Ladies and gentlemen,

Throughout this year Bielefeld University has celebrated its 50th anniversary with a multitude of events addressing various people and putting different aspects of our daily (academic) life in perspective. The conference taking place today and tomorrow is certainly a climax of this festive year. The panoramic view of our audimax filled with all of you is overwhelming – so first of all I would like to welcome every single one of you: thank you for being here and joining us for the scientific celebration of our university’s anniversary! – I add a special welcome and special thanks to our keynote speakers, Nancy Cartwright and Robbert Dijkgraaf, who have come all the way from abroad to be with us. They will set the tone for the whole conference and stimulate our thinking – once again: Thank you for being here!

The conference topic “The Theoretical University in the Data Age” has by no means been chosen by chance. It reflects our university’s founding principles which go back to Professor Helmut Schelsky. In 1965 Schelsky was designated by the Northrhine-Westphalian Minister of Culture to develop the concept for a university in the East Westphalian region. A few years ago he had elaborated his vision of a “theoretical university”. Although this vision could not be realised to its full extend, it has shaped our university and important elements of this vision have been effective til today – I will point this out considering three important aspects:
Firstly, **theoretical and methodological approaches and questions** have always been at the center of our interest. Today, we have set four strategic research areas in which we aim at conducting top-level research. These research areas are intertwined by three cross-cutting topics representing our university's approaches to conducting research: **Analysing Data, Building Models, and Constructing Theories**. With these cross-cutting topics we pick up our traditional focus on theoretical and methodological questions and combine it with empirical approaches and the emerging field of Data Science. They form a common methodological baseline for all major research endeavours and all of our faculties use methods related to one or more of the cross-cutting topics. In this sense they also serve as common denominators facilitating **interdisciplinary** dialogue and cooperation.

**Interdisciplinarity** – the key word to my second example has fallen! It was Schelsky's ultimate belief that in „modern“ times research progress would mainly take place at the border of different research areas and disciplines¹. No wonder that in a first step he established the Center for Interdisciplinarity which paved the way for our university. Since then „Interdisciplinarity“ has been a strong guiding principle. It has directed the setup of our faculties and has become manifest in the architecture of our main building. Home to all disciplines this huge building facilitated the contact of colleagues from arts and humanities, social and natural sciences which were all close together. In recent years we have had to expand and have added new buildings. Yet, interdisciplinary thinking and acting has become so natural to all of us that longer walks will definitely not prevent us from crossing borders and transcending boundaries.

The anniversary conference reflects Bielefeld’s theoretical and interdisciplinary tradition. I thank the Scientific Board who has worked out the overall frame and guiding questions of the conference. I also thank the colleagues (some of them even from other universities!) responsible for the panel sessions. They have put together an intriguing programme and have invited proficient and inspiring panelists who will shed light on theories and theorizing in such different areas as Contemporary Society, Contemporary Text Cultures, Big Data and Interdisciplinary Models for a Complex World.

Although, we will split up in parallel panels, the interdisciplinary momentum will not be neglected: The perspectives of the different panels will be brought together in a discussion where questions about theory formation and its relevance in different fields will be tackled.

This conference would not be complete – and this is the last of my three points – without an opportunity for dialogue between academia and politics. In his concept for our university Schelsky argued that it was necessary to re-design the relation between universities and society. He believed that a regular exchange between academics, politicians and other players was necessary to bring research results to life and to create conditions in which science can evolve and prosper. – The conference takes up Schelsky’s claim and ends with a roundtable debate about good governance in the data age. I thank our guests who will take part in this debate for joining us: Dieter Imboden, Ada Pellert, Eva Quante-Brandt and Robbert Dijkgraaf.
Well, we all have an interesting time ahead – so I will keep this short and hand over to my colleague, Angelika Epple, Chair of the Scientific Board who will say a little bit more about the programme.