

Hans Mislin and EXPERIENTIA:

The birth of a journal

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Hans Mislin, the founder of EXPERIENTIA, was a Swiss citizen, but one whose vision was never limited by the boundaries of his own country. He grew up in Basel, the Swiss city whose borders adjoin both France and Germany. Before the Second World War he studied and worked in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia. After the war was over he taught in Mainz, and made regular visits with his students to marine research stations in France – not only to give them the opportunity of learning about marine biology, but to try and build bridges between the two nations^{2,3}.

Hans Mislin was not only concerned about bringing people together across geographical borders; he was also concerned with the bridging of different disciplines. In 1929, he enrolled in the University of Basel to study medicine. But his restless mind could not be satisfied by the strictly rational study of the sciences that the medical school offered him, and he began parallel studies in philosophy, music (he was a singer and violinist), psychology and German literature. In addition, he founded a students' lecture committee, which invited internationally-known scientists, writers, artists and philosophers to come and speak in Basel. This was so successful that the activities are still remembered, and it was widely thought that the committee was an official organ of the University.

Among the invited speakers were several who made a deep impression on the young Hans Mislin. One of them was the German philosopher Leopold Ziegler, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship. Another was a Professor of literature from Vienna, Herbert Cysarz, who encouraged him to come first to Vienna and then to Prague. However, after two years of attending courses on subjects ranging from physiology to linguistics and anthropology, Mislin decided that his deepest interest was in the study of nature. He returned to Basel to study zoology, completing his studies with a doctoral thesis on the biology of the salmon in the River Rhine – a topic which involved working in what was then East Prussia, to study the fish in its marine habitat. In 1939, after completing his doctorate, he went to Bern to work under the physiologist Alexander von Muralt. In 1943, he returned to Basel as a lecturer in the department of zoology, and it was not long after that he embarked upon one of the major enterprises of

his life, the creation of the interdisciplinary journal EXPERIENTIA.

By the end of 1944, the end of World War II was clearly in sight, although fighting raged on, more fiercely than ever, and most of Central Europe was in ruins. Scientific activities ceased, and many of the scientists of the Axis nations who were lucky enough not to lose their lives were deprived of their liberty, as prisoners of war. Those who escaped these fates emerged from their cellars to find that their world had come to an end. For years, they had not had any contact with the international world of their scientific colleagues on the Allied side. Their publishing houses, too, had ceased to function, and at the beginning of 1945 it was not clear whether the well-known German scientific journals would ever be published again.

In this situation, Hans Mislin embarked upon an ambitious project. He was convinced that it was urgent, and indeed essential for the recovery of science in Europe and for the reunification of European scientists, that an international and multilingual forum for publication should be created in Central Europe. He interested his good friend and school-mate, the physician Dr. Hans Birkhäuser, in the scheme. Together they approached the latter's uncle, the publisher Albert Birkhäuser, with the idea of a journal covering all scientific disciplines, and accessible to scientists of all nations. The journal was to be published in four languages – German, French, Italian and English.

It was a risky undertaking for a publishing house, with no backing from a scientific institution or a learned society. Outside the rather limited Swiss market, it was not clear where the journal would find its first subscribers. However, due to Hans Mislin's energetic pressure the journal came to life. It was christened EXPERIENTIA, from a quotation from the writings of Paracelsus, 'Scientia est experientia', which is still the motto on the cover. The first issue, 32 pages long, appeared in April 1945. The editor was Hans Mislin, and there were three co-editors: the physiologist Alexander von Muralt from Bern, the chemist Leopold Ruzicka from Zürich, a Nobel laureate, and the physicist Jean Weigle from Geneva. The new journal appeared without any editorial introduction – just a brief statement of its aims,

inside the front cover. These were to give 'information . . . on the results of the latest researches', and to publish brief reports of experimental work, information about meetings and congresses, and book reviews.

The journal flourished, and as early as September 1945 the publishers managed to supply the first subscribers abroad – something that was more complicated than it sounds in the face of paper-rationing and currency restrictions, and with postal services that had not fully recovered from the war. By the sixth issue, EXPERIENTIA had already begun to publish papers from outside Switzerland.

In 1953, Hans Mislin was appointed to the Chair of Zoology in the University of Mainz. But though he went to live in Germany, he continued to edit the journal. He visited Basel frequently, irrupting into the editorial office with a great burst of energy and compressing a month's work into two or three crammed days. One of the innovations he introduced in the 1970s was what he called 'puzzle reviews'. His idea was to invite a team of specialists in related disciplines to collaborate in preparing a publication with articles on different facets of the same topic, which would fit together to form a whole, like the pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle. Reviews of this kind, later called 'multi-author reviews', have been a regular part of the journal ever since.

Some of the titles of these reviews demonstrate Hans Mislin's particular concerns and interests. A number were on the subject of his own scientific work, experimental physiology. These included one edited by Mislin himself on the circulation in the wings of bats – the topic he had begun to work on with von Muralt in Bern thirty years earlier. The titles of others illustrate his concern for the environment: 'The carbon dioxide problem' in 1980; 'Utilization of solar energy through biological systems' in 1982; 'Cadmium – a complex environmental problem' in 1984, and issues on 'Our dying forests' in 1985, 'The ecological effects of acid deposition' in 1986 and 'Radiation effects in man and animals' in 1989.

'Ecology' – in its modern sense of the effect of human beings on the environment – already occupied Hans Mislin in the years in Mainz^{2,3}. His concern is reflected in a list of some of his activities. He was a founding member of the Swiss Academic Society for Ecological Research; Secretary General of the International Association for Radiation Ecology; a member of the Swiss National Commission on National Energy Problems, and from 1968–1973 a Consulting Member of the Section on Ecology of the European Council in Strasbourg. However, Hans Mislin's interests were never limited to science. His early friendship with the philosopher Leopold Ziegler led him to found the Leopold Ziegler Society

for the Philosophy of Religion; he was a founding member of the Swiss Interdisciplinary Association for Integral (holistic) Medicine, and he also founded the Lisa Tetzner Seminars for the Comparative Study of European Fairy Tales.

After his retirement from his position in Mainz in 1973 he and his wife, a concert pianist from Belgium, went to live in Carona, in the Canton of Ticino in Southern Switzerland. Here, he had more time to devote himself to his multifarious interests. One of his last major projects was a treatise on St Francis of Assisi, written in collaboration with Professor Sophie Latour of the University of Bordeaux, entitled 'Francis, the Ecumenical-Ecological Revolutionary'⁴.

Hans Mislin continued to guide the fate of EXPERIENTIA from Carona as he had done from Mainz. In 1987, at the age of 80, he handed on his editorial responsibilities – with considerable reluctance – to a new generation. However, he remained in active contact with the editorial office and continued to provide a stream of original ideas. It was typical of his energy and his enduring interest in scientific observation that when he suffered a partially disabling stroke in 1989 he wrote a detailed protocol of the events during the stroke. He recovered to some extent, but he never left Carona again, and he died in a nursing home on Lake Lugano on March 25th 1993, in his 86th year.

Professor Hans Mislin was a man whose exuberant energy and constant flow of new – and often grandiose – ideas were not always easy to deal with. But the many students, colleagues and collaborators who came under the spell of his magnetic personality feel that the world is a duller place for his going.

Much of Hans Mislin's attitude to life can be summed up in one of the enterprises of his later years, an exhibition in 1985 in the Museum of Applied Art in Basel, entitled *The Spiral – in Human Life and in Nature*. It was initiated by Mislin, and organised together with Hans Hartmann, the Director of the Museum. In his introduction to the book they wrote together¹, Hartmann wrote that 'It was not by chance that in the native city of the Bernoulli Spiral a wide variety of people should have come together to set up an exhibition on spirals [. . .] – spirals in nature and in human artefacts; minute spirals in DNA molecules and vast ones in galaxies; spirals in concrete structures, and even metaphorical spirals like the price-cost spiral.' It was a truly interdisciplinary event.

It was not by chance that an exhibition on spirals should be set up in Basel, and it was also no chance that it should have been suggested by Hans Mislin. In the book on the exhibition he describes how as a student he used to look at the grave of the mathe-

matician Jacob Bernoulli in the Basel Cathedral, and consider the spiral carved on it; the spiral 'moves from the centre to the periphery, turns around and comes back to its starting-point. Going out and coming in; the outward and inward movement of a double spiral. For me, it was the symbol of development and movement outwards.'^{1a} The spiral as a symbol accompanied him from that time on. Half a century later, in 1983, a new cover-design was needed for *Experientia*. The one chosen was the spiral, that Bernoulli had called the 'Spira mirabilis', which you will find on the cover of this issue. It is a symbol of growth and development in nature, and of

the attempt of the human mind to understand the processes taking place in the universe. That – surely Hans Mislin would have agreed – is what scientific publication is all about.

1 Hartmann, H., and Mislin, H., *Die Spirale im menschlichen Leben und in der Natur*, cf. p. 9. MG edition, Gewerbemuseum, Basel 1985.

1a Cf. ref. 1, p. 10.

2 Hemmer, H., Hans Mislin as a teacher (1994) in this issue.

3 Jäger, R., Hans Mislin, the years in Mainz (1994) in this issue.

4 Mislin, H., and Latour, S., *Franziskus. Der ökumenisch-ökologische Revolutionär*. Hohenstaufen Verlag. Berg/Starnberger See, Bodman/Bodensee 1982.

