

# NARRATING COMPLEXITY

A Pragmatistic Narratology for Social Processes

# State of Project



TTN

Ethik interdisziplinär

- Doctoral Thesis
- Doctoral Adviser: Michael Hampe, Professor of Philosophy at the ETH-Zürich
- ETH-Research Grant:
- Duration: 3 Years
- Application deadline: September 1, 2010

- In this research project, I suggest an alternative approach on how to describe and handle complex problems with a social dimension.
- Complex problems with a social dimension are:
  - Economic- or financial crisis
  - climate change
  - labor market problems
  - demographic problems
  - ...
- Instead of a mathematical description of complex social processes I propose describing them in a narrative way.

- Background and starting point
- The narrative turn
  - A primacy of narration: A systematic reconstruction in Rorty's work
  - A critique of Rorty's distinction between the private and the public
- Two different types of literature
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# Prologue

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The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://ineteconomics.org/initiatives/conferences/kings-college>. The page features the Inet Economics logo and navigation menus. The main content area is titled 'Conference @ King's' and includes a sub-header 'The Economic Crisis and the Crisis in Economics INET Inaugural Conference @ King's College' dated April 8-11, 2010. A detailed paragraph describes the inaugural conference, mentioning key speakers like Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Adair Lord Turner, Joseph Stiglitz, and Simon Johnson. A sidebar on the right lists 'Conference Partners' (CIGI and Stiftung Mercator) and a 'Watch the Sessions' section with a link to view videos. At the bottom, there are sections for 'INET IN THE PRESS' and 'KING'S COLLEGE'.

http://ineteconomics.org/initiatives/conferences/kings-college

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE ABOUT THE WEBSITE TEAM THE MEDIA NEWS HELP LOGIN

**Institute for New Economic Thinking**

The Front Page Conference @ King's

INITIATIVES VIDEOS GOOGLE WAVES ENGAGE BLOG

## Conference @ King's

**The Economic Crisis and the Crisis in Economics  
INET Inaugural Conference @ King's College**

April 8-11, 2010

**The Inaugural Conference**  
The Institute for New Economic Thinking's (INET) inaugural Conference @ King's College concluded on Sunday, April 11, and was a great success. Two hundred of the world's most distinguished economists, academics and thought leaders congregated at King's College, Cambridge to discuss the future of the economic profession at the same location where Keynes pondered and debated economic theory over 70 years ago. Conversations focused on the Greek debt crisis, the current state of the Central Bank, and strategies for economic reform worldwide. Key speakers included Dominique Strauss-Kahn (Managing Director of the IMF), Adair Lord Turner (chairman of the Financial Services Authority), Joseph Stiglitz (professor at Columbia University and Nobel laureate), and Simon Johnson (professor at MIT and former Chief Economist of the IMF).

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Commerce Innovation  
Centre pour l'innovation dans  
la gouvernance internationale

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**INET IN THE PRESS**  
Top Articles

**KING'S COLLEGE**  
The Significance of King's

John Kay (Institute for New Economic Thinking):

- “Macroeconomics today is largely based on analysis labeled **dynamic stochastic general equilibrium**. The unappealing title gives the game away: the theorists are mostly talking to themselves. Their theories proved virtually useless in anticipating the crisis, analyzing its development and recommending measures to deal with it.”
- Basic assumption: Market participant act rational (“The Idea that households and companies make economic decisions as if they had available to them all the information about the world that might be available.”)
- “Any other way of describing the world would have to recognize that what people do depends on their fallible beliefs and perceptions, would have to acknowledge uncertainty, and would accommodate the dependence of actions on changing social and cultural norm. Models could not then be universal: They would have to be specific to contexts.”

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J. Doyne Farmer (Santa Fe Institute):

- We have to use more computing power and create much more complex models.

My suggestion:

- Take a step back
  - Take complexity seriously
  - Think holistically
  - Trust in narratives
- 
- Novels
  - Journalism
  - Plays
  - Movies
  - TV-Shows...

**Our society should show more confidence in their  
narratives**

# Prologue

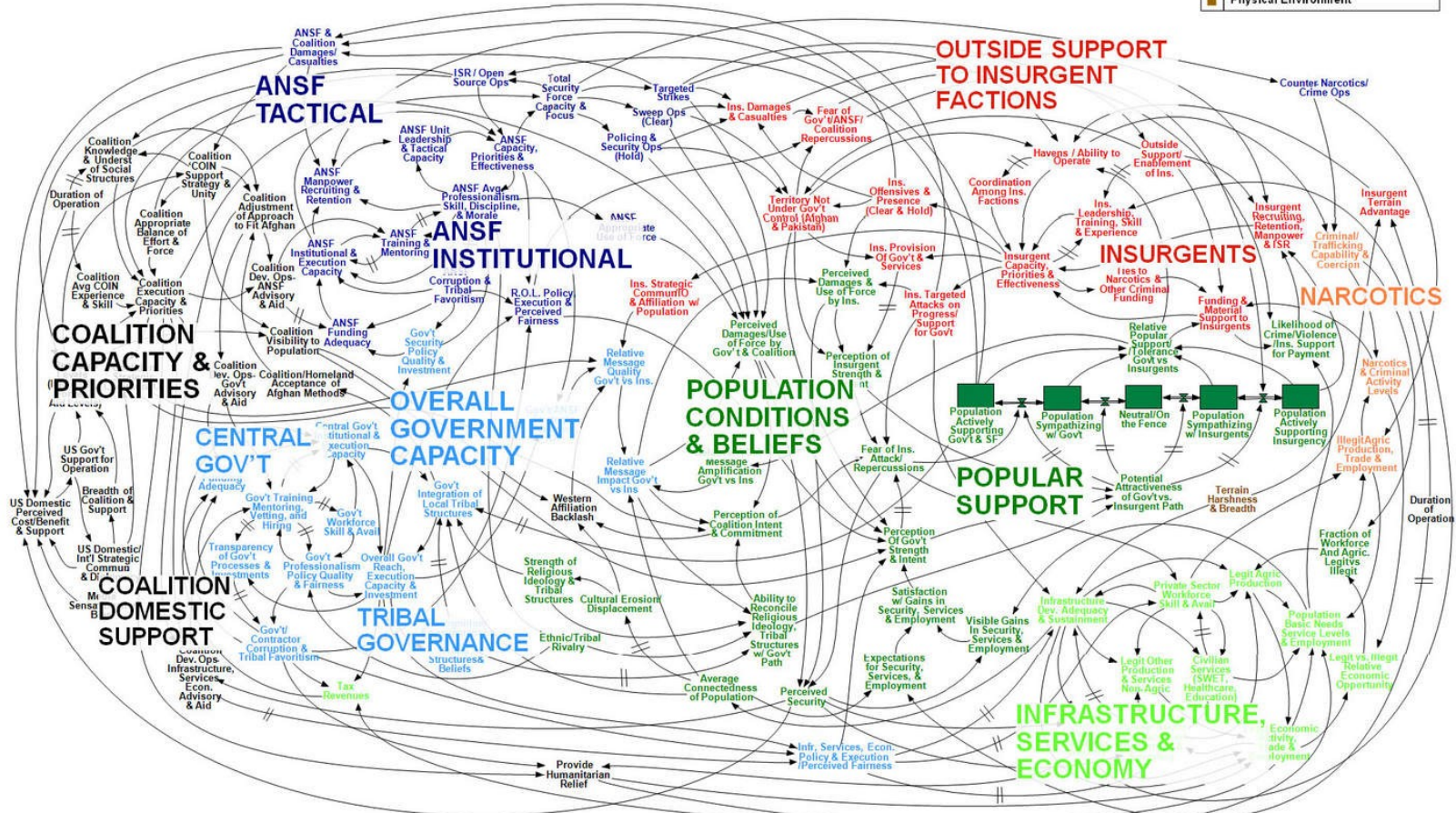


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## Afghanistan Stability / COIN Dynamics

= Significant Delay

- Population/Popular Support
- Infrastructure, Economy, & Services
- Government
- Afghanistan Security Forces
- Insurgents
- Crime and Narcotics
- Coalition Forces & Actions
- Physical Environment



WORKING DRAFT - V3

# The Limitations of System Thinking

- It seems that system thinking goes along with reductionism.
- It seems that the protagonists of system thinking do not seriously take into account the constitutive properties of complex systems.
- This approach will always stay – or even become – a more and more esoteric science.
- They pretend to be non-judgmental.

# The Limitations of System Thinking

- **substance ontology** versus **process ontology**
- **system thinking** versus **process thinking**
- In **system thinking** the structures *have* processes.
- In **process thinking** structures are described *as* processes.

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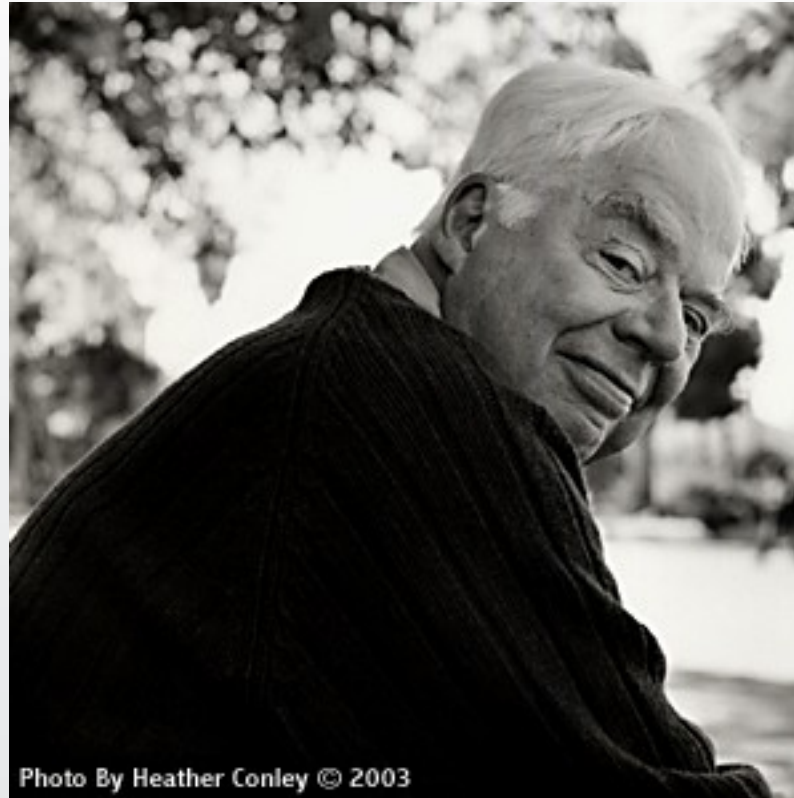
- **Lyotard, Derrida (Post-Structuralism, Deconstructivism, Post-Modernism).**
- **Narrative Ethics (Martha Nussbaum)**
- **Narrative Sociology**
- **Narrative Inquiry (discipline of organizational studies. B. Szarniawska)**
- **History (Hayden White)**



# The Narrative Turn

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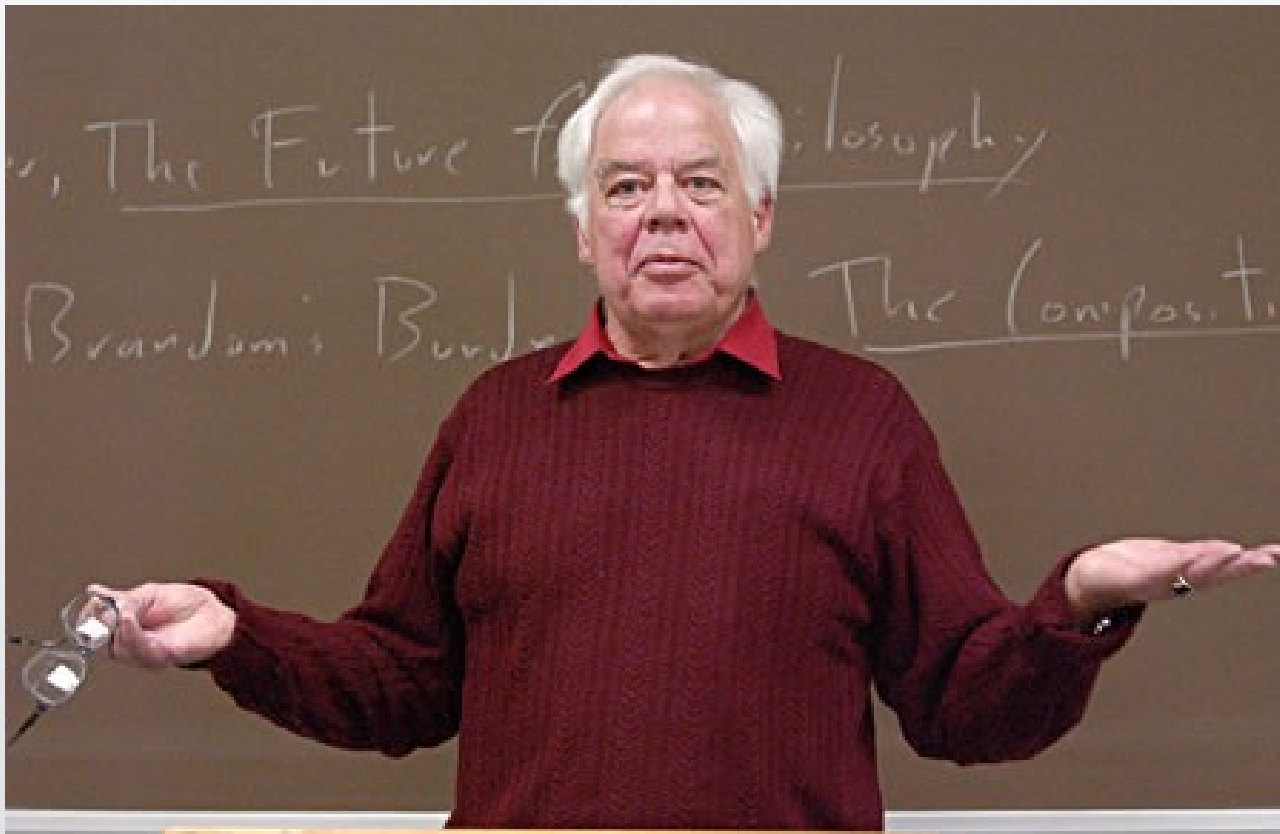


Richard Rorty 1931-2007

## Why Rorty?

3. I am fascinated by Rorty.
4. I am irritated by Rorty.
5. He is a pragmatist.
6. Being a pragmatist he is a process thinker.
7. He holds the notion of truth I need (He rejects correspondence theory).
8. He is an anti-essentialist.
9. He presented the most convincing, sophisticated and sound concept of the meaning of narration to our lives and societies.

The Primacy of Narration  
(opposed to primacy of theory)



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# A primacy of narration: A systematic reconstruction in Rorty's work



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- **Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979)**
  - Rejects Cartesian dualism
  - Rejects the idea of consciousness as a mirror, representing reality
  - Philosophy which is adhering to the mirror metaphor tends to judge other fields of our culture from a ahistorical point of view of pure reason.
  - A „philosophy without mirror“ is just one equal voice among others in the dialog which creates our culture.
  - Refers to Dewey, Heidegger and Wittgenstein
  - Holds a Kuhnian theory of history of science
- **Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (1989)**
  - Contingency of language, selfhood and liberal community
  - Incompatibility of private self-creation and public hope
  - Cruelty and solidarity
    - Two kinds of literature:
      2. Cultivates our autonomy
      3. Helps us being less cruel
        1. Recognizing how other people suffer and recognizing them as one of us
        2. Recognizing how we are cruel to others because of our idiosyncrasies
- **Essays (1979 - 2007)**
- **Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America (1998)**

# A primacy of narration: A systematic reconstruction in Rorty's work



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# A critique of Rorty's distinction between the private and the public

- A very selective choice of pragmatistic ideas and thinkers
- Rorty refers to Dewey, and only to some Deweyan concepts
- He completely ignores the work of Georg Herbert Mead and the whole Meaden school of process sociology (Symbolic Interactionism)
- Rorty lacks a consistent theory of action
- Rorty has a romantic concept of person/individual
- A continuous self-creation through autonomous re-description of one's own self



# A critique of Rorty's distinction between the private and the public



- Combining Rorty with a Medean theory of action and an interactionistic concept of person/identity

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- The success of the process of creating solidarity depends on how precise the description of other persons is.
- It depends on how precise and useful the narrative description of complex, interactionistic social processes is.
- **Finding and defining criteria that make a narration useful and precise.**

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