

Transatlantic intellectual exchange in the postwar era. The journal *Die Wandlung* as a transatlantic project

A ›manifesto of humanity‹ (Sternberger), the postwar journal Die Wandlung was published in Heidelberg, the so-called capital of the American Sector, between November 1945 to 1949. The journal turned out to be an appealing publication platform for many authors who had emigrated to the USA during WWII – like Hannah Arendt, Günther Anders and Jacob Picard. With their letters and manuscripts crossing borders from Germany to the USA, transatlantic intellectual exchange was a lived practice. Anna Axtner-Borsutzky (HU Berlin) turns to this journal to illuminate how its editors helped to rebuild postwar Germany's intellectual ties to and understanding of the world.

By Anna Axtner-Borsutzky

Published from 1945 to 1949 in Heidelberg, the so-called American capital in Germany, *Die Wandlung* (Sternberger 1945) was the first journal to obtain a license by the American occupation authorities (Waldmüller 1988: 9). It was edited by four very distinct public figures – political scientist and journalist Dolf Sternberger, psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, philologist and politician Werner Krauss, and sociologist Alfred Weber –, and in consequence it was a deliberately liberal journal, designed to give the German postwar society a medium where everybody was able to read things that weren't possible to write about or discuss during Nazi rule. These goals are outlined in the preface, where the editors claim to offer a new conversation culture to readers and to show what ›humanity‹, needed now more than ever, means in practice. They were part of their belief in changing Germans' minds and re-involving society in a democratic culture. Even the title of the journal – *Die Wandlung* – emphasizes the will to change. This intended *change* or rather *transformation*, however, was influenced by transatlantic intellectual exchange.

In general, *Die Wandlung* is an important source to understand the influence of journals on society as well as their educational impact on postwar Germany and the intellectual issues of the late 1940s. Moreover, *Die Wandlung* is an extraordinary point of reference to study the time after the end of World War II in Germany, a short period of pause before society returned to daily business. The editors published this journal to signal a decade of new beginnings (Hartlaub 102). They wanted to offer a possibility to practice moral and ethical discourse – and to achieve this goal they turned towards the United States. *Die Wandlung* was highly influenced by intellectuals in US-exile, as Dolf Sternberger asked them for help in creating the journal.

This makes *Die Wandlung* a rich source for transatlantic literary history regarding different aspects: It presents an interchange of knowledge, the journal offers answers regarding production processes in the post war era, it encompasses significant content and ideas, and clearly demonstrates the close connection between postwar Germany and the United States.

Concerning the production process, it must be stated that there would be no *Die Wandlung* if the journal had not obtained a license by the Americans. Since, at that point of time, a license not only served as a permission to publish but also a prerequisite to guarantee paper sourcing which became a significant problem over time. Karl Jaspers, who was called the ›Spiritus Rector‹ by the Americans, – they trusted him a lot, especially regarding the rebuilding of the University of Heidelberg (von Freytag-Loringhoven 2011: 85) – and Dolf Sternberger himself had good connections with the people who were responsible for the press. According to Lambert Schneider, his publishing house and his good standing (Schneider 80–91) made it possible to sell the first issue of the journal in November 1945. Schneider himself had only made it to Heidelberg on Alfred Weber’s behalf: The *Die Wandlung* editor had recommended Schneider to the American forces, who in turn issued the licensing for both of their publishing houses.

Closely tied to these transatlantic personnel relations is the aspect of content creation: Manuscripts that were printed in *Die Wandlung* crossed borders as material artifacts. They were sent from the United States to the editors in a physical transatlantic exchange. It is possible to map out a »geography of [...] manuscripts« as Corinna Norrick-Rühl suggested in her [blogpost](#). There is a reason for that: Dolf Sternberger was a true »networker« (Kiessling 44): his vast connections to German authors and intellectuals in global exiles enabled the incorporation of ideas from inside and outside of Germany.

The geographical aspect of traveling documents, of course, implies what Tim Sommer in his [essay](#) on this blog noted about the logistics of studying archives dedicated to transnational authors: Their work is scattered across both sides of the Atlantic. There is a huge amount of unknown and unexploited material that can deeply enrich our understanding of transatlantic literary history. A huge number of the authors who have emigrated to the United States (or elsewhere) left their literary work in libraries and archives abroad. *Die Wandlung*-author Jacob Picard’s estate, for example, is stored at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York and is already digitized. One can also find the ›Hannah Arendt Papers‹ in the Library of National Congress, partly digitized, that show the close exchange between Arendt and the two editors Dolf Sternberger and Karl Jaspers (in parts edited by Bermbach and Köhler/Saner). Some other parts of these authors’ letters and literary estates are stored in Germany, mostly in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

The journal gathers different types of texts that refer to transatlantic topics: Hannah Arendt, for example, published various essays like *Organisierte Schuld* (Arendt 1946) or *Konzentrationslager* (Arendt 1948) here – the first time in German, after they were published in English in the United States – as well as other authors like Stefan Andres, Günther Anders or, already mentioned, Jacob Picard. Hannah Arendt’s essays are obviously connected to the crimes of the Nazi regime and reflect the atrocities from a transatlantic perspective. Others, like the two intellectuals Heinrich Zimmer or Leo Spitzer, sent manuscripts that represent distinctly how they felt during emigration and about the American way of life. Their essays are called *Neuling in Amerika* (Zimmer 1946) and *Erlebnisse mit der Adoptiv-*

Muttersprache (Spitzer 1948). Mixed in with some documents and reports about the United Nations or the Declaration of Independence of the United States, the journal shows a wide range of transatlantic interconnections and presents the United States as a role model.

These few examples expose the editors' ideas: *Die Wandlung* should open minds by giving examples of democratic thinking as well as show how Germans in exile felt. Especially Arendt's support made the journal well-known in the United States as well as in Germany – at this time she was already a famous intellectual, her voice was heard.

The editors wanted the journal to be an instrument of »self-education« (Forner 2012: 646) for the German society. The journal made it possible to bring these ideas into a wider audience. Designed as a »manifesto of humanity« it should present how human rights grew in other parts of the world and how human beings should work together – especially via talking to, with, and about people across the Atlantic to show that there is no need to be enemies.

Finally, *Die Wandlung* wanted to offer a broad performative impact on its readers which means that the concept of the journal should encourage readers to think more pluralistically. This concept entails the special composition of the journal, combining literary, documentary, political, as well as philosophical texts displaying diversity as its key strength. The result is a particular form of journal attempting to include the whole society. Literature, in this case, fulfills an integrating function of orientation (Kiessling 111). The journal itself can be seen as an instrument for reeducation because it was meant to practice democratization processes. The editors used some sections like surveys and letters to the editors, for example, to involve their readers. All facets of the journal were built as a platform for discussion and conversation.

It's not surprising, that Sternberger himself has been referred to as the intellectual founder of the Federal Republic of Germany with his »passion for humanity« (Waldmüller 48), he was *the* influencer on the intellectual landscape of postwar Germany. Considering all this, studying *Die Wandlung* can enlighten the ways of transatlantic intellectual exchange during these first years after World War II. It offers different categories and layers of transatlantic intellectual exchange to analyze. In my opinion, *Die Wandlung* itself is constructed as a transatlantic project.

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