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news release

Attention: News editors and science correspondents

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IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY, AND THE HUMAN MIND

How much does imagination shape the people we are and the cultures we create?

Imaginative Minds – a British Academy interdisciplinary symposium organised by Open University senior lecturer Ilona Roth – will examine this question, among others, in an exploration of human imagination.

Dr Roth said she approached the British Academy with the idea of the symposium because she felt imagination had been somewhat neglected within psychology – her own field – and she wanted to rectify that.

“The study of human imagination is only beginning to gain a foothold in psychology,” she said.

“However if you consider the implications of a world without imagination, you would wonder why. It is not just that there would be no art, no music, no literature and no inventions. It is probable that everyday activities such as planning for the future and engaging with other people would not be possible either.

“You could say that imagination defines what it is to be human, which is why it is so interesting to those who study the evolution of modern humans. It is imperative that we discover all we can about our imaginations, so that we can utilise and nurture the tool that colours and shapes our world,” says Dr Roth.

Clearly, Dr Roth is not alone in her desire to see this area brought to the forefront of the mind, as evident in the speed with which the symposium sold out, with an overflow room added to accommodate demand.

Professor Uta Frith, British Academy Fellow said: “We were delighted when approached to host this symposium, which spans the wide range of scholarship represented among its fellows.”

During the symposium, respected speakers from the worlds of psychology, anthropology, philosophy, archaeology and musicology will present their views on a range of topics – including the connection between creativity and madness, the scope of imagination in great ape behaviour, and the evolutionary process of our imaginative minds.

Among the speakers is former Open University lecturer Dr Daniel Nettle, who will speak on the possible link between creativity and psychopathology.

“So many of the world’s geniuses are perceived as being a little mad – from Leonardo to Vincent Van Gogh. In order to determine if there is a connection between creativity and psychopathy I have examined the cognitive processes involved in delusion and hallucination and the creative process. I have found they share several features,” said Dr Nettle.

The implications of these findings for the evolution of the human mind form a further theme of his discussion.

Other speakers include: Ian Cross, Reader in Music & Science, University of Cambridge, who will speak on *Music, Science and Culture*; Mark Turner, Professor of English and Cognitive Science, Case Western Reserve University who will speak on *The Origin of Human Creativity*; and Steve Mithen, Professor of Early Prehistory, University of Reading, who will speak on the *Evolution of the Human Imagination*.

Imaginative Minds: An Interdisciplinary Symposium takes place at the British Academy in London on 30 April and 1 May 2004.

EDITOR’S NOTES

For more information about current work on imaginative minds log on to

www.britac.ac.uk/events/imagination

For more information on psychology courses at the Open University log on to

www3.open.ac.uk/courses and click on the psychology section.

To participate in on-line studies of imagination log on to:

<http://elsa.open.ac.uk/creativity.survey> and <http://elsa.open.ac.uk/survey.asp?id=AA4A17>

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