

Foreword

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Capping half a decade of annual *aspeers* publications, this fifth issue speaks from a much different place than its predecessors. Included in EBSCOhost, present in hardcopies in many European libraries, based on a website which logs more international hits every year, and featuring the work of renowned artists alongside the work of young scholars, many of whom have gone on to successful academic careers and PhD programs, *aspeers* is an established part of the publishing landscape of American studies. We no longer ask nor seek to answer whether there is supply and demand for a graduate-level journal for European American studies.

This success is owed in large part to the continued dedication each editorial team has put into not only creating the best possible issue of *aspeers* but also thinking beyond the confines of the complex editorial tasks of their respective issues and creatively considering the direction of the project as a whole. Over time, *aspeers* has developed a structure which we feel is most likely to showcase the best work in graduate-level MA scholarship in Europe and to serve as a platform for international academic networking among young Americanists. Thus, this issue on American Food Cultures stays with the format of its immediate predecessor by offering a topical introduction, a professorial voice, a diverse art section, and two academic sections: one which concentrates on a specific topic and one which allows for academic submissions on any topic related to American studies. The steadily rising number of universities and countries from which our submissions originate indicates the productivity of this multifaceted format.

While the format of this fifth issue follows that of the previous one, the continued growth of *aspeers* has brought tremendous changes to the project on many other levels. These changes are due, not least, to the high turnover involved in the journal's design as a teaching project: Taught by a PhD student and realized by a group of first-year MA students, *aspeers* inherently deals with an unusually high rate of regular institutional change for a periodical, making it both highly adaptable and acutely conscious of the

Foreword

responsibilities involved in receiving the torch from the previous editorial team. The leitmotif of this year's work, then, was sustainability, seeking ways in which the journal can continue growing at such a pace and still remain what, at its heart, it has always endeavored to be: a teaching and learning opportunity, a project-driven professional-skills class taught within the confines of one semester, and, most of all, a venue in which graduate level American studies scholarship in Europe is both conceptualized and performed as a form of interaction and cooperation which has editors and contributors literally work as peers. Many of the changes that were made to address this growth will not be immediately apparent in this issue itself, but they nevertheless were major steps to maintain the unique potential of the project throughout its development. A number of institutional changes were made which were designed to spread the organizational and teaching load on more shoulders. Perhaps the most significant change, however, was a modified selection process designed to handle the ever-rising submission numbers while granting the necessary time to fairly assess and thoroughly debate each submission and to provide detailed feedback for those articles chosen for possible publication.

Naturally, this status of establishment significantly changes the didactic nature of the project. Editors now no longer face the “challenges of beginning” described in previous forewords (Koenen and Herrmann iii). They are expected to meet the demands inherent in an established project, the challenges of furthering. On many levels, this is both a truly privileged position and one fraught with new difficulties: Not only are students able to connect with four previous editorial teams and profit from their expertise, a process which in itself requires them to be highly conscious of the intricate balance between benefiting from the experience of those who came before them and the strict confidentiality essential to the concrete editing process. More significantly, they also have a complex and established infrastructure in place on which to rely. There are templates for the communication with contributors and benefactors, a number of best-practice notes and guidelines, and a published *aspeers* house style for the editorial team to refer to. Perhaps most importantly, four existing issues show how things are done.

The foreword to the fourth issue noted how this development productively forces students to decide to which degree to integrate existing expertise while still making the project their own. As this year's editorial work has shown, an important part of the process is to consciously find a third option between continually reinventing the project and relying on those established practices which have made *aspeers* a success: The editorial team of the fifth issue of *aspeers* spent long hours in animated discussion critically engaging the work of their predecessors—ranging from letters asking for funding to the argumentative structure of the topical introduction to specific procedures in the submission responses—deciding what to integrate in this issue and

Foreword

what to modify. Regardless of whether, in each individual point, the editors followed the guidelines of their forerunners or decided to rewrite them, these discussions, based as they were on the editors' deep dedication to what they regarded as the priorities of the project and where they thought *aspeers* might go from here, were essential. It was through these productive exchanges that the students made a project their own which owes its establishment and success to procedures established long before the members of this editorial team entered American Studies Leipzig's MA program or began their university education.

As *aspeers* continues to grow, the editorial teams of the coming second half of our first decade will surely each find their very own version of this productive compromise. And each year will yield yet another variation on what that editorial team believes *aspeers* is and should be in the future, particularly in light of where it started and how far it has come.

WORKS CITED

Koenen, Anne, and Sebastian M. Herrmann. Foreword. *aspeers* 2 (2009): iii-v. Print.