

Opening address Royal Netherlands Academy Colloquium on Femtosecond Reaction Dynamics

On behalf of the organizing committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy Colloquium on *Femtosecond Reaction Dynamics* I would like to welcome you to The Trippenhuis here in Amsterdam and to this Meeting. Both the timing of this Meeting and its location seem just right. With respect to the timing: yesterday prof. Zewail was awarded the Wolf Prize in Chemistry for his outstanding work in the field of 'Femtochemistry.' Regarding the place: Amsterdam in many ways is a magical town; many were and are drawn to it because of its tolerance; others come here to admire the paintings of van Gogh, Rembrandt or enjoy listening to the world-famous Royal 'Concertgebouw' orchestra. Amsterdam has also a rich history in science; it was the home town of Johannes Diderik van der Waals who was the first physics professor at the University of Amsterdam. His forces hold many of the systems we study together. His successor was Pieter Zeeman. Who in this audience has not at one time or another used the Zeeman effect in her or his work? Jacobus van 't Hoff, the founding father of stereo chemistry has also been a professor at the University of Amsterdam. All these scientists received the Noble prize for their seminal contributions to science. This Conference site: the headquarters of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences keeps their memories and those of other prominent Dutch scientists in many ways very much alive.

This Meeting is not an ordinary meeting; the fact that so many distinguished scientists are gathered here makes it very special; the small number of scientists (about 50) participating in this Colloquium solicits for strong interactions among the participants and the Meeting's subject is at the front of research in the field of Optical Sciences. We therefore expect the Proceedings of this Colloquium to become an important milestone in the field of *Femtosecond Reaction Dynamics*.

This field is moving very fast indeed, not only by the increasing pace of technological innovations, but also by the fact that short optical pulses are finding constantly new applications in chemistry, physics, biology and even medicine. So one of the points to be addressed at this Symposium is: what is the future of femtosecond pulses in our field and what are the challenges in this next decade?

Before calling on the first speaker I would like to announce a few changes in the Programme: the first is connected with the fact that professor Zewail could not make it on time because of the Wolf prize ceremony yesterday. Professor Shank has been so kind to agree to change places with professor Zewail. Professor Shank will therefore also be the Chairman of tomorrow mornings session. Professor Castner will present his lecture on Wednesday instead of Tuesday. This gives the speakers in the after-coffee session on Wednesday a little more time.

Then now the time has come to call on the first speaker of this morning: professor Shank, professor at the University of California at Berkeley and Director of Lawrence Berkely Laboratory. Despite his youthful appearance professor Shank is, to many of us, the founding father of femtoseconds. His work together with Ippen and the other members of the Shank group at Bell Laboratories have made a lasting contribution to the field of ultrafast lasers and ultrafast phenomena. I wish you a very good and pleasant Meeting.

Amsterdam, May 17, 1993

Douwe A. Wiersma
(Chairman of the Academy Colloquium)