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Analysing cultural policy: incorrigibly plural or ontologically incompatible?

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Approaches to the study of cultural policy are currently tied to particular disciplines. This can lead to a failure to appreciate the real differences between these disciplines in terms of what they are investigating, and how they go about these investigations. The differences that exist at ontological, epistemological and methodological levels between differing disciplines mean that it is not possible to simply adopt what each discipline is saying about cultural policy at face value. Without greater theoretical and methodological understanding of the tools that are available for the analysis of cultural policy, it is unlikely that a more sophisticated approach to analysis will be generated. The consequences of this for both the analysis of cultural policy and future directions of analysis in the field are discussed.

Keywords: analysis; theory; methodology; cultural policy

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

(MacNeice 1964, p. 26)

Introduction

Bennett's (2004) *cri de coeur* concerning the incompatibilities that exist between different disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approaches towards understanding and analysing cultural policy identified a tension that is not subject to simple resolution or definitional *fiat*. That this tension is a real one can be seen in the increasing number of publications that deal with cultural policy, many of which appear to be operating in a set of hermetically sealed analytical silos which are marked by a degree of mutual incomprehension – where, that is, they bother to pay any attention to other approaches at all. The lack of understanding that is displayed derives in the main from: a failure to comprehend the differences between methodologies of analysis that are employed within and between different disciplines; a failure to engage with the broader literature arising from different disciplines; and the existence of stereotypical images concerning different theories, disciplines, ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies that are often, at best, misleading and, at worst, simply wrong.¹

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The idea that seems to underlie many of these failings is that there is one ‘true’ way to understand what cultural policy is and how it may be analysed. Approaches that do not conform to this are, consequently, the equivalent of academic heresy and the writers of such works must be cast into the outer darkness and their works can be safely ignored because they are quite simply wrong. Such self-righteous arrogance only makes sense if blinkers are worn that cut analysis off from an acceptance of a more open, if not pluralist, conception of alternative approaches. Starting from such an open position allows room to investigate what the strengths and weaknesses of differing approaches to cultural policy research actually are. Bennett (2004) clearly identified some of the areas where positivist and interpretive methods of analysis are asking different questions to each other which allow them to identify different points of interest to those with an interest in cultural policy, and equally they identify areas of weakness within other analyses that limit their opportunity to answer the questions that are raised by alternative approaches.²

A modest proposal to address some of these problems in the area of cultural policy research would involve an identification of the range of approaches that tend to be adopted towards the analysis of cultural policy itself. On this basis, the theoretical and methodological strengths and limitations of differing approaches could be more clearly and analytically developed and, it would be hoped, this could correct some of the grosser misapprehensions concerning analysis that exist. At the very least, a greater awareness of the underlying ontological, epistemological and methodological bases upon which different approaches to analysis rest could be developed, and the potential to not only permit the strengths, weaknesses and possibilities for current research, but also the development of new pathways for future analysis to pursue, be identified (Hay 2002, chaps. 1–3, Moses and Knutsen 2007). Earlier comparisons of approaches to the analysis of organisational sociology (Burrell and Morgan 1979) and the politics of the state (Alford and Friedland 1985, Dunleavy and O’Leary 1987) have demonstrated the benefits of such an examination for clarifying the potential strengths and limitations of different theoretical starting-points to the investigation of their subjects of study. By extending this to the different disciplinary bases that have been employed in the analysis of cultural policy in the past, a similar ground-clearing exercise should be possible.

An improved awareness of the disciplinary bases that underpin different approaches to analysis should also help to limit the bifurcations within the subject area that Bennett (2004) identified, whilst also highlighting those areas where analysis can do more than simply see things from a different perspective. Given that there are major differences both between and within academic disciplines, it is not the case that the analyst can simply adopt the findings from one approach (or set of approaches) and apply them within a different ontological, epistemological or methodological setting. Instead, a more rigorous and analytically aware approach to analysis is likely to be required before effective lessons can be learned from the range of potential approaches that exist.

Comparing approaches

There are numerous ways in which the proposed investigation could take place. The comparisons of Alford and Friedland (1985) and Dunleavy and O’Leary (1987), for example, investigated the application of different theories to their subject of study. Moses and Knutsen (2007) and Burrell and Morgan (1979), on the other hand, used

differing methodologies that had been employed to investigate social phenomena as their basis for comparison. In terms of the analysis of public policy in general, Sabatier (2007) provides a comparison of both methodologies and theories and models of the policy process thus combining both approaches.

In each case, however, the emphasis is on a different set of questions than the current paper is concerned with. The attempt to capture dominant views and approaches within particular academic disciplines inevitably tramples on the sheer variety of each discipline. In the case of cultural studies, for example, an attempt to develop a coherent overall picture of the subject would require the ignoring of the substantial differences between the Foucaultian, Habermasian and Gramscian approaches and the British and North American versions of it. Any attempt to generalise will be unfair to some examples of work within particular disciplines, but failing to make the effort to do so will simply leave the analysis of cultural policy in comparative limbo with little hope of learning lessons from what different disciplines can actually provide.

Unless analysts are working from a purely inductive perspective (if such a thing were possible), their work will always be underpinned by a range of theoretical assumptions that will structure the questions that will be asked, how they will be asked and the shape of analysis that would be required to answer them.³ Whilst inter-disciplinary work may provide an effective alternative to simply operating within the constraints of any single approach to analysis, care must be taken to ensure that there is actually compatibility between the structural characteristics that the disciplines that are involved display. Thus, attempts to utilise a neo-pluralist form of analysis from political science in the context of a rational choice perspective from economics would cause severe damage to both approaches and would not be capable of producing anything other than a theoretical and analytical mess. Underlying theories are more than simply a tasting menu where the analyst can pick and choose between whatever attracts their fancy, and neither are they simply an analytical tool-box where the researcher is free to adopt whichever piece of machinery or equipment is desired at the instant.⁴

Bearing these important strictures in mind, the approach that is adopted in this paper requires some explanation to demonstrate why particular questions have been identified as being important for discussion. Three areas of concern can be identified as providing a basis for investigating the ways in which particular disciplines approach key issues within the analysis of cultural policy:

- How particular disciplines and approaches attempt to define the essentially contested concept (Gallie 1955/6, Gray 2009) of 'culture';
- How they understand the idea of 'cultural policy';
- The dominant methodologies that are employed in analysing cultural policy.

These areas demonstrate that there are real differences in understanding between different disciplines and that attempts to impose the preferences of one over the others are likely to narrow the potential for informative investigation. Given a tendency towards a form of academic absolutism in some research (with definitive statements about what cultural policy, and cultural policy research, is and should be⁵), then an acceptance and recognition that the field is wider than this opens the possibilities for the development of multiple forms of analysis of multiple subjects of investigation.

Given that 'culture' is an essentially contested concept (Gray 2009 discusses the direct policy consequences of this) capable of multiple definitions with no mechanism for determining their adequacy or accuracy, the manner in which the central word in the subject of analysis is defined assumes an importance that may not be so evident for other policy areas such as defence, taxation or industrial policy, each of which can be relatively unambiguously defined and identified. A consequence of this is that how different disciplines identify the subject matter of 'cultural policy' will also need to be examined. Given that 'cultural policy' can be identified from the perspectives of sociology, cultural studies, political science, urban planning and economics, as including community cultural development, cultural diversity, cultural sustainability, cultural heritage, the cultural and creative industries (Craik 2007), lifestyle culture and eco-culture (Craik 2005), planning for the intercultural city (Bloomfield and Bianchini 2004), cultural planning *per se* (Evans 2001), support for national languages (Gray and Hugoson 2004), 'currently controversial issues in the wider society' (McGuigan 2006, p. 203), the 'culture wars' in the USA (Singh 2003, especially chaps. 1–2), 'the production of cultural citizens' (Lewis and Miller 2003) as well as being concerned with 'representation, meaning and interpretation' (Scullion and Garcia 2005, p. 116) and being a 'transhistorical political function' (Ahearne 2008, p. 2), it is evident that whilst there may be a lot of talk about cultural policy there is no agreed, clearly defined model of what it actually consists of. This is important as the definition of what the object of study is has a clear effect on how it is to be studied: the tools to analyse and understand whichever version of cultural policy is employed need to be appropriate to the job in hand (Gray 1996). The extent to which differences between disciplines originate in different understandings of what they see as the content of 'cultural policy' again points to the need for an investigation of the meaning that is attached to the title.

The third question to be examined – concerning the methodologies that are utilised by the different disciplines in undertaking analysis – deals with the question of how knowledge is acquired about the subject that is being investigated. A simple distinction can be drawn between positivist, interpretivist and realist methodologies in this respect,⁶ and these will be used as the basis for the current discussion. Different disciplines inevitably have within them examples of analysis based upon some, if not all, of these methodologies but in general terms it would appear that much of the economics literature on cultural policy is positivist in nature, much of the cultural studies literature is interpretivist, whilst sociology and political science appear to be, effectively, more realist in scope. The validity of this claim will be discussed further at a later stage of the paper, as will the consequences of these methodological choices for what can be satisfactorily investigated within each discipline. These consequences are important as they mean that even if separate analyses are focused on the same topic, the manner in which it will be investigated can be such that there is no simple basis on which to compare the findings.⁷

The findings, limitations and guides to further research that each discipline identifies are all affected by the choices of methodology that are made by the analysts concerned. It is evident – given the sheer variety of findings, methodologies and areas of analysis that are to be found across the disciplines involved – that none of the disciplinary approaches that are adopted for analysis has all of the answers to the entire range of questions that may be asked of them: each discipline is effectively operating within self-contained arenas of analysis that make little effective use of the possibilities that are available within other disciplines. This problem extends far

beyond questions of simple methodological difference and ultimately concern matters of ontology and epistemology. To this extent, it is unlikely to be the case that analysts can simply choose between the interesting things that differing disciplines have to offer each other and unambiguously apply these to their own work. Instead analysts need to develop a clearer picture of what the possibilities for investigation are within particular frameworks of analysis in the first place, and it is only by understanding what different disciplines actually offer that this can be developed. An examination of the cultural policy literature demonstrates that it is, at least, a multi-disciplinary endeavour: the following have all been used in their own ways to analyse dimensions of cultural policy in the past and there are probably others that the current author has simply not, as yet, come across: aesthetics, anthropology, cultural studies, economics, geography, heritage studies, history, literary studies, museum studies, musicology, philosophy, planning, political science, sociology and urban studies. The current paper concentrates on only four of these – cultural studies, economics, political science and sociology – in an attempt to limit the argument to an appropriate length.

Defining ‘culture’

If ‘culture’ is an example of an essentially contested concept, then it should be anticipated that there will be multiple definitions of the word to be found in the literature. It would also be expected that there will be no unambiguous method, and certainly no empirical method, available for determining the adequacy, or otherwise, of these definitions (Gallie 1955/6). To this extent, there is no particular reason to simply list the different definitions that are employed within differing disciplines: what is potentially more useful is to demonstrate how these definitions affect what is seen to be worth studying within these disciplines when ‘cultural’ issues are at stake.

The multiplicity of definitions that have been offered within each of the disciplines being examined here certainly contributes to the idea that ‘culture’ is essentially contested: none of the disciplines involved has a single definition contained within it to which all of its practitioners make reference. Regardless of this, however, there do appear to be certain tendencies within the disciplines to give greater emphasis to some definitions rather than others. Thus, although it is recognised that variants exist within each discipline the common ground that seems to exist within each is what will be discussed here.

In the case of cultural studies, there appears at first sight to be two common grounds instead of one, with the first developing from Williams (1961, pp. 41–71), and the second from various structuralist and post-structuralist concerns with semiotic signifying practices. In practice, the two become so intertwined that it is difficult to actually draw a meaningful distinction between the two. A cursory glance at student textbooks dealing with cultural studies indicates a preference for the Williams formulation as a basis for understanding ‘culture’ – at least at an introductory level (Storey 1998, p. 2, Milner and Browitt 2002, pp. 2–5, Lewis and Miller 2003, pp. 2–3). In this formulation, ‘culture’ takes distinct forms: ‘culture’ as a form of Platonic ideal in terms of values, ‘culture’ as recorded experience and culture as ‘a way of living’ (often, if increasingly misleadingly, referred to as an anthropological view given that the anthropology of culture has moved away from this view: see Williams 1961, pp. 41–71, Wright 1998; see also Williams 1981, pp. 10–14, where he simply distinguishes between ‘materialist’ and ‘idealist’ notions of culture; see also Baetens 2005). Alternative views along the lines of the semiotic variant can be seen elsewhere in cultural

studies: McGuigan (1996, p. 1), for example, seeing culture as being concerned with 'the production and circulation of symbolic meanings' (this *is* a fair example of current anthropological views of what 'culture' is – see Wright 1998 – even if it has not been directly derived from anthropology itself). Between them these definitions offer an uneasy mix of, in Williams' (1981) terms, idealist and materialist conceptions of culture.⁸ The consequences of this can be most clearly seen in terms of the methodologies that are employed within cultural studies and will be discussed at a later place.

In terms of political science, 'culture' has a tendency to be defined in specific fashions rather than in the general terms used in cultural studies. A simple distinction would be between 'culture' as a short-hand term for the societal contexts within which politics takes place (an example being Huntington 1996, where 'civilization' is used); 'culture' as a sub-set of societal contexts consisting of evaluations, knowledge and feelings about political activity and institutions (going back to the idea of a 'civic culture' in the work of Almond and Verba 1963: more recent, and very different, versions of this can be found in Crothers and Lockhart 2000, and Lane and Ersson 2002); and, lastly, to sets of formal and informal rule-governed behaviours (the idea of an 'administrative culture', for example: see Knill 1998, Gray 2002, pp. 6–9).

These definitions are quite distinct to those to be found in cultural studies: the closest to an overlap between them would be between the 'way of life' definition in the latter and the 'societal context' version in political science, and even here there are considerable differences between the two, with the latter being predominantly concerned with the specific interaction between the societal and the political dimensions of social life rather than with the more general sets of concerns that cultural studies would appear, in the main, to be concerned with. The dominant definitions in political science are heavily influenced by the behavioural strand in the study of politics and this has had an effect on the sorts of methodology that are believed to be appropriate to their study. This, again, will be discussed later on.

In the case of sociological studies of 'culture', there appears to be a division between 'the sociology of culture' and 'cultural sociology'. This division of title reflects differences at the methodological level as much as anything else, but involves different notions of what the 'cultural' actually consists of. One version of this is concerned with 'culture' as a set of meanings, symbols and structures (Alexander 2006) and involves a particular form of sociological (if not semiotic) analysis. A second version is that 'culture' consists of particular arenas of action associated with particular goods and/or activities that are limited to, for example, 'the arts, cultural industries and media sectors' (Bennett 2007, p. 32) (e.g. involving the study of 'cultural' consumption patterns amongst particular social groups as with Bourdieu 1993, or the more recent British 'Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion' project, see Bennett and Silva 2006). A third version tends to conflate 'culture' and social life, with no meaningful distinction between the two. This would seem to be similar to the 'way of life' definition from Williams where culture is decidedly 'ordinary' – even if what it actually consists of is utterly opaque: at the worst, 'culture' simply becomes so all-inclusive that there is no way of determining what makes something specifically 'cultural' at all (see the comments on this in Bennett 2007, p. 32).

In the case of economics, the greatest amount of work in the area of cultural policy deals with the specific topic of arts economics (more recent examples of this being O'Hagan 1998, Frey 2003). Even whilst an increasing number of books are appearing that carry the words 'culture' and 'economics' together in the title they tend to be largely concerned with the arts as their subject of enquiry (see Heilbrun and Gray

1993, Towse 1997a, 1997b, 2003, Cowen 1998). Indeed, Towse (1997a, p. xiii) actually says ‘the field of cultural economics, previously known as the economics of the arts’ – indicating that the two are effectively synonymous – although going on to argue (1997a, p. xv) that culture ‘is about shared norms of behaviour and values’ and that these are areas beyond the purview of economics. Cultural *goods*, however, are seen as being susceptible to economic analysis, and these goods are characterised by their containing ‘a creative or artistic element’ (Towse 2003, p. 2). Throsby (2001, pp. 3–4) repeats this distinction by identifying two uses of ‘culture’: the shared beliefs, values and practices of societal groups (as in the Williams ‘anthropological’ version) and, secondly, as a set of activities and the products of those activities which are concerned with ‘the intellectual, moral and artistic aspects of human life’ (Throsby 2001, p. 4). Where Throsby differs from Towse is that both of these versions of culture are seen as being capable of being analysed (and are) through the tools of economic analysis.

Clearly, there is some commonality between the disciplines in how they generally tend to define the core concept of ‘culture’. In each of them, a view of culture as a form of social glue that provides a common framework of understandings for the members of society to organise and interact around is present. Other versions of culture do exist, however, and it would be a mistake to overlook these variants as they point to quite distinct ideas about what a culture is and what it does, and how it may be used or lived in human terms. The attempt to provide an over-arching version of ‘culture’ that can be found with both the number one journal in the world that deals with cultural policy (Deakin University 2008) – the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* – and the major international conference in the field (the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (<http://iccpr2008.yeditepe.edu.tr>)) provides an example of this, with an emphasis on culture as ‘symbolic communication’ ‘encompassing a wide range of signifying practices’ and with much less interest being expressed in the ‘anthropological’ versions of culture derived from Williams (1961), indicating a somewhat plural conception of what ‘culture’ can be taken to mean.

It may seem that the analysis of cultural policy would appear to be relatively problematic in this instance: if each discipline were actually talking about the same object of study (which they are not), then it should be conceivable that a common strategy for analysing the policies that are associated with that object could be developed. In practice this has not occurred, primarily because of the existence of significant differences within, let alone between, disciplines as to what the object of study actually is. This definitional issue can be seen to generate differences in the underlying ontological bases (or, alternately, is generated by these differences) that underpin them, and also, consequentially, to generate methodological differences in terms of how to undertake analysis within different disciplines. Some of these differences can be more easily seen when the approaches that are taken in different disciplines to ‘cultural policy’ (rather than just ‘culture’) are investigated.

What is ‘cultural policy’?

The sheer variety of forms of cultural policy that exist (Gray 2009) indicates that there are likely to be many ways of analysing the phenomenon concerned. As with defining ‘culture’, the approaches that have tended to be adopted by different disciplines place the emphasis on a variety of policy practices and, even where there are underlying similarities in what is identified as being worthy of study in this field, the implied

ways in which these objects are to be studied, analysed and understood demonstrate clear differences between disciplines – as well as within them.

In the case of cultural studies, the normal division that is presented is between approaches that are derived from particular readings of Gramsci and Foucault. What gets investigated and how it gets analysed are clearly affected by the choices that are made in this respect. It should also be noted, however, that there is a third approach within cultural studies that derives from approaches that concentrate on techniques from literary (or even psychoanalytic) studies (being concerned with ‘reading’ the texts that are available) (see McGuigan and Gilmore 2002). In practice, this tendency has favoured critical practices developed from the study of literature, particularly in the field of examining ‘culture’ as recorded experience (once again generating ‘texts’ for analysis), with the Gramsci/Foucault distinction being developed as an expressly politicised reaction to this (Bennett 1996, 1998).

The division between the Gramscian and Foucaultian strands of cultural policy research in cultural studies is effectively one between an emphasis on ideology and hegemony on the one hand and the notion of governmentality on the other. Variants around these basic starting-points do exist (McGuigan’s (1996, 2004) Habermasian-influenced approach, for example) but these still tend to address the same distinctions of focus. At the extremes the Gramscian variant can be argued to adopt a ‘populist’ agenda, where bottom-up forms of cultural creation become identified with a radical form of resistance to dominant hegemonic forces within society (Hall and Jefferson 1976, McGuigan 1992), whilst the Foucaultian strand can mistake consequences for causes where the creation of compliant, managed individuals⁹ becomes the reason for cultural policies rather than the outcome of them, which is, apart from being teleological, as Bennett (2004, p. 238) notes, a ‘somewhat paranoid formulation’.

Whilst these extremes are over-drawn, they do identify the dominant arenas for analysis within the two most common wings of the cultural studies approach. The Gramscian wing concentrating on the meanings that are attached to particular forms of behaviour and expression by the participants within them, and the Foucaultian on the imputation of meaning to behaviours and expressions undertaken by others. In both cases, however, the ability of the analyst to identify the ‘true’ meanings that are attached to these things depends upon their ability to ‘read’ what policies and their associated practices actually exist for. It is this that connects these dominant cultural studies approaches to policy back to forms of literary criticism, with the educated and skilled critic being able to identify hidden depths to policy that the superficial readings of others may not be able to comprehend.¹⁰ At this level, ‘cultural policy’ becomes a series of ‘texts’ that are subject to the interpretations of the individual analyst rather than a set of concrete organisational practices to be analysed, even if the latter are something that the policy shift in cultural studies was intended to address (Bennett 1996, pp. 307–308).

This approach is markedly different to that adopted by political science. Whilst the content and significance of ‘texts’ is recognised within political science, the general approach to the analysis of cultural policy tends to take rather different forms (Gray 2009). In the first instance, cultural policy can be simply seen as the range of activities that governments undertake – or do not undertake – in the arena of ‘culture’. The array of activities that governments deem worthy of supporting can also be seen to provide an image of the underlying values and/or ideologies that governments support, and are certainly the product of political choices amongst a range of potential

forms and levels of support that governments can provide. In this form of analysis cultural policy is simply whatever it is that governments say it is, leading to a range of country-specific sets of actions, organisations and choices as the focus of study (Gray 1996, pp. 214–215).

A more complex line of analysis can be seen, however, if the focus shifts from what governments label as being ‘cultural policy’ to one where cultural policy is defined as being ‘the actions that a state ... take(s) that affect the cultural life of its citizens’ (Mulcahy 2006, p. 267).¹¹ This broader version moves attention towards a range of activities – such as media and education policies – that may not normally be considered by governments themselves as being a part of their own cultural policies (see, e.g., the European Parliament (2006) report on state financing and expenditure in the cultural sector in European Union member states which effectively equated the ‘arts’ with ‘culture’, and cultural policy with arts policy, rather than with any wider notions of a public culture, or, indeed, of any other forms of cultural policy whatsoever).

Whilst the general focus in either case tends to lie with the actions and choices of governments and public sector agencies there is nothing to say that these serve as the absolute limits to political science investigations of ‘cultural policy’, even if most of the work that is being undertaken within the discipline tends to stay within them. In this respect, some learning from the cultural studies tradition, which generally has a much wider conception of the field, may open up new fields of enquiry for political scientists. Certainly, a concentration on the cultural component of governmental policies that are not normally considered to be ‘cultural’ would widen the political perspective to the analysis of policy.

Sociological approaches to cultural policy tend to be relatively underdeveloped, with much of the work in the field of cultural sociology tending to be either the semiological analysis of individual and group meaning formation and usage (Alexander 2006), or the development of work within the sociology of the arts (Alexander 2003), with neither paying a great deal of attention to policy issues in a broader sense. Where ‘policy’ does arise, it appears to be related largely to the cultural studies literature use of the term (with ‘cultural policy’ being roughly concerned with Mulcahy’s ‘public culture’) (e.g. Jones 2007), with the occasional reference where cultural policy equates with governmental arts policies (Alexander and Rueschmeyer 2005). In either case, the analyses that are undertaken do not particularly diverge from the traditional concerns of either cultural studies or sociology in general. This implies an underdevelopment of the sociological literature in terms of analysing cultural policy, but this may be unfair in so far as a great deal of work within sociology that deals with ‘cultural’ matters – for example, the analysis of audiences and leisure habits, and the developing interest in concepts of cultural capital following Bourdieu (1993) – has a large number of policy implications attached to it, even if this is not particularly a major point of discussion or analysis. A direct focus on explicit cultural policy issues *per se*, however, does remain limited within the standard sociological literature.

The economics literature appears to be much more developed in this respect, even if, in common with the question of how ‘culture’ is defined within it, much is concerned with the ‘arts’ rather than any larger conception of ‘culture’. The general approach that is adopted is through the analysis of the application of particular economic tools – which are utilised as a part of general governmental economic policy (such as taxation policies) – to the case of various specific issues of cultural

production (see, e.g., Towse 1997a, 1997b, 2003, O'Hagan 1998, Frey 2003). In this respect, the focus is on the concrete economic policies that governments create and utilise for cultural purposes or within the cultural arena, rather than with the cultural content of these policies *per se*.

A second theme, however, derives from the normative questions of whether state involvement in creating and managing economic policies for the arts and cultural matters is appropriate, and normally involves the consideration of the public or merit good status of the arts and culture, or broader concerns with questions of cultural value *per se* (Cowen 1998, Throsby 2001). This argument is of a different nature to those that are commonly found in other approaches to the analysis of cultural policy as it explicitly raises concerns about the underlying value-systems that can be used to justify, or not justify, state action in the field. Whilst such normative concerns can also be found within political philosophy and political science, the attention that it receives within economics is noticeable, not least for the sheer vituperativeness of the arguments that it can generate.

As with the issue of how 'culture' is defined across the disciplines, there are some similarities between them in terms of how cultural policy itself is understood. One general view is that a key component of this understanding is concerned with what governments actually do in terms of the policies that they pursue, even though there is no general agreement as to whether this simply incorporates what governments themselves define as 'cultural policies' or whether it extends more broadly to the cultural content of any policies that governments produce, whether explicitly 'cultural' or not (Mulcahy 2006, Ahearne 2008). There is also a secondary view of cultural policy that is concerned with the role of private sector, religious and voluntary organisations (as well as individuals and general civil society groups) in the field of culture. The developing interest in this arena of concern – particularly in anthropology and sociology – may not be particularly new as it has been a mainstay of cultural historians for some time (see, e.g., Brewer 1997, Bashford and Langley 2000, Blanning 2002, Black 2005, Burke 2008), but it serves to widen the scope of cultural policy analysis beyond the relatively narrow confines of state action and/or inaction. In both cases, however, the manner in which the analysis of these concerns is to be undertaken is, perhaps not surprisingly, potentially open to a variety of methodologies that have been developed for the specific disciplinary and analytical approaches that have been adopted by researchers in the field.

Methodologies of analysis

The division between positivist, interpretivist and realist methodologies identified earlier in this paper forms the starting-point for the current discussion, but alternatives to this can equally be provided. Whilst the general points about definitional positions within differing disciplines that were made earlier caused some damage to specific examples within each of them, a general discussion of methodology is likely to create much more. The general claim that much of the economics literature derives from a positivist position, the cultural studies literature from an interpretivist position, and sociology and political science from more realist positions is debatable – and how each of the disciplines would deal with this claim would probably be rather enlightening in this respect – but it is intended to serve as an indication of broad similarities and differences within and between disciplines rather than as a definitive statement of the methodological propensities of each discipline.

In the case of both cultural studies and economics, there appears to be a clear methodological preference that is then capable of being used for all analysis within the disciplines concerned. With cultural studies, this preference is found in a distinctly interpretive and qualitative set of approaches (see, e.g., Alasuutari 1995, Murdock 1997) that is often allied with a particular set of political preferences (see, for an explanation and an example of this, Stevenson 2004). In the case of economics, as an alternative, a quantitative and distinctly positivist cast of mind concerned with decidedly empirical concerns is a core characteristic (see Frey 2003, pp. 6–8). The reason for viewing sociology and political science as inhabiting a more realist frame lies in the sheer multiplicity of approaches that each discipline encompasses: both cover the gamut of potential approaches from positivist to interpretivist to social constructivist to normative with the choice of methodology to be pursued being effectively determined by the questions that the analyst wishes to pursue (with this being itself a core feature of methodological realism: see Sayer 2000, p. 19). This catholicity of approach allows for the potential development of a wide range of explanations for particular cultural policies in both the sociological and political science literature, with the choice between these explanations being a consequence of how well they answer the questions that the analyst has posed. Certainly, sociology and political science would appear to make use of a much wider range of methodological strategies than are commonly to be found in cultural studies and economics.

Clearly these differences at the methodological level give rise to quite distinct understandings of what cultural policies exist for, how and why they are created, implemented and evaluated, and what lessons can be learned from the analysis of particular policies (Rose 1993). As such an awareness of the precise methodologies that are employed in the study of cultural policies is required to provide a basis for understanding what in particular has been uncovered by different analysts employing different tools, rather than a generalised summary of broad tendencies within the disciplines.

If it is accepted that each methodology gives rise to findings that are not discoverable by the use of other approaches to analysis, then further benefits may also be attainable. At the very least, the development of a wider conception of cultural policy concerns can be gained simply by examining the results of research undertaken through the use of the methods of other disciplines (or, indeed, different methodologies within the same discipline). A failure to recognise that the perceived weaknesses of disciplines are often to do with the methodologies that they employ rather than the disciplines themselves may also serve to limit the unfair criticisms of other disciplines that are sometimes made within the cultural policy field.¹² If it is accepted that no one discipline has a monopoly of knowledge within the field of cultural policy analysis, and if it is also accepted that methodological differences exist between, and within, disciplines in terms of what they are studying and how they go about studying it, then, potentially at least, a wider understanding of the entirety of the field of cultural policy analysis could be developed.

The extent to which this is a real issue within the world of cultural policy analysis can be demonstrated in the identification, developed from bibliometric analysis of articles in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, of distinct schools of approach to the subject based around the creative industries, cultural planning and cultural cities, democracy, the public sphere and culture, and ‘traditional’ cultural policy in both British and French variants (Frenander 2008). The strength of disciplinary boundaries in academic research is likely to have some impact in creating and

reinforcing such trends in so far as cultural economists writing for other cultural economists in the *Journal of Cultural Economics*, or cultural sociologists writing in *Cultural Sociology* for other cultural sociologists, for example, are not particularly concerned with how other disciplines approach similar issues as that is not their prime audience (see the discussion in Becher and Trowler 2001 concerning academic tribalism). In this respect, there is a self-generating academic purdah at play that may limit the attempt to think, and analyse, more widely. A conscious effort to develop beyond the limits of individual disciplines would, potentially, be of benefit for a wider understanding of cultural policy than these individual disciplines may provide.

Concluding comments

This paper is only a preliminary examination of a subject that should be of considerable concern for all those toiling in the fields of cultural policy research. The sheer variety of work that can contribute to an understanding of cultural policy matters raises a range of questions about appropriate methodologies for analysing what may appear to be, at first sight at least, a common subject of investigation. The differences between disciplines in terms of how they understand what it is that they are investigating, as well the differences between them in terms of their preferred methodologies, mean that there are some serious ontological and epistemological concerns with making use of the findings from one discipline in the context of another. It is certainly not the case that analysts can simply pick and choose from the range of methodologies and research findings that are available without being aware of these theoretical issues and how they can serve to constrain the potential paths to analysis that are available to the analyst.

In terms of the title of this paper, it is certainly the case that there is an incorrigibly plural range of approaches that *can* be taken to the analysis of cultural policy – and it is equally the case that there is no mechanism for determining whether any of these approaches are, in some absolute sense, ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than any other. The decisions about which disciplinary approach and which set of methodological tools will be adopted are, in a realist sense, determined by the subject matter that the analyst intends to investigate and the sorts of questions that the analyst wishes to ask. The fact that these choices can equally serve to close off other forms of analysis from investigation indicates that there *is* an element of incompatibility between disciplines and approaches. What would be a loss to the analysis of cultural policy would be to allow these considerable differences between forms of analysis to lead to a continued neglect of the research that is being undertaken using different tools and deriving from different disciplinary backgrounds that can be learnt from, even if it cannot directly be adopted for immediate use. A better understanding of the underlying theoretical, definitional and methodological issues that this paper has indicated may be of greater use to the analysis of cultural policy than the continued demarcation between disciplines and the continued failure to step outside of disciplinary boundaries that appears to be becoming ever more deeply entrenched.

At the very least, researchers may need to become far more theoretically and methodologically sophisticated than they currently are if the range of findings that are being produced from differing disciplinary perspectives are to be made effective use of. Unless or until cultural policy becomes a distinct discipline in itself – which would require a great deal more specific theoretical development that is explicitly directed at the subject of study than is currently taking place – then analysts are left to make use

of the particular tools that are available to them from particular disciplinary contexts. Whether the development of such a specific disciplinary endeavour as ‘cultural policy’ is necessary is another question altogether. The strengths of the current plurality of disciplines and methodologies that are employed in the analysis of cultural policy include the development of forms of analysis that build on the essentially contested nature of the core concept – ‘culture’ – that is involved, allowing the potential to capture at least the multiple forms and dynamics of policy that are contained within it, rather than closing analysis down into more restrictive boundaries. Alongside this, the development of policy ideas and models that derive directly from the practice and study of cultural policy itself (such as policy attachment (Gray 2002), ritual cultural policy (Royseng 2008) and explicit/implicit policies (Ahearne 2008)) – rather than being simply the transposition of ideas and models from particular, individual, disciplines to the cultural field – demonstrates the potential for creative analysis that exists from having a relatively open research field. The extent to which these developments would have been possible within any particular Kuhnian (Kuhn 1970) research paradigm is an open question, and viewing current cultural policy research as part of a Lakatosian (Lakatos 1970) research programme that is open to a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to analysis, rather than as a singular paradigm, may perhaps be more helpful.

In this respect a greater, detailed knowledge of what is available within these contexts, the questions that they may be useful in providing answers for, the types of explanations of what is occurring within the field that they produce, and explanations of why these occurrences have been taking place, and, just as importantly, the arenas where these contexts are of limited, if any, use, are required. It is only by being aware of the full range of possibilities for analysis that exist that development is likely to take place – unless we prefer to stay within our own comfortable disciplinary shelters and ignore what our fellow analysts are saying to us.

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Notes

1. Thus, Lewis and Miller (2003, pp. 2, 4) criticise approaches that do not share their own concerns as being ‘straightforwardly elitist’. Whilst this may score points for being politically on the side of the (radical) angels, it is by no means the case that other approaches are as simply ‘elitist’ as is claimed. Likewise, Hesmondhalgh’s (2002, p. 19) mention of ‘public goods’ misunderstands the economist’s notion of indivisibility and refers to multiple usage instead: at best this is simply inaccurate. Similar concerns can be found in other cases and a more detailed investigation of this point could be informative for understanding the consequences of this for the analyses that are then undertaken.
2. The approach adopted in this paper is an interpretative one on the basis that this is intended as a starting-point for future discussion within the cultural policy arena, sketching in some key questions, rather than an attempt to provide a definitive answer to these questions. Other approaches, from the philosophical to the bibliometric, may be more useful in later developments of the arguments that are presented here.
3. The extent to which induction actually escapes from an underlying theoretical basis can be debated and whether the ‘facts’ can simply speak for themselves has yet to be convincingly demonstrated.

4. Unless, of course, the analyst would like to attempt to extract a screw with some sandpaper.
5. See Lewis and Miller (2003), Scullion and Garcia (2005) and McGuigan (2006) as examples of this tendency to close off analysis.
6. Ideographic and nomothetic methodologies could also be added to these but a restriction of coverage, for reasons of space, has been employed for the current paper.
7. A comparison of McGuigan and Gilmore (2002) and Gray (2003) on London's Millennium Dome is difficult to undertake as they are effectively talking about different things: the former about the content and meaning of the Dome and the latter about how the Labour Government managed the public relations disaster that the Dome became.
8. This difference is emphasised when consideration is made of the American versions of cultural studies where the distinction between materialist and idealist is, perhaps, even stronger than in either the British or Australian variants, for example.
9. As in Lewis and Miller (2003, p. 1), 'cultural policy is ... a site for the production of cultural citizens, with the cultural industries providing not only a ream [*sic*] of representations about oneself and others, but a series of rationales for particular types of conduct', or Scullion and Garcia (2005, p. 125), who see cultural policy research as concerning 'the "policing" (in Foucault's terms) of the state and combines an engagement in representation and formulation'.
10. McGuigan (2004, p. 90) sees the British Millennium Dome as 'a disappointment in spite of the strenuous efforts made by visitors to make it better than it really was'. In this case, the analyst obviously knows better than the visitors what the Dome was 'really' all about. As an example of the 'elitist' perspective that cultural studies are so intent on attacking, this is hard to beat.
11. It could be argued that all governmental policies have such a cultural effect in one way or another. This would effectively make all governmental policies cultural ones. At this extreme, the objection levied at some sociological research – that it is so all-inclusive that what is specifically 'cultural' about such policies can become lost – equally applies.
12. The common complaint from cultural studies, for example, that disciplines like economics ignore questions of value is untrue if approached from the direction of economics where questions of value are actually central to what the discipline does – particularly in Marxist variants. What is meant by 'value' in either discipline remains, however, a matter of some considerable debate and is as much a methodological as a definitional issue. Again, the common complaints about 'elitism' from the cultural studies literature are unhelpful in the context of political science, where elitism and neo-elitism are analytical approaches rather than a set of accusations.

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