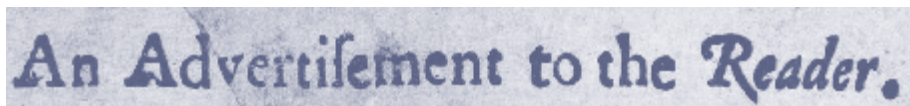




HEARD AT WALLOTSTRASSE 19
GABRIEL ABEND

Gabriel Abend. Uruguayan sociologist. Professor at University of Lucerne. Prior to that, Associate Professor at New York University, grad student at Northwestern University, and undergrad at Universidad de la República. Author of “Making Things Possible” and “The Meaning of ‘Theory’.” Not a fan of illeism. All rights reserved. – Address: University of Lucerne, Frohburgstrasse 3, Lucerne 6002, Switzerland. E-mail: g.abend@u.northwestern.edu.



As serendipity would have it, I happened upon these handwritten notes in the tunnel network that connects Wallotstraße 19, Villa Jaffé, Villa Walther, and the Edeka grocery store. (The magic phrase to get in is “¡abrite sésamo!”) While they’re unsigned, the author appears to be a certain Imulio Urganif.¹ There’s an alternative theory, though, that attributes the text to a secret permanent fellow. She’s believed to hail from Tacuarembó and to dwell in Villa Walther’s attic. Either way, whoever penned this, their handwriting is barely legible, so I only managed to transcribe a few fragments.

¹ Arturo Scarone. 1942. *Diccionario de seudónimos del Uruguay*. Second edition. Montevideo: Claudio García & Cía.

September 1

“Let’s begin with the general philosophy of the Wissenschaftskolleg. Freedom! Wiko is based on the conviction that intellectual and artistic creativity is inversely proportional to external constraints.”

Barbara and Daniel point out that there are significant similarities between the Wissenschaftskolleg and the Lunapark. This was an amusement park, on the other side of the lake, which the Nazis shut down in 1933 – alleging it was an immoral and decadent place. NB: this isn’t one of the aforementioned similarities.

Freedom.² Fellows are free to devote their time to whatever they wish. Your colloquium needn’t be about the topic described in your application. Staff and fellows introduce themselves. The latter receive a bilingual copy of *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin: A User’s Guide*. The epigraph reads: [illegible] ... fantastic ... [illegible]

* * *

What’s the collective mood around here? Excitement. Anticipation. Meeting strange strangers-*cum*-future friends. Predictably, a few awkward interactions. Goffman 101.³

October 12

“Next Tuesday, October 12, 2021, Gabriel Abend will give his talk; Sanyu A. Mojola will chair the colloquium. Please see attached the abstract for Gabriel’s Tuesday Colloquium.”

Title: “A burrito is a burrito is a burrito.” Abstract (excerpt): “Next spring there’ll be yet another Conference on X, where experts on X won’t be able to agree on the nature of X. Nor on how to empirically tell X from not-X. Conference papers will be published in a

2 Mercedes Sosa, “Inconsciente colectivo”: https://archive.org/details/mercedes_sosa/05%2C+Inconsciente+colectivo.mp3.

3 Erving Goffman. 1963. *Behavior in Public Places*. New York: Free Press.

special issue of *Journal of X*. A renowned scholar’s paper will be titled, ‘Toward a better X concept’ or ‘A novel conception of X.’ Comments and replies won’t find their novel conception up to par. Is this all a massive waste of time, paper, and coffee and cookies?’

Special thanks are due to Sanyu for chairing the colloquium and for her introduction.

* * *

Tuesday morning. At the colloquium. Is a burrito a sandwich? Contemporary social science has neglected this fundamental question. Here’s a sandwichness scale, from 1 to 7, where 1 is “not at all a sandwich” and 7 is “totally a sandwich.” Where would you say that a burrito falls? Attendees’ mean is about 2.1. Standard deviation is available from the author upon request.

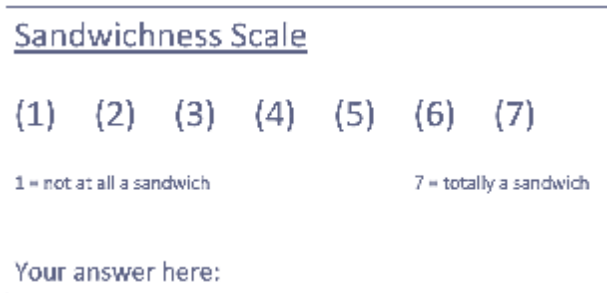


Figure 1: Colloquium prop.

November 11

“11. Wiko fellows have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”



Figure 2: Stralau, Berlin.

December 9

“Forty-two. The answer that the supercomputer Deep Thought gives to the ‘ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.’”

The event was titled, somewhat cryptically, “forty-two.” It was a TCF, that is, Three Cultures Forum. A forum for natural scientists, social scientists, and humanities scholars to exchange ideas. Artists and journalists, too. The invitation announced its main themes: “What do different disciplines conceive as a valid answer and why? And how is an answer determined by the way that the question is formulated?” Hold on, though. How is an answer to *this* question determined by the way it was formulated? The regress was duly noted (smart-asses as we are and can’t help but be). The conversation was fun.

We've come to see the Wissenschaftskolleg as a generative medley. People, places, ideas, arguments, fields. A cocktail of natural science, social science, humanities, and art. Visual artists, writers, playwrights. Photographers, musicians, composers. Most important: a cocktail of fellows who're eager to learn. Eager to see things they've never seen before. Cuckoo eggs. Snow leopards. Magic spells. Arsenic. The integration nation. The Cinderella syndrome. Truly open science. Why are you into this sort of stuff? What makes you so passionate about it? Fellows are intellectually curious creatures, a bit like children. Fellows' children are curious creatures as well.

Sometime in January

niñoquepiensa (kid thinking)⁴

these old people all these old people they're very weird what on earth are they doing the whole time? every day they have lunch together and they talk and talk and talk i wouldn't get any of it but i bet it's bullshit or for the most part bullshit anyway on tuesdays they go to this big room and listen to someone speak or read a paper and then people ask questions and the speaker frowns and looks funny and appears to be smart or appears to think they're smart whatever look at that thing over there isn't it beautiful? so many children in villa walther also two dogs and a few cats one of them seems to understand austrian and spanish pretty well hola hola hola for sure the best thing about this place are kids of all ages funny there should be three leos⁵ english-speaking leo spanish-speaking leo italian-speaking leo sometimes i miss my cousins and my room back home but other than that i really like it here there's a bunch of cool kids to play with oh yeah too bad the soccer goals are gone though

4 Damocles [Mario Benedetti]. 1967 [1956/1961]. "Niñoquepiensa." Pp. 21–23 in *Mejor es meneallo*. Montevideo: Arca Editorial.

5 Not counting Leo Africanus, author of *Description of Africa*, which Anthony is working on.

Sometime in February

“*Sur o no sur.*”⁶

March 29

“Next Tuesday, March 29, 2022, Nuno Ramos will give his talk; Anthony Ossa-Richardson will chair the colloquium.”

social imaginaries in russian realism a metabolic history shall we dance?
o futuro certo one hand washes the other the people of god?
irony illusion and paradox immigration integration and citizenship a ghost story
the lens of networks nine years two months and eleven days families in plural
ultracold gases sustainable community livelihoods untangling the wires
steamship connections being one ecology and evolution of hosts and pathogens
saving the snow leopard death by design ulysses in auschwitz
brood parasitic birds and their hosts story and history physical and pictorial space
the body and the air the host and its microbiome wanjiku and the wig
the great leap forward famine genesis of democracy a burrito is a burrito is a burrito
integrating two cultures of forest research a good short story whither open science?
constitution of the digital medium danish job centers what is a “grimoire”?
an unknown cartesian party in and outside the petri dish
triumph of fashion if you are a camel

* * *

variations on a nuno theme
(without actual voices, without actual sounds)

6 Kevin Johansen, “*Sur o no sur*”: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2ahrd>.

Sometime in April



Figure 3: A typical lunch at Wallotstraße 19. Fellows sitting at the table, from left to right: social scientist, natural scientist, artist, and humanities scholar.

* * *

Heard at one such lunch⁷:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is locapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.

⁷ Said by a fellow who seemingly memorized Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (while playing backgammon). Quotation is in book 1, part 4, section 7.

May 28

„Herr Kliger: wir haben Sie erwartet.“

„Die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.“⁸

Sentences uttered, respectively, by a non-native speaker and a native speaker of German.⁹ Everyone's wearing a Hegel mask. Surprise birthday party. Wiko is all about the group of fellows. We struck it lucky: it's a wonderful group.

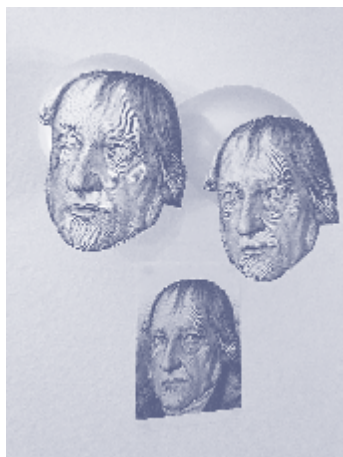


Figure 4: At the Geburtstagskind's apartment. The vodka of Minerva spread its wings only with the coming of the dusk. Or something.

8 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. 1911 [1821]. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner. Quotation is on page 17. A common translation is: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of the dusk."

9 Barbara, "Göttingen": <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1fjdv>.

Sometime in June

Sophie's email to fellow fellows:

“Each of us will have to write a report about their year at the Wiko

How can we do this, so that

(1) it will not be as boring as the reports of the previous years

(2) it will show something of the group we have formed

There have been several more-or-less crazy proposals, such as:

- writing the report of someone else drawn at random
- submitting all the same report
- writing a series of paragraphs each devoted to a theme... and combining them at random
- sending the transcript of a conversation”

And yet, these more-or-less crazy proposals didn't pan out.

* * *

There's nothing you could say about Wiko that hasn't been said in earlier yearbooks, including that there's nothing you could say about Wiko that hasn't been said in earlier yearbooks. Even “there's nothing you could say about Wiko that hasn't been said in earlier yearbooks, including that there's nothing you could say about Wiko that hasn't been said in earlier yearbooks” – at least from now on. Was there something after all?

* * *

What's the collective mood around here? Melancholy.¹⁰ A party. A “leaving book” (aka “*album amicorum*,” we’re told). Gratitude. Contentment. Understanding takes time. If this year we didn’t move at a snail’s pace, we didn’t move at all.¹¹

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- 10 Fortunately, “*it may be mitigated and much eased. Nil desperandum.* It may be hard, but not impossible, for him that is most grievously affected, if he bee willing to be helped.” Since several “lawfull” cures are available, soon-to-be former fellows should refrain from employing “diabollcall meanes, which are commonly practiced by the Divell & his Ministers, Sorcerers, Witches, Magicians, &c.” Robert Burton. 1621. *The anatomy of melancholy, vvhhat it is. VVith all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and seuerall cures of it.* [...] By Democritus Iunior. *With a satyricall preface, conducing to the following discourse.* Oxford: Printed by Iohn Lichfield and Iames Short, for Henry Cripps. Quotation is on pages 287–288.
- 11 “Let’s go slowly. In philosophy if you aren’t moving at a snail’s pace you aren’t moving at all.” Iris Murdoch. 1998. *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature.* New York: Allen Lane. Quotation is at page 500.