



LIMINAL TIME AND SPACE  
MISATO MOCHIZUKI

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Misato Mochizuki is a composer acclaimed for her distinctive musical language—marked by refined textures, dynamic structures, and a strong interdisciplinary sensibility. A graduate of the Tokyo University of the Arts and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, she has received numerous commissions, with works performed at major festivals including the Salzburg Festival, Venice Biennale, Festival d'Automne in Paris, and Lincoln Center Festival in New York. Her accolades include the Heidelberger Künstlerinnenpreis and the Japan Ministry of Culture's New Artist Award. Her opera *Die große Bäckerei-Attacke*, based on a short story by Haruki Murakami, was staged in Lucerne, Vienna, Tokyo, and Osaka. Recent works include *Intrusions* (Donauesschinger Musiktage 2021), an orchestral and electroacoustic piece exploring the intrusion of “others” including A.I. into human society, and *Otemba—Daring Women* (Holland Festival 2025), based on the true story of a 17th-century mixed-race woman who faced multiple forms of discrimination. Misato Mochizuki is Professor at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, and a Visiting Professor at the Tokyo University of the Arts. She serves as a member of the book review committee for the major Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. – Address: Meiji Gakuin University, Shirokane Campus, 1-2-37 Shirokanedai, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 1088636, Japan. E-mail: misato.mochizuki@gmail.com.

[Prélude]

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made my extraordinarily rich and rewarding year at the Wissenschaftskolleg possible. I owe a special debt of thanks to Isabel Mundry, who nominated me as composer in residence, and to

all those, led by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, who supported me on the academic side of my work. I am deeply grateful to the entire library team for their swift and attentive handling of requests for scores that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain.

My thanks also go to Francisco and Andrea, who assisted me in preparations leading up to my arrival, including those related to the particular academic calendar in Japan, where the school year begins in April rather than September.

I am grateful to Pit, Maxim, and Aziz, who installed IT and audio setups for both my devices and my living space; to Anna, Katarzyna, Dennis, and Martin, who maintained an always comfortable environment; and to the chefs, Dunia, and the kitchen team who provided delicious meals, especially from November onward. Abdoulie's ever-kind encouragement to try a second helping of dessert played no small part in keeping my brain happily fueled during long stretches of work!

I truly felt supported on every front. Never before in my life have I experienced the luxury of having someone else take care of cleaning, bed-making, and meals.

Borrowing the structure of a Baroque suite, I would now like to reflect on my time at Wiko.

[Allemande]

My stay began with the intensive German course at the end of August—a fresh attempt after several earlier abandoned beginnings. I shared the class with Bashir, Imani, and Yolanda. With a small and friendly group, daily four-hour sessions, and generously long tea breaks with other classes, the course was both enjoyable and fulfilling. Looking back, it may well have been the most relaxed period of my entire year here.

My sincere thanks go to Eva, who provided everything from coffee and tea snacks to textbooks, handouts, and even the folders to organize them. I also cherish the memories of our excursions—the city quiz, the Turkish Market, and Bashir's recommended hummus place—together with our tutors Ricarda and Giancarlo (I wholeheartedly hope his unexpected illness will enter remission soon).

From 16 September onward, the course shifted to a weekly 90-minute format. In Berlin, where English and French are widely spoken, moments when a true beginner urgently needed German were mostly limited to interactions with the housekeeping team or with program sellers at concert venues. As everyone became absorbed in their projects, attendance inevitably thinned out. I feel genuinely sorry for Eva and Lea, our teachers. Even so, the fact that all of this was offered without any additional fee remains an astonishingly generous service.

[Courante]

Freed from university duties, I arrived in Berlin with a considerable amount of composition work and review assignments already on my desk. I had hoped to devote more time to research related to composition itself, but I had not anticipated how many events take place at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I also attended numerous concerts and operas, and the days passed quickly—*courant* in the literal sense—simply completing the commissioned works I had brought with me: a collaborative score for a thirty-minute short animated film; the final movement,  $\psi$  (psi), of my five-part string quartet cycle *Brains*; and the eighty-minute chamber opera *Otemba*. Preparing for Colloquiums, lecture recitals, and outside seminars also required considerable time.

It was a great pleasure to attend several premieres (in Berlin and Amsterdam) and performances of earlier works (in Paris, Graz...) that I usually cannot travel to during the academic term in Japan—occasions that allowed me to reconnect with longtime musician friends.

I am also deeply grateful for the opportunity to record all of my string quartets at the Haus des Rundfunks in Berlin with my close colleagues, the Quatuor Diotima, who also performed in the lecture recital. Wiko's support for their two stays—first for the January premiere of  $\psi$  and the whole *Brains* cycle at Ultraschall, and again in June for the lecture recital and CD recording—was invaluable. The lecture recital, which received warm and joyful reactions not only from my husband and former students, but also from Fellows, Wiko team members, and even the Fellows' children, was without question one of the highlights of my year.

[Sarabande]

That said, I gained the impression that the number of artistic events and the general level of engagement with the arts at the Wissenschaftskolleg was not as much as I had heard from earlier Fellows. This may reflect an international trend: compared to earlier generations, who often possessed wide-ranging knowledge of and deep familiarity with the arts across disciplines, today's society increasingly emphasizes economic and temporal efficiency. Intensified professional specialization has contributed to fragmentation, and reductions in cultural budgets have become widespread.

An interdisciplinary environment like Wiko is therefore all the more valuable. Still, in the early months, I sometimes felt like an alien: I struggled to find what role a composer might play among the Fellows. Outside Wiko as well, I found that certain strands of new

music in Berlin—and the tastes of their audiences—seem distinctive compared with other German cities, France, Japan, or the United States. These situations made me acutely aware, in various senses, of a certain incommunicability.

[Passepied]

Another matter that stayed in my mind was a series of inexplicable occurrences in the Remise, the residence assigned to me. On several occasions, the house and windows trembled as if in a small earthquake; I heard knocking sounds on the windows; the front door, locked when I went to bed, would be wide open in the morning; and the motion-sensor light at the entrance switched on and off even when no one was there. More than once, while I was asleep, my computer, supposedly in sleep mode, began playing music.

Curiously, I did not feel frightened. Rather, I sensed that I was sharing the space with something not necessarily physical, but perhaps spiritual. Given the history of the area surrounding Wiko, I did not find this entirely surprising. Yet at times I wondered whether it might have been connected to my mother, who passed away a few months before my arrival. Indeed, during my stay here I dreamt of both my parents for the first time since their deaths.

[Air]

What comforted me and often revived my spirits were the lush surroundings of Grunewald and the remarkable musical life of Berlin. The sheer variety and consistently high level of performance were inspiring; in particular, the city's many opera houses stage works from the twentieth century onward on an almost monthly basis, often to near-capacity audiences who respond with enthusiasm. It reminded me of something distinctive about Germany: the cultural ability to engage in intellectual reflection through music.

Even within the traditional repertoire, I encountered performances that were wonderfully refreshing. *The Magic Flute* production featuring animation, recommended by members of the Wiko team through other Fellows, felt astonishingly fresh, despite being over a decade old. I found it one of the most convincing interpretations of the opera I have ever seen, full of discoveries that I hope will inform my own future work.

As a kind of extracurricular German lesson, we also went to the Berliner Ensemble to see *The Threepenny Opera*. I was struck by how well its distinctive style (somewhat reminiscent of *Sprechgesang*, yet something more like a deliberately off-pitch, rapid-fire delivery) suited the German language, and by the performers' remarkable precision and

wit in both singing and acting. Their playful insertion of topical lines—almost faintly recalling aspects of Kabuki theatre—made me feel the deep joy of witnessing cultural history unfold.

Above all, when I look back now, I am moved by how fortunate I was to encounter the genuine warmth of the Fellows and the richness that came from perspectives shaped by different disciplines and cultural backgrounds. I was deeply impressed by the boundless curiosity and adaptability shown by so many toward fields far removed from their own.

These experiences will remain unforgettable. I will always recall how many people responded when Leyla, Racha, and Florian took the initiative to support someone going through a difficult time, and how everyone came together to organize the “pink” farewell party. I am truly grateful for the good fortune of having met such kind-hearted people.

[Gigue]

I have always drawn compositional ideas from a wide range of phenomena outside the realm of music. As I mentioned in my Colloquium, translating knowledge from various fields into musical forms can open a door to understanding the world through composition. I am deeply interested in discovering how the world and human beings are designed—through music as an interpretive framework.

Listening to the many Colloquiums presented by the Fellows, I repeatedly found myself thinking, “This could be made into an opera or a music theater piece!” Not only universal (and sometimes overused) themes like love and death, but even scholarly discoveries that are not necessarily familiar or accessible to the general public can become a kind of adventure story capable of drawing anyone in. I believe that music theater has the potential to bring specialized knowledge closer to the public, in a form of *vulgarization* that is enlightening rather than reductive.

At the same time, I was reminded how little free time I currently have to pursue such projects, often feeling overwhelmed by the many roles I juggle: teaching at multiple universities, composing, serving on a review board, and other responsibilities. Several people at Wiko told me, “These things often come to fruition about ten years later.” Yet in view of my current situation, even a ten-year horizon feels uncertain. And so I leave Wiko with the essential question: What is it that I most want to realize next?