

# some thoughts about narrative methods

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- Why studying narratives or stories?
  - Stories are extremely important, they have many functions
  - People continuously construct stories
  - These stories show what is important to them
  - They show selective perceptions and constructions
  - They show how people construct self-referentiality
- How can we study narratives or stories?
  - an example
- Principles for studying stories



- A narrative (or story) is any account of connected events, presented to a reader or listener in a sequence of written or spoken words, or in a sequence of (moving) pictures (Oxford English Dictionary)





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### Stories make our lives bearable



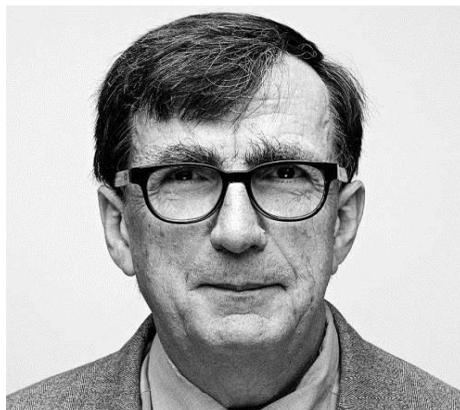
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**“To be a person is to have a story to tell”  
Karen Blixen**

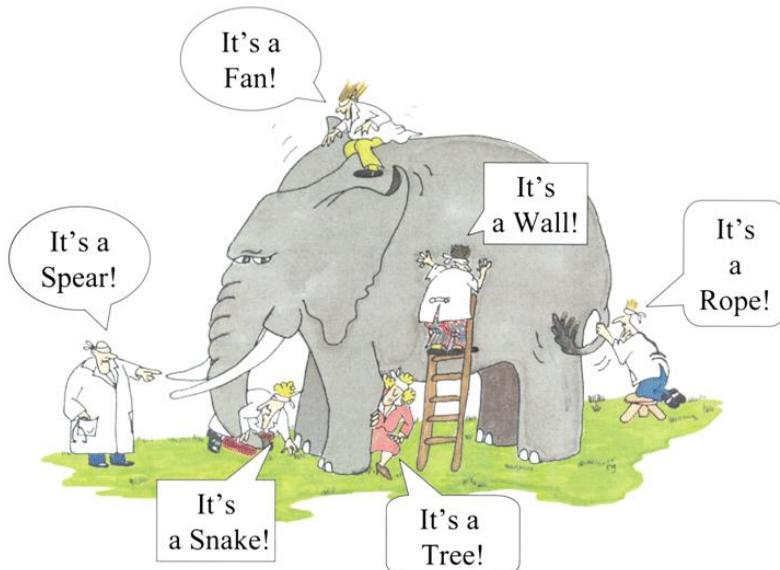


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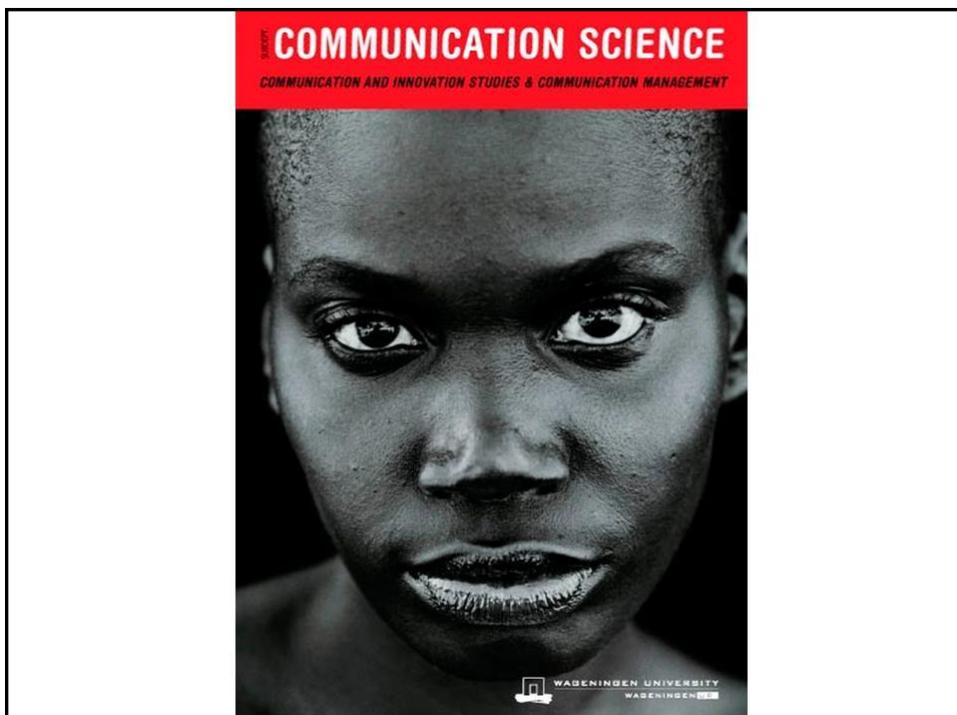
**Laboratory Life: the social construction  
of scientific facts (1979)  
(Bruno Latour en Steve Woolgar)**



## Stories are polysemic



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## **Self-referentiality refers to the characteristic of people and organizations to:**

- see the environment from a completely own idea about what is important and what not
- construct contexts that confirms this idea
- without being aware of doing so

(Luhmann, 1980)

## **Analysing text and talk by means of**

- Conversation analysis
- Discourse analysis
- Frame analysis
- Discursive psychology

**“My forest, my kingdom”- Self-referentiality as a strategy in the case of small forest owners coping with governmental regulations.**

Van Herzele, A. & N. Aarts (2013).  
in: *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 46 / 1, 63-81



- We started from a set of theoretical notions:
  - Self-referentiality (Luhmann)
  - Framing (Dewulf et al; Aarts et el)
  - Resemiotisation (Iedema)
  
- Which have been selected and further developed iteratively during the research process

## How the forest owners cope with policy artifacts

- **Interpreting policy artifacts from within the own life-world**
  
- Drawing boundaries between themselves ('we') and the government ('they')
  
- Positioning themselves within the government perspective

*Louis:* I, thus, have four dogs... and then I am in the forest with those four dogs and a forest ward turns up... and they run free... you can't do that... I find that wrong (*Marcel nods in much agreement*). Thus, now I have to keep my four dogs on a leach... so there is no freedom for those dogs, èh? ... And neither for me, èh?... (*Geel, April 23*)

*Johan:* From April first you can't enter the forest with a saw... to July first... it's birds time! Thus um ... we have stopped working now. It was a beautiful day this morning, but... ... it's a pity, eh? ... Yeah, from April first you are no longer permitted. (*Sint-Niklaas, April 2*)

*Leo:* (...) You have a piece of land with trees on it and that is cadastral income... and again to the municipality ... and then there is a shed on it where you can eat and store your grass mower ... And then you have to pay again for a second residence... If this would cease to exist, it would become much more interesting.

*André:* I find that very important.

*Arnold:* (adds another example of unduly taxes)

*Leo:* It is a burden ... but it is a milk cow for the government.

*Arnold:* yes yes ... completely wrong... (*Sint Niklaas, April 9*)

## Principles for narrative research

- **Transparency**, being open and clear about the decisions during the research process (decisional accountability)
- **Accuracy** of observation, registration and reporting (organizing data)
- **Systematics** for ordering concepts and for making clear and controllable the links in reasoning

## The triple hermeneutic

- Textual meaning is conveyed not only through the writer's intent or the elements of writing, it also rests on prior knowledge, from experience and situatedness in the world, that readers bring to their readings of texts (Yanow, 2000)

## Thank you!

