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Critical Literacy: Beyond Reason

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that critical literacy is essentially a rationalist activity that does not sufficiently address the non-rational investments that readers bring with them to texts and tasks. I begin by looking at playful advertising texts that work with humour and the transgressive in order to consider the role of pleasure rather than reason. Then I examine the force of powerful identifications in relation to reason to show that educational interventions cannot ignore them. Finally, I tentatively suggest that we may need to find ways to combine socio-cultural and psycho-analytic theory in order to imagine new directions for pedagogy in the critical literacy classroom.

Introduction

Most of my research is in the area of critical literacy education and language policy. Essentially, this work is located in a socio-cultural theory of language with a particular focus on the relationship between language and power. I saw my work in South Africa as both a moral and a political project which valued education as an important factor in achieving a just society. I designed classroom materials (Janks 1993) that aimed to help students investigate 'the ways in which meaning . . . serves to sustain relations of domination' (Thompson 1984, p. 35) and I examined what happened when these workbooks were used in classrooms in the early 1990s (Janks 1995). While my own work foregrounded language and domination, other realisations of critical literacy emphasised access or diversity or design. In my synthesis model (Janks 2001), I argue that these different orientations are crucially interdependent and that one without the other produces a problematic imbalance.

Access deals with how people gain entry to privileged spaces. This can include access to dominant genres, to powerful institutions and to modes of production. Domination, as a concept in critical literacy education, focuses on dominant discourses and the ways in which they are maintained, reproduced and contested. Literacy education which values difference as diversity recognises the importance of

using students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as a productive resource. Design is the most polyvalent of the four terms. It includes multi-modal and multimedia forms of representation as well as notions of creativity in relation to change, and the possibilities that this offers for transformative redesign. Their interdependence is summarised in the following table.

Domination without access	This maintains the exclusionary force of dominant discourses.
Domination without diversity	Domination without difference and diversity loses the ruptures that produce contestation and change.
Domination without design	The deconstruction of dominance, without reconstruction or design, removes human agency.
Access without domination	Access without a theory of domination leads to the naturalisation of powerful discourses without an understanding of how these forms came to be powerful.
Access without diversity	This fails to recognise that difference fundamentally affects pathways to access and involves issues of both history, identity and value.
Access without design	This maintains and reifies dominant forms without considering how they can be transformed.
Diversity without domination	This leads to a celebration of diversity without any recognition that difference is structured in dominance and that not all discourses/genres/ languages/literacies are equally powerful.
Diversity without access	Diversity without access to powerful forms of language ghettoises students.
Diversity without design	Diversity provides the means, the ideas, the alternative perspectives for reconstruction and transformation. Without design, the potential that diversity offers is not realised.
Design without domination	Design, without an understanding of how dominant discourses/practices perpetuate themselves, runs the risk of an unconscious reproduction of these forms.
Design without access	This runs the risk of whatever is designed remaining on the margins.
Design without diversity	This privileges dominant forms and fails to use the design resources provided by difference.

Table 1: The interdependence of domination, diversity, access and design

This model clearly demonstrates the logo-centric theorising that underpins such analysis. In this paper, I want to step outside of this framework to raise some difficult questions for critical literacy education and for critical pedagogy more generally. These questions confront the profoundly rationalist underpinnings of critical deconstruction. Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, for example, depends on three interrelated forms of analysis: text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis, which he calls description, interpretation and explanation (Fairclough 1989, 1995). All of these depend on logical reasoning and argument in relation to evidence in both text and context. What is missing from this model is the territory beyond reason. The territory of desire and identification, pleasure and play, the taboo and the transgressive; what Giroux (1994) calls 'disturbing pleasures', what Kenway and Bullen (2001, p. 157) call 'the profane' and what Comber (1997, p. 157 & p. 19) notices when children in classrooms are 'given permission to be other than sensible and serious'.

It is necessarily to consider the territory beyond reason in order to avoid a problematic disjunction between critical deconstruction and students' affective engagement with texts. In teaching students to deconstruct advertisements, we examine the words and the images to see what political work they are doing. We expose the faulty logic, look for the silences in the text, criticise the values that underpin the text and reveal the underlying assumptions. When we have finished, students can produce a reasoned critique that is not in any way transformative. This is how the problem manifested itself to a group of English teachers at an all girls school. One of the teachers, Weber (1999), had completed a small research project on Liquifruit advertisements that appeared in two different magazines aimed at youth markets of different races. Expecting to find different constructions of race, the teacher/researcher found different constructions of gender instead. When men were used to sell the product, they were constructed as energised by drinking pure fruit juice, thus enhancing their sporting prowess. When women were used to sell the product, they were constructed as objects of our gaze. The advertisement reproduced the unsurprising active-passive binary in gender construction. Moreover, from month to month the gorgeous, slim women models were progressively identified with the product (with the aid of digital morphing, they moved from drinking the product, to wearing the product to becoming the product) and they were progressively sexualised. While students had no difficulty in

deconstructing the visual and verbal semiotics of these advertisements, what bothered the teachers was that, despite all this work, many of the girls still had their favourite model, the one they identified with, the one they wished they could be. Where identification promises the fulfilment of desire, reason cannot compete. Students could produce the required deconstructive reading of the text, what Thompson and Janks have come to call dominant deconstructions (Janks 2000, p. 181), without any change in either their aspirations or their practices.

Joke work: Nando's as a case study

If desire and identification work against reason, are there other psychological processes that do the same? Freud in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* says 'If one laughs at a joke really heartily, one is not precisely in the mood for investigating its technique' (1916, p. 85).

I will use Freud's work on jokes to introduce the concepts of pleasure and play and then I will return to the unconscious process of identification, to show that the terrain of the non-rational provides a challenge that work in critical literacy education needs to address.

Nando's is a South African based international food business that sells Portuguese-style grilled chicken, flavoured either with lemon and herbs or with peri-peri, to a relatively small niche market. Peri-peri, which literally means small chilli, is a hot sauce made from a blend of chillies, herbs and spices first discovered in Portuguese East Africa. It has outlets in sixteen countries, including Australia and New Zealand. Nando's is small compared to big mass-market companies like McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken. In South Africa, their overall annual advertising budget is the equivalent of two million Australian dollars, whereas, according to the South African Ad Index, McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken spend the equivalent of 6.5 million Australian dollars per annum on above the line advertising.

In South Africa, Nando's employs a multi-award winning advertising agency to sell their products. In describing their brand personality, Josie McKenzie, the Nando's marketing director for South Africa, says 'It's fun, irreverent, cheeky, humorous and above all intelligent' (Interview, October 2001).

Nando's advertisements are worth investigating because they teach us how to combine critique with pleasure and play, how to use irreverence as a rebellion against authority and how to transgress the restraints of political correctness. They make the intelligent pleasurable.

Their humour is apparent in their short, punchy cricket advertisements. A good example is the advertisement that is shown when a batsman in cricket goes out without scoring. The picture of the animated yellow duck that moves across the bottom of the screen (in a squeezeback) while the batsman leaves the field is followed by a Nando's advertisement saying, 'Why go out for a duck when you can go out for a chicken?', together with the Nando's logo. (In South Africa, batsmen 'go out for a duck', whereas in Australia and Britain, they 'get out for a duck'.) Freud would describe this as an innocent verbal joke in which we derive pleasure from the play on words, from the joke technique. Both 'go out' and 'duck' have double meanings that the joke exploits.

Nando's also makes use of satire. The following advertisement parodies direct marketing advertisements and is in fact an anti-ad that makes us laugh at the silliness of advertising per se. The joke is carried by the voice-over script that is accompanied by appropriate visuals.

Voice-over script:
Need excitement? Well here's the Nando's box. This fantastic recyclable receptacle comes with an all white interior, fully functional lid and stylish designer designed logo. Now how much would you pay for such an ornament? Sixty rand? Fifty rand? Thirty rand? Now we're giving the box away for a stunning twenty rand fifty. But that's not all. We also throw in a genuine Nando's flame-grilled chicken leg in your choice of lemon and herb or mild or hot peri-peri. And there's more. If you come in, we also give you a chicken wing, attached to the leg by a complimentary breast and thigh. Still not enough? Then we'll fill the box with our old style chips. So, that's the box with white interior, designer logo, chicken leg, matching wing, breast, thigh, chips and to top it all, this small till slip printed with figures that you can show your friends. So don't hesitate, call this number now.

This extended joke allows Nando's to exploit something ridiculous in other advertisements to enhance our pleasure in the Nando's ads.

This is an example of what Freud calls a tendentious joke. Tendentious jokes have additional sources of pleasure to that occasioned by the word play of innocent jokes. These jokes, which have a social purpose, 'make possible the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile) in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way' (Freud 1916, p. 144). By 'making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him [sic]' (Freud 1916, p. 147).

Joke work often happens below the level of consciousness. It helps us to overcome psychic inhibitions (internal obstacles), and our psychic relations to external obstacles, such as authority figures or enemies. We do not always know why we are laughing or what the source of the pleasure is.

In addition to being witty, the Nando's advertisements are also often risqué, transgressive and politically incorrect. They play with taboo topics and transgress boundaries, flirting with the 'forbidden' (Freud 1916, p. 150). The following transgressive advertisement begins with a written message that unfolds frame by frame, accompanied by a voice reading the words together with background music. Each paragraph represents one frame that rolls up onto the screen, and the frames follow in quick succession. The font is an approximation of the font used in the advertisement (Figure 1).

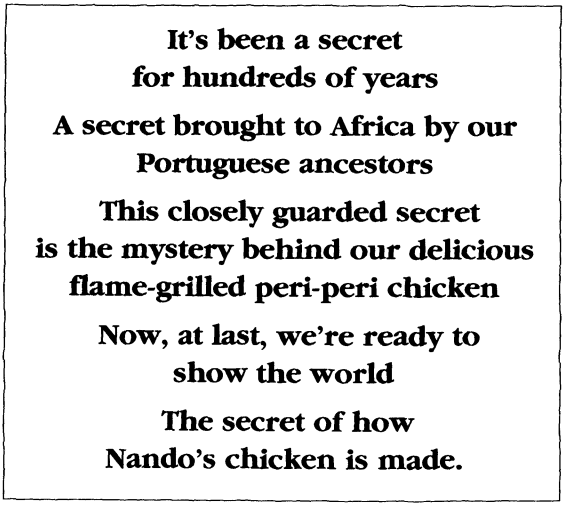


Figure 1

As the message moves into its last frame, the music starts building to a climax. The camera then cuts to a picture of a hen scratching around in the ground followed immediately by a shot of a cock flying in and mounting her, to inseminate her, as the music reaches its peak.

This advertisement breaks a number of rules. First, it shows the food that we eat running around live. It foregrounds the fact that the animals we eat are living creatures. Secondly, it explicitly focuses on the sex act, transgressing the way we habitually think about ready-to-go prepared food, or sanitised polythene-wrapped animal protein in supermarkets. It plays with the words 'are made'. This really is how chickens 'are made' as distinct from how they 'are prepared' as food. In the context of food, this advertisement works with the unsayable. And we laugh. Jokes work against repression and the amount of pleasure derived from them corresponds to the amount of psychic expenditure that is saved (Freud 1916, p. 167). Energy is released from the work on inhibition and suppression. In evading the psychic censors, jokes open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible. (Freud 1916, p. 147).

Had any animal rights activists stepped up to have the advertisement taken off the air, Nando's might have countered with the slogan that appears on another of their advertisements: 'No animals were harmed in the making of this advertisement, they were just eaten'. This political incorrectness points to the hypocrisy of bunny-hugging meat eaters.

'Political correctness' is an obvious example of discursive policing and an endeavour to organise the field of the sayable as well as ways of saying. Although the term is mainly used pejoratively by conservatives as a form of resistance to the transformation of their discourse practices, it can also be harnessed by the left to silence opposition. The South African Institute of Race Relations (2000, p. 2), for example, sees it as a new form of censorship, designed to prevent liberal criticism of the African National Congress (ANC) government. What is different about this form of censorship is that it often produces self-monitoring and self-censorship. Because what is deemed politically correct is often associated with self-righteousness it is an easy target for satirists; it invites transgression.

In his introduction to *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, Garner takes a pot shot at many of the cows that some of us hold sacred.

> If, through omission or commission, I have inadvertantly displayed any sexist, racist, culturalist, nationalist, regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomist, ethnocentrist, phallocentrist, heteropatriarchalist, or other type of bias as yet unnamed, I apologise and encourage your suggestions for rectification. (1994, p. x)

So, are these advertisements funny or just bad taste? And how much are funny and taste determined by our own identifications, our own reading positions, our own ability to enjoy the transgressive or not, our own ability to allow play, even in relation to matters that for us are important and serious. How much is taste related to our own cultural and class-based schooling? (Bourdieu 1984). Freud says that 'only jokes that have a purpose, run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to hear them' (1916, p. 132).

Where are the boundaries? Which borders may not be crossed? For whom? And what does this have to do with education? Many of the Nando's advertisements raise awareness of social issues in South Africa which, with the use of intelligent humour, make us both laugh and think. Irreverent and transgressive reframing make the social issues visible.

In the next example, Nando's perversely uses women with eating disorders to sell food. In this advertisement, mournful, wafer-thin women wearing T-shirts inscribed with the word 'model' are shown slavering over a Nando's advertisement on television. We see and hear them rewinding the tape to replay the pictures of the food that the advertisement allows them to enjoy vicariously as they munch on their celery sticks. Thin models are the norm in advertising. 'Fat', as we know, is a feminist issue. Here, Nando's make the thinness, and the eating disorders that it points to, visible in such a way as to construct the thinness as deprivation. In celebrating its food, rather than the thin models, it provides a critique of the way in which other advertisements exploit women.

In the second example, Nando's makes disability visible. Here, tempted by the enticing smell of the chicken, a guide dog leads its blind mistress into a pole so that it can eat the chicken which it has made her drop. The dog enjoys the food, while its mistress, a little gray-haired old lady, lies unconscious on the pavement. The music accompanying this film is jaunty, upbeat and

frivolous. This was the most controversial of all Nando's advertisements, and many viewers believe that it is cruel and not at all funny. For Freud,

> An impulse or urge is present which seeks to release pleasure from a particular source and if it were allowed free play, would release it. Besides this, another urge is present which works against this generation of pleasure – inhibits it, that is, or suppresses it. The suppressing current must, as the outcome shows, be a certain amount stronger than the suppressed on. (1916, p. 186)

At the time Nando's thought that this was a 'sweet ad'.

> McKenzie: We didn't think that it was going to particularly cross the boundary. We knew there was a sector who would find it offensive but nothing to the level that it went. I mean it went international even. It went around the world in a matter of days . . . we didn't realise how far the line was crossed. In retrospect you see what people will find acceptable and what they won't. And something like that is not acceptable. Clearly, on a world platform, never mind South Africa.
>
> Interviewer: Why? How did it cross the line?
>
> McKenzie: [It was] offensive in terms of the fact that it is someone who is disabled.
>
> Interviewer: Laughing at someone who is disabled.
>
> McKenzie: Laughing at someone who is disabled . . . it's the thing that when you were at school, you'd laugh heartily at and then you'd be reprimanded by your teacher or your mother. Actually that's not funny and why it's not funny. It then makes you squirm.

(Interview, October 2001)

In the end McKenzie's assessment is that it was schoolboy humour, not the intelligent humour that is the brand personality. She says that without the intelligence, the advertisement is hard to defend. She distinguishes Nando's advertising from the Benetton ads, which have been accused of appropriating social issues to create brand visibility using shock tactics. Her view is that Nando's advertisements are not sensationalist, but that they work instead with intelligent humour on taboo topics in a socially responsible way. 'You're saying "think about it". You've got to use your head about it' (Interview, October, 2001).

However, while Nando's advertisements in South Africa have satirised crime, prostitution, poaching, political corruption, homeless children, beggars, gambling, drugs, racial stereotyping and unemployment, there is still material that remains unsayable. McKenzie, for example, thinks that AIDS and rape are 'desperately serious issues' in South Africa. South Africa has the highest rape statistics in the world, and there are projections that 7 million South Africans will die of AIDS in the next 10 years (*The Sunday Independent*, 21 October 2001). Child abuse is widespread; there are 58 cases of child rape a day (*The Star*, 5 November, 2001) including horrifying instances of infant rape that defy comprehension. For McKenzie, it is clear that serious social issues are not suitable for irreverent treatment. How does she know where the line is?

> It's always a gamble . . . At the end of the day it's intuitive and it's what [it] feels like here. [She places her hand over her head] . . . What you do with your head is try and anticipate negative reactions, who will complain. Does it fit with the Advertising Standards Authority's code? . . . But the initial concept, [you ask yourself] does it sit right here? [She places her hand over heart] (Interview, October 2001).

In this statement, McKenzie articulates the relationship between her intuitive knowledge, what she feels with her heart, and her rational analysis, what she does with her head.

Lessons for pedagogy

According to Freud (1916, p.179) successful jokes make possible what is forbidden by reason.

> The thought seeks to wrap itself in a joke because in that way it recommends itself to our attention and seems more significant and more valuable but above all because this wrapping bribes our powers of criticism and confuses them. We are inclined to give the thought the benefit of what has pleased us in the form of the joke; and we are no longer inclined to find anything wrong that has given us enjoyment and so to spoil the source of the pleasure. If a joke has made us laugh, moreover, a disposition most unfavourable to criticism [reason] will have been established . . . Where argument tries to draw the hearer's criticism over on to its side, the joke endeavours to push the criticism out of sight. There is no doubt that the joke has chosen the method which is psychologically more effective. (Freud 1916, pp. 82-83)

Freud sees jokes as freeing us from sexual inhibitions, from disciplined control of our aggressive instincts, and from the tyranny of logic and reason. Freed from what Foucault would call 'care of the self', we are able to regain pleasure and to 'recapture the mood of our childhood' (Freud 1916, p. 302). Critical deconstruction of a joke refuses the bribe and insists on reason. It enables us to see the powerful interests at work, but it robs us of laughter and play. More importantly, it refuses the release of psychic energy bound up in repression. To insist on criticism is to lose the joke. This can be related to the critical work in classrooms that applies rational analysis to the popular cultural forms that our students enjoy. In many instances, the project of schooling asks students to police their pleasures (Buckingham 1998, Comber 1997, Giroux 1984, Kelly 1997, Kenway and Bullen 2001, Misson 1994, 1997, Morgan 1998, Nixon 1999).

But according to Thompson 'Jokes . . . are continuously engaged in recounting the way that the world appears and in reinforcing through laughter which profits at another's expense, the apparent order of things' (1990, p. 62). In this way 'we may be drawn into a symbolic process which may serve, in some circumstances, to create and sustain relations of domination' (1990 p. 62) where humour is used to legitimate them.

For this reason I am reluctant to abandon the critical literacy project, to agree with Kenway and Bullen (2001) that we are now in a post-critical moment. With Comber I want to ask:

> In what ways might humour and play be productive in literacies in classrooms? How can we keep the space for powerful, critical, satisfying and socially responsible literate practices and at the same time have fun? Is it possible, allowable?

Nando's provides some of the answers. Social action can take the form of parody, satire and caricature. Jokes and humour allow us to rebel against authority, to attack powerful institutions or views of life (Freud 1916, p. 153) and to unmask deception (Freud 1916, p. 262).

Imagine students using either reason and/or empathy to focus on society, and then, like Nando's, finding humorous ways to expose the workings of power.

Imagine students turning their satirical eye on their own generation, writing anti-ads or parodies that help them to laugh at themselves.

Imagine students, like the Nando's marketing director, working at the edge, pushing the boundaries of what is sayable, trying to work out the limits of what is and is not possible.

Imagine irony as essential learning in the national curriculum.

Comber and O'Brien have done extensive work on using everyday texts with young children in classrooms (O'Brien 2001 and Comber and Simpson 1995). In working with them on a new workbook in the Critical Language Awareness Series (Janks 1993) called *The Power and Pleasure of Everday Texts* (as yet unpublished), we included the transgressive as a way of foregrounding the normative. In deconstructing and 're-dressing' Barbie, Comber and O'Brien thought of asking children to colour in a Barbie doll advertisement, using preferred Barbie colours. They then asked them to colour in the same advertisement using 'no-no colours'. The concept of 'no-no colouring' highlights playfulness and pleasure in the deviant and the forbidden, while at the same time working powerfully to deconstruct the naturalised.

In similar vein, we could ask students to think of an offensive joke that they know. They could think about who they could never tell the joke to and what makes the joke 'forbidden'. They could consider the consequences of telling this joke. They could work out who would be offended by the joke and why.

They could be asked to imagine contexts in which the joke might be tellable and how they would assess or know this. They could be asked to remember jokes that offended them. In these ways, students can begin to think of how they respond to jokes in terms of their own identity investments and their own upbringing.

Working with the pleasure of jokes and the transgressive need not preclude an understanding of what is at stake. At the end of the day, Nando's branding and its advertising are designed to sell chicken meals. Television advertisements cost the equivalent of 60,000 to 70,000 Australian dollars to produce. A low-level flighting on television costs a million Rand (a quarter of a million Australian dollars). A prime time advertising spot in South Africa costs about AUS$8,000. Nando's is a business and every marketing initiative has objectives; each store has a target to reach. Nando's knows what the 'upsell' is from every campaign. Advertising works. Mistakes cost money. However, negative publicity is not necessarily detrimental. Nando's feels that because they handled the public outcry over the blind lady advertisement sensitively 'they turned what could have been a huge negative into a positive'. According to McKenzie, the story was covered by 'every newspaper, every daily, every weekly, every radio station, every talk station' and 'the sales for that period were phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal' (Interview, October 2001).

In the early 1990s when I explored what happened when my critical language awareness materials were used in schools, I came to understand that, in much the same way as Nando's cannot predict which of their risqué advertisements people will find offensive, the teacher cannot predict which text will erupt in class. The research produced evidence that when texts or tasks touch something 'sacred' to a student, critical analysis is extremely threatening. I came to define as sacred meanings that were constitutive of students' identities, meanings that, if challenged, attacked what one teacher described as 'the fibre of their belief' (Janks 1995, Interview 15, p. 364). In that research, it was a task that asked students to consider 'who should look after the children? Do you think that men and women are likely to have the same or different positions about this? Why?' and a literary text dealing with the story of Noah's ark from the perspective of the people who drowned (Junction Avenue Theatre Company 1989) that touched raw nerves in different classrooms. Then, while I recognised the power of identity investments, I

failed to realise how helpless rationality is in the face of them. I futilely offered analysis and reason to angry students who were, metaphorically speaking, fighting for their lives (Janks 1995, 2001). This finding of my own research is confirmed by that of Granville (1996) and by McKinney and van Pletzen (2000), in my own context, by the work of Kenway and Willis (1997) in Australia, and Ellsworth (1989) in the United States, amongst others. McKinney and van Pletzen quote from Britzman et al (1993) who argue that:

> the commitment to rationality – and to rational persuasion – . . . actively erases the complex, contested and emotionally charged investments students and teachers confront when their subject positions are called into question. It does this by positioning all participants as equal as if one could choose to be unencumbered with the larger dynamics of domination and subordination (1993, p. 196).

I have come to understand that we cannot know in advance which texts are dangerous for whom or how they will impinge on the diverse and multiple identities and identifications of the students in our classes.

I wish to conclude with a personal narrative – with an event that enabled me to 'know' just how effective identification is in negating reason. I use the word 'know' deliberately, because this is embodied knowledge, not the work of reason. I recently visited the United States in the company of friends and family to attend my son's wedding in Boston. The time we spent there was a profoundly emotional and important experience for us. The day after we returned, two hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Centre and another into the Pentagon. Still jet-lagged, I was deeply shocked by the attack on America, and by the terror of the people trapped in those buildings. All of us had been on planes, all of us had flown from Boston, and many of us had flown through New York. Just the week before, my son and his wife had left for their honeymoon on a United Airlines flight from Boston to Los Angeles. Caught up in the horror of it, made accessible by new technologies and the immediacy of CNN's globally telecast news coverage, I was not ready for the first piece of discourse analysis that appeared via email on my computer screen, two days after the event. In his introductory remarks, Paul Chilton wrote:

> *It is possible that some of our American colleagues will not concur with some of the remarks. I want to assure them, however, of our sincere sympathy and ask them to enter into dialogue. This is a Critical Discourse Moment, if ever there was one. (DISCOURS@LISTSERV.LINGUISTLIST.ORG, 13 September 2001).*

The only thing I knew for sure was that whatever this moment was, it was something more than a critical discourse moment. I steeled myself to read the analysis; I tried to bend my mind to the criticisms of America. I simply could not. My whole body rebelled. My reaction was visceral. Before there had been time to count the dead or to mourn, here was this detached, cold, clinical analysis. I could not hear it. It was as if my mind had shut down. I was glued to the television, absorbing the terror, feeling vulnerable, overcoming my disbelief. For days I was gripped by an irrational, unconscious, all-consuming identification with the United States. As my usual stance in relation to the States is critical, it took me days to understand why I could not engage intellectually with the issues. I knew I had to, (all my students could), but it was as if I had no access to my own rationality. This temporary identification, occasioned by the immediacy of the wedding trip, prevented me from accessing the discourses on American imperialism, on global capitalism, on America's self-serving foreign policy, that also formed part of my identity. In addition, we had limited access to the discourses of the other side. No one claimed responsibility. At the time, no anti-American voices were given media space. I discovered how identification holds reason hostage. Only by recognising that what I was experiencing was an unconscious identification could I recover my critical abilities. For the first time, I realised the extent to which critical discourse analysis preaches to the converted; the extent to which, when diversity threatens our identities, as it now does for many Americans, we may be unable to hear other positions. Only once I had confronted my state of unreason, could reason enter.

A month later, in a *Newsweek* special report, Fareed Zakaria examined the intersection of affect and reason in an article titled 'The roots of rage'.

> To the question 'Why do the terrorists hate us?' Americans could be pardoned for answering, 'Why should we care?' The immediate reaction to the murder of 5,000 innocents is anger, not analysis. Yet anger will not be enough to get us through what is sure to be a long struggle. For that we will need answers. (Zakaria 2001, p. 10)

Zakaria proceeded to provide an analysis of the roots of this rage. Analysis assumes a degree of critical detachment. Jokes, on the other hand, circumvent reason, and allow us to confront our fears and our hidden wishes, and to laugh. They also provide us with insight into our own identity investments. The jokes that we find offensive reveal our investments.

In conclusion, I have included two tendentious jokes that provide social commentary on the September 11 attack on America. They are jokes that I think Nando's would enjoy, in so far as they are critical of one of its fast-food competitors. The first provides us with what in Yiddish would be called a 'bittere gelegde' (a bitter laugh), while asking us to think about the effects of American imperialism on other countries. The second, while employing the un-PC racialised markers of turban and beard, can also be read as Bin Laden writing back to the centre.



Figure 2

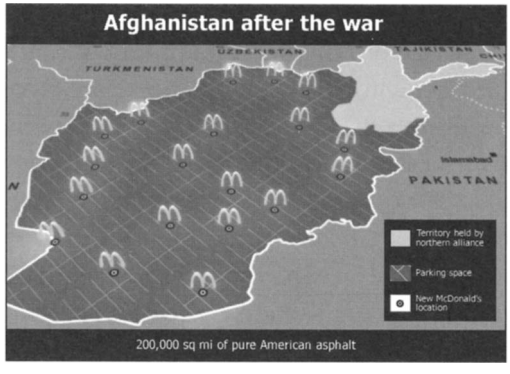


Figure 3

If jokes and the pleasure of this paper have not captured your reason, then you will have noticed that I need to do much more work to understand fully the implications of psycho-analytic theory for critical literacy. For me, this work is just beginning. Living in a world full of hatred and rage, and in post-apartheid South Africa, where much is beyond reason, that is the territory that I now need to explore.

Author's note

This paper was originally presented as a keynote address at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference in Perth, December 2001. In the presentation, the advertisements discussed in this paper were presented on video. The live presentation enabled the audience to experience for themselves the transgressive nature of the advertisements and people could sense that their own reactions did not necessarily match those of other members of the audience. In this way, the audience was able to 'live', as well as 'understand', some of the points made in this paper. While I have endeavoured to describe them, much of the pleasure of the multi-media performance is unfortunately lost in this written version of the paper.

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