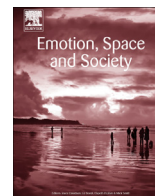




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Settling space and covering the nation: Some conceptual considerations in analysing affect and discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how affect and discourse intertwine. We analyse a corpus of newspaper editorials and comment pieces from 2013 to 2014 concerning Aotearoa New Zealand's national day investigating how affective-discursive practices are mobilised to 'cover the nation' and 'settle space'. We identify pervasive formulations of 'bitter Māori' and 'indifferent Kiwis' and the canon of affective-discursive repertoires and subject positions routinely set up as part of continuing white settler (Pākehā) cultural projects. A second objective is to contribute to the development of theory and method in studies of affect. We argue against non-representational perspectives and for a practice viewpoint that can work with entanglements of semiosis and embodied affect. Concepts from social psychological studies of discourse are applied in preference to 'structures of feeling', 'affect economies', 'emoscapes' and 'emotion styles'.

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In this paper we focus on a corpus of newspaper editorials and comment pieces collected in 2013 and 2014 concerning Waitangi Day – Aotearoa New Zealand's national holiday, equivalent to Australia Day and Canada Day. We argue that this media material continues a long tradition of 'settling space' as it 'covers the nation'. Our analysis focuses particularly on the *emotional work* involved in media accounts of the national holiday (see also [McConville et al., 2014](#)). We examine the assembling of affective-discursive orthodoxies and the construction of varied emotional citizens and affected figures. Investigating affect and emotion is not straightforward, however, and a further aim of the paper is to explore the conceptual and theoretical resources available for analyses of this kind.

Waitangi Day (commemorations are held on February the 6th each year) is a particularly appropriate site for investigating the mobilisation of the affective-discursive in news media in relation to banal nationalism and to continuing settler cultural projects. The day marks the signing over a number of months in 1840 of the

Treaty of Waitangi by Māori leaders of many tribes and representatives of the Britain, creating a bicultural vision for the development of the country in what is widely accepted as the founding moment of the modern state ([Kawharu, 1989](#); [Orange, 2011](#); [Sharp, 1990](#)). Despite these beginnings, however, the emerging settler society came to dominate. Institutions of sovereignty, politics, commerce, law, education, religion and public life marginalised Māori, dispossessed them of lands and resources, and rendered them 'other' in their own country ([Ballara, 1986](#); [Belich, 1986](#)). Waitangi Day has become a public holiday marking the anniversary and an annual focus for often heated and heartfelt debates, discussion and education about national futures, social justice, indigenous rights and the relationships between Māori and non-Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A number of studies have demonstrated how the news media in Aotearoa New Zealand typically reflect and reinforce the cultural/material projects of European origin New Zealanders (Pākehā) and frame indigenous Māori within a narrow stock of highly negative discursive resources ([Abel et al., 2012](#); [Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012](#); [Rankine et al., 2014](#)). From the mid 19th century onwards, small town, regional and national newspapers in Aotearoa New Zealand were vital in the settling process, stretching webs of writing over the newly colonised hills, bush and seas ([Day, 1990](#); [Scholefield,](#)

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1958; Walker, 1990). Provinces and landscapes were defined, and the geography of the new nation figured. Social and material relations with indigenous peoples were constructed and re-constructed, patterns of inclusion and exclusion were narrated, and new senses of home and belonging for primarily British settlers were identified and authorised (Ballara, 1986; Belich, 1986). We investigate how affect and emotion are put to work today as news media continue to discuss the meaning of Waitangi and what is to be commemorated.

The methodological and theoretical puzzle we grapple with in this paper is how to empirically analyse affect and unpick its power? How should the emotional labour evident in the media be conceptualised? Current trends in social research on affect (Anderson, 2009; Clough with Halley, 2007; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2004, 2008) typically divide the representational from the non-representational, and much recent empirical work has followed this lead, distinguishing the energy of affect from the taming power of the discursive. As one example - in their investigation of an on-line political campaign Knudsen and Stage (2012) pick out specific 'aesthetic-affective registers' seen as distinct from discursive registers. The discursive registers are described as regulated and mediated whereas the 'aesthetic-affective' triggers what are said to be 'non-representational effects' that are seen as immediate, wild, potentially contagious, and 'semantically unruly'. For Knudsen and Stage, investigations of affect involve exploring "physiological-affective reactions: repulsion/attraction, bodily attunement/attachment, intensity shifts, empathetic imitation, relational energizing" (2012, p.151).

As has been argued elsewhere (Wetherell, 2012, 2013a), the separation of affect (understood as non-representational intensity) from mediated signification is problematic both as a social theory of affect and, particularly, as method. It has led researchers to treat affect as a kind of cultural uncanny: mysterious, a force directly hitting the body, bypassing discourse, sense making and cognition. Method becomes a scramble to retrieve 'atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009) and the ineffable. The familiar objects of qualitative social research - people's accounts, their narratives, talk and texts - become treated with suspicion. Yet, as Wetherell (2013a) argues, attempts to engage empirically with processes formulated as *beyond, below or past* discourse tend to become very wordy indeed, and most of the phenomena of interest to 'non-representational' researchers turn out to be complex affective-discursive assemblages.

The analysis in this paper adopts an alternative perspective - a social practice approach grounded in current psychological research, and in studies of discursive practice in everyday life (Wetherell, 2012, 2013a; 2013b, 2015a see also Burkitt, 2014; Christou, 2011; Dixon and Condor, 2011; Everts and Wagner, 2012; Gammerl, 2012; Reckwitz, 2012; Sullivan, 2014). This perspective is strongly influenced by frames and themes articulated in earlier work in the sociology of emotion and, in particular, in feminist research on emotion (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Harding and Pribam, 2004; Hemmings, 2005; Hochschild, 1983; Jaggar, 1989; Lupton, 1998; Lutz, 2001).

In line with this re-working we explore some of the concepts currently available for analysing the patterning of affective-discursive material. Are the patterns we find in our Waitangi Day newspaper corpus best described, for instance, as 'emotional styles' (Gammerl, 2012) characterising 'emotion communities' (Rosenwein, 2006)? Are these best understood as 'structures of feeling' sitting alongside the ideologies making up the 'social character' of Aotearoa New Zealand (Williams, 1977)? Are we identifying the local 'affective economy' (Grossberg, 1988, 1997), or should we be charting the 'emoscape', or a 'national emotion archive' characterised by 'feeling rules' (Kenway and Fahey, 2011)?

Although each of these conceptualisations is valuable and draws attention to different features, we suggest that none quite captures the intertwining of affect and discourse in practice, the constructive power of affective-discursive material, and its flexibility, mobility, and action orientation.

The argument unfolds as follows. First, we look at one example of affective-discursive practice in some detail and then in the second section go on to explore the positioning of discourse in non-representational accounts arguing for a different understanding of the relationship between semiosis and affect. In the third section, we consider the concepts that might best frame an analysis of the overall patterns in an affective-discursive corpus, in light of recent work on emoscapes and emotional styles, and present a case for concepts derived from discourse studies in social psychology. The fourth section applies these concepts to unpick the orderings of the 'affective-discursive canon' in our empirical material and the 'affective-discursive positions' and 'repertoires' from which the canon is composed. Finally, we look at how formulations of affected citizens, due to the history and meanings assigned to emotion in general in Western frames, accomplish some very particular ideological effects, powerfully legitimating some emotional actors and disqualifying others.

1. An example of affective-discursive practice

Following Theodore Schatzki's (1996; 2002) formulation of social practice, and in particular his discussion of the teleo-affective nature of human practices, Reckwitz (2012) argues that every social practice has an affective and perceptual dimension. This obviously must be the case even if the affect is limited to simply feeling sufficient investment (or coercion) to continue a line of action rather than stop. We are interested, however, in affective-discursive practice in a more specific sense: in patterned forms of human activity articulating, mobilizing and organizing affect and discourse as a central part of the practice. This aspect of practical activity (and the semiotic work involved) come particularly into view when we shift from more global post-structuralist forms of discourse analysis to the more fine-grain 'mid-level' approach adopted in modes of discourse analysis developed in social psychology (see Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998, 2001; 2015b; Nairn and McCreanor, 1991). These studies focus not so much on the epistemic regimes or the discursive formations ordering a site or historical period but on the active work of meaning making in situ and its practical organisation. From this perspective, attempts to carve out separate registers of non-representational affect look highly precarious.

Consider the following extract and its affective-discursive labour. This is a comment piece produced by a former New Zealand right-wing politician four days after Waitangi Day in 2013 for the Sunday edition of a national newspaper.

1.1. Extract one

So-called national day about fights and whines

"THE UNITED States has the 4th of July, France has Bastille Day, and Australia, well, Australia has Australia Day.

And New Zealand? We have Waitangi Day. Try explaining Waitangi to an overseas visitor.

Anzac Day is easy.

[...]

But Waitangi Day? What's that about?

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