

'Subversion' from the series 'A Theory of Universal Control'

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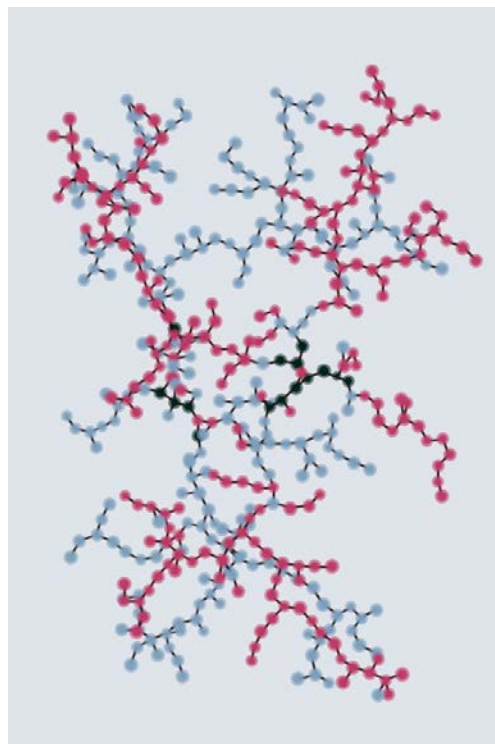
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cultures of discipline towards cultures of control.



Abstract

This paper describes my screen-based art work 'Subversion', one work in a series titled 'A Theory of Universal Control'. The series uses computer models and adaptive systems to explore mechanisms of control and strategies of resistance in contemporary society. This particular work, 'Subversion', models subversion and disruption as a strategic response to a control strategy of forced conformity.

Fig 1. *Subversion*, Theory No. 4 from *A Theory of Universal Control*, 2023, Angela Ferraiolo, digital file from computational system.

1. Overview

Thirty-years ago, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze made a series of observations about the way power organized society. According to Deleuze, societies were shifting from Foucauldian

The exercise of power was moving from institutional regimes of discipline towards mechanisms of logic and protocols of

information. Societies relying on institutions to establish social hierarchies would soon employ protocols of control to enforce hierarchies. Where disciplinary power had been based on surveillance, control power would be enforced through tactics like access and modulation. In control societies standards and benchmarks are actively shaped and reshaped as they are tested. Control shifts from reform and rehabilitation to influence and protocol. It's important to note that Deleuzian theory is highly nuanced and escapes simple dichotomies, but recent interpreters of Deleuze have observed that while societies of discipline sought to shape people and things, societies of control seek to generatively moderate what people and things are becoming or may become.

1.1 Rhizome as Metaphor

In their work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari use the rhizome as a metaphor to describe different modes of organization, control, and power. For Deleuze, the rhizome is non-hierarchical, interconnected, and lacking a central structure. It represents a more decentralized and dynamic form of organization, where power and influence can emerge from multiple points, with no central authority.

In *Plateaus*, the rhizome metaphor goes much deeper and covers a broad range of concepts and dynamics. The concept of 'rhizome' is introduced in a philosophical context to describe certain characteristics of organization and control in society. However, instances of this structure can be adapted and applied to computational models to represent similar kinds of organization. In *Subversion*, branching structures can be

seen as reflective of control structures becoming a visual metaphor that alludes to several aspects of control societies including:

Decentralization

The absence of a central authority and the presence of multiple interconnected nodes, which can represent individuals, data sources, or decision points.

Networked Control

The interconnectedness of nodes in the rhizome can represent how control and influence can emerge from various points within the network, rather than from a single, top-down source.

Fluidity and Adaptability

A rhizome structure can be visually dynamic, showing how connections can shift and adapt in response to changing circumstances or inputs, mirroring the flexibility of control in a control society.

While branching metaphor may not capture all the complexities of control societies, it can serve as a starting point for developing computational models and visualizations that shed light on the decentralized and networked nature of control in our modern, interconnected world.

1.2 System Design

Subversion and its larger series continues my work in adaptive systems that explores forces at work in post-capitalist societies. *Subversion* is made up of two factions of agents engaged in a struggle for power as expressed as their faction size. There are three factions active in the system:

Faction "a"

These agents follow a strategy of subversion, and seek to corrupt the agents they attack

Faction "b"

These agents follow a strategy of conformity and seek to copy themselves onto the agents they attack

Faction "c"

These agents follow a strategy of disruption and cause the agents they attack to switch factions regardless of their original loyalties

These factions are distributed over two 'agents' or sets of nodes. A sensor reads the amount of dissonance present in the world, and determines which faction will make the next move. Agents track the outcomes of individual competitions between nodes to evolve an overall strategy across their network. Agents also score the success rates of their constituent factions to evolve an overall agent or network faction population at each generation. On gaining majority presence in the system, factions can gain control of the sensor, though disruptors can reassign control of the sensor at certain times as well.

2. Discussion

Interpreting the metaphor of a system where factions attack and subvert each other in the context of a control society can carry a number of associations with various aspects of society and governance. Here are some ways to interpret this metaphor:

Power Struggles And Conflict

The factions represent different groups or entities within a society, and their attacks and subversion symbolize power struggles and conflicts that are inherent in human societies. This metaphor underscores the idea that competition and conflict for control or influence are common features of social and political systems.

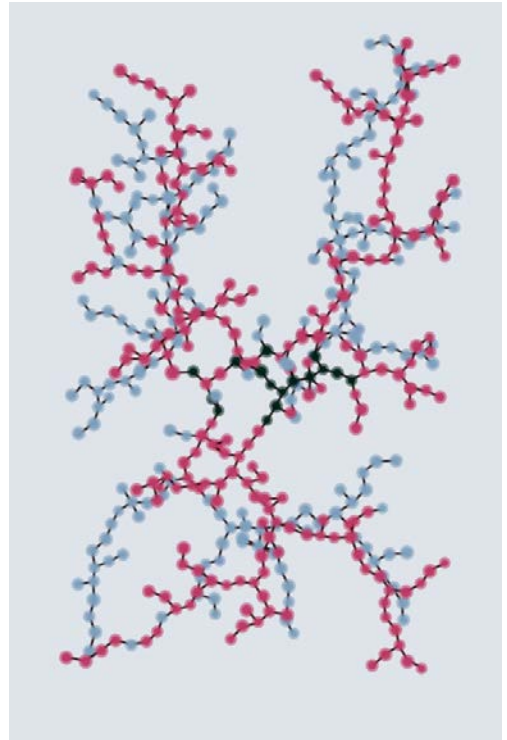


Fig 2. *Subversion, Theory No. 4* from *A Theory of Universal Control*, 2023, Angela Ferraiolo, digital file from computational system.

Authoritarianism and Surveillance The concept of a "control society" suggests a level of authoritarianism and surveillance, where those in power seek to maintain control over the population. The metaphor highlights the potential for abuse of power and the erosion of individual freedoms and privacy in such systems.

Dynamic and Adaptive Systems

The metaphor of factions attacking and subverting each other within a computer model represents a dynamic and adaptive system. In real-world societies, various groups and individuals constantly adapt their strategies to gain advantages or protect their interests. This metaphor

reflects the ever-changing nature of social and political dynamics.

Resilience and Vulnerability

The metaphor can also be interpreted in terms of system resilience and vulnerability. Factions that successfully attack and subvert the control system demonstrate vulnerabilities in the existing power structures. On the other hand, the control system's ability to withstand these attacks showcases its resilience and adaptability.

In addition to these primary readings of the system, there are several additional readings associated with the project:

Unintended Consequences

Factional conflicts and subversion can lead to unintended consequences and collateral damage. This metaphor illustrates how actions taken by different groups may have ripple effects throughout a society, affecting not only the targeted control system but also innocent bystanders.

Social Commentary

The metaphor can serve as a form of social commentary, raising questions about the ethical and moral dimensions of power, control, and governance. It prompts us to consider the trade-offs between security and individual freedoms in control societies.

Complexity and Interconnectedness The metaphor emphasizes the complexity and interconnectedness of systems. Actions taken by one faction can have cascading effects on other factions and the overall control system. This underscores the importance of understanding the interdependencies and feedback loops within society.

Modeling and Simulation

Finally, the use of a computer model to simulate these dynamics underscores the

role of computational modeling in understanding and potentially predicting the behavior of complex systems. It highlights the utility of such models for studying real-world societal phenomena.

The metaphor of a control society with factions attacking and subverting each other is intended to serve as a lens allowing the consideration of dynamics, challenges, and consequences of power, control, and conflict in human societies. It encourages critical reflection on these issues and the potential role of computer models in shedding light on complex societal systems.

Conclusion

This paper described an artwork titled *Subversion*, one system part in a larger series of works titled 'A Theory of Universal Control'. *Subversion*, and this series as a whole examines the dynamics of control societies and recent theories of control. *Subversion* consists of a set of agents representing distinct factions each with different strategies of engagement that compete for control across a branched structure of connected nodes. The design of the project draws on ideas from adaptive systems, critical theory, philosophy, and political science. The motivation for this project was to explore the branching structures as adaptive systems and as an expressive form.

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