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# COUNTER-GAMIFICATION: EMERGING TACTICS AND PRACTICES AGAINST THE RULE OF NUMBERS

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*by* Daphne Dragona

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media are ruled by numbers. Counts of friends and followers, scores of “likes”, views, and shares play a central role in defining what is on view and what is not, in a constantly evolving info stream. As every move is measured and every post awaits feedback, a particular ground for action is being set up. Images, links, videos, and thoughts constantly compete with each other for attention. The number of friends a user has, the time he chooses to upload a post, and the number of responses she or he gets are all decisive for her or his online presence. The social media world is a competitive world with scores dependent on networks’ algorithms on one hand and on users’ promptness and virtuosity on the other; it is part of a new gameful reality, which – based on machinic modes of counting – continuously tracks and processes networked human moves and interactions.

But is this then a new form of a gamespace? As users constantly consider what their next “move” should be while checking the scores of others, they very much seem to be acting like players. But what looks like a game is actually not such. It is rather the ultimate convergence of the real world with the online realm where real data is being used in a new peculiar game

system (Dragona 2014, 98). What happens in the web is one of the many facets of the phenomenon of gamification which opens the way not only to opportunities for gameful interaction, but also to new modes of exploitation, capitalisation, and control. As McKenzie Wark puts it, there seems to be “a sort of enclosure of the world” within what he famously called “gamespace”, “where the logics of the game become the general patterns of organization”. And this happens thanks to the contemporary game like media, “the allegories of our times” (Wark 2013a).

## 2 THE EMERGENCE OF GAMIFICATION

Gamification can be described as a trend (Gartner, Inc. 2013), a buzzword (Kumar 2013, 528), a method (de Neef 2013, 4), a process (Huotari and Hamari 2012, 19; Zicherman and Linder 2013, xii), or a strategy (Pradeep Kumar and Addagada 2013, 47). It relates to a vast array of activities to which game features are added, assigning a gameful character to people’s daily rhythm. Nowadays, for instance, someone could compete with his friends while jogging using Nike+ Running App (2006), gain or lose points while following a diet on Lose It! (2011), create a more engaging website with Bunchball, form a more productive work environment with Gameffective, and learn some new foreign language with Duolingo (2011). These are only some of the known gamification platforms that allow the inclusion of badges, points, progress bars, and leaderboards in non-game environments with the aim to challenge people to continuously improve their performance and to compete for better outcomes.

Described as “the application of a game layer on top of the world” (Priebatsch 2010), “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al 2011) or “the penetration of our society with methods, metaphors, values and attributes of games” (Fuchs 2012), gamification seems to have made an appearance which cannot be ignored, highlighting a new era for the role of games in culture and society. Although the idea behind gamification is not new – in certain areas, like the military or education, the use of game elements was always present – what happens today is something ultimately different as it also becomes clear from the controversies and discussions about it.

Gamification’s origins are not to be found necessarily in games. Even though the word itself appeared back in 1980 when Richard Bartle named

*see also*  
*Fuchs*  
*p. 119–140*

gamification the process of “turning something that is not a game into a game” (Werbach and Hunter 2012, 25), the term only started being used in 2010 after it was reintroduced by the technology company Bunchball as a new form of game-based marketing strategy (Ionifides 2012, 8). According to the company, game mechanics and dynamics started then being introduced into a “site, service, community, content or campaign”, in order to “drive participation”, to “teach, motivate and persuade people” (Bunchball 2010), or else as Zichermann and Linder put it, “to serve business purposes” (2010, 20). For this reason, gamification was confronted with hesitation by scholars mainly from the game studies field doubting its aims and values. Ian Bogost has referred to gamification as “exploitationware”, purposefully recalling practices of software fraud such as malware or adware (Bogost 2011). Chaplin described it as a “tactic employed by repressive authoritarian regimes” (2011) while Chorney argues that gamification “pacifies” players in order to generate revenue (2012, 9), and Man similarly claims that “value is created for the corporations while its citizens are playing games and kept happy” (2011). At the same time, its very connection to the world of games has been negated. Several scholars have claimed that gamification actually uses the least important element of games (Robertson 2010, Bogost 2011) in order exactly to invite the user to behave like being in a game (de Neef 2013, 4), and become more active, engaged, and motivated. For this reason, gamification was ironically characterised as “pointsification” by Robertson while it has also been argued that the fiction, ambiguity, and uncertainty found in games are also purposefully absent (Roberson 2010; Bogost 2011; Mosca 2012). But this is how it is perhaps meant to be as, according to Huotari and Hamari, the goal of the process is no other but to support the overall value creation by the users themselves. And this is done simply by offering to them affordances for gameful experiences (Huotari and Hamari 2012).

On the other hand and taking into consideration this line of thought, several game developers and games enthusiasts have asserted that, if used properly, game elements can still become an integral and positive part of life. In particular, it has been argued that gamification can be “smart”, creating compelling experiences (Kin 2011), or “meaningful” by offering inner motivations, developing engaging habits, and taking into consideration users’ needs and goals (Nicholson 2013, Rapp 2013). It might not need to follow the marketing strategy necessarily, but rather one of gameful design, which

pays attention to positive emotions, and purposes, which can ultimately bring changes to daily life (McGonigal 2011).

As it becomes clear, the spectrum of the gamification discourse is wide and so are its applications and uses, which might or might not be directly connected to the market. What all sides agree on, however, is the fact that the whole process did not appear unexpectedly. It rather followed what Raessens has framed as the “ludification” of culture, which emerged with the rapid development in the fields of computer games, mobile telecommunications, and the Internet (2006, 52). The serious and persuasive games, the pervasive and alternate games, as well as the use of games as services have all been aspects of this continuum, which set the stage for gamification to appear along with new possibilities offered by constant connectivity and availability of mobile devices. However, what was still unclear when ludification just became apparent was the direction that would be followed given the ambiguity of the term itself. Would it mean “an increase of playful activities” or rather a “transformation of perspective” using “play as a metaphor” for entities and domains that might not be necessarily playful (Frissen, de Mul and Raessens 2013, 82)? Ludification was an outcome not only of the adoption of a game logic penetrating different sectors of life, but also of the playfulness that these technologies encouraged. And what one could confidently now argue is that society was gamified at times when the lusory attitude, that is the game-like attitude according to Bernard Suits’ term, was on a high level (Fuchs 2012). This gameful shift in the behaviour and the perception of the many seems to have been a precondition for today’s gamified world.

### **3 GAMIFICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media entered gamification after a quite discrete period of ludification. It is actually possible, as it will be explained in this section, to even refer to a *gamified* and a *ludified* web, which respectively followed the early – now almost forgotten – playful web of the 90s.

Since the appearance of the social web in the middle of the previous decade, social networking platforms were based on technological structures which embraced different game and play elements, encouraging users to have a lusory attitude when interacting within them. One can recall, for example, the period when YouTube had a star voting system for videos, MySpace had a top friends rank, and Facebook offered its users the possibility to send vir-

tual gifts to each other. The two spaces of social networks and games seemed back then to actually have quite a lot in common. Based on voluntary participation, encouraging sociability, allowing users to play with their identities, and providing a particular context of action, social networking platforms just like games were inviting users to bring in their disposal and skills in order to freely interact with others.

The passage from ludification to gamification happened when certain elements started becoming apparent. These included the introduction of progress bars in users' profiles, the addition of social buttons (e.g. the *like*, *share*, or *check-in* button) enabling measurement on users' posts and interactions, the connection of various external gamification applications to social networking platforms to (e.g. Nike+; Starbucks reward card, 2014), and the emergence of social games especially designed to be played within social networks. The ludified space of the web was now being formed into a new, gamified one, not only because of the already game-like attitude of the users within it, but mostly because the web's development greatly enabled this change and this can possibly be associated to the following two aspects:

First, when the above elements appeared, at the end of the previous decade, the numbers of users and respectively of friends' networks on social networking sites had significantly augmented. As networks are systems, just like games, this meant that a great territory was opening up that could possibly accelerate and intensify interaction. And what could have been more convenient for social media companies than to use growing active and vivid systems to apply a strategy like gamification? If, as Salen and Zimmerman have argued, games can be defined as "systems in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in quantifiable outcome" (2004, 80), then one easily realises that all gamification needed was the construction of this artificial conflict in order to bring about quantifiable outcomes that would prove to be especially useful for the networks.

Second, gamification reached users in the era of a data-driven economy and culture, when new forms of measurement, capitalisation, and valorisation started to emerge. The social media are, of course, a great resource of data. As users constantly exchange information within them, an amazing wealth of data is collected, analysed and re-organised. This "datafication", as Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier name the process (2013, 73), not coincidentally, emerged at the same time as gamification, and the two of them, as

will be explained further below, serve and support one another. And it is not only companies and governments that are interested in the power of data. It is the very users themselves that are becoming more and more dependent on emerging forms of measurements and data structures. Phenomena such as the “quantified self/self knowledge by numbers” movement need to be taken into consideration in order to realise that a new trend and a new way of thinking now exist which see self improvement in the continuous self tracking of everything.

To conclude this point, it could therefore be argued that the earlier game-like or else ludified social networks were developed into gamified systems thanks to the very structure of the networks, the wealth of data circulating within them, and the lusory attitude of users, which was strengthened with the growing importance of online scores and numbers. While the emergence and application of gamification in the case of social networking sites might seem “light” compared to other gamified contexts, it is of a special interest as it can greatly capture the reasons that made this overall process feasible, while also revealing its goals and outcomes.

#### **4 FROM LUDIFICATION TO GAMIFICATION: LOCATING THE CHANGES OF THE TRANSITION**

In the section that follows, the transition from ludification to gamification is discussed, locating the game elements being introduced on one hand and the way users are being affected on the other. The changes are presented through different examples in relation to a) the online profile, b) the network of friends, and c) users’ networked interactions within the urban environment.

##### **4.1 The Gamified Profile**

When web 2.0 emerged, a user’s online profile very much resembled an online avatar. The way users choose images and attributed features to their profiles was not far from the process of identity-building for the characters of the online gaming worlds. Identities were often re-invented and the networked spaces seemed open to diversity and multiplicity. Many profiles on Friendster or MySpace were fictional and playful, and the social network seemed to be a new stage for social interaction and identity performance. As has been explained by different scholars, new, disembodied, mediated, and controllable spaces were offered where users could actually create their

own staging and setting for performances based on their social and affective needs and skills (Cover 2012; boyd 2006; Pearson 2009).

With the empowerment of subsequent social networking platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google+, however, and especially with the appearance of status updates, progress bars, and social buttons, a different form of gameful interaction appeared. The online self started more and more to be fed by data and numbers; it became measurable and started resembling a Sims character or a Tamagotchi toy that needed to be taken care of in order to remain “alive” (Dragona 2014, 101). If no new data was given, the online identity might be forgotten and be off the stage. And this is how, unavoidably, a shift occurred. A user-generated gamified data body replaced the playful performative online identity and gave way to a stronger connection to reality and to the logging of more data on the networks’ databases.

## **4.2 The Gamified Network of Friends**

For many users, the network of friends on a social networking site is their informal daily audience. As boyd puts it, it was the actual collection of friends that provided space for people to engage in identity performance (2006). It needs, however, to be taken into consideration that the number of friends for an average user in the early days of social media was much smaller compared to today, reflecting only a sample of a person’s real-life friends and acquaintances. Some of the networks were presenting a high ranking of friends, chosen by the user as the “top ones”, and in general a high number of connections was not necessarily seen positively. The ones with superficial friends were often called names, and in the case of Friendster they have even been called “whores”, as Donath and boyd write (2004, 80).

As the number of users in social media significantly increased, the importance of friends for an online profile changed. Not only did it become indicative for a user’s real or fictitious sociability, it also started playing a decisive role for her or his overall score of influence. Within this context, aggregating platforms such as Klout or Proskore appeared, developed especially with the aim to measure users’ influence and to assist them in improving their score. This brought about a new form of exponential growth of social capital for the networks and a new kind of alienation for the users, an alienation from their own data. At the same time, a new class of friends appeared, the “high quality” ones as Andrejevic calls them (2011), describing

as such the people of special interest, the influential nodes of the networks, that users connect to in order to raise their social or professional status. As for the “top friends”, they were replaced – for instance on Facebook – by the friends the user interacts with the most, depicted automatically by the network’s algorithm. The new scores therefore brought along not only different metrics of power and status, but also different metrics of friendship.

### **4.3 Gamified Urban Interactions**

Location-based social networking services were designed with the aim to facilitate users’ communication and especially coordination in the urban space. Just like on standard social networking sites, early location-based ones like DodgeBall offered opportunities not only for sociability in the physical space, but also for identity performance and “cataloguing” according to their preferences and tastes (Humphreys 2007, 355). Users were associating themselves with venues and were meeting up with friends, but as they were using an SMS-based system – in the case of DodgeBall – check-ins and shouts were “manual” and regulated by them. Game elements were therefore hardly present while at the same time a different field, location-based games, was emerging, highlighting the potentiality of gaming on the streets of a city.

In the era of datafication, things changed. When urban interactions became traceable and quantified, new game-like experiences became apparent. The map became a territory for exploration, socialisation, and gameful interaction, as users’ moves and preferences became connected to check-ins, badges, rewards, and leaderboards. In platforms like Foursquare (2009), city inhabitants were now offered moments of sharing, meeting up, and playing, but interactions were no longer regulated by the users; even if the venues were created by the users “manually”, they would in any case be datafied. Either used to locate friends, to express themselves, or to play with others (Cramer, Rost and Holmquist 2011), in all cases a wealth of geo-locative data and metadata was generated within these networks, without users really being aware of it. It seems like people were being challenged and rewarded to explore the city and be social – if we follow McGonigal’s (2011) line of thought – but in reality, more data was becoming vulnerable to exploitation and control.

## 5 SITUATING THE OUTCOMES AND OVERALL IMPACT

When discussing the gamification of the online self, online sociability, or mediated city interaction, one thing becomes clear. It is the users' data that is at stake and the mechanisms of gamification have come to facilitate access by the networks and other third parties to this very data. Social media networks sit "on an enormous treasure chest of datafied information that, once analysed, will shed light on social dynamics at all levels", Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier clarify (2013, 94). The question, however, is at what cost. On social networking sites, as Andrejevic frames it, "every image we write, every video we post, every item we buy or view, our time-space paths and patterns of social interaction all become data points in algorithms for sorting, predicting and managing our behaviour" (Andrejevic 2010). And if our networked algorithmic culture has already entered this path, the introduction of game elements makes particular processes connected to data collection, organisation, and analysis easier today. These processes could briefly be described as follows:

First, gamification assists in narrowing identity down to identification. As de Lange specifically argues, online social media platforms are coded spaces that define users by their personal taste and attributes (2010, 172). The inclusion of progress bars, the standardised questions, and the rapid flow of status updates demand information, which needs to be real and often updated. The user-generated data bodies created are based on one hand on the personal data the users willingly fill in – such as their date of birth, their relationship status, their religious views, etc. – and on the other on the information they provide regarding their interests and preferences. From this perspective, game mechanics assist in the formation of what Richard Rogers calls "post-demographics", that is the demographics which are being shaped by online profiles based on joined groups, accepted invitations, and installed apps, and not on race, ethnicity, age, income, and educational level, like the traditional ones (Rogers 2009, 30).

Second, gamification succeeds in applying new forms of *measurement* and *capitalisation*. Gerlitz and Helmond particularly discuss how data and numbers today have gained performative and productive capacities, how "they can generate user affects, enact more activities, and thus multiply themselves" (2013, 13). Different forms of affective responses are translated as "likes". They become productive while also opening the way to

advertisements, merely through their placement on web pages. Additionally, Evans specifically explains how a giant resource is formed for platforms like Foursquare by the check-ins of the users, who are not only checking in somewhere, but also work for the particular places, creating the entries themselves (Evans 2013, 196). And finally, at this point, one should not forget that that it is not only data, but also metadata which are constantly generated. Data's value does not diminish. On the contrary it can be processed and again constitute an open resource for the future (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2013, 101).

Third, taking into consideration the aforementioned points, as identities are logged and behaviours can be predicted, processes of *homogenisation* and *normalisation* are also facilitated. As Grosser argues, "the more one's personal details are shared with the world, the harder it is to retrieve or change them without others noticing [...]" (2011). Accordingly, Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier note that "measure leaves little room for change in a person's life" (2013, 167). Being limited to lists of shares and likes, users learn to

***What options are users left with to oppose gamification, when quantification governs an increasing part of their lives?***

"cycle through trends" (Dean 2013, 137). Online friendships are based on sameness, while datafied and gamified urban interactions accordingly seem to be limiting unexpected encounters and spontaneous city exploration (Dragona 2011). In the social media world, as Dean argues, in the era of post-disciplinary societies, there are no more normative expectations or institutional norms imposed by the school, the church, or the family (ibid.). The new norm is now rather defined by an audience, a network of users one feels that she or he presents oneself to. And this is unavoidably dependent on metrics, algorithms, and social software.

Gamification came in at a time when "software is the invisible glue that ties it all together" (Manovich 2013, 8), when it is software that "regulates and disciplines" (Kitchin and Dodge 2011, 133). Within this context, little possibility for any counter-action seemed to be an option. After all, this can only be possible "if an application's underlying calculative algorithms and communicative protocols are encoded to support such actions" (ibid.). So what options are today's users left with? Does data govern an increasing part of their reality? To what extent are current game-like structures responsible

for pacifying citizens? Gamification is the mode, the way used to enable exploitation and control. Networks can rule “through freedom” (Rose in Arvidsson 2007) while users might not even realise that they are playing by the rules of a gamified system. They might be in a state of unaware gaming, as Fuchs puts it, recalling Montola and Waern (Fuchs 2012).

Game mechanics therefore appear to have assisted the formation of new contemporary apparatuses, of mechanisms that have the capacity “to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings”, to follow Agamben’s definition (2009, 14). They came to contribute to the process of datafication and to facilitate the sovereignty of algorithmic control. With game elements that might not be directly perceived as such – as there are often no leaderboards, no winners and losers – and with the application of rules and modes of control, which in networks are “light” and “soft” (Terranova 2004, 100) – as users are never told how data is collected and processed and for whom – gamification in the case of the social networking sites is a practice that goes hand in hand with the market’s practices and interests.

## **6 DEFINING AND LOCATING COUNTER-GAMIFICATION**

Is the current gamified condition irreversible? Enabling processes of identification, capitalisation, and normalisation, play became “functional” (Wark 2013a), rendering personal information traceable, social relationships exploitable, and behavioural patterns recognisable as expected in a progressively datafying world. And like it is often said in relation to different fields of the post-fordist society, there seems to be no outside. These processes cannot be undone; they can only progressively be developed into something else, possibly more controlled and centralised. danah boyd, when discussing the future of gamification, argues that it will seep into even more aspects of life without people even acknowledging it (Anderson and Rainie 2012, 15). Susan Crawford, on the other hand, disagrees; “[. . .] there have to be ways to explore, invent, create, and avoid – it can’t be that we’ll be adding up points for every salient element of our lives”, she says (Crawford in *ibid.*, 16). But which are these ways? How can the processes of gamification and datafication be disrupted or rendered non-valid or non-reliable? How can the expropriation of users’ data based on the new mechanisms of capturing

and quantifying stop? How can users be empowered? Do such modes of resistance exist and how would a notion like counter-gamification be defined?

Etymologically, the prefix *counter* denotes opposition, retaliation, or rivalry. It has been used by philosophers and scholars in order to express different forms of resistance, highlighting the importance of the power to against the power over. Gilles Deleuze introduced the term “counter-actualisation” to describe the possibility of one becoming the actor of her own events (1999, 155, 161) while Hardt and Negri have framed as “counter-empire” the potentiality of multitude for resistance (2000). Respectively, addressing resistance within the networks, Castells names as “counterpower” the possibility – lying in collective action – to introduce new codes or to alter the existing codes (2009, 38) while Galloway and Thacker argue that counterprotocological practices can be found when power differentials within the system are located and exploited (2007, 13). But, interestingly, it is Agamben’s approach on the “counter-apparatus” which seems to be of special interest when addressing resistance within gamified and datafied systems. Opposition against mechanisms of power equals de-activation or profanation for Agamben, and this property can only be found in the element of play. Apparatuses need to be played, he claims, in order to not only abolish and erase the separations existing within them, but also to reverse and change their use (Agamben 2009).

So what if ultimately the network needs to be played, as Dmytri Kleiner impulsively also argued when discussing forms of resistance at the Transmediale festival in Berlin in 2013? What if the current gamespace – that is the ways with which data regulate today’s world – can be redesigned as Wark also suggests, through play (2013a)? This does not mean that play itself can become a form of resistance; it cannot be. But if elements of game can facilitate exploitation, capitalisation, and control, on this same ground elements of play can assist in activating mechanisms of counter-gamification, revealing the functioning of network structures and raising awareness.

Such an approach brings of course the old battle between *game* and *play*, between *ludus* and *paidia* as Caillois famously addressed the two notions as two opposing poles (2001, 13), back to the foreground while at the same time offering an opportunity for their redefinition and a re-framing of their use in present time. With one word, this could be framed ambiguously as *datenspiel* in German, and be translated as the *game* of data, but also play-

ing with *data* or else *dataplay* in English. And while the game of data refers to a new form of infinite and asymmetrical game algorithmically controlled, *dataplay* comes to express the potentiality of resistance against the rule of numbers and the power of the algorithm.

The fact that there is no outside does not mean that there is no room to move within the structures of the networks. One only needs to imagine the “emerging gaps and cracks”, as Wark says; good play is still possible when the “internal tensions, ambiguities and possibilities within systems” are discovered: “The time for the hack or the exploit is at hand” (Wark 2013b).

Counter-gamification therefore can be described as a form of opposition to the increasing use of game elements within non-game systems, which aims to disrupt the processing and exploitation of users’ data; it calls for a gaming with the system, for a disruptive play with its rules and content while being within it. For this reason, this form of resistance seems to be very close to hacking. Its actors might be artists, programmers, and very often skilful users who purposefully apply rules in unexpected ways, ignoring and surpassing the ones imposed by the platforms. They know that there might be no outside and no undoing. They know that there is no winning and losing in these systems. But they do move towards a changing and a re-designing of the system. They are the ones that Jan Rune Holmevick calls “electrate” inventors, as contemporary bricoleurs that use ad hoc strategies while also building a discourse around them (2012, 2–5, 23–25). Perhaps they could rather be addressed as “critical engineers” instead of artists (Oliver, Savicic and Vasiliev 2011). But at the same time, one can not ignore that they are equally connected to a long tradition of art based on “dismeasure” and “disproportion” (Virno 2012), on a revolt “against the rule of the number” (Caffetzis 2005, 100), confronting enclosures, commodification, and capitalism.

In the following section, different practices and tactics are discussed as acts of creative and playful opposition which aim to stop, confuse, subvert, or change the processes of gamification in order to enhance users’ understanding and empower resistance. An attempt for their categorisation is made following different strategies that have been developed by various scholars.

## 6.1 Obfuscation

Obfuscation is a term introduced by Helen Nissenbaum and Finn Brunton, used to describe a form of vernacular resistance, which is based on the idea of providing misleading, false, or ambiguous data in order to make data gathering less reliable and therefore less valuable. As a counter-logic, it is proposed as an ad hoc strategy, a weapon for the weak, a practice potentially beyond moral codes with the mission to protect the privacy of the individual. Some well-known examples the writers refer to are Tor, TrackMeNot, and Facecloack (Brunton and Nissenbaum 2011). Turning to events and projects initiated by creators, it is worth mentioning the CryptoParties that invite users to learn how to defend their right to anonymity, pseudonymity, and privacy, or the work conducted by the Unlike Us network and particularly the *Unlike Art* project (2012). Playful and humorous extensions have been developed such as the *John Smith Extension*, for example, which transforms any users in Facebook and Google+ to John Smith, the most common name in the social media.

## 6.2 Overidentification

Overidentification is a form of resistance based on the appropriation of the sovereign ideology in order to criticise it. It is an aesthetic strategy that was initiated first back in the late 80s by the band Laibach and the art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst in Ljubljana (Pasquinelli 2010). Slavoj Žižek has explained how the particular practice, or rather in this case strategy, “frustrates” the system not as its ironic imitation, but rather by over-identifying with it, by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system (Žižek 1999).

In social networking platforms, creators have often used similar tactics of appropriation to oppose the system in an ironic way. Such an example is the work of the artist Tobias Leingruber. In February 2012, he set up a *Social ID Bureau* in Berlin, which would print Facebook ID cards for people interested in it. Setting up a fake office, appropriating the aesthetics of Facebook for the production of the card, and playing himself the Facebook person, the artist purposefully identified with the sovereign network, in order to underline the power of control it possesses and imply its connection to any government and third parties with interests.

### 6.3 Desertion – Exodus

Desertion, connected to exodus and nomadism, stands for the evacuation of places of power. Hardt and Negri have defined desertion as a contemporary form of resistance, which followed sabotage that was an act of opposition for the disciplinary society (2000, 212), whereas Galloway and Thacker, going even further, see it as resistive act for the future, which will follow what subversion was for the society of control (2007, 101). The challenge is one of “existence without representation” (ibid., 138). In times when everything can be aggregated and measured, an act of desertion signifies leaving a space of control.

Two famous applications that can be related to this act were *Seppukoo* by Les Liens Invisibles and *Web 2.0 Suicide Machine* by Moddr, which coincidentally developed similar software at the same time in 2009 enabling users to delete their accounts from social networking sites. Gathering testimonials from the suiciders and – especially in the case of *Seppukoo* – encouraging competition among them, the creators of both platforms playfully introduced the idea of an online suicide as a social experience that can ultimately free users and their data. It is important to note that the two projects were initiated in a period when Facebook users were only able to de-activate and not to delete their accounts. Following the appearance of such projects and users’ demands, the option for users to delete an account and consequently their data was added.

### 6.4 Hypertrophy

In this case “the goal is not to destroy technology in some neo-Luddite delusion but to push technology into a hypertrophic state”, Galloway and Thacker explain, while introducing a notion of resistance that actually encourages acts of mismeasurement (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 98). “Allowing to be measured now and again for false behaviours, thereby attracting incongruent and ineffective control responses, can’t hurt”, they clarify (ibid., 136). Sean Dockray, in his *Suicide Facebook (Bomb) Manifesto*, similarly writes: “If we really want to fight the system we should drown it in data, we should catch as many viruses as possible; click on as many Like buttons as possible; join as many groups as possible; request as many friends as possible [ . . . ] Become a machine for platforms and engines” (Dockray 2010).

On Facebook, users have been playing with tagging and linking from the start in order to confuse the system and to break the productivity chain for the profit of the market. On Foursquare also, users have been found acting similarly when they repeatedly check-in into their home for instance, or when they name uncommon check-in places and therefore confuse the system (Cramer et al. 2011). Artist and researcher Benjamin Grosser, however, went a step further. He created *Reload the Love* (2011), a project that automatically and fictitiously inflates the notification numbers of a user's profile, playing with the value lying behind them for the user and for the network.

### **6.5 Exposure of Game Mechanics**

Another tactic embraced by creators is the exposure of the gamefulness of the system. In this case, the game mechanics and dynamics involved are being appropriated and used in a new context, possibly a platform, a game, or an application. Such projects do not have as a goal to over-identify with the networks, but rather to imitate and ultimately reveal their game-like structures, highlighting the impact they have on users' behaviour.

An early example of this direction is the *Folded-In* game by Personal Cinema & the Erasers, created in 2008. Based on YouTube video wars, *Folded-In* highlighted the rating system of the videos and the competitiveness found within the popular video platform. A more recent example is Ian Bogost's *Cow Clicker* (2010), an application developed for Facebook, which invited people to click on a Farmville-like cow every six hours, simply to gain more clicks. Commenting on social games, clicktivism, and the monetisation of simple game-like interactions, Bogost made a successful satire about the "numerical socialization", as he says, of our times (Dragona 2012).

### **6.6 De-Gamification**

De-gamification is a term introduced by Margaret Robertson in her critique of gamification where she argues that the latter unavoidably also means the former. For her, when fictional elements of games vanish, the game itself also vanishes (Robertson 2010). But, interestingly, this idea can also equally express the negation of gamification, the will that is to remove the game mechanics and dynamics added. Such is the position of game designer Holly Gramazio, who supports the idea of removing points, leaderboards, and

game elements added to non-game contexts, that force people to be competitive in game-like contexts (2010).

The *Facebook Demetricator* (2012) is a project that seems to be embracing Gramazio's logic. It is a web browser extension by Benjamin Grosser that removes all metrics from the platform connected to a user's performance and sociability. The demetricator invites people to experience how a non-quantified reality may be, how motivations and interests would change, and respectively how the market could be affected. The demetricator therefore both de-gamifies and de-datafies, one could say.

## 6.7 Re-Appropriation / Devaluation

This category is proposed to be included as one that can reflect practices and tactics embraced by creators who wish to render the algorithmic processes and the network structures visible and understandable to the users. If gamification works by applying game elements on datafied social networking platforms and by facilitating the processing of data, this practice is rather a form of reverse engineering. It invites people to get involved in networks' obscure mechanisms and become aware of how data is really used.

Such examples are the following projects. *Commodify.us* (2012) allows users to export their data from the social media, to view them, inspect their contents, and create a new account where their data is verified and anonymised. They are invited to explore and understand how their information looks to "potential licensors" of data and social media companies while also deciding how to license their data and leverage their monetary and creative potential. A similar approach is followed by the creators of the *Data Dealer* (Averintsev et al. 2013) game, which allows users to become data vendors and "build up their assets by trading in personal information", capturing the entire population in a database.

## 7 CLOSING THOUGHTS

"Gamification is the latest and most sophisticated strategy of the vectoral class, its aim being on one hand to manage networks and extracting data on the other", Wark (2013c, 74) writes in a single phrase summarising the main arguments behind gamification critique and highlighting the differentiations of power between those who own the means of producing and valorising information and the ones, the users that is, who produce data. Locating and

quantifying relationships, interests, and desires, gamification does indeed seem to be market's current weapon of choice as it greatly facilitates processes of identification, capitalisation, and normalisation. But what about the intentions, the effects, values, virtues, and aspirations lying behind these processes, one could ask. When discussing the impact of phenomena such as gamification, we should also consider those elements, as Sebastian Deterding (2012) argues. If game mechanics are only brought in to serve the market, what is left for the users? And how perceivable is this profound asymmetry? Aiming to highlight the urge for critical awareness and understanding, the paper presented different practices and tactics developed today by creators who wish to render control impossible, to re-appropriate content and disrupt the strategy of gamification. Empowering cryptography, embracing anonymity or pseudonymity, exposing networks structures and functions while also impeding metrics and building awareness, the aforementioned examples can be considered as emerging modes of counter-gamification, which play with the data and the networks' rules. Perhaps they are "allusions" – a notion political philosopher Paolo Virno (2012) uses to refer to contemporary forms of disobedience – in relation to what real resistance could be. But yet their existence is crucial as they highlight the potentiality users have to act and think differently while being within the gamified contexts. Changes can happen when dynamic elements, which are playful – rather than gameful – are introduced in order to disrupt predicted expectations and reinforce free movement within networked systems.

Despite the increasing datafication, gamification, and capitalisation of our times, there is always something that cannot be captured, which is yet to come. "The spark of invention becomes what the data does not say. This is something that no amount of data can ever confirm or corroborate since it has yet to exist", as Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier write (2013, 196). The excess, uncertainty, and potentiality for change are the elements that can be found within what can be defined as counter-gamification today. And possibly its creators – whether they are artists, programmers, or skilful users – are the "datapunks" that Wark claims we are in need of (2013d); the ones that, while playing "from within", will discover the gamespace's "internal tensions, ambiguities and possibilities" and possibly "redesign" it beyond systems of control (ibid.).

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