

Mary S. Morgan

Stolen Time



Born 1952 in England. An economist by training, beginning as a research assistant at Citibank in London and working at the Bank of England before writing a PhD in Economics (1984) at the London School of Economics. Previously Research Fellow at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies at Bielefeld (1982-83) and Fulbright/American Council of Learned Societies Fellow at Duke University (1990-91). Currently both Reader in History of Economics at the London School of Economics and Professor of the History and Philosophy of Economics, University of Amsterdam. Books: *The Probabilistic Revolution: Ideas in the Sciences* (edited with L. Krüger and G. Gigerenzer, MIT Press, 1987); *The History of Economic Ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Higgling: Transactors and their Markets in the History of Economics* (edited with Neil De Marchi, Duke University Press, 1994) and *The Foundations of Economic Analysis* (with David F Hendry, Cambridge University Press, 1995). Address: Department of Economic History, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, GB-London WC2A 2AE.

My "year" at the Kolleg was four months, abstracted from my joint academic posts and respective homes in London and Amsterdam to be a Guest of the Rector. It began with a memorial meeting held at the newly-established Berlin Max-Planck-Institute for the History of Science. This experience appears in retrospect to have been the perfect opening for my stay in Berlin. That institute had just moved into a former embassy building in the "old East", hard by where the wall was. We met to honour Lorenz Krüger, who had been the director of my previous research institute experience way back in 1982/83 at the ZiF in Bielefeld (and a WIKO Fellow in 1987/88). Of course, Bielefeld cannot be compared with Berlin for so many reasons, but would the research experience compare? I was asked to speak at the memorial meeting and used the opportunity to reflect upon how joint those works and the ingredients of successful interaction amongst those from different disciplines. Lorenz had a hands-off approach, cajoling from the middle rather than

leading from the front. In Bielefeld, however, our group started from a shared topic, namely "The Probabilistic Revolution". The Kolleg has different aims apparently; to collect a group of people working on many different subjects and hope their interaction and the Berlin experience changes them. Perhaps secretly it is more radical — perhaps it hopes to subvert them from their tasks, with the tacit compliance of the chosen Fellows?

This was idle speculation for which I had no time; I was forearmed from my Bielefeld days to get down to my project on Day One. I at least did not want to be subverted. The feeling that my four months were stolen time, rather than granted as the just rewards of good scholarship (as others regarded it), never left me. I felt "driven" by my task from the beginning, while all around me Fellows enjoyed the manifest luxury of contemplating a full year of reading and writing. Whilst in this happy state, a number of them indulged me by joining a "modelling discussion group" that mixed scientists and humanists (organised with Brigitte Falkenburg and Margaret Morrison). Chance conversations with other Fellows provided further stimulation to my thoughts and reading. By Christmas, I had completed three quarters of my time while others were realising that they were already a quarter of the way through theirs and still finishing last year's work. By February, when I came back briefly for a week, the atmosphere had changed. The long, cold, dreary winter had taken its toll. Fellows had abandoned the leisurely chatting of the Fall and were busy on their own islands of scholarships. Only the biologists, with some late-starting Fellows, could be found openly enjoying their work as they argued over their data and simulations. By May, on my return for my final month, faint wails of desperation permeated Kolleg conversations. Fellows wanted at least to feel their project was well underway (if not finished) and resented that now that good weather threatened (though it was late arriving), their kith and kin proposed to visit and divert them from their tasks.

While I began the year determined to involve myself fully in Kolleg life, as time went on, I began to feel more like a "guest", though always a most welcomed one. I see now that my status as a "Guest" rather than a Fellow allowed me the luxury of disengagement, without which I could not have begun to work so effectively at the beginning of the year nor make as much progress as I did. And, despite my absences, my long-planned research collaboration with Margaret Morrison on the role of models in economics and physics was beginning to bear fruit in the ivory tower of the Kolleg. We were able to meet briefly in London and in Amsterdam during the intervening periods. And in the exact same week in May, as we were both separately writing papers on "models", Margie

for her Wissenschaftskolleg Colloquium on models in physics, I for a review essay on models in economics, we found ourselves coming to a convergence in our analysis of how models function in our respective realms. Strictly, our analysis of the question and its solution were not conceived in exactly the same way, rather we had each focused on different elements and in different ways, but in May we suddenly began to see how these might be turned, focused and fitted together to provide the opening version of a joint account. It is not clear to me how this happened, for though we hoped this would happen during our Berlin time, we did not sit down to do just this. Rather we each worked on our own cases and communicated our ideas during occasional post-dinner brainstorming sessions and with detailed commentaries on each others' working papers. But happen it has, and needless to say we are delighted. Perhaps it is wise not to inquire more precisely how often, and by what process, the Kolleg Fellows succeed in joint projects, but surely the most reliable support provided by the Kolleg staff is enormously critical in this respect.

For an economist, Berlin in 1995-96 was a strange and interesting place in so many respects. It is a city of music and music lovers, yet it had many unsold seats in its opera houses and concert halls over much of the year despite the (internationally) low price of the cheaper seats. I have never lived in a place where it was in principle so easy to go to good music on a last moment whim. But old habits die hard, and despite the strange nature of the market for concerts, I planned events carefully because I wanted to see the "halls" and "concert rooms" as much as to listen to the music being played in them. Berlin is truly gifted in this respect with old venues gloriously restored, sometimes with the "help of our Soviet friends", and new venues that make every visit a musical excitement. From the string quartet at the Krüger memorial meeting, to *Lieder* at the Staatsoper, to the final night of my stay listening to Alfred Brendel at the Philharmonie, I was enthralled by them all. But it was the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra that changed my concert-going habits with an electrifying concert performance of Verdi's *Othello*. Of the many good things that WIKO offered me, it was the chance to get tickets to the one orchestra and venue that never has unsold seats that altered my choices. During the London promenade concert season that followed, I chose for the performers, particularly the orchestras, not for the music or composers. Since economists believe that it is only by revealed choices that we can know anything about individual feelings, this is evidence indeed. WIKO changed my views and subverted my decisions, but not perhaps in the way either it or I might have expected. I am more than grateful that it failed to subvert my project work on economic models.