

For *Isis*:

Éloge: David Owen Edge, 1932-2003

Donald MacKenzie

David Edge received his primary education at Aberdeen Grammar School and his secondary schooling at the Leys School, Cambridge. After national service between 1950 and 1952 as an air wireless instructor in the Royal Air Force, he read physics at Cambridge. He moved into the emerging specialty of radio astronomy, receiving his Ph.D. in 1959 for his work on the “3C survey,” an influential and widely used survey of radio stars.ⁱ In 1960, however, he switched career to become a radio producer in the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Science Unit. The numerous series he produced, primarily for the BBC’s Third Programme, went beyond science popularization to encompass philosophy, bringing Edge into contact with philosophers of science such as Hesse, Kuhn, and Lakatos.

In 1966, the University of Edinburgh appointed David Edge as the first Director of its newly established Science Studies Unit. The Unit’s original remit was to broaden the education of the university’s science undergraduates, a goal of which leading Edinburgh biologist C.H. Waddington was a particular advocate. A series of inspired appointments by Edge – sociologist Barry Barnes, philosopher David Bloor, and historians Gary Werskey and Steven Shapin – deepened this educational remit, turning the Unit into a leading site of scholarly research on science, especially in the sociology of scientific knowledge. I joined the Unit as a Ph.D. student in 1972, and well remember both the excitement of the time and the sense (particularly valuable to postgraduate students) of participation in a shared intellectual enterprise.

Along with the sociologist of science Michael Mulkay, Edge produced a fine historical sociology of his own scientific field, radio astronomy.ⁱⁱ His writing ranged widely, from elegant essays on technological metaphor to a distinctly sceptical survey of the burgeoning field of scientometrics.ⁱⁱⁱ With Barry Barnes, he edited *Science in Context*, one of the first teaching collections in modern science and technology studies. More than twenty years on, I still find myself frequently referring students to its crystal-clear expositions, and almost all the illustrative readings chosen by Barnes and Edge have stood the test of time well.^{iv}

Edge, however, was never narrowly academic in his outlook. From 1970 to 1973, he was the secretary, and in many ways the inspiration, of the Edinburgh Society for Social Responsibility of Science. He made sure that alongside the Science Studies Unit’s contributions to the emerging “strong programme” in the sociology of scientific knowledge, there also ran a stream of practical and policy-oriented Ph.D. theses on appropriate technology for the Third World. He was active in the scout and guide movement and in Methodism, and was very proud of his hymn, “Lord, We are Blind.” He was inspired to write it at a World Council of Churches event in 1968, and it was sung at his funeral in his Methodist church in Edinburgh in February 2003.

In the social studies of science and technology he will be remembered above all in two roles: first, as a teacher, mentor, friend, and host; and second, as an editor. In 1970, he and Roy MacLeod founded the journal *Science Studies*, in 1974 renamed *Social Studies of Science*. Under Edge's direction (MacLeod became less involved as the years went by), the journal became the flagship of the field that shared its name. Edge's editorship was always rigorous, but also always constructive and supportive: his work as editor played a major part in the Society for Social Studies of Science awarding him in 1993 its highest honor, the John Desmond Bernal Prize. In December 2002, after 32 volumes, Edge completed a carefully-planned hand-over of editorship to Michael Lynch of Cornell University. It was as if he had received an intimation – he had indeed coped bravely with several serious illnesses for some years – because a month later he was dead.

Too often, the world of academia can seem a place of selfish competition, of narrow specialization, and of excessive, obsessive work. David was a living counter-example. Much of his professional work was in the service of others, as teacher, director, and editor, and he took as much pleasure (indeed more pleasure) in others' successes as in his own. He moved easily between history, sociology, and philosophy of science, and had no time for the science wars' confected antagonism between science and those who research its social processes. He had a full and rich life outside of work, as a dedicated (if always sceptical) Christian, as a scout, music lover, sports fan and family man: he and his wife Barbara raised three children, Alastair, Aran, and Gordon, who spoke movingly at his funeral. We shall treasure his memory.

ⁱ D.O. Edge, *A Survey of Radio Stars at 159 Mc/s* (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1959).

ⁱⁱ David O. Edge and Michael J. Mulkay, *Astronomy Transformed: The Emergence of Radio Astronomy in Britain* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

ⁱⁱⁱ D.O. Edge, "Technological Metaphor," in D.O. Edge and J.N. Wolfe (eds), *Meaning and Control: Essays in Social Aspects of Science and Technology* (London: Tavistock, 1973), 31-59; Edge, "Technological Metaphor and Social Control," *New Literary History* 6 (1974-75): 135-47; Edge, "Quantitative Measures of Communication in Science: A Critical Review," *History of Science* 17 (1979): 102-34.

^{iv} Barry Barnes and David Edge (eds), *Science in Context: Readings in the Sociology of Science* (Milton Keynes, Bucks.: Open University Press, 1982).