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John Gerald Taylor 1931–2012

John Taylor, the Neural Networks Co-Editor-in-Chief for the European Neural Network Society, was born in Hayes, Kent, on August 18, 1931, and died on March 10, 2012, at 6:00 AM. He was in the hospital for three days, where he developed pneumonia which, combined with a rapid progression in his myelofibrosis, overwhelmed him. His daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband traveled down from Northumberland on Friday night. They and his beloved wife, Pam, were with him until the end. At the time of his death, John was Emeritus Professor of Mathematics and Director of the Centre for Neural Networks at King's College London, after having spent 25 years there as Professor of Mathematics. He was also a Guest Scientist of the Research Centre at the Institute of Medicine in Jülich, Germany.

John Taylor was admired, respected, and loved by a very large family of colleagues and friends. He was a remarkable and wonderful man: warm, generous, charming, brilliant, charismatic, deeply scholarly, beyond thoughtful, and wise. He was, in brief, a man who earned great respect and deep affection, and one who radiated contagious energy and enthusiasm. His sustained and multi-faceted leadership and many important research contributions to the field of neural networks will have a lasting impact.

John had a wide-ranging career in several fields before he focused his attention on neural modeling. He received his Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics from Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1956. He published over 500 scientific papers in theoretical physics, astronomy, particle physics, pure mathematics, neural networks, higher cognitive processes, brain imaging, and consciousness; and authored 12 books and edited 13 others. He gave numerous plenary addresses and tutorials at international conferences in the fields of particle physics, cosmology, and string theory. In recent years, he lectured around the world on neural networks, consciousness, and attention, and communicated with a wide audience through the press, TV, radio, theater, and poetry. Trained as an actor, John performed on stage and in films, wrote science fiction plays, and directed theater productions in Oxford and Cambridge.

The first time that we met, John was conducting interviews for the BBC with neural network researchers at the INNS first annual meeting in Boston in 1988. I quickly realized that this was a very remarkable interviewer indeed! His questions and comments were so relevant and interesting that I commented to him about this and quickly found out that he had a font of knowledge and experience way beyond journalism. Thus began a conversation as friends and colleagues that continued until this month.

In 1989, shortly after the INNS conference, John started focusing his research on neural networks. His remarkable intelligence and social skills rapidly brought him leadership positions in our field. He was a leader in the formation of the European Neural Network Society, where he served as President from 1993 to 1994. In 1994, he became the founding Director of Neuronet, set up to facilitate neural network collaborations and industrial awareness across Europe. For the rest of his life, he gave devoted service as a member of the Board of Governors of the International Neural Network Society and its President in 1995. He was the long-serving European Editor-in-Chief of Neural Networks and was planning the 25th anniversary issue of the journal with Co-Editors-in-Chief DeLiang Wang and Kenji Doya at the time of his death. John was the 2009 recipient of the IEEE Neural Network Pioneer Award. He was also Research Director for ECONOSTAT from 1995 to 2004; Research Director of the start-up company Lobal Technologies; and since 2007 leader of a research program at Commerzbank's Alternative Investment Strategies (COMAS) Group, which uses artificial intelligence techniques to create portfolios of hedge funds.

John Taylor's books about neural networks include Artificial Neural Networks (1992), The Promise of Neural Networks (1993), Mathematical Approaches to Neural Networks (1994), The Race for Consciousness (1999), and The Mind: A User's Manual (2006). His neural network research interests ranged from financial and industrial applications, including advanced chip design, to higher cognitive processes, including consciousness. His research projects included modeling of attentional agents, emotional recognition, language, time series prediction in the financial markets, and developing a brain-based language understanding system.

His many friends and colleagues will miss him greatly.

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John and Pam Taylor in 2003 with Gail Carpenter and Steve Grossberg in the garden of the Taylors' lovely home in London. Photos courtesy of Gail Carpenter.

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