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To: Whom it may concern

From: Johan Galtung

Re: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Comments and Recommendations.

Prefatory comment. The Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin is quite well known in intellectual circles in Western Germany as a whole due to the extensive debate about that new institution; it is also remarkably unknown outside the borders of Germany. When asked what my personal reactions to the Wissenschaftskolleg are, my answer the last half a year or so has been: "Wissenschaft O. K.; Kolleg not so good". What is meant by the second part of the sentence will be clear below. As to the first part the comment is very straight-forward: the working conditions have been superb. A nice office with a pleasant view; skillful, quick and highly capable secretaries of whom I would particularly like to compliment Mrs. Angelika Kuhn and the head of the secretariat Mrs. Ingrid Rudolph; an equally skillful library staff, and in general an atmosphere of helpfulness where all kinds of small practical details that matter in daily life are concerned. Mr. Reinhard Prasser always went out of his way to solve any small or big practical problems that might come up. So did Mrs. Golf, particularly in connection with that most valuable institution at the WKB, the opportunity for the fellows to invite colleagues to a conference/seminar around their own work. For all this I will always remain grateful.

On the other hand, most of this could also have been provided by a good university in a country with an income per capita as high as that of Western Germany, or by a good institute. I would not say that these fine working conditions for researchers are in any way special to the WKB. What differs from a good university where working conditions are concerned would rather be the possibility of concentrating on research, in other words the absence of lectures and administrative work. I belong to those who find interaction with students not only useful but a necessity for my work, because I usually find students although less knowledgeable, more open, less tied by loyalty to paradigms than people further advanced in their intellectual careers. Consequently I accepted an invitation of the Freie Universität to give 14 double lectures in peace strategies and 6 seminars in East Asian studies (at the OAS) during summer semester 1983, of course with no extra remuneration as I was already paid by the WKB. **The WKB/FU combination worked well.**

**But** as to administration: the WKB imposed much more of a burden on me than most universities would have done because of totally inadequate information, administrative amateurishness and obligatory presence. The heavy luncheon meals represented a major interruption in my work, as did a number of compulsory big and small arrangements, throughout the year, meant to be a part of the effort to build a community. I say this because I am not at all convinced that everybody at WKB was able to, or even expected to, get much work done. The situation was not that advantageous. I myself managed to a large extent because I simply refused to participate in too many of the meals, but showed up with almost no exception for the Wednesday night sessions. In short, there is still considerable room for improvement where working conditions are concerned. But this is not a problem concerning a staff so near the perfect as possible; it is a matter of organization and principles. Hence, so far my conclusion is that the Wissenschaftskolleg is a facility which operates very well at the lower administrative level. But this is certainly not the major aspect of the institution, nor the aspect for which the institution wants to be known. It is not specific to the WKB as such. The other aspects I would like to explore under five headings: composition, style, elitism, structure and academic level. They apply to the Kolleg as such, not to individual work.

### 1. Composition

The WKB is under no obligation to be representative of the world in general or the academic world in particular. But the composition of the WKB boards and fellows is by far too biased\*. The shield of the WKB shows a naked white man, obviously in some kind of humanistic tradition, with mathematical inclinations, apparently located in the center of the world. This is a very appropriate symbol for an institution based almost only on men, mainly in the humanities with some to come from the natural sciences, generally conservative/bourgeois, and incredibly ethnocentric, in the Western-, the European- and the Germany-centric senses. More particularly, a United States-Germany-Israel axis seems to take shape with obvious and highly political connotations: subservience to a master country that helped beat Nazi Germany successfully, and atonement and bad

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\* See Appendix for some data.

conscience towards the Jewish state. The composition is closely correlated with the composition of the boards, as is to be expected. Board members will generally have a tendency to select people similar to themselves, thereby trying to reinforce their own self-images as models of scientific behavior and of knowledge of scientific behavior. The boards are reproduced in the Kolleg.

The consequences of this highly biased composition are obvious: male, competitive, fragmenting, atomistic and deductive scholarship; mainly in the humanities (now, it seems, also in the more philosophical aspects of natural sciences); born out of the close connection between political and intellectual conventionalism; totally uninformed by and about what goes on in other parts of the world. The "Old World-New World" axis on which the WKB is based will appear so rich and impressive to those knowledgeable of nothing else that they will confuse it with the world as a whole, thus being unable themselves to discover their own biases and possible irrelevances in the world in which we live today. It is this latter point which I found particularly interesting. That the WKB would appear very biased to a person who has been working in many parts of the Third and the Fourth Worlds, (East and Southeast Asia) and in the UNO, is obvious. That people could have such an unreflected relation to their own narrowness came rather as a surprise, in this part of the twentieth century. The losers are the German hosts - for Germans to understand themselves, their own history and contemporary reality better they need more Third and Fourth World people.

Recommendation: The WKB should be modernized. It should try to become a part of the total world. At least one third of the fellows should be women. At least one third should come from outside the Western space. There should be at least one Arab scholar for each Israeli (population ratio 50 : 1), and at least one Soviet for two US scholars. The hope is that they might engage in dialogues. There should be more Western Europeans from countries outside the German sphere. If the board is unable/unwilling to locate candidates, or the administration can not stand such diversity, then change boards and administration. An international WKB - as opposed to a Western provincial one, with Western German provincialism at its center, could even make major contributions to the global scientific culture. As it stands today the WKB represents a clearly regressive step in trying to make people believe that the world still consists only of some parts of the Occident. The WKB today is an insult to the world of decolonization, of equality among races and civilizations; a relic of a past evidently not dead. This type of provincialism might have been good enough had the Kolleg been located in, say, Regensburg. From a Kolleg in Berlin one would expect something more ambitious, at least something all-European, possibly and preferably a truly universal institution.

## 2. Style

The attempted style of the WKB is a deliberately designed product of the administration, possibly serving the interests and the tastes of some of the fellows produced by the board through the cloning operation referred to as "selection". In the critique that now follows it is, consequently, not at all excluded that this style has its adherents, or that many people simply enjoy it. I am putting down my own comments, knowing that I talk for others who would be less inclined to phrase it in writing - but certainly not for all.

The style is that of a 19th century intellectual salon, with an admixture of an Oxbridge college, but with a certain teutonic heaviness rather than truly aristocratic ease and unpretentious elegance. The WKB looks like an exclusive club trying to exude power, status, prestige and money - particularly the latter. It does not even try to look like a part of the society that produced it, but as something above it. Those who think that it looks like a British club should try to compare it with one. Those really assured of their own inner worth, in Britain, dress casually and address each other casually. In the WKB, in addition to the ubiquitous "Professor" title, one also hears occasional nobility titles floating around. First names are almost banned, even among staff members.

The style of the meals is an effort to imitate the Oxbridge high table, with the rector up in the middle. It expresses very well the power structure, but looks plainly comical to those not taken in by this style. Again, those who think that it compares well with an Oxbridge college should participate in one of their meals, where the consumption of the dishes is done with considerably more ease and unencumbered elegance. The sight of the U-shaped table with the somber symbol of authority in the middle; a cluster of German fellows very close to the symbol; non-Germans further down the line, all of them trying to reconcile a sincere devotion to food, or even gluttony, with efforts to be analytical, knowledgeable, perhaps even bright, is not very edifying. Above all it looks artificial, and also mildly

irritating. It gives the feeling of having been "invited" not to do research, but partake in a ritual that serves the interests of some, but certainly not all. It serves not to reinforce a certain social structure that is, anyhow, very quickly disappearing, but to revive it, with the naive hope that a renaissance might one day come out of the effort; a revenge for 1968, a return to science as a privilege for the chosen few, accountable to nobody but itself. Commensalism is the classical tool, designed and employed precisely for this purpose.

One word should be added about the meals. The food is very tasty, very well prepared and served by excellent staff members. But it is heavy and not very healthy. There is an excess of fat and carbohydrates; a deficit of fresh fruit and vegetables of various kinds, of food with solid fibers. Already overweight bodies will get, literally speaking, a solid reinforcement during a stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, thus becoming more similar to many of the German elites also in corpore. Needless to say, comments such as these would have been totally out of place had it not been for the disagreeable fact that attendance is compulsory. And the menu offers little or no choice.

I doubt very much that those who designed this style themselves were aware of how special, and also how provincial it is. Moreover, they were certainly not aware of how alienating it is to many people outside a certain class and region. And we "outsiders" come in order to work, have dialogues with colleagues, enjoy all aspects of that miracle which is Berlin - not to be socialized into the 19th century, Germanic version.

Recommendation: Tone it down. This is not a question of introducing only the opposite style, some type of cafeteria where people enter casually, when they want, alone or in small groups, in a certain time interval (say, from 12 to 2). It would be a question of making the whole arrangement more pluralistic, and not insisting on anything being compulsory. The room is too small to permit several styles at the same time, but one proposal would be cafeteria style four times a week and then one more formal day, for instance Wednesday before the colloquium, and then with the seating pattern that so far has been the only one. On ordinary days there might also be a corner reserved for those who want a more elegant setting, possibly with table-cloth and candles, hierarchical seating pattern, and the obligation to wear a tie. The present imposition of just one style, throughout the week, all through the year is intolerable.

### 3. Elitism

This, of course, is highly related to the preceding point about style. However, I think the public debate about elitism has not yet hit the basic points. There should be no objection to good researchers occasionally having optimal working conditions, both for input (library access, discussions with colleagues if not at the WKB then at least at the FU, TU, WZB and other places) and for output (occasion to give seminars, colloquia, conferences, lectures; to have research papers typed, translated and so on). Any artisan or artist needs his workshop or atelier and ample occasion for undisturbed work, and often has it; probably more so than researchers. It is also generally agreed that many or most universities do not offer all these conditions today. Above I have mentioned that the WKB does provide this, but with some important exceptions due to the compulsory presence at meals and lectures, and in Berlin as a whole (Residenzpflicht: absence for more than 3 days is generally frowned upon and has to be reported in advance.

What is elitist about the WKB is not good working conditions but the style. The building itself is elitist, very different from universities in general. If some people are impressed by this it says much about those people. This point, however, is a minor one relative to the next one. Anyway, there is also the annex, in Delbrückstraße, for normal behavior.

The basic point about elitism, in my view, is the restriction of input and output to elites only, making it inaccessible to people in general. Nobody will dispute the right, indeed obligation of a researcher to relate to his peers in a language inaccessible except to some very few people. But s/he should at the same time feel obliged to relate to people in general, through lectures to students, public lectures, in popular books and articles - in Germany and in German as this is where the money comes from, from German tax payers, in other words mainly through work carried out by the German population. The fellows who make use of the building and the facilities in general, and in addition are drawing a stipend from the general lot of DM 5 million (that is about the annual budget of the WKB) have a moral obligation, and also a right, to give something back to the source, meaning the German people. The

fellows have all the privileges of members of a rich club for business men etc.; but those people usually pay a fee for those privileges. The fellows have only privileges, no fee, and in addition salary. The WKB should help those who want to give something back.

Recommendation: An important task of the WKB should be to organize, for the fellows, public lectures, for students and for lay audiences. That the fellows will associate with their colleagues in their own specialty goes without saying; no particular organization is needed for this. The fellow should not expect any remuneration for undertaking such tasks, but rather see it as an obvious part of the total contract, but to be stated explicitly.

#### 4. Structure

The structure of the WKB can best be characterized as highly vertical, collectivist and exclusive. It is a very traditional combination, just the opposite of the modern combination: horizontal, individualist and inclusive.

The WKB is vertical in the extreme. Of course it is possible to have informal talks with secretary, rector and members of the boards; but all formal lines of decision-making are one way, from top to bottom. There are papers circulated in the name of the rector and the fellows with no fellow ever having been consulted. Reports are supposed to be addressed to the rector, but were last year screened by the secretary and handed on in filtered form to the boards who do not care to communicate their findings back to the fellows. It is actually quite clear that the Wissenschaftskolleg as institution never includes the fellows; it only includes the two positions mentioned, and the boards. The fellows are something to be selected and processed, given opportunity to do work. Administratively they are clients, not members of the Kolleg as organization.

As a consequence there is no due process at all. There are no committees with fellows present with staff and board members to sort out the numerous problems, particularly of a young institution. Under such conditions administration will by necessity be paternalistic or at least suspected to be

paternalistic, random or at least appear random because the principles, if any, are not communicated. Conflicts will accumulate rather than be solved, also because of the low level of social and communication competence, and the high level of conflict shyness of the key WKB officers involved. Obedience, the ability to take it, to accept what comes from above seem to be the virtues cultivated. The result is withdrawal; fellows who do not take any initiative. The place should be bustling with activity; colloquiums should be fully booked. The WKB actually looks dead outside meal hours; nothing spontaneous and collective ever goes on.

The WKB is collectivist in so far as there is an effort to establish some corpus mysticum. Fellows are made to believe that they are of a higher kind; some embrace this idea with great appetite. The style and the elitism reinforce this, and seem designed for that purpose. Inside the WKB collectivism there is an inner circle of Germans surrounded by people of former German empires. That inner circle consume together (many are "Haus-fellows" living in Wallotstraße 19 or Königsallee 21) breakfast, lunch and coffee. They probably constitute a key reference group for the administration, and contribute even further to a narrow atmosphere. Some of them are in that elusive, somewhat metaphysical discipline called germanistics, contributing even further to the construction of an inner circle.

The WKB is exclusive insofar as outsiders are admitted to meals and to lectures by invitation only, from a fellow or the WKB. The share in power and privilege has already be conveyed by the board to the fellows through the selection; the fellows may then give the divine spark, or some minor version of it, to somebody else through an invitation. Simply to come, because one is interested, is unthinkable.

The total structure produces an almost incredible amount of joking, gossip, slander, criticism - much of it in personal, psychologizing terms as the problems and conflicts are interpreted in personal rather than in structural terms; after all only few of the people concerned are social scientists. Much of the atmosphere is simply juvenile. It is pathetic to see a group of grown-up; to a large extent even highly respected, scholars behaving like children when the rector is away, giggling with joy, "we are free"; mirth erupting around the table. The mice start dancing and criticism of the WKB becomes explicit and sharp. But when the cat is back again most mice creep back into their holes, including inside their own psyches. An unhealthy atmosphere prevails. There are sharp borders between thought, words and action - like in a boarding-school.

As the German fellows tend to constitute an inner circle, more exclusive than the others and more in the center of the collectivity



than the others, they are sometimes approached by non-Germans on the assumption that the Germans are closer to the top of the vertical system than others. The usual answer is: "I am very sorry, but there is nothing I can do about it"; even from people who have been voicing considerable criticism themselves. The usual interpretation is that they are afraid to be seen as trouble-makers, as Querulanten, as challengers of verticality, collectivism and exclusiveness, even risking being expelled from the inner collectivity because they are insufficiently subservient and exclusive. The inability to act in front of obvious injustices leaves a lasting impression among non-Germans. The Germans should know that non-Germans will have a tendency to interpret this type of behavior in the light of history. Such interpretations might be exaggerated, but should be mentioned lest people fall prey to the naive belief that the WKB is bound to produce a great number of friends among academics in European and other countries. It could easily end up producing exactly the opposite. Anything compulsory which in addition is seen as unnecessary may have that effect. Inability to handle disputes may have that effect. And so with the many surprises, with contract and reality differing from information received in advance. Such surprises are intolerable; they absorbed much of the time of many of the fellows.

Recommendation: I think it would help to change the title of the head of the institution from "rector" to "director", making it more clear that it is not any question of spiritual, academic guidance (fellows who are invited are presumably capable of guiding themselves, in addition to guiding a couple of others), but of a purely administrative function that can be performed more or less well. In order for it to be performed well a committee should be constituted, possibly consisting of two fellows elected by the fellows after an initial month of mutual acquaintance, one person elected from either board, and two persons from the staff, of which at most one should be the rector or the secretary. Of course, only matters of dispute would go for the committee, and the committee should probably either work until consensus has been obtained or refer the matter to higher bodies, meaning the boards or the Senate. It is assumed that even the mere existence of such a committee could have a very healthy effect. The present situation of steady conflict accumulation is unbearable.

To promote a more individualist design for a fellow's year in Berlin the WKB should eliminate all requirements of compulsory attendance. The meals should be seen as a facility, as should seminars, colloquia,

conferences etc. organized by the WKB. The present pattern of Wednesday presentation for the Berliner Prominenz might continue, but only as one of several possibilities, adding to it public lectures, small seminars at the Berlin universities, or at the WKB, and any other possibility.

In order to make the institution less exclusive attendance at meals and at public lectures at the WKB should be open to all, on first come, first serve basis. It should be possible for scholars in Berlin simply to drop into have a meal at lunch time, or possibly a cup of coffee, later on in the day, after 4 p.m. (if this can be managed) - paying for it on the spot, in cash. Not very many would make use of such a facility and there would still be ample possibility to invite people when that is wanted; important here is to avoid any type of exclusiveness so effective in provoking the aggressiveness with which the WKB is already surrounded. One might add as a requirement that people have to announce their presence for meals and lectures some time in advance because of limited space.

Finally: everybody should have the same stipend, or there should be a uniform, simple scale with some adjustment for seniority and family size. The "no gains, no loss" formula leads to all kinds of favoritism and injustice, is very difficult to administer and reproduces, even magnifies, the inequalities found outside the WKB. Comparisons are made and inevitably lead to a negative atmosphere. The principle was wrong from the beginning, and will not improve later.

##### 5. Academic level

No doubt the fellows selected are generally among the better in their field. However, this does not necessarily show in the public performances in the Wissenschaftskolleg, traditionally on Wednesday evenings. Those who had the occasion to compare the performance of the same people in smaller, more informal colloquia at the WKB, where both presentation and discussions were generally much more interesting, can only draw the conclusion that the setting is responsible for the difference. The public lectures tend to be stiff, unoriginal and scholastic, and in addition boring. The habit of interpreting the word Vorlesung exactly that way, as reading for a public which may even be equipped with a typed text, all of them turning the page in a synchronized manner, gives an air of the ludicrous to the whole spectacle. It even looks as if a WKB style has emerged with some type of deferent snobbishness unusual in purely academic circles; an effort to

play it safe by having nothing to say that can be attacked; in some cases even efforts to screen the audience so that nobody particularly critical will be admitted, and on top of it all the collective reading of written pieces already overdigested by the author, boring not only to the public but also to himself. It is a setting for academic conventionalism.

The "debate" is usually below the level of any graduate seminar at a decent university. Non-Germans, women and young people in the audience - including fellows with such characteristics, tend not to participate. Almost everybody looks unhappy. The outcome of such repressive sessions is highly predictable: afterwards there is head-shaking and shoulder-shrugging, while people are consuming, also in a bored manner, the wine and "Brezeln" that for some reasons are considered a part of this 19th century intellectual salon.

There is a humiliating aspect to this. It is almost like an initiation ritual for adolescent and young adults into grown-up academic life. In retrospect it is incredible that so many outstanding non-German scholars, themselves objecting to it vehemently, submit to this ritual. Of course, they/we consider submission a part of the quid pro quo for the stipend. But looked at in another perspective it is a socialization exercise in an alien academic culture, the Wednesday lecture being only one element in this culture (some others have been mentioned above). There is an ample reservoir of informal sanctions to stamp the people who object as deviants one way or the other. In doing so the people who engage in this without protest are not necessarily dishonest. Rather, they may be unable to see their own biases, having been exposed to nothing else, hence believing that this pattern is normal. Or worth imitating.

Recommendation: The WKB should definitely have public lectures, but they should not be compulsory and one prerequisite should be a minimum ability to perform. Sometimes the public discussion, the Streitgespräch, may be the better form. A number of other outlets for oral academic activity should be available and considered equivalent as performance. This also applies to the year-book: it will tend to be filled with these public lectures that have already been characterized, and be equally

limited by the nature of the audience as well as by the composition of the fellows. If the WKB wants the fellows to carry the banner of the house, a much more effective way would be to recommend the fellows to mention the stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg in connection with any publication that might come out of it. The experience so far, however, is that the WKB is much more interested in public relations with the press, newspapers, possible radio and TV than in anything seriously academic. The WKB is a public relations exercise for 19th century science, and for late 20th century Western establishment politics.

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To conclude: I have tried to look at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin along five dimensions. If there are two possible ways of organizing a Wissenschaftskolleg for each of them that would give us 32 different possibilities. Out of these 32 possible WKBs the present Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin represents only one, and in my view the worst one. It has a deliberately manipulated composition, with a certain elitist style and structure that does not conduce to innovative, interesting research. Obviously it serves other interests: putting Berlin on the map of Germany, of Europe, of the world; putting Germany on the academic map of Europe, of the world; contributing to the reconstruction of the old position of Europe, Germany and Berlin as centers in the world. The choice made along all five dimensions is compatible with this type of purpose. It is an effort to run history backwards, meaningful only to those unaware of the world transformation carried out from other corners of the world.

And yet the opposite Wissenschaftskolleg, the modern Wissenschaftskolleg which would be broad in composition, with a moderate and pluralistic style, non-elitist in the precise sense defined, horizontal-individualist-inclusive and at a high academic level, is also possible. Personally I doubt very much that it could grow out of the present institution, not only because of the strong interests pulling in the opposite direction, but also because a solid crust is already forming, protecting the structure chosen. More particularly, I do not think that it is merely a question of the changing two persons at the top of the structure. They have much power. But they are chosen in order to protect the

structure, not to change it. Much more is at stake: the boards, the style, the structure, the hidden agenda of the institution. I doubt it can be changed. More likely, great efforts will be made to recruit fellows who will conform, not make "trouble". Needless to say, I hope I will be proven wrong on this sad prediction; that the WKB is not so determined by the deeper structure of German society (and by this I mean something that the last governments have in common) but is sufficiently autonomous. But I doubt it.

Consequently, my final recommendation would be to construct an alternative Wissenschaftskolleg, based on the other horn of the five dilemmas. Preferably it should be done on the basis of the present one, if not one should start from scratch. It could cost much less. There is more than enough money in Berlin to do it, certainly in Germany and even more certainly in Europe. I think it could even become a very fascinating institution. I wish that had been the institution to which I had come, not the one at which I spent the year 1982/83. I got much of my own work done. But on the whole it was disappointing in form as well as content, frustrating in its organization. Brilliantly conceived, but on its way to becoming a lost opportunity, an expensive irrelevance. So, let this serve as a warning to future fellows about what to expect.

Berlin, July 1983

Appendix

COMPOSITION, WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG ZU BERLIN\*



	Board	Fellows 81/82	Fellows 82/83	Fellows 83/84
BRD	9	6	7	13
USA	4	3	5	10
Israel	1	2	2	2
Italy		1	2	1
France	1		2	3
Belgium			1	
Netherlands				1
Norway			1	
Switzerland	1		1	
Austria	1	2	1	
Great Britain	1			
Poland		4	1	
Hungary			2	
Number of persons	18	18	25	30
Number of countries	7	6	11	6
No. of countries per person	0.39	0.33	0.44	0.20
% male	$\frac{17}{18} = 94\%$	$\frac{16}{18} = 88\%$	$\frac{23}{25} = 92\%$	$\frac{27}{30} = 90\%$
% OECD area	$\frac{18}{18} = 100\%$	$\frac{14}{18} = 78\%$	$\frac{22}{25} = 88\%$	$\frac{28}{28} = 100\%$
% BRD	$\frac{9}{18} = 50\%$	$\frac{6}{18} = 33\%$	$\frac{7}{25} = 28\%$	$\frac{13}{30} = 43\%$

\* Based on: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin - Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin, 1983 and on information July 1983 for Fellows 1983/84