

Knut Erik Jensen

The Lack of Reality in Documentary and Fiction

Preceded by the screening of Knut Erik Jensen's documentary *My Dear Friend* (1994)

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JENSEN: Everybody's here except for me. I'm a little far off for the time being. As you could see, this film *My Dear Friend* was from 1994. It's already fourteen years old. We should open with some reflections about what you've seen, any questions or whatever that might be of interest, because once I start it's very hard to stop. So please, are there any comments on the story or anything else?

MAN IN AUDIENCE: What made you choose a kind of neutral commentary? You had the choice, of course, of making a personal story or to tell the story from his side or her side, but you chose a neutral commentary.

JENSEN: Well it's neutral in one way, but on the other hand it's maybe a bridge between what you have to put in and some information that doesn't come from anywhere else. But it's not a more normal, journalistic kind of commentary. Actually it's an actor who reads the commentary. So the idea was to build a bridge by using a voice that is not the typical sort of impersonal, journalistic voice. That's why it's an actor reading it. As I said, it's already fourteen years old, and my films are getting worse and worse, [laughs] so you never know. We had very few resources also. There's a lot of things that might have been done differently today. But you more or less have to accept everything that you've done in your past, and try to achieve better results in the future.

Now I'm working on a feature film based on this story. It's very free and open in a way. It could be very interesting to see how that turns out compared to this documentary. It's also an interesting approach to make a fiction film out of a documentary. Well I think that documentary and fiction are more or less the same; it's a question of directing human beings. I used to say that if you work very hard with actors over a long period, you can also reduce them to human beings. [laughter] It might sometimes be a tough job, but it's possible.

The other thing is that most of the features, in my opinion, are more or less documentaries anyway. The actors are more or less used to being believable people, being policemen or bus drivers or taxi drivers. So, in my opinion, most features are more or less trying to be documentary stories – stories that are already told because they're using the old type of dramaturgy, which means that it's already decided when the story is going to begin and end. And it has an intelligent way of being told from the beginning to the end. So in that sense it's very different from life because if you go off and make a documentary you don't know what's going to happen.

I think one of the new trends in documentary is to try to write precise manuscripts, to write too much about what you're going to do. What I find very interesting about working in both documentary and fiction is that the documentary is an experimental kind of situation where you can go off and do exactly what you like in a way. You think you can control reality, but if you control reality, it will never become a very good documentary anyway because then you have already decided what reality is going to be, or very often what you hope it to be.

But, of course, working in documentaries as in fiction, you have to be prepared. You have to do your research. You have to know more or less about a lot of things. If you know more or less the result or if you have already stated what you are going to say, what you are going to conclude, in my opinion it's not so interesting. The most interesting thing is what you cannot explain. Being in documentaries or in fiction, or

in art as such, art doesn't live for a long time if you can explain it. You have to have an emotional approach to it that you cannot always explain in normal terms.

But that's only the start of things. This wasn't a real answer, but a continuation. Are there any more questions? There's another question from Svein Andersen. He's a good pupil. He's sitting on the first bench. [laughter] That's what I like about him. Myself I used to be very far beyond there, trying to look down.

SVEIN ANDERSEN (FilmCamp AS): This is a film about life. It's about love. It's about war. It's a huge subject. In the beginning, you say that you were fascinated by her love story. But for me, it's as much a story about the war. Actually it's a kind of metaphor for everyday life, even today. Of course, this is a big story. It's a big political situation. What was it about this subject that attracted you? Was it about the war? Was it about the love? Was it all of this?

JENSEN: I think if you say all of it, there's a possibility to choose whatever you want to take out of it. There are two opposites: Let's call them love and hate, or whatever. You have these contrasts between good and evil, or I would say the absurdity of the knowledge of these two things, but not being able to solve it.

When I was very young and active in politics as a student, I thought in my naïveté before I was thirty that there would be no wars in the world because people had to be as intelligent as I was to realize that war is impossible to understand. But all these irrational sorts of powers in man, you know about them, but you cannot solve them. You know that good is a result of evil or evil is a result of whatever.

I think this story is to be seen in consideration of the things that happened around it. To try to find out why should love – that's the only thing people are interested in – why shouldn't it be possible when all the circumstances for making it possible should be there? You can ask if she was a traitor, but I think the politics and these things were the traitors of their love, if you put it that way. Because if you call somebody a traitor or somebody that is betraying their own country, that's one of the worst things that you can do.

In Norway during the wartime, you had all these women who fell in love with German soldiers, and tens of thousands of children were born as a result. Even in Norway at that time, with the government in exile in London, they had this special law that said that a woman married to a citizen of an enemy state automatically loses her citizenship, which means that every Norwegian woman who married a German or Austrian soldier automatically lost her citizenship. So for men, the worst thing is to be betrayed by a woman. If an enemy soldier takes away your girl, that's the worst thing that can happen to a man. But she did the only right thing during that period – she fell in love with an ally, a Russian. We were all friends. And then afterwards, everything turned around.

So she was constant in her sort of decisions, and so was he in a certain way. And it's very interesting to show this film in Norway and different countries and in Russia, too, because they all view the film in different ways. I just spoke to one of the interpreters we're using on the feature film that is helping the Norwegian girl in Russian things. And she said, "You know, they were trying to say that your fatherland, you know, your own country, comes above love, children, family, everything." So when she says that she betrayed her country, he might not have had the guts to do the same thing if he was trained in another country where you have another ideology.

So I think it's the condition of good, the condition of love, the surroundings, the politics, all the problems that you have today – it's the same thing. When one war is over there's another thing. When communism went away, then you had the Muslims. And then you have Bush and I don't know what you have. But it's the same thing going on, and it seems that no one is able to solve that problem that she tried to solve. And she was, of course, considered a traitor, a tragic person, and everything. I think she's a heroic person, following the voice of her own heart.

So that's maybe the main thing of it. But she says at the end that, "Happiness was so close. It was so possible." She thought she was naive enough to believe that this force was so strong that nobody could stop it except for politics and cannons and guns and all these silly things. So you can make whatever you want of this. What you can maybe criticize is: Is this too much to take into consideration? What is the most important thing? But I think you have to place the story in some kind of political framework. That's what I very often feel is lacking. These things are pointed out very simply. It's black or white. There are all these war movies where you have the evil ones. There was someone who just wrote a book about the two lives of Adolf Hitler. The one scenario asks what would have happened if he had been accepted into the art academy. What would have become of him if they hadn't said no? He went and used his art in another way. Goebbels always wanted to be a great writer. He admired Hamsun. He could never be a good writer, but he was really an artist in other ways. And this writer said, "I'm against everything that Hitler stood for, and so forth, but I cannot exclude him from mankind." You can't get away with it.

There's also a book or a play called *Hitler's Childhood*. Leonard Cohen has written a very good poem about Adolf Eichmann. He says, "Just a name, born, dead," and it says, "Ten fingers, two ears, two eyes, thirty-two or thirty-one teeth." And he said, "What did you expect? Claws? Vampire teeth?" A normal human being, just like anyone of us, except for me, of course. [laughter] I'm a good one.

ANDERSEN: Actually, I've got another one. You said that this film is about the conditions of love. If somebody wants to make a film about the conditions of love, I mean, you didn't start by saying you were going to make a film about the conditions of love. How did you find this theme? How did it end up becoming a great documentary about the conditions of love?

JENSEN: It was most of all because of Gunvor Haavik, knowing about her, reading the book, being interested in all these kinds of problems, especially up in the North, where the border was very close. When I started to study, I studied history, French, and I decided to study Russian as well, you know, the neighboring language. Knowing French, you could have the key to all the continental languages in Europe, you could easily learn Italian, Spanish and Portuguese actually, too. If you had history, you could maybe learn something about the world. But studying Russian, you had a key to all the fifteen Soviet republics, and to all the Eastern European countries, which were more or less forced to learn Russian. So when I studied in Russia, I traveled around the fifteen republics. Once the Soviet Union fell apart, all these republics had a lot of problems, as you know. I was in all the republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, all the Baltic States. They all spoke Russian.

Gunvor Haavik studied Russian at a very early stage. It was a fantastic initiative to take for a young girl in the 30s, just having seen a troupe of Cossaks dancing a dance in her small native town. And she went to Oslo. She was supposed to study medicine, but she gave up and went into nursing and decided to learn Russian by herself, just like that. So when she started to work in Bodø as a nurse, she spoke it fluently. And she did a very good job with the prisoners. It was very seldom at the time. When I studied Russian in Oslo, there were only twelve people in the whole class. And it started every second semester. Only twelve people in Norway at the time, even though we had a common border. And still the interest was so low. So that was one of the best decisions I've ever made to learn Russian. I've had a fantastic time with this language because it opens up a lot of things. I was there during the 100th anniversary celebration of Lenin's birthday, and it was a fantastic time. No one believed the Soviet Union would fall apart. Nobody could ever believe that.

Anything else?

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I was trying to remember the name of the main Russian man. What's his name?

JENSEN: Vladimir Kozlov.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I was just wondering: When you were interviewing him, did you ever have any doubts that maybe he was representing himself in a better light considering his history and the fact that it was five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and people who had been in the KGB and been so

compromised now had the opportunity to re-create themselves? I had no reason to doubt him at all, except there was this one moment where it was revealed that when he went back to the Soviet Union after being a prisoner, he was imprisoned but then released. My understanding is that a lot of prisoners in the Soviet army, when they were released and went back to Russia, they were killed or tortured. Was there the possibility at that stage that he had been taken in and compromised by the regime?

JENSEN: There are two myths about prisoners of war. The one is that everybody was more or less poorly treated, which is very exaggerated actually. If you go back to the paranoia of the Soviet Union, in the beginning when you had the intervention wars, that didn't end until 1924 – nine years before Hitler was elected in Germany. And remember, his party was called the National Socialist Party. And there was a lot of socialism in some of his plans like the Autobahn and lodging and normal people and all that. There were some elements of that in his policies. So it was very, very early that you had intervention armies from England.

Concentration camp is an English expression from the far North in Russia. You had concentration camps during the intervention war. So this was very early. And they also had lots of troubles with Ukrainians, with German minorities in Russia. There were a lot of different people who didn't necessarily love the communist regime, but a lot of them were more or less forced into the Red Army. Some of them fell in the back. Some of them became traitors, fifth columnists from the Baltic States. There was a scandal in Sweden when the Swedes sent back Baltic soldiers to the Baltics that tried to get away from the Soviet regime after the war. They were all more or less killed.

So there were a lot of things like this going on in this situation that made the Russians, even if they were 100 percent paranoid already, they became 120 percent after the war. So everybody was examined very, very carefully. But it's a good question because when I show this film in Russia, a lot of the Russians, well I wouldn't exactly say they smile at him, but they don't believe him 100 percent. In Norway, he's very charming, he's a very nice man in many ways. So a lot of things can be read between the lines.

I think it's a good question because in the prison camps there were a lot of people with all sorts of tasks. They were organizing prisoners at the time. You had agents, the KGB, the communists, who were also taken prisoner. They were also electing things according to the ideology.

This woman, already speaking Russian, first helped him run away. Then she got herself a job with the first border commission between Norway and Russia in 1947. And that led her into a job at the Norwegian embassy in Moscow. When they started interrogating Kozlov and asking him his story when they took him to the KGB, they said, "How long do you want us to beat you up? One day, two days, a week, two weeks?" And he says, "Why?" "Do you think we are imbeciles? You met this girl during the war. She helped you get away. Then she comes to visit you. Then she starts to work in the embassy. How was that? When did you become an agent?" And he said, "I'm not an agent. I'm not a spy." And they said, "Well, you have to prove it." And how could he prove it? Then they said, "If she tries to recruit you, get recruited." It's a situation you can't get out of because the KGB already don't believe anything. So whatever you say, you have to prove it. If you cannot prove that you are not a counter agent, you have to prove that you are not a spy. It's impossible.

So what they did was use the possibilities to get together. And after a period of time, nothing happened. So the KGB became impatient and said, "There's nothing happening here." That was in the end. They took her and forced her to get into it. They already knew it during the wartime, I'm sure. But whether or not they considered it interesting? Of course they did.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: You never saw his KGB file at the archives because they closed it down?

JENSEN: I had a fantastic event when I came into the Lubyanka because I had good connections everywhere because of my Russian and my studies. From Lenfilm I had some good people. So I got into the real heart of Lubyanka, into the main office with the man. And I'm using that in the feature film because he had an office that was completely naked with a lot of telephones on, and some archives on

the walls and everything. And behind his desk there was a painting of *The Last Supper*. [laughter] It's true. If you put that into a film, you have to do it in a very discreet way because no one will believe it's true. But it was. And the man was sitting there, and my poor colleague from Lenfilm was completely pale. He was so nervous about being in that room. But I, of course, as always played a kind of naive Westerner who didn't think this was so serious.

So I asked if I could see her file. And this man, if he was white already he became even paler. He looked at me and gave me a devilish smile for a long, long time. He just looked straight into my eyes and said, "No, I don't think so." And I said, "Why not? Why not? It's all over. It was long ago. Why not?" And he said, "No, no." And I said, "Can you give me a reason?" And he said, "There is one simple reason. There are people in her family, there are people everywhere who are still alive. That's it. So take it or leave it." So I said, "Could I see a similar file? You have a lot of them here. Could I see how they look?" [laughs] And he smiled and he went up and opened the archives, and brought out three of these files and put them on the table. I wanted to grab one, but he went, "No, no."

But it was a good atmosphere because he had a lot of power. And of course he thought I was a complete idiot coming there in the first place. But it was a great experience. Also to have Kozlov, Vladimir get into the corridors there was a sensation at that time. Unfortunately, video was not so sensitive at that time and we had no lighting, so it's quite dark. But it was hard to get the possibility to do something like this.

You can really wonder about these things: Who is betraying whom? I think that the woman was the real person – the strong, honest person – and that's what the feature is also about: that a woman knows only chemistry when it comes to basics. And there is no way back. That's why many men are afraid of women who take too many steps too directly, if they come straight up to your face and say, "I want you." Most men run away if they are not the first one to do that. That's why I think women get raped because if they say no, they mean no. But a man is quite different. The only thing they have in common is the opposite sex.

So I think this woman is a real heroine, and could be a role model for what you should do. You should follow the voice of your heart, believe in it, and go all the way. And then all the circumstances around you have to be arranged in such a way that a family can be built, that you can eat clean food. When the woman gives milk to the children for the first time, it should be clean. That's the only basic thing. So if it isn't, if there's something wrong with all that, those are the problems we are facing today. That's the main problem now, more or less, that normality, chemistry is turning against us. But it doesn't matter. The earth will stay and live on after us.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: You didn't actually choose to tell the story of the KGB and politics. That's just sort of the background. You made a choice to tell a love story. So the circumstances could have been any country where this could happen.

JENSEN: Yes, that's the thing. In the feature, it's her sort of world. She's in her story with him all the time. That's what matters for her. All the other things are just surroundings that try, more or less, to destroy her possibility to meet him, destroy the possibility for love. But that's only leaking in from the surroundings. She's always in her world about him. And she uses all her strength, all her energy is used to experience that affair. And that's why she becomes so clever in a way. You saw the people from the embassy. Somebody said all kinds of strange things about her. But she managed to fool everybody because I think that the strength of love is so strong in a woman in a way that it's a basic force in nature. That's what I want to tell in the feature film much more than this realistic story. As I said, realistic stories: What are they except for the industry? The industry creates realistic stories that are already sold for entertainment.

So that's what I mean by there is no reality in told documentaries or fiction in a way, I think. But that's just my opinion. I'm not interested in trying to tell a story in a linear sort of intelligent way that you do in school. You have people to put the red marks and lines and say, "You should put this here and there and so on. And the story should be like this." Of course, it's also very hard to tell a normal linear story for everybody. You have five people telling a joke, and you laugh at only one of them because he has some other talents

beyond just telling the joke as such. And then these four other people go to fifteen courses, and they say, “We’ll give you five jokes, and we can train you to tell these jokes so that you almost laugh in the end. And we’ll tell you you’re so good that we’ll give you five more jokes in the next ten years.”

But it has to do with other things than just telling the story. It’s hard enough to tell a story well, but my work is to tell a story that is more realistic, i.e. the story that goes on without control in your mind. That story you cannot always explain in any order. I mean if you sit here you can think, “It’s about time he stops. I can listen to what he’s saying, but I’m back in my childhood. I have a few glimpses of this film. I’m thinking of my mother. All this. The sun is going down now. I’m starting to get hungry.” All these things happen all the time in your mind. That’s what I call the ‘inner realism,’ which is completely different from the so-called ‘normal’ story that most of the courses are based on. A normal linear and often chronological storyline with a normal start, building up, turning points and a logical end. That’s why there’s hardly any competition in my field because most people are telling these straight stories and trying to tell them the best they can. But I try in my sort of childish, naive, optimistic way to tell them in a more – well, I can’t really say more illogical way because every story you tell in one way or another has the sort of logic you choose – but it doesn’t necessarily have to be a linear story. I try to work in a freer, personal auteur kind of way.

This documentary has a mixture of a lot of things. But I hope the feature is a lot more free and open to get into what I call more of a state of being, without getting into too many logical conclusions. That’s why I say that the normal documentaries, or quite a lot of them that are made by journalists, that have interviews, some images and a commentary, you tell a story, or you have the same, more or less, in a feature. In my opinion, these are not realistic stories. These are already constructed stories that have an end. Whereas your life has no end before it ends. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me. Why shouldn’t my film be that way? I don’t know what’s going to happen. If I knew everyone’s life was as predictable as, let’s say, most American films or any other films, if life should be that predictable, I think it would be very, very boring. I didn’t know what kind of life I would live ten years ago.

And that’s what I also say if you have a relationship with somebody. You know, you’re married to the most fantastic girl in the world, and it lasts for five years. Then ten years later, you start to explain why it didn’t work. You have all the reasons why. You know, somebody’s always talking about the toothpaste or the bread or the refrigerator that fell down. Or the woman who never cleaned the floor, or the man that never cared. Then you can explain these things. But once you’re in the situation where all the emotions are there – jealousy, the hope that she’ll come back, the anger at throwing the television out the window – at that time you don’t know what’s happening with you or with your situation. But afterwards, you can always be wise, and can explain why things went to hell. When you can explain it afterwards, then you have a good film. But why should you make films that way? I ask you just to provoke the teachers. But it’s very hard to get any teacher to teach you that kind of way, to get what I call reality into the films. When some of my films were accepted into the film festival in Tromsø, a very intelligent man said I was the only realistic filmmaker in Norway, which I found was a very good compliment.

So these are some of the things that I try, but it’s very hard because we are not really trained to do these kinds of things. As I used to say, the films that I remember are the films I don’t understand. The art that interests me is the art that still lives with me. As I say, with the Mona Lisa, was she eating cucumbers? Is that why she’s smiling? You never know why she smiled, but people line up to find out, “Ah, beautiful smile.” But you cannot explain it. That is what art is about, is that it lives. I hope that some of the things I do, some golden moments in my films, will live, not only now but always because they have something in them. Not that they’re a cult like *Casablanca*, but they have some moments that are not sold, but still make you curious or make you feel that there’s something there that you can’t explain, something that irritates you.

Very often when they go to the cinema people say, “I didn’t understand it. What is that?” Who here can say that they understand anything? I don’t understand much, very little I would say. And as I grow older and older, there’s less and less that I understand. I don’t have time to see the same things again and again, so I prefer to see things that are complicated and interesting in more artistic ways.

I love art movies of all sorts, and reading poetry. If you translate poetry, that's one thing. It's very difficult to translate poetry. If you translate it directly, you lose the poetry. The only thing that you don't have when you have translated poetry word by word is the *poesie*. It disappears if you don't re-make it in a 'poetic way'. That's the trouble: you lose the things when you explain them. When you read a good poem, you can understand every single word that is written, but still what is between the lines is what is of interest. That's the art of poetry. So once again: I should hope that not many people start making films like this because then the competition would become very strong. But I am sure I will be – almost – alone anyway...

ANDERSEN: When you talked about the conditions of love, did you ever try to find out what was the force behind this love? Was it erotic love? Was it romantic love? What kind of love was it? Did it matter to you actually? Why was it so strong? It must have been very strong for both of them to fight so hard for it. There can be so many different types of love.

JENSEN: It can be platonic, as I've heard. I don't believe very much in this though. What he says there, when he came back for the second time, he says in the documentary, "When we understood that we were in love, that evening we became intimate." That's a fantastic way of putting it. It ended up the way that it always ends up.

I'm making a documentary series or actually a free documentary about the life and writings of Knut Hamsun. I don't know if you know him. He won the Nobel Prize for literature. He was a great writer. He didn't become sexually active until he was thirty-one. And he decided that if he became sexually active, it would destroy his ability to write about love. After he did it for the first time that was the end of that story. It turned out exactly the way he thought it would. You build up for the first time, then everything else is more or less repetition. But that was him. I'm not talking about myself or anybody else in this room. [laughs]

I think in those circumstances, the threats and danger surrounding the affair make it stronger, of course. She's a tragic woman in many senses. She betrayed her own country, and so on. Who else has ever had that kind of excitement in a love story as she had? But what price are you willing to pay for this? In Norway, you can have a fantastic house and fantastic furniture and you can live a relatively good life. But she had a very, very strong life. If you asked her, "Was it worth it?" I'm sure she would say, "Yes. I loved every moment of it." Until all the circumstances failed, and so on. But that's another story.

DAVID WINGATE (SOURCES 2): Why did she die in prison like that?

JENSEN: That's a very interesting question because when she was taken, she knew that was the end. She said, "I've been a spy. I can tell you everything."

WINGATE: She wasn't very old, was she?

JENSEN: She was turning sixty-six. It was half a year before she would have received her pension. And she said, "I will tell you everything. Just ask me and I'll tell you everything." She was imprisoned in January – February 1977, and she died in the autumn of 1977 in prison. They said they did an autopsy. They said they had brought her breakfast to her cell as usual, and when they went to collect what was left around eleven or twelve o'clock, she was dead. They tried to find out the cause of death, but didn't find any traces of anything. But one of the ambassadors in the film said, "I have no doubt that the KGB killed her in the prison."

So there was speculation, but no documents were ever released so nobody knows anything about the real situation. But the thing that is real is that nobody wanted a trial. Norway didn't want one. The CIA didn't want one. And the KGB didn't want one. Nobody wanted one because if you have a trial, then everything comes up to the surface. So one might speculate on it. If you ask me, I'm not sure.

WINGATE: But she might have given up.

JENSEN: She gave up when she was taken. She completely fell to pieces and said, "That's the end." And when I was making this documentary and also this feature, after I made *Cool and Crazy* – a documentary on a male choir that had a certain success – I got a letter from her sister that I had tried to contact when I was doing the documentary. And I wrote her a letter and asked to meet her to talk about her sister. I said, of course, in the letter that I just wanted to point out the positive things in this woman, that she decided to do the right thing but all the circumstances destroyed her. They used her, she was a victim, and so on. And she said, "You are only trying to do these things for sensation and commercial reasons And we have tried to forget about it, and now you're bringing it up again. I hate you," and all kinds of things like that. And I said, "Let's talk about it." And she said, "No, no. No chance."

Then when I made *Cool and Crazy*, I got this letter from her saying, "I've learned from this film that you must be a very sympathetic, nice, tolerant and humanistic person, so I ask you again to not do this film for the sake of the family and everything." And I said, "This is history. It has to be done. It has to be done because of the destiny of your sister." And then afterwards I have heard that, this sister, because of the shame and everything, never visited her sister in prison. She never saw her after she was taken, and I think she has a very bad conscience about it. She's still alive, I think.

WINGATE: How far does the fiction film go? Does it go to her death and beyond?

JENSEN: Well, that's the enigma that I want to tell because that's also what I'm thinking about talking about my approach to things. If you go to historical persons to make historical documentaries or features or whatever. I never make films of historical issues that had happened before my lifetime. They are all taken out of my own life story in a way. So for me, doing this on Gunvor Haavik, even as a feature documentary or other things I do, even Knut Hamsun, then it's in my own sort of historical time. It's in my own lifetime. So if you want to make something about a historical person who had lived long before your own lifetime you have of course no chance to know who this historical person is and the milieu around him/her. You can tell the story from A to B, as they want to do in television with the Hamsun story, for instance: He was born in 1859, and all this what I call the linear story. But I want to tell the story from my approach. How do I evoke him today as a film artist? How do I approach his creative energy? What made him a fantastic writer? More than to tell a linear story of all the events in his lifetime.

And the same with this feature, *Icekiss*, because I think when you start with the past in a feature, it's after all now. You consider the past from the moment that is now. It's the same with the time today: In your mind you mix what is happening outside the window with the archival footage that happened in your lifetime. And the fantastic thing about film language is that there's only one cut between the North Cape, the Film Camp, and Africa. It's only three cuts, and you can do that. Or you can say, "No, I am in 1945. And then in the next cut I am in 2008." It's only you who can decide what kinds of associations you want between the different stages in your film.

So I work very often on associative visual things, sound, and also on intuition. I made a film called *Stella Polaris*. The manuscript evolved from being at a place, a key. I saw a key standing alone in the sea outside the place because the place was deserted, nobody lived there, everything was falling down, and this key was standing in the middle of the water. And this key was a fantastic image of something that had been. People had come there, lived there, gone. They were coming and going by boat to this key. This visual image started my manuscript. I started by saying, "What is this key?" There's a boat coming. Okay, so I put in a boat. Then I said, "Who's in the boat?" I don't know. I will go to a house and see if there's somebody in there. All the visual associations of how you build up a manuscript, which is completely different from the linear way, where you have a story and you develop the story. I'm trying to find a freer approach to what I like visually, and without necessarily asking for the rational meaning of it.

When I started off as a filmmaker, I started in England with very bad equipment. I had only the exposed film with me from Finmark and almost no sound. I was shooting everything silently or mute with a Bolex camera that was making a lot of noise. I did very little sync sound. So everything was visuals. And then from the visuals, I created a story and added sound afterwards.

Most of the manuscripts, if you have scriptwriters, are made in the tradition from literature, theatre, and linear stories. And that's good. I think it should be done because then you know what you get. Or, as I use to say: The worst thing about Coca-Cola is that it's good. So I mean, everybody is free to make exactly what they want to do within the tradition. But I think it's harder to make a personal story in an open and free dramaturgy than in the traditional linear way. A lot of people do it in the traditional way all the time. And it's hard enough. But I think it's much more interesting to find out what is the essence of you as a film artist. I'm talking more about that than about being a man in the industry because then it would be a waste of time to invite me here. I'm not a man of the industry, making 'official' stories. That's why it's always a battle to get the money to make my films. But when you believe strongly enough in what you're doing, if you want to make something strongly enough, nobody can stop you. It's not possible. That's my naive belief. Every single person is unique. There's only one you. There's only one like you. So if you find out what that is, and you cultivate your own little niche, that one little part of your personality that is different from everybody else then what you do will be unique. We are all alike, but all different. So if you can cultivate your own ego or personality, I think nobody else can do just your thing. It's not possible because there's only one you. You might even cultivate that in traditional stories of course, but for me, it's about trying to express this chaotic inside of myself in some unique form. And I'm very happy to have found the film medium to do it. I've tried to do it in a lot of experimental films, short films, even in documentaries, also in features, with very different results. Not always as good as I should hope, but it's on the way.

A journalist was interviewing me not so long ago, and he was asking, "What will you be doing in ten years time?" And I said, "I'll still be the oldest, working film director in Norway."

Maybe you have some questions? This is going in all directions, as my films do, and like I said, if you're lucky you'll get a good one. If you're unlucky, you'll have a bad documentary or reportage. "Hold on, be strong". That's a good story. That was the Norwegian song in the Eurovision song contest – "Hold on, Be Strong." I was watching this with my wife Mona, because I'm very interested in surrealism and abstract matters. So if you see this European Song Contest, I think it's very interesting. I never guess the right melody. I never understand why a certain melody wins. I think it's like this with a lot of people.

Once during this contest when I was in the kitchen pour the wine, I heard a fantastic song. I thought, "This is great! This is great! This must be the best one" But Mona said this is not one of the songs in the contest, it is an assembly of all the songs!! [laughter] "Ah, that's a good one." They were all the same, in a way, but when they were put together they sounded surrealistic different. I couldn't hear the difference between them because they did it in a way that everything seemed the same – but different. So I was fooled by that one...

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: Do you also make fiction films or is *Icekiss* your first one?

JENSEN: No, this is actually my fourth fiction film. And I've made three documentaries for the cinema. And then all sorts of other things. Altogether, I think I've made sixty or seventy films. It's strange today because the film world has come back to the basics. When I started many, many years ago, I had one camera and shot alone. The only difference is with all the video available today, you also have the sound at the same time. Still today, when I edit my feature with the best editor in Norway – in my opinion, she's a great, great woman – what frustrates me is that when we edit, she's always bringing in the sound. It has to be there and in sync. And I say, "Forget about the sound. Let's do the images. Let's do the picture." "No, we have to bring in the sound." But you lose visual energy by working this way.

So I started out with one camera, almost no sound, did all the reconstructions afterwards. Every now and then I put a microphone into the flower vase where people were sitting in order to try to get some sound, and wrapped a lot of things around the camera so it couldn't be heard. That was entertainment for the people I was going to shoot. Sometimes it was very hard. But it was a very hard school. Also the equipment we used – Steenbecks, Moviolas, etc. – I'd never used before. It was very hard to do sound. So I edited all my films visually first, and *then* worked with the sound.

Today I think it's very important that everybody has some connection to the camera. In film schools today, they get a lot of practice. But some people don't get any further directing because they don't shoot their own films while waiting for their projects to get funded. I've been working on this feature for ten or fifteen years because nobody wanted to make it in the beginning. I remember I went to one of the funders who said, "We cannot make this film." And I just laughed at him and said, "You don't know what you're saying. Do you really want to go down in history as the one who said no to this film because that will be publicized afterwards? I will never forget that you were the first one to say this film can't be made. I know your name, and it will be in the papers." [laughter] "Do you really still mean that you're not going to help because this film is going to get made anyway and in spite of what you say?" I was just laughing.

Nobody can stop you, of course. But while you are waiting for the money you have to do other things. There are a lot of people who say, "We've tried, we've tried. We've tried a hundred times, but nobody wants to make it." They get sour and in a state of despair. They destroy their relationships, and don't know what to do. But in the meantime, during these ten years that have passed since I gave that manuscript to a consultant to get money, I've made three documentaries for the cinema and one other feature, and lots of documentaries, some of them I shot myself: small, experimental films – five, ten minutes long. Because I think it's important to have the camera in your hand and to edit, to be in the mood all the time while you're waiting for your big projects to come through.

Some people have one or two manuscripts, but they don't do so much in between. I think you have to work in between, you have to work all the time. Never stop looking at the world through the camera, never stop searching for your style and your personality. I don't believe in this notion that, "I'll do this and that. I'll work in television and do commercials." I used to tell film students, "I never make commercials. But you, please do it. Do it, do it, do it. Of course." And they'd say, "Well, we have to survive." And I'd say, "Of course you have to survive. But whatever you do, you can fool everybody else, but you can't fool yourself." Because I think if you want it strongly enough, it has to be all the time, from the very first thing that you do. And, of course, it's a tough business. A lot of people give up, but I'll say to this class as I say to everyone, there are as many geniuses as there are people here. If you just find that little key to yourself to express that little well or that little diamond inside that nobody else has seen, you have to brush it.

I actually made a film about a diamond cutter. It's called *Caught by the Light*. It's a stone. You don't see it as a diamond; it's impossible. But then you start to shine it, and it's fantastic in the end. That's the way I think you have to go. Some stones you can see at once that it has these qualities. But I think even the smallest stone can be brilliant in the end. So you have to do that all the time, don't give in.

ANDERSEN: Back to your childhood, I think you should tell some more about your background because I've known you for thirty or forty years. But I think it's interesting to hear your story about your background because I've very often found that good filmmakers, dedicated filmmakers very often have strong emotions. And strong emotions very often come from strong experiences in life. I think very often that if you don't have strong experiences yourself, it's very hard to identify with people who have strong stories and to tell their stories. So to me, perhaps your own personal conflicts or strong stories in your own life could be a great source of inspiration. I don't know if it's like that for you, but for me it was like that. I think you have to learn to confront yourself in order to be able to confront other people. I think in your film that's what you're doing. But how does that link to your background?

JENSEN: It's of course, linked. It's your life that you're taking it from. That's what I don't understand also. Lots of people run off to books. There's a fantastic new book, and they buy the option to this book and it's a fantastic movie. Or they say, "Oh, this is interesting and this is interesting." But, of course, you know that that is going on all the time. That's the industry. That's the mainstream. That's television. These are the series. You know, all the things that have to be made, and that are made all the time. But as I said, I think you have to take the inspiration from your life, from your own experiences. If I were a young filmmaker in Norway today, I'd be a hundred percent desperate because everything is so good. I would be completely desperate and show what an absurd life you're living in a very rich country when you know what else is going on in the world. And you know that being very rich today is because of others having it maybe not so good. So you should show the world that you cannot live in this situation where people are not more

equal. For me, it's too late. But I bring it all from my own background, talking about wars and such, because I've experienced all these things that are repeating themselves. So I find an excuse to live in this very quiet and nice country, and try to make my films be international or cosmopolitan, all from my experiences in life. So I'm so happy to have experienced war and to have had a very tough childhood. The same with Hamsun. That's the myth of the artist – they have to have a very tough life in order to be able to create something.

But look at Germany today: there's so much coming from that country because there is so much that has been suppressed that has not yet come to the surface from the generations that have gone. So there are so many things going on there, as there will be in the ex-Soviet Union. Think of Russia. In Germany, they have tried to find out about things. You couldn't sell dolls of Hitler and Goebbels and Göring on the streets of Berlin. You would probably be shot or the police would bring you in. You'd probably be crazy. But if you go to Moscow, they sell Lenin and Stalin and Putin and everybody, and it doesn't matter. Why is that? It's an interesting question. Why can they do that there but why not in Germany? I think it's because Russia is so misunderstood, both by Russians and by the rest of the world. To have to accept or face the fact that Stalin and others killed 20 – 30 million of their own people – nobody that I've spoken to, none of the Russian actors in my film or in Lithuania, where I met people who'd been in the KGB and were sent to the Gulag, or who died in the blockade or who were killed by Stalin and so on – everybody has that sort of history. But how do they face that fact, that sorrow, that trauma? It doesn't disappear in a generation.

The best films today, and I'm not talking about the blockbusters, but the best films today come from Russia, when they go into their trauma. Like *Burnt by the Sun*, you name them. Tarkovsky, for instance. His films were not possible to make because of the suppression and everything, but they're part of film history. So you can imagine when this generation starts asking, "What did your grandfather do during the Stalin time? What did your grandfather do during the Nazi time?" Or what did my grandfathers do during the occupation in Norway? Did they collaborate with the Germans? A good girlfriend of mine is making a documentary about her grand uncle, who was one of the worst Nazis in Norway during the war. He was liquidated just before the war ended. She's now the third generation trying to make that story. And she's stopped everywhere. Her family doesn't want to talk about it. Nobody wants to talk about it. It's a shame, even in Norway. If you go to the children that were born from Germans, for instance, that are still alive, their destiny doesn't disappear in one generation or in two or three generations. A war lasts for generations or even centuries. That's the trouble in Serbia. That's about a battle that started in the thirteen century.

So history is alive. It's part of the whole sort of mess that humanity is in. I also think that knowing that today, being a young filmmaker in Norway, for instance, what is your place in this world? In this country? You can work for television, make commercials, have a good life, have a good house, and then you can complain about the social democrats and so on. It's all right. But there are possibilities for personal filmmakers with this desperation of knowing "How can I live such a good life?" knowing what's going on. In Norway, you have the new rich just like in Russia, and you cannot change it in a way. So if I were a young filmmaker, I would be desperate being in this situation where there are so many possibilities. Today when it rains in Norway, it doesn't rain rain, it rains cameras. There are so many cameras in the air. There are so many people sitting with AVIDs. They're everywhere, making all sorts of films. But how many of them are desperate? Maybe a few. But the first one who is really desperate will make film history, also in Norway. But you really have to be desperate.

That's what working on Hamsun has made me realize. He spent ten years of his life without any success, trying to do what had been done already. He tried to write like the great writers in Norway. He tried to write like this and that. And he went to some of his great idols and showed them what he'd been writing. And when he went to Bjørnson, who had won a Nobel Prize, he said to him, "I think you should be an actor. You're a very good actor." And he disappeared. He spent ten years in desperation, and the first book he wrote was *Hunger*. But it was not about 'hunger.' It was about the hunger of trying to express himself. And in this fantastic film, which was made by Henning Carlsen in 1966, which I recommend to everybody, with Per Oscarsson playing the main role there, he said, "There's no story to it. It's the first modernist book. There's not a real story." But this man, he's so desperate about hunger. Everyone thinks he's hungry. He

has nothing to eat. But he eats what he's writing himself because it's not good enough. He starts to eat the paper. He destroys his own story. He's desperate. And that, I think, is the difference between creating nice stories, trying to be clever. Cleverness is the main enemy of art. The more clever you are, the less art you produce. So I think filmmaking should be an expression of desperation.

I'm working on a very new project now. I'll take it all out because I'm getting a little impatient about some of the things I've been doing lately. So I have a very strong story I'm going to do.

ANDERSEN: Can you tell us a little bit about how you work because as far as I know, you don't write these American-style screenplays? Is that a problem when trying to sell your ideas?

JENSEN: In one way, I cannot complain because in the end I have done more or less what I've wanted to do. But what I can complain about is myself. In order to be able to make your films, you are always forced into making compromises. When you are a writer, you can afford this and this [holds up sheets of paper]. Even if you have to eat the trees outside, you can still write. You can get some paint, and you can do something. But with film, you know how complicated and expensive film is. I've become more and more aware of how difficult it is. I've become more and more arrogant, trying to hide the inner explanation that it is so difficult. The language is very complex, especially if you want to go into my way of doing it. It's very complex. It offers a helluva lot of possibilities. But if you want to make something personal, it has to begin with your idea, go through your manuscript, through the people that read the manuscript and try to find out if they want to produce it or not. They start to press you. All the people tell me, "You have some talent. You are quite clever. But if you listen to me, can't you do it a little more like this? I'm sure that the people in the audience will be very happy if you try to change your story just a little bit. Not very much, but you know..." There are compromises all the time.

Then you have the budget. Not long ago, I was presenting this feature that I was supposed to show a few clips of before you fall asleep here to all the chiefs of the cinema in Norway. They have a 'kick off,' as they call it, when they gather to see all the new films. So I was there to show them two scenes of my new film, and talk a little about it. Before I came, this woman was showing the marketing plans of some films she was distributing. *Hulk* was one. *Mamma Mia* was another. And then there was a monster film, *Kung Fu Panda*. And the trailers, the sound of them – it was all very impressive what they had done. They had some kind of cooperation with McDonald's. She spent half an hour showing all the products.

Then I had to present my little film. And the budget they had just for the trailers and the products was more than I had for my entire film. So I came there, and I said, "This film will be shown secretly, only in very small, intimate places. There will be no trailers. And because it's about espionage and so on, the date of the premiere is unknown." [audience laughter] "And the number of prints is secret." They had 200 – 300 prints, and this film has maybe fifteen.

But afterwards, all the chiefs of the cinemas came up to me and said, "All these American films merchandise themselves. They work for themselves. Everybody goes and sees them anyway. So we want to pour our energy into the other films." The system in Norway is still a social democracy, so they want you to have a chance to get your film out there. And as I said, this documentary I made about this male choir was seen by 600,000 people. It was shown on Norwegian television and everywhere. I was almost afraid because it was such a success. When I go to present my type of manuscript, I say, "Well, when I presented my manuscript about the male choir, everyone understood that this would be a film that would be seen by 600,000 people in Norway. Old men singing songs from a little fishing village. This will be a fantastic success," I told them. They knew, of course, that nobody believed in it. Nobody believed that this film would be seen by 600,000 people.

So you live in a dream that your film will be seen by a million people. And if they don't see it, then I comfort myself by saying, "Somebody has to make films for history, too." So I'm making cinema only for history, and for a few intimate audiences. That's a joke. But in Norway, it's still possible in Norway, like in a few other countries, because the competition is so low, they have an alibi in me because I've been working so long. So they say, "Well, give him some, and we'll see." Because the laws say they also have to make

some smaller films, some art films, and so on. There are very few people making them. So they say, "He's old. Give him the money. But not as much as for the other films. A little less, but let him get it." Because they know that they'll never be able to get rid of me. So if you don't get support for a project, you just have to go on.

But for a manuscript, I write them as *film* manuscripts, not as literature. That's also a strange thing that you want to make films based on visuals and not on literature and theatre. And I think that theatre or actors are *one* means of expression in a film. Dialogue is another one. But nobody says that you have to use dialogue and that the dialogue should be the most important in your film.

I used to say you can make a film on just anything, even a film about the drawing pin if you have the right person to sit on it. [audience laughter] That's a good story. It's a small one, but it could be a good one...

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