

## Communicating Astronomy with the Public 2007: A speech of welcome

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Communicating astronomy with the public is equivalent to communicating the quintessence of modern science with the man in the street, the man who walks the streets as he earns his daily crust, the anxious, fragmented man of our techno-civilisation who masters fragments of science in his imposed role as user: a user of machines, a user of computers, a user of prefabricated ideas, a user accustomed – or sometimes forced – to use useless things, produced en masse by our technological culture of abundance, just for the sake of using them.

These days, the only thing man finds he cannot use freely is his mental power to conceive and appreciate the broader large scale structure, and the deeper evolving pattern of the cosmos we are immersed in. To do this means to become human again, as defined by the Greek word *anthropos*, as a man who is prone to look up towards the heavens, to escape from the constraints of the never-ending, strict, narrow, miserable and repetitive orbit of his everyday life, forcibly oriented towards the society of the spectacle, which offers him refuge in a cosmos of virtual reality.

Nevertheless, as the history of science has proved again and again, the real reality is more fantastic than any virtual approach towards our existential search on Earth. I always keep in mind the Copernican paradigm or, being a Greek, I would rather say the Copernican re-invention of the blasphemous Aristarchean concept of placing the Sun at the centre of our parochial planetary universe. Copernicus's catalytic work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* has transcended the initial kinetic meaning of the word *revolutio*, implying the periodic motion of the planets around the Sun, and, because of the vast impact this sudden and unexpected dethronement of planet Earth has made on the mind of man, has provided us with the concept of revolution, both in science and society, serving as a paradigm for the new paths of enlightenment astronomy opened in the world by shattering the established views propped up by an old regime desperate to retain its stability.

In a sense communicating astronomy with the public means revolutionising the public, fracturing its lethargic view on the things, actions and machinations that permeate and drive our society, and offering instead the opportunity to construct a more humane framework of communication based on a broader understanding of our deeper ignorance of the mysterious Unknown we pretend we understand just by naming it the Universe. Astronomy means a critical approach to reality, in view of our ever-expanding accelerating knowledge, naturally circumscribed by our ever-expanding and equally accelerating ignorance. Communicating astronomy with the public also means communicating the principle of tolerance rooted in our small presence in the vastness of the Universe, a principle of tolerance badly needed for our everyday behaviour towards our fellow travellers in our short trip of life on planet Earth.

In a sense devising better ways of communicating astronomy means to contribute to a better world. And this is a gallant and noble effort that you have to be congratulated upon. Welcome to Athens, the evergreen city of spiritual light, and may the spirit of the place make you ease the way of communication between the world above and the world below, by taking into account our old Heraclitean view that the way between them is one, singular and identical for both levels of existence, the cosmic and the human, the macrocosmos and the microcosmos.

Thank you for coming and enjoy your stay in Athens.