

THE MAKING OF

Testees, protagonists, and guinea pigs

(welcome to reality)

It's been the order of the TV day for some time .

People as guinea pigs, so to speak, placed in artificial situations, exposed to stimuli, observed by millions.

No protests from animal rights campaigners, but psychologists getting ready...

Documentary film as an experimental design.

Are documentaries increasingly becoming modes of experimental procedure?

Situations being devised and provoked in order to generate and – camera at the ready – procure authentic joy and grief?

Spontaneous emotion (“under natural conditions”) is what matters to the commissioning editor .

What are we hoping to find when we film people?

A story, say the backers, sights trained on a script.

But is that what amounts to reality? Coherence? Planning? Dramatic structure?

And what for?

What's it supposed to do for the viewers? Enlighten them?

Heighten their self-awareness, knowledge?

It all began with Andi. He looked like he'd walked straight out of a film.

Could any filmmaker have resisted?

All one needed to do was to observe him in his natural habitat, document his life,

collect a wealth of digital data, then compress and project it – onto a story, for instance.

No complicated experimental design.

A highly suitable model of human existence – bursting with potential cinematic life.

Our hero in the middle of life, from a middle-class background and in the midst of Europe.

An image of what it is to be human, to be cast adrift in the everyday world.

A filmogenic embodiment of the hypothesis that human beings are mere pinballs of fate.

Man, the driven creature.

*And as the wind is only visible through what it causes to move, fate can only be known through its effect on life. **

He had sailed through that screen test, so to speak.

He happened to have the required qualities.

Cinematic, interesting, witty.

The ideal test subject: one who produced images just by being there.

Most of the time!

There are various methods of contemplating nature.

Observation by camera is currently considered to be especially faithful to the truth.

And scientific consideration? Observation and analysis? Does this method

of acquiring knowledge lead to more objectivity? How do we get closer to reality?

And which reality anyway?

** italics: quotes from the script*