



TOASTY MEMORIES OF A COLD WINTER TECUMSEH W. FITCH

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As I look out my window upon a cold and windy Scottish day, Berlin feels far off indeed, in both time and space. I'm reminded of cold days back in January, the long chain of lakes traversing Grunewald all frozen over, and biking down this white icy highway all the way from Koenigssee, over Hundekuhlesee to the Schlachtensee, almost to Potsdam. At the end, the glow of the setting sun lit ice skaters twirling and families walking on the ice, pulling their children on sleds. A *Glühwein* salesman doled out his flame-warmed elixir. Less idyllically, the cold reminds me of the “Filibuster for Peace” organized by Americans living in Berlin, a protest against the imminent Iraq War: 48 hours straight through of reading, talking, singing and dancing for peace in the still bitterly cold March night, and playing my protest song “Gulf War Syndrome” with nearly frozen fingers. But as the

memories start to flow of their own accord, warm ones begin to dominate. Memories of our impromptu dance party round Carnival time – cold outside but hot indeed in the crazily redecorated dining room. The inner warmth grows as I remember our first April meals outside the villa, or on the terrace at *La Forchetta*. My first swim, in early May, in the Halensee, when I heard my first nightingale singing. Finally, as summer commenced, sipping a fine rioja on the terrace above the library, in the summer heat, looking out on the new leaves of that magnificent beech tree. Indeed, despite it having been the coldest winter in Berlin for many years, my memories of the Wiko are suffused with a pervasive warmth.

Of course, despite the comfortable glow that characterized my time at the Wiko, work was the dominant preoccupation. My main project, a comprehensive book on vertebrate vocal production (alas still unfinished) went from a fantasy to a quite substantial five chapters. The luxury of uninterrupted work time allowed me to confront the rising panic of realizing just how big a job I'd set myself with the calm reassurance that I had plenty of time to accomplish it. In any other context, I probably would have quickly retreated to a much more manageable topic. As things stand, I have a clear idea of what remains to be done, a complete bibliography, have read most of the necessary literature (infinite thanks to the wonderful library staff!). I also have gained a clear sense of mission that will carry the project through to the finish. Frequent meetings with my collaborators at the Humboldt University theoretical biology group, led by Hanspeter Herz, provided a priceless opportunity for further learning, and for testing new ideas, about bioacoustics. The further opportunity to lead a small conference on vertebrate vocal production with many of the world's experts on vocal production (funded by the Wiko and elegantly organized by Britta Cusack) came at the perfect time. This workshop reinforced my sense of the importance of my project and reassured me that I hadn't missed too much, while teaching me plenty that was (and still is) not available in the literature. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to further this project, thanks to the intellectual nurturance that is the Wiko's forte.

I was able to finish five papers on other topics, as well, (including one project that had been hanging over my head for five long years). My paper on language evolution with Noam Chomsky and Marc Hauser came out in December, in the journal *Science*, and generated significant controversy and interest (including so many requests to give talks that I often had to decline, rather selfishly, to guard my writing time). Two papers on monkey auditory perception, also long in the works, are now submitted, along with two book chapters on language evolution and primate communication (in press). I also had the welcome

opportunity to share my work and ideas with the wider public, both through my Wiko evening colloquium and via the popular media: a television interview with Alexander Kluge (recently aired on Sat1), a radio special on vocal imitation aired on Süddeutsche Rundfunk, and a magazine article in the Vienna Science magazine *Heureka* about scientists who “moonlight” as visual artists. I also gave some eight talks in academic venues during my Wiko tenure, and started two very exciting and promising collaborations with German scientists I met in Berlin. Looking back on all this, it’s amazing that I accomplished any work at all on my book, and more amazing still that I felt so relaxed and unhurried during those halcyon ten months.

But, as I’m sure is true of many other Fellows, the real pleasures of the Wiko were unexpected: the host of new ideas and exciting intellectual exchanges from the staff and other Fellows. The everyday personal contact and relaxed atmosphere of the Wiko opened up a broad new set of interests and ideas for me. I explored the rich parallels between biological and social evolution with political scientists Kathy Thelen and Susan Zimmerman. In frequent discussions, both planned and fortuitous, with anthropologist Carlo Severi and cognitive scientist Gabriela Airenti-Severi, we began to sketch out a taxonomy of cognition that includes both animal and humans and attempts to “carve nature at the joints” by breaking cognition into culturally, biologically and evolutionarily meaningful subdivisions: a project that will continue long post-Wiko. Within my own field of neuroscience and evolutionary biology, the somewhat irregular but always enjoyable Brain and Behavior meetings with the other biologists in the group were stimulating and informative. Conversations on computation and cognition with neuroscientist David Raubenheimer were especially helpful and enlightening. The most unexpected outcome was initially hard-hitting conversations on the philosophy of mind and language with philosopher John Hyman, which evolved into a very pleasant opportunity to exchange and sharpen our viewpoints, often enhanced by a fine bottle of wine or a good meal at *La Forchetta*.

Besides wide-ranging interdisciplinary conversations like these, a second unexpected pleasure was a renewed plunge into music. My research on the evolution of language has led me to find ever more plausible Darwin’s hypothesis (shared by Rousseau) that fully-evolved human language was preceded by a musical proto-language (which I call the “prosodic protolanguage” hypothesis). This provided the incentive to deepen both my intellectual understanding of music (helped with conversations with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and composer Isabel Mundry, both of the Wiko, and Berlin linguist Manfred Bierwisch, with the warm and welcome encouragement of Joachim Nettelbeck) and to refresh my

performance abilities (which had become more than a bit stale since my last regular performances, during graduate school). I made Friday night my music night (apologies to my neighbors!), devoted to playing the gorgeous grand piano in the main building and writing a number of new songs. With the help of Wiko's own expert producer/engineer Christian Schmitz, I even burned a CD of one of these songs, based on Dryden's famous poem "Song for St Cecilia's Day". I now have enough songs to record an entire CD, hopefully again with Christian in Berlin in the near future. I performed several times out in the city, as well as attending many great performances. I also danced more than I have in years. Combined with a renewed practice of visual art (aided by the weekly opportunity to draw my colleagues, afforded by the Tuesday colloquia – not to mention valuable critical feedback from Christine Klöhn), I was able to considerably broaden and deepen my artistic side while in Berlin.

Of course, no stay is perfect, and the fly in this particular ointment was the US invasion of Iraq. The frustration, as an anti-war American, of watching the gathering storm and the travesty of justice that ensued, and feeling powerless to do anything, was acute. However, I felt particularly grateful to have the opportunity to discuss the developing issues with my Arabic-speaking colleagues, especially Abdul Sheriff, who kept me apprised of the latest news from Al-Jazeera, and Nasr Abu Zayd, who provided a solid (and brave) example of non-fundamentalist Islam at its best. Long and educational conversations with Dieter Grimm, Wolf Lepenies, and euromaven Maarten Brands helped me gain a more subtle understanding of European politics (though Maarten's euro-skepticism has not succeeded in dampening my enthusiasm for a powerful unified Europe with a coherent foreign policy as a necessary balance to the US). A protest against the war organized by various non-Wiko Americans living in Berlin and myself was firmly supported by many staff members and Fellows of the Wiko (thanks to you all). So despite the ultimate ineffectiveness of our protest and the ongoing disastrous outcome of the Bush administration's policy, even this dark cloud had an unexpected silver lining, driving me to a much deeper appreciation of European politics and the complexities of the Islamic world and renewing a long-dormant commitment to political action.

But, alas, the future calls, and retrospectives must come to an end. Berlin fades once again to a wintry Brueghesque memory, the figures on the icy lake beautiful but distant. Back at my desk (with a welcome bit of sun occasionally peaking out from behind the Scottish clouds), I continue to be amazed that a community like the Wiko exists. Amazed both by the temporary community of lucky 02/03 Fellows, which I am forever grateful to have

joined, and by the more permanent community of intelligent, kind, competent staff who are the golden threads running through the years, making it all possible. My gratitude of course extends also to the agencies that fund this unique and productive institution – may their wisdom continue! With the long cold nights of the Scottish winter on the horizon, I know I'll derive considerable solace and strength from both the accomplishments and the warm memories of my stay at the Wiko in Berlin. And in my better moments, I can even feel pleasure (rather than unmitigated jealousy) for the next round of Fellows, just settling into their year in paradise. May they profit as much, and in as many ways, as we did!



Upper: Steven Vertovec, Carlo Severi
Middle: Imre Kertész, Leonid Zhmud, Dieter Grimm
Lower: Éric Brian, Abdelahad Sebti