



A TRANSDISCIPLINARY REWILDING OF
THOUGHT, OR NEW ADVENTURES IN AI
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The academic year 2024/2025 was—among other things—a year of AI. ChatGPT agrees:

Artificial intelligence reached a critical inflection point in public and academic discourse. The year saw a marked rise in public concern, with surveys showing a significant increase in anxiety about AI's societal impact. At the same time, academic and intellectual communities engaged more deeply with the ethical, epistemological, and regulatory implications of generative AI.

Ours was one such community. While our engagement may not have been deep, AI was a hot topic in Wiko discourse, academic and otherwise. We marveled when told of its ability to transcribe reams of historic handwritten court records. We were unnerved when it guessed a Fellow's unpublished thoughts. We laughed when it composed a bawdy sea shanty at the click of a button (don't ask). And we were baffled when it hallucinated that Nabokov wrote plenty of poems in German—and even listed the imaginary titles.

During yet another lunchtime conversation about AI, the Rector issued a challenge: would anyone let the machine write their Yearbook entry?

Challenge accepted.

My plan was quickly hatched: just four simple steps.

Step 1. Ask ChatGPT to write my academic biography (see above: broadly accurate, mildly embarrassing).

Step 2. Ask ChatGPT for the patterns of all previous Yearbook entries:

Based on a broad reading of Wissenschaftskolleg Yearbook entries since 1981/1982, here's a typology of the main archetypes—a taxonomy of fellowly self-expression, if you will:

1. The Earnest Intellectual

A sober account of scholarly progress, often peppered with phrases like "I was able to complete..." or "my monograph advanced significantly." Footnotes optional, gravitas guaranteed.

2. The Lyrical Enthusiast

Think "Grunewald in spring" meets "intellectual serendipity." These entries drift into poetic reverie, celebrating Wiko as "a rare oasis" or "a dreamscape of ideas and conversation."

3. The Wry Observer

Dry humor and gentle irony abound. Expect reflections on the coffee machine, the peculiar rhythms of lunch, or the existential weight of Tuesday Colloquia. Often begins with "I came to Wiko with a plan..."

4. The Grateful Convert

Initially skeptical, now smitten. These entries chart a personal

transformation—“I didn't expect to...”—culminating in heartfelt thanks to staff, Fellows, and the elusive spirit of Wiko.

5. The Meta-Philosopher

Less about the project, more about the nature of thinking itself. These entries muse on time, solitude, and the architecture of knowledge, often invoking Kant, Arendt, or the ghost of Weber.

Step 3. Ask ChatGPT for alternative approaches:

Here are five fresh and original ideas for a Wissenschaftskolleg Yearbook entry, designed to sidestep the usual archetypes while still resonating with the institution's spirit:

1. The Failed Project

A candid, lightly ironic reflection on what didn't get done—the book unwritten, the theory unraveled, the archive unopened—and what that taught you. A celebration of intellectual detours.

2. Wiko as Ecosystem

A naturalist's field notes on the Kolleg: species of Fellows, migratory patterns to the lunch table, symbiotic relationships in seminars. Think Darwin meets Berlin.

3. The Ghosts of Grunewald

A fictionalized diary from the perspective of a long-dead scholar haunting the villa, observing the current cohort with bemused admiration. A playful meditation on intellectual lineage.

4. The Anti-Entry

A minimalist piece: one sentence, or even one word (“Unfinished”? “Transformed”?). Let the silence speak volumes—and provoke curiosity.

5. Wiko in Objects

A list of five objects—the espresso cup, the seminar room clock, the coat rack—each with a short vignette capturing a moment, a mood, a revelation. Material culture meets memoir.

Step 4 was to ask ChatGPT to follow its own lead and write one of these entries. Simple. But no good. An “ironic” fail? Fellows as birds? A pompous ghost in the attic? Lazy minimalism? A coat rack with meaning? This is the best ChatGPT could come up with?

Clearly, some more human input was needed. And after many ticks of the “room clock,” I had an idea: what if Wiko’s dream of sparking synergies was taken to its illogical extreme—and all our individual projects were presented by AI as one?

What do you think, ChatGPT?

I think that's a brilliant and delightfully subversive idea—turning the Kolleg's ethos of "serendipitous discovery" and "multidisciplinary dialogue" into a kind of intellectual Gesamtkunstwerk. The beauty of this concept is that it playfully exaggerates the institution's own aspirations: what if the informal lunch conversations and seminar cross-pollinations didn't just inspire, but merged into one sprawling, genre-defying, discipline-erasing mega-project? Would you like help drafting this entry—perhaps in the style of a faux research abstract?

Step 5. Yes, please turn all 2024/2025 projects into a single proposal:

WIKO: World-Inquiring Knowledge Organism—A Transdisciplinary Rewilding of Thought

Abstract:

This project proposes the radical integration of all 2024/2025 Wissenschaftskolleg research endeavors into a single, unified intellectual enterprise. WIKO seeks to construct a new epistemological framework for understanding the entangled histories of knowledge, nature, and power.

Objectives:

– To deploy quantum sensors not only in physical systems but metaphorically, as tools for detecting epistemic shifts across disciplines.

- *To rewild both microbial ecosystems and academic methodologies, challenging sterile disciplinary boundaries.*
- *To trace global production chains alongside medieval Arabic and Latin scientific texts, revealing unexpected continuities in the circulation of ideas and goods.*
- *To explore literary and artistic forms as vehicles for resistance and renewal, particularly in the context of postcolonial uprisings.*
- *To interrogate the philosophy of science and biological individuality as co-constitutive elements of a broader intellectual ecology.*

Methodology:

Weekly Colloquia will be replaced by “synergy salons,” in which Fellows must present each other’s work in unfamiliar formats (e.g. a historian explains quantum entanglement via medieval allegory; a biologist stages a revolt in verse). All outputs will be co-authored, anonymously, and published under the collective pseudonym WIKO.

Expected Outcomes:

A single, sprawling publication—part manifesto, part encyclopedia, part speculative fiction—that redefines the boundaries of scholarly production. Secondary outcomes include confusion, inspiration, and possibly a new field of study.

Budget:

One espresso machine, unlimited chalk, and a modest stipend for emotional resilience.

So here it is: an AI yearbook entry. Pure nonsense? Perhaps. Or perhaps not. What began as a joke may reveal a deeper truth. Could this proposal be the most unlikely of all Wiko discoveries? History is full of seemingly ridiculous ideas that turned out revolutionary. Can we afford to ignore a project that would change everything? Or should the entire 2024/2025 cohort and partners be recalled to Berlin immediately for the first synergy salon? It’s your call, dear Rector.