# Operative ethnographies and large numbers

The chapter concerns an attempt to bring an ethnographic sensibility to the data generated by contemporary software developers. It focuses on numbers as processes and counting as a form, and explores how re-counting might be useful in attempts to reconstruct platforms and their associative realities. Since launching in late 2007, the code repository Github (Github.com) has become tremendously popular amongst programmers. Github’s growth attests to some substantial transformations in the way coders, coding and code associate with each other. On Github, coding practices have been re-formatted in ways that emulate the traits and tendencies of contemporary social media platforms. ‘Sharing,’ ‘liking,’ ‘watching’ and re-circulation abound. Not only does Github host a wide variety of commercial, industry, government, scientific, educational and civil society software (and non-software) projects, highly dispersed and diverse human and non-human actors congregate there. Github in early 2016 claimed to host 29 million code repositories and 6 million coders. The chapter describes some ways in which such large numbers might be re-counted. It explores how coders render accounts of what happens on Github through analysis of big data generated by other coders. It outlines some preliminary attempts to map the ripples of associative imitation that animate the platform’s growth and capitalisation. The growth of Github as intersectional assemblage, the re-shaping of coding practices in imitation of social media, and the susceptibility of large-scale public data about coding to analysis by coders alter the scope and focus of ethnographic study.

## keywords: numbers, counting, platforms, imitation