



I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S ALL OVER:
2013–2014 AT THE WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG
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What a formidable challenge it is to summarize such a wonderful year! Somewhat daunted, I read entries from previous yearbooks (Jahrbücher) for inspiration. That proved to be a big mistake. It soon became clear that there was nothing I could say that hadn't already been said by someone else, and rendered much more beautifully and with greater skill than

I will ever possess. But browsing through the past entries helped to shape my recollections and underscored in my mind two similarities. On the one hand, our Wiko year together was a bit like an American high school, only there were no jocks or dweebs, only nerds. We arrived in the fall, all excited and eager to “learn the ropes”, nervous to figure out who were the “cool kids”, and mindful of the importance of first impressions. Our year ahead seemed to offer boundless prospects and a vast expanse of time. We sat together in the lunchroom day after day, and there was a lot of gossip and joking along with some very serious conversation (no food fights, however). The more sophisticated crowd would slip outside for a smoke after meals and debate the merits of Turkish vs. French vs. American cigarettes. As the year progressed, our social fluidity settled down, and several groups formed. Exactly how many I don’t know because, like other members of the Quantification Group, I find it extremely hard to count. And of course, people did their work, lots and lots of work. Then, slowly, the reality of “graduation” intruded into the Berlin spring. We realized our time was coming to an end. There would be parties and toasts, and maybe some would celebrate a bit too energetically (no names mentioned, but we know who). Eventually we would all leave so the staff could enjoy a bit of a break before the next year’s cohort arrived. And hopefully, like ex-high-schoolers, we can all come back to Wiko for our 5th, 10th, and 20th year reunions. I particularly want to see what Hari, Elena, Seth, Andrew, Gunther, Hanna, Mícheál, Judith, Kasia, and Natasha look like when they become middle-aged.

On the other hand, our year together reminded me of a boat cruise. We boarded the good ship Wiko, and after being shown to our accommodations, and after a few meals, realized that we were all in first class. True, some “passengers” enjoyed deluxe suites while others were consigned to mere luxury, but as compared with ordinary academic life there was at Wiko no second class, and certainly no steerage. For the Fellows, this adventure was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. For the staff, however, it was a thing they do year after year, voyage after voyage. If something doesn’t work, they fix it and do things differently in the future. From their standpoint, there are good years and not-so-good years (and maybe even bad years). And like ship passengers, we were variably knowledgeable of who did what on board. We all knew the captain, and we got to know the cruise director, chef, concierge, and cabin steward, but we spent little time with the folks in the engine room even though what they did was terribly important. Wiko is a place animated by lots of invisible labor. And I am deeply grateful for all that work.

As to my own research, I was able to make very good progress on my book manuscript on quantification and credit. The effect of Wiko was to suspend various teaching and

administrative duties and to provide a quiet haven for thought in a world-class city. The book is almost done, and the overall design will be reconfigured because of many interesting conversations I had as part of the quantification focus group. Thanks to the superb library staff, I did not want for sources or materials. But I know there are many other exchanges I participated in, and presentations I attended, whose influence will be less direct. To be sure, I valued the simple intellectual pleasure of learning from experts who were also friends. But in the long run, my research will move in directions I cannot entirely foresee, and I am sure I will use something of what I learned this past year. I will ruminate and cogitate, and gradually fit a few things together. Some ideas will bear fruit, although others that have occurred to me (about the evolution of antibiotic-resistant gladiators and how it relates to prison conditions and exaggerated traits in contemporary Britain) should probably lie dormant for a couple of years, if not forever.

Discovering Berlin was a joy, and I am so thankful for the opportunity to explore it in a leisurely fashion. As a social scientist, it was extraordinary to be in a place with a past that has born witness to the very extremes of human behavior, from brilliant creativity and noble self-sacrifice to intolerance and evil. But the past was no deadweight, and Berlin's cultural vitality offered more distractions than I could ever hope to enjoy. Indeed, toward the very end of the year I was torn by a hard choice: revise another chapter of my book or go see more opera. I chose both, of course, and enjoyed a luxury that only Wiko could provide.