



Participatory Citizenship in a War Zone – on Activist Strategies in a Documentary Film and on the Internet

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Abstract

This article studies Nagieb Khaja's documentary film *My Afghanistan. Life in the Forbidden Zone* (2012), produced from footage by locals. It is Khaja's aim to create awareness of how daily life is maintained in a war zone in Afghanistan. In 2013 he launched a webpage to further the interest in the matter. News on the withdrawal of military forces and interviews with locals were posted on the site, which was used as an educational participatory platform. This article highlights the participatory engagement by including the Deleuzian concept of 'the intercessor' – i.e. the use of the film camera as a creative rather than a documenting device – and it contends that the intuitive use of the camera momentarily has a participatory impact on the users and an affective impact on spectators and users alike.



Biographical Statement

Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen is Associate Professor, PhD, at the Department of Aesthetics and Communication, Aarhus University. Her research is focused on the interdisciplinary connections between media, aesthetics and culture with an emphasis on Lars von Trier's films, real-time video art and new media, haptic space and affective encounters and events in contemporary film, art and culture. She is currently a research partner in Erin Manning's SSHRC project, *Immediations: Media, Art, Event* (2013-20). She is a co-editor of *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, member of the board of *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, member of the advisory board of The Fibreculture Book Series, and a board member of the Novo Nordisk Art Historical Research Foundation. Recent publications include "Real Time Density and Microperceptions" (2013), "The Signaletic, Haptic and Real-Time Material" (2012), "Spatializing Time" in *Globalizing Art. Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art* (2011) and "The Haptic Interface. On signal transmissions and events" (2011).

Introduction

Many layers of media policy activism are involved in the production as well as the afterlife of Nagieb Khaja's documentary *My Afghanistan. Life in the Forbidden Zone* (2012). This is not least due to Nagieb Khaja's own involvement in the project.

Khaja is a Danish journalist with Afghan family roots who on several occasions has documented the 'War on Terror' from an Afghan point of view. In the summer of 2007, he succeeded in making an interview with a group of Taliban soldiers. He returned to Afghanistan in the autumn in order to make a proper documentary, commissioned by the Danish TV station TV2. However, this time he was taken hostage. He fled with the help of a local family, who had to be protected by the TV station afterwards due to their involvement. In 2009, Khaja succeeded in smuggling 30 cell phones into the forbidden area of Helmand, controlled by Danish military forces, with the purpose of letting the locals produce documentary film footage. *My Afghanistan. Life in the Forbidden Zone* is the outcome of this material, assembled and edited into a documentary (87 min.). The film toured documentary film festivals and received attention and several awards¹ before premiering on the Danish TV channel TV2 in the spring of 2013.



Nagieb Khaja instructs a photographer in how to use a cell phone camera.

www.myafghanistan.dk

Khaja's outspoken ambition with his film was to give a Danish audience more varied information about the Afghan people who mostly live in a rural environment where the allied forces' war on Taleban also took place. The film was indeed a rare example of information that was not controlled by or seen from the perspective of the Danish military engagement in Afghanistan. Denmark was part of the United Nation forces since 2002, and in 2003 it was decided that Denmark join the ISAF force, a NATO-coalition with soldiers from 42 countries. In 2012 Denmark had around 700 soldiers in Afghanistan, primarily in the province called Helmand. In 2013 it was decided that all Danish soldiers should be withdrawn from Afghanistan by 2014. The official number of Danish soldiers, who lost their lives in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2014, is 41.

In general, Khaja's productions can be characterised as classic case-oriented documentaries with the aim of enlightening an audience on a subject that has hitherto been hidden or veiled.² He has especially been engaged in researching and 'telling the stories that are not told'. This was actually the Danish title of a book of his from 2011: *Historien, der ikke bliver fortalt* (2011). Besides a famous collaboration with Christoffer Guldbrandsen on *The Secret War* (2006), he produced three documentaries for TV2 (during 2009 and 2010) on terrorism, investigating the personal choices and fates of young Muslim men who chose to become terrorists after 9/11.

In *My Afghanistan. Life in the Forbidden Zone*, it appears that some of the abovementioned activist experiences have become included in Khaja's aesthetic choices. Thus, in the following section I will examine whether or not an activist approach can occasion a documentary production that is neither inscribed in (following Platinga) the classical tradition of 'objectivity', i.e. 'formal' (with authority) or 'open' (observing)), nor in the tradition of 'subjectivity' ('poetic' or 'dramatised').³ It is furthermore my assumption that Khaja inadvertently achieves (in Gilles Deleuze's term) a 'cinema of truth' by putting emphasis on the documentation of a local place (i.e. the forbidden zone). The aesthetics of the 'intercessor' (see note 1) is provided by the individual cameramen and women who have had no previous expertise in the practice of filming. This cinema of

truth is – as underlined in the following – not identical with the announcements in the press coverage neither by Khaja himself nor in public mention. Nevertheless, in the following, the visible traces of the camera used as an intercessor that can create and thus reverse conceptions and representations of what counts as reality, will be explored as a participatory characteristic of the film. Whether or not the website also articulates this perspective will be discussed in the ending.

Three ways of relating – or more

The following description of the content of the film is derived from the homepage of the International Documentary Film Festival 2013 in Amsterdam:

We ride along with Hakl Sahab in his 70-year-old Jeep with no brakes, get hairstyling tips from Jurna Gul, and take cover from stray bullets with the frightened Shrukrullah. We see the beauty of the country, children in danger and the incessant destruction; we feel the underlying powerlessness and fighting spirit of the people and the corruption they must endure. Meanwhile, it becomes clear how difficult it is to capture the lives of women. Khaja alternates between the civilian reports and his own experiences in Lashkar Gah, where he kills time filming street scenes, a visit to a nearby hospital, and a chat with Afghan soldiers about their excellent relationship with the local Taliban leaders. A suicide bombing interrupts the relative calm. ⁴

This quote gives a good impression of the film's content. Conflict is by no means made the centre of attraction, even though violence is evidenced through obvious haptic⁵ traces left by camera movements when bombings take place in the midst of a filming session or when searching for a motive.

It is a familiar experience from one's own first experiments behind a film camera (small or big) that it is hard for an untrained eye to keep the camera steady, to remain in control of the filmed material. Often the person in charge of the camera will try to tell a

story by way of the camera and for example move it synchronously with the movements portrayed or in order to get some action. This is also the case in the small cell phone clips from the war zone. The person behind the camera is trying to make visible the fear and danger that is referred to in the voice-over as the centre of attention at all hours. This clearly suggests that movements of the body of the cameraman or woman and the filming of movement (especially children's movement) are preferred over motionlessness. Furthermore, the animation or abrupt switches that follow from trying to characterise a moment or to witness the physical affects on people by for example a bombing or a shooting nearby are visible as haptic modulations in the visual material.

Due to these haptic traces of the camerawork, it becomes evident that the cameraman or woman is also part of a community, and that it is crucial for him or her to sustain the rules and limitations belonging to it. People participate and are filmed and allowed the right to film others as well as doing autobiographical recording accordingly.⁶ In the following, I will briefly dwell on this in order to proceed to consider how the filmmaker's body as well as the recorded bodies of others can be seen differently. There are at least three ways of relating to the film.

The first two ways or approaches are imbedded in the film, since all the cameramen and women are, *on the one hand*, really trying to performatively deliver visual evidence of living in a war zone to the (to them) unknown director, Nagieb Khaja – and, *on the other hand*, they try to relate, by way of storytelling and orchestration, to their own affective states of fear, joy, panic etc. The third way of relating to the film is to comply with the framing perspective of Nagieb Khaja, seeing the film as a result of activism embedded in his former close encounter with the Taleban.

The last option also permits another way of viewing the film, namely in avoiding Khaja's established framing of his own activism, which is directly related to the familiar formula of social media reaching a global audience. His editorial mix of ethnographic, political and global activism, through which he portrays himself as the excluded journalist delivering forbidden documentary footage made by stand-ins (i.e. the local Afghan people who are not familiar with cell phone cameras), serves the purpose of

making a Danish audience (including the politicians who voted for warfare in Afghanistan) feel remorse for its war engagement. This pronounced purpose of the documentary – to show how unprotected Afghan people are, having to maintain daily life as innocent victims of war – might merely prove successful in its endeavour to evoke a sense of life as a living open-ended experience.

Following this perspective, it seems to me that it is the untrained cameramen and women's struggle to collect footage that arouses a certain affective impact. The haptic layers of imperfection contribute to the creation of an audience's affective engagement with the film. In the following, this vibrating material of life on the edge of death, rendered through the sensation of the presence of the filming eye, body and mind in the material, will be grasped theoretically as the creation of intercessors between the photographer and the photographed. The camera as a creator of stories and relations might in the context of Noortje Marres' research into 'the materialisation of participation'⁷ be seen as a device that activates participation.

Intercessors

Apart from the abovementioned haptic traces of intensity and lack of camera skills, the film clearly renders a special sensation of liveliness that is not easy to grasp. In the following, I want to consider this specific impression in relation to the local men and women's use of the camera as a material device that *both* makes the stories of the people portrayed become 'legendary' enough to be told *and* helps the audience become involved in the film. Gilles Deleuze's term 'the intercessor' (also explored as mediators) will be introduced here. In the following, I continue to adhere to Deleuze's description of the use of the camera as an intercessor in *The Time-Image*, since he uses the term 'mediators' in a much wider sense in *Negotiations 1972-1990*. Here, he argues that philosophy should be just as inventive in creating concepts as film directors are in creating 'sensory aggregates' (Deleuze 1995: 123). He mentions Bresson as a film director who succeeds in creating tactile connections of otherwise unconnected spaces in relation to the work of philosophers who should also create by way of mediators and work in series of

constellations or thoughts. In relation to this, he mentions his own collaboration with Félix Guattari, stating that 'Félix Guattari and I are one another's mediators' (Deleuze 1995: 125), meaning that the productive path to the creation of some kind of truth is to falsify established ideas – and in this case in a collaborative falsification of each other's ideas: 'each of us understands in his own way notions put forward by the other' (Deleuze 1995: 126). This explains what mediators do: they (re)work the material in a series of creative movements in which the process of thinking is an interplay of giving or taking (Deleuze 1995: 125). He also refers to Pierre Perrault's use of the camera as a mediator that focuses on the 'fabulation' or 'legending' ability of people to actively create an idea of a minority discourse as something different from a colonist's discourse. The use of the camera as a mediator or intercessor, which actually enables or materialises (with Marres) new creations or legendary encounters, is further explored in *The Time-Image* in relation to a critique of the documentary film's tradition of using the camera (just) as a truth-seeking device to actively falsify the usual positions of filmmaker and character, cinema of fiction and cinema of reality. This was what characterised the French and the Canadian forms of *cinéma vérité* in the 1960s. According to Deleuze's taxonomy, Pierre Perrault and Jean Rouch were inventive in creating a *series of time*, bringing together the before and the after in a becoming that characterises the time-image of modern cinema (Deleuze 1989: 155).

What Perrault and Rouch discovered in different ways was that the sensation of time as becoming might be produced by way of the camera in connecting here-and-there, past-and-future. They thus discovered a special storytelling function of the camera, different from the truth and fiction formula inherent in the literary tradition. Through their obstruction of conventional borderlines between the photographer and the photographed (normally referred to as the subject and the object of photography) they could make use of the real intervention of cinema, namely that a direct time-image and a free, indirect discourse can claim whatever reality to be true. Following this, filmic documentary was not just a matter of giving voice or camera to the poor, the victimised or colonised people. It was a matter of making them make the camerawork as a creative

instrument in *their* hands. For the camera can create and thus reverse conceptions and representations of what counts as reality.

In Deleuze's words, the discovery that cinema is able to avoid traditional descriptions of 'the identity of a character, whether real or fictional, through his objective or subjective aspects' (Deleuze 1989: 150) made it possible for these directors of the 1960s to leave the idea of a 'cinema of truth' in favour of 'the truth of cinema' (Deleuze 1989: 151). The truth of cinema is not interested in obtaining a 'raw real', since this is a fiction. Deleuze here leans on Nietzsche's argument that every ideal of the true is dependent on and created within a frame of fiction (in this case cinematic fiction) (Deleuze 1989: 149). The truth of cinema (*cinema vérité*) is based upon the common knowledge that 'the camera has an active effect on situations, and that characters react to the presence of the camera' (Deleuze 1989: 151).

With *cinema vérité*, Perrault and Rouch and later Godard and other nouvelle vague directors discovered the power in the false or the ability of the character to:

[...] cease [...] to be real or fictional, in so far as he [...] cease[s] to be seen objectively or to see subjectively: it is a character who goes over crossings and frontiers because he invents as a real character, and becomes all the more real because he [is] better in inventing. (Deleuze 1989: 151-152)⁸

It seems to me that Deleuze's extended description fits well with what became the result of Nagieb Khaja's media intervention in the daily lives of the Afghan people. It reads:

The character must first of all be real if he is to affirm fiction as a power and not as a model: he has to start to tell stories in order to affirm himself all the more as real and not fictional. The character is continually becoming another, and is no longer separable from this becoming which merges with a people. But what we are saying about the character is also valid in the second place, and in particular, for the film-maker himself. He too becomes another, in so far as he takes real

characters as intercessors and replaces his fictions by their own story-telling, but, conversely, gives these story-tellings the shape of legends, carrying out their ‘making into legend’. (Deleuze 1989: 152)

This is what Nagieb Khaja – in my view – *inadvertently* arrives at in *My Afghanistan*. It is his explicit aim to portray the innocent victims of war, but by putting randomly chosen individuals in charge of the camerawork, he strengthens their ability to tell stories, to construct themselves – not just to accomplish the task of the assignment but also to make legends out of their individual lives, to become another in front of the camera.



Juma Gul. www.myafghanistan.dk

In order to illustrate the work of the camera as an intercessor, I have chosen to dwell on a short clip of a man, Juma Gul, who is 20 years old and an artisan. He is making a kind of a self-portrait, with the cell phone camera as a kind of witness, as he explores two ways of combing his hair with a comb in his right hand and a mirror in his left. His commentary, spoken in an Afghan dialect, is translated to Danish. In my translation to English, it reads:

As is well known, hairstyling is very important to the culture of society, but in Afghanistan, people are not really preoccupied with this. They comb their hair a

couple of times each day. I style my hair each day. Foreigners comb at least 4-5 times each day, as most of them are white-collar workers. Now I want to style my hair. Then we will see if you like it.

Dear viewers! Do you like my hairstyle? If not, then move your tongue and lips and show (tell?) me what you think. Now I will comb my hair to the other side.

Dear viewers, you probably like this hairstyle. Thank you for your attention.

Goodbye!⁹

This short clip is followed by a couple of young males posing with naked chests for the camera while flexing their muscles. The clip with Juma Gul shows how the camera is used as an intercessor that could be interpellated in a feedback response, while the clip with the young men shows their awareness of the camera as a medium in which information is channelled. They become self-imposed objects of the camera, while Juma Gul proceeds to negotiate with the camera as if this was a live situation – like a Skype conversation. He acts as a subject with knowledge he wants to share, but he also becomes another, as he shares his fabulation with the camera as a kind of witness. He demonstrates that he is willing to become like the foreigners, that he is willing to transform to whatever form and that he is able to look at and distance himself from the group he belongs to (the Afghan people) – but also in that very instant – to position himself on par with the camera and the viewers. He creates a fiction, a legendary Juma Gul, who did not exist beforehand – and this is compelling to the viewer.

This example is just one of many, which in various ways foreground the camera as a *truth-making*, almost magical instrument used as if it were able to change the bare reality of these people's lives. Through this employment of the camera as an intercessor, which fosters a minority discourse of the rural 'forbidden zone' of war, the audience witness the evidence-making procedure of cinema. Reality is produced as if in a double exposure, and we become aware of time as a becoming connected to the machine and its ability to obstruct representational distinctions between observer and object, subjectivity and objectivity, truth and falseness. This direct cinema combined with the free indirect

discourse creates intercessions between individuals and form new paths into a preconception of what is truth and what is false. And what is more: its effects are felt as a poetic and even politically activist nerve in the material. In Deleuze's observation on Rouch's and Perrault's *cinéma vérité*, he underlines the creative workings of the camera when used as an intercessor:

This is no longer *Birth of a Nation*, but constitution or reconstitution of a people, where the film-maker and his characters become others together and the one through the other, a collectivity which gradually wins from place to place, from person to person, from intercessor to intercessor. I am a caribou, an original... 'I is another' is the formation of a story which simulates, or a simulation of a story or a story of simulation which disposes the form of the truthful story. (Deleuze 1989: 153)

It is obvious that Deleuze questions the validity of what he characterises as '[t]he famous formula [of] documentary [...]: that one knows who one is and whom one is filming' since 'The Ego = Ego form of identity (or its degenerate form, them = them) ceases to be valid for the characters and for the film-maker, in the real as well as in the fiction' (Deleuze 1989: 153). This insight still holds true in a contemporary media environment in which identity production has become a dominant form in the entertainment industry as well as in social media networks. Documentary forms still promise to deliver 'the true story' although the various forms of reality TV at the same time seem to undermine this belief. The creative use of the camera as an intercessor is only rarely seen today.

What I find interesting in *My Afghanistan* is how Nagieb Khaja's journalistic activism that follows the formula of documentary – outlined above by Deleuze as someone (the Ego = Ego) who gets behind the lines of the enemy and collects information (about them = them) that can become new, unheard stories to feed the news media – is actually undermined by the film material itself. This film is a result of the

rather strange journalistic framing of being prohibited from being an activist who could talk to and negotiate directly with the Taleban. It is, however, interesting to note that this experience – of being treated as another – was in fact one of the lessons Khaja was taught when he crossed the lines of the war zone in 2007 as a freelance journalist. Although, this experience is expressed differently in the press releases connected to the film. Here he states that he was unable to judge the trustworthiness of the individuals he negotiated with. The problem with war is of course that there might not even be such a thing as a trustworthy individual. So, Nagieb Khaja's activist and filming practices show one thing very precisely: that it is worthwhile to become an activist in order to make people take charge of creating a minority discourse, a creative storytelling practice. In my view, the outcome and success of this film cannot only be ascribed to Khaja's journalistic framings of the collected material; on the contrary, its success was also due to the creative practice of the cameramen and women who in some sequences of the film used the camera spontaneously as an intercessor. This generates the spark of a cinema direct – one that creates legendary stories by way of the recording situation. It is a cinema of perpetual change, in line with time as a becoming, a time in which events are forever held open to sensation and interpretation.

The analytical perspective described above might very well be complemented (in the study of any film) by a study of the haptic information given by the unsteady camerawork that constantly follows the body movements of the filmmaker. It is important to keep in mind that the discovery in the 1960s of the camera as an intercessor to create stories by cutting into the material given has since then been explored stylistically as creative simulations of reality and 'real-time' events – in for example the Dogma-95 movement. If this movement could be said to explore reality and documented 'life', it was exactly due to the creativity of the video and filmic material and pro-filmic events aesthetically explored as noise and as ugly, haptic images with bad lighting and sound filters that created immediate affects of dizziness and nausea in response. The Dogma-films offered a new experience of 'reality', of time as a becoming in response to the real-time of video and digital images. Today, the real-time control is everywhere, and things

are certainly in a perpetual state of change, as documented by social media and its data banks. These new developments within real-time control raises the question of whether ‘the signaleitic material’¹⁰ of film and electronic video, which informed the documentary forms from the 1960s and onwards, has become a technique, within the digitised codes, by which we can shape new realities? Instead of answering this major question, I will conclude this article by turning to how Nagieb Khaja’s webpage (<http://myafghanistan.dk>) erects interaction strategies for Danes and Afghans to become involved in discussions of citizenship and democracy.

Citizenship, democracy and having a voice

Nagieb Khaja’s activist and filming practice may be summed up as a lesson on making people responsible for the creation of a minority discourse, seen as a creative intervention. Due to the creative practice of untrained citizens of the Helmand province living under life-threatening conditions, the camera could be used as an intercessor that generates the spark of a cinema direct, one that creates stories by way of what happens and what is generated in the recording situation. The description of life and time as a becoming in which situations and people can change is thus momentarily captured.

This experience of actually giving voice to the citizens living in the war zone of Helmand may have influenced Nagieb Khaja’s general approach to presenting documentary material. It is interesting to note that some of the recording practices discovered in *My Afghanistan. Life in a War Zone* are continued on the website www.myafghanistan.dk. On this site, the general interest in the fate of the Afghan people documented in the film is maintained. Background information of the film, facts about Afghanistan and news about Afghanistan especially concentrating on the reaction to the withdrawal of western forces (from the autumn of 2013) are uploaded onto the site. In a special section, ‘Education in Danish’, the website invites people (i.e. pupils in Danish upper secondary schools (American: high schools)) to ask questions about Afghanistan. Based on these questions, an Afghan group of photographers (mostly men) have filmed short interviews about what it means to live in Afghanistan, how the education system

works, the difference between men and women in Afghan culture, what it takes to form and sustain a democracy etc. All films as well as the questions are uploaded on the website, grouped in thematic sections. Discussions between Danish and Afghan groups are from time to time arranged as Skype calls or take place as Q&A interventions on <https://www.facebook.com/myafghanistan.dk>.

In an email correspondence, Henrik Grunnet, the administrator of the website, explained that the interest to participate in this educational exchange of information has been overwhelming.¹¹ Since January 2013, the web administration has applied four times and received funding for ten upper secondary school classes to pose six questions each. This sum up to a total of 240 questions that are answered in short films filmed on cell phone cameras by the Afghan film crew. In addition to this, each week a new film has been uploaded to the site since 1 January 2013. In a film uploaded in March 2014 entitled 'Is it the right solution?', the situation is described as follows:

Most of the mobile reporters and interviewers in "My Afghanistan" expressed the same hopes for Afghanistan's future. A clear majority did not believe in a military solution to the conflict and did not think that ISAF and the Afghan government were doing enough to find a peaceful solution to the war. They wanted a stronger commitment from those in power in relation to peace talks with the rebel movement. Support for negotiations is particularly strong in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, where even those who sympathise with the Taliban and other insurgent groups have an understanding of their struggle against the government.¹²

As is evident, the documenting cameramen from the film have become involved as witnesses, supplying evidence of the process from war to a condition of possible reconstruction of the nation of Afghanistan. But as far as I can judge, the described intercessor practice of the cell phone camera in the film is not extended into the interface of the website. The question is indeed whether it is possible to create a website and its

interface to be as direct and compelling – when it comes to the affective encounter – as the filmic intercessor? The website's overall ambition to support a dialogue on 'what does it take to form and sustain a democratic government' is commendable.

The problem is that the quality of the open depiction of 'bare life',¹³ as it is lived in a war zone, has been assigned to an educational strategy on all the zones of politics involved in nation building. The questions on what citizenship means and might be are still viable in the material, and the interaction between Afghan photographers and the pupils in the Danish education system might lead to real online dialogue that takes place without being documented. But the camera as a creative intercessor with the potential to challenge positions and pin down relations and opinions has not really been achieved through the interface offered by the website. To develop this further, I will shortly return to Deleuze's warning when speaking about creation by mediators.¹⁴ This in turn might also apply to exchanges on websites with the aspiration of fostering participation:

What we have to recognize is that the interplay between the different lines isn't a matter of one monitoring or reflecting another. A discipline that set out to follow a creative movement coming from outside would itself relinquish any creative role. You'll get nowhere by latching onto some parallel movement, you have to make a move yourself. If nobody makes a move, nobody gets anywhere. Nor is interplay an exchange: it all turns on giving or taking (Deleuze 1995, 125).

This warning might be applied to the website, since the participation that is enabled focus on a classical Q&A situation in which a creative participation by way of mediators or intercessors described above is not really possible. Danish pupils are posing the questions, and they are undoubtedly able to grasp much more about Afghan life and culture than they would otherwise have been able to after engaging with more traditional media (for example a film). And even though it is a major achievement of Nagieb Khaja's team to have actually given Afghan people from all levels of society access to a camera and to practice journalistic skills given their living conditions, the creative camera practice that could activate users and spectators alike to adopt this new practice of documentary filming is not really present in this material. Something might still be done

in order make real forms or interplays of giving and taking. The Danish students could, for example, engage in making more videos of their own on an everyday basis in order to foster and motivate other forms of actual participation. The creation by way of mediators has to come from both sides of the screen. So while it was possible for Deleuze to point to the camera as an intercessor to create new spaces for minor voices in actual life, while also showing time as a becoming, the different conditions of the interface have to be taken into consideration. Even interactive, screened participation can only take place if exchanges are paused from time to time. Websites have to allow for space in the form of 'little gaps of solitude and silence in which they [people] might eventually find something to say' (Deleuze 1995: 129). Those pauses (whether they are artificial or obstructive or neither) might be necessary in order to activate users of the interface, since an affective sense of participation is often due to something that does not belong or fit into the expected scenario.

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¹ In 2013 the documentary received ‘The Best Documentary Award’ in the Brussels One World International Human Rights Festival and a special mention at the Buenos Aires Festival for Independent Film (Festival de Cine Independiente). It was also nominated for the Muhr Asia-Africa Award in the category of best film documentary at the Dubai International Film Festival in 2012 and nominated for the Dragon Award in the same category in Göteborg Film Festival, 2013.

² After finishing his education as a journalist, Nagieb Khaja collaborated with Christoffer Guldbrandsen on the production of *The Secret War (Den hemmelige krig)*. This film documented how Danish soldiers, under the operation ‘War on Terror’, held prisoners in custody and delivered them to American forces that no longer referred to the Genève convention on the rights of prisoners. *The Secret War* was broadcast on the Danish TV channel DR2 in 2006. It was criticised by the government for bringing false allegations, but it was also defended by the head of the School of Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark for giving enough evidence to raise a debate on criticisable issues. This again raised a discussion in the media on whether or not documentaries broadcast on TV should be allowed to use artistic expression. This recurrent theme in Denmark is partly due to the obligations to produce public service TV that is to be met by the Danish Broadcasting Company (DR), as the license fee that this channel receives directly from its viewers is thought of as a kind of public tax. This entails among other things that DR is not financed by commercials and thus are not allowed to bring commercials or to use product placement etc. Historically, the DR channels are in other words channel ‘to rely on’ in terms of the impartial and politically neutral information they deliver. Against this background, claims about objectivity in documentaries with political concerns are still current in Danish culture in spite of the fact that all kinds of docudrama, reality TV, celebrity and celetoid TV is alive and kicking in entertainment TV. Those formats are in general disseminated to a greater extent on the competing channel TV2, whose income, in contrast to DR, is primarily derived from commercials.

³ See Ib Bondebjerg’s article in Danish with an overview of documentary formats here: “Dokumentarismens genreteoretiske landskab”, in *Virkelighedens fortællinger. Den danske tv-dokumentarismes historie*. Forlaget Samfundslitteratur: Frederiksberg 2008.

⁴ International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, 2013. Retrieved October 7, 2014 from <http://www.idfa.nl/industry/tags/project.aspx?id=8d4ad3b7-643e-456c-8ae4-c0e6fc64fb55>

⁵ Cf. Laura U. Marks’ use of the word ‘haptic’ in *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Duke University Press, 2000 and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 2002.

⁶ One thing that attracts attention (but is not central to the argument of the article) is how a woman experiences joy in filming herself. She seems to experience the sudden liberty of both playing with and being in control of her own image. This incident might be interpreted as an experience of freedom to suddenly possess a right that normally belongs to others, especially the men. On the other hand – and following the argument in the article – this moment of joy might also simply be seen as a creative experience of becoming (another).

⁷ See Noortje Marres: “The costs of public involvement: everyday devices of carbon accounting and the materialization of participation”, *Economy and Society*, Volume 40, number 4, November 2011: 510-533. Retrieved October 8, 2014, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2011.602294>

⁸ The style of Danish director Jørgen Leth owes a great deal to this aesthetic.

⁹ In Danish it reads: ‘Som bekendt er hårstyling meget vigtig for samfundet, men I Afghanistan gør folk ikke så meget ud af det. De reder sig et par gange om dagen. Jeg sætter mit hår hver dag. Udlændinge reder sig mindst 4-5 gange om dagen, fordi de fleste arbejder på kontor. Nu vil jeg style mit hår. Så kan vi se, om I kan lide det. Kære seere! Kan De lide min frisure? Hvis ikke, så bevæg tungen og læberne og vis mig, hvad De mener. Nu reder jeg håret til den anden side. Kære seere, De synes sikkert om denne frisure. Tak for opmærksomheden. Farvel!’

¹⁰ Read about this term in Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen: “Signaletic, haptic and real-time material”, in the cluster of articles *From Sign to Signal*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol 4, 2012. Retrieved October 8, 2014, from <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/18148>

¹¹ E-mails were exchanged on November 8, 2013 and on March 23, 2014.

¹² www.myafghanistan.dk, retrieved October 17, 2014.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben’s term ‘bare life’ is engaged with the philosophical and political implications of how life (as ‘zoe’ and ‘bios’) is connected to the sovereign and later regimes of bio-power. According to Agamben, it has been possible since antiquity to expel individuals (as well as groups) from society at large. He relates the term outlaw (or the Roman term *homo sacer*) to the treatment of Jewish people in concentration camps or the prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp. The classical concept of *homo sacer*, meaning an individual who can be killed but may not be sacrificed, has today become a widespread strategy within a bio-political regulation of modern societies. I use the term here to show its possible (political) use in a wider sense, since those Afghan people living in a war zone do not even have a collective name. Cf. Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and bare Life*. Stanford University Press: Stanford 2011.

¹⁴ Here I refer to Deleuze 1995, see note 1.

