



Gabriella Angotti-Jones / The Chronicle

Musician and artist David Byrne sits in the “Being Barbie” room, part of “The Institute Presents: Neurosociety.”

Byrne's experiment meshes art, science

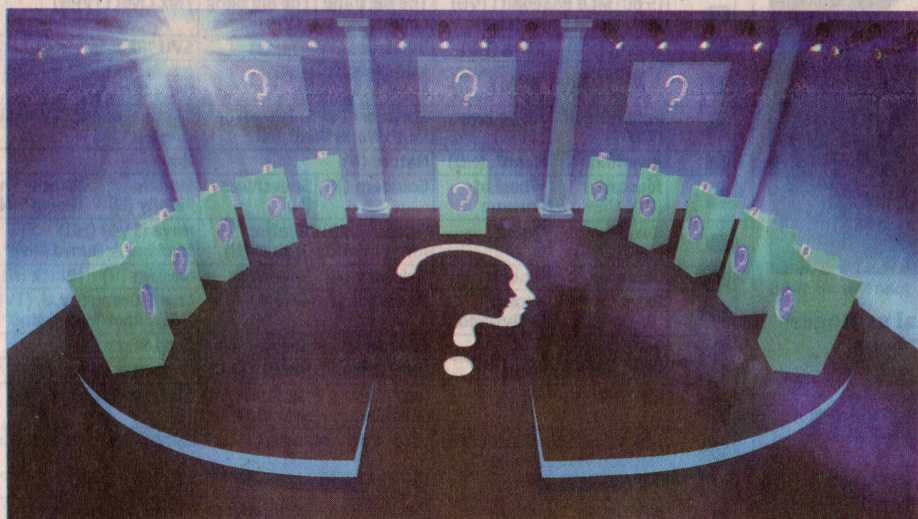
Immersive installation makes viewers the subject in a fun way

By Charles Desmarais

David Byrne is carefully answering a question about how various pursuits — art, writing, photography, film, theater and, of course, music — feed his life and support each other. He is seated in a faux study hall — a hyper-real version of a 1950s homeroom painted in hues of mint and cream, complete with a world globe on the teacher's desk and black chalkboards all around.

“Wow, it's a confusing life,” he says. “I'm obviously proud of the work I did with Talking Heads. I wanted to be able to go do things like this as well, which luckily I have been able to do.”

“This” is one of four environments that make up the sets for “The Institute Presents: Neurosociety,” an *Byrne continues on E2*



Artist's rendering by Kenny Komer

Each of the four environments in the show at Pace Art + Technology is the backdrop for scripted interactions that mimic psychology experiments.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

An experiment in art, science

Byrne from page E1

immersive work at Pace Art + Technology in Menlo Park that draws on Byrne's varied interests, particularly theater. Actors won't perform onstage, but will lead the audience through interactions in facsimiles of a heavenly all-white lounge, the aforementioned classroom, a room that feels like a local history museum, and — the grand finale — a TV game show studio.

The work, which he conceived with British technology investor Mala Gaonkar, publicly introduces yet another passion of Byrne's: science. "When I was a teenager, I applied to Carnegie Mellon," he says. "I wanted to do art and science, and they said, 'No, we don't do that. We won't let you do both.'... (But) to me, I didn't see a huge difference in terms of the creativity."

"The Institute Presents" is based on the research of 15 cognitive neuroscience labs at major universities around the world. Gaonkar and Byrne "would both read papers, books, whatever," Byrne says, "and then talk with one another and go, 'Oh, here's a good one. What do you think about (what) this lab did? Would that work translate into this project?' We just went

with the audience moving around to platforms above the dance floor. It went to the National Theater in London, which is where Gaonkar and Byrne met.

For "The Institute Presents," Byrne worked with his small New York studio team of assistants. They later enlisted a set designer and builders through Berkeley Repertory Theatre and American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.

"I've done theatrical projects and music tours and things like that," Byrne said. "The idea was, do it so that people can experience it. We pretty early on realized, OK, it's going to have to be small groups of people that go through."

"So in a certain sense it's already got something in common with a lot of immersive theater. And I think it might have been me who said, 'I think each experiment has its parallel in the real world, or outside of the science world.'"

It's all very colorful and a bit arch. But there's clearly a serious side to experiments that ask us to make political judgments based only on photographs, or require us to make ethical choices with limited information.

There is an aspect "that's meant to bring in a sense of fun and maybe a little humor," he allows. "It sends a signal to people that this is going to be fun. We're not getting a lesson taught here. ...

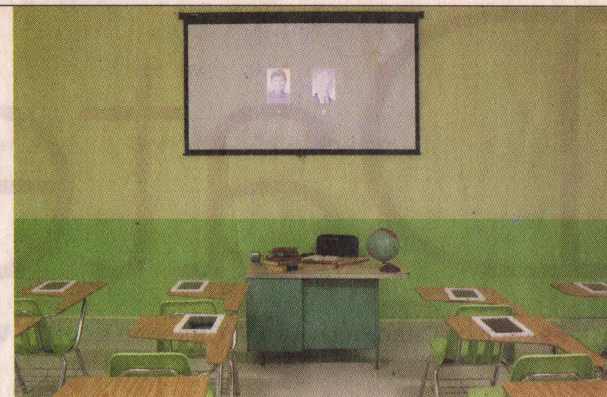
"I shy away from that, because it seems like that's a preachy, didactic

kind of thing. Although there is a level of that here, I keep pulling away from it. Part of the problem-solving on our end is not just how to make it work for 10 people at a time, but how people will intuitively start to process the things that happen, think about how they might apply to their lives, without being told, 'Now we're going to explain to you what happened and what it means.'

"Of course they want to know some explanation. They want to know why you see your hand get giant in the dark. How can you so easily be in the body of a doll? But beyond that, we're wary of connecting too many dots. It's more fun when they start to connect them themselves and see what they come up with."

"I'm a little skeptical about making political statements in pop songs, Bob Dylan notwithstanding," he says. "If it's really about a specific issue, you're trying to make a point, you're trying to convince people, sometimes that's better done as an op-ed page or an essay, and that's the format it should take. ... If you do it as a song, it can come across as kind of preachy, and it's not very good. Or I've tried other things where you do it in an ironic way, and sometimes it can subvert itself, and you end up with Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the USA,' where people think it's a patriotic anthem."

Trying to understand our emotional and moral actions — or, more to the point, our reactions — in



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Act 2 of "The Institute Presents: Neurosociety" teaches guests about Alexander Todrov's research.

scientific terms smacks of determinism. Is there a place for free will?

"It's a great thing to bring up," Byrne says, "but we couldn't find a good experiment that would work with a lot of people, and (that) people would intuitively get what it was about without being told ... Oh, boy. It does seem like a lot of our decisions and our behavior is, maybe not deterministic, but determined by our unconscious."

"The good news is that,

from what I can tell, it's not absolutely fixed. Our biases have changed. Our reaction to women having a vote, or slavery, or all of these things, you name it, have changed completely in the space of, whatever, 100 years or less. ... We're not doing lessons, but that's what I'm getting."

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Crossword Puzzle

GAD	LILAC	CHAOS
EVE	OCELO	NERVY
WET	CHICKEN	FEED
GRAPH	AIL	TAR
ASIA	CINEMA	CUP
WELL	RUN	OPPOSE
	EUREKA	ALDER
SMALL	POTATOES	
STALE	TRIPOD	
LAKERS	LOWDOWN	
ORE	SPLITS	ERTIE
SST	EON	EDGES
CHUMP	CHANGE	ANT
TIRED	ANNUL	NEE
SPENT	NEWTS	SRA

Today's Crossword

BEET	SPAN	PANDA
OLLA	TRUE	INUIT
WHIP	RUGS	NAIVE
LIAISON	TIGHTEN	
	OWLET	NEE
LOWCAL	RUDDIEST	
APIAN	YOGI	MEIR
TIN	SHELLAC	RTIE
ENCL	ONLY	UMIAK
REHEARSE	OSIERS	
	BID	YACHT
PARADED	SCYTHES	
IRANI	OAHU	EARL
CANON	CBER	NINA
SLING	KENS	SLEW

Sudoku Puzzle

5	9	3	6	1	8	2	4	7
4	2	8	5	7	9	1	3	6
1	6	7	2	4	3	9	5	8
7	8	9	3	6	2	5	1	4
2	1	6	9	5	4	8	7	3
3	5	4	7	8	1	6	9	2
6	7	1	4	2	5	3	8	9
9	4	5	8	3	6	7	2	1
8	3	2	1	9	7	4	6	5

Challenger

8	9	3	5	25
9	8	8	8	33
8	8	8	9	33
7	7	8	7	29
32	32	27	29	31

Chess

1. f7ch! Kxf7
2. Bxe5ch!
gets a whole
rook

PUZZLE
ANSWERS