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16/05/19

ANNETTE HILL

RIGHT TO ROAM:
MOBILE AUDIENCES

BEGINN: 18:15 / ORT: *JURA-SOYFER-SAAL*

TFM | INSTITUT FÜR THEATER-, FILM- UND MEDIENWISSENSCHAFT,
UNIVERSITÄT WIEN, HOFBURG, BATTHYANYSTIEGE 26, 1010 WIEN

Audiences are often described as fragmented, or nomadic, moving around media in mobile contexts. Rather than seeing audiences as nomadic, which suggests a placeless, restless viewership, this paper argues that people roam around storytelling within cross media content. The activity of roaming is one where people traverse the media landscape, following pathways and becoming pathfinders themselves. Roaming audiences is a metaphor that captures the dynamic practices of audiences as they experience storytelling that takes place across dispersed sites of production, distribution and reception.

This way of thinking about the media as an imaginary landscape shows the regions, borders, and contours of the cultural terrain, the enclosed spaces for commercial uses and the public byways for common land. The kinds of movements that audiences make are restricted; people are not free to roam no matter how much this romantic image appeals to us. There are commercial constraints, censorship, surveillance tracking of audiences and users by algorithms, geo blocking for content restricted to regional audiences, signalling a range of political economic, legal and ethical issues around access, content and comments. For those who resist these media laws and regulations, they are trying to generate an alternative vision for what Chambers (2016) calls a media imaginary where these technologies enable freedom to watch without restriction. Thus, there is a symbolic power to a right to roam media without economic barriers, time constraints and geographical borders. This article explores the right to roam for mobile audiences, paying close attention to the freedom and stricture of the economic, temporal and geographical relationships between media industries and audiences.

Annette Hill is a Professor of Media and Communication at Lund University, Sweden, and Visiting Professor at King's College, London. Her research focuses on audiences and popular culture, with interests in media engagement, everyday life, genres, production studies and cultures of viewing.

Kontakt: andrea.seier@univie.ac.at
tfm.univie.ac.at
mobilecultures.univie.ac.at