The performative character of digital methods

Dr. Astrid Mager

Institute of Technology Assessment

Austrian Academy of Sciences
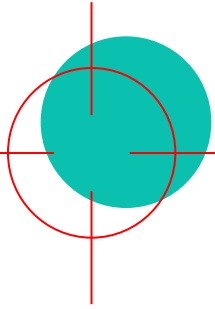
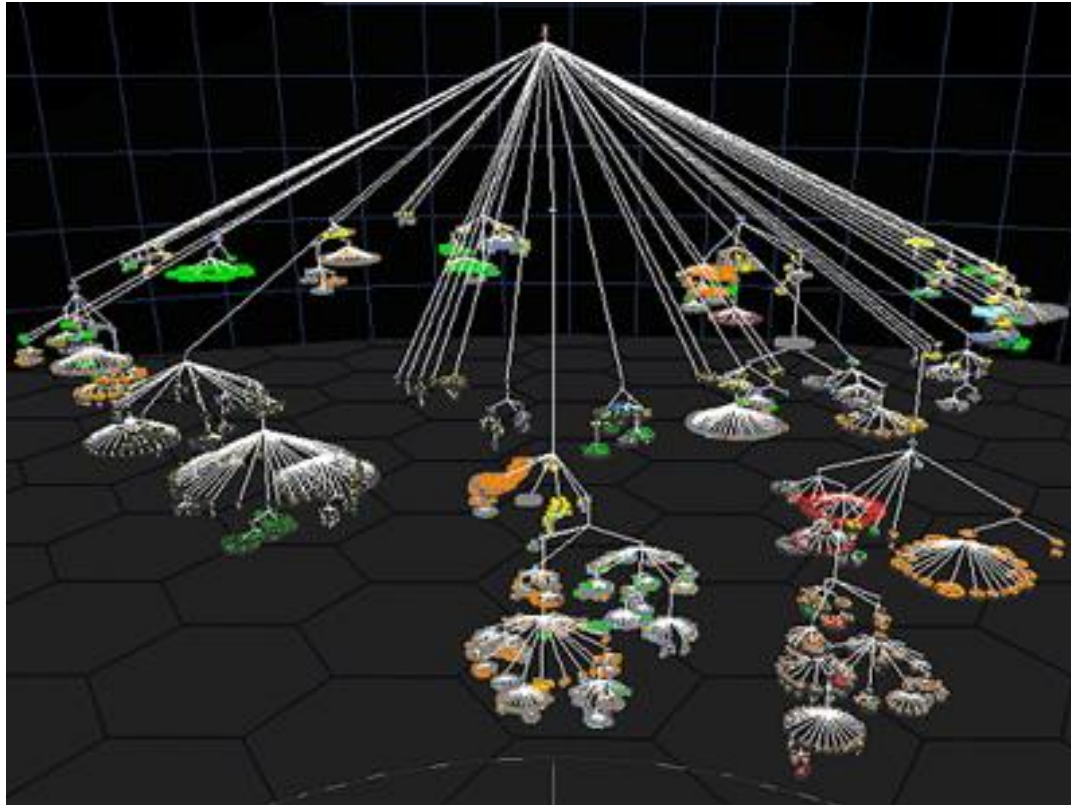A-1030 Vienna, Strohgasse 45/5

astrid.mager@oeaw.ac.at
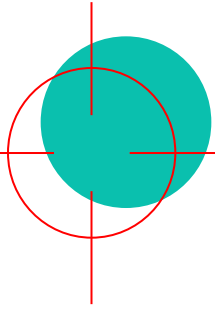
www.astridmager.net

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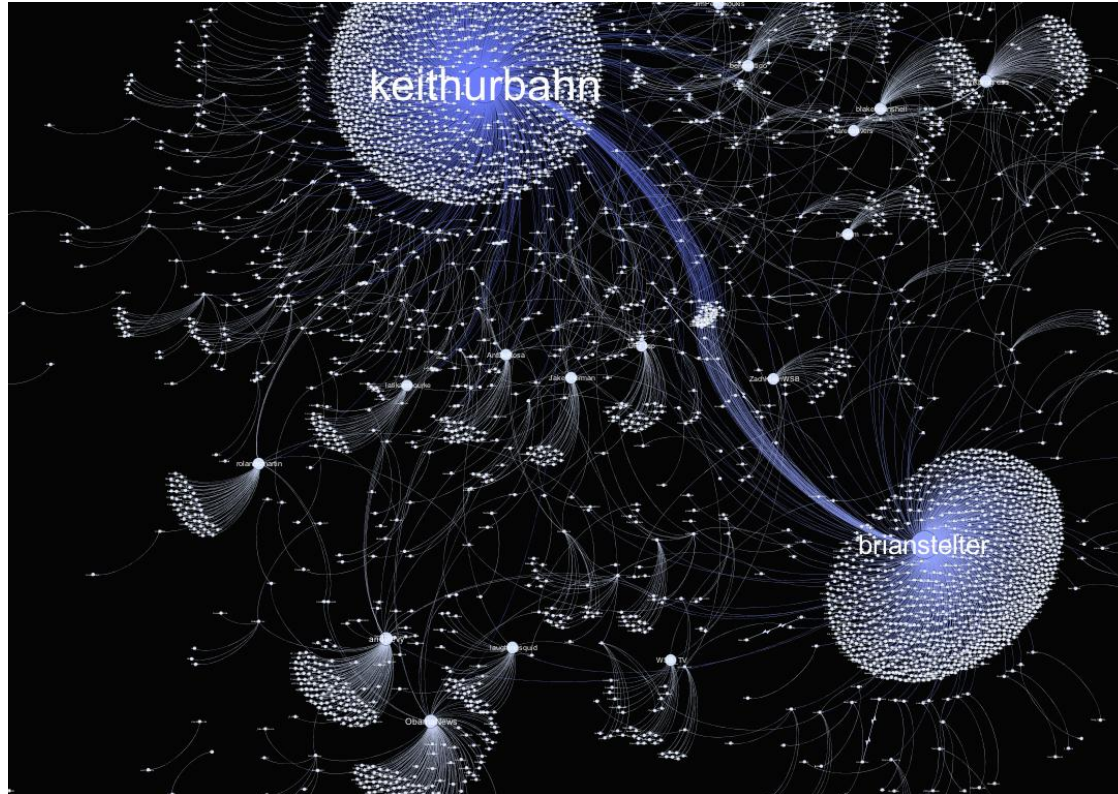# Internet as (democratic) NETWORK

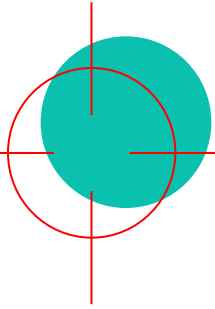© visualcomplexity.com

Internet as (democratic) NETWORK
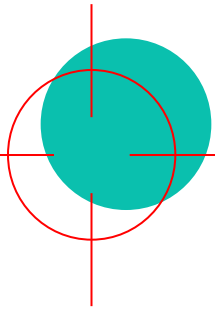

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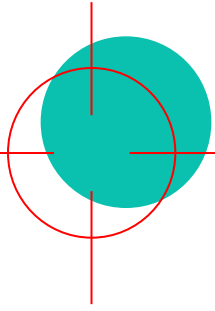
Google as GATEKEEPER

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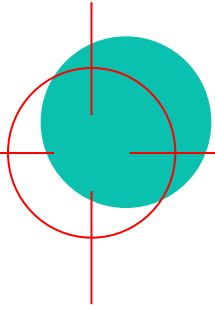# Google as GATEKEEPER

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METAPHORS

„metaphors structure our most basic understandings of our experience, they are "metaphors we live by"“

(Lakoff & Johnson 2003)

Performativity of METHODS

methods make „*certain (political) arrangements more probable, stronger, more real, whilst eroding others and making them less real*"
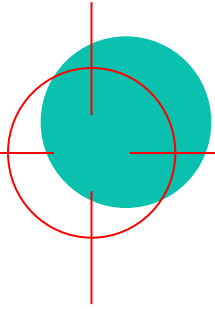(Law 2004: 149)

„*the term ontological politics suggests a link between the real, the conditions of possibility we live with, and the political*"
(Mol 1999: 86)

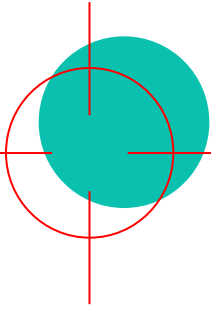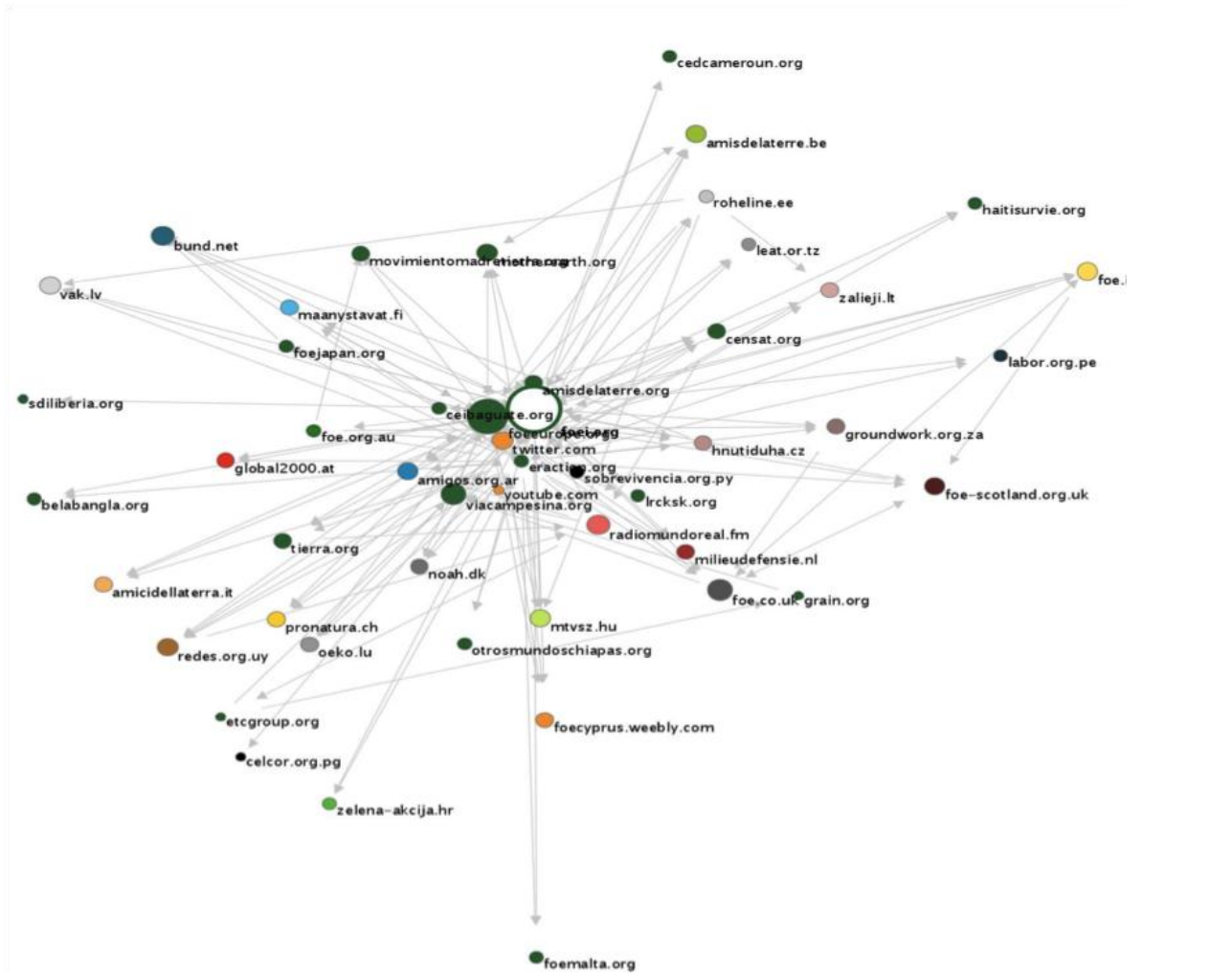*Are there options & how to handle choice incorporated (Mol)?*
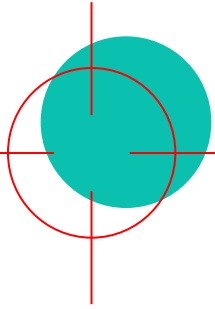
CASE STUDY: Biofuel controversy

- What web realities do link networks and search engine analyses enact? What is emphasized, what is hidden?

- What is the „ontological politics" of these digital methods?

- What choices could/ should be made? By whom? How to handle „choice incorporated"?
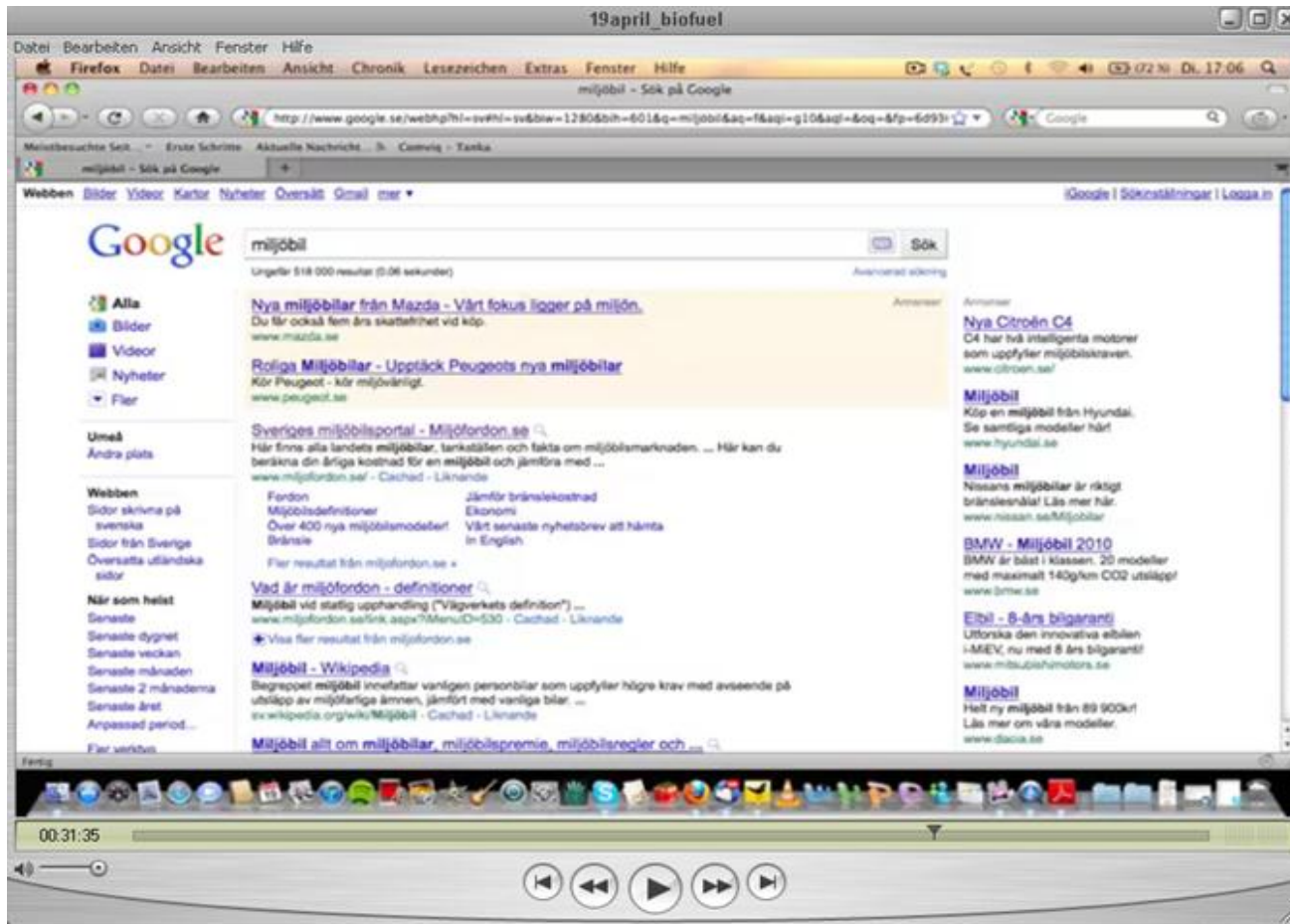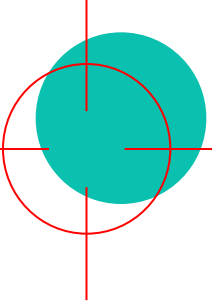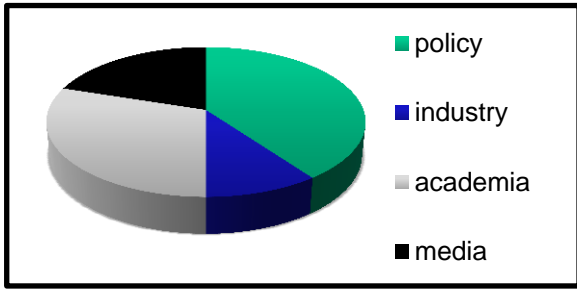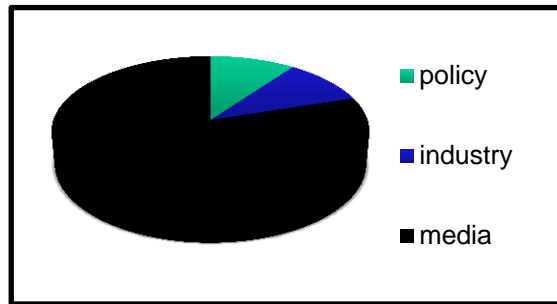
Web as link NETWORK

Web as link NETWORK
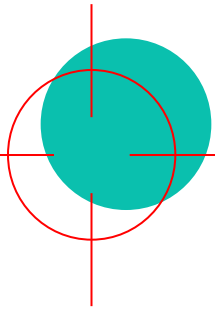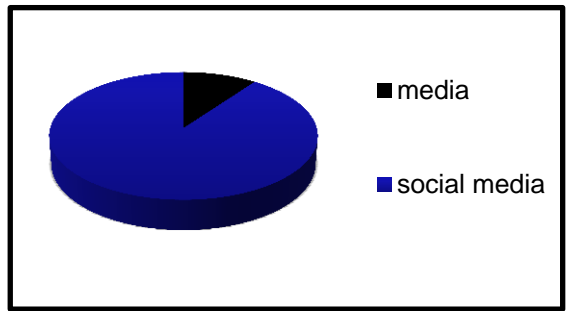
Google as GATEKEEPER

Google as GATEKEEPER

„biofuel"
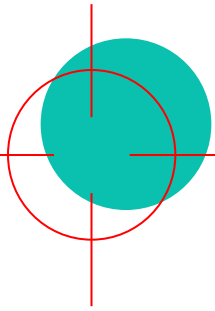
„biofuel debate"

"super green car bonus"

Google as GATEKEEPER

Issue cloud - issues for all sources (URLs, cumulative, retrieved by Google scraper)

deforestation (646)   land-grab (329)
environmental impact (808)
social impact (543) food price
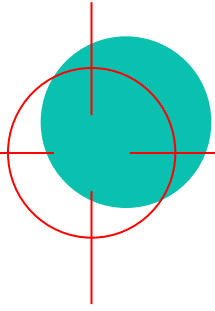(727) food vs fuel (488)

„Ontological politics"

Link networks

depict the web as a de-central network of websites

perpetuate democratic utopia of the web

may create desire for alternative technologies and tools

Google analyses

depict the web as a hierarchical index of websites

perpetuate corporate gatekeepers

may provide basis for search engine critique

(Political) choices?

Choices between different „digital" methods? – *„follow the medium"* (Rogers 2009)

Choices between different web realities? – *„realities do not merely co-exist; sometimes they clash or depend on each other, sometimes they are found inside one another"* (Mol 1999)

Who gets to make these choices? Researchers? Research fields? Funding bodies?

Does the increase in visualization tools mirror the growth of innovative „digital research"? Or does it rather correspond to budget cuts since software tools provide instant results, while qualitative web research of „big data" would take forever?
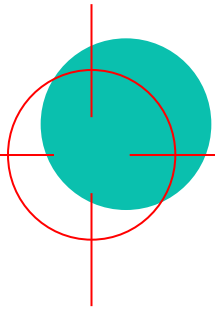
Thanks!

astrid.mager@oeaw.ac.at

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