

# Depression as a Feature: The Manufactured Passive Subject

How short-form video platforms engineered a psychological state – not as a side effect of engagement optimisation, but as its most reliable output. A structural argument.

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper argues that the anxiety, depression and attentional fragmentation associated with heavy short-form video consumption are not unintended consequences of engagement optimisation — they are its most reliable product. Drawing on platform architecture, psychoacoustic research, and the philosophy of constitutive environments, we propose that TikTok and its successors function as ontological infrastructure: spaces that do not merely reflect the people who use them but actively construct them. The genre of music the algorithm preferentially surfaces — phonk and its derivatives — is not incidental to this process. Its structural properties are acoustically isomorphic with the feed's psychological architecture: both systems produce sustained arousal without resolution, intensity without direction, and the sensation of power without the conditions for its exercise. We name the resulting state aroused passivity and argue that a population in this state — depleted, distracted, identity-borrowed, and returning compulsively to the source of its depletion — is not a failed user base. It is a successfully manufactured one. The implications extend beyond mental health into political economy: when attentional real estate is commodified and the architecture of selfhood is privately owned, the question is not whether this constitutes control. The question is who holds the title.

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# The Error of the Neutral Platform

The standard account of social media harm goes like this: platforms were built to maximise engagement. Engagement turned out to correlate with emotional arousal. Emotional arousal is easiest to produce through outrage, anxiety and fear. Therefore platforms, optimising for engagement, inadvertently optimised for psychological damage. The damage is real but unintended — a side effect of a system that was trying to do something else.

This account contains a buried assumption so pervasive it is almost never examined. It assumes that the platform is an environment a person enters and exits — that there is a self prior to and independent of the platform, which then suffers damage from exposure to it. The person comes first. The platform acts upon them. The damage is measurable against a baseline that would have existed without it.

*The spaces we inhabit do not merely affect us. They build us. There is no neutral position from which to receive an environment. Every space we occupy long enough reshapes the categories through which we experience everything else, including ourselves.*

This is not a novel philosophical claim. It is supported by decades of research across cognitive science, developmental psychology, and environmental neuroscience. The brain is not a fixed processor that receives inputs and produces outputs. It is a structure that continuously reorganises itself in response to the demands placed on it by the environment it inhabits. Attention, arousal thresholds, tolerance for ambiguity, the capacity for sustained independent thought — none of these are fixed properties of a person. They are habits built by the environments that consistently exercised or failed to exercise them.

When the environment is an algorithmically managed feed optimised for a specific psychological output, the person who emerges from sustained exposure is structurally different from the person who would have developed without it. Not merely more anxious. Not merely more distracted. Structurally different — in the same way that growing up in a language shapes not just what words you know but how you think.

The epistemological error is treating the algorithm as a tool. Tools are picked up and put down. Their effects end when you set them aside. An environment is not a tool. Its effects are the person you become inside it.

This distinction — between a platform as tool and a platform as constitutive environment — is the foundational premise of everything that follows. Accept it, and the mental health literature

on social media reads differently. The question is no longer what the platform does to its users. The question is what kind of person the platform is optimised to produce.

# A Brief History of Engineered Attention

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The idea that aesthetic environments can be deliberately engineered to produce psychological states is not new, and its history is worth tracing — not to invoke conspiracy, but because the pattern recurs with enough regularity to constitute a legible strategy.

## THE CIA AND THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS

In the early years of the Cold War, the United States government faced a specific cultural problem. Soviet cultural output — socialist realism — was accessible, populist, and legible. It told stories. It had heroes. It was designed to be understood and to move people. Western art needed a counter-narrative: evidence that freedom produced something the communist world could not.

The solution, documented in declassified records and extensively reported in the decades since, involved the Congress for Cultural Freedom — a CIA-funded organisation that promoted American abstract expressionist art across Europe. The painters selected — Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko — produced work that was deliberately inaccessible, non-representational, and resistant to any single reading. The argument, never made publicly, was structural: only a free society could produce art this unconstrained. The difficulty was the point. The alienation was the message.

What matters here is not the politics but the mechanism. A specific aesthetic — difficult, dissonant, resistant to resolution — was selected and amplified by an institutional actor because its structural properties produced a desired psychological and political effect in the audience. The artists themselves may have been entirely authentic. Their authenticity was instrumentalised at the distribution layer.

## FACEBOOK AND THE SELF-ASSEMBLED DOSSIER

On the 4th of February 2004, Facebook launched. On the same date, DARPA cancelled LifeLog — a research programme whose stated goal was to build a comprehensive digital record of everything a person did, saw, heard, and said: a complete dossier of a human life, automatically assembled. Whether coincidence or not, the functional outcome is identical. The dossier is the same. The mechanism of assembly is different — instead of surveillance, participation; instead of compulsion, the social pressure of connection.

Facebook's subsequent decade demonstrated that a platform optimised for engagement naturally converges on emotional oscillation as its primary mechanism. Content that moved between love and outrage, between affirmation and threat, between belonging and exclusion — kept people in the feed longer than content that produced any single stable emotional state. A person fully contented stops scrolling. A person whose emotional state is never quite resolved

keeps going.

#### THE MECHANISM

Emotional oscillation as a retention strategy is not incidental to the feed's architecture. It is produced by optimising for the one metric that correlates most reliably with advertising revenue: time on screen. The psychological damage is not the goal. It is the exhaust of a system that has no goal other than the next second of attention.

TikTok inherited this mechanism and hardened it. Where Facebook operated primarily on the cognitive and social layer — you read, you react, you compare yourself to others — TikTok added two dimensions that Facebook's architecture could not reach: the body, through sound, and the unconscious, through visual rhythm. The result is a system that does not merely manipulate what you think. It manipulates what you feel before you have thought anything at all.

## Reading the Character of an Algorithm

An algorithm is not neutral. This is understood in the abstract but rarely examined in the specific. When we say an algorithm is biased, we usually mean it produces outcomes that disadvantage particular groups. This is true and important. But it is not the bias this paper is concerned with.

Every recommendation system has a prior — a baseline disposition that exists before it learns anything about a specific user. That prior is encoded in what the system was optimised to maximise. It is the algorithm's default preference: where it would take you if you gave it no signal at all.

This prior is legible. You can read it by watching what a blank account is shown. Researchers have done this. A new TikTok account with no history, no follows, no interactions — given nothing to learn from — is nonetheless served content within minutes that trends toward a specific psychological register: high intensity, short duration, emotionally primed but unresolved. The content varies. The register does not. The algorithm's prior, before it knows anything about you, is already pointed somewhere.

### THE COMPLETION RATE MECHANISM

TikTok's recommendation system weights one signal above almost all others: completion rate. Not likes. Not shares. Not comments. Whether you watched to the end. A video that is watched to completion by a high proportion of its viewers is surfaced to more people, regardless of any other signal.

Content that produces resolution — a satisfying ending, a completed thought, a joke with a punchline — teaches the viewer that completion brings closure. Closure is comfortable. Comfort does not compel the next video. Content that produces unresolved tension is watched to the end because the viewer is waiting for a resolution that never arrives. They complete the video unsatisfied. The algorithm reads this as success.

*The algorithm did not decide to produce anxiety. It decided to maximise completion. Anxiety turned out to be completion's most reliable engine. The system optimised toward it not through intent but through selection pressure — the same process by which evolution produces outcomes that look designed.*

### THE CHARACTER PORTRAIT

Read through its selection behaviour, the TikTok algorithm has a definable character. It prefers:

- Intensity over depth. Content that produces an immediate strong response over content that rewards sustained attention.
- Unresolved tension over closure. Emotional states that do not discharge keep viewers in the feed seeking resolution.
- Borrowed identity over autonomous expression. Formats, sounds, and aesthetics that users reproduce rather than originate.
- Passive reception over active participation. The viewer watches. The creator performs. The algorithm intermediates. No genuine dialogue occurs.
- Arousal without direction. The content produces a felt state — energy, aggression, desire — that has no object and no action associated with it.

These preferences, taken together, describe not a content policy but a psychological target. The algorithm is not selecting for content it prefers in any aesthetic sense. It is selecting for content that produces a specific state in the viewer — a state that keeps them in the feed. That state has a name, and we will come to it. First, we need to understand the role of the music.

# The Phonk Problem — Sound as Architecture

Music arrived on short-form video platforms before anyone understood what it would do there. TikTok began as Musical.ly — a lip-sync app. Sound was always the medium. What changed, as the platform scaled and the algorithm matured, was which sounds the system learned to prefer.

The genre that came to dominate short-form video fancams, edits, and the general aesthetic texture of the platform — particularly from 2022 onward — is called phonk. To most people who encounter it, it sounds like it came from nowhere. It didn't. But understanding where it came from matters less than understanding what it does.

## A BRIEF GENEALOGY

Phonk originated in the early 2010s on SoundCloud, produced by bedroom musicians sampling the underground Memphis rap scene of the 1990s — artists like Three 6 Mafia, DJ Screw, and Tommy Wright III, who had built a sound defined by eerie minor-key melodies, chopped and pitched-down vocals, and booming 808 bass. The Memphis sound was itself a product of constraint: made on cheap equipment by artists the mainstream industry ignored, its lo-fi roughness was not a choice but a material condition that became an aesthetic identity.

The phonk that spread through TikTok is not this original form. It is a mutation that emerged in Russia in the late 2010s — drift phonk — and has since mutated further into Brazilian funk phonk, or funk automotivo. This is the sound most associated with the CapCut edit aesthetic that currently dominates the platform. What matters is not which mutation you are listening to but what structural properties all of these mutations share — and why those properties make them the algorithm's preferred sound.

## THE STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES

- Phrygian mode and unresolved harmonic tension. Phonk is almost universally composed in minor keys, frequently using the Phrygian mode — one of the oldest scales in Western music, heard in flamenco, metal, and Middle Eastern traditions — which produces a characteristic sound of unease and forward momentum without resolution. Standard Western musical phrases cadence — tension resolves. Phonk loops do not cadence. They restart. The tension accumulates across repetitions rather than discharging. The listener is perpetually mid-phrase, waiting for a resolution that the loop architecture structurally prevents.

- Sub-bass frequencies and somatic arousal. The defining sonic signature of phonk is its bass — occupying frequencies between 20 and 80 Hz that are felt in the body rather than heard in the conventional sense. Research on sub-bass exposure documents a consistent physiological response: elevated cortisol, increased heart rate, heightened skin conductance — the autonomic signatures of arousal and mild stress. This response is not mediated by taste or cultural familiarity. It is a mechanical consequence of low-frequency vibration on the human body.
- Loop architecture and the absent cadence. The standard phonk track is built for looping — no introduction, no development, no conclusion. It enters at full intensity and sustains that intensity indefinitely. Combined with the unresolved harmonic tension, this creates a listening experience that is constitutively incomplete. The brain allocates cognitive resources toward the anticipated resolution. When it never arrives, those resources remain allocated — a state of sustained low-level cognitive tension experienced as energy or alertness but functionally closer to a mild stress response.
- Aggression without object. The affective quality of phonk is threatening — the sound of menace without a source. Unlike music that expresses anger at something, phonk produces ambient hostility. Research on dissonance confirms that brain regions associated with threat detection and error monitoring become more active during exposure to dissonant music, tracking the degree of dissonance in real time. The listener is physiologically primed for a threat that never materialises.

#### WHY THE ALGORITHM PREFERS THIS SOUND

A video with phonk underneath it is harder to abandon mid-watch than a video with resolved, melodically satisfying music. The unresolved harmonic tension primes the viewer for an arrival that the music itself never delivers — so the viewer keeps watching the video, seeking resolution in the visual content instead. The somatic arousal from the sub-bass ensures the viewer is physiologically engaged regardless of their conscious interest. The loop architecture means the music never peaks and releases, never gives the viewer a natural exit point.

The algorithm did not commission phonk. It selected it the way evolution selects traits — by amplifying what correlated with the outcome it was optimising for. Phonk correlated with completion. The algorithm learned to surface more phonk. The music has become the architecture of the platform's psychological effect — not because anyone designed it that way, but because selection pressure, operating at scale over time, produced that outcome as reliably as if it had been planned.

## Aroused Passivity — Naming the State

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The existing literature on social media and mental health is substantial. It documents, with increasing precision, the association between heavy short-form video consumption and elevated anxiety, depression, attentional deficits, and sleep disruption. What it does not do is name the specific psychological state that the platform-music combination produces. It measures outcomes without characterising the phenomenological state from which those outcomes emerge. Without naming the state you cannot understand its function within the system that produces it.

We propose the term aroused passivity for this state. It has four defining characteristics:

- High somatic arousal. The body is activated — elevated heart rate, heightened skin conductance, cortisol elevated. The person feels alert, energised, or vaguely threatened. This arousal is produced primarily by the sub-bass frequencies of the music and the rapid visual rhythm of the edit format.
- Cognitive passivity. Despite the somatic arousal, no active cognitive processing is occurring. The person is not thinking, evaluating, deciding, or creating. They are receiving. The format is optimised to minimise the cognitive load required to consume it.
- Unresolved emotional tension. The harmonic structure of the music and the oscillating emotional content of the feed produce a state of sustained emotional incompleteness. The person feels something strongly, but the feeling has no object, no direction, and no resolution. It does not build toward anything. It accumulates.
- Absence of agency. The person in this state is not acting. They are being acted upon. The sensation of agency — of choosing what comes next — is simulated by the swipe gesture, but the swipe delivers only another algorithmically selected video. The choice is theatrical. The passivity is structural.

Aroused passivity is distinct from anxiety — anxiety is directed, it is fear of something. It is also distinct from the flow state documented in gaming and creative work — flow is active, high cognitive engagement, intrinsic motivation. Aroused passivity is flow's precise inverse: high arousal, zero agency. It is also distinct from relaxation. The person in this state is not resting. They are consuming energy while producing nothing — running a motor in neutral, at high revs, going nowhere.

*Aroused passivity is the psychological equivalent of the phunk loop: intense, unresolved, constitutively incomplete. The person keeps scrolling for the same reason the music never cadences — the architecture of the system structurally prevents the arrival they are seeking.*

This state, sustained over time, produces the outcomes the literature documents. Chronic low-level arousal without resolution is the physiological profile of chronic stress. Cognitive passivity, practised at scale, atrophies the capacity for sustained independent thought. Absence of agency, experienced repeatedly, produces learned helplessness — a well-documented precursor to depression. The platform does not cause depression the way a pathogen causes disease. It produces the conditions under which depression is the natural outcome of continued exposure.

## The Depression is the Feature

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The standard critique of social media platforms, stated charitably, is this: they built systems optimised for engagement, engagement optimisation produced harmful psychological states, and the harm is an unintended consequence they have an obligation to address. Most platform responses to mental health research operate within this frame.

This paper proposes a different frame. Not because platform companies are consciously malicious — the argument does not require intent — but because the outcomes of the system are so consistently aligned with its commercial interests that the distinction between intended and unintended becomes analytically meaningless.

Consider what a population in aroused passivity looks like from the perspective of the platform's revenue model:

- It consumes more. Research consistently shows that psychological factors including loneliness, low self-esteem, boredom, and depressive tendencies are among the strongest predictors of problematic platform use. The platform does not drive people away. The worse you feel, the more you use it.
- It is easier to advertise to. A person in a state of high arousal with reduced cognitive agency is significantly more susceptible to advertising influence than a person in a calm, deliberate cognitive state. The emotional priming that phonk provides is, from an advertiser's perspective, simply audience preparation.
- It does not organise. A population that is depleted, distracted, identity-borrowed, and consuming rather than producing does not form movements, does not sustain attention on systemic issues, and does not translate political awareness into political action. Aroused passivity produces what looks like engagement — strong feelings, viral responses, momentary outrage — but what it systematically prevents is the sustained, organised agency that constitutes genuine political power.
- It returns. The most important property of aroused passivity as a commercial product is that it is self-renewing. The state produces the conditions for its own continuation. A person in chronic low-level distress, with an atrophied capacity for sustained attention, finds the feed increasingly the path of least resistance. The platform becomes the solution to the problem the platform created.

This is not a conspiracy. It requires only that the system optimise for engagement, that aroused passivity be the psychological state most reliably associated with engagement, and that the system therefore continuously select for the conditions that produce it. Evolution does not intend the outcomes it produces. It produces them because they were selected for. The distinction between intentional design and selection pressure is philosophically important but

practically irrelevant to the person experiencing the outcome.

*If the depression is the output the system reliably produces, and the depression is what keeps users returning to the system, then describing the depression as a bug requires us to explain why the system has not fixed it in two decades of documented harm. At some point, a bug you decline to fix becomes a feature.*

# Attentional Real Estate and the New Feudalism

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To understand the full scope of what is being described here, it is necessary to move from psychology to political economy — to ask not just what the platform does to individuals but what it does to the social order those individuals collectively constitute.

Attention has always been valuable. Newspapers, radio, and television were all businesses built on the aggregation of human attention and its resale to advertisers. What is new is the scale of precision, the depth of access, and the constitutive nature of the platforms through which attention is now harvested. Previous attention economies operated at the surface. They captured your eyes for thirty seconds between programmes. The short-form video platform operates at a fundamentally different depth. It does not merely capture attention. It constitutes the subject whose attention it captures.

## THE FEUDAL ANALOGY

Classical feudalism was an arrangement in which the serf did not own the land they worked, could not freely move to other land, and produced surplus value that flowed upward to a lord in exchange for security — the security of the walls, the protection of the estate, the guarantee of a place to sleep.

The digital analogy is precise. The user does not own their social graph. They cannot move it. It belongs to the platform. The content they produce generates revenue they do not share in. The platform provides security of a kind: the comfort of the feed, the social belonging of the community, the identity scaffolding of its aesthetic templates. The mechanism of control is not the wall or the legal bond. It is psychological. The serf stays because leaving means losing everything they have built, entering a void, facing the anxiety the platform was managing on their behalf.

What the manufactured passive subject adds to this analogy is the mechanism of internal control that classical feudalism achieved through external constraint. The medieval serf was kept in place by geography and law. The digital serf is kept in place by an attentional and psychological architecture that makes the idea of leaving feel more threatening than staying. The walls are inside.

## THE CONCENTRATION OF ONTOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The pattern of acquisition visible across the last decade of technology and media consolidation — platforms acquired, media properties purchased, the metaverse layer claimed — is legible in this frame. These are not purchases of content. They are purchases of the infrastructure through which people form their understanding of reality.

If the spaces we inhabit build us, then controlling the platform means controlling, at the deepest available level, what kind of people are produced by it. Not by publishing propaganda. Not by censoring opposition. By owning the architecture of selfhood and optimising it for a preferred output.

Attentional real estate — the territory inside human consciousness where identity, belief, and emotional baseline are formed — has been commodified. It is being concentrated. And the passive, depleted, identity-borrowed subject that the current architecture produces is, from the perspective of whoever controls that architecture, the ideal tenant: too tired to leave, too distracted to notice the terms of the lease.

# What You Can Do Before the Infrastructure Exists

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Naming a structural problem without offering a structural response is an incomplete act. It is also, if we are honest, a potentially useful gift to the people running the system — a taxonomy they can study, co-opt, and inoculate against.

The full structural response — counter-architecture at the protocol level, distributed systems antifragile to state and corporate capture, epistemic infrastructure that makes manufactured consent expensive rather than cheap — is the subject of the next paper in this series. What belongs here is the individual response: not because individual action is sufficient — it is not — but because the structural argument points directly to specific things a person can do right now, with no new infrastructure.

## NAME THE STATE WHEN YOU ARE IN IT

The platform is designed to eliminate the gap between stimulus and response. A video ends. Another begins. The arousal state produced by the first primes the reception of the second before any conscious evaluation occurs. The feed is engineered as a continuous environment precisely because discontinuity — a moment of pause, a return to baseline — is where agency lives.

This paper has given the state a name: aroused passivity. High somatic arousal, cognitive passivity, unresolved emotional tension, absence of agency. The name matters not as academic terminology but as a perceptual tool. You cannot resist an environment you cannot perceive. The moment you can identify the state you are in, you have introduced the gap the platform is designed to prevent. Naming is not sufficient. It is the precondition for everything else.

## DISTINGUISH MEDIATED EXPERIENCE FROM CONSTITUTIVE ACTION

When you watch an atrocity unfold through a social feed — a war, a genocide, a systemic violence playing out in clips and threads — your neurological response is genuine. The mirror neuron system does not distinguish between witnessed and experienced. The distress you feel is real distress. The anger is real anger.

The platform knows this. It is why atrocity content drives some of the highest engagement numbers the feed produces. And it offers a discharge mechanism — the repost, the correct-opinion signal, the flag in the bio — that is neurologically credible as action while being structurally inert. Your nervous system registers having acted. Nothing in the world changed.

*The question to ask of any strong feeling produced by mediated content is not whether the feeling is real — it is. The question is: what does this feeling look like as a physical action in my local context? Not a post. Not a share. An action with a body in a place. The gap between feeling and local action is where genuine agency lives, and it is exactly the gap the platform is designed to fill with a gesture that goes nowhere.*

The normalisation of war and atrocity in the contemporary media environment is not primarily produced by propaganda — though propaganda exists and operates. It is produced by the structural coupling of genuine moral response to inert social gesture. A population that has strong feelings about everything and acts on nothing is not an informed citizenry. It is a managed one.

#### REBUILD FRICTION DELIBERATELY

The platform is frictionless by design. Friction — any moment of resistance, delay, or effort in the path of consumption — reduces the probability of the next action and therefore threatens the engagement metric. The removal of friction is not incidental to the platform's psychological effect. It is the mechanism. Frictionless consumption is what produces aroused passivity.

Reading that requires sustained attention is friction. A conversation that requires physical presence is friction. An action that requires leaving the house is friction. A creative act that requires tolerating incompleteness over time is friction. None of these are available on the feed, because none of them are completable in eight seconds. The counter is to consume differently, in environments that demand something of you. The demand is the point.

#### UNDERSTAND THE ECONOMICS OF ASTROTURF

State and corporate information operations do not primarily operate by convincing you of false things. They operate by flooding the zone: producing such a volume of contradictory, emotionally charged, difficult-to-verify content that confident knowledge becomes impossible. Doubt is the product. A population that cannot confidently know anything does not act. It scrolls.

The platform's architecture is synergistic with this operation. Aroused passivity produces epistemological learned helplessness — the feeling that the information environment is too complex, too contested, too manipulated to navigate reliably. The structural property that makes AstroTurf operations cheap is that purely digital signal is costless to produce at scale. The individual counter is not fact-checking — fact-checking cannot keep pace with zone flooding by design. It is developing a working model of the information environment's incentive structure.

Not: is this true? But: who benefits from my believing this, what does it cost them to produce it, and what action does it seem designed to prevent? These questions require friction. They require pause. They require exactly the gap the feed is designed to eliminate.

#### THE LIMIT OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE

These are individual responses to a structural problem. They are necessary — a person who cannot name their state, distinguish mediated experience from action, or model the incentives of their information environment is maximally vulnerable to the system this paper describes. But they are not sufficient. Individual resilience does not change the architecture. The structural response requires counter-architecture at the protocol level. That is the subject of the next paper in this series.

## What This Means

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This paper has made a structural argument, not a moral one. It does not claim that platform companies are evil. It does not claim that everyone who uses TikTok is damaged by it, or that phonk is dangerous music that should be suppressed, or that the answer is more screen time warnings and digital wellness features. These responses treat the symptom while leaving the architecture untouched.

The phonk observation is not a footnote to this argument. It is evidence that the mechanism operates at a level below conscious awareness. You do not choose to let the music prime your nervous system. You do not decide to feel the bass before you have evaluated the content. These effects are produced by the architecture and received by the body before the mind has formed any view. This is why the standard response — be more conscious, be more critical, use the platform more intentionally — is insufficient as a structural answer.

### THE THREE PAPERS

This is the second in a series of three foundational papers from Supernova Labs. Each addresses a different layer of the same underlying problem: the capture of infrastructure that should be common by actors whose interests are misaligned with the people who depend on it.

Physical Reality as Hypermedia — the first paper — addressed the capture of the physical-digital layer: every attempt to build a persistent digital layer over reality has reproduced the same architecture of central control. It proposed a protocol-level solution: make the physical world addressable and linkable without routing everything through a company's servers.

This paper addresses the capture of the attentional layer: the privatisation of the constitutive environments through which identity, belief, and emotional baseline are formed, and the optimisation of those environments for passivity, dependency, and managed consent. It has named the problem, traced its architecture, and located what individual agency is possible within a system not yet structurally challenged.

The third paper will address the epistemic layer: how you build information infrastructure that is antifragile to state and corporate capture, resistant to zone-flooding and manufactured consent, and capable of maintaining global connective tissue without the single points of control that make centralised manipulation cheap.

Each paper stands alone. Each one names a capture, traces its mechanism, and points toward a structural alternative. Together they form a single argument: that the failures of the current digital order are not accidents, not bugs, and not addressable by better policy applied to existing architecture. They are properties of the architecture itself. The response has to be

architectural.

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The depression is the feature. The passive subject is the product. The attentional real estate is privately owned.

The question is what we build next.

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Built with determination, not by VC.