

Reflections by Former Editors

We have invited former *aspeers* editors to share their memorable experiences for this anniversary issue. The collection of anecdotes and reflections paints a picture of the joys and anxieties of the editing process.



This issue's editorial team as photographed by Sebastian M. Herrmann.

“There is a genre of *aspeers* photos, and it is magical, but that is not how I should begin. So let me begin with some context: Each editing cycle that I had the honor and the privilege to chair resulted in much more than simply a new issue of the journal—this most tangible, most ‘real’ fruit of months of exciting, often difficult intellectual work. It also resulted in countless memories, many fond and some not so much, many lively and some fading rapidly. It sometimes resulted in difficult conflicts, sometimes in friendships. It always resulted in moments of human, intellectual connection, and always in growth. As one of the more unexpected results, however, these years of editing also resulted in many, many photos shot during editing sessions, images showing every single group at work.

Going through these photos—of editorial teams I chaired and of ones I only saw from afar—it seems to me that these pictures form something akin to a genre of *aspeers* photos, a distinct, recurring theme stringing together otherwise different images. On the surface, of course, they all are different. Many are shot at night, some inside out, showing dark windows in the background; and some outside in, a brightly lit room full of students set off against its black surroundings. Many feature the editors in a room marked by the advanced, if not terminal, stages of disarray: snacks, cups, and bottles strewn all over, a confused tangle of extension cords in the middle, exhausted computers all around, stacks of paper, crumpled paper, torn paper, and discarded pens that ran out of ink hours ago. Some of these images are snapshots of discussions, people with their mouths open, their arms in the air; others show silent, focused reading; heads bent over bright sheets full of myriads of words.

Going through these images, I cannot help but see in them this one unique moment, recurring but also always the same, one moment outstretched in time and revisited every year, a paradoxical simultaneity of many moments in one, a magical secret. It is the moment in which so many different forms of work, done at different times, at different places, by many different people, culminate in the editors' singular, focused labor: an almost holy moment, radiant and bright (although it never feels like that when it happens), a moment of communion, a moment in which very different minds come together in a uniquely whole purpose. And so I look at these images, pictures of the exact same moment taken over such a long time, as if from different angles, and I'm thinking: *This* is when a journal gets made."

Dr. Sebastian M. Herrmann
aspeers 1-4, 8-9 (2008-2011, 2015-2016)
General Editor

"The Folder: Had I ever seen a folder as thick and heavy before? Yes. Had I ever read through one filled entirely with academic essays submitted for publication, printed double-sided, within the span of a single weekend? No. Did I still volunteer to do it once more a year later? Yes. As Nietzsche said (or would have, had he known *aspeers*): If you gaze long into a folder, the folder also gazes into you."

"Preface: For some, this clearly designates a short, supplementary piece of writing at the beginning of a book. For others, it could be mistaken for an Italian family name when encountered in a parenthetical citation. After all, MLA style is life. Unless it is too unspecific or contradictory, of course; then we must make up our own rules. You do not choose the editor's life, the editor's life chooses you. Do I need a citation for this?"

"Inside Jokes: From characters who mysteriously disappear over the course of a single essay ("Where is Kevin?") to bizarre 1980s NFL team

music clips ('Ram It!'), there was always a lot to laugh about, sometimes over things entirely incomprehensible for anyone outside the editorial team. Part of it might have been the lack of sleep and excess of sugar and caffeine. Probably a large part."

Sören Schoppmeier
aspeers 6-7 (2013-2014)

"Clearly, there have been many funny episodes during *aspeers*. We could start with the astonished look of the cleaning personnel at daybreak after we appropriately celebrated our last session in the seminar room till dawn (which included dancing on the heater while listening to Eurodance like Captain Jack or DJ Bobo). We could report on several late-night editorial working sessions with far too much but absolutely necessary candy and caffeine-containing products. We could talk about leaving the university building in the dead of night after a long session while our bicycles and the whole city of Leipzig were amazingly covered by several centimeters of snow. Even the cab driver refused to drive us home—"too dangerous."

**Katharina Freitag, Marianna Polkau,
Bettina Schuster, and Christiane Vogel**
aspeers 4 (2011)

"During the last phase of line editing, we had another round of review of already edited papers.

Emotions ran high when one editor yelled:

'Who did this?! Someone search-and-replaced all *America* with *United States*. It's in the middle of a goddamn quote. Who did this?!'"

"One morning, the following dialogue came up:

Editor 1: 'I don't know if we are talking about the actual thing or the abstract concept anymore.'

Editor 2: 'I mean the real thing.'

Editor 3: 'Do you mean: A concept can be real, too?'

Editor 2: 'I mean the real thing, but not the *real* real thing.'

Editor 3: 'When I look at it, a thing without the discourse of the thing is not a thing.'

Editor 4: 'I agree. But it is also a concept. Don't you agree?'

Editor 2: 'But then it is not a real thing.'

Hours passed, and it seemed there would be no consensus. The general editor helped:

‘Okay, so there are multiple interpretations, even more than everybody thought. No consensus will happen. Be programmatic about it.’

In the early afternoon, a breakthrough happened: It is a triangular perspective. Using single quotation marks around the word is going to fix it. As you can imagine, the resulting air-quote gymnastics had the spirit and the grace of a word ballet.”

Ines Krug
aspeers 3 (2010)

“I recall my group having an in-depth debate about the anxieties related to receiving prenatal care. It was three in the morning and we had been working for several hours, so some people were standing because they could no longer sit. Looking back, that seems like a completely insane situation, but it certainly was very ‘*aspeers*.’”

“*aspeers* also taught me to appreciate the Oxford comma and made me like MLA (I was a huge Chicago fan beforehand).”

Linda Esch
aspeers 7 (2014)

“In all truth, it has been one of my favorite academic experiences.”

Heather Pruessing
aspeers 1 (2008)

“During a long night’s work, probably toward the end of the line-editing process, after having consumed and, by 3 a.m., long digested our Uno pizza, our instructor Dr. Herrmann suggested that we could make some pasta *aglio e olio*, since he had all the needed ingredients in his office. Of course, what he failed to mention was the lack of a stove. So I ended up cooking spaghetti in the microwave. Something, I am sure, my Italian ancestors are still rolling in their graves for.”

Eleonora Ravizza
aspeers 3 (2010)

“One thing I recall is proofreading the submissions in three languages to avoid every possibility of plagiarism. It appeared that one of the papers we were reading seemed oddly close to a paper in Norwegian. I double-checked with my colleague who also speaks a Scandinavian language and we agreed that it was clearly too close. I would never have thought that such a situation would occur.”

Silane Vatonne
aspeers 7 (2014)

“I think the experience that stayed with me most was when, in one of the early sessions of submission discussions, Florian Bast (who was assisting the editorial team at that time) encouraged us to always be on the lookout for the ‘spark’ in each paper. He said that even if a paper might not look that promising at first glance, it could still have a certain spark in it, and thus deserves a thorough second reading. Whether that is one chapter of in-depth analysis, one sentence that catches the eye, or even just one word or phrase that makes you want to read more. We had productive discussions about individual submissions in which one or more of us editors found this spark. In the end, I think this made me appreciate the time and effort each author put into his or her submission even more.”

“Kinder Bueno candy bars were the go-to suppliers of sugar during the intense line-editing sessions, and if I remember correctly, at one point we made the university cafeteria run out of them, which caused a small crisis for some of us.”

Miriam Wilke
aspeers 8 (2015)

“Being the general editor of *aspeers* for three years was one of the most multidimensional learning experiences of my life. It afforded me the privilege of working with some incredibly bright and committed early-career researchers in both the authors and the different editing teams. The joy unique to this kind of work is why, even after having changed career paths, I still cherish coming back from time to time and sharing my experiences with each current editorial team. I have been fortunate to be involved, in some small way, with each issue since *aspeers* 5, and it is a delight to thus know for certain that, in terms of personnel, the field of American studies is in superb shape in Europe for decades to come. I hope that in terms of funding and higher education politics, it will be as well. I am grateful for all the fulfilling experiences that the years of being connected to *aspeers* have afforded me, and I heartily congratulate the journal on what I am sure is only the first of many decades of excellent and important work.”

Dr. Florian Bast
aspeers 5-7 (2012-2014)
General Editor