

## Foreword

Prof. Anne Koenen, Sebastian M. Herrmann  
Leipzig, Germany

In this volume, a question asked five months ago has been answered, at least partially, by nearly 190 pages of print: Is there a demand for a graduate-level publication in European American Studies? The amount of submissions the editors of this issue have received—many of them of noteworthy quality—show that graduate students across Europe are indeed looking for a place to showcase their work beyond their classrooms and their professors' office hours, but below the level of established scholarly journals.

The idea to let a seminar publish a graduate journal stems from two major influences. First, Leipzig's American Studies Program has traditionally searched for new and innovative ways to bring together research and learning. For example, three years ago, students and instructors had joined in a teaching and research project that had culminated in an international conference on "Ambivalent Americanizations"<sup>1</sup> in Central and Eastern Europe.

Secondly, the so-called Bologna Process encourages European University programs to offer "Professional Skills Modules" in which students learn and practice skills related to their field of study. In 2007, the inauguration of the Institute's new MA program thus offered the opportunity to try a new form of blending academic learning, skill development, and professionalization.

As a seminar, this project offers students an opportunity to practice a wide range of skills—practical, administrative, as well as academic. In this first run,

---

<sup>1</sup> The conference was headed by Professor Anne Koenen and was co-organized by two faculty members, Dr. Katja Kanzler and Zoe A. Kusmierz, as well as two students in the program. At the conference, international scholars and American Studies students engaged in an exchange that all participants praised for being symmetrical and on equal footing.

## Foreword

students had to write a call for papers, research channels to distribute it, and find ways to enhance the project's visibility among graduate students. In addition, they had to perform many other tasks related to founding this project (applying for an ISSN and various questions of branding, as just two examples). Once the submissions were in, they had to screen impressive amounts of text in a very short time, coming up with precise and solid assessments to discuss whether a submission could be accepted. Writing editorial responses during the double-blind review process, then required engaging another student's critical writing in a depth usually not found in a university context. The editors worked in groups to provide all authors of accepted<sup>2</sup> publications with collaborative, detailed, fair, and productive feedback that would make every individual submission as good as it could be. Discussing and assessing creative submissions for the journal's open submission section required somewhat different skills. While literary studies should prepare students to do just that—to assess a poem or a short story—the discussions on the creative submissions showed the difficulty of doing this for texts that have no context, no place in any canon, no established opinions that one can relate them to. Finally, the nitty-gritty side of line editing required and helped practice almost obsessive attention to detail, bibliographic research, and, last but not least, extensive word processing skills. In addition to all that, the real-life quality of the project made it necessary to have many very strict deadlines spread across the term and forced the students to practice time management to a degree they reportedly had not seen in academia so far. In many of these steps, the instructor's role was more that of a facilitator than that of a teacher, often forcing the group to develop its own forms of communication and work management.

Of course, we also see this project as beneficial beyond the Leipzig classroom. As a peer-reviewed graduate journal, *aspeers* gives graduate students a chance to collaborate in a way that usually is found on the post-graduate level alone. All accepted contributions were answered by a detailed editorial feedback, and all authors responded to this, pointing out how grateful they were for the feedback and how much they felt it helped them improve their work. Even authors that did not manage to resubmit their revised work emphasized how productive the

---

2 *aspeers* uses three different forms of positive editorial response: unconditional acceptance, conditional acceptance, and request for resubmission. For these three, authors received a detailed editorial feedback.

exchange had been for them. Later on in the process of copy editing, every contribution had one assigned editor who worked together with the author to fix all remaining minor issues, missing or unclear references, etc. It seems that there is a real demand for students to practice these critical skills of academic collaboration in a form that is less awe-inspiring, more symmetrical, more peer-level than an established academic journal could ever want to be.<sup>3</sup> Ideally, *aspeers* will not only give graduate students a chance to prepare for publishing in post-graduate journals later on—ideally, it will become a forum for students across Europe to network and to exchange on their professional and research interests.

The feedback we received for this first issue underscores the demand among European graduate students for a publication channel that locates itself below the level of established journals. Across Europe, we have seen, students are producing extraordinary work and are looking for ways to share it. Whether this demand for expression will hold for topical issues as well, and whether the journal's readers will be as enthusiastic as its contributors have shown to be will remain to be seen. But with this issue, beginnings have been made.

---

3 Despite including one contribution by a professor in the field—in this issue, Prof. Marina Camboni's text on "Two John Smiths and a Tent"—*aspeers* has no aspirations to be anything else but a graduate journal. Accordingly, professorial contributions are meant to give students a chance to encounter eminent professors in European American studies in a format other than that of an academic essay or a lecture.