

The Ministry Connection

Bertel Haarder, Minister of Health and Internal Affairs
(Talk given at the celebration of the
25th anniversary of the Niels Bohr Archive, 9 June 2011)

The importance and impact of Niels Bohr cannot be overestimated.

He was a monument. – No, he is a monument. Books will be written about him in centuries ahead.

My parents talked about him. In High School we learned about him. We were fascinated by the theory of complementarity as well as the so called periodic system. It appealed to our imagination.

As a little boy I was fascinated by the model showing the hydrogen atom. I thought it resembled the solar system. I imagined that the solar system was an atom in the giant universe – nonsense of course, but appealing to imagination.

I understand that Rutherford initiated this system, but Bohr stabilized it!

His theory of complementarity allowed for harmony in spite of contradictions. – Harmony when you contemplate it from a higher and more inclusive level.

Particles or waves – one theory excludes apparently the other, but according to Bohr they also supplement each other. Both can be true at the same time which is beyond our imagination.

What particularly fascinates me is the side effect of the theory of complementarity - his openness to other interpretations of life including cultural, spiritual and religious interpretations of life – interpretations of substance and eternity. One interpretation does not necessarily exclude the other.

I wonder whether he was inspired by Hans Christian Ørsted and his book about the Spirit in Nature. I'm sure one of his students David Favrholt can throw light on this.

I love Niels Bohr's remark that there are some things that are so tragic, that you can only laugh about them.

The best theatre play I have ever seen is the play named *Copenhagen* with the remarkable dialogue with Werner Heisenberg in Niels Bohr's private home during the Nazi rule in Germany. I saw it at the Betty Nansen Theatre some years ago.

As a curiosity it is claimed in the play that in his home they loved to play cards without cards – with hidden cards. I have in fact tried it – I thought I invented that idea!. You need a good memory to play it.

When I was Minister for Education and Research in the 80'ies I was very happy to sign the regulations of the Archive.

It compensated somewhat for my bad conscience and remorse for the spending cuts I had to carry through in the early 80'ies when the country was in crisis. I received dozens if not hundreds of letters from scientists all over the world which underlined the importance of the institute as a world centre for advanced science.

This archive is important for the study of Niels Bohr's life, his line of thinking and reasoning and – of course - his works.

This institute in itself is a remarkable place – apart from being a scientific lab. I pass it nearly every day on my bicycle. I can always smell the spirit of Bohr.

This is where his particle accelerator and the cyclotron were placed.

I was told yesterday by one of his admirers – Peder Olesen Larsen – that his kvante mechanics theory was developed here in the little auditorium with the wooden benches!

We should also remember his proposal that the East and West should share his insight and the development of nuclear energy. For that he received the famous prize Atoms for Peace. Today that vision is perhaps more realistic than ever. - Yes, I said more realistic than ever. Just wait a couple of decades.

He was the brain and initiator behind the establishment of the Danish nuclear experimental facility at Risø.

Risø was founded on a great vision.

Today, off course almost everybody rejects the idea of nuclear energy. Particularly after the Japanese tragedy.

That is even reflected in my letter box! - The protest letters I receive these days are about the tiny waste disposals from the Risø facility. - It so happens that I'm now responsible for the disposal of nuclear waste from that facility – probably the worst political task I have had so far!

But who knows what will be developed in the future. The vision of Niels Bohr is still valid. That nuclear energy should be used for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all of mankind. The vision that knowledge about it should be shared. That is still a vision that future generations will have to deal with.

Also for this reason it is important to keep Niels Bohr and his works and thinking in the minds of scientists and in the minds of everybody who cares for the development of physics and for the exploration of the fundamental laws on which this world is based.

Thank you so much for paying tribute to this living legend, this torch throwing light on our creation and our future. A torch that in this building has been passed from generation to generation. Thank you.