



## CHILDREN, GRUNEWALD, AND GHOSTS RONALD ROGOWSKI

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I arrived in August 2007 with five projects in mind:

- to enroll our two daughters (then 8 and 10 years old) in German schools and get them completely fluent in German;
- to put the finishing touches on a book (with three co-authors, on economic effects of electoral systems) that had been hanging fire for a couple of years;
- to join my family in (re)discovering Berlin's urban and cultural richness and in exploring more of Europe than I had been able to do as a post-graduate hitchhiker;

- to finish research on, and complete much of the writing of, a book on economic inequality (theory and history); and
- having led a multidisciplinary group at UCLA for several years, to revel in the opportunity to learn from scholars from other disciplines and traditions.

On our first formal evening, Horst Bredekamp – perhaps the most universally learned of the Permanent Fellows – welcomed us with an unsettling but liberating speech, from which I recall especially these lines (perhaps distorted in my memory): “Our only expectation of you this year is to have no expectations. If, by February or March, you are deciding to write a very different book than the one you planned to write, or to pursue some other subject altogether, that is probably a good thing – and the project that you begin will almost certainly be better than the one you have abandoned.”

So what happened to my own ambitious projects?

My daughters indeed became completely, almost frighteningly, fluent in German. They developed their own friendships and overcame their own fears. At the same time, they discovered the truth of the damning Pisa studies and the chaos of the Berlin school system, where classroom teachers tended to change at least monthly, and over one memorable month every two or three days. In one way this was lucky: since the substance of instruction was about two years behind what they would have learned almost anywhere else in the world (literally: fifth graders at the *Grunewald-Grundschule* were still trying to master their multiplication tables, many without success), and since formal instruction at school rarely reached five hours a day (Berlin teachers having apparently one of the world’s toughest unions), they could focus entirely on learning German – with the indispensable help of the excellent private teacher that Wiko subsidized. And within the Villa Walther, they became part of a loving and close international community of kids who wandered freely in and out of each other’s apartments, languages, and refrigerators. I think all of the families with kids will retain special memories of the Family Dinners that Frau Klöhn, Frau Speder, and the rest of the staff organized so superbly: the big Christmas goose dinner will certainly always be part of our family album!

The “hanging fire” book indeed got finished (thanks in great part to one of my co-authors) and submitted to a press. Since one of our main arguments is that proportional methods of election (used, for example, in Germany) empower producers over consumers, stifle competition, and lead to much higher consumer prices, I was able in my concluding chapter to introduce some nice illustrations of particularly anticompetitive policies in present-

day Germany (start with *Apotheken*, energy prices, and the multitude of state-countenanced monopolies, but the list is easy to expand).

Helped by the terrific walking tours that Eva von Kügelgen, Christine von Arnim, and Horst Bredekamp organized, and striking out pretty fearlessly on our own, we sampled corners of Berlin – Mitte, Kreuzberg, Prenzlauer Berg, Regierungsviertel, Hansaviertel, Nikolaiviertel, *Forum Fridericianum* – that I/we previously knew superficially, at best; and, of course, delved extensively into Berlin's and Brandenburg's museums and palaces, including such neglected corners as the Musical Instruments Museum (highly recommended). Some lecturing invitations allowed us, despite the painfully weak dollar, to manage short stays in Trier, Konstanz, Seiffen (recommended to anybody with kids!), Bologna, Florence, Prague, Budapest, and Barcelona. But I think our fondest memory of Berlin will remain chopping down our own Christmas tree in the Grunewald (on the one day in December when that is permitted), hauling it back on the S-Bahn, and decorating it in our Villa Walther apartment (and thanks once again to Herrn Riedel for loaning us the crucial saw!).

Almost as Horst Bredekamp predicted, I ran into a complication in my original research plan – or, better, a stubborn riddle – that proved almost more challenging than the whole larger enterprise. That was figuring out where slavery and serfdom fit into the overall history of changing inequality, which otherwise (I continue to think) has a fairly straightforward economic explanation. So, helped immensely by the amazingly resourceful Wiko librarians (special thanks to Gudrun Rein!), I produced three chapters (of a projected seven) of the book, but also what I hope will be a significant paper on slavery. I wound up presenting pieces of the larger book to seminars in Konstanz, Bologna, Fiesole, Budapest, the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, a seminar that I organized at Wiko, and (of course) to the Wiko Tuesday Colloquium – generally to friendly, or at least tolerant, audiences. More remains to be done, but the path now seems clear to me.

But far more than I could have ever anticipated, the real joy of the Wiko – its intellectual feast and delight – was the inter- (or supra-?) disciplinary Colloquia, seminars, and luncheon conversations. While preparing your own Colloquium talk costs a huge amount of research time (typically three to four weeks), the pleasure and payoff from hearing *others'* talks is more than adequate recompense. While not every Tuesday, Thursday, or evening talk (to use the more eloquent German) *hat mich angesprochen*, the great majority (and often even more the ensuing discussions) opened whole new vistas of knowledge: the role of mirrors in Renaissance self-portraiture, law in ancient Israel and in a globalizing world,

early relations between Christianity and Judaism, the intellectual milieu of George Eliot, why evolution seems to make mistakes, how composers work (and handle audience reactions to their work), why an ancient statue or forum took the shape it did, why the Jesuits misunderstood Indian mathematics, what Goethe and Napoleon made of each other (in several senses) – in short, a dizzying demonstration of the variety and wonder of human knowledge. More than this: the rapid building of a mutually appreciative community of scholars, whose conversation seemed to deepen and grow with each new presentation.

Now (I write in early August, one of the last hangers-on), it seems all to have vanished. After the farewell parties, the last dinner and lunch, the rushed packing of books and belongings, the almost furtive early-morning departures, only the echoes, perhaps even the ghosts, remain. Do we leave lasting traces, do we influence the Fellows and the conversations that come after? Many years ago, when I moved into my study to begin a year at Palo Alto's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the first thing I saw on my blank and polished desk was a single sheet of paper. It listed, year by year, which Fellow – each of them, it seemed to me, a towering eminence – had occupied what was now “my” study. I found the names so intimidating, the standard they had set so high, that for about a month I could do no useful work; and even later in the year, as I worked at that desk, I often felt as if one or another of them was peering over my shoulder, offering sometimes helpful, more often devastating, criticism. Perhaps the Wiko tradition, its unspoken Law of Oblivion, is more liberating. Our predecessors' ghosts, and our own, can find better haunts.