

The Constructed Truth of the Story

Documentation and Documentarism in Birgit Johnsen and Hanne Nielsen's Video Works

By Lars Movin

Over a period of ten years -from their first collaboration, the video *Gokker* (Meenie, 1994), to their most recent joint project, the installation *Replay*(2004) -the artistic duo, Birgit Johnsen and Hanne Nielsen, has kept up an ongoing dialogue with their viewers concerning such concepts as audience expectations, truth and authenticity -especially in relation to the representational possibilities of the video medium. Their early work, mainly single-monitor videos, brought various ideas and investigative fields into play in relatively simple, performancebased tableaux. These were clearly studio projects, sometimes with the artists themselves as actors, and in most cases using only a few everyday props. By contrast, several of their later works have been technically and conceptually more sophisticated, multi-screen installations, in which raw material gathered away from the studio in a traditional documentary way is used in combination with professional video processing and extensive staging to explore the relationship between so-called authentic versions of reality and interpreted or mediated representations of it. Their most recent installation, *Replay*, is a good example of this. Exhibited as several parallel set-ups, each including two or three projections, this work is based on a series of recordings made with surveillance cameras placed in private homes. The participating families agreed to have their daily life video-recorded over a period of two weeks, but were otherwise asked to ignore the camera, as far as possible, and just go about their daily routines. Afterwards Johnsen and Nielsen looked through the material, selected certain passages, transcribed parts of the conversations -typically taking place around the breakfast table or while dinner was being prepared -and passed them on to a team of actors who were asked to stage their own interpretation of these situations, strictly on the basis of the written material. The actors did not get to see the original recordings and were given no information about the mutual relationships of the characters, their ages, etc. Finally, one of the rules of this game was that some lines, underlined in the 'script', were to be spoken verbatim, while the rest could be subjected to a certain degree of improvisation. The staged situations were then recorded, using cinematic and narrative devices typically associated with TV-fiction: hand-held cameras, close-ups, crosscutting, and more or less optimal lighting. In the final work, the original recordings are shown alongside the staged interpretations, thus inviting the viewer to compare these two very different ways of looking at the same fragments of everyday life. *Replay* can be said to mark opposite extremes of a documentary discourse. In the ordinary usage of the word, documentarism signifies a cinematic practice of seeing reality through a temperament. There are at least two implications of this. The first is that documentarism is not synonymous with neutral observation, or simple documentation, since reality is seen through a temperament, the director, who chooses the subject and how to approach it, and is thus responsible for the cinematic presentation. The second implication is that we are, after

all, concerned with reality, that is to say with some degree of authenticity. Even if we acknowledge that documentarism may involve staging, the unwritten agreement between filmmaker and audience is that the raw materiel has to come out of real life and that the cinematic interpretation must stay as true to this reality as possible.

Seen in relation to these criteria, Johnsen and Nielsen in *Replay* seem to move the fence posts of the two extremes of documentarism farther apart. The naked recordings made by the surveillance camera do away with so many cinematic conventions that it becomes difficult to interpret the sequence of events as narrative at all. And in the remade versions, where the authentic characters are replaced by actors, the distance to reality is so great that not even the label 'staged documentarism' seems adequate.

By juxtaposing the two extremes, Johnsen and Nielsen not only establish a formally challenging, double perception of the world, they also heighten our awareness of the credibility of any interpretation or staging, thus problematizing the premises of documentarism. Presented with the work, viewers will invariably start comparing the two versions, demonstrating to them how even the most simple and unobtrusive cinematic or narrative device is a form of manipulation, an interference with reality. The everyday situations that appear undramatic when seen through the surveillance lens -merely as the somewhat distracted, routine relationships between people who live together and know each other well -will typically take on an added quality of drama and underlying conflict when interpreted by the actors. What in the original recordings comes across as just ordinary behaviour, turns into vibrant, explosive situations in the staged version where practically every line, every gesture, every changing mood is loaded with potential meaning. Of course the different ways of interpreting these situations will in part depend on what the viewer brings to the work and projects onto it But how they are interpreted also says something more general about our relationship to visual representations of reality (including documentary formats), namely that our interpretation of them to a large extent depends on our familiarity with cinematic and narrative conventions. And these, it should be noted, are typically established by a practice that does not always distinguish very clearly between fact and fiction, between staged and merely recorded events, a practice that freely makes use of linguistic and narrative devices mainly associated with fiction in documentaries, and vice versa.

In *Replay*, Johnsen and Nielsen -in a wider sense -address the question of truthfulness in connection with so-called fictive and reality-based genres -including the assumption that fiction is made-up, while documentarism is synonymous with the truth, and, paradoxically, the opposite assumption: that fiction can contain an element of truth, while documentarism (or journalism) can seem quite far from reality. With regard to the latter, one could, as a thought experiment, claim that the surveillance perspective in *Replay* actually obscures the truth of a given incident, since the passively recording, far-away shot fails to show the nuances of what goes on, while the staged version tells the truth, or a truth, because the interpretation brings hidden layers to the surface.

Although such elements as audience expectations, truth and authenticity enter into most of Johnsen and Nielsen's works, they have not previously been linked as clearly to a documentary discourse as in recent years. If we go back to the mid-nineties, we will see that the artistic duo started out with a series of videos that were documentation rather than documentaries, and - typical of their time -were developed in dialogue with the now classical conceptual and performance-based video experiments of the 1970s.

Birgit Johnsen(born 1958) and Hanne Nielsen (born 1959) both came out of the Jutland Art Academy, and both had been working with sculpture and installation when, in 1993, they began a collaboration that in the years to come was to revolve around videos. That their choice fell on videos was somewhat accidental, inspired by an invitation from the Aarhus Film Workshop. The invitation was for a project aimed at encouraging people from different environments - who would not ordinarily express themselves in moving pictures -to experiment with this medium under the auspices of the Film Workshop. The process-oriented way of thinking often required in video production turned out to be well suited to Johnsen and Nielsen's artistic strategies, and the project ultimately resulted in four productions, three of which became part of the anthology entitled *Crawl* (1995), subsequently published by the Aarhus Film Workshop.

Of these, the video *Grinding Onions* (Afrivning af Iøg,1995) is now regarded as a major work of the period -and one that became practically emblematic of the pair. With this video, Johnsen and Nielsen not

only discovered a form that is both simple and full of ambiguities, they also placed themselves in the tradition of process-oriented and selfinvesting art, which in the 1970s manifested itself mainly as performance and body art. It seems near at hand to see *Grinding Onions* as a nod to and/or humorous comment on such artists as Vito Acconci, Chris Burden and Carolee Schneemann, who for a number of years, starting in the late sixties,created performances that with their taboo-breaking and endurance-testing exploring of limits, challenged the artists as well as the spectators. In Vito Acconci's *Rubbing Piece* (1970), for example, the artist is sitting in a New York restaurant, Max's Kansas City, rubbing his left underarm with his right hand for an hour, making the skin red and irritated. In *Trademarks*

of the same year, he bit himself, leaving tooth marks on his skin. There is no video or film documentation of these two works, but other, similar pieces of this period were staged for the camera, for instance *Blindfolded Catching* (1970), in which Acconci, blindfolded and placed with his

back against a wall, is exposed to a bombardement of balls thrown against his body by an anonymous co-actor, from which, in this helpless position, he tries to protect himself. A similar form of self-investing exploration of the body takes place in *Grinding Onions*, a documented performance in which Johnsen and Nielsen grate onions until their eyes run with tears. In the video's dead-pan staging of this everyday activity, undertaken as a scientific experiment, the two artists sit facing the camera and grate no less than ten onions while their determined gaze at the viewer becomes more and more harrowed and blurred by tears. As mentioned earlier, this work at first suggests the body art of the seventies, but at the same time it seems to operate on level less concerned with the act itself or the bodily challenges it presents; it belongs more on a meta-level and points to a gender-political aspect as well as the relationship between authenticity and staging.

The meta-level has to do with the fact that while the act seems to refer to an earlier type of art, it also clearly contains a comical element that springs from the lack of necessity (the meaninglessness) of the self torturing act. The gender-political aspect could be said to be related to the fact that Johnsen and Nielsen - rather than engage in a neutral act such as rubbing their skin raw, or being bombarded by balls - chose an everyday activity related to cooking and thus to a traditionally female sphere. Finally, there is the authenticity question, raised by the fact that the tears in the video are artificially provoked but nevertheless real.

Sticking with the tears for a while, there are several art-historical references at work in this aspect of the work alone; in addition to a long and comprehensive tradition for depicting suffering, there are at least two very obvious, earlier examples of films or videos of artists crying in front of the camera. One is the British artist Georgina Starr's breakthrough video *Crying* (1993), made just two years prior to *Grinding Onions*; the other is the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader's film (and still photo) entitled *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* (1970). In both of these works the cause of the tears is not revealed and they remain a mystery to the viewer. The title of Bas Jan Ader's work signals that the nature of his sorrow is such that he is unable to even talk about it; Georgina Starr sends the more neutral signal that she is simply crying - perhaps without knowing the reason why herself. In both instances, the viewer is made to reflect on crying as the outer sign of an inner state, the face as the mirror of the soul, the imponderable depths of the inner life, and other such image of psychological and emotional states and mechanisms which Johnsen and Nielsen effortlessly dismantle by presenting an almost scientific documentation of crying as a simple physical reaction to a specific influence. Furthermore, if the cause of this instance of crying is so lacking in spirituality, what are we to think of the nature or genuineness of the crying and the emotions we encounter in other visual media?

It is perhaps a bit disingenuous to describe Johnsen and Nielsen's early work as mainly performance-oriented, since their other works of this period, even if they do involve a certain element of performance, are more concerned with questions of form in visual art. Most of their works, on one level or another, also reflect on documentary conventions and the relationship between medium and viewer, including the expectations linked to different genres and media categories.

Thus in the work *Gokker* (Meenie, 1994), which preceded *Grinding Onions*, the boundary between the properties of painting and sculpture is erased in a tricky and humorous way; at the same time, the video provocatively mixes children's songs and destruction and involves the viewer in a sequence of events where suspense, audience expectations and unwritten agreements are brought into play. Shot from a fixed camera angle, we see 154 cream puffs neatly arranged in perfectly straight lines, a grid consisting of eleven rows in one direction and fourteen in the other. A hand enters the picture frame, and while a strange squeaky voice on the soundtrack recites the children's rhyme 'Éenie, meenie, minie, moe', the hand crushes the cream puffs one by one. Although it spares one cream puff each time it gets to the line '... let him go', the end result is a horrible mess of white foam and brown chocolate pieces - an abstract image created by the destruction of a sculptural form, perhaps?

We find a similar combination of formal investigation and challenge of the viewer's expectations in *Guillotine* (1995), the latest of three works in the *Crawl* anthology. Here a tilted camera, starting at floor level, calmly climbs up various figures one by one - men, women, children, even a black dog. The film is shot in domestic surroundings with characters dressed in everyday clothes, which, along with camera movements, might suggest a cinematic convention - the kind of portrait in which a number of features are presented in a calculated order until a more or less complete picture emerges - were it not for the fact that all of the tilted camera movements stop at the neck of the

person being filmed, leaving the face unseen. Instead of releasing the 'suspense', the amputated -or amputating -camera movement, after a short pause, changes to a rapid panorama shot from side to side, a sort of shaking of the head, accompanied by a mocking or almost hysterical, witch-like laughter on the sound-track. The 'decapitating' camera movement can be seen as an unusually direct way of addressing the viewer who is caught between an authentic feeling of having been cheated (or made a fool of) and a more meta-like, intellectual level where the video's explicit undertaking brings the work/viewer relation under discussion.

The artists' formal investigation of the medium continued during the 1995-96 period. The installation *Okeanos* (1995) consists of a projected image composed of two separate shots of a pair of boxing hands -one pair of hands on either side of the screen. The two pairs of hands appear to be boxing with each other, but the fact that they have been filmed on two separate occasions and subsequently added together in one picture, raises the question of spatial presence -that of the medium versus that of reality. In the video's electronic space, the hands are present simultaneously, while in the real, physical space they both box into nothingness. The video, in other words, documents a meeting or confrontation that never took place.

Wipematerial (1996) -like *Gokker* -reflects on the properties of painting and sculpture, this time by means of water. The main part of the film is framed by shots of a boiling kettle with steam shooting out of its spout like a sculptured pillar. Between the opening and closing pictures, we see a series of shots of a green slate alternately receiving wet marks from a damp dishcloth and being blown clean with a hairdryer. A sort of painterly Sisyphean task with transience as the central parameter.

And finally, also dating from this period, we have *Beyond Reach* (1996) a performance video in which vision, body and space are involved in a demonstrative act of seeing that encourages us to reflect on the body as a mechanism for seeing and a measure of sculptural and spatial categories. The work also demonstrates the artist's difficulties in documenting her own performance, having to fill the double part of actor and recorder. With her feet solidly planted on the floor, each in a set position, the performer video-films her own naked body, apparently in accordance with a predetermined pattern: starting from the floor and moving up the front of the left leg as far as the groin, then going through the same procedure with the front of the right leg, the outer side of the left leg, the outer side of the right leg, the back of the left leg, etc. Each time a set of movements is carried out, the performer has to stop when the physical condition and flexibility of the body sets the limit - which means before the lens reaches the performer's back. Moaning and groaning can be heard on the sound-track, indicating the physical exertion connected with exploring the limits of the act of seeing. From an art-historical point of view, it could be said that the work points to a sort of formal breakdown occurring at the point when the artist's own body becomes the material of art, when the subjective gaze, the subject, and the work as object merge and become one.

This first body of work -comprising more titles than mentioned here -took a new direction as early as in 1996, when Johnsen and Nielsen, without essentially letting go of the thematic and formal core of their work, for a while let 'nature' - more specifically dead blackbirds and rabbits -take the place of the human body and the everyday props and situations of their earlier pieces. At the same time a certain note of hilarity crept into their work, kept in check by a grotesque, at times even grim humour. The latter is especially evident in *Wake Up, Charlie* (1996), a short, vignette-like video in which an anonymous actor's half-hearted attempts at reviving a dead blackbird takes the viewer by surprise. The bird is seen lying on a neutral surface while a pair of male hands tries to restore it to life in different ways. The hands 'bicycle' with the bird's legs, flap its wings, give it heart massage and pour water down its beak through a plastic tube. 'Wake up you lazy bird, choopchoopchoop...', says the man in a voice that does not signal serious concern. 'Give me a sign, I don't have all day. Wake up, or I'll give you to the cat!' That the man seems incapable not only of empathy but of distinguishing between humans and animals is probably a point in case.

In a certain sense, this new category of work is still concerned with documenting performances, only now Johnsen and Nielsen are no longer in front of the camera themselves, and -what is just as important -the neutral documentation seems to have shifted in the direction of familiar video genres, mainly demonstration and instruction videos. Consequently, the artists also operate with the conventions and expectations that go with these formats.

This is especially true of the two 'rabbit videos', *Attributes* and *Rabbitsuit*, both made in 1996, and both apparently dealing with man's furry and feather-clad fellow creatures in as casual a way as in *Wake Up, Charlie*. In these two works, the rabbit is 'instrumentalized' -a soft, 'cute' animal,

traditionally the object of human affection, is here made the object of 'coo!', artistic considerations as to surface and form -and at the same time the tendency to humanize animals is problematized. In *Attributes* we see the hands of an anonymous male actor who systematically skins a dead rabbit hung on a wall by its hind legs, while he comments on his actions in a neutral tone of voice: 'First I place an incision by one knee', he explains. 'Then I carefully loosen the skin all the way around: Step by step, the man loosens the rabbit's fur, finally pulling it off and leaving the animal's body hanging like a naked piece of meat. The form and tone of voice would be worthy of an instruction video -right up to the point when the man, after the skinning is completed, lays the animal's body down on a checkered piece of cloth and starts dressing it in children's or dolls' clothing: under garments, pants, shirt, etc. The animal is thus given a new surface, a new dress, a new 'fur', that again makes it worthy of human affection.

In addition to these formal references to the rational, authoritative and predictable format of instruction videos, *Attributes* can be said to be concerned with the surfaces that give objects their form and distinguish them from their surroundings, while *Rabbitsuit* appears to be exploring basic forms: cubes, cones, spheres, pyramids. But it does so by borrowing from a very different kind of narrative, namely the fairy tale; for the formal investigation in *Rabbitsuit* happens in the guise of a grotesque story about a vain rabbit, Miss Long Ears, who is so preoccupied with her own appearance that she is a mere whisker's breadth away from falling prey to Mr. Fox. While a female voice-over (nearly exploding with laughter) relates the story of Miss Long Ears' dangerous encounter with the fox, some primitively staged and poorly animated tableaux present a sequence of events in which a dead rabbit, like a piece of modelling clay, is made to take on the basic forms mentioned above.

The whole thing is so strange that as a viewer you find it difficult to focus your attention. Should you become absorbed by the story, should you try to keep a level head and pay attention to the presentation of sculptural forms?

Rabbitsuit, with its fairy-tale references, pointed in a new direction that would turn out to be symptomatic of Birgit Johnsen and Hanne Nielsen's art in the period to come. Their work subsequently branched out in several directions with video installations such as *Carwash* (1999), *Inflated Constructions* (2000), *Grooming the Environs* (2001) and *Blindgang* (Walking Blind, 2003) -unfolding a range of strategies and themes -and a short film entitled *Børge's Auto Workshop: Four Men*

and a *Car* {2000}, the first of a series of straight documentaries, later followed up by installations such as *Territorial Statements* (2003) and *Replay* (2004).

Børge's Auto Workshop, produced with support from The Danish Film Institute, constitutes an exception as well as a 'link' in Johnsen and Nielsen's oeuvre. What makes the film exceptional is the fact that -despite its formal experiments -it was actually made to comply with the standard forms of film distribution and screening. And it represents a 'link' because here the documentary element -which in their later work is incorporated in art projects -is explored, developed and unfolded in a more or less pure form. In *Børge's Auto Workshop*, it is as if the element of documentation in their early work meets the documentarism of their later work.

At the same time *Børge's Auto Workshop* marks a move away from the studio and the artists' immediate surroundings, out into a larger social reality, more specifically an auto workshop where four men meet every Thursday evening to restore a classic car, a 1934 Dodge. For a whole year, Johnsen and Nielsen followed these four men -Børge and his three mates -as they worked. At a first glance, this would seem to suggest a familiar documentary formula: a curious (female) pair of eyes takes a look at an otherwise inaccessible (male) world. But instead of intruding on the men and looking for explanations and hidden layers, Johnsen and Nielsen pan around the place in a superficial way, sometimes letting the camera rest on more or less arbitrary details.

In other words, we are not presented with a traditional, linear, pictorial narrative. Rather, this film, with its musical montage, outlines a fluctuating, visual space where associations can wander freely between the specific and the general. The fragmented sound track helps to generate a dense, hermetic atmosphere that leads attention away from the filmed situations and in the direction of the -sometimes bizarre -visual approaches. The observers confuse the men, for instance by being more than commonly interested in their footwear -wooden clogs -and at the same time willingly lending their lense and microphone to little demonstrations of a fuel pump, a

chromium-plated device, or something completely different. The objects are consistently shown out of context, however, and you soon realize that the main objective was never to document the work on the car -even though the film follows a time line from the start of the restoration project until the finished car rolls out into the world. The focus is more on the environment, on a way of being together socially, and on the special form of interaction that takes place when an insider group is being observed by people from the outside. The film also focuses on the formal devices of documentarism. By consistently avoiding classical dramaturgy and refusing to supplement the images with explanatory or context-providing information and comments, the artists indirectly point to cinematic conventions. And rather than manipulate their footage to fit a narrative mold, they subject it to more purely artistic visual strategies: slices of time and deconstructions of space, modelled into a cinematic structure.

In 2003, after having flirted more directly with the documentary genre in Børge's Auto Workshop, Johnsen and Nielsen in the installation *Blindgang* (Walking Blind) zoomed in on the act of seeing and the relationship between visual decoding and verbal mediation of the world. At the same time, and from a quite unexpected point of view, they sort of commented on at least one aspect of the documentary discourse. The *Walking Blind* installation borrows elements and themes from their earlier work. From *Wake Up, Charlie* and the 'rabbit videos', we recognize the use of animals as substitutes, or objects of projection, while the performer's perception merging with the recording camera lens recalls *Beyond Reach*. But here these elements are combined employing an inscrutable form of humour that places the work in a category of its own.

On the practical level, the idea behind the installation is relatively simple. The viewer is presented with two film sequences, projected side by side. Both are of a blind woman and her seeing-eye dog's daily excursion to the park. Both the woman (Hanne) and the dog (Billy) have had a video camera strapped onto them, the woman on the upper front side of her body, the dog on his head. The two cameras record the reality that the mutually connected couple pass through as they leave the apartment, start off toward the park, wait for the bus, walk among the trees in the park where a number of episodes take place, and return home. On the sound-track we hear the woman's comments, both her communications with the dog -praise, encouragements, commands, chit-chat -and her reactions to incidents and impressions along the way.

Much of the time the dog is 'in place' at the woman's side, which means that the two 'visual impressions' the two camera recordings, are parallel registrations of the scenes in front of them. The viewer sees the path leading through the park, the trees, the passers-by, and whatever else the couple meets on their way -both from dog height and from the somewhat higher perspective of the woman. Some of the time the dog is let loose, however, so that the two sequences become separated, so to speak, and the dog -the woman's prosthetic sight, or substitute eyes -scampers about while the woman herself, moving more stiffly, tries to stay on the path and her planned route. In these sequences, the woman and the dog seem to move towards each other, 'seeing' each other, so to speak -which destroys the illusion of seeing things from the woman's and the dog's point of view, since the viewer is made aware of the strapped-on video equipment.

By coupling a visual recording medium to the sense impressions of a non-seeing person, the work - in the viewer's mind -effects a meeting of three elements: 1) the combined impression of the two film sequences; 2) the real sound of the surroundings; 3) the blind woman's interpretation and decoding of the reality she is moving through. From a documentary point of view, this coupling raises questions concerning the relationship between objective visual representation and subjectivity or interpretation -what we initially called seeing reality through a temperament. The interesting thing, you might say, is that even though the cameras register 'something' close to the reality of the woman and the dog as they go on their walk, the video recordings presented to the viewer are not necessarily representative of their experience. The woman has not seen what her camera records; and we can have no real sense of what the dog has 'seen' or 'registered' or 'experienced' since we have no in-depth understanding of an animal's consciousness. The discrepancy between the reality that we, as viewers, perceive in the recordings and the reality perceived by the woman is clearly revealed by an episode where the woman hears the crunching sound of wheels on gravel and comments to Billy that somebody must be bicycling in a place where it is not allowed, while we, the viewers, can see that what she is hearing is a family with a stroller. Thus the double perspective of *Walking Blind* is not, strictly speaking, a documentary perspective on the world -nor is it visual documentation. 'Something' is being documented, but cannot with any certainty be coupled with the subjectivity -or subjectivities -involved in the two video recordings. The physical acts themselves, the bodies moving through the world, are recorded and can be

interpreted by the viewer. But the visual recording's connection to a subjective consciousness has been almost completely removed, and thus the recordings only in a very indirect way reflect the will and intentions of the subject(s), and do so in a way that subjects the act of seeing, or rather the visual recording, to other senses -in Hanne's case, above all the sense of hearing, and in Billy's case perhaps primarily the sense of smell.

While *Walking Blind* can be seen as somewhat of a side track in Birgit Johnsen and Hanne Nielsen's oeuvre, the documentary approach used in Børge's *Auto Workshop* is continued in *Territorial Statements* (2003). This work consists of filmed interviews, subsequently displayed in two different formats: an installation and a film/video. Here, too, a documentary recording of the world is combined with formal investigations of cinematic devices -but in *Territorial Statement* the weight is more on formal aspects than it was in Børge's *Auto Workshop*.

Six women have been interviewed about episodes where they felt pressured by their surroundings to go beyond their normal limits (only four of the six women are included in the film version): An African woman is harassed by a downstairs neighbour because she once rejected his approaches. A young woman feels let down by her girlfriend because, when they are together, the girlfriend appears to be more interested in her own baby. A woman has been plagued by her conscience ever since the morning when she stood waiting for the bus and egotistically chose to ignore a drunken, beat-up man who turned to her for help. A young Muslim woman, a permanent resident here, feels pressured by her parents to choose between a life in Denmark and a possible future in Iran. A woman regrets having let herself be lured into revealing intimate details concerning a divorce to a fellow student whom she hardly knows. And a woman from the Faeroe Islands, in spite of the fact that she has lived in Denmark for more than ten years and has her family here, because of her accent is often asked very direct questions about private affairs or probed on her views on hot Faeroe islands issues such as killing pilot whales and receiving support from the Danish state. Each of the women talks about the same incident four times, with an interval of several days. The four takes are made at different times of day, using different lighting, camera angles and framing - alternating between an almost neutral form of questioning and a more dramatically staged one. Each time, the women were alone in the room with the camera, but the different times of day and types of staging cause them to present their stories in completely different ways. The two versions of the material presented to the viewer -the installation and the film -crosscut between the different takes, and in this way the work not only points out how a story is never told the same way twice, but also how even a simple documentary device, such as an interview, can be edited in different ways, significantly influencing the viewer's perception of the story. In other words, there are no 'true' versions of a given story; every version is invariably coloured, either by the narrator's impulses and emotional state at the time, or by the 'wrapping', the staging.

Through the formal device of juxtaposing several versions of the same story, Johnsen and Nielsen place the six accounts in *Territorial*

Statement in a field of tension between cinematic construction and the reality of the participating women. Again -as in *Replay* -it is the concept of documentarism and our relationship to cinematic representations of reality that are being problematized. Both works draw nourishment from an authentic reality, in principle unfolding in front of the camera, which gives their content its weight. But at the same time they reveal, by various means, the differentiation of the concept of truth invariably involved in all story-telling -which again points back to the element of construction that underlies stories as a phenomenon. Any story is -potentially -a constructed stab at the truth. On this subject, Birgit Johnsen and Hanne Nielsen's constructions have something to say -something interesting, and perhaps even true.