

CHASE THE FEELING

**MAKING MEANING IN AN
AUTISTIC THEATRE COMPANY**
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ABSTRACT

This research explores the work of a theatre company made up entirely of people diagnosed with variations of Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD). It investigates their practice with respect to the social structures that define their identity, the craft and techniques of contemporary actors and the vehicle of theatre itself to wrangle self-determination and expression in ways that re-imagine their collective identity. In doing so, this research explores how theatre performance as a social phenomenon suspends the everyday social relationships people have and by doing so facilitates the reconfiguring of meaning by way of an embodied, social and corporeal experience. Finally the project speaks to ideas in anthropology about writing culture and so includes a play script and performance. This creative analysis of the research seeks then to find a tangible path linking the rigor of creative practice, academic research and writing culture.

Fieldwork was conducted with the COMPANY @ which operates in Adelaide, South Australia. This analysis is presented in the form of exegesis, playscript and performance. The performance of the script took place on August 28, 2015 at the Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. The performance itself is sixty minutes in duration and rehearsals were conducted over two months with the cast, which consisted of participants from the fieldwork and a guest actor. Rehearsals were conducted over five hours per week for ten weeks, totaling approximately seventy hours rehearsal.

The writing of a play script and the subsequent interpretation of this script into a live performance are devices intended to speak to the authority of writing culture with respect to ethnography. This is used to delineate the process by which anthropological study contributes to the writing of culture and literature. The thesis is an ethnographic analysis and argues that writing observations of participants in fieldwork is in some respects a definition of cultural practice. The script and its performance seek then to broaden this analysis and allow a more fluid and interpretive construction of culture based on the readers/audiences contribution to experiential analysis. In this sense the research engages anthropological analysis and theory with the practice of interpretation on behalf of the reader. Given that members of the fieldwork acted the performance this gives autonomy to the participants of research and ownership of (re)creating their identity. The act of perceptive interpretation by the audience and subsequent feedback to performers creates a hermeneutic circle of expression and construction of identity, keeping the work alive and dynamic rather than fixed. In this sense the final analysis seeks to create a dynamic lived interpretation of cultural practice and contribute to arguments about dynamic anthropology and writing culture.

Declaration

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