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INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

JAHRBUCH 2024/2025

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER  
MIT BERICHTEN UND BEITRÄGEN VON

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EYAL WINTER



## VORWORT DER HERAUSGEBERIN

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Auch dieses Fellowjahr stand wieder im Zeichen weltweiter Schockwellen. Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine, die Niederlage der iranischen Freiheitsbewegung, die fortgesetzte Unterhöhnung der amerikanischen Verfassung, die Bedrohungen der Wissenschaftsfreiheit, vor allem die Zerstörung Gazas als Folge des Massakers vom 7. Oktober 2023, all das ließ die Atmosphäre im Kolleg nicht unbeeinflusst. Mehrere Fellows entstammten entgegengesetzten Lagern und waren persönlich betroffen; mehrere wissenschaftliche, journalistische und künstlerische Arbeiten hatten die gegenwärtigen politischen Krisen zum Thema; andere Projekte erlebten eine ungeahnte neue Aktualität. Das alles hat die Fellowgruppe politisiert, aber nicht polarisiert – zum Glück. Der Wunsch eines der Fellows, die Politik aus dem Kolleg, den Kolloquien, Workshops und Veranstaltungen fernzuhalten, ließe sich nicht erfüllen, selbst wenn man ihm folgen wollte. Wo, wenn nicht hier, sollte es möglich sein, über politische Grenzen hinweg respektvoll miteinander zu sprechen? Dass das gelungen ist, bezeugen mehrere Einträge in diesem Jahrbuch. Es ist, so scheint mir, weniger einem akademischen Habitus strenger Sachlichkeit zu verdanken als vielmehr der Bereitschaft und Fähigkeit zu wechselseitiger Empathie.

Auf die Geister der deutschen Vergangenheit treffen die Fellows überall in Berlin und selbst im idyllischen Grunewald. Für manche brachte das Wiko, wie David Edgerton formuliert, wieder zusammen, was die Geschichte getrennt hat. Die Suche nach Spuren der von den Nationalsozialisten vertriebenen Vorfahren förderte erstaunliche Verbindungen zutage. Sein Schwiegervater ging im Grunewald zur Schule; Rachel Gregor fand hier das Haus ihres Großvaters wieder. Heute ist Berlin seinerseits ein Zentrum verschiedener Exilgemeinden – aus der Ukraine, aus Iran, aus China. Wie wichtig das für die

Menschen aus diesen Ländern ist, erfährt man von den Fellows und lernt so auch als Deutsche Berlin mit anderen Augen zu sehen.

Wenig überraschend ist, wie unterschiedlich der Aufenthalt wahrgenommen wird. NachwuchswissenschaftlerInnen werden von ganz anderen Sorgen umgetrieben als Etablierte; Eltern mit Kindern stehen vor anderen Herausforderungen als Fellows, die allein kommen. Die einen fühlen sich sofort zu Hause, die anderen brauchen lange, um sich nicht mehr fremd zu fühlen. Es gibt die AktivistInnen und es gibt die Unpolitischen. Die Küche ist für die einen wichtiger als für die anderen. Erstaunlich polarisierend wirkt die Villa Walther: so einladend für die einen wie gespenstisch und abweisend für die anderen. Auch was als Höhepunkt gilt, ist verschieden: für manche die Lesung zum Jahrestag der Auschwitz-Befreiung, für andere der Abend mit Angela Merkel oder das Gespräch über *Das Schweigen* bei untergehender Sonne am Halensee. Nicht zu vergessen die privaten Höhepunkte: Ashley Dungan hat mittlerweile ihr Wiko-Baby Violet zur Welt gebracht; Volodymyr Ryzhkovskiy Pavel hat im Wiko seine ersten Schritte gemacht.

Das akademische Leben im beschaulichen Grunewald, wie es Hannah Darabis Fotografien zeigen, hat trotz allem seine Elfenbeinturmhaftigkeit noch nicht ganz verloren. Es herrscht ein anderer Zeitrhythmus als außerhalb. Laufgruppe, Chorproben, Filmabende, Schreib-Selbsthilfesitzungen und Workshops haben das Leben im Kolleg auch diesmal strukturiert. In diesem Jahrgang war es vor allem die Arbeitsgruppe zur Geschichte und Philosophie der Wissenschaft, die eine intensive Zusammenarbeit über die Disziplingrenzen hinweg eröffnet und dabei eine Produktivität entfaltet hat, die zwar dem schmeichelhaften Selbstbild des Kollegs entspricht, tatsächlich aber auch nach Wiko-Maßstäben außergewöhnlich war.

Das Jahr 2024/2025 war schließlich auch ein Jahr der Künstlichen Intelligenz. So jedenfalls teilt uns KI auf Anfrage mit. Schon im Jahrbuch 2022/2023 wurde die Frage aufgeworfen, wann die Berichte von KI generiert würden und woran sich das erkennen ließe. Dieses Jahr hat Nikolaus Wachsmann die Herausforderung angenommen, aber so viel ist klar: Auf diesen Hoax fallen wir nicht herein. Die Typologie der Jahrbuchbeiträge und die Ideen für alternative Veranstaltungsformate, die er vorlegt, können nur einer natürlichen Intelligenz zu verdanken sein. Vielleicht sollten wir in Zukunft darauf zurückkommen.

Berlin, im März 2026

## THE EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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Once again, this Fellow year stood under the sign of worldwide shock waves. The war against Ukraine, the defeat of the Iranian freedom movement, the continuing undermining of the American constitution, the threats to academic freedom, and above all the destruction of Gaza as a consequence of the massacre of October 7, 2023—the atmosphere at the Kolleg could not remain uninfluenced by all of this. Several Fellows came from opposing camps and were personally affected; several academic, journalistic, and artistic works took the current political crisis as their theme; other projects experienced an unexpected new timeliness. All of this politicized the Fellow group, but—fortunately—did not polarize it. The wish of one of the Fellows that politics be kept out of the Kolleg, the Colloquia, the workshops, and the events could not be fulfilled, even if one wanted to grant it. Where, if not here, would it be possible to speak respectfully with each other, across political faultlines? That we succeeded is testified by several contributions to this Yearbook. It appears to me that this is owed less to an academic habitus of strict objectivity than to the willingness and ability to exercise mutual empathy.

The Fellows encounter the ghost of Germany's past everywhere in Berlin, even in idyllic Grunewald district. For some, the Wissenschaftskolleg brought back together what history had torn asunder, as David Edgerton formulates it. The search for traces of forebears expelled by the National Socialists brought astonishing connections into view. Edgerton's father-in-law attended school in Grunewald; Rachel Gregor found her grandfather's house here. Today, Berlin is in turn a center for various communities of exiles—from Ukraine, from Iran, from China. One learns from the Fellows how important this is for people from these countries, and so even as a German one learns to see Berlin with different eyes.

How differently Fellows perceive their stay is hardly surprising. Up-and-coming scientists have very different worries than established ones do; parents with children face challenges different from Fellows who come by themselves. Some feel at home immediately, others take a long time before they stop feeling like outsiders. There are the activists and the apolitical. The kitchen is more important for some than for others. The Villa Walther seems surprisingly polarizing: as inviting for some as it was spooky and forbidding for others. And what is considered the high point differs, as well: for some, it was the reading on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, for others the evening with

Angela Merkel or the discussion of *Das Schweigen* as the sun set over Halensee. Not to forget the private high points: in the meantime, Ashley Dungan has given birth to her Wiko baby Violet; Volodymyr Ryzhkovskiy's Pavel took his first steps here.

As Hannah Darabi's photographs show, academic life in tranquil Grunewald has not entirely lost its ivory tower aspect, despite everything. A temporal rhythm prevails here that differs from the outside world. The running group, choir rehearsals, film evenings, and writing and other workshops structured life in the Kolleg again this year. In this cohort, it was especially the working group on the History and Philosophy of Science that opened up intense collaboration across disciplinary boundaries and thereby a level of productivity that flatteringly corresponds with the Kolleg's image of itself, but in point of fact was extraordinary even by Wiko standards.

Finally, the year 2024/2025 was also a year of Artificial Intelligence. Yes, sure, AI responded on request. In 2022/2023, the question already arose: when will AI generate the reports and how will that be recognized? This year, Nikolaus Wachsmann responded to the challenge, but this much is clear: we aren't taken in by this hoax. The typology of Yearbook contributions and the ideas for alternative event formats that Nikolaus presents can be owed only to natural intelligence. Maybe we should return to it in the future.

Berlin, in March 2026

*Arbeitsberichte*

*Work Reports*



NERVOUS CONDITIONS IN GRUNEWALD:  
REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR AT WIKO  
BASHIR BASHIR

---

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Rarely does an academic experience that stretches over a ten-month fellowship encapsulate rich intellectual stimulation, remarkable hospitality, unparalleled library services, and a rare opportunity to meet highly accomplished individuals from different disciplines. The fellowship at Wiko was that unique experience. The fellowship offered an excellent and conducive environment for research and intellectual exchange and enrichment. I have come out of it with a wealth of knowledge, profound reflections on academia and politics, a better understanding of certain German historical and political complexities, a powerful network of friends and fellow scholars, and the intellectual drive to produce new academic work based on the research of the past year.

I started my fellowship during very challenging times back home, as well as elsewhere around the world. We are living and witnessing alarming structural shifts, collapses, and ruptures in our world. The steady rise of right-wing populism in Europe and elsewhere in the world, Israel's war on Gaza, Russia's attack on Ukraine, the increasing US-China tensions in the Pacific Ocean, particularly around Taiwan, and other sites of local and global contestations have been contributing to exposing fundamental problems in the world order that was established after World War II. These fundamental problems, together with the nascent shift from American unipolarity to fluid and "unbalanced multipolarity," have given rise to demands calling for rethinking, reforming, or decolonizing the world order and generated new levels of violence, anxiety, precarity, insecurity, racism, capitalist greed, climate crisis, and the decline of welfare policies and democratic values.

Pursuing my academic research on egalitarian binationalism in Palestine/Israel during these precarious global conditions and the horrendous violent realities back home of an ongoing genocide in Gaza, extreme violence in the West Bank, and racial discrimination and oppression inside Israel was a daily struggle. More specifically, it was hard to gather the emotional and intellectual strength to talk, read, and write about alternative horizons and a new moral and political grammar for Palestinians and Israelis. These nervous, wretched, and tormenting conditions invite us to serious reflections on the value of academic research and public intellectual engagements. More precisely, I often found myself challenged by the gap between the distant and abstract world of academia and the lived realities. Also, I wondered about the ability of academia and intellectuals to rise to the occasion and use their knowledge and research to make impactful interventions, interrogate hegemonic discourses and power structures, and potentially contribute to stopping genocide, war, and violence in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere in the world.

Being in Germany during this period posed an additional challenge. While Wiko provided a protected oasis of free and honest intellectual exchanges, dominant and powerful circles in the German mainstream political, academic, and cultural spheres were engaging in the policing, silencing, and criminalization of debates around Palestine and the Palestinian struggle and quest for freedom, equality, and justice. While the Israeli genocide with the complicity of several Western countries brought the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of German internal politics and gave impetus to the global solidarity movement with Palestine, the public and academic debate on Palestine remained largely policed and hostile to the Palestinians. These realities in Germany, though depressing, encouraged me during the second half of my fellowship to engage with the German academic audience

through talks that I delivered in several academic institutions in the country such as the Technische Universität Berlin; Bielefeld University; the University of Konstanz; Marburg University; and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Through these talks, I witnessed initial signs of change in the German academic and public scene. I learned about enclaves of opposition and critiques in Germany and was exposed to German academic, cultural, and political sensitivities and controversies on memory culture, the Holocaust, German identity and democracy, and how Palestine questions these sensitivities and controversies.

Due to these complications, challenges, and engagements, I couldn't write as much as I had planned, but thanks to Wiko's remarkable library services I managed to get hold of and read almost every reference I was hoping to read for my research on egalitarian binationalism. The outstanding help of the librarians and their ability to obtain books, articles, and other references in various languages were a serious contribution to the progress of my research.

The weekly Colloquium at Wiko as well as the daily joint meals created a sense of social and intellectual community through which one could discuss at length topical issues and closely learn about academic, cultural, and political themes from people with different disciplinary backgrounds and various geographies. The special arrangement that allows Fellows to invite academic guests who work on related topics allowed us to meet and learn from several visiting scholars through internal seminars and networking activities.

The presence of German scholars among the Fellows at Wiko was of great value. Though the fellowship is primarily geared to enable Fellows to focus on their research, there was the added and unexpected benefit of gaining insights into German culture, history, and politics. I would highly recommend increasing the optional activities related to German culture, society, and politics as part of Wiko's fellowship, including two or three organized day trips to cities of cultural, political, and historical significance. I also benefited greatly from the German language course that Wiko offered. Besides learning the language with kind and highly trained teachers, the course served as a great opportunity for closely knowing some of the Fellows, developing friendships, and organizing joint academic and social activities.

Being elected to serve as one of the two speakers of my cohort gave me the opportunity to better know my Co-Fellows and familiarize myself with some of their work. It also provided me with the opportunity to grasp the outstanding efforts the different sections of the management of Wiko invest in these fellowships to render our stay productive, meaningful, and comfortable.



A NEW CONTEXT FOR DELVING INTO  
THE DEEP PAST  
JULIA A. CLARKE

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I started my Wiko stay in late August for the intensive German course. Taking advantage of the opportunity to learn German during my year stay was something I was really looking forward to. I am glad I did the course and thank Giancarlo, Eva, and my course-mates. But I took the four-hour per day course, then did the homework from the course,

then had meetings with my lab group or other collaborators in the afternoon and evening. Keeping up was a bit of a struggle. My class was the wonderful “false beginners” with Mariana, Tolik, Basile, and me. I relished the opportunity to get to know this group and the other course-takers before the start of the program.

In September, the program began. While kicking off my project, excitedly getting key help from the library on sources I had longed to find, I was also working intensively to contribute to two manuscripts on the evolution of mammal coloration for publication (1–2). The research for (1) started nearly 10 years ago. We needed to do final analyses and figures and edit the written text. Next, I needed to focus on two projects on pterosaur color (3, in preparation); these needed more extensive work. Unfortunately, I had a conference (GSA Connects), which I had to attend to run a program and to chair sessions related to a new grant (see below) almost as soon as the stay started. I got COVID at this conference, and it was a struggle.

By early October, I had settled into a routine. I could read, write, and work on my project or other papers in the mornings and have meetings (to keep my lab going) in the afternoons. This worked pretty well. I was approached by an editor who had seen the description of my Wiko project and asked if I was thinking about a book. The several conversations I had with them over the year were very helpful. November was noteworthy because the chef finally arrived. The weather turned, and the lake was visible through the trees. Sometime in the winter, a dead body was found in the snow near the main villa; it was said that it was discovered because several foxes were acting strangely.

I made progress on my project. Edits on three other joint projects enabled them to be submitted (4–6). I also met with my former student Hans Bilger, who lives in Berlin, to work on getting three other manuscripts submitted. At Wiko, everyone was out sick for some duration. It seemed we shared our germs freely and efficiently at the mealtimes.

January was to be very short. My presentation was on February 7; there didn’t seem to be nearly enough time to complete what I wanted to by that date. I undertook a long-planned trip to South Korea in late February to go in the field and work with collaborators. On my return, my experience of Wiko also really started to shift.

Around this time, I had to start having emergency meetings with co-investigators about the possible cancelation of our major National Science Foundation grant, one that had just been funded in August 2024 for five years. The focus of this grant was a complex, tiered program for mentors and scholars to increase access, retention, and support leadership in geosciences for all groups historically underrepresented in this, the least diverse of

STEM disciplines. The information we received was changing weekly. Would we be canceled? Were other colleagues being canceled? We escaped the earliest rounds of cuts. Maybe it would be ok? We proceeded with paperwork required by NSF and, with most other science funding, our funding was cut off for about 10 days, halting payments to staff. On April 25 the grant was terminated as no longer aligned with NSF's priorities. Was this legal? Now my time was even more impacted by emergency meetings about appeals, possible legal action, the fate of staff, student grants intended for fall, and programming. While following the progression of bills affecting my position and all other public university faculty in Texas, it was still a pleasure to work with my former student Hector Garza on completing a joint project (7). This was a small light. He graduated with his PhD while I was out of the country.

Since February, concerns about the fate of science, higher education, and more broadly democracy in the US felt existential. I can imagine what Wiko colleagues directly impacted by war were feeling. This too was often a topic of conversation at meals. How to celebrate scholarship and discovery in a time of global crisis? I found myself reflecting more on the purpose of research and higher education in these times than on my original project. Indeed, focusing on my book project was difficult. I felt I needed to focus on action, and, in my scholarship, I needed to focus on activities that would directly relate to persisting in my career. In science, unfortunately, creative book projects are largely luxuries not rewarded in our system. Thus, in May and June, I prioritized meeting with European collaborators and colleagues to lay possible foundations for projects. I also accepted an invitation for a trip to New Zealand as a distinguished speaker. This trip also allowed me to reconnect with colleagues and further explore new projects that could be developed moving forward. Wiko colleagues generously shared information on proposal preparation and scoping for ERC grants.

It has been a strange, and in many ways, uncomfortable year, but the green and lakes and new friendships with many fellow Fellows have been bright lights in this time. A sincere thank you to Wiko staff and colleagues for an invaluable stay affording me the freedom (not to be taken lightly) to pivot but still explore and discover.

Partial list of works submitted:

1. Li, R., L. D'Alba, G. Debruyne, J.L. Dobson, C.-F. Zhou, **J.A. Clarke**, J. Vinther, Q. Li, and M.D. Shawkey. 2025. "Mesozoic mammaliaforms illuminate the origins of pelage coloration." *Science* 387: 1193–1198. doi:10.1126/science.ads9734.

2. Li, X., S. Bi, **J.A. Clarke**, Z. Li, X. Zhu, Q. Liu, Y. Peng, L. Zhao, Z. Li, and Y. Pan. 2025. "High mammalian melanosome diversity exhibits weak correlation with color and environmental variables in the early evolution of therian mammals." *Science Advances* 11 (43): eadw8707. doi:10.1126/sciadv.adw8707.
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LES PETITES CHOSES DE GRUNEWALD  
LEYLA DAKHLI

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Leyla Dakhli est née à Tunis, a travaillé en Syrie et au Liban, a étudié en France, et vécu dans plusieurs endroits, dont Berlin, Marseille et Paris. Elle est historienne et ses travaux portent sur l'histoire sociale du long 20<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les pays de langue arabe de l'est et du sud de la Méditerranée. Chercheuse au Centre national de la recherche scientifique, elle est l'auteur de plusieurs ouvrages d'histoire sociale sur la région. Après avoir travaillé sur l'histoire des intellectuel-le-s en Syrie et au Liban de 1908 à 1940, elle a mené une série de travaux sur les mobilisations féminines et féministes. Elle s'est ensuite penchée sur la place des cultures de l'écrit dans la Jérusalem des années 1890–1920, puis sur l'histoire des langues et du multilinguisme dans les mondes arabes contemporains. Elle a enfin coordonné, dans le cadre d'un projet financé par l'ERC, des travaux sur les révoltes sociales postcoloniales dans la région et travaille sur l'histoire, la place et le sens de la dignité dans ces mouvements. – Adresse : Centre d'histoire sociale des mondes contemporains, 5 cours des Humanités, 93300 Aubervilliers, France. E-mail : ines-leila.dakhli@cnr.fr.

Jamais je n'aurais pensé passer une année à Grunewald, ou même dans un IEA, avant qu'une collègue ne lance cette idée dans une conversation où je me demandais comment trouver la concentration nécessaire pour enfin écrire la monographie qui rendrait compte des dernières années de recherche collective, agitée et enthousiaste que je venais de mener avec l'ERC DREAM. Imaginer un espace de concentration quand on aime plus que tout l'échange intellectuel collectif, que l'on ne conçoit pas ce travail sans implication, et qu'on est dans le même temps mère de trois (grands) enfants relève d'une forme d'idéal presque inaccessible. Imaginer vivre à Grunewald était aussi quelque chose que j'avais un peu de

mal à me représenter. Pour moi, ce lieu était une villégiature, un lieu de promenade et de baignade, un espace fait de villas un peu mystérieuses, de lieux de mémoire sombres et isolés, un endroit un peu trop européen ou allemand pour moi, pas assez cosmopolite ou urbain. J'ai pourtant fait le dossier, pensant que ce serait une expérience certainement apaisante, le moyen, sinon d'écrire un livre, au moins de faire le point sur mes recherches. C'était à l'automne 2022.

Deux ans plus tard au mois d'août, j'ai posé quelques valises dans un appartement le long d'un lac artificiel, et fait connaissance avec une famille de canards et de cygnes, ainsi qu'avec des personnes qui venaient de loin, apprenaient un peu d'allemand ou rafraichissaient leurs connaissances, rôdaient les trajets vers les écoles de leurs enfants, prenaient leurs marques.

Ce que j'ai trouvé au Wiko n'était en réalité rien de ce que je m'étais imaginé, ni sur Grunewald, ni sur l'IEA. D'abord, bien sûr, le Wiko apporte à ce morceau de ville bourgeoise ouest-allemande un air de cosmopolitisme qu'il a perdu depuis bien longtemps. On y parle bien des langues, certaines que je pouvais comprendre, d'autres qui chantaient joliment à mes oreilles. On y parle aussi de nombreuses langues scientifiques, des disciplines diverses, mais aussi des cultures et des références, on y échange ces monuments de nos mémoires intellectuelles, on y échange nos connaissances, nos admirations.

Après deux semaines d'adaptation sous la forme de cours d'allemand où j'ai rencontré quelques-unes des personnes qui allaient devenir des camarades et amis tout au long de l'année ainsi que la douce et sensible Eva, je me suis installée dans mon bureau, toute au plaisir d'un luxe de calme, de lectures facilitées par les services de la bibliothèque. Je me suis saisie de cet espace pour replonger dans ma recherche sur l'histoire de la dignité. Lire et relire, reprendre des notes, prendre le temps de réfléchir. Se plonger dans les aspérités de ce que l'on croyait évident... tout cela a fait que, finalement, c'était bien pour écrire un livre que je me trouvais là, et j'ai tout naturellement commencé à écrire.

Les colloquia venaient ajouter de nouvelles questions, des envies de comprendre et de lire, des points de passage que je n'avais jamais aperçus. Les conversations informelles poursuivaient ces méditations. Quelques ateliers prolongeaient encore autrement ces occasions d'échange : une lecture commentée en commun, des ateliers sur les questions posées par l'écriture, une série sur les questions posées par le conflit en Ukraine, des discussions sur la situation en Palestine.

L'impression que j'avais, tout au contraire de ce que j'avais cru, c'est que Grunewald ne nous mettait pas dans une bulle isolée mais nous connectait au monde, de manière

profonde, grâce à la profondeur des analyses et des perceptions de nos *co-fellows*. J'étais toute à mon plaisir d'apprendre, et à celui de profiter de la solitude et du calme de mon bureau pour avancer et réfléchir. Surtout, je prenais un plaisir tout particulier à m'éloigner de mes obsessions. Aujourd'hui je comprends que le Wiko m'a permis de renouer avec l'éclectisme délicieux des années d'études, ce moment où je n'étais pas encore devenue une « spécialiste de ma spécialité ». Mais ici, les domaines auxquels j'ai été initiée étaient encore bien plus vastes. Des horizons entiers se sont ouverts quand j'ai écouté Misato Mochizuki raconter et expliquer sa musique ou Yolanda Ohene parler d'imagerie médicale, Michael Smith d'abeilles, Sara Magalhães d'acariens... cette étrangeté me ramenait sans cesse à notre commune humanité et notre commune curiosité, celle d'une assemblée de chercheur-e-s et de questionneur-e-s en tout genre.

C'est dans ces multiples distances, celle du lieu, des disciplines, des langues, des conversations que j'ai trouvé un espace propice pour avancer dans mon travail, et aussi pour faire la place à des amitiés nouvelles, ce que je n'avais certainement pas imaginé. Le contexte de ce séjour, pris dans la violence de la guerre génocidaire menée en Palestine avec la complicité de nombreux gouvernements occidentaux, de l'agression russe en Ukraine, de l'élection et de la politique brutale de Trump aux États-Unis, a vite favorisé des conversations plus profondes et essentielles entre nous. Le silence n'aurait pas été possible. Il a fallu très vite créer des ponts, écouter et dire. Pour ma part, je n'ai pas beaucoup parlé. J'ai surtout écouté. Mais je voyais les échos des fracas du monde dans la situation politique qui se tendait en Tunisie jusqu'à m'en barrer bientôt l'accès, et dans la joie du renversement du régime du Baath en Syrie qui me permit d'y aller pour une courte semaine en janvier. Et ces échos ont nourri mon travail sur l'histoire de la dignité, pour lui donner toujours plus d'épaisseur, de complexité et de trouble.

Au milieu de ce fracas du monde, des liens et des parentés plus directes se tissaient au fil des semaines, avec les archives dissidentes chinoises que Ian Johnson et sa compagne Chi Yin Sim collectaient et organisaient, les questionnements sur les langues de la mobilisation en ligne qu'Alina Mozolevska soulevait pour l'Ukraine contemporaine, les réflexions profondes sur la religiosité et l'identité que construisait Asonzeh Ukah, les explorations de grottes-refuges de Natalia Romik, d'usines post-industrielles et de travail précaire que décortiquait son compagnon Jakub Szreder..., comme des fils ou des petits cailloux qui, par-delà nos disciplines ou des formes de parentés plus évidentes, faisaient de l'accident de notre présence ensemble à Grunewald une chance, construite, organisée et orchestrée par cette équipe administrative patiente et énergique, de rencontres et de connexions nouvelles.

De semaines en semaines, j'ai trouvé mon chemin dans le livre, et j'ai laissé aussi la place à d'autres projets. La possibilité offerte d'accueillir une invitée académique a permis à l'un de ces projets de prendre forme. Par deux fois, nous avons fait, avec ma collègue Falestin Naili de l'université de Bâle, des séjours d'écriture pour un livre à venir. Nous avons largement profité du confort des petits déjeuners délicieux au restaurant pour démarrer la journée, puis des déjeuners préparés par cette équipe joyeuse que nous avons peu à peu appris à connaître, comme eux avaient appris à nous connaître. Des gestes délicats, comme ceux de cet employé de la cuisine qui amenait régulièrement des fruits coupés à celles et ceux qui n'aimaient pas les desserts, ou l'attention que chacune et chacun portait à cette autre travailleuse qui cherchait un logement... les soirées où l'on apportait un plat que l'on savait bien cuisiner pour partager avec les autres. Jusqu'à cette soirée où nous avons construit, sous la direction de Natalia, ces drôles de sculptures fragiles de cristal qui contenaient nos « plaies », une figuration si poétique d'un collectif qui mettait ses douleurs sous cloche dans un geste de soin et d'attention. C'est tout cela qui a fait le caractère généreux et unique de ces mois au Wiko, par-delà l'amour de la science et de la vérité que nous partagions.

Un autre rendez-vous a contribué à changer ma manière de faire, de travailler et même de vivre, c'est le *running group* du jeudi matin, animé par Daniel Schönplflug. J'avais rencontré Daniel en 2014 au Centre Marc Bloch, et je savais déjà qu'il était un coureur assidu. Je n'ai donc pas été surprise de le voir proposer cette course matinale hebdomadaire, dans ses terres de la forêt de Grunewald. Ce qui m'a surpris c'est la manière dont j'y ai pris goût, le plaisir que j'ai éprouvé à commencer ces journées par un effort et une conversation – ce que je n'aurais jamais cru être capable de faire ! Aujourd'hui, ce plaisir de la course m'accompagne comme un legs, inattendu, du séjour en Institut d'études avancées...

Une somme de petites choses, le plus souvent simples, et presque toujours inattendues. C'est ce que je retiens des mois passés à Grunewald. Au final, ces petites choses m'auront portée jusqu'à l'élaboration d'un plan et l'écriture d'un bon tiers de mon livre, le lancement d'un autre ouvrage avec Falestin, ainsi que l'organisation, comme co-représentante des *fellows*, de quelques soirées épiques et joyeuses dont certaines incluaient des récitations de poésie arabe. Peut-être me faisais-je une idée fautive de la concentration. J'avais associé cela avec la solitude, l'isolement, la focalisation sur un seul objet... mais la concentration et l'attention à mon objet qui m'est venue a été facilitée par une somme de petites « dispersions attentives », de multiples connexions intellectuelles et amicales, des

attentions quotidiennes qui toutes sont venues me donner confiance et me permettre de respirer et de travailler.

Cette somme de petites choses, auxquelles il faut ajouter le parfum de la pluie dans les arbres, les changements de lumière sur les massifs de la Weiße Villa que je voyais depuis mon bureau, je les emporte avec moi pour poursuivre le chemin. J'espère écrire un livre dans lequel on pourra les reconnaître ou les découvrir. Que toutes les personnes qui m'ont aidée et entourée et accompagnée en soient ici remerciées.



24 PORTRAITS DE HALENSEE  
HANNAH DARABI

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Artiste-Photographe iranienne née en 1981 à Téhéran, Hannah Darabi a étudié à la Faculté des Beaux-Arts de Téhéran, puis à l'Université Paris 8 – Saint-Denis. Aujourd'hui installée à Paris, son pays d'origine demeure le sujet principal de la plupart de ses séries photographiques. Afin de révéler la complexité de la situation politique en Iran, elle conçoit des séries où ses photographies interagissent avec d'autres matériaux tels que des textes, des images d'archives ou des objets. Le livre d'artiste occupe une place centrale dans sa pratique, parmi les autres formes de représentation qu'elle explore. Ses ouvrages font partie de collections publiques et privées. Son travail *Rue Enghelab, la révolution par les livres : Iran 1979–1983*, publié en 2019 par Spector Books et Le Bal, en est un exemple emblématique. *Soleil of Persian Square*, son projet de recherche-crédation autour de la diaspora iranienne du sud de la Californie et de sa musique populaire, a été publié par le Centre d'art GwinZegal en 2021. Hannah Darabi a reçu en 2022 le Prix Bernd et Hilla Becher décerné par la ville de Düsseldorf pour l'ensemble de sa pratique artistique. Elle est lauréate du Prix Elysée en 2025 pour son projet sur la danse populaire iranienne, *Why Don't You Dance?*. – Adresse : 14 rue de l'Abbé Rousselot, 75017 Paris, France.  
E-mail : hannah.darabi@gmail.com.

Vous pouvez partir de la station S-Halensee. Suivez le Kurfürstendamm jusqu'à la Rathenausplatz puis prenez à droite sur Halenseestrasse. Vous arrivez dans la nature, en passant par l'entrée sur le trottoir de gauche. Un premier petit lac, qui s'appelle... ? Le Halensee bien sûr ! [...] En passant par le nord du lac, vous rejoignez la Trabener Strasse, suivez-la sur la

gauche jusqu'à l'Erderner Strasse, puis tournez à gauche et tout de suite à droite. Vous arrivez sur la Koenigsallee. Attendez-vous à en prendre plein les yeux d'un point de vue architectural. Les bâtisses qui bordent l'entrée de la forêt contrastent avec le Berlin que nous connaissons habituellement. Vastes, richement décorées, de haut standing, et pour certaines, porteuses d'Histoire, comme la Villa Walter qui accueille des scientifiques (ou « Fellows ») en résidence, travaillant pour « das Kolleg ». On peut entrer ?

Cette petite description (orthographe comme dans l'original), qui apparaît sur le site de *Vivre à Berlin*, nous guide dans l'un des quartiers les moins connus de Berlin, Grunewald. Faisant partie des *fellows*, j'ai eu le privilège d'entrer dans la fameuse Villa, et le lac faisait partie de mon quotidien durant mes neuf mois passés sur place. Je suis arrivée à Berlin mi-septembre 2024.

« Nous vivons dans un moment inquiétant » : venant des quatre coins du monde, cette phrase était échangée entre les *fellows*, en allant vers la Villa Walther ou en en revenant, dès les premiers jours. Mais sur le chemin, lorsque nous arrivions au lac, un calme s'imposait à nos discussions sur l'état de nos sociétés. On regardait le lac, et il nous observait en retour. Il nous rappelait tout simplement notre compréhension limitée et parfois erronée de l'Histoire.

Au fur et à mesure que je passais du temps avec mes « Fellows » et leurs familles, le lac me semblait être une métaphore parfaite de notre vie commune à « das Kolleg » ; cette surface calme et miroitante reflétait les lumières changeantes des saisons, et parfois offrait un aperçu de son fond.



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## ON MY RESIDENCY AT WIKO PHILIPPE DJORWÉ

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Philippe Djorwé is Senior Lecturer on Quantum Computing and Quantum Optics at the University of Ngaoundéré, Cameroon. He was born in 1984 in Obala, Cameroon. He received his Bachelor in Physics and Master in Quantum Cryptography from the University of Ngaoundéré and his PhD in Quantum Optomechanics from the University of Yaoundé I. Philippe is an Iso Lomso Fellow from the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in South Africa. As a theoretical physicist in quantum mechanics, Philippe's project aims to enhance sensor sensitivity at the vicinity of the exceptional point by using quantum resources such as quantum correlations and squeezed states. – Address: Department of Physics, University of Ngaoundéré, 454 Ngaoundéré, Cameroon. E-mail: djorwepp@gmail.com.

### *Life at Wiko*

With the Iso Lomso Fellowship, I had the opportunity to be one of Wiko's Fellows in Berlin from 16 February 2025 to 15 May 2025. It has been a very nice and unique experience for me, as it was my first time to visit Germany. I met experienced and outstanding researchers/scholars, artists, and politicians who are so kind and working so hard to either advance their respective research fields or to make life better in this world. Beside the Fellows, I also met Wiko's fantastic community, people who are so devoted to their duties and who work hard to ease the lives of the Fellows during their residency. I can mention the people at the reception, Vera and her colleagues who are so devoted to prepare the Fellows' stay, the library team who did everything to provide us with any literature that we ask for, the people from life sciences/admissions like Jana Petri and Janina, and the IT services. You cannot be a Fellow at Wiko and forget people from the restaurant like Abdoulie

and Dunia who are always feeding you and who want you to always get more food. I would like to sincerely thank them. Above all this, the Rector Barbara reshapes your way of considering life. In fact, despite her loaded schedule, she will always find time to talk to each Fellow and she somehow remembers all of them. She is a hard-working person, so open-minded and somehow attached to sociocultural and family identities, qualities that we tend to lose nowadays. I really appreciated how she manages her team at Wiko and would like to thank the whole Wiko staff for the hospitality that I received during my stay.

I am also grateful to Wiko for activities organized to bring the Fellows together. I remember Colloquia, Thursday dinners, the Fellows tour, some Fellows' expositions organized by Wiko, and so on. I cannot forget my Thursday dinner with Angela Merkel, the former German Chancellor, who was invited to Wiko for a panel discussion on the future of democracy.

### *Work at Wiko*

I carried out various tasks related to my research activities while at Wiko. I also managed to organize online meetings with my students in Cameroon to supervise their Master thesis work. I completed four manuscripts. Two manuscripts are in collaboration with my former group in Barcelona and researchers in the United Arab Emirates. These manuscripts are almost done and will be submitted soon. The two other manuscripts are co-authored with my students; the results are very good and they are about quantum sensors performing at the exceptional points. These manuscripts are in line with one of my research interests in the improvement of sensor sensitivity near the exceptional points, which are singularities of Non-Hermitian systems where the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of the systems coalesce. These sensors are designed to detect tiny objects such as viruses, nano-particles, bacteria, and so on. Such sensors perform better than the existing conventional sensors and are meant to improve applications like water treatment, the accurate diagnosis of diseases, the tracking and detection of air pollutants, etc. Experimental implementation of these sensors already exists for optical and electronic systems, and sensing performances have been reported that are better than those of conventional sensors. Our aim is to enhance such performances by exploiting quantum resources and artificial intelligence.

### *Experience*

I had a very nice experience during my stay at Wiko. The discussions during lunch with people from different disciplines and cultures and from all over the world have

substantially reshaped my opinion about many things. For instance, my thoughts about the social sciences have been completely redirected. Thinking that social sciences are not useful to change our societies, for example, was wrong. I instead realize that they directly impact our societies even more than natural sciences. Moreover, I came to know that both social and natural scientists must work together to address real world issues. Such an environment not only allows us to be open-minded toward other fields, it also stimulates multidisciplinary in science.

Furthermore, I was able to strengthen my research network and my contact with outstanding scholars. I had an opportunity to visit one of my collaborators, Flore Kunst, at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Light at Erlangen in Germany. I had a stimulating discussion with each researcher in the group (eight people), and I gave a talk there. All our discussion was around Non-Hermitian systems and the exceptional point with application to sensing technology. We are planning to apply for a Humboldt fellowship together, so that I can come to the Max Planck Institute to pursue our collaborative work on sensing application and other research questions regarding Non-Hermitian physics. This initiative, which focuses on sensor matters and open quantum systems, may be a nice opportunity for my future students regarding their research careers.

#### *To realize the full potential of Fellows*

To realize the full potential of the Fellows at Wiko, it could be nice to put in place some resources to attract more and more natural scientists. Such resources can be scientific software, a supercomputer or server, or any other material in that sense.

Another point to consider is to welcome the Iso Lomso Fellows at the beginning of the year, so that they get to know the experienced Wiko Fellows from the beginning. When the young Iso Lomso Fellows arrive at the middle of the year, it is somehow difficult for them to integrate.



CONSERVATION MICROBIAL ECOLOGY  
IN TRANSITION: REFLECTIONS FROM  
THE WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG  
ASHLEY DUNGAN

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Dr. Ashley Dungan is a conservation microbial ecologist whose research explores how host-microbiome interactions shape wildlife health, resilience, and survival. She leads an interdisciplinary program at the University of Melbourne, developing microbiome-informed strategies to support the conservation and reintroduction of threatened marsupials, having previously pioneered approaches for coral and aquatic systems. Ashley's work combines field ecology, genomics, and microbiome engineering, with a record of competitive funding and publications in leading journals such as *ISME Journal* and *Trends in Microbiology*. Her career bridges continents, from the Florida Keys to the Great Barrier Reef and now Berlin, reflecting a commitment to tackling biodiversity loss on global scales. Deeply engaged in teaching and mentoring, she has trained students across biology and bioinformatics and is active in international societies advancing microbial ecology, equity in STEM, and early-career leadership. – Address: School of BioSciences, The University of Melbourne, Grattan Street, 3010 Parkville, Australia. E-mail: [ashley.dungan@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ashley.dungan@unimelb.edu.au).

During my four-month fellowship in the College for Life Sciences, I set out with three ambitions: to expand my academic network, to secure my next academic position, and to step back to reflect deeply on my field. Despite personal challenges—including the discovery that I was pregnant with my first child—I was fortunate to make meaningful progress on all fronts.

*Expanding academic network:*

Interdisciplinary engagement can be daunting in practice, but two key events—the Berlin Reception and my Colloquium—proved invaluable. Specifically, during the Berlin

Reception, I was introduced to Prof. Mitja Remus-Emsermann, a microbiologist and Professor at Freie Universität. In email exchanges, Prof. Remus-Emsermann introduced me to other scientists, and I later went on to give a seminar to a broad ecology audience at Freie Universität on 18 December 2024 titled “Microbial rewilding—a viable option for advancing conservation outcomes?”

My Colloquium, wisely shaped by Jana’s suggestion to invite external participants, was attended by researchers from the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, including former Fellow Dr. Alexandre Courtiol, Dr. Gábor Czírják (wildlife immunology), and Dr. Kristin Mühldorfer (wildlife disease microbiology). This exchange sparked a collaboration with Dr. Czírják, and together we are now co-authoring a review on One Health perspectives of marsupial immunity and microbiome interventions.

Prior to coming to the Wissenschaftskolleg, I aspired to run a workshop, bringing in an interdisciplinary network of scientists to discuss microbial rewilding. Being pregnant and needing to leave a month early threw a big wrench into those plans coming to fruition. However, the spreadsheets and contacts I had made during my time in Berlin will be an asset for running something similar in collaboration with the Melbourne Biodiversity Institute in my new role.

*Finding my next academic role:*

Prior to coming to the Wissenschaftskolleg, I was employed as a consultant for the Australian Institute of Marine Science. It was a great opportunity, but it did not include any wet or dry lab research, student mentoring/supervision, or opportunities to give talks/seminars or contribute to peer-reviewed manuscripts. Given that the Wissenschaftskolleg fellowship was only for a few months and I was pregnant, this was an urgent task for me. I had initially applied for a few permanent lecturer roles where the focus was on teaching biology. I used the network within the Wissenschaftskolleg, specifically Fellow Prof. Margaret McFall-Ngai, to review my application documents but was unfortunately unsuccessful. I spent much of October working on an application to The University of Melbourne Excellence in Diversity—Gender Equity in STEM Fellowship where, if awarded, I would be able to lead my own independent research under the guidance of a senior academic. For this application I leaned hard into the support of the Fellows and received feedback from Kärin Nickelsen, Sara Magalhães, Mariana Gómez-Schiavon, and Rachel Gregor. In a surprisingly quick turnaround, it was announced that I was the sole recipient of this fellowship and could begin early the following year. Here is the project abstract:

Australia reports the highest mammalian extinction rate on Earth. An estimated 10% of endemic mammal species have become extinct over the past 200 years and, given that ~21% of extant Australian mammals are now assessed as threatened, without substantial intervention, further extinctions are likely in coming decades. Management plans for threatened species traditionally include the maintenance of captive populations. It is challenging to provide a true native diet to captive animals; this is particularly apparent in carnivorous and omnivorous species, where the supply of natural and diverse diets in an artificial setting is often restricted. This diet alteration can lead to changes in the gut microbiota: the often complex and diverse community of commensal bacteria resident in the gastrointestinal tracts of their animal hosts. As well as playing a crucial role in the digestion of food, studies from humans and model laboratory animals highlight the benefits of gut microbiota on host behaviour and fitness.

The gut microbiome of native Australian marsupials is largely unstudied but is the topic of my proposed innovative project. Using a model marsupial, the fat-tailed dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*), I aim to understand how diet and the gut microbiome can impact overall fitness in a vulnerable marsupial species.

As mentioned above, because of my new relationship with Dr. Gábor Czirják, I was able to add a new component to this project and document how diet and microbiome composition impact host immunity. This novel addition was funded by a grant from the Applied Microbiology International Sustainable Microbiology Novel Research Grant (awarded May 2025). I feel confident that my success in being awarded the two-year fellowship and this research grant is due in part to my position as a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I began the new fellowship at The University of Melbourne in early February 2025, but was only in the position for two months before going on parental leave.

#### *Time to think:*

The most distinctive gift of the Wissenschaftskolleg was time—time to read, reflect, and write without interruption. I read far more literature than I ever could in my usual academic routine, often 10–15 papers a week. From this immersion, I drafted two reviews: one providing a broad synthesis of conservation microbial ecology and the potential of

microbiome engineering to enhance animal health and conservation outcomes, and another, in collaboration with Dr. Czirják, focused on the unique immunological development of marsupials and its implications for microbiome interventions. The latter is critical for my research, as marsupials experience early-life immune development profoundly different from that of placental mammals. These reviews will shape the conceptual foundation of my research going forward.

*Final thoughts:*

I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg in early September, having found out just a few days prior that I was pregnant with my first child. It was a challenge on so many levels. Being without my partner and friends in a new place where I didn't speak the native language. Being a woman in STEM where there is still a stigma around having children—those who do have children seem to have to work twice as hard, as if there is something to prove. Having previously had a miscarriage and being worried that it would happen again. I found myself not only experiencing the traditional symptoms of first-trimester pregnancy, but quite depressed and struggling to build relationships with Fellows that would have otherwise come easily to me. I am particularly thankful to Vera, Jana, and Mariana for being so supportive and always checking in on me. It was also quite the relief to get past the 12-week mark and feel comfortable sharing the news of my pregnancy with the larger group. My daughter, Violet, is the greatest gift and I feel very fortunate that I was able to have that time at the Wissenschaftskolleg to grow professionally but also rest when I needed to.

There are a few parts of life in the Kolleg that I think could have been altered to improve my overall experience. To start, having my office in the same place as my apartment/bedroom was challenging. Other than for meals, I wasn't really going to the main building and interacting with other Fellows as often as I should have. It also made separating work and rest tricky. I also never felt a huge camaraderie with the other College for Life Sciences Fellows. I wish there would have been more group activities early on for the five of us together or focused time when we would have met each week to discover where our research or interests overlapped.

My time at the Wissenschaftskolleg was transformative. I left Berlin with new collaborations, a prestigious fellowship, and clarity about the future directions of my research. Balancing professional ambition with the realities of motherhood will remain a challenge, but my experience at the Kolleg has given me both the confidence and the perspective to embrace this next stage of life and career.



A SMALL WORLD  
DAVID EDGERTON

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David Edgerton was born in Montevideo in 1959 and moved to the United Kingdom in 1970. He studied Chemistry at St John's College, Oxford (where he is now an Honorary Fellow) and History at Imperial College London, where he later taught for 20 years before transferring to King's College London with the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine in 2013, where he is Hans Rausing Professor of the History of Science and Technology and Professor of Modern British History. He has worked mainly in two areas, the history of science and technology and twentieth-century British history. Perhaps his best-known books are *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (Profile 2007, 2019), and *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (Penguin, 2019). His new book, a global history of production since 1900, will be published with Allen Lane/Penguin in 2027. He is a regular contributor to the press, especially *The Guardian* and the *New Statesman*, mainly on current British politics. – Address: Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, Department of History, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2 LS, United Kingdom.  
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My time, our time, in Wiko has been about the discovery not just of a wonderful community of scholars and staff, but also of a historical reconnection with a city and a country. Wiko, the City of Berlin, and the German government deserve our warmest thanks for this.

The opportunity to come to Wiko came at a very particular moment that made it doubly attractive. Claire's parents were born in Breslau and Leipzig, and both left in the early

1930s. Our unwillingness to be torn away (again) from the Continent because of the machinations of the hard right led to Claire and our three children becoming German citizens. Or rather, as the German embassy in London graciously put it, they have had returned to them the birthright of their parents and grandparents. The ceremony was so correctly done that I opened my review of John Kampfner's book on Germany with a reference to it, not knowing of course that we would be Fellows together.

Claire and I both decided to learn at least some German, as a means and a symbol of reconnection, Claire with Duolingo and I with the tender ministrations of Lea Zsivkovits. Though starting from scratch, we both stumbled on traces from the past—Claire from conversations of her parents they did not want overheard, or the half-remembered name of a cake or pudding (what else); I from a year of German when I was 12 or so. But we did not expect to find, with Wiko's help, connections to Berlin itself.

In her Colloquium, Rachel Gregor included references to her Berlin antecedents that she was rediscovering with the help of Kirsten Graupner of the library. I would have not given this much thought had not Claire, as we were walking to Grunewald station, suddenly said that she thought her father had possibly started to study engineering in Berlin. It prompted me to consult Kirsten. She was extraordinarily keen to help, and so, guided by what turned out to be these false leads from me, found that parts of the prewar registers of Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität and the Technische Hochschule had been destroyed. But there seemed to be something to Claire's thought because online ship's passenger lists showed Claire's father, then Andreas Eppenstein, described as a student from Berlin, travelling twice (in 1936 and 1937) between Germany and the UK. Elementary German was proving useful, but this information made no sense.

But Kirsten was able to dig up information that showed Claire's Breslau grandmother had been living in Berlin sometime in the late 1930s. But there seemed no trace in phone books or the like. This prompted a search through documents at home, where it emerged that Claire's father (and uncle) had studied at, of all places, the Grunewald-Gymnasium (1929–1933). And he and his mother and brother lived on the corner of Ku'damm and Joachim-Friedrich-Straße, a block from Halensee station. Claire's father had intended, post-Abitur, to study law but instead went to the LSE to study economics (starting in 1934). He was indeed a student from Berlin, but was not studying in Berlin.

This turned out not to be the only unknown Berlin connection. His aunt, Dr Lisa Eppenstein, was a schoolteacher in Berlin who joined the Epiphaniienkirche in Charlottenburg and taught at Provost Grüber's *Familienschule* for baptized Christian children from

Jewish families. We visited her *Stolperstein* in Bayernallee. And, according to Claire's brother, though this is still unconfirmed, their father was in Berlin as a British army officer in July 1945, for the Allied victory parade in the city.

There was one other uncanny Eppenstein-Wiko coincidence. Jana Petri invited us Fellows to visit the Gropius-designed house in Jena now owned by her former professor. It had been built for another Jena professor, the physicist Felix Auerbach, who was married to the aunt of Claire's great uncle, Dr Otto Eppenstein of Zeiss of Jena. The Eppensteins and indeed the Auerbachs were from Breslau, where Claire and I duly went, armed with pages from a 1914 Baedeker supplied by Kirsten. There we made some discoveries and also followed a false lead to the wrong Gymnasium. Such is genealogical research.

The world is small, and our stay in Wiko unexpectedly proved it, or rather made it so. It was only in Wiko that I met, or even heard of, I am ashamed to say, my esteemed colleague David Owens, despite having had an office not 100 yards from his in King's in London for many years. On the other hand, unexpected links to Africa revealed themselves. I noticed by chance that Omar Gueye, in a footnote in one of his papers on display at the time of his Colloquium, referred to the pioneering work in African history of Robert and Marianne Cornevin. He was overjoyed to learn, as I was to tell him, that they were the parents of Claire's brother's first wife, who died tragically young. Omar marked this discovery with a much appreciated gift of a book to the eldest Cornevin child, Genevieve. I was thrilled that Charles came to dinner in Wiko and met Omar and Imani Sanga. I also earned more undeserved kudos from having as a neighbour in London the distinguished anthropologist and historian of Nigeria, Murray Last, well-known to both Basile Ndjio and Asonzeh Ukah. A small world indeed.

Wiko brought together what history had torn asunder. Exile and emigration were, it turned out, part of the family history of many of my Co-Fellows; even in the current generation, roughly one third (I estimate) are living away from their country of birth. Sherene Seikaly gave a talk about her family, loyal servants of the British Empire, who were dispossessed of their property in Palestine and moved first to Lebanon and then the USA. That such a story should be told in Grunewald, so replete with expropriated property, seemed especially poignant.

Indeed, the history of Germany was never far away from our collective discussions; nor, with all its resonances with that history, was the brutal dispossession, destruction, and starvation that worsened with every day in Palestine. Wiko was an island of sanity

and civilised exchange of views between experts on these matters, in a world (again) denying, misrepresenting, and repressing obvious truths.

Berlin is blessed with a wonderful national history museum, alas mostly closed during our stay. But the Deutsches Historisches Museum did have a temporary exhibition on “Roads not Taken” in German history. But it did not really imagine a historical path where Germany continued after 1933 to be a great centre of world Jewry, perhaps so integrated, assimilated, and converted that the very idea would make little sense. I did not find it too difficult to imagine a Germany led by Walther Rathenau and Rosa Luxemburg, instead of one with memorials to their murders. I can also imagine a Germany feeling able to condemn all crimes against humanity, rather than one that teaches us a grim lesson in *Realpolitik* and *Staatsräson*. Perhaps history, or rather particular histories, are weighing rather too heavily on us.

Argentina was once described as a land of forgetting, its immigrants wanting to leave behind memories of poor Southern Europe. My own Argentine ancestors, emigrants from Italy, had indeed forgotten, or at least not passed on such memories. There is something to be said for it. Forgetting can be liberating; remembering a curse. Misremembering is perhaps the worst option of all. For the lesson of history might well not be never again, but we can indeed do it again, we can be what we think we were.

Which brings me to my project, a global history of production since 1900. It involves thinking one’s way out of the standard entrenched stories of production that are foundational to our accounts of the modern age. It is also, I suppose, a way putting into history, in part at least, the technical and business classes, from which Claire and I spring. But most of all it is a history aimed at allowing us to think in new ways about the future of production by freeing us from the fetters imposed by misleading historical accounts. For here too, very particular histories weigh heavily on the imaginations of the present.

I found it rather thrilling, in ways I know others do not understand, to visit Siemensstadt, even to pass the Volkswagen works and the Leunawerke on the train, to be close to Ludwigshafen, to visit various technical and industrial museums in Hamburg, Essen, Berlin, Breslau, and Prague. This for me had more than the usual scholarly historical interest. My German-speaking chemist father had been in Germany in 1946 or 1947 officially stealing technical secrets from Germany’s industry. As he travelled around the country, he took colour pictures, but using a British process much inferior to the German Agfacolor process. My first knowledge of Germany, perhaps of history, came from his Dufaycolor pictures of the Soviet war memorial in the Tiergarten, the bomb shelter above Hitler’s

bunker, the balcony of the Reichs Chancellery, and of the IG Farben building in Frankfurt (where Hartmut Leppin has his office!).

As I had hoped, the book will have more of Germany than it would otherwise have had. The library was kind enough to do machine translations of Rudolf Berthold (ed.), *Geschichte der Produktivkräfte in Deutschland von 1800 bis 1945*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1988). It turns out to be the most detailed history of production ever written, and useful for not falling for the usual naïve stage theories of bourgeois historiography. Its own perfunctory ideological commitment could not conceal the depth of scholarship behind it. Hartmut Leppin taught me how to understand this only apparent paradox. I was also, thanks to conversations with Arndt Sorge and Jürgen Kocka, able to get some more sense of how German scholars dealt with the history of production, and I made some pleasing discoveries, for example the prevalence of the phrase “Taylorist-Fordism” in both histories and industrial sociologies, and the deep commitment in the literature to, in effect, a German *Sonderweg* in production. It was also a joy to wrestle with the German of Marx, Brecht, and Celan with Eva von Kügelgen. My book will now have the odd German-language epigraph.

The library facilities are a wonderful gift to a scholar. I rather cheekily tested them by asking for a 1937 Chilean pamphlet about Palestinian Christian business in Chile. A PDF arrived within a day and turned out to me much more useful than I expected. Stefan Gellner showed great tenacity in uncovering lots of hard-to-find statistics on coal, steel, and cement. Thank you!

Above all, Wiko gave all of us time to write and to think. I was able to nearly complete a draft of what is a long and complicated book, which would not otherwise have been possible. Not only that: Wiko may yet have provided me with a title. For, after my Colloquium, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger made a comment that made me go back to Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, which turned out to be richer, more political, and much more pertinent than I remembered. As a result, my book may be called *Making Modern Times*.



GRUNEWALD ANZIX  
GÁBOR EGRY

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Gábor Egrý is a historian, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Director General of the Institute of Political History, Budapest. His research interests are nationalism, everyday ethnicity, the politics of identity, the politics of memory, and economic history in modern East Central Europe. He was István Deák Visiting Professor at Columbia University and held fellowships at the Imre Kertész Kolleg in Jena, the New Europe College Bucharest, Stanford University, and the European University Institute in Florence. He is the author of five volumes in Hungarian and several articles, among others in *Contemporary European History*, *European Review of History*, *Slavic Review*, *Hungarian Historical Review*, and *Südost-Forschungen*. His last monograph *Etnicitás, identitás, politika. Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* [Ethnicity, identity, politics. Hungarian Minorities between nationalism and regionalism in Romania and Czechoslovakia 1918–1944] received an Honorable Mention from the Felczak-Wereszyczki Prize of the Polish Historical Association, and he received the Mark Pittaway Article Prize of the Hungarian Studies Association in 2018. He was the Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator project *Nepostrans—Negotiating post-imperial transitions: from remobilization to nation-state consolidation. A comparative study of local and regional transitions in post-Habsburg East and Central Europe* (2018–2023). – Address: Institute of Political History, Nádor utca 9, 1051 Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: [egrygabor75@gmail.com](mailto:egrygabor75@gmail.com).

Historians are notorious for digging up unexpected sources. Below are two from the future about the spring of 2025, followed by my own, short, impressionistic take on my stay.

*Excerpts from the diary of a restaurant critic*

This will be an irregular restaurant check, but two German history professors I met in Brussels sang praise of the restaurant of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Grunewald. In the basement of a bourgeois villa surrounded by huge trees and a well-tended garden, it is rather a canteen than a restaurant. Most days, people take a tray, cutlery, and a serviette and receive their meals over the counter. Occasionally they have seated lunches and dinners with table service. Simple, black tables, basket-chairs on a metal frame. Always three courses: salad, a main course, and dessert.

The place is busy; people talk and joke in the queue and at the table and greet the kitchen personnel as their friends. On the first occasion I visited, everybody complained about the food. I did not get it, as it was certainly not the most refined, but well over regular canteen standards. Next time, everyone was radiating, and they whispered: the cook is back!

The presence of the cook really makes a difference! The cuisine clearly takes inspiration from the Mediterranean, the Wednesday salad buffet (four varieties) often visibly from Yotam Ottolenghi. The menu shows a soft spot for rare and medium fried meats: lamb, veal, and beef, but German classics (sausage in various form with heavy sides) checker the experience. Seasonality is at its best here, and the spring menu is as colourful as a rococo still life or landscape: flowers in violet or yellow, green sprigs and courgette, black beluga lentils, orange sweet potatoes, yellow polenta, apricots, crispy white feta... Often it gives a German twist to the lighter dishes with the seasonal evolution of the sides and cream soups, based on more local ingredients, from carrots, beetroots, cabbage, and lentils to a long asparagus season and once even a vegetable tart with apricot as main dish.

The other meal the kitchen excels at is fish. It is fish at its best. If it is fried, it is always nicely crispy on the skin side, the flesh flaky and soft. In curry or with vegetables, it is never overcooked. And beware of the desserts, the crumbles, the infinite varieties of tiramisu and fruit mousse, the macarons, the sweet tarts...

Exceptional canteen food! I recommend it unreservedly for every gourmet academic.

*Excerpts from the diary of a forester from the Grunewald natural reserve area*

Today I had an unlikely encounter. I was walking along the Koenigsallee, in Berlin's Grunewald area. A place of large villas and even larger gardens, often parks, dotted in an area of lakes and forested patches of natural reservation areas (*Natur-* and *Grünschutzanlage*). The street is lined by fences, with a narrow patch of green behind, dividing the fence from the gardens proper with flowers, bushes, and occasionally garden gnomes. Suddenly, a fox, coming from the side of the road, crossed my path, walking in a calm rhythm. It slipped through the fence, climbed up on the narrow green until it could see me eye to eye, just to turn its head towards me. It lasted only a few moments, the gaze self-confident, not inquiring, just noting me and signalling on whose grounds I was walking, before it moved away calmly, deep into the garden.

[...]

I saw the fox again, in the morning, before the sun rose over the treeline, looking down from the window at the third floor. It moved along the lakeside, with the very same self-confidence and smugness.

[...]

This time the fox crossed the road closer to the building of the famous Wissenschaftskolleg; after reaching the other side, it looked back and measured the opposite sidewalk for a while, took a few steps towards the bus stop before again leaving the asphalt in the direction of the houses towards Bismarckallee. No hurry, no stress, no sign of fear of all the people moving and walking.

[...]

I still don't know whether the fox had anything to do with the decimation of the baby swans. The first time I spotted them, the swan family with its eight furry small babies was swimming from Hubertussee to Koenigssee, under the bridge on Koenigsallee. The babies in fours, the parents in the front and in the back. A family idyll.

A week later, when I spotted the family on the northern shore of Koenigssee there were still seven babies, playing in the water. One parent calmly swimming close by, the other one taking the guard's post on the shore. Cute and calm. People watching from the bench on the shore. Another week, another baby lost. The last time I saw the swans they led and pestered four of their offspring on the waters of Hubertussee. They were just as idyllic as on the first occasion, no air of tragedy hanging over.

*My time at Wiko: distraction and focus*

Before I came to Grunewald, I could not imagine that my report on my stay would start with the food and the nature. (And I could go on with hiking, the cityscape and how it reflects a palimpsest of social fabrics, and many more topics.) This certainly sounds like distraction, but these are just as essential to the Wiko experience as the Colloquia. As I did not have concrete plans of finishing something, these kinds of impressions were similar in importance to my intellectual engagement and cultural experience. The exceptional calm of Wiko and Grunewald, the absence of any feeling of pressure, stress, or distressing moments, the nights with only the sounds of the birds together with the unfolding spring with all of its flowers and smells and colours, ending with the thick and heavy smell of linden flowers—all these sensory experiences helped me to disengage psychologically from what is impossible not to be aware of.

How much did it help my academic work? Without a clear benchmark it is hard to give any assessment, but I feel I was actually able to focus my attention much better than anywhere else recently. I tried to make use of the library facilities and services, and I certainly found treasures that help in my research on Austro-Hungarian economic space and informal imperialism. And yet, some of these treasures, with arguments I also make about the tensions between political and informal imperialism and about the agency of local elites vis-à-vis the imperialists, also highlight how quickly historiography forgets. Wiko assisted me in bringing together a group of scholars for a workshop on the “New Economic History of Central and Eastern Europe?”, which brought so long and endless discussions of our work and what economic history is that we ran overtime, straining the patience of the Wiko staff assisting us. (I’m extremely grateful for their tolerance with us on a Friday evening.) Towards the end of my stay, I started to feel I’m somehow settled with all my project’s framing and theorizing and methodologizing, all pieces of my conceptual puzzle falling into place. Am I ready to start thinking about what economic history is, after all? That is at least a concrete result of my stay, isn’t it?

But the most inspiring are always the other members of the Wiko community. Getting a glimpse of how a composer thinks of their work, why an artist paints female bodies, how literary fiction swallows up historical facts. The colours of Natalia contrasted with the darkness of “her” hiding places. Thinking about what we lost with the elimination of ancient classics from school curricula when talking about how historians and the public just can’t accept that figures like the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm I were simply vile. Traveling back to my university years when hearing about Meister Eckhart and

Hildegard von Bingen and how their vernacular writings are probably even more important than their Latin ones. Listening to the audio recording of a Colloquium I could not attend. One chapter from a draft book manuscript on Auschwitz that in this strange and isolated form was more than a recitation. It truly sounded like an already published audio book, demonstrating how much storytelling is part of the story itself. All of them—just like many other experiences with my fellow Wiko Fellows—flabbergasting because they tell very convincingly something unconventional, and I feel they change my world—even if I just simply realize something that might be obvious for many others.

And finally, my German teacher. Our German teacher, Eva. Who ignited in me the desire to speak German, the most unexpected of all consequences of five months in Grunewald.



WISSENSCHMAUS  
MATHIAS ÉNARD

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Mathias Énard is a French writer born in 1972 in Niort in the western part of France, near the Atlantic coast. He studied Arabic and Persian at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales in Paris before residing for ten years in the Middle East, in Egypt, Iran, and Syria. He then settled in Beirut for some time before moving to Barcelona in 2010, where he currently resides. His first novel, *La perfection du tir* (The perfect shoot) appeared in 2003 and received the Prix des cinq continents de la francophonie. Mathias Énard kept on publishing novels, among them *Zone* in 2008 (*Zone*, 2010); *Parleur de batailles, de rois et d'éléphants* in 2010 (*Tell Them of Battles, Kings and Elephants*, 2018), and *Boussole* in 2015 (*Compass*, 2017), which latter won the Goncourt Prize in 2015 and the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding in 2017. In 2023 appeared *Déserters* (*The Deserters*, 2025), his last work to date. His books have been translated into more than 20 languages around the world, including Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. His project as a Wiko Fellow was to write a new novel about the fate of the Arab intellectuals (mostly novelists and poets) in the 20th century, especially between 1950 and 2000, in Beirut and the East of the Arab World and to explore the changes in cultural and political patterns, as well as to put into fiction some great characters of Arabic literature history, like Badr Shakir Sayyab, Mahmood Darwish, and Adonis.

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I hardly noticed the year slip by. Or rather, I swallowed it whole—greedily, without restraint, like a feast, too rich to refuse. Ten months at the Wissenschaftskolleg, and here I am, full, happy—and, it must be said, considerably heavier than when I arrived.

It all began with lightness. The lightness of thought, first: that heady feeling of being able to breathe again, to think without having to produce, to meet exciting new people. The Kolleg offered me what every writer dreams of: time, and companions. A community of knowledge. But it was more than that: a community of curiosity, of listening, of appetite. Every lunch became a colloquium, every Colloquium, a meal. We spoke of memory, of revolution, of the end of the world and the beginning of everything. Of the difficult blind lives of arthropods. And as we spoke, we ate.

A place where your only obligation (*Pflicht*, as they say in German) is to eat lunch every day (except on Thursday when you are supposed to have dinner instead) is meant to have great food. And it did.

Dunia and her kitchen team were our benevolent deities. Everything conspired to ensure we lacked nothing. That, perhaps, was when my real research began: to study the effects of pumpkin ravioli on intellectual focus, or of strawberry pie with custard on creative impulse. I took notes, though the data remain inconclusive: the more I tasted, the more I wanted to pursue the study.

Soon I discovered that common abundance had its private and regional variations. The Scots celebrated January and Burns Night with lots of sheep guts, sheep lungs, sheep liver, and good whisky. The Poles initiated me to the joys of their homeland: herrings thick with sour cream or dip, or smoke-flavored with onions; dumplings dense with potato and mystery; pierogi that seemed to have proved (the biologists were so upset by this!) spontaneous generation AND perpetual motion, as they multiplied endlessly on the plate. Every day we travelled to different Orients; there was the Polish Orient, the Lebanese Orient, the Tunisian Orient, the Palestinian Orient, the Israeli Orient, the Brandenburgish Orient. Every morning, I woke up thinking, “What are we going to cook tonight? What are we going to eat at lunch?” We unrolled the subtleties of German cuisine, a revelation of quiet discipline and endless cabbage: roulade with red cabbage, roulade with sauerkraut, roulade with raw green cabbage, roulade with a subtle cabbage, roulade with a dream of cabbage, roulade with absent cabbage—each a philosophical variation, a meditation on patience and digestion. I began to suspect that cuisine was Germany’s secret method of contemplation.

As I chewed and thought in equal measure, my body began to change—a library putting on weight. I found myself weighing my sentences as I did my portions, searching in each idea for a new flavor. Even discussions of German constitutional law, dino bones, and Messiaen’s music mingled with the scent of curry and Uruguayan “criollo” sausage. The talk was nourishing, and so was the buffet.

Little by little, gluttony crept into every part of my life: I began ordering far more books from the library than I could ever read, piling them up in my office like empty bottles under the bed. It took me a long time to discover the glass-recycling container—it was, conveniently, quite far away. Thus, getting rid of the evidence of my excesses became my daily walk, a wholesome combination of exercise and domestic hygiene.

Then one February morning, I looked out my window. On the lake, two swans glided through the mist—impossibly white, almost insolent. And suddenly I thought: *What if we cooked them?* The idea made me laugh, at first. Then it returned, obstinate, nearly serious. Perhaps we were all infected by the fever of the banquet: after months of feeding on everything—words, friendships, discoveries—we dreamed of one final feast.

I tried to convince the English Fellows to pay tribute to their Queens & Kings, as the English Crown claims property over all swans of the realm, and fish for them—or hunt them. They refused, arguing that, despite appearances, teaching at Oxford or King's College gave them no authority over German waters.

Every morning, I watched those birds. They became the silent guardians of my excesses, the symbols of my bottomless appetite. I imagined a closing dinner: an immense table where each Fellow would bring a dish, an idea, a poem, a memory. And I—I would bring those two roasted swans, golden and perfect, served up to knowledge itself. Filled with memory and desire. Their skin as crispy as Saint Martin's goose in a Grunewald inn.

At the end of the year, I hadn't written all I planned to. But I had learned what it means to be nourished—intellectually, humanly, literally. I had gained weight, yes, but the scholar's belly, great love handles for Athena to hold me with. Each conversation had thickened me with new knowledge; each friendship had added another layer to my thinking self. The swans still remain to be eaten... The *Grillen* could go further. Something had to be left undone... For another visit, maybe. The last banquet before the world ends.

And now I leave the Kolleg driving west, the road unspooling before me like a menu without end. Every sign, every billboard seems to echo that vanished abundance—*McDonald's*, *Thuringer sausages*, *Schwarzwald inns*, *golden beers*—all shimmering in the afternoon light like sad, vulgar traces of a long-gone meal. The year lingers, invisible but indelible, somewhere in the flesh. I don't yet know what book will come from this Berlin stay, but I know what it will taste of: eternal herrings, everlasting kibbehs, infinite friendship, and the lake at dawn.



AN INTELLECTUAL PARADISE:  
*TIME TO THINK* IN GRUNEWALD  
MARIANA GÓMEZ-SCHIAVON

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Mariana Gómez-Schiavon earned her B.Sc. in Genome Sciences from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), her M.Sc. in Biomedical Engineering and Physics from the Center for Research and Advanced Studies (CINVESTAV), and her Ph.D. in Computational Biology and Bioinformatics from Duke University. She conducted her postdoctoral research at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) and, in 2021, established her research group in Evolutionary Systems Biology, as part of the International Laboratory for Human Genome Research (LIIGH, UNAM). Her group combines tools from population genetics and systems biology to study how the dynamic properties of gene regulatory circuits emerge, propagate, and persist through natural selection. Its long-term goal is to develop a quantitative theoretical framework linking molecular-scale regulation with evolutionary patterns to uncover principles shaping the structure and function of gene regulatory networks. – Address: International Laboratory for Human Genome Research (LIIGH), National Autonomous University of Mexico, Boulevard Juriquilla No. 3001, Juriquilla, 76230 Querétaro, Mexico.  
E-mail: mgschiavon@liigh.unam.mx.

To be completely honest, before learning about the call for the College for Life Sciences fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and deciding to apply, I didn't know that places like this existed at all. Wiko (as we more often referred to the Wissenschaftskolleg—thankfully, for non-German speakers like myself) welcomes each year a few dozen remarkable scientists (from both the natural and social sciences), philosophers, and artists from a wide range of disciplines. At first, the combination was hard to fathom and

frankly a bit intimidating: What could we possibly all talk about? Would I fit in? What was expected of me?

What to me looked like an intriguing experimental design turned out to be a unique and wonderful experience, which helped me understand why Wiko has been doing this so successfully for over forty years.

The entire staff—from the academic team to the kind and attentive people who orchestrate daily lunches and keep the Kolleg's spaces in perfect shape—were extraordinarily supportive. Still, I believe Wiko is above all made by the Fellows. I was fortunate to be part of an amazing cohort of brilliant people, with whom I shared daily lunches, thought-provoking conversations during weekly dinners, and inspiring Colloquia. For me, getting to know these people was the most enriching part of my time at Wiko, and for that I will be forever grateful.

The College for Life Sciences fellowship at Wiko is explicitly described as “time to think” for early-career researchers in the life sciences—and I took that to heart. From the outset, I proposed an open-ended, ambitious project, one that took me outside my comfort zone. I honestly wasn't sure—and probably still am not—what shape a potential solution might take. But I was, and continue to be, convinced of the urgency and relevance of the question behind it: I believe that biological systems are intrinsically and profoundly fluid and stochastic and that biology as a field requires a new interpretative framework—one that takes these properties not as nuisances or complications to be worked around, but as fundamental features of life. Until we understand how life uses these features, we cannot fully understand life.

Wiko was, quite simply, the ideal environment for such a pursuit. For the first time in years, I had the mental space to explore open-ended ideas without the pressure to report progress and with the freedom to reflect on unconventional approaches. I found my favorite corners in the Wiko buildings depending on the time of day—whether to read with a delicious coffee, gaze out at the greenery of Grunewald, or take a thoughtful walk around the lake. The library staff were extraordinarily helpful in finding relevant literature, and I especially enjoyed sitting in the library after lunch by the big window, soaking in the afternoon light. And if I found myself stuck, there was always a kind and curious Fellow nearby, ready for a thoughtful five-minute chat.

In some sense, I didn't accomplish what I set out to do—and in another, I accomplished far more than I expected. I came to Wiko with a project centered on how mathematical modeling might support a much-needed conceptual shift in the life sciences. Over the past

decades, mounting evidence has shown that cells are dynamic, self-organizing, and probabilistic systems—highly responsive to their environments in ways that challenge traditional, deterministic frameworks. I believe this demands more than new models; it requires a new way of thinking about what biological explanation itself should look like.

I didn't arrive at a new interpretative framework during my three months in Berlin. But I came away with something equally valuable: a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the question itself and of the intellectual landscape around it. In particular, conversations with other Fellows—especially philosophers of science—challenged and enriched my perspective in ways I couldn't have predicted when I applied. These exchanges didn't just clarify the stakes of my project; they reshaped them. That, to me, is one of the great gifts of Wiko.

One of the most meaningful experiences during my stay at Wiko was participating in a weekly discussion group on the history and philosophy of science. True to the spirit of Wiko, the group was highly interdisciplinary—not only philosophers and scientists, but also an economist and a medievalist. The topics we explored were loosely framed around our shared interest in the history and philosophy of science and included primary sources, classic texts, and examples from our own work.

I engaged deeply with the group, often bringing in questions from my own project to the discussions. Alongside the Colloquia, these meetings were among the most intellectually enriching moments of my fellowship. They offered me a rare opportunity to understand how different fields approach scientific inquiry—how they frame questions, what counts as evidence, and what assumptions they take for granted.

Out of this group emerged a collaboration that led to a newly submitted article, co-authored with a philosopher (specializing in history and philosophy of science) and an ecologist (with hands-on expertise in experimental evolution). Together, we developed a critique of dominant notions of experimental control. We argue that current control paradigms in biology—while essential in some contexts—may inadvertently limit discovery. In particular, overly stringent control designs can obscure the very emergent properties that are key to understanding complex biological systems. Our article questions entrenched assumptions about experimental rigor and proposes the concept of well-controlled experiments as a more realistic and productive alternative for biological research. This collaboration, which would have been unlikely outside of Wiko's interdisciplinary setting, reflects precisely the kind of intellectual synthesis the Kolleg makes possible.

Wiko is a fully immersive experience—especially for those of us who traveled across the world to Berlin, leaving behind our families and partners. It's more than an intellectual

retreat; it's also the space and the people who inhabit it. One key part of that experience for me was the German classes: first during the intensive course before the official start of the fellowship, and later through the weekly lessons.

I made my first personal connections during the intensive course. Those early bonds helped me feel accompanied and grounded in the weeks that followed. The German instructors were warm, generous, and encouraging—true anchors for many of us navigating this new city and community. I feel lucky to have met them, and I hope to stay in touch for a long time.

There was also something humbling and joyful about sitting in a classroom with highly accomplished scholars—people at the top of their fields—watching everyone stumble through adjective endings and separable verbs. It was a gentle reminder that we all have blind spots and that brilliance in one domain doesn't make us fluent in another. It made us laugh, and it made us human. As one of us put it, "we are all stupid for something"—and that's okay.

For me, even though I didn't manage to speak German fluently after my short stay in Berlin, I feel that something in my brain shifted during those classes. A sort of mental flexibility was unlocked—one I hope to keep cultivating. Language learning, like science, requires patience, humility, and the willingness to start from scratch. And in that sense, my German lessons were very much part of the Wiko spirit.

I cannot emphasize this enough: I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have experienced Wiko. As I kept telling family and friends back home throughout my fellowship, Wiko is simply an intellectual paradise. Returning to reality—filled with bureaucracy, deadlines, and the usual demands—was difficult after such a vibrant, stimulating, and generous environment. But I like to think that part of me stayed at Wiko—or better yet, that a little bit of Wiko now lives in me.

I've promised myself to continue carving out those small, precious spaces where open-ended and risky ideas can flourish. I've also committed to nurturing the kind of conversations across disciplines that Wiko made possible—approaching them with humility, curiosity, and an open mind.

At times, it's overwhelming to reflect on how privileged I am—not only to be an academic, but also to have been welcomed into a place like Wiko. I'm deeply thankful to everyone who makes the Kolleg possible, and especially to those who opened its doors to me. I hope to return one day, and I look forward to crossing paths again with the remarkable people I met there. I'm confident those encounters will continue—through future collaborations, shared spaces of thought, or chance meetings in unexpected corners of the world.



WIKO COMMUNITY ECOLOGY  
RACHEL GREGOR

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Wiko found me at a transitional moment. The deadline for the short-term College for Life Sciences fellowships came in November, in the midst of faculty application season. I applied with no idea where I would be by the fall: starting as an assistant professor or gearing up for my third consecutive year on the job market. Happily, it ended up being the former, with the three months at Wiko bridging between my postdoctoral research and my new faculty position. I knew that I was one of the fortunate ones who had secured a wonderful job in an extremely competitive market. Although I felt (and still feel) lucky, I was also burned out.

Postdoctoral research in the sciences generally proceeds in two stages. In stage one, the first year or two, you are wrapping up publications from your PhD while also trying to

find your footing. It is a challenging transition from being the most experienced and senior person in a research group and the expert in your research, to feeling at sea again in a new lab, new institution, and often new subject area. If you are lucky, perhaps before the next stage ramps up there is a small window to relax, focus, and enjoy learning new things and doing research.

Just as things begin to settle, you enter stage two. You start to feel the uncertainty of the future looming, with the pressure to put together a competitive package for the academic job market. The job search itself is a full-time job, which takes you away from your research, the very thing that will eventually land you a job, supposedly. I spent two years honing my application and interview skills into razor sharp talons, ready to swoop in and snatch up the academic job of my dreams. Or perhaps I have this backwards, and I was plumping myself up into a more delectable, tempting little morsel for the birds of prey circling overhead?

All in all, I applied for 66 academic positions spanning 10 countries and 4 continents. I was long-listed 9 times, went to 3 multi-day on-site interviews, and in the end received 1 offer, which I accepted after 4 months of negotiations. I finally signed my offer letter a few days before arriving at Wiko.

I share this here in the spirit of the “CV of failures” created by Professor Johannes Haushofer from Princeton: Degree programs I did not get into, Research funding I did not get, and Paper rejections from academic journals. To find these statistics now, I had to open my job application tracker spreadsheet, the sight of which still fills me with a visceral sense of dread and stress. These ghosts haunt us all. This is an especially apt reminder in a place like Wiko, full of academic superstars who make everything look effortless.

Suffice it to say that I arrived at Wiko tired. My goals were modest: hear some interesting talks, finish a manuscript, and write my first grant. All these boxes were ticked. I also planned to travel a bit and enjoy Berlin—which I did, although the gravitational pull of sleepy Grunewald proved to be strong. I did not plan to collaborate with other Fellows or use the library, needing nothing except my laptop and my beautiful and perfectly appointed office (which has set an unattainable standard for both me and my wife Lisa for every space we will ever work in again). Mostly, I wanted some space to breathe and the freedom to think and learn about things that would not necessarily add a line to my CV.

More interesting were the things I did not expect. My apartment was in Villa Jaffé, an impressive house with high ceilings and big windows. Every day I passed two brass

stumbling stones outside, commemorating the Jewish owners who died in Shanghai exile during the Holocaust. I had no plans to do any family roots research, but living in Berlin, especially in that grand house with the stumbling stones outside, made me think about my grandfather. Hugo Münsterberg (nephew to the prominent psychologist of that name) was born in Berlin in 1916 to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. This story has a happy ending: Hugo escaped to the US in October 1935, with his family following soon after. He was also an academic, an art historian, who went on to have a long and productive career at SUNY New Paltz in upstate New York. I gave this information to Wiko librarian Kirsten Graupner, who tracked down records and, to my family's astonishment, even found the beautiful house that he had lived in, just a short distance away. It gave me a much more vivid picture of my grandfather's childhood in Berlin, the city he loved.

My time at Wiko also opened unexpected directions in my research. My work in the lab at first felt distant from all the exotic and interesting topics discussed in the Colloquia and at the lunch table. In general, the mention of my research can be a bit of a conversation killer, often eliciting something along the lines of "I hated chemistry in high school." I had hoped to somehow find new insights into my work through my time at Wiko, but it was hard at first to see how it would happen. The History and Philosophy of Science reading group helped start to bridge that gap. A ragtag assortment of historians, philosophers, and scientists, the group met weekly to discuss our research or papers we were thinking about. I could not always attend, but when I did it was always thought-provoking.

I signed up for a Colloquium slot in late November, giving me ample time to brood. Every week, I would leave the Colloquium thinking how in the world I could translate my excitement about my work to the other Fellows. I study the vast and diverse chemistry produced by microbial communities in the human body and the environment. Although microbial life is all around us, it can feel as distant and foreign as outer space. That is one of the things I love about my research: it is the closest I can get to exploring new worlds. In the end, I created an elaborate metaphor on Wiko community ecology, drawing parallels between academic structures and productivity to microbial taxonomy and function. Once more, the library proved indispensable, with Dominik Hagel providing data on the fields and publications of Wiko Fellows throughout the years. The talk was well-received, and I had a lot of fun doing it—what more could one hope for?

After only three months, I was on my way, onto a vacation before starting my new lab in Toronto. Wiko quickly felt like a distant dream. What stands out in my memory the most is the warmth and openness of my fellow Fellows—I say sincerely that you have

inspired me to become a better academic and human. I also think of the wonderful staff at Wiko and your tireless efforts to make our lives in Berlin effortless. I smuggled out a small piece of my Wiko experience and the History and Philosophy of Science group, through a project with Cheryl, Kärin, and Jutta on categorizing microbial chemicals. We have recently submitted a manuscript (thus contributing to the productivity metrics for 2025's Wiko community) and a grant application to continue the project. Of course, we made sure to budget for a writing retreat at Wiko, to hopefully recreate some of the magic of our time together there.



BIENWIKO !  
*L'ACCUEIL, L'AUTRE PERMANENT FELLOW*  
À WIKO  
OMAR GUEYE

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Pendant tout le temps que j'ai passé à Wiko, un seul mot m'est resté à l'esprit : *accueil*. Partout, c'était comme si on s'était passé le mot d'ordre depuis toujours, presque une injonction me semble-t-il, tant les services de l'institut se sont mis exclusivement à notre service. C'est si impressionnant que j'ai posé la question à un de nos hôtes qui m'a répondu de go : you are *fellow* ! Cela suffit comme raison. Il me fallait alors reformuler ma conception de *fellow* dans un Institut d'études avancées, moi qui l'ai été ailleurs. Non pas

que les autres prestigieuses institutions qui m'avaient déjà accueilli n'en avaient pas la même conception, loin de là, mais la proximité et la promptitude à répondre à la moindre sollicitation méritent d'être soulignées. Du premier à l'ultime moment de notre passage au Wissenschaftskolleg, tout est mis en œuvre pour que le séjour soit parfait et, surtout, inoubliable. A travers le mot *accueil*, j'exprime alors quelques sentiments et réflexions parmi tant d'autres que je partagerai au fur et à mesure que j'aurai encore à parler de la ville de Berlin et de mon expérience unique au Wissenschaftskolleg.

### *L'accueil et son engrenage positif*

L'accueil relève du bon sens à Wiko, le bon sens étant par ailleurs « la chose la mieux partagée », pour parler comme le philosophe René Descartes. Nommer cet accueil reste un dilemme pour moi qui ai passé mon temps à écrire sur tout lors de mon séjour, aussi bien sur la vie à l'institution que sur le quartier de Grunewald, la ville de Berlin et l'Allemagne en général. Choisir parmi des sujets divers et aussi intéressants les uns que les autres, me voici donc devant le curieux dilemme d'un jovial enfant devant choisir parmi ses jouets préférés. Je prendrai un peu de chaque sujet pour leur trouver un lien ou un seul liant : le mot *accueil* que j'associe volontiers à l'adjectif *bien* pour former l'anagramme *bienwiķo*, pour dire plus simplement Bienvenue à Wiko !

Tout commença avec le service des admissions par lequel s'effectua mon premier contact avec l'institution pour prendre des informations et explorer les possibilités offertes par l'institution et, éventuellement, candidater. Ce premier contact virtuel fut un succès dès les premiers mots avec Francisco Martínez Casas qui me donnait aussitôt envie de candidater, tant ses informations étaient complètes, son ton courtois et ses conclusions encourageantes. J'avais l'impression qu'il me parlait déjà comme à un futur membre de la communauté, il a été assez persuasif pour maintenir ma motivation à faire partie de l'aventure. Ce fut par la suite au terme d'une deuxième candidature que je fus invité comme *fellow* à l'institut. Je le dois en partie à la sagesse et la générosité d'un homme qui fut ma porte d'entrée dans cette prestigieuse famille, que je découvrais davantage l'humanité lors de mon séjour.

Le chemin peut être assez court entre le rêve et la réalité, même si la distance peut paraître abyssale et la probabilité parfois chimérique. Voilà, Wiko avait été un objectif aujourd'hui réalisé ! Une autre étape d'un parcours académique et humain plein d'enseignements et d'enrichissements mutuels.

Aussitôt après l'admission, le reste fut une succession de manifestations de la beauté de l'âme de généreuses personnes à Wiko, aussi simple que ça. Le service de préparation du

séjour, *preparing your stay*, se mit à l'œuvre pour organiser le séjour en s'occupant des moindres détails relatifs au voyage depuis les formalités administratives (visa, congé sabbatique, etc.), jusqu'aux conditions du séjour à Berlin et en Allemagne (logement, assurance, déplacements divers, etc.) et aux détails de la vie quotidienne (du courrier aux questions les plus impertinentes) en relation avec le service de la *réception*. Vera Pfeffer fut la porte d'entrée effective dans le très courtois monde de l'institut où se côtoient des collègues souvent très discrets et tout aussi efficaces. J'ai ainsi appris à me familiariser avec le personnel de tous les services et leurs personnels *rectorate, library, academic programs, domestic services, admissions, public relations, German class, accounting, IT, event organization, restaurant, apartments and offices*, entre autres. Nous avons pu nouer un contact et eu des échanges continus lors de nos rencontres formelles autour du colloquium du mardi, au restaurant, lors des manifestations scientifiques et culturelles de l'institut, lors des visites organisées dans ou hors de Berlin, ainsi que lors de notre cohabitation de tous les jours dans l'espace Wiko. Nous avons ainsi eu des moments de socialisation pendant lesquels une véritable amitié est née dans cette communauté de *fellows, partners* et du personnel de Wiko. Je m'excuse d'emblée de ne pas citer de noms, de peur d'en oublier ! J'ai connu tellement de bons moments lors de mon séjour avec de si belles personnes et de si belles âmes que je ne peux me permettre de leur faire l'offense de l'oubli : elles se reconnaîtront toutes et savent que je ne les oublierai jamais. J'exprime à toutes et tous ma gratitude.

#### *Chaque brique est importante dans l'édifice*

Une mention particulière est destinée à des personnes qui ne sont pas nécessairement les plus en vue, mais qui contribuent à faire de Wiko cet endroit unique. Je veux citer le personnage d'entretien du logement qui accourt chaque fois qu'une lampe ne clignote pas bien, les braves femmes qui s'occupent de mon appartement toutes les semaines, le personnel du restaurant qui s'assure que toute bouteille d'eau vide sur une table est remplacée, le personnel de la réception qui veille à l'entrée et s'occupe de notre moindre requête, les baby-sitters qui s'occupent des enfants pour permettre aux *fellows* et *partners* de faire leurs activités, ainsi que toutes les personnes qui travaillent discrètement à rendre notre séjour parfait, sans s'attendre à être félicitées. Bien sûr, tout cela n'aurait pas été possible sans une bonne vision et une parfaite organisation de la direction de l'institution : je me réjouis que des femmes, la rectrice Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger et la secrétaire Iris Fleßenkämper, soient à la tête de l'institution, ayant moi-même travaillé à Wiko sur un sujet de recherche portant sur les femmes. A toutes et à tous, je dis un grand merci !

Si j'ai le sentiment d'appartenir à la grande communauté de Wiko, depuis mes premiers instants à Berlin, c'est aussi parce que j'ai aussitôt été adopté par d'anciens *fellows* et *permanent fellows*, comme nous nous étions connus depuis toujours. Claudia Schmölders et Ingrid Holtey me manifestent une sympathie et une amitié de tous les instants, ainsi que Giovanni Galizia et Wolf Lepenies. Bien sûr, j'ai une profonde affinité intellectuelle avec Daniel Schönplflug des *academic programs* ainsi qu'avec des collègues *fellows* comme Hartmut Leppin et Leyla Dakhli. De même, grâce à la transversalité de mon projet de recherche sur les femmes, j'ai eu des échanges très profonds avec beaucoup de collègues de l'institut, à travers Berlin et l'Allemagne en général. C'était aussi un de mes objectifs d'élargir la perspective de ma recherche aux collègues allemands et du monde rencontrés ou contactés à partir de Berlin. Les nombreuses présentations que j'ai faites dans la ville et en dehors en ont beaucoup contribué.

Enfin, le principal résultat de mon séjour est la finition du manuscrit du projet sur lequel j'ai été invité à Wiko, « Women of 1968: Africans in the Global Context ». En effet, j'ai pu bénéficier de l'espace et de l'environnement de recherche approprié de l'institut pour accomplir ce travail : un *workplace* dans l'appartement, un bureau au bâtiment principal, un cadre environnemental inspirant à Grunewald et, surtout, une excellente bibliothèque où de merveilleuses personnes veillent à me trouver dans les meilleurs délais la documentation requise. Je souhaiterais féliciter et remercier Michael Dominik Hagel et tout le personnel de la bibliothèque pour cette excellente coopération, leur patience, leur générosité et leur sourire permanent : je ne l'oublierai jamais. Tous mes remerciements ! J'aurais souhaité avoir cette équipe avec moi en permanence ☺

*Les abeilles : Ah, ces permanent fellows !*

Je dis souvent à mes amis allemands, je vis à Grunewald. Bien sûr, je suis tout à fait à Berlin, mais je veux juste mettre l'accent sur la spécificité de mon nouvel environnement que le nom indique bien d'ailleurs, *Grunewald* ou la *Forêt Verte*. Elle abrite le Wissenschaftskolleg qui se niche au milieu de la forêt et de ses lacs, calme et inspirante. Il y fait très beau en toutes saisons, surtout pendant le printemps. Les arbres y prennent des couleurs et brillent sous le soleil. Les oiseaux parmi d'autres espèces animales y font leurs randonnées en chantonnant, brisant un silence souvent bruisant et appelant à s'ouvrir aux sonorités ambiantes. Je réponds toujours à cet appel de la nature, en ouvrant les fenêtres de l'appartement ou du bureau, selon le moment ou l'endroit où je me trouve : accueillir la nature chez soi, humer l'air si rafraîchissant et sentir les odeurs diffuses de

parfum ou d'encens, c'est si poétique. Mais s'ouvrir à la nature, c'est aussi recevoir son package : elle ne fait ni de tri ni de demi-mesure. Alors, les abeilles font partie des hôtes !

S'ouvrir à la nature, profiter de la beauté du temps de Grunewald, c'est également s'ouvrir aux abeilles. Elles font partie de l'offre de la nature, l'une ne peut aller sans l'autre, à moins qu'on ne renonce à tout et reste enrhumé. Cela n'aurait aucun sens, d'autant qu'observer la nature du dedans n'a pas la même saveur que d'y être plongé. Le choix de s'ouvrir à ces hôtes s'accompagne toutefois de l'acceptation des bourdonnements et la prise de précautions d'usage pour créer les conditions d'une cohabitation pacifique avec ces hôtes qui s'invitent sans protocole. Il m'est d'ailleurs arrivé de me réveiller juste après m'être endormi, suite à une longue nuit de labeur, pour refermer derrière une nouvelle hôtesse trop bourdonnante ; par une piqûre sur un doigt assez inquisiteur elle rappelait une de ses prérogatives : c'est elle qui décide de rester ou de partir, on ne la vire pas ! Le sommeil disparut et je fus aussitôt plongé dans une recherche à la rubrique santé pour consulter les recommandations sur « piqûres » d'abeille ou d'insectes. Et puis, pourrait-on reprocher aux abeilles, aux mouches ou aux moustiques le désordre dans ma chambre si on a ouvert les fenêtres soi-même... La première leçon avec cette « invitée » sur la défensive, c'est qu'il ne fallait pas la toucher. Et si elle attendait qu'on l'invite à entrer dans l'appartement ou au bureau ? Grunewald semble nous dire qu'elle a tous les droits.

Ce jour, mercredi 16 avril 2025, les journaux avaient relaté une information sur une invasion d'abeilles à Louga au Sénégal qui avait fait une victime et un blessé grave : il paraît qu'on voulait les déloger d'une maison. Donc, si on ne peut adéquatement négocier leur départ, autant rester à une bonne distance et/ou les laisser tranquilles. Une abeille est une abeille, qu'importe la nationalité, celle de Berlin n'est pas plus gentille que celle de Louga. Surtout, les abeilles ont aussi leur dignité à défendre : que s'y frotte s'y pique !

En attendant la fin de la réflexion, Grunewald nous invite à profiter de la beauté de la nature et du chant des oiseaux au moment où l'été avance à grands pas et mettra tout le monde d'accord. C'est le temps des sorties, celui des vacances, de toutes les vacances – y compris celle des piqûres – le temps du bourdonnement de la musique qui berce les âmes déstressées, le temps du miel, celui récolté après un séjour si fructueux. Demain, un autre cycle recommencera, avec une autre cohorte et toujours le même bel accueil vers une autre version d'un séjour d'un toujours égal bonheur, de même profondeur et de même sens. A toi de rendre à Wiko sa grandeur : à ton arrivée, elle te donne la clé qui t'ouvre tout... vraiment tout.

Bienwiko !



FINDING HOME IN BERLIN  
IAN JOHNSON

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Ian Johnson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, author, teacher, and researcher. He has been engaged with China for the past thirty-five years, writing on the country's search for faith and values, as well as its efforts to control dissent and history. He is a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker* and regularly speaks in the media or to public audiences about China. He is the founder of the China Unofficial Archives ([www.minjian-danganguan.org](http://www.minjian-danganguan.org)), an online repository of hundreds of samizdat magazines, books, and underground films. – E-mail: [iandjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:iandjohnson@gmail.com).

When I first came to Berlin it was 1987 and I stayed for only a week, but it was enough to convince me that this was my true home. Turning points in life are usually contrived, but this one was real enough.

It was the early spring, and I was exiting the Wittenbergplatz U-Bahn station. I walked up the stairs, stopped, and stared. In front of me was one of the world's great war memorials, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. This was pre-Internet and pre-digital photography, and so I don't think I'd seen images of it before, which contributed to my sense of shock. The main spire was cut in half as if by a mighty bolt of lightning. Turrets were sheared off. The copper roof was blackened. This was before the new hotels were built around the Zoo, and so the monstrous structure stood bleakly against the sky, a wound that would not heal.

Then I looked to my left. Across the street was the grand KaDeWe department store, but almost blocking my view was a tubular steel frame holding rectangular black metal plates with names stenciled in gold: Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, Theresienstadt... I couldn't read the German above it (which simply said "Places of Terror That We Should

Never Forget”) but the message was clear. I didn’t know the history of the memorial—how it had been put up in 1967 as part of a flowering of West German civil society and memory culture—but the names were enough. And the cheek: sorry to bother you on your way to shop but read these names. Carry on now.

My hometown was Montréal, but I’d been forced to leave it when I was 15 because my father was transferred to Florida. In the decade since then, I’d struggled to find a home. Looking at the church and the memorial, it suddenly hit me: this would be my home.

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That’s not exactly how it turned out. I lived in Berlin from 1988 to 1992 and then again from 2001 to 2008, meaning I was away for large chunks of time. Work always took me back to China, but I always felt most at home in Berlin and experienced some of its grandest moments, especially the fall of the Wall. So, when the opportunity presented itself to apply for a Wiko fellowship, I jumped at the chance. Before arriving here, I had once again been living a nomadic existence. I had resided for a dozen years in China until 2020, when I was expelled as part of worsening ties between it and the West.<sup>1</sup> My wife Chi Yin, our son Lucas, and I bounced from London to Singapore to New York, all the while trying to find a place where we could live and focus on our work as freelancers—she as an artist, me as a nonfiction writer. The call to be a Wiko Fellow was like a message from heaven to return.

And so, we did. At first, I thought that it would be old hat to return to Berlin but that wasn’t the case. My last experience living here full-time had been nearly twenty years ago, when the city was, in the words of a former mayor, “poor but sexy.” Now it was just poor. The first phrase that Chi Yin learned was “Zug fällt aus” (train cancelled), a result of years of national neglect of infrastructure, but also Berlin’s population growth. Soon after we arrived, the city government announced it was radically curtailing the culture budget, slashing for example the small indie cinemas (for example, Sinema Transtopia) that had made the city sexy.

We were also living in a different part of town, leafy Grunewald, instead of the city center. That has its drawbacks, but I soon discovered the joy of living next to a forest with

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1 See my reflections of the trauma of this: “Kicked Out of China, and Other Real-Life Costs of a Geopolitical Meltdown,” Opinion, *The New York Times*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/opinion/sunday/china-us-cold-war.html>.

a lake within view of our balcony. More importantly, the quiet forced me to think about my goals here.

One was to run the China Unofficial Archives, the only digital archive of independent Chinese thought (see: [www.minjian-danganguan.org](http://www.minjian-danganguan.org)). Able to focus on this project for significant amounts of time, I secured several large grants, allowing us to launch a newsletter, add staff, and expand our holdings. This wasn't part of my formal Wiko project. But the Wissenschaftskolleg inspired me to think of archives in different ways and how to document an erased past.

At first, however, I began to doubt if Berlin really was the right place to work on China. Chi Yin and I are both focused on Asia. She is from Singapore, worked for a decade as a correspondent and freelance photojournalist in China, and now makes art about memory and Southeast Asia's colonial and post-colonial past. As for myself, except for a few years in the 2000s when I wrote about Germany, I concentrate on China. Coming to Berlin made sense on many levels, but our part of the world isn't a center of German intellectual life. As the Wiko Rector, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, told me, Chinese Studies in Germany are an "Orchideenfach"—literally an "orchid discipline," meaning a niche field of study.

That is not exactly right, at least not anymore, but it is true that China is still marginal to how Germany thinks of the world and the past. Life in Germany still, eighty years on, focuses on the events that created those two memorials that struck me so strongly back in 1987—the war and the Holocaust. For many, especially the older people who run the country's cultural establishments, this means that memory culture is almost always equated with Holocaust memory culture. Other traumas are secondary or tertiary.

It seemed that Wiko might also be like this. Many Fellows were studying topics related to the Holocaust, or its aftereffects, including the Palestinian trauma. In early September, I began to wonder if I indeed weren't just another orchid. Was this the right place to bring back to life China's erased past?

And yet with time, my doubts subsided. I had incredibly fruitful conversations with Fellows such as Michael Rothberg, whose classic work *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* showed how the Holocaust, as uniquely horrible as it was, has a broader meaning that we can use to understand other conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

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2 *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

With Leyla Dakhli I discussed ways of archiving Syria's dictatorship, and with two Palestinian Fellows, Bashir Bashir from the Open University of Israel Ra'anana and Sherene Seikaly from the University of California Santa Barbara, I thought hard about the ways that transgenerational traumas afflict populations.

More practically, next door to my office was the Forum Transregionale Studien, which was founded with the help of Wiko and is still going strong. I joined a workshop to learn how people were trying to archive various crises in the Middle East. I was able to discuss technical problems with the center's staff.

Even more crucial was the enthusiasm of Michael Dominik Hagel, the head of Wiko's library services. He put me in touch with the Staatsbibliothek's East Asia department. After several useful meetings, its director agreed to archive our digital archive—meaning that one day, if our funding disappears, our modest contribution to China's memory culture will be preserved as part of the Stabi's holdings—amazing!

I haven't yet mentioned my main project, which is an academic study of Chinese pilgrimage associations and how they use rituals as a form of resistance against an all-powerful state. Finally able to find some quiet, I unpacked twenty cartons of books and oral histories that I had collected in China. I used the library to read up on theory of ritual and memory, and toward the very end of my stay I began to, yes, write.

Beyond Wiko, I began to see that Berlin and Germany had more to offer than I had thought. If Germany is still obsessed with its own past, it is less so than when I first came here in the 1980s and even when I was here in the 2000s. The German way of understanding the war is still overwhelming. This has led to a broader cancel culture, which we felt even at Wiko. Michael Rothberg and Bashir Bashir had events called off or were openly criticized for venturing ideas that were not lockstep with the mainstream view of how to deal with an increasingly undemocratic Israeli state.

Despite these depressing experiences, it was possible to see a less provincial Germany emerging. Chi Yin and I were struck by the growth of China's diaspora in Berlin. Traditionally the city has not had large-scale immigration from China and so it has no Chinatown. But nowadays there is an independent Chinese film festival, a thriving independent cultural center in Prenzlauer Berg, a foundation established by Chinese philanthropists that supports beleaguered Chinese filmmakers and authors, and a magazine by young members of the diaspora. None of this existed five years ago, let alone when I was last in Berlin.

And so, when confronted with the decision of where to go to settle down and raise our five-year-old, we knew the answer. We didn't need to return home; we were already home.



NOT QUITE AN OUTSIDER  
JOHN KAMPFNER

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John Kampfner has had a 40-year career in public life spanning global affairs, politics, media, and arts. His latest book, his eighth, *Braver New World*, is published in April 2026. His previous recent book, *In Search of Berlin*, was published in 2023. His 2020 book, *Why the Germans Do It Better*, was a Sunday Times bestseller, as was his 2003 book, *Blair's Wars*. He writes regular columns for *The Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico*, the *FT*, and *Der Spiegel*. He is a regular contributor on broadcast media. He is a regular speaker at conferences and literary festivals. His current positions include: Senior Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, Deputy Chair of the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft (German-British Society), Chair of Young Königswinter Conference, and Chair of the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration. – Address: 18 Mecklenburgh Square, London, WC1N 2AD, United Kingdom. E-mail: john@jkampfner.net.

I think I was a little strange, in more ways than one.

Not only am I not a registered scholar, in the sense of being attached to a particular university, but as a long-standing Berliner I did not live in the beautiful but rarefied confines of Grunewald. Did that make my experience or enjoyment of my year at Wiko any less intense? Not at all, I would argue. But it did make it slightly different.

During my ten months, aided by a beautiful office in the New Building and by superb library facilities, I worked feverishly hard on three projects. The first was my book; alongside that were regular commissions for newspapers (such as *The Guardian* and *Foreign Policy*), radio, and TV on the state of German politics and society, which were

particularly intense during the period of the general election campaign; and then from early 2025 I was presented with a surprising commission by the BBC.

Alongside these, the regular Wiko events required time and commitment. I made sure that, unless I was travelling, I attended all the Colloquia—which were generally of a high standard—alongside the dinners and lunches. Where I feel I could not devote enough time were workshops and other meetings planned less in advance, and the informal social gatherings. But you cannot have everything in life, or in an academic year. And I do not feel it detracted from the relationships that I developed.

There were many reasons to feel delighted when I was informed of my fellowship. Wiko's reputation is unsurpassed. For me, it answered a desire to fall in the middle of an intellectual triangle—between journalism, public policy, and academe. They each bring something specific.

My 40 years in journalism—as a foreign correspondent, magazine editor, documentary maker, radio presenter, and commentator—have provided adrenaline, immediacy, excitement, and a sense of being in the front row of important global events. Yet journalism is always the first draft of history; often, as soon as you have devoted yourself to a subject, you are required to move on.

My work for various think tanks has provided another important attribute—a direct line to policymakers in government and a sense, even if from a distance, of inputting into important decisions.

Yet the missing link for me has always been scholarship. As a member of the governing Council of King's College London, in the mid-2010s I gained useful insight into the workings of academic institutions—everything from finance to personnel, from student housing to fundraising (mercifully, not something that German institutions have to worry too much about so far). Most of all, I had the opportunity to talk to academics at all levels not just about the organisational side of their work, but also about its content. It made me yearn for the opportunity to have time and space to think—and to delve more deeply.

Wiko has given me all of this. On the subject areas that I am more familiar with—not least in two areas where several Fellows had specialisations, memory culture and the Middle East—I have had spent several discursive, sometimes impassioned, hours deep in debate and thought. But also, I have treasured the Colloquia and subsequent lunch conversations about other areas, not least scientific ones, where I had the opportunity quietly to learn.

And then there were the more direct contributions. For my BBC radio programme, a one-hour archival enquiry into the legacy of *Mein Kampf*, I received several helpful

suggestions for contributors. I ended up interviewing one Fellow and one Fellow's partner. I am grateful to Daniel Schönplugg for helping turn my still-flawed written German into something presentable for an accompanying piece for *Der Spiegel*.

Whenever I was faced with a newspaper commentary about German politics or other related subjects, I made sure I turned to various Fellows or staff for their thoughts.

As for my book on global best practice, I used my Colloquium in April to subject myself to peer review from my peers. And I'm very pleased that I did, as the results have helped me hone my arguments. That book, the eighth of my career, now with the title *Braver New World*, will be published first in English in late spring/early summer 2026.

Lucy, although away for much of the time because of her work, also gained a considerable amount from her interactions, particularly those relating to Wiko's research on Ukraine. Viktoriya Sereda's suggestions about possible stories and contacts were much appreciated. She also enjoyed presenting the arguments in her book, *The Baton and the Cross*, during an online seminar with Wiko-affiliated researchers in Ukraine about the way senior clerics in the Russian Orthodox Church have colluded with Vladimir Putin and given a spiritual imprimatur to his invasion.

Lucy is also extremely grateful to Anja and Stefan for digging out some books and articles for her on Russian clerics and Soviet-era composers, to Petria and Vera for making her feel at home, to Frank for his advice on using a Zoom recorder and to everyone in the tech department. Last but by no means least, Eva's German lessons were a huge boon during this year—even if Lucy didn't always do enough homework.

We both hope to engage Wiko more in that in the future and to keep in contact with many of the Fellows, wherever they may be.

We leave Wiko, but we do not leave Berlin. I chose to live in the city some time ago largely because of the intensity of the debate, the sense of urgency that it brings. This was particularly pronounced over the past academic year.

We leave with much gratitude and thanks towards the staff—not only those that were prominent in our lives, but also those behind the scenes. Long may Wiko thrive.



A YEAR OF ENCOUNTERS AND  
EVOLVING IDEAS  
RACHA KIRAKOSIAN

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Racha Kirakosian is Professor of Medieval Studies at the Deutsches Seminar, University of Freiburg. She is a member of *Die Junge Akademie* in Berlin (2021–2026) and Co-Director of the Centre of Medieval Studies and the Digital Humanities Lab at the University of Freiburg. Her academic career has included positions at Harvard University as joint Associate Professor of German and Religion and a visiting professorship at the University of Oxford. Her educational background includes a D.Phil. in Medieval German from the University of Oxford, a Magister Artium in History and German Philology from the University of Göttingen, and a Master de recherche in History of Art and Digital Humanities from the École nationale des chartes, Paris. Kirakosian has been awarded several fellowships, including full-year fellowships at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS) in Uppsala and the Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study (HIAS). Her research and publications primarily focus on medieval Europe, women's history, and religious text cultures, with monographs such as *From the Material to the Mystical in Late Medieval Piety* (2021) and *The Life of Christina of Hane* (2020). She also engages in editing historical texts, using both traditional and digital methods. – Address: Deutsches Seminar – Mediävistik, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Platz der Universität 3, 79085 Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. E-mail: racha.kirakosian@germanistik.uni-freiburg.de.

My fellowship year at the Wissenschaftskolleg has been shaped by a variety of encounters—with my Co-Fellows, Berlin- and Potsdam-based academics, Wiko alumni, and the dedicated Wiko staff. This environment fostered the development of new ideas, often sparked by unexpected inspirations. Beyond the formal Colloquia, workshops, lectures,

concerts, and panel discussions, the self-organised History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) group provided a vital space. Within this group, we shared both published and unpublished work, deepened our Colloquia discussions, and explored, and often transgressed, the boundaries of our respective disciplines.

**Forging New Paths in Research.** My overarching interest during the fellowship year centred on “Scientific Discourse in Medieval Vernacular Texts,” leading to several interconnected projects. A prominent endeavour involved securing the Momentum funding of the VolkswagenStiftung, with the application submitted in late September. This extensive project encompasses several work packages: developing a model study on inquiry-orientated dialogues; analysing systematically and with computer assistance medieval texts containing such dialogues; conducting a historical study on the access to inquiry-orientated learning; and creating a dialogue-based teaching format in collaboration with the respective medieval centres at Strasbourg and Stockholm universities. My presentation of this project to a jury in Hanover in January greatly benefited from preparatory discussions with the Wiko HPS group, which helped sharpen my presentation. The project started upon my return to Freiburg in the autumn. This Momentum funding offers the invaluable opportunity to recalibrate my research profile, allowing me to venture further into the history of knowledge and epistemology.

Further contributing to my overarching topic was a public hybrid lecture in early April, titled “Die Vermittlung von universitärem Wissen an ein sogenanntes Laienpublikum im Mittelalter” (Science communication to a so-called lay audience in the Middle Ages). This lecture was part of the public programme VHS Wissen, to which Wiko contributes annually. It was a great privilege to honour the work of the Volkshochschule through this lecture, recognising it as an institution dedicated to continued learning and a vital pillar of our democratic values and structures.

My second primary focus at Wiko, which I intend to continue pursuing, concerns the history and philosophy of “habitus,” an age-old concept experiencing periodic revivals. This research involved habitus workshops in Edinburgh in October 2024, in Lancaster in April 2025, and a smaller session at Wiko in May 2025. Working alongside Carmel Raz (Cornell) and Alexander Wragge-Morley (Lancaster), we were keen to continue these conversations, and we were thrilled when Anna Gil Bardají, Mathias Énard’s partner, joined our team, which meets regularly.

The habitus ideas also find place in an interdisciplinary paper co-authored with neuropsychologists and fellow medievalists, examining the connective features of the power of belief in medieval theology and its links to modern clinical practice in the placebo effect.

In June, I participated in a conference of the Tübingen-based CRC 1391 “Different Aesthetics,” presenting a paper that connects the medieval concept of *habitus speculativi* with bodily functions in scholasticism, titled “Körperlichkeit als Vehikel des Spekultativen.” The proceedings of this conference are currently being planned for publication.

My Wiko Colloquium paper, “Habits, Old and New: Meister Eckhart, Medieval and Modern,” served to connect my work on the history of scientific discourse with my habitus research. In this paper, I illuminate the historical conditions of the critical edition and their ongoing impact on contemporary research. I also study an unresearched manuscript housed at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, identifying its historical context through philological and codicological analysis. This work is given in tribute to Nigel F. Palmer, my academic mentor and friend who passed away in 2022. He guided me through the initial crucial steps in editorial practice and was instrumental in my pursuing codicology as a methodological approach in my work.

**Publications and Editorial Activities.** A significant part of my year involved redacting and preparing a volume manuscript from a March 2023 conference, which I organised with my Freiburg-based team, focusing on women’s reading and text practices in late medieval convents. The volume, titled *Women Read. Differently? Text in Women Convents from the 13th to the 15th Centuries*, is co-edited with Linus Möllenbrink and Meret Wüthrich and is slated for publication by V&R unipress within their series “Transatlantic Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Literature and Culture.”

My only trip away from Berlin to my base in Freiburg was for a workshop, colloquium, and concert I organised, celebrating Almut Suerbaum’s (Oxford) 65th birthday, with “dialogue” as its methodical and thematic core. This included a performance on February 21, 2025 in a Benedictine convent near Freiburg, featuring music by the 11th-century monk Hermann von Reichenau. Scholars from Britain, Canada, Germany, Israel, and Switzerland contributed to the ensuing workshop, engaging in dialogue with Suerbaum’s work. During my year at Wiko, I also co-edited a volume featuring essays by Suerbaum, accompanied by scholars’ academic responses and reproductions of selected art pieces. This volume, *Multivocality and Responsiveness: Medieval Literature in Dialogue*, has just

been published with De Gruyter as part of their “Festschriften, Occasional Papers, and Lectures” series.

I developed and wrote a paper on Bernard of Clairvaux’s use of the net as a metaphor for love, titled “Vom epistolarischen Eschaton: Ein Essay zum bernhardschen ‘Netz der Liebe.’” This contribution was published in *Vernetzungen – Relationen (in) der mediävistischen Literaturwissenschaft: Festschrift Michael Stolz*. It was a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge an inspiring scholar I studied with in my very first year at university, as he had introduced me to the study of early-medieval manuscripts.

A short piece exploring silence in medieval thought and religious orders, titled “Die Methode Bruno,” appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* XIX/2 (2025). I also worked on redacting a paper contribution based on a conference talk in Thessaloniki, given prior to joining Wiko, where I discuss the term “neuromedievalism.” This volume is forthcoming as *Cognitive Theories and Later Latin: Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* in the series “Trends in Classics—Supplementary Volumes.” Additionally, I completed copy-editing and proofs for an article in the journal *Poetica*, co-authored with Linus Möllenbrink. This article, “Schön und schuldig: Kulturgeschichtliche und philologische Betrachtungen zum Körper der Maria Magdalena in ihrer spätmittelalterlichen Bekehrungslegende. Mit einer Neuerfassung des Überlieferungszusammenhangs,” explores a late medieval legend within its cultural context and systematically portrays its transmission details. I participated in a hybrid session of the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, MI, presenting a paper on the writings of the Helfta mystics as a form of “art criticism.” Despite being physically removed from the panel’s location, the discussion was vivid and provided a good opportunity to continue conversations about medieval visionary writing, a central theme of my book on Gertrud of Helfta (CUP 2021).

I devoted time during the year to organize two conferences in September 2025: one in Oxford on posthumanism (28th Anglo-German Colloquium: “Posthumane Perspektiven im Dialog mit vormoderner Kultur: Neue Zugänge zur deutschsprachigen Literatur des Mittelalters”) and another on the culture and literature of Lake Constance in the late Middle Ages (“Die Kultur- und Literaturlandschaft um den Bodensee im späteren Mittelalter”).

**Ecstatic Postlude.** The first third of my Wiko stay involved completing my book on ecstasy, *Berauscht der Sinne beraubt: Eine Geschichte der Ekstase*, published with Propyläen

at the beginning of 2025. In this book, drawing inspiration from medieval mystical treatises, I pair ecstasy with another concept in each chapter, highlighting the ambivalence of both the ecstatic experience and its accompanying discourse. The book's release was followed by a series of interviews in various national and local newspapers, magazines, and radio stations. I was particularly pleased with the positive reviews in the *FAZ*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *SWR*, and other outlets. The book was also recognised in "Best Non-Fiction Books" listings, received the Doxumentale 2025 award for "Best Non-Fiction Book," and was shortlisted for the Austrian Science Book Award in the category Medicine/Biology. Swiss TV (SRF) featured my book in a one-hour interview on *Sternstunde Religion*. A translation into Chinese is currently in the planning stages. Two readings took place in Berlin: one public, and a private one held in Wiko's vicinity, in the very place where the Fischer family once hosted their salons. This served as a momentous highlight of my year at Wiko. Being present in Berlin for my book's release allowed me to engage in a kind of well-balanced, hands-on science communication, drawing insights from the experiences of my Co-Fellows. Their willingness to share their disciplinary knowledge and offer tips on engaging with the media world was immensely helpful, and I continue to be inspired by their wealth of wisdom and generosity.



MASCHINENRAUM MEINER STADT,  
HORIZONT UNSERER WELT  
PER LEO

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Per Leo lebt als Schriftsteller und Historiker in Berlin. Sein Werk wurde mehrfach ausgezeichnet. Mit einer Arbeit über Ludwig Klages und die Tradition des charakterologischen Denkens promoviert, arbeitet Leo seit 2011 als freier Autor. Ein Schwerpunkt seiner Texte liegt auf der Geschichte und dem Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus, wobei der stilistische Zugriff variiert. Auf den autofiktionalen Familienroman *Flut und Boden* folgten publizistische Interventionen wie der von ihm mitverfasste Leitfaden *Mit Rechten reden* sowie eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen Erinnerungskultur. Zuletzt hat Leo sich verstärkt dem Nahostkonflikt im Kontext der Migrationsgesellschaft gewidmet, u. a. mit dessen Repräsentation in deutschen Schulen. Sein zweiter Roman, eine Road Novel zwischen Niederösterreich und Polarkreis, soll im Herbst 2026 erscheinen. Seit September 2025 ist er Mitherausgeber der *Weltbühne*. – Adresse: Liselotte-Herrmann-Straße 37, 10407 Berlin, Deutschland. E-Mail: perleo@gmx.net.

Als sogenannter Non-resident Fellow pendelte ich – fast – jeden Tag von unserer Wohnung im Prenzlauer Berg zu meinem Arbeitsplatz im Grunewald, einem herrlichen Giebelzimmer mit Blick auf den Fernsehturm, wo ich entgegen hartnäckiger Gerüchte kein Drogenkartell mit meinem geschätzten Nachbarn und angeblichen „Partner“ Jerry O. leitete, sondern abwechselnd an meinem Roman über einen hochstaplerischen Geigenhändler und meinem Projekt für das Wissenschaftskolleg arbeitete. Im Laufe des Jahres wurde mir allmählich klar, dass diese beiden Tätigkeiten nicht nur, wie erwartet, um meine Zeit konkurrierten, sondern auch, zu meiner Überraschung, viel mehr miteinander zu tun hatten als gedacht.

Details tun an dieser Stelle nichts zur Sache, und natürlich will ich auch nicht zu viel verraten. Aber über Krachstaedt, die Hauptfigur des Romans, lässt sich immerhin sagen, dass er ein großer Geschichtenerzähler ist. Die Fähigkeit, den Spielraum zwischen den sogenannten Tatsachen und den eindeutigen Lügen bis zum Äußersten auszureizen, hat ihn nicht nur zuerst reich und dann arm gemacht, sondern seinem Leben auch in vielen misslichen Lagen, so auch während eines langen Gefängnisaufenthalts, Ordnung und Orientierung verliehen. Denn wie der Schriftsteller weiß, ist der erste Adressat einer Erzählung ja immer ihr Autor. Und der Hochstapler ist deshalb ein so faszinierender Betrüger, weil ihm das, was er anderen aufischt, selbst zur zweiten Natur geworden ist.

Als ich begann, an meinem Projekt zu arbeiten, hatte ich ein klares Bild vor Augen. Nachdem ich es immer und immer wieder in den Medien gelesen hatte, ging ich davon aus, dass an Berliner Schulen ein symbolischer Stellvertreterkonflikt tobt: auf der einen Seite Schülerinnen und Schüler mit arabischem oder muslimischem Hintergrund, die sich angesichts des Gewaltexzesses nach dem 7. Oktober mit den Palästinensern in Gaza solidarisieren, auf der anderen solche mit jüdischem und herkunftsdeutschem Hintergrund, die es – unterstützt von den Lehrkräften – mit Israel halten. Die Wochen der Lektüre, die meine Arbeit an dem Projekt einleiteten, schienen dieses Bild zu bestätigen. Immer ging es dabei um Feindseligkeit, um Stress, um Vorurteile, um Bedrohungsgefühle und Hass und, weil es sich bei den Gehassten und Bedrohten um Juden handelte: um Antisemitismus. Glaubte man diesen Texten, war der sogenannte Nahostkonflikt das Einfallstor, durch das sich an deutschen Schulen eine Pandemie der Judenfeindschaft und des Israelhasses ausbreitete.

Dass dieser Konflikt an Schulen mit hohem Migrationsanteil von großer Relevanz ist und oft starke Gefühlsreaktionen hervorruft, lässt sich nicht bestreiten. Und in den Köpfen vieler Schülerinnen und Schüler geistern tatsächlich Bilder von Israel und „den“ Juden herum, die, freundlich gesagt, nicht von der Wirklichkeit gedeckt sind. Woran ich jedoch mit der Zeit zu zweifeln begann, war das Bild, das deutsche Journalisten und Wissenschaftler über die Zustände an Berliner Schulen verbreiteten. Und diese Zweifel hatten ihren Ursprung darin, dass ich immer häufiger meinen Adlerhorst in der Bibliotheksvilla verließ, um mich zurück in die Stadt zu begeben, in der ich seit fast dreißig Jahren lebe.

Lange hatte ich meine Aufgabe darin gesehen, dem überforderten Lehrpersonal Wissen und Prinzipien an die Hand zu geben, mit denen sie ihre Schulen angesichts einer Krise, auf die sie nicht vorbereitet waren, wieder befrieden könnten. Als ich jedoch den zweiten Teil meiner Recherche begann, änderte sich innerhalb weniger Wochen der

Charakter meines Projekts. In den Interviews, die ich mit Lehrern, Eltern, Rektoren, externen Bildungsträgern etc. führte, wurde nämlich immer deutlicher, dass auch auf diesem Gebiet gilt, was man auf anderen ganz selbstverständlich annimmt: Es gibt solche und solche Geschichten. Die einen Geschichten erzeugen unmittelbar Sinn. Sie nehmen einem das Denken ab, weil sie sich in ein Weltbild fügen. Ihre Funktion besteht nicht darin, Dinge zu erkennen, sondern *wiederzuerkennen*. Man kann sie Narrative nennen oder, wenn man es etwas pointierter mag, auch Mythen. Die Logik der anderen Geschichten funktioniert genau umgekehrt. Sie fordern das Denken heraus, weil sie sich nicht auf eindeutige Botschaften reduzieren lassen. Sie müssen erzählt werden, weil sie auf Erfahrungen beruhen, die quer stehen zum allgemein geteilten Sinn. Nennen wir sie, auch weil sie der Rohstoff der Literatur sind, Erzählungen.

Die Erzählungen aus dem Schulalltag forderten die Eindeutigkeit der Narrative heraus. Und sie waren es auch, die mich von der Idee abbrachten, ein Buch zu schreiben, in dem die überlegene Weisheit des Intellektuellen den überforderten Lehrern Wissen und Prinzipien zur Lösung des symbolischen Nahostkonflikts in der Schule an die Hand gibt. Die Realität, die mir in den Interviews begegnete, entsprach nämlich ganz und gar nicht dem, was die Bücher und Zeitungen behaupteten. Zum einen lagen die Probleme anders als gedacht. Die handgreifliche Auseinandersetzung zwischen einem Lehrer und einem Schüler, der auf dem Pausenhof eine Palästinaflagge präsentiert hatte, oder die antisemitischen Ausfälle kamen in der Öffentlichkeit nicht deswegen vor, weil sie typisch, sondern weil sie entweder spektakulär waren. Oder weil man genau danach fragte. Und vor allem kamen sie vor, weil sie sich in ein deutsches Narrativ fügten, das viel zu schön für die Wahrheit ist. Wie jedes Narrativ ist auch dieses so einfach, dass man es in einem Satz wiedergeben kann. Die Deutschen, die aus ihrer Vergangenheit gelernt haben, so lautet dieser Satz, schützen die Juden, die zum Beweis ihrer moralischen Wandlung wieder unter ihnen leben, vor zugewanderten Migranten, die ihren Antisemitismus noch nicht überwunden haben.

Man muss die erwähnten Vorfälle ernst nehmen. Aber meine Interviews zeigten mir, dass sich die Lage an den Schulen viel besser begreifen ließe, wenn man die extremen Ausschläge der Wirklichkeit nicht zu einem sinnstiftenden Narrativ formte, sondern sie als Erzählung in einer Vielzahl von anderen Erzählungen betrachtete. Denn es gibt auch ganz andere Probleme, die es genauso verdienten, ernst genommen zu werden. Und ironischerweise liegt an deren Ursprung jenes deutsche Narrativ der Selbstentlastung, das sich selbst so gerne als Lösung präsentiert.

In den Erzählungen, die ich an der schulischen Basis hörte, ging es meist nicht um die Übertragung eines realen Konflikts ins Symbolische, sondern um Perspektiven und Erfahrungen, die quer stehen zum Sinnstiftungsbedürfnis der sogenannten Mehrheitsgesellschaft. Oder anders gesagt: um Geschichten, die nicht ins Bild passen. Zwei nicht deutsche Mütter erzählten mir, wie irritiert sie waren, als sie sich zu Hause die Folge der Kinder-Nachrichten ansahen, die der Klasse ihrer Söhne die Vorgeschichte des Gazakrieges nahebringen sollte. Die Einseitigkeit und die Leerstellen dieses gut gemeinten, aber schlecht gemachten Bildungsfilms passten so gar nicht zur Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der diese Mütter aus anderer Perspektive auf das gleiche Geschehen blickten. Und es verstörte sie, dass die Lehrerin offenbar so wenig wusste, dass sie dem Film blind vertrauen musste, weil ihr die Mittel fehlten, ihn medienkritisch zu durchleuchten. Zwei externe Bildungsträger, sie eine Palästinenserin, er ein Jude aus Deutschland, berichten von der großen Emotionalität, mit der Schülerinnen und Schüler auf die Gewalt im Nahen Osten reagieren. Aber dabei ging es nicht in erster Linie um die Identifikation mit einer Konfliktpartei, sondern um die Solidarisierung mit menschlichem Leid – und um die Verarbeitung des schrecklichen Leids, mit dem sie tagtäglich auf ihren Handys konfrontiert sind. Ein Rektor erzählte von der Angst, mit der deutsche Eltern auf die Idee reagierten, einen Informationstag zu Israel und Palästina zu organisieren. Statt anzuerkennen, dass Eltern, die selbst aus dem Nahen Osten stammen, über ein Wissen verfügen könnten, das ihnen selbst fehlt, spürten sie sich bedroht von einer Sichtweise, die eigene Gewissheiten infrage gestellt hätte.

Doch nicht nur sind die Probleme vielfältiger und oft anders gelagert als gedacht. Auch die Ideen zu ihrer Lösung sind an der Basis vorhanden. Die Schulen sind in der Regel nicht auf externe Impulse angewiesen, schon gar nicht bei diesem Thema. Und warum nicht? Weil sie in der Lage sind, sich selbst zu organisieren. Sei es eine von Schülerinnen und Schülern erstellte Ausstellung; sei es, besonders beeindruckend, eine Reihe von Gesprächen, die ein Politik-Leistungskurs mit über 50 Experten aus aller Welt geführt hat; sei es die simple, aber effektive Regel, sämtliche nationalen und politischen Symbole aus der Schule zu verbannen; sei es die einfühlsame Klugheit einer ägyptischen Mutter, vor dem Besuch einer israelischen Klassenkameradin alle Zeichen der Palästina-Solidarität für einen Nachmittag zu verbergen. Und so wird mein Buch denn, statt der einen großen Geschichte auf den Leim zu gehen und ein Wissen zu präsentieren, das niemandem hilft, lieber die zahlreichen Erzählungen von der Basis sammeln – auf dass die Schulen voneinander lernen können.

Doch das Wissenschaftskolleg erlaubte mir nicht nur, in unbekannte Bereiche Berlins einzutauchen. Es erlaubte mir auch, den Blick in die Welt zu weiten. Dank glücklicher Umstände, die vielleicht nicht nur dem Zufall geschuldet waren, fand die Weisheit an der Basis nämlich ihre Ergänzung im profunden Wissen einiger Fellows, die sich aus professionellen wie persönlichen Gründen intensiv mit dem Nahen Osten beschäftigt hatten. Die zahllosen Gespräche, die ich mit ihnen führte, kamen mir vor wie ein Spiegelbild der Geschichten, die mir in den Schulen erzählt wurden. Von beidem habe ich unglaublich viel gelernt. Es ist erstaunlich, wie viel man über die Welt erfahren kann, ohne die eigene Stadt zu verlassen.



WERTSCHÄTZENDE  
HERAUSFORDERUNGEN  
HARTMUT LEPPIN

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Hartmut Leppin, geboren 1963, studierte in Marburg, Heidelberg, Pavia und Rom Geschichte und Klassische Philologie. Nach Promotion in Marburg 1990 über römische Schauspieler und Habilitation 1995 in Berlin über spätantike Kirchengeschichtsschreibung sowie Stationen in Greifswald, Nottingham und Göttingen lehrt er seit 2001 an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. 2015 erhielt er den Leibniz-Preis der DFG. 2015/16 war er Fellow am Robinson College in Cambridge, 2019 am Institute for Advanced Study; seit 2016 ist er Kuratoriumsvorsitzender des Historischen Kollegs in München. Er hat Monografien unter anderem zu den Frühen Christen und zur Geschichte des Worts Parrhesie verfasst. Sein Schwerpunkt liegt auf der Spätantike in einem weiten Verständnis. Er versucht, sie in ihrer religiösen, kulturellen und sprachlichen Vielfalt zu erfassen, und verfolgt dabei das Ziel, eine Geschichte der Spätantike zu entwerfen, die Eufrasien insgesamt im Blick hat und so weit über das Mediterraneum hinausreicht. – Adresse: Historisches Seminar, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1, 60629 Frankfurt a. M., Deutschland. E-Mail: [h.leppin@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:h.leppin@em.uni-frankfurt.de).

Altertumswissenschaftler sind am Wiko selten vertreten. In der Villa Walther untergebracht zu sein, ist für sie eine besondere Herausforderung. Der spätwilhelminische Bau repräsentiert Antikenrezeption *at its worst*. Die Wände des alten, unzerstörten Gebäudeteils sind bestimmt von groben Nachahmungen antiker Kunstwerke, umgeben von fragwürdigen, oft militaristischen Sinnsprüchen, und diese nicht immer in korrektem Latein. Dafür entschädigt der wunderbare Blick ins Grüne, auf den Herthasee und das alltägliche Leben in einer anregenden Gemeinschaft.

Damit ist das Wiko eines von vielen Institutes for Advanced Study, die darauf abzielen, eine ruhige Arbeitsatmosphäre zu schaffen, sodass die Fellows kreativ arbeiten können. Und selbstverständlich tut der überaus freundliche, hilfsbereite, umsichtige Staff des Wiko alles, damit die Fellows ungestört ihren Gedanken folgen können. Das Wiko wird nachgerade zu einem Ort der Regression. Man wird betreut, ob in Fragen des praktischen Lebens, der Bücherbesorgung oder der IT, fast alles wird einem freundlich erleichtert oder gar abgenommen. Manches am Umgang mit anderen Fellows erinnert an Studentenzeiten: Suchte man für eine abendliche Veranstaltung Begleitung, so fand sich leicht jemand, der sich die Zeit nahm. Gelegentlich klingelte noch spätabends ein Fellow, der das Bedürfnis spürte, sich über die Erfahrungen des Tages auszutauschen, oder einen guten Whisky entdeckt hatte. Spontaneität war möglich, wie man sie in Zeiten des Berufslebens selten hat. Es entstand eine große Nähe zu vielen über disziplinäre, weltanschauliche, nationale Grenzen hinweg – wie weit sich dies zu tragfähigen Freundschaften entwickeln wird, wird sich weisen.

Es gelingt, auch den Partnerinnen und Partnern der Fellows das Gefühl zu vermitteln, dass sie vollwertige Gäste sind, die von den Vorteilen etwa bei der Buchbeschaffung profitieren, die aber auch bei allen Debatten involviert sein können und ihre eigenen Akzente setzen. Dadurch wächst der Kreis der Fellows zusammen und wird der Austausch noch reicher.

So schön und hilfreich alles war – mein ursprüngliches Buchprojekt wollte nicht vorankommen. Natürlich arbeitete ich dafür vom ersten Tag an, doch merkte ich rasch: Wer lediglich in stiller Selbstgenügsamkeit an seinem Buch arbeitet, nutzt das spezifische Potenzial des Wiko schlecht. Fast jedes der verbindlichen Mittagessen bedeutet eine intellektuelle Herausforderung, bietet Anregungen, zwingt zum Weiterdenken, sei es über moderne Musik, über klassische Fotografie, über Quellenforschung im 17. Jahrhundert oder über die politische Situation der Zeit – und nicht zuletzt über das eigene Forschungsthema. Anregungen kommen oft unvermutet aus interdisziplinärer Perspektive unter den Bedingungen von *serendipity*, der überraschenden Begegnungen; hinzu treten die berühmten naiven Fragen, die einen erst dazu bringen, sich die Kernprobleme des eigenen Nachdenkens bewusst zu machen. Diese Interventionen, stets wertschätzend vorgetragen, ereilen einen, schrecken einen auf, während man das lecker gewürzte Gemüse oder das zarte Hähnchen genussvoll verzehrt, und wirken umso stärker nach. Und danach mag ein Gespräch über die Qualität der Staubsauger am Wiko (nicht so gut) oder über eine Berliner Theateraufführung (immer spannend) folgen. Doch die Nachfragen zum eigenen Forschungsthema wirken weiter.

So interessant die Diskussion nach meinem eigenen Vortrag am Wiko war, die gelegentlichen, bisweilen nur ganz knappen und unerwarteten Nachfragen bei Tisch nachdem, was ich eigentlich tue, waren irritierender, in einem positiven Sinne. Dass das Vortragsprogramm meistens in vielerlei Hinsicht lehrreich, inspirierend und horizont-erweiternd war, steht außer Frage. Es erlaubt es, die Co-Fellows in anderer Weise kennenzulernen, und ist daher unverzichtbar. Es ist wichtig für die intellektuelle Interaktion und wird bisweilen als das Herz des Wiko bezeichnet, aber es ist näher am akademischen Alltag als die überraschenden Mittagsgespräche, die für mich die Schlüsselerfahrung des Aufenthalts waren und die sich natürlich in zahlreichen anderen Gesprächen fortsetzten.

All diese Begegnungen, Herausforderungen, Nachfragen, Lernprozesse fordern zwangsläufig die Routine des Forschenden heraus; die Weiterarbeit, das Weiterdenken wird angeregt, denn es gibt so viel mehr zu bedenken als ursprünglich geplant. So fördern sie die Offenheit, die im Alltag des Lebens eines Wissenschaftlers, gerade eines arrivierten, leicht zu kurz kommt: die Bereitschaft und den Mut, *out of the box* zu denken.

Ich hatte mir ohnehin ein Thema vorgenommen, das dazu beitragen sollte, ein dezentriertes Bild der Spätantike zu gewinnen. Denn ich hatte in meinem Antrag angekündigt, mich mit Städten zu beschäftigen, die aus Sicht der Römer peripher waren, doch aus Sicht bestimmter Menschen außerhalb des Reiches eine Zentralfunktion hatten, wie Jerusalem für Christen im Kaukasus oder Edessa für die Syrischsprachigen. Als ich damit begann, erweiterte sich das Thema indes unversehens zu einer Beschäftigung mit Formen der Sakralisierung von Kriegen (in meinem Vortrag sprach ich noch vom „Heiligen Krieg“), die besonders in der Peripherie der Reiche eintraten und so das Problem der Zentralität in einer anderen Weise beleuchteten.

Jetzt versuche ich nach vielen Eindrücken am Wiko, natürlich auch nach manchen Lektüren, die Spätantike konsequent in einer eufrasischen Perspektive zu betrachten. Diese Weitung des Blicks hatte sich schon vorher abgezeichnet; das Wiko erwies sich dann als der geeignete Ort, um die Gedanken weiterzuführen, zu erproben und durchzuspielen. Auch wenn ich weitaus weniger Seiten geschrieben habe als geplant, verlasse ich das Wiko mit dem Gefühl, in den eigenen Forschungen deutlich vorangekommen zu sein, auf einem ungeplanten, aber gerade deswegen ertragreichen Weg.

Das Wiko hat sich noch in einer anderen Hinsicht als horizontweiternd erwiesen. Denn es ist ein Laboratorium der Begegnung unterschiedlicher Wissenschaftskulturen in einem Klima der Vertrautheit. Traditionelle Gelehrsamkeit stand neben einem aktivistischen Wissenschaftsstil, den einige Fellows offensiv vertraten. Einige verstanden sich als

*public intellectuals*, hinzu kamen Künstlerinnen und Künstler verschiedener Richtungen, mit je eigenen Habitusformen. Die Diskussionen auch nach Vorträgen waren nicht immer leicht, wenn bisweilen den von Ambivalenzen geprägten, an Ergebnisoffenheit orientierten Forscherinnen und Forschern moralische Eindeutigkeit und eine übermäßige sachliche Gewissheit gegenübertrat, wenn geschliffene Rhetorik auf grüblerisches Abwägen oder auch poetische Assoziationslust traf. Gelegentlich, gar nicht so selten, sprachen wir auch aneinander vorbei, doch das ließ sich in der Wiko-Kultur auffangen, durch zahlreiche Nachgespräche. Es gab sogar Situationen, die kritisch waren und die hätten eskalieren können, doch dank der wachsenden Vertrautheit, vielleicht auch nur aufgrund des Wissens, dass man sich tagtäglich weiter begegnen werde, gelang es, wenn ich recht sehe, ausnahmslos zu verhindern, dass der Streit in persönliche Verletzungen mündete. Das war eine höchst lehrreiche Erfahrung, zumal die Begegnung so unterschiedlicher Wissenschaftsstile sicherlich künftig viele Universitäten auch in Deutschland prägen wird.

Indem das Wiko das Nebeneinander verschiedener Wissenschaftsstile zu befördern sucht, geht es Risiken ein, die vielleicht nur in einer Einrichtung einhegbar sind, der es gelingt, eine persönliche Nähe zwischen Fellows zu fördern, die nicht nur habituelle und wissenschaftliche, sondern auch politische Grenzen zu überwinden half. Bei allen spürte man das Bemühen, die anderen zu integrieren. So ist das Wiko ein Ort der Versöhnlichkeit und Offenheit.

Und dennoch. Die gewalttätige Gegenwart, die ihre Schatten über alles wirft, prägte auch die Stimmung am Wiko mit: Gewiss, die Wiko-Gemeinschaft war an etlichen Abenden fröhlich und beschwingt, sie feierte Partys und Karneval, gerade um die Schreckensnachrichten bewältigen zu können. Doch die schlimmen, teils grauerregenden politischen Entwicklungen in vielen Regionen, namentlich in der Ukraine und im Vorderen Orient, ließen niemanden kalt. Manche Fellows kamen aus Ländern, die miteinander im Krieg lagen. In bewegender Weise zeigte sich verschiedentlich, dass wechselseitige Empathie, namentlich die Frage nach der Lage von Verwandten gerade in Kriegsgebieten, selbst diejenigen zusammenbrachte, die aus verfeindeten Staaten stammten. Doch auch die einfühlsamsten Nachfragen können das Leid von Verwandten und Freunden nicht lindern.

Die Wahl von Donald Trump zum Präsidenten der USA löste bei den allermeisten Fellows Entsetzen aus und die Konsequenzen waren rasch fühlbar: Die Vereinigten Staaten, für die meisten Forschenden seit Jahrzehnten ein Sehnsuchtsort, entwickelten sich zu einem Ort der Bedrohung von Forschungsfreiheit und unvermittelter Einschnitte.

Europa hingegen, die Region der großzügigen und weltoffenen Finanzierungsmöglichkeiten des European Research Councils, gewann eine neue Attraktivität. Daraus entstanden etliche transatlantische Gespräche, doch das klingt vielleicht zu positiv.

Das Wiko erwies sich immerhin für viele als ein Ort, an dem die, die von Kriegen unmittelbar betroffen waren, etwas Abstand gewinnen und Kraft schöpfen, auch einfach reden konnten. Angesichts all dessen kam es mir bisweilen nachgerade frivol vor, mich mit einem entlegenen historischen Thema zu befassen. Doch war auch zu spüren, dass die Ebene der Wissenschaftlichkeit Gemeinsamkeiten schuf und der Habitus der Forschung half, aktuelle Konstellationen präziser zu analysieren.

Stärker als andere Institutes for Advanced Study, wie jenes in Princeton oder das Historische Kolleg in München, bringt, ja zwingt das Wiko die Fellows dazu, sich auf überraschende Begegnungen einzulassen und die dadurch entstehende Reibung zu ertragen. So hat es ein ganz eigenes Profil unter den vielen IAS. Reibung entstand in dem Jahrgang, dem ich angehören durfte, nicht selten. Auch eine produktive Zerstörung fand bei meinen Forschungen statt. Das war anstrengend und zugleich überaus motivierend und gewinnbringend. Derartige Bekundungen gehören offenbar zum guten Ton, nachgerade zur Topik, der Rückblicke und Abschlussberichte von Wiko-Fellows. Doch scheint es mehr zu sein als ein Stereotyp, denn die spezifische Konstellation des Wiko, seine disziplinäre Vielfalt, seine Diversität, seine Porosität gegenüber politischen Debatten, vor allem die Intensität der Gesprächskultur, schafft ideale Voraussetzungen, um die Bereitschaft zu fördern, einen Neuansatz des Denkens zu wagen. Der Rückblick ist von Dank bestimmt an alle die, die das möglich machen, begleitet von der bangen Frage, was sich von all dem bewahren lässt und wie die Institution sich in bedrängten Zeiten behaupten kann.



REDISCOVERING CURIOSITY AMONG  
SWANS AND TREES  
SARA MAGALHÃES

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I am a professor and a researcher, working at the interface between Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Lisbon. My work is anchored in laboratory experiments using herbivorous spider mites, which are elaborated, performed, and interpreted together with a team of excellent students and researchers. I address questions related to sexual selection, sex allocation, competition, and host-parasite interactions, often using the powerful tool of experimental evolution. I strongly believe that science is a cooperative endeavour and invest in activities that benefit the scientific community. I thus play active roles in national and international scientific societies, having just been elected President of the European Society for Evolutionary Biology. I also act as a reviewer for journals and for grant schemes on a regular basis, being part of the Editorial Board of several journals (currently *American Naturalist* and *Evolution*). Although I consider fundamental research a societal priority, I am also devoted to bringing science closer to society. In particular, I conduct initiatives aiming at building bridges between researchers, producers, and consumers committed to sustainable agriculture. – Address: Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes, University of Lisbon, Edifício C2, 3o Piso, Campo Grande, 1749-016 Lisbon, Portugal. E-mail: [snmagalhaes@fc.ul.pt](mailto:snmagalhaes@fc.ul.pt).

The academic year I had at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin was one of the best years of my life in several ways, and one that I predict will have long-lasting repercussions on the way I conduct my work and envision the world in general.

## 1. I learned the most

I attended most of the Colloquia and listened to recordings of those that took place during the rare weeks I was away from Berlin. In addition, I joined the meetings of the History and Philosophy of Science discussion group and the Writers Anonymous group. I attended the Three Cultures Forums and actively participated in one (“What is a Community?”). I also hosted a table discussion at the Berliner Abend (“The Ecology of Conflict”) and took part in several events organized either in-house or by Fellows in the city. I read articles, books, and book chapters authored by several of my colleagues. I also joined most lunches and dinners, where I consistently had highly stimulating conversations with Fellows and, occasionally, their guests. By the end of the year, I had interacted with all Fellows. These exchanges have enriched me in ways that are difficult to express. I had not imagined that there could be a place where one could learn so much, across such a wide range of topics and in such a pleasant and engaging atmosphere. I believe the intellectual and human qualities of my colleagues played a key role in making this experience so rewarding. I also take from this year a bunch of people that will hopefully continue to be present in my life, which is something I didn’t really expect at this stage.

## 2. I finished long-standing research

Being at the Wissenschaftskolleg gave me the time and mental disposition to finish work that had been lingering on for a significant amount of time. It is not the quantity of articles that I managed to finish this year, but their nature that was special. For example, I wrote one manuscript with data that we had collected eight years ago. The topic is a fascinating one (whether traits associated with density-dependent environments trade off with those associated with non-saturated ones), but one that has been out of the scope of the research conducted in my lab. To delve into that, I had to go back to a whole body of literature I was no longer familiar with. I somehow hadn’t found the mental space to do this before coming here. To my great relief, I completed the manuscript and submitted it.

Moreover, thanks to the generosity of the Kolleg, I hosted several academic guests during the year. These meetings were instrumental in bringing together colleagues from different parts of the world to work in the wonderful setting of Grunewald. During those visits, we were able to work intensively on the elaboration of a project and on completing manuscripts. This would not have been possible (or it would have been much slower and exhausting) had we not had the opportunity to meet in this setting.

### 3. I developed my Wiko project

The project I originally proposed for this year evolved significantly over the first half of the year, ultimately crystallizing into a conceptual article titled “The Ecology and Evolution of Interactions: Finding Common Processes and Identifying Knowledge Gaps.” In this article, I develop a unifying framework to analyse all ecological and evolutionary interactions—predator-prey, host-parasite, competition, and male-female interactions—that are traditionally studied in isolated domains with limited cross-communication.

By integrating insights from both ecology and evolutionary biology, I classify interactions along three key axes: *Specificity* (the range of resource types that an interactor consumes), *Dependence* (the number and consistency of partners an individual interacts with over its lifetime), and *Impact on Fitness* (the degree to which interactions increase or decrease the fitness of interactors). These axes allow for a dynamic understanding of interactions, which may shift along the spectrum or even change categorical identity (e.g., competition becoming cooperation) depending on the strength and symmetry of these dimensions.

The article proceeds to examine organismal responses to interactions, organizing them under three core processes: *avoid*, *adjust*, and *adapt*. I then explore the *emergent outcomes* of these interactions for species distributions (e.g., priority effects, coexistence, exclusion), individual fitness (e.g., alignment of interests, negative frequency-dependent selection, character displacement), and the environment (e.g., niche construction).

Finally, the article highlights key *knowledge gaps*—instances in which processes well-documented in one domain of interaction literature are absent or underexplored in others. While the conceptual framework is now fully developed, I am currently in the process of writing the manuscript.

### 4. I collaborated with researchers from other areas on a common article

As a spin-off of the History and Philosophy of Science discussion group, a shared interest emerged among three of us—Jutta Schickore, Mariana Gómez-Schiavon, and me—leading to a collaborative writing project. Our forthcoming manuscript, titled “Harnessing Complexity May Strangle It: What Is a Well-Controlled Experiment?”, explores the concept of control in scientific experimentation. We argue that excessive control can sometimes obscure key features of complex systems, thereby limiting scientific insight.

Our different backgrounds have led us to this problem via different paths. Jutta is a philosopher of science who has written important pieces on the notion of control throughout the history of science, Mariana is a biologist who uses mathematical modelling to

understand the functioning of the cell, in particular the emerging properties of regulatory networks, and I am an evolutionary biologist used to performing large-scale, highly controlled experiments in the laboratory. Together, we bring complementary approaches to this discussion.

This manuscript is currently under review.

#### 5. I found a new way of working

All these endeavours have certainly contributed to my career in meaningful ways. However, the most important impact this year has had on my professional life is immaterial—and therefore difficult to articulate. The academic world often traps us in a success fallacy: as our visibility grows, so do our responsibilities. We are called upon to serve our institutions and the broader community with grant evaluations, conferences, editorial duties, and more. These roles, while important, consume so much of our time that we risk losing sight of why we chose this path in the first place. This year reminded me of the importance of carving out time for what scientists should ultimately strive for: open-ended, curiosity-driven research.



DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR  
REMODELING BIOLOGY EDUCATION TO  
INTEGRATE MICRO- AND MACROBIOLOGY  
MARGARET MCFALL-NGAI

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Margaret McFall-Ngai is a staff scientist at Carnegie Science and a Faculty Associate at the California Institute of Technology. Her laboratory works in the frontier field of animal-microbe symbiosis. She is heavily involved in promoting microbiology as the cornerstone of biological sciences, with particular attention to the remodeling of biology education. She received her PhD from UCLA in animal physiology and did postdoctoral research in protein biochemistry/biophysics. She holds Honoris Causa (honorary PhD) positions at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland; the University Claude Bernard Lyon 1, France; and Kiel University (CAU), Germany. She has had tenured faculty positions at the US universities of Southern California, Wisconsin-Madison, and Hawai'i-Manoa. She was a Guggenheim Fellow (2010) and an A.D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University (2010–2016). She is a member of the American Academy of Microbiology (2002), the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2011), and the National Academy of Sciences (2014) and is an HHMI Professor (2018–). – Address: Church Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, 1200 E. California Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91125, USA. E-mail: mcfallng@caltech.edu; mmcfallngai@carnegiescience.edu.

In the fall of 2024, I had the privilege of residence at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Wiko) in Berlin for a season of scholarship. This extremely precious opportunity allowed me to explore the horizons of education in the field of biology, in light of the dramatic technology-enabled shift in our view of the biosphere. A series of features of the experience provided the most intellectually supportive environment of my career. Most critical was the high quality of and interplay between the scholarship efforts and the

infrastructural framework that is created by Wiko's leadership. The Rector Dr. Stollberg-Rilinger and her staff have created the ideal balance between required interactions among the Fellows and free time for the development of each individual's goals for their stay at Wiko; i.e., the format for interaction between the Fellows was rich, but not so intense as to compromise the research efforts of each Fellow.

#### *Academic goals while at Wiko*

I had five interrelated goals for my tenure at Wiko that would lay the foundation for my continued advancement of these ideas through 2025 and into the future:

1) *To develop and refine a draft template for a new introductory biology course that, in unifying the field, will provide students with a strong foundation in the discipline.* The prototype must be broad and basic so that it can be developed further for a range of situations, i.e., high school, university, or medical school, with short-term courses (one quarter or semester) to longer-term courses (full academic year). In addition, the course should be formulated to allow integration of other science and engineering majors (i.e., from STEM disciplines); the incorporation of this aim is critical, as humankind's challenges, while having biology at their base, will have effective solutions only with the incorporation of expertise from other fields.

2) *To pivot the content around the organismal level of the biological hierarchy (i.e., molecule to ecosystems), with the microbial world as foundational.* For many years, the cells and/or genes of animals and plants have been the starting point for understanding biological systems. By incorporating the microbial world as foundational, students can build a framework for the field that explores topics from the origin of life to the basis of organismal, population, and community diversity.

3) *To develop a strategy for dealing with resistance to change in the curriculum.* Biology has been in separate silos for decades, with cell/molecular/development at one end and ecology/evolution at the other. These challenging intellectual barriers are accompanied by the narrow foci of expertise of the practitioners of biology, particularly the senior, most "politically" powerful members of the faculty communities. Further, the impact of this siloing is reflected in departmental structures, scientific societies, funding agencies, etc. These divisions are highly guarded, and change in the structures is perceived as

threatening. As such, it is important to address this “political” issue. A variety of approaches should be explored, e.g. teaching the teachers and/or offering traditional approaches along with the new ones in separate sections of existing introductory courses.

4) *To consider mechanisms to publicize this approach.* I have already given a number of seminars on this topic in the international arena. Such is one way to “plant a seed.” I will continue to seek out such opportunities. For example, I have been invited at the end of this fall to Singapore for a two-week visit and next spring for a week-long visit in Vienna. In addition, I typically give 20–25 lectures at universities throughout a given year. I will request to provide two seminars at each venue where I speak, one on the need to remodel biology education and one on my research program. In addition, I hope to publish a perspective piece in a broad scientific journal, such as *Science*, *Nature*, or the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*. The goal is to reach the audience across the disciplines of science.

5) *To gain a perspective from the other Wiko Fellows, particularly those in fields that have recently undergone major conceptual shifts.* What drives such shifts and how do the practitioners adapt? In biology, conceptual shifts occurred in the 19th century with Darwin, in the 20th century with the defining of DNA as the genetic basis of life forms, and in the 21st century by the discovery of a world we could not have known, the Earth’s microbiomes. My efforts were significantly enriched by the interactions with my Co-Fellows. One interaction that I will never forget is the problem that the historians and philosophers in the group had with my referring to “revolutions” in biology. Scientists use this terminology to refer to major breakthroughs or changes in the intellectual framework of the field. These are considered “scientific revolutions”; however, it was clear that this terminology carries a strong political meaning, which should be acknowledged and respected.

In summary, my stay at Wiko, although short, was one of the most remarkable of my academic career. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity.



DER TITEL DIESES BERICHTS WIRD MIR  
IN EINIGEN JAHREN EINFALLEN  
FLORIAN MEINEL

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Florian Meinel, geb. 1981 in Marburg, lehrt Vergleichendes Verfassungsrecht und Politische Wissenschaften an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. Langjährige Bemühungen, ein seriöser Publizist zu werden – so nannte man früher die Vertreter der Wissenschaft vom öffentlichen Recht. Im Zuge dieser Bemühungen Beschäftigung unter anderem mit der politischen Ideengeschichte des Autoritarismus, mit vergleichender Theorie und Praxis der Demokratie und Fragen der politischen Ökonomie des öffentlichen Rechts. Unterdessen, namentlich aber im Laufe des Fellowjahres, mehrten sich die Indizien, dass das weitverzweigte Firmennetz Konstitutionalismus & Co. KG, bei der er früh angeheuert hatte, auf die Insolvenz zuschlittert. Überlegt seitdem, welches Amt die lange Ablage im Fundus besser überstanden hat: der redliche Konkursverwalter oder der politische Professor – und wie das eine oder das andere sinnvoll auszuüben wäre. Nimmt außerdem gerne Fortbildungsangebote aller Art wahr, unter denen die Co-Fellows des Jahres 2024/2025 das beste aller denkbaren waren; weitere Vorschläge hierzu gerne an die bleibende Adresse: [florian.meinel@gmail.com](mailto:florian.meinel@gmail.com).

Das Wissenschaftskolleg lädt seine Fellows, wie es im freundlichen Schreiben der Rektorin hieß, zum *Leben und Arbeiten* ein, verlangt für dieses Jahrbuch aber lediglich *Arbeitsberichte*. Die Differenz zwischen *Leben* und *Arbeit* markiert also den Bereich, über den in einem Bericht zu schweigen ist oder geschwiegen werden darf. Ein Klassiker wie: *In den ersten Monaten arbeitete ich an der Schriftfassung eines größeren Vortrags und einem überfülligen Buchkapitel* kann beispielsweise zugleich Arbeitsbericht sein und Schweigen über das Leben. Arbeit und Leben zugleich aber: DAS SCHWEIGEN. Heft 2/2025 (Sommer) der

Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte, hrsg. v. Meinel & Schlak, vorgestellt im Juni, fast am Ende des Jahres, im Strandbad Halensee, dessen Eröffnung die Berliner Baubehörden mit kleinlichen Einwänden bis in den Hochsommer hinein verschleppten. Baden baulizeilich streng verboten, aber trotzdem herrlich, vor allem nachts.

Arbeit, Leben und Tod: In den ersten Wochen des Jahres lag mein Freund Jörg Trempler im Sterben; in zehn Minuten Fahrradentfernung vom Grunewald. Was ich außer hinfahren noch tun konnte: nach Tonbandaufnahmen vom Krankenbett ein letztes Gespräch mit ihm redigieren, über Caspar David Friedrich und den Nebel als einer Darstellungstechnik von Bildern, die, wie ein Bericht, darauf bestehen, selbst zu entscheiden, was sie zeigen wollen und was nicht. Wenige Tage vor seinem Tod gingen wir den Text, den er als Essay geplant hatte und von dem wir wussten, dass er den Druck nicht erleben würde, ein letztes Mal gemeinsam durch und wählten die Abbildungen aus für die Publikation im Heft über *DAS SCHWEIGEN*. Unlösbares Problem, hier und überhaupt: Wie beendet man ein Gespräch, von dem man sich wünscht, dass es immer weitergeht, und das man ohnehin in sich selbst fortführt? Bilanz all dessen, was noch zu sagen wäre? Letzte Worte? Abschiedsformel? Abreißen lassen mitten im –?

Der Arbeitsplan für das restliche Jahr klang übersichtlich: in Ruhe einer alten Intuition nachgehen, die ungefähr so lautet: Kapitalistische Rechtsordnungen kennen Eigentumsrechte in zwei Formen, einmal unter der landläufigen Bezeichnung als privates Sachen- und Personenrecht, und dann, oft unter anderen und sogar Tarnnamen, als administrative Berechtigungen; als Rechte auf ein Stück Politik und Verwaltung. Ich wollte verstehen, dass und warum sich die Bedeutung von Eigentumsrechten eigentlich aus dieser wechselseitigen Zuordnung ergibt; dass alles Wichtige in jenem Zwischenraum liegt, in dem die Interessen, ungeordnet durch Rechtsinstitute, diffuser und dadurch mächtiger sind. Nur: Wie erforscht man Zwischenräume zwischen juristischen Kategorien? Methodisches Problem von der Art: Wie studiert man das Schweigen zwischen zwei Sätzen, zwei Gesprächen, zwei Begegnungen? Es geht nur in Ruhe, aber nicht, wenn einem zu viel auf einmal bewusst wird. *Intervention eins*: Wichtiger und vielleicht auch wirksamer als alle Theorie des Rechts ist die schlichte Benennung eines manifesten Unrechts und ein kleiner Versuch der Abhilfe. Aber was ist die richtige Sprache dafür? Gibt es eine Rechtswissenschaft, die nichts autorisiert? Die Zeit bis zum Kolloquium Anfang Februar brachte immerhin die Gewissheit, dass das Buch so wie geplant und angefangen nicht zu schreiben ist. Jeder Grund, den ich dafür fand, eine kleine Idee zu einem Text oder einer Parallelaktion. Notiz 1, Notiz 2, Notiz 3 usw., gemeinsame Form: Mahnung an mich

selbst zu einer immer kleineren Fragestellung. Gemeinsames Problem: Hier kann ich sie nicht ausarbeiten, hier ist viel zu viel zu lernen und zu erleben. *Chaque conversation va à son rythme.*

Bald nach dem Kolloquium Lunchtermin mit einem von früher; berühmter Mann, Wissenschaftskolleg alte Schule. Belehrung: Alles sei ja heute furchtbar nett und menschlich warmherzig, damals aber sei es intellektuell spannender gewesen, agonaler, die großen Konflikte der Zeit hätten sich als Parteiungen in den Jahrgängen gebrochen, und es seien sogar Bundeskanzler gekommen. Unnummerierte Notiz: Du bist 43 und hast ein Recht darauf, den Nachgeborenen das Jahr Zwanzigfünfundzwanzig in vierzig Jahren als intellektuelle Glanzzeit zu verklären. Schau dich um und streng dich nicht so an, lies, hör zu, fühle, verstehe: Mehr Gegenwart war selten. Alles, was die Welt ist, ist auch hier. Nur diese Bundesrepublik und ihre introvertierten Dauerschleifen des Vermeidens können einem bisweilen peinlich werden. Aber die Kanzlerin schaute dann auch noch vorbei und machte bella figura. *Intervention zwei:* Das Recht, über die Zukunft zu sprechen, nimmt ab mit der Verantwortlichkeit für die Misere der Gegenwart. –

*Un jour viendra cette ritournelle / quand ma voix se sera envolée / je te supplie en souvenir d'elle / de continuer à chalooper.* Notizen lassen sich nummerieren, aber jede willkürliche Ordnung ist selbst eine Vermeidungsstrategie, induziert nicht zuletzt von der Ideologie des Eigentums – der Zwang, den Zwischenräumen und Formen des sozialen Lebens einen Namen zu geben, die sie nicht haben wollen. Schwäne – ein besonders schöner Fall *mutatarum nova in corpora formarum* – sind da in ihrer vor allem im Grunewald beobachtbaren Form der Assoziation gelassener; Glas wahrscheinlich das ihnen gemäße Material, ephemere Kompositkörper für einen Abend. Und das Projekt? Ich nannte es weiterhin Buch, aber zunehmend im Passiv: Protokoll, Bericht. Ungefähr gleichzeitig schwand die Hoffnung, bis zum Ende des Jahres gegen S. oder N. auch nur einen Satz zu gewinnen. Leben konnte ich damit bestens, weil ich bei beiden auf dem Tennisplatz sah, was mentale Stärke ist: *winning beautiful*. Definition: Ein echter Freund ist jemand, gegen den man gerne verliert und



AN ENGAGING YEAR  
CHERYL MISAK

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Cheryl Misak is University Professor and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. She works on American pragmatism, the history of analytic philosophy, ethics, and political philosophy, and the philosophy of medicine. Her books include *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers*; *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein*; *The American Pragmatists*; *Truth and the End of Inquiry*; and *Truth, Politics, Morality*. In the autumn of 2025, *Oxford Pragmatism: Ryle and Austin's Debt* and *Margaret Macdonald and Analytic Philosophy in the 1930s* will be published. She has had visiting fellowships at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main; the Freie Universität Berlin; All Souls College, Oxford; Trinity College, Cambridge; and St. John's College, Cambridge. She is an Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford and has been a Guggenheim Fellow and a recipient of a Humboldt Research Prize. In 2013, she completed a long run in academic administration at the University of Toronto, culminating as Vice-President and Provost. – Address: Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, 427 Jackman Humanities Building, 170 St. George Street, Toronto, ON M5R 2M8, Canada. E-mail: [cheryl.misak@utoronto.ca](mailto:cheryl.misak@utoronto.ca).

How sad to look at our year at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin through the rearview mirror, when there is still a short road that lies ahead. But we are all sharply aware of the impending end and it is a nice hit of prospective nostalgia to take stock now.

The project I arrived with was to explore the role of truth in our moral and political lives. Can we make sense of aiming to get things right in difficult moral and political matters?

It seems that we do aim at truth. We make assertions, have strong commitments, act on our beliefs, and change our minds in light of hearing about or having new experiences. All this seems to suggest that we aim at getting things right, despite our beliefs in these domains being heavily dependent on human feelings, context, and history.

The project progressed nicely over the course of the year. I happened to give the first Colloquium at the Wiko and the queries and comments from photographers, painters, novelists, historians, and others not in my field of philosophy were a great start. Right away, the interdisciplinary nature of the Wiko informed my work. In the dead of winter, Robert Talisse at Vanderbilt University came to Berlin and we had an intense week of planning and writing. That resulted in a paper, "Pragmatism, Progress and Politics," which I presented at Stefan Gosepath and Dorothea Gädeke's seminar at the Freie Universität; Rahel Jaeggi's seminar at the Humboldt-Universität and in the Humboldt-Universität Philosophy Department's main colloquium series; and Rainer Forst's seminar at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. This extended conversation with some of Germany's finest political philosophers shaped our paper, albeit mostly by turning it into a polite, but sustained, critique of some of those philosophers. The conversation spilled into public events, such as the reception after Tommie Shelby's first Walter Benjamin Lecture on the terrace of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. It was wonderful to be engaged with Berlin's huge, international, and extraordinarily active world of intellectuals, often at the Wiko during, for instance, Berliner Abend events, often in other parts of the city.

My absorption into the German philosophical world extended beyond the project on truth and politics. I gave two talks in Potsdam, on the analytic philosophers J.L. Austin and Wilfred Sellars, another talk at the Humboldt-Universität titled "The Best of Pragmatism," and three talks in Vienna (not Germany, but close enough) on the topics of truth, philosophical biography, and John Dewey's engagement with the Vienna Circle. Farther afield, I presented a paper in Bologna on perception and gave the Chris Hookway Memorial Lecture in Sheffield. All in all, it was an intense and lovely year of European philosophical discussion.

But the engagement with my Wiko Fellows was even more important to my work than my discussions outside of leafy Grunewald. Not only were there those queries from photographers and historians about my project, but a highlight of my Wiko year was the History and Philosophy of Science working group that convened on Wednesday mornings in the small seminar room. And a highlight of that working group, at least for me, was the project four of us Fellows (a chemist, two philosophers of science, and one

historian of science) started regarding the classification of metabolites. We have almost finished what I think is a very interesting paper, and our next task is finding a journal broadminded enough to see the point of such an interdisciplinary argument.

The small seminar room was also where I delivered my three Dewey Lectures “at” the University of Fudan, and I thank Pit, Gesine, and Frank for helping make that a success. Pit and Gesine arrived early each day to help me set up (I think they would have arrived early even had they not suspected that I was completely useless in these ways), and Frank helped give the slides a professional look.

Lest I neglect the large seminar room, let me say that I loved the weekly Colloquia, the evening events, the important political conversations, and the concerts. David Hughes even provided some country music for this western Canadian.

The library staff was simply stunning. I arrived with two book projects in the final stages of completion. Of course, when the proofs arrived, it turned out that I had neglected to put the page ranges for a large number of bibliographical items. All the librarians did a lot of time-sensitive work to help me get all that in order. When I needed to look at a book of photographs for a cover of one of the books, Denis insisted on driving me to the Kunstbibliothek, as the volume couldn't be taken out of the library. What service! I'll be honored to send those books to be a part of the Wiko library, as soon as they exist in concrete form.

Just as important as the intellectual, political, and cultural benefits of the Wiko were the friendships made or deepened with my fellow Fellows, many of which will definitely continue into the future. There was also the privilege of being a part of the neighborhood. The Floh was our local. The biking and swimming in the woods and lakes was a daily pleasure (and minimized the effects of the brilliant Wiko cooking on one's waistline). We got to know the pleasures of Charlottenburg, and it turned out that most of our old friends in Berlin lived there.

Thank you, Barbara, Daniel, and the rest of the Wiko academic staff, for putting together such a wonderful group of Fellows and partners. Thank you also to the entire staff at the Wiko who work so hard and in such a friendly manner to make everything run beautifully. It was a warm and lovely year, which did not mean that there were no intellectual and political disagreements. But as a true community of inquirers, the disagreements were part of a serious, honest, and respectful engagement with others. I shall miss it.



LIMINAL TIME AND SPACE  
MISATO MOCHIZUKI

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Misato Mochizuki is a composer acclaimed for her distinctive musical language—marked by refined textures, dynamic structures, and a strong interdisciplinary sensibility. A graduate of the Tokyo University of the Arts and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, she has received numerous commissions, with works performed at major festivals including the Salzburg Festival, Venice Biennale, Festival d'Automne in Paris, and Lincoln Center Festival in New York. Her accolades include the Heidelberger Künstlerinnenpreis and the Japan Ministry of Culture's New Artist Award. Her opera *Die große Bäckerei-Attacke*, based on a short story by Haruki Murakami, was staged in Lucerne, Vienna, Tokyo, and Osaka. Recent works include *Intrusions* (Donauesschinger Musiktage 2021), an orchestral and electroacoustic piece exploring the intrusion of “others” including A.I. into human society, and *Otemba—Daring Women* (Holland Festival 2025), based on the true story of a 17th-century mixed-race woman who faced multiple forms of discrimination. Misato Mochizuki is Professor at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, and a Visiting Professor at the Tokyo University of the Arts. She serves as a member of the book review committee for the major Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. – Address: Meiji Gakuin University, Shirokane Campus, 1-2-37 Shirokanedai, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 1088636, Japan. E-mail: misato.mochizuki@gmail.com.

[Prélude]

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made my extraordinarily rich and rewarding year at the Wissenschaftskolleg possible. I owe a special debt of thanks to Isabel Mundry, who nominated me as composer in residence, and to

all those, led by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, who supported me on the academic side of my work. I am deeply grateful to the entire library team for their swift and attentive handling of requests for scores that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain.

My thanks also go to Francisco and Andrea, who assisted me in preparations leading up to my arrival, including those related to the particular academic calendar in Japan, where the school year begins in April rather than September.

I am grateful to Pit, Maxim, and Aziz, who installed IT and audio setups for both my devices and my living space; to Anna, Katarzyna, Dennis, and Martin, who maintained an always comfortable environment; and to the chefs, Dunia, and the kitchen team who provided delicious meals, especially from November onward. Abdoulie's ever-kind encouragement to try a second helping of dessert played no small part in keeping my brain happily fueled during long stretches of work!

I truly felt supported on every front. Never before in my life have I experienced the luxury of having someone else take care of cleaning, bed-making, and meals.

Borrowing the structure of a Baroque suite, I would now like to reflect on my time at Wiko.

[Allemande]

My stay began with the intensive German course at the end of August—a fresh attempt after several earlier abandoned beginnings. I shared the class with Bashir, Imani, and Yolanda. With a small and friendly group, daily four-hour sessions, and generously long tea breaks with other classes, the course was both enjoyable and fulfilling. Looking back, it may well have been the most relaxed period of my entire year here.

My sincere thanks go to Eva, who provided everything from coffee and tea snacks to textbooks, handouts, and even the folders to organize them. I also cherish the memories of our excursions—the city quiz, the Turkish Market, and Bashir's recommended hummus place—together with our tutors Ricarda and Giancarlo (I wholeheartedly hope his unexpected illness will enter remission soon).

From 16 September onward, the course shifted to a weekly 90-minute format. In Berlin, where English and French are widely spoken, moments when a true beginner urgently needed German were mostly limited to interactions with the housekeeping team or with program sellers at concert venues. As everyone became absorbed in their projects, attendance inevitably thinned out. I feel genuinely sorry for Eva and Lea, our teachers. Even so, the fact that all of this was offered without any additional fee remains an astonishingly generous service.

[Courante]

Freed from university duties, I arrived in Berlin with a considerable amount of composition work and review assignments already on my desk. I had hoped to devote more time to research related to composition itself, but I had not anticipated how many events take place at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I also attended numerous concerts and operas, and the days passed quickly—*courant* in the literal sense—simply completing the commissioned works I had brought with me: a collaborative score for a thirty-minute short animated film; the final movement,  $\psi$  (psi), of my five-part string quartet cycle *Brains*; and the eighty-minute chamber opera *Otemba*. Preparing for Colloquiums, lecture recitals, and outside seminars also required considerable time.

It was a great pleasure to attend several premieres (in Berlin and Amsterdam) and performances of earlier works (in Paris, Graz...) that I usually cannot travel to during the academic term in Japan—occasions that allowed me to reconnect with longtime musician friends.

I am also deeply grateful for the opportunity to record all of my string quartets at the Haus des Rundfunks in Berlin with my close colleagues, the Quatuor Diotima, who also performed in the lecture recital. Wiko's support for their two stays—first for the January premiere of  $\psi$  and the whole *Brains* cycle at Ultraschall, and again in June for the lecture recital and CD recording—was invaluable. The lecture recital, which received warm and joyful reactions not only from my husband and former students, but also from Fellows, Wiko team members, and even the Fellows' children, was without question one of the highlights of my year.

[Sarabande]

That said, I gained the impression that the number of artistic events and the general level of engagement with the arts at the Wissenschaftskolleg was not as much as I had heard from earlier Fellows. This may reflect an international trend: compared to earlier generations, who often possessed wide-ranging knowledge of and deep familiarity with the arts across disciplines, today's society increasingly emphasizes economic and temporal efficiency. Intensified professional specialization has contributed to fragmentation, and reductions in cultural budgets have become widespread.

An interdisciplinary environment like Wiko is therefore all the more valuable. Still, in the early months, I sometimes felt like an alien: I struggled to find what role a composer might play among the Fellows. Outside Wiko as well, I found that certain strands of new

music in Berlin—and the tastes of their audiences—seem distinctive compared with other German cities, France, Japan, or the United States. These situations made me acutely aware, in various senses, of a certain incommunicability.

[Passepied]

Another matter that stayed in my mind was a series of inexplicable occurrences in the Remise, the residence assigned to me. On several occasions, the house and windows trembled as if in a small earthquake; I heard knocking sounds on the windows; the front door, locked when I went to bed, would be wide open in the morning; and the motion-sensor light at the entrance switched on and off even when no one was there. More than once, while I was asleep, my computer, supposedly in sleep mode, began playing music.

Curiously, I did not feel frightened. Rather, I sensed that I was sharing the space with something not necessarily physical, but perhaps spiritual. Given the history of the area surrounding Wiko, I did not find this entirely surprising. Yet at times I wondered whether it might have been connected to my mother, who passed away a few months before my arrival. Indeed, during my stay here I dreamt of both my parents for the first time since their deaths.

[Air]

What comforted me and often revived my spirits were the lush surroundings of Grunewald and the remarkable musical life of Berlin. The sheer variety and consistently high level of performance were inspiring; in particular, the city's many opera houses stage works from the twentieth century onward on an almost monthly basis, often to near-capacity audiences who respond with enthusiasm. It reminded me of something distinctive about Germany: the cultural ability to engage in intellectual reflection through music.

Even within the traditional repertoire, I encountered performances that were wonderfully refreshing. *The Magic Flute* production featuring animation, recommended by members of the Wiko team through other Fellows, felt astonishingly fresh, despite being over a decade old. I found it one of the most convincing interpretations of the opera I have ever seen, full of discoveries that I hope will inform my own future work.

As a kind of extracurricular German lesson, we also went to the Berliner Ensemble to see *The Threepenny Opera*. I was struck by how well its distinctive style (somewhat reminiscent of *Sprechgesang*, yet something more like a deliberately off-pitch, rapid-fire delivery) suited the German language, and by the performers' remarkable precision and

wit in both singing and acting. Their playful insertion of topical lines—almost faintly recalling aspects of Kabuki theatre—made me feel the deep joy of witnessing cultural history unfold.

Above all, when I look back now, I am moved by how fortunate I was to encounter the genuine warmth of the Fellows and the richness that came from perspectives shaped by different disciplines and cultural backgrounds. I was deeply impressed by the boundless curiosity and adaptability shown by so many toward fields far removed from their own.

These experiences will remain unforgettable. I will always recall how many people responded when Leyla, Racha, and Florian took the initiative to support someone going through a difficult time, and how everyone came together to organize the “pink” farewell party. I am truly grateful for the good fortune of having met such kind-hearted people.

[Gigue]

I have always drawn compositional ideas from a wide range of phenomena outside the realm of music. As I mentioned in my Colloquium, translating knowledge from various fields into musical forms can open a door to understanding the world through composition. I am deeply interested in discovering how the world and human beings are designed—through music as an interpretive framework.

Listening to the many Colloquiums presented by the Fellows, I repeatedly found myself thinking, “This could be made into an opera or a music theater piece!” Not only universal (and sometimes overused) themes like love and death, but even scholarly discoveries that are not necessarily familiar or accessible to the general public can become a kind of adventure story capable of drawing anyone in. I believe that music theater has the potential to bring specialized knowledge closer to the public, in a form of *vulgarization* that is enlightening rather than reductive.

At the same time, I was reminded how little free time I currently have to pursue such projects, often feeling overwhelmed by the many roles I juggle: teaching at multiple universities, composing, serving on a review board, and other responsibilities. Several people at Wiko told me, “These things often come to fruition about ten years later.” Yet in view of my current situation, even a ten-year horizon feels uncertain. And so I leave Wiko with the essential question: What is it that I most want to realize next?



WIKO: A COMMUNITY OF STRANGERS IN  
A HOSPITABLE HOME  
BASILE NDJIO

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Basile Ndjio is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Douala. He has held several visiting fellowships and professorships in prestigious academic and research institutions including: the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa, the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies, the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University, LSE, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, University College London, Harvard University, Leiden University, and Freie Universität Berlin, among others. Basile Ndjio trained in sociology and anthropology at the University of Yaoundé and the University of Amsterdam and has published on urban popular culture; Chinese sex labour migration; migration and diasporic conditions; and African queer studies. His most recent works include: “Transnational Chinese Beautyscapes: Ghetto Glamour and Fake Beauty in Abidjan” (*Africa Spectrum*, 2024); “In the name of the (God)father: The unnameable name” (*Ethnography*, 2024); “Coronavirus, Imagined Location and Disenchanted Home in Africa” (*Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 2023); “Rhizomic authoritarianism: power, biopolitics and transnational authoritarian practices in Cameroon” (*Globalizations*, 2024); *Fashioning the Afropolis: Histories, Materialities and Aesthetic Practices* (co-edited with Kerstin Pinther and Kristin Kastner, Bloomsbury, 2022). He has just completed a monograph on sexual politics in Central Africa (under review with Cambridge University Press). – Address: Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Letters and Social Science, University of Douala, Ange Raphael, 3132 Douala, Cameroon. E-mail: bndjio@yahoo.com.

First of all, I was delighted to be a Fellow at Wiko, as the fellowship provided me the opportunity to learn the German language, one of the first most significant mediums in

which Cameroon's colonial history was scripted or documented in the late 19th century, thus serving as an essential linguistic instrument for any researcher seeking to access the country's colonial past. More importantly, I came to this world-renowned research institute with high expectations of finding here a secure haven, and particularly a space of intellectual freedom, enabling me to pursue in total liberty an independent research on same-sex sexuality, a subject typically considered taboo in Cameroon, my country of origin, where I have faced many administrative pressures over the past two decades, due to my unconventional scholarship and research interests.

My initial plan was to work on a project titled "Inhospitable medicine: homosexuality, medical discrimination, and the precarious life in Cameroon." This proposal addressed the problem of medical violence and discrimination based on stereotyped sexual and gender identity, which had become a crucial issue in most public medical institutions in Cameroon. The research particularly focused on the moralizing rhetoric and the stigmatizing attitude of the medical personnel towards self-identified or suspected LGBTIQ patients. My main goal was to provide some insights into the complex way in which Cameroon's medical order has been dealing with patients with nonconforming sexual and gender identities since the country's adoption of anti-homosexual legislation in 1965.

But my reading of several seminal works highlighting the anti-homosexual rhetoric of some colonial missionaries and ethnologists, such the British Baptist missionary Alfred Saker (1814–1880) and the famous German explorer, traveller, and ethnologist Günther Tessmann (1884–1969), as well as the exploration of German colonial archives in some museums in Berlin and Potsdam, caused me to switch my heuristic interest towards the history of knowledge production on same-sex sexuality and unconventional sexual and gender identity in Cameroon. I presented the preliminary findings of this new research during a highly debated Colloquium on June 17, 2025. The study entitled "Same-sex sexuality in Cameroon: Complex history, dynamic knowledge production, and ambivalent epistemologies" had three main objectives: (1) examine the evolution of knowledge production regarding same-sex sexuality, illustrating the fluidity of discourses and narratives surrounding homosexuality, as well as the complexity in the management of non-conventional sexual and gender identities in Cameroon; (2) elucidate how homosexuality has been established as an object of discourse and a domain of knowledge production since the 19th century; (3) scrutinize the way in which a specific imagination, representation, problematisation, and rationalisation of homosexuality has been constructed over the past century.

The study concluded with several observations and remarks: firstly, many pre-colonial African societies were sexually democratic and homo-tolerant long before the West's new-found "sexual democracy" (Éric Fassin, *L'inversion de la question homosexuelle*). Secondly, the phenomenon typically characterized by many Western media and observers as "African homophobia" arises from both Western colonial epistemology ("colonial library") and postcolonial nationalist re-invention of African sexuality. Thirdly, contemporary "homophobic" and "homo-intolerant" African regimes are legitimate successors of the Western colonial power and missionary order. Fourthly, "primitive" African societies acknowledged homosexual rights long before the decriminalization of same-sex relations in many purportedly progressive Western societies in the 1990s. Finally, the same Westerners who indoctrinated Africans to despise homosexuality under the guise of civilisation are now, in a paternalistic manner, instructing them to embrace homosexuality in the name of modernity and human rights.

In many respects, my stay at Wiko has been intellectually productive. Indeed, during my ten-month residency at this prestigious research institution, I finished a book manuscript on the political management of queer identity in Cameroon, which is expected to be published by Cambridge University Press. In addition, I initiated and made significant progress on a new editorial project concerning the emergence of novel forms of sexual connections and relationships in contemporary Central Africa. Moreover, I have completed and submitted three peer-reviewed articles for publication on diverse topics, including political treason, contemporary urban African music, and the interplay between homosexuality and power. Furthermore, I contributed to a collective work, *Textures of Power: Central Africa in the Long Twentieth Century*, edited by Florence Bernault, Benoît Henriët and Emery Kalema (2025), with a paper addressing homosexuality and power dynamics in postcolonial Cameroon.

In other respects, I was both culturally and intellectually active during my residency at Wiko. For example, I engaged in numerous cultural and intellectual events hosted at Wiko or organized by various academic or cultural institutions based in Berlin and elsewhere. This included: seminars and public lectures at the Humboldt Forum, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), the Freie Universität Berlin, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the Technische Universität Berlin, the Centre Marc Bloch, the University of Basel, the University of Amsterdam, etc. I also actively participated in the European Conference on African Studies (ECAS) in Prague from June 24 to 28, 2025, where I co-convoked a panel on the Chinese informal economy in Africa with a colleague from the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

At Wiko I was at home and I felt a sense of belonging, particularly at the Villa Walther, one of the Institute's Fellow residences, which my Co-Fellows and I usually referred to as our home. This experience of home has transformed from an initial sense of alienation and disenfranchisement to one of familiarity and attachment. Indeed, upon relocating to Wiko in August 2024, I initially perceived this locale as what Freud would term an *unheimlicher Ort* (uncanny place), not as a haunted site that evokes dread or anxiety, but rather as a place that simultaneously appears strangely familiar and familiarly strange.

This suggests that I was initially affected by the eeriness of this location, which triggered in me a sense of alienation due to Wiko's disturbing ambivalence between familiarity and strangeness, or between the perception of a homey place and the experience of an unhomey space. One reason this location was particularly conducive to uncanny disturbances, or possessed an uncanny nature, was its troubling status as a "Fellows' institution." In the academic tradition, a "Fellow" often embodies a contemporary figure of the intellectual *xenos* or stranger, typically regarded as the foreign guest of a local academic or research institution. Thus, it is tempting to interpret Wiko and its various Fellows' houses as what Karl Marx would term a "house of a *stranger*."

This term refers to a specific location designated solely for *xenos* who do not belong to the national imagined community, or for strangers who cannot view themselves as the "master of the house" because they dwell in a house that is above all a *maison de l'autre*. In addition, the "house of a stranger" denotes a locale that creates a link between habitation and estrangement, while dramatizing a sense of dislocation and alienation among its foreign inhabitants. This is because a Fellows' house primarily appears as a site of otherness and estrangement, existing or functioning solely in relation to its foreign or "other" Fellows. Furthermore, as it is intended solely as a *case de passage* or a transient accommodation for foreign guests, the house of strangers is frequently perceived as a "non-home," rendering the sentiment "home, sweet home" inapplicable, as individuals seldom experience the warmth of a true home in such a "space of flows," which has been established at the expense of the "space of places" (Manuel Castells, *The Informational City*).

Following Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida has emphasised that the issue of the *étranger* (foreigner or stranger) is intrinsically linked to the question of hospitality, asserting that the rights of foreigners are inextricably connected to their right to hospitality. If the initially unwelcoming nature of Wiko's Fellows' houses did not evoke feelings of homesickness and nostalgia, and if over the past ten months I have managed to bridge the gap between homelessness and belonging, transitioning to a more homey perception of

my current living space, and if, like many of my fellow residents, I have come to regard my Wiko's Fellows' house as my "home," despite my legal, ethnic, and racial status as both a *Fremder* (stranger) and an *Ausländer* (foreigner), it is primarily because the Institute proved to be a venue for what Derrida would call an "absolute hospitality," which requires that we "give place to" foreigners, "let them come, ... let them arrive, and take place in the place [we] offer them" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality*). This indicates that the warmth, cordiality, and friendliness I enjoyed as a Fellow were instrumental in my gradual shift from *oikophobia* (fear of home) to *oikophilia* (affection for a specific place). The Institute also facilitated its foreign Fellows' acclimatisation to the unsettling and unfamiliar environment of the Fellows' houses through a comprehensive practice of hospitality.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Wiko's caring and compassionate management, as well as the "invisible" men and women of the support staff, whose dedication and assistance have fostered an environment of conviviality, familiarity, and camaraderie for all of us. Absent the diligent efforts of the administrative staff, cleaners, technicians, librarians, and cooks, life at Wiko would have been markedly different. I also extend my gratitude to them for ensuring that each of their *hôtes* (guests) felt like the *maître de céans* (master of the house), even in an environment that was not his or her own.

During my stay at Wiko, I have discerned that a genuine gift of hospitality is an act of generosity perceived by the Fellow or "guest." This transforms a stranger into a friend, an allochthon into an autochthon, albeit temporarily. Furthermore, true hospitality entails converting an uncanny and inhospitable dwelling into a welcoming home for the strangers and uprooted individuals who are away from home. This is how Wiko ultimately presented itself to me.



INTERKULTURELLE BEGEGNUNGEN  
KÄRIN NICKELSEN

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Kärin Nickelsen ist Professorin für Wissenschaftsgeschichte an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Sie studierte Biologie und Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Göttingen, wurde 2002 an der Universität Bern promoviert und 2010 ebendort habilitiert. 2011 erfolgte der Ruf nach München. Kärin Nickelsen forscht zur Geschichte und Philosophie der Biowissenschaften in der Neuzeit (18.–20. Jh.) mit besonderem Interesse an Fragen der historischen Epistemologie und Methodologie sowie Prozessen der Wissensgenerierung im Kollektiv. Kärin Nickelsen war Sprecherin der DFG-Forschungsgruppe „Kooperation und Konkurrenz in den Wissenschaften“ (2018–2025). Ihre Arbeiten wurden mit internationalen Preisen ausgezeichnet, und sie ist Ordentliches Mitglied mehrerer Wissenschaftsakademien, darunter die Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften (Leopoldina), die Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaft und die European Academy of Sciences. Zu ihren Buchpublikationen zählen *Draughtsmen, Botanists and Nature. The Construction of Eighteenth-Century Botanical Illustrations* (2006); *Explaining Photosynthesis. Models of Biochemical Mechanisms, 1840–1960* (2015); *Far beyond the Moon. A History of Life Support Systems in the Space Age* (2021; mit David Munns). – Adresse: Historisches Seminar, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 München, Deutschland. E-Mail: K.Nickelsen@lmu.de.

Zum Wissenschaftskolleg, diesem Elfenbeinturm mit Stadtanschluss, ist eigentlich alles gesagt. In vielfältigen Sprachen und Tonlagen wird in den Jahrbüchern der Grunewald besungen mit seinen Seen und Villen, die wunderbare Bibliothek und die hervorragende Küche, die unendliche Hilfsbereitschaft des Staff, die zugewandte Leitung durch die

Rektorin, das intellektuelle Abenteuer und die wechselhafte Sozialdynamik. Alle diese Dinge sind wahr, und sie prägen jeden Jahrgang dieser besonderen Institution aufs Neue – auch unseren. Ein ganzes Haus bemüht sich fortwährend, einer Gruppe von Fellows aus aller Welt das Leben zu verschönern und die Arbeit zu erleichtern: was für ein Geschenk!

Das größte Geschenk jedoch ist die selbstbestimmte Zeit. Ich stolperte in den Grunewald aus dem Alltag einer Universitätsprofessorin mit etlichen Zusatzämtern, zudem als Vertreterin eines kleinen Fachs, das darauf angewiesen ist, dass sich alle an Gutachten, Expertisen, Empfehlungen und Reviews fleißig beteiligen. All dies konnte ich für zehn Monate (weitgehend) hinter mir lassen und stattdessen die Dinge tun, die sonst zu kurz kommen, insbesondere lesen und das Gelesene überdenken. Dafür bin ich zutiefst dankbar. Es ist nicht selbstverständlich, dass eine Gesellschaft sich eine solche Institution leistet, in Zeiten, die von Kriegen und Krisen gebeutelt sind, und in einem globalen Kontext, in dem Bildung und Wissenschaft unter Druck geraten. Es ist schon gar nicht selbstverständlich, dass diese Institution ihren Auftrag derart herzlich, geduldig, aufgeschlossen und mit beständig guter Laune umsetzt.

Ich nutzte die geschenkte Zeit, um mir ein neues Thema zu erschließen. Im Unterschied zu anderen Fellows kam ich nicht mit einem definierten Buchprojekt, sondern mit einer Idee in embryonalem Zustand. Das Wiko erwies sich als idealer Inkubator. Nach zehn Monaten ist immer noch vieles unklar, aber es zeichnen sich Fragestellungen ab, Aufsätze sowie die Konturen möglicher Kapitel. Im Zentrum steht die Geschichte der oft kontroversen Begegnungen zwischen Geschichts- und Biowissenschaften. In jüngster Zeit zählt dazu die Debatte um die Bedeutung archäogenetischer Daten als Beiträge zur Geschichte des Frühmittelalters und anderer Perioden. Doch bereits europäische Wissenschaftler des 19. Jahrhunderts stritten sich darüber, ob und inwiefern naturwissenschaftliche Befunde gewinnbringend zum Projekt einer Geschichte der menschlichen Kultur und Zivilisation beitragen konnten. Insbesondere die Botanik beanspruchte eine Rolle in diesem Diskurs, denn nach breiter Überzeugung fiel der Beginn der menschlichen „Kultur“ zusammen mit dem Beginn des Ackerbaus, d. h. mit dem Anbau von Nutzpflanzen – und damit kannten Botaniker sich besser aus als viele Historiker.

Während meiner Zeit im Wiko konnte ich ansatzweise kartieren, wie sich diese Agenda einer globalen Geschichte der Kulturpflanzen, und damit der Zivilisation, entfaltete, auf welche unausgesprochenen Vorannahmen sie zurückgriff und welche Rolle dabei andere Fächer spielten, etwa die prähistorische und klassische Archäologie, die

Philologien, aber auch Zoologie, Geografie und Linguistik. Das Projekt reiht sich insofern ein in die Geschichte der oft beschworenen und noch öfter kritisierten zwei, drei, vier oder mehr „Kulturen“ der Wissenschaft – und wo könnte man diese Geschichte besser erforschen als an einem Ort, der diese interkulturellen Begegnungen nicht nur ermöglicht, sondern programmatisch fördert. In der Tat durchlief das Projekt am Wiko eine beunruhigende, aber auch beglückende Explosionsphase. Gespräche mit Fellows und Fundstücke in der Bibliothek führten mich aus dem späten 19. Jahrhundert in die schottische Aufklärung, zu den Historikern der Göttinger Schule und immer weiter zurück in die Vergangenheit bis zu Hesiod, Polyphem und Gilgamesch. Sie drängten mich aber auch in die Archäologie des 20. Jahrhunderts, in Debatten um die so genannte neolithische Revolution, in Zivilisationsdiskurse der Gegenwart und anarchistische Gegenarrative. Diese Gespräche und die Möglichkeit zur breiten, undisziplinierten Lektüre von Literatur und Quellen haben die Weiterentwicklung des Vorhabens nicht nur bereichert, sondern überhaupt erst ermöglicht.

Die viel diskutierten (von mir sehr geschätzten) gemeinsamen Mahlzeiten strukturierten den Tagesablauf. Darüber hinaus hatte meine Woche am Wiko drei Fixpunkte. Montags starteten wir mit dem Chor für Fellows und Staff – eine wunderbare Tradition, die ich allen folgenden Kohorten dringlich ans Herz lege: Das gemeinsame Singen klärt den Kopf und öffnet das Herz. Dienstags folgte das Kolloquium mit wöchentlich neuen Einsichten. Ich habe enorm viel gelernt: über funktionale Redundanz am Beispiel der Wiko-Community, epistemische Effekte von Editionspraktiken, das Potenzial (vermeintlich) langweiliger Porzellanfigurinen, das Mikrobiom von Beutelhamstern, angewandte Logik in der Sattelzeit und vieles mehr. Nachhaltig beeindruckend waren der Blick in Arbeitspraktiken der Kunst, Musik, Literatur, Malerei und die Teilhabe an einem Skulpturprojekt. Hoffentlich hütet das Wiko sorgsam unsere kollektiv erstellten *Towers of Plagues* und die in Glas verschlossenen Schrecken unserer Zeit.

Mittwochs folgte ein selbstgewählter, dritter Termin: die *History and Philosophy of Science Group* unseres Jahrgangs, eine gemischte Runde aus (Wissenschafts-)Philosophie, (Wissenschafts-)Geschichte, Assyriologie und verschiedenen Fächern der Biologie, punktuell ergänzt durch Kunstgeschichte, Mediävistik, Psychologie und andere. Wir setzten entweder die Diskussion des Dienstagskolloquiums fort, wenn ein Mitglied unserer Gruppe dort vorgetragen hatte, oder diskutierten gemeinsame Lektüren. Diese Gespräche zwischen Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften waren ein echter Höhepunkt meiner Zeit am Wiko: ein beständiges Forum der Wissenschaftskulturen im Dialog. Aus dem

Format gingen Ende des Jahres gleich zwei Publikationen hervor, in Co-Autorinnenschaft von Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften, sowie ein gemeinsames, transatlantisch angelegtes Grant Proposal – beantragt wurden darin auch Gelder für ein jährliches Schreibretreat im Grunewald.

Bei aller Abgeschlossenheit ist das Wiko aber auch ein Teil der größeren Welt. Unser Jahr stand im Zeichen von Budgetkürzungen für Teile der Wissenschaft in den USA, dem fortdauernd brutalen Krieg in der Ukraine sowie der Eskalation des Kriegs im Gazastreifen. Manche Fellows waren direkt betroffen, die anderen immerhin mittelbar. Ob und wie die wissenschaftliche Gemeinschaft auf politische Ereignisse reagieren soll, wo die Grenze zwischen Wissenschaft und Aktivismus zu ziehen ist, zwischen legitimer Zuspitzung und unzulässiger Simplifizierung: Auch dies wurde über das Jahr hinweg verhandelt, implizit und explizit, während der Kolloquien, in Abendveranstaltungen, am Mittagstisch. Trotz aller Spannungen blieb aber der persönliche Umgang freundschaftlich; auch dafür bin ich dankbar.

Mit einer unvergesslichen Pink Party nahmen wir schließlich Abschied voneinander und vom Haus. Ich werde die selbstbestimmten Tage vermissen, die hervorragende Versorgung, den Gong zum Donnerstagabend, die Spaziergänge, Ausflüge und Ausschweifungen, vieles mehr, aber ganz besonders den täglichen Austausch mit den Freundinnen und Freunden, die ich fand und die mir bleiben werden. Vielen Dank, liebes Wiko!



RE-ENGINEERING AND COMPUTATIONAL  
MODELLING OF VASCULAR GRAFTS  
JERRY OCHOLA

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Jerry Ochola is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Manufacturing, Industrial and Textile Engineering at Moi University, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Materials Engineering from Ghent University, Belgium, with the project title: “Mechanical Modelling of Tubular Biomedical Textile Structures for Repair of Ruptured and Degenerated Tendons.” He has held postdoc fellowships as an Iso Lomso Fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, an Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF) Fellow at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where he undertook the project “Development of Electrospun Fibrous Scaffold Structures for Cardiovascular Graft Applications,” and also as a Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICOPS) Fellow at the University of Pavia, Italy, where he undertook the project “Fracture propagation studies in femur bone shaft using Extended Finite Element Methods (XFEM).” Ochola is a member of the fibrous structures standards committee at the Kenya Bureau of Standards and previously worked at the Kenya Industrial Research & Development Institute as a research scientist. His publication record includes journals, conference articles, and two book chapters. He is also a reviewer for numerous journals and has supervised several master’s and PhD students. – Address: School of Engineering, Department of Manufacturing, Industrial and Textile Engineering, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.  
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Generally, cardiovascular diseases and related complications form a significant part of fatalities in the world, especially in the Global South. Africa as a continent is projected to be more vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases in the coming years. This will be due to

increased rates of hypertension, smoking, and obesity, among other causes. This has created the dire need for multi-field interventions to combat incidences of coronary artery diseases, which are yet to be optimally prevented or treated. One such strategy, I believe, will be to apply computational techniques and approaches in the design and testing of custom-made patient-specific vascular scaffolds for the support and repair of deformed arteries, which will be affordable for the population living in low-income countries in the Global South.

My Iso Lomso Fellowship at Wiko provided me with the much-needed platform to advance my innovations and ideas in re-engineering and computational modelling of vascular grafts; to me it was a golden opportunity to advance skills and knowledge that I acquired over time during my postgraduate studies and postdoctoral fellowships. Further, the prospect of working on this project at Wiko alongside some of the finest scholars from diverse backgrounds was fascinating, to say the least! It was a rare opportunity to learn from some of the greatest minds in academia, both scientists and non-scientists. For me it was a chance to explore novel ideas, acquiring new skills not only for my Wiko project, but also for my personal and career advancement.

My work during the 3-month residence period (13 September–15 December 2024) at Wiko was based on a project entitled “Computational Modelling of Tubular Fibrous Scaffold Structures for Cardiovascular Graft Applications.” This project envisaged that the design of tubular structures with desirable internal and external topology is a challenge for tissue engineering of cardiovascular grafts. Even though conventional vascular grafts have the capability of providing sufficient structural and biological support to tissues, they are expensive and susceptible to anatomical limitations. Hence, fibrous structures such as polymeric electrospun grafts have appeared as viable options for use in cardiovascular surgery, due to their suitable extracellular matrix for tissue regeneration, better compliance matching, and improved mechanical properties. However, due to random nanostructure occasioned by a non-uniform polymer assembly, which influences their surface topography, mechanical properties, cell proliferation, and cell growth potential, electrospun grafts still have inherent limitations in their design.

Meanwhile, 3D models of electrospun grafts for investigation of their deformation and performance have been based mainly on solid, three-dimensional (3D) structures without considering fiber placement within the structures. Whenever fiber alignment has been considered, such models have been based on planar fiber networks. Hence, there is

insufficient information on 3D computational models of tubular electrospun vascular grafts that could consider the constituent fiber alignment and randomness of their nanostructure. It is envisaged that the use of tubular vascular structures in 3D interface would be more realistic for in-depth investigation of their performance, which would further support their seamless integration as vascular implants.

The aim of this project therefore was to design tubular electrospun polymeric grafts that could consider the randomness and alignment of fibers. To design these structures, Computer-Aided-Drawing in 3D interface in custom-built programming scripts in python® and commercial FE software ABAQUS®/Explicit was used.

Eventually, the mechanical performance of the 3D tubular graft models was analysed using tensile, compressive, and bending loading criteria. This was accomplished using Finite Element Analysis (FEA) approaches based on 3D parametric models. Further, to mimic deformations of the vascular graft models, realistic boundary conditions were assigned, which were able to simulate the deployment and performance of grafts. The deformation criterion of the 3D tubular vascular graft models was then used to compute results in terms of displacement, uniaxial forces, and stress-strains levels in the structures.

In this regard, the residency period offered an excellent experience, and my productivity was for the most part satisfactory.



LOOKING INWARDS  
YOLANDA OHENE

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Yolanda Ohene is a Wellcome Accelerator Award Research Fellow in Neuroimaging at The University of Manchester. Following an MSci in Physics from Imperial College London (2013) and a Master in Plasma Physics from UPMC and École Polytechnique, France (2014), she obtained a PhD in Medical Imaging from University College London (2020). Yolanda was awarded the Institute of Physics' Jocelyn Bell Burnell Bronze Medal and Prize in 2019 for outstanding contribution to physics by an early career researcher for her work in the development of a new MRI technique and The Women in Neuroscience UK's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Award (2025). Alongside scientific research, Yolanda is a keen science communicator and has spoken at The Royal Institution, Cambridge Theatre London, and at large science events including New Scientist Live, Cheltenham Science Festival, and The British Science Festival, where she was the recipient of one of the Award Lectures (2021). Yolanda has been featured on the BBC and in *The Guardian* advocating for better equity in STEM fields and is one of the directors of The Blackett Lab Family C.I.C, UK Collective for physicists of Black heritage, to represent, connect, and inspire the next generation of physicists. – Address: Division of Psychology, Communication and Human Neuroscience, The University of Manchester, Zochonis Building, Manchester, M13 9NT, United Kingdom. E-mail: yolanda.ohene@manchester.ac.uk.

The College for Life Sciences Fellowship instantly attracted me because I had been searching for ways to integrate public health, science communication, and creativity more deeply into my basic science neuroimaging work. Delighted and excited about pursuing research, I hadn't prepared for just how much the time would teach me about myself.

My proposal was “How can medical imaging research better serve historically marginalised groups?” Over the years since doing my PhD, I had been gradually coming to this question. The ideas of exploring the lack of inclusion in medical imaging research and more holistic approaches to the scientific method were exciting. But I quickly found that my question was too big to handle in a 5-month fellowship. There are almost infinite avenues to approach the question: struggling healthcare systems, medical discrimination, underrepresentation in research, systemic racism, the list goes on. Initially, my plan was to write a fellowship application based on this question. Lucky for me, I found out that I had been successful in a Wellcome Trust Fellowship application that I had submitted before I arrived at Wiko: Breaking Barriers: Exploring blood-brain barrier function in a Black population at risk of dementia using advanced MRI. This took the pressure off and gave me time to explore other sides of myself outside of science and writing grants.

While learning languages isn't my forte, I seized the opportunity to participate in the German classes. It was wonderful to have three extra weeks in August, during the intensive German course, to get to know the other early-arriving Fellows and go on excursions in the city. Thank you to Eva von Kügelgen for gently guiding us in the beginner's class and expanding my vocabulary from “Guten Tag” to be able to order a coffee. I was blessed to have Bashir as my partner in our class throughout my time at Wiko. His intellect, humour, kindness, and knowledge were boundless. This also gave me the extra chance to probe him further about his intricate questions at each week's Colloquium.

Like everyone, I was terrified of giving my Colloquium. I asked the fantastic Sherene, who kindly agreed, to give my introduction. In preparation, the first question that Sherene asked me was, “What was your first relationship with the lab, tell me what it felt like, what it smelt like?” These simple questions took me aback; I suddenly recognised that my relationship with science has been almost completely cerebral. I have been separating myself from my experiments and had rarely taken a moment to examine how the environment I work in felt to me. This was poignant especially because I was trying to understand how my area of research could be more inclusive. It made me examine the labs that I had previously worked in, which felt safe and supportive, which I'd learnt from technically, and which created a welcome environment. This reflection also brought a deeper realisation about how being a scientist suited my character of being on the introvert/extrovert cusp. I enjoy sharing my work with wider audiences and speaking at conferences, but also I am truly content when working alone in the lab. Perfecting the setup of equipment, tweaking the way in which the radiofrequency pulses and magnetic

gradients are programmed on the MRI machine to capture the highest signal and the sharpest image. These reflections allowed me to start imagining what the ideal lab environment would be like for me. How would I like to build future teams, what skills and values would I like the people to have, and what make spaces feel inclusive for all working there?

It was humbling to sit back and listen to the conversations at lunch and dinner (a massive thank you to Dunia and the staff for providing so generously for us). I learnt so much from the other Fellows, their partners, and their wonderful children, as well as the fantastic Wiko staff during the mealtimes. Sometimes, I found that the discussions would cause an internal conflict for me between a desire to find the courage to speak up and share my story and a yearning to retract further into myself. This taught me something about being able to sit more comfortably in my unknowing. I was incredibly grateful to Hannah (another self-proclaimed introvert) who often rescued me from my shyness and gave a calm reassurance that we all bring our individuality to the table. Hannah also gave me excellent exhibition recommendations and a witty appreciation of the darker side of life.

Living in Berlin was the perfect place to reignite my love of art. I visited many exhibitions, saw theatre plays, went to the cinema, sat in listening bars (my favourite was Migas in Wedding), I went to dance classes, watched dance shows, and of course went dancing! I enjoyed discovering some new Black British poets—thanks to the fantastic Wiko library team. It was very special to go along to attend Misato's concert, *Boids*, for the string quartet at Radialsystem. The musicians and composition took us on a beautiful, abstract, and sometimes obscure journey into an otherworldly soundscape. The sounds they created, through the strings and at points directly off the bodies of the instruments themselves, reminded me of the multitude of ways of exploring and expressing the function of the brain. And how we are still only scratching the surface of our understanding of this organ.

Alongside exploring my creative side, my time at Wiko allowed me to foster a fruitful and hopefully long-lasting collaboration with my neuroimaging colleagues, Lizzie Powell (University College London) and Lena Václavů (Leiden University Medical Centre). They joined me for a week in which we set up some mathematical simulations of advanced MRI techniques to probe the blood-brain barrier. We delved into the foundations of the mathematical models, debated the meaning of the signal to measure subtle changes in the brain, and worked together to write code for the different models. This shone a light on many existing questions in our field. How to untangle a very small signal from the noise? What does this signal reflect biologically? How to better access and join

together the global expertise in our field? We have continued to work together this year; I invited them over to The University of Manchester in the summer. And now we've now presented some of this work at an international conference and have submitted a European Cooperation in Science and Technology proposal with others in the field.

I was glad that I brought my bike with me to Grunewald; it was a very handy way to explore the city. I enjoyed cycling to the various flea markets across the city, where I found some lovely gems for my wardrobe. I also loved to go for long cycles in Grunewald Forest to let off some steam, think of ideas, and move my body. One of my most cherished memories was cycling with Basile to the less-popular checkpoint of Berlin (Checkpoint Bravo). We spent the afternoon traversing the forest along the old route where the Berlin Wall used to stand and ended by visiting the University of Potsdam. We took lots of pictures of the historic building and beautiful scenery. It was a wonderful day, getting out into the countryside and being able to talk freely about the privileges we have as academics, as well as some of the struggles we have with working in a system that wasn't necessarily built for people like us.

There were many memorable moments, but few other highlights to mention. I took a trip to visit Prof. Onur Güntürkün's neuroscience lab in Ruhr University Bochum. His lab specialises in the origins of cognition across different species; it was incredibly inspiring to see the cutting-edge work they were doing and meet the brilliant people in his lab. I travelled to Poland to speak at the Silesian Science Festival Katowice, which is the biggest science festival in Europe. Racha kindly lent me one of Pieti's whistles, which I used for a demonstration about radio waves during the talk. All I can say is I'm glad I didn't know anyone in the audience for this one! A big shout out to the party committee, especially Leyla and Sara, for bringing the dancing, laughter, and good energy during the darker days. Finally, walking, chatting, and imagining new worlds with Sherene, I felt blessed to hear her insights about hidden histories, about global healthcare, about Palestine.

On reflection, I learnt that I have a superpower of being very technically minded, but perhaps a rare ability of finding ways to bring the clarity of abstract maths and physics to a wider audience. I was blown away by the Colloquia of other College for Life Sciences Fellows (Mariana, Michael, Rachel, and Ashley) who had similar superpowers, which made me proud we are reshaping the "awkward scientist" stereotypes. And a heartfelt thanks to Jana for looking after us and giving me great suggestions about science talks happening in Berlin. Fundamentally, I am a people person. I love to learn from people, to

try to understand new perspectives, and Wiko fosters this environment so beautifully. It's a unique place where you form a web of unexpected connections that deepens one's understanding of oneself and the world.

I started my Wellcome Fellowship in July 2025, I stepped into a new environment implementing a new technique on the MRI scanner at Salford hospital, and I took a deep breath and thought: "What does this environment feel like to me?" How fortunate I am to have crafted this expertise to see inside the brain, "the final frontier." And how can I continue to shape my research for inclusivity to be at the heart of my practice?

Thank you to the Rector Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and the incredible Wiko team for giving me the space for me to look inwards, break myself open, and continue to find my path.



## WRITING, SEMINARS, AND SINGING DAVID OWENS

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From August 2025, David Owens will be the Sekyra and White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He is the author of four monographs (*Causes and Coincidences*, 1992; *Reason Without Freedom*, 2000; *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, 2012; and *Bound by Convention*, 2022), together with a collection of his papers (*Normativity and Control*, 2017). – Address: Corpus Christi College, Oxford OX1 4JF, United Kingdom. E-mail: david.owens@philosophy.ox.ac.uk.

In the project description I submitted to the Wissenschaftskolleg, I proposed to study the ways in which political and social authority threatens our liberty. That is what my fellowship has enabled me to do. During my time at the Kolleg, I’ve been working on half a dozen papers, some of which I had in draft when I arrived and several of which are fresh products of my stay. I also began drafting a monograph that links these papers together. This work would have been much retarded without the fellowship.

During the past year, two papers were published that outlined the central themes of my project:

“Command and Obedience.” In *Engaging Raz*, edited by A. Marmor, K. Brownlee, and D. Enoch, 443–462. Oxford University Press, 2025.

“Rules and Rulers: Demanding, Commanding and Assuming Responsibility.” *Political Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2024): 463–487. <https://doi.org/10.16995/pp.15381>.

The fellowship was spent elaborating on and applying these ideas more widely. Some papers were in draft when I arrived: “Coercion as an Excuse,” “Liberty, Equality, Authority,” “Authority and Choice: The Case of Employment,” “Property and Slavery.” These all

required further work. In the course of the year, they were given as talks generating valuable feedback. All four have now appeared or will appear in print.

During my time at the Kolleg, my work took a methodological turn. A new paper drafted during my fellowship, “Morality, Convention and the Method of Cases,” examines the way in which Anglophone moral and political philosophers use examples to establish their conclusions. It argues that they must do this rather differently, since a good part of morality is based on social convention.

Another new paper entitled “The Fragmentation of Justice and the Direction of History” examines the methodology of Anglophone political philosophy. The paper argues that there can be no such thing as a philosophical theory of justice. Justice is conventional rather than natural; a society’s conception of justice consists in the set of political values that actually regulate that society’s collective deliberations. My Colloquium presentation at the Kolleg was based on this paper. Given the thesis being defended, it was especially valuable to receive feedback from historians and social scientists, an audience to which I usually have little access. I intend to give this as an Inaugural Lecture when I take up the Sekyra and White’s Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford this coming academic year.

My residence in Berlin generated a number of invitations to give talks in Germany. Within Berlin I spoke to academic fora at the Humboldt-Universität and the Freie Universität and received invitations to LMU Munich and to the Department of Philosophy at Bielefeld University. Outside Germany, I addressed conferences at the University of Bergen, the University of Neuchâtel, and the University of London. The freedom from teaching provided by my fellowship enabled me to deliver fresh material on these occasions, making them more profitable for both speaker and audience.

My work has benefitted in more intangible ways from my stay at the Kolleg. I’ve long had a keen interest in history, but little opportunity to interact with professional historians except in purely administrative contexts. In my cohort of Fellows, there are at least half a dozen historians with whom I speak regularly about matters of mutual interest. (Among them is David Edgerton, a colleague at King’s College London whom I had never previously met!) I frequently found myself ordering and reading historical works that had been recommended and that enriched my own research. Had there been more social scientists in my cohort (economists, sociologists, anthropologists), the atmosphere would have been even more stimulating, and I’d recommend a recruitment drive in those areas.

The weekly Fellows' Colloquium is central to the intellectual life of the Kolleg. To facilitate discussion among people in different disciplines, Colloquium talks must strike a difficult balance between giving the audience some sense of the details of the Fellow's project, on the one hand, and placing that project in a broader intellectual context, on the other. Though I invariably learnt from both presentation and discussion, I felt that the balance was not always achieved. Some talks presented the material on which the Fellow was working without giving the audience too much of a sense of its wider significance. Other talks painted a clear picture of what was going on in the Fellow's discipline or of the Fellow's past academic work, but without really describing their Wiko project. Upon arrival, some of us (myself included) felt rather unsure what was expected of us, and it might be helpful to give Fellows more of a steer at the start of the year.

Beyond the strictly academic sphere (and the excellent library that supports our work), the Kolleg's ecosystem in 2024/2025 contained some important informal institutions. Nikolaus Wachsmann organised a writing club where those of us who wish to write in a more accessible way could present and get feedback on work intended for a wider audience. As someone who has tried (and largely failed) to do this, I found these sessions very illuminating. I know that the Kolleg rightly prides itself on its efforts to integrate Fellows' partners into the life of the institution. As well as attending social and academic events regularly, my husband Sam took German lessons throughout the year and found them extremely helpful. Sam (together with Hannah Darabi) also established a film club whose showings were illuminating and well-attended.

There was one quite unexpected pleasure during my stay at the Kolleg. For most of my life, I've been a chorister, though I'd rather given up singing in the past decade. Upon arrival I was delighted to discover that the Wiko ran a choir composed of Fellows and staff with an excellent director of music, Simon, to conduct us. The standard was high, and both the weekly rehearsals and the informal performances we gave were very enjoyable. Hopefully I've got back into the habit of singing—not the least of the many benefits the Kolleg has brought me.



GEDANKENSPIELE UND  
SCHREIBEXPERIMENTE IM GRUNEWALD  
HERLINDE PAUER-STUDER

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Herlinde Pauer-Studer ist emer. Professorin für Philosophie an der Universität Wien. Ihre Arbeitsgebiete sind Ethik, politische Philosophie und Rechtsphilosophie. 1997–98 war sie Fellow am Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics der Harvard University, von September bis Dezember 2006 Fulbright Scholar an der New York University und von Januar bis Juli 2016 Austrian Chair an der Stanford University. Von 2010 bis 2015 leitete sie das ERC Advanced Research Grant „Distortions of Normativity“ und von 2018 bis 2023 das ERC Advanced Research Grant „The Normative and Moral Foundations of Group Agency“. 2023/24 verbrachte sie im Rahmen eines Carl Friedrich von Siemens-Forschungspreises der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung an der LMU München. Sie hat u. a. veröffentlicht: *Autonom leben. Reflexionen über Freiheit und Gleichheit* (Suhrkamp 2000); *Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit. Moraltheorie im Kontext der Geschlechterdifferenz* (De Gruyter 2015); „Weil ich nun mal ein Gerechtigkeitsfanatiker bin“. *Der Fall des SS-Richters Konrad Morgen* (mit J. David Velleman, Suhrkamp 2017); *Justifying Injustice. Legal Theory in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge University Press 2020); *Im Namen von „Führer“ und „Volk“.* *Das Recht im Nationalsozialismus* (Mohr Siebeck 2025). – Adresse: Institut für Philosophie, Universität Wien, Universitätsstraße 7/3, 1010 Wien, Österreich.  
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Wenn man mit dem Fahrrad von der Villa Walther die Koenigsallee entlang zum Hauptgebäude des Wissenschaftskollegs in der Wallotstraße fährt, muss man die Straße spätestens an der Stelle überqueren, wo die Koenigsallee eine scharfe Kurve nach rechts macht. Dort steht, von der Straße einige Meter nach hinten versetzt, ein schlichter Gedenkstein

für Walther Rathenau, den ehemaligen Außenminister der Weimarer Republik, der an dieser Straßenbiegung am 24. Juni 1922 von rechtsextremen Attentätern ermordet wurde.

Fast jeden Tag wartete ich dort vor dem Gedenkstein auf die Gelegenheit zum Überqueren der Straße, oft versunken in Gedanken an die Krisen und den Untergang der Weimarer Republik. Und irgendwann drängte es mich, die literarische Verkörperung Rathenaus in der Person des Dr. Arnheim in Robert Musils Roman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* nachzulesen – unter anderem die folgende Passage, in der Musil diesen preußischen Charakter so unmittelbar in die merkwürdige Welt Kakaniens versetzt:

Arnheims Dasein war von Tätigkeit ausgefüllt; er war ein Mann der Wirklichkeit und hatte mit wohlwollendem Lächeln und nicht ohne Gefühl für die gute, gesellschaftliche Haltung der Altösterreicher zugehört, wie man in der Sitzung, deren Zeuge er war, von einer Kaiser-Franz-Joseph-Suppenanstalt und dem Zusammenhang zwischen Pflichtgefühl und Militärmärschen gesprochen hatte; er war weit davon entfernt, sich darüber lustig zu machen. [...] Als aber mitten darin Diotima, diese Antike mit einem wienerischen Plus, das Wort Welt-Österreich ausgesprochen hatte, ein Wort, das so heiß und fast auch so menschlich unverständlich war wie eine Flamme, da hatte ihn etwas ergriffen.<sup>1</sup>

Musils ironische Worte beziehen sich auf die sogenannte „Parallellaktion“, also seine fiktive Geschichte von hochfliegenden Plänen der kaiserlich-königlichen österreichischen Ministerialbürokratie, parallel zu der im Deutschen Reich geplanten großen Feier zum 30-jährigen Regierungsjubiläum Kaiser Wilhelms II. im Jahre 1918 eine wahrlich staatstragende Ehrung zum 70-jährigen Jubiläum der Thronbesteigung Kaiser Franz Josephs, die ja gleichfalls ins Jahr 1918 fallen würde, zu organisieren – eine Aktion, die sorgfältigst durchdacht sein müsse, um nicht ein neuerliches Königgrätz zu erleben.

Der Lauf der Geschichte entlarvte schonungslos die Brüchigkeit, ja Albernheit solcher Ideen. 1918 sollten beide Großmächte in ihren damaligen Verfasstheiten untergehen, und das infolge eines weltumspannenden grausamen Krieges, den die beiden Reiche ohne zureichenden Grund begonnen hatten und der nach vorsichtigen Schätzungen mit 17 Millionen Toten endete.

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1 Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Erstes Buch, Kapitel 26.

Warum beschäftigte mich Rathenau so sehr? In den ersten Wochen meines Aufenthalts am Wissenschaftskolleg arbeitete ich neben einem Artikel für ein *Oxford Handbook on Law and Authoritarianism* an den letzten Korrekturen meines Buchs zu den Rechtsverzerrungen im Nationalsozialismus, *Im Namen von „Führer“ und „Volk“*. *Das Recht im Nationalsozialismus* (Mohr Siebeck 2025), in dem ich auch auf die Endphase der Weimarer Republik und die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Carl Schmitt und Hans Kelsen um die Befugnisse des Reichspräsidenten einging. Für Kelsen sollten die Notverordnungen des Reichspräsidenten der juristischen Prüfung auf Verfassungsgemäßheit unterliegen, während sich für Schmitt der Reichspräsident als höchste politische Instanz und Autorität einer solchen Kontrolle entzog – eine Position, die sich spätestens am 2. August 1934 als normativ verhängnisvoll erweisen sollte, als sich Hitler auch das Amt des Reichspräsidenten aneignete. Und sowohl bei diesen letzten Änderungen am Manuskript als auch beim späteren Lesen der Korrekturfahnen des Buchs fragte ich mich immer wieder, in welcher Form und mit welchen Verfahren Rechtsstaaten radikalen politischen Bewegungen und Parteien, die gewillt sind, eine demokratische Staatsform zu untergraben, entgegenzutreten können, ja müssen.

Diese Sorge um die Demokratie begleitete nicht nur mich, sondern auch viele meiner Co-Fellows am Wissenschaftskolleg. Die politischen Ereignisse dieses Jahres waren vielfach Thema unserer Gespräche. Sie brachten uns, ungeachtet teils unterschiedlicher Wahrnehmungen und Standpunkte, einander näher, wenngleich oft nur noch in geteilter Fassungslosigkeit über ungeahnte normative Verschiebungen und Grenzüberschreitungen.

Meine anderen Forschungsprojekte? Mein Plan in diesem Jahr am Wissenschaftskolleg war es, ein Buchmanuskript zu relationalen Theorien der Moral auszuarbeiten. Grob gesagt erklären relationale Ansätze das Phänomen der Moral nicht über hierarchisch geordnete Prinzipien der Rationalität, deren Richtigkeit auf a priori Einsichten aus der erstpersonalen Subjektperspektive beruhen, sondern über die Ansprüche und Pflichten, die sich aus den Relationen zu anderen ergeben. Der Fokus liegt also auf den konstitutiven normativen Bedingungen und Anforderungen sozialer Interaktionen. Neben der genaueren Ausarbeitung der theoretischen Grundlagen relationaler Ansätze interessierte mich insbesondere die Frage, wie sich diese Konzeptionen im Kontext von Gruppen bewähren, also wie mit Gruppenzugehörigkeiten verknüpfte Beziehungen zwischen Personen aus moralischer Perspektive zu bewerten sind. Im Laufe des Jahres stellte ich als Teil dieses Buchprojekts einen Artikel darüber fertig, welche

Konsequenzen sich ergeben, wenn man die grundlegenden Einsichten relationaler Moraltheorien auf das Strafrecht überträgt.

Neben dieses Buchprojekt trat unvermittelt ein anderes, das der am Wissenschaftskolleg gewährten Freiheit des Denkens und der besonderen Atmosphäre des Zusammenseins mit Forscherinnen und Forschern aus unterschiedlichen Disziplinen geschuldet ist. Die von ihnen vermittelte Fülle an Ideen, Gedanken, Geschichten und Theorien lädt ein, neue Wege des Schreibens zu gehen. Der unmittelbare Anlass für mein neues Projekt war der von Nikolaus Wachsmann geleitete *Workshop for anonymous writers*, der sich darauf konzentrierte, Texte für eine breitere Öffentlichkeit zu entwickeln und vorzustellen. Und dieser Schreibklub hat mich motiviert, über eine Krankheitserfahrung als Kind zu schreiben, die eine mehrmonatige Trennung von der Familie bedeutete – also einen Text, der auch den epistemischen und normativen Status von Kindern, deren berechnete Ansprüche und die Informationspflicht ihnen gegenüber thematisieren will.

Besonderen Dank in diesem Zusammenhang schulde ich David William Hughes und Racha Kirakosian. David hat mich nicht nur zu diesem Buchprojekt ermuntert, sondern zwang mich mit seinem Ansinnen, ihm zumindest einige geschriebene Seiten zu präsentieren, an den Schreibtisch. David und Racha gaben mir auch wertvolle Rückmeldungen zu einem ersten Teil des Texts und der Struktur des geplanten Buchs. Ich danke auch Anna Gil Bardají, die mich bestärkte, das Projekt zu verfolgen, und Mathias Énard für ein hilfreiches Gespräch zur Montage von Eindrücken und Sachinformationen.

Die Bibliothek des Wissenschaftskollegs und die Unterstützung der Fellows durch das Bibliotheksteam sind bekanntlich legendär. In meinem Fall war es Anja Brockmann, die mir bei meinem Projekt großzügig zur Seite stand und mit ihren Recherchen in alten Tageszeitungen und Archiven half, die ersten Spuren zu einem aus dem öffentlichen Gedächtnis verdrängten Sanatorium für Kinder zu finden. Und dem IT-Team des Wissenschaftskollegs danke ich für die Rettung meines digitalen Lebens, als ich bereits zu Beginn dieses sensiblen Schreibprojekts meinen Laptop ruinierte.

Der Aufenthalt am Wissenschaftskolleg war einzigartig, intellektuell bereichernd und inspirierend. Neben den Kolloquien, Workshops, Vorträgen und Donnerstag-Abendessen war ein Highlight die von Daniel Schönflug mit Expertise und ruhiger Kompetenz geleitete Laufgruppe. Jeden Donnerstagmorgen (8 Uhr!) nach Aufwärmübungen rund um den herrlichen Grunewaldsee – mit Gesprächen, Anregungen, Fröhlichkeit und Energie für den Tag. Mein besonderer Dank geht hier an die wunderbare Frauengruppe mit Leyla Dakhli, Nadja Schäfer, Natalia Romik und Sara Magalhães, die

im solidarischen Abstand zu den ehrgeizigen Spitzenläufern blieb. Unvergesslich ist mir ein Wintermorgen, an dem ich mit Avi Winitzer (die Kolleginnen hatten wegen der unwirtlichen Bedingungen wohlweislich verzichtet) über den eisig-verschneiten Weg entlang des Grunewaldsees schlitterte und uns ein ob des hilflos-unbeholfenen Spektakels sichtlich amüsiertes Nigel Davies (ohnehin der Star der Laufgruppe) in elegantem Laufstil und hohem Tempo überholte: „Guys, you need other shoes!“ Es sollte die einzige kleine Demütigung in diesem an Wertschätzung, gegenseitigem Verständnis, Empathie und Freundschaft so reichen Jahr bleiben.

Die Zeit am Wiko und im wunderschönen Grunewald geht leider zu Ende. Und ich danke dem gesamten Team des Wissenschaftskollegs und allen Fellows und Fellow-Partnern und -Partnerinnen für einen unvergesslichen Forschungsaufenthalt.



KONZENTRATION IM DENKEN,  
GROSSZÜGIGKEIT IM AUSTAUSCH  
AGNIESZKA PUFELSKA

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PD Dr. Agnieszka Pufelska ist Kulturhistorikerin mit einem besonderen Schwerpunkt auf den deutsch-polnischen Konfliktzonen. Nach ihrer Promotion an der Europa-Universität Viadrina habilitierte sie sich an der Universität Potsdam mit einer Arbeit über das polnische Preußenbild im 18. Jahrhundert. Am Nordost-Institut (IKGN) in Lüneburg, wo sie als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin tätig ist, widmet sie sich der jüdischen Kulturgeschichte, der Geschichte des Antisemitismus, der kolonialen Wissensproduktion sowie der deutsch-polnischen Verflechtungsgeschichte. Ihr Interesse gilt vor allem den Schnittstellen von Macht, Erinnerung und intellektuellem Handeln in Ostmitteleuropa – jenen Räumen, in denen Geschichtsbilder entstehen, umkämpft werden und fortwirken. 2024 veröffentlichte sie gemeinsam mit Philipp Oswalt den Band *Der Geist von Potsdam. Preußisches Militär als Tradition und Erbe* (De Gruyter), eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der bis heute anhaltenden Wirkmacht preußischer Militärtraditionen. – Adresse: Arbeitsbereich Polen, Nordost-Institut an der Universität Hamburg (IKGN e.V.), Lindenstraße 31, 21335 Lüneburg, Deutschland. E-Mail: a.pufelska@ikgn.de.

*Ein Ort der geistigen Konzentration und intellektuellen Großzügigkeit*

Der Aufenthalt am Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin war für mich eine außergewöhnlich inspirierende, produktive und horizonterweiternde Erfahrung. In einer wissenschaftlichen Laufbahn gibt es nur wenige Orte, die in vergleichbarer Weise dazu einladen, sich ganz auf das eigene Denken zu konzentrieren, den Ballast des akademischen Alltags abzustreifen und sich in großer geistiger Freiheit auf ein Thema, eine Idee, eine Frage einzulassen. Das Wissenschaftskolleg bietet genau diesen Raum – mit einer Großzügigkeit, organisatorischen Sorgfalt und intellektuellen Offenheit, die ihresgleichen suchen.

### *Exzellente Rahmenbedingungen für konzentriertes Arbeiten*

Die Voraussetzungen, unter denen wissenschaftliches Arbeiten hier möglich ist, sind ideal. Die großzügige Ausstattung mit Arbeitsmitteln, die hervorragende technische und bibliothekarische Unterstützung, die liebevolle Betreuung durch das Kollegsteam – all dies macht es möglich, sich ganz der Forschung zu widmen. Besonders hervorheben möchte ich die Professionalität und Freundlichkeit der Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter. Ihre diskrete, stets präsent und dabei nie aufdringliche Unterstützung hat entscheidend dazu beigetragen, dass man sich ganz auf die eigene Arbeit konzentrieren konnte. In allen Bereichen – von der Verwaltung über die technische Unterstützung bis zur Bibliotheksarbeit – zeichnete sich das Kolleg durch einen professionellen, freundlichen und zugewandten Umgang aus.

### *Kulinarische Sorgfalt und soziale Wärme*

Besonders hervorheben möchte ich das außergewöhnliche Engagement der Küchenmitarbeiterinnen und -mitarbeiter, die nicht nur täglich für abwechslungsreiche und liebevoll zubereitete Mahlzeiten sorgten, sondern mit großer Aufmerksamkeit und Empathie auf individuelle Wünsche, Unverträglichkeiten oder besondere Anliegen reagierten. Die Atmosphäre im Speisesaal war herzlich und offen, das gemeinsame Essen ein Ort des Austauschs ebenso wie des Wohlbefindens – getragen nicht zuletzt von der Warmherzigkeit und Umsicht des Küchenteams.

### *Forschungsatmosphäre zwischen Dichte und Freiheit*

Zugleich war die wissenschaftliche Atmosphäre des Kollegs von einer Dichte und Intensität, wie ich sie nur selten erlebt habe – und doch nie bedrängend, nie kompetitiv. Vielmehr war sie getragen von gegenseitigem Respekt, Neugier und dem ehrlichen Interesse an der Arbeit der anderen. Die wöchentlichen Kolloquien bildeten dabei ein zentrales Forum für den Austausch. Die Vielfalt der Disziplinen und Herangehensweisen war eine ständige Einladung, die eigenen Begriffe und Positionen neu zu justieren. Die Diskussionen waren oft herausfordernd, immer aber konstruktiv und nie ideologisch.

### *Informeller Austausch und intellektuelle Begegnungen*

Darüber hinaus war der informelle Austausch mit den anderen Fellows von unschätzbarem Wert: Die Gespräche beim Mittagessen, beim Spaziergang um den See, beim Donnerstagsdinner oder bei einem Glas Crémant führten nicht selten zu überraschenden

intellektuellen Begegnungen, zu Verbindungen zwischen ganz unterschiedlichen Denkfeldern – und zu Freundschaften. Der interdisziplinäre Dialog war dabei nicht nur ein begleitendes Element, sondern Teil des Denkprozesses selbst.

Bereichert wurde dieser Austausch durch die Einbindung eingeladener Gäste, Projektgruppen und ehemaliger Fellows. Die Begegnungen mit ihnen – etwa im Rahmen von Workshops, bei Abendessen am Donnerstag oder in öffentlichen Veranstaltungen – erweiterten nicht nur das thematische Spektrum des Kollegs, sondern vertieften auch das Gefühl, Teil eines lebendigen intellektuellen Netzwerks zu sein, das weit über das einzelne Jahr hinausreicht. Besonders wertvoll war für mich die Teilnahme an Veranstaltungen, bei denen ich meine Forschung in völlig neue Kontexte stellen konnte. Die Resonanz aus anderen Disziplinen, das aufmerksame und zugleich kritische Zuhören, die klugen Nachfragen – all das war ungemein anregend.

#### *Ein geschützter Raum für Forschung und Lektüre*

Mein Aufenthalt am Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin war eine außerordentlich produktive und inspirierende Zeit. In der einzigartigen Atmosphäre dieses besonderen Ortes konnte ich nicht nur wesentliche Fortschritte in meinem eigenen Forschungsprojekt „Postpreußen“ erzielen, sondern auch neue Denkräume erschließen, die im üblichen akademischen Alltag oft verschlossen bleiben. Die großzügig bemessene Zeit, die völlige Befreiung von administrativen Verpflichtungen und die exzellente Infrastruktur ermöglichten es, sich ganz auf das Wesentliche zu konzentrieren: auf das Lesen, das Denken, den Dialog mit anderen und das Schreiben. Gerade das ungestörte Lesen – ein Luxus, den man im universitären oder institutionellen Betrieb selten erlebt – hat es mir erlaubt, zentrale theoretische Texte neu zu durchdringen, bisher Unbeachtetes zu entdecken und auf dieser Grundlage neue Argumentationslinien zu entwickeln. Die tiefere Durchdringung meines Themas wäre ohne diesen intellektuellen Freiraum nicht möglich gewesen.

#### *Organisatorische Unterstützung und Veranstaltungsmanagement*

Auch organisatorisch wurde ich vom Kolleg in vielfältiger Weise unterstützt. Die Planung und Durchführung meines Workshops verlief reibungslos und war von einer hohen Professionalität geprägt. Die organisatorische Hilfe, die technische Begleitung und die Gastfreundschaft des Hauses gegenüber den eingeladenen Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern waren vorbildlich und wurden von allen Beteiligten sehr geschätzt.

### *Transparenz als zukünftige Stärke?*

Sosehr ich das Kolleg insgesamt in höchstem Maße schätze, möchte ich jedoch drei Punkte ansprechen, bei denen eine größere Transparenz wünschenswert wäre. Erstens betrifft dies die Vergabe des besonders begehrten Büros mit Übernachtungsmöglichkeit. Die Kriterien für dessen Zuteilung an einen bestimmten lokalen Fellow blieben auch auf direkte Nachfrage hin unklar. Dies führte stellenweise zu Irritationen und Spekulationen, die leicht hätten vermieden werden können.

Zweitens wäre eine klarere Kommunikation hinsichtlich der Abrechnung zusätzlicher Mahlzeiten – etwa bei Abendveranstaltungen, Gästen oder Sonderanlässen – hilfreich gewesen. In ihrer aktuellen Form war diese nicht ganz durchschaubar und bedarf einer klareren Regelung. Die Praxis, sich handschriftlich in Listen einzutragen, ist zwar pragmatisch, führt aber leicht zu Missverständnissen oder Unstimmigkeiten. Eine automatisierte oder digitale Lösung – etwa durch eine elektronische Anmeldung oder ein Online-System – könnte hier Abhilfe schaffen und die Transparenz und Nachvollziehbarkeit der Abrechnung deutlich erhöhen.

Ergänzend sei ein weiterer Aspekt angesprochen, bei dem mehr Transparenz wünschenswert erscheint: die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in Bezug auf einzelne Fellows. Zwar ist es nachvollziehbar, dass nicht jede Person in gleichem Maße in öffentlichen Formaten präsent sein möchte oder kann, doch blieb über das halbe Jahr hinweg unklar, nach welchen Kriterien bestimmte Fellows für öffentliche Veranstaltungen ausgewählt wurden, warum von einigen professionelle Fotos angefertigt wurden und weshalb einzelne Forschungsprojekte in den Kommunikationskanälen des Kollegs (Website, Social Media) besonders hervorgehoben wurden, während andere kaum sichtbar waren.

### *Ort der Sehnsucht*

Diese kleineren Kritikpunkte mindern jedoch in keiner Weise die außerordentlich positiven Erfahrungen, die ich mit dem Wissenschaftskolleg verbinden darf. Es ist ein einzigartiger Ort der geistigen Konzentration, der intellektuellen Großzügigkeit und der wissenschaftlichen Offenheit. Mein Aufenthalt war nicht nur eine Phase produktiver Forschung, sondern auch eine Zeit des persönlichen und intellektuellen Wachstums. Ich verlasse das Kolleg mit einem erweiterten Horizont, vertiefter Kenntnis und großer Dankbarkeit.



FROM THE HIDEOUTS TO THE TOWERS  
OF PLAGUES  
NATALIA ROMIK

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Natalia Romik is a graduate in political science, practitioner of architecture, designer, and artist. In 2018, Romik was awarded a PhD at the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London for a thesis on the post-Jewish architecture of memory in former Eastern European shtetls. She combines academic research with methods of contemporary art and architecture to explore the post-Jewish architecture of memory. From 2007 to 2014, she cooperated with the Nizio Design studio, was a consultant for, among others, the POLIN Museum core exhibition design, and was a co-author of the revitalization of a synagogue in Chmielnik. Romik is a member of the SENNA Architecture Collective, responsible for designs including the exhibition at the Museum of Jews in Upper Silesia in Gliwice and the permanent exhibition at the Brodno Jewish Cemetery. In 2018, she co-curated the exhibition *Estranged: March '68 and Its Aftermath* and, in 2024, *(post)JEWISH... Shtetl Opatów through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt*, at POLIN. Her art projects include: *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *Open Anti-Fascist Studio*, *The Dream-Catcher—Mobile Sauna*, *JAD*, and *X<sup>2</sup> Plagues*. She was a postdoctoral fellow of the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah. Her research concluded with the exhibition *Hideouts. The Architecture of Survival*, presented in 2022 in Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, Trafo CCA in Szczecin, and the Jewish Museum Frankfurt. In 2022, she was awarded the Dan David Prize. – Address: Stalowa 47 /10, 03- 425 Warszawa, Poland.  
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Five months in early spring and summer 2025 spent in West Berlin became an extraordinary convergence of my research horizon—focused on contemporary interpretations of

hideouts—and the finely woven web of intellectual coexistence (gradually turning into friendship) among the scholars of the Wissenschaftskolleg.

As a public historian and architect, I have been engaged for over four years in a spatial exploration of the hideouts built by Jews during the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe. My project *Hideouts. The Architecture of Survival* examined the history and architecture of nine such places in Poland and Ukraine, where Jewish people sought refuge during the war. While the topic of Jews going into hiding and the aid they received has appeared in various contexts of Holocaust studies, comparatively little is known about the architecture of the hiding places themselves—partly because so many have eroded with time, but also because research has often focused more on the fates of those in hiding and their rescuers than on the spaces that enabled survival. It is estimated that, of the three million Jewish citizens who had lived in pre-war Poland, only around 50,000 survived the Holocaust by hiding among the so-called “Aryan” population. Some managed to survive entirely on their own, while others were helped by their compatriots. They hid not only from Nazi persecutors but also from other outsiders, including blackmailers, the so-called *szmalcowi*ks. Most survivors had to adapt existing spaces—attics, sewers, and cellars—to serve as their shelters, or to construct new ones in the hollows of trees, even in empty graves. This fragile infrastructure of survival not only had to conceal human presence, but also had to sustain basic life functions: to provide air, water, food, warmth, and a means to dispose of waste—often within only a few square metres.

At the Wissenschaftskolleg, I decided to explore the theoretical frameworks of contemporary migration and refugee crises, as well as the spatial mechanisms of exclusion that connect to my broader research on the techniques of building hideouts and shelters in the contemporary world. These reflections led me to study sites such as Ukraine, the Polish-Belarusian border, Palestine, and Israel.

The first *hiding place* I examined that extended beyond the “Holocaust typology” was located in the border zone of the Białowieża Forest between Poland and Belarus. Since August 2021, a so-called “refugee crisis” has been unfolding along this frontier. People on the move—refugees from the Middle East and Africa—continue to take this route, perceiving it as one of the few remaining passages into the European Union. This situation has been cynically exploited by Lukashenko’s regime, while both the previous and current Polish governments have responded by constructing barbed-wire barriers and, more recently, a 5.5-metre-high, 180-kilometre-long wall. Refugees perish in the swamps and dense forests, especially in winter; to date, more than 130 deaths have been officially

recorded. Together with Dr Natalia Judzińska (a Holocaust scholar and activist from *Researchers on the Border*), Dr Aleksandra Janus, and surveyor Przemek Kluźniak, we conducted research and geodetic measurements of a shelter built and used by people on the move—a makeshift hut constructed from pine wood. Our scans and video recordings serve primarily as evidence: proof that even today, people around the world are still forced to hide, building secret shelters for survival. In the case of Ukraine, I was drawn to the example of the Drama Theatre in Mariupol, which served as a shelter during the Russian invasion in 2022. This tragic episode is described in detail in the forthcoming book *Society of the Frontline: A Guidebook of Kyiv Perennial*, edited by Vasyl Cherepanyn (Berlin, 2025). Another example that captured my attention were the hideouts built by Palestinian civilians in the cemetery of Khan Yunis, which provided refuge during the massive bombardments of Gaza carried out by the IDF. Yet another form of contemporary hiding emerged during the October 2023 Hamas attacks, when Israeli kibbutz residents and participants of the Supernova electronic music festival were forced to seek impromptu shelters to protect themselves from violence.

This new project, which is still evolving, is conceived as a long-term endeavour. Like *The Architecture of Survival*, it will involve scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines and fields of expertise, each contributing to an ongoing investigation of the spatial, ethical, and political dimensions of hiding in times of crisis.

The rhythm of my research unfolded in parallel with the tempo of Wiko's lectures, seminars, and critical conversations—an intense and inspiring intellectual atmosphere that constantly expanded the scope of my reflections. Many of these encounters revolved around the theme of the contemporary “plagues of the world”: There was, for instance, John Kampfner's analysis of the German elections and the rise of the AfD; the discussion “Between Past and Present: The Politics of Memory” with Sherene Seikaly, Per Leo, and Michael Rothberg; and the workshop on the war in Ukraine organised by Alina Mozolevska. I also attended the discussion “After Prison and Exile” at the neighbouring Forum Transregionale Studien, in which Yassin al-Haj Saleh and Rasha Abbas explored the evolving meanings of imprisonment and exile in the Syrian experience and their impact on both individual lives and collective struggles. These encounters—and many other informal conversations—ultimately inspired the idea of creating an artistic installation titled *The Towers of Plagues*.

Over several weeks, I asked the Fellows and the wonderful staff to nominate *one object* that they felt represented a contemporary plague of the world. The response far exceeded

my expectations: I received a vast range of propositions, from witty critiques of contemporary culture to reflections on political crises, ongoing wars, genocides, and profound meditations on the human condition. The project continued a series I have been developing over the past three years. In 2022, I created the *Pyramids of Plagues* for the Venice Biennale of Architecture and, in 2024, for the Festspiele Europäische Wochen Passau.

Several visits to flea markets around Berlin, together with friends from Wiko, resulted in the collection of around eighty glass objects: nineteenth-century vases, Art Deco glasses, colourful glassware produced in the GDR, and even Venetian glass. In the installation, each glass vessel contained within it a smaller element—chosen by the participants as representing a contemporary plague—encased in another layer of glass. The vertical towers, varied in colour and form, were assembled using a special liquid adhesive and exposed to blue UV light. The process required careful balance: just enough pressure to hold the glass together without causing cracks or spills. The Monday afternoon when a group of us Fellows gathered in our living room—temporarily transformed into an improvised art studio—to build the *Towers of Plagues* remains one of the most beautiful moments of my time at Wiko. That act of collective work will stay with me forever.

In my understanding, this gesture of creation referred to the Lurianic concept of *tikkun ha-olam*—the repair of the world, an effort to mend the primordial fracture caused by the “shattering of the vessels.” It was, symbolically, an act of what Ewa Majewska has called *weak resistance*: small, persistent gestures of care and repair in the face of overwhelming global crises. The semi-transparent, crystalline form of the glass containers—at once fragile and resilient—symbolises the vessels from the Kabbalistic tradition, in which divine energy was enclosed, and whose shattering marked the beginning of human suffering. At the same time, these vessels represent our attempts to contain, comprehend, and perhaps even control the modern plagues that afflict our world. The project draws loose inspiration from the biblical story of the ten Egyptian plagues (עשר המכות) described in the *Book of Exodus*. During *Pesach* (the Feast of Passover), one of the most symbolic celebrations in Judaism, drops of wine are sprinkled onto the plate during the *Seder* dinner as each of the plagues—vermin, pestilence, darkness, and the death of the firstborn—is named aloud. This ritual gesture, both solemn and intimate, acknowledges human fragility and collective endurance in the face of catastrophe.

The ceremonial unveiling of *The Towers of Plagues* took place during our Farewell Party, accompanied by the aria “Their land brought forth frogs” from the oratorio *Israel in Egypt* by George Frederic Handel, performed by David William Hughes. The

installation was conceived as a response to a shared, deeply felt sense of anxiety—a recognition that we live in a world still marked by the lingering effects of the pandemic, where human and women’s rights are continuously violated; antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, and racism are resurgent; territories and nations remain occupied; millions of workers are exploited; brutal wars persist; and both younger and older generations begin to experience the tangible consequences of climate catastrophe.

Yet this fear does not prevail. It is met by the courage and perseverance of communities—the *righteous ones*—who refuse to surrender to despair and, through their daily gestures of care, protest, and solidarity, prevent the plagues from spreading further. They resist, they rebuild, they protect. It is to them that this exhibition—and this work of remembrance and repair—is dedicated.

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In order to honour my Co-Fellows and Wiko staff, I would like to quote their nominations, listing them below.

***Towers of Contemporary Plagues***—*Wiko project of Natalia Romik, realised with the generous help of Wiko friends* (Anna Gil Bardají, Racha Kirakosian, Leyla Dakhli, Sara Magalhães, Kärin Nickelsen, Florian Meinel, Mathias Énard, David William Hughes, Nadja Schäfer, and Kuba Szreder)

**Bashir Bashir:** Picture of people in Gaza—genocide

**Leyla Dakhli:** A piece of red fabric resembling the uniform worn by prisoners in Sednaya (Syria), it stands for torture and annihilation of human dignity

**Gábor Egrý:** Non-refillable plastic ballpoint pen, subspecies of the plastic waste, ubiquitous with all kinds of logos, becomes empty abruptly, no chance of refilling, while unclear how to dispose of it

**Mathias Énard:** Asian hornets are a terrible plague that kills bees in huge proportions, devastating entire populations of both wild and domestic bees

**Anna Gil Bardají:** Masculinism is an ideology that often frames men as victims of gender inequality, while downplaying or opposing feminist movements, frequently reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies and resisting progress toward gender equity

**Ian Johnson:** *Return of the Soul from Purgatory*: a samizdat book from China, 2024, symbolizing the plague of forgetting and how people fight against it

**Racha Kirakosian:** A squeeze toy with missing eyes—the lack of humour is a form of illiteracy

**David William Hughes:** A *Fiktionsbescheinigung*—representing the difficulties of immigration, the opacity of bureaucracy, and the absurdity of German bureaucratic language

**Hartmut Leppin:** The commodification of anything and everything which coincides even with the loss of the sensory character of money

**Nadja Schäfer:** The digital inbox (computer mouse), once a practical tool, is increasingly turning into an endless sea of information snippets that threaten our concentration and productivity

**Sara Magalhães:** Smartphone—designed to miscommunicate, ensuring we (don't) miss communication

**Florian Meinel:** Mirror—the technology of self-images has distanced us from one another and eventually brought us the government of narcissistic clowns

**Cheryl Misak:** Anti-nausea pills, which, alas, won't make us feel any less ill about the state of the world

**Kärin Nickelsen:** The Tower of Babel: an emblem of humanity's insatiable greed, ambition, and envy, which has led to destruction, disunity, dispersal, and despair. Yet, the Tower is also an emblem of what humans would be able to accomplish collectively, if only they joined forces and controlled their egos.

**Herlinde Pauer-Studer:** A pen, to write, write, write—against the Carl Schmittians and for female political liberalism

**Natalia Romik:** Earth and sand—an example of annihilation of nature, ecological disaster and human interference with nature

**Yasemin Yildiz:** A fingerprint—will you be able to cross that border or not?

**Volodymyr Ryzhkovskyi and Ivana Bago:** Gummies. The endless expanse of supermarket shelves with sweets, snacks, and candies—luring the children with their fake, illness-inducing abundance, their bright colors and emblems in the shape of smiling animals, the same animals that those children will only see in zoos or future paleontology books. Walking past those shelves, buying from those shelves, then coming home to watch the news, and witness mothers in Gaza holding the emaciated little hands of babies and children about to die of thirst and starvation.

**Sherene Seikaly:** A charm to keep away the plagues

**Roni Taharlev:** Poster of Benjamin Netanyahu—evil power

**Joanna Tokarska-Bakir:** Hard drive parts—polarisation

**Asonzeh Ukah:** Wine symbolizing human blood—I have never stopped thinking that the greatest plague haunting humankind and its society is the human person. Misanthropy is an age-old idea we no longer take seriously because humans think they are the centre of the universe. I am nominating humankind as a plague against its kind and the world and the universe.

**Nikolaus Wachsmann:** This fragile red sphere represents the plague of global warming. Come to think of it, perhaps also of Karneval.

**Abraham Winitzer:** Square adapter thing (for iPhone?) for our insatiable addiction to the electronic age

**Eva von Kügelgen:** Stone, cobblestone, potential Stolperstein—if fear turns into hatred, our hearts become stones and will not function, neither for our own lives, nor for connecting with others in empathy

**Jana Petri:** A tampon or a menstrual pad—menstruation is often accompanied by discomfort, pain, and the weight of social stigma. These negative perceptions are rooted in long-standing taboos and a widespread lack of education about menstrual health—an issue that touches the lives of over 4 billion people around the world.

**Gesine Rodewald-Bongers:** Parts of the MAC computer—representation of social inequality

**Maike Schaper:** Amazon—sweet poison of the affluent society

**Daniel Schönflug:** Brass knuckles—a symbol of hatred and violence between humans



INCOMPARABLE  
MICHAEL ROTHBERG

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Michael Rothberg is Professor of English and Comparative Literature and the 1939 Society Samuel Goetz Chair in Holocaust Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research focuses on the social and cultural implications of political violence and its afterlives, and his writings have been translated into French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish. His books include *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (2019), *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* (2003; co-edited with Neil Levi), and *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000). In addition to his Wiko project, he is completing a book called *Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance* with the German Studies scholar Yasemin Yildiz. He has also written for public-facing venues such as *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Nation*, as well as German-language publications such as *Die Zeit*, *Berliner Zeitung*, and *Geschichte der Gegenwart*. – Address: Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of California, Los Angeles, 149 Kaplan Hall, P.O. Box 951530, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1530, USA. E-mail: mrothberg@humnet.ucla.edu.

I came to Wiko to write a book on comparison, but my experience there was, I must admit, incomparable.

Incomparable, but not unique. Wiko Yearbooks are filled with the same kinds of praise I would want to offer, too: above all for the incomparably professional, generous, patient, and kind Wiko staff and the comfortable, well-maintained spaces for work and

conversation. In our “real lives,” university budgets are in constant crisis; support staff always overworked; libraries struggling to keep up with the latest publications; maintenance invariably deferred; and hiring inevitably frozen. In contrast, Wiko seemed to be an oasis of infrastructural plenty, of competence, of a desire to foster intellectual pursuits of all sorts. That last point cannot be overstated: Wiko is incomparable as an institution committed to fostering academic freedom, even if that means providing a place for research that might be considered “controversial” elsewhere. In Germany, the existence of such a space does not go without saying, and that is increasingly true in other nations as well—including, especially, my own.

And, of course, Wiko is incomparable as a community. Who could have dreamed up a place like Villa Walther? With its new wing and its old wings, with its Greco-Roman reliefs, with the Kosovo Embassy, with its overgrown garden and lake views, with its multiple entrances—including our own, the well-hidden back entrance leading up many flights of stairs (no elevators here!) to our Wiko micro-community comprised of Yolanda and Nik (and later, Roni and Dror). Between the Villa Walther and the smaller apartments scattered across the buildings on Wallotstraße, we were, over the course of the year, forty-four Fellows, plenty of partners, just enough children. Of course, the Fellows cohort was amazing and talented and fun, but I think it’s worth mentioning that partners are the secret weapon of the Wiko magic. One of the most noteworthy aspects of Wiko is the commitment to treating partners as full members of the community, with equal access to research support, meals, and special events. The partners—many of whom were artists, writers, or scholars in their own right—enriched the community immeasurably. Similarly, the support we received as a family from Wiko staff made a daunting transatlantic move involving visas, schools, health insurance, and more as manageable as it could possibly be. And our fellow Fellows, partners, and families created a fantastic environment for our kids. Our boys—who turned ten during the year—will never forget the ping-pong, the dance parties, the garden antics, the concerts, the collective Champions League viewing, and, above all, the opportunity to mingle and converse with accomplished scholars and artists from around the world. “Whose Colloquium is this week?,” they’d ask, “and who’s doing the introduction?”

So, it was truly an incomparable year—one that, a couple of months later, almost seems like a dream. But even the magic of living in such a nurturing community could not block out the realities of a world that seemed to be sliding off the rails even as we sat in the beautiful Wiko garden with our after-lunch coffees. Events in Palestine and

Ukraine weighed heavily on many of us for the entire year. I sometimes found it difficult to face our Fellow-friends from those places as atrocities mounted. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, the Italian Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi spoke of the “shame of the world”—the fact that, despite the temptation to “turn [our] backs” to the crimes committed by others, “we were not able not to see.” Like the witnesses Levi discusses, many of us in our cohort—I believe—also felt that something “irrevocable” was happening around us: an “infinite enormity of pain.” Wiko, at least, provided a place we could process some of what was happening, however imperfectly. And then there were the US elections and their aftermath. Attacks on immigrants, attacks on universities, attacks on all the fundamental elements of democracy and the rule of law. I know it’s not a unique experience, but it was a dramatic and disturbing one to watch at a distance. Our return has been uncanny as well—the sun is still shining and I can see students walking to class outside my office window as I write these lines, but all is not well and it’s hard to imagine where things will be six months from now.

All of which brings me back to my project—to write a book on comparison. My focus is what I call “comparison controversies”—public disputes about contentious historical analogies, most of which involve the Holocaust or Nazism. The impetus for the project came from debates I was involved with in Germany in the early 2020s, some of which arose from the translation of my book *Multidirectional Memory*, a study of how remembrance of the Holocaust has intersected with the memory of colonialism and slavery. Those public debates involved especially the relation between the Holocaust and colonialism and antisemitism and racism, and the role played by Holocaust memory in the Israeli/Palestinian question. By the time I arrived at Wiko, however, the ground had shifted: the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023 and Israel’s subsequent war of destruction in Gaza brought Holocaust and National Socialist analogies and references to the fore in ways that were both familiar and particularly intense. All of a sudden, my work had a new center of gravity. “Comparison controversies” erupted almost immediately after October 7: for example, when the Israeli ambassador to the UN donned a yellow star and denounced Hamas as Nazis, or when the journalist Masha Gessen compared Gaza to a Nazi ghetto. I had plenty of material to work with as I arrived in Berlin, but the examples kept coming throughout the year. There were controversies involving a mural in the American Midwest, a Christmas market in Germany, and then—perhaps closest to home—at the Buchenwald memorial site, where a former Wiko Fellow (and occasional guest during our year), Omri Boehm, was disinvited from speaking at a commemorative event for

allegedly “relativizing” the Holocaust by comparing it to the Nakba (a completely false claim in my assessment). I immediately wrote up the case for my book—a story of how the Israeli embassy pressured the memorial site to cancel the Israeli philosopher Boehm’s lecture because of his promotion of “universal values” (!). Through a contact I’d met at a Wiko lunch I was able to place a short version of my discussion in the *London Review of Books* blog. Spurred by a plethora of relevant controversies unfolding around me—and comfortably situated in my beautiful, spacious office in the gorgeous Villa Jaffé—I was able to write much more of my book than I ever would have realistically dreamed possible. I’m now trying to build on that momentum to finish this all-too timely book as soon as I’m able.

Although it probably slowed me down a bit, I also took advantage of being in Berlin to give talks around Europe—a dozen or so in six countries and in all sorts of venues, from universities and museums to cultural centers and foundations. These engagements sometimes distracted me from my book, but also gave me the opportunity to present my new work in front of different kinds of audiences. It goes without saying—at least in our cohort—that my Wiko Colloquium was both friendly and productive. The same was true for all my other presentations, though on a couple of occasions colleagues in Germany expressed anxiety in advance about possible disruptions because of the sensitive nature of discussions about the Holocaust and about Israel/Palestine in Germany. And not completely without reason: after a somewhat informal presentation in Berlin about “comparison controversies,” a prominent journalist for a prominent conservative newspaper tried to turn my lecture into its own controversy by pitting me against an audience member who also happened to be a former Wiko Fellow! If nothing else, it was a reminder that comparison controversies are not likely to disappear any time soon.

Our year at Wiko was not our first extended stay in Berlin—we’ve been going regularly for around 20 years to our beloved Schöneberg. But this year was an entirely new experience, nonetheless. Situated in a neighborhood we had honestly never visited—but came to appreciate for its calm and beauty—the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin now feels like another home away from home. I can’t wait to return for a visit.



DER RISS IN DER ZEIT  
VOLODYMYR RYZHKOVSKYI

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Volodymyr Ryzhkovskyi is an independent scholar currently based in Zagreb. He studied Russian, Soviet, and Eastern European history in Ukraine, Russia, and the US, where he earned a PhD in History from Georgetown University (2019). He's had several post-doctoral appointments as a research fellow at New York University Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia (2020–2021) and at the New Europe College in Bucharest (2022–2023). He is currently completing a book manuscript *Soviet Occidentalism: Medieval Studies and the Restructuring of Imperial Knowledge in Twentieth-Century Russia*, which explores the twentieth-century history of medieval studies in late imperial and Soviet Russia as a model demonstrating the crucial importance of Soviet appropriation of Western culture and knowledge in the post-revolutionary reconstitution and maintenance of the empire following 1917. In addition to pursuing the imperial and colonial theme in the history of Soviet modernity, Ryzhkovskyi has published articles and essays on the history of late imperial and Soviet education, the history of late Soviet intelligentsia, and Soviet philosophy. During his fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Ryzhkovskyi developed his new project on the intellectual history of universalism in 20th-century Ukraine based on the history of the journal *Vsesvit*. – Address: Travanjska 7, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: vryzhkovskyi@gmail.com.

The world did not stop while we were in Grunewald. That much was clear from the beginning. And yet, this was a beautiful year. The Wissenschaftskolleg provided tranquility, peace, and something even rarer: a friendly and humane community. For a few precious months, it was possible to pause the relentless race of regular life and to return to a slower,

deeper way of thinking. But even in our seclusion—surrounded by lakes and trees, deer, foxes, wild boars, and (more dangerously) excellent scholars—it was not easy to remain entirely calm. The world continued to intrude, and at times its weight was almost unbearable: the ongoing slaughter in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the gathering clouds of authoritarianism across Europe, and the astonishing return of Trumpism in the United States. What, in this atmosphere, could be the meaning of words like “international order” or “universal values”? They felt increasingly hollow—ghosts of former certainties.

It was in this tense and fragile moment that I started to work on a century-old Ukrainian journal named *Vsesvit*—which, fittingly, means “universe.” Founded in 1925, it celebrated its 100th anniversary during my Wiko year, and it proved to be an unexpected lens through which to examine the dilemmas of our time. Each phase of the history of *Vsesvit* offers a different model of engaging with the world, a different imagination of what “universalism” might be. Researching its early decades—between 1925 and 1934—was not simply a historical exercise; it became a kind of dialogue with the present, perhaps even a reckoning. As if the past, in its unresolved dreams and recurring disasters, was insisting on entering the present. Wiko, in its quiet way, became a perfect space to explore this temporal multiplicity.

There were, in fact, several temporalities shaping my year: the deep past of early 20th-century Ukraine, marked by revolutions, wars, and utopian hopes; the fractured and uncertain temporality of the Ukrainian present, in which I situate my research, and which I also view as a Ukrainian who has lived abroad since 2007, witnessing its recent history from a distance with a mixture of pain, doubt, and admiration. And then there was the slowed-down rhythm of Wiko itself, where the flow of time is structured not by deadlines but by conversation, by the rhythm of shared lunches, walks, and parties, by the generous exchanges that often happened unscheduled and unplanned.

The geography of the place reinforced this layered sense of time. Grunewald is a kind of paradox: part of Berlin, yet apart from Berlin; seemingly pristine yet saturated with traces of violence. Walking around Halensee or Grunewaldsee, one gets a sense of time folding. The trees, the villas, the stillness recall a vanished world of late 19th-century aristocracy and of bourgeois retreat, a space construed to enable an escape from the pressures of modernity. But the cracks in this illusion appear quickly. A modernist house surrounded by older splendid buildings suggests a villa that did not survive the war. The story of Walter Rathenau’s assassination, which we learned about during the first walking tour organized for the German course Fellows, continues to echo. The very buildings of

Wiko—Villa Jaffé, the Hauptgebäude, and our beloved Villa Walther—carry their own haunted pasts: of exile and dispossession, of wealth and ruin, of demolition and awkward renovation.

Villa Walther, in particular, seemed to crystallize the crooked temporalities of the 20th century. Its decor, its scars, its layers of eccentric ambition and damaged grandeur became a daily reminder that the past is never past. Wiko tries—valiantly and orderly—to exorcise these ghosts, to turn the buildings into a calm shelter for thought. But the past insists. Even Wiko's institutional emblem on my office computer desktop—an angel calmly and confidently leaning forward—began to take on Benjaminian features, less a reassuring guardian and more a horrified witness to history's wreckage.

It's hard to say what shaped my thoughts more this year: the walks around Grunewald or the long hours immersed in the world of interwar Ukrainian journals. Probably both. My research on *Vsesvit* became a study not only of past dreams but also of cracks in the present. The early issues of the journal, written in Ukrainian and yet committed to world revolution, imagined a future beyond nationalist limits and postwar suffering—a dream of global solidarity that now feels both heartbreakingly naïve and strangely resonant. The effort to recover and rebuild after World War I, the rise of fascism, the way Berlin itself was once a symbol of the coming future in the early days of Soviet Ukraine: these were topics in *Vsesvit* that returned, unsettlingly, in today's headlines.

Over lunch, another Fellow recommended a biography of Reinhart Koselleck. The title—*Der Riss in der Zeit*—stayed with me. It captured not only Koselleck's idea of ruptures in historical experience, but also my own experience of this year. Between the past and the present, between Ukraine and Berlin, between Wiko and the world, there was a visible and sometimes painful rift. But it was in this crack that reflection became possible.

My research was shaped and deepened not only by solitude but also by conversation. Daniel Schönplug's encouragement to write about *Vsesvit* and its universalism for Wiko's *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* helped me expand the project's scope and ambition. So did many discussions—around tables, during coffee breaks, after Colloquia. The presence of the VUIAS (Virtual Ukraine Institute for Advanced Study) scholars at Wiko made a decisive difference. Their projects, the talks and film screenings we co-organized, the warmth of a shared intellectual community—all helped me reconnect with Ukraine's present, not only as an object of study, but as a living, complex, and painful reality. I was especially moved by initiatives such as the Invisible University for Ukraine and the sense of the shared purpose they embody. But the overlaps of temporality were also instructive:

not all positions match, and they don't need to. It is in these overlaps, not in neat synchronization, that productive insights arise.

The conferences I attended during the year, and the talks I gave in Berlin and elsewhere, were essential in framing the larger argument of the project. But it was Wiko's unique rhythm—the deliberate interruption of the usual academic frenzy—that gave space for deeper connections. Time at Wiko is not only slowed down; it is choreographed toward human encounters. The Colloquium may be the official centerpiece of the week, but it is the common lunch that organizes the actual tempo of life. In my case, this tempo was also shaped by my family: my partner Ivana, our nine-year-old son Anton, and our baby Pavel, who took his first steps at Wiko and whose needs and routine became ours. This added a new layer to the rhythm of days—another temporal thread, grounding and joyful.

And so, this year has left me with a lesson: that even in fractured time, in moments of historical rupture, solidarity is possible. Wiko did not offer a solution to the world's crises, but it offered a space in which scholars could listen to one another across disciplines, across geographies, and across different kinds of time. This, perhaps, is the quiet gift of Wiko: to turn a crack in time into a space for thought—and, occasionally, for hope.



EXPANDING HORIZONS  
IMANI SANGA

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I came to Berlin a few weeks before the official commencement of the fellowship year in order to complete school registration for our children and to attend an intensive German

course at Wiko. This early arrival also proved fruitful for me to experientially explore the area. With the aid of Google maps, my son and I walked to various places near Villa Walther, located at Koenigsallee 20, 14193 Berlin, from the nearest supermarket, the post office, and Wiko's main office on Wallotstraße to the Berlin International School. It turned out that studying Google maps before physically going to a new place would become my weekly ritual as I slowly, but surely, explored and expanded my Berlin geographical horizons to different markets, shops, hospitals, and football sports grounds, where I took my son for football training or games around Berlin.

The main project I set out to accomplish during my year at Wiko—"Sonic Letters, Decolonial Acts: Musical Figures, Swahili Literature and Anti-imperialist Struggles in Tanzania"—has been with me for almost a decade now. From the start, I decided to work on it piecemeal: writing and publishing one journal article (which would later be a chapter) at a time before moving on to another segment. On the one hand, this decision helped me meet the professional demands for regular publications while, at the same time, gradually adding draft chapters to my book project. On the other hand, however, as the project progressed, the theoretical foundations of these segments were also evolving. Thus, when I began to bring together these isolated pieces into the book manuscript, I realized that I needed to rethink afresh the theoretical framework for organizing the work. In short, my experience of trying to accomplish this monograph has meant expanding my theoretical horizons beyond the narrow frameworks I used in the articles.

This expansion of horizons was made possible and encouraged by many people, conditions, and encounters at Wiko. The first set of the enabling conditions and catalysts with regard to my research was the library services. Nearly all the requests I made, be it a book, an article, a music score, or a song recording, would be available for me within a day or two, except for a very few rare materials. At Wiko, I was able to obtain even those Tanzanian Swahili literary texts that have been out of print for years and that I was unable to obtain while in Tanzania. The librarians were so kind to do extra research beyond my many requests. They found and suggested to me a number of other texts that I found to be very useful for my work. Concerning this generosity, I recall one day I made a request for two song recordings. The next day, I was made aware of a free online archive through which I was able to access and listen to more than a hundred other equally useful and relevant 1950s song recordings of Hugh Tracey from Eastern Africa. For this, I am so grateful to all the Wiko library staff: surely, my work will never be the same again.

Another catalyst for the expansion of my horizons was my encounter and interactions with fellow Fellows and staff. From the very first days, nearly everyone seemed genuinely eager to know the details of my research. My attempt to summarize my response in a few sentences would lead to a series of follow-up questions: how, why, etc. This would happen spontaneously, even when you stop to greet someone in a corridor or during Wiko gatherings. The eagerness to know more about each other's work was more vivid during lunches, to the extent that I had to re-tune my cultural norms of eating (you may call them table manners if you grew up eating at tables) that I grew up learning to religiously respect. The curious questions asked during these meals made me suspect that people came to these lunches to eat not only food, but also knowledge that was served with it by those they happened to sit with on any particular day. I confess, my Wiko experiences were acts of expanding my cultural horizons beyond the intellectual menus served at lectures and workshops.

There were also a series of weekly Colloquium presentations where Fellows took turns to present their work in progress and benefit from the discussions by other Fellows and Wiko staff. In addition to the generous comments and thought-provoking questions I received during my own presentation, I also learnt greatly from the presentations of other Fellows, which I found to be well prepared, lucidly articulated, and interestingly diverse in terms of disciplinary orientations. All of these presentations, from the one dealing with the structure of beehives and the one dealing with neuroimaging techniques to those dealing with computational modelling for cardiovascular grafts, the paleontological study of the evolution of birds, women's role in the 1968 global movement, democratic/undemocratic elections, and questions concerning antisemitism and the genocide in Palestine, sounded as if they were addressed to a non-specialist like me. Although most of the details of these presentations have begun to wane with the passage of time, some concepts, arguments, and catchy phrases, such as "supra-organism," "comparison controversy," "assembly line," "marine microbes," "architecture of hiding places," and "egalitarian bi-nationalism," as well as the visual artistic presentations of the female body (or bodies) and the dramatic performance of new music compositions, still resound in my mind with the tones and articulations characteristic of their presenters. All of these together keep my memory of Wiko intellectual life alive.

My memories of life at Wiko are also furnished by the wonderful office, an Apple computer with Sibelius software that made my music writing exercises easier, Wi-Fi connection, and easy-to-use printers and photocopying machines. A spacious apartment in

the Villa Walther with all the facilities I could only dream of enticed me to continue working beyond my usual office hours. For all these things, I thank Wiko for giving me the opportunity to expand my horizons through its generous fellowship.



FROM SCIENCE TO *WISSENSCHAFT*, OR:  
FORTUITOUS INQUIRY  
JUTTA SCHICKORE

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In his book on logic, published in 1795, the philosopher Johann Gottfried Kiesewetter distinguished among three kinds of scientific inquiry: confirmatory, exploratory, and fortuitous. In confirmatory research, he told his readers, the empirical investigation merely corroborates what one already knows. Exploratory research serves to investigate in depth

and detail what one already knows in broad terms. Fortuitous study proceeds without any concrete expectations about the possible outcome.

When I arrived at the Wiko in September, I expected my work to be mostly confirmatory, and perhaps somewhat exploratory also. I had a plan for a book on German philosophy of science in the decades around 1800. I had identified a set of little-studied sources representing philosophy of science in Germany during this period. I even had drafts of book chapters on topics like observation, experiment, hypotheses, and causation in the natural sciences and a pretty good idea of what the book would show and how the argument would be arranged. This is unusual for me; the arguments of my previous books and articles took shape while I was writing, and the main point only became clear to me as I was finishing each piece.

Upon arrival at the Wiko, I was quite confident that I could make good use of what I expected to be a period of free time to write (interspersed with trips to the swimming pool and an occasional concert or art exhibition). I would write a couple more chapter drafts during the first few months, following my plan, maybe exploring some of my sources in a little more depth. I would spend the remaining months revising, perhaps collecting some feedback from a couple of fellow Fellows along the way, and leave with a nicely polished book manuscript.

Or so I thought. Then Wiko life happened. Early on, we started a History and Philosophy of Science reading group, which usually met once a week all the way through June 2025. Fortuitously, several scientists decided to join the group, as did a scholar of ancient Near East languages and literature, a medievalist, and an art historian. Conversations ranged from Mesopotamian divination to mathematical modeling in biology and from the cultural significance of calling bird vocalizations “song” to the role of uncertainty in medical reasoning. Whatever the topic was, each and every meeting was hugely stimulating.

Two group members, Avi Winitzer and Kärin Nickelsen, realized that their respective invited guests—an Assyriologist and a historian of the humanities—would love to meet each other. A one-day workshop ensued. A few other scholars from the area joined us and our two guests for a day of conversations at Villa Jaffé about Scythes, Herodotus’ ethnographic reports and his 19th-century readers, cuneiform tablets, and Nelson Goodman’s philosophy of worldmaking.

Another immensely inspirational spinoff of the HPS conversations was two joint projects, both collaborations of historians, philosophers, and scientists. One project came into being as Cheryl Misak, Kärin, and I pricked our ears during Rachel Gregor’s

Colloquium talk, as Rachel described her work on the chemical repertoires of microorganisms. Rachel was working on a framework to classify the numerous and diverse molecules synthesized by marine microbes and thinking about criteria for doing so. A scientific classification problem! It immediately caught the attention of the philosophers and historians of science in the audience. The ensuing collaborative work on an article about chemical categories continued via Zoom and email after Rachel's term at the Wiko ended.

The other collaborative project, equally rewarding, took shape as Sara Magalhães and Mariana Gómez-Schiavon discovered that they were both pondering similar issues arising from their respective work in evolutionary and systems biology. Both were wondering how to make rigorous experiments and precise measurements of biological systems, which are inherently complex and stochastic. And since I had already bugged both of them independently with my questions about rigor and experimental control in biology, we decided to work out more systematically what it means to conduct a *well-controlled* experiment in biology. This work also continued after Mariana's stay at the Wiko had ended. Both projects led to papers, which, hopefully, will be published soon. For me, the two collaborative ventures were among the most valuable Wiko experiences.

These fortuitous encounters at the Wissenschaftskolleg made me realize that the topic of my work on German scholarship is not the history of philosophy of science. It is the history of philosophy of *Wissenschaft*—all of it, from experimental agriculture to pharmacology to criminal psychology and scientific bible studies. My work took on an entirely new dimension as I began to see the real breadth and scope of German philosophy around 1800 and as I set out to incorporate the novel insights into my project.

So yes, I did emerge from these intense ten months with a draft of a book. And I did swim, indoors, outdoors, in pools and lakes, in freezing cold and in sweltering heat. But it was also a year of full of unanticipated intellectual adventures (and music! the lovely Wiko choir!), facilitated and supported in every way by the wonderful and dedicated Wiko staff. As a result, my project took entirely new turns.

For the philosopher Kiesewetter, fortuitous investigations—unplanned, unforeseen, unexpected—were a vital ingredient of scientific inquiry. I happily concur.



TRACING DEMOCRATIC FRAGILITY,  
BUILDING TOWARDS RESILIENCE  
PETRA SCHLEITER

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I arrived in Berlin at a time when democracy itself felt unusually fragile. From across the Atlantic to the Channel and Berlin, civic norms were fraying, and familiar institutions seemed suddenly radically more vulnerable to corrosion from without and within. My project stepped very modestly into this moment, aiming to understand how laws that appear technical, even mundane—like mandatory voter ID—reshape who gets to speak in a democracy and who is silenced by design.

The Wissenschaftskolleg gave the project more than time. It gave rhythm to thinking. It gave colleagues who turned from strangers into perceptive critics, into friends who challenged assumptions and fortified the work with warmth and insight. There were countless conversations, over coffee and dinner, after Colloquia, and at lunch.

At the empirical heart of my year was a rare opportunity: a natural experiment unfolding in real time as the UK introduced voter ID requirements nationwide. With it came access to data—surveys, discontinuities, and ID trial data. More importantly, voters’ perceptions took shape, and in turn sharpened mine. Democracy, it turned out, can be reshaped quietly, one line of administrative procedure at a time.

Throughout the year, broader questions were gaining momentum and saliency—what kind of resilience democracy really needs and what kind of work it takes to build it. Data alone cannot build resilience. So, we built community.

In May, with the support of the generous and far-sighted Otto und Martha Fischbeck Stiftung, I convened a workshop titled “Democratic Institutional Resilience” at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Two days of honest, urgent exchange followed—across disciplines, across institutions, across science and practice. Scholars and practitioners wrestled with polarisation, trust, authoritarian creep, and civic expectations that outpace institutional delivery. We debated Citizens’ Assemblies and militant constitutionalism, discussed leadership pipelines and judicial insulation. We laughed, built maps of ideas, tested one another’s certainties, and developed new collaborations.

And from these dialogues, something larger began to take shape.

This year not only deepened a specific research project—it seeded a far-reaching one. The outlines of a new initiative began to emerge: a *Centre for Democratic Resilience*. Born from empirical inquiry, but nourished by collaboration and conviction, the Centre aspires to be a space where scholarship meets practice, where democratic fragility is studied and democratic strength is forged. It is the next step—a home for research, dialogue, and practical innovation that carries forward what this year began.

Outside the workshop, the conversations gathered momentum. I was humbled to share research results and plans at Princeton, which was, at the time, reeling from the blizzard of initiatives unleashed by the most recent US administration; at King’s College London, the Hertie School, the University of Stuttgart and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center—each offering a different window into democratic practice, fracture, and resilience.

I was lucky to speak, too, in rooms where practitioners and stakeholders gather: with ReCampaign, Falling Walls Summit, SwissRe, the Ditchley Foundation, Civitates, the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft, Königswinter Conference, the Staatskanzlei Sachsen-Anhalt, at the ULA’s Deutscher Führungskräfte tag and the GLS Bank; and I began a hugely enjoyable collaboration with KreaB Germany. Each offered a different strand to weave into the fabric of this project—a testament to the broad coalition of actors across

government, politics, civil society, and business who are united not only by expertise, but also by a shared interest in renewing and strengthening democracy on the ground where it matters most.

There are so many memorable moments of this year, so many wonderful conversations and Colloquia, but one particular event will stay with me. In spring, Chancellor Angela Merkel joined us at the Wiko for a private panel conversation. In her calm, considered, empathetic, and differentiated way, she reminded us what inspiring democratic leadership can look and sound like. She listened deeply, spoke compellingly, and left the evening heavier with meaning.

From this extraordinary year, a new chapter begins. The Centre for Democratic Resilience is emerging—not just as an idea, but as a home. A home for impactful research that intersects with practice, for policy and public engagement, and for the many hands needed to steady democracy's foundations. What has started here will grow. With hope. With evidence.

To the Wissenschaftskolleg, thank you for a year of extraordinary generosity—for the time, the space, and the intellectual abundance. To my Co-Fellows, thank you for sharing your extraordinary joy in inquiry and your curiosity. And to the Wiko staff—whose care made everything possible, often invisibly—thank you for your warmth, your thoughtfulness, and your unwavering support. Rarely have I been made to feel so welcome. This was more than a sabbatical; it was a season of renewal, made rich by community. I leave grateful and inspired.



NARRATIVE URGENCIES  
SHERENE SEIKALY

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Sherene Seikaly is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her book *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford University Press, 2016) explores economy, territory, the home, and the body. Her forthcoming book, *From Baltimore to Beirut: On the Question of Palestine*, tells a global history of capital, slavery, and dispossession. She is the Editor of *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, co-editor of the Stanford Studies Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures Series, and co-editor of *Jadaliyya*. – Address: Department of History, University of California at Santa Barbara, HSSB 4223, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9410, USA. E-mail: sseikaly@ucsb.edu.

My time at the Wissenschaftskolleg allowed me to bring my book, *From Baltimore to Beirut: On the Question of Palestine*, to near completion. This book traces the trajectory of Naim Cotran, a Palestinian man who was at once a colonial officer and a colonized subject, a slaveholder and a refugee. Originally inspired by family papers I found six months after the publication in 2016 of my first book, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine*, this book moves through my great-grandfather's experiences in Palestine, Baltimore, Sudan, and Lebanon. Following Naim as an ancestral teacher, I explore his trajectory as a medical doctor and his experiences of mobility and immobility, placing the question of Palestine in a global history of race, capital, slavery, and dispossession. Naim's papers eerily brought to life the accountants and colonial officials, the banks and business firms, and the experience of class and dispossession that I had documented in *Men of Capital*.

Naim Cotran (ca. 1877–1961) was born in the northern coastal city of Acre, Palestine, at that time under Ottoman rule. He began his education at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. In 1899, he traveled to Baltimore to continue his medical training at the University of Maryland. Naim returned to Palestine to become one of Acre’s first registered medical doctors. During World War I, he served as a medical official in Omdurman, Sudan with the Anglo-Egyptian Army. On his return to Palestine, then under British rule (1918–1948), his in-laws gifted Naim an enslaved woman named Sa’da. Naim and his young wife Aniseh manumitted Sa’da; she lived and died with them as their domestic servant. Eight miles northeast of Acre, in a village called Nahr al-Nabi’a, Naim owned about twenty hectares of land. During the war of 1948, his children and grandchildren took refuge in Lebanon and Egypt. Naim and Aniseh stayed on the land, in an attempt to hold on to Palestine’s shrinking remains. They lost that battle in 1951 and became refugees who lived the last years of their lives in Lebanon.

Naim would do more than resuscitate the people and structures I had studied. He imparted lessons on the inextricability of subjectivity and historical narration. He was the very “man of capital” that I had spent a decade researching. He deepened my thinking about these elite men. For example, his court records and correspondence reveal how Palestinian families sorted out shifting meanings of law, debt, and property, quite apart from Zionist settlement and British colonialism. Naim showed me new ways to understand state formation. His petitions and correspondence reveal how an infant Israel used the mundane mechanisms of bureaucracy to shape state power. Naim was, if nothing else, a committed bureaucrat. However, his linguistic and procedural fluency in Ottoman and British bureaucracy would not guard him against the formidable structure of Israeli laws and regulations that rendered him immobile and ultimately “absent.”

Naim’s narrations, as well as his silences, invited me to move beyond the geographic and conceptual borders to which my first book was confined. He repeatedly invoked his status as a wealthy, educated, medical doctor to try to guard himself against dispossession. This vulnerable but determined figure was the same man who, four decades earlier, had posed for a photograph in Omdurman, sitting cross-legged and authoritative, donning the signature pith helmet of the British imperial official. Two Sudanese men stood dutifully at his side. That young man with his elaborate moustache and his colonial affect could not have imagined that the British officials he emulated would be the source of his own dispossession. It was not simply the British or later the Israelis who held tightly to a civilizational logic. Naim too believed himself to be culturally and racially superior. That

logic would eventually shatter in the wake of dispossession. But how did it initially take shape and what can it teach us?

Naim's status as a member of the Palestinian elite was the source of a bureaucratic letter-writing practice that allowed me to discover and recover his history. But what did these family papers and in turn my recovery of the history they narrated erase? After all, the silences of the papers Naim and later Lamia preserved are bottomless. Sa'da does not appear in the records; she has no voice.

Aniseh's voice is faint, filtered through Naim's mediation. Naim's life in Baltimore and Sudan are nowhere to be found. These silences are an irresistible invitation to explore an international life that reveals otherwise foreclosed spaces, times, and historical possibilities. Following this familial trajectory across Baltimore, Omdurman, Acre, and Beirut, I also made new significant progress on my third book project: *Kantousha and the Pox* draws on clinical notes, colonial records, municipal papers, and United Nations reports. Inspired by a smallpox outbreak in 1903 in Omdurman, Sudan, it narrates histories of outbreaks from the perspective of patient zero. Because a sixteen-year-old Sudanese girl named Kantousha got smallpox, parts of her life and world became visible: a freshwater well, the red- and white-lined bell tents of a smallpox camp, a lemonade factory, and creeks and rivers marking one neighborhood from the next. *Kantousha and the Pox* seeks to understand, to travel, and to commit to memory the spaces, places, and stories that outbreaks of smallpox, malaria, and typhoid make visible and obfuscate.

The Fellow cohort at the Wiko across disciplinary and intellectual formations inspired me to explore, transcend, and challenge the divides between storytelling, history writing, and narration. In Colloquia, writing groups, panels, and roundtables, we collectively explored history writing as a place to exit predetermined outcomes, the relationship between subjectivity and historiography, memory as a mode of survival, and how formations of concepts are products of imaginative labor.

I am a product and a scholar of the Nakba, the ongoing condition of the denial of Palestinian peoplehood and political rights. In 2024/2025, to be nestled in a forest surrounded by a lake was a gift for nine months. Grunewald was a refuge, a place that offered respite and community in a global time of emergency and genocide. The Wissenschaftskolleg was a space to learn, to think, and to create. The nine months here taught me to reside in the present, to practice vigilance, and to bridge the multiple realities that we are touched by.

Today, the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip reside between the loss of breath and the imperative to narrate. They teach us to listen to ordinary people narrating extraordinary

things. Telling our stories is a way of living despite catastrophe, of perceiving the world and reckoning with it. Storytelling is an act that intervenes in the world. Through storytelling, we can work to exceed exclusion from the human, to hold tightly to our visions of the possible, and to shape and reshape life—even amidst the certainty of death. In these ruins of general catastrophe, we can find arenas of shared possibility across difference.



PERIPHERAL GALLERIES AND  
NEW PERSPECTIVES  
MICHAEL L. SMITH

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I first visited Berlin as a PhD student and then as a postdoc, while collaborating with the Landgraf Lab at Freie Universität Berlin. Coming back to Berlin with young children was a different experience, but still enjoyable, albeit from a completely different perspective. As a postdoc, I never noticed Berlin's network of playgrounds, full of sand, wood, and a water pump during the summer months. Even with children, I still managed to get a bike ticket (fortunately without a kiddo on the back), and thoroughly sampled the *döner* landscape (despite the name, "Oriental Snack" by the Halensee station is quite good).

I owe a debt of gratitude to Kirsten Traynor, who first invited me to a Thursday evening dinner at the Wiko, which convinced me that I had to apply in the future. Jana Petri

was incredibly welcoming, and we loved visiting her neighborhood yard sale. Many of those toys were supposed to remain in Germany, but seem to have migrated back to Panama/Auburn (including some *zu verschenken* glassware). I can only assume that Giovanni Galizia did not fully mention my predisposition for mischief. Fortunately, I've done my best to redirect those urges towards more productive endeavors (watch out, future inhabitants of the Villa Walther, some rogue crocuses have been planted along the north side of the building).

Some of the more mundane aspects of life in Berlin are those I remember most fondly. Identifying the house by the blue bridge ("El Puente Azul"), looking for swans in the ponds, and making spätzle. Traveling anywhere requires the M19 bus, and the coveted first-row seats on the upper level of a double-decker are a top-notch view. Once I realized that the bus and bikes traveled at about the same speed, a favorite activity was to have spouse and kiddos on the bus, while I would race the bus on my bike alongside, waving as we passed each other. We convinced our 3-year-old that the bus would stop only if you yelled "estamos aquí, estamos aquí" (we're here, we're here). Breaking up trips between multiple forms of transportation makes any travel a special event.

The staff at the Wiko are wonderful, and everyone helped us with so much paperwork that would have been insurmountable otherwise. The kitchen staff, who kindly would provide cookies to the kids whenever we came by for a "Miko Café" (we needed to work on his table skills). Dunia, who has an incredible knowledge of where to find random things in Berlin (some not so random, like chipotle peppers, or passable tortillas). The childcare staff for Thursday nights was indispensable, making it possible to fully enjoy the wonderful meals and company.

An unexpected perk of having young children is the interactions with others in a similar boat. Trick-or-treating through the Villa Walther revealed certain differences between children. Lucas, for example, was careful to note his peanut allergy to each person handing out candy. Miko, half-wearing his crocodile outfit, carefully unwrapped each piece of candy he received, immediately eating it while handing empty wrappers to the next member of the National Academy.

Of all the gear we purchased while in Berlin (which wasn't much), the bikes, and seats for the kiddos, were by far the most useful. Having a bike immediately increased our transportation radius and made my spouse's commute to Humboldt-Universität that much faster (and provided a nice morning ritual). Having a kid on the back of the bike does also carry its risks. For example, one afternoon we were biking down the Ku'damm,

and my passenger behind was oddly quiet. He wasn't sleeping, so I asked what he was up to and, as I reached back, realized he had opened my fanny pack. He was rummaging through my wallet. Next thing I heard was a "flap" on the ground as he threw its contents out into the road. Fortunately, I was able to recover most of it.

Another unexpected perk of this time abroad was that my mother was able to stay with us for a couple weeks to help with childcare and enjoy the city during the warmer part of the year. My spouse and I categorize visitors along two axes: on one axis is helpfulness; the other is their propensity for fun. Fortunately, my mother ranks high on both axes and has a knack for finding random events about town. Many colleagues asked my spouse, "Are you ok?" upon hearing that my mother was visiting for an extended time, but she seemed to be ok with the arrangement—or was good at hiding her true feelings. I mention these personal aspects of our time in Berlin partially as a way to remember them, but also to acknowledge that spending time at a new institution is not just an academic transition, but also a personal one.

During orientation at the Wiko, I was pleased to hear from Barbara, the Rector, that we were free to pursue whatever topic of research we found interesting. This type of freedom is rarely afforded in academia, and following one's curiosity is critically important for developing new lines of inquiry. The research I had originally applied to do at the Wiko had already become a significant focus of my lab, and so, faced with a period of open-ended research, I decided to delve into something new.

When honey bees build their nests inside an empty cavity, they attach their combs to the interior walls. However, they do not attach the combs continuously, creating gaps between the comb and wall. These gaps are called "peripheral galleries" and they were first described by my PhD advisor, Tom Seeley, during his PhD. Since the original study, published almost 50 years ago, peripheral galleries have been a largely unexplored aspect of honey bee nest architecture.

Fortunately, I already had a dataset that we had collected in the field, which would serve as an important starting point for exploring peripheral galleries in semi-natural nests. In this dataset, we allowed honey bee colonies to build their nests freely within an empty nest box. We did, however, provide wooden structures upon which the bees could build their comb, so that we could repeatedly image the nests without destroying them (this makes them "semi-natural," as the wooden frames also provide space for bees to move from one comb to another, but we do have other data streams in the lab that we can use to fill these gaps).

The first step in my investigation was observational—simply looking at individual combs and entire nests to see where the bees did and did not attach their combs to the wooden supports. “You can observe a lot by just watching” is excellent research advice from Yogi Berra, which I try to impart in my lab. This work also involved some supplementary software for quantifying the attachments and classifying the contents of the comb/nest (this software was previously developed in the lab, albeit for other purposes/projects). This period of observation was also important for developing multiple alternative hypotheses, corresponding critical predictions, and eventual experimental tests that could be conducted once back in the lab.

Talking with other researchers at the Wiko, especially historians, made me realize how fortunate it is to be an experimental biologist working with living organisms. While we cannot talk directly to our research subjects, if you design the right experiment, you can ask them questions indirectly, and repeatedly. For example, if I modify the space upon which the bees can build their comb, how will this alter their attachment points? The experimental work that was inspired by my time at the Wiko is currently underway, and will continue through the 2025 field season (and potentially multiple field seasons).

My previous work in honey bee architecture has always focused on positive space, what the bees build, never on the negative space, or what they leave open. This change in perspective might seem minor, but it’s a bit like revisiting a city with young children—it changes what you notice. These new passageways, however, would not have been possible without the phenomenal support of the Wiko. I am immensely grateful for the time they provide for researchers to investigate ideas that would otherwise be skipped over.



THE MISERIES OF WAR  
RONI TAHARLEV

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Roni Taharlev is an Israeli artist with a primary focus on the human figure. Born in Kibbutz Yagur (1964), having raised four children in a small village up in the hills of Western Galilee, she now lives and works in the mixed town, with both Jews and Israeli Palestinians, of Jaffa near Tel Aviv. Specializing in painting human figures from observation, Taharlev wishes to observe women's bodies from a 21st-century female viewpoint. She shows women and gender-fluid bodies without the cultural constraints that Western civilization places on them. Taharlev's intimate relationship with the traditions of Western art leads her to place models in classically derived poses while subtly altering the bodily effects of these poses. Taharlev has exhibited in various museums in Israel and around the world, including the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, The Israel Museum, the National Portrait Gallery in London, and an exhibition at the galleries nationales du Grand Palais in Paris. Recent exhibitions have been concerned with how bodies are gendered and with the social and cultural expectations from supposedly gendered bodies, reflecting relations of power in 21st-century contexts. In 2022, she was awarded the Haim Shiff Prize for Figurative-Realist Art, Israel's most significant award in this field, which also led to a year-long solo exhibition in 2023–2024, disrupted by the war of the 7th of October. Taharlev teaches painting and drawing at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem. – Address: 19 Yehuda Meragusa Street, Jaffa, 6813615, Israel. E-mail: rtaharlev@gmail.com.

At Wiko, I continued a series of paintings that began on October 7, exploring the fear embedded in the feminine body. It was an extraordinary privilege and an immense inspiration, one that even now, two months after returning to Israel, continues to shape my work.

At Wiko, I was developing an exhibition conceived as a total space embodying the fear in the feminine body. The walls are dedicated to the idea of the female body as a war zone. The total space is completed with a ceiling, one that transforms the space into a contemporary “Miseries of War” painting in the tradition of Goya and of Picasso’s *Guernica*: a vision of the horrors of war as seen through the female gaze, or more precisely, through the feminine body: the passive side of war.

This ceiling is inspired by Giambattista Tiepolo’s depictions of biblical massacres, especially *The Scourge of the Serpents* (*Castigo dei Serpenti*, ca. 1730). The influence of Wiko, with its quiet, light-filled atmosphere and its profound respect for creativity, gave me both the mental space and the courage to envision this radical expansion of my project.

The privilege of being at Wiko was extraordinary. The beauty of the place, the indefatigable support of the team, staff, and Fellows, and the faith in the significance of creative and spiritual work allowed me to dedicate myself fully to painting. This immersion opened new avenues of thought—and not only thought. Subtle changes in perception and palette occurred: the green light filtering through the Grunewald trees seeped into my paintings, leaving a lasting mark. These seemingly minor shifts led to profound changes in my work and enabled me to complete my *Swing* series, which had been my initial goal.

But 2025 was also a painful year, following a previous year of difficulty and loss. The public and the personal intertwined. Even I, usually secluded in my studio reflecting on femininity and women, found myself drawn into the public sphere, driven to paint the female body as a site of war as an immediate response to the horrific acts committed against women on October 7, 2023 and the suffering of women on both sides in the war that followed. I felt conflicted: painting, for me, is intimate, personal, and ambiguous, not a public statement. And yet the confusion after October 7 blurred the boundaries between private and public, between the small-scale and the monumental.

At Wiko, these tensions were palpable. I had been at Wiko before, in 2020, as the spouse of my partner Dror Wahrman. That year—cut short by COVID—was full of conversations about climate, Borges, Freud, Assyrian gods, legal models, mosses, bees, and miniature gems. Detached from the world, it embodied the full glory of the ivory tower.

This year was different. War and politics invaded the Colloquia, just as they invaded my studio. Gaza and Israel, Ukraine, Iran, blood libels, expulsions, genocides—these were no longer abstractions but urgent presences. I am not surprised, but wistful, since there was something to be marveled at, something pure and magnificent, in the academic peacock tail that soared above any immediately useful imperative and sported the

privilege to shine with no apparent reason. Or as I once heard a woman utter in a vaporetto in Venice while looking at the labyrinth of canals: “Venice is not practical.” And for me Wiko was Venice, and painting is Venice; and Venice is not practical. But when so many young girls are raped and killed, and so many children and people are dying of hunger or bombs, and the whole world is on the brink and stunned into silence, it is not the right moment for Venice.

And yet, despite the heaviness of this year, the experience was invaluable. The ceiling project—born at Wiko and shaped by the spirit of Tiepolo—is the outcome of this tension: between ivory tower and war zone, between Venice and catastrophe, between the private intimacy of painting and the public weight of history. For this, and for the extraordinary privilege of time, reflection, and support, I am deeply grateful.



PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION  
JOANNA TOKARSKA-BAKIR

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Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* returned to Berlin on 8 May 2025, on the eightieth anniversary of the Third Reich's capitulation. Not for long. It was on display at the Bode Museum until 13 July. Right now, it's probably packing for its return trip to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

How did this watercolour by the Swiss-German artist, purchased in 1921 by Walter Benjamin, end up in the Middle East? It was taken there by Gershom Scholem, to whom Benjamin had left it in his will, entrusting it in the interim to Georges Bataille and Theodor Adorno.

“Leaving something in one's will” suggests a peaceful departure after a hardworking life. But the forty-eight-year-old Benjamin's death in 1940 was anything but peaceful; he

died by suicide in 1940. As Scholem wrote, the writer took his own life “while fleeing from the Germans.”<sup>1</sup> This happened at a border crossing in Spain. A local civil servant in Port Bou threatened the group with which Benjamin was crossing the Pyrenees that he would have them deported back to France, where the Gestapo was waiting for them all.

Hannah Arendt reconstructs the circumstances of their apprehension thus: “One day earlier Benjamin would have got through without any trouble; one day later the people from Marseilles would have known that for the time being it was impossible to pass through Spain. Only on that particular day was the catastrophe possible.”<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin always had Klee’s watercolour with him, but when he fled Paris, he left it with someone for safekeeping. According to Scholem’s testimony, the writer felt a “mystical identification” with the *Angelus Novus* figure portrayed on Klee’s picture, which resembles a bird with its wings spread or a lion’s mouth standing on two chicken-like claws. His exegesis of it is to be found in Thesis IX of his *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen*:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of 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; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Gershom Scholem, “Walter Benjamin,” trans. Jan Balbierz, *Literatura Na Świecie* 284, no. 3 (1995): 117.

2 Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin 1892–1940,” in *Men in Dark Times* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), 171.

3 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History: IX,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1969), 257–258.

Eighty-five years on, Paul Klee's work is in Berlin again.



Berlin, corner of Seesener and Paulsborner Straße, May 2025. Photo JTB

The exhibition in the Bode Museum occupies two rooms. In the first, opposite the entrance, is Klee's watercolour, surrounded by photographs of Benjamin and original writings typed or handwritten by him. The alarm-secured picture confronts the viewer with the evolution of Benjamin's concept of the aura:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 220.

These “changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership” are addressed in the design of the second room, which is entitled *The Berlin Angels*.

These Berlin angels—those in the Wim Wenders film *Himmel über Berlin / Wings of Desire* (1987); Giambattista Bregno’s *Kneeling Angel*, a Baroque sculpture mutilated by Allied bombardments and then spirited away to Moscow as a war trophy; and the angel inspiring Matthew the Evangelist in the photograph of a Caravaggio painting destroyed by fire—are thus associated with Benjamin’s *Engel der Geschichte*.<sup>5</sup> But rightly so? In his historiographic thesis no. VI, Benjamin wrote that “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy, if he wins.”<sup>6</sup> Who controls the angelic narrative in the Bode Museum? Friend, or foe? Its unsettling context is further extended by the Albert Dürer copperplate etching *Melencolia I*, which features yet another angel.

In the second room, a photograph of the bombarded Berlin showing a group of children playing<sup>7</sup> against the backdrop of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church is displayed in the same position as the *Angelus Novus* in the first room. What does this association suggest, and how binding is it? It is as though the Germans, from whom Benjamin was fleeing, were answering him: We didn’t want your death; we are victims. Our bombarded cities were populated by children and lofty, art-loving souls. We were wronged. A black melancholy is all that is left us.

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5 This selection is accompanied by the commentary: “The Berlin Angels. From 1943 until the end of the war, Berlin was bombed with increasing intensity by the Allies. The German capitulation of May 8, 1945 did not put an end to the destruction: in mid-May, two fires destroyed the control tower of the Friedrichshain anti-aircraft bunker which housed thousands of works of art from the Berlin museums. Almost 440 paintings from the Gemäldegalerie were lost in flames, including Caravaggio’s *Saint Matthew and the Angel*. Hundreds of sculptures were also destroyed—such as Giambattista Bregno’s *Kneeling Angel*. These lost or damaged angels are reminiscent of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* and Walter Benjamin’s *Thesis IX*, which seems like a dark prophecy. In 1987, Wim Wenders took up the angel motif in one of his most famous films staged in Berlin, *Wings of Desire*.”

6 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History: VI,” in *Illuminations*, 255.

7 The explanation on the board alongside the photograph reads: “This photograph, taken shortly after the end of the war, shows both the extent of the destruction in the German capital and life as it begins to resume, as shown by the three boys playing in the ruins. In 1953, Berliners fought to ensure that the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was not completely demolished and rebuilt, but remained a ruin as an eternal reminder of the war, complemented by a new building. Wim Wenders’ film *Wings of Desire* begins at the top of the tower of this destroyed church.”

So much for World War II: when, eighty years after the war, this relic of Walter Benjamin returns to the capital of the country that started it, a curator in a German museum, rather than staging a commemoration, has composed a paean to narrative fetishism. When does a story become a fetish? When it attempts to evade confrontation with a traumatic truth, offering comfort where there is none.<sup>8</sup> *Der Engel der Geschichte* as fetish? Scary thought.

As Gershom Scholem wrote, “However sublime it might be to forget, we cannot. Only by remembering a past that we can never completely master can we generate new hope in the resumption of communication between Germans and Jews, and in the reconciliation of those who have been separated.”<sup>9</sup>

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8 “Fetishism,” Eric Santner writes, “is a strategy whereby one seeks voluntaristically to reinstate the pleasure principle without addressing and working through those other tasks which, as Freud insists, ‘must be accomplished before the dominance of the pleasure principle can ever begin’. Far from providing a symbolic space for the recuperation of anxiety, narrative fetishism directly or indirectly offers reassurance that there was no need for anxiety in the first place.” Eric Santner, “History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution,”* ed. Saul Friedlander (Harvard University Press, 1992), 147.

9 Gershom Scholem, “Jews and Germans,” *Commentary* (Nov. 1966): 31–38.



THE WIKO CHAPTER: LESSONS LEARNED  
THE HARD WAY  
ASONZEH UKAH

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I started my fellowship two weeks after the start date because of university administrative responsibilities. This was a major setback for my self-set targets for the fellowship year. I had intended to draft a six-chapter manuscript on “African Pentecostalism,” so I commenced work on that. After two draft chapters, however, I had to start drafting a keynote lecture on “Decolonising of African Secularities” to be delivered at a Point Sud workshop in December at STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, South Africa). This took a disproportionate amount of time, partly because of a personal stance on “decolonisation” theory and its implicit activism, and partly because the field of decolonisation has grown to become a forest of competing and contradictory ideas. The idea of decolonisation requires decolonising.

By January 2025, it was clear that I would not meet my deadline. This time, competing demands on my time and presence at workshops and seminars at a few universities were

the culprits. The environment at Wiko, however, helped me develop certain concepts that I had relegated to the background of my research. Especially the workshop on “Sociology and Critique,” held in March, helped me articulate ideas I have been wrestling with for several years. For some time, I had abandoned sociological theory owing to its male, Western-dominated figures and ancestors. I had the opportunity to put in writing my critique of some of these theories and their principal proponents.

The main research project that brought me to Wiko was on infrasacred formations, the entanglement of sacred infrastructure and technological installations across many African cities, especially emerging “Miracle Cities.” The environment at Wiko slowly but steadily nudged me in a different direction to explore something innovative and still unfolding: the changing regulatory landscapes for religious organisations across a swath of African countries south of the Sahara Desert. Cultivating this new research idea and project was by far the singular achievement of my fellowship year. My Colloquium was based on this theme. Writing up a nearly 35-page draft paper on it took its toll on my time and energy. In this, the Wiko library performed much of the heavy lifting, scouring for legal frameworks from a range of African countries as these were being released by governments and state agencies. My Colloquium presentation and the theme of “The Regulatory State and Africa’s Vibrant Religious Marketplace” have become an ongoing multi-year project. The academic resources accumulated during the fellowship will go a long way in sustaining the exercise for the foreseeable future.

I had very inspiring encounters with fellow Fellows whose research provided a challenging, even inspiring, perspective for me to consider. The sociology of Chinese religions, European medieval Christian history and practices, moral philosophical entanglement, and the sociology of modern mass production were themes that excited my imagination, creativity, and scholarly curiosity. By interacting with many scholars from various disciplines involved in some special interest products, I am developing new, still-gestating research ideas.

A sizeable portion of my fellowship year was devoted to attending conferences and workshops and giving presentations during these events. My involvement “compelled” me to draft some papers that would soon be revised for publication. In addition to the Point Sud workshop at STIAS mentioned earlier, I gave a presentation at the University of Bayreuth and at the European Conference on African Studies in Prague, where I co-convoked a double panel on “African Lifeworlds: Secularities, Immanence and Governance.” In the last week of my stay in Berlin, I conducted a two-part workshop at the

Theology Faculty of the Humboldt-Universität (Graduate Centre for Theology and Recent Research on the History of Christianity); the first part was titled “Miracle Cities—Infrasacred Formations: The Moral Economies of Sacred Space in Africa,” while the second part was titled “Rites vs Rights: Emerging Governance Dynamics and the Management of Religious Excess and Waste in Africa.” Both parts of the workshop were intimately connected with, and emerged from, my research at Wiko.

Despite not meeting my original target, these varied activities assure me that I had a productive, enriching, challenging, and exciting fellowship year at Wiko.



A TRANSDISCIPLINARY REWILDING OF  
THOUGHT, OR NEW ADVENTURES IN AI  
NIKOLAUS WACHSMANN

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The academic year 2024/2025 was—among other things—a year of AI. ChatGPT agrees:

*Artificial intelligence reached a critical inflection point in public and academic discourse. The year saw a marked rise in public concern, with surveys showing a significant increase in anxiety about AI's societal impact. At the same time, academic and intellectual communities engaged more deeply with the ethical, epistemological, and regulatory implications of generative AI.*

Ours was one such community. While our engagement may not have been deep, AI was a hot topic in Wiko discourse, academic and otherwise. We marveled when told of its ability to transcribe reams of historic handwritten court records. We were unnerved when it guessed a Fellow's unpublished thoughts. We laughed when it composed a bawdy sea shanty at the click of a button (don't ask). And we were baffled when it hallucinated that Nabokov wrote plenty of poems in German—and even listed the imaginary titles.

During yet another lunchtime conversation about AI, the Rector issued a challenge: would anyone let the machine write their Yearbook entry?

Challenge accepted.

My plan was quickly hatched: just four simple steps.

Step 1. Ask ChatGPT to write my academic biography (see above: broadly accurate, mildly embarrassing).

Step 2. Ask ChatGPT for the patterns of all previous Yearbook entries:

*Based on a broad reading of Wissenschaftskolleg Yearbook entries since 1981/1982, here's a typology of the main archetypes—a taxonomy of fellowly self-expression, if you will:*

*1. The Earnest Intellectual*

*A sober account of scholarly progress, often peppered with phrases like "I was able to complete..." or "my monograph advanced significantly." Footnotes optional, gravitas guaranteed.*

*2. The Lyrical Enthusiast*

*Think "Grunewald in spring" meets "intellectual serendipity." These entries drift into poetic reverie, celebrating Wiko as "a rare oasis" or "a dreamscape of ideas and conversation."*

*3. The Wry Observer*

*Dry humor and gentle irony abound. Expect reflections on the coffee machine, the peculiar rhythms of lunch, or the existential weight of Tuesday Colloquia. Often begins with "I came to Wiko with a plan..."*

*4. The Grateful Convert*

*Initially skeptical, now smitten. These entries chart a personal*

transformation—“I didn't expect to...”—culminating in heartfelt thanks to staff, Fellows, and the elusive spirit of Wiko.

#### 5. The Meta-Philosopher

Less about the project, more about the nature of thinking itself. These entries muse on time, solitude, and the architecture of knowledge, often invoking Kant, Arendt, or the ghost of Weber.

### Step 3. Ask ChatGPT for alternative approaches:

Here are five fresh and original ideas for a Wissenschaftskolleg Yearbook entry, designed to sidestep the usual archetypes while still resonating with the institution's spirit:

#### 1. The Failed Project

A candid, lightly ironic reflection on what didn't get done—the book unwritten, the theory unraveled, the archive unopened—and what that taught you. A celebration of intellectual detours.

#### 2. Wiko as Ecosystem

A naturalist's field notes on the Kolleg: species of Fellows, migratory patterns to the lunch table, symbiotic relationships in seminars. Think Darwin meets Berlin.

#### 3. The Ghosts of Grunewald

A fictionalized diary from the perspective of a long-dead scholar haunting the villa, observing the current cohort with bemused admiration. A playful meditation on intellectual lineage.

#### 4. The Anti-Entry

A minimalist piece: one sentence, or even one word (“Unfinished”? “Transformed”?). Let the silence speak volumes—and provoke curiosity.

#### 5. Wiko in Objects

A list of five objects—the espresso cup, the seminar room clock, the coat rack—each with a short vignette capturing a moment, a mood, a revelation. Material culture meets memoir.

Step 4 was to ask ChatGPT to follow its own lead and write one of these entries. Simple. But no good. An “ironic” fail? Fellows as birds? A pompous ghost in the attic? Lazy minimalism? A coat rack with meaning? This is the best ChatGPT could come up with?

Clearly, some more human input was needed. And after many ticks of the “room clock,” I had an idea: what if Wiko’s dream of sparking synergies was taken to its illogical extreme—and all our individual projects were presented by AI as one?

What do you think, ChatGPT?

*I think that's a brilliant and delightfully subversive idea—turning the Kolleg's ethos of "serendipitous discovery" and "multidisciplinary dialogue" into a kind of intellectual Gesamtkunstwerk. The beauty of this concept is that it playfully exaggerates the institution's own aspirations: what if the informal lunch conversations and seminar cross-pollinations didn't just inspire, but merged into one sprawling, genre-defying, discipline-erasing mega-project? Would you like help drafting this entry—perhaps in the style of a faux research abstract?*

Step 5. Yes, please turn all 2024/2025 projects into a single proposal:

*WIKO: World-Inquiring Knowledge Organism—A Transdisciplinary Rewilding of Thought*

*Abstract:*

*This project proposes the radical integration of all 2024/2025 Wissenschaftskolleg research endeavors into a single, unified intellectual enterprise. WIKO seeks to construct a new epistemological framework for understanding the entangled histories of knowledge, nature, and power.*

*Objectives:*

*– To deploy quantum sensors not only in physical systems but metaphorically, as tools for detecting epistemic shifts across disciplines.*

- *To rewild both microbial ecosystems and academic methodologies, challenging sterile disciplinary boundaries.*
- *To trace global production chains alongside medieval Arabic and Latin scientific texts, revealing unexpected continuities in the circulation of ideas and goods.*
- *To explore literary and artistic forms as vehicles for resistance and renewal, particularly in the context of postcolonial uprisings.*
- *To interrogate the philosophy of science and biological individuality as co-constitutive elements of a broader intellectual ecology.*

*Methodology:*

*Weekly Colloquia will be replaced by “synergy salons,” in which Fellows must present each other’s work in unfamiliar formats (e.g. a historian explains quantum entanglement via medieval allegory; a biologist stages a revolt in verse). All outputs will be co-authored, anonymously, and published under the collective pseudonym WIKO.*

*Expected Outcomes:*

*A single, sprawling publication—part manifesto, part encyclopedia, part speculative fiction—that redefines the boundaries of scholarly production. Secondary outcomes include confusion, inspiration, and possibly a new field of study.*

*Budget:*

*One espresso machine, unlimited chalk, and a modest stipend for emotional resilience.*

So here it is: an AI yearbook entry. Pure nonsense? Perhaps. Or perhaps not. What began as a joke may reveal a deeper truth. Could this proposal be the most unlikely of all Wiko discoveries? History is full of seemingly ridiculous ideas that turned out revolutionary. Can we afford to ignore a project that would change everything? Or should the entire 2024/2025 cohort and partners be recalled to Berlin immediately for the first synergy salon? It’s your call, dear Rector.



CONTEMPLATING DEAD CIVILIZATIONS  
AND THE SOUNDS OF LIFE  
ABRAHAM WINITZER

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Abraham Winitzer teaches ancient Near Eastern Studies at Notre Dame in the US, with an emphasis on Assyriology and related disciplines. In particular, he works on matters of intellectual history and has in that context written about the significance of Mesopotamian divination and mythic literature. He has recently completed a 2-volume intellectual biography of the Assyriologist A. Leo Oppenheim and his conception of ancient Mesopotamia. Another (edited) volume by him to come out soon concerns the work of Catholic priests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who broke ground in various branches of ancient Near Eastern studies. In addition to the project begun at Wiko, another one, whose thinking began in his time in Berlin, will take on the question of revelation in pre-monotheistic Mesopotamia. – Address: Department of Theology, The University of Notre Dame, 130 Malloy Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.  
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My time at the Wissenschaftskolleg lived up to expectations on many fronts, and even exceeded a few. The range of tempting events—from lectures and panels to cultural outings, trips, clubs, and of course, German classes—were at times almost overwhelming (no easy feat for a Germanophile like myself). Fortunately, I heeded the advice of a former Fellow who had described her own Wiko experience and prepared me for this embarrassment of riches. As I sought to strike a balance between social, or social-intellectual, engagements and my own focused research, I found Wiko completely relaxed, understanding, and welcoming. In the following I offer a brief overview of the latter.

As a first order of business, my year at Wiko gave me the precious time to finish odds and ends of a book I had been working on for over a decade. That project is an intellectual biography of the Viennese-born and later American Assyriologist A. Leo Oppenheim (1904–1974). Oppenheim’s ideas about key aspects of ancient Mesopotamia remain foundational in Assyriology. But it was his sustained, pessimistic conception of this world as a “dead civilization”—ultimately beyond our abilities for meaningful retrieval—that had first piqued my curiosity about him. This interest deepened when I discovered a large cache of family letters that revealed much about his personal side and the extent of his losses during the Second World War. It was this discovery that led me to undertake the study. The biography explores the intersection between Oppenheim’s personal tragedy and the possibility that it left a lasting, unresolved imprint on his later intellectual life. The book will go off to press in the fall, upon my return to the US. The library staff was typically superb in these final stretches, tracking down, for instance, the granddaughter of someone discussed in the biography and receiving from her valuable family photos along with permission for their publication. Inevitably, the subject of the Holocaust also pressed upon my work. The many Colloquia that explored its history, commemoration, and legacy, or that drew novel comparisons to it—along with my own strolls among Grunewald’s beautiful homes and scattered *Stolpersteine*, and the stories of Fellows who found themselves unexpectedly reconnecting with severed family histories—only deepened my impression of the vast, seemingly unending shadow which that event continues to cast and the protean ways in which it insinuates itself into other matters—some, like ancient Mesopotamia, wholly unrelated. That one “dead civilization” might be brought into relation with another by Oppenheim—however tentatively—lends fresh weight to the biographical study I have undertaken and to the subjective historiography it seeks to illuminate.

Yet it was the project for which I received the fellowship that remained foremost in my mind while in Berlin. Tentatively still titled *Mesopotamian Myth in Biblical Demythologization* (although a learned Fellow questioned the suitability of the latter term), the project set out to revisit enduring questions about the relationship between Mesopotamian mythological traditions and biblical narratives of origins; these include, most prominently, the so-called Primeval History (Genesis 1–11), but also extend to other biblical texts. Comparative studies in this area have almost invariably focused on how biblical texts were shaped by earlier Mesopotamian sources. My approach, remaining Assyriological in orientation, sought to invert that perspective. Rather than asking how Mesopotamian myths informed the Bible, I wanted to explore whether the Bible’s reception and

reinterpretation of these myths might, in turn, shed light on the Mesopotamian material itself. These texts are appreciated today primarily for their literary artistry and theological genius, but are excluded from discussions of Mesopotamian science and philosophy specifically on account of their symbolic forms—and, of course, their unvarying appeal to the gods in accounts of the perceived and conceived world. What I aimed to ask, in other words, was whether the Bible's less mythological, more naturalized reformulations of these traditions might help us better appreciate the conceptual and intellectual world underlying Mesopotamian mythmaking.

The project is organized around a series of case studies. Several of these—on the Mesopotamian myths or epics of *Atraḥasīs*, *Gilgamesh*, *Etana*, and *Nergal and Ereshkigal* and their reception and reformulation in some celebrated Biblical narratives—I had previously examined individually. In this new context, however, I began to revisit these cases with the goal of integrating them into a more cohesive analytical framework, one that could advance our understanding of Mesopotamian myth and the possibility of its inclusion in broader considerations of Mesopotamian thought. Alongside this reassessment of earlier work, my time in Berlin also allowed me to explore new, related instances of such mythic interaction. These included potential Mesopotamian antecedents to the creation of the firmament and the rainbow in *Genesis* 1 and 9, respectively, as well as the striking portrayal of the flood hero as preeminent not in righteousness, but in knowledge—a curious detail for a tradition that allegedly does not prioritize thinking.

One particularly intriguing new example I pursued at Wiko concerns the rationale for the flood in both Mesopotamian and Biblical traditions. In each narrative, the turning point hinges on an elusive term that appears at the moment of crisis—seemingly central to understanding the divine response. In the *Atraḥasīs* epic—the earliest known Akkadian version of the flood story—the gods unleash the deluge in response to *rigmu*, a “noise” generated by humanity and perceived as disruptive to the divine order. The biblical account in *Genesis* 6–9 offers a striking contrast: there, the cataclysm is attributed to *ḥāmās* (6:11, 13), usually translated “violence,” but more precisely connoting large-scale bloodshed. The precise connotation of *rigmu* in *Atraḥasīs*'s run up to the flood has long puzzled scholars, who cannot agree on what lies behind the intolerable din that is said to disturb the chief god's sleep.

Through an analysis of the relevant passage in *Atraḥasīs* within its broader context, alongside the Biblical account considered within its own textual framework, I was able to highlight a shared structural logic as well as a common underlying concern about human

proliferation (*Atraḫasīs* II 1–2; *Genesis* 6:1) that frames both traditions and links one to the other. This comparative approach, I found, clarifies the meaning of *rigmu* in *Atraḫasīs* and also offers new insight on the understanding of *ḥāmās* in *Genesis*. In each case, the term in question extends a related, more literal motif that appears earlier in the respective narratives, in both instances marking the upending of a primitive earthly order. In *Atraḫasīs* this *rigmu* refers initially to the ruckus of a localized rebellion by minor deities; in the Primeval History, a scene of bloodshed, or *dāmîm*, punctuates Cain’s murder of Abel before the Flood episode.

It is precisely through the comparison with this biblical development—from *dāmîm* to *ḥāmās*, a shift from concrete to symbolic disorder—that the more metaphorical usage of *rigmu* in *Atraḫasīs* becomes clearer. (The significance of bloodshed in the Primeval History and the shift in terminology from the more standard to the more metaphorical was also investigated and will be addressed in a forthcoming study.) Both traditions trace a similar conceptual trajectory: they begin with an initial, more tangible act of disruption and evolve toward a more abstract representation of disorder, each shaped by concerns over human excess. Yet their resolutions diverge in revealing ways. Whereas the biblical flood ends with an encouragement of human fertility—this is the famous “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 9:1)—*Atraḫasīs* responds to the same problem by limiting human reproduction through various means (Tablet III, final lines). In this light, the nature of the noise that so disturbs the gods becomes clear: this must refer to human copulation and/or birth: the generative sounds of life itself. Additional evidence from native Mesopotamian sources furthers this hypothesis.

This reading, I suggested, not only offers insight into a mytheme that has so far proved fanciful but impenetrable. With the aid of this comparative perspective, an improved sense of one of *Atraḫasīs*’s chief concerns is also afforded to us. To wit, this is the tension between the perceived need for human labor and the destabilizing consequences of unchecked population growth. In *Atraḫasīs* this issue is set in mythical time and framed in mythological terms, rather than through discussions of politics, law, or their underlying philosophical reasoning. Still, it becomes difficult to argue that the author is not aware of some of these issues. It is also hard to ignore how closely this myth anticipates core issues in today’s political discourse. In this manner, I noted, a nearly 4,000-year-old Mesopotamian text speaks powerfully to contemporary social and political debates—a timeless reflection of enduring human concerns.

The method I exemplify here helped to resolve other, comparable cruxes and further confirmed the viability of the project as a whole. What emerges as most promising—indeed, even innovative—is the recognition that, contrary to prevailing tendencies in Assyriology, it is at times by looking beyond Mesopotamia that we can most effectively illuminate the internal logic of its traditions. Biblical adaptations, precisely because they stand closer to the Mesopotamian worldview than the vantage point of modern scholarship, can serve as a mirror, refracting ancient concerns in ways that render their deeper structures newly intelligible.

Indeed, even more valuable than the specific progress I made on individual cases in the project was the rare opportunity to explore its broader theoretical implications, particularly its relevance to ongoing debates about what qualifies as scientific or philosophical thinking in Mesopotamia. A year-long reading group on the history and philosophy of science, led by Co-Fellows Jutta Schickore and Kärin Nickelsen, was especially helpful in this regard—and also genuinely enjoyable. Discussions of other Fellows' work on topics such as scientific models, hypotheses, empiricism, the qualification of sources, etc. were both fascinating and illuminating. In that setting, I also had the chance to present some of my own work and receive invaluable criticism in areas well outside my expertise. Equally important were many conversations with Fellows from other fields. The historians Hartmut Leppin and David Edgerton were delightful interlocutors, encouraging me to refine, for example, my critique of the insistence on the inner ("emic") philological approach—the so-called *Eigenbegrifflichkeit*—dominant in Assyriology, and to think more critically about the benefit of my drive to argue for a Mesopotamian canon. These intra-historian exchanges were nicely counterbalanced by discussions with philosophers Cheryl Misak, David Owens, and Herlinde Pauer-Studer, who—at times subtly, at times more directly—reminded me of the enduring value of intellectual inquiries that are pursued apart from historical framing.

This year at Wiko stands among the most formative of my academic and personal journey. It was a time in which ideas for several future projects were hatched, and which I shall joyfully acknowledge. The friendships and memories forged here, I expect, will remain with me indefinitely. To remain in contact with Wiko will be a pleasure; to count myself among its good-will ambassadors, an honor.



FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO THE  
RATIONALITY OF ART  
EYAL WINTER

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I am the Silverzweig Professor of Economics at the Hebrew University and the Andrews and Elizabeth Brunner Professor of Economics at Lancaster University, specializing in Behavioral Economics and Game Theory. I completed my Ph.D. at the Hebrew University in Game Theory and did my postdoc with Nobel laureate Reinhard Selten at the University of Bonn. I served as Director of the Center for the Study of Rationality at the Hebrew University. In 2011, I was awarded the Humboldt Research Award in Germany. I am an elected fellow of the Econometric Society, an elected council member of the International Game Theory Society, and an elected fellow of the Economic Theory Society. I have held full professorships at Washington University, the University of Manchester, and the European University Institute. My book *Feeling Smart* has been published in nine languages and was endorsed by seven Nobel laureates. I also published in leading journals in economics and the social sciences, including *Econometrica*, *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *Review of Economic Studies*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Legal Studies*, and *Psychological Science*. My essays have appeared in *Time Magazine*, *Forbes*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and others. I have advised governments, corporations, and NGOs on behavioral economics and decision-making. – Address: Federmann Center for the Study of Rationality, Department of Economics, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 91904, Israel.  
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During my stay at Wiko I made significant progress on my research project on social media interactions. A central issue on which I advanced concerns the *spillover effect* from the

social media sphere into real-life interactions. To address this question, we began from a broader perspective: *to what extent do spillover effects exist across different interactive environments?* For example, do toxic workplaces generate negative externalities that carry over into other domains, such as interactions within families, between service providers and their customers, or among neighbors?

While in Berlin I worked on the *design of a laboratory experiment* to test these spillover effects and coordinated with my co-authors at Lancaster University on running the experiment. The design consists of two stages. In the first stage, participants face the possibility of exploitation. In the second, they engage in a battery of three games—the trust game, the public goods game, and the prisoner’s dilemma. Although participants in stage two interact with entirely new partners, experiences in stage one influence their pro-social behavior in stage two, for both those who were exploited and those who exploited others.

Our findings suggest that among the exploited, experiences of unfairness reduce the propensity to cooperate and to trust. Moreover, exploiters whose exploitation was unintentional also exhibit a decline in pro-social behavior. We interpret these results in the context of toxic workplaces: workers’ experiences in such environments generate negative externalities that extend beyond the workplace, affecting interactions in other domains. These externalities can be seen as a form of *social pollution* which—like environmental pollution—should entail responsibility beyond the direct consequences for a firm’s own employees. The same concerns apply to social media as well. Irresponsible platforms that foster toxic interactions can generate social pollution with effects that extend beyond the online sphere.

Alongside this project, I also pursued my interest in the *rationality of art*. I organized a workshop at the Institute with the artists Amnon Ar (Berlin), Elie Shamir (Israel), and David William Hughes (Freiburg), as well as Professor Henrik Walter (Charité—Universitätsmedizin Berlin), among others. Together, we discussed the rationality of art from evolutionary, psychological, and social perspectives. I also explored these issues in depth with the History group among the Institute’s Fellows and their partners, especially in conversations with Dror Wahrman and Abraham Winitzer.

I benefited substantially from the weekly Colloquia and workshops at the Institute. I gained more from those that address pure and general research questions, and less from those that center on political debates, where researchers are often predisposed to a certain position because of their background. *I would strongly recommend that the Institute keep*

*Colloquia, workshops, and other activities on political issues in both science and art to a minimum.* They rarely lead to genuine scientific or artistic breakthroughs and can too easily create friction among Fellows from different backgrounds.

My relatively short stay at the Institute was enormously productive, engaging, and enjoyable, and I look forward to returning for shorter periods in the future.

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