



BERLINESQUE  
JAHNAVI PHALKEY

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Up until my arrival in Berlin, I was accustomed to wandering purposefully in the corridors of the *Age of Extremes*. In Berlin, there was enough time and leisure to wander aimlessly in search of stories in the Age of Empire. I arrived as a historian of 20th-century science and technology. I am leaving as a historian of 19th- and 20th-century science and technology. This could be, ideally, the end of my report but I might dare say a little more since I am yet to unravel the full implications of this metamorphosis.

The Quantification Group made for curious fellow travellers. It was also interesting to get to know a little more about the French School of quantification led valiantly by the Nantes group – we await a manifesto from them in the coming years! In the meantime, some of my conversations with Lorraine Daston, Ted Porter and Bruce Carruthers will stay with me for a long time. It is my hope that the ideas that grew out of these conversations will find their way into my work on numbers.

When my work on numbers does eventually see the light of day, Sonja Grund, Kirsten Graupner and Anja Brockmann could take credit for it between themselves. Their generous support in organizing my research on the history of statistics, but equally for two other edited volumes, is invaluable. Thanks to them, the two volumes are progressing towards publication!

At my arrival, I had planned to visit a museum every week. I did nothing of the kind but even so managed to visit some stunning exhibitions at the Museumsinsel and the Hamburger Bahnhof. These have indelibly shaped the transition of my thinking from primarily in words to now thinking also in three dimensions and about objects in history. Berlin has shaped my exhibition proposal for the Science Museum in London. I hope to indicate the influence of the city on my thinking, even as I look forward to bringing the exhibition to Berlin in 2018.

Lars Hubrich sometimes showed up for dinner. Sometimes he showed up with Nina after dinner for the Yuri Slezkine-led whiskey sessions. In one of those conversations, he mentioned paper editing as a solution to the difficulties of editing a (first) documentary film. I will remain grateful to him for opening that door to misunderstanding and never tell him what I eventually subjected my editor to! But despite my misdeeds, we moved ahead with the film. It has given me enough faith to pour my entire research grant into filmmaking equipment! We will meet again, I hope. In Berlin.

Living in Berlin strengthened old friendships and helped build new ones. Grunewald offered its best memories of Walter Benjamin. This meant that the M19 became my lifeline to David Bowie. On my days out, it was a pleasure to meet Charlotte Klonk, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Ludger Derenthal and Margrit Pernau. It was a joy to reconnect with Tong Lam, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and Uljana Feest – old colleagues from the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.

The surprise and the madness of the ten months were the incorrigible biologists. Felix, Gerry, Hari, Michael and Natasha (in alphabetical order) brought birds, guppies, French food, movies, music and irreverence to my everyday life! Janina Wellmann, John Carson and Vera Schulze-Seeger provided everyday affection a-plenty.

Among other things, this proved to be the year to hone my cooking skills – for one dish. Those subjected to my experiment know what I am talking about. Speaking of taste, from being a strict non-smoker I went on to become a selective smoker. Any future lung problems will be singularly attributed to Laurenz Lütteken and the delectable cigars that

he shared with Natasha and me. It was interesting to find out that he appreciates the Muppets at a much deeper level than I do.

Luca Giuliani, Thorsten Wilhelmy and their colleagues at the Wiko have done all they could and I wonder if that reduces the rest of my professional life to a mere grudge against all future Fellows who will enjoy all that I will henceforth not, in Berlin. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus always found the right people for me to talk to about my museum work. I cannot thank Eva enough for her indefatigable efforts to improve my proficiency (or the lack thereof) in the German language. In the end, she even tried Kafka! My apologies to her for, unfortunately, I did not get as far as both of us would have liked to see me go.

I once told Joachim Nettelbeck that my report would be called “Thinking in Captivity”. After leaving Berlin, I might better say that Berlin captivated my thinking – putting much else that I arrived with on the pause mode, such that I was able to parse out questions that had patiently awaited my attention for years: questions about me, about my work. By the end of my stay, I found a few answers. Alongside, I also got some work done.