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## **On the move**

Twentieth anniversary editorial of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*

Joke Hermes, Jaap Kooijman, Jo Littler, Helen Wood

### **Abstract**

Twenty years of *European Journal of Cultural Studies* is a cause for celebration. We do so with a festive issue that comes together with our first free open access top articles in three areas that readers have sought us out for: post-feminism; television beyond textual analysis; and cultural labour in the creative industries. The issue opens with freshly commissioned introductory essays to these three thematic areas by key authors in those fields. In addition, the issue offers new articles showcasing the range of the broad field of cultural studies today, including pieces on the politics of co-working, punk in China, black British women on YouTube, trans pedagogy, and fantasy sports gameplay; featuring work by emerging as well as established scholars. Our editorial introduction to this celebration of cultural studies offers reflections on how both the journal and the field of cultural studies have developed, and on our thoughts and ambitions for the future within the current conjuncture as we 'move on' as the new editorial team.

Keywords: cultural studies, Europe, postfeminism, television, creative industries, dossier,

### **Introduction: Celebrating 20 years of *European Journal of Cultural Studies***

Twenty years of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* is a cause for celebration. We do so with this festive issue which offers an exciting range of critical ideas and empirical research that reflects the current moment of cultural studies and the range of international scholars attending to its core themes. This issue comes with three online dossier collections to be found on [www.journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs/](http://www.journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs/).... which contain a selection of our most popular articles in areas that readers have sought us out for: post-feminism; television beyond textual analysis; and work and the creative industries. As an anniversary gift to our readers, the articles in the three dossiers are

and will remain open-access. More dossiers are to follow in future. The current dossiers on post-feminism, television and cultural studies and work and the creative industries are headlined by specially commissioned opening essays by key thinkers we are proud to welcome back. Below we will briefly introduce Ross Gill's reflection on postfeminism over the last decade; Christine Geraghty reading of how 'television' is one of the thematic 'magnets' of this journal and Mark Banks and Justin O'Connor's overview of cultural studies work on labour and the creative industries.

Before we introduce the opening essays and the range of exciting contributions by established and emerging scholars that follow the three opening essays, we want to go back in time to situate both the current issue and our new editorial grouping. After reflecting on the very different context in which the journal was started, we move on to the challenges, both exhilarating and intimidating, that we face today. We will end by introducing the rest of the work chosen for this special issue that has been entitled 'On the Move' to give a sense of the restless energy of cultural studies and of the kind of work we are privileged to edit. Now twenty years old, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* continues to reinvent ways to engage with how the world is made meaningful across media texts and the cultural, social and political practices of everyday life, whilst always taking into account and challenging the nature and reproduction of relations of power.

### **Looking backwards, looking forwards**

'On the move' and its three open access dossiers mark two decades of *European Journal of Cultural Studies* and a new group of editors. At the time of writing Donald Trump has recently been inaugurated as the US President and Brexit appears unstoppable. It is a different conjuncture from the late 1990s when right-wing populism appeared to be a uniquely French phenomenon, and multiculturalism elsewhere in Europe was still regularly regarded as an achievement (if often reductively positioned as a potential 'problem'). Fake news referred to American satirical television programmes that offered their own form of political commentary. The aggressive resurgence of nationalist sentiments, Euroscepticism, the ascendancy of Putin in Russia were all yet to come, as were Facebook and YouTube. Editing and reviewing the journal in the mid-1990s involved sending round paper copies of articles. Access to academic work was the

prerogative of those working in academic institutions and Altavista was the search engine of choice and Yahoo and AOL were major players.

The founding of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* was closely connected to the first *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* conference organized by Pertti Alasuutari and his team at Tampere University, Finland, in July 1996. Not only did the journal founding editors—Alasuutari, Ann Gray and Joke Hermes—first meet at the conference, but the journal's first issue, published in January 1998, contained several articles based on Crossroads conference presentations, including those by Ien Ang, Handel K. Wright, Maureen McNeil, Lawrence Grossberg, and Jostein Gripsrud.

Remarkable, in hindsight, is how cultural studies needed defining and querying in the mid-1990s. While institutionalized in and via teaching, the only specialised journal at that moment in time was *Cultural Studies*, edited by Larry Grossberg. When Alasuutari, Gray, and Hermes founded the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, they shared a strong sense that cultural studies as an interdisciplinary field needed more well-theorized empirical work. They immediately connected via their own work on audiences and everyday practices of meaning-making, which in turn linked back to the audience studies of the 1980s by Morley (1980, 1984), Radway (1982) and Ang (1985) in Britain, the United States and the Netherlands rather than to a more delineated tradition or school. Unbeknownst to each other, at the same time, the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* was launched with the same publisher, conceived of and edited by John Hartley, which was to offer a more critically textual approach and sought an explicitly global reach.

All three journals flourished while academic publishing was transforming: to be a ranked journal became an inevitable goal, as national governments made funding conditional and passed the pressure of selection and quality by accountability onto universities. While academic labour is more and more casualised, it becomes imperative for individuals to publish in the 'right', ranked, journals. To be part of these new disciplinary politics is deeply unsettling, politically, as our American co-editor Jon Cruz, who joined the journal as editor in 2009, discussed in a special issue dedicated to the American 'link' made by the journal (Cruz 2012). A glimpse of more positive - if still

undoubtedly politically ambivalent - change can be found in our ongoing discussion about open access publishing (Trottier, 2015). We now know that open access publishing may come in highly coercive forms that may shift control over who gets to publish to grant authorities and university administrators who decide budget allocation for the handling fees that will eventually replace the currently dominant subscription system. Such changes are carried and facilitated by these seemingly mundane shifts. The journal is now produced on an internet-based platform that allows for easy implementation of the conditions set for ranking (such as double-blind peer review).

Journals are strange creatures, dependent as they are on those who perceive them as their 'natural' home for their work. In the first decade, with metrics and citation indexes becoming increasingly important as the online use of journal articles took off, we found that titles that included sex, reality television and the music industry did far better than any others. We may well have disappointed a sizable number of porn researchers whilst reality television researchers, on the other hand, have been very well-served. Some subjects have moved into significance and importance within the journal over the past two decades: cultural labour studies was barely on the radar twenty years ago but is now a pronounced disciplinary strand that we are proud to have played a part in fostering (e.g. Ross, 2012, Marshall, 2013, Striphos 2015; Hope and Richards 2015)

Cultural studies as a field has changed in a number of ways. Over the last twenty years, identity and representation had become far less prominent entry points for cultural studies work but are returning now that transgender politics has finally been put on the agenda, Black Lives Matter has found widespread recognition (and fierce populist resistance), feminist activism has returned with a vengeance via activity like Slutwalk and the Everyday Sexism Project; and class is firmly 'back' as a central area of study as the global landscape has resulted in increasingly obvious widening inequalities in the western world as well as the world at large. New issues are presenting themselves in the wake of global social and political change. To better understand fundamentalist identity politics in all its complexity, not simply in reference to religion, for instance, is certainly an issue that needs our critical attention; as do the urgent issues of climate change and extractivism, the resurgence of right wing populism and demotic racisms,

the roles of the elites and financialisation, and online worlds of bullying and hate as well as self-representation and pleasure.

Cultural studies is ideally placed for this: it is the zone where an understanding of how discourses and social forces interconnect with each other to create meaning – an understanding of ‘articulation’ – was developed (Slack 1996; Grossberg and Hall 1986). More recently, the related intersectional querying of identity and subjectivity has gained much popular ground. While intersectional feminism developed in the late 1980s (Crenshaw, 1991) to denote how the experience of one’s gender is impacted by race, sexual orientation, education, the term has gained an unprecedentedly large popular usage. In a recent article, for instance, the American newspaper *USA Today* explained it at length in relation to the women’s protest marches against President Trump (Dastagir 2017).

The last twenty years has seen a period in which the rise of neoliberalism – involving the attempt to marketise all areas of social life and to reduce us to simply competitive individuals – has expanded and become more painfully apparent. Corporations and politicians have encouraged us to focus on honing our individualised market value, on intensifying and self-regulating the worth of ‘brand me’ in order to maximise our potential as flexible workers. We have been increasingly addressed as ‘responsibilised’ subjects: as people who need to deal with issues like retirement provision and health on an individual basis without relying on the state, and who can solve social problems through savvy consumer purchasing. Cultures of accountability make clear that while neoliberalism may present itself as being about freedom, it is a deeply disciplinary project, one that draws heavily on conservative thought and tends to ‘outsource’ the burden of keeping up moral standards to women, thus making them doubly responsible as individuals and as moral subjects (e.g. Gill and Scharff, 2011; Elias and Gill 2017).

The expansion of post-Fordist capitalism, with its fêting of the flexible consumer-worker, and its proliferation of consumer products, has segued since the 1990s with platform capitalism: that online cultural economy that has brought us Instagram, AirBnB and Uber (Murray 2015, Huws 2014; Srnicek 2016; Van Dijck & Poell 2013). The boundaries between work and personal life have changed, with so many people

checking the smartphone at the beach or in the playground, being 'always on' - even whilst France legislates against it (Gregg 2011). We have new ways to be social through media, to produce shareable content, to represent ourselves and to be, in that ubiquitous term, 'curators' of culture; and we also have new ways to be monitored through Big Data, to be targeted by affective brand analysts and exploited by those with the power to pay for its marketing (Crawford *et al* 2015, Striphas 2015).

Class never went away, but the dream that we were 'post-class' was embraced by many in the 1990s as consumer capitalism promised to break down boundaries and splinter us into more complex tribes based on transient identities. The banking crisis of 2008 has been felt as a fundamental failure of global financial institutions and yet the brunt of the damage has been rested on public services and welfare through harsh austerity measures, particularly in the UK. Impoverishment has become harder to ignore in recent years, as the yawning chasm between rich and poor continues to expand at alarming rates and where poverty has been made spectacle through developments in reality television (Tyler and Bennett 2010; Wood 2016).

After World-War II, Western European societies witnessed the emancipation of working-class children through access to higher education. Today, they witness the perverse result of that emancipation in a new divide produced by the competitive 'meritocratic' educational agenda. This produces a profound wedge between what are sometimes called a 'cosmopolitan' elite with higher education and a larger nationalist group with less opportunities and less education, whose trust in representative democracy has waned fast. Levels of debt have rocketed amongst students alongside that of wider populations, changing our relationship to what is possible and to what the future can hold (Adkins 2016; Ross 2013).

All of these developments -and they are only a small number of examples - present cultural studies with a new range of challenges. When starting the journal, the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* was intended to promote an empirical strand of cultural studies with a strong theoretical dimension, taking everyday meaning-making and their imbrication with relations of power as defining the cultural studies' field of interest. While the founding editors shared a strong interest in media, media audiences, media



texts, and media organisations, they felt it was important to understand media studies alongside sociology, and its insights into organisations and policy as disciplines that could help strengthen cultural studies, always mining at disciplinary seams. ‘Well-theorized empirical work’ was what they were looking for, rather than purely essayistic or theoretical pieces, which they felt were well covered by literary and critical theory journals. Although less than in the 1980s when the defence of popular culture had been felt to be a much-needed enterprise, derogatory attitudes to mass culture were clearly waning, allowing the scope for the journal to expand its critique of ‘everyday meaning-making’.

To maintain a focus on everyday meaning-making and attend to unequal power relations is of course as much needed today as it was twenty years ago. Returning to questions of identity and representation with the barrage of new critical tools that have emerged is important now that new variants of inequality, prejudice and hatred are expressed in no uncertain terms. Both experiences of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity construction’ and the political ramifications of changing power relations need to be interpreted by powerful and rigorous research, including research into popular culture, defined as widely as possible. Today’s ‘popular culture’, after all, encompasses the news (be it in satirical forms on television, as Facebook lists of trending topics, as ‘fake’ Macedonian-made stories, or good old-fashioned newspapers), an enormous array of entertainment forms (including the arts, live performances, the mass media as well as social network sites), wholly new types of politics (post-fact and even post-truth), as well as new ways of working (as capitalism’s short-termism has produced new groups of independent workers and a new precariat). An interest in any of these topics will take a researcher across domains, demanding a broad set of research tools which may range from textual approaches to discourse analysis to political economy and organisational sociology. Combining methods, grounding them, explaining and justifying choices made has been key to the type of work this journal has sought to publish since its inception.

### **Opening up space: the journal**

As we indicated above, a key point of the journal from the beginning was to open up space for cultural studies work. Alongside *Cultural Studies* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, as Gil Rodman put it, ‘tripled

the page space' for cultural studies (Rodman 2014 p104 and see Finola Jilly Kay's review in this issue). On November 12, 1999, the *Times Literary Supplement* published a review of four cultural studies journals, including the then newly-founded *International Journal of Cultural Studies* and the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. The review opened rather negatively by questioning their relevance, claiming that such journals have 'lost their hegemony over writing about culture' and are too 'vague' and 'fuzzy' in their aims of promoting an 'interdisciplinary' approach. When specifically discussing the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, the review takes a more positive turn:

A far clearer sense of purpose, and a far greater sense of urgency, is evident in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*—which, although susceptible to the same fashionable brand of woozy rhetoric as the rest [...], at least appears to be driven by a group of editors and contributors who are broadly in agreement as to what kind of issues and ideas they are meant to be exploring. (McCann 1999)

Although receiving compliments is pleasant - and quoting them may seem rather vain - the praise does not diminish the review's primary criticism of all these journals for their *interdisciplinarity*, an approach that the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* both defends and has encouraged from the start. A key intellectual and political aim of cultural studies has always been to be inclusive and transdisciplinary — to question and challenge, rather than prescribe and reinforce, disciplinary boundaries. As the journal's very first editorial reads: '[o]f course cultural studies has a somewhat unclear identity, but this openness is its greatest quality [...] our guiding principle will be that the traditions and future of cultural studies are best served by keeping an open mind' (Alasuutari, Gray and Hermes 1998: 7, 10). Instead of being dismissed as 'vague' and 'fuzzy', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* argued from its beginning that such disciplinary openness can help to give intellectual work its radical edge in generating new ways of seeing. At a time when disciplinary boundaries are often increasingly tightly policed under the imperatives of neoliberal audit culture, this is just as true as it was twenty years ago.

Another aim of the journal was and is still to be inclusive to scholars from different countries and regions. The 'European' of the title seemed appropriate to underscore that

cultural studies work was not only done by British and American scholars. As the founding editors explicitly pointed out, the 'European' in the title recognized 'that location matters' in cultural studies, and sought to expand the involvement of European scholarly work beyond Britain; but did not exclude scholarly work from elsewhere. On the contrary: 'Australian, Canadian, Asian, African and American papers will be as welcome as those produced in Europe' (Alasuutari, Gray and Hermes 1998: 7-8). However, we have to admit that inclusion has not always come easily. In 2015, Roman Horak did a survey of our journal, as well as of *Cultural Studies* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, and found a clear UK English dominance, both in nationality of authors and in their instructional locations (Horak 2015). We have tried to break this pattern, such as through the special issue on how Asian cultural studies challenges the dominance of Europe (16: 6, 2013) and the more recent issue on memory, post-socialism and the media (20:3, 2017). We want to do more work in this direction in the years ahead, alongside work that considers culture in relation to a Europe in flux and crisis, to migration, and citizenship under conditions of closing borders.

### **Future space**

As a new editorial team take on the direction of the journal, a team including both new and longstanding editors, we (Joke Hermes, Jaap Kooijman, Jo Littler and Helen Wood) are acutely aware of the new intensities that shape the cultural studies field in which we want to encourage good intellectual work. Cultural studies has settled into the academy but its space there in any institutionalised form has not remained firm in the new arena of the neo-liberal university. Whilst Birmingham University has since put up blue plaques to commemorate the site where Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall gave us British Cultural Studies, in 2002 it closed Cultural Studies as a department, quite *unceremoniously* and received much outrage (Gray, 2003). None of us edit from within the space of a cultural studies department - rather Media and Communication, Media, and Sociology - and this makes cultural studies for us, especially in this political landscape, a more urgent and future-oriented project. Since cultural studies is recognised as brushing along the borders of so many disciplines and so regularly exists without concrete institutional space, we feel the need for the journal to pursue, and help generate, the intellectual space for the next phase of its growth.

Defining that space is still difficult, since our journal title means that we receive numerous article submissions which might more regularly be considered area studies, or which touch upon 'culture' in the loosest sense. In this landscape it is important for us to insist on cultural studies, not as *a* discipline - since it is even in some ways *undisciplined* - but as an important *practice*. This remains a consistent commitment that we take from Stuart Hall, 'a practice which always thinks about its intervention in the world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect' (Hall, 1992, p286).

It is with that sense of critical intervention that we publish this anniversary issue. In Gray's (2003) discussion of cultural studies at Birmingham, one of the reasons that cultural studies didn't fit within the institutional strategy of the university was because of its commitment to a critical pedagogy. The three newly commissioned articles in this special issue head up the first of our online dossiers framing some of the areas of analysis for which the journal has been most appreciated: post-feminism, sexuality, television, and the cultural and creative industries. The intention is that these open access dossiers will provide valuable (and free) intellectual as well as teaching resources which enable critical pedagogy and increase the reach of cultural studies to encourage others to want to take up this practice.

Ros Gill opens this issue. She revisits her 2007 article 'Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility' and reflects on 'postfeminism' ten years on. We are proud to say as we write this that the 2007 article is the most read and quoted article in the history of the journal. In the new piece Gill refers to the 'affective, cultural and psychic life of postfeminism.' The journeys of postfeminism indicate how the world has changed irrefutably over the past ten years. Feminism, like multiculturalism has been redefined, individualised and challenged in a variety of ways during the turn from social democracy to neoliberalism.

Asked to reflect on the long list of articles that the journal has published on television, Christine Geraghty discusses how television surfaced as a 'thematic magnet' in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, giving the journal a signature all of its own. It also

makes her ponder what the journal aims for and what the 'European' in the title stands for, exactly? (We return to these important and timely questions below).

Mark Banks and Justin O'Connor foreground the dossier on creative industries and cultural work, reflecting on two decades of research in the 'cultural industries' policy paradigm. They discuss the excitement of the creative city's transformative potential but how ultimately the economic policy discourses took hold at the expense of the promise of the progressive project. Together these three articles signal a new project for cultural studies in a world that over two decades has changed irrevocably. Engaging with practices of everyday meaning making and the power relations that shape these practices seems even more needed today.

After these three reflective articles follow an eclectic range of new articles from established and emerging scholars. These include Christian Fuchs on the continued importance of Raymond Williams' theories of communication and how Williams' 'communicative materialism' can advance our understanding of digital media. Anita Brady discusses the phenomenon of Caitlynn Jenner whose contribution to greater trans-visibility plays out alongside political conservatism and gender normative citizenship on reality television. Andrew Ploeg's discussion of fantasy sports gameplay discusses new distinctions in fan identities on a world stage and Jian Xiao explores the importance of the biographical approach to understanding the (post) punk music scene in China. Francesca Sobande analyses how watching YouTube videos has become a means, for some black women in Britain, to counteract a lack of diverse national broadcasting. Greig de Peuter, Nicole Cohen and Francesca Saraco discuss the ambivalence of co-working as part of a wider emerging tendency that discusses 'the new precariat' in the creative industries. We suggest that these articles offer innovative analyses identifying new cultural trends which exemplify the kind of work we feel *European Journal of Cultural Studies* has to offer the field.

*European Journal of Cultural Studies* is therefore far more than a collection of individual publications for the generation of citation metrics. We want to continue to use the journal in interesting ways to help the journal *work* as more than a repository to generate the citation data authors are obliged to use for their careers. In Hall's sense

then there is a new challenge for political intellectual work in the competitive neoliberal world of academic publishing which is not to substitute publicity and metrics for good intellectual political work which *makes an intervention*. We invite you as readers and writers to join us in this venture and to continue to use this journal as a platform for critical work, for critical pedagogy and ultimately for the critical growth of the politically-engaged practice of cultural studies.

We want to thank Ann Gray, Pertti Alasuutari as the original founding editors with Joke Hermes, for the opportunity to continue this important work as well as Jon Cruz for providing what was an always inspiring cross-Atlantic perspective in the second decade of the journal's existence. The work of Motti Regev and the associate editors, of our book review editors (Handel K. Wright, Joost de Bruin, Tanja Dreher and now Ruth McElroy) and our assistant editors (Pekka Rantanen, Erin Bell and Jilly Kay) over the years has been invaluable, not least in making this journal a truly international venture.

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