

***Culture Unbound* Vol. 2 Editorial**

By Johan Fornäs, Martin Fredriksson & Jenny Johannisson

Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research was launched in June 2009. Its first volume consisted of 24 academic articles, two photo essays, two reviews and totally more than 500 pages of text. The contributions came from more than ten countries on four continents and the articles covered a wide range of research areas: from cultural policy or science and technology studies to music theory and commercial ethnography. Many of the articles were grouped into two main thematic sections: one on “What’s the Use of Cultural Research?”, with six articles, and the other on “City of Signs – Signs of the City”, comprising eleven articles guest-edited by Geoff Stahl. Articles are peer-reviewed in a double-blind process, and published open-access by Linköping University Electronic Press (<http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se>). To multiply interfaces, *Culture Unbound* is also present on FaceBook.

We are proud of this first volume. We worked hard, but the success was only possible thanks to the support of our strong editorial board, whose members have generously helped us make a flying start. Another vital resource has been our firm basis in three cooperating units – the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS), the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q) and the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult) – with funding from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and a starting grant from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). But most of all, we are immensely grateful for the valuable contributions from authors, guest editors and the large number of anonymous reviewers who, for the time being, must remain anonymous to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process.

The main proof of usefulness is how scholars respond to this new voice in cultural studies and other forms of research on culture. We have received encouraging feedback from actual and potential authors, reviewers, editors, advisors and readers. When the journal was launched on June 11, it immediately attracted attention. In the first three weeks, *Culture Unbound* had more than 530 visitors, and over the course of the year this number has grown to more than 1,500. The most read articles – Tom O’Dell’s “What’s the Use of Culture?”, closely followed by Mikko Lehtonen’s “Spaces and Places of Cultural Studies” – can boast more than 250 visitors. And reader interest seems to be stable: our second theme section, “City of Signs/Signs of the City”, published on December 18, attracted more than 330 visitors in only three weeks. These numbers tell a lucid story: *Culture Un-*

bound is here to stay! Nevertheless, although we are pleased, this is no reason to just sit back. It takes time for a new journal to shape its profile, prove its quality and become a truly established forum in the academic world. There is still a long way to go before this has been achieved, and we will surely keep on walking.

The enthusiastic response from authors and readers strengthens us in our conviction that there is a need for an open-access electronic academic journal for cultural studies and other branches of cultural research with an interdisciplinary orientation. At the launch of the first volume, we explained how *Culture Unbound* from its Swedish home base is to serve as a transnational and inclusive forum that seeks to bring together strands of “glocal” cultural research from different parts of the world. It strives to cross boundaries and move beyond a narrow understanding of culture and cultural research.

Firstly, *culture* is, in some ways, less limited by strict boundaries. In several of the multiplying definitions of the term, culture and cultural aspects or phenomena move across the boundaries of inherited divisions, necessitating increased and focused attention that does not limit itself to any given disciplinary or geographic domain. *Culture Unbound* will trace these changes as they affect new developments of cultural research.

Secondly, *cultural research* is currently in an interesting flux, with growing interest in, and need, for boundary-crossing innovations, where the field of cultural studies is becoming transnationally glocalised and is mutually interacting with other, sometimes regional, branches of interdisciplinary cultural research. *Culture Unbound* will act as an interface and arena for such interchanges.

Thirdly, the journal *Culture Unbound* will formally strive to provide an unbound, free and open space for intellectual exchange. Not bound to any printed format and not limited by subscription fees, it is an open-access resource available to anyone with a networked computer and a wish to take part in recent developments in the understanding of the many facets of culture and culturalisation.

The wide geographical and thematic span of the articles published in 2009 implies that we have taken these ambitions seriously. But the goals from our first volume’s editorial are still valid. *Culture Unbound* welcomes individual article manuscripts on any topic of relevance to cultural research, and from any world region.

We have an impressive number of guest editors who have offered to organise thematic sections that we agree touch on key issues of current cultural research. This first 2010 release includes a group of articles on “Surveillance”, edited by Toby Miller, who presents these articles in his own introduction to the theme. This topic is particularly urgent today, inviting new scholarship in the legacy of Michel Foucault to critically explore how new forms of communication and media technologies are integrated in a subtle politics of the gaze, involving a combination of state authorities, market enterprises and civil society communities. 2009 Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller has depicted how techniques and practices of surveillance and self-surveillance under dictatorship penetrate and shape the most intimate relations and subjectivities. In shifting modes and proportions, similar

mechanisms are equally evident in China, Iran or, in more subtle forms, in democracies like the United States. In Sweden, too, the government recently passed laws permitting the authorities to gather information on all electronic data traffic across national borders, and private businesses to collect data necessary to press charges against alleged piracy. This development, in turn, breeds critical responses, and the newly-started Swedish Pirate Party has, as a result, even won seats in the European Parliament. They represent an awkward mixture of neoliberal nerds and anarchist activists, but they nevertheless indicate that the new surveillance strategies cannot be installed without resistance, and that younger generations are certainly not pacified. Toby Miller's theme section, with analyses from many different locations, offers ample evidence of both the dangers and the contradictions involved in the dawning 21st century landscape of surveillance. A forthcoming theme section on "Intellectual Property" (edited by Eva Hemmungs Wirtén) will reconnect to similar issues from a slightly different perspective.

A comparable mixture of fateful tragedy and unexpected rays of hope can be found in the climate issue, where widespread passivity and arrogance threaten the future of the human species on this planet, while so much responsible activity is simultaneously emerging all over the globe. Cultural studies should engage far more actively in such issues, since the climate crisis itself is related to an intrusion of human culture into planetary nature, and since possible solutions must involve cultural transformations of lifestyles on all societal levels. Therefore, in June 2009, ACSIS organised, a big and successful national conference in Norrköping, Sweden, on "Culture~Nature". It will leave several traces in *Culture Unbound*, beginning with a theme section entitled "Feminist Interrogations of Posthumanism", which will be published this coming fall. In it, our guest editor Jenny Sundén will explore some of the most crucial intersections between culture and nature in the field of gender studies.

These issues also relate to the ongoing geopolitical transformations that need to be addressed by cultural research: the shift in economic and political power between Europe, North America and East Asia; and the fate of the unification processes in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Another issue where we invite articles or proposals for theme sections concerns the intermedial aesthetics of new media genres such as reality television, games, blogs, autobiography or crime fiction. And why not make theoretical or methodological combinations that have been rare or even unfashionable in mainstream cultural studies?

These thoughts merely aim to bring inspiration to the new year – the actual outcome is up to our readers, authors and co-editors. What we do know is that in the hereby opened second volume, we plan to release a number of thematic sections reflecting the relevance, richness and homogeneity of contemporary cultural research: "Culture, Labour and Emotions" (edited by Tom O'Dell); "Rural Media Spaces" (edited by Magnus Anderson and André Jansson); "Literature and the

Public Sphere” (edited by Torbjörn Forslid) and “Uses of the Past” (edited by Peter Aronsson). Many more are planned to follow next year. The co-editors this year happen to be predominantly Swedish, but we will continue to commission authors from various world regions, and will be particularly welcoming to authors and guest editors from other continents for all future volumes of our favourite journal of current cultural research.

Welcome to a second year with *Culture Unbound*!

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