

## Scientists, uncertainty, and story-telling

A review on Barclay, J., Robertson, R., and Armijos, M. T.: "Scientists as Story-tellers: the explanatory power of stories told about environmental crises.

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This is an excellent and inspiring article. Since Bruner (1986) there has been a great deal of theorizing about two different, if not even opposite, forms of knowledge, the *paradigmatic* (or 'scientific') and the *narrative*. Recent discussions about narrative and climate change have often led to such less than surprising conclusions that a narrative cannot fully capture such complex phenomena as global warming. Barclay et al. do not stop by wondering and stating the differences between these knowledge forms but proceed – very much in the spirit of Bruno Latour – to study the entanglement of these forms of knowing within the context of several volcanic crises. The knowledge forms may be different, even radically different, but during the time of crisis, when scholars seek scientifically justified responses, these forms of knowing get entangled in exciting and productive ways. I think this study and its setting has much to offer to narrative scholars and students of other kinds of crises.

The performed narrative analysis is as such impeccable enough but might profit from further subtlety. Words like "expectation", "surprise", and "uncertainty" recur in the text. Jerome Bruner (1990; 1991; cf. Hyvärinen 2016) has theorized narrative as a language and knowledge form whose function is to react to unexpected, surprising, and non-canonical events. He describes how cultures encode the expectations of the normal, proper, and canonical in the form of sequential scripts. The description of how the scientists were observing the gradually exploding volcanos, being insecure about whether the process follows the scientifically processed, expected course of events, or does it and how and when does it violate the expectations, reminds me closely of Bruner's discussion. To add one more layer, many recent narratologists (Fludernik 1996; Herman 2009; Caracciolo 2014) have defined narratives not merely as sequences of events but have accentuated the aspect of experiencing and emotions in the recounted storyworlds. As we read the article and the stories the scientists tell, we can see that intense feelings and disrupting experiences are strong drivers of telling.

One laudable move in the article (in 135) was when the interviewers "asked them how, where, when and why they more normally would tell these stories". This is a clever move since interviews have often been criticized for their "artificiality" (in most cases unfairly, but it is another story entirely). Now the researchers wanted to locate the "natural environments" of these stories by putting the interviewees to think about their telling habits. Of course, it is still different from the recording of the storytelling in situ...but when indeed can we be there in right time and place, with a recorder and proper permits? In any case, this move indicates that the researchers have not only collected stories as descriptions of something (say, volcanic crises) but wanted to address the "narrative realities" where the scientists already were telling these influential stories to their colleagues and students (see Gubrium & Holstein 2009).

Also, speaking about the methodology, the idea of asking three different stories sounds elegant and justified, precisely for letting the tellers to express a variety of experiences and interpretations. Of course, the employed thematic reading is not the most elegant or productive way of reading interview materials. In this study, it gives a rough and informative outline of the contents. By paying more attention to the interview interaction and the nuances of language use, this exciting material might offer chances for more thorough and comprehensive analysis. As regards the tools of more nuanced readings, I would recommend several chapters in De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2015 (esp. Parts III-IV). I hope the team will continue its cooperation with this intriguing theme!

Some details:

(40) The classical sociolinguists are William Labov (not Lebov) and Joshua Waletzky (not Waletsky). The philosopher, in (30) is Bruno Latour, not LaTour. (125) Jackson, 2002, is missing from the references.

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