



LOS TRABAJOS Y LOS DÍAS  
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*Morgens*

Grunewald is what I saw first, Grunewald in winter. It is a peculiar way of approaching Berlin, through one of its most residential, elegant, and affluent neighborhoods. In a short

time, however, with the aid of the bus 119, the rest of the city gradually came into sight. Soon I was caught by its magnetism. Discovering Berlin was one of the main experiences of this year at Wiko: a city in perpetual change yet at the same time deeply rooted in the past and permeated by its history. In spite of its peculiarities, Grunewald shares some of that quality, as it breathes both continuity (rather more) and variation (rather less).

From the tall windows of my early twentieth-century flat, I watched the frozen lake across the street, the weak sunlight barely illuminating the kitchen. The short walk to the Wallotstraße on the crisp mornings prepared me for the German class. The challenge usually proved too exerting for that time of day, and a combination of enthusiasm and frustration inevitably fell upon our odd group of scholars-in-the-role-of-students. Yet learning the language soon proved a key way of approaching Berlin and, indeed, Germany.

Morning was also the time for e-mails in the small office in the *Neubau* and of browsing the library catalogues for books. This is the initial step of one of the most cherished of Wiko's features. You hand in the name of any publication you might like to read, copy, touch, or simply look at, and a few days later, there it is, waiting for you in your library pile. The miracle is performed by the library staff, who are not only incredibly efficient, but also very friendly.

On Tuesdays: the Colloquium, a weekly ritual for the Fellows on both sides of the table, as speakers and as members of the participant audience. This was an ideal occasion to observe, find out, and try to understand how other scholars, from different fields, theoretical orientations, and academic traditions, go about thinking, asking questions, and producing knowledge. Also, when my turn for the podium came, it was my main opportunity to explain my own work as a historian, to display the forms I had chosen to define and address a particular subject matter – the Argentine Revolution of 1880 and the role of violence in politics –, and to put my ideas to the test. Although the chemistry did not always work, most seminars succeeded in generating a space of shared interrogation and debate. My favorite ones were those that uncovered for us the ways of inquiring into and exploring a specific topic, no matter how distant it may have been from my own academic interests.

### *Mittags*

Lunch had an important place in our everyday life at Wiko. This was the time to engage in conversation, a key intellectual practice that has, of late in our culture, almost fallen into oblivion. Around a well-served table, a feat of the kitchen staff, no topics were precluded

in friendly chats and heated discussions that helped to make our social and intellectual exchanges more intense. World politics was always a must, and for a good part of the year, the war against Iraq featured as the main theme of our lunchtime debates. Not that our prevailing views had any chance of affecting the decisions of the powerful ...

Later on, the spring came, and, with it, our tables moved to the courtyard and, weather permitting, we lingered in the sun for a little longer.

### *Nachmittags*

Back to my office, the best part of the afternoon I devoted to reading, writing, working on my current research on the role of violence in the political life of nineteenth-century Argentina, and developing a new collective project. I took advantage of the library resources in Germany to do bibliographical searches followed by some systematic reading of theoretical and historical works on political violence. This reading triggered the writing: a piece on the historiography of that topic in Argentina, two on the revolutions that took place in Buenos Aires between the 1850s and the 1890s, and three others related to my previous work on civil society and the public sphere in Latin America. All of these were delivered as talks and discussed in academic meetings during the year, when I had the opportunity to establish a scholarly dialogue with German colleagues in the vast area of Latin American studies as well as in the disciplinary field of History.

History also brought me together with other Wiko Fellows interested in reflecting upon history writing and its relationship with politics and collective memory. We created a space for the discussion of the different experiences in countries or regions that have recently gone through processes of deep political and social change and where that relationship has acquired particular relevance. The exchanges in the group, which included Abdelahad Sebti, Abdul Sheriff, Carlo Severi, Balász Trencsényi, and myself, were very productive and led to the proposal of a more comprehensive project for the future.

Finally, German history and historiography were an overall presence during my days in Berlin. It was, however, an ever-elusive presence; no matter how much it permeates daily life, it proves hard to grasp for an outsider.

### *Abends*

Evenings at the Kolleg combined learning, conversation, and a good table in the convivial atmosphere of the regular Thursday dinners, the special Wednesday seminars, and the more informal film sessions and debates. Yet most of my evenings were devoted, above all, to the enjoyment of Berlin's music and theater scene: operas, concerts, and plays were the source of a unique esthetic experience.

There was also dinner with friends and drinks in the *Biergärten*. And the more and more frequent farewell parties on the patios of the Villa Walther, as the end of our fellowship year approached and we all prepared to leave.

### *Nachts*

Nights are warm now. It is late, yet the tall windows of my flat still let in some light from the fading sun. Impressions and evaluations overlap. Questions come to mind, in a random succession that allows for little poised reflection. The Wiko experience is coming to an end; I am leaving Berlin soon. The smoothness of these months will probably be replaced by the roughness more typical of our "real" life at home. Sometimes I feel that our atmosphere here was a bit too self-centered, too complacent, perhaps too detached to allow for a strong intellectual commitment. But then, it was precisely this atmosphere that allowed me to engage more freely and open-mindedly in thought and reflection. And once I go back to the conflictual Argentine environment, I will surely miss the relaxed style of scholarly dedication that presided over our days and our works ("los trabajos y los días") at Wiko.