

I WAS ONLY DOING MY JOB

Magnificence Professor Scheucking, Rector of the University of Leipzig, honored Prorector Schwarz.

High Magnificence and dear colleague, Mr. Haeuser;
dear Ms. Rytel-Schwarz, dear Danuta, Associate Dean of the Department of Philology;
dear Ms. Felten, Vice Director of the Institute of Romance Studies, dear Uta;
dear Susanne, formal doctoral candidates;
dear Mr. Michael Faber, Mayor and Culture Assistant of the City of Leipzig;
dear Professor Mario Lillo, Dean of the Department of Philology of the PUC Santiago de Chile;
dear M. Jean-Christophe Tailpied, Director of the Institut Français in Leipzig;
dear Prof. Ingenschay, dear Dieter;

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends!

I would first like to thank you all for taking the time to spend this evening with me, and special thanks go to all of you who have spoken this evening in honor of my work, or better said, the work of our team over the past 23 years.

Today is a day like any other: On one hand, someone is retiring, an event that is surely occurring thousands of times in this moment; on the other hand, today marks the end of a chapter in someone's life. This brings many changes and, as I have noted, new tasks as well. I am very curious to see what this new period will bring, especially when I look over my plan for the next three years.

I did not plan to say anything today beyond an enormous "thank you". But my staff was of the opinion that today being my last day appearing as an active professor, and thus as a university "official".

This puts me under some pressure, as I already said most of what needs to be said in my speech on my 60th birthday and in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Ibero-American Research Seminar last year, and as a friend of Borges, I find repetition awful. Let us remember the words of the heresiarchs in "Tlön, Uqbar Orbis Tertius" (*OC* 1989: I, 431-432): "mirrors and fatherhood are hateful, because they multiply and increase everything."

But I have chosen to heed my team's words, and hope that I am not repeating myself.

Let me begin by briefly mentioning a few points from along my career path, but not in the same way as Dieter Ingenschay. No, in a different way, as I cannot reproduce his words, let alone imitate his ingenuity.

When I look upon some of the faces here today, I have more than enough reason to talk for hours – but never fear, I won't!

I see **Klaus Meyer-Minnemann, Professor emeritus of Hamburg University**, who oversaw my habilitation and thereby lay the foundation for my professorship; for this I owe you many

thanks Professor Meyer-Minnemann, dear Klaus. I have not forgotten how you introduced my publications into the Latin American Studies curriculum in your chair as an assistant in Kiel; nor how you and Karsten Garscha opened the doors to *Iberoromania* Journal, in which I was honored to publish several semiotic and poststructural works which, at that time, were not to be taken for granted; nor how you received me in your section when I gave my very first presentation in Germany as an assistant at the Regensburg Hispanists' Day. These were a generous gestures someone shocked by the brusqueness of the full professors when dealing with the new generation at the time, as we briefly discussed in Hamburg.

I see his **High Magnificence Cornelius Weiss**, the architect of our university's new beginning, with whom I enjoyed collegial cooperation, but who also saw two important events shape our relationship, of which I will mention only one: As a new professor in Leipzig and following the attacks in Moelln and Solingen where were killed citizens of Turkish origin, and in light of the massive criticism that I received as a professor in the U.S., asserting that we Germans "were once again burning people", I spoke out a problem – as the only member of the faculty at the University of Leipzig, apart from you, Magnificence –at the first meeting of my regular lecture ("Vorlesung"), and I addressed with an open letter to the Minister at the time, a letter that was published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, in order to protest against the leader of the Republicans, a radical right-wing party, who was a professor in the Sociology Department.

Of course the media exploded, and I made no friends at the university; I got insulting and offending letters, personal threats, and more followed. The only person who came out publicly on my behalf was you, dear Mr. Weiss. You acted nobly, like a true Democrat, with an open mind and with the civil courage that is so often demanded of us, something inherent in your character. As you can see, this is my vivid memory of you, just as if it were yesterday. You made me feel protected and understood. I have thanked you many times for this.

And you **Mr. Koenig**, how grand has been our cooperation from the moment we met to your last day of service. As head of personnel, you were always a trusted help to me.

And **Professor emeritus Gerd Wotjak**, you and Ms. Steube were the guides of this *lazarillo* named de Toro, in a part of Germany that was, for me and my whole generation, foreign, and this in a context of total upheaval. You were a stable, trusted, reliable and upstanding reference point for me; thank you for this, Gerd.

High Magnificence Professor Häuser, dear Mr. Häuser, you have supported and fostered my work together with the former Prorector for Teaching and Studies, Charlotte Schubert over two rectorships with great engagement and significant consistency.

Together, we undertook different endeavors of public relations in connection with science and politics, and here I must unfortunately repeat myself, which belong to the golden age of the IAFSL. Here, I mean the visits by President Lagos and President Bachelet; the meeting with diplomats from Latin America and the Caribbean at the IAFSL; the dialogue between Germany and Latin America, as well as that between Germany and Chile; the bicentennial celebration of the independence of Latin American countries; and much more.

Of course, I also have fond memories of our trip to Chile as the guests of Ms. Bachelet at her assumption of office in the *Moneda*.

Dear Mr. Häuser, while you were Rector, you always accepted our invitations to different events, great or small, and here you are again today, and have even been so kind as to speak to us. Thank you very much.

I also see my old brothers in arms, e.g. **Professor emeritus Wolfgang Schwarz** (we should start an emeriti club). We have had many valuable academic and personal experiences together. I recall our culinary evenings at the beginning of our time in Leipzig, with Anne Koenen as well.

I could never omit **Dieter Ingenschay** and **Michael Rössner**, who, as editors of the Journal *Iberoromania*, published several of my articles and gave me valuable advice, and of course, I could not forget the many research projects, successful and unsuccessful.

I also see **Mr. Floeck** here today among the guests, with whom I spent twenty years in valuable cooperation.

I thank the Dean of the Philology Department of the Episcopalian Catholic University in Santiago de Chile, **Professor Lillo**. Thank you, dear Mario, for coming so very far (C. Opazo is, of course, from Chile), and thank you for your continued support in our privileged partnership. It does me honor and brings me great joy to know that we will continue to work together in research and in *cotutelles*; a new generation of doctoral candidates and postdocs is coming, they are already at the starting line. And finally, I look forward to my stay with you next June, and I thank you for your kind and generous words.

I would also like to mention **Professor Cristián Opazo** from the same university, who was with us for a year as a guest DAAD professor and a representative of a new generation of professors, a true cosmopolitan in the sciences. I thank for everything he does for us. This University is the number one in Chile and Latin America, and has one of the best philology departments in the world.

To my many colleagues from **Morocco** and **Jerusalem**, I love you all, you live in two truly complex and not always risk-free laboratories, and I have you to thank for so much knowledge and affection. I thank you for our professor exchange, and for how all of us here have started a diaspora project, funded by the BMBF. It was like a dream to me when, in 2010, 64 scholars from Israel, Morocco, Turkey, and Europe came together. What an event that was, and here you all are again today!

And you, dear Abderrahman and Moha, took me into your fold and, in spite of your work as Dean or Rector, thought of me as one of your own. For this, I thank you.

Both regions, Israel and Morocco, have become very dear to me over the past one or two decades, so much so that they have become like new homes for me. I look forward to visiting again, for example, next year at the Hebrew University.

And I cannot forget our, my, dear colleague, friend, and comrade in so many endeavors: I am talking about Professor Ruth Fine, who unfortunately cannot be here today due to a family tragedy. She was, however, with us during the entire conference.

Let me come to a close:

In talks with my family, my children have asked me if this life of labor and sacrifice, a deprived life for science, a life as a slave to the schedule and one of rigid discipline, has been worthwhile (my wife has known the answer for years, and it is a very clear one). They ask whether a more chilled out life would not have been better, whether I could have been happy.

Of course, as you can image, it is night impossible to talk of happiness or unhappiness in life or to answer such questions.

At the time I couldn't answer, and brought forth a few truisms before I realized that the question was treacherous.

Today, I dare to attempt an answer in two steps, and in doing so I separate my career as my profession, as part of an academic institution, as an official, from the service in this profession as a scientist.

The profession is not pleasant, no. The office itself is full of thorns and traps, cooperation and collegiality often give way to merciless and unchecked competition and chance, and the constant pressure of what we know as self administration – how many concepts and profiles or reforms that served no end have I, have we drafted or planned since 1993. How many tons of paper have we used in vain? This part of the profession never lets one rest, it consumes enormous amounts of energy, and we would do well without it – but it is part of the job.

The science side of things is different. When I look back and ask myself what has been at the core of my work in teaching and research since 1978, even since the beginning of my studies in Munich in 1973, one thing stands out: understanding culture and literature in systems and epistemologies. In my teaching, my goal has never been to crush my students, doctoral candidates, and postdocs with knowledge, but to effectively foster them under the idea that less is more; to introduce them to systems. Only in this way can one learn to manipulate different objects to come to logical conclusions that hold up under pressure.

Since the beginning of my studies, it has been my driving goal to transversally, transdisciplinarily, think and work in epistemes and dispositives. This was first visible in the concentrations I chose, in my choice of Philosophy; Theory of Knowledge and Logic; German, French, Hispanic, Portuguese, and Italian Studies; Psychoanalysis; and much more, including in aspects that went well beyond literature.

As my life has been since my fourth year, so have I structured my scholarly activities, as a nomad, as an endless path, as a *trace infinie et disséminate*, as our colleague Ms. Felten accurately said.

I have managed to foster a type of science that has a signum. One recognizes products of Leipzig immediately, and that is not only true of my work. Our work is clearly localizeable and enjoys – despite some who sell themselves as brands – uncontested international renown.

The draw of our work as an institute is reflected in the requests received monthly, often weekly, by those who would write their dissertations and habilitations with us.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have had the good fortune to have found a group of **young people** in Leipzig in 1992 who immediately began to attend my lectures, some of whom became my **student assistants**, wrote their **magister theses** under my supervision, became my **academic assistants**, worked on their PhD and Post-Docs in my care, and some of them became **professors** or are in the process. Others who were there even before the fall of the Berlin Wall were my coworkers, who always supported me and on whom I could always rely.

I had the good fortune of being able to help rebuild this university, with its distinguished tradition, one of the best universities in the world up to World War II. And I was able to do so in the beautiful and no less historic City of Leipzig. For this reason I spoke at my 60th birthday celebration of my Leipzig and of my **ALMA MATER LIPSIENSIS**, and mine

they are, because since 1992 I have worked with many others to make this university what it is today.

Dear colleagues, I will remain active for a long while, and as I have already stated in another context, it is a great honor and joy to continue to serve my university, now in a different role. You won't be rid of me so easily.

My passion, my curiosity, and my energy live on, as strong as it was when I began my studies. I am encouraged and inspired by the heartfelt messages from my institution and colleagues, and I am carried by a constant wave of doctoral candidates and postdocs who wish to continue working with me. This is both a duty and a mission. The endless trail does not break off just because one leaves office.

And so I will remain in close contact with the university, and will do everything I can to retain the right to funded research. Saxony has fallen behind in this sense, a fact that I will help to remedy.

I leave you with a successful institute and a visible Chair with a *Triple* – and please forgive the comparison to Jupp Heynckes and Bayern München – that is comprised of international research, quality and sustainable support of young scholars, and the internationalization of your organization.

But I wish my successor a different fate than that of Pep Guardiola.

I would like to thank my patient family from the bottom of my heart for their love and patience, their advice and criticism. I hope that I will now do a better job of avoiding the sentence “I don't have time, I have to work.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank all of the institutions and people who have supported me all these years, be it the DFG, the Humboldt Foundation or Studienstiftung, the DAAD, the die Vereinigung der Freunde und Förderer of the University of Leipzig, the House of the Book, die Book Faire, the City of Leipzig and many others. I would especially like to thank my colleagues in the institute, and of course, my staff. They all deserve great thanks, but I would like to highlight one person who was at the heart of things, the calm eye of the hurricane, whose task is anything but easy.

When we were on vacation in London, I took my wife and daughter shopping in Kensington Street, as I didn't feel comfortable at the time with walking alone in London. We bought a gift at *Anthropologie*, just a token, and I would like to give it to someone today who was a blessing for my office, and whom I treasure for her kind and loyal character. You will have guessed, I mean the head in my office, Ms. Anke Steinberg.

Now I will come to a close. Thank you for your patience attention and I hope you will join me in a drink next door.