

which family can signify intimate connections without biological relationships, or the way in which the word family itself might be used differently by the same person in different contexts. Schaffer's point is that we need to pay attention to how people themselves use words if we want to begin to understand what those words might mean. But Schaffer is also very clear that the stakes are not just academic. When we reconstruct the concept of family instead of elucidating it, we may keep loved ones from the hospital bedsides of their sick partners or prevent potentially loving parents from adopting children (p. 19). The stakes are very high.

All of this makes for what appears to be a very messy approach to social science. There are no clean boundaries and there is always some element of ambiguity. But "for the conceptually informed interpretivist, such contextualized classifications are not manifestations of ambiguity or confusion to be cleaned up . . . they are situated, intersubjective understandings that shed light on how people construct, navigate, and challenge their social worlds. Such understandings matter for many of the social phenomena that both positivists and interpretivists want to explain" (p. 16). This messiness is uncomfortable and highly impractical, but Schaffer's discussion clearly shows why it is critical to the work we do.

The remainder of the book focuses on exploring three modes of elucidating concepts: what Schaffer calls grounding, locating, and exposing. Schaffer clearly explains each research practice and offers helpful guidance to scholars who might want to use them. Through illuminating examples from existing work, Schaffer shows how scholars might engage in a variety of research "tasks" (p. 44) and what role each might play in constructing a larger analysis. Also important is the way in which Schaffer himself does not avoid or dismiss the challenges that come with elucidation. To his credit, Schaffer thinks carefully through some of the dangers, pitfalls, and potential misuses of the method he so carefully elaborates. These chapters are likely to prove most directly useful to interpretive scholars, but even the most committed positivist might find the discussion provoking in important ways.

I would be curious, however, to see how Schaffer might engage more directly with a sympathetic positivist audience. If positivist scholars do read the book (and I hope they will), they may find, after being convinced of the importance of concept elucidation in Chapter 1, that they aren't sure how to think about incorporating it into their own work. What does a positivist scholar do next? This may be an impossible question to answer, as the task itself may be just that. The epistemological and ontological divides may be too great for a committed positivist to engage in concept elucidation. And yet as Schaffer states at the end of Chapter 1, elucidation "should be of interest not only to interpretivists, but also to self-aware, morally responsible positivists as well" (p. 22).

I agree wholeheartedly and hope that Schaffer will carry his impressive contribution forward by directly tackling the question of *how* a self-aware positivist might proceed.

Analyzing Social Narratives. By Shaul R. Shenhav. New York: Routledge, 2015. 103p. \$140.00 cloth, \$32.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759271600339X

— Jade Larissa Schiff, *Oberlin College*

In this deceptively slim book, part of Routledge's series on interpretive methods, Shaul R. Shenhav offers a toolkit for social scientists to use in the study of narrative, which he defines broadly as "a representation of a course of events" (p. 12). He defines social narratives, his primary interest, as those "that are embraced by a group and also tell [*sic*], in one way or another, something about that group" (p. 17). The definition is intentionally and usefully broad so as not to exclude any narrative in advance; but it is also vague, because narratives can be "embraced" in many ways: Must a narrative be believed? Accepted as legitimate even if one does not believe it, if that is possible? What about narratives embraced ambivalently? Is a narrative collectively rejected therefore not a social one? This critical part of the definition is underspecified.

In any case, using the concepts of classical narratology—story, text, and narration (p. 5)—Shenhav "[adapts] its basic concepts to the social sciences" (p. 6). He borrows definitions of these concepts from the literary theorist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* 2002 [1983]), upon whom he relies very heavily throughout the book. To Shenhav, a story is a chronological sequence of events (p. 16). A "text" consists of "'spoken or written discourse,' which undertakes the telling of events" (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, he defines "text" more broadly to include "visual images, gestures, and the architecture of spaces," but he never addresses these other forms, and all of his examples are of speech and writing, leaving the scope of his proposed framework unclear (p. 7). "Narration" refers to the communication of the narrative by a narrator to his or her audience (p. 16). To this triad, the author adds a fourth element: multiplicity, "the process of repetition and variation through which narratives are reproduced at [*sic*] the societal sphere" (p. 56).

The book is largely organized around this conceptual quartet. After a brief introduction highlighting the significance of stories and the importance of "being a story-listener" (p. 1), Chapter 1 introduces story, text, narration, and multiplicity. Chapters 2 through 5 treat each of them in detail. Chapter 6 addresses normative problems and questions facing researchers who study social narratives. Chapter 7 concludes the book by describing a continuum from "thin" (p. 83) to "thick" (p. 84) analysis, where thickening refers to the introduction of more elements of narrative into a study. Because of the density and breadth

of the book, it would have been improved by a conclusion summarizing its main points.

Analyzing Social Narratives has several virtues. It is the only book I know of that offers a full-blown framework for narrative analysis in the social sciences. It is well researched and generally clearly written, the text replete with succinct definitions. Because they are many and technical, it is helpful that Chapters 1 through 5 each contain tables summarizing key concepts. At the end of each of these chapters, Shenhav returns to a single text—one of King George’s wartime speeches—to demonstrate these tools. That Shenhav is able to pack so many concepts, insights, and strategies into such a small book is itself a considerable achievement. In the introduction, he also provides a helpful user’s guide that allows researchers to focus on those chapters most relevant to their work (pp. 7–8).

Many of the virtues I have identified make the book convenient, user-friendly, and expedient. But these virtues can become vices when they affect not only form but content. The editors of the series, Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, praise the book in part because it lets researchers avoid “[diving] into the dense conceptual literature of the humanities” (p. xii). Considering the wealth of scholarship about narrative and listening in that enormous literature, however, avoiding it amounts to a significant loss regardless of the merits of the book under review. More strikingly for a work by a political scientist, there is no engagement with, or even any mention of, a large and growing literature on narrative in political theory (see, e.g., Iris Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 2001; Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment*, 2006; Simon Stow, *A Republic of Readers* 2007; and my own *Burdens of Political Responsibility*, 2014). Consistent with the editors’ praise, Shenhav identifies “the need to adapt the basic elements of narrative analysis developed in the context of literary analysis to better serve social science disciplines” (p. 5; emphasis added). Elsewhere he claims that “even if one questions certain aspects of this distinction between story and text . . . it is *analytically expedient* to differentiate between a story and the discourse or form in which [it] is conveyed” (p. 22; emphasis added). Expedience and its cousin, parsimony, are among the hallmarks of social science, increasingly so as its practitioners try to copy the natural sciences. The consequences of doing so, however, can be unfortunate, even perverse.

One familiar consequence of this move is the importation of standards of objectivity that treat social phenomena as inert objects of value-free inquiry. In a “technical, simple and straightforward” move, Shenhav appeals to “a long tradition of scholars who defined a narrative as . . . a “thing—an object or an artifact” (pp. 11–12). I have never seen a narrative described as a “thing”—which is not necessarily the same as an object or an artifact—and Shenhav offers no citations for it. More importantly, there is nothing straightforward or innocent about this

definition. Among other things, it reflects the particular values of positivist social science, especially the long-held Weberian conceit that facts (including things, objects, and artifacts) and values can be separated at all (Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, pp. 129–156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946). Narratives *are* artifacts because they are always constructed selectively out of the material of experience and our reactions to it, but that selection process is inevitably value-driven. To describe them as things is to obscure, and even efface, the ways in which they are dynamic social products that help to create the communities that produce them. Shenhav does acknowledge that narratives are social products, but while analytically treating them as things makes them easier to examine, it also badly distorts what they are and how they work. It sacrifices too much to the social-scientific enterprise.

Moreover, characterizing narrative as a thing obscures the complex relationships between addresser and addressee, a relationship that is further obscured by the author’s definition of narration as a unidirectional process in which the narrator transmits and the audience receives. When he begins the book, he describes listening negatively—“I try to speak as little as possible,” and “I keep quiet because I want to listen” (p. 1). But this does not mean that he does not communicate powerfully to the speaker—through facial expressions, changes in posture, breathing, and so on. And these responses can have profound effects because we are always editing ourselves on the basis of our audience’s reactions. In both cases, the telling of the story—even the story itself—is changed. Shenhav understands that “the narrative triplet of story-text-narration is a methodological device, a means for separating and analyzing what, ontologically, is an integral whole” (p. 18). But his inattention to these relationships between telling and listening makes this device especially problematic because it distorts the whole that is being separated and analyzed. And again, he ignores literatures in political theory that explore listening and its relatives, like receptivity and responsiveness (e.g., Susan Bickford, *Dissonance and Democracy*, 1996; William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 1995; Romand Coles, *Rethinking Generosity*, 1997; and more recently Andrew Dobson, *Listening for Democracy*, 2015).

Shenhav’s effort to adapt the study of narrative to the demands of social science also creates confusion. In their series introduction, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea laud Shenhav’s work for its “jargon-free conceptual framework” of story-text-narration. In the first place, “story,” “text,” and “narration” are themselves part of a jargon—the jargon of narratology. Shenhav’s clear definitions do not change that. More strikingly, in a particularly strange and dense section of the chapter on multiplicity, he describes

social narratives in terms of “fractal geometry,” which he borrows from mathematics; and then he briefly extends the analogy to chaos theory, which borrows from fractal geometry (pp. 60–62). To someone unversed in the language of fractals and chaos theory, this brief section is impenetrable, and it adds nothing to our understanding of multiplicity as the process of narrative reproduction. Importing scientific jargon into the social sciences, which is increasingly common, even further undermines their conceit to be clearer and more jargon-free than the

humanities, and Shenhav’s reliance on it especially here makes his argument unnecessarily opaque.

Analyzing Social Narratives is an important work in social science’s narrative turn. While it provides a useful toolkit for researchers, it does so at considerable cost for the sake of expediency. If social scientists want to engage deeply with narrative, they cannot avoid engagement with the humanities and, in political science, with political theory, in which so much of this work is being done. It may not be expedient, but it is necessary.