Editorial: Feminist fabulations in algorithmic empires

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Editorial on the Research Topic
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The prevalence of digital and algorithmic systems in everyday human subjectivities prompts an urgent critical analysis of these systems that considers not only their sociotechnical aspects, but also their influence on cultural and communicative factors. This is because contemporary digital and algorithmic systems reinforce the offline world's white supremacist, ableist, cisnormative and heteropatriarchal hierarchies, reflecting historical empire-building, while also sustaining the coloniality of modernity (see Mignolo, 2007). In online spaces, borders have formed that reflect traditional offline biases and normative categorizations that oftentimes only serve a narrow and already privileged demographic. Furthermore, techno-solutionism and digitization are widely employed in border policing, war, and migration, with states justifying their deployment of these surveillance and violent technologies through claims that they increase efficiency and accuracy, despite widespread evidence to the contrary (McGregor and Molnar, 2023; Broeders, 2007). Contemporary techno-social digital systems and algorithms commonly foregrounded do not reflect the diversity of human existence; however, digital practitioners are appropriating digital tools and technologies in increasingly innovative ways, discovering creative and unique methods of digital resistance, examples of which are outlined in this Research Topic. This Research Topic draws on the existing groundwork of the Full Stack Feminism in Digital Humanities (FSFDH) research project (https://fullstackfeminismdh.pubpub.org/), funded by UKRI-AHRC and the Irish Research Council under the "UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Research Grants Call" (grant numbers AH/W001667/1 and IRC/W001667/1).

The Research Topic *Feminist fabulations in algorithmic empires* seeks to recognize and explore cultural methods of survival and resistance within existing biased, market-driven digital empires. Most notably, Hartman (2008) offered the term "critical fabulation" in her article "Venus in Two Acts" with reference to a critical reading of the archive that seeks "to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling" (Hartman, 2008). Fabulation refers to the way we tell stories and it has recently re-emerged as a useful concept with which to re-emphasize and recenter human multiplicities within contemporary technocentric digital systems. Prioritizing storytelling and embodiment helps to disrupt dominant perspectives, histories, technologies, and practices. For example, the term "provenancial fabulation" serves to "decenter 'the archival gaze,'" which is understood to be white, cis, powerful, and male (Lapp, 2021, p. 120), challenging notions of "singular, central creator bodies—to instead account for difference, contention, and the entangled nature of feminist lives and histories" (ibid.). This kind of pluralistic and fluid framing cultivates positions that focus on the ways in which digitally-mediated storytelling can be a mode of challenging biases that manifest at all levels of the development and

data life cycle of digital technologies—from design to implementation, from processes of datafication to dissemination, and from the machine code right to the infrastructure layers above—and that are reflective of wider societal injustices and inequalities.

For example, the study by Hill, Speculative Black Feminist Epistemologies of Worlding Building for XR looks beyond Cartesian models and understandings of space for XR to invoke methods of storytelling. Hill suggests unrestricted modes of world mapping for Black female bodies that would not be possible in real life. Here we see the virtual realm offering us potential for more freeing virtual embodiments, which have previously only been explored in linear stories.

In "Feminist HCI and narratives of design semantics in DIY music hardware," Jawad and Xambó Sedó examine DIY musical instruments created by women builders. Jawad and Xambó Sedó's explorations uncover a unique mode of storytelling that emerges in the process of instrument building when incorporating a Feminist HCI approach.

In the article entitled "Algorithmic Agency and Instagram Content Moderation: #IWantToSeeNyome," Willcox examines how human and algorithmic content moderation conspire to limit the agency of Instagram content creators, particularly those with non-normative body types, such as Black, fat or queer. Willcox's article uses the social media campaign, #IWantToSeeNymone, as a case study to explore affective responses to the moderation of the content created by such marginalized online influencers.

Shukla explores the interplay of power and politics in AI systems and argues for the use of hermeneutic reverse engineering as a framework for critical analysis in her article, "Investigating AI Systems: Examining Data and Algorithmic Bias Through Hermeneutic Reverse Engineering."

In the study "I'd rather be a cyborg than a celebrity: Black feminism in the digital music industry" Carmichael-Murphy elucidates, through Haraway's (1991) cyborg concept, how Black feminist artists appeal to technological embodiment in order to untangle the idea of celebrity. The limits therein offer possibilities for the creation of both assuming and subverting the notion of celebrity in response to "intersecting oppressions."

The contribution by Putnam "On (not) becoming machine: countering algorithmic thinking through digital performance art" is an auto-ethnographic reflection on her artwork, *Ghost Work* (2023) and *Friction* (2023). She sets the algorithm in motion to unravel its poetic affordances for the creation of "feminist fabulations." In her piece, Putnam unpacks "data colonialism" and works toward "alternative logics" that encourage maintaining rather than solving conflicting affective responses at the receiving end.

In "Reanimating Feminist Archives: Ethics and Praxis at the interstices of ethics" Webb et al.'s work at the intersection of ethics, "rematriation" and language, addresses the ethics of care and risk involved in reanimating feminist archives. For these feminist scholars, reanimation is not a mere quick technical exercise for preserving the past. Rather, it involves a "slowing down" that brings to life buried voices, knowledge, and ontologies, enabling them to speak to us and with us.

In "DIY academic archiving: mischievous disruptions of a new counter-movement," Karels et al. challenge the unproductive curatorial practices in research governance and the norms of either destroying data or making it "open," which is "often not open enough." What Karels et al. call "DIY archiving" calls for a productive "politics of refusal" in which coding is exploited as a subversive, mischievous and playful mechanism that ensures the "care-full risk" of curating qualitative social science research.

In "Feminist Fabulations as 'Fighting Back,'" Hickey-Moody and Wilcox position digital feminist fabulation as radical creativity for collective transformation. They look at the work of Christine Yahya (@pink_bits), a bisexual, feminist artist and graphic designer living and working in Sydney, Australia. Christine Yaha's work offers diverse perspectives on the non-normative world and can be seen as a practice of feminist digital fabulation. In Yaha's work, shadowbanning and content removal have led to a process of feminist fabulation, as they take content reduction as a call to create images that trouble regulatory boundaries.

The Frontiers in Communication *Feminist fabulations in algorithmic empires* Research Topic serves as a minor intervention to the growing body of timely and vital scholarship in the fields of intersectional feminist digital humanities; critical DH, AI and data studies, and decolonial digital and archival practices, along with movements and projects such as the Distributed AI Institute (DAIR), the Design Justice network, Tech for Palestine, the Algorithmic Justice League, and Data Feminism, among others. This Research Topic will form part of the Full Stack Feminism in Digital Humanities toolkit of digital resources, which also includes other critical reflections, frameworks for analysis, and an archive, in addition to practical guides for employing intersectional feminist research and methods in DH.

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JN: Project administration, Resources, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. AK: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. IF: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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