

Tricks of the Psych Trade: A Triple Bill

Funded by a Public Engagement with Psychology Grant from the British Psychological Society

Summary Proposal

Tricks of the Psych Trade: A Triple Bill is an interactive event that incorporates science, technology and art. Its aim is to communicate three major methods used within psychology – scientific experiments, brain imaging techniques and individual testimonies. During the event, the audience will gain an understanding of each of these methods on an *intellectual* and *experiential* level. Different modes of communication such as audience interaction, participation and sensory experience will be used to promote audience engagement.

An enduring theme throughout the event will be empathy and social cognition, higher order constructs that fall within the psychologists' remit but are also accessible to the general public – after all everyone has an idea what empathy is!

An exhibition of artwork will highlight the value of individual testimonies to psychological understanding (in contrast to the technological and scientific methods covered in the previous activities) – whilst giving a unique insight into an autistic mind.

Emergent messages from this event are the diversity of creativity, and the potential of using art, and audience participation, to communicate scientific principles in an unusual format.

1. The event

i) An interactive session, by **Dr Emma Lawrence**, a postdoctoral psychologist at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London. This will introduce the methods psychologists commonly use to study empathy in the laboratory. This will include live demonstrations and audience participation using a selection of fun stimuli taken from real psychological studies, for instance, geometric shapes apparently 'arguing', 'chasing each other' etc and 'interacting' in a human way.

Throughout the session we will monitor and display the 'real time' physiological responses of collaborator – Julie Freeman - using state of the art galvanic skin response. A 'Pacman' interface will be used whereby Julie's physiological arousal in response to the emotive stimuli displayed will determine the movement of the 'Pacman'.

The audience will also be encouraged to interact and respond to the stimuli shown and their responses will be feedback and discussed. This is the third time this event has been shown, and previous events (at the Dana Centre, London) used electronic keypads allowing the audience to respond anonymously (see Appendix 3).

During this session the accompanying art exhibits will also be introduced (see below).

In a concluding session, the three elements of the event will be discussed, alongside a consideration of the individual creative process and the role of empathy, based on data gathered from several artists including Dinos Chapman.

Emma is also an Associate Lecturer for the Open University and so regularly communicates psychological principles to variety of audiences. For further biographical information see www.em-online.org

ii) An art installation, by **Julie Freeman**. 'In Sound Mind' consists of a number of speakers playing layers of environmental and human vocal sounds. The abstract audio composition is inspired by the process used in brain imaging. The layers fade in and fade out moving between dense complex auditory sound and simple aural clarity. As the audience move through the sound slices by walking around in the space, they will begin to discover that through their own movement they can 'subtract' the unwanted noise and find the desired 'auditory signal' – a physical manifestation of the way psychologists isolate brain activation in brain imaging studies. The work can be challenging to listen to as the sounds play outside of their usual context (see Appendix 1).

Julie has exhibited in the UK and internationally, her work has generated media interest ranging from the BBC's Tomorrow's World through to Radio 4's Woman's Hour. She is a NESTA fellow, and currently chairman of FreqOUT! (a community education project <http://freqout.blogspot.com/>). For further information see <http://www.juliefreeman.co.uk>.

iii) An exhibition of artwork, by **Peter Myers**. Peter is an artist with Asperger's Syndrome who has recently had his work and life story published in a book 'The Exact Mind'. Approximately 11 line drawings, 2 canvases, 3 wall hangings, 1 sculpture and two animations will be displayed.

Peter has exhibited worldwide and is interested in communicating the nature of autistic spectrum disorders to a lay audience via the showing of his work. His success as an artist makes him an exemplary role model for aspiring artists with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (see Appendix 2).

2. Preliminary Timetable

We would like the event to be held around March / April 2007 to coincide with National Science Week (9-18th March 2007). Please see <http://www.the-ba.net/the-ba/Events/NSEW/> for more information. The event will start at 6:30pm and end at 9:00pm

18:30 – 19:00 Arrival and time to explore sound installation look at artwork
19:00 – 19:45 Introduction, interactive audience presentation by Emma Lawrence
19:45 – 20:15 Interval, a time to wander through installation, look at artwork
20:15 – 20:45 Conclusion - discussion of artwork on display and empathy in the creative process.
20:45 – 21:00 Time to look at artwork

3. The Venue

Previously this event has been held at the Science Museum's Dana Centre in London – the first event was funded by the British Psychological Society and due to its success, the second was commissioned and funded by the Dana Centre (see Appendix 3).

We are now looking for a suitable venue outside of London that can host this event. This requires two rooms: one for the interaction session, mainly reliant on Powerpoint and with electronic keypads for audience response, if possible. The second 'artwork' room will house Peter's Myers visual artwork and Julie Freeman's sound installation.

4. Technical Requirements

Interactive session room:

Seated auditorium/lecture theatre – approx 80 people
Interactive keypads for each audience member with real-time feedback
Projection screen for Powerpoint presentation
Mic for speakers x 2 (ideally radio mics)
1 x large plasma screen or secondary projector to display GSR information

Artwork room:

In Sound Mind is an 8 speaker sound installation. The artist will provide speakers, cabling, computer and break-out audio box. At least four speakers require ceiling or other above head mounting. Ideally the room will be an enclosed space to retain the sound (see Appendix 1).

Peter Myers work comprises 10-14 A4 and A3 foam mounted line drawings. These will be wall mounted using non-permanent fixtures.

We have two animated versions of Peter Myers work which should be displayed on plasma or other screens in either room. If possible 2 computers/laptops are required to run these animations (provided on CD-ROM, Mac or PC compatible).

5. Promotion

The collaboration of a scientist and two artists (one with Asperger's Syndrome) make this an exciting and newsworthy event.

The cross-fertilisation of art and science, the use of fMRI and exploration of empathy, are all currently considered 'hot' topics within the media, and are inherently intriguing to a lay audience.

Promotion will be via event listings on websites such as:

BPS – <http://www.bps.org.uk/>

Medical Research Council – <http://www.mrc.ac.uk> – events diary

Mental Health & Learning Disabilities portal – <http://www.connects.org.uk>

Mental Health Foundation – <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

NESTA bulletin – monthly email - National Endowment for Science Technology and Art

Lecture List event website – <http://www.lecturelist.org>

National Autistic Society website - <http://www.nas.org.uk>

Emma Lawrence - www.em-online.org

Julie Freeman - <http://www.juliefreeman.co.uk>

Flyers in other local exhibitions/gallery and entertainment spaces.

Press releases and event listing magazines and web sites (news, art and science based)

Appendix 1

In Sound Mind – speaker layout diagram

Appendix 2

Example of Peter Myers artwork

Appendix 3

Feedback, quotes, and photographs from previous event