

USU

Ungdomskultur vid Stockholms universitet

Youth culture at Stockholm University

Johan Fornäs et al.

This research program *Youth Culture at Stockholm University* (Ungdomskultur vid Stockholms universitet; USU) was started by Johan Fornäs in 1987, with extensive activities like seminars, working groups, publications and newsletters that comprised an open, local and interdisciplinary forum for studies of youth culture. Anthologies like *Tecken i tiden. Sju texter om ungdomskultur* (Signs of the time. Seven texts on youth culture, 1989), *Rum och rörelser. Om ungas inre och yttre livsrum* (Spaces and movements. On the outer and inner life space of young people, 1989), *Spelrum. Om lek, stil och flyt i ungdomskulturen* (Space for playing: On play, style and flow in youth culture, 1990), *Moves in Modernity* (1992), *Ethnicity in Youth Culture* (1992) and *Ungdomsforskning – kritik, reflektioner och framtida möjligheter* (Youth research: Critique, reflections and future possibilities, 1994) derive from this program.

Due to subsequent reorganization of Swedish youth research, the USU in 1999 fused with the association of Swedish youth culture researchers (Sveriges ungdomskulturforskarens förening, SUF), which in its turn derived from the research programme Youth culture in Sweden (Forskningsprogrammet Ungdomskultur i Sverige, FUS), to form a new Network for youth culture researchers (Nätverk för ungdomskulturforskare, NU). In 2000, the institutional basis moved to Södertörns högskola (South Stockholm University College).

An English presentation pamphlet was produced in 1989 and is reproduced below. For more recent information, see Åsa Bäckström, Johan Fornäs, Michael Forsman, Hillevi Ganetz & Adrienne Sörbom (1998): *Nätverk för ungdomskulturforskning. Verksamhet 1987-1998*, Stockholm: JMK (JMK skriftserie 1998:2).

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A presentation

Johan Fornäs October 1989

Introduction

With the Unit of Media and Cultural Theory (formerly the Centre for Mass Communication Research, now incorporated into the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication; JMK) at the University of Stockholm as its focus an interdisciplinary programme involving research into youth culture has been started. In addition to the research itself, open courses, seminars, conferences, publications and newsletters have been initiated. Our goal is to develop a centre for research on youth culture and popular culture of international standard, where researchers and students as well as interested youth workers can meet and learn from each other.

Different forms of youth culture – the cultural expressions, life styles and media of young people – plays an increasing role in modern society. Internationally research into the field of culture is expanding and is dynamic and creative. One subfield of this research consists of an overlap of interest in youth and in popular culture, and this has borne fruit in enriching our understanding of central cultural processes of modern society.

Our activities principally address 1) researchers with a need for interdisciplinary contacts and exchange of experiences, 2) students needing help to get into the fields of youth and popular culture, 3) people working practically with youth questions who want to learn from ongoing research. Besides serving the needs of the Stockholm-Uppsala area, we also, through specializing on cultural aspects of youth, constitute a national complement to the five other youth research centres that exist in Sweden, which with their other main focuses offer us mutually rewarding contacts.

We stress strongly the need for basic research, not concentrating only on practical measures for authorities dealing with youth questions. Youth workers are warmly welcome to and also regularly take part in our activities, but we try to keep relatively free of direct control by different institutions with interests on the youth arena. Our activities should provide a refuge and a meeting point for open, unrestricted and undogmatic inquiries into the life conditions and expressions of young people, more from the perspective of the young themselves than from that of adult institutions. We support studies being critical towards hierarchies, systems and mechanisms exercising power over and among young people. Such critical basic research in youth culture is not only necessary for a vital and advanced Swedish development and cultural theory, but also needed to give those who work with young people better tools to understand recent processes and tendencies.

Like research in media, culture and popular culture, youth research is unavoidably inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary, and must necessarily contain a multitude of different aspects. Youth research would not be well served by the construction of a new unitary science, be it called “youth science” or “juventology”. It is not a new discipline, but ought to be seen as a field in which a num-

ber of related areas of interest meet. It is important that efforts should be made to preserve the multifariousness of this expansive field. No one approach has any claim to hegemony. The field lends itself to social, historic and pedagogic research, but also to psychodynamic socialization theory and not least to interdisciplinary cultural research with contributions from aesthetic disciplines, ethnology and anthropology.

To sum up, we are the only centre in Sweden focusing on youth culture. We emphasize unfettered basic research attempting to understand modern processes and tendencies in youth culture. This gives important knowledge about the whole of society. It is essential that some research adopts the perspective of young people rather than that of adult institutions, and has a critical attitude towards systems and hierarchies for the exercise of power over and among young people. This research need to be inter-disciplinary, i.e. to range over several different fields and areas without getting fixed in rigid doctrines. We strive to maintain a free and open milieu for all those interested in developing such critical and interdisciplinary basic research in youth culture. Only thus can the flexibility, multifariousness, creativity and critical aspects of youth culture be understood and inspire our research as well as our understanding of contemporary society.

Since its inception in 1980 the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the university of Stockholm has devoted itself to helping media research across traditional faculty and disciplinary borders. From the very start, its ambition has been to widen its scope from mass communication and media to popular culture in general. In 1989 the centre was united with the College of Journalism to form the new Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK).

Youth culture

An important branch of our activities in the area of popular culture has been directed since the summer of 1986 towards youth culture. This has a broad base, even though it is focused upon basic research in youth culture, i.e. on cultural aspects of everyday life and life forms of all young people – concerning symbolic expressions, forms of consciousness and communication. Far from only centring upon deviant youthful subcultures, it explores the objective, social and economic reality of all young people, youth psychology and the aesthetic forms of youth culture in general. Our youth culture activities function as points of contact for researchers and students studying youth culture as well as for people working with youth questions in the practical field.

These youth culture activities started when the Swedish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR) established a post in July 1986 for research on youth culture for Johan Fornäs, who chose to work at the centre. The Research Council specified research in “life forms, values and symbols among young people today”, for example in different subcultural youth groups and styles. It was to be based on traditions for “exploring behavioural patterns and environments from a comprehensive perspective”. Fornäs’ first research was in musicology, in which subject he has a post as reader, but he is involved in interdisciplinary cultural studies in which aesthetical analysis is combined with social and psychological viewpoints. In a three-year project for the Research Council, he carried out, together with the pedagogically oriented literature researcher Ulf Lindberg in Lund and the sociologist Ove Sernhede in Göteborg, an empirical, qualitative field study that developed theories on the functions of rock music, cultural creativity and the peer group for the development of identity of young people in modern society. This project was described in the book *Under rocken. Musikens roll i tre unga band* (Symposium 1988: “Under the surface of rock. The role of music in three young bands”).

With a planning grant from the HSFR and with the Uppsala ethnologist Johan Wennhall as assistant, in 1988 Fornäs started a more extensive research program *Ungdomskultur i Sverige* (FUS; “Youth culture in Sweden”) comprising new projects and a network of ca 40 researchers from different towns and disciplines. The program is centred around four themes: modernity, gender, style and spheres. Fornäs, the literary historian Ulf Boëthius and the sociologist Sabina Cwejman (Göteborg) form, with Michael Forsman, a student of film, as new assistant, the hub of this project, with comparative and communicative tasks. It will try to create a comparative synthesis of existing empirical and theoretical studies, and by means of seminars and the internal information bulletin

BUS, to initiate co-operation and exchange of ideas between researchers and projects within the national frame of the network.

In the autumn of 1986 Fornäs arranged and led a shorter postgraduate course in youth culture research. The course gave a broad overview of this field, with the aid of lecturers like the sociologist Erling Bjurström, the ethnologist Jonas Frykman (Lund), the psychoanalyst Karin Crafoord, the cultural sociologist Kirsten Drotner (København), the film researcher Bert Fridlund, the media researcher Keith Roe (Göteborg) and the school researcher Lars-Göran Malmgren (Lund). The course had about 35 participants from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, ethnology, literature, art and film. New interdisciplinary courses in youth and popular culture are planned to start in 1989-90.

Research and education is carried through within the normal framework of the university. In addition to that, however, it has been possible to start a fast-growing variety of activities aiming towards creating an open research milieu for all those in different locations interested in youth culture studies. From the very start such activities could only be arranged through voluntary efforts by Johan Fornäs and others, and with occasional smaller contributions from different organs. Since the summer of 1988 such youth culture activities have been considerably stabilized and extended by a grant from a Government agency Barn- och ungdomsdelegationen ("The Delegation for Children and Youth"). For two years it will experiment with the stimulation of youth research in Sweden through a milieu subsidy to six different centres, located in Stockholm, Lund, Göteborg, Linköping and Umeå. Johan Fornäs is head of our youth culture activities, which in the autumn of 1988 was organized by Helena Wulff, a social anthropologist, in the spring of 1989 by Lotta Gusterman, an ethnologist, and Peter Dahlén, a student of film, and from the autumn of 1989 by Peter Dahlén and Karin Lövgren, an ethnologist.

Conferences

Up to now we have arranged three major conferences. Commissioned by the State Council for Building Research (Bygghälsöversynsmyndigheten) a conference on *Spaces and movements of young people – on the external and internal living-space of young people in modern society* was arranged, with film student Michael Forsman as assistant, between the 18-19 of April 1988. Lectures were given by the ethnologist Karla Werner, the media researcher Keith Roe (Göteborg), Mats Lieberg from the institute of technology in Lund, the sociologists Mats Franzén (Uppsala) and Margareta Norell (Lund) and representatives involved in the practical work of various youth activities connected to the theme. The nearly 50 participants (researchers, students, architects, politicians, civil servants and social planners) took part in an interesting discussion of modern tendencies and conflicts concerning the room for young people in society and the ways different youth groups use various physical and social spaces: living quarters, public spaces, the city, school, media etc.

19-20 December 1988 Helena Wulff arranged another conference, on *Youth style*, with about 40 participants. Lectures were held by the anthropologist Anne Krogstad (Oslo), the criminologist Joi Bay (København), the sociologists Gestur Gudmundsson (Reykjavik) and Erling Bjurström (Stockholm), the literary researcher Hillevi Ganetz, the ethnologist Lotta Gusterman and the anthropologists Virva Vainikainen and Helena Wulff (all Stockholm). The conference focused upon concrete style studies but also discussed general and principal aspects for this type of research. It is important that researchers develop a closeness to youth groups and a capacity for empathy to be able to interpret the living meanings of styles. At the same time a distance is needed in the phase of interpretation and analysis, when it is important to relate to social and cultural theories on a macro level. The conference also discussed how researchers interact with youth cultures and use, influence and change their development, in interplay with state, market and media.

Ganetz saw three necessary levels for studying youth style from a feminist perspective: style as language (social, "the Birmingham school") – style as experiment with identity (psychic, Thomas Ziehe's socialization theory) – style as aesthetization of everyday life (aesthetic, Ulrike Prokop). Gudmundsson added a partly different division of the field: style as rituals (structuralist Marxism,

Cohen, Hall) – style as guerilla warfare (postmodernism, Hebdige) – style as aesthetic praxis (West German socialization and modernity theory, Ziehe, Helmut Hartwig, Prokop).

It also became obvious how subcultures appear differently if the focus is on different elements in their styles: music, clothes, images, rituals, argot etc. The concept of style has many sides that all need attention if the totality is to be intelligible. Krogstad's differentiation between the declarative (i.e. extrovert and position-marking) and regulative (i.e. introvert and relation-steering within the group itself) aspects of single symbols seemed very useful.

Several times the successive changes of the meaning of single styles were touched upon: Bjurström for example mentioned how the Swedish "raggare" (driving big American cars and listening to rock'n'roll music) in the 50s expressed an affirmation of an Americanized modernity, while they later on rather stood with their nostalgia for a restorative conservatism. Similar dislocations can also be noted by the "knuttar" (mc rockers) in Bay's research and Krogstad's punks. It is interesting that certain styles seen as youth cultural have in reality for a long time been borne mostly by adults (raggare, knuttar): youth styles thus subtly diffuse into adult culture and youth images drift apart from real youth life. A common trait of youth culture seems to be the cultivation of mobility and freedom, both spatially and socioculturally. This is true both for vehicle-centred styles and for the younger styles (punk, mod revival, hip hop etc) that Vainikainen and Gusterman presented. The longing for freedom and the flexible search for identity of youth groups find expression in the stress placed by each style on mobility as well as in that many young people quickly move between different style forms and are all the time changing them. There are of course also differences between the degree of openness of different styles and subcultures. Knuttar, raggare and, to some extent, skinheads as well show a much greater and almost stiffened rigidity than for example hip hoppers or the mixed immigrant youths Wulff has studied.

A similar conference on *Teenage play* was arranged on 25 May 1989 by Peter Dahlén with the help of the literary researcher Ulf Boëthius and the film researcher Margareta Rönnerberg, and it had about 40 participants. Margareta Rönnerberg talked on theories on and general types of children and youth games and play, the film researcher Olle Sjögren on teenage games in movies and music videos, the film researcher Ole Breitenstein on computer games and the social anthropologist Yngve Lithman on sports as cultural texts.

One issue was the definition of play: which types, genres and media exist, and how play can be delimited from non-play (for example seriousness, reality or work). Play is against reality, but also in it. The questions of the definition and essence of play is hard to answer – there are probably several definitions and essences, not only in theories but also in reality. A second point was the functions and meanings of play(s), the relations to the rest of society and culture. All play carries a complex ambiguity – it is free, transcendent, creative fantasy as well as rule-governed, ordering adaptation. It can be related to social, cultural and psychic processes, and to power, class, gender and ideology, but also to socialization and adolescence. A third question is how play develops temporally: how its tradition relate to the new, "late modern" tendencies in forms and relations.

Publications

In the spring of 1989 two anthologies were published. *Tecken i tiden. Sju texter om ungdomskultur* ("Signs of the time. Seven texts on youth culture"), edited by Johan Fornäs, Hillevi Ganetz and Tove Holmqvist (Stockholm/Lund: Symposion), collects seven of our seminar participants, all born in the 1950s, around themes like modernity, gender and style. After an introductory article by Johan Fornäs the six texts treat: Youth in a long historical perspective (the ethnologist Johan Wennhall); The dark current in 80's post-punk (the film researcher Peter Dahlén); Teenage girls and ethnicity in southern London (the anthropologist Helena Wulff); Young males and changing masculinity in advertisements (the anthropologist Tove Holmqvist); Symbolic construction of femininity mirrored by idol, fans and media (the literary researcher Hillevi Ganetz); Comparison of popular literature and music video (the sociologist Irène Grundberg).

In Johan Fornäs and Michael Forsman (ed): *Rum och rörelser. Om ungas inre och yttre livsrum* ("Spaces and Movements. On the internal and external life-space of young people"; Byggforsk-

ningsrådet) ten articles are to be found on the room for young people in modern social planning, based on the conference mentioned above. Mats Franzén looks back on the work and leisure of young people in the 1930s. Mats Lieberg analyses how teenagers use the public spaces of the city. Margareta Norell writes about girls in private and public rooms and their stylistic expressions in different decades of the post-war period. Keith Roe treats the relation between school and media spaces. Karla Werner relates how young people experiment in their use of living quarters and localities. Representatives for the music house Ultra in the Stockholm suburb of Handen, Husnallarna, squatters in Göteborg and the municipal institution Ungbo in the same town elucidate problems in the relation between young activists and municipal authorities.

A third anthology, on *Ungdom och medier* ("Youth and media"), edited by Helena Wulff, was published in the autumn of 1989 in the series *Mass*. The sociologist Erling Bjurström writes there on social and rock musical rhythm, the film researcher Ole Breitenstein on video and computer games, the musicologists Per-Erik Brolinson and Holger Larsen on the hit list as media phenomenon, the media sociologist Cecilia von Feilitzen on how young people are represented in television, the art researcher and comic strip writer Magnus Knutsson on moral panics from Nick Carter to video violence, and the film researcher Olle Sjögren on youth idols and myths in film and music. Peter Dahlén and Margareta Rönnberg edited a fourth anthology on *Style, play and games*, published in 1990.

The Research Council project of Johan Fornäs, Ulf Lindberg in Lund, and Ove Sernhede in Göteborg, resulted in their book *Under rocken. Musikens roll i tre unga band* ("Under the surface of rock. The role of music in three young bands"; Symposium 1988). Fornäs has also edited and introduced two anthologies with texts by the West German social psychologist Thomas Ziehe: *Kultur-analyser. Ungdom, utbildning, modernitet* ("Cultural analyses. Youth, education, modernity"; Symposium 1989), and *Ambivalenser og mangfoldighed* ("Ambivalences and plurality"; co-editor Elo Nielsen, København: Politisk revy 1989).

In our series of Working papers have been published up till now three items on youth culture: Fornäs' reprint collections titled *Omtryckta artiklar om ungdomskultur och rockmusik* ("Reprinted articles on youth culture and rock music") vol. 1 and vol. 2 (1987) and his *Papers on pop and youth culture* (1989).

A monthly information letters on youth culture activities is distributed to around 300 addressees. We have also built up a reference library in the field of youth culture, in addition to our collection of literature on media and popular culture.

Seminars

Since the spring of 1987 we have been arranging a regular series of open inter-disciplinary seminars on youth culture. Some seminars have been arranged in co-operation with the Swedish National Board of Education (SÖ), the State Council for Building Research (BFR), the Student Organization of the University of Stockholm (SUS) and others. During the five first terms from spring 1987 to spring 1989 31 seminars were arranged, with 37 lecturers:

Kirsten Drotner, youth researcher from København

Simon Frith, British rock sociologist

Judith Kapferer, social anthropologist from Adelaide in Australia

Elo Nielsen, Danish youth researcher

Deanna Campbell Robinson, American media researcher

Ola Stafseng, Norwegian youth sociologist

Anne Scott Sørensen, Danish youth researcher

Paul Willis, British youth researcher

Thomas Ziehe, West German youth researcher

Bengt Erik Andersson, College of Education

Leif Berggren, researcher in pedagogics

Erling Bjurström, sociologist

Ulf Boëthius, literary researcher

Per-Erik Brolinson, musicologist
Sabina Cwejman, sociologist from Göteborg
Magdalena Czaplicka, sociologist from Uppsala
Cecilia von Feilitzen, sociologist and media researcher
Johan Fornäs, musicologist and youth culture researcher
Michael Forsman, film researcher
Hillevi Ganetz, literary researcher
Kristin Hallberg, literary researcher
Hans-Erik Hermansson, institute for social work in Göteborg
Tove Holmqvist, social anthropologist and media researcher
Johannes Knutsson, criminologist
Magnus Knutsson, art researcher and comic strips writer
Ulla Kotsinas, Nordic linguistics
Holger Larsen, musicologist
Daniel Lundin, activist
Judith Narrowe, social anthropologist
Mikael Palme, cultural sociologist at the College of Education
Kenneth Petersson from the Department of Communications in Linköping
Ove Sernhede, institute for social work in Göteborg
Olle Sjögren, film researcher
Johan Wennhall, ethnologist from Uppsala
Karla Werner, ethnologist
Berit Wigerfelt, ethnologist from Lund
Helena Wulff, social anthropologist

Groups

A couple of smaller working groups have also been formed. In the autumn of 1988 some ten persons in a theory group studied a number of theoretical texts with relevance to youth culture. During the spring of 1989 three working groups were started, where the participants are expected regularly to follow the groups' work, to facilitate a continuous and cumulative discussion and development of knowledge. The groups can use the competence of experts and guest initiators, and may produce working papers or arrange bigger, open seminars, study visits etc.

One group discusses questions of power, taste and resistance. This group studies works by, among others, the French sociologist of culture Pierre Bourdieu.

Another group focuses on gender, style and popular culture, reading different feminist theories and analyzing various phenomena of popular culture.

A third group is discussing studies of subcultures, mainly in our region – from methodological questions in qualitative cultural studies and the role of the researcher to theoretical explanatory models in different disciplines for styles and subcultures of different sorts.

A different function is served by the reference group constituted in the autumn of 1988. Its members in Stockholm and Uppsala meet regularly to provide ideas for and views on our activities, while those living outside the region function as corresponding advisors. The group consists at present of the following members, but is continuously being enlarged in accordance with our needs:

Stefan Andersson, Stockholm University Library

Joi Bay, Sociology, København

Erling Bjurström, State Youth Council and Institute for Social Studies, Stockholm

Ulf Boëthius, Comparative Literature, Stockholm

Kirsten Drotner, Sociology of Culture, København

Billy Ehn, Ethnology, Stockholm

Cecilia von Feilitzen, Media and Cultural Theory and Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, Stockholm

Simon Frith, The John Logie Baird Centre, Glasgow

Gestur Gudmundsson, Sociology, Reykjavik
Tommi Hoikkala, Sociology, Helsingfors
Ulla Kotsinas, Nordic Linguistics, Stockholm
Leena Louhivuori, Ethnology, Helsingfors
Kjell Nowak, Media and Cultural Theory, Stockholm
Birgitta Qvarsell, Education, Stockholm
Keith Roe, Politology/Mass Communication, Göteborg
Thomas Ziehe, Social Psychology, Frankfurt, Germany

Postscript 2007

USU was gradually dissolved in the early 1990s. Its effects in terms of informal interdisciplinary networks among cultural studies scholars remain.