

International conference „Le monde en mouvement: Identité et nouvelles diasporas (Hospitalité – Appartenance – Emotion – Corps - Désir)“ in honor of Prof. de Toro

(14.09.2015,18.00, Universität Leipzig, Alter Senatssaal)

Dear Professor Rytel-Schwarz,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear guests from far and wide,

Welcome to Leipzig and thank you to the organizers, especially Prof. de Toro, for the kind invitation. “Le monde en mouvement” – the world in movement: has this formula ever been more significant than today? “The world is out of order”, Shakespeare says, and it springs to my mind that the area your conference focuses on – Fernand Braudel in his great book from 1949 simply referred to it as the “Mediterranean Sea” or the “Mediterranean world” – is “out of order” in a special way.

Not only a daily look in the newspaper but also our everyday reality in Leipzig remind us of that. Right now, while we are talking, people from Syria, Libya or Tunisia arrive in Leipzig. They claim, and quite rightly so, a hospitable reception. And, if you will allow me this personal remark, nothing makes me more optimistic about a common future than the fulfillment of this desire by the urban community of Leipzig.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In your conference program, I can see that you precisely reflect upon the conditions of this situation. On the political and economic conditions, of course, but also, and even more so, on the symbolic and cultural conditions of the encounter. I am deeply convinced that the actual solutions for our common problems are to be found in this area. Consequently, I am also convinced of the irreplaceability of the humanities that engage in this perspective.

This kind of conference program requires a global intellectual vision. And this conference can consider itself lucky to have an organizer who thoroughly embodies this vision. And therefore –dear Professor de Toro, this brings me to you – I may say: I am very glad to have come.

First of all, let me give you the best regards by Mayor Burkhard Jung. You two have met in many common projects, in activities towards a Cervantes institute or the subject of Spanish in Saxon schools, in countless events during the book fair or at conferences and political events that you promoted. Let me just recall the visit of Chilean president Michelle Bachelet to Leipzig.

During all these activities I noticed in Professor de Toro an enormous will to urbanity, a will to Leipzig that is – allow me the big word – exemplary.

So, it was no coincidence when we met this year on January 12, late in the evening, when 35,000 people here in Leipzig went to the streets to raise their voices for tolerance, fraternity and hospitality, against all figures and specters of musty enmity. That I met you and members of your staff there added a special facet to my perception of you.

However, I was by no means surprised to see you there. Dear Professor de Toro, I expected you to be there. I always thought of you as an “universal intellectual” in the sense that Sartre gave to these words, an intellectual for whom thinking has no real borders, no extraterritorial spaces. Thinking can deal with everything, especially with the unutterable and with the inopportune.

„Le monde en mouvement“, the world in movement – i.e. globalization – is not just a word for the universal intellectual. It is a multiplicity of discontinuous processes that take place before our eyes and through our actions. The task is, above all, to understand it and to open it up for being shaped.

I am not surprised that scholars from the Maghreb and Israel participate in this conference in order to address and overcome – in the process of the intellectual encounter – the barriers that seem to be insurmountable at other places.

A third and last point, dear Professor de Toro!

As you have deep roots in the global spaces of an urban spirit, you are bound to the idea of the university. The university is a social space of freedom and autonomy with a will of its own. It is also a place to live. After all, even a wanderer between the worlds has to know where he belongs.

In your comments about the future of the university, especially in your last intervention in the newspaper “Leipziger Volkszeitung”, I have always perceived a realistic and at the same time melancholic overtone. Something has begun to reach its end: the classical university, the original university, the “unconditional university”, as Jacques Derrida, one of your teachers, called this extraordinary invention by the name of university. Terry Eagleton, the great English scholar, recently said, having in mind the development in England: right before our eyes “the university as a center of humane critique” is slowly dying.

Dear Professor de Toro,

It maybe unseemly to say so but I always understood your public objections in matters of the university as a manner of intervening in the process of putting an end to things, of not understanding it as a natural, immutable. By intervening as an intellectual, you are critical, what else? The intellectual is a troublemaker. That’s his job. There are obviously enough people who just tell us what we want to hear.

That is the aporia of the intellectual: he cares about things that apparently do not concern him – and people sling mud at him. When the damage has been done, many, or rather all, exclaim: We didn’t want that to happen.

Dear Professor de Toro,

One has to want that and to be able to endure it. Recently, I read an article in the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” about Milos Rau’s last art and film project. It has the title “The Congo tribunal”. For Milos Rau, a globally acting spirit is the necessary reaction to global economy. When no one raises his voice, intellectuals have to do so, like Voltaire in the Calas affair, like André Gide in matters of the Congo at the beginning of the 20th century, like Pierre Bourdieu in the 1990s against the demon of neoliberalism.

At the end of his article, Milos Rau remarks: “When they will ask me one day: What have you done when six million people died in Congo?, I don’t want to have to admit: I was in Paris, deconstructing a novel by Houellebecq.”

Dear Professor de Toro,

Please excuse when I thought of you and knew: you would have subscribed to that idea, adding at the same time: One also has to deconstruct Houellebecq in order to really understand what happens in Congo.

You’ll be with the university, you will stay in Leipzig. I am looking forward to our further cooperation.

Thank you very much!