

ABBAS KIAROSTAMI

THE AUTEUR, THE ETHNOGRAPHER, THE DEMOCRAT

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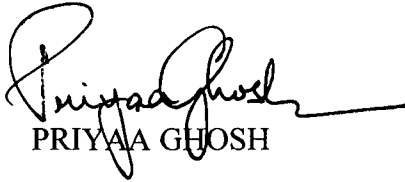


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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled '**Abbas Kiarostami: the Auteur, the Ethnographer, the Democrat.**', submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of Degree of Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution. I shall be responsible for the mistakes and inaccuracies in this dissertation.

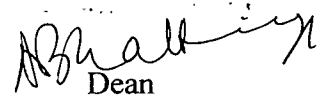

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We recommend that this dissertation maybe placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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In loving memory of Gorgontu,

Da and Dada

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation project seeks to engage with the work of one of Iranian New Wave Cinema's contemporary director, Abbas Kiarostami, placing him within an international context as well as locating him specifically within the aesthetic traditions of Iranian culture. Kiarostami is also one of the most important and often controversial filmmakers of the Iranian New Wave whose films have circulated widely all over the world through festivals and through the writings of an active group of film critics in the popular press. I encountered Kiarostami's films first in the early years of my undergraduate studies through the Kolkata International Film Festival, and later attended many other screenings at private galleries, where his films formed a part of the Iranian cinema package. Iranian cinema's global journey started much earlier in the late 1980s when David Streiff, the Director of the Locarno Film Festival became was one of the first persons to recognize the burgeoning talent in the post revolutionary Iranian film industry. In 1987 Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home* (1987) and Nasser Taghavi's *Captain Khorshid* (1987) were screened in the competition as official selections of the Festival. Kiarostami won the Silver Lion. Before the revolution it was Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow*, (1969) which had made an impact on the international festival circuit, and opened up a renewed discussion on the role of Italian neo-realism in the emerging film industry of Iran. When, *Taste of Cherry* won the Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, sharing the prize with the Japanese New Wave director Shohei Imamura's *The Eel*, a growing cinephilia emerged and associated discourses emerged with Abbas Kiarostami at its centre. Soon filmmakers like Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Behram Beyzai, Tahmineh Milani, Rakshan Bani Etemad, Ebrahim Fourouzes, Majid Majidi, Abolfazal Jalili, Samira Makhmalbaf, and many others became more prominent on the international scene gaining critical acclaim and awards.

While many have seen Kiarostami as a filmmaker influenced by neo-realism and at times even by the French New Wave, my approach in this project is to undertake a retro-active study of his films. I approach Kiarostami's work as ethnographic texts, as performance documentaries, and as reflections of contemporary Iranian society and culture. I suggest that Kiarostami's films through

their mobility and universal message perform the role of cultural ambassador for Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

My project focuses on three particular sites. The first site is an excavation of archival research on the immediate literature (the brochures, the newsletters, publicity posters, newspaper reviews, recorded interviews, etc.) and the discourses that have emerged at film festivals. I then problematize the existing debate on Kiarostami's films which locates the director's oeuvre as primarily realist inspired by Italian Neo-realism. I have tried to shift the discourse towards recognition of the films as ethnographic documents that combine in themselves an "ethnographicness". Here I want to look at the influence of anthropological traditions on Kiarostami's work and will draw on critical discourses in existing literature and films. In the third site of this dissertation I have situated Kiarostami's visual style as engendering a democratic viewership, locating his form within the larger context of installation practices with which he now engages.

A NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS:

Early cinema in Iran remained confined within the peripheries of the royal houses. It primarily flourished under royal patronage of the Qajar dynasty, for which filming and its exhibition constituted itself as a popular form of entertainment among the royal family, the members of the royal court and the rich upper classes. Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkasbashi, shot the first Iranian film in Ostend in Belgium during a tour with the Shah, just like the first Iranian sound film was shot in India. Initially, it was the documentary impulse of recording events that made major use of the apparatus of cinema. Newsreels on royal weddings, circumcision ceremonies, coronation of monarchs were instances of early cinema in Iran. The first public cinema, *Soleil* was established in the 1990s in Tabriz, north of Iran, by the Roman-Catholic missionaries and later Ebrahim Khan Sahhafbashi-e- Tehrani was the first person to establish the model for a public commercial cinema, opening at a hall in 1904 (though it ran only a short while, and screened mainly European imports).

However cinema as an industry in Iran flourished much later in the latter half of the mid twentieth century, prior to which few people had traveled abroad to train themselves in the art of film making. They came back and made films in Iran. This phase generated sporadic instances of film making, with various models of the

cinematograph which the filmmakers brought from abroad. It was only in 1930 that the first feature length film, *Abi' and Rabi*, was produced by Ovans Ohanians. Even then Iran lacked in technical expertise and so the first Iranian talkie titled *Lor Girl* was by Ardashir Irani's Imperial Film Company in India in 1931. The film was based on a script by Abdul Hossein Sepanta. The practice of Iranian cinema's production abroad continued till the production of *Laila Majnu* in 1937. In 1948 Esma'il Kushan's *Tufan –e Zendegi (Tempest of Life)* the first Iranian feature was made inside Iran. During the war and after, Iranian Cinema faced a period of recession. The following decade until 1947, production suffered a stagnation after which it saw some sporadic revivalist impulses like the emergence of the Mitra Films in 1948 and Pars Film Studio in 1949, (after the failure of the former this met with some success) producing cheap escapist films, which gradually was to become the popular cinema of Iran.

By this time cinema had successfully replaced other major forms of popular entertainment in Iran. Cinema reaching the common mass very quickly in Iran and emerged as an autonomous form of entertainment. In 1905, the first public cinema hall was opened in Tehran and the government took special measures to keep the prices of the tickets low, to enable easy access to this new form of mass entertainment that was capable of replicating the experience each time. Replacing popular performing traditions like the *Ta'zīyeh*, the *naqqali*, the *Shamayel-gardani*, which hitherto had been major forms of mass entertainment, cinema emerged as a fascinating and seductive form of popular culture, whose discourse extended beyond the peripheries of the cinema halls to discussion amongst groups of people outside. Audiences recollected the stories, reenacted the emotions, hummed the tunes, and lived and relived the celluloid world, generating a new kind of cinephilia.

Naqqali is a popular form of story-telling, performed by professional story tellers or *naqqals* who perform the traditional Persian epic *Shahnameh* mostly in its entirety before public gatherings. *Naqqal's* perform individually with the aid of props - sticks, a drum or a bell. *Ta'zīyeh* is typically an outdoor public performance that stages the hagiographies of saints and martyrs. *Shamayel-gardani*, also performed independently, is often used as a popular form of narrative exposition or a prologue to *Ta'zīyeh*. It is a unique method of narrating an epic or religious story with painted cloth screen as backdrop, depicting an event or episode from the epic. This also makes it a traditional precursor to cinema in Iran. The exchanges between the

Shamayel-gardani and *Ta'ziyeh* are also explored by Kiarostami in his “gallery film” or installation, *Ta'ziyeh*.

Iran’s home production both before and after the war was not sufficient to meet the growing market of films in the country, so they resorted to imports from Hollywood, Germany, France, Russia, India, Egypt, England and other countries. The situation exposed Iran to a number of cultural influxes and to trends in world cinema. This would later lead to syncretism in indigenous film form and aesthetics.

Popular cinema in Iran till the 1960s was constituted primarily of melodramas, thrillers, and comedies. The films packaged and re-packaged hit formulas without failing to abide by the tenets of an Islamicized film aesthetics. The films dealt primarily with the patriarchal structure of society - negotiations between modernizing forces and the recalcitrant forces of tradition, between the secular and the religious.

Cinema in Iran has always been subjected to the complicated forces of culture, religion and politics. Though Reza Shah’s regime under the Pahlavi Dynasty in the 1960s started with promising spirit of reform and modernization, the state imposed agenda of modernization led to social discontent generating what Hamid Dabashi calls “a theology of discontent” finally leading to the 1979 Islamic Revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The revolution inaugurated yet another regime of dictatorship.¹ This was followed by islamisation of socio-cultural thought and activities, a strict control of what was described as the westernization syndrome of Shah’s modernization program. The modern history of Iran is marked by a rhetoric of democracy, a radical secularism, a selective attitude towards cultural influxes; and an active process of selective modernization, all accommodated within the larger framework of Shiite Islam.

The institutionalization of certain bodies under the Shah’s regime and the presence of academic reformists led to the gradual evolution of an Iranian new wave in the sphere of literature and cinema. The institutionalization of the National Iranian Television in 1969, the National Iranian Radio and Television in 1972, the organization of film festivals, the emergence of the Farabi Film Club, the *Cinematheque* of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts - all contributed to the diffusion of cinema as a major socio-cultural force in Iran. The evolution of state sponsored technical and academic

¹ See accounts of the period in Shirin Ebadi and Azadeh Moaveni’s *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope*; (U.K. and N.Y. Random House) 2006.

training in film through bodies like The Graduate School of Television and Cinema, became a significant development.

Reza Shah Pahlavi's project of modernity depended on western models of modernity and played an important role in the revival of cinema and the generation of a more socio-politically conscious aesthetics in arts and literature even as the Iranian censor board and filmmakers demanding artistic freedom, conflicted with each other. During this time Mehrjui's *The Cow* was banned because the Shah's government saw the film as counter modern and backward because of its focus on poverty.² Discrepancies with the censor board had been a persistent problem with all regimes in Iran. A film like Kiarostami's *Tribute to Teachers (Bozorg dashte-Moallem)* had faced a paradoxical fate of not gaining a screening permit both before and after the revolution. The film was commissioned by the education minister Manuchehr Ganji, to be shown in the presence of the Shah. The problem lay with the Islamic *hijab*. Before the revolution, under Shah's liberal, westernization programme, women wearing the *hijab* was an anti Shah statement but Kiarostami had filmed it with his usual pact with truth, where the truth of the event was that women in their everyday life in public during this time appeared both with and without their veils. Later the presence of women without the *hijab* in the film, became the major issue preventing a public screening of the film after the Islamic revolution as it was contrary to Islamic ideology of the Shiite nation. The Iranian censors have historically suffered from this kind of contradictions.

However, histories of resorting to popular literary forms for encrypting socio-political criticism dates back to Firdausi. *KANUN* or the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, gave rise to a group of radical and subversive practitioners of film and literature. This was contrary to the objectives of the Institute, to "engage the Iranian Youth in politically harmless entertainment."³

It was in this milieu that Abbas Kiarostami became one of the most well-known directors of Iranian new cinema. His films are characterized by a marked simplicity and precision in their form and content. Kiarostami developed a distinctive oeuvre of films – universal in their appeal; poetic in probing reality and truth. His deep sense of humanism and promising quest for reality is rooted in his ethnic

² Screening permit to this film was given only on putting a public address before screening that the film represented a past historical time.

³ See Hamid Dabashi's *Close-Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future*.

imagery. The universality of themes is reflected on with a contemplative vision on a nativist canvas. (Though in *Tickets*, and *Copie Conform`e*, Kiarostami moves beyond the cartographic limits of his country and assumes the identity of a global filmmaker). Nearly all of his films are located in Iran and its surrounding areas. The concerns are locally rooted, yet their appeal and importance extends beyond geographical confines. Narrative in Kiarostami's films are simply a pretext to embark on a journey, which may or may not end.

Though the Islamic Revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran led to a period of censorship and recession in artistic activities, Kiarostami continued to emerge with his ingenious stories playing on the borderline between subversive cinema practices and subtle critiques of the entire discourse of nation building and citizenship. Cinema and cinema halls have always been sites for the full play of violence, disillusionment, and public unrest. The first instance of violence to mark the storming of the Islamic revolution, was a cinema hall. On 10th August 1978, the Rex Theater in Abadan was set on fire, even as three hundred people sat inside watching Massoud Kimi'a's *The Deer* (1975). By 1979-80, one hundred and eight cinemas were burnt, destroyed or shut down to protest against Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime⁴ of passive modernization.

This violence led to the gradual reduction in the number of cinema halls in Iran, which has now become an irremediable shortcoming for the substantial film industry of the nation. There is very little that the government does to repair or reopen cinema halls which have been shut down, creating a tangible impediment in local distribution of films.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY AND THE AUTEUR

Born on 6th June, 1940 in Tehran, Abbas Kiarostami, was one of the many children of an interior decorator father. From several interviews on Kiarostami's life, one can gather that he did not have a particularly happy childhood, and was generally a loner who had taken to canvas at a very young age. "In childhood I used to fill my

⁴ See Hamid Naficy's 'Islamizing Film Culture' in Richard Tapper ed. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, pub. by I.B.Tauris, London, N.Y., 2002. (p 26-65).

loneliness with painting.”⁵ At the age of sixteen, Kiarostami left home to earn his living and began his career as a traffic police. During this job as traffic policeman, Kiarostami attended the Fine Arts faculty of the University of Tehran intermittently, finally completing his degree and gaining his license as a practicing artist after thirteen long years of struggle at the Department. This biographical detail may help us trace Kiarostami’s love for the image. Photographs and paintings helped him to see the world as a reflection which finally helped him in making a career in the industry of moving images. In 1969 Kiarostami was married to designer wife Parvin Amir-‘Goli, and from this marriage had two sons, one of whom is Bahman Kiarostami, who besides being a publicity filmmaker also helps his father’s filmmaking practice. Kiarostami started his film career in the newly established wing of Film Division at the Institute for the Development of Children and Young Adults(KANUN), an institute under the Ministry of Education. Kiarostami joined the institute on an invitation from Firuz Shirvanlu, the then Director of KANUN, who also owned an advertising company and had seen some of the director’s films. Before this Kiarostami had worked as a graphic artist, who made advertising films and had designed title cards for films. During this phase of his career Kiarostami made around one hundred to one hundred and fifty ad-films. He was probably the only person in this field at that time who had made nearly fifty ad-films without women, because it was normative to have a woman even in an advertisement for a tyre. This is an important fact because Kiarostami was someone who had very efficiently worked in tandem with both the regimes; that of Reza Sha’s liberalism and later the authoritative conservatism of the Islamic regime. There wasn’t any major shift in gear, and this was because he knew how to optimize the resources, and the limits of constraints.

Critics have drawn connections between Kiarostami and other great masters of cinema like Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu, Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard, Jacques Tati, Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Victor Erice, Hou Hsiao Hsien, Satyajit Ray, Krystoff Kieslowski and many other auteurs of world cinema. For example, this quote from the popular press is expressive of how this Iranian auteur is introduced to a reading and viewing public, “many critics rate Kiarostami among the

⁵ See *Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Mahmoud Kalari, 'Le Monde du A.K.' in Cahiers du Cinema,*

all-time greats, a worthy successor of Rossellini, Truffaut, or Kieslowski.”⁶ But Kiarostami himself often rejects such associations. In several of interviews the director has stressed that it was Sophia Loren who had attracted him to films and not Italian neo-realism with which his films are most often associated. Kiarostami had always maintained, “...in my life I have never seen more than fifty films; I never wanted to see a film two times, consequently. I was not influenced by any director. I don’t support the films of Bresson or Dreyer, it tires me....Rather than the films of Dreyer and Bresson, there are Iranian films which have influenced me much: *A Simple Event*(1973) by Sohrab Sahid Saless, or the Films of Kimiavi or some episodes of Dariush Mehrjui’s film *Facteur*. It is very difficult to gauge if in this interview, Kiarostami is playing out a nationalist politics. What is well known is that he is paying respect to all the filmmakers before the Islamic Revolution of Iran on the map of world cinema through their award winning careers in the international film festivals like Locarno and Berlin.

RATIONAL AND INTERVENTION

Jean- Luc Godard once said, “Film begins with D.W. Griffith and ends with Abbas Kiarostami.” Such a remark emphasizes the importance of the filmmaker in the history of world cinema. The international press both critical and popular have made every effort to compile, map, and trace, the body of Kiarostami’s works from his films to photographs, paintings, and now his exercises in video art.

There are only three full length books devoted to Kiarostami, two of which are products of a cinephillic discourse. One is a full length study by Alberto Elena, which was published in collaboration with the Iran Heritage Foundation, an incisive and exhaustive analysis of Kiarostami’s films vis a vis classical Persian poetry. While Elena locates him within the aesthetic discourse of realism, neo-realism, and the French New Wave.,I find the arguments somewhat inadequate. Elena rushes to situate Kiarostami within a larger global context but she fails to engage with the influence of contemporary Iranian poetic traditions on the filmmaker. Neither are issues related to the filmmakers transnational appeal dealt with.

Mehrnaz Saeed Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum’s book titled, *Abbas Kiarostami*,(2003) which is the first full length book on the director from the

⁶ See S.F.Said’s ‘The Best Director in the World?’, pub. in *Daily Telegraph*, dated 21st September, 2000.

Contemporary Directors series, is a useful comprehensive study of Kiarostami, which situates him within the Iranian New Wave cinematic tradition, right from Forough Fourroghzad and Ebrahim Golestan, to trace the mobility of his work through various international film festival circuits. The book also navigates through a lot of interviews with the director, the cast and the crew. Rosenbaum's book serves as an important point of entry in my own investigation of Abbas Kiarostami as an ethnographer of contemporary Iran. The other full length publication on Kiarostami in the English language is Geoff Andrew's *Ten*, published by the BFI which also focuses on film analysis and serves as a monograph of the film, *Ten*, which Andrew, the Director of the British Film Institute, regards as Kiarostami's best film. This book was released as a part of a month long Kiarostami festival held in London in collaboration with The National Film Theater, and therefore the book's objective is to also introduce the filmmaker to a British audience.

Other books, like Hamid Dabashi's *Close-Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (2001), situates Kiarostami as one of the many contemporary Iranian filmmakers. Dabashi offers close readings of the films and tries to contextualize them as critiques of the nationalist discourse of citizenship and nation building. He too engages with Kiarostami's own engagement with contemporary Iranian poetry, and situates him in the existing discursive practice of neo-realism, realism, *cinema verite* styles of filmmaking. Richard Tapper's edited volume, *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation, and Identity* (2008) is a comprehensive study of the Iranian New Wave Cinema at large. Here Kiarostami's films are situated within debates centering on identity, politics, representation, Islamicization of film culture and the outreach of the Iranian New Wave Cinema in the global film market through film festival circuits. Negar Mottahadeh, in her book *Displaced Allegories: Post Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*, offers feminist readings of Iranian films. She refers to Kiarostami's films as a "cinema of surplus images" where the "less than life" quality of the films, is the absence of women.

French journals like, *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Postiff* are two sources that have devoted full length issues to Kiarostami. *Film International*, the only dependable English language magazine published in Iran is another source that carries information on Kiarostami's reception in his country, including information on screening permissions. *Film Comment*, and *Sight and Sound* are the other two monthly magazines from the What I am trying to arrive at through this review of

literature survey, is to point out the absence of three things in the oeuvre of existing literature on Kiarostami, in the sense of any full length up-to date study. Firstly, none of the books try to posit Kiarostami as an ethnographer, or draw parallels between his films and the tradition of ethnographic cinema.. The engagement with the prosaic and the everyday is overlooked by most of the writers and precedence is given to allegorical interpretations over simple primary forms of identification with the routine, everyday practices of the filmed world.

Kiarostami's films are also interpreted as national allegories or as narratives of *bildungsroman*, placing them within the framework of national cinema. To me Kiarostami who is often referred to as a controversial cultural ambassador for Iran, is also a director whose global circulation has been possible primarily through film festival circuits. I have argued that, although most of his films are shot in Iran, focusing specifically on rural landscapes, they can quite easily be referred to as ethnographies. They have a global currency owing to their simplicity and trans-cultural appeal.⁷ Kiarostami, it must be noted, was very much a part of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, that operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, whose motto was to produce a morally correct cinema.⁸ Most of Kiarostami's early films were produced and distributed through Farabi Cinema Foundation which was instrumental in approving scripts, financing projects, censoring and distributing the films, both in Iran and overseas. How does something so local specific transcend into global cultural relevance, becoming prominent in the international film festival circuits. This dissertation tries to locate and trace the sustained development of the figure of the star Iranian auteur within specific contexts of distribution, circulation and reception.

Citizenship, democracy, human rights, women's issues, issues of cross border migration, freedom; are some of his key narrated as simple fables which instead of moralizing, tends to stir the consciousness of the implicated spectators. Kiarostami's films are about everyday life. If Henri Lefebvre had mounted a critique of the everyday life of urban France in a consumerist society. Kiarostami's films are both

⁷ *By which I mean, the films don't require a specific language to understand them. They speak of certain values and certain predicaments in everyday life which are beyond any cultural specificity.*

⁸ " *We are not opposed to cinema, to radio, or to television. The cinema is a modern Institution that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people....*" Ayatollah Khomeini at Beheste- Zahra Cemetery in 1979, Tehran.

representations and critiques of the everyday in the rural context or in the context of a conservative society in a country as special as Iran from both political and historical perspectives⁹. But it is important to note that Kiarostami wants us to make a conscious distinction between Iranian Culture and Islamic culture (which is perpetually open to revision of prescriptions and contextual interpretations) where I would read about the distinction between lived reality and theological prescriptions, where the former bears a strong anthropological connotation in discerning the local, and the global, the specific and the universal. Iranian culture can also be read as a product of a dialectical relationship between Islamic Shi'ist scriptures and the pragmatics of a continued process of negotiation with the practices of daily life, where religion itself is a matter of performance through gestures and modes of conducting the daily lives.

Secondly, all the books posit Kiarostami as an auteur, which is undoubtedly true, because he does have a distinctive style of his own and his works are mobilized through the channels of parallel cinema circuits, attracting critical acclaim at film festivals. But, because I am trying to engage with Kiarostami's cinema as primarily ethnographic, and at the same time polysemic, the concept of an auteur complicates the approach. My intervention at this point has been to propose an alternative thinking about his films. There has been a trend both at festivals and with all as existing literatures to make comparisons with Jean-Luc-Godard, Jacques Tati, Vittorio De Sica, Satyajit Ray and others. At the International festivals, Kiarostami's films are screened under categories like "Great Masters" along with Godard, or "Celluloid Diamonds" along with Ken Loach, who are all auteurs in the very sense of the term. My proposition is to play with the idea of authorship, to reflect on a more comprehensive and revolutionary definition. Therefore I have developed two notions of authorship in my dissertation, one in my first chapter where the term is deployed as a marketing strategy and one in the third chapter where authorship is identified with the notion of a democratic and plural spectatorship.

None of the existing works on Kiarostami engages with a retro-active analysis of his films, nor do they situate his work within the performance traditions of Iranian culture, like the *ta'zieh*, which are the popular folk forms of performance traditions.

⁹ However, Abbas Kiarostami's later independent projects like *Ten*, *Five Dedicated to Ozu*, also address the everyday life of the urban sphere.

Although the existing accounts do mention Kiarostami's minimalist style of filmmaking, none take the argument further to films which are minimalist video arts.

Ta'zieh which is essentially Shi'ist is the only legitimate form of Islamic drama, is a very important mode of performance, which draws on spectatorial engagement, memory, and also, like Kiarostami's films offers reflective spaces. The spectators co-produce the narrative simultaneously as it unfolds. This form of popular performance in Iran is also, like films, subjected to stringent censorship restrictions owing to its inherent scope of social criticism. Increasingly, ever since the production of Kiarostami's *My Sweet Shirin*, and his installation of *Ta'zieh*, concepts of performance, spectatorship, collective production of a text and the very idea of democracy, take on a greater importance in situating Kiarostami's films within the broader context of an ethnographic realism, developed along trends in *Cinema Verit*.

METHODOLOGY

My first step in this dissertation has been to situate Kiarostami within the international film festival circuits as an auteur, so that the definition of the auteur is complicated. Here I have drawn on archival work and followed Igor Kopytoff's method to trace a cultural biography of the films beyond the compact category of 'ational cinema'. Kopytoff writes that "the cultural response to such biographical details reveals a tangled mass of aesthetic, historical and even political judgment and of convictions and values that shape our attitudes to objects labeled as art."¹⁰ If in the festival circuit Kiarostami's films are clubbed with auteurs like Godard, Loach, Kurosawa etc, they are classified and constituted within culturally existing categories. Cultural intelligibility can also be another kind of appropriation. In an interview Kiarostami recollects how his *Taste of Cherry* was advertised in Japan at a Festival where it was customary for all films to bear a message. In maintaining the protocols of the festival, Kiarostami had written, "today is Nov. 10th and 1000 people have exited life. Those who have existed tell us to those who are left on Nov. 11th, that since you have chosen to stay, you have taken the responsibility to live better, and thus your life has to be better today than Nov. 10th". (quoted from *The Iranian*.) This reveals how the first encounter with Kiarostami's films in the early 1990s inaugurated a new cinephillia pointing to a fresh market of films in Iran. The immediate responses

¹⁰ See Igor Kopytoff's 'The Cultural Biography of Things' in Arjun Appadurai edited

at the Press conferences and the reviews in the festival booklets, showed how these articulations attempted to appropriate the film within the World cinema discourse, making it accessible and intelligible to non-home viewers. Kopytoff's method has also allowed me to show how the film object in the course of its movement and travel changes from being an object of national iconic value to being an object of global iconicity. *Through the Olive Trees* for example (distributed by Miramax¹¹) was an official entry to the Foreign Language Film section of the Oscars. Though the film lost to another by Krystoff Kieslowoski, the *New York Times* compared the Kiarostami's film to Truffaut's *Day for Night*.

I follow up on British sources, guided by the fact that Britain and France have become major curators and Kiarostami is not granted a screening license in his own country. Kiarostami's refusal to conform to the regulations of Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic guidance, has led to interpretation of his work in a different light. He is often within his homeland referred to as somebody who makes films for a foreign audience.

Here I would like to connect Kiarostami and the culture of curating associated with his films with Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea of "global cosmopolitanism". Appiah argues that cultural artifacts are of "potential value to all human beings" and lead to a "cosmopolitan aesthetic experience" in their deterritorialized archiving. Kiarostami's films are also a form of what James Clifford terms "Travelling Cultures". This is particularly linked to the ethnographic dimensions of Kiarostami's work. The film object, opens up problems of localization and its reverse appropriation. The films explore the idea of documenting the everyday and the commonplace. The journey of the films within the festival circuits maps the farthest range of travel, where culture is not an essentialising component. They are objects in translation offering themselves for transcultural comparisons.

The aesthetic tendencies in Kiarostami's cinema sound very Bazanian, but how far are they operative within the framework of realist aesthetics in a Bazanian sense, or for that matter, what is Kiarostami's way of negotiating with reality and realism as a mode of representation, is an area I feel can be best explored through the philosophical prism of Henri Lefebvre. Critiquing empiricist and positivist attitudes as flawed in their quest for objective reality, Lefebvre points out that reality is both the

¹¹ It is important to note because it is related to the network of global circulation, via the Hollywood giant.

object of knowledge and at the same time something which may be approached through the prism of objectivity. This marks a shift away from the fetishized idea of “reality”. The real is profound and beyond representation. Lefebvre posits that the real can be grasped only in a dialectical relationship between the possible or the potential and the actual or the present. Reality is always pregnant with possibilities that are gradually destroyed in the search for the concrete. Therefore, it is this possibility I suggest, which lies embedded in the philosophical structure of “reality” that Kiarostami relentlessly explores in his films. It is the moment within the everyday which bears the seed of transformation and imposes order to the ambiguities of everyday life.

For example, In *Wind Will Carry Us*, the bone which the so called telecommunications engineer has been carrying along with him from the cemetery is thrown into the flow of a stream after the death of the old lady, and the camera focuses on the journey of that bone as it drifts afloat downstream. This moment resolves the ambiguities that cluttered the mind of the village visitor. The action here is commonplace, but the moment alludes to yet another journey. Kiarostami’s exploration of these moments, form not only the platform of realism in his films; but also permeate his poems, which are observations of the prosaic and also the obvious, seeking reflections on them. An example can be:

Snow descends (baraf mibaran)

from the black clouds (aj abr siaha)

With the whiteness of the snow (ba safedeh –e-baraf)

All his poems are of non-personal nature, yet there is an inscription of an observer, which is easily displaceable. They bear the imperative to pause and look more closely at the moments within the daily experiences. *The Iranian* dated 25th August 1998, had reviewed Kiarostami’s films as examples of reflection on, “the deepest human emotions in the most ordinary events of life”.

I have divided the dissertation into three chapters to help channelize my arguments. The First chapter titled ‘**Situating the Star Auteur within the Film Festival Circuit**’, tries to look at the phenomenon of film festivals as imagined communities, and then tries map an understanding of how the figure of the auteur emerges as a marketing tool. This in many ways is a reconceptualization of the classical definition of auteur cinema. I situate Kiarostami within festival circuits to unravel the mechanisms through which author value is produced. Kiarostami is

referred to as “the star of the festival circuit” (Iordanova), and such claims are also endorsed by people in Iran where he is often called the “festival director”. In this chapter I try to relate the idea of the auteur with stardom and its associated aura. The network that operates to produce this successful figure of the filmmaker includes state sponsored promotion, sustained marketing, international distribution, interest of the critical press and finally stardom and independent productions. It is this network that has made Abbas Kiarostami one of the most important living filmmakers of our time. This chapter is a point of entry to propose and revise the classical definition of auteur cinema, as proposed by Francois Truffaut, Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, and son. In the light of its own shortcomings and complications in the second chapter. To show how the figure of a filmmaker like Abbas Kiarostami requires new definitions of authorship to be incorporated in this discourse. If auteur cinema is about a specific stylistic pattern emerging from a director’s oeuvre, then, Kiarostami may easily be appropriated by his formal and stylistic practices as an auteur whose directorial styles are etched in the ways in which the frames in his films are constructed, the perspectives are etched in them to reveal a specific mood through his canvas of landscapes, most often captured in long takes and long shots, deep focus, and lateral panning, juxtaposed point of views etc. However, I have tried to argue that Kiarostami’s style rewrites the auteur formulation through a systematic invocation of the spectator as an active figure, deconstructing the form of the closed text and opening up possibilities towards generation of multiple narratives, and this kind of authorship closely resembles a commercialization of the concept as Tim Corrigan argues.

The Second Chapter, titled, **‘Kiarostami’s Trends and Influences: in Dialogue with Other Arts’** tries to look at the films of Abbas Kiarostami as instances of ethnographic filmmaking, where the degree of ethnography varies from film to films in his oeuvre, to arrive at a certain definition of truth, transcending the boundaries of conventional codes of representation in realism deployed as a means. Firstly, I have discussed how is films if at all have any bearings with realism, may be read in a Bazinian light because of his long takes, deep focus, lateral pans, presence of polyglossia through the juxtaposition of dialogues various regional dialects. The next part tries to point out the similarities and differences with the neo-realist style of filmmaking with which he is so much associated, finally trying to show through the

films of Kiarostami how they are more close to a form of realism which is deployed in ethnographic filmmaking to be truthful to the object of cinema.

The active spectatorial engagement is a major political investment in his films that refuse formal closures, or resolution of problems presented by the narrative. Kiarostami in an interview with the audience post the screening of *Taste of Cherry* said, “To me perfection is defined by how much the spectator can engage in the movie, and so a good movie is one that involves the spectator as a part of it and not as a captive person.”¹² The free play of imagination, the varying natures of spectatorial identification with the film makes them precisely the cinematic ideal of what Barthes calls a *writerly text* in which each viewer and each new reading can rewrite the text endlessly. This is an oppositional function of any auteur text, which belongs to the realm of what Roland Barthes distinguishes as the *classic* and the *readerly*. Here I have posited the existing debates on authorship and have tried to show how authorship emerges in a new definition not only out of the politics played out at the festival circuits but also a different definition of the author is possible to be generated from the indigenous cultures of Iran and ethnographic realism with which Kiarostami engages in. The chapter then engages with a discussion on Kiarostami’s style and philosophy developed in his landscape photography, and poetry. also drawing parallels and references with Persian miniature paintings. Finally, this chapter tries to posit an overview on Kiarostami’s aesthetics in relation to his other artistic practices.

The Third Chapter, titled, ‘**Alternative Sites, Empowering Forms: Towards an Alternative in Democracy**’ explores Kiarostami’s engagement with minimalism as a form and style, and how he deploys with it through his practices in installation art and “gallery films”. Minimalism which developed as a style in conceptual art always imagines the viewer within its space as inscribed, including the varying subjectivities. This leads to the art piece to perpetual open interpretation like Kiarostami’s own filmic practices. In this chapter I have shown how Kiarostami’s installations and gallery films set a new paradigm of thought and vision, once again building on his preoccupation with active spectatorship. This I have argued is a possible way of putting minds to think, and explore the invisible layers of reality manifested in any form of representation, be it media or art. Thus I argue a certain viewing culture may shape a certain viewing public who may be empowered simply by free thought.

¹² See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Akbar Mahdi and Bill Horrigan,

Since Iran (except during the tenure of Mohammad Khatami) had always been on a quest for democratic leadership, this dream has always been deferred and suspended under the current Islamic regime as was before, a plebiscitary form of viewer's democracy may be achieved through the films of Abbas Kiarostami, which transforms Iran's quest for democracy onto a private individual level, in a country of too many codes and silences.

CONCLUSION

Finally this dissertation is an attempt to raise a few theoretical questions on authorship, spectatorial engagement, realism, ethnographic modes of filmmaking minimalism and installation art practices as a training of the eye and the mind to transform the lived world of objects beyond its empirical and to train the mind's eye in visualizing the unseen in the manifest. The three chapters in my dissertation will only try to trace the possibilities of alternative conceptualization of these issues. Kiarostami is an Asian filmmaker, and constantly strives to unsettle the hegemony of practices of filmmaking and techniques of presentation, I believe that my observations and the questions that I have raised in course of my dissertation, will be an important contribution in the study of World Cinema. They will certainly open up scopes of investigation and theorization on practices in world cinema in future researches. Kiarostami's oeuvre is so rich that this dissertation is only one humble way of looking at it from the perspective of a cinephillic outsider in Iranian cinema.

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING THE STAR AUTEUR ABBAS KIAROSTAMI WITHIN THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

MAKING OF THE IRANIAN AUTEUR

Iranian Cinema broke into the international scene, through the film festival circuits in the late 1980s in Europe and the United States, and soon became a rage as a new discovery of films that brought to the fore some of the fading aspects of neo-realism. My introduction to Iranian Cinema and Abbas Kiarostami's films happened only through film festivals. India had a relatively early and sustained exposure to Iranian cinema which were screened in the competition section at the India International Film Festival, almost regularly since 1975. The Festivals were held in Delhi, Kolkata, Bombay, Kerala, and Hyderabad. However, it was with the films of Abbas Kiarostami that post-revolutionary Iranian cinema emerged as a unique repertoire of style, narratives, and simplicity. Abbas Kiarostami was a comparatively unknown figure in his own country, who essentially made children's films with a pedantic edge. In 1987 Kiarostami won an award for his film *Where is the Friend's Home* at the Locarno International Film Festival. Since then the director has never looked back. Kiarostami had also visited India as a Guest of the Kerala International Film Festival in 2000, and had addressed the public with his views on digital technology.

The instantaneous spread of this craze for Iranian cinema was also aided by the emergence of a group of critics in almost every country which took interest in Iranian Cinema to generate reviews. Alain Bergala and Jordi Ballo in Italy, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Godfrey Cheshire in the United States, Alberto Elena in Spain, Stephane Goudet in France, Geoff Andrew in the U.K, and Rashmi Doraisamy in India. All these critics gradually became empanelled contributors or correspondents with *Film International*. Very little information on the inside story of Iranian cinema related to new films, releases, festivals, awards, upcoming productions, new policies on censorship and screening, was available in English for readers across the globe. The interest in the cinema of Iran was however increasing - lauded for its simplicity, humanism and revival of neo-realist trends in film aesthetics. Two major English language film journals came up during this time which provided reliable reports in

English. These were, *Film International: Iranian Film Quarterly*, run by Mohammad Atebbai, Shadmehr Rastui, and *FILM*, a monthly publication, run by Massoud Mehrabi, Houshang Golmakani, and Abbas Yari.

In 1997 Kiarostami wins the prestigious Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The director had been a juror at the same festival in previous years. Kiarostami is probably the fourth Asian jury member after Filipino Lino Brocka in 1986, Mira Nair in 1990, and Lester James Peries in 1992. Film festivals are funded by the state and are mostly designed to support and promote national cinemas globally. The Fajr International Film Festival was designed with the objective of showcasing the annual produce of the state funded and state controlled Iranian film industry. However, owing to the typical status of the international relations of Iran post its Islamic revolution of 1979, the need to reach out to other nations through cultural products was seen as necessary, especially since tourism was not very common. Films therefore served as potential cultural ambassadors of the Islamic nation of Iran.

Abbas Kiarostami will be presented in this chapter as a festival “star”. Dina Jordanova in her article titled, “The Film Festival Circuit” observes that in general, film festivals have become akin to “conveyor belts or treadmills”. Jordanova observes that within this networked circuit of film festivals the figure of the festival hopper creates “transmission links between a chain of film festivals which are so organized that these busy bees are able to be present for some time at each one them”¹³. Pierre Rissient, a French gentleman has been referred to as the most important “film industry and festival circuit operator”, who is solely responsible for linking up the European and North American film festivals. Rissient is credited for linking up the Telluride Film Festivals and Cannes, and therefore referred to as “sole trader”. *Man of Cinema: Pierre Rissient*, directed by Todd McCarthy in the U.S.A. in 2007 was “partially shot by festival superstar Abbas Kiarostami”. Thus the most successful “auteur” of the festival circuit shot for the most important circuit operator Rissient. What deserves to be noticed in the context of my discussion is how Kiarostami is discovered through festivals and grows up through festivals to be its “super star”. I will discuss how such

¹³ See Dina Jordanova's 'The Film Festival Circuit' in Dina Jordanova and Ragan Rhyne eds. *Film Festival Year Book 1 : The Festival Circuit*; Pub. by St. Andrews Film Studies in collaboration with College Gate Press, United Kingdom, 2009.

journeys of achievement are not events in vacuum but are construed and manufactured to create a desired impact, just like cinema itself.

Before we take a look at the phenomenon that established Kiarostami as one of the most respected and sought after Iranian auteurs, we must consider the broader scenario which has acted as the springboard for Kiarostami. Let me propose a few key points of entry which I hope will provide a practical and historical backdrop. Kanoon-e- Fiqr-e Parvaresh- e Kudakan- va Noujawan (Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults or IIDCYA) ,The Farabi Cinema Foundation, The Fajr International Film Festival, and the Fajr Film Market. These four institutions or organizations have historically been integral in not only helping Kiarostami to make films but also to distribute them, shaping the very poetics of his cinema.

KANUN

Kanoon or the Institute for the Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) was established by Farah Pahalavi in 1965 under the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi . The organization was also a part of the state led modernization programme under the Pahlavi regime, whose primary objective was to foster the growth of children's literature and promote reading habits among children and young adults. It was under this agenda that films alongside music also became another important instrument in educating young minds enabling them to think through the language, of moving images. Under the IIDCYA a network of libraries were established, and it was here that many of the films produced under IIDCYA were screened and discussed in small groups. Gradually a greater number of recreational, vocational and intellectual activities were brought under the purview of this organization, after which the libraries became cultural centers for young people. Cultural programs gradually served as windows to a broader world enabling expansion and thought to increase the horizon of knowledge and thought among young Iranian people. IIDCYA also had a history of international presence ever since its inception and continues to maintain it through participation in international and world wide programs and film festivals. This institute also organized International Children's film festival in 1965, titled, International Children's and Youth Film Festival of Iran. I will show how this festival set a certain trend in Post Revolutionary Iranian cinema. In 1970 a Film Center was a

established under IIDCYA, which inducted the yet to be famous talents of the likes of Abbas Kiarostami and Behram Beyzai, Majid Majidi. The films produced under IIDCYA were supposed to be for educational purposes, like Abbas Kiarostami's *Rangha(Colors)*, or *Man Ham Mitunam(So Can I)*. The former being an introduction to the various colors designed for young children in their primary school education and the latter a comparative note on the animal kingdom and human beings in terms of their bodily activities. *Rangha* is one of Kiarostami's adventure with animation techniques.

It was here at the KANUN that Abbas Kiarostami started his career as the head of its Film division and much of his poetics and preoccupations on cinema that we know of today, came out of the environment until he became an "auteur" of international repute and gradually abandoned professional filmmaking for his own kind of experimental cinema. The root to his experimental, ethnographic impulse was already there in his films produced under what I prefer to call his KANUN period.

FARABI CINEMA FOUNDATION

The Farabi Cinema Foundation before the Islamic Revolution operated as an active film club, which like all other film clubs functioned as an organization for the promotion of film culture through screenings and discussions. Farabi was engaged in showcasing international cinemas, mostly Hollywood and European classics that would have a lasting impact on the then young generation of film makers and spur into action the makers of the Iranian New Wave Cinema. In the following section I will discuss the role of Farabi Cinema Foundation as a major influence in putting the films of Kiarostami on the international map, through their persistent marketing and promotion.

Film Festivals and Film Markets:

Before I engage with the role of the Fajr International Film Festival and the Farabi Cinema Foundation in positioning Kiarostami within a broader context, I will briefly enumerate on the definition of a film festival and the critical and theoretical possibilities of the event. The evolving definition and scope of film festival is something which will help in situating concepts such as "auteurs", and "stars", within a different matrix of critical engagement.



DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS

The importance of film festivals lies in the subtle role that they play in global and cultural diplomacy. It is through film festival circuits that a certain type of cinema turns into objects of global travel; they are what anthropologist James Clifford refers to as “traveling cultures”. From this perspective the film festival itself becomes an important field of critical inquiry, since it generates a new definition of “imagined communities” unsettling the general definition of the “public sphere”. Transnationalizing the phenomenon of film festivals open up the possibility of “theorizing the formation of collectives that cross ruptures of space and are outside formal definitions of ‘culture’”.¹⁴

If we take a look at the concept of “imagined community”(Benedict Andersson), proposed in the context of film festivals by Dina Iordanova,¹⁵ the foremost question that arises is- who forms this imagined community ? Is there a conglomerate of stateless nationhood, or is it the community of diasporic public? If the daily newspapers have played the primary role in shaping “imagined communities” of nation states. Then, drawing on Benedict Andersson’s famous thesis on nationalism one can ask what replaces the role of the newspaper in effecting this kind of a transnational public sphere. The imagined community of the film festival circuit is not exactly imagined into being, but is formed through tangible participation. Film festivals call into being a public sphere with its head quarters stationed elsewhere. The site of the film festival is a live and interactive social space where both the audience and the organizers by their viewing experience, enliven the imagined community of the spaces projected on the screens of multiple national origins. The national and cultural hybridity of the audience and the organizers of film festivals extend screen space to the sites of the festival, thereby expanding the scope and horizon of engagement of the participants in making the event truly global. Film

¹⁴ See “Dynamics of world Cinema”(2008-2011), http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/world_cinema.(1st Nov. 2009).

¹⁵ See Dina Iordanova’s ‘The Film Festival Circuit’ in Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne eds. *Film Festival Year Book 1 : The Festival Circuit*; Pub. by St. Andrews Film Studies in collaboration with College Gate Press, United Kingdom, 2009.

festivals therefore play an effective role in geopolitics through the active and interactive mediation of what Arjun Appadurai calls the “cultural scape”.

Film festivals are usually organized in the same venues, almost during the same short period of time. The success of the festival depends largely on the festival’s ability to repeat itself on a regular basis as an event. Film festivals first started in Europe, and the Venice film festival which began in 1932, is the first instance of a film festival held regularly every year.

With a completely economic logic, festivals have often been held at scenic sites with a desire to promote national and local tourism. Cannes is held on the banks of the Riviera, the Venice film festival is held at the old and the beautiful city of Venezia, the Berlin Film Festival takes place in the historic city of Berlin. Today some film festivals are directly linked to popular tourist sites – such as festivals in Hongkong, Bangkok, Cape Town, the Sundance film festival, the Pusan Film Festival, and many others. Film Festivals in most places are also linked to national tourism, where the tourists are also targeted as prospective visitors. Marjicke de Valck, in his book *Film Festivals: European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*,¹⁶ suggests that the festival may be historically categorized loosely under three phases, keeping in mind their ever transformatory nature, their quest for attention and self preservation. De Valck describes the first phase as the period when film festivals are first established, and their reoccurrence confirmed over the initial years of the event in the same place and time. During this phase within the developing history of the film festival, the primary agenda is exhibition and promotion of national cinema in front of a national or international audience. The second phase expands the scope of the festival. During this phase the scope of the film festival rises above its nationalistic concerns to act as guardians of the art of cinema and take on the role of supporting and developing the film industry as a whole. Thus festivals start to internationalize themselves involving the industry of their own nation and of other participating countries within the festival’s larger umbrella. The focus is primarily on the business agenda of the festival to ensure a move towards corporatization and globalization or internationalization of the event. The third phase reworks the late developments that have happened over the second phase and moves towards more professionalization in the organization of the

¹⁶ See Marijke De Valck’s *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*; Pub. by Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2007.(p 13-43).

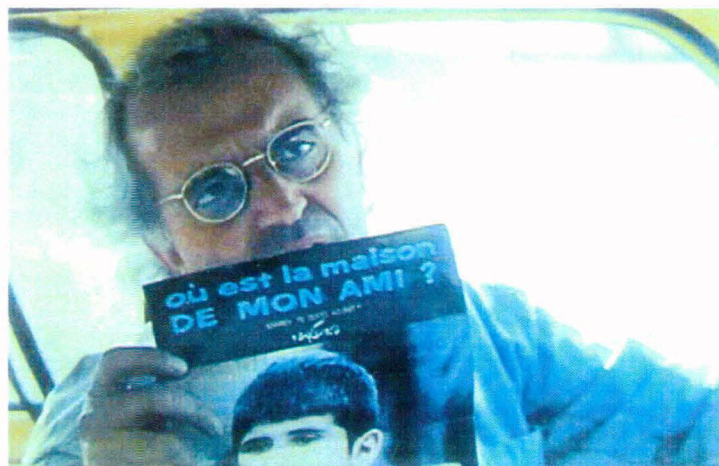


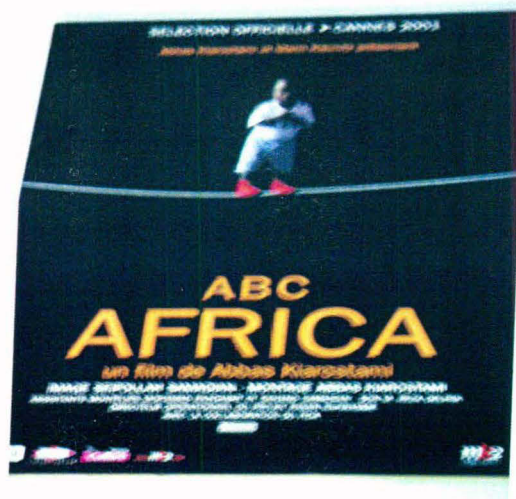
Both these are posters for the film **Where is the Friend's Home?**
 This shows how posters are different from sites of exhibition.





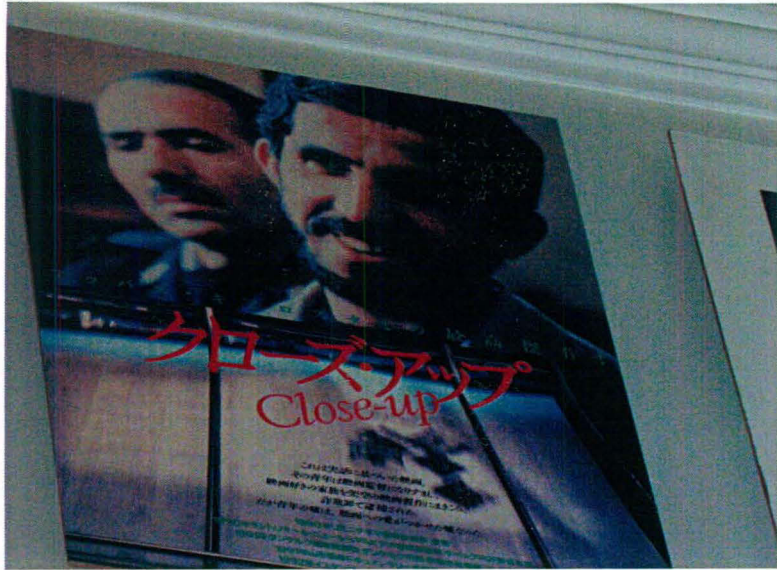
ABOVE: This poster is designed by FCF.
BELOW : Poster for **Life and Nothing Else** see the intertextuality.





ABOVE: Poster for **ABC Africa**
BELOW: Poster for **Through the Olive Trees**





Both are posters for **Close – Up**



festival and its multiple arms or ancillary service sectors to create an integrated system. This third phase ensures that the film festival also starts to operate as a short term business locale. It is at this point that the film festivals truly become mega-events. It is within such a framework that I will contextualize the case of the Fajr Film Festival, which is the oldest and the most prestigious film festival in the middle-east. The Film market associated with this also promotes the films produced in the middle-eastern countries at large.

THE FAJR INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF), started after the Islamic Revolution of Iran under the new conservative regime of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1982, after the Imam had recognized and approved the role of cinema in a critically positive light. The Fajr International Film Festival offered itself as a site for screening in the competition section all Iranian films produced in that current year. The Festival also followed the European model of development and continues to exist as the most important film festival of the Middle-East. It is quite wonderful to see the success of Fajr given its location and association with a nation embroiled in intense political and ideological complications. Yet Fajr has succeeded in offering fresh cinematic masterpieces to the world at a time when the West was busy discussing the death of the seventh art.

The Fajr Festival was not something that evolved in a vacuum, but had its antecedents in the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi in the form of the Tehran International Film Festival, the Children's Film Festival, and the Educational Film Festival. The use value of the latter two film festivals under the former regime is of some crucial importance in relation to the film career of Abbas Kiarostami. These were the primary areas where Kiarostami's early short films came into focus and attracted the attention of festival jurors as a creative talent in the film industry working in the periphery.

The Fajr Festival is organized by the Farabi Cinema Foundation, a semi private company, in the sense that it is not a typical government organization under the wings of the cultural ministry. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance have certain allocated funds which are fed into FCF to fund the festival and other activities like supporting the Iranian film industry with funds and equipment at very low costs on loan. However, a lot of private organizations within Iran fund the festival together

with corporate sponsorships from companies like LG, Samsung, Lufthansa, MTN, and many others who do not partake in any organizational or promotional job. Corporate sponsors are only interested in advertising; they do not interfere with FCF.¹⁷

However, the Fajr International Film Festival, which is primarily state funded, has now opened up for partial funding from corporate houses. Fajr never had tourism on its agenda, given visa restrictions. Amir Esfandiari who is the Head of International Affairs at FCF, on being asked if there are intentions of relating the festival to tourism says, “we do not focus on some people like tourists to see the films, we just do business.” Thus the logic of simultaneous tourism is not something that functions in the case of FIIF. What we see is the rise of the film market which has developed as another arm under the efforts of Esfandiari. However, despite its non-tourist orientation, care was taken to choose screening venues that were identified with national and cultural heritage. The objective was to promote the goodwill of the nation among the eclectic guests at the festival. The film festival was organized in four major venues chosen for simultaneous screenings, and all these sites were tourist attractions in Tehran. From 1998 until recently the event was being hosted at the Carpet Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Arts, The Laleh Park and the Hejab Centre; all located within close proximity.

THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT:

Thomas Elsaesser calls the festival circuit “a parliament of national cinemas”, They are also looked upon as sites where international relations and negotiations on geopolitical issues are staged. Most film festivals which are graded as the A list, are funded both by private and public subsidies. The funding may often be international, depending upon the theme and the scope of the festival, often giving it a “global non – profit” face, in the process underplaying the diverse and dynamic stakes of the investors and organizers at work. The film festivals have also historically developed as sites where power and politics are out. The Cannes Film Festival emerged as a reaction against the Fascist affiliation of the Venice Film Festival organized under Benito Mussolini. Festivals have historically supported themes, causes, ideologies and have therefore emerged as important cultural sites of negotiation.

¹⁷ *In an interview with Amir Esfandiari, the Head of International Affairs and Sales of FCF, this was clarified.*

A very brief discussion on the global history of film festivals will be useful to comprehend Abbas Kiarostami's presence in the contemporary. Historically, film festivals were born in the continent of Europe in the period between the two World Wars, as alternate sites of exhibition and distribution after the post war period. International film festivals owing to participation from several countries from the continent and also from other continents to elevate themselves as guardians of high art or high culture as opposed to the culture of Hollywood's mass production. Festivals became decisive marks of difference of quality and freshness as opposed to Hollywood's conveyor belt productions.

Marjke de Valck in his book *Film Festivals* makes a distinction between the state – “model (subsidized cinema)” and the “studio system (box office cinema)”. Valck sites these two pivotal distinctions to be the primary reasons for the development of art films and festival circuits. This exhibition fair ground of the site of the film festival then takes on a more important and commercial role to play in the distribution and afterlife of films and filmmakers. Thomas Elsaesser narrating his view on film festivals shifts the axis of discussion from the Europe versus Hollywood and art versus commerce scheme to a more nuanced and interrelated approach toward festivals as a network. According to Elsaesser the passage from a general value based binary system to a more calibrated perspective, computable in aggregate intensities. Elsaesser writes that the phenomenon of film festivals are “no longer based on the art versus commerce opposition, but structured around the terms we now associate with globalization: space/place, mobility/ubiquity, mapping/tracking etc., but where the pairs do not line up on a positive/negative scale, and instead represent different modalities, aggregate states of varying intensities.”¹⁸ Thus this networked structure of the film festival is rhizomatic in its configuration and potential disposition. This structural definition then enables the conceptualization of the sites of film festivals as “sites of passage”. This approach necessitates the abandoning of standard intrinsic qualities of “art” and “auteur” in the context of film festivals and by default European cinemas and cinemas of other nations other than Hollywood. These value loaded

¹⁸ See Thomas Elsaesser's *Film Festival Networks: The new topographies of Cinema in Europe* in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2005. (p-82-108).

terms now circulate as components of a strategic discourse which frames what is called an international film festival. Film festivals may then be conceptualized as circuits of global space and the films which travel the various sites within the networks are chronotopes in global travel. In my second chapter the semantic transformations of these categories will be addressed to arrive at their renewed meaning with which they persist to operate within this same field.

De Valck, proposes a working theory for the models of the international film festival which ensures their persistence, proliferation, and successful organization. According to De Valck, the tools of cinema studies which involve either a formalist approach, or a narrative analysis, or study of cinema as an institution fall short in analyzing the phenomenon of film festivals. For my topic of discussion on Abbas Kiarostami as a the “star of the festival circuit” it is essential to look at film festivals through an analytical lens to understand aspects influencing the creation and projection of star images of festival auteurs. This will also help us understand the emergence of a new definition of auteurship emerging from the context of film festival.

Kiarostami’s films are at the very outset national cinemas because until he collaborated with Mk2 for his *Wind Will Carry Us* most of his productions were state funded in one way or the other, and were also always made in Iran with Iranian non-professional actors. The films are generally set in a rural environment. During the 1990s the national cinemas of comparatively lesser known film producing nations were doing their festival round and breaking fresh ground in the international film festival circuits. Preceding this discovery of the Iranian post-revolutionary New Wave films and filmmakers, was the fifth generation of Chinese film makers. Bill Nichols notes that, the “usual opening gambit in the discovery of new cinema is the claim that these works deserve international attention because of their discovery by a festival” Thus this networked system of the festival circuit provides “immediate contexts of international reception of these films”. Nichols also notes that background stories or “behind the scenes information” shapes the international reception of films. Citing the context of Iranian cinema, Nichols writes, “Iranian film representatives learn with experience, what predispositions and doubts loom fore-most in the festival goer’s mind”. Reports from the Iranian and international media on the inside story of the situation of cinema in Iran and circulating stories in the international press and festival circuits provide a pre-set discursive field for the reception of an auteur. This

discursive field shapes and reshapes the auteur's image together with the films, constructing the fissures of an object in travel. These cultural ambassadors/negotiators make their films with an anthropological touch to project ethnology of the distant ethnic. In these films commonalities are foregrounded through a logic of humanism.

The point in this argument lies in the fact that art cinema and social realism are intricately related to each other and is also related to the exhibition and distribution network of the film festival circuit. This network depends also on the filmmaker and his/her representative country and the filmmaker's position within it. The proposition that I want to make with the support of all these perspectives is that auteurs are also stars in the same way as actors are. Here it is the director who replaces the actor within the framework of auteur theory. Further I also want to argue that what Dyer classifies as "corporate authorship" if applied to auteur directors, transforms into what King refers to as "personal monopoly".¹⁹

FILM FESTIVAL: THE NETWORKED EVENT

In his article on the Sundance Film Festival, Daniel Dayan, "Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival", proposes a "collective performance theory, where journalists, sales agents, distributors, filmmakers and the audience- all simultaneously act as performers in the event playing their specific role in relation to the structure and scope of the film festival. In the field of anthropology "collective performance is defined as "norms that appear within behavioral sequences"²⁰. However, collective performance may not be linear and uniform; rather the players are simultaneously at play within the same field. Dayan notes that festivals become platforms where director's answers questions related to self definition, identity and character. All this influences the festival jurors to select the winning films of different categories. Dayan concludes that the scope and character of film festivals is by and large proffered by "printed material" in circulation which feeds the necessity of self determination to claim its position and importance as an event within the context of other festivals in the circuit.

¹⁹ See Richard Dyer's *Stars*, Pub. by British Film Institute, London, 1998.

²⁰ See Marijke De Valck's *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*; Pub. by Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2007.(p 13-43).

This anthropological line of inquiry is furthered by De Valck, where he effectively posits network theory for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Film festivals are sites of negotiation of multiple agendas operating within the same field and are more horizontal in nature (i.e without a vertical structure of organization hierarchizing them). Business agendas, geopolitical agendas, and aesthetic agendas are the primary themes that structure festivals. These facilitate the network and a system of effective communicative connection between different agendas develops to facilitate effective functioning of the festival. It is thus clear that there is nothing at the center of this structure. Rather a “system” is generated out of a logic of effective networking that enables functional coherence in all spheres of activities. The analogy of a system actually ensures that no film festival precipitates into a total impact of the sum of its parts. De Valck writes that Festivals are supposed to be self sustainable, and its culture is legitimized. One of the key components of the festival network is the film market.

MAGIC OF THE NETWORKED CIRCUIT/ THE FILM MARKET

Film markets have developed as a very important ancillary branch of film festivals. These markets are usually housed within the main premise of the festival, and are organized with a commercial objective to promote films, attract funds, secure distribution, and sell theatrical and exhibition rights to interested buyers. The scope of the film market in each international film festival remains different. Some cater only to their own national cinemas, while some may open up for interested representatives from other countries who may be attending film festivals. In this context, I will analyze the film market of the Fajr International Film Festival which began in 1997, and coincided with Abbas Kiarostami winning the Palm d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the newly refurbished nation state was grappling with issues of its own image and that of what could and could not be legitimized as a part of the culture of the reformed republic. Islamic values and opposition to the cultural imperialism of the West were the main concerns in the drafting of the codes of approved state culture. Mir –Hosein Musavi in 1983 had

instituted the code of *Nezarat va Namayesh*²¹, (Supervision and exhibition), under the purview of which fell the censorship codes required to be observed in cinema. The film industry in Iran had been largely dependent on state funds and certification by the government was necessary, as without the certificate no film could be exhibited, sold or even sent abroad for participation in international film festivals. The following is a brief list of things which are not permissible in post-revolutionary Iran:

- Any form of insult, direct or indirect against the prophets of Islam, the imams, the supreme jurist or the ayatollahs, the leaders, and people in the state legislative services.
- Any films with themes that encourage wickedness, corruption and prostitution, and or depict sex and or deals with themes with sexual undertones.
- Films with strong contents on violence and drug abuse, and engagement with anti-Islamic activities, as a way of life.
- Films which tacitly encourage foreign(western) culture or political values and systems, and therefore runs against the “neither west nor east” ideology of the new nation state.
- Films with any kind of information on the country which is considered to be of national interest, and hence exploitable by the foreign audience.
- The way women may be depicted and projected in the films, which applies not only to films made in Iran by the Iranian filmmakers but also on films which are imported into the country for exhibition.

This *Nezarat va Namayesh* code was made more strict in 1997, imposing so many restrictions that it became difficult to make films and show them to the Iranian audience. Coupled with this was the increasing dearth of good theatres for movie projection. Following is a brief summary of the 1997 code under Mirsalim of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which were implemented in addition to previous censorship codes :

²¹ See Saeed Zeydabadi Nejad's *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Pub. by Routledge, London & N.Y., 2010.(p30-54).

- No names or characters with Islamic roots may be casted in a negative light.
- Women cannot wear tight fitting clothes and nothing other than the face and the hands until the wrist may be shown onscreen
- Strategies of attraction in films like multiple change of attire, which fuels a consumerist culture are also not permissible.
- Close-up of women's faces, body contact between opposite sexes is prohibited.
- Use of offensive language, smoking of cigarettes and pipes on screen.
- Negative characterization of army personnel, revolutionary guards, police and sympathetic portrayal of criminals.
- No music which is famous, irrespective of Iranian or Western origin.
- Scenes showcasing violence and weapons and armed attacks.

The last nail on the coffin of any kind of remotely free cinema was carefully hammered in by the current Ahmedinejad's conservative government in 2005. Hossein Saffar-Harandi, of the same MCIG, promulgated the decree that films with elements of feminism and secularism would be prohibited and banned for any public screening.

Thus looking at the brief transitional history of the censorship codes and restrictions on filmmaking in post-revolutionary Iran, we can see why the country definitely needed an alternative circuit of assured exhibition and fruitful collaborations to sell their films abroad. It was just after the 1997 revision of the MCIG guidelines, that a formally instituted Iranian film market was designed as part of the Fajr International Film Festival. Initially the film market was catering to Iranian cinema and therefore national cinema, rather than to pure business. For this reason particular types of secular film were developed to attract buyers and exhibitors. These films often bypassed the distribution and screening processes within the country and were directly aimed at export and therefore alternative circulation.

The success of films and festival directors at International film festivals was largely dependent on "attention". De Valck argues using a very important observation of Jonathan Cary, where the latter suggests that ideas about perception and attention were transformed in the late nineteenth century alongside the emergence of new technological forms of spectacle, display, projection, attraction and recording. De

Valck notes that one of the characteristics of this shift noted by Cary is that “attention acquired a central position in modern subjectivity”. It is because of the augmentation of the act of “attention” what Walter Benjamin referred to as the “exhibition value”, that defined the life and value of objects in circulation. The sites of international film festivals are spaces where spectatorial attention is sought and emotional responses solicited as a part of the process of screening the films. But attention is also solicited from people with power and fame for not only the films but also the countries of their origin, the makers of the films, the background information in circulation and so on. This “attention” then becomes the determining factor in slotting objects within a shifting regime of competitive exchange value. The film market facilitates the intermingling of multiple interests of the invited guests who have varying expectations from both Iranian cinema and international cinema.

One may simply ask, what is the unique thing that one looks for in Iranian cinema that makes it so popular in the film festival circuit?, Marcel Martin, Honorary president of the Paris based International Union of Film Critics; provides an answer saying,

“...we like the Iranian cinema now. The cinema of Makhmalbaf, Kiarostami and Panahi. We have always looked to Iranian cinema to enjoy a different reality in cinema. Something different in concept. We are tired of expecting and getting what we expect from the productions in the West. We are not looking for great acting, nor for technique balance, style or even taste. We don't watch Iranian films in order to be impressed, nor to discover something new. We look for poetry. Admittedly most of the films we see are rather slow. But we do get a different reality.”²²

The following section will address the role of the Film Market at Fajr to show how they have organized themselves and instituted distribution and exhibition of not only Iranian but also middle-eastern films.

THE FILM MARKET AT THE FAJR FILM FESTIVAL

Instituted in 1998, the Film Market which was organized as a five day event running simultaneously with the Fajr International Film Festival, was held within the huge precincts of Hotel Laleh in south of Tehran, with five to six booths. This was the

²² See Shahram Hamzai's 'New York Strive for Originality and Refinement' in *Film International*, Vol 4:1&2, 1996, Winter-Spring (91).

first attempt on the part of the Fajr organizers and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to create an official platform for selling films produced in Iran irrespective of screening permits within the country. Initially the international sales office was responsible for making the selection of Iranian films at a primary level and sending them out for competition to various international film festivals. However, not all the filmmakers benefited from this. Therefore, keeping in mind the closed nature of the country and the interest in Iranian cinema, especially in Europe, other non government production houses were invited to participate in the film market to promote films and to conduct business. Gradually over the years, obviously supported by the international success of the films of Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaff, this market made good business in securing tie-ups with French, Swedish, and Italian production houses, which not only undertook to finance the films but also helped in securing a steady distribution. The number of booths gradually increased from an initial five to twenty, until it took the form of any other standard international film market both in size and scope.

Initially, no formal brochures featuring the Guest list of those participating in the film market as either buyers or sellers were prepared. Therefore no documentation on the years referred to as the “Golden Age” of post –revolutionary Iranian cinema exists today. Therefore whatever has been the story of the inaugural year under the liberal Prime Ministership of Mohammad Khatami can only be reconstructed through speculations. However a systematic study of the available brochures from the third film market to the present reveals a general trend about the major importers of Iranian cinema in the world and the position of Abbas Kiarostami within it in terms of export business. The scope of the market and its role in regional and Middle-Eastern politics as one of the most important democratic nations in that area must also be considered. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran does not fall within countries in the typical cluster of what is known as the Middle-East, its importance in the development of films may also be illuminated by the role it plays in marketing and promoting films from these countries.

The Farabi Cinema Foundation which is the organizing body of the Fajr International Film Festival until 1998-99, had monopoly over the marketing and promotion of Iranian films both in the film market and abroad. However, criticisms levied on its practices, have broken the monopoly with the first major incident of Farabi returning its screening rights of Kiarostami films to KANUN. These were

Kiarostami's films made during the KANUN period. After Kiarostami won the Palm d'Or at Cannes, there was a growing interest in discovering the works of this filmmaker. Retrospectives of films made before *Taste of Cherry* were held at various European festivals. Until this moment Farabi had provided the facilities for improving the copy of the 16mm shorts, subtitling the films, designing and printing the posters etc. Usually the posters of a single film are different from festival to festival. It is the distributor of the film who decides on the layout of the poster depending on domestic preferences. Approval of the director on the final print was however mandatory both out of need and out of respect for the author, said Kamyar Mohsenin, the Head of the Research wing of FCF.

The representation of Iranian cinema also has a prominent presence at the Cannes film market, where Farabi has an umbrella selling Iranian films. Under this umbrella at Cannes, other Iranian producers could also be present with their films. At other festivals like Locarno and Berlin, the films are required to be submitted to FCF, who have the sole rights to represent Iranian cinema in those places. The film markets in Berlin and Cannes function throughout the period of the festival itself. Amir Esfandiari claims that a market that operates for so long is not always fruitful owing to the fact that business is not very brisk.

Farabi's indispensable and persistent role in promoting Iranian cinema can be substantiated through a few examples from its initial years of intervention. Other than the big names of Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaff, internationally awarded and well known figures like Dariush Mehrju'i, Rakshan Bani Etemad, Ebrahim Hatamikia, Kamal Tabrizi, Tahmineh Milani, are also directors whose films were initially promoted and distributed by FCF and who secured more popularity because of the festival circuit. Production and distribution companies like OMID, Sahara, Soureh Cinema Development organization, Kanoon, Iranian Independents, were some of the early names which were popularized through FCF.²³

Upto the 7th edition of the Film Market, it was only the national cinema of Iran which was promoted. In the year 2000, during the third edition of the Film Market,

²³ See *Brochures Film Market*, Pub.by Farabi Cinema Foundation, I.R.Iran, from 2000-11. Iranian Independents was formed by Mohammad Attebbai, wh had been one of the most important staff under Farabi Cinema Foundation. This organization was also instrumental in producing films of Tahmineh Milani, one of the internationally well known feminist filmmaker of Post revolutionary Iran. Mohammad Attebbai is also somebody who is rumored to be one of the instrumental figures in shaping the distribution and export of Abbas Kiarostami's films, during Attebbai's days in FCF.

Marco Muller, director of the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland and Rose Issa, a very prominent and influential festival consultant, became some of the esteemed guests of the FIFF and the Film Festival. Other prominent distribution companies on the list of invitees were Alisa Simon, dealer in distribution and exhibition rights from Facet Multimedia²⁴, Sean Mc Phillips, from Miramax, representatives from New Yorker Films, Kim Spence from Link Media, of U.S.A., a major buyer of satellite and television rights. The FIFF also had international jurors from the Hollywood Foreign Press, and the Spanish film critic Alberto Elena had also attended the Festival. ARTE France:T.V., Arthaus Distribution from Norway, Atlanta Films from Portugal, Contact Films from Netherlands, Channel Asia from Japan, CINEFIL.Inc, U.S.A., Children's Film Society of India, Crown Films from Taiwan, Folklets Bio, from Sweden, Kanal from Turkey, MK2, Distribution from Paris, were some of the major buyers and distributors who had frequented the Film Market prior to its 7th edition where the Fajr Film Festival entered its third phase and opened up its platform to international buyers. The list of these companies will shortly reveal the major buyers of the Abbas Kiarostami's films before he started to self finance his productions or collaborate more closely with European producers.

Alberto Elena is the author of the book *Abbas Kiarostami*, which is one of the most up to date books on the film oeuvre of the director. Elena was sponsored in for this project by the Iran Heritage Foundation. This is important to know, given the argument that directors who are closely associated with film festival circulation and distribution channels are considerably dependent on published material for marketing "cultural capital". We must note that the 4th Film Market had promoted and distributed a 43 minutes film titled, *Close-Up Kiarostami*, written and directed by Mahmoud Behzadnia. This film was a typical festival release serving as promotional material. It features Abbas Kiarostami's opinions as well as views expressed by some international film figures and critics on his work. The Italian auteur Nanni Moretti paid homage to Kiarostami with a short film titled, *The First Day of the Opening of Close-Up* (1997) was in fact made to mark the premiere of Kiarostami's film *Close-Up* in Rome in Moretti's own theater, where he was relatively unknown then. The fact

²⁴ Facet is one of the leading companies which release Iranian films on DVD. Several films of Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Dariush Mehrj'ui, Forough Foroughzad has been released by them on DVD.

that endorsements play an important role may be substantiated by what Moretti says in an interview, in favor of a different kind of cinema that Kiarostami advances,

“ We started the Nouvo Sacher six years ago, but there isn't really anymore space now for a different kind of cinema. I don't want to say that I want to educate the public, but it's important to form a public in such a way that a relationship can be created between public and the cinema. I think that a part of the Roman audience trusts my choice and would go and see a film if it was programmed at Nuovo Sacher, even if they don't know the director”²⁵....

Today Kiarostami does have a public in Italy, where he has gone back to make his *Cerified Copy*, presented *Tazieh* installations.

The TIME magazine, referred to Iran as the,“..home of the world's most reliable art film industry”²⁶Art films doing their rounds at international film festivals not only assure a life but also accrues value as they pass on from one festival to the next. This “rite (s) of passage” enables films to build itself on accrued impressions like a palimpsest which passes on further to keep alive this rite of accretion over time and contexts of exhibition.²⁷

It must be noted that the relationship between Iranian films doing festival rounds and their cultural and social life vis a vis the nature of support distribution and exhibition rights, depends on the favor it gains from the government. Earlier just after the revolution, Iranian films became cultural tools for the authorities which aimed at exporting their Islamic Revolution abroad. However, the initial attempts in realizing this agenda by the Farabi team met with no success. Films were rejected by international film festivals. Farabi Cinema Foundation's head of international affairs had written to the head of international film festivals to gain rights for the “Sacred Defence” of films to be screened there. However, the ardent effort of Ali Reza Shoja Nuri was met with very little enthusiasm. It was only from 1985 onwards that post revolutionary Iranian cinema²⁸ started to gain a momentum at the international film

²⁵ See Nanni Moretti in 'A Film About a Film' in *Independent Eye*, dated, 12th December, 1997.

²⁶ See *Time*, January, 2000.

²⁷ See Igor Kopytoff's 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process' in Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Pub. by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. 1986.

²⁸ Saeed Zeydabadi Nejad's *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Pub. by Routledge, London & N.Y., 2010.(p30-54).

festivals with Amir Naderi's *The Runner* in 1985, Abbas Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?* In 1987, and Bahram Beyzai's *Bashu, the Little Stranger*.

The success stories of these films were however not well received by the Iranian authorities, negatively impacting the work. An example of this contradiction may be highlighted from a conservative's speech in 1988,

"Some times(cinema authorities) say proudly that our film(s) are praised abroad and they conclude that art is revived in Iran. What an achievement! Shall we be happy when those who are responsible for the spread of moral corruption in the world praise us...?"²⁹

The rhetoric of the statement was similar to what Ayatollah Khamenei had said about the defensive role of Iran against the "cultural aggression of the West". This rhetoric comes at a moment when the liberal government of Mohammad Khatami was almost on the verge of resigning. Despite these allegations it must be borne in mind that no films made in Iran could be sent to an international film festival without certification from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Several stories related to the impact of their certification at the last moment have been in circulation in the festival press. Even Abbas Kiarostami's film *The Taste of Cherry* had a very late submission at Cannes in 1997. The Festival director had to leave a slot for the film, and the selection committee saw it for the first time when it arrived late on the day of the screening. This game of indecision and finalizing things at the last moment is something ideological on the part of the government leading to ambivalent repercussions in the domestic sector of the film's distribution.

In an interview, the then Head of Farabi Cinema Foundation, Beheshti said that, "from 1989 we saw in practice that if we announced the international success of Iranian cinema in the country, this would work against cinema as a whole. That is why we blocked (the news getting out). But when it was reported in the international media, it was publicized inside the country by Iranian journalists. The reason why we refrained from reporting the issue our self was that we knew it would become a politically sensitive issue."³⁰

²⁹ Saeed Zeydabadi Nejad's *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Pub. by Routledge, London & N.Y., 2010. (p30-54).

³⁰ Saeed Zeydabadi Nejad's *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Pub. by Routledge, London & N.Y., 2010. (p30-54).

However, it was under this regime of Khatami that the post of FCF's head of international affairs was led by Talebzadeh, under whom the role of FCF in international distribution and marketing of films became very important. The export of Iranian films reached an all time high, and in 2003-2004 Iranian films had 1769 appearance at international festivals, winning 103 awards. The most prominent Iranian auteur and star of the festival circuits, Kiarostami said in an interview with Miriam Rosen published in *Cineaste* that, "Iran's major exports now include pistachio nuts, carpets, oil.... and films".³¹

The role of Farabi Cinema Foundation was so important in promoting Abbas Kiarostami and the post revolutionary Iranian Cinema abroad, that an example of this may be the event of FCF promoting Kiarostami in the United States. Rumors of the FCF's desperate attempts to revive and promote Iranian cinema abroad was so steep, that a very well known Professor of Cinema Studies in the University of Tehran, who had been teaching in the U.S. during those years had said to me in an interview that there were rumors both in the U.S., and Iran that FCF had persuaded Mehrnaz Saeed Vafa to coax Jonathan Rosenbaum of *The Chicago Reader*, (may be to the extent of bribing) to write favorable reviews for the films of Abbas Kiarostami. Later the only English language book from the *Contemporary Director's* series was written by these two authors titled *Abbas Kiarostami*. This Professor (whom I will not name), also added that Kiarostami was not the top most one on the list of those liked by American film critics, they usually tended to favor Mohasen Makhmalbaff and later Majid Majidi also became a favorite with his *Children of Heaven* and *The White Balloon*.

I do not wish to completely go by this eccentrically bold contention, but two other findings may support this claim, of how the favorable reception of this Iranian auteur in the U.S. was manufactured. In an interview which I had taken with the FCF, Director of International Affairs, Amir Esfandiari, I had asked him for information on the countries that were the major buyers of Kiarostami's films. Esfandiari replied with "France has persistently been a major buyer followed by England and Italy, and the television channels of the Scandinavian countries. In the East it was Japan followed by Korea and America."³² Thus the U.S. was last on the buyer's list and this

³¹ See *Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Miriam Rosen in Cineast'e, Vol.19:2&3, 1993.(p38)*.

³² *This information is gathered from an interview conducted by me with Amir Esfaniari, the Head of International Affairs at FCF, in May 2011.*

first claim can be further substantiated by taking a look at the list of active buyers published by FCF for the Film Market every year. The evidence clearly points to the fact that the European countries shared a penchant for Abbas Kiarostami's films while this may not have anything to do with the use of continental aesthetics at a formal level, and the prevalence and acceptance of the category of the "auteur", in which the discourse has always also been historically spawned by the film festival circuits.

The manufacturedness of the event whether true or false is not the debate to which I want to land myself in, but the assiduous effort in promoting Kiarostami on the part of FCF is an important issue to talk about. In 1992, Kiarostami was formally launched in the United States of America by an event hosted by the Lincoln Center in collaboration with FCF. This was also the first introduction of Iranian cinema in the U.S. and was promoted as a national cinema. In 1996 the same event was repeated with the same collaborators in New York. Later many film centers associated with the Universities and Cinema Studies departments and the shared enthusiasm of the migrant Iranian population living there led to the regularizing of the event in the U.S. It was during the event of 1996 that Kiarostami's short films, made during his days at KANUN were screened at a retrospective to give a sense of the full body of his work to American audiences. We cannot forget that, this was the time when the liberal government of Mohammad Khatami was trying to negotiate a better relationship between the two nations following the U.S. hostage crisis³³ and the trade embargoes on Iran, which had its worst impact on the Iranian film industry in terms of the price of raw stock. Not surprisingly *Film Comment*, the U.S. based journal which had been the most ardent advocate of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema and especially Abbas Kiarostami, expressed a perception about of the moment and the effort. Godfrey Chesire wrote

"Iranian cinema is not only a link among other arts but a bridge between despair and hope, devastation and survival, poverty and plenty, subject and object – and most importantly between people".³⁴

³³ On 4th November 1979, 52 Americans were held hostages for 444 days till January 1981, under the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. The American Embassy in Tehran was seized by Iranian students as a protest against all forms of western dominance. This event had a far reaching impact on international ties of Iran with the United States.

³⁴ See, Godfrey Gheshire's 'How to Read Kiarostami' pub. in *Cineaste* Vol. 25:4, 200

These festival oriented films were loaded with a deep sense of humanism and optimism which may have functioned as a window into the heart of the majority of the Iranian population looking forward to the renewal of dialogue between the two countries and a context for new relational ties with the two nations. These are examples of epistemic back up being generated through distribution channels, simultaneous with the reception of the filmmakers and their films.

Nick James, editor of the British film monthly *Sight and Sound*, wrote an editorial recounting an anecdote on the U.S. based Iranian literary and film critic Hamid Dabashi in the context of Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*. Dabashi had been appointed as an advisor on Scott's project and therefore had the opportunity to see a full cut of the film before release. James who had been unable to catch a premiere of the film(since according to James, block-buster film sare made so critic proof that the distributor do not bother to screen them for film magazines) had requested Dabashi to write an article on the subject. Nick James points to the significance of previews and international premiers, where the marketing strategy of Kiarostami's films also come into focus. Hamid Dabashi writes that the technique of promotion in the world of blockbuster films like that of *Kingdom of Heaven* "couldn't be further from the processes which bring us the works of Iran's Abbas Kiarostami. Such films as his new release *Five*, are premiered at festivals to critics a long time before they reach a western audience, so that a positive consensus gathers the necessary momentum (for without positive critical backing such films do not get distributed). Thus strangely the opposing filmmaking styles of a Kiarostami and a Ridley Scott are mirrored by their distribution: the crusader epic will burst onto the screen in a volley of fast cuts and effects, whereas *Five*, quintet of shots which lasts a very long time indeed, finds its audience over a long time."³⁵ Purely from the perspective of distribution and business, one can see how the Hollywood auteur was compared to the Iranian festival auteur. It is not just a matter of fact or chance that led to such comparisons. The category of "auteurs" both in the context of Hollywood and in the case of film festivals continue to exist in a global world, parallelisms create a strong ground to inaugurate a debate on the definition of "autership" in the context of a global world.

³⁵ See Nick James' 'The Quick and the Slow', in *Sight and Sound*, Vol.15:5, May 2005, (p3).

Stardom and the Festival Circuit

Ever since Abbas Kiarostami won the Palm d' Or and persistently proved himself to be versatile in his craft, catalyzing positive appreciation from the international press, he has become a star in every sense of the term. Until recently he has religiously avoided the use of stars in his films, mastering his craft with non-professional actors. To understand the links between stardom and festival auteurs, we must revisit some of the stardom debates. Richard Dyer in his book *Stars*³⁶ has engaged with a systematic unfolding and critical analysis of the phenomenon of stardom in Hollywood. He begins his discussion with a proposition made by Edgar Morin's – "production - consumption dialectic of mass communication".³⁷ Dyer posits the question, "are stars a phenomenon of production (arising from what makers of films provide) or of consumption (arising from what audience for films demands)?"³⁸

"The internal characteristics (of the star system) is the very basis of grand scale industrial, mercantile and financial capitalism. The star system is first of all a fabrication. This is the word chosen instinctively by Carl Laemmle in his book *The Stars*, the inventor of the 'stars'." Laemmele suggests that "the fabrication of the stars is the fundamental thing in the film industry."³⁹

Thus both these perspectives on stars indicate that it is not just a disinterested phenomenon premised only on performance, beauty and fascination; but rather a product with a very high exchange value, competing in a market of overproduction. The successful star has the possibility of becoming a brand and therefore becoming a product where his/her aura is the unique selling point. Dyer notes the following from an article by Richard Schickel that stardom has the possibility of elapsing into an institution. This argument stages the height of the first part of the proposition of stars as products of Morin's "production – consumption dialectic of mass communication", illuminated from the perspective of production.

Secondly the argument that stars are products of the phenomenon of consumption leads to the reading of stars as empty signifiers at play, trying to be meaningful. Therefore how one makes meaning out of this figure of the star is left to

³⁶ See Richard Dyer's *Stars*, Pub. by British Film Institute, 1998.

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid*

its interpreter. Arguably, this interpretation also depends on the mechanisms by which the industry engages in projection. At this point I will raise the question whether it is possible to look at Kiarostami as a 'star' in the way actors are looked at? Kiarostami is probably the most successful filmmaker whose fame was constructed considerably by critical and journalistic appreciation generated by the film festival circuit. Now besides being an emblematic figure of the Iranian art film industry, Kiarostami has become almost a brand, a label, for artistic simplicity and persistent innovation. One may say that he is an auteur and auteurs do enjoy star status; but Kiarostami is an auteur with a difference and a certain edgy complexity. He is not an auteur in the same way in which Ingmar Bergman and Michaelangelo Antonioni were or the way Lars Von Trier is. The complicatedness lies in his aesthetics and the absences in the films he makes. Can we refer to Jean Rouch, or David Mayses as auteurs, because their preoccupation is the everyday and the commonplace, visited through an ethnographic approach to cinema? This specific approach even if deployed in a fiction film exposes the apparatus and the constructedness of the film text, which makes the text loose in its structure and open to interpretation, complicating the role of the classical auteur, whose vision is supposed to be embossed in the film.

It is not surprising that the international press has compared Kiarostami with Lars von Trier. Probably the common running thread among the two auteurs, who are comparatively "new discoveries", lies along three points - inclination for experimentation in both form and content, creating room for thought, and engaging with new techniques in filmmaking and film theory. The networked circuit of the film festivals, irrespective of their national or international status, always tries to draw parallels or posit one in relation to the other.

In the second chapter of my dissertation I will elaborate a different perspective on Abbas Kiarostami's position of as an auteur as complicated, referring to how such complicatedness is related to the various aesthetic influences he has on his style. At this point just to stage my debate on stardom and stars I will very briefly outline the three major classifications under auteur theory to posit my argument, that there is a renewed definition of the "auteur" in circulation, which refers to it as a commercial category, much like "stars". Individual auteurship - refers to the approach of crediting the director as solely the author of a film. Dyer sums up after Andrew Sarris's view on auteur theory to suggest, that there are two perspectives on individual auteurship. The first, is an "evaluative" approach which may be a parameter for only "good

directors” who are capable of transforming readymade scripts with their Midas touch as in Hollywood. The second is an investigative approach through which an indelible mark of a signatorial style is discernable throughout the oeuvre of his/her work.⁴⁰

The aforesaid approach however is the most contested terrain within debates on auteurism. Countering which, are the arguments on “multiple authorship” which states that the director, the scriptwriter, the producer of the film are all authors of a single film, owing to their very specific individual contribution. This contribution may also be of a collective nature where the director is the center of all the collective efforts. Dyer notes that Hollywood proposes yet another model under this theory that of “corporate authorship” wherein the individual studios or the institution of Hollywood as a whole influences, controls, structures the entire process of a film, from its very production to its distribution.

The European film Festivals which have established themselves as a major site for the exhibition of non commercial cinema project films by auteurs in the way it has been classically defined. Here individual directors, their persona in the films all end up creating an aura of success and celebration of high art. However corporate authorship has an intrinsic relationship to the idea of the auteur as a star, manufactured with several contributing factors. Dyer’s book on stars elaborates on how the institutionalized system of the studios has a potentially informal route, walking on which one may reach the zenith. Stars have the ability to establish their own values by cultivating an individual image leading to assertion of a certain type of “personification”. Barry King in his article “Articulating Stardom”, calls this phenomenon “personal monopoly”, a process through which stars try to “represent a set of meanings which are uniquely marketable”. Emmanuel Levy posits that stardom is dependent upon a certain paradox, “ a discrepancy exists between acting’s egalitarian orientation –(that) anybody can become a movie star and its highly stratified structure....”⁴¹ thus the first part of the proposition shows the possibility of seeing the figure of the star as a “democratic elite”, which however, is displaced by the second part of this proposition turning it into a paradox. Most stars are projected as people coming from very ordinary backgrounds, who lack in formal higher education, and are struck by sheer luck to get noticed and singled out of an extremely competitive pool.

⁴⁰ *op. cit.*

⁴¹ *op. cit.*

The biographical detail of Kiarostami also situates him within this discourse. Kiarostami in several interviews has talked about his mentioned of his unhappy childhood, the fact that he was a traffic police in his college days, or had no formal training in filmmaking, also paints the picture of any other man. The making of the figure of a star depends on strong publicity and endorsements, and in the following section I will show how a very powerful endorsement game played via the festival circuits have made Kiarostami as one of the most important living and active filmmakers of our time.

Films that travel the festival circuit depend on international endorsements to add to their value can also be revealed by the example of Akira Kurosawa writing the publicity leaflet for Kiarostami's *Taste of cherry* during the Tokyo International Film Festival. The necessity of comparing festival auteurs with an earlier era seems to be necessary to ensure that people gather enough enthusiasm and makes sure to watch it amidst a pool of art films simultaneously in circulation within the exhibition flow. Kurosawa writes,

"I believe the films of Iranian filmmaker are extraordinary. Words cannot relate my feelings. I suggest you see his films; and then you will see what I mean. Satyajit Ray passed away and I got very upset, but having watched Kiarostami's films I thank God, because now we have a good substitute for him. Recently in the face of the decline of cinema in the developed countries, nations with little experience in the area of filmmaking have produced valuable works; and I have to think about this more seriously after seeing Kiarostami's films."⁴²

The second instance of this kind of publicity is also fed by the critical media. For example when Kiarostami's films were being popularized in the United States of America, *Film Comment*, a U.S. based film journal had made a bold declaration that, "we are living in the age of Kiarostami, as we once did in the Age of Godard". In the game of endorsements and comparisons, a number of film directors in their interviews have expressed their admiration and enthusiasm for Kiarostami's films. Nanni Moretti, Quentin Tarantino, Akira Kurosawa, Jean Luc Godard, Emir Kusturica, Aki Karusmaki, Claire Simone, Klapisch, are some of the internationally famous directors who have endorsed Kiarostami.

⁴² See Shohreh Golparian's *The Emperor and I : Abbas Kiarostami Meets Akira Kurosawa*, Pub. by Film International, Autumn 1983.

There has always been a tendency to compare Kiarostami with Satyajit Ray, Federico Fellini, and Roberto Rossellini, to fit him within the larger discursive contexts of neo-realism and its ideological practices. This is most visible in the writings of European film critics. Interestingly Kiarostami has also been awarded the life-time achievements in both Federico Fellini and Roberto Rossellini awards. During the early years of his hey days in the festival circuit Kiarostami had said in an interview that he was more interested in Sophia Lauren, than in Italian Neorealism with which he has been identified. The U.S. based critics however, are more inclined to compare his techniques and styles with the French New Wave masters like, Jean Luc Godard and Jacques Tati, and most visibly the writings of Jonathan Rosenbaum echoes this discourse. According to a poll conducted by *Film International: Iranian Film Quarterly*, among 58 non- Iranian film experts in 1999, Abbas Kiarostami won 128 votes for his film *Close-Up* and *Where is the Friend's Home?* And Mohsen Makhmalbaff occupied the second position in this poll, followed by Jafar Panahi. This tells us that FCF was successful in establishing the requisites of a film festival through their marvelous marketing. By this time the new discovery of Iranian Cinema was no longer suspended in a pool of intellectual speculation, but was grounded in critical discourse generated via this network of film festivals. The dependability on the national cinema from the Islamic Republic of Iran as voiced by the *TIME* magazine was kept upto their expectation thereby enabling a steady and persistent flow of Iranian films in all the major the international film festivals, and Kiarostami was a pioneer of this flow. The following Table 1 actually bears testimony to Kiarostami's status as a "star" within the festival circuit. It shows the list of countries that have honored him with a Life time Achievement Award, for his entire film career. The vote of popularity and the innumerable number of these awards, together with the data of Table 2 which catalogues the international journey of his films and the list of awards they have won over time and across nations, truly reveals the face of the "star", and the brand name Kiarostami, who is still devising tools to unsettle the role of conventional aesthetics in capturing everyday life.

The proposition that I want to make with the support of all these perspectives on stars, is that auteurs are also stars in the same way as the actors are. Here it is the director who replaces the actor. Further I also want to suggest that Dyer's

classification of as “corporate authorship” if applied in auteur directors, could turn into what King calls the “personal monopoly”⁴³.

Abbas Kiarostami is a figure who emerges from an institutional setup, even though it is not of Hollywood. The fact that Kiarostami has made a number of his of films under the non-profit seeking organization KANUN, he was largely unknown outside his own country, is worth noticing carefully. However even within his tenure in Kanoon he made films with an experimental edge to them. These humble attempts at revolutionizing film aesthetics was criticized by his colleagues and critics. However, it was the completely corporatized marketing strategy of the International Sales and Distribution section of the Farabi Cinema Foundation which tacitly fostered the creation of the ‘star’ Abbas Kiarostami. This attempt reached its finitude with the crowning of Kiarostami as the winner of the Palm d’Or at the Cannes International Film Festival.

Post –revolutionary Iranian cinema after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, became a global rage in the international film festival circuits. The festivals also led to newer discoveries from Iran. Auteurs like Mohsen Makhmalbaff, Jafar Panahi, Bahman Ghobadi, Samira Makhmalaff, Tahmineh Milani, Bahman Farmanara and others. Before the revolution only two filmmakers,- Sohrab Sahid Sales, Ebrahim Golestan and the poet Forough Foroughzad, from the pre-revolutionary Iran had received popularity and critical acclaim outside their own country.

This critical acclaim at Cannes opened up for Kiarostami a whole new network of production, distribution and exhibition contexts, in navigating intelligently through the network of international film festivals. Kiarostami negotiated what Dyer calls the “corporate authorship”. Kiarostami did himself forge a “personal monopoly” like a star. He has transformed himself to a brand, an institution, which represent a certain set of meanings that are uniquely marketable within the festival circuits. Meaghan Morris points out that, “the primary modes of film and auteur packing are advertising, review snipping, trailers, magazine profiles- always already in appropriation as the preconditions and not the postproduction of meaning.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Richard Dyer's *Stars*, Pub.by British Film Institute, 1998.

⁴⁴ See Meaghan Morris's, 'Tooth and Claw:Tales of Survival and Crocodile Dundee', in Andrew Ross ed *Universal Abandon: the Politics of Postmodernism*, pub. by University of Minnesota Press, U.S.A.,1998.

The success of this festival star has been so overwhelmingly impressive, that he hardly makes any films with Iranian investments, or in Iran. This has become the most viable alternative for Kiarostami to combat with the state's banning of his films in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Kiarostami's success in forging a personal monopoly may be further substantiated with Kiarostami's foundation of the Abbas Kiarostami's Productions, which after he completely shifted to the digital format in film making, took over the charges of production and distribution. However, one cannot forget the role of the Film Market of the Farabi Cinema Foundation organized as part of the Fajr International Film Festival, which had promoted Kiarostami's films world wide at the peak of his career and also showcased his shorts made at KANUN at the international film festival circuits. This kind of promotion established him as an auteur committed to a persistent quest for aesthetic transformation and simplicity.

Table 1: Cataloguing the List of Life Time Achievement Awards

Year	Name of the Award	Festival Organization	Country
2000	The award of Poetic Cinema of Recanati.	-	1. Italy
2000	Lifetime Achievement Award of Beirut Film Festival	Beirut Film Festival	2. Lebanon
2000	Akira Kurosawa Honorary Award	43 rd San Francisco International Film Festival	3. USA
2000	Special Plaque	Lebanese Ministry of Culture and Art	4. Lebanon
2000	The Golden Dolphin of Kish Island	-	5. Iran
2000	The Most Voted Filmmaker of the 1990s by 114 Film Figures	Film Comment	6. USA
1999	1990s Most Outstanding Filmmaker Prize	Cinematheque of Toronto	7. Canada
1999	Golden Alexander Prize	Thessaloniki Film Festival	8. Greece
1999	Honorary Prize for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	Montpellier Film Festival	9. France
1999	Panorama Golden Plaque of the	Athens Film Festival	10. Greece

	European Cinema		
1999	Special Prize of Masters for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	18 th Istanbul International Film Festival	11. Turkey
1997	UNESCO special Award for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	UNESCO	12. France
1997	Victtorio de Sica Memorial Award for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	Victtorio de Sica Foundation	13. Italy
1997	Special Prize of Festival Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	27 th Feast of Cinema	14. Italy
1997	Special Award of Feast of Cinema for Abbas Kiarostami	2 nd Feast of Cinema	15. Teheran
1996	Officier de la Legion d'Honneur	Ministry of Culture and Art	16. France
1995	Pier Paolo Pasolini Award for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	Pier Paolo Pasolini Foundation	17. Italy
1993	Golden Spike for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	38 th Valladolid Internationa Film Festival	18. Spain
1993	Special Award of Festival for Film Career of Abbas	6 th Riminicinema International Film	19. Italy

	Kiarostami	Festival	
1993	Prize of City of Rimini for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	6 th Riminicinema International Film Festival	20. Italy
1993	Francois Truffaut Award for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	23 rd Giffoni International Film Festival	21. Italy
1992	Roberto Rossellini Award for Film Career of Abbas Kiarostami	International Film Festival	

Table 2: List of Films that have won internationally in Competition

Year	Name of the Film	Name of the Film Festival/Organization	Host Country	Award / Participation
1970	The Bread and Alley	5 th Teheran International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults	Iran	Jury Special Award
1974	The Experience	4 th Giffoni International Film Festival	Italy	1 st Prize in Narrative Category
1974	The Traveler	9 th Teheran International Festival of Films for children and Young Adults	Iran	Jury's Grand Prize
1974	The Traveler	9 th Teheran International Festival of Films for children and Young Adults	Iran	National TV Prize
1976	A Suit for Wedding	11 th Teheran International Festival of Films for children and Young Adults	Iran	Special Diploma of Critics
1976	Two Solutions for One Problem	International Educational Festival of Mexico	Mexico	1 st Prize
1977	A Suit for Wedding	10 th Moscow International Film Festival	Soviet Union	Diploma of Honor
1979	Case No. 1, Case No. 2	Iranian Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults	Iran	Best Film Award

1984	The Chorus	2 nd Fagr International Film Festival	Iran	Golden Plaque of Best Short Film
1986	First Graders	4 th Fagr International Film Festival	Iran	Special Jury Award
1987	Where is the Friend's Home?	5 th Fagr International Film Festival	Iran	Golden plaque of Best Director
1987	Where is the Friend's Home?	5 th Fagr International Film Festival	Iran	Jury Special Award
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	42 nd Locarno International Film Festival	Switzerland	Bronze Leopard
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	42 nd Locarno International Film Festival	Switzerland	FIPRESCI Special Mention
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	42 nd Locarno International Film Festival	Switzerland	Prize of International Confederation of Art Cinemas
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	42 nd Locarno International Film Festival	Switzerland	Ecumenical Jury Special Mention
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	42 nd Locarno International Film Festival	Switzerland	Berkley Jury Prize
1989	Where is the Friend's Home?	RCC Film Festival	France	Prize of International Confederation of Art Cinemas
1990	Close Up	5 th Fagr Intonation Film Festival	Iran	Jury Special Prize

1990	Close Up	3 rd Ruminicinema International Film Festival	Italy	Silver R
1990	Where is the Friend's Home?	International Film Festival of Royal Film Archive of Belgium	Belgium	Best Film Award
1990	Close Up	19 th Montreal International Film Festival of New Cinema and Video	Canada	Prize of Quebec Critic Association
1991	Close Up	5 th Dunkerque International Film Festival	France	Prize of Best Director
1991	Close Up	5 th Dunkerque International Film Festival	France	Prize of the Press
1991	Close Up	5 th Dunkerque International Film Festival	France	Prize of the City of Dunkerque
1992	Where is the Friend's Home?	5 th Cinekid International Children Film Festival of Amsterdam	Netherlands	CINEKID Award
1992	Close Up	11 th Istanbul International Film Festival	Turkey	FIPRESCI Prize
1992	And Life Goes On...	45 th Cannes International Film Festival	France	Best Film Award of Certain Regard
1992	And Life Goes On...	Association of Belgian Film Distributers	Belgium	Prix Cine Decouvertes

1993	And Life Goes On...	17 th Sao Paolo International Film Festival	Brazil	Special Award of Critics
1994	Through the Olive Trees	30 th Chicago International Film Festival	USA	Silver Hugo
1994	Through the Olive Trees	18 th Sao Paolo International Film Festival	Brazil	Special Award of Critics
1995	Through the Olive Trees	8 th Singapore International Film Festival	Singapore	Award of the Best Director
1995	Through the Olive Trees	13 th Bergamo Film Meeting	Italy	Golden Rose
1995	Where is the Friend's Home	Rome Summer Film Festival	Italy	Best Film Award
1995	Through the Olive Trees	44 th Melbourne International Film Festival	Australia	The Third Best Film of Audience
1996	-	International Film Guide	International	Director of the Year
1997	Taste of Cherry	50 th Cannes International Film Festival	France	Golden Plam of Best Film
1997	Taste of Cherry	Time Magazine	USA	Best Film of the Year
1998	Taste of Cherry	Society of Film Critics of Boston	USA	Best Foreign Film of the Year
1998	Taste of Cherry	National Society of Film Critics	USA	Best Foreign Film of the Year

1999	The Wind Will Carry Us	Venice International Film Festival	Italy	Jury Grand Prize
1999	The Wind Will Carry Us	Venice International Film Festival	Italy	Best Film Award of Critics
1999	The Wind Will Carry Us	Venice International Film Festival	Italy	Future Cinema Youth Prize

A closer look at both these tables shows Kiarostami's films have a market and are appreciated in the culturally hierarchical centers of France and Italy. Therefore there is something universal in their impact. Like a "star" Kiarostami's controversies related to U.S. visa was much highlighted in the press, and repercussions of the event of denial actually joined the invisible community of the festival circuit. A very good example will be the following. The U.S. consular services in France had declined to grant Abbas Kiarostami a visa to the U.S to attend the New York Film Festival in 2002. During this visit he was also supposed to be present at the screening of his film and visit the Harvard University and the Ohio State University. As a strong response to this insult, Finnish filmmaker, Aki Karusmaki, boycotted the New York Film Festival in solidarity. Karusmaki who was also scheduled to appear at the Press screening of his film, *Man Without a past*, declined to attend the festival saying,

"Under the circumstances, I too am forced to cancel my participation, for if the present government of the United States of America does not want an Iranian, they will hardly have any use for a Finn, either. We do not even have the oil."⁴⁵

An immediate example from the Iranian press would be the article published in *Film International: Iranian Film Quarterly*, which is the most circulated English language Iranian journal, titled, "Abbas Kiarostami is no Tom, Dick and Harry". In this article Richard Pena's statement on the issue, (the chairman of New York Film Festival's selection committee and Program Director of Film Society of Lincoln

⁴⁵ See *Screen International*, Vol: 1375, Issue October 2002.

Center) that, “The State Department said that the Iranians are subject to an extensive security review based on the Enhanced Border Security Act, approved in May as a part of post September 11 security measures.” was taken very offensively by the Iranian press. They responded to Pena, saying that, “I strongly believe that Mr. Kiarostami ought to have withdrawn his film from New York Film Festival immediately upon hearing that he had been denied an entry visa. He needs no fame and fortune to be made in the U.S.” Abbas Kiarostami had himself commented on this incident at the Thessaloniki Film Festival in Nov.2002, saying, “It seems I was considered a terrorist..... This comes from a country which is unable to seize real terrorists and instead runs after people like me.”⁴⁶, it is probably the first time that Kiarostami had criticized the U.S. government for barring Middle Eastern filmmakers instead of catching terrorists.

Another event of solidarity was when Jean Luc Godard, who had once said- “films begin with D.W. Griffith and ends with Kiarostami” declined his presence at the Academy Awards ceremony in anger because Kiarostami’s film, *Through the Olive Trees*, did not win at the festival and lost to a film by Krystoff Kieslowski. Kiarostami had also been declined a visa to the United Kingdom in 2004 when he was to direct *Mozart’s Cosi Fan Tutte* for the English National Opera. In this case some quick diplomatic intervention in the Embassy had set things straight for the Iranian filmmaker.

Kiarostami has always expressed his distaste for interviews. He also does not like being on the jury at festivals; but paradoxically he is probably a filmmaker with the maximum number of interviews published in different languages. He is also the most prominent judge at international film festivals after the 1990s. A star of the international festival circuit is thus made and unmade by the jurors in the festival and Kiarostami is quite aware of this highly subjective and not so disinterested job of the juror.

Kiarostami has said that he always feels he has been unable to say what he meant to in interviews and that it makes him feel stressed. However, he continues with them as publicity for his films which of late he himself produces. In reality Kiarostami controls his interviews and in the absence of any personnel runs a monopoly on his vision on cinema. Whenever the time is ripe and demands a

⁴⁶ See *Screen International*, Vol.1382, Issue, Nov. 2002.

necessary intervention on his part, Kiarostami films self documentaries like *Ten on Ten*. There are probably very few other directors who have such a prolific oeuvre of interviews as Kiarostami has. He tacitly creates his own episteme to feed off the festival circuit and the image of the “star”, in this case as someone who engages in an act of creation with the very same tools as any other, but emerges with very different results, forming the tagline of this kind of “stardom”. As far as publicity of his films are concerned, it was Farabi who did the best job and also the MK2 Production and Distribution company of Paris, which was again introduced to Iranian Cinema through FCF. The fact that promotion and distribution makes or unmakes a film and sometimes a director altogether may also be cited with reference to the failure of Kiarostami’s *Through the Olive Trees* at the Academy Awards. Kiarostami had said in an interview that had Miramax not taken the task of promoting his *Through the Olive Trees*, the film’s chances of winning at the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign language film category, would not have been lost. In an interview with *Cineaste* Kiarostami writes, “I am not happy with Miramax, because they did not do any decent publicity on the film. This is a small movie, a low budget movie, but its not a pathetic movie and it does not deserve the treatment they gave it. They decided not to distribute it nationally before the nominations. Perhaps the problem is Disney(which owns Miramax). Big distributors don’t pay attention to small films. They were probably too busy with Pulp Fiction.”⁴⁷

We can see how the festival circuits are closely connected to the distribution of films. The fate of a single film may be decided by its complicated mechanisms of circulation. All this leads to a layered texture of the product with ample scope for self regeneration. International film festival circuits often show an inclination towards appreciating a kind of poetic cinema which like its very own structure will offer meanings on a conveyor belt to suit the interests of the various stake holders, who are part of the festival and the larger circuit. This is the reason why “auteur” cinema needs to be redefined. The auteur is not dead, at least within the physical peripheries of the festival circuit, which still thrives on celebrating the auteur function. Developing on Richard Dyer’s formulation of “corporate authorship”, Timothy Corrigan has discussed the case of the German New Wave filmmaker, Alexander

⁴⁷ See Pat Aufderheide’s *Real Life is More Important Than Cinema Pub. in Cineaste*

Kluge in his article, 'The Commerce of Auteurism: A voice without Authority'⁴⁸. Corrigan suggests a definition of auteurism moving away from the sixties debate to the 1980s. He proposes that auteurism can be read as "a way of viewing and receiving movies."⁴⁹ This kind of corporate authorship along with the celebration of the death of the author of any text merges at a certain point. Through the development of critical aesthetic strategies, which effectively contains both the corporate urge to preserve the figure of the author and the post structuralist desire to celebrate its absence? Corrigan writes, "with Kluge, one finds a less critical exploitation of auteurism as a category for reception.....Kluge admits to performing himself as an image of the writer/producer/filmmaker, but primarily as a strategy for eliciting certain relations with his audience."⁵⁰ Following this renewed and effective definition of participatory authorship in cinema I will discuss the role of Abbas Kiarostami as a self-reflexive author in the following chapter.

⁴⁸ See Timothy Corrigan's 'The Commerce of Auteurism: A voice without Authority' in *The New German Critique*, Issue.49, Special Issue on Alexander Kluge, Winter 1990.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ *op. cit.*

CHAPTER 2

KIAROSTAMI'S TRENDS AND INFLUENCES: IN DIALOGUE WITH OTHER ARTS

Abbas Kiarostami is one of the most enigmatic auteurs of world cinema whose films refuse to be straight jacketed under any single “ism” like realism, neo-realism, or any specific movement like the cinema verite movement, the French New Wave or direct cinema practices. It would be naïve to say that Kiarostami’s films are affirmative examples of a revival in neo-realist practices in film making or that they are borderline ventures making a case for themselves between the thin and fragile boundaries of fiction and non-fiction cinema or for that matter they are simply legacies of the great tradition of Persian poetry, music and visual arts.

In this chapter I will show the complicatedness of Kiarostami’s films and their relationship with other arts like photography and poetry. It must be noted that Abbas Kiarostami is also a photographer, a graphic artist, a poet and a painter (though I have not had the fortune to see any of his paintings and therefore am unable to relate my discussion with this art form.) At the onset I will start with how Kiarostami has persistently been compared to the neorealist auteurs and how his films have been read as realist films by a majority of the western critics. Having opened this debate I will show how these labels fall short in their scope and definition to accommodate Kiarostami’s ethnographic approach in his films. Secondly, I will pick up the thread of argument on auteur theory from my preceding chapter to suggest distinctness in Kiarostami’s work. The point in this chapter is to show how Kiarostami arrives at a definitive stylistic practice and how he rewrites the auteur function. Thirdly, there is a very strong communication between different forms of artistic practices discernable in Kiarostami’s oeuvre, specifically in his framings, and his landscape photographs.

Aristotle thought of *Poesis*, as a distinct conceptually formed activity of non original, imitative production or *mimemata*. This kind of human activity generates a specific form of presentation of the universal. The basic objective of representation in any medium is generally aimed at achieving an experiential understanding of rational finitude: of what it is like to be an embodied rational creature, a human being in this

situation or that.⁵¹ Imitation is therefore differentiated from one another by the very nature of the medium: the object concerned and the very perspective of the imitator adopted in the act of representation.

Realism in art claims to appropriate the external objective world, through certain formal arrangements. This is achieved through an ordering of reality in a specific manner. Cinematic realism takes after the tradition of realist novels in their approach to narration and representation, which however is not a replication of reality, but an imposition of a certain aesthetic on the subject. Reality on the other hand is something ambiguous, described through a complex web of signifiers. Perception of reality through a work of representation, therefore invites the mitigation of human consciousness, to make meaning out of the ambiguity of apparently irrelevant details; of slips and fissures. Kiarostami exploits the medium of cinema in his search for truth that exists beyond visible reality, in the rhythm of a poetry that simply simulates meaning without attributing any value. Given the stylistic precision in his work, its simplicity and the use of certain approaches to the film medium, the director is often located in the context of Italian Neo-Realism, Cinema Verite practices and Third Cinema approaches to films. But in this Chapter I would like to argue, that despite his close stylistic association with these approaches to cinema, Kiarostami's films develop a deep sense of humanism, unqualified by any usual preoccupation. The films are not counter approaches to the face of socio- political upheavals in Iran. Kiarostami's humanism spills out of his cinema from a certain love for life and a certain rational for existence.

BAZINIAN REALISM AND KIAROSTAMI

Andre Bazin in his 'Ontology of the Photographic Image'⁵² hailed photography as a means of recording and preserving the real world (the profilmic world), even in its dislocation from the confines of historical time and space. When Bazin wrote that the aesthetic qualities of photography have the power to "lay bare the reality", he stressed on the indexical bond between the image and the object. The

⁵¹ See Richard Elridge's *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (U.K. and New York: Cambridge University press, 2003) pp-26-27.

⁵² See Andre Bazin's 'Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, Trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London; University of California Press:1967).

assumption that the image is existentially linked with the object, transforms the former to the order of a “natural creation”.

Bazin’s writings on cinema and his concern with realism have been contextualized in his biography by theoreticians like Dudley Andrew; Bazin’s inclination towards a French Catholic existentialism and phenomenological worldview was shaped by the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl. He stressed on the essence of reality of being and on a worldview that allowed the marriage of the empirical and the metaphysical. Bazin believed in the redemptive power of the image its ability to thrive on “a phenomenology of salvation and grace.” According to Bazin’s philosophy of realism, it is this very essence that makes reality go through a process of “emergence into something” negotiated, structured and made comprehensible by the intervention of human consciousness. Bazin’s urge like Husserl’s is “to clarify the sense of this world”, as something existing and valid. *Noema* in the Husserlian sense of the term is a concatenation of the features of consciousness that make perception meaningful through a sense of “as if of” an object. Husserl’s very act of *noema* stems from a humanist approach of a shared existence in the life-world, characterized by the process of adaptation, but where each individual experience is guided by differences in their intentionality. It is perhaps this strand of humanism discernable in the Husserlian oeuvre of phenomenological thought that attracted Bazin and now Kiarostami in their worldview and aesthetics of cognition.

Kiarostami’s *Bread and Alley* was far from political in its content or approach. It was rather an exercise aimed at reaching the moment of evolution of a rational solution to the problem and the recurrence of the same human situation that constitutes human reality. Similar concerns would emerge in his later films. In *Where is My Friend’s Home?*, like the bread in the former film, it is the homework copy in the latter that becomes the focus of the story, only waiting for the young protagonists to come to terms with reality and perform that action which best satisfies the need of the moment, with moralizing. The film’s essence of humanism does not stem from the fact that Ahamad saved his friend from being punished, but the fact that he could feel the humiliation that awaited his friend.

What Bazin had admired in the neo-realist films was their “fundamental humanism”. Bazin saw neo-realism as a cinema that had attained its fullness in “being the art of the real”, which extended to a celebration of a new film form. Parallel to

films like Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* or Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema*; Bazin had also forwarded his appraisal for Orson Wells' *Citizen Kane*. Therefore it is not just a movement, or the content of the film that Bazin was an ardent protégée of, but a certain film form that deployed deep focus photography, long takes, one shot-sequences, panning shots or in short a form that sought not to piecemeal reality like in Hollywood's dominant form. The use of such formal devices enables a "continuum of reality", "without chopping the world up into little fragments".⁵³ The ambiguity of deep focus in the parlance of a phenomenological aesthetics allows the ego(the self) to single out something, which may be an object, a memory, a mood for special attention; allowing it to be viewed from various aspects so that eventually some essence emerges, which is not identical to any perception. Here it is experience which stands out as autonomous, bracketing the reality of the material world. In both *Wind Will Carry Us* and *Through the Olive Trees* in the last scenes, the camera recedes backwards and in a high angle deep focus shot and with long takes the camera slowly pans; capturing the ambiguity of the search, the resolution is present there but awaits itself to be conjured by the individual subjected in the act of experiencing it. The films never conclude on a note of finitude; the final moments in these films are pregnant with possibilities but the individual experiences structure the closures by virtue of their intentionality.

It is this essence of reality which is achieved through the ambiguity of the profilmic captured in deep focus and with long takes. In *Where is My Friend's Home?* Ahmad's Search for Nematzadeh's house lead by the old carpenter through the dark tired alleyways is captured without sensationalizing the situation. The minimal editing tries to he retain the essence of the fear of getting lost, of despair, and fatigue, the essence of the real journey in search of a house without an address.

A dead tree by the side, a flock of sheep, a black smith's shop, are the unique address locators for an eight year old Ahmad. The long takes of Kiarostami reflect on rather inconsequential objects like a tortoise, a tin can rolling along in the wind; or an insect pushing through a pebble; which forms the larger corpus of reality beyond the realm of the diegetic. The panning shots of the mountains in the back-drop of the vast stretches of Olive trees, contextualizes the human subject within the broader reality of

⁵³ See Andre Bazin's 'The evolution of the Language of Cinema' in *What is Cinema? Vol.1* Trans.by Hugh Gray (Berekeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press:1967).

nature in which the exchange of emotions, moments of impersonation, stories of survival start to unravel the realities of life. "Cinema has always felt the natural unavoidable necessity to insert a 'story' into reality to make it exciting and spectacular",⁵⁴ but neo-realism stressed on the dailiness of life; and on the trivial incidents in the course of living which coupled together could produce stories "worth watching".

Kiarostami's films often play on common spectatorial desire for a "story" *Wind Will Carry Us* is the most obvious example of how Kiarostami inaugurates the possibility of a story and obviates its importance, relegating what was to form the diegetic focus, to a peripheral concern. The reporter who poses as a telecommunications engineer is on a mission to document the funeral rituals of a certain rural community in rural Iran. Mrs. Malek's impending death and her death itself, are supposed to be the primary preoccupation of the film. However, for Kiarostami the realities of life in this community are to be found in the ever complaining lady at the tea shop. The image of the site provides a counterpoint to a now defunct public space (sphere) which has been reduced to a domestic space (of the order of private sphere) for venting household complaints. The new Islamic regime post 1979 has led to the radical transformation of the mosque and the *bazaar* into the only public spheres (they are the only sites where public meetings are held and grievances are voiced for mobilization of the masses). The account of funeral rites and rituals by the *madrasah* teacher, the little boy's urgency in availing himself education, the lack of network experienced by the reporter each time he tries to communicate over the phone, and the struggle of a tortoise to upturn itself in continuing its journey, or in things that either seem cursory or inconsequential. Similarly, in *Where is My Friend's Home?*, Kiarostami is not interested so much in revealing the outcome of an action, as he is 'in the drama of things' he(we) happen(s) to encounter not out of any planning. When Ahmad reaches the house which is supposed to be Nematzadeh's, guided by the old carpenter, he reaches the door and there is a cut to darkness; the next shot is that of a solitary mule ringing its bell in a nocturnal unidentified space, uninhabited by another soul. For that moment the answer to whether Ahamad succeeds in returning his friend's notebook or not remains suspended, until he produces both copies with the homework in class the following day.

⁵⁴ See Cesare Zavattini's 'Some Ideas on the Cinema' in *Sight and Sound*; Vol. 23:2, Trans. By Pier Luigi Chiarini.

LOOKING FOR THE CLOSEST PREDECESSOR IN FORM AND STYLE

NEO-REALISM

Italian neo-realism developed in post war Italy, recuperating from the experience of destruction, war and the anti fascist resistance, an unlikely liaison with the Left and the church. The movement made a decisive change in the history of cinema. Though neo-realism started in the mid 1940s, by the 1950s the movement had faded away. Yet the style and agenda of Italian Neo-realism continued to be put to use most prominently by the Third Cinema, and Cinema Verite practitioners of the 1950s and even later.

Abbas Kiarostami has often been compared with neorealist filmmakers like Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, and Satyajit Ray for his use of non-professional actors, deep humanism, deep focus shots and long takes to respect a certain space-time relationship, and a preoccupation with everyday life and the common people. Like Kiarostami's cinema, Neo-realist films have also had a universal appeal. However, I would argue that there is a major difference between Neo-realism and Kiarostami's style. If there is anything common here, it is Andre Bazin, by which I mean a certain philosophy that Bazin had traced in these films that is also developed and celebrated in the films and also in the other artistic practices of Kiarostami. It is not always very prudent to rely on a filmmaker's version of influences on his/her work, however, Kiarostami had repeatedly denied any influence of the neo-realist style on his filmmaking approach and had said that whatever one or two films he did see from that period was because of he liked Sophia Loren, and not because of Rosellini, De Sica, or Fellini. He did express his liking for Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* which was far from bearing the tenets of neo-realism, belonging to the director's post neo-realist period.

One of the other reasons for this repeated comparison with Italian neo-realism is that, the films were also made on low budget; they too have an inclination towards children and were also state funded. It is important to remember that Kiarostami had spent a major part of his career making films under the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults(KANUN) which was controlled by the Ministry of Education and therefore was State funded.

Neo-realism developed in opposition to the mechanical, formulaic and conveyor belt productions of Hollywood cinema that had flooded the European markets during the post war period. Neo-realism developed from a dual impulse. At one level it was a response to the contemporary socio-political scenario of post-war Italy and at another level, it generated itself out of a deep sense of humanism in the face of existential crisis in Europe. Set within these two broader concerns of neo-realism, Abbas Kiarostami has often been considered a contemporary beneficiary of the movement.

Lino Micciche has referred to neo-realism as “an ethics of aesthetics”⁵⁵ than an aesthetic by itself therefore clearly hinting at its politicized counter agenda. The French journal *Films and Documents*⁵⁶ published the ten point agenda of this ethical movement in filmmaking:

- Films must “bear a message”
- The scripts are required to be “topical” ,inspired by “concrete events”
- They must express “a sense of detail as a means of authentication”.
- The films must bear “a sense of the masses and the ability to surprise”
- Films must exude “Realism; but reality is filtered by a very delicate sensitivity”.
- They must thrive on “the truth of actors, often non-professionals”
- The films were preferred to be shot on location ie: they must bear “the truth of décor and (show) a refusal of the studio.”
- The truth of lighting
- Cinematography must “be reminiscent of reportage style(which) stresses the impression of truth”
- Use of post synchronization and free mobility of the camera.

These tenets of neo-realism, were mastered by De Sica, Visconti, Rossellini in landmark films like *The Bicycle Thieves*, *La Terra Trema*, *Rome: Open City*. We will see how many of these obligatory prescriptions have made their way consciously or unconsciously into Kiarostami’s oeuvre.

⁵⁵ See Mira Liehm’s *Passion and Defiance: Italian Film from 1942 to the Present*, Pub. by University of California Press, U.S.A., 1986.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

It is true that, Abbas Kiarostami's films do show strong inclination towards neo-realism. The director has almost always shot in open spaces, except for *Ten* and *My Sweet Shirin*.⁵⁷ *Ten* in this context is also a perverse violation of Kiarostami's stylistic principles since the entire film is shot inside a car, driven by a female driver (the protagonist) moving through the streets of Tehran, day and night. The car is the most private place that one can carve out in a completely private domain. *My Sweet Shirin* is another crucial counterpoint to his style as it is a chamber drama where the protagonists are the spectators who watch an imaginary film and its sound track. Apart from these two instances, all of Kiarostami's films are shot on location so much so that they sometimes become an extradiegetic explorations of landscape.

Use of non-professional actors: Until recently⁵⁸ all of Kiarostami's films were made with non-professional actors and this was not only something specific to his style but many other Iranian New Wave filmmakers had been using them like Sohrab Sahid Saless, Amir Naderi, Abolfazal Jallili. Kiarostami's use of non-professional actors was for primarily of two reasons. At KANUN Kiarostami made films about children for which he had to use a lot of children who were not professional actors. Non professional actors were also easier to handle because of their lack of knowledge of cinema and were therefore more adjusting to the needs of the director.

If neo-realist films are message oriented, then that is not what Kiarostami's films, are. However, Kiarostami's films address universal issues which human beings encounter in the course of their lives. Neorealist films do not offer solutions; the end of the narrative is particularly inconclusive. The issue remains usually inconclusive. This strategy of inconclusiveness remains most prominent in *Through the Olive Trees* which is a curious play with certain cinematic reality and fiction. Whether Tahereh ultimately decides to marry Hossein remains inconclusive as the camera zooms out, and pulls away from the endless pleading of Hossein. The camera ultimately loses itself in the wilderness of the olive trees.

⁵⁷ Only these two films are shot in closed door situations. All of his other films use both the interior and exterior spaces.

⁵⁸ In *My Sweet Shirin* almost all the actresses whose faces we see are Iranian actors and *Certified Copy* a film which he had directed in Italy stars Juliette Binoche French star, which is one of the very few fictional narrative Kiarostami had made during his career.

CINEMA VERITE

“Every film is a fiction film” claimed Christian Metz. Mick Eaton contextualizes Rouch’s films to contend that, every reality that a film tries to posit is specific “to the cinematic representation and the space allowed to us as spectators of the representation...” Kiarostami perhaps believes in this. He simply marries fiction and non-fiction not as incompatible but as compatible partners in generating a sense of reality only achievable in cinema. Orson Welles, had praised De Sica’s *Shoeshine* (1946), when he said, “The camera disappeared, the screen disappeared, it was just life.”⁵⁹ However, contrary to this kind of cinematic realism Kiarostami’s form is one that, “declares its artifice, vividly depicting a reality but not allowing us to forget that we are watching a film...”⁶⁰

Cinema verite can be best defined as an exercise in the filmmaker’s submission to truth in his or her goal of representation. Cinema verite as a style and aesthetic emerged out of several counter influences, like Dziga Vertov’s “Kino-eye”, the socio-cultural contexts of post Second World War Europe, aesthetic developments in neo-realism which strived for “truthful presentation of the film content”. Low budgets, very basic technical facilities and maximum know how became important in filming, life as it was lived, instead of life as acted. The French historian Georges Sadoul had for the first time translated “kino-pravda” as “Cinema Veritae” in his *History of an Art*, published in Paris in 1940.

“Cinema can... take the mask from the face, play a game without frolic, tell the true story with cinema-veritae”.⁶¹

In March 1963 at a conference held in Lyon, Paris, film intellectuals distinguished cinema verite from other practices like that of Direct cinema or living camera or film enquiries all of which operated on similar impulses, but had different means aimed at different goals as the names suggest. “Cinema –verite means that we want to eliminate fiction and get closer to real life. We know that we must only pose the problem of truth, to arouse questions in the spectator”⁶² The protagonist of these

⁵⁹ See Gilberto Perez’s ‘Where is the director?’ in *Sight and Sound* . Vol.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ See Georges Sadoul trans ‘Actua`lite de Dziga Vertov’ in *Cahiers du Cinema*, Vol.24:144, June 1963.

⁶² See Hubert Smith’s ‘The University Film Director and Cinema Veritae’ in the *Journal of University Film Producers Association*, Vol. 19:2, 1967.

films was then hailed as the unknown man in the street who is caught in his daily web of activities.

Cinema verite aesthetics developed in close collaboration with ethnographic filmmaking by people like Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch. The problem of a moral order always persisted along with the artistic constraints in observing reality. The effectiveness of the film form or the aesthetics depend on the extent to which the problem can be mitigated. Karl G. Heider writes of the "ethnographic" as a "continuous variable property of many films"⁶³ Heider uses "ethnographicness" as a term to define a certain quality in films, which may or may not be directly anthropological. Heider defines ethnography as "a way of making a detailed description and analysis of human behavior based on long term study on the spot.... (it) relates specific observed behavior to cultural norms". At the same time the problem of truthfulness surfaces as a challenge. In this sense Kiarostami's films are rich in their ethnographicness, the concern is for truth and not a constructed realism.

Cinema Verite in France and Direct cinema in the United States brought about major changes in filmmaking. Both these movements had developed from the technological innovations of light weight super eight cameras and 16mm filmmaking equipment which could record synchronized sound on location. 16mm cameras had not only made the camera lighter but also smaller and less intimidating. Kiarostami's encounter with the digital camera, which his son had been using to take production notes onsite had revealed to him a major area of experimentation that he had hitherto left unexplored. Having realized the potential of this new form of recording device Kiarostami had refashioned the concluding portion of *Taste of Cherry*, which complicated everything that the narrative of the feature film had posited.

"...the only way to film is to walk about with the camera, taking it to wherever it is the most effective, and improvising a ballet in which the camera itself becomes just as much alive as the people it is filming"⁶⁴

For Kiarostami the notion of reality in cinema is its self-reflexivity. The fact that the filmmaker does take into account the reality of the audience watching the film, the profilmic is being filmed where the actors are playing their roles, is essential in preserving the truth of the moment. This concern of Jean Rouch is best exemplified in Kiarostami's own film practice in *ABC Africa*, where the apparatus

⁶³ See Karl.G.Heider's *Ethnographic Film*, Pub. by University of Texas Press, Austin, 1976.

⁶⁴ See Jean Rouch's "The Camera and the Man"

and the director are constantly foregrounded as the children sing and dance around them. In the context of *Close-Up* Kiarostami had said,

“In *Close-Up*, for example, one explains before the trial that he is doing a film. We also request the responsible authority to allow us to bring our own equipment in the courtroom. The camera and film by all means play a role in the trial itself. So it must show them. In this case the reality you are talking about is actually giving the viewer to see.”⁶⁵

The act of filming is always about framing and therefore it can on principle never capture reality in its entirety. Filming is always partial and fragmented. What is possible is a partial truth to enter that space through the framings. The artifice of filmmaking must be included as an equal protagonist.

“I am violently opposed to film crews. My reasons are several” (and these are all related to the ethics of ethnographic filmmaking). “Every time a film is shot, privacy is violated; but when the filmmaker - ethnologist is alone, when he cannot lean on his group of foreigners, the responsibility for any impurity can only be assumed by this one man.”⁶⁶

In an interview, Kiarostami said “My wish in vain was to make a day of cinema without camera, without microphone, without team, or to find a definitive way to make the actor forget the omnipresence of this instrument without stop fixed on him. Because the actor in front of the camera confronts an invasive technique, he or she loses his liberty or spontaneity, which in this sense is effectively killed”⁶⁷ Kiarostami’s *Ten*, *ABC Africa*, *Close-Up*, *Wind Will Carry Us*, explicitly deploy the techniques of cinema verite and therefore show an aesthetic inclination for ethnographic cinema. In a certain sense they are ethnographic. *Ten* not only manages effectively to efface the filmmaker but also deploys an interview mode, exploring the various perspectives on the nature of the man – woman relationship, from various other women of varying ages and from different walks of life. *ABC Africa* is a film that closely resembles the famous feminist Persian poet Forough Fouroughzad and Ebrahim Golestan’s documentary *House is Black* (*Khaneh Siah Ast*) on the leprosy colony of Tabriz in northern Iran. The unique way in which Foroughzad handled the seriousness of the issue without marring the truth of their everyday lives in the

⁶⁵ See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Stephanie Goudet...

⁶⁶ See Jean Rouch’s ‘Camera and the Man’

⁶⁷ See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Stephane Goudet.....

colony, may have been a very strong influence on Abbas Kiarostami's treatment of the Ugandan AIDS victims.

"I think anyway, that all filmmakers lie, without exception. But this lie serves to say a truth, a great truth; that is what is important and not the form that one takes to tell this truth."⁶⁸

The fact that the primary preoccupation is truth and not reality which is perceptual and subjective is best substantiated by the way Kiarostami treated *Life and Nothing Else* in which the director was shooting months after the actual earthquake had taken place in Koker district of northern Iran. Kiarostami was asked to make a film on the earthquake but he had said,

"...in reality in the moment of the earthquake we didn't have the camera with us, One cannot consequently direct a film on this subject much later and it was impossible for me to deny this delay."⁶⁹

Ethnography cannot be cheated of its true temporality, then it ceases to be of any ethnographic value. Here Kiarostami wanted to include the spectator within the frame to emphasize that the film was a construction and therefore should not be approached with any kind of sentimentality. Whatever remains as the essence of the event bygone is what constitutes the truth in this film. The elements of self reflexivity, intertextuality, all aid in testifying to the truth of cinema. In the following discussion on the art of eliminating the author, (which is the most radical thing that any auteur may do in his films) I will show how and why such theoretical and philosophical positions are expressed in the films of Kiarostami.

"The closest I can come to any accurate definition is that the finished film.... Photographed and edited by the same filmmaker's perception of what happened. This is assuming that he does no directing. No influence, in a funny sort of way our films *are* the audience , a recorded audience, The films are a way of sharing my audience experience."⁷⁰

Nothing more closely and accurately can capture the essence of Abbas Kiarostami's own philosophies on cinema. *Ten*, was an ethnography of a wife and a mother, the two defining roles of a woman with a series of interviews that appear one

⁶⁸ See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Stephane Goudet.....

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ Hubert Smith's 'The University Film Director and Cinema Veritae' in the *Journal of University Film Producers Association*, Vol. 19:2, 1967

after another as the female protagonist drives through the streets of Tehran. In this film Kiarostami used the digital camera to take full advantage of the apparatus to devise a new form of cinematography where it is possible to completely discard the role of the professional could be discarded. Kiarostami had filmed his *Ten* by mounting the camera on the dashboard of his car, and had stated in a lot of interviews that he sometimes was seated in the back seat of the car, but on occasions was absent and only saw the rushes later on. *My Sweet Shirin*, his “gallery film” which is a document on the ethnography of emotions where the audience reaction to the screen is captured on camera.

REWRITING AUTHORSHIP

Having argued that Kiarostami’s films have a complicated relationship to realism I will now show how the director rewrites the conventional definition of the auteur. This discussion has two points of entry. Firstly we need an exploration of how we define classical auteur theory, and secondly, how does a substantiation of Kiarostami’s use of sound serve both the functions of an ethnographic tool, and a recurrent motif in his aesthetic tendencies.

AUTEUR THEORY

Auteur theory developed in 1965 and tried to proclaim cinema as an art form with its own consistency, theme and style. The attempt was to try and elevate cinema to the upper echelons of high art, disentangling it from its base association with entertainment. There was a need to pin down cinema which is essentially a collective art to a single artist. By this cinema had the possibility of performing all the higher intellectual functions of painting or sculpture, like embodying a personal vision on ethics, morality, and metaphysical issues. It may be of some significance that during the same time the French critic Roland Barthes was decrying the “death of the author” and the “birth of the reader”; where the texts were freed from any preordained shackles of interpretation. Meaning was set free and reading became a democratic practice, less expressive and more personal. In this context apparently Abbas Kiarostami’s films which play on a note of self effacement seem to readily give in to the idea of a free text, a “readerly text”.

Andrew Sarris in his 'Notes on the Auteur Theory'⁷¹ had foregrounded certain characteristic features of the film text, and mastered it with the name of its director or author, irrespective of how bad or how good the film script or the actors were. Technical competence, distinguishable personality, interior meaning capable of transforming the object of film into art; are some of the primary defining features of auteur theory. Auteurism also depends on intertextuality, because this helps in mapping a consistency of style and therefore making a case for the uniqueness of the author. It must be noted that in the 1960s when Sarris wrote his article, film festivals were celebrating the discourse of "auteurs" and national cinemas after their post war rejuvenation. In my preceding chapter I have already discussed how the idea of the "auteur" was so important in the construction of the "masters" of cinema who were celebrated by film festivals.

Pauline Kael in her article, 'Circles and Squares'⁷², responded critically to the nature of Sarris's plea for "auteur theory", Kael refuted the entire idea as a theory predicated on bogus claims which could never stand in for a theory to judge cinema on any aesthetic grounds. Kael had noted that the greatness of the critic lies in being able to apply one's own intuition in determining the quality of the work of art, deploying his or her own knowledge and intelligence. If "formulaic" auteur theory was just about vouching for a particular kind of film and filmmakers who repeated their pattern for the critic to voice them, then that amounts to degeneration, because, "repetition without development is decline"⁷³ The objective of any constructive criticism noted Kael was "sifting the corns to point out the new, fresh, original". Citing the case of Antonioni and Cocteau, Kael suggested that the ability to achieve their own personal experience is what is far more valuable than to achieve technical competence. Technical competence only aids in covering up the weakness of the narrative and cannot be the overriding factor in determining the worth of any filmmaker. Kiarostami's films from the perspective of technical competence are definitely incompetent as his director of photography had pointed out to him during their first shoot of *Bread and Alley*. In this film Kiarostami had opted for a single take to film the sequence of the boy carrying the bread who enters his home and shuts the door behind him where the dog is sleeping. The cameraman had insisted on

⁷¹ See Andrew Sarris's 'Notes on Auteur Theory', pub. in *Film Culture*, Vol.29, 1962.

⁷² See Pauline Kael's 'Circles and Squares' in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 16:3, 1963.

⁷³ *op.cit.*

introducing a cut to the sequence. He had even shown Kiarostami a book on cinematography to explain how faulty the long take would be. Kiarostami insisted that as long as the idea has been conveyed it does not matter what technique is deployed to achieve a certain philosophy of the event.

It may be noted clearly that Sarris was trying to make a case for the Hollywood directors and Kael was trying to establish an argument about the “great masters” of European art cinema, which still at that time had the scope of receiving films without any a priori judgment, and therefore fresh talents like Kiarostamis could find a ladder to be one of the “masters” of the craft. However, an operation of “decipherment” as Peter Wollen argues in proposing his case for an auteur theory does persist in Abbas Kiarostami films, and this can be supported not only by interpretative freedom that his films offer, but also by what the editorial board to the preface of Godfrey Cheshire’s article begins with. Cheshire introduces the debate as,

“With the release of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the “Great Kiarostami Debate” has begun to rage with renewed intensity. On one side are those who feel the Iranian director is the greatest filmmakers in the world anywhere at work today. In the opposing camp are those convinced that he’s no more than a critic’s darling, an overrated and pretentious filmmaker whose films are meaningless as they are boring.”

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In an interview to *Cahiers du Cinema* Kiarostami had said, “ I was convinced after a few films, that it was necessary to eliminate the director”⁷⁵ The existence of a self effacing director in the films became a possible reality with the introduction of the digital camera. Kiarostami writes, “Thanks to the digital camera which allows us to erase us and to take the distance much more easily”⁷⁶ Eliminating the director from the scene of action eliminates the pressure group that sometimes may distort the freeness of a non-professional group of actors. The digital camera allows the condition of direction to have taken place much in advance of the shooting on the actual day.

⁷⁴ See Godfrey Cheshire’s ‘ How to Read Kiarostami’ pub. in *Cineaste* Vol.25:4, 2000.

⁷⁵ See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Mahmoud Kalari, ‘Le Mond d’ A.K.’ pub. in *Cahiers du Cinema*, Vol.493.

⁷⁶ See Patrice Blouin and Charles Tesson’s ‘Elimination de l’auteur’ in *Cahiers du Cinema* in Sept. 2002.

If Jean Rouch had stressed on the minimal intervention of the filmic apparatus to preserve the essence and truth of the profilmic, then the replacement of the digital camera in the act of filming makes it possible to shoot without any alteration to the object under observation. Both Kiarostami and Rouch hold that the intervention of the camera alters reality to a great extent, the actors stop being themselves and take on a synthetic persona. In his *Ten*, Kiarostami had deployed this technique and notes that, non-professional actors feel free this way. The director observes that "...at the end of the film this instrument could show the intensity of the moment"⁷⁷ The other option is to make the camera visible and include it as a part of the text almost like a Joycean exercise. The presence of the director and the cameraman Seifollah Samadian in *ABC Africa*, is an example of this kind of reflexivity the camera freely mingles with the crowd of children showing both the director and the cameraman onscreen through the lens of another camera, which gives the film a behind the scene feel of "truthfulness" and reality.

Sylvie Rollet in an article on Kiarostami has observed that in his attempts to not tell a story to the spectator, the director writes systematically in his films, the process of achieving itself."⁷⁸ Rollet suggests that this "desire to film a story and simultaneously record the emergence of writing makes the "squint time" one of the preferred postures of his work"⁷⁹ The depiction of pure duration of the act of filmmaking is an impulse that may alter the basic premise of a classical text that fits the bill of auteur criticism. Rollet's use of the term "*l'écriture*" or the act of writing in French, invokes the image of a "*le camera stylo*" of Alexander Astruc, which is probably the first instance of theorizing authorship in cinema, relating it to an act of writing with a camera instead of a pen. The camera in Kiarostami's films is still the pen, now much lighter, and versatile, but what is altered radically is the idea of the auteur.

It must be remembered that Barthes had freed the text from the author. The term "auteur" in cinema studies has taken a backseat and turned into a sign that operates in the market, in film festival circuits for renewed appropriation of meaning. Festivals take a free hand in re-appropriating the discourse of the auteur in a market

⁷⁷ See Patrice Blouin and Charles Tesson's 'Elimination de l'auteur' in *Cahiers du Cinema* in Sept. 2002.

⁷⁸ See Sylvie Rollet's 'An Aesthetic of the Track', pub. in *Positif*, Vol.443, December 1997.

⁷⁹ *op.cit.*

oriented world, which is always in a post modern context a star in some sense. The auteur is then a human figure tangible and subject to effective and positive criticism, rather than a function, that embodies itself in the text s/he produces. The question then is, can Abbas Kiarostami be the Dostoevsky of this auteur about whom it is difficult to extrapolate any singular layer of meaning?

SOUND AND KIAROSTAMI

There is a certain signatorial way in which Kiarostami uses sound in his films right from the early period when he made short films at KANUN. The use of direct sound in Kiarostami's films is of primary importance. "At the beginning of each shooting I say to my team to go for sound recording. And one takes a cameraman along for filming"⁸⁰ Sound which the filmmaker acknowledges adds a third dimension and depth to the flat two dimensional film shot. Kiarostami explores and plays with sound through deep engagement with various experimental techniques. Since sound also indicates the perspective of a shot, it often faces the battle of equally competing perspectives. Kiarostami cites that in his film *Through the Olive Trees*, when Hossein and Tahereh speak to each other on the terrace this conversation is of a private nature which to be truthful to the reality of the situation is expected to be outside ear shot. At the same time there is urgency on the part of the spectators to know what they are saying. In such moments of compromises with truth, Kiarostami simply prefers to mix sound with group sound to give it a layered texture. The preoccupation with the perspective of sound and its specific impressions are best exemplified in his documentary feature *Close-Up*, Drawing on verite techniques, *Close-Ups* main protagonist is an imposter Sabzian, who impersonates as the famous Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaff. In Kiarostami's film Sabzian is the author of his story and the director is simply a facilitator and a spectator who records the proceedings of the trial in the Court room. Kiarostami points to the sudden sound failure in the film during the climax when Makhmalbaff goes to meet Sabzian. The fact that Makhmalbaff is famous and that he has persistently been informed about the trial proceedings, makes it possible to see that the camera may posit Makhmalbaff in the process as the hero and negate the original agenda of the film. To undercut this

⁸⁰ See Kiarostami in an interview with Stephan`e Goudet pub. in *Positif*, Vol.442, 1997.

possibility of a switch over in authorship in the film Kiarostami said the sudden failure of sound which appeared as a technical error was in fact a post production stunt. The director recollects,

“The dialogue between Hossein and Makhmalbaff gave a new direction to the film, and I did not want it. It may have brought the story to a conclusion and not open it again.(closed texts are not a part of Kiarostami’s artistic practices) Finally this would have made Makhmalbaff the hero. But I wanted to make a film on Sabzian, and that remains from start to finish, the center of my concern.”⁸¹

He adds, “I wanted to cut the sound track with the scissors, the sound engineer of *Close-Up* threw a significant look at me not believing that I was going to do this. He refused to cut the sound himself. Finally it was I who had to do it, while he walked to the other side of the hall”⁸²

Another example of the deliberate removal of the sound track is present in the controversial film *Homework(Mashq-e-shab)*. In this film which addresses the issue of children not taking their homework to school, Kiarostami records a sound track while filming young boys reciting their prayers at school. But gradually the voices break and deteriorate into the sound of anarchy. The authoritative government of the Islamic regime had problems with this scene as it made many spectators laugh. Thus to avoid any controversy, Kiarostami decided to take away the sound only to use its absence as a mark of accentuation in the film which completely transformed its power and semantics. For Kiarostami, this proves how the silent cinema is still powerful today, because the absence of sound requires greater concentration on the visual.

In his film *Hamsarayan* or *The Chorus* Kiarostami used the aural track as something more subtle than the visual track. The film which is about an old deaf man who walks down the busy Tehran streets to buy his daily bread and bundle of salad raddish, who suddenly notices that his hearing aids have been dislodged when a tanga puller tugs and rushes past him. The hearing aid is then put back, but the second time when the old man waits at a cobbler’s booth in the busy bazaar with high pitched noise and loud conversations, he takes a decision to disconnect it from his ears, to escape the torture of the noise. The hearing aid is disconnected a third time when the

⁸¹ See Abba Kiarostami in an interview with Stephan`e Goudet pub. in *Positif*, Vol.442, 1997.

⁸² See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Mahmoud Kalari, ‘Le Mond d’ A.K.’ pub. in *Cahiers du Cinema*, Vol.493.

old man looks out of his window at home and sees a road drilling machine creating uproar. The duration of time from this image till the repositioning of the hearing aid is something marvelous. This film in a very simple manner sums up the discourse of sound used in cinema. The sense of an uninterrupted slow rhythm makes him forget the passage of time and the fact that it is time for his granddaughter to come back from school. Finally sound and time are reinstated when all the children had joined below his window and started to call out, “grandpa open the door”.

The idea of representing sound comes from an inability to modulate and control, through a recording machine. This old man is capable of controlling sound and therefore oblivious of time. We first see the hands of the table clock at twelve. There are at least three to four close shots of the same clock when the hands have barely changed their position. But just as the chorus from below gathers momentum, to penetrate the old man’s preferred silence, the clock is shown to have traveled a semicircle striking at half past twelve. In *Homework* and *Close-Up* Kiarostami controls the sound to privilege the image, the absence of sound does not create a void in the image track because its presence is always evoked and at times represented.

FILMS IN CONVERSATION WITH OTHER ARTS

Godfrey Cheshire is perhaps the foremost proponent of lending a sense of mysticism and duality of meaning to Kiarostami’s artistic oeuvre. For Kiarostami, cinema, “has roots in Persian traditions of visual art and story telling that are millennia old – aspects of his country’s civilization that are often forgotten in the west.”⁸³ In the very same year Cheshire suggested that Kiarostami’s cinema needs to be viewed as reflections on an “eastern mirror”⁸⁴. Although Cheshire maintained that it was perfectly possible to read Kiarostami without this edge and only through the contexts of modernity. However, he suggested that Kiarostami’s work reflects “Shiite thought: *zahir*(the outward, the apparent); also, the *Koranic* text and *batin* (the inner, the hidden; the esoteric meaning)”.⁸⁵ Cheshire suggests that there are two layers of meaning in his work and three ways of approaching them,

⁸³ See S.F. Said in an interview with Abbas Kiarostami , ‘The best Director in the World?’, in *Daily Telegraph*, dated 21st September 2000.

⁸⁴ See Vol.25:4 , Godfrey Cheshire’s ‘How to Read Kiarostami’ in *Cineaste* 2000.

⁸⁵ *ibid*

“...the first of these readings might be called the *exoteric* and the second the *esoteric*, a third reading can be *poetic-philosophical*, one that encompasses both the preceding meanings, seeing their ‘higher’ truth not as a case of ‘*either/or*’ *both /and*’.”⁸⁶

What Cheshire sees as the truth of a “poetic-philosophical order”, can only be arrived at through dialogue with the other arts that the auteur opens up for the spectators.

POETRY

Kiarostami had published a collection of three or four line poems in his anthology *Walking with the Wind* in 2001, which was translated into several European languages. This was a decisive moment in his film career, given the startling similarities between his poems and philosophy of filmmaking. The poems in this collection reflect the figure of an artist who is as venerable as the Japanese poet Basho (who is regarded among the deities in the Shinto pantheon). I purposefully draw this parallel between the Japanese master and the Iranian poet for Kiarostami’s poems can be traced to the tradition of Japanese *haiku*. However, it will be wrong to overlook the great Persian tradition of poetry which unconsciously or consciously colors his work. The poems of Maulana Rumi and Hafez the two bulwarks of the Sufi poetic tradition have an overarching influence on his work. The use of metaphors, symbols and high contrasts in Kiarostami’s poems are direct influences of his native tradition. The poems of the modernist poet Sohrab Sepheri, who is also a painter, are probably the closest predecessors in their visual quality and in their quest for capturing the amorphous “moments” that punctuate the humdrum flow of everyday life. In terms of their sensuality, Forough Foroughzad’s poems are the best and closest in their treatment of sensuality and human desire. Direct influences of these poets are visible in the way they have inspired two of Kiarostami’s most successful and enchanting films, namely *Where is the Friend’s House?* and *Wind Will Carry Us*. The former is inspired by one of Sepheri’s poems titled *Nishani (Address)* which reads:

⁸⁶ *ibid*

In the false-dawn twilight
The rider asked,
“Where is the house of the friend?”
The sky
halted
had a branch of light
in his mouth which he gave
to the darkness of the sand
and pointed with his finger
to an aspen and
said:
“before you get to the tree there is garden-lane
more green than God’s dream
and in that garden-lane,
as far as the breath of the wing-spread
of candor, love is blue.
you go to the end of that lane
which appears behind adolescence
then you turn
towards the flower of solitude
two steps more to the flower...
at the foot of the fountain
of eternal earth myths you stop and stay
and a transparent fear envelops you
in the intimacy of flowing space
you hear a rustling
you see child
who has climbed up a pine tree
o pick up a chick
from the nest of light.
And from thre child you ask

“Where is the House of the Friend?”⁸⁷

The old bespectacled man in *Where is the Friend's House?* stops by to accompany the young boy on his search for his friend's home and finally loses his way in a surreal journey through a maze of alleyways. This moment in the film is true to the dream like evocations of the prescriptive poem and is also one that introduces a very uncommon jump cut, where we see the little boy undertaking a fruitless journey suddenly is in his home confronted by his parents. Whether this temporal ellipsis is a dream or a real journey is left to open interpretation. What is true is the notion of a quest without a map, without a proper guide, without an address. A quest which may also be read as one for the ultimate truth, where the triumph awaits at the horizon in the moment of twilight when the seeker loses the self that seeks.

The other film is inspired by the poetic impulse of Foroughzad's poem reads as follows *Bad ma ra khwahad bord*(*The Wind Will Take Us*)

In my small night, ah
The wind has a date with the leaves of the trees
In my small night there is agony of destruction
Listen
Do you hear the darkness blowing?
I look upon this bliss as a stranger
I am addicted to my despair
Listen
Do you hear the darkness blowing?
Something is passing in the night
The moon is restless and red
And over this rooftop
Where crumbling is a constant fear
Clouds, like a procession of mourners,
Seem to be waiting for the moment of rain
A moment,
And the nothing

⁸⁷ See David.L.Martin trans. *The Expanse of Green: Poems of Sohrab Sepelri*, Pub.by Klimat Press, Los Angeles/UNESCO, 1988.

Night shudders beyond this window
And the earth winds to a halt
Beyond this window
Something unknown is watching you and me
O green from head to foot
Place your hands like a burning memory
In my loving hands
Give your lips to the caresses
Of my loving lips
Like the warm perception of being
The wind will carry us
The wind will carry us.⁸⁸

In the film the voice over reciting the poem is synchronized with the mysterious erotic potential of the moment when in complete darkness a grave digger's beautiful fiancée, goes to the stable to fetch some fresh milk for a civilized man, who impersonates as a telecommunications engineer in the film. The man desires to see the face of the woman lit by dim candlelight in the darkness of the basement. But the taboo and restraint is strong and the amorous advance of the man is carried away by the tumultuousness of the wind and storm that manifests itself in darkness and silence in the shadow of a flickering lamp.

The formal quality of the poems can be seen also in the haiku poems of not just Basho but also Chiyo, who had addressed the ultimate loneliness of existence and the complexities involved in a man-woman relationship. Kiarostami's poems like his films are also filled with didacticism on the art of seeing and feeling. The films bid the reader to slow down and contemplate. They are therapeutic and the vivid imagery of placid nature carries away the reader on a spiritual journey of realization. I will now draw a few parallels between Kiarostami's poems and the haiku tradition and will then show how some poems themselves encapsulate some of the director's films in their essence and entirety. His poems can also be read as cross-references to his undated uncaptioned landscape photographs. For example his poem:

⁸⁸ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

“The dream of a thousand little birds slaughtered
On a downy pillow”⁸⁹

This haiku like poem evokes a scene from the film *Taste of Cherry*, where Mr. Bagheri, (the one who had promised Mr. Badii, that he will shower his face with soil after he is dead in his chosen grave) behind closed doors instructs the students of taxidermy in the natural History Museum on how to slaughter quails in order to give them eternity through taxidermy. This masterfully crafted scene never shows the subject of conversation. The students are instructed on how to hold the quails by their neck and slit them open with their scalpel, but this is simply the soundtrack which evokes the image, one can say the poetry evokes the film or vice-versa, since even though the anthology was published in 2001, the poems were written over a period of time, just like the collection of Kiarostami’s landscape photographs remain undated but span over decades. In an interview the director said on his *Taste of Cherry* that the, “whole idea behind choosing that particular location came from an Iranian poem about a butterfly over a candlelight I was inspired by how this man drives around and around making circles, and those circles get smaller and smaller until he gets to the center, which is the grave”⁹⁰ The still image to the left will suggest that this poem maybe a caption for a landscape photograph which is undated:

“The round moon
rises gingerely
above the volcanic peak”⁹¹

*Haiku*⁹² is a twentieth century coinage wherein *hai* means “unusual” and “*ku*” means strophy, stanza, lines or verse. In 16th century Japan *haikai* and not haiku developed as a form of poetry which used everyday language, gradually became a site for displaying the contest of wit and scatological humor. *Haikai* is traditionally

⁸⁹ *op.cit.*

⁹⁰ See Abbas Kiarostami in an interview with Kent Jones, ‘On the Road’, Pub. in *Village Voice*, dated 24th March, 1993.

⁹¹ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

⁹² See Faubion Bowers ed. *The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology*, pub. by Dover Publications, nc, Mineola, New York, in 1996.

constituted with the word *hai* and *kai* which sums up as “sportive” and “pleasantry” *Haikai* requires the presence of a *kigo* or a seasonal word that refers to a multilayered reality empirically verifiable in the mundane proceedings of everyday routine. These poems were also marked by a caesura and it was this moment of punctuation that imparted the mood and tone of the poems, which were usually sung. Kiarostami’s poems are also similar to this formal approach, only in them there is no decisive caesura, since the visual poetry is construed to pause through moments of perception and reflection. Many translators of haiku have lamented the untranslatability of these verses into other languages because they fail to convey the rhythm and mark the caesura at the right point in the target language, but in the case of Kiarostami’s poems I feel that his poems like his films are equally cosmopolitan and written to ensure not much is lost in translation except for the nuances of gender. The imagery and inbuilt space is stronger which may be like a sequence of a film, a specific shot, or a whole film itself. There is no definite rhyme and rhythm in his poems even in the original Persian version. The poems happily imbibe the rhythm and mood of the visual in all their pace and immediacy. The English poet James Kirkup had defined haiku as

“Haiku should be just
Small stones dropping down a well
With a small splash”⁹³

Maybe what Kirkup writes about the characteristic feature of haiku is true of the form but in the case of Kiarostami’s poems the “splash” is something which is only initiated by the intrusion of the camera apparatus or the recording machine to reflect and persuades us to think. A few of the following poems will reveal how closely they resemble the scenes or sequences of his *Wind Will Carry Us*:

“Colorful fruits
in the silence of black-clad mourners”⁹⁴.

OR

“In the assembly of black-clad mourners

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

the child
gazes boldly at a persimmon”⁹⁵

Both these verses take us to that sequence in *Wind Will Carry Us* where the photographer awaits to shoot the funeral procession of the old lady in the Kurdish village of Siah-Dayereh. The following verses will enliven the film scenes like:

“The gravedigger
Stops work
To take a bite
Of bread and cheese”⁹⁶

..is reminiscent of the gravedigger in the same film who does stops for his quick meal. There is the uncanny presence of a tortoise which over turns itself slowly, and persistently makes its way through the rugged topography in *Wind Will Carry Us*. The poem reads as follows:

“among hundreds of rocks
small and large
dawdles
a single turtle”⁹⁷

For example a few poems from Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), one of the foremost poets to draw on the anarchy of everyday life reveals the impulse in the poems of both Kiarostami and Basho: Basho writes,

“old pond
a frog leaps in
water’s sound.”⁹⁸
OR

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁹⁸ See Faubion Bowers ed. *The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology*, pub.by Dover Publications, nc, Mineola, New York, in 1996.

“Leafless bough
A crow is sitting:- autumn,
Darkening now-“⁹⁹

OR

“sleeping at noon
The body of the blue heron
Poised in nobility”¹⁰⁰

The imagery evoked by these words is very common in the quotidian rural atmosphere, but implores the reader to stop for a moment to recall the image and let it settle in the mind to feel the sensuality in the poem. The absent sound is imagined and the disruption caused to the stillness of the pond by the jumping frog is felt only through editing the small *mise en scene* elements in the reader’s contemplative mind. A few examples from Chiyo will also show how feelings of loneliness and lack of love (both of which are themes in Kiarostami’s repertoire of poetry) are constructed by the minimalist collage of words in haiku:

“I sleep... I wake...
How wide
The bed with none beside”¹⁰¹

Kiarostami writes,

“I arrive alone
I drink alone
I laugh alone
I cry alone
I’m leaving alone”¹⁰²

OR

“Woman lying awake
beside a sleeping man
No hope of a caressing hand”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

¹⁰² *op.cit.*

This poem sums up Abbas Kiarostami's video art installation *The Sleepers* where a man and a woman lie beside each other on a double bed. Nothing other than a feeling of anticipation is present and finally one gives up on expecting anything beyond the frame. Or one may recollect the scene from Kiarostami's *The Report* where the couple whose relationship is on the verge of deteriorating, sleep on a double bed only for the man to finally walk out on the woman.

Sometimes the poetics that Kiarostami deploys in his cinema are like repetitions aimed at unsettling the mind of the spectator to evoke multiple responses to the same issue. This technique is also deployed in his poems. For example the five takes of the same sequence(the episode with the pair of socks) between Tahereh and Hossein in *Through the Olive Trees*, could have been done with a single take and repeated five times. But this would not embody his philosophy that no two takes are ever the same as the components of reality are perpetually in a sense of passage. The actors are also never the same with each temporal progression - the nuanced difference lies in the quality and the relationship that one shares with the issue.

For example:

“Snow falls
Snow falls
Snow falls
The day ends.
Snow falls.
Night.”¹⁰⁴

The same action of the falling snow may reveal itself in different light depending upon the mood and time of the reader and tries to visualize the snow. The slowness of the action enables the imaginary mind to digress until the episode is completed by the end of the day and the gradual passage into the night. One may here sense a stagnation of time weighing down the shoulders, or maybe each image of a snowfall referring back to a point in memory. The same sensibility is also there in his *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*.

¹⁰³ *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁴ *op.cit.*

The uselessness of verbal policy making is a theme that Kiarostami has deftly established in the film, *Case No.1 and Case No.2*, which builds itself on a series of interviews with people in power, about the way a few delinquent and miscreant children need to be tackled in school. The same sense of futility as that of the film is also found in this poem,

“The nun’s discussion
concludes nothing.
Eventually
It is time to sleep”¹⁰⁵

Kiarostami’s poetry undoubtedly develops on a minimalism of form and content and they present themselves as something at the crossroads of his cinema, his landscape photography, his installation practices; ultimately it is difficult to ascertain whether his poetry feeds into the other forms with which he engages or if they remain in dialogue with each other.

Landscape Photography

“ I never thought my last film, *Through the Olive Tress*, would be filmed in a place where the wind blows with such force on the wheat fields, since it was precisely the picture which I had painted ten years ago and photographed twenty years ago. At that time I used to do painting rather than photography. This unity of subject and composition one can find more in the photo than in the painting. But in my opinion, what deserves discussion is the exploration of the reasons of why these elements are present one in another.”¹⁰⁶

Roland Barthes had said the world “is full of signs, but these signs do not have the fine simplicity of the letters of the alphabet, of road signs or of military uniforms: they are infinitely more complex.”¹⁰⁷ Many critics have pointed out that Kiarostami’s films are all about journeys different orders; not a quest, not one that leads to material

¹⁰⁵ See Abbas Kiarostami in Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and Michel Beard trans. *Walking with the Wind*, Pub. by Harvard Film Archive Publication, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

¹⁰⁶ See Mahmoud Kalari in an interview with Abbas Kiarostami in *Le Mond d’A.K. pub. in Cahiers du Cinema*, Vol:493.

¹⁰⁷ See Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, trans by A.Lavers, Pub. by Hill and Wang, New York, 1986.

gains at the end. Laura Mulvey says, Kiarostami's films lull the viewer to embark on a journey of "personal transformation", to arrive at "a new level of understanding"¹⁰⁸ Mulvey suggests that these journeys are premised on a "principle of uncertainty" where the undertaker and also the viewer embark on a zig zag ride through the breath taking landscapes of rural Iran. The narrative then becomes the pretext and the film uses the medium of cinema to foreground visual digressions. Mulvey writes,

"Many Kiarostami films feature the process of driving and looking from a car at the surrounding landscape. These long driving shots draw attention to the road itself, giving a literal presence to the journey. But most of all the presence of a road draws attention to something these landscapes and cinema have in common. The landscapes are marked by human labor, and the roads and paths in particular bear witness to human movement which has worn them into traces across the countryside. While human life and history well may appear as illusion onscreen, these traces are a reality themselves. The cinema has a similar relationship to the traces of the past, preserving the appearance of things across time."¹⁰⁹

What then is the significance of the painterly landscape photographs? Human beings rarely appear in Kiarostami's landscape photographs, if they do appear, their presence is on account of the fact that they are organic to the landscape and hence a part of the nature he is filming just like a tree or a flock of bird flying over a snow clad landscape. Barthes says,

"reading a landscape is firstly perceiving according to one's body and one's memory, according to the memory of the body."¹¹⁰

Which becomes an ethnographic activity and hence the task then is to recuperate the activity of the Others who are practitioners within this field of landscape. In Kiarostami's complicated ethnographic approach, it seems that the reconstitution of the "other" is the primary agenda, as is the preservation of a certain "truth". If Kiarostami is an ethnographic photographer, his subject of ethnography or the Other is nature itself, with its impenetrability and unpredictability. Laura Mulvey

¹⁰⁸ See Laura Mulvey's 'Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle', pub. in *Sight and Sound*, Vol.8, No.6, 1998.

¹⁰⁹ See Laura Mulvey's 'Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle', pub. in *Sight and Sound*, Vol.8, No.6, 1998.

¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes in 'La Lumiere du sud-ouest', in *Incidents*, Edition du Seuil, 13-20., Paris, 1977

aptly points out that landscapes in Kiarostami's films are preserved with a certain sense of eternity. Landscape is photographed because the memory of the body will fade with time and landscape will be eroded from holding back the traces of human existence. However, Kiarostami's own urge to photograph landscape stems from a desire for painting. He writes,

“its almost obvious that between realist painting and nature photography, there exists points in common. They implicate the gaze of man upon the subject of nature....a simple immobile mise en scene is in fact like photography”¹¹¹

Often the frames of Kiarostami's films are similar to the frames of his landscape photography, as if the film frames sometimes do appear as still photography set in motion. Whether it is photography or film it is about a certain way of looking at the world through a frame, limiting that space. It is the view finder of the camera which by confining human vision to a geometrical grid manipulates it. Kiarostami has time and again stressed that nature is the best painter and though he has been academically trained in painting, he feels no form of realist painting can be a true representation. It is this love for nature and a desire to eternalize and share moments of pain and passion that makes Kiarostami enjoy his photography of landscapes. The paintings are like his films shot in deep focus with wide angle frames, often not focusing on any spatial hierarchy of the objects. “Chance, moment, light and discovery” are all elements in his photography. An invitation to the act of observation and the presence of open spaces for contemplation are as always the signature qualities in all of Kiarostami's artistic practices. The fact that it is quite difficult to pin down a definitive influence on Kiarostami's films vis- a vis his practices in other forms of art.

Some of the pictures of his collection of photographs *Walls*, which show beautiful walls of houses, are canvases of a picturesque shadow of trees, or some punctuated by windows from which diminutive figures lean forward to look outside it. Some of the walls which like all his photographs are untitled or undated) are traceable to the film stills of *Taste of Cherry* and the *Where is the Friend's Home?* The parallelism can be established through stills from his installation *Walls*. The vast expanse of the straw colored wheat or corn fields of *Wind will Carry Us*, or the flight

¹¹¹ See Abbas Kiarostami in *Photographies, Photographs, Fotografie... Trente Questions `a Abbas Kiarostami par Michel Ciment. Pub. by Hazan, 2000.*

of a flock of birds over a snow capped mountain from *The Solution* are examples of parallelism between his films and his landscape photography.

At this point one may also say that being a star auteur it is possible for Kiarostami to sell piecemeal each of the elements of his repertoire of films with strict copyright and circulation controlled by himself. On the other hand it is also unjust to look at the films in isolation without bringing them into dialogue with their multifarious artistic contexts. Kiarostami who hardly acknowledges any influences on his artistic career, has acknowledged the influence of the American nature photographer Ansel Adams, For Kiarostami his landscape photographs are testimonies to the harmony between nature and man.

He writes,

“In Iranian mythology *Gilgamesh* means one third human and two thirds divine human matter. In other words, he is human celestial combination, oriented towards immortality. In Islamic mysticism, the sky, the earth and the trees are not in conflict. To the contrary there exists an intimacy and unity between them. It is for this reason that I prefer to speak of a gaze that reconciles man and nature.”¹¹²

Michel Ciment has pointed to the existence of a certain geometric ratio of earth and the sky discernable in Kiarostami's photographs which are minimalist like all his other arts. In a question to Kiarostami, Ciment asks

“Your landscapes reveal very concerted composition, five sixth field plus one-sixth sky; or a quarter landscape below plus a quarter mountain plus a quarter blue sky. Do you look for order and geometry in nature?”¹¹³

Kiarostami responds with, “Geometry and art of proportion had always existed in nature, even in things that appear disproportional, One must simply discover it and understand its meaning or at least know how to interpret it. Proportion of 1:6 between earth and sky is an aesthetic proportion, and in my opinion it did not come about by chance, The world itself is thus proportioned. In photographs when we see sky, it is purely and simply about sky. The dark and light clouds are in proportion 5:1, or 4:2 with the sky. Yet we can link the proportion of the sky to the earth, to a secret or a

¹¹² See Abbas Kiarostami in *Photographies, Photographs, Fotografie... Trente Questions `a Abbas Kiarostami par Michel Ciment. Pub. by Hazan, 2000.*

¹¹³ See Abbas Kiarostami in *Photographies, Photographs, Fotografie... Trente Questions `a Abbas Kiarostami par Michel Ciment. Pub. by Hazan, 2000.*



ABOVE: Landscape photograph.
 BELOW: See similarity with poster of **Wind Will Carry Us**.

Marin Karmitz presente

Le vent nous emportera

un film de Abbas Kiarostami

 Prix Fipresci de la Critique Internationale
 Grand Prix du Jury
 Venise 1999

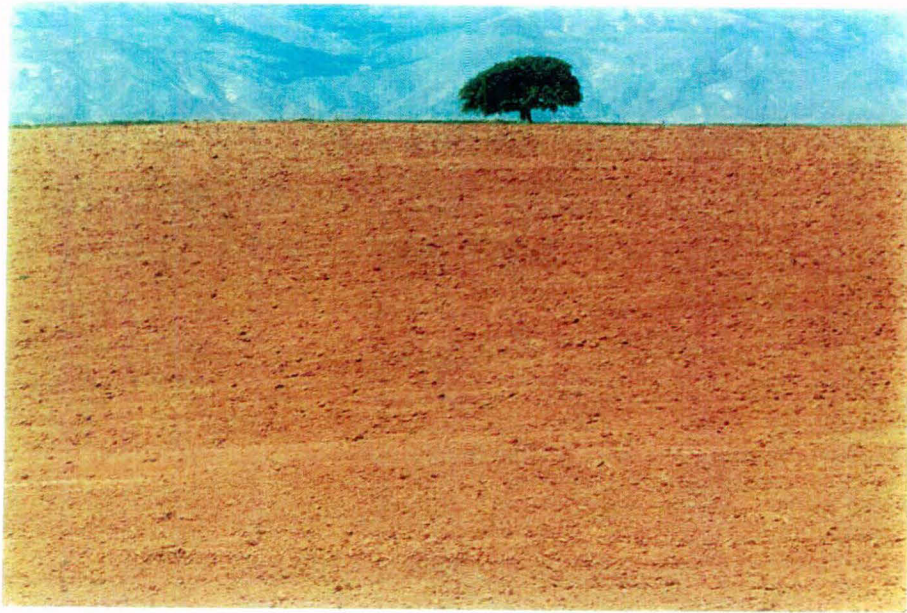
avec Behzad Dourani et les habitants du village de Siah Darih

scénario et réalisation Abbas Kiarostami. d'après une idée de Mahmoud Aghaie. directeur de la photographie Abbas Kiarostami. montage Abbas Kiarostami. assistant réalisateur Bahman Ghobadi. scripte Nasrin Ghahari. son Muhammad Hassan Naghi. musique Peyman Yazdani. production Marin Karmitz. France 3. production: Abbas Kiarostami. 1999

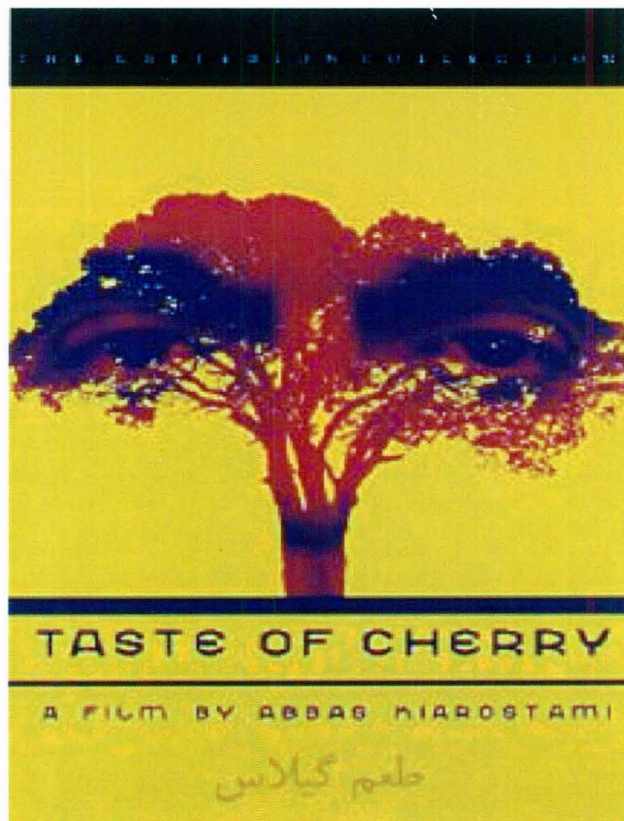


ABOVE: Landscape photograph
BELOW: See formal similarity with the installation **Forest Without Leaves**



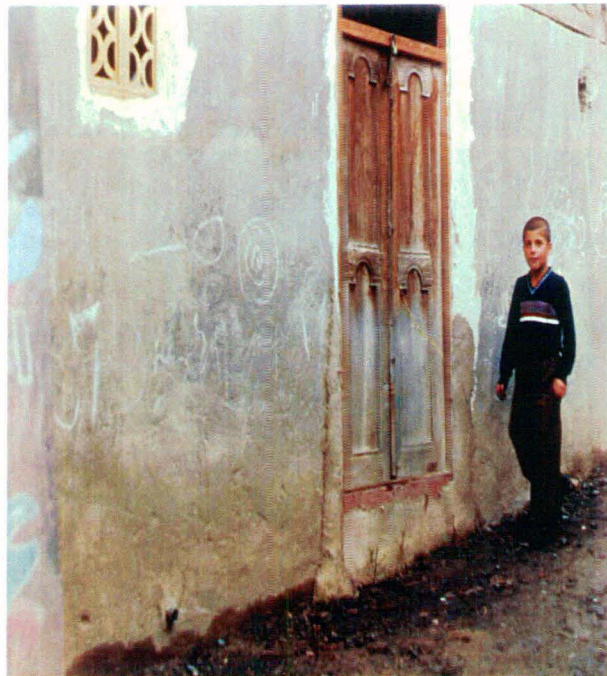


ABOVE: Landscape photography.
BELOW: Similarity with poster for **Taste of Cherry**.
First instance of Kiarostami's published photograph.





Both are film stills from **where is the Friend's House?**





ABOVE: Stills from installation, **Walls**.

See similarity with stills of the walls' in **Where is the Friend's Home?**

BELLOW: Similarity with a frame in **Taste of Cherry** where Mr. Badii measures his temperature before lying in the hole.





Stills from **Zang-E-Tafrih** note the uncanny resemblance to Truffaut's **400 Blows**





Stills from **Lebas Baraiye Arusi** note the uncanny resemblance to the 70s style in colour and mise-en-scene with our Bombay Cinema.





ABOVE: A still from *Solution*
BELOW: A landscape photography.



meaning. The relationship or architecture of 5:1 sky to earth can pull one's attention to a meaning that goes further. This is a choice and the interpretation of these images is up to the spectator. In the photographs in which the sky occupies five –sixth of the space, we can notice the emptiness of the sky, and the earth thereby becomes the center of existence. Spectators can have diverse interpretations.”¹¹⁴

Thus through this randomly prescriptive account of the formal and structural composition of photographs we see the theoretician of *Ten on Ten* at work, trying to build on a genre of his own. .

THE TRADITION OF MINIATURE PAINTINGS

Persian miniature paintings were commissioned works of art that concentrated on heroic deeds. In the classical tradition of Persian fine arts calligraphy was considered nobler and of higher market value when compared to painting, since in the Islamic tradition any act of mimesis is considered to be un virtuous. However, gradually this taboo was worked against and the painting of landscapes and human figures started flourishing under the various dynasties, especially under the Qajars and the Savafids. Each province of ancient Iran developed its unique style. Often Persian miniature paintings lacked the stamp of the creators and were more a collective production that passed down many hands. They were also accompanied with text that was calligraphed on the borders that bore the narration and the context of the sceneries. Miniature works were almost always sceneries, never focused on one single element. Some of the major aesthetic tendencies that may be summed up from the vast and diverse world of classical Persian paintings are sometimes reflected in the film aesthetics of the Iranian New Cinema. The paintings generally pay no heed to any atmospheric effect, they ignore shadows. Natural elements like thunder, storm and rain are rare in the paintings. The element of shadow in a painting which is a corollary of an effective realistic handling of light is not addressed because these paintings are far removed from the tenets of realist iconography. The scenes generally have a happy disposition, and no sense of off screen space is hinted at. Space is always enclosed. It is self sufficient, and lacks any center. There may be a main event like an emperor sitting in the garden, but all along the fringes it is possible to locate several digressions. Each of these digressions may constitute independent

¹¹⁴ *op.cit.*

narratives of their own, yet they co-exist in the same spatio-temporal plane. Kiarostami's endless digressions into scenic journeys through remote landscapes also bear the essence of this tradition of painting. The plurality of subjects within a single frame gives rise to a multiplicity of interpretation, where the beholder of the pictures may have separate points of entry into this inner world. Digressions of this kind which also constitute dramatic relations, leading to dramatic expectancy of an uncalculated nature, is a characteristic feature of Persian paintings. It is through the intricacy of design or ornamentation and not the features that such possibilities are revealed. The ability to encode the narrative is a result of a combination of instinct and ornamentation.¹¹⁵ It is this ornamental aspect of Persian paintings which eliminates the referential aspects of the art and focuses on indecision, the uncertainty of sense/feeling born of the motif. The manuscripts inscribed on the fringes of the paintings illuminate the miniatures. In the case of Kiarostami's films it is the text in the reader's mind that stands in for the manuscripts and gives meaning to his frame. The signifiers are ordered in a meaningful syntax, but the arbitrariness of the signifiers generates texts of signification of a subjective nature, in a multitude of variations. The Persian miniatures always dwell on a duality of meaning therefore having a literal and figurative level co-existing in the frames.

The tradition of point of views in these paintings is however, very close to the films of Kiarostami. The classical Persian paintings always have multiple points of views with the absence of any convergence point. The spectator is positioned to look down at the scene from a certain elevation. Just as western traditions of iconography and painting follow a particular aesthetic code of construction which is invisible and makes the subject of painting or portraiture appear to the spectator in a realist idiom, the classical Persian miniatures makes the technique visible, it is always exposed to foreground the fact that it is a representation, the figures and objects are drawn in inconsistent ratios with references to the back ground, foreground and middle ground, thus thriving on a symbolic pact with the onlooker. Thus the idea of self-reflexivity in the films may not be a phenomenon that Kiarostami has imbibed from the counter aesthetics of French New Wave or Cinema Verite, but the roots of his obsession to inscribe the apparatus within the frame is an impulse deeply entrenched in the rhetoric of the traditional arts of Iran.

¹¹⁵ See Lawrence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray's *Persian Miniature Painting*, pub. by Dover Publications, NY.

Abbas Kiarostami's humanism generates a platform of age old philosophical questions like "What is the meaning of life? Is there a God? What are we as human beings? Are we free, or genetically and (or) culturally determined? What can we know and with what degree of certainty? What constitutes human growth? What makes us who we are both as individuals and as members of a larger social unit?....."¹¹⁶ These questions try to address the totality of human reality, and in doing so he never slips into any theological dogmas. Reality is something more than just a concrete piece of truth; it is more experiential and realizable within a sense of totality; than as instances of an isolatable truth. The way a human body or mind moves through the medley of landscapes and joins various human situations in the films; reticently reflecting on them to see if the realities of human existence, human conditions can be contained in a totality of human experience. The outdoor shots capturing the vastness of nature, in someway provide the larger matrix in which the experience needs to be situated to engender its essence.

Thus in this chapter, I have tried to engage with the most pertinent movements and theories in cinema and have read Kiarostami's oeuvre in that light, as products of syncretism in form and style. I have also engaged with the possible sources of influence on his work – like literature, photography and painting. In the following chapter I will show how all the features discussed in this chapter contribute in the making of Kiarostami as an installation artist.

¹¹⁶ See Daniel Shaw's ; *Film and Philosophy :Taking Movies Seriously* (London and New York; Wallflower: Short Cuts 2008.) pp114-115.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE SITES, EMPOWERING FORMS: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE IN VISUAL DEMOCRACY

Abbas Kiarostami's films have always been critiqued as minimalist in their framing, narrative, and mise-en scene. Critics have often traced this tendency to the biographical detail of Kiarostami's days as a graphic artist and title card designer for films. In this chapter I will try to develop a relationship between this minimalist tendency perceptible in his films *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*, *My Sweet Shirin*, *The Sleepers*, *Looking at Tazieh*, *Ten Minutes*, and other video arts (also noticeable in his photography and poetry, which I will discuss in Chapter Two) and specifically his three later films and installation works which testify to this claim. The chapter will therefore start with the objectives of minimalism as an artistic practice and its correlation with installation art, to justify my claim that a retroactive analysis of Abbas Kiarostami's films will reveal that he has always been on a quest since his film *Breaktime* made under KANUN. I will argue that it is only in his later work that he reaches a complete maturity in his style.

Minimalist art focuses on the material. They deny connotative social meanings and therefore expand the possibility of creating an experiential sense of the "pure". This tendency gradually surfaced with the persistent decline in formal approaches to painting. Similarly video installations too started gaining prominence with the exhaustion of the cinematic medium. One needs to remember, that Giacometti's nude bronze statues, represent only the bare structure of the human form without any excess, the objective was to capture a certain essence of the human beyond the measures and confines of the body, thus looking for a certain idea of purity in art.¹¹⁷ Often, like environmental art, minimalism consciously disavows social, historical or temporal mediation. Dan Graham suggests that this tendency in minimalist art makes "a re-statement of Kantian idealism which separates the experience of the purely

¹¹⁷ This is how the works of Giacometti are introduced by the explanatory texts in *Alte Pinakothek* where they are exhibited.



FILM STILL OF MY SWEET SHIRIN (2008)

aesthetic from the socially utilitarian”¹¹⁸. Within this re-appropriated notion of Kantian idealism the spectator’s “subjective consciousness in itself replaces the art object to be perceived for itself”¹¹⁹. The perception thus emanates from the product of the art work. The reduced and simple forms of minimalist art checks on psychological absorption and redirects the viewer’s attention to conditions external to the object. Therefore it creates a situation through which minimalist art includes the beholder.

In his book, Abbas Kiarostami speaks about his own relationship to minimalist art. He writes,

“ It is an art that communicates its message to the general public with the minimum of means and maximum of constraints. ...Graphic design is an important field of art, working in this domain is a good exercise for creating methods of communication without using the habitual tools”.¹²⁰ Communication is not about sending a message. Time and again Kiarostami has emphasized his distaste for films that tends to bear a message. Kiarostami says “if you want to send a message you should go to the post office”¹²¹

In 1978 Kiarostami directed *Breaktime (Zang-e-Taffrih)* for the Institute for Development of Children and Young Adults(KANUN). The film did not use subtitles. It is here that Kiarostami decided to direct a dialogue free film that would be understandable to all. He believed such a universal appeal was difficult to achieve because spectators tended to identify only with characters or events at the surface level. For Kiarostami, *Breaktime* was perhaps this most audacious experimentation with the medium.

GALLERY FILMS: REFRAMING SPECTATORSHIP

This chapter will focus primarily on Abbas Kiarostami's later works, namely, *Five: Dedicated to Ozu (2005)*, *My Sweet Shirin(2008)*, *Looking at Tazieh(2003)*, and the *Correspondences(2005)*; All these films belong to a period in Kiarostami's career

¹¹⁸ See Dan Graham in Alexander Alberro edited *Two-Way Mirror Power: selected writings by Dan Graham*, pub. by MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London; 1999.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

¹²⁰ See Abbas Kiarostami in *Photographies, Photographs, Fotografie...Trente Questions a Abbas Kiarostami par Michel Ciment*, Pub. by Hazan 2000.

¹²¹ Quoted from an interview with the director published in *The Independent* on Sunday dated 17th September, 2000.

where he had already established himself as an auteur¹²² in the international film festival circuit and also gained a reputation for being one of the most important living filmmakers of our time. The primary concern of this chapter will be to show how these films move from a general conception of cinema to share and critique seminal aesthetic tendencies associated with installation art practices. For the sake of convenience and owing to the films' histories of exhibition and aesthetic proclivities I will refer to the aforesaid cluster of films as "gallery films". In the first part of this chapter I will talk about the position of the spectator in Installation art with reference to its history of genesis. The second part of the chapter will show how spectatorship is active in Abbas Kiarostami's gallery films engaging in a critical dialogue with each other on issues related to this phenomenology of perception. Finally I will address the ways in which this activated spectatorship indicates a path to an alternative system of democracy, predicated on an ocular form rather than the existing practices of the vocal or the "voice of the people" position.

Having explored the liberating potential of the digital camera in his film *Ten*¹²³ in terms of its light weight, mobility, self sufficiency and cost effectiveness, Kiarostami embarked on a new journey to explore his theories about spectatorship and perceptual psychology. Acknowledging the presence of the spectator in cinematic practices has had a circular history since its early days to the moment of experimental and new wave films in the 1960s and 70s which radically engaged with its form, and artifice. One might say that in doing so the director wants to take the spectators back in time like in the case of painting. Painting is by itself mute and therefore its silence is pregnant with infinite discourses that are initiated at every point of its entry, or through looking at it as a form in its totality. Cinema in its early period had presented itself as a frontal and self-reflexive form that was attributed to the mediums liaison with pre modern practices of representation. However when the same early cinema techniques made their way back into the formal techniques of filmmaking in the 1960s, we need to remember that modernity by then had already become the norm, and the resurfacing of this tendency was not a relapse or a counter modern practice.

¹²² It is important to note that the term "auteur" is a critical term which has underwent critical changes after its re-materialization in the 1980s and 1990s. Here it is used in the sense Tim Corrigan uses it to refer to a commercial performance of being an auteur.

¹²³ ¹²³, where he ties the camera to the dashboard of the female protagonist's car, and almost effaces the director's presence from the film.

The simultaneity had actually indicated to a more wholistic, inclusive vision of the contemporary with parallel running subtexts.

It is regrettable that some critics site the characters and situations of the new wave Iranian cinema as pre modern, and Abbas Kiarostami's films as something that deals with the rural and the primitive. Critics, see this as a reflection of the so called "backwardness of Iran" represented with all its naiveness through a cloak of humanism. The point I want to raise here is that historically and sociologically Iran had had no exposure to modernity and its discourses and practices. Iran had maintained a cordial relationship with the U.S.S.R, France, Germany, Switzerland, and briefly the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. All these countries together form the map of the post-revolutionary Iranian diaspora. Therefore, it is important to read aspects of simplicity, or so called "pre modern", imagery more critically than they appear at first glance. Abbas Kiarostami in all his films uses form as the device through which he critically engages with his subject matter whether in his feature films or "gallery films". For Kiarostami form reveals parallel temporalities of modernity, and the complexities of vision which the images foreground. However, what is being referred to here is a particular tendency in acknowledging spectatorial presence, departing both from theories of early cinema and from new wave practices.

Kiarostami's films consciously work towards developing a unique spectatorial space within the film, a space that not only acknowledges the spectator as the viewer with keys to the frames semantic codes, but, also sees the spectator as both the subject and the object of the film. This philosophical experimentation on perception entails an implicit point of rupture, generating what Maurice Merleau Ponty in his book *The Visible and the Invisible* describes as the "blind spot"¹²⁴. Human vision depends on movement, where vision is prefigured by the movement of the eye. The seeing self can envisage the other side of the self. The blind spot is that zone in the field of vision where the two images(one formed by the eye as it moves and one of the image of the object as it appears through someone else's vision) overlap with each other and turns in to a single vision that is co-ordinated by thought. An image is the 'inside' of the 'outside' and the 'outside' of the 'inside' which the duplicity of sensing makes possible.

¹²⁴ See Maurice Merleau ponty in "L'oeil et l'esprit " in Gale A. Johnson edited *The Merleau Ponty Aesthetic Reader*, Pub. by Northwestern University, Evanston, Chicago.

The image is made possible only by the blind spot which unifies the two. The image is therefore imaginary and thus acts as the diagram of the life of the “actual” in the body. So one may say that an image may be a conglomerate of multiple truths in relation to the body and the outer object turns into another object that can generate multiple truths through its subjection to visual processes.

The seeing subject who is narcissistic is confined within the boundaries of the flesh with a past and a future and therefore is a historical subject. Installation theories which gained greater prominence following post structuralist thought have often tried to posit a dehistoricized subject position as a counter to the subject position of the historical spectator.

Minimalist art was born in close communion with philosophies of science. Science’s primary goal remains objectification and reduction that can drift towards an abstract form. These forms are always inert, objective and unexpressive. The author of an installation piece or a minimalist work of art is one who exercises in “experimental control”. The agenda in this kind of art stems from a desire to invent techniques which are again collated and directed towards multiple and simultaneous thought processes.

Minimalist art evolved as an international movement in painting and sculpture originating in New York City, in the late 1960s. This form of art came to be characterized by extreme simplicity of form and literally an ‘objective’ approach. One of the basic principles of this art form was to exclude any subjective expression on the part of the artist. This stand was taken against the extremely personalized approach of Action painting, an offshoot of American Expressionism. Minimalist art is one of the late culminations of the reductionist tendencies in modern art which found its early expressions in the works of the Russian painter Kasimir Malevich, who had “installed” a black square on a white ground. In Minimalist art, the only explicit reference is to itself and nothing beyond it. The dominant idiom of minimal art are represented through extremely simple monumental geometric forms, made of fiber glass, plastic, sheet metal, aluminum, raw or paint coated. One of the most influential contributions of minimalist art was to foster a close relationship to art and criticism, emphasizing the role of the critic onlooker.

Merleau Ponty refers to this style as something which is historical and intersubjective, bearing a specific experiential dimension of the body with its sensibilities and practices. Such an artistic practice becomes a conglomerate of

gestures and meanings which simultaneously perpetuate the “historical” as well as interrogates its coherent systematic deformation over time and practices.¹²⁵ Abbas Kiarostami is not unaware of text book prescriptions of cinematography and editing. Rather to make a break with the “historical” which often happens to be the “dominant”, and thereby create a different language and experience through participation remains Kiarostami's conscious choice.

The “open images”¹²⁶ in Kiarostami’s films as Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn suggest enable this sort of empowering of the spectator as an equal creator of the work of art. Chaudhuri and Finn in their comparison of the structural form of “open images” with different national cinemas point out that “a repressed political dimension returns within the ostensibly apolitical aesthetic form of the open image”.¹²⁷ The idea of an open image I argue is most strongly manifest in installation art.

All the films I have mentioned above are presented as some kind of an installation, and are highly experimental in their agendas, even as *Five* and *My Sweet Shirin* were released on DVDs and enjoyed limited screenings world wide in movie halls. The films show strong tendencies of installation art, deriving from the art work’s materiality, and above all from the positioning of the spectator who is a liberated object and subject of the art. The fact that Abbas Kiarostami is also beginning to gain prominence as an installation artist can be substantiated by the following five instances.

The London wide festival on Abbas Kiarostami titled, “Abbas Kiarostami” *Visions of the Artist*” was held in various sites like the National Film Theater where a retrospective of his films was held. The Zelda –Cheatle Gallery hosted an exhibition of his photographs of landscapes in the snow titled ‘*Roads of Kiarostami*’; The Victoria and Albert Museum hosted his installation *Forest Without Leaves*, and at Edinburgh his installation *Looking at Tazieh* was exhibited. *Forest Without Leaves* was a live, life sized installation of a forest of trees with photographed barks mounted

¹²⁵ *op.cit*

¹²⁶ See Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn in ‘*The open image: poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema*’ in *Screen*, Issue 44:vol.1, Spring 2003.

¹²⁷ Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn in ‘*The open image: poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema*’ in *Screen*, Issue 44:vol.1, Spring 2003.

on tall metallic pipes in a large mirrored space, which had text messages in Farsi and English. The installation space allowed the visitor mobility within the maze of trees in the virtual woods.¹²⁸

Zenith Culture International hosted Abbas Kiarostami's solo exhibition in the newly opened contemporary wing of the Beijing Art Museum of the Imperial City from 26th January to 6th March 2008. Besides featuring Kiarostami's landscape photographs, all shot in black and white, the exhibition also featured a single video installation titled *Ten Minutes*. This particular video installation was initially created as a short film to be included within the Cannes International Film Festival's tribute collection of ten films made by ten most important directors of the world. The primary theme of the exercise was representation of time and what it meant to each of these ten directors. However, Kiarostami's film did not make it to the final collection of the ten films for the project '*Ten Minutes Older*'.

The French Critic Alain Bergala, who is also a prominent voice on Abbas Kiarostami's work; and the Spanish curator Jordi Ballo organized a joint installation programme of the directors Victor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami in 2008. This was a kind of travelling exhibition, taking place sequentially from 10th February to 21st May at the Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona(CCCB), and in Madrid at La Casa Encendida from 6th July to 24th September. Later the exhibition travelled to Centre Pompidou in Paris from 7th February to 30th April 2007.¹²⁹ Commenting on this exhibition John Conomos in a review on 'Erice-Kiarostami' *Correspondences* writes,

“The exhibition constantly asks of the engaged gallery visitor, “what is cinema?” particularly in a time of vertiginous cross pollination between cinema, digital cinema, photography, installation, painting, sculptor, etc.”¹³⁰

The formal structure of this installation is premised on an inventiveness of form, nature of dialogue and performance, perception of space and a distinctive conceptualization of “text”.

¹²⁸ See *Abbas Kiarostami: Visions of the Artist*, 27th April to 9th June, in the brochure published by National Film Theater, London 2005.

¹²⁹ See <http://www.cccb.org/> and www.centrepompidou.fr/

¹³⁰ See John Conomo's article '*Parallel lives: in cinema and beyond*' published in *Realtme*, Issue 87, Oct-Nov 2008.

All of these details of the programmes that featured Abbas Kiarostami indicate his circulation beyond the international film festival circuit, celebrating him as a more complete artist than just a filmmaker. At this point I will describe what constituted the *Correspondences* and what brought the two filmmakers and their works within the framework of a parallel exhibition.

Correspondences was an unique joint project with the Basque filmmaker Victor Erice, and Abbas Kiarostami, organized by the CCCB, Barcelona. A preoccupation with the representations of everyday life, history, landscape, myth and memory, is what brought these two directors in a dialogue with each other in the project “Childhood and cinema and the cinema of childhood”. The installation was designed to make the visitor an onlooker from any entry point, to find himself or herself at the crossroads of the oeuvres of the two filmmakers, without any hierarchization of the cinematic works of either directors. To the left of the gallery was Erice’s section showing film sequences from both the directors on a split screen, titled “*The Art of Infancy*”, and to the right, which was the section of the hall dedicated to Kiarostami, where there was another split screen titled “*The Infancy of Art*”. Both these presentations were introductory video clips on the works of both the directors. The journey into the exhibition was premised on recurrent themes and questions with which both these directors have engaged. The thematics were classified primarily into three areas; childhood, the city and natural landscapes.

Abbas Kiarostami and Victor Erice not only belong to the same generation, they both share a few commonalities in their films. Both of them are related to narratives of nations that are rebuilding themselves and their works have withstood the test of time, though Erice, the critic turned filmmaker has been less prolific than Kiarostami, more silent in his discussions about his work. Both directors focus on children in their films. Kiarostami grew up in Tehran, before the revolution and Erice in Spain during Franco’s regime of dictatorship. Both take walks down their memory lane to recollect memories of their childhood and their relationship to the cities in which they had grown up. Memories of Tehran, San Sebastian, Madrid all come alive in their comparisons with the contemporary landscape of these cities. Both directors try to relate to each other’s childhood and their subsequent journey into adulthood. *Correspondences* took place through *cartas* or letters which were digitally shot, and exchanged between Kiarostami and Erice for a while. It must be borne in mind that none of the directors know each other’s language, and therefore they communicate

with images and subtitles appearing in Castillian Spanish, Farsi and French. None of these letters bear any direct correspondences like we normally do in real life, but hold an exchange of thought communicated through images. For the viewer in the exhibition gallery who was witnessing the exchanges within the set parameters of the installation, reflection was necessary. There was no right or wrong in what they made of it. The images were free and removed from any contextual specificity. Kiarostami's images were more abstract and played with perspectives of human vision.

The Letters in the installation *Correspondences* opened with a close shot of the director's hand with a pen, of course reinstating that both were auteurs. The camera was their pen. However, how exactly were these auteurs performing and how they thought via the signifying text, is disputable, because in any installation, the subjectivity of the creating subject is only partially complete. The image or the idea is presented only in its raw framework and the spectator's subjectivity extends to complete the meaning of the work of art. There can be no signatorial style in an installation piece; it is only an act of assemblage with a certain vision of the image of the materials assembled.

Correspondences began with Victor Erice's letter to Kiarostami, "Dear Abbas, I have just seen your film for the third time". The most important contribution of this show was that it enables a live comparative dimension to the formal approaches of the two filmmakers. For Erice, formal devices are a means to reach the 'real'. It is a manifestation of "intuition". But for Kiarostami choices in formal devices are made on the basis of "comfort".

The series *Correspondences* begins with Victor Erice's first *carta* *The Painter's Garden* filmed on April 22nd 2005. This nine minute long digital letter was filmed in the same garden of the Spanish painter Antonio Lopez Garcia where he had filmed *The Quince Tree Sun* years back. The short film focuses on the reactions of the artist, grand children, each of whom makes their own depiction of the courtyard. Kiarostami replies to this filmed letter with a ten minute long digital film titled *Mashad*, filmed on 5th September 2005. The film consists of an extreme close shot of a cow's skin marbled in black and white, initially appearing like a surreal landscape. As the camera gradually zooms out the cow is revealed in its entirety.

Victor Erice responded to this fanciful letter from Kiarostami in a personal way in his next filmed letter *Arroyo de la Luz* dated October 22nd 2005. In this twenty

minute long film a porcelain cow rests on a dresser and besides it is an old photograph of Erice from his childhood days posing with a cow. The next part of this *carta* shows a class of eight-nine year old children who are just about to finish watching a screening of Kiarostami's film *Where Is My Friend's Home?* The class screening is followed by a discussion on the details and story of the film.

The next response is Abbas Kiarostami's filmed letter titled *The Quince*, shot in December 2005. This is based on Victor Erice's film *The Quince Tree Sun* where Kiarostami tries to reframe the story of the quince tree in the film where one branch has seemingly gone astray outside the boundary wall and has become public property. Children from below try to shake that branch for quince and when it falls to the ground, something wonderful happens. The errant quince journeys down the flow of a stream where a shepherd picks it up for a bite and passes on to his flock of sheep for a nibble. The camera gradually recedes from this idyllic feast to reveal the entire landscape of brown hills, and roads with racing cars.

Spectators who have seen Abbas Kiarostami's *Wind Will Carry Us* and *Taste of Cherry*, will remember the flow of the bone down the small brook in the former film and the landscape of brown hillocks and patchy green fields with trafficked roads and construction sites in his latter film. Linda C. Ehrlich thoughtfully poses issues about this kind of correspondence; she says "This type of letter does not need an "assassin postman" to be delivered. It doesn't even need a stamp - stamps imply nationalities and borders. Yet it does require effort, choice and reception"¹³¹

Apart from these exchanging of cinematic letters, *Correspondences* also consisted of a *mélange* of independent works from both the directors. The installation *Forest Without Trees* (which I have described in the context of the London wide Kiarostami festival) and the film *Five* were also present as part of the show. Victor Erice's ten minute long *Lifeline* (2002), which formed a part of the package of ten films presented at the Cannes International Film Festival under the title *Ten Minutes Older*, was also present. *Correspondences* was an installation that displayed the feel of a work in progress. Here the installation grew and evolved with time as it travelled from Barcelona to Madrid and Paris. This open form of the installation is also a unique way of preserving the openness of the cinemas of both these directors in terms of their images and meanings.

¹³¹ See Linda C Ehrlich in "silencing the clamour of the world: Erice-Kiarostami Correspondences" pub in *Cinemascope*, Issue 28.

BEYOND THE PHILOSOPHIES OF INSTALLATION

Installation art refers to the totality of the space within which art is staged and the ensemble of elements placed within it. This often includes the absent, but intermittently present onlooker, as an aspect of the work of art. Installations can be exhibited at a gallery or just on the roadside. It is the site of exhibition that exudes the ambience for the spectator's consumption of the art. The viewer is always addressed directly as a literal presence in the site/space. This tendency which is seminal to installation art is also a key element in Abbas Kiarostami's films, discernable even in films which preceded his gallery films. These films evoked through narrative play of perspectives and complicated point of view shots.

Julie Reiss in her book *From Margins to Center : The Spaces of Installation Art*(1999) observes that the spectator is regarded “ as integral to the completion of the work”¹³², to the extent that it is impossible to analyze an installation art without being physically present before or within it. Reiss raises a few pertinent questions like who is the spectator. What is the nature of his/her participation in imparting meaning to the work; what is the significance of first- hand experience in the perceptual psychology of installation art?

It was in the 1990s however that the form became institutionally approved. Installations were showcased in prestigious museums in the large gallery halls of Western Europe and the United States of America. This syncretic multi-disciplinary art form like the modernist collage, invested itself in developing a perception of space-time relationship which was decentered in a very Derridian sense. Installations refuse to confer any origin to the ensembles. What it emphasizes is the very moment of perception and therefore the production of a subjective meaning untainted by any a-priori memory to contextualize it. An early instance of an installation of an ensemble within the exhibition site of the gallery was Marcel Duchamps' *Urinal* (1917), which was a very common object taken from everyday life, but its placement within the site of exhibition revised its normative use value, elevating it to an object of art. Marcel Duchamps had observed in his conceptualization of the figure and role of the spectator a creative act which is not formed by the artist alone. Rather he or she brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and adding to the cognitive concept of "art coefficient". Drawing

¹³² *July Reiss from Margin to Centre; The Spaces of Installations Art, Pub. by M.I.T. Press, U.S., 2001*

on this 'Art coefficient' we may define installation art as a cognitive setup, a system where the material for art is in its raw state, irrespective of any aesthetic values like, "good, bad, indifferent". It is the spectator who catalyses the transmutation of the materials to the work of art. Kiarostami's exposition of cinematic techniques and long takes; variation of mise-en-scène elements in subsequent shots, intended repetition; all these after a while settle as sediments within the frame for the mutual conceptualization and creation of meaning and art. Kiarostami's techniques seem to conform to the human desire of "conatus"¹³³ or the desire of the flesh which demands visibility. Therefore all his attempts at visual exposition and clarity of the profilmic, actually unsettles and confronts this inner desire, thereby transferring it to a multilayered experience in vertical time.

This particular agenda of installation art as a historical impulsive urge for "presentness" is something that comes in to conflict with the act of spectating or critically engaging with the object under view, than simply seeing it, which implies a superficial engagement. Spectating itself is a complex socially determined process, and with its seemingly gender neutral structure, has an implicit tendency to run into conflict with perceptual paradigms of either genders.

Video possesses the defying potential of resisting commodification as an art object even when it is disguised as an installation. Electronic reproducibility and its inherent immateriality beyond the apparatus of projection flatten its value as an art work. The video format enabled a break in the chain of semantic hierarchy which may build up through the exchange value of an art work. It is this very quality of video, shared with cinema that prevented seventh art from finding legitimacy in the museums and galleries until the latter end of the last century. Jean Luc Godard had said that video came from cinema and it eased processes of filmmaking. For Godard, the presence of video made it possible to write the history of cinema. Kiarostami, like Godard, tries to engage with a certain history of cinema, and aims at turning it inward, to explore the limits of both cinema and video. Video in installations furthers this possibility of engaging with a fractured historiography of cinema.

The following analysis of Abbas Kiarostami's *My Sweet Shirin* which is based on the popular Persian lore of the love story of Khusrou and Shirin, by Nezami of Ganjavi is a typical example of how the viewer's experience is elicited by placing him

¹³³ This is not used in its technical sense as has been used in Spinoza, but rather to emphasize on a desire for preserving the self through the preservation of the body.

/ her before a film which shares and contains many installations. Not only is the film a comment on the reception of films at qualities of the movie halls, but is also an experiment to expose the mechanisms of spectatorship.

Installations can be of different types depending upon the way in which the artist designs the nature of engagement with the work. Since installation art is the stylized display of a collage of materiality and forms, it aims at developing a sensory connection with the viewer, by tapping either one or more of his/her senses. Some installations invite the viewer to “plunge” completely into the fictional world and become a part of it. This kind of engagement is of a highly cinematic order, like in a movie-theater. While watching *My Sweet Shrin* I could see Kiarostami making every possible effort to underplay the visual track and evoke a landscape and an “elsewhere” with the soundscape. *My Sweet Shirin* showcases a group of women responding to a film they are watching. The film is not displayed on the screen; we only see the face of the women, illuminated by the flicker of the projected screen. We do hear the sound of the film. For the spectator of *My Sweet Shirin*, the multiple emoting faces may recede to the furthest plane foregrounding personal subjective emotions, against a blurry image of collective emotions. That’s the point at which the film succeeds in making connections with each individual spectator’s personal narratives of love, longing, desire, and complications arising from the subject’s identity as a socially and culturally determined being.

The extremely melodramatic soundscape which captures the auditory senses with its highly nuanced rendition stands in as the semantic turning point for all those who do not understand the Persian lyric serving as the soundtrack. Kiarostami in an interview had stressed that the faces of the women acted as subtitles for the narration, to cut through the cultural unintelligibility for non Iranian viewers. At this point I must mention that this almost ethnographic documentation of the life and emotions of Iranian women, was released in the United Kingdom and unfortunately failed to earn a screening license in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Like all other Kiarostami films, beginning with *Wind Will Carry Us*.) Therefore, what is indicative is the fact that it is the installation effect of the film enhanced by its contrapuntal use of a melodramatic sound track that creates sensory reflexes, mobilizing a sensorium of emotions hyphenated by images. Besides Kiarostami has always used very precise and motivated sound in his films, which can be traced all the way back to his *Close-Up* made in 1990. In an interview to *Screen International* Kiarostami writes,

“Sound is so important to me. Through sound you can cover up all the weaknesses of a film and give depth to it. When (filmmakers) shoot you normally have silence around you. But sound can help you represent more than one facet of life. Through sound you add truths. As a joke I sometimes say to actors “let us go and record sounds, we will also take a camera along”. But by hearing a voice a viewer can visualize a face. As a child I would fall asleep with the radio. I could visualize all the characters. Image alone is flat.”¹³⁴

The act of spectation in this film tends to dissolve self-presence by refracting the image of the spectator into a plethora of mirror reflections of a culturally rooted audience. It is of some importance to note that besides the French star actor Juliette Binoche, all other members of the audience featured in the film were Iranian actors for whom the story was known as popular folk lore. But it was Binoche’s startling presence in the audience which emphasized the film’s experimental agenda, inviting any spectator, irrespective of his/her nationality to be an equally potent meaning maker of the film. It is the aural track that provides the clue to the film’s installation tendency since it requires the spectator’s contemplation and engagement with the aural landscape of the narrative. The objective I read here is to experience a space-time relationship through aural negotiation. Commenting on John Cage’s (the American composer, poet, philosopher)¹³⁵ response to a crisis in musical composition and hence Cage’s justification for including the extramusical elements within the musical in an attempt to reconnect music with the world, Sean Cubitt writes,

“I want to suggest that the baroque had found certain techniques of working with both sound and the imminent collapse of meaning; techniques that inspire material aesthetics, indicating exits from the impasse of accelerated modernity’s new baroque”¹³⁶

According to Cubitt, Cage’s attempts generate a void. It is this kind of an absent vortex that installation art makes use of in decentering meaning, to create subjective perceptualization. Film critic Jonnathan Jones also says, “*Shirin*” is a kind of work more typically found in galleries... unqualified to comment on “proper art”,

¹³⁴ See *Screen International Vol.1365*, dated 26th July 2002.

¹³⁵ John Cage was one of the foremost avant-garde musicologist who observing a growing crisis in pure musical compositions, had introduced his musical notations and experimented with musical forms and non conventional musical instruments.

¹³⁶ See Sean Cubitt’s ‘Fountains and Grottos’ in Erika Suderberg edited *Space, Site, Intervention: situating Installation Art*; Pub. by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London

film critics need to ask if we should be arguing for a counter movie. Should cinema become more like art galleries?”

In the late 1970s Vito Acconci started making installations in which the audience was invited to act and assume for themselves the role of the performer. I want to propose that Kiarostami’s highly provocative decision to showcase the female faces in *My Sweet Shirin* or the faces of the mixed spectators in *Looking at Tazieh*, is geared to invite the spectators who are watching the film or looking at the installation, to undergo a similar journey of mimesis. Only in this case, mimetic turns are generated by the subjective, emanating from first-hand sensory impulses, than a mere cathartic expression spurred by the events unfolding. The films which I refer to as “gallery films”, substantiates how Installation art often functions as an extended critical dialogue between cinema and spectatorship.

Installation art is about transformation of meaning of an object (which may or may not be artistic) in relation to its positioning within a specific site. James Meyer has made a critical distinction between two types of sites used in installation art. He first talks of a “literal site” an actual location, a singular place. Meyer writes that this site is as unique as the work itself, but the latter conforms to the constraints of the space and is inseparable from and dependent on the specificity of its location. The second type of site that Meyer talks about is referred to as “functional site”. This definition of the site frees it from any locatedness. Functional site may or may not have a physical space. Such a conceptual notion of space does not privilege place. These spaces of functional sites host the installation work because of its re-creatability, ahistoricity, and mobility. Meyer writes,

“It is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them. It is an informational site, a palimpsest of text, photograph, and video recordings, physical places and things”.¹³⁷

In one word, functional site serves as an “allegorical site”, generating a concept of space which is inter-related with late modernity. The very temporariness and mobility enables installations to bear a semantic chain and imbricated histories.

¹³⁷ See James Meyer’s ‘The Functional Site’ in Erika Suderberg edited *Space, Site, Intervention: situating Installation Art*; Pub. by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London

The functional site temporarily marks out a space for itself only to abandon it shortly, always bearing its own spectre of destruction.

Installation valorizes the otherwise ephemeral subjectivity of the everyday. Chance encounters, movement, loss, desire and multiplicity are the various facets of everyday life.¹³⁸ All these observations would closely connect with Abbas Kiarostami's films, which play on these impulses of the everyday. It is also for this reason that the poetic realism explored in his films conform to a Bazinian worldview¹³⁹, which respects the possibility of "open spaces" in cinema. This specific point can be best expressed through his installation *Five*, which is also later developed as *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*. *Five* is a film that is shot on a digital format, consisting of five long static shots in five long takes. The film is dedicated to the Japanese auteur Yasujiro Ozu. Though the film is not bereft of technical artifice and manipulation in its sutures and expressions of temporality and events, the structure and rhythm of the film is what makes it a "gallery film", deploying installation tendencies in communication.

A review of *Five* by Jonnathan Romney in *Sight and Sound* dated June 2005, observes the atypical nature of this Kiarostami film. Romney writes, "Although it is being commercially screened in cinemas- and was premiered out of Competition in Cannes last year- *Five* has less in common with art film, even at its least narrative, than with gallery video, another form the director has explored".¹⁴⁰

The five sequences/shots of *Five* are as follows; it starts with a piece of wood on a sea shore being tossed by the waves, the scene continues until finally the log breaks off, failing to resist the action of the waves. The second sequence shows a seafront promenade, along which many people pass by in their daily pursuits. Only four old men stop to converse, though we never hear any dialogue. The third sequence focuses on a group of dogs sunbathing at a beach, and the sun gradually shines more brightly. The fourth sequence shows the to and fro journey of a group of ducks who retrace their steps to the very direction from which they had appeared. The fifth sequence is more narrative oriented, in a stormy night frogs croak, and then the break

¹³⁸ See Ernest Larsen's 'Ordinary Gesture of Everyday' in Erika Suderberg edited *Space, Site, Intervention: situating Installation Art*; Pub. by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London

¹³⁹ I have already discussed Bazinian realism, and its relationship with Abbas Kiarostami's films in Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁰ See Jonathan Romney's review on Abbas Kiarostami's *Five*, in *Sight and Sound*, Issue 6, June 2005.

of dawn. However, in this particular sequence it is sound which creates the narrative of the storm gradually approaching and passing by. The only visual one sees on the screen is that of moonlight reflected on the surface of a pond. This particular episode in the film bears an intertextual reference to Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*. In *Taste of Cherry* when Mr. Badii finally places himself inside his chosen hole near the tree in the dark stormy midnight, the camera never shows his face as he lies in his own grave. The camera instead cuts to a stormy sky, where layers of dark clouds rushes to cover the soft moon, as a soundtrack of rustling leaves, and gusts of stormy wind make all obvious allusions to the intensity of the moment in the film. It is the same composition of the moon we see in *Five* before the tumultuous night breaks into dawn. In *Five*, the context is removed. It is just an event. All the sequences of *five* are based on everyday situations which people usually never stop to take a look at. *Five* tries to transform the everydayness of these little happenings through a training of the eye to locate the moments in the sameness of events. Larsen also points out that any installation which concerns itself with the production and reproduction of everyday life will probably be structured by temporalities, where the "unique represented by the moment (the particularity of which is by definition unrepeatable) while the repetitive (accumulation of sameness) slogs through willingly to represent that which is inescapable".¹⁴¹

The last sequence of *Five* is about reflection alone. The moon itself is absent. This minimalist experimentation exposes the mechanisms of film projection in a movie hall, where whatever the spectator sees happening on the screen is a reflection of the projection. Despite obvious manipulations of the formal devices, the film embodies Kiarostami's poetic urge and bears strong connections with installation aesthetics to the extent that only contemplation and subjective engagement with the repetitive visual, may stress or the meaning of the text. Installation art as I have mentioned before following Ernest Larsen is about moments and the everyday both of which remain relevant to Kiarostami's oeuvre. "The present is the repeated frontier of the unrepeatable," writes Larsen. Kiarostami has always stressed on repetition, because each time the experience and response to viewing the same thing is different and multiple. Installation art by its secular definition aims at being ahistorical, but in

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*

Kiarostami we see the act of repetitive or variant visuals tacitly turning into memory and infiltrating into installation art's impulse to be perpetually in the present. The extremely slow motion images in the film expand the presentness of time (since the image is always already dead,). This memory is the vortex of imagination that enables the viewer to create his/her own allegory, through associations and semblances of his or her lived experiences, much like the general anti-memory approach of installation art. This kind of installation tendencies offer the space for poetic reflection, in a world where heightened perception and the bombardment of senses have led to the unending flow of sound and images. Installation galleries effectively efface the presence of human habitation and emphasize the product (art), the process itself is not the focus, because the process is subjected to endless re-creations by the visitors. It is like the Barthesian *writerly* text¹⁴² which endlessly rewrites itself. The work is only a site for deferral of any meaning. Installation structure allows for the play of empty signifiers to conjure a plurality of semantic fields. The art work then becomes the incomplete subject waiting to configure itself within a structural totality by including the viewer within it. The spectator becomes the object of interactive art, only to objectify it after it regains the consciousness of the spectating subject.

Looking at Tazieh is the next important video installation of Kiarostami which shows clearly how the decontextualization of video installation from its regional locatedness suspends it in a wider semantic field. *Looking at Tazieh*¹⁴³ was exhibited as a part of the Kiarostami festival, in Edinburgh. *Tazieh* is the only form of Shiist Islamic drama which is performed during *Ashura* in the months of Muharram. This drama of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein is actually a very culture and location specific performance. Kiarostami in many of his interviews has claimed that it was the structure of this performance tradition with an age old heritage in Iran that had influenced him in conceptualizing his radical aesthetics on spectatorship and cinema, an approach different from that of Bertolt Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, which western critics often associate him with. I have already established through a quote from Peter Chelkowski, in Chapter two (in the context of authorship and ethnographic filmmaking), that *Tazieh* develops itself as a participatory form of drama, where the

¹⁴² Roland Barthes in his *S/Z* discusses two types of texts, namely the readerly or the classic, which is not open to interpretation by the reader, and a writerly text on the other hand allows free interpretation by the reader, where each time the text subjects itself to a new reading.

¹⁴³ See *The Guardian* dated 11th August 2008.

director becomes a part of the performers on stage, transparently playing his role of supervision.

Apart from London, this video installation has also been presented in Italy, where Kiarostami has a considerable fan following. With speedy replacement by other forms of mediatized entertainment, *Tazieh* as a street performance, and also as the only surviving form of traditional popular culture, has now become almost obscure in Iranian cities. Kiarostami travelled to remote villages in Iran and Khanshar in southern Tehran (where this tradition is still alive), to film the performance and the spectators watching the performance. This highly melodramatic, culturally rooted story and performance was rendered flat when Kiarostami projected it in color on a large plasma screen at the centre of the exhibition room. Two other screens were placed on either side to show the footage of the close-ups taken of spectators in black and white, of both men and women, from remote Iranian villages watching the same version of the play. Kiarostami had himself remarked in an interview that, “The faces of the Iranian spectators are the subtitles”¹⁴⁴. Thus knowledge of the story and its cultural ramifications was not a necessity. The faces were accordingly edited to correspond to the goings on of the play being performed onstage. In Italy, Kiarostami had presented his *Tazieh* at the Teatro-Greco in Taormina July 2003, and politicized his presentation of the play through the character of Imam Hossein. At this time Iran was experiencing student protests against fee hikes in the higher education sector, voicing their general disillusionment with the new Islamic Republic. With reference to this immediate event of student unrest and demonstrations in Iran, which got international media coverage, *Tazieh* became more contextualized as a performance with its themes of martyrdom, and discontent. *Tazieh* is an essentially Shiist¹⁴⁵ drama as it is built on the story of the murder of Hazrat Ali’s son Imam Hossein. *Tazieh* is a symbolic act of ritual mourning to pay respect to Imam Hasaan and Imam Hossein. Despite its importance in the Shiist lexicon of Islam, some Iranian authorities do not favor the legend of his martyrdom in the battle of Karbala in 680A.D. The student unrest was against the Khatami government’s decision to privatize the Universities. Kiarostami had also joined in solidarity with this protest because he said, “I come

¹⁴⁴ See, David Bordwell's blog on Abbas Kiarostami

¹⁴⁵ Shiism is a practice within the faith of Islam where the followers do not follow the Callipahate as the legitimate Imams, but believe in the supremacy of the family lineage of Prophet Mohammad. Ali is the son in law of the Prophet, and Hassan and Hosein are the two sons born to Fatemah and Ali.

from a large family, if university had not been free in my day, I wouldn't have been able to go. Our revolution (1979) was in favour of the disinherited, the poor. So my request is that the government should remain faithful to its initial intentions.”¹⁴⁶ Kiarostami had pointed out that Hossein is like a spiritual leader of the dispossessed and herein comes out the symbolic relevance of the story of the battle of Karbala beyond its historical context.

It maybe quite interesting to note that this was the only Kiarostami film that the Iranian government wanted to screen in public but, Kiarostami in an interview to Angelique Chrysalis said “For once I was the one who refused....,I said the day you show all my films, you can also show this. You can't just choose this because you consider it something religious you can use in a different way”¹⁴⁷

Kiarostami's installation/play *Tazieh* in the Italian context was staged in a unique and critical setting. The play was staged in an open air hexagonal wooden theater with a central stage encircled by tiered seats. Like in Edinburgh, there were six screens positioned above showcasing the filmed faces of the spectators watching the same rendition of the play.

Kiarostami has always stressed on the crucial links between the audience and *Tazieh*. For him “the event is created by the rapport of actors and spectators”...aiming to transform “an empty stage show into a living ritual”.¹⁴⁸ Like self-reflexivity in Kiarostami's cinema *Tazieh* also operates on a note of formal and technical exposition, making shocking connections between the diegetic and the extra-diegetic. Kiarostami recalls his earliest memory of a *Tazieh* play he had watched, where two characters one good and the other evil were fighting each other with their tin swords and one of the swords had bent backwards. The other character onstage picked up a pebble from below the stage, hammered the sword back into shape to resume their fight. The sight of a cuddly lion refusing tea onstage was also common within the form of a *Tazieh* play. The reality of the lives of the performers and that of the story being performed are drawn into play. Lee Marshall in an interview with Kiarostami had said

¹⁴⁶ See *The Guardian*, Section 2, dated 14th July, 2003.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ See *The Guardian*, Section 2, dated 14th July 2003.

“Iranian audiences extreme emotional reaction left me with a feeling of inadequacy, even envy”,¹⁴⁹

Western audiences ignorant of this Islamic passion play find it akin to a circus or a pantomime show where they are unable to relate to the devout identifications and mourning of the Iranian spectators shown in the background on the screen. Responding to this lack of identification of the western spectator to this essentially Iranian Islamic play, Kiarostami had remarked, “That is central to the experience I had in mind...”It comes down to innocence: the innocence of the Iranian spectator, of his reaction to the *Tazieh*; and the innocence of western audiences, who feel inadequate when confronted with that type of reaction to the very same show that they are watching. It’s important to me that audiences in Rome have understood the innocence of the faces they are watching on the screen- I wasn’t sure that they would”¹⁵⁰ In an interview years ago, about his film, *The Taste of Cherry* Kiarostami had asked to make a conscious distinction between Iranian culture and Islamic culture, while commenting on the cultural taboo on issues of death and fatalism in Iran(the reason for which *Taste of Cherry* had not received a screening permit in Iran), he had suggested that it is more an individual’s outlook than a cultural influence which is at play.¹⁵¹ The pointed out that Iranian culture was not just Islamic culture since one should not forget the rich and ancient legacy of pre-Islamic Iran. Iranian culture is a unique amalgamation of both Islamic and non Islamic cultural practices (as best exemplified in the nationally celebrated event of *Nouruz*, a pre-Islamic tradition of New Year).

Like the *Correspondences*, *Tazieh* and *Looking at Tazieh*, were two other installations of Kiarostami. The former is a live drama installation that was showcased in Italy and the latter a video installation on the same subject. Both are formal variations of the same subject. This also indicates how the thematic of the installation evolves and refashions itself over time through different formal approaches aimed at different kinds of spectation. This is another unique tendency of installation practices which refrains from putting a stasis to the work. Rather, it constantly corresponds to

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁵¹ See Abbas Kiarostami in conversation with Bill Horrigan in “I Give Credit to my Audience” in *Film International*, Vol.6 Issue 2, 1998.

the nature of spectatorial engagement for every new re-creation of the work presented in every new context of exhibition.

The story and practices of *Tazieh* can be traced back to the Sassanid period which centered around the religious wars of Zarirr, a general of the Iranian army, against the enemies of Zoroaster. Belonging to pre Islamic Iran's oral tradition and sung by the *gusan* or the minstrels, the story-telling techniques and the religious story played a significant role in the later development of the mourning rituals and processions that emerged with its islamicization. So one can argue that the story represented in *Tazieh* may be Islamic in its content, but it also bears a pre-Islamic structure and therefore is more Iranian in its nature than just an Islamic religious drama. Since Shiist Islam developed sociologically as a protest against Arab domination, it had incorporated several practices of Iranian cultural and social practices, which figured themselves prominently in these plays.

It is also noteworthy that *Tazieh* like cinema bears a history of persecution and vigilance. The blind westernization programme of Reza Shah under the Pahlavi regime had sought to wipe out much of the cultural traces of the Qajar dynasty. Takieh Dowlat was the magnificent theatre house and the hub of *Tazieh* plays which had under the Qajar dynasty become a national form of performing art. This was burnt down and the small troupes of performers were forced to seek refuge in remote villages to save them from being persecuted by the police. Similarly during the Islamic Revolution of 1979, cinema halls were targeted as sites of malice, and films were seen as evil and corrupt. One of the foremost recorded instances of violence in the wake of the Revolution was the burning down of a cinema hall in the city of Abadan.

The sites of installation of this particular work on *Tazieh* remains far removed from its origin, and the video recordings filmed and projected onto the large screens in the background of this installation allows us to frame a fresh set of spectatorial positions. Video projection depends on a conscious removal of contexts of the factual order bearing any phenomenological specificity. This flattens the possibility of both dramatic and social contradiction to inaugurate, and as Larsen puts it "a play between the physical and the metaphysical; the embodied and the disembodied"¹⁵² It is not

¹⁵² See Ernest Larsen's 'Ordinary Gesture of Everyday' in Erika Suderberg edited *Space, Site, Intervention: situating Installation Art*; Pub. by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London

essential for audiences in Taormina or Edinburgh to possess a-priori knowledge of the content of the work, rather it is through their live insight aided by the screens in the backdrop, that new cultural texts can be formed through multiple modalities of cognition and interpretation. Kiarostami's specific arrangement of the stage is aimed at advancing a plethora of disembodied signifiers deferring any semantic centralization to enable multitude emotions to emerge from engaged spectatorial subjectivities.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a nation where television is state controlled and only a few non satellite state run channels exist¹⁵³ (although there are satellite connections in most well- to -do houses in Tehran, but they are illegal and sporadic military raids lifts these apparatus away). These channels telecast news or they recite the holy prayers, virtually assembling the nation five times a day through *azan*, through and recital of eulogies to the almighty. This is also a model of conjuring the idea of the "nation", in a similar way to that of Benedict Andersson's. Andersson writes that it was the newspapers that fostered the idea of a nation. In Iran it is the prayer calls that enliven the Islamic Republic as one nation with one faith, despite the existence of *Sunni* minorities and Armenian Jews living alongside the *Shii* majority.

Jeffrey Edward Green notes four aspects of plebiscitary politics. First is the mediatization of political communication. One must remember that the new Islamic regime was never unfriendly with the media or cinema; rather it historically tried to use it for its own purposes of fostering ideals of citizenship and nationhood; primarily as a medium of education. Second, is the "personalization of political power" and the third is "discretion of leadership". Both these second and third points can be related together and one may reflect on them from the Iran's recent election context. Green sums up the fourth salient feature of plebiscitary democracy as "the creative power of the leader vis- a-vis public opinion and popular will"¹⁵⁴. All of the four features point towards a fifth feature which alone may encapsulate the entire meaning, in a way it is most often understood. Green writes, "People's voice"- whether in its official manifestation as the majority's electoral choice or its informal function as public

¹⁵³ There are a few channels which present melodramatic serials, or runs a programme like *Animal Planet*(imported) dubbed in Farsi. The serials either tend to center on religious stories, or they are B grade melodramas, which the people who watch deem as 'garbage'.

¹⁵⁴ See, Jeffrey Edward Green's *The Eyes of the People, Democracy in Age of Spectatorship*, Pub. by Oxford University Press, 2010

opinions are rendered superficial and to a large degree fictive.”¹⁵⁵ People’s capacity of being vocal or expressive with their opinions, values and preferences are generally not considered part of plebiscitary models of democracy. The apparatuses of the mass media are generally not inclusive of everyday lives of the public.

Kiarostami’s films are often seen as apolitical and he always refuses to comment on Iran’s political environment in his interviews. But the very nature of “open images” in his films also shows the possibility of interpretative meanings. In an interview to Film International for their Autumn Issue of 2009, Kiarostami was asked if he had voted for the Presidential election, he replied saying that he would go bare foot to vote on the day the elections become democratic. The filmmaker was pointing out to the pointlessness of a system where votes could be bought in exchange of sacks of potatoes.

Sean Cubitt has lamented the failure of the vernacular press in the fourteenth century to structure a ‘communicative democracy’. With installations, Cubitt sees the possibility of renewing it. (citations!) Having destroyed the semantic hierarchization which assured the regime of meanings, installation tendencies in artistic practices stress on the conditions under which meaning may become possible. Meaning can no longer remain simply localized in a networked society, where *Tazieh* has to mean much more than just the Islamic drama of Imam Hossein’s martyrdom. Similarly, the tale of Khosrou and Shirin has to take on many more possibilities and be more than just a Persian narrative. *Five long takes* has to be more than just the repetition of the mundane phenomenon of life. But the meaning must remain unassigned to the subject of art; it must be conjured individually by each spectator through a process of cathected transformations of the mind. The incompleteness of Kiarostami’s films are completed by whoever participates in the process, initiated by the tacit mechanisms of the ‘functional site’.

Even if democracy in everyday life is not attainable in the strict sense of the term at least the communicative democracy engendered through reflective, interactive spaces, bears a critique and an alternative use of the ocular democracy of Iran. This is why I want to draw a fine connection with the plebiscitary form of democracy as a critical practice in social engagement and the empowerment of the masses. Plebiscitary democracy has always been projected as an alternative model within

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

theories of democracy. This type of democracy is governed by a rule of spectacle in which manipulative powers of society corrupt the possibility of genuine decision making. The role of citizens is relegated to that of mere spectators. Iran is a nation which has a history of a long quest for democracy and mass empowerment, but time and again they have failed to institute a truly democratic government. So beneath the cover of popular vocal models of democracy, premised on the tenets of “by the people, of the people and for the people”, an infantilism is inflicted on the citizens in the name of religion. This reduces the active capacity of the citizens. As a result one is not activated, even as a spectator. It is regrettable that most of Kiarostami's films are now banned in Iran. The films are primarily about young people and in some ways bears the vision of neorealist cinema's desire for nation building.

Even if the films appear as devoid of any offensive content, the structure and form itself is a threat to the current model of democracy prevalent in the nation. Through his engagement with spectatorship, Kiarostami forces the viewer to read things for themselves, to interpret on their own without the ideological interpellations content that may be present in the films. Abbas Kiarostami has a strong investment in activating the spectators as training for citizenship. This exercise in viewing tries to stir the consciousness of the citizens of a country where citizenship entails a namesake passive engagement with the political and juridical decisions of the state. Kiarostami's films are emblematic, for their visual democracy, which is the first step in thinking and acting independently. Kiarostami's films call for a conception of popular empowerment sharing an immediate relation to the “conduct of leadership”. The vocal model is generally understood as a means to “the ultimate end in legislation”. Under the ocular model it is the leader who functions as the ultimate site on which democracy is realized. If “decision” is the organ of popular power in the vocal system of democracy; the ocular model says Green “is grounded on the people's eyes and its capacity for vision”. Here the act of spectatorship is elevated to the level of a gaze, which is capable of structuring a hierarchical form of visualization “that inspects, observes and achieves surveillance”. This model of democracy bears the possibility of empowerment of the masses, from their general conditions of sedation.

I would like to conclude this chapter with the reiteration that minimalism plays a crucial role in politicizing the object of the gaze and transforms the modalities of vision from seeing to gazing, engaging critically with the object through one's own built up experiences and training in perception, gained over a span of the beholder's

life. Abbas Kiarostami's "gallery films" are sites of his fullest realization of the formal devices of cinema in terms of communication with spectators, commenting on the act of spectatorship, and the entire notion of spectatorship.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to engage with various points of entry to the study of the works of the Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami. This project has looked primarily at issues of authorship in cinema from the perspective of international film festival circuits and through an engagement with various theoretical and aesthetic paradigms associated with Kiarostami's work. These issues have provided different entry points to enter debates on the Iranian author, trying to renegotiate the role of an auteur or a filmmaker in international cinema. Kiarostami's primary preoccupations seems to be his concern for an essence of truth, and it is in search of this essence for a "pure experience", that he rejects all kinds of "isms" labeled on his work. Humanism and democratic criticism are what apparently effuses out of his films, but at some level a reality of their crisis is also exposed. Kiarostami does take on the role of an artist as also a critic, and a seeker of a transcendental truth. His films today are becoming more popular in an aggressive global world, which is compartmentalized for co-habiting within frameworks of multiculturalism. For Kiarostami, truth is not a proposition for correctness, assured by an object or a human subject. Rather, it embodies a sense of exposition of the being, through a sense of disclosure, which paves way for an openness to inhabit the senses. This freedom of the tortured, fragmented self, is what is of a higher order, than any sense of political freedom. Kiarostami, being a filmmaker from a country which suffers from an unfulfilled quest for democracy, turns to the freedom of the self to contextualize the beings in a field of existence.

There have been many reviews of Kiarostami's films placing him as one of the best filmmakers in the world cinema today. Richard Pena, Director of the Lincoln Center, once said " we are living in the age of Kiarostami". Peter Lennon, from the British Press, responded to this with a lament that actually one is not living in the age of Kiarostami and that indeed is a sad thing. We are actually living in an age where our visual fields are cluttered with too many signifiers competing with each other for attention and meaning, overlapping and displacing each other, ultimately putting the practitioners of urban living into a tiresome scopical regime with increasingly reduced space for thought and readymade emotions and gestures planned for events. The

urban sociologist George Simmel had argued in his writings on early 20th century metropolitan life that the “bombardment of the senses”, is an intrinsic phenomenon of modernity and city life. Almost a century later we are seeing the frenetic experience of globalization and its spectacular transformations. It is in this context that the films of Kiarostami take on a certain value.

Abbas Kiarostami simply reorganizes the aesthetics of viewing with his slow rhythmic films. The narrative is only a pretext for the viewer to wander through the meandering structures of the film text, punctuated with digressions and open spaces, only for the viewer to be lost in a maze of events that unfold on screen with the action displaced on to the mind of the spectator. Through his works of art, Kiarostami teaches us to pause, to look closely at what is just right before us, but with patience and willingness to see the meaning of the object transformed. His films have been a plea for truth as it resides in everyday life. Kiarostami is a visionary artist who interrogates the nature of human progress and modernity. He assumes the responsibility of an interdisciplinary artist and explores the limits of representation, by proposing a way of seeing the truth of the object world. In a globalized and fast moving world like ours, phenomenology of perception becomes a very important window to stop, think, and feel; To move towards a sense of freedom of being itself.

Someone may argue that slowness and self reflexivity are aesthetic stand points used by many filmmakers who belong to the new wave movements of national cinemas. What is of critical importance here is not just the existence of certain stylistic devices, but more an exploration of the philosophical drives behind such experimentations at a time when globalization has unleashed a frenetic pace of life. Kiarostami’s engagement with techniques of ethnography, his belief in a particular kind of truth located in the rhythms of everyday life and his belief in the emancipated spectator – make him a powerful interlocutor. It is of importance to notice what these stylistic devices were aimed at. The objective of the aesthetics that Kiarostami engages in is like an onion, we keep peeling off each layer, uncovering the layer beneath, only to arrive at a tiny core which can no longer be peeled further. The truth resides in this core and it is this truth that holds his film. No study on the filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami can be definitive since to arrive at anything which ends with a full stop is not the aesthetic strategy proposed by him. I have engaged with only a few points of entry in this dissertation which I hope will help in situationalizing and appropriating his works over time.

FILMOGRAPHY

THE KANUN PERIOD

Bread And Alley (Nan va Kucheh) -short film, 1970: deals with the simple conflict of a child who had encountered a hungry dog at the turn of the street during one of his routine walks back home from the bakery carrying a piece of Iranian bread. The film has no message but addresses the conflict of the everyday, that how he make his way past the dog safely without being bitten. There is no permanent solution that Kiarostami offers, the solution is of temporary survival, and the possibility of repetitions of such encounters looms large.

Break Time (Zang –e- Tafrih)-short film 1972: It is about a boy who is made to stand outside the class as a punishment for breaking the window pane with his ball, on his way back home from school, he meets a group of children playing football in the neighborhood to whom he passes the ball. He is however haunted by the punishment and is afraid to give into the game and therefore runs along the mistaken alleys just to land himself on the heavily trafficked highway. There is no message, but only complication which persists and it is the complexity of the voice of the ego and the Id in their dialogue in his unconscious.

The Experience (Tajrobeh)- short feature 1973 Based on a script by Amir Naderi, (which Kiarostami had altered to a large extent) the film is about the impossible dream of a young adolescent who works as an errand boy in a photography studio and harbors amorous desires for a rich girl whom he sees everyday on his way, when she boards her school bus. Naturally it is a domed love story and hardly bears any message, other than the pragmatics of a class based society, and a deterring patriarchy even during the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi. This theme will again be explored in a slight variation to achieve a different end in his later feature *Through the Olive Trees*.

The Traveler (Mosafer) short film 1974-: About a boy who had made desperate arrangements for seeing a football match in Tehran but had unfortunately fallen asleep in the stadium. All his attempts were obviated due to a disharmony between his fatigued body and time-bound event of the play. Maybe there can be some hints at morality in this film which is also one of Kiarostami's concerns.

Two Solution for One Problem (Do Rah- e- Hal Baraiye Yek Masleh) short film 1975

This film clearly charts out the two possible outcome of a simple problem that has happened between two school friends. One of the two boys have torn the others notebook, so the other has broken his ruler, and the series of violence continues in order to equal the intensity of every preceding reaction. Finally this chain of violent repercussions leads to physical violence and severing of friendly ties. The second solution is that the note book is returned torn, but on observing the fault the friend glues it. They remain friends and avoid any violence. The film only proposes, delineating the impact of either of the two ways. This may be a film which bears a message that a simple solution may avoid violence, but then one must not forget that both of them are proposed endings of the same story.

So Can I (Man Ham Mitunam) short film 1975: This a typical educational film for school children. The only possible message is aspiration coupled with determination leads to the possibility of success.

The Colors (Rangha) short film 1975: Also another educational film instructing through the surrounding objects the seven colors of the vibgyor, punctuated by sudden flights of fancy from the classroom situation of instruction when one of the boys whose point of view the film shares imagines himself at the crossroads of a traffic signal in his self driven car. I have not been able to find any message in the film, but rather discerned some unleashing violence at the end when the little boy shoots he bottles filled with colored water one after another and the splash onto the ground.

The Wedding Suit (Lebas Baraiye Arusi) short feature 1976 is a very complicated film, which simultaneously opens up many issues like friendly bonding, the deafness of elders to the problems of young adolescents, the desire for class mobility and the tussels of desire, transgression and the consequence of the same. More than any message it raises questions on issues of morality and social systems of disparity and inequality.¹⁵⁶ Both *Tajrobeh* and this film shows a caged, imprisoned childhood

¹⁵⁶ Together with *Tajrobeh*, *Lebas Baraiye Arusi* are two films with which I find a very close resemblance with our own Bollywood cinema of the 1970s, the era of mass disillusionment, when films *Dewar*, *Shakti* come up. These two young Iranian protagonists are uncanny resemblances of the childhood of Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan). The narratives of male friendship and loyalty as we find in these Bollywood films are also present in these films as the moments when they sit to eat together or make plans are the moments of freedom. This also shows a degenerating society, where the revolution to overthrow the regime of the Shah

where the elders and the society will squash all the happy dreams to under their ever punitive disposition. The film still(1.1) shows the boy framed in such a way as if he is behind a cage with no possibilities of exit. The deep sense of humanism that is much expounded as a value in the neo-realist manifesto is not present in these films, on the contrary it is the crisis of such values which are foregrounded.

Report (Gozaresh) feature 1977 : is a film which is not very typical of a Kiarostami film which centers round the failing marriage of a couple. Issues of corruption among government employees and domestic violence are addressed but the turn of events like the wife's attempt to suicide leads to the path of decisive action. He rushes her to the hospital but leaves the place on being informed on her survival.

Tribute to Teachers (Bozorghdshat-e-Moallem) short film 1977: This film about a tribute given to the profession of teaching and to teachers, and opens and closes with a old teacher who makes a journey down his memory lane to the days when he was a student in the school. This is quite a humanist portrayal of teachers unlike other films of Kiarostami.

Solution (Rah-e-Hal) short film 1978. This film tries to stress on the importance of common sense and simple solutions to apparently big difficulties. Tyre of a car punctures in a snow clad mountainous region and the driver takes it to a distant service station where he expects he might get a lift to carry his tyre back to the car, but unfortunately he is not helped by anybody and finally good sense dawns on him when he starts to walk back to his car rolling the tyre in front which finds its way to its destination.

Here the message is in praise for simplicity of thought and action.

Case No.1, Case No.2 (Ghaz -e- Shekyl- Avval, Dovvom) documentary feature 1979; This is a critique of the education system of the pre revolution Iran, triggered by the expulsion of seven boys who violate the rules of the school. Kiarostami undertakes a series of interviews with people in power like the minister of education, the Islamic scholars, the senior members of KANUN, parents, teachers themselves. All of them make tall talks, and make ideal propositions through out the film without realizing the practicability of solutions.

looming large in the discontent and disobedience of these young adolescent protagonists). The mise-en -scene and the color are also very similar to our Indian films. Please refer to film still

Toothache(Dandan-e- Dard) short film 1980: This is also an educational film , one bearing a message that if one doesn't take good care of one's teeth then one becomes a looser not only does s/he loose the tooth but also school and other opportunities.

Orderly or Disorderly (Tartib va Bedune Tartib) short film 1981: This is about the goodness in maintaining order in the general flow of public life, expressed two representations of the same episode of children moving out of their classes at recess.

The Chorus (Hamsarayan) short feature, 1982: Centering around an old man, it is Kiarostami's one of the most beautiful films on sound, its controlling, absence and presence in relation to a sense of passage of time.

The Fellow Citizen (Hamshahri) short documentary feature 1983: About a traffic control police trying to ward away traffic from a particular road to avoid traffic congestion, but his fellow citizens all have some reason or the other to force their way through that very road. It Simply manifestins the arrogance and deafness of the fellow citizens. Finally, the helplessness and boredom surfaces on the visage of this man who gives up repeating himself in disgust.

First Graders(Avvaliha) documentary feature 1985: This is based on the experiences of the first day of the first graders at school, and how the delinquent and disobedient little boys line up at the Headmaster's office for being reprimanded.

Where is the Friends Home(Khaneh Dost Kodja Ast?) feature 1986: It is a continuation of the former film, but in this feature Kiarostami explores the poetry of life, journey, friendship and responsibility, through the character of Ahmad.

Homework (Mashq-e- Shab) documentary feature 1988: About the problems of doing home work and coming to school I time. In many interviews Kiarostami had mentioned that this film was inspired by the same problems faced by his son

Close-Up (Namay -e Nazdik) documentary feature 1990: This is based on the true story of a trial of an imposter named Sabzian who impersonated in the role of Mohsen Makhmalbaff.

Life and Nothing More (Zendegi va Digar Hich) 1992: Through the Olive Trees (Zir Derakhtan e Zeytun) 1994.: A film about filming, a proposition for a love story between the protagonists Tahereh and Hossein, and complicated issues of class and its mobilization even in the context of a rural village.

Post KANUN

Dinner for One(1995) This film was developed as a part of the Lumiere and Company project, where some of the world's most important filmmakers were give the oldest Lumiere camera o make a film of their own. This short is about a decaying/finished relationship between a man and a woman, where the only visual is that of a man frying two eggs in a frying pan,

Taste of Cherry(1997): This is about a man who explores the possibility of suicide as an exit from his life. However, the final decision is left unclear.

Wind will carry US(1999); Developed almost as a critique of Anthropology and the act of filming is about a photographer or a filmmaker who goes to a remote village to shoot the mourning ceremony popular among the woman of that village. Finally the man gives up on his quest to know the impossible and move on with the flow of life.

ABC Africa(2001): A film commissioned by IFAD, to make an awareness documentary on the aids victims of Uganda.

Ten Minutes Older (2001): Also another film designed to form a part of a package released by the Cannes Film Festival, to commemorate the essence of cinematic time, Kiarostami was also one of the selected directors to make a ten minutes episode, but this film was not accepted in the final package. It shows a baby boy sleeping over a duration of time and ends with him waking up crying.

Ten(2002): About a mother and a patriarch son, who keeps on accusing the mother for her decision to divorce his father. One of Kiarostami's audacious experiments shot in a car, with a digital camera, mostly in absence of the director.

Ten on Ten(2003) This is Kiarostami's treatise on his own aesthetics and his expectations from the digital format of cinema.

Five(2003): One of his gallery films with five long takes, shot over five different episodes, to reveal a certain transformatory appeal of the everyday and the commonplace.

Tickets(2004) Shot as a joint venture with Ermanno Olmi and Ken Loach, Kiarostami's first episode in a feature film outside Iran. It is predicated on a train journey from central Europe to Rome.

Certified Copy(2010): Kiarostami's mega starer feature shot in Italy with Juliette Binoche, is a film which explores the philosophical and empirical distinctions between copy and original, reality and truth, through exploring a possible relation with a professor of art and a woman who owns a shop of antiques.

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