



## WALKING IN ON A BROKEN LEG DHRUV RAINA

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My sense of excitement and anticipation in spending a year at the Wissenschaftskolleg received a rude shock just before I landed in Berlin. This of course had nothing to do with Berlin per se, but rather with the fact that for several months before my departure I had been unwell and in setting out had my hand in a cast and a bandaged leg – thanks to a thoroughly enjoyable if ruinous game of football. As a result the *aatish-i-chinar* (flaming maples) lost their charm for me and the onset of the Berlin winter appeared more forbidding than it eventually turned out to be. The first three months were spent struggling with an excessive preoccupation with my indifferent health, this further complicated by medical advice that advised me to stay away from exquisite Rieslings and other fine wines as well as the proverbial German beers. It was a struggle not to allow this circumstance to colour all my (sociable) interactions with the new people I was meeting and the novel culture and experience I had so anticipated.

But I did have the presence of mind to put on my analytical hat and make notes on the German health system, as first a taciturn doctor, and then a more jovial and talkative one, exorcised the demons running riot through my body. These notes I often exchanged with the orthopaedist who combined “magnetic resonance imaging” techniques with physiotherapy and sticking needles in my shoulders, neck and legs. The techniques produced results – but only very gradually. And the taciturn internist actually smiled and joked after the fifth visit as my health showed signs of improvement. But my body had never before confronted so much technology. On another front, Christine Klöhn and Katarzyna Speder carefully monitored my Wiko diet till I was able to eat and drink as usual. Through all this Bob Perlman, the skeptical neurophysician, remained a constant interlocutor and the long discussions with him on evolutionary biology issued in a session where I was invited to share my ideas on the notion of “disciplines” with the evolutionary medicine *Schwerpunkt*. I thoroughly enjoyed several discussions with Mark Thomas that had the flavour of the “Two-Cultures Debate”, and his shooting-from-the-hip style required equally rapid response times.

On another front, my education in the area of Arab modernity was initiated through conversations with Fawwaz Traboulsi; these conversations then extended to the seminars organized by EUME and I got down to meeting some of the bright young scholars working on the Middle East. The most enjoyable part was the dinner after the seminar at the Greek restaurant on the Ku’damm, where the discussion continued long and not always on the theme of the seminar just held. The conversations with Marc Aymes, Tamim Al-Barghouti, Georges Khalil, Samah Selim, Mohammed Tabeshat and several others from institutes in Berlin (such as Margrit Pernau, then at the Zentrum Moderner Orient) enlivened the sometimes-splendid isolation of Wiko.

The Arab world remained a constant fixation in the first few months. In early December the art and media theorist Siegfried Zielinski invited me and a colleague from India to participate in a workshop organized at the Universität der Künste Berlin. We were excited because George Saliba was also to come – his arrival and paper more or less setting the tone for the proceedings; and the icing on the cake was the paper by Hans Belting on Ibn-Al-Haytham’s (Al-Hazen) optics and its impact on perspective in the arts. But this for me was also an introduction to students of art history and media philosophy in Berlin, Cologne and elsewhere, who in turn introduced us to some delightful bars from the 1960s – “Zwiebelfisch” remains my favourite.

If I remember correctly, it was in Ionesco's play *Macbett*, between scenes of great dramatic intensity and historical importance, that a butterfly-catcher walks across the stage with his butterfly net. Somehow, amongst all that was happening around and to me, I was able to catch my prized butterflies, and work slowly got done. Books arrived at my desk – some were read, contemplated and digested; others remained unread until almost the very end; others still were unread but photocopied and put aside for later perusal. Amidst all this, in steam-engine fashion, papers and chapters chugged out of my office at something like monthly intervals.

My wife Rajeswari and son Abhinav arrived in the last week of December. As a result, I became more involved with other families in the Villa Walther and my health showed signs of improvement. Even the raging winter (mild by Berlin standards, so I'm told) now lost its bite, and I began to enjoy winters as I normally do. My entrance into the inner life of Berlin slowly commenced. With our poor smattering of German, Rajeswari, Abhinav and I nevertheless marched determinedly through Berlin and much of eastern Germany. In our German class, Meenakshi Mukherjee and I would invariably move the discussion away from German grammar towards German literature and poetry. As a result, our intake of German grammar was meager, but our knowledge of current trends in German literature grew apace. Perhaps Eva was unimpressed. But we are grateful to her, and her lessons strengthened my resolve to not only read but speak the language fluently some day. Rajeswari and I, normally quick learners, and proud of speaking several languages, were humbled in our encounter with demanding German. But we took solace in the fact that Abhinav picked up the language fairly quickly and his patient tutor and schoolteachers insisted that he continues his studies. Perhaps this will be a way of keeping our time spent in Berlin alive in memory.

In addition, young Berlin scholars guided us through the city and became important sources of information about what to read and the latest trends in German politics and culture. Albrecht Bluemel and Gernot Wolfram guided me through a detailed Hobsbawmian kind of social history of the area in and around Hackescher Markt. Jana Tschurunev and Urs Lindner were generous philosophical informants as to the future of critical realism. In like manner, Julian Rohruher and Renate Weiser, over several evenings, led us through various aspects of Bavarian culture and of course the history of reunification. The experience of hearing what the Germany of tomorrow was thinking of today was fascinating. But I must confess that this exploration was not an entirely naive and innocent one,

since I had already been somewhat primed by Wolf Lepenies' wonderful book, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*.

I often sought refuge in the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in order to discuss certain matters that nagged me – and Jürgen Renn, Dagmar Schäfer and Martina Seibert welcomed me with open arms to Max-Planck. The confluence of disciplines and ideas at Wiko sometimes triggered disciplinary anxieties – which drew me back towards my own field. But then again, science studies as well as the history and philosophy of science are in and of themselves interdisciplinary. Some years ago, on my first trip to Berlin, a philosopher had educated me about why science studies were like *Mambo Number Five*: “A little bit of Habermas for tonight, a little bit of Foucault on the side, a little bit of Merton is what I need.” The interaction with colleagues from Max-Planck drew me into new research problems that I had postponed working on until finishing the book I'd originally thought to complete at Wiko. I had met some of the researchers from Max-Planck at workshops organized elsewhere in Europe, but this time it was interesting to encounter them on their home turf – starting with the Dahlem conference on models of the globalization of knowledge. As workshops go, this was among the most intense I had ever attended. For four days we were locked in, as a group, discussing the ins and outs of a certain model of globalization. The evenings were spent dining at a “genuine” Chinese restaurant on Uhlandstraße.

For me, the relationship between the history of science and didactics was exemplified by a lecture I gave in Oldenburg. I was fortunate enough to be invited by the historian of physics Falk Reiss. Reconstruction of certain of the truly classical experiments of physics – Gauss' magnetometer, Lichtenberg's visualization of the electric field or, for me, closer to home, the Raman effect, named after the Indian physicist Raman – these were true eye-openers and provided a concrete instantiation of the foundational role of the history of science in a dynamic science curriculum. More than anything else it revealed the enormous difficulty in “reconstructing” those certain physics experiments that have now been canonized; how much more it told us of the material culture and practices of physics at various historical moments is another issue altogether.

On weekends, we boarded the regional *Züge* – Vera Schulze-Seeger having worked out the complicated train itineraries for us – and visited some of the larger historical towns and cities – and sometimes the smaller sleepy ones. One day over lunch Heiner Goebbels asked me where we had been travelling and I reeled off a list of place-names. He remarked quizzically: “But you should explore western Germany as well.” The seasoned traveller re-

sponding: “We did that on earlier trips.” The two days spent in Weimar were certainly our touristic highlight and inspired me to reread Thomas Mann’s *Lotte in Weimar* and Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* – after more than a quarter-century.

The Wiko lunches were remarkable. But as lunches go, the Tuesday afternoon lunches were by far the most compelling. I rarely recall a post-colloquium Tuesday lunch marked by indifference. Everyone of the Fellows had something – indeed! – to say about the colloquium and lunch flew by as views appreciative or critical, strongly or gently worded, bounced and ricocheted from table to table like an intellectual pinball machine – never a dull moment. Some of us cobbled together what we called the “The Third-World Table”. The conversation at the dining table, invariably interesting and “constructivist”, lingered about issues that had little to do with the concerns of our other co-Fellows. There were no apparent rules of membership – required was a different way of looking at the world – Argentinians, Australians, Indians, Israelis, Lebanese, Rumanians, South Africans – if I am not mistaken we also had a Czech over on a couple of occasions and sometimes the English even deigned to chip in. I was frequently reminded of the oft-quoted passage from Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*: “Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close, and listen ... They will see you, perhaps, but they will go on talking among themselves, without even lowering their voices ... Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, nightbound and perished with cold.”

I slowly headed towards the final chapters of a book on the culture of the history of science and the science of policy-making in 1950s India – a book that I had not come here to write. What about the one I was *supposed* to write? Denis Thouard patiently read through my chapter (in addition to some others) on the French-Jesuit astronomers in India and, with a philologist’s lens, corrected my reading of a Jesuit manuscript from the early eighteenth century. While I plodded through the historical writings of the Scottish mathematicians, the distance necessary to adopt a reasoned historiographical position on the Scottish Enlightenment still eluded me; and while reading I felt that the material needed to slosh around in my head some time more – but the Berlin spring and summer were too distractingly beautiful. As we sat through the opera based on Walter Braunfels’ funereal *Jeanne d’Arc*, Rajeswari and I thought that opera as a musical form was beyond our appreciation. But our musical excursions culminated in *Fidelio*, and our faith in opera was restored. The time had come to bid a sad and reluctant goodbye and return ardently to the life of the

university. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus would certainly smile on reading this line, reminding me of the *Ars moriendi*.