

# Smart Resistances. Mobile Media and the Dynamics of (Refused) Participation

January 20, 2022 – 9:00-10:30 AM (UTC+1)

*Hosted by "Smartphone-Communities. Dynamics of Resistance in Relations of Participation" – a research project (DFG FOR 2252) at the University of Konstanz, Germany*

We are very happy to welcome Heather Horst (Sydney) and David Morley (London) to our online discussion event on "Smart Resistances- Mobile Media and the Dynamics of (Refused) Participation". Each participant will give a 10-minute impulse on their topic and will give a 5 to 10-minute response to their discussion partner. We look forward to welcome interested students and colleagues from all fields and will allow generous room for debate.

The discussion will take place **online** on January 20, 2022. Please join us at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81919527242> (Meeting-ID: 819 1952 7242)

Contemporary activist and resistance practices, behaviors, or protests can be closely connected to the participants' ability to coordinate online, to connect, and share their efforts live and in asynchronous participation after protest events. The smartphone's capacity to enable medial 'co-presence', its role in refugee movements, in moments of political or natural crises etc. make it essential and omnipresent. As such, smartphone practices become political and the focal point of our discussion with Professors Horst and Morley.

The discussion concentrates on the interplay between user and device and the smartness that emerges in that relationality. Smart resistances in a multiple sense are in the focus of our debate, asking: How can different forms of resistance be momentarily facilitated or overthrown through the operations, iterations, and practices of the interconnectivity of smartphone-users? How can we grasp processes of (refused) participation more thoroughly and formulate media theoretic concretizations and systematization?

We invite you to question dynamics of smart resistances regarding their capability of opening and closing playing fields of participation. Smartphone-based platforms, mobile services, geofencing etc. facilitate peripheries, niches, and subcultures for communities that may be more or less against prevailing mainstream or power structures. Taking the processuality and temporary stabilizations of these relations and the smartphone-user as a mobile and digitally connected subject seriously, we want to examine situations of such smart resistances and discuss, how smart devices elucidate the manifold operations of contempt, defiance, and immunization against resistant practices.

Taking the (smart) mobile phone seriously as a 'site of protest', which is itself steeped in power relations we want to speak to situations of protest or resistance and how these are shaped by the smartphone, drawing upon the valuable input by our two guests.

*Professor Heather A. Horst is the Director of the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. A sociocultural anthropologist by training, she researches material culture and the mediation of social relations through digital media and technology. Recent publications focused on The Moral Economy of Mobile Phones: Pacific Island Perspectives (Foster and Horst, eds. 2018) and Location Technologies in International Context (Wilken, Goggin and Horst, eds. 2019). Her current research examines the circulation of music in Melanesia through mobile technologies.*

The question of resistance and more temporal forms of subversion with and through a smartphone requires reflection on the broader framework of the moral economy of the mobile phone (see Foster and Horst 2018). Focused upon the enlivened relationships between consumers and companies, consumers and the state, companies and the state and raft of other state agents who regulate, monitor and set other conditions for the smartphone's use, the moral economy framework accounts for a world beyond 'users' and 'consumers' who appropriate technology like the smartphone for different ends. I further illustrate how the moral economy framework operates in practice through a series of short examples: an academic-activist project on the circulation of protest music as part of the Free West Papua Movement, the introduction of an 'online safety' bill designed to regulate 'free speech' and a political campaign that used social media. Through these examples from the anthropological field, I highlight the ways in which the smartphone is an intrinsically entangled object. These entanglements – ever dynamic and mutually constitutive – have consequences for the recognition, conditions for and legitimation of different forms of smartphone resistance.

*David Morley is Emeritus Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths College, London. Having begun his research in the field of media studies, and moving later into cultural studies /geography, his work has now been translated into 22 languages. His most recent books include Communications and Mobility; The Migrant, the Mobile Phone and the Container Box (Blackwell 2018) and the editorship of Stuart Hall's 2-Volume "Essential Essays" (Duke 2020).*

My contribution to the workshop will take as its starting point the issue of how technologies such as the smart phone increasingly function as the necessary and constitutive conditions for a variety of forms of 'prosthetic citizenship'. In some respects, these debates take us back to the issues originally formulated around what was then called the "digital divide" between those with and without access to the (then) "new" digital technologies. However, we now face more fine-grained questions than that - in terms of exactly who, in which socio-cultural situations, has access to which generations of which technologies, at what price and in what modalities. Evidently this is a two-edged sword: critical questions have to be posed in terms of how these technologies function so as to include and enable some people, while excluding and disabling others from participation in various networks and modes of sociality. The further issue concerns the inherent political valences of these technologies - in enabling citizens to organise themselves to achieve a variety of cultural and political goals, in the short term – but at the price of greatly facilitating the long-term capacity of the state to map, track and repress the very modes of self organisation which these technologies enable.