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INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER  
MIT BERICHTEN UND BEITRÄGEN VON

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RESEARCH  
BEE YUN



## VORWORT DER HERAUSGEBERIN

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Jeder Fellowjahrgang ist anders. Jedes Jahr findet eine Art chemisches Experiment statt, schreibt Michal Kravel-Tovi: Rund 45 Fremde werden gemischt, ohne dass man vorher weiß, wie sie miteinander reagieren werden. Jill Leutgeb beschreibt den Jahrgang als raffinierte neurophysiologische Versuchsanordnung, bei der „brain-enhancing factors“ gezielt verstärkt und „negative modulators“ minimiert wurden. Dieses Jahr war die Mischung offenbar so günstig, das Experiment so gelungen, dass der irrtümliche Eindruck entstehen konnte, es sei das Ergebnis sorgfältiger Planung. Das muss leider korrigiert werden: Es ist eine Sache glücklicher Zufälle. Doch immerhin scheinen die Rahmenbedingungen für solche Zufälle am Kolleg besonders günstig zu sein.

Jeder Fellowjahrgang ist einzigartig – aber inwiefern, das ist gar nicht so leicht zu beantworten. Zuerst das Offensichtliche: Dies war dank Barbara Thériault zweifellos die bestfrisierte Kohorte aller Zeiten. Es war auch die Kohorte mit den wahrscheinlich meisten Tanzparties („Think less dance more“), die erste Kohorte, die bei den Diskussionen im Kolloquium Losverfahren und Tarotkarten zum Einsatz brachte, und die einzige, die am Ende einen hauseigenen Horrorfilm produzierte.

Dieser Jahrgang, so scheint es mir, hatte außerdem ein besonders ausgeprägtes Gespür für Veränderung. „Eine Institution ist immer nur so exzellent wie der Wandel, den sie zulässt und befördert“, schreibt Luxa Mart\*in Schüttler. Am Anfang waren viele Fellows von der Eröffnung überrascht, dass es keine Evaluation geben würde. Niemand ist im Wiko daran gebunden, genau das Projekt zu verfolgen oder gar abzuschließen, mit dem er oder sie sich beworben hat. Die Fellows sollen alle Freiheit haben, sich von dem Zusammentreffen mit den anderen inspirieren zu lassen, den Blick auf die eigene Disziplin zu verändern, ungewöhnliche Kooperationen einzugehen. Kaum eine andere akademische

Institution gewährt diese Freiheit. Manchen erscheint das Kolleg deshalb als eine Art „extended retreat“ oder „Summer Camp für Erwachsene“. Doch tatsächlich zeigt die Erfahrung, dass das Vertrauen der Institution in die Fellows belohnt wird. Auch in diesem Jahr wurden nicht nur Bücher zu Ende geschrieben, Artikel eingereicht und angenommen, neue Projektanträge bewilligt und prestigeträchtige Preise gewonnen, sondern es wurden durch die ungewohnten Begegnungen auch neue Themen erschlossen und neue Fragen gestellt. Mehr Fellows als üblich gaben in diesem Jahr zu Protokoll, dass sich ihre ursprünglichen Pläne, ja mitunter sogar ihre Rolle und ihr Selbstverständnis im Lauf ihres Aufenthalts grundlegend verändert haben.

Viele Fellows berichten zudem davon, sich zu Anfang fehl am Platz, eingeschüchtert und verunsichert gefühlt zu haben. Viele befürchteten die üblichen Dominanzkämpfe; manch eine(r) hielt es sogar für möglich, überhaupt nur aufgrund eines Irrtums eingeladen worden zu sein. Das ist allerdings nicht überraschend, wenn man bedenkt, dass das Impostor-Syndrom unter den Begabtesten am stärksten ausgeprägt ist. Alle wurden im Laufe des Jahres eines Besseren belehrt. Lara Puhmann verdanken wir belastbare quantitative Evidenz, was die psychische Disposition der diesjährigen Kohorte angeht. Es hat sich gezeigt: Kein Fellow war „niemals gestresst“, mehr als die Hälfte dagegen „manchmal“ bis „sehr oft“. Aber: Dafür waren alle Fellows signifikant öfter als der Durchschnitt der Bevölkerung von der Sinnhaftigkeit der eigenen Arbeit überzeugt.

Bemerkenswert an diesem Jahrgang waren schließlich auch die Solidarität, Empathie und gegenseitige Unterstützung unter den Fellows, die – einmal mehr – bitter notwendig war. Die weltpolitischen Katastrophennachrichten rissen auch in diesem Jahr nicht ab. Der Expansionskrieg Russlands gegen die Ukraine ging ins dritte Jahr; die rechtsextreme Bedrohung von Demokratie und Rechtsstaatlichkeit nahm in vielen Ländern – auch in Deutschland – zu; die zerstörerischen Folgen des Klimawandels wurden immer unübersichtbarer. Und es war das Jahr des Hamas-Massakers vom 7. Oktober und des Beginns eines Krieges, der verheerende Folgen für die Zivilbevölkerung hat, dessen expansionistische Motive immer deutlicher zutage treten und dessen Schockwellen auf der ganzen Welt spürbar sind. Einige Fellows waren und sind unmittelbar betroffen; viele andere können sich in ihren Heimatländern vor Zensur und Verfolgung nicht mehr sicher fühlen. All das beherrschte die Stimmung des Jahrgangs, dominierte die Tischgespräche, war Gegenstand von Abendveranstaltungen, Workshops, offenen Briefen und Demonstrationen.

Der diesjährige Maskenball zu Karneval stand unter dem Motto „Into the Future“. Niko Kolodny ging als Winston Smith aus Orwells „1984“ – was niemand bemerkte,

denn Winston Smith sieht aus wie jedermann. Das Kostüm hat sich in der Rückschau als prophetisch erwiesen. Heute, während ich dies schreibe, ist Tag 100 der neuen Präsidentschaft in den USA. Das amerikanische Wissenschaftssystem ist in präzedenzloser Weise von Zerstörung bedroht. Es bleibt spannend.

Berlin, im Mai 2025

## THE EDITOR'S FOREWORD

---

Each Fellow class is different. Each year, a kind of chemical experiment is conducted, writes Michal Kravel-Tovi: about 45 strangers are mixed, and no one knows how they will respond to each other. Jill Leutgeb describes the class as an ingenious neurophysiological experimental arrangement in which the “brain-enhancing factors” are purposefully maximized and “negative modulators” are minimized. This year, the mixture was evidently so favorable and the experiment so successful that the erroneous impression could arise that it was the result of meticulous planning. Unfortunately, this must be corrected: it was a matter of serendipity. But at any rate, the framework conditions for such coincidences are especially favorable at the Kolleg.

Each Fellow class is unique – but to what degree is not so easy to describe. First, the obvious: thanks to Barbara Thériault this was the best-coiffed cohort of all. It was also the cohort that probably held the most dance parties (“Think less dance more”), the first cohort that used a lottery and tarot cards in the discussions in the Colloquium, and the only one that produced its own horror film.

This class, it appears to me, also had an especially finely honed feel for change. “An institution is always only as excellent as the change it permits and fosters,” writes Luxa Mart\*in Schüttler. At first, many Fellows were surprised by the revelation that there would be no evaluation. At Wiko, no one is obligated to pursue, much less complete,

precisely the project with which he or she applied for a fellowship. The Fellows should all have the freedom to take inspiration from the encounter with the others, to change their view of their own discipline, and to enter into unusual cooperations. Hardly any other academic institution grants this freedom. For some, the Kolleg thus appears as a kind of “extended retreat” or “summer camp for grown-ups.” But in point of fact, experience shows that the institution’s trust in the Fellows is rewarded. This year, too, not only were books written to their conclusion, articles submitted and accepted, new project applications approved, and prestigious prizes won; the unusual encounters led to the exploration of new topics and to new questions being posed. This year, more Fellows than usual wrote that their original plans, and sometimes even their role and self-understanding, changed fundamentally during their residence.

Many Fellows also report having felt at the beginning that they were out of place, intimidated, and insecure. Many feared the usual struggles for dominance; some even thought it was possible that they had been invited only by error. But that is not surprising when one considers that the imposter syndrome is most pronounced among the most gifted. In the course of the year, everyone was disabused of such ideas. We owe to Lara Puhlmann robust quantitative evidence about the psychological disposition of this year’s cohort. It turned out that no Fellow reported that they “never” felt stressed; more than half said they “sometimes” or “very often” felt it. On the other hand, the Fellows were convinced significantly more often than the average in the population that their own work was meaningful.

Remarkable in this class was also the solidarity, empathy, and mutual support among the Fellows, which – once again – was bitterly needed. The news of world-political catastrophes never ended this year, either. Russia’s war of expansion against Ukraine entered its third year; the threat of right-wing extremism increased in many countries – including Germany; the destructive consequences of climate change grew ever more unmistakable. And it was the year of Hamas’s October 7th massacre and the start of a war that has devastating effects for the civilian population, whose expansionist motives emerged ever more clearly, and whose shock waves are palpable all over the world. Some Fellows were and are directly affected; many others can no longer feel safe from censorship and persecution in their home countries. All of this dominated the mood of the class, dominated table talk, and was the subject of evening events, workshops, open letters, and demonstrations.

This year’s masquerade ball at Carnival stood under the motto “Into the Future.” Niko Kolodny came as Winston Smith from Orwell’s “1984” – which no one took note of,

because Winston Smith looks like everyman. The costume proved prophetic in retrospect. Today, as I write this, is Day 100 of the new presidency in the United States. The American science system is threatened without precedent. Things remain suspenseful.

Berlin, in May 2025

*Arbeitsberichte*

*Work Reports*



IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE GREATS  
IVEREN ABIEM

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Iveren Abiem is a lecturer at the University of Jos, Nigeria. She completed a BSc in Plant Science and Technology and an MSc in Conservation Biology at the University of Jos and a PhD in Ecology at the University of Canterbury. Iveren is a forest ecologist and conservation biologist studying biodiversity in montane ecosystems. She combines quantitative and experimental approaches to examine forest structure, species interactions, and their relative contributions to providing ecosystem services. She is also involved in participatory conservation, working with local communities to protect and manage biodiversity. – Address: Department of Plant Science and Biotechnology, University of Jos, Bauchi Road, Jos, 930001, Plateau State, Nigeria. E-mail: [abiemi@unijos.edu.ng](mailto:abiemi@unijos.edu.ng).

This was my second time in Berlin. The first was a one-day visit in 2022 during a one-week postdoctoral tour to various institutions in Germany. I enjoyed the tour, and I remember thinking at the end of the tour that I would love to return for a longer stay. The Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin gave me a wonderful opportunity to return. Wiko delivered what it promised: physical and intellectual space. It delivered on the “Gain time to think” theme that is on the College for Life Sciences fellowship call-for-applications flyer.

Having just arrived from New Zealand, which was still experiencing the later stages of the winter season, I was grateful for the warm autumn day and quiet Sunday afternoon in Berlin when I arrived at Wallotstraße 19, Grunewald. The long and exhausting two-day trip was quickly forgotten as I took in my environment and met the lovely Vera Pfeffer. After I got to my apartment, I unpacked, took a shower and then laid down for a

nap. Before I slept off, I remember lying there feeling quite content. I guess it was a knowing feeling that I was in for a wonderful five months.

In the first week of introductions, excursions, and orientation, I was delighted by the realization that I was in the company of some highly accomplished people from various disciplines, and I feel blessed that I had the opportunity to meet these “greats” whom I wouldn’t otherwise have met. I went to lunch with some trepidation after the first Tuesday Colloquium thinking, “Well, that was intense.” However, week after week, I appreciated the discourse at the Colloquia and the knowledge that was available. It was a learning journey as I listened to the diverse talks concerning topics such as: universal legal justice, the diversity of sound, the science of memory storage, democracy, the spice trade and Islam, the chemistry of early Earth, the dynamics of infections, sourcing safe water, the Maya peoples, Central Banks, and many others. The other evening public talks were also enlightening.

For my project, I worked on a research proposal “Assessing and valuing ecosystem services of an African mountain forest in Nigeria.” This transdisciplinary task seeks to understand how to attain sustainable human well-being by measuring the contributions of natural capital (ecosystem services) and their interaction with social capital. Part of this research will lean on the knowledge of the indigenous people of the Mambilla Plateau to understand the perception, knowledge, and use of the forest by different stakeholder groups. The research project will also investigate how these local communities identify and prioritize ecosystem services and identify the observed changes in the climate and their impacts on the biophysical system. It will also identify the strategies they’re using to adapt to climate change and will investigate differences in adaptation strategies across groups. The other part of the research will measure some of the ecosystem services provided by this forest ecosystem. I am particularly interested in measuring fog, a prominent feature of this kind of forest, which is known to affect the hydrological cycle of mountainous regions. Giving my Colloquium allowed me to engage with people that were not from my field, a rewarding experience. I am grateful to Debora for moderating and for the heaps of encouragement.

As I worked on my project, I also spent some time researching the history and practices of the Tiv tribe (the tribe I hail from) in Nigeria, a topic I became interested in during a conversation in the first few weeks of the fellowship year about justice systems. The library at Wiko is amazing. I couldn’t believe how much literature there is about the Tiv tribe. The library staff (bless them) were amazing and efficient in finding and providing

me with abundant literature that made this side research project exciting. I remember spending hours on phone calls with my father discussing some of the content and gaining clarity. This was instrumental to my willingness to contribute to the first Democracy Forum “Democracy: But how?,” drawing on the political structure of the Tiv people.

I appreciated the continuous social interactions with Fellows and staff at the lunches and Thursday dinners and the sometimes extended lunch conversations with Jana, Eva, Ismaila, Arjun, and Stefany. Jana, who coordinates the Junior Fellows in the College for Life Sciences programme, is amazing. In our conversations, Jana always had a word of encouragement, a helpful suggestion, and so much knowledge to share. The Wiko staff were kind and always ready to help. Dunia and her team were exceptional. Dunia’s attention to the detail of the dietary preferences of everyone was superb. We were well fed. Every part of Wiko works towards making Fellows succeed.

In addition to working on my project and engaging in the intellectual space, I looked forward to choir practice on Mondays and German language classes on Fridays. Berlin and Potsdam had so many sights and sounds to offer. I enjoyed visiting the museums and art galleries, going to the concerts and the opera. To describe it simply, my time at Wiko was refreshing. I would describe Grunewald with the words in Goethe’s poem “Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,” which we learnt in German class. Wiko’s environment provided tranquillity, respite, and peace, just like the scenery Goethe described in the poem.

Wiko is an ideal environment for every scholar. I am grateful for the learning I was exposed to at the Wissenschaftskolleg. As a young researcher, it was an incubator, a furnace, a mould. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity this fellowship offered me. I gained knowledge and experience. I was challenged, appreciated, cared for, and listened to.



MY JOURNEY FROM NIGHTMARES TO  
DREAMS  
MINA AKBARI

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Mina Akbari is a distinguished journalist, writer, filmmaker, and ardent advocate for women's and human rights. With a career that spans multiple decades and geographies, Mina has consistently leveraged her skills in journalism and documentary filmmaking to shed light on pressing social issues and to promote change. Mina has directed, produced, and written several impactful documentaries. Notably, "Women of the Revolution" (2022) explores the roles and challenges faced by women in social movements, while "Formerly Youth Square" (2017) critically examines the Iranian reformist press over the past twenty years. "Formerly Youth Square" has won several awards, including Best Film at the Cinema d'IDEA and the Hong Kong International Documentary Film Festival in 2020. In her prolific journalism career, Mina has held editorial positions at prominent Iranian newspapers such as *Etemad*, *Rozgar*, and *Mashaq Aftab*. Her report on Abbas Kiarostami's death won the Best Investigative Report at the Cinema-Cinema Festival in 2016. Mina is deeply involved in community organizing. In 2016, she launched and managed the "You Are Not Alone" campaign, aimed at holding the health system in Iran accountable and raising awareness of patient rights. In 2022, she served as the spokesperson and PR representative for the "800 Women" campaign, which protested harassment and abuse of power against women in the Iranian cinema and theater industry.

– E-mail: akbari.mina@gmail.com.

Walking in the Wiko yard and the surrounding streets, I noticed things for the first time that I hadn't seen in several months of passing by. It was strange to me, as I pay a lot of attention to details. So why hadn't I seen this beauty before? The answer was simple.

When my travel authorization to Germany was finally issued after months of waiting, I had eight hours to get to the airport without even saying goodbye to my family and friends. Apart from Persian, I knew rudimentary English, just enough to introduce myself briefly. However, my colleagues at Wiko were curious about Iran, and I was at a loss, with nothing but my nightmares to share with them.

After the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, at the morality police headquarters, we were in the streets, chanting “Women, Life, Freedom” for six months. During this time, I was either in the streets or in front of courts and prisons, demanding my friends’ freedom. Our lives changed after September 2022 forever. It is easy for the Iranian government to turn all our nightmares into reality, but we are alive with our dreams.

I believe that we do not need a common language because empathy is more important than language. With this mindset, I embarked on my journey to Germany and to the Wissenschaftskolleg to complete a project about forty years of Iranian women’s struggle for their demands and, more simply, for their most basic right: the right to life.

I had read in books that art always connects people from different countries and can be considered a bridge that links distant lands. It’s not only Persian-speakers scattered around the world who listen to the voices of Shajarian and Shervin, watch Abbas Kiarostami’s “Where Is the Friend’s Home?,” or view the paintings of Vaziri-Moghaddam and Iran Darroudi. For years, people have known Zarathustra through Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” Omar Khayyam’s “Rubaiyat” through Edward FitzGerald, and Rumi through the translation of his poems by R. A. Nicholson. The death of Carlos Fuentes on the other side of the world grieves Iranian readers, and Abbas Kiarostami and Asghar Farhadi draw global attention to Iran by winning the Palme d’Or and an Oscar. Tchaikovsky is not just a Russian artist, but an international composer, and Chekhov’s stories unfold in every corner of the world. I don’t want to digress, but more masterpieces can be mentioned, such as the use of “Macbeth” by the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa in his film “Throne of Blood,” the Russian director Grigori Kosintzev’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” and the creation of numerous films like “Rebecca,” “Pride and Prejudice,” and “Gone with the Wind” based on the works of great writers.

All these indicate an unbreakable bond between artists and people worldwide. So, I decided to screen my documentary about the situation of journalists in Iran. The reaction of my colleagues at Wiko and their precise, insightful questions amazed me and momentarily pushed my nightmares aside. Yet, they had newer questions. A translation

machine couldn't convey the realities of Iranian life and the bravery and strength of its people. I realized I needed to take language learning seriously to broaden my world and share it with others. Learning a new language, especially with ADHD in middle age, was harder than I thought, but I started my efforts. In this journey, I had a supportive sister and friend named Debora, who encouraged me every step of the way, and colleagues at the Wissenschaftskolleg, including Barbara, Iris, Janina, Vera, Dunia, and others, who did everything to keep me calm and happy.

Now, my new project is finished and I have finished the research for my next documentary. With the help of my colleagues at Wiko, I secured a one-year residency in Germany. During my residency, we made a short film together. That was the moment when art connected us to each other. The documentary we created transcended the barriers that often divide us, weaving together a tapestry of shared experiences and emotions. It wasn't merely a film; it was a unifying force, illustrating the profound truth that art possesses a unique power to connect us all. More than that, for the first time in my life, I enjoyed being in the academic world and felt that I belonged to it. For the first time in my life, I could express my opinions in public without self-censorship and without being scared of their consequences. Before coming to Wiko, I never thought about studying for a PhD, but because of your encouragement, I am preparing for further studies and pursuing a PhD with big dreams in mind – dreams for myself, my sisters, my people, and my homeland. But before all that, I must return to my country to finish my unfinished works there. I arrived here with my nightmares, and now I will return to my country with my dreams.



GENEROSITY  
JOSH BERSON

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Josh Berson (New York, 1975) practices fiction, essay, and sound. Raised and educated in the United States, with postgraduate training in computer science (Oxford University Computing Lab, 1998–99) and the history and philosophy of science and anthropology (PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 2009), Berson has held appointments at two Max Planck Institutes (History of Science, 2010–12, 2020–22; Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, 2013–17), the Wellcome Hub (2014–16), and the Berggruen Institute (inaugural Berggruen Fellow in the Transformations of the Human, 2018–19). He is the author of three monographs: *Computable Bodies* (Bloomsbury, 2015; 2016 AAP Prose Award, Linguistics), *The Meat Question* (MIT Press, 2019), and *The Human Scaffold* (University of California Press, 2021). His research joins themes and methods from linguistic anthropology, the history and philosophy of science, and the philosophy of mind and consists in an effort to formulate a critically reflexive approach to the study of long-term (10–100,000-year) dynamics of cultural change, with special attention to the cumulative social reproduction of knowledge related to food, medicine, and the construction of sensory niches, among other things. – Address: Hiddenseer Straße 6, 10437 Berlin, Germany. E-mail: [josh@joshberson.net](mailto:josh@joshberson.net).

My year at the Wissenschaftskolleg has been transformative. The months leading up to the start of the fellowship year were difficult. Four weeks before we arrived, a publisher I'd been working with withdrew the contract for a book that had been under contract and had now been complete for twenty months, after I'd made extensive changes I disagreed with to satisfy their demands. This book had been difficult to sell in the first place, and

the news – weeks before it was to go to typeset – that it would not, in fact, be appearing early in 2024 left me despondent. The episode underscored my abiding sense of not having a place in the world, of being caught between incompatible professional milieux and a member of none of them. My work, this publisher complained, was at once too “technical” and too experimental. This was something I’d heard before. Hearing it in August 2023 exacerbated the apprehension I’d been feeling about Wiko. I feared my colleagues there would expect me – reasonably, in view of my CV – to inhabit a persona that had not felt like mine to inhabit in a decade. Briefly I considered withdrawing.

I open thus to emphasize what has been, for me, Wiko’s defining feature: the generosity, intellectual and personal, I’ve experienced from all sides – from the leadership and staff, the Permanent Fellows, and above all my Co-Fellows. For this I offer my gratitude. It is this generosity, this willingness on the part of everyone present to suspend their commitment to the analytic protocols characteristic of their field in the interest of seeing something new emerge that has given me the courage to pursue experiments in theme, method, and style that, even before the reversal on my fourth book, I often doubted would come to fruition.

The outcome has been that, in the course of the fellowship year, I’ve completed two short books (about 60,000 words apiece – though in one case this represented a distillation of drafts totaling over 250,000). I’ve also secured new representation, with an energetic agent at a powerful London agency, for the book that was pulled last year, with encouragement to continue in that experimental vein. I’ve formulated a couple new projects – a third book-length work of fiction, which, like the previous two, I view as a continuation of my research practice in a new key, along with a fifth book-length essay that will take some time to come into focus. Indeed, for the first time in years I am able to view my day-to-day efforts as contributions to a life’s work (or, perhaps, as contributions to the work of more than life: I think of Indigenous Australian artist Archie Moore’s Venice Biennale installation *kith and kin*,<sup>1</sup> which refigures survival as a taphonomic process, the artifact itself the compacted breccia of a 65,000-year history).

For years I’ve viewed whatever it is I do as an effort to slip sidelong through a window as it closes, or, by achieving some modest recognition, to prop the window open a bit longer. That sense – to mix metaphors – of having to construct the ship as it sails off the edge of the horizon, has receded for the time being. This is striking because the material

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1 [kithandkin.me; news.artnet.com/art-world/archie-moore-venice-biennale-golden-lion-interview-2500717](https://kithandkin.me/news.artnet.com/art-world/archie-moore-venice-biennale-golden-lion-interview-2500717).

circumstances that engendered this feeling, above all the absence of abiding institutional support, have not changed. What has changed is that I feel a new confidence in the lasting value of whatever it is I “do” – less in the artifacts, book-shaped or otherwise, that come of this doing than in the practice itself. Being at Wiko has renewed my commitment to the lasting social value of thinking and acting in a way that resists closure and encourages epistemic humility.

Wiko’s librarians deserve special thanks for their thoughtfulness and generosity. Without their efforts I doubt I would have accomplished much this year.

Apart from the generosity described above, a second feature of the collegial environment at Wiko has contributed to the renewed sense of purpose I feel, and that is the absence of the kind of professional competition and internecine drama characteristic of so many research environments. This is something I’ve observed myself, and it’s something I’ve heard others note in conversation. One of the benefits of not having a permanent institutional tie is that ordinarily I’m able to tune out this kind of drama, but of course I’m aware of it; I see on a daily basis the soul-sucking toll it takes on friends. The fact that everyone at Wiko is, in some sense, out of their place, lacking both the motive to build a power base and the institutional alliances to facilitate such a thing, might play some role in the relaxed atmosphere. But I can easily imagine a one-year fellowship playing host to all the usual careerist maneuvering in miniature, and it is to Wiko’s credit – the tone set by the leadership, staff, and Permanent Fellows, not to mention the thought that goes into assembling the cohort – that there has been none of that.

Indeed, getting to know other Fellows, outside the ritualized settings of the Colloquia and meals, has been among the most gratifying parts of being here. Before I came, there were a handful of people I was looking forward to meeting, people whose work I had admired, and for the most part the anticipation I felt has been borne out by the fellowship year. What I did not expect was to form any lasting friendships. But I have made four or five friends I expect to stay in regular contact with – in three cases, it’s possible our conversation will lead to some kind of professional collaboration. Only one of these people was someone whose work I was aware of before the fellowship year.

For my partner Jessy, too, this has been an unexpectedly pleasurable year. Though we live part of the year in Berlin and keep a place in Helmholtzkiez, and though Jessy has lived in Berlin more than twenty years, moving to Grunewald was, in the best way, like moving to a new country (and, for Jessy, one where the customs and rituals were unfamiliar). Jessy has accompanied me on previous fellowships, and the difference with

respect to Wiko's inclusion of Fellows' partners and families in the life of the community is striking. Jessie has been particularly grateful for the respect with which Fellows and staff have welcomed her into the intellectual life of the Kolleg. The fact that partners, whatever their background, are invited to participate in the Colloquia and other key features of the fellowship year – and to draw on the support of the librarians – contributes markedly to the atmosphere of generosity I described above. For this, again, we are both grateful.



BERLIN, PORTAL TO CAIRO  
&  
AN EVENING WITH WEBER'S GHOST  
JOEL BLECHER

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Joel Blecher grew up in the American Midwest, but was formed by a young adulthood punctuated by stints abroad in Italy, Syria, Yemen, and India. He received his PhD from Princeton in 2013 and is now a historian of Islamic thought and societies and Associate Professor at the George Washington University. He is the author of *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium*, which has been translated into Arabic, and the co-translator of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's *Merits of the Plague*, which was recently published with Penguin Classics. He was named the Bayard Dodge Distinguished Visiting Professor at the American University in Cairo in 2023–2024, and his work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Library of Congress, and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. He has spoken about the Islamic world on National Public Radio and numerous podcasts and has contributed to *The Atlantic*. – Address: Department of History, The George Washington University, Phillips Hall, 801 22nd St. NW, Suite 335, Washington, DC 20052, USA. E-mail: [jblecher@gwu.edu](mailto:jblecher@gwu.edu). Twitter/X and Insta: [@joelxblecher](https://www.instagram.com/joelxblecher); Bsky: [@joelblecher.com](https://bsky.app/profile/joelblecher.com).

*Sie erweisen mir die Ehre, mich aufzufordern, der Akademie einen Bericht über mein öffentliches Vorleben einzureichen. In diesem Sinne kann ich leider der Aufforderung nicht nachkommen.*

—Kafka, *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*

### I. *Ausweg*, *Freiheit*, and *Gespräch*

I had been locked in my home for almost a year. The pixels of my computer screen unglued from the Zoom logo, allowing me to submit my application to the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

I had modest expectations. Not a year of freedom, as the online brochure promised, but a humble *Ausweg*, a way out, à la Kafka's ape-cum-human, Rotpeter. What I found instead was neither *Ausweg* nor *Freiheit*, but an invitation to a *Gespräch*: a conversation with a community that allowed me to wander, on any given day, through the wormholes in space-time linking the spilled coffee on the desk of a Habsburg empress to the gut bacteria of early humans. Denuded of the prestige of our titles, I found that my fellow Fellows and I encountered one another as kindred spirits, rekindling in ourselves and one another the childlike questions that animated us before we set off on our careers.

Having spent the previous spring at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where scholars were permitted to disappear for weeks into the library to polish their footnotes until they gleamed, and where historians, mathematicians, and social scientists ate at separate tables, the setting of the Wissenschaftskolleg was refreshing. While IAS Princeton was an academic idyll in its own right, Wiko offered late nights after dinner under the stars beside Lake Halensee, and long walks through the dog trails along Lake Grunewald, where there was no *Ausweg* for a humanist when a scientist wondered about the point of a literary analysis, nor was there *Freiheit* for that same scientist when the moral consequences of their work were challenged. Instead, we had to find areas of mutual understanding – a fruitful *Gespräch*. The Wissenschaftskolleg may not be the ideal place to finish writing a book, but it is the perfect place to conceive one – or two or three.

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When I arrived in Berlin, I had been struggling to anchor my project on the history of Islam and the spice trade. I spent years in the archives poring over Arabic manuscripts, but I still needed a central character or throughline to carry the reader from the Mediterranean to the South China Sea. Was it the birth, life, and death of a group of Muslim spice merchants? Was it the story of the rise and fall of pepper? How about something even larger: the origins of capitalism itself? The problem vexed me. In my conversations at IAS Princeton, Francesca Trivellato and Sabine Schmidtke had guided me towards a range of possibilities, but months later in Berlin I had yet to narrow it down.

Unfortunately, narrowing was not on the menu at the Wissenschaftskolleg, as each new day brought a novel *Gespräch* with an eclectic group of economic historians over gurnard with ginger pickles, historians of science over pumpkin-coconut soup, literature scholars over curry cauliflower and sage mushrooms, artists and composers over celery steak with zatar and herbs, philosophers over rhubarb with sorrel ice cream, and political scientists over an espresso with a dash of milk foam. The avenues for taking my book only multiplied – no *Ausweg* yet.

Was it Andrew Hui, Claudia Verhoeven, Martha Jones, Barbara Prainsack, Marcus Willaschek, or Erika Milam who first pressed me to consider if there was a person who could anchor the book? Or was it Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Daniel Schönplüg, or former Fellows Michael Gordin and Stephen Greenblatt, each a master of the genre of biography in their own right? Surely it was all of them, or none of them, some hidden *tzaddik*, a person whose name my memory hides from me now, who deserves the credit. In the end, they asked me if I had a character who could serve as a pinhole through which to explore this larger world of Islam and the spice trade – *not really, no...* I pore over my notes... *not a figure that ties the route together from Egypt to Indonesia... or is there?* From a *Gespräch* springs a glimmer of an *Ausweg*...

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Our Rector had told us that each year at the Wissenschaftskolleg was inevitably defined by a global event – e.g. “the year of the pandemic,” “the year of Trump.” At the start of the year, she pleaded, “let this year be the year that the aggressor in Ukraine is defeated.” It was not meant to be. Our year was the year of October 7th and the bombardment of Gaza. As an American Jewish Islamicist in Berlin, studying Arabic manuscripts and scholarship in German by day, learning Yiddish with my children by night, I felt ripped in two. I was a double mourner. Bar Mitzva’ed on Mt. Mossada, I came of age during the War on Terror and moved to Syria after college, spending my time learning Arabic and teaching Palestinian refugees in Damascus to read. While October 7th roused others to speak out, it stunned me into silence. Mute out of intellectual paralysis – not complicity – I could only mourn. In those overcast days, I turned to Walter Benjamin, the alienated Jewish intellectual from Berlin who had spent some of his darkest days around the corner from us at the Wissenschaftskolleg and only blocks away from Gleis 17 that had deported most of Berlin’s Jews during the Nazi era. He wrote on Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, who reminded him of the Angel of History: *Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one*

*single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet; the angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed... but a storm is blowing from Paradise...*

The week in October when *The Times Literary Supplement* at last reviewed *Merits of the Plague*, my translation of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's treatise on the Black Death – a plague that brought ruin upon Gaza in the mid-1300s – Gaza was again in ruins. I doubt anyone craved to turn to a book about the plague that week, but if they had, they would have been greeted by the perversely consoling voice of the Black Death itself: *You were in ashes before I came, and in ashes you will be after I go – calm, calm – in time these ruins will be rebuilt.*

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani... could he be the anchor for my project? A paragon of Islamic thought, Ibn Hajar was also a spice trader who tied together the intellectual and commercial history of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. But he does not bring me to Indonesia, where my book's narrative ends. He never set foot there.

## *II. Berlin, Portal to Cairo*

Before the start of my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I had been appointed the Bayard Dodge Visiting Professor at the American University in Cairo – an appointment once held by the esteemed Edward Said, whose voice had been sorely missed in the wake of October 7th. This meant that the week following my Dienstagskolloquium – the day of the first snow of the year – I would head to Cairo to deliver a series of lectures on my current project, at the invitation of Adam Talib, Ahmad Khan, and Ellen Kenney in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Civilizations. Knowing I would be discussing my recent translation at one of my lectures, I borrowed the Wissenschaftskolleg library's copy of *Merits of the Plague*, with the blue Wiko stamp still fresh on the book's bottom fore edge, and took it with me to Egypt.

Broody, cloudy winter days of Berlin yielded to the sunny but smog-filled skies of Cairo. Orderly German auto culture yielded to wild near misses of Cairene traffic. From my home in Washington, DC, Cairo is quite a distance east; but from Berlin, Cairo is a short distance to the south. Berlin was a portal to Cairo.

My first day in Cairo, I mentioned to my colleague Ahmad Khan over tea that I was now considering the figure of Ibn Hajar as an anchor for the narrative of my book – but that the issue was that he could only take me from Egypt to Yemen; he could not carry the work's narrative to the straits of Malacca, the origin of the spice trade near modern-day

Indonesia. He mentioned that Ibn Hajar's grave still stood in Cairo's City of the Dead – an impoverished but history-filled neighborhood in Cairo that was now threatened by development. Ahmad helped me make arrangements to travel there the evening before my final lecture.

When the time came, I took my Wiko-library-stamped copy of Ibn Hajar's book in hand on a journey to the grave of Ibn Hajar in Cairo's City of the Dead. After both Google maps and residents among the graves led us astray, we searched in vain for his final resting place for hours. At last, we came upon the doors of Ibn Hajar's tomb – the *muqarnas* on the façade looked shockingly white, as if they had just been restored. A gate-keeper greeted me there.

“No entry – the grave is off limits to visitors.” The explanation he gave in Arabic was that the tomb had fallen into disrepair, but was in the process of being renovated. I pressed him again, explaining that I had traveled all this way to visit the tomb, and that I had spent my pandemic years translating one of Ibn Hajar's books into English (I flashed the Wiko library book under my arm). He relented, but implored me to refrain from photographing the interior while it was under construction.

“Who is funding the restoration of Ibn Hajar's tomb?” I asked.

“A group of students far away...”

“Where?” I asked.

“Indonesia.”

Ibn Hajar had never set foot in Indonesia. But the long tail of his ideas certainly had – and now students from Indonesia had returned to Cairo's City of the Dead to restore his memory. At that moment, I could see in Ibn Hajar a string that intertwined commerce and Islamic commentary, spanning the length of the spice trade.

I took out a pen and scrawled the date on the front page of the Wiko library book, with the following message: “On this day, this copy of Ibn Hajar's *Merits of the Plague* visited the tomb of Ibn Hajar in Cairo's City of the Dead.”

On my flight back to Berlin, I spied the pyramids from the window of my plane as they receded into the distance.

### *III. A Conversation with Weber's Ghost*

Spring 2024. Erfurt, Max-Weber-Kolleg – another Institute for Advanced Study. The year at Wiko is rapidly coming to a close. I sped down from Berlin for the day to deliver a lecture on my new book project, ready to hurry home as soon as it ended (I would need

to be prompt to help my children to their bath and bed). On the train down, I sensed Weber's ghost would be in the audience. He had haunted me since my days at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

"Allow me one concluding word about Max Weber," I said, "since we are at a Kolleg named in his honor, and since he had quite a lot to say about religion and the origins of capitalism, as well as Islam's relationship to economic growth. If his ghost were sitting here, attending this lecture, how might he respond?"

"But I am here!" his ghost shouted at me. He sat stiffly at the table as if he were flesh and blood, and he wore a long beard on his scowling face, which a phantom vision of Barbara Thériault attempted to trim between his inappropriate outbursts.

"Herr Professor Weber, a pleasure to meet you at last."

"I have always conceded," his spirit began, "that Islam has the capacity for a certain kind of adventure capitalism and entrepreneurship... but in the final analysis, Islam is essentially a warrior religion!" *Snip, snip.*

"But Muslims were instrumental in thickening economic relations during a time of thinning military connections," I argued, "rather than the other way around..."

"Yes, but it is still only *adventure* capitalism," the apparition retorted, "mere buying-low-selling-high... we do not see the forms of industrial capital that emerged in modern Europe!" *Snip. Snip-snip.*

"Consider again the example of Ibn Hajar," I stammered, "he was not only invested in shipping sugar but also in sugar refinery as well. And he's not the only example – many Muslim merchants were invested in mass production as well as arbitrage..."

"But they immobilized their capital through the institute of charitable donations... profits that otherwise would have been re-invested in business!" *Snip.*

"Ah – here again, consider Ibn Hajar's will! He was a merchant who invested in his students, who themselves were also businessmen. Investing in madrasas and in Sufi lodges, which played host to networks of Muslim businessmen, was also a way of re-investing in the business community..."

"*So ein Quatsch!* In any event your book does little to respond to my *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism...*" Two more *snips* from Barbara.

Weber's argument in the *Protestant Ethic* responded to an ongoing debate over the origins of capitalism. One's perspective in this debate hinges on one's definition of capitalism, of course, but Werner Sombart's negative – and frankly antisemitic – suggestion was that capitalism originated with the cultivation of greed among Jewish moneylenders. In this

regard, Weber's thesis that capitalism was not rooted in the vice of greed but in the virtues of prudence and otherworldly salvation cultivated by the Protestant work ethic turned Sombart's argument on its head.

"Well..." I hesitated, "Islamic business ethics also contained much in the way of prudence and otherworldly salvation... this has been pointed out by many others before me, but I'm not simply pointing to timeless Islamic doctrines found in the Qur'an and the hadith and in Islamic legal codes that praise the accumulation of profit through trade... but showing how such ideas played out in a real-life like figure Ibn Hajar, and the public debates among a diverse group of merchants, scholars, and states."

"If I were to revise my thesis," Weber stuttered, "and I am not saying I would – but *if* I were to... perhaps I would say that Protestantism was not the origin of the spirit of capitalism, but a kind of a cyclical return to form..."

"Yes – a moment when religious virtues guided and animated an entrepreneurial culture rather than allowed it to grow unbound..."

"So, in this view, the great divergence in economic fortunes between Islam and the West seem less attributable to the austerity of Protestantism or a lack of Islamic entrepreneurial spirit or to some foible of Islamic law..."

"...than to a moment of norm-breaking – when European powers, in the 'Age of Exploration,' marshalled state violence in support of mercantilist trading policies, race-based slavery, and the rampant exploitation of natural resources, a breaking of a centuries-old culture of commercial norms that had been held in check, with greater or lesser success, by Muslim religious authorities!"

"*Quatsch!*" Weber scowled again and shook his head. "I would never go so far... But it could be an interesting idea for a book – or at least the start of a conversation... a *Gespräch*–"  
*Snip.*

#### *IV. Postscript: Ten Rules for Moderating a Dienstagskolloquiums-Diskussion*

Following today's presentation, we will be using a new method to solicit your questions. Please observe the following rules:

1. Write down your name and your question on a scrap of paper.
2. Take your scrap of paper, exit Wiko, and sprint through the wooded trails of Grunewald.
3. Use your scrap of paper as a bookmark as you read through chapters 1, 2, 7, and 9 of Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900* while the dogs play beside the *Strand*.

4. Run back to Koenigsallee and use your scrap of paper as a bus ticket; jump on the M19 to hear the Berliner Philharmoniker perform.
5. Use the paper scrap to perform on stage with the Philharmoniker, pulling it so tightly that it can be plucked like the string of a cello.
6. Erase your name and your question from your scrap of paper, and instead use it to write an outline of the book you proposed to write during your fellowship.
7. Hustle back to the Wissenschaftskolleg where the scrap of paper will be roasted with fresh garlic, a goat-cheese mousse, and sea buckthorn.
8. Relish the scrap of paper on the terrace under the stars beside Lake Halensee.
9. Take what remains of the scrap of paper to the gates of Mordor, and cast it into the heart of the volcano.
10. Please return in no later than five minutes, and we will call on the first person who raises their hand.



## THE REALITY OF IDEALS OMRI BOEHM

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Omri Boehm was born in 1979 in Israel. He started his studies at the Adi Lautman Program for Outstanding Students, also known as the “Yehuda Elkana Program” (Tel Aviv University), and completed his PhD in Philosophy at Yale University. After a postdoc fellowship at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, he joined the Department of Philosophy at The New School for Social Research in New York, where he is an Associate Professor. His most recent publications include *Kant’s Critique of Spinoza* (Oxford University Press 2014), *Israel – eine Utopie* (Propyläen 2020; *Haifa Republic: A Democratic Future for Israel*, NYRB 2021), *Radiķaler Universalismus* (Propyläen 2022; *Radical Universalism*, NYRB 2025), *Der bestirnte Himmel über mir, ein Gespräch über Kant* (Propyläen 2024, with Daniel Kehlmann), and *The Reality of Ideals* (Propyläen 2024; *Die Realität der Ideale*, Propyläen 2024). In 2024 Omri Boehm was awarded the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding (Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung). He regularly writes for *Haaretz*, *Die Zeit*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*. – Address: Department of Philosophy, The New School for Social Research, 6 East 16th Street R1115A, New York, NY 10003, USA. E-mail: boehmo@newschool.edu.

In March 2025, I met with a group of Israeli and Palestinian scholars and activists – experts in political science, international law, and the Middle East conflict, as well as directors of joint Israeli-Palestinian initiatives – at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo. We gathered for a conference co-organized with Andreas Føllesdal (my Co-Fellow 2023/2024) on “(Con)Federal Constellations in Israel/Palestine.” Far removed from both the Middle East and Berlin-Grunewald, the meeting served as a vivid reminder of the lasting impact

my five-month stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg (February–July 2024) had on my work – specifically on the (con)federative bi-national framework I first began developing in *Haifa Republic* (2021).

It is a remarkable feature of the Kolleg that, during this difficult period, I came to know both an expert on federalism like Andreas and Palestinian colleagues from previous and upcoming years: Hassan Jabareen (Fellow 2015/2016) and Bashir Bashir (Fellow 2024/2025).

When I planned my stay at the Kolleg, my hope was to spend several quiet months working on “purely” academic materials – whatever that may mean – and less on the kind of political-academic engagement that has shaped much of my recent work. My intended project, which I had long postponed, was a thorough critique of “post-metaphysical thinking”: an attempt to identify the necessary metaphysical assumptions underpinning moral universalism – such as freedom and personhood – and to explore whether, absent a theoretical defense of these assumptions, moral universalism collapses into what I have elsewhere called “fake universalism” or “we-liberalism.” Relatedly, I sought to ask whether a broadly Kantian cosmopolitan project of the sort familiar from Habermas can be sustained without metaphysical commitments. My suspicion is that it cannot – and that, without them, cosmopolitanism and universalism halt at the threshold of historical commitments, which at least partly overlap with our identities. These concerns also motivated my book *Radikaler Universalismus* (2022), and I had hoped to return to its arguments for a more systematic account during my time at the Kolleg.

However, the Juridical Overhaul in Israel the previous summer already put into question my ability to disconnect from political writing. Then came Hamas’s attack on October 7th and the ensuing Israeli campaign in Gaza – events that decisively ended any such hope. I was faced with a choice: retreat into the utopian environment of Wiko, or acknowledge the historical moment and write – not op-eds, but essays with both academic grounding and public reach – trying to begin addressing what we are witnessing.

The result was a series of longer, more systematic public lectures and essays that aimed to go beyond the immediate political surface (urgent though it is) and speak to the deeper questions the moment posed – at least to me, no doubt as an Israeli Jew. While politically relevant, the essays were never *only* political – though some critics thought they weren’t political *enough*. The time, space, and company of leading experts – including some unforgettable conversations – proved invaluable for this kind of work.

The first text, “Ethical Monotheism Today,” grew out of a keynote I gave at the opening of Munich’s Literature Festival. It reflects on the Jewish-German tradition of Ethical

Monotheism, beginning with Hermann Cohen and reverberating through figures like Cassirer, Buber, and Benjamin – a tradition that saw monotheism not as the discovery of a single God, but of a single humanity. Interrupted by the Second World War – many of its representatives fled to Palestine – it briefly resurfaced in the bi-nationalist traditions formed just before and after Israel’s establishment. I argue that Ethical Monotheism, and its roots in neo-Kantianism, remain relevant far beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It holds philosophical possibilities that have been overlooked – by Kant scholars, the Frankfurt School, and post-colonial critiques alike. My aim was to ask what remains of this tradition today – not merely as a subject of historical inquiry, but as a living philosophical possibility.

The second essay, “Friendship as the Schema of Human Dignity,” was originally written as my acceptance speech for the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding (awarded to *Radikaler Universalismus* in 2024). Engaging with Hannah Arendt’s well-known acceptance speech for the Lessing Prize – where she contrasts Lessing’s ideal of friendship with Kant’s categorical ethics as a pillar of Enlightenment in “dark times” – I explore the role of friendship in Kant’s thought. Often considered “cold” or “abstract,” Kantian universalism in fact grounds the ideal of dignity in a duty to friendship, conceived not as a private sentiment but as a public virtue of Enlightenment. For Arendt, a dark time is one in which public discourse undermines rather than sustains reason. A dark time, for Kant, would mean one in which “thinking for oneself” is in question, because it is only possible in the public sphere. I was trying to suggest that here lies the crucial role of friendship in his thinking: friends allow us, amid a dark time, to think with others – whom we trust, “opening” ourselves to them – thereby enabling thinking in dark times. Departing from this interpretation, I tried to reflect on the tragic ideal of German-Jewish friendship and, no less significantly, on Israeli-Palestinian friendship today. (In a later exchange with Peter Schäfer [Wiko Fellow 2007/2008], the connection between friendship and universalism became even clearer, see especially “Mit Gott auch wohl gerechtet,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 2, 2024.)

The third essay, “Europe and Its Victims: Beyond the Myth of National Sovereignty,” was written for the third “Rede an Europa” event of the IWM Vienna and Wiener Festwochen. In it, I argue that while Europe has largely responded to its imperial and colonial past by questioning national sovereignty – broadening citizenship beyond national identity – it has taken the opposite approach with its victims. In relation to the Holocaust and to colonialism, Europe has often accepted national sovereignty and ethnic conceptions of

citizenship as vehicles of liberation. These nationalist frameworks are now colliding in Israel/Palestine – and Europe’s failure to address them coherently undermines its own internal legal-political solutions to its past.

These three talks were collected in a short book, published in both German and English, *The Reality of Ideals* (2024). Taking a cue from Ernst Cassirer, I wrote in the preface that these texts “represent my best efforts to take some first steps” in sustaining an attitude in which ideals can be meaningfully distinguished from “political myth.” It is a “humble contribution to a not-so-humble state of mind: the one that insists that speaking for utopian ideals is not advocating placeless moralistic politics for the day after; one that recognizes ideals as valid principles rather than comfortable noble lies; one that takes seriously that peace is truly distinct from domination, and that human dignity – not national sovereignty – is truly inviolable.” I added, however, that while the essays aim to uphold this frame of mind, “none of them amounts to a theoretical defense of the reality of ideals – something I hope to do on a future occasion.”

Only after writing that line did I realize it may be the most mature expression of what I had initially hoped to do during my brief stay at Wiko, though I hadn’t yet found the right terms for it, or even understood things that way. A critique of post-metaphysical thinking and a defense of the reality of ideals are two sides of the same coin: one stated negatively, the other positively. I now look forward to taking up this project more fully, with an emphasis on the positive aspects, perhaps in the course of another Wiko stay...



**T.H.E. W.I.K.O.!**  
RUTH CHANG

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Ruth Chang holds the Chair of Jurisprudence at the University of Oxford. Her expertise concerns philosophical questions relating to the nature of value, value conflict, decision-making, rationality, AI, love, and human agency. She has shared her research in public venues including radio, television, and newspaper outlets such as National Public Radio, the BBC, *National Geographic*, and *The New York Times*. The institutions she has lectured at or consulted for include Google, the CIA, the World Bank, the US Navy, the Bhutan government, Big Pharma, and many businesses and financial institutions. Her TED talk on hard choices has over nine million views. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. – Address: University College, University of Oxford, The High Street, Oxford, OX1 4BH, United Kingdom. E-mail: [ruth.chang@law.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.chang@law.ox.ac.uk).

Over the course of nearly thirty years in academia, I have managed to inveigle my way into eight IASs around the world. How does the Wiko compare? Let me count the ways.

1. *Thinking freely*. On the first day of the Wiko year, the Fellows are invited to spend the year in blue sky thinking. The Wiko understands that the most precious gift one can offer self-motivated academics is intellectual freedom. Some other IASs put greater emphasis on publication output. When noting that the Wiko provides funds for Fellows who wish to put on events, the head of academic programs asks the agenda-setting question: “Do you really want to spend your free year going to conferences and putting on workshops when you could do that from your home institution?”

2. *Home away from home.* Unlike many other IASs, the Wiko provides good rental housing for its Fellows. And unlike every other IAS I've visited, it makes ample provision for spouses, kids, dogs, cats, and rabbits. Just look out for Mr. Fox, who roams the grounds of the Villa Walther. Before visiting another IAS, I spent stressful months trying to find adequate housing only to discover that the house I had finally secured was also home to a very large clew of worms that descended, like clockwork, from the ceiling into the living room every year to mate. The food at the Wiko is also incredible. My fellowship year won the lottery with a new Michelin-star chef in charge of our sustenance – sadly departing after the year – who, along with an amazing restaurant manager and kitchen team, kept the fellowship jolly with glorious meals. At another IAS, one fellow was driven to write poetry in honor of the lettuce we were served at lunch every single day. But I did enjoy his “The Romaines of the Day.”

3. *Extra events.* Some other IASs tend not to sponsor a lot of additional programming. The Wiko organizes and promotes a cornucopia of intellectual and creative events, some of which include the general public. I ended up speaking at one of these and was glad that I did, and I know the same is true of other Fellows who participated in extracurricular activities.

4. *Weekly Colloquia.* It is easy for weekly Colloquia led by such differently trained people to devolve into a rotation of department-specific talks. The nudging and setting of expectations by the Wiko leadership really made a difference; pretty much every Fellow succeeded in presenting their work in a way that was accessible to academics outside their own expertise, whether it was about the neuroscience of memory, the African dhole, solidarity, or Charlie Manson.

5. *Interdisciplinary discussion.* Interdisciplinarity is always a risky proposition. Discussion among thinkers from wildly different disciplines can be hostile and unproductive, with intellectual factions forming as people dig in their heels in favor of their own methodology and assumptions. I remember an anthropologist at one IAS telling me that my research about human choice was all nonsense since there is no such thing as choice. My year at the Wiko was marked by friendly – maybe too friendly – Q&A. As the year progressed, Fellows were less prone to ask reflexive, orthogonal questions from their disciplinary silos but to think more expansively about how their expertise bore on the ideas presented. In the end, I thought we operated pretty well, like a balletic flock of birds, adjusting spontaneously to defects in discussions from weeks prior. The impressively careful curation of each class by the admissions team made it possible.

6. *Key personnel.* The Wiko has the largest support team of any IAS I have encountered and is superbly run. The Wiko library staff were exceptional in literally *goad*ing us into presenting them with research challenges. I sent them two doozies and got back highly intelligent and really thoughtful research results. I am kicking myself now at the end of the year for not using them more. The reception team were friendly, inordinately kind, and highly competent; the IT/AV team out of this world.

7. *Organizational structure.* The Wiko has two distinctive organizational features that enhance its appeal as an IAS: the Permanent Fellows and the academic staff. The Permanent Fellows are a group of highly distinguished individuals who add intellectual heft and sometimes participate in the Colloquia and meals. It is a great boon for the annual cohort of Fellows to learn about their work. The other intellectual bonus is the academic staff. Most IASs are led by a sole academic director who is supported by a group of non-academic administrative staff. The Wiko is run by a number of senior academics and other accomplished people. The presence of such capable people leads to innovation. In my year, the head of academic programs and others created – from soup to nuts – an IAS in Ukraine.

8. !The Wiko is generous and proactive in ensuring that every Fellow has the conditions they need to do the best work of which they are capable. Talking shop with a colleague in the hallway? Here, why don't you use my office? a Wiko leader offers. Need to print at home as well as in the office? Let us provide you with a second printer, an IT person suggests. Have a mosquito allergy? Given that the Wiko sits on the banks of a beautiful lake, we'll install some screens in your apartment, says the head of internal affairs. Nervous about some dodgy emails you receive regularly? I'll install a sandbox on your computer, offers an IT expert. Ack! Trapped in a building during a Berlin downpour without an umbrella? No worries, the head of the library proposes, we've a bunch of umbrellas in the library I'll bring over. Let's face it, complaining is an academic sport. At the Wiko, one's skills become rusty from disuse.

The Wiko is a thinker's paradise. I took up the offer made that first day and engaged in free thinking over the year. What helped me along was the stellar community and friendship of fellow Fellows. To my fellow Fellows and to the Wiko, I will always be grateful.



PHOTOS AND JOURNALS  
DEBORA DINIZ

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Debora Diniz is a Brazilian anthropologist and documentary filmmaker. She is a professor at the University of Brasília's Law School and the founder of Anis – Instituto de Bioética, an organization that uses video and research for evidence-based advocacy, policy change, and strategic litigation on reproductive justice. She has served as Deputy Executive Director of Fòs Feminista, an international alliance for reproductive justice based in the Global South and led by over 220 organizations in more than 44 countries (2018–2023). She is a member of the High-Level Advisory Committee for the Gender and Health Hub, coordinated by the United Nations University International Institute for Global Health (UNU-IIGH). Diniz's 2016 book, *Zika: From the Brazilian Backlands to Global Threat*, published in Portuguese, won the Prêmio Jabuti, Brazil's most traditional literary award, and has since been translated into English and Japanese. Her films have won more than 90 awards and have been shown in festivals, prisons, universities and schools, hospitals and laboratories, courts and churches in more than 35 countries. For her response to the impact of the Zika epidemic in Brazil, she was nominated as one of *Foreign Policy Magazine's* 100 Global Thinkers in 2016. In 2020, she received the prestigious Dan David Prize, a lifetime achievement award for her contributions to gender equality, and the Global Health Ethics Leadership Award in 2023. – E-mail: [debora.diniz@unb.br](mailto:debora.diniz@unb.br).

In my last days at Wiko, I look at the pictures I took during my stay. I have swans and their babies from my window; flowers in bloom on my way to the supermarket; meals and parties; colleagues and their seminars. I also have snapshots of the city, the cafes where I spent the winter days reading and checking the originals of a book manuscript.

I regret that I do not have a photo for each day of my stay. I wish I could anticipate the imaginary experience described by Sanaka Hiiragi in *The Lantern of Lost Memories* and choose a single image for the entire period. With some days missing in my photographic memory, I refuse to choose one among the hundreds I have.

Realizing the missing photos, I turned to my daily journal – another Japanese reference, a Hobonichi, a five-year journal. There is no missing day in my writing. I found my journey at Wiko in elements of inner and outer life. It was a path that combined a deep solitude of being alone with my thoughts and a constant experience of community. *Now that I am leaving*, the Wiko community has been transformed into camaraderie and friendship. Some people may believe that we, scholars, need adversarial thinking to improve academic thinking. I have always doubted this formula, especially after my stay at Wiko. I thought better when people, genuinely, questioned me; I learned more by paying attention in the Colloquia of colleagues to topics I had never thought about; and I connected realities through observation and deep curiosity.

I came to Wiko with a project about health emergencies and time: “What happens to women when a health emergency is declared over?” was my research question. I still have to continue on this path of temporalities, emergencies, and survival. But Wiko opened the doors of creativity and freedom; and I believed it on my very first day in the large seminar room when Fellows, families, and the Wiko community were present, “You are free to choose your path here.” It took me a few weeks to change my original proposal. I produced a documentary film (“a common woman”) that was shown at my Tuesday Colloquium and was privileged to have my colleagues as the first audience. The documentary circulated in international festivals and won awards, and I thanked my colleagues and Wiko staff in the credits of the film. After the film, I took time to walk in Grunewald near Villa Walther and breathe in the silence of the neighborhood. What should I do next? The first words about “freedom to think and create” were with me.

A new, strange time of peace and haste moved my concentration. It was during the short days of winter when I opened the first draft of a manuscript that was waiting for my review. In my personal calendar of photos and memories in my diary, I lived two terms in Wiko: the first, when I adapted my personal rhythm to the cycle of seminars, lunches, and dinners; the second, when the collective rhythm became part of my daily routine and I started having neighbors and colleagues. In the second moment, after the winter break, it was when I immersed myself in my manuscript. Strangely enough, it was launched on

the very last day of my stay (“Academic hidden letters: about researching and writing”). The calendar of coincidences is also how I now share the delicate experience I had at Wiko: a time of freedom and practice of creativity; a space to listen, to connect, and to transform myself. A time to meet people who will be with me as good colleagues when I leave.



## VON DER KUNST DES ZUHÖRENS JEFFREY DÖRING

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Jeffrey Döring ist freier Musiktheater-Regisseur. Entsprechend seinem Masterabschluss in Dramaturgie an der Theaterakademie und der Filmakademie in Ludwigsburg vereinen seine Projekte Medieninstallation, Opernmusik und Stationentheater. Dabei stehen die Beteiligung von Bürger\*innen und die Sensibilisierung für die Lebensweisen sozialer Randgruppen stets im Fokus. Einen Schwerpunkt bildet die Arbeit zur Deutschen Gebärdensprache. So entwickelte er die Gehörlosen-Oper „Rat Krespel“, inszenierte für das Deutsche Gehörlosentheater „Die Hauptsache“ und für die Landesbühnen Sachsen „Rusalka“ – jedes Mal mit einem Team aus hörenden und Tauben<sup>1</sup> Darsteller\*innen. Darüber hinaus arbeitete er dokumentarisch zum Thema Hochsensibilität („Brennender Schnee“), widmete sich Tabus queerer Liebeskonzepte („Wankelmut der Herzen“), dem deutschen Gesundheitssystem („ZauberBurg“) und der Intelligenz von Pflanzen („Tränen der Daphne“). Mit der Mortier Fellowship entwickelte er „Blaubarts Burg“ zum Thema Einsamkeit im Alter. – Adresse: Petzscher Straße 19, 04129 Leipzig, Deutschland. E-Mail: [post@jeffrey-doering.de](mailto:post@jeffrey-doering.de). Website: [jeffrey-doering.de](http://jeffrey-doering.de).

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1 „Taub“ wird hier bewusst in Anlehnung an Paddy Ladds „Deafhood“ großgeschrieben als Beschreibung einer kulturellen Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinschaft der gebärdenden Tauben Menschen. Der Begriff steht in Abgrenzung zu „taub“ als Beschreibung einer Beeinträchtigung, die zumeist aus hörender Perspektive formuliert wird und sehr selten dem eigenen Empfinden Tauber Menschen entspricht. Vgl. Paddy Ladd, *Was ist Deafhood? Gehörlosenkultur im Aufbruch* (Seedorf: Signum, 2008), <http://www.signum-verlag.de/BTitel/978-3-936675-18-4.html>.

„Wie der Frühling, still und leise, bist du ans Wiko gekommen“ – mit diesen Worten hatte mich Nils Jansen, einer der Fellows in meinem Jahrgang, verabschiedet. Von Februar bis April 2024 trat ich meine Short-Term Fellowship am Wissenschaftskolleg an und tatsächlich war meine Zeit geprägt von stillem, andächtigem, manchmal auch aktivem Zuhören – jedoch nicht nur, weil ich mich mitten im Fellowjahr erst zurechtfinden musste. Der Stille Raum zu geben, sodass andere sprechen können, war essenzieller Bestandteil meines Arbeitsvorhabens. Denn anders als mancher Fellow wertete ich keine Daten aus oder schrieb an einem Buch. Ich war aktiv auf der Suche nach Menschen und ihren Geschichten.

Mit „Blaubarts Burg“ war ich mit einem Projekt am Wiko angetreten, das es sich zum Ziel gesetzt hatte, die Märchenoper Béla Bartóks mit Erzählungen von Senior\*innen und Pfleger\*innen über Einsamkeit im Alter zu verschneiden. In diesen drei Monaten in Berlin wollte ich Menschen dazu einladen, mir von den sozialen Ursachen, den medizinischen Folgen, den politischen Maßnahmen gegen, aber vor allem dem persönlichen Empfinden von Einsamkeit zu erzählen. Ich wollte es mir zur Aufgabe machen, diese Menschen ins Reden zu bringen und ihre Stimmen möglichst unkommentiert und wertungsfrei aufzuzeichnen. Dabei war ich besorgt, dass meine Fragen womöglich meine Interviewgäste verletzen könnten. Was, wenn ich alte Wunden aufreiße oder eine Zuschreibung erfolgt, die sie als Stigma empfinden? Ohne auf diese Fragen eine Antwort zu haben, begann ich damit, Kontakt mit möglichen Multiplikatoren aufzunehmen. Mir war noch nicht klar, dass meine Suche nach der Einsamkeit auch andere Fellows später anrühren oder inspirieren sollte.

Ich kontaktierte also Wohn- und Pflegeeinrichtungen, Koordinationsstellen der Seniorenarbeit und mobile Pflegedienste mit der Bitte um ein Interview. Während ich auf Antwort wartete oder oft genug mich und mein Anliegen nochmals in Erinnerung brachte, stand noch eine weit pragmatischere Aufgabe vor mir: das Verfassen und Überarbeiten von Projektförderanträgen für das spätere Theaterstück. Es ist stetiger Bestandteil meiner Arbeit, mich auch um die Finanzierung meiner Projekte zu kümmern. Trotzdem fühlte es sich merkwürdig an, das Privileg dieser Residenz zu haben und anstatt, wie geplant, Menschen zu interviewen, mich erst einmal am Schreibtisch mit Zahlen, Förderauflagen und der zehnten Umformulierung der Antragstexte zu befassen. Jedoch waren die Ruhe, die damit verbundene Konzentration sowie die finanzielle Unabhängigkeit, die mir das Wiko ermöglichte, wahrscheinlich auch die Gründe, warum beide Anträge beim Bund und beim Land Sachsen letztlich erfolgreich waren.

Wie bereits angedeutet waren die Pflegeinstitutionen anfangs eher zögerlich im Beantworten meiner Interviewanfragen. Denn wie so oft brauchte es erst einen Türöffner, diese eine Person, die einen mit etwas Vertrauensvorschuss weitervermittelt. Diese Person fand ich in Frau Weinholtz von der Seniorenarbeit Tempelhof-Schöneberg. Ein erstes Interview mit ihr gab mir nicht nur Einblicke in die Angebote und Hürden der Seniorenarbeit, Frau Weinholtz vermittelte mich auch an Senior\*innen, die bereit waren, mit mir zu sprechen. Schon allein auf eine Person verweisen zu können, der meine potenziellen Gesprächspartner\*innen vertrauten, öffnete sehr viel schneller Türen als jede Beschreibung meines Konzepts oder jeder Verweis auf das Wissenschaftskolleg. Meine Erfahrung mit partizipativen Projekten bestätigte sich einmal mehr: Menschen vertrauen Menschen, nicht Ideen oder Institutionen.

Mit diesen ersten Kontakten folgten wie in einem Schneeballsystem schnell weitere Gesprächspartner\*innen: Freund\*innen von Interviewten, Pflegekräfte, Kolleg\*innen. Aber auch je öfter ich meinen eigenen Freund\*innen von meiner Arbeit am Wiko erzählte, fielen ihnen immer mehr Leute ein, die ich interviewen könnte. Im Rückblick bin ich davon überzeugt, dass auch die gemeinsamen Gespräche beim Essen mit den Fellows am Wiko mir halfen, mein Vorhaben zunehmend besser in verständliche Worte zu fassen. Fast jedes Dinner oder jeder Lunch, bei dem eine neue Person mit mir am Tisch saß, war wie eine Trainingseinheit zum Pitchen meines Recherchevorhabens. Dabei traten im Gespräch mit meinen Co-Fellows auch unerwartete Querverbindungen und Ideen aus ihren jeweiligen Disziplinen auf: Wie äußert sich Einsamkeit neuronal im Gehirn? Welche psychologischen Folgen hat Einsamkeit? Wie beobachtet die Soziologie dieses Phänomen und welche Methoden der Gesprächsführung werden dort angewendet?

Doch auch neben diesen fachlichen Inputs vertrauten mir Fellows und Wiko-Mitarbeiter\*innen ihre eigenen Erfahrungen mit Einsamkeit an. Sei es die plötzliche soziale Isolation im Zuge der Covid-Pandemie. Sei es das Miterleben des inneren Rückzugs der eigenen Eltern oder gar der eigenen Kinder. Sei es die Erfahrung von Flucht und politischem Exil, die zu sozialem Ausschluss und Einsamkeit führten. Die Berichte waren unglaublich mannigfaltig und bewegend, rührten sie ja auch an meine Erfahrungen mit Einsamkeit und der Angst davor. Unser Bedürfnis, sich zugehörig zu fühlen, für mindestens eine andere Person von Bedeutung zu sein, ist offenbar so fundamental, dass wir alle zumindest die Angst vor diesem Verlust, diesem Losgelöstsein von der Welt, erfahren haben.

Für dieses berührende Vertrauen, das mir meine Co-Fellows in diesen Erzählungen entgegenbrachten, bin ich nach wie vor dankbar. Doch ebenso danke ich für das Vertrauen und die Offenheit meiner Interviewpartner\*innen aus den Pflegeeinrichtungen und insbesondere den Senior\*innen. Während ich anfangs noch besorgt war, das Reden könnte schmerzhaft für meine Gesprächspartner\*innen sein, wurde ich schnell vom Gegenteil überzeugt. Weniger musste ich Menschen ins Reden bringen, als vielmehr ihnen einen zeitlichen Rahmen und ein Ende setzen. Oft reichten zwei oder drei Stunden mit einer älteren Person gar nicht aus. Dann brauchte auch ich wieder Zeit, um mich zu sortieren, um aus der Biografie dieser Person aufzutauchen und in meinen Alltag zurückzukehren. Da waren Gespräche mit den Fachpersonen deutlich kürzer und präziser, erzählten sie ja nicht aus ihrem Leben, sondern von ihrer Arbeit oder professionellen Perspektive.

Zuzuhören und einen ruhigen Ort zu schaffen, war also wesentlicher Bestandteil meines Wiko-Aufenthaltes – sowohl im Gespräch mit den Fellows als auch insbesondere mit meinen Interviewpartner\*innen. Dabei ist aufmerksames, ehrliches und konzentriertes Zuhören unglaublich anstrengend und keineswegs passiv, wie man meinen könnte. Zuzuhören, einen anderen Menschen verstehen zu wollen und seine Ansichten nachzuempfinden, erscheint mir manchmal – und ganz besonders in diesem Projekt – weit fordernder, als sich selbst auszudrücken, laut zu werden, sich und seine Arbeit zu präsentieren. Denn wahrhaftes Zuhören fordert alle Sinne, auch Sehen, Riechen, Berühren und manchmal auch Schmecken (wenn wie bei mir Tee und Kuchen mit im Spiel waren). Doch darüber hinaus heißt Offensein auch, das Gegenüber in den eigenen sozialen Schutzraum einzuladen, die eigenen Bedürfnisse hintanzustellen und flexibel und spontan auf Stimmungen, Situationen und auftretende Emotionen zu reagieren. All das fordert Energie. Doch am Ende wird all diese Arbeit, diese Kraftinvestition, mit einer ehrlichen Begegnung, mit Nähe und menschlichem Austausch belohnt – also all das, was Einsamkeit verhindert. Folglich bestand meine Recherche nicht allein aus den Informationen und Daten zur Einsamkeit, die aus den Gesprächen hervorgingen, sondern insbesondere auch in meinem eigenen emotionalen und physischen Erleben dieser Begegnungen.

Und so wie der Einsamkeit die Begegnung entgegensteht, freue ich mich immer noch, dass ich meine Recherche anstatt in Form eines Vortrags in einem inszenierten Gesprächskonzert den Fellows und dem Publikum präsentieren konnte. Aus der Zusammenarbeit mit zwei begnadeten Pianisten aus Charkiw in der Ukraine, zwei freudvollen Sänger\*innen und einem musikalischen Leiter sowie einem beflissenen Sounddesigner und einem enthusiastischen Kameramann entstand aus meiner solitären Recherche eine

Gruppenarbeit. Denn schließlich ist es das, was Theater und Oper für mich zu einer lebendigen Kunstform macht: Begegnungen mit Menschen, das Erleben von Gemeinschaft und das Teilen von Fragen und Ideen mit dem Publikum.

Ich möchte daher dem Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, allen Fellows, ihren Partner\*innen und dem Staff herzlich und aufrichtig für diese erfüllende Zeit danken. Vielen Dank für das Vertrauen, die Offenheit, die Gespräche und die Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der ich als Short-Term Regisseur mich inmitten von renommierten Wissenschaftler\*innen bewegen konnte. Ebenso ein herzlicher Dank an das Komitee des *Mortier Next Generation Awards*, das mir mit seinem Glauben an die Dringlichkeit dieses Themas und an meine künstlerische Arbeit sowie durch das verliehene Preisgeld die Realisierung dieses Projekts im September 2024 erst ermöglichte.



IN SEARCH OF “ARTIFICIAL TONGUES”  
FOR TARGETING AND REMOVING TOXIC  
METALS IN WATER  
ISMAILA EMAHI

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Ismaila Emahi is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Chemical Sciences at the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR) in Sunyani, Ghana. He obtained his PhD in Chemistry from Saint Louis University (SLU), St. Louis, Missouri, USA in 2015. Immediately following his PhD, Ismaila Emahi began his academic career as Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), Illinois, USA, where he taught courses in Chemistry and Biochemistry. He later moved to the University of Richmond in Virginia, USA as a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry, where he taught Biochemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Functional Nucleic Acids and Analytical Applications. Ismaila Emahi returned to Ghana in January 2018 and joined the Department of Chemical Sciences at UENR as Lecturer. His research interest is in the development of innovative materials for removing toxic metals in water and the design of smart tools for environmental sensing. He is an Iso Lomso Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), South Africa; a Fellow of the Africa Science Leadership Programme (ASLP) at Future Africa, University of Pretoria, South Africa; and a Fellow of the Regional Center for Energy and Environmental Sustainability (RCEES) at UENR, Sunyani, Ghana. – Address: Department of Chemical Sciences, University of Energy and Natural Resources, P.O. Box 214, Sunyani, Ghana. E-mail: ismaila.emahi@uenr.edu.gh.

Having previously stayed in a similar Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), my expectation when coming to Wiko was straightforward – to enjoy a serene environment and solitude to continue to ponder my research and make meaningful advances. This time, however, I had a really ambitious goal. My plan was to write and submit six original research

articles for publication by the end of my three-month stay at Wiko. Regardless of how insane this might seem, I certainly hoped to accomplish this goal because I already had the data to process for these six papers and, as I told myself, “All I need is the space to think and write.” Indeed, I had the space – a well-furnished room with a lovely desk and a sweet, cozy bed just within about three meters away. Yes, I requested to have my office space within my bedroom because I was so ambitious prior to coming to Wiko that I felt stepping out from my bedroom to walk to another office to do my work could be a loss of precious time. Yes, that’s how overly ambitious I was, but soon I realized that there was something different and interesting about Wiko.

Unlike my past experience at an IAS, Wiko had a formal welcome reception of all Fellows within the first few days of our arrival, which enabled me to settle in rather more quickly and comfortably. In fact, all the emails I was receiving from the “preparing your stay” team were enough to suggest to me that Wiko was going to offer me an incredible experience, and it did not take me long after I arrived to recognize this. I especially loved the “cheat sheets” that highlighted all the Fellows’ and staff’s profiles. It really did make it easy for me to identify and bond with all the other Fellows and the staff as well. Even before the first, formal welcome meeting and lunch, I had “ticked” a few Fellows on the list that I wanted to interact with. So I did not need any further introduction to identify these Fellows. The great lunch that accompanied this welcome reception and subsequently the everyday lunches, coupled with the exquisite Thursday dinners, were enough for me to realize that my initial ambition of completing two research articles every month was not just overly ambitious, but actually insane. There was much more to learn and enjoy at Wiko than just brooding over data processing and writing research articles.

Right from the day of my arrival, I knew that Wiko would not only offer me the space to think, but also an opportunity to feel at home and connect with people. Vera Pfeffer of the “preparing your stay” team really gave me the warmest arrival reception I could get. Eventually, I realized that the entire “preparing your stay” team, as well as the entire staff – from the reception to the restaurant, to the library, to admissions, to the Head of Academic Programs and Rector’s offices – were just amazing people with fantastic human relation skills that could make any Fellow feel a great sense of belonging and the opportunity to do more while in residence.

Then, as if the Fellows were also purposively selected to be respectful of and supportive to each other, Wiko became such a place to develop yourself physically, mentally, and even spiritually. The diverse backgrounds (academically, culturally, geographically, etc.)

coupled with the fact that these Fellows are top-notch in their respective fields makes it exciting and fulfilling to interact with and feel a part of it all. Chatting with these geeks not only gave me the opportunity to learn new things outside my field of chemistry, but I even gained broader and insightful perspectives into my own research. I was very much impressed with the rich perspectives I received after I presented my research during one of the Fellows' Colloquia. Before my Colloquium I was still battling with ideas about refining my research – the identification of DNA aptamers for fabricating biosensors, which I coin “artificial tongues,” to remove toxic metals in drinking water. Little did I expect that “non-chemist” Co-Fellows could help me reshape my thoughts about a rather “chemistry-dense” topic. The questions and follow-on discussions after my seminar really did help me to rethink my research and unravel new ideas to move my research in a better direction.

It was also amazing to learn how connected some of these Fellows were and how they could easily recommend resources and contacts to broaden my network and knowledge. Eventually, I felt my ambition was better shaped, I was writing to make an impact and not just for the numbers. I was still able to complete and submit three research articles for publication before I left Wiko. Even better, the connections I made, the new ideas I gained, and the new friends I made would remain long-lasting and fulfilling to me.

Beyond my academic, my social and physical life also improved while I was at Wiko. I had no idea that I could complete a 3km run, but with a team of some dedicated running mates, who eventually became like a family to me, I left Wiko with the capacity to run 8km in just about 45 minutes. Beyond the run was another team of table tennis players who also shaped me to become a better ping-pong player. Indeed, I will miss a lot from Wiko.

I am exceptionally thankful to Jana Petri, the Academic Coordinator of the College for Life Sciences for providing long-lasting networking opportunities not only to me, but to all the College for Life Science Fellows in residence. Through her support and persistent efforts to help us succeed, I was able to establish remarkable new research collaborations within Germany.

Finally, I would like to commend and recommend Wiko to continue to provide such a healthy and friendly environment for its Fellows. As someone who has previously been in a similar Institute for Advanced Study, the Tuesday and Thursday Colloquia were not something new to me, but the initiative to allow Fellows to choose their own “introducers” was something I found quite creative and calming. To anyone willing to learn new things while accomplishing so much in his own research career, I would recommend considering taking up a fellowship at Wiko.



THREE MONTHS AND TWO MOURNINGS  
IN WIKO  
BARBARA ENGELKING

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Professor Barbara Engelking is the founder and director of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. She has authored and edited many books and articles on World War II and the Holocaust, and she has received numerous awards and honorary titles, including HC doctorates from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Universities. Among her published works in English are *Holocaust and Memory* (Leicester University Press, 2001); *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (Yale University Press, 2009), coauthored with Jacek Leociak; and *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day...* (Yad Vashem, 2016). More recently, she co-edited with Jan Grabowski *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland* (Indiana University Press and Yad Vashem, 2022). Her research interests focus on the experience of the Holocaust in survivors' accounts and in the light of other primary sources, the history of the Warsaw ghetto, the everyday life of occupied Warsaw, and the challenges and moral dilemmas of the time of the Shoah. – Address: Polish Center for Holocaust Research, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Nowy Swiat St. 72, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: bengelki@ifispan.edu.pl.

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

*Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"*

I arrived in Berlin on the 16th of September 2023, 10 days after my mom's funeral. Before she died, she had been in the hospital for 2 months – most of the time already without consciousness, increasingly distant. My sisters' and my daily visits, with no way to contact her, made us depressed and increasingly despairing. I wondered where Mom was staying – her soul, her consciousness, which had already left her body. During her stay in the hospital, it turned out that my father had lung cancer. After my mother's funeral, I managed to go with him 10 times for radiation – the prognosis was favorable.

When I arrived in Berlin, I was in the early stages of mourning for my mother and full of anxiety about my father's health, as well as guilt that I had left him with my sisters – that it would fall on them to take care of him, while I had something of a vacation.

After all, staying in Berlin is basically a vacation – the perfect vacation for work. The Wissenschaftskolleg creates dreamlike conditions for effective work and wonderful rest. Everything is conducive to this – the space around the building, the charming neighborhood that encourages walking, the very topography of the building. Its past was particularly interesting for me. And then there is the library. The speed at which you can get an ordered article or a book – sometimes even on the same or following day – is impressive. Not to mention the importance of the exceptional kitchen and the friendliness of the entire staff – from the management to the cleaning ladies. Along with me, a very interesting and diverse team of Fellows gathered at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I wish I had been able to engage more in interacting with everyone there.

So the conditions were ideal, but... my thoughts were in Warsaw with my family and my emotions were sadness, anxiety, and mourning. In October, I went home twice for a few days, because, first, there were important parliamentary elections, which perfectly improved my mood, spirit, and general outlook. Second, unfortunately it turned out that my dad's cancer had metastasized to the brain. So I decided to interrupt my stay in Berlin and returned to Warsaw on the 15th of November, for his 88th birthday, which was the following day. I spent the afternoon and evening with Dad, and brought him the "Berlin wurst" he asked for. He remembered their taste from his childhood. He died at night.

With a sense of complete shock and disbelief, we organized another funeral (less than 3 months after Mom's funeral). In mid-January I returned to Berlin – I still had a month left of my planned 3-month stay. It was an important time for me, although I cannot say that I managed to work effectively.

I have read quite a few articles and source texts, and have planned the structure of the book I am working on. It will be a book about Jews hiding in German-occupied Warsaw

in 1939–1945, and I am keen to break the prevailing stereotypes that Jews were passive when hiding and that the Poles helping them were noble and active. In reality, Jews were active, courageous, enterprising, helping others in hiding, creating self-help networks, including families, friends, acquaintances. “Zegota,” an aid organization affiliated with the Polish Underground State, was a federation of Polish and Jewish aid networks; the underground couriers, distributing the money sent for this purpose from the Polish authorities in London, came mostly from worldwide Jewish organizations; and the couriers themselves were most often themselves Jews in hiding. My goal is to describe Jewish efficiency, determination, and self-reliance in saving themselves and others. Writing itself, however, requires energy and clarity of mind, which I did not have at the time. My thoughts were occupied by my parents – conversations with them, longing for them.

We used to come to Dad with all matters of intellectual work – from school essays, to writing master theses and plans for upcoming books. Our children also came to him with similar problems. He was a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Warsaw. When retired, he took up translating French literature, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Nerval. He knew everything about 19th-century Paris.

Mom, also an academic teacher in mathematics, was excellent at explaining math – to us, to our friends, then to our children. She was also great at maintaining relationships with her closer and distant family with lots of acquaintances and friends. She always knew what was going on with whom and was an indispensable information center. From the 1970s on and later during martial law, she supported the democratic opposition in Poland, and we followed her example. Mom taught us civil courage, Dad taught us not to take ourselves too seriously.

They were with me during the long walks and bus rides around Berlin (ah, that wonderful bus M19!) when visiting museums, parks, fairs. All of these places instilled in me a sense of awe and admiration for the city’s culture and legacy. My stay in Berlin was not what I had planned and expected, but the city and the Wissenschaftskolleg provided a much needed comfort and distraction. It allowed me to recuperate and get back to work.



THE SWANS OF GRUNEWALD  
KIT FINE

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I am a University Professor and Silver Professor of Philosophy and Mathematics at New York University in the United States. I mainly work in metaphysics, philosophical logic, and the philosophy of language, though I have done work in other areas of philosophy, including the history of philosophy and social philosophy, and also work in other areas of study, including economic theory and computer science. While at Wiko I worked on providing mathematical foundations for Ruth Chang's idea in decision theory that alongside the usual evaluative relations of being better or equal or worse there is a fourth evaluative relation of being on a par. We were especially interested in how this idea might have application to the problem of aligning AI with human values. – Address: Department of Philosophy, New York University, 5 Washington Place, New York, NY 10003, USA. E-mail: [kit.fine@nyu.edu](mailto:kit.fine@nyu.edu).

I am an amateur composer; and during the last weeks at Wiko, I composed a musical work that I called "The Swans of Grunewald." It was based on the well-known theme, "The Approach of the Swans," from Tchaikovsky's score for the ballet "Swan Lake." My own work consisted of a number of variations on this theme in the style of different composers – all the way from Bach, through Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Mahler, Rachmaninov, Elgar, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, to our very own Martin Schüttler. The variations sometimes took the form of parody, exaggerating familiar features in the style of these composers, though always with an eye (or rather an ear) to what was most admirable in their work.

But why swans? Berlin and its environs are full of wondrous things. There is the allure of its checkered past, the sights and sounds of its museums and concert halls, the beauty of its parks and forests. So why, of all these wondrous things, should these creatures have held such fascination for me?

There are about sixty swans in all who gather on the lakes of Grunewald – some white, some black, and some of indeterminate color. But they seemed to me to be predominantly white and somehow it always seems to be the white male swans who fed off the tastiest vegetation and swam in the choicest parts of the water.

Some of the swans are migratory. They fly in from afar in the hope of finding more hospitable climes in which to spread their wings, only to return to their original habitats once the year is done. The other swans are permanent residents, even guardians, of the area. They stay in the same lake, year in year out, braving whatever vicissitudes the changing composition of the migratory swans may bring.

At first sight, the swans seem much alike – content to spend their days swimming in the placid waters from one side of the lake to the other and occasionally lumbering onto dry land, only to return as soon as they can to the more familiar and reassuring environs of the lake.

However, on closer inspection, it became apparent that there were great differences between them. Some of the swans were “mute” and would only occasionally make any sound, though always to great effect. Others were “trumpeters,” who could always be heard no matter how far away they might be. A few of the swans liked to adorn themselves with weeds and with other shiny bits of flotsam that could be seen floating on the lake. Some other swans, by contrast, had lost most of their feathers but were just as capable as their younger brethren of defending their territory when it appeared to be under threat. A number of swans liked to dance and could often be seen late at night gyrating to the raucous sound of frogs. There was one particular swan who never seemed to swim on his own but could always be seen in the company of other swans, whom he somehow managed to conjure up from other nearby lakes. And let us not forget some of the more aged swans, who would float around the lake with a stately elegance that seemed reminiscent of a bygone, more cultivated era.

But most remarkable of all was a strange ritual that the swans engaged in – about once a week and always in the morning and in the same, especially lovely, spot of the lake. They would all gather around and one of them would raise its neck to a great height and

proceed to groom another swan at its side, all the time making the most affectionate cooing sounds. This display of affection would continue for ten minutes or so, sometimes for as long as fifteen minutes. The swan who had been groomed would then raise its neck to an even greater height and proceed to emit a steady and seemingly inexhaustible stream of the most extraordinary sounds – snorts, yaps, honks, and squeals, intermingled with the occasional grunt or hiss. I have no idea what it all meant and I feel confident that it would have been incomprehensible to any other species or even to other broods of the same species. This performance continued for about fifty minutes; and after so much intense activity, the swans felt the need to wet their beaks and sip from the warm coffee-colored water that lay beneath the surface of the lake.

Once they were done, the most extraordinary commotion broke out! One swan after another, and in rapid succession, would start hissing in the most provocative manner at the swan on whom so much affection had previously been bestowed. This swan would then hiss back, sometimes in a conciliatory way, but more often in an equally provocative manner, while reproducing with even greater emphasis some of the very sounds that it had made before. I had no idea what to make of these hissing matches. Was it a way to see who could hiss the longest and loudest, thereby establishing their place in the pecking order? Was it a form of bonding ritual, through which a harmless display of aggression helped to bring the swans closer together? Or was it merely a way of building up an appetite, so that they could enjoy even more the plentiful supply of roots, tubers, stems, and leaves that mysteriously would appear in the neighboring part of the lake once the ritual was over?

Whatever the reason, I hope it is now clear why the swans should have held such fascination for me and why my fond memories of them will remain indelibly fixed in my mind.



THE MAGIC OF WIKO – TOWARD A  
RESEARCH PROJECT  
ANDREAS FOLLESDAL

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We had many pleasant surprises during the welcome week at Wiko. One of them was to be told that once we are here, we can leave aside what we proposed to do and instead work on whatever topics come to fascinate us. And the second was how the carefully curated informal encounters were set up to foster such serendipitous intellectual discoveries – among the Fellows, but also with various Wiko staff and Permanent Fellows.

What a well-composed plan, well executed!

The preemptive absolution notwithstanding, I stuck with my plans and – quite unexpectedly – completed them. The conditions that Wiko offers make even ambitious aspirations achievable.

And the seminars, lunches, forest runs, German classes, and trips to concerts and museums fostered new puzzles, themes, and collaborations. One common feature of these arenas was that I would have no idea what would be discussed, but knew that I would learn much and fuel my own curiosity and intellectual creativity – and perhaps that of others.

Looking back on the year, my academic milestones appear less important than trying to pinpoint some of Wiko’s success factors, starting with the unbeatable staff.

I had proposed to study what more the European Court of Human Rights can do to quell, contain, and shorten the swell of authoritarian populism in Europe – the movements that seek to sabotage accountability and target vulnerable minorities. Unfortunately, this topic had become only more urgent after I submitted the application several years ago.

At Wiko my thoughts benefited from the opportunity to present my work in progress to an ideal audience: other Fellows and staff. They are bright, consistently friendly and concerned, yet unfamiliar with the research frontiers on the topics that concerned me, ranging from sociology to economics, from political philosophy to international law. I have seldom been part of a multidisciplinary group that so consistently asked questions that improved the speaker’s grasp of their own puzzle – rather than asking and commenting in order to impress.

The exceptional support from Wiko for my project – as with all the other Fellows’ – was remarkable also in how they organized my workshop, “The ECtHR’s Response to Illiberal and Authoritarian Practices.” A dozen bright and enthusiastic younger colleagues from Europe and beyond met to discuss their contributions to a special issue of a scholarly journal. Their experiences here were the best advertisement, so Wiko can expect an influx of applications from the field of international law soon!

The academic harvest of my year includes one book on subsidiarity and articles on a range of topics: our obligations toward refugees, on the constitutionalization of international law, how to combine doctrinal studies with more empirical sciences, some work on Quine, and finishing touches on four special issues and anthologies concerning responses to populism, customary international law, philosophy and international law, and on a conversation between Quine and Davidson. I could not have imagined that so many Fellows

at Wiko would contribute to so many of these publications in so many ways: the political impact of Confucian thought in China, the Islamic tradition of Zakat, the political order of the Tiv people in Nigeria, the weaknesses of Quine, the value and vulnerability of associational democracy...

One remarkable sign of Wiko's success: for the first time in many years, perhaps ever, I caught up with writing obligations, and even had several sightings of a completely empty email to-do box. I could get used to that!

The Wiko goal of facilitating new, unplanned research themes, individually and jointly, has also been successful, I think. Some plans are firmer – a workshop on paths out of the current Middle East tragedies. Others may come in due course, concerning the sorts of scientific objectivity we have reason to value and on the independent and autonomous yet accountable central banks – and other bodies in society ranging from churches and universities through the market and the family to art and the judiciary...

A further unforeseen but rewarding set of lessons concerns the precarious roles and responsibilities of academics as public intellectuals and contributors to public policy: how to convey complex issues of individual and institutional academic freedom on politically tense topics; the need to engage both the mind and the emotions of various audiences; how to convey research-based findings correctly enough without alienating the interested public by using jargon or too-abstract modes of reasoning. So much to learn from what leaders and colleagues at Wiko do!

Among the great thrills that Wiko also accommodated and catered to was the opportunity to engage with colleagues of all ages who develop their research projects. The intellectual thrill of raising puzzles as a curious non-expert bystander and to witness other Fellows explain some of what for them makes their (academic) life worth living...

Turning to the topic that continues to fascinate me about Wiko, even since before I arrived. It was first fueled by a preparatory meeting here in 2022. How does Wiko sustain its success? Of course there are the crucial physical conditions: the generous funding... in a magnificent building... its location in the midst of perfect running terrain (resident experts say that the risk of wild boars is exaggerated, but we of course only hear from the survivors)... in the sweet spot for Berlin's culture and art: easily accessible but far enough away to keep the constant temptations at bay, often enough.

But the human factor is crucial.

Never before have I been privileged by such a hospitable community of staff, whose attitude consistently was “The answer is yes, what is your question?” Some glimpses:

- To be greeted on our first day by name, by everyone among the staff we met. Impressive, almost scary, to be known by those responsible for the kitchen, IT, library, and reception, just to mention a few of the more visible persons.

- To be invited to challenge the library with difficult tasks – which they received, and handled with aplomb.

- To forget who are the Fellows and who are the spouses, in all settings, at an institution (unlike some other institutes for advanced study) that correctly treats the partners not as necessary burdens, but as added resources.

- To be invited to a three-week intensive German course prior to the main Wiko stay, calibrated to our individual skill level. Come to think of it, our German teachers are perhaps the epitome of the Wiko culture. Among the whole staff they are perhaps most clearly Wiko’s Sisyphuses: pushing us foreign Fellows a little up the mountain that is the academic German language, only to do so again next year with the next cohort, and again and again...

How does Wiko attract, maintain, and keep such excellent staff: highly skilled, committed, and energetic, year after year? In my experience, institutions of higher learning globally must fight fiercely to attract and keep good people, academics as well as the many forms of support and administrative staff. Why is it at Wiko that so many staff stay until retirement, even though some arrived thinking that they would only stay a few years?

My conversations have yielded some preliminary hypotheses – put me down for a comparative research project – at Wiko – on this topic!

I say it is what *Wiko* does, rather than *only* what the Wiko *leadership* does. Some aspects are clearly deliberate policies of the current and past leadership. But other elements are sustained among the staff, much less directly under immediate leadership control. Rectors come and go over the decades, but the Wiko work culture remains for longer – as long as the Rectors maintain it... I suspect that this culture requires shared and sustainable long-term institutional memory among a large critical mass of staff. Consider the collegiality and willingness among so many to go beyond any strict duty to get things done – to make the cohort of Fellows, partners, and children thrive. The many collegial friendships among staff must be built over time, yet they are always welcoming to newcomers. These factors must surely be part of what makes Wiko an attractive place to work.

And then there are the factors more clearly set and upheld by leadership, past and present. Many staff clearly cherish the combination of explicit autonomy, trust, and community among a team with the overarching shared commitment to facilitate the work of, and enjoy interacting with, Fellows and partners.

Lessons to keep forever, for me as an individual and for other institutions of higher learning.

And not only lessons, but gratitude beyond words...



SOMETHING AMBROSIAN...  
ALISA GANIEVA

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Alisa Ganieva is the author of three novels (*The Mountain and the Wall*, 2012; *Bride and Groom*, 2015; *Offended Sensibilities*, 2018), a number of short and long stories, and a biography of Lilya Brik (2019, 2020) who was a muse of the Soviet avant-garde. Her prose has been translated into 15 languages, awarded various prizes, and mentioned among book highlights of a year by several international media resources like *World Literature Today* (USA), *The Asian Review of Books* (Hong Kong), *The Calvert Journal* (UK), and *The Globe and Mail* newspaper (Canada). Her novel *Bride and Groom* has been turned into two episodes of a radio play and has been twice broadcasted by Radio BBC 4 (UK). At Wiko she's been working on her next novel, also set in her native region of Dagestan in today's Russia. What is central to this novel is the theme of historical utopia materialized in the idea of the "Mountainous Republic of the Caucasus." – Address: Shevchenko street 162 Б, ap.25, A05K2T2 Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mail: alisagan1985@gmail.com.

During my short and hectic visits to Berlin (except for four weeks at the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin LCB on the banks of the quiet and icy wintertime Wannsee twelve years ago), I've never had a chance or occasion to find myself in Grunewald, a romantic and luxurious neighbourhood almost untouched by the destructions and calamities of the past decades.

In late August of 2023, I came to Grunewald as a willy-nilly nomad travelling from country to country and still harbouring a dying hope to return home to Russia – the country seized by a havoc-wreaking aggressive madness. A country which I had to leave abruptly in early March of 2022 after its bloody invasion of Ukraine and precipitous exacerbation of internal repressions.

An unbelievably generous residency at the magic land of Wiko went by as a wonderful dream, a retreat from a normal life, where every person – Wiko Co-Fellow or staff member – was incredibly kind, smart, intelligent, and talented.

Where we were fed and cared for as if we were in paradise.

Where we were provided with possibilities and facilities almost beyond the limits of imagination.

Where at dinners we could partake in engaging talks on various scientific and social topics, and even hole-and-corner matters would suddenly sound interesting and fascinating.

For me it was an everlasting honour to be a neighbour of academic luminaries from all over the world and to be treated so gently, notwithstanding my present lack of verve, energy, and esprit (consequences of sleep-deprived motherhood or maybe just a phase).

I was happy to get to know the Ukrainian thinker, editor, and writer Kateryna Mishchenko, in whose collection of essays on the war in Ukraine I participated last year. I was admiring the versatile talents and appealing personality of our speaker Andreas Føllesdal from Norway, the erudition and sophistication of Andrew Hui from Singapore, the positive ardour, playfulness, and expertise of Erika Milam from the US, the compassion, empathy, and sense of humour of Debora Diniz from Brazil, the honesty and values of Bin Xu from the US and China, the charm, achievements, and unpretentiousness of Jill and Stefan Leutgeb, the philosophic and musical genius of Kit Fine, the wit of Ruth Chang, the diligence of Juliano Morimoto, the brilliant mind and kind personality of Marcus Willaschek, the fortitude of Mina Akbari, the experimental creativity and artistic freedom of the composer Martin Schüttler, the grace and researching excellency of Barbara Prainsack, and so on, and so on.

My husband flourished in the intellectually nutritious environment of the Wiko running club, where he made some warm friendships and even dared to run two half-marathons in Berlin and Potsdam. My baby daughter, who, by the end of the year, had spent most of her life at Wiko, started to walk and to talk there.

My accomplishments were much more modest. Having a baby and only a limited number of hours for writing a week, you prioritize. Thus, I secluded myself from Berlin's vibrant cultural life. I didn't go to concerts, operas, or museums. I declined almost all invitations to give a talk or take part in a panel discussion outside Wiko. I didn't let my Berlin-based fellow countrymen/emigrants know that I'm in the city. I didn't travel and almost never left Grunewald or Charlottenburg, only taking the M19 bus to a nearest coffee shop for some urban vibe and inspiration.

My main goal was to build my castle of fiction. And when I felt low because of the inevitable doubts and sufferings of creative writing, I rested my eyes on the ponds and creatures of Grunewald.

But thanks to this domesticity – very unusual for a person who used to pack a suitcase almost every week hopping from a book fair to a reading and so forth – I contrived to concentrate. I visited all the Colloquia on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I missed a lunch or dinner only twice during the whole year when I had a rare event outside to attend. And though I didn't ask many questions and didn't show much explicit activity, everything I heard – at my Co-Fellows' presentations or during common meals – did stir my thoughts, and spark some ideas, and switch my brain into a certain abstract and lofty mode.

Another thing that I gained at Wiko – was entering the threshold of a new language. I never learned German before in my life and frankly was a little afraid even to start – it seemed too complicated. But the intensive course organized by the fantastic Eva von Kügelgen dissipated all my fears and ducked me into the new wondrous world of *Deutsch*.

Three weeks of four-hour lessons by Reinhard von Bernus suddenly turned street hums and noises into discernible phrases and words, made slogans and inscriptions gradually comprehensible, and – oh, miracle – suddenly I found it possible to speak to sellers at shops or bartenders at coffeehouses. Those three weeks also gave us a chance to form initial acquaintances with some Fellows and see unusual districts and nooks of Berlin during a few excursions led by the architect Rolf Zimmermann.

Then we continued learning German through the year once a week for an hour and a half, and though for the last months I remained the only one in the class and it was less fun than it could have been if there were more pupils, I was extremely grateful to our teachers and to Wiko for providing us with this bliss and treasure of knowledge.

There was also a *Deutschtisch* at lunches for advanced speakers and a coffee pause for beginners like me where we could chat in German with Eva every Wednesday, but I could use this opportunity only twice or thrice because of the sparseness of free time I had...

Another thing that surprised not only me, but every Fellow every year: the absence of any considerable conflict or drama. You gather forty-something people together, they bring partners and families, and live cheek to jowl for months – you expect something to happen. A grudge, an adultery, a severe ideological argument. But though the world was fraught with turbulence, and wars, and scandals, and cancellations, and protests, and splitting into camps, the Wiko haven remained peaceful and quiet.

When people asked me if I might write a novel about life in Wiko I kept thinking that a happy world without any sin or bloodshed wouldn't make a good story. Some years ago, in my former life in Russia, I created and co-hosted a live radio program dedicated to different world plots finding their realization in reality and literature – it turned out to be 75 episodes about 75 plots, but none of them materialized at Wiko. Occasional petty incidents like somebody's bike being stolen and found don't count.

That's another proof of the fact that Wiko can't be registered as an earthly institution, it's something ethereal, something ambrosian. And this doesn't just happen by itself, it's the fruit of so many diligent efforts of those who toil there all year round – who trim the bushes, cook the meals, prepare our stay and book the tickets, provide schools and kindergartens for the Wiko children, sift through the applications, install hardware and software in Wiko offices, edit Wiko magazines, find library books and manuscripts even if they don't yet exist, etc.

I will always be grateful to our magnificent Rector Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and Iris Fleßenkämper, Daniel Schönflug, Katharina Wiedemann, Petria Saleh, Dunia Najjar, Sophia Pick, the library team and so many, many others from Maike Schaper to Francisco Martínez Casas, whose smiles and service and supportive word always put you on the right foot.



A WIKO ABECEDARIUM  
ANDREW HUI

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Andrew Hui is Associate Professor of the Humanities at Yale-NUS College, Singapore. He is the author of *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (Fordham, 2017), *A Theory of the Aphorism from Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton, 2019, translated into five languages and reviewed in *The New Yorker*), and *The Study: The Inner Life of Renaissance Libraries* (Princeton, 2024), which he finished at the Wiko. His articles have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *Dante Studies*, and *Journal of the History of Ideas*. He has lectured at the Collège de France and has received fellowships from Villa I Tatti, the Warburg Institute, and the Bodleian Libraries. After his Wiko fellowship, he will return to teach in Singapore, where his little liberal arts college will close in May 2025. – Address: <https://www.instagram.com/andrewyhui/>.

E-mail: [andrewyhui@me.com](mailto:andrewyhui@me.com).

### **Arbeit**

At the Wiko, work when you must, play when you can.

### **Arbeitsvorhaben, Arbeitsberichte**

In July, incoming Fellows are requested to write a short project proposal. A year later, also in July, departing Fellows will be asked to reflect on their Wiko year, gathered in this very *Jahrbuch* you are currently reading. Thus your Janus-faced contributions bind you to the collective of not only your *Jahrgang*, but also Fellows past and present, alpha and omega.

### **Auerbach, Erich**

When I was 19, I read the first chapter of Auerbach's *Mimesis* for the first time, I thought: I want to do that! Now, finally, at the end of my Wiko year, I can at least read some chunks (but not all) of this masterpiece in the original.

### **Bibliotheksdienst**

The library service will satisfy every whim of any *Bücherwurm* (including this one). Very grateful.

### **Buchenwald**

If you embark on a journey through the Land of Poets and Thinkers in your final weeks in Berlin, be sure to visit Weimar; and you must also visit Buchenwald, a concentration camp that is a mere 20-minute bus ride away from the home of Goethe, Schiller, Liszt, and Nietzsche. Seeing Weimar and Buchenwald side-by-side, you will receive first-hand confirmation of Walter Benjamin's dictum that "Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne ein solches der Barbarei zu sein."

As it happens, Benjamin's parents' house – Delbrückstraße 23 – would have been just a few minutes' walk from Villa Walther.

### **Deutsch**

Be sure to take lessons with Eva von Kügelgen, our superlative German teacher, though sadly I hear she will retire in 2025.

### **Discurro**

Latin for "to run around," to roam, to wander, from which *discourse* originates.

I was lucky to be part of a running group (with our team captain Artem and co-runners Andreas, Niko, Stefan, David, Lara, Mallory, and sometimes Daniel). In order to have discourse, you have to first start running around, ideally with other people. But sometimes alone is good too.

### **Entwurf**

I worked on the proofs for my forthcoming book, *The Study: The Inner Life of Renaissance Libraries* (Princeton) and made an *Entwurf* of a new one (see entry **Maze**).

### **Erhellen, Erleichtern, Empfang**

Ah! To enter the Hauptgebäude every morning, to be greeted by the tasteful arrangement of flowers and the smiling faces of Maike, Vera, Johanna, and Nicola. *Der Empfang hat unser Alltagsleben erhellt und erleichtert.*

### **Dienstagskolloquium**

May you receive lots of helpful feedback and may your moderator devise creative, equitable, and not too Rube-Goldbergish ways for people to raise their hand.

### **Frühstück**

The breakfast with fresh fruits, juices, yogurt, cold cuts, tomatoes, avocado, bread, and croissants galore. (\*\*\*) *Une des meilleures tables, vaut le voyage*

### **Gemütlich und gesellig**

The Wiko is the perfect combination of *gemütlich* – pleasant, comfy, and homey – and *gesellig* – social and convivial.

### **Glücksfall**

It was our *Glücksfall* that our Fellows had this special sense of *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

### **Gespräch**

Hours and hours of conversation with Joel Blecher, Chris Wood, Raine Daston, Carlos Spøerhase, Josh Berson, Michael Gordin, Erika Milam, Claudia Verhoeven, Andreas Føllesdal, Ruth Chang, Éric Monnet, Bee Yun, Kit Fine, and Daniel Schönflug.

### **Jahreskarte**

See all the glorious museums of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin with an annual card for just €59!

### **Jahreszeiten**

Since I live in Singapore, I had not experienced the four seasons for a long time. Autumn: Wallotstraße blooms in an orgy of orange, red, and purple. Winter: the lake turns to ice and the trees to barren skeletons. Spring: the weekly rotation of happy flowers, bees, insects, and soft, luminous, blue days. Summer: deep green, humidity, flash rains, the croak of frogs, the invasion of bugs.

### **Kinder**

My family loved our neighbors and apartment in the Villa Walther (“spätwilhelminische Repräsentationsarchitektur”). Happy were the days when the sun returned, the children would all play in the inner courtyard of the Villa Walther, Julia would be practicing her cartwheels, others playing with chalk and gathering sticks and stones, and Joel and I would talk for hours about our book projects. Just be sure not to be too loud or the people in the Kosovo embassy will definitely come out and complain.

### **Marathon**

My first marathon, with the photo-finish line at the Brandenburg Gate. Let’s just say I’m glad I finished.

### **Maze**

After making 798 (!) requests to the library (thank you thank you Bibliotheksdienst!), I have a good blueprint of my book project *The Maze: The Encounter between China and Europe in the Early Modern World*.

### **M19**

IYKYK

### **Philharmoniker**

See my *Köpfe und Ideen* contribution, in which I reflect my teenage love for Deutsche Grammophon recordings and my first time going to the Berlin Philharmonic at the age of 43.

### **Restaurant**

Really the heart of the Wiko. With thanks to all the delicious meals Dunia hosted and Sonja cooked.

### **Sitzfleisch**

The scholarly capacity to sit and just get something done – can be a virtue *and* a vice. One stray remark before the Colloquium has now led to an unexpected collaboration with Carlos Spoerhase.

### **Sternstunde**

Lit., the hour of the star; fig., your shining moment.

For me this year, it was to appear on *Sternstunde*, the Swiss TV show for religion, philosophy, society, arts, and culture.

### **Swans**

I have never lived in a place with a lake and graceful swans with their adorable cygnets, to boot.

### **Torschlusspanik**

Literally “Panic of the door-closing,” which I felt in my last week of the Wiko stay.

### **Übung**

*Jeden Tag muss ich mein Deutsch üben. Jeden Tag muss ich mein Deutsch üben. Jeden Tag muss ich mein Deutsch üben.*

### **Zukunftsmusik**

Wagner’s term for the “music of the future” – now it has a slightly pejorative meaning of beautiful, unrealizable “pie in the sky” projects. At the Wiko, you might dream of many and abandon many, as I did. But that’s a good thing.

### **Zusammenhang**

According to the *Goethe-Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts*, “The lexeme *Zusammenhang* (nexus) was introduced into philosophy by the German rationalists, who conceived of the world as a multiplicity of independent substances coordinated in a system of pre-established harmony.”

Substitute “substances” with “Fellows and staff,” and the Goethean *Zusammenhang* pretty much describes the Wiko, this beautiful system of pre-established harmony. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say the *potential* or *possibility* of harmony, for this harmony must be constantly calibrated by everyone in the community. And I’m so, so grateful that our Jahrgang achieved this beautiful *Stimmung*.



PARRHESIA AND PERSUASION  
HAROLD JAMES

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Harold James, the Claude and Lore Kelly Professor in European Studies at Princeton University, is Professor of History and International Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School and an associate at the Bendheim Center for Finance. His books include *The German Slump* (1986); *A German Identity 1770–1990* (1989); *International Monetary Cooperation Since Bretton Woods* (1996); *The End of Globalization* (2001); *Family Capitalism* (2006); *The Creation and Destruction of Value: The Globalization Cycle* (2009); *Making the European Monetary Union* (2012); and *The Euro and the Battle of Economic Ideas* (with Markus K. Brunnermeier and Jean-Pierre Landau, 2016). He was also coauthor of a history of the *Deutsche Bank 1870–1995* (1995), which won the Financial Times Global Business Book Award in 1996. His most recent books include *Making a Modern Central Bank: The Bank of England 1979–2003* (2020), *The War of Words: A Glossary of Globalization* (2021), and *Seven Crashes: The Economic Crises That Shaped Globalization* (2023). In 2004, he was awarded the Helmut Schmidt Prize in German-American Economic History, and in 2005, the Ludwig Erhard Prize for writing about economics. He writes a monthly column for Project Syndicate. – Address: History Department, Princeton University, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544-1017, USA. E-mail: [hjames@princeton.edu](mailto:hjames@princeton.edu).

I was delighted to be at Wiko for the academic year, where I divided my time between several academic activities. First, I made some good progress on my main project, a long-term study of how and why financial centers rise and decline, of how financial activity moves from one center to another, of how financial centers relate to centers of political power, and of how multiple financial centers coexist, interact, compete, and occasionally

try to destroy each other. The work involved reading as much as possible about earlier historical periods, but also trying to access data – especially for the twentieth century, when the sources of data multiply, and I was fortunate to be able to spend a few weeks in Basel at the Bank for International Settlements.

What makes Wiko so special is the very special overall atmosphere. Being at Wiko was a wonderful way of broadening my mind and widening my approach. In my home university, over the past nearly forty years, I often have had very intense but precisely focused discussions on a specific topic. What is so great about the Wiko environment is the way that general conversation, whether over lunch or dinner, in the street, or in the club room, can turn in surprising, interesting, and revealing ways. And the staff of Wiko do their utmost to make all this happen: the fantastic library resources, the help with public relations from Katharina Wiedemann, the logistical support, and the unique atmosphere around dining and sociality created by the amazing Dunia Najjar. Frederick the Great is supposed to have said that an army marches on its stomach, and in that way Dunia was the General.

It is hard, and in some ways unjust, to select particular moments or individuals. Quite a few of the Fellows' presentations at the Tuesday Colloquia gave me a new impetus. Obviously it was great to work alongside Éric Monnet, who is working on a very broad study of central banks across the world; and central banks play a key part in the making of financial centers, from the Casa di San Giorgio in Genoa, the Venice Rialto Bank, and the Amsterdam Wisselbank, to the Bank of England, etc., etc. And listening to Joel Blecher's eloquent assessment of medieval trade routes across the Indian Ocean, and the role of public officials in setting the terms of commercial transactions, opened up a new geographic area that seemed especially tantalizing, as I came to Berlin from Princeton via Samarkand in modern Uzbekistan and was captivated by the legacy of the old Silk Road and puzzled by how it operated across such different political and economic entities. At the same time, not all the contributions were really related to my research – and the most intriguing ones came from far away. I was struck by Stefan Leutgeb's off-the-cuff remark that human brain size had remained constant over millennia, and that strictly we couldn't be more intelligent than previous generations. This is a version of a point made frequently when I was a student in 1970s Cambridge by the brilliant historian Jonathan Steinberg, who loved to emphasize precisely that point: as he put it, we ain't cleverer than our ancestors. We can record more, and that helps us to gather lessons from more experience. But we may also be more stressed, and Stefan and Jill Leutgeb both worked out beautifully

the implications of their laboratory work: that the experience of stress measurably changes the genetic code in DNA.

I was compelled by the number of philosophers, a unique feature perhaps of our Wiko year, and learned a lot. Marcus Willaschek generated insights into the philosophical world of Kant that may be critical for the precarious world around us since the pandemic and the Ukraine war: how courage (*Mut*) can become *Übermut* (cockiness) in the absence of good will (*guter Wille*). Ruth Chang taught me about choices and what really constitutes a dilemma – a concept I had been centrally concerned with in economics as a way of thinking about trade-offs between usually three desirable but mutually inconsistent objectives in “trilemmas.” The classic trilemma for economists is between fixed exchange rates, capital mobility, and autonomous monetary policy, but the notion has been productively applied to national sovereignty, globalization, and democracy. Carlos Spuerhase gave a great insight into how rhetoric works and how narratives can be scaled in different dimensions: I felt here an invaluable impulse on how small-scale cases can be connected to big, even global, pictures. And in the context of the multiple elections of 2024 across the globe, from Taiwan, India, and the European Parliament to the looming contest in November 2024 in the United States, democracy was obviously a topic of frequent, almost continuous discussion. It is worth thinking in this context of a different variety of *Mut* or courage, the archaic German term *Freimuth*, which was the rendering by Martin Luther of the biblical Greek term *parrhesia*, the right but also duty of citizens to convey their arguments in a public forum, in debate where they can be subject to testing and to counter-argument.

The second theme I worked on was a joint project with my wife Marzenna James, a Princeton political scientist, on monetary policy in Poland since the creation of the new Polish state in 1919. Monetary policy in a relatively small Central-Eastern European state sounds awfully boring, doesn't it? I've never worked on a project that is more suited for a script for a movie thriller. The highlights include the evacuation of Poland's gold reserves at the last moment in September 1939 after the German attack, their shipment in buses to the Romanian frontier, then across the Black Sea in a leaky old tanker steaming by night with no radar to Istanbul, then by train to Beirut, then by French frigates to Toulon; and then a new evacuation after a new German invasion of France in May 1940, which brought the gold to West Africa rather than the intended destinations of Canada and the United States, and where the gold was under the control of Vichy France, not de Gaulle's *France libre*. The final stage in the gold odyssey was then a court case that the Polish government in exile fought in the Supreme Court of the State of New York, where they

succeeded in obtaining an injunction placing a lien on the Banque de France's gold in the New York Federal Reserve in the event that Vichy should hand it over to Nazi Germany. So the story is actually connected to, and illustrative of, my first big project, on the legal and political underpinnings of financial centers.

But there are even more extraordinary features of the Polish story, including a central bank head during the Nazi occupation who by night stamped old banknotes to make them legal tender so that the underground could use them. And a high-ranking bank official who carried out the biggest bank robbery in Polish history – during the German occupation of Warsaw – and completely avoided detection. And a new central bank in the communist era whose key personnel had a background that they had to hide from the communist government and the omnipresent Polish and Russian intelligence services: that they had fought during the war with the anti-communist Home Army, *Armia Krajowa*, rather than the communist people's army, *Armia Ludowa*. So we have at the end of the year a book, and dream of having a movie script.

This project benefited from the Berlin vicinity and from insights from the economic historians Alexander Nützenadel and Nikolaus Wolf (at Humboldt-Universität) and Ingo Loose (Institute für Zeitgeschichte, Berlin).

Finally, I'd published a book just before I came to Wiko, *Seven Crashes: The Economic Crises That Shaped Globalization* (Yale University Press), released in German as *Schockmomente* by Herder Verlag. Maybe because of the prevailing geopolitical uncertainty, the book, which emphasizes how moments of shock and scarcity generate new uses of theoretically already available technology, attracted some attention, and I spoke about it in debates in Berlin, including talking with the economic historian and journalist Ulrike Herrmann at the Staatsbibliothek. I had a discussion with Éric Monnet that was webcast jointly by the Volkshochschule's online lecture program "vhs.wissen live" and the Wissenschaftskolleg, and then at an event organized by the Kiel Institut für Weltwirtschaft. I also spoke at events organized by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *New Zürcher Zeitung*, the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Delphi Economic Forum. Delphi was special, and I convinced myself that the oracle still communicated the Aeschylean wisdom derived from the Delphic deity Apollo about suffering into truth, and where Athena propounded the importance of persuasion as exemplified through *parrhesia*.

Non-academically, Berlin is obviously full of culture, and we went to many concerts, theater performances, and operas, often in the benignly erudite company of our fellow

Wiko-ites. This included two different cycles of Richard Wagner's *Ring*, a work which can be seen (and was interpreted in the Staatsoper) as a critique of the modern psychology-and-surveillance society and in the Deutsche Oper as a depiction of modern late capitalism. I'm not sure that the productions really managed to be consistent, but they made me think: in the way that the whole Wiko experience really made me think.

PS Life-cycles.

Living in the Villa Walther with the view over the Herthasee was magical. When we arrived, a pair of white swans floated around the lake, always with five quite large gray cygnets in strict formation behind them. Then, early in November, came the first wave of unpleasant icy weather, and there were only two cygnets left. In January, with more bad weather, there was only one grown-up swan left, swimming distraught. Many of us were desolate. And then came April and May, and a new swan couple, rather smaller than last year's couple, was gliding on the lake, with five tiny little cygnets. We could see a new cycle beginning. We are leaving in July; in September new Wiko Fellows will see new swans.



IM ZAUBERWALD  
NILS JANSEN

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Nils Jansen lehrt an der Universität Münster Europäische Rechtsgeschichte sowie Deutsches und Europäisches Privatrecht und ist dort Direktor des Instituts für Rechtsgeschichte. Als Stipendiat der Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes studierte er Rechtswissenschaften, Philosophie und Politik an den Universitäten Passau, Kiel und Oxford. Nach der Promotion 1996 bei Robert Alexy habilitierte er sich 2002 bei Reinhard Zimmermann. Vor seiner Berufung an die Universität Münster 2006 lehrte Jansen an den Universitäten Kiel, Regensburg, Cambridge, Augsburg und Düsseldorf; 2014 lehnte er einen Ruf auf den Regius-Chair an der Universität Oxford ab. Jansen war Gastprofessor an der Duke Law School (2008), an der Universität Oxford (2009) und am Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (2013 und 2015); von 2014 bis 2018 war er zudem professor extraordinary an der Universität Stellenbosch. Seit 2007 ist Jansen Hauptantragsteller im Exzellenzcluster „Religion und Politik“; zwischen 2019 und 2022 war er dessen Sprecher. – Adresse: Institut für Rechtsgeschichte, Universität Münster, Universitätsstraße 14–16, 48143 Münster, Deutschland. E-Mail: [nils.jansen@uni-muenster.de](mailto:nils.jansen@uni-muenster.de).

Wer vom Kurfürstendamm stadtauswärts fährt und in die Koenigsallee abbiegt, befindet sich auf einmal in einer anderen Welt – und bleibt doch mitten in Berlin. Wie vergessen sind der Lärm, der Trubel, der Schmutz, plötzlich ist man im Grünen, inmitten von Bäumen und Vogelstimmen. Abends kommt der Fuchs. Dabei ist doch gerade auch der Grunewald ein Teil dieser Stadt, ihrer Bürger und ihrer Geschichte.

Das lustige Ortsspiel wiederholt sich, wenn man noch einmal rechts in die Wallotstraße abbiegt und sich in das Wissenschaftskolleg begibt. Zurück bleibt jetzt die Universität

mit ihrer verwehrlosen Geschäftigkeit, ihrem Hamsterbetrieb und Gockelgehebe, und doch ist man mitten in der Wissenschaft: in einer Oase gepflegter Ruhe und entspannten Nachdenkens, weit weg, nicht nur von der eigenen Universität, sondern auch von der wirklichen Welt und dem wirklichen Leben. Ich kenne keinen anderen Ort, an dem Akademikerinnen und Akademiker mit solcher Wärme und Zuwendung aufgenommen, so fürsorglich umsorgt und so vorzüglich gemästet werden wie am Wissenschaftskolleg. Man spürt diese Stimmung gleich am Anfang, beim ersten Eintritt ins Foyer, beim ersten Willkommensgruß von Vera oder Maike. Allerdings sollte dieser Gruß auch eine Warnung sein. Das Wissenschaftskolleg ist ein wirklicher Zauberort. Wer sich auf dies Jahr einlässt, wird nicht derselbe sein, wenn er zurückkehrt, und er wird in eine andere Welt zurückkehren, als er verlassen hat.

### **I. In Berlin, im Kolleg**

Das Jahr war groß. Nach langen Jahren in der westfälischen Provinz war für mich vor allem Musik wichtig. Knapp 40 häufig sehr eindruckliche Abende in den beiden Sälen der Philharmonie, im Boulez-Saal sowie in der Deutschen und vor allem der Staatsoper haben mir vieles mitgegeben, was ich lange erinnern werde. Einiges davon konnte ich ins Kolleg mit zurücknehmen – ich erinnere außerordentlich anregende und gewinnbringende Gespräche zu Brahms, zur Oper und vor allem zur Neuen Musik. Oder eine ungemein interessante Diskussion zum Gegenstand der Illusion auf dem Theater. Solche Gespräche, so dachte ich anfangs, hatte ich seit meinen Sommerakademien nicht mehr geführt.

Am längsten werden wohl die Gespräche langer Donnerstagabende und Abendspaziergänge nachhallen: zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung von Kunst, zu Religion und religiöser Prägung in pluralistischen Gesellschaften, zur Verwandlung des Grunewalds durch Schnee und später auch mehr zu politischen Themen. Manches war ausgesprochen witzig, etwa ein langer Abend mit einer Journalistin, in dem es vor allem um Möglichkeiten des Protestes für die junge Generation ging. Anderes tat weh, etwa die Bemerkung einer israelischen Kollegin Mitte Oktober, sie genieße die Donnerstagabende, weil sie dann einmal in der Woche ein normales Leben fingieren könne. Überhaupt wurden die Diskussionen politischer. Waren unmittelbar nach dem 7. Oktober der Terror der Hamas und der Krieg in Gaza eine Art Tabu, so änderte sich das alsbald mit den Protesten an amerikanischen und später auch an deutschen Universitäten. Hier gab es sehr unterschiedliche Perspektiven und wirklich offene Diskussionen. Wenn meine eigenen Positionen sich in dieser Zeit stark verändert haben, so verdanke ich das vor allem diesen Gesprächen.

Überhaupt habe ich den Eindruck, mein Denken sei in diesem Jahr flüssiger geworden, nicht zuletzt auch deshalb, weil ich besser verstanden habe, wie weit Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung auseinanderfallen können: nicht nur im literarischen Spiegel des Barbershops (danke, Barbara [Thériault]!, hier ist Anonymität nicht möglich), sondern vor allem auch in langen Gesprächen mit Kollegen und Kolleginnen einer anderen Generation oder aus anderen Teilen der Welt. Der Grunewald wurde mir zu einem wirklichen Zauberort.

## II. Arbeiten

Die wenigsten Gespräche waren fachnah, unmittelbare Gesprächspartner hatte ich nicht. Ich habe das aber nicht als problematisch empfunden. Zum einen konnte ich mit einer Gruppe von Rechtshistorikerinnen und Rechtshistorikern ein sehr intimes Kolloquium veranstalten, bei dem wir einzelne Texte der Beteiligten sehr intensiv in den Blick genommen und über die Vermittlung rechtshistorischen Wissens diskutiert haben. Zum anderen und vor allem habe ich gerade mit fachferneren Mitfellows wirklich inspirierende und hilfreiche Gespräche zu meinem Buch geführt, zu Grundbegriffen wie Universalismus oder Wissenschaft oder auch zu einzelnen Aufsätzen. Wenn Fellows anderer Disziplinen meine Texte gelesen und teils sehr intensiv – auch stilistisch – kommentiert haben, so war das für mich ein Geschenk, das ich sehr dankbar mit nach Hause nehme. Ich habe dabei viel gelernt.

Der schwierigste Teil meines Vorhabens, das war mir von Anfang an klar, bestand darin, die passende Sprache für eine moderne Rechtsgeschichte zu finden, die über den engen Expertenkreis hinaus Leser sucht. Nichts hätte mir hierbei mehr helfen können als die vielen so unterschiedlichen Gespräche in diesem Jahr, die mir ganz neue Denk- und Leseanstöße gegeben und auch meine Wahrnehmung verändert haben. Mittlerweile glaube ich, dass ich die Sprache gefunden habe, nach der ich gesucht hatte. Gewiss wird das Buch nicht im nächsten Jahr fertig werden, aber es steht jetzt auf einem festen Gleis. Ein Viertel oder Drittel ist geschrieben. Daneben stehen zwei größere Aufsätze, jeweils Vorstudien zu einzelnen Kapiteln, sowie ein Artikel in der FAZ. Es war auch eine fruchtbare Zeit.

## III. Diskutieren

Anders als an anderen Zauberorten treffen die Neuen nicht auf Alteingesessene und etablierte Regeln. Es gibt keine Tradition. Jahr für Jahr muss die neue Kohorte sich neu erfinden und eigene Regeln suchen. Unsere Kolloquien bestätigten bald, dass Gruppen sich über Rituale konstituieren, akademische Gemeinschaften also über Vortrags- und Diskussionsformate. Uns war von Anfang an vor allem anderen das gute, faire und achtsame

Miteinander wichtig. Auch die deutschsprachigen Fellows einigten sich gleich beim ersten Ausflug auf ein kollektives „Du“. Ich habe es als ausgesprochen angenehm empfunden, dass akademischer Status niemals zum Thema wurde.

Der Jahrgang liebte Experimente. Etablierte Diskussionsregeln galten nichts, als sich herausstellte, dass alte weiße Männer sich häufiger melden und früher als andere. Mir war das nicht bewusst, seither agiere ich vorsichtiger. Ein Vergnügen waren die wochenlangen Experimente mit immer neuen Verfahrensformen aber nicht. Die neue Regel, Fragen in der Pause anzumelden und dann nach Zufall aufzurufen, war gewiss fair. Der Wissenschaftlichkeit tat diese Regel aber nicht immer gut, auch weil wir die Redezeiten nicht mit in den Blick genommen hatten. Spontane Äußerungen waren ausgeschlossen, Reaktionen auf andere Beiträge erst recht. Zum Kern eines Problems kam man so nur schlecht. Über die künstlerischen Kolloquien habe ich länger nachgedacht als über manch ein wissenschaftliches.

Ein Jahr ohne Streit. Ernsthafte Konflikte hat es unter den Fellows, soweit ich sehe, nicht gegeben. Und doch hatte ich auch Schwierigkeiten. Zum Teil war das mein Problem – in den Anfangswochen hatte ich nicht mit jedem sprechen können, später fand ich es schwierig, Fellows anzusprechen, die ich nicht gut genug kannte. Aber es gab vielleicht auch objektive Probleme. Allzu oft gingen politische Überzeugungen und wissenschaftliche Thesen recht fließend ineinander über. Zu offen normativ schien mir die wissenschaftliche Argumentation, auch in Beiträgen von Gästen. In solchen Diskussionen war wenig Raum für normative Skepsis und historische Erfahrung. Moralische Vortrefflichkeit schien wichtiger als akademischer Ernst. Es gab wenig Bewusstsein dafür, dass wir hier draußen in der Wallotstraße möglicherweise anders dachten als andere Menschen. Aber auch wenn ich deshalb nicht mit jedem Kollegiaten eine passende Gesprächsebene gefunden habe: Im Laufe der Zeit, vor allem in den letzten Wochen, lernt man sich viel besser kennen. Mit einigen Fellows habe ich im Laufe dieses Jahres zunehmend vertraut sprechen können und wirkliche Freunde gewonnen.

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Am Ende steht vor allem großer Dank: Herzlichen Dank Euch allen im Kolleg, stellvertretend Dir, liebe Barbara (Stollberg-Rilinger), die Du die Stimmung geschaffen hast und pflegst, die all das möglich macht. Und danke Euch Mitfellows, die Ihr mich durch dies Jahr ge- und vielleicht auch einmal ertragen habt.



DEUTSCHTUM  
MARTHA S. JONES

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“Gesundheit!”

I would be sitting nearby, head in a book. Or in the kitchen, fixing a snack. I’d be riding in the back seat of the car, or in my room readying for bed. Each time I let out a sneeze, my mother called back “Gesundheit.” The gesture was an automatism. A habit of language. Verbal muscle memory. My mother didn’t choose the word, didn’t think before she spoke it. The expression sprung from deep within her, as reflexive as how, when she let out an “achoo,” her hands lifted up to cover her mouth.

Soon I imitated my mother, never asking why. “Gesundheit” is the sort of utterance that was just in the air. I liked the way it felt on my tongue, in my throat. It came naturally, not at all like I was speaking a foreign language. I heard kids on my block respond with another phrase – “Bless you” – and began to understand that my mother’s habit was ours alone. What followed was my first effort at code-switching: “Gesundheit” at home; “Bless you” on the street.

I never asked my mother why we warded off evil – the Devil or a cold – with that word. Today I understand that “Gesundheit” is a German term. Roughly translating to “health.” I’ve occasionally heard its echoes. One friend, after a summer visit, always gives me a hug and then

wishes me a safe journey with, in Yiddish: “Zay gezunt un kum gezunt.” It’s an expression passed down from Eastern European Jewish culture, inherited from parents and grandparents. My mother didn’t pass along to me much culture. I am the heir of just one word.

I recently heard myself blurt out “Gesundheit.” I was on a fellowship in Germany at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, along with my husband. “You are so German,” he remarked when I wished him good health in the local tongue. He commented on this frequently, such as when watching me slurp potato and sausage soup in the market, or impatiently checking my watch when the M19 bus was running late. Like when I wrestled with a knife while cutting thick slices of brown bread for lunch, or stored away my Stuart Weitzman heels in favor of boots with soles made for ice and muck. Like when Christmas season began in early November, and I happily strolled through every market, mesmerized by hot, spicy wine, handcrafted ornaments, and carols humming from loudspeakers. My husband meant to say that I appeared to be at home.

I was not. It was my mother, she was German: raised in the home of a nineteenth-century migrant grandmother who settled in the upstate New York city of Buffalo. When she recounted tales from that place, my mother also taught me that being white in America was never simply that. White people came in many guises, and hers were German-speaking peasants from Bavaria and Austria. The rooms of my mother’s tarpaper-covered childhood home were filled with the voices of older generations that spoke German like a secret code, one that she and her brother, my Uncle Chuck, were never properly taught. Their world orbited around St. Anne’s Catholic parish on the East Side where the baroque-styled sanctuary was decorated with the stone and plasterwork of German craftsmen, showing off their talents for the faithful while also advertising for customers. A favorite holiday tune there, later sung in our living room in suburban Long Island, started not “Silent night,” but instead “Stille Nacht.”

I knew I came from German people. Still, already as a girl I’d learned to signal that my mother’s family immigrated to America in the 1890s. They entered the United States via New York Harbor and Ellis Island and then settled up north near Niagara Falls. Her people had not been in Germany during the Nazi era, I meant to convey, had not been agents of the Holocaust. By the mid-twentieth century, they were Americans, among them young men who served the Allies during World War II. Still, their ideas about others, and their own special if not superior ranking among the human races, persisted in the New World. My mother came from people so American, so German, that they hated the Irish and the Poles, the Italians and the Puerto Ricans. Protestants they despised.

What then did it mean to be German? I came to believe that to be of my mother's clan was, above all, to be racist. I did not yet know how connected the antisemitism of Hitler's regime was to anti-Black Jim Crow ideas in the U.S. I did know that in Buffalo my mother's family and friends deplored, feared, and notoriously distanced themselves from Black people. Foremost, from my father. He'd captured my mother's heart in the mid-1950s when they were neighbors living in the rooms of an upper-Manhattan settlement house. Her family schemed, conspired, pleaded, and finally boycotted my mother, all to discourage the marriage that she was dead set upon entering into. Only her brother made the trek down from Buffalo to Manhattan for the celebration. With his solemn expression and drooped shoulders, he appeared more like a member of a funeral party, my mother always said. She, on the other hand, was radiant.

By then, the two – my mother and her brother Chuck – had been separated for years. She'd run away to Manhattan, dreaming of college, while he stayed back in Buffalo, married, worked the steel mill, toyed with being a writer, and began to put paint on canvas. He remained for the rest of his life a poet and painter at heart. From Chuck's letters – lyrical, rambling, occasionally alcohol-fueled – I learned that German was their secret language. At least snippets of it. In the early years of their long-distance life, he sprinkled in German phrases, sentimental touches that softened his otherwise acerbic tones. "Good-bye for now, meine Frau und Kind und ich," he signed off in a letter that mostly reported on the fate of their family home – rented out for the time being – and his success during a short stint as a student at the University of Buffalo. "Meine liebe Schwester," began another note, this one a bit philosophical: "Most people are dead but refuse to assume the position of the dead," he droned. "Guten Tag!" brightly began a note about an afternoon spent on the sidelines, watching local soccer matches.

Questions about their sort of Germanness – their particular *Deutschtum* – surfaced for me during a weekend trip away from Berlin, as my husband and I wandered with friends through the endless maze that was Leipzig's Christmas markets. Snow threatened and the air filled with the sweet smell of mulled wine and roasting chestnuts. Holidayers crowded into chalet-styled stalls that overflowed with candies, trinkets, and gift ideas. The long line for freshly griddled waffles, topped with sweet whipped cream, was too long to bear. That afternoon, memories of my mother flooded back. Fifteen years earlier, when I'd visited Germany as an adult on business, she had asked for only one thing: a stollen. Dutifully, I squeezed a five-pound loaf of dried fruit, nuts, spices, and marzipan all coated in sugar into my suitcase, a precious taste from her childhood. She was, my mother, so German.

Nearly all of my mother's Christmas decorations were imported from her family's motherland. This I learned only by browsing Berlin's Christmas markets where versions of my childhood holidays were on display. Delicately woven straw angels and stars. Intricately crafted tin ornaments, painted bright. Wooden carousels with spinning figurines, turning by the warm air of small candles. In my mother's home, she displayed one each year: It inevitably went up in a blaze as the wicks burned down to their ends. There were Advent calendars of every size and shape and, after I'd paused a bit too long fascinated by their mysterious doors, friends gifted me one to take home. I giggled a bit each morning as I carefully opened the day's tiny compartment at our Berlin breakfast table. "You are so German," my husband insisted.

Still, I am not German. I am sure. It is one thing to be irresistibly drawn to souvenirs from one's childhood. Call it nostalgia or the long clutches of consumer capitalism, we need not be of a culture to find it beautiful, compelling, and even give in to a need to make its artifacts our own. Germany's culture is not mine. I looked around at the faces, my ear listened for the voices. I walked beside, clustered among, and even shared a smile, nod, or "danke" there in the bustle of the Christmas market. I felt many things immersed in these sights, sounds, and smells. But they didn't add up to kinship.

My mother could have made me in her own image, or in the image of her people she'd left behind in Buffalo. She might have made me German, but did not. Her brother, Chuck, in the year I was born, was preoccupied with what their links to the old country meant after the war. Just before Thanksgiving 1958, I was an infant, five months old. We lived in an 104th Street walk-up. Chuck wrote from Buffalo and Germany was on his mind: "I am reading a book about Hitler and find that he is not such a bad fellow. Should I qualify that, I don't think that I could. The thing I dislike most about him is that he made people call him 'Führer.' That was a little ridiculous and insane." By the time I read his letter, a grown woman living in Berlin, I already knew my uncle's dry, dark wit. I knew he played the provocateur and liked to ruffle feathers. For my mother, had he gone too far?

The next fall, he wrote again, this time starting with a light lament about how his "Germans" had lost during local soccer matches, against the Italians and then the Poles. In his world, sports were still organized along those white, ethnic lines. And then he imposed a favor on my mother: "You mentioned a source that will sell you books at a reduced rate. I am trying to get a copy of *Adolf Hitler: The Middle Years* ... It has been recently published. Do not go to a lot of trouble. Merely inquire. I will not die if I have to

wait for a copy.” He was weighing things and reading helped him do that: “If history must wait to judge Hitler, who am I to be anxious?” Chuck was an intellectual, largely self-taught, much like my mother. She never mentioned to me this strain of his curiosity. It remained contained by the envelope in which it arrived, never entering the intimate spaces of our home.

I was already four, almost five, when I began to notice my mother’s books. Nestled underneath the staircase, above a shallow coat closet, they reflected how she got past the questions that vexed her brother. My favorite was Edward Steichen’s *The Family of Man*, with its more than 500 photographs from the Museum of Modern Art exhibition of the same title. The project was a retort to the racism and genocide of the Second World War through a portrait of universal humanity knit together through values including family, love, children, and peace. The success of the exhibit, which traveled the globe, was attributable to its view that all humankind was one. My mother, the child of German immigrants, embraced Steichen’s rebuttal to Buffalo’s ethnic lines and the war’s atrocities. She lived it when she married my father and then raised us, her children, by Steichen’s creed: The world was knit together into one “family of man.”

Alongside Steichen’s MoMA catalog was my mother’s copy of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by journalist William Shirer. She shared, it seems, her brother’s interest in the history of Germany’s Nazi period, though not his preoccupation with Adolf Hitler. Published in 1960, Shirer’s book was an indictment of the National Socialist regime and, after years embedded for U.S. news outlets, he attributed the war’s atrocities to the longstanding nature of German culture. Its long-time fascination with authoritarians, in his view, allowed for Hitler’s rise. The book was a tremendous commercial success and, despite criticisms from academic historians, became the text that many, many in the United States turned to for insight into what made the war possible and for what made them as Americans different. My mother was among them.

We did not see much of Chuck in those years. Still, my mother loved him enough that she kept up their correspondence. And without her letters, which he did not save, I cannot know precisely what passed between them. She did, I know, wait her beloved brother out. If Germanness was merely her past, a long-ago chapter that occasionally surfaced at holidays or with a sneeze, she let her brother work through his own dilemma about who they were and what it meant. And he did. By 1968, that fall, when he wrote her again, her only sibling shared with my mother a list titled “Chuck’s Heroes.” My uncle penned a pantheon that included two Jewish artists of the era’s counterculture, Leonard Cohen and

Bob Dylan. He listed the French-styled television chef, Julia Child. I can't say whether he admired more her facility in the kitchen or how as a woman she'd broken a mold.

On the list of those Chuck admired most, Adolf Hitler was nowhere to be found. In his place, perhaps, my uncle listed the German writer Thomas Mann. Chuck may have admired Mann's prose; he'd after all once dreamed of being a writer himself. He might have longed for the sort of cosmopolitan style of living that Mann adopted after fleeing Germany in 1939. Chuck barely got much beyond Buffalo and its environs, though his imagination took him far, far away. I'd like to think that Chuck, like Thomas Mann, took seriously how history demanded he rethink his homeland and who he was in relation to it. In exile, across generations and continents, in their pursuit of an answer, both men remained so very German.



A SOJOURN AMONG THE BARBARAS  
NIKO KOLODNY

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Niko Kolodny was born in New York City in 1972. After studying at Williams College and Oxford University, he received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of California, Berkeley in 2003. He taught for two years at Harvard University before returning to Berkeley in 2005, where he is currently Professor of Philosophy. Specializing in moral and political philosophy, he has written papers on a wide range of topics, including rationality, promising, love, democracy, justifying the state, *modus ponens*, future generations, and Rousseau. His book, *The Pecking Order*, published in 2023 by Harvard University Press, asks what might follow if social hierarchy – at least when not appropriately tamed or managed – is itself something to avoid or regret. The book offers a systematic alternative to the widespread view that our political thought and feeling is nourished primarily by a jealousy to preserve individual freedom; more significant, he argues, is our deep anxiety about interpersonal inequality. His teaching at Berkeley is largely on the ethics of emerging technologies. During the 2023–24 academic year, he gave the Hempel Lectures at Princeton University and the Shearman Lectures at University College London. – Address: Department of Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley, 314 Philosophy Hall #2390, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA. E-mail: kolodny@berkeley.edu.

I began the year with an announced project on privacy for a digital age. Since I was slated to give three lectures on the topic in March at Princeton University and again in June at University College London, my work at Wiko was organized into writing three lectures. The first lecture was negative, criticizing existing views of the value of privacy. The second lecture was positive, presenting my own view of the value of privacy. And the

third lecture was applied, considering implications for real-life issues raised by the Internet and Internet of things. I felt that I made good progress on the first and third lectures, but I still remain dissatisfied with the second. I wonder whether the focus on producing three lectures constrained my thinking about the topic in artificial ways, and I look forward to developing this work more freely as a monograph. Working on privacy, with the “time to think” gained at Wiko and ever-present stimulation from its vibrant and diverse intellectual community, led me to puzzling a great deal about consent in general, which looks to be my main next area of inquiry. On the side, I wrote a paper criticizing the idea that AI ought to be designed to satisfy our preferences. And I spent time responding to comments on my 2023 book, *The Pecking Order*, at the Freie Universität Berlin, University College London, and UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø.

It would be hard to overstate my sense of good fortune in finding myself among such a wonderful group of Fellows and partners. (Partners were so accomplished in their own right and so well integrated into life at Wiko that it was often easy to lose track of who the official Fellow was.) As the year progressed, with the accretion of Colloquia and meal-time conversations, I felt growing admiration, awe, and affection for each of my fellow Fellows, whether named Barbara or not, and a certain pleasure in reflecting on the traits of each that inspired such feelings. I might start at the beginning of the alphabet with Abiem, Iveren (with her intrepid researches and commitment to benefiting the world with them), then on to Berson, Josh (with his prodigious polymathism and gift for finding precisely the right word) and so on, finishing at the end of alphabet with Yun, Bee (with his dauntless mastery of languages and self-deprecating sense of humor). It was particularly striking that in a profession marked by egotism there was not a hint of egotism to be found. So much cause for vanity, and yet so little of it. Do be warned, though, that Wiko, at least if this year is anything like the norm, is not the place to cure yourself of imposter syndrome.

It was a tremendous stroke of good luck to have such a great group of philosophers among the Fellows in particular: Josh, Omri, Ruth, Kit, Andreas, Artem, David, and Marcus. It was a special privilege and pleasure to share drafts of work in progress with Artem, David, and Marcus. While I of course learned a lot from their specific views, I also learned from their different approaches to doing philosophy. Of course, I learned at least as much from the Fellows outside of philosophy, not just about their own projects, but also about my own. There is always value in being challenged to bring someone, from a standing start, to see why your problems are problems. I can't say that I always met the challenge. But I won't look at things the same way going forward.

When asked what Wiko was, I often described it as a summer camp for academics, located in Grunewald (“Imagine a posh, leafy food desert”), with a mess hall and activities, like choir, field trips, and dances. (“Dances?!” “Yes, dances.”) Even as someone not much given to audience participation, I found myself more eager to be a good camper than I would have expected, dancing in at least some of the discos, until at least my early bedtime, and dressing up as 1984’s Winston Smith for the future-themed Karneval. The costume amounted more or less to appearing as a shabby man in a jumpsuit. It was somewhat concerning that few seemed to recognize that it was a costume.

One of the highlights of the year was the running group, which met under the flag of the Kosovo embassy housed in Villa Walther on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to run around the Grunewaldsee, along with occasional longer weekend runs, led by Daniel, to Teufelsberg. Artem, who first organized the group, was our fearless leader, followed by Andreas, Andrew, David, Ismaila, Lara, Mallory, and Stefan. I was invariably at the back of the pack, watching Mallory disappearing ever further ahead in the distance, but I was touched that someone always slowed their pace to keep me company and that those at the front would often circle back toward the rear so that we would all finish at roughly the same time. Artem had the brilliant idea of taking photos of the group at the end of each run. Apart from being a cherished record of the year of runs, it worked as an added inducement to show up. As much as one might like to believe that one is above such things, there was a definite feeling of FOMO in being left out of a photo of runners cheerfully jacked up on endorphins.

The year held delights not just for me, but also for my wife, Jessica Cross, our son Eddie, and our dog Shirley. Jessica and Shirley went for long walks in the forests of Grunewald. Eddie made the most of Berlin’s public transit, as well as the permission to drink beer. We traveled widely in Europe, with some or all of us visiting (mind you mostly on holidays and weekends when I was involved!) Copenhagen, Prague, Spain, Paris, Greece, Venice, Munich, Vienna (where I stayed near another Kosovo embassy), London (where I stayed next to still another Kosovo embassy), Tromsø, Dublin, and Stockholm.

Unlike Eddie, who was thrown into the linguistic deep-end at the local Walther-Rathenau-Gymnasium, Jessica and I had fewer opportunities, apart from classes and the *Deutschisch* with Eva, to practice German. For reasons I still can’t explain, the only locals I encountered who seemed to struggle with English as I struggled with German were (a) hypereducated doctors, (b) American football fans at a Superbowl viewing, and (c) two inexhaustible Mormon missionaries, who cornered me as I was leaving the main building.

Walking Shirley, we developed proficiency in what we came to call “Hunddeutsch,” answering questions about Geschlecht, Alter, and Rasse. (“Mädchen, sieben Jahre alt, halb Chihuahua, halb Pudel.” “Na, heute ist alles verpudelt.”) The staff were patient and forgiving interlocutors, who, for example, realized and let pass unmentioned that my literally expressed demand for reparations (Entschädigung!) was a request for reimbursement (Erstattung?).

The staff of Wiko was simply extraordinary in their competence, generosity, and good cheer. When the Rektorin writes, “You might wish to criticize the way we do things at the Kolleg,” I struggle to think of what anyone might have to criticize. I don’t believe that I have ever felt more welcomed and supported by an institution. Andrea and the rest of the preparing-your-stay team did a marvelous job in getting us settled, not least in finding Walther-Rathenau for Eddie. From the summer intensive to the last weekly class, Eva was a delightful teacher of German, overflowing with suggestions of things for us to engage with. (I haven’t given up hope that someday Andreas, Henk, and I will master the distinction between dative and accusative!) Library services felt like a personal research genie, with books appearing like magic on request. Dunia and the dining staff were amazing, serving invariably delicious meals, with encyclopedic knowledge of everyone’s dietary requirements. IT brought an extra monitor to our apartment as if it were nothing and was remarkably unjudgmental about the fact that we lost two (yes, two; don’t you judge!) sets of keys. The entire Wiko staff went out of its way to arrange a *Praktikum* for Eddie, which he thoroughly enjoyed. The list of thanks could go on and on. But I will stop here and simply express my eternal gratitude to Wiko for an unforgettable balm and reset of a year.



PARALLEL LIFE  
MICHAL KRAVEL-TOVI

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Michal Kravel-Tovi is an associate professor of socio-cultural anthropology at Tel Aviv University. She works at the intersection of political anthropology, anthropology of religion, and Jewish Studies. Her previous projects focused on messianism and failed prophecy among Chabad Hasidism and on state-run Jewish conversion in Israel. Her book, *When the State Winks: The Performance of Jewish Conversion in Israel*, received a Clifford Geertz Honorary mention from the American Anthropological Association as well as a Jordan Schnitzer Book Award from the Association of Jewish Studies. She has published her work extensively in top journals including *American Ethnologist*, *American Anthropologist*, *Current Anthropology*, and *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Michal is currently working on two projects: one, the project on which she worked throughout her fellowship at Wiko, is titled “Accounting of the Soul: Quantification and the Crisis of Jewish Life in the US” and focuses on the role of quantification, in regard to socio-demographic knowledge of the population in particular, in imagining and making American Jewry a small ethno-religious, post-Holocaust minority group. The second, called “Speaking of the Unspeakable: Sexual Violence on the Haredi Agenda,” is an ethnographic project concerned with an emerging “Haredi MeToo movement” among ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel. – Address: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, P.O. Box 39040, Tel Aviv, 6997801, Israel. E-mail: mkrael@tauex.tau.ac.il.

In October 2020 – deep into the second or third COVID wave, a time when even walking to the nearby supermarket meant breaking lockdown regulations – I received an email from a Francisco Martínez Casas, clearly located more than 500 meters away from me. With the

intriguing title “Institute for Advanced Study Berlin: your nomination as a Fellow,” the email informed me that I had been nominated to take up a yearlong fellowship at the institute and invited me to formally apply for a place. I confess that for a moment I thought it was a strange variant of an academic spam – “Dear X, you are invited to submit your paper to Y journal, etc.” If I had followed my initial instincts, I would have deleted the email. Fortunately, curiosity won through. Francisco didn’t disclose who had nominated me (information that I’m still trying to glean); instead, he promised a stimulating environment for developing an ongoing project and detailed the underlying principles of the Wiko fellowship. On reaching the concluding part of the email, where he outlined the selection process, the penny dropped. Somehow, something that appeared to be too good to be true was very genuine indeed. An online search informed me that “the Wissenschaftskolleg offers a maximum of intellectual freedom, and the Fellows return the favor by making the very best of it for themselves.” Even without being able to fully grasp the opportunities offered by this remarkable proposition, and without the certainty that these promises could actually be delivered, I began to outline a proposal that had been on my mind for some considerable time. My research project on American Jewry, which had awaited me for too long, could perhaps now be actualized; I would be able to give it the sustained and uninterrupted attention that a project of this scope warranted.

And now it is June 2024, and I am composing this report at the end of the fellowship. Over the course of this year, I learned that Wiko’s reiterated ambition to nourish ideas and inspirational interactions of ideas was more than mere rhetoric. Tuesday and Thursday Colloquia, and even sometimes casual conversations over lunch or during a walk in the woods with other Fellows, served to prove these words. Half-packed boxes around are a reminder that we have come to the end of our Wiko experience. That said, I don’t really need the boxes as a reminder. Whenever I spend time in the Wiko main buildings with my Wiko friends, I simply feel it. The change of seasons, the last dancing party with its very special vibe, the anticipation of the farewell party, small talk with my admired and beloved cohort of Fellows, some of whom will be leaving soon, the reckoning that this could be the “almost last walk” in the Grunewald forest, the half-smiling jokes between us about soon being “thrown out of heaven.” And, of course, our envy of the next cohort of Fellows, knowing as we do what awaits them.

During the introductory session in mid-September 2023, I recall Barbara, Daniel, and Iris speaking about what they called “the Wiko magic.” While it was already present in the

air even then, it didn't yet have the texture of concreteness and familiarity that it was to acquire, via faces, names, memories, moments. The Wiko magic, just like everything that had preceded it, turned out to be a real thing. But, it should be noted, this magic did not emerge from nowhere. The magic is made, co-produced by the many people who work hard to envision, shape, and retain it in daily life, right down to the very smallest details. It makes itself evident in matters as small as the warm and welcoming smile at the reception, and in Dunia's care for each and every one of us, seeing us all and forgetting nothing about our dietary sensibilities and needs. The labor of so many of Wiko's permanent team: the "preparing your stay" people (I was lucky to have Andrea with me all the way through, but I know that all her colleagues are equally charming!), Permanent Fellows, the academic leadership, the librarians, the media and public relations team, the IT people, the chef de cuisine and restaurant and kitchen staff, the housefather and -mother of Villa Walther. The labor of all these good people is invested in forging reality from an abstract and ostensibly unattainable notion of "magic." The evidence of this labor can be seen everywhere. And the effort, collegiality, kindness, support, and friendship of my fellow Fellows, the temporary residents at Wiko, made all the difference in the world. I will state the obvious. Wiko is more than the institution and its grand legacies and impressive resources. It is more than the beautiful campus, the dreamy terrace, the serenity of Grunewald, and the other material comforts and beauties embedded in its place-making. Wiko is about the people, always about the people.

Ultimately, Wiko is an experiment. For those of us trained to think and communicate within disciplinary rubrics, Wiko is an experiment in finding the productive words and means with which we can transgress these boundaries and extend ourselves beyond our comfort zones. It is an experiment in the sense that its *raison d'être* is to create an immersive environment in which Fellows are also neighbors, embedded in an academic schedule with an intense and supportive rhythm. In a way, Wiko resembles an extended retreat. It is an experiment in the sense that it puts a group of about 45 people together without being able to predict the nature of the chemistry that will unfold between them. One can argue that chemistry is, in itself, a form of magic. Wiko is an experiment in the sense that it inhabits and enables a parallel world: parallel to the demands and routines of everyday academia in our respective institutions, parallel to our lives elsewhere, and parallel to the "real" Berlin. I think and hope that many of my cohort of Fellows, as well as Wiko's staff, will conclude that in this case at least, the experiment worked, perhaps even excelled.

This praise cannot do justice to my gratitude to and appreciation of Wiko. But neither can this praise do justice to my unavoidably complex and challenging experience of the

Wiko magic. Three weeks after my arrival, I woke up on a Saturday morning to find a sequence of increasingly breathless messages from my mother. It was October 7. Her first few messages updated me on a series of security alarms and interventions in the immediate vicinity (“another boom”; “and now another one”; “and another one”; “fifth”; “sixth”; “seventh”) of her hometown, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and in my hometown of Modi’in. Succeeding messages provided what little information there was at this early stage of terrorists invading *kibbutzim* in Southern Israel, drawing on rumors and disjointed updates on social media about hostages, injured, victims. I would give everything to go back to the small number of victims reported in these initial updates, before the catastrophe unfolded in its full and awful scale. My mother’s last message was concise and familiar: “Bibi, go home!”

I didn’t know where to put myself that day, and I still do not. The struggle is ongoing. I was born in Kibbutz Gevim, a kibbutz located 3 or 4 kilometers from the border with the Gaza Strip. In a miraculous way, Hamas terrorists failed to invade Gevim. My partner and two sons were in Israel. My older son, undertaking his compulsory military service in the north of the country, was called up to his base immediately. Yoel, my partner, and Shauli, my younger son, managed to secure a flight to Prague and spent the first two weeks of the war with me at Wiko. Since October 7 I have flown to Israel eight times, to spend whatever time I could with my family. Because I was out of the country, I could not join the impressive civil mobilization that sprang up immediately after the murderous invasion and attack – a civic undertaking that both proved and provided hope, strength, and the gratification inherent in solidaristic activity. Being away meant that aside from a few sporadic opportunities, I could not participate in the unfolding wave of demonstrations across the country, urging the government to bring the hostages back home and demanding immediate elections. Being away did not take away the pain and the constant worry. Throughout the year, as the horrifying moment of that Saturday morning turned into a reality unbearable and progressively escalating for nine months and still ongoing, the unbridgeable distance between the utopia of Wiko and the hellish, dystopian situation back home and in my mind became chronically painful. The experiment of inhabiting parallel worlds proved too taxing at times.

In one additional important sense, the experiment proved itself to be a success. Specifically: comparing the serenity of Wiko with the turmoil and agitation in so many academic settings across the globe, or with the violent dynamics erupting in research universities in the UK, the US, and Germany, giving expression to dormant hostilities and

shaping new bifurcations and new vocabularies, it is clear that Wiko remained a safe haven in the most literal and meaningful sense. It was safe to talk, to share sentiments, to disagree, to remain silent, and to cry together. I have no doubt that in our cohort, as well as among other staff members, people subscribe to many different positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israeli military policies, the future of Gaza, and the politics of BDS. Some of these positions, unsurprisingly, differ from mine. But these gaps did not interfere with the overarching orientation of Wiko as a safe space. Friends and colleagues in Israel often asked me about the repercussions of October 7 on the political ambience at Wiko; each time, sharing my benevolent experiences, I was amazed by my – by our – good fortune in being able to keep the disorder at arm’s length. I very much appreciated and was moved by the gesture of a “moment of silence,” initiated by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, at the first Tuesday Colloquium after October 7; likewise, the opportunity to put into words my emerging insights about October 7 during a public event alongside Omri Boehm and Sonja Zekri. Following my presentation at the public event (which explored some of the tropes emerging in vernacular Hebrew), I co-edited, together with two Israeli colleagues, a special issue on how Israelis speak vernacular Hebrew after October 7 (“Speaking after October 7,” *Israel Studies in Language and Society* 19 (2024)).

At the moment, it is hard to cling on to hope, to see an end to this vicious war, the fall of the terrorist Hamas and Hezbollah regimes in Gaza and Southern Lebanon, or the collapse of the far-right, corrupt, dysfunctional, and abusive Israeli government of the moment. But I will try to take back home with me my faith in the good: a faith integral to the magic created and felt at Wiko.



## ALLTAG UND STRUKTUR ANDRÉ KRISCHER

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André Krischer studierte Geschichte, Philosophie, Anglistik und Geografie an den Universitäten Köln und Bonn. 2005 erfolgte die Promotion in Mittlerer und Neuerer Geschichte an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster mit einer Arbeit über die Ritual- und Symbolpraxis von Reichsstädten in der frühneuzeitlichen Fürstengesellschaft. Anschließend Wissenschaftlicher Geschäftsführer des Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibnizprojekts „Vormoderne Verfahren“ von Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger an der WWU Münster. 2009 Berufung auf die Juniorprofessur für die Neuere Geschichte Großbritanniens und des Commonwealth, 2016 erfolgte die Ernennung zum Akademischen Rat a. Z. und zum Leiter der Forschungsstelle Großbritannien an der WWU. 2015 Habilitation mit einer Arbeit über die Ausdifferenzierung von Verfahrenssystemen in der Frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel englischer Hochverratsprozesse zwischen dem 16. und dem 19. Jahrhundert. 2019 Vertretungsprofessor an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. Seit 2022 Professor für die Geschichte der Frühen Neuzeit an der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. – Adresse: Historisches Seminar, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 79085 Freiburg i.Br., Deutschland. E-Mail: krischer@geschichte.uni-freiburg.de.

Natürlich bietet das Wissenschaftskolleg einmalige Voraussetzungen, um eine Forschungsarbeit abzuschließen. Die unermüdliche Gesprächs- und Zuhörbereitschaft der leitenden Akteure, der Altrektoren und Permanent Fellows, die fabelhaften Services der Bibliothek und, nicht zu vergessen, die tägliche Umsorgung durch Küche und Restaurant. Mein angegebenes Vorhaben habe ich trotzdem nicht ganz abgeschlossen: zu viele Altlasten in Form noch zu schreibender Aufsätze, zu viele offene Kanäle zur

Heimatuniversität und anderes mehr. Aber das ist nicht schlimm, denn ich bin am Wiko vor allem zur Besinnung gekommen – nach Jahren der Unsicherheit als „Nachwuchs“ in der Academia und dann der bruchlosen Betriebsamkeit als Neuberufener. Einen erheblichen Anteil an dieser Rückbesinnung hatte die Art und Weise, wie ich am Wiko leben durfte: in der Villa Jaffé und als Nachbar von Arwed M. Diese Konstellation stellte sich schon bald als eine großartige Wohngemeinschaft heraus, die durch den zeitweiligen Zuzug meiner Tochter auch familiäre Züge gewann. Natürlich hätte ich abends auch mehr lesen können, aber zunächst gemeinsam zu kochen, zu essen und zu reden, fühlte sich meistens besser an. Mit einer gewissen Regelmäßigkeit haben wir die Küche für allerlei Kochabenteuer genutzt – und wieder aufgeräumt, bevor Ellen und Kamila in aller Herrgottsfrühe mit ihrem Tagwerk begannen. Es war kurioserweise diese ritualisierte Häuslichkeit, die mir die nötige Ruhe zum Lesen und dann auch Schreiben verschaffte. Dabei soll doch das Wiko diese Art von Alltagsroutinen eine Zeitlang suspendieren, aber nach Jahren der Pendelei und Wohnprovisorien habe ich sie besonders geschätzt. Auch die täglichen Mittagessen und die Donnerstagsdinner sind wunderbare Rituale, bei denen man allmählich Kolleginnen und Kollegen und Fellows/Spouses auch jenseits ihrer akademischen Rolle kennen- und noch mehr zu schätzen lernt. Die wechselseitige herzliche Zugewandtheit bei den geselligen Anlässen war stets wohltuend, nicht nur für mich, sondern auch für meine Tochter. Rückblickend bedauere ich nur, nicht klarere Grenzen gegenüber meiner Uni gezogen zu haben, denn mein halbes Jahr an diesem außergewöhnlichen Ort verging wie im Flug. Aber ich zehre jetzt noch davon.



THE LASTING IMPACT OF WIKO ON  
CREATIVITY AND MEMORY PROCESSING  
FROM A NEUROSCIENTIST'S PROSPECTIVE  
JILL K. LEUTGEB

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Jill K. Leutgeb is a Professor of Neurobiology and the Walter F. Heiligenberg Professor of Neuroethology at the University of California, San Diego. She is also a member of the Kavli Institute for Brain and Mind, San Diego. She was trained as a young scientist in her hometown at the University of Utah, and then travelled abroad to expand her neuroscience training, receiving her Ph.D. in Neurophysiology from the Leibniz Institute for Neurobiology, Germany, and was a postdoctoral fellow at the Kavli Institute for Systems Neuroscience, Norway, in the lab of Nobel laureates May-Britt and Edvard Moser. Jill Leutgeb's research focuses on understanding neural circuit computations that underlie learning and memory. In addition, her research team investigates how the function of memory circuits is altered in the development and expression of acquired epilepsies and neurodegenerative diseases. Her laboratory combines high-density in vivo electrophysiology with behavioral testing, computational analyses, and pharmacological and molecular manipulations as a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the neural basis of memory. – Address: Neurobiology Department, School of Biological Sciences, University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, TATA Hall, La Jolla, CA 92093-0338, USA. E-mail: [jleutgeb@ucsd.edu](mailto:jleutgeb@ucsd.edu).

Biology has revealed that memory, creativity, and decision-making are supported by distinct neural circuits in the brain that can be influenced, either enhanced or hindered, by the presence of certain neuromodulators produced in our bodies. These modulatory chemicals are produced in response to specific experiences, and when present they can have lasting impact on brain function, with certain brain circuits more readily influenced by their presence than others. I have dedicated my research to understanding how the

collective activity of brain cells in our memory centers computes information that we perceive as thoughts and memories and that guide our actions. These brain circuits are specifically impressionable and easily modified by neuromodulators when present. It appears that Wiko has carefully considered current neurophysiology research and painstakingly created an environment specifically designed to activate the enhancing brain modulators needed for creative intellectual productivity. Their protocol is to place the specimen, a Fellow such as myself, in an idyllic location, with immediate access to nature on the one hand and a vibrant ever-living city on the other. They provide excellent food, coupled with an instant community committed to dedicated time together in facilitated social interactions. This separation from our typical demanding academic environments is in itself an immediate stress reliever. All of these factors have been shown individually in a laboratory setting to induce memory enhancers and suppress modulators that are negative, setting up an environment geared towards priming the brain circuits that mediate memory and creativity for optimal function. Moreover, one of the most significant catalysts of enhancing molecules that has also been shown to spur new brain connections is novelty – a diversity of new experiences. In brain research using model organisms, these are called “enriched environments.” They have the capacity to increase the number of new neurons needed to increase memory capacity and to strengthen brain connections already formed that are required to retain memories for the long term. If the science is right, Wiko has curated and combined these brain-enhancing factors into an “enriched experiment” that should be the cocktail needed to cultivate new ideas and inspire creativity among its subjects. Does it work? What are the outcomes?

My decision to become a part of the Wiko experiment, to place myself within the ultimate “enriched environment” curated by the collection of world-class individuals diverse in their thinking, experience, origins, and social constructs, has had immediate and long-lasting impacts on my scientific research, as well as on my own personal growth and happiness. The scientific outcomes are more directly measured. As an experimental neuroscientist whose lab collects large data sets on neural activity, the level of understanding we can gain from such data depends on the computational tools available to explore the data. Collaborations with computational neuroscience laboratories have the potential for innovation, and I have set this goal to expand my lab’s current capabilities. The interaction can also be reciprocal, so that the more we understand how the brain solves problems and computes information, the better we are able to improve computational models and improve network algorithms inspired by the brain (i.e., the development of recent

advancements in AI). Germany is a hub for computational neuroscience and renowned for its prestigious computational institutes, such as the Bernstein Centers for Computational Neuroscience, which are scattered across the country, including in Berlin. Wiko provided the space and time that allowed me to discuss projects with computationally minded Fellows and to invite and establish collaborations within the larger computational community. Established German collaborators were invited to stay for extended periods of time to join the Wiko “enriched environment” and work with me on my proposed Wiko project. The situation was ideal, and the environment transformative for these types of creative interactions. In that time period supported at Wiko, we were able to analyze complex data that revealed important and unexpected computations from the brain, explaining the mechanisms for how neurons in memory centers retrieve past memories to inform and then execute future decisions. Computational models were then tested from artificial networks we built to mimic the computations of the brain we discovered (code published on GitHub<sup>1</sup>). We could then use these artificial networks, which we confirmed behaved like our brain circuits, to test many variables in order to point us towards likely cellular mechanisms and new hypotheses we can test experimentally. From this creative work we wrote a manuscript of our findings and submitted it for scientific review before leaving the Wiko campus. We also were able to turn our new hypotheses into a grant application to the Collaborative Research in Computational Neuroscience initiative, funded jointly by the US National Science Foundation and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.<sup>2</sup> Large funding of this scale will allow for continued collaborative work for many additional years. The impact of this creative work also is evident from the recent news that our submitted manuscript has been accepted for publication<sup>3</sup> after peer review in the journal *Nature Communications*, the open access journal of the prestigious *Nature* publishing group. This is among the top journals for the publication of

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- 1 Custom codes are published and freely available from a *GitHub* repository, <https://github.com/cleibold/CA3phaseprecession>, and from *Zenodo*, [doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13907008](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13907008). Custom code was created to analyze the data and create the computational model presented in Ahmadi et al. (2025), *Nature Communications*, see footnote 3.
  - 2 NSF-24-510. CRCNS US-German Research Proposal: Neural-network mechanisms of learning: The role for sequence plasticity. J. K. Leutgeb and C. Leibold, Proposal # 2424006.
  - 3 S. Ahmadi, T. Sasaki, M. Sabariego, C. Leibold, S. Leutgeb, and J. K. Leutgeb (2025), “Distinct roles of dentate gyrus and medial entorhinal cortex inputs for phase precession and temporal correlations in the hippocampal CA3 area,” *Nature Communications* 16: 13.

scientific research across STEM disciplines. Wiko is listed as an affiliation in this publication. These outcomes support the conclusion that the Wiko “enhanced environment” worked to free my mind from restrictions, thus allowing me to focus on creative problems, and then provided the environment that would enhance those efforts, resulting in measurable creative outcomes.

For a scientist who spends their life in the laboratory it may seem like a career barrier to leave the laboratory and the collection of data for more intellectual pursuits. However, from my experience, if you prepare your lab for the absence, it will free your mind to produce many new creative hypotheses that you can then take back to your lab with and pursue for many years to come. Removing ourselves from the typical daily demands and stepping into novel and creative spaces can work even for scientists dedicated to lab research if they can leave behind a productive team that they can guide from afar. The situation at Wiko was transformative for my creative process, but it also has the power to be transformative for the scientific community in the local area. At Wiko, interactions between local laboratories and world-class scientists collected from abroad can introduce new partnerships for collaboration, a process that is easier and more natural when people are within the same space. The measured outcomes of my experience are direct results of this potential.

The personal outcomes of the Wiko-induced brain state, high on enhancing brain chemicals, may not be as directly measured from a curriculum vitae, but perhaps for me are the most salient and memorable. Some of the discussions with the most impact that still persist in my immediate memory are those between friends during rainy walks in the Grunewald forest, across a table with a few bottles of sparkling water, and on a wicker Bauhaus chair in a restored turn-of-the-century villa. The personal interactions were for me the most important and in a sense most unexpected reward from the Wiko experiment. They are what I crave after leaving Wiko and what I miss when returning back to the confines, both physical and intellectual, of my research laboratory. I was exposed to unique theories, ways of thinking, problems, and challenges. I was inspired by uncommon solutions and creative works of art and music, and surprised at times by the differences in academic experiences and demands between the life sciences world and the social sciences world. The exposure I received at Wiko to world-class thinkers and creative people was one of the greatest rewards of my experience. The challenging discussions and new friendships are personal measured outcomes that reflect a successful outcome of this experiment on my personal journey. Couple this with access to a rich and dynamic city that feeds off of its own energy: the experiment worked for me!



NAVIGATING THE NOT SO ARTIFICIAL  
INTELLIGENCE AT THE WISSEN-  
SCHAFTSKOLLEG  
STEFAN LEUTGEB

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Stefan Leutgeb received a Master's degree from the Paris Lodron University Salzburg (Austria) and a PhD degree from the University of Utah (Salt Lake City, USA). He performed his postdoctoral research with Nobel Laureates May-Britt and Edvard Moser at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Trondheim, Norway) before joining the faculty of the University of California, San Diego as an Assistant Professor in 2008. He currently is Full Professor and former Department Chair of the Neurobiology Department at the same university. Throughout his career, Stefan Leutgeb has published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles on neural circuits that support memory computations. He is the recipient of the Sloan Research Fellowship, the Ellison Medical Foundation New Scholar Award in Aging, and the Walter F. Heiligenberg Professorship in Neuroethology and is a Faculty Fellow of the Kavli Institute for Brain and Mind at UC San Diego. – Address: Neurobiology Department, School of Biological Sciences, University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0338, USA. E-mail: sleutgeb@ucsd.edu.

For life scientists, the metrics for success are the number of grants and publications, and perhaps, prominence in the field. Before arriving at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I was looking forward to having protected time to focus on writing grants and publications, but was somewhat skeptical about the remainder of the setup. I was unsure whether the model of gathering a diverse group of academics and artists for a year would be inspiring and productive. I did write my share of papers, concluded some projects, moved some projects forward that were stuck, and launched some new ones. However, I feel that

something more foundational transpired, which has resulted in finding more academic freedom and new avenues for approaching my scientific and academic endeavors for the remainder of my career. Many of these benefits may not yet have fully emerged, and it therefore seems premature to write a summary of my time at Wiko. I therefore see this more as a progress report than as a final report. I will first briefly summarize work that is directly related to my Wiko project and then conclude with more general remarks.

**The Wiko project.** My main goal was to think and write more about the field of spatial navigation, about its history, about the adoption of neural networks to identify computations, and in turn, the field's influence on the development of neural network architectures. This is an extensive and timely topic, and I was able to reinvigorate my interest in theoretical neuroscience and to devote time to learning new mathematical and computational foundations, such as topics in linear algebra, and acquiring programming skills that allow me to design and work with artificial neural networks. Although there is a lot more learning to do on these topics, I was able to devote enough time to these topics to be able to discuss papers, do programming projects, and launch a new collaboration on comparing biological and artificial neural networks for spatial navigation. Here, I benefited from the setup at Wiko in many ways. First, in an unexpected way, by being able to have frequent discussions with the partner of a Fellow, who is a mathematician and an expert in linear algebra. This was extremely valuable in helping me understand the limitations and pitfalls in publications on artificial neural network models for spatial navigation. Second, it was immensely helpful to be able to invite visitors and to have a few days to intensely brainstorm and discuss with colleagues in computational neuroscience. One of these visits launched a collaborative project that is still in its early stages, but has been invigorated by now co-supervising a PhD student. Third, it was immensely valuable to be geographically close to the outstanding computational neuroscience community in Berlin and in other parts of Germany. I was able to have many one-on-one meetings and to attend local and international conferences, such as the 2023 Bernstein Conference in Berlin and a 2024 meeting on NeuroAI in Norway. I was also an invited speaker at the Science of Intelligence at Technische Universität Berlin, at LMU Munich, at the Leibniz Institute for Neurobiology in Magdeburg, and at Heidelberg University, among other institutions.

**Other collateral outcomes.** As I had anticipated, I was able to focus on reading literature in my field and on writing and revising papers. The setup of having the apartment, the

office, and the hub of the institute in close spatial proximity was ideal and allowed for much more extensive uninterrupted time than what had been available to me at any other time in my career. Furthermore, it was inspiring not just to live in Berlin, but to be in Berlin with a group of colleagues who organized numerous outings to local academic institutions, theaters, music events, lectures, and other events. This was of course ideally complemented by the many in-house and public events at Wiko. These opportunities would already have been inspiring by themselves, but were of course further enriched by the daily interactions and discussions with my Co-Fellows and their partners. Often, exposure to expertise in fields that seemed the most unrelated to my own turned out to be particularly inspiring. As a neuroscientist, I now have a much deeper appreciation of biases, ethics, creativity, and hardship and of the limitations of reductionist approaches. In addition, we had many thought-provoking discussions about the rise of artificial intelligence. I hope that I could contribute to some of these conversations from the perspective of the science behind these systems. More importantly perhaps, I hope that I will be able to make future contributions to educational initiatives on the responsible use and development of these technologies.

In summary, the experience at Wiko was productive and inspiring. The setup of being able to interact with colleagues beyond the traditional academic boundaries was transformative. I anticipate that many of the contacts in Berlin and from my time in Berlin will continue to inspire my academic pursuits and continue to steer my work in new research and educational directions.

## Academic Work throughout the Year

### *Peer-reviewed Publications*

Viana da Silva, S., M.G. Haberl, K. Gaur, R. Patel, G. Narayan, M. Ledakis, M.L. Fu, M. de Castro Vieira, E.H. Koo, J.K. Leutgeb, and **S. Leutgeb** (2024). “Localized APP pathology in the hippocampus is sufficient to result in progressive disorganization of the timing of neuronal firing patterns.” *Neuron* 112 (1): 124–140.e6. doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2023.10.001. Epub 2023 Oct 30.

Athanasiadis, M., S. Masserini, L. Yuan, D. Fetterhoff, J.K. Leutgeb, **S. Leutgeb**, and C. Leibold (2024). “Low rate hippocampal delay period activity encodes behavioral experience.” *Hippocampus* 34 (8): 422–437. doi:10.1002/hipo.23619.

- Ahmadi, S., T. Sasaki, M. Sabariego, C. Leibold, **S. Leutgeb**, and J.K. Leutgeb (2025). “Distinct roles of dentate gyrus and medial entorhinal cortex inputs for phase precession and temporal correlations in the hippocampal CA3 area.” *Nat Commun* 16: 13. doi:10.1038/s41467-024-54943-2.
- Yuan L., J.F. Figueroa, A. Khan, G. Narayan, J.K. Leutgeb, and **S. Leutgeb** (2024). “Time cell sequences during delay intervals are not dependent on brain state.” In revision, *Nat Commun*.
- Srikanth, S., D. Le, Y. Hu, J.K. Leutgeb, and **S. Leutgeb**. “Theta oscillations in the prefrontal-hippocampal circuit do not couple to respiration-related oscillations.” In revision, *ELife*. bioRxiv 2021.12.22.473834. doi:10.1101/2021.12.22.473834.

### *Abstracts*

- S. Gonzalez, S., Z. Xiao, S. Kooiman, L. Yuan, L. Yao, B.K. Lim, J. Leutgeb, and S. Leutgeb (2024). “Effects of progressive dopamine loss on movement cessation and initiation: Insights into basal ganglia network dynamics from a genetic model of Parkinson’s disease.” FENS Forum 2024 Abstract.
- Wang, J., Y. Li, W. Li, J.K. Leutgeb, and S. Leutgeb (2024). “Neuronal firing patterns during working memory retention differ between medial prefrontal cortex layers and subregions.” Society of Neuroscience Abstract.
- Li, Y., L. Tong, F. Farouq, W. Li, J. Leutgeb, and S. Leutgeb (2023). “Effects of the persistence of theta oscillations during working memory retention on the information flow between hippocampus and medial prefrontal cortex.” Society of Neuroscience Abstract PSTR301.13
- Wang, M., Y. Zhang, T. Sasaki, S. Leutgeb, and J. Leutgeb (2023). “Theta-associated high-frequency oscillations in the CA3-DG network predict future choices in a dentate-dependent working memory task.” Society of Neuroscience Abstract PSTR301.14.



## THE COMPLETE ANSWER EVA LIEVENS

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Eva Lievens is an evolutionary biologist who studies host-parasite interactions. She grew up in Belgium and the US, obtained her master's from universities in France and Sweden, earned her PhD in France, and is a postdoc in Germany. Her work looks at infections through the lens of ecology and evolution; her main topics are infection life histories and the (co)evolution of resistance and host range. She can generally be found pipetting, staring at algae, powering through R code, or looking for missing lab equipment. Eva interrupted her postdoc at the University of Konstanz to join the College for Life Sciences from September 2023 to February 2024. During this time she abandoned the lab to work on a meta-analysis of infection dynamics. She fell in love with the Wissenschaftskolleg for its academic excitement and with Berlin for its fencing and salsa dancing. – Address: Department of Biology, University of Konstanz, Universitätsstr. 10, 78464 Konstanz, Germany. E-mail: [eva.j.lievens@gmail.com](mailto:eva.j.lievens@gmail.com).

When I left the Wissenschaftskolleg in February, it seemed everyone wanted to ask me variations on the same question: “How has Wiko changed your research interests?” or “Has Wiko changed your approach to science?” or “Do you think you’ll start using new methods after Wiko?” I think I disappointed those who asked, because I didn’t really have a good answer then. The truthful answer was “No,” but that didn’t feel quite complete. Now, after several months of hindsight, I can finally articulate those missing pieces. So, dear fellow Fellows: please consider this report to be, finally, the answer to your question.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg as a College for Life Sciences Fellow, with six years of postdoc’ing under my belt and a tower of unfinished projects on my plate. The plan was

to take one of these unfinished projects, a meta-analysis, and dedicate five months to completing it. The meta-analysis was designed to answer a fundamental question in my field: does the number of parasites that start an infection affect the dynamics of that infection within the host? Since tests aimed at answering this question were relatively scarce in the evolutionary and ecological literatures, my collaborators and I had decided to synthesize data from across the life sciences. The project had turned out to be massive, in large part because we had underestimated the additional reading we'd have to do: the parasites that formed the focus of the veterinary or medical studies had not been chosen for their tractability as ecological model systems, and often had complicated life cycles or unresolved natural histories. Furthermore, terminology differed between the fields in unexpected ways, forcing us to backtrack regularly to revise our collected data. Squeezing this work in around our other obligations had caused the project to drag on since 2020 – but we were so close, and I was sure I could finish the meta-analysis by the time my five months were over.

Beyond that, I was excited to go to academic summer camp, as I described it to my friends and family. The institute really seemed like it could be advertising in the garish WordArt fonts of my childhood: “Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin: Join us for ~~two weeks~~ five months of ~~forest~~ Berlin fun! Develop your talents and make new friends!” After five years at a smallish university, after the years of pandemic-induced stress, and with the job market looming, I was in sore need of that excitement.

The Wissenschaftskolleg more than delivered, in expected and unexpected ways.

Academic summer camp turned out to be exactly right. From the moment I arrived, everything was easy and exciting. The staff was so welcoming (special thanks to Jana and Vera), the food was so good (special thanks to Dunia et al.), everything was so well-organized (special thanks to... everyone?). I felt like I'd been catapulted back into the world of Dorothy Sayers, if Dorothy Sayers had had personalized IT cards left on her desk. Moreover, this world was populated by a group of phenomenal Co-Fellows: open, kind, interested, interesting people with specialties I'd barely ever heard of before. The social atmosphere and meandering discussions put me at ease in this crowd of famous intellectuals. Through the Colloquia I discovered disciplines I'd barely ever heard of before (microhistory: who knew there was a micro- and a macrohistory? analytical philosophy: philosophers do stats?). The presentations were fascinating and sometimes baffling, stretching my academic muscles in new and uncomfortable directions. And if those directions ever got too new or too uncomfortable, Arjun, Iveren, Ismaila, and Stefany brought back a touch of sanity. The whole experience reminded me what a joy learning can be and was exactly the motivation boost I needed.

I got work done, though not quite the work I'd anticipated. The library staff generously spent hours hunting for the most obscure references I could give them, so that I could include 60-year-old data in my meta-analysis. I coded for weeks, making sure that the data could be compiled smoothly and without bias. I spent days thinking about the right analyses, and more days trying them out. I presented my work at the Freie Universität and the Leibniz Institute, and I debated my strategies with the colleagues I met there. I was able to invite two of my collaborators, Nitin Bansal and Georgia Drew, to visit the Wissenschaftskolleg; together we made decisions and powered through datasets. All this work dramatically advanced my meta-analysis project, but it also revealed unexpected dilemmas and yet more reasons to backtrack. Furthermore, I spent part of my Wissenschaftskolleg time writing an application for an independent research grant (which I have since received!). The end result was that my meta-analysis project went from "so close" to "so, *so* close"... Although this was disappointing, the time I could invest at the Wissenschaftskolleg will make an enormous difference to the quality of the meta-analysis once it is finished.

If all the Wissenschaftskolleg had achieved was a motivation boost and completed work, I would have gone home happy – and indeed I did (metaphorically, that is, factually I was definitely not happy to be going). But in the months since, I think I've noticed a more profound effect: the way I see myself as a researcher has changed. Pre-Wiko, I thought I knew what academia was. My semester in Berlin showed me that I only knew my small scientific corner: colleagues from different disciplines communicated in radically different ways, valued different methods, and even seemed to think in different patterns. In contrasting myself with them, I began to recognize the extent of my specialized skillset – and consequently to revalue it. I found myself saying "as a scientist..." a blanket title I would never have aspired to before. Furthermore, everyone else recognized my skillset automatically: my phenomenal Co-Fellows were interested in my research, in my experiences, and in my opinions on their own work. The entire experience made me more confident that I have something to offer, both in my research interests and in my skills. Post-Wiko, that new confidence has helped me write job applications and prompted me to apply for a research prize (which I have since received!).

Being a Junior Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg was exciting, challenging, and relaxing by turns. I'll always be grateful to the staff and colleagues who made it possible – I'll think of you every time I work on an idea that crystallized at Wiko, every time I make an alumnus contact, and every time I take a bit of breathing room in the madness.



UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS  
MALLORY MATSUMOTO

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Mallory Matsumoto is an archaeological and historical anthropologist whose research addresses language, material culture, and religion in the Maya region of Mesoamerica during the Classic and early colonial periods. Currently an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, she earned her PhD in Anthropology from Brown University in 2021. During the 2023/2024 academic year, she was a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg and an Alexander-von-Humboldt-Stiftung post-doctoral research fellow at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute, IAI). – Address: 2505 University Ave, Stop A3700, Austin, TX 78712-1090, USA.  
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The first shock came at the first group meeting during orientation in September. I was horrified when the Rector – an imposing figure who seemed both bewilderingly warm and incredibly intimidating – announced that, in the spirit of true academic freedom, we did not actually have to complete the project that we had proposed in our statements. In fact, we didn't even have to start it. We could spend the whole year reading broadly, undertaking a disciplinary transition, developing an entirely new project, or burrowing into intellectual rabbit holes. We were, in essence, free to do whatever we wanted. I had arrived in Berlin a few weeks earlier with no idea of what awaited me. But that disorienting declaration was the indication that, no matter what, this year would end up being different from anything I could have imagined.

If I'm being honest in this report, which I've been told I should be – it took some time for me to adjust. I felt out of place on more than one occasion: disciplinarily, as the sole

archaeologist and (I think?) the first-ever Fellow from the field that the Germans call *Altamerikanistik*; socially, as an introvert overcome by the intense togetherness; and professionally, as the youngest and only untenured member of the yearlong cohort. I lacked the experience, perspective, and organizational know-how to take full advantage of Wiko's perks, like organizing workshops or enlisting library staff to pursue obscure research tangents. I was intimidated by – afraid of, in some cases – my new colleagues, all of whom clearly, in contrast to me, knew what they were talking about. It took me a good two months before I had memorized their names. It took even longer to get used to the carousel of unfamiliar faces (academic guests, Permanent Fellows, former Fellows, family visitors...) at mealtimes. I was overwhelmed by the prospect of writing my own humble manuscript alongside dozens of established scholars who were composing much more ambitious, influential tomes. I was convinced that I had slipped into the cohort due to some clerical error that would soon be found out, at the latest when I gave my Colloquium.

I had also arrived in Berlin wary of the interpersonal drama that inevitably arises (or so I thought) when you throw together fifty-odd academics, all rigorously screened for research acumen but not for social competence, in an idyllic Grunewald villa for a year. So, I trod cautiously at the beginning. Weeks turned into months; tree branches turned bare; temperatures kept sinking. Until one point, deep into our fellowship year, when it suddenly occurred to me that mealtime conversations, informal hangouts, and Colloquia discussions continued to be strikingly... unremarkable. Boring, even, at least in terms of social drama. Maybe it was luck; maybe it was Wiko magic. But despite unevenly distributed social skills and an eclectic mix of personalities, we actually got along pretty well as a group. Surely, it helped that we were surrounded by caring, attentive staff who seem almost absurdly good-humored and sincere, all the time – quite a contrast to the no-nonsense, harried vibe of greater Berlin's workforce. By the time my Colloquium rolled around in January, I knew that even if someone at Wiko had realized that I didn't belong there, they were far too kind to kick me out.

That's not to say that our interactions were always normal. After almost ten months, my chest still tightens anxiously every time I enter the restaurant and survey the half-populated tables, knowing that I have to find a seat at one of them. But since the initial stranger-danger subsided, I've learned to appreciate the lottery-esque quality of each mealtime. Not just when it comes to non-random constellations of tablemates – itself a phenomenon worthy of anthropological inquiry – but also in terms of conversation. Every encounter is a box of Wiko chocolates, and there certainly have been a variety of flavors.

Adventures outside the Grunewald bubble (thank goodness for the M19), lab rats (they'll do anything for chocolate milk), the climate apocalypse (it's already upon us), nude beaches (a glimpse of humanity's physiological diversity), trust (society needs more of it), chemically engineered meat "goo" (our unappetizing but unavoidable future), K-dramas (do they count as a guilty pleasure if they teach you something?), police archives (it's all about having the right connections), Dian Fossey (and the sticky politics of fieldwork), mathematicians (they're so much more collaborative than they get credit for), Immanuel Kant (no one deserves such a protracted birthday celebration), local wildlife (the cute owl in the tree at the bus stop!), AI (can I ask ChatGPT to write this final report?)... Not every conversation was equally absorbing, of course, and social anxiety got the better of me on more than one occasion. But I've never laughed so much or thought so hard, day in and day out. Those interactions made it easier to return to my desk because even if I was alone in work, I wasn't alone at Wiko.

This year was my first opportunity to take research leave since starting an academic job. The physical and metaphorical distance from campus allowed me to focus, in a way I hadn't been able to since late grad school, on the very reason why I had wanted to enter academia in the first place: research. But as I realized at some point in the depths of winter, the distinction between campus life and Wiko life can't be measured only by time rescued from teaching and service. Over the last nine-and-a-half months, I've spent fewer hours than I would've liked actually working at my desk or in the reading room of the Ibero-American Institute, my institutional co-sponsor for the year. Yet I surprised even myself with how productive my writing was this year. It's no coincidence, I think, that it was the first stretch in recent memory when I woke up every morning with a deep sense of gratitude simply for being right there where I was – no matter what kind of day awaited me.

Wiko has often felt like an adult version of summer camp, albeit with gourmet food, ample wine at dinner, and unnervingly erudite conversation partners. At other times, it's been a flashback to student life: spontaneous late-night ping-pong matches, multigenerational football/soccer watch parties, washing dishes together in the shared kitchen, lingering for hours over dinner knowing that you're only a five-minute stroll from home. Only that it's better this time around. Unlike during my actual student days, even the most social in our cohort are trying to get some serious work done, and I'm never judged for wanting to do the same. I've always been a solo runner, but after I reluctantly dragged myself to the running group in late October, I found myself wanting to go back, morning

after morning. Then there was the June evening when I found myself surrounded by more than a dozen Fellows in the lobby of the Philharmonic, after a concert by the community orchestra that I'd stumbled into during late winter. They clapped and cheered and showered flowers and macarons as if I'd just performed Mahler's Symphony No. 5 all by myself, and I wanted nothing more than to sink into the floor. But awe overpowered my mortification – and my flight response – as I took in the familiar, smiling faces who had been complete strangers to me just nine months earlier. This academic year was the first time that I experienced, in a visceral sense, what a difference contentment can make for productivity.

Some colleagues have already told me that this year at Wiko has been the best of their careers, if not their lives. I worry that I may have peaked too early. But as daylight stretches well into nighttime, the trees are heavy with lush foliage, and the countdown to the residency's end is almost finished, I still wake up every morning in Villa Jaffé thankful to be here.



DER CLUBRAUM  
ARWED MESSMER

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Arwed Messmer, 1964 in Schopfheim geboren und aufgewachsen, studierte ab 1987 an der Fachhochschule Dortmund und 1990 an der HGB Leipzig Fotografie. Seit 1992 arbeitet er als freiberuflicher Fotograf, primär im Feld des Dokumentarischen. Ab 2007 entwickelte er einen neuen Arbeitsschwerpunkt, die Recherche, Bearbeitung und Neukontextualisierung gebrauchsfotografischer Bildkonvolute aus öffentlichen Archiven im Sinne einer künstlerischen-bildarchäologischen Praxis. Entstanden sind umfangreiche Ausstellungen und Publikationen zum Ostberlin der 1950er-Jahre, zur Berliner Mauer, zu den Archiven der Staatssicherheit und zum westdeutschen Linksterrorismus. Arwed Messmer erhielt zahlreiche Preise und Stipendien, wie den Otto-Steinert-Preis der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie (1996) und Arbeitsstipendien des Berliner Senats (2001) und des Kunstfonds (2016, 2023). Mit dem Stipendium „Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie“ (2015) entwickelte er die Arbeit *RAF – No Evidence* über den westdeutschen Linksterrorismus, die er 2017 im Museum Folkwang und 2019 als Finalist beim Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize in der Photographers' Gallery in London präsentierte. Ende 2023 erschien sein jüngstes Buch *TIEFENENTTRÜMMERUNG. Der Traum vom Reich* bei Spector Books, Leipzig. – Adresse: Rheinsberger Straße 16, 10115 Berlin, Deutschland. E-Mail: arwed.messmer@gmail.com; mail@arwedmessmer.de.

Als *photographer in residence* bat mich Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger im Namen des Wissenschaftskollegs um einen Konzeptvorschlag für die Gestaltung der beiden Holzgetäfelten Wände rechts und links vom Haupteingang des Clubraums. Dieser Raum, zugleich Lese- und Ort für geselliges Beisammensein, beherbergt die Präsenzbibliothek des jeweils aktuellen Fellowjahrgangs.

Im Frühjahr 2023 betrat ich diesen Raum zum ersten Mal. Ich besuchte das Wissenschaftskolleg, um vorab organisatorische Fragen zu klären. Dort saß ein Mann, von mir abgewandt, im zarten morgendlichen Gegenlicht. Die Situation blieb in meinem Bildgedächtnis hängen. Später erinnerte es mich an ein unspezifisches Medienbild des Wirtschaftsfunktionärs und ehemaligen SS-Offiziers Hanns Martin Schleyer, der 1977 von der RAF entführt und ermordet wurde. Vor Jahren hatte ich dieses Pressefoto in Schleyers offiziellem Nachlass in Hohenheim bei Stuttgart in den Händen gehabt. Der Clubraum mit seinem gediegenen Interieur erinnerte mich an (fiktive) repräsentative Räume des Bundesverbands der Deutschen Industrie.

Inspiziert vom Wiedergänger Hanns Martin Schleyers in der Bibliothek, entschied ich mich, einen Auszug aus meiner Archivarbeit *RAF – No Evidence* zu zeigen: acht Fotografien, die zusammengesetzt die Zellenbibliothek Gudrun Ensslins in Stuttgart-Stammheim reprografisch abbilden. *RAF – No Evidence* thematisiert die Geschichte der ersten Generation der RAF mit fotografischen Bildern der Ermittlungsbehörden, aus der (Bild-)Perspektive des Staates und nicht durch die bekannten Medienbilder. Die Arbeit verweist dabei immer auch auf das Medium selbst und versucht, die nicht intendierten Bildüberschüsse, die dieses Material erst in der Rückschau preisgibt, sichtbar und lesbar zu machen. *RAF – No Evidence* ist keine zeithistorische Arbeit über die RAF: Das Buch und die begleitende Ausstellung zeigen Bilder jenseits der kanonischen Aufnahmen dieses Konflikts. Zugleich haben sie eine bildethische Dimension: Sie werfen die Frage auf, welche Aufnahmen gezeigt werden dürfen, wie sie präsentiert werden können und warum wir sie sehen sollten. Letzteres rührt an einen zentralen Punkt in der Debatte über Bilder, die einerseits historische Dokumente sind, andererseits ihre eigene Ästhetik und ein großes, kaum steuerbares Potenzial für die empathische Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichte aufweisen.

Die gezeigten Aufnahmen wurden am 18.10.1977 im Rahmen einer Tatortdokumentation von Polizeifotografen des LKA Stuttgart angefertigt. An diesem Tag wurde die RAF-Terroristin Gudrun Ensslin tot am Gitter des Zellenfensters hängend aufgefunden. Zeitgleich nahmen sich die ebenfalls einsitzenden RAF-Terroristen Andreas Baader und Jan-Carl Raspe gemeinsam das Leben; Irmgard Möller überlebte schwer verletzt. Kurz zuvor war die Entführung einer Boeing 737 der Lufthansa durch palästinensische Terroristen der PFLP-SC, einer Abspaltung der Volksfront zur Befreiung Palästinas, auf dem Flughafen von Mogadischu spektakulär gescheitert. Die Entführung sollte der Freipressung der Stammheimer RAF-Mitglieder dienen. Der ein paar Wochen zuvor entführte Hanns Martin Schleyer wurde kurze Zeit später im Kofferraum eines Pkw tot aufgefunden.





Durch unerlaubte Weitergabe kam das Magazin *Stern* in den Besitz eines Teils dieser Aufnahmen und veröffentlichte sie in einem Artikel am 30.10.1980. Für seinen Zyklus „18. Oktober 1977“ bediente sich der Maler Gerhard Richter einiger dieser Motive, etwa dem des Schallplattenspielers von Andreas Baader. Diese wenigen bekannten Motive gehören zum kollektiven Bildgedächtnis der Deutschen. Auch wenn viele dieser Fotografien Bilder des Grauens sind, erlauben sie doch einen Blick in den Alltag der Inhaftierten von Stammheim, in die Literatur, die sie lasen, und die Musik, die sie hörten. So ist in diesen Fotografien die Gewalt der Zeit eingeschrieben, die der Terroristen wie auch die des Staates.

Die acht Aufnahmen der beiden Bücherregale entstammen einem größeren Konvolut von knapp 700 digitalisierten Negativen, das vollständig indexiert in Form eines Folianteils ebenfalls im Clubraum auslag und die Herkunft des Materials nachvollziehbar machte. Die zwei jeweils vierteiligen, fast drei Meter hohe Montagen erfassen die Zellenbibliothek von Gudrun Ensslin in der Justizvollzugsanstalt Stuttgart-Stammheim in Gänze. Sie orientierten sich an der tatsächlichen Größe der Regale, wurden für ein paar Monate prägend für den Clubraum und boten Stoff für teilweise kontroverse Gespräche. Am Abend der Farewell-Party wurde dort vor der Zellenbibliothek sogar getanzt. Die Frage, ob das in ethischer Hinsicht vor diesen Bildern nicht problematisch sein könnte, hatte sich niemand mehr gestellt. Die Bilder gehörten am Ende offensichtlich dazu.

Die Abnahme meiner Bilder am 15. Juli 2024 war meine letzte Handlung am Wissenschaftskolleg, nachdem ich mich von den Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern verabschiedet hatte. Es war ein fast ritueller Akt. Der Clubraum erhielt damit seine Eigenständigkeit zurück.



THE LUCKY LIST  
ERIKA LORRAINE MILAM

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In February 2024, I crossed paths with an improbably happy person. He delighted in meeting new people, was captivated by his research, and reveled in intellectual exchange. Over a conference dinner, he said he would take his conversations from the last few days and add them to his Lucky List. What's a lucky list, I asked? He said it was a written record that he kept of all the good things that happened to him. I then imagined him, in a rare glum mood, skimming it to cheer himself up. Hmm. When I returned to the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin* a few days later, I started my own.

Perusing that list now, I see how my spring was filled with the joys of traveling and connecting with people in person. COVID has not gone away, of course, and I remain consciously grateful for the opportunities that a year in Berlin afforded and the intimacy of regular shared meals with friends. I relished knowing that when I arrived in the restaurant at 13:00 on Wednesday I would be greeted by a festival of salads. In March I recorded my glee over the lengthening days and the returning light. By April, I had noted my fond affection for three walking routes that wend away from the Wiko: the downhill slope to the dog beach in the Grunewald, the quiet trail that almost encircles the Hubertussee, and the path that leads around the Halensee. Their twists and turns through the changing seasons mark my memories of the year's passage. Measured by the kilometers covered on these walks and hours spent in fruitful conversation, my time at the Wiko was a reality check I had not known I needed.

My memories of the year are filled with convivial laughter echoing through the spaces of the Wiko. The extra touches were everything. The statuesque flowers in the entrance each week, the abundance of seasonal ingredients at dinner, scrumptious desserts at every meal, tote bags to help you carry your books from the library to your office (and back), warm smiles, thoughtful questions, and ingenious solutions to any problem that came up, all lubricated by an infinite supply of coffee. Thanks to the sense of camaraderie that developed over my time in Berlin, I found my footing again after the pandemic. I want to convey my sincere gratitude to the community of Fellows and the warm, dedicated staff who craft this Wiko magic each year anew.

When researching my book, *The Hyena & the Jay: Long-term Research and the Birth of Behavioral Ecology*, I hoped it would take me away from a human-centric view of animal life, allowing me to explore how scientists wrote about animal behavior as an end in and of itself. In earlier books, I explored the origins and consequences of zoomorphic conceptions of the human – as advanced in evolutionary models of sex or violence – as a means of exposing the dangers of over-biologizing life's dramas. I had been especially keen to give visibility to moments in which lessons from the study of animal behavior were applied to humans, sometimes with dehumanizing consequences.

When *Creatures of Cain* was published in 2019, I was already looking for an intellectual antidote to accounts (including my own) of theories about animals and fossils that spun out of control in colloquial accounts of human nature. I started my current research project because I wanted to see for myself the places where scientists turned their observations of animal behavior into data and then into theories and papers and grants, long

before the public became aware of their findings. How did they forge decades of data on generations of marmots, dolphins, baboons, scrub jays, and more? As global landscapes have changed as a result of shifting climates, patterns of land use, and human-animal interactions, these data are needed more than ever. In addition to being extraordinarily well-cited within ecology, publications from long-term studies contribute disproportionately to ecological policy making. Given their success, I wondered, why did they end at all?

As I explored the history of these long-term studies in behavioral ecology, all of which started after the Second World War, I came to meet a group of scientists who saw an individual animal's behavior as emerging from the complexities of its ecological interactions, and who wrote for each other rather than the reading public. Through interviews and conversations with ecologists and populational biologists I have also come to appreciate the multi-generational dramas that have unfolded over decades of observations – genealogies of animals and of the biologists who have studied them. In these site visits and interviews, I realized that all of these projects started as short-term trials and, through a series of serendipitous events and changes in perspective and planning, slowly expanded to long-term projects. I had been asking the wrong question, I realized – instead of wondering why some long-term projects had to end, I began exploring why scientists' expectations had changed such that these projects had become potentially infinite archives. Put another way, when had closure become tantamount to failure?

In scientific terms, long-term projects provided a means of seeing the social behavior of animals embedded in a complex web of kin relations and environmental conditions. In humanistic terms, these were dynastic tales! When confronted with a changing environment, behavioral ecologists demonstrated how yellow-bellied marmots, spotted hyenas, scrub jays, and other animals exhibit species-specific behavior and also behave in ways that must be attributed to individual temperament. When different individuals are confronted with similar situations, some respond consistently with more or less aggressive reactions, are more or less wary of novelty, or are more or less likely to take risks or explore new territories. That elephants have distinct personalities will come as no surprise to any reader, but even smaller animals, like red squirrels or marmots, have individual temperaments too.

Understood in this way, I have become intrigued by the possibility that animal behavior as modeled in these projects did indeed provide a corrective to reductionism. When behavioral ecologists drew on the animals they studied as sources for understanding the

behaviors of humans, and even our natures, they did so with a greater appreciation of the uniqueness and variety of the individuals they follow, as well as their lifetime experiences.

Being at the Wiko reinforced the importance of place in the generation of knowledge, not just for scientists but also historians. Certain kinds of places – truth spots in the language of Thomas Gieryn – are transformed into trusted sites where generalizable knowledge about the world is generated. Place constitutes an essential tension in ecology, as each ecosystem is unique, and yet its study provides lessons about how ecological systems work in general. When behavioral ecologists study a group of animals for multiple generations, they generate immense quantities of data. The animals' behaviors are ephemeral, made manifest through the transformation of immaterial phenomena into numbers and narratives. Their task and mine are not so different. And historians, like ecologists, find some places are more conducive to knowledge production than others.

Indeed, the magic of the Wiko as a place and a community of scholars made my year productive in unexpected ways. I drafted two papers unrelated to my current book project – one on a mid-twentieth century American artist named Thomas Cornell, the other developed the idea of “soft demarcation” in the sciences. With Etienne Benson and Banu Subramaniam (Wellesley College), I co-organized a conference generously hosted by the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. The papers of the conference will eventually be published in *Osiris* as “Abundance and Loss: Historical Narratives of Diversity and Nature,” but you'll have to stay tuned until 2027 to read them. Most useful for my book, over the course of the year I gave seminars on each of the chapters of the project that I was still in the process of conceptualizing – that is to say, all of them after the first. I am thus delighted to be finishing the year with a good sense of each of the major pieces and how they all fit together.

Looking back at my list, it ends much as it began with sincere appreciation for friends, conversation, and long walks through the Grunewald.



## WIKO UND SOLIDARITÄT KATERYNA MISHCHENKO

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Kateryna Mishchenko ist Autorin, Verlegerin und Kuratorin aus Kyjiw. Sie studierte Deutsche Philologie an der Kyiv National Linguistic University, wo sie später kurz als Dozentin tätig war. Danach arbeitete sie als Übersetzerin, unter anderem von literarischen und kulturtheoretischen Texten, und war Mitbegründerin der Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Gesellschaftskritik *Prostory*. Parallel dazu war sie als Dolmetscherin für die deutsche NGO Connect plus e. V. tätig, die Fortbildungs- und Aufklärungskampagnen zu HIV/Aids in der Ukraine durchgeführt hat. Seit 2014 ist sie Verlegerin im unabhängigen Verlag Medusa. Ihre Essays sind in internationalen Zeitschriften, Anthologien und als Buch erschienen: *Ukrainische Nacht/Ukrainian Night* (2015). 2023 erschien der von Katharina Raabe und Kateryna Mishchenko herausgegebene Band *Aus dem Nebel des Krieges: Die Gegenwart der Ukraine*. – E-Mail: kat.mishchenko@gmail.com.

### Wiko

Es ist mein dritter Jahrbuchbericht aus dem Wissenschaftskolleg, was sehr ungewöhnlich ist. Leider nicht ungewöhnlicher als die Zeit und die Umstände, unter denen meine Aufenthalte dort möglich wurden. Die ersten zwei Texte sind Erfahrungsberichte über meine Arbeit, die nur vom Krieg definiert wurde. In diesem Beitrag bin ich auch präsent, aber weniger; stattdessen tritt das Wiko selbst in den Vordergrund, als Institution, die mit ihrem eigenen Konzept der akademischen Solidarität auf den Krieg in der Ukraine reagiert hat. Ich meine die Gründung des (V)UIAS – (Virtual) Ukraine Institute for Advanced Study. Die Klammern sind meine. Sie implizieren die Hoffnung, dass das Virtuelle nur vorübergehend die Form des wissenschaftlichen Miteinanders bestimmt.

Ein kurzer Exkurs: Nur in so einer künstlichen Oase wie dem Wiko – und im akademischen Jahr 2023/2024 waren die Menschen besonders toll und entgegenkommend – kann man sich innerlich vom Horror erholen und Kräfte sammeln. Die Gastfreundschaft hat einen unglaublichen Wert.

Die Nachrichten vom 7. Oktober und die Bilder der darauffolgenden Verwüstung von Gaza versetzten mich sofort zurück in die ersten Monate der russischen Invasion, zu Gedanken an einsame Menschen nach der Gewalterfahrung, an Menschen in belagerten Orten. Auch zu den Gedanken an die Einsamkeit der Opfer, obwohl die Verbrechen gegen sie ähnlich und die Täter strategisch verbunden sind.

Das Wiko reagierte auf diskursive Affekte rund um diesen Krieg mit intellektueller Würde und wurde zum Ort einer offenen und kritischen Diskussion und eines menschlichen Dialogs. Dafür und für die Gastfreundschaft dieser Jahre werde ich immer sehr dankbar sein. Ich bin auch froh, die Ideen, Wärme und Freundschaft einiger Menschen aus dem Team in mein weiteres, „Wiko-vertriebenes“ Leben mitzunehmen.

#### Solidarität

Als Fellow aus der ersten Kohorte des VUIAS wurde ich damit betraut, bei der Eröffnung der neuen Institution, die in Berlin stattfand, eine Rede zu halten. Einige Gedanken aus der damaligen Rede möchte ich hier wiedergeben. Sie mögen heute, im dritten Jahr der Großinvasion und bei allen heutigen Weltunsicherheiten, richtiggehend wirklichkeitsfremd erscheinen. Aber jeder Neubeginn schlägt einen Bogen zwischen dem Utopischen und dem Realistischen. Und dem utopischen Impuls möchte ich hier Raum geben.

Ich möchte mit der Idee der Solidarität anfangen und kann dabei die politische Erfahrung der ukrainischen Gesellschaft des letzten Jahrzehnts nicht unerwähnt lassen. Damals, während der Maidan-Proteste in Kyjiw, wurde die Offene Universität Maidan ins Leben gerufen. Auf einer kleinen Bühne im Herzen der Revolution kam eine vielfältige Gemeinschaft von Intellektuellen zusammen, um Vorträge, Vorführungen und Diskussionen anzubieten. Bei dieser Initiative handelte es sich nicht nur um Wissenstransfer, sondern um eine Wiedergewinnung des Wissens als gesellschaftspolitische Kraft. Es kommt immer wieder vor, dass eine emanzipatorische Welle den Anspruch hat, die Rolle des Wissens für die Gesellschaft neu zu definieren.

Wie sieht es heute im Kontext des andauernden Kampfes der Ukraine um ihre Souveränität und ihr Überleben aus? Seit der russischen Invasion haben die Ukrainerinnen und Ukrainer im In- oder Ausland viel Solidarität erfahren. Die akademische Welt ist da

keine Ausnahme. Von der Aufnahme vertriebener Akademiker und Akademikerinnen über das Neudenken der Rolle der Ukrainistik innerhalb der Slawistik bis hin zur Organisation von Maßnahmen zur Bewahrung des ukrainischen Kulturerbes – diese konkreten Formen der Solidarität prägen ein neues Verständnis der Ukraine.

Doch Solidarität ist nicht nur ein Akt der Unterstützung, sondern auch eine Praxis der geteilten Vorstellungskraft. Solidarität gedeiht, wenn Menschen „gemeinsam denken“ und Räume schaffen, in denen sich Ideen überschneiden und weiterentwickeln können. Ein solches gemeinsames Denken erfordert mehr als virtuelle Verbindungen; es erfordert eine physische Präsenz von Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern in der Ukraine.

Es geht um die transformative Kraft der Nähe und die Bedeutung der Einbindung der Ukraine in die breitere intellektuelle und kulturelle Welt Europas und darüber hinaus. Der Platz der Ukraine in Europa muss über die bürokratische Integration hinausgehen; er muss ein Raum sein, in dem gemeinsames Wissen und gemeinsame Forschung ermöglicht werden. Vielleicht ist sogar eine institutionelle Imagination mit konkreten materiellen Auswirkungen notwendig. Zum Beispiel der Zugang zu den globalen wissenschaftlichen Infrastrukturen und Möglichkeiten.

Das Wissenschaftskolleg solidarisiert sich durch die Schaffung einer neuen Institution in der Logik des gemeinsamen Denkens und Bauens. Eine solche Solidarität könnte auch die Basis für den viel beschworenen Wiederaufbau sein. Wiederaufbau in dem Sinne, dass die bestehenden ukrainischen Institute, Archive, Labore und Bibliotheken in der fernerer Zukunft wiederbelebt oder gestärkt werden.

Im Krieg haben auch viele Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler ihr Leben verloren. Nun sind diese Tatsache, diese Verluste und Abwesenheiten unser Erbe. Welche sind die Möglichkeiten des Gedenkens? Beim Lesen einiger Nachrufe ist mir aufgefallen, dass für die Verstorbenen die Popularisierung der Wissenschaft eine wichtige Rolle spielte. Dies war unter anderem eine Möglichkeit, ihre prekäre finanzielle Lage zu verbessern.

Der prekäre Status der Wissenschaft und der Forschenden in der Ukraine ist manchmal unsichtbar, aber immer spürbar, immer da. Und heute sowieso. Die Veränderung dieser Lage und die erwähnte Popularisierung der Wissenschaft sind zwei Grundlagen für die Demokratisierung der Wissenschaft und des Zugangs zum Wissen.

Die Dunkelheit der jetzigen Zeit ist heikel. Aus einer gewissen zeitlichen Distanz mögen die Ukraine-Enthusiasten wie naive Optimisten erscheinen, die irgendwelche

Strukturen für die neblige Zukunft planen. Aber verwandeln wir den Optimismus in Realismus, indem wir davon ausgehen, dass die Idee des UIAS ein wichtiger Schritt zur Schaffung eines neuen Raums des Wissens und der akademischen Integration der Ukraine ist. Hinter dieser Idee stehen konkrete Menschen, deren Wille und Inspiration mich stärker machen und anspornen.



AT THE CROSSROADS OF ERDENER  
AND WALLOTSTRASSE  
ÉRIC MONNET

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Éric Monnet is Director of Studies at EHESS, Professor at the Paris School of Economics, a member of CEPR (Centre for Economic Policy Research), and scientific advisor at the CEPII. He was an economist at the Banque de France from 2013 to 2019. He has published numerous articles on the history of the international monetary system, public debt, banking crises, financial markets, and the financing of long-term investment in France and Europe in the 20th century. His work also focuses on the history and current issues of central bank policies. His research in economic history has won awards from the Economic History Association and SUERF/UniCredit, among others, and in 2021 he was awarded the prize for best young French economist (*Le Monde – Cercle des économistes*). His recent books include: *Euro, les années critiques* (2015), *Controlling Credit: Central Banking and the Planned Economy in Postwar France, 1948–1973* (2018), *L'Europe: du marché à la puissance publique?* (2024), and *Balance of Power: Central Banks and the Fate of Democracies* (2024). – Address: École d'Économie de Paris, 48 Boulevard Jourdan, 75014 Paris, France. E-mail: eric.monnet@psemail.eu.

The year at Wiko exceeded all my expectations, and not just because of the quality of the meals, the beauty of the place, and the unfailing availability and kindness of the staff. It was a very rich year in many ways. My stay in Berlin enabled me to forge relationships with colleagues from Berlin's universities and think tanks. They have already led to joint projects, exchanges, and lasting working relationships, and will certainly continue to do so in the years to come. It also gave me the opportunity to learn German, enough to read – slowly and not effortlessly – books and newspapers and to consult archives in order to

integrate the history of Germany into my comparative economic history research. The invaluable help of the Wiko librarians and the tranquillity offered by this institution were conducive to pursuing several ongoing research projects and starting a new book on the global history of central banks, as well as an article on German hyperinflation in the early 1920s. The rich and enjoyable discussions with the other Fellows, who come from different disciplines, countries, and intellectual backgrounds, also led to many discoveries and reflections on my research methods, which will undoubtedly influence the way I work in the long term.

On a personal level, I would also like to emphasize that the way in which Wiko's staff welcomed my entire family and helped everyone – adults and children – to integrate into Berlin has also counted for a great deal. This help enabled my partner and me to concentrate on our professional work, relieving us of the usual administrative and logistical difficulties associated with moving house. It was also a prerequisite for our full integration into Berlin life, which remains an unforgettable experience that has enriched each and every one of us.

When I arrived in Berlin, I knew that the city was home to a number of economic historians, particularly at the Humboldt-Universität under the leadership of Alexander Nützenadel and Niko Wolf, with whom I had already met and with whom I would be able to develop and maintain fruitful relationships. I was not disappointed and met a very active research group, to whom I was able to present my research. I have invited two doctoral students from this group to spend a few months at the Paris School of Economics next year, in the hope that this is just the start of a more sustained long-term relationship between the economic history groups at our two institutions.

I also found opportunities to talk about economic history at the Centre Marc Bloch, where Jakob Vogel invited me to take part in a workshop on the history of taxation and I was later invited to give the inaugural lecture, and at the Freie Universität, where I had the chance to meet Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, professor emeritus but still active, whose help was invaluable and decisive in navigating through the literature on the history of German hyperinflation. At the FU, the encounter with Sebastian Kohl, a sociologist also working from a quantitative history perspective, was just as decisive. Our shared interest in the comparative evolution of European financial systems in the 20th century will lead us to submit a proposal for a Franco-German research project soon. Steffen Murau, who is a young research group leader in political economy at the Global Climate Forum and the Freie Universität, also has a strong interest in financial history and the history of the

state, which has fuelled our many stimulating discussions. I was happy to help him organize a workshop in March 2024 on the monetary financing of the Nazi economy by the central bank, which brought together a large number of experienced and young researchers from the vicinity, confirming that Berlin is indeed a major meeting place for economic history and political economy in Europe today.

Benjamin Braun is a key figure in the revival of political economy in Germany and Europe, and his presence in Berlin the same year as me was an exceptional opportunity to strengthen the intellectual and institutional links between economic history and political economy, while continuing our friendly discussions on the evolution of central banks and financial systems. The fact that I was able to invite Jens van 't Klooster to Wiko for several days further strengthened the pre-existing links – which, for the time being, have crystallised in Berlin – within this new group of European researchers wishing to rethink the relations between finance and the State.

This revival of political economy within academic research is taking place in Berlin in close connection with think tanks, in particular the Global Climate Forum, the Forum for a New Economy, the Dezernat Zukunft – of which I officially became a fellow during the year – the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), and the new Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Berlin directed by Moritz Schularick. These think tanks already have strong links with each other – just as they interact with economic policy administrations and academic research. Participating in their activities this year (by presenting my work or taking part in conferences and informal discussion groups) enabled me to gain a better understanding of German economic policy while giving me the pleasant feeling that I was witnessing the emergence of a revival of European thinking in political economy and macrofinance.

My travels through economic history seminars and Berlin economic policy think tanks were often in close companionship with Harold James, who was also a Fellow at Wiko this year. Wiko is obviously the place to meet people working on very different subjects, but I won't hide the fact that it was a pleasure to have another economic historian specialized in finance and monetary policy as a Co-Fellow, especially since Harold has contributed so much to this field of research and shares his knowledge with uncommon generosity. Our discussions with him and his wife Marzenna James, as they wrote together the history of the Polish central bank, were a structuring element of this year, and often a way of introducing me to the history of Germany and Eastern Europe. I benefited greatly from the special welcome given to Harold and me by Thomas Fricke and Moritz

Schularick who, on several occasions, invited us to exchange views with other colleagues, journalists, and specialists in German politics and economic history.

It was of course by learning German, thanks to the energy, patience, and *savoir faire* of Ricarda Brücke and then Eva von Kügelgen, that I was also able to improve my knowledge of the history and economics of contemporary Germany. My progress in German and my stay in Berlin gave me the opportunity to finally begin a research project I had been thinking about for a long time on German hyperinflation in the early 1920s. A few visits to the Bundesarchiv in Lichterfelde, discussions with German colleagues, and Stefan Gellner's invaluable help with bibliographical work and press analysis enabled me to lay the foundations for a study of the causes of German hyperinflation and thus reopen the long-standing controversy between monetary theory and balance of payments theory (in other words, whether the main responsibility for hyperinflation lays with the German government's monetary financing or with the constraints of the reparations imposed by the Allies). Reopening this debate a few metres from the place (at the crossroads of Erden-er and Wallotstraße) where Walther Rathenau was murdered in 1922 is undoubtedly an irony of history. The assassination of Rathenau, Germany's Foreign Minister at the time, in June 1922, is often considered one of the main destabilizing events leading to the hyperinflation. The opportunity offered by Wiko to invite Miklos Vari, with whom I am working on this project, for several days was also decisive.

Most of my research over the year has focused on the history of central banking. I pursued two quantitative research projects, initiated before my arrival at Wiko, that aim to collect the balance sheets of central banks in order to trace their activity and measure the economic effects of their operations. At the same time, I started working on the research project I had submitted to Wiko, which aims to write a global history of central banks since the beginning of the 19th century. This project makes use of a number of quantitative sources but is mainly a comparative and institutionalist history that aims to study how central banks have played a part in the creation and evolution of modern states. The year at Wiko was ideal for taking a step back and thinking about the project as a whole, rather than reducing it to its economic and financial dimension. Presenting it at the Tuesday Colloquium (and at Humboldt-Universität) and discussing with other Fellows how to integrate the history of law, the history of colonialism, global history, and the history of the diffusion of knowledge will prove crucial to the final version. This book has yet to be completed, but it is clear that the form it will take would have been quite different without the thoughts, confrontations, and discussions offered by this year in Berlin.

For all these research projects, the help of the librarians at Wiko, the quiet atmosphere of Grunewald, the opportunity to discuss with colleagues at Wiko or in Berlin, and to invite my co-authors were all invaluable. Attending the Tuesday (and Thursday) Colloquium every week, and preparing my own by thinking about those I had seen before, was a particularly rewarding and demanding experience. Presenting one's research to an audience of non-specialists who are nonetheless well-versed in academic codes and scientific methods, including some willing to question the fundamental interest of the social sciences, meant returning to the questions at the basis of one's disciplines, methods, and research subject. Suddenly not being able to take things for granted, or to play with symbolic legitimacy tricks, was an uncommon experience of intellectual stimulation and scientific challenge. I think that the lectures that helped me most to reflect on my own research work were those that were furthest removed from my research subjects. It is by listening to novelists, musicians, or biologists that an economist like me is led to ask himself most directly – and perhaps brutally – the question of the meaning of economics and economic analysis. These Tuesday mornings were undoubtedly a typical Wiko experience: a place of extraordinary material and intellectual comfort and freedom, paradoxically conducive to the most profound re-examination and questioning, far removed from one's usual comfort zone.



A TIME THAT I DID NOT REALIZE  
I NEEDED  
STEFANY MORENO-GÁMEZ

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Stefany Moreno-Gómez is a postdoctoral fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Originally from Bogotá, Colombia, Stefany received her BSc from the University of the Andes and later moved to Europe, where she completed the Erasmus Mundus Master Program in Evolutionary Biology. She then carried out her doctoral research at the University of Groningen and ETH Zurich, where she studied how bacteria cope with antibiotics and communicate with each other using quorum sensing. Currently, her work focuses on understanding the role of the microbiome on human health, and her ongoing projects explore how dietary and host-derived glycans shape the ecological and evolutionary dynamics of the gut microbiome. – Address: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Parsons Laboratory, 15 Vassar St, Cambridge MA, 02139, USA. E-mail: stefany@mit.edu.

I had the wonderful opportunity of joining Wiko in 2023 as a recipient of a generous award, the John Maynard Smith Prize, from the European Society for Evolutionary Biology. This was the last year that I could activate my fellowship at Wiko, and since I was in the midst of my experimental projects back in Boston, I tried to negotiate a later start date and even considered not taking this opportunity – looking back I am so glad that I did take it.

From the very first week that I arrived in Berlin, I had two impressions that solidified over time. First, everyone at Wiko was willing to go above and beyond to make us feel at home. Vera, Francisco, Sophia, Stephan, Pit, Maike, Nina, Petria, Eva, Daniel, Katharina, and Barbara, thanks for accommodating my multiple requests and for all the wonderful and insightful conversations about everything from German academia to football. Some

of the best memories I have from my time in Berlin were the myriad of lunches and dinners that we shared together with the other Fellows. In my opinion, the restaurant was the soul of Wiko and nobody could have done a better job than Dunia and her team (special mention to Manu) of making sure that good conversations always happened while enjoying truly delicious food.

Last but certainly not least I would like to thank Jana for all the work that she does to make sure that the Fellows of the College for Life Sciences can profit as much as possible from the Wiko experience. Jana, thanks for all your advice and endless initiatives – I hope I can impress Robert with my German skills next time we meet.

Second, it quickly became clear that this stay would offer a different experience from what academia usually looks like for me. While it was occasionally challenging to keep up with the discussions (especially during some Colloquia where Google became my greatest ally), in the few months that I was there, Wiko offered me the opportunity to engage with a very wide breadth of topics: from the social dimensions of hairdressing to the art of making hard decisions, the brain circuits for spatial navigation, and the history of long-term projects in ecology. Casual chats with my Co-Fellows over a meal or a glass of wine were often full of insights that helped me to grasp better how their disciplines work and what type of questions and approaches move them forward. These interactions also inspired me to take a more historical angle when introducing my project during my Colloquium – I am glad to have done this, since the discussions and exchanges that followed my presentation were some of the highlights of my time at Wiko. For this and all the fantastic interactions that I had I can only thank all my Co-Fellows and say that I hope our paths cross again in a not so distant future.

While engaging with academics from different disciplines was at the core of the Wiko experience, it always felt great to go back to known territories. Eva, Iveren, Arjun, and Ismaila, thanks for being a little family to me while I was in Berlin. I look forward to continuing our friendship and seeing how your careers develop in the coming years.

Finally, I could not end this memoir without a special mention of the city of Berlin. I think there could not be a better setting for a place like Wiko – a city full of contrasts where the past and present constantly intersect. I hope to be back at some point. For now I will just cherish the memories of some of the best months of my academic career.



WIKO FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF  
SOMEONE WHO ALMOST DID NOT GO  
(BUT IS GLAD HE DID)  
JULIANO MORIMOTO

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I am a biologist, born and raised in Brazil, who, after finishing my BSc in Biological Sciences at the Federal University of Paraná, was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue my PhD – or “DPhil” – at the University of Oxford. In 2016, after completing my PhD in Zoology, I moved to Australia for four years to research the role of nutrition on physiology and health, using insects, mice, and humans as models. I first worked at the University of Sydney and then at Macquarie University. In January 2020, I relocated to the UK, specifically Scotland, where I began my independent research career as a Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen. Two years into my independent career, I was promoted to Senior Lecturer, the position I held when I joined the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Wiko) as a College for Life Sciences Fellow for five months. Before Wiko, my research focused on interdisciplinary approaches to modelling and gaining a deeper understanding of complex biological processes, such as how animals respond to their diet and environment. But things changed after Wiko in ways that I could not have predicted. – Address: Institute of Mathematics, University of Aberdeen, Fraser Noble Building, Aberdeen, AB243UE, United Kingdom. E-mail: [juliano.morimoto@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:juliano.morimoto@abdn.ac.uk).

Before I dive into the details, I just want to mention that throughout this text, I list some of my Fellows by name while others are not explicitly mentioned. This was not done out of preference, but because I had to limit the text. I could write pages listing every Fellow with whom I interacted during my time at Wiko, but that would defeat the purpose of this text, which I hope provides an accessible narrative of what Wiko means to me. I am deeply grateful to all the Fellows and the Wiko staff, and I hope this short text gives the

reader a glimpse of my sincere gratitude for the opportunity and trust bestowed upon me during my fellowship.

Having said that, I almost didn't come to Wiko at all. One week before boarding my flight, I had an email ready for the Wiko staff, calling the whole thing off. It felt like too much. We had just had a baby – who was about six months old at the time of my departure from Aberdeen – and we had never flown with our son before. I was sleep-deprived, and my wife and I were sceptical about Germany for several reasons. Both of us had lived in Germany before, she in Hamburg and I in Hanover. Berlin is different, I was told by those who had been there. But I am, for lack of a better word... peculiar.

And it wasn't just the location; it was the logistics of the whole thing, too. Most Fellows started in autumn 2023, but I arrived at the beginning of spring 2024. They had almost half a year to socialize and get to know each other, while I would be parachuted into an already-established social group as an outsider, forced to socialize with academics, no less. The idea of sharing lunch every day with a bunch of stuck-up academics made death sound like a prize.

Everything seemed overwhelming.

But therapists worldwide charge good money for clichés like “face your fears,” so we decided to embrace the cliché. We planned and stressed over it for weeks, and after many bad decisions on how to get to Berlin, we arrived on a rainy day at Villa Walther. We were welcomed by the Wiko staff, whom I anonymize here because I did not seek formal consent, and Germans are obsessed with their privacy (although Germans also use social media, so it's a living paradox). It took time to settle in. We were tired. I missed my home. My baby missed our home. Genetics is amazing that way. But despite all this, we decided to walk it off on our way to the supermarket.

On our way back, my wife and I talked about how impressed we were with the accommodation. It was spacious and very well equipped. Sounds like an Airbnb advertisement, but it's true. We had everything there – more so than we have at home. The baby, who was learning how to crawl, loved it. Up and down the corridor he went. This is one excellent thing about Wiko: *we are taken care of by people who genuinely care about us and our well-being*. This is extremely rare in academic contexts, at least in the ones I've experienced. The accommodation was within walking distance of the main Wiko building, where meals, offices, and colloquia take place. Pretty handy if you ask me – depending on where in the world you come from, it's a privilege to be able to walk to your office in the morning next to the lake.

Monday arrived, and I was nervous. It felt like walking to my first day of school, which is ironic because, as an academic, I experience a “first day of school” at least twice a year. The walk was long, full of thoughts and anxieties. I was walking to my first-ever shared lunch with my fellow Fellows, even though I had no idea who they were, where to go, or what to do. This is perhaps something that Wiko could improve: *helping us understand how to navigate Wiko situations*. It may have been different for those who were there from the start, but for me, who was teleported to Wiko in the middle of the academic year, a bit more instruction on what to do and where to go would have made my anxiety more manageable.

It just so happened that at the gates of Wiko, I found another equally lost soul – another Fellow of the College for Life Sciences who, like me, was arriving and starting that day too. “Hi, I’m Lara,” she said – it was Lara Puhlmann. Search the books – she also wrote one of these. I don’t know what she wrote, but I’m sure it’s great. I clung to her like a tick on a dog. She had been there before, is German, and is much more skilled in social situations. In other words, she was my lifeline. I mention this not only because Lara is amazing and I love her, but also to illustrate one of the most important points that Wiko offers, which I found nowhere else: *the genuine opportunity to meet interesting people*. Everybody at Wiko is at the top of their fields. This means that everyone is interesting if you give them a chance to tell you a bit more about themselves. I found this to be very true, at least in my Wiko cohort. I cannot think of anyone there from whom I did not learn something.

Imagine me, from a city that almost nobody knows, having the chance to sit and have conversations and dessert with people like Michal, Erika, Tom, Marta, Jean, Barbara, Henk, Debora, Marcelo, Andrew, Melissa, Alisa, and Artem, among others. Getting to know them better – their lives, their approaches to their work, their way of thinking, their strengths and weaknesses – just makes you admire them more. And while you do, you have the chance to grab a chair, sit, and share a meal or coffee with them virtually every day. How crazy is that? That is what Wiko does well: *it makes room for us to meet the people behind the achievements*. That can go either way, of course. But if you are as lucky as I was, your cohort will be almost as amazing as mine.

Importantly, what this cross-pollination of thoughts and ideas does to you is magical. If you are even a “wee bit” willing to let your work be influenced by others, you will find that Wiko is an exceptional place to reach flow. More than that, you can even spend hours and hours sitting outside discussing what flow actually is, how people in different fields experience it, and what ideas we can share to try to achieve flow more often in our careers.

That I did with Mart\*in, whose advice on how to unleash my creativity beyond my academic career has had – and will continue to have – impacts on how I do my work and how I live my life. By the way, if you hate this text, blame Mart\*in, as he encouraged me to write more. You could also learn how to think about absence, like I did from the way Barbara Prainsack approaches her work and her world. Or *all the endless different perspectives that you can be exposed to only in an environment like Wiko and nowhere else*. In this sense, Wiko is an intellectual utopia.

But not everything is perfect about Wiko. The fact that it ends is obviously one of these things. But also, the psychological pain of not continuing to have that influx of new ideas and perspectives is understated. Mind you that Wiko brings people from all over the world and across disciplines. This means that, if you hit it off with someone, you might not see that person again for a long, long time (or ever). Yes, Zoom and WhatsApp exist to make our technocratic lives better, arguably, but they are no replacement for the tasty food and daily serendipitous interactions. As I write this text, my Wiko-soulmate Kateryna Mishchenko and I are exchanging messages and planning when and how we can meet again. Alas, it might be difficult to find an event where a Ukrainian writer and a Brazilian biologist can both attend – maybe that’s why I am writing.

I was told that some previous Fellows, when writing this text, complained about mundane things like noise and food. At first, I was surprised. What ungrateful person could complain about this intellectual paradise? But on second thought, I reminded myself that sometimes, academics are special in their own way. In my opinion, Wiko is exceptional. Yes, a few things could be done differently to attract other colleagues. For instance, the compulsory lunch is sometimes disruptive to work and, for biologists who run experiments, makes Wiko almost impossible to reconcile with an empirical project. Or perhaps a more flexible timespan for Fellows of the College for Life Sciences who could afford to spend more than five months there (although I was told I am eligible to apply for a full-term fellowship, so this would give me the chance to experience Wiko twice; please don’t change that just because I mentioned it).

Overall, I had a great time at Wiko, and so did my family. My son learned how to walk, which I attribute to the ample opportunity for trying in our spacious flat. My wife and I are seriously considering Germany as a future home. I have new collaborations and mentors who already had major impacts in my career development. And I am desperately searching for any opportunity that will allow me to go back to Wiko because it is such a special place, and I hope it remains the intellectual utopia that it has been to me.



PNEUMA  
PALLAVI PAUL

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Pallavi Paul is a filmmaker, film scholar, and artist based in New Delhi. Her practice explores cultural histories, questioning the limits of speculation, facticity, and evidence. Paul examines the concepts of the archive, the tensions between document and documentary, and the implications of the trace of factual events within these frameworks. She holds a PhD in Film Studies from the School of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her film, *The Blind Rabbit*, premiered at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 2020. Paul's work has been exhibited in venues including the Tate Modern, London (2013); the AV Festival, Newcastle (2016, 2018); Beirut Art Centre (2018); the Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (2019); the Contour Biennale, Mechelen (2017); and the New Alphabet School, HKW, Berlin (2020). In 2024, she participated in the exhibition *How Love Moves* in the Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, which explored the intersections of love, breath, and collective experience. During her fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, she engaged in explorations surrounding the cultural and emotional significance of breath in contemporary contexts. Her project *Pneuma* examined the challenges of representing breath within cinematic frameworks, fostering dialogues that bridged artistic practice and scholarly inquiry. Pallavi Paul investigates the connections that shape human experience, aiming to foster dialogue and understanding through her films and artistic projects. – Address: 389, Nilgiri Apartments, Alaknanda, India. E-mail: paul.pallavi@gmail.com.

In reflecting on my three-month fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I contemplate the intricate interplay between breath, existence, and the communal fabric of our experiences. Engaging with the project *Pneuma*, I have come to understand breath

not merely as a biological function, but as a significant cultural and emotional signifier that has assumed heightened relevance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global events.

### *The Breathing Body in Crisis*

Throughout the past few years, the act of breathing has transitioned from an overlooked physiological process to a poignant emblem of life, resilience, and collective identity. The pandemic underscored the fragility of our existence, rendering the act of inhalation and exhalation both a personal and a communal affirmation. My time at Wiko facilitated deep explorations of this concept, allowing me to engage with fellow scholars who grappled with the implications of breath in a world marked by profound uncertainty.

Moreover, my fellowship coincided with significant global events that permeated my thoughts and artistic explorations, notably the invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war in Gaza. These crises served as a backdrop to our discussions, reminding us of the urgency of our work and the interconnections between personal experiences of breath and the collective struggles for existence, dignity, and freedom. This awareness heightened the stakes of our inquiries and infused them with a sense of immediacy.

### *Collective Dialogues and Intellectual Nourishment*

Central to my experience were the seminars and informal discussions, particularly the shared lunches with my cohort and invited guests. These gatherings provided fertile ground for intellectual exchange, enabling us to explore the nuances of our respective projects while cultivating an atmosphere of camaraderie. The diversity of thought represented in these interactions became a vital source of inspiration, challenging me to reframe my understanding of breath as a relational act interwoven with love and connection.

One particularly memorable event was the screening of *The Blind Rabbit*, organized at Wiko. The attendance of my Co-Fellows created a vibrant space for discussion, and the rich post-screening Q&A offered an invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas outside of a strictly academic format. This experience underscored the importance of informal dialogue in fostering a deeper understanding of our work and its implications.

### *How Love Moves: A Collaborative Exploration*

My engagement in the exhibition *How Love Moves* epitomized the generative potential of collaborative practice. This project offered a platform to interrogate the intersections of

love, breath, and lived experience. As we assembled narratives and artworks, it became evident that love – like breath – serves as an invisible yet omnipresent force binding us together. This exhibition compelled us to confront the complexities of human emotion and relationality, revealing how our shared vulnerabilities become sources of strength in times of crisis.

During my time at the Gropius Bau, I felt incredibly supported by the Wiko team. A highlight was the studio visit, where my colleagues came to my workspace to celebrate the opening of *How Love Moves*. Their presence not only bolstered my confidence, but also fostered a sense of community that transcended the boundaries of our individual practices.

### *Institutional Collaborations and Future Anchors*

The Wissenschaftskolleg has also opened up avenues for meaningful institutional collaborations, including partnerships with the Schering Stiftung, the Berlin Museum of Medical History, and the Gropius Bau. These connections have reinforced Wiko's role as a vital cultural anchor in the city, positioning it as a space where ideas flourish and cross-disciplinary dialogues take place. As I prepare to leave Berlin, I recognize that this institution will continue to anchor my thoughts and explorations, serving as a touchstone for future artistic endeavours.

### *The Challenges of Representation*

The endeavour to represent breath within a cinematic framework presents a paradox: how does one visualize the essential yet elusive act of breathing? This challenge resonated deeply within my creative practice. Engaging with the conceptual frameworks introduced by my peers, I experimented with cinematic techniques that evoke the sensation of breath, transforming it into a palpable experience for the audience. The aspiration to create a “breathable cinematic time” emerged from this exploration, aiming to collapse the boundaries between the viewer and the lived experience.

### *Cultivating Community and Intellectual Kinship*

My time at Wiko has been marked by a profound sense of community, characterized by an atmosphere of intellectual kinship and mutual support. The collective commitment to exploring complex ideas fostered an environment where creativity could flourish. The relationships formed during this fellowship will undoubtedly extend beyond my time at Wiko, providing a foundation for future collaborations and dialogues.

*Conclusion: Breathing, Loving, and Creating*

As I conclude my fellowship, I am left with a renewed appreciation of the intricate relationships between breath, love, and community. My engagement with the project *Pneuma* has not only deepened my understanding of these themes, but has also reinforced my belief in the transformative power of art as a means of connecting individuals and communities.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Wissenschaftskolleg's community, where the exploration of breath and love has taken on new dimensions. As I move forward, I carry these insights with me, committed to continuing the dialogue around the vital connections that bind us together. While I may travel away from Berlin, I hope to return, continually anchored by the experiences and collaborations that this city and Wiko have offered.

Thank you, Wiko, for this invaluable experience.



SOME THINGS I'M GRATEFUL FOR FROM  
MY TIME AT THE WIKO  
DAVID PLUNKETT

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David Plunkett is a Professor of Philosophy at Dartmouth College. His core areas of current research include ethics (especially metaethics), philosophy of law, philosophy of language, philosophical methodology, epistemology, and social/political philosophy. – Address: Philosophy Department, Dartmouth College, 6035 Thornton Hall, 19 College Street, Hanover, NH 03755, USA. E-mail: david.plunkett@dartmouth.edu.

When I reflect on it now, I think that my time at the Wiko was one of the most intellectually engaging and productive years I've had in my academic career. I'm truly grateful for having had the amazing opportunity to do this fellowship, and I want to thank everyone at the Wiko who helped make this such a great year for me.

Some of the most important aspects of the fellowship for me were the following.

First, I loved having so many thoughtful, interesting, and kind people around the Wiko to talk with, about such a wide range of topics. These conversations were such an awesome part of the fellowship. I hope to continue many of these conversations in the coming years, whenever and wherever I get the chance to cross paths with people.

Second, it was great having so much time to focus on own research. I took advantage of this time to make progress on a range of papers I've been working on, dealing with a cluster of connected issues about philosophical methodology, epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of law.

Third, I'm happy to have had so many rich experiences with people outside of official Wiko activities (meals, talks, reading groups, etc.). Here, I'm particularly grateful to the running team, everyone who played ping-pong with me (and especially my rival Yanfei,

who stayed better than me the whole year), everyone who went on walks with me, and all of you who joined me to explore museums, concerts, and neighborhoods around Berlin (even when you felt like you should be doing more writing instead...) or who invited me to do so with them.

I want to give a special thanks to the staff at the Wiko. The staff proved to be amazingly helpful and supportive over the entire course of the year. For example, at the start of the year, this included their help with retrieving my lost luggage. Lufthansa had sent one of my bags to a random address in another part of Berlin, without any record of doing so. Maike Schaper and Vera Pfeffer were incredibly helpful and eventually contacted the Berlin police. Olli Kuß and I then ended up successfully tracking down the luggage with the Berlin police using my Apple AirTag that was in the luggage. I'm told this was one of the more interesting luggage stories in the history of the Wiko. And at the end of the year, the staff generously helped me organize a workshop on metaethics and ancient philosophy. This workshop was a bit of an experiment. It brought together philosophers working in these two different subareas of philosophy, who are not regularly in conversation with each other, to discuss work in progress. This workshop was a great success, with lots of interesting conversation over the course of three days. The level of support the staff provided over the course of the entire year, on pretty much every different aspect of life there, was really extraordinary.

There is a lot more I could say about everything at the Wiko. But, as many of you from this fellowship year now know, I strongly prefer talking about life and reflecting on experiences in person, rather than in writing. (And preferably doing that outside, and preferably while walking...) So I'll just leave it at that for now. Thanks again to everyone at the Wiko – and to the other Fellows, and their families – for helping make this such a rich and positive fellowship year for me.



A YEAR OF BEING (AT WIKO)  
BARBARA PRAINSACK

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Barbara Prainsack was born in 1975 in Klagenfurt, Austria. She studied Political Science in Vienna, which she considers her home – despite having spent a good part of her life elsewhere. After holding research fellowships and visiting professorships in San Francisco, Bangkok, and Cardiff during the early 2000s, she moved to London in 2007. She was a Senior Lecturer and, from 2014 onwards, a Professor at the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at King’s College London. Next to Barbara’s academic work, her professional heart beats for policy. From early in her career, she has chaired policy initiatives (e.g. the European Science Foundation’s Forward Look on Personalised Medicine, 2012/13) and served on advisory bodies (e.g. the Ethics Group of the UK’s National DNA Data Database). Following the Brexit referendum, Barbara and her partner Hendrik Wagenaar moved back to Vienna, where Barbara was offered a chair at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna. She leads the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Solidarity (CeSCoS), and she also keeps up her policy-related work. Since 2022, she has been chair of the European Group on Ethics (EGE) which advises the European Commission. – Address: Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Vienna, Austria. E-mail: [barbara.prainsack@univie.ac.at](mailto:barbara.prainsack@univie.ac.at).

Many of us are constantly reminded of the fact that, in academia, there is no such thing as a free lunch. We need to account for our time in ever more detailed ways. Sabbaticals, which were once a time for rest and inspiration, are now seen by many institutions as periods during which academics deliver the research outputs that they cannot find the time for during normal academic life. Research assessments and performance

development reviews require that we explain in detail how our research and teaching contributes to the excellence of our institutions and the employability of our students. In other words, being given time for blue sky thinking is not something that most of us are used to.

It is also for this reason that arriving at Wiko felt like landing on a different planet. It was not merely the beauty of Grunewald in late summer, with shimmering lakes and the promise of eternal bliss lingering in the air while the outside world seemed to go up in flames, that was unsettling. For me, it was also the fact that we would get so many wonderful things without having to return anything specific. At welcome receptions and introductions to the Wiko institutions that we came to love – the library, IT services, the restaurant – we were told the only thing expected from us was to show up for the daily meals with the other Fellows and to participate in the Tuesday Colloquium. Beyond that, the only thing we needed to do is *be here*.

Both of these words, to *be*, and to be *here*, are important. Wiko fellowships come with a residency requirement, meaning that Fellows are not supposed to be away for more than a set number of days during the academic year. While this requirement had a bit of a boarding school ring to it when I first heard it, it quickly became apparent why it is important: Being *here*, and spending time with other colleagues (Fellows, spouses, staff), is what creates the famous Wiko magic. I started to feel it around January. I had come to Wiko with two main professional goals: to write a book that would bring together several years of research on solidarity in various fields of policy and practice, and to write a large grant application. The first I thoroughly enjoyed doing: I think better when I write, and I feel that I never have enough time for it. The grant writing I dreaded. I am not good at it; my success rate with bids for funding is much lower than most of my colleagues'. What nourishes the words in my grant proposals is the sweat of procrastination and discomfort.

One day over lunch in January, I shared my thoughts about grant writing with Andreas Føllesdal. Andreas staged an intervention: I was to write a one-page outline of my proposal and show it to him in three days' time. Not wanting to admit that, while I had made good progress on my book, I had barely written half a page on my grant proposal in over four months, I complied. Andreas' critical yet gentle comments made a huge difference. Seeing that he was quite taken by my idea reframed the situation for me. Instead of hating the prospect that I had to "sell" my idea to funders, I fell in love with my own project. (At the time of writing this report, I have a full draft of the proposal, six weeks prior to the deadline. And I sweat for different reasons than grant writing.)

Being *here* – having meals, conversations, visits to museums and theatres, and watching football games with other Fellows – creates something that cannot be designed. From Iveren I learned a lot about institutionalised forms of solidarity outside state institutions. Josh helped me to better understand the relevance of giving legal rights to nature (my part of this conversation I unfold in my new book). From Luxa, Jeffrey, and Kit, I received the gift of musical performances that affected much more than my ears. Ismaila gave me many insights into the politics and economics of Ghana and some of the best shito I have ever eaten. With Chris, Joel, and Michael I spent many hours in Yiddish class, where we mispronounced the names of animals and practiced our reading skills under trees. Alisa is one of the most perceptive people I know; from her I learned how to be attentive to things I did not even know existed. Over several lunches and dinners, Nils was a great sparring partner, challenging me with incisiveness and humour. Ruth taught me a lot more than philosophy – among other things, how to make swans. From Barbara E. and Harold, I learned about Polish society in the past and in the present. Listening to Andrew taught me that, no matter how hard I try, I will never learn a new language half as fast as he does (not to mention his knowledge about art, history, and culture, which is at the level of a good-sized university library). Niko helped me think about data privacy, democracy, and solidarity; David, Omri, and Kit gave me extremely helpful feedback on my conceptualisation of solidarity. Tetiana was the first Wiko Fellow whom I met, initially only virtually, when she started the group’s WhatsApp group. She was a wonderful and warm presence. As was Erika, who generously shared her knowledge, kindness, and wisdom on many different matters in work and life. With Arwed, Hedwig, André, and Barbara T., I shared a passion for eating (and, for some of us, for cooking) in seasonal style – ranging from wintery stews in Villa Jaffé to discussing politics in the garden in late spring. Stefan, Mallory, Arjun, Éric, Stefany, Tom, Carlos, and Pallavi broadened my horizon in unexpected ways, changing the way I think about time, food, and the role of central banks in contemporary democracies. Spending time with Katya and Juliano lifted my spirits even on the darkest days. To Yanfei, Kirsten, Bin, and Michal, I am grateful for – among many other things – their engagement with parts of my book manuscript, and for sharing tea. With Marion and Bee, I ran a series of workshops that brought together Fellows across all disciplines to share concerns, knowledge, and hopes related to the contemporary state of democracy. Marion and Luxa also led a group of us who regularly visited plays and performances – and sometimes ended up in bars chatting with a director or lead actors. Under Debora and Mina’s leadership, alongside the other members of the Cot Committee,

Martha, Erika, Luxa, Michal, and Yanfei, I helped to create a movie about an incident at Villa Walther (the details of which I will not disclose here. Ask a fellow Fellow). Marcus taught me about music, life, death, and the importance of having the right book cover. With Martha, Michal, Debora, Mina, Claudia, Lara, Jill, Eva, Kirsten, Marion, Hedwig, and many others, I shared stories about the people and things that make a difference in our lives. I thank them for their trust and friendship, and what I learned from each of them. This long list is not even complete: I could say much more about the Permanent Fellows, the Wiko staff, and the spouses, who were a very big part of the Wiko magic.

But let me say a few words also about the *being* part of “being here.” Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had travelled almost constantly. For various reasons, cutting down on travel was one of the resolutions I made during the pandemic lockdowns. My Wiko fellowship was an object lesson in what is to be gained from being in one place for a longer period of time. For the first time since becoming an academic, part of my mind was not still in the place that I just had arrived from, or at the place where I was to go next. At the beginning, this felt disconcerting, as if the outside world had forgotten about me, simply because I was not continuously pulled in different directions. After a few weeks, I came to love and cherish the kind of being that I experienced here, and I hope to take some of it home.

I am quite pleased also with what I achieved academically in this year: a book manuscript that, while still being far from perfect, has come alive. A near-complete grant proposal that still makes my heart race, but no longer from fear. And I am proud that I led a report by the European Group on Ethics on autocratic populism and democracy in Europe, which was published just before the European Parliament election. Being shielded from the constant gaze of accountability, it turns out, can be quite productive.



IN OTHER REALMS  
LARA PUHLMANN

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Lara Puhlmann was born in Berlin, Germany. She embarked on her journey into academia and nerdism by leaving the world's coolest city to finish her high school education at the Hockerill Anglo-European College boarding school in England. Having gotten a taste for the Island and British education, she studied Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London. Her PhD led her back to Germany to the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, where she studied the effects of contemplative mental training on stress biology – a topic that sparked her (still) unwavering interest in stress, mental wellbeing, and the intricate interplay of mind and body. Lara now works at the Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research in Mainz, where she tries to unravel the biological and psychological mechanisms that promote stress resilience. She also holds a Maria Reiche Postdoctoral Fellowship at the TU Dresden. Lara received an Otto Hahn Medal from the Max Planck Society for her doctoral research and has published over 30 articles in peer-reviewed journals including *Translational Psychiatry* and *Jama Network Open*. – Address: RG Kalisch, Research Division “Systemic Mechanisms of Resilience”, Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research (LIR), Wallstr. 7, 55122, Mainz, Germany. E-mail: lara.puhlmann@lir-mainz.de.

*In Other Realms*

“Psychology: from the humanities to the natural sciences” is the title of an introductory essay on the discipline. In some ways, my fellowship as a biopsychologist at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Wiko) felt like a personal rewind of this process: from natural scientist to philosopher and humanities scholar (or rather, humanities apprentice). I came

as an empiricist, modeler, and analyst – and quickly found myself engaged in heated debates about historical, sociological, and artistic perspectives on psychology and beyond. In a way, it was an exercise in returning to the roots of psychology. And I myself felt like something of a wanderer between worlds during this time. A Wiko fellowship is a unique experience in any case, but perhaps especially for a natural scientist. As I reflect on the time I spent in Grunewald, it is already bringing a smile to my face.

When you have a unique and fixed-term opportunity like a fellowship at Wiko's College for Life Sciences, one question naturally arises: how do you make the most of this time? Early on in my fellowship, one of the previous Wiko Fellows shared some wisdom in this regard. In a way, they said, a CfLS fellowship at Wiko feels like the compressed experience of a whole lifetime: it seems unimaginably long when you start, full of possibilities, from immersing yourself in your own project, to trying to get to know everyone else's fascinating work, to going out and exploring all that Berlin has to offer. In the end, you can only ever realize a fraction of these possibilities, and you will have to make many painful choices (including work unread and events unattended – which, yes, truly hurts when you are at Wiko!). And yet, looking back on the fellowship now, it feels like an incredibly rich time filled to the brim with experiences.

I arrived in the late cohort of only four people starting in the second half of the year, which was a bit daunting at first. For a life scientist, Wiko itself can already seem like a strange place. Instead of the hustle and bustle of a wet lab, or the reassuring buzz of an MRI scanner, you find a quiet, focused atmosphere with an exceptionally well-equipped and well-staffed library as the central research facility. I had decided to hold my Colloquium early, right after the start of my fellowship, to introduce myself and my topic to the group. What seemed at first like a baptism of fire ended up being one of the most enjoyable talks I had given in a long time – all thanks to the attentive and appreciative audience of Fellows, who were not holding back on challenging questions about my work, but also my field as a whole. This was the start of a most notable experience for me as a relatively less-senior scholar at Wiko: being the only psychologist in the cohort, I was implicitly given the authority (and responsibility) to speak as the expert of my field as a whole. An equally exciting, humbling, and impossible role. And yet, in navigating it with care (which mostly involved pointing out that I was, in fact, not an expert on xyz), one can grow such so much from being attributed this level of competence and granted this much trust.

After my Colloquium presentation, spring quickly set in, and I settled into a routine of two- to three-weekly morning runs with the running group, long lunches on the

terrace, and even longer discussions about everything from the philosophy of “Sitzfleisch” to topological modelling. Simultaneously, I entered a flow of wonderfully focused work on my project, greatly helped by the overall stimulating and focused atmosphere at Wiko and among the Fellows. Those few months in Grunewald were a time of uninterrupted reading, immense motivation, and inspiration, which generated countless novel project ideas (now all waiting to be realized...). And, of course, there were the other Colloquium presentations and discussions. For me, an unprecedented interdisciplinary exchange that, unsurprisingly, encouraged disciplinary comparison. What perhaps stuck with me the most was the difference in the scope of the questions asked. If the usual questions after a quantitative science presentation are concrete and empirical (“Have you also looked at/ tried this?”), in this more humanistic and interdisciplinary setting, we all faced much broader questions, sometimes addressing the fundamental assumptions of our respective disciplines.

One historian asked me: How can we derive conclusions about individual psychology based only on numbers and empirical analyses, when they are, in fact, merely one source of (limited) information, to be interpreted alongside many others?

And a political scientist made me wonder: How can we do meaningful quantitative research if it is not complemented by qualitative research?

From the very start, I appreciated these questions as a reminder to never forget to think about the science in your field deeply and broadly, including assumptions we must question, and what the point of it all is. Wiko provides a unique space for pondering these big questions, which sometimes feels like the “real” scientific thinking, and no less importantly, for rekindling one’s personal love affair with science, which can get a bit dimmed as the relationship devolves into academic routine.

### *A Brief Analysis of Stress at Wiko*

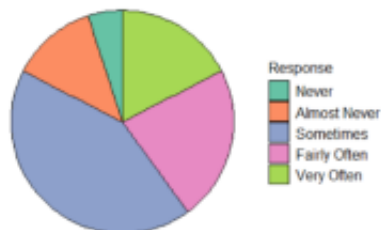
Next to adopting so many new perspectives on my field, I would probably not be a real empirical psychologist if I had missed the opportunity to assess the unique psyche of my Wiko cohort in at least some small way.

Below, I present the results of a short, anonymized survey on stress and coping in February 2024. It appears that even at Wiko, Fellows encounter high levels of private or work-related stress, and at the same time find what they do mostly meaningful and only sometimes overwhelming.

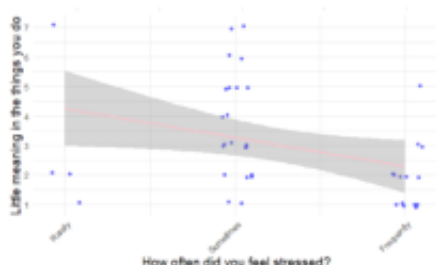
How often do you feel stressed in your private or professional life?



In the past month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?



How often do you have the feeling that there is little meaning in the things you do in your daily life?



**Fig. 1. A deceptive calm?** Results of an anonymous survey of 40 Wiko Fellows and their partners in February 2024. Compared to a sample of German adults,<sup>1</sup> Wiko Fellows and partners are more likely to report being “sometimes” or “frequently” stressed. No Fellow reports “never” being stressed (top left). More than half of the Fellows and partners feel they “sometimes” or “very often” cannot cope with all the things they had to do (top right). At the same time, fewer than a third of Fellows and partners tend towards saying their everyday activities have little meaning “very often” as opposed to “never” (bottom left).

1 “TK-Stressstudie 2021 ‘Entspann dich, Deutschland!’,” Techniker Krankenkasse, published December 1, 2021, <https://www.tk.de/presse/themen/praevention/gesundheitsstudien/tk-stressstudie-2021-2116458>.

Moreover, those Fellows who report seeing more meaning in their daily activities are also more likely to be “frequently” rather than only “sometimes” stressed (bottom right: jittered scatter plot of question 1 [“How often do you feel stressed in your private or professional life?”] and question 3 [“How often do you have the feeling that there is little meaning in the things you do in your daily life?”]); a significant relationship in a logistic regression, with a coefficient of  $b = -0.87$  (SE=0.34),  $z = -2.55$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ).

So, how does one make the most of a Wiko CfLS fellowship? For me, it was all about letting go, trusting and committing to the Wiko process. While a year-long fellowship probably has a cyclical feel to it, the five-month fellowship for me had more of a transformative, process-like character in my work, the social microcosm of the College, and of course, the beautiful surrounding nature. Change is inevitable, but transformation is by conscious choice – at the very least, that should be the choice to not resist it.

The prime source of this transformative and focused energy was undoubtedly the other Fellows. I remain deeply impressed by the level of care and intention that my fellow Fellows put into their work, presentations, and interaction with their colleagues. From my arrival in February, this cohort welcomed me warmly, and I was humbled by the depth of knowledge and creative thinking of these scholars and artists, both within and beyond their personal disciplines. Too many people left a lasting impression on me to name them all – some now cherished acquaintances and colleagues, others dear friends (you know who you are!). But the sum is greater than the parts, and so what perhaps fascinated me the most was the unique atmosphere of inspiration, dedication, mutual appreciation, and general air of care created at Wiko. Certainly, this atmosphere was very much shaped and carried over the years by the Wiko staff. I personally have been drawn to community-oriented projects throughout my life, from small and large flatshares to collectives, but it is safe to say that I did not expect to find such community in the heart of Grunewald, among some of the most outstanding scholars and creatives of their respective disciplines.

More than once, I reflected on how the framework provided by Wiko shaped my perspective on my work and myself. The resources available were truly abundant: daily interaction with brilliant and successful scholars and their networks, from the first coffee to the last glass of wine. Continuous support by the incredible Wiko staff. The comfort of my temporary Grunewald home, from which I walked down three flights of marble stairs, past an embassy, to reach my office in just five minutes. And of course, the kitchen

and restaurant, the undisputed center of our social and intellectual exchange, whose staff looked after us so well (and served us more asparagus in one summer than I have ever, or will ever again, eat in one season). How often do scientists and creatives have access to such rich resources? Surely, these are precisely the ingredients that can elevate one's work, opening opportunities that many do not have access to in this world of unequal distributions. With that in mind, I am humbled by the privilege of having been (and continuing to be) part of such a unique community and institution. And I am truly grateful to all the people who continue to make Wiko possible. It is safe to say that in some smaller and some larger ways, the Wiko experience has permanently changed how I think and work. It is true, then, when they write: The College for Life Sciences is "*not just another fellowship.*"

DEAR WIKO  
THOMAS RICHARDS

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Thomas Richards is Professor of Evolutionary Genomics at the University of Oxford and a Royal Society University Research Fellow. He was an undergraduate student studying Human Sciences at University College London and conducted his D.Phil. studies between the University of Oxford and the Natural History Museum, London. He was previously a Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research Integrative Microbial Biodiversity program, part of the EMBO Young Investigator Program, and a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow. In 2017, he was a Miller Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He has received several research prizes for his work, including the Hutner Prize from the International Society of Protistology, the Berkeley Award from the British Mycology Society, the Society for Experimental Biology President's Medal for Cell Biology, and in 2014 a Philip Leverhulme Award for Bioscience. He currently holds an ERC consolidator grant. Tom's research is concerned with the diversity and evolution of the eukaryotic form, especially microbial forms. Over 1.5 billion years ago, the most important evolutionary transition in the history of life occurred, leading to complex/compartmentalized cellular forms – the eukaryotes. The aim of Tom's research is to understand the evolution and diversification of this form. Tom lives in Oxford with his wife Anna and their two children Audrey and Ben. – Address: Department of Biology, University of Oxford, 11a Mansfield Road, Oxford, OX1 3SZ, United Kingdom.  
E-mail: [thomas.richards@biology.ox.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.richards@biology.ox.ac.uk).

Here we are at the end. Looking back, my plans changed almost entirely. My original plans for the year were to develop infographics (“cartoons that describe foundational

data”) to explain major transitions in the evolution of life. My long-term aim was to write a book that explains the complexity of early evolution in an accessible manner. This was to be my project in later years when running the lab became too much (it is often too much).

The underlying approach was to use the infographics to communicate a grasp of how tenuous some of the data are to illuminate how life evolved 3–1.5 billion years ago – therefore, illuminating the key outstanding questions. The problem was that in June 2023 my lab, working with chemists and biophysicists, discovered something we thought could be quite important for the origins of life. A subject I had not really thought about since my very first scientific job as an intern at a NASA laboratory straight after my undergraduate degree in 2000!

Some months later I sit in the Wiko seminar room and Daniel is telling us to follow our interests and be inspired by the Wiko constellation. We were allowed to depart from our stated objectives! So, I began reading about the origin of life again. I read a lot. Many times, I had to read the same paper over and over again: papers from the 1950s containing long monologues about dinner with Einstein interspersed with conjectures about the biochemical principles of life,<sup>1</sup> and papers from decades later that then proved these conjectures.<sup>2–4</sup> This journey took me to papers from 1906 written in German:<sup>5</sup> a key paper, as it turned out, because it was one of only four studies that had attempted something similar to our experiments (of course using very different experimental approaches). Using the excellent Wiko library facilities, I therefore had the paper translated into English, and inspired by interactions with Erika Milam (Wiko Fellow 2023/2024), I wrote a short

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- 1 Wald G. The origin of optical activity. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 1957;69(2):352–68. doi:10.1111/j.1749-6632.1957.tb49671.x.
  - 2 Bonner WA, Blair NE, Dirbas FM. Experiments on the abiotic amplification of optical activity. *Origins of life*. 1981;11(1):119–34. doi:10.1007/BF00928003.
  - 3 Chakrabarti AC, Breaker RR, Joyce GF, Deamer DW. Production of RNA by a polymerase protein encapsulated within phospholipid vesicles. *J Mol Evol*. 1994;39(6):555–9. doi:10.1007/BF00160400.
  - 4 Matsuura K, Inoue S, Tsuruta T. Asymmetric selection in copolymerization of n-carboxy-l- and -d-alanine anhydride. *Makromolekulare Chemie*. 1965;85(1):145–62. PubMed PMID: WOS:A19656586000025.
  - 5 Nagano J. Zur kenntniss der resorption einfacher, im besonderen stereoisomer zucker im dünndarm. *Pflugers Arch*. 1902;90:389–404.

introduction setting the work in the context of the connections between early-1900s German science and the emerging agricultural sugar industry, publishing this as a preprint.<sup>6</sup>

One of the big problems in biology is to understand why the DNA and RNA used by all known life has right-handed stereochemical structures, while all life uses proteins with a left-handed stereochemistry. It was known that obtaining highly homogenous stereochemical states was a prerequisite for the evolution of DNA, RNA, and amino acid polymers, the constituents of how all known life works. Indeed, polymers cannot form in equal mixtures of left- and right-handed compounds, so DNA can't form genes, and amino acids can't form proteins, unless a hard bias is introduced. Life cannot begin.

So where did this bias come from? Our work had shown a certain type of membrane (the chemical bag that encapsulates cells) generates permeability selection for this exact recipe, providing a scenario that explained how life started. The more papers I read, the more of the puzzle came together. This process was probably the most fun I have had in science.

So here I am at the end of my time with Wiko, the initial paper reporting these findings is under review,<sup>7</sup> and we will have a fight to publish it as the peer review process is long and the reviewers will ask us for additional experiments... a process that is often devastating and always grinding. I was dreading this process as much as I was excited by our results (these two experiences are strongly anti-correlated in the sciences). However, last week I presented these findings at a major conference. As I left the conference session, the head of a major private philanthropy funder in the US came up to me. "That was f\*\*king awesome." We talked and I discussed my fears about the complexity of the follow-up science that will be needed. "We can help you with that."

Sitting on the plane back to Berlin thinking about what I will need to do next for this research arc and for the funding bid I will shortly write, it became clear to me I need some mathematical modelling, specifically to show that the chemical phenomena we were observing could translate into ecological selection (i.e., Darwinian evolution). Where will

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6 Richards TA, McAleer K, Kiliyas E. Translation from German to English of: 'Zur kennntniss der resorption einfacher, im besonderen stereoisomer zucker im dunn darm' by Junzo Nagano. *Cambridge Open Engage*. 2024. doi:10.33774/coe-2024-0jdv-nv2.

7 Goode O, Łapińska U, Glover G, Milner DS, Santoro AE, Pagliara S, Richards TA. Membrane permeability selection drove the stereochemistry of life. *bioRxiv*. 2024:2024.04.23.590732. doi:10.1101/2024.04.23.590732.

I find a mathematical modeller who understands ecological competition... Enter stage right Dr Juliano Morimoto (Wiko Fellow 2023/2024).

This year I also took the mad decision to write a “consensus opinion” review. Reviews, at the best of times, are a major time sink. This year I have had to negotiate with 30 other senior scientists on a set of recommendations on how the field moves forward to understand the evolution of cellular complexity (the origins of the eukaryotic cell). I would not have been able to do this without the time Wiko has afforded me this year. I believe this review will set a key tone for this field, as there will be lots of research activity in this area in the next five years.

At this stage I do not know how all this will turn out. But it has been great fun pursuing it, especially the work on the origins of life. This is not my usual focus, and this work has changed the direction of my research fundamentally. In terms of the original infographics project, this year I have generated some images and done some thinking. I now know what I will need to do and how I will do it for this project, even though it will have to take a back seat. Fundamentally I got distracted. Sometimes it is good to be distracted. I hope to be able to write to tell you in ten years’ time it was worth it and what we are seeing now is of fundamental importance. This is the nature of the scientific journey.

Much love  
Tom

P.S. My kids had the best of years, so thank you so much for that.



## TRANSFORMATIONEN HEDWIG RICHTER

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Hedwig Richter ist seit 2020 Professorin für Neuere und Neueste Geschichte an der Universität der Bundeswehr München. Zu ihren Arbeitsschwerpunkten gehören Demokratie- und Diktaturgeschichte, deutsche, europäische und transatlantische Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert und Geschlechterforschung. 2024 publizierte sie mit dem ZEIT-Journalisten Bernd Ulrich *Demokratie und Revolution. Wege aus der selbstverschuldeten ökologischen Unmündigkeit* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch). Weitere Bücher von ihr sind *Aufbruch in die Moderne. Reform und Massenpolitisierung im Kaiserreich* (Suhrkamp, 2021); *Demokratie. Eine deutsche Affäre. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (C.H.Beck, 2020). Ihre Forschung wurde unter anderem mit dem Anna Krüger Preis des Wissenschaftskollegs zu Berlin ausgezeichnet. Hedwig Richter schreibt regelmäßig für die FAZ, die taz, die *Süddeutsche* und den *Spiegel*. – Adresse: Historisches Institut, Universität der Bundeswehr München, Werner-Heisenberg-Weg 39, 85579 Neubiberg, Deutschland. E-Mail: [hedwig.richter@unibw.de](mailto:hedwig.richter@unibw.de).

Überall war Transformation im denkwürdigen Jahr 2023/2024. Die Ostdeutschen, so las man in den Zeitungen, hatten die Nase voll, allein schon von dem Wort. Vielleicht sollte man einen neuen Begriff suchen? Etwa Metamorphosen? Das triggert nicht so, klingt aber bildungsbürgerlich und ist etwas unverständlich. Oder Revolution? Da schlagen Boomer-Herzen höher, der FAZ-Herausgeber rümpft die Nase, Historikerinnen und Politikwissenschaftler wiegen bedenklich den Kopf, vermutlich haben die meisten schon einen theoretischen Text über „Revolution“ geschrieben.

Am Wissenschaftskolleg war „Transformation“ oft zu hören, als sich das goldene Wiko-Jahr im Sommer 2024 dem Ende zuneigte. „Wie war das Jahr für dich?“, fragten

sich die Fellows. Oft folgte ein Seufzen, schwer, aber auch wohligh – oft gepaart mit der Antwort: Es hat mir so viel bedeutet, es war für mich auch ganz persönlich ein Jahr der Transformation. Die einen hinterfragten ihr Geschlecht, die anderen ihre Heimat (geföhlt 50 Prozent des Jahrgangs, davon die meisten aus dem Ausland, wollen nach Berlin ziehen), die einen stellten ihre Disziplin infrage, die anderen ihre Beziehung. Einige zweifeln sogar an ihrem Beruf in der Wissenschaft und denken darüber nach, ihre alte Institution hinter sich zu lassen.

Und dann die Transformation des Arbeitsprozesses. Wie weit ist das Buch, wie weit das Projekt gediehen? Viele erklären, sie hätten gerne mehr geleistet, aber immerhin, nutzlos sei das Jahr nicht verstrichen. Einige sind zufrieden mit ihrer Arbeit. Ich selbst konnte ein Buch schreiben, in Co-Autorenschaft: über Transformation, genauer: über „Demokratie und Revolution“. Und mein eigentliches Projekt, das über die Hausfrauen, hat nach Beendigung des uneigentlichen Projekts noch Transformationen und Fortschritte erlebt, auch wenn ich längst nicht so gut vorangekommen bin, wie ich gehofft hatte: Die Quellen, für deren Recherche und Lektüre ich noch einige Monate Zeit hatte, zeigen, dass es komplizierter war – natürlich! Die Lage nach 1945 erweist sich als noch anarchischer, die Situation als noch offener als gedacht, diese große – tja – Transformationszeit vom Nationalsozialismus zu BRD Noir war wild und oft radikal auf einen Neuanfang setzend. In der Frauenzeitschrift *Constanze* handelte der erste Fortsetzungsroman 1948 vom Leben und Sterben der Geschwister Scholl. Nachdem die Männer so versagt hatten und die „Männerpolitik“ immer und immer wieder nichts als Krieg und Leid hervorgebracht habe, sollten nun Frauen zum Zug kommen, forderten Publizistinnen und Intellektuelle unterschiedlichster politischer Färbung.

Immerhin schien vieles dafür zu sprechen, dass wenigstens das Familienleben neu gestaltet werden konnte. Angesichts des Frauenüberschusses: War es da nicht vernünftig, in Dreiecksbeziehungen zu leben oder zu „Mutterfamilien“ überzugehen, die vom Staat geschützt keinen männlichen Ernährer brauchten? Solche Fragen wurden weithin diskutiert. Frauen steckten überall in Lohnarbeit, waren unverzichtbar auf dem Bau, auf dem Kohlerevier, in den Büros und Bürokratien ohnehin. Aber alle waren Hausfrauen und mussten das Überleben bewerkstelligen. Kleider stopften sie mit Haaren, weil es kein Nähgarn gab, ranziges Mehl machten sie wieder genießbar, traumatisierte Männer betteten sie in Gemütlichkeit. Der Aufbruch war mindestens doppelbödig, zu viel Altes hatte zu viel Beharrungskraft. Wieder einmal erwies sich die Hierarchie der Geschlechter als besonders robust. Sie begann mit dieser Sorge um den Mann in den

Trümmerwohnungen, setzte sich fort über die viel höheren Lebensmittelrationen, die ein Mann erhielt, während eine Hausfrau trotz Schwerstarbeit nur die niedrigste Zuteilung bekam. Und sie zeigte sich in der Politik, die mit aller Männerherrlichkeit weiterlief, als habe sich an der Geschlechterfront nichts ereignet. Im Parlamentarischen Rat saßen unter den 65 stimmberechtigten Mitgliedern vier Frauen. Die Welt konnte in Flammen aufgehen und Diktaturen vergehen, aber die Geschlechterordnung blieb bestehen. Vorerst.

Doch ganz so klar war es nicht. Auch die Fünfzigerjahre erwiesen sich als uneindeutiger. Frauenzeitschriften und das omnipräsente Radio berichteten durchgehend über attraktive Frauenberufe und informierten über Berufsausbildungen für Mädchen. Zwar tat der Staat so ziemlich alles, um die Hausfrauenfamilie durchzusetzen, und ab Ende der Vierzigerjahre gab es immer mehr – wie man es unironisch nannte – „Nur-Hausfrauen“. Aber schon in den Fünfzigern stellten sich diese Frauen selbst infrage, und von Anfang an wurden sie verspottet. (Also selbst die scheinbar so fest etablierte Figur der Hausfrau der Fünfzigerjahre erlaubte es Frauen nicht, eine unangefochtene Position einzunehmen.)

Die radikale Transformationszeit der frühen Bundesrepublik bis in die Siebzigerjahre war zutiefst von den Hausfrauen geprägt, in ihrem scheinbar zeitlosen Idyll ermöglichten sie überhaupt erst die Transformation; das bestätigte eine Ausgangsthese des Projekts. Allerdings war das in noch mehr Dimensionen der Fall, als ich gedacht hätte: Hausfrauen etwa waren im Zentrum der sogenannten Großen Beschleunigung, die viele für den Beginn des Anthropozäns halten: Der CO<sub>2</sub>-Ausstoß schnellte nach oben, die Plastikproduktion, Tourismus, Erderwärmung, Versäuerung der Meere, Konsum in alle Himmelsrichtungen. Aus der sparsamen Hausfrau, die das Überleben sicherte, wurde der aufgeklärte „Verbraucher“, der die Marktwirtschaft aufblühen ließ.

Ist es professionelle Verengung, überall Transformation zu sehen? So zögerlich sich Geschlechterordnungen ändern, so sehr verschieben sich momentan Normalitäten. Die Demokratie scheint in die Knie zu gehen. Im Herbst 2023 stiegen und stiegen die Werte der AfD, im November diskutierten in Potsdam Rechtsextremisten ihre Deportationspläne. Die Welt wendet sich vom sogenannten Westen ab, er scheint ins Straucheln zu geraten. Putin mordet immer ungestörter die Menschen in der Ukraine und zerstört die Städte und attackiert die europäische Friedensordnung. Das Massaker in Israel am 7. Oktober 2023 legte weiteren Zündstoff ins Gebälk der globalen Ordnungen. Am Ende der Wiko-Zeit heißt es in den Nachrichten, dass im vergangenen Jahr erstmals das Wetter im jährlichen Durchschnitt weltweit über 1,5 Grad im Vergleich zum vorindustriellen Zeitalter lag.

In zahlreichen Projekten der Fellows geht es um Transformationen. Wir haben eine ukrainische und eine russische Autorin, die in ihrer Literatur von dem Schrecken erzählen. Fellows forschen über Artensterben, über die Verteidigung von Menschenrechten, über nachhaltige Demokratiekonzepte, über die Metamorphosen von Narrativen. Nebenbei geht es auch darum, dass etwa eine so kostbare Einrichtung wie das Wissenschaftskolleg weiter existieren kann. In einer Welt der ökologischen Katastrophen, in der der Wohlstand untergraben wird und die bürgerliche Ordnung sowieso: In dieser Welt würde sich die Republik eine solche Institution womöglich nicht mehr leisten – und eine rechtsextreme Regierung könnte ein Haus, das dem Geist und der Nachdenklichkeit, der Wissenschaft, der Offenheit und der diversen Reflexion gewidmet ist, mit Freude und Pomp schließen: Schaut, wir machen ein Ende mit diesem elitären Gedöns.

Eigentlich handelten die Gespräche unter den Fellows nicht erst am Ende der Wiko-Zeit von der großen Transformation, sondern schon das ganze Jahr hindurch. Welche Rolle spielt unsere Wissenschaft in den Transformationen? Kann man sich raushalten und unter Berufung auf eine Neutralität so tun, als ob alles irgendwo anders abläuft? Natürlich auch: Was ist das eigentlich: Transformation? Was bedeuten die Veränderungen für uns als Bürgerinnen und Bürger, als Demokratinnen und Demokraten? Ein großer Teil der Fellows und Wiko-Mitarbeitenden traf sich dann vor dem Reichstagsgebäude, als im Januar 2024 in ganz Deutschland Massendemonstrationen mit teilweise über 100.000 Teilnehmenden gegen die Rechtsextremen und für Demokratie stattfanden.

Das ist erhebend. Manchmal ist die aktivistische Hoffnung auch kläglich und lustig. Und doch schön. Nach der Buchpremiere von *Demokratie und Revolution* in der Schaubühne sprachen wir Fellows noch intensiver darüber: Wie kann man das eigene Leben demokratisch und ökologisch verbringen? Wie wird der Musikbetrieb ökologisch gestaltet? Ich wurde sozusagen zur offiziellen Öko-Beauftragten. Viele wünschen sich ein ökologischeres Essen. Warum ist am Wiko Fleisch der Standard und nicht die Abweichung? Insbesondere die amerikanischen Fellows freuen sich am funktionierenden öffentlichen Verkehr, während die Deutschen darüber klagen, wie wenig Busse den Weg in den Grunewald finden und wie abstoßend die dicken Autos auf den Straßen dort sind. Die meisten Fellows fahren sowieso mit dem Fahrrad.

2023/2024 war ein Jahr der Panik, der Abschiede von alten Normalitäten, der Ängste, der Transformation, der flackernden Ampelregierung, der Autoritären, Trump feiert Auferstehung; die angespannte Europäische Union, ein Jahr der Demokratie, der Erleichterung am Ende mit den Wahlen in Großbritannien und Frankreich. Dass es auch

ein strahlendes Jahr war, dass Transformation so viel Hoffnung und Aufbruch brachte, das liegt für mich wie vermutlich für viele Fellows wesentlich am Wissenschaftskolleg. Der inklusive, liebevolle, warmherzige Fellowjahrgang, erzählte mir ein Fellow, hätte ihm erst die Transformation ermöglicht.

Zum Abschied schenkten die Fellows dem Wissenschaftskolleg tatsächlich einen Apfelbaum. Die Idee hatte kein Theologe, sondern ein Biologe, und die sozialistische Politikwissenschaftlerin legte fest, was auf der Plakette steht: „Bad apples. Fellows 2023/24“. Apfelbaum jedenfalls klingt schöner als Transformation und trägt die Hoffnung schon in sich, aber auch die Dürftigkeit und die Demut.



A REALLY CARING AND INSPIRING  
SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND  
WONDERFUL PEOPLE  
KIRSTEN SCHEIWE

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Kirsten Scheiwe was Professor of Law at the University of Hildesheim from 1999 until 2022, working on law and social policy, particularly family law, social law, legal comparison, law in context, and gender studies. Her approach is historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary. She received her PhD in 1991 at the EUI Florence (on legal models of time regulation and inequalities) and her Habilitation at Goethe University Frankfurt in 1997 (a comparative study of the costs of children and care work in law). She was a Fulbright Fellow and Visiting Professor at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University in 2010; Academic Visitor at the Law Faculty, Oxford in 2014; and Fernand Braudel Fellow at the EUI Florence in 2019. Besides family law and social law, she has published on the development of a social right to early childhood education and recently on the regulation of domestic work and its historical change (*The Development of Early Childhood Education in Europe and North America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, co-edited with H. Willekens and K. Nawrotzki 2015, and “It’s about Time – Gender, Justice and Working Time Regulation in Employment and Care Work,” in Langille/Trebilcock, *Social Justice and the World of Work: Possible Global Futures*, 2023). – Address: Martin-Boyken-Ring 36, 31141 Hildesheim, Germany. E-mail: scheiwe@uni-hildesheim.de.

*Thanks first:* My time at Wiko was very inspiring and supporting. I had already spent awesome sabbaticals elsewhere, but the whole setting at Wiko was very caring, helpful, and enjoyable. The library services were generous and extremely fast, the staff very kind and always ready to help, from small matters to bigger issues, which made it a pleasure to stay there. “No hairdryer in your apartment? No problem, we have another one in our

storage. Problems with the mattress? True, that one was already too old, we'll get you a new one, but it might take two days until it will be delivered." That's the spirit you can see; look at the beautiful flower arrangements in the entrance hall freshly arranged each week, after an early visit to the Berlin central flower market at 6 o'clock in the morning. Not to mention the great provision of delicious food and dealing with all kinds of special requirements. Thank you so much for being cared for and supported so well! And caring for partners is another great achievement of Wiko, far removed from an outmoded and old-fashioned "ladies programme," but directed towards a dual-career model with full access for partners to library and IT services and all the academic activities (caring for the children as well, but that's another subject).

This created an ideal basis for scientific work and exchange as well as for friendship. I was at first very surprised by the advice of Wiko's Head of Academic Programs Daniel Schönflug when he spoke about the organisation of workshops during our stay and recommended us a year without workshops, encouraging us to enjoy research freedom without the usual arduous organisational tasks of scientists. This relieved me very much, and I skipped the workshop I had felt obliged to apply for with an easy heart. I spent the time on other things, supported by the library staff and by discussions with other Fellows. Here are my next big thanks: dear Co-Fellows, and there are some especially dear ones, thanks a lot for sharing ideas and time, and in some more intense discussions on our research interests, for your inputs and inspirations. There were so many interesting and inspiring people, and I am grateful to have come to know you. I sometimes arrived at the limits of my capacity for small talk and for the intake of new information, and I felt like I was somewhat "over-socialising," but seen from some distance I really miss you! I also learned a lot about the less happy and politically difficult or oppressing circumstances from which some of you came or even had to flee, and I feel a strong sense of solidarity with those engaged scholars or artists who continue their work and engagement under very difficult conditions. But not to forget that we also had a lot of fun, brought to special theatre performances or dress performances by Marion Tiedtke and to new music performances by Martin Luxa Schüttler and the aficionados among us, and introduced to new styles of feuilletonistic writing plus haircutting by Barbara Thériault. And we had excellent and impressive Fellow representatives, Hedwig Richter and Andreas Føllesdal, great organisers and initiators.

Enough emotional awards, and now *back to work*: the subject of my research at Wiko was caring and the law, investigating legal regulation and reform proposals around the

question how and why law and social policy should upgrade the recognition of care. Care is often undervalued or invisible, the legal regulation is fragmented and often ambivalent, and an overarching legal approach that expresses care as a central societal concern is missing. This requires a coordinated approach to fragmented policies and regulation – a “care first” strategy is needed in labour law, social and family law, constitutional and international law, and with regard to welfare state provision of services, infrastructures, and social protection. Some international organisations have started to develop policies for recognising, reducing, and redistributing care work, paid or unpaid. In my period at Wiko, a handbook on “caring and the law” took shape that I am editing in collaboration with my Swiss colleague Michelle Cottier and my Austrian colleague Caroline Voithofer. It will appear in spring 2025 as an open-access publication in the Springer Law programme under the title *Handbuch Sorgearbeit, Sorgebeziehungen und Recht* with about 30 contributions. The regulation of paid and unpaid care activities by law and social policy between public and private responsibility, as well as questions of distributive justice, take centre stage. The organisation and interpretation of rights and duties, principles and concepts (the protection of human dignity, the welfare state principle, solidarity, social rights) are examined. The focus is on the care of children and young people as well as of people in need of care. There are connections to social ethics, philosophy of law, social sciences, sociology of law, social policy, and care economics. Besides this handbook, an article on “Caring, solidarity and the law” was published,<sup>1</sup> linking the legal issues around care to solidarity as a legal principle. This article has benefitted from comments and criticism by colleagues at Wiko; special thanks to Barbara Prainsack, Dieter Grimm, Harry Willekens, Michal Kravel-Tovi, Yanfei Sun, Bin Xu, and Hendrik Wagenaar.

If I had had one more wish free (difficult to wish for something in the past), I would have appreciated a stronger focus on law and social policy in areas such as family law and policy, children’s rights, inequalities and antidiscrimination law, etc. – fields that were somewhat underrepresented. Prospective Fellows should apply in thematic groups, would be one answer, but that is not so easy to organise two years ahead when applying. But this is a minor point. Thanks to all of you, thanks Wiko!

I now pass the pen to my husband, *Harry Willekens*, who accompanied me at Wiko. Harry is a lawyer with historical-sociological research interests.

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1 Kirsten Scheiwe, “Caring, law, and solidarity – on the need for reorientation,” *International Journal of Law, Policy and The Family* 38, no. 1 (2024): ebae016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebae016>.

I, Harry, had never heard of Wiko before Kirsten told me she had obtained a fellowship; nor could I have imagined that at Wiko the Fellows' partners would be treated as teacher's pets rather than as unavoidable background noise. I spent the whole year at Wiko, and I am glad I did.

I will not bother the reader with praising the food, the library, or the staff too much, since Kirsten has already done so. The food is great, not only by the standards of universities and research institutes (for that would be very faint praise indeed), but even compared with many restaurants. Being an amateur connoisseur of good wine, I was even more struck by both the abundant presence of wine at the Thursday dinners and by its undeniable high quality. This came as a huge surprise to me, because until now I was under the firm impression that German academic institutions look upon food and drink from the exclusive perspective of the cheapest possible reproduction of labour power. The library services are amazing: I could get used to having my bibliographical desires served within hours instead of within weeks. And the same holds for all kinds of support by the wonderful, ever smiling and helpful staff.

But my main memory of Wiko, I think, will pertain to the way the Wiko culture deals with disciplinary boundaries. I have always thought of myself as very much an interdisciplinarily oriented academic, and I was confirmed in this self-image by lawyer colleagues who considered my research to lie somewhere between the unorthodox and the weird. But I felt nevertheless overwhelmed by the multidisciplinary practised at Wiko. The kind of interdisciplinary work I had gotten used to consisted (only) of historicising attempts to integrate legal and social scientific approaches. In the Wiko talks and in the conversations at the daily meals, the approaches, perspectives, and research questions were as wildly varying as the participants' manners were impeccable. At Wiko I was confronted with artistic, literary, and musical inputs and with facts and arguments from scholarly disciplines I had never encountered in the past. The experience was at the same time exhilarating and baffling. I sometimes felt completely lost in the concepts of the unknown discipline. Sometimes I could follow the argument (or at least I thought so), but I could not for the life of me see why anyone would bother with the research question under discussion. Then there were occasions on which I could very well follow the argument and was convinced the speaker of the moment was getting it wrong. And sometimes I just felt illuminated.



THINK LESS DANCE MORE  
LUXA MART\*IN SCHÜTTLER

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Luxa Mart\*in Schüttler arbeitet als Komponist\*, Performer\* und Medienkünstler\* mit einem ästhetischen Schwerpunkt auf der Rekontextualisierung sozialer, medialer, performativer, biografischer oder körperlicher Gegebenheiten von Musik. Dafür setzt Schüttler gezielt auf eine disparate Klanglichkeit, auf strukturelle Unwuchten und sonische Diversität, vielfach durchsetzt mit popkulturellen Bezügen. Häufig entstehen Schüttlers Arbeiten zusammen mit ausgewählten Verbündeten, zum Beispiel dem Nadar Ensemble, dem Ensemble Mosaik oder dem Trio Catch. Darüber hinaus ist Schüttlers Musik mit zahlreichen renommierten Klangkörpern und auf internationalen Festivals zu hören, etwa dem Warschauer Herbst, Musica Strasbourg, den Donaueschinger Musiktagen oder Wien Modern. Hinzu kommen Publikationen, Radiosendungen, Vorträge, Kurse, Performances, Ausstellungen und Konzerte weltweit. Schüttler studierte Komposition und Musiktheorie an der Folkwang Universität der Künste bei Nicolaus A. Huber und Ludger Brümmer. Stipendien unter anderem am ZKM Karlsruhe und der Villa Serpentara. Seit 2014 ist Schüttler Professor\* für Komposition an der Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart. – Adresse: Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart, Urbanstr. 25, 70182 Stuttgart, Deutschland.  
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Von Brian Eno stammt der Neologismus „Scenius“ als Gegenentwurf zum Begriff des Genies. Gemeint ist der Umstand, dass herausragende Produktionen häufiger als behauptet vom Austausch und der Praxis einer größeren Gruppe geprägt sind, von einer „Szene“. Mir gefällt an dem Gedanken nicht nur die Dekonstruktion des

individualistischen, maskulin-heroischen Geniebegriffs. Eno betont die kaum zu überschätzenden Vorzüge einer positiven, sich unterstützenden Gemeinschaft im Gegensatz zu Konkurrenz und Abgrenzung. Das Wissenschaftskolleg zeigt paradigmatisch die Kraft einer solchen gemeinschaftlichen Umgebung. Für mich war das durchaus eine neue Erfahrung. Bislang erging es mir in wissenschaftlichen und kulturellen Institutionen häufig anders. Viel behauptete Exzellenz, Gängelung und Selbstdarstellung. Wenig Risikobereitschaft, Vertrauen in längere Prozesse oder Bereitschaft zu grundlegender Veränderung. Es liegt in der Natur von Institutionen, dass sie immer ihrer Zeit hinterher sind. Nur ihre Fähigkeit zur (Selbst-)Kritik und zur Erneuerung sichert ihre Legitimität. Eine Institution ist immer nur so exzellent wie der Wandel, den sie zulässt und befördert. Als Museum für Genies macht sie sich überflüssig. Die zehn Monate am Wissenschaftskolleg haben mir auf eindrucksvolle Weise gezeigt: Eine ideale Institution kann gemacht werden. Von diesem Gedanken war ich jedoch zu Beginn meines Aufenthaltes weit entfernt.

Rückblick. Es ist September 2023. Wir neuen Fellows sitzen zum ersten Mal gemeinsam im großen Kolloquienraum. Alle stellen sich der Reihe nach vor. Je näher das Sprechenmüssen an mich heranrückt, desto größer wird meine Aufregung. Mein Unterkiefer zittert, mir stockt die Stimme. Was in schlechtem Englisch aus meinem Mund kommt, vergesse ich sofort wieder. Nichts von meiner Aufregung hat mit den anderen Fellows zu tun, kaum etwas mit dem Wissenschaftskolleg. Das meiste bringe ich selber mit. Meine Angst, zu scheitern, aufzufliegen. Meine Projektion, in solch eine elitäre Institution nicht hineinzupassen. Mein Gefühl, überhaupt eine ganz andere Person zu sein. Ich ahne nicht, wie richtig dieses Gefühl war. Und auch nicht, wie grundlegend meine Verwandlung werden sollte. Jetzt, im Sommer 2024, beim Schreiben dieser Zeilen, kommt meine Unsicherheit zurück. Ist der Einstieg in den Text angemessen für das Jahrbuch? Was wird von mir erwartet? Also Recherche. Ich lese in den alten Jahrbüchern. Je weiter ich in die Vergangenheit vordringe, umso stärker wird mein Unbehagen. Früher scheint alles wesentlich enger gewesen zu sein. Eine Veränderung, wie ich sie in den letzten Monaten erlebt habe, wäre damals vermutlich nicht möglich gewesen, denke ich. Immerhin wird mir durch die Lektüre der Jahrbücher klar: Ich möchte anders schreiben. Offener. Persönlicher. Mutiger, falls es mir gelingt.

Im Herbst 2023 legt sich meine anfängliche Aufregung nur langsam. Die gängige Erzählung am Wissenschaftskolleg betont die Selbstbestimmung und die freie Entfaltung der Fellows. Jenseits von Leistungsdruck und Rechtfertigung. Für mich stellt sich

die Situation zunächst anders dar. Die Exklusivität und das Narrativ von Exzellenz belasten mich. Das Entsprechenmüssen erzeugt bei mir eine andere Form von Leistungsdruck. Was selbstverständlich zum Profil einer solchen Einrichtung zu gehören scheint, lähmt mich in den ersten Wochen. Den unausgesprochenen Codes versuche ich so gut wie möglich zu gehorchen. Ich imitiere die Sprechweisen, wie schon oft in meinem Leben. Ich versuche, schnell zu lernen. Viele Verhaltensweisen sind mir nicht geläufig und schüchtern mich ein. Einmal mehr spüre ich: Ich stamme aus einem anderen Milieu. Es bedeutet für mich Arbeit, die richtige Rolle zu spielen. Den richtigen Ton zu treffen. Mich zu maskieren, auch vor mir selber. Und natürlich lasse ich mir von all dem nichts anmerken. Das gehört zum Spiel, denke ich. Und auch: Das geht bestimmt nur mir so. Später erfahre ich: Anderen ging es ähnlich.

Leicht hätte es zehn Monate so bleiben können. Ein freundlich-distanziertes Nebeneinanderherperformen. Nicht unwahrscheinlich, hätte es nicht entscheidende Brüche gegeben. Wertvolle Widersprüche. Solidarisierungen. Erste Veränderungen vollziehen sich jedoch nur langsam. Zunächst in abweichenden Kolloquien oder in fragileren Einzelgesprächen. In behutsameren Sprechweisen, habituell weniger stark verengt, weniger stereotyp. Einzelfälle von Verwundbarkeit und Zweifel. Die Mehrheit der Gruppe erscheint mir reserviert. Lange habe ich den Eindruck einer auf zehn Monate gedehnten akademischen Konferenz, in deren internationalen Standards ich mich fremd fühle. Einsamkeit.

Dann ein erster einschneidender Moment, nach etwa sechs Wochen. Es ist Dienstag. Ende Oktober 2023. Während der Fragerunde nach einem großartigen, ungewöhnlichen Kolloquium gibt es zum ersten Mal offenen Einspruch gegen männlich dominantes Verhalten. Zum ersten Mal werden maskuline Machtstrukturen adressiert. Sie existieren überall, wenig überraschend auch unter den Fellows am Wissenschaftskolleg. Sie zeigen sich in Dauer und Lautstärke des Sprechens, in körperlicher Präsenz, in Blicken, in Gesten. Viele unauffällige Kleinigkeiten, die in ihrer Summe patriarchale Vorherrschaft demonstrieren. Der deutliche Einspruch gegen zu viel männlichen Redeanteil lenkt den Blick auf diese Aspekte und löst Diskussionen aus. Das Thema wuchert weiter und ich werde stark davon erfasst. Auch mein Unbehagen während der ersten Wochen hatte viel mit maskuliner Performance zu tun. Mit der von anderen, aber vor allem mit meiner eigenen. Das wird mir jetzt klar, im Moment der öffentlichen Konfrontation. Dieses Ereignis wird zum Wendepunkt meines Aufenthaltes am Wissenschaftskolleg.

Von nun an beginne ich, die Zweifel und Widersprüche bezüglich meiner Männlichkeit grundlegend zuzulassen. Konflikte mit meiner Geschlechtsidentität sind mir nicht

neu. Sie ziehen sich durch mein gesamtes Leben, haben immer wieder künstlerische und persönliche Krisen ausgelöst. Insbesondere die häufig toxische, maskulin-heroisch geprägte Umgebung der meisten musikalischen Institutionen hat mir viele Wunden zugefügt. Wunden, die auch mit meiner abweichenden sozialen Herkunft zu tun haben. Wunden, die ich mir zum Teil selber zugefügt habe, um mich besser in ein maximal kompetitives Umfeld einpassen zu können. Und obwohl mich diese Themen schon lange begleiten, finde ich erst am Wissenschaftskolleg die richtige Gelegenheit, um daraus radikale Konsequenzen zu ziehen.

Die ersten Monate am Wissenschaftskolleg sind besonders stark von zahlreichen globalen Krisen geprägt. Konkret von den grausamen Ereignissen in Israel und im Nahen Osten. In der Ukraine. Unzählige Gespräche der Fellows kreisen um diese Konflikte. Aber auch um andere drängende Themen wie Klimakatastrophe, Rechtspopulismus, technologischer Wandel. Deutlich wird: Es besteht extremer Handlungsbedarf! Es fehlt weniger an Wissen und Erkenntnis. Vielmehr braucht es die Entschlossenheit, überfällige Veränderungen mit der nötigen Dringlichkeit anzugehen. Dieses Denken mache ich mir zu eigen. Ich wende es auf mich selber an. Ich erlaube es mir! Eine Veränderung des Selbst ist auch eine kleine Veränderung der Welt, denke ich. Das Persönliche ist öffentlich. Ich frage mich: Möchte ich überhaupt männlich sein? Kann und darf ich mich anders begreifen? Ja! Ich traue mich. Ich traue mich, endlich die Person zu sein, die ich schon immer war. Die ich so lange versteckt hatte. Ich beginne, mein eigenes Selbst zu komponieren. Luxa.

Ein weiterer einschneidender Moment. Es ist ein Donnerstagabend im Dezember. Eines der letzten Dinner des Jahres und der letzte Abend des Chanukka-Festes. Das Essen ist beendet, im Restaurant werden die Tische zur Seite geräumt. Die Fellows beginnen zu tanzen. Wir tanzen nicht zum ersten Mal. Doch dieses Mal ist es besonders intensiv. Wieder lege ich auf und zum ersten Mal fühle ich eine starke Verbundenheit zwischen den Fellows. Das Tanzen, die Musik, das gemeinsame Feiern. Zum ersten Mal entsteht eine Gemeinschaft der Körper. Ohne Exzellenz. Ohne Leistung, ohne Erfolge. Nur durch unser Dasein. Wir sind ausgelassen, exzentrisch. Wir liegen uns in den Armen. In dieser Umgebung des Vertrauens fühle ich mich zum ersten Mal angenommen. Angenommen auch in meiner neuen, zart aufkeimenden Identität. Dieses Gefühl wird von nun an immer wieder entstehen. Immer anders. Immer häufiger. Es wird mich wundervoll durch die verbleibenden Monate tragen.

Nun kommt auch endlich mein künstlerisches Arbeiten in Gang. Von Anfang an sollte es in meinen Projekten um diese Themen gehen. Um genderfluides Singen, um Kontrollverlust und Männlichkeit. Theoretisch war alles da. Nur musste es sich zunächst in meinen Körper einschreiben, bevor ich es herausschreiben konnte. Ich musste aus meinem Misstrauen herausfinden. Aus der Ängstlichkeit und der Trauer, die tief hinter den Masken meiner maskulinen Kontrolle versteckt lagen. Den Druck ablegen, meine Exzellenz beweisen zu müssen. Zu einem unbeschwerteren Arbeiten finden. Das gelingt mir von nun an mehr und mehr. Meine Existenz und mein Arbeiten synchronisieren sich.

Am Ende unserer gemeinsamen Zeit schenken mir grandiose Fellows ein T-Shirt. Darauf steht: „THINK LESS DANCE MORE“. Besser kann ich nicht formulieren, wie es mir ergangen ist. Ausgerechnet an einem Ort der Reflexion und Intellektualität gelingt es mir, überflüssiges Denken zu reduzieren. Meine Zweifel zuzulassen und für mich fruchtbar zu machen. Mich grundlegend und nachhaltig zu verändern. Meine Erfahrungen belegen: Das Wissenschaftskolleg ist die ideale Institution. Oder persönlicher formuliert: Die Fellows lassen das Wissenschaftskolleg zur idealen Institution für mein Arbeiten und meine tiefgreifende Verwandlung werden. Und das Wiko unterstützt diesen Prozess auf wundervolle Weise. Erst fingen die Fellows an zu tanzen, dann lassen die Fellows das Wiko tanzen und machen es zu seiner besten Version. Alle haben daran ihren Anteil. Die dort arbeiten, forschen, die zu Besuch kommen. Als Gemeinschaft erzeugen wir die Voraussetzungen für dringend benötigten Wandel: Wertschätzung, Ehrlichkeit, Freundschaft, Mut, Vertrauen. Wildes Denken hat auch mit Zärtlichkeit zu tun.



## THE SCALE OF WIKO PROJECTS CARLOS SPOERHASE

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During my fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I intended to address one main question: What happens when aesthetic artifacts, media, and discourses are scaled up or down? Are such modifications merely superficial in character or do they imply qualitative transformations of the phenomena concerned? Questions of scale have already received some attention in aesthetics, of course, but in a manner that remained rather sporadic and limited to occasional practices of scaling. The ubiquitous practice itself, its history, and its conceptual development had not yet been subjects of profound reflection. To change that, I planned to conduct historical case studies, drawing from a broad spectrum of the arts, showing how individual artifacts respond to scaling. Also, I aimed to develop a theory considering scale not as a lofty idea, but as an operative concept, as a technical activity involving analog and digital practices of scaling up and scaling down.

As it turned out, my project was too large-scale to be completed during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, which is why I downscaled it and focused on just one main aspect of the project: the downscaling of texts. In the present day, practices of condensing and compressing texts have gained great relevance, of course. We currently live in an era of abstracts, summaries, synopses, executive briefs, and elevator pitches. And we can now use artificial intelligence to automatically generate compressed versions of any text too long for us to read. In my re-scaled project, however, I endeavored to show that the compression of literary texts is not just a contemporary phenomenon. Rather, condensed versions of longer works have been laboriously produced since ancient times and indeed enjoyed great popularity ever since. As a matter of fact, the genre of epitome is a seminal example showing that Western literary culture has always operated with forms meant to condense larger amounts of textuality in one way or another. But from the very beginning, there were not only enthusiasts, but also opponents of said genre, who raised strong objections against abridged versions: epitomes simplify a literary work inadmissibly, it is asserted, harm its aesthetic qualities, seriously impair its meaning, or even fundamentally distort its message. These are, of course, exactly the very same objections that are also raised against modes of automated text summarization in current large language model-based applications. In the course of my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, it emerged that there is an undeniable continuity of problematizing textual compression from antiquity to the present, centered on questions of scaling: Is it possible to create “lossless” compressions that preserve all the central qualities of a larger work and just do away with redundancies; or are all compressions “lossy” in the sense that they unavoidably delete some central element of the work?

My project benefited greatly from continuous exchange with the Fellows. Furthermore, I was able to discuss some of my ideas not only in my Tuesday Colloquium on “Compression: On Literature and Its Reductions,” but also in the Three Cultures Forum at the Wissenschaftskolleg on “Artificial Intelligence in Academic Research and Publishing” and at a workshop at the American Academy in Berlin on “Understanding the Historical and Societal Impacts of Artificial Intelligence.” The deeply enriching conversations at these events allowed me to write a book-length essay on textual compression, which was published right after my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg and is now in its second edition (*Kurzfassungen*, Wallstein 2024).

The intensive discussion of matters of scaling also led to the question of whether certain methodological scaling preferences in the humanities structure the perception of our

objects of study. The close dialogue with other Fellows and a reading group with some Fellows led to the conclusion that the “sentence” had unjustly played a subordinate role in our observation of literary, philosophical, legal, and religious texts. Together with Fellow Christopher Wood and Permanent Fellow Juliane Vogel, I organized a Wiko workshop on “Thinking in Sentences,” which was attended, among other people, by current and former Fellows. At the two-day event, we discussed the sentence from various disciplinary perspectives: as a building block of grammar, cognition, and communication, as an element of oral culture and written texts, as a logical structure, as a carrier of knowledge, as a mnemonic aid, as a stylistic device, as a political instrument, and as a component of everyday interaction. We discussed how sentences initiate or conclude thought processes and what role sentence structures play in complex trains of thought. We also debated the possibilities and limits of sentence structures for intellectual reasoning: In what way does the very structure of a sentence enable our thinking and, conversely, in what way does it inhibit the development of ideas and their representation and expression? The workshop proved to be intellectually stimulating and productive. We agreed to reconvene and explore the questions raised in greater depth in a subsequent workshop.

As I am profoundly interested in how *Geistesarbeit* is practically carried out in the present, my stay was also very insightful in terms of observing academic practices at the Wissenschaftskolleg itself. The daily communal meals in the dining hall stimulated reflections on the role of table manners in contemporary society, a topic that I addressed in an essay on “Literary Cutlery Scenes.” The culture of academic debate, especially the discussions following the Tuesday and Thursday Colloquia, raised my interest in the current forms of criticism in academic culture, a question that I pursued in an essay on the problems of academic “feedback culture.”

Of course, the most significant moments at the Wissenschaftskolleg did not find their way into publications: the meaningful conversations and the joint visits to concerts, cinema, opera productions, and theater performances. A particular highlight was the wonderful Theater Club organized by Fellow Marion Tiedtke. Thanks to her, we had the privilege of engaging with celebrated actors and actresses and the unique opportunity to witness the magic of theater rehearsals up close. Her profound knowledge of the realities of contemporary theater has substantially expanded our horizons of what happens on the stage today.



A THOUSAND WORDS  
ARJUN SRIVATHSA

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MY FOUR SEASONS AT WIKO  
YANFEI SUN

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*The Setting*

As the taxi turned a corner, we were greeted by towering oak trees, their leafy canopies casting a soothing coolness. Well-designed villas nestled among the greenery came into

view, including Villa Walther, my residence for the next ten months. Vera, in a light blue dress, was already waiting for us under the shade of a linden tree at the entrance. After putting down my luggage, I began exploring my new home, gazing out the windows at the surrounding lakes. Though the view was partly obscured by leaves, the shimmering water reflected onto the walls, creating ever-changing patterns of dancing light. On the apartment's terrace, I could touch the maple leaves, the warm mid-September breeze slipping through my fingers.

In this idyllic setting of lakes and forests, I was set to experience the four seasons of Grunewald.

If not for the horse chestnuts littering the ground and the slightly yellowed, curling edges of the leaves, September could have easily deceived us into believing it was still midsummer. By October, the linden, oak, and maple trees displayed their seasonal flamboyance against the azure sky. Walking down Winkler Straße leading to the Grunewald S-Bahn Station, Edeka, the pizzeria, the forest, or any other place, I was often mesmerized by the golden leaves of linden trees lining the street, sometimes forgetting the purpose of my trip.

By late October, the air was thick with vapor, and the bright sunny days were behind us. Each day, the trees and bushes in the forest and around the lakes subtly shifted their colors, creating a tapestry of rich, layered hues. Were it not for the frequent rains, this transformation might have seemed eternal. Yet, rain after rain blanketed the gravel road of Hasensprung with a carpet of fallen leaves. Under the dim yellow glow of the streetlamps and shrouded by the dense fog, I felt as though I were traversing a time tunnel, slipping back to the late 19th century.

A few light snowfalls at the end of November finally swept away the remaining brown leaves. With the foliage gone, the bright white of birch bark, the red of shrub branches, and the expanse of the lake became clear. Even the rustling of cattails in the wind had its own charm.

One day in early February, with the cold still intense, I saw the Japanese cornel blooming on the twigs. Following this harbinger of spring, crocuses, winter aconites, Siberian squills, Balkan anemones, snowdrops, glory-of-the-snow, and witch hazels blossomed in succession, as if in a relay. By April, the pace of flowering slowed, and long-blooming flowers took center stage: lesser celandines adorning the ground of the woods, leisurely blooming elderberry bushes, and linden flowers infusing the neighborhood with their sweet fragrance. When we left in mid-July, chicory's blue flowers dazzled our eyes everywhere.

The natural environment here has a kind of little-managed wild beauty. Everything unfolds and intertwines organically. Nettles grow onto the pedestrian paths, but no one seems to mind.

When my thoughts became tangled, when self-doubt seeped in during the long process of writing, or when uncertainty, anxiety, and anger about the world beyond Wiko troubled me, I walked the trails by the lake. The vitality and freedom I found in nature became my source of solace. I watched wild ducks chasing each other, Eurasian coots diving in and out of the water, and swans gliding slowly across the reflections of the sky and clouds. Gradually, I began to see myself through their eyes. Then I found peace.

### *The Community*

While the surrounding natural environment nourishes us, it is the Wiko community that truly nurtures and inspires. The Fellows, hailing from diverse academic backgrounds, age groups, and regions, are each doing fascinating or pioneering work in their fields, and every one of them is quite a character. I always looked forward to the Tuesday and Thursday Colloquia, eager to learn about their work. What excited me most was the Q&A session. With 48 Fellows and their partners, along with Wiko's Barbara, Daniel, Iris, Permanent Fellows, and guests of Fellows, the seminar room was always packed. The range, sharpness, and endlessness of the questions were astonishing. I often found myself wowed by the quality of the questions: "This question is fundamental," or "This question has a novel angle that never occurred to me." Responding to questions from all angles, even the wildly unexpected, not only challenged the presenting Fellows, but also provided a rare opportunity for us to reflect on our own work. Of course, deeper exchanges occurred in the numerous conversations outside the Colloquium, for which Wiko provided ample opportunities.

Some people, like David, have a remarkable talent for forging ties with all sorts of people. He was proactive in scheduling time to chat with every Fellow to get to know their work. I am not as outgoing, and while I had become bonded with some Fellows by the end, there were still a few with whom I never had in-depth conversations, a regret I carry to this day.

Our Rector Barbara described our cohort of Fellows as exceptionally lively. Indeed, I often felt overwhelmed by the number of activities to participate in. Various societies sprang up like mushrooms after a rain, and there were always activities happening. Serious ones included different discussion groups and writing groups; quiet ones included a

meditation group and a film club; active ones included a running club and a monthly dance party (thanks to Luxa, who graciously became our DJ, and Erika, who successfully lured me to dance for the first time in my life). Wiko had an excellent ping-pong room, and these past ten months were the most intensive period of playing ping-pong for me since middle school. My ping-pong pals (especially David) were very competitive, so we usually had heated matches, even squeezing in a few games twenty minutes before the Colloquium. I'm afraid my performance reinforced the stereotype about Chinese people – that every Chinese, regardless of age or gender, is potentially a formidable ping-pong player. By the way, many Fellows participated in acting in a short film directed by Debora with the assistance of Mina and Barbara P. The film serves as a memento of the liveliness of our cohort.

I was constantly in awe of the enormous talents within the Wiko community. Debora, with just an ordinary phone, could transform commonplace moments into something magical; Mallory, during her fellowship, joined an orchestra as a violinist and performed Mahler's Symphony No. 5 at the Berliner Philharmonie. Kit, in his farewell party performance, demonstrated an amazing depth of musical perception and compositional ability.

The Wiko community was also imbued with a strong spirit of solidarity (I am borrowing Barbara P.'s definition of the term here). The turbulence of current events increasingly impacted more and more Fellows, some more profoundly than others. In these challenging times, Fellows extended solace and encouragement to one another. While both were in a similar plight, Debora helped Mina in the most profound ways. Her selflessness touched me deeply.

All this made Wiko not only an ideal academic community but also an ideal human society.

I often feel that Fellows are omnipresent: I caught glimpses of Fellows' books in bookstores, found a Fellow featured in media reports, and had friends excitedly telling me they just attended a lecture by a Fellow. I often ran into other Fellows in various corners of Berlin: on a forest trail, in a restaurant, in the lounge of the Berliner Philharmonie, and on the steps of the Altes Museum. Dear fellow Fellows, I will continue to follow you, and I also hope to bump into you in some corner of the world.

What keeps the Wiko community running so smoothly is undoubtedly the dedication and hard work of the Wiko administration and staff. Barbara and Daniel always lent us an ear, whether for academic discussions or anything else. I will never forget Vera's willingness to go the extra mile during the grueling process of my visa application. The

reception staff were always so accommodating. Anja of the library services approached me on her own initiative and asked if I had any tasks that could challenge her. Indeed, I had one in mind, but it involved searching in Chinese and a lot of background knowledge of Christian missions in China. I was afraid I might end up abusing the library services. Yet, in a week or so, Anja came back with a one-and-a-half-page list of different archives and databases, with detailed comments on each! Once again, Wiko's library services proved it was nothing short of legendary. Dunia, in charge of the kitchen, always with a heartwarming smile, was the anchor of our community. Always super-busy and multitasking, she was the perfect embodiment of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of immense compassion.

### *My Progress at Wiko*

Blessed by the environment and the community of Wiko, from October 2023 to the end of February 2024, I experienced one of the most intensive writing periods of my life. By March, I had finished the manuscript for a book on religious changes in post-Mao China, drawing on two decades of ethnographic work and research. As the Wiko fellowship ended, I received the good news that the University of Chicago Press had accepted it for publication.

Another book project I pursued at Wiko aimed to identify and explain the patterns of how pre-modern empires dealt with religious diversity, comparing 26 pre-modern empires in Eurasia. My presentation of the project at the Tuesday Colloquium in early April was followed by an exceptionally stimulating Q&A session. The challenging questions from historians reminded me of the need to justify and refine my approach. The philosophers Ruth, Andreas, Marcus, David, and Omri, while affirming the significance of my project, provided excellent constructive feedback. Some of them even advised me on how to better respond to challenging questions. I am particularly grateful to Jean and André, whose reminders prompted me to consider more subtle framing and select more suitable case studies. Following my presentation at Wiko, I also presented at the Empire Workshop at the University of Copenhagen, the Max Weber Institute of Sociology at Heidelberg University (where reporting on such a Weberian project allowed me to pay tribute to him), and the Colloquium of History at the University of Freiburg (thanks to André's invitation). After collecting, grouping, and analyzing the questions I have received, and a period of self-reflection and further research, I was ready to continue writing with renewed vigor.

The Wiko fellowship allowed me to connect with the intellectual community of Europe. Several German institutions reached out to invite me for lectures. I also traveled to Denmark, France, and Italy for talks and events. In these places I traveled to and in the events organized by Wiko, I encountered former Wiko Fellows whose scholarship I deeply admire. Realizing that I, too, was part of this distinguished community was something both exhilarating and inspiring.

Needless to say, the experiences and connections I gained through Wiko have become an invaluable part of my journey, which will enrich my work and life for many years to come.



DER SALON IM ALTEN WESTBERLIN  
BARBARA THÉRIAULT

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Barbara Thériault ist eine in Deutschland ausgebildete kanadische Soziologin; Professorin an der Université de Montréal; Übersetzerin von Feuilletons und Miniaturen vom Deutschen ins Französische; Mitherausgeberin von *Siggi, le magazine de sociologie*; ehemalige Stadtschreiberin in Lviv (Ukraine) und Halle an der Saale; Friseurin. Im Juni 2024 erhielt sie für ihr Buch *Abenteuer einer linkshändigen Friseurin* den Forschungspreis Ethnographie der Sektion Wissenssoziologie der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie. – Adresse: Département de sociologie, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-ville, Montréal, QC, H3C 3J7, Kanada. E-Mail: barbara.theriault@umontreal.ca.

Wir standen vor dem Friseursalon, Ludmiła, Jules und ich, in dem ich einen Tag in der Woche arbeite. Drei Soziologen, Kollegen. Während ich auf Kundschaft wartete, plauderten wir über dies und das, unter anderem darüber, ob Männer, die in einer Ein-Eltern-Familie groß geworden sind, eher dazu neigen, einen Bart zu tragen. Steile These. Jules unterbrach unser Geplänkel und sagte plötzlich: „Ich habe mich immer gefragt, wer sind die ganzen Leute, die vor Friseursalons herumhängen. Nun denke ich mir: ‚Das sind vielleicht Soziologen.‘“ Er meinte damit diejenigen Menschen, die ich „die Freunde des Hauses“ nenne, die Kundschaft, die zu jeder Tageszeit im Salon vorbeischaud und die Passanten beobachtet.

Der Salon, um den es sich handelt, befindet sich in einer kleinen, in den 1990er-Jahren gebauten Einkaufspassage eines belebten, noch nicht gentrifizierten Viertels im Norden des alten Westberlin. Darum herum befinden sich ein Schuster, ein Lottogeschäft, ein Restaurant, eine Bäckerei, die einer älteren Kundschaft Blechkuchen und Weißbrot

verkauft, ein polnischer Delikatessenladen, ein Halal-Metzger und ein Supermarkt. Es riecht süßsauerlich nach asiatischer Küche. Vor dem Salon steht ein roter Stuhl, Wegweiser und Werbung zugleich. Er wird gern von älteren Menschen benutzt, die kurz Rast machen oder einfach Zeit totschiagen wollen. Das Hin und Her vermittelt ein Bahnhofsgefühl. So was finden wir herrlich.

An dem Tag war viel Betrieb im Friseursalon. Es war noch voller als sonst. Zusätzliche Stühle wurden nach draußen gestellt. Der Salon expandierte in den Korridor der Einkaufspassage. Drinnen führten die Kundinnen konventionelle Gespräche: „Man muss leiden, um schön zu sein, nicht wahr, Frau Schmidt?“, „Ja, ja“, übliche Floskel. Im Hinterraum schrumpfte der Salon zu einem *safe space*. Eine Frau, die in der Öffentlichkeit ein Kopftuch trägt, wartete, vor männlichen Blicken geschützt, auf das Einwirken der Farbe. Neben ihr langjährige Kundinnen, die nach ihrem Termin eine pafften. Sie beschwerten sich über öfter auftretende Krankheiten und höhere Preise. Ein fröhliches Wettbüro des Leidens. Als zwei meiner Kunden ankamen, begleitete ich sie hinein, um Haare zu schneiden.

Meine jetzige Kundschaft rekrutiert sich aus einer homogenen Gruppe ausländischer Personen aus Wissenschaft und Kunst, die an einem Institut im Westen der Stadt forschen. Dort gibt es Villen, Botschaften, Luxusautos, Bäume und Seen; jedoch keine Kioske, Cafés oder Dönerbuden. Es ist eine Enklave innerhalb einer Enklave, mit ihren Themen und Floskeln (man organisiert nicht, sondern „one curates“ Veranstaltungen, die „fascinating“ oder „spannend“ sind). Ihre Bewohner und Bewohnerinnen kommen zum Salon teils mit Bus und S-Bahn, teils mit dem Auto. Mir fällt auf: Sie freuen sich über den Besuch im Salon. Er ist für sie ein kleines Abenteuer, ein kurzer Urlaub vom Alltag. Wenn sie englisch sprechen, finden es die einheimischen Friseurinnen etwas komisch, denn hier gelten Deutsch und Türkisch als normal.

Drinnen bediente ich meine zwei Kunden und andere gleichzeitig. Viel gibt es nicht zu berichten, da Arbeitskonzentration gefordert ist. Ich spürte Hunger und Durst, die Blase drückte – normal. Es macht aber nicht unbedingt müde. Im Gegenteil: Nach meiner Schicht verließ ich den Laden mit dem Gefühl, dass ich Energie getankt habe.

Seit einiger Zeit fahre ich nicht mehr in den Norden des alten Westberlin, sondern in eine Stadt in Thüringen, unter anderem bekannt durch ihre große Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung für Geflüchtete. An jenem Tag zum Beispiel. Ankunft in Erfurt, dann Weiterfahrt in die Berge. In der Landeshauptstadt löste sich ein Teil der am Bahnhof vertretenen

Gesellschaft heraus. Junge Männer und vereinzelte Menschen höheren Alters drängten sich in die engen Waggons der Regionalbahn. Es duftete wie in einem Barbershop, allerdings Sprachen waren zu hören: Arabisch, Kurdisch, Polnisch, sogar meine Muttersprache, was mich erfreute. Die Zugbegleiterinnen schienen die einzigen zu sein, die deutsch sprachen. Sind sie deshalb so laut und so unglaublich genervt?

Viele von uns hatten anscheinend die Stadt als Ziel, denn die Zuggesellschaft teilte sich wieder: Die jungen Männer stiegen allesamt in einen Bus um, der an den Rand der Stadt fuhr, während ich mich mit zwei älteren, unparfümierten Personen Richtung Altstadt fortbewegte. Dort machten Altersgenossen meiner Wegbegleiter Besorgungen, während andere Kaffee in einer Bäckerei tranken oder auf Bänken saßen und sich austauschten.

Nach einigen geschäftlichen Terminen traf ich mich nachmittags mit redseligen Altansässigen im Café. Wir unterhielten uns prächtig: Ob ich einen Mann habe, wollten sie wissen, meine Integration in die lokale Gesellschaft schon mitdenkend. „Was hat sich hier in der Stadt so in den letzten Jahren verändert?“, lenkte ich ab. Einer von ihnen antwortete gleich politisch: „Früher war es ganz rot ... heute nicht mehr. Ich bin auch kein Fan von Multikulti“, sagte er. Leichte Enttäuschung meinerseits. Auch seinerseits: Ich wohne gerade in der Hauptstadt und besitze zudem keinen Pkw. Wir tauschten trotzdem Telefonnummern aus.

Als sich der Abend näherte, bemerkte ich vier junge Männer vor einem Barbershop. Um diese Uhrzeit gehört uns der Marktplatz allein. Gegen meine Erwartung gibt es in der Stadt einen Ort, ein Restaurant, das bis 23 Uhr geöffnet hat. Menschen im Berufsalter, die tagsüber nicht in der Altstadt zu sehen waren, fanden sich auf mysteriöse Weise in dem Lokal ein.

Am nächsten Morgen presste sich wieder ein Teil der Gesellschaft in die Regionalbahn. Die Mitreisenden waren deutlich jünger als meine neuen Bekannten aus dem Café und die Restaurantgäste, die bestimmt kein 49-Euro-Ticket haben. Am Erfurter Hauptbahnhof angekommen, verschwanden sie in der Menschenmasse.

Nach vierstündiger Fahrt befand ich mich wieder in der Berliner Enklave. Ich fühlte mich unentspannt, erschöpft, hatte Redebedarf. Ich griff zum Telefon und rief Jules, den Soziologen, an.

„Ich war wieder in der Stadt in Thüringen ... Ich bin fertig, körperlich und geistig“, klagte ich.

„Das sagst du immer, wenn du unterwegs auf Feldforschung bist“, bemerkte er zu Recht. „Lange Reise?“

„Kannst du dich an den Salon im Nordwesten Berlins erinnern?“, erkundigte ich mich, ohne auf seine Frage einzugehen. „Wir mochten das Nebeneinander, das gleichzeitige Zusammensein in einem Raum, die gesellige Atmosphäre. Daraus habe ich immer viel Energie geschöpft, aber hier und in der kleinen Stadt ...“

„Deine Kundschaft schätzte auch das lockere Ambiente, im Fachjargon: die ‚Kreuzung der Kreise‘, war froh, mal aus dem Villenviertel rauszukommen ...“

Der Anruf war zugleich Dampfablassen und Umriss einer Vorstellung vom entspannten Leben. Jules hat recht: Einige meiner Kolleginnen und Kollegen am Institut genießen zweifellos die Kreuzung der Kreise im alten Westberliner Salon. Ich musste auch an die Zugbegleiterinnen, die genervten Pendlerinnen zwischen wechselnden Gesellschaften, denken. Kommen sie überhaupt zur Ruhe?



THEATER UND DEMOKRATIE  
MARION TIEDTKE

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Marion Tiedtke ist Dramaturgin und Professorin für Schauspiel. Sie leitet seit 14 Jahren an der Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt den Studiengang Schauspiel. Nach ihrem abgeschlossenen Studium der Philosophie, Germanistik und Geschichte arbeitete sie von 1989 bis 2007 in Festengagements an der Schaubühne Berlin, am Schiller Theater Berlin, Bremer Theater, Bayerischen Staatsschauspiel, Wiener Burgtheater und den Münchner Kammerspielen. Von 2017 bis 2020 war sie Stellvertretende Intendantin und Chefdramaturgin am Schauspiel Frankfurt. Sieben Produktionen, an denen sie beteiligt war, wurden zum Berliner Theatertreffen eingeladen, drei Produktionen als beste Inszenierung des Jahres ausgezeichnet. Als Gastdramaturgin war sie im Schauspiel am Thalia Theater Hamburg, am Schauspielhaus Bochum und den Salzburger Festspielen engagiert, in der Oper bei den Salzburger Festspielen, an der Nederlandse Opera Amsterdam, in London Covent Garden, der Bayerischen Staatsoper München und der Nationaloper Mannheim. Sie ist Mitglied der Deutschen Akademie der Darstellenden Künste und wirkte in Jurys (Gertrud-Eysoldt-Ring, Deutscher Theaterpreis: Der Faust, Mülheimer Dramatikpreis und weitere) mit. Von 2017 bis 2020 moderierte sie regelmäßig eine Redenreihe im Schauspiel Frankfurt (Denkraum) und 2021 bis 2023 im Haus am Dom Frankfurt (DenkArt: Ein partizipativer Diskursraum zu gesellschaftlichen Themen der Gegenwart). Sie publiziert in verschiedenen Fachzeitschriften. – Adresse: Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt, Eschersheimer Landstr. 29–39, 60322 Frankfurt am Main, Deutschland. E-Mail: marion.tiedtke@hfmdk-frankfurt.de.

Schon bei der ersten Vorstellung der verschiedenen Forschungsprojekte unserer fast fünfzig internationalen Fellows entrollte sich ein unsichtbarer Faden, der viele unserer

Vorhaben verband: Das Ringen um die Zukunft unserer Demokratie. Wie sehr dies die kommenden Monate meines Aufenthaltes bestimmten sollte, ahnte ich noch nicht – auch die weltpolitischen Ereignisse trugen ihren Teil dazu bei.

Beim ersten gemeinsamen Dinner konnten wir in spätsommerlicher Schwüle den wunderbaren Garten am Halensee genießen. Sogleich wurde ich von zwei Fellows gefragt, warum man denn über Theater forschen müsse: In den USA habe es keine Relevanz, der Film sei viel wichtiger. Einmal mehr wurde mir bewusst, dass das Theater eine europäische Erfindung ist und seither seine Tradition hier verankert hat. Die älteste uns überlieferte Trilogie 458 v. Chr. ist verknüpft mit der Geburt der Demokratie: *Die Orestie*. Aischylos setzt anstelle der Gewaltspirale, in der Rache auf Rache folgt, eine Gerichtsbarkeit, die von der Verantwortung aller Rechtsmitglieder getragen ist. Dieser Grundgedanke der Demokratie sollte durch den öffentlichen Akt der Aufführung als religiöse und politische Botschaft manifestiert werden. Die Berliner Schaubühne, über deren Anfänge als Ensembletheater ich forschen wollte, hatte sich viele Jahre mit diesem antiken Stoff beschäftigt. Fast ein Jahr wurde geprobt, um dann 1980 eine neunstündige Aufführung der *Orestie* in Kreuzberg nahe der Berliner Mauer zu präsentieren, die anschließend um die Welt reiste. Geblieben ist davon bis heute eine der meistgespielten Neuübersetzungen der *Orestie* als Prosatext durch den Regisseur Peter Stein.

Theater und Demokratie gehören zusammen – das jedenfalls war die Überzeugung der Berliner Schaubühne, als sie 1970 ein erstes eigenes Ensemble gründete. Junge, schon erfahrene und erfolgreiche Schauspieler und Schauspielerinnen wollten sich nicht mehr durch die strenge Hierarchie der subventionierten Häuser und die alte Vätergeneration der Intendanten bevormunden lassen. Viele von ihnen waren geprägt durch die Erfahrungen aus der APO. Von der jungen Demokratie der BRD fühlten sie sich durch die staatlichen Gewaltmaßnahmen der Sechzigerjahre betrogen, daher wollten sie als Privattheater von der Kulturpolitik unabhängig sein und eine antiautoritäre Struktur schaffen, die ein kollektives Arbeiten ermöglicht. Protokolle entstanden – nicht nur Ergebnisprotokolle, die jede Absprache über Neueinstellungen, Gagen, Ankäufe und Ausstattungen belegten, sondern auch Verlaufsprotokolle, die umfangreiche Diskussionen im Wortlaut wiedergaben. Alle sollten über alles gleichermaßen informiert sein, gleiches Wissen für alle, wenn doch alle über Produktionsinhalte und Arbeitsorganisation entscheiden mussten. Die Schaubühne wurde das erfolgreichste Theater der BRD und zog elf Jahre später, 1981, in den damals modernsten Theaterbau am Lehniner Platz. Inwiefern hat die Demokratisierung der gemeinsamen Arbeit zum Erfolg des Theaters beigetragen?

Meine Forschungsfrage wurde schon bald komplexer, genährt von den vielen Kolloquien oder Tischgesprächen. Bee Yun hatte mein Interview mit einem Politikwissenschaftler über die *Orestie* gelesen und war von der Aktualität des alten Textes begeistert, während ich neugierig die Ausführungen von Barbara Prainsack zum Thema Solidarität verfolgte. Arwed Messmers Fotobände mit Aufnahmen aus den Polizeiarchiven zu den Studentenunruhen der Sechzigerjahre veranschaulichten mir eindrucksvoll die Vorgeschichte zur Berliner Schaubühne. Hendrik Wagenaar gab mir Tipps, welche Autoren sich mit den Demokratisierungsprozessen in Institutionen beschäftigten und den Demokratiebegriff genauer definieren. Mit Mart\*in Schüttler besprach ich erste Ideen zu meinem Kolloquium. Schließlich eröffneten Barbara, Bee und ich einen Arbeitskreis zur Demokratie, dessen erstes Treffen am Dienstag vor Weihnachten gleich zeigte, dass sich mit dem Begriff viel mehr als eine Rechtsordnung verband: Demokratie als Haltung, Denkweise, Organisationsform und Erfahrungsraum, der in unserer Öffentlichkeit durch Institutionen und Selbstverantwortung gelebt werden muss. Wie viel Verantwortung jeder und jede Einzelne auch in Hinblick auf die Zukunft tragen muss, um die globale Klimakatastrophe noch abzuwenden, hat immer wieder Hedwig Richter als Demokratieforscherin in die Waagschale geworfen. Zur Jahreswende aber war endgültig klar: Die AfD wird zweitstärkste politische Kraft in Deutschland sein. Viele von uns gingen gemeinsam am 3. Februar zum Reichstagsgebäude, wo über 150 000 Menschen für die Demokratie ein Zeichen setzten. Längst schon nahmen die weltpolitischen Ereignisse von der Ukraine bis nach Israel über Gaza, über Polen, Ungarn und Italien unsere Tischgespräche ein. Zwischen Sorge, Ohnmacht und Verantwortung versuchten wir Stellung zu beziehen und uns zugleich selber kritisch zu befragen, was wir ausrichten könnten. Alisa Ganieva gab präzise Einblicke in die russische Gesellschaft am Rande der Metropolen, wo ein toter Soldatensohn das finanzielle Auskommen einer Familie zu garantieren verspricht. Omri Boehm argumentierte – wie einst Aischylos in der *Orestie* – gegen Gewalt und Vergeltung und für eine Einstaatenlösung, die allein den gewünschten Frieden für die Palästinenser und Israelis bringen könne. Michal Kravel-Tovi berichtete aus Israel, wo ihre Familie in Tel Aviv täglich mit dem Krieg konfrontiert wurde. Mina Akbari und Debora Diniz zeigten uns mit ihren Biografien und Projekten, wie unglaublich viel Mut es verlangt, in autoritären Systemen für das Recht auf Selbstbestimmung einzutreten mit der Konsequenz, die eigene Heimat dadurch verlieren zu müssen.

Während dieser politischen Ereignisse saß ich über den Protokollen im Archiv der Akademie der Künste und verfolgte wie eine stille Beisitzerin aus einer anderen Zeit die

ausgiebigen Diskussionen der damals jungen Theaterkünstler, *warum* man *wie* für *wen* Theater spielt. Wie viel Geduld sie für das gemeinsame Aushandeln mitbrachten, wie viel Vertrauen dabei unter den Schauspielern und Schauspielerinnen entstand – weil das Ziel ein gemeinsames war: die historischen Differenzen der alten Texte zur eigenen Gegenwart auszuloten und damit zeitgenössische Machtansprüche zu hinterfragen. Die Theaterarbeit war ihnen ein Erkenntnisinstrument. Manchmal pendelte ich zwischen den Welten: Wenn ich am Mittagstisch saß und das wunderbare Essen genoss, wanderten meine Gedanken beispielsweise zu den fünf Besen, die der herausragende Schauspieler Bruno Ganz anschaffen wollte, damit das Ensemble seine Garderoben selber sauber machen und das Geld für eine weitere Putzkraft einsparen konnte. Zugleich schnappte ich Schnipsel der politischen Analysen unserer Fellows in englischer Konversation auf, und die Gedanken schwirrten zwischen den Sprachen in meinem Kopf: dieses Ringen um die eigene Standortbestimmung, die Sinnhaftigkeit des eigenen Tuns – damals wie heute. Was können wir ausrichten? Wie die Freiheit verteidigen, Demokratie leben?

Seit Oktober organisierte ich einmal im Monat Theaterbesuche – mal am Deutschen Theater, mal am Berliner Ensemble, an der Volksbühne oder Schaubühne. Das zeitgenössische Theater lotet seine Darstellungsformen aus, seit der Film das psychologisch-realistische Spiel übernommen hat. In einer Zeit, in der durch die sozialen Medien die Performance unmittelbar Einfluss auf die Politik nimmt, versucht Theater das Ungeöhnliche, Überraschende, Kritische der Repräsentation zu erkunden. Wie kann man alte Stücke, zentrale Konflikte, neue Rollenbilder, prägnante Verse in der Informationsflut unserer Gegenwart noch unmittelbar-sinnlich erfahrbar machen? Die meisten Fellows besuchten mit mir eine Probe zu *1984* von George Orwell in der Inszenierung von Luk Perceval, wo sich der Protagonist Winston Smith durch eine raffinierte Bühnenspiegelung als kontrollierter Jedermann im Überwachungssystem vervielfältigte und wir uns als Publikum ebenfalls im Spiegel erkannten. Die Bühne drehte sich auf den Rollen, die nach dem Krieg die großartige Schauspielerin Helene Weigel von sowjetischen Panzern abmontieren ließ. Sie machten sich durch leises Quietschen bemerkbar, ein aufrüttelndes Zeichen in neuen Kriegszeiten.

Ich traf einige Schauspielpersönlichkeiten aus der alten Schaubühnenzeit zum Interview und spürte ihre Trauer und Wehmut darüber, dass das Theater von heute seine gesellschaftliche Relevanz von damals eingebüßt habe – und wie schnell ihre Arbeit doch ins Vergessen geraten sei. Das Primat der Ökonomie hat die hierarchischen Strukturen wiederbelebt, auch der Freiraum des Forschens auf den Proben ist dem Bühnenbetrieb

heute weitgehend fremd. Je mehr den Theatern in den kommenden Jahren das Geld fehlen wird, weil neue Subventionskürzungen drohen, desto mehr werden sie gebraucht. Das ist jetzt schon klar, denn sie gehören zu den wenigen öffentlichen, freien Versammlungsorten, die reale Begegnungen schaffen, wo die Nachrichten aufhören und die Botschaften schweigen, wo das Erforschen, Experimentieren, Zuhören, Austauschen durch die Kunst stattfinden kann.

Als ich im Dezember der Soziologin Barbara Thériault den Forschungsstand meines Projektes vorstellte, wurde ich inspiriert durch ihre eigene Arbeitsmethode: den Blick präzise auf ein Detail zu lenken, einen Erfahrungsraum zu erkunden, sich dem Kleinen zu widmen, um darin das Große aufzudecken. Ihre Texte sind anschaulich, direkt, authentisch, empathisch – frei von einer akademischen Attitüde. Ja, auch wir müssen uns befragen: Wo fängt unsere demokratische Praxis an? Für wen schreiben wir, was reflektieren wir und warum? Nach einer wunderbar ertragreichen Zeit am Wissenschaftskolleg hieß es leider irgendwann, die Koffer für die Heimfahrt zu packen. Mehr als das Doppelte an Gepäck steckte jedoch in meinem Kopf – Eindrücke, Ideen, Anregungen, Hinweise, Begegnungen und Erinnerungen. Eines war aber auf jeden Fall klar: Die Arbeit zu der Berliner Schaubühne in den Siebziger- und Achtzigerjahren muss die Auseinandersetzung mit Demokratie und Solidarität in den Fokus stellen, denn das Ringen darum ist ein Auftrag, der an die Zukunft des Theaters ergeht.



THE GHOST OF I. AND  
OTHER FELLOWS PAST  
CLAUDIA VERHOEVEN

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First thing we arrived at Villa Walther, the kids ran round back and saw the spiral staircase: “There’s a helter skelter here!” I took this to be fortuitous, a sign that at Wiko I might indeed finish writing my book, which was then still titled “Helter Skelter History of the Manson Murders.” That this fortune came courtesy of Wiko magic I learned right after that, from a randomly selected Yearbook on display in the bookcase in our apartment. As the kids continued to explore the yard, I sat on the couch leafing through this book, then flipped to the table of contents and recognized a former Fellow’s name as someone I had met once in my previous life as a scholar of Russian history: “I.” So I.’s was the report I read. And I was horrified.

I was jetlagged. I overstate. But still, I was stunned, and for this reason: I.’s text testified to an experience at Wiko that I imagined I could not possibly end up having. For

example: Somehow – *how?* – I. had in what must have been a very short time after all become part of a circle of friends so good – and by the way, a circle of not just two or three Fellows, but fifteen of them! – friends so good that they all knew that the right way to celebrate one of their own on his birthday was to *all* wear a mask of the German philosopher with whom this Fellow was ostensibly obsessed! Now, true, I. himself seemed not to have been entirely at ease at first: “a month or so” into his stay at Wiko, he had fretted about being “one of the few people here who doesn’t have a bike,” and though he kept fretting, he also kept not having a bike (“there goes I., on foot once again”). However, it turned out that I.’s strangely self-sabotaging behavior was in fact but the necessary condition for the magical intervention of some mysterious “M.,” who bricolaged for I. a bicycle out of spare parts left behind by former Fellows. I.’s sentences seemed suspended in an atmosphere of what I can only describe as a kind of blessed belonging; as if existentially, their author had been *at home* at Wiko, but also as if this being-at-home had been an elevated form of existence. Indeed, I. said as much; life at Wiko “condensed into art,” and he stressed that “even A.” had “confessed that in no other intellectual setting had he felt so known, accepted, and appreciated simply for who he was.” *Even A.!* But me?

\*

At the first lunches and dinners, I (not I.), a historian who mostly researches individual people and singular events, am bamboozled by the billions of bees and brain cells that my fellow Fellows know how to think with, the sheer scale of it all. I feel dizzy.

\*

There are several Fellows here who have a moral clarity I wasn’t sure existed anymore. Others whose grace and kindness astonish me. The exiles repeatedly leave me speechless.

\*

“I cannot be as [fill in the blank] as A. [B., E.!]” I fret about my forthcoming Colloquium one day. To which A. himself says: “Don’t worry, because I already cover that.” And then maybe I start to get it, the bit about “even A.”

\*

Months pass. I don't remember why, but I suddenly started writing a new and unplanned chapter to open my book, and while I was writing, A. (not A. who already covers what I don't) brought me *Redheaded Peckerwood*, and then I suddenly envisioned yet another new chapter to open that earlier other chapter, but unlike that first new chapter, this second one would be wordless. Collaging images for this chapter, all the while protesting to myself that really I didn't know enough about images, was one of the great pleasures of my time at Wiko. It did also mean obsessively hunting down the rights to "just right" images – once, for a time so long it can't possibly be captured by "once," it was a video that had been shot from a particular angle that caught a particular gloss on a particular blue dress on a particular Manson family woman, but I really needed that gloss (!) – and frankly all this took too much time. But it took a lot less time after I asked S. at the library for help, for example with an obscure poster for *The Creeping Terror*, a worse-than-B-movie shot at the Manson family's stomping grounds in L.A., Spahn's Ranch, whose director, not really a director, S. explained, may have escaped the financial debt he incurred from the shoot by becoming a hot dog vendor on the beach in Santa Monica or a corpse in its Bay. As well, crucially, my meandering eventually landed me at a photo archive that, I think I'm sure, will anchor my next book project. Photography is one of the passions that have blinked throughout my life; one of those that was never consuming enough to become a profession, but whose fading when my profession became all-consuming made my life poorer. I am immensely grateful to A. for the initial suggestion (and for his work, his talk, and the guided tour at the Helmut Newton Foundation's "Berlin, Berlin" show). And to S., because she too spoke to me of photos.

\*

By December, B.T. has saved many of us from continuing to slide into our haircuts; we – we are becoming a "we" – are the best-groomed Fellow group!

\*

People speak like they mean it. When there is this much patience for the other, even misunderstandings are beautiful confusion. I will no longer be able to have butterflies in my stomach without also knowing that there might be a cat scratching at my soul; and vice versa.

\*

We experiment with form: B.Y. introduces an ancient Athenian principle to democratize our Colloquium discussions, and then J.Be. fills that bag with a new trick, and then there are cards and the cards have clouds, and, and, and . . .

\*

My conversations with J.Be. linger in the mid-to-late twentieth century, from Deleuze to Didion, but our first exchange was apropos of Japanese fabric, for which he had a vocabulary that only lifelong tailors possess. I now know this is true about J.Be.'s vocabulary on any topic, but somehow those words about that fabric and the conversations about clothing that followed gave permission to my all-year-long obsession with Wiko fashion. There were eyes that always matched the dresses and someone who perfectly mismatched decades; there were pink pants of corduroy; glitter, a gown, and a crown (maybe I misremember, but it could have been a crown!); shawls and scarves; someone's socks. What Wiko did was return me to my senses, by which I mean: I slowed down enough to notice I notice things. I don't know what it means that I was so interested in all these colors, cuts, and combinations, but it doesn't really matter; what matters is I started seeing again.

\*

C. and C. send out an invitation for a reading group on "Thinking in Sentences." I think of myself as someone who cares about sentences, so I'm thrilled, also by its first assignment, which is for all of us participants "to bring along one or two sentences that have particularly irritated or impressed us." But then the whole thing turns strange: all the sentences I thought I loved are either fragments that only work in the context of their paragraphs or, worse, ones that my memory had rewritten so that I now dislike the originals. Maybe I don't care about sentences at all. Maybe I care about images. One's idea of oneself is turned upside down here, helter skelter. Is it the carnivalesque ghosts of the Luna Park that sat near where Wiko now sits?

\*

Winter, we walk, walking Oso. They run, the runners. All of us dance. A lot. Long live L.!

\*

Spring, the garden at Villa Walther gathers the kids. This is what I had imagined for them when we first arrived, and that they would remember it later. But they'll also remember this: the rides back from the Skatehalle at the RAW-Gelände with A. and B., ping-pong with Y. and D., desserts after Thursday dinners and drinks while dancing, an interview with E. and talks with J. and S.'s daughter M. (thank you, E. and M.!).

\*

Around that time, also in the spring as the weather warms, at a talk in town I happen into one day, I realize I've become spoiled, and start actively worrying about how I will live without Wiko.

\*

Summer, what was best about M. playing in the Berlin Philharmonic was both the fact that she played and the fact that everyone – not just two or three, but fifteen Fellows at least, or double! – wanted to be there to see her play.

\*

At the very end, when people were already packing, a fairly large group of us met in E.'s favorite Biergarten to celebrate her and the German language and culture she had taught this year's Fellows. I was in a different conversation but suddenly heard, at the other end of the table, the name "I." "I.?" I rudely interrupted the story E. was telling. Turned out I. had been at Wiko a few weeks back for an event I had missed. That in itself was not weird, given the frequent visits by former Fellows throughout the year, but it was weird for me: to hear I. mentioned a year after reading his Yearbook essay and to suddenly realize that everything he had written now made perfect sense. "Even A." Even I (not I.,

though I. too)! And all of us there, future Wiko's past (ghosts). Again, I feel dizzy. This is to say: so lucky.

\*

OK, for the record: I wrote the first full draft of my book at Wiko (signed the contract midway through the year in Berlin and submitted the manuscript a month after returning to Ithaca, on time). Concretely, that work consisted of drafting (and collaging) one new chapter, finishing four difficult ones I had earlier set aside, and revising four more. I also gave talks, four again, on four chapters. Two of these were at Wiko: "‘Make It Look Like Nothing’: The Optics of the Manson Murders Case" at the Tuesday Colloquium and "The Manson Murders and the My Lai Massacre" at the Evening Colloquium. (On the basis of the latter, Wolfgang Krischke published a review article entitled "Sympathie für einen Teufel" in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.) At Humboldt-Universität's Forschungskolloquium für Osteuropäische Geschichte, I presented "ATWA(R) Against the Anthropocene: Environmentalism and Eco-Terror in the Manson Murder Case" (because colleagues there were kind enough to invite me back to my old life and present new work unrelated to Russian and Eastern European History). And finally, at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development's Center for the History of Emotions, I presented "‘The Love and Terror Cult’: On the Problem of Authority in the Manson Family." It was a privilege, and highly productive, to be able to discuss my work in these venues, but I want to especially thank Daniel Schönplflug for inviting me to his "Terrorism" graduate seminar in the Global History program at the Freie Universität, where he and his wonderful students made it possible for me to discuss the three main topics that have occupied me throughout my life as a historian – Russian revolutionary terrorism, temporality, and this thing that is the history of the Manson murders – all at once.



## DAS HÖCHSTE GUT IM GRUNEWALD MARCUS WILLASCHEK

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Marcus Willaschek (\* 1962) ist seit 2003 Professor für Philosophie der Neuzeit an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. Seine Arbeitsgebiete sind die Philosophie Immanuel Kants sowie aktuelle Fragen der Metaphysik, Erkenntnistheorie, Ethik und Philosophie des Todes. Forschungsaufenthalte führten ihn u. a. an die Universitäten Harvard, Berkeley, UC San Diego, Keio (Tokio) und Osaka. Er ist Mitglied der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW) und der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft Frankfurt. Als Vorsitzender der Kant-Kommission der BBAW ist er mitverantwortlich für die wissenschaftliche Referenzausgabe der Schriften Kants („Akademieausgabe“). Wichtigste Veröffentlichungen: *Praktische Vernunft* (1992), *Der mentale Zugang zur Welt* (2003; 2. Aufl. 2015), *Kant-Lexikon* (3 Bde., 2015), *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics* (2018; Paperback 2020), *Kant. Die Revolution des Denkens* (2023; 4. Aufl. 2024; mehrere Übersetzungen in Vorb.). – Adresse: Institut für Philosophie, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1, 60629 Frankfurt am Main, Deutschland. E-Mail: willaschek@em.uni-frankfurt.de.

Nachdem Immanuel Kant 1784 mit 60 Jahren in sein eigenes Haus gezogen war und zwei Jahre später auch eine Köchin eingestellt hatte, lud er bis zu seinem Tod 1804 an jedem Wochentag verschiedene Gäste an seinen Mittagstisch ein. Dabei legte Kant Wert auf gutes Essen, guten Wein und, mehr noch, auf angeregte und anregende Unterhaltung. Tatsächlich, so Kant in seiner *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* von 1798, sei „eine gute Mahlzeit in guter (und wenn es sein kann, auch abwechselnder) Gesellschaft“ die bestmögliche Annäherung an das „höchste moralisch-physische Gut“, das „Tugend“ und

„Wohlleben“ miteinander verbindet. Bei einer solchen Mahlzeit solle die Zahl der Gäste zwischen der der Grazien und der Musen liegen, also zwischen drei und neun (AA 7:277f.).

Ob diejenigen, die die Formen geselligen Austauschs am Wissenschaftskolleg erdachten, Kants *Anthropologie* gelesen haben? Jedenfalls hätten sie seine Vorstellungen vom „höchsten moralisch-physischen Gut“ nicht besser umsetzen können als mit den gemeinsamen wochentäglichen Mahlzeiten bei gutem Essen und in der wechselnden Gesellschaft von zumeist sechs bis acht Fellows an einem Tisch. Wie viele anregende Gespräche, wie viele lebhaftes Diskussionen, wie viele neue Freundschaften sich so im Laufe der zehn Monate in der Grunewaldvilla ergeben haben! (Sonja, Dunia und allen Mitarbeiter:innen in Küche und Restaurant sei Dank!)

Meine Zeit am Wissenschaftskolleg war für mich stark geprägt durch Kants 300. Geburtstag am 22. April 2024 und die große öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit, die Kant in seinem Jubiläumsjahr zuteilwurde. Eigentlich wollte ich am Wissenschaftskolleg intensiv an einem philosophischen Projekt über die Endlichkeit des Lebens und den Tod arbeiten. Kant sollte dabei keine besondere Rolle spielen. Aber da ich seit über dreißig Jahren immer wieder zu Kant publiziert habe und an der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW) für einige Veranstaltungen im Kant-Jahr zuständig war, hat mich der Königsberger Philosoph dann doch sehr in Anspruch genommen. Den Höhepunkt bildete ein Festakt der BBAW an Kants Geburtstag mit einer Rede von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz. Ein großer Spaß war auch der „Berliner Kant-Marathon“, den ich mit Berliner Kolleg:innen im Pei-Bau des Deutschen Historischen Museums veranstalten konnte. Es hat mich besonders gefreut, wie sehr das Wissenschaftskolleg und die anderen Fellows an diesen Aktivitäten zum Kant-Jubiläum Anteil genommen haben.

In mein Jahr am Wissenschaftskolleg fiel der Überfall der Hamas auf Israel am 7. Oktober 2023 und die militärische Reaktion Israels im Gazastreifen ebenso wie die Fortsetzung des russischen Angriffskriegs gegen die Ukraine. Diese und andere weltpolitische Ereignisse standen im Mittelpunkt vieler Gespräche unter den Fellows. Über diese bedrückenden Vorgänge auch mit israelischen, ukrainischen und russischen Fellows sprechen zu können (palästinensische Fellows gab es dieses Jahr nicht) und ihre Perspektive kennenzulernen, war für mich eine große Bereicherung.

Trotz Kant-Jubiläum und Weltpolitik konnte ich mit meinem aktuellen Projekt einige Fortschritte machen. Dabei waren zwei Besonderheiten des Wissenschaftskollegs sehr hilfreich: das wöchentliche Kolloquium und die Möglichkeit, Gäste für gemeinsame Forschungsarbeit einzuladen.

Wenn die gemeinsamen Mahlzeiten am Wissenschaftskolleg das höchste „moralisch-physische“ Gut sind, dann ist das wöchentliche Kolloquium das höchste „akademisch-soziale“ Gut: jede Woche spannende Vorträge aus den unterschiedlichsten Fach- und Forschungszusammenhängen, gefolgt von einer konstruktiv-kritischen Diskussion in wirklich kollegialer Atmosphäre. Ich habe dabei sehr viel gelernt – über neuronale Netze, Mayakultur, Solidarität, literarische Form, Notenbanken und Unzähliges mehr. Zugleich hat mich mein eigener Kolloquiumsvortrag im Januar 2024 gezwungen, mein eigenes Projekt aus der Perspektive einer interdisziplinären Gruppe von Fellows zu betrachten. Wie kann ich meine Ziele, Thesen und Methoden einer so heterogenen Gruppe nahebringen? Da mein Projekt zwar fachphilosophisch ausgerichtet ist, aber mit der Endlichkeit unseres Lebens doch eine Frage behandelt, die alle Menschen betrifft, hat bereits die Ausarbeitung meines Vortrags mein Projekt vorangebracht. Das gilt umso mehr für die anschließende Diskussion und die zahlreichen Gespräche mit einzelnen Fellows in den Tagen und Wochen danach. Eine Besonderheit in unserem Jahrgang war die ungewöhnlich große Zahl von Philosoph:innen – sie lag nur knapp unter der Zahl der Musen –, sodass ich auch von fachnaheem Feedback zu meinem Projekt profitieren konnte.

Der andere Umstand, der mir in der Arbeit an diesem Projekt sehr geholfen hat, war der Besuch zweier Kollegen am Wissenschaftskolleg – Martin Pleitz und Holmer Steinfath –, deren eigene Arbeiten sich mit meinem Projekt über die Endlichkeit des Lebens berühren. In der entspannten Atmosphäre des Wissenschaftskollegs konnten wir im Dezember und Januar (Pleitz) und Mai (Steinfath) Stunden und Tage in intensiven Gesprächen verbringen – ohne jeden Zeit- und Publikationsdruck. Gerade deshalb waren diese Gespräche so produktiv und haben mich in meinen Überlegungen weitergebracht.

Es ist eine bekannte Erfahrung, dass man mit einem wissenschaftlichen Projekt manchmal die größten Fortschritte dann macht, wenn man die Arbeit daran einmal unterbricht. Es gehört eben oft beides dazu: Wochen und Monate der Konzentration auf das Projekt, aber auch die Ablenkung, bei der sich oft die besten Ideen einstellen. Für mich hat das Wissenschaftskolleg beides in idealer Weise verbunden: die Möglichkeit zur ungestörten Arbeit im eigenen Arbeitszimmer, unterstützt von einem unglaublich effektiv arbeitenden Bibliotheksdienst, und die produktiven Ablenkungen durch die Gespräche mit anderen Fellows, die Workshops und Vorträge am Wissenschaftskolleg, die wöchentlichen Chorproben und das kulturelle und akademische Leben in Berlin. (Mein herzlicher Dank an die Leitung des Wissenschaftskollegs und das gesamte großartige Team, das den Aufenthalt im Grunewald so unvergesslich gemacht hat!)

So bin ich dank der idealen Bedingungen am Wissenschaftskolleg im philosophischen Nachdenken über die Endlichkeit und Kürze des Lebens trotz allem etwas vorangekommen. Aber grau ist alle Theorie. Wie schnell die Zeit am Wissenschaftskolleg vergangen ist, hat mich trotzdem überrascht!

Nachdem Kant 1804 gestorben war, trafen sich die Mitglieder seiner Mittagstafel jedes Jahr an seinem Geburtstag zu einem gemeinsamen Essen. Wie schön wäre es, wenn der Fellowjahrgang 2023/2024 ebenfalls einmal im Jahr zu einem gemeinsamen Essen im Grunewald zusammenkommen könnte! Das wird nicht möglich sein. Aber zumindest einzeln und in kleinen Gruppen dürfen wir ab und zu als Gäste an das Wissenschaftskolleg zurückkehren, das für fast ein Jahr unser Zuhause war, und dabei auch wieder am höchsten moralisch-physischen Gut teilhaben.



A NEW APPROACH TO THE EUROPEAN  
LOCAL LEGENDS  
CHRISTOPHER S. WOOD

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I arrived at the Wiko at a good moment: on the threshold of a completely new project. It was like starting a dissertation. Except that the topic had never been approved by a dissertation committee. But it had been approved by the Wiko selection committee! So emboldened, I began reading: the standard literature, the surveys and handbooks, the more specialized secondary literature, the primary sources. I reached out to the incumbent specialists at the Freie Universität and at the Humboldt-Universität – invited them to lunch at Wallotstraße 19 and asked for their advice.

The topic is the *local legend* in premodern Germany: stories people used to tell each other about apparent encounters with the supernatural and other strange happenings. Often the stories or anecdotes were connected with local landmarks: a deep lake, a ruined

castle, an abandoned mineshaft. Unlike fairy tales (*Märchen*), the local legends (*Sagen*) did not happen far away and once upon a time, but at specific times and places, to real people with names. A certain Christoph Patzeber, from the village of St. Michael near the town of Salurn in the South Tyrol, was poking about a ruined castle in the year 1688 when he fell upon a staircase that led to a subterranean wine cellar (Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen*, no. 15). He then encounters three old men sitting at a small table who invite him to take home as much wine as he likes. And the story gets ever stranger, until one day the three old men reckon up his bill, drawing a cross with chalk on a slate. Patzeber dies ten days later.

This legend was published in a collection of ghost stories in Frankfurt in 1737. But accounts of similar eerie encounters were recorded already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The brothers Grimm gathered and edited several hundred examples, publishing them in volume one of their *Deutsche Sagen* (1816, 1818). The *Sagen* are far less well known than the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812, 1815).

The German-speaking lands have no monopoly on this quasi-literary form. My project, or a similar project, could have dealt with French, Italian, British, or Scandinavian material. But I teach in a German department, and here I was in Berlin, where the Grimms are buried (Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof in Schöneberg – an autumn pilgrimage), so the Grimms it was.

My aim was to develop a way of reading these stories. I soon had the feeling that I had quite a lot of freedom, since no scholarly discipline is really taking responsibility for this material: literary historians do not recognize the texts as literature, and social historians do not consider the texts to have much value as sources. The field of historical *Volkskunde* or folklore studies, meanwhile, was condemned after the Second World War for its nationalist and ethnicist ideological biases, and has never quite managed to renew itself intellectually. And so I discovered that one way of working in an interdisciplinary mode is to work with materials that lie around, semi-abandoned, in a territory unclaimed by the disciplines.

My method is to go back to the early modern publications from which the Grimms drew their texts, and to attempt to reconstruct the original circumstances of narration. This is admittedly a highly speculative kind of philology. But there is no other way. You have to imagine how the stories came into the world: and in particular, how and when an eyewitness account (“I found a wine cellar inside the mountain”) becomes a report on what someone else witnessed (“I heard that a man named Patzeber in the next valley came upon a wine cellar below a ruined castle”). Then you have to imagine how often

people told each other these tales, and to whom, and why. What pleasure did people take in these rudimentary narrations? Clues are provided by the framing discourses in the periodicals and books in which the stories were first fixed in print. The compilers – local chroniclers, proto-ethnographers, “encyclopedic” knowledge-collectors – tell us where they heard the stories and add their own often skeptical commentary.

The narratives are related in a plain, unadorned language, devoid of description, supplemented by no metaphors and no symbols, stripped of any internal formal patterning that might make listeners doubt the veracity of the accounts. The clergy and the Church play no role in these stories. The repertoire of events and motifs is quite limited. Typically the protagonist encounters something uncanny and Other and frightening – a revenant, a ghost, a demon; one of the quasi-human creatures who inhabit the zone between human-kind and nature: elves, moss-women, and other diminutive forest-dwelling folk; dwarves who live inside mountains; women in white who appear near springs or wells, and then disappear. Named characters such as Frau Holle, or the Wilder Jäger; werewolves; *Kobolde* or poltergeists, *Wechselbälge* or changelings. The stories represent the response to an incident, in words and actions, conveying what it would feel like to come up against something external, alien, and incomprehensible.

Jakob Grimm incorporated some of these stories into his *Deutsche Mythologie* (first edition, 1835), a vast compilation of material drawn from poetry and folklore attesting to the survival into modern times of fragments of a pre-Christian “Germanic” religion. Grimm interpreted the repertoire of demonic characters animating the *Sagen* as popular transformations of the religious myths. This remained the dominant approach to the *Sagen* in the twentieth century. The scholarly literature, to the extent that the *Sagen* are treated at all, almost invariably refers to them as evidence of “popular beliefs.”

“Belief” seems to me the wrong term. The stories were not asking their listeners to assess the nature or the ontological status of the supernatural characters. Nor were they expecting anyone to invest psychically in an alternative cosmology to rival the established Christian theology. Even less were they inviting participation in heterodox customs or rituals.

People did not *believe* in the Wilder Jäger, the Weiße Frau, and Hinzemann the poltergeist. Rather, they *knew about* them. These characters are *topoi*, familiar “places” held in common and known to all. One can refer to the *topoi*, in any context, with the confidence that your audience will follow you. It is a little like the repertoire of characters from Hollywood movies whom we all know: Taxi Driver, Pretty Woman, the Cowardly

Lion, Easy Rider, Dirty Harry, Dr. Strangelove, the Terminator, Carrie, the Godfather, the Little Mermaid, and so on. I don't "believe" in the Little Mermaid. But I know about her! She resides in a "commons" belonging to everyone, or at least a lot of people.

Here I was guided by the narratologist Monika Fludernik, who identifies spontaneous conversational storytelling as a key matrix of a modern, democratic, and realist literature. Such simple forms of narration, involving sequences of phrases representing someone else's embodied experience, do not even necessarily rise to the level of plot. The point was only to represent embodied experience, and that representation is itself experienced by the listener as significant and pleasurable.

In the *Sagen*, people take literature into their own hands, rejecting the prestigious genres inherited from antiquity, ignoring the precepts of classical rhetoric, framing the ordinary by profiling it against the extraordinary. This was not a "renaissance," but a relaunch, leading ultimately to the democratic modes of fictional narration of modernity: the novel, the diary, the comic book, not to mention the movie and the TV series.

Over the course of the year I spoke at length about my project with many Fellows and guests, and profited greatly from the transdisciplinary insights. I won't soon forget two key consultations, yielding valuable insight, with Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and Lorraine Daston; as well as a dinner conversation with the Assyriologist Stefan Maul at the Fellows' Club meeting in June. I would also mention the linguistic anthropologist Angelika Linke (Zurich), one of the participants in the Wiko workshop *Denken in Sätzen/Thinking in Sentences* (June 2024) that I co-organized with Fellow Carlos Spoerhase and Permanent Fellow Juliane Vogel.

But on reflection, my interpretation of the *Sagen* was primarily shaped – in fact, created – by the everyday and seemingly casual conversations in the Wiko restaurant and other shared spaces. As the year unfolded, I started paying attention to how we speak, and how we take pleasure in listening to people recount simple embodied experiences, and how the simple empathy was enough, even when plot in any ambitious literary sense was lacking. It was an ideal situation: almost unlimited spontaneous natural speech, built around micro-narratives.

So, if I asked, What did you do this weekend? I might hear in reply, We went to Schloss Charlottenburg; we were going to roam about in the Schlosspark, but it started to rain; we ducked into that pizzeria across the street and waited it out. The kids were getting really restless. We did finally get to check out the park, but there was no time to see the Schinkel Pavilion.

There is no plot here to speak of, but it didn't matter. I could vividly imagine the excursion to Schloss Charlottenburg and feel vicariously the family's relatively minor hopes and disappointments; and that is enough.

The homemade folk horror movie screened at this year's *Abschiedsfest* revealed where the early modern ghost story was headed. This brilliant film, carried off by the editing and natural acting skills of a half-dozen or more Wiko Fellows, circled around a mysterious and still unexplained sighting in the stairwell of the *Altbau* of Villa Walther. Of course at the Wiko we don't believe in ghosts. But then what did really happen that night?

In our cohort, month after month, everyone was talking, talking all the time, representing their thoughts and feelings; and everyone was listening all the time, making inferences about the feelings and thoughts of others. We represented ourselves to each other, in conversational groups of two, three, four, five, six. We then talked *about* our conversations. And that was our year at the Wissenschaftskolleg.



A HAVEN FOR WANDERERS IN A  
ROOTLESS WORLD  
BIN XU

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Eight in the morning, the northern European sunlight remained feeble but managed to filter through the wall-size windows and cast a gentle glow on the room's dark-wood shelves and the large, black desk, surrounded by the Cesca chairs, all of which constituted a Vermeeresque interior scene. Piano sound traveled from the main seminar room, penetrated the closed doors, and flew into the room in a serene, unobtrusive way. At least for most early mornings, this room was the perfect place for me to seclude myself from unwanted social interactions and immerse myself in reading and writing.

In my retrospective remembrance, this small seminar room gains a symbolic status and becomes an emblem for the Wiko – that is, a safe haven for people like me to suspend much of the chaos and tumult in the world and to escape the mandatory chores of the

profession. A year without teaching but with full pay is already a dream too good to be true, and a year without teaching but with full pay *and* with the opportunity to hang out with brilliant minds is almost an unbelievable luxury. I know I almost fully relied on the luck of the draw and the Wiko's generosity to be sitting in the seminar room. Other Fellows looked more like legit occupants. They outsmarted me in breadth and depth of knowledge as well as "research output" – a technical term that often appears in bureaucratic paperwork. But the dull technical term became embodied in the Wiko. Embodied, literally. The humble scholar who talked randomly about movies and sports over lunch turned out to be a big name whose CV may frighten someone moderately content with his or her own "output" if one bothers to search the colleague's name online. I have to confess I did this kind of search quite a few times during my Wiko stay. I also have to confess that, often after such searches, I was overwhelmed by mixed feelings of admiration, envy, shock, and self-criticism.

Nevertheless, I still shared something with my walking-on-water colleagues: we are all "wanderers" in some sense.

We are intellectual wanderers who sometimes trespass disciplines and fields. Among my colleagues, there are some encyclopedic figures. For example, a colleague writes about the Peloponnesian War, Machiavelli, and South Korean democratization at the same time. Or another colleague who grew up in a Cantonese-speaking family but manages to speak at least six languages and published three books about the Renaissance. We are mostly driven by curiosity and aspiration rather than the formulaic norms in narrow fields.

We are also wanderers in a more geographic sense. Many of us were born in one country, went to college in another country, graduated school in a third country, and are now working in a fourth country. Wanderers in this literal sense, however, are not always voluntary, not even happy. Some of us are displaced and expelled for political reasons: the Ukrainian colleagues' residence as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Iranian director's brief stay as a result of her government's repression of intellectuals, and the Brazilian feminist activist's exile due to the country's laws on abortion. For them, the Wiko is more a haven in the sense of shelter and protection, even for a short period, than an intellectual utopia.

For others who are not exiles in the traditional sense, dealing with the difficult terrains of public opinion nowadays was as dangerous as a confrontation with the authoritarian states. Our year at the Wiko was concurrent with a series of shocking events in the

world, including the brutal killing of innocent people in Israel in October 2023, the equally brutal killing of innocent people in Gaza after the October attack, the protests rattling American universities (including a shocking conflict in my own university, Emory), the ongoing war in Ukraine, worries about the rise of the ultra-right wing political forces in Germany and around the world, etc. The world is becoming increasingly a rootless place because numerous people have become involuntary wanderers. Yet, no havens like the Wiko are waiting for them. Sitting in a seminar room and engaging in transcendental contemplation is just unimaginable luxury for them. We feel the pains of these displaced people, sign letters of support or protest, and sometimes speak for them in front of the public. Nonetheless, some of our words have unintended consequences and sometimes get us involved in minor or major public debates.

I am a wanderer in all these senses. Being a sociologist, I was always amused – and eventually flattered – by my Wiko colleagues' comments like, "You are not *that* kind of sociologist" – meaning the stereotypical number cruncher working on narrow topics that interest only 40 people in the world. I work on memory, disaster, and civil society, all of which are broad terms interesting to historians, political theorists, political scientists, and even art historians. I dialog with all of them and receive invitations for talks from European historians, Chinese political scientists, and general political theorists – well, not many sociologists, I have to admit. With the generous support from the Wiko, I organized a workshop "Memory in Literature and Politics: China and Beyond," which covered at least four disciplines, with even a renowned writer Yan Geling as a participant.

My projects at the Wiko probably best represent my wandering character. I started my career as a China scholar and a sociologist, a dual identity that brought me more conundrums than conveniences. Being a sociologist working on China, I have to face the constant pressure to prove my case is "generalizable" and can be "applied to" the United States, even if by population, China certainly has more advantages over the US in terms of generalizability. Being a China scholar who happens to be a sociologist, I also need to compete with historians, literature scholars, political scientists, and economists for "China jobs" – more often than not, job ads for China positions do not include "sociology." "Survival by sheer luck" is the best phrase to describe my career. Once my job is secure (in the US system, this means you get tenure – one of the rare lifetime employments in a capitalist society), I release myself from the constraints of identities.

Long story short, in the Wiko year, I realized such a self-releasing indulgence in two concurrent projects. The first is about "memory, forgetting, and silence about the 1989

Tiananmen incident,” but this project is significantly different from my previous ones in its comparative scope (I draw on cases in Germany, Italy, Poland, etc.) in examining the ethical-political dilemma of the people living under a repressive regime. The comparison often led me to the Eichmann trial debate, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and other non-China cases. I presented some of these thoughts in the public-facing Evening Lecture at the Wiko.

The second project is an ambitious – probably too ambitious – one: I examine how societies around the world commemorate the COVID pandemic. I chose 11 countries – the top 10 countries in terms of mortality plus China, since the Chinese government’s statistics on COVID-19 deaths are unreliable, and many experts suspect the actual number of deaths in China is between one and three million. With the help of my Wiko Co-Fellows, I hired eight research assistants from different countries to collect almost 300 cases. I presented preliminary findings from the analysis of some of the cases at my Tuesday Colloquium.

This intellectual aspiration to wander drove me to the world. In less than a year, I paid field visits to scores of memorials in Europe and accumulated images, brochures, and notes for my future teaching and research. Seeing the memorials with my own eyes was an intellectual pilgrimage. On weekends and holidays, I visited major memorials in Europe, especially the iconic ones, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Buchenwald, Dachau, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Monument where Willy Brandt knelt to apologize, etc. Smaller, unnoticeable ones in various neighborhoods in Berlin, including the Stumbling Stones, which are scattered around the city (even two in front of Villa Jaffé), Gleis 17 in U-Bahn Grunewald, and a blue-glass, minimalist memorial for the victims of the Nazi “euthanasia” program at Tiergartenstraße 4.

The Stumbling Stones in front of Villa Jaffé were almost predestined to remind me of my wandering trajectory in the world. The brass stones were for Mr. and Mrs. Braun, who fled to Shanghai and died there. Plus, the first owner of this building, Professor Jaffé, was a sociologist – well, “not *that* kind of sociologist” – Max Weber’s student and collaborator, whose wife had some unusually intimate relationships with both Max and Alfred Weber. I was born in China, went to college in Shanghai, trained as a sociologist, and now lived in this building – almost like walking in a global circle, traveling in time, and meeting the Brauns and Professor Jaffé on a daily basis.

Yet, like some other colleagues, I wandered because I was unable to go home – if “home” is defined as the country where I grew up and my parents still reside. At the end

of April 2023, less than four months before I arrived in Berlin, I flew from the US to China to see my parents, who I had not seen for four years due to the pandemic. After flying for almost 24 hours, at the border control in Shanghai Pudong Airport, I was detained and interrogated for six hours and sent back to the US on another 24 hours of flights. The questions the police asked were about the political implications of my writings, which in many ways address “politically sensitive” topics or taboos as viewed by the Chinese government. This ban means that I probably will not see my parents again in China. It also means I officially joined some of my Wiko colleagues to form a group of “intellectuals in exile,” with members from Iran, Brazil, Russia, Ukraine, and, certainly, China. Our solidarity did not solve our problems, but it at least reduced our pain of being political wanderers.

So far, I have not talked about the inspiring weekly Colloquia, the exuberant Thursday dinner, various self-organized group activities (I heard about the ping-pong tournament but did not dare to join due to my fear of revealing myself as the worst ping-pong player from China), etc. I trust my Wiko colleagues must have written much about these activities of collegiality. I certainly enjoyed them. Nonetheless, upon departure from the Wiko, I realized how ephemeral our temporary stay was and how permanent our wandering would be. Drifting from various parts of the world to the four buildings in Grunewald and sitting and talking in the seminar rooms for a year, we were again drifting out to different corners of the world. If we could somehow suspend our worries about the rootless world for a year, then we now have left our haven behind and wandered back into this world. For good or for bad, our life and the world are in perpetual motion.



WIKO – A DECISIVE TURNING POINT IN  
MY LIFE AND RESEARCH  
BEE YUN

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Bee Yun specialises in the history of political thought, contemporary political theory, and the political and religious iconology of the Pre- and Early Modern Ages of the West. He received his Ph.D. with a work on the transformation of political thought in the later Middle Ages and Niccolò Machiavelli's ideological innovation at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2009). He had taught at Humboldt-Universität and Seoul National University prior to joining Sungkyunkwan University, where he teaches political theories. He has published several articles in top-ranked domestic and international journals, such as *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, *History of Political Thought*, *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, *Viator*, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, and *International History Review*. He also contributes domestically and internationally to daily newspapers and journals like *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel*. He published the monograph *Wege zu Machiavelli: Die Rückkehr des Politischen im Spätmittelalter* (Ways to Machiavelli: The Return of the Political in the Later Middle Ages) in 2021 (Cologne: Böhlau), which contains extensive discussions of European political thought from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, including Machiavelli's political thought. – Address: Hoam Hall 51108, Sungkyunkwan University, Jongno-Gu, Sungkyunkwan-ro 25-2, 03063 Seoul, Republic of Korea. E-mail: vitafelix@skku.edu.

During my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I pursued my project titled “The Will to Democracy: Democracy in East Asia and a New Global History of Democracy in the 21st Century.” The project focuses on reconstructing the history of democracy's development and its global success, particularly over the last seven decades, with a comparative perspective. This approach does not overlook the challenges to democratic governance or

its moments of failure, as we currently see with the global rise of populism. Instead, the project seeks to analyse what actually drives democracy and how and why this driving force can be lost. The Wissenschaftskolleg, as a hub for scholars from diverse fields and a platform for engaging with experts beyond academia, played a pivotal role in advancing my research. It offered an ideal environment for my project, enabling numerous formal and informal discussions that significantly enriched my understanding of the subject matter.

The concept of the “will to democracy” emphasizes the importance of the voluntaristic aspect in democracy’s development. Democracy emerged because it was actively pursued, not because it was logically necessary or inherently more reasonable than other forms of governance. It is not the inevitable outcome of rational thinking or open public deliberation. The focus of my research is on four experiments with democracy: ancient Athenian democracy, often regarded as the first democracy in world history; the popular government in late medieval Florence, which, while not strictly a democracy, nonetheless exemplifies the societal forces that push toward a broader distribution of power; Weimar democracy, which vividly demonstrates both the essential conditions for democratic success and the factors leading to its crisis; and the post-World War II democracies of South Korea and Japan, considered two of the most successful realizations of the democratic political idea.

Significant progress was made in this research during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg. My understanding of the concept of will, which serves as the cornerstone of this study, became clearer. Dialogues with Fellows, particularly philosophers, were crucial in helping me develop and refine my ideas about this concept. Additionally, my understanding of related historical experiences has deepened. Interactions with historians and legal scholars were especially beneficial in expanding my knowledge of the rise and fall of Weimar democracy in Germany. Moreover, several forums I organized with Marion Tiedtke and Barbara Prainsack, focusing on the topic of democratic crises and the challenge of populism, provided a platform for lively exchanges that greatly stimulated my research ideas. Building on the progress made so far, I now plan to write a monograph.

A significant turning point in my research occurred during my Tuesday Colloquium on January 30th (titled “The Will to Democracy: The Development of Korean Democracy and Its Implications in the Worldwide Democracy Crisis”). The presentation, along with the ensuing discussions, offered a valuable opportunity to refine my arguments. Communicating effectively with colleagues from different fields requires sharpening one’s ideas

and expressing them more precisely and accessibly. In the process of doing so, one often gains new insights, which was certainly the case for me. Additionally, the more than thirty questions I received during the presentation provided key reference points for future research. My subsequent talks and presentations on this related topic, at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and the University of Augsburg, benefited significantly from these experiences.

Another benefit of the Wissenschaftskolleg is that it serves not only as a hub for interacting with Fellows, but also as a space for meeting and engaging with scholars from Berlin, across Germany, and beyond. At the Wissenschaftskolleg, I had the opportunity to connect with a wide range of scholars, both directly and indirectly related to my discipline, which provided me with significant inspiration and valuable feedback on a variety of topics. Additionally, the Wissenschaftskolleg allowed me to broaden my outlook by engaging with colleagues outside my usual humanistic and social science boundaries, such as natural scientists, as well as professionals from outside the academic sphere, including photo essayists, novelists, filmmakers, and musicians.

It is also worth mentioning that the Wissenschaftskolleg's influence extends beyond its physical space. It constantly hosts a diverse group of professionals not only from academia, but also from the media and the arts. These interactions have enriched my research on democracy. For instance, my article published in *Der Spiegel* (July 8), which reflected on the cases of Germany and South Korea in responding to the challenges of populism, is one of many outcomes of these exchanges.

In this context, I must also mention my lecture on Niccolò Machiavelli's political thought, delivered at the Einstein Hall at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities on May 27th. The stimulating discussions I had before and after the lecture with the Fellows in attendance helped advance my ideas on the topic, leading to new research concepts regarding the development of political thought in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Personally, my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, with all the connections I made, significantly broadened my perspective on life and work. The Wissenschaftskolleg is a residential community, offering abundant opportunities for personal interactions and exchanges. The numerous conversations I had with colleagues over drinks in and around the Wissenschaftskolleg, discussing academia and life, were truly inspiring. Even chairing the talks at the Colloquia (I was exceptionally honoured to chair four of them) was a rewarding experience for me. Reading and listening to the stories of their scholarly

journeys and life experiences frequently took me beyond the boundaries of my own. From these interactions, deep mutual understanding and sympathies sometimes developed, leading to genuine friendships. This is the most valuable gift I took away from my ten-month stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Although our time there has passed like a fleeting dream, the precious bonds and memories remain.

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