Introduction

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The academic discipline of American Studies is extraordinary in at least two respects. Compared to other fields of study, it is a comparatively young field, and it is a discipline that, as its chief characteristic, defines itself through its interdisciplinarity. Heinz Ickstadt, professor emeritus of the JFK Institute in Berlin, has recently related these two aspects to one another, claiming that the "openness [of American Studies] may well be taken as proof of its vitality, of its ability to map new areas of research, to generate new questions, and to stimulate new interests and intellectual energies with a younger generation of scholars" (545). His observation on the link between American Studies' vitality and youth and its disciplinary openness is important for us for one more aspect: He specifically mentions a younger generation of scholars, and this younger generation, of course, is what *aspeers* is all about.

Our mission manifests itself in the title *aspeers.* The "as" naturally stands for "American Studies," but it also refers to the role the we take in the editing process. As a noun, the word "peer" refers to us as we look at other students' work—as people of an equal standing, as colleagues who know about many of the specific challenges of graduate work, as well as of publishing our research—"as peers" per se. As a verb, "peer" means "to look searchingly at something difficult to discern," which applies beautifully to the landscape of graduate scholarship that is becoming more and more discernible, which we in fact seek to make more discernible through *aspeers.* Along with the subtitle, "*aspeers: emerging voices in American Studies*," the title represents what the journal means to us and what we hope it will come to mean for others.

This introduction has two purposes. As with any introduction, the following pages aim to ease the reader into the content of this issue, to introduce the purposes and formats of the individual elements of the journal: the contribution by a professor in the field, the open submission section, and the academic section. The second purpose is to outline the innovative project of *aspeers*.

The aspeers Project

In creating a new journal for American Studies, we were immediately confronted with the issue of defining the concept of "America." We are aware of the frequent assumption that America and the United States may be used as interchangeable terms. However, we felt strongly that accepting this limited definition would severely hinder the depth of our journal's discourse. We also see the dangerous political associations with equating America and the United States. Such a one-to-one equation only reinforces preexisting notions of US imperialism, and these are connotations we want to avoid. Therefore, we draw upon the tradition of ex-territorial American Studies, which has historically conceptualized "America" as more than just the United States, to include Canada in our definition. Looking at the current state of many European American Studies departments, Canadian Studies has quite literally been subsumed under American Studies. Speaking even more broadly, wherever American Studies has been pursued as part of English Literature, it has traditionally, and in fact continues to be, in close contact with other English-speaking, non-US philologies. This includes such disciplines as Canadian or Caribbean Literature. Therefore, we have also expanded our borders to include an exciting work on the Caribbean.

In the United States itself, American Studies is continually expanding beyond the US national body, and in doing so, is looking for America in other countries and even between them, in hybrid contact zones. When the American Studies Association, for example, chose to center their October 2007 conference around the theme "America Aqui: Transhemispheric Visions and Community Connections," they took a seemingly self-explanatory statement "America is here" and made it ambivalent. Are we to interpret the title as a Mexican or a Chicano voice speaking from within the United States? Is this a voice speaking from within Latin America—perhaps a voice who hopes to reassert that

"America" is not geographically limited to the US? Such a conference title immediately opens transnational, borderland, and transhemispheric discourses, and the desire for this kind of scholarship in American Studies is also visible in Emory Elliot's March 2007 Presidential Address to the ASA. Here he urged his colleagues to "[work] closely with scholars from every country to form alliances, advance knowledge, and accomplish goals together so far unimagined" (19).

The goal of fostering this transnational discourse also ranks high on our agenda as a journal for graduate work, and for this reason, we chose to invite submissions from all over Europe. However, for our academic section we received almost exclusively submissions from Northwestern Europe including Germany, Denmark, and England. The lack of submissions coming from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe invited us to ask the question: why? In part, the shortcomings in our regional distribution could have simply resulted from the strict time limitations between the conception of the journal, the release of our call for papers, and the submission deadline. Yet, we are also curious whether or not the regional disparity has influences beyond these initial factors. More generally speaking, could it be that there is a detachment between American Studies in Western and Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe? Furthermore, if such a detachment does exist, could it be influenced by the predominance of university discourses in English versus the scholars' native language? That being said, one of the greatest challenges that we faced as editors was our attempt to create a coherent European voice throughout the journal. With submissions coming from such a diverse spread of universities, all of which teach their students subtly, and sometimes even drastically, different ways of structuring a paper, finding a single voice was a nearly-impossible task. In fact, the editing process in general confronted us with difficult questions. For example: when do our suggestions in an effort to create this coherent voice run the risk of creating one homogenized voice?

Our first step in creating coherence was our election to publish *aspeers* exclusively in English. This decision did unfortunately mean rejecting several promising papers, but we remain confident that in order to most effectively foster international discourse, the journal's submissions must be unified by language. We are also ultimately interested in accurately portraying Europe's heterogeneous scholarly landscape, and because we have chosen to publish in English, it is perhaps even more important to distinguish between the creation of a *coherent* voice and the creation of *one* voice. As editors invested first and

foremost in catalyzing discourse, we felt it was crucial to avoid homogenization, and we have thus worked to make the texts accessible for an international audience while simultaneously maintaining the diversity within our submissions.

A Professorial Voice

In addition to academic work written by graduate students and creative items, each issue of *aspeers* will also contain one contribution from a professor working in the field of American Studies. We decided to include the perspective of a professor in order to add yet another facet of graduate studies to the journal. The faculty of an institute is inseparably linked to the development of the students, and should be given a voice in a journal focusing on graduate-level students of European American Studies. In this section, where the respective professor is given complete creative license, a list of favorite books, records, or other works, along with a short commentary explaining why each item is listed and linking it to American Studies, is shared with the readers of *aspeers*. As a creative feature, this contribution is meant to be an experimental space going beyond normal academia, similar to the open submission section of *aspeers*. Its personal character invites the reader to take a look behind a purely-academic perspective within American Studies. Student readership profits from getting to know eminent, established scholars of American Studies in Europe in a format that is not simply a reference in a book or a scholarly text. This section, featuring interesting areas and aspects of American Studies and giving them a personal voice, allows students of American Studies to better understand what it means to be studying in this field and to identify with it.

For the first issue of *aspeers*, we are honored to be able to publish a contribution from the president of the AISNA (Associazione Italiana di Studi Nord Americani), Marina Camboni. She is professor of Anglo-American Language and Literature, and Director of the PhD Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Macerata in Italy. An important aspect of her scholarly work is dedicated to the American poet Walt Whitman. Her publication *Walt Whitman e la lingua del mondo nuovo*[1] (2004) is a collection of three of her essays paired with the three texts that Whitman explicitly devoted to

1 'Walt Whitman and the language of the New World.'

American English. She also edited *Utopia in the Present Tense: Walt Whitman and the Language of the New World* (1994), the proceedings of the international conference at the University of Macerata.

Another main focus of her recent scholarly work is the American poet Hilda Doolittle (H.D.). Marina Camboni edited *H.D.'s Poetry: "The Meanings That Words Hide"* (2003) and published the bilingual edition *H.D. Trilogia* (1993), an annotated translation of H.D.'s *Trilogy* with an added biography and interpretative essay. Her most-recently published book is called *H.D. La donna che divenne il suo nome*[2] (2007). Other female American writers like Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, or Alicia Ostriker are also part of Camboni's scholarly work, which covers annotated translations, biographies, interpretative essays, and other formats. She has been the project coordinator of the national research initiative "Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America 1890-1950. Towards a Rewriting of Cultural History."[3] These scholarly interests as well as personal experiences are portrayed in her contribution "Two John Smiths and a Tent." Her narrative allows the reader to meet Camboni professionally as well as personally. She combines some of her recent reading and teaching, includes her individual reading experience, and contextualizes it using her scholarly knowledge.

The Open Submission Section

As editors interested in a comprehensively diverse and representative discourse of American Studies, we needed to ensure not to exclude a whole variety of engaging and fascinating texts which simply did not adhere to the conditions for academic writing. Creative forms of expression constitute a very meaningful voice necessary to sufficiently represent the works of authors interested in issues related to America. Therefore, *aspeers* created the open submission section. Based on its open and all-inclusive character, we strived for a more diverse and enhanced discussion of *transatlantic encounters*.

2 'The woman who became his name.'

3 For more on this project, please refer to the partly-English-language web page at http://reti.unimc.it.

First, let us briefly introduce how we employ all-inclusiveness as a guiding principle for this section. In general, *aspeers* aims to be a catalyst for the trans-cultural and transatlantic discourse. While offering an outlet for creative and innovative ideas regarding *transatlantic encounters,* the open submission section of *aspeers* is one attempt to not only contribute and describe this intellectual debate, but also to provide an institutionalized framework for this discourse. Therefore, we are interested in that notion of transatlantic where two cultures encounter one another and create something new. In doing so, the open submission section is the forum for creative arguments that stimulate and enrich this discourse.

The second key concept in establishing the open submission section in *aspeers* is diversity. Above, we have already referred to the notion of diverse ideas and attempt to describe the work of a variety of authors interested in America. For this issue, we are very pleased to feature both already distinguished authors and promising new talents. The open submission section thus also promotes *aspeers's* diversity of genres, means of communication, and concepts of place. Therefore, poetry (Hardy and Mills), photography (Dore), and creative writing (Zoeller) constitute the nature of this year's open submission section. Following the motto*: let yourself go!* our contributors demonstrate the potential of a creative approach to *transatlantic encounters*. Lastly, the notion of diversity also refers to the body of contributors in a way that *aspeers* is always looking for a true representation of the heterogeneous nature of American Studies in Europe.

The open submission section engages the discussion of *transatlantic encounters* by creating the space for ideas that do not necessarily fit into the academic discourse. Some of the contributions might present a very different point of view referring to individual encounters (Mills) that remains solely subjective; however these observations also productively contribute to the discussion. Moreover, some of the contributions refer to or present already-familiar ideas in a customized, abstract, and fresh way (Zoeller) and therefore are worth being considered in the discourse. In fact, oftentimes these creative accounts invite the reader to re-think formally-established assumptions regarding *transatlantic encounters.* Overall, this forum is intended to encourage not only European graduate students of American Studies who prefer a creative way of expressing their thoughts to academic scholarship, but we also hope that all authors interested in this discourse of *transatlantic encounters* will be encouraged to participate in the discussion.

Academic Contributions

With the academic section of this initial issue of *aspeers*, we mean to provide a snapshot of graduate work in European American Studies. Accordingly, it is not organized around a specific topic. Instead, our call for papers explicitly invited any academic contribution written by European graduate students of American Studies, thus aiming to explore the diversity and productivity of the field.

To a certain extent, the remarkable topical variety of contributions in this issue reflects this snapshot quality and gives an impression of the different kinds of research currently done in European graduate programs of American Studies. At the same time, the individual papers also share striking similarities, some of which hold for all of them, others of which create clusters that are worth commenting on.

For example, all contributions respond to events or texts in the last one-hundred years. Beginning with a close look at Freud's first and only visit to the USA in 1909 (von Falkenhausen) and ending with a reading of Don DeLillo's 2003 novel *Cosmopolis* (Noble), they span a century and nothing more. In the choice of subjects, earlier texts and histories are absent.

There is another absence: with only one exception, all texts collected in this volume come from a literary or cultural studies background. While the published contributions are only a small part of the submissions we initially received, the overall number of political science and history papers sent to us was also extremely low. The strong presence of literary and cultural studies in this issue accordingly is not the result of an editorial policy to focus on these areas. It represents the scope of submissions we received. As to the reasons of this strong presence of just one area of American Studies, at least three ideas come to mind.

The first and most obvious factor might be related to communication. There are no established channels of professional communication for graduate students. Distributing the call for papers, we thus had to rely on existing post-graduate networks (such as the EAAS newsletter) that primarily reach professors. With an extremely tight schedule for the founding issue of *aspeers*, we complemented these official channels and networks by directly asking professors to tell their students about the project and to encourage them to consider submitting. Random effects in this kind of communication might have contributed to a higher visibility of our call for papers in some areas of study.

Another factor might be the accessibility of sources. For American Studies students in Europe, the object of their study is a whole ocean away. In literary studies, it is nevertheless easy to access primary sources of literature written by American authors in the present or past. For students working in history or political science, primary sources and original data are much harder to come by.[4] Accordingly, students may find it harder to create original research in these fields, reducing the chance of writing papers they feel confident submitting for publication.

Lastly, canonization in literary studies seems to be significantly stronger. And this canonization may make it more likely that students feel confident that they have written something relevant and shareable. In other words, scrutinizing a core canonical text of American literature is immediately identifiable as a legitimate object of study, whereas research on a particular aspect of American history may leave a student wondering about how interesting his work would be to a larger audience. Interestingly, it is our impression that this form of canonization holds not only for primary texts in literary studies. Even methodologies and theoretical approaches seem somewhat more canonized in literary and cultural studies, forming a tighter, more overt, and more outspoken set of important theoretical works, names, and approaches. And if our above interpretation is correct, this would add to the described effect.[5]

How these factors combine, how they mix with others, we do not know. But within this strong focus on literature, the variety of submissions was remarkable. And even in the final selection presented in this issue, all literary genres still are covered. Not surprisingly, fiction is represented strongly by three papers (Cyba, Noble, and Smith) discussing fairly canonical novels or authors. But also poetry is explored in the form of song lyrics (Butz), and even drama (Barthel), albeit geographically removed from the USA, is present.

Besides observations that thus hold for all contributions, the publications can also be parceled into different clusters. Quite striking—and, we feel, somewhat typical of American Studies—is the contributors' interest in marginality that

4 It seems worth noting that this does not hold for students working on projects in the recently prolific field of Americanization Studies, or other areas of American Studies that scrutinize presences of "America" in local contexts abroad the USA.

5 It remains to be seen in how far this is a more general trend in American Studies graduate-level publications. In the future, *aspeers* will work to confront this challenge through topical issues that invite a diverse, possibly trans-disciplinary exchange within the field.

most contributions share. Classical concerns, such as race and racism (Cyba), as well as gender discrimination and feminism (Smith) evidence this interest. But also the question of the post-colonial marginality of Caribbean identities (Barthel) and the imagined marginality of hardcore fans and artists (Butz) fit this interest in a minority status in the widest sense. Only two contributions (von Falkenhausen and Noble) set themselves apart here, making marginality in this broadest sense of the word the largest cluster in this issue.

Methodologically, different clusters form. Investigating the intersection between the literary and the social, some contributions employ a more classical form of literary analysis that either tries to excavate traces of the social in the literary (Cyba) or attempts to identify moments of intertextuality between the two (Smith). With a similar—albeit more local—interest, the method of close reading is complemented with a personal and biographical investment (Butz) to investigate the social location of a given text. In its interest in a very small socio-historical moment, this study could also be seen as forming a cluster with von Falkenhausen's essay in that they both can be read as case studies. Lastly, two contributions form a third methodological cluster by reading the primary texts of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (Noble) and Trevor D. Rhone's Caribbean drama *Old Story Time* (Barthel) not simply as reflective of social theory, but as social theories in themselves.

The contributions' treatment of theory allows for one more very general observation. What is striking in all published papers is their interest in the specific, the local, the concrete. This focus on concise, doable projects may be one of the particularities of student papers, which necessarily explore limited scopes if they want to deliver outstanding quality. At the same time, it is in line with a general trend in the humanities, a shift away from grand narratives and all-encompassing theoretical schemes towards the local, the case study, the precise reading of individual moments—a shift away from homogenization and towards the exploration of contradictions and ambivalences.

In this issue's first contribution, Judith Freiin von Falkenhausen (Leipzig, Germany) invites the readers to investigate "The Influence of Sigmund Freud's Clark Lectures on American Concepts of the Self." She explores Freud's experience during his one visit to America, the lectures he gave during that visit, and the changes that occurred in American psychiatry as a result. For such a short visit, Freud's new style of psychiatry sent out shocking ripples. Prior to his

visit, most American psychiatry was based on the somatic style, meaning that only the symptoms of psychological ailments were treated. Von Falkenhausen argues that although Freud's theories were Americanized, they changed American self-awareness and freed American society from constraints caused by accepted ideologies.

"Seeing Through the Bell Jar: Distorted Women's Identity in Cold War America" by Rosi Smith (Nottingham, UK) also discusses Freudian theory, but as it relates to the identity crisis of middle-class white women in the 1950s. In the Cold War Era, Smith argues, an ideology of cultural containment enforced domestic models of femininity. Through the character of Esther in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*, she scrutinizes how then-popularized forms of Freudian theory promoted a theory of biological roles that ultimately lead intellectually-enlivened women to feel dissociated from their bodies. Smith uses Butlerian notions of performativity to show that forcing roles causes irrevocable damage to identity.

Also interested in societal changes, yet much more recent ones, Stuart Noble (Copenhagen, Denmark) turns his attention to "Don DeLillo and Society's Reorientation to Time and Space." Noble uses Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* to illustrate the alleged changes in post-industrial society's conception of time and space. He suggests that the novel itself can be read as the novelized version of social theories. Concentrating on the language in *Cosmopolis*, Noble points out that the language reflected on and used by the protagonist mediates society's changing orientation towards time and space. It is a society that does not have a sufficient vocabulary to cope with the radical and rapid changes of its environment, triggered by industrialization and growth of technology. Thereby, Noble argues that inefficient language is a symptom of the insufficient adaptability of society to the changes of time and space. He ends on the note that *Cosmopolis* does not offer a solution but hope.

Looking for a similar presence of social theory in a literary work, Johannes Barthel (Erlangen, Germany) investigates Caribbean drama and reads "Hybridity as a 'Narrative of Liberation' in Trevor D. Rhone's *Old Story Time*." He examines the concept of hybrid identities in formerly colonized environments through a close reading of the play *Old Story Time* by the Jamaican writer Trevor D. Rhone, which until now has not received much scholarly attention. He classifies this play as a "narrative of liberation," a term introduced by the scholar

Patrick Taylor. A main feature of this kind of narrative is to portray changing ways of handling and accepting the hybrid nature of the protagonists in colonized settings. Barthel identifies this feature as strongly dominating the plot of the play. Furthermore, he suggests that, beyond the fictional liberation, the play functions as a call for the Jamaican or Caribbean readers to accept their own hybrid identities.

In contrast to Barthel's interest that pushes the boundaries of American Studies, Frank Cyba's (Berlin, Germany) "An Older Light than Ours: Faulkner's Reflections on Race and Racism in *Light in August*" locates itself at the core of the field. Entering a diverse range of theoretical discourses, Cyba explores William Faulkner's portrayal of race as a white construct as well as Faulkner's depiction of the conceptions of race that influenced post-bellum Southern racial politics. To do so, Faulkner's characters Lena Grove and Joe Christmas are compared on both the narrative and symbolic levels. In the second part of the paper Cyba shifts his focus to the Jefferson community as a whole and uses the concepts of "self" and "other" to explain the community's continual need to draw the line between "whites" and "blacks." Here, Cyba also explores how the community's racial views seem to be shaped by gender and Protestantism. Finally, the third section returns to the character of Joe Christmas and examines how his racial circumstances have caused his psychosis.

Lastly, Konstantin Butz's (Bremen, Germany) project of "Rereading American Hardcore" offers a contextual close reading of three hardcore punk songs and provides a comprehensive and detailed insight into the 1980s Californian hardcore punk youth culture. Situated in a broader discourse about minorities and the conservative atmosphere during the Reagan administration, the author reverses the concept of intersectionality and thus develops his own critical approach to this radical movement. Juxtaposing the main protagonists' white male middle-class social status with the rebellious themes offered in the songs, the analysis reveals numerous inconsistencies between the protagonists' privileged background and the counter-culture image that was sought to be created by Californian hardcore punks. However, the author insists that most members of this subculture indeed recognized and reflected on these contradictions, yet their approach remained uncritical and thus failed to develop a feasible contra-position to the conservative environment of the 1980s Californian suburbs.

It remains impossible to decide whether the sum of these contributions accurately represents current graduate-level European American Studies. It is hardly probable. But the notion of the snapshot does not aim at being representative in the empirical sense. The snapshot asks to be explored, to be read —as we have sketched in this introduction—for moments of coherence, for synergies, but also for incompatibilities and contradictions. It is in this sense that we invite our readers to explore this first issue of *aspeers*.

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