



A YEAR OF GIFTS, 2006–2007
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One of the last events of the year was also a summation of much that came before. In mid-July Helmut Lachenmann led a colloquium on the “suspended magic”, as he called it, of contemporary music. It was enchanting to hear him analyze a piece by Webern and stimulating to hear the critical discussion that followed; I left the room reminded of what a gift it was to spend the year as part of the Wiko community. We were unusually blessed with three composers this year, Toshio Hosokawa and Noriko Hosokawa as well as Helmut Lachenmann; the performances of their work, complemented by the photography of Tomasz Kizny, led us out of the narrows of our areas of expertise to the expansive human conversation that is what we mean by culture.

My own time was taken up above all with my research and writing of a complete first draft of a book on the discourse of gift-giving. Central to the book is Marcel Mauss's famous essay, *The Gift*, published in 1925; from there I worked backward in time to Hobbes (with glances further backward as far as classical antiquity) and forward to the most recent critical discussions of gift-giving and its role in contemporary societies; I looked inward to the gift-giving practices of Western societies and outward to Oceania, the American Northwest, and India. Contrary to the long-held belief that "primitive" societies exchange gifts while modern societies have market economies, empirical research has revealed hard bargaining in tribal societies and ongoing philanthropic, charitable, and other gift practices in capitalist societies. Contrary to the dominant view of gifts as a means to social integration, gifts are a volatile medium that can lead to violence as well as to peace; but whether they are a source of grace or conflict, we cannot dispense with them and would do well to understand them.

The generosity of the staff members appeared to me almost as a laboratory of gift-giving at its best; they were a reminder of the peaceful and fruitful potential that Mauss, in the concluding pages of his book, desperately wished to activate in the divided Europe of his time. Their dedication to our work made *us* feel that our work must indeed be important – and that we should live up to their confidence in us.

The Fellows showered gifts of knowledge and friendship on one another. It takes a special alchemy to transform the shared challenge of separating five kinds of trash at the Villa Walther into a subject for wit and skit that lasted right to the end-of-year party. The same generosity extended to our work: with pleasure, we helped one another with translations, travel advice, tips for working in foreign archives, working through difficult patches of one's project – whatever it was, we collaborated.

A year in Berlin was a gift in its own right. The effervescence from opera, theater, museums, and concerts carried over to our table conversations, where we cheered each other on to find the right *Magic Flute* performance or weighed the qualities of the newly re-opened Bode Museum. More specifically for my own work, I savored the chance to visit Berlin's ethnological museum, with its great collections and its historical ties to Franz Boas, who began his career there before emigrating and shaping American anthropology. Two Berlin university locales, the Berlin Seminar for Comparative European History (Prof. Jürgen Kocka, Prof. Hartmut Kaelble, Free University) and the seminar "Risiken des Kulturbegriffs: Religionsanthropologie gestern und heute" (Prof. Renate Schlesier, Free University), invited me to present my work. Professor Lorraine Daston of the Max Planck Insti-

tute for the History of Science generously invited me and other Wiko Fellows to take part in a late July colloquium on radical breaks in twentieth-century music, philosophy, and natural science that turned into a most stimulating workshop. The Wissenschaftskolleg itself sponsored one event after another that made this an exciting year for the Fellows; I will only mention Stefan Litwin's performance and discussion of Schumann, and the Artemis Quartet concert, as two that especially appealed to me. Every Fellow will have his or her own list of the Wiko evenings and other Berlin events that have challenged them to add new ingredients to their hometown recipes.

As a center of learning, Berlin is inseparable from the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the intellectual founder of its first university. Just by following its own agenda, the Wissenschaftskolleg creatively re-creates his cosmopolitanism and his belief in a dialogue of all disciplines.