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Abstract

Multimodal technologies open possibilities to go beyond the dominant written model of anthropology through layering and expanding theoretical and storytelling processes into different modes. Dyslexia challenges different concepts of text and this article builds from this knowing by questioning ideas of written scholarship through engaging with multimodal practices. It opens up spaces for diverse voices to be woven together from the research through to the 'writing-up' process affecting what can be defined as scholarly discourse. By exploring collaborative knowing in multimodal practice, it juxtaposes analysis against the realities of lived experiences of dyslexic adults in NZ and the UK.

INTRODUCTION

Through the ability to weave together multiple layers including modes, ideas and paradoxes, multimodal approaches open new ways to collaborate in the research process and also alter the ways in which engagement with people's lived experiences can be communicated. The following film contains layers of information threaded through the stories of collaborators, diverse film techniques and an intentional commentary on the place of research. I have been collaborating with the same group of people for over 7 years, I have become more aware of the complexities and paradoxes within the research space. So often the pivot point of communicating collaborative research is the researcher in the way they shape information through writing or editing visual material. The short films embedded in the larger film seek to create an embodied collaborative engagement between these unseen collaborators and the unseen audience by seeking to create somatosensory experiences in ways which text alone cannot.

The three short films shown were all created with different collaborators as we worked together to visualise their hidden experiences and we often discussed their role versus that

of mine as a researcher, even though as I often told them, they are the expert researchers of their experiences and I'm still learning. However, as the learner I have a position of privilege whether I sit at the keyboard writing or editing.

The other sections of the video are spoken, experimenting with textual academic forms - specifically analysis and discussion. I use the textual here to challenge the 'academic' ways of 'writing-up' research by weaving and layering different threads and forms. The spoken sections are purposefully juxtaposed against the bleeding ink graphics to explore intersubjective moments which flow into understanding or/and dissipate through text. Layered on and through the bleeds are words from the spoken text fading in and out isolated from their academic identity as a way to embrace the gaps possible in non-traditional academic language forms. This use of text creates a poetic form which leaves room for engagement in ways which more formal text does not. Juxtaposing this information against the more formal discussion it experiments with layered textual information. The use of spoken text, visual text and graphic movements create some discomfort about the relationship between the academic space and the collaborative space. Through the formatting of difference between the collaborative projects and the academic discussion it highlights these different voices and the roles they play. The three films highlight the embodied experiences of my collaborators triggering an embodied response from the viewer asking them to engage in their knowledge of the world. The spoken textual sections do the discourse of academia but through these very different voices layers of information become accessible.

Please see HTML version for accompanying video content.

Transcript of ABSTRACT

1st Film – D_SL_X__

Dyslexia is more often a focus of neuroscience, education and psychology than that of anthropology, especially from a visual/sensory perspective. In anthropological ethnographic research, the aim is to understand people's worldview which in this situation meant stepping outside of the dominant discourse around fixing or curing dyslexia into understanding what it means to be dysleXic. (You will notice in the text that there is a capital X which is not a typo but a way to distinguish the collaborative nature of the research and distinguish it as ethnographic and coming from within the community). The project worked with dysleXics from the age of 10 years to 65 years using art as a way to collaboratively explore the experience of dysleXia. The research was undertaken in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand with the research being predominantly focused on NZ where Dyslexia was only recognised by the government in 2007. In using visual and sensory anthropology the work creatively engaged with representing embodied experiences focusing on perception and embodied knowing (for more on knowing see Rapport and Harris 2007 and Hogan and Pink, 2010), or as I will show aesthetic knowing, from those who are dysleXic. Dyslexia is often framed as unknowing, where experiences are to be overcome or unlearned. This video article explores the possibilities of bodies engaged in sensory exploration through the use of animation and film. It focuses on specific perceptions of people who are DysleXic and uses these mediums to cross barriers and bleed across the boundaries of the skin into embodied

communications with other knowing bodies. Through the use of *ostranenie*, making strange, real embodiment as perceptive feeling is explored and communicated.

“Aisthitikos is the ancient Greek word for that which is ‘perceptive feeling.’ Aisthesis is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality – corporeal, material nature” (Buck-Morss 1992:6).

Transcript of text

The aesthetic is often limited to art rather than drawing on its origins of perceptive feeling and sensory perception which can be seen in the original Greek (Buck-Morss 1992, p.6). Acknowledging the importance of aesthetics as embodied helped to develop a different way of connecting with somatosensory embodiment and to recognise experiences which spread through the entire somatosensory system communicating the world around us both seen and unseen. I look here specifically at two of the films we created called ‘When I walk into a room...’ and ‘Soundfall’ which use different types of film work to explore perception. The first began as parts of recorded interviews and the second is one of the individual works created with a participant to represent her experiences.

The use of film and animation within this sensory circuit opens up possibilities to engage with lived experiences in ways which text alone cannot. Samantha Moore (2011) in *Animating Unique Brain States* discusses the work of Landreth and how he altered the visual forms of the interviewer and interviewee to create what he calls ‘psychorealism’ where experiences were represented visually. Moore (2011) goes on to discuss her own work about ‘audio-visual synaesthesia that needed to visually articulate a perceptual processing unique to an individual.’ Their work resonates with my own in that it is about taking the internal experienced reality of a unique group of people and seeking to communicate that reality to those who do not experience or perceive the world in the same way. Communicating these different lived experiences becomes possible through these mediums and provides potential for researchers to add to their ways of thinking about ideas of perception, as Sousanis has suggested what we think *with* affects how we think. Thinking beyond the boundaries of words creates new potentials for thinking *with*.

The use of animation and film were created to not just reflect lived experience but to trigger responses in the bodies of those who viewed them. The visual and auditory information spreads throughout the somatosensory system engaging in a communication through the aesthetic. The films become integral in the communication of embodiment. Buck-Morss (1992) has suggested that

...the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit. In order to differentiate our description from the more limited, traditional conception of the human nervous system which artificially isolates human biology from its environment, we will call this aesthetic system of sense consciousness, decentred from the classical subject, wherein external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation, the “synesthetic...” (Buck-Morss, 1992, p.13).

How then can we discuss or represent these different ways of being-in-the-world which do not isolate the body from itself. Words, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) have suggested are embodied metaphors but as Ong (2002) has said text has the potential to create boundaries. How then do we engage with the best of words and expand their boundaries? Using images and animation as intentional processes opens up possibilities to engage with sensory knowing as more than an abstract experience but as something felt and experienced within people's own bodies. Walking into a room is an everyday practice but in thinking with other forms and blending words with animation new dimensions of being-in-the-world are communicated. It also requires an engaged embodied viewing of the audience so I ask that you pay attention to your somatosensory system in watching the film.

2nd FILM – 'When I walk into a room....'

Please take a moment to pause the video and consider your own reactions to the film. What did you notice and what 'resists intellectual comprehension' (Buck-Morss, 1992 p.15)

The film shows the crossing of thresholds through entering a door but also aims to cross the intersubjective threshold into embodied experience and sensory engagement - removing a level of detachment from lived experiences which can happen in other forms of 'writing up' research. The intersubjective, through the animation, becomes complex as photo-realism is replaced with the aesthetic perception of walking into a room. The films due to their animation connect, as Moore (2011) has suggested, to the "truth" of an internal experience without being wholly dependent on photo-realism.' Both this and the second film focus on the senses as communicative as they reach 'toward other nerve cells ...where electrical charges pass through the space between them. Whereas in blood vessels a leak is lamentable, in the networks between nerve bundles everything 'leaks' (Buck-Morss 1992, p.13). Ostrannenie (Van Heusdan, 2010) becomes a way to pay attention to this knowing embodiment. Buck-Morss (1992) and Eagleton (1990) suggest an individual's aesthetic perception has the potential to impact on their interpretation of the world. In thinking about leaks the next film 'Soundfall' represents my collaborators experiences as a child going for a walk. The film is of the Huka falls in Aotearoa/New Zealand and shows this blurring and leaking of information between sound and visual experiences. When I asked if this was a problem for her she explained that this was normal - although as an adult it had lessened as she had learned to control and use it - it was just a case of having time to be able to control the space.

3rd FILM - SoundFall

Please take a moment to pause the video and consider your own reactions to the film.

Soundfall shows how seeing and perceiving can leak across the senses altering a Dyslexic person's engagement with places and spaces. Dewey has stated "an instantaneous experience is an impossibility, biologically and psychologically. An experience is a product, one might almost say a by-product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world" (Dewey 1934, p.229). This raises important questions about the accessibility to an embodied understanding through the use of ostrannenie (Van Heusdan, 2010). It shows that an awareness is required during creation as well as of the audience itself of the embodied nature of the work. For example, in the instance of the film just seen,

the collaborator often created representations of her experiences that were more extreme and often represented their experiences in childhood rather than their experiences as adults. The reason for this was that they didn't believe that a non-dyslexic audience would be able to access the information if it wasn't done in this way. They emphasise that these experiences were normal and not something that was an unusual experience but this representation of normality is not always recognised by a non-dyslexic audience or seen as valuable as my collaborators saw it. In that moment the different embodied continuous and cumulative organic self, as Dewey (1934) describes, comes into play and can dominate part of the discourse. It means that we need to find ways to help people cross the boundaries of their existing knowledge when using these forms of embodied representation.

The experience of ostrannine (Van Heusdan, 2010) is part of the films but the potential in recognising diverse perception is also present. The ability to engage with embodied information was highly valued by my collaborators and developed over years as a journey they travelled alone. In sharing the films with other collaborators, they recognised their own experiences and as I worked with people from different ages, the aesthetic knowing as sense consciousness varied from age group to age group, for the younger people who described sensory overload, through to some of those who were older who learned to use their embodied experiences to expand their understandings. It had taken them years to learn to trust their sense-consciousness, not an easy task as many had experienced, throughout their lives, being told they were wrong. Berger (1972) has discussed the relationship in the visual and its content stating that it frames the way the work is seen. Animation and film opens up aesthetic ways to engage with embodied experiences of the somatosensory - from altering breath, through to affecting balance, experiencing sound and visual triggers communicating across the body. The animation also places requirements on the 'audience' as they become part of the sensory experiences leaking across the mediums, stories and histories represented in these aesthetic evocations of Being through ethnographic collaborations.

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Ruth Gibbons is a Sensory Anthropologist interested in knowing and unknowing, embodied sensory dialogue, perception, experimental methods and aesthetics within her collaborative research practice. Her work uses different mediums including digital animation, sculpture, soundscapes, experimental film, Augmented reality, and digital collages as modes of inquiry as well as ways of 'writing-up' research. She is interested in how different forms and art modes challenge existing ideas of scholarship and how through these different approaches it alters the voice of the scholar placing their voice among the collaborators. Ruth currently teaches courses in anthropology at Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand.

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