



THE FLUIDITY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MARCIA PALLY

Professor Pally teaches at New York University in Multilingual Multicultural Studies and is a Permanent Fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities. Her book, *Warnung vor dem Freunde: Tradition und Zukunft amerikanischer Außenpolitik [Die Vereinigten Gottesstaaten: The Religion, Values and Foreign Policy of the Country with the Biggest Guns]*, will be published in spring, 2008; her last book, *Lob der Kritik: Warum die Demokratie nicht auf ihren Kern verzichten darf [Critique Abandoned: The Ceding of Democracy]* was published in Germany in 2003/2005. Research interests include the intersection among culture, religion, and US politics and the influences of culture on language use and learning. Marcia Pally has lectured widely at universities and professional associations, among them Harvard, Columbia, The University of Chicago, Humboldt University Berlin, The University of Zurich, The Cato Institute, and the Aspen Institute Berlin. In addition to her academic work, Marcia Pally has been a cultural and political columnist in the US and Europe for the past 20 years and is the author of two books on censorship and freedom of expression, *Sex & Sensibility: Reflections on Forbidden Mirrors and the Will to Censor* (1994) and *Sense & Censorship: The Vanity of Bonfires* (1991). Before her career as a professor and writer, she was a dancer and choreographer. – Address: Department of Multilingual Multicultural Studies, New York University, 230 Greene Street, 6 floor, New York, NY 1003, USA.

My relatively short time at the Wissenschaftskolleg had both direct influence on my scientific and essayistic work and influences so delicate that the best way to express them would be in literature, which I do not write. Perhaps the best I could do would be to return to choreography and create a new work that would convey the sense of challenge, emotional

and intellectual enrichment, and tension that arises within the sense of inclusion in this small society. It is with great sadness that I write this final report; as I came only at the beginning of May, I would now like to build on the relationships I've started. But Frau Speder, of the spectacular kitchen staff, told me it is better to leave in the exhilaration of the closing weeks than to linger (that is, till the next visit).

On the most basic level, I finished my book, with the title (to date) of "Die Vereinigten Gottesstaaten: The Religion, Values and Foreign Policy of the Country with the Biggest Guns", which will be published in Germany at the beginning of 2008. I also wrote a number of articles for European and American publications (*Harper's Magazine*, *Internationale Politik*, and others) and gave a number of lectures at the Wiko, various Stiftungen, and universities elsewhere. Colleagues here were of great help to me in reading early versions of articles and lectures and offering their feedback. This is invaluable generosity.

In addition to this direct assistance, I benefited from three sorts of interactions with colleagues and staff: discussions about my work, discussions about other people's work, and serendipitous conversations about both and topics beyond.

Conversations about my book and the two talks I gave here (one a Wiko colloquium and one at the conference organized by the Religion subgroup, in which I also participated) sharpened my insight about certain points of my argument but also about framing my ideas for a German audience. First, framing: From my stays in Germany over the years and from my writing here, I've had some idea of what sort of "translation" of cultural frameworks I should do. Still, at the Wiko I was forced to face others. Ironically, then, a premise of the book was reinforced, which I suppose is better than finding one's premises falsified and having to start over when the publisher's deadline is close.

In the book, I hold that US foreign policy – what was actually done by US administrations after all the debate and infighting was over – is not only the creation of a political class, but on a deeper level also emerges from the values and assumptions of American society. At the Wiko, the questions I was asked, the tone of the interaction, in short the behavior of my colleagues, came out of their values and assumptions, which at times differed from even my supposedly "translated" ones. For one thing, some people are fed up with having to translate things American into their frameworks. Others assumed, however politely, that my research material would not offer anything new to them, as they already have so much information (and ideology) about the US from years of reading the German press. Some expressed real surprise at what they heard, and reported that they were astonished that there are new constructs and information to be had. It was most educational for

me to see what sort of framing I should use to meet them with that information. Still others were irritated that I didn't explain what bothers them about the US. For instance, in a talk about the doctrinal shifts from European Calvinism to American evangelicalism, one Fellow was decidedly unsatisfied that I didn't explain structures of US daily life. Such ethnographic or anthropological studies could be and have been done, but this was not the paper I was asked to give by the conference chairman, and the question made me reflect again on framing the material so that the audience is comfortable with the area of delimitation.

[As I gave these matters some thought, I learned about a lecture given before I arrived by another American woman. Apparently, it did not go well. Her topic, the 1993 war in Bosnia, is one about which Europeans have many sensitivities, which this Fellow did not know or take into consideration in her talk. There were, it seems, also questions about the proof she brought for her claims. This I suppose can happen in a year at the Wiko, but the unusual thing was the manner in which other Fellows challenged her paper. With whispering and the passing of notes, the atmosphere slipped away from the usual professional standards. Female members of the Wiko staff later told the speaker that they had never seen such a response before, and questions were raised about the role of gender at the Wiko. Gender came up again in a casual evening discussion with several Fellows and the Rector Luca Giuliani. I could not say much about this, as I hadn't been at the talk. But I did say this: the aspect of this incident that pertains to gender is the difference between the Fellows' response to this speaker – including the female Fellows' response – and the response they would have given to a similarly problematic talk by a male, especially a non-minority male.]

The talks I gave and the discussions within the Religion subgroup also sharpened several of the concepts with which I'd been working in the course of writing the book. That is, they enriched the points of argument. Three interactions with colleagues were particularly illuminating: one, those with colleagues working on various aspects of the Islamic world; the second, those with colleagues from the South African Reformed Church, with whom I discussed the many similarities between American evangelicalism and their confession. These similarities were unexpected for all of us, and then the differences between these two approaches to Protestantism became even more intriguing. The third was a discussion about notions of the sacred and profane, the religious and secular. Ideas from this small debate filtered into two articles I wrote on secular/pluralistic and assimilationist/participatory models for organizing government, society, education, and religion.

Beyond these rather direct contributions to my work were the benefits from discussion about other people's work, in colloquia and out. A short example: one Fellow was questioned in his colloquium about the validity of tracking a religious image over considerable distances, different cultures, and periods of time. The objection was that he did not sufficiently consider the specific contexts of the various locations. What followed was a debate about the possibility and value of *longue durée* studies and structural approaches (which must nonetheless account for change). I found myself considering two things, my own *longue durée* study (of evangelicalism and US foreign policy) and the need for a certain balance in science: that between the relative safety of studies that restrict themselves to highly delimited arenas but that then have limited applicability to other contexts, on the one hand, and, on the other, the adventurousness of extracting or hypothesizing patterns, concepts, and hermeneutic tools applicable to many circumstances, but less precisely so. (The matter at my lunch table was solved when one Fellow praised the colloquium in question and declared: "Fuck context!")

In addition to discussions expressly targeting our work was the serendipitous exchange with colleagues – some of the best mind-tennis I've played lately, drawing my attention to ideas, sources, material, and differences in how people think. Several playful conversations with the biologists required, for instance, that I justify the methodologies of cultural history as against those in the biological sciences. Since I do not have a repeatable event – hundreds or thousands of Americas – as a data set, how can I explain the value of my work to someone who is unconvinced absent statistically reliable and valid calculations? Some of these conversations also produced hilarious "experimental designs" for a study with thousands of Americas – something apparently desirable statistically if not politically.

Unexpectedly, I had several conversations with Wiko philosophers that brought me to a topic rather far from my present work but close to my former career as a dancer and choreographer: the meaning of "meaning" in dance (a non-referent-based mode of communication) in contradistinction to the meaning of "meaning" in verbal languages, in philosophy, and my field of Multilingual Multicultural Studies, where signs/symbols do have referents. These conversations over several weeks suggested to me a possible project for the future.

They also touched on the border area between the personal and the professional, perhaps where the motives for our research begin. I found myself remarking to these philosophers that much of the understanding that shapes my assumptions and conduct is grounded in dance – as are, apparently, the metaphors of my understanding, such as "ground".

“Ground”, as it turns out, is also a key word in the book on evangelicalism and US foreign policy. In it, I describe the relationship between American values/assumptions and US foreign policy this way: that values and assumptions form the ground from which foreign policy emerges – ground in the sense of fundament and in the sense of an orientation of energy. This strikes me as a rather dancer-ly way to explain a socio-political phenomenon. I’m not sure why this private/scientific border came to the fore at Wiko, other than through the unexpected provocation of my colleagues.

These few examples, I hope, give some sense of the ways the Wiko came to bear not only on present projects, but also on my thoughts about thought. There were hardly any interactions that were not of this ilk – except those that were raucous, bawdy, and wine-enhanced. This brings me to the structure of the Wiko: the combination of individual work and communal colloquia, meals, concerts, and the outings Fellows arrange (to museums, opera, and so on). I was amazed at the support infrastructure, as were all the Fellows.

[Here, I’d like to remark on the language classes by Eva von Kügelgen. In addition to seeing her approach to language teaching in her classes, she and I had several talks about theories of language pedagogy, which is one area of my Multilingual Multicultural Department. She is no simple language teacher, but a sophisticated student of language acquisition theory who is impressively inventive in the materials she creates and in her classroom approach. My sense is that she has even more effective methods than some Fellows, used to traditional language learning, allow for. In all, she is a real find.]

What struck me as most magical about the Wiko structure is the *fluidity* between private work and public that this infrastructure created. After hours of working alone, open the door and one is not just in public (that can be achieved anywhere), but in a community where intriguing conversation can occur at any time. (Perhaps this was enhanced by my being in the main house at Wallotstraße 19.) This aspect of the physical plant created a sense of ever-present intellectual stimulation – the chance to begin or continue a conversation – and of the inclusion and warmth I mentioned above. I will keep in touch with several of this year’s Fellows, but this special traffic between community and individual work is very hard to come by, and I will sorely miss it.

I don’t think, for instance, that I would have bared my history with limericks in a less hospitable atmosphere. Though I came late, I was encouraged to plunge into the plans for the final party, which I did with the sense that my talent for doggerel, such as it is, would be taken in the right spirit. It was, and I include them below.

The Limerick is an Anglo-Saxon form of doggerel or poetry for idiots. And it is the only thing I do really well. In fact, I am authorized to annoy you with limericks by my English teacher who awarded me the limerick prize in the 5th grade. For those of you not familiar with the required rhyme structure, it always goes like this:

A
A
B
B
A

A prelude in limerick form, just to give you an idea of the sound of the thing:

Preparations for this final fest
Put my limerick skills to the test
But once the challenge was set
I'd never relent
To find *something* to rhyme with Longuenesse

A limerick on the metamorphosis theme of our fest:

At Wiko, a dance apologist
Awoke as a Swiss biologist
The resident theologians
Said it's a fate to beholdin'
You could've awoke a British proctologist

Now that we're getting the hang of it, we can move to the expanded form of the limerick, where we have not one middle couplet but two or three, or however many you can manage while still recalling the "A" rhyme for the final line. This one has four middle couplets but you must keep the "A" line in mind. (This is also a test for Alzheimer's.)

We've been set here for months to tinker
Und Deutsch zu lernen, aber das ist schwieriger
If we've got little done
For having so much fun,
Mixing evolution and God
And the Reformed Synod,

Our publishers with opprobrium
Look at time spent at colloquium
And not at our desks
Producing serious hefts
At least we've got photos that say we're The Thinker

A final limerick, also in expanded form with multiple middle couplets, in honor of metamorphosis and my thanks to all of you, staff and Fellows, affording me such a wonderful time:

When psychology was Frank's domain
He secretly mapped all our brains
But now he's a historian
Of the guard Praetorian
Joe's abandoned La France
And taken up dance
Our theologian Herr Graf
Is tracking giraffes
And our historian Almut
Is studying Knut
Toshio's left all his notes
For the genealogy of goats
If from this list you are missing
Consider is a blessing
Now I must again
Rhyme with ... Brain and domain
So let me say our lives
Will ne'er be same