

## Foreword

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

This fourth issue of *aspeers*, the second-largest since the project's founding, is a welcome opportunity to look back at a success story that began in 2007 with the work on *aspeers* 1 (2008). Back then we had asked if there really was a market—demand and supply—for a graduate-level peer-reviewed journal of European American studies. The journal's first issue, 180 pages of academic articles and creative contributions, gave a first impression of what the answer to that question might be. An even more convincing, even more powerful response has been given by the issues that followed: The regularity with which, since 2007, small teams of MA students at American Studies Leipzig have published their peers' work has helped establish a publication channel that is, by now, well on its way to becoming an important element of European American studies education. This most recent issue, 159 pages in print, may well be seen to underscore this.

Indeed, the project's ongoing vitality is underscored by the large number of submissions it keeps receiving, by its ability to change and adapt to the needs of its graduate audience, and by the consolidation it has seen over the last three years. This year, *aspeers* has received a record number of submissions by graduate-level students from Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, and other European countries, forcing the editorial team to make difficult decisions during the double-blind evaluation process. *aspeers*, in its mission to showcase graduate-level scholarship, prides itself in publishing only the best work it receives, but with submission numbers as high as this year, some work with great potential could not be considered. The strong response to our Call for Papers not only testifies to the project's standing, its reach, and its attractiveness. To some extent, it is certainly also due to a change, an adaptation, of the journal's format: After two issues that contained only topical papers, *aspeers*'s fourth issue returns to the project's roots by including papers outside the respective issue's thematic focus as well. This issue thus contains a topical spotlight, but it also showcases work that was selected for its quality regardless

## Foreword

of subject. Previous issues had raised doubts as to whether a strict topical focus might artificially limit the journal's international appeal and inclusiveness,<sup>1</sup> and we are glad that this issue's return to thematically open submissions has allowed us to review outstanding non-German work again.

This change that, in fact, constitutes a return to the origins, is, paradoxically, an indication of the project's consolidation in the most positive sense of the word; a consolidation that takes place on several levels. Having experimented with organizing the issue around one topic alone, we now know that thematic openness will get the journal closer to its mission and will make it better serve its graduate audience. To publish the best work done on this level, the journal cannot limit its thematic focus too narrowly. Consolidation, albeit on an entirely different level, is also expressed in the publication of the *aspeers* house style, an extensive list of necessary departures from and specifications of the MLA style that have proven productive in the editing process. The 2009/10 team of editors hoped that a publication of these rules would not only ease the work for future teams, but that it would also help other graduate students deal with some of the less transparent regulations the MLA stipulates. Most strongly, however, the journal's increasing consolidation is evidenced by a number of library subscriptions to the print version of *aspeers*. From its beginning on, *aspeers* had been listed in various online directories, the addition to EBSCO's services being only the latest in a number of databases to offer the journal to their subscribers. In 2010, then, a number of German university libraries have signed up to receive printed volumes of *aspeers*, and we have reason to hope for more subscriptions this year. This development does not only underscore that the journal is perceived as an important publication venue that libraries are willing to pay real money for. It also emphasizes the potential of *aspeers*'s hybrid mode of publication: Staying true to the spirit of open access, the journal's content is offered online under a Creative Commons license. At the same time, a print edition, produced via print-on-demand, ensures high visibility and sustained availability. It is exciting to see that this innovative, hybrid mode of production gets so readily accepted in the field.

*aspeers*, then, has always been more than a journal. From the start, it was conceived as a laboratory in which to explore the didactic opportunities of project-driven learning and of learning from shared hands-on experience. Self-empowering, project-oriented learning has a strong tradition at American Studies Leipzig,<sup>2</sup> and one of the project's goals, from its very beginning, thus was to translate this tradition into the new

---

1 Cf. our remarks in the previous foreword.

2 Cf. our comments on the *Ambivalent Americanizations* project in the 2008 Foreword (iii) and the paper on student teaching at American Studies Leipzig (Herrmann and Schmieding). For more information on project-driven learning at American Studies Leipzig, cf. <http://americanstudies.uni-leipzig.de/project-driven-learning>.

BA/MA degree programs and to realize the particular opportunities offered by the Bologna process and its emphasis on practical learning. Part of the project's didactic philosophy had thus been to have each team of editors reinvent the publication process with as little steering as possible. Typically, the instructor would help avoid mistakes, give advice, and let the students explore the process on their own as much as possible. With three generations of editors alumni and considerable experience gathered by these cohorts, this model has reached its limits: The different student cohorts naturally share their experiences, a welcome form of student collaboration that nevertheless makes it more difficult for a new cohort to really reinvent the process. More importantly, the combined knowledge of the previous cohorts has come to be an important asset, and it seems wasteful to toss away this asset only to give a new cohort the opportunity to discover the project's various aspects anew. One of the challenges of the next issues will thus be to find a new middle ground between integrating previous editorial teams' experience, possibly even integrating tutoring by editors alumni, and still allowing each team to make the process their own.

Hopefully, the 2012 foreword will be able to relate not only the ongoing success of *aspeers* as a unique publication channel for young scholars of American studies, but also new perspectives on the didactic challenges and opportunities of this form of project-driven international collaborative learning.

## WORKS CITED

- Herrmann, Sebastian M., and Leonard Schmieding. "Studierende Lehren im Grundstudium." *Studium ist Praxis: Argumente, Anstöße, Erfahrungen*. Ed. Doris Flammeyer. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004. Print.
- Koenen, Anne, and Sebastian M. Herrmann. Foreword. *aspeers* 1 (2008): iii-v. Print.
- . Foreword. *aspeers* 2 (2009): iii-v. Print.