

Ruling the airwaves

Our editor Jon Sutton pauses to appreciate two long-running psychological BBC Radio 4 programmes – *Digital Human* and *All in the Mind*

Within 10 minutes of waking each morning, I have encountered half a dozen amazing things that I take for granted (namely electricity, stairs, mobile phones, coffee, locks, and poo bags for dogs). As I wend my way to work, it's usually the turn of bicycles, headphones and radio/podcasts. In particular, there are two enduring marvels which we should never overlook.

We have reviewed BBC Radio 4's *Digital Human* and *All in the Mind* in these pages before, and met the presenters (and psychology graduates) Aleks Krotoski and Claudia Hammond. But

they've been churning out high-quality episodes for so many years now that it seems passé to simply say 'they're great, listen to them'. Instead, I thought I would speak to Aleks and Claudia, and their producers (Peter McManus on *Digital Human*, and Adrian Washbourne for *All in the Mind*), to find out the secrets of their success. They will be referred to throughout by their initials.

Is it easy to find new topics to cover after all these years?

CH: There's so much interesting psychological and neuroscientific research being published at the moment, and also so much happening in the field of mental health, that the difficulty is choosing which subjects to choose from all those we want to cover. We are on air for two nine-week series a year, so between series we save up topics, and by the planning stage the producer and I each have a stack of ideas. Then as soon as the series begins, listeners suggest even more topics. We can't fit them all in.

AK: We have an ongoing Slack channel and a Google doc that runs in the background during and between series... we throw ideas and links and fragments of thought into them. It's rich pickings for the meetings when we get together and hack through the next series' topics.

PM: The clue is in the title *Digital Human* – I'd struggle to think of an aspect of modern living that isn't affected by technology or that some tech company doesn't have in its sights, so the possibilities are endless. But we go through a very thorough process of checking a theme ticks all the boxes and have had to drop ideas when they don't measure up. In terms of interviewees we always like to throw in the unexpected; from our very first episode where we had a nature diarist commenting on our urge to take pictures of everything around us.

Has your subject matter or approach changed?

CH: In my early days on *All in the Mind* very few other programmes ever covered mental health. Now that coverage is more widespread, we are freed up from covering the basics so often, and we're able to take a more nuanced approach, based on years of experience within the team. As a long-running programme, we're also able to revisit topics and look at how things have changed because we remember covering it the first time. I also have the frustration of seeing some things that don't seem to change, however much good work people are doing in the hope that they will. On the positive side, one of the biggest differences I've seen in my time on the programme is the willingness of people to come on the programme to talk about their difficulties without asking for their name to be changed. That suggests attitudes to mental health are changing.

AK: I think we've been really consistent throughout the 10 series. The balance of psychology and digital observation is approximately the same, I'd argue. We also get the opportunity to explore the philosophical, anthropological and social phenomena – we've got the soft sciences covered! I don't think psychology has changed, but I would say I have a better understanding now of the vast range of topics tackled by psychology because of the series. Our audience is global, which was always the intention from the beginning. It's gained great traction all over the world – thank goodness for podcasting!

PM: I don't immediately think of it as a series about psychology, but more what it's like to be living in the modern world – psychology just often seems the best language to describe that. On listenership it's surprising how big a proportion of our 'download' audience is international, it's much bigger than similar Radio 4 series. One really gratifying piece of feedback we've got is from schools and universities who use the programmes not just as a means of discussing the impact of digital technology but also as examples of how to explore an idea.

How do you keep it fresh?

CH: One way is by constantly covering topics which are just emerging. I chair a lot of public events where people come up afterwards and tell me about interesting things that are happening or things that concern them. And of course people use Twitter to contact me; we get lots of emails; and we still get handwritten letters too, letters

over which people have clearly taken a lot of care. We do read it all, and this contact with our audience definitely makes a difference to the programme.

But we also work to ensure the sound of *All in the Mind* evolves too. Listening back to the programmes from the archive you can hear how much it's changed over the years. Recently we've started having a guest in the studio sometimes who stays throughout the programme, commenting on each item and also bringing some new research to talk about [including Dr Catherine Loveday, Chair of the Psychologist and Digest Editorial Advisory Committee]. This means we can cover six or seven topics in one programme instead of three or four. We are also doing the occasional outside broadcast with a live audience, which I really love. There's nothing like having people there in the room with you to get a sense of what audiences really want to know. And finally, the All in the Mind Awards have given us the opportunity to feature individual stories of mental health and recovery at length. The response we had was extraordinary, and if we can secure the funding, we would love to continue having awards every two years.

AK: We are lucky to have a vast pool of content: the ever-changing human in the constantly evolving digital world! We are all also constant audio listeners; I always have my ear to new sounds. It's literally thrilling to be part of the podcast space and hear the new ways people are telling stories through this glorious and immersive medium.

PM: One of the delights of making the show is finding the stories and devising the soundscapes that will bring the ideas we're exploring to life. It's a constant creative challenge, but one we love meeting, so the freshness comes from that passion.

Do the psychologists you invite onto the programme usually say yes?

CH: We're very lucky... I can't think of the last time a psychologist we invited on said no.

There's no doubt that psychologists are becoming far more confident about being interviewed and better at explaining their work in lay language, but it is the case that for a few, unfortunately, past experience with the media has made them wary. We have the advantage of being a specialist programme, made by the BBC's Radio Science Unit, which means academics know we're going to take their work seriously. Sometimes psychologists have told us they have a policy of saying no to interview requests, but have made an exception for *All in the Mind*.

Any particular challenges along the way?

AW: In terms of a challenge, it's probably managing our listeners' expectations – always getting the balance between claims made about a new breakthrough but then examining the reality of access to it and its impact. Also getting accurate representative first-person testimony within the field of mental health – that takes time and careful sensitivity. A lot of effort has to go into researching the right contributors and gaining their trust and confidence to come on and discuss particularly sensitive issues surrounding their condition.

Mental health diagnosis isn't always an exact science so we have to be extremely careful with contributors' use of general terms like *depression* and *psychosis*. No single person's testimony is fully representative, but we hope that elements of their stories are enough for people to be able to identify with.

What do you think your programme is best at?

AK: We really like to look at a question from lots of different angles, and always take a step further than the most obvious case study. I think what we are best at is asking a provocative and unexpected question, and then supporting it – or disputing it – with curious and unexpected evidence.

AW: Perhaps it's the wide range of topics that the programme is able to cover. Neurophysiology, for instance, seems to be going through a rich period producing results that translate into real potential to get at the heart of some current psychological conundrums and mental health conditions. I'm very proud that we create a programme that appeals to a general listener through a mix of items that can offer up surprise, can be extremely moving, and reflect both the current news agenda as well as issues in psychology and mental health which get covered nowhere else.

Any powerful moments from across the years?

CH: It's wonderful when people tell us they heard something in our programme that really spoke to them. Just this week a man emailed to say he lay on his bed and cried for his teenage years when he heard two teenage girls speaking about mind-wandering and ADHD. He said that suddenly everything he had experienced made sense. So we invited him to come into the studio to tell us about it.

AK: We have the benefit of having a really broad listenership, in terms of age and location, so when I hear directly from listeners that a subject has been revelatory to them, or the way we asked a question has provoked new thinking about our selves in the modern era, I am excited about the programme all over again.

Both *Digital Human* and *All in the Mind* return in April on BBC Radio 4, and hundreds of past episodes are available to download via their websites.



exhibition
Beyond My Brain
 London Brain Project

A novel fusion of art and science

The London Brain Project is a not-for-profit social enterprise founded by three developmental cognitive neuroscientists and an award-winning artist. They use art to promote awareness and conversation about neurological and mental health issues. *Beyond My Brain* is the third in the project's *Beyond* series. It's an exhibition of expressive pieces of art (large and small) created collaboratively by people with brain injury, their families and professionals, funded by the Arts Council England and NIHR Great Ormond Street Hospital Biomedical Research Centre.



We were delighted to the opening night and see the art first hand. It is a fun, user-friendly exhibition revolving around questions posed by children with brain injury such as 'What caused this?' and 'What does the future hold?'. On arrival, you are issued with a colourful map of the route around the small intimate gallery. We took a detour

because the gallery was bustling with people discussing art and neuroscience; a stimulating blend. The journey guides you first through information about brain injury, then into the art. Helpfully, 'big words' are spelled out phonetically and explained (e.g. hy-druh-sef-uh-luh-s). We learned new things, such as that Roald Dahl was one of the inventors of the modern shunt. Sadly, we also learned that 36 per cent of children with traumatic brain injury sustain it as pedestrians on the footpath.

Activities in the exhibition help people learn about language and executive problems. For example,

saying the alphabet backwards, and following a new route with steps missing. We walk under rollercoaster tracks twisting amongst an enormous string of red and white blood cells; a touching representation of the fragility of our nervous system. There is tear-jerking poetry, photographs and singing. We liked it all, especially a piece with layers of fabric symbolising layers of emotion, produced from discussion about when we reveal our deeper emotions. Much like a support group, the workshops appear to have been empowering, informative and energising. Other viewers explained how the art connected with them, on a visceral level, with the personal impact of neurological disability.

It reminded us, as clinical neuropsychologists, of the powerful use of group art; offering shared expression and a sense of belonging. The collaborative painting concept could potentially transfer into clinical settings. Metaphors found here could helpfully be shared with other injured families too. Themes of loss, growth, acceptance and identity emerged, as they also do in published research about family adjustment to TBI. The metaphor of 'learning to live on a houseboat' stays with me because it simply captures, without negativity, how much a family system is required to adapt to a new, more intimate, lifestyle.

The evening was completed by a superb theatrical performance, pictured above, by a group of talented drama students portraying the lived experience of brain injury. A production by OffTheWallCo tells the story of Grace, a young woman with encephalitis portrayed so authentically in the play, and her sister. In many years of working within the field, I have not seen or heard such an accurate portrayal of the family perspective in brain injury.

Overall, the London Brain Project exhibition presents a novel, unpretentious, fusion of art and science. The process of creation seems to be reciprocally therapeutic and informative for professionals and families.

Future projects include dementia (2017) and anxiety (2018): see www.londonbrainproject.com and #tracinggrace. Reviewed by Siobhan Palmer and Jo Johnson, St George's Healthcare NHS Trust

Reviewed by Jon Sutton, Managing Editor

music
Overview Effect
 Roger Goula

Universalise that human experience

The 'overview effect' is a cognitive shift in awareness reported by some astronauts during spaceflight, often when viewing the earth from orbit. The term, coined by Frank White in 1987, has inspired psychologists such as Nick Kanas (tinyurl.com/zcusemr). Composer and multi-instrumentalist Roger Goula's *Overview Effect* is a debut release on Cognitive Shift Recordings.

The album bridges modern classical and electronic music, with swelling strings offset by disquieting scratches and stabs of noise that evoke the eerie void of space. Titles such as 'Awe', 'Looking back to self awareness' and 'Something about silence' reflect the centrality of the psychological, and Goula tells me: 'Unconsciously I always relate my music to a psychological experience

by trying to universalise that human experience. Somehow it is like if both magnitudes, the universal and the inner human one, are so far away that they meet again at the other side of each end, and so, very close together.'

Goula also says that he initially wanted to focus the album on recordings of events that changed us as humans, and he came across one of Gagarin on his first trip around earth. Listen to his album alongside Public Service Broadcasting's *Race for Space*, which takes a similar approach, and you can see where Goula is coming from when he says 'the subjective human experience of the cosmos answers me many questions and of course, opens new ones.'



film
T2 Trainspotting
 Danny Boyle
 (Director)

Life after heroin

T2 Trainspotting has been one of the most anticipated sequels in the British film industry, not only because *Trainspotting* was considered a cult classic, but because we wonder: How can it continue? We last saw Mark Renton (Ewan McGregor) in 1996 betraying Spud (Ewan Bremner), Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller) and Begbie (Robert Carlyle), by escaping with £16,000 from a heroin deal. The message was clear. Mark was starting a new life, free from heroin and the destructive environment surrounding him and his unruly friends.

Refraining from trouble for 20 years, *T2* sees Mark returning to Edinburgh and rekindling old friendships with Sick Boy and Spud. Unfortunately for Mark, it seems that his path might also cross Begbie's, still raw from the 20-year-old betrayal. Mark quickly returns to his life of trickery and robbery – but this time without the heroin. It becomes obvious very quickly that old habits die hard.

T2 demonstrates that it was not just the heroin that was the problem, but addiction to danger and chaos. This summarises one of the many problems with drug addiction: it's not just abstaining from the drug, it's abstaining from the lifestyle. This culminates in a scene during which the men pay tribute to Tommy and baby Dawn, heroin-related deaths from *Trainspotting*. They are clearly traumatised by memories, and Mark and Sick Boy

try heroin once again. This is in stark contrast to Spud, who, after listening to Mark's advice, begins channelling his 'addiction' into something positive: writing.

In terms of cinematography and spirit, *T2* lives up to the original. Aided by the revamped yet quirky-as-ever soundtrack and integration of old footage, the film feels highly nostalgic. The characters remain their eccentric selves, and director Danny Boyle returns to the symbolic shots of sordid tower blocks, nightclubs and local pubs filled with the walking dead. He also balances humour and the whirlwind of events without distracting from the devastation of drug abuse.

For those working with addiction and mental health, *T2* provides insight into the dynamic world of addiction and recovery, adding a sinister and realistic dimension to life after heroin use. In terms of real-life impact, it rings as true as its predecessor in portraying drug use for what it really is: a penetrating yet reversible problem heavily influenced by one's environment. As Mark puts it: 'You are an addict. If you're going to be addicted, be addicted to something else... It's not getting it out of your body that's the problem, it's getting it out of your mind.'

Reviewed by Katie East, a PhD student at the National Addiction Centre, King's College London

Fright without solution

Time and again we hear vivid accounts of the trauma of those held captive in cultic situations. Once again, this week, I watched another of these: a poignant series of interviews with survivors of a tiny London-based cult led by Aravindan Balakrishnan supposedly devoted to the revolution and the unlikely scenario of eventual liberation by Mao's communist forces. Of the handful of women who were held captive by him in a flat in Brixton, two died and one was born and raised – for 30 years – in this impossible environment.

Although a moving programme, *The Cult Next Door*, like so many others, had little to offer in helping the viewer understand how such things can happen. Yet it is not beyond our understanding. These situations are extreme versions of the same dynamics that we know as Stockholm syndrome or that we see in cases of controlling domestic violence (as has been recently addressed by the 2015 law criminalising coercive control: see tinyurl.com/hnorr5a). This law is as good a place as any to start understanding this phenomenon, which consists of: 'a purposeful pattern of behaviour which takes place over time in order for one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another' (Home Office, 2015). This law limits criminalisation of this behaviour to that which occurs in an intimate or family relationship. However I argue that in any cult, the cult becomes the intimate or family relationship and that therefore this law should also apply to criminalising the extreme levels of control we see in these groups.

As noted in the programme, any normal family ties were broken – between those inside and outside the cult, and those within the cult. In particular, and most moving, Katie Morgan-Davies, who was born in it, was prevented from knowing that Balakrishnan and Sian Davies, another member, were her parents. As a baby she was not allowed to be cuddled, except by the leader. As one former captive said, 'Bonds were not encouraged with Katie.' And in



general there was, as in so many cults, an edict not to be attached to family.

Meanwhile Balakrishnan exerted complete control over every aspect of life and punished the women with beatings and threats, warning them against escape with dire curses of what would happen to them in the outside world.

In my own analysis, which I detail in my new book *Terror, Love and Brainwashing*, I draw on John Bowlby's attachment theory and Mary Main's extension of this, by using the lens of disorganised attachment to clarify the behaviours of the psychopathic leaders who create these oppressive systems and the effects on those within them.

Put simply, this states that a situation of 'fright without solution' is set up in these groups. All previous ties with family and friends are broken off, then the now-isolated follower is engulfed within the cult through a variety of means (endless meetings, prayers, work, chanting, meditation, study, etc.) and, finally, the cult leader creates a chronic sense of threat – of the outside world, an apocalyptic future, of potential punishment, of one's inner sin, failure or badness. Having removed all of a follower's previous 'safe havens' to whom they might turn when fearful, the cult leader presents themselves or the cult as proxy, as the only remaining safe haven.

But turning for comfort to the source of fear is maladaptive – it creates 'fright without solution' rather than calming the feelings

of fear. There are two effects from this. First is the tendency to remain seeking comfort from the fear-arousing figure (in the absence of any other) and thus bonding to that figure – what we can call a trauma or disorganised bond. Second, 'fright without solution' or chronic trauma can result in dissociation – a cognitive freeze state – regarding the frightening situation. This means the person literally cannot think about their condition.

These effects are powerful and disabling. It is critical for therapists and other professionals to learn about and to understand this in order to help victims. Without appropriate help the disorganised bond and the frozen cognitive state in regard to the group can last for many years even after leaving. It is a state of complex post-traumatic stress – also well-documented in Judith Herman's classic 1992 book *Trauma and Recovery*.

Programmes such as *The Cult Next Door* are valuable as case studies, but I continue to hope that future programmes add some analysis – without this we risk becoming voyeurs to terrible human suffering rather than increasing public awareness and knowledge in order to prevent future tragedies.

Reviewed by Dr Alexandra Stein (Birkbeck, University of London), whose new book is *Terror, Love and Brainwashing*. She is also author of and *Inside Out*, her 2002 *Memoir of Entering and Breaking Out of a Minneapolis Political Cult*.

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