



Culture Unbound
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***Culture Unbound* Vol. 12 Editorial**

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At the time of writing, it is April 2020 and large parts of the world are in various stages of Corona-lockdown. Both the severity of the penetration of the virus itself as well as the severity of the measures to combat it varies across the globe, but increasingly everywhere lives are turned upside down. Normality is suspended and it is frequently pronounced that the world will not look the same on the other side of this crisis.

While we are launching a new volume, the current situation also gives renewed actuality to some of our previous publications. Not least, one of our 2016 issues is worth revisiting: *Rupture and Exile: Permanent Liminality in Spaces for Movement and Abandonment*, edited by Harmony Siganporia and Frank G. Karioris (Volume 8, issue 1).

This thematic section is centred on *liminality*, a concept with which every sociocultural anthropologist and many other social and cultural theorists are well acquainted. Liminality is a concept that is most usually attributed to Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) and his *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), but it is also tightly associated with Victor Turner and his *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) or (perhaps especially) *The Ritual Process* (1969). While Turner departed from a discussion of liminality as primarily an attribute of rites of passage, he also expanded the concept to include “a greater variety of ambiguous situations, epochs, and spaces that might be read as liminal” (Siganporia & Karioris 2016).

Van Gennep had a three-stage model of rites of passage: separation, margin/liminality and reintegration. It is in this middle stage we find liminality. Liminality is from Latin *limen* meaning threshold. It is the boundary between the outside and the inside, between two entities that are separated from one another. A rite of passage is a transition from something old to something new, and liminality is the state of neither nor in between the old and the new. In the case of initiation rites—neither child nor adult. Liminality is marked by ambiguity, uncertainty

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and, quite often, physical isolation. Turner described it as a state of being “betwixt and between”. The liminal state is ambiguous and indeterminate. It is, he suggests, a “moment in and out of time”, and outside “secular social structure” (Turner 1969: 95–96).

Liminality is also characterised by what Turner termed *communitas*—a deep sense of community outside of normal society and everyday life. It is a recognition “of a generalized social bond” (1969: 96) and springs from the directness of the suspension of normality. In the current pandemic, there are frequent appeals to community and solidarity. Despite physical isolation, there are countless adaptations on “together apart” across the globe. In so many contexts, there is a frequent repetition that “we’re in this together”. New and old media are filled with examples of how people come together—albeit at a distance.

However, while liminality, according to Turner, is characterized by an erasure of status differences or even their reversal, this ritual equality of liminal states frequently serves to highlight the status differences of ordinary life (his theory is dialectical and structuralist). In contrast, the current pandemic is rife with inequality. It is easier to go into “self-isolation” in a big house with a garden than in a small, and perhaps cramped flat. How isolated isolation is also varies, and to be able to go into isolation at all is a privilege, or a curse. Do you have a job where you can work from a distance—or did you just lose your job because of the crisis? Or do you even have access to clean water to wash your hands? We might be in this together, but we’re not in it on equal terms.

While ritual liminality is predetermined in length, many wonder for how long the present situation will drag on. And this is where we return to the thematic issue we’re revisiting. In *Rupture and Exile*, contributions looked at examples where liminality extended toward permanence. Building on, for instance, the work of Arpad Szakolczai and Bjørn Thomassen, they suggest people and places may become trapped in a form of ‘permanent liminality’. Szakolczai uses a three-stage framework, mirroring that of rites of passage, and suggests that any of these stages can be ‘frozen’ in which case liminality extends towards permanence. Frozen this way, as Bjørn Thomassen (2012) has suggested, liminality becomes “pure danger”.

In *Rupture and Exile*, the contributors expand on Szakolczai’s first stage of ‘separation’ by introducing the notion of rupture: “a breach, or even a clean break from the orientations and grand narratives which undergird societies” (Sigamponia & Kariotis 2016: 21). The contributions to the section analyse, with rich empirical detail, reasons for, and the nature of, ruptures which force individuals or groups into liminality in various contexts.

Rupture seems like a particularly apt term to describe what is happening when a tiny virus makes the machine of global capitalism if not grind to halt then at least appear significantly less well greased. Something that has meant the indefinite suspension for so many things that were previously taken for granted.

At the time of writing, we do not know for how long normality will be suspended. Are we nearing the end or just beginning? And to what extent will the new normal resemble the old? For how long will we live with the consequences? Will we remember this as a period of isolation or community? We are hoping that *Culture Unbound* will be one of the fora where this conversation can be kept going, and that we will see sharp analysis of the social and cultural consequences of the pandemic appearing in the journal.

Culture Unbound began the year 2019 with a workshop on *Interdisciplinarity, publishing and new models of collectivity*. This workshop departed from the idea that the pressure that environmental change puts on previously separate disciplinary knowledges to come together, as it requires a radical rethinking of the way we conduct scholarship. That existing modes of research creation need to be rethought is particularly true in disciplines where the scholar traditionally has been engaged for many years in a project with single authorship. The urgency of environmental change calls for new models of collectivity, and new platforms for collaborative research that are global in scope and agile in relation to changing events and technologies. Now, a year later we may add that the current pandemic is putting this in even sharper relief. If isolation temporarily pushes the scholar back to the Ivory tower, this is paralleled by signs of *communitas* and calls for collectivity.

Last year was concluded by a celebration of our 10th anniversary with the workshop *Publishing, Property and Academic Labour*. With talks by Björn Hammarfelt, Janneke Adema and Alessandro Ludovico, the workshop explored the infrastructural challenges in the intersection of scholarly publishing, intellectual property and academic labour. Its purpose was to reflect on the current conditions of scholarly publishing and to initiate a discussion on what the future might hold for journals such as *Culture Unbound*. We are hoping to continue this discussion and are welcoming any interventions to take these themes further.

For the journal, the year 2020 is also a year of transition. The anniversary constituted a changing of the guards as the old editorial team of Eva Hemmungs Wirtén, James Meese and Johanna Dahlin left the journal to be replaced by Jesper Olsson as editor in chief, Egle Rindzeviciute as associate editor and Kristin Wagrell as executive editor. We also have a new editorial assistant in Victoria Van Orden Martínez. In addition, the 10-year celebration hosted the inaugural meeting of the journal's new editorial board: Marit Ruge Bjærke, Giacomo Botta, Johanna Dahlin, Solveig Daugaard, Per Israelsson, Matts Lindström, Sanna Nyqvist, Carsten Stage, Ingrid Tolstad.

While times may be uncertain, *Culture Unbound* enters its second decade and remains a truly accessible home for cutting-edge cultural research.

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