



INTERIORS AND INTERIORITIES,  
OR, VOYAGE AROUND MY ROOM  
EWA LAJER-BURCHARTH

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Often while working ensconced in my lovely office in Wiko’s *Neubau*, I was reminded of Xavier de Maistre’s little book titled *Voyage autour de ma chambre*. De Maistre, a young Savoyard officer, wrote this idiosyncratic essay – part autobiography, part philosophical investigation – in 1790, during his involuntary interiorization in Turin. Having fought a

duel, he was sentenced to 42 days of house arrest, and he decided to make the best of it. Written in a spirit of defiance and resistance to confinement, *Voyage Around My Room* is an inversion of a travel book that takes the reader on a tour around the author's dwelling and his mind. An account of an interior that metamorphoses into an essay on interiority, de Maistre's book was important to my own research project, which deals with the problem of the relation between interior space and the sense of self in contemporary art. But it was also a kind of model for me for how to use my *voluntary* confinement to produce new work.

What I liked about my year-long stay at Wiko was precisely the sweet interiority of my enclosure, the space and time it provided me to think and write about the question of the relation between interior and interiority as it manifests itself in contemporary art. I cherished those hours of enabling seclusion. But what I also cherished was the prospect of daily release from it occasioned by the daily lunches with my colleagues and fellow travelers around *their* rooms. These lunches, and the forum for daily discussions they provided, proved to be inspiring in many, often unsuspected and indirect ways, and I look back at them with fondness. Though I would have welcomed more Fellows working in the humanities, it proved more stimulating than I expected to have such a large number of scientists at hand. The conversations conducted on the occasion of these daily lunches, but especially the discussions following the seminar presentations, the *Dienstagskolloquia* in which I was very happy to participate, were in a deep and lasting way inspiring to me. I have learned a lot and established many rewarding rapports not only with the literary scholars and the philosophers, with whom I expected to interact, but also with the biologists and the lawyers, the writers and the musicians, some of whom became very dear friends.

Berlin as a city proved to be, of course, a special pleasure: a vast room in which to wander, full of art. With its stupendous museums, but especially its contemporary art scene – certainly the most lively in Europe – the city was the most stimulating and rewarding place to be in, for me, as well as my family. I have devoted (almost) every Thursday afternoon to explorations of the museums and the city's art scene, and my husband, Martin, a journalist, who accompanied me on these occasions, enjoyed them as much as I did. Our daughter, Zofia, too, thrived in Berlin, wherein she was able to conduct a life far more autonomous than in Cambridge. She came to speak German fluently and made lots of new and dear friends. Above all, she became immersed in a new culture and was exposed to new ways of doing things, which proved at once challenging and enjoyable to

her. This aspect of the life at Wiko – the possibility for the Fellows to bring their families along, *and* the extraordinary care given them by the staff – is truly unique and most appreciated. I am most grateful for this experience, as is my family – “Thank you Wiko!” as my daughter says.