



Communicating Disaster. Framing a New Research Program

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Introductory Talk

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2. Research Focus: Close-Up and Distant View
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„Blind Spots“ in Disaster Research



„Blind Spots“ in Disaster Research



- Blind spot: the communicative and societal processes that characterise and even constitute disasters
- Difference of working *with* disasters and doing research *on* disasters
- First-order concept and second-order concept
- Traditional: focus on “information”
- Communication or lack of communication as crucial element in dramatizing disaster situations



Hurricane Katrina

“... the lack of survivable, interoperable communications, which Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi said was the most critical problem in his state, occurred because of an accumulation of decisions by federal, state, and local officials that left this long-standing problem unsolved.” (p. 5)

“Wide-spread communications failures in Louisiana and Mississippi were so bad that many officers (from fire and police department) reverted to either physically running messages from one person to another, or passing messages along a daisy chain of officers using radios with limited range.” (p. 8).

Katrina Report of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Executive Summary of the report „Hurricane Katrina. A Nation still unprepared“, 2006, p. 5

Communication

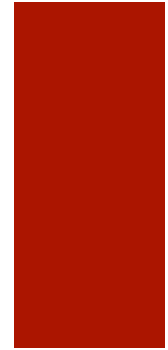


- Traditionally: Conduit-Model (Sender → Recipient)
- Communication as an autopoietic process with the indispensable parts:
 - information
 - message
 - understanding
- Communication and its effects are contingent and context specific

Research Focus:
Close-Up and Distant View



Research Focus



Close-Up

- Use of qualitative methods
- Constructivist approaches
- Relativistic and flexible definitions
- Contextualized research and analysis of the micro-structures of communication

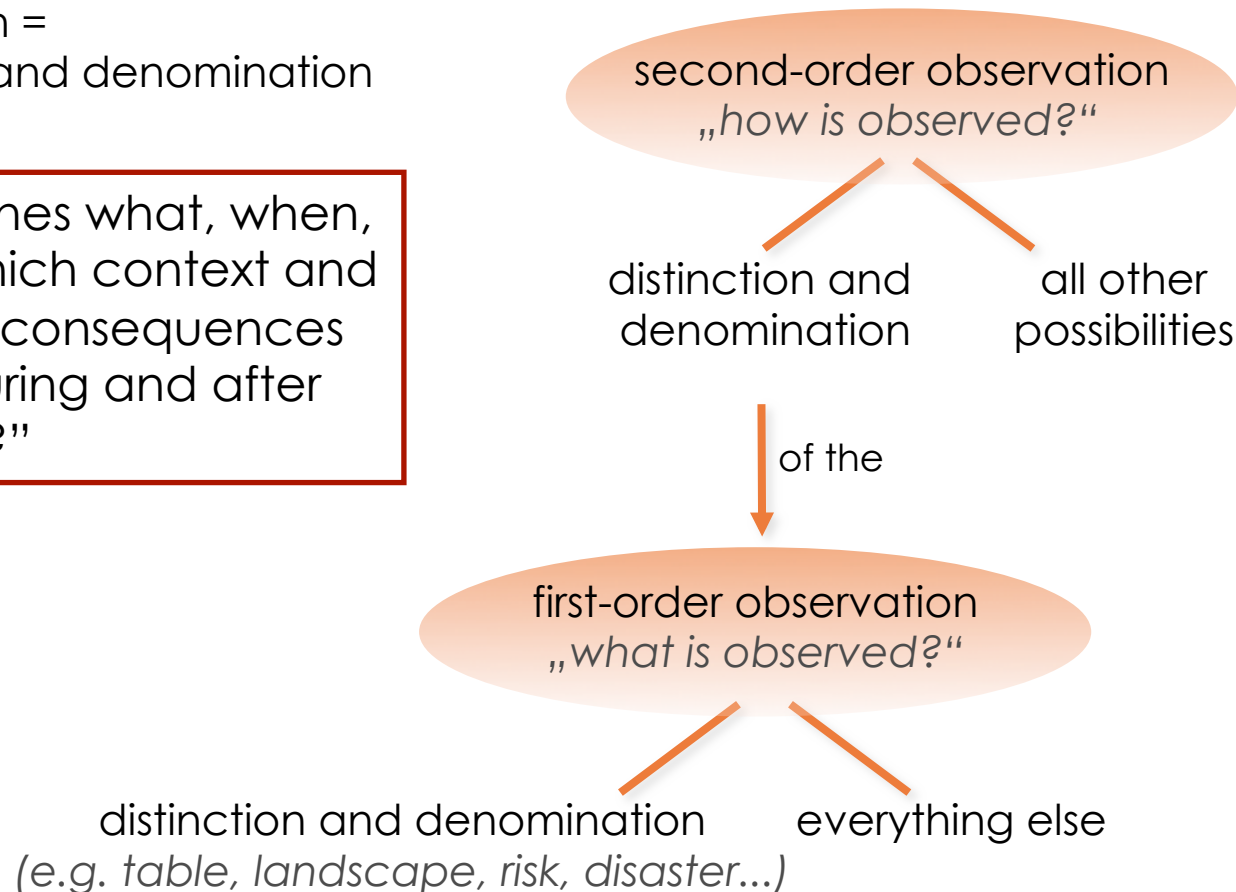
Distant View

- Second-order-observation
- Reflexive knowledge
- Challenge: Data is already implicitly interpreted
- Contingencies, ambiguities and relativism on different levels

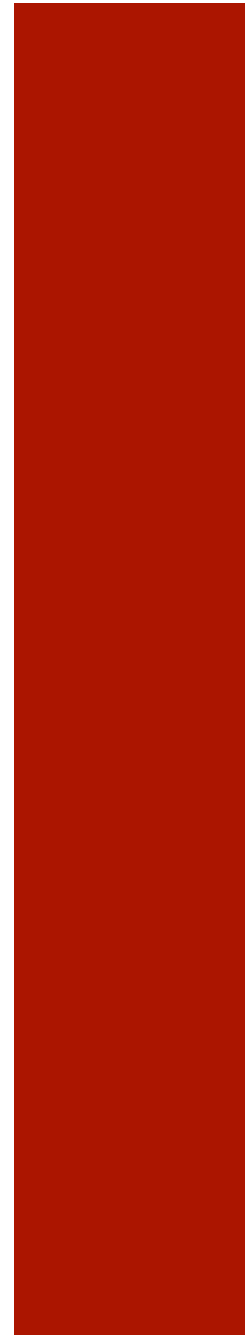
Second-order Observation

observation =
distinction and denomination

“Who defines what, when, how, in which context and with what consequences before, during and after a disaster?”

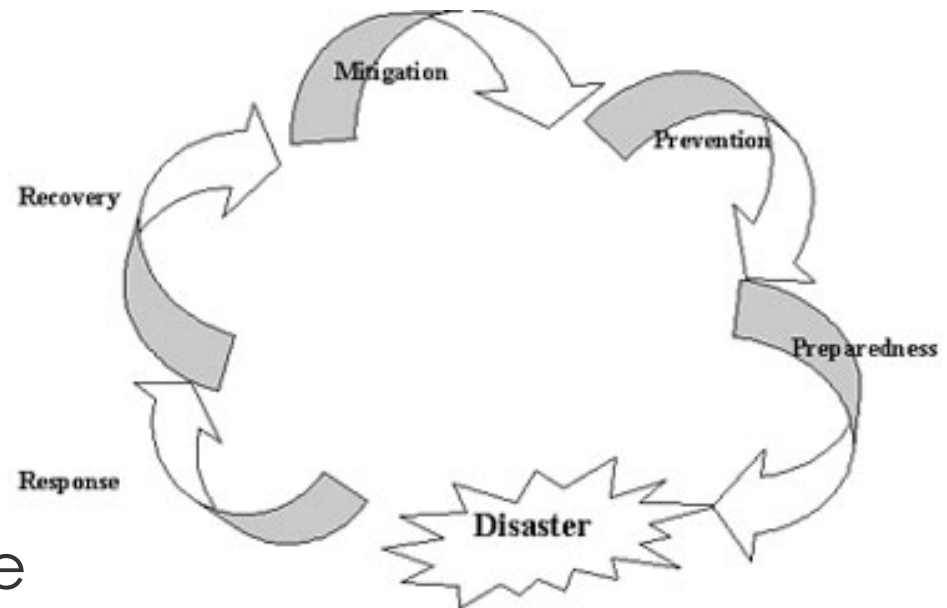


Evaluation of the Temporal Heuristic



Temporal Heuristic

- Lars Clausen (1983)
 - „rapidity“
 - „radicality“
 - „rituality“
- Reiner Keller (2008)
 - „slow-motion-disaster“
 - „fast-forward-disaster“
- Disaster life cycle
- Risk management cycle

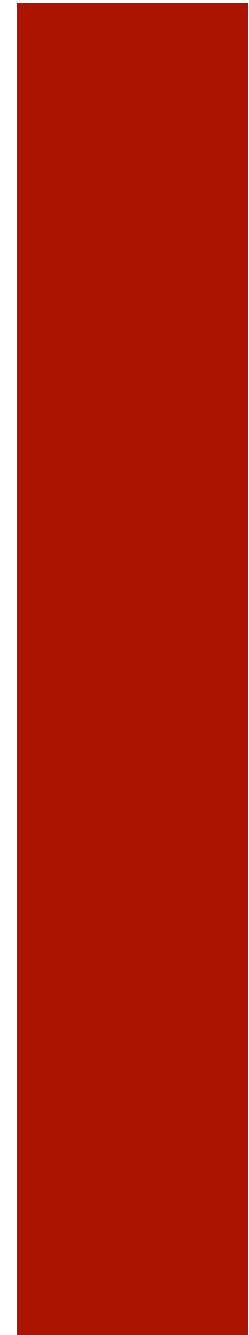




Temporal Heuristic

1. Alarm communication
2. Communications on coping with disasters
3. Communications on risk and evaluation

„Spatialisation“ in Disasters





„Spatialisation“ in Disasters

- Location: „Where“ did it happen?
- Basal distinction of space: spaces of the affected/spaces of the non-affected
- „Precarious Topographies“ and “Accidental Cities”
- Negotiation of borders: Risky or safe areas
- Geo-semiotics
- Distances and spaces of media
- „Dealing with the disasters of others“

Conclusio



Conclusio

- Disasters are the extraordinary – with consequences for communication
- Disasters as perfect subject for interdisciplinary scientific discourses
- Research questions, focus and methodology different to classical disaster research → Second-order-concepts
- Analytical dimensions: time and space





Thank you.

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