



BERLIN SUMMER  
CATHERINE C. ECKEL

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I arrived in Berlin on Wednesday, May 1: a significant German holiday, and the first of many that occur in May. Naturally, the Wiko office and kitchen were closed, as was nearly everything else in the city. But my host, Alex Kacelnik, met me with a key and a smile, and I settled into my sunny, two-room suite in the Villa Jaffé. I was pleasantly surprised by the green beauty of the rather grand residential neighborhood, the Grunewald living up to its name. Not everyone agrees with my assessment. In *The Berlin Stories* Christopher Isherwood refers to the Grunewald area as a “millionaire’s slum” because of the enormous houses’ proximity to one another, “in all known styles of expensive ugliness, ranging from the eccentric-rococo folly to the cubist flat-roofed steel and glass box.” He has a point. But somehow it is very lovely anyway.

The first two days, I participated in an interdisciplinary conference on risk attitudes, which is one of the subjects I study. There were biologists and anthropologists and mathematicians and psychologists, one philosopher, one sociologist, and two economists. I thought this might be the interdisciplinary high point of my summer, but it turned out to

be only an appetizer. Never have I been surrounded by such a diversity of disciplines and interests. What a great pleasure it was to discuss *everything* with such an intellectually curious and diverse group of people.

In the Tuesday Colloquia, Wiko colleagues presented a fascinating array of studies. I'll admit my favorite talks were the scientists: Raghavendra Gadagkar on the kindness of wasps, and the locomotion group on, well, locomotion. But I greatly enjoyed them all. It was an unprecedented opportunity to learn and learn.

I am an economist, one of only three at the Wiko during my stay. Much of my work chips away at the "economic man" paradigm that is still predominant in economics. Economic man had taken quite a beating before my arrival, and to my surprise I found myself defending the self-interested old fellow. Economists are not very popular among academics, and the three of us had our work cut out communicating our science to both to the nonscientists and to the "real" scientists in residence. It was challenging and very much fun.

I made quite a lot of progress, though less than I wanted to, on two projects. As the only official member of two groups – the Risk Group and the Social Norms Group – I had plenty to do just attending all the seminars and discussions. The Risk Group meetings fed one project, having to do with developing behavioral measures of risk aversion that generalize across decision contexts. The input of Elke Weber and Eric Johnson changed the way I think about the problem, closing off some research avenues, but opening many more. And John McNamara's intolerance for sloppy thinking sharpened all our arguments. Alex somehow (charmingly) kept us all communicating with each other over the chasms of disciplinary terminology. The Norms Group participated in the lively seminars of Martin Hoffman, who educated us all about the psychology of empathy. Cristina Bicchieri's persistent enthusiasm and Ernst Fehr's eloquence and diplomacy contributed greatly to the quality of our interactions. These discussions substantially shaped the paper I wrote on social status and learning.

While I had been exposed previously to evolutionary thinking, the prevalence of evolutionists at the Wiko this summer led to many discussions that expanded my knowledge of the subject. In some ways, evolutionists are even more firm in their thinking than economists, and they encounter similar resistance to their ideas. However, this work is beginning to have a significant influence on my work and the way I think about human behavior. In a recent experimental project, I test the ability of subjects to detect "reciprocators" in a situation where money is at stake. This work has been strongly shaped by my experience at Wiko.

One of the high points of my stay was a journey to Hiddensee with two experts in animal behavior, Margo Wilson and Martin Daly. Martin concentrated on the birds; Margo on the environment more generally. I forced them to pause now and then and look at a building – an inanimate castle or a church – about which they were surprisingly good-natured. The island of Hiddensee has no cars, but many bicycles, and has no English speakers that we could detect. Fortunately Martin’s high school German had not deserted him, despite 40 years of neglect. I bought an amber pin in a tiny shop, and Martin and Margo added considerably to their lifetime bird lists. Most of the houses on the island and many of the larger buildings have thatched roofs, which I had never seen before. We stopped to observe a chorus of frogs. Lunch was smoked halibut on thin, dense black bread, with beer. The scenery was very beautiful, and the food excellent and plentiful and very fishy.

There were many, many nice surprises, including: the Picasso Museum; double-decker busses; outdoor cafes; the beautiful copper beech in the garden of the Wiko; Helga’s perfect necklaces; apricot soup for dessert; Messien’s St. Francis opera; the amazing thunderstorm that accompanied Helmut Lachenmann’s last concert; sun pouring in my window at 4.30 a.m.; helping Alex put little bracelets on baby blue tits; feasting on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the KaDeWe; John McNamara’s hilarious paper on why we sing; the singing, of course, oh my that was fun, led by the endlessly patient and encouraging Volker Dürr (memorable quote, to the sopranos: “I know you must feel as if you are singing that note a little sharp ... but try if you could to sing it a bit sharper still”); Michael Kosfeld tinkling the ivories late at night; teaching econometrics to John Breuilly; Alex’s films of his brilliant crows; the house with the clock over the front door – on the outside (go figure); *Rote Grütze*, cheeses, and sausages; Potsdam; shopping for and producing gumbo with squid and scallops (instead of oysters and crab) for a large number of prominent scholars, part of the rolling goodbye party of August; meeting old friends and making new ones I hope to keep.

And there were a few inevitable disappointments: failing to learn enough German to carry on a conversation even with David Fehr, age 3, despite the valiant and charming efforts of our tutor Marita Ringleb; not managing to get to Prague, despite many plans; almost but not quite beginning a new research project with my colleagues. All I needed was a few more months.

I am enormously grateful to the Wiko and its friendly and extremely accommodating staff for making the visit such a wonderful experience for me, and for my family. Thank you all.