



WIKO-PAIDEIA/WIKO-PEDIA
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The Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin has been an extraordinary place: hospitable, stimulating, and very generous in supporting its Fellows' academic work. I feel enormously privileged to have been able to spend time in an environment marked by such deep and unconditional respect for the freedom of individual intellectual pursuits.

The principal outcome of my stay here was the completion (minus a chapter) of a draft which will in due course become a book on post-Romanticism as a complex discursive and ideological formation that outlived Romanticism proper and helped shape the twentieth century – culturally, intellectually, and politically. For my Tuesday colloquium I

presented a portion of this draft. I also continued reading and thinking towards a book as a bundle of cultural and political discourses that have been subject to transformation and various mobilizations in modern European societies since the 18th century.

As I arrived here in October, I was still completing an edited collection on Gustav Shpet, the Russian phenomenologist who had studied with Husserl in Göttingen and upon his return wrote in a number of fields: hermeneutics, social psychology, aesthetics, and theater theory. The proofs were done in early November, and the volume appeared in mid-December 2009.

I was also engaged in the writing and editing, with Evgeny Dobrenko, of a *History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism since 1917*, now completed and scheduled to be published in 2011. For this authoritative account of Russian literary theory and criticism, I wrote at Wiko the chapter on émigré theory and criticism of the “first wave” (1917–39) and, with Katerina Clark, the chapter on Soviet literary theory in the 1930s.

This brings me to one of the most pleasurable ongoing commitments this year: the working group on the 1930s, initiated by Boris Gasparov, also a Wiko Fellow, and convened by the two of us. The group met once a month to discuss texts and presentations engaged in rethinking the balance between ideological coercion, national myth, and various contradictory practices of the self during the 1930s. A conference emerging from our work, co-organized by Boris Gasparov, Georg Witte, and myself, and co-hosted by Wiko and the Freie Universität Berlin, took place on 25 and 26 June 2010.

My other – equally motivating – regular commitment was the working group on university curriculum reform led by Yehuda Elkana. We would meet twice a week, discussing issues germane to the current state and the future of the university as an institution, drawing on expertise from Europe, the US, and India. As our conversation progressed and matured, we were able to conclude our proceedings with a manifesto on curricular reform, to be published in two different versions (longer and shorter), with the purpose of stimulating public debate and concentrating the minds of policy makers – in the universities and beyond – on the need for change.

When I came to Berlin, I did so determined not to give in to invitations for conferences and lectures. I did on the whole stick to this promise, with a few exceptions that partly reflect prior commitments: a paper on the study of folklore at GAKhN for a conference at the Freie Universität, a paper on Tönnies and Plessner for a workshop at the Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin, and invited lectures on cosmopolitanism; semantic paleontology; Leftist Eastern European exiles in Stalin’s Moscow; and émigré literary theory and

criticism at the Philosophy Forum of the City of Vienna; the Department of Slavic Studies, University of Vienna; the Peter Szondi Institute and the Programme for Area Studies, Freie Universität Berlin; and the Slavic Departments in Göttingen, Oldenburg, Hamburg, and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

I was also very glad to attend two conferences organized by colleagues and friends at Wiko: on theater and performance theory, organized by Dieter Thomä and Martin Puchner; and on music in World War II, organized by Annegret Fauser. I should also mention the workshop on modern Indian political thought, convened by Sunil Khilnani, Rajeev Bhargava, and Yogendra Yadav; I attended some of the sessions and learned a lot.

So much for the tangible benefits and measurable outcomes. Equally important, if not more so, have been the many conversations with my hosts, colleagues, and new friends here at Wiko. The truly interdisciplinary ethos of the place makes it a marvelous environment in which to explore and question the boundaries of knowledge. The exciting discussion on 30 April 2010 (sciences and/vs. humanities) is just one example; our Tuesday colloquia have been a source of inspiration and kept my curiosity and skepticism alive throughout the year. I say “skepticism”, for I realized during my time here that fostering a productive dialogue between the (social) sciences and the humanities is an immensely difficult task that requires concerted effort and hard work over several years. Wiko has graciously planted the seeds; it is for us to persevere in this endeavor in the time to come.

Perusing early on the reports of former Fellows in Wiko’s Yearbook, I was struck by how many of them spoke of their time here as a life-changing experience. By the time I began to collect my thoughts for this report I had come to see why they might indeed have had a point. The many questions we have been asking this year – about the future of the humanities and of our universities, about the responsibilities of the educated elites, about the accommodation and transformation of knowledge in the new information society – will stay with me, urging me to remember the need to translate ideals, however imperfectly, into practice.

Let me conclude by saying that I immensely enjoyed my time here, profiting from the special brand of Wiko-paideia that envelops and nurtures the Fellows, and – equally important – from the encyclopedic curiosity and breadth of scholarship at Wallotstraße. Year after year, a true Wiko-pedia emerges in Berlin; it has been a great pleasure to be able to contribute to this live event.