

UCC Doctoral Showcase, May 2015



In May 2015, I was awarded first prize in ‘The Creative Mind’ category for my presentation in the UCC Doctoral Showcase held in the UCC Aula Maxima. In this category, I was given five minutes to demonstrate my research through performance. The nature of this category presented both a challenge and an opportunity for me, since *performing* mentalism is, generally speaking, more engaging than *talking about performing* mentalism. Yet, because this was an official academic event, and I was adjudicated by local VIPs and faculty members including the Dean of Graduate Studies, I was acutely aware of the ethical challenges surrounding the use of deception. Likewise, the audience consisted largely of faculty and post-graduate students who would have naturally presumed that my performance could be taken at face value.

This five-minute performance was framed as a TED Talk* style lecture on the importance of recognizing and appreciating the ‘deeper levels of connection and communication.’ I began by asking the question, ‘Do we think like we think we do?’ After several participatory psychological group exercises, I performed two demonstrations which were accomplished with the use of covert artifice. I began the second part of my performance with the question, ‘How much do we know without realizing that we know it?’ I concluded with a statement which I hold to be true, despite the duplicitous nature of the “demonstrations” with which I purported to demonstrate it: ‘Curiosity leads to awareness, and awareness leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to understanding.

* TED Talk conferences gather together experts in their field to give mini lectures, and many of these talks have gone “viral” on the internet.

And a deeper understanding of the subtleties of our interactions will lead to better connections and communications.’

This *performance disguised as a lecture* was my first public performance of a *dark TED Talk*, a concept to which I would return numerous times. The dark TED approach exploits the public’s familiarity with the TED Talk formula in an attempt to legitimize or authenticate a performance of mentalism in an academic context. I have explored the use of clothing in non-performances such as TED Talks in ‘Banishing the Spirits.’* I have further explored the ethics pertaining to the use of deception and pseudo-scientific strategies within performance and paraperformance within the Introduction.*

* See: ‘Clothing and “Crossing” in Paraperformance.’ pp. 119-129.

* See: ‘The Ethics of Mentalism.’ pp. 58-73.