

Foreword

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At first glance, a foreword to the sixth issue of *aspeers* might seem superfluous. After all, the previous five forewords have elaborately explained the purpose of the venture as a pedagogical project of the MA track at American Studies Leipzig and as a unique voice both in American studies and in European graduate-level education. Moreover, the successful pursuit of this purpose has been demonstrated: In its first five years of existence, the journal published contributions from seven countries and received submissions from many more. It introduced the distinct voices of five established professors of American studies working in Europe. Featuring foci on topics as transnational as Migration and Mobility (Aho et al.); as socially and culturally relevant as Crime in America (Herrmann et al.); as canonical to the field as Nature and Technology, Revisited (Betker et al.); and as current as American Food Cultures (Bast et al.), the journal has continually presented the vast breadth and impressive scholarly quality of the work being done by students in American studies programs across Europe. This sixth issue with its topical focus on the manifold meanings of American Memories is but one more step: Once again, the journal received more submissions than ever before, it showcases the voice of another distinguished European professor of American studies, and it raises the number of countries from which contributions have appeared in *aspeers* to ten. Indeed, as we noted in this space last year, the project has moved from confronting its participants—student editors and instructors alike—with the challenges of beginning to making them face “the challenges of furthering” (Koenen and Bast iv). Sustaining and growing what previous editorial teams have achieved has become a core task.

And yet, *aspeers*—for all the best practices established, organizational processes optimized, and editorial rules settled and implemented—continues to be an ever-changing undertaking. At its very heart, the project remains a “laboratory,” to use the term of the foreword to the fourth issue (Koenen and Herrmann iv), not in the sense of a strictly regulated working environment with fixed routines and operational sequences but rather—as opposed to the proverbial drawing board—in the sense of an experimental space, in which new methods and materials are continually tried out

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and evaluated in the context of both previous results and changing conditions. The reasons for this are at least threefold. First, as the previous paragraph illustrated, *aspeers* continues to grow. Second, with each new issue being published by a new team of editors, the venue has a higher organizational turnover than other journals. Third, each year brings a new topical focus and with it a new set of challenges.

This year's most fundamental change to the project is the interweaving of another didactic layer by virtue of the addition of supervising editors to the editorial team: Two of last year's editors return to *aspeers* as teaching assistants to the general editor and as advisors to the editorial team. The project's already immense pedagogical potential is thus significantly heightened. *aspeers*—along with being an established publication venue in European American studies and a unique opportunity to learn editorial, research, and numerous other academic and professional skills—becomes a space in which to learn to teach. The status of supervising editor not only enables members of previous cohorts to go through the process of publishing another issue of the journal but also allows them to approach the project with the benefit of significant prior experience. Even more importantly, it gives them an opportunity to gather extensive teaching and coaching experience: Guided by the general editor, they participate in planning and actualizing individual units and longer didactic and organizational periods within the project, they teach numerous sessions, and they share in creating the pedagogical strategy underlying the project.

The introduction of supervising editors to the editorial personnel structure has a number of far-reaching beneficial consequences both for the new class of graduate students and for the general editor. For the editors of the entering MA cohort, the presence of supervising editors establishes a support system of both personal and academic value: It creates ties to fellow students who have been through the process before and can be a source of advice in terms of dealing with the oftentimes unexpectedly multifaceted demands attached to being an editor of an academic journal. Furthermore, the editors are working with supervisors who have been in the very same position only one year prior—who have quite literally sat in the same seats—and who are, thus, in a uniquely knowledgeable position in terms of empathizing with and motivating those whom they teach.

For the general editor, the supervising editors are an invaluable resource on manifold levels: There is an added element of continuity in the face of change. There is now a team of people with expertise in editing and publishing that collaborates in addressing any issues, be they pedagogical, editorial, or of any other nature. Moreover, since the supervising editors partake in the creation and execution of pedagogical strategy, their role as former student editors is crucial within this context as well. Perhaps most importantly, by way of their shouldering a significant part of the ponderous teaching load within the project, including supervising editors constitutes

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another significant step toward meeting a core challenge of *aspeers*: managing the work and the responsibility within this permanently evolving project, so as to assure the maintenance of its high standards in the face of the fast growth of this emerging voice in American studies.

Inviting *aspeers* alumni back, asking them to become supervising editors and to join the collaborative process that, after months of creative and collective efforts, yields yet another issue of *aspeers*, is an experiment. It is only possible, as we described earlier, in the context of previous results and changing conditions. These are exemplified perhaps most starkly by the significant increase in editorial capacity as the editorial team almost tripled in comparison to the previous one. In some way, surely, these conditions will change yet again. As established as the journal has become in its first half decade, *aspeers* has proven that, by its very nature, its success is as much about a constant dedication to institutional evolution in the face of new challenges as it is about confidently building on the strong foundation left by one's predecessors. In the coming years, this space will continue to serve as a lab report of sorts in which the experimental history of this venture is documented.

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