



## AT HOME AT WIKO ION MANOLESCU

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During the spring of 2010, I had the privilege and pleasure to be invited to the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin* as an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in the Humanities. From the very beginning, it struck me as obvious that the interdisciplinary project I had submitted to Wiko, involving literature, cognitive psychology and cognitive philosophy, was about to find its perfect research ground, as the Kolleg’s scientific, academic and, not to forget, gastronomic reputation had already spread far beyond the borders of Germany, reaching New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest. My literary robots, cyborgs, androids, brains without bodies and minds out of brains were eagerly waiting to colonize Berlin and to meet with several groups of neurobiologists, the amazing library of

the Kolleg and the delicious culture of the *Spargel* soup, *Spargel* soufflé and *Spargel* pie. And so they did.

At first, I looked more like *The Invisible Man* than *Robocop* or *Terminator* (three science-fiction movies that had quite a lot to do with my work). Since I came to Berlin in the last months of the academic year and since I was the only Fellow to live in an apartment in the office building, people kept on coming to work early in the morning only to meet a sleepy person in the hall with a cup of tea in one hand and a book in the other. They would politely smile to that person, while asking the same questions: “Who are you?” and “What is your project about?” Time and time again, I had to tell my story concerning cognitivism and cyberpunk fiction: about the mind as a possible “software” of the brain, about what it “sees” in reality and in literary texts, as well as about the mysterious, uncharted spaces where literary images may emerge from – the mind of the author, the “body” of the text or the mind of the reader. To reveal the functions of imagery production, processing and maintenance, by comparing the works of psychologists and philosophers such as Stephen Michael Kosslyn, Daniel C. Dennett, Douglas R. Hofstadter or Alva Noë with the postmodernist novels of authors such as William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker or Neal Stephenson, would have been my main theoretical goal. Everybody agreed that the topic sounded quite interesting; after a couple of weeks, *The Invisible Man* had become *The Romanian Cyber Fellow*.

My academic activity at Wiko quickly became related to three main sequences of events and fields of exploration. First of all, the refreshing Tuesday Colloquia, where interdisciplinary debates on quantum physics, fractals, evolutionary biology, the philosophy of mind or the future of robotics were of the utmost interest to me. Exchanging ideas with scientists coming from areas quite different from mine, but still familiar in their theoretical approach, proved to be one of the greatest pleasures and benefits one could get at the Kolleg. Then, the individual research enabled by the Wiko library and its generous staff. No matter what book I was interested in reading or consulting, no matter which library or country it was taken from, after a couple of days, it was waiting for me on the shelf, under the same friendly note: “*Herr Manolescu*”. I cannot be grateful enough to the Wiko library staff for providing me with hundreds of books on recent trends in cognitive psychology and philosophy (such as the enactive theory of the conscience, which I would later relate to neuro-technological cyborg devices used by the characters in cyberpunk and steampunk fiction), on the latest theories on cybersculture, Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence or on updated perspectives on the role of imagery in science-fiction com-

ic books and graphic novels. Last, but not least, the academic lunches and dinners, where one could easily combine intellectual and gastronomic pleasures. Under such circumstances, discussing the philosophical consequences of the sensorimotor approach in neu-robiology and postmodernist fiction became as wonderful a challenge as finding out the recipe of the delicious Rhabarber-Pie made by the newly appointed *Chef de Cuisine*.

Stimulated by the view of the aristocratic villas on Wallotstraße, as well as by the daily long walks in the almost endless forests of Grunewald, I managed to keep myself in good shape for completing a large part of my academic project in Berlin. After months of reading, making notes and confronting opposite theories dealing with my field of research (examining the cognitive mechanisms of the human conscience; studying the “hard”-“soft” relation between brain and mind; establishing different levels of biotechnological cognition in the evolution of cyberpunk fiction characters), a large section of my future book on literature and cognitivism was ready. At the same time, since I came to Wiko not only as a professor and researcher, but also as a *Schriftsteller*, I had the joy of being invited to two significant literary events: a reading, as a guest from Romania, at the Fontane Festspiele Neuruppin and a meeting with readers of my novel *Derapaj (Im Schleuderkurs)* in 2006 at Kafé Szimpla in Berlin. Taking part in these events was a great experience, which provided me with the opportunity to accommodate German readers to the postmodernist profile of recent Romanian fiction and culture.

I cannot end this report without expressing my half-human, half cybernetic, entirely warm gratitude to all the people who made my stay at Wiko an unforgettable experience: academic board, administrative staff, fellow colleagues and everybody involved in the perfect functioning of the Kolleg. I may have bothered quite a few people at the reception with my annoying questions about bus tickets and FedEx packages; I may have requested quite a few rare books from the library service, even at the weekends; and, sometimes during lunches, I may have taken an extra scoop of the chef's exquisite *mousse au chocolat* with forest fruits, under the amused look of the Rector. It always felt like home in the large family of Wiko.