



Narrative analysis of cultural policy offers definite potential in understanding the values policies transmit to audiences, as well as the choices made by the narrator of such policies as he / she unfolds the story for that audience (or indeed multiple audiences).

REVIEW:

Narrative, Identity, and the Map of Cultural Policy: Once Upon a Time in a Globalised World (Constance DeVereaux and Martin Griffin: Ashgate, 2013)

PARAIC MC QU Aid

Narrative, Identity, and the Map of Cultural Policy: Once Upon a Time in a Globalised World (Ashgate, 2013) is written by Constance DeVereaux of Colorado State University and Martin Griffin of University of Tennessee. In the book the authors propose a new academic approach to cultural policy, which they suggest has the potential to offer new ways of thinking and understanding the subject. The main focus of this new research approach is an exploration of narrative as a conceptualisation within cultural policy discourse. The authors view cultural policy as sitting within a framework of different narratives that are, at best, difficult to navigate.

Traditionally, much cultural policy discourse has emanated from within a framework of government policy and has often had a predisposition towards a positivist evidence-based thinking. To the same extent the cultural studies approach to cultural policy texts has been dominated by a critical analytic approach that has rarely resulted in constructive policy formation. Within this frame, this book offers some new hope for the use of a particular cultural studies approach that may constructively inform concrete policy outcomes.

The book is a collaborative project between two authors from different disciplines, one from philosophy, political economy/arts management and cultural policy studies, the other from historical and literary studies. This trans-disciplinary approach has definite potential to offer new insights into a problematic field that has struggled to deal at an integrated policy level with issues of cultural rights and expressions of culture outside of core areas of arts activities. Policy research requires such new and novel approaches to researching policy text in order to add fresh options for policy discourse. As the authors rightly suggest in the preface, the reader is required to have openness to this transdisciplinary approach to policy research. This transdisciplinary 'journey' is one that jumps from one academic field such as cultural studies, to another such as anthropology or sociology, without apology. This demands a lot of the reader and may frustrate some. However, it is through this transdisciplinary approach that the authors believe new ways of thinking about cultural policy will emerge. Those readers who manage to keep pace with the shape-shifting approach adopted in this book will be rewarded with refreshing new ways of looking at and thinking about cultural policy.

Narrative analysis of cultural policy offers definite potential in understanding the values policies transmit to audiences, as well as the choices made by the narrator of such policies as he / she unfolds the story for that audience (or indeed multiple audiences). While reading this book, a text with which most Irish policy readers will be familiar – Brian P. Kennedy's *Dreams and Responsibilities* (Dublin: Arts Council of Ireland, 1990) – was brought to mind. Within Kennedy's book, the narrative is used both to explain the motivations behind certain historical policy decisions with very clear 'good guys' and 'bad guys', while simultaneously used to interlink eras into a clear linear narrative.

Review: *Narrative, Identity, and the Map of Cultural Policy: Once Upon a Time in a Globalised World* (DeVereaux and Griffin, 2013)

Paraic McQuaid

As DeVereaux and Griffin suggest, we (as readers of narrative) look for causal structures and expect to find them whether or not causal linkages between events actually exist (p.93). Here we see that an understanding of narrative is important to the writing of policy and its interpretation. Narrative can be used by policy makers to join disparate policies into suggested causal relationships through structural placement. We have seen this approach used in recent years in Irish cultural policy where causal linkages have been suggested between the policy goals of tourism and the arts. These narrative structures suggest numerous implicit causal linkages and there is potential for the study of cultural policy through narrative as formal system, narrative as ideological instrument, and narrative as rhetoric (p.91). This narrative approach progresses out of discourse analysis and narrative analysis that fit within the discipline of cultural studies. It is a very useful analytical tool in critical analysis, but this approach would appear to offer more potential in the interpretation of policies as narratives that unfold historically, rather than to interpretation of present policies. There are many individual highlights in the book, for example, the wide variety of case studies from post World War II Berlin (p.54-59), to the foundation of the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States (p.59-72), to the rights related to UNESCO monuments in Afghanistan (p.72-78), to the Culture Wars in the US (p.88-89), and these are sure to intrigue and engage the reader.

One of the book's main assertions is that narratives of various kinds determine culture, and that stories are building blocks of our identity as individuals or as groups. The authors are particularly concerned with the stories formulated around a discourse on national boundaries and identities, alongside developing processes that open up such boundaries. They focus on the narrative effects of the terms 'globalisation' and 'transnationalism', particularly the impact of the varying and often conflicting narratives surrounding these terms on cultural policy (p.13-36). The authors focus mainly on the negative implications of these terms, interpreting the narrative of globalisation as a 'network of hostile and exploitative forces covering the globe with nothing to hinder its movement' (p.24). The ideals of globalisation – such as exchange of ideas, increased participation in cultural activities, and increased mobility – are presented by the authors as largely unachievable. Yet many cultural policies are conceived within this ideal view of 'globalisation' and 'transnationalism'. For example the EU 'Creative Europe' fund for the cultural sector and creative industries places very strong emphasis on transnational cooperation and exchange. From one perspective, the narrative approach offers opportunity for greater understanding of the narrative frame within which the policy is constructed. The authors present 'globalisation' as the more malleable term above 'transnationalism', which they view as a more fixed term in contemporary interpretations. However, they see the use of both as being within an inconclusive narrative that offers opportunity for future reinvention of interpretation.

The arguments presented in chapters one and two around 'globalisation' and 'transnationalism' offer strong justification for the narrative approach to the study of cultural policy. Through this study of the multiple narratives behind policy discourse we may arrive at a better level of critical analysis of policy. This could be especially useful in informing cultural diversity policy and national cultural identity policy through a better understanding of the complex narratives surrounding such policies.

The tricky problem of subjectivity related to 'narrative analysis' as a tool is not fully resolved by the authors within this book. Their approach relies on subjective judgments by the researcher in order to find the causal linkages between texts. The failings of narrative approaches lie in the ever-present temptation to fill gaps in knowledge with linear narrative structural logic. Narrative has the ability to brush over important issues by creating logical order in the flow of the story. Also, the strong emotive force of narrative could be seen as the natural antithesis of

Review: *Narrative, Identity, and the Map of Cultural Policy: Once Upon a Time in a Globalised World* (DeVereaux and Griffin, 2013)

Paraic McQuaid

rational empirical evidence gathering.

There will be obvious concerns about allowing the full powers of this level of subjectivity to diffuse the empirical approaches often used in framing policy discourse. The authors do attempt to deal with this problem by referencing existing experts with accepted academic approaches in the area of structural analysis such as Frank Fisher (p.37), Vladimir Propp (p.43), Elizabeth Shanahan, M.K. McBeth, and Michael Jones (p.96). It is clear, however, that further work is needed to elevate the value of narrative analysis as a tool for policy analysis. Throughout the book, the authors often drift away from strict cultural policy analysis into their obvious love of fictional narrative such as Alice in Wonderland (p.99-103) and the fictional Duchy of Grand Fenwick (p.86-9, p.162-4). Here the usefulness of the examples became tenuous, however endearing. The use of such wide-ranging case studies in narrative from fictional to varying cultural policy examples is possibly too wide in scope to arrive at constructive findings. For much of the book, the authors are more focused towards an exploration of uses of 'narrative' than on the potentially constructive outcomes of the approach on 'policy'. There is a dense use of vocabulary from a wide range of academic disciplines within the first two chapters, which is, at times, a barrier to the main structured argument of the book. This dense vocabulary eventually gives way to a shift towards a structure around case study examples in chapter three. There are evident shifts in tone and flow throughout the book, as the authors appear to have written many chapters separately, which has an effect on the over-arching flow. Additionally, the very useful description of narrative in chapter four may have been better placed in the first chapter.

One of the key strengths of the book lies in the study of narratives around cultural identity in chapter five. Cultural identity, within the processes of policy, is increasingly a site for skirmishes along the boundaries of interpretation, where past assumptions have potential to collide with present policies. In these very grey policy areas of identity and citizenship, an understanding of the narrative framework of identity and therefore citizenship formation is essential to policy formation and policy communication with awareness of cultural sensitivities. The problems of cultural identity policy alone justify the authors' new narrative approach.

Ultimately, on reading the book we must arrive at a conclusion on narrative analysis. Some readers may find difficulty accepting narrative analysis as a potentially useful tool within the field of cultural policy study. However, the current over-reliance on empirical evidence gathering is not working for the cultural sector in building justification for government expenditure on culture and garnering public support. Narrative analysis does allow for a fresh approach to the policy discourse problems that exist. This book strongly affirms the authors' proposition that firstly, narrative is real and has a significant effect on real life, rather than being interpreted solely as background colour used in the writing of the history. As such, the authors make a strong argument that within narrative there are structures or patterns that can be analysed, and that by using a narrative approach to interpret historical policy creation, new interpretations and alternative perspectives may be revealed.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, the book does offer fresh perspectives and interesting reading for all scholars working in cultural policy and cultural studies. It represents a challenge to the mainstream approaches of political science thinking about public policy that have thus far led to dominant positivist approaches.

About the reviewer: Paraic Mc Quaid is programme coordinator of the BA Business Studies and Arts Management programme in the Institute of Art, Design and Technology. He lectures in cultural policy and arts administration. He has a background in visual arts practice as well as collaborative arts practice. He is an expert for the EACEA of the European Commission. Twitter @ParaicMcQ