

Recibido: 01-03-2016  
Aceptado: 21-04-2016

Open peer review  
<http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/TEKN/pages/view/opr-51973>

**Theory as Noir:  
a cartoon version of an academic article**

*La teoría como Noir:  
un comic de un artículo académico*

Chris H. Gray

University of California, Santa Cruz  
[chris.hablesgray@stanfordalumni.org](mailto:chris.hablesgray@stanfordalumni.org)

**ABSTRACT**

Expanding on the growing movement to take academic and other erudite subjugated knowledges and distill them into some graphic form, this “cartoon” is a recounting of the author’s 2014 article, “Big Data, Actionable Information, Scientific Knowledge and the Goal of Control,” *Teknokultura*, Vol. 11/no. 3, pp. 529-54. It is an analysis of the idea of Big Data and an argument that its power relies on its instrumentalist specificity and not its extent. Mind control research in general and optogenetics in particular are the case study. Noir seems an appropriate aesthetic for this analysis, so direct quotes from the article are illustrated by publically available screen shots from iconic and unknown films of the 20th century. The only addition to the original article is a framing insight from the admirable activist network CrimethInc.

## **KEYWORDS**

Big Data; CrimethInc; iconic representation; optogenetics; scientific knowledge.

## **RESUMEN**

Se expande el creciente movimiento de tomar los saberes académicos y otros conocimientos subyugados eruditos y estilarlos en un formato gráfico. Este comic es un recuento del artículo del autor, titulado “Big Data, Actionable Information, Scientific Knowledge and the Goal of Control,” *Teknokultura*, Vol. 11/no. 3, pp. 529-54. Se trata de un análisis de la idea del Big Data y el argumento de que su poder radica en su especificidad instrumentalista y no en su alcance. La investigación de control mental en general y la optogenética, en particular, son uno de estos casos. *Noirparece* ser una estética apropiada para este análisis. Citas directas del artículo se ilustran a través de capturas de pantallas procedentes de películas emblemáticas y desconocidas del siglo XX. La única adición al artículo original es un encuadre desde el admirable netactivista, *CrimethInc*.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Big Data, CrimethInc, conocimiento científico, optogenética, representación icónica.

---

Big Data, actionable information, scientific knowledge, and the goal of control

Chris Hables Gray

"...we are pursuing a conflict between rival organizational principles, not between specific networks or individuals."

-- CrimethInc.com (n.d., p. 8)



Big Data is control.

Consider Technological  
“watching” (veillance).



Whether it is lists of banned books, files and interrogation reports on arrested people, or algorithms searching massive databases, it isn't about voyeurism...



but instrumentalist power.



Established distinctions between data, information, and knowledge from computer science are a helpful sorting device for understanding why some forms of Big Data are more effective for control than others.



Political struggles and corporate hype over veillance Big Data obscures how unuseful it has been so far, and how different “data” of any sort is from actionable information (intelligence).

Even then, action doesn't promise effectiveness.





Affordances, agency, network architectures, semantics and the political economy determine effective communication and control.

Affordances are the possibilities all objects and systems offer for use. Consider how a china mug makes a poor screwdriver, an adequate weapon for close combat, and an excellent drinking vessel.



Having agency, doing something, does not guarantee efficacy...



...But the illusion of effective action is hard to resist; agency can be intoxicating.



The term political economy is used here to make it clear that assumptions about gender, class, race, ownership, justice, power and productivity are decisive aspects of any culture and they determine the framing of all understandings.





Semantics, broadly conceived, is about shaping and knowing meanings. To determine meaning is to exercise control (in military terms, winning "hearts and minds").

And this is exactly the realm where much Big Data manipulation fails.



Corporations, seeking profits, have had more success for they form a distributed landscape and they seek to evoke just one behavior (buying), instead of meeting the complex goal of military operations: loyalty, or at least submission.

But for real efficacy in technological interventions in politics, we need to look at the emerging science of mind control.



This is clear from the role of Big Data in neuroscience, which is making great instrumentalist progress.

Mind Control of Other Animals and Humans: Scientists at Washington State have already turned chimps, and fellow scientists, into “meat puppets” where their limbs are controlled by someone else.



There are three major reasons for the recent progress in the area of technological mind control: 1) improved observational and modeling technologies; 2) the continued improvements in electrical implant research; and, most importantly; 3) the new field of optogenetics.



Optogenetics is the technoscience that involves genetically modifying brains (so far flies, worms, rats and nonhuman primates) so that even on the level of one neuron, they can be manipulated by light of different colors.

Brain control "in a flash of light" as one overview put it.



All of this work is part of what could be termed the consciousness studies industry, an emerging "military-industrial-spiritual-scientific complex" that has mushroomed now that it seems neuroscience (especially psychopharmacology and optogenetics) is on the brink of major advances in the instrumentalist control of mentation.



Specific, rigorous knowledge is much more powerful, and dangerous, than data of any size or information, no matter its origin.





The ultimate danger of Big Data in the social media world and of Big Data neuroscience in our individual brains is the same – a loss of autonomy and agency, the ceding of our self-control to those with the data.



That is why data is never enough. It takes knowledge and wisdom to transcend our epistemological limitations. And this is why big data from below is needed.

Wikipedia, Wikileaks, the whole Open Source, commons, the committed, distributed horizontalist network of systems, is in opposition to the secret files of the security services.



What is the role of our agency as citizens and human beings in this?