

Foreword

Stefan Schubert
Leipzig, Germany

In the winter term of 2007/08, when a group of five graduate students and one instructor founded *aspeers* and published its first issue, they expressed confidence that the number of submissions they received that year showed “demand for a graduate-level publication in European American Studies” but were uncertain whether “this demand for expression [would] hold” in the future (Koenen and Herrmann iii, v). The past nine years have clearly demonstrated that this concern can be confidently answered in the positive: There still is clear and strong demand for a publication dedicated to showcasing the best of graduate-level American studies scholarship in Europe as well as for the dialogue and exchange it engenders.

This issue of *aspeers* marks its tenth anniversary, looking back at a history of “continuity and change,” which the foreword to the 2016 issue proclaimed as a consistent theme of the project (Koenen and Herrmann iii). Indeed, throughout the past decade, as the journal underwent a number of variations and evolutions, one constant has been that *aspeers* “continues to be an ever-changing undertaking” (Koenen and Bast iii): Every year, of course, saw a new cohort of graduate students take on the reins of editing and publishing. Yet in between, other personnel changes also took place, from the larger position of the general editor to smaller ones like the assistant and supervising editors throughout the years. Similarly, the teaching philosophy for the project switched between different models, each putting varying emphasis on how much the student editors should discover for themselves and how much ‘top-down’ input there should be. The journal’s issues themselves, the final product of each editing cycle, likewise changed not only in their specific yearly contents but also on a formal level: in terms of the types of submissions that they featured; in formatting and stylistic choices; in the focus moving from featuring a general call for papers without topical restrictions to a topical emphasis for each issue to a mixture of both—to name just a few of the most visible elements.

However, regardless of whether the cohort of a specific year of graduate editors was small or large, of the specific topic they focused on, or of any other peculiarity of

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a particular editing cycle, each year produced an issue whose core principles have continued to stay the same: *aspeers* is simultaneously a journal and a didactic project in that the first-year MA class at American Studies Leipzig gets to know and fully engages in the process of editing, curating, and publishing one issue of an academic journal. Accordingly, *aspeers* has always been both about spotlighting excellent American studies scholarship produced by a group of European graduate students and about familiarizing another group of students with the process of editing a journal: with ways of ensuring quality control, with the different aspects of teamwork involved in that, with how to cope with stressful situations, etc.—“a laboratory in which to explore the didactic opportunities of project-driven learning and of learning from shared hands-on experience,” as the foreword to the 2011 issue put it (Koenen and Herrmann iv). It is these core principles of giving a voice to academic excellence on the graduate level and, simultaneously, fostering excellence in project-driven learning that make *aspeers* so unique a project and that are visible throughout each of the issues published so far. In this sense, in the ten years that the journal has existed, *aspeers* has not only published more than forty academic articles by American studies graduate students, nine professorial voices and one postgraduate one, and dozens of pieces of art, but it has also featured over seventy graduate editors throughout its ten issues, acquainting each of them with the ins and outs of academic publishing.

In the spirit of ‘continuity and change,’ this particular year, accordingly, also went through a number of adjustments. Most significantly, Professor Anne Koenen—who cofounded the journal with Dr. Sebastian M. Herrmann in 2007/08 and remained a constant presence up until now, reflecting on the journal’s developments together with the general editor in the foreword—went into retirement. *aspeers* has always been closely linked to the chair for American literature and culture at American Studies Leipzig, with all general editors having been doctoral or postdoctoral students of Professor Koenen, and the future will have to show how the journal will be shaped by new impulses. Professor Koenen will undoubtedly stay in touch with *aspeers* and the people involved in it, and to the delight of this year’s editors, she agreed to lend her Professorial Voice to this anniversary issue, but her more immediate presence in the project will be dearly missed. On my own behalf and also the previous general editors’, I want to thank her for her profound support, unwavering commitment, and invaluable guidance over all these years.

Other changes occurred on smaller levels: Previous graduate editors of *aspeers* took on new roles in the journal, while others parted ways. Still, part of the ongoing success of the project, of keeping it thriving throughout so many years, has been the willingness of its alumni and alumnae to continue supporting it. This year, in particular, the previous general editors Dr. Sebastian M. Herrmann and Dr. Florian

Bast as well as the former student and supervising editor Wiebke Kartheus graciously lent their time to offer workshops to this year's graduate editors, while former editors Elif Özdemir and Miriam Wilke helped with teaching and communication aspects of the project, respectively. In terms of changes on a formal level, this year's editors have decided to switch from the seventh to the eighth edition of the rules for documenting sources by the Modern Language Association. *aspeers* has now witnessed three different iterations of the MLA rules. Future developments in (particularly digital) publishing will surely continue to affect how the journal chooses to present specific types of scholarship, which might result in updates to the *aspeers* house style.

Against these changes, big and small, a large number of elements remained the same. Above all, the success of the journal and each individual issue depends on its graduate editors. This year again has seen an incredibly motivated and hard-working group of eleven MA students invest large amounts of their time and energy into devising a project structure, agreeing on criteria for evaluating the submissions, discussing all of them thoroughly and checking them for scholarly integrity, coming up with a selection, writing feedback letters, researching and writing an introduction, line editing all parts of the issue, acquiring contributions beyond the scholarly articles, and engaging in numerous other tasks in between. Without their enthusiasm and intellectual rigor, without their willingness to take ownership of the entire process and push beyond their limits when needed, and without their ability to find compromises and keep up their spirits during difficult situations, this issue, and this project, would be unimaginable.

The result of their labor is an anniversary issue featuring four articles by graduate students, a Professorial Voice, an Artistic Voice, reflections by former editors, and an introduction from the editors of this tenth issue of *aspeers*. In its entirety, the issue reflects on notions of monstrosity, the frontier, postapocalyptic visions, and facets of post-fact and post-truth. In the face of the presidential election of Donald J. Trump, such issues in particular—and American studies in general—seem to have gained renewed relevance and importance, with the field of American studies perhaps facing a (re)politicization, a theme also echoed in Professor Carmen Birkle's greeting for this anniversary and in the editors' introduction.

It seems clichéd to look ahead to the next ten years on such an occasion—yet, at the same time, it feels incomplete to not at least speculate on what the future might hold for *aspeers*. As explorations into what 'America' and 'Americanness' mean are unlikely to lose any of their relevance, creating visibility for such investigations already on the graduate level will surely become even more important. Hopefully, then, future issues of *aspeers* will continue to build on excellent scholarship produced and edited by graduate students of American studies and will continue to innovate by keeping true to

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the journal's core principles, one of which, significantly, is the idea of periodic change, variation, and experimentation.

WORKS CITED

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