



Recent Methodological Opportunities in Online Hypermedia – a Case Study of Photojournalism in Singapore

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Abstract

This methodological paper reviews the recent work done by photojournalists in Singapore who have leveraged on the use of multimedia to create meaning-rich narratives of the social situations they investigate. Using an online multimedia project recently launched by journalists and photojournalists in Singapore, I will show how photographers'/photojournalists' expertise, knowledge and combination of text and photographs serve to exemplify the opportunities that hypermedia affords to sociologists, and argue that hypermedia presentations are particularly useful in extending auto/biographical narratives, encouraging collaborative research, as well as interrogating the everyday social lives of our informants.

Keywords: *Visual Sociology, Hypermedia, Online Methods, Singapore, Photojournalism, Visual Methods, Photography*

Introduction

1.1 Despite the increasing use of multimedia and hypermedia (defined here as multimedia accessed via the world wide web) in society, the presentation of sociological data still appears to be firmly rooted in text-heavy, print-formatted journals and books. Online sociological journals are comparatively fewer in number than their print counterparts, and articles published in such journals tend to remain textually-centric (Pink 2007:198), oftentimes not leveraging on the benefits afforded by web technologies like streaming videos, graphics or audio, with some exceptions (Brown, Dilley and Marshal 2008, Büscher 2005, Gibson et al 2005).

1.2 Scholarly debates surrounding the use of anything more than text in social research often focus on the role of images, particularly photographs and how to interpret or frame them. Chaplin (2005:1.22), in her article in *Sociological Research Online's* (10:1) special issue on Visual Sociology, pointed out that a tension exists between constructionism and realism approaches to photographs. She writes

"...we could say that the more the focus is on the photographic image, the less room there is for focus on the (verbal) theory, and the more incoherent is that theory. Conversely, the more the focus is on theory, and on theoretical coherence, the more the image slips out of sight."

1.3 Using a variety of approaches to interpreting images (social constructionism, photographic realism, Foucauldian discourse), Chaplin found that no single one really gave a satisfactory approach to situating the photograph as a resource for social scientists. She suggests at the end of her article that scholars should explore other practices and disciplines for possible answers and solutions.

"For, given the inbuilt tendency for contemporary social science theory either to chase the image away or to be incapacitated by it, we should start looking elsewhere for ideas about how to keep the balance of autonomy between photographic image and words." Chaplin (2005:1.23)

This paper takes up Chaplin's suggestion and looks to the professional practices of photojournalists in Singapore to illustrate how Sociology can be enlivened by not just photographs, but also the use of multimedia slideshows (of sequential photographs, audio and text) to present data.

1.4 The use of non-text, especially images in scholarly sociological work has been gradually increasing (Knowles and Harper 2009, Twine 2006). Likewise, peer-reviewed journals like *Cultural Geographies* now incorporate practice-based sections that encourage the submission of work that leverages heavily on photographs and their interactions with text (Merriman and Webster 2009, Wiley 2006). Elsevier, for

example, also encourages the submission of video as supporting data for research – see for example the journal *Poetics*. However, many texts remain in a static form, distributed to readers either in "traditional" paper format or electronically in the form of PDF files. Despite an increasing acceptance towards arguments using video, photographs and sound as data – practitioners still encounter relatively limited channels to present their scholarly work.

1.5 There are two possible reasons behind the relatively fewer number of journals, especially Sociological journals, which support the presentation of data through mediums other than text. The first is simple logistics – a video file, especially one of a High-Definition quality, would consume many more megabytes than a text file. This in turn may increase costs for a publisher, as some web hosting providers place a cap on the number of megabytes (or gigabytes) any particular website may provide to users in a given period of time – this is commonly known as bandwidth. The second reason behind has to do with the availability of technology and software that provides affordances to scholars to create and disseminate data easily in formats other than text. Few postgraduate courses in Sociology make it compulsory for students to create data in formats like video or to provide photographs as part of their work, which would in any case be counterproductive. However, this also means that sociologists sometimes lack the ability to generate and present non-textual data. This paper shows how both issues, online bandwidth as well as the complexity of software, can be addressed with recent technological innovations, and how this has begun to be methodologically appropriated by practitioners in journalism.

1.6 Using multimedia and/or hypermedia to present data is not new – before broadband became widely available (allowing for easier streaming of video, graphics and audio), scholars used CD-ROMs to disseminate non-textual data (Biella 2004) ^[1]. Ethnography has enjoyed the greatest focus by scholars on the use of hypermedia to show their work (Dicks et al 2005; Hine 2000), and this is particularly so amongst visual anthropologists (Banks 2001; Howard 1988; Pink 2007). Efforts to incorporate hypermedia into sociological presentations of data are relatively less apparent – though some work has been done, particularly in a special issue of *Sociological Research Online* that attempts to capture the performativity of everyday life through web-based presentations (Halford and Knowles 2005). Büscher's article (2005:3) in that issue used embedded videos interspersed within text to enrich her sociological observations and textual narratives. Büscher was able to demonstrate to readers the potentials that lay in hypermedia and the presentation of sociological data. Chaplin (2005), in the same special issue, embedded ethnographic photographs of families in a South London neighbourhood in her online article as a way of demonstrating the theoretical tensions between images and text. Chaplin's use of hypermedia was to position photographs between sections of text that created a flow of arguments and images, thereby immersing the reader in her discussion. Similarly, Farrar (2005) drew not just upon his own photographs, but archival and publicly-available images to support his study of racialised boundaries. Farrar's argument was deeply enriched by the faithfulness of colour reproduction in some of the vintage photographs he drew upon.

1.7 Web technology has continued to develop since Halford and Knowles's 2005 special issue in *Sociological Research Online* (10:1), especially with broadband speeds amongst developed nations. It is only sensible that one revisits the opportunities that hypermedia affords sociologists who employ different qualitative methods. One such opportunity lies in the ease at which sociological data can be rendered into hypermedia through simple and non-specialised tools available to anyone running a Windows or Macintosh operating system. In this paper I will first consider the opportunities that richer hypermedia environments present us. I will then demonstrate how simple media components can be interlaced together to create a rich qualitative narrative that would benefit researchers using ethnographic, interview or participant observation methods. This will be done using a case study of "Through the Lens", a public online section of the Straits Times, a Singaporean English language newspaper that presents short, 5 minute stories in hypermedia format. Such hypermedia narratives also raise other questions about potentially multilinear hypermedia narratives that could be created using similar software.

Meaning-Rich Hypermedia Environments

2.1 The study of meaning-rich hypermedia environments is not new. Initial sociological studies of new media involved text-based role-playing games in the 1990s (see Jones 1998 on text-based Multi-User Dungeons), and studies of successors to such games involve graphics-intensive, physics-based Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games that demand more computer and internet resources (see Nardi 2010 on an ethnography of the *World of Warcraft*). In other words, I am not "cyberbolising" (Woolgar 2002) the increasing saturation of the senses online. Rather, I am highlighting the *possibilities* that such technologies afford sociologists to present their data that have surfaced over the last few years. These affordances are primarily twofold – One, an increased internet bandwidth for higher quality video, audio and still images and two, an increased ease of use (and availability) of software and hardware to *create* and *render* hypermedia.

2.2 Broadband, or high-speed internet access, is becoming increasingly common. The United Kingdom is ranked 5th amongst OECD countries for broadband penetration, with 18.2 million households^[2] having some form of broadband. An Ofcom survey in May 2010 noted that 92% of British households with broadband boasted speeds of more than 8 mbps – a speed at which a 25mb video (a reasonable quality video of 3 minutes) would (theoretically) take 26 seconds to download^[3]. Likewise, an entire DVD-quality film would theoretically take about 1 hour to download – meaning that it is not entirely implausible to consider distribution of high quality internet via online means.

2.3 The pervasiveness and year-on-year increasing speeds of broadband imply that researchers should not shy away from creating multimedia formats of data that generate large file sizes, because users are increasingly becoming able to access them. Previous work involving video or other forms of media (Pink 2007) would often mean that researchers would either have to distribute their findings via physical discs (CD-ROMs or DVDs) or limit themselves to shorter clips or video stills on webpages (Pink 2007). In other words, the means of disseminating data are becoming increasingly complex and the ability of users to access them increasingly sophisticated. I argue that sociologists can leverage on these possibilities by creating richer forms of data based in hypermedia environments.

2.4 Sociologists are deeply *involved in* and *study* rich hypermedia environments, but they rarely *use* these

environments to present their own data or enrich their own findings, with some exceptions^[4]. One difficulty with doing that has previously been access to and knowledge of both software and hardware needed to create rich hypermedia were often expensive and software in particular was sometimes difficult to master. Only until recently, creation of rich hypermedia would lie in the hands of enthusiasts or professionals with specialist domain knowledge. Recent developments in the consumer market have meant that video and hypermedia production have become more mainstream. This is particularly so in two important areas – content production through "free" software in major operating systems and web publishing through social media outlets. I will deal with each of these in turn.

Creating and Sharing Hypermedia

3.1 Hypermedia production using non-specialist software has improved to the point that it is now possible to draw upon programmes included in mass-market operating systems to create meaning-rich content. Two programmes are of particular note here – Apple's iLife software suite, part of its OSX operating system, and Microsoft's Live Movie Maker, part of its Windows operating system. I will deal with the latter as both suites offer similar results. Windows Live Movie Maker is a simple programme that allows individuals to pull together images, videos, text and audio to create video files that can then be disseminated via the web or other forms of media. It was designed specifically for mass-market consumers, meaning that many complicated processes were either eliminated or simplified in their function and use in comparison to professional-level video-editing programmes like Adobe Premiere.

3.2 At the same time, sharing produced content has also become simplified and to a certain extent, cost-free. Video-sharing websites allow for slideshows, music, videos and anything that can be encoded into a video file to be uploaded and presented to viewers. The main advantage of video-sharing websites is that one does not pay for bandwidth used by viewers, as that burden is shouldered by the website itself. The most popular website, Youtube, is a good example and is often leveraged upon by academics as a channel for virtual conference presentations. However, other websites also offer similar services. Vimeo, for example, allows users to apply a password to their video, such that only a select group of individuals can have access. The case studies in this paper leverage on Vimeo and its ability to support High Definition, site-protected^[5] videos to deliver their content to a large number of viewers.

Applying Hypermedia Technology to enhance Auto/Biography, shape Participatory Research and Visualise Everyday Life

4.1 Although hypermedia presents methodological opportunities to both qualitative and quantitative research, my case study suggests that it is especially beneficial to researchers utilising auto/biography. Auto/biography focuses on the study of the individual to find the social (Evans 1993) - it can show how individuals create their life-histories and use these histories to shape their decisions and plans (Evans 1993, Rapport 1999). As Rapport (1999:3) notes, "individuals are responsible for seeing present moments of being in the context of past and future ones." Auto/biographical narratives have been used in a wide variety of sociological studies. For example, that of race and ethnicity making (Alibhai-Brown 1995, Kenan 1999, McBride 1996, Merton 1988). It "reveals some of the dynamics of lives and the activities of living ...exposing the substance of the lives in which ethnicity and race operate tactically..." (Knowles 2003:53).

4.2 Hypermedia environments support and enrich auto/biographical narratives in the same way that ethnographic film creates additional layers of information about a researcher's informants (see Pink 2007)^[6]. However, hypermedia environments can further extend narratives by creating interactive and democratised sets of data that encourage non-linear explorations of an informant's narrative. A researcher building a hypermedia environment like a website can choose to fragment data or create a more linear presentation. In my case study below, the video used by photojournalists is linear, but within the entire website, viewers are encouraged to browse and forage different stories in different sequences. Also, because each film on the website is controlled by the user (i.e. client-side), there is at least an ability for a viewer to pause, skip ahead or repeat aspects of a narrative, creating a potentially different experience of an informant's biography from individual to individual.

4.3 In this way, hypermedia also presents opportunities in exploring different aspects of participatory/ collaborative photographic research. Pink (2007) noted two significant forms of collaborative research in visual ethnographies. One involved the ethnographer taking photographs in collaboration with his or her informant. In other words, the informant would sometimes direct the ethnographer on angle; style and subject matter (see Pinney (1997) on his work on farmers in India). The other involved informants receiving cameras of their own, from which they would produce their own images for use in a researcher's project (see Radley and Taylor (2001) on hospital patients). Likewise, they may also supply their own historical photographs, like family albums, making these images also informant-generated. These might also serve to complement images taken by the researcher (see Twine 2006).

4.4 Participatory photographic research is particularly popular amongst researchers looking to avoid or challenge masculine or exploitative ethnographic "gazes", the most obvious of these being imperial-era photographs of colonised individuals and groups (Maxwell 2000). As Pink (2007:27) argues, scholars like Mulvey (1989) and Sekula (1989) have shown how "women, or the less powerful, are oppressed by an objectifying masculine gaze that is implied in the way they are represented visually in both film and photography". Participatory research, especially those studies that encourage informant-generated content, create opportunities for informants to have their own voice, thereby subverting potential distortions that may arise from viewing data or analyses solely from a researcher.

4.5 Hypermedia further democratises participatory research in two important ways. The first involves narrative audio and visual layers that intermingle and inform the viewer. As the next section shows, the photojournalists' subjects are not just photographed, but are allowed to narrate their own stories and emotions to the viewer. Informants are thus literally given their own voice on top of photographic images that claim to give one kind of record of their everyday lives (more on this later). The second way is an increase in viewer autonomy. Hypermedia allows for a more interactive experience, encouraging the viewer to view, re-view, skip or select parts and sections of data that he or she may or may not be interested in^[7].

More importantly, it is only semi-linear. Although the photo narratives we see in *Through the Lens* follows a chronological timeline, it can be rewound, fast-forwarded or paused. This has obvious implications over passive watching of film in theatre, and grants users a choice in constructing their own narrative. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, the positioning of narratives on the website (due to the site's navigational design) actually encourages a certain degree of random exploration, meaning that viewers can create their own overview and an individual experience of the various voices and stories on display.

4.6 Viewers thus become a "third", often silent collaboration group in participatory research. Although we as researchers are always aware of a degree of interpretivity on the part of our viewers/readers, hypermedia environments allow us to further reflexively subvert and undermine our own claims to authenticity, creating a fluid interpretive space that works to avoid objectifying or reifying our informants. The key challenge then is how to adjust the interfaces of hypermedia environments to increase a viewer's autonomy and how to increase collaboration between a researcher and viewer. I shall consider this challenge at the end of this paper.

4.7 Finally, hypermedia environments are able to visualise the textures of everyday life (Jhala 2004) that text-only narratives would struggle to do. Through the incorporation of audio visual and textual elements they can engage with and draw the reader into a researcher's informants' lives and ways of living (Halford and Knowles 2005). Pink's (2007) study of Büscher's use of video, still images, text and audio showed how a researcher could capitalise on hypermedia environments. This was done through weaving and interspersing multiple forms of media throughout a linear narrative. As Pink points out

"The introduction of so much of the visual data into the text also invites the viewer to several possibilities, including: to engage with the experiences of the people represented on a personal and empathetic level; to re-analyse the data her- or himself; to reflect on not only the design process as it is represented in the text, but also on the research process as it is embedded in the video data." (Pink 2007:200)

4.8 Despite these advantages, there are less instances of hypermedia appearing in peer-reviewed articles. Some of the best examples of socially-rich hypermedia come not from sociology but from journalism. Newspapers have begun to recognise that print alone can no longer sustain their businesses and that they must find alternative channels in which to disseminate their content. In the United Kingdom, the BBC has capitalised on hypermedia on various levels of technical complexity. Their iPlayer is an example of high-bandwidth hypermedia in the form of streaming HD video delivered via the internet to both personal computers and portable media players.

4.9 Less technically complex but still content-rich, the BBC News website also regularly features slideshows of photographs synced with audio voiceovers. By examining the BBC News' website, one can see just how this has evolved. In 2003, an article^[8] about Anna Lindh, a Swedish politician stabbed to death, involved a set of 9 photographs with a simple textual caption. The photographs were small (to accommodate smaller screen sizes in 2003) and the interface was simple. In 2010, an article^[9] about the Cholera outbreak in Haiti involved photographs about three times that size, with an option to play the images automatically. The recent coverage of the freeing of 69 Chilean miners involved a running slideshow of photographs^[10] with an audio overlay of news coverage, telephone interviews and music.

4.10 While these slideshows are of a general journalistic interest, they do not always interrogate the social lives of individuals. They provide an interesting angle to a particular incident, but do not always consider deeper specificities of the environments, events or individuals they investigate. However, other journalists have chosen to exploit hypermedia and create intense, rich and yet compact accounts of their informants. One particular example of this is a new initiative by photojournalists and journalists of the Straits Times. The Straits Times is the main English-language broadsheet publication in Singapore. It publishes content in both print and electronic formats on a part-free part-subscription model in the latter. Users can access short versions of news stories on their website www.straitstimes.com but are required to pay to access full versions.

Through the Lens

5.1 Over the last year, journalists and photojournalists from the Straits Times have leveraged on hypermedia to extend stories published in print. Creating a new section in their online presence called *Through the Lens*^[11], journalists draw upon data gained when investigating to exceed the limitations of print. I first came across *Through the Lens* whilst browsing for daily news stories about Singapore on the Straits Times Interactive (STI) website, the newspaper's online presence. A blog post by Samuel He, whose photojournalistic work on immigrant workers in Singapore I found especially inspiring, drew me to investigate further. I first engaged with the site as a member of the public, and when I realised they were doing something methodologically and sociologically significant, I started to analyse it in more detail.

5.2 Most of the stories on *Through the Lens* concern specific individual's everyday lives and are told from the perspective of the individuals themselves. Each hypermedia story lasts approximately five minutes, and is a bricolage of still photographs, moving videos, text and audio interviews. I will draw upon two of these stories to illustrate what can be done with current advances in hypermedia technology. Before that however, I will briefly consider the interactivity of the website and how this helps to create additional opportunities for presenting one's data.

5.3 *Through the Lens* is simple, with less interactivity than a larger, fully specified website. This is largely because *Through the Lens* appears to be designed as a microsite – an addition to a larger web presence of Singapore's *Straits Times* broadsheet. Despite its simplicity, the website's layout and navigation suggest an availability of resources beyond stories of everyday life. Journalists and photojournalists offer their own reflections on stories presented in the form of blogs, there are also daily and weekly updates of their work from *The Straits Times*'s print edition.



Figure 1. Through the Lens microsite (Photo Essay Section)

5.4 In Figure 1 above, we can see a selection of photo essays that contain the two stories I will be focussing on in the rest of the paper – To the right and left of the page, there are navigational arrows that loop three new stories each time they are clicked. As I mentioned above, this suggests a level of customisability for the experience of the viewer. Instead of being treated to a linear presentation of several film clips, the user is able to choose what to view first, later and what not to view at all by using the navigational arrows and preview images.

5.5 The preview images of each photo essay in Figure 2 also serve a secondary purpose – they provide a flavour to the website about the general, macro-level content of everyday life that journalists and photojournalists on the website propose to investigate. This aspect is important because it exhibits the utility of using graphical, instead of textual links in a hypermedia environment. Once we navigate through these pages, we are presented with two stories that I will use to show how a combination of photographs, text and audio can come together in an interactive environment to enhance our understanding of social lives.

Kevin Lee and Tay Et – Intimate Lives^[12]

6.1 Kevin's story was one of the first articles featured on *Through the Lens*. It tells of a 21 year old man with muscular dystrophy, his life and the life of his mother, Tay Et who cares for him full-time. It is about kinship, social acceptance, and living both on the periphery of society as well as being the centre of attention in public. It takes an intimate look into the home and public life of Kevin, his mother Et and their relationship with each other and the wider public sphere of hospitals, doctors and strangers.

6.2 The slideshow opens with two brief paragraphs setting the context of the photographs. From that point on the story is narrated purely by Kevin and Tay Et who take turns talking about their fears, feelings towards one another, and simply describing mundane activities like caring and being cared for. The photographer, Desmond Lim, uses his images as a visual overlay of Kevin and Tay Et's narratives. Tay Et begins by introducing herself, her son and describing the sequence of care she has to provide for Kevin, including waking up to turn him over multiple times during the night. What is striking is her frank reflections on herself, immediately and before she lets the audience know whose voice is narrating the slideshow (see Figure 3 below)



Figure 2. Tay Et and Kelvin at Home (00:18 of 4:26)

6.3 Whilst it is entitled "A Mother's Love", the slideshow reveals many more things to the reader than just Tay Et's devotion to her son. In the span of four and a half minutes, it exposes the following aspects - One and most obviously, the everyday relationship between mother and son. Two, it creates a visual interrogation of the physical and social body. Three, it is an emotive portrait of sickness and the social position of an ill person in society. Each of these aspects overlap and are interwoven with each other, such that we are presented with a complex and concentrated burst of everyday life. I will deal with each of these in turn, and show how hypermedia as a *combination* of text, audio, images and movements *accentuates* each aspect.

6.4 The everyday relationship between Tay Et and Kelvin is exposed throughout in two significant ways. The first is the way either individual is positioned and posed against each other. In Figure 2 for example Tay Et adjusts her son's breathing apparatus, but at the same time looks as if she is locked into an embrace with him, signalling intimacy, trust, dependence and care. These signals are similar when she brushes his teeth, a typically personal and intimate act transformed into a sign of dependency. That Tay Et is all but removed from the frame (Figure 4) except for her hands reminds one of how even the most personal of things now becomes a communal activity.

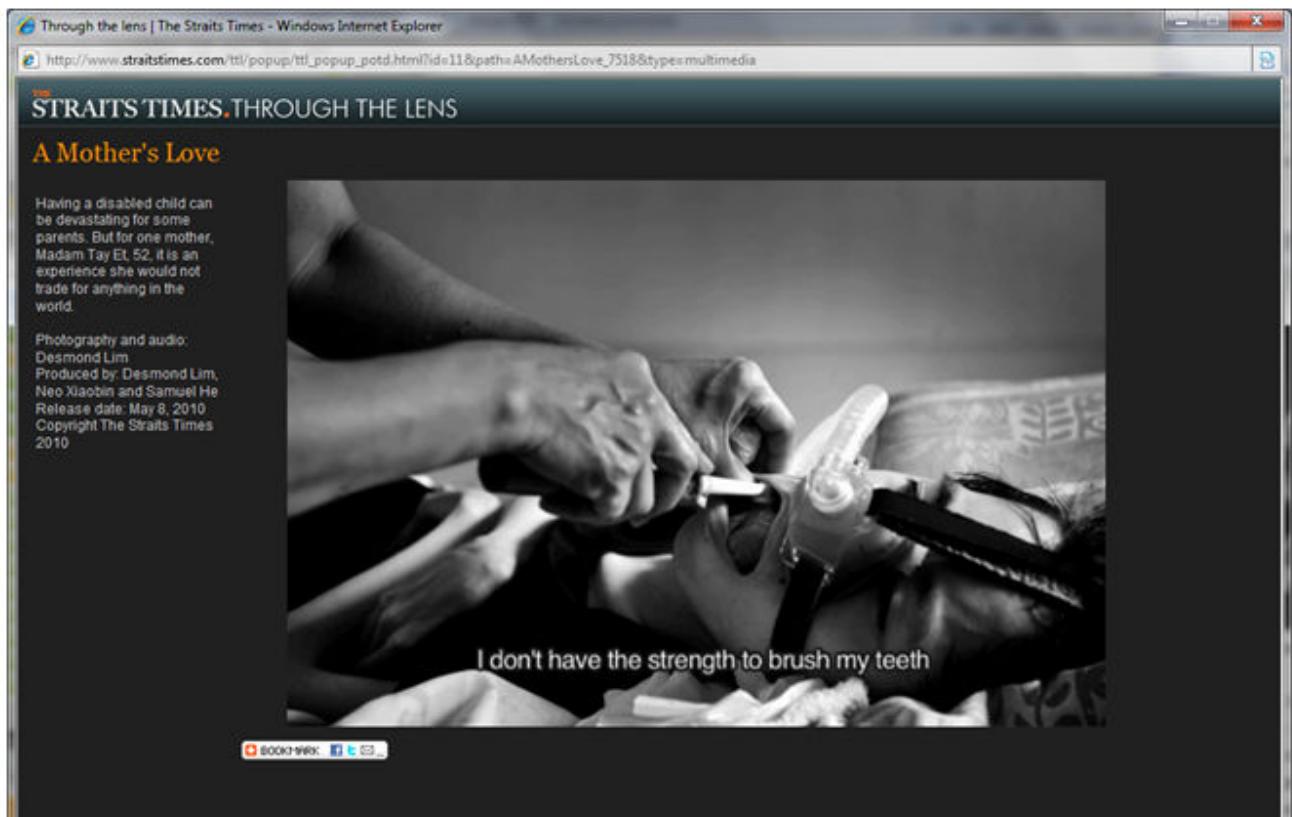


Figure 3. Teeth-Brushing (00:56 of 4:26)

6.5 Kelvin's dependence on Tay Et is manifested in ways other than the images on show. They are suggested in localised contexts that require an understanding of the way contemporary Singaporean society works. Most tellingly, Tay Et speaks in Mandarin (translated into subtitles) but Kelvin speaks in English. Scholars have previously noted (Kong and Yeoh 2003, PuruShotam 1998) how Mandarin and Chinese dialects (and speakers of Mandarin and dialects) have become economically marginalised in Singapore through historical, global and political processes. That Kelvin creates his narrative in English and Tay Et creates hers in Mandarin accentuates the *pathos* of Kelvin's condition. It suggests that he has the capacity to increase his family's economic position, but his body has become misaligned with the demands of economics and commerce. Despite the world moving around them, Kelvin and Tay Et maintain a parent-child relationship both socially and economically.

6.6 Kelvin's body is also exposed to the reader, the individuals around him and the environment that surrounds him. As Tay Et wheels him into the hospital and around public places, the images betray a physical distance (Figure 4) between Kelvin and passers-by and on-lookers. Their faces and postures seem uneasy and unsure of how to interact with him, and this is especially so with children who more easily betray their feelings through their expressions. The image in Figure 6 exposes that awkwardness powerfully. Notice how the head of the woman is cropped off, leaving only Kelvin and two young girls in the frame. It is as if the photographer had isolated him with the most honest of on-lookers.

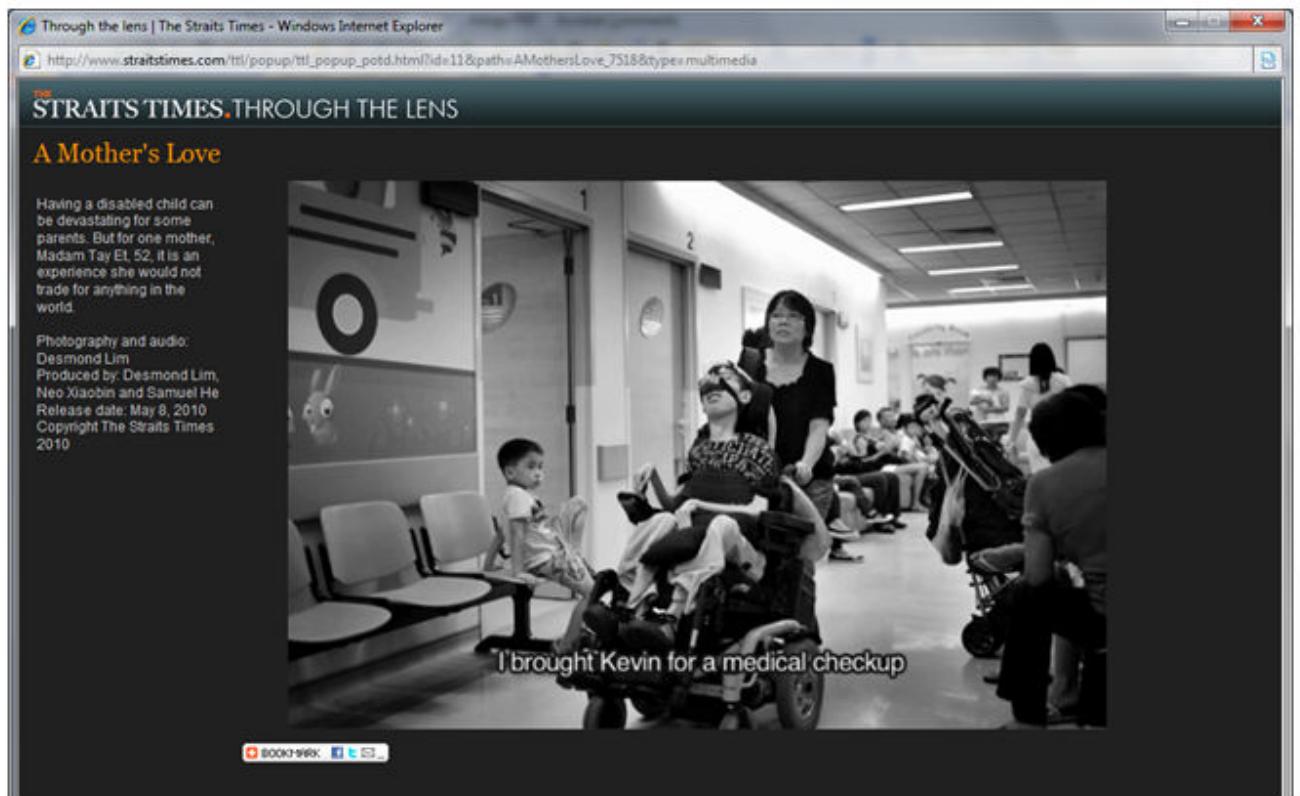


Figure 4. Hospital (01:28 of 04:26)

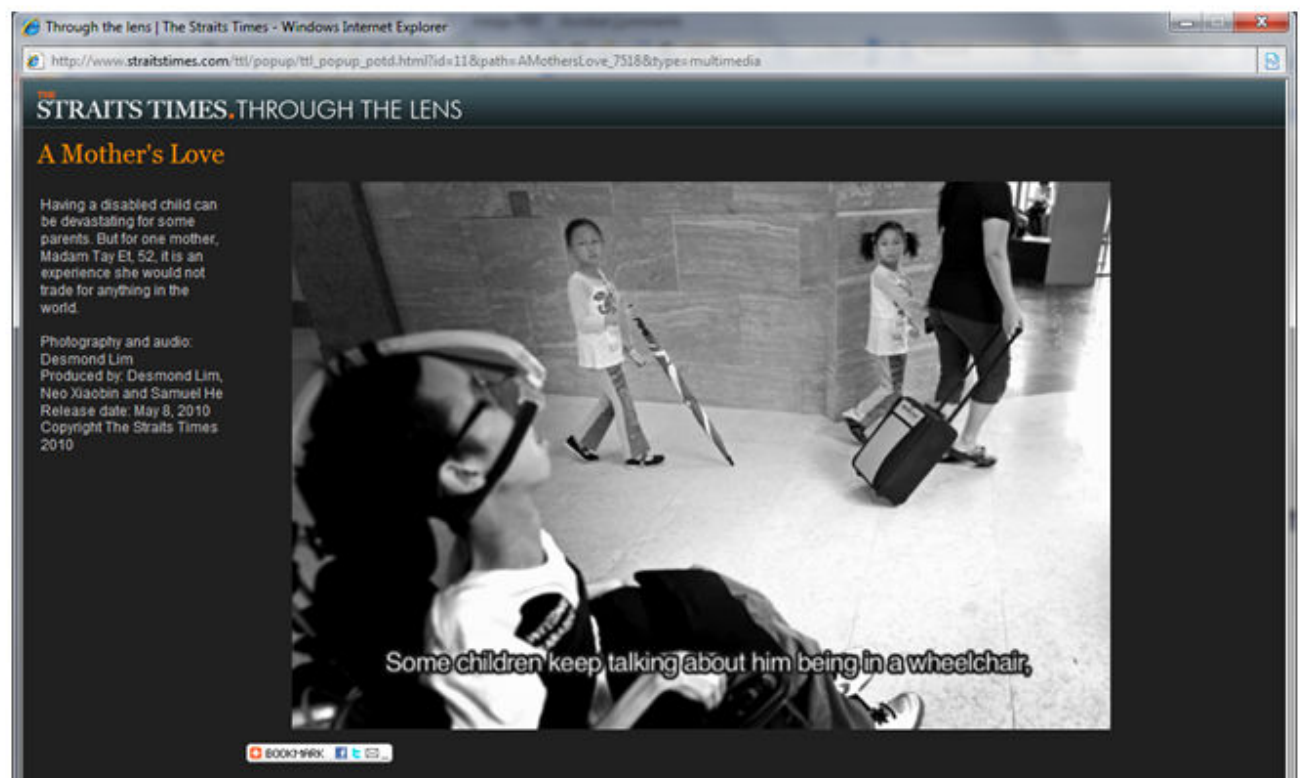


Figure 5. Outside (02:57 of 04:26)

6.7 Tay Et maintains a poker-face composure throughout the time they are in public, her "normal" body a foil against Kelvin's physically wasted-away form. She confesses that she has to maintain a physical and emotional barrier both around and against Kelvin. When he experiences complications during a routine medical test, she talks about how she cannot cry, even though she wants to because Kelvin would see the fear and weakness in her tears.



Figure 6. Becoming an On-Looker (01:48 of 04:26)

6.8 In Figure 6 Kelvin's body becomes enveloped in a mass of medical bodies working to stabilise him. Tay Et is physically demarcated and momentarily helpless, her expertise as a mother negated in this medical environment. The photograph in Figure 6 is unique because it is a rare moment where the reader's attention on Kelvin's body is taken away and placed on Tay Et's figure. The contrast of her clothes and her awkward peering over the shoulders of nurses betray her concern and feelings of helplessness.

6.9 At the end of the slideshow we experience a convergence of the two main themes of mother-son relationships and the body. As Tay Et muses about Kelvin's condition she reflects on her own body. She expresses her desire to be healthy in order to compensate for his illness – "I just hope to be healthy so that we (her and her husband) can take care of him for the rest of his life. Only then can I rest in peace." That closing line creates an almost poetic feel, a play of words on "rest", resonating against her son's inert and restful form. Tay Et's body is a fundamental instrument in caring for her son's body. Without it the relationship changes as well. As she narrates these thoughts, images of her taking Kelvin to the playground fade in and out, ending with her gazing tentatively into his oxygen mask-covered eyes.

6.10 The efficacy of this slideshow is in no small part to the quality of the images by Desmond Lim. Each image is poignant, each telling a smaller sub-plot of the story and revealing aspects of the protagonists' relationship and their bodies. A deliberate removal of colour forces us to focus on shapes, lines and forms, further accentuating Kelvin's frame and body. Shadows and uneven lightings force a reader's focus on particular aspects of a photograph. For example, in Figure 3 Kelvin's oxygen-mask is slightly dodged^[13] to make it appear brighter (judging from an aura around it).

6.11 Kelvin and Tay Et's story concludes with a reconciliation of sorts, an epilogue that brings together their concerns about each other (not just Tay Et's concern about Kelvin). It is also telling that much of the conclusion involves photographs taken in public, rather than at home, suggesting that Kelvin's life is, or should be, far more than a wheelchair in his bedroom. In this aspect the photojournalist's positioning of Kelvin in public confronts us with the discomfort we may feel with aesthetically different individuals we encounter in our everyday lives.

In Edward's Words – Private Spaces, Intimate Everyday and Material Lives^[14]

7.1 Edward Khoo's story is a far more intimate account of an individual's space. In a short montage of film clips Edward narrates his life-views for the reader, revealing the way he makes meaning in life. What is striking about this montage is the depth at which the camera penetrates the mundanity of Edward's private and domestic life. Unlike Kelvin and Tay Et's story, the camera or the protagonist never leave the home, and indeed remain in either the kitchen-diner or the living room. It is a small, 2 bedroom flat in a suburban part of Singapore – the preface states that Edward lives alone at the age of 80, despite fathering 8 children from 2 marriages. He is a cancer survivor, and a retired policeman.

7.2 The montage focuses on Edward engaging in mundane everyday activities – eating, washing up and watching television. Twice it is positioned at the doorway to his flat, the same angle one would have if walking past and peering in. In Figure 7 below Edward washes up in his kitchen-diner, which typically for 2 bedroom government flats in Singapore is located at the rear of his flat. The effect is an enveloping of his form within his household, his eclectic and vast collection of religious artefacts partially shielding him from an outsider's gaze. Edward is largely left to his own devices in the video, the camera sometimes taking an almost voyeuristic feel, especially at the end where it shows him closing up for the night. The way the lights go off one by one become analogous with a man slowly entering the twilight of his life – the everyday

becoming a metaphor for the spiritual and the significant.

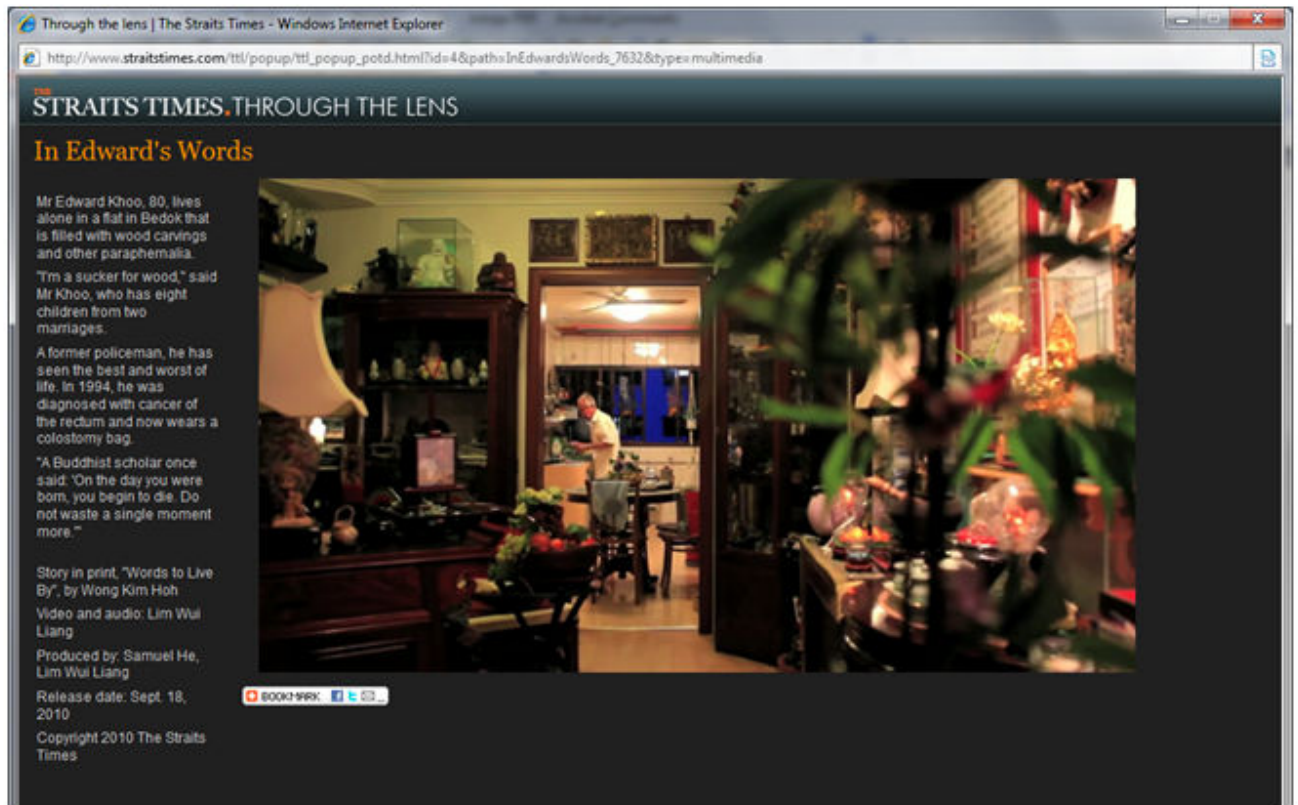


Figure 7. Inner Sanctum (00:36 of 03:05)

7.3 But it is not just the lived activities of Edward that are on display. His material life-path becomes open to the viewer who wants to look into this man's social life. Lingered shots of his living room walls create a cultural inventory (Collier and Collier 1986) backdrop to his audio narrative. Figure 8 shows how when even using a video-camera it is possible to create a fixed and lingering still capture of an individual's material and *dwelled* environment (Ingold 2000). The inventory comes alive as well because the video is able to capture the flickering lights of his doorway in the mirror just to the right of the centre of the frame.

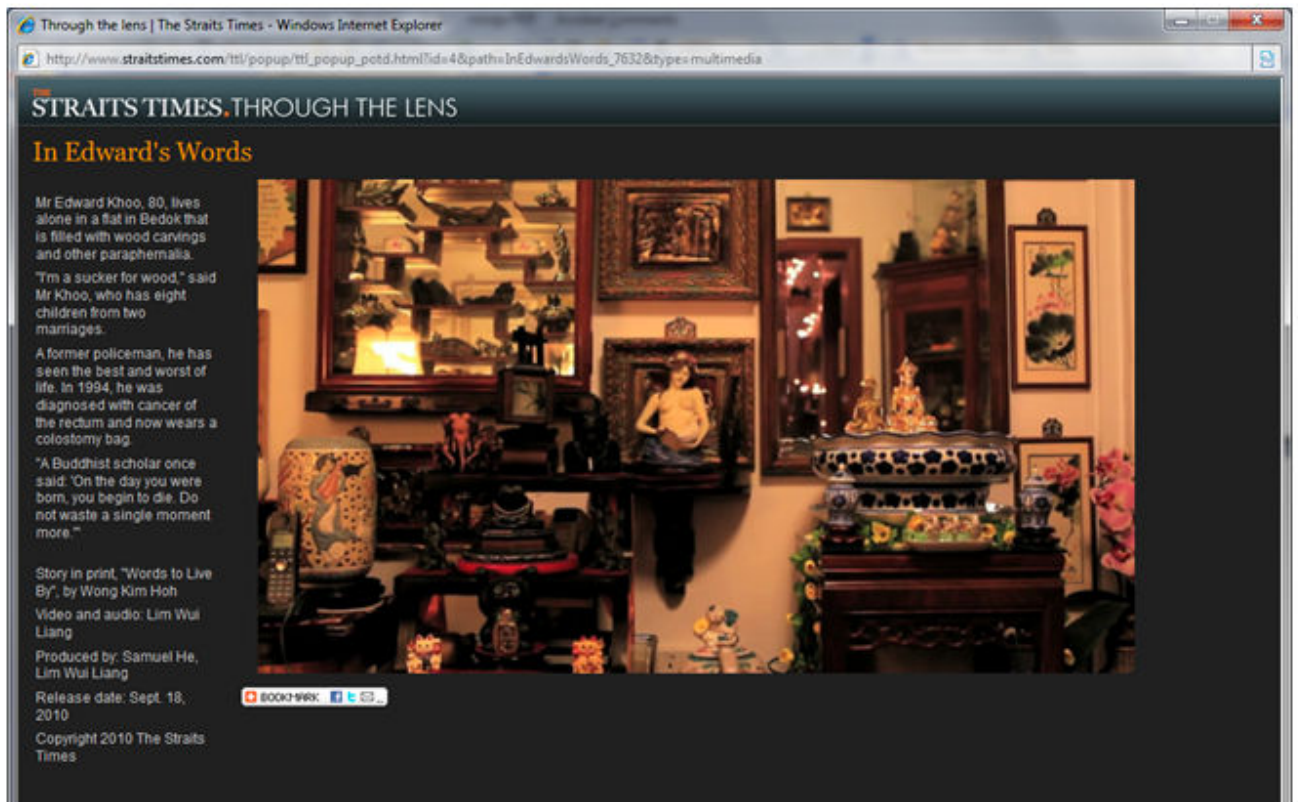


Figure 8. Cultural Inventory (01:21 of 03:05)

7.4 From these three minutes it is possible to see just how effective a camera is in recording Edward's

everyday and material life. We see Edward's routine compressed into a series of activities, his comforts are snapshots of singing canaries, television and most of all his string of flashing Christmas lights that are strewn across the ceiling of his flat. The montage is particularly effective at this compression for two reasons. The first is that the post-production process, where important facets of life are distilled into a storyboarded narrative – routine, inventory, monologue. Instead of a continuous reel of film, the reader is treated to a concentrated approach. The post-production process also incorporates another important feature of limited interactivity - the ability to pause, rewind or replay parts of it. Although possible with all kinds of film, the responsibility is now handed over to the viewer to make the decision, as opposed to chronologically linear screenings.

7.5 The second is because of the combination of interview and personal narrative spliced into a monologue. Instead of a conversation between Wui Liang (the journalist) and Edward, Edward is left to his own musing, descriptions and opinions. Only once midway through do we hear Wui Liang's voice asking him about the Christmas lights. It would be easy to imagine that at the data-gathering stage the monologue was more of a dialogue, with Wui Liang asking questions and Edward answering them. However, at the post-production stage Wui Liang steps aside to let Edward become his own narrator. Edward begins to take on a form of self-reflection, looking back onto the years that he has lived, the way he is spending his time now, and the time that he has left.

7.6 A similar thing occurs with Kelvin and Tay Et's story, and this is important because it means that although we visually witness their lives through the lens of the photojournalist, a degree of collaboration is also achieved with the primary nature of Tay Et, Kelvin (and Edward's) voice. Instead of the journalist telling their story, they are allowed to tell their own story, in a language that they are most comfortable in. The use of English subtitles rather than a translator's voice, especially for Tay Et and Kelvin, create a particularly more authentic experience for a viewer unfamiliar with the Hokkien dialect or Mandarin. It also allows the viewer to hear the inflections in the tone of their voices, which creates an additional layer of emotion onto the video.

Weaknesses

8.1 The main weakness with these montages is also their strength - the shortness of it. At just over three minutes long it is difficult to create a highly textured portrait of Edward or Tay Et and Kelvin. However, this montage was also designed to complement a print article in the Straits Times. The problem then becomes access, because while viewers could view the montage free of charge, they would either need a subscription to access the article it complements, or have access to newspaper archives in Singapore. For scholars to appropriate such technology would then mean that they have to aware of granting access to all and not just some of the relevant materials.

8.2 The other weakness is the linearity of the stories we are presented with. Each story is scripted and presented in a straightforward fashion, similar to watching a short film, except the film is being delivered over a different medium. This kind of linearity does not take full advantage of the possibilities of hypermedia, which might allow for a more interpretive and unbounded form of reading of data. For instance, different clips could be arranged within a space on a webpage that were connected loosely through graphical or textual hyperlinks that might allow readers to "jump" to different points (or positions) in Tay Et/Kelvin's or Edward's journey.

Areas for Future Research: Extending Online Journals like SocResOnline

9.1 Peer-reviewed journals that draw primarily from an online audience are best positioned to leverage on video-sharing websites as a means to deliver hypermedia content. This journal already has a long history of placing text in HTML and disseminating articles in an electronic format. It would not be difficult then, to encourage submissions from practitioners keen on investigating social forms of life using multimedia methods. Also, as I mentioned previously, some scholars have experimented with embedding their videos into webpages as part of their analysis (Büscher 2005).

9.2 However, a key difficulty to using multimedia/ hypermedia is potentially cost. One of these key costs^[15] is bandwidth - the amount of megabytes / gigabytes an internet service provider allows users to download from a website before the site is suspended – is currently less problematic when scholars provide text and still images. In *Sociological Research Online* costs are less related to bandwidth than to person-hours, or the extra time spent editing and preparing images for online publication. I would suggest that this *might* change if more high-definition videos were released, and if this coincided with a rise in viewership, with both factors contributing to increased demands for bandwidth. A simple example of this involves incidents where popular websites (especially international newspaper/ news channel websites) create a hyperlink to an amateur or enthusiast site. The surge in referral traffic often causes the site to crash or be suspended by its host internet service provider, and to bring the site back online requires extra payment for bandwidth capacity.

9.3 It is not cheap to pay for bandwidth to stream videos to a wide and globalised audience. But this is where websites (like Vimeo) come in and allow for three things. One, like Youtube, users of Vimeo can embed their videos on other websites, thereby leveraging on Vimeo's bandwidth rather than their own hosting provider. Two, videos can be password protected, such that the content producer can at their discretion keep videos private to a select group of viewers. Three, videos can be *exclusively* embedded into specific websites of the producer's choice, meaning that the video can be restricted to one or many journals^[16].

9.4 How then should one go about utilising a video-sharing website? It is not in the purview of this paper to develop a how-to guide, but another paper detailing the basic use of "free" software like Microsoft's Windows Live Movie Maker or Apple's iLife suite to create stories similar to ones in *Through the Lens*, along with instructions on how to upload the video to sites like Vimeo or Youtube and streamline access would be very useful. Additionally, non-conventional papers of shorter word length but drawing upon the use of multimedia could also be encouraged, along with a special edition of the journal dedicated to shorter, practice-based pieces that uses multimedia in creative ways.

9.5 Finally, more research needs to be done to address the challenges of providing viewers with more autonomy. Hypermedia presents opportunities to further democratise collaborative/ participatory research by giving viewers more autonomy to navigate through the data as they please, drawing upon the semi or quasi-linearity of website design. I suggest two ways in which this research can be conducted – the first is to start a project that brings together web designers and developers with sociologists to create interactive sociological websites that allow users to customise their experience *and* provide feedback to participating researchers. The second is to encourage sociologists to be bolder with their hypermedia projects, to generate interactive data presentations that go even beyond the hypermedia stories we have seen here in *Through the Lens. Sociological Research Online*, with its resources and established reputation in online sociology journals, is in a prime position to capitalise on these projects.

Conclusion

This paper considered the methodological opportunities that recent innovations in hypermedia have afforded sociologists. Using case studies from practitioners in Singapore, I showed that it was possible to create short but impactful pieces of data that combined video, audio and text into a concentrated presentation of everyday life. One piece focussed on routine, belonging and kinship. The other interrogated the intimate structures of an old man's everyday surroundings. In both these pieces, journalists and photojournalists were able to distil the mundane into the specific, the social from the everyday. Although there still remain challenges for sociologists to do the same within their chosen fields of study, it is an exciting time for individuals to consider expanding their use of non-textual data.

Notes

¹ Also see Pink 2007:204-205 for a review on ethnographic hypermedia distributed through CD-ROMs.

² <http://www.oecd.org/sti/ict/broadband>

³ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/telecoms-research/bbspeeds2010/bbchartpack.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward.do?AwardNumber=0738921>

⁵ Site-protected in this instance means that authors are able to limit the locations in which the video may be embedded. This is especially pertinent in instances where copyright or privacy issues are important.

⁶ At the same time, it should be noted that the films presented in this case study not constitute a strict ethnography, as the journalists' time spent with their subjects appear limited and fleeting. My case study also does not strictly fit into the idea of moving images, because they are slideshows of photographic stills and thus work in related but subtly different ways. My argument here is not about how film can be transposed online for wider distribution, but rather the additional possibilities that hypermedia environments open to researchers who may not normally consider using non-text based methods.

⁷ Of course, books and galleries are similar. One can skip a book section, or re-read a photo essay at different points. However, hypermedia, especially in the form of websites, can encourage a kind of randomness to its structure, depending on how the website is designed. One simply has to visit Youtube, a collection of videos, to see how user experiences can vary greatly because of the website's navigational structure and video link suggestions on each page, sometimes based on a user's keyword searches.

⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/photo_gallery/3099534.stm

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11616672>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-11544807>

¹¹ <http://www.straitstimes.com/ttl/>

¹² http://www.straitstimes.com/ttl/popup/ttl_popup_potd.html?id=11&path=AMothersLove_7518&type=multimedia

¹³ Dodging in photographic post-processing lightens a part of an image, making it more obvious to the observer.

¹⁴ http://www.straitstimes.com/ttl/popup/ttl_popup_potd.html?id=4&path=InEdwardsWords_7632&type=multimedia

¹⁵ Other costs involve creating a satisfactory user interface should a website choose to host and stream videos. This includes not just a front-end interface, but also a sufficiently robust system to handle video uploads, security and privacy settings. Although not impossible, it may very well be more efficient to draw upon free resources from established providers.

¹⁶ The last two points are important because they address some issues of copyright and the duplicative nature of electronic media. This will probably not deter individuals determined to replicate images/text/video elsewhere, but prevents casual downloading that tends to affect some other streaming technologies.

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