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“IT’S ALL OF THESE PUZZLE PIECES.”:
THE REPRESENTATION AND THE MANIFEST DISCOURSE OF DYSLEXIC EXPERIENCE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Social Anthropology

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Ruth Gibbons
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Dyslexia as a term to define bodies has undergone various interpretations in the 120 years since it was first diagnosed (Shawitz 1996:98). The numbers of people calculated as dyslexic worldwide ranges from 1 in 4 to 1 in 10 reflecting confusion about what dyslexia actually is, as well as issues around how people are diagnosed (Elliot and Grigorenko 2014:31-34). Research about dyslexia has happened in a variety of fields including education, psychology, and medicine but anthropology has been predominantly silent in the discourse of dyslexia. This thesis explores dyslexia from an anthropological perspective as embodied experience and expression through worlding. Through working collaboratively with people with dyslexia it explores intersubjective relationships, language expression, sensory awareness and being-in-the-world. A central part of this exploration was using art as a way to understand knowing (Rapport and Harris 2007, Hogan and Pink 2010), which expanded into explorations of how dyslexics attune sensory knowing and pay attention to all of the experiences of everyday life. Using art as an empathetic ethnographic invitation I discuss and explore dyslexia as a way of knowing and moving through the world. Therefore, I focus on dyslexia beyond a diagnosis into the way people inhabit and negotiate their experiences as complex, creative agents in their lifeworlds. The research covers creation of artworks, making new words to represent dyslexic experiences and many discussions late into the night. It has been a collaborative exploration of experience. From discussions of whether Giraffes need scarves through to declarations of “we are iron man” my collaborators have expressed their ways of being-in-the-world and this thesis engages with their dynamic ways of interpreting and knowing the world.
Acknowledgements

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 1 – Introduction: “Our voices not heard.”

What Is In A Name: “We Knew It Was Subjective To Begin With”          ................................................. 2  
Interpretations Of Dyslexia: “It Is Such A Weird Word Diagnosed. It Sounds Like I’ve Got Cancer.,”: ................................................................. 3  
Finding The Field ................................................................................................................. 6  
Dyslexia, Creativity and Visual Representations ................................................................. 8  
Focusing On Dyslexia: “Every experience you have ever had.” ........................................ 10  
  - Personhood ..................................................................................................................... 10  
  - The Everyday: Experience And Expression ..................................................................... 12  
  - Aesthetic Embodied Thinking As Worlding: Perception With Feeling .......................... 13  
Intersubjective And Inter-Objective Worlding: Representing Lived Experience ............... 14  
‘Reading’ The Thesis ............................................................................................................. 15  
Summary .................................................................................................................................. 16

## Chapter 2 – Meaning Is In The Making: “This is how it is I want it to show them that it doesn’t stay one shape.”

Why Use Expressive Art Practice? Researching Dyslexia ................................................. 20  
  - Communicating Embodied Knowing .................................................................................. 21  
Collaborative Making Art as Evocation ............................................................................. 25  
  - The Process of Making .................................................................................................... 26  
  - Explorative Practice: “I went why am I?” ..................................................................... 29  
Meaning Through Making: Art as Embodied Knowing .......................................................... 32  
Opening a Collaborative Dialectic Themed Works: “No It Has To Be Forward.” ............... 38  
Collaboration Through Mutuality: Individual Works............................................................ 41  
  - Exploring Experiences with Individuals: Personal Journeys and Collaborative Practice .................................................................................................................. 43
Why Art as a Collaborative Method: Mutuality through Art as Method .........................50
Summary................................................................................................................................53

Chapter 3 – Introducing my collaborators and their Artwork:
“We Can Craft Them To Have Deeper Meaning.”
Amanda.....................................................................................................................................56
Elise............................................................................................................................................58
Craig.........................................................................................................................................60
Mathew......................................................................................................................................62
Debbie.......................................................................................................................................64
Philippa.....................................................................................................................................66
Heather....................................................................................................................................68
Janine........................................................................................................................................70
Mark.......................................................................................................................................72
Marie.......................................................................................................................................74
Aby..........................................................................................................................................76
Sam..........................................................................................................................................78
DYSPLA.....................................................................................................................................80
Contributors who chose not to create artworks.................................................................82
The Alphabet.........................................................................................................................83

Chapter 4“Do You Get Those Blank Stares?”: Navigating The Everyday
Inhabiting A Name ..................................................................................................................85
- “Are there some day’s you’re more dyslexic than others?”..............................................87
Correction As Everyday Experience: “I think you meant to say exotic.” .........................89
- The Inconsistencies of Left and Right .................................................................94
- Travelling: “So where exactly are you?” .................................................................96
- Time: “There are two 10 o’clock’s.” .................................................................97
- “Wibbly Wobbly Timey Wimey Stuff.” .................................................................99
Conversations as Creative, Real and Imagined: “Everyone Hurries Us Up Or Cuts Across Us.” .................................................................101
- “The Blank Stare”.........................................................................................102
- “You never know what’s Behind The door.” .........................................................103
- …And then there was candle wax..........................................................................107
Summary ..........................................................................................................................108
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5  Language With The Body: “To Waffull, Because It’s Full”:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words Are Part Of The Everyday ...........................................110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words Are Montage ..................................................................111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Words Are Not Passive: Representing Language With The Body 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Words ....................................................................114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creating Meaning: “It’s hard to tell my story.” .....................117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beginning of Alphabet .......................................................118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporeal Reality of Words: “I’m not allowed to read them there.” 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersubjective Storytelling: “It’s waffull.” .........................146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Waffull As Joining In: “Sometimes I finish people’s sentences.” 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing With and Losing Words: “Powlf-ulm.” .........................150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transrobe: “I have to watch myself because I get lost in books.” 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary ................................................................................156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6 Exploring The Senses As Embodied Worlding: “It’s Ness.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology, Dyslexia and the Senses ..........160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Montage of Embodied Thinking Through the World: “You’ve gathered it all together.” 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The World Is Porous: “I sense out a space.” ..................171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Paying Attention: “You’re in it and you’re part of the things in that space.” ..........173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense-Consciousness: “Dyslexic-Ness.” .........................175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ness is Between: “It’s normal for us.” ..........................180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montage Overload: “When it happens you just have to let go.” 183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary ...........................................................................191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7 Gesturing As Embodied Expression: “To Create More To Create Ness.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing With The World.............................................193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Embodied Knowing: “It’s Discussionnessness” 197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing Intersubjectivity ...........................................204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gesturing Listening: “Everyone else feels better, but we have no idea what was said.” 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gestures Puncture Proxemic Space: “It was like poof.” ..........208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic Gesture ................................................................210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “It looks dead.” ..........................................................213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With Objects: “Everything just flowed.” .......................215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing Against Bodies: “They have to be uncomfortable.” 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary ......................................................................221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8 Conclusion
Art as Empathetic Evocation of Embodied Knowing.................................224
The Senses And The Everyday ......................................................................226
  - “The Wrongness” ....................................................................................228
  - “It’s More.” ..............................................................................................229
Ever Evolving Field .......................................................................................238
  - Questions For Ongoing Research .............................................................231
Collaborative Research..................................................................................232
Final Comments..............................................................................................233

Reference Material
Bibliography ..................................................................................................235
Appendicies ....................................................................................................249
  - List of research undertaken .....................................................................250
  - Collaborative artwork projects ...............................................................252
  - Interactive works at Installation .............................................................278
List of Illustrations

Chapter 2
In Conversation ................................................................. 27
Possibilities ........................................................................ 34
Five of the Letters .............................................................. 35
Meaning is in the Making .................................................... 40
A Collaborative Practice .................................................... 45
The Dialectic ....................................................................... 49
Amanda ............................................................................. 56
Elise .................................................................................. 58
Craig ................................................................................ 60
Mathew ............................................................................ 62
Debbie ............................................................................. 64
Philippa ........................................................................... 66
Heather ........................................................................... 68
Janine ............................................................................. 70
Mark .............................................................................. 72
Marie ............................................................................. 74
Aby ............................................................................... 76
Sam ............................................................................... 78
Dyspla ........................................................................... 80
Chapter 5
Letter F ........................................................................... 118
Letter C ........................................................................... 119
Letter A ........................................................................... 120
Letter M ........................................................................... 121
Appendices

Attaining ................................................................. 254
Education ............................................................... 256
Learning ................................................................. 258
Reflections ............................................................. 260
Seeing the World ..................................................... 262-263
“it’s thinking” .......................................................... 265
Outside the Box ....................................................... 267
Through the Looking Glass ..................................... 268-271
Possibilities ........................................................... 274
“Wibbily, Wobbly” .................................................. 276
Installation writing responses .................................. 278
Movement is thinking ............................................. 280
Canvas responses to Installation ......................... 282
Terminology

DysleXic/DysleXia  The use of the capital ‘X’ defines the experiences and observations coming out of the dyslexic community as subcultural knowledge.

Dyslexic/dyslexia  This traditional form of the term is used to relate to medical, psychological and educational perspectives.

New Words Created to Represent DysleXic experience.

Ness: An experience and an expression of lived experience for persons with dysleXia. Relating to sensory awareness, intersubjectivity and inter-objectivity.

Noshush: Represents agency when dealing with sensory overload.

Powlf-ulm : Refers to both the ability to play with and enjoy words as well as the loss of words both spoken and written words.

Transrobe: DysleXic reading practice where the person reading feels that they are both within the story and surrounded by the story.

Unness: Dissonance between embodied experiences of ness and societal expectations.

Waffull : Is intersubjective communication which is full of story details.

Senses

Equilibrioception: Sense in relation to balance also known as the Vestibular sense.

Proprioception: Sense of motion, acceleration, awareness of position of body.

Cronoception: Sense of time within the body away from the clock.

Introception: Sense within the body and body function.

Peripheral Chemoreceptors: Sense related to awareness of oxygen levels in the blood triggering breathing and exhalation.