

Science in context

Introduction days 3+4

KULT8850/1 Fall/Winter 2023

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Plan Day 3+4

- Today
 - Thomas: From reflection to navigation
 - Terje: History of science and (your) discipline(s)
 - Govert: Theories about science as practice
- Tomorrow
 - Knut: The university
 - Thomas: Practical science: on conferences

Plan and goals: Hours 1+2

- Building a bridge to days 1+2
- Navigational tools
- Group work: Departing, arriving and everything in-between

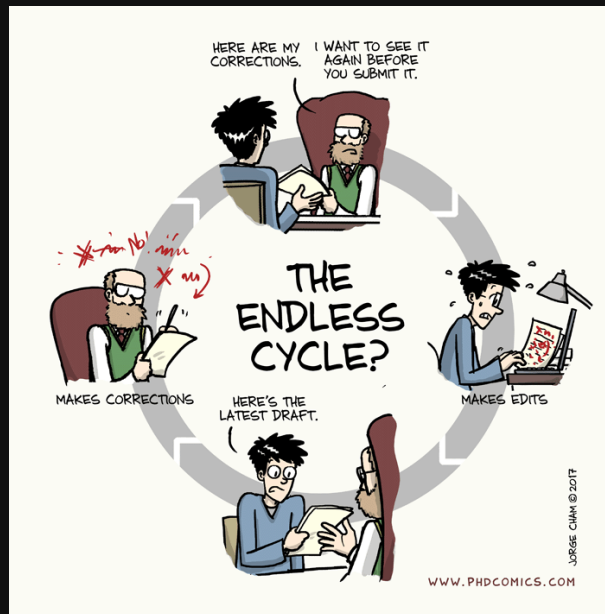
Days 1+2

- Jonathan: Reflections on objectivity
 - the many meanings of this term
 - the (still) dominant view in science and engineering: detachment, purification, progress
 - doubt: paradigms, standpoints
 - a space between detached objectivity and anything goes
- Mattias: The body and literacy
 - the link between both
 - the humanities: contemplation, engagement, "Bildung"
 - an alternative: imitation and improvisation

Days 3+4

- What if we approach science as
 - having a history (there was a time when they did not exist, they change, and they may cease to exist)
 - having functions for individuals, groups, institutions
 - having consequences
- Laboratory studies (1970s/80s): empirical studies of scientific knowledge production - the birth of Science and Technology Studies (STS)
- And: From science in context to your everyday life: doing science as social practice and what this means for you

Navigation



The crux

- Every PhD project is unique and
- there is an expectation that the thesis contributes "some" new knowledge
- which together make PhD-projects risky: what if nothing new comes from it?
- More specifically:
 - the ideas do not work out
 - it is never finished (endless cycles of review and revision)
 - it is deemed not worthy of being defended by the committee
- There is no complete "map", but there is help...

Getting from A to B without a map

- Ask those who were there?
- Ask the locals?
- Pretend that you wanted to go to C when you arrive there?

Ask those who were "there"

Mentors, supervisors, colleagues

- They have been somewhere near maybe, at another time
- They have their own navigation to do (to other places): where they may need your help
- But in the end you walk alone...

Ask the locals

Stakeholders, research partners, groups you engage with

- Know a lot about "there" but little about where you are: A PhD is a weird thing for most people
- And again: They have their own navigation to do and will want you to help them
- And in the end you walk alone...

Pretend it was C you wanted to go

- Has received a lot of scrutiny recently: Produce a lot of data, some significant correlations will always emerge
- In social science and humanities: often baked into the process, e.g. the iterations of grounded theory
- But how do you not get lost? How do you know that C is a goal worthwhile having arrived at?



Navigational tools and skills

- Experienced navigators "feel" their way through changing landscapes (currents, smells, visual clues, ...): **Learning by doing** (and failing once in a while)
- Navigation is always about the **current position** and **the next step**
- **Methods and associated tools** give guidance, they depend on previous mapping work
 - sextant, gps: measure angles between objects whose precise location is known
 - applied to PhD work: previous research and theories do the same

More specifically

- Supervisors, mentors, colleagues: Which tools do they use to know where they are now and where to go next?
- Stakeholders, research objects, engaged groups: They can tell you about a potential destination, but you do not have to arrive exactly where they are
- Different projects: Some have detailed maps, some less so, expectations will vary accordingly
- "Publish" often, "release" early: Enables you to make many small corrections to the course, instead of waiting for the big "jump" to the destination
- Short periods of getting lost are part of every navigation

And: Navigation as craft

- Allow for days where you do nothing but "sharpen the tools" (aka productive procrastination)
- Academic tools: your methods, your ability to find and absorb literature
- And the little tools of everyday navigation: Todo-lists, personal knowledge management, bibliographical software, backup strategies, etc.

Group work

Stories of arriving and of getting lost

- Tell each other stories from when you **arrived** at a new insight (an output, an insight) and from when you felt **lost** in your academic work
- Reflect together on **how** you tell these stories

Telling the story of an academic journey

- The published version: frontstage
- The actual practices: messy, idiosyncratic, coincidental
- The task at hand: translating mess into a meaningful whole
 - preserving as many links between both as possible
 - and of course without violating ethical rules
- everybody knows... (no need to dwell on the mess)
- trial and error = practice

Weaving together day 3+4

- From mess to a PhD: navigation
 - between confusion and a meaningful whole
- The history: it could be otherwise (because it was)
 - between internalist and externalist histories
- Science as practice: sociology of science vs actor-network theory
 - between "nature" and "the social"
- The place of science: University between external forces and internal processes

What makes science special? Three proposals

The laboratory (or your study): A protected space "outside" society

- Positivism: Protected to keep society out/"pure" knowledge in!
- Latour (1983): Protected to shield society from the consequences of trial and error inside
- Knorr-Cetina (1981): Massive number of feedback loops (peer review, etc)

Conference

Scientific conferences

- Who has been at one?
- How was it?

What are scientific conferences?

- Bridging the temporal gap between research and publication
 - early feedback on "preliminary" findings but also
 - a conversation around plans
- See and be seen: Where a scientific community manifests itself, discusses its priorities, fights about future directions
- PhD students: "legitimate peripheral participation"

Types of conferences

- Big annual meetings of basically "everyone" in a discipline or field
 - an overview of what is done right now: keynotes and the overall program
 - finding the small conference within the conference (session) which is most relevant for you
 - always useful to co-organise your own session (first step out of the periphery)
- Workshops on a specific topic, often part of funded projects
 - more difficult to "get in"
 - often connected to a publication (special issue, book)
 - in-depth discussion and networking

"New" formats

- Problems with the traditional format (keynotes+sessions+talks+posters)
 - Extensive travel not sustainable
 - Reproduces hierarchies
 - Often regular presentations are very short (10-15 mins), posters attract little attention
- Alternatives
 - Online/Hybrid conference
 - Unconference or other alternative formats (walking sessions, artistic elements, invited activists, ...)
 - Being a guest researcher can give similar benefits

Group work: Organising committee

- **decides topic** and formulate the call
- receives, reviews and chooses abstracts
- practical organisation (advertisement, room, time, conference dinner)
- organises the publication

What are possible topics of our 5 conference sessions?

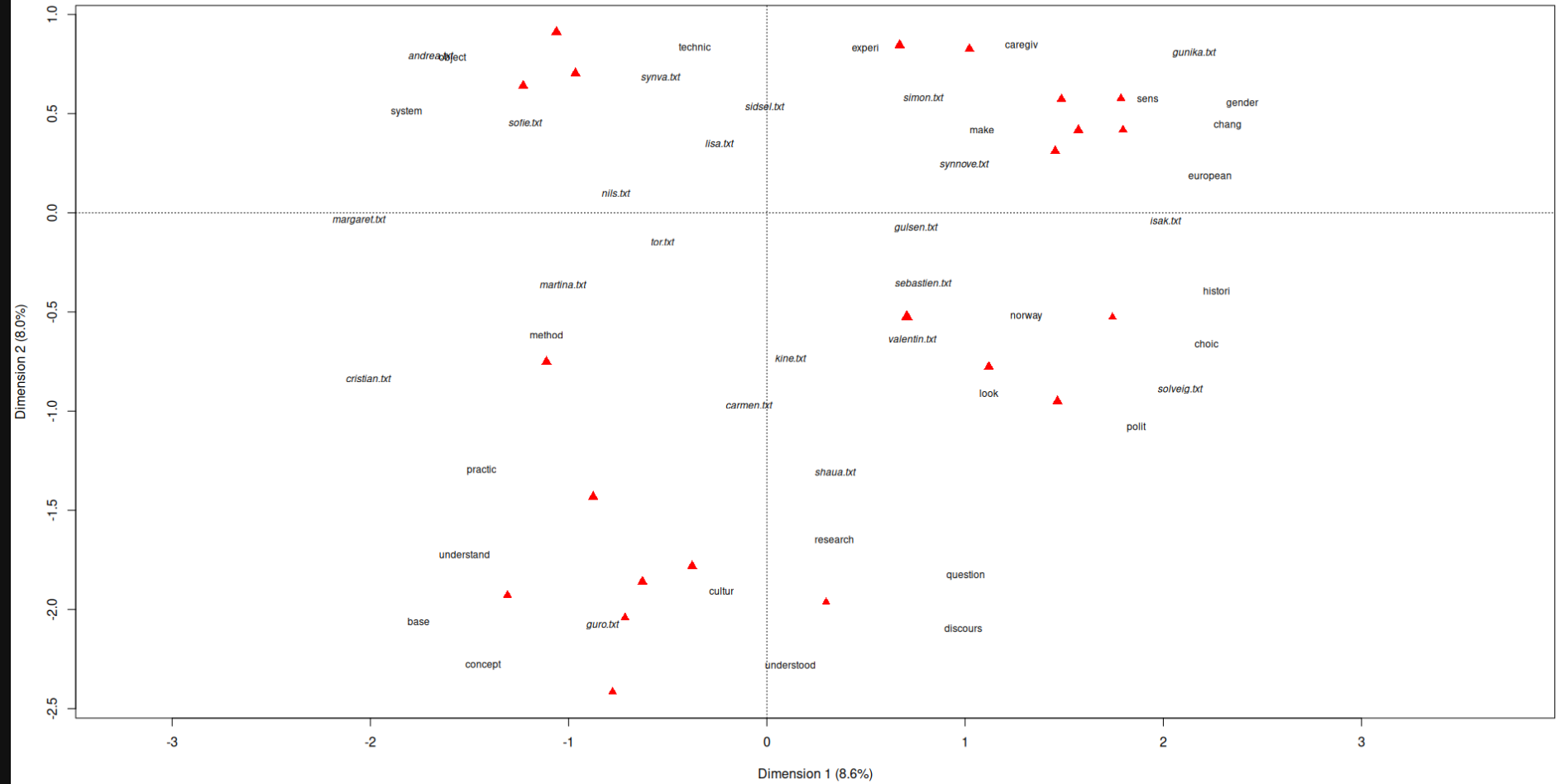
Every team agrees on a topic and a format, which is then presented (5-10 minutes), covering:

Why is it a good match for KULT8850?

Why is it useful to attend the session for all PhD course participants?

Who else could be invited?

We meet again : 14.15, D5



Group 1

Guro, Cristian, Synva, Tor
Team "technology"

Group 2

Isak, Solveig, Synnøve,
Sebastien, Valentin
Team "politics"

Group 3

Lisa, Margaret,
Gulsen, Gunika,
Sidsel, Simon
Team "cure &
care"

Group 4

Andrea, Shaua,
Martina, Juliet
Team "sustainability1"

Group 5

Carmen, Kine, Nils,
Sofie
Team "sustainability2"

What is a possible overarching topic for the conference?

Every team agrees on a topic, which is then presented (5-10 minutes), describing the process that led to the result.

We meet again : 15.15, D5

Group 1

Guro, Isak, Margaret,
Andrea, Carmen

Group 2

Solveig, Cristian, Gulsen,
Shaua, Kine, Valentin

Group 3

Gunika, Synva,
Synnøve,
Martina, Nils,
Simon

Group 4

Juliet, Tor, Sebastien,
Sidsel, Sofie

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