Chaotic Human Simulations

- A STEAM Lab by Artist Mike McShane

"It felt like really good therapy!"

What's a STEAM Lab?

STEAM Labs are highly experimental, collaborative workshops where participants have the opportunity to experiment with processes that impel them to think about the development of projects, products and services in completely new ways.

Each STEAM Lab is different but each one is underpinned by five guiding principles: conversation, exploration, collaboration, openness, and newness.

What was this STEAM Lab about?

On the 28th March, STEAMhouse welcomed 15 participants to explored the intersection of technology, art, and science through the use of human simulation technology. During the STEAM lab, the transfer of information was explored as a creative act, with a focus on how chain reactions fed into each other and were transitioned through various methods, materials, and challenges. The activities provided an opportunity to consider whether mistakes in communication were analogous to the errors that occur in genetic code during reproduction, and how this could drive the evolution of the creative process.

Who's Mike McShane

Mike McShane is an artist and educator based in Birmingham. He works at the intersection of art, technology, and linguistics, exploring the limitations of communication through the use of flawed systems and machines.

McShane's art includes sound installations, sculpture, and performance, often involving interactive or participatory elements. He has exhibited his work in galleries and museums

across the UK and internationally and has also worked on public art commissions. McShane is also a lecturer and tutor, having taught at a number of institutions including the Royal College of Art, London and Birmingham City University

What happened?

To develop the physical creations the group embarked on a iterative communication exercise where our simple statement drawings where deciphered and developed by passing the evolving booklet of communication round the table, seeing it evolve and change without our control or verbal input. At the end of the exercise individuals where then tasked with creating a physical manifestation of our original statement, which at this point had evolved and changed beyond comparison due to the group's Chinese whispers style evolution.

The group took our new creation and turned it into physical models, bringing them to life with movement and vibration. These 3D neon wonders that lit up the room with their bright and vibrant colours.

At the end of the session, the attendees gathered around a large brain-shaped table to display their creations. As the models were placed on the table, they came together forming a collective and spatialized neural network of moving parts, ideas and communication brought into physical form. The models danced and swayed in unison, creating a mesmerizing visual display that left a lasting impression on everyone in the room.

Overall, the event was a testament to the power of creativity and collaboration, as the attendees came together to create a collaborative piece of collective artwork. Through their use of technology and innovative thinking, they were able to turn their conversations into a tangible and visually stunning experience.

What did people think?

During the STEAM lab, participants explored how sharing information creatively can lead to exciting outcomes. They successfully discovered how mistakes in communication can inspire new ideas, just like genetic code errors drive evolution. Participants enjoyed how the session was, "entertaining and got people talking". Participants felt Mike should be commended for his meticulous "planning and preparation, and 100% of those who provided feedback felt they were very likely (50%) or likely (50%) to apply what they had learnt in their own work.

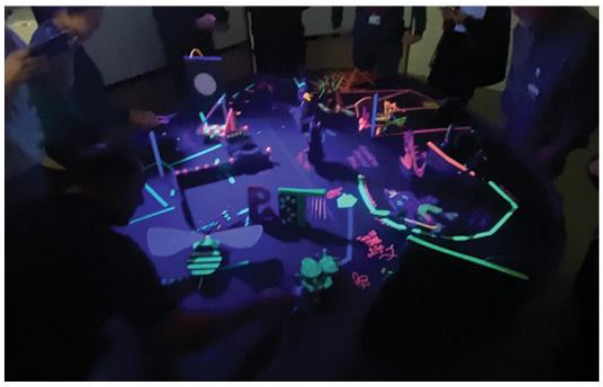
"Really good workshop, really fun. Can't wait to come back to STEAMhouse"

What might be applied to future STEAM activities?

This STEAM Lab compelled members to explore the creative potential of iterative communication exercises in conjunction with making as a means of open communication. By engaging in activities where ideas evolve and change without direct control, participants explored the transformative power of collaboration and communication without a pre-determined outcome or structure.

Mike gave participants the power to translate their evolving concepts into physical manifestations, allowing a deeper exploration of how to communicate ideas however conceptual in a physical form.

Moreover, this collaborative approach fostered a sense of collective creativity and encouraged participants to think innovatively while integrating rapid making methods. The resulting visual displays and spatialized networks of ideas showcase the potential for STEAM activities to merge art, technology, and collaborative thinking, leaving a lasting impression on participants and inspiring future endeavours.



How to get involved with future STEAM Labs.

As a participant:
Join the STEAMhouse mailing list and keep an eye on our channels (LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter & Facebook) for information on upcoming STEAM Labs.

As a Lab Lead:
Anybody can propose or lead a STEAM Lab. All you need is a project, idea or process that provides a space to play, experiment, and collaborate with new people. If you are interested in inspiring conversation about what it means to collaborate across disciplines and support us in developing new STEAM approaches, then get in touch.

With thanks..

Thank you to Mike for bringing his energy and guiding the group, celebrating their ideas and building their confidence. We're excited to see what happens next!