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Affects, emotions and interaction: the methodological promise of video data analysis in peace research

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ABSTRACT

Methodologically, Peace Research has long been dominated by words, numbers, and sometimes images. This article suggests also integrating Video Data Analysis (VDA) into the analytical toolbox of Peace Research so as to explore the potential of the millions of videos of relevance for the study of peace and conflict that can be found online and beyond. The article introduces VDA and shows how the method can be applied to analyse micro-dynamics of phenomena such as violence, conflict, mediation, and peacebuilding. Videos enable researchers to observe events that no or few researchers would otherwise have access to from their armchairs, integrating the attentiveness to interaction and atmosphere that only ethnographers would have. While losing the ethnographer's benefit of 'being there', videos allow researchers to replay events in slow motion and thus capture subtle dynamics of timing, interaction, and affect. The article discusses the epistemological challenges, ethical dilemmas, and future promises of applying VDA in Peace Research and provides concrete examples of how the observation of affects reflected in body postures and facial expressions, as well as the social bonds reflected in the rhythm and content of interaction, can be of value in peace research.

Introduction

Many phenomena of relevance to peace research, including those once 'invisible' to scholarly inquiry, are now recorded and available online: from Trump's dominating handshakes with other heads of state, to the Gacaca courts established in Rwanda, UN security council meetings, or fighting on the ground in Syria. Analysing these videos holds untapped potential to inform and challenge our understandings of peace, conflict, and diplomacy. Following a long tradition of peace research integrating new methodologies and approaches into its toolkit,[1] this article therefore introduces Video Data Analysis (VDA) as a method to harness the insights these new data sources may hold. In doing so, the article furthers the aim of 'making peace researchable' at the micro or situational level of interactional dynamics depicted in these video data.[2]

Variants of VDA have been applied *ad hoc* in several fields, particularly sociology and psychology, for decades.[3] The approach was recently formally articulated as a distinct

method by Nassauer and Legewie (2018a, 2019). Unlike visual International Relations (IR), or cognate approaches in peace studies, VDA does not prioritise a focus on the aesthetics of politics[4] or the political effects of images.[5] Instead, videos are usually analysed to understand the interactional dynamics between human beings and environments that they portray. Thus, rather than focusing on the reasons for the production of particular images, how they reflect wider socio-political discourses, or the affective consequences of images on audiences, VDA explores what is concretely depicted within images in order to analyse the interaction dynamics, behavioural patterns, emotional-affective cues, and conversational content that can be observed.

Notably, VDA suggests that 'visual data offer analytic potential that is complementary to participant observation and retrospective interviewing'.[6] It complements these approaches because observed incidents can be replayed several times (and in slow motion) and so analysed at a micro-granular level that is rarely achieved via ethnographic methods. VDA is able to explore, for example, the intonation of speech, facial expressions, body postures, and the rhythm of interaction.[7] Video material can also gift researchers a certain degree of insight into the affective quality of having been 'present' at the events or phenomena they study, albeit one that does not reach an ethnographic level. This comparison to ethnographic approaches foregrounds that VDA is of most value when studying local, situational, and 'micro-level' phenomena.

In this article, we explore just one of many potential uses of VDA of relevance to peace research: its deployment to study the emotional and affective dynamics of situations. Affect and emotion are notoriously difficult to study, particularly at the collective level, due to their embodied and subjective aspects, which are often difficult to capture verbally (through interviews) or in the analysis of secondary sources (Introduction, this issue). VDA, by contrast, allows for a 'first-hand' look at the emotional and affective dynamics of particular situations. To demonstrate this, the article now proceeds in four main parts. First, we describe concretely how VDA is deployed as a method, including the importance of triangulating it with other methods. Second, we discuss the challenging question of positionality in VDA. Third, we explore conceptually and concretely how VDA is particularly suited for capturing emotions and affects and thus adding empirical substance and nuances to the study of emotions in peace and conflict. Finally, the article discusses dilemmas related to the application and presentation of VDA, before concluding by pointing towards further research avenues for applying VDA.

Video data analysis in practice

VDA usually begins with the open-source collection of video material. Today Closed Circuit TeleVision (CCTV), smartphones, photojournalists, and other actors record almost every aspect of life, from everyday situations to iconic events of relevance for the study of peace and conflict.[8] Videos can be found through search engines, dedicated video platforms (*Youtube, Vimeo*), and social media platforms (*Facebook, Twitter*). For example, when Bramsen analysed the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria, she began by locating Facebook groups used by protestors before searching back in time to gather visual material posted since the beginning of the uprising.[9] When carried out manually, the collection of videos often involves trial-and-error, as search terms are varied, multiple languages are used, and different outlets are searched (e.g. video

platforms and social media platforms). The collection process can also involve gathering video material from documentarists, organisations filming their own activities or CCTV data. The researcher may herself also personally record the concerned phenomena, echoing longstanding work in visual anthropology.[10] Likewise, interviewees may help in pointing towards relevant videos, or they themselves may have recorded events relevant for the research.

Following data collection, videos can be coded by different means, but usually involving a focus on the body postures present, the nature of the interactions visible, the types of material artefacts involved, the environment in which the interactions occur, or the use of language.[11] The coding scheme may be orientated towards quantitative or qualitative analysis and can be carried out either manually or through automated tools. Manually, coding schemas are similar to those developed within for ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, as well as qualitative coding techniques more generally.[12] At the automated level, a growing number of tools exist for coding video material that are capable of recognising facial expressions, sounds, actions, or objects. An example of such a tool is the *Noldus Face Reader* that offers automated face recognition and coding of emotions. Cloud AI services have also recently appeared and offer researchers and analysts easy ways of mobilising artificial intelligence to analyse video material. In either case, the core goal of VDA is identifying patterns in the data of analytical relevance.[13] Such patterns may be found through counting specific things or events (facial expressions, words, etc.), looking for changes or turning points in interaction, tracing temporal development, or ordering practices. Often, it is beneficial to look for surprising elements in the video data, something that challenges or eloquently exemplifies established understandings of war and peace.

VDA most frequently benefits from being coupled with, or supplemented by, other methods that offer alternative insights. In particular, participant observation, deep textual analysis, ethnographic interviewing,[14] discourse analysis, content analysis, and beyond are all likely to be useful in overcoming 'incomplete' visual information, uncertainties about veracity, and related difficulties in relying on videos. The importance of such methodological triangulation is at least twofold. First, it can aid in ensuring the 'complete capture'[15] (or – at least – 'more complete' capture) of an event or phenomenon (putting together different data sources like police reports, news reports, interviews, videos, and court data e.g. to reconstruct a situation from a to z). This allows the researcher to construct a fuller picture of a given phenomenon without the different pieces of video data necessarily coming together to reconstruct all aspects of an event. Different data sources need not provide different entry points to comprehend the *same* violent events but may also just multiply the number of the situations that can be analysed and add a *different* dimension to the study e.g. by taking into account the experience of conducting and being subjected to violence. Thus, rather than ensuring complete capture, triangulation can give a more comprehensive, overall picture of a given phenomenon.

Positionality, positivism, and post-positivism in VDA

It has long been recognised that positionality is an important factor to consider in *all* forms of social scientific research.[16] Given its relative novelty, considering positionality in

relation to VDA is indeed especially key. Notably, although VDA is often considered a kind of 'second-best' form of ethnographic inquiry, it naturally poses quite different positionality-linked questions. For example, while some more positivist readings of VDA suggest that the *absence* of the researcher from the phenomenon studied in videos can increase objectivity by allowing for the capture of so-called 'natural behaviour',[17] others would suggest this is a rather dangerous fallacy. Visual material always only tells a partial story of reality, which is inevitability marked by questions of power, positionality, and social construction.[18] In order to unpack the core terms of this debate, we now tease out two possible interpretations of VDA, which range from positivist to post-positivist understandings.[19] While we refrain from taking an explicit position in these debates, we wish to emphasise that VDA is malleable enough as a methodology to be deployed through quite different epistemological and ontological standpoints.

In Nassauer and Legewie's (2018a, 2019) sociological introduction to VDA, they propose a positivist and behaviourist approach. The goal in such an understanding is identifying causal links within human interactions. Similar to qualitative process tracing, this implies 'reconstructing a situation step-by-step' so as to 'analyse its inner dynamics, and establish comprehensive story lines'.[20] For example, Lindegaard et al. (2017) suggest that 'consolation in the aftermath of robberies resembles post-aggression consolation in chimpanzees' based on CCTV footage of robberies. In this understanding, video data captures 'natural behaviour' that is defined as the degree to which 'actors in visual data behave in a way they normally do in the type of situation under investigation'.[21] Locating data meeting this standard is considered a key criterion for the 'validity' of any study. Another criterion for validity is *complete capture*, meaning using videos that portray a given event, the object of study, from one end to the other in as 'complete' a manner as possible.[22] If this is not obtainable, methodological triangulation can be applied to ensure complete capture. For example, Nassauer (2019) puts together different data sources, such as police reports and media articles, to make up a full picture of what happened, second by second, in demonstrations in the US and Germany. VDA is considered especially useful within such a positivist approach since it allows for the micro-level study of behaviour in ways that unlike, say, ethnography or interviews, appears to remove the subjective bias of the researcher from affecting the behaviours in question. Equally, the fact that VDA allows for easy replication of an analysis (as long as videos are publicly available) is considered a key virtue within such an epistemology. Finally, VDA can be conducted on hundreds or even thousands of videos where the same videos are, for example, coded by several research assistants or automatically coded, in which case comprehensive amounts of empirical reality can be observed, which might thus provide a more quantitatively representative set of research results than would be possible within ethnography inquiry.

The search for 'natural behaviour' need not be the over-arching goal of VDA, which is only one deeply contested understanding of how VDA might proceed. Indeed, the assumption that visual data is more 'objective' than other forms of data stems – to some degree – from the false belief that a camera recording this data can operate as a 'neutral' observer whose presence does not affect the phenomenon in question. By contrast, it is usually stressed that the presence of an ethnographic observer always affects the subjects that she observes. This misses the degree to which the camera itself not only influences the event occurring but also the ways in which, for example, the positioning of

the camera is a way of interpreting in advance: 'although restricting how or what we see is not exactly the same as dictating a storyline, it is a way of interpreting in advance what will and will not be included in the field of perception'.[23] For example, in Nassauer's empirical study of street demonstrations, she argues that because demonstrations are often recorded by both police, demonstrators, and the media, the actions in a demonstration constitute natural behaviour as it is considered quite normal to have actions recorded in these circumstances and – hence – the behaviour of individuals remains 'natural' in some way. However, one could argue that this permanent presence of recording mediums during events like protests actually *demands* a deeper accounting of their role in influencing behaviour. What would demonstrations look like without cameras, to what degree are protestors and/or police 'acting' for the cameras, to some degree, and how might key emotional, affective, and/or discursive aspects of demonstrations be being *missed* by these recordings?

Questions like these indicate that analysing situations, events, or sites where cameras *do* affect social interactions should not be considered an 'invalid' research practice. On the contrary, this fact demands only deeper inquiry into the multiple possible layers through which any image can be interpreted. Indeed, in many cases the presence of cameras should not be treated as a 'potential bias' to be taken into account, but rather as an inherent part of the interaction being observed. For instance, this would be especially true vis-à-vis diplomacy where a performance such as handshaking is conducted precisely for the benefit of the watching cameras. For example, in Bramsen's (2022) analysis of the Philippine peace talks between the government and the communist group National Democratic Front (NDF), it is shown how energy and solidarity are built up within the respective parties prior to the talks through the use of slogans and hand gestures in front of the cameras. Here, the presence of cameras contributed to ritualistic processes of solidarity building that then *directly* impacted the following negotiations. Hence, as with protests, it is relevant to analyse the performative aspect of the actions and the 'effects' of the presence of the camera, rather than labelling it as 'natural' because diplomatic handshakes or protests are anyway performative (from a Goffmanian perspective all behaviour can be considered performative but the camera adds another (often more unknown) audience to which actions and utterings may be directed).

A more interpretivist or post-positivist understanding of human practice thus implies alternative approaches to conducting VDA. Anthropologists have long deployed participatory film-making and other visual methods to co-produce visual material that can be analysed through interpretivist frames.[24] This typically involves a strong focus on the positionality of the researcher within that process of co-production, including reflections on the place of power, gender, race, class, and other factors in both how the video material was produced and how it was later interpreted.[25] Likewise, VDA is also suited to the study of international practices, which are usually considered (within political science) as products of human institutions, history, and social construction, rather than being 'natural' phenomena (Pouliot 2008). Across such possible alternative approaches to VDA, special emphasis must be placed on developing context-specific knowledge and understanding. This usually involves combining 'experience-distant' data (such as videos or secondary sources) with 'experience-near' data (interviews, ethnography, etc.) in order to better understanding depicted events.

Table 1. Examples of the deployment of VDA to cases of relevance to peace research across epistemological divides.

Representative/ Examples	Question of Interest/ Dependent Variables	Explanatory Phenomena/Independent Variables
Positivist Approaches		
Nassauer (2018) \Data: CCTV footage.	Why do violent/aggressive interactions often fail in spite of power imbalances between aggressor and victim?	Facial expressions and bodily postures; 'universal' emotions; weapon types and sizes; bodily/spatial movement.
Lindegaard et al (2017) \Data: CCTV footage.	Why/how does post-aggression consolation occur?	Social 'closeness'; gender; number of subjects in aftermath of aggressive incident; physically close (during event and aftermath); same age group; same ethnic group.
Interpretivist Approaches		
Elsey (2018) \Data: Leaked military helicopter footage	Why/how do military practitioners make decisions to kill/attack in particular situations (and not in others)?	Interpretations of human practitioners of a situation; broader contextual factors (beyond immediate situation) affecting interpretations of practitioners; the phenomenology of situations.
Austin & Leander (2022) \Data: Leaked perpetrator-filmed footage of violence.	Why are functionally 'identical' political practices (of torture/mass detention) perceived differently when enacted by state authorities with distinct institutional structures (democratic/autocratic)?	Presence/absence of material or technological objects; aesthetic perceptions of the performative 'cleanness' or 'dirtyness' of violent practices.
Mixed Approaches		
Collins (2008, 2012) \Data: Multiple video sources of violence.	How do humans overcome forms of (natural) fear/tension that *usually* prevent the use of violence?	Corporeal self-entrainment; micro-coordination between attacker and victim; social-interactions between groups and/or audience; emotional and affective valences; subjective phenomenological factors.
Bramsen (2021) \Data: Footage of meeting in Norther Ireland Assembly	How does agonistic interaction unfold in practice?	Laughing (compared to laughing during the first years of the assembly), display of self-irony, performative gestures like avoiding clapping, mode of interaction, expressions of identity and counter-hegemony.

In sum, VDA can be deployed *across* epistemological divisions within the social sciences. Table 1 provides a representative view of how these possibilities play-out in practice, through concrete examples of how VDA has been deployed through positivist, interpretivist, and 'mixed' epistemological approaches. In this article, we do not take a stand on which approach is most appropriate, as this is a question for individual researchers and the traditions they operate within. In order to further stress the 'openness' of VDA as a research methodology, the following section will move to discussing VDA's value for the study of emotion and affect in peace and conflict by continuing to stress how it can cut across such epistemological divides.

Affect and emotion in peace and conflict

Attention to the place of affect and emotions has been growing within the study of peace and conflict, as well as IR more broadly. This began with Crawford's seminal essay on passions in world politics, and Bleiker and Hutchison's call to focus on emotions in IR.[26] This work has generated greater insight into the workings, dynamics and effects of emotions in world politics. Much of this research is founded in feminist, post-structuralist and/or discourse analytical traditions that explore (the effects of) emotions

in various aspects of international relations including speeches, protests and foreign policy strategies.[27] Alongside this focus on emotions there has been a growing interest in affect. Affect is generally distinguished from emotions, with the latter considered "socially recognised, structured episodes of affectively valenced response, such as 'anger', 'pride', or 'fear'," and affects deemed 'biases at levels of intensity below conscious awareness'.[28] While theoretically complex, the basic distinction here is that the affectual operates beyond or outside 'conscious' human awareness such that it can rarely be neatly categorised as a specific emotion. This has led to an interesting convergence in which those who explore affect often combine post-structuralist or feminist traditions with insights from neuroscientific studies that explore how we are pre-consciously influenced by affects.[29]

In our view, the most important work draws simultaneously on understandings of emotion and affect. For example, consider Andrew Ross' (2013) book *Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict*, which takes a microsociological approach. To understand the role of emotions in complex phenomena such as ethnic conflict or terrorism, Ross focuses on the circulation of affect, that is, 'a conscious or unconscious transmission of emotion within a social environment',[30] and emphasises how emotions should not be seen as fleeting responses but as processes of circulation that travel and influence social processes in various ways. In doing so, he empirically explores what Anderson (2009) has termed 'affective atmospheres' or, simply, the ways in which particular social situations are characterised by the presence of a kind of 'collective mood' that affects all of those present. Such an understanding can be grounded either in a more psychological understanding of collective emotions or a more radical post-structuralist understanding of the 'autonomy of affect' in which such atmospheres exist 'outside' human bodies and minds to some degree.[31]

Studying emotions and affects is difficult. In each case, the phenomenon of concern exists at a subjective, corporeal, and often non-linguistic level, meaning it seems less easy to access or measure than more simple human behaviours or attitudes. This is doubly so given that emotions and affects can be simultaneously felt at the micro-level (in a single human) and a collective level (in a body politic). In addition, while some of these obstacles might be overcome through psychological methods, such as controlled experiments, this is less viable when studying contentious political events. We see this difficulty in Ross' book where his innovative approach nonetheless finds it difficult to capture emotional dynamics empirically. As argued by Kalmoe, Ross's approach has great difficulty in 'measuring what he is most interested in. His descriptive accounts from secondary sources are unlikely to tap unconscious and embodied emotions. And Ross often merely asserts the presence and influence of emotions not described in those sources'.[32] Moreover, as others have noted at length, one of the main difficulties in relying on secondary sources, or even verbally-articulated personal accounts of events, is the human tendency to unconsciously construct a personally meaningful autobiographical narrative around those events that may deviate from 'what actually happened'.[33]

The analysis of video material has long been seen as a solution to these dilemmas.[34] However, it has previously been used principally by psychologists and sociologists either 1) to analyse more-or-less public and high-profile phenomena, such as televised election debates, or 2) within controlled settings where social scientists make recordings of events.[35] More recently, micro-sociologists have studied forms of inter-

personal violence and other phenomena through video data but have typically explored relatively non-controversial or depoliticised events (e.g. street fights). However, because of the digitalised environment that we now live in, as described in the introduction, it is now possible to access video material that depicts phenomena of great relevance to the study of peace and conflict. This has generated early studies drawing on video data that explore, for instance, phenomena such as protest movements, torture and political violence, or war crimes.[36] In what follows, we now move to drawing on these early approaches but extend them to the specific study of emotion and affect through VDA.

Four points of analysis

While VDA might be deployed to study peace and conflict in a multiplicity of ways, we now tease out four especially central points of analysis within video data. These four foci cut-across the full range of possible emotional and affective states that have usually been conceptualised: from individual emotional or affective states, to those that are collectively held, and the ways in which these states circulate in different ways. As we describe, VDA can also incorporate aspects of relevance to emotion and affect that exist 'beyond' the human, including the ways material and technological factors affect human emotion. These also cut-across different epistemological understandings of how we can deploy video data, described above: ranging from more positivist to more post-positivist understandings. We summarise the four points of analysis we focus on in Table 2, before describing them in depth.

First, and following the pioneering work of Ekman, VDA can be used to identify *individual* emotions by observing micro-level facial expressions, body postures, and tones of voice.[37] In Ekman's approach this involves the (usually manual) anatomical coding of facial and corporeal expressions. For example, Ekman argues that anger can be

Table 2. Four points of analysis for studying emotions and affect through VDA.

	Focus	Example	Theories
Individual Emotions	Facial and bodily expressions of individuals, as well as tone of voice, etc.	Anger in peace negotiations can be identified through wide-open eyes, the tight pressing of lips together, etc.	Largely behaviouralist and positivist, derived from psychological studies and neuroscience.
Collective Emotions	Shared emotional states generated in interactions between individuals.	Peaceful protests might produce feelings of joy through repeated jokes told among a crowd, or the chanting of slogans.	Largely used within sociology and microsociology from either positivist (e.g. Randall Collins) or post-positivist (e.g. Elias Canetti) perspectives.
Affective Priming	The relationship between displayed emotions and prior cues, whether cultural, historical, etc.	A soldier's emotional reaction to individuals is shaped by, for example, racial biases produced in society and her own military training.	Cuts across fields from psychology, psychoanalysis, affect theory, and the philosophy of cognition.
Affective Atmospheres	The affective 'context' in which interactions take place and which can shape emotions, including material environment, etc.	The level of violence during protests may be mediated by types of urban architecture, the music played in the background, etc.	Largely post-positivist in focus, drawing on social theorists such as Deleuze, Massumi, Foucault, and Manning.

identified through micro-expressions including eyebrows being pulled down and together, wide open eyes with a hard stare, and the tight pressing of our lips together. The unique granularity of video data is especially suited to analysing such facial expressions and as such for identifying emotional states. Vis-à-vis the study of peace and conflict, such work is especially valuable in understanding, for example, how certain actors might have developed emotional approaches to peace negotiations that produce better outcomes. This is doubly so because VDA can be deployed to observe the rhythm of interaction between different participants and how the individual emotional valence of person X affects that of person Y (see below). In her study of the Philippine peace talks Bramsen for example applies visual material to analyse the facial expressions displaying low-intensity interaction with downturned mouths and evasive gazes vis-à-vis engaged, friendly interaction with smiling faces and mutual focus of attention.[38] Such an approach is not, of course, without controversy. It relies on an idea of universal modes of emotional expression, as well as, despite the complexity of the coding schemes that have been developed, a large degree of interpretation on the part of the coder. Controversy has particularly surrounded the use of the approach within governments (e.g. at security screenings) or by technology companies that 'offer algorithms designed to detect a person's emotions from their face'.[39] In general, it has thus also been emphasised that it is crucial to also consider 'body movement, personality, tone of voice, and changes in skin tone' when analysing facial expressions, as well as to consider possible biases and the 'visual context, such as the background scene' that may affect such analysis.[40]

Second, it is possible to use VDA to analyse *collective* emotions.[41] As Hutchinson and Bleiker write, it remains challenging 'to theorise the processes that turn individual emotions collective, social, public, and thus, political'.[42] More broadly, these debates connect to questions about the assumptions necessary to define what or who constitutes a particular group in social life, something that sociologists and game theorists have long grappled with.[43] Nonetheless, growing evidence has now accumulated that some degree of 'collective emotion' drives core dynamics surrounding major events of relevance to peace and conflict. In general, such collective emotions are theorised as emerging through interactions among groups of individuals.[44] These interactions can create, transform, and transfer individual emotions to collectives.[45] In Collins work, a key concept is therefore that of 'emotional energy' and its transfer across individuals and groups through what he terms interaction ritual *chains*, and which he has studied with a focus on political violence.[46] Video data allows a fine-grained understanding of precisely such forms of interaction and the emotional states they might elicit. This is doubly so because VDA allows for a longitudinal analysis of how such collective emotions develop. It is possible, for example, to take multiple videos of protest movements situated at different points in time and to see how interactions in the former protests (e.g. jokes, slogans, chants, etc.) are 'carried forward' into future protests alongside their emotional valences. Equally, one can study a single video to track over time how interactions result in increased collective emotional entrainment, such as the way a crowd seems – for instance – to grow angrier as a protest grows in size and number. VDA can also be applied for more quantitative purposes. In her study of agonistic interaction in the Northern Ireland Assembly Bramsen for instance applied video footage from the assembly among other things to count the number of times a crowd laughs and the number of seconds this takes place which she then compares to transcripts from the first years of

meeting after the establishment of the assembly. On this basis she demonstrates the increasingly jovial interaction and atmosphere in the assembly and discusses what this entails about the state of the conflict between loyalists and nationalists.[47]

Notably, the study of collective emotions in this manner is also subject to critique. In particular, the focus on interactions restricts our understanding of emotions to their being embedded in individual bodies (or minds) in ways that make it difficult to explain – for example – how collective emotional states can spread so rapidly and beyond the point of their original articulation. This is especially so because while it has long been argued that emotions are both biological *and* social, such that collective emotions can be attributed to a shared group identity,[48] this appears to risk conflating emotions with ideas (collective emotions as 'socially constructed'), preventing an understanding of their pre-conscious and embodied status. It is here that approaches centred around affect usually enter the fray.[49]

Following this, our third point of analysis where VDA is of key value focuses on *affective priming*. By affective priming we refer to the psychological view that many of our reactions to events, people, and phenomena in the world can be traced backwards to prior experiences.[50] In this view, it is important to focus not only on the specifics of an immediate and individual interaction between actors but to understand how those interactions are 'primed' by previous interactions in ways that produce automatic (i.e. unthought) and embodied affectual responses. A basic but crucial example would be the ways in which historical processes of racial segregation and subordination produce what Gendler terms 'affective beliefs'.[51] As she notes, it can be observed that even those who outwardly, ideationally, and politically express anti-racist attitudes are affectively 'primed' to be more distrustful, suspicious, or aggressive towards those of other races, but to do so at an unthought level. VDA can help analyse these processes by combining a study of video material with a focus on a historical and social study of the (cultural) backgrounds of those interacting therein. Here it would be important to focus, for example, on the affective context of an interaction to see why particular interactions that are *intended* – say in peace negotiations – to produce positive emotions (reconciliation, trust, etc.) fail to do so because they do not align with the affective context of one or another individual.

Fourth, we can move to a focus on broader affective *atmospheres*. Affective atmospheres refer to 'a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions'.[52] While often articulated in complex post-structuralist language, the basic focus here is on a far broader understanding of the 'context' within which interactions occur and which produces emotional and affective responses. A focus, put differently, on the 'shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge'.[53] For example, a room in which a baby is crying creates an atmosphere that adjusts the affective quality of interactions amongst *all those present* in that room, even those who are not a parent of the child, but who are simply chatting on a nearby couch. This appears equally true for peace and conflict where 'atmospheres' of conflict or non-conflict are often colloquially described as being present and contributing to a collective mood, such as a tense atmosphere.[54] VDA can help capture such atmospheres in multiple ways. First, it is – of course – possible for the researcher herself to gain a glimpse of such atmospheres simply by watching the videos and analysing their effect

on themselves: videos of crows chanting revolutionary songs evoke a particular atmosphere.[55] Second, it is also possible to focus on the non-human elements recorded in videos. The presence of particular natural or manufactured sounds (humming, drum beats, the swirl of helicopter blades, etc.), or particular material objects (flags, placards, tanks, etc.) or even weather conditions can be interpreted to be contributing to particular affective atmospheres (e.g. protests are more likely to fizzle out in the rain). Finally, one might conduct a comparative study of videos in which different outcomes are present (peaceful protests vs. street riots) in order to understand if there exist key differences in the affective atmospheres present. In spite of its value, there are also key problems with the focus on affective atmospheres. For instance, the concept does not explain why – say – 'some social members resonate with the religious aura in churches or in sacred places while others remain unaffected'.[56] Simply, 'even when a strong affect has most people in its collective grip, there are always exceptions'.[57] These difficulties reflect the fact that once we move to a focus on affect, *interpretation* becomes very central to the analysis, often rendering findings more subjective.

Dilemmas of VDA

As we have now seen, VDA offers unique methodological potential to the study of emotions and affects of relevance to peace research and beyond. However, it is important to conclude by stressing that VDA is no panacea. Each of the points of analysis we described above face particular difficulties, largely relating to the subjective nature of the analysis of emotions and affect. Beyond this, there are more practical issues. Indeed, three dilemmas are clear in the use of this approach: difficulties relating to of the availability and access to visual artefacts, challenges related to validity and veracity, as well as difficulties related to data presentation. As we will see, while each of these dilemmas reveal challenges, none are insurmountable if careful consideration is given to how they affect our research designs.

First, *access* remains a core challenge in VDA. While an ever-increasing number of events and interactions relevant to peace research are now recorded and made available, there are still many other practices, situations, and events that are not. This is typically because these phenomena are confidential, private, or simply not recorded. Despite this, visual artefacts of many secretive, confidential, and/or controversial practices are increasingly made available. This even includes the leaking of videos of war crimes including more hidden violence like torture. It is possible that such access will continue to be increasingly provided through leaks, happenstance, and/or releases through Freedom of Information Requests in the future.

Second, assessing the '*validity*' of visual artefacts is difficult. For example, only a fraction of YouTube videos depicting violations of human rights or war crimes in Syria contain verifiable contextual information indicating the date and time the video was recorded, the geographical location in which the events depicted occurred, and the identity of the perpetrator and victim. In cases like these, it is – quite literally – difficult to know what we are seeing. Indeed, the very truthfulness of visual artefacts is often contested, with numerous fake videos frequently appearing that feature staged events or are manipulated using digital tools. This has always, of course, been a problem vis-à-vis studying the visual, but the problem has only increased lately as its use has been

embraced by governments and non-stop groups alike to further their socio-political goals.[58] More prosaically, 'real' videos may be mislabelled, mis-categorised, or mis-located for various reasons. Despite these issues, it is possible to draw on contextual knowledge of places, phenomena, and events to make judgements about the likely validity of video material, as well as to compare and contrast different videos of phenomena, and triangulate analysis through other data sources (interviews, secondary sources, etc.). In this, it is important to stress that VDA *complements* existing approaches.

Third and finally, VDA poses *ethical concerns* (Nassauer & Legewie 2022), which only becomes more salient in studies of sensitive issues like peace, conflict and violence. The primary issue revolves around the consent and safety of participants in the videos analysed. If the video is recorded by the researcher, she naturally needs to get consent from the depicted individuals. If the video is found online or is publicly available in other ways, it can be extremely challenging to identify participants, let alone gain consent. There is no easy solution to this challenge, and therefore in-depth ethical considerations must be made before any VDA study, to consider any potential risks or dangers for analysing the videos and publishing material that may potential identifying participants. Here, it is of course important to consider that the video is already publicly available, and hence the added risks by analysing it in research may be limited.[59] As in any study, the essence of ethical considerations regards the pros and cons of analysing video data, that is, the risks involved in this vis-à-vis the potential contributions of the study to society or the context to be studied. For example, analysing protest videos would involve some considerations of the protester's perspective on research applications of the video material they have put online. A crucial element of several ethical standards, including GDPR, is to not process personal data. Therefore, Anisin and Musil (2021) deliberately removed any personal data in their data set of videos from the Gezi protests in 2013: 'Whenever we noticed that a video includes personal details (such as the name of a protester or a police officer), we eliminated it from our collection of data'.

VDA: an emerging field

This article has introduced the field of peace research to the method of Video Data Analysis (VDA). In doing so we have sought to problematise positionality and objectivity in VDA and stress the multiple ways in which VDA can be deployed across epistemological traditions. Moreover, we have demonstrated the special value of VDA for the study of emotion and affect in peace research. We have shown how VDA can be applicable for analysing individual emotions, collective emotions, affective priming as well as affective atmospheres. Finally, we have discussed the different ethical and challenges related to access and validity that comes with the VDA approach.

We hope to have demonstrated that VDA holds great potential for contributing to the field of peace research with new insights, depth and details not captured with other methods. In line with this special issue, we argue that peace research needs to improve the methodological toolkit for capturing 'micro-dynamics of everyday relationships'. VDA can contribute with exactly this, from everyday interactions in street protests to more official 'everydayness' in diplomatic engagements. While there are several aspects of the

everyday that is of course not captured on video camera, surprisingly many everyday aspects of peace and conflict can be observed and analysed in video recordings.

It is worth noting that VDA is an emergent field of inquiry that remains 'open' to many different possible applications. For example, VDA would also be of value in studying the relationship between peace and temporality, given its capacity to show the longitudinal evolution of events or phenomena, as well as their particular social 'rhythm', another focus of this special issue.[60] Moreover, tools for conducting VDA are evolving rapidly. It is likely that the rise of big data and novel computational technologies will allow for the automated analysis of visual data in ways that are ever-more relevant for peace research. However, such a development would also compound some of the dilemmas and disagreements described above: can video data capture 'real' human behaviour without a consideration of positionality, subjectivity, and interpretation? Does such an understanding – on the contrary – risk creating ethical and political dangers? In either case, we suggest that VDA holds exciting and largely untapped promise within the study of peace and conflict going forward.

Future avenues of research would include studies of how interstate relations such as the relationship between the US and China are manifested in concrete diplomatic interactions which can be studied through video footage of official meetings. Likewise, future research could investigate the patterns in signing a peace agreement and shaking hands comparing numerous videos of this reconciliatory ritual. Moreover, in line with this special issue, future research could investigate the pluralism of everyday peace from a video analytical approach for example by analysing how diverse actors such as Afro-Americans, women's groups, FARC supporters and others engage with each other in the ongoing Colombian protests. While much depends on the availability of video footage or possibility of producing video material is no doubt that VDA has the potential to significantly contribute to our understanding of the granular, dynamic and changing nature of peace and conflict in time to come.

Notes

1. Wallensteen, 'Contemporary peace research', 17.
2. Jarstad, 'Umeå Peace and Conflict Studies'. Wallensteen, 'Peace Research in Uppsal'.
3. Kjær and Davidsen, 'Videoanalyse af social interaktion'.
4. Bleiker, 'Emotions and world politics'.
5. Hansen, 'International icons of Abu Ghraib'.
6. Nassauer and Legewie, 'Video Data Analysis'.
7. Colins, 'Interaction Ritual Chains'. Liberman, 'More Studies in Ethnomethodology'.
8. Austin, *Global Cruelty of Digital Visibility.*.
9. Bramsen, *Route Causes of Conflict*.
10. Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*.
11. Nassauer and Legewie, *Video Research and Research Ethics.*.
12. Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.
13. Nassauer and Legewie, *21st Century Video Data*.
14. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*.
15. Nassauer and Legewie, *Video Data Analysis*.
16. Leander, *Strong Objectivity Security Studies*.
17. Nassauer and Legewie, 21st Century Video Data.
18. Sontag, *On Photography*.

19. Austin and Bramsen, *Video Data Analysis*.
20. Nassauer and Legewie, *Video Data Analysis*, 15.
21. Lindegaard, 'Consolationin the Aftermath of Robberies'.
22. Ibid.
23. Butler, *Frames of War*, 66.
24. Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*.
25. Brighenti, *Visual, Visible, Ethnographic*. Ives, *Visual Methodologies through feminist lens*.
26. Crawford, Embracing the Essence of Inquiry and Bleiker and Hutchinson Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics.
27. Clément and Sangar, *Researching emotions in IR*. Koschut, *The power of emotions*.
28. Hall and Ross, 'Affective Politics after 9/11'.
29. Fitzgerald and Callard, 'Social Science and Neuroscience Beyond Interdisciplinarity'.
30. Ros, *Mixed emotions*, 9.
31. Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect'.
32. Kalmoe, 'Mixed Emotions'.
33. Damasio, *Self Comes to mind*.
34. Kalmoe, *Beyond fear and hatred*.
35. Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations*.
36. Klusemann, 'Atrocities and confrontational tension'; Bramsen, *How violence happens (or not)*; Bramsen, *How Violence Breeds Violence*. Bramsen, *How violence happens;* Klusemann, *Micro-Situational Antecedents*. Kluseman, *Massacres as Process*; Austin and Leander, *Visibility: Practices of Seeing*. Elsey, *Violence as Work*.
37. Ekman and Friesen, *Facial Action Coding System*.
38. Bramsen, 'Transformative face-to-face diplomacy?'
39. Heaven, *Faces and Feelings*, 503.
40. Ibid, 503.
41. Bramsen and Poder, *Emotions in Conflict*.
42. Hutchinson and Bleiker, 'Theorizing Emotions in World Politics', 99.
43. See, for example, Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*.
44. Thoits, *The Sociology of Emotions*. Hochschild, *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules*.
45. Ahmed, *Affect and Boundary Formation*.
46. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*; Collins, *Violence*; Collins, 'Enteringand Leaving the Tunnell of Violence'.
47. Bramsen, *Agonistic dialogue in practice*.
48. Mercer, *Feeling like a State*.
49. Seyfert, *Beyond Personal Feelings*.
50. Fazio, *On the Automatic Activation*.
51. Gendler, 'Alief in Action'.
52. Anderson, *Affective Atmospheres*, 78.
53. Ibid, 78.
54. Wæver and Bramsen, 'Dynamics of escalation', 16–17.
55. Bramsen, *Route Causes of Conflict*.
56. Seyfert, *Beyond Personal Feelings*, 29.
57. Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 11.
58. Sontag, *On Photography*.
59. Nassauer and legewie, *Video Data Analysi*.
60. Söderström & Olivious, this issue.

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