



LOOPS
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I spent my time at the Wissenschaftskolleg walking in the Grunewald. Nearly every day after a delicious, soporific lunch, I took off for an hour or two in the woods.

On my first trip, I set off down the main path just to see where it took me. When I spotted the tattered remains of the Teufelsberg station, I decided that odd structure should be my destination. But when I got to Teufelsseechaussee, the trees blocked my view of the station, so I couldn't see where to go.

On my next trip, I consulted the entrance map and planned my route. Somehow I ended up too far north and had to turn back. After that I found myself wandering south of the Sandgrube. Definitely a wrong turn. Once I got lost in the maze of switchback

trails at the base of the Teufelsberg. After several trials, I hit upon the simple and straight path that leads directly to the goal.

At one point it occurred to me to look online to see if others had tracked paths for me to follow. Various sites were helpful but not quite right – some were designed for bikes, some gave only vague directions. The Grunewald map from Dussmann, while an excellent resource, often left me puzzling about where on the map I was at a particular juncture.

So I decided to make my own maps of walking loops with various lengths through different areas of the Grunewald, all of which begin at Villa Walther, of course. As I began taking pictures and recording walking times, it occurred to me that my walks were very much like my research at the Wiko.

At the beginning of the research year, the path ahead was unknown. Everything was possible. As I began to explore the state space of possibility, however, I soon found myself frustrated at the lack of progress. Each article I read, lecture I heard, conversation I had was fascinating and gave me a new perspective on my project. But I wasn't making much headway on the book I wanted to write. I was learning the territory, but had not yet found the straight path to my goal.

There were goals achieved along the way – a response written, a workshop organized, an article drafted. Slowly my looping paths have begun to give me a sense of the whole. Crossroads are more familiar and relations between paths have formed a network connecting previously distinct areas into a comprehensible structure.

Here are some of the loops my mind travelled at the Wiko:

The most significant loops circled around my research topic: consciousness (a strange loop in itself). During the intense initial weeks of conversation, I realized that most people really don't reflect much on the nature of consciousness. We spend all our waking lives being conscious, but it's like the glasses many of us need to see clearly – we use consciousness without examining what it is and how it functions. So one big loop was phenomenological, including more descriptions in my explanation to make vivid the essential features of consciousness to be explained.

Time is the key element to conscious experience, in my view. Consciousness represents the world as it is *now*. An animal needs to be conscious when it has the capacity to choose its goals and actions, because it needs to know how things are now in order to decide how to proceed. Decisions, of course, are motivated by emotions. The evaluation of something as pleasant or painful and the level of urgency to move toward or away from that thing

determine effective response. Much of my work with the *Pain* Focus Group looped around and through relations among emotion, pain, learning, and consciousness.

Loops in and out of German were a delightful and distracting part of my time. Though I have had a fair amount of conversational practice in German over the years, my formal training ended in 1985. The opportunity to engage in German culture and academics in a more literate way was a wonderful bonus of the Kolleg. Eva was by turns encouraging and forgiving; my classmates exhibited great tolerance for error; the staff was gracious and patient. Gradually my verb conjugations became more consistent and my vocabulary broader. The most important lesson I learned from Eva was that language learning is loopy. With each advance in ability comes a renewed feeling of insecurity and incompetence. Previously habitual associations become open to scrutiny from a higher level of understanding.

Come to think of it, all learning should unsettle confidence a bit. New conceptual vistas should reveal unanticipated patterns and mistaken assumptions. Confrontation with opposing ideas and methodologies should rupture the complacent calm of success in our chosen fields of study. Occasionally it is good to be confused about which direction to take. It is even better to share the journey with a group of brilliant, curious, kindhearted friends.

Wiko friends were great companions while looping around Berlin. The proximity of Fellows meant it was relatively easy to find someone to go to the movies, out to dinner, or to see a concert, opera, or museum. As with German, these distractions were delightful, even though I wondered whether I should be following the scholarly path more faithfully.

Now at the end of my Berlin travels, both of my projects, the book and the set of maps, are unfinished. My hope is that the habits of thought and step formed at the Wiko will continue to move me forward. I would like to remember the value of mapping a territory by walking its byways and the joy of walking in the company of others. Time for such deep and circuitous exploration is a rare gift.