

Around five – die Untertitel

(Hinweise auf das, was das Bild zeigt, stehen in Klammern)

(Fußballspiel im TV)

(TV_Ton)“We are about to qualify for the World Cup. Everything is ready for Iran to go to the World Cup. The match will be broadcast again tonight at 10:30.”

This is a match between Iran and Bahrain which, as the football commentators would say, will shape destiny. The winner will qualify for the World Cup. I was thinking about making a film about the making of “Five”. A friend phoned me and reminded me that the match would be on 7 o'clock today. Well, today is the 7th June. Well, it is obvious that I no, it is not obvious. I would like to say that I am not a football fan. However, the first shot of my short film “Bread and Alley” started with a kick - 30 odd years ago and my first feature film “The traveller” was totally about football. It is the story of a boy who travelled 400 km to watch a match, but in the end, he falls asleep. So I should confess that I am not a football fan. I have not yet followed a live or a pre-recorded match to the end. I even started to watch this match from the second half. I set up a camera in front of the television, so that I could use this match in “Five”. Not so much for the similarities, but more for the contrasts. I should point out that, at the moment, two of my colleagues who helped me in the making of “Five” are in this stadium. One of them is making a movie about football and the other one is here for two reasons – first football and then because Samadian is everywhere. He is now shooting the match from amongst the 100.000 spectators and he was with me when I was working on “Five”. Well, the football match is over and Iran made it to the World Cup. Naturally, I am very happy now but it is good, after being in a football atmosphere and among a crowd of 100.000, to go back to the silent atmosphere of “Five”.

(Strand mit Menschen)

“Five” is a real experimental film. I had not done anything like it before. It is something between perhaps photography, poetry and cinema. However, it is not a combination I have worked with before, so I do not really know how to categorize it. As I said, it is an experimental work but it is very difficult to speak about an experimental work. I am working on the order, partly based on memory and partly based on watching the rushes that Seifollah Samadian shot from behind the scenes during the time we were working. It was supposed to be done as a simple conversation in London but I had a bad cold. Therefore, by looking at the rushes, and looking at the questions that Geoff Andrew prepared for me, I will try to tell you what I remember about it. The subject of water, which is the main theme of these five films, is apparently limited to the one or two months spent somewhere by the Caspian sea, somewhere quiet. I was writing the storyline for a film called “Crimson Gold” for Jafar Panahi. At the same time I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time wandering around and observing. That was where I met the piece of wood that had come from the sea and was waiting on the shore to return to the sea.

(Holzstückchen und Wellen)

I say “met” because it was not an object for me, a mere piece of wood. It was a person who had spent an age in the sea and become a receptacle for memories. Well, wood does not naturally belong in the sea, and I think it was feeling alienated here compared to the other pieces of wood on the beach who did not have its experiences as a seafarer. Its body was covered with the marks of different experiences that it had gained in the sea. It looked like a sea creature. In my opinion, the sea life had shaped something beyond a simple piece of wood out of it. Now...if this does not sound too unimaginable, it wants to return to where it has come from. This way of looking at objects, people, in my opinion, is the quintessential element of my work. We should set our imagination free about everything and based on conjecture, bring back...the value that something has had and has lost.

(bei Kiarostami zu Hause)

With this in mind I think we should extract the values that are hidden in objects and expose them by looking at objects, plants, animals and humans, everything. In my opinion, “Five” is the result of this way of looking at things. Through the shots that I have, I will try to provide you with information about the making of “Five”.

(Holzstückchen und Wellen)

In the making of the first film “wood”, two methods could have led to the end result. The first is the logical way, the way of cinema, the way of industry and it benefits from the experiences and expertise of others. This method of working tells us that in order for the wood to break and disintegrate at the right time, a design is necessary. With some explosive and a remote control, the piece of wood can be broken into two at the right time.

(Holzstückchen in 2 Teilen)

Now the piece of wood is broken into two pieces. Some higher waves are supposed to come and take one of the pieces out to sea and leave the other piece on the shore, which the waves will not be able to take out to sea. This can also be achieved, for example, with the use of a small temporary barrier. You can block the water and then release it at the right time. Then the higher waves can take the first piece away from the scene and the second piece can be fixed on the shore so that it cannot be taken by the waves. The first piece can be pulled with an invisible thread – by someone who is sitting out of the frame, on a boat, for example – very slowly towards the horizon until it is out of the frame. This is something that can be simply achieved through cinematic techniques and special effects.

(Kiarostami zu Hause)

The second method is simpler, but also more complex. This is very different from the cinematic approach, which involves the cooperation of several technicians and different people of different skills.

(Holzstückchen am Strand)

This is a writing job and does not need a crew. One or two companions are enough.

(Crew am Strand)

For this way of working, you need the earth, wind and water to cooperate. You need a tail wind. You need a good wave. As backgammon players say: “It’s how the dice fall that counts”. I would like to tell you a story that I just remembered. It is said, that in old times, a philosopher in India invented chess after much pondering and presented it to the Maharajah of India. The Maharajah was so impressed with this logical and mental game of war, that he presented it to the Iranian emperor as a symbol of Indian intelligence. In doing this, the Indian Maharajah was delivering a philosophical challenge. Bozorgmehr, the wise vizier of the Iranian king, Anowshirvan, deciphered the secrets of this complicated game and the logical warlike thought behind it. He decided to respond to the Indian philosopher in the same way. Therefore, in return for chess, he invented backgammon with two small cubes called dice. This game takes full control away from the player and shows him that there are other factors contributing to one’s destiny than skill, intelligence and experience, factors that many of us are unaware of. Bozorgmehr called the game Pandnaakmak and sent it to the Maharajah’s court. He wanted to teach the young philosopher that here are other factors contributing to a game than skill and experience. These factors, like dice, may strike our lives at any point and a wise person is one who allows for these accidents in the game. These hidden powers are known as destiny or fate or ultimately, God’s will, or free will. I believe in these combinations of these things, even good and bad luck, as elements of a hidden pattern. I cannot deny the role of this hidden pattern – the role of accident – the occurrence of the power of destiny, neither in my personal life nor in my work. There are moments in all my films that I must confess are not of my making. This is not humility. In my opinion, “Five” should be watched with this in mind, the entire “Five”. Episode 1, episode 3 and even 4. The difference between well-crafted cinema and this is like the difference between chess and backgammon. In my opinion chess does not allow for this undeniable power. Everything is ruled and controlled by the gods of the scene – the producer and the director. Not being a backgammon player myself, I respect backgammon players. The reason that backgammon players boast is this – they bank on their luck and allow for this as a determining parameter in the game. Because really, in my opinion, if we imagine life without this parameter, we have lost some of our sense of realism. Now, digital film making helps a lot with the kind of cinema that is more about performance and related to hidden patterns. For me, who does not believe, as such, in literary narrative in cinema, the period of making “Five” was an opportunity for me to be the audience.

During this time I could tell my personal story as if I was the audience. In my opinion, sitting in a cinema seat has accustomed the audience to a mental laziness. Every member of the audience in their daily life, and in every situation, can understand the simple or sometimes complicated occurrences around them. Curiosity and intelligence are the two important factors that feed the human imagination and result in a self-understanding and the telling of a story that belongs to that person. Maybe this is an experience that allows anyone, who hasn't gone down the road of becoming a filmmaker, to tell their own story, using the facilities of the digital camera. This is a new piece of equipment that will have many benefits for artists and, as a result, for audiences as well. I believe we need more time to discover how to use this new phenomenon better. We should not feel frustrated if, in the hands of a lot of careless people, these cameras are only used for simple and worthless recordings.

(Hunde am Strand)

If I was going to invent another title for "Five", maybe it would be "Watch again", or "Look well" or simply "Look". These would not be unsuitable titles. I should say that my duty as the director of "Five", especially this episode ends precisely when I start the camera. Normally, the director's role should start, when shooting begins. So I do not really know how to define the creation of such works. Naturally this episode could not exist without me, although there was no input from me during the making of it. How can I explain this role of having no role? In summary this is, what happened. I switched the camera on and then I went to sleep because I started shooting when nothing could be seen on the shore. There was absolute darkness. I wanted to capture in the film the gradual brightening of the sky. When I switched it on, nothing could be seen on the shore. In fact, I was not even sure that the actors, who had not signed any contract with me, would be cast in the right roles for them. When I realized, that the director, who was me, could do nothing, I slept. In the morning, I realized, that everything had gone well, even better, than I had imagined. To be honest, I cannot even tell what I had in mind. Whatever it is, in my opinion, this second episode or "dogs", for me.... I do not believe at all that, through his own personal comments, the filmmaker can supply the audience with the key to decipher the riddle of the film. Therefore I am fully aware that I would be making a mistake if I were to analyze my own film. I am an audience here, an audience who is watching this scene, just like you are. Paul Valéry said: "I would like to amaze even myself in writing". I would say that I have achieved this. I am amazed by what I can see on the screen. On finishing each film, we achieve something that we have not made. What has been recorded here, is the result of an act of creation. This is from Bresson. I feel that in this creative act I have simply created the right conditions for this to happen. About dogs I used to think that they wag their tails to thank humans or to ask for a piece of bread or a bone. I did not know that they express emotions far more authentic than we ever anticipate. Here as you can see it can be something like "Good morning" or "What a good day", or even "Did you sleep well last night?". A strange relationship exists between them. I think like us, like some of us, they have a good understanding of nature. I had not watched dogs in relation to one another before. I had always watched them, when they were watching me too. I had never seen them in their own private gathering. You will notice that one of them wakes up from his bed, for whatever reason, and goes somewhere else and lays down on a corner of the sofa. When the other one wakes up, it goes and put its head next to the other one's on the pillow. The value of this episode, however, is not limited to the interactions between dogs. It is also about the relationship between the sky and the earth, the sky and the sea, which, after a while, unite to form one space. The waves become sea creatures and everything moves towards a total non-existence, and a new existence will appear from the heart of this non-existence. The still pieces of wood and stone that we saw in the beginning of the film gradually become mobile and move. Then, at the end of the film – again in complete stillness, like spots at the heart of nature – they disappear and die. And this cycle carries on. I think, this episode is more than a real film. Where the blue of the sky and the sea unify and the waves gradually turn into sea creatures, everything is completely annihilated in front of our eyes. And the 17 minutes of the film pass in such a way, and all this changes take place so slowly, that we actually we cannot see any change. But after a few minutes we feel that everything is moving towards an absolute brightness then it melts and is annihilated. This

17 minutes episode, I think, suggests eternity – birth, life and resurrection. And if it was shown as a cycle, it would have a better impact on the audience.

(Enten)

We kept 800 ducks by the sea. This is the number the duck keeper said we had, but we did not count them even though they passed in front of our camera one by one. 800 ducks by the water. They were supposed to pass regularly from left to right in front of our camera. When we look at them as crowd, the kind of order that you expect from them seems to be unlikely if not impossible. I do not know whether they know the scenario or if it is only an agreement between myself and the duck keeper. They do not know what role they should be playing in front of our camera, our digital camera. So far this is the biggest crowd that I have had in front of my camera. I cannot think of them as extras because every single one is supposed to play their role in front of the camera. Therefore none of them has a more colorful role than the next. However, each mistake can be plainly seen, leading to a need to repeat the shot. So they cannot be called extras. I should say that I usually panic with a big crowd in front of or behind my camera. This is why often in my films, I have very few people in front of or behind my camera. I know that in the movies the extras are usually managed by assistants. But looking at a crowd terrifies me, so usually the subject of my films is limited to one or two people. Maybe this characteristic is affected by the other things that I do during the year, like painting, photography, carpentry. This is why I am so protective of my solitude. And I should say that “Five” has been the most pleasurable work that I have ever done, because I preserved my solitude during the making of it.

(Enten)

They are getting ready to appear in front of the camera. A training period in a seaside camp. If I thought, that the audience for this film was to be only students of cinema, I would explain more. But I remember that once in a festival, a member of the audience said to me: “Do not explain to us, the audience, the secrets of your work. The audience do not like to know all the tricks of the filmmaker.” Therefore I should not disturb the audience's willingness to believe. We should believe that the ducks enter the scene in accordance with their roles, and exit. I know that you are wondering what their motivation is for this orderly march.? Well I will answer that in due course, but before I do I would like to mention this as an audience and draw your attention to the fact that you cannot really distinguish between their personalities and behaviour. As you can see, here in front of the camera regardless of their real motivation, whatever it is, it is a common motivation. But the difference in their behaviour in response to that common motivation, is obvious in the film, showing that the individual personality of each one is distinguishable from the other and also just how significant their differences are. This is something that cannot be seen in them as a crowd. Within the five shots of this film “Ducks” can be seen as a break, a break so that the audience can get ready for the next episode which is “Moon and swamp”. This is the relation between the toads and the moon.

(Mond im Wasser)

I want to distinguish between the making of “moon and swamp” and the other episodes. The making of this episode is more like making a normal cinematic work. It is obvious that this film was not shot all at once. The film looks as if it comprises only one shot but there are as many shots as there are patches of darkness in the film. There are several shots which are presented in one shot. The reason is obvious – we used a fixed camera. Because of the very slow movement of the moon, we could not follow it. With a fixed camera, in less than two minutes we would actually lose the balance of the picture and sometimes the moon would completely move out of the picture. Therefore, using the darkness between shots these shots are compiled in a way that shows continuity. We faced a lot of problems with this episode. We only had two hours in which to shoot it. Every night the moon shone directly over the pond and during this time there was an interplay between the moon and the cloud that was delightful. During these two hours we naturally could not fully benefit from this game of hide-and-seek. This was why each month we went to the same location. We only had two days in each month for this when the moon was full. We traveled 400 km and once we arrived, it was either raining or completely cloudy or the sky was too clear. Therefore, we had to wait until the following month for the right conditions for the interplay between the moon and the cloud

to exist. So we spend several month traveling to make this film. The idea of this episode, too, I think is based on ... watching and observing the surroundings. Of course I had an idea of the relationship or serenade between the frogs and the moon. I had seen this a lot in Eastern literature and Japanese haiku. A Japanese haiku says: "I am grateful to the clouds that, every now and then, deprive us of the sight of the moon." Maybe this whole symphony of silence, and than the duet, the trio , and the improvisation of the frogs, or toats, is an interaction of both, observation and non-observation, presence and absence. Hafiz says: "I do not complain about your absence. There would be no pleasure in your presence, were it not for your absence." Well.... so far I have already answered some of Geoff Andrew's questions. And I will now try to answer those which I have not answered and I prefer to have the pond in the background.

What was your purpose? A 'one-word-film', without story and conventional direction.

Well, a one-word-film without a story. I think that the expression 'one-word' is used by Kundera and we should ask him if he believes that a story can be told in one word. I should say that, regarding stories, basically I do not believe in cinema without a story. There's no such thing as cinema without a story. I do not believe in a cinema of literary narrative, but I do not believe that cinema can exist without telling a story. Most films tell their stories in a literary way. It can be called visual literature, or the visual novel, which is a better expression. But when a story comes from the heart of the picture and does not have a literary narrative form, it is the role of the audience to form the story and make their own personal story based on their background. "Five" should be put in this category. I think that even an abstract picture has a narrative. When someone pauses in front of a picture in a gallery during the moments that he is staring at the picture, consciously and sub-consciously, he is discovering or inventing the story behind the picture. The word "creation" is most apt here. So I think that "Five" is a narrative film but not like a literary story.

Is there for you any kind of overriding theme? (e.g. solitude, community, rebirth)

There is no specific theme for me. Even if there was one, I would not tell the audience what it was in advance. The themes to which you referred definitely exist in the film. Otherwise you would not mention them, but I do not like to limit the audience to these themes. I should also say, that I often have a problem giving my films a titel. I look for a title that does not define the film for the audience or direct them and lets the audience build their own film based on their experience or even their momentary need based on an open film or a half-made film. The audience's perception is what I derive most pleasure from even if it is not all what I had imagined. I have sometimes had the opportunity to meet with the audiences of my films and to speak to them after the film. I have come to realize that, most of the time, the creative mind of the audience has gathered something from the film and has built something that is much more valuable than my ideas. Therefore, I do not deny the themes that you mentioned but I also do not limit my films to those. Also I cannot help the audience to watch the film any better. The doubt or sometimes bewilderment of the audience.... when they say: "I did not understand the film" this is not unpleasant for me at all. Nature is full of secrets and discovering these secrets should not be easy. It is difficult and not fully understanding a film in my opinion does not mean that there is a problem with the film, or that it is faltering or the audience is suffering from any misunderstanding or lack of understanding. The relationship between the audience and the work is naturally sometimes quite complicated, I think.

Do you see it as more closely related to your other films or to your photography and/or poetry?

Poetry, photography and cinema are my mental involvements. I express this explicitly so it would be strange if they were not interlinked. In my opinion each shot is a seperate picture and every idea or story should ultimately become a poem. Even daily life should ultimately reach an essence that is akin to poetry and get closer otherwise....even the most insignificant relationships. Therefore, I think, if a process fails to get close to poetry, what is the point of it? I think of poetry, photography and cinema as three inseparable elements. The long shots of "Five" especially seeing as you watch without meditation by which I mean the dramatic interference of filmmakers like myself, are very

close to pictures. I think we can sometimes call a picture a film and naturally, a film is the producer of different pictures and should be the product of poetic thinking. Whether "Five" is or not, I do not know, but it should be.

Did you originally intend it for an audience? What do you want them to take away from your film? I definitely made it for myself, but before being a filmmaker we should remember that I am also in the audience. Once or twice a year I play the filmmaker for a month or two but I am in the audience for the rest of the year. Therefore I have made "Five" for my audience self. And perhaps they are made to be watched. As a member of the audience if I believed that they were not worth watching no doubt they would not be made. But in terms of who the audience of this film is, this is a real question because the perception of the audience cannot and must not be defined by me. My only advice is to sit in front of the screen with an open mind to not compare it with anything, especially with another film because it is not comparable and to have your own personal perception the one that come naturally to you.

How would you like them to see it? - not in galleries (video art)

It should be somewhere very comfortable. Definitely not a gallery because I do not like the audience's concentration to be broken by other people's coming and going. Of course it can be shown in a gallery, too, but episode by episode. However, if all five episodes are seen together it will have a better impact on the audience, the impact I intended. In terms of the numbers in the audience, the fewer the better. Definitely under 100 and even under 70. Better still 50. Comfortable seats preferably an armchair to provide the right conditions for a nap, even. A pleasant nap, and I am not joking. You know how annoyed some directors get on finding out that someone has fallen asleep while watching their film. I will not be annoyed at all. I can confidently say that you would not miss anything if you had a short nap. The important thing for me is how you feel once the film is finished. The relaxing feeling that you carry with you after the film ends. That is important. I do not believe in nailing the audience down at all. In certain films you cannot miss a moment, but when the film is finished, you will have lost the whole film, your nerves and your time. I declare that you can nap during this film. I wish we could tell the audience in advance what kind of film they are going to watch. I think this would help them to deal better with the film.

Why the dedication to Ozu?

I think it is not too far removed from Ozu's cinema. This is a tribute for me. Ozu's cinema is a kindly cinema. He values natural interactions, natural relationships, the natural human in all his films. His long shots are everlasting and respectful. The interactions between people happen in the long shots and this is the respect that I believe Ozu felt for his audience. Maybe one of the reasons for Ozu's everlasting appeal is that he worked on simple subjects and in his *mise en scène* he respected the rights of the audience as an intelligent audience. His films were not usually very technical which would make them appear nervous and melodramatic which you find with today's montage facilities. I think "Five" too, if it is not like Ozu's works, at least I can say that it is not in contrast with them or at least it is in contrast with the kind of cinema that Ozu strictly avoided.

Can you envisage making further films on this sort, or is it as far as you can go in this direction?

I cannot really envisage what I will be doing in the future. Definitely I think that one-word-cinema may be the end of the line or we are at a dead end. I cannot imagine defining cinema in half a word, but I think in the future if I get involved with certain subjects that prey on my mind I will compile and record them in the same way for an audience who are interested in and believe in this kind of work. I would like to finish with a line of poetry: "I am standing where the roads forks. Return is the only way that I know." I think I should in some small way return to the two-word and the more-than-two -word cinema. But if I find time I will not deprive myself of the pleasure of recording more films like "Five".

(November 2005)