



PAST AND PRESENT
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Lydia Goehr was born in London but now lives in New York. She is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. She has been a recipient of Mellon, Getty, and Guggenheim Fellowships and in 1997 was the Visiting Ernest Bloch Professor in the Music Department at the University of California at Berkeley, where she gave a series of lectures on Richard Wagner. She is the author of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. Oxford, 1992 and *The Quest for Voice: Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy*. Oxford, 1998. In 2002/03, she was the visiting Aby Warburg Professor in Hamburg and a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. She is currently writing a book on the relationship between Philosophy and Music in the work of Theodor W. Adorno. Her long-term project is a book entitled “Lonely Composers and Solitary Thinkers: A History of the Philosophy of Music as Told Through the Quarrels Between Philosophers and Composers”. She is currently completing with Daniel Herwitz an edited book, entitled *The Don Giovanni Moment: A Collection of Essays on the Moral and Aesthetic Legacy of Don Giovanni*. – Address: Department of Philosophy, Columbia University, Mail code 49 86, New York, NY 10027, USA.

I am writing this report – rather, these reflections – sitting in my Wiko study for the last time on the last day. It is August 3, 2003. Most of the other Fellows have left. I am the last to leave in the Villa Jaffé. I have just read a report in the *Tagesspiegel* about the Astoria Restaurant on Halensee Bridge, the restaurant in which a group of us spent a wonderful final evening dancing alongside a party of Russian Jews to Ukrainian and Jewish songs. They were eating smoked salmon, herring, and a large leg of pork! We were being denied

nearly everything we ordered from the menu, including that great Russian specialty, the stuffed elephant trunk. "We don't cook that tonight," said the Russian waiter as if he were still living in a city where one cannot buy what one wants.

„Wenn ich auf jene Jahre des Exils zurückschaue“, schrieb Vladimir Nabokov 1951, „sehe ich mich und Tausende anderer Russen ein seltsames, aber keineswegs unangenehmes Leben unter völlig belanglosen Fremden führen, in deren mehr oder minder unwirklichen Städten wir, die Emigranten, zufällig unser Domizil genommen hatten.“ In ähnlicher kultureller Selbstgenügsamkeit leben auch heute viele der Charlottenburger Russen. Am deutlichsten lässt sich das im ‚Astoria‘ erleben, einem Restaurant gewordenen Golddrausch am westlichen Ende des Ku'damm: Goldene Kandelaber zieren golddurchwebte Tapeten, goldenes Geschmeide prangt an heillos überschminkten Damen, goldene Armbanduhren an bärtigen Kavalieren. Bis in die Nacht spielen Live-Bands russische Versionen westlicher Klassiker, und das Astoria verwandelt sich in einen skurrilen Ballsaal. Des Russischen unkundige Gäste sind willkommen, aber nicht unbedingt vorgesehen: Erst nach einigen Minuten gelingt es dem Kellner, eine deutsche Speisekarte aufzutreiben. Darauf finden sich Köstlichkeiten wie Borschtsch: Rote-Rüben-Suppe mit wohlriechenden Brötchen, die Gogols Hauptfiguren des Romans *Abende auf dem Vorwerk bei Dikanka* gekostet haben. Wer ins Astoria kommt, will vergessen, dass Russland weit weg ist und dass Russland nicht mehr Russland ist.“ (Jens Mühling. „Wladiwostok liegt gleich hinter Charlottenburg.“ *Der Tagesspiegel* August 3, 2003)

I stare at the beautiful tree outside my window and think of Péter Nádas's photographs that probably still hang on the wall in the Colloquium room. It was so nice that this was the year for the Hungarians. Yes, the tree tells us that time passes and things change. I have left so many places so many times, but in Berlin I found something to which I can and always will return. My family once left and they did not all return. Some did, and because of the ones that did, I was able to find and discover my family history. An incredible story of a finding, but in the end the story was too good to write down. I tried. I did not just find the facts, but the photos, the birth certificates, the letters, and the graves. I discovered the meaning of putting a stone on a grave. A person working at the Centrum Judaicum Archive in Oranienburger Straße said to me: "Most Jewish families never get anything back; they don't find their photos. You found the treasure chest." I really did. A history that was for so long lost and unknown now belongs to my family's present. Personally, it will always be connected to my year at Wiko.

I came to Wiko with some advance knowledge of what it had to offer. I was not disappointed. I began my year with an intensive German course. I found the experience completely difficult but absolutely marvelous. I had to unlearn all my mistakes. I continued to take German lessons throughout the year with Eva von Kügelgen. She is an excellent teacher. In some ways, working with the German language, with the sufferings and joys of translation, was my greatest pleasure this year. I discovered a new passion, a passion for translation. I would have liked more of Wiko's activities to have taken place in German. I was disappointed by the dominance of the English language in an unhappy year when the USA and the UK were trying to dominate the world. The German course is an indispensable part of a foreign Fellow's life.

I spent most of the year working on the philosophical and musical writings of Theodor W. Adorno, this year being the centenary year of his birth. Translating one language into another, moving between music and philosophy was Adorno's theme; understanding and translating Adorno was mine. I wrote a number of essays, all of which are being published this year in English and in German, following upon their presentation as lectures at the many, many Adorno conferences I will continue to attend in the next few months. I gave 20 public lectures during my year in Berlin. Soon I will put these essays together to produce a small book: it will represent the work I did in Berlin. It will be a book about the less well-known and often unexplored concepts of Adorno's philosophy, which nonetheless are indispensable for understanding why he took philosophy so seriously in his enquiries into music, and music so seriously in his philosophy. I had not planned to write this particular book, but I have no regrets about having done so. I learnt an enormous amount about the relation between philosophy and music in a city where philosophy and music have long been two of the primary cultural ways in which and through which its people live (at least the more fortunate ones). Being in Berlin gave me an experience I had never before had: when I told people that I worked on philosophy and music, they responded: „natürlich“. I am more used to the rejoinder: "Is that really a subject?!"

I took full advantage of the cultural life of Berlin, attending concerts, operas, and theaters and visiting galleries whenever I could. I spent much time in the rehearsals of the Berliner Philharmoniker and at the opera. I will write something soon about the concept of a rehearsal.

Life at Wiko was intellectually rich, always provocative. I found the colloquia interesting, even if they confirmed my prejudice that conversation in large groups is well-nigh impossible. Many Fellows, by arrangement or interest, formed small groups. I regretted

that I did not attempt to do this, too. On the other hand, the Fellows sharing my interests were rather limited and I was under immense pressure to meet all sorts of conference and publication deadlines.

Most exciting were the public evening lectures, the political discussions, and the musical events. I enjoyed being given so many opportunities to meet the academics and intellectuals of Berlin.

Do I have complaints? There's an old joke: An old Polish Jew is asked why he wants to leave Poland and move to Israel. The Polish government official asks him: "Why do you want to leave when we gave you so much, a fur coat, a job, a car, an apartment?" The old Jew says: "Yes, thank you. I can't complain." The official asks: "Why, then, do you want to leave and go to Israel." The old Jew says: "Because there I can complain!"

Yes, I can complain about this and that. But really Wiko's library service alone or just the generosity of its staff cancels out any complaint. With a smile on my face, I wonder why my only real complaint is that somehow Wiko cannot seem to make any of its rules for the Fellows' lives comprehensible. I don't know why it is. It does not seem to be a matter of language or expression. Perhaps it's just a reflection of an institution that regrets so deeply that it has to be rule-bound.

Many thanks.