

Foreword

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With its seventh issue, *aspeers* continues to grow and, in growing, to develop its self-understanding as a project and to make fundamental, sometimes difficult, decisions. First and foremost, this is a sign of the ever increasing success of the venue as a whole: By including two contributions from Switzerland, the journal has added yet another entry to the list of countries from which publications have originated. Articles, artwork, and professorial voices from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States have appeared both online and in print since the inaugural issue of 2008. With its 2014 issue on “American Anxieties,” *aspeers* presents a sixth topical focus on a highly dynamic aspect of American culture and on a productive field of American studies.¹ Comparing the contributors pages of our first six issues with the names of successful young scholars of American studies in Europe today—be it on student lists at some of the few scholarship-granting PhD programs or on tables of contents of publications such as *Amerikastudien/American Studies*—it is evident that *aspeers* has grown to be a prestigious first step in a career in American studies.

This growth was, of course, explored and documented in this space in previous years. The foreword to the second issue discussed the “challenges of beginning” (Koenen and Herrmann iii), and the fifth issue, referring specifically to those, mapped the changes in the journal by portraying the newly arisen “challenges of furthering” (Koenen and Bast iv). Moreover, while *aspeers* originally set out to prove that there was enough high-quality MA-level American studies scholarship in Europe to warrant the existence of a publication venue solely devoted to it, the fifth issue noted that this had been resoundingly affirmed (Koenen and Bast iii).

However, while *aspeers* has long established the solidity of its foundation in terms of the quality and quantity of the scholarship it publishes and while the project has expanded every year, we have yet to touch, or even see, a ceiling. Both the number of

1 The foreword to *aspeers* 6 (2013) offers a complete list of the previous topical foci.

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academic submissions and the number of countries from which they are sent has risen steadily over the years, and not even the rate of increase is declining. Seven years in, we are beyond excited to repeatedly see the project vindicated and face the privilege that is the challenge of ever adjusting to new logistical dimensions.

As earlier forewords have protocolled, *aspeers* has used each new annual issue as an opportunity to reflect on itself as a project, i.e., on its practices and methods and on its overarching philosophy. In this, the journal has significantly profited from the creativity and flexibility that is part of its chosen twin focus of didactics and academic production: Each issue being edited by a new editorial team consisting of American Studies Leipzig's first-year MA students means that each issue benefits from the valuable, albeit often difficult, chance to consider the project with fresh eyes taking in established success. A prime example of this potential is the integration of supervising editors into the didactic and editorial structure of *aspeers*, an innovation (described in last year's foreword) that has proven immensely beneficial and was retained this year.

This 2014 issue, however, marks the first time that the project cuts one of its elements in favor of the whole. The structural necessities of the journal's dual project—specifically its short editorial period covering only four months from the first introductory editorial meeting to sending the finished file to the printer—have made it increasingly difficult to treat the rising number of submissions with the required thoroughness and dedication. Faced with the reality that a treatment of both the open submission section and the academic section was less and less manageable in a way that did both of these sections justice, the general editor decided, after last year's issue reached the limits of the editorial team's capacities, to focus on the journal's academic priorities and no longer publish a call for submissions for artwork.

On the one hand, there is no doubt that this decision constitutes a loss for the journal. For its first six years, *aspeers* has programmatically and productively combined its academic explorations of the facets of American culture, literature, history, and politics with artistic expressions of all sorts. These works, as the foreword to the second issue stated, “[entered] into a dialogue with the essays” and “[created] breaks and tensions that we feel are highly productive” (Koenen and Herrmann xiv). Contributions ranging from poetry to photography, from short stories to paintings, and from cake art to collages have invaluablely enriched the discourse of our publications. Both established and up-and-coming artists from Europe and North America contributed their work to this dialogue and added their perspectives on the topics of each issue. Foregoing this aspect of our topical explorations was clearly the most difficult decision in the history of the project.

On the other hand, *aspeers* has built its reputation around a standard of academic and editorial excellence that is widely recognized in the field and that has been a

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conditio sine qua non in our endeavor of establishing MA-level scholarship as a significant contribution to American studies in Europe. This standard has always been considered untouchable for both the didactic and the academic purposes of the project; its maintenance is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the journal's tremendous success on both levels. Ironically, this success and the resulting steadily rising number of submissions to the journal have now made it impossible to maintain this standard without a decision to focus the journal on its academic content. This decision is both regrettable in its consequences for the breadth of the issue's topical investigations and humbling in its statement as to where the past seven years have brought us.

This change, like most elements of *aspeers* aside from its dual project and its commitment to editorial and academic excellence, is not set in stone. Perhaps future ideas and innovations within the project will make it possible to once again include artwork in our explorations. For now, the project will concentrate on presenting the best MA-level American studies scholarship in Europe and on introducing one established professor in the field as our professorial voice each year, an endeavor that this year's editorial team has worked tirelessly in pursuing. But as we keep stretching and growing, searching for a ceiling to the project, *aspeers* will remain the "laboratory" that the fourth foreword rightly explained it to be (Koenen and Herrmann iii).

WORKS CITED

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