

THEME: Borders, Security Technologies, Data Gathering and Data Sharing

PROJECT: The Vigilant Image: Documentary Technologies in the Age of Global (In) Security

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Primary Location: Mitchell Institute

The discourse of catastrophe has become particularly influential in contemporary global societies. In addition to environmental disasters and the spectre of economic collapse, there is now the emergence of complex, mutable, unpredictable forms of terrorism, forms that have in recent times become more effective in *terrorizing* by being simultaneously here and elsewhere, familiar and alien. The socio-psychological consequences of ‘new terrorism’ are significant in relation to how communities and citizens – especially, in the major global cities – are becoming habituated to a culture of normalised trauma and excessive vigilance. The role of contemporary liberal democracies – equipped with increasingly sophisticated surveillance and security technologies – and the mass media, remains similarly problematic in this context. Guy Debord’s adage that ‘the story of terrorism is written by the state’ is still relevant to any understanding how responses to (and representations of) contemporary forms of political violence and the ‘terrorist threat’ undermine democratic power-relations and affect the sociology of everyday life in the West.

This PhD project explores how new and emergent documentary technologies contribute to cultures of excessive vigilance, and their influence on political and social behaviour in modern democracies. New digital technologies have transformed traditional modes and ontologies of documentary practice, with filmmakers increasingly experimenting with animated, VR/AR, 360, and interactive multimedia platforms. These developments have the capacity to both shape and critique perceptions of reality, especially within the political sphere where states and corporate interests compete with creative practitioners and activists to control the content and dissemination of these technologies. What is the role of these technologies in negotiating between modes of vigilance and technologies of surveillance? How might new documentary technologies be employed to critique the over-vigilant society, disrupting the legitimizing processes integral to ‘states of exception’, with its and direct and indirect forms of repressive legislation, censorship and regulation, and more generalised suspicion of the ‘other’?

A PhD in this area would pivot the participation of the Mitchell Institute and CSIT in the £13m Future Screens NI, the collaboration between Queen’s, Ulster University and local industry partners for creative industries in Northern Ireland. Future Screens NI aims to provide opportunity and growth across film and broadcast, animation, games and emerging technologies and industries. This PhD proposal speaks directly to its film and emerging technologies foci.

Primary Academic Discipline: Film Studies