

Opening Press Conference of the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011

Tuesday, 11 October 2011, 11.00 a.m., Open Space

Speech by Juergen Boos

Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair

- The spoken word takes precedence -

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

I wish you a warm welcome to the 2011 Book Fair, which will open officially in just a few hours from now.

We are here in the middle of the Agora, and we're surrounded by something completely new. I can assure you, if you had told me just a year ago that I'd be standing here now together with Peter Schwarzenbauer, board member of a car manufacturer, I'd have said you were mad.

Audi and the Frankfurt Book Fair were introduced to each other in January. In our talks then we quickly realised that, for all our differences, we share a very similar need for new "tools of corporate culture" - for meeting new challenges and devising tenable approaches to problem solving in the future, and above all to respond to the customers of the future. Both we and Audi feel it's our responsibility to partake in such discussions - such thought exercises - and that we carry these impulses across into our respective industries.

In literature, it is mainly the science fiction authors who are responsible for the future. And there is in fact a long list of exceptional utopians who have even spent time considering the future of books and reading. The first I can name - as a reference also to our Guest of Honour 2010 - is Jorge Luis Borges. In *The Library of Babel*, Borges developed a scenario of the future which presented the world as a library containing all the books imaginable. Although the books are mostly unintelligible to the population, the people idolise them and hope one day they'll find a book containing a sentence written just for them.

In *The Diamond Age*, from 1995, Neal Stephenson tells the story of Nell, a girl from the ghetto who chances upon a copy of *A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer*. This is an interactive book that has been designed to build the characters and personalities of upper class girls. The book maintains an unbroken dialogue with the child and simultaneously also develops its own content further, in order to push forward the girl's education.

Ray Bradbury shows us a sinister world in Fahrenheit 451. It is forbidden to own books here, and anyone found searching for meaning, asking questions or looking for answers in books is deemed to be subversive. The masses are kept satisfied with garish, superficial multimedia shows that distract them from more important matters. In the world depicted in John Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar, we no longer need books; text and images are projected onto our clothing. As you can see, the variety of ideas is almost infinite.

The science fiction authors have always been rethinking the future, using tremendous imaginative power and meticulous attention to detail to create fascinating scenarios. And these examples are but a tiny selection of the many ideas of how reading, books, knowledge transfer and ultimately even the attitudes of society regarding content might look in the future.

And, as you've probably guessed, that brings me this year once again to the immense changes that are facing our industry. We are experiencing an upheaval - in more ways than one. On the one hand, the value chain is breaking apart, as the individual links in the chain separate from one another and reposition themselves afresh, in an almost infinite number of new combinations. On the other, the industry - the authors, the editors the translators, the publishers and producers - are reinventing the concept of publishing. They're packing up their proverbial belongings and setting off for a new era of publishing. They're leaving behind them their familiar terrain and are daring to explore new regions.

As they venture forth into the new land, the book people - we call them "creative work professionals" - have begun to meet a whole new group of fellow players, people they've had very little to do with so far (at least not before the book was completed.) They are meeting people from the fields of film, games, interactive design and music, and they're starting to work with them. And this new convergence is reflected here at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011. We now greet new exhibitors and visitors from industries which, just five years ago, you would never have imagined being here. This year, please pay a visit to our newly restructured rights centre in Hall 6.0, to which we've now attached a large business centre for multimedia projects. Or drop in at the StoryDrive conference, the first all-media conference, which will kick off tomorrow, just next door to where we are now, and at which producer David Heyman and gamification expert Gabe Zichermann will speak.

All of a sudden, something is happening to us book people. We're beginning to realise that we have to start thinking differently and develop new skills. Because multimedial stories often require a different approach. We no longer start just by writing the book; instead we think of the film from the outset as well, and spend time considering where we can integrate interactive elements into the plot. We are therefore developing the content in a multidimensional way. And we're being forced to rethink a lot of our old habits. What happens during the creative process if other authors contribute

to the story? How do the authors share the copyright, and whom do the characters belong to in a collaborative story? How does one relate to the readers if they themselves were involved in the writing process?

If you are now thinking, “What’s the point of all this?”, I have to admit, we’ve asked ourselves the same thing quite often. The traditional book worked well enough. Why throw it overboard now? The answer is simple. The most important factor in our business has changed radically – I mean our customers. Above all, the customers of tomorrow, our children! Today, they are already using the new media formats as instinctively as sleepwalkers. They’ll still become interested in printed books, if we set them the example. But at the same time, their lives are already filled with new digital products; they are fascinated by them and spend a lot of time in social networks. Authors and publishers (creative work professionals generally) must produce and market their works with these new generations of readers and media-users – these new markets – in mind.

Of course it’s a bitter pill to swallow when, suddenly, so many things we used to understand and things we were good at no longer count. Or at least, when they don’t count exclusively. Accordingly, in his book, *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, Clayton M. Christensen calls for industries and enterprises that are confronted with drastic changes of this kind (he calls it “disruptive business”) to find out what kind of information is important in these new markets. And here it is again: the venturing forth into new regions. To be successful there, we must begin again – in part at least – to acquire knowledge. But before that we must establish just what knowledge we really need. This means that companies in the publishing industry must begin practising “continuous learning” as part of their corporate strategies. Of course, publishers are very competent at recognising new ideas, and at embedding those ideas into society in the form of stories, information and images. Now they need to apply those skills to their own businesses.

I would like to make one thing clear. What’s new is not necessarily always better – to start with, it’s just new. I just wish that in our industry we’d make a habit of leaving our trusted surroundings more often, to discover new things and find out if they have anything of value to offer our own business. “You won’t believe your eyes,” as Grangers grandfather would have said in Bradbury’s novel. The result, ultimately, will be a relaxed approach to new situations and other “systems”.

All around the world, creative work professionals use just such a method in order to have good ideas. One of the first to do this, by the way, was William Gordon who developed his system of synectics in 1944, the basic principle of which was “make the familiar strange and the strange familiar”, in order to develop new and surprising approaches to problems. Science fiction authors almost always borrow other disciplines, and reprocess the findings in a creative manner. It is precisely this “make-the-strange-familiar” attitude which underlies our cooperation with Audi, and which has now blossomed in this joint presentation – the “Open Space” project.

I have often thought of Audi as a trend-setter, in the way it approaches and implements new developments with a high degree of technical and design competence. For instance, when Audi completed its own relaunch to become a designer marque of high quality at the beginning of the 1990s. Audi is busy today, too, trying to reinvent the car itself to some extent. Above all it wants to redefine the role of the car in people's lives and to use new technologies to integrate it more profoundly with its environment and the lifestyle of the drivers. I have also come to view Audi as a company that gets deeply involved with cultural projects, and provides sustainable support for them.

Now, together with Audi in this fascinating structure, the Book Fair has developed a meeting place that will host discussion events and collective storytelling. Moreover, we want this to be a place where meetings are possible that produce valuable stimuli for our own business. How do ideas arise? Where do they come from? Who are the people driving the ideas, and what is driving those people? These events will bring together clever and argumentative individuals; their talks should inspire new visions, ideas and points of view. And I'd like to point out the exhibition of antiquarian books just next door to here. Where could we find a better place to carry forward our own story, than right here, with the values of our industry and the witnesses of our past as a backdrop?

We hope that we can use this cooperation to inspire our customers and our visitors, and prompt them to develop new business ideas. To quote Bradbury one more time, here Clarisse say: "My uncle says that in olden days, the houses used to have verandas in front of the door. Sometime people would sit there in the evening and talk, if they felt like it ... It's said that architects stopped building them because the verandas looked unsightly. But my uncle says that that was just an excuse ... The people talked too much and they had time to think about things..."

I believe that in our industry we've always had too few of these verandas - too few spaces where we can invite passers-by and have a talk with them in an informal setting. I hope this Open Space is just such a veranda.

Frankfurt, 11 October 2011