

## **Engaging the Audience through Videography as Performance**

**Anastasia Seregina** (corresponding author), Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Marketing of Aalto University School of Business, P.O. Box 21230, 00076 Aalto, Finland.  
Tel. +358 (0) 50 407 26 20, [anastasia.seregina@aalto.fi](mailto:anastasia.seregina@aalto.fi)

**Biographical note:** Anastasia Seregina is a researcher in the field of consumer culture studies. Her work focuses on the experiences of fantasy and aesthetics, as well as the political, interactive, and spatial aspects of these experiences. Anastasia is also developing art-based research methodologies that engage audiences interactively.

**Abstract**

The audience is an important part of videography, but its role tends to be seen as passive and unengaged. The audience's experience is often guided in videography, with intended reaction made clear. Yet such an approach to the audience does not make use of the possibilities of videography for inciting active interaction and incorporating multiple interpretations. Previous research has suggested that videography has potential for interventional influence on audiences by taking on the performative turn in research. Developing more deeply the notions of performance and performativity in the context of videography, this paper proposes that one way to activate audiences, interact directly with them, and engage them in meaning-making is to approach videography as performance. To provide practical suggestions for creating such performance, the paper contextualizes videography as a recording medium, thus establishing its ontological position and ties to other media.

**Statement of contribution**

To provide a perspective on how videography could create more interactive, engaging, and evocative experiences for its audiences, this paper develops the notion of the performative turn in the context of videography, as well as culturally and historically contextualizes videography in order to map out its ontological position in contemporary culture. The paper proposes that one way to actively interact with audiences is to create live performances through videography.

**Keywords:** videography, recording media, performance, performativity, performative turn, live performance

## Prologue

Videography as a research method has been rapidly growing within consumer culture research (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a, b; Hietanen, 2012). Previous literature has addressed many aspects of videography, mainly focusing on the practicalities and the form of the method (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a), as well as the various ontologies and epistemologies of videography (Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten, 2014). The audience has often been noted to be an important part of videography, as it is ultimately for them that videographies are made (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a; Petr, Belk, and Decrop, 2015). However, audiences are often approached as a passive and unengaged entity, which is meant to receive rather than actively interact with the videography. Moreover, videographers tend to intentionally structure or shape the emotional and cognitive response of their audience, basing this readability or viewability in a perceived lack of visual literacy among audiences, that is, the audience's lack of ability to interpret and negotiate meaning from visual forms of knowledge (De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen 2009; Kozinets and Belk, 2006). The result is a directed and curated experience of the videography by the audience, where little room is left for interaction or individual interpretation. Such an approach further overlooks the highly mediatized cultural context of videography, in which visual literacy has become naturalised and normalised (Jansson, 2002; Auslander, 2008).

Recent work on videography has noted the need for more interactive engagement of the audience. For instance, Petr, Belk, and Decrop (2015) call for exploring more creative and artistic aspects of videography, as well as incorporating more interactive elements into videography. Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) suggest approaching videography as a more expressive mode of research by taking on the performative turn; an active, experience-based approach to research that I explain in more detail later on. Hietanen and colleagues propose that, instead of providing a window onto reality, videography should rather *create*

new realities. However, Conquergood (1998, 2002) stresses that creating other worlds is not enough to engage an evocative performance, as the former resonates with a type of poietic performance that does not necessarily bring people back unchanged from the other worlds that it takes its audience to. To push people to action and to actively make meaning, Conquergood suggests, performance needs to be kinetic, that is, embodied, active, and lived. Only this type of performance can create interventional results, he argues.

Following these ideas, the aim of this paper is to explore how videography could engage its audiences in active, evocative, lived interaction. I employ the previously proposed idea of the performative turn, engaging the approach and related concepts in more detail. More specifically, I delve more deeply into what performance and performativity could mean from the perspective of videography in consumer culture research. I stress the difference between performativity and performance, and suggest that focusing on the latter could allow researchers to create contexts of active, bodily interaction among research and audience.

A performance methodology calls for deeply contextualised interaction (Carlson, 2003; Schechner, 2006). Hence, to engage videography as performance, it becomes relevant to culturally and historically contextualize videography as a medium, as well as understand its ontological position in contemporary culture. Following this line of thought, I provide a brief overview of the development of recording media in Western culture. I further explore the emergence of and the relationship between live performance<sup>1</sup> and mediatized performance, along with the resultant ontological shifts that took place within recording media and its cultural context. Based on the historical account, I propose that videography largely takes on the form of film, with this connection resulting in videography inheriting film's ontology and mode of interaction with the audience.

To move videography beyond its normalised form and to create lived interaction with audiences through it, I propose approaching videography as performance. This means

focusing away from the video itself and rather creating a basis for engagement through open-ended stimuli. The result is multisensory, co-created knowledge that emerges through active, contextualized interaction between audience and videography. I provide examples of how researchers can create videography as performance by breaking norms of research and its presentation, as well as discuss the outcomes and assessment of such work.

### **Videography in Consumer Culture Research**

Videography has become a relatively popular approach within consumer research, gaining a footing in the academic community, in publication outlets, and in corporate market research. The approach has gained an especially strong position in conference proceedings. For instance, videography has become a pivotal part of such academic gatherings, as the Association for Consumer Research conference and the Consumer Culture Theory conference. However, videography is still a long way away from being fully accepted as a legitimate way of conducting research. Heisley (2001) provides a detailed description of video being seen as less intellectual, less serious, and less academic than traditional academic work that takes form in writing. Wood (2015) notes similar criticism, adding that many academic fields find video to be deficient in demonstrating research. Videography is often seen as entertaining and unintellectual; something that is too subjective and artistic, and thus something not warranting the full attention given to 'real research' (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; De Valck, Rokka and Hietanen, 2009). In connection to this, the assessment of videography as research has been a point of contention, with critics suggesting that videography cannot be used for research, because it cannot be evaluated as such. Videographers have nevertheless proposed their own criteria for assessment. Most notably, Kozinets and Belk (2006) describe how quality control of videography can take place, suggesting that the work needs to be assessed for its topical, theoretical, theatrical, and technical characteristics. All in all, while

videography has a strong presence and is being taken on as a serious approach to research by many, it is not (yet) viewed as an equal with other, more traditional methods of research.

Petr, Belk, and Decrop (2015) define videography as “the process of producing and communicating knowledge through the collection and analysis of visual material” (73). It is important to specify that the aim of videography is to produce a video, or moving visuals. In this sense it is different from other visual approaches, such as visual ethnography (Schembri and Boyle, 2013), visual analysis (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998), or art-based research (Leavy 2009). The latter approaches may include the use or analysis of video, but also incorporate other visual media that are not necessarily recorded as part of moving imagery, such as photography or art installations.

It is further important to note that videography is different from other forms of recording media, by which I refer to all media with various technological aspects that present its viewers with recorded temporal visuals (following Baudrillard, 1995; Auslander, 2008). Videography is specifically an academic and research-oriented form of recording media that involves “the entire methodology of the production of an expression via recording media, but it also means the finished product of the videographic work” (Hietanen, 2012, p. 5). In comparing videography to other research approaches that take on video, De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) suggest that videographies need to tie into academic discussions, put forward an academic argument, and allow for multiple interpretations. Kozinets and Belk (2006) suggest that videography work can, nevertheless, take on different forms.

Petr, Belk, and Decrop (2015) explain that videography emerged in consumer research for several reasons. First, there is a clear demand for the approach: consumption as a topic of research is growing, technological developments have allowed for easier use of cameras, and there is an increased demand for visuals. Second, videography allows for more creativity; research can thus become more focused on aesthetics and narrative. Third,

videography aids data collection in that it enriches data, increases precision of analysis, and expands available topics of research. Fourth, videography allows for presenting research in new ways through expanded distribution outlets, use of thrilling effects and new ways of interacting with the audience.

Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) suggest that videography can be approached either as a representational tool, or as an expressive tool. They stress that videography in consumer culture research is mainly representational, but such an approach may be problematic, as it can create a feeling of exact representation of reality. In fact, many researchers that embrace videography as a way of representing their data stress the ability of video to capture context and activity in more detail, which allows for a more real or authentic record of expression and embodiment (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a; Smith, Fischer, and Cole, 2007). In contrast to this, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten believe “that authentic representation may be impossible and that perhaps the best we can do as researchers on that front is to not create damaging misrepresentations” (p. 2). They continue that video is imbued with the subjective and selective perspectives of the researcher(s) and participant(s) involved in the process, resulting in the capturing of “a performance constructed for camera and screen” (p. 2). To overcome these issues, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) propose the use of videography as a non-representational, relational tool for expression based in an emancipatory epistemology. This does not claim to represent reality, but rather brings about new perspectives to and ways of thinking about the phenomena by creating another world. In other words, the video becomes an acknowledged fictive account of a subjective perspective on the researched phenomenon.

### **Audience and Interaction in Videography**

An important characteristic of videography is its ability to engage audiences in ways that

more traditional forms of research cannot. Following Sherry and Schouten's (2002) work on poetry, Belk and Kozinets (2005a) write: "One of the more compelling advantages of video presentation is the ability to engage the audience with a multi-sensory set of materials that ideally make it easier to gain not only a cognitive knowledge about something, but also a more emotional and "resonant" knowledge of the experience of something" (p. 133). Belk and Kozinets (2005b) continue that videography allows researchers to reach wider audiences, as well as to stimulate enthusiasm and interest, causing audiences to empathize with the researched phenomena. They add that researchers can impact the audience on an emotional level through creating accessible and intimate experiences that let individuals feel what is being presented (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; see also Petr, Belk, and Decrop, 2015).

Videographers acknowledge audiences to be reflexive. As Belk and Kozinets (2005a, p. 134) write, "[a]udiences are not naïve and uncritical." Hence, they continue, videography requires strong evidence and argumentation, as audiences can see flaws more easily in the direct, visual medium. At the same time, videographers often imply that there is a need for clear and direct guidance of the audience's experience. Videographers tend to approach audience response as something to be shaped (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a) or formed (Belk and Kozinets, 2005b), with audiences requiring help in understanding presented topics (Kozinets and Belk, 2007). Stressing a lack of visual literacy both in those that review and view videography (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen, 2009; Petr, Belk, and Decrop, 2015), videographers point to the importance of their work as being viewable and readable to audiences. In line with these ideas, De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) conclude that "[w]e need to learn to think in images, we need to learn the skills of filming and editing, and we need to learn a new language that allows us to discuss audiovisual text meaningfully" (p. 97).

The clearly communicated experiences and shaped responses of videography are often accompanied by written or oral explanations to assure that intended meaning gets across. For instance, De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) describe that they show videos with authors present to contextualize their work as well as address any questions or queries. Hietanen (2012) similarly explains that most videography work is accompanied by written papers or accounts to assure clarity. This seems to be a response to criticism of videography. For example, Heisley (2001) has stated that some of the reasons why videography is not taken seriously within academia is that its interpretation is open, there is little familiarity with the medium, and the visual in general is seen as much less intellectual than written word. One of videography's so-called faults has been argued to be its subjective point of view as well as the resultant open interpretation; videography is artistic, but not informative or scientific (Heisley, 2001; Kozinets and Belk, 2006). These notions tie into a more general trend of contemporary research and contemporary Western culture that gives high authority to text- and language-based knowledge (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2015). This, in turn, is supported by the prevalence of positivist and realist perspectives in social sciences that elevate neutral and objective knowledge (Bleiker, 2001).

Belk and Kozinets (2005a) write that clear communication of meaning is a central responsibility that lies with the filmmaker and never the audience. Consequently, emotional and cognitive experiences that result from videography are often clearly shaped and guided by researchers (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; Belk and Kozinets, 2007; De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen 2009). The structuring of audience response has a lot of benefits: it can create a clear message and meaning, as well as build a solid theoretical or conceptual basis for the videography. However, strict structuring also greatly limits co-creation of meaning, multiple perspectives and interpretations, as well as the development of knowledge interactively and organically. Furthermore, this approach can result in ethical dilemmas of manipulating

audience response through shaping their experiences, as Kozinets and Belk (2007) note.

All in all, videography clearly notes the importance of its audience, approaching it as reflexive and even critical. However, the role and presence of audience has not been widely discussed in the context of videography beyond the method's ability to reach and emotionally affect audiences when disseminating research. Moreover, the audience's response is mostly approached as a passive experience of being communicated to, but not with. Yet, as Wood (2015) shows, video has the potential to engage audiences in ways a text cannot through allowing affective, discursive, and lived experiences of researched phenomena. Similarly, Kozinets and Belk (2007) note videography's potential to challenge its audiences, and Petr, Belk, and Decrop's (2015) call for engaging audiences through more creative approaches to videography. Marks (2000) explains that video can accomplish such goals through allowing access to multisensory understanding and memory. Following these ideas, I would suggest that the subjective, artistic point of view inherent to videography may actually be a central strength of the method. Through tapping into its artistic roots, videography has the potential for creating interactive engagement with its audience.

Following a similar line of thought, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten's (2014) propose the use of videography as an expressive tool. They base this on the performative turn in research, proposing that, here, videography becomes a "performative act" (p. 3). According to Conquergood (1998, 2002) and Denzin (2003a, b), embracing the performative turn allows for research to engage with phenomena as they are lived and felt, resulting in contextualized, multisensory, and multisided understanding that engages the audience. However, if videographers are to embrace the performative turn, it becomes important to decouple the concepts performance and performativity, as well as understand the notion of the performative turn in light of its application to videography. I turn to this next.

### **Performativity, Performance, and the Performative Turn**

Before delving into the performative turn in connection to videography, it becomes important to distinguish various concepts and approaches related to it. As a theoretical framework, performance has been approached in a variety of ways, most notably either as discourse or as behaviour. The former has its roots in Austin's (1962) speech-act theory, which, simply put, asserts that saying something equals doing something. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) later developed this into a more detailed understanding of performativity. She writes that performativity involves the "reiterative power of discourse" (1993, p. 2), which accrues its power through citing and recombining performance. In other words, in performing and repeating certain behaviours, individuals establish their meaning, as well as form naturalized, seemingly pre-existing structures out of them. Performative acts thus become a type of authoritative speech, as Butler (1990) explains. In marketing and consumer research, performativity has been often used in studying gender issues (e.g., Goulding and Saren 2009; Thompson and Ustuner 2015).

Performance as behaviour is based in the work of Erving Goffman (1959), and was later developed by Victor Turner (1969) and Richard Schechner (2006). As Schechner (2006) writes, this approach views all behaviour as performance, that is, made up of bits and pieces of previously behaved behaviours repeated over and over to create norms and meaning. Carlson (2003) elaborates that performance is an event in space and time that takes form neither as behaviour itself nor the cultural rules guiding it, but rather emerges as the negotiation of the two. In consumer research, performance has been addressed by Deighton (1992) and Bode (2010).

The two perspectives are often used in combination. For instance, Callon (1998) uses both streams to discuss the performativity of economics. In marketing research, Mason, Kjellberg, and Hagberg (2015) have similarly used performativity as a way of approaching

social behaviour. Yet, as Thompson and Ustuner (2015) stress, performativity and social performance are very different concepts and should not be conflated. Following McKenzie (2001), the two approaches nevertheless overlap and support one another in many ways. Denzin (2003a) agrees, explaining that performativity and performance exist in a tension: performativity can be seen as ‘the larger term’ that encompasses performance, with the latter being the experience we can access through engagement. Instances of performance thus build up into performativity over time.

The performative turn in research needs to also be understood as separate from, yet deeply intertwined with performance and performativity. The performative turn has its roots in the stream of performance as behaviour, especially in its development in performance studies and theatre studies. Following Denzin (2003a, b) and Conquergood (1998, 2002), the performative turn in social studies entails moving away from systems and structures, and rather focusing on particular practices and people as alive, creative, playful, expressive, and imaginative. The focus is on the doing, the lively, and the active process of engagement. Denzin (2003a) explains that the main aspects of the approach are its embodied, participant-driven, and highly contextualized characteristics. Conquergood (2002) elaborates that researcher and their audience become co-performers that gain meaning through participatory, bodily experiences. Conquergood (1998) further stresses that the approach does not engage in imitation (*mimesis*), or in creative construction of other worlds (*poiesis*), but in the active, lived, and interventional (*kinesis*). Reflecting these ideas in the context of videography, the more common representational work could be seen as mimetic, whereas the expressive work<sup>2</sup> could be said to take on a more poietic form.

Bode (2010) provides a detailed account of what taking on the performative turn in consumer research entails. He explains that, in practice, a performative approach requires co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and researched through a research position that

is actively engaged. The aim is to embrace a subjective point of view that goes far beyond neutrality, and to approach the context critically (cf. Denzin, 2003a, b). Embodiment, live experience, as well as the body as it is situated in time, place, and history become central sites of knowing (Conquergood, 1991, 2002).

In taking on the performative turn in the context of videography, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) suggest approaching videography as performative acts. However, I would argue that this defeats their own purpose of moving the focus of videography away from authentic accounts of reality, as performative acts constitute instances of authoritative speech, through which reality is put into place (following Butler, 1990, 1993). Hietanen and colleagues do state that their aim is to create novel worlds through videography. Yet, to be evocative and interactional, these cannot be prescriptive. As Conquergood (1998) writes, it is the kinetic, rather than the poietic or mimetic, that emerges as lived and interventional performance.

I propose that to approach videography as a method of active, evocative interaction with the audience, it may be more useful to focus on videography as performance when taking on the performative turn. In other words, it may be more fruitful from the point of view of engaging the audience to focus on the event of the performance, rather than on the performativity of meanings. How exactly can researchers do this? Before delving into practicalities of videography as performance, it becomes relevant to address the cultural context of videography, because a performance approach calls for deep contextualisation of phenomena (Carlson, 2003; Schechner, 2006). Next, I contextualize videography in terms of its connection to reality and live performance, as well as map out how individuals engage and interact with it.

### **Contextualizing Videography as a Recording Medium**

To explore videography as performance, it becomes relevant to historically and culturally contextualise the medium as a form of recording media. This provides an understanding of its ontological position in terms of the medium's relation to perceived reality and possible representation of this reality. Moreover, contextualization of videography allows for understanding how its performativity has come to be, that is, how its naturalised form has emerged in contemporary culture through a repetition of norms and structures that give it meaning. As McLuhan (1962, 1964) has explained, a medium does not emerge and develop in a vacuum. Each medium builds on its predecessors, taking on their entire history along with their modes of perception, understanding, and communicating.

An important step toward the development of recording media was the invention of print media (Gergen, 1991; McLuhan, 1962). This first mass medium took shape in newspapers, novels, and photography, allowing access to huge crowds in less time and with less effort than any type of live performance (Auslander, 2008). Print media rapidly grew popular, and through this popularity, began to imbue other media with its logic, as Auslander (2008) notes. Knowledge became visual, but also rational, uniform, and repeated, allowing the idea of a fixed reality to emerge. McLuhan (1962) argued that print culture made the modern world possible through organizing knowledge, fragmenting meaning, and supporting individualism.

The novel and the newspaper were taken over by cinema (Auslander, 2008). Schechner (1985) and Baudrillard (1995) explain that cinema created an even more precise idea of reality than print media through presenting a multisensory experience perfect in its repetition, with no mistakes or edits being made in subsequent performances. McLuhan (1964) and Brecht (1965) write that the experience of cinema became so complete that those undergoing it could accept it subliminally and without critical awareness. Cinema became a

way of recording events and history, thus fixing life into a visible, objective form; replacing memory; and blending into our perceived past seamlessly. It is noteworthy that most theatre practitioners at the turn of the twentieth century did not believe film to thrive. They argued that what theatre presents is ephemeral, live performance, while cinema tries to *capture* live performance, which is, in its nature, uncapturable (e.g., Meyerhold 1968).

Interestingly, when television came around, the new medium modelled itself on theatre, and not on cinematographic film. Auslander (2008) explains that even though both television and film are camera-driven media, the former takes on the ontology of theatre, while the latter only takes on the *structure* of theatre. Just like theatre, television seemingly transmits *occurring* events, not the merely recorded events of cinema.

Following Auslander (2008), the birth of recording media, and especially television, could be seen as the point of emergence of the dichotomy of live and mediatized performance. This is due to the fact that live only became a possibility when something could be not live. Basing his ideas on Baudrillard's work, Auslander describes mediatized performance as performance circulated in technologies of reproduction, such as television or film; a product of mass media and mass technology. Live performance can, then, be described as a representation without a reproduction, Phelan (1993) suggests. While radio previously provided live broadcasting, television was the first type of media to be able to expand lived experiences through live broadcasting by reflecting a presence of people, things, and spaces in a manner that does not seemingly deprive any senses (Couldry, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, recording media seemingly present not a phenomenological difference, but a contextual one in comparison to real life (Auslander, 2008; Schechner, 2006).

The original aim of recording media was to preserve live performance by making copies of it (Auslander 2008). However, because mediatized versions of an event can reach far more people much faster than a live event, media developed into a normal way of

experiencing, attaining information, and preserving the past (Gergen, 1991; Auslander, 2008). Media has further come to provide norms and standards for individuals' actions and reactions (Jansson, 2002). For instance, we gain understanding of situations we have never actually faced, as we see them unfold through recorded media (Gergen, 1991). As a result, live performance becomes dependent on the mediatized through the structures for behaviour the latter provides.<sup>4</sup>

Schechner (2006) writes that the live is often seen as exclusive from the recorded and mediatized. However, Auslander (2008) argues that the seeming ontological opposition between the live and the mediatized rather emerges as an ontological dependency. Mediatized performance implies the existence of a counterpart, on which it is based, thus requiring the live as its basis. At the same time, live performance now uses mediatized elements to form norms and structures of behaviour, as I explained above. The two thus become deeply interconnected, and it is no longer clear where one ends and the other begins.

Baudrillard (1995) wrote that the event is now a televised object. Perhaps, in today's world, it is more accurate to speak of a video-blogged object, a streamed object, or a 'shared on social media' object. Contemporary culture is a participatory one, based in continuous connection to social media and sharing of media. However, the overall logic of ontological dependency of the live and mediatized described above seems to remain, with the reigning medium fragmenting into various Internet-wielding software used through computers, smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles, and TV sets. These allow the consumption, creation, and sharing of various forms of recording media, such as video blogs or gifs. Russell (1999) writes that such forms of video extend cinema, resulting in video as media practice that is now always a part of culture and social relations.

There are some important changes to how individuals now consume recording media. The recording and repetition has become much more condensed and rapidly distributed.

Videos are expected to be short and concise, instantly globally shared, as well as modified and passed on by any audience member. Turnover is increasingly faster, with novelty wearing off in mere days or hours, and with recording media elements instantly becoming an element to be used in live performance. For instance, various Internet memes and viral videos become a part live interaction through referencing. The above-described developments were made possible by technology becoming massively accessible. As equipment and software are cheaper, easier to use, and available to the public, anyone can potentially become the producer of recording media. Power relations between consumers and producers of media thus shift, diluting the previously one-directional flow of information (following Auslander, 2008; McLuhan, 1964).

Live and mediatized performance become further blurred. Couldry (2009) writes that, with no centralized media (such as television previously) guiding the distinction of live/mediatized and with individuals connecting to media all the time, defining what is live becomes a continuous, ever-present, interpersonal process. Media no longer have specific spatial or temporal limitations, but are rather continuously present in individuals' lives through parallel interaction with various forms of media. Exchange between live and mediatised becomes constant, fragmented, and rapid; what is real or important becomes a matter of choice. Following this line of thought, it could be said that there is no possibility or even need to differentiate between live and mediatized performance. However, as Auslander (2008) and Schechner (2006) stress, individuals continue to subjectively perceive mediatised and live performance as different.

All in all, recording media have become an inherent part of contemporary culture (Russell, 1999; Jansson, 2002). First, cinema became a realm on memory and history, making possible the idea of and becoming deeply entwined with an objectively perceived reality (Gergen, 1991). Developing and extending into other forms of video as media practice (cf.

Russell 1999), recording media further began providing individuals with norms and guides for action, as a result of which the relationship between live and mediatized performance became one of co-dependence rather than hierarchy. Hence, recording media has become central in distributing, but also producing contemporary culture and live performance.

### **Videography as a Form of Recording Media**

What does the central role of recording media in contemporary culture mean for videography as a method of research? The answer to this question is infinitely different depending on what one's goals are as a videographer. Nevertheless, whatever approach one takes, it is important for videographers to face the cultural embeddedness of recording media, as this directly influences how both researchers and their audiences produce, receive, and interact with videography. In being a recording medium, videography becomes a piece of the massive sea of mediatized representations that form contemporary culture; something that the producers and viewers of videography have already been acculturated into. It then becomes irrelevant for videographers to teach visual literacy or to stress readability in their work, as these aspects are deeply imbued in contemporary culture and are natural to audiences.

Heisley (2001) has argued that video is rarely taken up as a research method because there is little familiarity with the medium. However, perhaps it is rather the opposite that is the problem. Videographers may have *too much* familiarity with video as a medium, and can thus become blind to how it influences individuals, how individuals engage with it, as well as what its possibilities are. By stepping out of acculturated norms, videographers could make use of the various ways audiences already actively interact with recording media as well as tap into the co-existence of mediatized and live performance inherent to contemporary culture, thus embracing different forms of knowledge the method can employ.

To reflect on acculturated structures of videography and address videography as a

medium embedded in contemporary culture, videographers would first need to let go of their own naturalized understanding of recording media and address the form that videography takes in terms of its wider cultural setting. I stated earlier that videography differs from other recording media in its research orientation. While this is true, it is important to note that videography will often be received like its sister media because of similarity in form and in the audience's normalised, acculturated response to such form. Hence, the question begs to be answered: how can we classify videography in terms of recording media?

I would suggest that videography reflects in its aims and ontology the medium of film. As I explained earlier, film aims to preserve life in exact, detailed correspondence with reality, resulting in a fixed perspective and the preservation of memory (Baudrillard, 1995; Schechner, 1985). Videographers have similarly stated that video helps them represent experience and expression in more detail, as well as capture context and embodied activity (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a; Smith, Fischer and Cole, 2007). Both thus strive for realistic, detailed reflection and/or expression of reality.

In line with the above, the connection to film links videography to a sense of underlying reality, something imbued in how individuals consume film. Through seemingly capturing reality precisely, videography creates the idea of an objective reality it is meant to be reflecting (following Schechner, 1985), thus upholding a hierarchical perspective on the relationship between live and mediatized performance (Auslander, 2008). In this sense, Belk and Kozinets' (2005a) and Hietanen's (2012) fears are well-justified: videography does indeed run the risk of being perceived as presenting its audience with objective reality.

Videography and film are further similar in their forms. As Hietanen (2012) explains, videographies in consumer culture research still largely take on a very uniform structure, in many ways emulating academic research papers, but also film. Many videographers stress the production value and focus on storylines as part of videographies, reflecting heavily the

production of film (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; Petr, Belk, and Decrop, 2015).

This similarity of form could help explain some of the issues that videography has faced. Through the connection to the form of film, audiences of videography engage in a very familiar experience that they have been deeply acculturated into and which they have naturalised reactions to. They engage in a multisensory experience that emulates reality and displaces time, providing a finished story to be received passively (Auslander, 2008). What videographers are then left with is a method that projects memory of live performance in an exact, precise, and detailed manner (be it an actual memory or a fabricated one). Memory is projected momentarily into a scene, creating a break in reality, but failing to activate its audience or to link this break to everyday life. Hence, all the audience can do is passively receive what it is being shown.

The link to film may further explain the stigma of videography as something leisurely and unserious. For instance, Kozinets and Belk (2007) as well as De Valck, Rokka and Hietanen (2009) worry about videography often being seen as entertainment, suggesting that it is framed as such at academic events. In referencing film in its form, videography may be inadvertently tapping into the audiences' acculturation of such a format as entertainment.

### **Videography as Performance**

I have suggested that videography is imbued with the structure of film. In such form, the research method has little chance of tapping into interactive, live performance, as the audience intuitively interprets videography as its opposite. I propose that researchers can create much more engaging and evocative videographies that link to everyday life and embrace the performative turn in research by focusing on *creating* performance.

Following Carlson (2003) and Schechner (2006), performance in itself can never actually be recorded, as it is ephemeral. Consequently, what recording media captures is the

*disappearance* of performance. Videography as performance would therefore need to focus away from video as a product in itself, and rather work toward creating a context through the videography, in which live performance can take place in the form of embodied, evocative co-creation of meaning. Therefore, the performance is *not* the videography itself nor its creation or presentation. The performance rather takes form as ephemeral, contextualised interaction between audience and videography.

Videography as performance does not aim to capture or represent, but to create a basis for live performance. Videographies in marketing and consumer research tend to reflect reality in the form of mimesis or create other worlds and expressive stories in the form of poesis. Such forms often experientially disconnect both videographer and their audience from live performance, leaving them unchanged and unengaged. Through focusing on creating performance in the form of kinesis, videography has the potential to connect to the cultural context it is a part of, create multisided meaning, and activate the audience to engage and respond. Moreover, the approach embraces the relationship between live and mediatized performance as the co-dependence of the two inherent to contemporary culture.

How can videographers produce such live performance? Following Meyerhold (1968) and Brecht (1965), creating a performance that activates both its creators and its viewers involves a reflexive process of breaking convention and leaving things open. The aim of the performance is not to present any type of narrative, as this always involves potential for passive reception by audience. The focus is rather on providing stimuli for co-creation and active meaning-making. In creating such performance, the videographer has to become aware and reflexive of the medium they are using, as well as use this reflexivity throughout the research process to break naturalised structures. The videography takes form in stimuli created by researchers, which do not provide answers to questions, but rather open them up for reflection and discussion, pushing the audience to look for their own understanding. The

viewer has to actively work in order to figure things out, resulting in meaning that is continuously created and recreated. To put this into academic language, videography as performance does not close gaps, but opens them.

The audience members are central in videography as performance, as they become active co-creators of the performance and its meaning. The focus of a videography thus shifts from showing empirical research and/or producing the video in itself (Kozinets and Belk, 2006; Schembri and Boyle, 2013) to the interaction *with* the videography. The videography becomes a never-ending learning process, both for viewers and videographers, with meaning existing ephemerally as it is performed, thus continuously developing and changing.

De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) have implied that viewers may be intimidated by a research form, of which they have no prior familiarity. Yet, this is at the core of the approach. Meyerhold (1968) and Brecht (1965) stress that the only way to link performance to life and to create possibilities for interventional understanding that result in change is to push audiences to face the unknown. By facing something not fully understood, the audience members have to create their own interpretation, not consume a ready one. In parallel, researchers also face the unknown, which helps alleviate the naturalised familiarity with videography that I alluded to earlier and allows possibilities for new ways of approaching research.

Vahtangov (1984) nevertheless notes that it is important to have some familiarity in performance, even when the aim is to push individuals to make their own meaning, because the audience needs to have a basis from which to begin building interpretation. In other words, videography as performance should be linked to the audience's specific visual literacy, which is closely intertwined with their cultural context. Some familiarity with a medium and its use is also a huge advantage to videography as a method, as this creates a

situation, in which the audience has some understanding of how to engage with the medium and thus also with the research.

It is difficult to provide direct guidelines for creating videography as performance, as its essence lies in providing norm-breaking stimuli for invoking reaction and forming individual interpretation. Nevertheless, some examples are in order.

One way of creating videography as performance involves making use of the historical development and cultural contextualization of videography as film. Videographers do not need to reinvent the wheel, as filmmakers have struggled with inciting active responses from their audience throughout history. One main way of addressing this has been through editing. Focusing on editing is not a novel idea in videography (Belk and Kozinets, 2005a,b, 2007; Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten, 2014), yet to create performances, videography would need to tap into specific forms of editing that engage audiences. For instance, Eisenstein (2002) wrote that cinema can be made influential and activating through the use of montage, as this does not convey emotions, but rather creates an experience, in which the audience is emotionally, intellectually, and ideologically engaged. Such film does not provide a meaningful whole directly, but pushes audiences to work out meaning for themselves, creating an active and reciprocal relationship between film and audience. In the context of consumer research videography, Bode (2010) similarly notes that “[a] performative videography would set the cultural phenomena into motion, shattering the constructed narrative line” (p. 150). In practice, montage is created through the use of rhythms, tempo, and sequence. No story or plotline is presented, but the audience is pushed to actively create meaning through engaging with the film and with one another.

Such use of montage can be seen in the videography ‘A Pen’ by Seregina and colleagues (2013), which focused on exploring the agency of everyday consumption objects. The work heavily used editing to create a succession of quick-paced scenes, supported by

rhythms of music. The work did not use spoken word and involved limited written text, thus explaining very little of what it attempted to convey, and pushing individuals to fill in gaps in meaning on their own. By using various objects and contexts that are familiar to viewers, but arranging them in unexpected, novel ways, the videography aimed to elicit various responses from the audience as emotional, cognitive, and bodily reactions to the videography, thus creating a live performance of interaction through and with the videography.

Another way of shattering convention is by breaking the all-inclusive multisensory experience that is expected of film. As Auslander (2008) explains, a central way through which film creates other worlds, in which viewers get lost, is by providing a multisensory experience that emulates immersion into a real context. Such illusion can be broken by depriving or adding a sense that is normally not present. The former can be seen in Hietanen and Botez's (2014) videography 'When the Silence takes Control.' The videography explored hearing as part of consumption, linking this to the viewer's own subjectivity and ability to choose within capitalist, consumption-oriented culture.

Interestingly, the focus on hearing is achieved by an almost complete lack of sonic stimuli. The audience becomes painfully aware of that, which is absent, yet subliminally expected to be present. By depriving a sense, the videography gets the audience to actively engage through having to make up for aspects of the experience they would normally be passively receiving.

Lastly, videography could embrace existing forms of recording media *beyond* film to break its naturalized forms. These could naturally evoke different ways of interacting in the audience, with some even connecting directly to live performance of everyday life through their fragmented, ever-available use. This could materialize in taking on forms of recording media that individuals engage with on a daily basis, such as video blogs, interactive video, and other various use of video on social media. For instance, Figueiredo and Scaraboto's

(2013) research involved circulating objects from person to person in different countries, recording this, and sharing it on social media. Through similar use of recording media, videography can become the basis for performance that is direct, immediate, and intertwined with the flow of mediatized and live performances. Here, the audience becomes a part of the scene, not projected into it, as is often the case with film, with videography becoming intricately contextualized as a live performance to take part in personally, actively, and bodily.

### **Outcomes and Assessment of Videography as Performance**

Videography as performance is not strictly structured, nor does it have absolute, correct ways of viewing it or understanding it, with resultant knowledge being co-created and open-ended. Questions are not answered in this type of research, but opened up for interpretation, exploration, and discussion within a context created by the videography. As a result, norms of research, its empirical context, and its medium are broken for both researcher and audience, requiring active engagement and reflexivity. In the words of Meyerhold (1968) and Brecht (1965), such an approach allows for communication *with* rather than *to* the viewers.

Videography as performance further results in knowledge through experience, rather than the transfer of knowledge in narrative form. This takes place through the open-ended, loosely structured performance that requires individuals to figure things out on their own and thus to reach for the unknown. Such active engagement allows for multisensory understanding and meaning-making that does not need to take the rational, text- and language-oriented form of traditional research. As Marks (2000) writes, video has great potential in engaging audiences through various sensory expressions, which allows for the recollection of memories and the emergence of understanding through embodied expression.

Social behaviour and meaning are multisensory, and videography as performance can allow researchers to tap into knowledge about these as they are lived.

The knowledge created through videography as performance is also deeply contextualized, as it emerges in co-created form in the specific space and time of interaction among videography and its audience. This allows for contextualised understanding, as well as provides ample opportunity to become engaged with the public interventionally, reflecting ideas of participatory action research (Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008). Moreover, the open-ended and loosely structured form of videography as performance allows the research to break out of a specialized academic field, as field-specific terminology and forms of representation are recombined or omitted. This creates opportunities for cross-disciplinary understanding as well as reaching wider audiences both within and outside of academia.

Naturally, the issue of assessment arises. How can we know that videography as performance is good, rigorous research? I noted earlier in the paper that videography faces many issues in terms of acceptance and assessment within academia. Videography is often seen as less serious, less intellectual; too subjective and unable to demonstrate rigor. I do not suggest that videography as performance would resolve these issues. In fact, quite the opposite happens, as the proposed approach pushes videography to embrace its artistic roots more directly.

In discussing various alternative research methods, Leavy (2009) writes that academic knowledge is created with the structures of its evaluation in mind. Hence, any knowledge not fitting these criteria becomes discredited. However, as Eisner (1997) argues, research that takes on artistic practices ends up creating a very different kind of knowledge, for which traditional forms of evaluation become inapplicable. Similarly, the knowledge created through videography as performance has no specific form that traditional ways of research evaluation could assess. Such knowledge is structured differently, as the aim of the approach

is to create response, subjective interpretation, and multiple points of view. In trying to fit into pre-existing, 'valid' forms of knowledge, videography as performance would end up simply repeating the structures of traditional, written research, with the approach becoming incapable of engaging different ways of understanding.

If videography as performance is to embrace the creation of knowledge that is not compatible with traditional research assessment criteria, then the evaluation of the co-created knowledge should take similar form. In discussing artistic practice as part of research, Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest that assessment of such research should avoid static criteria, and rather focus on evaluating whether the work invokes feelings and thoughts, inspires conversations and deepens discourses, as well as has social significance. Interestingly, they do not present artistic value as a point of evaluation. Finley (2003) similarly argues for a focus away from artistic merit, rather stressing "experiences of passion, communion, and social responsibility" (p. 294) for evaluating the quality of research that uses artistic practice. More specifically, she proposes that evaluation of research should look at its usefulness to the research field and the context of research, the ethics of research, and the ability of the research to create dialogue. I suggest that similar criteria can be used to assess videography as performance.

In conclusion, it is important to note the approach proposed here is a marginal one. Such approaches often face difficulties of acceptance and evaluation, as academic work is restricted by institutional pressures and norms of publishing. Yet videography as performance has the potential to become a means of communicating with, challenging, and activating audiences, in the way Pert, Belk and Decrop (2015) as well as Kozinets and Belk's (2007) have called for. As Wood (2015) advocates, academics need to let go of their fears and break traditions, as taking on such risks can allow engagement with new types of understanding and create novel ways of interacting with audiences.

## Epilogue

I have proposed that one way to actively and directly engage audiences through videography involves creating live performance. To do this, videographers need to become reflexive, break convention, as well as leave things open. Videography as performance requires continuous reflection from both researcher and audience, resulting in meaning that is co-created, deeply contextualised, and reformed with each instance of interaction. The performance puts individuals outside of their comfort zone, pushing them to actively reflect and learn by creating and experiencing, rather than receiving knowledge. This allows researchers and their audiences to tap into ways of understanding not available to traditional forms of research.

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<sup>1</sup> Live performance can be described as performance happening in real space and time. I address the concept in more detail later on in the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Such as suggested, for instance, by Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Ellis (2000) explains that the idea of live was originally connected to actual live broadcasting, as, in the early days of television, all programming took this form. Live thus originally referred not to the factuality of an event, but to its form of transmission. However, as Couldry (2004) points out, based on this original connection, liveness became something more, a naturalised idea of connecting to the broader reality that is performed live.

<sup>4</sup> This does not exclude the fact that mediatized performances may be partially or even fully fabricated. As McKenzie (2001) and Schechner (2006) stress, information becomes increasingly entertaining and extremely dramatized, with major sources of information becoming realistic soap operas.