

Workshop Title: Awe Lab 3.0

Keywords: Awe, Behaviour Change, Psychology, Mental Health

1. Workshop Organizers

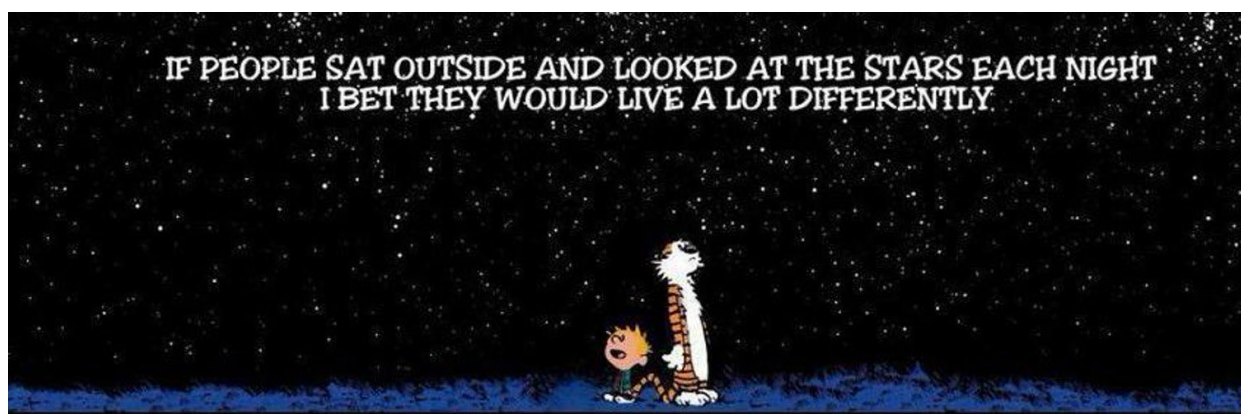
Organizer Name	Email	Affiliation
Eva Kukar (Lead and Contact)	eva.kukar@network.rca.ac.uk	Royal College of Art
Pod Bluman (Lead and Contact)	pod.bluman@network.rca.ac.uk	Royal College of Art
Laura Ferrarello	laura.ferrarello@rca.ac.uk	Royal College of Art

Abstract:

We believe that awe, i.e. *a response to things that are perceived as vast and overwhelming and that alter the way we understand the world*" (Keltner & Haidt 2003), is an incredibly powerful emotion and that its use as an agent of behaviour change is largely unrecognized.

How does experiencing awe affect behaviour? What opportunities for a new model of design for behaviour change lie at the heart of awe, wonder and transcendence? In this workshop, we will be exploring awe as an agent of behaviour change. We invite the DRS community to collectively explore what is known about the experience of awe and how it strengthens community relations, thus improving wellbeing and the emotional and empathic cohesion of people in society. As a participant, you will be looking at how we can harness the power of positive emotions and apply it to current and future social and environmental challenges through the lens of design. To further explore this potential, our group will share, gather data and subsequently map and visualize our experience of awe.

Our motivation draws from developing practical strategies that address the big challenges in society and our environment. In our research practice, we've identified awe as uniquely positioned in relation to collective wellbeing, mental health and behaviour change.



2. Context and Aim of Workshop

Awe is a complex and transformative emotion that can restructure individuals' mental frames so deeply that it could be considered a therapeutic asset for major mental health issues, including depression. It can lead as a strategy for behaviour change that supports better physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Similarly, we believe that awe can be a powerful tool and strategy to support reconceptualisations of sustainability and serve as an instrumental agent in our shift towards the ecocene. When people feel awe, their feelings of connectedness to nature increase, which in turn prompts the inclination of ecological behaviour. In recent years, we've seen the effects of climate change fatigue in people's response to the mounting challenges and threats that face our environment. In light of this, new education and engagement strategies are required to propel this shift in mentality and behaviour.

The specific context we are interested in investigating the power of awe as an agent for behaviour change - is the deep sea biosystem. We are investigating awe in this context for the significant role it plays in generating prosocial behaviour. Prosocial behaviours are actions that individuals engage in to benefit others or the collective. As convivial and social creatures, we need to cooperate with one another to better adapt to the environment and address unpredictable changes.

With respect to physical and mental health and wellbeing, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that experiences of awe don't just make people feel wonder and amazement. People also tend to feel a cascade of other positive emotions such as joy and gratitude, which are linked to greater health and well-being.

This workshop explores both our own and the participant's relationship with the experience of awe. Participants will develop awareness of the potential that awe has as an agent of behavioural change. Namely, awe helps situate individuals within broader social contexts and enhance collective concern. The experience of awe is accompanied by a decline in self-importance and makes people pay more attention to their role in society. The collective experience of awe will benefit the whole group, considering it makes people feel that they belong to a community and motivates them to engage in behaviors that benefit others, thus promoting prosocial behaviors and creating a sense of 'universality' or 'unity'.

This will be mediated through reflections on their personal experiences of awe, such as seeing a beautiful landscape, witnessing a thunderstorm, watching a dance piece or listening to the crescendo of a moving piece of music. The collective recollection of these experiences is awe-inspiring in and of itself, and could inspire the rest of the participants.

We have run two Awe Labs at the Royal College of Art in London, one was part of AcrossRCA, an annual event during which normal teaching is suspended for the week and all students, staff and alumni at RCA take part in a series of elective, interdisciplinary, collaborative projects that explore new ideas, approaches and skills. Over 900 students and alumni participate from more than 15 disciplines.

Here at the DRS we would like to engage the diverse, global design research community in stimulating discussions and activities surrounding the experience of awe and behaviour change.



Image Legend

Far Left: Awe Lab 1.0 Poster
Image Source: The View Collage, Maya Land

Bottom Left: Awe Lab 1.0 @ RCA - Experiment #1
Image Source: unknown

Bottom Center: Awe Lab 1.0 @ RCA - Experiment #2
Image Source: Cephalopod Atlas, Carl Chun

Bottom Right: Awe Lab 1.0 @ RCA - Experiment #3
Image Source: Sea Angel, Alexander Semenov



credits: Eva Kukar and Pod Bluman

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

The primary objective of our proposed workshop at DRS22 is to use awe as an agent of behaviour change by captivating the imagination of our participants through storytelling, participation and reflection. Participants will be exposed to the beauty, vulnerability and threats facing the deep sea through the lens of awe and wonder, thereby fostering a sense of custodianship towards the deep sea, and by extension, our natural environment.

In addition to this, we aim to create a memorable participatory experience that invites the participants to engage with their own understanding and experience of awe. By strategically exposing participants to awe-inspiring content and setting, we plan to create a memorable, heightened sense of humility, gratitude and community.

In detail the workshop will be divided in the following activities:

Timetable:

In this workshop we are looking for an input rather than an output

Our desire is for all of our participants to leave the workshop with a deeper understanding of awe and the power of awe. During our research we often talk with people about experiences that they have had in their lives that they have found awe inspiring. Both during and after doing so, there is a tangible change in their mood and interaction with us. They have clearly benefited from repeating and reliving the experience.

1 Day

Hybrid format (30 in-person, 30 online)

1 x 3 hour session (including a 15 min break)

10am-1pm (180 mins)

Title: Introduction to Awe

Description: We will be exploring the phenomena of Awe, by looking at what awe is and how it affects humans' psychology and behaviour. This will include sharing some Awe inspiring media and stories told by the academic and the industry community

Aim: To understand the power of Awe and to start thinking about personal experiences in relation to the stories and media shared

Outcome: Personal reflection on awe

1 hr lunch break + Networking

1 x 2.5 hour session (including a 15 min break)

2pm - 4.30pm (150 mins - including final sharing session)

Title: Awe Lab

Description: You will be encouraged to think about experiences that you have had in your life that have inspired awe. Starting with some simple word association and sharing of ideas and feelings, you will develop some form of creative expression to express the feeling of awe that they experienced. It may be a story or some poetry or something more experiment such as movement or dance

Aim: To develop connection with your experience of awe and to help hold on to them and keep close in your psyche.

Outcome: A sharing session where any participant will have the opportunity to share their creative output with the rest of the audience. In addition we will also be creating an environment in Spatial (<https://spatial.io/>) to document these experiences and the session as a record of the event.

4. Intended Audience

We very welcome a diverse audience. We feel that our workshop will be suitable for a very broad audience to include psychologists, phd researchers, transdisciplinary design professionals, service designers, user experience designers and design research professionals. We feel that our workshop is of particular interest to groups or communities with either neurodiversity and physical diversities or both.

5. Space and Equipment Required

We would like an informal environment for in-person participants

Bean bags, or casual seating

Large whiteboard

Microphones x3 (countryman) + small speaker system

Appropriate size presentation system for the audience

Atmospheric Lighting

We would be very happy for the session to take place in a community space surrounding the conference venue

6. Potential Outputs

We are hoping for 3 other outputs:

1. A 5D visual(Space(3), Time(1), Emotion(1)) awe map that will be hosted in the spatial.io community, that will have a representation of all the awe experiences that have been related in the workshop
2. A short online survey the participants will all complete after the session which will give us some qualitative data on the experience - the survey will be anonymous
3. The 5D awe map will be a unique manifestation of s community generated representation of their emotional landscape and response to the workshop.

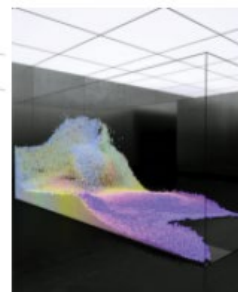
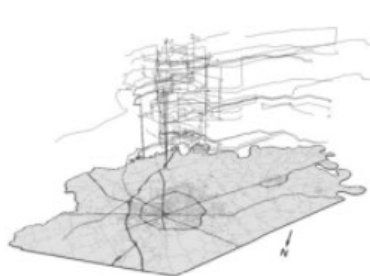


Image Sources:

Left: Cube of Space, Paul Foster Case

Center: Space-time paths based on GPS data collected in Lexington, Kentucky. From Kwan, M.-P. and Lee, J.

Right: Maxim Zhestkov, Impulse 4.0

7. References

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About the Organizers:

Organiser 1 - Eva Kukar

Royal College of Art, United Kingdom eva.kukar@network.rca.ac.uk

Eva Kukar is a multi-disciplinary designer working at the intersection of design, architecture and branding. Coming from a background in architectural design and philosophy, she is interested in approaching design practice through the lens of the social sciences. Outside of the RCA, her experience with running workshops has been largely within her professional practice.

Organiser 2 - Pod Bluman

Royal College of Art, United Kingdom pod.bluman@network.rca.ac.uk

Pod Bluman is a creative technologist and experience designer who's professional practice is the field of live events and interactive and immersive environments. He has over 25 years of experience in this field. Whilst his experience of running workshops is limited, he has many transferable qualities such as presentation and collaboration skills which he feels will be highly applicable.

Organiser 3 - Laura Ferrarello

Royal College of Art, United Kingdom laura.ferrarello@rca.ac.uk

Laura Ferrarello (PhD) is Senior Tutor and Pathway Leader of the MRes Design Pathway. She is an interdisciplinary researcher and designer focusing on developing inclusive/accessible innovation through design-led collaborative and interdisciplinary methodologies. Laura's research includes ethics, human-human-AI interactions, design for resilience and cultural transformations, future of work and education and design for safety.