

VIDEO RESEARCH IN THE OPEN

ENCOUNTERS INVOLVING THE RESEARCHER- CAMERA

AUTHOR: LARS FRERS (email: lars.frers@fu-berlin.de)

This chapter has been published in *Video interaction analysis : Methods and methodology*, edited by Ulrike Tikvah Kissmann. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang: 155-177.

It is available at: <http://www.peterlang.com/index.cfm?vID=57473>

[the page breaks of the published version are given in square brackets]

WHERE, WHAT, WHO.....	2
HIERARCHIES OF THE GAZE	4
<i>Camera & film</i>	4
<i>Being an academic</i>	7
IN THE OPEN.....	9
<i>Invisible evasions</i>	10
<i>keeping the distance</i>	10
<i>Getting close</i>	14
CONCLUSION.....	19
<i>Strategies & tactics</i>	20
TRANSCRIPTION.....	21
REFERENCES.....	21

Filming is an encounter. The person wielding the camera, the camera itself, and the people and things around them enter a dynamic relationship. This relationship unfolds itself according to the rules set by the social, spatial, and material features and practices that constitute it. These features and practices constitute it, but they do not determine it in a linear way – too many contingencies enter the interaction process, disrupting, changing, or reorienting it.

When I quickly unpack my camera, alerted by some action that I want to record, my perception changes. I am focussing my attention on viewing angles, light conditions, obstacles, and on the reactions displayed by others who are witnessing me becoming someone who is videotaping them and their surroundings. Before I start recording, I can never be totally sure what is going to happen. How will people react? Will I record something that can be used for my research? Am I encroaching on anybody's privacy? Where should I point my camera, which part of my surroundings seems to be most interesting, which part looks less promising?

In this essay, I will focus on the surprising, unplanned side of doing video research, pointing out both the risks and the opportunities that are part and parcel of filming non-staged everyday life in public settings. I would not claim that public settings are quantitatively more or less structured than private settings. Since I have not performed any video research in private settings I cannot compare the two, instead I want to focus on paying full attention to the peculiarities of the publicly accessible settings as I have encountered them. Using an approach inspired but not constricted by ethnomethodology¹ shall allow me to investigate the encounters or interactions in a way that is open to small details, disruptions, and to the interpretations offered by the members of the settings themselves. Most of the recordings and the experiences on which this essay is based have been collected during my research on railway and ferry terminals.² These places are – even when they are owned by private companies – accessible to and used by a highly diverse public. Accordingly, I had the opportunity to record a host of different situations and encounters. Working in midst of this diversity made me aware of the [156] great variety of situations with which a video researcher is being faced. It is these experiences, the challenges one may face while being out in the open, equipped with a video camera, that I want to ponder here.

WHERE, WHAT, WHO

Investigating issues of social control, and generally examining the relations between the social and the material, I used a handheld DV camcorder to record what is happening in railway and ferry terminals. I covered almost all times of day and

1 See Garfinkel, 1984; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1986 for the basic theoretical and methodological assumptions of ethnomethodology and Maynard and Clayman, 1991 for a discussion of the diversity of ethnomethodology.

2 See for example Frers, 2007a; Frers, 2007b. In addition, I did some videotaping for a long-term research project about a blossoming cherry tree in Berlin, and for my new project on the perceptions of the materiality of islands in a time of climate change.

night but recorded mostly during the day. I filmed many in different locations in the terminals: main entrances, ticket selling machines, passages, niches and corners, plazas in front of the terminal, waiting areas on the platforms, and so on. I mainly filmed in German cities, but also in a few other places in Norway, Denmark, and the United States.

In a way, this information could be interpreted as providing an answer to the where question regarding my research. The position of the researcher has been given in terms of geographical location. But there is much more to be said about the where – when it is asking for her or his position in the social and material field. In this section, I will only provide a brief theoretical reflection of this question, the actual answering will be done by analyzing what did happen when I performed my recordings. Thinking about one's location in the *social field*, it is, of course, Bourdieu (for example Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15-19, 26-35) who pops into mind. My economical, cultural, and to a degree also my social capital put me into a position where I dress, talk, move, and perceive in a way that is closely related to the way I have been raised in family and in academia, to the amount of money that I have at my disposal, and to the taste and style that I developed in exchange with my peers and with the things that I witness in the media and in everyday life. Thus equipped, I establish distances towards others who are co-present in the place of my investigation. Some may appear inferior, others superior, others both or difficult to judge. I watch others, judging their appearance and actions, while they are doing the same – both being aware of the other one's awareness.

But what about the position in the *material field*? Is that not the same thing as the geographical location? In the way that materiality is conceptualized for this essay, there is more to this position than physical location. Drawing both on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Merleau-Ponty and Lefort, 1968) and on works published in the wide field of science and technology studies (Garfinkel et al., 1981; Latour, 1987; Pickering, 1995), I want to propose that the position in the material field is taken by myself as a bodily actor who has at least temporarily become a hybrid of man and machine: a camera-researcher. The way I position myself is guided by the way *I perceive with and as the camera*, by the way *the camera perceives with and as me*. I am not a disembodied subject that perceives its surroundings, analyzing its perceptions, then deciding on what to do next, step by step, one after the other in a logical sequence. Instead, I am oriented towards the world, always perceiving and acting at the same time, seamlessly going into alliances and oppositions with the things around me (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 143). Things and others which/who become parts of the horizon of possibilities that I enter and constitute at the same time.

At this point in the essay, this reference to the body in action as something that acts beside the subject-object or human-thing/technology divide is mostly a programmatic statement – the same goes true for the claim that researcher and camera form a unit of perception. We will see what kinds of analytical and self-reflective insights will be allowed by taking this perspective in the following sections.

HIERARCHIES OF THE GAZE

Since this volume focusses on video and video analysis, I will first pay particular attention to the gaze – how it is used, how it is put into interaction with the surroundings, and how it is modified by becoming the gaze of a camera. Gazing at others, filming them and putting them into the camera's focus establishes a specific set of hierarchies, one that is being produced by the actant-bundle³ researcher and camera.

Camera & film

Video research produces recordings. Usually, it is the researcher who is *controlling the camera*, thus *controlling the field of vision* that is covered and recorded. When working in public settings, one cannot or does not want to direct what is happening, as a director of a movie would do. Instead, the directing is mostly limited to deciding how things are recorded. Accordingly, it is the actual camera-work, turning the lens into a particular direction, or carrying the camera around, by which the researcher exerts his particular kind of power. He or she decides: whom or what to follow, to leave in peace, to ignore, or to sneak upon. The others who are co-present have to live with the visual regime that is being established. As we will see later, that does not mean that they are powerless, but it means that the hierarchy is set by the researcher – the hierarchy can be challenged or not, but it is present.

It is present even if those who are being filmed do not realize that this is the case. Depending on the way the filming is set up, it is more or less discernible to others. The range of possibilities extends from hidden (surveillance) cameras to cameras operated by a staff of people using tripods, lights, and microphones, attracting the attention of everyone around. Since for ethical and practical reasons most academic social research in public settings will probably not be conducted in one of those extreme ways, it makes sense to pay some more [158] attention to the range in-between these extremes. Using a handheld DV camcorder, I was able to use different tactics to position me-the-camera. Most of the tactics I employed in the field served to keep my impact on the setting limited. For ethical reasons, I did not want to conceal my operations completely, but I still wanted to limit the effect that I have on the field.⁴

Concealing my filming would have felt as if I become one with the system of surveillance that sweeps through the terminals – I would become part of the panoptic system that makes everyone feel observed by an entity that cannot be seen and that might look anywhere at any time. (See Foucault, 1995: 200-209.) Since one of my

3 'Actant' is used by Latour (2005) to refer to the agency of both things and people.

4 There is a wealth of studies on participant observation and its relation to what is going on in the observed setting. The following titles might hint at of the breadth of this field: Bondi, 2005; Girtler, 2001; Heath and Hindmarsh, 2002; Kanstrup, 2002; Lofland and Lofland, 1995.

objectives was to engage myself critically with surveillance technology, I needed to keep a distance between my way of filming and the filming that is being done by surveillance cameras. However, when the German federal police was hunting two men who had planted bombs in trains (the bombs did not explode), they made some surveillance material public, showing their suspects. When watching the material, I was struck by the similarities between their recordings and mine. Although the intention and some technical aspects were quite different, there was an eerie overlap in the content, in what could actually be seen on the recordings: mundane activity, people walking, talking, and waiting. Just like in my recordings. But these recordings were not about everyday life, they were about the big specter of our time: terrorism. (See Frers, 2007b: 205-207.)

It was obvious to me that people would feel observed when I put the camera's eye-piece to my eyes, practically aiming my full attention at them in a way that is hard to overlook. This feeling was so strong that I even had difficulties trying this out just to judge its effect – it felt highly uncomfortable to put people into such a position of being obviously scrutinized. In this way, the fact that I produced a visual hierarchy became tangible for me. This kind of taking into the gaze is so obvious that it exerts a strong pressure, pushing those who are affected by the gaze of the camera-researcher to openly acknowledge the presence of the observation. Both parties know who is being filmed, and the one who is subjected to the gaze has to react, knowing that his or her reaction will be recorded. It is this double discomfort (being subjected and knowing that the researcher-camera knows this and still keeps doing it) that I did not want to evoke. Accordingly, making precautions to keep the directedness of the gaze of the researcher-camera unclear or at least unobtrusive was one of the tactics I employed while recording in the field. This was accomplished best by holding the camera in front of my belly, either looking at the camera's display, which was flipped out to allow me to watch it from above, or by placing the camera on some kind of even surface close to me, for example on a flat handrail. The direction of my gaze compared to the direction of the camera's gaze was [159] important for those who were co-present. That is, neither my gaze for itself or the camera's gaze for itself were relevant, instead it was the the gaze as it was performed by me and the camera together. As long as I gazed directly at the people who were in the eye of the camera, I seemed to evoke discomfort or irritation. When I looked at the display or, even more so, in a direction completely unrelated to their position, they did not show the same amount of discomfort, usually not showing any kind of acknowledgement of the presence of the camera-researcher at all. Thus I tried to keep low both the discomfort that I caused by doing my research, and the general impact on the field, which I wanted to study in its 'normal', researcher-camera-free configuration.

Depending on the way the camera-researcher is oriented, people are compelled to or are enabled to adjust their behavior. They have at least potential access to seeing and reconstructing what is going on, and they can act accordingly. This fragile balance is being undermined by one aspect of filming (and photographing) that should not be underestimated in its effect. By *controlling the zoom* one is able to

creep or *sneak into the intimate*. It is practically impossible for those who are being filmed to judge or recognize how close the observer moves to them with the zoom. Therefore, they cannot adequately react and change or modify their behavior in a way that would help them to protect their intimacy. Going into full zoom, I could have observed people who were using the ticket machine as if I would be standing right next to them, staring unblinkingly at their fingers, their faces, and their bodily posture – perhaps even at the PIN code which they are typing into the money transfer interface.

The zoom is a powerful tool. Using it is very tempting, because using the zoom allows me to discern the small details of people's interactions – and it is exactly those small details that I was interested in. On the other hand, it is a sneaky affair that robs those who I study of parts of their dignity. They feel unobserved and disclose things, which they probably would want to keep to themselves. Using the zoom, I become a voyeur more than with any other function that is offered by the camera. Because of this highly problematic and ambivalent aspect of the zoom, I tried to avoid it most of the time. One exception to this rule were cases in which I would not have been able to get access to information that I thought was highly valuable and when at the same time I had the impression that the situation is not particularly delicate or the people involved not particularly vulnerable. (Another exception will be discussed in the section "double-challenge.")

The final aspect of hierarchy of the gaze that I want to discuss in this section is related to the concrete product of the recording activity in the field. By *keeping the recording* the researcher can exert his or her real power. She or he can decide when to watch a scene – again and again, forwards and backwards, slowly frame by frame, or quickly skimming through the recording. What is even more problematic: he or she can also show the recording to anybody – the participants of a conference, the readers of a book who can look at video-stills or watch the accompanying DVD, or even to everyone who has access to the inter-[160]net and a computer able to play video files. When the researcher keeps the recording, those who were filmed are *loosing control of their self-presentation*. This puts a lot of responsibility into the hands of the researcher. One never knows if what one films contains compromising information, which might bring someone into trouble. One way to deal with this is to anonymize those who have been recorded. Anonymizing someone in a video track however does not only require an uncommon amount of technical know-how and sophisticated software – when looking at it in detail, it becomes apparent that it is very hard to decide what degree of anonymization is actually required. Does it suffice to pixelate the eyes, or the whole face? What about clothes? People one does know closely are easily recognized by their gait, which will be very difficult to get rid of without losing everything one needs in the recording. It should be obvious that an adequate handling of the problem of losing control of one's self-presentation cannot be accomplished by adhering to a recipe-like practice of anonymization. Depending on setting, situation, and the vulnerability of those involved, one should decide on appropriate measures. Maybe it is even possible to think about this while one is still in the field – when the question is if one

should continue to record or not. One minimal requirement is, of course, to make sure that access to the material is limited – securely erasing hard drives and USB sticks before selling or giving them away, keeping potentially sensitive material locked or encrypted or both and other procedures should be standard measures for privacy protection.

In the introduction, I wrote that researcher and camera become hybridized because they together observe and relate themselves to the world. That is, they constitute a unit with a shared perspective and agency. However, in the first part of this section, I have also demonstrated that the researcher and the camera are treated as a unit by those who are interacting with them. Depending on the way the camera-researcher distributes attention, on the way they are configured with regard to each other and thus with their surroundings, they are treated differently by those who encounter them. Since the researcher-camera is both acting as a hybrid and being treated as such, I would argue that it makes sense to treat them as a unit on an analytic level. Therefore, when I am speaking of my recordings or my attention in the following text, this usually includes a reference to the camera as being part of me, too.⁵

Being an academic

In this section, I will approach the establishment of a hierarchy of the gaze from another perspective. Looking at the researcher's position in the social field, I want to map a set of distinctions that should help in problematizing the power effects that accompany field work in public settings.

[161] The first aspect that I want to inspect is the particular location in relation to the *power-knowledge* complex (see Foucault, 1978, vol. 1: 92-102; Foucault, 1980) that an academic takes. In the Foucaultian sense, the academic can speak in the truth, that is he or she can position him- or herself in a discourse that produces truth, or even create this discourse together with others. The knowledge claimed by the researcher grants him a very specific kind of power: the power to name and define. Vested with this power-knowledge, the researcher can arrange others and their statements, discrediting them, lifting them into a higher position, or – by being cryptic and esoteric in different kinds of ways – just baffling and confusing them. Thus, the researcher not only acquires an advantage in long-term negotiations of his or her social position but also gains additional opportunities in short-term, situational negotiations. However, this power-knowledge complex does not only grant superiority in discourse in the more delimited sense of talk and writing, it also grants a better position in terms of the gaze. What the researcher sees and what she or he looks at, gains particular attention. It is not only looked at, but it is put under the scrutiny of science. Science will decide if it is right or wrong, will count, measure and explicate it, tear it out of its own context, connect it with unforeseen and uncontrollable other entities and finally present it in its own frame-

5 Of course, that does not mean that a camera has the same epistemological status as a self-reflective human being.

work. Seen from this perspective, it becomes obvious that being investigated by science's gaze can cause a considerable amount of unease.

The second aspect is somewhat related to the first, but the focus moves from knowledge and discourse to the habitus of the researcher. The researcher always uses *practices of distinction* (see Bourdieu, 1984. chapters three and five), distancing himself from others who are co-present in the field. Having already mentioned Bourdieu's framework as the evident point of reference earlier in the text, I only want to provide some more detail regarding how the researcher maintains distances. Since my personal capital is pretty much distributed accurately as it has been outlined by Bourdieu for average academics (that is little economic capital, some social capital in the form of good connections to others who might potentially become relevant in talk or negotiations, and a much higher than average cultural capital), I do have to struggle in relation to those who have more financial capital. Depending on the way they dress or the newspapers and books that they read, the kind of electronic gadgets player they use, etc., I can try to see them as being unrefined, show-offs, nouveau-riche, etc. – or I have to acknowledge their obvious superiority in the social field and live with it. In relation to those whom I perceive to be in a similar position, I can either try to positively identify with them (from my male perspective this might go along the lines of: “he has a nice style,” “she is quite attractive,” “I always wanted to read that, too,” etc.) or I can try to look out for clues that might offer opportunities for a positive distinction from their position (“who wears this much makeup?,” “sneakers with these kinds of pants? seems he tries to pretend he's still twenty-five.”) With those below my position, I can also either sympathize, telling myself that they probably earned to be in a better position, or I can see them [162] as just having bad taste, slow wits, rude behavior, etc. It is certainly not easy, and probably impossible to rid oneself from all of these preconceptions and the many subtle practices of distinction that go along with them completely, while one is in the field. One tactic that I employed to raise my awareness of these issues was to try to put on different kinds of clothes while filming. Sometimes I would film in a Punkrock-style black leather jacket with a red hooded sweater and a pair of washed out jeans, sometimes I would wear a functional all-weather jacket and sensible clothes, and at other times corduroy pants with an upscale brand shirt and Budapest-style shoes. I was not able to quantify or measure the effect these changes of outfit had on my observation practices in the field, however, I certainly felt different: sometimes more uneasy towards the lower strata of the social scale, sometimes more uneasy towards the upper strata – and I certainly had the impression that both genders looked at me or treated me differently depending on my appearance (see Frers, 2007b: 236-242).

The final aspect that I want to focus upon in this section are positional advantages that stem from *having a legitimization*. When I was in the field, both in the railway and in the ferry terminals, I usually had acquired prior permission for filming and photographing. In the case of the ferry terminals, this was handled informally by talking to some representative of the shipping company who would usually not be particularly interested and just grant me permission in a wave-me-

through gesture – I obviously was not seen as a threat in any way, more as a minor nuisance or a strange but harmless person. In contrast, I had to acquire permission to film from a higher-up (a press representative) in the Deutsche Bahn company, for which I needed to file an application, provide information about me, my research, the concrete way in which I wanted to film (what kind of equipment, alone or with a team, etc.), the time period, and the different locations that I wanted to cover. After handing these things in, the permission (valid for one year) was granted without much further ado. However, I had to present my permission at every terminal in which I wanted to film. This way, most of the personnel was informed about my activities. There were significant local variations in how my presence was handled. Sometimes it was quite relaxed, that is a glance at the permission was deemed sufficient, but at other places, like in Leipzig Hauptbahnhof, my permission was copied and my presence announced to the security staff of the terminal. Thus, my presence was officially legitimate, proven by an official sheet of paper. This gave me a somewhat secure position, although I was sometimes treated with a distanced but pronounced suspicion – the security staff would keep an eye on me from the distance, from outside of the perceived viewing angle of my camera, demonstrating to me that I am being observed, too. Nonetheless, equipped with this kind of legitimization, I was in a safe and sound position when compared to others in the terminal. Everyone's presence is open to suspicion – are they legitimate travellers or shoppers, or are they loitering, perhaps even begging or otherwise breaching the rules of the house? In contrast to the average other, I was not alone. By carrying a sheet of paper, by having [163] communicated with someone from the Deutsche Bahn management, by coming from a university, by having an official mission, and by having an academic title I was different from them, connected to a large network of more or less powerful or symbolically important people and institutions.

Taken together, the camera-researcher has many features that constitute a locally specific and multi-dimensional hierarchy of the gaze. By controlling the recording of the action and by being equipped with formal and informal resources, skills, and legitimizations, the researcher-camera has several responsibilities in his relation to the field and the people she or he is recording or observing, because their privacy and their social position is often more vulnerable. Negotiating the relations between researcher-camera on the one hand and those who are being filmed on the other hand is a delicate and contingent process.

IN THE OPEN

Because of the open-endedness and the delicate character of doing video research in public settings, I chose to label this kind of research as being 'in the open.' It is open to modifications, surprises, and challenges from many different sources. In the following sections, I want to present evidence supporting this statement, and supporting the emphasis that I put on using the term encounter – a term that is

intended to stress the indeterminacy of interactions.⁶ I will show how the people in the field reacted to my presence, how they interacted with me-the-camera, thus putting their mark on my research, and implicitly or explicitly questioning my position.

Invisible evasions

The first set of interactions that I want to discuss is both obvious and hidden. If people detect the presence of me and my camera in time or from the right location, they will often have the opportunity of evading the camera-researcher. By taking a different route, perhaps passing me behind or using another entrance/exit, they can avoid being recorded at all. Since my vision was not restricted to what the camera recorded (as I wrote earlier, I often looked into a direction that was different from the direction the camera was pointed at), I could sometimes see people who did not enter the area covered by the camera. Following them in my peripheral vision, I could see how they moved past me, perhaps even throwing one or two suspicious glances in my direction. More often than not, people who would choose to evade being recorded were those who spent a substantial amount of time in the terminal, having enough time to observe me, and make up their mind about what I am doing. Service and security staff, people who waited for extended periods of time, and people who [164] did not have a clear mission – they sometimes scrutinized me from a distance, keeping clear of the camera. Evading to be recorded is an obvious tactic to protect oneself, even if it is hidden when one only looks at my recordings. Most people, however, would just pass through the camera's field of recording, either unaware or aloof of my presence.

keeping the distance

The second set of interactions encompasses encounters between others and the camera-researcher in which the others preserve a distance. My argument is that by keeping a distance, they maintain the order of the setting, that is they do not challenge the hierarchy of the gaze that is being established.

6 Helen Liggett uses the term encounter in a very similar way, see the introduction in Liggett, 2003.



throwing a passing glance while walking by

The video-still printed here shows a woman (in company of a man who is walking to her left) who passes by while I am recording. I am holding the camera in front of my belly. The pair was coming all the way down the main hall, passing by on their way to the exit of the railway terminal. They were engaged in conversation and not paying particularly noticeable attention to me while they approached. However, in the few steps which took them past me, both of them threw one or two short glances towards me-the-camera. They only did this when they were almost out of the field of vision of the camera. They also did not turn their [165] heads in an obvious way, they just shot their gaze towards me and the camera for a moment, immediately afterwards taking their gaze back to the field in front of them.

This kind of *passing glances* is a very common behavior. People displayed these short glances in practically all locations where they had to pass somewhat close to me-the-camera. Some of them maintained their gaze for a longer time, some only very briefly.⁷ Some of them had an interested impression (this was most often the case with children, adolescents, and some men), some of them appeared to be skeptic (mostly adult men) but most did not display a change of expression when they threw a glance towards me-the-camera.

Another reaction that I could track on my recordings is *checking* behaviour. Some people who realize that they or their surroundings are being filmed will then look around themselves, usually scrutinizing the area which they perceive as being filmed. In one case – filmed in the same location where I took the “passing glance” video-still – I had two adolescents approaching me up to the area between the two

7 I did not try to quantify this, but the range does probably extend from maintaining the gaze for three full steps to only a brief flick of the eye.

standing signs at the entrance to the ticket selling area (in the left half of the video-still). There, one of them stops, while the other one is continuing to walk on, until he passes me, and disappears out of the recording. The other one, however, remains standing right in the middle of the area which I am filming. He looks in my direction, and, after a bit more than a second, he turns his head around twice, the second time including his upper body in the turning movement and gazing over his shoulder for a longer period of time. After that, he remains standing where is, looking in my general direction but not making the impression that he is feeling uneasy or that he is watching me. A few seconds later, his companion reappears from behind me, walking back to his waiting counterpart. They meet, the one who waited says something to the one who came back, and while they both walk into the ticket selling area, the one who came back looks into my direction twice, each time turning around his whole upper body and regulating his steps in a way that allows him to look back into my direction while moving on.

In this case, the two young men acknowledge the existence of the-camera-me in the way that they throw looks into my direction, and they also display that they have an exchange that is highly likely to concern me-the-camera. The one who waited did use his time and attention to examine the situation with which he was faced by checking the field of vision that was covered by the camera. Of course, I do not have any solid basis for guessing what he was thinking about my activity or what he was telling his companion about me filming them and their surroundings. I can only demonstrate that, when encountering the-camera-me, they displayed their awareness of my presence in a distinct but distanced way – they looked at me, and probably talked about me, but they did not approach me in [166] any direct way.⁸ I was surprised how rarely those who do realize that they are being filmed *move away*.

8 This is a case where just writing about an event is much different than actually seeing or witnessing it – even if it is only on a recording. When I wrote this paragraph, I had to re-edit it several times, trying to avoid raising the suspicion that may I inadequately over-interpret the situation. However, when I am showing the actual video sequence to others – thus presenting the action as it unfolds itself – the (mostly visual) evidence seems to be so convincing that I never heard any objections regarding my interpretation of the situation. I see this as a strong argument for including the performative aspect of social action not only in the analysis but also in the representation of data. Text, or academic writing, is a limited medium for evoking both the full complexity, and the intelligibility of social life. Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Jones, 2005; Rose, 2006; Spinney, 2006 discuss related issues of representation and performativity.



entering the field of recording and leaving it again (13 seconds)

The woman who is shown on the sequence of video-stills is entering and leaving the area that is being recorded in the course of a bit more than 13 seconds. She comes into view from the right (first video-still). She stops after one further step, now standing right in the middle of the area that is covered by the DV camcorder. As usual, I am holding the camcorder in front of my belly, looking at the display. While she stops, she turns around and pulls her trolley towards her, so that it stands on its own. While she is turning, however, she also lets her gaze rest on me for a prolonged period. Looking at the recording frame by frame, it becomes apparent that she moves her pupils into my direction well before her head actually faces me (from first eye movement to full face-to-face it takes about 0.6 seconds). When the turning is almost completed, and while she is pulling the trolley closer, she looks into the direction of the trolley, but half a second later, she is again looking into me-the-camera's direction (second video-still), this time for about 0.8 seconds. As far as I can discern on the recording, she uses the first observation to look at the camera, and the second to look at my head (my gaze is directed downwards to the cam-[167]era's display). Then, she turns a bit more to her left, keeping one hand on the trolley's handle and using the other hand to fidget around with her coat (third video-still) for five seconds. During that time, I pull the zoom out as far as I can,⁹ getting some distance between me-the-camera and the woman on my display/in front of me. After sucking in her lips for a moment, the woman lifts her left hand to her mouth for two seconds (fourth video-still). When she ends this gesture, she leans forward and starts to move out of the picture (final video-still), throwing a glance at the trolley which she pulls along.

When I recorded this sequence, I felt uneasy about being too close to the woman. I was not sure what I should do, and I quickly had to decide whether I should try to keep going as I was, hoping to demonstrate to the woman that she is not disturbing me and that she might not be recorded; or whether I should make

9 I did zoom in by a slight amount (perhaps x1.3) to have a better view of the entrance area of the terminal, which is visible in the back of the recording. I used the zoom because during that recording session I was trying to get a grip on how people orient themselves when entering the terminal.

an obvious break, either by shutting down the camera and moving away or by turning it into a different direction. I decided for the former, because in the situation this seemed to be causing the smallest amount of disturbance both for me and for her.

By only throwing passing glances, by checking the covered area from a distance, and by moving out of the covered area, people keep a distance between themselves and me-the-camera. They do not get too close, or if they are close, they keep the contact as distanced as possible without causing a disturbance. The passers-by only flick their eyes into my direction for a moment, the checking does not result in a confrontation, or in a question about what I am recording, and when standing right in front of the lens the woman only displays some minor signs of unease before she leaves the area. Although a distance is maintained in all of these instances (and many others that were similar), they still caused a slight amount of confusion, surprise, or even irritation – both for me and for the others who were involved.

Getting close

The third set of interactions shows what happens when the usual divide between researcher-camera and others is crossed. The hierarchy of the gaze is being transformed in different ways. In the first case that I want to discuss, a man approaches me from behind and asks me for some money:

Transcript 1: bumming¹⁰ [168]

```
[him] [speaking with local accent] sorry
[I]   yes
[him] one question
      (0.5)
      over there I've just
      (0.5)
[him] at the Luisenplatz left my car |and the key
[I]   |yes
      (0.5)
[him] would you just have 50 cents so that I could call the
      ADAC [German Automobile Club] please?
      (0.5)
[I]   yes
      (0.5)
[him] super
      (3.0) [camera display makes noise while being closed]
      well til I get at it there
      (0.5)
[I]   yes
[him] they would've perhaps already towed the car |(.) eh
[I]   |yaya eheh
      (0.5)
      fiffy cent?
[him] (right)
      (9.0)
[I]   (wait a sec)
      (0.5)
      (erm)
      (0.5)
      fifty cent coin isn't necessary or what?
```

10 The transcription rules are explained at the end of this chapter.

(1.0) [his mobile phone rings]
[him] yes, I put in five |Euro
[I] |or what?
(1.5)
[him] (moment)
(1.0) [mobile rings]
[I] okay
(1.5)
[him] (many thanks)
(2.5) [he leaves, I take up the camera] (2.0)
[I] Well: that was bad luck (3.0) the ladies took off (.)
I did not observe what how they continued

After I acknowledge the presence of the man talking to me with a “yes,” he starts to formulate his request, putting several pauses in his talk. I do not make use of these pauses to provide any further acknowledgement, instead waiting for more information to pour in, and only offering another single “yes,” overlapping with his talk, telling me about his problem. When he finally closes his question, adding a “please,” I again wait for a short time before telling him that I will help him out with fifty cents. While I am taking my time looking for the money, he further elaborates on his problem. Several seconds later (I have to get rid of the running camcorder, and fumble out my wallet), while rummaging [169] through the contents of my wallet, I ask if he needs a fifty cent coin, closing the question with a somewhat rude and informal “or what,” which I repeat during his answer, again in overlap with his talk – and now also with the first ringtone of his mobile phone. The ringing phone causes some additional delays and confusion until I finally give him the coin, and he leaves, taking the call on the mobile and thanking me. After I have finally taken up the camcorder again, I make a commentary, complaining about my bad luck, which sabotaged the recording of two ladies who seemed to have problems using the ticket selling machine.

This sequence shows how both parties feel bad about the interaction, and about the disruption of my-the-camera’s activity. The man who bums me for fifty cents justifies himself, while I express a certain annoyance in my reluctance and in the informality of addressing him (in the original sequence he is using the formal third person to address me, while I am addressing him informally using the second person). The distance is not being kept, but since the interaction is asymmetric – him being in a weaker position than me – the hierarchy of this interaction goes parallel with the hierarchy of the gaze that is established through me-the-camera’s position in the field.

The following sequence is the only instance in which I have been directly approached and challenged by someone who was not an employee working in the terminal. The sequence happened while I was recording commuters leaving an evening express train. The man who approached me was probably in his forties, wearing a business suit and a briefcase. As I was able to discern when I later screened my recording, he walked through the area which I recorded, throwing a glance in my direction, before he approached me. He walked past me and then must have turned around and approached me from the side. I did not notice him until he started talking to me.

Transcript 2: challenge

[him] I have a question why are you filming here at all?
 [I] Sorry?
 [him] May I ask why you are filming?
 [I] Erm, I make this is a research project of the Technische Universität Darmstadt (.) about: t erm:
 (0.5)
 [I] m: orientation in railway and ferry terminals in harbors
 [him] I see |because
 [I] |I also have a license to film and such for the railway
 [him] ok, yes, I only wonder because
 [I] no no, it's often (.) completely (understandable) yes |it's=
 [him] |mhm
 [I] =no problem yes |(hn)
 [him] |is something different
 [I] few people wonder (.) am surprised myself
 (1.0)
 [him] yes, because
 (0.5)
 usually I do not like to be on films |but=
 [I] |yes, yes
 [him] =this is okay
 [I] he he

[170] He is demanding a justification of me, not asking what I am filming, but “why” – even stronger, “why at all.” When I fail to answer his initial question, he rephrases the question in a very formal way. For me, this decided politeness together with his clothes and his general demeanor generated the impression of interacting with somebody who claims to have a higher status than mine. I only answer him with difficulty, inserting several pauses and extending the duration of the “erms” that I utter. However, I finally manage to present my main legitimization assets: first, that I am doing research for an academic institution, and, after a short delay (overlapping and thus interrupting his turn), secondly, that I have license for my activity. He acknowledges this information twice (“I see” and, after the overlap, “ok, yes”), and then goes on to provide information that legitimizes his challenge to my activity (“I only wonder”). Before he can tell me why he feels legitimized to approach me, I display to him that I have understood his claim and that I think it is “completely understandable yes no problem yes”. He in turn also reinforces his acknowledgement of my legitimacy by stating that this “is something different”. The interaction was almost finished at that turn, and he proceeds to leave the scene. However, while he turns away, I raise my voice and try to elicit more information from him, telling him that I am wondering while so few people wonder about my activity. It takes him a moment to re-orient back to the conversation and provide an answer: “usually I do not like to be on films.” However, he affirms my legitimacy once more by repeating that he thinks that “this is okay.” I provide an agreement token for both of his statements, and the conversation is finished without any further utterances marking its ending.

This sequence does not only show how quickly difficult claims to legitimacy can be negotiated, reaching a shared interpretation of the situation, it also displays how both participants in the interaction provide justifications for their respective posi-

tion as soon as the legitimacy of the other's claim has been acknowledged. It thus becomes apparent that, while the hierarchy of the gaze can be actively challenged, those who challenge it might maneuver themselves in a position where they have to provide reasons for their challenge. Taken together, this very brief sequence demonstrates how the habitus, the different kinds of symbolic capital, and the hierarchy of the gaze appear in his and my performance and how we both negotiate our status or position in the field.

In the last sequence that I want to discuss in this section, it is not necessarily the-camera-me that is challenged. Instead, I-the-camera am challenging those who have more authority than I do have in the terminal: the security personnel. [171]



direct gaze exchange

After panning through the terminal building as a whole, I move the focus of the camcorder to the service point, where two security employees, both currently on duty, are standing.

Transcript 3: double challenge

[I] mhm (.) that (is now) kind of interesting
 [zooming in on security personnel and ServicePoint]
 (49.0)
 (4.0) [man raises walkie-talkie and fixes his hair]
 whats curious now, usually I feel always bit of uneasy:↓
 (1.0) affected, when so (.) the security personal pay (.)
 attention to me (1,0) in this case: I've got a somewhat
 more offensive stance (1.0) because I have just seen'im
 sending-off [a homeless person] and erm (4.0) this is why
 I feel the other way round

Looking at the display of the camcorder, when the employees get into focus, I make a comment for the recording, saying "that is is now interesting." Then I do a full zoom, closing in on the employees. Two seconds later, the employee to the right turns his head in my direction and keeps his gaze steady for two seconds. During this time, the other employee also turns her gaze into my direction (this is the moment displayed in the video-still). At that time, I start to pan a bit to the right,

so that both of them move out of the center of the recording and into the periphery. After keeping them in the periphery for about seven seconds, I zoom out almost fully – only to zoom back in about a second later. However, I do not zoom as close as I did the first time. I keep zoom and [172] focus set on them for almost a minute. During this time, both of them repeatedly turn their gaze into my direction. At one point the man raises his walkie-talkie, looks intently at its display and then makes a movement with his other hand, apparently fixing his hair. After he finishes this move, I start making the rest of the transcribed commentary, elaborating on what is interesting about this situation. I say that I usually feel uncomfortable about staff watching me. However, “in *this* case” I feel differently because I have witnessed how the man has send off someone who was ‘loitering’ at one of the entrances and who made the impression on me of being homeless. This makes me feel “the other way round” (in German “anders gepolt”, translated literally as “with the pole in the other direction”), that is I feel not uneasy and like a victim of his attention. To the contrary I am in an offensive, aggressively ‘watching-back’ mood, trying to produce the same feeling of discomfort or unease in those who usually evoke it. When it appears to me that I am successful in this endeavor, I keep the gaze of me-the-camera steady for another fifteen seconds before a woman carrying luggage enters the area of focus and I finally zoom out as far as I can, keeping her and her luggage in view until she passes me.

As I have stated in the section “camera & film”: I usually tried not to use the zoom to protect the intimacy of others and not subject them to my gaze more than I think is necessary for my research. In this case, however, I make an exception – an exception that I explicitly comment, trying to justify it while recording. Fully aware of the disquieting power of the hierarchy of the gaze, which is being established by me-the-camera, I try to exert this power to switch or at least destabilize the hierarchy between security personnel and non-employees in the terminal. Although I feel somewhat uneasy while I am doing this, I keep going for a while – until several factors come together: I have the impression that my goal has been achieved, I might feel that if I keep recording for too long I might cause too much provocation or an illegitimate amount of unease (after all, I could say to myself that he just did his job), and someone else enters the field of recording, providing a new opportunity to do video research and follow the objectives of my study.

In all of the three cases discussed in this section, the hierarchy of the gaze is being mangled.¹¹ Me-the-camera and others encounter each other, bringing with themselves different interests and feeling different constraints. In the encounter, however, the hierarchy of the gaze becomes unsteady, falling prey to the contingencies of the situation and to the processes of mutual negotiation. Everyone involved in the encounter employs certain practices, relating to each other’s position in the social (and material) field. At the same time, the whole interaction is embedded in a general flow of events and intentions – I want to return to my recording,

11 I borrow this term from Pickering, 1995, who uses it in his analysis of the entanglement of human and non-human agency.

the businessman wants to be at home, the security staff wants to avoid disturbances of the order, someone enters the field of view and attracts my interest, [173] etc. The encounters which destabilize the hierarchy of the gaze only last for a brief period of time.

CONCLUSION

Video research in the open is a process full of contingencies and challenges, full of unplanned encounters between researcher-camera and others in the field. I argue that in spite of potentially problematic impact of the researcher on the field, this kind of video research offers many opportunities for analysis exactly because of its contingent nature. Interruptions and irritations should not be regarded as research induced artifacts that have to be cut out of the analysis. To the contrary, they offer a wealth of material for study, throwing a spotlight on several important aspects of video research in publicly accessible places. Since, usually, it will be practically impossible to get explicit consent for the filming in these kinds of places, the presence of the researcher-camera has to be negotiated in the field, in the encounter. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to study the relation of camera-researcher to the field: it helps to assess the way the researcher-camera's presence changes the social-spatial-material constellation that she or he enters with the camera.

First, I want to re-visit the decision to use the notion of the 'researcher-camera' that I introduced in this essay. Are researcher and the camera a unit? Do they act together? The answer is a decided "yes and no". They do act together in two ways. Together, they constitute a field of perception (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962, chapter five). Without the camera, the researcher would see the world differently. He or she would not be able to zoom into it, to keep a steady and unflickering eye on one region for long periods of time, and to rip it out of the flow of time, keeping it available as a recording for future uses. Without the researcher, the camera would not be able to pan around and follow those people and events that might be interesting for analysis, that is it would lose an aspect of perception which is perhaps its important feature: its innate connection to intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 130-139). Together, the camera-researcher can do things that they cannot do on their own. They can create ambivalences for the others that are present, because they can easily display ambiguous orientations. Thus, they make it difficult for others to perceive what is going on, to see if they are the subject of the camera-researcher's gaze or not.

These examples should suffice to demonstrate that it makes sense for the analysis to treat researcher and camera as a unit, a bundle of actants, or a hybrid that constitutes a distinctive relation to the world around that is different from the relation created by each of them alone. Nonetheless, it is also quite obvious that they are separate entities. The camera can be put aside, it can stop working but the researcher will still be able to continue her or his observations, and even record them, for example by logging them into a notebook. The camera can, of course, be

put somewhere and continue recording even without the presence of the researcher. Treating the researcher and camera as a unit for [174] analytical purposes does not mean to sell one's soul to some kind of hype about hybrids and the dissolution of the subject-object divide (although it should make you think about how much sense this divide actually makes). However, it should enable one to treat events, things, and people in an analytically open way, thus helping to avoid blind spots in the research and to acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of social processes.

Strategies & tactics

To provide some analytical depth to the discussion of the researcher-camera's relation to the field, I want to employ Michel de Certeau's distinction of strategy and tactics (de Certeau, 1984: xix-xxx). *Strategies* are those aspects of social practice that relate to temporally and spatially stable entities. Like the strategical positions and the equipment that place an army in a good or bad position for a battle, they set the frame, they determine the positions people take on the field, determining advantages as well as disadvantages. Similarly, there are strategical aspects to doing video research in the open. The researcher-camera takes a distinct position in the field. She or he is equipped with certain amounts of capital, with certificates, and connected to a wider network, which is providing resources that the camera-researcher can use. Outfitted this way, entering the field with a certain habitus, specific intentions, and modern technology, the camera-researcher establishes a hierarchy of the gaze. As has been shown in particular in the sections "invisible evasions" and "keeping the distance", this puts him or her in a relatively advantaged position, particularly when compared to everyday people passing through their area of observation.¹²

Strategies or strategic positions are highly influential, they shape the specific normality of a place or a general setting. However, they do not determine what is happening. Specifically, they might exert a great influence over the outcome of events, but they do not necessarily shape how an outcome is achieved. It is this particular aspect, the how of normality, of social control, the how of the practice of everyday life, that is at the heart of de Certeau's interest. In his words, it is the *tactics* that are the subject of interest. In a way, this whole essay can be read as an inquiry into the role of tactics in video research. The strategic positions and advantages are distributed. We have read and understood Bourdieu, we know of the importance of the habitus, and we have learned about the importance of being in control of technological augmentations like the camera. But this is not all that happens. When one looks at the details, it becomes apparent that the rules are used, undermined, and challenged in multiple ways. People can comply to the rules by embracing them, by only following them hesitatingly, by playing contradicting

12 Of course, this is not the only strategic component of the setting. Other factors such as the gender of those involved, and the social, spatial, and material setup of the place itself also participate in distributing strategical positions in the field.

or conflicting sets of rules against each other. Thus, the setting, and [175] the processes and practices that constitute the setting become open to variation. I can make use of the power of the camera and my certificates to turn around the hierarchy of the gaze with regard to the security personnel. The inquisitive questions of a businessman reveal how I actually make use of my claims to legitimacy. They also display how a stranger can make use of his position in the social field to destabilize my position in the local hierarchy of the gaze. The fact that I have to remain at one location for a prolonged period of time to produce a recording makes me vulnerable to become the target of requests for assistance. Taken together, all those co-present in the field have a range of tactical moves at their disposition for dealing with the constraints, for making use of sudden opportunities. This is what tactics are about. They usually cannot change strategic distributions, they have no control over place, cannot fortify positions. But they take control over the time in which they are performed. They can create holes in a defense, make a surprise move, and use the non-determined to their advantage.

I hope to have demonstrated that both the strategic and the tactical aspects of the dynamic setting are relevant to doing video research in the open. They show how the setting is created structurally and in action. As might have become apparent by now, taking an ethnomethodologically inspired approach to the analysis is an excellent way of creating awareness for both the tactical and the strategic. Since ethnomethodology studies how practices *make and are* the rules that govern social settings (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002: 99, 272), it opens a perspective on the small and large features of social action, which together generate the dynamic stability of places, of social-spatial-material constellations. The recorded events, which have been transcribed and analyzed in this essay, display how both the researcher-camera and the others employ their own, localized methods, their ethno-methods, in dealing with the setting that they encounter – and constitute.

TRANSCRIPTION

The transcripts are all translated from German. For the originals, see Frers, 2007b: 148-149, 149, 153.

[176]

[] is used for remarks about the situation and other explanation
 | is used to mark the beginning of overlapping talk
 = is used to mark talk that continues without pause over several lines in the transcript
 (.) is used to mark a <0.5 sec pause
 ↓ is used to mark a fall in accentuation
italics are used to mark louder speech.

REFERENCES

Bondi, Liz, 2005: The place of emotions in research : From partitioning emotion and reason to the emotional dynamics of research relationships. In Joyce

- Davidson, Liz Bondi/Mick Smith (eds.) *Emotional geographies*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 231-246.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 1984: *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre/Loïc J. D. Wacquant, 1992: *An Invitation Into Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- de Certeau, Michel, 1984: *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel, 1978: *The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley, 3 vols. New York: Pantheon Books.
- , 1980: *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Translated by Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books.
- , 1995: *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books.
- Frers, Lars, 2007a: *Perception, aesthetics, and envelopment : Encountering space and materiality*. In Lars Frers/Lars Meier (eds.) *Encountering urban places : Visual and material performances in the city*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 25-45.
- , 2007b: *Einhüllende Materialitäten : Eine Phänomenologie Des Wahrnehmens und Handelns an Bahnhöfen und Fährterminals*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Garfinkel, Harold, Eric Livingston/Michael Lynch, 1981: *The Work of a Discovering Science Construed With Materials From the Optically Discovered Pulsar*. In: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 11(2), 131-158.
- Garfinkel, Harold, 1984: *Studies of the routine grounds of everyday activities*. In Harold Garfinkel (ed.) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Malden/MA: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishing, 35-75.
- Garfinkel, Harold/Harvey Sacks, 1986: *On formal structures of practical actions*. In Harold Garfinkel (ed.) *Ethnomethodological studies of work*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 160-193.
- Garfinkel, Harold/Anne Warfield Rawls, 2002: *Ethnomethodology's Program : Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism*. Lanham/MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- [177] Girtler, Roland, 2001: *Methoden der Feldforschung*. 4 edn. Wien: UTB.
- Heath, Christian/Jon Hindmarsh, 2002: *Analysing interaction : Video, ethnography and situated conduct*. In Tim May (ed.) *Qualitative research in action*. London: SAGE, 99-121.
- Jones, Owain, 2005: *An ecology of emotion, memory, self and landscape*. In Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi/Mick Smith (eds.) *Emotional geographies*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 205-218.
- Kanstrup, Anne Marie, 2002: *Picture the Practice : Using Photography to Explore Use of Technology Within Teacher's Work Practices*. In: *Forum Qualitative Research* 3(2),

- Latour, Bruno, 1987: *Science in Action : How to Follow Engineers and Scientists Through Society*. Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press.
- , 2005: *Reassembling the Social : An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liggett, Helen, 2003: *Urban Encounters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lofland, John/Lyn H. Lofland, 1995: *Analyzing Social Settings : A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 3 edn. Belmont/CA: Wadsworth.
- Maynard, Douglas W./Steven E. Clayman, 1991: The Diversity of Ethnomethodology. In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 17, 385-418.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 1962: *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice/Claude Lefort, 1968: *The Visible and the Invisible : Followed By Working Notes*. Evanston/IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Pickering, Andrew, 1995: *The Mangle of Practice : Time, Agency & Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rose, Mitch, 2006: Gathering 'Dreams of Presence' : A Project for the Cultural Landscape. In: *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space* 24(4), 537-554.
- Spinney, Justin, 2006: A Place of Sense: A Kinaesthetic Ethnography of Cyclists on Mont Ventoux. In: *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space* 24(5), 709-732.
- Thrift, Nigel/John-David Dewsbury, 2000: Dead Geographies : And How to Make Them Live. In: *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space* 18(4), 411-423.