



FRAGMENTARY THOUGHTS  
ANDREAS MAERCKER

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I would like to present my report under a series of headings whose selection and order are somewhat arbitrary. Some have to do with my professional point of view, others do not. For me the very special thing about such a year at the Wissenschaftskolleg cannot be adequately captured in a coherent narrative – hence these fragmentary thoughts.

## Interaction

This year there were 40 Fellows and a substantial number of partners – plus some adorable children. Wiko’s staff was competent, charming; you wanted to chat with them all day long instead of working. We Fellows were supposed to interact with each other. In addition to the weekly colloquium, it was mainly the meals that made you mix and talk. But frankly speaking, my interaction with the other Fellows did not actually issue in the creation of anything substantial for my own field. Our methods and areas of interest were too divergent. This was even the case among us three psychologists: the music psychophysicist Peter Keller, the sleep researcher and statistical methodologist Gordon Feld, and me – our “mother discipline” psychology is simply too vast in scope. My work received certain impulses from the neighboring Center for Transregional Studies, where Stéphanie Benzaquen was writing about the spirits and demons that still haunt the Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge massacres. Of course, the many human interactions with my Co-Fellows were wonderful. I believe we were a good outfit, dealing with each other in a benevolent and supportive way. And we also had those periodic dance evenings.

## Work

As planned, during my year at Wiko I studied the “cultural scripts” of the aftermath of psychological trauma, meaning the variety of representations employed by the psyche in reacting to extreme threats of catastrophic magnitude. The very professional cooperation I enjoyed with colleagues from different regions of the world, along with the recent European refugee crisis, succeeded in sharpening my awareness that in the West the usual definition of the typical effects of trauma represents only a small section of the many “trauma scripts”. At the same time, I wanted to examine any possible background dimensions that might be informing such scripts. The great intellectual freedom that one has at the *Wissenschaftskolleg* enabled me to work not only in a quantitative-empirical fashion, as is the prevailing mode in my disciplines, but also on the theoretical and qualitative-interpretive levels.

The result was a loose series of papers, all written with members of my Zurich working group or other co-authors. Together with my guest of two weeks, the Russian psychologist Yulia Chentsova-Dutton (Georgetown University, Washington, DC), I wrote a conceptual paper on the cultural scripts that result from trauma. Another team effort was on the topic of “fatalism”, covering six countries and three continents and how fatalism is

related to the self-awareness that accompanies trauma (fatalism generally leads to ignorance about the consequences of trauma). A theoretical paper with Christian Lönnecker took up a concept from religious studies, namely numinosity, which has greater psychological connotations that might be summarized as what is both puzzling and beyond our ken. Many traumatized individuals, especially children, remain in this numinous stage of self-perception for quite a long while. At the same time, my Zurich working group led me to work on a study of trauma metaphors in four regions of the world, which in turn led to the concept of “historical trauma”. This phrase appeared again and again in the many discourses of this ethnographic study, particularly in the case of those who have severely suffered as a result, which prompted me to conjoin it with my clinical knowledge. However, this project to write on “Clinically Relevant Historical Trauma” is not yet complete – we will see how long it will take to conclude, after having made so much progress during a year of focused work at Wiko.

What I found memorable were the many appreciative words that Fellows had for my topic after I lectured on it at the Tuesday Colloquium. This sort of response can help sustain one during the long solitary periods when you are composing your texts.

### Family

Wiko does a wonderful job of integrating your partner and family into the institute. This is noticeable even before you arrive in September – the information packets are full of options concerning children – and life at Wiko is also very pleasant for partners. This was the view of my own partner Franz Diegelmann, who works in Zurich, but still spent over half his time in Berlin in the course of my Wiko year. One was also able to observe a certain symbiotic relationship between those individuals comprising a couple, in that their intellectual or artistic creativity was strengthened.

I was very fortunate during my Wiko year to be able to spend much time with my adult son, who lives in Berlin. When will there be such an opportunity again? He also took part in Wiko events, such as the evening lectures.

### Humor

All these heavyweight topics and discourses of my Co-Fellows – and then of course the serious follow-up in conversation at our five shared meals per week! So, the escape into

humor was a necessary safety valve. At least that's how I felt. The whole spectrum of sarcasm, irony, and puns was employed, and there was much laughter – in fact I often thought to myself: “*Selten so gelacht*” (*rarely* laughed so much).

What's interesting is that not everyone wanted or was able to participate in these humorous interactions, whereas the more competitive among us saw these as occasions to test their wit against that of their counterparts. Then a short period of exhaustion would usually set in and a new serious argument would serve as “displacement activity”.

### One's Own Life in Review

I often spoke to Co-Fellows about my own past life and perhaps overwhelmed them; after all, I'm something of an expert, life review being one of my clinical-psychological interests in recent years. And Berlin has evoked this interest time and again. I was a university student in East Berlin when the Wall still existed. Like many East Germans, I was confronted from afar with the realities in West Berlin and West Germany, so I had to find my niche in an informal intellectual network of people and cultural institutions as opposed to the “official” ones.

At the age of 21, my first domicile as a university student was the *Sprachenkonvikt*. This was the Protestant student accommodation and one of the few academic relics from pre-socialist days. In the first weeks there, by chance I met a Fellow from the Wissenschaftskolleg's inaugural year: Ivan Illich, the medical critic and philosopher, who loudly complained about the obligatory lunch, which he would skip whenever he could. Through him, I met Wolfgang Harich, the dissident GDR philosopher who had been a political prisoner for eight years; during my time at Wiko, I wrote an article about it for the *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*.

My past life in Berlin had many ups and downs, like the birth of my son, but then my detention in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen as a prisoner of the Stasi (since I wanted to leave the country and go West). The latter is now a museum, about twelve miles as the crow flies from Wiko. It's good to see that Wiko is now intensely committed to scholars who are persecuted by their authoritarian or dictatorial regimes.

### Aging

During my time at Wiko, I accrued certain aches and pains that developed into illness on occasion, and I also suffered a number of small accidents. All of this was new for me. Was it because I was in my 60th year or because after these many years I no longer enjoyed the

comfort zone of my home university? Some things were quite curious: the first dog bite in my life – something you usually experience as a youngster – and the loosening of a dental crown after twenty years of perfect functioning.

I am still asking myself why I was suddenly revisited by lower back pain, namely sciatica, after an absence of 30 years. The last time was also in Berlin, after my time spent in that East German prison. But the pain was probably less reminiscence-induced than it was owing to those hours of ergonomically adverse work at my desk where there were far fewer interruptions than when working with my research team at my home university.

I mentioned the dancing at Wiko. We had a number of very enjoyable practice sessions. As long as you can still strut your stuff while completely forgetting yourself (and your advanced age!) then there is still hope.

## Arts

No report on the Wiko year can fail to include those arts that lend spice to our lives. We had four professionals from the worlds of literature, the visual arts, and music. And they let you gaze over their shoulder, figuratively speaking, as they pursued their creations. In addition, there was *Hausmusik* of a very exceptional kind. Where else can you sit in a villa situated among idyllic green surroundings and listen to world-class performances?

Jessica Stockholder had an exhibition at the Centraal-Museum Utrecht (which I was able to visit by virtue of a conference trip to Rotterdam) and an open-air installation at the “Graben” in Vienna, which was unparalleled in both its chromatic and conceptual virtuosity.

Then there were the opera visits in this city with three opera houses. Sometimes you went alone and happened to meet other Fellows or you arranged to meet them; and the same thing occurred at those many museums that make Berlin a touristic cynosure. Among all this artistic inspiration, two of my Co-Fellows were even moved to consider whether they weren't better advised to abandon their current professions and devote themselves to the arts.