Introduction: Mobility, Mediatization and New Methods of Knowledge Production

By Martin Fredriksson & Alejandro Miranda

This special issue of *Culture Unbound* focuses on three themes central to contemporary dynamics of culture: mobility, mediatization and methods of knowledge production. Much cultural research has investigated how mobility and mediatization intervene in different social spheres and processes. This issue, however, seeks to shift the perspective by exploring the ways in which knowledge production and dissemination become related to mobility and mediatization. Growing possibilities of international exchange, open access publishing and digital technologies have created new methods of gathering and analysing data, as well as of presenting research. Yet, the intensifying mobilities and rapid changes in publishing platforms affect the research process itself and the relations of power and dependencies in the world of research.

The background of this issue is a network project entitled 'Everyday life of research in the mediatization era', funded by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences. A series of workshops in three countries were central in advancing the discussion on these three themes. The first one, 'Mobility: the Travelling Researcher' took place in Sydney in November 2015, followed by '(Ex)Changing Methods' in Amsterdam in November 2016 and finally 'Publishing and Mediatization' in Norrköping in June 2017.

These workshops were in themselves acts and embodiments of mobility, bringing together scholars from several collaborating environments at different sites to reflect on the conditions of our own work. Looking at mobility, therefore, appeared as a proper place to begin. Academics from Sweden, Australia and Germany gathered to discuss how today's cultural researchers are becoming more mobile as research funders are increasingly investing in internationalisation. Individual researchers are given opportunities—or must meet expectations—to work outside their home countries, and contribute to an ever-growing number of projects con-

ducted in partnership with researchers in different parts of the world. While many aspects of mobility are well researched, we as academics rarely subject our own mobility to the same kind of attention. The first workshop was an opportunity to reflect on how mobility affects the research process and the production of knowledge, as well as how the aspirations and/or expectations to be constantly on the road affect us as scholars and individuals.

The changing conditions of mobility as well as new forms of media practices that permeate culture and society also affect the context for conducting research. The second workshop in this project examined how established research strategies such as ethnographic participant observation, text interpretation, visual studies, audio-visual essays and archival research can be applied in new ways in an age of increased mediatization. Digitization makes a growing body of information and sources available online and offers possibilities to communicate with colleagues across the globe: to an increasing extent the researcher does not need to leave his or her desk to access archival material or interact with colleagues. In that regard, it appears as somewhat of a paradox that the possibilities and demands for mobility within academia increases while digitization and mediatization make it possible for us to conduct the better part of our work *without* travelling. The second workshop thus addressed a number of methodological questions regarding how to conduct research under these changing condition.

The overarching theme of mediatization was explored in the concluding symposium on Publishing and Mediatization. This event explored how changing modes of mediatization affect the conditions for conducting and disseminating academic research. The conditions for scientific publishing have changed dramatically with the rise of an open access 'movement'. The increase in open access platforms has allowed researchers greater access to online publishing as they no longer have to contend with the terms and stipulations set by formal publishing channels.

The format and nature of the scientific text are also undergoing transformation. Animated images and audio files can be embedded in text, newspaper articles linked to podcasts and the set data published for secondary analysis. Our third event approached questions regarding how the changed forms of publishing affect the research process itself, and how the changed publishing landscape affects power and dependencies within academia as well as between academia and other sectors.

Over this three-year period, ideas were exchanged and lines of thoughts crossed. Some of the articles presented in this issue rely on work presented at those meetings, while others grew out of the wider research environments that hosted them. Nevertheless, they all connect to the themes of mobility, methodology and mediatization. As such, most of the contributions are not as much documenta-

tions of the project as they are reflections on the questions it set out to address. This issue of *Culture Unbound* is thus not necessarily a conclusion of a project, but rather constitutes a call for a continuous, collective exploration of contemporary conditions for knowledge creation.

The contributions

In order to acknowledge the expanding field of academic knowledge creation and dissemination we have chosen to open up this special issue to different types of media formats. Apart from four peer reviewed articles the issue also includes two essays, one podcast and a recorded video lecture. By providing different examples of how academic knowledge can be presented we want to approach the issue of mediatization in a self-reflexive way, rather than merely writing about it.

David Rowe's essay *The University as a 'Giant Newsroom': The Uses of Academic Knowledge Revisited* provides a point of departure for this issue. Here Rowe reflects on the relationship between mediatization and academic knowledge production—both as a theoretician and a practitioner. As a media scholar, Rowe has studied journalism and news media for decades; but as a public intellectual he has also contributed to the public debate. In this essay he reflects on how the desire and expectations to mediatize research and make it accessible to a general public affects the research process as well as the choice of topics to study. Furthermore, Rowe also highlights how expectations to leave the ivory tower of academia and engage with the tabloidized news media—with its increased emphasis on fast, accessible and spectacular content—may also put academics in the line of fire when they take on politically sensitive issues.

Teresa Swist and Liam Magee examine how socio-technical circuits, conceptualised as 'digital binds', exert influence on the political economy of academic publishing. Their critique of the expansion of these digital binds across the fields of academic publishing is developed in relation to the increasing dependence of university researchers upon substitutive metrics. In analysing different constraints and affordances of publishing and circulating academic texts in the digital age, the article proposes three 'ethical executions of code' to promote more equitable practices. *Dissuading* as a way of bringing unfair publishing practices into the public debate and negotiating fairer practices. *Detouring* as a way of developing alternative publishing pathways. *Disrupting* as the ways in which blockchain technology can transform the ways in which the contemporary publishing industry functions.

James Arvanitakis, Martin Fredriksson and Sonja Schilling's article takes the prototypical pirate as a starting point to discuss how scholars can navigate in an academic environment that is both enabling and restricting. For academics with safe positions and plenty of resources mobility can be a privilege, but for

those who work under precarious conditions on short term contracts, constantly moving between places and employers, the precariousness creates a need for self-promotion where networking and publishing become tools to build a competitive entrepreneurial self. At the same time, commercial publishing often locks up articles behind paywalls that limit their circulation in ways that are detrimental both to the interests of the academic and those of the public. While digital pirate libraries can circumvent the paywalls, scholars can navigate the system in different, more or less opportunistic or oppositional ways, just like golden day pirates and privateers both profited from and opposed the colonial trade empires.

Some of the issues raised in the articles by Swist & Magee and Arvanitakis et al. are further explored in the podcast called *Publishing+Mediatization*, recorded by Andreas Lind at the last of the three workshops in June 2017. It centres on a lecture where Gary Hall, head of the Centre for Disruptive Media Studies at Coventry University, talks about how the shift from print media to digital media —the transition from a Gutenberg Galaxy to a Zuckerberg Galaxy—changes the conditions for academic knowledge production. In consecutive interviews Gary Hall and James Arvanitakis, Dean of research at Western Sydney University, continue to discuss how the attention economy that has emerged with the expansion of digital social media affects the role of the academic, and how digital technologies enable free circulation of knowledge which sometimes clashes with copyright policies and the commodification of knowledge.

Through the analysis of cases in the Netherlands and Austria, Christoff discusses how self-organised citizens turn neglected public facilities into socio-cultural spaces. In describing how these *citizen professionals* negotiate and use these locales, Christoff discusses how the meanings and practices conducted within and around them are digitally transmitted, consumed and diffused into the public arena. From this perspective, mediatization denotes the impact that different media practices have on the articulation of alternative forms of housing, volunteering and working in relation to a *lived space* (Lefebvre 1991).

Just like Christoff, Timothy Ström also discusses the mediatization of space and its relation to social change, but from a different perspective. In his article, 'The Road Map to Brave New World', Ström asks what maps can tell us, not only of space but also of society. By comparing a roadmap from 1915, produced by Gulf Oil, with a Google map from 2015, Ström explores the relationship between capitalism and cartography. Ström draws parallels between google maps as a form of augmented reality and the transition from Fordism to cybernetic capitalism that emerges as software increasingly overlays and intertwines in all aspects of production and social life.

Space and place are central also in Johanna Dahlin's essay *On Not being there*, which focuses on the importance of spatial presence in the history of anthropo-

logical methodology. Relating to her own work where she moves between digital and on-site ethnographies, Dahlin reflects on all the information that lies hidden in the background noise in on-site observations that might not be possible to formulate as knowledge but still informs ones understanding of the objects of study. While Dahlin laments her incapability to hear the background noise in social media her colleague Mattis Karlsson responds, in a comment to the essay, that virtual reality is reality first and virtual second, and that background noise exists in all realities. The most important lesson to be drawn from this dialogic essay is that new technologies give us the capacity to approach the world in different ways; there is no need to limit ourselves to one single approach, but we also have to grapple with the fact that different approaches carry different methodological challenges.

Finally, we close this issue with a Video Keynote presentation by Astrida Niemanis, 'Queer Times and Chemical Weapons, Suspended in the Gotland Deep'. Ocean beds across the world are littered with barrels of mustard gas and other chemical weapons, waiting to burst. Some of these chemical time bombs may never go off, but they nevertheless embody a constantly present potential of slow violence. Niemanis' contribution is not only a thoughtful and poetic reflection on an intriguing issue, but also a fascinating example of how restricted mobility fosters innovative ways to mediate knowledge since it was originally produced for the symposium on Mediatization in Norrköping in June 2017, but presented via skype from Sydney as Neimanis could not attend the event.

Shifting methods and conditions

In his opening essay, David Rowe defines the issue of mediatization and how it differs from mediation in relation to academia:

> Published academic knowledge is always mediated, usually within the established genres of journals and scholarly books. But mediatization is a more thoroughgoing effect produced by engagement with the dominant, routine processes of the institution of the popular media. Rather than taking academic knowledge and processing it, mediatization describes the impact on the formation and articulation of that knowledge at the point of production. Mediatization may mean that academic research and scholarship that is deemed to be media friendly and popularly digestible is institutionally favoured over intellectual activity seen to be obscure, irrelevant or, in deference to an adjective that has taken on an increasingly negative connotation, 'elite' (Rowe 2017).

Crucial to our understanding of mediatization of research is that mediatization constitutes a structural precondition for conducting research. It is a logic that applies to and affects a research project from the moment of its conception. Furthermore, this is also relevant for the case of mobility as funders are increasingly calling for international collaborations, sometimes even between specific countries, as a requirement for funding larger projects.

These conditions often have positive outcomes: collaboration across borders and communication with large audiences appear to enrich and enhance the discussion on significant social issues, which is a fundamental part of conducting research. But mobility and mediatization are not merely added features that leave the research process intact. In order to fully engage with these mediatization and mobility issues we need to acknowledge the multiple ways in which they shape how we do research. These changing preconditions for academic knowledge production have methodological implications in at least two ways: first of all they might enable, or call for, new methods of knowledge production. Secondly, they affect how we can work and act within academia. Overall, the contributions in this special issue show how these two facets become intertwined. While this special issue does not offer a road map to understanding the role and meaning of mediatization and mobility in contemporary academia, it is our hope and belief that it gives the readers tools, fresh insights and perspectives to further stimulate the discussion on these shifting conditions.

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