

Bodily pleasures and/as the text

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ABSTRACT: Literacy education is at a crossroads. While traditional school experiences still prize disembodied experiences of reading print-based texts as the pinnacle of sound education, informal learning experiences provide fruitful examples of the ways that visual texts are read as they are embodied by readers. In this paper I draw from the literacy lives of two, Grade 8 boys to illustrate how their popular culture interests become a means of reading their bodies as visual texts that ultimately define them and allow them to define themselves in relation to their peers. Using poststructural theories, data are analyzed using Barthes' theories of plaisir, jouissance, and the anachronic subject, Foucault's theory of power, and Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the assemblage. The paper also discusses a projection for future conceptualizations of literacy education, one that validates youngsters' readings of their embodiment of visual texts as they use print-based texts to create notions of self.

KEYWORDS: Literacy education, visual text, Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, embodiment, popular culture.

"The act of reading is creative because the reader is constantly having to fill in gaps and absences in the text. This model of the act of reading is in keeping with the post-structuralist figuration of desire as something without satisfaction, continuous, motivating and, ultimately, pleasurable" (Fuery, 1995, p. 72).

The term *pleasure* in literacy and English education is most often associated with intellectual pursuits of the mind, of the sheer enjoyment of losing oneself in a good book, or of the aesthetic appreciation of one's rational sensibilities developed through textual experiences. Pleasures associated with the literacy development of youth often conjure up images of youngsters curled up on a sofa engrossed in a thick novel while oblivious to the world around them or depicted in books and on advertisements as children reading in a cozy book nook, sharing texts, smiling, perhaps pointing to illustrations. It's not uncommon for literacy advocates to saddle up pleasure with reading printed texts. Rock stars such as R.E.M. or movie stars like Nicole Kidman – people who are well-liked by youngsters – have been hired to pose for advertising the joys of reading. These celebrities who are considered cool and associated with pleasures from their music or movies promote that reading print-based text, as a product, is cool and pleasurable too. Their endorsement of reading books is pleasure by association. Posters hung at libraries and in schools also promote the intellectual pleasures reading has to offer. Detailed illustrations of far-out places offer glimpses of the promises of textual pleasures with captions such as "Read: Fantasize new worlds!" Youngsters need only to engage their minds with a good book to reach that sense of pleasure.

But what if fantasizing new worlds in reading extends beyond the cerebral pleasures stimulated from losing oneself in a good book? What happens when reading pleasures are created through visual texts? What if young people's reading pleasures seep out of the realm of print-based texts deemed appropriate for intellectual pleasures (e.g. the works of high culture – reading Edgar Allan Poe or even the newest literary genius, J.K. Rowling) and into the realm of pleasures created from texts of the popular – sports, computer media, and Asian animé, for instance? What if youth's reading actualizes rather than fantasizes worlds where reading extends beyond books and the mind and manifests pleasures through embodiment of their print-based reading?

The phrase *reading texts* is all too often only associated with reading the printed word. However, visual texts, such as television, posters, clothing, and even people, serve as texts that are read, interpreted, and used everyday. People read bodies when in conversation in order to try to understand what others are saying non-verbally. Bodies are also read in relation to popular culture – in chosen clothing worn, language used, and the gestures and actions that convey non-verbal communication. People use their pleasures and interpretations of visual texts (for example, websites, computer games, and Japanese animé) to read and to create notions of themselves and others. Bodies, like print-based books, are read texts, and people often find pleasure in reading one another's bodies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this paper, I examine this mind/body split between intellectual and visceral pleasures associated with reading visual texts using youth's engagement of self-defined popular culture. Drawing from poststructural theory, I analyze two adolescent boys' (ages 12 and 13) uses of popular culture (including their interests in sport, computers and Asian animé) during a 10-week study of adolescents' uses of popular culture texts to form notions of self. Data samples are taken from taped and transcribed semi-structured interviews, observational field notes, daily emailed dialogue journals about the boys' uses of popular culture, and individually produced photo documentaries of their definitions and uses of popular culture both in- and out-of-school. From these data I analyzed how adolescents use visual texts of popular culture to read the body as a text for varying purposes and interests.

This poststructural analysis of pleasures and the body is not a phenomenological endeavor. It doesn't use the experiences of the body to point to all of the texts of signification relative to the body. It doesn't seek to locate what a text means or why it is pleasurable. Instead, this analysis takes the view of pleasure from the poststructural work of Roland Barthes. Referring to Barthes's theories of pleasure described in *The pleasure of the text*, Fuery (1995) noted that "through pleasure the text disrupts and challenges meaning, classification, the sign and the idea of the author. The pleasure of the text turns reading into a creative act and generates plurality in meaning" (p. 69). In this space of the plurality of meaning I draw from poststructural theories of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari to focus on the body surface that makes possible examinations of the body *as* a visual text. This body as a visual text is analyzed in two ways: (1) as a text that is marked and written upon by histories and institutionalized practices and

(2) as a text that is linked with other bodies and texts – to produce embodied pleasures.

THE EMBODIED TEXT

The literate body differs considerably from the Cartesian notion of the mind/body split. The body from a poststructural standpoint *is* the text of everyday life and is equally as important as the mind. By enacting the body as a text, it becomes not only a product of pleasure, but also the producer of pleasure. The body is a cultural interweaving and production of nature as influenced by factors such as people, culture, and experiences. Body is not neutral – a blank slate or an empty page. The body as a text is written upon and socially (re)produced and inscribed according to specific practices to which it has been exposed. Drawing from Foucault (1977), the body is “the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration” (p. 148).

The body situated in this way also sees pleasure differently. Rather than conceive of pleasure as a manifestation of a desire that proves lack as in models of psychology and psychoanalysis, pleasures produced by reading body as a text point to *how* a text is being used within a particular context. As Barthes (1975) explained, texts produce two kinds of pleasure. A text of pleasure (*plaisir*) is one “that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading” (p. 14). *Plaisir* refers to “a pleasure...linked to cultural enjoyment and identity” of reading” (p. 13). A text of bliss (*jouissance*) is “the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings into crisis his relation with language” (p. 14).

Barthes explained that when a reader uses texts as both forms of pleasure and bliss, the reader becomes an “anachronic subject.” According to Barthes, these readers

simultaneously and contradictorily participate in the profound hedonism of all culture and in the destruction of that culture: [they] enjoy the consistency of selfhood (that is [their] pleasure [*plaisir*]) and seek its loss (that is [their] bliss [*jouissance*]). [They] are subjects split twice over, doubly perverse (p. 14).

Applied to readers’ pleasures, when bodies are conceived of as visual texts, they can be simultaneously read as texts of pleasure (*plaisir*) and bliss (*jouissance*). Both kinds of readings reassure and challenge readers’ notions of themselves. Using Barthes’ work with pleasure, Foucault’s (1978, 1990) theory of power and the self, and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of assemblage, I illustrate how reading bodies as visual texts produces pleasures in playing with various notions of self.

In the following section I introduce Tommy and A (self-chosen pseudonyms), two participants in a larger study of Grade 8 students’ uses of popular culture to inform notions of self. Drawing on several different pieces of data from my time shadowing these boys in both in- and out-of-school contexts, I examine how they use their readings of visual texts of popular culture as a series of practices to read and assign

interpretations of notions of self. I first analyze the data related to the workings of Barthes' work on plaisir, jouissance, and the anachronic subject. Then I present an analysis of the larger picture using the incidents as an "assemblage" (what Deleuze and Guattari, [1987] described as "the dimensions of multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" [p. 8]) to illustrate how the body as a visual text is a multiplicity that produces pleasure in its exploration of notions of self.

INTRODUCTION: BODIES AND TEXTS

Mere appearance alone gave no glimpse that Tommy and A were anything alike. More likely, they were an odd couple. A immigrated to Australia, having lived the first ten years of his life in a small fishing village in China. During two years of primary school (Grades 6 and 7) and one year of high school (Grade 8) in Australian public schools, A honed his English skills and learned how to fit into Australian culture. When I met him, he considered himself bilingual in Chinese and English, and wanted to be a part of the study in order to practice his English and to "make friends with someone from America". At the same time, A was apprehensive about participating in the study because, as he said, "I don't know if I can represent an Australian identity." In short, he understood that he was an outsider from another place, and he wanted to be clear that he thought that his interests might differ from his peers who had grown up living in Australia.

A was a tall 13-year-old. His straight, black hair was cut short, and it stood up in different places on his head. His dark brown eyes and furled brow lightened up and relaxed when he grinned and laughed. A spent most of his afternoons alone after school while his parents worked at the local university where his mother was a doctoral student in chemistry and his father ran computer analyses for the Engineering Department. Usually A's afternoons consisted of doing homework, playing sport at a local park, and surfing the Internet on an old laptop computer that his parents bought for him. On the Internet, he mostly read junk email that he received from listservs he joined and chatted with strangers on yahooteen chat. He said these activities helped to improve his English.

Once a week A delivered a neighborhood newspaper, and was saving his money for a trip to China to see the friends and family he left behind. (He had saved 900 Australian dollars when I met him.) A enjoyed school, and he prided himself on being a hard-working student. On Saturdays, he attended Chinese School, and he hosted a Chinese student, He Wei, for two weeks through an exchange program at Kehara, the high school he attended.

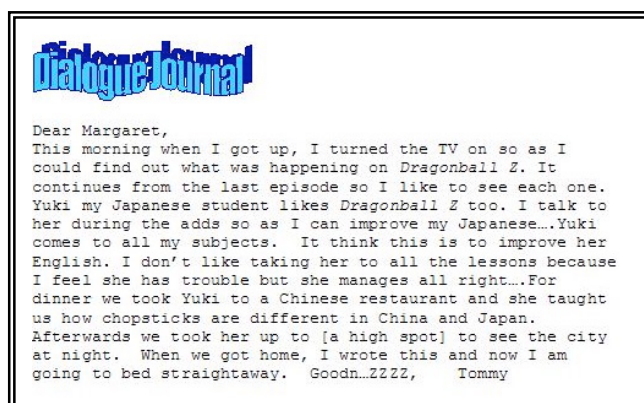
A was also well liked at Kehara. As a big, muscular boy, he was a talented athlete, excelling in track and Australian football. He also liked computers, computer games, and chatting online, and he described himself as "funny, strong, and happy".

Born in Australia, Tommy was of English descent. His father had been a high school maths teacher, and he wrote the currently adopted Grade 8 maths text used at Kehara. Tommy's father had left education and begun working for the Ministry of Transportation, and his mother worked part time as a cosmetic consultant so that she could have flexible hours to be at home in the afternoon with Tommy and his younger

brother, Richie. Tommy was quite small and skinny at 12-years-old, with long, straight blonde hair and blue eyes. His pale, white skin burned easily, even during the middle of an Australian winter. Like A, Tommy valued school and worked diligently to continue his successes as an excellent student. He described himself as “sensitive, caring and thoughtful.”

Tommy’s afternoons were booked with extracurriculars – playing trumpet in the school orchestra, taking golf lessons, playing soccer. When he wasn’t at coordinated activities, he spent time at home, playing on the computer, drawing Japanese-inspired animé, and designing a *Dragonball Z (DBZ)* website. Tommy’s interests in Japanese popular culture had begun sometime before he learned about *DBZ*. As he explained, “At my primary school I was really into *Pokémon*, and I knew about it six months before everyone else. I collected everything – the cards, the games, the figurines. But it just got too popular, and too many people liked it. And it got too commercialized, and that is why I stopped liking it because I prefer something that is a bit more to yourself. So I stopped playing the game. Then I found *Dragonball Z*, which is much better because the whole school isn’t talking about it, but a few people like it.”

Tommy was fluent in English, but he was learning Japanese so that he could watch and understand *DBZ* cartoons in Japanese and go to Japan on a student-exchange program through Kehara. He was one of four Grade 8 students at Kehara who hosted an exchange student from Japan. Yuki, a tall and thin Japanese girl, spent two weeks living with Tommy and his family and attending Tommy’s classes at Kehara. Tommy enjoyed Yuki’s company because they shared interests in Asian culture and Japanese animé. He noted this in one of his dialogue journals.



Tommy and A had attended different primary schools, so they didn’t meet until they both enrolled as Grade 8 students at Kehara. Assignment to the same form, which aligned their course schedules, and mutual interests resulted in a friendship beginning the first day of school. Recalling their first meeting, Tommy said, “Yeah, I thought A looked like Chinese or Japanese or something. I thought he was Chinese, but I thought...well um *Dragonball Z* is Japanese and Chinese, and well, it is mainly Japanese. But in China I thought he might know of it, so then I thought we could start up a conversation.”

Although A knew all about *DBZ*, he actually didn’t share Tommy’s pleasures in the animé. The *Dragonball* animé series originated in 1982 in Japan, and A had already seen all the sagas (*Dragonball*, *GT*, and *Z*) before moving to Australia. The series had

only recently aired in Australia. *Dragonball Z* and all the paraphernalia that went with it was a waste of time and money, A insisted. As he explained, “It isn’t too interesting anymore. I’ve seen all of them, and yeah it’s boring. I can’t be bothered with that. Kids love it for a period, and then it goes away. It’s like *Pokémon*. Everyone loved it when they came out. One year kids have 100 of the cards, and then one year later they just have none left, so it’s not trendy anymore. It’s just too expensive, and I have other things to learn.”

A and Tommy didn’t share pleasures in *Dragonball Z*, but they did share an interest in computer games, information technology and sports. And, each one admired something about the other’s prowess in one of these areas. A, for example, was a well-respected athlete among the students at Kehara and was known for his running abilities and strength. He often represented Kehara at local athletics carnivals with other schools and he consistently was among the top five competitors. A loved sport and was naturally agile. He explained, “I play every kind of Australian sport like rugby league, AFL [Australian Football League], soccer. Well, every country can play soccer. I can play, um, soccer and cricket. But I did not play that in China. There’s no such thing like cricket in China.” For A, playing sport in Australia was a way for him to be accepted by the other Australian boys in his class because they recognized his talents. “I am pretty good, like at running. In AFL, you need fast people. So I can do it like the other boys. In like rugby league, you need stronger people. I’m pretty strong. So I can play that too.” Often, his dialogue journals focused on his interests in computers and his engagement in sports-related events.

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From: Aacrazycat
To: mhagood
Subject: this is A

Hi Margaret:
I will tell you what I do after school:
After I have done my home works, the time is left to me.
Sometimes I read a book but mostly I am on the computer. I am
really good at computers, especially at computer games. I think
I have finished about 30 big games, e.g. Age of Empires, KKND,
Simcity 2000, Red Alert, and a lot more..I like to [go] on the
Internet because I want to meet lots of friends in the chatroom.
And sometimes I play sport at the park by my house. I was a
champion in my primary school. I won everything except two things
so I am really good at sport. That is all!!!! Cheers, A

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Tommy also liked sport, especially soccer and Australian football (footie). He wanted to play with A and the other boys during pick-up games at morning tea or lunch, but they often made fun of Tommy for his petite size and diminutive features. The other boys regularly prohibited him from entering their games, and though A didn’t get involved when the other boys acted this way toward Tommy, he certainly didn’t encourage Tommy to play either. The teachers at Kehara worried about Tommy, saying that other, bigger boys picked on him “because he is small and has an effeminate face”.

More often than not, Tommy was excluded from the footie game and left the athletic field to hang out with a group of Asian boys who played handball and talked about *Dragonball Z*, computer graphics related to artwork and design, and Asian culture. Though Tommy and A rarely spent time together on the oval playing sport, they did hang out together in the morning before classes began, during morning tea, and sometimes after school to play on and to talk about computers. The two boys had formed a partnership to play a computer-simulated game of the Australian Stock

Exchange that had been instituted for high school students, and they were competing to win \$1000. Sometimes their conversations about computers also included their research on stocks they thought prudent to buy.

Tommy had access to state-of-the-art computer technology at home, too. He owned a Pentium desktop computer, a scanner, a color printer, a Nintendo 64, and a Play Station, and several expensive computer software games – none of which A had at home. With access to this equipment, Tommy had taught himself how to use various software programs. He also had begun to create his own *DBZ* web page, which A didn't know how to make and had asked Tommy to teach him.

Each boy had something that the other one wanted. Tommy wanted to be good at sports like A and to be accepted into the group with the other boys. And A wanted Tommy to teach him how to make a webpage.

A TEXT OF PLAISIR

One afternoon, A and Tommy wanted to go to Mcers (McDonalds) after school. While the three of us sat outside near the brightly painted jungle gym eating caramel and chocolate sundaes, the two boys discussed what made them friends.

“We both really like computers,” noted Tommy.

“Yeah,” A piped in, “Tommy has really good equipment.”

“Yeah, and we also, like, are pretty sporty. We both really like soccer,” Tommy said, and then turned to A. “You do like soccer, don't you, A?”

A shrugged his shoulders, and Tommy continued, “And we like to play football, and also...”

“But Tommy,” A interjected, “but sometimes other people don't want Tommy to play because...”

“Nobody thinks I'm any good at anything on the oval,” Tommy finished A's sentence. “But it's actually,” he paused, “I may not be good at it, but they should at least give me a chance.”

I looked back and forth between Tommy and A. They both fell silent suddenly.

“They won't let you play?” I directed my question to Tommy.

Tommy sat forward in his seat and put down his sundae. “Yeah, sometimes they don't, like, let me play, like they go, ‘Oh, you got Tommy on your team?’ So, like, they aren't very nice to me.”

A glanced over at Tommy and then at me, but he didn't say anything. “And do you have the same thing going on, A?” I asked.

Before A could say anything, Tommy quickly responded, “No, A's popular. Everyone likes A. He is, like, really good at everything. He's really good in sports. He is really good, like, at touch, like running; he's really fast, and he's good at soccer and everything.” He nodded at A, and then went on. “I'm good at soccer; I can be good at soccer, but some of the guys have something against me. Like I say, as soon as I walked up, I went to give A something for ASX [the stock broker online game they're playing as partners] and they were playing soccer, and I knew that they weren't going to let me play as soon as I walked out. Tim said, ‘No, Tommy, you aren't playing,’ and he doesn't even turn to me. He just knows that I'm there, and I just go, ‘Yeah, right,’ and I just walk, and I go back, but it's sort of, like, it's pretty mean. That day I wasn't even going to stay.” He paused and then picked up his sundae again and began eating.

“Yeah,” A replied, “They are really into sport. Maybe I'll talk to Tommy about it, but if I say something to them they will pick on me.”

Turning to face A, Tommy said, “Yeah, but they could listen to you, too,”

“They won’t listen to me,” A countered immediately.

But Tommy persisted. “Yeah they could. They could listen to you. They would listen to you. You’re big.” Stopping a moment to think, Tommy then suggested, “They would listen to you if you say, ‘Ah, why don’t you let him play, or something.’ Then, they might, they might listen to me. They wouldn’t make me leave or anything. They wouldn’t say, ‘No, you aren’t playing.’” Tommy waited for a response.

A thought for a moment and then said matter-of-factly, “Tommy, you have to grow taller. No one will be calling....”

Tommy interrupted, saying, “I know, I’ll have a growth spurt, and then everyone will say, ‘Hey, you come over here!’ Then, I’ll go and talk with them.” Tommy sat back in his seat and laughed.

A laughed too, and reasoned to me, “I think all the problems are because Tommy is so little.”

“But why should anyone care about being small or big?” I asked.

“They don’t care about that. Like it’s about play,” A explained. “Tommy can’t, he can’t, like, run as fast as me and even other people. He’s not strong yet.”

“Yeah, and when I am big, then I’ll catch the ball,” Tommy laughed sarcastically. “Gosh, the world would be chaotic if I caught the ball. What would become of the world if I caught the ball?”

A looked to Tommy, but didn’t say anything.

Tommy paused. “Why, then everyone would say, ‘Tommy, you caught the ball. Good on ya!’”

And they both fell out laughing uncontrollably.

Returning to Barthes (1975), a text of *plaisir* is a reading of text that is comfortable. It doesn’t break the mold nor does it challenge one’s thinking necessarily, but it does grant a sense of euphoria. Visual texts such as Tommy’s enjoyment in *DBZ* and A’s uses of the Internet are texts of *plaisir*. A and Tommy’s discussion regarding Tommy’s body size related to playing footie on the oval is also a reading of *plaisir*. Tommy’s body is a visual text that is inscribed through the other boys’ readings. In the realm of A’s and Tommy’s interests in sports that they deemed popular culture, they realized that bodies were important and that boys read each others bodies and attributed certain features to their bodies related to their understanding of proper identities for successful play in athletics. To be sure, A’s body and his general athletic abilities fit the Australian male, athletic identities that these boys – and their peers for that matter – perceived as appropriate for playing sport on the oval. Tommy’s body, on the other hand, was compared to readings of visual texts that defined proper body size and identity for playing sport, and the reading of his body type didn’t fit into what was considered acceptable. In order for Tommy to play sport with the other boys, he must become big and strong. At first, Tommy disputed A’s rationale and even tried to seek A’s assistance to speak to the other boys on Tommy’s behalf. But once A explained that the other boys wouldn’t pay attention to him and that Tommy’s performance had much to do with his height and strength, Tommy agreed. Tommy then began to fantasize future encounters where his body fitted the proper athletic identity, and others would recruit him to play sport.

Tommy would like to play sport with the others, but he succumbed to the reading and inscription of identities produced from visual texts made popular within the arena of masculinities and sports. He tried to negate the idea that boys have to have a particular kind of body and identity to play sport; indeed, he even solicited A’s assistance to get the other boys to see him differently. But sensing that the assumed

identity was too ingrained and that A wasn't going to stick up for him, Tommy quickly bought into A's logic. This practice of excluding Tommy from playing sport with the other boys made sense to both Tommy and A, even though they both thought the other boys were unkind in their exclusive practices. They felt that they couldn't directly challenge the identities accepted to play sport on the oval. Ultimately, both Tommy and A allowed the others to produce identities onto them based upon their readings of visual texts that inscribed the body and determined who was to be included and excluded from play. This practice of marginalizing Tommy from playing footie with the other boys made sense to both boys. They allowed their bodies to be acted upon and inscribed by the others' reading. This text of *plaisir* didn't challenge other readings of bodily texts nor did it challenge the visual texts of popular culture that defined the body. Both boys experienced *plaisir* in their resignation that Tommy would have to grow. Once big, Tommy would then be able to play and to catch the ball.

A TEXT OF JOUISSANCE

The Grade 8 boys at Kehara further produced Tommy's identity as effeminate because of his other popular culture interests. At Kehara, Tommy won several High Achievement Awards for his artwork, and teachers recognized his talent as a burgeoning artist. But the other boys consistently picked on him because he liked *Dragonball Z* and art, and many of the athletic boys often took advantage of his small stature and tried to push onto him a particular gendered identity.

One day A was absent from school, and Tommy sat at a table talking with Allan (Tommy and A's Taiwanese friend who was also interested in *DBZ* and computers) before a social studies lesson began. Tommy spun his metal pencil case around in circles on the tabletop as they talked. The *Dragonball Z* characters and the kanji that Tommy had painted atop the pencil case blurred into a swirl of colors with each spin he gave it.

Simon, a boy who regularly teased Tommy and prohibited him from playing footie during morning tea, overheard their conversation about their recent picks of good *Dragonball Z* websites. Simon walked over to the table where Tommy and Allan sat. He pulled up a chair behind Tommy, and sat down so that Tommy was boxed in – the table in front of him and Simon's chair behind him.

Tommy continued talking with Allan, ignoring Simon. Then Simon grabbed the back of Tommy's chair and tipped it back so that Tommy's head arched and nearly touched the floor. "People who like *DBZ* are wussies," he sneered.

Tommy looked up at Simon and replied calmly, "Then you are calling Allan a wuss."

Allan didn't say anything.

Simon pulled up on the chair, and then let it go. Tommy teetered on the seat for a moment and then caught his balance so that the chair righted itself. He smiled closed-mouthed directly at Simon, seemingly pleased with his balancing act.

"Why do you like it, Tommy?" Simon continued to jeer. "It's like Chinese stuff."

"No, it's not! It's cool" Tommy retorted and turned back to the table.

Simon yelled across the room to the other boys, "Tommy's hosting a Japanese girl! That will work just fine for him. He is going to show her all his *Dragonball Z* stuff."

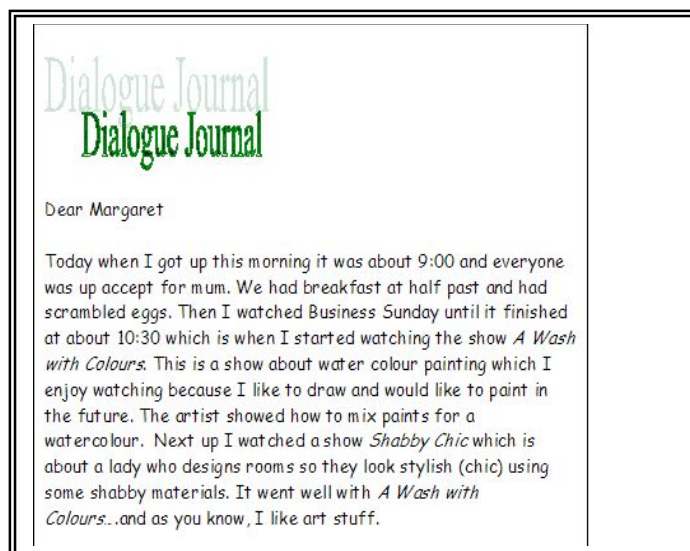
Tommy looked over and grinned. "Those guys are so immature!" he remarked, shaking his head.

Over and over again, the Australian boys hassled Tommy, ostracizing him from playing sport and teasing him about his interests in *Dragonball Z*. Tommy's interest in *Dragonball Z* coalesced with his interests in art. One afternoon at his house, he showed me a bulletin board of his own anim  creations that he drew by hand, scanned, and then printed from a color printer attached to his computer.



Looking at the corkboard, he said, "I love, I really love drawing. I really appreciate the pictures that anim  artists draw because I know how hard they are. Like when they fight, I like that because the drawing is really, really good. It's actually quite amazing how they draw them. It's interesting how the story sort of continues on and on and on, and people get more powerful. I mean when I draw one, I'm drawing it from another thing. I'm copying it. But when they do drawing they are just doing it out of their heads, and it just looks so realistic. If you have a look at [the characters'] hair and their faces, they are really small and sort of detailed and all the shadowing makes them look really good. It takes me a really long time to draw one picture, let alone thousands and thousands per show."

Tommy actually spent a lot of his free time outside of school developing his interests in artwork. One Sunday, he wrote in his dialogue journal:



The following week, Tommy used what he had learned from the television shows in his own design work in art class. He was working on a landscape picture of a tree, and when the teacher passed by him, Tommy asked, “Do you ever watch *A wash with colours*?”

The teacher stopped next to him and replied, “No, I’ve never seen it.”

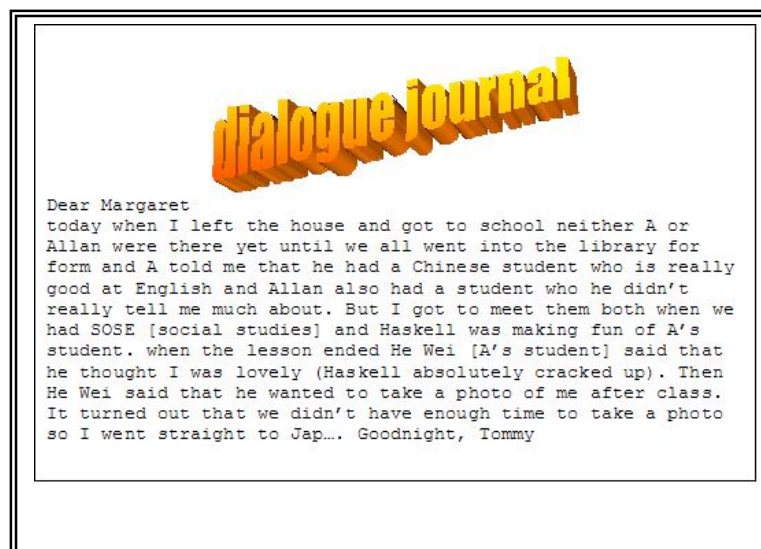
Going back to his painting, Tommy continued as his teacher looked over his shoulder. “It’s on the Lifestyle channel, and it’s an Irish man who is an artist. He tells you what to do to make a watercolor painting. He says that 90% is mixing colors and 10% is drawing. I watched this weekend, and I learned all this stuff about drawing and mixing paint. He used a picture he had taken to paint a landscape.”

“I don’t know it,” the teacher said. “I’ll have to have a look for it.”

Haskell and Stephen, two boys who often made fun of Tommy during art class, listened to Tommy’s discussion with the teacher. When she walked away, Haskell yelled out, “Yeah, Tommy, you would know about that show. You wimp!”

Tommy didn’t respond. The teacher didn’t either. Tommy continued drawing.

The following week the Chinese exchange students that A and Allan were to host arrived for a two-week visit. He Wei and Lim attended all of A’s, Allan’s, and Tommy’s classes. He Wei spoke a little English, but he mostly communicated through A. During the two weeks, when A went down to play footie on the oval during morning tea and lunch, He Wei hung out with Allan, Lim, Tommy and a few other boys who spent their free time together discussing Japanese animé. While Tommy hung out with the Chinese students, he found that their shared interests in Japanese animé produced a different reading of body for him – one that contradicted the demeaning reading of the boys on the oval. This reading of Tommy’s body began in his dialogue journal entry one day after school.



During the next several days, two other incidents occurred that challenged the reading of body Tommy had recently experienced. Tommy found that the Chinese students liked him. He explained in detail another incident that he didn't understand and that tested his own perceptions of language use and readings of the body.

"After He Wei wanted to take my picture, there was Quin Ma, a Chinese girl, and she wanted to meet me," Tommy recalled. "She thought, I think, it might have been because, well, she asked me if she could be my big sister – if I wanted a big sister. And she said that I could have one, that she could be mine. But also, He Wei said to her that I was cute, and Allan said, 'He Wei just said I was cute,' and I thought that didn't sound too good coming from a male student."

Tommy thought for a moment and then continued on. "But I don't think he, really, I don't think he understood the way that we use...I mean, if I said that another boy was cute, everyone would say that I'm a bit queer. But he didn't really realize that, I don't think. Well, it was really funny!" he exclaimed. "I laughed, but I said, 'Hey, that's not funny!' And Allan said, 'It's true. That is what He Wei said.' But then A said that the Chinese people think I am cute because I am so little, like an animé character."

Unlike before when A refused to take up for Tommy with the Australian boys on the oval so that Tommy could play sport, in this case he felt confident to assist Tommy in seeing that having a small body and small features was perceived as cute and good. A used his own knowledge of Japanese animé and of Chinese culture to validate the Chinese students' reading of a new identity for Tommy. In this context, with Asian students and Tommy, A felt confident that all would listen and believe what he said, whereas A didn't feel comfortable when thinking about defending Tommy on the oval to the Australian boys. In this situation, rather than saying, "They won't listen to me" as he argued previously with Tommy, A felt assured of himself to help Tommy out.

The following week another incident occurred where Tommy's body was read in relation to popular culture.

Allan and Lim, A and He Wei, and Tommy sat at a rectangular table together during art. None of the boys talked to each other, as each was engrossed in a project. A, Allan and Tommy had drawings to complete that needed to be submitted to the art teacher at the end of the lesson, and each was determined to finish. While these boys

picked up the art materials they needed, the teacher gave Lim and He Wei large pieces of white paper and asked A and Allan to translate to these exchange students that they could draw whatever they'd like during next the 50 minutes.

The boys all settled in and began working, each on his own project. With the exception of a few students who sat discussing their own work at different tables, the room was silent. About halfway through the lesson, Lim handed Tommy his drawing. In bold black paint strokes that took up most of the paper was an anim  caricature of a boy's face. The face was small with petite features and straight long hair. Tommy was written diagonally in the right corner in block letters. And in the background around his name was sketched an interwoven heart and a clover. Tommy studied it for a minute and smiled.

"This is quite nice. Thank you," he said to Lim.

Tommy put the drawing down next to his own watercolor painting he was finishing. A reached across the desk and grabbed the picture. He glanced at it and laughed, and turned around in his chair to show a couple of girls who also laughed.

"Tommy, you'd be lucky to look like that picture," Sarah commented sarcastically.

Tommy continued painting, and didn't look up.

A took a paintbrush and quickly painted a black moustache and whiskers and red horns on the caricature, and then handed it back to Tommy. The small caricature now looked less like Tommy and more like a grinning fiend.

Tommy picked it up and said, "Hey, thanks A! Why did you have to go and wreck it? It was quite nice! I could have used it!"

Tommy crossed out his name on the paper and wrote A on top of the X on top of his own name. He gave it back to A. Allan grabbed it and laughed, and then A grabbed it back, looked at it, smiled, and tore the picture into tiny pieces.

The second incident exemplifies an embodiment of Barthes's (1975) notion of *jouissance*. In these data, Tommy is confronted with conflicting readings of visual popular culture texts and the related uses of his body as a visual text. He has become accustomed to his body being inscribed by others as inferior because he is small and skinny. However, the Chinese exchange students' readings of Tommy's body as a visual text are quite different. Both male and female Chinese students seem enamored of Tommy, thinking that his petite stature and features are fine attributes. At the same time Haskell, a big boy in the class who often harasses Tommy because of Tommy's size, overhears these comments, laughs, and makes fun of Tommy.

In this episode, A and Tommy were not only surrounded by the Chinese students (as before), but also by Australian students. When A saw that the Chinese students produced Tommy as a Japanese anim  character, he seemed to make fun of it, showing it to the girls behind him and getting them to rib Tommy, too. A seemed to want to produce a reading of Tommy through the same small and effeminate body that the Australian boys produced for him on the oval. But then, when Sarah commented that Tommy might "be lucky to look like that picture," A seemed to think that the girls thought the drawing was flattering, and so A changed it, adding the moustache and the horns so it no longer looked like Tommy at all.

At first Tommy liked the drawing and seemed appreciative to have it. He didn't seem disturbed by the heart that surrounded his name or the fact that Lim – a male student – had drawn a picture of him. But once A changed it so that it no longer seemed to resemble Tommy's likeness, Tommy saw no use for it himself. He decided that the

devilish additions were more in keeping with A's actions, and Tommy changed the name on the artwork from his own to A.

Tommy and A continuously challenged and changed identities of one another through their additions to the picture. With each change, the caricature morphed into something that was finally unrecognizable as either A or Tommy. It seemed that when A ripped the picture into shreds and the two boys laughed, then the reading of each other's bodies through the illustration ceased.

As texts of *jouissance*, Tommy's interests in visual texts of popular culture – sport, Japanese animé and computers – worked together to produce identity for Tommy and for Tommy to construct his own notions of himself. His friends and his own uses of texts revealed an intricate illustration of the pleasures adolescents have in their reading of visual texts, the body, popular culture. In many ways the visual popular culture texts produced a particular way of being for these boys, and they used stereotypical texts of masculinity to define who they should be. If they were to like sport, they needed to be strong, muscular and fast. Because Tommy's body didn't fit this build, other Grade 8 boys consistently produced an identity for him, reading him as an outsider. Furthermore, Tommy's interest in art and drawing and its relation to *Dragonball Z* alienated him from the group of boys that played footie as they produced an effeminate identity for him.

Yet Tommy was confronted with conflicting readings and uses of his body in different contexts. In one situation, he became accustomed to his identity being produced as a wimp and a wuss because of his small stature. However, the Chinese students' reactions to Tommy and to his petite size were quite different. Both male and female Chinese students seem enamored of Tommy, thinking that his petite figure and features were masculine attributes similar to those produced in Japanese animé.

Texts of *jouissance* are euphoric, but also unsettling. These sorts of texts challenge historical, cultural and psychological assumptions, which bring about a crisis in the reader's relation with language. As an embodied text of *jouissance*, Tommy was unsure what to do with the Chinese students' perceptions that challenged the notions of his inscribed body. The drawing (inclusive of a heart), the Chinese student's desire to take Tommy's picture, and the Chinese students' descriptions of Tommy as "lovely" caused Tommy to rethink his own perceptions of his body as a visual text and how it is read. Unlike with texts of *plaisir* where strength and body size determined acceptance into the group, the opposite is prized in this incident. As a text of *jouissance*, Tommy's perceptions of himself were challenged. Language use was challenged. Little, lovely, and small were complimentary terms not derogatory ones, which caused Tommy to reread his body. As in the previous example, it took A's input and explanation for Tommy to grasp a new body inscription, a new formation of self. As a text of *jouissance*, Tommy again allows his body to be read and inscribed in particular ways by others.

READING OF THE ANACHRONIC SUBJECT

Several weeks later, after the Chinese students had left, Tommy had an opportunity to construct his own way of being, both pushing against and using the identities that marked him as a wuss.

One morning the students stood outside waiting for the art teacher to come and open the door for them. Several boys began pushing against each other, and soon Haskell, Simon, and Pat encircled Tommy and shoved up against him.

Tommy crossed his arms over his chest and bounced back and forth off of them, like a little metal ball in a pinball machine. He laughed as they taunted and called him a wussie and a wimp. Tommy replied, "When you push me, you like it. *You're* the one trying to fancy *me*."

A got pushed into the circle as the circle pushed into him. A pushed on Tommy and said, "Tommy, get off me!"

And Tommy pushed back, saying, "You stop pushing me!"

They laughed as the other boys pushed them around.

Tommy, having been produced with contradictory identities by the Australian and Chinese students, had fun with this rough-housing that the boys participated in. He was able to throw their readings of the body and the subsequent identities back onto the Australian boys who perceived his diminutive size as despicable. A, being big and strong, wasn't teased at all by the Australian boys. But interestingly, A, like the other Australian boys, picked on Tommy in this incident, telling Tommy to get off of him.

Once in art, Tommy began working on a Buddha sculpture that he had shaped out of clay. During class, Haskell passed by him and stopped to examine the Buddha. "That's cool!" he remarked.

"Thanks."

Overhearing Haskell's comment, Simon walked over and said, "Yeah, is it strong enough to take a punch?" He hit the clay lightly with his hand.

Tommy jumped up from his seat and said, "Stop! Get away, Simon. You are going to wreck it."

"Calm down, Tommy!" Simon laughed as he walked away. "You are freaking out. You little wimp."

Pat, who was seated at an adjacent table, chimed in. "Yeah, Tommy, you little freak."

Tommy stood guard over his sculpture and said, "Shut up, you guys."

Haskell walked away from Tommy and over to Simon and Pat. "Tommy isn't a freak. Leave him alone."

Tommy and A looked at each other and smiled.

As we left the art room, the three of us crossed the open field on our way to their computer class.

"What happened in there with those other boys?" I asked.

"I don't know really," Tommy said.

"But I thought they were so mean," I said, trying to defend Tommy.

"Those boys aren't too bad," Tommy said. "They don't really mean anything by it. I have become used to it."

"Really?" I was stunned by Tommy's response.

"Yeah, they're just mucking around really," added A.

"So Haskell normally takes up for you like that?" I asked Tommy.

"Well, no," replied Tommy, "That's new."

Though A and Tommy walked to their next class together, A didn't get involved in the banter between Tommy and the other boys during art class, even though he sat next to Tommy and was Tommy's friend. Perhaps Haskell took up for Tommy because Tommy had taken up for himself when the boys pushed him around before art. Perhaps Haskell didn't like Tommy's come-back, a first for Tommy, and Haskell didn't know what to do with Tommy's reading and questioning of Haskell's desire to push him around.

No matter what Haskell's motives were for sticking up for Tommy, A waited until after class to discuss it. As a Chinese student, the Australian boys accepted A on the oval because of his agility. He expected that these boys would make fun of him if he tried to take up for Tommy in that context, and he also seemed to understand that he didn't need to confront any of these boys, as he was an outsider and was just trying to fit in.

The following week, I talked with Tommy again about this incident while he surfed on the Internet at his house for *Dragonball Z* pictures that he could copy and add to his website.

“So what's up with Haskell?” I asked. “Are you guys friends now?”

Tommy sat for a while and toggled back and forth among four *DBZ* websites. He was comparing pictures to see which ones he thought were the best to add to his own site. Finally, Tommy responded.

“Ah, Haskell, he is a bit of a ratbag, I think. He pushes me around because I'm short, well, because I am little. Like if I was regular height he wouldn't even go near me. You know, A is strong. Nobody picks on A because he is so big and muscly. But Haskell just isn't sort of, he isn't really, he is all right to have as your hunch man (sic) who will stop someone. He will say, ‘Are you picking on my little friend Tommy?’ and that is all right by me if he does that. But when he teases me, I know that it is not anything. But he is not really the sort of person that I would become friends with. He has got a, a different way of thinking. A and I sort of have the same sort of thing because we want to do well at school, but Haskell doesn't really care, and he doesn't know too much. I mean, he might, but he doesn't really show it that much....Yeah, I mean we get along. I'm not really friends with him, but we get along.”

This third series of data functions as an example of Barthes's (1975) notion of an “anachronic subject” in an embodiment of visual text. The grouping of these incidents exemplifies Tommy's active reading of his own body through his interpretations of visual popular culture texts. According to Barthes, readers use texts of *plaisir* and *jouissance* simultaneously in ways that perpetuate self-indulgent, normative and material practices of a culture while also working to destruct the same self-indulgent practices they enjoy. Thus, the maintenance of the inscribed body is *plaisir* while the attempt to destruct that inscribed body is one's *jouissance*.

Tommy, as an anachronic subject, actively uses his body concomitantly as an embodied text of *plaisir* and *jouissance*. By having had experiences with the Chinese students who challenged his readings of language and body produced by his culture, peers and popular culture, he used his diminutive body both as maintenance of the status quo and as a text to dispute the status quo. On one hand, being small and read

by others (boys in particular) as in need of help seemed all right to Tommy. Tommy was happy to allow Haskell, though a ratbag, to be his hunch man (sic), to take up for him to others. This bodily inscription as a text of plaisir didn't confront any of the normative practices accepted at Kehara among the Grade 8 boys

At the same time, Tommy didn't seem to mind being pushed around by a circle of larger boys. He didn't try to get out of the circle, nor did he ask them to stop their behaviour or to leave him alone. He actually laughed as they shoved him around. In this portion of the incident, Tommy used his body as a text of jouissance to challenge these other boys' perceptions of him. As they inscribed him as small, a weakling, and possibly as gay, he attempted to destruct that inscription of himself by defending himself and those categorizations to these boys. As an anachronic subject embracing both plaisir and jouissance, he enjoyed the contradictions of himself that he posed for these boys. It is in this space that Tommy tried to retain and to lose his identity as small and lovely that he experiences both plaisir and jouissance.

According to Foucault (1977; 1988/1983), the body as a text is an object and an instrument of power. The body is the materiality – a medium or conduit – on and through which power and pleasure function. Thus, the body is both acted upon and inscribed by factors determined by society and culture, and the body acts in its own materiality to resist those factors and to create its own ways of being. The body is strategic – both passive and active. In this sense, the body is a mediated visual text transformed by culture, interpretations and representations. The body's mediation occurs within the spiraling relations of pleasure and power. This spiral is the result of pleasures that exercise the power to both question and assume the incitements of the body in particular ways of being (Foucault, 1978). What is at stake in the body as a visual text is the struggle for power to be read and recognized in a multiplicitous manner.

THE ASSEMBLAGE

An assemblage – a multiplicity – is characterized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) neither by principles of sameness nor by various identities taken up in different contexts, but rather by capabilities to undergo transformations, permutations and realignments, thus forever destabilizing identities. The assemblage, that multiplicity that necessarily is created through an establishment of disparate ideas, changes as it expands its connections of incidents. Examining the data as a whole illustrates how Tommy used his body as a powerful visual text and an embodiment of pleasure as an anachronic subject, recognizing both plaisir and jouissance. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) explained that for Foucault power is made mobile through technologies implemented on the body. Looking at the assemblage that formed Tommy as text, multiplicities arise and connections are made. As others inscribed Tommy's body as an inferior social text calling him effeminate, a fag, a wussie and a sissy, they positioned him outside and against the norm. Yet, the Asian exchange students who read his body as a text associated with beauty, as both lovely and cute, also inscribed him differently as a visual text. Most importantly though are the ways that Tommy then used both of these readings as embodiment of pleasure and as a powerful means to negotiate social interactions on his own. His body as an assemblage of

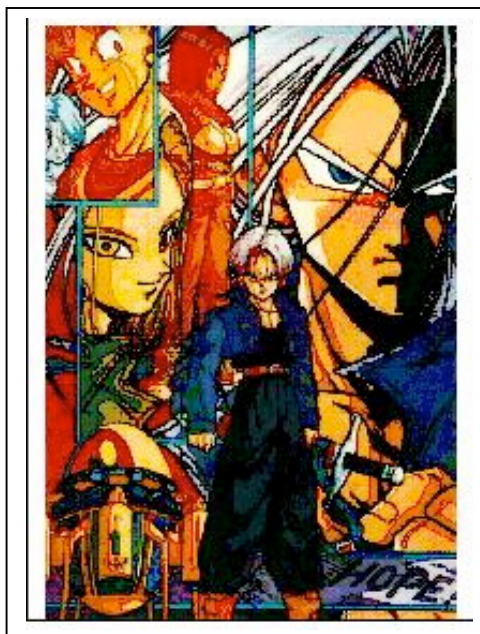
multiplicities was constantly shifting and changing his own views of himself, which produced his pleasures.

From these readings of the body, Tommy then constructed his own ways to negotiate a new space and identity for himself. Parodying what the Australian boys said about him and throwing it back upon them was pleasurable to Tommy. A mostly tried to fit into each context, so he remained as reserved as possible.

During our final meeting and interview, Tommy gave me two photographs taken from his photo documentary that illustrated popular culture in his day-to-day life. Describing the pictures, he said, “These are popular culture texts in my life.” The first photograph he had taken of himself holding one of his Japanese animé figurines and a drawing that he had copied from a picture, scanned into his computer, and printed.



The second picture was a print-out of a collage of *DBZ* animé characters. This picture he later added to his website that he dedicated to *Dragonball Z*.



Looking at the pictures, he said, “I took this picture because it is a bit like the picture that Lim drew, don’t ya think?”

In the end, Tommy capitalized on the Chinese students’ readings of his body and found a way to insert their readings into his own readings of himself. This assemblage of being was one that Tommy was ultimately proud of and desirous of adding to his own website.

THE VISUAL IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

English and literacy educators often focus on disembodied, intellectual pleasures associated with print-based literacy practices for achievement in school tasks. Certainly, such foci are important for literacy development and for assessment performance. However, the emphasis on pleasures associated with students’ minds implicitly ignores and/or explicitly avoids students’ literacies and pleasures that exceed the boundaries of pure academic pursuit and that flow into bodily pleasures associated with literacies of students’ social and emotive environments, especially student-chosen literacies inclusive of popular culture. A psychologically based model of literacy highlights cognitive components of academic learning while downplaying the physical, aesthetic and emotive pleasures of what is often categorized as leisure-time literacies (for example, those literacies that are not print-based and are associated with popular culture), producing a singular understanding of literacy related to the self. The academic separation of the mind and body to promote particular kinds of literacies results in (1) a truncated concept of a literate self, (2) a narrowed understanding of literacy practices and of reading that students use in their daily lives, and (3) a devaluing of embodied engagement with literacy.

Students’ embodied reading pleasures associated with popular culture often go unnoticed by adults because they extend beyond the normative texts accepted within school and into the realm of the body. Rather than continue this model of disembodied learning, perhaps educators should become more attentive to the pleasures associated with literate bodies, as visual texts of popular culture impact readings and interpretations of the visual texts of the body. Cranny-Francis (1995) explained,

The embodied subject has a different role in our changing society. Instead of maintaining old distinctions and their regulatory definitions, it tactically occupies a range of different positionings that enable it to subvert those remainders and reminders – both institutional and individual – of traditional, inequitable discourses and social practices (p. 113).

A move toward an embodied literate subject where attention is paid to the ways that bodies are read so as to be inscribed and to inscribe themselves in their uses of pleasure may assist in breaking down distinctions that privilege the mind over the body and stable notions of identity that limit the multiplicities of self-construction that people produce for themselves. For it is through adolescents’ uses and readings of visual texts of popular culture that they interpret, inscribe, deconstruct and construct readings of the body and notions of self.

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