

From: John Brockman <[REDACTED]>

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Subject: The Second Brockman Conference - An Invitation

Date: Thu, 02 Aug 2018 16:00:33 +0000

Attachments: PossibleMinds_1stPass.pdf

HERE'S THE MOST RECENT UPDATE BELOW. RESPONSE IS BEST EVER - EVERYBODY WANTS IN.
AT THE FARM [REDACTED] OR MOBILE [REDACTED].

[Eastover Farm](#)

325 Guilds Hollow Road, RR 132
Bethlehem, CT 06751

[REDACTED]
[Map](#)

Dear XXX,

In September, 2016, I organized a meeting at a resort in Washington, CT, the purpose of which was to make sense out of what's happening in AI. The result is the forthcoming collection titled POSSIBLE MINDS: 25 WAYS OF LOOKING AT AI, scheduled for publication by Penguin Press on February, 19th.

I am writing to invite you to the second "Brockman Conference" which will be held at Winvian Farm (winvian.com) in Morris, CT September 7th-9th.

The participants in the book are Chris Anderson, Rodney Brooks, George M. Church, Daniel C. Dennett, David Deutsch, Anca Dragan, George Dyson, Peter Galison, Neil Gershenfeld, Alison Gopnik, Tom Griffiths, Danny Hillis, Caroline A. Jones, David Kaiser, Seth Lloyd, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Judea Pearl, Sandy Pentland, Steven Pinker, Venki Ramakrishnan, Stuart Russell, Jaan Tallin, Max Tegmark, Frank Wilczek, and Stephen Wolfram.

Stewart Brand, in his jacket blurb, nicely frames the project: "Intelligences born and intelligences made have a lot to offer each other. For that beneficial blend to occur, the contextual framing that the voices in this book spell out will be crucial."

Here is a pdf of the 1st pass galleys of the book (confidential please until publication date).

WHEN

5pm Friday, September 7th — Sunday noon, September 9th

WHERE

At the beautiful high-end resort, Winvian Farm (winvian.com), a 5-star Relais & Chateaux resort hotel in Morris, CT, six miles from Eastover Farm. Even though I've been there for dinner numerous times, I had no idea what a unique place it is. Their accommodations consist of cottages, each with a unique theme and architectural design. For example, one is an actual interior of a Sikorsky helicopter; another is a treehouse, with ladder, etc.

(See <https://www.winvian.com/cottages/>) We have a block of rooms at Winvian and also at the nearby Lichtfield Inn reserved for Friday and Saturday nights. We will pick up transportation and room costs.

RSVP

Apologies for the tight deadline, but the hotel has a very appealing conference space can accommodate a maximum of 22 people. In order to secure the space and blocks of rooms, I need responses from participants by the end of this week.

AGENDA

(IMPORTANT NOTE: The entire event will be videotaped and in this regard there are 22 seats at the conference table for the speaker-participants only. Chairs will be available on the side, off camera, for observers, significant others, etc.)

The agenda of the Second Brockman Conference is to explore a plan to update the highly influential Macy Conferences of the 1940s and 1950s.

It's interesting to note that we periodically find ourselves in a situation in which empirical developments in science run into an epistemological wall, and we have to step back and rethink the framework we have constructed to make sense of the world and our place in it. Consider the developments during the 1930s-1940s: Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems (1931); Turing's "On Computable Numbers, With An Application To The Entscheidungsproblem" (1936); Bateson's theory of "Schismogenesis" in Naven (1936); Rosenblueth, Wiener & Bigelow's "Behavior, Purpose and Teleology" (1943); McCulloch & Pitts's "A Logical Calculus of the Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity" (1943); von Neumann's book Theory of Games and Economic Behavior (with Oskar Morgenstern) 1944; Shannon's "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" (1948); Wiener's Cybernetics (1948).

A result of this dazzling array of new ideas was the creation of The Macy Conferences of the 1940s and 1950s. The original participants wanted to create a new social science for their time and, in so doing, asked people in various disciplines to talk and interact with each other. Participants included a who's who of cutting edge scientific intellectuals: H. Ross Ashby, Gregory Bateson, Julian H. Bigelow, Warren McCulloch, Margaret Mead, F.S.C. Northrop, Walter Pitts, Arturo Rosentbleuth, John Von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Heinz Von Foerster, W. Grey Walter, Norbert Wiener, and J.Z. Young.

McCulloch, as Chairman, presided over the sessions and decided who to invite and what they should talk about. von Foerster, as Secretary, was the driving force of the project. It was McCulloch who insisted over Norbert Wiener's objections that "mind" be introduced into the mix, and for this, he recruited Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. The disciplines represented over the decade ranged across economics, electrical engineering, biology, chemistry, medical research, neuroscience, philosophers, physics, physiology, psychiatry, and zoology.

The ambition for their agenda seems remarkable but not when you consider it in the context of WWII and the post-Cold War and nuclear threat. Interestingly, although people look at cybernetics as a necessary defense effort, the people involved were almost all deeply humanistic while at the same time being erudite and leaders in their respective scientific disciplines. (For examples of the interdisciplinary aspect of the Macy Conference, see selected title of talks below.)

Also, have a look at the pdf at the link below of a small portion of the mammoth 770-page book on proceedings of the Macy Conferences (which actually includes only half of the conferences) which includes the Introduction to the book, the participants page for each of the Conferences covered, and the Introductory Discussion of the

1949 Conference. Click [here](#) to read on a computer or tablet screen (5MB); click [here](#) for hi-def version to print (25MB).

WHO

In addition to the essayists in POSSIBLE MINDS, I have invited a few additional extraordinary thinkers: Danny Kahneman (thinking), Robert Axelrod (game theory), David Chalmers (philosophy), and Demis Hassibis (computation), the first three of which to date have agreed to attend and to chair a session on their topics.

NOTE: There are 22-seats at the conference table and I am holding the last one for you, as well as a cottage at Winvian, but, again, I need a response by the end of this week.

CONFIRMED PARTICIPANTS

[John Brockman](#)

[Katinka Matson](#)

[Robert Axelrod](#)

[Rodney Brooks](#)

[David Chalmers](#)

[George Church](#)

[Freeman Dyson](#)

[George Dyson](#)

[Peter Galison](#)

[Neil Gershenfeld](#)

[Alison Gopnik](#)

[Tom Griffiths](#)

[W. Daniel Hillis](#)

[Jennifer Jacquet](#)

[Daniel Kahneman](#)

[Caroline Jones](#)

[Seth Lloyd](#)

[Sandy Pentland](#)

[Frank Wilczek](#)

[Stephen Wolfram](#)

INVITED

[Demis Hassibis](#) (possible)

[Ian McEwan](#)

I am very excited about this project and your participation is important. Join us!!

Best,

JB

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John Brockman

mobile

SELECTED MACY CONFERENCE TALKS

The Psychological Moment in Perception
John Stroud

The Neurotic Potential and Human Adaptation
Lawrence S. Kubie

Quantum Mechanical Theory of Memory
Heinz von Foerster

Quantum Mechanical Theory of Memory
Heinz von Foerster

Sensory Protheseses
Norbert Wiener

The Manner in Which and Extent to Which Speech
Can Be Distorted and Remain Intelligible
L.C.R.Licklider

The Redundancy of English
Claude E. Shannon

Experience in Learning Primitive Languages Through the
Use of Learning High Level Linguistic Abstractions
Margaret Mead

On the Development of Word Meanings
Heinz Werner

The Development of Language in Early Childhood
John Stroud

Body Symbolization and Development of Language
Lawrence S. Kubie

Communication Patters in Problem-Solving Groups
Alex Bavelas

Communication Between Sane and Insane: Hypnosls
Lawrence S. Kubie

Communication Between Animals
Herbert C. Birch

Presentation of a Maze-Solving Machine
Claude Shannon

In Search of Basic Symbols
Donald M. MacKay

The Position of Humor in Human Communication

Gregory Bateson

The Place of Emotions in the Feedback Concept

Lawrence S. Kubie

Homeostasis

W. Ross Ashby

Discrimination and Learning in Octopus

J. Z. Young

Mechanical Chess Player

W. Ross Ashby

Investigations on Synaptic Transmission

Walter Pitts

Studies on Activity of the Brain

W. Grey-Walter