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Fieldwork as Interface

Digital Technologies, Moral Worlds and
Zones of Encounter*Karen Walторp*

In the summer of 2015, a Danish journalist contacted me by telephone. She asked whether I could confirm that even though a growing number of young second-generation immigrant women were pursuing higher education, they were still victims of social control. She had written the story and was looking for an expert to quote. I asked what she understood by social control, as I myself had used the term previously (Walторp 2013) but had failed to interrogate it in depth. She replied that many colleagues of mine had no problem with calling ‘what was taking place’ social control. I reiterated that I would love to talk to her should she be interested in critically engaging the concept of ‘social control’, but if she needed someone to confirm it before a deadline she was welcome to call someone else. I was surprised that she did actually call me back, and a dialogue by mail then ensued.

In the meantime, I discussed the term and its use with a number of my interlocutors – young Muslim women, mostly second-generation immigrants. I was a bit irritated on their behalf that the journalist had not questioned the term ‘social control’, but simply assumed it to be a dynamic endemic to Muslim immigrant families, while Danes were understood to raise their children to be responsible individuals who make ‘free choices’. I felt that ideas about freedom, autonomy and the collective were at stake. Over the following weeks, exchanges of views with interlocutors followed in a WhatsApp group, on Facebook, and over the telephone. The WhatsApp group was initiated by me, and included Henriette,¹ an ethnic Danish woman of 23 who had converted to Islam; Samah, 26, of Palestinian–Jordanian

origin; and 25-year-old Yasmin, of Iranian origin. The latter quickly responded:

Hi Karen, don’t get it. Want to help out ... What do you mean – what is social control? Can’t you describe it in street slang [*gadesprog*]?

Karen: That ethnic minority girls are controlled by their family ... says the journalist.

Yasmin: Not all of us, no. I’m Muslim, my mother is religious, but we come from a very open family and have the same opportunities as everyone else. But you know immigrants [*indvandrere*] are always more afraid that people are going to talk. They think more about the neighbours than making themselves happy.

Samah entered the discussion on WhatsApp with a formulation that was strikingly close to the formulation in a particular leaflet from a government-funded organization called Etnisk Ung (Young and Ethnic). The example described a young woman who was not allowed to choose whom or when to marry, not allowed to decide where to go, and her parents would check the messages on her telephone. The discussion in the WhatsApp group continued, but Samah chose to call me up also, and talk privately about her views on social control.

What I wish to direct attention to with this opening vignette is how digital technology enabled the iterative formation of knowledge and continued feedback in specific ways. It easily disappears from view how a knowledge-making process is entwined with specific digital technologies and platforms. In the example above, there was communication via landline, mobile telephone, email, Facebook’s Inbox, and WhatsApp. These digital technologies and platforms contributed in various ways to the interactions, both to what was communicated and how. These mediated interactions were in turn shaped by the face-to-face relations existing prior to and alongside the communications via media. I have elsewhere discussed how reciprocity and mutuality are necessary in qualitative research in the private spaces in social media, as in all other anthropological fields (Walторp 2016).

With a starting point in fieldwork and filmmaking (2010–11, 2014–15) with and about young Muslim women on a social housing estate in central Copenhagen, I argue that the use of digital technologies such as smartphones and video cameras allows for particular interfaces in fieldwork. I had set out to explore place-making and belonging with a focus on the affordances of smartphones for women who had transnational networks and lived in a local immigrant neighbourhood in Nørrebro. The term ‘affordances’ is used here in a relational sense,

rather than as the properties of an object (Gibson 1977). My interlocutors' smartphones shaped, registered and impacted on what they communicated, 'did', and made through them and with them, just as my video camera also impacted on the knowledge created between us. Using video and social media platforms as part of being 'in the field' resonated with my interlocutors' ways of being and sharing moments; and while my research looks at affordances in the broadest sense of smartphones for my interlocutors, in this chapter I seek to draw out the affordances of smartphones and a video camera for the anthropologist as knowledge-making devices that allow for specific interfaces in fieldwork, through describing a few such interfaces in my fieldwork.

Both viewing fieldwork as interface and drawing on the concept of affordances imply certain ideas about agency, the relationality between human and non-human actors, and between interior worlds and the environment of which we make up part. Attempts to understand the relation between inner worlds, cognition, and the 'outer' phenomenal world of objects have been at the centre of inquiry and theory building for centuries. I see affinities between Gregory Bateson's ecological systems theory and his notion of 'distributed mind' spanning brain-body environment, on the one hand, and post-Gibsonian approaches underscoring the relational property as shared between object and agent, on the other – as well as the idea that 'the information specifying where the situation can lead is not entirely within the agent's head, but is in some way also held within the object (itself within an environment)' (Knappett 2004: 46). I quote Bateson's example of the blind man and the stick as an analogy for my interlocutors and their smartphones.

... when we seek to explain the behavior of a man or any other organism, this "system" will usually *not* have the same limits as the "self" – as this term is commonly (and variously) understood ... If you ask anybody about the localization and boundaries of the self, these confusions are immediately displayed. Or consider a blind man with a stick. Where does the blind man's self begin? At the tip of the stick? At the handle of the stick? Or at some point halfway up the stick? These questions are nonsense, because the stick is a pathway along which differences are transmitted under transformation, so that to draw a delimiting line *across* this pathway is to cut off a part of the systemic circuit which determines the blind man's locomotion. (Bateson 2000: 317–18; emphasis in original)

In this chapter, I introduce two examples of fieldwork as interface: Interface 1, a participatory photo-diary project turned collaborative exhibition-making titled 'Ghetto NO Ghetto'; and Interface 2,

participant observation with smartphone and video camera as integral components. Digital technologies formed part of the object of study and were also integral to the applied methodology, intertwined with other contexts and practices (Ardévol 2012). I trace how digital technologies have gradually come to work more intentionally as fieldwork devices for me. This has happened as a response to previous fieldwork experiences, and points to an iterative movement of collaboration between anthropologist, interlocutors and, not least, 'field'. While acknowledging that there are already interfaces in place everywhere, the interface I conceptualize here as a methodological device is one that is changed and repurposed with the inclusion of the anthropologist – one that has been devised through a constellation of digital technologies that bring into existence an encounter in specific ways.

The conception of the interface as I use it here is not restricted to the well-known graphical user interface between humans and computers alone, but also indicates critical points of intersection between lifeworlds, social fields, and moral and value systems, made possible in a specific way through digital technology. The interface is defined as 'a zone of encounter that actively extends into and conditions that which it separates' (Hookway 2014). The interface has an ambiguous condition because it simultaneously links together those things that it separates. As such, it can be conceived of as a 'productive moment of encounter embedded and obscured within the use of technology' (ibid.: ix). Hookway continues: 'It is a disputed zone, a site of contestation between human beings and machines as much as between the social and the material, the political and the technological'. Research in the humanities and social sciences arguably depends increasingly on digital technologies, affecting how research is conducted and the knowledge that it produces, so that specific forms of technology reconfigure the relation between researcher and object in any field of study (Law 2004, 2016). Here I describe vignettes from an ethnography where the field takes the form of an interface: a field of ambiguous condition because it links together those things that at the same time it separates.

Interface 1: Photo-Diary Project Turned Exhibition

In 2010–11, I carried out a participatory photo-diary project in Blågård, a social housing estate, which transformed into a collaborative exhibition titled Ghetto NO Ghetto (Waltorp 2011). I invited

young people (between 15 and 25 years of age) from the Blågården area to participate in a photo-diary project. It is notoriously difficult to engage this age group in this area. My point of entry was the work I had done previously with young people in the so-called coloured township of Manenberg outside Cape Town (Walторp 2010, Walторp and Jensen, forthcoming), and in the Parisian suburb (*banlieue*) Saint-Denis (Walторp 2011), which resonated with some of the young people in Blågården. Through NGOs and personal contacts in the area, I invited as many as possible to attend a free screening of the film 'Manenberg' (Walторp and Vium 2010) at the Empire cinema near Blågården. There was a Q&A session after the film, at the end of which I invited the young people attending the screening to a workshop introducing the photo-project. The 'inaugural meeting' was held at the facilities of Rabarberlandet (part of the social housing association FSB), located in a corner of the central square, Blågårds Plads. In this sense, media products, photographs and film made up part of the interaction from the start.

The young participants would take photographs with a disposable camera every week as a form of visual diary. I would develop the film and meet them individually to discuss their pictures, and then once a week we would all meet at the Rabarberlandet meeting spot. The weekly gatherings took the form of workshops, where there would either be a talk by a photographer or filmmaker to inspire their practice, or hands-on training in techniques like picture editing or framing. When inviting the young people, I framed the project as one of documenting from the 'inside' what living on the Blågården social housing estate was like, as a response to the heavy stereotyping of the area, which the young people talked a lot about. It is important to be critically aware of such a 'politics of inviting', as it frames how issues are allowed to emerge – or rather, if issues are treated as pre-given through the framing of a project, it shapes both how people engage with it, and who becomes concerned. As soon as I had invited them and instigated the photo-project, though, the participants, technology, and 'outside' circumstances started to reshape it.

First of all, none of the participants found the particular aesthetic or process of the disposable analogue cameras appealing. Instead they brought their smartphones with them and showed the pictures they had taken with those – they had their phones with them all the time anyway, and they preferred the instant editing that a digital camera affords. In October 2010, two months after I had initiated the project, Blågården, along with twenty-eight other areas

in Denmark, was identified as a ghetto by the centre-right government as part of its new 'ghetto strategy'.² This topic dominated the discussions in the group, and shaped how the ten participants and I presented the photos and narratives: we formulated a reply countering the ghetto stigma. Practically, it created an interest in the project from the Copenhagen municipality and a few local NGOs, which helped to fund the exhibition. When we were invited to exhibit the outcome of the project at the Nørrebro Theatre, we jumped at the opportunity. This was a chance to generate data for me, and a way of working together that arguably involved a moment of cultural critique (Marcus and Fischer 1999) for anthropologist, audiences and participants. The exhibition juxtaposed the pictures and narratives from Blågården alongside pictures and narratives from young people in Manenberg (South Africa) and Saint-Denis (France), and asked of its audiences: What is a ghetto? Who decides? For what purpose and with what effects?

At the exhibition opening, several politicians and stakeholders from the various organizations in the area were present. Rania, a 22-year-old participant in the project of Syrian descent, with braces on her teeth and a veil covering her hair, took the microphone and welcomed people:

I am so tired of turning on the television and listening to Pia Kjørgård (influential Danish right-wing politician). She doesn't know anything about living in our neighbourhood, and I wonder why she doesn't come to this event. I am tired of hearing all the prejudices against us wearing a scarf, or Blågården being called a ghetto, which it is not. It is actually very multicultural, like Syria in the old days, which is why it had such an amazing culture, and artistic styles developed. This is what can come out of this place too.

The above quote from Rania points to a way of being able to 'talk back' through media, entering into a public space of appearance (Arendt 1998). Through exhibition-making, questions were raised about how the young, mostly Muslim, people living in the area were seen as a group, and the power of mainstream media in this.

According to Hannah Arendt, plurality is a precondition for being a public agent; without the presence and acknowledgement of others, action would cease to be a meaningful activity. To the extent that action requires appearing in public, making oneself known through words and deeds, and receiving the consent of others, it can only exist in a context defined by plurality (Arendt 1998: 177–79; Walторp 2013). Stereotyping of the area, and of Muslims, by mainstream

Danish media were addressed through the analogue medium of disposable cameras, the digital video camera and smartphones, and through interviews and stories broadcast about the exhibition in local newspapers and online. I bear in mind James Weiner's reminder that we cannot consider visual representation apart from the particular metaphysics that is deposited in our image-producing technology, a metaphysics that is just as much part of our culture and the social relations through which we live it (Weiner 1997: 198), and there is consequently reason to be critical when working together with groups of people with implicit ideas of 'giving voice' to them. The framing rests on my (Western) values of democratic politics and a public space of appearance. The staging of the exhibition, to me, formed part of an exploration of the relation between ascription and self-ascription of (ethnic) minority identity, rooted in place – and the role played by media and media representation in this dynamic. To the participants, I guess it implied various things, and the conversations around that subject are ongoing with those participants with whom I am still in contact.

I interacted with participants on Facebook and via text messages, and – at the participants' suggestion – organized a Facebook group where we could all post information and remarks, yet 'private' communication was still possible through the Inbox function. This latter function was used by almost all participants discerning what they wanted to disclose to me but not necessarily to other project participants or followers of the group on Facebook. In this sense, the affordances of the digital technology of cameras, smartphones and the social media platform Facebook (trans)formed the way we worked together and how knowledge was created. Furthermore, this online communication with participants and other people interested in the project was a source of data creation in itself around the diverse issues that could be made public, and those that ought not to be. It sparked my interest in boundaries between intimate, private and public spaces, and between visibility and concealment, which I elaborate on elsewhere (Waltorp, forthcoming).

In the case of the photo-project, which transformed into the Ghetto NO Ghetto exhibition, we set up photographs by participants and a twelve-minute video shot by two of the participants and me to dialogue with the written texts displayed next to the photographs and in the exhibition catalogue. The 'representations' shaped by the participants and anthropologist were visual products full of excess that intended to evoke the multiple experiences and narratives coexisting and contesting each other.

Framing, Feedback from 'the Field', and Reiterations of Fieldwork

The project Ghetto NO Ghetto, described above, was framed 'derivatively' in the sense that George Marcus speaks of when he says, in conversation with Paul Rabinow, that any anthropology of the contemporary is fated to be derivative since it covers the ground that others – the media, other disciplines, the 'natives' themselves – have already represented, written about, described and analysed (Marcus, in Rabinow et al. 2008: 68). We are working derivatively, they say of anthropologists, in that we depend on actors and their already constituted discursive realms:

Fieldwork evolves these days as an engagement with found imaginaries ... This found imaginary could begin anywhere – with experts, or migrant workers – and eventually these sites or positions will be connected if they are relevant to each other. Sometimes the ethnographer defines this relevance as her argument and makes connections between overlapping worlds that may only be indirectly perceived by the actors/subjects, or not at all. It is not only the native point of view that is operative ... You develop this design as you find yourself in situated engagements with epistemic partners, but you are constructing it for your own purposes, which are those of making the tools, the concepts that permit the exploration of the kinds of relations that a distinctive anthropology of the contemporary approaches. (Marcus, in Rabinow et al. 2008: 70–71)

They call for experimenting with the design of techniques and equipment for research that 'face up to anthropology's present condition of distinction and derivativeness, and the tension between the two' (Marcus, in Rabinow et al. 2008: 91). The interface that I describe here, as a fieldwork device, is a contribution towards this. It is an interface that may lead to transformations of the self of the ethnographer, who is engaged in playing new roles within the frame of fieldwork, and experimenting with new statuses in the different contexts he or she takes part in, while at the same time representing other moral worlds to her interlocutors. Ideally, our anthropological fieldwork and analysis is an interface that takes the form of a 'mutual interrogation, which can reveal "our" traditions to ourselves, as much to the other' (Verran 2013: 154). Norms, or particular values of the host society, can often become part of the anthropologist's self (which is hybrid, multiple, situated, and shifting), or come to form new social repertoires (Maskens and Blanes 2013: 261). This is

a peculiar case, when the ‘host’ society is at the same time also one’s own ‘home’ society.

In the time between the photo-diary project and collaborative exhibition-making in the Blågården area in 2010–11 and my fieldwork in 2014–15, I kept in contact with a number of the participants through social media and face-to-face meetings. Some of the initial participants from the photo-diary project went on to become interlocutors in my PhD fieldwork. Other interlocutors became involved in my research through the network I had developed; in other words, friends of friends or acquaintances became my interlocutors through the snowball method. Without people in the area to introduce me, access would not have been easy, and keeping in contact with people, while still working full-time and meeting family obligations, was made possible through social media. During these intermediate years I increasingly came to see the digital technologies as a fascinating object of study, as well as a promising fieldwork device.

In the next section, I argue that participant observation is both experimental and collaborative at its core. This potential is arguably lost when coupled with a strictly positivist analytical framework. If the anthropologist is restricted to ‘being there’ to document, when there are other modes, and experimentation could go beyond mere observation, then once again the potential of anthropology is lost. There is no ‘outside the frame’; instead there are situated and partial knowledges (Haraway 1988) with the anthropologist always included in her/his experimental material (Law 2004, 2016; Mol 2008). Such an experimental approach, to me, is qualified by generating questions and answers in an iterative movement, through reiterations. To get at something, we have to accept that getting it right the first time may not be a criterion of success but an indication of a lack of sensitivity to the feedback in the field.

Interface 2: Participant Observation with Smartphone and Video Camera

The places that comprised my field were the social housing estate Blågården and the larger Nørrebro neighbourhood, the online sphere, and some of the (transnational) spaces that are assembled by this technology. I conducted fourteen months of fieldwork: eight months of fieldwork in situ in Blågården between February and September 2014, which included participant observation and collaborative video making; and six months of subsequent online fieldwork conducted

via smartphones and the social media platforms that my interlocutors used – most importantly Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, text messaging, telephone conversations and video calling applications like Skype and Viber. At the time, the WhatsApp application only supported photos, text and small videos; Facebook was the largest social (networking) site and, as mentioned above, afforded both public displays on ‘the wall’ and private communication via an inbox. The Snapchat application allowed users to take photos, record videos, add text and drawings, and send the so-called ‘Snaps’ to a controlled list of recipients. The content was then automatically deleted after a set time limit of maximum ten seconds (see Walторp 2016). FaceTime was a video-telephony application that made it possible for the parties – as long as they were both using Apple products – to see each other while talking on the phone; Skype and Viber also offered video and audio calling but across a wider range of operating systems than Apple and, as Voice over IP (VoIP) applications, they also supported instant messaging and exchange of images, video and audio media messages.

I stayed at interlocutors’ homes for two to three days at a time once or twice a month during the six months when I did, primarily, online fieldwork. I interchangeably conducted participant observation (sometimes with a video camera), shared physical space and time, and shared moments in online media physically removed from the interlocutors. I also achieved the view on communication from the United Arab Emirates and Iran to others ‘at home’ in Blågården, Nørrebro, as I accompanied two interlocutors on trips to their parents’ country of origin, Iran, and to visit a potential future husband of an interlocutor in Dubai, where several interlocutors had married and settled.

Below I present a vignette from fieldwork, a situation where values were probed at various levels, and bodily and aesthetic norms discussed. Simultaneously those norms were expressed and transformed through a continuous, effortless discerning between what to share via which media channels or platforms, and with what audiences. My presence, and that of my video camera, invited a questioning of the deep-seated values of the anthropologist, those of the interlocutors, and potentially those of the audiences of the textual and audiovisual outputs from the interface, in the future.

It’s a late summer afternoon in 2014 in an interlocutor’s living room on the outskirts of Copenhagen. Together with a group of interlocutors, I took the bus from the neighbourhood of Nørrebro to visit

Khadija, who moved here from Nørrebro with her husband and son, pregnant with their second child. We brought along cakes, bread, humus, olives and other snacks.

I film lips. Smoke is inhaled and exhaled. I film the table full of plates of cake, the colourful mix of fresh and dried fruits, candy and soft drinks. I zoom in on a Coca-Cola can. I hear the light summer rain on the windows because my hearing is augmented, courtesy of the technical extensions to my body that is the camera equipment. Nour grabs her phone and says: 'Come, we do a selfie'. We move closer together, eyes to the tiny lens on her smartphone. The picture she takes is quickly decorated with a few emoticons and sent as a Snap to girlfriends who are not there with us in the moment – and who only see the picture in the moment they receive it (see Walторp 2016). Other pictures are arranged in montages of pictures of the cakes, the fruit that is arranged on the table, and us smiling to the camera. A filter is added and the photo is put on Facebook, receiving comments from friends and acquaintances. In these pictures, the hijab is worn, as a very different audience is able to look at what is uploaded to Facebook. It is a semi-public space, as opposed to the private space of the living room, and the private space of the Snapchat platform.

I pan over the four women sitting on two black leather sofas around a glass table. Although they go veiled in public spaces, here in the private space of the home they remove the veil, long cardigans, and the 'outer layer' of clothes they are wearing. This is safe and allowed as long as no men except those from the immediate family are present. Nour sits in her black leggings and tight black blouse. She has removed just part of the hijab from her head, and keeps on the inner part that functions like a hairband. Khadija is wearing a short, comfortable dress in a stretchy jacquard material, and her hair is in a ponytail. She is five months pregnant and the bump shows clearly now. Jamila does not remove her headscarf – 'bad hair day' – she sits legs curled up under herself on the sofa, in elegant trousers and a small jacket. Mona arrives late, with a water pipe wrapped in two H&M plastic bags, and arranges it on the table. She is wearing jeans and a tunic top. I am in tight jeans and a T-shirt, seated next to Nour. My thoughts are drifting, until they are called back by the women's voices getting louder:

Khadija: If you're psychologically tired of your breasts, then it's allowed, I'd say it's allowed.

Mona: Depends on your husband.

Jamila and Khadija protest: No, no, no, no, no not the men.

Khadija: I'd do it for my own sake. My husband says, no, that he doesn't want me to do it. But I want to do it – why: because I feel uncomfortable when I'm naked and my breasts are small.

Jamila: Listen, if your husband tells you to do something that is really wrong and lousy, would you still do it just because then he would be happy?

Mona: No, I'm just saying ...

Nour: If it's for him, and he's happy about it, he won't look at other women!

Jamila: Even if it's haram, you'd do it?

Voices overlap and interrupt each other as the discussion heats up, and my camera follows the discussion, zooms in on facial expressions and the simultaneous handling of messages on the smartphones. Soon, I am actively drawn into the discussion and asked why I do not use push-up bras. This is something several interlocutors have been discussing among themselves, and the discussion follows around what my thoughts are on beauty ideals, 'being natural', whom one should attempt to look good for, and so on. My camera grows unsteady as I defend my choices and ideals, so embodied and taken for granted that I rarely question the deep-seated values in which they are embedded.

The above case unfolds an everyday social situation among the women, slightly altered and made into an event by an anthropologist being present with her video camera. In the situation, the smartphone is used in various ways: to take selfies and share them on the Snapchat platform with friends, to take other pictures for a different audience on the Facebook platform (wearing the hijab in the pictures for Facebook), and for texting and talking with friends and family. The video camera helps in focusing on the many simultaneous (inter)actions, and in handling both on- and offline dimensions – it is an interface that extends into the on- and offline spheres, which it at the same time brings together and separates. In situations like the one described above, the tactility of hands touching and handling the smartphone is kept on record because of the video camera.

I consider devices and technologies in terms of their affordances – the actions they make possible, or the opposite, those that they constrain. Yet my focus is not on technologies or agents alone, but on the fundamental interactions between the two and on how the relational property shared between an object and agent is at once highly situational, socially negotiated and contested (Knappett 2004: 46). In the conversations we would have around topics such as gender roles and beauty practices and ideals, I was interchangeably identified

as a separate individual and a representative of Danes at large. We were each other's interlocutors, probing each other and ourselves around body aesthetics, maintenance and alteration, and gender relations. I observed, filmed and participated in their everyday lives and activities, as well as staged more particular events through my presence, my questions and my camera – and my interlocutors shared thoughts, videos, photos and texts with me when I was physically present, as well as through the smartphone when I was physically absent.

Moral Worlds and Zones of Encounter

In the above vignette, Interface 2, conceptualizing fieldwork as interface has helped me to draw nearer to understanding practices, logics and values as experienced and lived by the interlocutors, as well as turn a critical gaze back upon my own culturally taken-for-granted ideas, morals and values. My interlocutors and I belong to the same nation, share the city of Copenhagen and the neighbourhood of Nørrebro, and belong to various other collectives reaching beyond the Danish borders. We are each other's interlocutors – with various stakes, from various class backgrounds and social positions, differently positioned in terms of religion, secularism, politics and ideology. The interface between us is made up of resonances, contestation and critique. Our (moral) worlds are not 'wholes', but rather composites (Waltorp 2015). We may disagree with some aspects of each other's moral stances, and ethical and normative practices, without dismissing or holding in disrespect each other's worlds, and our shared reality, altogether.

My interlocutors formulated in various ways a wish to counter the stereotyping of immigrants and Muslims that they experienced in Denmark, as well as to show people in the Middle East what life in Europe is 'really like' – and in this endeavour, they envisaged me as a partner. This focus on minority–majority relations occurred often, although only when I initiated those discussions, and mostly at the beginning of the fieldwork. It also came up when we were doing feedback sessions, when I would ask for their opinions on and critiques of my tentative analyses (see Waltorp 2016).

In the vignette that opened this chapter, a journalist's question made me revisit the concept of 'social control' with my interlocutors. In this instance, there were three main themes that emerged from their responses: irritation at being uniformly represented by

mainstream media as subdued Muslim women with headscarves, discontent about having less control over their own affairs than they wished for, and a questioning around freedom, secularism and religion, and what this entailed for each of us (see Asad et al. 2009; Fernando 2013). I argue that, as anthropologists, we should subject our own moral positions and assumptions to the same kinds of analysis we use on others in the process of asking 'what is it that counts as morality in the various social worlds we and our interlocutors inhabit, and what are the processes by which this morality comes to matter?' (Zigon 2010: 13; see also Fassin and Stoczkowski 2008). Anthropologists are always already entwined in power relations, political agendas and the public debate; ethnography cannot be disconnected from political morality.

To reiterate, the interface is 'a productive moment of encounter embedded and obscured within the use of technology. It is a disputed zone, a site of contestation between human beings and machines as much as between the social and the material, the political and the technological' (Hookway 2014: ix). 'Most human encounters ... occur in this in-between space of partial evaluations, translations and contestations' (Benhabib 2002: 41).

Conclusion

It is the fieldwork as mutually produced interface instigated by the curiosity of the experimental anthropologist that I have sought to tease out here. There is no doubt it can be demanding and tiring work to make up part of an interface. The interface, in its provision of an augmentation, Hookway argues, 'requires an extraction of work, and for this work a cost must be paid' (Hookway 2014: 7). The augmentation comes at a cost, which many a fieldworker who could not easily exit the field might agree with. Also, an interface, once established, is not just eradicated when the fieldworker physically leaves the field site. One can encounter emotional and physical fatigue when continually being made to question one's values and morals, perhaps encountering 'epistemic disconcertment':

'Epistemic' refers to knowledge and how we account for what it is: our story or theory of knowledge. 'Disconcertment' conveys the sense of being put out in some way, and when qualified by the term 'epistemic' it implies that our taken-for-granted account of what knowledge is has somehow been upset or impinged upon, so that we begin to doubt and become less certain. (Verran 2013: 144–45)

We implicitly invite our interlocutors to do this work as well. Yet working with epistemic disconcertment might allow us to grasp 'generative possibilities for going on together doing difference' (ibid.: 146).

In the examples offered above, I first described (in the opening vignette) how a journalist's question about social control led to a discussion in social media with interlocutors on freedom, autonomy and control. In Interface 1, a photo-diary project turned exhibition allowed for a fieldwork interface, which then led to the more intentionally created fieldwork as interface described in Interface 2. Sensitivity to the interfaces that emerge, and an intentional crafting or devising of such interfaces in fieldwork, allow for unforeseen experiments into moral behaviour, and a new range of moral possibilities (Zigon 2009) are opened up (for study) in this process, implying a cultural critical potential (Marcus and Fischer 1999). We cannot afford to ignore spaces, practices, or technological devices that are significant to our interlocutors, or to neglect seeking to qualify these as they make up part of our fieldwork and knowledge making. My efforts here have been towards showing how tracing the affordances for my interlocutors of technological devices have entailed an increased awareness and employment of those same technological devices in pursuing fieldwork as interface – as a device and a conceptualization that we can draw on, not instead of but alongside other methods and practices, whether experimental, interventionist or classical.

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Notes

1. Names of interlocutors have been changed.
2. Denmark is a small country of 5.6 million people where first and second generation immigrants currently constitute around 11% of the national population, and approximately 22% of Copenhagen's population (Danmarks Statistik 2014:11). The definition of a ghetto was according to such criteria as the percentage of residents unemployed, the percentage of immigrants from non-Western countries, and the percentage of inhabitants with a criminal record (Ghetto Strategi 2010: 5).

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