

## Foreword

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When the general editors of last year's issue of *aspeers*, the first to have been edited in a completely online classroom setting, wondered whether "more online and digital teaching tools are particularly well suited to a project like *aspeers* in 'normal' years as well" (Schmieder and Schubert vi), perhaps they already had the following year in mind. Yet the 2021-22 editing cycle was still far from a 'normal' year in the sense of returning, at least partially, to pre-pandemic norms. Instead, in the winter term of 2021-22, fourteen new editors of American Studies Leipzig's first-year MA cohort set out to go through the annual process of learning the ins and outs of editing, evaluating scholarly work, writing feedback letters, line-editing all of the articles, and learning to make decisions as a group initially in a way similar to previous years, meeting in person at Leipzig University. Throughout the semester, however, the changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated some sessions to be taught entirely online, while others were tackled in 'hybrid' settings, with some students in the classroom, others joining digitally from home. Arrangements and plans sometimes had to be changed rather spontaneously, and new tools for communicating and collaborating were tried out. In this sense, at least at this moment of writing, 2021 felt like it was a far cry from a 'normal' year, but at the same time, this semester's particular mixture of online and in-person teaching and learning tools did work out exceptionally well—largely thanks to the graduate editors' unwavering commitment and excellent work ethic—so potentially the same will be true for future iterations of the project hopefully done in happier circumstances.

Perhaps more so than last year, this time around, the systemic effects of the pandemic were visible in other areas well, such as a slight dip in the number and geographic diversity of the submissions. As deadlines for seminar papers were extended, the writing of MA theses was postponed, and leaves of absence were taken throughout European MA programs under the pressures of an ongoing pandemic, it seems unfortunately only logical that, overall, less MA scholarship was produced. Still, this itself does not necessarily explain why submissions from Germany, where

*aspeers* is based, did not decrease in a similar manner to the rest of Europe. When reviewing the submissions for potential acceptances, the papers' quality (and how exactly to judge it) remains the single deciding factor, and a strict double-blind peer-review process ensures exactly that. However, as a journal, it is also our mission to showcase the diversity of MA-level scholarship in American studies across Europe. Here, apparently, more needs to be done still: While, after fifteen years, it is surely fair to say that interest in publishing MA-level scholarship generally remains high and that *aspeers* has been firmly established as a venue for new scholarly voices, this seems particularly true only in certain circles, such as the German(-speaking) academic context. In the coming years, further intensifying our efforts to increase visibility throughout Europe, efforts that have been with the journal since its founding, might be an especially worthwhile project and pressing issue.

The past few years can also point to a particular difficulty in that effort: how to reach out to interested MA students. When students submit papers to *aspeers*, we also ask them how they learned about the annual call for papers, and about 50% of them indicate that they were pointed to it by professors or other instructors. Conversely, the numbers are relatively low for the traditional means of spreading a CfP in the post-MA scholarly world, through calls posted on websites (5%) or mailing lists and associations (10%), owing perhaps to a(n understandably) less pre-professionalized self-conception of graduate students in Europe. Even social media (6%) and fellow students (6%) make up a relatively small amount (the remaining percentages were other, singular mentions). Every year, *aspeers* already reaches out to individual instructors of American studies and related fields across Europe and asks them to spread the word as well. Yet between actually reaching a person, them reading that email, forwarding it to interested students or mentioning the CfP to them in class, and the students then taking up this opportunity, a lot can go wrong. There are also, of course, very different scholarly traditions in different European countries, all with their own practices and timelines of teaching students the ins and outs of being an academic. Then again, in the German context, there is traditionally little emphasis on explaining to students why they could already consider publishing scholarship during their MA studies either, so perhaps the past fifteen years of *aspeers* have contributed to changing that mindset in favor of taking MA-level scholarship more seriously, at least in American studies. In either case, in light of these numbers, it seems only prudent to redouble our efforts to contact instructors beyond Germany in the coming years—or perhaps to think of additional ways of reaching students directly.

Beyond such moments of reflection brought about by the pandemic, the issue in front of us testifies not only to the importance of graduate work done in European American studies but also, specifically, to the tenacity and unwavering optimism of this year's group of editors. Under what at times can only be described as trying

circumstances, they produced an issue both high-quality and timely. Focusing on “American Bodies,” the issue highlights the diversity of embodied experience in the US and of scholarly engagement with the topic. Next to the scholarly perspective, this year’s editors have made room for other forms of grappling with embodiment by choosing to involve different artistic voices in the issue as well, gesturing toward the increased call for widening humanistic work beyond the narrow constraints of the scholarly article while deepening our engagement with other communities outside academia. In addition to the indispensable work of the editors and of all contributors to this issue, *aspeers* would not be possible without the often largely invisible labor of the wider American Studies Leipzig community, such as former graduate editors Peter Hintz, having served as this year’s editorial assistant, and Laura Michelle Pröger, who managed the communication in the back office, as well as former general editor Sebastian M. Herrmann, who offered a workshop on word processing.

With *aspeers* now already halfway through the second decade of its existence, the journal has time and again shown itself remaining true to its core as a “laboratory” (Koenen and Herrmann iv) allowing space for experimentation for both emerging voices in European American studies and the current cohort of editors. The longevity of *aspeers* in the face of energies needed for publishing a new issue speaks loudly not just to the grit and hard work of this particular team of editors but also to the ongoing need of this project as a crucial platform for young scholarship in American studies.

#### WORKS CITED

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