

Hearing With Light, Seeing with Sound



Aesthetic Journalism as a place for Depth and Difficulty in a Media Life

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

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Dedicatum

On April 20, 2011, British photojournalist and multimedia producer Tim Hetherington was killed while reporting from Misrata, where he was one of only a handful of journalists reporting from within Libya. I received the news while researching for this thesis. Hetherington's innovative work and commitment to facilitating thoughtful dialogue across geographic and cultural borders served to remind me that theory's role is not merely to critique practice, but also, and more importantly, to enhance it (Bolter 2003, pp.17-18). This thesis is therefore written and produced for journalists as well as academics, and for anybody else with a concern for the social quality of digitally mediated communication; and it is dedicated to the work and memory of two men – Tim Hetherington and Roger Silverstone – who in their different ways made important contributions to how we perceive and think about media morality.

And this thesis is also written for my son, Oliver, who will grow up in what many people will describe to him as two worlds: one 'developed', one 'underdeveloped'; one speaking English, the other Spanish; one cautiously quiet, the other rambunctiously noisy. I hope that Oliver will recognise his two worlds as one world, recognise that difference is what humanity has in common, and – being able to speak fluently the mother tongues of over a billion people – that he will listen well.¹

¹ Oliver's generation will also grow up with an additional 'world' known that is often described as 'cyber', 'digital', and even 'social'. It, too, must be considered a sphere of the one world we share.

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Abstract

A colleague tells me that journalism is still about good writing, and she's right. At the centre of good writing is narrative, the dance between complexity and simplicity, nuance and rhythm. Good journalism engages us with each other and with the world beyond our daily geographical borders; it holds power to account and provides an imperfect agora for public debate; and more often than not its form is digital: text, image and sound stitched together in binary code. This thesis is about the challenge and importance of digital narrative, and the role that photography can play in engaging a digitally connected public with journalism that is not exhausted by a single reading, that employs our imagination and our empathy to delve beneath surface facts, subverting the digital logic of efficiency to sit somewhere between impenetrable overloads and binary simplifications. The possibility and moral importance of this journalism, new in form but old in substance, is the starting point for this thesis as well as its through-line, the point from which the parallel narratives and ideas herein will resonate. Fundamentally, this is a thesis about how we understand each other *in* media, and how creative approaches to digital journalism can make communication productively difficult, deepening our understanding of one another and the world we share.

Media ecology and creative practice are combined to explore the metaphorical 'logics' of digital communication – the Internet's *how, why, what, where* and *when* – and discourses from the disciplines of media morality, journalism studies, sociology and art converge to delineate journalism's place within the blurred spaces of our material-digital, public-private media life. The thesis argues that our capacity to witness in media, our ability and inclination to approach each other with hospitality and proper distance, requires that we continue to properly see and hear each other across the hybrid spaces of digital and smelly media, and that we think critically about the nature of media and our life within it.