

## Foreword

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Last year's general editors mused whether a foreword that explains this journal's purpose or scope could not perhaps be considered "almost superfluous" (Schadewaldt and Schmieder v), given that *aspeers* has now existed for more than fifteen years. Indeed, to pick up an even earlier theme, as the foreword of the ninth issue phrased it, the publication process of *aspeers* involves "continuity and change" (Koenen and Herrmann iii): There are constants and there are variables that, over time, have developed into what perhaps could be called, somewhat oxymoronically, a flexible routine of how *aspeers* is published. Hence, even though every year's process of arriving at a new issue is individually specific, largely due to the work of a new cohort of editors and the kinds of submissions they receive, it is structurally quite similar. Likewise, the results of this process are obviously unique every year, culminating in diverse articles, a professorial voice, and sometimes other content, but overall they are comparable in that they manage, each year, to showcase the excellence of graduate American-studies scholarship in Europe. Accordingly, the routine part of this process does not seem to demand any more explanation or context, but the flexible elements, perhaps unsurprisingly, manage to produce distinct dynamics every year, allowing us to briefly comment on them.

As *aspeers* is slowly approaching its second full decade of existence, we are happy to report that demand for this kind of graduate scholarship in American studies is remarkably high. This year's large number of submissions to the journal seems to be evidence that the "slight dip" in quantity the immediate post-pandemic years experienced (Schadewaldt and Schubert v) is over, and that the mission of the journal—publishing graduate-level scholarship through the work of graduate-level editors—is as important as ever. Similarly, among these submissions, there was an increase in internationality, demonstrating that the continuing efforts to expand the journal's "visibility throughout Europe" (Schadewaldt and Schubert vi) have paid off, even though there is less evidence of this internationality in this year's published articles. While, as in the years before, it is paramount for us to uphold

that the papers' quality remains the most important factor during the review phase, maintained by a strict double-blind peer review process, it is certainly important to acknowledge that “national or regional styles of writing and thinking” can shape the dynamics of academic scholarship and of the review process alike, which makes it difficult to objectively take into consideration how different academic cultures inform scholarly practices. As the general editors already noted for *aspeers*'s third issue, “the historically and regionally contingent nature of what young German Americanists consider to be good American studies scholarship” of course influences expectations of what is understood as excellent scholarship (Koenen and Herrmann iv). Without impinging on academic quality, these differences should prompt us, once more, to double down on our efforts to reflect the consequences of such nationally or culturally distinct processes, finding more ways for international outreach and exchange.

The continued focus on scholarly quality also seems particularly pertinent in the face of recent developments in academia. Next to ‘bogus’ scholarship or predatory journals being continually on the rise (Sauer), the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 and the by now widespread availability of AI tools have also increased worries about the use of AI in scholarly writing and publishing (Abbas et al.). While yet other (also AI-assisted) tools might help in detecting forms of AI-related plagiarism, in the end, only a careful and dedicated peer-review and editing process by actual human editors can ensure the continued quality and originality of published scholarship. The academic journal remains the most suited and rigid venue for this kind of scholarly rigor, a standard that we are thus happy to continue to uphold. As a small-scale corollary to this kind of professionalism, all past and future contributions to *aspeers* now have DOIs (digital object identifiers) in order to guarantee that all our publications are digitally archived and can always reliably be referred to. This was made possible by having *aspeers* issues featured in the repository of The Stacks, for which we have to thank former *aspeers* editor Wiebke Kartheus.

The issue in front of us—as part of the continuity, the constants, and the routine of *aspeers*—once again speaks to these efforts of upholding scholarly rigor and quality. It features four excellent academic contributions that, via quite different topics, media, and approaches, all contribute to the topic of ‘time’ in its widest sense, a professorial voice by Dr. Olena Boylu on “Discussing Time Through Literature,” and an academic introduction by the editors. While the brunt of the work was done by this year’s graduate editors, they were also helped by the wider community at American Studies Leipzig, and we particularly want to thank *aspeers* alumnus Max Hahnemann for his editorial assistance during the discussion phase and Malte Herting for his work in the *aspeers* back office. Above all, though, we were especially impressed to see the eleven editors of this issue tackle the process of reading, discussing, reviewing, and deciding on the submissions, penning feedback

letters to the authors, finding a professorial voice, discussing the resubmissions, line-editing the final articles, and overall finding ways to facilitate and organize all of these tasks. In the span of just a few months, they have put in commendable effort, tenacity, and enthusiasm, and—dare we say—even had a bit of fun while doing it. With their different backgrounds and biographies, they grew together as a team, genuinely caring for and supporting each other. We applaud their incessant work ethic in creating this issue and hope that you will find its contents as invigorating and—pardon the pun—timely as we do.

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