



ZOOM, ZOOM, ZOOM
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Zoom 1. We'll be there very soon... 10:45 a.m.... Quick, quick... hurry up before connecting. The toilet is done. But I forgot to shave... Change my shirt, drink a last coffee, push the wet laundry aside so that it is not visible on the screen... What else? 10:55. Find the link... Damn, where is it again?... 10:57. It's ok, I have it, I launch... 10:58. Stop everything... I forgot to stop the music. The Boss starts "Tougher than the Rest," but I can't let him have it now. Too bad... Quick, run to the other room. Aim for the stop button. "Left

somebody's heart in a mess. Well if you're..." That's it, Bruce is gone. 10:59. New mouse click, waiting in the Zoom lobby... My head appears in postage stamp format in the gallery of Fellows patiently waiting for the weekly seminar to kick off. 46 people are connected. All heads are at attention. There are those who are awake and those who are pretending. There are the helmeted ones, and those who keep their ears free. There are those who melt into a background that varies from week to week (ah, the little blurs as soon as they move...) and then there are those who, imperturbably, fit into the same decor that we end up knowing by heart. Why not invent a new game? *The Wiko association game*. Everyone would be presented with a series of photos of interiors, and the goal would be to associate each image as quickly as possible with the head that, every Tuesday at 11 a.m., is stuck on it. The problem is that some people never show their head. What to do in these conditions. Imagine joker cards? And what could the winner win? The right to extend her/his stay as a Fellow one more year, but on condition that corona has finally deserted the premises...

"It's 11 o'clock sharp, it's time to start our seminar..." The ritual opening sentence brings me out of my reverie. It is a young man in his thirties who is in charge today. Fluent English, international background, absolutely brilliant CV, smile on his face... So, the introduction of the speaker of the week: "Our speaker studied at..." "She is a specialist in..." "She has published many..." "She has been..." "She will talk to us about..." Now it's the speaker's turn to take the floor for at least three-quarters of an hour. From week to week, the topics vary greatly. Today's topic is the role of the wet nurses in the princely courts. The topic is specific, but no less fascinating. The exhibitor is brilliant, she shows us how the historian that she is works close to the archives; the results are sometimes surprising. Even though we are in Zoom, I am not bored... End of the presentation. Mute applause: everyone raises their hands in front of their camera and claps their hands, but the microphones are not connected. It's time for questions. In our small world of international academics, a ritual is unavoidable. Before asking a question, you have to explain to the speaker how fascinating, illuminating, inspiring... his or her presentation was... Then comes the comment. In France, and in some other countries I imagine, we are usually more sparing with praise. Whatever. Besides, it's not so bad when it's your turn to be bombarded with compliments. Everyone plays the game and, in turn, about fifteen Fellows (almost the same ones from week to week...) ask questions. The criticism is never harsh and the exchanges are always kind. A little kindness in this world of confined spaces is not bad after all.

12:40 p.m. End of the seminar. I go to Wallotstraße 19 to get my lunch. I don't have to go very far. I only have to cross the street. I live in the Remise, a spacious apartment next to the Weiße Villa, where the library is located. Mask on my nose and on my mouth, I line up in the corridor that leads to the dining room. This year, because of corona, the meals were first shared by tables of four, then of two. Now everyone gets their food delivered at home or picks up a bag. On Tuesdays, more people make the trip to Wallot 19. The time spent waiting in line allows people to continue the conversation started during the talk or simply to exchange news. It's an important moment of sociability while waiting to be served. Then Dunia, the good genius of the place, as efficient as eternally smiling, distributes to each his bag or tray. Without her and all the staff, what would have become of us...

Zoom 2. So, if you'd like to take a trip... Zurück hinter meinem Computer. Punkt 14 Uhr trete ich meinem Deutschkurs bei. Eva ist immer vor allen anderen da. Außerdem erhellt sie den Bildschirm mit ihrer unermüdlich guten Laune. George, Minou, Madeleine und Bill melden sich in den nächsten Minuten an. Der Kurs ist für uns wertvoll. Nicht nur, um ein bisschen besser Deutsch sprechen zu lernen oder um nicht mehr so oft über unsere Grammatikfehler zu stolpern. Es ist ein weiteres wichtiges soziales Moment in diesen Zeiten der Enge. Wir beginnen immer mit einer Runde am Tisch (oder eher Bildschirm), um Neuigkeiten auszutauschen, von einer Reise zu erzählen oder ein Buch zu empfehlen. Mit ihrem klaren Deutsch geht Eva auf unser Stocken und unsere Fragen ein und füllt das Zoom-Whiteboard mit neuen Wörtern, farbenfrohen Ausdrücken und essenziellen Referenzen. Die Arbeit an Texten von Schriftstellern, Künstlern, Journalisten und Philosophen hat uns einen tieferen Einblick in die deutsche Kultur gegeben. Heute ist es Hannah Arendt, die uns interessiert. Wir beschäftigen uns mit einem langen Interview mit Günter Gaus aus dem Jahr 1964. Eine Mischung aus biografischen und theoretischen Betrachtungen. Der Hang des Verstehens ist manchmal schwer zu erklimmen, aber es lohnt sich immer ... Schon 15:30 Uhr. Wir müssen aufhören und uns wieder unseren persönlichen Dingen zuwenden. Auf Wiedersehen an alle, bis nächste Woche ...

Herauszoomen. Zum Schluss habe ich noch ein wenig Zeit, um mich wieder mit meinem Forschungsvorhaben zu befassen. Ich habe beschlossen, das Jahr den nordamerikanischen Utopien des 19. Jahrhunderts zu widmen, mit einem besonderen Interesse an der Oneida Community. Ich kam mit Kopien aus Archiven hierher, die ich während eines früheren Aufenthalts an der Syracuse University erstellt hatte. Diesem Thema habe ich mein Dienstagskolloquium mit einem Blick auf die französische Situation gewidmet; ich

arbeite nun an einem Artikel, der den Inhalt meines Vortrags aufgreift und mit genaueren Bezügen zu den Archiven sowie einer elementaren Netzwerkanalyse anreichert. Auch wenn ich etwas weiter weg von der Villa-Walther-Gemeinschaft wohne, wird mir bei der Arbeit über utopische Gemeinschaften und die Art und Weise, wie man in ihnen lebt und arbeitet, nicht langweilig. Ist es die Sehnsucht nach den normalen Zeiten, in denen wir uns die Hand geben oder küssen konnten, ohne Angst zu haben, krank zu werden? In jedem Fall ist das tägliche Eintauchen in die Literatur und die Archive der Gemeinschaftswelten ein gutes Mittel gegen die Enge.

Zoom 3. Just step inside my rocket ship... 17 heures 05. L'heure de Zoom a à nouveau sonné. Réunion administrative avec des collègues français. Mais pourquoi diantre ai-je accepté d'y participer ? Important, important, important... m'a-t-on assuré. Mais je vais m'ennuyer, c'est sûr... Bon, tant pis. Clic, rejoindre la réunion par la voie audio, mettre en marche la fonction vidéo. Tout le monde est déjà là. Échange rapide de nouvelles. « Tiens, tiens... Comment se fait-il qu'il y ait un piano derrière toi ? » Explication : habituellement la Remise accueille un compositeur ou une compositrice. Il n'y en avait pas cette année qui soit intéressé-e par le lieu. Donc je travaille sur le fouriérisme et les harmonies sociales sous la vigilance constante d'un piano à queue condamné au silence par le seul fait de mon incompétence musicale. La réunion démarre. Le temps passe au compte-goutte. Quand je lève la tête, je peux voir des *fellows* aller et venir à la bibliothèque, livres en mains et préoccupations de recherche (du moins je l'imagine...) plein la tête. Après quelques mois à observer malgré moi tous ces déplacements quotidiens, je suis maintenant capable de dire qui est assidu-e et qui est aux abonnés-es absent-es. Encore un petit effort, et je serai le roi des potins du coin. À la Remise, je suis un village à moi tout seul.

Back on earth, or rather in France. My turn to intervene by zooming in to make my report. Discussions. The meeting drags on... At 6:30 p.m., finally deliverance comes. Please, music! Button on. "...looking for love honey, I'm tougher than the rest. Some girls they want a handsome Dan or some good-lookin' Joe..." Bruce is back. A glance at the e-mails before ending the day. "Can we get in touch by Zoom tomorrow? I have something important to speak with you. I promise, it won't be long. I hope everything goes well in Berlin. You're lucky that you're not bothered by long-distance meetings like we are." "No problem..." I answer, "in fact, Zoom has become my best friend..." So here we go again... *Zoom, zoom, zoom, we're going to the moon.*