

# Editorial

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## Linköping University Post Print



N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

Original Publication:

Martin Fredriksson, Johan Fornäs and Jenny Johannisson, Editorial, 2011, Culture Unbound.  
Journal of Current Cultural Research, (3), 5-10.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.1135>

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<http://www.ep.liu.se/index.en.asp>

Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-74260>

## ***Culture Unbound* Vol. 3 Editorial**

By Johan Fornäs, Martin Fredriksson & Jenny Johannisson

Nowadays culture is everywhere – not least in the academic world. Much can be said about its increasing presence in society and everyday life, but culturalisation has definitely affected academia. Around the world, few departments and other university units in the humanities and social sciences manage to avoid some version of the word ‘culture’ in their names: ‘Cultural Studies’; ‘Cultural Research’; ‘Cultural Sciences’; ‘Cultural Sociology’; ‘Cultural Anthropology’; ‘Cultural History’; ‘Cultural Economics’; ‘World Cultures’; ‘Popular Culture’, ‘Culture and Society’; ‘Culture and Design’; ‘Culture and Media’; ‘Culture and Communication’; ‘Culture and the Arts’; ‘Culture and Resources’; ‘Languages and Cultures’; ‘Literature and Culture’; ‘Teaching, Learning, and Culture’; ‘Religion and Culture’; ‘Gender and Cultural Studies’; ‘Philosophy, History, Culture, and Art Studies’ – the list can go on and on.

What’s in a name? In some cases, the addition of some inflection of culture implies little more than putting a trendy façade on the same old stuff that has been taught and researched at the department for ages. Still, discourses and language uses have effects on how a practice or an institution is understood, and may be a sign of a slowly growing awareness of the importance of making meanings, of signifying practices, as these need to be taken seriously in their own right, intervening in the previously dominating polarities of individual and society, micro and macro, agency and structure, etc. Current cultural research continues to span and expand a conceptual space for the third dimension of intersubjectively shared realms of meaning, with arts and popular cultures as laboratories of focused experimentation, but also spreading out into all other social spheres and forms of activity.

Growing phenomena soon tend to question their own identities. What might culture and cultural research mean when almost everything is considered in those terms? Can cultural research be something specific when virtually anything (or anything virtual!) may legitimately be defined as cultural? Cultural studies formed a relatively clearly definable current as long as it was confined to ‘the Birmingham School’ and its immediate followers around the world. In the 1990s, when it became multiplied and differentiated into a polycentric glocal field, it soon became almost impossible to pinpoint its core essence in terms of a fixed canon of theoretical heritage, genealogy of development, or current agenda. This is even truer for the wider field of current cultural research in general – for better or for worse.

There is thus an overflowing excess of culture in every corner of society, including university research. Still, the flows of culture are far from boundless. Important struggles continue to develop around the boundaries of what is understood as cultural; manifested, for instance, in attempts to regulate or pinpoint distinctions between culture and (cosmological or biological) nature, society, or politics. Equally fierce efforts and conflicts are waged in drawing, attacking, or defending various internal borders that divide forms of culture from each other within the field. One task for cultural research consists of reflecting upon such practices of differentiation and coming to grips with how they manage to survive and thrive in spite of all ideological talk of erasing every boundary, for instance in the digital domain or when it comes to the historical transformation of social norms.

### ***Culture Unbound***

The inter-, trans-, or multidisciplinary of cultural research has ambiguous results. On the one hand, it should make this research interesting to a wider public than would more-limited disciplinary approaches. On the other hand, the openness itself may also deter potential users who do not quite know what to expect with such a publication. For someone primarily interested in one field, for instance sociology, literature, or history, a wide mix of different studies may not be as attractive as a more-focused journal in one's own field. There is a certain risk of estranging more-rigid or -discipline-bound readers and authors. This is common to all multidisciplinary fields, units, and publications. For a hard-core historian, cultural studies will always include too little history, while one-track literary or sociology scholars will likewise find that *other* fields dominate too much. The open access electronic format improves things somewhat since it is easy for anyone to use search engines to find those specific articles that are most relevant to them, hopefully also getting a brief glimpse of the rest of the publication in the process.

Two of *Culture Unbound's* editors are themselves trained in interdisciplinary environments and have received Ph.D. degrees with a hybrid profile – Jenny Johannisson from the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås, and Martin Fredriksson from the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), Linköping University. The third editor, Johan Fornäs, has throughout his career moved between disciplines as well as (Swedish) universities. Thus, he, in practice, has a similarly hybridised academic identity. The journal certainly suits people like us, but having also been in monodisciplinary contexts, we stubbornly insist that it is highly relevant to other scholars as well, since it is always useful to at least momentarily step back a little

and have a look at things from a slightly different perspective. This is how new ways are created for understanding cultural processes.

The strength of a multidisciplinary perspective also lies in its ability to endorse and make use of the specific knowledge and methods developed within a range of different academic disciplines. That is why *Culture Unbound* also invites more-specialised articles, such as Katherine Giuffre's quantitative analysis of creativity and network density in Emily Dickinson's authorship that was published in December 2010, or Philip Dineen's study of Arnold Schöberg's aesthetic theory in our first volume. It all adds up to a multifaceted outlook where various aspects of cultural research intersect to give a richer and fuller understanding of how culture exists in different contexts.

*Culture Unbound* will continue to widen the field. We welcome articles and theme sections that reflexively deal with such basic issues of conceptual history and strategies for research policy, but there is also always room for texts that dive into shifting cultural flows, interpreting and mapping out the force fields of meaning production. This attempt to be inclusive without forfeiting the exclusive can be regarded as an overarching agenda for *Culture Unbound*, and our experience so far indicates that many authors and readers find this approach fruitful.

## The Year That Was

Launched in June 2009, *Culture Unbound* has now published two complete volumes. The 2009 volume contained twenty-four articles (more than 500 pages), partly divided into two thematic sections: 'What's the Use of Cultural Research?' and 'City of Signs – Signs of the City'. In 2010, ambitions grew and *Culture Unbound* published forty-three articles, comprising more than 800 pages, and divided into five thematic sections: 'Surveillance'; 'Rural Media Spaces'; 'Culture, Work and Emotion'; 'Literary Public Spheres'; and 'Uses of the Past'.

During 2010, the *Culture Unbound* website had more than 13,000 visitors and the most downloaded individual article – Henry Krips, 'The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek' – had almost 1,600 readers. The journal's mailing list has about 200 members and more than 800 people have signed up as fans on Facebook. And the experts agree! The Open Humanities Press's Editorial Oversight Group has read the first one and a half volumes and praised 'the diversity and general feel' of this 'fascinating journal', seeing it as 'a potential flagship journal' for humanities open access publishing: 'This is one where I find myself wanting to read all the essays'.

Over the last year, it seems like *Culture Unbound* has managed to attract a circle of readers and develop a distinct scholarly identity, largely constituted by a combination of academic quality, relevance, and diversity. And it is indeed important for *Culture Unbound* to strike a good balance between its various

elements: for instance, the humanities and social sciences, artistic research, and other sciences. Here, we strive not to fall into either of these categories, but to offer insights from them both, and not least to look for topics and texts that manage to combine them in original and innovative ways. The 2010 publications are good examples of this as they mark a wide disciplinary and thematic scope spanning from historiography and museology to sociology of literature to urban studies and media analysis.

An attempt to roughly categorise the contributors to the second volume of *Culture Unbound* reveals that the two most represented disciplines are media & communication studies (twelve authors, 27% of the total number) and cultural economics (eight authors, 18%), followed by cultural studies (seven authors), comparative literature (five authors), and history (four authors). The general distribution between social sciences and humanities is rather balanced: twenty-three authors from the social sciences vs. twenty-one from the humanities. It is, however, interesting to see that a journal entitled *Culture Unbound* draws so much attention from two disciplines as firmly rooted in the social sciences as media & communication studies and cultural economics. Of course, this is just arbitrarily playing with numbers, as many of the articles and thematic sections we publish are characterised by their very ability to reach beyond such simplifying academic categories. Still, we believe that a multidisciplinary journal should keep such records to enable scrutiny of academic power relations as well as to provide input to the debate over why some academic disciplines seem to more easily transgress boundaries than others.

Another balance is that between a Swedish and Nordic research context and an expanding network of European and global interests, actors, theme editors, and authors. *Culture Unbound* has so far published authors from fifteen different countries on four continents and this geographic diversity has been one of the journal's significant traits from the beginning – partly thanks to the diversity of its editorial committee. At the same time, *Culture Unbound* has a Swedish editorial basis that is certainly not hidden, and there is, of course, a statistical bias towards material from our own region in what has been published so far. But identities are never fixed or unified. Not only disciplinary, but also national affiliations are being weakened in the increasingly internationalised research landscape of today. Place, of course, matters, but the individual can no longer be easily identified by either his/her place of birth or current affiliation. How do we, for instance, define an American working at a Swedish university, or a Canadian with a German Ph.D. working in New Zealand? *Culture Unbound* is not only formed by a new disciplinary topography, but also by the cosmopolitanism of twenty-first century academia: it results from a complex pattern of superimposed communities, where the Swedish, the Nordic, and the European profile crisscross and make the totality relevant to the overall global current of contemporary cultural research.

There are, in any case, good reasons for us to be proud of the accomplishment of *Culture Unbound*, and of the many authors, co-editors, and reviewers who have made it possible. The necessary funding has been generously provided by Linköping University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the three constituting units: the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS), the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), and the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult). Start-up support has also been received from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond).

## The Future

*Culture Unbound* aims to be an active and reflecting part of the various worlds of cultural research. Conferences are events that effectively sum up contemporary currents in different fields of research and provide excellent opportunities to crystallise what later become journal articles or whole theme sections. The Association for Cultural Studies' (ACS, [www.cultstud.org](http://www.cultstud.org)) biennial 'Crossroads in Cultural Studies' conference is a key example of this. Its last one, held in Hong Kong in the summer of 2010, will surely leave its mark on *Culture Unbound*. ACSIS also organises biennial conferences in the field, held in Norrköping, Sweden. 'Culture~Nature', the 2009 conference, has inspired several of our latest and forthcoming releases. The forthcoming conference – 'Current Issues in European Cultural Studies' – will be held on 15–17 June 2011 ([www.isak.liu.se/acsis/conference-2011?!=sv](http://www.isak.liu.se/acsis/conference-2011?!=sv)). Its plenary sessions will deal with a number of central themes for current cultural studies, such as 'cosmopolitan', 'cosmic', 'chronotopic', and 'convergence' issues. A set of spotlight sessions cover cultural studies in all main European subregions, while more than thirty parallel group sessions together offer a unique glimpse of the main issues in cultural research in Europe today. A selection of themes will be transformed into future *Culture Unbound* contents.

The third and forthcoming annual volume will aspire to the same spirit of interdisciplinary and geographic diversity that has set the tone for the past year. 'Fashion, Market and Materiality' (edited by Therese Andersson) is the first theme section for 2011, presenting a range of texts in this eminently contemporary area of research, which combines the study of fascinating new trends in visual culture with the theoretical challenges posed to traditional cultural studies by various positions that focus on the issue of materiality.

Later this spring, this will be followed by a second theme section – 'Creativity Unbound: Policies, Governments and the Creative and Cultural Industries' edited by Can Seng Ooi and Birgit Stoeber. The third one, edited by Stefan Krankenhagen, will be published in the early autumn. It is preliminarily called 'Exhibiting Europe' and it will explore the ongoing production of a European narrative in exhibitions, museums, and collections. The last thematic section of

2011 is entitled ‘Shanghai Moderne: The Future of Microcosm?’ It is edited by Justin O’Connor and Xin Gu and it focuses on Shanghai as a prism for the modernisation of China. In addition, *Culture Unbound* is always open to individual article contributions, which are, of course, assessed according to the same academic criteria as other contributions. Again, we are particularly grateful to our anonymous reviewers for making it possible to maintain high academic standards in every publication.

Welcome to the third volume of *Culture Unbound*!

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**Martin Fredriksson** is executive editor of *Culture Unbound*. He is also the administrator at ACSIS, with a Ph.D. from the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), Linköping University. His dissertation *The Rights of Creativity* explores the relation between the cultural construction of the author and the history of Swedish Copyright Law, 1877–1960, and he is currently preparing a future project on the globalisation of copyright and the ideology of piracy.

**Jenny Johannisson**, Ph.D., is associate editor of *Culture Unbound*. She works as a researcher and lecturer at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research, the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås. She is chair of SweCult and a member of the scientific committee for the International Cultural Policy Research Conference (ICCP). Her main research interests concern local and regional cultural policy against the backdrop of globalisation processes.