CHAPTER 3

Ten: Everything there is to Know

Ten presents ten vignettes of varying lengths separated by fake leaders counting down from ten to one. Almost all the footage is taken from two stationary video cameras mounted on the dashboard of a car and trained on its front seats. The film's protagonist – played by Mania Akbari, a divorced artist with a young son called Amin – is a divorced artist with a young son called Amin. She features in each of the ten scenes, having intense conversations with Amin, her sister, a sex worker, a heartbroken woman, and two women on their way to mosque. She is Kiarostami's first post-Revolutionary female protagonist and – among many other things – perhaps a reply to the Iranian critics who had been attacking him for consigning women to marginal positions in his films.[1] With its starkness and severity, *Ten* employs a visual style startlingly different from the lyrical, contemplative, rural aesthetic for which the director was known (though of course, in certain ways it is also highly characteristic, especially for its violation of shot reverse shot conventions – that Kiarostami signature is taken to its next level here – and interest in what happens inside cars). The film's formal elements produce a minimalist rigour that forces us to consider the artifice of video while simultaneously creating a sense of realism: on the one hand, the set-up feels harsh and unnatural, at least when compared with the ease with which we are absorbed in films that employ continuity editing; on the other hand, Kiarostami's directorial presence is minimised throughout the movie, inviting us to indulge the impression that we are viewing reality unmediated.[2] Breaking the film into ten separate sections grants it an analytical aspect, such that we are able to study its parts in isolation, and reflect more acutely on the relations between them. The stationary cameras train our gaze very steadily on the characters, giving the film a discomfiting intimacy. The car itself provides a device for constraining and thereby clarifying the potentials for action and expression of the characters on screen as it opens the political, feminist question of the relation between public and private.

It is fair to say that there is something excruciating about this film: the viewer can feel trapped or pinned in place, anxious for a release from the

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severity of its framing and spare *mise-en-scène*. And of course, this is reflected in Akbari's situation: she is herself in search of lines of flight, struggling with the repercussions of her recent divorce from Amin's father (she interrogates the sex worker and the pious women she encounters with genuine curiosity, as though their lives might teach her how she could change her own). These features are crucial to the moral power of the film. Its formal conceits do not only provide a metaphor for the protagonist's own entrapment in a patriarchal society; they also force the viewer to face her situation with clarity and steadfastness. Given all this – and touching as it does on the sensitive topics of divorce, prostitution, abortion, pornography, and hijab – it is perhaps unsurprising that *Ten* was banned in Iran.[3] It is Kiarostami's most politically provocative film. It is also arguably the most significant from his mature experimental period.

Ten opens with a shot of the car's passenger seat as Amin climbs in. The first thing out of his mouth – coming just after an offer of ice cream from an off-screen Akbari – is a command: "We're late, get going." At almost twenty minutes, it is the longest of the film's scenes, and with its uncompromising depiction of the relationship between Amin and Akbari – and in particular of Amin's spitefulness, as well as the peculiar combination of worldliness and petulance that seems characteristic of him – it is probably also its most compelling. This is partly achieved by directorial fiat: the shot does not change for over fifteen minutes, leaving us to watch Amin as he argues with his mother. We are thus placed in claustrophobic proximity to him, forced to view not only what he says and how he reacts to what Akbari says, but also the bits in between, as Amin stares out the window, pulls faces, plays with his schoolbag, thrashes about in his seat, covers his ears in a huff, and so on. Primarily the two are clashing over Akbari's recent divorce. Amin, it becomes clear, thinks it was a selfish decision on her part; most of the scene is taken up with her defending herself, and trying to get Amin to appreciate her position. "You're like your father," she says at one stage, "he shut me away, destroyed me. He wanted me only for himself." Kiarostami's point will not be lost on the viewer: though just a boy of roughly nine, Amin has taken on the chauvinism of a much older, traditionalist Iranian male, and functions as a kind of mouthpiece for what we presume are his father's attitudes. When the argument reaches its acme Amin exits the car, and now the cut to Akbari finally comes, as she transforms from what Michel Chion has called an *acousmêtre*[4] into a rather beautiful woman. There is much to say about this decision to withhold Akbari from the screen for over a quarter of an hour. It means the cut to her surprises us. For the first fifteen minutes of the film, we could be forgiven for thinking that Amir is its protagonist, and that this is another Kiarostami

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film about a boy; the cut thus underlines the fact that Kiarostami has finally made a film about a woman. Perhaps it is also a ploy to shake Western viewers out of condescending complacency: to someone whose primary exposure to Iranian life had come through mainstream Western media, Akbari – with her makeup, designer sunglasses and clothing, and light headscarf (which sits a few inches back on her head, revealing a swathe of her hair) – will look quite shockingly 'modern'. It will take some time for the significance of all this to reveal itself, however. We are now given about two minutes of her driving, negotiating with another motorist for a parking space.

The second scene opens with an extended shot of a woman – Akbari's real-life sister Roya Arabshahi – waiting in the passenger seat. Nothing really 'happens' for nearly two minutes (though it is so excruciating that it feels much longer than this); instead we watch Arabshahi staring out the windows as she struggles in the heat, fidgeting with her (comparatively heavy) headscarf and manteau, and fanning herself. The shot switches to the driver's seat when Akbari arrives with shopping; they talk about their family as she starts driving. As they make their way through the streets, Arabshahi gives Akbari directions (she warns her about a deep pothole, which Akbari hits regardless). Arabshahi steers the conversation to Amin. She speaks of his aggressive behaviour with her own son, his disrespectful attitude toward his grandmother, and how he uses foul language. "He needs to go his father's," she says. "He'll set him straight. He won't call *him* an asshole." One wonders if this isn't her way of condemning Akbari's attempt at independence. "It's not easy," Akbari responds. "It's not easy, but you have to try," says Arabshahi, before Akbari stops to offer a lift to an old woman, who declines. "I'll be like her one day," Akbari says. Arabshahi gives Akbari some more unsolicited advice about Amin and his father before Akbari drops her at her destination.

The third scene opens with Akbari pulling over to ask an old woman for directions. She ends up giving her a lift to Ali Akbar Mausoleum. As they speak along the way, the woman offers Akbari both literal and spiritual directions. "My husband is dead, my twelve-year-old son too," says the old woman. "I also sold my house to go on a pilgrimage in Syria." She shows Akbari prayer beads, claiming they are her only riches in the world. "I gave everything I owned to someone who had twelve daughters," she says. "I gave all my things. I swear, on the Imam Reza." Akbari is mostly impassive as she talks, though eventually responds with a sentence that shows a certain kind of connection between the two women, as different as they are: "Very good. The fewer ties you have, the better you live." When they arrive at the mosque, she declines the woman's repeated offers to wait with her car so Akbari can go inside to pray.

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The fourth scene involves the film's only professional actor, hired because Kiarostami was unable to find a real sex worker willing to appear as such. Interestingly, we do not see the circumstances in which Akbari picks her up, as the scene opens in the middle of their conversation. Nevertheless it appears that Akbari has picked her up to talk, with the sex worker mistaking her for a trick. As they try to find a place where the woman can be dropped, Akbari presses her into conversation, and they speak frankly of sex, pleasure, men, money, and abortion. Akbari appears genuinely curious, but the woman admonishes her repeatedly for the moralism she perceives in her questioning. "You want to lecture me? An honest trade, a decent job . . .," she says with derisory laughter. "Who do you think you are, sitting at your wheel, lecturing me, guiding me?" "Don't you ever grow fond of the men you sleep with?" Akbari asks. She goes on: "Do you fall in love? Don't you like to have feelings before making love?" "I used to need them," the woman replies. "But I need them so much that . . . That's your problem. You're all clinging to your men. You cling to your husband." Eventually the woman tries to get Akbari to see the economics of her own relationship: "Who bought you that necklace? You see. And that night, he gave you . . . [Y]ou have the give and take too." Throughout the conversation we see only Akbari, though when the woman exits the car we do get a view outside it: we watch from behind as she crosses the road and enters another vehicle.

In scene five, Akbari picks up a young woman outside a mosque. We quickly learn that Akbari has been attempting to pray, as the pair discuss the mausoleum's rules regarding chadors: Akbari has just been turned away because she failed to bring one with her, despite being let in without a chador the day before (now it is Friday, however: the holy day of the Iranian week). The young woman says she visits the mosque once or twice a week; Akbari says it is not yet a habit for her. "But I came yesterday," she says, "and I wanted to come today as well." Along with the word 'yet', this statement leads one to wonder about the effect her conversation with the pious old woman might have had on Akbari. "It's interesting," Akbari says – the same phrase she used repeatedly when pressing the prostitute to talk – "I never imagined that I'd come to a mausoleum one day to pray." The young woman says she once felt the same: she wasn't always a believer, and even now only describes herself as believing "to some extent". Akbari says a woman – once again we wonder if she means the old woman from scene three – told her that praying at the mosque would see her wishes granted. The young woman says her own wishes haven't been granted yet, and she has been praying at the mosque for ages: she wants to be married, and has been praying for her lover to want the same. Akbari responds with her own story, saying her son has left her to

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live with his father after their divorce. "I don't know. I feel guilty at times," Akbari says, confiding that her feeling of guilt all but faded away when she first visited the mausoleum.

Scene six opens with Akbari picking up Amin from his father, who is parked across the street. Amin enters the car scowling and utters another command: "Get me to Grandma's." The pair soon argue over directions. The conversation turns to Amin's father's satellite television. It seems Amin is annoyed at not being allowed to watch it, and so craftily dobs his father in for using it to view pornography, in what seems a rare moment of collusion between mother and son.[5] After the next leader the car is very dark, and it is difficult to confirm who the woman in the passenger seat is (indeed – another signature – there are periods of complete darkness, presumably as Akbari drives beneath bridges or the like). Akbari's passenger – there are accounts of the film in which she is taken as the sister, as the young praying woman, and as an entirely new character with an undetermined relation to Akbari – has had her heart broken by the man who recently left her. Akbari is cold throughout the conversation, reproving the other woman for her failure to accept reality: "You can't live without losing. We come into the world for that." They decide on dinner; Akbari finds a park; another leader appears, then we are back with a happier Amin. At first the two manage to avoid shouting at each other, talking half-jokingly around the issue of Amin's father's new partner and whether she will make a prettier wife or better housekeeper. Ultimately it becomes an argument (again apparently provoked by a disagreement about directions), this time turning on Amin's assertion that Akbari works too much to be a good mother to him.

The ninth scene involves the young woman Akbari picked up in scene five. Her relationship has turned sour; the man she wanted to marry has refused her. For some reason Akbari is much more sympathetic to this woman, who pulls back her headscarf a couple of inches to reveal her newly shaven head. "It suits you," Akbari says, but does not hide her surprise: "Why?" she asks, as the woman shrugs and smiles. "Why did you do it? Let me see." The woman removes her scarf entirely. "What did you feel when you did that?" asks Akbari. "It felt great. I stopped crying. This is the first time I've cried since then," replies the young woman, as tears roll down her cheeks. This astonishing moment serves as the film's emotional apex: the brief final scene – which again features a scowling Amin on his way to his grandma's – is really more of a denouement. It concludes with a piano sequence from Howard Blake's *Walking in the Air* (another signature).

We can start accounting for the power of the film by reflecting further on the car. It is a formal device for physically separating the characters, and

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provides a claustrophobic structuring principle that grants the film a special intensity while simultaneously speaking to the protagonist's entrapment.[6] It also gets the viewer confronting a series of questions regarding the public and the private. For of course, the space of the car is an ambiguous one in this regard, a semi-private bubble one nevertheless finds in the street, where drivers in their bubbles interact with other drivers in their own. We are reminded of this again and again as the film unfolds, as intimate conversations are interrupted (sometimes for a few moments, sometimes for long periods) by what happens on the road. There is a problem being flagged about videoing, and the disconcerting 'realness' of the movie: what, exactly, are we *privy* to here? After all, part of the film's power stems from its intimacy, from how it gives the sense that the viewer has encroached upon private space. I want to say it presents exactly what reality television purports to, yet usually ends up travestying: human life in its ordinariness.

How is Kiarostami able to achieve this? The question is especially pointed considering many of the film's stylistic features – including the use of non-actors (who effectively end up 'playing themselves'), an obsession with faces, a focus on mundane personal problems, and a certain (implicit or explicit) promise that what one is watching just *is* real in some sense – are shared by the reality genre. The difference, I would venture, is that *Ten* makes a far more complex, far less bombastic claim to reality than does reality television. I am referring, first of all, to Kiarostami's commitment to revealing the possibilities and limitations of his own medium: the use of leaders, the austere visual style and lack of shot reverse shots, the radically 'unnatural' camera placement, etc. – the movie, as is typical of Kiarostami, constantly brings our attention to its own constructedness. At the same time, however, the film also displays a singular realism, evident in its refusal to use music, its refusal to *explain* anything, its refusal to couch what happens in narrative form, and in the unflinching detachment with which it treats its subjects, who appear to perform for long periods without directorial intervention. It thus forces opposing aesthetic procedures into a confrontation, inviting us on the one hand to read it as a reflexive experiment, and on the other as granting genuine insight into the lives of a series of real Iranian women. This is part of how it troubles the viewer's claims to know, as distinctions between the constructed and the natural, the scripted and the unscripted are called into question.

Reality television often seems to betray the worry that ordinary human life might *lack* the requisite realness and so need supplementation: the nature of its claim to the real, we might say, requires a certain disingenuousness about what it claims to show. One thinks here of the phrase 'raw emotion': what

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is sought is what was there *before*, the human element untainted by the dishonesty or fakeness we associate with film, video, and scripted performance. What results, of course, is usually shot through with tawdry sentimentality and/or base sensationalism, as the people on screen play up their 'personalities', and as producers and editors work to use whatever narrative, visual, or sonic devices they can to extract the maximum possible drama from their manufactured situations. The paradox of reality television is that it attempts to peel off artifice to reveal ordinary human lives, but what emerges is painfully dramatised, jazzed up, and stagey. Against such a thought of reality, Kiarostami shows that the real is not what appears when the artificial has been stripped away; rather, this notion of removing artifice in order to get to the reality beneath it is itself profoundly fantasmatic (not to mention probably sadistic) – and indeed ends up producing painfully inauthentic, cloying, emotionally pornographic, and/or trite images of human life. This gives a way of understanding Wittgenstein in the following passage:

> Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes – surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything that a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself. – But then we do see this every day and it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from *that* point of view.[7]

I will return to this passage in the next chapter. Now I want to ask: what does an unobserved human life look like? The question is unhinged by a paradox like the one that I raised in relation to Wittgenstein's 'big book' thought experiment in the last chapter: that writing a book describing every fact in the world would mean falling into an infinite regress of descriptions. Once again the problem pertains to the position of the describer, and how the acts of observing and describing are themselves part of the world that is to be observed and described. It is as if what we crave is to see *without a point of view*, to see the world "from sideways on",[8] in the apt phrase employed by both McDowell and Mulhall. If this is a desire for reality, it is just as much a desire to get out of reality, to view the world from a position outside the world. Kiarostami demonstrates that the problem is not simply with an 'observer

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effect' – in this context, the fact that being filmed or videoed will change a person's behaviour – but the craven attempts at surmounting it, at finding or extracting a really *real* (sensational, emotional) reality beyond display or beneath all mediation. His realism is achieved not through (the pretension of) eliminating artifice, but through a complex foregrounding of it. The claim to the real is predicated on a renunciation of it. Or rather: of a certain fantasy of it.

Now it is worth invoking Noël Carroll's theory of documentaries as films of "presumptive assertion".[9] For Carroll, what distinguishes documentary films is how documentary filmmakers intend their films to be received by audiences. Both documentary films and fictional films have propositional content, in that both types of film ask the audience to entertain "situations",[10] understood as sets of propositions. A fictional film, however, asks us to entertain those sets of propositions as *unasserted*: as imaginative *suppositions* rather than assertions about the way things actually are. When we watch *Jaws*, for example, we "suppositionally imagine"[11] that a huge great white is terrorising Amity Island (itself a fictional place): we do not really believe that such a thing is happening, but merely suppose that it is in our imaginations, taking what Carroll calls a "fictive stance"[12] toward the propositional content of the film. When we watch a documentary, by contrast, we are asked to "entertain as asserted the propositional content of the text":[13] we are asked not to imagine the content of the film but to believe it.

If fictional films ask us to suppose that something is the case, and documentary films ask us to believe that something is the case, then we might give a general characterisation of reality television by saying that it wants to get us *believing in suppositions*. The content of the images and sequences it presents is not strictly believable, because they are shot through with the contrivances of fiction, as producers work to extract drama from their scenes and personality from their subjects. Yet on the other hand, the content is not quite imaginatively supposable either, insofar as the images and sequences certainly play what Carroll calls "the assertion game":[14] they are in the business of making claims about the actual world and the real people in it, rather than simply about a fictional one populated with characters. Reality television, in other words, asks us to believe in propositions that could only be imaginatively supposed, and hence produces images and sequences whose content we can neither believe in nor suppose. Rather than human life in its ordinariness, what we are thus given is a travesty of it, born out of the fear that the ordinary does have the drama required to compel our conviction. Neither fiction nor documentary, it corrupts the ordinary in a very particular way.

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It would not take much to convert *Ten* into a documentary, in Carroll's sense of the term: all the audience would need are a few cues designed to let us know that the content of what we are watching is meant to be believed. For example, one could imagine Kiarostami employing a voiceover, intertitles, or some kind of introduction to lead us in this direction, perhaps by tipping us off that the women on screen are real people, maybe that they are unaware of being videoed, or that what happens in the car is unscripted. One could also imagine *Ten* converted into fiction, on Carroll's account of fictional films. We would need cues designed to let us know that what we are watching is meant only to be supposed: imagine, for example, if Kiarostami had employed continuity editing, doing away with the unnatural camera placement, the extended shot lengths, and the violations of shot reverse shot conventions (and perhaps removed the sequences in which very little happens, propositionally speaking, for long periods). By refusing both of these options, Kiarostami leaves us in an ambiguous position: we are not called upon to believe in the content of the film, yet nor are we simply asked to suppose it imaginatively; we cannot consistently take an "assertoric stance"[15] to it, but nor can we take a fictive one. Throughout the film, the epistemic status of what is conveyed on screen is undeclared.

So there is a sense in which *Ten* shares structural as well as stylistic features with reality television: both blur the line between documentary and fiction, forwarding content that can neither be believed nor imaginatively supposed; both leave the viewer in a highly ambiguous epistemic position; both thus (claim to) grant an insight into the ordinary. The difference is that reality television wants to get us believing in suppositions – trying to compel a belief that we cannot wholeheartedly offer – while *Ten* troubles the distinction between supposition and belief. In reality television, the ordinary is corrupted by the very artifice that its producers want to deny (artifice, we might say, comes back to bite them); in *Ten*, the ordinary is achieved not because artifice has been denied but because it has been allowed to emerge and confound us. By disallowing both the belief and the supposition of propositional content, *Ten* brings out something that may not be reducible to such content, and which makes a claim on us in virtue of that.

Consider again those two minutes in which Arabshahi waits for Akbari. She scratches, taps, and rubs her forehead; she bites her finger; she glances out the window; she rubs her nose and eye; she fans herself; she looks around; she rubs her chin; she pulls and picks at her cheek and lip; she tugs at her headscarf and manteau; she pokes her teeth; she chews her lip; she tongues the corner of her mouth. It's exactly the type of material that another filmmaker – or reality television producer – wouldn't think twice about leaving

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out. By leaving it in, Kiarostami forces us to confront something. Perhaps a nervous response to the fact of being videoed, or perhaps just the kind of thing one does while waiting for someone, thinking oneself unobserved, this fidgeting is both ordinary and agonising. These idiosyncratic tics and mini-gestures are difficult to watch, even a little unbearable: *boring* in both the usual and the etymological senses of the word. This nervous energy – call it *jouissance*, if you like – makes one think of that line from Pascal: "All human unhappiness [*malheur*] comes from one thing, which is not knowing how to sit quietly in a room."[16]

What kind of proposition about Arabshahi – the character and/or the person – is being imparted in these moments? That she is nervous? That she is waiting? That she is uncomfortable? That she is hot? That she is a fidgeter? That she is caught in an oppressive society? I suggest that none of these descriptions do real justice to the difficulty of what is screened here; that there would be a residue left over if we were to boil these moments down to their propositional content. Instead it is tempting to suggest that what is being imparted – along with these or similar propositions – is a proposition that is not really *about* her at all. Rather, one wants to call it the proposition *of* her, the proposition that Arabshahi is: to say that this is the energy of a woman struggling against – and of course *as* – the absolute particularity and immanence of her own life. As it is no proposition about her, it does not pertain to any specific feature (or set of features) of her or her particular situation. Unlike 'she is hot' or 'she is waiting', this proposition would not be contained in the set of propositions that would give a complete description of her; knowing everything there is to know about Arabshahi does not require that we also come to believe or suppose the proposition of her, which is instead implied by the ascription to her of any feature at all (being is not a real predicate). Any proposition about her could be analysed in terms of existential quantification: 'there exists an X *such that* Y is true of it'. So where do we locate the proposition of her, if not in the totality of propositions about her? *Is* she simply the totality of propositions *about* her? That still fails to get at the specificity of this proposition, the sense that it picks out something 'more' than a mere grouping of features. And crucially, there is something affecting about it, something that one cannot simply ignore or disregard.[17]

The words 'empathy' and 'sympathy' seem to overshoot the mark at this point (just as they did in relation to the faces screened in the closing sequence of *ABC Africa*): it's not quite that I sympathise with the particular experience or feeling that has befallen Arabshahi here. I want to say that I am affected by Arabshahi's auto-affection: that I am affected – that I cannot but be affected – by her affecting herself. This may sound a bit Spinozist, but this feeling is

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difficult to account for in the terms of his philosophy of emotion: on the one hand, it is not an active affect in the sense of leading to greater power; yet on the other, it is not passive because its cause is in no way external.[18] One could say instead it is the feeling caused by someone's *inability not to* persist in their being, someone's inability not to be active.[19] The early Levinas will be more helpful than Spinoza here: "It is . . . the being in me, the fact that I exist, my existing, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship. One can exchange everything between beings except existing."[20]

As with the moral feeling evoked in *ABC Africa*, this affection is not *exchanged* in the mode of sympathy (feeling *for* someone) where, as Adam Smith writes in his classic account of the concept, "we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments".[21] After all, in these moments Arabshahi is not simply facing circumstances that would be describable in propositions, and which I therefore may be able to conceive myself as enduring; she also endures something less specified. And as Smith acknowledges, there is nothing absolute about sympathy: I am always able to eschew the exchange, fail to respond, decline to place myself in the other's position. In his account, this occurs when there is a lack of approbation or disapprobation: if I feel that someone deserves his suffering or does not deserve his success, then I will not sympathise with him. The feeling in question here, by contrast, does not require that I imagine myself into Arabshahi's particular position or moral situation, which is what would open the possibility of a failure of imagination, perhaps through a lack of belief or a disinclination to suppose. Instead Arabshahi's squirming in her seat just *makes me* squirm in mine, without the requirement of imaginative exchange. It makes no particular moral demand on me, but it does make a demand; its claim is more general, more subtle, but also more absolute.

The philosophical temptation that opens here, of course, is to say that what is conveyed in these moments is not natural, that it is supernatural or metaphysical, perhaps something like a soul. Yet such speculation would actually seem to lead us away from what opened the desire to speculate in the first place: that what is imparted here strikes one as intensely physical and mundane. The adjectives I want to use for its effect on me include: pressing, harrowing, acute, piercing, and of course boring. There is nothing spiritual about it; rather, it pertains to the struggle of having and being a finite, biological body, to the terrible *thereness* of a singular human organism. There is something very private about what is displayed in these moments, and yet – insofar as it *is* a display, insofar as these are exactly the types of behaviours we engage in without realising it, behaviours we do not and cannot *own* – something very public too.

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Note again the quote from Levinas, where he speaks of the fact of one's existence as something "absolutely intransitive", as something that can never be exchanged. There is a very radical notion of privacy at work here, as though human beings are burdened by something so intimate that it is literally unspeakable. It would seem to be borne out in the claim I made earlier about this scene, and how it appears to foreground something about Arabshahi that would elude our propositions, something that would not be captured in a complete description of all her features, something that would be 'left over' after all the propositional content was accounted for. One could also return here to the scene where the young pious woman removes her headscarf: the two and half minutes that go by from the woman's loosening to her replacing her headscarf are some of the most moving I have seen in a film, yet amongst the hardest for me to describe satisfactorily. At the same time, however – and this is where we should perhaps depart from Levinas – it is not as though there is anything ineffable about them, or even anything particularly mysterious about what happens: the woman has shaved her head in an act of defiance against the man who jilted her and the society in which she finds herself, with its arbitrary rules and myriad other brutal impositions on the lives of women; Akbari is taken aback but touched by what she has done; the two share a moment of intense solidarity. While we cannot say if these propositions are meant to be believed or supposed, there is nothing about the scene that can't be uttered, just as there is nothing incommunicable about what happens when Arabshahi waits: what is affecting about these scenes is *displayed*, just as it is in ordinary life, where what is most characteristic of us is constantly given up in the most mundane of ways, in mannerisms, posture, gestures, and voice. It is nothing *in particular*, but particularity itself, and it is hard to imagine anything more ordinary.

Consider again the question I raised earlier: should we understand Arabshahi's fidgeting as the kind of behaviour human organisms engage in when they think themselves unobserved, or as a nervous response to the fact of being videoed? It is like the question of whether we should believe or merely suppose what is conveyed propositionally about her wider situation (for example, whether she really thinks that Amin should go live with his father, or whether she would really wear such a dark, heavy headscarf and manteau on a hot day). In my reading, it is crucial that we cannot come to an answer in either case. Once again, the unmatched, even overwhelming sense of reality evoked in *Ten* emerges out of its highly complicated, indeed undecidable relationship with artifice. What the film troubles is the intuition that, in order to get to the real, we need to dig down through what is merely

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for show in order to find bedrock. What happens in it affects us despite and because of the fact that we do not know if we are meant to believe or merely suppose it. Perhaps it goes some way toward showing that moral feeling can emerge out of something other than entertaining propositions (which is not to say that it is therefore non-cognitive).[22]

Whence does our sense of the moral importance of a human being come, when human beings and the things that happen to them are nothing more than totalities of natural facts, in principle describable in a big book of propositions? More broadly (but also more pointedly): what happens to value once the world has become a totality of propositional content? Rather than showing us how we might answer these questions, *Ten* asks us to shift their weight. Rather than ask: *is there something essential about value that stands outside the reach of the totality of all true propositions, something that cannot be described?* we should ask: *what capacities for thinking and responding become opaque to us once we admit this notion of totality into our philosophising?*

Notes

1. Farahmand's 'Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema' (published in the year *Ten* was released, and which therefore cannot be blamed for failing to consider it) is paradigmatic here. She writes that "as for the portrayal of women, [Kiarostami] simply avoids the issue, by using only a few female characters" (99); that "[i]n his construction of female roles, Kiarostami keeps conservatively in line with the religious belief that allocates a marginal position and a subordinate gender role to women." She goes on to criticise his portrayal of the "exoticism of village women" in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (100). Khosrowjah paints a more sympathetic picture, conceding that "before *Ten* Kiarostami's films were routinely criticized by many for their conspicuous absence of marginal place of their female characters", but acknowledging Kiarostami's stated position on the matter: that his avoidance of female characters and domestic spaces "was an ethical decision to avoid possible misrepresentations due to legal restrictions" ('Unthinking the National Imaginary', 160).
2. I take it that this is why Kiarostami refers to *Ten* as a "non-made film". "The filmmaker must make the least intervention possible", Kiarostami says. "You dare, you argue, you coach, but you don't intervene" (quoted in Winter, 'The Long Roads Home').
3. Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad writes:

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> The censors considered four of the ten sequences that make up the film, including one that features a prostitute, unsuitable for public viewing. The ban was followed by attacks in the conservative magazine *Sureh*, which accused *10* of encouraging prostitution and social corruption. (*The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 125)

For accounts of the complicated post-Revolutionary history and practice of film censorship in Iran, see Devictor, 'Classic Tools, Original Goals'; Naficy, 'Poetics and Politics of Veil, Voice and Vision in Iranian Post-Revolutionary Cinema' and 'Islamizing Film Culture Iran'; Sadr, *Iranian Cinema*, 166–291; Farahmand, 'Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema', 88–98; and ASL19, 'Censorship in Iranian Cinema'.

4. See Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 15–49.
5. The issue of satellite TV is a particularly significant one in Iran, where satellite dishes are illegal because they allow access to international media. Like many other things in the country, however, illegal does not mean unobtainable. On the contrary: satellite dishes are ubiquitous there, often displayed openly on building façades and rooftops. There is also a particular significance to satellite dishes for Kiarostami, because one plays a crucial (and amusing) role in his brilliant *Life and Nothing More*.
6. Shooting in a car also allows filmmakers to work in secrecy, as demonstrated recently in Jafar Panahi's 2015 movie *Taxi*. It was produced after the filmmaker was banned from making films, and is partly a homage to *Ten*.
7. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 6 (original emphasis).
8. Mulhall uses the phrase in an article on the *Tractatus* that engages with 'resolute' readings of the text, which try to take seriously two of Wittgenstein's most difficult claims about the book: that its own propositions are nonsensical; and that the point of it is ethical. In reference to the opening remark of the text (where Wittgenstein asserts that the world is all that is the case: that it is the totality of facts, not of objects), Mulhall writes:

> our difficulties here suggest that this, too, is a remark that could only be made from a God's eye view on the world, a view from sideways on, from which the way the world necessarily is appears as something that might have been otherwise . . . If, then, talk about the world as a whole must be transcended ethically, must it not also be transcended logically? ('Words, Waxing and Waning', 239)

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McDowell uses the phrase in an article on moral non-cognitivism and the famous paradox of rule-following that emerges in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. It comes in the context of a discussion of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, the view of rule-following it forwards (which McDowell says can produce a kind of 'vertigo'), and the view of rule-following it works to reveal as empty (which McDowell describes as 'platonistic'). He writes:

> The idea is that the relation of our arithmetical thought and language to the reality it characterizes can be contemplated, not only from the midst of our mathematical practices, but also, so to speak, from sideways on – from a standpoint independent of all the human activities and reflections that locate those practices in our 'whirl of organism'; and that it would be recognizable from the sideways perspective that a given move is the correct move at a given point in the practice: that, say, 1002 really does come after 1000 in the series determined by the instruction 'Add 2'. It is clear how this platonistic picture might promise to reassure us if we suffered from the vertigo, fearing that the Wittgensteinian vision threatens to dissolve the independent truth of arithmetic into a collection of mere contingencies about the natural history of man. But the picture has no real content. ('Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following', 207–8)

9. See Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 207–12.
10. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 205.
11. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 206.
12. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 207.
13. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 207.
14. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 195.
15. Carroll, 'Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion', 209.
16. Pascal, *Pascal's Apology for Religion*, 105 (my translation).
17. J. M. Bernstein writes: "The *achievement* of cinematic realism is its capacity to make possible the perception of a thing's existence as what demands a response, as in need of a response as the fulfilment of its naked reality" ('Movement! Action! Belief?' 91).

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18. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, Third Part, specifically definitions I–III (83–4).
19. Perhaps this is the mirror image of what Agamben calls 'potentiality', which he describes "not simply [as] the potential to do this or that thing but [as] potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality" ('On Potentiality', 179–80).
20. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 42.
21. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 12.
22. In 'Dogs and Concepts', Crary gives an account of visual experience as simultaneously non-propositional and conceptual, in McDowell's sense of the term. She writes:

> A good phenomenological case can be made against understanding experience as propositional. Consider the case of visual experience. In such experience, the world becomes visually present to us. And what thus comes into view is describable in propositions. But the descriptive possibilities are unlimited, and none in particular is given. If we are to accept these features of our ordinary understanding of visual experience without correction or qualification, then we can't think of experience itself as propositional. We have to adopt a view of experience that takes seriously the recognition that, as Arthur Collins put it in a commentary on *Mind and World*, "experience does not come as though with subtitles". When McDowell discusses his reasons for rejecting the idea that the content of visual (and other forms of sensory) experience is propositional, he says he wants to take at face value an observation that is closely related to the observation, just touched on, that in perceptual experience no particular propositional description of the world is simply handed down to us. He wants to take at face value that when we move from such experience to beliefs about the world we are not drawing inferences from given propositions. On the contrary, we ordinarily take ourselves to be arriving at beliefs about the world non-inferentially, by articulating, or rendering in propositional form, content that is visually revealed to us. (220)

On my account of *Ten*, it reveals something similar of moral experience, bringing out a moral claim that is neither propositional nor ineffable/non-cognitive. I return in detail to the role of propositions in experience in Chapter 7.

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