



IT TAKES A VILLA
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I am a philosopher, interested in the nature of mind and language. Here at Wiko, I was part of a Focus Group on Language Evolution. This was a very stimulating and productive year for me, with lots of presentations given – at our focus group workshops and meetings, at departments around Germany, and beyond – and several papers/chapters written. Instead of detailing the academic aspects of my life here or reiterating astute observations about Wiko made in the numerous reports collected in the yearly volumes to date, I provide a more lighthearted contribution. The story below is one I presented as part of the entertainment at our final party, where it was accompanied by slides, photos,

and sounds (omitted here). The story can serve to provide a (fictionalized) glimpse of a Fellow's life during a year at Wiko.¹

Berlin, Koenigslot Straße² 10/20

For nearly eleven months, German classes have been an important part of life at Wiko for many of us. Under the patient guidance of Eva von Kügelgen, several of us read through a charming little book, *Berlin, Meyerbeer 26*. The book is set in Berlin-Weißensee and is narrated by one Josefine König, who comes to know the neighbors in her apartment building by listening to the various sounds and noises they make. Below is a Wiko version of the story, set in Grunewald, Villa Jaffters, Koenigslot Straße 10/20.

Our Villa Jaffters

Hello, my name is Josephine, and I have lived this year in Berlin. I like living here, in Grunewald, in Villa Jaffters, along with a number of lovely and distinguished people. I live on the third floor. It's the apartment with the light that stays on late every night.

Every day I tell myself: Jo, tonight you must go to bed early or you won't be able to finish that paper. And you'll miss the Fellows' morning walk again. But then I get a call, or an e-mail, or a knock on the door: 6 p.m., meet you downstairs, going Salsa; or: apartment 312, drinks and dinner, 7 p.m.; or: Serbian movie, 8 p.m. tonight, White Villa, bring snacks. Before I know it, it's the middle of the night!

When all goes quiet, I begin to listen. I like listening to my Fellow neighbors. I've come to know when they are coming and going. I know when they are exercising, especially when they drop their dumbbells on the floor. I know when they are having a party. Or coming back from a trip to Abu Dhabi, or Kazakhstan, or Zaire, rolling their suitcases. And I certainly know when their damn dog is barking!

1 Although any resemblance between the characters in the story and some of the 2015/2016 Fellows is probably not coincidental, it's best not to try to guess ...

2 A fictional amalgam of two villas where most Fellows are housed: Villa Walther, Koenigsallee 20 and Villa Jaffé, Wallotstraße 10.

Our villa is quite old. Not very old. But pretty old. Right now the villa is between renovations. Many things have been replaced or fixed in the last ten years. But not the elevator. (Although I hear it's just been fixed!!) Or the heating system. Our maintenance chief says the heating valves on our radiators are very old. That's why they keep shutting down. That's why the neighbors at #152 had to buy a special gadget called *Entlüftungsschlüssel*. I've learned to like the sound of the *Entlüftungsschlüssel*. I find it oddly soothing. It somehow means that everything is under control in our villa.

In the last few months I have begun to collect noises. I've decided to become a noise collector. I know that noise collecting isn't much of a profession. But I confess I get fed up with my own profession, atomic chemistry. Unlike atoms and molecules, sounds and noises always make sense. They emerge, live, and die. They have a *history* and they tell *stories*. I listen and record them.

Tsss-tsss

Many of the noises I hear in the course of a day become very clear. Steps, for example. Or birds. Or children playing in the yard. Cars tearing down our otherwise quiet road. Or the sound of a just-missed M19. And there's always the sound of our BELOVED coffee machine. These are all ordinary sounds.

But then there are the extraordinary sounds that never become clear. For weeks now I've been hearing one such sound when I am at my desk at night reading a book.

The strange sound I hear comes on suddenly. It's a light, soft hissing-sizzling sound. Tsss-tsss. I almost think I produce it myself by turning the pages. But no.

Quiet. Then again. Then quiet again. I sit and hear. Nothing. Quiet. Then Tss-tss. A not-yet-stolen bicycle is squeaking below my window. Ben is back from an evening game of Badminton at Tempelhof. I can tell it was a good game, by the energetic squeak. Then I hear the two Dutch cognitive scientists, Ilse and Rex; they are back from their weekly group-discussion-over-beer at the local pub, Floh. I am guessing three, maybe four beers each? I don't hear another Tsss.

The next day I can think of nothing else. I go through all the possibilities. But nothing makes sense.

I decide to launch a systematic investigation, floor by floor.

Top Floor: Yusuf Bailes and Deidre Champignon

In the apartment closest to our roof live two astrologers, Yusuf and Deidre. I'm certain they were placed in the roof apartment on purpose. I imagine them standing on their balcony looking at the sky on clear nights. Actually, they don't. They sit by their computers, just like me; well, I don't actually sit; I stand at my desk. I ALWAYS stand. Anyway, Yusuf and Deidre don't look at all at the stars. They just plot their charts.

I know that because my partner, Raul, himself an astrophysicist here with me this year as a LUCKY SPOUSE, with a LOT of time on his hands, regularly goes to their apartment for a drink, while I slave over my papers.

"Don't you ever talk about stars?" I ask Raul. "Don't you ever go out on the balcony and look at the heavens?"

"Not if we are sober ..." says Raul. "We have rather different views on the stars, you see. They don't approve of the astrophysics narrative. And I think they have too much of a narrative going." So what DO they do? Well, at least sometimes they go watch football with other Fellows.

But I digress. Yusuf and Deidre have a cat. The cat is sometimes out on the balcony. She *is* gazing at the stars, and softly scratches the railing. Tsss-tsss? Nope.

Third Floor, Right: Giorgio Aguta the Photographer

On the third floor, right, lives Giorgio Aguta, one of the more colorful among the Fellows, son of a famous Italian painter and an important Kenyan historian. Giorgio himself is a Pulitzer prize-winning photographer, fluent in seven languages. Years ago, he had taken a photo of another Fellow, Nelles, during one of his trips. Handsome guy, Nelles. This was before they knew each other. What a coincidence!

Giorgio likes to play tricks on other Fellows. Knowing how much we all like our wine, he sometimes pours cheap wine into bottles with expensive labels and then likes to watch the reaction of the connoisseurs among us. He has tricked me several times. *Was für Kopfschmerzen.*

In his spare time, Giorgio likes to practice some small percussion instruments that he has picked up during his travels. I stand outside Giorgio's door and listen. Tsss-tsss?

Wrong again.

Second Floor, Left: the Artists

On our second floor, in a very large apartment, with wooden floors, a grand piano, and dance bar, live our resident composer, Reinhardt, and her partner, Ines, a dancer. A rather unlikely couple: Ines comes from a Catholic family in rural France, whereas Reinhardt is a daughter of Bohemian atheists from Berlin. Reinhardt and Ines are usually able to work through their differences, but not right now. The Euro 2016 semi-final has been too much of a challenge for them.

Reinhardt's project this year is to compose a piece for Ines to dance to. Inspired by the multiplying swans in the lake behind our villa, Reinhardt has decided to create a contemporary riff on Tchaikovsky. About a month ago, Reinhardt and Ines decided to give a party. Almost everyone was invited (except those Fellows who had been asking nasty questions at our weekly presentations). After some appetizers and drinks, we gather to watch a preview of the piece Reinhardt and Ines have been working on, which they have titled "SCHWANENSEE TAKE II". Maybe Tsss-tss is the sound Ines's dance slippers make as she slides across the wooden floor? I watch, and listen very carefully.

No luck again. The sound is all wrong.

First Floor, Middle: Bela Partosh

I have a new idea. On the first floor lives a Hungarian wildlife biologist, Bela Partosh. He studies animal morphology. He's especially interested in the European bison. Bella often travels to wildlife preserves, which can be found across the border, in Poland, much to the disapproval of our academic supervisor, who wants the Fellows to do their work here, at the Institute. Bela comes back with hours of videotapes to watch in his office. He is trying to determine WHY the European bison has a beard, unlike the American buffalo. Could the mystery sound be coming from the bison on his videos? I must be losing my mind. This sounds NOTHING like Tsss-tsss!

This noise. What could it possibly be? Any ideas? Anyone? My time in Berlin is almost up. I MUST find out where this sound is coming from.

At a Fellow's birthday party in our garden last Saturday, I learn that my Fellow neighbors have placed a bet on whether or not I'd be able to discover the source of the mystery sound. A BET!! I'm not sure whether to be flattered or insulted, amused or hurt. But the stakes are getting higher.

At night, I stand by my window and think about my Fellow neighbors, whom I have come to love and admire so much in the past few months. For a change, I reflect on all the sounds I am UNLIKELY to hear at our villa:

the sound of a complex explanation coming to a grinding halt;

the sound of a polemical argument collapsing;

the sound of a clever hypothesis crumbling in the face of evidence;

the sound of a sharp analysis getting twisted in a nasty knot;

OR: the sound of a grand theory deflated.

But what *about* Tss-tss??

An Artist's Brew

It's my last week. I have already checked all the floors in our villa. But I forgot: our villa has a basement level. On that level, right next to the storage room, there is an office where one of our Fellows, Jean-Luc, works. I tiptoe outside the window. I see a light. I crouch so as not to be seen. I know Jean-Luc *hates* it when people walk by and look in. Suddenly I hear it, loud and clear. Well, soft but still very clear. I peak in, feeling quite guilty. EUREKA! I finally discovered where Tsss-tsss is coming from!

I should have thought of it. I myself AM, after all, a chemist. Though I only worry about atoms and molecules and how they combine. Jean-Luc, on the other hand, has spent all his life figuring out how to *grow* things; how to make invisible natural structures and processes visible, using live microorganisms to *fabricate* new materials.

Tsss-tsss is the sound one of Jean-Luc's special brews makes when it begins to sizzle, as it reaches *just* below boiling temperature, and when it's time to cool it off a bit, so that it coalesces, forming a thin gelatinous layer.

Jean-Luc's Fellowship Project for the year has been to create an intelligent Guerilla Beehive – a functional and organic shelter for swarming bee colonies. As Jean-Luc explained in his presentation to us last week.

“Once the colony decides to leave the hive, the shelter will decompose completely. It is a cradle-to-cradle design.”

Oder?

Jean-Luc's work epitomizes for me the bright, bubbling, sizzling spirit of our little community. It combines science, art and philosophy, sound and image, micro and macro, the raw and the cooked, the natural and the fabricated, the reactive and the creative, the descriptive and the prescriptive, the found and the invented, the analytic and the synthetic, and much else that falls in between.

I am oh so relieved I was able to identify the mystery sound that has haunted me for so long. Now I can leave Berlin in peace.

And here are some of the things I managed to do, between listening to sounds.

Publications: completed and appeared, or written and submitted during my Wiko year:

“Knowing Our Own Beliefs” (with Kate Nolfi). *Oxford Handbook Online*, 2016.

“Sociality, Expression, and This Thing Called Language.” *Inquiry* (special issue), 2016.

“Emotions and Their Expressions” (with Jim Sias). *Emotional Expression* (Abell and Smith, eds.), Cambridge UP, 2015.

“Transparency, Expression, and Self-Knowledge.” *Philosophical Explorations* (special issue), 2015.

“Pragmatic Interpretation and Signaler-Receiver Asymmetries in Animal Communication” (with Richard Moore). In *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Animal Minds*. Andrews and Beck, eds., forthcoming.

“Gricean Intentions, Expressive Communication, and Origins of Meaning.” In *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Animal Minds*. Andrews and Beck, eds., forthcoming.

Papers written and presented around Germany (and beyond) during my Wiko year (which will form parts of two books I have been working on – one on origins of meaning, one on self-knowledge):

“The Distinctive Security of Avowals.” Chapter 2 of a jointly authored book in progress (with Crispin Wright) for the *Great Debates* series from Wiley (40 pp.).

“Expression and Meaning: Acts, Products, and ‘Linguistic Fossils.’” Goethe University, Frankfurt, June 7, 2016.

- “Crude Meaning, Brute Thought; or: What Are They Thinking?” Language and Thought workshop, Salzburg, Austria, May 19–20, 2016.
- “Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning: A Philosophical Perspective.” Invited Mind-Brain Lecture, Humboldt University, April 21, 2016.
- “Speaking *and* Knowing My Mind.” Self-Knowledge workshop, Harvard University, March 11, 2016.
- “Pragmatic Interpretation and Signaler-Receiver Asymmetries in Animal Communication” (with Richard Moore). Berlin School of Mind and Brain Reading Club, Humboldt University, April 10, 2016; Wissenschaftskolleg workshop on Meaning in Animal Communication, April 12, 2016.
- “Expression and Meaning: Acts, Products, and ‘Normative Language’.” Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University, October 22, 2015, Leipzig University Philosophy colloquium, April 13, 2016, Potsdam University, April 26, 2016.
- “Origins of Symbolic Meaning: Philosophical Issues.” Workshop on Origins of Symbolic Gestures. Wissenschaftskolleg, October 20, 2015.
- “Expressive Communication and Origins of Meaning.” Session on Origins of Gricean Communication. *Protolanguage* 4, Rome, September 23–25, 2015.

In addition, I participated in several seminars and workshops on my work at Humboldt University (December, February, and April 2016), MIT (November 2015), Freiburg University (February 2016), Harvard University (March 2016), and the University of Szczecin (June 2016).