

In Memoriam

Claus Walter—A Pioneer in the Field of Facial Plastic Surgery (1927–2016)

Werner J. Heppt, MD¹¹ Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Facial Plastic Surgery, Klinikum Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany

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Looking at the history of medicine of the 20th century, Claus Walter can be described as the academic heir of Jacques Joseph. Joseph, who was born in 1865 and died in 1934, laid the foundations for facial plastic surgery at the beginning of the last century while Claus Walter stands for its further development after World War II. Being a gifted surgeon and exemplary teacher with an outstanding international reputation, Claus Walter was at the same time a modest, warm-hearted, and welcoming man. In 1977, he and Tony Bull, a London colleague, founded the Joseph Society, which eventually became the European Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery. In 1984, he and his fellow surgeon, Helmut Jung, who directed the ear, nose and throat (ENT) department at Koblenz, inaugurated the legendary Winter Meeting of the Joseph Society. Following a serious illness, Claus Walter died on September 11, 2016.

Claus Walter was born on March 10, 1927 in Gleiwitz, a town in Upper Silesia. As the son of a well-known engineer, he seemed to have inherited the gift that would later make him famous—the ability to create new shapes based on precise spatial imagination. In early 1944, he started studying medicine in Breslau. His studies were interrupted by military service in the German Navy and as a British prisoner of war for a short period. At the end of 1945, he could continue his medical studies at the University of Würzburg. Having graduated in 1951, he spent a year of practical training year in Essen. Claus Walter went to the United States in 1952 for further medical education. His wife, Herma, followed him in 1953 (→ Fig. 1).

After postgraduate education at the universities of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Columbus, and Ohio, he successfully qualified as a board-certified physician for otorhinolaryngology in 1955. During his university studies, he was the first German after the war to attend the famous rhinoplasty courses at the Mount Sinai hospital in New York. This was one of the most important experiences of his professional career and for which he was grateful all his life.

Address for correspondence
Werner J. Heppt, MD, Department
of Otorhinolaryngology, Head
and Neck Surgery, Facial Plastic
Surgery, Klinikum Karlsruhe,
Moltkestrasse 90, 76133
Karlsruhe, Germany
(e-mail: wheppt@web.de).

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MD, PhD

Having returned to Germany in 1956, Claus Walter concentrated on facial plastic surgery. After working in Krefeld and Essen, he was appointed the Head of the Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Facial Plastic Surgery at the Huysdens-Stiftung hospital in Essen in 1962. In 1972, he became Head of the Department of plastic reconstructive surgery and ENT at the “Diakonie Krankenanstalten” in Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth. In 1983, Claus Walter moved to Heiden, Switzerland, and opened a practice for plastic and reconstructive surgery at the “Klinik Am Rosenberg,” which he continued to direct until 2002. On top of his everyday work, he acted for many decades as a consultant surgeon and associate professor in the field of complex plastic reconstructive surgery. This brought his expertise to clinics around the world, including Bonn, London, St Antonio (Texas), Augsburg, Munich, Krefeld, Aachen, Rorschach, and Lucerne.

Besides his busy clinical schedule, Claus Walter was never inactive in the academic field. In 1973, he obtained his professorship at the University in Bonn, supervised by Professor Becker. In 1981, he was certified as a general surgeon with a specialist qualification in plastic surgery. In countless lectures, publications, and courses, he dedicated himself to develop the skills of younger colleagues as well as introducing fundamentally new techniques to facial plastic surgery. His numerous innovations in this field included composite grafting techniques in nasal interventions, the excision method for pinnaplasty, and the use of a septum flap to correct severe lacrimal duct stenosis. Nowadays, these procedures unquestionably belong to the standard repertoire of plastic surgery. The most important of them are outlined in his book, *Plastic Surgery of the Head and Neck (Plastisch-chirurgische Eingriffe im Kopf-Hals-Bereich)*, which was published by Thieme Verlag in 1997. As a clinician and teacher, he helped numerous colleagues on their way to qualify in the field. Thanks to his American diploma and



Claus Walter (March 10, 1927–
September 11, 2016)

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Fig. 1 Herma and Claus Walter.

guest professorship in St Antonio, Texas, he even held a license that permitted him to train American interns in the field of plastic and reconstructive facial–neck surgery.

Claus Walter placed a high value on interdisciplinary work and was an honorary member of various national and international professional organizations. In 2012, he received recognition for his life's work from the International Board for Certification in Facial Plastic Surgery in Rome that honored him with the Claus D. Walter Award. The prize is awarded annually for special achievements in the field of plastic reconstructive facial surgery (→**Fig. 2**).

Claus Walter was a real gentleman, who inspired everybody he met. I still recall meeting him in the mid-1980s with great happiness and gratitude. Initially, he was my teacher,



Fig. 2 Claus Walter and Ira Papel, Rome, 2012.

but later we organized the Winter Meetings together and I came to think of him as a close friend, almost a second father. People loved him for his humor, openness, and the incredible wealth of professional experience; his patients loved him for his surgical abilities as well as great kindness and humanity. He was a bundle of energy, dynamic, active, friendly, and as punctual, correct, and reliable as a Swiss watch. In his private life, art was his passion, but he was also an ambitious skier and tennis player; only a privileged few were allowed to disturb him while he was watching a Grand Slam tournament. He was devoted to his family, and leaves behind his wife, Hertha-Maria, his two daughters, Maureen and Patricia, five grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. He will also be mourned by his many loyal friends (→**Figs. 3 and 4**).

In his last years, Claus Walter had to scale back his sporting activities, but he continued to practice rhinoplasty, his greatest passion, until the very end. He was 88 when he performed his final surgical procedure, a nasal correction, and he did it just as always before—quickly, calmly, and with absolute precision.

We miss you so much and think of you with a smile on our lips.

Werner J. Heppt
Baden-Baden, Germany

My recollections of Claus go back to 3 decades. I will always remember him as a most enthusiastic and committed pioneer in the development of the Joseph Society, today's European Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. His humility and most genuine and warm character were so special. He was always welcoming and had an engaging laugh. One could not help but have an immediate affection for him as well as the utmost admiration for his surgical talents. He was always open to new ideas and young at heart to the end. Claus also distinguished himself by being one of the earliest and strongest supporters of the American Board for Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, and is recognized by having founded the renowned "Claus Walter Award," which honors the best performer of the International Board for Certification in Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery examination.

Claus' legacy will continue as long as facial plastic surgery exists as a specialty, and our warm memories and admiration for him shall exist as long as we all are alive.

Peter Adamson
Toronto, Canada

With a twinkle in my eyes, I remember the first meeting with Claus Walter during a Joseph Society Meeting in Salzburg in 1981 and later during the many Winter Meetings of the European Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (EAFPS), where our families became close friends. These meetings, founded by Helmut Jung and Claus Walter, were always a great happening and I am thankful for so many personal highlights and unforgettable moments. Claus visited my clinic several times, sharing his wisdom and experience in the whole field of facial plastic surgery. Connected by ties of deep friendship, we spent wonderful times together in



Fig. 3 Winter meeting impressions. Organizers on the slope. Jarl and Unn Bunaes. Gabriele Feller-Heppt and Claus Walter. Claus Walter at the ski race. Tony Bull (man with the tie in the snow). Fondue evening with Claus and Herma Walter. Werner Heppt, Claus Walter, and Heinz Bull.

the South of France, on the tennis court, on his boat, water-skiing, and having long and stimulating dinners. Claus and Herma, his always caretaking angel, will remain deep in our hearts forever.

Jarl Bunaes
Oslo, Norway

We got acquainted at a meeting in Paris in the mid-1980s and soon through our mutual friend, Guy Jost, developed a close friendship. Over time, I became more involved in the European Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (EAFPS), acting as the Vice-President and Spanish delegate. In 1988, I had the honor to chair the International Meeting of the European Academy of Facial Surgery in Barcelona, hosting a distinguished faculty among others with Guy Jost, Tony Bull, Claus Walter, Ian S. Mackay, Otto Staindl, Bernard Bertrand,

Andrew Maguire, Rolf Nordstrom, Claus Herberhold, Ernst Kastenbauer, Valerio Micheli-Pellegrini, Rodolphe Meyer, Wolfgang Draf, Dominique Rheims, Hilko Weerda, Eugene Tardy, and Gilbert Nolst Trenité.

For many years, I visited Claus at his clinic “Am Rosenberg” in Heiden, Switzerland, assisting him during surgery and getting introduced to the secrets of facial plastic surgery. Claus was skilled at very refined techniques and always found solutions for even the most difficult cases; he was a true genius! We became close friends over the years and his wife Herma treated me as a son when I was at their home. They left their house to us with a full fridge—a rare gesture underlining the enormous trust he offered to me and my family.

Claus was a real “gentleman,” humorous, always friendly, and an enthusiastic sportsman who loved to play tennis and skiing. He spoke several languages, among them Spanish, but he never boasted. When I was recently informed about his passing away, I had the sensation of losing a real, good friend, an excellent professor, and a part of myself.

Rest in peace, Claus.

Pedro Clarós,
Barcelona, Spain

Claus was a remarkable man. Last autumn, we were together in St. Petersburg, where he delivered a perfectly structured and timed lecture.

His work will live on in those he inspired and taught.

Charles East
London, United Kingdom



Fig. 4 EAFPS meeting, 2007 in honor of Claus Walter's 80th birthday. Left to right: Darko Perko, Claus Walter, Benoit Lengele, Ted Cook, Tony Bull, and Werner Heppt.

There are a very few individuals who stand out as true leaders and masters in a particular field. Claus Walter was one of them. Described by many as a surgeon's surgeon, he was among those who first carried the torch for the European Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery. A great debt of gratitude is



Fig. 5 Claus Walter and Wolfgang Gubisch.

owed to him. We honor him by continuing to carry the brightest torch!

Fred G. Fedok
Alabama, United States

In 1978, I visited Claus for the first time in Düsseldorf. At that time, he was undoubtedly the best rhinoplastic surgeon in Europe and it was not easy to visit his clinic as an observer. Watching him performing around 10 major and minor nose surgeries in a single day, I was impressed how fast and skillfully he performed his surgeries, always following a clear concept. Although from different generations, Claus and I had some parallel academic background being the first double boarded ENT and plastic surgeons in Germany. Despite favoring different surgical techniques over time (I was more influenced by others such as Gilbert Aiach), we

never lost our reciprocal appreciation. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Stuttgart Course for Functional and Aesthetic Rhinoplasty in 2012, I was deeply touched by Claus who as an honored guest, offered a moving laudation to me describing our common passion as follows: “Both of us are totally addicted to noses ... and we still can’t keep our hands off them. For us, the nose is like a Mount Everest in almost every person’s face, just waiting to be conquered ... with our hands and instruments.”

This was the last time I saw Claus, but we always remained in contact and I miss him a lot nowadays. He was an outstanding teacher and a great personality, and it was a real privilege to have him as a friend (→ Fig. 5).

Wolfgang Gubisch
Stuttgart, Germany

Professor Claus Walter was an exceptional colleague, merging general plastic surgery and ENT into facial plastic surgery. He was one of the founders and cornerstones in the Joseph/EAFPS society. He was master and servant at the same time and became a mentor for colleagues all over the world during his long-life span.

He told me once how much he suffered in America to get enough money to get married to his fiancée, whom he had left behind in postwar Germany. Since then, Herma became the cornerstone of his life, standing by him for the rest of his life. Claus is dead but his spirit will stay alive for many years ahead (→ Fig. 6).

P-O Haraldsson
Stockholm, Sweden

Claus was not only my professional mentor but also my role model in life. Besides being a genius at work, he was an



Fig. 6 Skiing in the Alpes. Left to right: P. Pasche, P-O Haraldsson, T. Hundt, C. Walter, W. Gubisch, G. Lange, and G. Paulus.

exemplary husband, father, and grandfather. I am more than blessed to have the honor to call him my friend.

Thomas Hundt
Munich, Germany

Claus was both a wonderful doctor and person. I am sure he will be greatly missed by many. I am so sorry for this loss.

Steven J. Jurich
Alexandria, United States

Claus Walter was a mentor to many including myself. His training in both Europe and the United States uniquely qualified him to lead in both the organizational and scientific arenas. His accomplishments, from his role in founding the EAFPS to the creative use of composite grafts, are legendary. It is, however, his human qualities that make him such a beloved and important person in the history of facial plastic surgery. He was generous with his time and teaching. He was an amazing technical surgeon. He never failed to reach out to younger surgeons from around the globe to encourage and mentor them. We will not see a person like him again. We will all miss him very much.

Wayne F Larrabee
Seattle, United States

I would like to thank Claus for teaching rhinoplasty to me during the last years. Claus was a noble gentleman and friend, who has left a gap that cannot be closed.

Marcus Maassen
Lucerne
Switzerland

I remember Claus as my teacher, mentor, and friend. Like so many of us, I visited Claus after my residency in the early 1980s, where I also met Ritchie Younger.

It was amazing to see his tissue feeling, "as fast as his cars." Another special memory is the moment of an official board meeting during the Winter Meeting of the EAFPS in March 1997. On the agenda was the president elect. Tony Bull had often said to me, "I would like to have you as the next president." When the discussion started, no suggestion came of my name from Tony's side. Probably, I had made the wrong remark to him the day before. Then, it was Claus who said, "Hey Tony, you said that Gilbert would be a good candidate for president." Then, Tony, as we have known him so well with the typical understatement said, "Yes, why not." So, thanks to Claus I became the next president for several years (► Fig. 7).

In the years after we became friends, we wrote articles together, which meant that I got a bunch of slides from his immense slide library on a certain subject to add the words. It was always nice to meet him; together with Herma, he was on his best, making jokes and telling endless stories about the past. Most impressive was his love story of how Herma and he met and went to the United States without a penny in his pocket.

Claus was an icon of the European Academy, very supportive, and great with advice for difficult problems. I, and so



Fig. 7 Claus Walter, Tony Bull, and Eugene Tardy during the 10th course in modern rhinoplasty techniques in Amsterdam, 2003.

many with me, will miss him. My heart is with Herma and his children.

Gilbert J. Nolst Trenité
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Claus was a personal friend and a true friend of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS). He was a founding member of the Joseph Society, which evolved into the European Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery. Claus was one of the most energetic, innovative, brilliant, and giving facial plastic surgeons I have ever known. He spoke at a meeting in Germany in 2016 with the same intellectual enthusiasm I felt in the audience 20 to 30 years ago. It seemed like Claus would always be there, always teaching us something new. I will miss him. My condolences go out to his family.

Norman Pastorek
New York, United States

Belonging to Claus Walter's Plastic Surgery School, I had the privilege to cooperate with him for decades and we shared numerous professional and personal activities. I am



Fig. 8 Rhinoplasty course in Athens, Greece, 1993. Left to right: V. Pavlidelis, C. Walter, C. Koegel, and K-F. Jacobs.



Fig. 9 Spending a nice weekend in southern Germany, 2013. Left to right: C. Walter, V. Pavlidelis, K-F. Jacobs, and C Koegel.

deeply grateful for his support, advices, and friendship (→Figs. 8 and 9).

Vasilis Pavlidelis
Athens, Greece

Dear Claus,

You have been a master to me: A master of nose surgery, a master of teaching, a master of elegance, a master of friendship, a master of laugh and fun, and ... a master of skiing, even at 75 years of age on that black slope in Verbier when you were the first downhill, laughing to watch all of us (20 to 30 years younger than you!!) suffering on the huge bumps....

I still see your smile and big laugh (→Fig. 10).

I pay my respects and full admiration to a great life and the person you were!

Your French Riviera friend.

Hervé Raspaldo
Cannes, France

I met Claus at several occasions. One of the first was the famous course for facial plastic surgery in the 1980s in Würzburg. I was a resident and he was one of the world



Fig. 10 Sharing the same birthday on March 14, 2007, Anja, Hervé, and Claus.

wide renowned surgeon and teacher in the field. The main attraction was live-television surgery on spectacular cases from three operating theaters simultaneously. Claus had to reconstruct a lower and an upper eyelid after exenteration because of malignancy. He demonstrated the finding and explained that he would start with harvesting a composite graft from the auricle, which was one of his favorite grafts. The moderator switched to the other theaters and after about half an hour returned to Claus Walter, asking about his next steps after harvesting the graft. Claus' reply was, "Sorry, but I just finished the operation." It was a little bit like a miracle: Where there was an empty eye socket before, one could see a pretty normal looking eyelid. The only detail missing were the eyelashes. In spite of a long elaboration by Claus Walter of how he achieved this brilliant result, for the inexperienced like me, it remained a mystery.

Claus Walter was an ingenious and pretty fast surgeon. Although it was not always easy to understand all the details, I learned a lot from him at various courses, from lectures and a personal visit at the Rosenberg Clinic in Heiden, Switzerland. In private, he was a warm-hearted person and a story-teller about his adventures that would have been enough for two lives.

Gerhard Rettinger
Ulm, Germany

"Dear Dr Saban, I appreciated a lot of your presentations on rhinoplasty and I would like to congratulate you for your results but what I liked especially was your first picture when you showed my house in Cap Ferrat from yours in Villefranche-sur-Mer!" These were the first words I could hear from a very famous white-haired and deep-blue-eyed faculty member during the "Rhinoplasty 2000" meeting in Venice, Italy run by Valerio Micheli-Pellegrini. Claus Walter stood up at the end of my presentation and came to me, just as before, sat peacefully, listening to everyone, passionate by the talks about rhinoplasty... his life (→Fig. 11).

Our last meeting was a dinner, together with our wives, Herma and Sylvie, in Grand Hotel du Cap Ferrat, when he appreciated the sea food so much, tasting Champagne and Sancerre white wine, sometimes with oysters, then crabs, then lobsters, then abalones, and a fruity sorbet to finish, even if he was already tired, breathless, eating these seafoods like a starving child looking at sweets. To say that I learnt a lot from him is just saying nothing, as he taught me so many things, just by being himself, a true gentleman.

October 2015, his last meeting in St. Petersburg, was a wonderful time. We planned this meeting in Nice during a lunch with Eugene Kern, Rollin Daniel, Milos Kovacevic, Charles East, Olivier Gerbault, Vitaly Zholtikow, and Abdulkadir Goksel while sharing new thoughts about rhinoplasty(→Fig. 12). A few days before, he gave me his presentations, as he did not know if he could come, "In case, please, Yves, just tell Vitaly and our friends that I will do my very best to come but if impossible for me, could you tell them that I apologize..."

We have lost a gentleman of the rhinoplasty and a master of behavior. Sylvie, my wife, joins me to address all our



Fig. 11 View from Villefranche to Claus' beloved, Cap Ferrat.

thoughts for rest and peace to him and give our love to Herma, his beloved wife who was so fusional with Claus.

Yves Saban
Nice, France

Claus Walter distinguished himself as a pioneer in the field of facial plastic surgery, both in Europe and the United States. Through his facile surgical expertise and enthusiasm for sharing his knowledge with others in the field, Claus loomed largely as a much sought-after speaker and surgeon at surgical meetings worldwide.

A special friend and colleague, my most vivid memories of Claus center around his personality and unfailing generous gentlemanly conduct in true German fashion. Without failing, at the outset of every lecture delivered, he warmly thanked the host for the opportunity to speak; generally,

he recognized the effort expended by less well-recognized colleagues who toiled to plan and execute the teaching exercise but who often received no appreciation. Claus made them feel important and useful.

Claus loved to laugh.... we enjoyed many good stories together, and when Tony Bull was present, often endless roars of laughter were generated.

European Facial Plastic Surgery would be much less strong than it is today without the herculean efforts of the tandem force of Claus Walter and Tony Bull. They will forever serve as beacons of light and guidance for those facial surgeons who try to stand on their shoulders.

Eugene Tardy
Chicago, United States

“La gloire des chirurgiens ressemble à celle des acteurs, qui n'existent que de leur vivant, et dont le talent n'est plus appréciable dès qu'ils ont disparu. Les acteurs et les chirurgiens, comme aussi les grands chanteurs, comme les virtuoses qui décuplent par leur exécution la puissance de la musique, sont tous les héros du moment. La comédie humaine de Balzac-Honoré de Balzac.”

Claus Walter was indeed a glorious surgeon. He was, however, so much more than Balzac's hero of the moment; looking back on two generations of personal experience in facial plastic surgery, he contributed to the profession with innovation, almost until his last breath, inspiring generations of surgeons, and generously and modestly sharing his experience with countless friends he so easily made around the globe. We will remember Claus as a grand leader in facial plastic surgery and as a delightful person. We will miss him as a friend.

Abel-Jan Tasman
St. Gallen, Switzerland



Fig. 12 Claus working with friends in Nice, 2015.

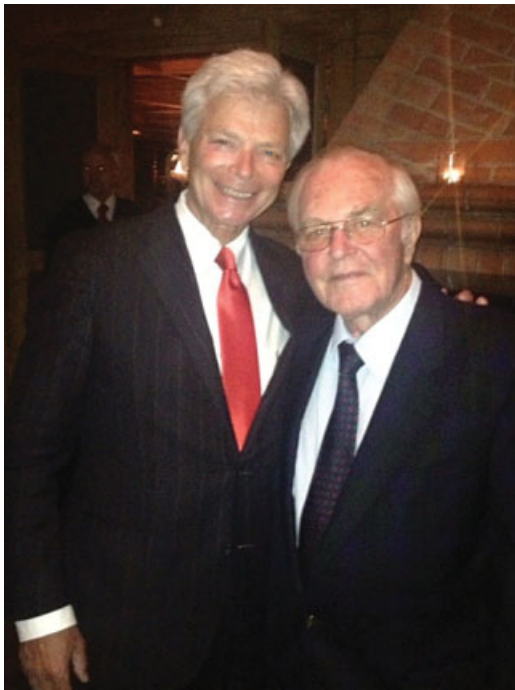


Fig. 13 Regan Thomas and Claus Walter.

I met Claus approximately 30 years ago through our mutual friend, Rich Holt. He was immediately a genuine friend as an established authority in our specialty, kindly mentoring me as a young, aspiring surgeon. Through the years, we shared many great thoughts, ranging from rhinoplasty techniques to advice on great European beers, to our

mutual good fortune to have wives who are also our best friends. Goodbye, Claus. I miss you and your wisdom (► **Fig. 13**).

J. Regan Thomas
Chicago, United States

Since the 1970s, I had a very close relationship and friendship with Claus Walter. I met him first as a participant of the famous Würzburg courses founded by Horst Wullstein in the 60s and continued in the 70s by Walter Kley and moderated by Erwin Haas and Claus Walter (► **Fig. 14**). Becoming a member of the teaching board and finally one of the founding members of the Joseph Society was based on Claus' initiative. Having been a junior doctor at that time, I was deeply impressed that this famous surgeon not only took notice of me but even supported me in the academic world. Preparing a presentation on auricular reconstruction at the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in Los Angeles, even today I gladly think of the wonderful stay at his home in Switzerland, combining scientific work with friendship.

In the late 1980s, when the Würzburg courses were moved to the University hospitals in Munich and Lübeck, he was part of our faculty sharing his tremendous experience and surgical skills with all of us (► **Fig. 15**).

Our last time together had been at the EAFPS meeting in Porto. We had rented a car and had a wonderful time driving along the lovely coast, talking, laughing, and enjoying the wonderful life we had.

I miss you, Claus.

Hilko Weerda
Freiburg, Germany

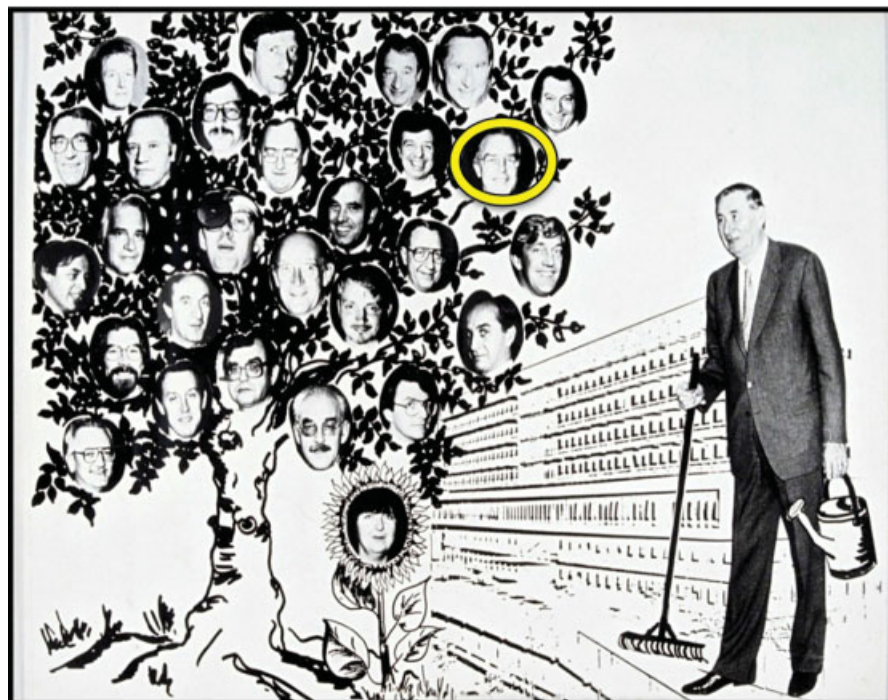


Fig. 14 Members of the Würzburg course in plastic technics of surgery of the head and neck in 1984 with Claus Walter (yellow circle) and Professor Walter Kley (right).



Fig. 15 Faculty of the course on plastic and reconstructive head and neck surgery with Claus Walter in Lübeck, 1994.