



The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and Their Consequences

By Rob Kitchin

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"Carefully distinguishing between big data and open data, and exploring various data infrastructures, Kitchin vividly illustrates how the data landscape is rapidly changing and calls for a revolution in how we think about data."

- *Evelyn Ruppert, Goldsmiths, University of London*

"Deconstructs the hype around the 'data revolution' to carefully guide us through the histories and the futures of 'big data.' The book skilfully engages with debates from across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences in order to produce a critical account of how data are enmeshed into enormous social, economic, and political changes that are taking place."

- *Mark Graham, University of Oxford*

Traditionally, data has been a scarce commodity which, given its value, has been either jealously guarded or expensively traded. In recent years, technological developments and political lobbying have turned this position on its head. Data now flow as a deep and wide torrent, are low in cost and supported by robust infrastructures, and are increasingly open and accessible.

A data revolution is underway, one that is already reshaping how knowledge is produced, business conducted, and governance enacted, as well as raising many questions concerning surveillance, privacy, security, profiling, social sorting, and intellectual property rights.

In contrast to the hype and hubris of much media and business coverage, **The Data Revolution** provides a synoptic and critical analysis of the emerging data landscape. Accessible in style, the book provides:

- A synoptic overview of big data, open data and data infrastructures
- An introduction to thinking conceptually about data, data infrastructures, data analytics and data markets
- A critical discussion of the technical shortcomings and the social, political and ethical consequences of the data revolution
- An analysis of the implications of the data revolution to academic, business and

government practices

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Editorial Review

Review

Kitchin's powerful, authoritative work deconstructs the hype around the 'data revolution' to carefully guide us through the histories and the futures of 'big data.' The book skilfully engages with debates from across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences in order to produce a critical account of how data are enmeshed into enormous social, economic, and political changes that are taking place. It challenges us to rethink data, information and knowledge by asking - who benefits and who might be left out; what these changes mean for ethics, economy, surveillance, society, politics; and ultimately, whether big data offer answers to big questions. By tackling the promises and potentials as well as the perils and pitfalls of our data revolution, Kitchin shows us that data doesn't just reflect the world, but also changes it. (Dr Mark Graham 2013-12-30)

With a lucid prose and without hyperbole, Kitchin explains the complexities and disruptive effects of what he calls 'the data revolution'. The book brilliantly provides an overview of the shifting socio-technical assemblages that are shaping the uses of data today. Carefully distinguishing between big data and open data, and exploring various data infrastructures, Kitchin vividly illustrates how the data landscape is rapidly changing and calls for a revolution in how we think about data. (Evelyn Ruppert)

An incredibly well written and accessible book which provides readers who will be curious about the buzz around the idea of big data with: (a) an organising framework rooted in social theory (important given the dominance of technical writings) through which to conceptualise big data; (b) detailed understandings of each actant in the various data assemblages with fresh and novel theoretical constructions and typologies of each actant; (c) the contours of a critical examination of big data (whose interests does it serve, where, how and why). These are all crucial developments it seems to me and I think this book will become a trail blazer because of them. This is going to be a biggie citation wise and a seminal work.

(Mark Boyle)

Data has become a new key word for our times. This is just the book I have been waiting for: a detailed and critical analysis that will make us think carefully about how data participate in social, cultural and spatial relations.

(Deborah Lupton)

By carefully analysing data as a complex socio-technical assemblage, Rob Kitchin discusses thought-provoking aspects of data as a technical, economic and social construct that are often ignored or forgotten despite the increasing focus on data production and usage in contemporary life. This book unpacks the complexity of data as elements of knowledge production, and not only provide readers from a variety of disciplinary areas with useful conceptual framings, but also with a challenging set of open issues to be further explored and engaged with as the "data revolution" progresses. (Luigina Ciolfi)

A timely intervention of critical reflection into the hyperbolic and fast-paced developments in the gathering, analysis and workings of 'big data'. This excellent book diagnoses the technical, ethical and scientific

challenges raised by the data revolution, sounding a clarion for critical reflections on the promise and problematic of the data revolution.

(Sam Kinsley)

Much talk of big data is big hype. Different phenomena dumped together, a dearth of definitions and little discussion of the complex relationships that give rise to and shape big data practices sums it up. Rob Kitchin puts us in his debt by cutting through the cant and offering not only a clear analysis of the range, power and limits of big data assemblages but a pointer to the crucial social, political and ethical issues to which we should urgently attend. Read this book.

(David Lyon)

Data matter and have matter, and Rob Kitchin thickens this understanding by assembling the philosophical, social scientific, and popular media accounts of our data-based living. That the give and take of data is increasingly significant to the everyday has been the mainstay of Kitchin's long and significant contribution to a critical technology studies. In *The Data Revolution*, he yet again implores us to think beyond the polemical, to signal a new generation of responsive and responsible data work. Importantly, he reminds us of the non-inevitability of data, articulating the registers within which interventions can and already are being made. Kitchin offers a manual, a set of operating instructions, to better grasp and grapple with the complexities of the coming world, of such a 'data revolution'.

(Matthew W. Wilson)

The Data Revolution is one of the first systematic attempts to strip back the hype surrounding our current data deluge and take stock of what is really going on... The book acts as a helpful wayfinding device in an unfamiliar terrain, which is still being reshaped, and is admirably written in a language relevant to social scientists, comprehensible to policy makers and accessible even to the less tech savvy among us.... *The Data Revolution's* main success lies in clearing a space – cutting out the conjecture and gloss, the Utopians and the reactionaries pulling in different directions – and locating a common ground from which to build something.

Read the full review on the Theory, Culture & Society blog. (David Moats)

Kitchin's *The Data Revolution* is absolutely recommendable and provides a sober account of the interaction between society and big data. Kitchin avoids the hubris and speculation often found in literature about big data to focus on big data's logic. [It] would serve as [an] ideal book in introductory graduate courses that deal with data and information in any capacity. (Andrew J. Iliadis)

Kitchin's latest book invites the reader to think critically and conceptually about data. [...] The clear and measured writing style and logical progression of the chapters directs the reader through a balanced discussion of the so-called data revolution. The book is well referenced with in-text citations and an extensive reference list with which to seek further reading. This fact, along with its accessible style, lucid prose, and comprehensive coverage of diverse topics that the data revolution brings to light, make it a valuable text for anyone working within this area. (Jonathan Cinnamon, University of Exter)

Published in 2014, this is an ideal *guide* to the essentials of what is DATA; what we are currently doing with it that is fundamentally different than in the past; and finally speculation and ramifications of both BIG and OPEN DATA for information systems. Broken into several chapters... it occurs to me that this is the perfect outline for a complete overhaul of a DATA Lecture I've tried to sandwich between *Intro to Vector* and *Raster Model* Lectures! Often Introductory GIS courses really don't consider Geo Data in depth; much less DATA itself as a stand-alone lecture topic; so this is a bit of a unorthodox approach, but one whose time I

think has come.

(Geospex.com 2015-02-24)

Rob Kitchin, The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and Their Consequences has that *Ground Truth* level of impact feeling to it, and I strongly urge anyone with an interest in geospatial technologies, GIS, mapping, data, cartography, mashups, and related topics to read this book. Could easily be justified as the #1 book for the year. (Place Memes)

A sober, nuanced and inspiring guide to big data with the highest signal to noise ratio of any book in the field. (Matthew Fuller, Centre for Cultural Studies)

One of the key contributions of this book is its thorough analysis of popular and prevalent discourses around big and open data, and subsequent reflections on the limitations of these conceptualizations... Ultimately, this book is useful for anyone with an interest in the present and future of scholarly research and the role of new technologies in shaping the discourses and practices of such work, and is almost sure to spur considerable future research into these pressing issues. (Taylor Shelton, Graduate School of Geography, Clark University)

This is a path-breaking book. Rob Kitchin has long been one of the leading figures in the conceptualisation and analysis of new forms of data, software and code. This book represents an important step-forward in our understanding of big data. It provides a grounded discussion of big data, explains why they matter and provides us with a framework to analyse their social presence. Anyone who wants to obtain a critical, conceptually honed and analytically refined perspective on new forms of data should read this book. (David Beer, Senior Lecturer in Sociology)

Rob Kitchin's timely, clear, and vital book provides a much needed critical framework. He explains that our ontologies of data, or how we understand what data are; our epistemologies of data, or how we conceive of data as units of truth, fact, or knowledge; our analytic methodologies, or the techniques we use to process that data; and our data apparatuses and institutions, or the tools and (often huge, heavy, and expensive) infrastructures we use to sort and store that data, are all entwined. And all have profound political, economic, and cultural implications that we can't risk ignoring as we're led into our "smart," data-driven future. (Shannon Mattern, Faculty, School of Media Studies)

Kitchin paints a nuanced and complex picture of the unfolding data landscape. Through a critique of the deepening technocratic, often corporate led, development of our increasingly data driven societies, he presents an alternative perspective which illuminates the contested, and contestable, nature of this acutely political and social terrain. (Jo Bates, Information School)

The Data Revolution has that Ground Truth-level of impact feeling to it, and I strongly urge anyone with an interest in geospatial technologies, GIS, mapping, data, cartography, mashups, and related topics to read this book. Could easily be justified as the #1 book for the year (Gwilym Eades)

Kitchin's *The Data Revolution* is essential reading for anyone dealing with data. It is an extremely well informed and reflective book that is comprehensive in scope. Kitchin convincingly argues how data analysis is always imbued with prior knowledge, assumptions about causation, and interpretations based on these. ... I hope you will find *The Data Revolution* to be a useful recommendation for your own, and your students', reading lists (Bettina Berendt)

Scholars new and old in CSCW will benefit from Kitchin's in-depth examination of the many facets of long-

term and emerging research in data studies. ... The Data Revolution as a volume aims to parse the landscape of big data as more than a hubristic and hype-driven rhetorical realm, but rather one that is critically framed and examined. Here Kitchin succeeds and offers an easily readable volume that draws on and complements the work of this journal. Readers immersed in data studies will find many well-known points succinctly presented. For those less familiar with such work this is an excellent introduction (Drew Paine)

Rob Kitchin's latest book is an important addition to the emerging field of critical data studies, in that it manages to both make a clear, convincing and reasonably detailed case for why it is necessary to look critically at what data are—and, just as crucially, what they do in the world—and provide stimulating insights and suggestions for further research in this area. (Francesca Menichelli, University of Cambridge)

This is an exemplary scholarly book: smart, objective, clear, concise, well informed, rich in insights, and thought provoking. Definitely the best 'general' overview of big data I have seen so far. (Cristian Suteanu, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, Canada)

Professor Rob Kitchin's overview of "the data revolution" is the best monograph we have discovered on open and big data. It defines the issues of open and big data and the potential consequences of the data revolution. In a balanced way, and without the hyperbole of trade press books on big data, Kitchin explains that the data revolution has implications for governance, management of business, and even understanding of science and knowledge. (Chris Hoofnagle, Berkeley Law, University of California)

The purpose of this excellent book is to prove how these [big] data do not exist independently from the ideas, techniques, technologies, people and contexts that produce, process, manage, analyze and store them. Moreover, the author explores the definition, characteristics and the techniques to manage big data, but he also focuses his attention on the challenges of this way of thinking and on how big data are changing existing epistemology and science. (Barbara Martini)

About the Author

Rob Kitchin is a professor and ERC Advanced Investigator in the National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, for which he was director between 2002 and 2013. He has published widely across the social sciences, including 23 books and 140 articles and book chapters. He is editor of the international journals, *Progress in Human Geography* and *Dialogues in Human Geography*, and for eleven years was the editor of *Social and Cultural Geography*. He was the editor-in-chief of the 12 volume, *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, and edits two book series, *Irish Society* and *Key Concepts in Geography*. He is currently a PI on the Programmable City project, the Digital Repository of Ireland, and the All-Island Research Observatory.

He has delivered over 100 invited talks at conferences and universities and his research has been cited over 600 times in local, national and international media. His book 'Code/Space' (with Martin Dodge) won the Association of American Geographers 'Meridian Book Award' for the outstanding book in the discipline in 2011 and a 'CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title 2011' award from the American Library Association. He was the 2013 recipient of the Royal Irish Academy's Gold Medal for the Social Sciences.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sheila Lefevre:

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Lynn Jones:

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