

***Culture Unbound* Vol. 4 Editorial**

By Johan Fornäs, Martin Fredriksson & Jenny Johannisson

The year 2011 was a turbulent one. A year that started with massive upheavals against old oppressive regimes in North Africa and ended with an occupation of Wall Street that spread to other business districts all across North America. The North African revolutions set off similar reactions in parts of the Middle East; there were demonstrations in Greece against welfare cuts; rallies in Russia criticising election fraud; widespread revolts in cities across China against local corruption, and riots in London over poor living conditions. Many of these revolutions were not only televised but also mediatized through digital social forums, such as Twitter and Facebook, putting them at the top of the news agenda for 2011. This exceptionally vast range of civil movements led *Time* magazine to declare the protester the person of the year, concluding that '[p]rotests have now occurred in countries whose population total at least 3 billion people, and the word *protest* has appeared in newspapers and online exponentially more this past year than at any other time in history' (Stengel 2011).

So, where does academia stand on all this? Is it a part of the forces that change the world or are we still safely ensconced in the ivory tower that has often been depicted as the home of the scholar. It is of course an arbitrary question: academia is not a homogenous sphere that relates to political powers and social forces in a singular way. But in spite of internal differences, one thing that can be said about academia as a whole is that the image of the scholar in the ivory tower is very much a stereotype and whatever truth it might once have held is rapidly waning. Regardless of whether we think that the scholar's task is to explain, preserve, or change the world, it is nevertheless equally important and fundamentally unavoidable to engage with it.

But let us not forget that engaging with the powers that be is not always a choice that can be made from a distance: for many, it is an inescapable part of everyday life. In the past year, we have seen many examples of how students and professors have been arrested and detained on questionable grounds, not only under authoritarian regimes but also in countries aspiring to democracy, such as Turkey, Russia, and other parts of Eastern Europe. (See the Network for Education and Academic Rights for an account of alerts where students and academics are facing persecution: www.nearinternational.org/alerts.asp.) And researchers are of course, just like any other writing profession, also subject to many of the increasing restrictions on free speech that have followed in the wake of the war on terrorism in Europe and North America.

In our interaction with editors, authors, and readers over the last years, we have seen how cultural research engages with society in many different ways. In this regard, *Culture Unbound's* very first theme, 'What's the Use of Cultural Research?' from June 2009, posed a question that would reverberate in much of the journal's subsequent publication. One of the most important uses of cultural research is to contribute to a better understanding of current social changes. A look through the thematic sections published since 2009 reveals a strong tendency to discuss and explore issues that are central to contemporary social and political life. Thematic sections, such as 'Surveillance' and 'Culture, Work and Emotion', have given different perspectives on how the individual subject is monitored and governed in everyday working life. 'Rural Media Spaces' and 'Literary Public Spheres' explored how changes in mediascapes and new forms of communication affect people's living conditions in different parts of the world. And the sections on 'Uses of the Past: Nordic Historic Cultures in a Comparative Perspective' and 'Exhibiting Europe: The Development of European Narratives in Museums, Collections and Exhibitions' have analysed how cultural political institutions affect and reflect collective identities that form the very basis for how we see ourselves and each other.

Another interesting tendency in *Culture Unbound* over these last three years is that many contributions have been part of a growing trend within cultural research to more actively put academic knowledge and methods to social and commercial use. This is nothing new to most disciplines: technology, law, and social and political sciences have always been widely applied, putting their knowledge at the service of private businesses and public interest. For most of the modern era, the humanities have been an exception to this rule. Studies of culture, arts, history, and philosophy have either been disregarded as largely irrelevant and trivial knowledge or idealised as a higher wisdom that stands above the everyday banalities of political and economic life. Either way, their services have been of minor interest to commercial, social, and political actors.

However, with the growing political focus on the 'knowledge society' and the 'creative industries', and with the belief in culture as a resource of economic growth and social development that this embodies, the role of the humanities and cultural research is changing, and over the last years, the concept 'applied cultural research' has entered the academic vocabulary. This recent interest in applying cultural research to promote social and economic development is well worth encouraging, not only because it improves the fundability of cultural research but, most importantly, it also increases its ability to influence society. However, it also raises important questions regarding the future relationship between research, politics, and commerce. Since not only interventions from authoritarian regimes but also commercial interests might interfere with academic freedom, it is of great importance to continuously and critically discuss this new role of the humanities.

These issues were already on the agenda in our first publication in 2009; Orvar Löfgren and Billy Ehn's article 'Ethnography in the Marketplace' and Tom O'Dell's 'What's the Use of Culture?' both discussed the potential conflict between academic integrity and the commercial and practical applicability of cultural research. Since then, these tendencies to engage with economics in a way new to the humanities have been regularly present in the *Culture Unbound* publication list, for instance in thematic sections, such as 'Fashion, Market and Materiality' and the aforementioned 'Culture, Work and Emotion'. The first theme of 2011, 'Creativity Unbound: Policies, Government and the Creative Industries', was entirely dedicated to the question of creative industries and cultural research.

This growing interest in the social, political, and commercial life outside of the academy does not necessarily mean that there are no more ivory towers; it does not even mean that there *should* be no more ivory towers. As Sharon Rider points out in another article from *Culture Unbound's* first volume, 'The Future of the European University: Liberal Democracy or Authoritarian Capitalism?' many of the truly innovative universities in European history, such as the Humboldtian university of the nineteenth century, have been characterized by their striving to distance themselves from practical applicability in order to secure academic freedom and a focal preoccupation with theoretical knowledge (Rider 2009). A space for thinking shielded from the short-sighted expectations and limitations that a one-dimensional emphasis on applicability brings can thus be crucial to safeguard the integrity and quality of academic research in a longer perspective.

Academia in general, and the world of humanities and cultural research in particular, is in a flux marked by tensions between sometimes opposing interests, tendencies, and ideals. We believe that all these ideals have a value and a role to play and that this value can be multiplied if they can be brought to communicate with each other. That is why we need more forums where such meetings can take place and we hope and believe that *Culture Unbound* has the potential to be such a forum. To serve as an interdisciplinary crossroads was one of the fundamental goals that made us start this journal three years ago and it is still *Culture Unbound's* guiding star.

The 2011 Volume

The disciplinary affiliations of the authors *Culture Unbound* published in 2011 largely reflect the growing body of interdisciplinary research focusing on the interface between culture and economics. In the past year, as much as 24% of the contributors could be placed in the rather fuzzy category of cultural economics. Cultural economists have always been fervent contributors to *Culture Unbound* but in 2011, they actually became the largest group, followed by design/fashion studies (10%), consumer research (7%), ethnology (7%), media and cultural

studies (7%), political science/cultural politics (7%), and service management (7%). We are happy that we have been able to serve as a breeding ground for this exciting and innovative new area of research, but it does not mean that we will pay less attention to the humanistic traditions within cultural research. On the contrary, *Culture Unbound* is always looking for new, interesting research areas and issues within the humanities, and we particularly welcome proposals for theme sections that reflect the avant-garde of contemporary humanistic research.

We are also always trying to broaden the journal's international profile. In 2011, *Culture Unbound* published authors from nine different countries. Danish and Swedish were the most common nationalities but we also saw contributions from many other European countries previously unrepresented in *Culture Unbound*. Since 2009, authors from nineteen different countries in Europe, Asia, and North America, as well as Australia and New Zealand have been published in *Culture Unbound*. We, however, still lack contributions from Africa and South America and would particularly like to encourage academics from those parts of the world to submit articles and proposals for thematic sections. Another positive trend in the statistics of 2011 is that we had, for the first time, a slight majority of women (58%) among the authors.

Culture Unbound also saw a sharp increase in readers in 2011. The website had approximately 22,000 unique visitors over the last year, which is a significant increase compared to 2010, when we had about 13,000 visitors. The monthly average was just under 2,000 visitors but varied a lot over the year, peaking in November after the publication of the thematic section 'Exhibiting Europe', which saw an all-time high of 2,760 visitors.

The most frequently downloaded articles were Henry Krips' 'The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek', first published in March 2010, with 2,525 downloads; Mark Andrejevic's 'Reading the Surface: Body Language and Surveillance', also from March 2010 (999 downloads), and Stefania Kalogeraki's 'The Divergence Hypothesis in Modernization Theory Across Three European Countries: The UK, Sweden and Greece', from June 2009 (803 downloads). The most downloaded thematic sections were 'Fashion, Market and Materiality', published in April 2011, with 858 downloads; 'Rural Media Spaces', from June 2010 (730 downloads), and 'Culture, Work and Emotion', from September 2010 (552 downloads). It is thus interesting to see that even though new thematic sections certainly attract readers, the most frequently downloaded articles are the ones that have been in circulation for some time. In those cases, the number of readers are growing continuously; Krips' article, for instance, had 1,592 readers in 2010 but as many as 2,525 in 2011. We can thus see that while we are reaching a steadily growing base of regular readers, we are also creating a backlist of articles that will hopefully make *Culture Unbound* a long-term resource providing increasingly influential and relevant articles.

In the Pipeline for 2012

The thematic section that opens this fourth annual volume is another excellent example of how cultural research takes place in contemporary society in a very concrete way. Under the title 'Shanghai Modern: The Future in Microcosm?' Justin O'Connor and Xin Gu have gathered a number of articles that represent a range of different reflections on Shanghai past and present. The global city of Shanghai is taken as a starting point to explore issues of urban space, modernity, and the Chinese transition in the twentieth and twenty-first century. And, much like our second section from 2009, 'City of Signs/Signs of the City', it also allows for contributions that challenge the traditional forms of academic representation to explore the modern city in a more essayistic manner.

The next section scheduled deals with the concept of 'culturalisation' and is edited by Johan Fornäs and Martin Fredriksson. It has originated from a research project on culturalisation and globalisation that the Department for Culture Studies at Linköping University has conducted together with the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. The project explores the various interfaces between the processes of culturalisation and globalisation that are currently reshaping the world. This section of *Culture Unbound* focuses on the concept of culturalisation but it will be made in dialogue with the Australian edition of *Global Media Journal*, which will be publishing a parallel issue on globalisation.

In the autumn of 2012, Kristofer Hansson and Åsa Alftberg will edit a thematic section about 'Self-Care Translated into Practice'. It deals with the concept of self-care management, which has emerged as the paradigm of neo-liberalism and expects individuals to take responsibility for their own health. It discusses how this development has changed the way health care is organized, putting a larger responsibility on the patients, and analyses how cultural ideas about self-care and self-care management are taking practical form.

The fourth thematic section of 2012 is called 'Current Issues in European Cultural Studies'. It is edited by Ferda Keskin and draws on the conference with the same name that the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden arranged in Norrköping, Sweden, on 15–17 June 2011 (<http://www.isak.liu.se/acsis/conference-2011?l=sv>). A large number of leading European scholars came together for three days to talk about current developments in cultural studies. The discussions focused systematically on different European regions and provided a unique inventory of the state of, and conditions for, cultural research in Europe today. An inventory that will now be made accessible to *Culture Unbound's* readers.

A number of other possible themes we have in the pipeline for the future deal with issues, such as 'Piracy', 'Feminist Cultural Studies'; 'Critical Race and Whiteness Studies'; 'Theming, Branding and Urbanity'; 'Protests and Social Movements'.

Finally, as proud editors of *Culture Unbound*, we wish to thank all those guest editors, authors, and anonymous referees who have contributed to the success of this journal. We look very much forward to another year in such excellent company and to the new political, cultural, and intellectual challenges that this year will pose to current cultural research.

Johan Fornäs is editor-in-chief of *Culture Unbound*, professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University in South Stockholm, and director of ACSIS at Linköping University. With a background in musicology, he is a board member of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and was between 2004 and 2008 vice-chair of the international Association for Cultural Studies ACS.

Martin Fredriksson is executive editor of *Culture Unbound* and coordinator at ACSIS. He usually works at the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), Linköping University but is currently visiting scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he is conducting a study on copyright and pirate parties in North America. Starting in July 2012 he will be back at Linköping University to continue his pirate studies with a three year project on 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, Borås. She is chair of SweCult and a member of the scientific committee for the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCP). Her main research interests concern local and regional cultural policy against the backdrop of globalisation processes.

References

- Network for Education and Academic Rights (2012): <http://www.nearinternational.org/alerts.asp> (accessed 07/01/12).
- Rider, Sharon (2009): "The Future of the European University: Liberal Democracy or Authoritarian Capitalism?" *Culture Unbound*, Vol. 1, 83–104, <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v1/a07/> (accessed 24/01/12).
- Stengel, Rick (2011): "2011 Person of the Year", *Time*, 26 December 2011.