Professor Thornhill, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to welcome you, Professor Thornhill, and wish you a pleasant stay at our University. We are grateful that you have accepted our invitation as Niklas Luhmann Guest Professor and are looking forward to the lectures and seminars you will be holding during the coming weeks.

This Guest Professorship has become quite a tradition – for the 11th time we are receiving an international renowned researcher here in Bielefeld. – But, as we all know, there is always a first time too and in this case it is the fact that after a row of Sociologists you are the first Professor of Law assuming this position.

For most people here this will not come as a surprise, but to the general public it is much less known that Luhmann has studied law and started his professional career as civil officer (“Verwaltungsbeamter”). His first academic appointment (1962-1965) was with the German University of Administrative Sciences (“Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaft”) and one of his first publications from 1965 dealt with “Grundrechte als Institution” (“basic rights as institution”). Later on other publications followed – the most prominent ones being “Rechtssoziologie” (A Sociological Theory of Law, 1980) and “Das Recht der Gesellschaft (Law as a Social System, 1993). Without any exaggeration, the Sociological Theory of Law and the writings on law constitute one central point of Luhmann’s publications. – Having said this, it seems only reasonable to
invite a Professor of Law who himself has extensively published on the Sociology of Law to our university!

At this point I am normally supposed to mention that the Niklas-Luhmann-Guest Professorship is not about inviting scientists with a high content-related affinity to Luhmann, but rather about inviting interesting personalities from the world of science. – Well, in your case, Professor Thornhill, both is true and although it is not at all a pre-requisite, it is definitely no harm to know Luhmann’s theory: You have published quite a few articles on Luhmann’s legal thoughts and just recently edited a comprehensive book on “Luhmann and Law” and from all I know – I really cannot claim to be an expert in this field – you go beyond Luhmann’s ideas and challenge them. He would have liked this!

However, I will not go into any more details, but rather wishing you a good time at our university with many inspiring discussions with colleagues and students and maybe, there will be some moments left for relaxation and getting to know the city and the region or talking a brisk walk through the Teutoburg Forest which you can reach within a few minutes!

And now I wish all of us an interesting evening and let my colleague, Matthias Albert, introduce you and your work!