

## **Material Cultures 2010**

July 16 to 18, 2010, University of Edinburgh

### **Long form writing in a short-form world**

New technologies have made it possible to deliver quality goods and services at low cost. As a result, people are only prepared to pay more if they get something truly luxurious or special; hence the growth of organics and the “slow food” movement. This is known in marketing circles as “the end of the middle”.

Does the process apply to the market for journalism and nonfiction writing? At the bottom end is basic news, on tap. In the middle, traditional print journalism is losing readers fast. At the luxury end, there should be a flourishing market for essays, reportage and other long-form narrative nonfiction writing that takes its time: “slow journalism”.

There seems to be a public appetite for such writing, more typically known as literary journalism, but it has not yet translated into a significantly changed publishing landscape. This is partly because of fashions and prejudices, but also because writing that involves factual discovery costs time and money, and the digital business model proves elusive. Reading habits may pose an additional obstacle: in an environment that privileges multimedia and interactive content, text can be relegated to a supporting role.

At the same time, these new conditions remove constraints and offer opportunities for experimentation in “digital storytelling”. Examples – to be explored at the conference – include journalism told as graphic art; the blog as a literary form; a return to publishing by instalment; new synergies between text and documentary film; and new connections between books and their readers.

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