

Andrei S. Markovits

What a Long Great Trip it's Been



I was born on October 6, 1948 in the west Romanian town of Timisoara. I grew up tri-lingually (Hungarian, Romanian, German) in a Jewish family that had been ravaged by the Holocaust. Following my mother's death in 1958, my father and I emigrated to the United States. My father decided to return to Europe and settled in Vienna where I attended the Theresianische Akademie, graduating with a "Matura" degree in 1967. Thereafter I returned permanently to the United States, where I studied at Columbia University. Following my departure from Columbia, I became a Research Associate at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University, an affiliation which I maintained until June 30, 1999. As of July 1, 1999 I have been Professor of Politics in the Departments of German Studies and Sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. My main areas of research and teaching have been in comparative politics and historical political sociology. My most recent book *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Cornell University Press, 1997) was also published in German and Dutch. My book on sports cultures in the United States and Europe, which I completed at the Wissenschaftskolleg, will be published by Princeton University Press in 2000. – Address: Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, The University of Michigan, 3110 Modern Language Building, 812 East Washington, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1275, USA.

Simply put, my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg was far and away the most successful of my academic career. Perhaps more important still, it was also one of the most enjoyable of my entire life. This is all the more pleasing to me because I had few, if any, expectations before arriving here; and those that I did have were not necessarily positive. First, I was worried as to how I would be able to live in Germany for nearly one year. Of course as a political scientist specializing in European and German politics, I had visited Germany since 1974 on a very frequent and regular basis, but my

longest previous uninterrupted sojourn had been in 1979 when I spent eight months in Düsseldorf and Frankfurt researching the German trade unions. Despite having acquired a veritable bevy of German friends and colleagues over the years, whom I consider family and whose affection and trust I cherish beyond everything in the world, even they could never dispel a definite uneasiness and discomfort about the abstract entity of “Germany” that I have always felt – and will continue to feel for the rest of my life. Then, I was concerned about the large number of (often unleashed) attack dogs that have become part of the Berlin street scene over the past decade or so in which, willy-nilly, I had to participate four times a day on account of my having to walk our wonderful golden retriever “Kelly”. Lastly, I knew from reliable sources that – not being a superstar and probably for other reasons as well – my appointment to the Kolleg was far from smooth which made me wonder as to how welcomed I would actually be at this illustrious institution. But having regarded my appointment akin to winning a lottery ticket, I arrived with virtually no expectations at all, hoping that things might turn out well and that anything decent, let alone good, that was to happen to us – my wife Kiki, our Kelly and myself – would be gravy. The Kolleg, to be sure, owed me nothing. It was up to me to make this year a worthwhile and enjoyable experience. And that it most certainly was!

From the very first moment that we set foot in our apartment at the Villa Walther on Monday evening, October 5, 1998, all signs were most auspicious for our year to be a great one. Monika Fogt showed us our living quarters with grace and efficiency. Two things struck me that very evening: First, that the Kolleg had seen to it that we had some food awaiting us in the refrigerator – some cold cuts for dinner, some cheese, bread, and breakfast fare, nothing fancy, just perfect for the situation. And then, Frau Fogt handed us two sets of keys, one for me and one for my wife stressing very clearly that my wife had the very same access to the Kolleg’s facilities that would be accorded to me, that in fact she was very much part of the Kolleg’s life as much as she chose to be and that – from the Kolleg’s point of view – she was part of the team, the community. This was done with no great fanfare, no major explanations, no pathos, yet it said so much about how the Kolleg would treat us as a family. The living quarters at the Villa Walther were simply superb in every respect: cleanliness, comfort, convenience, let alone the physical beauty of its surroundings. We never lacked anything from the very moment that we set foot there to the day that we departed. In addition to the wonderful living arrangements that the Kolleg accorded us, we were also fed royally, as our extended girth clearly attested at our departure.

The string of perfection continued the very next day when we met Barbara Sanders and Christine von Arnim. Their professionalism, humor and helpful manner were evident from our very first meeting and became a mainstay throughout our sojourn at the Kolleg. Frau Sanders's wonderful smile and cheerful soul could not help but lighten up every one of our visits to the Kolleg, even if it only entailed picking up the far too many FEDEX packages and facsimiles that kept bombarding me throughout the year. Frau Sanders mastered them all with warmth and humor. Very early on Frau Sanders also became our trusted adviser concerning Berlin's prodigious cultural scene and we availed ourselves of her expertise and efficiency in visiting with great regularity and frequency Berlin's three opera houses and its theaters.

Professionally speaking, the entire year was a string of successes, so much so that my skeptical nature still awaits the big disaster that is bound to happen since life usually punishes such abundance of joy with some kind of calamity. Far and away I remain proudest of the fact that four Fellows asked me to introduce them at the Kolleg's Tuesday colloquia. This is a testimony to their trust, respect and affection which I cherish all the more since none of the other Fellows were accorded such a distinction more than three times thus making me a very proud albeit unofficial winner in the sweepstakes of collegial prominence. Thereafter, I am convinced that it was mainly due to my Fellowship at the Kolleg that I was appointed to the faculty of The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, without any doubt among the finest institutions of higher learning in the United States, perhaps the world. My presence at the Kolleg and the opportunities – as well as the cachet – that this institution accorded me both directly and indirectly placed me into a "Michigan category" that I did not quite have prior to my year in Berlin.

Academically speaking, my stay at the Kolleg was an unmitigated success. My main task was to complete the manuscript of my comparative sports book on which I had been working on and off for over five years. I arrived at the Kolleg having to write circa 300 pages and I am thrilled to report that I accomplished this goal by February 1, 1999. I wanted to have the completed manuscript in the hands of Princeton University Press by Valentine's Day (February 14) – and that is exactly what happened. To be sure, there remained some revisions here and there, but on the whole the book had been completed at the Kolleg as planned. So much for the planned part of my stay.

Concerning the unplanned, things developed exponentially to a degree that I had never experienced previously. Permit me to list the tally at the outset before I provide some explanatory details: All in all, I delivered 46 lectures between October 5, 1998 and July 14, 1999 all over Germany,

from Frankfurt an der Oder to Frankfurt am Main; from Munich to Düsseldorf; Hannover to Bonn; Bielefeld to Essen just to name a few. I delivered nine lectures at the Free University alone. The most memorable among these events was my opening of the exhibition “Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944” in Saarbrücken when I was asked by the organizers to substitute for the indisposed Marcel Ophüls on less than 24-hours notice. With the entire government of the Saarland and the municipal leadership of Saarbrücken gracing the front rows of the completely packed Staatstheater I partook in an experience that I will never forget. I wrote 13 newspaper articles and commentaries in publications as diverse as *Die Woche*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Der Tagesspiegel* and *die tageszeitung – taz*. My work and I were profiled in four publications from *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Berliner Morgenpost* to *Berliner Zeitung* and *taz* and I was interviewed by *Der Spiegel*. I appeared on 25 radio broadcasts of various kinds in Berlin and Germany – from short five-minute segments to lengthy two-hour call-in shows. And I was also present on television nine times, participating in programs aired by *Bayerisches Fernsehen*, *WDR* and *Phoenix* to *ZDF*’s “Nachtstudio” (together with my co-Fellow Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Fellow-to-be Claus Leggewie) and that station’s morning show as well. I co-organized a conference on and with Daniel Goldhagen in Potsdam which led to the publication of a volume on the Goldhagen controversy three years after the publication of Goldhagen’s book and shortly after the Kosovo War. I served on the committee of a doctoral dissertation at Humboldt University and helped seven students at the Free University of Berlin with their various projects ranging from seminar papers to Master’s theses. I also managed to write three academic articles and two book reviews, all of which were accepted for publication.

Essentially there were three areas of my work that garnered most of this interest: First, I had the good fortune to have had my book *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* published in German by the newly established and “hot” young Berlin-based publishing house Alexander Fest Verlag. To make things more attractive still, the preface to the book was penned by Joschka Fischer, who, again as luck would have it, would become foreign minister at exactly the same time that I began my stay at the Kolleg. There can simply be no doubt that it was due to the fortuitous confluence of all these events that my book received much attention, and – with the author conveniently in the neighborhood – so did I. Twenty-two of my appearances occurred on account of this book. Second, my work on sports anchored in a scholarly attempt to explain why the United States developed a different sports culture from that in Europe also garnered a lot of interest all over Germany,

where the topics of soccer/football, the United States and intellectually interesting (and unusual) explanations proved a very attractive mix accounting for 16 of my appearances. Lastly, to my great chagrin Martin Walser held his deplorable speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair barely one week after my arrival, which once again catapulted the issues of Jews, the Holocaust and the Germans' identity and history onto the public debate's center stage. Having written a few things on these topics in the past, I found myself in the midst of this controversy which formed the topic of eight of my presentations. Of course it is quite evident to me that were I not a Jewish academic from the United States who happens to speak German fluently, I would never have received nearly the attention that I did. I was instrumentalized, yet – truth be told – I enjoyed every minute of it.

Far more meaningful – and lasting – than my enjoying the limelight in Germany were the wonderful friendships that I made with many a co-Fellow here at the Kolleg. I will not list them by name in this report. Instead, I made sure that I told them in person and unequivocally how much I appreciated their friendship and how forever grateful I will be to them for sharing with me parts of their minds, their work, their hopes, fears and dreams – in short for letting me experience their humanity. Of course they also opened to me new intellectual vistas that I had never known existed before let alone how enriching they might be for my own personal development. In this context I would only like to mention the presence of the Artemis Quartet and Walter Levin at the Kolleg. Their beautiful concerts and Levin's extraordinary skill to explain and analyze the most difficult – perhaps even jarring – music were without any doubt the most amazing highlights of this richest of academic years. As I told Walter Levin, I will still continue to whistle Mozart, Beatles and Jerry Garcia tunes rather than themes from the Ligeti string quartet, but thanks to this exposure I have come to understand – and better still, appreciate – a form of music that had always remained enigmatic to me. I sincerely doubt whether in my future work I will incorporate epistemologies and methodologies that I learned from my many conversations with people as diverse as musicologists, biologists, physicists, poets and philosophers. Most likely I will not. If one were to measure the Kolleg's "output" by that criterion alone, my fellowship's tally would have to be classified a failure. But if one looks at the small but crucial fact that not since my father's untimely death in 1990 had I spoken as much Hungarian as I did with co-Fellows at the Kolleg, the year needs to be gauged as a rousing success. Because to me, the bottom line of this amazing year's legacy will not be its intellectual glitter and brilliance, but its quiet humanity and palpable *Menschlichkeit*. For that I owe the Kolleg, its wonderful staff, its Rektor and its Permanent Fellows my eternal gratitude.