

Politics

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Under its Editor-in-perpetuity Stephen Graubard (nobody quite remembers when he was *not* at the journal), *Daedalus* has built a respectable stronghold in the no-man's-land between the pure academic and the general reader. His Board of Editors includes some of the great figures of the Anglo-American university world, such as Isaiah Berlin, Daniel Bell, Stanley Hoffmann, and the late Judith Shklar. And since *Daedalus* is the official "Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences", its cachet (together with the informal Harvard Connection) draws authors of weight and readers of ambition.

But there is a problem in trying to straddle the "two cultures". The attempt to bridge the ever more esoteric world of "scientific" social science (where the model-builders and number-crunchers hold sway) and the realm of demanding, but accessible writing may end up in the worst of all possible worlds: neither first-rate academic work nor good journalism.

Today, journals such as *Daedalus* must compete (in the United States) against the likes of *Commentary*, the *New Republic*, *Atlantic*, or the *New York Review of Books*. These monthlies and weeklies are faster to publish, some of them pay extremely well and all of them can draw on the finest talent – be they academics or professional writers. As a result, the best of American journalism is hard to beat for insight, felicity and freshness.

A quarterly like *Daedalus* will typically have a lead-time of one year or more, and that turns an issue such as "Germany in Transition" (Winter 1994) into a risky business; what was an insight twelve months ago may elicit a "so what?" on the day of publication. Unable to pay authors enough to relieve them of their normal chores, such journals may have to take less than original pieces. And if they have to corral writers who are not at home in the English language, they run the additional risk of imposing a literal, ie, wrong translation on top of a (in this case) Germanic writing style that does not travel well.

Take Heinrich August Winkler, an established historian of the Weimar Republic, and his "Rebuilding of a Nation: The Germans before and after unification". What was undoubtedly *Nationalbewusstsein* (national consciousness) in the original turns into "national conscience"; what the translators render as "double resolution" is not a twice-affirmed New Year's vow, but Nato's 1979 "twin-track decision" on the Euromissiles.

"Germany in Transition" addresses all the right issues: whatever happened to the vaunted "economic miracle" that has given way to almost Depression-type levels of unemployment? And how do we account for the neo-Nazis and foreigner-bashers who have crept out of the woodwork since reunification? What is the national identity of the "new Germany"? How will this powerhouse, now unshackled from the fetters of the Cold War, behave on the international stage?

The answers, alas, often lack punch and precision. In almost every essay, much space is devoted to regurgitations of the past – of the "old Germany" both East and West, and how the twain became fused. Where the future is tackled, things become murky. "As democracy strengthens", writes a French expert on Germany, "past and future will be seen to be both one and multiple. They cannot be linear, deprived of all asperity . . ." And a British colleague opines: "The future is open." Usually, this is indubitably true.

Sometimes, a tougher editor would have helped. The German historian Jürgen Kocka opens his essay on the "Crisis of Reunification"



Rock painting of a group of Shamans at Sterkstroom, Orange Free State; from *World Archaeology*: Volume 25, Number 3, February 1994, "Reading Art" (£26 per year. Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE)

with the categorical statement: "Germany has changed more in the last four years than it has in the last four decades." This is simply wrong. I can think of no other society in the West that was transformed more dramatically than Germany between 1945 and 1990. Perhaps not so much in the East, where one totalitarianism was traded for another. But the Federal Republic emerged from the ashes to burst through the confines of past German history and leave East Germany light years behind.

Where democracy in the Weimar Republic was but a sickly experiment which was trampled to death by the Nazis, the Federal Republic grew into a vibrant liberal polity. Culturally, pre-1945 Germany had always occupied a precarious perch between Enlightenment, liberalism and capitalism, on the one hand, and bizarre dreams of a "third way" between East and West, on the other. But the Federal Republic took to "Westernization" – individualism, pluralism, secularism – like a duck to water. Just compare the loose-limbed Fritz Müller of 1994 with his bow-from-the-hip and authority-craving forebear of 1950, and you will see what enormous distance Germany society has travelled in forty years.

The categorical overture becomes even more egregious when it is compared with the text that follows. There Kocka correctly points out how little post-reunification Germany has changed in the two-thirds of the country west of the Elbe. Thus he writes: "There has been no significant change in the West German party system as it extended to the East." In 1990, "the economic order of the West was abruptly introduced to the East" – and so was the legal and administrative system. That is continuity, too, as not even the tiniest remnants of East German state socialism made it across the former Wall. A firm editor could have saved this essay with a few strokes of his blue pencil. In particular, he or she would have deleted "problematique" where "problems" would have done just fine.

One of the most intriguing essays is the last. It is entitled "Dealing with a Stasi Past" and is written by Joachim Gauck, the head of the Federal Commission in charge of miles of State Security files. An *Ossi*, he has shown enormous bravery in the face of many opinion-makers in the media and in politics who would love to seal his archives and banish him to the Outer Hebrides. In a way, Gauck is Germany's post-reunification conscience: determined not to bury an ugly past where millions of East Germans spied on and denounced each other. His argument is plain and powerful: "We will be in a position to forgive and forget only if we are given enough time and the right to heal our wounds, to calm our anger . . ." And his message is: let's not repeat the collective repression that swept through Germany after 1945; if we deny the oppression and corruption, we will not know how to define "our inalienable rights to freedom" in the future.

The problem with *anything* "in transition" is precisely transition. In real transitions – and Germany's is real – we barely know where we are, let

alone where we are going. Hence, this issue of *Daedalus* was a tough, almost forbidding assignment. Academic journals should do what they do best: the calm essay, the painstaking research paper, the reasoned argument. This is what has turned *Daedalus* into a leading exemplar of its kind. But academic journals should fear to tread where day-to-day journalism can barely keep its footing.

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