



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

2nd Dialogue on Science – 15 - 17 October 2003
in Engelberg, Switzerland

Welcoming Address on the Opening of the Conference

Klaus Hug, Dr.,

President of the Academia Engelberg Foundation

Contact:

Benediktinerkloster, 6390 Engelberg

E-Mail: info@academia-engelberg.ch



What else needs to be said after this beautiful film and the musical introduction? What needs to be added?

That we were able to arouse enthusiasm last year. That the start has been a success, and that a lot of optimism and energy have also been registered for future conferences. That Engelberg with its unique combination of culture and alpine landscape provides a framework that makes for good discussions and debate, far from the mundane environment of five-star luxury, but in a cultivated rustic and cosy village atmosphere.

It is a great privilege for me to welcome you to this 2nd Engelberg dialogue. We start the conference in this beautiful baroque hall, a secular space of wonderful architectonic design in the midst of this spiritual-religious centre, the Abbey. And almost symbolically we draw strength here before streaming out into the various localities of the village and engaging in our discussions.

We aim to create a tradition with the Engelberg Dialogues. I recently heard it said that tradition carries the future with it. And with this year's choice of subject we have taken a leap into the future which is already upon us today.

Not everyone knows what to make of the English title of this year's conference. It sounds too much like something for experts and special supplements in daily newspapers or academic articles in the specialist press. You will be surprised. Rainer Maria Rilke is once supposed to have said that "the future manifests itself long before it is upon us". We only have to open ourselves in order to see it. Yet what a contradiction! How can one see something that is invisible? How is one supposed to see the invisible chips? Let us have this described to us and demonstrated. Diving into the nanoscale world is like diving into the sea. You first have to get used to the new environment before you can see the wonders of this mysterious world. But it also has its sting-rays, its poisonous fish, which you have to watch out for.

The invisible chips are there and are already controlling a large part of our commodities. Will they also be controlling us very soon? Are we losing our freedom and self-determination? We who have controlled and managed machines since the dawn of the age of the steam engine, will be soon find ourselves controlled by new artificial dwarves? A reversal of empire, where the slaves become the masters? Spartacus rules. Have we created an empire that is about to strike back?

No one denies the unimaginable advances which the computer has brought. But also no one can overlook the fact that, with it, a new kind of counterworld has become established, in which it is possible to live comfortably and to enjoy a share of these advances of all kinds, but which at the same time has its own rules and is shackling us within the constraints of these rules.



This is the subject we shall be discussing in the next few hours and days. But we also aim to acquire new insights and wherever possible to make demands on ourselves, on science and on politics. Also in the world of invisible chips the focus needs to be on the individual. People's autonomy and freedom of choice need to be preserved. I wish you all a great deal of stimulating information in your discussions and encounters.

You will find that a number of changes have taken place since the programme was printed. Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss has unfortunately had to cancel his participation owing to government business which cannot be postponed. As a result we have moved the presentation by Prof. Weizenbaum to tomorrow Thursday. The final paper will be presented by a widely known personality, Prof. Friedemann Mattern from the Swiss College of Technology (ETH) in Zürich, who has already played a crucial part in the Programme Committee.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all the speakers, the participants in the panel discussion and the many sponsors for their commitment and their contribution to the success of the conference, and not least also the organizers of the event, who have worked and continue to work so hard behind the scenes, and above all also the Benedictine Abbey of Engelberg for their warm hospitality.

And with these words I declare the conference now open.