

# Editorial

In the first issue of *Textual Practice*, Terence Hawkes claimed, “It is never a good time to start a new journal.” As a Shakespeare scholar, he specifically lamented—but also critiqued—the situation in the arts and humanities. He diagnosed, “The Humanities . . . feel marginalized and underfunded” and “sense themselves to be hopelessly at odds with a culture which has long abandoned any recognition of the value of their role.”<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Hawkes’s emphasis on the lack of “recognition of the value of” the humanities has a nostalgic ring to it; however, as soon as one has peeled away that layer (and has overcome the initial outbursts of agreement and attendant claims that the humanities should—or must—matter), there are some points Hawkes raised that still ring very true today, more than thirty years later.

Addressing the three main points Hawkes mentioned in his editorial in reverse order, I see a “complicated” (for the lack of a more appropriate word) relationship between the humanities and public engagement. One may blame the scientification and managerialization of the academy and the attendant embrace of metrics which cannot capture outreach and its purported impacts (but neither can they capture the impact of publications) as well as the resultant penalizing of what may be termed “public humanities.” However, more often than not, it seems to me, humanities scholars (the broad field of cultural studies, in particular) seem to struggle not necessarily to *reach out to the public*, but to *reach the public*. The reasons for being unable (or unwilling) to do so are most definitely numerous and varied, but the general lack of interaction with the public in a field that (purportedly) engages with society and culture is startling—and does not bode well for any claims that the humanities matter. In short, too often, we shoot ourselves (and/or the one standing next to us) in the foot.

As far as the underfunding of the humanities is concerned, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, humanities departments constantly face budget cuts (if not being on the brink of being cut entirely). Here in Austria, the (neo)liberalization of universities is still in its infancy. In part, this is because all of the larger universities are primarily financed through public funds (whether directly or indirectly). In addition, major cuts in the budgets of humanities departments have so far been averted by funding schemes geared toward the humanities and political interventions. In that respect, we can count ourselves lucky—at least for now, for signs indicate that the systems in the UK and US are among the ideals Austrian politicians and university managements aspire toward (hence, we know where the train is going).

In contrast to Hawkes, one may wonder whether it might, in fact, not be a *good time* to launch a journal, in particular a gold open-access one. After all, the traditional ways of publishing research have been changing dramatically in recent years. As library budgets are diminishing and funding agencies across Europe have been increasingly implementing open-access mandates, there is an apparent *need for* journals (and monograph publishers) committed to open access. To be sure, we are not the first American studies journal to take the open-access route. Journals such as the *European Journal of American Studies* and the *American Studies Journal* have been open access for a number of years. But the success of journals such as these and the emergence of new open-access journals in the field testifies to the need for these publication outlets.

I do not think that the many benefits open access entails need to be regurgitated here, as they should be well known by now (newcomers to the discussion surrounding open access may just google and/or avail themselves of Martin Paul Eve's excellent book *Open Access and the Humanities* [2014]<sup>2</sup>—of course available for free); neither do I want to counter the criticisms usually leveraged against open access, as such an approach would render the purported “disadvantages” of open access more credible than they actually are (for your information: we peer-review articles, we do not charge any publication fees, and we are looking for a long-term digital preservation solution). However, in view of one of the points raised above, I should point out that offering the public *access to* our research—and making our research *accessible to* the public—may help us *reach* the public and hopefully stimulate critical thinking in the public. This is urgently needed in a time when filter bubbles on social media increasingly shape—and black-and-white worldviews dominate—global politics.

But back to the journal. What you see (and hopefully read) here today is the first issue of *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies*. *JAAAS* replaces a book series the Austrian Association for American Studies launched in 2003 and published on an annual basis (more or less). Due to an advantageous deal with LIT Verlag, the publisher of the book series, all of the volumes will be made publicly accessible soon.<sup>3</sup> The book series, *American Studies in Austria*, is still active (and the editors welcome book proposals), but *JAAAS* now functions as the association's primary publication channel.

Following this inaugural issue, *JAAAS* will appear twice a year and will publish research articles in the broad field of American studies, short essays on innovative topics and/or novel approaches, forums on “hot” topics, reports on current research in Austrian American studies, and reviews. Of course, this first issue is just a start. With an endeavor such as the establishment of a new journal, you would expect a long list of individuals and institutions we should thank. However, this journal exem-

plifies “scholar-led” publishing. Currently, we do not have any editorial assistants to help us operate this journal (and the people doing most of the work behind the scenes are on part-time, fixed-term contracts). Nevertheless, we would like to thank the University of Graz for a start-up grant, hosting the journal, and managing the Open Journal Systems installation this journal runs on. At the University of Graz, we would like to extend our thanks to the “OA Team,” Lisa Schilhan and Christian Kaier, for their commitment to open access, two members of the University of Graz’s IT staff, Burkhard Salomon, who set up the journal, and Karl Rizzolli, who provides technical support, and Roman Klug, who designed the template for the pdf version of our journal. Of course, we also thank the Public Knowledge Project and the OJS community for their work on OJS. Most of all, however, we would like to thank our authors and peer reviewers—without them, operating this journal would not be possible.

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## Notes

- 1 Terence Hawkes, “Editorial,” *Textual Practice* 1, no. 1 (1987): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502368708582003>.
- 2 Martin Paul Eve, *Open Access and the Humanities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316161012>.
- 3 See “American Studies in Austria Book Series,” *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies*, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://jaaas.eu/index.php/jaaas/amsa>.