



INTEGRATING WORK AND LIFE AT WIKO:
POW-WOWS, *LESESTUNDEN*, POTLUCKS
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The idea of spending a year at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin was first planted in my head by Rüdiger Wehner, Permanent Fellow of the Kolleg, four years ago if I remember correctly. This communication took place face-to-face, after a fine dinner at the Wehners' home in Zurich. It took till 2003/04 to find a suitable year for my sojourn at Wiko. Much had to be done to prepare for the year. Chief among the preparations was assembling a focus group, which required a good number of e-mails and phone calls. As it turned out, the focus group on spatial cognition, consisting of Janellen Huttenlocher, John Rieser, Sara Shettleworth, and me, got along wonderfully well. We presented our own work to one another, read a good deal of literature for discussion, and heard many visiting guests. In the end, we found enough common ground to write a theoretical paper together, a project that will be carried on beyond our time at the Kolleg.

Life and work consisted of writing and revising a diverse array of articles and chapters, pow-wows, *Lesestunden*, potluck dinners, and *Einkäufen* with my 2-year-old daughter Tia on Saturday mornings. The writing was productive enough, although I could have written

more. Because most of the community of scholars lived close to one another, gatherings for dinner and parties have been more frequent than back home. But it was the pow-wows and *Lesestunden* that stand out in making me really feel like a scholar.

Our focus group met regularly to discuss things, and I affectionately call the meetings pow-wows. We started reading pieces of literature and discussing them. Because we are from different areas of study, it meant a good deal of integration of materials for everyone. These were great occasions for mulling over thoughts and getting to know one another. We all wanted to work on our own in the morning, so that pow-wows were invariably in the afternoons, sometimes right after lunch, sometimes before Thursday dinner. Eventually, John Rieser noticed a common thread through much of our work and our discussion. It was the integration of different sources of information in spatial cognition. And thus we had more integrating to do, to put down a diverse array of topics into one paper. The “integration” paper took quite a few pow-wows worth of midwifery, but was finally born in May. It is still being written as we leave for our home institutions.

The pile of pdfs that I printed out to read grew to half a boxful by the time they were shipped near the end of the year. For a change of scene, I would often read in the library, especially in the quiet nook where the bay windows were. One day, one of the librarians called it “Ihre Lesestunde”, and the term has stuck since then. These *Lesestunden* let me sit and chew over a wide variety of topics, far beyond my reading diet back home. *Nature* and *Science* came to the library regularly, and I would leaf through those journals regularly. It surprised me what a pleasure it was to flip through the beautiful hard copies rather than scroll up and down a monitor examining a soft version. This wide-ranging reading made me feel like a scholar as never before.

Our focus group had quite regular occasions for getting together for a meal. But guests that visited us especially called for meals together, even breakfasts. One guest who was more one of us than a guest was Nora Newcombe of Temple University. A long time collaborator with Janellen Huttenlocher, Nora visited Wiko twice. She and Janellen, who together have written *the* book on the development of spatial cognition, had a massive handbook chapter to write. Nora and I also worked together polishing off a big theoretical review paper (Cheng and Newcombe in press), some two years in the making. The topic of this review paper brought me back to the beginning of my career. It concerned the use of geometric and non-geometric cues in relocating a place (Cheng 1986) in a range of vertebrate animals. We had written most of the thorough review of the “geometry” literature before arriving at Wiko. But it was here that the most important theoretical ideas were

developed and written. I remember discussing these nascent notions with John Rieser on Kurfürstendamm one afternoon, with the two of us drawing imaginary diagrams on the roomy sidewalks near Rathenauplatz. The intellectual environment of the Wissenschaftskolleg is conducive to grand thoughts. The paper took on theoretical wings here, enough ideas for two grant proposals, I would say in a loose moment. Of the number of papers that found their way to press in my time here, the geometry paper was the most satisfying. Nora Newcombe and I wrote revisions on her first visit, and we finished the final version for the publishers on her second visit. One thing leads to another and we are now doing a web version of the paper with lots of pictures, a cyberchapter whose making is occupying my last days in Berlin. We had great dinners with Nora, at one place in Villa Walther or another.

“Potluck” does not describe the dinner evenings properly. The meals relied on multiple sources of cooking but were, well, integrated. One would bring a salad, one would bring a soup, one would bring dessert, and the host would cook a main course. Red and white wine were arranged for, and *Mineralwasser* too. I like to think that work reflects life (or is it the other way around?). Tia, my two-year-old daughter, had a good time climbing up and down on other people’s furniture.

Looking back, I might have written more had I not read so much, talked so much, or took on so many different projects. But then, it has been all in all a productive year, and I would not have developed nearly as much intellectually without the breadth of activities. It has been a marvelous year of personal and professional development. Oh, and Tia enjoyed most of the Saturday morning *Einkaufen*.

Works revised in part at Wiko on their way to publication

- Spetch, M. L., K. Cheng, and C. W. G. Clifford. “Peak Shift but not Range Effects in Face Recognition.” *Learning and Motivation* 35 (2004): 221–241.
- MacDonald, S. E., M. L. Spetch, D. M. Kelly, and K. Cheng. “Strategies in Landmark Use by Children, Adults, and Marmoset Monkeys.” *Learning and Motivation* 35 (2004): 322–347.
- Oaten, M. and K. Cheng. “Academic Stress Impairs Self-Control.” *Journal of Clinical and Social Psychology*, in press.
- Cheng, K. and N. S. Newcombe. “Is there a Geometric Module for Spatial Orientation? Squaring Theory and Evidence.” *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, in press.

- Cheng, K. "Arthropod Navigation: Ants, Bees, Crabs, Spiders Finding Their Way." In *Comparative Cognition: Experimental Explorations of Animal Intelligence*, edited by E. A. Wasserman and T. R. Zentall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, due 2005.
- Cheng, K. "Common Principles Shared by Spatial and Other Kinds of Cognition." In *Spatial Perception, Spatial Cognition: Mapping the Self and Space*, edited by F. Dolins and R. Mitchell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, due 2005.
- Cheng, K. "Review of K. J. Jeffery, ed. *The Neurobiology of Spatial Behaviour*." *Animal Cognition* 7 (2004): 199–200.
- Cheng, K. "What Makes us Tick: Clocks in the Brain. Review of W. H. Meck, ed. *Functional and Neural Mechanisms of Interval Timing*." *Animal Cognition* 7 (2004): 267–268.

Guests who talked with the Spatial Cognition group

- Horst Bredekamp, on Leibniz, consciousness, perception
- Neil Burgess, on models and neurophysiology of spatial representations
- Matthew Collett, on ant navigation
- Larry Hedges, on human spatial cognition
- Mark May, on human action and navigation
- Randolf Menzel, on honeybee navigation
- Nora Newcombe, on development of spatial cognition
- Herb and Anne Pick, on human action and navigation
- Marina Vasilyeva, on development of spatial cognition
- Rüdiger Wehner, on insect navigation