

Joachim Strähle (1937-2009)

Joachim Strähle, Emeritus Professor for Inorganic Chemistry at the University of Tübingen, died on the 20th of January 2009, at the age of 71.

He was born in Dresden on the 14th of April 1937, where he experienced the destruction of the city in 1945 as a seven year old. In 1954, the family fled from political repression to western Germany, and settled in Stuttgart. After his *Abitur*, Joachim Strähle commenced his chemistry studies in 1958 at the *Technische Hochschule* in Stuttgart. He was deeply impressed by the great academic teachers Josef Goubeau, Helmut Bredereck, and Theodor Förster there, and from early on, the desire to become a scientist himself was awoken in him. Kurt Dehnicke, a young up-and-coming scientist, was carrying out chemical research in Stuttgart that fascinated Strähle, who then joined Dehnicke as a postgraduate student. Kurt Dehnicke had discovered that unusual metal chloridonitrido complexes with metal–nitrogen multiple bonds were formed from metal halides and the not-exactly-harmless compound chloroazide, and it was with the characterization of these compounds that Joachim Strähle began his research career. Oxidative transfer of an azide group from ClN_3 and VCl_4 led to the formation of the intermediate compound VCl_4N_3 , which, under N_2 elimination, rearranged to the imidochloride $\text{VCl}_3(\text{NCl})$; he established the linearity of the $\text{V}\equiv\text{N}-\text{Cl}$ group by vibrational spectroscopy. The nitridoimido complex $\text{MoCl}_3(\text{N})$, with a terminal nitrido ligand, is formed analogously from MoCl_5 and ClN_3 .

After completing his doctorate in 1965, Joachim Strähle worked for one year with Georg Brauer in Freiburg. There he met Brauer's student Hartmut Bärnighausen, who had just been appointed from Karlsruhe. Joachim Strähle followed him to Karlsruhe, where he had the opportunity to study single-crystal X-ray diffraction, the method that was rarely used in chemistry at the time but showed great promise. What is today a routine method was reserved for crystallographers in the 1960s. Joachim Strähle was a pioneer who mastered this method himself, applied it to his own products, and helped to introduce it into the chemistry repertoire. He carried out his first structural analyses on $\text{VCl}_3(\text{NCl})$ and $\text{MoCl}_3(\text{N})$.^[1] The structural determination of these complexes with their short metal–nitrogen bonds convinced all skeptics. In Karlsruhe he turned to the structural chemistry of gold halides.

Immediately after his Habilitation in 1973, he was offered positions in Hannover and Tübingen. He chose Tübingen, where he took up the chair in Inorganic Chemistry as the successor to Walter Rüdorff in 1975. He remained true to Tübingen; in

1987 he turned down an invitation from the University of Stuttgart. Metal–nitrogen chemistry remained a central theme throughout his research career. Milestones in his work were the ammonolysis reactions of metal halides with ammonium ions, which led to binuclear complexes with symmetrical nitrido bridges, such as $[\text{Br}_5\text{Ta}=\text{N}=\text{TaBr}_5]^{3-}$,^[2] or complexes with pentaazadienido ligands $(\text{R}-\text{N}_5-\text{R})^-$ with remarkably short distances between d^{10} -configured metal ions.^[3] Through the photolysis of $[\text{Ph}_3\text{PAuN}_3]$ in the presence of metal carbonyls, it was possible to prepare a whole series of heterometallic gold clusters.^[4]

Joachim Strähle was a philanthropist. Together with his family and science, the fostering of friendships was of the greatest importance throughout his life. He always associated his diverse scientific cooperations with close personal relationships. His long-term commitment to the development of a structural analysis department at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain was recognized by the award of an honorary doctorate in 2001. He supported the German scientific community for many years as an honorary advisor appointed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation). He was twice dean of the Faculty of Chemistry and Pharmacology at the University of Tübingen and a member of the university council. Joachim Strähle was an excellent university teacher, whose lectures were characterized by clear structuring. The fact that teaching was close to his heart is demonstrated by the continuance of the classic German text book *Jander-Blasius*^[5] on inorganic analysis, which he revised together with his student Eberhard Schweda. Conceit was a stranger to him; he did not appreciate any fuss about his person, rather an open and hospitable house and his orchid cultivation.

He bore his illness, which increasingly afflicted him in latter years, with discipline and assurance, which earned him the greatest admiration. His many colleagues, pupils, post-graduates, students, and all who knew him have lost a master of academic teaching and an exceptional preparative inorganic chemist. Joachim Strähle is survived by his wife Barbara, his children Christine and Stefan, and two grandchildren.

Johannes Beck
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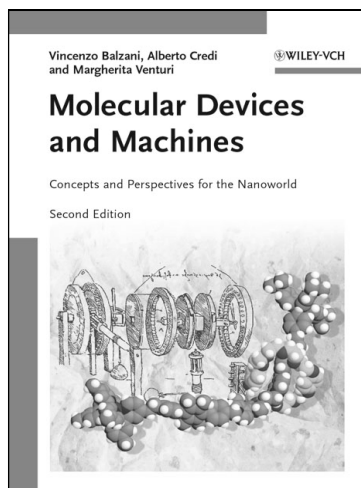
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