

**INTERVIEW WITH JOHN RUSSELL AND
FERDINAND RUPLIN
GERMAN DEPARTMENT**

May 16, 1988

Dr. Hartzell: An interview with John Russell and Ferdinand Ruplin of the German Department in their offices Monday, May 16, 1988.

Dr. Ruplin: Are there question numbers?

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, question number on there.

Dr. Ruplin: Shall I start?

Dr. Russell: Go ahead.

Dr. Ruplin: Okay, question number 1, Ferdinand A. Ruplin, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, Associate Professor.

Dr. Russell: John R. Russell, Associate Professor of German in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages.

Dr. Hartzell: You're chairman?

Dr. Russell: Not now.

Dr. Ruplin: Both of us have been chairman.

Dr. Russell: Ferd was chairman three years, I was chairman at three different times for nine and half years, I believe.

Dr. Hartzell: Who is chairman now?

Dr. Russell: Ed Czerwinski.

Dr. Ruplin: With regard to question two, this is Ruplin speaking, I came to Stony Brook in 1963 at the age of 29.

Dr. Russell: Russell came in 1965 at the age of 36.

Dr. Hartzell: What kind of a department existed at that time?

Dr. Ruplin: Well, in 1963 it was a department of foreign languages. Most of the faculty members were junior, and of the people who came, who were there in 1963, only two of us are still here -- Ruplin and Carol Blum in the department of French and Italian.

Dr. Russell: In 1965 the department of foreign languages had just split into romance languages and Germanic and Slavic.

Dr. Ruplin: Okay, shall we proceed to number four?

Dr. Hartzell: All right.

Dr. Ruplin: Okay, this is Ruplin speaking again, Professor Seymour Flaxman, who was chairman of the department of foreign languages at that time, through a friend of his from Yale, Constantine Reichard, through his protégé, Cecil Wood, who was my mentor, that was the connection between Flaxman and me, gave me a call late one night

Dr. Hartzell: At Yale, you were at Yale?

Dr. Ruplin: No, I was at the University of Minnesota, and I was an ABD as an Instructor there -- I'm anticipating the next question.

Dr. Russell: Russell -- my *docteur fater* knew that I was looking for a job and introduced me to Flaxman and interviewed me at the annual slave market, the MLA convention.

Dr. Ruplin: This is Ruplin again. The market at that time was very, very good, and I was not really looking for a job. I had several offers, but when Flaxman called me, I was flattered at the notion of coming east. That is part of question six, I guess I've anticipated that. I came out for my interview and it was, for a middle western boy whose only experience outside of the middle west had been in the service, which is parochial enough, I was very impressed and came out to the campus here, and I was interviewed, I think, by every department chairman, including the Executive Officer -- was that your title, Dr. Hartzell?

Dr. Hartzell: Chief Administrative Officer.

Dr. Ruplin: The Chief Administrative Officer, that was very impressive. I guess just the idea that it was eastern was what impressed me the most, influenced my decision to come out here.

Dr. Russell: If we're on six, I was looking to move. I had taught for six years previously at Wabash College in Indiana and left it due to an argument with my chairman who interfered with my grading. And also because I thought it was time to move on, much as I enjoyed teaching in a small college.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you know Byron Trippet by any chance?

Dr. Russell: Oh, yes, oh, yes. And after I left there in rather a hurry and went to Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, which again was a very pleasant teaching position, a small college where everybody, but it was in the darkest south and not a very pleasant place to bring children up in, in my opinion. Why did I come to Stony Brook, I was interested in remaining in higher education but I wished to go into public education, where I thought the nation's interest should be put. Stony Brook, to anticipate further questions, had the reputation of a young, growing, dynamic institution dedicated to public teaching. It was also in a very part of the United States as far as I was concerned, even though I had never been on Long Island, I knew its reputation in terms of climate, its obvious geographical situation, etc., it seemed most attractive to me since I didn't think Harvard was going to call me.

Dr. Ruplin: Of course, another reason why I came out here was it was time to jump out of the nest. The University of Minnesota wasn't going to keep me as an ABD Instructor forever. And I was impressed by the fact that it was a brand new institution, it was appealing to me to see what would happen in the creation of a university. As regards question seven, if that's cool to go onto that one, I didn't really understand the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook; I didn't understand purposes behind the creation of any institution, and I'm not sure that I do right now. I certainly am awed by what has happened in the twenty-five years since I've been here at Stony Brook. Certainly Stony

Brook has not become what I thought it was going to become, or what I felt it might become, because I'm not sure that I really thought about it.

Dr. Hartzell: What do you mean by 'what it has not become what you thought it was going to become'?

Dr. Ruplin: Well, the image of Stony Brook that it was projecting for itself when I came, of course, was the small New England college-type of thing. I was impressed by this image I guess primarily by the community; I lived in the community. I also was impressed by the attitude, which I highly respected at the time, the rather elitist attitude of the faculty, I felt that the faculty was very much Ivy League and I was a little bit awed by that. I came from a populist background, coming from a land-grant university, and I was a little troubled by that, and I suppose that would relate to subsequent questions about how I felt about what was happening in the sixties, the late sixties and the early seventies.

Dr. Russell: I partially addressed this question already, the two years difference made quite a difference in that the New England college was no longer apparent at all, and the fairly elitist faculty-student ratio, which had existed, I think I looked up Stony Brook in the 1963 almanac, it has a faculty of 120 and a student body of 800. By the time I got here in 1965, I think there were over 2,000 and obviously we were not a New England college nor headed in that direction.

Dr. Hartzell: Okay, next.

Dr. Ruplin: Okay, if we want to get down to 8, the impressions pertaining to the campus itself, the people and the leadership, I guess I have to relate that to 9, because what I remember of the decade of the sixties was 1968, and almost everything that I think of when I think of the sixties is 1968, from the student demonstrations to the construction workers to the arguments in the faculty assembly about who should vote in the first place, and secondly should we have professional programs and all these kinds of things that were all new to me as a young person. I had been involved in the civil rights movement in the fifties, and I became somewhat involved in the anti-war movement on campus, but by that time having a wife and three children, I was a little mellowed than I had been in

the fifties. And being a veteran I did not run up to places where there were allegedly were bombs planted, I ran away from places where there were bombs planted. Whereas in the fifties I might have run up to those places. 1968 is it, that's the big thing that stands out in my mind and the people who were associated with these things, of course, and the drug busts and so forth, residential college program, I was involved in that.

Dr. Hartzell: Were you?

Dr. Ruplin: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: How, what was your function in the residential college program?

Dr. Ruplin: I was master of Langmuir College. I was there the day of the lottery, the first lottery. And the person who was drawn first won the grand prize in the dorm, I don't know what that was any longer, but it was a problem for that person. I don't know whether he went, 285 students or so in the dorm, but many present as well.

Dr. Hartzell: What about, are you on 8 now?

Dr. Russell: I guess I'm on 8. I've already given some of my impressions. I think I was less impressed by 1968 than Ferd was simply because I was impressed all along by institution and evolution. And one of the things that most impressed me and continues to fascinate me was our getting into computer assisted instruction. Already I think in the first year I was here IBM approached the college and Ferd started teaching in 1966 and I got into it in late 1966 or 1967. And that to me was very exciting pedagogically, but it was simply symptomatic of the whole university which is in evolution. And the sixties seemed a part of it, not a happy part of it, but a part of it. And leadership, again, Toll and I arrived at the same time. I found him a strong leader and not particularly a friend of the humanities, but still a very much a part of a growing and evolving institution.

Dr. Hartzell: Ann and I lived for six months at Sunwood, next door was John Toll; and I had occasion one time to go in and saw some poetry on a table beside his bed. I think he had broader interests than he had a chance really to follow.

Dr. Russell: I did not mean to suggest that he was contemptuous in any sense, I think he was very open, but he had other interests.

Dr. Hartzell: He thought he was going to do some research in physics; I think he discovered that administration took more time than he expected.

Dr. Russell: Another thing that stands out from that time were the annual faculty parties, which when I came were still held in Sunwood, soon moved to the gym and were soon abandoned, it was simply changing that fast.

Dr. Ruplin: I was always impressed by the annual parties that were held out in Oyster Bay hosted by the Hartzells, and I was always impressed by the fact that your wife knew everybody's name, including those of the children whom she hadn't met and somehow or other she was able to sort them out that Ferd obviously was the oldest one because he was named after his father and Warren was obviously the youngest one because that's the most recent name she had learned, tremendous talent. But here you have this kind of dichotomy, I have the image still yet from Oyster Bay, although it wasn't there and the New England thing smashing into the late sixties, and as John said was CAI coming and so forth. This was very flattering to a kid from the middle west too. I mean people were coming up to us and saying, hey, we've got the CAI program, how would you like to be the first people in the world to do this. And that's not the kind of thing I had experienced before, nor had I experienced editors coming out and asking us if we had manuscripts and we would like to write books and so forth, which we did, John and I did. We did create during that period, I guess this the evolution to which you were referring, John, is a very, very fancy foreign language program in which we had closed circuit television, computer assisted instruction, conventional audio-language laboratory plus programmed classroom text and lab manual workbook, which, of course, has since been abandoned for lack of funding and support. That's a little twist from the sixties to the eighties.

Dr. Hartzell: Next.

Dr. Ruplin: Well, I guess that gets to 10 for me, the understanding of my place. I was hired as a philologist and Seymour Flaxman, bless him, decided that I would be an applied linguist overnight because we needed somebody to supervise teacher training and there was nobody close to it, I guess, and the departmental philologist came the closest

cause the departmental philologist had heard of a grammatical paradigm or something like that. As a result, I haven't been a philologist now for twenty-five years, but I have been involved in a lot of teacher training kinds of things. John came out, I guess, let me speak for you, if I may, John, for a second, as an expert in the works of T..... and ended up as an applied linguist in order to fill the needs of just everyday stuff of service courses and so on.

Dr. Russell: I don't think either from without or within things were so well defined in my mind as to any teleology as to where I was going, we simply had a lot of work to do and get on with it.

Dr. Hartzell: What can you say about the evolution of the department itself in or toward graduate work or toward literature courses, proliferation of literature courses?

Dr. Ruplin: In this period, up to 1971. We hardly count there. Bentley Glass brought in a person named Andrew White, whom you may have known, probably did, who turned out to be somewhat of a disaster. He should have been a salesman, he was a wonderful four-flusher, a great showman. This was at a time when the administration was rooting on the star system and somehow he was perceived of as a star. He ended up after three years, when he was not reappointed, living in seclusion over in Gershwin, not having anything to do with the department and so forth. But because of him and or despite of him we did apply for graduate work; we were processed and allowed to start in 1970, with excellent reviews for possibility of potentialities, etc., and so things went smoothly on the whole.

Dr. Hartzell: When did additional staff come in, beside you two?

Dr. Ruplin: We grew at least a person a year on the German side. I think at our high point we had something like 13 or 14 people in German and maybe 7 in Russian, plus some part-time instructors and so forth. 1968 took care of part of this, of course, getting rid of the two-year language requirement to no language requirement.

Dr. Hartzell: No language requirement now.

Dr. Ruplin: There is one now, it has been reintroduced. It is an exiting requirement of one year or the equivalent, and most of our incoming students can satisfy that requirement.

Dr. Ruplin: I guess we could sum that up by saying that, I think there were three or four people in German when I arrived in 1963 -- Sloan, O'Neil and me -- I think that was it. And we had, as you said, 12 or 14 by 1970 or 1971, and now we have, depending upon how you count them

Dr. Russell: Six Germans and one Scandinavianist, if you want to include it in the German.

Dr. Ruplin: So we were building with the University in the sixties, but the priorities have changed. I'm kind of anticipating here once again twelve here about the expectations working out. In the sixties we had great expectations, in the eighties we have none. I mean I personally feel betrayed by the institution because I was asked to service the University in foreign languages, then they were taken away. I was asked to bring CAI in, which I did, which I don't feel was recognized. More people knew about our CAI program in Germany than knew about it on this campus, I would say, if we did an actual count, except for our students. We were asked to chair programs, we were asked to build departments, we were asked to supervise teacher training.

Dr. Hartzell: Off-campus, in other words, in other institutions?

Dr. Ruplin: No, here on campus. We developed a whole foreign language teacher training program. I would say John and I were principally responsible for this until Tursi came in, and then of course, you are certainly going to want to talk to him; and now all of that has become meaningless. I don't know, do you feel that way, John?

Dr. Russell: Pretty much, not quite to the same extent, generally, yes.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that characteristic of what is going on nationwide or is that a local shift in priorities.

Dr. Ruplin: Can I guess first?

Dr. Hartzell: Go ahead.

Dr. Ruplin: Nationwide, definitely, in the seventies. But certainly there is, well, there is no local shift in the priorities. I don't think anyone has doubted that Stony Brook was destined, is destined to be a natural science institution, and I haven't been fooling myself in that regard either. But we are not playing the game anymore and I think other institutions in this country are pretending at least or at least working to some extent in our field.

Dr. Russell: This gets us well beyond 1971, of course.

Dr. Ruplin: The question is have expectations worked out, so I think it's fair

Dr. Russell: Expectations have not worked out, and having introduced graduate studies, for which we always received excellent reviews, our reward has been to take away the doctoral degree, to reduce the staff to a point where, if I were honest and a candid outsider, I would question whether we can fulfill what we are supposed to be doing in offering our degrees, whether we are doing a proper job. And that's a degree of non-support which is incomprehensible at an honest university. Someone should make some decisions along the line as to where we are going, rather than let's dabble improvisation.

Dr. Hartzell: Is this due primarily to an FTE point of view; in other words, no support if you don't have students majoring in the field.

Dr. Russell: I cannot read minds, this is the justification used, of course. And the more exotic the language, the more impossible it is to defend any program, much less a program. My counter to this is let's have faculty to curriculum ratio. By our rules on campus every major has essentially the same requirements, therefore, why does one department have 40 or 60 faculty members, and another one have 11 to run two degree programs. It's irrational.

Dr. Ruplin: Our FTE was quite favorable before the language requirement was eliminated. Obviously we were doing our service responsibility pretty well in those days. So our FTE is not favorable now, so our staffing is cut, you know, it's just a circular kind of thing. But I could count on teaching three courses every semester in the sixties. I

signed off on eleven courses this year, that's 5½ per semester, three a semester in the sixties.

Dr. Hartzell: By 'you signed off on eleven courses,' what does that mean?

Dr. Ruplin: Well, I had a graduate course which was obligatory; there were only two students in the grad, but that's a course that I had to offer; and I had an undergraduate course that was obligatory, that's each semester; so we have four courses now. And we make our money, of course, by teaching the language courses, elementary and intermediate. We all have to teach those, we have to staff these courses. So once you fulfill the responsibilities of teacher training in my area -- applied linguistics and historical linguistics, plus language teaching -- we've got four specialties already that are not seen by the outside as separate specialties, and they don't generate FTE's. Every time I have to add another class, an obligatory graduate course with two students, it looks silly on the books. Why are you teaching that course in the first place? Well, we do have our obligations. I'm sure you can sense a little bit of bitterness on our part.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I can.

Dr. Russell: Not so much bitter, as frustrated. Why is it as it is? And to whom do you speak to change things?

Dr. Ruplin: It's rather strange that in the sixties during or despite all of that turmoil and all that time in the faculty assembly when I was representing the dissidents and the populists and so forth and so on, I always felt support nevertheless, even if my opinions were different from a lot of people.

Dr. Hartzell: Support from the administration?

Dr. Ruplin: Support from the administration, support from my colleagues, elitist or otherwise. I felt support from John Toll. Obviously, I was not on John Toll's side but we always were able to speak and understand each other, and I always respected him for the fact that he let anybody say anything that he wanted. I don't have a feeling now that I can't say anything I want, I just don't want to say anything. I guess frustration is a closer word to

Dr. Russell: Or that it will be heard if you say it.

Dr. Ruplin: Or that it will be heard, yeah.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, the Provost is a marine scientist, you now have an associate provost who comes from the field of art, Aldona Jonaitis, you have a dean who is a phenomenologist in the field of philosophy

Dr. Russell: Yes, indeed we do.

Dr. Ruplin: We do not feel that we are supported by our dean. We do know that we are supported by a vice provost for undergraduate studies

Dr. Russell: Who has no moneys therefore speaking to the Pope.

Dr. Hartzell: The vice president for undergraduate studies now is?

Dr. Ruplin: Vice provost, that would be Jonaitis. And she likes us very, very much because our students like us very, very much, and she's vice provost for undergraduate studies, and when things go smoothly in undergraduate studies, it's good for her, and we like her. But she has no power really as far as we're concerned. It would be the dean, and we do not feel that we are being supported by the dean.

Dr. Hartzell: Where do his interests lie?

Dr. Russell: His own self and his Institute, which robs resources without doing anything productive, takes TA's away that are badly needed -- I think he has 8 TA's now. The Humanities Institute might be a good idea if we had strong humanities departments. We are being pillaged; we are already weak, we are being pillaged to create an ego trip, and it's hard to see beyond that, including the director who seemed to be an intellectual heavyweight. It's unfortunate.

Dr. Ruplin: Question 13, activities confined to Stony Brook campus or outside? I personally didn't really have anything to do with anything that took place within the University system off of the Stony Brook campus.

Dr. Russell: We did have relations with IBM but your question seems to be SUNY.

Dr. Hartzell: My question was SUNY, but I also was interested in your relation to the discipline as it's organized nationally.

Dr. Russell: Ferd did quite a bit with

Dr. Ruplin: Yeah, well, I tried to get the University associated with the American Association of Teachers of German. There was no involvement at that time because we were very young, very junior; most of us were not tenured, most of us did not have our degrees. We did get involved with the Long Island American Association of Teachers of German. We did get very involved with the National Chapter in the sixties and in the early seventies; Barbara was very involved then. We were very much involved with the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers. A lot of this involvement came because of our work with CAI, the profession was sort of impressed by the machinery in the sixties, and so we were invited, John and I were invited out to talk about our program in Chicago, in Los Angeles. Here I was very young, John was not quite as young, but pretty young, and from a middle western state too, so once again this impressed us -- New Orleans, Boston, Atlanta -- we did read papers, we did make people know that we had something here in the sixties.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you have any dealings with the computer science people here on the campus, Jack Heller, for instance?

Dr. Russell: No, this peculiarity, no, well, Heller was new. We were here when he was being interviewed, as a matter of fact. We went to hear one of these talk things. This is the nature of the beast. What IBM was doing was really so simple; human language is so difficult that what one can do, and this is even true today, no matter how much more sophisticated it is, you end up doing very simple things. And for our needs we learned very quickly, or thought we learned very quickly, that the computer is a very effective tool for learning language deductively, which is what adults do, which is our business. But what we wanted to do was very simple, and it's hard to find anyone in computers who is doing anything so simple. They want to be on the cutting edge, understandably, and should be. They don't know foreign languages, they are typical American monoglots on the whole; if they are polyglots then they are even less interested in working in foreign languages, they want to be on the sharpest point of the cutting edge and so forth. It's an

anomaly. We knew they existed. Our big contact was Ed Lambe, who was very impressive; he was head of the ERC for seven or eight years; and he essentially recruited us. He interpreted that to mean something other than an audio-visual lending facility and had gotten interested in computing, given courses in computing, tried to recruit people, Peg Wheeler. I think what Peg did and what we did were the most interesting experiences which certainly came out of this campus and what we did was perhaps the most successful thing that's been done in foreign languages with the IBM experiments from 1965 to 1972 or something.

Dr. Ruplin: You have to remember that there was a lot of money floating around in those days, not only on campus, but off campus. We certainly benefited from what IBM did, and we certainly benefited from the support we got automatically on campus whenever we were asked to read a paper somewhere, we were supported. Whenever we wanted more for experimentation or whatever, it was supported; it was just for the asking, that's all. Of course, that certainly isn't the case now. It's hard to think of the sixties as being the glory days, because I am sure that most of the people on this campus think of the campus as the eighties as being the glory days. But for us the sixties were.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. All right, anything else that crosses your mind or have we come to the end of the questions?

Dr. Ruplin: Well, we're pretty much at the end of the questions. By 1971, I think John would agree with me, we felt that we had done a really good job in building a department because as John had mentioned before, we were about to get our Ph. D. program; we had our CAI program going; we had an international reputation. John has been maybe too modest, he's still invited often to discuss the CAI program in, for example, East Germany; and you discuss in Poland, and I was invited to France. And this is all because of what started in the sixties. John has been very much involved since then and is recognized for doing so, but it started in the sixties.

Dr. Russell: We weren't allowed to get a swelled head. One of the more amusing anecdotes I remember is, I wrote a rather feisty, I forget what triggered it, but I wrote a

rather feisty memo suggesting, one, there might be a, again be a department of modern languages for the sake of intelligent language instruction, which is still one of my theses to get technological support, staff support, instead of atomizing things. In this memo I also dropped the phrase 'if anybody wanted intelligent discussion about language and language teaching, one had to go over to the ERC and talk to Malcolm Skulnik,' and so forth. This caused the chains to rattle a bit in the department. I guess we had three departments by then, Spanish had split off from French and Italian. And Bentley Glass called and said -- I guess maybe Ferd was certainly along on this -- Bentley sort of looked at his watch and said that's very interesting what you had to say there, have anything more to say; we talked for a few minutes, he said, well, thank you for coming but I have something important to do now.

Dr. Ruplin: Yet on the other hand, Bentley Glass was very supportive when Langmuir College was dedicated. He gave some personal funds as I recollect to Langmuir College.

Dr. Russell: He's a good man.

Dr. Ruplin: And I remember when I was college master I had the privilege of having dinner, and this was always supported by the University and philanthropists like Bentley Glass on campus, I had dinner with Benjamin Spock, had an opportunity to have dinner with a very well-known Nobel Prize winner. Here, once again, this is the sixties. And it's kind of funny, I still think of those as the glory days.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, those situations and those actions and those people are what create the traditions of an institution, and they themselves are important, not simply on a horizontal time basis but on a vertical time basis.

Dr. Ruplin: May I shoot out one other anecdote as long as we are speaking anecdotally of the sixties. This relates to my interviews when I came out here. At that time chairman or acting chairman of Poli Sci was Martin Travis. And I'll never forget Martin Travis, he's become a very close friend of mine since, so I can speak about him anecdotally. I'll never forget him sitting behind his desk with his suit on, of course,

everyone wore suits in those days and white socks, which were unheard of to me, advising me not to leave the University of Minnesota until I had finished my dissertation because he was sure I would never finish it if I came out here. I kid Martin about that. But we were fairly close, Karl, I think you can remember that.

Dr. Hartzell: He's a great chap, I think a lot of him. It's the intellectual odyssey of people is a fascinating study. If you are dean you see all kinds of individuals, you see minds that wander from one core thinking to another, almost like a tornado, bouncing here and there. You hire somebody to do something, suddenly you find he's off in the air somewhere.

Dr. Ruplin: Perhaps because we were small, we were closer, but I felt more leadership.

Dr. Russell: I didn't see Reuben Weltsch's name on your list. When you interview him, you might remember that he taught German here, as well as being the librarian for several years; he's not just a historian.

Dr. Ruplin: He certainly is one of the more memorable characters.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, well, thanks very much.

Dr. Ruplin: You're very welcome. By the way, Karl, not all frustration, I felt really good yesterday afternoon, this is my campus. I wish Tom Curt was still standing in the door because I would say, as loud as I possibly could, I built this campus brick by brick, Tom.

Dr. Hartzell: Thanks a lot.

Dr. Russell: You're welcome.

[end of interview]