



NO END IN SIGHT  
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A bright morning in October 2021. Distracted by a sudden change of light, heralding an approaching storm, I turn towards the ample windows of my office in the Neubau – and I am startled by a shower of shimmering leaves, falling gracefully at irregular intervals,

from the trees that envelop the building. The leaves are travelling sideways, pushed by the autumn breeze, painting the street a thick, solid yellow. The sight arrests me. And I find myself interrupting whatever it is I am typing on my computer, standing up, listening to the golden rain. It may seem peculiar to remember this moment, out of all the wonderful experiences of our year at Wiko – the intense seminar discussions, the apartments and gardens of the gorgeous Villa Walther, the parks and lakes and forests, the convivial German classes and Daniel’s budding Wiko choir, Berlin’s theatre halls and playgrounds and restaurants and musea. But this was a rare moment, especially since the start of the coronavirus pandemic (not to speak of the unfolding Brexit chaos), where I could allow myself to stop and let thoughts wander, unprompted but fostered by the many surprising conversations that marked my first few weeks on Wallotstraße. At that moment, having gained some distance from the stress of attempting a move in the midst of a pandemic, it became clearer to me what a year at Wiko could and would mean.

Of course, coronavirus utterly derailed the expectations I had formed back in 2019 when planning my prospective visit. My first term was all about picking up old threads and weaving anew, hospitality truly fuelling and replenishing me, my partner, and our children. Mornings of friendly greetings and helpful chats with Maike and Vera while picking up the mail, while books long yearned for magically appeared on library shelves. Evenings with the extended Wiko family, which grew increasingly relaxed as we got to know and love each other’s quirks, passions, and struggles. My kids blossomed through the daily ritual of ringing their friends’ doorbells and running off to new adventures – in the backyard at first, then the neighbourhood as their confidence grew. Dunia, Dennis, and the brilliant kitchen staff provided food invariably infused with care, that rarest of ingredients. Frequent visits to the Komische Oper, Deutsche Oper, Philharmonie, and most of all the phenomenal Staatsoper nourished our soul after a long period without live music.

Still, this was not a time of slow contemplation. Reflection was highly compressed – the stimulation of the daily conversations over food, colloquia, Three Culture Forums, evening lectures, and workshops at Wiko alone provided a kaleidoscope of topical, cutting-edge research across all fields to dip my toes into, not to speak of the wider Berlin/German intellectual environment to explore in its latest configurations, despite the many empty buildings due to the pandemic. And after the Christmas break, the world made its way to Grunewald in other, less gentle ways. COVID picked up again in early January, leaving a toll on my family, as my daughter in particular got rather sick, and shifting

Wiko life online for a few weeks; leg troubles, which had pursued me since breaking my knee at the start of the pandemic, intensified in ways that ended up requiring surgery; and on February 24, the horrific Russian war on Ukraine started, bringing a new shift in worldview and a torrent of refugees into Berlin – including some artists and scholars whom Wiko was able to bring into our midst, together with their families. The unfolding tragedy made being part of this community ever more significant for me, an unexpected source of hope through daily evidence of kindness, fairness, courage, and the opportunity to learn from other Fellows, especially those with experiences of exile.

As I write, the war continues, its seismic impact on the planet reverberating ever more aggressively, making much of my research feel at once insignificant and urgent. What a time to be working on what the concepts of openness and diversity may mean for scientific research – and to interrogate Bergson’s and Popper’s questions around what an Open Society could and should be, for science to function humanely and reliably. I had originally planned to work on the notion of epistemic diversity this year, that is, the extent to which cultivating a variety of perspectives and methods to acquire knowledge (as well as a pluralist understanding of what knowledge amounts to in the first place) may be constitutive of reliable and robust practices of inquiry. My starting point was the varied manifestations of notions of diversity and their implications for existing assumptions about “best practice” for scientific evaluation – especially assumptions made in well-resourced research contexts, where the availability and necessity of cutting-edge technologies and related skills are taken and given for granted and often used as proxy for quality assessment. Partly thanks to a European Research Council project that unexpectedly got funded starting this year, this question became intertwined with a study of current policies and practices of Open Science, leading to an even broader interrogation of the framing and evaluation of research methods across locations and knowledge systems – and of the extent to which a common commitment to openness (and related principles such as transparency and reproducibility) can help safeguard the epistemic and social value of science to an increasingly endangered planet. Discussing these issues with other Fellows (and their equally wonderful partners!) was enlightening and inspiring, with many collaborations forming to accompany this work as it proceeds beyond this year.

Some of that thinking took the form of a short book on *The Philosophy of Open Science*, where I argue against the conceptualisation of openness as a form of “sharing” and instead for a renewed emphasis on the conditions under which those contributing to scientific research can meaningfully connect and improve their interactions with the world.

This understanding of openness, I contend, is intrinsically discriminating, since it is explicitly aimed to support not only epistemic diversity but also epistemic justice – a plea for a reflexive, politically charged standpoint rather than easily instrumentalised appeals to egalitarianism. Another strand of thinking was a complete reframing of a book I had planned (a short version of which already exists in Italian) on the epistemology of data-intensive research and its deep roots in the transnational mobilisation of data as objects. This manuscript remains far from completed: what I ended up with is a rewritten outline for a book intended to articulate an understanding of empiricism as grounded on the absence of evidence, rather than on its presence. My focus is shifting decisively towards the gaps, the indeterminacies, the incompleteness of whatever humans (and especially scientists) use as a document to study the world – a change in worldview that takes account of the by-now obvious problems with the rhetoric and promises of big data and data-driven research, while also pointing to the key interpretative role played by highly diverse forms of knowledge in producing and contextualising meaning. Here too, I can't thank my fellow Fellows enough for the inspiration that they provided for this shift, with a special mention for those who do not rely on writing as their main form of expression: from Liza's music, steeped in a multi-layered, embodied understanding of the connections between human and non-human experiences in and of nature across many traditions, including the loss and puzzlement that is the origin of any inquiry; to Nuno's cross-media renditions of humanity, infused with dissatisfaction in the most generative, generous ways – the play of life as constant seeking, falling, reacting, yearning.

My own material engagement with the world, which informs and grounds my philosophical writings, also came in two interrelated strands this year. The first investigated the implications of COVID-19 data-sharing for epidemiology and public health, resulting in a forthcoming *Report on Reproducibility* and a paper on how data-intensive exchange is changing epidemiologists' understanding of the environment. The second strand focused on the collection, management, and re-use of crop science data, and particularly attempts by various international bodies over the last forty years to establish links between existing plant data infrastructures around the world, in the hope of supporting agricultural development – work that culminated in an edited volume on *Responsible Plant Data Linkage* and its significance for planetary health. The history of crop science – and especially its data-semantic systems – is a rich platform to examine the intersections between biological, methodological, and cultural forms of diversity. What names do we use to label plant traits, and who is the “we” assumed by the increasingly automated systems for trait

recognition (and related data collection) used by farmers, breeders, and agrotechnology companies around the world? How are naming choices shaped by the scientific knowledge base and political economy of current regimes of agricultural development, in their novel intersections with digital infrastructures and related institutions? How are such naming choices positioned vis-à-vis the history of plant trait descriptors, on the one hand, and biological taxonomies, on the other – and what kind of multi-species histories do these classifications nourish? And how can biological research processes facilitate the development of sustainable, responsible food systems, given the dominance of technology-fuelled, high-yield monocultures as a model for agricultural development? These questions become particularly haunting when considering crops such as cassava, which are increasingly recognised for their nutritional potential under conditions of climate change, but are not (yet?) global mass products or protagonists of crop research efforts. Studying the evolution of research on cassava provides a window on the transition from small-hold local agriculture to transnational techno-scientific market regimes and may help to fashion data systems that are explicitly value-laden and supportive of agroecology and community-supported agriculture. In that sense, I was particularly glad this year to finally round up an argument for what I am calling “process-sensitive” crop-naming systems, an approach that recognises the crucial role of dynamic classifiers and data architectures in confronting epistemic diversity and injustice within data sharing technologies (published in *Philosophy, Theory, and Practice in Biology*). This is but one attempt to put philosophical thinking about openness and empiricism into practice, while also learning more – and from a widely varied array of voices and experiences – about how such concepts could and should be framed. The gift of Wiko is that I now carry the voices of my \*amazing\* Wiko Fellows with me, conversations and collaborations that will be continued well beyond our year in Berlin – a delightful beginning for a choral composition with no end in sight.