

## Online Participant Videos: A New Type of Data for Interpretative Social Research?

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interpretative video  
analysis; social  
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**Abstract:** In this article, online participant videos (OPVs) are defined as audiovisual participant accounts of social situations and events, and simultaneously as components of social media, online video culture and their technical, media and social logics. We demonstrate that OPV is a multi-layered and meaningful type of data which—depending on the genre—often documents a sociologising of the participants, and which can be used profitably in interpretative video analysis. We present different procedural steps of analysing OPV, based on our experiences from teaching research projects, especially in the context of the sociology of political protest. This shows that the analytical possibilities provided by OPV lie especially in the field of the interpretative sociology of affect.

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## 1. Introduction

In interpretative sociology, audiovisual data that are not produced by social researchers themselves are rarely used. This means that research is not taking into account a momentous development in terms of both method and content: since smartphones with camera function have become an integral part of many everyday social situations, but also of cultural and political events, audiovisual material that makes social situations and events *accountable* in the ethnomethodological sense is being continuously and "naturally" produced in copious quantity and variety. Nevertheless, videos produced, circulated and annotated by participants are still rarely included in interpretative procedures of empirical social research. This is particularly unfortunate since the video material circulating online that has been produced by participants makes available a new, multi-layered and meaningful type of data, which—as we would like to explain below—can profitably be used in interpretative video analysis. [1]

The term "online participant video" (hereinafter "OPV") refers to an audiovisual type of data produced in online video practices. The procedural steps of analysing OPV that we propose belong to the *native digital methods*, with which researchers attempt to utilise the specific characteristics and logics of digital practices, devices and infrastructures. They can be distinguished from *digitised* methods, which are traditional social science methods of image, text or discourse analysis that are simply being applied to digital content and contexts (see ROGERS, 2013 on this distinction). [2]

The term *vernacular video* (SNOWDON, 2014) has become the established term for online video practices within research discussions in the media sciences. In contrast to professional video practices, it emphasises the "colloquial", locally specific and everyday nature of these practices (TUMA, 2017) and stresses that, in principle, anyone can participate in them (BURGESS & GREEN, 2009). Furthermore, the adjective vernacular refers to indigenous, i.e. historically "grown" activities and practices by means of which—in ILLICH's (1980) sense—collectives are created and maintained<sup>1</sup>. These may be collectives formed in and through the online video practices of streaming, filming and subsequent uploading, linking, commenting, etc., and are characterised by a shared focus of attention (SHIFMAN, 2011). However, these collectives do not necessarily concentrate exclusively on virtual space; they can also enter into relationships with offline practices, as in the case of "viral videos"<sup>2</sup> and "memes"<sup>3</sup>. [3]

As studies on the role of OPV in protest and resistance events such as the Arab Spring have made clear (CASTELLS, 2012; SCHANKWEILER, 2016), this is

1 Hereafter, we do not view online participant videos primarily as media products. Such a classification, which has so far been common in videography (TUMA, SCHNETTLER & KNOBLAUCH, 2013, p.42), overlooks the fact that this type of data is about participant productions and ignores the possibilities of knowledge afforded by it.

2 Videos are known as "viral" if they achieve a high degree of popularity in the shortest possible time via online "word of mouth".

3 A meme is in the broadest sense an internet joke, which can attain relative longevity through constant modifications by the community.

particularly the case in political contexts. The specific characteristics and qualities of OPV data, as well as some of the associated analytical possibilities, have so far been highlighted in such studies on the accounting of state violence and protest events (ANDÉN-PAPADOPOULOS, 2013; SNOWDON, 2014, 2016; STRANGELOVE, 2017; WESTMORELAND, 2016). [4]

In this article, we reflect on how to take this further, our approach having emerged from various successive teaching research projects and research internships at the Department of Process-Orientated Sociology at the Catholic University (KU) Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany. Given the heterogeneity and diversity of online video practices, we had to impose limitations and thus confine ourselves to videos and video practices that can be understood as audio-visual participants accounting for social situations, their ongoing accomplishments, their centres of attention, affective loads and dynamics<sup>4</sup>. That is to say that the empirical materials and objects of knowledge of our explorative video analyses and methodological/methodical considerations are audiovisual recordings by participants of "natural" social (political, cultural, etc.) situations—i.e. situations that have not been produced for research purposes<sup>5</sup>. Such OPVs function as audiovisual accounts of social situations and events, characterised by a situative and more or less affected camera. Since these audiovisual participant accounts can develop affective agency themselves, the type of data type we characterise here is of particular relevance for an interpretative empirical sociology of affect (WIESSE, 2018). [5]

In order to characterise OPV data and the associated epistemological possibilities in more detail, we first explain the connections between technological developments and the development of interpretative strategies, procedures and cognitive possibilities (Section 2). We then present the methodological considerations and methodical guidelines for analysing OPVs that we have developed in our research teaching projects (Section 3), before testing their plausibility in Section 4 using extracts from a case analysis. The situation we present is an OPV created in the context of the occupation of a school in Kreuzberg, Berlin, by refugees, supporters and activists, and its siege by the police. Finally, we summarise our discussion and findings (Section 5). [6]

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4 With this exclusive focus on cases that centre on the accounting of social situations and the situative and communicative physical-gestural activity of recording, other genres and cases of OPVs such as video blogs (TOLSON, 2010), facecams in gamer streams and *Let's Plays* (ACKERMANN, 2016; SMITH, OBRIST & WRIGHT, 2013), drone flights (GARRETT & McCOSKER, 2017) or GoPro videos (ORTIZ & MOYA, 2015) recede into the background. The analysis of data types arising from such online video practices requires its own methodological and methodical consideration.

5 OPV data are therefore self-generated or process-generated, but not research-generated data (on this distinction DIETRICH & MEY, 2018).

## **2. The "Technology Dependence" of Interpretative Methods, their Data Types and Epistemological Possibilities**

Changes and innovations in the field of interpretative sociology have always been closely linked to technological developments. Thus the method of field research founded by MALINOWSKI is already inconceivable without improved traffic routes, means of transport, handy typewriters and replacement ribbons that could be taken to remote areas newly made accessible (MARKLE, WEST & RICH, 2011). Later, the availability of new technical recording and storage media—above all the development of tape recorders and mobile, battery-powered cassette recorders for recording conversations and interviews—was decisive for the development of new analytical perspectives and processes (ZIEGHAUS, 2009). Finally, the development and availability of digital technologies has also led to new analytical methods in interpretative sociology. Examples are the development of computer-aided data generation and data analysis tools, or the development of new digital cultural objects of investigation (CISNEROS PUEBLA & DAVIDSON, 2012; GIBBS, FRIESE & MANGABEIRA, 2002). [7]

The fact that the possibilities of new technical media favour the development of new research strategies and epistemologies is illustrated, for example, by the close connection between audio recorders and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA). With the help of inconspicuous and handy cassette recorders, everyday and "natural" conversations—that is, conversations not initiated or animated for research purposes—could be recorded and preserved; the recording technology could be used to rewind and forward the recordings as often as required. In connection with more precise detailed transcription processes, and a new epistemological interest in the actual practical processes of a social reality that continuously realises itself, the new recording and storage media were transformed into "time machines" (BERGMANN, 1985, p.304),<sup>6</sup> which enabled the temporal structure and micrologic of situative order formations in communicative interactions to be analytically unlocked in an innovative way. [8]

Similarly, the development of audiovisual recording technologies in the form of ever smaller, lighter, more compact, easier to handle and cheaper video recorders in the 1980s led not only to the development of new methods of analysing audiovisual data, but also to the opening up of new areas of investigation in interpretative sociology (SCHNETTLER & RAAB, 2008). Because video technology made it possible to break down recorded sequences of movement very finely, it could be used as an "interaction microscope" to study gestures, facial expressions and other forms of physically expressive behaviour in detail. Not least, this ushered in the "golden age" of the sociology of emotions (COLLINS, 2008, p.5; see also KATZ, 1999, p.10; WETHERELL, 2012, pp.99f.). [9]

In interpretative sociology, video data have so far almost exclusively been used in the form of material produced following specific procedures, in line with the aforementioned research traditions. They are produced by researchers who

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6 German quotations translated; all translations into English by Tom GENRICH.

record interviews or generate video data in the field. Situational video data produced by participants rather than by researchers are rarely used. With a few exceptions, interpretative sociology has so far shown a certain reticence towards such data. The exceptions include participatory video processes, sociology-of-knowledge studies on the pictorial hermeneutics of semi-professional video productions (e.g. edited holiday and wedding videos, RAAB, 2008) as well as research contributions from the wider field of ethnomethodology (BROTH, 2008; GOODWIN & GOODWIN, 1997; JALBERT, 1999; MAIR, WATSON, ELSEY & SMITH, 2012). [10]

Participatory video processes (PV) (MILNE, MITCHELL & LANGE, 2012) are used in particular within the framework of so-called empowerment strategies (BERGOLD & THOMAS, 2012; ROSS, 2017). In this process, selected participants are equipped with video cameras by researchers and instructed to stage or document their everyday experiences in this medium. The resulting video material is played back to the researchers, interpreted in dialogue, and sometimes presented in public (see e.g. PFEIFFER, 2013).<sup>7</sup> Public online activities—both as a method of presenting results and as a basis for digital ethnographic research—can certainly be included here (TEITELBAUM, 2012). PV and similar approaches aim to help local, group-specific worlds of meaning to a public expression via the research process. In contrast to this, OPV is an independent and self-contained form of participant publication and accounting—that is, animated and initiated not by social researchers, but by social situations and their dynamics of events. [11]

From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge and pictorial hermeneutics, video analysis focuses on the forms of construction (editing patterns, image-sound arrangements, etc.) used in video production. It does not differentiate between (semi-) professional videos and recordings by amateurs, but aims to bring out visual orders, aesthetic styles, and ultimately communities' perceptions of the world and themselves. This emphasis on the principles of video construction, however, accompanies a neglect of the specific "situationalist" qualities of participant videos<sup>8</sup>, characteristics which we will explain in detail using OPV data. [12]

The video data used in ethnomethodological interaction and conversation analyses is mainly produced by researchers (HEATH, 1986; LEHN, 2018; MONDADA, 2008). However, there is also research work that examines, for example, TV broadcasts in their situative and interactive production contexts (BROTH, 2008) or the legal evaluation of an automatically recorded cockpit video from a combat aircraft (MAIR et al., 2012). In these contexts, analysis strategies

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7 PV can thus be understood as a video-based form of photovoice, the guided participant production of photographic essays. On photovoice, see MARK and BOULTON (2017), WANG and BURRIS (1997) and WOODGATE, ZURBA and TENNENT (2017).

8 Semi-professionally produced videos could also be examined as arrangements of social situations produced for the participants' camera. However, RAAB's analyses only address situativity as a pictorial staging of situational authenticity (2008, pp.300). This neglect of the situative in favour of the pictorial results from the theoretical default positions of the sociology of knowledge regarding pictorial hermeneutics.

are applied that also represent an important source of inspiration for investigating OPV. This is especially true where the object of research has clear parallels to OPV. Charles and Marjorie GOODWIN (1997), for example, focused their study of the Rodney KING trial on the role of the amateur video in which police can be seen assaulting the African-American motorist Rodney KING, who had been stopped for a traffic check. They aimed to examine the way of seeing things that the accused police officers' lawyers presented in the legal proceedings following the assault. The authors illuminate how this particular perspective on the video—which eventually led to the acquittal of the defendants, which in turn triggered the Los Angeles riots—was accomplished and rendered plausible in the courtroom with the help of a range of communicative and discursive practices. They demonstrate how the defence managed to "make" the jurors and judges "see" in a certain way, perceiving the video images not as a brutal use of force by the police officers involved, but as carefully executed police work. The video can be considered an early example of the new and momentous use of cheap technology that had become usable in everyday situations, and GOODWIN and GOODWIN's investigation represents an exemplary analytical handling of this new object. The authors were particularly interested in the *accounting of the video recording*, i.e. the development of a socially organised way of seeing it. In contrast, Douglas MACBETH (1999) emphasises *accounting in and through recording*, as it appears in the witnessing practices of documentary and ethnographic films. The practice of interpreting the images' reception is here juxtaposed with the shot of cinematic practice: a silent account of the situation that oscillates selectively between a commitment to *following* the situative centres of attention and the distanced *documentation* of situative attention. In other words, the *audiovisual accounting of participants itself* becomes the focus here, rather than ways of seeing and watching video recordings produced by participants. [13]

In the process we describe below, we follow the ethnomethodological and situationalist approaches to analysis as outlined, and further develop them with a view to the specific requirements and epistemological possibilities of OPV data. In other words, we ask how exactly participants orientate themselves through filming by means of (smartphone) camera use in situative events; how exactly they create audiovisual accounts of these situative events; and how these accounts are made public in online video culture and beyond, and potentially "garner fame" there. [14]

OPV data is characterised by the fact that it is not researchers but participants and/or lay sociologists who produce (often in a more or less unplanned and spontaneous way) these audiovisual accounts of "natural" social situations and events—"natural" meaning not created for research—in which they themselves participate and which they then disseminate on the Internet, where the accounts are interpreted, commented on and analysed many times over. This ongoing proliferation of OPV is linked to the specific affordances of Internet-enabled smartphones with camera function. The most important guarantees of smartphone use are their small size, low weight, and ability to participate in social situations without difficulty (guaranteed by their usability), as well as the

possibility of immediately publishing the audiovisual accounts of these participations and situative affects by uploading them (instantaneously and with ease) to social media (DOVEY & ROSE, 2013; JUHLIN, ENGSTRÖM & REPONEN, 2010; POSTIGO, 2014).<sup>9</sup> [15]

OPVs resulting from camera-supported participant observation and reporting of social situations simultaneously document these situative participant activities of observation and reporting themselves. Starting from this fundamental peculiarity, the specific qualities of this type of data with regard to criteria such as reactance and naturalness, which are important in interpretative video analysis (TUMA, 2017; TUMA et al., 2013), can be characterised more precisely. [16]

Conventional video data, as used in interpretative sociology for the analysis of interactions, are mainly produced by researchers "capturing" social interactions with a camera, and endeavouring to minimise the "distortions" of such interactions caused by their presence. This reactance of observed situation participants is viewed as a methodological problem that needs to be overcome (TUMA et al., 2013, pp.13f.). In the production of OPV, participants in the situation adopt self-observing, self-documenting and self-interpreting perspectives and positions similar to those of social researchers. The specific feature of this type of data is that a reactance due to the presence of researchers is not decisive, whereas the situative reactivity of the participants and camera activities is. OPV data themselves do not include any (hidden) construction or interpretation achievements by the researchers. Rather, OPVs are determined by the practical interpretations and constructions of the participants.<sup>10</sup> OPV data document what participants consider to be worth reporting. They are a product of the situative relevance of the participants and the attraction of temporary centres of attention that form in these social situations (COLLINS, 2004). The criterion for assessing the specific quality of such video data is how sensitive they are to situative requirements, relevance and dynamics. This quality criterion cannot be captured by the usual distinction in interpretative video analysis between artificial settings and data produced for research purposes, and "natural" ones not produced for research purposes (TUMA et al., 2013, p.36). OPV data are "natural" constructions of situations, events and their participants<sup>11</sup>. [17]

The specific characteristics of audiovisual data produced by participants present particular analytical possibilities and perspectives. We would summarise our thinking so far on that matter in two theses:

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9 In our experience, the various social media platforms are used differently for the immediate publication of videos, especially in the case of political events: live streaming and direct ex-post uploading tend to be more frequent via microblogs such as Twitter and Instagram, while portals such as YouTube and LiveLeak tend to fulfil the subsequent function of archiving.

10 These can be seen, for example, in camera angles, movements, actions, and focussings, and where applicable also in cuts and montages.

11 Situations created for the participants' camera also frequently occur in online video practices. The "naturalness" of video data that we have outlined is not altered or restricted by such "productions" and stagings.

1. In connection with the "situationalist" qualities outlined above, the analytical possibilities provided by OPV lie particularly in the area of the interpretative sociology of affect. OPVs document a physically situative involvement and a becoming-affected, and make this reportable and referable, especially in the context of social media. This is achieved particularly by the camera (which is closely coupled to the participating bodies) being affected by the social situations and their centres of attention. OPVs preserve the affective relevance settings registered by a participating camera in situative events. In this context, OPV as a new type of data is also interesting for questions involving sociological situation and event research<sup>12</sup>.
2. OPVs are able to "transmit" situative being-affected.<sup>13</sup> They generate resonances, affect viewers and thus achieve attention value on the Internet. By acting as medium and distributor of shared situative attentions, they are assigned specific affective agency<sup>14</sup>. [18]

### 3. Procedural Steps in OPV Analysis and their Reference Problems

We have dealt with a broad spectrum of cases in our Eichstätt research seminars, which have been held continuously since the summer semester of 2015, and have thereby gradually developed a series of procedural steps for OPV analysis, the most important of which we shall explain in detail. These procedural steps refer to various difficulties and reference problems associated with the specific characteristics of OPV data, and attempt to realise the knowledge possibilities provided by OPV. Our previous experience, from which the above characterisations of OPV data are derived, has repeatedly led us to the conclusion that these characterisations must always be relativised and differentiated at case level. Despite their provisional nature, however, they nevertheless form reference points and criteria for orientation that have proved useful in our work to date for the more detailed classification of the videos we have examined. [19]

#### 3.1 Situatedness and situativity

Although OPVs are easily and proverbially available "at the touch of a button", they cannot simply be used as obvious evidence of empirical research. Where they appear familiar and self-evident, they must rather be actively alienated (GARFINKEL, 1967, pp.36-38), and where they are incomprehensible, they must be made accessible through methodical understanding of alterity

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12 We thus emphasise the *situationalist* qualities of OPVs. In contrast, TUMA et al. (2013) distinguish special *subjective* qualities of participant videos. They characterise OPVs as "insights into the actors' practice (...), which are selected by the actors themselves and into which their self-interpretations enter in a very special way" (p.41).

13 We understand transmission here in the sense of *broadcasting* and *not* as mass psychological contagion. On the affect-theory problems of contagion metaphors, see WETHERELL (2012, pp.145-148).

14 Although the decoding of this potential to affect is still in its infancy, our thesis of the affective agency of OPVs can draw on media-science studies in which the affecting and mobilising effects of vernacular videos were astutely described, e.g. in the context of protests and violence (GREGORY & LOSH, 2012; SCHANKWEILER, 2017), or in relation to recruitment videos by Islamist terrorists (KRAIDY, 2017; LEANDER, 2016; STRAUB, 2016).

(*Fremdverstehen*). First of all, OPV are not "data" at all in the conventional sense, i.e. they are not generated by research processes. When watching participants' videos, we sociologists find ourselves in a similar position to ethnographers who observe an event that they only gradually understand by striving to make it revelatory and by exploring the field within which the event has special relevance as a case. [20]

To do justice to OPV as a type of data, the analysed videos must first be examined as cases of online video practices. This takes into account the issue of the dual documentary meaning of OPVs: OPV data are not only documents of the social situation in which they are produced by participants, but also of online video practices and their technical, media and social logics. That OPV data are documents of online video practices is reflected, for example, in their viewability, usability and trajectory in social media. This trajectory can be explored, for example, by asking *how exactly* and *where* the video data was uploaded, *how* and *where* it is reposted, "liked" and linked, etc.<sup>15</sup> All cases of online video practices are suitable for the procedural and analytical steps proposed here, if they can be researched to a certain degree in their *dual situatedness*—that is, with regard both to their specific sharing and participation in online video culture, and to the issues of the situatedness of the recorded event, and the narrower situative context in which the OPV data originate. [21]

### 3.1.1 Case situatedness in online video culture

Online participant videos always refer to their specific online contextuality. Procedures developed in sociological and ethnographic Internet research for investigating virtual interaction spaces and communication spaces and their structures (COLEMAN, 2010; KOZINETS, 2015) are relevant for exploring this contextuality and the situative references to meaning linked to it—in other words, its indexical dimensions of meaning. [22]

The situatedness of the investigated case can first be determined more precisely by assigning it to certain genres (grassroots journalism, home video, eyewitness account, video blog, parody, etc.), which have emerged within online video culture (BLEICHER, 2009, pp.190ff.; SNOWDON, 2014, p.413). In our work to date, the following questions have proven to be particularly suitable and productive for exploring the meanings associated with online contextuality: when (in what time interval to the filmed event), and where (on which channel, web portal or similar) was the video published? How exactly does it qualify for the virtual locations and framings in which it occurs? In which different versions and formats does it circulate? Which online communities share and distribute the video? What can be said about its online trajectory, popularity and itineraries through social media, and possibly beyond? [23]

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15 This reference to online video practices also emphasises all those *participatory* aspects that distinguish online video culture from other, but related, cultural genres such as television or cinema.

In our case analyses, we have repeatedly drawn attention to such trajectories. We have, for example, traced how an amateur video made in the context of the terrorist attack on Brussels Airport in March 2016 developed a life of its own as news material and was rapidly distributed. This video was published around noon on the YouTube channel of the news agency AP<sup>16</sup> with an unspecified source. On the same evening an excerpt of the video appeared on the German news programme *Tagesschau*<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, it was also taken up by other media, for example in the live coverage of *The Guardian*<sup>18</sup> and *Stern*<sup>19</sup> online editorial offices. [24]

This meteoric trajectory in online video culture and offline media led to more precise analytical questions. How exactly does this video actually qualify for the trajectory outlined? What exactly is its attention value, which is then increased, siphoned off or turned into a scandal by the online formats in which it appears? What can be said about the recipient design of the video? Is it possible to describe a particular "pointing gesture" which can be expressed by uploading the video to the various online news channels, and by embedding it in various forms of reporting, but which might also be reinforced by post-processing (cuts, additional audio tracks, etc.)? Is the video supposed to "provide evidence", pursue forensic objectives, document previously ignored perspectives? To what extent are characteristics such as authenticity, factuality or eye-witnessing underlined by this form of embedding? [25]

The questions that the analysis of online participant videos has to deal with in relation to the contextuality and situatedness of cases in online culture refer not least to current developments in media economics. Online content is increasingly no longer determined by the participants and users who produce and upload images, videos, etc., but is structured by the platforms and applications that dominate the Internet. View counts and other information that could be used to trace the trajectories of certain videos are often the subject of strategic manipulation<sup>20</sup>. [26]

These developments risk calling into question the vernacular properties of OPV outlined above. In our analyses, we therefore strive to identify the extent to which a *participant* video is involved, and the specific off- and online activities to which it owes its creation and trajectory in each individual case, in terms of material critique and data critique. Online research tools are helpful for this, many of which

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16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwfNdk6Dxw4> [accessed: 26 April 2019].

17 <https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/sendung/ts-13189.html> (01:23-01:27) [accessed: 26 April 2019].

18 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2016/mar/22/brussels-airport-immediately-after-the-suicide-bomb-attack-video> [accessed: 26 April 2019].

19 <https://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/anschlaege-in-bruessel--amateuraufnahmen-zeigen-das-ausmass-des-terrors-am-flughafen-6760004.html> (00:32-00:58) [accessed: 26 April 2019].

20 On these developments, see FERRARA, VAROL, DAVIS, MENCZER and FLAMMINI (2016) as well as the contributions on portals such as [netzpolitik.org](http://netzpolitik.org), or the blogs and contributions by critical data journalists like e.g. [Michael KREIL](http://www.michaelkreil.com).

were developed in close connection with critical participant methods in online video culture itself<sup>21</sup>. [27]

### 3.1.2 *The situatedness of the recorded event*

By means of OPV, social situations and contexts of events are shown, put into perspective, logged or documented in a special way. The crucial issues are always: what is shown and how, and what is hidden; which elements of a larger context of events are brought into the picture and from which perspective, and which are not? To decode this case-specific showing and hiding, contrasting it with other reports and representations of the same event must be possible. The filmed event must therefore be a researchable event, i.e. also described and depicted in other media forms and discourses. [28]

This is predominantly true, for example, in political contexts, to which the majority of the cases examined by us belong. So far, we have mainly worked with OPV data generated in the context of political protest events that have been (or still are) surrounded by controversial debates and intense discourse, making these events particularly well researchable. *Following* and *mapping* techniques (CLARKE, 2005; MARCUS, 1995) as well as discourse analysis strategies have proven their worth here. With the help of such procedures, we can work out what exactly the filmed event represents a section of; what links it has with further locations, arenas, scenes, infrastructure elements, concepts, discourse positions etc.; in which overarching multilocal and transsituative event contexts it is embedded; and how exactly it can be located in the media discourse that has formed around the events. [29]

Often, however, the detailed search for references to the place and time of the event registered in the OPV data themselves leads to important discoveries regarding the location of the recording. These notes can, for instance, contribute to correcting already established contextualisations and interpretations. This is illustrated, for example, by the case of the video *G20: Busfahrgäste in Angst* ["G20: Bus Passengers in Fear"], which was created in the context of the protest activities against the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017. Using the OPV data, which show a passenger's perspective on an encounter with a black block moving past outside the bus windows, we were able to work out that the filmed events had taken place on the first day of the summit at 7:30 a.m. in the Elbchaussee, a residential area known as the "villa district". Video of cars being set alight, which was used by the media as evidence of the aimless destruction wreaked by an unleashed terrifying mob<sup>22</sup>, are given a meaningful targetedness by this specific

21 See the research tools explained on <http://www.journalisten-tools.de> and in the so-called [Verification Handbook](#). In our educational research projects, reverse image searches have proved particularly useful for investigating online contextuality: tools like [TinEye](#) or [Amnesty International's YouTube DataViewer](#) can be employed to search for sources and context information using images, including video still frames, especially thumbnails of video platforms (rather than only using keywords or URLs). This procedure can be considered closely connected to the widespread critical participant methods within online culture to assert or refute the status of images and videos as "the document of" (GARFINKEL, 1967, p.78).

22 This video appeared, often only in excerpts or in strongly edited form, in many media reports on the events during the G-20 summit in Hamburg, e.g. in a report of the ARD news programme

geographical and temporal situation (namely, against one of the richest residential areas of Hamburg and its inhabitants). In further analyses, this aspect of meaning was then related to the other disparate layers of meaning that could be deciphered in the material. [30]

### 3.1.3 *The situative context of the development of OPV data*

OPVs are audiovisual data generated by situation participants, which always also document the respective mode of filming participation, the form and degree of situative involvement of the filmmaker(s), and situative action and observation by means of the camera. The modes of participation and involvement initially vary according to whether filming and recording is a typical activity appropriate to the situation—as with pop concerts and large-scale political demonstrations—or whether it violates situative social rules and must attempt to protect itself from anticipated sanctions, as in the case of certain liturgical celebrations, clandestine actions, etc. These situative specifics manifest themselves in particular in the camera activities and movements, which in turn find expression in the material. [31]

In our teaching research projects, we have been particularly concerned with OPVs that can be regarded as audiovisual accounts of social situations and events, and are characterised by a camera that is situatively more or less affected. This sensitivity of the camera to the changing centre of attention of the social situation (GOFFMAN, 1966, pp.95-98) is always in tension with the "reconstructing intentionality" (CORSTEN, 2018, p.802) of filming and recording. The following question has proven to be analytically productive in this context: to what extent are such intentionalities (of documenting to ascertain, of showing, monitoring, etc.), which structure the activities of film and which are connected with a specific selectivity and framing (*cadrage*), impaired, made to disappear, realigned and/or transformed by the situative dynamics? [32]

We have also devoted special attention to situative interactions (linguistic and non-verbal, physical, gestural, mimic) between the camera and participants in the situation, including acting for the camera. OPVs that show activities initiated for the camera are also considered "natural" data in our methodology, i.e. products of online video practices to be found in the nature of the social. OPV is a "natural", meaningful "ethnological" type of data—in the sense of ethnographic naturalism—produced by participants, which provides the basis for participant interpretations and explanations<sup>23</sup>. With OPV analysis, we also try to do justice to this ethnological naturalness. [33]

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Panorama, in which it was additionally accompanied by sombre music and comments by the bus driver; see <https://daserste.ndr.de/panorama/archiv/2017/G20-Gewalt-Wer-sind-die-Taeter.gzwanzig246.html> (ca. 00:50-02:06) [accessed: 26 April 2019].

23 Ethnographic naturalism here means that ethnographers "assume by way of a method that 'their areas' [in our case the area of online video practices, RS/BW] are self-organising social units that exist and have an internal order even when they [i.e. the ethnographers] themselves are not present" (BREIDENSTEIN, HIRSCHAUER, KALTHOFF & NIESWAND, 2013, p.10). Such "natural fields" are thus found in the nature of the social.

These considerations give rise to questions that have enabled us in our joint interpretation sessions<sup>24</sup> to determine more precisely the extent to which the camera and the social situation are exposed to each other, and thus construct or generate completely different OPV data. How can the camera positions, perspectives and activities be characterised? Is it a stationary camera that is insensitive to the situation's relevance and dynamically changing centres of attention, but instead provides a permanent and detailed registration of the event, whose sequentiality can be logged and used for sequence analysis? Or is it a participatory camera that becomes involved in the situative logic of events, is affected by the events, and follows the relevance settings of the situation, but does not provide a permanent registration of the events? Can the participants' and/or the camera's activities be recognised as ratified opening and/or closing procedures for situative processes? Is it a situative dynamic that is shown—in uncut sequentiality—or do we find cuts and montages that impose meaning? [34]

### **3.2 Data preparation and interpretation**

For data preparation, we have developed a data and case-specific procedure in three steps, which is roughly based on the procedural proposals of TUMA (2017) and TUMA et al. (2013), but which specifies, modifies and complements them so as to do justice to the particular reflexive properties of this type of data. When processing OPV data, the reference problem of the specific complexity of this type of data must first be dealt with, as in any interpretative analysis of audiovisual data. Given this complexity, selectivity is inevitable: one must decide which aspects of the multi-layered data should be included in the study, and how. [35]

As a first step, we carry out a rough sequencing based on situative relevance. This means that by looking together at the material again and again, we try to identify units and situatively meaningful sequences of the events shown, which are opened up, decided upon and delimited from each other in the material itself (through appropriate interactions, actions, camera activities, etc.). [36]

In the second step, we select individual sequences for minute analysis. This selection process is already closely linked to the exploration of possibly relevant questions and is based on the principle of theoretical sampling formulated in grounded theory methodology (e.g. STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1994). The aim of this joint selection and exploration process, which is advanced in the data sessions, is to discover and formulate relevant questions to which interesting answers are available and discoverable in the material. [37]

In the third step, the selected sequences are jointly transcribed in the data sessions. Here, the writing of a score (MORITZ, 2011; TUMA et al., 2013) has proved feasible, i.e. the selected OPV sequences are divided into various modalities, which can then be systematically dealt with. This step is the very heart

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<sup>24</sup> In our data and collective interpretation sessions, we have always (roughly) sequenced the video data prepared according to the procedures described below, and subjected them to the detailed analysis procedures also described below. Here, it was important to use the implicit (social) knowledge of all participants in the data sessions in a methodically controlled way.

of the detailed analysis, since we have discovered that the joint transcription of the selected sequences is often also analytically very productive and is accompanied by the formulation of memos and analytical ideas, which can then be further elaborated on the basis of the transcript created. [38]

In the interpretation and data sessions, we initially refer to OPV as the participants do. In other words, we first mobilise an implicit, practical "membership knowledge" (HAVE 2002), which we share with the participants of online video practices. The analytical challenge is then to transform this membership knowledge and membership ability from a resource into an explicit topic, and to ask how exactly the participants as researchers, analysts and (participant) sociologists are interested in the situative events and activities; how exactly they film, upload, disseminate, repeatedly play and investigate, question, comment on and criticise these activities. These questions about the *how exactly* open up the problems and topics that the video practices are about. In other words, we ask *what exactly* is of interest in the video practices: what should be shown, made recognisable and comprehensible, be put in perspective, in focus and at the centre?

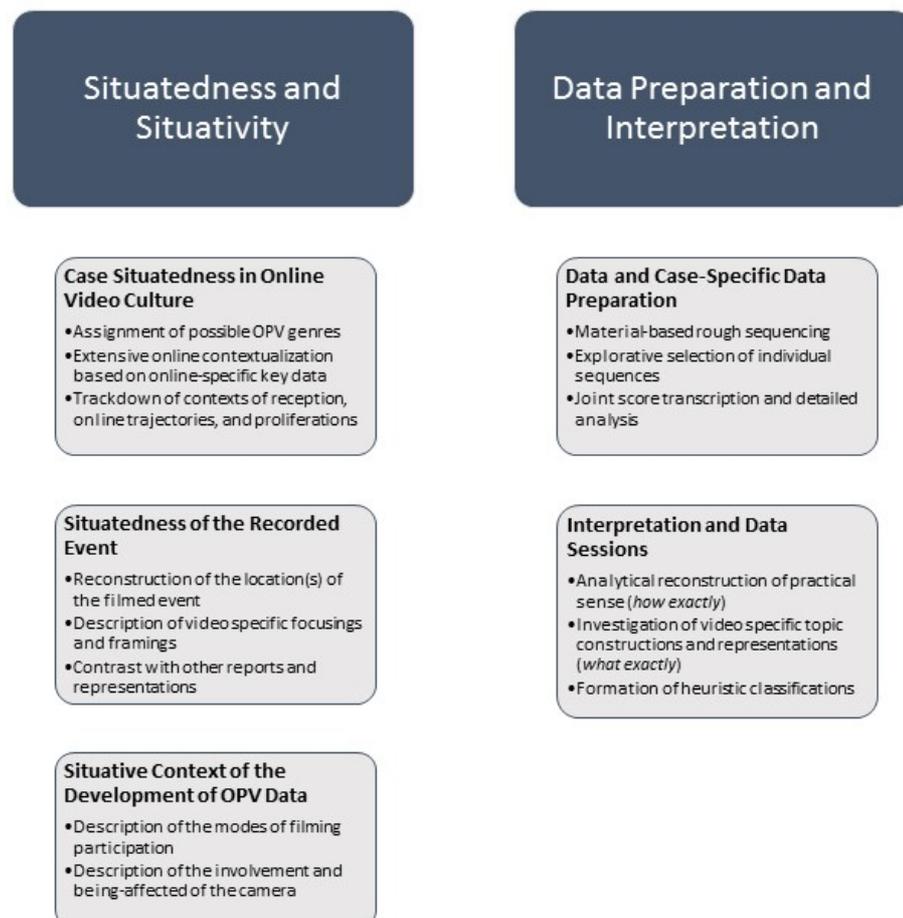


Fig.1: Schematic representation of the procedural steps [39]

In the context of political protests, to which category the majority of the cases we have worked with so far belong, we can heuristically and provisionally describe the video-supported sociologising of the participants as having two different basic orientations. Although we have repeatedly found cases in which both orientations play an important role, they can be juxtaposed as follows: [40]

Many online video practices follow a gestural language (*gestus*) of documenting, showing, revealing, reasoning, substantiating, refuting, investigating, proving, and arguing. This gestural language is often particularly emphasised by an enquiring camera and by genre formats such as citizen journalism or forensic video. The corresponding video practices mobilise "ethnological" capacities and establish vernacular counter-publics. In such online practice contexts, videos often enter into communicative and/or confrontational relationships with one another. The police publish recordings that refute the accounts of police violence posted on the Internet by other participants, cast doubt on their "authenticity", etc. [41]

A second frequent orientation of video practices can be described as a gestural language of the situative and the affective. This is particularly emphasised by a situative camera—possibly fixed to the body of a participant—and by formats such as eyewitness video. Of particular interest are the affective loads of situations, the idea being to transmit "what it was like to be there" (SNOWDON, 2014, p.415). The aim is not only to testify to being-affected, which is experienced situatively, but also to "carry away", i.e. to affect other groups of participants who are not present (SCHANKWEILER, 2016, 2017). [42]

#### **4. "A Press Conference Ends in Disaster and Arrest"—Excerpts from a Case Analysis**

The plausibility of the preceding methodological and methodical considerations will now be further tested by extracts from a case analysis. We follow the procedural steps outlined in the previous section. Our case comes from the context of the events surrounding the occupation of the Gerhard-Hauptmann-Schule (GHS) in Berlin-Kreuzberg in June 2014 by a group of fugitives and activists, and the nine-day siege of the occupied building and the surrounding Kreuzberg residential area by the police<sup>25</sup>. [43]

##### **4.1 Local press conference: Situative condensations and affective loads**

The video, entitled *Eine Pressekonferenz endet im Desaster und mit einer Festnahme* ["A press conference ends in disaster and with an arrest"], was uploaded to YouTube<sup>26</sup> by Andreas KOPIETZ, a journalist (crime reporter) with the newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* on 26 June 2014, the day of the filmed event. It has a length of 2 minutes and 24 seconds, is still on the YouTube channel

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<sup>25</sup> The wider political context of the events is formed by the various joint protest actions and demands by means of which the so-called refugee movement had drawn attention to the difficult living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers since 2012, i.e. long before the so-called refugee summer of 2015 (GLÖDE & BÖHLO, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laSSmQl6lgU> [accessed: 11 October 2018].

maintained by Andreas KOPIETZ—along with other videos from the above-mentioned context of events, and yet others on predominantly Berlin-specific topics—and has been viewed over 34,500 times<sup>27</sup>. During the occupation of the GHS and the cordoning-off of the neighbouring residential area, a wealth of OPV circulated, documenting individual events and disseminating them on social media. Many of these OPVs are no longer available. The police took part in this situation-specific online communication via Twitter, but did not put its own OPV on the Internet—as is now common in other protest contexts<sup>28</sup>. Given its availability and access figures, we can assume that our case video is one of the most popular videos in this context. [44]

The narrower situative context of the events registered and focused on in the video is a press conference called by the Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain district office within the zone cordoned off by the police in front of the occupied building. This press conference was a situative condensation of the political situation of the occupation, which by then had already lasted three days. It was characterised by the physical co-presence and proximity of antagonistically situated protagonists of the conflict, and developed a special dynamic. Moreover, the press conference was already affectively charged by its immediate prehistory. Journalists, who had been repeatedly invited by the occupiers and supporters, had been denied access to the occupied building and to talks with the occupiers for several days by the district office and the police. On the morning of 26 June, members of the press had again been turned away from the police barriers and prevented from talking to the activists<sup>29</sup>. Under the ensuing public pressure to justify their actions, district politicians and city councillors invited members of the press for the afternoon to explain to them *in situ* what they saw as a complicated security situation. [45]

The video was presumably made by the journalist Andreas KOPIETZ (and uploaded on the same day), who, along with fellow journalists, was gathered in a semicircle around the press spokesman of the district office posted in front of the locked gate of the occupied building. It is also important for the situative context in which the data were created that the video was probably produced with a professional video camera, rather than a smartphone. Several such video cameras were used in the situation; they are part of the technical equipment of professional journalists. The OPV data are situative accounts of the press

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27 Andreas KOPIETZ posts videos on his YouTube channel with titles (in translation) like "Police raid against mosque in Berlin Tempelhof", "The tunnel the bank robbers dug" or "Protests against Nazi march". These examples form the contextual background to our case.

28 See, for example, the police use of recordings of the G20 Summit 2017 in Hamburg both for investigative and PR purposes [<https://www.polizei.hamburg/g20-fahndungen/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82lAbUM-el>, accessed: 26 April 2019]. On the relevance of OPV practices for the executive branch in general, see also the debate held in September 2018 about the "authenticity" of the so-called *Hetzjagd* ["hounding"] video from Chemnitz, which finally led to the reassignment of the then-President of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg MAAßEN [<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/maassen-reaktionen-103.html>, accessed: 26 April 2019].

29 This was done in order "not to complicate measures", as the district office spokesman explained [<https://www.freitag.de/autoren/dame-von-welt/raeumung-der-gerhart-hauptmann-schule>, accessed: 1 May 2019].

conference and its ritual participants and speakers, and at the same time a product of the situative and event-driven dynamics that unfolded in the course of the press conference. In the following, we will give the outline of the conference along with the rough sequence of the video, illustrated with translated excerpts from the verbal transcript and with still images. [46]

#### 4.2 The event-driven dynamics of the event in seven successive sequences

The video begins with an attempt by the press spokesman of the district office (P) to establish a definition of the situation vis-à-vis the journalists, and to bind all those present to it—grammatically, by using the first person plural:

	P: "... it is a situation that is very, very difficult from a security point of view. We've got people in this house threatening to throw themselves off the roof ..." (00:03-00:15)
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Sequence 1: Still image 0:06 (Source: YouTube) [47]

This opening sequence ends after only a few seconds. A sequence begins in which the usual distribution of speaking rights for the interaction ritual of a press conference is cancelled, and the press officer is interrupted by tough and insistent questions from journalists (J1, J2 etc.).

	J2: "Yes, but I'm sure they didn't threaten to kill themselves if there's a press conference and we hear their story ..." (00:15-00:32)
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Sequence 2: Still image 0:27 (Source: YouTube) [48]

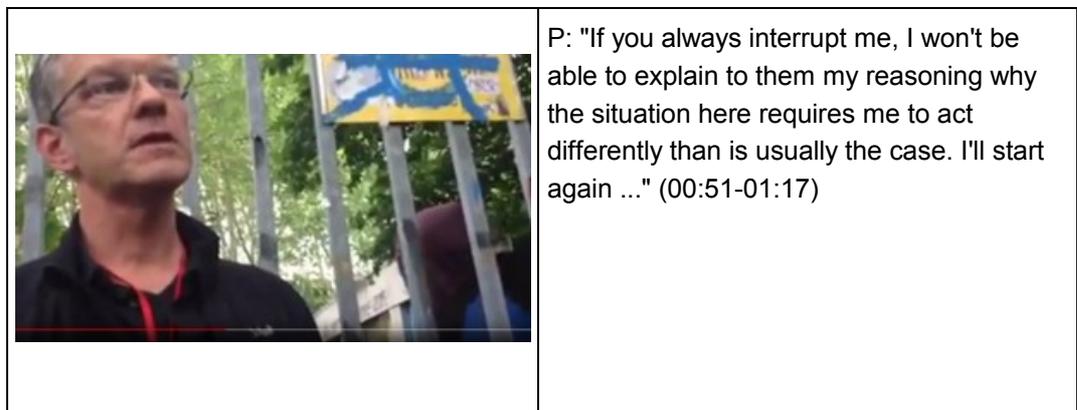
With the next sequence, the event accelerates. A supporter (U), who is behind the press spokesman in the cordoned-off area behind the locked iron-bar gate, interrupts the spokesman and addresses the journalists. The cameras and

microphones turn towards him. He succeeds in situatively reorganising the infrastructure of the press conference. The press conference of the district office becomes the press conference of the occupation supporters.



Sequence 3: Still image 0:33 (Source: YouTube) [49]

While the supporter turns away with a gestural invitation to the journalists to accompany him and walks through the courtyard towards the occupied building, the press spokesman tries to restore the press conference format.



Sequence 4: Still image 1:01 (Source: YouTube) [50]

Suddenly, loud shouts in the locked courtyard in front of the occupied building attract the attention of all situation participants. The camera pans away from the press spokesman and swivels in the direction of the shouting. It finally focuses on a group of four policemen kneeling on the supporter on the ground. On his way back to the occupied building, he was apparently roughly pulled to the ground and calls attention to this incident by shouting loudly. The journalists react with great indignation, making upset accusations and shouting, to begin with mainly at the press officer.



Sequence 5: Still image 1:21 (Source: YouTube) [51]

The press officer gives up his attempts to make himself heard against the outraged journalists and turns to a group of district representatives standing in the background. By averting his gaze, he seems to seal the failure of the press conference. A participant from the group of district representatives (B1) gains the attention of the camera and defends the role of the district office<sup>30</sup>.



Sequence 6: Still image 2:02 (Source: YouTube) [52]

Accompanied by the journalists' indignant shouts, the camera again turns towards the events in the courtyard behind the bars of the closed gate. The previously kneeling policemen are standing again; the supporter seems to have disappeared. A statement from the group of journalists, close to the microphone of the camera, ends the situation, and the video stops.

<sup>30</sup> The oppositional relationship in this sentence is revealing. The juxtaposition of the district office ("we") and the police ("they") suggests that in the political situation surrounding the occupation of the GHS in June 2014, the Berlin police increasingly acted as an independent political actor and as a counterpart to the district office led by the Green Party.



Sequence 7: Still image 2:21 (Source: YouTube) [53]

### 4.3 Situative solidarity, indignation and being-affected

We have selected Sequence 5 for an extensive detailed analysis, since the situative event receives a special affective load here. Our results can be summarised as follows: in this sequence, the OPV data are used to register and ratify how a "mutual focus / emotional entrainment mechanism" (COLLINS, 2004, p.xi) builds up situatively, and captures and sweeps up a large number of the situation participants, especially the journalists. Their violent indignation refers to a situative solidarity established in previous interactions. They respond to the violation of this previously established, certified and binding social norm by expressing moral feelings. A few seconds earlier, the supporter, who has now been pulled screaming to the ground, was still an interaction partner of the journalists and enjoyed a status as speaker, person and member which had been situatively established during the reorganisation of the press conference, and which was grossly violated by the policemen who pulled him to the ground. The outbreak of indignation is a concerted production of the participants. The situational modulation (GOFFMAN, 1974) of the supporter's shouts is particularly important: these are targeted cries in the situative co-presence of potentially outraged eye witnesses, ear witnesses and video witnesses. The indignation is directed against the press spokesman as well as against the police officers who executed the arrest, and puts the representatives of the district office that are present in a difficult position. According to an interpretation that has not gone unchallenged in our data sessions, the police are sabotaging the press conference convened by the district office in front of the journalists and their rolling cameras, and thus also sabotaging its intended communication strategy<sup>31</sup>. [54]

31 Deviating from this, the interpretation group pointed out that it was not possible to clarify—on the basis of the OPV data and the subsequent context research (which was only possible to a limited extent)—how and why the supporter could get from the occupied building to the school gate at all under the eyes of the police officers present in the courtyard. Did the police, at the behest of the district office, initially allow him to go, or was he able to advance unnoticed to the press conference at the school gate?

#### **4.4 OPV and the transmission of "being-affected"**

In summary, we can say that the situative, eventful and affective dynamics of events fixed in the OPV data are due to an affective preload, which had come about through the lockout of the press in the preceding days of the occupation and police siege. Many journalists who came to the press conference in front of the occupied building were already very angry about the district office's information policy, which was therefore under enormous pressure to justify itself. The arrest of the supporter and the breach of situative solidarity then dramatically increased these affective preloads. The events recorded in the video not only affected all the participants who were within hearing and seeing distance of the event, but were also intended to affect and captivate the viewers of the video. The arrest of the supporter—marked as a sudden, surprising and situatively improbable event by the participants—was captured by the video. It received a great deal of attention, garnered a lot of fame during the ongoing occupation and siege of the GHS, and acted as a medial support, amplifier and mediator of the being-affected we have outlined. Accordingly, we can assume that OPV practices are also able to transmit recorded being-affected. However, this affective broadcasting via OPV presupposes an affectibility and a practical understanding of affects (WIESE, 2019) on the part of the participants. The conditions for this are created by involvement in practices operating offline as well as online, i.e. they are not tied to physical presence or co-presence. In this way, the binding of attention that is constitutive for political situations and protest events in particular can be intensified, and arouse and reinforce moral feelings (e.g. indignation) also in the participants of online practices—or upset existing moral evaluations. These characterisations more acutely define a specific relevance of OPV which has emerged repeatedly in the context of political movements and has made online video practices an integral part of recent political protest and resistance cultures. [55]

#### **5. Conclusion and Outlook**

These excerpts from one of our case analyses have emphasised that OPVs offer special epistemological opportunities if they can be considered and interpreted as audiovisual accounts of social situations and events produced by an affected camera. Moreover, such audiovisual participant accounts can have their own affective effects while garnering fame on social media. They thus have an important role within the framework of an interpretative empirical sociology of affect. [56]

We have suggested and presented the possibilities and procedural steps of analysing "reflexive" forms of video data production and analysis practised by participants. This is a type of participant data and procedures that has so far received little attention in interpretative empirical social research. These vernacular productions can often be described as participants' practices of analysing and sociologising (SCHEFFER & SCHMIDT, 2013), especially in political contexts. However, further research on the production and use of OPVs is needed to determine how they are produced, distributed and utilised in different

contexts<sup>32</sup>. How exactly is OPV analysed and argued with? What can be said about the corresponding online video practices and ethnomethods of arguing, doubting, criticising, contradicting, etc.? How exactly do themes, problems and topics constitute themselves in the video-supported sociologisation of the participants? Such questions will have to be empirically elaborated within the framework of critically-minded social media research. [57]

It is crucial to continue developing work on cases with audiovisual data produced by participants and, furthermore, to transform the production and use of video data in sociology as well as the video practices and data of social research from a research *resource* into a research *topic* and, consequently, into a research *object*. Interpretative sociology can be usefully advanced by decoding and mobilising the corresponding practical and methodological membership knowledge of "lay or professional analysts of ordinary activities" (GARFINKEL & SACKS, 1986, p.162). However, the methodological literature tends to over-accentuate the difference between audiovisual data produced by participants and those produced by research, or between vernacular practices and lay analyses on the one hand and a scientific video interaction analysis on the other; this stands in the way of a productive further development of sociological video analysis. [58]

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32 See for the contexts of police work, football and market research, TUMA (2017). For analysis of the various uses and online activities connected with OPV, (digital-ethnographic) studies would be fundamental for advancing further empirical differentiations. In the course of such a differentiation of the idea, developed here, that OPVs have affective potentiality, it could be argued, for example, that a practical basic competence in OPV-specific "learning to be affected" (LATOURE, 2004, p.209) is a basic condition for participation in OPV practices. However, this must be distinguished from any "affective content", for example moral feelings, which can be straightforwardly suggested to viewers by a video or its contextual embedding, but which in practice can provoke quite different responses (SMITH & McDONALD, 2011, pp.306f.).

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