



Cultural impresario and literary and software agent John Brockman has spent the last half century merging art and science to create what he calls the Third Culture. In 1988, the now 69-year-old Panama-hat-wearing New Yorker, who represents the literary works of big thinkers such as Steven Pinker and Richard Dawkins, created the Edge Foundation, which publishes original writing of prominent thinkers in fields from evolutionary biology to mathematics. WIRED asked him what it's like to live life on the edge.

What is Edge?

It's a conversation. We look for people whose creative work has expanded our notion of who and what we are. We encourage work on the cutting edge of the culture, and the investigation of ideas that have not been generally exposed.

Could you explain the Third Culture?

In 1959 CP Snow noted in his book *The Two Cultures* that, during the 30s, literary intellectuals took to referring to themselves as "the intellectuals", as though there were no others. This new definition excluded scientists such as the astronomer Edwin Hubble, the mathematician John von Neumann, and the physicists Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. In the second edition, Snow added a new essay, optimistically suggesting that a "third culture" would emerge and close the communications gap between the literary intellectuals and the scientists. Although I borrow Snow's phrase, it does not describe the third culture that he predicted. Literary intellectuals are not communicating with scientists. Scientists are communicating directly with the general public, and in doing so they are taking the place of the traditional intellectual in rendering visible the deeper meanings of our lives, redefining who and what we are.

Which new writers, scientists and artists should we be following at the moment?

Research psychologist Daniel Kahneman, who won a Nobel Prize for the creation of behavioural economics, is one. Jeff Bezos, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Dean Kamen, Nathan Myhrvold,

Matchmaking with science and art

John Brockman, the literary super-agent who runs the Edge community, shares his influences

Jimmy Wales and Salar Kamangar all came to an Edge seminar to hear him lecture. Kahneman is not exactly a household name - yet among many of the leading thinkers in psychology, he ranks at the top of the field.

What is your media diet?

The New York Times and *Wall Street Journal*. In the sciences I read *Nature*, *Scientific American*, *Science*, *New Scientist*, *Discover*. General-interest publications include *The Economist*, *The*

Left: John Brockman at the Edge Foundation's 59th Street office in New York, November 2010

New York Review of Books, *The New Yorker*, *WIRED*, *The Atlantic*, *Prospect*. In all cases, I read the print editions. Online, the first stop is always Arts & Letters Daily. I look at *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Observer* and *The Daily Telegraph* and leading German papers. Sometimes I look at *Slate* and *Salon*. I don't read blogs unless I'm sent a link. For serendipitous reading, I rely on my Twitter feed, on which I follow around 40 people, all of whom I know. If they take the time to put up a link to something they think is interesting, chances are it's worth reading.

What is it that gets you interested in a person or their work? I am interested in 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. Show me people who create their own reality, who don't accept an ersatz, appropriated reality. Show me the empiricists (and not just in the sciences) who are out there doing it, rather than talking about and analysing the people who are doing it.

How do you find these people?

It's all based on word of mouth and reputation. Edge, contrary to how it may appear, is not exclusive. Elitist, yes, but in the good sense of an open elite, based on meritocracy. The way someone is added to the Edge list is when I receive a word from a Steven Pinker, a Brian Eno, a Martin Rees, an Ian McEwan or a Richard Dawkins, telling me to do so. It's as simple as that and I don't recall ever saying no in such circumstances.

How do science and art meet?

Typically, they meet as artists, acting as sensing and monitoring devices for a society. [They] go forward and send back signals telling us who and what we

are. It was through artists in the New York avant-garde of the mid-60s that I first became excited about science. John Cage handed me a copy of *Cybernetics* by Norbert Wiener; Robert Rauschenberg turned me on to books by the physicists James Jeans and George Gamow.

What's the most exciting thing at the intersection at the moment?

It's not a "thing" but a person: HUO, Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator and codirector of the Serpentine Gallery in London's Kensington Gardens (see *WIRED* 02.10). Known to his friends in the art world as "The Hurricane", he has singlehandedly (well, with a little help from me) put a focus on the intersection of science and art. In doing so, he has shone a bright spotlight on London, which is emerging as "the" interesting art scene in the world. HUO is too sophisticated to try to bring artists and scientists together for creative collaborations; instead, he will run projects such as "Maps for the 21st Century" and commission 50 artists to produce pieces, and lean on me to do the same with the science crowd. We did a similar event in 2007 on "Formulae for the 21st Century". The juxtaposition of these works was enlightening, the results marvellous.

Duncan Graham-Rowe *edge.org*

Essential reading from the Brockman catalogue



The Third Culture (1996)

Dawkins, Dennett, Pinker et al on the theories that underpin our world view.



The Next 50 Years (2002)

Scientists from Smolin to Hauser on the discoveries that will change the world.



What Is Your Dangerous Idea? (2007)

Theories that could shake our fundamental beliefs.



This Will Change Everything (2009)

Edge contributors on the progress coming our way.



Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think? (2010)

What the net means for us, by Shirky, Taleb et al.

LAB NOTES #6

Secrets of a long marriage

How do you know whom you should marry? Is it best to trust your feelings or pick a person who looks good on paper? Science has the answer. First, find someone whom you idealise and who idealises you. If you're cynical about the person before you marry, you're in trouble: "Longitudinal analyses suggest that spouses were less likely to suffer declines in love when they idealised one another as newly-weds."¹

Want a long, healthy life together? You'll benefit from a spouse who is conscientious and even neurotic: "Conscientiousness and neuroticism acted synergistically, such that people who scored highly for both traits were healthier than others."²

And a husband who's involved with his kids? Find a guy with high socioeconomic status. "Fathers... become more involved with their children if they are of high socioeconomic status (SES) than if they are of low SES... High-SES fathers [make] more difference to the child's IQ by their investment than low-SES fathers do."³

And here's a final rule of thumb that your grandmother may not have told you: Everybody is happier when the wife is better-looking than the husband. "Spouses behaved more positively in relationships in which wives were more attractive than their husbands, but they behaved more negatively in relationships in which husbands were more attractive than their wives."⁴ **Eric Barker**

1. Miller, Niehus, Huston (2006) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(12): 1579-1594
2. Roberts, Smith, Jackson, Edmonds (2009) *Psychological Science*, 20(5): 553-559
3. Nettle (2008) *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29(6): 416-423.e1
4. McNulty, James, Neff, Lisa, Karney, Benjamin (2008) *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(1): 135-143

