
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 restaurants, artists lofts, the Board Rooms of Rockefeller University, the New York Academy of Sciences, and investment banking firms, ballrooms, museums, and living rooms, among other venues. In January, 1997, The Reality Club has now migrated to the Internet on Edge. Here you will find a number of today's sharpest minds taking their ideas into the bull ring knowing they will be challenged. The ethic is thinking smart vs. the anesthiology of wisdom.

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

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

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

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

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

The more than one hundred and fifty individuals who have made presentations at Reality Club meetings and the more recent EDGE Seminars include a wide range of people in the arts and sciences: actor Ellen Burstyn; philosopher Daniel C. Dennett; scientists Richard Dawkins, Freeman Dyson, Niles Eldredge, Murray Gell-Mann, Stephen Jay Gould, Stewart Kauffman, Benoit Mandelbrot, Lynn Margulis, and George Williams; psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Howard Gardner, Steven Pinker, and Roger Schank; artists Gretchen Bender, Peter Halley, April Gornick, and Gary Stephan; poets Michael McClure, Paul Mariani, and Gerd Stern; religious 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 =eading cultural figures of the new industrial age — James Watt, =rasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgewood, 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

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John Brockman

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