



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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

Farewell und Preview

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A year ago, at this very same place, I said I had a dream, a dream of an open and fruitful dialogue on science in the cultural environment of Engelberg.

This year saw the dream to a very large extent come true.

We have behind us three highly interesting and richly packed days of debate on an issue for which there was initially considerable scepticism as to whether it would be sufficiently attractive. The large number of people who showed an interest and took part in the event showed our doubts to be misplaced. And the latest reports from the media also indicate how topical this issue is and just how rapidly pervasive computing is taking a grip on our lives.

On 15 October, I read in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" an article on the "Danger of dwarfs – a debate on nanotechnology becomes ever more urgent" (toxicity of nanoparticles); yesterday I read in this week's edition of "Der Spiegel" (no. 42/2003) a fascinating article on "smart vacuum cleaners" (when the vacuum cleaner breaks down, a microcomputer built into it relays all relevant information to a diagnosis unit at the other end of the line).

In the workshops we engaged in a great deal of discussion and worked through a great many antinomies, conflicting ideas and theories:

- state regulation versus self-regulation
- managed society versus open society
- beautiful new world versus brave new world
- small chips as big brothers
- usefulness versus privacy
- power of providers versus impotence of users
- information flood versus islands of contemplation
- reliability versus chaos
- delegation of authority versus autonomy
- etc.

Thanks to outstanding speakers, it was possible to keep information and discussion at a high level.

Perhaps in the future we shall have to pay even greater attention to the fact that not only does the actual conference topic need to be dealt with competently, but also the sociopolitical environment has to be adequately presented. Also the cultural dimension needs to be given greater



weight both on the podium and among conference participants. The interdisciplinarity calls for a certain professionalism.

I would like to read out the following short poem by the deceased poet Rose Ausländer:

*Not true
It's not true
That you die*

*Electron angels
Pass you on
To the electron God*

...

*... it's not true
that you die*

*the electron god
puts you back together
is composed within you
gently
unrepeatably*

(Poem 1976)

So art also has something to say on the subject, imprecise perhaps, but certainly prophetic!

In Engelberg we want to arouse hope, accept and promote progress for the benefit of humans, identify and assess risks, and thus help to find a way out of the dilemma that in this the best of all ages we feel increasingly the victims of progress.

We shall carry on. Next year will see the "Climate in Dialogue" – controversial science seeks trust, lost trust seeks safe ground – from 29 September to 1 October 2004.

Finally, I would like to thank one person in particular: Dr. Dominik Galliker, without whom this conference would be unthinkable, who remained tirelessly at our disposal with efficiency and good humour and his team of industrious helpers.

May the "Spirit of Engelberg" continue to inspire and encourage many of us to be there again next year.