

POLS4047/8047

Interpretation, Method & Critique

Graduate seminar in Political Science

Australian National University

Semester 1, 2023

Course Convenors

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Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the long tradition of Interpretive Social Science. It mirrors exciting new trends occurring in the US and Europe where interpretivist and critical scholars are drawing together the long and complex tradition of methodological scholarship focussed on meaning, communication, social construction and the politics of knowledge production. The 20th Century witnessed profound challenges to classical knowledge paradigms in the social sciences. Approaches to the study of society and politics diversified. Critical, social, post-structuralist, post-colonial and 'post-modern' interventions drew attention to structures and practices of meaning-making and to the relationship between knowledge paradigms and power. The aim of this course is to invite students to consider how interpretivism's theoretical claims might inform their own epistemological and methodological decisions. The course offers practical training for students interested in modes of enquiry into the increasingly communicative, media driven, institutional and text-based world in which we live that are not covered by conventional quantitative and qualitative approaches. In addition to equipping students with skills for interpretivist research design, data generation, analysis, inference, interpretation and critique, it addresses fundamental questions about the logic, conduct and significance of social scientific inquiry and the politics of knowledge in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, students will have the knowledge and skills to: (1) engage in epistemological debates that relate to methodological approaches; (2) assess the diverse range of strategies and approaches available to scholars in the social sciences; (3) develop techniques and skills appropriate to the design and conduct of interpretivist research; and (4) assess the logics that distinguish methodologies and the creative possibilities for their assembly.

Workload

Total of 130 hours comprising 36 hours of contact over 12 weeks, being a three-hour seminar per week, and 94 hours of independent student research, reading and writing.

Assessment

1. Research Paper 40% 4000 Words Friday 2nd June 11:59;
2. Weekly Reading Response, 30% 200 Words each X 10 (3% each);
3. Oral Presentation, 20% 20 Minutes
4. Participation 10% comprised of attendance, preparedness and timely submission of all assessment

Assessment Description and Rationale

The Research Paper comprises the major written assessment and is designed to immerse course participants in a summative piece of research devised in dialogue with the course convener. It should demonstrate their ability to synthesise and integrate ideas obtained over the duration of the course with their own research interests and goals. It **MUST** comprise a substantive piece of research and/or theoretical exposition. If it's a theoretical exposition, it **MUST** state explicitly what research problem/question/design it relates to.

Weekly reading responses will be posted to wattle constitute a form of intermediate task building towards the final goal of the course. It will enable students to develop and evaluation their reading comprehension skills which are a vital component of interpretivist methods. Students and convener will be encouraged to post comments on weekly reading responses and this will contribute to course participation. You are assessed on your comprehension and evaluative engagement with the reading.

The Oral Presentation is a form of peer-reviewed summative assessment designed to involve all course participants. Presentations will be on research that demonstrates some aspect of interpretivist methods in practice. Students will be provided with a working list of possible texts. Students may locate their own text to present upon in consultation with the convener so long as a pdf can be provided. Presenters will be assessed on their ability to succinctly engage with and present a reading that demonstrates 'interpretivism in action' and to lay out for students the components of the approach, research design and analysis with a focus on the strengths, limitations and contributions of the research under discussion. They will be

asked to lead the class in formulating and discussing methodological and analytical questions that arise from the research.

Participation will be assessed on student overall engagement with the course. This includes their weekly preparedness for class, timely submission of all assessment, engagement with online discussion in weekly reading responses and their engagement with discussion during presentations.

Topics and Readings

The first six weeks of the course follow a designated design. In weeks 7-11 we will discuss topics and hear presentations on books that align with research interests and plans of course participants.

Week 1 – Introduction and Course Overview

Required Reading

Wierzbicka, Anna (2014). *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1 & 2.

Yanow, Dvora (2003). “Interpretive Political Science: What Makes This Not a Subfield of Qualitative Methods”, *Qualitative Methods*, 1 (2): 9-13.

Further Reading

Bevir, Mark, and R. A. W. Rhodes, eds. (2016). *Routledge handbook of interpretive political science*, London: Routledge, Introduction.

Law, John (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*, London: Routledge. Introduction.

Rabinow, Paul, and William M. Sullivan, eds. (1979). *Interpretive social science: A reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Introduction.

Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. (2006). *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. Introduction.

Podcast

Interview with Dvora Yanow and Schwartz-Shea discussing their book “Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes”: <https://newbooksnetwork.com/peregrine-schwartz-shea-and-dvora-yanow-interpretive-research-design-concepts-and-processes-routledge-2012>

Week 2 – What Distinguishes the Interpretive Approach?

Required Reading

Bevir, Mark and Jason Blakely (2018). *Interpretive social science: An anti-naturalist approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

Harding, Sandra. 2015. *Objectivity and diversity: Another logic of scientific research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1+2.

Further Reading

Kuhn, Thomas S. (2012). *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Fourth edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 4+6.

Porter, Theodore (1995). *Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 8+9.

Shapin, Steven, and Simon Schaffer (1985). *Leviathan and the air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 8.

Podcast

Interview with Mark Bevir and Jason Blakely discussing their (2018) book "Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach": <https://newbooksnetwork.com/mark-bevir-and-jason-blakely-interpretive-social-science-an-anti-naturalist-approach-oxford-up-2018>

Week 3 – How interpretivists reason

Required Reading

Levin-Rosalis, Miri (n.d.). Using Abductive Research Logic: 'the Logic of Discovery', to Construct a Rigorous Explanation of Amorphous Evaluation Findings. 27.

Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 3-6.

Additional Reading

Meyer, Samantha B., and Belinda Lunnay (2013). "The Application of Abductive and Retroductive Inference for the Design and Analysis of Theory-Driven Sociological Research", *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (1): 12 <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/12.html>>

Sæther, Bjørnar (1998). "Retroduction: An alternative research strategy?" *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 7: 245-249.

Week 4 – What is a Concept?

Required Reading

Bevir, Mark, and Asaf Kedar (2008). "Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology", *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (3): 503-517.

Schaffer, Frederic Charles (2016). *Elucidating social science concepts: An interpretivist guide*, New York: Routledge. Chapter 1.

Additional Reading

Ewing, Blake (2020) "Conceptual history, contingency and the ideological politics of time", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 26 (3): 262-277.

Koselleck, Reinhart , and Michaela W. Richter (2006). "Crisis", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67 (2): 357-400.

Novy, Andreas, Daniela Coimbra Swiatek and Frank Moulaert (2012). "Social Cohesion: A Conceptual and Political Elucidation", *Urban Studies*, 49 (9): 1873-1889.

Onuf, Nicholas Greenwood (1991). "Sovereignty: Outline of a conceptual history", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 16 (4): 425-446.

Podcast

Interview with Fred Schaffer discussing "Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide": <https://newbooksnetwork.com/frederic-c-schaffer-elucidating-social-science-concepts-an-interpretivist-guide-routledge-2015/>

Week 5 – What is Social Constructivism?

Required Reading

Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London: Penguin. Part I.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional. Introduction.

Additional Reading

Blatt, Jessica (2018). *Race and the Making of American Political Science*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Introduction & Chapter 6.

Burr, Vivien (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge. Chapter 3.

Hacking, Ian (1999). *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press. Chapter 1.

Meja, Volker, and Nico Stehr, eds. (1990). *Knowledge and Politics: The sociology of knowledge dispute*, London & New York: Routledge. Introduction.

Week 6 – Hermeneutics

Required Reading

Olesen, Jens (2016). "Hermeneutics." In *Routledge handbook of interpretive political science*, Bevir, Mark, and R. A. W. Rhodes, eds. London: Routledge. Chapter 4.

Ricoeur, Paul (1981). "The task of hermeneutics", In *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences* Thompson, John B. eds. 2016. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Additional Reading

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1967) "The Historicity of Understanding" In *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt eds. 2006, New York: Continuum. Chapter 9.

Godrej, Farah (2011). *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 3.

Josselson, Ruthellen (2004). "The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion", *Narrative Inquiry*, 14 (1): 1-28.

Simpson, Lorenzo C. (2021) *Hermeneutics as Critique: Science, Politics, Race, and Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.

Weeks 7 – 11

Please select one or more preferred topics from the alphabetically organised list. In the first week of the course we will discuss and rank order your preferences and allocate topics to weeks.

Archival and paper work

Required Reading

Cheesman, N. (2021). "Reading paperwork realistically." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9(4): 835-40.

Hull, M. S. (2012). "Documents and Bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 251–67.

Presentation — Choose one of the following (one presentation per book only)

Hull, M. S. (2012). *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Mathur, N. *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Stoler, A. L. (2009). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Case study comparison

Required Readings

Riofrancos, T. (2021). From Cases to Sites: Studying Global Processes in Comparative Politics. *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. E. S. Simmons and N. Rush Smith, eds. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Soss, J. (2021). On Casing a Study versus Studying a Case. *Rethinking Comparison*. Simmons and Smith, eds.

Presentation — Choose one of the following (one presentation per book only)

Riofrancos, T. (2020). *Resource Radicals: From Petro-nationalism to Post-extractivism in Ecuador*. Durham, Duke University Press.

Schatz, E. (2021). *Slow Anti-Americanism: Social Movements and Symbolic Politics in Central Asia*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Schwedler, J. (2006). *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Required Readings

Fairclough, N. (1993). "Critical discourse analysis and the marketisation of public discourse: the universities." *Discourse and Society* 4(2): 133-168.

Fairclough, N. (1992). "Intertextuality in Critical Discourse Analysis." *Linguistics and Education* 4: 269-293.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Chang, Y. (2004). "Courtroom questioning as a culturally situated persuasive genre of talk." *Discourse and Society* 15(6): 705-722.

Chiluwa, I. M., et al. (2022). "Deceptive transparency and masked discourses in Ponzi Schemes: a critical discourse analysis of MMM Nigeria." *Critical Discourse Studies* 19(1): 55-72.

Mwinlaaru, I. N. and M. Nartey (2022). "'Free men we stand under the flag of our land': a transitivity analysis of African anthems as discourses of resistance against colonialism." *Critical Discourse Studies* 19(5): 556-572.

Discourse Historical Approach

Required Readings

Wodak, R. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach. *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*. K. Tracey, John Wiley & Sons.

Wodak, R. The Discourse Historical Approach. *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Graham, P., et al. (2004). "A call to arms at the end of history: a discourse-historical analysis of George W. Bush's declaration of war on terror." *Discourse and Society* 15(2-3): 199-221.

Boukala, S. (2016). "Rethinking topos in the discourse historical approach: Endoxon seeking and argumentation in Greek media discourse on 'Islamic terrorism'." *Discourse Studies* 18(3): 249-68.

Stuckrad, K. v. (2013). "Secular Religion: A Discourse-historical approach to religion in contemporary Western Europe." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28(1): 1-14.

Wodak, R. and S. Boukala (2015). "European identities and the revival of nationalism in the European Union: A discourse historical approach." *Journal of Language and Politics* 14(1): 87-109.

Genealogy

Required Readings

Bevir, M. (2008). "What is Genealogy?" *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2: 263–75.

Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Donald F. Bouchard, ed. Ithaca and New York, Cornell University Press.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Koopman, C. (2019). *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

McQuade, J. (2021). *A Genealogy of Terrorism: Colonial Law and the Origins of an Idea*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Webb, A. (2022). *Chasing Freedom: The Philippines' Long Journey to Democratic Ambivalence*. Brighton, Sussex Academic Press.

Interpretive Policy Analysis

Required Readings

Appel, S. and F. Telch (2020). "Grassroots International NGOs: Using Comparative Interpretive Policy Analysis to Understand Meanings in Private Development Aid " *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 22(1): 30-46.

Yanow, D. (2007). "Interpretation in policy analysis: On methods and practice." *Critical Policy Analysis* 1(1): 110-122.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Soss, J., R. C. Fording, and S. Schram (2011). *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yanow, D. (1996). *How Does a Policy Mean? Interpreting Policy and Organisational Actions*. Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press.

Zacka, B. (2017). *When the State Meets the Street: Public Service and Moral Agency*. Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press.

Interviewing

Required Readings

Fujii, L. A. (2018). *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. New York and London, Routledge.

Soss, J. (2014). Talking our way to meaningful explanations: A practice-centered view of interviewing for interpretive research. *Interpretation and Method*. D. Yanow and P. Schwartz-Shea.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Fujii, L. A. (2021). *Show Time: The Logic and Power of Violent Display*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Shesterinina, A. (2020). *Mobilizing in Uncertainty: Collective Identities and War in Abkhazia*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Wells, T. (2021). *Narrating Democracy in Myanmar: The Struggle Between Activists, Democratic Leaders and Aid Workers*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Required Readings

Kress, G. and T. V. Leeuwen (2001). *Multimodal Discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London, Arnold. Chapters 1+2.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Ledin, P. and D. Machin (2019). "Doing critical discourse studies with multimodality: from metafunctions to materiality." *Critical Discourse Studies* 16(5): 497-513.

Oostendorp, M. (2015). "The Multimodal Construction of the Identity of Politicians." *Critical Discourse Studies* 12(1): 39-56.

Ope-Davies (Opeibi), T. (2023). "A multimodal discourse study of selected COVID-19 online public health campaign texts in Nigeria." *Discourse and Society* 34(1): 96-119.

Tan, S., et al. (2018). "A multimodal mixed methods approach for examining recontextualisation patterns of violent extremist images in online media." *Discourse, Context and Media* 21: 18-35.

Political ethnography

Required Readings

Pachirat, T. (2018). *Among Wolves: Ethnography and the Immersive Study of Power*. New York and London, Routledge.

Wedeen, L. (2010) "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 255-72.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

Apoifis, N. (2016). *Anarchy in Athens: An Ethnography of Militancy, Emotions and Violence*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Smith, N. R. (2019). *Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Wedeen, L. (2008). *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Virtual ethnography

Required Readings

Hjorth, L., et al., Eds. (2017). *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. London and New York, Routledge. Chapters 1, 3.

Presentation — Choose one of the following

De Bruijn, M. (2017). Mediated Political Agency in Contested Africa. *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. L. Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway and G. Bell. London and New York, Routledge.

Barassi, V. (2017). Ethnography beyond and within Digital Structures of Social Media Activism. *Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. Hjorth et al.

Beckwith, R. and K. Anderson (2017). Environmental Sensing and Control. *Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. Hjorth et al.

Ford, H. (2017). The Search for Wikipedia's Edges. *Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. Hjorth et al.

Week 12 – Wrapping up

Reflections on the course

Discussion about the future and challenges for interpretivist research

Invitation to discuss essay topics and plans for future research