

EXTREME SCIENCE: 8 BRILLIANT MONTHS AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

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REVOLUTIONARY MINDS

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Revolutionary MINDS



Every generation has its salon, its emblematic gathering of emergent thinkers. The **20s** saw the likes of Matisse, Pound, Hemingway gathered in Gertrude Stein's Paris apartment. The **50s** saw Paul Bowles' "Tangerinos," with giants Allen Ginsberg, Truman Capote, and William Burroughs taking up residence in Tangiers. In the **60s** there was Andy Warhol's Factory, the studio where his iconic silk screens were produced and where Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, and so many others could be found on any given New York night.

Today's incarnation doesn't distinguish between the arts and the sciences, nor is it restricted to any one city. This "third" culture (in the parlance of John Brockman) is borderless. Its icons aren't bound by devotion to any single discipline. Instead, they operate in a world in which cross-pollination and the synthesis of ideas are the norm: mathematics with design, physics with poetry, neuroscience with literature. They are interested in more than the sheer novelty of technology, or the navel-gazing pursuit of irony. It's too early to name its members or analyze their legacy. They're young, visionary, iconoclastic—and after nothing less than a command of the natural world.

Here, we present the first in a series of portraits of these revolutionary minds.



BUSINESS
FIRST COURSE

Nick Matzke

Legal Beagle

Location: Oakland

Age: 30

At a time when intelligent-design rhetoric has persuaded some public schools to include the philosophy in their science curricula, Nick Matzke is championing the cause of science. Even after leaving his mark on the Dover trial, he continues to defend Darwin's theory.

Nick Matzke will gladly give a quick tutorial about evolution and the history of creationism—even if it means lecturing at 3 a.m. while strolling along the banks of the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg, PA. It was there, last November, that Matzke helped the plaintiff's lawyers cram for their final cross-examination of intelligent design (ID) proponents, as the 2005 federal trial *Kitzmiller v. Dover* was coming to a close. In this landmark case, parents successfully sued the school board for requiring that biology teachers formally expose students to ID as an alternative to the theory of evolution when discussing the origins of life.

As spokesperson for the National Center for Science Education, a nonprofit advocacy group for evolution education, Matzke regularly finds himself acting as a go-between for scientists and nonscientists. And when scientific findings are at odds with religious teaching, as they were in Dover, a skilled communicator such as Matzke can be the missing link between a scientist's body of knowledge and the public's grasp of it. "There are places where you can basically see evolution right in front of you if the data is actually presented directly," he says.

With a background in biology, chemistry, and geography, 30-year-old Matzke sharpened his expertise writing for The Panda's Thumb, a leading evolution blog. There, he became an avid participant in online debates with proponents of ID—a hobby that transformed into a secret weapon for the legal team he later advised. He attributes part of the plaintiff's edge to his careful study of ID tactics. "We knew that [we] could predict exactly what the other side was going to say in response to any argument," he recalls.

Matzke also assisted by searching archives and collecting evidence. In April 2005, after reading about the development of ID's seminal text, *Of Pandas and People*, Matzke realized that early versions of the text might reveal its authors' intentions and notified the legal team in what he calls his "Psychic Email about the *Pandas* drafts." Sure enough, when five drafts of the text were subpoenaed and analyzed, they turned out to be the ID proponents' smoking gun. In each successive draft, as the use of the term "intelligent design" soared, the use of "creationism" plummeted, helping to convince Judge John E. Jones III that ID was in fact a euphemism for creationism.

Though the nation is no longer focused on the Harrisburg courthouse, Matzke is still working to undo the evangelical smear campaign against Darwin. This year he has coauthored essays in leading science journals and a chapter in the new book, *Not in Our Classrooms*, critiquing creationists' arguments and explaining how science can refute their claims. "In modern society we are seeing that it is not enough to just have the truth on your side," he says. "You've got to let people know about it."

—Molly Wetterschneider