup Is the Whitest Sauce: Memes as Silly/Serious Bordered Spaces in International Relations. *International Political Sociology*, 19(3), olaf026. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaf026>

Seymour, R. (2024). *Disaster Nationalism: The Downfall of Liberal Civilization*. Verso.

Smith, W. D. (1980). Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum. *German Studies Review*, 3(1), 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1429483>

van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding Social Media Logic. *Media and Communication*, 1(1), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v1i1.70>

Vázquez-Herrero, J., Negreira-Rey, M.-C., & López-García, X. (2022). Let's dance the news! How the news media are adapting to the logic of TikTok. *Journalism*, 23(8), 1717–1735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920969092>

Verdegen, P. (2023). Critical AI studies meets critical political economy. In S. Lindgren (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical Studies of Artificial Intelligence* (pp. 302–311). Edward Elgar.

Vighi, F., & Feldner, H. (2007). Commodity Fetishism: From Desire to Drive. In F. Vighi & H. Feldner (Eds.), *Žižek: Beyond Foucault* (pp. 128–163). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592766\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592766_14)

Vulović, M., & Ejdus, F. (2024). Object-cause of desire and ontological security: Evidence from Serbia's opposition to Kosovo's membership in UNESCO. *International Theory*, 16(1), 122–151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971923000210>

Wiehn, T. (2023). Algorithms and emerging forms of intimacy. In S. Lindgren (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical Studies of Artificial Intelligence* (pp. 117–127). Edward Elgar.

Wilson, J. (2017). Neurotic Neoliberalism and the Economics of Anxiety. In E. Eklundh, A. Zevnik, & E.-P. Guittet (Eds.), *Politics of Anxiety* (pp. 165–188). Rowman & Littlefield.

Wilson, J., & Swyngedouw, E. (Eds.). (2014). *The Post-political and Its Discontents: Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics*. Edinburgh University Press.

Wodak, R. (2020). *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Žižek, S. (1998). Cyberspace, or, How to Traverse the Fantasy in the Age of the Retreat of the Big Other. *Public Culture*, 10(3), 483–513. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-10-3-483>

Žižek, S. (2002). *For They Know Not what They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. Verso.

Žižek, S. (2009). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso.

## Appendix

### References in Illustrations

These references were collected and selected via a purposive sample process (Etikan et al., 2015; Patton, 2002) in the period January 2024 – September 2025. This sampling logic identified US and international-based online media outlets (newspapers, news websites, blogs, institutional websites) covering and quoting tweets from Republican-supporting social media users concerning the US Capitol Hill insurrection in January 2021 and their Democratic counterparts during the electoral defeat to Donald Trump in November 2024. This sampling was mainly focused on prominent Congresspeople, Senators, and the presidential candidate Donald Trump. However, it also encompassed second-party reporting on celebrities, influencers, ordinary social media users, and otherwise media personalities opining on these crises. A sole exception of secondary purposive sampling was a direct quote to a tweet by US Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 (see below).

### References in description

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2015). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Third Edition). SAGE.

### References in empirical analysis and illustrations

Abdulhaq, R. (2024, November 7). *Instead of looking inwards, white liberals are blaming Arab Americans for Trump's victory*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/us-elections-instead-looking-inwards-white-liberals-blaming-arabs-trumps-victory>

Arkin, W. M. (2021, January 21). *Exclusive: Official Fear of Trump Froze Intel Agencies, Led to Capitol Riot*. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/2021/01/08/exclusive-how-officials-fear-donald-trump-paralyzed-intelligence-agencies-led-capitol-riot-1563221.html>

BBC. (2021, February 14). *Capitol riots: Did Trump's words at rally incite violence?* [Newsitem]. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55640437>

BBC. (2022, April 22). *Marjorie Taylor Greene: I did not call for violent capitol insurrection* [Newsitem]. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-61196311>

Dale, D. (2021, January 21). *Fact check: 11 false claims Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has tweeted in the last month* | CNN Politics [Newsitem]. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/21/politics/fact-check-marjorie-taylor-greene-twitter-election-capitol/index.html>

Delaney, B. (2022, February 10). If the only voice I hear for a week is Joe Rogan's, what sort of person will I become? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/11/if-the-only-voice-i-hear-for-a-week-is-joe-rogans-what-sort-of-person-will-i-become>

Dreisbach, T. (2024, October 29). Donald Trump calls Jan. 6 a "day of love." Here are the facts. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/29/nx-s1-5159868/2024-election-trump-harris-capitol-riot>

García, E. (2024, November 9). 'If that dude's mama gets deported, that's on him': Democrats' reaction to Trump-voting Latinos is a problem. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/democrats-reaction-trump-latino-b2643998.html>

Harb, A. (2024a, November 4). *Trump or Harris? Gaza war drives many Arab and Muslim voters to Jill Stein*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/4/trump-or-harris-gaza-war-drives-many-arab-and-muslim-voters-to-jill-stein>

Harb, A. (2024b, November 6). 'We warned you,' Arab Americans in Michigan tell Kamala Harris [Newsitem]. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/6/we-warned-you-arab-americans-in-michigan-tell-kamala-harris>

Herb, J., & Cohen, M. (2022, July 20). *What we know about Trump's inaction during the 187 minutes of January 6*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/20/politics/what-we-learned-trump-187-minutes/index.html>

Kimberley, M. (2024, November 13). *Liberal Arrogance and Hatred on Display After Trump Victory* [Newsitem]. Black Agenda Report. <http://www.blackagendareport.com/liberal-arrogance-and-hatred-display-after-trump-victory>

Kunzelman, M., Seitz, A., & Klepper, D. (2021, January 21). *Inauguration sows doubt among QAnon conspiracy theorists* [Newsitem]. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/biden-inauguration-qanon-79dd03a6dc497d6157304f8045f12cef>

Lauter, D. (2024, August 10). *Harris thrives as she drops Biden's campaign themes*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/newsletter/2024-08-10/harris-polls-shift-politics>

Luscombe, R. (2024, November 9). How Trump won over Latino and Hispanic voters in historic numbers. *The Observer*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/09/trump-latino-hispanic-vote-election>

Marcus, J. (2024, November 8). Why some Democrats want to create their own Joe Rogan after Trump's win. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/joe-rogan-trump-kamala-harris-b2643492.html>

McHugh, C. (2024, November 11). What Democrats Don't Understand About Joe Rogan. *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/11/11/how-trump-won-the-podcast-bros-00188518>

Messerly, M., Leonard, K., & Diaz, D. (2024, November 6). 'A hard political pill to swallow': Dems grapple with losing Latino voters. *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/06/democrats-latino-vote-trump-00187991>

Moline, M. (2022, June 23). Jan. 6 committee hears of Matt Gaetz's fervor for Trump and request for "broad" pardon. *Florida Phoenix*. <https://floridaphoenix.com/2022/06/23/jan-6-committee-hears-of-gaetzs-fervor-for-trump-and-request-for-broad-pardon/>

Montanaro, D. (2024, November 22). *In this election, demographics did not determine how people voted* [Newsitem]. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/22/nx-s1-5199119/2024-election-exit-polls-demographics-black-latino-voters>

Mustafa, M. (2024, November 6). *Muslims, Arabs face baseless attacks on social media over Harris election loss* [Newsitem]. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/trending/us-elections-2024-muslims-arabs-face-baseless-attacks-social-media-harris-loss>

Naylor, B. (2021, February 10). *Read Trump's Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part Of Impeachment Trial* [Newsitem]. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/966396848/read-trumps-jan-6-speech-a-key-part-of-impeachment-trial>

Place, N. (2022, April 21). Lawyer says Marjorie Taylor Greene used 'codeword' to encourage Capitol riot. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/marjorie-taylor-greene-codeword-1776-b2062673.html>

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene  (@RepMTG). (2021, January 7). *I condemn the violence today, just like I've condemned Antifa & BLM riots that have burned our cities, attacked our police officers, & hurt so many people throughout the year. But that's not going to stop me from OBJECTING to fraudulent electoral votes with our #FightForTrump*. [Https://t.co/DJc8m42kIa](https://t.co/DJc8m42kIa) [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/RepMTG/status/1347021626899107840>

Saponara, M. (2024, November 12). Uncle Luke Slams Latinos Who Voted for Donald Trump: 'Y'all Stupid A– Gon' Get Deported'. *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/uncle-luke-slams-latinos-who-voted-for-donald-trump-1235826729/>

Seitz-Wald, A. (2024, November 10). *Muslim voters once abandoned the GOP. Now they may leave the Democrats*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/muslim-voters-abandoned-gop-now-may-leave-democrats-rcna179304>

Touchberry, R. (2020, December 20). *Matt Gaetz to Join GOP Effort for Congress to Overturn Trump Loss* [Newsite]. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/rep-matt-gaetz-join-gop-effort-overturn-trump-loss-im-not-going-back-losing-politely-1556245>

USA Today. (2021, October 12). *Fact check: Claim about Rep. Boebert and Jan. 6 insurrection is partly false* [Newsite]. USA TODAY. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2021/10/12/fact-check-rep-lauren-boebert-didnt-tweet-pelosis-jan-6-location/5933942001/>

Watson, J. (2021, January 15). *Comparison between Capitol siege, BLM protests is denounced* [Newsite]. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-capitol-siege-race-and-ethnicity-violence-racial-injustice-af7dc2165f355a3e6dc4e9418019eb5>

Wingerter, J. (2021, January 6). Colorado Rep. Jason Crow recounts being trapped in House chamber as pro-Trump mob attacks Capitol. *The Denver Post*. <https://www.denverpost.com/2021/01/06/trump-dc-capitol-riot-mob-jason-crow/>