

Preface and Acknowledgments

“But, Percy, the book should be starting with all these stories, not ending with them. . . .” That’s me talking, “Percy” is Percy Tannenbaum, then-director of the University of California, Berkeley’s Survey Research Center, and these stories were chapters of a book he was helping edit. The idea behind his book still seems good to me: Get the participants in a major science, technology or environment, controversy—in this case, the California Mediterranean fruitfly crisis of the early 1980s—to put on record their experiences in that controversy, then assemble these pieces into a picture of what actually happened.

But it didn’t work out that way. Participants ended up supplying different pieces to different puzzles. Instead of recording what actually happened, the accounts, when considered together, demonstrated just how complex and uncertain these kinds of controversies are for those caught in their midst. As in *Rashomon*, perspective took hold. More formally: Sometimes what we are left to deal with are not the facts—that is why there is a controversy—but the different stories people tell as a way of articulating and making sense of the uncertainties and complexities that matter to them. Percy’s view was that the final volume of edited accounts would still serve as a useful reminder to a policy analyst, such as myself. Their message was that in some controversies our tool kit of microeconomics, research methods, law, organization theory, and public management practice ceases to be of any real help. Controversies like the medfly crisis push us to the limits of our competence.

The questions that became *Narrative Policy Analysis* grew out of this interchange with Percy. What would a policy analysis look like if it started with stories rather than ended with them? Can we policy analysts still say something useful about issues of high uncertainty, complexity, and polarization, if the only things we have to analyze are the scenarios and arguments that animate them? These questions proved better than I realized. One conclusion they lead to is that, unless you are able—not just willing, but able—to treat seriously people’s stories about those situations where facts and values are in dispute, you are not taking the situations seriously. Contemporary literary theory, especially the analysis of narrative, turns out to be one serious and particularly potent way to treat complex policies. I don’t know what Percy thinks of my questions or my answer, but he let me run with the challenge, and I thank him.

“That’s the problem,” Janne said, tapping the flowchart with his free hand, the other steering our way up I-80 to Sacramento. I looked at the chart closely for the first time. “But this is the solution!” I realized.

Janne Hukkinen had this great idea. He was researching the controversy over salinity and toxic trace elements associated with irrigation in California’s San Joaquin Valley. What he had done was to interview major actors in the controversy, code the interviews into separate problem statements, and then analyze the network of relationships that formed when all problem statements of all actors were aggregated together. Once you had mapped this network of interrelated cause-and-effect statements, you could see if there was a pathway that took one from problem definition to proposed solution and that no one interviewee had hit upon alone, but which became visible and useful only when the views of all interviewees were considered together.

That was the idea. What happened was the chart on my lap. Like a plate of spaghetti, arrows crosses arrows and loops looped loops. No dominant pathway this, but rather a mesh of circular networks, where a problem said by one party to cause another was held by someone else to lead right back to the initial problem. So here we were, driving up to meet state officials who sponsored the research, and what were we going to tell them?

The details of that story are in chapter 5. What needs establishing here is my special debt to Janne. Working through our report to the California Department of Water Resources, and then writing the article that is the

basis of chapter 5 taught me much of what I know about analyzing policy narratives. Thanks also go to Gene Rochlin, our coauthor for that article, whose almost intuitive grasp of how science and politics intersect cemented much of our analysis.

Other chapters of this book also started out as policy analyses for specific clients. The material on the animal rights controversy (chapter 4) and Native American burial remains (chapter 7) was drawn from work in the University of California's Office of the President, where I analyzed legislation. Much of the discussion on budgeting in chapter 1 as well as on the tragedy of the commons and land registration in chapter 2 came from my overseas advising and consultancy activities in Kenya and Botswana. Also arising out of my work experience is the closing essay on tolerance, indifference, and the need to check the impulse to choose sides in the kinds of controversies studied here, if our goal is policy relevance.

Much of the policy world is not complex; the terrain I know, write about, and write for is. In this region of the world (and to adapt James March), different people at different times and in different ways contribute different things to what we summarily call "decision making." Here and abroad, this decision making is a hodgepodge of muddling through, groping along, opportunistically, incrementally, hopefully by rules of thumb and bounded rationality, in organized anarchies where nothing is ever thrown away but is rarely available or agreed upon when you need it the most. To introduce this book's mantra: the policy world is often quite complex, uncertain, and polarized. Not always, but frequently enough to matter. That's what attracted me to science, technology, and environmental controversies in the first place: they are the most extreme version of the challenge to come up with something useful to advise in the face of many unknowns, high intricacy, and little agreement.

A good number of people believe that the best way to deal with complexity is to focus on what is already simple; with uncertainty the idea is to reduce it or assume that certainty is within reach; and with polarization, to focus on what we agree with already. This belief is understandably human. It, however, robs us—all of us—of our chance to deal with the big issues. What do we do, when we can't reduce the uncertainty, can't simplify the complex, and can't resolve the polarization, yet have to make a decision? How do we deal with major science, technology, and environmental issues whose complexity, uncertainty and polarization are here to stay? This book demonstrates how contemporary literary

theory allows us to address the big issues, without assuming away all that makes them big in the first place.

Throughout *Narrative Policy Analysis*, I try to follow a rule of thumb that I learned while working with two very different practitioners, Pat Crecine and Aaron Wildavsky, both of whom were in at the founding of policy analysis. The rule: Never stray too far from the data, if you want to be useful. To that end, I've grounded my analysis in case studies that illustrate how to do a narrative policy analysis for what look increasingly to be intractable policy issues. My thanks to Pat and Aaron for setting the example.

This is a good juncture to introduce some of the concerns raised about my approach to narrative policy analysis and its intersection of literary theory and policy analysis. (These concerns are addressed more fully in the introduction that follows.) For it turns out that the audiences I am writing for (in this case, policy analysts, literary theorists, and scientists, both social and natural) are as divided and polarized as the science, technology, and environmental controversies I study. Some literary theorists expect me to critique the narrative foundations of policy analysis, and since I don't, I have been accused of being neopositivist, insufficiently self-reflective about my praxis, and lacking the conviction of taking narrative analysis to its logical conclusion. (I'm guilty of the first and deserve the Scottish verdict of "not proven" for the others.) Social scientists, on the other hand, by and large dislike deconstruction, think poststructuralism is but one more Continental silliness, and want assurances that narrative policy analysis is not just another adversary culture attack on a status quo that really can't or shouldn't be changed anyway. Natural scientists are quick to conclude that because I'm talking about narrative I must be relativizing science. As for some of my colleagues, the practicing policy analysts, their judgment is loud if not clear: So what? Just cut the theory and tell us what to do! Not for them the postmodern temper of all answers are allowed, no answer is permitted.

Some polarization is very specific. A few of the literary theorists I have talked to privilege irony as a response to uncertainty, undecidability, and pluralism; policy types, by and large, don't find ironists to be of much help in the emergency rooms of contemporary society. Some of these literary theorists privilege the role of culture critique and believe the first duty of the public intellectual is to criticize; the policy types I'm familiar with believe the first duty of the public intellectual is that if you have to criticize, come up with an alternative. A few literary theorists, in turn,

see in poststructuralism and postmodernism the first real alternative to science; most policy types would think that's mad. Overall, it's been my observation that literary theorists don't know much about policy, and practicing policy analysts certainly don't know much, if anything, about literary theory.

I do not pretend to have resolved these tensions here. There are, nonetheless, readers in each audience searching for cross-disciplinary approaches for improved policymaking, and they are the ones for whom *Narrative Policy Analysis* has been written. I know they are there, because it has been my good fortune to have "test-marketed" earlier versions of the chapters in major journals for literary theory and policy analysis. Moreover, *Narrative Policy Analysis* should appeal to readers not just from literary theory and policy analysis, but also from regional planning, sociology, geography, economics, cultural studies, and ethnic studies. What is presented in the following pages is a new and rewarding way of looking at topics that are in desperate need of being seen afresh by these disciplines.

Literary theorists who helped in the making of this book include Gerry Prince, who invited me to speak on narrative policy analysis for his cultural studies group at Penn, and Ron Schleifer, another narratologist, who extended an invitation to Oklahoma. Seminars on the approach at Tulane and the Institute for the Study of Social Change at Berkeley also contributed. I am especially indebted to Michael Riffaterre, consistently the most challenging and personally most helpful of the literary theorists I have read. I hope some of the scratch-and-itch excitement his work has given me comes through in the case studies on global warming and Native American burial remains. My thanks as well to Jacques Derrida, for his kind words (via Richard Klein) on the article that became chapter 1.

I am also grateful to William Ascher, Ralph Cohen, Janet Craswell, Jeffrey Friedman, Richard Haynes, Richard Klein, Jonathan Morell, and David Weimer for their encouragement and comments as editors of the journals (or special sections) in which the original versions of the chapters appeared. I owe special thanks to the encouragement of Mark Greenberg, Seymour Mandelbaum, and other reviewers of the manuscript, who remain anonymous. This book would not have happened without Reynolds Smith, Jean Brady, and Maura High at Duke University Press.

Support for writing has been provided by the Survey Research Center and the S.V. Ciriacy-Wantrup Postdoctoral Fellowship program, both at the University of California, Berkeley. Additional support has been

provided by the Office of the President, University of California, Oakland; Centre for Applied Social Science, University of Zimbabwe, Harare; and the College of Natural Resources, University of California, Berkeley.

Much of the material in this book represents substantially revised journal articles. An earlier version of chapter 1 appears as "Deconstructing Budgets," *Diacritics* 18(2): 61–8 (1988). I am grateful to *Diacritics* and the Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to use this material. Chapter 2 appears as "Development Narratives, Or Making the Best of Blueprint Development," *World Development* 19(4): 287–300 (1991). This material reappears here with the kind permission of Elsevier Science Ltd, The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington OX5 1GB, UK. Chapter 3 appears as "Narrative Analysis for the Policy Analyst: A Case Study of the 1980–1982 Medfly Controversy in California," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 8(2): 251–73 (© 1989 by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management). I am grateful to John Wiley & Sons, Inc., for permission to use this material. Chapter 4 appears as "Nonsense, Fate and Policy Analysis: The Case of Animal Rights and Experimentation," *Agriculture and Human Values* VI(4): 21–9 (1989). I thank *Agriculture and Human Values* for permission to use this material. Chapter 5 appears as "A Salt on the Land: A Narrative Analysis of the Controversy Over Irrigation-Related Salinity and Toxicity in California's San Joaquin Valley," coauthored with Janne Hukkinen and Gene Rochlin, *Policy Sciences* 23(4): 307–29 (© 1990 by Kluwer Academic Publishers). This article won the *Policy Sciences* Lasswell Award. The material is reprinted by permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers. Chapter 6 appears as "Global Warming as Analytic Tip," *Critical Review* 6(2–3): 411–27 (© 1993 by Critical Review Foundation). A shorter version with the same title is to appear in the forthcoming book, *Global Climate Change and Public Policy*, to be published Nelson-Hall. I thank both Nelson-Hall and *Critical Review* for permission to use this material. Chapter 7 appears as "Intertextual Evaluation, Conflicting Criteria, and the Controversy over Native American Burial Remains," *Evaluation and Program Planning* 15(4): 369–81 (1992). This material reappears here with the kind permission of Elsevier Science Ltd, The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington OX5 1GB, UK. Material in the conclusion and appendix A appears as "Applied Narrative Analysis: The Tangency of Literary Criticism, Social Science, and Public Policy," *New Literary History* 23(3): 555–81 (1992). I am grateful to *New Literary History* for permission to use this material.

My gratitude goes again to those individuals acknowledged in each article listed above. Finally, I want to thank the two people I love the most and who were instrumental in making this book happen the way it did. To paraphrase P.G. Wodehouse: Without the constant love and attention of Louise and Scott, this book would have been done a lot sooner.