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Algorithmic Regimes of Perception: Belief Formation, Social Action, and Digital Mediation

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Abstract

This article examines how digital platforms and generative artificial intelligence systems have transformed the social conditions under which perception and belief formation take place. It develops the concept of algorithmic perceptual regimes to describe historically specific configurations in which technological infrastructures, social dispositions, and symbolic structures shape what becomes perceptually available and cognitively actionable for social actors. The analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and perceptual schemas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodied perception, and predictive processing approaches associated with Andy Clark and Jakob Hohwy. These perspectives are brought into dialogue with Gilles Simondon's reflections on perceptual regimes, Slavoj Žižek's account of ideological perception, and contemporary scholarship on platform capitalism, algorithmic governance, and artificial intelligence.

The article argues that algorithmic systems do not merely mediate access to information or transmit preexisting perceptual content. Rather, they participate in structuring the perceptual and interpretive schemas through which social actors understand reality, evaluate credibility, form beliefs, and orient action. In this sense, digital platforms and generative AI systems constitute a novel form of sociotechnical power that exceeds traditional models of media influence and remains insufficiently theorized within contemporary sociology. To address this gap, the article proposes the concept of the algorithmic perceptual dispositive as an analytical framework for examining the relationship between technological infrastructures, perception, cognition, and social power. It concludes by outlining a research agenda for a sociology of perception capable of addressing the transformations associated with digital modernity and generative artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Perception, Algorithmic Regimes, Belief Formation, Habitus, Platform Capitalism, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Social Action

1. Introduction

The question of how human beings perceive the world and form beliefs about it has occupied philosophers, psychologists, and social theorists for centuries. What has changed dramatically in the first quarter of the twenty-first century is not the persistence of that question but the material conditions under which it must now be answered. Contemporary social life unfolds in environments saturated by algorithmic systems that do not merely mediate access to information but actively shape the perceptual field within which individuals encounter reality. Recommendation engines, social media platforms, generative language models, and behavioral targeting systems intervene at the precise juncture where perception, attention, and belief converge. To analyze perception today without engaging with these infrastructures is to study a phenomenon that no longer corresponds to the conditions under which most social actors live.

The scholarly literature on perception is both vast and disciplinarily fragmented. Philosophical epistemology, phenomenology, cognitive neuroscience, experimental social psychology, and the sociology of culture have each produced substantial bodies of knowledge, but these traditions rarely enter into sustained dialogue. The result is a landscape in which embodied and predictive accounts of perception developed in cognitive science coexist without explicit connection with sociological accounts of socially structured dispositions, while both remain largely isolated from the emerging literature on platform capitalism and algorithmic governance of attention. This fragmentation constitutes the primary research gap that the present article addresses. Published reviews of the literature on perception have tended either to remain within the boundaries of a single discipline or to survey multiple traditions without producing an integrative analytical framework. Neither approach is adequate to the

theoretical challenges posed by the emergence of algorithmic systems as structuring forces in social perceptual environments.

The article pursues a specific theoretical objective: to develop the concept of algorithmic perceptual regimes as an analytical tool for examining the ways in which digital platforms and generative artificial intelligence systems participate in structuring the schemas through which social agents perceive reality, form beliefs, and orient action. This concept brings together Simondon's notion of the perceptual regime, Bourdieu's account of socially produced perceptual schemas, and recent scholarship on platform capitalism and generative AI, with the aim of producing a framework adequate to contemporary conditions. The guiding research question is the following: how do algorithmic systems intervene in the social production of perceptual schemas and, through them, in the formation of socially consequential beliefs? This question is not merely academic: the answer has implications for how the conditions of democratic public life and collective rational agency are to be understood in societies where the production of symbolic content is increasingly automated.

The methodology of the article is that of a critical narrative review ^[1]. This approach is appropriate for the purposes pursued here because the theoretical integration of bodies of knowledge developed in different disciplinary traditions requires interpretive synthesis rather than systematic aggregation of empirical results. A critical narrative review does not aim to produce a comprehensive inventory of the literature but to develop a theoretically grounded account of a problem by bringing relevant bodies of scholarship into productive dialogue. The approach differs from a systematic review in that it does not follow a pre-registered protocol for the identification and screening of sources, but it differs equally from a simple review of the literature in that it pursues an explicit theoretical argument rather than a descriptive summary of existing contributions.

The argument proceeds in three stages. The first section reconstructs the theoretical foundations of a non-representationalist account of perception by bringing embodied phenomenology, predictive processing, and the sociology of practice into a common analytical space, drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Clark, Hohwy, Barrett, Bourdieu, Reckwitz, and Simondon, among others. The second section examines how digital platforms restructure the social conditions of perceptual experience, drawing on Zuboff, van Dijck, Couldry, Bucher, Han, and Rosa to develop the concept of algorithmic perceptual regimes. The third section addresses the specific transformations introduced by generative artificial intelligence as a novel form of automated production of perceptual and symbolic content, engaging with the work of Latour, Barad, Metzinger, Gallagher, Illouz, and Zizek to propose the concept of the algorithmic perceptual dispositif. Conclusions identify the implications of these arguments for sociological theory and propose lines for further inquiry.

2. From Embodied Perception to Socially Structured Dispositions

Any adequate theory of perception must begin by acknowledging the tension that has structured the field since its inception: is perception a more or less direct registration of external reality, or is it a construction shaped by the cognitive, bodily, and cultural apparatus of the perceiving

subject? This tension, present already in the opposition between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian empiricism, and reformulated with decisive consequences by Kant's transcendental framework, cannot be resolved by choosing one pole over the other. Kant's contribution in the Critique of Pure Reason remains indispensable precisely because it refuses both alternatives: perception is neither a passive mirror of the world nor an arbitrary projection of the mind ^[2]. Hegel's radicalization of Kant introduced a decisive historical dimension: the Phenomenology of Spirit presents perception not as a fixed act performed by a stable cognitive apparatus but as an activity that develops through the dialectical encounter between the subject and the world, generating a process of progressive transformation of the categories through which experience is organized ^[3]. The perceiving subject is not given in advance but constituted through the very process of perceptual engagement. This insight anticipates later arguments about the developmental and intersubjective character of perception without yet providing the social and material grounding that those arguments will require.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception provides that grounding by displacing the analysis from the transcendental subject to the lived body. In his Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is not an object in the world but the very medium through which the world becomes available to experience ^[4]. Perception is not a cognitive operation performed on sensory data; it is an activity of the body-subject that is always already engaged with its environment through practical, pre-reflective orientations. The body carries a motor intentionality that organizes perceptual experience before reflection intervenes. This means that perception is irreducibly situated: it depends on the particular bodily capacities, habitual postures, and practical engagements of the perceiving organism, all of which vary with social experience and cultural formation. Language, in this account, is not a neutral medium for communicating pre-formed perceptions but an active participant in the organization of perceptual experience itself. Merleau-Ponty's insight that perception is an embodied disposition opens the way for a sociology of perception without reducing perception to a mere social construct, because the bodily medium through which experience is organized is itself shaped by social conditions. This connection between phenomenology and the sociology of practice was noted by Bourdieu, who acknowledged Merleau-Ponty's analysis as an anticipation of his own account of the habitus as a system of bodily dispositions that structures both action and perception ^[5].

Contemporary cognitive science has approached related conclusions through a different route. The predictive processing framework developed by Andy Clark and Jakob Hohwy proposes that the brain is not a passive receiver of sensory information but an active prediction machine that continuously generates hypotheses about the causes of its sensory signals and updates those hypotheses on the basis of prediction errors ^[6, 7]. On this account, what is perceived is never simply what is present to the senses but the brain's best inference about the state of the world given its current predictive models. Lisa Feldman Barrett's extension of this framework in the theory of constructed emotion adds a further dimension: what individuals experience as basic perceptual and emotional states are themselves constructions

that draw on prior experiences, conceptual categories, and social learning [8]. The implications for the sociology of belief are significant: if perception is predictive and constructive, then the prior models that organize it are not merely cognitive but social and cultural, acquired through participation in fields of practice and structured by the differential distribution of symbolic capital. The predictive processing account of perception thus converges with the phenomenological account in emphasizing the active, constructive, and socially shaped character of perceptual experience.

It is Pierre Bourdieu who most rigorously theorizes the social structuring of perceptual dispositions. The concept of habitus designates the system of durable and transposable dispositions that individuals acquire through socialization in specific social conditions and that structure both their practices and their perceptions without necessarily rising to the level of conscious deliberation [5]. Perceptual schemas are integral to the habitus: they are the mental and bodily categories through which individuals classify, evaluate, and make sense of the world, and they carry the mark of the social conditions under which they were formed. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates this argument empirically with respect to aesthetic perception: differences in taste reflect not arbitrary individual preferences but socially structured dispositions acquired through differential exposure to cultural fields [9]. Andreas Reckwitz has extended this practice-theoretical perspective by showing how perceptual and affective dispositions are embedded in socially organized practices that prescribe specific ways of attending to the world, making the cultivation and transformation of perception a matter of participation in social practices rather than individual cognitive development [10].

Gilles Simondon contributes to this framework the concept of the perceptual regime: the historically and situationally variable configuration of relations between organism and environment that determines what objects become perceptually salient and what valences they acquire [11]. A door, a lock, or a window does not carry the same perceptual meaning for a prisoner, a homeowner, or a thief; the same material affordance is differently organized within different perceptual regimes depending on the subject's practical position and the history of their engagements with the world. Simondon's account differs from Bourdieu's in that it does not focus primarily on class position and symbolic capital as the organizing principles of perceptual regimes, but on the more general relation between the organism and the technical and material environment within which it operates. This makes the concept particularly productive for analyzing how changes in the technical infrastructure of social life produce changes in perceptual regimes: when the material environment changes, the perceptual regimes appropriate to navigating it change with it.

The psychoanalytic tradition, particularly in its Lacanian formulation, introduces a dimension that practice theory and predictive processing tend to underemphasize: the constitutive role of desire, fantasy, and the symbolic order in organizing perceptual experience. For Lacan, perception is not simply shaped by cognitive models or social dispositions; it is structured by the subject's position within a symbolic order that precedes and exceeds individual experience [12]. Freud's earlier insight that unconscious processes of repression and wish-fulfillment distort

perception in systematic ways is preserved in Lacan's account but given a more explicitly linguistic and social articulation. Slavoj Žižek radicalizes this line of argument by connecting the psychoanalytic account of ideological fantasy with the sociology of perception: what individuals take themselves to be perceiving directly is always already mediated by ideological frameworks that organize experience in ways that reproduce existing social relations [13]. Ideology operates not primarily through explicit doctrines or conscious belief but through the fantasmatic framings that constitute perceptual self-evidence: the social order appears not as a historical construction that might be otherwise but as the way things simply are.

The experimental social psychology literature provides empirical specification for these theoretical claims. The conformity experiments of Solomon Asch demonstrated that perceptual judgments are systematically influenced by social pressure even in situations where the correct answer is unambiguous: subjects regularly reported perceiving what the majority reported perceiving rather than what their senses directly indicated [14]. Muzafer Sherif's studies of social norm formation showed that under conditions of perceptual ambiguity, individuals converge toward shared perceptual norms through interaction, producing collectively sustained frameworks of interpretation that subsequently function as standards for individual judgment [15]. Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance adds a further dimension: when individuals encounter information inconsistent with their existing beliefs, they typically modify their perception of the new information rather than revising their beliefs [16]. Daniel Kahneman's dual-process framework shows how fast, intuitive processing systems produce perceptual and inferential responses that are systematically biased in ways that slower, deliberative processing only partially corrects [17].

The relationship between perception and belief also has a sociological dimension that anthropological and sociological approaches have developed with particular clarity. Emile Durkheim's analysis of collective representations established that the categories through which social reality is perceived are not the product of individual experience but are constituted through collective social life and sustained by social institutions [18]. Clifford Geertz extended this insight in a cultural direction, arguing that what humans perceive is always already organized by the webs of significance that constitute culture: perceptual experience is not a pre-cultural given on which cultural interpretation is subsequently imposed but is itself structured from the outset by cultural frameworks [19]. Jean Piaget's developmental account of belief formation adds a further dimension: beliefs are not simply received from the social environment but are constructed through the active engagement of the developing subject with its material and social world, in a process of progressive differentiation and integration [20]. These accounts provide the conceptual basis for understanding why changes in the sociotechnical environment within which development and socialization take place produce changes in the perceptual and epistemic dispositions of the subjects formed within them.

A final dimension of this theoretical reconstruction concerns the relationship between neuroscientific findings and the sociological account of perceptual structuring. Neuroscience has established that the amygdala and related structures involved in emotional processing exercise a significant

modulatory effect on perceptual attention: emotionally salient stimuli are more readily perceived, more durably retained, and more rapidly retrieved than emotionally neutral ones [21]. The psychophysical tradition, from Fechner and Helmholtz through David Marr's computational theory of vision, has developed precise accounts of the mechanisms through which the perceptual system extracts structure from sensory input. What these neuroscientific findings add to the sociological account is an account of the biological mechanisms through which social influences on perception operate: the social structuring of perceptual schemas is not merely a cognitive or cultural overlay on a pre-given biological system but involves the ongoing modification of neural systems through experience and practice. This convergence between neuroscientific and sociological accounts of perception is theoretically significant because it closes the gap between the biological and the social that has organized the debate about perception since Kant.

3. Digital Mediation and the Restructuring of Perceptual Regimes

The emergence of digital platforms as the dominant infrastructure of information circulation and social interaction has produced conditions under which the social organization of perceptual experience has been systematically restructured. This restructuring does not operate through direct coercion or explicit instruction but through the invisible governance of attention that algorithmic systems exercise over what becomes perceptually available to their users. The concept of algorithmic perceptual regimes is proposed here as an extension and updating of Simondon's original formulation: configurations of sociotechnical relations in which the practical position of the subject within a digital environment determines which stimuli become salient, which interpretive schemas are activated, and which beliefs are thereby rendered more or less plausible. These regimes are not merely informational; they are perceptual in the full sense, because they shape the material and symbolic conditions under which sensation, attention, and interpretation interact. Shoshana Zuboff's analysis of surveillance capitalism provides an indispensable starting point for understanding the economic logic that drives the construction of algorithmic perceptual regimes. Zuboff argues that the business model of the major digital platforms is organized around the extraction, analysis, and commercialization of behavioral data derived from users' online activity, and that this model generates a systematic pressure to design perceptual environments that maximize engagement and minimize perceptual friction [22]. Users must be kept in states of perceptual availability, primed to attend to the content and stimuli that generate data of commercial value. Platforms do not sell attention in a passive sense; they produce and cultivate specific forms of attention as a commercial product. The economic logic of engagement maximization is therefore simultaneously a logic of perceptual structuring: the architecture of attention that platforms produce is not a neutral medium but a systematically organized perceptual environment that reflects specific commercial interests.

Jose van Dijck's analysis of the culture of connectivity extends this argument by showing how social media platforms embed specific logics of visibility, popularity, and connection into their technical architectures, producing

perceptual environments that systematically favor certain kinds of social experience over others [23]. The metrics of likes, shares, and follows do not merely measure social reality; they constitute a perceptual framework within which social value is experienced and evaluated. Agents who participate in these environments acquire perceptual schemas calibrated to the specific visibility logic of each platform: what counts as important, credible, or socially significant is experienced through the filters that platform architectures impose on social perception. The naturalization of platform metrics as indicators of social value is one of the most consequential effects of this process: agents socialized in digital environments tend to perceive social significance through the lens of quantified engagement, treating the signals generated by platform architectures as direct indices of social reality rather than as artefacts of a specific commercial logic.

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias have developed this line of argument in their account of data colonialism, proposing that the extraction of behavioral data from platform users represents a new form of colonial relation in which human social life is appropriated as a resource for capital accumulation [24]. Their analysis points to a dimension of algorithmic perceptual regimes that is frequently overlooked: they are not merely environments within which perception happens to take place but active producers of perceptual subjectivities systematically oriented toward the reproduction of the relations of data extraction. Taina Bucher's examination of the algorithmic management of visibility on social platforms shows how the specific protocols by which content is ranked and distributed create perceptual hierarchies that are invisible to users but structurally consequential for what they encounter, remember, and regard as socially significant [25]. The invisibility of this intervention is itself a significant feature of its operation: unlike earlier forms of editorial selection, which were visible as exercises of human judgment, algorithmic curation presents itself as an automated optimization process, thereby naturalizing its effects and making them harder to perceive as effects of power.

Byung-Chul Han's analysis of psychopolitics provides a theoretical framework for understanding the affective dimensions of this restructuring. Han argues that contemporary forms of power operate not through prohibition and coercion but through the stimulation of desire, enjoyment, and positive affect, binding subjects to the systems of power through the cultivation of appetites that those systems themselves create [26]. Digital platforms exemplify this logic by constructing perceptual environments designed to generate pleasurable experiences of social recognition, informational novelty, and affective connection. Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration adds a temporal dimension: the acceleration of information circulation on digital platforms compresses the temporal horizon within which perceptual processing and belief formation can operate [27]. When the rhythm of informational change exceeds the capacity of reflective processing, fast intuitive perception becomes the dominant mode of engaging with social reality, systematically advantaging content optimized for rapid emotional response rather than deliberative evaluation.

The combined effect of these processes on the social production of belief has been extensively analyzed in research on filter bubbles, echo chambers, and the

algorithmic amplification of misinformation. The filter bubble thesis describes the tendency of personalization algorithms to construct information environments tailored to individual preferences, systematically reducing the diversity of perspectives to which users are exposed [28]. Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross's work on the availability heuristic and the fundamental attribution error takes on new significance in this context: if individuals systematically overestimate the probability of events that are more cognitively accessible, and if what is accessible is itself the product of algorithmic amplification, then the cognitive biases identified by social psychology are no longer merely individual characteristics but are actively produced and reproduced by the technical systems that govern access to information [29].

Armin Nassehi's sociology of digital society provides a further conceptual resource for this analysis. Nassehi argues that digital technology does not simply accelerate or mediate pre-existing social processes but introduces a new form of societal self-observation: the continuous production and processing of data about social behavior generates a second-order social reality in which society becomes observable to itself in unprecedented ways [30]. Platforms that observe and model user behavior in order to predict and modify it are not merely processing data about a pre-given social reality; they are participating in the constitution of that reality by making certain patterns of social behavior more visible, more legible, and therefore more amenable to amplification or suppression. Walter Benjamin's analysis of the transformation of perceptual experience in the modern city acquires renewed relevance here: just as Benjamin argued that the shock experience of urban modernity produced new perceptual dispositions oriented toward the rapid registration of transient stimuli rather than sustained attention [31], the informational intensity of digital environments produces perceptual dispositions oriented toward the rapid processing of emotionally salient signals rather than the reflective engagement with complex arguments.

What distinguishes algorithmic perceptual regimes from earlier forms of socially organized perceptual experience is not the existence of external structuring influences on perception but the systematic reflexivity of those influences: algorithmic systems continuously update their models of user behavior on the basis of behavioral feedback, producing a loop in which the perceptual environment is continuously adjusted in response to the perceptual and behavioral responses it has elicited. This recursive dynamic produces a form of sociotechnical co-evolution in which perceptual dispositions and platform architectures mutually adapt to each other over time, with consequences that cannot be predicted from the analysis of either factor in isolation. Bourdieu's field theory retains its analytical value, but the fields within which perceptual schemas are produced and reproduced now include algorithmic fields: sociotechnical configurations organized by the specific rules and stakes of digital platforms, in which what registers as visible, valuable, or significant is governed by processes that are at once technical and social.

4. Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Production of Social Belief

The development of generative artificial intelligence systems represents a qualitatively distinct phase in the sociotechnical transformation of perceptual experience. Unlike earlier algorithmic systems, which filtered, ranked,

or recommended pre-existing human-generated content, generative AI systems produce new symbolic content: text, images, audio, and video that did not previously exist and that may be perceptually indistinguishable from human-generated material. This capacity introduces a fundamental change in the social conditions of perceptual experience: the symbolic environment within which individuals form beliefs and orient action now contains a growing proportion of content produced by automated systems that operate according to statistical regularities extracted from massive corpora of human-generated data. The implications of this change for the social production of perceptual schemas and beliefs have not yet been adequately theorized, and existing frameworks in the sociology of perception, developed before the emergence of these systems, do not straightforwardly apply to them.

Bruno Latour's actor-network theory provides a first conceptual resource for approaching this problem. Latour argues that social action is always distributed across human and non-human actants, and that the specific capacities and limitations of non-human participants in social networks shape the possibilities of action available to human agents [32]. Generative AI systems are actants in this sense: they participate in the production of social reality not as passive tools operated by human agents but as entities with specific capacities to produce, transform, and circulate symbolic content at a scale and speed that exceeds what any human agent could achieve. The inclusion of non-human actants in the analysis of social perceptual processes does not imply attributing agency to machines in any philosophically substantive sense; it means recognizing that the systematic effects produced by the interaction between human agents and automated systems cannot be adequately analyzed by attending only to the human side of that interaction.

Karen Barad's concept of intra-action offers a complementary perspective: rather than understanding humans and technological systems as pre-formed entities that interact, intra-action proposes that the relevant terms of the analysis are themselves constituted through their mutual engagement [33]. The perceptual subject who encounters a world partly produced by generative AI is not the same subject who encountered a world produced exclusively by other humans: the conditions of subjectivity themselves are reconfigured by the ongoing intra-action between human agents and automated production systems. Barad's framework thus provides a theoretical basis for the claim that algorithmic perceptual regimes do not merely influence pre-existing perceptual subjects but participate in the constitution of those subjects through the ongoing structuring of their perceptual environments.

Thomas Metzinger's account of the self-model theory of subjectivity is relevant here for a different reason. Metzinger argues that what individuals experience as a self is the product of a predictive model that the brain constructs to represent its own states and their relation to the environment, and that this self-model is updated continuously on the basis of incoming information [34]. If the symbolic environment that provides the material for this self-modeling is increasingly produced by automated systems that generate statistically typical representations of human experience, then the self-models that individuals construct on the basis of that environment will be correspondingly shaped by the statistical regularities that generative systems embody. Shaun Gallagher's enactivist

account of cognition extends this argument by showing that cognitive and perceptual capacities are not self-contained properties of the individual organism but are dynamically constituted through ongoing interaction with the environment [35]. Cognition, on the enactivist account, does not happen inside the head; it is distributed across the organism and its environment, which means that changes in the environment produce changes in cognitive and perceptual capacities rather than merely influencing processes that unfold independently of them.

Eva Illouz's analysis of emotional capitalism provides a framework for understanding the specifically affective dimensions of these transformations. Illouz argues that contemporary capitalism has produced a cultural configuration in which emotional life is simultaneously commodified and used as a resource for the organization of social relations, generating a mode of social integration in which the management of emotion becomes a central form of social competence [36]. Generative AI systems participate in this configuration by producing emotionally calibrated content: language models trained on human-generated text absorb and reproduce the emotional patterns of that text, generating outputs designed to elicit specific affective responses. The beliefs produced through perceptual engagement with algorithmically generated content are not merely informational but are affectively structured in ways that shape their stability and resistance to revision. Walter Lippmann's early observation that people cannot have objective opinions because they are limited by their subjective perceptions [37] acquires new dimensions when those subjective perceptions are themselves shaped by systems optimized to produce emotionally compelling representations of social reality.

Slavoj Žižek's account of ideological fantasy acquires new analytical force in this context. Žižek argues that ideology operates not primarily through explicit doctrines or beliefs but through the fantasmatic framings that structure what social agents take themselves to be perceiving directly [13]. Generative AI systems participate in this ideological function in a specific way: by producing symbolic content statistically calibrated to reproduce the dominant patterns of human symbolic production, they systematically amplify the representations, framings, and interpretive schemas that are most frequent in the training data, while rendering less frequent perspectives correspondingly less visible and less perceptually natural. The effect is what may be called automated decontestation: the reduction of the symbolic diversity that makes visible the contested character of social reality, and its replacement with a perceptual landscape in which dominant framings present themselves as self-evident. Where Michael Freeden analyzed the decontestation of essentially contested political concepts as a defining feature of ideological thought [38], generative AI systems perform this function at the level of perceptual schemas themselves, reducing the range of what appears plausible or thinkable rather than explicitly prescribing particular doctrines.

The concept of the algorithmic perceptual *dispositif* is proposed here to designate the ensemble of these processes in their structural unity. Drawing on Foucault's use of the *dispositif* as a heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectures, and practices that produce specific subject positions [39], and combining it with Bourdieu's analysis of the social production of perceptual

schemas, Simondon's account of perceptual regimes, and Žižek's critical account of ideological structuring, the algorithmic perceptual *dispositif* refers to the historically specific configuration of platform architectures, generative systems, commercial imperatives, and social practices that jointly structure the conditions under which perception, attention, and belief formation operate in contemporary societies. The *dispositif* is not a conspiracy but a structural configuration: it produces systematic effects without requiring the coordinated intention of any agent, and its effects are all the more powerful for being experienced by those subject to them as natural features of the perceptual environment rather than as artefacts of a specific form of sociotechnical power.

The relationship between the algorithmic perceptual *dispositif* and the formation of social beliefs requires more precise specification. Belief formation is not a single process but a family of processes that operate at different levels and timescales: the rapid formation of perceptual judgments through fast intuitive processing, the slower construction of explanatory frameworks through deliberative reasoning, and the even slower sedimentation of stable evaluative dispositions through repeated experience. Algorithmic perceptual regimes intervene at each of these levels, but in different ways and with different consequences. At the level of rapid perceptual judgment, engagement-maximizing platform design systematically amplifies emotionally salient stimuli, producing perceptual biases toward content that elicits strong affective responses regardless of its epistemic quality. At the level of stable dispositional formation, the cumulative effect of prolonged exposure to algorithmically curated environments produces modifications in perceptual and evaluative dispositions that operate below the threshold of conscious deliberation, shaping what appears natural, plausible, or self-evident without requiring explicit endorsement. The result is a self-reinforcing dynamic in which algorithmically structured perceptual experience progressively narrows the range of what appears perceivable, thinkable, and believable.

The sociological analysis of these dynamics requires attention not only to the mechanisms through which they operate but also to the differential effects they produce across social positions. Algorithmic perceptual regimes do not affect all social agents equally: the specific ways in which platform architectures interact with pre-existing social dispositions, cultural competences, and economic positions vary systematically with social location. Agents with high levels of cultural capital and media literacy may be better equipped to perceive the constructed character of their algorithmic perceptual environment and to develop compensatory practices, while agents with lower levels of such capital may be more fully absorbed within the perceptual frameworks that platforms provide. Bertrand Russell's early distinction between beliefs, understood as fundamental dispositions that organize experience, and opinions, understood as more surface-level propositional attitudes that are more readily revised, acquires new relevance here: algorithmic perceptual regimes may operate primarily at the level of belief in Russell's sense, producing modifications in fundamental perceptual orientations that are substantially resistant to correction through the provision of contrary evidence at the level of opinion [40]. If this is the case, then strategies of counter-disinformation that focus on the provision of corrective information are working against

the wrong level of the perceptual and epistemic system, and more fundamental interventions in the conditions of perceptual experience are required.

5. Conclusions

The argument developed across the preceding sections converges on several conclusions that have implications both for sociological theory and for the broader social scientific understanding of perception and belief formation in contemporary societies. The most fundamental conclusion is that perception cannot be analyzed as a process that occurs independently of the sociotechnical conditions under which it operates. The assembled theoretical framework demonstrates that what social agents perceive, and the beliefs they form on the basis of those perceptions, are co-produced by individual dispositions, social structures, and technological infrastructures. What has changed with the emergence of algorithmic systems is not the existence of sociotechnical mediation but its scale, speed, commercial organization, and generative capacity. The novelty of the present situation lies not in the discovery that perception is socially structured but in the specific configuration of sociotechnical forces that now organize that structuring and in the systematic consequences of that configuration for the conditions of collective belief formation and democratic public life.

A second conclusion concerns the conceptual vocabulary required to analyze these conditions. The concepts inherited from earlier periods of social theory, *habitus*, *field*, *perceptual regime*, *ideological fantasy*, remain indispensable, but they require updating and extension to address the specific configurations introduced by platform capitalism and generative AI. The concepts of algorithmic perceptual regimes and the algorithmic perceptual dispositif proposed in this article represent contributions to this theoretical updating, but they should be understood as theoretical hypotheses requiring empirical specification rather than completed analytical frameworks. The empirical investigation of how specific platform architectures, generative systems, and social practices interact to produce systematic perceptual effects is a research program that has barely begun, and its development requires collaboration across cognitive science, sociology, media studies, and the emerging field of AI ethics.

A third conclusion concerns the ideological dimension of algorithmic perceptual regimes. The concept of automated decontestation proposed above designates a specific mechanism through which generative AI systems contribute to the naturalization of dominant social arrangements by reducing the perceptual availability of alternative framings and interpretive possibilities. This mechanism does not operate through intentional ideological design but through the structural logic of probabilistic generation calibrated to dominant patterns in training data. Its consequences are epistemologically significant because they affect not merely what beliefs individuals hold but the conditions under which belief revision is possible: a perceptual environment in which alternative framings are rendered less visible and less plausible is an environment that systematically restricts the social conditions of critical reflection.

A fourth and final conclusion concerns the political and ethical implications of the analysis. If the conditions of social perception and belief formation are increasingly

organized by commercial systems with specific structural interests, then the question of how to maintain the conditions for critical perception and rational belief revision is not merely an epistemological but a political question. It concerns the governance of the sociotechnical infrastructures through which perceptual access to social reality is organized, and it requires forms of collective action and regulation that go beyond what individuals can accomplish through the cultivation of individual critical capacities. The Kantian aspiration to autonomous rational judgment cannot be realized under conditions where the perceptual field within which that judgment must operate is systematically organized by systems that do not share that aspiration. A critical sociology of perception, in this sense, is not an academic exercise but a contribution to the analysis of conditions that are consequential for the possibility of democratic public life.

Future research should pursue at least four lines of inquiry. First, empirical investigation of the specific perceptual and epistemic effects of different platform architectures and generative AI systems is required, drawing on the methods of experimental social psychology, computational social science, and ethnographic research. Second, comparative analysis of how different social groups and positions are differently affected by algorithmic perceptual regimes would extend the Bourdieuan insight that perceptual dispositions are structured by social position into the analysis of digital environments, attending to the ways in which class, gender, and postcolonial positioning interact with the logics of platform capitalism. Third, theoretical work integrating enactivist cognitive science with the sociology of practice and the critical analysis of digital platforms would help develop more adequate accounts of the mechanisms through which sociotechnical systems intervene in perceptual and cognitive processes. Fourth, normative and institutional analysis of the conditions under which the governance of algorithmic perceptual regimes might be organized in ways that are compatible with the social conditions of adequate collective belief formation represents an urgent practical task for social science. These research directions collectively constitute an agenda for a sociology of perception adequate to the conditions of the present.

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