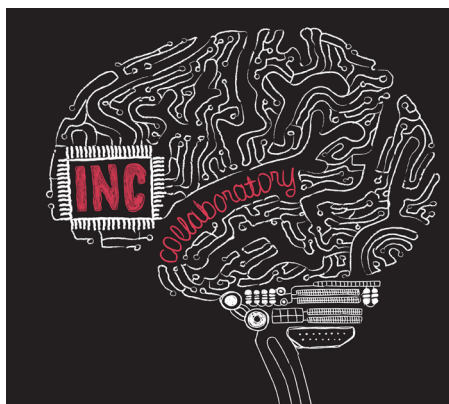


COLLABORATORY THROWS ITS FIRST SCIENCE IN SOCIETY EVENT

The calm, ambient tunes of Brian Eno played as attendees filtered in to hear from Drs. Patricia Churchland and Read Montague about the origin of the “Conscience” in the first of a series of “Science in Society” events run by the Collaboratory and sponsored by the INC.

The Collaboratory, the brainchild of INC’s Roger Bingham, was founded in 2016 as a way to bring together science and other disciplines in service of exploring the far reaching consequences of science from different vantage points. So far the Collaboratory has helped facilitate the public event, “Ethics of Emerging Technologies” and develop the UCSD class, “Tomorrow’s World: A Guided Tour” taught by Bingham with Terry Sejnowski and Churchland.

RIGHT: Collaboratory Logo made by Marley Rossa. The tagline of the Collaboratory is, “Where the science gets cultured -- and the culture gets science.”



LEFT: Setting up for the event. Photo Credit: Lara Sievert

Their latest endeavor is the Science in Society gatherings where deep topics like “Conscience” will be explored. As Bingham explains, “One word like ‘conscience’ or ‘loneliness’ serves to sum up what we see as urgent facets of the human condition that we want to explore”. The choice of “Conscience” as the prompt for their first event was in large part because of the recent release of Churchland’s newest book of the same name.



From left to right: Patricia Churchland, Roger Bingham, Read Montague

The central question of the event was why humans do good for others that aren’t related to them, when it doesn’t serve their genetic “fitness”? Churchland, in her explanation for the origin of our moral compass, began at the evolution of the first warm-blooded animals. These endotherms needed to eat much more food, which means they needed to be smarter. To learn all that was needed to survive, babies developed slower, remaining babies for longer. And it is at this point when Churchland believes we had to expand our idea of self to others in service of taking care of our young. This is the system that she believes further developed into empathy and conscience. Montague, a former postdoc in Sejnowski’s lab and professor at Virginia Tech, complemented Churchland’s talk with an explanation of mammalian reward systems and our ability to predict future outcomes, features of our brain that are hypothesized to be important for conscience.

The evening vacillated between the subjects of history, philosophy and neuroscience. And that is the way that Bingham likes it. “Omnidisciplinary is our preferred mode of investigation and discussion. To those who say we are all over the map, our answer is Yes! Absolutely - but with expert guides,” he proclaims. These guides are meant to serve the public, but also the students of UCSD. The day after the event, a group of students got to meet and converse with the speakers. Bingham says, “This approach has attracted a wonderful group of student collaborators with agile minds and no interest in thinking of science and the arts/humanities as two cultures.”

If you missed the first “Science in Society” event, don’t worry, there will be more. The next event will be on February 24th, 2020. The topic is “Loneliness” with speakers Drs. Candice Odgers (UC Irvine), Kay Tye (Salk), and Karen Dobkins (UCSD). Come for the science, stay for the culture, or vice versa - It’s up to you.