SIG/AH Program
for the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Information Science

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SIG/AH AND SIG/BSS-MIDWIFING THE "WORLD BRAIN"

Moderator: June Andel
The Information Connection

It is fifty years since the publication of H. G. Wells' collection of essays urging the development of a universal encyclopedia as an instrument of world peace. On this shared 50th Anniversary, five distinguished panelists, including ASIS Award of Merit Winners Manfred Kochen and Eugene Garfield, reflect on the significance of Wells' dream to their professional endeavors, reviewing ways they have contributed to the dream, and projecting future prospects for its attainment.

Dr. Goodman defines the "World Brain/World Encyclopedia" concept, traces its historical roots, and describes early attempts at implementation. He follows this introduction with a summary of his own contributions to the evolution of the concept and its concrete realization, including REGISTER III; the "Right Information" concept and its complement, the Individualization of Information Services; and, with Manfred Kochen, the formation of the World Mind Group—all integral parts of the current version of H. G. Wells' ideal information system. (Full text of Dr. Goodman's paper in Proceedings.)

In addition to his contribution to the World Mind group, Dr. Kochen reviews his proposed World Information Synthesis and Encyclopedia (WISE). Along with the Wells concept, he credits the intellectual contribution of comprehensivist R. Buckminster Fuller, and compares the goals of WISE with those of the UNESCO UNISIST project.

Dr. Garfield discusses the contribution of Citation Indexing toward the achievement of universal bibliographic control already exceeding even Wells' vivid imagination. He also considers the contribution of Vannevar Bush whose "Memex" symbolizes the ideal information retrieval device for the individual researcher, closely approximated today by access to electronic databases on CD-ROM.

Professor Harmon compares the Wells vision with recent experiments in artificial intelligence, particularly the "power versus generality" issue. He describes attempts to build a system comprehensive enough to serve as a clearinghouse of all human knowledge, exemplified by the General Problem Solver experiment at Carnegie Mellon University. Conversely, he offers the expert systems movement as a means of achieving the specificity required to address particularized problems.

Dr. Rossman reviews the contributions of comprehensive online databases, global information utilities, electronic storage and transmission technologies, and the University of the World experiments toward the achievement of the Wells vision. As a welcome guest from outside of the information profession, he also reminds us to consider other philosophical components of the concept, including Teilhard de Chardin's "collective brain" and Jung's "collective unconscious."

Examination of the factors which have tended to inhibit the achievement of the objectives shared by

encyclopedists and philosophers for generations clarifies the role we as information professionals might play, individually and collectively, in achieving the humanistic goals with which Wells challenges us.

Panelists:

H. J. Abraham Goodman, Professor Emeritus,
   University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Manfred Kochen, Professor of Computer & Information Science, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,
   Michigan

Eugene Garfield, Institute for Scientific
   Information, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Glynn Harmon, Associate Professor of Library and Information Science, The University of Texas at Austin

Parker Rossman, Former Dean of Yale University
   Ecumenical Continuing Education Center, author of
   books and articles on "The Coming Great Electronic Encyclopedia" and "The Coming Global Electronic
   University Consortium"

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Society for Information Science, Boston, Massachusetts, October 4-8, 1987*. Edited by Ching-Chich Chen. Medford, NJ: Learned Information, Inc., 1987. This program abstract, p. 256. See also full paper, pp. 91-98.

SIG/AH = Arts & Humanities Special Interest Group; BSS = Behavioral & Social Sciences.

See also The Philosophy and Information Professions: SIG/AH Program, 50th ASIS Annual Meeting, Boston, 1987 (253-255), extended abstract of T. R. Girill (83-84), and paper of Alastair McKinnon (170-180).

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