
From: John Brockman <[REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 29, 2014 6:40 PM
To: Epstein Jeffrey
Subject: The Reality Club

From 1981 through 1996, The Reality Club held its meetings in Chinese =estuarants, artists lofts, the Board Rooms of Rockefeller University, =he New York Academy of Sciences, and investment banking firms, =allrooms, museums, and living rooms, among other venues. In January, =997, The Reality Club has now migrated to the Internet on Edge. Here =ou will find a number of today's sharpest minds taking their ideas into =he bull ring knowing they will be challenged. The ethic is thinking =mart vs. the anesthesiology of wisdom.

Through the years, The Reality Club has had a simple criterion for =hoosing speakers. We look for people whose creative work has expanded =ur notion of who and what we are. A few Reality Club speakers and/or =dge presenters are bestselling authors or are famous in the mass =ulture. Most are not. Rather, we encourage work on the cutting edge of =he culture, and the investigation of ideas that have not been generally =xposed. We are interested in "thinking smart;" we are not interested in =he anesthesiology of "wisdom." The motto of the Club is "to arrive at =he edge of the world's knowledge, seek out the most complex and =ophisticated minds, put them in a room together, and have them ask each =ther the questions they are asking themselves."

We charge the speakers to represent an idea of reality by describing =heir creative work, their lives, and the questions they are asking =hemselves. We also want them to share with us the boundaries of their =nowledge and experience and to respond to the challenges, comments, =riticisms, and insights of the members. The Reality Club is a point of =iew, not just a group of people. Reality is an agreement. The constant =hifting of metaphors, the intensity with which we advance our ideas to =ach other — this is what intellectuals do. The Reality Club draws =ttention to the larger context of intellectual life.

Speakers seldom get away with loose claims. Maybe a challenging question =ill come from a member who knows an alternative theory that really =hreatens what the speaker had to say. Or a member might come up with a =reat idea, totally out of left field, that only someone outside the =speaker's field could come up with. This creates a very interesting =ynamic.

The most challenging evenings are when the speakers present the =uestions they are asking themselves. This is in contrast to evenings =uring which the speakers discuss questions they have already answered. =n communications theory information is not defined as data or input but =ather as "a difference that makes a difference." It is this level I =ope the speakers will achieve. We want speakers who are willing to take =heir ideas into the bull ring.

The Reality Club encourages people who can take the materials of the =ulture in the arts, literature, and science and put them together in =heir own way. We live in a mass-produced culture where many people, =even many established cultural arbiters limit themselves to secondhand =deas, thoughts, and opinions. The Reality Club consists of individuals =ho create their own reality and do not accept an ersatz, appropriated =ality. Our members are out there doing it rather than talking about =nd analyzing the people who are doing it.

The more than one hundred and fifty individuals who have made =resentations at Reality Club meetings and the more recent EDGE Seminars =nclude a wide range of people in the arts and sciences: actor Ellen =urstyn; philosopher Daniel C. Dennett; scientists Richard Dawkins, =reeman Dyson, Niles Eldredge, Murray Gell-Mann, Stephen Jay Gould, =stewart Kauffman, Benoit Mandelbrot, Lynn Margulis, and George Williams; =ychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Howard Gardner, Steven Pinker, =nd Roger Schank; artists Gretchen Bender, Peter Halley, April Gornick, =nd Gary Stephan; poets Michael McClure, Paul Mariani, and Gerd Stern; =eligious scholars Richard Baker-roshi, Elaine Pagels, and Robert

=hurman; editor Steven Levy; social commentators Betty Friedan, Paul =rassner, Naomi Wolf, and the late Abbie Hoffman; writers Annie Dillard, =en Kesey, Steven Levy, and Mark Mirsky.

The Reality Club is different from The Algonquin, The Apostles, The =loomsbury Group, or The Club, but it offers the same quality of =ntellectual adventure. Perhaps the closest resemblance is to the early =ineteenth-century Lunar Society of Birmingham, an informal club of the =leading cultural figures of the new industrial age — James Watt, =rasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestly, Benjamin Franklin. In = similar fashion, The Reality Club is an attempt to gather together =hose who are exploring the themes of the post-industrial age.

The Reality Club is not just a group of people. I see it as the constant =hifting of metaphors, the advancement of ideas, the agreement on, and =he invention of, reality. Intellectual life is The Reality Club.

— John Brockman

JB

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Visit edge.org ("Take a look. No matter who you are, you are bound to =ind something that will drive you crazy." -NEW YORK TIMES)

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