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- Wednesday, January 6, 1999
Multimodal Prior Entry

It has been claimed that modern day western psychology was born In 1796 when Nevel Maskelyne, the astronomer Royal at the Greenwich observatory fired his assistant, David Kinnebrook (Boring, 1950; James, 1890; Mollon Perkins, 1996). It was claimed that Mr. Kinnebrook was dismissed because his application of the eye-to-ear method of observation was faulty. This method involved comparing the visual position of a star with a continuously presented auditory ticking. In later examining this incident, several psychologists (Wundt, Titchner von Tchisch and James) and another astronomer (Bessel, 1922) noted that the observed discrepancy (800 ms) could have been caused by a differential preference to attend to one modality or the other. This became known as the prior entry hypothesis and was stated as one of Titchner's seven laws of attention. This presentation will examine several confounds found in all previous research on this question and present a novel methodology which overcomes these difficulties. These experiments provide a clear answer to whether attending to a particular modality (or location in space) can speed the perception of stimuli.

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