

Research project Marianne van den Boomen (short introduction)

Medium, Metaphor, Myth: The Making of the Internet

My Ph.D. project is called *Medium, Metaphor, Myth: The Making of the Internet*. My aim is to provide a material-semiotic ontology of the Internet. My hypothesis is that this can be done by analysing the role of metaphor. More precisely, I try to follow the remediations/intermediations between the metaphors and technologies which constitute this thing we call the Internet.

Examples of those mediating metaphors are discourse metaphors like electronic highway, cyberspace, and digital commons, but also medium metonymia like the screen, the mouse, the keyboard and open source.

The main question is: How do these metaphors work, how do they become actors in a network of code?

Code here has a double meaning:

1. code as digital code (software, network protocols, scripting languages)
2. code as signification system (linguistic, semiotic, moral, social, political)

This double sidedness is in itself an metaphor of the research project. This metaphor keeps recurring on several levels, as the main problems of this study lie in some well known dichotomies:

- between the discursive and the material
- between the social and the technical
- between thinking and doing
- between representations and ontology
- between subject and object
- between actor and network
- between situated embodiment and metaphysical transcendence

These oscillating dichotomies will not dissolve in some dialectical synthesis. What I try to do is to think these terms 'into each other', as productive hybrids, while at the same time creating space for the notion of the 'inter'. This 'inter' can be seen as a dynamic space in which translations and coding take place, in a double sense: conceptual and discursive translations in metaphors and metonymia, and material translations/transformations ('labour').

My method of tracing metaphors as actors consists of a mixture of metaphor mapping (Lakoff & Johnson), micro-discourse analysis (Hacking, Derrida), and materialistic semiotics (Hayles, Latour).