Professor Illouz, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to welcome you, Professor Illouz, 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 12th time we are receiving an internationally renowned researcher here in Bielefeld. You, Ms Illouz, are indeed the perfect example of a scientific cosmopolitan:

Your scientific training and career led you to many different places in various countries above all France, the US and Israel. Germany, however, is by no means a blank on your map. The past 15 or so years you have frequently been here. You were invited to give Adorno Lectures at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt; you were a fellow of the “Wissenschaftskolleg” in Berlin and you received the Anneliese Maier Research Award of the Humboldt Foundation, which is granted to outstanding researchers in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences.

However, your reputation in Germany stretches even beyond the scientific community: the wider public knows you for your articles in the weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT and your books are discussed in daily press. We appreciate all the more that you have chosen to come to
Bielefeld, a place where – as far as I know – you have not yet been and where you will hopefully feel comfortable.

This year is a very special one for Bielefeld University, we celebrate our 50th anniversary and so does the Faculty of Sociology which was one of the three faculties we started with (the other two being the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Mathematics). And the first professor appointed was Niklas Luhmann.

The name has dropped, so this is probably a good time to mention that the Niklas-Luhmann-Guest Professorship is not about inviting scientists with a high affinity to Luhmann, but rather about inviting interesting personalities from the world of science and having the chance to learn about and discuss their theories and ideas.

One of your main research fields, Professor Illouz, are emotions and how they are shaped by our modern capitalistic society. In recent years, you have published several books about love and modern relationships. You might not be aware that one of the first courses Luhmann taught at our university also dealt with “love”. In summer 1969 he delivered a seminar and started with the observation that “the phenomenon of love has attracted little noteworthy attention from sociological research (…) there has been no sophisticated theoretical treatment of the topic – probably because there are no theoretical ideas available that might offer grounds for claiming that they are able to do justice to such a complex, tangible and yet far-reaching phenomenon of daily life”.

We will probably all agree with Luhmann’s judgement: Love itself is a complex phenomenon and it has not become less complex in times of digitalisation with the social web, online matchmaking agencies and mobile dating apps offering almost endless possibilities. Your research,
Professor Illouz, addresses all this and takes into account our modern life’s complexity.

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

I would like to end this short welcome speech with a funny anecdote involving Luhmann. In the early years of the university, the “founding father” Helmut Schelsky – a Sociologist himself – regularly met with the Faculty of Sociology. Every semester he asked the professors what they were planning to do in their courses. Preparing the already mentioned seminar about “love” Luhmann answered: “Next semester Otthein Rammstedt (Luhmann’s assistant at that time) and I are going to make love.”

Well, what else is there to say? I wish all of us an interesting evening and let my colleague, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, introduce you and your work, Professor Illouz.

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