

SPOTTED

Spotted: Memory map; postdoc pileup

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10 APRIL 2015

WEEK OF APRIL 6TH

Memory map

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A **map of the world** that an 11-year-old boy with autism reportedly drew from memory went viral this week. The map highlights the **artistic abilities** that often accompany autism, as well as the rare but remarkable skill of some people on the spectrum to recall detailed scenes. **Stephen Wiltshire**, a 40-year-old artist with autism, made similar headlines in 2009 after drawing an 18-foot panorama of the New York City skyline based on a 20-minute helicopter ride over Manhattan.

Postdoc pileup

There are **more postdoctoral fellows in science** than ever and a shrinking number of faculty positions, according to an article published 7 April in *Nature*. This gap has left many **ambitious trainees** jumping from postdoc to postdoc, earning an annual \$50,000 for years filled with evening and weekend work. "We made postdocs so cheap that principal investigators had lots of incentives to hire them," **Paula Stephan**, an economist at Georgia State University in Atlanta, told *Nature*. The article outlines some possible solutions to the problem, such as hiring fewer postdocs or paying them more.

Broadway adaptation

More and more theaters are offering **autism-friendly performances** — reducing sensory stimulation, for example, and providing information about the show ahead of time. An article in *The Atlantic* this week describes the **Autism Theater Initiative**, which partners with Broadway theaters to tone down the lights and sounds of Broadway favorites, such as *The Lion King* and *Matilda*. “*Matilda* is a story of a child who sees the world differently, and it was absolutely important for us to tell the story to kids who also see the world differently,” Broadway actress Lesli Margherita told the magazine. Last month, the roughly 1,500 tickets for an autism-friendly performance of *Aladdin* sold out in 5 minutes.

Noisy brain

Some people with autism have **‘noisy’ brains**, with unusually high activity in some areas and low activity in others. A study published 8 April in the *Journal of Neuroscience* **links this idiosyncrasy to social deficits** — a core feature of autism. Specifically, people with autism who have large disparities in brain activity in different areas tend to have difficulty understanding the social motivations of others. The findings highlight the heterogeneity within a diagnosis of autism.

Personal touch

A short film about the **Wendy Klag Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities** at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore shows the **personal side of autism research**. It features Sarah Klag, a young woman with autism. She is the daughter of Michael Klag, dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and Wendy Klag, who died from a seizure disorder in 2006. “When Sarah was diagnosed 18 years ago, we didn’t really understand a lot about autism,” Michael Klag says in the film. He created the center two years ago to help people like his daughter and memorialize his wife.
