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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Kwek, Ivan Eng Tai.</td>
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TELEVISING THE AGED:
TOWARDS A CRITICAL TV PRACTICE
IN SINGAPORE

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Paper to
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Televising the Aged: Towards a Critical TV Practice in Singapore
Ivan Kwek

ABSTRACT
This paper reflects on my initial experiences and encounters in an on-going production of a four-part television documentary series, called “Golden Years”. As the title suggests, its theme relates to the elderly. The series is commissioned by the Singapore Television Twelve in conjunction with the International Year of the Older Person. Its brief was simple – a series that looks at “the issues of an aging population”, a common and seemingly innocuous topic. Yet, in the process of negotiating the appropriate treatment of the series, it soon became clear that the elderly of television is potentially problematic; not least of all, when you start recognizing the traces of power/knowledge defining and working through its images. Driven by a desire to demonstrate how the elderly is not a homogenous category but crisscrossed by race, class, gender, and history, I sought to contextualize the profiles in terms of their specific situations in time and space. I also sought to privilege their voices or perspectives over that of “experts”. The station, while sympathetic with my cause, was more concerned about getting the “right” message through. Mindful of the views of the funding agency (the Singapore Broadcasting Authority), their specific response to my positions was that, “it is okay as long as I do not depict a stratified society”. Thus, the first out-of-bound-markers were laid out.

What started as a commercial and artistic enterprise has became an exercise in critical practice. The process has been slow, and is only at its embryonic stages (even at the time of the conference). But it has opened up some critical lines of thought, sometimes schizophrenic, between the practice of media and its research. This paper is but a moment in this oscillation.