



## WHAT I COULDN'T DO AT HOME CANDACE A. VOGLER

---

Candace Vogler took her Bachelor's degree at Mills College (1985) and earned her doctorate in Philosophy (1994) and her doctoral certification in English Literature and Cultural Studies (1992) at the University of Pittsburgh. She joined the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1992, became an Associate Professor in 2000, and a Professor in 2007. From 2000 to 2007, she co-directed the Master of Arts Program for the University of Chicago Humanities Division. She is the author of *John Stuart Mill's Deliberative Landscape* (Routledge, 2001) and *Reasonably Vicious* (Harvard, 2002). She works in ethics, social and political philosophy, sexuality and gender studies, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and philosophy and literature. – Address: Department of Philosophy, The University of Chicago, 1010 E. 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA. E-mail: vogue@uchicago.edu

I have had two careers in the States since completing my doctoral work and joining the Philosophy faculty at the University of Chicago. I work in Anglophone analytic philosophy. I also work in literary theory and cultural studies. The structure of the North American Anglophone academy is such that these careers are almost completely distinct. Analytic philosophers do not normally read Lacan, say, or Marx, or Freud. Hegel and Heidegger are a bit of a stretch for them. And when analytic philosophers do read outside the boundaries of their chosen sub-disciplines, they read as though everyone of philosophical interest was setting out to do analytic philosophy (it's just that most of them do it very badly). People in Anglophone literary and cultural studies, on the other hand, work from different archives, do not read for argument after the fashion of analytic philosophers, have very different understandings of what counts as an interesting research problem, operate

with different modes of argument and different senses of what counts as evidence in support of a claim, start from different assumptions, come to different kinds of conclusions, and have different understandings of how one might reasonably move from start to finish in a train of thought. Thanks to having two disjoint careers, thanks to having an academic home in an institution with long experience encouraging and fostering cooperative and collaborative research projects across academic disciplines, and thanks to the extraordinary separateness of disciplines in the North American Anglophone academy, I have stopped believing in interdisciplinary work – work that successfully meets the standards of scholarship, evidence, and argument in divergent disciplines at the same time. There is such a thing as cross-disciplinary work, however – work that is useful in divergent disciplines, even if it is appropriated in very different ways across disciplinary divides. I came to Berlin looking forward to settling into a narrowly disciplinary philosophical project. I had spent the preceding seven years having to contend with the inevitable struggles of cross-disciplinary work – pedagogical struggles, scholarly difficulties, and theoretical impasses. As it turned out, I had to alter my plans for the year.

Left to my own devices, I work solidly from the very early morning through the early afternoon (roughly, from 3:00 to 14:00). I think best in those hours. I write best then as well. Whenever possible, I do not see anyone. I do not eat. I do not talk to anyone or answer email. Given half a chance, I stay in my dressing gown and don't bother preparing to face a larger world until afternoon. I can normally manage this back home with very little trouble. In a pinch, I just sleep fewer hours.

I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg with hundreds of pages of notes toward a monograph, intending to complete work on the book during the course of my stay. I enjoyed the intensive German course during my first six weeks. By late October, however, it was clear that my writing and research habits were incompatible with the structure of life at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I had to be away from my room in the mornings on Mondays and Thursdays. Tuesday mornings were given, happily, to the Colloquium. Lunch came at 12:30. After trying to get by on two hours' sleep a night for a few weeks, I realized that I needed to take a different approach.

I turned my attention to thinking about what I *couldn't* do at home. I couldn't do the kind of work that happens before a project takes shape, in the days when the topic isn't yet set, the disciplinary home is not yet fixed, and the archive is radically open. I had fallen in love with Berlin and happened into an artists' collective in the city during the first month of my stay. I spent as much time as I could manage with local painters, filmmakers, and

video artists. The things made possible with a BVG transit pass and a few local contacts could only happen in Berlin. Attending concerts, opera productions, gallery shows, and museum exhibitions, practicing conversational German with strangers and new friends in the city, and absorbing as much of the history, culture, and feel of the place as I could – these things could only happen in Berlin. And the working relationships I began building with my fellow Fellows could only happen at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

I became involved in a small group interested in philosophy and literature. One of my fellow Fellows was beginning to make headway with an ambitious project on the work of George Eliot. She thinks that Eliot's fiction embodies a mode of philosophical investigation of social and moral life that has much to teach contemporary philosophers about the ethical. Arguing for this claim requires more than mining Eliot's literary corpus for discrete moral insights. It requires giving serious attention to narrative structure and giving an account of Eliot's rhetorical conduct, use of dialogue, modes of direct address to readers, and so on, as well as developing readings of Eliot's philosophical sources. The philosopher spouse of a philosopher Fellow has done extensive work on James Joyce and was preparing to give a talk on *Finnegan's Wake* to the Joyce Society in Dublin. I have an ongoing research project on Edgar Allan Poe. Poe is an improbable moralist. Poe's fiction takes no interest in character, for example. "In the tale proper," he noted, "there is no space for development of character." That's why he wrote tales. Of course, if there is no space for character development, then there is no space for character *at all*. Instead, his households crumble around masculine figures notable for groundless, but still goal-directed surges of volition, affection, and thought. Strange and beautiful women, when in evidence, only come into their own post-mortem. Unsurprisingly, there are almost no children. And when we turn from individual and household to civil society, things are no better. Poe's cities – most notably, a London and several Parises that bear striking resemblances to antebellum New York – are scenes of crimes. And so the twin pillars of most morality tales – character and society – will not support the weight of ethical narrative in Poe. Nevertheless, Poe writes morality tales. I have been at work off and on for several years trying to learn how best to read them. Our three-person informal philosophy and literature study group gave us an opportunity to read each other's works-in-progress and also to read and discuss our various literary and literary critical source materials with each other. By summer, we had formed a kind of cabal and vowed to stay in touch and to continue the work of bringing literary study and philosophy together in unusual ways.

I led another small group of Fellows interested in working through Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention* (the topic of my ill-fated monograph). I edited two lectures and various notes for our group, and such progress as I made on my official project was made with our group and off campus at several conferences and gatherings in other places. I was able to attend conferences in Rome, Oslo, London, and Lisbon and so to meet more members of the relatively small community of philosophers and scholars who work on and from the writings of Anscombe in order to discuss my work and theirs.

Another Fellow and I co-sponsored a small working group on philosophy and film, bringing Robert Pippin, Jim Conant, and John McDowell to the Wissenschaftskolleg for a few days in May to discuss Hegel, aesthetics, and three films. The arguments were unusually fruitful, partly because we kept the working group small.

I developed powerful friendships with several of my fellow Fellows. I read widely. I watched a lot of films. I wrote hundreds of pages of notes and several stories. I began thinking about love, the erotic, and ethics.

The work on ethics and the erotic is so new that I do not yet know what sort of book I will make. But the book will be born entirely of my time in Berlin, my affection for my fellow Fellows, and the surprising results of negotiating crises in writing. It has been a very important year for me. I find myself once again working in more than one discipline. Although I did graduate work in three disciplines – philosophy, English literature, and mathematical economics – and although I help to edit a major journal in the humanistic social sciences, working across disciplines is always a matter of being out of one's depth. But being out of one's depth in a brand new region of inquiry that as yet lacks shape is less demoralizing than the more usual experience of being perpetually out of one's depth on familiar ground.

At the Wissenschaftskolleg, being perpetually out of one's depth has been a delight, actually. The community of Fellows has been extraordinary. Quite apart from my work toward a new topic, my return to an ongoing project in philosophy and literature, and my occasional forays into work on my official topic, I wrote two serious essays during the course of the year, neither of which was a thing I could have written without the luxury of long hours spent reading in a multi-disciplinary archive on risk assessment, punctuated by ferocious debate and friendly banter with Fellows working in the sciences, in policy studies, and in law.

Because I have never had a year off before, and because my initial writing plans had to be shelved for the year, my time at the Wissenschaftskolleg also gave me an opportunity to

think seriously about my life and my work. It is not always comfortable to have to look at why one does what one does, and how, and what one might do next. But I think that the combined chance to begin developing a new project and to engage in sober reflection about my life and my work planted seeds that I will be cultivating for many years to come. I will not know how even to calculate the magnitude of the debt of gratitude that I owe the Wissenschaftskolleg for some time. I already know that it is considerable.