

## Working Bakhtin's Body

### A Dialogue on Critical Qualitative Research in Education

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**Abstract** In this article we critically examine the use of embodiment in education research and illustrate how analyses of embodiment within education reframe persistent educational problems in productive, actionable ways. We juxtapose embodied analyses with traditional analyses of speech by interrogating Bakhtin's notions of the body and dialogue, each of which departs from dominant modes of analysis in education research. We purposefully read Bakhtinian notions of the grotesque through a Deleuzian frame of the body as force, as always in excess of representation. We approach the knowledge-construction process *in dialogue*, situating our work around Bakhtin within Bakhtin's work itself. Through problematizing traditional dialectical and body-less notions of education research we illustrate how educational problems and research practices seeking to understand embodiment might be reframed and reconceptualized, through a dialogic process between the two authors. Cumulatively, we hope that our dialogue will promote understanding of how bodies matter in education research through dialogic knowledge construction.

*The unfinished and open body...is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with objects. It is cosmic.*

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 26–27

*The eternal truth of the event is grasped only if the event is also inscribed in the flesh.*

—Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 161

AK: This all calls to mind a line in our *QI* dialogue (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2011) where you talked about migrant students knowing elements of educational reality “in their bodies.” How might recognition of the grotesque provide access to elements of embodied experience/place/

knowing that otherwise might go unrealized? How might embodied dialogues change how we view what it means to connect, to interconnect, to affect one another?

RG: I think many of these embodied knowings require us to honor the experiences of participants in ways we might not be used to. For example, I remember one ethnographic encounter with three migrant students in the Imperial Valley of California—right along the border with Mexico. Well, one of the students, Renaldo, recently began working under-the-table at a gymnastics studio (he's undocumented). He brought all of us over there to play around a bit. Now, I'm no gymnast. And I'm at *least* 10 years older than these students. So, there was a sense of fear and a necessity of trust when it came to playing around. But I really wanted to, because it was clearly an important piece of this student's negotiation of identities. I, and the other two students, gave into our trust rather than our fears and allowed Renaldo to assist us in flipping over the uneven bars, bouncing on the balance beam, and just plain jumping into (and climbing out of) a huge pool of sponges. I needed Renaldo's help—his hands on me—to accomplish any of this. And in coming to know Renaldo's hands on me, I also came to know more of how he engages in this activity, which helped make a whole lot more sense of how it matters in his negotiations of identity.

AK: How so?

RG: Well, getting back to your question, I suppose it was the grotesque forming in that contact zone of Renaldo's hands on my body. His touch was firm and authoritative, yet flexible and comforting to me. I had a new, and corporeal, understanding of how important his job at the gym had become to him. I also could recognize, and know in my body, new expertise that Renaldo had developed. Whereas before, all I knew was that he really enjoyed being a cheerleader while in high school, and that he liked the tumbling that he got to do as part of the squad. But back to the grotesque—in that moment, neither of our bodies are contained, but rather, drawing from and citing multiple other texts in order to make sense of our surroundings—to become part of the gymnasium and have the gymnasium part of us. My experience draws from and cites experiences of his corporeal presence, and vice-versa.

AK: I really appreciate this example, but I think it might be more complex than what you're allowing. Specifically, I think the term corporeal might reify a dichotomy between the mind and the body that the grotesque just doesn't support. Remember, the grotesque offers us an understanding of body as unfinished and resisting permanence—acting from its *emplacement*, to

borrow from Rose (2002). So, I don't disagree with any of your analysis, but I think the bodies you speak of were constituted with the gymnasium and both you and Renaldo were citing or referencing selves (bodies) that had been constituted through other emplacements.

RG: Well, then I think you just hit on another piece of the puzzle from your original questions. Recognizing the grotesque assists us in analyzing the spatial subjectivities that we engage in and that influence our understandings. What do you think?

AK: When Bakhtin discusses the grotesque body he emphasizes its magnified interaction with its immediate material surroundings. That is, when the body is literally magnified it might be seen as more porous than not, more interactive with surrounding environments. Magnified skin shows pores that secrete oil and sweat even as they take in air, perhaps even becoming clogged with microscopic particles of dust and the like. This grotesque body resists static definition—the lines that demarcate the boundaries of the body are no longer distinct. Our grotesque bodies merge with the world in which we live. It is only when we allow ourselves to be understood from a distanced perspective that we return to rigid definition; our bodily lines returning to artificially separate ourselves from our material contexts.

RG: So in the moment that Renaldo's hands were placed on my body, could we argue that our selves were constituted by our emplacements in/outside of the gymnasium separately *and* together, simultaneously? I mean, in one citation, I'm a queer dude who used to be totally hot and the envy of men gay, straight or anything else. In fact, that was largely how Renaldo "read" me when we first met and began our critical (ethnographic) engagement together five years ago. But now I'm more handsome than hot, and men envy me for the enjoyment I derive from my marriage rather than my sexual exploits. While, in another citation, I'm the guy that's been available—even eager—to listen to Renaldo whenever he wanted to share something about school, friends, girls, family, or whatever—someone that he trusted and knew wouldn't judge him. And these are only two of the citations going on—two that I can readily identify because there are social scripts available to name them.

AK: Yes, there is an element of the erotic within the grotesque. Bakhtin points to the grotesque as a means, I think, for recognizing the transgressive—the body cannot be contained, it does not easily adhere to the normative requirements of constraint, control, and containment. Here, too, we find parallels with the

erotic—in education we rarely recognize our bodies (certainly we rarely recognize the grotesque body), and we shy away from the erotic. The same might be said for educational inquiry. There is a fear here, I think, for what might become of such things—our grotesqueness, our erotic connections—if they exceed our capacity to know them, to control or contain them. Certainly social critics such as bell hooks (1994) have pointed to the political potential of the erotic in education. Here, the erotic has a connective function, bridging the confected divide between knowing and doing and, through such bridging, becomes a mechanism for social justice. Similarly, as you’ve noted in your encounter with Renaldo, your bodies intersect and boundaries blur. Similarly, your readings (even renderings) of the encounter might intersect and blur. Your encounter is grotesque and erotic, in the Bakhtinian sense, I suppose. The question becomes how we learn to recognize or even interpret such encounters. All too often within the realm of inquiry, we sterilize such encounters and default to interpretations based on some linguistic interpretation of ‘data.’

RG: But I digress. These historical citations become magnified in the moment that Renaldo helps me move my body over and between the uneven bars. When his hands are placed on my back, my legs, well, we each constitute new bodies in that moment, transmitting knowledge through the magnification of our connection within the gymnasium—a space that permitted this intimacy by demanding it for my safety. I mean, in that moment, his hands are part of my backside. My body’s movement is an extension of his expertise. Yet, only from an acceptable distancing can I articulate the learning that took place, for my part.

AK: This “acceptable distancing” is, I think interesting. In one sense you might claim a need to remove yourself from the experience in order to best understand it—to extend out, away from the porous interactions that are your encounters. “Making sense” might thus be some move away from the grotesque, a shift to distancing in order to enable some element of articulation. And I wonder what is lost in such distancing endeavors, what are the consequences of such actions? I ask this primarily because I don’t yet know how to move in the other direction, how to engage in critical inquiry that doesn’t distance, that dwells in

the grotesque, that articulates through (within) the mess of the local, the mess of the grotesque. Brian Massumi (2002) would, I suppose, point to the work of Deleuze and his subsequent emphasis on affect, as well as the lines of flight that extend out of affective responses.

AK: What is interesting, I think, about this magnified/distanced perspective is that the proper distance must be maintained in order to continue our constructed separation from the “outside” world. This is to say, if we magnify the body we see its “grotesque” interaction and lack of differentiation from the material world. If we zoom too far out, we lose our individualness, becoming understood as an element of “population,” another statistic, as it were (Foucault comments on this in relation to biopower, I believe).

RG: Yes (re: Foucault), but I believe Foucault’s notions of biopower are more closely aligned with his ideas around governmentality and the production of particular kinds of bodies that can only operate in particular kinds of ways. For example, black bodies in the United States have been produced through social institutions such as legislatures, judiciaries, and education, to more easily find ways into prisons than colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> Foucault’s interest lie more in the material production of bodies from institutions than in the interaction of bodies and material environment, I believe.

AK: Absolutely. Yet Foucault’s notion of biopower and governmentality never fully leave behind the material—bodies are both materially situated and discursively known. So, Foucault offers the notion of biopower, a concept which brings together concepts of discipline and biopolitics, both individualizing and massifying respectively.<sup>2</sup> This relates to your earlier conception, I think, of Renaldo’s hands on you as you negotiate the uneven bars. This moment calls forth both individualizing and massifying narratives. And those narratives never fully absent our bodies, even though our analyses most often pass over our bodily selves. Foucault then, for example, discusses notions of “state racism” that extend out of biopower formations. Here, bodies are read in terms of populations, which might be manipulated to produce affects on the level of both the individual and population. What happens to the grotesque body in such a scenario? The individual becomes subsumed to population, a series of state strategies that read bodies/populations according to economic determinations of logic and structure.

RG: And, dare I suggest, the role of critical inquiry could be to carnivalize such state readings? Through, perhaps, recognition and privileging of the grotesque body? Let's come back to this thought. I want to hear more about working through our bodies and dialogue.

AK: In any event, there thus exists an ongoing tension in order to maintain our separate-ness from the material world—we must read ourselves from the proper distance in order to allow for conceptions of the closed self, the contained subject. Bakhtin's grotesque body, obviously, doesn't allow for such a tension; it disrupts the strategies of not-too-far but not-too-close distancing that we have relied on for some time now. There is nothing "neat" or tidy about the body, nor its interaction with the material world. Bakhtin takes the time to interpret the literature of Rabelais, I think, because his characters are so large and magnified that they lose a degree of distinction—even a distinction unto themselves. Not sure if this makes sense, but when you zoom in on the skin, as I mentioned above, you might see it as orifice-like, the skin acting (even looking) like the nostril or the ear. This body is never finished in definition. It only becomes defined through our adherence to Cartesian duality.

RG: So, in a very real sense, our bodies are interlocutors to our experiences of realities. If we forgive ourselves in failing the Cartesian imperative to designate boundaries, might we be able to find new expressions of knowledge? Not to hammer on my gymnastics example, but in zooming in on my in-process-of-becoming body as Renaldo's hands changed shape with my back, we came to know each other in a new unified-yet-unstable truth; we came to know each other as inter-reliant, physically.

AK: So what might this have to do with inquiry? I wonder about our adherence to that not-too-close-but-not-too-far sense of distancing. The amount of energy we put into discerning complete subjectivities, static selves closed off from static environments. There's something almost sterile about it all. When (or how) do we allow the grotesque into our inquiry? What might the grotesque make possible? In short, what are we to do with Bakhtin's body? We can't ignore it, I suppose...

RG: No. You're right. But for me, the trickiest of it all becomes how to describe Bakhtinian bodies? How to indulge in the unified-yet-unstable momentary truth when examining the world via the grotesque? And to be clear, when I deploy the term "unified," by no means do I mean *absolute* or *complete*. Rather, unified only in the sense that some kinds of truth have come

together and generated a new not-fully-whole understanding that is significant to change how we might engage with the social world in our immediate environment as well as in our distanced notions of self.

AK: Unification as intersection perhaps? As productive? I think Bakhtinian bodies resist traditional representations in our research (at least 'traditional' in the sense of positivism and the like). There's a tension, I think, in striving for analysis/representation that does more than simply point to excess and the silencing thereof. How to represent something indeterminately? Maybe this is where we return to dialogue-as-strategy.

RG: I like unification as intersection, and the call to dialogue-as-strategy. Our own dialogues allow us to repair and reframe and recontextualize as our bodies expand and fill spaces differently—as we are emplaced across new subjectivities. If I practice patience as the Buddha teaches, I can concentrate on the moves and turns of dialogue. For, even as Renaldo placed his hands on me in the gymnasium, we continued to talk, but our talk was given different meaning by our corpus. And I think I could only produce my understanding of the gymnasium's significance to Renaldo's life when I allowed myself to read these components (place, bodies, speech) in the grotesque—amalgamated as a giant zoom lens onto our mutually-produced space. But all the while in dialogue with one another and a gazillion others: dialogues before, during, together, and separate from one another, as texts.

AK: Dialogue is forever indeterminate. It also relies on notions of change (working for change even as one is open to change). Yet how does dialogue make possible the grotesque? In our earlier dialogic work I pointed to metaphor as (forever) incompletely representing that which it is designed to replace (a metaphor can never fully be the experience it points to, otherwise it would simply take on the name of that experience). Perhaps the grotesque body and dialogue-as-inquiry intersect at the level of affect...

RG: I know you're pushing me to bring in Deleuze, but here is where I think we must attend to Bakhtin's notions of the carnival and the carnivalesque. As he described in his treatment of *Rabelais*, the carnival inverts the dominant hierarchy through jokes and satire and comic treatment of the serious. If we make the grotesque body a representation of the world as a carnival then—that is, if we understand it in terms of the carnivalesque, couldn't that expose the absurdities of our

normative logic around everyday activity? Such as how we generally mystify and demonize the erotic that you mentioned? From the carnivalesque perspective (if that is a possibility), we could see how ridiculous it can be (not must be), to assign the erotic a (Cartesian) connotation? Rather, if understood in carnival, the citations of the erotic can be made known and unknown in perpetuity, allowing us to explore their meanings without fixing them, because each meaning can be made into satire, exposing more of our latent and ridiculous assumptions. But am I treading too closely to nihilism?

AK: I don't think so (in terms of becoming nihilistic). I do wonder if we might take seriously the carnival aspects of critical inquiry (and I do recognize the apparent discord of taking seriously the carnival). This might stem from critical analyses that attend to what happens when we follow normative logic structures or rationalities all the way through; that is, extend such rationalities beyond their moment-of-articulation. When critical inquiry does this, traditional logic structures fall apart—they become carnivalesque. Thus we might laugh at positivism's fixation on cause-and-effect thinking even as we abhor the fetishization of the economy via neoliberalism.

RG: Alright, so in my erotic carnival with Renaldo's assistance in the gym, and our two friends playing around us, our grotesque bodies infinitely transforming in dialogue with one another and one another's histories and the history of the gym and the histories of undocumented students in education, our unification-at-intersection affords me ... what?

AK: I don't know ... what did you learn?

RG: I'm thinking through "how to analyse" what I've learned. Or how to show it, I suppose. Renaldo's the expert in the moment that he assists me over the uneven bars. But we achieve the feat by our porous grotesqueness satirizing the world outside the gym—a world where I'm a White middle-class professor and Renaldo is an undocumented Latino student struggling to access and persist through higher education. In the moment of our unification-via-intersection, we constitute an awareness of the ridiculousness of the structures that produce our experiences outside the gym (yet forever and always informing our experience inside the gym).

AK: In a sense, we zoom in on the pores of the logic and dwell in its secretions. It's grotesque on multiple levels, though we might hope it is



productively grotesque. The question then becomes what do we do with these grotesque rationalities? Out of such space, can we contrive alternative logic structures, perhaps a new logic of sense (oops, there's Deleuze again). Bakhtin would have us engage with normative logic structures through madness, I suppose.

RG: I suppose ...



The purposes of this article are to critically examine embodiment in education research and illustrate how analyses of embodiment in education might reframe persistent educational problems in productive, actionable ways. We conceive of educational problems broadly, such as educational opportunity for historically marginalized communities, faculty equity concerns in tertiary education, and the generation of knowledge (regimes) in educational settings, assuming that at some level(s) of analysis, *bodies* are at stake in such persistent concerns within education. We juxtapose interpretations of embodiment with those of speech, by interrogating Bakhtin's notions of the body and dialogue, each of which departs from dominant modes of analysis in education research. Further, we extend Bakhtinian perspectives of the body through Deleuze's (1990) interest in the affective capacities of bodies, the dynamic intersection of bodies within an event. Perhaps oddly, we encounter Bakhtin through Deleuze, making possible a layered engagement with the body; a 'working' of the body that does not seem possible through traditional approaches to scholarship—it requires an indeterminate and performative approach that we find in dialogue. In short, our approach foregrounds understandings of the body as event, as opposed to representation; a focus on what bodies 'do' rather than what bodies 'are.' Bakhtin's grotesque body is one in process, a doing, that resists mere representations and is always *in excess of* representational acts.

As both the outcome of a dialogic process and an example of that process-in-action, we aim through this article to create an open space for discussions regarding inquiry and embodiment, one that exists without closure or analytic end.<sup>3</sup> Far too often, inquiry manages the body through a distancing mechanism, one that moves away, not through, sense. In response, we hope dialogic interrogations of the grotesque might make available productive spaces for new knowledges and new ways of coming to know. As such, we hope readers gain insight into the productive possibilities of engaging with bodies as lived, and the critical sense-making necessary for such work. In this way, inquiry itself might be lived, not distanced through commonsensical technologies of documentation or otherwise marking bodily experiences in education.

It remains important to note the contemporary context in which our inquiry into embodiment, the grotesque, and qualitative research seeks to intervene. As has been examined elsewhere (c.f. Couldry, 2010; Lather, 2007), our contemporary time is driven by the normalizing discourses of neoliberalism and its attendant values of hyper-individualism, economically determinant cultural frames, and audit culture. Such ‘dangerous discourses’ (Lincoln & Cannella, 2004) privilege evidence-based ways of knowing, laying claim to the primacy of the closed and complete individual subject. This logic structure has gained status in educational research, resulting in a vast cottage-industry related to the development of methodological ‘best practices’ and ‘gold standards.’ In this article we seek to intervene in such discourses through a strategic emphasis on the fluid body, the becoming subject, and dialogically performative modes of inquiry.

Traditionally, critical educational researchers have relied on dialectical frames (Hegel, 1977) through which to develop, actualize, and interpret their studies, relying heavily on speech acts for units of analysis (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2011). Dialectical frames assume there can be a single compromised position from which to assert truth. The dialectical—through its over-emphasis on speech-acts—also foregrounds the representational at the expense of the material. Consequently, educational research at all levels remains dominated by, for example, developmental models of student learning, individual identity construction according to specified timelines and “known” subjectivities (i.e. tenure, on the tenure-track, tenured), and a sense of educational progression that is rendered outside its material effects. These analyses seek a cogent, uniformed alternative to dehumanizing educational processes, yet continue to perpetuate hegemonic structures through their very adherence to logics of the singular, synthesis, and assumed developmental progression. Most often, such scholars fail to address the implications of their very approach to knowledge development, the consequences of the singular narrative, for example, or the inherent limitations of representing the body as closed or fully contained.

More recently, postmodern educational scholars have been influenced by the “performative turn” in cultural studies and have cast a critical eye upon how such dialectical frames overshadow other embodied analyses. As Denzin (2010) argues, “We have simply moved to performance-sensitive ways of knowing, writing and acting, we have moved away from text-centered forms of representation. We are in a different paradigm—pluralistic, performative, political” (p. 37). The performative places an emphasis on doing, as well as the event and, as such, disrupts normative representations of the body, casting the body out of the finitude of body-as-object and towards the possibility of body-as-event. As a consequence, the body-as-event

resists full representation; not a thing, the body becomes a doing. We seek to understand how turning from the dialectical to the dialogic might afford researchers a more layered, dynamic, and nuanced investigation into processes of learning, particularly through engagements that refuse to absent the body from educational discourse. The dialogic assumes all texts, spoken and embodied, always draw from and contribute to meaning-making available from pluralistic combinations of understanding, such as literary, social, aesthetic, and scientific texts (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986).

For the purposes of our text, we approach the knowledge-construction process *in dialogue*, situating our work around Bakhtin within Bakhtin's work itself. We problematize traditional dialectical and body-less notions of education research and illustrate how educational concerns and research practices seeking to understand embodiment might be reframed and reconceptualized, through a dialogic process between the two authors. This process relies on a recursive practice of question, response, re-mediation, and repair (in no particular order and illustrated above). To be clear, we work through questions of embodiment and dialogue by illustrating our own dialogue about *the body* within Bakhtin's work on *dialogue*. Cumulatively, we hope that our article will promote understanding of how embodiment matters in education research through dialogic knowledge construction.

Within educational inquiry, there remains an all-too-easy and commonsensical refusal of event-full bodies (what bodies do) in favor of representational bodies (what bodies are), an emphasis that draws from Foucault's conception of individuation: "Certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourse, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Often, this hyper emphasis on representation at the expense of the event is highlighted in the intricate procedures of educational research. We observe—recognize—bodies, gestures, and desires and interpolate them into particularly normalized individuals. We produce a vast array of methods and techniques all aimed at making such individuals visible, knowable to the researcher and reader. To think outside such normative representations requires an alteration to the very logics that undergird such traditional approaches to inquiry. It requires a Bakhtinian shift to the madness of the carnival, a Deleuzian embrace of schizophrenic vision. Both alterations in being—whether they be Bakhtinian or Deleuzian in nature—require an emphasis on the interactive, dialogic event. Indeed, it is through the performative nature of dialogue that new insight might develop, lines of flight newly recognized, mapped, and de-territorialized towards productive ends.

## Theoretical Framework, or Why Bother Bakhtin?

As educators, our interest in Bakhtin departs from the dominant critical engagement with his work. A great deal of Bakhtinian studies in education research obsesses over literacy and language (see for example, Ball & Freedman, 2004). Often these projects seek to inform various critical pedagogies (see, for example, Norton & Toohey, 2004). Bakhtinian studies in education privilege Bakhtin (or Bakhtin-related) concepts of dialogism, authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse, and intertextuality, particularly from text and language-driven interests (Matusov, 2007). As illustrated above, our effort here strategically targets Bakhtin's body, namely the grotesque bodies that populate the carnival. Our commitment in this dialogue is to theorizing embodiment as a useful—indeed incumbent—analytic in the critical inquiry of education.

One key element that Bakhtin (1984b) offers notions of embodiment is his work on the grotesque, most notably seen in his commentary on the literary author Rabelais. As Bakhtin writes, “The grotesque body is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created.... The logic of the grotesque ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body” (p. 317). In this way, Bakhtin's explication of the grotesque offers an alternative rendering to the body as container. Often, Modernist representations of the body emphasize its containment as well as its distinction from the mind (à la Cartesian duality), and independence from the environment. In this sense, elements of ‘culture’ emphasize containing or otherwise hiding the body's excesses and maintaining the body as distinct from the natural environment. In Bakhtin's reading, however, the body is never fully contained, never containable. The grotesque body overflows, ontologically. Our fluidity and trans-mingling in porous ways constitutes our being.

It is here that our reading of Bakhtin's body borrows from Deleuze: we read the inability of bodies to be fully contained not to extend from its endlessly proliferating state—its representational excess—but rather the body always extends beyond representational limits, in excess of representation. As such, the body can never be fully represented, yet must be considered as in-process, an event. As Budgeon (2003) notes, “Bodies then can be thought not as objects, upon which culture writes meanings, but as events that are continually in the process of becoming—as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade.” (p. 50). The ongoing production of bodies-as-multiplicity situates “the body” forever on the periphery, what Deleuze (1990) described as both “an extremely mobile *empty place*” and “an *occupant without a place*” (p. 41; original emphasis). Turning to *Alice in Wonderland*, Deleuze gives

expression to this infinite absence/excess through the example of Alice's discovery of the "empty shelf." Deleuze's interpretation of Carroll's text is worth quoting at length:

"The most provoking of all" (oddest: the most incomplete, the most disjointed) was that "whenever Alice looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly what it had on it, *that particular shelf was always quite empty*, though the others round it were crowded as full as they could hold." How things disappear here, says she finally in a plaintive tone, after having spent about a minute in a vain pursuit of a "large bright thing that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a work-box, and *was always in the shelf next above one she was looking at.*" (p. 41; original emphasis)

The intersection of lack (here the empty shelf) with excess (the overcrowded, always on the periphery shelf) presents the limitations of representation—representations are never complete, never able to fully capture what they seek to contain; they always lack full expression even as they exceed our efforts at representation. This playful contradiction is demonstrated in conceptualizations of the body as always in the act of becoming; never fully contained and always in excess of the representations that seek its full definition. Similarly, the grotesque body dissolves assumed representational boundaries between bodies as well as those very distinctions that denote bodies themselves. Here, Deleuze's event dwells in Bakhtinian notions of the grotesque.

The grotesque emphasizes the interconnection of the body with place—bodies merge with their surroundings, emptying into and pulling from the places in which they are immersed. As Deborah Rose (2002) notes, Bakhtin's interpretation of the body is one that resists permanence even as it is *emplaced*: "The emplaced ecological self is permeable: place penetrates the body, and the body slips into place" (p. 312). In this sense, the previously atomized notion of the self is expanded—we are not entirely separate from our surroundings, neither discursively nor materially. Our sweat mixes with our clothes, we odor our surroundings. This notion of 'emplacement' is more fluid than sanitized separations of self-other or self-environment. Thus, Bakhtin embraces the grotesque as it centers and highlights the permeability of the body, as well as the inability of cultural norms to adequately contain or fully distinguish the self. We are forever in-relation, penetrating and penetrated; we conspire in the truest sense of the term (to breathe together).

Bakhtin's emphasis on permeable encounters of emplaced bodies is echoed in Deleuze's (1990) assertion of the dynamic interconnected and embodied nature of affect. As Deleuze notes, "Only bodies penetrate each other" (p. 64). As a consequence,

educational researchers who absent the body or simplistically represent bodies as distinct and contained overlook important affective interactions—encounters that are more than representational, never fully representable, yet remain inscribed on the very flesh of our becoming.

We might pause here to ask what, then, must the inquirer do to engage responsibly with the body in educational research? How might inquiry practices engage with the complexity of embodied events? Affective encounters? What happens when bodies come together in all their grotesque incompleteness? Though such questions can never be fully resolved and inquiry strategies must be locally-situated, we offer the promise of dialogic encounters that resist attempts to claim unified or singular meaning. To this end, we turn next to the productive role of dialogue as a means of inquiry.

Bakhtin's *dialogism* notes that all voice is multiple-voiced and dynamically situated within history and culture (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Dialogue does not assume permanence or a unified truth to the human endeavor. Dialogue, in this sense opposes monologue—a speech act that holds unified authority. Bakhtinian dialogism has been appropriated by critical educators as foundational to some pedagogies of resistance (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Kamberelis, 2001; Skidmore, 2000) and to inform more critical notions of cognition and learning across a variety of subjects (Lemke, 1990; Lensmire, 1997; Rockwell, 2000). However, most of the work in education remains focused on Bakhtin's contributions to spoken and written text, *as if speech acts are divorced from the bodies producing them*.

Recognizing the permeable body (the grotesque self) allows for an even more fluid notion of dialogue; dialogue as event. One enters dialogues in places—dialogues are emplaced as much as bodies. Dialogues take place in time and place and this emplacement is both frightening and empowering; refusing isolation, revealing vulnerability, and expanding notions of the self and self-interest (Rose, 2002). Further, Bakhtin's notion of dialogue is of fully embodied (and emplaced) interaction:

To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person contributes wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 293)

Dialogue is fully participatory, a giving over of the self to the immediacy of the event. In addition, dialogue is more than linguistic and, as such, requires more

from the inquirer than a fixation on coding words from an interview transcript or other overly simplistic presentations of our encounters “in the field.” In short, dialogue is performative.

Obviously, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogic participation is invested with embodied meaning—“eyes, lips, hands” intermingle with “soul, spirit” made manifest in the “whole body and deeds.” Thus, we might critique even contemporary notions of dialogue as they refuse to acknowledge the grotesque, the many ways in which we resist easy sanitation of our bodies.

Finally, notice the embodied language Bakhtin uses to describe the development of an idea:

The idea lives not in one person’s isolated individual consciousness—if it remains there only it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others. (1984b, pp. 87–88)

Through relationships we grow; dialogic convergence.

Unfortunately, this dialogic conception of “the idea” is rarely recognized in educational discourse—rarer still are instances of educational inquiry that privilege dialogic knowledge building both in content and methodological approach. This is to say that, traditionally, educational research has resisted performative ways of knowing and coming to know. This remains particularly evident when considering the body in educational inquiry.

Exceptions include Cheville’s (2006) efforts to incorporate social and spatial semiotics into deeper understanding of how “the human body might be a formative influence on meaning and mind” (p. 29). Drawing on work with college athletes and deep theoretical conceptualization, Cheville argues “a semiotic conception of embodiment bridges cultural and natural planes of activity and welcomes cross-disciplinary questions at the intersections of life, learning, and health” (p. 34). Although, somewhat dismissive of the material qualities of bodies, Cheville points to a need for embodiment to be more deeply theorized for education research, especially as concerned with learning.

Duncum and Springgay (2007) reviewed representations of the body and embodiment in visual arts education, tracing a history of bodies across classical, contemporary, critical, and popular contexts. Through their genealogical analysis and drawing on experiences with youth in visual arts education, Duncum and Springgay ultimately reject modernist notions of a body that is closed and confined

to its material shape. Rather, they argue for analyses of the “extreme and the excessive body” (p. 1153): bodies with inherent instability and struggling to contain abjective effluence—the absence of a final desired outcome (Kristeva, 1982). Duncum and Springgay put forth

that the body’s ‘limits’ are not conditions of contamination, violence, or abuse, but a way of knowledge construction that resists structures of domination, systems of codification, and control ....The body is the means by which we produce ourselves, so it becomes crucial that analyses ... in education include an understanding of extreme bodies. (pp. 1153–1154)

Duncum and Springgay, as well as Cheville, still retain some remnants of an autonomous experience of embodiment, and we are uncertain to what extent any autonomy might be afforded between mind-body-culture/society or learning-speaking-practicing/performing. Yet, these examples remain exceptional from the dominant operations in critical education research.

In many ways, education is all about the managing of bodies—the disciplining of bodies to remain still, to be rendered silent and non-disruptive. As such, through a performative dialogue we advocate for an understanding of embodiment as an event and the body as situated within an affective series of endless relationships. As Probyn (2004) notes, quoting Deleuze (1992),

The body here is not a monolithic entity, it is composed of an infinite number of particles, continually arranged and re-arranged in relations of speed and slowness. Crucially, ‘a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality.’ (p.37)

Bodies as capacities, as endlessly relational affective systems, disrupt the traditional assertion of the body as representable. This is body as force—not producing an excess of representation, but rather the body as in excess of traditional representational processes (Massumi, 2002). Thus, the specter of the body-as-force presents a methodological quandary for the intrepid methodologist—how does one communicate the relational event of bodies coming together to conjoin meaning through traditional mechanisms of inquiry? As an alternative, we turn to the performative promise of dialogue.



## **Methods, or Modes of Inquiry**

In their collective work, hooks and West (1991) offered personal dialogues as an illustration of their analytical process and meaning-making. We follow this tradition as they asserted, "Dialogue speaks more intimately to people's lived realities" (p. 2), and add that dialogue allows us the opportunity to map our analyses in a manner congruent with the theoretical and conceptual framework that critical postmodern theorizations of the body promote.

Our text, excerpted above, operates as a dialogue between the two authors, both in representation but also in its sourcing of understandings from other texts. These texts include formally cited research as well as our collective knowledge from our respective research projects, participants, and daily lives. Each acts upon another, changing what each can mean or be in any given context. Importantly, we hope our texts make contact with readers' texts, each informing the other. In this way, our dialogue seeks to promote a living understanding of embodiment in education research.

In accordance with Bakhtin's notions of dialogue and dialogic process, we have not sought a dialectic understanding of the body. That is, we strive to work against Hegel's (1984) notions that ideologies can be merged in synthesis to create a new compromised tension or understanding. Rather, we engaged in a dialogue that can help achieve, as Bakhtin notes "a deepening with the help of other meanings ... deepening through expansion of the remote context" (1986, p. 160). We present our dialogue asynchronously so as to exacerbate our resistance to synthesis and our commitment to a constant rebuilding of understanding—the infinite interpretations available to any symbolic system, according to Bakhtin (1986). Our asynchronous representation—outside of a discrete chronology, but operating from a tenuously chronological endeavor—underscores our commitment to dialogic contact, wherein texts live in contact with other texts, joining these texts to our dialogue. To be clear, we resist the authoritative word.

## **Evidentiary Sources**

Specifically, our dialogue blurs the boundaries between two elements of Bakhtinian interaction: *external dialogue* (between two people) and *internal dialogue* (between earlier and later selves). We represent this incessant interplay through the use of indention, wherein one author might respond to his own earlier comments even

as he responds to the other author's developing interjections. We use two primary evidentiary sources for our dialogue: reflections on our own research projects struggling with embodied analyses and the scholarly literature on embodiment, with an unapologetic privileging of Bakhtin's writings about the body and dialogue. In many respects, our dialogue is an asynchronous chronology of our coming to know the body in Bakhtin's dialogic imagination. One author has incorporated notions of the body and dialogue (Kuntz, 2009) in order to explain how faculty activists in higher education navigate the professoriate. Another author has struggled productively with embodied methods of representation within his ethnographic engagement with Mexican migrant students around educational equity and opportunity (Gildersleeve, 2010). These reflections, as represented in our dialogue, demonstrate and make relational the difficulties and rewards of privileging embodied analyses when traditional methodologies do not recognize or advocate for such a perspective.

## **Enduring Questions and Future Considerations**

Our dialogic engagement of Bakhtin's body leads to two primary lines of enduring questions and future considerations related to embodiment and critical qualitative research in education. First, we suggest that embodied analyses support a more complex contextual understanding of educational problems, but want to probe deeper into how we can communicate embodied understandings to key stakeholders in education. How can current educational infrastructures be transformed to account for matters of the body? Perhaps our dialogue might also cause us to ask the question differently—in what ways are particularly sanitized bodies accounted for and what are the consequences of that accounting? Second, we suggest that embodied analyses afford the opportunity to reframe persistent educational dilemmas in newly productive frameworks. Clearly related, these two lines of thought provoke substantive questions about the contemporary dialectical dominance in educational research. How do students' subjectivities get taken up across bodies in school? How do educators move through embodied spaces of education (e.g., college-going) in pluralistic ways that support democratic participation for all students? How can communities empower themselves to re-center their experiences across educational contexts, via the workings of bodily negotiation?

## Educational Significance

Scholars have already recognized that changes in the economic, cultural, and social organizations of the post- Cold War era have reorganized the meanings of work, civic, and private life in ways difficult to understand from simple and fixed notions of sociality (New London Group, 1996; Apple, 2006). Educational scholars need to push for embodied analyses. Yet, more than simply inserting the body into our educational analyses, we need to do so in a way that disrupts or intervenes within the very rationalities that govern normative (traditionally Cartesian) meaning-making. Like Blackmon and Venn's (2010) work on affect, we seek to "foreground the question of what do we mean when we invoke, examine and enact the body" (p.8). This simultaneous doubling—asking for embodied analyses even as we question what logics pervade or make possible such treatment of the body—is perhaps where Bakhtinian and Deleuzian approaches meet, conspire, and make possible new ways of living in our world.

For Bakhtin (1984b), this is to engage in madness, "because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by 'normal,' this is commonplace ideas and judgments" (p. 39). For Deleuze (1990), this is to engage in schizophrenic being. Through the grotesque, "commonplace ideas and judgments" are degraded, brought down to earth, and that degradation is endlessly productive: "it is always conceiving" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 21). Thus, we might ask what such madness makes possible, how degradation—the bringing to the earth of the commonsensical—alters our processes of critical inquiry. What new methodological possibilities emerge with an emphasis on the grotesque body? Through this article we present dialogue as a necessarily incomplete yet productive engagement with the impact of the body on inquiry. Through dialogue, meaning loses its fixity and we are able to engage in a carnival-like degradation of our conservatively neoliberal times. We hope others take up our dialogue, granting new dimensions to the possibilities of the grotesque in educational research.

## Notes

1. See Kim, Losen, & Hewitt (2010) about the school-to-prison pipeline.
2. See Foucault (2003) and Clough (2009).
3. We would like to thank Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, an early reader of this article, for her commentary on these specific points.

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