

A day in the life...: Mapping the
academic assemblage socio-
materially

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Overview

- The University: Evolutions and devices
 - Evolutions
 - Devices
- The study
 - Conceptual Framework: Actor-Network Theory
 - Methodology: Ethnographic interviews as case studies
 - Results: A socio-material mapping of the academic assemblage
- Discussion

The University: Evolutions and devices

- Evolutions:
 - Digital technologies:
 - Research: publishing and reading online, instead of (only) books and paper journals
 - Teaching: electronic learning environments (cf. Blackboard), instead of (only) in auditoria
 - Services: communication with society by means of e-mail or Skype, instead of (only) by postal mail and (fixed) telephone
- Devices: e-mail programs, web browsers, mobile phones, tablets, smartboards, laptops, research devices, etc.
- How these devices and evolutions influence the concrete daily functioning of the academia, and of academics in particular, is scarcely subject of investigation

=> Research question/interest of the general doctoral project: How do these digital technologies and devices affect/shape the concrete daily lives of academics/the University?

The study

- Conceptual framework: Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in a nutshell
 - A socio-material approach focussing on how practices are being assembled
 - These practices consist of both the human/social and the non-human/material (the human subject is not being given privilege). *Active* social and material elements (i.e., entities that do things) are both called *actors*
 - These actors form networks by means of their interactions and performed relations (*associations*)
 - I, this Powerpoint presentation, the beamer, and all of you (if you are active, that is ☺) constitute a 'conference presentation' network
 - Actors are relational effects themselves: an actor is, always, a network
 - My network right now, for example, consists of my computer, my clothes, my promotor, etc.: they (co-)define what I am right now and what I can(not) do right now

The study

- Data gathering: interviews with senior academic staff
 - Purposeful sampling: different countries, universities, research domains, seniority
- Contents of interview:
 - Conform the ANT-framework, the intention was to disentangle the academic's practices by tracing the different relations with different actors
 - Specific interview research questions:
 - *What* do interviewees do concretely? (e.g. with their computer, cell phone, books, reports)
 - *Which interactions* do they form exactly? (e.g. who is skyped or e-mailed with, which people are met in the office, specific communication to students)
- Interview process:
 - Long duration (1-2h)
 - This lead to a peculiar interview structure ('ethnographic interview'):
 - No focus on meaning giving
 - No focus on the interviewee's discourse
 - Instead: Examining the academic's course of the (previous) day: what did s/he do, with whom, with which devices, when, etc. – from the moment of waking up until the moment of going to sleep
 - In utmost detail: many but short questions ('hearing')
- Why interviews?
 - The supposition was that direct access to the course of the day and especially to computer activity would be denied: private and public dimensions seem to be interwoven in computer activity, cell phone access, and other electronic devices
 - Interviews grant only mediated access to the data... but the same is, of course, also true for observation or any other method

The study

- Respondent Mary:
 - Tenure-track position
 - Bio-engineer
 - Research professor
 - Strong bonds with industry and MIT
 - Interviewed at the end of the academic year

Interview sample course of the day (Mary)

- In utmost detail:
 - **May I ask you to return to the beginning of the day...**
 - Yes?
 - **Thus, the very moment you awoke.**
 - Uhm, ok. Yes...?
 - **Thus, that far backwards.**
 - *(laughs, confused)* Yes, ok? Uhm...
 - **How did you wake up, for instance? (...) I will often be very direct...**
 - *(interrupts)* Yes, yes, I know.
 - **... meaning that it will sometimes take up the form of a hearing...**
 - *(interrupts, laughs)* I wake up, I think I wake up by means of the sunlight because, uhm, I have just moved to a new house and my curtains are not that, uhm, lightproof. Thus, uhm, I woke up slowly by means of the light. *(laughs)*
 - **Yes, and does that happen most of the time, or do you set an alarm...**
 - No, most of the time I set an alarm, but, it is one of the kind that builds up the music volume very slowly, which makes that I can awake slowly.
 - **So, not by means of a computer, a cell phone or...?**
 - No, my cell phone is also my alarm clock.
 - **Ok, yes.**
 - *(Gets going)* Yes, then... Getting up, washing, dressing...
 - **Etc.**

Analysis

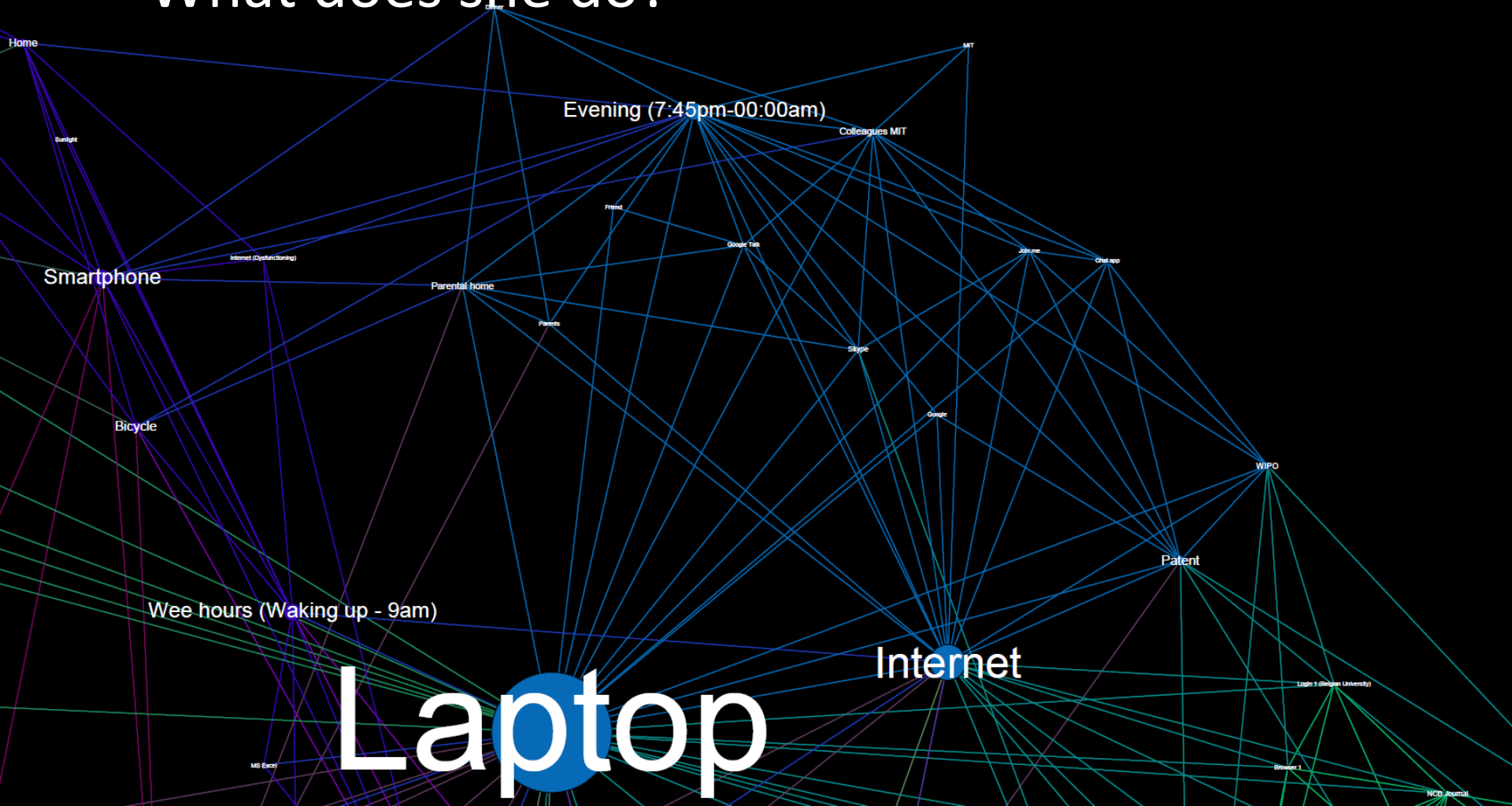
- Interview transcriptions (verbatim)
- Interview coding (QSR Nvivo)
 - Codes:E.g.:
 - Parts of the course of the day: Wee hours, Morning, Noon, etc.
 - Interactions – with devices, persons, spaces, etc. (computer, colleagues, meeting rooms)
 - Interactions in its literal sense: inter-action, *viz.* if some kind of action occurs between two (or more) actors: using, speaking, typing, sending, touching, ...
 - No interpretations and/or derivations, only what the interviewee mentioned literally
- Graphic rendering of the network (Gephi)
 - Clustering: actors with same color tend to interact more often
 - Lay-out: Force Atlas algorithm (the further away, the less likely an interaction will occur)

Results: Meet Mary

- An actor, is always, a network...
- Hence, here is a graphical presentation of Mary('s assemblage) that day:
- [..\..\..\..\Desktop\Gebruiken!!.pdf](#)
- [..\..\..\..\Desktop\Zonder tijdsindicaties.pdf](#)

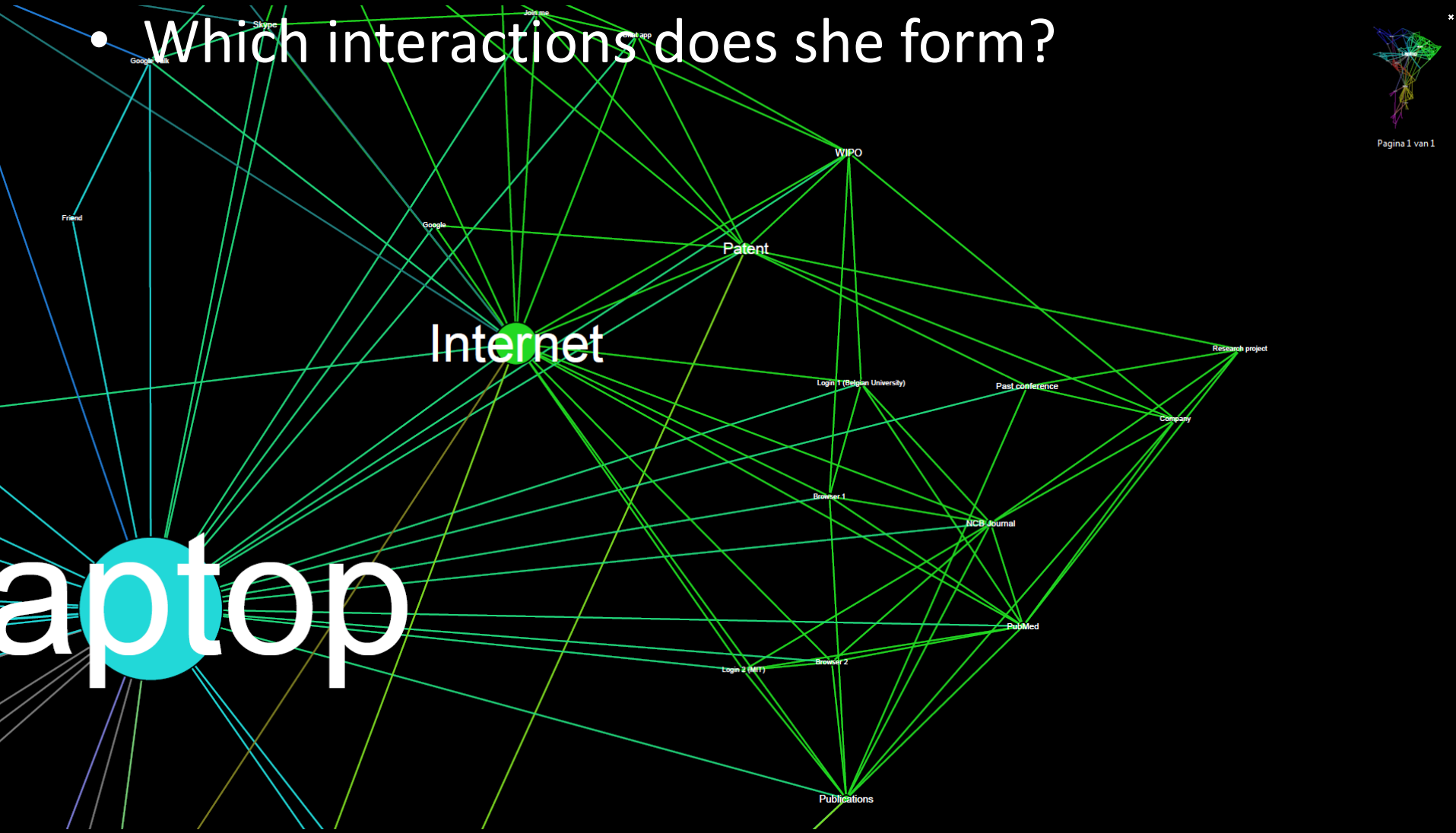
Results: Meet Mary

- What does she do?



Results: Meet Mary

- Which interactions does she form?



Thank you

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