HOME

The interplay between text and photograph

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Morro Yi Qiu _____ 22/04/2016

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Abstract

This project examines the interplay between text and photograph. It explores how photography can be affected by any text contained within the photograph. Both photograph and text are tools that can be read to construct meaning. "Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy" (Sontag, 1977, p. 22).

In this research, the potential to construct multiple meanings allows photograph the possibility of cooperating with and being altered by the chosen text. Choosing a particular text may effectively lead the audience to a "more precise understanding of a given subject" (Havermans, Keegan, Hartog, 2015). The meaning of the object (text and photograph), can be "swept from one sphere into another" (Norridge, 2009). The relationship between text and photograph is a complex two-way interaction, in which even subtle changes can potentially transform the nature of how they cooperate with each other.

Contextually, the research reflect on the Asian gay community as the context in my research, and its identity in New Zealand through daily life activities of the participants. This project will also approach, explore and recognise both the original resolution of the notion of home (HOME), the Asian gay community (HOMO) and the identity (ME).

Introduction

This study - Home, the interplay between text and photograph, aims to investigate the interplay between text and photograph. It considers the ways in which these two elements can affect one another. Just as text can add more specific meaning to a photograph, our reading of the photograph can alter the meaning of text. It is not one way; it is a reciprocal conversation.

Songtag (1973) believes that photography, as a possible object of fascination, has multiple potential meanings. Similarly, an audience could be effectively led to understand a precise meaning by reading a particular text chosen mindfully (Havermans et.al, 2015). Integrating photograph and text provides a fertile ground for the creative resolution of contemporary design practice. This research further explores how the meaning of text can be transformed into a visual sign that nonetheless continues to preserve the original meaning.

HOME, HOMO and ME, are three identities of the self that have been constructed using two primary photographic contexts (studio portrait and location documentary), together with the subsequent experimental interplay with text. These identities are family (inherited identity), sexual orientation (community identity), and ego (self-identity) respectively. Discussions on these identities of the self appeared frequently in the responses I received from the participants in my research, which formed an important data set.

In studio portraits, I attempted to explore all three identities of the self in the individual portraits; by then combining them I extended the exploration to collate a collective representation of the Asian gay male community, while preserving individual characteristics. The location documentary photographs primarily aim to communicate the personal characteristics of the subjects.

In order to provide a range of examples, I have varied the balance of text and photograph between these two different photographic contexts; text takes a more prominent role in the studio portraits, while photography takes the leading role in the location documentary.

Three main methodologies have been utilized in this project, each supporting a different stage. Grounded Theory assisted the process of data collection, while Action Research supported the practical processes, the analysis of data, and the narration. Narrative Inquiry was the main methodology used to narrate the stories of participants, which have been retold from my own perspective.

The interplay between photograph and text was initially explored through a series of procedures: screen printing text onto photographs, hand writing characters onto photographs, and digitally overlaying text onto photographs. This led to the research design and focused my research on the Asian Gay Men (AGM) community and their narratives of identity. The outcome of this project is a series of visual discussions created through this interplay between photograph and text, which the research addresses.

GROUNDED THEORY   ACTION RESEARCH   NARRATIVE INQUIRY

METHODOLOGY

HAND-WRITTEN

TEXT   INTERPLAY   PHOTOGRAPH   LOCATION

FONT   STUDIO

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRACTICE   CASE STUDY
LITERATURE REVIEW
DATA COLLECTION

HOME

HOMO   ME
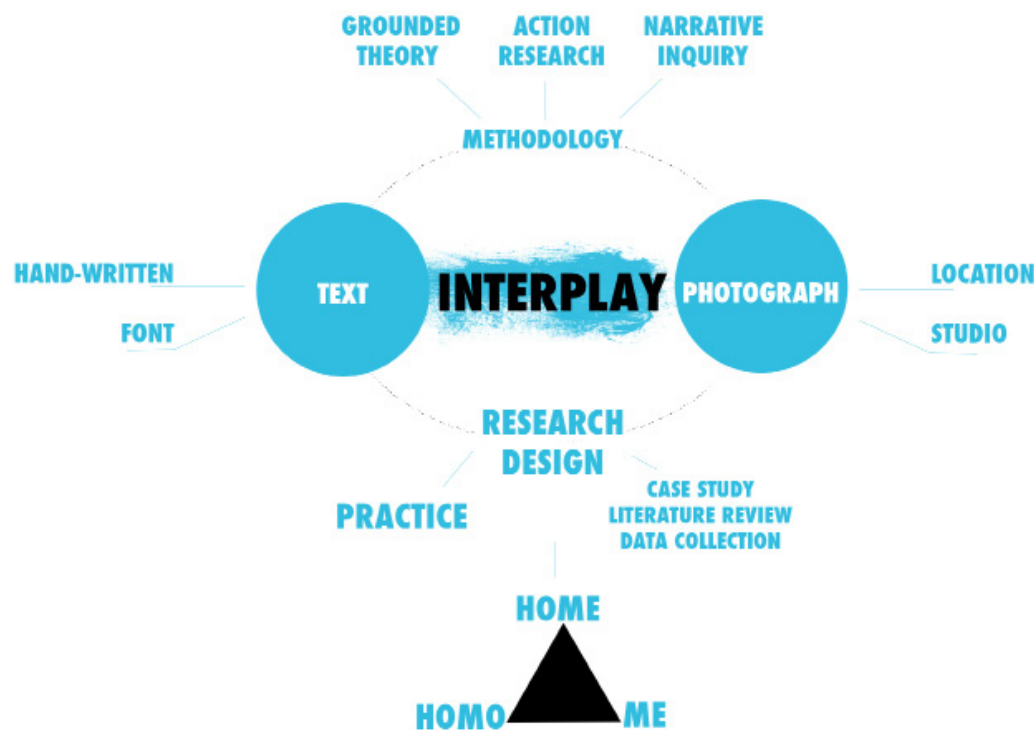
Figure 1

Figure 1 demonstrates the general structure of this project, mainly focusing on the interplay between text and photograph. Text is classified as hand-written and digital fonts. Photograph is classified as location documentary and studio portrait.

The research design of this study is structured around two components. The first is a body of practical research, and the second is an exegesis that reviews the relevant literature, as well as the case study and data collection, with a proportional weighting of eighty and twenty percent respectively. Extending beyond the initial direct scope of the content, the research explores the relationship of Home, Homo and Me - a discussion of my views on home, sexuality and identity for Asian gay men in Auckland. This work embodies elements of these ideas.

Chapter 1 – The Parlance of Text and Photograph

1.1 Interplay and four ways of connection

The word 'interplay' refers to the interaction of and influence between two objects within a similar environment. Interaction and interplay means that two objects that can exist independently are connected, and that each has sufficient power to influence the other. Text and photograph are the two objects of interaction and influence in this project. Kara D. Federmeier and Marta Kutas (2001) demonstrate that "both pictures and words can be thought of as symbols, or objects that "stand for" information that they do not directly represent" (p. 202). This project - Home, the interplay between text and photograph, aims to use these two 'signs' to visually contribute a main theme, which is the graphic outcome of this research.

Neil Cohn (2013) identifies four different ways of connecting text and photograph: Inherent, Emergent, Adjoined and Independent (p. 35).

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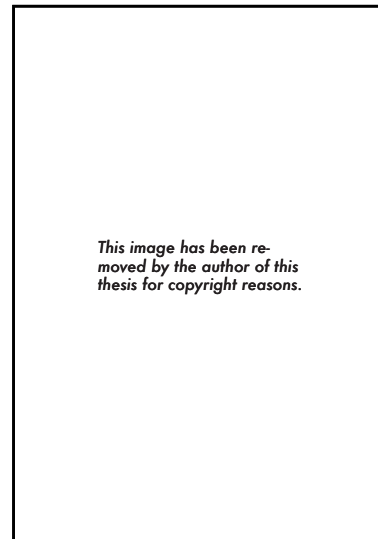
Figure 2. Yang, T. (2014), New Bicycle Art. Retrieved from http://www.fubiz.net/2014/11/16/new-bicycle-art-by-thomas-yang/

Inherent

Inherent interface indicates a precise correlation between text and photograph. In other words, text often exists as part of a photograph. An example that explains the relation of inherence between the text and image is pertinently exemplified by Thomas Yang (2014) in his artwork 'New Bicycle Art' (Figure 2). His work shows an image of a person riding a bicycle with both hands stretched away from the handlebars, but upon further inspection, the contour is actually formed from densely arranged text. Cohn (2013) believes that inherent meaning is created through the relationship between text and photograph, as they are each part of the other's structure. Yang sketches the background of the main photograph by using different depths of ink in the texts, which is the antitype compared to my idea of using photography as the fundamental element that interacts with the text. Thus, in the practical process, I will examine the inherent interface as to whether it is suitable to apply to this project or not.

Emergent

Emergent interface is the method initially I applied to the practical work. It investigates the connectedness of text and photograph. Cohn (2013) admires the emergent method because to him, "text is bound to some visual elements, (it) doesn't count as image itself" (p. 38). In my view, most magazine covers are involved with the idea of emergent interaction. Figure 3 is a typical magazine cover; it uses different typefaces to enrich the character and the scene by overlaying type in front of and behind the person at the centre. The intentionality and the meaning of the photograph change after cooperating with the other signs. Thus, text and other elements relate to each other in order to construct a photograph, and ultimately present a theme. Based on the emergent interface experience, this project attempts a similar approach. Cohn (2013) states that "While these elements often appear overtly in demonstration", they can be "understood as abstract parts that inherently make up any emergent relationship" (p. 38).

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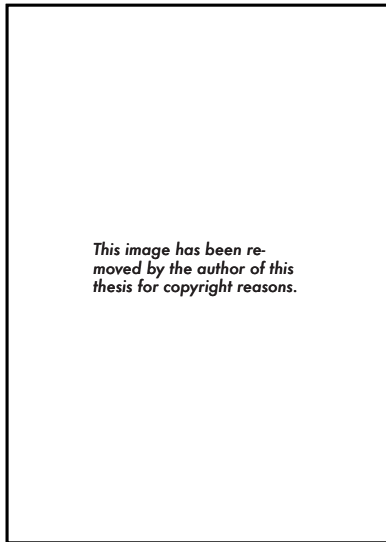
Figure 3. The Sunday Telegraph. (2014). In S. S. W. J Oliver (Ed.). Australia: News Corp. Retrieved from http://www.fromupnorth.com/stunning-magazine-covers-1266/

Adjoined

An Adjoined interface is more concerned with visual integration and less concerned with the concept that occurs between text and photograph. The difference between an adjoined interface and an emergent interface is described as 'narrative captions' (Cohn, 2013, p. 57). It overlays text onto a photo; however the connection between these two mediums is not directly under the same visual representation. In other words, the text and the photograph each have their own narrative, and these may not necessarily relate to each other (Figure 4). Once they are presented in the same plane, the text normally acts as the main narrator to tell the story of the visual outcome. The idea of using adjoined interface is to enhance a specific photo in order to provide a theme greater than the photograph by itself. I practiced this in my studio shots to enhance the discussion around the theme of community.

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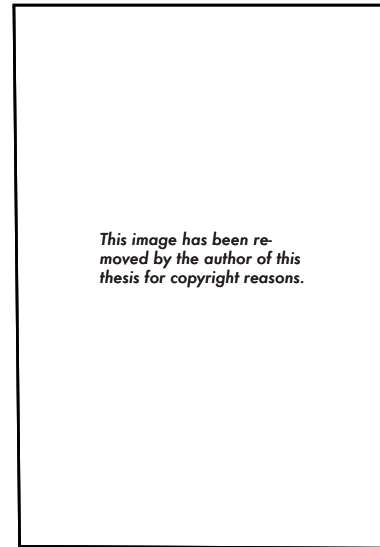
Figure 4. Wong, J. (unknown). It hurts because it matters. Retrieved from http://www.lifehack.org/297705/it-hurts-because-it-matters-john-green?ref=pp

Independent

The Independent interface is less likely to reveal a visual connection between the two elements. Cohn (2013) explains that "Independent interface relation has no capacity to create composite signals" (p. 60), which means the two modalities are not linked visually. The independent interface is not the main method used in this research; however I decided to use it in order to add to further discussion. This research is not only about experiencing a two-dimensional surface, it is also concerned with other elements such as data collection as they also contribute to the interaction between the oral and the written text.

These four methods of graphic representation are explicated by Cohn through his understanding of the connection between two elements, text and photograph, which helped me to explore a deeper meaning of interplay during my practical experience. In a broad context, the word 'image' refers to a range of visual media such as illustration, graphics and, photography, and also to a combination of different media. While this analysis also applies to my discussion, for clarity when discussing my practice, it refers specifically to an image that involves both text and photograph and the interplay between them. Roland Barthes (as cited in Smith, P., Lefley, C. 2015, p.172) describes this as an "un-coded message with persuasive powers proportional to its reality effect". Daniel Chandler (2007) states that photography is 'synchronically' (p. 9). For instance, under certain conditions such as instantaneity, the photograph can be more fabricable than other graphic objects. The works can thus be experienced through four different ways of connecting, creating a co-presentation of text and photograph shown in a two-dimensional, and static form.

1.2 Text and translanguaging

In this project, text is used as a contextual element, covering terms such as words, typography, hand-written, fonts, and calligraphy. John Bateman (2014) writes that "text is simply anything that can be analysed using the techniques of semiotics" (p. 13). In this content, text displays 'entity, behaviour, or pattern' (Bateman, 2014, p.14). Semiotician Roman Jakobson (as cited in Daniel Chandler, 2007) demonstrates that "deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs whatever and with the character of their utilisation within messages, as well as with the specifics of the various sign systems and of the diverse messages using those different kinds of signs" (p. 4). Text, therefore, is simply a sign that contributes to the meaning, visualisation, and interaction of a photograph.

The main approach to the text in my discussion is known as translanguaging. Translanguaging is about the interaction between "visuality and verbality" (Lee, 2015, p. 441). Using my background, I experimented with Chinese calligraphy to write characters (Figure 1.2.1). Chinese character writing has unique advantages, such as diverse strokes, complex structure, and strong plasticity. Feifei Liu (2013, p. 5) believes that "in handwriting authentication, Chinese character writing has more individuality and less similarity". I felt that this method would provide me with the most effective representation for text discussion, and could create an interplay with photography.

Figure 1.2.1

In reality, the interviewed subjects were mostly bilingual and from different countries in Asia. All these countries are respectful of their individual writing culture, and their character writing differs according to the culture (Figure 1.2.2). Understanding all the different linguistic expressions is beyond the scope of the researcher; therefore in order to ensure that the participants understood the meaning of the written characters applied in the practical work, English text played the role of the sign, while other language signs were used only as auxiliary elements.
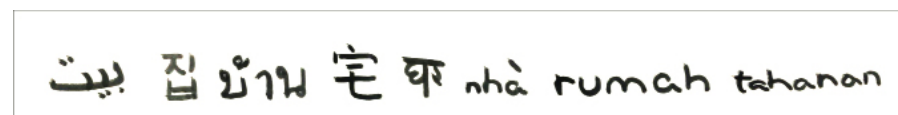
Figure 1.2.2

Lee (2015) believes that "Translanguaging is a crucial resource for linguistic creativity in communication practices in general and aesthetic practices in particular" (p. 444). This supports the idea of including text as a medium that could convey the message from my view of the data collected from the participants. Chinese artist Xu Bing aims to "mix(ing) and mesh(ing) not just different language codes and writing systems, but different genres, materials and locations" (Jarworski, A. 2014, p. 84). My approach to aesthetics is not as avant-garde as Xu Bing's. I utilise translanguaging as a method of. transferring information to a particular sign in my text design, and the representations of text as a language sign.

1.3 A Photograph and the three positions

In this research, the photograph mostly refers to photographs taken by the researcher. The elements in a photograph convey a special message. A photograph catches and freezes the action of the subject. As Rudolf Arnheim (1974) explains, 'A photographic appearance reveals the snapshot as a fragment' (p. 151). Given that the photograph consists of many small fragments, such as the subject, the background and so on, the meaning of the image must be contributed to by all the elements in the photograph.

I found that with both types of my photography, the background fulfilled different functions. Some works clearly told the story of the person in the image. These stories were mostly constructed from the various background elements within the photograph. The background in the photograph also contributed to the narration, perhaps as much as the subject did. I use the term "narrative background" to describe the actual life scene behind the participant in the photograph, then use the term "blank background" to describe the total white scene behind the participant in the photograph. Through the narrative background, I tried to clearly understand the different relationship between each elements. The relationship of different affections between these two backgrounds is they can both act as supplementary to the main idea, however, the blank background (mainly white), has the opposite effect to one that contributes to the narration. These two styles of background are treated as the object study. A location shoot has a real environment as the background, while a studio shoot has a blank background.

When discussing what kind of guidance the photograph, regardless of background, offers to our perception of it, I introduce the following concept to describe the relationship between Sign, Object and Interpretant, in order to understand what these three components are and how they work together.

Pierce (cited in Ying, 2013, pp. 48-49) states that at every point of each logic theory, three concepts arise constantly. He calls them: one-position, two-position and three-position. One-position refers to a thing's existence that does not rely on any other thing; two-position means the existence is relative to another thing, meaning the concept is counteractive to other things; three-position is the concept of a medium by which one-position is connected with two-position (Figure 1.3.1).

"Sign, object and Interpret are not always consistent when accepting the intention of each other", writes Zhao, 2010. The following two figures demonstrate that 'I', the researcher (information sender), can send out two streams of photographs, namely studio portraits and location documentaries, about the same subject. I looked at environmental elements such as the equipment in the gym and the movements connected to the person (sign information) to guide the audience (receiver) to know more about the photographed image. However, as the information sender, I am not able to control the fact that the information received by an audience will always match my expectations. The information received by an audience may actually be about the audience's life experiences (cognitive efficiency).
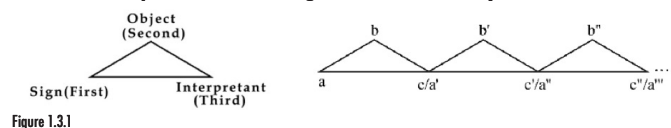
Figure 1.3.1

'I', as the researcher and information sender, project my own point of view of the participants and their stories through my photographs (Figure 1.3.1). As the text is a reflection of the participant's, photograph, it is therefore a cogitation formed from my understanding of the subject, furthered by my desire to narrate my initial interpretation. The resulting images are all different to some extent. The location shoot focuses on the individual story of each participant, mainly revealing their sense of self. The studio shoots however primarily emphasize the concept of community, and community values.

Chapter 2 – The Conceptual and the Contextual

2.1 HOME

Some participants, who have lived in Auckland for many years, still retain cultural habits and influences, such as making tea at home in the eastern manner. Habits formed when they were brought up have not been abandoned or forgotten due to a change of living environment. On the contrary, many participants choose to decorate their homes with cultural and symbolic accessories in their own unique way. Feedback from the participants reveals that home can also be described as a representation of cultural belonging for people who live abroad.

2.1.1 What is home?

A home is never as simple as a roof above one's head. In discussing the definition of home, Peter Somerville (1992, pp. 533-534) puts forward a list of significant key items, including:

Shelter, a physical presence that has been constructed to protect its residents.

Hearth, an environment where people feel at home and are able to relax both bodies and minds.

Privacy, a place where people's privacy is well protected

Roots, a sense of belonging, which is different to affection

Abode, the most basic definition of residence, i.e. any place where people can live, whether it is a palace or a bench in the park.

I would add one more to this list: 'Paradise', all positive features of home, be it real or imagined.

The meaning of home is beyond any definition listed above, and my participants included all these possibilities as a definition of 'home'. Everyone has a unique perspective on home, defined by their cultural influences, education, acquired cognition and other factors. Apart from their own unique perspective of home, the traditional Chinese (also those in other Asian countries) family value of 'having a home' [成家] means getting married. When a man and woman have reached marriageable age, they are supposed to enter into marriage and to have their own home. However, gay marriage is not considered in the traditional view. As of April 2016, there are still no Asian countries that explicitly acknowledge the legal existence of homosexuality. In this sense, homosexuals are 'homeless'. Commonly, in all countries, gay men just wish to 'have a home'.

Having a home is closely related to one's own life values, which are recognisable in daily life. As in a heterosexual marriage, some participants have found their 'other half' and created a home; while others have chosen to settle down in in a community. The definition of home, as described by Sixsmith (1986), includes "personal and physical modes of experience, and also a third component - social experience" (p. 293). The sense of belonging to a home builds not only on personal living space, but also includes the communities that people socialize in.

2.1.2 Where is home?

Through communication with the author Christopher Ferreria (personal communication, April 07, 2016), I understood that the purpose of his work is to present the concept of oneself and home through a gay group in California that employs personal photographs. This continuing project by Ferreria (2016) gives a more open-ended idea of one's identity, one's idea of home and sense of belonging; a mystery, and a journey. In other words, it is the place to return to and the origin, the place where people think they belong. When Asian immigrants choose Auckland as a place to stay, they are surrounded by western culture. Ideally the transformation from their origin to a new place is part of the attraction that immigrants pursue; it becomes home.

Ferreria's project (2016), (Figure 2.1.2.1,Figure 2.1.2.2, Figure 2.1.2.3) contains many similarities to my research, except that he only uses photography as an information medium. In my opinion, this series of photographs presents an extremely powerful story of home by showing different but ordinary gay men.

Ferreria also shared notes about the setting up of the home scene during photo shoots. Coincidentally, we both share a similar idea about not letting the participant's home become a contrived stage to show perfect interior design. Through presenting home decoration and furnishings, clothing styles selected by the interviewees and in some of the works partial bare skin, his research work portrays both vivid personal characters and informative photographic backgrounds. The photograph is thus effective in presenting genuine moments and details of everyday life. When presenting the idea of home, I didn't urge participants to choose their physical dwelling as the only option; anywhere in Auckland that made them feel at home is what the portrait of home is meant to be.

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Figure 2.1.2.1. Ferreria, C. (2011). Tim, Long Beach, California.
Retrieved from http://www.advocate.com/photography/2015/10/24/photos-home-where-one-begins

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Figure 2.1.2.2. Ferreria, C. (2010). Paul and Jack, Winnetka, California.
Retrieved from http://www.advocate.com/photography/2015/10/24/photos-home-where-one-begins

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Figure 2.1.2.3. Ferreria, C. (2011). Jack, San Francisco.
Retrieved from http://www.advocate.com/photography/2015/10/24/photos-home-where-one-begins

2.2 HOMO - The community

Not all males who relate to other males would define themselves as gay. Therefore, in demographic studies about the composition of gay groups, many use MSM (Men who have Sex with Men). The Social Report, (New Zealand, author unknown) from 2006, showed over 12,300 males were living together with same sex partners. However, no analysis of their ethnicity is available. Some data appeared in the research paper Male Call by Saxton and Robinson (1990) late last century. This research divided the MSM population into four main groups; NZ European, NZ Māori, Pacific Islander, and Other. Asians were included in 'Other'. The life conditions of Asian gays in New Zealand were, and still are rarely recorded. The New Zealand AIDS Foundation (2007) explains that Asian gay men "are often deeply closeted because of the anti-gay culture they bring with them, and are potentially more vulnerable to harm because of the lack of social skills and control". With the rapid growth of the Asian population in New Zealand, which has the fastest growth rate of all cultures, the population of Asian MSM couples will also increase.

Two MSM groups in New Zealand have been established to provide services to Asian people. One was the Long Yang Club (now closed), founded in the early 1990s with a targeted service of New Zealand man meets Asian man. The other is Equasian, which was founded in 2014 with a targeted audience of LGBTIQ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning). Gay Express (2014) explains that "Asian peoples often lack visibility and representation in LGBTIQ services and community groups". Personal experience has shown me that some gay Asian men don't like to stand out as being part of a labeled group.

In my project, the function of the community not only plays the role of the supporter behind the scenes, but also acts as the main theme in the studio shoots. Although there were only eight participants in the study, it still manages to represent parts of a much larger invisible group.

2.3 ME - The identity

The letter E in the title, printed in a faded colour, is based on ME with the meaning of ego, as well as self-recognition. There is an idiom in Chinese, "欲盖弥彰", which means the more one tries to hide, the more one is exposed as a result of a lack of place to hide. To fully express the idea underpinned by the idiom, I purposely diluted the colour in the letter E to better convey why some AGMs prefer to hide their identity instead of exposing it, while still wanting to maintain the ego of self-recognition.

As Asians move from east to west, there are many challenges to adapt to. They bring with them the characteristics of modesty and keeping a low profile, common in Asian culture. However, being inconspicuous does not mean being neglected or non-existent. Gay men are often ambivalent about their identity. On one hand, they wish to hide their identity, on the other, they wish to expose their identity because of their ego. The deliberate dilution of the letter E is a metaphor for Asian gay men who do not (or do not wish to) publicize themselves, yet who have still created their special sense of presence within the LGBT family.

Chapter 3 - Methodologies and Methods

3.1 Methodologies

This study first uses Grounded Theory to analyse and utilise the large amount of data that provided a theoretical support for the follow-up experimental work, which is combined with Action Research. Grounded theory is more suitable for theoretical research, and my whole project is experimental (practical research based). Relying on grounded theory does not support the whole process of the research, therefore action research methodology is included as a supplement to grounded theory. Narrative Inquiry is used as the overarching methodology to create a visual narration for the different subjects. "Such research writing allows the researcher to search for an emotional truth" (Ketelle, 2010; Blew, 1999; Denzin, 2008; Stegner, 1962, as cited in Ketelle, D., 2010, p.549). Through narration, Myself as the researcher can combine my personal understanding of the participants with my analysis of the data to "translate experience, memory, and fantasy into fictional truth" (Ketelle, D., 2010, p. 549).

3.1.1 Grounded theory and Action research

Action research and grounded theory are somewhat similar. Namely, both argue that the research process should be maintained. Yet grounded theory adds the circular process of repeated collection and comparison. Action research however requires that the study process must keep to the plan, which means that in-depth excavation must be carried out, under the premise of having plenty of facts, data and investigations, and the study process needs to remain purposeful.

The plan can be changed later, but only after analysis of a relevant phenomenon, or unique result. Other participants' observations and recommendations should be involved, and any necessary adjustments should be made. Grounded theory requires that researcher maintains a clear vision, and regardless of how they carry out the research, the researcher's subjective participation must always be acknowledged (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1489).

The process of data collection involved both the acquisition of photographs and the organization of interview data. The researcher's subjectivity and the involvement of the participants are not directly expressed in the work in the form of comments. Instead, they were communicated to the researcher in the form of data, then modified and utilized. This repeated process of data collection and reuse is named 'Coding', which is the process whereby a theoretical proposition is established in a real sense (Xie, 2009, p. 50). The coding process helps the researcher to understand how to link up common data (Charmaz, 2012). It also creates the opportunity to observe how to communicate between signs, text and photographs.

Since the meaning of a picture is transformable (Xie, 2009, p. 29), then through coding, pictures can be connected to the meaning that I would like them to express. In compliance with the four interrelated and dependent links in action research, which are as follows:, 'plan', 'action', 'investigation' and 'reflection', my research went through the entire process from the initial sampling to a group study. Because of the repeated steps and discussion in Grounded Theory and Action Research, the creative achievement involved going between one sample and many, then coming back from the multiple samples I created to a single sample after comparative studies in different modes. I believe that I have enough representative data from the participants to present a good representative range of different backgrounds and ages.

3.1.2 Visual narrations

In this project, the process of narration applied from the beginning. The creative process is constantly changing and is enriched by talking to different interviewees. In turn this feeds back into the conceptual development and its implications, which adds authenticity to the creation of the practice.

Visual narration considers the way in which photographs can present the identity of the subject. Photographs essentially bring an understanding of subjective "feeling, experiences and contextual influences" (Grushka, 2011, p. 116), to indicate the "privilege and power of social identities". However, this viewpoint seems too weak to support the photograph itself, as it needs to be able to convey the power and privilege of social identities. To avoid interference from the photograph itself, adding text is one of the ways to point out the intended meaning.

Chase (as cited in Diane Ketelle, 2010, p. 550) discusses five modern narrative inquiry approaches for researchers:

a), A clear narrative is a way of understanding personality and
     action, a connection and a view of consequences.
b), View narratives as a way of doing something.
c), View stories as 'enabled and constrained by a range of social
     resources and circumstances'.
d), View narrative stories as 'socially situated interactive perfor-
     mances'.
e), Understand 'themselves as narrators as they develop interpreta-
     tions and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas
     about narratives they studied'.

I refer to these five lenses in my project. I first agreed with lens 'e' as a way of communicating with the participants, as they described their stories in the way that they preferred. The process of narrating also provides thoughts into the visual outcome. Grushka (2011) believes that the process also "impacts on subjectivity and bodies, or sense of self" (p. 73).

The participants commented about various elements used in the photographs, which provided the particular works with a more appropriate mood when interpreting the results. As practical research, it follows the methodologies of theoretical study. This process fully developed my flexibility and freedom as a researcher, and research problems varied between each data collection, collation and reuse.

3.2 Participant recruitment

There were two ethical concerns in this project. Firstly, how to protect the participants, and secondly, how to choose subjects.

3.2.1 Finding participants

Due to the limited data about Asian gays living in Auckland, it was difficult to pre-define the number of expected participants. I met with Asian gays at bars and restaurants, at sport venues such as the badminton stadium and natatorium, as well as at community activities such as the monthly tea party at Equasian. I also designed a poster (Figure 3.1.1.1 and Figure 3.1.1.2), and presented this to potential participants (Figure 3.1.1.3).

Figure 3.1.1.1

Figure 3.1.1.2

Figure 3.1.1.3

Originally From
(First Approach)

Thai : 1
Bahraini : 1
Pilipino : 6
Malaysian : 7
Indian : 2
Hongkongnese : 1
Mainland Chinese : 5

Pilipino   Indian   Mainland Chinese   Hongkongnese   Malaysian
Bahraini   Thai

Figure 3.1.1.4

Originally From
(Final)

Bahraini : 1
Thai : 1
Indian : 1
Malaysian : 3
Mainland Chinese : 2
Hongkongnese : 1

Thai   Indian   Mainland Chinese   Hongkongnese   Malaysian
Bahraini
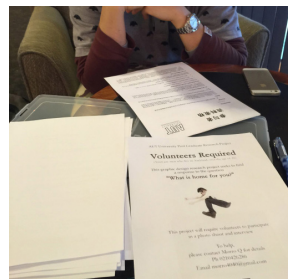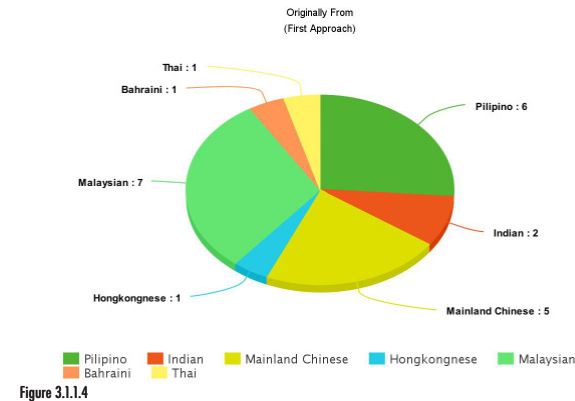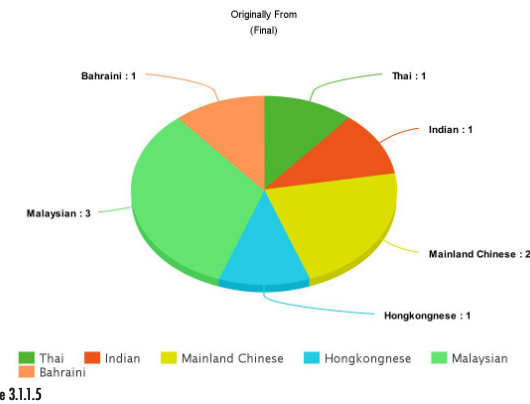
Figure 3.1.1.5

I tried Facebook promotion and friends recommendations. The number of volunteers recruited using the advertisements was zero. Social media response was also very rare. Most volunteers were recommended by friends or acquaintances, the majority of whom were from Auckland Feathers, an LGBT-oriented badminton club. Four weeks of recruitment led to nineteen volunteers aged between their 20s and 50s, from seven countries of origin. Another two men in their 60s and 70s firmly refused to disclose their gay identity (Figure 3.1.1.4 and Figure 3.1.1.5). Having more than enough volunteers, I began to screen them, weighing such factors as nationality, age, life background and emotional state, this resulted in a final number of nine volunteers. I then offered to tell my own story, which laid a foundation for hearing their stories.

3.2.2 Ethical concerns

In the initial phase of the research, I submitted an ethics applica-
tion, which was a process to ensure my understanding of respecting
and protecting the people who participated in my research, and
also to clarify the responsibilities between the participants and
myself. The application was approved by the Auckland University
of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), reference number 15/62
The Home: the Asian Homosexual Community in Auckland.

After ethics approval, I started with interviews that aimed to collect
information. A big concern was the participants' safety. Auckland
may be one of the most gay-friendly cities in the world, but hom-
ophobia exists and potentially could affect both my volunteers
and myself. I doubly confirmed with all the participants to ensure
they were ready to accept the risk. It was also made clear to all
participants that they had the right to withdraw if there were any
concerns.

Chapter 4 – Reflection on Practical Development

As shown in Figure 4.1, the integration of the nine participants into
the same photograph led my experiment in two directions. The first
was the stream of studio portraits and how I could utilise text to
elicit a sense of community through the interplay of elements. The
second stream was the location documentary, which focuses on the
individual story of each interviewee.

Figure 4.1

4.1.1 Photograph - studio portrait

Studio portraits were conducted in the AUT photography studios, where participants were shot against a white background. This put the focus on their physical characteristics, movements and facial expressions.

The studio stream's first aim was to test the correctness of my first idea – can a harmonious background contribute to the function of interplay? The purpose was to study whether text, given the same photographic background, is able to reflect the different characteristics of the interviewees.

Figure 4.1.1.1 Ling Ling's six characters

Figure 4.1.1.2

Figure 4.1.1.3

Figure 4.1.1.4

Figure 4.1.1.5

Initially, an independent experiment was conducted for each participant using just one photo to discuss its importance, as each one had a unique story (Figure 4.1.1.1, Figure 4.1.1.2, Figure 4.1.1.3). The idea of integrating several interviewees' photographs into a single picture was not considered at this stage. It was not until I conducted an interview with five participants who shared similar ages and a nationality (Figure 4.1.1.4) that I realized the sense of community that could be expressed by putting their photographs together into one picture. This ultimately led to all the participants' studio shoots being integrated into the same photograph during post-production. To avoid repeated information, Figure 4.1.1.4 remains just an experiment. This later evolved into a series of experimental group montages as representations of the community (refer to Figure 4.1.1.5).

4.1.2 Text - studio portrait

Considering the respondents' different countries of origin and cultural backgrounds, I tried experiments that involved adding the written term 'home' in different languages, for the purpose of linking a diverse Asian cultural inclusiveness to a western based text system (Refer to Figure 4.1.2.1 – Figure 4.1.2.2). Continuing with the idea of language combinations, I further examined the words as signs, adding another visual dimension. As shown in Figure 4.1.2.3, an experiment using the shape of a google maps the location marker. However the idea of an extra visual dimension was more likely due to the interplay between photograph and another image that combined the map and some text. Both Figure 4.1.2.4 and Figure 4.1.2.5 are experiments in overlaying texts onto one another to see if this could enhance the power of the text. Can this produce a stronger feeling when interacting with the photograph?

Figure 4.1.2.1

Figure 4.1.2.2

Figure 4.1.2.3

Figure 4.1.2.4

Figure 4.1.2.5

Figure 4.1.2.6

Figure 4.1.2.7

Figure 4.1.2.8

Figure 4.1.2.9

Figure 4.1.2.10

Figure 4.1.2.11

Figure 4.1.2.12

Figure 4.1.2.13

Initially, three fonts were selected for the studio portrait. The first was Warehouse (Firgure 4.1.2.6), a font usually found at container ports. The typeface has very clear outlines and a powerful yet practical design that can be easily stencilled onto traveling containers. Frankfurter (Figure 4.1.2.7 - Figure 4.1.2.10) was used for its rounded terminals, which to me represents the attitude of life within the community. The third font is Chinese Takeaway, which contains characteristics of Chinese calligraphy: Lively yet tense, it reflects the aesthetic culture of Asia (Figure 4.1.2.11). However, after attempting to use the Chinese calligraphic font, I found it was too controlled and consistent, and had lost the true spirit of hand-done calligraphy. Therefore, I invited a friend, Wing Liang (2016), who is an accomplished Chinese calligrapher to compose the calligraphy that I applied on the practical works. This brought back the strength of hand-done calligraphy. See examples Figure 4.1.2.12, and Figure 4.1.2.13.

4.1.3 Interplay of text with the studio portrait

I began by considering how to use photographs and text to show the independent story of each individual, by adding hand-sketched personal information into the photograph (Figure 4.1.3.1 & Figure 4.1.3.2).

Figure 4.1.3.1
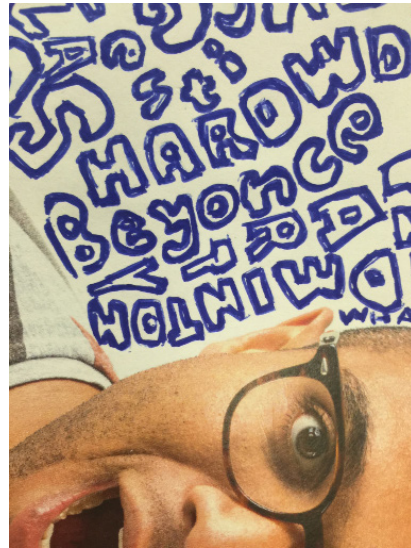
Figure 4.1.3.2

Figure 4.1.3.1
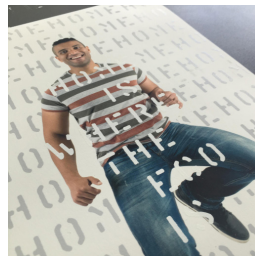
Figure 4.1.3.3

Figure 4.1.3.4

Figure 4.1.3.5

For the next experiment I tried adding theme-related layers into the photograph using screen printing (Refer to Figure 4.1.3.3, Figure 4.1.3.4. & Figure 4.1.3.5).

Further experiments simulated magazine covers. (Figure 4.1.3.6, & Figure 4.1.3.7).

Figure 4.1.3.6

Figure 4.1.3.7

Figure 4.1.3.8

Figure 4.1.3.9

Figure 4.1.3.10

Figure 4.1.3.11

Figure 4.1.3.12

Figure 4.1.3.13

Figure 4.1.3.14

Figure 4.1.3.15

Figure 4.1.3.16

Figure 4.1.3.17

Figure 4.1.3.18

Figure 4.1.3.19

Figure 4.1.3.20

Figures 4.1.3.8 to Figure 4.1.3.14 are experiments that used a coloured background to create a sense of fulfilment. The idea was to create a visually colourful world using soft gradients. However, this is when the picture started to become complicated and more distracting. I therefore decided to add colour to the type style, thereby avoiding the unnecessary confusion of a third element.

Figure 4.1.3.15 to Figure 4.1.3.20 were experiments that compared colour, size and position.

The final presentations for the studio portraits are Figure 4.1.3.21 and Figure 4.1.3.22.

Figure 4.1.3.21

Figure 4.1.3.22

The final photograph shows a wide range of Asian gay men in Auckland. This integration of the community, with their different postures and facial expressions, reflects the volunteers' impression of their society. For example, the second participant on the left shows the public only his back, which reflects that he has selected to hide some aspects of himself from the public, while still recognising himself as a part of the community. The text is hand-written in English, but based on the brush strokes of Chinese calligraphy. There are three words overlaying each other to convey the notion of the home (home), the community (homo), and identity (me). The colours demonstrate that the community is pictorially vivid. Through the interaction of these two visual signs, both the text and photograph emphasise information and the emotional interaction with each other: the text revealed the theme of the group portrait, and the image visualised the understanding of the three-layered text, which is the overall strength of this particular interplay.

4.2.1 Photograph - location documentary

Figure 4.2.1.1.Johnny Liu

The location shots utilised the interplay between photography and text to describe individual stories. If the location was the participant's home, I would suggest that they didn't intentionally rearrange their homes. However if the home was rearranged prior to my visit was ultimately an unknown. Some participants thought that a home should not be limited to their residence and could include places where they felt relaxed, which is part of what makes up a 'home'. Therefore, in addition to their residences, places such as gyms, shopping streets, badminton courts and other areas were also selected.

Figure 4.2.1.2.Ling Ling
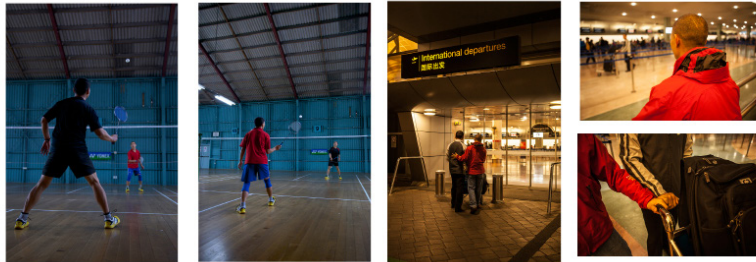
Figure 4.2.1.3.Zam Yang

The location stream aimed to present the individual stories of the participants. The major challenge in choosing photographs for the location shoot wasn't in trying to find a place or setting to capture the best angle, but rather the challenge lay in selecting just one photograph out of hundreds, to represent the story of the person. Following, I present several different photos of one respondent, and the final choice was made according to how the photograph interacted with the text (Figure 4.2.1.1.Johnny Liu, Figure 4.2.1.2.Ling Ling and Figure 4.2.1.3.Zam Yang).

4.2.2 Text - location documentary

Figure 4.2.2.1

The idea behind choosing a typeface was to display a specific font on each photograph. Every typeface has its own character through its shape, weight, curve or line, A diverse range of fonts were used. For example in Figure 4.2.2.1, the font was used to represent the weight of the words, and the desire of the participant's expectation from other people, to match the participant's impression. Another experiment in the selection of a font was to try and find one that could interact well with all the different images. The challenge of testing under the same conditions is to see how the typeface cooperates with the different themes of the photographs and personalities of the subjects. Referring back to the studio portrait, Chinese calligraphy was also one of the choices for this experiment (Figure 4.2.2.2.Wingme Liang Calligraphy).

Figure 4.2.2.2.Wingme Liang Calligraphy

4.2.3 Interplay of text and the location documentary

Figure 4.2.3.01

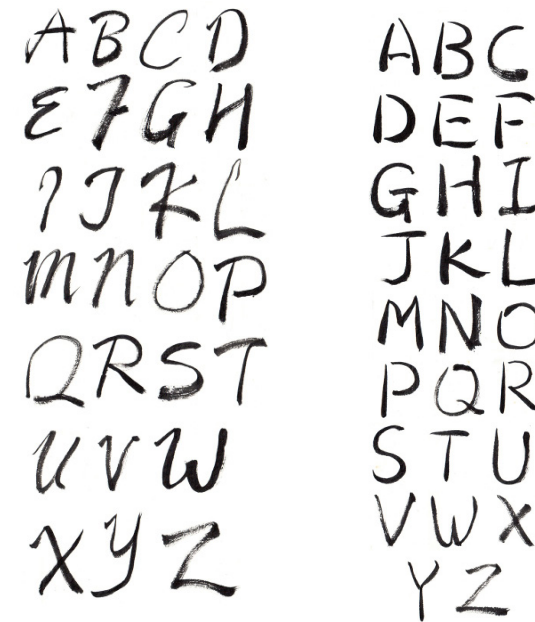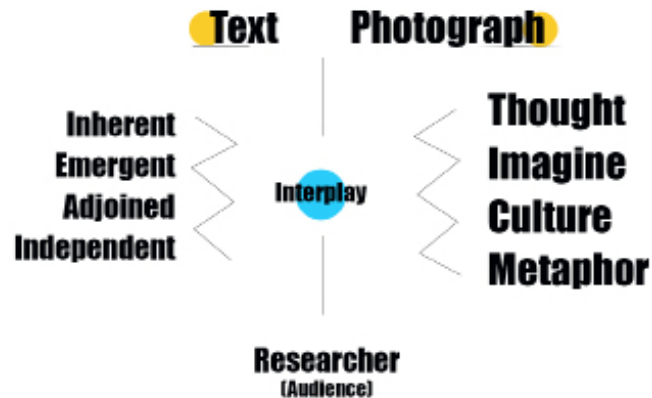The strategy of processing a location documentary is completely different to that of the studio portrait, as shown in Figure 4.2.3.01. The location documentary explores a specific plan of interplay. The four methods of overlaying text onto a photograph - Inherent, Emergent, Adjoined and Independent, were applied randomly to the process of experimenting with different participants. Each individual project experimented with at least one of the four methods, Sometimes the result was expected, but mostly it was a surprise. These surprises from the practical outcome, informs the four forms of narration, Thought, Imagine, Culture and Metaphor.

1), Thought, based on the interview data which brought me the understanding of the participant, then reflect my understanding visually back to the photograph by overlay text onto it. Text plays as a direct inform to present the thinking behind the photograph.
2), Imagine, also based on the interview data, but the different from Thought is the way of displaying text with the photograph. In this section text isn't supposed to be read, but a path to lead the imagination of the photograph.
3), Culture, is the section to present the culture clash in the image.
4), Metaphor, is similar to Imagine. Text brings the photograph to a deeper and metaphorical thinking.

Figure 4.2.3.01 shows the plan for exploring interplay with both image layouts and fonts. Examples of this can be seen in Figures 4.2.3.1.1 to Figure 4.2.3.1.6. Johnny Liu was the subject of this experiment. Interplay also happened between these two elements, but only one of the displays eventually presented the idea of the image and text from my perspective of interpreting the thoughts behind the scene. Neither example presented a clear and strong narration through the interplay. For example, from figures 4.2.3.1.3 to 4.2.3.1.5 show three different kinds of text overlaid on a photograph, yet none of the texts contributed to the theme.

Figure 4.2.3.1.1

Figure 4.2.3.1.2

Figure 4.2.3.1.3

Figure 4.2.3.1.4

Figure 4.2.3.1.5

Figure 4.2.3.1.6

Figure 4.2.3.1.7.Johnny Liu

In Figure 4.2.3.1.7.Johnny Liu, the participant is reading subtitles while watching TV. The text I overlaid on this image acted as a new message that could be read by the audience. This creates a connection as well as an interaction in terms of the visual presentation. In this location documentary, the interplay between text and image creates two streams of conversation. The first is between the TV programme and Johnny, the second is between Johnny and the audience. The text reflects the subject's inner thoughts, made available for the audience to read.

Figure 4.2.3.1.8.Don Chooi

In figure 4.2.3.1.8.Don Chooi, the participant cuddles his kitten. My understanding of this image is a narrative about a man staying at home to do nothing but relax with his favourite thing. Accordingly, I created a blurry world from this atmosphere by overlaying the unclear text outside the window and inside the TV screen. As a photograph, it has a few skilful contributions, such as the depth of view in the background and the composition of the participant, which led to the image being more clearly able to present the idea of the message. In this location documentary, the interplay between text and photograph lies in the home scene and the virtual noise outside the subject's home.

Figure 4.2.3.1.9.Eric Tan

In Figure 4.2.3.1.9, Eric Tan is having dinner. Although this relates to the subject's story and habits, I strongly believe it's a photo showing a westernized man eating typical Eastern food in a small Eastern noodle house, located in a Western town. The interplay between text and image speaks of the culture clash between East and West, by showing the perspective between the indoor and outdoor scenes.

Figure 4.2.3.1.10.Ling Ling

In Figure 4.2.3.1.10.Ling Ling, he gives me an impression that is completely different to his stage character. "Home is a place for me to relax and enjoy a cup of tea, play with my iPad, also get ready for my next stage show" (Lingling. 2015). Enjoying the peace in his home is important, because once he steps out, he is known as a beautiful drag queen, ready for the spotlight and music. I overlaid text onto the tree reflected in the window as a metaphor for the rumours he hears around him in society. Here he is presented as at one with nature, freedom and silence, in a place where he can be himself. In this image, the interplay is about both text and photograph together contributing to the same meaning of home, as well as the contribution of the narration inside the image.

Figure 4.2.3.1.11.Mohamed

In Figure 4.2.3.1.11.Mohamed, I overlaid text onto the side of the weights, imprinting the message onto the plate he's lifting. Mohamed wishes to be remembered, loved and appreciated. I used a small sized text, to show that he is aware of protecting himself from exposing too much to the society. In order to protect himself and his ego, he builds himself stronger. In this location documentary, the interplay between text and photograph creates an emotional sustenance of the participant's expectation.

Figure 4.2.3.1.12.Tam

Tam. Tam is preparing a meal, an activity central to many people's concept of home. Cooking is often a shared task or the focus of a social occasion. But Tam's labour is lonely; a process that might remind him of the absence of his partner or evoke meals enjoyed in the past. In this image I have played with opposites – images of sociability and togetherness contrasting with the loneliness of Tam's expression and the isolation of him as a subject. The multiple mugs in the background, the 'busy' visual impact created by the packed shelves and well provisioned kitchen. A narrow depth of field pushes these elements into the distance. In this location documentary, the interplay between text and image creates a representation of his partner there in the kitchen with him in the past and in the future but absent in the present.

Figure 4.2.3.1.13. Jason

Jason Cabral. In this image, Jason is pegging out laundry; a mundane, almost thoughtless task – the epitome of homeliness. I chose this image because Jason's facial expression is neutral: caught in the routine of everyday life. His hand and foot are both moving, positioning him mid-task. His downturned head may initially suggest sadness, but a closer examination reveals a true neutrality of expression inviting the reader to look further for cues as to the participant's emotional state. The love poetry pegged on the line above him, dynamic with wind, is a social media post from his partner – a partner who is absent from the picture - maybe across the world or maybe in the next room. In this location documentary, the interplay between text and image evokes a romantic connection defining a subject who is alone but not lonely.

Figure 4.2.3.1.14.Zam

In Figure 4.2.3.1.12.Zam, the participant wears a red shirt. The other subject is Zam's legal partner, Paul. Both represent AGM who prefer to hide their identity. Through the interview with Zam, I understood that the meaning of home for him is to be together with Paul. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, Paul couldn't return to New Zealand. So, I put the text "together" in between them as a metaphor for their relationship, both together and apart. The interplay is a metaphor about their love.

Figure 4.2.3.1.15.Too

In Figure 4.2.3.1.13.Too. This is a scene where the participant is walking around the shopping centre. This image reflects Too's personality and his natural self-confidence, by graphically overlaying the text on the floor like a red carpet for him to walk on. The interplay between text and photograph combines the real world architecture and the virtual carpet, placing Too as a celebrity, confident and so for Too, The chic mall fashion stores reflect his innate sense of fashion and glamour and for Too are in a very real sense a second home.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Whether it is the content of the text, the content of the photograph or the visual narrative that these elements create, my exploration of the interplay between text and photograph was focused through my own personal paradigm, which is about understanding myself and my life. My own sexual identity and my connection with the gay community are the motivation. My understanding of self and my relationship with the participants provided a conceptual vehicle that helped me to navigate the creative resolutions in the final work.

My two streams of research (studio portrait and location documentary) were applied to each subject individually as well as to the communities that they represent. In the practical work, I experimented with the manipulation of both text and photograph to alter and potentially to direct the narration in the photographs. I have discovered that the relationship between text and photograph is a complex two-way interaction and that even subtle changes can transform the nature of how they cooperate with each other to develop layers of meanings. This provided the designer with limitless opportunities to create and even direct a narrative constructed both within and between the images.

I have used the four modes of textual integration (Inherent, Emergent, Adjoined, and Independent) throughout the experiments to guide a creative resolution. In the studio stream of experiments, text plays the role of transmitting cultural signals, expressing narrative, and also acts as a background to illuminate the subjects' personalities. The photographs (and the combination of individual portraits) provide a direct communication to the different personalities. As a series, they also provide a representation of a community. In the location documentary stream, where the focus of my practice was overlaying text onto photographs, the fourth mode (Independent) proved less effective and was rarely applied in the experiments. IMost of the time, text acts as an extra layer in the photograph, a signifier that provides further meanings. It is a vehicle that pushes the narrative beyond the original photograph. I have applied the different modes in specific ways within each photograph, creating an interplay that helps to define or demonstrate each individual subject's connection with place (HOME), sexuality (HOMO) and self-identity (ME).

In contrast to the location documentary, which explores individual identities, the studio stream presents the diversity of connections – a true representation of community.

Through my practice I was able to explore the identities of Home, Homo and Me. The interplay of visual and textual elements was a particularly powerful tool for presenting individual understandings (and sometimes contrasting understandings) of these identities. For my subjects, 'home' was not a concept that could be generalised. Each AGM respondent had their own view of 'home' – one defined by their own needs and experiences. As a community that is defined by their 'otherness', the respondents all saw their sexuality as a central part of their identity. However, in most cases their sexual orientation was self–defined as 'low-key' or completely undercover. The interviews showed that some of the respondents considered this choice to hide their sexual identity to be an element of their Asian cultural identity (citing 'protection of family', 'cultural attitudes' and 'traditional values' as motivators). While I was able to capture many elements of hidden or closeted identity directly within my photographs, the addition of text and the interplay between them enabled a deeper and more effective communication of meaning.

My final works seek to create narratives about 'self', a concept which, for my subjects, was not only about self-recognition, but also about the connection (or disconnection) with their ideas of sexual identity and home. Different subjects presented different understandings of 'me' and of the role that 'home' or 'homo' plays in their self-identity. In my final outcomes I have accentuated and focused these differences using text-photograph interplay to provide narrative clues for the viewer. An unexpected outcome of my research was to make me inspect my own identity again. I too am an AGM who partially conceals my identity, in my case it is an act of self-protection – often a subconscious one. My research has led me to a new understanding of my own community. As Asian Gay men living in Auckland, we are connected by more than just our sexual identity and our race but by an entire history of cultural identity and values that we remain connected to.

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Figure Extra 1. Exhibition 1

Figure Extra 2. Exhibition 2

Figure Extra 3. Exhibition 3

Dimension:

Individual Location Documentary
A2 (420mm x 594mm) for Portrait
A2 (594mm x 420mm) for Landscape

Studio Potrait
2000mm x 753mm

Figure Extra 4. Exhibition 4

Figure Extra 5. Exhibition 5

Figure Extra 6. Exhibition 6

Figure Extra 7. Exhibition 7

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