

playing with **data** and its consequences

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datafication = process through
which social reality and social
life are transformed/translated
into data points

datafication alters the ways in
which people enact their
citizenship in their everyday
practices of participation

e.g. open data,
data visualization for advocacy,
data for good, encryption...

but how do data & engagement with
data **change activists** themselves?
e.g. tactics, attitudes, visions



data as socially-constructed technology
cf. *technê* (τέχνη)
making, craftsmanship (Braman 2004)
or “human ability to make and perform”
(Shiner 2001, 19)

data activism

= social mobilizations taking a
critical stance towards datafication

= sociotechnical practices
interrogating the fundamental
paradigm shift of datafication

- making sense of data as a way of knowing the world & turning it into a point of intervention
- nesting data countercultures and new, alternative epistemologies
- producer of counter-expertise

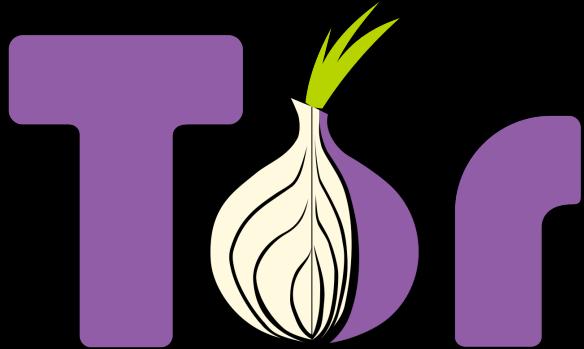
data activism
takes (at
least) two
forms

re-active

pro-active



enabled and constrained by **software**
emerges from pre-existing movements such
as open source and hacker subcultures..
but seeks to reach new publics



in-depth interviews with 40 data activists

sampling criteria:

- i) data infrastructure; ii) self-definition;
- iii) tactics; iv) social change goals

Table 1: Types of change

Change Type	Biographical	Action repertoires	Empowerment	Epistemologies
	Career	tools	social causes	activism
	Personal	methods	self sufficiency	paradigms
		collaboration	Impact	viewpoints
		hybridization	Insights	complexity
		new languages	Transparency	
			new business models	
			new challenges	

#1 change in biographical circumstances

personal and career path
conversions (often towards
advocacy)

“I realized the kind of projects I was doing
were just projects, without any other extra
incentive. So... we started a different
company, focused on civic engagement, data
visualization and transparency”

#2 evolution of action
repertoires

beyond tools and methodologies
towards hybridization.
collaboration, new languages

Table 2: Before and after in action repertoires

	Before	After
Journalism	development of secretive sources and leaks; application of freedom of information laws; conventional non-fiction writing; fact-based story telling	development of sources WikiLeaks-style (millions of documents); hybridization (multimedia, transmedia, cartoons, data, graphic novel, activism); employment of new languages for impact (i.e. maps, infographics); use of data to tell stories through patterns and correlations; use of data analysis to find stories; collaboration and alliances to tackle <i>bigness</i> and complexity
Activism	conventional message-developing, protesting, denunciation and campaigning	hybridization (research, journalism, transmedia, data visualizations); adoption of data infrastructure for transparency, advocacy and communication
Research	traditional report writing (executive summaries for policy makers, report design)	work in alliances to tackle complexity; tools that tackle breadth, width and depth; hybridization (activism, data visualizations, animation videos with data visualizations, story-telling and narrative techniques); new languages (i.e. infographics, maps); intensive data mining; increasing reliance on crowdsourced data; more focus on impact
Architecture	top down conventional architecture	participative methodologies; incorporation of the <u>IoT</u> ; advocacy slant
Epidemiology	conventional statistics; antibiotics and vaccines	participative methodologies; social slant; the return to the clinical experience and the real world; a focus on the patient; hybridization (anthropology, sociology, economics); use of data-based maps in early warning and crises

#3 self-empowerment and the empowerment of others

“statistics are no longer the realm of a few gurus”
data shed light on dark corners: “data are powerful weapons that serve to render visible social issues based on facts, rather than conjecture”

“we promote a **culture of data** (...) for example: every time the unemployment rate is updated, you get headlines on some newspapers saying that it has fallen, but on some other papers that it has increased. This is crazy! We want people to have easy tools to allow them to access real information and form their own opinions”

“the challenge is to combine these new insights with action; that is, fusing scientific knowledge with the human factor”

#4 new epistemologies

data activism as bearer of
alternative visions and knowledge

“new” activism

“new” paradigms

“new” viewpoints

increased complexity

how “amazing” it is “to be able to report and improve accountability processes with patients and populations about data that has been gathered clinically or by the same populations, and then being able to use the analysis either to simply inform people... or to act upon a situation. (...) this changes the previous paradigm, because what you get is an active, well-informed, participative population. It is putting epidemiology **in the hands of people**. By doing that, population medicine goes back to its own roots in individual health, and it does so via the analysis of the accumulation of individual data, for the benefit of both the whole population and the individuals. It is a perfect circle”

muchas gracias

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