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Article

## Understanding Emotions in Policy Studies through Foucault and Deleuze

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### Abstract

Discussing Foucault's and Deleuze's work on meaning-making, the article argues that we might make better use of the intersubjectivity of a meaning when interpreting emotions. Interpreting emotions in texts remains complicated because discussion on the ontological character of emotions sustains an opposition of emotion to meaning structures. Both Foucault and Deleuze conceive meaning-making through permanent oscillation between the subjective accounts of a meaning and its collective interpretation. These two dimensions are not in conflict but create meaning through their interdependence. On the basis of this interdependence, we can conceive of an interpretive analysis of emotions as a way to study language means that label particular emotions as relevant, legitimized, or useful. This shift of the debate on emotions away from what emotions *are* and toward what they *mean* enhances the critical shape of interpretive analysis of emotions because it uncovers conflicts hidden behind the veil of allegedly neutral policy instruments.

### Keywords

Deleuze; emotion; Foucault; interpretation; interpretive analysis; knowledge; meaning; policy studies

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Despite a growing consensus in political science that emotions help us make sense of politics (see e.g., Clarke, Hoggett, & Thompson, 2006; Hunter, 2015; Jupp, Pykett, & Smith, 2016), a heated discussion still prevails over the ontological character of emotions. This discussion mainly concerns whether emotions are 'subjective', 'individual', or 'collective' practices, whether they are framed through bodily responses or are socio-politically and historically contingent (see the overview of the debate in Clément & Sangar, 2018). This large body of thought has an impact on the way the interpretation of emotions has been conceived in the analysis of politics. Scholarly works that analyze policies—working mostly with textual data (such as policy documents, parliamentary debates, transcripts of interviews, etc.)—have approached emotions in one of two ways. One approach considers 'emotions' as expressions of feelings and affects that are incongruous to meaning structures because of their bodily and sensual character, their unpredictability. This has

been the main focus of the affective turn that loosely echoes Gilles Deleuze (Brennan, 2004; Clough & Halley, 2007). The other approach identifies emotions as a sort of pre-stage to meaning, as a raw energy or individual agency that must be inscribed in the meaning structure (Glynos, 2008; Norval, 2009). This approach was advanced mainly by poststructuralist political theory, which built on Michel Foucault (for Foucauldian discourse analysis see also Delori, 2018) and other theorists.

The present article affixes the rich discussion on emotions in politics to the issue of the interpretation of emotions. It argues that an intersubjective notion of meaning is needed to understand how emotions become part of meaning and how these meanings are transmitted through textual data for analysis in policy debates. This notion of meaning is conceptualized here through the discussion of Foucault's and Deleuze's work on meaning (Deleuze, 1968, 1975, 1978; Foucault, 1966, 1969a, 1971). Both Foucault and Deleuze provide conceptual tools for us to think about such an intersubjective notion because they see meaning-making as an intersubjective

activity that is produced and reproduced through interdependence between the subjectively expressed or articulated meanings and their inscription in patterns of collective interpretations. The article thus shows how the authors' mediating interest in this interdependence proposes epistemological groundings for an interpretive analysis of emotions (for the role of both authors for analyzing politics see Brass, 2000; Dean, 2010; Edkins, 2014; Howarth, 2002; Lövbrand & Strippel, 2015; Patton, 2000; Rabinow, 1991; Zevnik, 2016).

The article begins with an overview of how the turn to emotions in social sciences has enabled a distinct focus on knowledge in policy studies. It shows then that while operationalizations of knowledge have been proposed in policy studies (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Fischer, Torgerson, Durnová, & Orsini, 2015; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013; Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 1996), these works have not clarified the role of emotion in such analysis (see the critique also in Durnová, 2015). The interdependence of the subjective and collective dimensions of a meaning-making conceived by Foucault and Deleuze enables us to understand emotions as evaluating and value-loaded references to articulations of emotions that frame policy debate, giving legitimacy to some actors while silencing other actors by labeling them as 'emotional'. The interpretive analysis of emotions has the advantage of depicting concrete language means by that these references to emotions are displayed. The article concludes by providing examples of how such an interpretive analysis of emotions can be set up. It follows that this article does not aim to provide yet another site for discussing the ontological character of emotions, nor does it endeavor to resolve the dilemmas between the cognitive and representational nature of emotions that those discussions imply (as discussed, e.g., in Barbalet, 2002; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1990). Rather, it proposes epistemological groundings for identifying emotions in textual data, which can be used not just in policy studies but in any social analysis of knowledge.

## 2. Emotions as Intersubjective Elements of Meaning-Making

A diversified and somewhat antagonistic set of approaches has been deployed to understand emotions in politics, which has elevated the debate on the ontological character of emotions to prominence (see the review works on the topic, e.g., Berezin, 2009; Dixon, 2012; Jasper, 2011). It was deemed necessary to reflect on what emotions are in order to identify where emotions can be found and how they can help us to understand political phenomena better. In policy studies, mainstream research first resisted including emotions in its analytical toolkit, which has been emphasized mainly by Thompson and Hoggett (2001), van Stokkom (2005), and Newman (2012) in their critique of deliberation as an enterprise that excludes citizen groups, and knowledge on the basis of their emotionality. The critique

of deliberation was part of larger paradigmatic framings of emotions in sociology and political theory, which defined them as socio-historically contingent practices (Ahmed, 2013; Hochschild, 2003; Zelizer, 2005). This debate helped scholars in policy studies conceptualize emotions as elements of knowledge framing policies and actors that discuss them and/or formulate them (Hunter, 2015; Jupp et al., 2016). Referring to emotions and emphasizing emotions of actors are then practices understood as revealing the socio-political hierarchy that affects what knowledge is seen as legitimate and which actors are seen as relevant. This perspective was set up to explain how emotions are used in policy debates to advance particular types of knowledge (see the example of the public debate on AIDS in Gould, 2009; and the example of the public debate on care in Durnová, 2013). While focusing on the use of knowledge, and the contexts of this use, works in policy studies have shown how emotions frame the identities of policy receivers through these uses of knowledge (Clarke, 2006; Hunter, 2003). These approaches have highlighted that emotions enter as evaluative components of policies (Greene, 2002; Orsini & Smith, 2010; Stenner & Taylor, 2008) and that the emotional lens helps scholars understand the values behind policies, which may otherwise be hidden behind the notion of a neutral policy instrument. How actors evaluate a particular policy issue against their feelings about that issue shapes what they do and which arguments and symbols they deploy in their actions (see the examples in family policies in Durnová & Hejzlarová, 2017; Jupp, 2017).

At the same time, all these works showed that emotions are used in the analysis of policies as contingent practices. This perspective positions them close to works in social geography that stress that emotions are 'embedded knowledge' (Bondi, 2014) and 'narrations' of problems (Czarniawska, 2015). Identifying emotions through their aspect of socially inscribed and collectively organized contingency is also the main strand of sociology of emotions working with qualitative data (Flam & Kleres, 2015) as well as in IR works (Koschut, 2018). Recent International Relations works take up such contingency, focusing on why specific emotions become relevant in particular situations (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014). As shows for example Ty Solomon (Holland & Solomon, 2014; Solomon, 2011), the analysis of emotional phenomena should focus on the interdependence between individual agencies and their inscription in these contingent practices. All these processes of socially and collectively organized inscription, regardless of whether they are described in the different social scientific disciplines as norms, rules, practices, or rituals, share the perspective that emotions are endowed with meanings and that, in order to understand their role in politics, we must interpret them.

However, the focus on the interpretation of policies has not automatically produced an inclusion of emotions. Interpretive works in policy studies focused on how polit-

ical phenomena have meaning (Yanow, 1996) and how we can understand politics better through interpretation (Wagenaar, 2011). They were focusing on language and meaning-making practices as practices coproducing the way problems are framed and understood as such (Fischer, 2003; Griggs & Howarth, 2004; Yanow & van der Haar, 2013). In doing so, these works have highlighted the role of ‘arguments’ (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012) or ‘narratives’ (Lejano & Leong, 2012) as language strategies that enable us to see the ‘political process’ behind the formulation or implementation of policies (Zittoun, 2014). These approaches have had a somewhat complicated relationship with emotions. On the one hand, some interpretive works have evoked the issue of emotions more in the sense of ‘showing emotions’ (Fischer, 2009; Gottweis & Prainsack, 2006) rather than interpreting their contingency. Other works have analyzed how the presence of emotions in policy processes enrolls a novel dynamic in policy negotiations (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2016). On the other hand, interpretive concepts such as ‘arguments’, ‘narratives’, and ‘discourses’ have developed into rationalizing meaning structures. This resulted in viewing the analysis of emotion in policies as a pre-stage to the analysis of meanings (see the conceptualization of affects in poststructuralist policy analysis in Glynos, 2008) or even opposed to it. An example that illustrates this opposition is scholarly work that analyzes feeling and performance in policy work; that perspective views the analysis of emotions as an antipode to the interpretive character of analysis (Anderson, 2017).

This article proposes solving this complicated relation of meanings to emotions by investigating more deeply the notion of ‘meaning’. Analyzing policies and policy debates comprehends all manner of textual data: documents, media articles, and parliamentary debates, inquiry transcripts, but also field notes and notes from (participatory) observation. All these data are meaningful; they are conferred meaning by a variety of actors entering the policy debate. This makes ‘meaning’ a central unit of interpretation of policies. Returning to Foucault and Deleuze and their work on meaning proposes an epistemological grounding to argue for an ‘intersubjective’ notion of meaning. In its linguistic conception, intersubjectivity is the very condition of verbal interaction because it brings the subjective intentions of saying something together with the collective understandings of these sayings (used in different sorts of textual analysis such as Maingueneau, 2014). Understanding the intersubjectivity in the analysis of policies enables us to overcome the complicated relation between the interpretation of meanings and the analysis of emotions because it suggests that meaning is a result of interdependence between the subjective expression (moment, feeling, point of view) and its collective validation (socio-cultural contingency, path dependency, the established institutional practice). Making this interdependence central for interpretation allows the focus to shift from ‘emotions’ to particular discursive registers through which some refer-

ences to emotions become legitimized in policy discussions while others are disregarded or even disqualified as illegitimate or ‘too emotional’. This move from what emotions *are* toward what they *mean* enhances the critical shape of analysis. It makes visible the language means by which voices are silenced in a policy debate based on their alleged emotionality as much as it renders germane the conflicts hidden behind the veil of ‘neutral’ knowledge or policy instruments.

### 3. Understanding Intersubjectivity through Foucault and Deleuze

Reflections on meaning-making of Foucault and Deleuze are used here as a pathway to propose epistemological groundings for conceiving of textual data as revealing the intersubjectivity of meanings. Viewing through the lens of intersubjectivity enables us to conceive an interpretation of emotions in these textual data. Both authors reflect in their work that texts are full of fluctuation between ‘classified’ semantic categories and ‘volatile’ rhetorical devices that challenge these categories. Text can subsequently be seen as an oscillation between ‘structured’ narrations of events, which bring forward established and codified genres, and ‘subjective’ narrations that challenge these genres. Both thinkers emphasize that the meaning of an event is negotiated through subjective accounts of a meaning and the multiplicity of other meanings that could be used to describe such an event. Both authors assert that a necessary part of a meaning is the constant aspiration toward a certain type of codification. Even though subjective accounts are important, without this codification, meaning would not be understood by others. What diverges in the perspective of both authors is the focus on the codification procedure in Foucault (1966, 1969b) and the focus on the possibility of disturbing this codification in Deleuze (1968, 1978).

This focus on codification turns us first to ‘discourse’, Michel Foucault’s key term. Discourse, for Foucault, presents a link between thought and the ‘culture of thought’, which presents, represents, articulates, and classifies meanings. The turn to discourse makes us attentive to meanings not as surplus decorations of political actions but as actions themselves that shape and coproduce what policy actors do. Discourse reveals the link between power and knowledge (see e.g., Fischer et al., 2015; Lövbrand & Stripple, 2015). Foucault defines power as an instance governing through—and governing of—a constantly developing knowledge (1966, 1969b, see also in 2009), which has given interpretivists’ epistemological grounds to think of policies through meanings, texts, symbols, or arguments. For that reason, interpretivists analyze registers of knowledge that establish a hierarchy of what counts as valuable or legitimate, an idea advanced mainly in Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1969b).

Second, there is always the possibility of a change of a discourse. Discourse, albeit coding the collective, in-

teracts constantly with subjects using it. Foucault's emphasis on taxonomies, which order our subjective experiences to make them meaningful collective phenomena, represents one such interaction. Taxonomies reveal to us the dangerous mixing of elements within a language, which codifies our practices. If observed from a comparative perspective of different cultures, or from a perspective of diversified subjective experiences, as we can see in contested policy issues, the analysis has to pay attention to how the subject acquires the knowledge, and how she interiorizes it by both confirming it and rejecting it. Studying fractures in a discourse, thereby searching to conceptualize how to deal with multiplicity or contestation, has become pressing in policy inquiry, especially in times of plurality of knowledge and in times of ambivalent hierarchies in increasingly globalized and networked democracies. Some works in the interpretation of politics have thus suggested turning away from meaning structures to dramaturgy (Hajer, 2005) or to physical performances (Edkins, 2015) and the staging of events, referring explicitly to Deleuze (Lundborg, 2009).

That we constantly run the risk of repressing the subjective meaning of an event through some codifying mechanism is essential to the Deleuzian notion of meaning-making (Deleuze, 1968, 1975). However, instead of staying within the 'subjective', or the 'affective', Deleuze proposes focusing on the tensions that emerge between the subjective and collective dimensions of meaning. Deleuze describes a subject's role in meaning as both a producer and a suppressed object of a collective semantic boundary (1977, 1978; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). To be attentive to a subjective shaping of knowledge, and to tensions that might result, is part of his idea of 'difference' (Deleuze, 1968). Through difference, Deleuze conceives the possibilities the subject has to emancipate herself from her discourse. The potentiality of being outside a structure gives a possibility that the discourse might change, that power relations might be subverted or that peripheral meanings might move to the center. This movement beyond, '*devenir*' in the language of Deleuze (1988), is conceived positively as a continual emancipation from all sorts of 'repression mechanisms' that try to restrict the subject in rigid formats. Beyond this, it also serves as a critical alert for analysts that their toolkits and theories can also develop into 'repression mechanisms'. Deleuze ties this risk to schemes of language such as 'explanation', 'analysis', and 'interpretation', which by seizing the manifold and rich reservoir of experience may become oppressive.

This view allows Deleuze at the same time to conceive meaning not as a compact category but as a constant possibility of disturbance (Deleuze, 1968). Irony, joking, and misunderstanding are semantic figures that *per definition* escape any order of discourse, but without this escaping they would not make any sense (Deleuze, 1977, p. 143). Deleuze thus pits the idea of an event against 'the potentiality of an event' because the potentiality explicitly entails tensions and possibilities of

re-codification (Deleuze, 1988, p. 8). At the same time, Foucault does not abandon the individual mechanisms by which power is exercised, either. What rises as the important point for the study of a discourse is that, in Foucault's view, the subject adopts certain practices, rejects them, revises them, or becomes emancipated from them. Discourse and identity are inextricably linked (see also Foucault, 2008). The subject coproduces power by making these practices 'normal', 'rational', or 'legitimate' (Foucault, 1988, pp. 26-33). In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault (1971) uses the disturbance, the eventual contradiction, to illustrate his emphasis on the order and his fascination with it. This can be seen also in his foreword to *The Order of Things*, where he explains how Borges's anecdote on the Chinese encyclopedia made him laugh, because it creates an order by placing together totally different elements (Foucault, 1966). He describes his laughter as the 'impossibility to think something' and it becomes an important epistemological category for the subsequent codification of meanings.

What is central for the conceptualization of inter-subjectivity is that both authors point toward the interdependence between the subjective (instant) and the collective (codified): Foucault uses 'this impossibility to think' to explain that discourse has the power to 'speak truth', to give meaning to events and problems and to codify these meanings in a long-term perspective. Discourse achieves this because it codifies this impossibility of thinking in categories, practices, rules, and norms. These categories might be inaccurate for grasping subjective accounts, but the codification comprises also this inaccuracy. An example of this can be found in the verbal interaction in which we state that we know that something is difficult to describe, but then we describe it anyway. The difficulty of describing is the lens that Deleuze applies to deal with the interdependence. Deleuze uses the same 'impossibility of thinking' to explain that discourse cannot speak truth to power, nor can it coin the meaning of an event, because its power is constantly disturbed by the multiple subjective accounts of meanings (Deleuze, 1968), by inaccuracies, jokes, ironical statements, or even silence. But again, these rhetorical devices can function only in their relation to the codification, no matter how much we might feel oppressed by this structure when articulating the subjective meaning of an event.

Both authors cite the larger implications of this interdependence for social analysis: the context of modern rationality has made structures and norms and codes its ultimate device for organizing citizens into societies. The oscillation between organized codification and disorganized subjective accounts of meanings is what drives public debates on an issue. There are codified practices that become contested, disrupted, and challenged in the debate in order to become the new codification. From one perspective of the debate, these practices can be seen as 'codified', while from another perspective they are seen as 'disturbing'. Taking this oscillation into account



means that we cannot stand outside of a discourse; we are always within discourse, as debaters or as analysts (Foucault & Deleuze, 1972). Deleuze suggests in *Nomad Thought* (1978) that it is possible to overcome this constellation by embracing multiplicity. One of the examples he uses is the spread of psychoanalysis in France in the 1970s, which he also articulates together with Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). Deleuze's reproach of the rising fashion of psychoanalysis was that—albeit searching to understand the wild subconscious—it alienated the subject through the codified analytic structure of psychoanalytic therapy. The main impetus of this critique was to uncover how intellectual positions that might understand themselves as 'critical' and 'innovative' or even 'revolutionary'—and in France the group advancing Freudian thinking was one such reference for them—run the risk of becoming just another new 'repression mechanism'. Deleuze was afraid that the focus on the analytical framing might reduce the multiplicity of meanings and the possibilities of becoming something else (Backes-Clement, 1976).

#### 4. Embracing Emotions through Interpretation

Policy studies offer examples that enable setting up an interpretive analysis of emotions that takes advantage of the intersubjective notion of meaning. Maarten Hajer (2005), for example, shows in his analysis of the post-9/11 re-building process of Ground Zero in New York City the role of contradictory emotions for policy planning, although he does not discuss implications for respective analysis of emotions. Contradicting views of property owners, family members of victims, and New York residents were all meaningful parts of the decision-making process around the re-building of the site. All these subjective assessments of the event played some part in the city's mourning process over 9/11, yet they did not enjoy the same level of recognition during the decision-making process. The dramaturgy to stage a particular narrative of the re-building process in fact employed meaning-making procedures to bring forward some emotions expressed during the planning process as the 'important' or 'legitimate' ones. An interpretive analysis of emotions could study these particular staging further by examining the verbal interactions among actors and arguments in policy papers to identify how these particular emotions were referenced, how they were brought into relation with the events of 9/11 and with the aim of a 're-building process', and how, on that basis, they might be framed as 'emotional', which subsequently legitimized their exclusion from the process. Interpretive analysis of emotions can also uncover the hidden conflict around the paradigmatic framing of a planning process that—by conceiving of a policy design as a rational enterprise—allows only certain experiences to become a legitimate part of the discussion.

A second example is the issue of alimony policy, which shows how the subjective meanings of 'single

motherhood' are diffused by the respective policy design (see the analysis in Durnová & Hejzlarová, 2017). That single mothers don't feel 'happy' and that they are 'frustrated' are excluded from the design of alimony because these are too emotional to be included in a policy. Subjective assessment of the policy is seen simply as part of the cost-benefit analysis because policies—as policy studies have taught us (May, 2012)—are always reductionist and therefore have winners and losers. Interpreting concrete references to emotions, such as references to a 'frustrated mother', enables those who argue for the policy design to disqualify these voices from a debate that is labeled as 'serious' because it is about 'real' financial costs and not about 'sentiments'. A third example of interpretive analysis is the end-of-life controversy (analyzed in Durnová, 2018). Every end-of-life policy, regardless of whether it is for or against self-chosen death, is intertwined with the diversified, and often ambivalent, subjective experience that each of us might have with the end of life. Any end-of-life policy oriented toward elaborating a concrete choice will in fact exclude other subjective experiences. Interpretive analysis of emotions, in this case, can look at how emotions are referenced in particular situations and how some of them become legitimized as 'understandable' while other emotions are not legitimized and instead are described as 'irrational' and the people who hold them as 'not really meaning it'. The analysis can then look behind the ethical debate on this issue to show that these ethical positions are sustained through references to emotions.

Setting up an interpretive analysis of emotions means identifying discursive registers through which emotions are articulated and shared because they are seen as legitimate or relevant, while other emotions are not acknowledged as either relevant or legitimate. Such identification means explaining through which concrete means these registers hold together, what challenges them, and what consolidates them. By revealing these registers, the interpretive analysis of emotions finally enhances the critical shape of policy inquiry: it allows those who are silenced by the paradigmatic framing of valuing political rationality over emotions to be heard. Analyzing the language means through which those complaining about a policy design are silenced can become a way to uncover the larger dichotomization of politics opposing arguments presented as 'rational', against arguments presented as emotions of 'strained mothers', or 'unhappy citizens' and 'suffering patients'. Making this dichotomization visible through an analysis of concrete references to emotions in a policy debate enables to identify the normative dimension lying behind the alleged neutrality of policy knowledge and policy instruments.

#### 5. Conclusion

While analyses of political phenomena have paid attention to emotions through multiple approaches, viewing emotions as a 'necessary disequilibrium' (Berezin, 2009)

opposed to structured knowledge has persisted in the field. This limitation has also affected interpretation of policies. As I have demonstrated through discussion of the interpretative approaches to policy studies, emotions have been treated as elements with a special status or, as Foucault put it, as ‘impossible to think’. They have been seen as ‘disruptions’, as Deleuze holds about the role of the subjective accounts of meanings. In treating Foucault and Deleuze as the two main sources of inspiration for interpretation, the article proposes an outline for an epistemological framework for an intersubjective notion of a meaning. Emotions can be analyzed in terms of what they *mean* to whom without losing their aspect of disruptive elements that challenge those meanings. Emphasizing the interdependence between subjective accounts of meanings and their validation through collective understandings (socio-cultural contingency, path dependency, historical contingency) gives an epistemological grounding to understand that meaning is intersubjective, and the oscillation between subjective accounts and collective understanding is part of this. It also enables us to shift the discussion on emotions in social science away from what emotions *are* toward what they *mean* in a concrete policy debate and how they are used to design policies as much as they expose these policies to contestation.

The examples cited, along with the discussion on meaning in Foucault and Deleuze, permit us to draw a pathway toward the interpretive analysis of emotions. Looking for emotions as they can be found in the textual data can identify contradictions and misunderstanding once we treat these texts, as Foucault and Deleuze suggest, as a site for negotiation between what the subject says or does and how that is understood by the collective and subsequently framed in policy debates. Emotions are not opposed to meanings: they play with them, and sometimes against them. Emotions are inscribed in cultural or societal contingencies, underpinning actors’ motivations to participate, while simultaneously enacting changes in contexts and actors in the policy process. Emotions both consolidate and challenge policies: they ‘negotiate’ with meanings while being simultaneously negotiated by them.

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