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## Facebook for Facebook's Sake: An Aesthetic Usage

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### Abstract

The affective labour debate has become mainstream in communications studies. In this paper, I suggest the Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century as inspiration for how users can use Facebook with the knowledge that their data is being used for profit. I present Facebook usage as art, creating an analog with aesthete Oscar Wilde's essay, "the critic as artist" (1891/2010), where he presents critics as artists. Other theorists, especially Walter Benjamin provide grounding for making the argument that Facebook usage is an artistic expression. I then turn to my inversion of Walter Pater's "art for art's sake", the seminal idea of Aestheticism and propose *Facebook for Facebook's sake* as a method for Facebook use. While more advanced remuneration concepts have yet to arrive with such force that they could provide the proper payment to users, Facebook for its own sake is a way to appreciate Facebook's beauty in the meantime. Baudelaire and Debord's psychogeographic theories provide methods for navigating cities that I apply to examine Facebook as a digital city. The central claim of this paper is the following: By using *Facebook for Facebook's sake*, users take back some of the dignity taken away from them in the exploitation of free labour. Finally, I turn to critiques of Aestheticism and how contemporary software might provide insight into using Facebook in an ethical manner. Users will have to consider each action differently; how would liking something affect users' artistic expression of themselves? In this way, while the affective labour debate continues, users can use Facebook for its own sake.

### Keywords

Facebook, political economy, Aestheticism, affective labour

### Introduction

In this paper, I am proposing a way of using Facebook that draws on the Aesthetic Movement to attempt to navigate the complex realm of dignified Facebook usage. *Facebook for Facebook's sake* is a prescription for how to use social media in an age when the ethics and politics surrounding Facebook usage are incredibly complicated. I am not contributing to the debate of what kind of work users may be doing or how their contributions should be valued (monetized value, social value, etc.). However, my ideas are predicated on the notion that social media users are exploited for some kind of value. Educated users must decide how to navigate social media in an ethical manner. The Aesthetic Movement and its theorists that emerged in the late 19th century inspire my idea of *Facebook for Facebook's sake*. This is a usage that seeks to find the least possible sacrifice of uncompensated affective labour.

## Exploitation on Social Media

Before defining what *Facebook for Facebook's sake* means, I will give a brief summary of the debate about exploitation on social media. This ongoing debate has many different proponents and I will mention only those helping to understand my argument. Wages for Facebook (Ptak, 2013) is a movement that demands wages for the perceived labour of that is Facebook usage. This is based on the idea that users are digital prosumers, namely consumers who contribute to the production process. Wages for Facebook's argument is that Facebook acquires value through its users' unpaid work. Users interact with the platform and their usage is converted into profit, a process I will describe later on.

Christian Fuchs' "Labor [sic] in informational capitalism and on the Internet" (2010), shows that large capitalist companies, like social media companies, exploit their users for profit. He draws on Dallas Smythe's "audience commodity" (2002), the idea that audiences perform marketing functions in a kind of Marxist exploitation. Every interaction on Facebook, from clicking on an ad to sending a message, gives Facebook more data from which to glean profit. Through the production and reproduction of labour, users work in a liminal space, exploited for their marketing functions while using the platform for free. Smythe and Fuchs' identification of this interaction as labour is one of the questions in this debate, but not one which I seek to answer here. Their idea that companies gain value from their users, however, is hard to contest.

Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) see value more in financial terms. Rather than a lens of Marxist labour, they adopt a lens of affective labour. Affective labour refers to immaterial labour performed online and on social media platforms (Hardt, 1999). For Arvidsson and Colleoni, the value created on platforms like Facebook is not about a commodity exchange, but about the value that Facebook derives in financial markets. To them, this is a more accurate way of thinking about the value exchange online, and presents a more accurate model of informational capitalism. As to Arvidsson, Bauwens, and Peiterson (2008), they call the kind of immaterial labour happening on sites like Facebook the ethical economy. In this economy, the immaterial labour performed online is uncompensated, creating precarious employment where unemployed or underemployed people are unpaid by the very economy they serve. Their use of the word ethical is important here: it is not that exploitation on social media is ethical, but that the word ethical emphasizes the value logic in these newer modes of production. The source of value is an ethical thing in that it relies on communities, shared values, and affective relationships.

This debate is highly complex and ongoing. From here on, I will take the stance that in some manner, Facebook acquires value from its users' actions which the users perform without financial remuneration. My response is related to this debate, but rather than finding a solution for compensating Facebook users, I refer to selected theorists that offer some instruction in how to find pleasure in artistic ventures, and in turn, can be applied to Facebook usage. By doing so, I show how users can find meaning through their technology usage and maybe take back some dignity that may be lost in their exploitation. I have chosen Facebook specifically because it has become a kind of authoritarian figure in discussions around value creation and exploitation online (Cohen, 2008). As the largest social network, it has the largest ethical economy (Arvidsson, Bauwens, and Peiterson, 2008), provides the largest communities, and a large volume of affective relationships. In brief, it is creating the largest possibilities for sharing values and ideas.

One significant way that social media usage is converted into value is through algorithms.<sup>1</sup> Mike Ananny writes about algorithms as Networked Information Algorithms (NIAs), which works for my concept because they have an ethical component. Through their situated code, practices, and norms, they facilitate relationships with people and data with their autonomous processes (Ananny, 2016).

This is a similar concept to Arvidsson, Bauwens, and Peiterson's (2008) ethics of communities, shared values, and affective relationships mentioned above. The algorithmic process Ananny describes can be seen as one element within Arvidsson, Bauwens, and Peiterson's ethical economy. My response to the "affective labour debate", as I will refer to it from now on, is an ethical response in which algorithms are viewed as ethical processes, such as those in Arvidsson, Bauwens and Peiterson's ethical economy. In this context, part of the ethical process is offering a usage where the user is sacrificing the least amount of pleasure despite Facebook's exploitative actions. The algorithms are networked because they connect different "actors" (Johnson, 1988) to every part of Facebook and the internet-at-large. Facebook's algorithms are NIAs that decide which ads to display, what comes up in News Feeds, and other functions of Facebook. Although the Facebook News Feed's algorithm is commonly referred to as EdgeRank, it has moved on from that system into a far more complicated one (McGee, 2013). Facebook's NIA uses machine learning to make its decisions based on approximately 100 000 different factors (McGee, 2013).

It would be extremely difficult to question Facebook's NIA as to why it makes certain decisions. Frank Pasquale (2015) argues that many algorithms, like the ones Facebook uses, are inherently unknowable. Machine learning creates opaque black boxes. These algorithms perform their functions and then create data which Facebook can sell for profit. Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) argue that finding ways to quantify the value from social media use would be quite difficult, and due to the opacity of the black boxes, almost impossible. Users are faced with the question of how to use Facebook knowing that their usage may be exploited for profit. I suggest looking to the Aesthetic Movement as inspiration for how Facebook might be used ethically for pleasure.

This differs from other approaches to digital labour and exploitation for a number of reasons. The idea of digital labour stems from the notion that users are, in some manner, being taken advantage of for value. Yet, the likelihood of this issue being resolved any time soon is minimal. The authors mentioned in this section write about how social media is exploitative, but solutions to this problem are difficult; answers are hard to come by. If Arvidsson and Colleoni's assumption (2012) is correct and quantifying this value is impossible, then the issue will never be resolved. Should the value somehow be quantified, then users being paid out universal dividends may be a possible solution. However, that may or may not ever happen, and does not seem likely to occur any time soon. My response to this debate is not to delete one's Facebook account or to stay off of social media sites. Rather, it is to use theories of art, urban experience, and others to find a way to use Facebook for maximum pleasure. Since the exploitation issue is unlikely to be resolved, my approach intends to help users take back some of the dignity lost in exploitation by making the most out of their experience on Facebook. Users are faced with the question of how to handle themselves knowing that their every click is being tracked (Bolin & Schwarz, 2015). Users may be exploited, but they should not let that ruin their experience. *Facebook for Facebook's sake* is inspired by the Aesthetic Movement, which I will now turn to in order to explain the meaning of this statement.

### **Social Media Use as Art**

Oscar Wilde, a prominent Aesthetic writer, wrote "the critic as artist" (1891/2010). In this essay, Wilde sought to eliminate the binaries of criticism and fine art. The essay is formatted as a dialogue, in which Wilde makes the argument that criticism is beyond reason, is subjective, and subject to analysis. For him, criticism creates order out of chaos, much like fine art. The essay changed critical theory by presenting it as an artistic form. In light of Wilde's argument, I am looking at Facebook usage as a kind of art.

Walter Benjamin's (1935/1969) writings help to make this jump. Responding to Karl Marx's idea of the superstructure, and writing about artistic labour in photography and film, Benjamin argues that as technologies change, we need to re-evaluate what constitutes art. For Benjamin, works of art like photography and film lose their auras, or unique qualities, in the way that they are reproduced. When images are reproduced, they become less about art and more about copying the original. Despite the loss of aura, to Benjamin, these are still works of art, and one can find pleasure in their reproductions.

I argue that Facebook usage has a Benjaminian aura. In many ways, Facebook use is the very definition of Benjamin's mechanical reproduction. It is reproducible and there is a way to find pleasure in it. At first glance a 'like' can be counted as an identical, quantifiable unit in a uniform way across Facebook, and in that way it is reproducible. Kylie Jarrett's (2014) response develops this better. For her, the 'like' button may be reproducible in its quantifiable unit, but what it represents is not totally reproducible. Jarrett explains that the affective relationship that surpasses the quantified data point is not reproducible and is only partly captured in the reproducible 'like'. Looking at Facebook usage as reproducible art, Jarrett's analysis works well.

To continue the analogy, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) identify seven functional building blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. In expressing oneself on social media, these building blocks can all be inherently creative. Online identities require creative composition by cultivating these well-thought-out identities. Even regular users compose their online identities through conscious and unconscious online decisions (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010). Conversations are creative: every word that a user types is a kind of creative expression. Choosing which photos, videos, or statuses to share is a creative choice. Each item posted online is a part of the tapestry of an online identity. A user's presence, or the way the user shows up online, is creative. When a certain user's presence is apparent on a timeline, it is representative of user choices. The way Facebook defines relationships and the way users choose which relationship statuses best fit a certain relationship are creative acts. Reputation, or the way people are perceived, is part of the creative cultivation of an online presence. Finally, groups provide a forum to express all of these creative social media building blocks amongst fellow users.

The previous paragraph shows: Facebook users act creatively. Their created identities are unique and therefore not reproducible. Just as Benjamin considered photography and filmmaking as art, Facebook use can be rethought of as art. Unlike his idea of photography and filmmaking, social media use is difficult to replicate. Its close ties to a user's identity, one of Kietzmann et al.'s building blocks (2011), make social media, and specifically Facebook, a unique expression. Every time a user makes a decision online, the user is deliberately fostering their online expression of themselves.

### **Facebook for Facebook's Sake**

If Facebook users are artists, or at least performing some kind of creative act, then theory and criticism of art might be able to guide its usage in a positive direction. To respond to user exploitation on Facebook, the Aesthetic Movement and other theorists offer some ideas of what ethical Facebook usage might look like. I call this ethical usage *Facebook for Facebook's sake*. This statement is a variation of Walter Pater's (1873/2010) "art for art's sake", often cited as the beginning of the Aesthetic Movement. Although Pater did not coin this term, he popularized it in his seminal *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873/2010). Pater's idea of art for art's sake is a profound statement that rebelled against the Victorian style so prominent at the time of his writing. Victorian critics like

Matthew Arnold (1865/2010) believed that the critic had a divine duty to find morality in art. While the Victorians were concerned with highly ornamental and symbolic art, Pater started the Aesthetic Movement that suggested art was about beauty and finding pleasure in that beauty. Pater empowers his readers to find their own meaning in art and challenges the Victorian notion of imbuing morality in every facet of a piece of art. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Wilde writes that “All art is quite useless” (Wilde & Elfenbein 2007, p. 4). For the Aesthetics, art exists for its own reason, not for any other uses. Facebook may have a purpose unto itself as well.

The Aesthetic Movement’s rejection of Victorian morality is important. If users are to use Facebook for its own sake, they must acknowledge their exploitation. Using Facebook for purposes of pleasure is not an ignorant decision. It is a decision to use Facebook for pleasure despite exploitation. This is not giving in to the capitalist rule of a major platform, but it can be seen as a rebellion. Just like the Aesthetic Movement responded to Victorian morality, Aesthetic Facebook use is a rejection of the idea that a response to exploitation is needed immediately. This ethical response is can be read as follows: although NIAs have exploited the communities, values, and affective relationships on Facebook, some of the indignity aroused by exploitation can be taken back by finding the greatest possible pleasure in Facebook usage.

This is a rebellion on multiple levels. To begin with, using Facebook for pleasure is a rewarding act. The discourses around the exploitative aspects make some users feel guilty. In contrast to other research that recommends obfuscation, deleting accounts, or completely swearing off social media, *Facebook for Facebook’s sake* suggests using Facebook in a way that seeks beauty is the least possible sacrifice of uncompensated exploitative labour. Users should not feel guilty for finding joy on social media platforms. Rather, they should relish and actively seek joy. In other words, if users decide to stop using Facebook, then exploitative social media companies like Facebook are actually doing even more harm to the user, because they prevent them from seeking joy. By finding pleasure on Facebook, users can take back some of the agency lost in their uncompensated labour.

When the Aesthetic Movement rejected Victorian morality, it made the statement that not every single action had to be meticulously calculated. By rejecting Victorian morality and consequently the calculation of individual action, the Aesthetic Movement tried to show that there can be enjoyment in art. I argue that this also applies to Facebook. Not enjoying it is a disservice to oneself. It is very difficult for users to use the platform without giving up their data, but in using it for the maximum amount of pleasure, users can maximize what they receive in an exploitative relationship that is unlikely to change. When users maximize their pleasure, it makes Facebook’s side of datafication lose agency because users do not let Facebook determine their actions.

Even in Arvidsson and Colleoni’s (2012) work on the difficulties of translating social media use into quantifiable value, they suggest that surpluses from socially produced value are distributed globally based on as-of-yet unestablished affective laws of value. In another paper, Arvidsson et al. (2008) offers scenarios in which the ethical economy takes over for the capitalistic economy. In a way, Aesthetic Facebook use, a use without meaning other than finding beauty, is a way to attempt a more deliberate usage of Facebook before these suggestions. The suggestions mentioned above would require understanding and analysis of the digital economy that is far from fruition. Users should not feel guilt for using Facebook before these new economies are established, and especially if they are never created at all. Aesthetic Facebook use suggests that using Facebook for pleasure and beauty is actually an ethical usage. By finding pleasure on social media, users can experience some good on the platform, despite the platform’s exploitative actions. To engage with the digital art and express oneself in a pleasurable way that makes one benefit from the platform is to give oneself the dignity and credit that the platform may not offer. If Facebook is hurting users by exploiting them for their labour, then users finding pleasure in Facebook can fight back against that

negativity with positivity. This can, in my opinion, be considered as part of the ethical process. I will further develop this argument in the next paragraphs.

## The Ethics of Aestheticism

The ethics of Aestheticism offers possible answers for how Aestheticism may be an ethical answer to resist exploitation of free labour. The Aesthetic object offers a useless pleasure, because defining it, and making sense of it, would also create a usage-value (Buchan, 1999). Aesthetic pleasure is useless in that it does not seek to accomplish anything other than itself. In consequence, my argument is more of a stopgap answer than a direct answer to exploitation. In the same way that the Victorians gave rise to the Aesthetic Movement, exploitation on social media gives rise to *Facebook for Facebook's sake*. Victorianism sought to find truth in all art, while the Aesthetic Movement rejected the notion that art had to have truth at all. In the same way, I reject that Facebook usage should have its own didactic purpose, like every aspect of the Victorian movement. Rather, using Facebook purely for pleasure is a way to find beauty in it without making a moral statement that might affect how much pleasure a user actually receives from the platform. Again, the exploitation issue exists, so how should users conduct themselves online today?

## Psychogeography

Up until this point, we looked at creative expressions through Facebook such as outputting statuses and pictures and we argued that these expressions could be considered art. However, Facebook use that does not necessarily involve this kind of direct expression. To explain this argument, I turn to psychogeography. Psychogeography designates the playful navigation of urban environments and is a good site for more information on using Facebook in an Aesthetic manner. The two theories of psychogeography that I will apply to Facebook come from Symbolist Aesthetic theorist, Charles Baudelaire, and French Marxist situationist, Guy Debord. These psychogeographical theories offer two methods of using Facebook for pleasure.

In Baudelaire's critical essay, "the painter of modern life" (1863/2010), he describes the artist as the *flâneur*, an artist whose perfection is in joining crowds in cities. Baudelaire's artist blends in by joining with others. "He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I'", he writes (1863/2010, p. 684). The *flâneur* is a window shopper in Paris, but also watches people. He joins the crowd, but is still observational, like in Edgar Allan Poe's 1840 short story, "The Man of the Crowd". The narrator observes a crowd and then, in his fascination with an old man, he follows the old man and in turn joins the crowd.

Facebook can be constituted as a contemporary version of Baudelaire's crowd. Some of Kietzmann et al.'s building blocks (2011) can make that connection through presence, sharing, and groups. Everyone in the crowd shares their connection to the group by being present. A *flâneur* on social media is not an influencer because they blend into the crowd. This user is one who seeks beauty in simple interactions shared with the masses. The Facebook *flâneur* takes part in memes, group discussions, and keeps up with the latest trends on the platform. By joining the crowd, the *flâneur* expresses himself in his appetite for that which is outside of himself.

This is part of the rebellion of *Facebook for Facebook's sake*. By finding the most pleasure in the platform, users can reject the drive to become an influencer, someone who makes themselves the center of attention. The attention seeking would contradict the Aesthetic principal of using Facebook for Facebook's sake: seeking attention comes with moral stances. By contrast, the Facebook *flâneur* can take Aesthetic pleasure in the mere fact of being part of the crowd. Finding beauty in the interactions and affective relationships with online peers can bring great pleasure.

One possible counterargument to joining the crowd is the ceaseless identification of Facebook users. They are tracked at every click, producing constant data traces. This may seem like it would

counter the idea of disappearing into the crowd, or becoming something outside of oneself. By joining the crowd, users actually reject their unique digital footprints. The digital *flâneur* explores Facebook despite being tracked. By not allowing the exploitation to guide his usage through any other prescribed methods, the *flâneur* rebels against those exploiting his labour.

Another psychogeographic theory that enables one to explore Aesthetic Facebook use is Situationist and French Marxist theorist Guy Debord's *derivé* (1956). The *derivé* is Debord's suggestion for rapid movement through a city. It is an unplanned strategy for exploration in which people are drawn by things that attract them, an example of Aesthetic thinking at work. Debord's subjects could be drawn in by beauty, finding the sights that are the most pleasing to engage with and look at. This provides a fitting framework for pleasurable Facebook usage. Aesthetic Facebook use requires users to seek out what makes them the happiest. Like with Baudelaire and Facebook, users can explore the platform in the sense of Debord's idea. The *flâneur* represents more of a lurker on Facebook: someone who explores the platform without taking action and participating in the actions that communities deem pleasurable. The *derivé* takes a more active approach: deliberately seeking out pleasurable images and interactions on Facebook. The *derivé* will happily click on anything that piques his interest. Paying no mind to the masses, the *derivé* finds pleasure in exploring the digital landscape on a whim.

Others might critique this argument by saying Facebook's algorithms shape the *derivé's* digital landscape. While it is true that algorithms determine what occurs on one's homepage, the *derivé*, has full autonomy in choosing what pleases him. Although the algorithm is exploitative, in the long-term, it uses machine learning to better display the most pleasurable landscape for the *derivé*. In this way he might be able to better explore the geography of his News Feed. If the Aesthetic Facebook user can find more pleasure, they are successful. Like the Aesthetics rejected the Victorian need to find morality, the Aesthetic ethic here is not to change a user's actions based on finding morality. When the Aesthetic Facebook user finds beauty, the user takes back some of the power that Facebook may have taken by dictating their usage.

The argument that rejecting Facebook completely as a more effective form of rebellion is fair. However, in its own way, refraining from Facebook is still interacting with the platform. Nobel Prize winner J.M. Coetzee offers some insight. His novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), received some negative attention because several critics believed that it allegorized Apartheid without Coetzee identifying Apartheid as his subject. In his 1986 essay, "Into the Dark Chamber", Coetzee writes a thinly veiled response: "For the writer the deeper problem is not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them." (p. 13). For Coetzee, writing about the transgressions that an ideological body creates is still working within the ideology. Rejecting social media is still interacting with it, too. Refusing to use Facebook is making a decision based on the fact that Facebook itself has dictated to you. By exploring the psychogeography of Facebook, users can find more pleasure than completely ignoring the platform. This is not to equate or compare the South African Apartheid to Facebook's exploitation of free labour. Coetzee's argument does, however, present legitimate reasoning that choosing not to participate is still a choice dictated by the ideological body governing participation.

## Nietzsche's Critique of Aestheticism

There is little to no research on the connection between Aestheticism and exploitation on social media, but that does not mean that Aesthetic critiques cannot be transposed to this area. To expand on the idea of Facebook for its own sake, I will turn to Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of the Aesthetic

Movement in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889). In section twenty-four of the chapter entitled “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” Nietzsche rebukes Aestheticism. After Pater describes his, “L’art pour l’art,” as a fight against morality’s tendency to create prejudice, Nietzsche makes the argument that Aestheticism creates its own kind of prejudices. For him, if Aestheticism is searching for beauty, relative beauty will create something ugly. This is not a Victorian critique. Nietzsche does not vindicate art without morality, the art of Aestheticism, as lacking virtue. Rather, he is arguing that the same moral divisions that Victorianism created are also created in Aestheticism. If everyone is seeking pleasure and beauty, then users are going to be divided into groups that determine the users’ worth on social media. In Nietzsche’s thinking, the exploitation of affective labour would be replaced with the unfair and subjective demarcation between what is beautiful and what is not. For Aesthetic Facebook use to search for beauty, it might have to demarcate what is ugly as well. Nietzsche would not say that this is a problem, but a symptom of Aestheticism.

To avoid this dilemma, Aesthetic Facebook usage will have to be more about finding pleasure in one’s own outputs than how other people are interacting with the platform. The most important of Kietzmann et al.’s (2011) building blocks is identity. If users’ expressions of themselves have auras that cannot be duplicated, then no one will be able to compete with a user for the expression of that user’s identity. Nietzsche’s criticism of Aestheticism highlighting that which is unappealing will be avoided because users inspired by Aestheticism will be focusing on themselves and not competing with others.

This response to Nietzsche’s critique may create some issues with the psychogeographical theories. If finding pleasure in one’s own outputs works, then users would not be able to interact with other people. Specifically, with the case of the *flâneur*, users would not be able to join a crowd or community because they would be focused on themselves. This critique might stop participation in Facebook at all. By its very nature, Facebook involves interacting with other people. A distinction needs to be made between rejecting the idea of a competitive landscape and rejecting Facebook altogether. *Facebook for Facebook’s sake* rejects the notion that a user has to be an influencer or to acquire some kind of social value in an economy of reputation. In reality, interacting with others does not have to mean competing with them. If users recognizing their own Facebook usage or interactions as ugly, they can learn to rectify them.

### **The Facebook Demetricator**

If searching for beauty creates its opposite, as Nietzsche suggests, then there is another solution that might allow users to interact with Facebook in a way that limits social comparisons, while still allowing users to explore the platform with the psychogeographical frameworks in mind. Users on Facebook can ‘like’ a post: the way in which beauty might be quantified is through how many likes a post receives. Someone might feel disliked, or even ugly, by comparing the low number of likes on their profile picture to the high number of likes on someone else’s profile picture. One solution to the problem might be by using Ben Grosser’s Facebook Demetricator (2016). The Facebook Demetricator is a free, open-source browser extension that removes numbers from Facebook. It does not remove numbers from messages or other user inputs, but only from places where Facebook inserts the metrics. For example, instead of a status saying, “16 people like this”, it will say “People like this” (Grosser, 2016). Grosser’s Demetricator removes the biggest area of relative comparison on Facebook. If users seek beauty, they can do so without worrying about any comparisons between what they are expressing versus what other people are expressing. Without its metrics, Facebook can become a site for seeking out pleasure. Since gaining pleasure from the metrics is too rooted in comparison to others to work with this usage, interactions only become more meaningful

if users base their actions and explorations on the platform on what they really think, rather than on an attempt to be a better user than the next person.

By creating the Demetricator, Grosser wanted to explore Facebook without its metrics. He is interested in how the visible metrics, on a site that depends on its users' free labour, are important to success. Grosser (2016) asks what happens when quality, not quantity is foremost. His browser extension is partially a response to the affective labour debate. Using the Facebook Demetricator is an effective way to use Facebook for its own sake while avoiding the creation of the ugly that Nietzsche thought Aestheticism promotes. A user can still join a crowd, as a Facebook *flâneur*, because objects on Facebook will still say "people", but the user will not know how many people like that object. This can lead to a more reflexive use of Facebook: users might have to rethink what kind of crowd they want to join, because each action can be considered differently based on how it affects the users' artistic expression of himself or herself. Using the Demetricator also helps users to avoid the draw to become an influencer. Bolin and Schwarz (2015) call this the *metricated mindset*, a mindset in which the metrics displayed on screen privilege certain actions and punish others. Part of the power that influencers acquire is in their greater number of followers and interactions than other users. Taking the *metricated mindset* out of Facebook makes it more pleasurable for other users.

### Acknowledging Exploitation

*Facebook for Facebook's Sake* is positive thinking: it implies that although exploitation is occurring, there is no reason to stop using the platform. One could argue that using Facebook for pleasure is exactly what Facebook wants users to do. In fact, Facebook does not want ad-blockers, virtual-private-networks, and obfuscation damaging their data, but it wants users to interact with their sites as they would if they did not know that Facebook converts digital labour into profit.

Nothing prescribed here says that users should not be informed about Facebook's exploitive methods. Rather, the informed user can still consciously use Facebook. While it is true that when a user intentionally subverts Facebook's data, Facebook is influencing his or her actions, as Coetzee's example shows, Facebook's business goals do not have to contradict what gives users pleasure. Perhaps the relationship is not as antagonistic as it has been portrayed. Indeed, in exchange for beauty-centered Facebook usage, Facebook's algorithm can provide information that gives users pleasure. In return, Facebook can have targeted advertising to capitalize through exploitation of free labour. In the age of Big Data and individualized digital footprints, this transaction could be the price that one must pay to reap the pleasures of Facebook. This is one of the central questions of this usage: if users know they are being exploited, are they willing to fight back by finding pleasure on social media? Côté and Prybus (2007) argue that it is the digital labour on Facebook that produces the capital relationship. I argue that by using Facebook for pleasure, users can take back some of Facebook's dominance in this relationship. Exploitation on social media is not fair, but it may be a necessary evil of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's internet landscape.

As Bolin and Schwarz (2015) put it, once algorithms have collected the users' data, there is a need to translate the latter back into traditional social parameters, parameters that can be converted into an actionable query. If social media companies like Facebook have to translate their data into a way to understand people based on certain social parameters, using Facebook for purely Aesthetic purposes is not identifiable as any kind of recognizable usage. Using Facebook for no reason other than itself could make it incredibly difficult for Facebook to actually identify a user's goals: pleasure seeking Aesthetic is not a traditional social parameter.

This data is not even anthropomorphic. As a matter of fact, Facebook's data is a series of numbers and accumulated traces describing the users' actions (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). They are a

failed attempt at commodified humanity: users can take back agency and humanity by finding beauty in their interactions with other users, as Facebook cannot turn data into accurate representations of humanity.

## The Aesthetic Candle

Using the Aesthetic Movement as inspiration for social media use is useful, but it is important to recognize some limits. I am not saying that users should live fully Aesthetic lives, but I am suggesting that in these theories there is some instruction on how to find pleasure in artistic ventures, and that pleasure can be found in Facebook usage. Through that pleasure, users can find meaning, as Pater intended in his criticism of art. While not all the theorists are pure Aesthetic thinkers, their theories help to support the idea of *Facebook for Facebook's sake*, which is a direct tribute to art for art's sake, the mantra of the Aesthetic Movement.

Ending the affective labour issue is complex. Arvidsson and Colleoni's (2012) economy of the future is a fruitful starting point because users could be reimbursed for their labour, but it still seems to be incredibly hard to distribute the excess wealth that social media generates to its users. It would require advanced technology, which would instantly remunerate users based on automatically processed interactions. This text proposes an immediate solution, while researchers are still working on answers to the labour debate. It suggests that users should not quit Facebook, but rather, use their informed positions to employ a usage that seeks the most possible pleasure. In Baudelaire's poem, "damned woman" in *Fleurs de Mal*, he begins by describing the scene, "In the pallid light of languishing lamps" (1857/1952). The light burning out in a candle is an image of the Aesthetic Movement; the candle will burn out, so it is worth appreciating while it exists. The candle also represents every human life. As the candles of our lives burn, Facebook and other social media can be used to explore meaningful and beautiful interactions. As a matter of fact, I argue that users can take back some of the dignity that may be taken away in the exploitation of affective labour, at least until a more permanent and fair solution can be devised so that users are no longer exploited for their free labour.

## Notes

1. The media architecture of Facebook is certainly more complicated than this. Yet, this discussion would go beyond the scope of the paper.

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