The Traveller: A Philosophical Journey through Kiarostami's Cinema

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Abstract

The primary goal of this thesis is to provide a way to look at Kiarostami's cinema philosophically, or a key to assist in unlocking and unpacking philosophical questions, concepts and themes in his cinema. To this end, I analysed Kiarostami's cinema through Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the cinema, Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of nothingness and the specific role that Martin Heidegger grants to poets in the destitution time.

My main focus in this thesis is on Kiarostami's first feature film *The Traveller* (1974), since this film has been widely ignored in the literature. Concentrating on this particular film, I endeavoured to show that almost all the formal and aesthetic features that has been considered as the characteristics of Kiarostami's cinema was already existed in *The Traveller*. I attempted to show that *The Traveller* is essentially a modern film where "nothingness" finds a narrative place and to demonstrate that this film well fits into the Deleuze's time-image model. I also explicated key elements of Deleuze's Kafka-inspired notion of "minor cinema" to show that Kiarostami's cinema is a politically engaged one where politics is not represented but enacted. Another key concept that I utilized in this endeavour is Heidegger's "disenchantment of modernity" where the need for great poetry is felt more than ever, because I maintain that poetry is the very foundation of all Kiarostami's films. For this purpose, I first tried to demonstrate that Kiarsotami's cinema is structurally poetic with the help of the characteristics that Pier Paolo Pasolini considers for the cinema of poetry and Deleuze's "crystal-image". Secondly, I endeavoured to illuminate that Kiarostami takes the role that Heidegger grants to poets which is to say to prepare us, "the preserver", for the "holy".

Throughout this thesis, I endeavoured to fill in the gaps in the theoretical analysis of Kiarostami's cinema by making connections between concepts and images that may not be apparent, addressing elisions in his films.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis offers a philosophical reading of Iranian film-maker Abbas Kiarostami's cinema identifying which philosophical positions, themes and questions are being revealed through his films, and providing a lens through which one could read a film in relation to philosophy. This study also situates Iranian cinema within a network of philosophical thinkers whose writing is either directly about cinema or has implications to art such as painting, theatre and literature. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to bring Western thoughts into conversation with Iranian cinema.

The importance of films and motion pictures to Iranian culture is undeniable. Motion pictures have become a feature of everyday modern life through television, drawing attention to questions about the logic and conceptual framework of films, and turning them into the subject of philosophical debate from very early in the twentieth century.

Philosophy enables us to understand the intellectual content that films represent and explore. In addition, films create their own philosophical point and their own view into the human situation.[1] In this sense, films can improve philosophy itself, in particular a philosophy that has lost its connection to concrete reality. Especially, in the case of Iranian cinema, only one philosophical study – Erfani's *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*[2] – is available. Thus, a qualitative research for developing this path and providing a suitable theoretical and

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[1] Cristopher Falzon, *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy,* 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge 2014).
[2] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*. (New York: Palgrave Macmilan 2012).

philosophical framework for analysing Iranian cinema can help us to understand films in connection to various philosophical themes.[3]

My main focus is on Kiarostami's first feature film shot before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Although Kiarostami's cinema has been the subject of many studies, *The Traveller* (1974) has rarely been mentioned in the literature. The previous studies have mainly explored Kiarostami's cinema during 90s when he was known internationally in film festivals, and particularly after his *Taste of Cherry* won the *Palme d'Or* in the Cannes film festival 1997. Moreover, in many studies the 1979 revolution was considered as the only historical event that shattered Iranian's identity and gave rise to a new type of character in Iranian cinema: the children. I believe that it was the modernisation of Iran that led to a shift in Iranian identity. The concept of Iranian identity requires further clarification for Iranian identity has evolved over many centuries and had experienced recurrent construction and transformation. In the 19th century, the modern ideas, coming from West, such as nation, nationalism and national identity adapted and reinforced the historical pre-modern Iranian identity. The change that eventually led to a new political consciousness and identity and patriotism became a new political value. Ahmad Ashraf in his article, *Iranian Identity I. Perspectives*, mentions three main perspectives on Iranian identity; the first is "romantic nationalist view" which identifies with the pre-Islamic golden era and believed in a continuity in Iran's history from past to modern times searching for an organic identity, the second is

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[3] Philosophy and film firstly encountered in the question of whether film could be an art form. Stanley Cavell's interest in the philosophy of film helped to seeing film as a source of knowledge and, even, as potential contributor to philosophy itself. See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1979), *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1981), *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996), and *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2004).

"modernist or post-modernist" account of Iranian identity which disregards the first view and sees "the concept of 'nation' as a modern construct," the third called "historicizing perspective recognizes that "civic nation" is the product of modernity and as such could not be applied retrospectively to pre-modern times, but it strongly rejects the modernist and post-modernist contention of a radical discontinuity between a modern nation and its historical past." [4] The "romantic nationalist" ideas of Iranian identity developed in the literature produced during Constitutional Revolution. The second view rejects the retrospective concept of romantic nationalism and holds that the nations are "invented" or "imagined" by ruling elite. The historicizing tendency toward Iranian Identity views nations as the product of historical process and perceives "nations as a historical phenomenon that are subject to flux and change."[5] The historicizing perspective tried to find the aspect of the nations in "myths, memories, values, and symbols."[6] In the 20th century Iran, Pahlavi shahs underlines the 25 centuries of Persian empire in search of a natural identity and believed in the formation of a "civil society" as consequence of modernization. This shift made Iranians rediscover the world again and cinema was one of their immediate mediums for this purpose. *The Traveller* was made before the revolution and yet it has many characteristics of Iranian films made after the revolution. In my opinion, this film is very important in the history of Iranian cinema as it not only already has the aesthetic quality and main characteristics of Kiarostami's cinema, but also thematically explores the societal conventions and the Iranians' identity encountered with modernity. This film shares many features with modern cinema and there are poetic aspects to it. In an era when the revolution was

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[4] Ahmad Ashraf, *Iranian Identity I. Perspectives*, Encyclopedia Iranica, vol. XII, Fscc. 5, pp.501-504.
[5] Ibid,.
[6] Ibid,.

in the air and westernization of Iran was happening rapidly, this film visually provides a glimpse of Iranian life in the 70s. I find that *The Traveller* "thinks" through the modernization process of Iran.

The film tells us the story of a young boy from the town of Malayer, in the Hamadan Province, Qassem, who is mad about football. When Qassem finds out that the national team is about to play an important game at the capital, he is determined to watch the match at any cost. To do so, he has to steal some money from his parents, deceive the schoolboys by pretending to take their picture with an old, broken camera, cheat his friends by selling their football gear, and sneak out of the house to catch the bus which will carry him to Tehran. This film ends with an enigmatic sense of resolution. The overnight trip makes Qassem so tired. Qassem takes a nap like many other spectators on the grass. He has a nightmare about the severe punishment awaiting him on his return to school. When he wakes up he finds out that nobody is around him. Everybody has already left. He runs towards the stadium. At the end, Qassem finds out that the match is over and the mission has failed. The only thing that Qassem has found is an empty stadium. Qassem starts running out of the camera's frame.

Abbas Kiarostami: a Self-taught Director

Abbas Kiarostami, maybe the most renowned Iranian director, was born on 22 June 1940. He completely experienced the rise and fall of contemporary Iran. He grew up when Iran was temporarily occupied by the Allied forces and Mohammad Mosaddiq became Iran's prime minister from 1951 until 1953, an era of temporary relief from Shah Reza Pahlavi's dictatorship, which revived the memories of the constitutional

revolution of 1906-11[7]. Kiarostami's interest in painting and plastic arts was greater than in film when he was a teenager; perhaps the reason might be rooted in the condition of Iranian cinema in general during those years (late 1950s). According to Hamid Dabashi: "An average of twenty-five films are being produced every year, but each one as bad as another in their hackneyed images and ideas."[8] Kiarostami studied painting in the University of Tehran College of Fine Arts. After graduation from the university, he became a commercial artist in the 1960's and designed several book covers, posters and even TV commercials.

His career as a filmmaker started with making short films for the state-funded Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (CIDCYA), which Iranians simply call Kanun. Kanun was founded in early 1960s in order to publish books and build libraries and to make films for and about children. In 1969, he accepted the invitation of his friend, Firuz Shirvanlu, to collaborate in setting up a film unit within Kanun. In 1970, Kiarostami made his first short film *Nan va Kucheh (Bread and Alley)* in Kanun. This black and white 10 minutes film which is about the confrontation of a merry boy light-heartedly carrying bread home and a frightening dog in an alley marked the beginning of Kiarostami's journey with children[9].

Learning filmmaking through making films for children with children and the fact that Kanun was a non-commercial organization aided Kiarostami to form his basic approach to cinema. For Kiarostami this new post as educational filmmaker in Kanun was like a "school of filmmaking in more ways than one, since Kanun went

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[7] For more information see Hamid Dabashi, *Close up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London: Verso 2001) and Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, and Jonathan Rosenbaum *Abbas Kiarostami* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2003).

[8] Hamid Dabashi, *Close up: Iranian cinema, past, present and Future,* 41.

[9] This film also is the first film made in Kanun which "encouraged Kanun to create a cinema section and thus talented filmmakers were invited to collaborate with Kanun and make films for children and young adults." Touraj Daryaee and Kourosh Beigpour, *50th anniversary of Kanun*, (UK: H & S, 2016), 5.

on to produce works by such new-wave Filmmakers as Bahram Beyzae and Amir Naderi."[10]

Urbanization during the 1960s

Most of the studies on Iran conventionally considered the clash between secular, progressive and modern inspirations on the one hand, and backward, traditional, Islamic urges on the other hand, as the primary grounds of political events and intellectual discourse. Similarly, the revolution of 1979 has been frequently viewed as a fundamentalist movement[11]. While some scholars argue that the Iran revolution of 1979 is an attempt towards the idea of modernity[12].

During 200 years of Iranian exposure to modernity, the history of Iran went through several social and political changes. The exposure of Iranians to new ideas from colonized India to the European Enlightenment has consistently changed the social and political circumstances inside the country and shaken the Iranians' belief in themselves to its foundation. These changes include the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) - which was the first struggle of Iranian intellectuals to run a democratic government; the 1953 CIA engineered coup against the government of Mohammad Mosaddiq and subsequent period of brutal dictatorship; the Reza Shah's program of modernization in 1950s and Mohammad Reza Shah's westernization plan during 60s and 70s; the Islamic Revolution (1979); and finally the Green Movement (2009). Although every single event was sudden and foreign influence has been significant, the whole process of transition has, however, been gradual and occasionally indigenously engendered. Although the process of modernization in Iran resulted in a shattered and plural identity, the whole erosion and depreciation situation of this

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[10] Mehrnaz saeed-Vafa, Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 8
[11] Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 10
[12] Ibid.

identity is a part of the process of a self-conscious movement towards a modern identity.

During the 60s the Iranian economy experienced an upheaval. The comparatively remarkable growth rates of the economy in overall, and that of the manufacturing and oil sector in particular, generated the illusion "that the country was going through a genuine process of industrialization and development"[13]. However, a closer analysis of the economy situation of Iran during this decade shows the contrary. As a matter of fact, while the oil sector produced around 28 per cent of the GNP by the end of 1960s, it employed only about 0.5 per cent of the country's active population. Moreover while industry grew, employment in agriculture diminished. While Iran became ever more dependent on its oil revenues, around 70 per cent of the population was still living in rural areas.

The Shah, under pressure and supervision from the USA president John F. Kennedy, introduced a programme of 'rural reforms', which aimed at the simultaneous reorganisation of agricultural work and transformation of the social relations of land ownership to attract the rural population into entering the age of consumption. However, Iran was a society which had not superseded feudalism and therefore could not be successfully modernised[14].

The government executed the main parts of the rural reforms during 1961-62. An upper ceiling was introduced of 400 hectares for land ownership which actually meant that any businessman with sufficient means or the right governmental corrections was able to buy the cultivable farms on offer. The Shah's plan was the

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[13] Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd 2006), 90
[14] Ibid. Since the transformation from feudalism to capitalism required the change in certain 'productive forces' (say, the organisation of labour before 60s - which involve the social relations of villain to lord), after the 60s, the development of new modes of productive organisation became based on a changed set of social relations - this time between the capitalist class in Iran who owns those means of production and the proletarian class.

mechanisation of agriculture to free surplus labour for employment in urban industries. However, the only consequence of the introduction of the rural reforms was to turn farmers from producers into consumers. Divided villages were gradually ruined. The government's problems can be seen in the resignation of three prime minister during 1960-62 and the clashes between peasants and authorities in various regions. The changing economic situation at the beginning of the 60s was characterized by a dramatic decline in productivity and a rise in unemployment and certain shifts in the organisation of the traditional family structure. Kiarostami's artistic trajectory took place within this context. These rural-urban conflicts can be clearly seen in Kiarostami's *The Traveller*.

Modern Literature

By the turn of twentieth century, many Iranian intellectuals in the field of poetry and prose tried to reform and modernize their art. In 1920s and 1930s, the modern ideas of Nima Yushij's (1897-1960), who is known as the father of Iranian modernist poetry (new poetry), have triggered a revolution in Persian poetry. He achieved a new form of poetry by "organizing new concepts, introducing novel structures, and championing unprecedented subject matters through a diligent, deliberate campaign to modernize Persian poetry."[15] A decade later poets such as Ahmad Shamlou, Mehdi Akhavan-sales, Sohrab Sepehri and Forugh Farrokhzad extended Nima's ideas and established the new poetry as a mode of contemporary poetic expressions[16]. Modern Persian literature emerged as a secular activity and was "characterized by modernist ideas such as the use of Western literary forms, new

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[15] Ahmad Karimi-hakak and Kamran Talattoff 'Introduction: Nima Yushij and the Millennium-old Tradition of Persian Poetry' in *Essays on Nima Yushij* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 4.
[16] Ibid., 5.

styles, and the promotion of non-traditional culture."[17] In the field of prose literature a revolution had begun a few decades earlier and by the 1920s a mature and unprecedented fiction literature emerged. Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh (1892-1997) and Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951) played an important role in this modernism.

Children of Iranian Cinema

Without giving too much credit to censorship, censorship has sparked a very unique creativity in Iranian cinema: children. To escape from the restricted rule imposed by the Iranian government, Iranian directors used children as their protagonists. Over past few years, some scholars have analysed the presence of children in the Iranian new-wave products. Sadr in his essay on children in *Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children* investigates the representation of children in the Iranian new-wave in a political and historical context. He argues that the use of children is mainly due to the authorities' concerns for portraying a positive image of Iran abroad[18]. Zeydabadi-Nejad, however, suggests that the stylistic considerations and limited funding were the reasons behind the use of children in the new-wave cinema[19]. Whatever is the reason for the use of children in Iranian cinema, their presence on the screen and their struggle with circumstances which adults can hardly face produce a relatively "unbelievable children"[20]. These films have been ironically produced for an adult audience. Abbas Kiarostami's *The Traveller* is one of the examples in which an adolescent has been put in such a situation. Kiarostami states

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[17] Kamran Talattof, *The politics of writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, (New York: Syracuse University Press 2000), 4.

[18] Hamid Reza Sadr, "Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children," *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation, and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2002).

[19] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*, (London: Routledge 2010).

[20] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*. (New York: Palgrave Macmilan 2012).

that: "I don't consider myself in any way a director who makes films for children I've only shot one film for children; all the rest are about children."[21] The unusual roles that children play in Iranian films can again be due to the censorship rules governing Iranian cinema. Children in Iranian films are the surrogates of adults and these films, ironically, are not for children[22]. Erfani writes:

> Censorship is restrictive, but it does not work as intended in Iranian cinema, since women, for example, cannot be portrayed without their veils, female characters wear their religious scarves even in the intimacy of their imaginary homes on screen, and in bed. While censorship rules were supposedly meant to protect women's dignity from the male condescending gaze, the utterly outcome brings more attention to the veil and to its awkwardness the censors are less difficult about children's characters, which makes for rather unreal or surreal situations in which children are put in adult situations struggling with issues that the older members of society can hardly face.[23]

Kiarostami explains the use of children in his films as follows:

> This is very much rooted in that period of my life. If I had not started with children I would never have arrived at this style. Children are very strong and independent characters and can come up with more interesting things than Marlon Brando, and it is sometimes very difficult to direct or order them to do something. When I met Akira Kurosawa in Japan, one question he asked was, 'how did you actually make the children act the way they do?'... In order to be able to cooperate with a child, you have to come down to below their level in order to communicate with them. Actors are also like children[24].

In chapter 2 I begin by exploring *The Traveller* using Deleuze's time-image model. Here a discussion of *The Traveller* entails a broader exploration of the role of child in Kiarostami's cinema, and how this type of character emerged in a new form of optical drama. I start with an overview of Deleuzian film theory followed by an

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[21] Abbas Kiarostami is quoted in Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*. (London: Saqi in association with Iran Heritage Foundation, 2005), 33.
[22] Richard Tapper, ed., *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation, and Identity,* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2002),18.
[23] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*. (New York: Palgrave Macmilan 2012), 7.
[24] Abbas Kiarostami, "Abbas Kiarostami," Interview by Geoff Andrew. *The Guardian* at *BFI*, April 28, 2005.

examination of cinema in his overall ontology. I briefly explain his time-image model and his notion of the "cinema of seer". After an analytic synopsis, I examine Kiarostami's *The Traveller* by categorizing the film into three parts: Maleyer part where the protagonist is able to act since his "link" to the world has not been broken yet. In Deleuzian terms, the first part still "relies on world or subject" as the each situation that the protagonist encounters, extends into action. The second part begins when Qassem travels to Tehran. The second part operates in the realm of "incommensurability"[25]. This is where, in Deleuze's words, the confrontation occurs between "inside" and "outside"[26], between the protagonist's psych and his surrounding environment. Third part happens when the protagonist comes to modernized Tehran and sees himself seized in a space to which he no longer knows how to react. It is where the break in the link between man and the world occurs and a child-seer is created.

Each of Deleuze's books contains a precise analysis of cinema and covering them all is beyond the scope of this thesis. For my purposes, I present the broad concepts of movement-image and time-image. According to Deleuze, the movement-image cannot stand in radical opposition to time image, it is just a matter of subordination:

> The time-image does not imply the absence of movement (even though it often includes its increased scarcity) but it implies the reversal of the subordination; it is no longer time which is subordinate to movement; it is movement which subordinates itself to time.[27]

`What these two models share is image. For Deleuze and Bergson, image is not merely what is shown on screen; it is much more than that:

[25] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum 2005), 267.
[26] Ibid., 266.
[27] Ibid., 260.

> [d]rawing a parallel with Einstein's physics, Bergson in effect proposes a conception of the material universe of figure of light and movement, 'blocs of space-time' as Deleuze often puts it. In this universe there would be an absolute coincidence between matter, light, and movement, and Bergson's name for this coincidence is 'image': the material universe is universe of moving images. Or more precisely, of movement-image.[28]

According to Deleuze, the creation of concepts reveals a feature that he calls image. Image is contingent; it is moving, subjected to time. What movement-image thus means is not only a picture in motion but an "immanent analysis of movement". Time-image, however, is more capable of appreciating the appropriate place of image due to the fact that in this model movement subordinates itself to time.

In the third chapter, I move from Deleuze to Sartre's philosophy of "nothingness" which is quite helpful in particular in the case of Kiarostami's *The Traveller* to understand how modern experience of human existence finds a narrative place in Kiarostami's cinema. This chapter explores the way in which an abstract concept such as nothingness is represented in cinema by examining *The Traveller* as an example of Iranian new-wave cinema. Since the notion of nothingness is only applicable for "modern melodrama"[29] I unavoidably need to prove that *The Traveller* can be categorized as a modern film. I choose this film as an example of Iranian new-wave and argue that this film is not only stylistically modern but also that Qassem's character is a representation of the modern experience of human existence through the notion of "nothingness". I intend to show how the concept of nothingness finds a narrative place and becomes an invincible power in front of which the protagonist is helpless. To sustain and clarify my argument regarding the philosophy of "nothingness", I make a comparison between Kiarostami's *The*

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[28] Paola Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy,* trans. Alisa Hartz, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press 2008), 19.

[29] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2007).

Traveller and Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), with which *The Traveller* shares many features: *The 400 Blows* is Truffaut's first feature film as Kiarostami's and both are, also, stylistically similar. Both films can be categorized under "wandering/travel genre"[30]. And finally, and most importantly, nothingness is the ultimate power that finally catches both protagonists. According to Sartre, Nothingness is the key concept of both human relations and the relationship between man and objective world. For Sartre, Nothingness does not associate with another world or accord beyond the world; it rather exists exactly in the "heart of the world". He claims Nothingness is the essence of human being and it exists within being, unlike Heidegger who places Nothingness beyond being. Sartre interprets the concept of Nothingness within the frame of an individual's everyday life, where people are left alone by their feelings and beliefs which may cause disappointment due to the lack of something solid. This is where man has to either rely on his will or possible action, which is made out of probability[31].

In the first nine years of filmmaking (from 1970 to 1979), Abbas Kiarostami produced thirteen short and long films, mostly about or for children. Most of the films explore the individual's failed attempts to come to grips with his innate autonomy. The concept "nothingness" has been, also, widely studied in Islamic philosophy. From the perspective of Islamic philosophy, the concept "nothingness" is undefinable without referring to "being". For instance, Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shirazi) – who was one of the most important figures in the final phase of the development of Muslim intellectual and spiritual life – explains that being is an enveloping totality in which everything is immersed and, therefore, it is

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[30] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, 102.
[31] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (Oxon: Routledge 2003).

irreducible to categories of reason and logic such as substance and accident, or universal and particular. For Mulla Sadra, everything is plunged in being; and this exhausts every possibility of defining it "outside of" itself because this "outside of" does not exist. Mulla Sadra explains that the concept "nothingness" (adam) is contained in the bosom of being because it is understandable only when considered in terms of being, i.e., it cannot escape mental existence. In Mulla Sadra's philosophy, nothingness symbolizes not to exist, to lose and to lack. Thus, being is all that is wanted and desirable and nothingness is that which is unwanted and detestable. For instance, death means loss of existence and fear of death amounts to the fear of nothingness. However, For Sartre nothingness is not a totally negative concept.[32]

Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness*, suggests a kind of freedom that is exactly the nothingness at the centre of a conscious being to choose the person he or she wants to be by acting upon the world. This gap or emptiness which one experiences would provide the opportunities for one to create an unique individuality for oneself. Humans suffer anguish with the recognition of the inescapable freedom and the responsibility of being free. Escaping from the anguish in the face of freedom would cause 'Bad Faith'. And freedom gives a sense of openness to Being-for-itself with possibilities to be fulfilled. Moreover, freedom gives the power to distinguish between Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself through the difference between conscious and unconscious, between free and determined. As the result of this radical freedom, then, man finds himself in a situation with continual contingent circumstances.

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[32] Muhammad Abdul-Haq, *Mulla Sadra's Concept of Being*, Islamic Studies, vol,6. Sep 1967, 267-276.

Sartre strongly argues against any determinism suggested by Freud, Marx and science. Human being's 'facticity', by which he means the contingent circumstances, he argues, may be determined but it does not limit the freedom of the conscious being. Free action is constantly taken by for-itself to overcome the limitation and resistance presented by biological, psychological, social, economic determinants in the world. And for-itself exists as an impure 'transcendence' of his facticity by having the power of perpetually choosing the meaning of his individual experience of being in the face of the facticity.

In chapter 4 the focus is on the politics of Kiarostami's cinema through Deleuze's notion of "minor cinema."[33] This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the critics who attacked Kiarostami's cinema as being "political escapism" or "apolitical." One of the criticisms which accused Kiarostami's cinema for not showing the reality of Iranian society and for confirming the dominant ideology is published in Iran in a book entitled *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami's Cinema* (2008) by Morad Farhadpur and Maziar Islami[34]. This book consists of conversations between two Marxist Iranian philosophers. To examine their discussion, I turn to Terry Eagleton's *Marxism and Literary Criticism* to illustrate how Marxist criticism can help us examine the claims by critics of Kiarostami's cinema. I look at Kiarostami's cinema through Walter Benjamin's articulation of the relationship between art and politics in the twentieth century. Then I draw on Deleuze's discussion of the representation of politics in modern cinema and the way it has changed from that in classical cinema by focusing on Kiarostami's *Close-Up* (1990).

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[33] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* 208.
[34] Morad Farhad-Pour, Maziar Eslami, *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami`s Cinema – Dialogue between Morad Farhadpour and Maziar Eslami*, (Tehran: Farhang Saba, 2008).

Eric Rohmer as one of the main critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*, drew a distinction between "classical" and "modern."[35] He believes that the capability to depict the objective world as it is, is the main aspect of modern cinema. Rohmer considers cinema as the only art form in which the contemporary reality can be depicted. Simultaneously, cinema can be classical art form as it is capable of transcending the objects it represents. Moreover, cinema acquired the role of classical poetry:

> Film possesses the pleasure of the metaphorical power, whose secret poetry has lost, and that is why the most recent art is classical poetry's only legitimate refuge. . . . The poets are unable to accept into their metaphorical world these fabricated objects, which the modern world has made our company at every moment.[36]

This brings me to another significant qualification of Kiarostami's cinema: poetics. The years during which Kiarostami emerged as a new-wave director were coincidental with the emergence of modern Iranian poetry. It is well-known that Kiarostami has chosen the titles of some of his films from these poems - like Where Is the Friend's House? which was chosen from a poem by Sepeheri with the same title; or *The Wind Will Carry Us* which was taken from a poem by Forough Farrokhzad - and directly or indirectly referred to modern Iranian poetry. Therefore, it makes sense to analyse Kiarostami's poetic cinema through the lens provided by Heidegger in his *The Origin of Works of Art*[37]. In chapter 5 I discuss the philosophical problem of Being addressed by Heidegger in order to examine how cinema as a medium deals with such philosophical problems. I turn to Pier Paolo

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[35] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980,* 35.
[36] Cited by Antoine de Baecque, Les cahiers du cinéma: Histoire d'un revue (Paris: Diffusion, Seuil, 1991) 1: 226.
[37] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track* trans. Julian Young and Keneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002).

Pasolini's essay *Cinema of poetry* (1965) and demonstrate his stylistic analysis of poetic cinema to examine stylistically the poetic aspects of Kiarostami's cinema.

For the poet, Heidegger explains, the words are what enable the thing to emerge in its being, and to endure[38]. The relationship between the words and the thing is not a relation with the word on one side and the thing on the other. It is the word which is the relation, which retains the thing, so that it is a thing. With this example, one may perceive the great responsibilities of poets. Poets must persistently strive to lead readers of their poems to undergo and experience with language, to describe beings and to relate the word to the thing. In addition, the poet is responsible for the emergence or non-emergence of beings. This is merely by fulfilling these intertwined responsibilities that the poet presents the gift to the reader. Heidegger holds that the gift of a poem is the truth, the truth significant to human existence. Great poetry not only provides us with the truth, but also allows its reader or listener to enter the realm where this truth reigns, the realm of thinking claimed by Being. Entering such realms is necessary for a reader to dwell poetically. Reading or listening to great poetry is in essence an experience with language in which significant truths are brought forth and revealed. A poem is important for thinking, Heidegger indicates, for great poetry is within a specific realm of thinking and thinking is in the neighbourhood of poetry. The thinking which Heidegger has in mind is neither a rational calculation, nor its goal is to gain knowledge - wisdom concerning the Being of beings is its goal. To think for Heidegger means "to heed the essential."[39] Rational calculation Deals with beings as they are immediately present to us while ignoring Being and the human relation to Being. The thinking

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[38] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blachwell, 1962), 22.
[39] Martin Heidegger*, Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, trans. William McNeil and Julia Davis (Bloomington, ind: Indiana University Press, 1996), 43.

that heeds the essential opens and brings forth into the light of human comprehension concealed or buried section of beings and of the Being of beings. In a poetic idiom, Heidegger describes this thinking: "Thinking cuts furrows into the soil of Being." To relate to the gift of poetry one must establish a place in his or her life and find the openness to read and to listen to poetry. Finding a place for poetry differs from finding time for everyday actions. To be true to the gift of poetry one must establish a place for it in the neighbourhood of thinking. In other words, in relating to poetry one must distance himself or herself from the scientific method that characterizes our everyday modern life. It is through reading and listening to poetry that we can enter a unique region in which thought exists, a region which is not governed by a scientific method. As Heidegger puts in a series of lectures on Aristotle's *Metaphysics:*

> The human "has the word"; it is the way he makes known to himself his being, and the way in which he sees himself placed in midst of beings as a whole…To be empowered with language-; language, however, not merely as a means of asserting and communicating, which indeed it also is, but language as that wherein the openness and conversance of world first of all bursts forth and is. Language, therefore, originally and authentically occurs in poetry…- however, not poetry in the sense of work of writers, but poetry as the proclamation of world in the invocation of god. But nowadays we see language primarily from the point of view of what we call conversation and chit chat; conventional philology is in accord with this[40].

Heidegger shows that thinking and poetry are the gifts of language and their neighbourhood can be defined by what he calls Saying. It is Saying that enables human beings to think, to compose poetry or to listen to great poetry. One aspect of being human, Heidegger argues, is that, together with being granted a language at birth we are also granted its sublime gifts, among them Saying thinking and poetry. Great poetry provides us with instances that articulate an aspect of reality. It also

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[40] Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1995), 109.

frequently illuminates thinking. And by these gifts we can attain wisdom. In such a world that modern technology creates a situation where the gifts of language have been depreciated, Heidegger suggests to us to dwell poetically upon the earth. He stresses that Saying is what illuminates and conceals beings in the world and is what brings poetry and thinking into neighbourhood. He defines Saying based on the word "saga" which means "to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call world, lighting and concealing it."[41] For him, thinking and poetry are modes of Saying, and they are therefore, ways of showing, illuminating and making Being and beings appear vocally. For Heidegger analysing and deconstructing poems or reading them quietly cannot lead us to the Saying crystalized in the poem. Heidegger believes that learning poems by heart and reciting them out loud is a way of listening to the Saying of the poems, which can, in turn, direct the listener to neighbourhood of thinking and lead him or her toward wisdom.

Here, I attempt to broaden the discussion by analysing Kiarostami's Haiku-like poems in order to examine what Heidegger means by "dwelling poetically" in this world. Believing in the "saving power of art"[42], Heidegger granted that great poets were like someone who can help us to recollect our shattered, displaced collective selves. Kiarostami's cinema also performs the task that Heidegger assigns to poets. Through Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us*, I will briefly show that Kiarostami tries to prepare the "preservers" for the Heideggerian "holy"[43]. His poetic

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[41] From: Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 93.

[42] See Miguel de Beistegui, "The Saving Power of Art", in *The New Heidegger* (London: Continuum, 2005).

[43] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 75.

cinema plays the very crucial role that Heidegger says poets perform in "destitution time"[44].

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[44] Martin Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells...," in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 32.

Chapter 2

Kiarostami's The Traveller: a Cinema of Seer

This chapter offers a fresh perspective on Kiarostami's cinema by exploring *The Traveller* (1974) using Deleuze's time-image model. I define the film as consisting of three parts: 1) the Malayer part where Qassem (the protagonist) is able to act 2) the bus sequence which actually metaphorically represents the transition from tradition to modernity and 3) the Tehran part where "the link between man and the world breaks" and the character becomes a 'seer' confronted by the 'intolerable' which is represented in the film by an empty stadium. Through close textual analysis of the mise-en-scène of the last sequence, my goal here is to consider the formal and structural elements used to deliberately engineer the memorable "feel" of the evacuated stadium sequence.

Among all philosophers, Deleuze wrote comprehensively about cinema. Other philosophers have briefly mentioned cinema in their work or have written short essays on cinema. Deleuze devoted two major works to cinema: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983)[45] and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985)[46]. During the last few decades, Deleuzian theory has been applied to various cinemas from different regions and with different themes[47]. I am not, thus, the first to analyse cinema through the lens of Deleuzian theory. David Martin-Jones expertly employed Deleuze's philosophy in order to analyse various national cinemas and

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[45] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the movement-image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London : Continuum, 2005).

[46] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005).

[47] For instance, see David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas* (London: Continuum, 2011). Patricia Pisters, "Arresting the Flux of Images and Sounds: Free Indirect Discourse and the Dialectics of Political Cinema," in *Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Adrian Parr, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

reconsidered Deleuze's writing on cinema in the context of "world cinemas"[48]. He proposed a hybrid model where movement-image and time-image are simultaneously in operation in films considering varied examples including the earliest days of cinema in France, Bollywood blockbusters, European spaghetti westerns, Argentine melodramas, South Korean science fiction films and Hong Kong action films. Martin-Jones provides a constructive critique of what he perceives as the Eurocentric conclusions drawn by Deleuze in his cinema books. Furthurmore, Cinemas from other nations have been discussed using Deleuze's ideas such as the discussion of Ousmane Sembene's *Borom Sarrett* in *Rodowick's Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (1997), and Patricia Pisters's attempts to highlight the challenges of Deleuzian analysis of political films examining contemporary African Films[49].

In the case of Iranian cinema, there are a few published works available in which Deleuze's time-image model has been used to formally analyse Iranian films. In *The Opening Image: Poetic Realism and the New Iranian Cinema*, Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn analyse Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000) and Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987) by applying Deleuze's notion of "crystal-image" and Paul Shrader's "images of stasis". The authors conclude that certain types of image which are often described as ambiguous and epiphanic ("open images") have been utilized by Iranian filmmakers to find a way round the censorship and to suggest the plurality of truth in an ideological state. Further, these

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[48] The concept of "world cinema" has been subjected to debates among scholars. The term of "world cinema" can be used for non-Hollywood, non-European films in western studies. It can have a colonial connotation to construct a singular entity and a homogenous Other out of a variety of cinemas existed in non-western countries. David Martin-Jones in his introductory chapter in *Deleuze and World Cinemas* (London: Continuum, 2011), discusses the term "world cinema" and his preferences to use "world cinemas" instead, in order to capture the nature of the plurality of cinemas that exist globally and avoids the connotation of a singular entity associated with the world cinema.

[49] Patricia Pisters, "Arresting the Flux of Images and Sounds: Free Indirect Discourse and the Dialectics of Political Cinema," in *Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Adrian Parr, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

images are a reminder for people in the West where contemporary films are no longer "a space for creative interpretation and critical reflection." In *Beyond Representation: Abbas Kiarostami's and Pedro Costa's Minor Cinema,* Vered Maimon examines Kiarostami's *Ten* (2002) aesthetically and structurally by using Deleuze's 'the power of the false' concluding that Kiarostami's cinema is inherently political by moving away from the representation of the inequality and violence in a marginalised community and allows new forms of political subjectivity. In an elaborated study, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, Farhang Erfani employs the Deleuzian notion of 'national cinema' to analyses Majid Majidi's *The Colour of Paradise (1999)* proposing that the Iranian Revolution shattered the narrative fabric of society opening up a world of possibility for Iranian artists to explore, so it makes sense if we, also talk about the more popular and conservative films in the context of Iranian national cinema. All these studies are worthy and illuminate different aspects of Iranian cinema; however, their focuses are mainly on the films made after the Revolution of 1979. I intend to follow a similar path and apply Deleuzian philosophy to Kiarostami's films, beyond its current application. Studies concerning history of art cinema indicate that the West recognized Iranian cinema in the 1990s as an inventive and creative cinema while during the 1970s and 1980s Western critics, cinephiles and filmmakers witnessed the weakening of modern cinema and modernist inspiration. Most of the studies mentioned above are based on this self-recognition of the West. However, I am more interested in the cultural-historical process that heralds a change in the history of Iranian cinema which is an important contributor to the history of world cinema. Moreover, most studies on Kiarostami's cinema focused the films he made after the Revolution

which made him "possibly the best-known post-revolutionary Iranian filmmaker."[50] By 1995 his films had already been presented at international film festivals such as Chicago and New York film festivals, but in 1997 when he won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for his *Taste of Cherry*, his cinema received a lot of attention. However, Kiarostami's cinema attracted the attention of Iranian festivals and critics as early as 1970 when he won the Jury special award at the 5th Tehran International Film Festival for children and young adults for his first short film *Bread and Alley* (1970). Most published studies – in particular those in English – ignored his films before the Revolution or only summarized them in a few paragraphs. This convinced me to examine his earlier films formally and aesthetically to understand whether Kiarostami's formalism was already in place and applied to those films. Thus, I would like to examine his debut, *The Traveller* (1974), in order to know Kiarostami's cinema beyond international recognitions. I believe that Kiarostami's films over the period of time from 1974 to 1999 fit perfectly in Deleuze's time-image framework: the role of the child seer in the time-image, the loosening of sensory-motor connection, emergence of a pure optical situation or any-space-whatever, and the broken link between man and the world becoming an object of belief. By choosing *The Traveller*, I intend to show that all the diegetic and non-diegetic components of Kiarostami's cinema were already initiated in his filmic debut.

Using time-image in the context of Kiarostami's cinema, I argue that for Iranians, films became a particular place to rediscover the world in its "immanence" in the process of an inorganic transition from tradition to modernity. I will argue that, in representing the modernity crisis in Iran, Kiarostami's *The Traveller* (1974)

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[50] Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 90.

presents what Deleuze terms "the cinema of seer", forming a new kind of "optical drama" replacing "traditional drama" in which the paralyzing effect of cultural alienation has created an impotent character that "sees" rather than "acts".

Deleuze holds an unorthodox position compared with other film theorists. According to him, cinema produces philosophy in and by itself. Throughout his works, "thought", that is, the consequence of the confrontation between "outside" and "inside," remains his concern. "The outside is not a fixed limit", Deleuze writes, "but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than outside, but precisely the inside *of* the outside"[51]. For him, modern image/cinema explores thought outside itself and an un-thought within itself. The construction of concepts is guided by a secret and powerful "image of thought" which "inspires by its developments, forkings and mutations the necessity of always creating new concepts, not as a function of external determinism, but as a function of becoming which carries along the problems themselves" [52]. Deleuze states in an interview in 1988:

> … in the screen there can be a brain, as in Resnais or Syberberg's cinema. Cinema does not operate only with linkage by rational cuts, but by re-linkage on irrational cuts: this is not the same image of thought.[53]

In the preface of the English edition of *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze explains that the Second World War resulted in "any-spaces-whatever," a term by which Deleuze refers to the spaces in the course of "demolition or reconstruction" to which Europeans "no longer know how to react" or "to describe." [54] The experience of living in such spaces necessitated European rediscovering of the world. Cinema

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[51] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans & eds. Seán Hand (London: Continuum, 1999), 80.
[52] Quoted in the Translator's Introduction in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, xvii.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., xi.

was a privileged location for this communal reflection. For him, the need for the communal reflection from which to rediscover the world led to the emergence of Italian neorealism and the French new-wave. Thanks to any-spaces-whatever, a new race of characters appeared. The characters who were "seers" rather than "doers": they saw rather than acted. In any-spaces-whatever, a new type of characters (mutant characters) appeared, such as "a child in the ruined city, a foreign woman in the inland, and a bourgeois woman who starts to 'see' what is around her"[55] in Rossellini's trilogy: *Stromboli* (1950), *Germany Year Zero*(1948), *Europe51* (1952).

We can define cinema, according to Deleuze, "as the system that reproduces movement by relating it to any-instant-whatever."[56] This is "any-instant-whatever" that is unique to cinema. This is its quality of "any-instant-whatever" that makes it distinct from other art forms such as ballet and mime which need movement to function. Unlike the ancient philosophers, Deleuze favours the world of Becoming over the eternal static Being.

Erfani considers the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran as an historical event which had the same impact as World War II, "[t]he revolution in Iran was a more geographically limited political event, but perhaps a more disruptive one, that turned Iranian cinema toward rediscovering the world beyond the paradigms of Islamic fundamentalism."[57] He applies Deleuze's notion of national cinema to Majidi's *The Colour of Paradise* (1999) which is a more popular film in Iran than any of Kiarostami's. *The Colour of Paradise* is a sentimental film which is about the struggles and sufferings of a blind boy, Mohammad Reza, whose father is ashamed of him and sees him as a hindrance to his desire for remarriage to a young woman.

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the movement-image,* 6.

[57] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*. (New York: Palgrave Macmilan 2012), 5.

Majidi's *The Colour of Paradise* "drew more than 600,000 spectators in Iran, earning \$166,394 in the Tehran Theatres alone…and became the seventh-ranking film in Tehran in terms of its box-office earnings for 1999."[58] However, Kiarostami's films are less popular in Tehran for various reasons: not being released due to imposed state censorship, and since they are degraded by being widely criticized on the grounds that they are made only for international festivals' audience, thus, these films represent either a dark image of Iran or "an exotic and primitive image of Iranians in rural settings."[59] Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* made on the same year was not released in Iran because Kiarostami did not accept the censorship that the Ministry of the Culture had imposed. Those Kiarostami's films released in Iran during 1989-1994 ranked 21-45 in the box-office ranking in Tehran[60]. Throughout his first chapter, Erfani draws attention to the shortcomings of the film –that it is overly sentimental, and operates within a clichéd economy of images – but he rightfully defends the importance of "not dismissing popular films and filmmakers". Erfani states, "Majidi's film resists the time-image model, but the young blind Mohammad (the protagonist) is ironically Deleuze's favoured type of character, one who learns to "see" the world in its immanence."[61]

I agree with Erfani in that the Revolution created unusual situations that were influential on Iranian films, but I doubt that it was merely the Iranian Revolution that caused such a radical shift in Iranians' image of themselves as did the Second World War in Europe. Many crucial factors could have contributed to this. The country

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[58] Hamid Naficy, "Cinematic Exchange Relations: Iran and the West," in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 267

[59] Shahab Esfandiary, *Iranian Cinema and Globalization: National, Transnational and Islamic Dimensions*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 74

[60] See Table 4., in Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, "Iranian Intellectuals and Contact with the West: The Case of Iranian Cinema," in *Iranian Intellectuals: 1997-2007*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 137.

[61] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, 16.

suffered from an identity crisis after industrial revolution and modernization. The process of industrialization and development was traumatic for Iranians which resulted in "rural unemployment and an acceleration of the movement of people from the villages to the cities."[62] The Shah's strategies benefited the cities more than the villages. The self-conscious urban middle-class found it rather difficult to be reconciled with their often rural background. In the midst of the social changes in the 1960s and 70s; an anti-western movement emerged among intellectuals out of concern for Western impact in relation to Iranians' identity. Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) proposed a highly polemical social theory of time, *Gharbzadegi* (West-struckness)[63] and Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977) was, too, preoccupied with the need to search for a cultural identity to which Iranians could return to.[64]   The Iranian Revolution, however, was among a chain of contemporary socio-political events which caused a break in the "link between man and the world". I believe the abrupt transition from tradition to modernity was the main reason that displaced the Iranians' identity. Ali Mirsepassi in his book, *Intellectual Discourse and the politics of Modernization: Negotiating modernity in Iran* (2000), suggests "the central concern in Iranian intellectual and cultural discourse for the past 150 years has been the problem of reconciling modernity with Iranian culture" and he argues that "the revolution in Iran was fought most emphatically for modernity and all of its promises as a social ideal."[65]   This transition includes historical events such the Constitutional

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[62] Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 74.

[63] Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *West-Struckness*, trans. John Green & Ahmad Alizadeh, (Lexington: Mazda, 1982).

[64] Ali Shariati, *Majmu'eh-ey asar*, (Tehran: Husseinieh-ye Ershad Press, 1979).

[65] Mina Safizadeh in her review of Mirsepassi's book, *Intellectual Discourse and the politics of Modernization: Negotiating modernity in Iran*, published in 'contemporary sociology' believes that this argument is novel since "conventional scholarship in the west and in Iran has viewed the political events and intellectual discourse mainly as a clash between progressive, modern, secular motivations on the one hand, and backward, traditional, Islamic impulses on the other hand. Likewise the Iranian Revolution of 1979 has often been portrayed as a fundamentalist movement."

Revolution 1906-1911, the 1953 CIA engineered coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddiq and the subsequent period of brutal dictatorship that overwhelmed Iranian intellectual and artistic life[66], and the rapid modernization of Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah starting from the 1950s. The Islamic Revolution itself could be considered as a natural reaction to this inorganic rapid modernization. Rapid industrial growth resulted in the formation of a new, modern, urban working class and the rise of a competing national bourgeoisie that coexisted alongside people with more traditional occupations, values, and ways of life. According to Dabashi, the project of modernity was ultimately failed due to several reasons:

> […] among them the colonial prevention of the formation of a self-conscious national bourgeoisie and the catastrophic consequences of the economic placement of Iran in a disadvantageous position in the productive logic of global capitalism. But equally important in the contour of this failure was the moral collapse of any successful formation of individual subjectivity.[67]

This caused the cinema to become a place for rediscovery of the Iranians' shattered self: "this cinema has succeeded in resubjecting the Iranian self where the project of modernity has failed."[68] Although the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was profoundly influential on Iranian films, it was not the only historical event that caused Deleuze's favoured type of character to appear in Iranian cinema. But it was one of the several historical events, most importantly the "inorganic" and fast modernization of Iran, that led to the emergence of a new kind of character. For this, I turn to Kiarostami's *The Traveller* (1974) which well predates the Iranian Revolution of 1979. By examining this film, I intend to show that the "cinema of seer" was already in place before the Revolution. *The Traveller* is Kiarostami's first

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[66] Hamid Dabashi, *Close up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London: Verso 2001).
[67] Ibid., 11.
[68] Ibid., 13.

full-length feature based on a story by Hassan Rafi. It is about the adventure of a school boy, Qassem (Hassan Darabi), who is resolved to make his obsessive dream of watching the national team's match in the stadium come true at any cost. Having overcome all the obstacles in his path to Tehran, Qassem manages to go to the stadium, but at the end, his goal is unachieved and what he finds is an 'empty' stadium. The ending of the film will be discussed in great details in the next chapter.

The Child Seer in *The Traveller*

Kiarostami's *The Traveller* "thinks" through the modernization process of Iran. The story of *The Traveller* takes place in two cities in Iran in 1974: Malayer, a small town in the west of Iran and Tehran, the capital. The protagonist (Qassem), a schoolboy from Malayer, travels to the capital, modern Tehran to see a football match in a stadium and is determined to overcome all obstacles in his way. Here, I focus on Deleuze's notion of the 'cinema of seer', examining the depiction of the experience of modernity through a child's eyes who becomes a 'seer' when he suddenly encounters modern environments. The first 40 minutes, where the protagonist is able to act since his "link" to the world has not been broken yet, still relies on world or subject. The second part begins with Qassem's bus journey to Tehran which represents the shift from tradition to modernity. The third part begins when the protagonist comes to modernized Tehran and finds himself trapped in a space to which he no longer knows how to react.

Deleuze's transition from *Cinema 1* to *Cinema 2*, from movement-image to time image, is because of the crisis of the "action-image"[69] in the aftermath of the Second World War. The situation and action unity can no longer be achieved in the

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[69] Deleuze's *Cinema 1* deals with the different movement-images of classical cinema: perception-image, affect-image and action-image.

tattered remnants of the post-war world. The action-image as the dominant form of the movement-image (classical Hollywood) was replaced by time-image. At the start of the first chapter of *Cinema* 2, Gilles Deleuze argues that a 'pure optical situation' originating in Italian neo-realism creates a "cinema of the seer and no longer that of the agent,"[70] in which "the character has become a kind of viewer."[71] In this pure optical situation "perception struggles to progress to action."[72] The sensory-motor which links the action-image in traditional realism has been loosened by the rise of situations in which the character faces "something too powerful or too unjust."[73] In such an intolerable situation the character does not know how to respond and "records rather than reacts."[74] The seer becomes an observer of the time passing.[75] From the pure optical situation the time-image, thus came into being along with the seer.[76] Deleuze considers the role of the child as witness extremely significant in the emergence of time-image. Deleuze states that:

> The role of the child in neorealism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because, in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing.[77]

Kiarostami's frequent use of children as his main character is one of the characteristics of his earlier cinema. Kiarostami worked for the institute for the *Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults*, or *Kanun* for short. Kanun turned out to be a major centre for the new-wave film-makers of Iranian cinema, of which Kiarostami was one of the pioneers. Many previous studies of Iranian cinema suggest that one of the reasons behind the frequent use of children as the main

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[70] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 123.
[71] Ibid., 3.
[72] David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, (London: Continuum, 2011), 72.
[73] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 17.
[74] Ibid., 3.
[75] David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas,* 72.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 3.

protagonist in the aftermath of the Revolution is a direct consequence of censorship imposed by the government.[78] However, this argument may not be entirely true as it is evidently rooted in the films produced in Kanun in the 1970s that favoured children. Thus, directors' fascination for children character has been widely interpreted as playing around regulations and limitations. But in the case of Kiarostami who learned his art particularly by making films for and with children, children have a different function.

There is a shift in the child's point of view in *The Traveller* in that the child doer transforms into the child seer as he reaches Tehran. Qassem overwhelmed by the experience of encountering modernity, loses his function in the new situation. Then, the visit to the pure optical situation of child occurs in the streets of Tehran and the football stadium where Qassem ceases to function due to his lack of control over his circumstances and his environment in the modernized Tehran, whereas he had effectively functioned in his small town. The film is a meditation on the social and cultural experience of the Iranian modernity and its troubled situation. *The Traveller* foregrounds the national experience of disintegration, contradiction, ambiguity and anguish by focussing on the child's experience in two different cities through a journey. Marshall Berman, a radical modernist, describes the experience of modernity as follows:

> There is a mode of vital experience – experience of space and time, of the self and the others, of life's possibilities and perils – that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience 'modernity'. To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world and, at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are… It pours us into a

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[78] Hamid Reza Sadr, "Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children," in *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation, and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2002). Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*, (London: Routledge 2010). Richard Tapper, "Introduction," *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation, and Identity*.

maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air.'[79]

This Journey functions as a metaphor for the Shah's unpopular "modernization" projects. The small town of Malayer, Qassem lives in, is the situation to which he knows how to react in order to overcome all obstacles in his way, whereas, Tehran becomes the limit situation in which Qassem is incapable of acting. Through Qassem's journey to Tehran, *The Traveller* explores the pure optical situation which is at once an adventure in a modern environment and a thread to his identity.

The bus journey to Tehran takes place at night. Qassem sits on the bus, watching the scenery as they are passing by, keeping his attention on the road whilst heading toward his goal. This 3 minute scene is the initiation of a system of the cinematic element – an observer character in a car – that was so consistently used by Kiarostami in his later films such as *Life and Nothing More*, *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*.

In *The Traveller*, the wandering route through the mutating city of neorealism takes place in and around the Amjadiyeh stadium. Although, the character has a goal to achieve (watching the football match), as soon as he enters the stadium, there is a sense of an aimless journey. When Qassem arrives in Tehran, he has to join an endless queue for tickets. After a long wait, he reaches the box office but the tickets are sold out and he is pushed out of the area. He wanders around the stadium trying to find a way in. Finally, he was able to buy a black market ticket at double price and by this decision; he puts his return journey at stake. He has a conversation with a man in the stadium seating area and he realizes that the match will start in 3 hours. Now inside the stadium, he aimlessly wanders around it. In these standout moments inside

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[79] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

the stadium, there is a sense of a journey and a limit situation in response to which Qassem is unable to react. Qassem's walk through different spaces in the arena (running section, shut put field, an under construction boxing venue and a swimming pool) reveals Kiarostami's interest in exploring the relationship between bodies and space which is another hallmark of his cinema. For Kiarostami, the body is closely integrated into the space in which it is held. The interest in the relationship between bodies and space constitutes the central part of his film *The Wind Will Carry Us* in which the body is so deeply intertwined with the space, so that, the film becomes an indecipherable union of the two. However, this relationship between body and space is a feeble one in *The Traveller*, as the character's endeavour to bodily inhabit the space is constantly interrupted by the space itself. For example, in one scene, Qassem tries to communicate with a boy on the other side of the window through the swimming pool glass window. He knocks at the window and persistently encourages a reluctant Tehrani boy to come close to the window. Qassem asks: "how deep is the pool?" But, he cannot be heard because the glass window divides the space into two: the interior which somehow represents a modernized mutant space where Tehrani children are diving and swimming, and the exterior where Qassem stands. The window itself acts as an obstacle that prevents Qassem from identifying himself with a Tehrani boy. The window can be interpreted as the broken link between Qassem and his surroundings. This relatively resistant space to integration indicates that the modernized capital has become an unwelcomed space for the bodies which inhabit other cities. The intolerable situation which the child-seer witnesses in this respect is the modernity crisis and the gap between rich and poor. Qassem is so tired after his overnight journey that he lies down on the grass and takes a nap. He has a terrible dream of his punishment witnessed by his close friend Akbar, his mother and other

classmates. This dream can be seen as indicative of his tormented state of mind or the moral consequences of his wrongdoings (stealing money from his own mother, deception of school mates by taking photo with a camera without film and selling the football goals which belonged to his local football team). He only wakes up when the game is over, he just runs down the empty stadium. What he ultimately achieves is 'nothingness' – a key notion, which I will explain in the course of next chapter and is very important for understanding the whole body of Kiarostami's films.
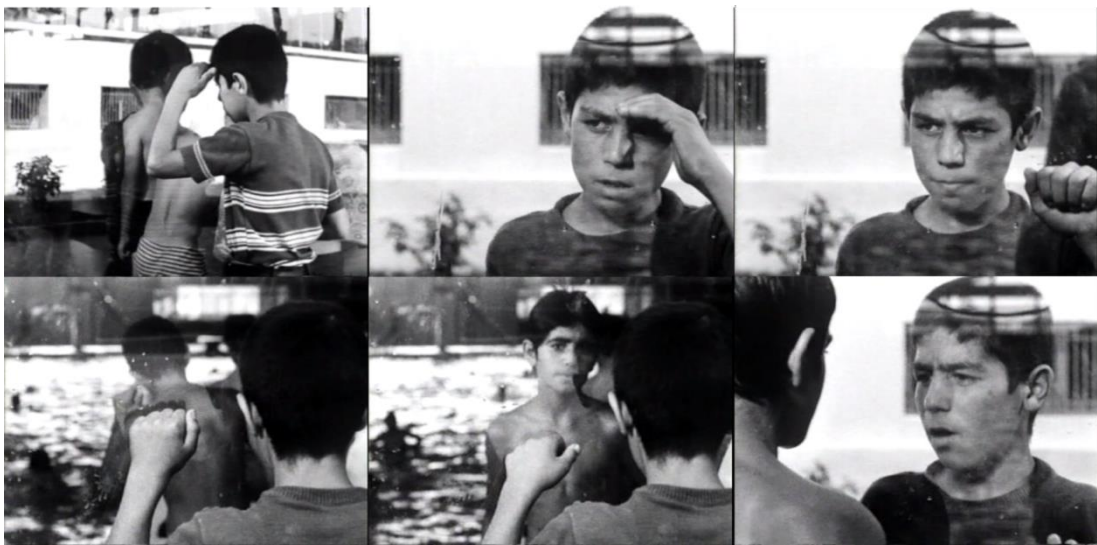
Abbas Kiarostami, six stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

The film shows that a new type of character was needed in the grip of a mutation; mutation of a modernized Iran, "a new type of character for a new cinema."[80] The reason for the emergence of this type of character, who is a seer, is "because what happens to them does not belong to them and only half concerns them."[81] Deleuze claims a pure optical situation "makes us grasp, […] something intolerable and unbearable."[82] The rapid development led to the formation of a strange city of Tehran in the 1970s. The juxtaposition of old and new, rich and poor

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[80] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 19.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 17.

and rapid development resulted in a trauma for those who involved. In Tehran the newcomers from the small cities encounter a city of concrete with its ugliness and beauty. They "discover something unbearable, beyond the limit of what they can personally bear."[83] In this respect, the film functions as a purely visual situation in which the breaking of the sensory-motor connection leads to a break in the link between man and the world, man becomes a seer confronted by something intolerable in the world.

Kiarostami's Beliefs: In the crisis of "Break in the Link between Man and the World"

Deleuze in chapter seven 'Thought and Cinema' of *Cinema 2* explores the relationship between thought and cinema and tries to answer the question of how thought concerns cinema. He considers the experience of thought in modern cinema as a result of the change in the image. The basic difference between movement-image and time-image in Deleuzian philosophy is that sensory-motor is in operation in movement-image or in other words the situation extends to actions, whereas in time-image the causal links are broken and thus the sensory-motor connection between stimulus and response is suspended. In time-image, image represents something that is too strong to reduce to what happens or what is seen, felt or perceived: "the image is ceased to be sensory-motor". When the sensory-motor connection breaks in an image, it leads to a break in the link between man and the world. The resulting image gives rise to "any-spaces-whatever" which becomes a pure optical and sound situation. The break in sensory-motor connection between

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[83] Ibid., 2.

situation and action "makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought." [84] Kiarostami's realism cannot be merely interpreted as its commitment to record reality. All those characteristics which define his cinema – the use of non-actors, contemporary social and political events dealing with common people, the mixture of fiction and documentary and location shooting – must be linked to something else.

For Deleuze, neo-realism was the space for rediscovering the world in its immanence. In Deleuzian philosophical landscape, neo-realism is not simply a matter of style but its real concern is the status of reality itself. Unlike neorealism, classical realism had a naive approach to reality and at the ontological level it failed to appreciate temporality and change. In this context, I think Deleuze's definition of neorealism is worthy of being cited here:

> What defines neo-realism is this build-up of purely optical situations (and sound ones, although there was no synchronized sound at the start of neo-realism), which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism. It is perhaps as important as the conquering of a purely optical space in painting, with impressionism. It may be objected that the viewer has always found himself in front of descriptions, in front of optical and sound-images, and nothing more. But this is not the point. For the characters themselves reacted to situations; even when one of them found himself reduced to helplessness, bound and gagged, as a result of the ups and downs of the action. What the viewer perceived therefore was a sensory-motor image in which he took a greater or lesser part by identification with the characters.[85]

In neorealism as the paradigm of time-image, characters on screen are no longer acting based on a simple cause-and-effect system, but rather the reality they face is more ambiguous and complex. The sensory-motor perception is not merely a

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[84] Ibid., 164.
[85] Ibid., 3.

purely empiricist perception but rather it follows the Bergsonian emphasis on impression (sense perception), responsive movement (motor).[86]

Kiarostami's setting in *The Traveller* retains its reality but it no longer represents the situation in which the image reveals actions. What Qassem encounters is not a "serious injustice" but the permanent state of daily banality." Kiarostami takes this daily banality further in his later films: *Taste of Cherry* where a middle class man without any given reasons decides to commit suicide; or in *The Wind Will Carry Us* where the middle class filmmaker goes to an isolated village apparently to shoot a mourning ceremony that will accompany the death of an elderly woman whom we never see.

In *The Traveller*, the viewer is simply presented with the lack of causal links, and the sensory-motor break that stops the character from reacting. Qassem can see better that he can react to the intolerable situation he faces in Tehran. He starts to wander around and what he feels or perceives does not expand to actions. The camera constantly remains at the boy's height, representing events from Qassem's point of view and keeping the viewer at this diminished perspective, forcing them to share in the dynamics of various onscreen interactions, whether between Qassem and people in Tehran or Qassem and space. We are also invited to observe the everyday and insignificance along with Qassem. We are prevented from seeing any long shots of the football field when Qassem enters the stadium. Instead, what the film shows us is Qassem's wanderings and his constant attempt to find a connection to the modern environment whether it be his excitement when he enters an under construction boxing stadium or his curiosity about the depth of a pool. All these

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[86] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* and Valentine Moulard-Leonard, *Bergson-Deleuze Encounters: Transcendental Experience and the Thought of the Virtual*, (Albany: State university of New York Press, 2008).

create a psychic situation for him that makes him dream about the punishment awaiting him at school. Here, as described by Deleuze, "the 'psychic' situation which replaces all the sensory-motor"[87] and the break in the link to the world makes him a child seer who "is in the adult world…is affected by a certain motor helplessness."[88] The most striking sequence is the high angle shot in the last scene of *The Traveller* showing only a quarter of the stadium's seating section; Qassem enters the stadium only to find it empty, he pauses for a second and runs through the empty stadium. Here, for the first time, the camera distances itself from Qassem but not enough to see the whole stadium – we only see a quarter of the stadium – to capture the impossible, unthinkable and intolerable that makes Qassem to run as fast as he can. Deleuze draws on Artaud's perspective of cinema and its relation to the thinking and his conclusion that modern cinema gives rise to a different experience of thought by the "recognition of powerlessness":

> What cinema advances is not the power of thought but its 'impower', and thought has never had any other problem. It is precisely this which is much more important than the dream: this difficulty of being, this powerlessness at the heart of thought. What the enemies of cinema criticized it for (like Georges Duhamel, 'I can no longer think what I want, the moving images are substituted for my own thoughts') is just what Artaud makes into the dark glory and profundity of cinema.[89]

The Traveller reveals this powerlessness to think at the core of thought. Incapable of achieving his thoughts with a logical deduction, Qassem bears witness to the impossibility of his own thinking. Kiarostami reveals this powerlessness at the heart of thought or the 'figure of nothingness' in this film by creating a pure optical and sound situation. He achieves this by not showing the scenes that the viewer logically or habitually expects to see in films, for example, after a long journey full

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[87] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 165.
[88] Ibid., 3.
[89] Ibid., 161.

of obstacles when Qassem finally arrives in the stadium, there is no shot of the football field and at the end of the film there is not even a football match.

Abbas Kiarostami, three stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Viewers simply intuit the shift in the film's atmosphere when Qassem reaches the stadium. The main components of mise-en-scène that evoke a certain mood are music, framing and the pacing of the film. The wandering sequence is shot with a low-angle camera and is accompanied with a musical score composed by Kambiz Roshanravan.[90]

In addition to the visual echoes within the frame compositions, repetition also occurs on the soundtrack. Two musical motifs weave and blend together throughout the film as a whole: a playful Persian setar[91] and flute accompanies each sequence in which Qassem is able to act and overcome the obstacles, and an elegiac scoring played in a minor key. This soundtrack recurs in all the sequences where Qassem is unable to act suggesting that his dream drifting away further from him more than ever: first, when Qassem sits in the bus to begin his journey to Tehran, and second, right after the sequence where the match tickets are sold out. However, for the whole duration of the wandering sequences, it is the ambient sounds that accompany the shots. Here, Kiarostami creates meaningful structural relationships between different elements of the film. Within the wandering scene, the mixture of framing and the

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[90] Although Kiarostami rarely uses music in his films but for his first feature film he asks Kambiz Roshanravan to compose music. He later uses the same musical score for *Close-Up*.
[91] Setar is a Persian stringed instrument. It is a long-necked four stringed instrument with a wooden sound-box.

ambient sounds construct an intermediate and insular unsafe space within the diegesis. But one specific arrangement occurs only once: during the shots after Qassem's unsuccessful attempt to talk to a Tehrani boy in the pool.
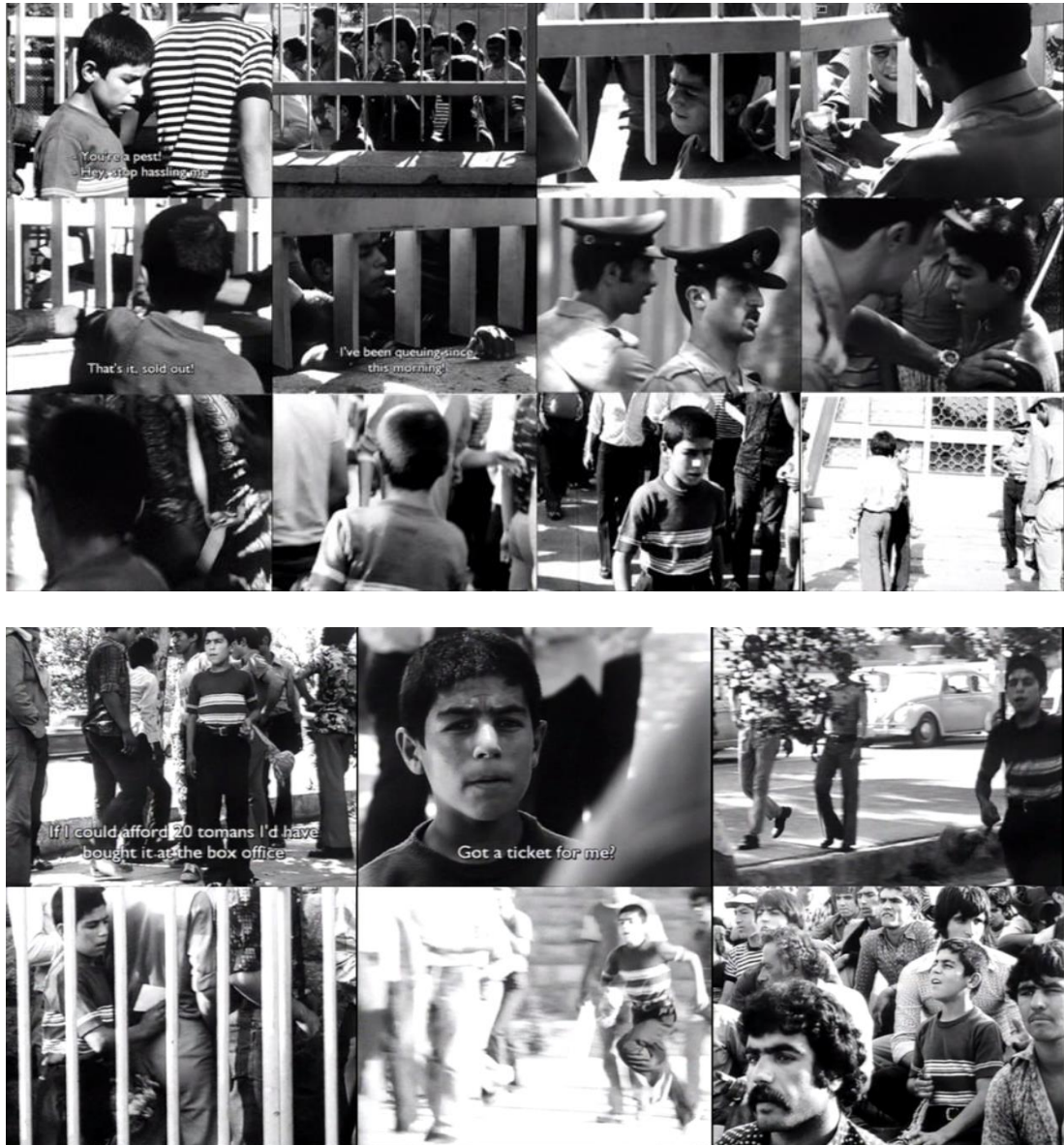
Abbas Kiarostami, eighteen stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

This musical score while not threatening brings a tense, otherworldly score to an unsatisfying and disturbing conclusion. This scoring accompanied by a medium shot of Qassem, invades the joyful world of Qassem pushing him towards his nightmare about his awaiting punishment back in the school. From this sequence to

the end of the film, once again it is the ambient sounds that accompany the film. After the nightmare sequence, a wide pan shot features Qassem in the middle of the frame running toward the lit entrance to the stadium. This sequence is shot again with a low-angle camera (at the boy's height) to assign a monstrous character to the huge structure of the stadium while Qassem is running up the stairs.

The lit entrance itself can be a metaphor for Qassem's hope and of a gate to his dream which is to watch the football match. In terms of mise-en-scène, this arrangement functions to establish the environment as a discrete, bordered space – low-angle shot partly showing the stadium structure deemphasizes the space's geographical connections to its surroundings and creates "any-spaces-whatever". Lighting also provides an unrealistic environment and implies that Qassem's hope is still alive. But as soon as we are shown the other side of the lit entrance, we realize that his hope is dead as we encounter an empty stadium. The increasingly realistic last shot suggests that his dream is now corrupted by its return to reality. The focus on the evacuated space leads to what Deleuze calls "pure optical and sound situation" in which it is no longer possible to separate Kiarostami's mode of filming from its objects of depiction. The empty stadium does not function as a setting that presupposes or promotes a specific action that Kiarostami's cinema then captures. Instead, what is filmed is the very crisis of action, the inability to act or respond in situations that overwhelm the Qassem's capacities.

Hassan Darabi (Qassem) is a real marginalised individual who was asked to play himself rather than be himself. Kiarostami in one of his interviews explains:

> I do not have very complete scripts for my films. I have a general outline and a character in my mind, and I make no notes until I find the character who is in my mind in reality. When I find the character, I try to spend time with them and get to know them very well. Therefore my notes are not from the character that I had in my mind before, but are instead based on the people I have met in real life. I only make notes, I don't write dialogue in full. And the notes are very much based on my knowledge of

that person. Therefore when we start shooting I do not have rehearsals with them at all. So, rather than pulling them towards myself, I travel closer to them; it is very much closer to the real person than anything I try to create. So I give them something but I also take from them. There is a Rumi poem that helps to explain this, it goes something like this: You are like the ball subject to my polo stick; I set you in motion, but once you are off and running, I am in pursuit. Therefore, when you see the end result, it is difficult to see who is the director, me or them.[92]

In a sequence consisting of 58 cuts, Qassem acts amorally to collect enough money for his journey to Tehran by deceiving his schoolmates and pretending to take a photo of them using a camera with no film. This sequence recalls the self-reflexive character of Kiarostami's cinema: Qassem actually represents Kiarostami himself. The sequence consists of repetitive shots of children's portraits, Qassem's camera, Qassem's hand while putting money in his pocket and Qassem's friend remind us Kiarostami's job as a filmmaker who is employed by Kanun to make films for children. He does call into question the role of a filmmaker: am I doing something morally wrong by being paid to make films for children? Am I making a positive contribution to society? Can we arrive at truth by fabricating lies in cinema?[93] This method is not to eliminate fiction, but as Deleuze argues: "to free it from the model of truth which penetrates it, and on the contrary to rediscover the pure and simple story-telling function which is opposed to this model." The character of Qassem represents Hassan Darabi in "another order of time" to which he simultaneously belongs and does not belong. By this mixture – a non-actor playing himself and the self-reflective character of Qassem – Kiarostami achieves a new mode of story-

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[92] See Abbas Kiarostami, ""The Fruitful Tree Bends": Abbas Kiarostami," interview by Bert Cardullo, in *Action!: Interviews with Directors from Classical Hollywood to Contemporary Iran*, ed. Gary Morris, (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 308.

[93] Kiarostami in one of his interview addressed this question: "we can arrive at the truth. In cinema anything that can happen would be true. It doesn't have to correspond to reality; it doesn't have to 'really' be happening. In cinema, by fabricating lies we may never reach the fundamental truth, but we will always be on our way to it. We can never get close to the truth except trough lying." Quoted in Christopher Gow, *From Iran to Hollywood and Some Places In-Between: Reframing Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 101

telling which reaches its peak in *Close-Up*, where it shakes the very detachment between fiction and reality, real and imaginary, actual and virtual, and past and present which will be discussed in chapter 4. His mode of filmmaking manifests "the power of the false" in Deleuzian terminology:

> … what is opposed to fiction is not the real; it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonisers; it is the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster.[94]

The sequence depicting Qassem's act of deception insists on "the power of the false" where the false ceases to be a lie or appearance, but allows the character to cross a limit and become another. This sequence transforms Qassem "in an act of story-telling which connects him" to a Qassem past or to come.

The film gets its title from its concept, the journey from tradition to modernity, from act to rediscovery. The film structure not only highlights the crack in the film's time-space as opposed to the chronological structure of the film, but also adds a solid sense of 'before' and 'after' in the character of Qassem. What the film prompts is not, thus, a chronology of events, but an 'incessant passage from one state to another', an act of becoming in which Qassem constantly transforms and oscillates between what he no longer is and what he is in the process of becoming. In Kiarostami's cinema we are invited to go on a spatial journey through the line of time. Bergson explains the difference between chronological time and time as 'duration', as Valentine Moulard-Leonard explains:

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[94] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 145.
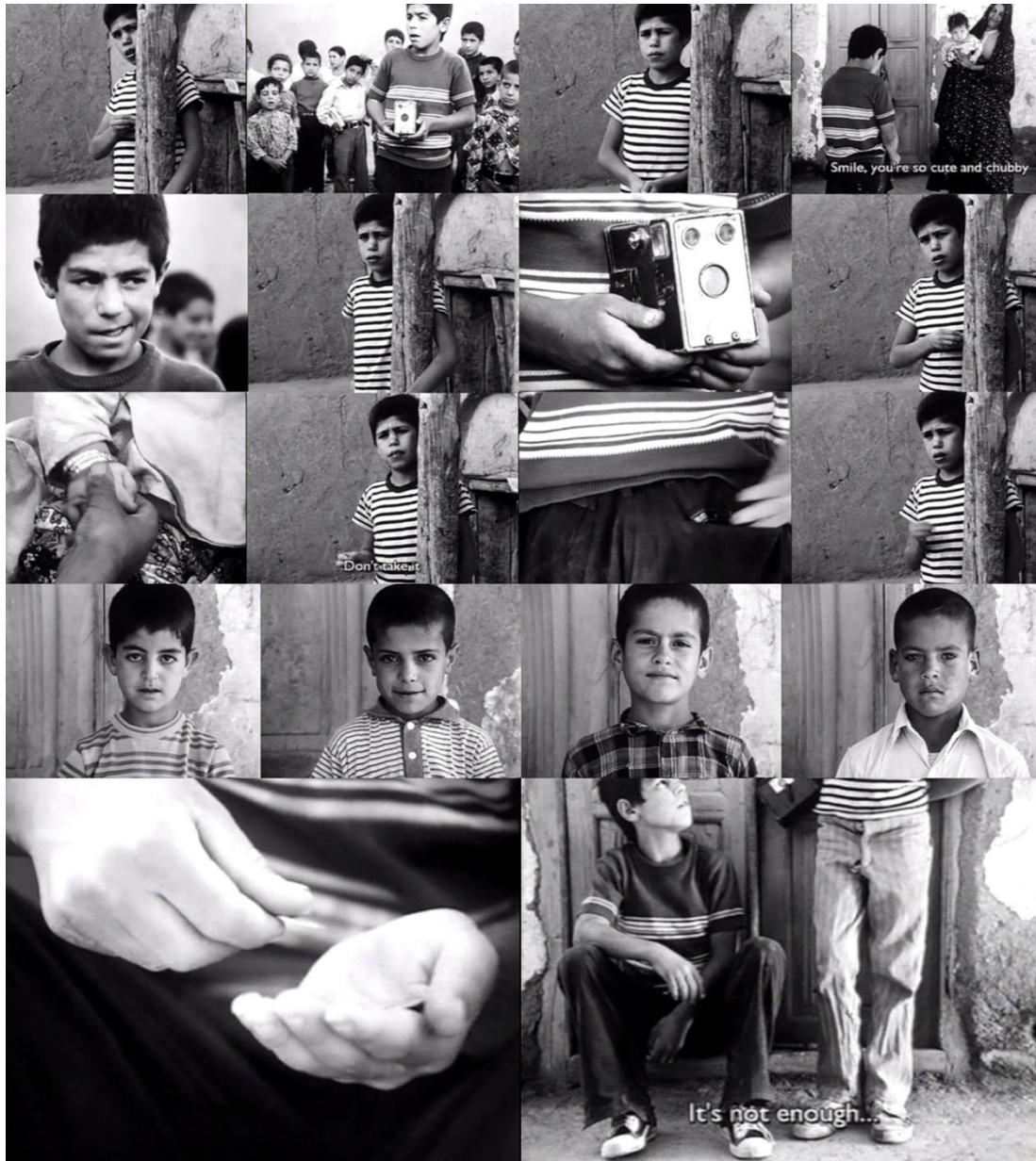
Smile!

There we go!

Smile!

Hold your bag in the other hand
and put your arm around him

Smile!

You have such nice teeth

Smile, darling.
You're really very pretty

Abbas Kiarostami, eighteen stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Bergson's seminal insight lies in the insistence, against all scientific and metaphysical approaches, the time not be confused with space. While space or matter consists in an actual, discrete, or quantitative multiplicity akin to unit and number, time or psychological duration can only be thought of as a virtual, continuous, or qualitative multiplicity. Lived duration is continuous and qualitative because it enfolds a confused plurality of interpenetrating terms. It is only by means of an intellectual abstraction from this incessant flow that we can even begin to speak of discrete states and well-defined discontinuous objects. Our ordinary conception of time as a homogenous medium in which our conscious states are placed alongside one another as in space thus fails to take into account the essential heterogeneity of duration. The difficulty and novelty of Bergson's approach here lies in his connection of the continuous with the heterogeneous (duration), on the one hand, and of the discontinuous with the homogenous (space), on the other.[95]

The Traveller projects movement as duration, as the whole; it puts everything into a dynamic, heterogeneous relation, and is capable, in Giles Deleuze's words, of providing an "immanent analysis of movement."[96] Generally speaking in Kiarostami's cinema, no direct path exists for protagonists to follow.

As Deleuze described, the break in the sensory-motor connection resulted in a break in the link between man the world. The powerlessness of thought, then, is given rise to the man who sees better than he reacts. This situation in which the seer is struck by "something intolerable in the world and confronted by something unthinkable in thought,"[97] is where the powerlessness of the thought functions to reveal the thought. Deleuze elaborates on how the experience of thought functions in modern cinema:

For it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world, but, on the contrary, it is because this world is intolerable that it can no longer think a world or think itself. The intolerable is no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of daily banality. Man is not himself a world other than the one in which he experiences the intolerable and feels himself trapped. The spiritual automaton is in the psychic situation of the seer, who sees better and further can he can react, that is, think. Which, then, is the subtle way out? To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as an

[95] Valentine Moulard-Leonard, *Bergson-Deleuze Encounters: Transcendental Experience and the Thought of the Virtual*, 12.
[96] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 6.
[97] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 164.

impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: 'something possible, otherwise I will suffocate'.[98]

The socio-political indications are also considerable. In *The Traveller*, Kiarostami consciously reacted to this flux of Becoming, to grasp the actual meaning of immanence and change. It was the transition from tradition to modernity that rapidly and inorganically altered "the whole" and everything in the whole. It was this transition that changed an agent who "does" to an agent who "sees". The rapid transformation from one multiplicity to another makes the world ungraspable for Qassem. If Kiarostami's cinema is the cinema of the seer, it is because we need to see everything again.

In a modern world, we no longer believe in the world and we lose our faith in love, life and death. When the link between us and the world is lost, it is the link itself that becomes an object of belief. In a pure optical and sound situation, we have been dispossessed of reaction in the world. We now need something to reconnect us to what we 'see and hear' and this is the belief in the link that replaces our reaction. The function of the image is, thus, precisely to reconnect what we can see and hear with its exteriority. Projecting alternative spaces, modern cinema can retrieve the lost link between us and the world and elevate our soul to the level of belief. "The cinema must film, not the world," Deleuze states, "but belief in this world, our only link ... Restoring our belief in the world - this is the power of modern cinema." [99]

In modern times, we need reasons to believe in this world. This is the function of image-concept (modern cinema) to replace the model of knowledge with belief. Kiarostami recognizes this modern fact that "belief can only replace the model of knowledge only when it becomes the belief in this world." [100] To restore our link to

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 166.
[100] Ibid.

this world is the main theme in almost all of his films during the period of 1974 to 1999. Confronting by forced, inorganic modernization, revolution and war (between Iran and Iraq – September 22, 1980 – August 20, 1988), Kiarostami's characters' (adult/child) link to the world constantly breaks in the face of the intolerable. His later films explore the break between man and the world in "a permanent state of daily banality" by focusing on the insignificant and unimportant. Kiarostami shows us that the way out of this, is to believe in the very link between man the world; to believe in friendship in *Where is the Friend's House?*, or in life and death in *Life and Nothing More*, *The Wind Will Carry Us* and *Taste of Cherry*, or in love in *Through the Olive Trees*. These concepts such as friendship, love and death can also be considered in relation to Persian poetry concepts. Persian poetry has held a central position in the lives of Iranians as a vibrant and influential tradition. The concepts that Persian poems offer have helped Iranians to come to terms with the realities of Iranian society, belief in God, friendship, love and death. Kiarostami is no exception to the rule. I will explain the poetics of Kiarostami's cinema and his poems and the role of poets in 'destitution times' in chapter 5.

What he seeks in his films is, thus, "reasons to believe in this world". In the last part of *The Traveller*, Kiarostami searches for a link to this world, a belief. His character must find the link to this world within this world. Qassem tries to find his link to the transformed world: modern Tehran. He is not successful since the link does not become "an object of belief". It is instead Nothingness that becomes the ultimate power much stronger than the character's power.

Chapter 3

Nothingness: The Ultimate Power that Qassem Encounters

My primary goal in this chapter is to analyse *The Traveller* using Sartre's notion of 'nothingness'. In *Being and Nothingness*[101], Sartre draws an important distinction between unconscious being (being-in-itself) and conscious being (being-for-itself). Being-in-itself is solid, without an ability to change, and has no consciousness of itself. Being-for-itself is conscious of its consciousness. Sartre, in search of an answer to the question arises from this distinction – which is how these two radically different types can be part of one Being – focuses on the question itself. He believes that the reason behind the fact that a human (For-itself) can ask questions and can be in question for himself in his being is the presence of nothingness in "the heart of being, like a worm."[102] This nihilating consciousness that For-itself carries is indivisible from it. So for-itself (man) creates himself by acting in the world. Sartre is one of the most famous intellectuals of 20th century and one of the few who became internationally famous. In many ways his journey, as both an intellectual and activist, marks a certain search for meaning in the 20th century. His works had a great influence on art, particularly literature, drama and cinema. Sartre, too, has influenced Iranian literature and has become an important source of inspiration for Iranian intellectuals such as Sadeq Hedayat. This chapter includes an understanding of modern cinema and showing that *The Traveller* shares various aesthetic and stylistic traits with it. I examine the manner in which *The Traveller* differs from classical art films by providing an overview of the formalist distinction between classical and

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[101]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (Oxon: Routledge 2003).
[102] Quoted in András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2007), 92.

modern cinema. However, this chapter does not provide a purely formalist analysis, but seeks to understand the film in its historical and philosophical contexts.

In art history, the term 'modernism' was first used by the American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and has been widely employed in art history and aesthetic ever since. Greenberg considers modernism as a movement with values such as authenticity and actuality which can truly express the experience of the contemporary world[103]. He holds that modernism can globally identify with one general trait: self-criticism/self-reflection. Modernism originated in a critical-reflexive relationship with tradition and simultaneously affirms and negates continuity with tradition. In this chapter, I analyse how modernist aesthetic dimensions became artistic means for Kiarostami by analysing the narrative structure of *The Traveller*.

Cinema as a production of modernity as well as a place for reflecting socio-political circumstances in Iran has experienced changes from its introduction in 1900. The modes of filmmaking - its narrative and aesthetics - as well as that of production have always closely interacted with Iranian performative and visual arts and also with modern ideas imported from the West. In the framework of ideas, the imported arts and literatures were adopted, adapted, translated and occasionally mistranslated. Hybridization of Western concepts with Iranian and Islamic philosophies and aesthetics is also another phenomenon that has been profoundly influential on Iranian cinema. Throughout Reza Shah's (first Pahlavi period 1925-1941) fast authoritarian Westernization program, film production was strictly controlled and remained artisanal while documentaries capturing rapid modernizing

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[103] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965): 193–201.

Iran were encouraged.[104] Cinema was industrialized during the second Pahlavi period (1941-79) producing over ninety films per year. Film production consisted of two major cinemas: the commercial tough-guy genre (filmfarsi), popular with low-quality films, which often juxtaposed Iranian traditions with modern Western traditions, and the new-wave films which had a critical approach to Pahlavi authoritarianism and were very successful at film festivals. Almost all of the new-wave films had a fear-driven narrative and were produced by the collaboration of modernist dissident writers and westernized directors who were constantly exposed to the best of literatures and cinema.[105] During this era, the state actively supported the film industry while strictly guiding and controlling it.

The neorealist quality of new-wave has been debated by many scholars. Naficy outlined the five essential characteristics of Italian neorealism offered by Georges Sadoul. By the means of those criteria, Naficy tries to clarify the similarities and differences between Iranian new-wave films and post-war Italian neorealism.[106] There are many similarities that have been detected between Iranian and Italian neorealism but there is a unique quality to Iranian new-wave that makes it distinct. As Naficy puts it:

> In the case of Iranian new-wave directors, the moral commitment to reality and the poetics of realism also involved a political commitment to society and a critique of tradition, modernity, and the government. Since they could not directly inscribe these criticisms into their work without inviting censorship, they resorted to symbolism, surrealism, mysticism, abstraction, and indirection, which tended to subvert the other tenets of neorealism, particularly those that emphasized clarity and realism.

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[104] Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press 2011).

[105] Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978*. And Hamid Dabashi, *Close up : Iranian cinema, past, present and future.* (London: Verso 2001), xxiii.

[106] Ibid., 349.

As a result, Iranian new-wave neorealism constituted an amphibolic movement, style, school, or a filmmaking moment.[107]

Iranian new-wave cinema emerged during the 60s and lasted until 1978, when Iran was gradually modernized. It was at the end of 1960s, that the sudden release of two films Masoud Kimiai's *Caesar (Qaisar*, 1969) and Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow* (*Gav*, 1969) shocked the local film industry.[108] Both films were politically and socially conscious and presented a different view of Iranian society. Sadr gives a picture of how these two films created a major impact on Iranian cinema in the 1970s:

> These oppositional films tried to undermine or subvert the mainstream values that the audience had absorbed from sources such as work, family and government and which had been reinforced by commercial films. They presented a strikingly different, dystopian picture of Iranian life. The Cow and Gheisar derided the alleged oil boom, the absolute power of the state, and its ritualistic bouts of self-congratulation, by portraying lower-class poverty and by rebelling against the status quo. Interpretations of the two films vacillated between a political reading around Iranian themes, and a more universal take, but whatever the mode of analysis, their influence shook Iranian cinema to its very roots and helped generate a new, more discerning, audience.[109]

The Cow is usually referred to as a film that added uncanny surrealism to gritty reality which, later on, became the symbol of the some of the best new-wave films such as Golestan's *The Secrets of the Treasure of the Jenni Valley* (*Raaze Dareye Jeni*, 1972).[110] Surrealism is an art movement that is associated with modernism, and the existence of surrealism in the new-wave products is one of the hallmarks of the emergence of Iranian modernity.[111] Discontinuity, repetition, spatial

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[107] Ibid., 351.
[108] Rose Issa and Shila Whitaker, eds., *Life and Art; The New Iranian Cinema*, (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 16.
[109] Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd 2006), 130.
[110] Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978*, 340.
[111] Ibid.

and temporal discontinuity are the other marks of the new-wave cinema. Naficy states:

> what differentiated these sorts of discontinuities from those of filmfarsi movies was the way they were motivated by modernity and by character psychology, not by improvisational practices of the artisanal mode or by the exigencies of commercial cinema.[112]

On the other hand, some of the new-wave directors were educated in Western countries, namely Feraidun Rahnama (France), Farrokh Ghaffary (France), Bahman Farmanara (USA), Dariush Mehrjui (USA), Kamran Shirdel (Italy), Parviz Kimiavi (France), Sohrab Shahid Sales (Austria, France), Khosrow Haritash (USA), and Hajir Daryoush (France). As Naficy states: "Their impact (Western trained filmmakers) was enhanced by the contributions of the self-taught or domestically trained cinéastes such as Bahram Baizai, Abbas Kiarostami, Masoud Kimiai, Nasar Taqvi, Parviz Sayyad, and Amir Naderi."[113] This implies that new-wave filmmakers were familiar with terms such as 'cinema of auteurship' and late modernism (1950 - 1970) which was the first art movement[114] in cinema that began initially in Europe.

Although I already demonstrated that *The Traveller* follows the time-image model which makes it essentially a modern film, I choose Abbas Kiarostami's *The Traveller* again, as an example of Iranian new-wave and will argue that this movie is not only stylistically modern but also that the Qassem's character is a representation of modern experience of human existence. To make this point, I will highlight a comparison between naturalistic, post-classical, and modern melodramas using different examples of European cinema. I will, then, turn to Sartre's philosophy of 'nothingness' which was the most influential notion in modern cinema.[115] I will

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112 Ibid., 341.
113 Ibid,. 335.
114 András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2007), 3.
115 Ibid., 90.

explain how such an abstract concept finds a narrative place and is represented in *The Traveller.*

Sartre takes the philosophy of nothingness from his German philosophical ancestors Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Perhaps, Nietzsche gives the most radical definition of nothingness. He holds that nothingness is an independent power that opposes the everydayness. He uses this philosophy as a means to fight metaphysics. Although Sartre shares common grounds with Nietzsche – the death of God and self-responsibility – he diverges from Nietzsche in that he attributes absolute freedom to nothingness. In contrast to his romantic counterparts, for Sartre nothingness is not a negative concept at all. Sartre distinguishes nothingness from mere emptiness of nonbeing and places it "into the heart of being."[116] He holds that nothingness determines being's relations and the relationship between being and the world. For Sartre, nothingness is simultaneously "the product of human intensions and the essence of being."[117] Sartre gives a solid content to nothingness and deciphers it into everyday situations "where man is alone, disappointed by his beliefs and expectations, desperately looking for something solid in a situation where his own identity is called into question." [118] In Sartrean philosophical landscape, nothingness becomes the key concept of existentialist philosophy and generates a metaphysical myth through retaining the subject-object dualism. This is the mythical character of nothingness that makes it suitable for representation in modern cinema. These philosophical tenets are highly relevant to the case of Kiarostami's films. However, I better mention that these philosophical tenets are not more relevant to the Iranian modern cinematic context than any other.

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[116] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 57.
[117] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema*, 1950-1980, 92.
[118] Ibid.

The use of them in the context of Kiarostami's cinema is just for the sake of providing an analytical-philosophical framework that fits closely with this specific type of cinema. During the last few years, I realized that Sartrean nothingness and Deleuzian crystal-image can be employed to perceive the last enigmatic scene of *The Traveller*. Moreover, the mythical character of nothingness is well-matched with my primary analytical framework that is Deleuzean time-image. Crystal-image is the inseparable unity of the virtual-image and actual-image. We should note that for Deleuze- virtual is not opposed to real but to actual. Virtual is as real as actual is. When the actual-image (objective and perceivable) is put into relation with virtual-image and the virtual-actual circuit is developed (subjective and outside of the consciousness in time) crystal-image is created. Thus, crystal-image always exists at the border of an indiscernible actual and virtual image. The last enigmatic scene in *The Traveller* exactly lies at this border where actual image and virtual image meet and create crystal image. In that scene, the actual is an empty stadium and the virtual is nothingness or the presence of the absence.

The exposure of Iranians to Sartre's works dates back to 1945 when Sadeq Hedayat – the famous Iranian modernist writer – translated *The Wall* into Farsi and published it in Sokhan.[119] Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* (1936) was considered by most readers and critics as a direct product of his imitation of the writings of Sartre and Kafka.[120] Moreover, the official academic and intellectual language in Iranian universities was French during 1930s. In addition to that, many Iranian modernist writers lived in Europe during 1930-40s where they were directly exposed to contemporary European literature, for example Mohamad-Ali Jamalzadeh who was

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[119] Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002), 142.
[120] For more information about Hedayat see Ibid.

one the most prominent Iranian writers of 20th century, lived in Switzerland where he read Sartre's *Nausée* (1937) and sent a copy of the book to Hedayat, one year before the publication of *The Blind Owl* in 1938.[121] Many of Sartre's writings were then translated to Farsi and have been published in Iran ever since: *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946) translated by Mostafa Rahimi in 1965, *The Words* (1963) translated by Hossein-Gholi Khoshchehreh in 1972*, Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays* (1975) translated by Mostafa Rahimi in 1975. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Sartrean philosophy found a place in Iranian modern literature and in new-wave films.

In this chapter, my argument is that *The Traveller* - by comparing it with Truffaut's *the 400 Blows* - is a type of film in which the philosophical concept of 'nothingness' finds a narrative place and becomes an invincible power in front of which the protagonist (Qassem) is helpless. Also, I will discuss below the freedom with its accompaniment of responsibility that a human being experiences in his/her 'situatedness' in relation to the children of Kiarostami presented in his pre-revolution films.

Modern Melodrama

Andrés B. Kovács in *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, identifies the origins of narrative structures and genres in European modern art-films in order to understand the innovation and originality of the modern cinema. He explains that the rule breaking is one of modern art-films' main principals. Moreover, he describes the modern melodrama delineating the classical drama by comparing it to naturalist style. Melodrama is a story of the suffering of an innocent victim or of a lonely human facing a physical or natural power event, social power or

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[121] Ibid.

psychological power; a story of a helpless human who is condemned to lose right from the beginning and succeeds only by a miracle. It is a dramatic genre lacking "words and verbal expressions"[122]. That is why broad gestures and highly expressive music play a key role in it.[123]

In addition to being suitable for stories dealing with emotional conflicts, melodramatic narrative is an appropriate framework for stories with political, historical and social contents because of its fatalistic character. Kovács employs cognitive theorist Torben Grodal's approach to show how melodrama can be in operation in the modernist framework. Highlighting two aspects of a melodrama – passive response and subjective perception - Kovács states that in melodramatic genre the repressive objective power of the world is staged as a "subjective perception" - it is experienced as a mental event - whereas in naturalist form both the objective world and the "victim-subject" are used as something exterior to representation. It is the individual's perspective that yields to melodrama's pathetic and highly emotional character. It is the melodrama's individualistic approach that is the key to understanding the relationship between melodrama and modernism. According to Grodal, it is the individualism of melodrama, or in other words this passive subjective experience, that is the cause of emotional saturation[124]:

> If we are transformed into a passive object for the objective laws, the hypothetical-enactive identification is weakened or blocked, and the experience loses its character of being rational and exterior-objective, and, by negative inference, is experienced as a mental event. In the great melodramatic moments in *Gone with the Wind*, the agents lose their full ability to act in the world, in which is therefore only experienced as sensation, as input, and so remains a mental phenomenon.[125]

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[122] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, 85.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: Anew Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
[125] Quoted in András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, 86.

The lonely individual is powerless before the oppressive force. His powerlessness is represented as a mental perception, emotional state, in a general term as a passive process. High emotional reaction, thus, belongs to melodrama and its representation system. The melodramatic hero realizes that the fate cannot be shifted, apprehends his helplessness and powerlessness and tries to overcome this situation by "excessive" emotional response. In addition to highly emotional state, passive mental experience in front of a great power can also be transformed into a cognitive one. Passive mental experience can therefore be either emotional or intellectual.[126] Basically, this is the fundamental difference between classical melodrama and modern melodrama that the classic one provokes emotional reaction in the audience by staging such states while modern melodrama provokes emotional reaction in the audience by radically withdrawing the representation of emotions. The viewer's reaction to modern melodrama is, therefore, always a kind of anxiety. In what follows, I will discuss why *The Traveller* is a modern film with a modern narrative form and a subjectivized character. This film is not only stylistically modern – because of its open-ended circular narrative – but also Qassem, its (a)hero, is a "modern individual".

The Traveller: a Modern Film with Modern Narrative Structure

According to András B. Kovács, there is no such thing as modern style in cinema; it is rather different modern film styles. He considers two phases of modernism in cinema: silent cinema (1919-1929) and sound cinema (1950-1975). The early modern filmmakers (silent film directors) used the lack of the synchronic sound as an advantage to explore cinema's aesthetic potential emphasizing the abstract features of the medium. The late modern filmmakers' style, on the other hand,

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[126] Ibid., 87.

depended on literature and theatre and their aesthetic aim was to 'reach a purely mental representation' which stands in contrast to the 'purely visual form' aimed by the early modernism abstraction.[127] By making a distinction between different style tendencies in early and late modernism cinema, Kovács reaches a very significant difference between these two modernist cinemas:

> …early modernism was founded upon a unified conception, whereas forms of late modernism are very much determined by a cultural background whose "mental representation" appeared to be relevant for filmmakers at different parts of the world. This made late modernism the first really international art movement in the cinema realized in a variety of styles or trends.[128]

Therefore, according to Kovács, if we wish to talk about modern cinema beyond a generalised concept of modernist art –whose basic characteristics are subjectivity, reflexivity and abstraction – we ought to consider the diversity of 'modern film forms' locally generated by different national cinemas, and to understand how these basic principles of modernist art particularly modernized different national cinemas.[129]

The Traveller was made in 1974, in a decade during which revolution was in the air, not only politically but also in cinema and literature. The new-wave filmmakers explored new modes and styles in filmmaking, providing counter-narratives to those of filmfarsi. The story of the films dealt with the darker side of society which had been ignored by escapist movies of commercial cinema. Ironically, all of them were funded by the government but they would have been also censored by the government. For example, *The Cow* incorporated the political and social complexities that became the distinctive feature of new-wave films funded and

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[127] Ibid., 54.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

censored by Ministry of Culture and Art. Naficy explains the process of funding and censorship as follows:

> To obtain funding and permission to film Mehrjui concocted a lie by presenting the screenplay to the mca as if it were a documentary. To ensure an exhibition license later, he engaged in another subterfuge. Even before the mca had given him filming permission, Mehrjui whitewashed the village walls and spruced up the village setting to make it presentable. The advantage of working with the ministry was that it not only financed the film but also put at the director's disposal a cadre of experienced actors that it employed in its theater division. When the completed film print went for mca review to obtain an exhibition permit, the director was asked to add a caption at the film's head that would historically place the story forty years earlier, before Reza Shah's main reforms had been inaugurated. These preproduction and postproduction changes constituted attempts to deny the existence of poor villages like the one in which The Cow was filmed. Even after these changes, the film was banned for a year because the government feared it might contradict "the official image of Iran as a modern nation of promise and plenty."[130]

The Iranian new-wave broke many rules of Iran's commercial cinema. Seeking alternatives to commercial cinema, new-wave filmmakers collaborated with modernist writers seeking to work with original screenplays which were very rare in commercial films. Mehrjui adapted a story[131] by Saedi, *The Cow*, which marked this shift and "legitimized cinema as an intellectual medium."[132] Saedi's stories were mostly "dealt with psychic traumas of modernity."[133] The filmmakers adapted and wrote original screenplays. In tracing the relations between literature and new-wave films, Naficy claims that "directing was modernized and transformed into film authorship."[134] Moreover, at the same time, in the realm of poetry where a gradual

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[130] Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978,* 346.

[131] The adapted story of *The Cow* comes from a book consisting of eight stories which is named *Bayal's Mourners* (*Azadaran-e Bayal*).

[132] Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978,* 345.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 346.

withdrawal from classical poetry was occurring since 1920s[135], modern poetry or new poetry (*she'r-e no*) flourished by the work of Mehdi Akhavan Sales[136], Ahmad Shamlou[137], Sohrab Sepeheri[138] and Forough Farrokhzad[139]. Two of these modernist poets participated in filmmaking. Ahmad Shamlou had written screenplays for B-grade films and directed some documentary films about folk dances of Iran such as *Turkmen Dance* (*Raqs-e Turkaman*, *1970*) and *Dailaman Dance* (*Raqs-e Dailaman*, *1970*).[140]Forough Farrokhzad directed a black and white short film, *The House Is Black* (*Khaneh Siah Ast*, 1961), about the lives of the lepers in a leper colony near Tabriz. She used her poetic imagery to create 'poetic documentary' and "her poetic and sorrowful off-camera voice-over, which quotes rearranged biblical passages, documents the lepers' life in the colony and punctuates their desolate humanity."[141]

Almost around the same time as the emergence of late modern cinema in Europe, the Iranian new-wave cinema emerged and alongside many other national cinemas around the world dealt with the expression of the human condition in the modern world emotionally and aesthetically. Their particular way of narration and storytelling is one of the most important characteristics of modern cinema which stands in contrast to the traditional narrative techniques. In the next two sub-sections, I will show that how the narrative pattern of *The Traveller* fits well into the narrative trajectories of modern cinema.

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[135] In the 1920s, Nima Yushij who is known as the founder of modernist Persian poetry wrote his first modernist poems. For more information on new poetry, see Ahmad Karimi-hakak and Kamran Talattoff 'introduction: Nima Yushij and the Millennium-old Tradition of Persian Poetry' in *Essays on Nima Yushij*(Boston: Brill, 2004)

[136] For example see Akhavan-Sales, Mehdi. *Angah Pas Az Tundar: Muntakhab-i Hasht Daftar-I Shi'r* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1378/1999) and Akhavan-Sales, Mehdi. *Zimistan : Majmu'ah-i Shi'r Mehdi Akhavan-sales (M. Omid)*. (Tehran: Murvarid, 1967).

[137] For example see Ahmad Shamlou, *Qat'namah* (Tehran: Murvarid, 1364/1985) and Ahmad Shamlou, *Shikuftan dar Mih* (Tehran: Zaman, 1349/1970).

[138] See Sepehri, Sohrab. *Hasht Ketab* (Tehran: Tahouri Library, 1366/1987).

[139] See Farrokhzad, Forough. *Tavalludi Digar: 1338-1342* (Tehran: Murvarid, 1347/ 1968).

[140]Hamid Naficy, *Asocial History of Iranian Cinema*, *Volume2: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978*, 82.

[141] Ibid., 346.

Narration

A common feature that *The Traveller* shares with modern cinema is that the plot is not revealed in such a way that is easily understandable by viewers and many details and explanations are left for the viewers' imagination. In other words, the story of *The Traveller* is not finished without the viewers' participation at the end of the film where Qassem runs out of the frame. This approach –unwillingness to disclose an appealing and understandable story – was the attitude of modernist filmmakers at the beginning of the 1970s[142] – the same years during which *The Traveller* was also made.

The term "modern" first appeared around the fifth century C.E and is derived from religious history. The term was used to differentiate between the Christian era and antiquity. It was first around the seventeenth century that this term was used to describe certain novel aesthetics in art. Modern was originally used for two important nuances: "new" and "actual". In other words, the term was not only used to describe something as yet unseen but also to supersede something. Modern in the sense of new can mean that old and new can still coexist; however, modern in the sense of actual means that old is eliminated. Thus, modern was always opposed to past and the concept of "antique". The dichotomy of antique and modern thus draws a border between the old and the new and between valid and invalid. However, for Baudelaire a work of art should be both antique and modern simultaneously. For Baudelaire modernity was only "transitory" and "fugitive" and represented only half of the art. The other half was eternal values and ideals. Thus, for Baudelaire a modern artwork should represent the immovable values through the actual and transitory form of the world. But what I mean here by "modern" in relation to

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[142] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, 129.

cinema is more a Deleuzian concept. For Deleuze, modern refers to a new sense of spatiality that enables us to traverse between various real and imaginary spaces into which we can imaginarily project ourselves. For Deleuze, what is modern has the brain in "a state of survey without distance" and subjectivity as its effect or to use Deleuze's own words as "its eject". In modern times, it is the brain that thinks, not man; man is only a crystallization created by the movement of thought. For me, a modern cinema, thus, means a cinema that has brain and thinks through space and time.

Kiarostami's approach to storytelling deviates from traditional routines because his protagonist is disconnected from traditional human relationships: Qassem is alienated from his surroundings. If I want to put it in the Deleuzian philosophical landscape, the last 20 minutes of the film lacks the traditional cause and effects of man's actions that we see in movement-image model. Qassem's interaction with modern Tehran is not according to physical contact but to mental responses. This modern alienation ultimately leads to a fundamental "disbelief" in the world.[143] Here, the function of *The Traveller* is to restore belief in the world and to replace the traditional patterns between man and the world with new ones. My aim in this section is to investigate the methods that Kiarostami employs to achieve this "restoration."

David Bordwell classifies the narrative forms of non-classical narrative cinema into three historical categories: "art-cinema narration" where he describes the development of modern cinema, a cinematic version of modern literature like *nouveau roman*; "historical-materialist" mode for describing which he turns to Eisenstein's films followed by some examples from Godard's cinema from the late

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[143] Ibid., 56.

60s and early 70s, a narration mode which particularly follows the political theatre model proposed by Bertolt Brecht; and finally "parametric narration," a mode which mainly stems from abstract painting and for which Bordwell's main example is Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959). Bordwell also recognizes that the narration techniques of some filmmakers like Godard switch between these three modes. Bordwell's description of the narrative forms implies that non-classical modes were merely used by art films and explicitly claims that each of these modes could be called "modernist". For my purpose in this section, the great merit of Bordwell's classification is that he shows that modern film narration modes involve a set of *different* techniques. This eliminates any counter argument stating that modern cinema follows one homogenous system and a film is modern only if it fits into that specific system.

According to Bordwell, the non-redundant "suzhet" (plot) structure of modern cinema eliminates the deadlines as a temporal motivation of the plot, extensively represents the characters' different mental states, loosens the cause-effect tradition, focuses on the characters' psychic reactions rather than their actions, often uses symbolic linkage between images, includes increased ambiguity which makes the interpretation of the story difficult, has open-ended stories, etc. A simple comparison between the narrative structure of *The Traveller* and Bordwell's description of the characteristics the modern cinema reveals that this film perfectly follows the narrative techniques of modern cinema, for example, the long take during the bus journey, Qassem's nightmare about his punishment, the empty stadium sequence which cannot have any explanation according to traditional cause and effect chain of the plot, a child seer rather than a child doer, the symbolic bus journey which reminds viewers of the transition from tradition to modernity, the

unexplained ending sequence encouraging the viewers' intellectual involvement in the film.[144]

Abbas Kiarostami, twelve stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Moreover, the narrative structure of *The Traveller* has the three main principles of modern art: the ambiguity of the interpretation of its ending scene creates *abstraction*, the broken camera sequence creates a sense of *self-reflexivity*, and its story which has a *subjective* character. Although these are the characteristics that create modernist effects in *The Traveller*, these qualities are not solely used in modern art films. These are the *necessary* traits for making an art film modern. However, they are not *sufficient* to conclude that *The Traveller* is a modern film because many of these characteristics have been also used in classical narrative forms for example early-classical style of Ingmar Bergman's psychological dramas

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[144] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,1985),150. Other characteristics the Bordwell summarizes for modern cinema and one can find in Kiarostami's cinema as well, are permanent gaps in the plot's chronology of *Ten* which is the result of its episodic structure, delayed exposition of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, stories which are not motivated by genre rules, the elimination of the temporal motivation of the plot in *Taste of Cherry*, concentration on the "condition humaine" in *Close-Up*, the events in the plots which are merely based on chance like the cow mating sequence in *The wind Will Carry Us*, subordinating the plot to the development of rhetorical political arguments in the *Homework*, *Close-Up* and *Ten* and etc.

that deal with human relationships. What makes *The Traveller* essentially modern is that a complex situation that cannot be reduced to some well-defined problems becomes ambiguous and impossible to define. The spectator is encountered with a situation that eliminates the need to searching for reasons in the past or a causal chain of events that leads to the future.

If *The Traveller* shares the Bordwellian characteristics – a multi-layered complex narration - with classical art films in the majority of its sequences, the final scene makes all casual chains of events up to that point irrelevant. The film ends while the spectator is eager to learn more about Qassem's future but there is no information forthcoming that could make the plot more understandable and all the information about Qassem's past becomes irrelevant. This is the universal "human condition" of Qassem that is the Kiarostami's focus, not his encounter with a particular environment, and that is how *The Traveller* diverges from classical art films. Qassem becomes an "abstract individual" – a type of hero that was exclusively used in modern narrative – disconnected from his environment.

Abstract individual is a "genuine modernist invention"[145] whose inner drive does not determine what happens to him. The last sequence in *The Traveller* transforms the character of Qassem into "an estranged person who has lost all his essential contacts to others, to the world, to the past, and to the future."[146] However, despite how abstract the character is represented in the film, he cannot be deprived of all personal or social characteristics. In all modern films – Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), Fellini's *8 ½* (1963), Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968), Bertolucci's *The Grim Reaper* (1961), etc) the abstract protagonists are somehow connected to their interiors and exteriors of representation. Similarly, Qassem

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[145] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980,*65.
[146] Ibid., 66.

inevitably has a look, he has to dress in one way or another, he lives somewhere (Malayer), he is a schoolboy and he belongs to a social class. It is only in literature that the protagonists have no physical presence and the writer can, thus, play with the exterior description of the characters. In cinema on the other hand, it is the image that constitutes the films and that is why a protagonist of a modern film cannot be as abstract as one in a modern novel. Kiarostami's approach to making the character of Qassem an abstract individual, is to disconnect him from his environment through that particular situation – after all his effort what he encounters with is an empty stadium. In other words, Kiarostami generalizes this character and represents a "condition humaine."[147] The alienated character of Qassem is an abstract individual whose main lesson to learn in this world is everything just happens.

Although most alienated abstract characters in modern cinema are urban middle-class intellectuals or industrialists – that makes them free from material concerns and free to move because working hours are not a constraint for them[148] – we have some modern films in which the individual is very young like Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) and *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) because the theme of revolt – which is one of the characteristics of abstract characters in modern films – fits well with the concept of childhood. This is the reason that I choose Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* as an example with which I will compare Kiarostami's *The Traveller*.

Chance

Another characteristic that *The Traveller* shares with modern cinema is the role that chance plays in its plot. It is true that narrative cinema cannot eliminate the role of

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[147] Quoted in Ibid., 61.
[148] This can be exemplify by the upper-middle-class intellectual characters in Antonioni's *L'avventura*, *La notte*, *Eclipse* (1962), *Blow-Up* (1966), Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960), *8 ½*; *Juliet of the Sprits* (1965), and Godard's *Breathless* (1960) or industrialists characters in *The Red Deserts* (1964) or *Zabriskie Point* (1970), etc.

chance in its form and each shot is singular and unrepeatable because of the theatrical principle of randomness[149], Kiarostami pushes this further and makes it a constitutive element. He extensively includes the occurrence of uncontrolled events as compositional elements, by shooting in natural locations; employing non-actors and allowing their random decisions and expression determine the story.

Chance as a narrative element is not only used in modern cinema. Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1951) is a well-known example of a classical narrative in which the theme of chance finds a narrative place. Its plot is based on a series of commonplace accidental coincidences which finally cause the main character to be mistaken for another person. This leads to a chain of events and the plot follows the logic of a mystery film. But in the final scene Hitchcock miraculously supresses all casual linkages and saves his heroes. In other words, Hitchcock employs the theme of chance to create "accidental events which serve as an obstacle that the protagonist" [150] must overcome to restore order in the universe of the plot. Thus, the closure in the classical narrative is the point where order is restored in the world. At the end, accident in the plot of *North by Northwest* serves as an element to confirm the ordinary laws of causality. However, in modern films chance has another function in the plot. Chance in the narrative of modern films – like most French and Iranian new-wave films – is a central element to show the spectator the dramatic effect of accidents. This explains why accidents happens frequently at the end of the modern films, for example Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962) where suddenly the female protagonist decides to end her life with one of her lovers, or Godard's *Breathless* (1960) where Michel is only shot dead because his

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[149] Each shot is singular because it simply depends on the actors' momentary state of mind. Even if a film is shot in a studio with highly organised artificial settings, the role that randomness plays cannot be totally ceased.
[150] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema*, 1950-1980, 71.

friend throws him a gun. Similarly in *The Traveller*, the plot ends with an accident. Qassem is unable to see the match because he accidentally falls asleep. Chance in the plot of *The Traveller* erupts at a key moment to manifest "the clash between ordinary expectations and the unpredictability of freedom."[151] Disaster remains throughout the plot of *The Traveller*, but when it happens it is unexpected. The universe of *The Traveller* is the single possible world of classical narratives, but it is essentially uncertain, unpredictable and incalculable. That is why the narrative of *The Traveller* – like all other Kiarostami's films and like all other modern films – is open-ended. The story of *The Traveller* is not ruled by chance and its goal is not to confirm the causality, like classical narrative where we are faced with a situation that concludes "whatever happened, that is the way things should be"[152], but to demonstrate that social and natural orders are unpredictable for the individual and can strike at any moment.

Abbas Kiarostami, three stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Sartre's Nothingness

Jean-Paul Sartre undoubtedly was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, and his thoughts had a great impact on art including film. I should mention that there is no direct evidence that Sartre's thoughts had an impact neither on Kiarostami's way of thinking nor on other Iranian filmmakers'. Also, no scholar

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[151] Ibid., 73
[152] Ibid., 72

ever mentioned that *The Traveller* can be analysed through an existentialist analytical framework. However, the influence of Sartre's ontological analysis of human existence on Iranian intellectuals is undeniable as discussed above. Thus, it is merely my speculation that the last enigmatic scene of *The Traveller* can be better explained and understood under the Sartrean notion of nothingness. Existentialism "has come to the attention of a wide international audience through the work of Sartre".[153] He proposes an ontological analysis of human existence in his major work published in 1943, *Being and Nothingness*. The concept of nothingness in Sartre's philosophy is very crucial in terms of its relationship with modern man's fundamental existential experiences of solitude and disappearance.[154]

To explain an abstract notion like nothingness, Sartre starts with giving a concrete content to it resulting in an abstract conclusion. He believes that concrete subjects are the way to understand abstract concepts. He lessens the negativity of nothingness and distinguishes it from hollowness of nonbeing.[155] He writes in *Being and Nothingness*:

> ...We cannot grant to nothingness the property of nihilating itself. For although the expression to nihilate itself is thought of as removing from nothingness the last semblance of being, we must recognize that only being can nihilate itself, however it comes about, in order to nihilate itself, it must be. But Nothingness is not. If we can speak of it, it is only because it possesses an appearance of being, a borrowed being Nothingness is not, Nothingness "is made-to-be" Nothingness does not nihilate itself; Nothingness is nihilated.[156]

According to Sartre, nothingness is the key concept of both human relations and the relationship between man and the objective world. For Sartre, nothingness does not associate with another world or accord beyond the world; it rather exists

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[153] Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1956), 28.

[154] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980,* 91.

[155] Ibid., 93.

[156] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (Oxon: Routledge 2003), 46.

exactly in the "heart of the world". Unlike Heidegger who places nothingness beyond being, Sartre believes nothingness is the essence of a human being and it exists within being. Sartre interprets the concept of nothingness within the frame of an individual's everyday life where people are left alone by their feelings and beliefs which may cause disappointment because of the lack of something solid in their daily banality. This is where man has to either rely on his will or possible action that made out of probability.

Nothingness is generated when an individual's expectations are not fulfilled. Thus, nothingness is not considered as the state of not being, but the state of not being of something, something that should exist. This means, our expectation and disappointment are nothingness. Therefore, the notion of nothingness does not fall into an entirely negative category as it is represented in relation to being. For further clarification, I would like to introduce Sartre's most famous example:

> I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the cafe a quarter of an hour late. Pierre is always punctual. Will he have waited for me? I look at the room, the patrons, and I say, He is not here It is certain that the cafe by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its light, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it - the cafe is a fullness of being... ... Pierre is absent from the whole cafe...What serves as a foundation for the judgement – 'Pierre is not here' - is in fact the intuitive apprehension of a double nihilation."[157]

Sartre points out: "Freedom is a human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness."[158] It is the empty space between past and future where a human being has freedom of choice; where he revokes his past before the future. In this sense, nothingness is freedom.

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[157] Ibid., 33.
[158] Ibid., 52.

Nothingness is present when something is missing, and this missing thing is that which related man to the world and others. I would like to quote Sartre's emphasis on nothingness as "the freedom of other":

> We are dealing with my being as it is written in and by the others freedom. Everything takes place as if I had a dimension of being from which I was separated by a radical nothingness; and this nothingness is the others freedom.[159]

This is how the modern experience of human existence and nothingness are entwined: he becomes lonely, he is endangered by the others' freedom, he feels the lack of positive values, he has to choose and take care of himself.

Man Is a Useless Passion

In most of his films before the revolution of 1979, Kiarostami recurrently stresses the 'facticity' of human existence and the ways in which freedom affirms itself through decisive, responsible action in response to its situation. He does this by employing specific narrative and visual strategies. For example, Kiarostami's second film, *Breaktime* (1972) depicts a situation in which a school boy is beaten by the school teacher or headmaster for breaking a window. The film starts with a scene in which a boy is standing in a corridor and repeatedly blowing and emptying a balloon. Then, the camera distances itself from the protagonist in order to engage the viewers with a printed title appearing at the dark end of the corridor, explaining the story in five simple sentences. The story goes:

This is Dara. He has a ball. At the break he played football with Akbar. Akbar threw him the ball. Dara kicked it. It hit a window. Dara broke the window.

In the next scene the camera is placed behind the broken window and we see Dara through the cracks in the window. By his facial expression, we realize that Dara is being beaten. He is in trouble and he could see no way out of the situation. On his

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[159] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 286.

way home, Dara finds himself in rather a similar situation in the street where some children are playing football. He passionately involves himself in the football game and kicks the ball without their permission. Unlike the first situation, this time he does not hesitate to run as fast as he can through the narrow streets of southern Tehran trying to escape from a child who aggressively follows him. Eventually, he manages to escape him. Scared, anxious and hopeless Dara, once again, goes through the narrow streets searching new ways to avoid the boy which leads him to the city's outskirts. Ultimately, he faces a highway. He seems fascinated by the highway and passing cars and starts waving to them. At the end of the film, Dara is shown walking along the verge of the highway. In this film, like *The Traveller*, football appears as a strong passion or desire; stronger than the resistance and adversity presented by the world.

Sartre holds three modes of being to distinguish in being and nothingness in order to explain existence; Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself, and Being-for-others. He tries to explain the relation of the first_ Being-in-itself_ to the second _ Being-for-itself_ partly by the means of the third mode; Being-for-others. Being-for-itself (transcendence) equates to conscious being. Therefore the consciousness is being defined in the definition of for-itself. Sartre says that there is a gap within consciousness, that is, a gap between thought and the object of thought. This emptiness and vacancy is the essential characteristic of the for-itself. Then, this leads on to the other characteristic of the consciousness which is the power of distinction between affirming and denying of what is true or false of its object. This ability of affirming or denying constitutes freedom and this freedom exists in the gap between thought and object which is the essence of consciousness. Sartre explains that in-itself (facticity) refers to what is solid, self-identical and passive in our being –

roughly nonconscious – whereas for-itself is fluid, nonself-identical and dynamic – consciousness. He states that human beings are entities that combine being-in-itself and being-for-itself. For Sartre, our ontological ambiguity is rooted in the combination of these two mutually exclusive characteristics. Freedom is realized within the limitation of human being's 'situatedness'. For-itself is constituted as a lack of being, for being-for-itself is essential to be situated. It exists as negation of its situation. And every situation in which for-itself encounters, lacks something for for-itself. Therefore, as perpetual temporal transcendence towards future fulfilment, suspended between past and future, for-itself always encounters every situation as lacking something in the present. To overcome the lacks and therefore to satisfy the desire, 'action' must be taken. For Sartre, intention is the defining characteristic of action. Therefore, Sartre distinguishes accidental acts from intentional acts, as the latter are purposeful bodily actions aiming at reorganizing the world in a certain way to overcome the perceived lack, and for-itself choices must be made in response to its situation because for-itself is not a fixed, determined entity. Therefore, being-for-itself must constantly create itself in response to its situation through choices. The concept of freedom is a central element in Sartre's existentialism. Sartre argues that people are unavoidably and limitlessly free and by affirming their freedom, they are constantly striving to take responsibility for their choices.

Kiarostami's children are individuals going through the process of creating themselves by freely choosing and taking action in response to their situations. They realize their freedom by choosing and taking responsibility for their actions. They perceive their desire or lack. So they experience failure because of the impossibility of complete satisfaction. They realize that a particular desire can be satisfied but it is immediately surpassed towards further desire. They are a passion that strives to

complete fulfilment, however, complete fulfilment and overcoming all lacks and desires is impossible. They are "a useless passion".

The Experience (1973) is another exemplary case. Kiarostami's medium-length feature *The Experience* is a story of a working-class adolescent, orphaned and poor who works in a photographic studio and falls platonically in love with a rich girl. Far from a mere 'love melodrama', Kiarostami takes a very subversive approach towards the sub-genre of Iranian commercial cinema.[160] The very construction of the film constitutes a series of 'dead time'[161] aiming to provide the film with its meaning and poetry.[162] The film is an adaptation of a story by Amir Naderi who was one of the greatest filmmakers of Iranian new-wave cinema. The story of the film was very personal and was coloured by Amir Naderi's own experience. However, Kiarostami made the film in Naderi's absence with total freedom based on his own criteria.[163]

The main character of the film is Mohammad who experiences a harsh childhood and desires a platonic love on the verge of sexual awakening. He sticks a blown-up photo of a female face onto a cardboard mini-skirted model, seemingly to fill his extremely lonely nights in the studio. It was a random encounter with the girl that leads to a passion which eventually gives him the strength to give up his job and present himself at her house as a potential servant. Once again, an overwhelming desire fuels Kiarostami's hero. His impossible dream seems possible after all his efforts had been doomed to failure. He freely wanders through the city in a long wait before he goes back to the house of the girl he loves to know the answer to his job request. Undoubtedly, the final sequence of *The Experience* masterfully depicted the

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[160] Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*. (London: Saqi in association with Iran Heritage Foundation, 2005).
[161] Alberto Elena uses this term but does not explain it. The term here for me means the taking of time to engage with time with temporality.
[162] Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami,* 19.
[163] Ibid.

unfulfilled human desire in his 'situatedness'. The answer is no. Elena impressively explains the final sequence:

> A zenithal shot shows Mamad, totally confused and disoriented, unable to grasp what has happened, standing stock still facing the girl's house. Seconds later he moves out of shot and Kiarostami keeps the camera on the empty scene so long as to be uncomfortable for the audience. Here *The Experience*, as in *Bread and Alley*, has been an experience in sudden maturity, and a particularly painful one for young Mohammad.[164]

Kiarostami deals on a regular basis with the radical freedom of the human being and outright nihilism in his short film *Breaktime,* his medium-length feature *The Experience* and his first full-length feature, *The Traveller*. He constantly acknowledges radical freedom by his choices of subject matter, and incites his viewer to observe the consequences of acknowledging radical freedom along with responsibilities. He typically avoids moralising and psychologising over the character's existence in certain situations.

Kiarostami's *The Traveller* and Truffaut's *400 Blows*

In Kiarostami's *The Traveller* and Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, one can trace a clear formulation of the concept of modern melodrama because the protagonists of these films who are helpless victims of their situations seeking to understand "what" the situation is. Despite the fact that the most typical individuals in modern films are in their mid-thirties, the adolescent characters of Qassem and Antoine can be categorized as abstract individuals, since they revolt against social and natural orders. They have the qualities of an individual: they are lonely, they live in or come to a big city, and they wander around different places to explore their surrounding environment. Moreover, the ending sequence in both films is a representation of Sartrean nothingness.

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[164] Ibid., 24.

Kovács classifies the modes of narration in modern films into three categories: linear, spiral and circular. Linear narration refers to "chronological, causal, and conceptual continuity leading towards a closed set of relevant narrative information."[165] It means that linear narration not only has a sequential order but also includes a direction. This mode of narration was usually used in classical films in which there is a "beginning" and an "ending". This mode includes a conflict and all the information for understanding the solution to the conflict is revealed throughout the plot. In spiral narration, the permanent solution to the conflict is impossible. All the solutions are temporary and each problem that has been resolved triggers a new problem. In circular mode of narration, we usually have more information at the end of the story, but we never understand what the solution to the problem is. Even sometimes there is no problem presented in the plot to be resolved. In films with circular narration, the ending situation does not differ significantly from the starting point.

According to Kovács's description of narrative modes in modern cinema, one can see that both *The Traveller* and *The 400 Blows* follow an open-ended circular narrative. They both tell us the story of young boys, one from the town of Malayer, in the Hamadan Province, Qassem who is mad about soccer and one from Paris, Antoine, who is obsessed with cinema. They are both from working class families. In *The 400 Blows*, the misunderstood young adolescent, Antoine (Jean-Pierre Leaud) tries to free himself and run away from the objective laws of the world and at the end we do not see anything but Antoine as a being standing in the very same world over a vast area of "nothingness" while his photo is hanging on the screen. His rebellious

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[165] András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, 78.

character which cannot fit into social norms pushes Antoine toward a point where he runs nothingness, for an absolute freedom. *The Traveller* is about the adventure of a grade-school-age boy, Qassem (Hassan Darabi), who is resolved to make his obsessive dream – watching the national team's match in the stadium – come true at any cost. Having overcome all the obstacles on his path to Tehran, Qassem manages to go to the stadium, but at the end, his goal is unachieved and what he finds is "nothingness". The Sartrean sense of nothingness is signified through the deserted stadium and the disappearance of the spectators as well as Qassem's supressed desire.

In both *The Traveller* and *The 400 Blows*, the protagonists are lost in and alienated from the world they live in. None of them can actually comprehend what is happening to them. They are both looking for something solid in their life. But what they find is "nothingness". They do not know what their crises are. They are not, even, able to find any well-defined problem to resolve. The only thing that these protagonists face is nothing less than the entire world around them with its all objective laws. However, the lack of awareness and understanding of a situation has been also a common theme in the stories of classical melodrama. I would like to present Laura Mulvey's words about classical melodrama:

> Characters caught in the world of melodrama are not allowed transcendent awareness or knowledge. ...They do not fully grasp the forces they are up against or their own instinctive behaviour.[166]

A classical melodrama transforms into a modern intellectual melodrama when the protagonist finds himself before an existential situation that he cannot understand. This is the lack of comprehending that stimulates suffering, passivity, and anxiety, whereas in classical melodrama, not understanding or not knowing is not the main source of suffering. Basically, in classical melodrama, it is enough that

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[166] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (New York: Palgrave, 1989), 41.

the protagonist realizes that the objective power he is up against is unsurpassable. On the contrary, in modern melodrama, the protagonist does not even understand that he is in the middle of critical situation. The unsurpassable power that the protagonist faces is frequently absent. That is why the protagonist of modern melodrama does not understand that his situation is critical. This missing, invincible power is often impossible to represent clearly. This bigger power is an existential "lack" of positive values, such as human communication, love, security, emotion, or God, or in a Sartrean term: the presence of absence. Qassem, like Antoine, is an "abstract individual". He is the narrative materialization of "modern soul" which is the genuine modernist invention. He is an "abstract individual" whose past as well as his inner drives are not decisive factors of what happens to him. Carl Jung explains:

> Let us say that the man whom we call modern, who lives in the immediate present time, is like standing on a peak at the edge of the world, with the sky above, and with the entirety of humankind below, whose history vanishes into the haze of the commencement; in front of him, the abyss of all the future He who comes to this consciousness of the present is necessarily lonely. Modern man is lonely all the time . . . What is more he can really be modern only if he arrives at the extremity of the world . . . with Nothingness recognized in front of him from which anything can emerge.[167]

Qassem is the (a)hero of modern narrative who is an abstract entity disconnected from his surrounding environment. The character of Qassem has the alienation of the abstract individual. Qassem, like Antoine, does not "understand" what is happening to him. Although Qassem is not as radical and complex as the characters we usually see in the works of Antonioni (for example Vitoria in *L'Eclisse*) or Tarkovsky (for example *Andrei Rublyov),* his ahistorical, anti-psychological character represents the abstract individual which is the main difference between a modernist narrative and a classical art-film narration. This is

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[167] Quoted in András B. Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980, 66.*

exactly Qassem's lack of psychological characterization that Barthes describes as modernism: "The most immediate criterion of an art work's modernity is that it is not "psychological" in the traditional sense."[168]
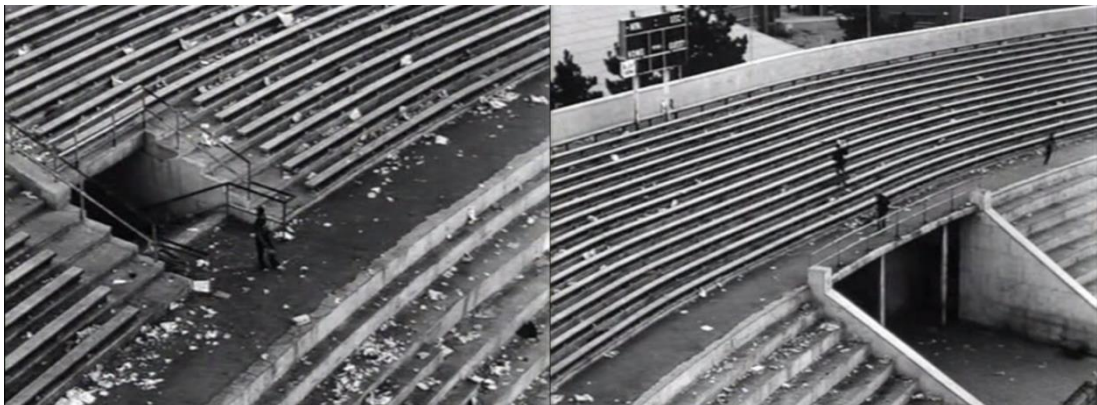
Abbas Kiarostami, three stills for *The Traveller* (1974), black & white thirty-five millimetre film, seventy-one minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Qassem and Antoine are free from their social determinants; they are free from their past and their future is vague. As we see in one scene, the only words

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[168] Qouted in ibid., 124.

Qassem knows are "rebel", "discipline", and "ambition", he does not know what "ambulance" means, since the objective world is outside of him. His inner psychic life drives him but it is not the determining factor of what happens to him. He is unable to organize his inner psychic life into a rational system resulting in planned act. At the end, what he encounters is a stadium without any spectators. He realizes that there is nothing he can do about it and runs away out of the camera's frame. This barren urban landscape disserted of human beings is what we can call the being of nothingness or the presence of absence.

Chapter 4

Towards A New Political Image: Kiarostami's *Close-Up*

"Perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian."

Michel Foucault

"We are living in the era of Kiarostami, but don't yet know it."

Werner Herzog

This chapter analyses the film *Close-Up* (1990) based on Deleuze's notion of "minor cinema," a notion that Deleuze borrows from Kafka's "major" and "minor" literature. For Deleuze, major cinema (literature) constantly preserves the border between "the political" and "the private". In minor cinema (literature), on the other hand, the private becomes instantly political and "entails a verdict of life and death."[169] By assembling and outlining a selection of Deleuze's writings on "minor cinema", the "politics of the face," and "affection image" this chapter offers an understanding of how politics finds its way into Kiarostami's cinema; a cinema that has been criticised by film critics inside and outside Iran for being "apolitical". By formulating the problem surrounding the term "people" in relation to modern cinema, this chapter argues that Kiarostami's cinema offers the possibility to imagine new political forms of subjectivity.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the criticism of Kiarostami's cinema by presenting two different arguments which charge his films with being "politically neutral", because of either a compromise between the filmmaker and the

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[169] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum 2005), 210.

Iranian authorities enabling his films' participation at international festivals[170] or the affirmation of the dominant ideology. However, it seems that the authors of these criticisms have not been aware of the ways that politics is depicted in minor cinema or have not been familiar with the fact that the role of the intellectual or filmmaker has been changed in our contemporary era. As Deleuze states, there is a "call for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist."[171] This "future form" is that of "becoming-other" rather than "becoming-conscious", of merging "the private" with "the political" and is based on "fragmented people" rather than "united or unified people"[172]. This provides scope for detailed analysis of the depiction of politics in Kiarostami's films where the idea is no longer represented but "enacted".

Azadeh Farahamand argues that the international film festivals caused Iranian cinema to become apolitical. She believes that in order to participate at these festivals Iranian filmmakers had to become compromisers and opportunists who ignored the social and political realities of Iran to bypass censorship. Farahmand criticizes Kiarostami's avoidance of female characters portrayals which in Iran is a 'sensitive subject'[173]. On the other hand, Saeed Zaydabadi-Nejad argues in his article, *Iranian Intellectuals and Contact with West: The Case of Iranian Cinema,* that Kiarostami (among other Iranian filmmakers) has become more politically engaged over the years. Zeydabadi draws on Kiarostami's *10* (2002) as an example of a political film which outspokenly deals with women's rights. He also believes that writing the script for – his former assistant now a controversial filmmaker –

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[170] Azadeh Farahmand, "Perspectives on the Recent (International Acclaimed of) Iranian Cinema," in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politic, Representation and Identity,* ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 99.

[171] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, (New York: Columbia University Press 1994), 108.

[172] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 210.

[173] Azadeh Farahmand, *Perspectives on the Recent (International Acclaimed of) Iranian Cinema*, 99.

Jafar Panahi's *Crimson Gold* (2003) is "a courageous move."[174] He takes "transnational funding as well as the filmmakers' rising international profile" as two positive consequences of participation at international festivals which led to a change in filmmakers' attitude toward politics[175].

Kiarostami has been vigorously attacked in his homeland not only by conservative critics, but also by Marxist oriented critics. In a controversial book, *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami's Cinema*, which is a published dialogue between Maziar Eslam – art critic and translator – and Morad Farhadpour – translator and philosopher, Kiarostami is criticized for being 'passive' and for his aesthetical form which is claimed to be like 'Tibetan meditators', arguing that his cinematic style can be compared to "a view as a Buddhist monk for several hours sitting and staring without getting involved." They believe that Kiarostami's cinema is politically neutral and deeply conservative[176].

All the arguments about the politics of Kiarostami's cinema have been made with respect to his international success. It is plausible to look at Kiarostami's cinema in relation to socio-economic factors and the institutional politics of international festivals and their consequences for particular national cinemas. However, I would like to look at the politics of Kiarostami's cinema beyond these factors and discuss that Kiarostami's cinema is rather political on a more profound level.

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[174] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad. *The politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 2010), 151.

[175] Saeed zeydabadi-Nejad convinced that the transnational funding partly led to a freedom of speech for Iranian art film directors and aided them to become "independent of Iranian financial support and hence, to a degree, of the political control of the Islamic Republic." Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad. *The politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*, 152.

[176] Morad Farhad-Pour, Maziar Eslami, *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami`s Cinema – Dialogue between Morad Farhadpour and Maziar Eslami*, (Tehran: Farhang Saba, 2008).

Kiarostami's Cinema: Apolitical?

Reviewing Kiarostami's cinema, Farhad-Pour and Eslami suggest that he should capture the basic contradictions of his community and to show what Iranian society really is, rather than being a contemplative monk. The authors blame his cinema for upholding the dominant ideology (imposed by Hollywood, international film festivals, and the Iranian government) by using provincial locations, and excluding women. They hold that Kiarostami's cinema has not brought any new vision and style to cinema, and "has the excesses of the dominant cinema in the West, and recycles them under the context of provincial countries to feed it back to the market… The eastern filmmaker – instead of giving an independent and different image of his world – changes himself to be compatible to the desire of 'The Other', who is the superior western counterpart; A western critic`s point of view."[177] Farhad-Pour and Eslami also claim that women have never been a central constituent element of Kiarostami's cinema and take it as a mark of the director's compromise with the censorship dictated by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Terry Eagleton in his book *Marxism and Literature Criticism* explains that Marxist criticism developed a concept which is called "objective partisanship"[178]. According to Eagleton, the writer does not need to impose his own political views on his work because overtly political commitment to social reality in fiction is unnecessary. In this respect, a writer becomes a partisan as soon as he discloses the real forces objectively in his work: "Partisanship, that is to say, is inherent in reality itself; it emerges in a method of treating social reality rather than in a subjective

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[177] Morad Farhad-Pour, Maziar Eslami, *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami`s Cinema – Dialogue between Morad Farhadpour and Maziar Eslami*, 43.
[178] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* (London: Routledge, 2003), 22.

attitude towards it."[179] Denouncing it as 'pure objectivism' later on, objective partisanship was replaced by purely "subjective partisanship" under Stalinism[180]. Being accused of politically "escapist" or apolitical, Kiarostami says that the politics in his films lie partly in his choice of subject matter or location - the rural poor, or Kurdish Iran - and he believes cinema should ask questions, not answer them. "I'd never invite anyone to vote for one person or the opposition. I'm not pushing people to react, but trying to reach a truth of everyday life. As long as we try to touch this truth, it's essentially and profoundly political."[181]

As discussed earlier, a barrage of criticism that Kiarostami has often been faced with is that his cinematic universe affirms the ideological limits of its time. To provide a valid response – based on the Marxist criticism discourse itself – to the abovementioned criticism of Kiarostami's cinema, we need to first understand how the relationship between art and ideology is defined according to Marxist criticism. For Marxist criticism, art is part of superstructure[182], and aesthetics is entirely

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[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Abbas Kiarostami, "A Life in Cinema: Abbas Kiarostami," interview by Maya Jaggi. *The Guardian*, 13th June, 2009.
[182] In Marxism, 'base' or 'infrastructure' consists of the social relations between the capitalists and the proletarian class. In every period of time, superstructure arises based on this economic structure. According to Karl Marx, superstructure constitutes the political, religious, ethical, and artistic beliefs of a society and its function is to 'legitimate' the power of social class that owns the means of production and to 'stabilise' the economic structure. For Marx, superstructure, thus, ultimately forms the consciousness of a society, as he in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1859) states that: 'In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.' Also, Marx and Engles are quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*: 'The production of ideas, concepts and consciousness is first of all directly interwoven with the material intercourse of man, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the spiritual intercourse of men, appear here as the direct efflux of men's material behaviour...we do not proceed from what man say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as described, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at corporal man; rather we proceed from the really active man ... Consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness.'

affected by ideology. However, within the Marxist critics' circle, there have been two opposite approaches to this issue: what is exactly the relationship between art and ideology? One is 'vulgar Marxist' criticism that believes that any artistic form is nothing but ideology[183]. In other words, all arts are just expressions of the ideologies of their time. Considering any works of art as a mere expression of 'false consciousness', vulgar Marxists denounce the potential of art to reveal the reality that ideology hides from us. Nonetheless, this viewpoint is not able to explain why there have been always works of art that challenged the dominant ideology of their time. The second approach to art's relationship to ideology has an extremely opposite position to vulgar Marxists' point of view. It acknowledges that many works of art challenge the dominant ideology and argues that art is capable of transcending the ideological confines, of reaching beyond the false consciousness to disclose the truth[184].

Louis Althusser in his *Letter on Art in reply to André Daspre[185]*, provides a plausible explanation for the relationship between art and the ideology. Althusser does not "rank art among ideologies"[186] and states that it has rather a particular relationship with ideology[187]. Art and ideology do a similar thing in the sense that they provide the imaginary ways in which human beings experience the real world and how it feels like to live in particular conditions, rather than signifying a conceptual analysis of those conditions. But to Althusser, art's function is more than just a passive reflection of that experience. It emerges from ideology, but simultaneously distances itself from it, to the point where it allows its audience to

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[183] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* 16.
[184] See for example Ernst Fischer, *Art against Ideology*, Trans. Allen Lane (London: Penguin, 1969).
[185] Louis Althusser, "Letter on Art in reply to André Daspre." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London, 1971), 221-228.
[186] Ibid., 221.
[187] Ibid.

'perceive' the ideology within which art is held. For Althusser, "the particularity of art is to make us see something which alludes to reality"[188]. As he writes:

> What art makes us see, and therefore gives us in the form of 'seeing,' 'perceiving' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of knowing), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes. Macherey has shown this very clearly in the case of Tolstoy, by extending Lenin's analyses. Balzac and Solzhenitsyn gives us a 'view' of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a retreat, an internal distantiation from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us 'perceive' (but not know) in some sense from the inside, by an internal distance, the very ideology in which they are held.[189]

Nonetheless, it cannot arrive at a point to reveal the truth which ideology conceals from us, as 'knowledge' to Althusser in its strict sense means scientific knowledge – the kind of knowledge of, say, the social relations which Marx's *Capital* enables us to understand. Althusser's argument shows that the difference between art and science is not that they deal with different objects but they deal with the same objects but in different ways. According to Althusser, art is not able to provide us with conceptual knowledge, but to share the experience of a particular situation. By doing so, art permits us to 'feel' the nature of the ideology that it confronts, and therefore starts to push us towards the full understanding of ideology which can only be provided by scientific knowledge.

It is in this precise sense that we can say Kiarostami's cinema seeks 'to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society.'[190] Alain Badiou in his essay on *Philosophy and Cinema* holds that in

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[188] Ibid., 222.
[189] Ibid., 222-223.
[190] George Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance,' in *Aesthetics and Politics,* ed. Roland Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), 38.

Kiarostami's films[191], there are "multiple cinematic situations in which truth is thinkable."[192] Badiou recognizes that Kiarostami's cinema pushes "the dominant motifs to the point of torsion", and extends contemporary genre beyond the limits defined by Hollywood and thus creates a 'cinema-idea'[193]. Badiou exemplifies Kiarostami's move towards cinema-idea with his 'characteristic use of the car as a personal space for social interaction, thereby subverting its stereotypical iconic use to denote impersonal power and speed.'[194] It is thus through his move towards generating new ideas, forms and even genres that Kiarostami allows his cinema to distance itself from the dominant ideology of cinema imposed by Hollywood[195]. A tendency to using video art and digital camera which can be seen in ABC Africa, and later on in *Shirin* – the greatest collection of all contemporary Iranian actresses – where he dedicates an independent mise-en-scène to the sound very close to Godard's idea about sound and image. As Godard claimed in an interview; "sound is not only language. Sound is everything. A picture can go without any images on the screen for some time-just sound."[196] A new form of narrative, also, emerges in for example *Ten* by the experiment with digital camera which subsequently was rejected by the Cannes festival. As Kiarostami states:

> The sound is supposed to assume the role of what is not visible. Throughout this movie it was a challenge to see if we could show without showing, to show what is invisible, and to show it in the minds of viewers rather than on the screen. Basically, anything seen through a camera limits the view of a spectator to what is visible through the camera lens, which is always much less than

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[191] Badiou also presents different examples from the films of Oliviera, Straub, early Wanders, Pollet and some Godard to explain his notion of 'cinema-idea'.

[192] Alex Ling, "Can Cinema Be Thought?: Alain Badiou and the Artistic Condition," in *The Praxis of Alain Badiou,* eds. Paul Ashton, Adam John Barlteltt, Justin Clements (Melbourne: re.press 2006), 297.

[193] Lindsey Hair, *Badiou/Deleuze: Art and Cinema*, PhD thesis (New York: UMI 2007), 192-193.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Vulgar Marxist critics believed that paying attention to technical aspects of any work of art separates it from historical significance and reduce it to a mere aesthetic game.

[196] Jean-Luc Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard: interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1998), 37.

what an individual can see with his own eyes. No matter how wide we make the screen, it still does not compare to what our eyes can see of life.[197]

And this is a key to Kiarostami's move towards 'cinema-idea'. Kiarostami believes that showing the viewer everything could be like "going to the point of being pornographic, not sexually pornographic, but pornographic in the sense of showing open heart surgery in all its gory details."[198]

In *Paris-Tehran: Kiarostami's Cinema*, one of the primary criticisms is the absence of women in his films. But, one may wonder whether the authors have ever seen his *Ten* or *Shirin*? Vared Maimon in her essay *Beyond Representation: Abbas Kiarostami's and Pedro Costa's Minor Cinema,* eloquently explains how Kiarostami's *Ten* is politically charged, in particular in the sequences showing Mania Akbari's (the protagonist) two encounters with a young woman (who is one of the invisible characters of the film):

> In their first encounter the woman tells her that she is going to pray in the hope that it will make her boyfriend marry her. In their second encounter the woman informs Akbari that her boyfriend has ended the relationship and that she is sad but that she will overcome this separation. And then in a highly provocative and moving scene Akbari urges the woman to loosen her tightened head scarf – and it slips to reveal her shaved head… The power of this scene lies not only in the brave gesture of an Iranian woman who exposes her bald head (which led to censorship of the film in Iran), but in the way it stages a political process of subjectivisation in which the woman's unmarried status and Akbari's divorced status become a positive force, not a mark of a failure or a lack, but an affirmative power of becoming-minoritarian, a refusal to conform that is at the same time an opening of the possibility of solidarity and community.[199]

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[197] Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2003), 114.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Vared Maimon, "Beyond Representation: Abbas Kiarostami's and Pedro Costa's Minor Cinema." *Third Text*, Vol. 26, Issue 3 (May 2012): 331-344.
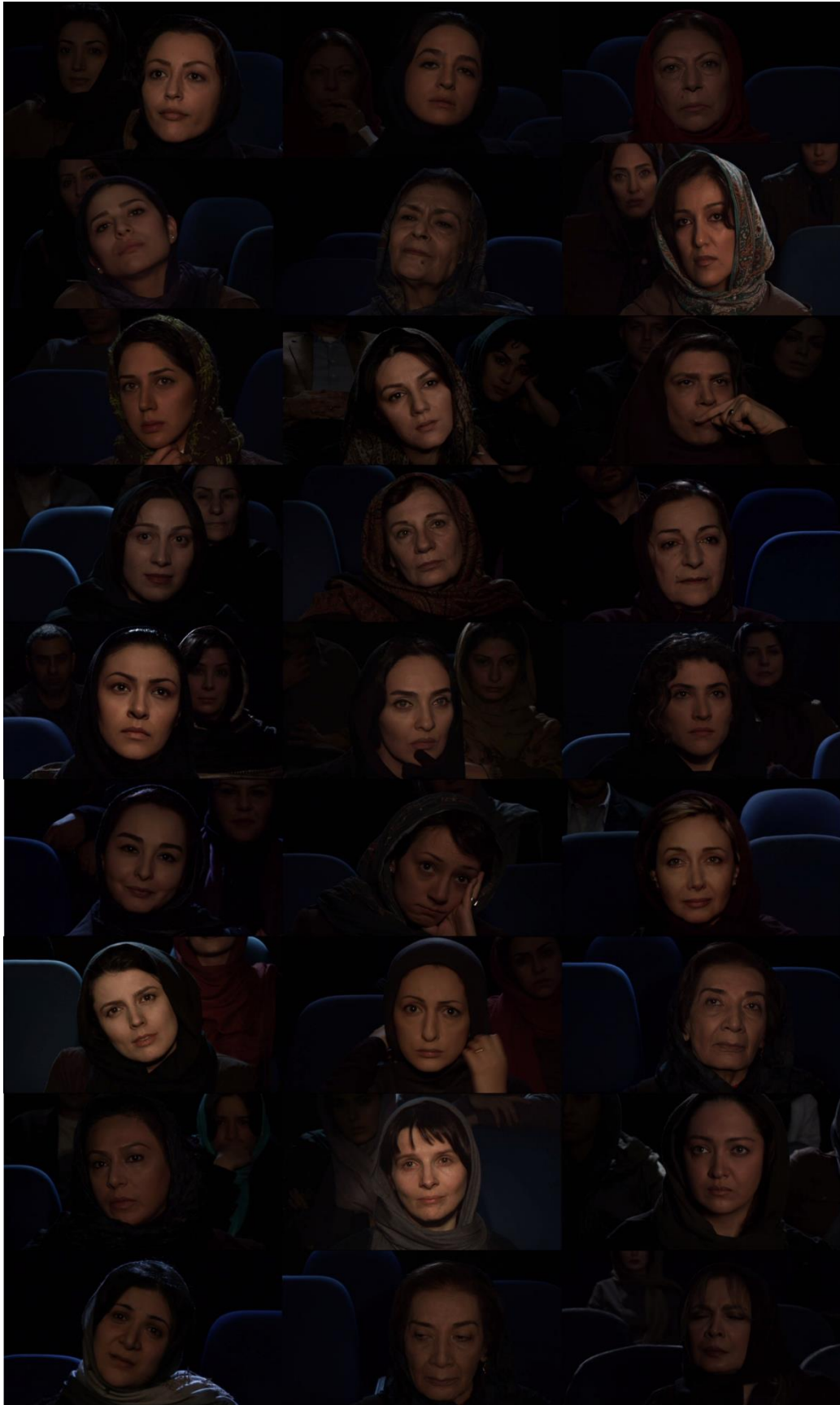
Abbas Kiarostami, forty-five stills from *Shirin* (2008), colour DCP, ninety-two minutes, © Kiarostami Production.

Isn't that the case where Kiarostami gets involved with the social reality of Iran? Doesn't that show his *commitment* to capture the social and political issues and to question the women's situation in a male-dominant society? Doesn't that show Kirostami's recognition of the fact that women are marginalized? Yet, the importance of this scene lay not only in Kiarostami's recognition of women's rights, but also in how ideas of emancipatory politics are incorporated into this film: by

creating an image of solidarity in a minority group: "As tears drop on the woman's cheeks", Maimon writes, "Akbari's hand is seen wiping them away (the only case in the film of an actual touch). This gesture of empathy breaks the basic binary segmented structure of the film in which each camera shows only the gestures and movements of one character."[200]

Walter Benjamin in his *The Works of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* considers commitment more than just a matter of presenting correct political opinions in one's works of art. For Benjamin, commitment reveals itself in how far the artist reconstructs the artistic forms at his disposal, turning authors, directors, readers and spectators into collaborators[201]. Jean-Paul Sartre also recognizes this relationship between author and audience and argues in a more individualistic, existentialist vein in his *What is Literature?* that the reader of any writing reacts to the created characters, and thus to the author's freedom; conversely, the author calls for the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work[202]. This type of author's relationship with his audience is what can be seen clearly in Kiarostami's cinema. "Many films made today", he says, "are so shallow and one-dimensional that, despite the imagination of viewers, everything has been given to them. Unfinished cinema leaves room for the audience to take part in the creative process. It allows everyone to see their own film."[203]

Walter Benjamin in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* explicitly articulates how a work of art is intertwined with politics. According to Benjamin, the uniqueness and novelty of an artwork is embedded in

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* 58.

[202] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays,* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1988), 54.

[203] Abbas Kiarostami, "A Life in Cinema: Abbas Kiarostami," interview by Maya Jaggi, *The Guardian*, 13th June, 2009.

'the context of tradition'. For example, the uniqueness of a classical statue of Venus is in its singularity or its 'aura'[204]. Works of art first were in the service of some ritual, and then religious. And it was essential for a work of art and its auric mode of being to be inseparable. To put it in Benjamin's words: "The 'one-of-a-kind' value of the 'genuine' work of art has its underpinning in the ritual in which it had its original, initial utility value"[205]. According to Benjamin, mechanical reproduction of a painting, abolishes that alienating 'aura' and enables the viewers to encounter the artwork in his own particular place and time[206]. Benjamin argues that in contrast to traditional 'high art', the camera continually penetrates and modifies the viewer's perception creating the "shock effect". Kiarostami's camera does not merely photographically reproduce the surface phenomena of society without penetrating to their significant essence (naturalism); and his cinema does not represent a character who is stripped of his history and has no reality beyond the self (formalism); his camera penetrates, brings its object humanly and spatially closer and so demystifies it. In contrast to Lokács who may consider the fragmentation of people in modern life as a miserable consequence of capitalism, Benjamin sees positive aspects of it and considers it as "the basis for the progressive artistic forms." [207] Take for example Kiarostami's *Ten.* Filming in his favourite location, *cars,* Kiarostami constantly puts the inside in contact with the outside; the private affairs are constantly interrupted

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[204] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* (London: Penguin 1936), 10.
[205] Ibid., 11.
[206] Benjamin considers photography as the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction and states that by its advent art felt a crisis approaching that, and therefore, art reacts with the theory of 'art for the art's sake which constitutes a theology of art' again. However, when art became reproducible by technological means, it was freed for the first time in history from 'its existence as a parasite upon ritual'. When many prints of a photograph could be made its aura and the question of the genuine print was disappeared. But at the same time art has been underpinned by a different practice: "the instant the criterion of genuineness in art production failed, the entire social function of art underwent an upheaval. Rather than being underpinned by ritual, it came to be underpinned by a different practice: politics".
[207] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,*59.

and disrupted by being in direct contact with city crowd and traffic. Or recall his particular styles in *Close-Up* which blurs the boundary between real and imaginary, present and past, actual and virtual. All these artistic forms produce a "shock effect" and strip the objects and experience of their 'aura'[208]. Kiarostami himself in an interview with British magazine *Sight & Sound* states that:

> Any work of art is a political work, but it's not party political. It does not approve one party and attack another, and doesn't support one system over another. Our understanding of 'political cinema' is that it should always support one specific political ideology. I think if you look at my films from this view point, they are definitely not political... I think that those films which appear non-political, are more political than films known specifically as 'political films'.[209]

Kiarostami's Cinema: Political?

In chapter eight of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze discusses how the representation of politics in modern cinema has changed from that in classical cinema. He refers to "modern political cinema" as "minor cinema"[210] which is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's terminology of minor literature in their book on Kafka[211]. He draws three main differences between minor cinema and classical political cinema. According to him, in classical political cinema people do exist although they are "oppressed, tricked, subject, even though blind or unconscious."[212] He refers to some examples from both

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[208] Benjamin turns to Brechtian 'epic theatre' to explain the change in both political content and the productive apparatus of artworks. Brecht, as Benjamin states, "succeeded in altering the functional relations between stage and audience, text and producer, producer and actor". See Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" in *Understanding Brecht* (London 1973). Brecht criticizes 'bourgeois theatre for its 'illusion of reality', and for the finished unchangeable constructed world that makes its audience a passive consumer. Kiarostami constantly destroys the 'illusion of reality' in his films to clarify it for the audience that it is all constructed and fake. For example take the epilogue of *Taste of Cherry*, or his cinematic style in *Through the Olive Trees* where he constantly insists on the fact that it is all constructed, or his open-ended narrative in *The Traveller* (as well as all his other films) which is incomplete without the intellectual participation of the audience.

[209] Abbas Kiarostami, "Near and Far: Interview with Abbas Kiarostami," interview by Nassia Hamid, *Sight and Sound*, 7:2 (February 1997): 22-24.

[210] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 208.

[211] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986).

[212] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* 208.

American and Soviet films, and argues that in classical cinema "people already has a virtual existence in process of being actualized."[213] Deleuze considers the cinema of Resnais and Straubs as the best example of minor cinema and states that in their films, politics does not exist through the presence of people, but "on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet... *the people are missing.*"[214] The second difference concerns the relationship between "political" and "private". According to Deleuze, the classical cinema always maintains the boundary between the political and the private, whereas in minor cinema the private is immediately political. In minor cinema, no boundary exists to mark the correlation between the political and the private: "the private affairs merges with the social – or political – immediate."[215] In minor cinema, the private is not a place "of becoming conscious" but a place consisting of "putting everything into trance."[216] Minor cinema passes private affairs into the political and political affairs into the private. "it is as if modern political cinema were no longer constituted on the basis of a possibility of evolution or revolution, like the classical cinema" Deleuze argues, "but on the impossibilities, in the style of Kafka: the intolerable."[217] The third big difference is that in minor cinema there is no united or unified people, there is always several people, and it is upon this fragmentation and break-up that modern political cinema has been created[218].

We should note Deleuze's terms "minor cinema" does not mean a cinema belonging to a demographic minority with a certain pre-existing identity, but one that

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[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 210.
[216] Ibid., 210-211.
[217] Ibid., 211.
[218] Ibid., 212.

fights to express "collective utterances"[219] that address people who "do not yet exist" or whose existence is what is at stake. Another important term in Deleuze's discussion which needs extra attention is "people are missing", by which he means that people no longer exist as a united subject. For Deleuze the presence of people in classical cinema as an organic totality leads to the formation of a coherent mass which has a pre-given identity because people are "real before being actual, ideal without being abstract."[220] What is missing in minor cinema is then the formation of a collective which is indebted to its simulated existence in the cinema screen. Thus, minor cinema is a cinema of *becoming*, or more precisely of "becoming-other"[221] and not of becoming-conscious as in classical political cinema. In this sense, minor cinema contributes to the creation of the people.

When Kiarostami's camera finally passes behind the high gates of Ahankhah's middle-class residence, we understand that there hides a very common story of unemployment. Both sons have finished their engineering degree but they have been unable to find jobs: the elder son sells bread in a bakery and the younger "has chosen art instead of selling bread." It is the younger son's failure to find a career as an actor that has left the family vulnerable to Sabzian's plan to cast him as his actor and to choose their house as his location. What is striking in the intensive encounter between the poor printer and the middle-class family with two unemployed sons is that both parties' private affair passes into the political and the political passes into their private businesses. This encounter conveys a sense of the post-war socio-political situation of Iran with the burst of unemployment and economic instability.

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[219] Ibid., 214.
[220] Ibid., 216.
[221] Ibid., 264.

The first time that Mrs. Ahankhah meets Sabzian on a bus, she asks him: "how is it that you take public transportation? Famous directors usually have their own personal cars." This reminds us immediately of Sabzian's social position and economical situation. Sabzian replies that he uses "public transportation to search for interesting subjects" and then quickly asks Mrs. Ahankhah if she has seen his film, *The Cyclist*. The story of *The Cyclist* is about a former cycling champion who is in such poverty that in order to pay for his wife's hospital bill, he has to cycle for seven days without stopping. In another sequence in the courtroom, Sabzian says he impersonated Makhmalbaf because he loves Makhmalbaf's *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989). He continues that he also loves Kiarostami's *The Traveller:* "I am that boy in *The Traveller."* He identifies himself with Qassem because he thinks Qassem's passions, sufferings and struggles represent his miseries. Within a couple of minutes, we find out that the main reasons that he has impersonated Makhmalbaf, is to gain Ahankhah's respect and to escape from the identity of poor Sabzian who cannot afford to buy a packet of crisps for his child. He likes to be a filmmaker because he thinks that is the only way of showing the suffering of people like him.

As modern cinema can no longer be constructed upon the basis of the possibilities of a revolution, it is created on double impossibilities: "the impossibility of escaping from the group and that of not forming a group", "the impossibility of escaping from the group and the impossibility of being satisfied with it."[222] This is precisely the basis that *Close-Up* constitutes itself on: the impossibility of unifying "the people" because they are several people (a poor printer, a famous privileged director, a middle-class family with two unemployed sons, and even Kiarostami's himself as the author). The struggles of these several people can be both common

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[222] Ibid., 211.

and simultaneously extremely specific. While their interests and confrontations within the power structure can occasionally be united, they can also clash with each other. *Close-Up* chronicles a split in the unity of the people and constitutes itself on the fragmentation and break-up of people.

‘The fragmented people’ in *Close-Up* do not represent the people that for example a Marxist might have in mind. In Marxism because of the emphasis on class, the term ‘people’ is always taken as an ideological entity masking the clash between the man and the citizen. With the contemporary demise of the category of class, the category ‘people’ obtains new political meaning. This new modern meaning of the term ‘people’ is what is represented in *Close-Up*: the fragmented people who have become the very condition of a politics that is not based on the sharing of collective values. Jacques Rancière argues that the fragmented people highlight a political subject in-between pre-defined classes, they are at the same time included and excluded from what is conceived as common[223]. In contrast to a Marxist critique of ideology that considers appearance as an illusionary apparatus of concealment of the real, for Rancière politics is a matter of fictions and staged appearances: appearance “is not opposed to reality. It divides reality and “reconfigures as its double.”[224] According to him, appearance reveals the contradictions in any form of political and social identification[225]. Kiarostami’s recognition of the power of the “fictions of the real” and his disclosure of the fragmentation of the people as a collective political subject, explains his decision to use a number of narrators for a simple event at school in his *First Case, Second Case*

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[223] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999).
[224] Ibid., 99.
[225] For further discussion on the use of fiction as a critical strategy by contemporary artists and its relation to Rancière’s notion of politics, see Vared Maimon, “The Third Citizen: On Models of Criticality in contemporary artists practices”, *October* 129 (Summer 2009), 85-112.

(1979). It is Kiarostami's first short film after the revolution of 1979 which is about the viewpoints of various educational experts and famous political figures from different parties who differ in age, religion and gender and who seem to have different positions in relation to a simple incident at school. The constant shift between the pronouns 'I' and 'we', between a person and a group, between individual and society and people, when these are expressed by various persons raise the question who are 'we'? Who is the collective subject that is addressed? 'We' who saw the student? 'We' who believe in Islam? 'We' who are members of the Todeh Party (Iranian communist party)? 'We' who are members of the Freedom Movement of Iran Party? 'We' who are members of the National Front Party? By enlisting a number of narrators for a singular event, Kiarostami avoids reducing everything to a "personal fiction" and evades constructing an "impersonal myth". As Deleuze states:

> There remains the possibility of the author providing himself with 'intercessors', that is, of taking real and not fictional character, but putting these very characters in the condition of 'making up fiction', of 'making legends', of 'story-telling'. [226]

In *Close-Up*, Kiarostami's juxtaposition of staged real events with edited footage of the trial crosses the very boundary between fiction and reality and creates what Deleuze calls "double becoming", a new mode of storytelling which is "a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from politics, and which *itself produces collective utterances.*"[227]

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[226] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* 214.
[227] Ibid.

Abbas Kiarostami, three stills for *First Case, Second Case* (1979), colour sixteen millimetre film, fifty-three minutes, © Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan.

Kiarostami takes a step towards Sabzian when he first meets him in prison: "What can I do for you?" and Sabzian takes a step towards Kiarostami: he is in love with cinema and he wants to be director/actor. This is how double-becoming occurs in *Close-Up*, by "the becoming of the real character when he himself starts to "make up fiction"". Cinema is a place where acting as somebody is accepted, but only for a privileged few. Rejected from being member of the club, Kiarostami's *Close-Up* makes the fake Makhmalbaf ceaselessly shift between "what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a part as well as what cannot belong to the whole in which it is always already included... what always already is, as well as what has yet to be realized."[228]

Both Sabzian and the younger son, Mehrdad, have been waiting for an opportunity to act as somebody else to enhance their humiliated public images as well as their self-confidence. Other members of Ahankhah's family also take the opportunity to participate in Kiarostami's film as they were above all interested in projecting a proper image of themselves. Indeed, it looks as if they only needed a camera to focus on them to become the 'people' that they sought to be.

Deleuze explains "crystal image" as reversible movements between the real and the imaginary, between, present and past, and between actual and virtual:

> The image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. The past does not follow the present that it is no longer on, it coexists with the present it was.[229]

This formulation is exactly what we see in *Close-Up* where all these poles coexist while the distinction between them is indiscernible and un-attributable.

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228 Giorgio Agamben, "What Is a People?" in *Means without End: Notes on Politics,* trans.Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 32.
229 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* 79.

Sabzian's identity repetitively swings between what he is and what he becomes, between his actual present identity and his virtual previous identity, between his real character and his staged character. This is how *Close-Up* becomes a minor cinema, by allowing Sabzian to become an actor playing himself instead of being himself, listening to himself and beholding himself playing, hence letting him become-other and not an other which is a poor unemployed printer[230].

The Face Is a Politics

Yet in *Close-Up*, the virtual also displays itself strongly in what may appear to create the contrary of the images contemplated so far: the individual portrait. *Close-Up* consists of a series of close ups of Sabzian– the portraits of an individual that when juxtaposed together with the medium shots of Sabzian's mother, Ahankhahs, the judge, soldiers, and journalist reveal the political characteristics of Kiarostami's portraits that are not necessarily tied to the identity of the individual who is being filmed but to Kiarostami's specific way of configuring images of faces. By juxtaposing these two sets of images of groups, of individuals, *Close-Up* exposes how the political moves beyond identity functions as a necessary condition for a new kind of relationship between politics and visual images, between the political and the private. Kiarostami states that:

> In *Close-Up*, I describe the face to face encounter of art and law. I think that lawmakers do not have enough time to pay attention to what happens in the interior of the human being. But art has more time. It has more patience. This is why the film relies on two cameras: the camera of the law, which shows the tribunal and describes the trial in juridical terms, and art's camera which approaches the human being for seeing him in close up, for looking more profoundly at the accused, his motivations, his suffering. It's the work and the responsibility of art to look at things more closely

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[230] Deleuze cites Bergson's explanation about the coexistence of past and present in terms of acting: "'Whoever becomes conscious of the continual duplicating of his present into perception and recollection. . . will compare himself to an actor playing his part automatically, listening to himself and beholding himself playing." in *Cinema 2:The Time-Image,* 79.

and to reflect, to pay attention to people and to learn not to judge them too quickly. [231]

These words of Kiarostami's raise the question: what does the lens of choice has to do with justice? Kiarostami is very careful to avoid presenting a mug shot of Sabzian. As Nancy notes: "in Close-Up, the camera appears at first to behave in a policing mode, by investigating with curiosity, in searching for a view, for one more vision to seize of the pretender...In reality it neither spies on anything nor taps it ... but it opens onto what is real in all of cinema."[232]

We first meet Sabzian when Kiarostami and his crew visit him in prison. Our first view of him is framed through the bars of the window behind which the camera is located.

Kiarostami: Mr. Sabzian?

Sabzian: Yes.

At first Sabzian turns away his face from the interrogator, from the identifying policeman or the force of law (Kiarostami), and thus changes his profile view closer to a traditional cinematic three-quarter frontal angle.

Kiarostami: Ok, what can I do for you?

Sabzian: You can show my suffering.

He continues: "Send my message to Makhmalbaf. Tell him I have lived with his *The Cyclist*." When Sabzian realizes that the interrogator is Kiarostami, and as they start talking, Kiarostami's camera begins to zoom through the corrugated bars to an extreme close-up of Sabzian. The move from profile to a final front view which

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[231] Stéphane Goudet, "Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations," *Positif* 95 (1997), 442.

[232] Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'évidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), 22.

is choreographed with successive zooming from a long shot to a medium shot to a close up, highlights Kiarostami's solution for turning away from an identifying policeman to his signature close-up approach to his subject. It is through Kiarostami's artistic choices that the viewers see how Kiarostami's choice of lens questions justice, ethics as well as art itself.
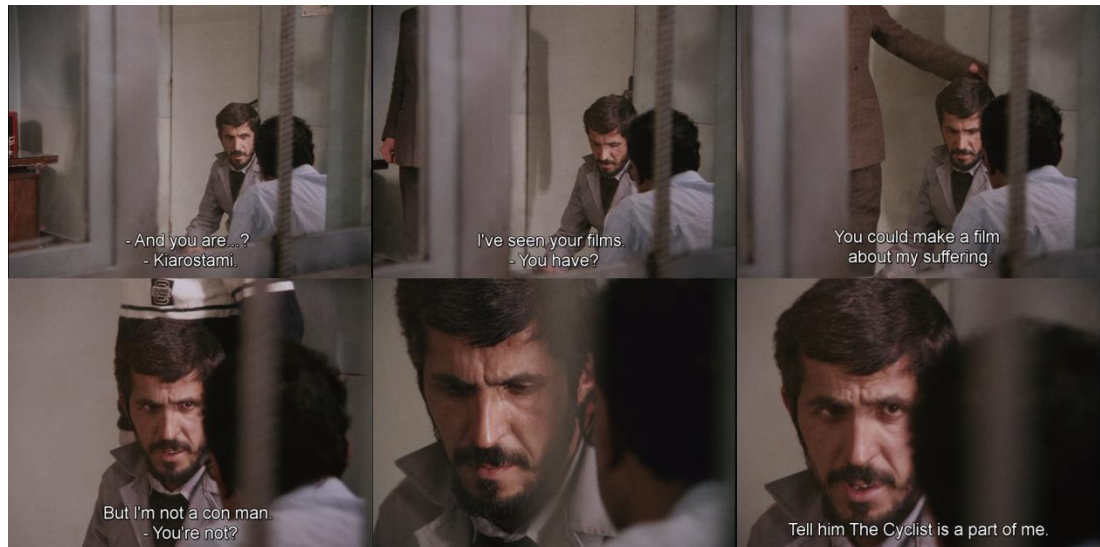
Abbas Kiarostami, six stills from *Close-Up* (1990), colour thirty-five millimetre film, ninety minutes, © Farabi Cinema Foundation.

According to Deleuze, "there is no close up of the face, the face is in itself close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, the affection image."[233] Through Kiarostami's close-ups of Sabzian, the face divorces from identity, the face always carries within itself the possibilities that its returned gaze makes a space that is singular. In contrast to how the law sees Sabzian and Ahankhahs, the accused and the plaintiffs, Kiarostami's camera creates a place that allows people to see each other with equality; it creates a threshold below which each man is as good as any other.

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[233] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1:The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1986), 88.

Deleuze defines his terminology of affection image in relation to Bergson's definition of affect meaning a series of micro-movements on a fixed surface. When a fragment of the body, like the face, records external movements while remaining fixed, it converts to a reflecting surface on which a compromised movement of extension transforms to a movement of expression. In this way, an object becomes "facialised" once it displays these two poles, reflecting surface and micro-movement that is whenever one feels that an object returns a gaze even if it does not have a face. On this basis, Deleuze argues that every object of the affection image is a face regardless of what it depicts. Based on Bergson's notion of affect, Deleuze distinguishes two different types of close up in classical cinema: D. W. Griffith's cinema where the face represents unity of its outline, and thus articulating a "pure Quality", and Eisenstein's film where the face is defined by features that function against the outline, thereby expressing "pure Power". Deleuze makes this differentiation according to two questions that are frequently attributed to face: What are you thinking about? And what is bothering you? Interestingly, the second question is what a viewer logically might ask when he sees the close up shots of Sabzian. What bothers Sabzian is that he is a poor jobless printer who is seeking respect from society. This makes *Close-Up* a coherent body of politics by its focus on close up shots, between the face, the affection image and the logic of the fragmentation and double-becoming examined earlier. Deleuze quotes Béla Balázs who was a member of a group of avant-garde theoreticians and film-makers like Epstein, Benjamin and Vertov:

> When a face that we have just seen in the middle of a crowd is detached from its surroundings, put into relief, it is as if we were suddenly face to face with it. Or furthermore if we have seen it before in a large room, we will no longer think of this when we scrutinize the face in close-up. For the expression of the face and

the signification of this expression have no relation or connection with space dimension of another.[234]

Balász identifies close up shots with the medium specificity of cinema. For them, the close up is an epistemological tool which according to Epstein "is the soul of cinema" by which he means that the close up is the main optical tool for the magnification and transformation of emotions[235]. The conceptualization of the close up in Epstein's definition of the term demonstrates that for the avant-garde cinema was not a means of entertainment but a form of knowledge since it discloses optical and sensorial forms that are not easily reachable for human perception. However, the importance of the close up shots of Sabzian lay not in the fact that it let the viewer to see better but as Balász clearly states: "the close up has not only widened our vision of life, it has also deepened it" because it discloses "the hidden mainsprings of life which we had thought we already knew so well."[236]

Close up shots in Kiarostami's *Close-Up* are a cinematic tool for defamiliarization and it thus makes an analysis of physical reality and social existence possible. Walter Benjamin famously states: "The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render precise what in any case was visible, ... it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. . . . The camera introduces us to unconscious as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."[237]

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[234] Béla Balász is quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image,* 96.
[235] See Jean Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings", trans. Stuart Liebman, *October* 3 (Spring 1977), 9.
[236] Béla Balász, *Theory of Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1972), 55.
[237] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1:The Movement-Image,* 98.

Abbas Kiarostami, two stills from *Close-Up* (1990), colour thirty-five millimetre film, ninety minutes, © Farabi Cinema Foundation.

Frequently, face's role is accounted for something that individuates a person among other things, by pointing to his or her social role. Yet for Deleuze, the face does not have this function. For him, the close up abstracts the person or object that it depicts. For him, the face in a close up shot is not a mark of identity, but a "potentiality considered for itself as expressed."[238] Significantly, this is what constitutes Kiarostami's *Close-Up*: the face induces the possible without actualizing it at all; the face in *Close-Up* points to what is impersonal yet singular, different from every individuated states of the person nevertheless still rooted in a specific history, in which it arises as something new. The close up shots of Sabzian displace the face into a realm where "individuation ceases to hold way", they turn the face "into a phantom, and the book of phantoms."[239]

In this sense, Kiarostami constructs an "affection image" or cinematic close up in which an image of a face does not express a person's identity as a detached self-sufficient subject, but by presenting him as both present and past opens the transformative possibility of "becoming-other". *Close-Up* offers us a new image of politics and of *the missing people*, and inseparably a new politics of the image. Once

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[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 99.

the people are presented as fragmented and as inseparable from the "fiction of the real", the image itself as an "affection image" is no longer a sign of identity, but precisely what demonstrates the possible beyond its delimitation in immobile identities. That is once politics is configured as inseparable from the realm of phantoms and doubles, images are no longer addressed as entirely documentary or fictional.

Abbas Kiarostami, one still from *Close-Up* (1990), colour thirty-five millimetre film, ninety minutes, © Farabi Cinema Foundation.

Kiarostami recognizes Sabzian's existence through allowing him to watch himself and listen to himself, thereby becoming aware of his existence, through playing himself but not through being himself. The last freeze-frame shot of Sabzian is the gift that a minor film can offer him, *his image: the image of a missing people*. Since the last, and the most lasting image of Sabzian that *Close-Up* has to offer, his freeze-frame crossed beyond the limited duration of the film and extended into

everyday space by being incorporated into film posters, although he is still a poor unemployed printer living in Tehran.

<div dir="rtl">

رنگ سبز

به زردی گرایید،

هوا

به سردی،

من

به مرگ اندیشیدم.

</div>

The Colour green

 turned yellow;

 the weather

turned cold;

 my thoughts

 turned to death.[240]

Chapter 5

The Poetics of Kiarostami's Cinema

Kiarostami's films are instances of what may be called a Heideggerian cinema. My attempt in this chapter is to show that Kiarostami's cinema can serve as a medium for addressing philosophical problem of Being which is the central argument in Heidegger's writing. I will explain how Kiarostami's cinema is stylistically poetical through the use of Pier Paolo Pasolini's notion of 'obsessive framing' and Deleuze's philosophy of 'crystal-image' and 'any-spaces-whatever'. However, I will not limit my discussion merely to Kiarostami's cinema. I will refer to his Haiku-like poems and argue that Kiarostami performs the function of the poet during what Heidegger called 'destitution times' in both film and literature.

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[240] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), trans. Karim Emami. Michael C.Beard (Tehran: Sokhan, 2005), 67.

Most critical descriptions of Kiarostami's cinema places great emphasis on its poetic qualities[241]. Iranian poetry was rich and revolutionary during the 60s. The new wave coincided with the emergence of poets like Sohrab Sepehri, Forough Farrokhzad, Ahmad Shamlu and Mehdi Akhavan Sales, who marked this defining moment in the history of Modern Persian poetry. A significant development in literature was created in the realm of modern poetry by Forough Farrokhzad, before her tragic death in 1967. As Hamid Dabashi puts it "Forough Farrokhzad emerged as the most eloquent voice of a generation, speaking not only of suppressed femininity but a whole spectrum of forbidden thoughts. Shohrab Sepehri cut through the thick politicization of his age to grasp a primal moment of wonder in the world."[242] Abbas Kiarostami's artistic trajectory took place within this context.

Kiarostami has written Haiku-like Poems. His collection of poetry is published in two bilingual books; *Hamrāh bā* bād (*Walking with the Wind*)[243] (2001) and *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*)[244] (2005). In the introduction of *Walking with Wind,* Karimi-Hakkak calls Kiarostami "the most radical Iranian poet of his generation", who stylistically breaks away from the formal feature of Classical Persian poetry. "Kiarostami has, thus," writes Karimi-Hakkak, "grafted the most abiding aspirations of the best of Persian poets, both classical and modern, to contemporary concerns. If he can be said as a filmmaker to have led the art form of twentieth century to new aesthetic heights, these restless, airy walks with the wind

[241] Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*. (London: Saqi in association with Iran Heritage Foundation, 2005). Also see Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution*. (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011).

[242] Hamid Dabashi, *Close up : Iranian cinema, past, present and future*. (London: Verso, 2001), 43.

[243] Abbas Kiarostami, *Walking with the Wind*, trans. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Michael C.Beard, (London: Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Film Archive, 2001).

[244] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), trans. Karim Emami. Michael C.Beard (Tehran: Sokhan, 2005).

may guide us step by step to a new verbal kinetic."[245] Karimi-Hakkak regards Kiarostami's poems, like the great Persian poet Rumi, "cosmopolitan, humane, and global."[246]

Pier Paolo Pasolini in his essay *Cinema of Poetry* (1965) fluently draws a distinction between literary language and cinematic language.[247] He argues that a writer finds his or her poetic invention in an instrumental language whose primary function is communication, while images, which are the primary constituent of cinema, are not used as a means of communication. Therefore, communication through cinematic images is arbitrary. Moreover, a writer's task is to elaborate the meaning of a sign and of a word which is already classified in the dictionary and is ready for use. But a filmmaker must first grasp a sign from 'chaos' and then classify it in the dictionary of cinematic language. In other words, the primary task of a writer is aesthetic invention while that of filmmaker is doubled, that is, firstly, "linguistic invention, and then aesthetic."[248] For Pasolini, critical comparison between cinema and literature is therefore fallacious. By comparing 'cinema of prose' and 'cinema of poetry', Pasolini argues that an appropriate critical assessment of images that constitute cinema of poetry should be based on cinematic style itself. He does not stop at points which are universally recognizable as poetic such as symbols, refinement in colours, or object out of focus or fiercely in focus. But rather, he is more interested in 'stylistic condition' that creates cinema of poetry. He identifies some characteristics of poetic cinema and summarized them under the heading of what he calls 'obsessive framing'. This may involve frames being filled with or

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[245] Ibid., 13.
[246] Ibid., 10.
[247] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", *Movies and Methods* 1 eds. Bill Nichols (Berekley: University of California Press 1976), 542-558.
[248] Ibid.

emptied of human beings (in the case of Antonioni's cinema), and neurotic characters which enable the filmmaker to substitute his or her world-view with that of a character. Sometimes characters with an elegiac spirit allow the director not to substitute his view-point but to contaminate it with that of a character. Stillness of a shot upon an object (which is the characteristics of Bertulocci's films) is also a common poetic technique, as well as neurotic characters being filmed with a hand-held camera (which characterizes Godard's films whom Pasolini calls a vulgar Braque).[249]

Kiarostami's cinema shares many of these characteristics, in particular static shots and contamination of his world-view through the characters with elegiac spirits. His static shots of landscape and road which always have an unusual duration remind us of Bertulocci's poetic style. The characters we can only hear and not see can be compared to Antonioni's style in which the frame fills and empties of beings. His cinema has a self-reflective character. He is often physically or figuratively present in his films. However, my analysis of the poetics of Kiarostami's films will not be limited to Pasolini's definition of cinema of poetry.

Deleuze in *Cinema 2: Time-Image* raises "dispersive and lacunary reality"[250] in Rosellini's *Piasa* (1946), where locales split into unstable arrangement. This feature is carried further in Kiarostami's cinema, where the Deleuzian "any-space-whatever"[251] constitutes from zigzag paths, roads and mountains. This gives rise to disconnected spaces in which various sensory-motor linkages begin to come apart. This happens because the effect of documenting social reality combines with fictional

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[249] Ibid.

[250] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1:The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1986), 212.

[251] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum 2005), 5.

reconstruction through the visual stylization. These emptied and disconnected spaces, obtain a relative autonomy from the surrounding narrative. Moreover, Kiarostami's self-critical approach to cinema – in many of his films there is a central character, who is usually an outsider and who is a manipulator, which represents Kiarostami himself – creates unsympathetic character, identification with whom is not possible for the audience. The failure in the identification with the character breaks the sensory-motor system and facilitates connections with virtual image which will remain in the audience's memory. This is the combination of all these characteristics, "obsessive framing" of landscapes, roads and (to adapt Jean-Luc Nancy's term) "rolling things"[252], the replacement of naturalistic specificity of geometrical location with poetic universalism, montage-rhythm, and unsympathetic characters, provides a pause, an openness and clearing for thought.

Abbas Kiarostami's rolling things, one still from *Close-Up* (1990) © Farabi Cinema Foundation, one still from *Taste of Cherry* (1997) © Abbas Kiarostami, two stills from *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) © MK2

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[252] Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'évidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), 26.

Great poetry, Heidegger writes, the "throbbing, shimmering, enlightening, beautiful phrases that articulate and reveal an aspect of reality,"[253] cuts through superficiality and illuminates the great truths of existence. "Language is the house of Being," states Heidegger, "In its home man dwells."[254] Heidegger considers poetry as revealing of truth (*Aletheia*). The excessive calculating character of the modern era conceals the essence of truth, which is at once a concealing-revealing.

But how can human beings poetically dwell upon the earth? Heidegger tries to answer this question in his essay *...Poetically Man Dwells....*[255] This was the title of a lecture given by Heidegger in October 1951 and later published in 1954. Its title refers to a phrase, "Poetically man dwells," in Hölderlin's poem *In Lovely Blue.*[256] Here dwelling does not refer to accepted conception which is linked to work, entertainment or recreation. Nor does he consider dwelling as simply a manner of aestheticizing human existence. Heidegger also rejects the common conception of poetry and explains that today poetry is considered as "a frivolous mooning and vaporizing into the unknown, and a flight into dream land."[257] Such a view makes it impossible for the reader or listener to understand the meaning of the Hölderlin's phrase. Heidegger points out that the phrase is what let us dwell, is what causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetic creation is a quiet unique kind of human building which lets human being dwells upon the earth in his or her unique human way. It is a building which is unique to human existence. Heidegger's suggestion is deeper understanding of the role poetic creation, which is to open up and to illuminate the

[253] Martin Heidegger is quoted in forewords of Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

[254] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on "Humanism"", *Basic Writings,* eds. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge 2011), 141-182.

[255] Martin Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells...," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

[256] Friedrich Hölderlin, "In Lovely Blue" in *Hymns and Fragments*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984).

[257] Martin Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells...," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

'Being' of human beings. Heidegger continues that human beings are not the master of language; instead it is language that is the master of human beings. Primarily, language is not a tool for conveying messages or expressing one's feeling. Language primarily, speaks and human beings respond by listening to its appeal. This unique relationship between human beings and language enables them to dwell poetically. "Dasein encounters"[258] the appeals of language by its Being-in-the-world[259]. And frequently gives voice to these appeals through responding to them: "Among all the appeals that we human beings, on our part, help to be voiced, language is the highest and everywhere the first."[260] Great poetry often contains crystallization in language of what great poet perceived by responding to the appeal of language, and of what they attained from this appeal about a thing's nature. For the reader or the listener the absorption of great poetry is a way of coming closer to an authentic appeal of language to which the great poet responded.

As mentioned above, Kiarostami's cinema has the features which Pasolini[261] and Deleuze[262] count for poetics of Italian neorealism and the French new-wave. However, my attempt in this chapter is to read his poetic cinema as well as his poems with the help of a Heideggerean approach to poetry. As I will discuss later in this chapter, many scholars such as Sheibani[263] and Elena[264] analyse Kiarostami's cinema

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[258] ***Encounter*** in Heideggerian philosophical landscape corresponds to the comportment by which Dasein perceives its own existence and recognizes entities within the framework of the world.

[259] ***Being-in-the-world:*** Heidegger uses this term to express the world, Dasien and world-Dasein relation form a unitary wholeness.

[260] Martin Heidegger is qouted in Robert Hughes, *Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Beyond of Language* (New York: State University of New York Press 2010), 97.

[261] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", *Movies and Methods* 1 eds. Bill Nichols (Berekley: University of California Press 1976), 542-558.

[262] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2:The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1986), 212.

[263] Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution.* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011).

[264] Alberto Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*. (London: Saqi in association with Iran Heritage Foundation, 2005).

by placing it in the context of Persian culture and poetry. However, I see the genuine humanism that great poetry (including Persian poetry) encloses, as universal. Thus, my attempt in this chapter is to place the poetic cinema of Kiarostami in a universal context while I try not to signal a break with its foundation. For me, great poetry – although may be psycho-geographically restricted – transcends time and place. Great poetry – like what we see in Hölderin's poems – tells profound and universal experiences or ideas. They tell us about love, friendship, anxiety, God, life and death and all these concepts are not merely limited to a particular region, class or society. As Kiarostami writes in one of his poems:

<div dir="rtl">

در چشم پرنده ها
غرب
مغرب است و
شرق
مشرق
همین.

</div>

In the bird's eye
west is
where the sun sets
and east is
where the sun rise
that's it.[265]

Measuring human being's life according to the enclosed truths of poetry is the essence of dwelling poetically. Kiarostami's poetic cinema as well as his poems provides clearing where truth emerges. He reads great poetry in his cinema for us which in turn help us into a new way of life guided by the happening of truths that become unconcealed. He invites us to listen to great poetry by providing a clearing for thought through his cinematic style. Kiarostami prepares us for the "holy" by the

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[265] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin (A Wolf Lying in Wait)*, 86.

use of poetic style in his cinema, by reading poetry for us in his films, and by his own poems.

Elena and Sheibani on the Poetics of Kiarostami's Cinema: a Brief Review

Alberto Elena in his book *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* takes a considerable care to situate Kiarostami's cinema within the context of Persian poetry as well as Persian art and philosophy[266]. He explains that the spiritual tradition of classical Persian poetry informs Kiarostami's cinema. However, he indicates that it is necessary to avoid understanding it strictly in a mystical sense. He suggests that one should understand Kiarostami's spirituality as a counter-narrative of Islamic culture of censorship and backwardness practiced by the government. He tries to draw a distinction between the mystical Persian poetry and religion. He clearly appreciates the spirituality of Persian poetry and thought for its philosophical and aesthetic values. He also discusses the influence of modern Iranian poet such as Sohrab Sepehri and Forugh Farrokhzad on Kiarostami's cinema and Kiarostami's close relationship with poetry as a constant source of inspiration, pleasure and comfort throughout his life. Elena admits that Poetry for Iranians, particularly for Kiarostami's generation played an essential role in their development and intellectual stimulation and resistance during Iran's social and political upheavals during 1962-79. Elena emphasizes on the relevance of poetry in analysing Kiarostami's cinema because it constantly demands our attention by its presence.

Khatereh Sheibani's main thesis in her *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution* is that the formal structure and

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[266] Alberto Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*.

visual aesthetic of Iranian art cinema can be traced back to Persian classical poetry[267].

Sheibani suggests that the major shift in post-revolutionary Iran was that the Persian

poetry as a main artistic mode for centuries replaced by the image as a central formal

expression. According to Sheibani, this mode of expression is a continuation of the

poetic cinema that emerged in the pre-revolution period. She uses the Russian

formalist concept of 'the dominant' to suggest that film becomes the dominant

national art form and the major expressive vehicle of modernity in shifting from

poetry to film. Simultaneously, she sees a connection between film and modern

poetry and explains that this shaped the characteristics of Iranian cinema in both form

and content.

She discusses how Kiarostami's filmmaking among Iranian art cinema is the

closest example which resembles a sub-genre of lyrical poetry – *ghazal* – found in

the poems of Hafiz (1315/1316-1389/1390). She believes that Kiarostami's films

reflected a form of poetic cinema which is called Cinema-yi Taghazzuli, the "lyrical

cinema."[268] Ghazal is a form of classical Persian poetry which was sophisticatedly

used by Hafiz[269] to articulate his philosophic and social thoughts. Sheibani explains

that the themes in Hafiz's poetry already existed in the tradition of Persian poetry,

particularly in the *ghazal*'s of Sa'di[270] and concludes that what makes Hafiz's

poetry unique among his Iranian readers is his sublime use of a lyrical form.

Sheibani, then, claims that Kiarostami's film language shows an equal passion for

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[267] Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution,* 26.
[268] Ibid., 27.
[269] Hafiz, *Divan-i Hafiz*, edited by Parviz Natel Khanlari (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1362/1938).
[270] Sa'di, *Ghazaliyat-i Sa'di* (Tehran: Muasseseh-i Mutale'at va tahghighat-i Farhangi, 1361/1982).

form[271]. Although, Hafiz's *ghazals* lack a semantic unity between the couplets which make a multi-meaning form, they bring a dynamic harmony out of apparent disharmony. This non-linear, multi-meaning structure of each *ghazal*, demands its readers to become 'attentive' to its meaning. Sheibani's discussion is that Iranian filmmakers – in Iran's history of cinematography from its introduction in the twentieth century – adopted and adapted this non-linear style of Hafiz's *ghazal* to the realm of film. She argues that the semi-linear or non-linear structure of Iranian poetic films is an established aesthetic practice in which Iranian filmmakers create a kind of images that stand alongside the film narrative in order to reinforce the poetic aura of a film[272].

For her, Kiarostami's cinema, its aesthetics and its nature of being a 'non-narrative' cinema and even its 'formal poetic structure' are very similar to Hafiz's poetry. She states Kiarostami's filmmaking grammar "reaches beyond the more visually oriented poetics in favour of what I call 'abstract poetics' or 'philosophical poetics', similar to *ghazal*."[273] This 'abstract poetics' of Kiarostami's films stems from the very essence of everyday life which Kiarostami finds poetic; she admits

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[271] She states that Hafiz transformed *ghazal* both in content and form and shaped a new form of *ghazal*. Sheibani draws on Baha u-din Khoramshai's comments about Hafiz's *Divan* that the verses in Hafiz's *ghazals* look semantically fragmented inherited from the non-linear structure of the Qur'ran (Ibid., 31).

[272] She supports her argument by examples of two Mehrjui's films, *Sara* (1993) and *Leyla* (1996), and Ali Hatami's TV serial, *Hizar Dastan* (1979-89) in more details and some other directors in general. She believes that the poetic moments of the character in Mehrjui's *Sara* is created by aesthetic elements of an specific frame, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, and choice of an specific actress (for her innocent but serious face) and the celebration of colour by depicting a carpet shop. And *Leyla* is visually poetic for symbolically use of colour in different shots. *Leyla*'s poetics is, too, charged with spiritual and mystical moments, she claims, referring to the scene in which a sound montage is accompanied by the depiction of Leyla's uncle playing tar.. For Sheibani, the architecture of Leyla's house in the film is regarded as a highly symbolic element. Sheibani detects a 'general poeticity' in the scenes, costumes, music and lighting in Hatami's Hizar Dastan. She claims that "The rich colour and texture…and the traditional costumes and carpets create a lyrical and nostalgic space," as well as "the images of calligraphy and the presentation of traditional Iranian beauty through close-ups of the veiled" female character of the film.

[273] Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution,* 34.

Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa's[274] claim about the aesthetics of the film *Where is the Friend's House?* enhanced by "a system of narrative based on...a sense of metaphysical absences and presences,"[275] and states that "This is one of the underlying principles of mystical poetry and philosophy, in which the artist relies on his or her sense of imagination rather than a rational thought and direct observation."[276]

The basis of Sheibani's thesis is founded on a comparison between the structural form of Hafiz*'s ghazal* and that of cinema. Sheibani states that the non-linear approach of Kiarostami in *Where is the Friends House?* is similar to Hafiz's *ghazal* in that the unfolding of its meaning brings harmony out of the apparent disharmony. The constant interruption of the narrative with irrelevant images and alternative stories has been used by Kiarostami as a technique that enriched his non-linear philosophical cinema.

However, we should have in mind that there are some fundamental differences between these two artistic forms. The task of a writer is to take the words from an already existing dictionary and thus is merely aesthetical, whilst, that of a filmmaker is double: he should first form a dictionary of image from chaos – there is not an already existing dictionary of images – and then create his work of art in terms of aesthetics. In what follows, I will expand my argument about this difference between the task of a writer and that of a filmmaker with the help of Pasolini's essay on the poetry of cinema.

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[274] Ibid., 36.
[275] Ibid., 57.
[276] Ibid.*,* 36.

Pasolini on Poetic Cinema

The poetic conception is articulated in Pasolini's essay *The Cinema of Poetry*. This essay was read in Italian by Pier Paolo Pasolini in June 1965 at the first New Cinema Festival at Pesaro and then appeared in *Cahiers du Cinema* No.171, October 1965. In order to clarify the characteristics of the cinema of poetry, Pasolini draws an analogy between literature and cinema by referring to "free indirect discourse" and "interior monologue", and by highlighting examples from emerging directors of Italian neorealism and French new-wave such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci, Jean-Luc Godard to classic cinema directors such as Charlie Chaplin, Kenji Mizoguchi and Ingmar Bergman. Pasolini attempts to explain the "language of poetry" theoretically and considers the possibility of practicality of it in cinema.

Pasolini's first concern in this essay is the fundamental difference between the basis of a literary language and cinematic language; that is to say, the former primary objective is communication while communication through cinematic language appears to be "arbitrary and devious". Communication occurs through words, not images in men's quotidian life. This causes the cinematic language to appear as "a pure and artificial abstraction". This means that cinema is a series of insignificant signs[277]. The autonomous system of signs by gesture can be employed as an unique instrumental language for communication[278]. The objects that we encounter in our everyday life compose a world of meanings which, in Pasolini's

[277] Pasolini explains that semiotics studies the "system of linguistic signs" just for their existence and indifferently ignores the possibility of other sign-system, so to speak a system of signs by gestures which is a compliment to the linguistic signs. A word followed by a certain facial expression or a gesture has one meaning, followed by another conveys another. The system of signs accompanied by gestures forms an autonomous system and can be considered as the object of a study.

[278] Pasolini clarifies what he means by system of signs by gesture through an example: while walking alone in a street, one can be in a continual dialogue with one's surrounding environment without any use of systems of linguistic sign and only through the mediation of the images that constitutes this environment, for instance, the gesture of the passersby, their silence and their expression and their collective reactions as well as the traffic signs, indicators, etc.

words, "utter a brute speech". Similarly, audiences siting in the movie theatre are equally accustomed to "visually read reality". Pasolini assigns to this entire world of significant images – which is enriched by memory and dreams – the term 'im-signs' (i.e. image-signs). All men's dreams contain a series of im-signs which shared all the characteristics of the cinematic sequence, for instance: close-ups, long shots, etc. Similar to spoken language which has its instrumental foundation, this whole complex world of significant images - composed of gestures, of various signs rooted in the environment and of memories and dreams – form the instrumental foundation of cinematic communication[279].

Pasolini draws a distinction between the writers and the filmmakers, that is to say, the act of the writer is to elaborate the meaning of a sign which is classified in an incomplete but perfect dictionary, whereas the work of filmmaker is to take his signs from chaos as there is no dictionary of images[280]. According to Pasolini, the act of the writer is aesthetic invention, whereas the work of the filmmaker is primarily linguistic invention, then aesthetic. "It is true that a sort of cinematic dictionary has been established, or rather a convention, which has this curiosity it is stylistic before

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[279] In this sense, there is a difference between the instruments of poetic and philosophical communication and those of the visual communication: the former is already matured and perfected historically, while the latter is brute and instinctive – all the gestures and the surrounding reality as well as dreams and memories are pre-grammatical. Therefore, cinematic language is of the irrational type. That explains its oniric nature while inevitably concrete because of its objective status.

[280] Pasolini describes the act of the writer and states that it adds to the reality of the language, as it is a function both of the writer's historical situation and of the history of the words. In other words, when the writer makes use of language he increases the historicity for the word – that is a growth of the meaning. In doing so, he serves it both as a linguistic system and as a cultural tradition. However, the words he uses are already exist in the dictionary, ready for use. On the other hand, the act of filmmaker is a doubled one: he is first obliged to grasp the im-signs from chaos, posit it in the realm of possibility, and then he is obliged to do the same tasks of the writer which is to enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression.

being grammatical", Pasolini writes, "…cinema will never attain a true grammatical normativity."[281]

The words used by the writer have cultural and grammatical background. Although the meaning of them evolves over time, they dominate the objective world. But the objects cannot penetrate the words. Objects allow no modification by themselves. They are what they are at each particular moment. Therefore, there is certain determinism to the objects of the cinematic images. The task of filmmaker is, thus, to single out objects from chaos at the very moment of filmmaking, and consider them as classified in the hypothetical dictionary of im-signs, of a community which communicates through images. Pasolini considers a 'common heritage' for the images or im-signs, even if there is no classified dictionary of them and even if they are not ordered by a grammar. In his words, "Thus in reality, "brute objects" do not exist: all are meaningful enough by nature to become symbolic signs."[282] In sum, if im-sign have a grammatical history, they do also have a pre-grammatical history which is already long and intense. So there is a similarity between a poet and a filmmaker, they both refer to the pre-grammatical history: the poet to the pre-grammatical in the spoken sign and the filmmaker to the pre-grammatical in the objects. The realm of cinematic language available to the filmmaker is composed of images which are always concrete. Here, Pasolini comes to the crucial distinction between literary work and cinematic work. He concludes that cinema is an artistic language that while it can be parable it is never a directly conceptual expression like philosophical language. Thus, cinematic language contains an expressive force; it has the power to embody the dream which in turn

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[281] According to Pasolini, even if we assume that there exist grammatical signs in cinema, they consist of a world of chronologically exhausted signs, for example, the cars of 40s or the clothes fashion of 30s.

[282] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", *Movies and Methods 1*, 544

constitutes its essentially metaphoric character. This is how he comes to this conclusion that the cinematic language is essentially a *language of poetry*[283]. He believes that cinema suffers a failure in grasping the language of poetry (bearing in mind that time (1965) he read this essay, was the blossom of Italian neorealism and of its French counterpart[284]). He attributes a double nature to cinema (or the language of image sign). One is 'subjective' as the linguistic archetype of im-sign consists of the images of dreams and memories, the images which are essentially for communication for oneself or only *indirect* communication with others (assuming that they have common reference). Im-signs are endowed with an immediate basic subjectivity, a quality which entirely belongs to the realm of poetry. And the other one is that the 'objective' nature of cinema as im-sign has another archetype substantially different from those of memories and dreams. This architypes, namely the gestures integrated into the spoken language, belong to a type of "communication with others". They are "common to all and strictly functional" and are "rather flatly informative". This double nature of cinema is imperceptible as irrational component of cinema and cannot be eliminated[285].

He believes that the technical tradition of the "language of poetry" in cinema is bound to a form of "free indirect cinematic discourse." Pasolini defines this term in relation to the author's knowledge of the character he creates and his ability to reveal the character's specific psychology and language. In his words: "the author

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[283] Pasolini explains that what practically constitutes the cinematic tradition is a 'language of prose'. This led to construction of a narrative convention and consequently to the emergence of "…fallaciously critical comparisons with the theatre and the novel." Although we can draw analogy between narrative convention and the language of written prose communication, what counts in this analogical comparison, is only an exterior aspect: "illustrative and logical methods", while they differ in a fundamental element: "the rational".

[284] Among the films entered the 1965 Pesaro film Festival was Ibrahim Golestan's *The Brick and the Mirror* (*Khest va Ayeneh*) (1965). Ibrahim Golestan is among the generation of Iranian new-wave directors.

[285] Posolini states that literature also has a double nature: language of prose and language of poetry. But they are separable and that is why they have their own history.

penetrates entirely into the spirit of his character, of whom he thus adopts not only the psychology but also the language". Henceforth, cinema of poetry does not consist of objective shots (indirect discourse) nor of the subjective shots (direct discourse), but of a point of view that has liberated itself from the two. By making a comparison between Dante and Carl Theodor Dreyer, he explains that "In direct discourse the author puts himself aside and allows his character to speak, in quotation marks." He believes that free indirect subjective discourse was not achieved up to the 60s[286]. However the difference between the language of narrative cinematic prose and the language of poetry is very subtle due to the fact that "[T]he most poetic cinematic metaphor possible is always closely bound to the other nature of cinema, the strictly communicative one of prose."[287]

While in "free indirect discourse", the author adopts the psychology and language of his characters, no matter if they are from the same social class, in the "interior monologue," author and character are from the same social class and generation. In his analogy between literature and cinema, Pasolini comes to the point that "free indirect subjective" is neither closely related to "free indirect discourse" nor "interior monologue". As cinema lacks the faculty of interiorization and abstraction which the word has, "interior monologue" in images does not perfectly correspond to "free indirect monologue" in literature. Nor does to "free indirect discourse", due to the fact that the institutional language of cinema is infinite in possibility; the image is the vocabulary of cinema, the filmmaker has to create it

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[286] He excludes the surrealist directors such as Luis Buñuel's *The Andalusian Dog* (1929). Surrealists attained the language of poetry thanks to the poetic nature of surrealism: its oniric nature of dreams and of unconscious memory.

[287] In literature, naturalism was the first platform on which free indirect discourse was formed. To achieve free indirect discourse, the writer employs terms which belong to the vocabulary of his character's social milieu, by means of "relived discourse". The characteristic common to all relived discourse is that social consciousness of the milieu and the characters are inseparable. This reminds of what Marx says: "consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness."

constantly and by doing so, he produces a universal language for everybody has eyes. Images are uncatalogable whereas words can belong to various social categories. The immediate material that a filmmaker has in hand is the look: the look by a peasant and by a middle class person directed upon the same object. These are essentially different as the same object offers two different faces to the two looks. It is quite possible that the writer is able to differentiate his own language from the language of the character; it is also possible that a director distinguishes his own look – linguistic basis of cinema – from that of his character. But this distinction is purely psychological and social and not linguistic.

Pasolini in his critical and theoretical formulation of "free indirect subjective" concludes that the fundamental characteristic of it has not a linguistic nature but a stylistic one. It is an "interior monologue" excluding its conceptual and philosophical element. Endowed with a very flexible stylistic possibility, "free indirect subjective", liberates the expression possibility supressed by traditional convention narrative through a sort of revival of the origin of cinema: its oniric, barbaric, irregular and aggressive nature. He takes examples of Antonioni, Bertolucci and Godard as case studies to analyse this. He refers to instances form *Red Desert* (1964) in which the Antonioni's viewpoint becomes one with his neurotic heroin Giuliana's. Instead referring to universally recognizable poetic features, Pasolini prefers to illustrate the characteristic of "free indirect subjective" by explaining the technique: the technique which he calls "obsessive framing". He first refers to Antonioni's formal ideas and interprets his experimental use of colour as the materialized psychological state of the neurotic protagonist (for example: grey reflects uncertainty or red shows her sense of danger). To demonstrate stylistic operation (obsessive framing) in this film, Pasolini takes into consideration

Antonioni's two strategies: successive shots of the same object with two viewpoints with slightly different angels, or with two different lenses, and a series of shots with static camera setups in which characters enter and leave the frame. Therefore, "free indirect subjective" resulted from both the character and narrative perspective and psychology and aesthetic of filmmaker[288]. The amalgamation of two viewpoints (filmmaker and character) creates an ambiguity which remains as an unresolved tension which in turn creates pure pictorial beauty: the cinema of poetry.

Unlike Antonioni's use of world-fragments captured in a frame and the transformation into an autonomous beauty which does not refer to anything out of itself, Bertolucci's interest is less pictorial. Bertolucci's formalism does not metaphorically transform reality into various mysteriously autonomous places (like Antonioni's pictorial style). Bertolucci's still shots adhere, instead, to reality leading to the revelation of a certain profound and confused love for that portion of reality. The vision of the protagonist (neurotic woman) in *Red Desert* merges Antonioni's world-view undistinguishably whereas in Bertolucci's films – Pasolini draws an example on *Before the Revolution* (1964) – there is a *contamination* between the world vision of the protagonist (neurotic woman) and that of the author which is analogous but not easy to understand as they are "being so closely intermixed and

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[288] In January 7, 1965, Pasolini answered a letter from a reader of journal *Vie Nuove* who was upsets that Antonio's film had won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival instead Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). He courteously defended Antonni's film and wrote back: "Through this stylistic mechanism, Antonioni freed himself: finally he could see the world with his own eyes, because he identified his own delirious aesthetic vision with the vision of a neurotic woman. It's true that such an identification is somewhat arbitrary; but the arbitrariness in this case is a part of his poetic freedom: having once discovered the liberating mechanism, the poet can get drunk on his freedom. It doesn't matter that it is a fallacy to make his "frames" of the world as it appears to a real neurotic coincide with the world as it appears to a neurotic poet; to the extent that this fallacious operation has become the non-poetic and uncultivated residue of the film, to that very degree on the contrary his "poetic drunkenness" is appropriate. The important point would be that there is a substantial possibility for an analogy between the neurotic vision of the poet and that of his neurotic character. There's no doubt that the possibility for an analogy of this kind exists. And its contradiction is then a cultural fact, which instead of objectifying itself in the character, subjectifies herself in the author. Therefore precisely through the extraordinary formalistic success this time the imposition of the sociological theme of alienation isn't in the least fallacious or worthless."

having the same style."[289] His uncommon duration of a shot or a montage-rhythm which structurally derived from the framing and montage-rhythm of Rosselinian neorealism, like *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1948) – expands to such an extent that it shapes a sort of technical scandal[290] as Bertolucci is in constant deviation from the system of the film by insisting on details in digression: each Bertolluci's film is a "temptation to make another film."[291] This reveals the temptation of a liberated author to make another film beyond the film he is making and continually threatens to cease it in order to follow an inspiration which is "latent of the author's love for the poetic world of his own life experiences."[292] Unlike Antonioni's mystified subjectivity which was introduced by a method of false objectivism, Bertolucci's subjectivity is so naked and raw which seems very natural in a film. Pasolini states:

> Beneath the style generated by the disoriented, disorganized, beset-by-details state of mind of the protagonist, is the level of the world as seen by an author no less neurotic, dominated by elegiac, elegant, but never "classicist" spirit.[293]

Godard's "obsessive framings", for their part, are not elegiac, as in the case of Bertolucci, and have not the characteristics of classicist formalism, as in the case of Antonioni: it is in principle technical and poetic by its very nature. In his cinema there is no moral imperative, no restrains, no modesties. He has none of the conservative characteristics which are present even in Antonioni's and Bertolucci's cinema. His formalism is ontological. Yet his cinema shares a "neurotic dominant state of mind" of the protagonist to establish his technical liberty. His characters have the obsessive attachment to objects, but his camera does not insist on a single

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[289] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", *Movies and Methods* 1, Ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 542-558.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

object to establish a cult of the objects as form (as in Antonioni) nor a cult of objects as "a symbol of lost world" (as in Bertolucci). Comparing Godard's style with neo-cubism, Pasolini Writes:

> Behind the narrative of his films, behind the long "free indirect subjective" which imitate his characters' state of mind, there always unwinds a mechanical and asymmetrical film, made for the pure pleasure of restoring a reality broken by technique and reconstructed by a vulgar Braque.[294]

Films belonging to the "cinema of poetry" have a double nature: on the surface, the director employs a neurotic state of mind of a sick character while beneath without any pretext the director creates a totally expressive film. In other words, the use of "free indirect subjective" and neurotic characters are only a pretext enabling the director to speak indirectly.

The basic and fundamental characteristic of the technico-stylistic tradition of "the cinema of poetry" is technically defined as "making the camera felt."[295] Their ambiguity, therefore, resides in the camera itself. Commenting on Pasolini's cinema of poetry, Deleuze refers to this point as a "reflecting consciousness" distinct from that of character and filmmaker or "camera consciousness…a properly cinematographic cogito."[296] This camera consciousness is the main difference between "the cinema of prose" and "the cinema of poetry". It does not necessarily mean that "the cinema of prose" cannot be poetic like the great cinematic poems of Charlie Chaplin, Mizoguchi and Bergman. As the camera presence is never felt in this cinema, their language cannot be that of "the cinema of poetry". Its poetry resides elsewhere than in the language (consider as linguistic technic), its poetry is

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[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image,* 71.

an inner poetry as in the narrative of Chekhov and Melville. Pasolini makes a technical list of how "the camera can be felt":

> The alternation of different lenses, a 25 or a 300 on the same face, the abuse of the zoom with its long focuses which stick to things and dilate them like quick-rising loaves, the continual counterpoints fallaciously left to chance, the kicks in the lens, the tremblings of the hand-held camera, the exasperated tracking-shots, the breaking of continuity for expressive reasons, the irritating linkages, the shots that remain interminably on the same image.

…"The grandeur of my finger"…

I argue that Kiarostami's film 'style' is poetic. Kiarostami along with his French and Italian counterparts was part of a process of forming a common 'techno-stylistic' tradition: that is, as Pasolini states, a cinema language of poetry. This emerging tradition needs a special language in order to express the inner vision of chosen characters. If we study his oeuvre's style, we can find many elements of the cinema of poetry explained by Pasolini in his essay "Poetry of Cinema", discussed above. The static long shots of the hill with zigzag pathway in *Where is the Friend's House?,* of the Badi's yellow Range Rover through the outskirts of Tehran in *Taste of Cherry¸* the fragmentation of space when Ahmad is desperately looking for his friend in the narrow alleys of Poshteh at night with the old carpenter in *Where is the Friend's House?,* and so on are just a few examples demonstrating Kiarostami's special cinematic language to create poetry in his films.

When we turn the emphasis from Kiarostami's realism to its poeticism and its production of optical and sound situations, the ground on which the common view of Kiarostami's cinema stands, begins to shift. No longer can we see it simply in terms of its commitment to record reality. All those characteristics which justified that view – its associations with non-professional actors, contemporary social topics dealing with ordinary people, combining fictional drama with documentary, and

location shooting – must be put into contact with something else. The settings retained the reality, but they are no longer situations that disclose actions as they would in traditional realism. As discussed in chapter 2, movement-image shows 'sensory-motor' link between stimulus and response[297]. The time-image is formed when such sensory-motor connections in the image are suspended or broken[298]. When the situations no longer lead to actions, images create pure optical and sound situations. In time-image, there is something excessively strong in the image, something that is irreducible to what occurs or what is understood or sensed by the characters. As Shohibi and Finn put it: "Time-images are connotative rather than denotative, imbuing objects with the number of associations."[299] As analysed earlier, the settings in Kiarostami's *The Traveller* corresponds to this paradigm, in particular when Qassem arrives in Tehran. The audience can no longer understand a sensory-motor image to which they react by identifying with the protagonist. Instead they undergo "a dream-like connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs."[300] Although, *The Traveller* exploits the effects of documenting social reality and combines this with fictional reconstruction by way of a formalist aesthetics, its reality effects would be nothing without the visual stylisation and theatrical staging that characterizes each shot. This film makes striking compositions out of the surroundings. Remember when Qassem watches Tehrani children swimming in a pool through the glass, rather than extending into movement, the pure optical and sound-image enters into relations with a virtual image, and "forms a circuit within," as if it has linked up with an image we recall from somewhere else. This happens through the capturing the everydayness, a meticulous representation of the dull,

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[297] Ibid., 70.
[298] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 18.
[299] Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn, "The Open Image: Poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema", *Screen* 44:1 (Spring 2003):35-57.
[300] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 4.

banal common places of everyday living. The pool, the image is no longer a particular place in Tehran, but (to adapt the Deleuzian term) "any-spaces-whatever." Although this film is structured by a quest through a realist location, this location is stylized – naturalistic specificity loses the specific geographical or spatial coordinate of a particular place and reorders references. This indeterminate environment attracts a new type of protagonist who, because images no longer obey sensory-motor rules, tends to 'see' rather than 'act.' For this reason, the role of the child (Qassem) who mostly looks on in wonder or confusion while unable to intervene, becomes significant. In this process where the child gazes and the pure optical and sound image meet, poetry enters the film. Because Qassem's quests become a meandering circular itinerary, the realistic locations break down into disconnected spaces. The film's cinematography has the effect of erasing the precise coordinates – the narrow streets of Malayer or streets of Tehran – and instead gives rise to disconnected spaces in which the various sensory-motor linkages begin to come apart. In this film, the narrative is driven by its character's attempt to watch the National team football match but the city gradually dissolves into disconnected spaces and instead signifies an unstable zone of inexplicable modern atrocity. The treatment of the environment in the film places an emphasis on the relationship between the character and his surroundings where he is moulded in the image of the environment. As a result of this "free indirect" relationship between the character and his surroundings (where the vision of the city is filtered through that of the character), poetic images are possible in every scene.

The disconnected spaces are reflected in the editing of *The Traveller* as well as in its mise-en-scène. Instead of normal editing which ensures spatial continuity from shot to shot, the editing in this film tends to present a given scene as

disconnected fragments of space. This kind of editing highlights the instability of space, spatial disruption and disorientation. For example, in a scene where Qassem queus to buy a ticket for the football match, the camera alternates from Qassem's medium shots to the close-ups of disembodied ticket seller's hands in the act of selling the tickets. There is no common space from shot to shot. Or when Qassem was shot from different angles: in the que between other people while his disconnected unfriendly conversion with other people is around the subject of their positioning in the line. Several low-angle shots capture medium shots of Qassem dwarfed between the torsos of adults. Qassem also shots from behind the bars around the stadium. The successive shots of Qassem from different angles symbolize the hurrying-around of modern Tehran. In this film we encounter the world fragments, imprisoned in the frame and transformed by it into a fragmented autonomous image of reality, which resembles the formalism of Antonioni. Kiarostami's frame in this film is less pictorial than Antonioni's and does not intervene metaphorically upon reality sectioning it into many mysteriously autonomous places like pictures. Walking alone in the Tehran's streets, Qassem constitutes a continual dialogue between himself and the surroundings and encounters objects charged with meanings, and which utter a brute speech by their very presence. Thanks to the stylistic condition created by "free indirect subjective," Kiarostami relives the modernization process of Iran through the 'look' of his adolescent protagonist. Holding the viewer in an extreme way to the image both temporally and spatially (long and wide shot of one scene) is one of the characteristics of Kiarostami's cinema that resembles Bertolucci's formalism. Kiarostami's frame adheres to reality according to the canon of a certain realist manner – according to a technique of poetic language – followed by the classicist manner from Chalie Chaplin to Ingmar

Bergman. Similar to Bertolucci, Kiarostami's cinema contains many still shots upon a portion of reality which is called, in Pasolini's words; "obsessive framing." For instance, the long shot of the stadium at the end of *The Traveller*, or the long-take of the zigzag path on the hill between Koker and Poshtih in *Where is my Friend's House?*, or the long-take in *Through the Olive Trees* depicting Hossein and his love Tahereh fading through an olive orchard and a long zigzag path across the valley, or the distant shot of the journalist (Kiarostami's alter ego) in *Life and Nothing More* driving his yellow Renault through the zigzag path on the mountain in northern Iran, or the distant shots of Badi's Range Rover in the zigzag road of Tehran's outskirts in *Taste of Cherry*, or the static shots of the car of a group of documentary filmmakers driving through a winding road toward the a village in the outskirts of Kurdestan in *The Wind Will Carry Us*. The distant view and the length of the take devoid of any classical action make the audience to focus on the image and perceive the abstraction imposed on the environment. In *Where is the Friend's House?*, Kiarostami had the path especially built for the film and planted a tree on top of the hill which shows his concern for not just recording reality but charging it with certain poetic resonances. Nonetheless, some of these are symbolic. For instance, a single tree in Persian poetry symbolizes friendship, or a window that is one of main component of mis-en-scène in *Where is the Friend's House?* is a symbol of knowledge and wisdom or connection to new and fresh space – in particular in Sepehri's poems – or house is a symbol of human's being and his inner or heart. House is also sometimes used in Sepehri's poetry as a symbol of a special poetic glance at world, or a symbol of the world of thought. Apple is a symbol of vision and knowledge or wine is a symbol of

losing the calculative mind and logic to enter into a world of trance and of impossible[301].

"Near the tree is a wooded lane, greener than the dreams of God."

Abbas Kiarostami, one still from *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), colour thirty-five millimetre film, one hundred and eighteen minutes, © MK2

Kiarostami's static long-shot frame and its duration give the cinematic image "an openness for thought" allowing a pure optical and sound situation to emerge. In contrast to closed symbolism and instead of extending into movement, the actual image – the image that is objective and perceived – in his films enters into a relationship with virtual image creating an indiscernible actual and virtual image. Kiarostami in an interview with Nassia Hamid about the final scene of *Through the Olive Trees*, where two figures disappear into almost invisible dots in the distance, states:

> The filmmaker has carried the film up to here, and now it is given up to the audience to think about it and watch these characters from very far away. I like the last shot because of its openness. Until that moment social differences were dividing these two people, but as human beings they were equal. The class system separated them, but

[301] Mehdi Sharifian, *Symbol in Sohrab Sepehri's Poetry,* PhD thesis, Hamedan University Iran.

in nature and in long shot I felt that these two could get closer to their real selves, that is to their inner needs, without giving any value to the social norms[302].

Through disconnected spaces and static long-shots of a portion of reality, Kiarostami achieves poetic universalism. Moreover, his characters although less neurotics than Antonioni's, are dominated by an elegiac spirit similar to Bertolucci's characters. Kiarostami's use of an elegiac protagonist reminds us of F. W. Schlegel's explanation of elegy as the form of transcendental poetry:

> It begins as satire in the absolute difference of ideal and real, hovers in between as elegy, and ends as idyll with the absolute identity of the two … This sort of poetry should untie the transcendental raw material and preliminaries of a theory of poetic creativity – often met with in modern poets – with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring that is present in Pindar, in the lyric of fragments of Greeks, in the classic elegy, and among the modern, in Goethe. In all its descriptions, this poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry[303].

When Qassem undertakes his quest in *The Traveller* many obstacles are put in his path to fulfil his ambition by interfering unhelpful adults. Qassem's confusion in the world of adult is the key to the film's emotional power. One might have expected Kiarostami to shot many close-ups expressing this confusion, but although the image of Qassem's baffled face is one we are likely to take away from the film, there are not many close-ups. Instead, Kiarostami prefers medium close-ups moving out to extreme long-shots blocking direct identification with Qassem's look and making the audience see through the "free indirect subjective" relation between the look of the character and a given image between the Qassem's look and the look of the camera. The most confusing sequences in the film, both for Qassem and for the audience are the wandering through Tehran. The sets create anxiety because of the meandering structure of the film in general, and this sequence in particular. This directly

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[302] Nassia Hamid, "Near and Far: Interview with Abbas Kiarostami." *Sight and Sound*, 7:2 (February 1997): 22-24.
[303] Friedrich Schlegel is quoted in Eric Williams, *The Mirror and the Word: Modernism, Literary Theory, and George Trakl* (London: University of Nebraska Press 1993), 70.

confronts what Deleuze calls "the child' motor helplessness in the adults' world."[304] This characteristic of Kiarostami's cinema reaches its peak in *Where is the Friend's House?* in which the anxiety and the helplessness of the child lost in the narrow streets of Poshtih is encapsulated in the film's title, a plea to which nobody has a proper answer. In this film, everyday banality become mysteriously threatening, for instance, in the sequence in which a man dwarfed and bent over by a pack of twigs he is carrying, or in another showing the brown trousers on the washing line which Ahmad (the protagonist) believes mistakenly to belong to his friend. The protagonist's quest is dead-end because of the ambiguous and imprecise directions that the inhabitants of the village give him while we hear off-camera sounds like the meowing of cats and the barking of a dog, all more puzzling and ambiguous for their absence in the scene. These images are not reducible to realism but a reflexive motif on the technology that projects the images that we see. These images are a contamination between the child's vision of the world and Kiarostami's, which are inevitably analogous but difficult to perceive, being closely intermixed and having the same style.

Kiarostami normally appears in his films either physically or figuratively by choosing an actor to play his role in the films. Unlike narrative cinema where the protagonist is the moral measure against which the viewer assesses all other characters in a film – while the protagonist with whom we most identify, and we can do this as he is presented as sympathetic – the presence of unsympathetic characters is central to many Kiarostami's films. This marks the divergence from the narrative cinema and connects instead with a development out of represented characters in particular by Antonioni. Kiarostami takes it further through his physical and

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[304] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 3.

figurative presence which is evident in many of his films, including *The Traveller,*

Close-Up, Life and Nothing more, Through the Olive Trees and *The Wind Will Carry*

US. The difficulty of identification relates to the muted performances Kiarostami

draws from his amateur actors. To put it in Deleuzian terms when identification with

characters takes place, the sensory-motor remains intact because there is a connection

between what is seen and a motor reaction (the audience) identification with that

character in that situation. The failure of identification with characters breaks the

sensory-motor chain and thus liberates the senses in the viewer. The audience

becomes more receptive to other aspects of the film. Thus, it facilitates connection

with virtual images which will be retained in the audience's memory.

To raise money in order to buy a ticket to Tehran and attend the big football

match, Qassem borrows a non-working camera from his friend (Akbar) and scams

every kid at school, claiming to be taking their portraits. Here, we see an

extraordinary scene with the duration of 3 minutes and 58 cuts showing repeating

medium close-ups of Qassem, Akbar and school kids. This scene is preceded by three

static shots of a scene in which characters enter and leave the frame. This is another

example of Kiarostami's "obsessive framing." Qassem is an amoral character whose

act of deception using a broken camera adds self-reflexive ambiguity to the film and

criticises the role of Kiarostami himself as a seemingly insensitive and aloof

manipulator of his casts. It is a self-mirroring scene that functions as an act of

criticizing a filmmaker who will eventually lead to an attempt to eliminate him in his

later films. These 58 cuts are the intense moment of expression, the moments which

are, in Pasolini's word "insistences of the framing and the montage-rhythms."[305] The

structural realism of these moments is charged by means of the uncommon duration

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[305] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry."

of a shot or a montage-rhythm. This scene is adequate evidence confirming Kiarostami's cinema of poetry had begun to flourish as it has the characteristics of the "free in direct subjective" image which Pasolini described under the heading of "obsessive framing."

The self-critical approach of Kiarostami is also evident in *The Wind Will Carry Us*. The story of this film is about a group of documentary filmmakers going to a small mountain village in Kurdistan wishing to produce a documentary film about the villagers' strange and extraordinary death ceremony. Their subject is a hundred-year-old lady who is sick. Of the group of three we just see one (Behzad) waiting for the lady to die so they can film the burial ceremony. The group are greeted by a young boy (Farzad), who guides them to where they stay and shows Behzad around but he finally turns his back on him. Behzad spends his time exploring the village, "wandering distractedly from one place to another."[306] The unsympathetic central character is the filmmaker (Behzad) who is insensitive and irresponsible in his attempt to manipulate and exploit the poor rural villagers he has come to film, just like Kiarostami himself who travels to remote places to make films. Kiarostami's reflexive and regressive approach casts irony on the established symbolic meaning of road and traveller (a transcendental journey in search of truth) in Persian poetry[307]. Kiarostami's autocritique is best described by Schlegel as "simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry."[308] Although Kiarostami's poetic film is engaged with a number of issues such as the question of life and death, it is "a cinema of cinema" to adapt

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[306] Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 153.

[307] Journey usually have a central role in Persian poetry, for example in Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm's (better known as Attar of Nishapur) *The Conference of the Birds* (1117), trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 1984). which is a long sufi poem which tells the story of the longing of a group of birds who desire to know the great *Simorgh*. The group begin their journey under the guidance of a leader bird toward the land of *Simorgh*. But one by one they stop their journey because they are not able to endure the difficult journey.

[308] Friedrich Schlegel is quoted in Eric Williams, *The Mirror and the Word: Modernism, Literary Theory, and George Trakl,* 70.

Schlegel's term with a self-critical awareness of its own cinematic nature and the power to construct meaning through cinematic techniques. In a disturbing scene, during a moment of angry frustration, Behzad on the hillside kicks a tortoise onto its back and leave it stranded, but it manages to turn its back over while Behzad drives back down the hill. This scene with a duration of 2 minutes and consisting of 9 cuts has some conventional reverse-shots of the character looking down on the back of the tortoise. However, it is the tortoise movement and struggling which is the dominant real time-image, beyond any conventional point of view or narrative requirement. As with similar scenes in Antonioni's cinema, a reductive explanation is possible: when Behzad kicks the tortoise he gives expression to the way in which his individual alienation (bourgeois, urban) necessarily alienates him from existence itself (nature). There are three levels of being is expressed in this scene: the personal level, the social level of class difference and the existential level of nature. Such alienation is manifested in the very arbitrariness of his cruelty and the fact that it is an unthinking act rather than intentional cruelty for he does not stay to experience a sadistic pleasure from the tortoise struggling. Because Behzad is not a hero or villain or victim, identification with him and his act remains disconnected and open as does the image of the tortoise which is obsessively framed in excess of the narrative requirement. Kiarostami's insistence on certain details which are not central to or connected with the main point of the narrative is also repeated in his other film; for example, a rolling apple in this film and a metal cylinder in his *Close-Up*. Jean-Luc Nancy refers to these objects as rolling things and states:

> *The Wind Will Carry Us* plays back a scene in *Close-Up* – here a metal box in the shape of a cylinder, there an apple. They roll on the ground for a fairly long while, the camera following the object's erratic, aimless course in the film, like a movement that would exit from the film properly speaking (from the script, from the topic), but concentrate the property of kinematics and kinetics in its pure state: a little bit of motion

in its pure state, not even "picture" motion pictures, but rather in order to roll up or unwind in them an interminable driving force. It winds and in winding it does nothing but turn motionless, toward a stopping (almost a "freeze-frame") that posits the truth of motion just as motion points to the truth of a thing whose shape prompts it to roll. Thus the car that rides (rolls) through the films as well as through the olive trees are also a kinematic truth in two ways: first, as a box that looks; second, as incessant motion[309].

Kiarostami's "rolling things" – his insistence on the framing and the motion-rhythms – are a deviation in relation to the system of the film, to adapt Pasolini's terms:

> it is the temptation to make another film. It is the presence of the author, who, in a measureless liberty, goes beyond the film and threatens continually to abandon it for the sake of an unforeseen inspiration which is that latent of the author's love for the poetic world of his own life-experience.[310]

According to Deleuze, "crystal image" occurs when an actual optical image and a virtual image form a circuit and coalesce to exchange places[311]. The "crystal image" has, according to Deleuze "an internal disposition like a seed in relation to the environment."[312] Here the "crystal image" has the mise-en-abyme[313] structure, where the seed is the virtual image crystalizing the environment. For Deleuze environment denotes both the physical landscape and the diegetic reality of the film. Deleuze states that this work in the mirror must be "justified from elsewhere"[314] if it is to succeed, that is, the self-reflexivity must not be in and for itself. Another type of crystal image is the film-within-a-film which is one of the characteristics of Godard's film. This includes the film which takes its own process of making as its object. Some striking examples of this type of crystal image can be best seen in *Close-Up*, *Life and Nothing More*, *Through the Olive Trees*, *Taste of Cherry*, *Wind Will Carry*

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[309] Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'évidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami,* 26.
[310] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry".
[311] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 69. The most familiar example of the "crystal image" is the mirror, in Orson Wells' Citizen Kane (1941) where we see cane passing between to facing mirrors; as the mirror images recede infinitely, the actual and the virtual become indistinguishable.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid., 71.
[314] Ibid., 74.

Us. The overt reflexivity of Kiarostami's cinema is not merely a borrowing of other directors, but rather something integral to its form and always "justified from elsewhere" by the diegesis. In *Close-Up*, for instance, Kiarostami after reading in the press that a man fraudulently impersonated the filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, decides to investigate the case, filming the trial and thereafter reconstructing the whole for the camera in which the real people from the case play themselves. In a striking scene, Kiarostami uses grainy video stuck to give a Cinéma vérité effect for the real trial scene of the fake Makhmalbaf case. The dialogue between the judge and the Sabzian (fake Makhmalbaf) goes as following:

> **The judge**: Mr. Hossein Sabzian, you stand accused of fraud and attempted fraud. You are to defend yourself on these two accounts. How do you respond to these charges? If guilty, explain how you intended to commit fraud.
>
> **Sabzian**: As for the burglary…
>
> **The judge:** You're not on trial for the burglary, only fraud and attempted fraud.
>
> **Sabzian**: As far as the attempted fraud you mention, that was not my intention. Legally it might be an acceptable charge, but mentally it is not. I have a great interest in the arts. I saw lots of movies as a child. Later on, I'd play with my friends and pretend I was a director. Our games were mostly about the arts. But I didn't have the means to pursue those things, and I develop a kind of complex about it. For there to be fraud, there has to be some element of deception like using a

car or carrying a briefcase to look the part. I never did that. That was not my intention.

The judge: what was your motive for passing yourself off as Mr. Makhmalbaf?

Sabzian: I admire him for the film he's given society and the suffering he portrays in his films. He spoke for me and depicted my suffering, especially in *Marriage of the Blessed*, just as Mr. Kiarostami does especially in *The Traveller*. You could say I'm exactly like that traveller. I really liked that film. Due to his passion for football, that boy takes pictures with a camera that has no film to raise money to go to a football match. But he oversleeps and misses the game, as I feel I have done. He left behind and I think I also left behind. I know I'm guilty in the eyes of the court, but my love of art should be taken into account.

I should say that I am not sure if the Sabzian's dialogue where he compares himself to Qassem (*The Traveller*'s character), is scripted by Kiarostami himself or they are Sabzian's own words. In either way, this is a scene which looks reflexively at the director's own past and might be said to reconstitute the past. As explained in chapter 4, here past and present are inseparable and therefore forming a "crystal image." We can also find "crystal image" in Kiarostami's *Life and Nothing More*.

Life and Nothing More is filmed after a devastating earthquake in a village (Koker) in the north of Iran responsible for the death of over 50,000 people in 1990. It is a story of a middle class man travelling with his son in search of the young

protagonist of Kiarostami's previous film *Where Is the Friends House?* that was also filmed in the same village. This film partly takes place within the man's yellow Renault. The car not only serves as the site of the films central diegetic action, but also structures the very rhythm of the film. It is also a "rolling thing" which deviates from the main point of the film. They are wandering to see whether the actors, especially the young boy who played Ahmad, have survived after the earthquake. The middle-aged man quits the clogged main road for a dangerous mountain route. He discusses with various villagers the details of the disaster seeking for something solid to believe in the world, while driving his car through the ruined area towards Koker where he hopes he can find the boy. The man's role somehow represents Kiarostami himself; in other words, it is Kiarostami who is looking for his young non actor from his previous film. Although Kiarostami's presence is figuratively represented by the middle-age man, his worldview is contaminated by the child's. It is the child's questions and curiosity about the surroundings that guide the camera to explore the environment. In addition to portraying an inseparable past and present, this film has the anti-realistic consequence that characters who had never met before act as if they know each other intimately.

That is how we realise that deciphering the real is a hard task in this film and becomes even harder in the third film of Kiarostami's Koker trilogy, *Through the Olive Trees*, when we see the same couple, Hossein and Tahereh – who, as we already know from *Life and Nothing More*, lost their relatives –and were the focus of the second film. Soon enough we discover that their story turns out to be even more complicated as Elena points out:

> During the shooting of *Life and Nothing More* (*Life Goes On*) Kiarostami noticed that there was an undercurrent of tension in the relationship between the two young people chosen to play the couple

who got married just after the earthquake. This was because Hossein was in real life attracted to the girl and had been courting her for some time, but with no encouragement. *Through the Olive Trees* reconstructs this love story played out during the shooting of the previous film, and from there it follows that cinema plays an important role in the film, as a backdrop and a catalyst for the relationship.[315]

The fusion of reality and the poetic settings in *Through the Olive Trees* develops into a very complex "crystal image," – for there is a significant disparity between the past as it happened and the past which is recollected in the film – in which no component is entirely independent from any other. For all the films intricate design, the components in the film do not just slot precisely inside each other "but they open onto each other, overlapping."[316] In this regard the film formally reminds us of the musical round which, according to Deleuze, is an example of the crystal with its rhythmically modulated repetitions.

Maybe the most striking example of "crystal image" takes place in the closing scene of *Taste of Cherry.* The story in *Taste of Cherry*, again, happens almost entirely in the protagonist's – Badii's –Range Rover driving up and down of a hill, not looking for someone to pick-up, but for someone to help him to commit a planned suicide. He represents a being-towards-death in Heideggerian words. Heidegger states that death is singularly our own and nobody can die for us. What motivates Badii to wander in the outskirts of Tehran is merely death. He does not want to avoid death or to share his death. He knows that he has to die and has to die alone. Cruising through the city and a desert hill in the Tehran countryside, Badii acts as a tourist, apparently being very carefree and detached, looking at the world with

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[315] Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 109.

[316] Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn, "The Open Image: Poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema."

curiosity and engaging only in "idle Talk"[317]. Pivoting most of the film around Badii, the sequences are mostly shot from the interior of his car – although there are some external shots – separating the viewer from the world, firstly through the camera lens and secondly through the car's windows. Driving aimlessly and silently for three minutes, Badii begins making brief stops, listening to other men talking with phones and casually speaking with a few people all from a working class background. Badii's eyes reveal his unsatisfied desire as we discover this is another "Freudian drive"– death drive – behind the Range Rover's wheels[318]. Three passengers – in order of appearance, a young Kurdish soldier, and Afghan seminarian, and an old Turkish taxidermist – accompany him throughout the film. Conversing with his three passengers one by one, Badii tries to convince them to help him to end his own life. Eventually, the taxidermist agrees to his terms. Badii takes a taxi to his already dug grave under a cherry tree. The sky is raining and thundering; he lies in his burial site and the moon is hidden behind the clouds; the screen turns into black and a long silence occupies it. It is the end of the story but not the film. The most striking sequence starts right after that, the "epilogue"; a lively scene filmed by a video camera showing the same site while Homayoun Ershadi – the actor playing Badii – is going up the hill and enjoying a cigarette with Kiarostami and other crew while they are doing their everyday tasks. The scene shows soldiers, not only the young Kurd soldier from the body of the film – sitting on the hill, carrying flowers instead of a gun, smiling and waving at the camera. Interestingly, the scenery is shot in the spring whereas in last scene before the darkness it is filmed during the

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[317] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blachwell, 1962), 34.
[318] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*. (New York: Palgrave Macmilan 2012), 43.

autumn. Everywhere is now covered by grass; "image of life"[319] as opposition to the "oppressive solitude and darkness of Badii alone in his grave."[320] In *Taste of Cherry*, the documentary effect in *Close-Up* is subverted. The Cinéma vérité coda does not assert in Brechtean fashion, that the forgoing film is just a representation, because the fussing imaging of the video reality seems far stranger that the tangible diegetic reality of the preceding narrative. Instead the intrusion of this uncanny real marks a shift to the poetic qualities of the film. The switch from night and death to day and life, far from resolving the narrative, creates an "opening for thought," (I will come back to this point later in this chapter), as if we are now watching images of life after death whether our central character actually died or not. Following the blacked out sequence, the temporal connection between the coda and the earlier narrative is put into confusion, as is the connection between the diegesis and meta-diegetic documentary. The coda evoking dream or déjà vu is not a memory or flashback but a merging of past and present forming a "crystal image."

"Freeze-frame" is a feature of usually a film ending and closing scene which try not to close down a narrative but rather to open it out to the viewer's consideration, to live on after the film itself has finished. An obvious indication of this, is the use of the long-held freeze frame as closing image in *Close-Up* which ends on a "freeze-frame" and it freezes the character (Sabzian) in mid-action, that is, in an overt movement. As a cinematic device, this can probably be traced back to the influence of the famous closing "freeze-frame" of Antoine running towards the sea in François Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* /*The 400 Blows* (1959). The "freeze-

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[319] Roth, L., c. Tesson, et al., eds. *Abbas Kiarostami: Texts, Entretiens, Filmographic Complete*. (Paris: Cahiers du cinema 2008).
[320] Mehrnaz saeed-Vafa, Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, (Urbana, Ill., University of Illinois Press 2003), 30.

frame" of Sabzian is an actual disunity between him and his environment which builds up to a decisive action. An aesthetic of "freeze-frame" appears paradoxical given that an essential component of cinema is movement. Cinema can be seen as opposed to photography even though it is constituted by still photographs, these are not perceived as such in the act of viewing, although they can be extracted as distinct frames. As Jean Mitry has noted, the photographic image has a melancholic relationship to its referent: "the photograph of a person retains the impression of his presence. It constantly refers back to him. He is going away merely reinforces the impression that this image is the only testimony of what is physical appearance was at the particular moment in his existence."[321] Although in the cinematic image this "testimony" is desired yet paradoxical, "freeze-frame" is an attempt to imbue the moving image with the photographic aura. The photographic aura makes the cinematic image of "freeze-frame" as an always already recollected image. The "freeze-frame" of Sabzian therefore has a photographic aura which impresses itself upon our consciousness and constantly refers back to its presence. It is a frozen view of life which does not resolve the preceding disparity but transcends it. The freeze-frame image in Kiarostami's *Close-Up* finds itself embroiled in notions of presence, absence and death, especially when it is experienced in cinema that is related to moving images and to duration. Other example of "freeze-frame" in Kiarostami's cinema is its "rolling thing" (metal cylinder, apple and car) that wind toward a "stopping."[322]

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[321] Jean Mitry, *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*, trans. Christopher King (London: Athlona press, 2000), 31.

[322] Jean-Luc Nancy in *L'évidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami* notes that motion is the opposite of neither immobility nor static: "Motion is not the opposite of immobility, or, rather, the motionlessness in question is not static – this immobility is, in all the films, sometimes that of the landscape, sometimes that of a character fastened to his steering wheel, and sometimes that of a camera held to lengthy fixed shot, in which it can happen that very little or even nothing at all moves within the picture."

In sum, it is Kiarostami's obsessive framing of a character, or of a landscape that gives rise to viewer resistance to static, experienced as boredom, and through boredom, although boredom might be an integral part of aesthetic experience. The experience of resistance, of boredom transforms into the experience of the transcendental and of ecstasy. The stillness of Kiarostami's shots upon the objects, the elegiac obsessive framing of a landscape, the uncanny reality, self-reflexivity and the sense of a past that is still present transcend the narrative "im-sign" system of the cinema of prose and achieve the images that form the cinema of poetry which are "infinite possibility". These obsessive framings, thus, create an opening, a clearing for thought that is claimed by Being.

…"Iron girders and quicklime"…

For Heidegger, poetry has a premier place among all other arts because of its non-instrumental, non-technological approach to language[323]. As he puts it: "the linguistic work, the poetry in the narrower sense, has a privileged position in the domain of the arts."[324] Heidegger identifies European modernity as a time of crisis, as a departure of the 'gods' or the 'holy'[325]. Believing in the 'saving power of art', he granted that great poets were like someone who can help us to recollect our

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[323] Heidegger spent a great part of his life learning from poets. This made him one of few twentieth centuries' philosophers for whom poetry was a genuine philosophical concern and constant source of inspiration and thinking. He extensively investigates the works of great poets such as Sophocles, Goethe, Rilke, Stefan George and others in order to seek for the meaning of the Being. Heidegger gave three lecture courses on the work of the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Hölderlin at the University of Freiburg. The first lecture course was on Hölderlin's hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine" in 1934-35 and available as *Gesamtausgabe* volume 39. The second lecture course on the hymn "Remembrance" ("Andenken") given in 1941-42 and published as volume 52 *Gesamtausgabe*. The hymn "The Ister" was third and last major lecture course on the work of Hölderlin delivered in 1942 and first published in 1984 as volume 53 of the Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. The Ister is also the name of a documentary inspired by this lecture course on the hymn "The Ister" directed by David Barison and Daniel Ross. The film travels 3000km up along Danoube to its source while the philosophers Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Bernard Stiegler and filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg discuss the contemporary social relevance of Heidegger.
[324] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track* trans. Julian Young and Keneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 45.
[325] Miguel de Beistegui, *The new Heidegger* (London: Continuum 2005), 125.

shattered, displaced collective selves. This position does not neglect 'great thinking'. John Caputo correctly states: "When thinking is truly recognized for what it is, its poetic character will be acknowledged. The great poets think, the great thinkers think poetically[326]." Emphasising on the notion of the 'collective', Heidegger does not consider art as a personal or subjective business, but rather he thinks it is an urgent and necessary task because of the 'disenchantment' of modernity. He believes in art being capable of bringing us together out of our 'average everydayness' and 'busy-ness'. Heidegger himself does not extend his appreciation of poetry to other arts and in particular to cinema because of its reliance on technology[327].

For Heidegger, the relationship between man and poetry is closely associated with the question of the relationship of Dasein (the human existence as Being-in-the-world) to Being and to the meaning of Being. Yet, Being is indefinable: "Table is a use object;" Heidegger explains, "a use object is something extant; something that is extant is a being; Being belongs to beings. I cannot pass beyond Being; I already presuppose it in every determination of being; it is not a genus; it cannot be defined."[328] The most frequent question Heidegger raises is the one presented at the opening of his major work *Being and Time*: "we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being."[329] Moreover, "Being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy."[330] Thus, the meaning of Being is Heidegger's continual concern in his writings and he investigates it each time from a different perspective and persistently asks how human beings can and should relate to Being. In order to raise the question

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[326] John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press 1986), 235.
[327] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, 40.
[328] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1982), 84.
[329] Martin Heidegger is quoted in Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 3.
[330] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* 11.

of the meaning of Being, Heidegger suggests that one needs to learn from the thought of several philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Nietzsche[331]. In his writings, Heidegger finds it absolutely impossible to reveal Being conceptually; Being cannot be limited by any concept. To address the question of the meaning of Being, he proposes a way through which an existential analysis of that human entity – *Dasein* – is needed, because Dasein "is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that Being is an *issue* for it."[332] His conclusion proved highly significant to existentialist thinking, that is, in order to live authentically as well as to relate authentically to the question of the meaning of Being, one must to encounter his own death resolutely.

However, Heidegger believes that existential analysis of its own being is not the only way that Dasein can address the question of Being. An additional way to attend to this question and to explain Dasein's relationship to Being is through learning from great poetry. For Heidegger poetry is a gift of language as well as a major source of all art. In Heidegger's point of view, poetry is essential for anybody who wishes to live a fully human life. In order for a person to live a full human life, he or she must "dwell poetically" upon earth. Before we go any further, however, we need to understand what "poetizing" means to Heidegger. In his words:

> "To poetize," *dichten* – in Latin, *dictare* – means to write down, to
> fore-tell something to be written down. To tell something that, prior
> to this, has not yet been told. A properly unique beginning thus lies
> in whatever is said poetically.[333]

In the Heideggerian intellectual landscape, a poet is, thus, a 'god' who may initiate or help to initiate a transformational event in the history of Being by opening

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[331] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 87.
[332] Ibid., 62.
[333] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, trans. William McNeil and Julia Davis (Bloomington, ind: Indiana University Press, 1996), 8.

up an alternative clearing. Therefore in the present times of 'destitution' we are waiting for a 'god' who will reawaken us to the poetic and therefore enable us to "dwell poetically" upon earth. I should emphasize that Heidegger's 'god', here, is a secularized sacredness. In his essay "poetically man dwells" whose name refers to one of Hölderlin's poems, Heidegger explains how humans may dwell poetically. In simple words, to dwell poetically means learning from great poems how to live a full human life in which we think and relate authentically to beings and to Being. The aspects of human existence which are disguised beneath the everydayness and busyness of the technology dominated world which encircles human beings can be revealed by great poetry. By reading and listening to poetry, we can undergo profound experience with language. Such an experience is often a revelation that may result in spiritual enhancement. By reading or listening to poetry we can arrive at the neighbourhood of thinking as these acts open up a clearing for truth to enclose in the concealed world that encircles us. Heidegger argues that one can break out of the superficial existence and everyday busyness only with the help of great poetry for it enables him or her to think about the question of the meaning of Being.

Similar to Heidegger, Kiarostami has also extensively studied the poetry of great Persian poets such as Sa'di (*Bustan* (1257), *Gulistan* (1258)), Hafiz (*Divan-e Hafiz*) and Mulawi (*Masnavi-l Ma'navi* (1260))[334]. He has written two books on Hafiz[335] and Sa'di[336] in which he has selected some verses by these poets in the form of Haiku. Returning to his cinema, not only his films' titles are taken from modern Persian poetry – *The Wind Will Carry Us* from a poem with the same title by

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[334] Jalal al-din Rumi Maulana, *Masnavi-i Ma'navi* (Lahur: Matba-i Lahur, 1285/1906). For a comprehensive study on the influence of Persian poetry on Kiarostami's cinematic style, see Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution*. (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011).
[335] Abbas Kiarostami, *Hafiz be ravayat-e- Kiarostami* (Tehran: Nashr va Pazouhesh Farzan, 2006).
[336] Abbas Kiarostami, *Sa'adi az dast khishtan faryad* (Tehran: Niloufar publishing, 2007).

Forough Farrokhzad and *Where is the Friend House?* From a poem (*Address*) by Sohrab Sepehri– but also they are full of sequences that implicitly or explicitly refer to poems from classic Persian poetry to modern one. For instance, in a striking scene in *The Wind Wil Carry Us,* when Behzad (the protagonist who also represents Kiarostami himself) goes to a dark cellar to watch a young woman milking a cow, he reads verses by Forough Farrokhzad. I will come back to this later in his chapter.

A manner for Dasein to live authentically, according to Heidegger, is to encounter its death. This is what Kiarostami does not only in his cinema poetically– *Life and Nothing more, Wind Will Carry Us,* and *Taste of Cherry* in which the human beings' encounter with their own death is the central theme – but also in his poems. For example, consider these two poems by Kiarostami in *A Wolf Lying in Wait*:

<div dir="rtl">

شمارش معکوس

روز مرگ من

آغاز شد

درست لحظه تولدم.

</div>

The countdown

to the day of my death

started

at the very moment of my birth.[337]

Or in this poem:

<div dir="rtl">

از ارتفاع می‌ترسم

افتاده ام از بلندی،

</div>

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[337] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait)*, 135.

<div dir="rtl">

از آتش می‌ترسم

سوخته‌ام به کرّات،

از جدایی می‌ترسم

رنجیده‌ام چه بسیار،

از مرگ نمی‌هراسم

نمرده‌ام هرگز،

حتی یک بار

</div>

I am afraid of heights;

I have fallen from a high place.

I am afraid of fire;

I have been burned many times.

I am afraid of separation;

often have I been offended.

I am not afraid of death;

I have never died before,

not even once.[338]

These poems are about beings' life and the universal question of life and death. They remind us of Heidegger's thought of death that "our death is singularly our very own and that no one can die for us."[339] The main theme in *A Taste of Cherry* is death (other Kiarostami films also deal with death, such as *The Wind Will Carry Us* and the *Koker* trilogy[340]). When Badii attempts to convince his random passengers to help him and bury him if he was dead after an attempted suicide, each

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[338] Ibid., 136.

[339] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, 43.

[340] Paradoxically, all his films are about the appreciation of life.

of them has a different reaction. The young soldier jumps out of the car and runs after hearing Badii's proposition. The seminarian tries to dissuade him by a conversation based on a religious grounding. But perhaps the most important character is the taxidermist, an old man whose job is not to deal with the dead but to make the dead look alive. As he needs the money for his child's medical expenses, the old man accepts Badii's proposition. The old taxidermist, in his turn, tries to dissuade Badii saying that he also once decided to commit suicide, while carrying a rope to a mulberry tree, he tasted a mulberry. It was the taste of mulberry that saves his life[341]. I think the old taxidermist's dialogue is worth quoting at length:

> "Finally, I was so fed up that I decided to end it all. One morning before dawn, I put a rope in my car. My mind was made up… I reached mulberry gardens. I stopped, still dark. I threw the rope over a tree. But it did not catch hold. So I climbed the tree and tied the rope tight. Then I felt something soft under my hand. It was mulberry, sweet ones. I ate the first and the second and the third. Suddenly I notice it was not dark anymore."

Kiarostami stated that the idea of this film came to his mind after reading a comment by Emil Cioran: "Without the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself long ago."[342] The appreciation of life is, also, a repeating notion in Kiarostami's poetry, for instance:

<div dir="rtl">

از باورهای امروزم

یکی این که

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[341] Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, 43.
[342] Emil Cioran is quoted in Alberto Elena, *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 123.

<div dir="rtl">

زندگی زیباست.

</div>

Among my current beliefs

one is

that life is beautiful.[343]

In his two essays *Letter on Humanism*[344] and *The Question Concerning Technology*[345], Heidegger argues that a genuine humanism needs acting and thinking. The acting that Heidegger has in mind differs from acting that we often understand in terms of cause and effect and of utility. Heidegger holds that the essence of acting is "accomplishment". What he means by "accomplishment" is to disclose something into the fullness of its essence. Understanding this distinction between acting in terms of cause and effect and acting as an accomplishment is not difficult. Consider for example Kiarostami's act when he was writing his *A Wolf Lying in Wait*. His acting cannot be explained in terms of utility. For instance, consider the following two poems by him:

<div dir="rtl">

چه کسی می‌داند

درد غنچه را

به هنگام شکفتن؟

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Who knows

the rosebud's pain

as it opens to full bloom?[346]

And:

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[343] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), 139.

[344] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). This essay is an expanded version of a personal letter that Martin Heidegger wrote in December in 1946, in response to Jean Beaufret's questions on the relation of the existentialism to humanism after Jean Paul Sartre's lecture on "Existentialism and Humanism".

[345] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row: 1977).

[346] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), 120.

انبار خانه ام

پر از اشیای بی مصرفی است

که دوستشان دارم.

My attic

is full of useless objects

that I love.[347]

He forms his thought and impressions based on his existence into a poem. His accomplishment was a series of poems that help to illuminate the essence of "rosebud's pain" and "useless objects" by presenting them in much greater fullness that usually perceived. Any reader of these poems discovers an aspect of the Being of these beings through a space that Kiarostami creates in our world for "rosebud's pain" or "useless objects" in his attic.

In order to explain his view on humanism, Heidegger states: "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells."[348] Humans can become the guardian of this human home, of language in which Being is also inhabited, merely through thinking and creating with words. Kiarostami's cinema consists of many simple things such as wooden doors in *Where is the Friend's House?*, rolling metal cylinder in *Close-Up*, rolling apple in *The Wind Will Carry Us* and all those shots of the landscapes, roads and zigzag paths. Similarly his poetry contains a lot of simple objects. For instance in the poem below, he poetizes a snowflake:

چه حیف،

میزبان خوبی نبودم

برای اولین دانه برفی

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[347] Ibid., 129.

[348] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

که بر پلکم نشست.

What a pity

I was not a good host

for the first snowflake

that settled on my eyelid.[349]

In this poem one can sense a vast world in such a simple expression. Kiarostami, thus, guards, sustains and adds depth to the meaning of simple objects in his cinema and of simple words in his poetry. He also teaches us to relate to and to think of simple beings that we frequently ignore, and to relate to the Being of these beings. Like other great poets, Kiarostami relies on the fact that human beings dwell in the home established by language, either be it words or cinematic language. Merely because they dwell in this home can they think and relate to the world and to other beings in worthy manners.

Heidegger believes that the accepted version of humanism suffers from the lack of genuine thinking. He argues that truths of Being can be only said through the act of thinking, for thinking appears simply when it allows itself to be asserted by Being. But what does it mean that thinking allows itself be asserted by Being? It means that thinking belongs to Being since everything belongs to Being. Yet, thinking has a special relationship with Being, as only thinking explicitly questions the meaning of Being. Dasein's novel relationship to Being – a relationship that can be expressed by language to some degree – qualifies Dasein as the only being to raise this question of the meaning of Being. Thinking is also required to be an "attentiveness to Being" in order to raise this question. Such attentiveness may lead to a wisdom which is among humanity's greatest distinction. Heidegger suggests that

[349] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), 45.

this worthy accomplishment appeared in history well before the term "humanism" was coined. Heidegger holds that thinking is of Being and distinguishes it from the technical interpretation of thinking. Heidegger states: "Thoughtful reflection is meant to awaken our attentiveness. Such attentiveness is distinguished in an essential way from mere curiosity that wants only to "get to know" something without gaining knowledge of it.[350] Curiosity, for Heidegger, is the inauthentic mode of understanding. Thinking, Heidegger explains, is generally viewed as a process which serves doing and making and is the basis of scientific thinking and of calculated interaction in society. For Heidegger, science is just applied metaphysics. He resumes that scientific thinking closes itself to thinking purely which is asserted by Being and is essential to the human essence. The essence of language, thus, vanishes when it is used as an instrument for scientific and everyday communication. And even when it appears, it has to justify itself. The concealment of the language as the house of the truth of Being, causes thinking purely, to become very rare. The use of language as an instrument of domination over beings makes it to "fall out" from its element. In Heideggerian philosophy, "falling" (*verfallen*) means the dominance of the one-self in everyday concernedness (*besorgen*) with the world. It refers to the full immersion in everyday life insofar as it is guided by curiosity. In other words, it is the inauthentic mode of "being-among" structure of concern. A genuine humanism must transcend the calculative language which prevails over our daily interactions. A genuine humanism must transcend this inauthenticity in order to direct Dasein to its greatest virtue which is thinking purely. Dasein needs to fulfil its essence to free itself for its humanity. And it does so with the help of genuine humanism. The essence of being human is conceptually difficult to be presented due to the fact that

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[350] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, 13.

this essence embodies Dasein, whose being is claimed by Being, and Being is indefinable. One manner Heidegger suggests for the understanding of the essence of human being is by means of experiencing death resolutely and authentically. In the process of thinking on the essence of human being, Heidegger challenges the humanists' understanding of accepted terms such as value, logic, world and God. For example, he challenges the term "value" by claiming that through characterizing anything as "a value", you rob the significant thing from its worth by making it an ordinary object of estimation. Thinking according to values like when one says God is the "highest value" is a degradation of God's essence, estimating God as a mere object against other values. Being degraded by everyday language, these established discussions of humanism centralize the mediocre aspect of human existence and fail to consider Dasein's essence including thinking and being claimed by Being.

Another example which Heidegger does not give could be love. In his *Trough the Olive Trees* which is the reconstruction of a love story between Tahereh and Hossein, we cannot degrade love as a value. Calling love a value is a decision to regard love as object that can be measured by specific methods. Such a measurement makes the final scene of the film (in which the two characters walk through the olive trees) meaningless, because love is no longer an enhancing moment of wholeness, of joy in giving and receiving, of delightful play and grace. Kiarostami also has a poem which thematically resembles this film:

یک هزارپا

به دنبال جفت خود می‌رود

زیر درختان زیتون.

A millipede

follows in the track of its mate

under the olive trees[351]

If we approach love as a value we disregard the spontaneity of love that springs between lovers which can lead the participants to spiritual and physical fulfilment. It ignores according to Plato and many other thinker poets, the wisdom that love brings to lovers, the wisdom that illuminates their being and their mood of relating to Being[352]. Like many modern and contemporary artists, Kiarostami recruits the audience to complete his films. For example, the last scene of *Through the Olive Trees* invites its viewer to participate and think by not giving a conventional closed ending. Through his cinema of poetry (the stillness of the shot upon the landscape), the viewer resides in the neighbourhood of thinking, by which a truth about love is revealed - the great joy and the spiritual and physical fulfilment that it brings about. This truth is enclosed by Kiarostami's obsessive framing of two lovers winding through the olive trees.

Heidegger's partial answer to the question "how can we restore meaning to the word humanism?" emerges in his *Letter on Humanism*: a call for Dasein's essence[353]. This call necessitates transcending the limitations of ordinary language and the mode of existence that it promotes. The other manner he suggests for the understanding of the human essence is thinking purely. But, Heidegger states in the letter that the ordinary language which dominates metaphysics, scientific thinking, day-to-day interactions, and in general our ordinary existence is hardly ever challenged. He considers thinking in values - promoted by calculative language – as

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[351] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait)*, 100.
[352] Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 35.
[353] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, 145.

"the greatest blasphemy imaginable against being."[354] It is "thinking against values" that relates us to Dasein's essence. As Heidegger puts it:

> To think against values does not mean to beat the drum for the valuelessness and nullity of being. It means rather to bring the clearing of truth of being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects.[355]

Kiarostami's cinema of poetry transcends everyday busyness and interactions by capturing the very essence of everyday life. For instance, beyond the simple story of *Where is the Friend's Home?* is a more complicated idea about friendship and commitment which are at stake in our modern life. The title of the film comes from one of Sohrab Sepehri's poems, *Address*, which reads:

"خانه دوست کجاست؟" در فلق بود پرسید سوار.

آسمان مکثی کرد.

رهگذر شاخه نوری که به لب داشت به تاریکی شن ها بخشید

و به انگشت نشان داد سپیداری و گفت:

"نرسیده به درخت،

کوچه باغی است که از خواب خدا سبزتر است

و در آن عشق به اندازه پرهای صداقت آبی است

می روی تا ته آن کوچه که از پشت بلوغ، سر به در می آرد،

پس به سمت گل تنهایی می پیچی،

دو قدم مانده به گل،

پای فواره جاوید اساطیر زمین می مانی

و تو را ترسی شفاف فرا می گیرد.

در صمیمیت سیال فضا، خش خشی می شنوی:

کودکی می بینی

رفته از کاج بلندی بالا، جوجه بردارد از لانه نور

و از او می پرسی

---

[354] Ibid., 265.

[355] Ibid.

"Where is the home of the friend?"

Asked the rider at dawn.

The sky stood still.

The passerby bequeathed

the branch of light he held to his lips

to the darkness of sands

and pointed to a poplar and said:

"Before the tree,

there is a garden lane greener than God's dream

where love is as blue as the wings of fidelity.

Go on till that alley which emerges from maturity,

then turn to the flower of loneliness,

two steps before the flower

remain at the foot of the eternal fountain of earthly legends

where a transparent fear overtakes you.

In the flowing sincerity of the space, you hear a rustling

A child you see

has climbed a tall pine, to take a chick from the nest of light

and you ask him

where is the home of the friend?"[356]

In the opening sequence of *The Wind Will Carry Us,* we also hear that Behzad refers to the address of the remoted village and reads: "Before the tree, there is a garden lane greener than God's dream." Great poetry is a major realm in which the dominance and superficiality of ordinary language is persistently refused. In his *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger invokes Aristotle's saying in the *Poetic* "that poetic

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[356] Sohrab Sepehri, *Hajm-e-Sabz* (*The Green Volume*) (Tehran: Tahouri Library 1987), 358. This piece was translated into English by Marzieh Ghiasi.

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composition is truer than exploration of beings"[357] and concludes that a genuine humanism relates to Dasein's essence through carefully reading, listening to, and studying the works of great poets. For him, these actions – reading, listening and studying – means neither seeking symbols and allegories in the poem, nor presenting an accepted interpretation of that, but rather being attentive to the poem as a source of thoughtful reflection on what is essential. Kiarostami's cinema is attentive to the poetry, he never interprets the great poetry but tries to relate his audiences to Dasein's essence, through his cinematic style (Kiarostami's exclusive use of the car – another Kiarostami's rolling thing – which is a place for a character's everyday frustrations, fears, emotions and needs, long-takes, montage-rhythm, and static shots) and by means of reading aloud the works of great poets through the characters of the films. I will provide a few examples for this later in this chapter.

It is in his essay; *The Question Concerning Technology* that Heidegger builds a way for Dasein to relate to technology, to fellow human beings, to the world and also to Being[358]. As he holds the view that "questioning is a way of thinking," he opens his essay by questioning technology. For him, all the ways of thinking lead through language. Thinking opened by questioning can help being to establish a free relationship to technology, for thinking is the most remarkable way of living in freedom. To establish a free relationship to technology, one must open himself or herself to the essence of technology and thinking is the way we can open ourselves to an essence. To think about the essence of technology helps us to experience technology within its own boundaries. In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger again puts an emphasis on the importance of pure thinking in the

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[357] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, 275.
[358] Heidegger's philosophical exploration can be divided into three categories: the investigation of the nature of being, engagement in a conversation with the Greek thinkers and German thinkers and poets and analysing the human situation in the modern time.

technological and calculative oriented world. *Letter on Humanism* and *The Question Concerning Technology* share an emphasis that pure thinking is not calculative. However, in the technological world, the profound gifts of language have often been abandoned. Speaking and listening have lost their element, an element that is firmly linked to thinking[359]. To understand the essence of technology, Heidegger returns to ancient Greek and brings up the four Aristotelian causes (causality): the material, the form, the end, and that which brings about the effect. These four causes are responsible for something that is brought-forth.

The Greek word for bringing-forth is *poiesis*. *Poiesis* happens when something becomes present out of concealment. To bring-forth into unconcealment is a revealing. The Greek word for revealing is *aletheia*. This word has been translated into English as truth. *Poiesis* therefore leads to the revealing of a truth. It means that technology is also a way of revealing. As Heidegger puts it: "*Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis.*"[360] Using the Greek terminology, he argues that technology is a knowing. Knowledge is essential since technology brings-forth something out of concealment, something which does not bring itself forth naturally. However modern technology is, Heidegger holds, no longer a revealing that can be termed *poiesis*. For example, how we today perceive rivers is entirely different form Hölderlin's perception. In our modern technological calculative-oriented world, we consider rivers as sources of energy while for Hölderlin "The river is locality of journeying,"[361] Heidegger writes, "Yet there is also the journeying of locality."[362] Modern technology reduces everything including human beings to resources and

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[359] Heidegger gives an example of the silver chalice to clarify the explication of causality in its fourfold Aristotelian mode: silver is the material cause, the form is a chalice, the final purpose is ritual rite, and the silversmith is the efficient cause.
[360] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 5.
[361] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, 33.
[362] Ibid.

orders each specific resource to stand in preparation to be utilized anytime needed. Heidegger calls this way of ordering of all objects: relating to objects as "standing-reserve" (*der Bestand,* also translated as resources). Standing-reserve results in an additional consequence which Heidegger names "Enframing" (*das Gestell*, also translated as the framework)[363].

The essence of technology, Heidegger holds, is Enframing. Technology as Enframing sets everything within a framework and thus defines the areas of scientific research as well as the direction of technological development. For Heidegger modern technology is prior to science. As he puts it: "Modern physics is challenged forth by the rule of Enframing, which demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve."[364] As modern technology dominates almost all calculative thinking and various aspects of human existence, there is a great danger for freedom, for thinking and for the spirituality of Dasein. In the destitution of the modern life, Heidegger claims that we need to read and listen to great poetry, as great poetry resides in the neighbourhood of thinking. But this reading and listening should be more than a mere source of aesthetic delight. For Heidegger aesthetic experience "is

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[363] Heidegger articulates five key terms of his modern technology philosophy and gathers them under the title of Enframing: It *challenges (herausfordern)* nature to provide its treasure for humans, then it *positions (stellen)* and order *(bestellen)* the production of nature in order that they are accessible and obtainable to humans. Anything which is so positioned and ordered becomes a *resource (der Bestand)*. Heidegger calls this entire way of treating and disclosing nature *Enframing* or *the framework*.

[364] Martin Heidegger is quoted in forewords of Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 20.

the element in which art dies"[365]. Reading and listening to great poetry should be a struggle for humanism worthy of Dasein and help the reader to dwell poetically[366].

Cinema relies on technology, but having known Kiarostami's passionate attachment to poetry and his several books on Persian poetry, he is not only a director whose cinema is stylistically poetic, but also a director who brings poetry into the cinema. Poetry always plays a key role in Iran and Iran certainly needs great poets since throughout the centuries of social and political crisis it was poetry that "preserved" and re-collected Iranian identity. Heidegger too, considers poetry as the keeper of heritage and grants it a premier position, as I said, because of its ability to articulate in language the uniqueness of a community's destiny. As he puts it: "thinkers name being, poets preserve the traces of the holy."[367] Considering the

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[365] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track,* 50.

[366] To expand his discussion of the nature of dwelling, Heidegger brings up the two lines in Hölderlin's "In Lovely Blue":

> *Full of merit, yet poetically, man*
> *Dwells on this earth.*

These two lines show that man dwelling on this earth has many merits. In spite of all these merits, this is merely poetry that can lead a human being to dwell upon the earth: to live the full nature of such dwelling. Without poetically dwelling, the other merits are quite dull. To further clarify Hölderlin's poetic statements concerning dwelling, Heidegger remarks that for any human beings dwelling refers to a measuring of oneself "with and against something heavenly." In other words dwelling requires taking measure of Dasein's existence in the earth while encountering those great things that Dasein attributes to heaven. This taking measure requires poetry, Heidegger remarks. For great poetry always is measure-taking. Great poetry reveals the being of poetry as a measure-taking which is required for a genuine human dwelling upon the earth. And this is the one of the greatest gifts of poetry which can help Dasein to take measure of its existence. This taking measure that Heidegger has in mind, is of human being. Taking measure that emerges in great poetry brings into the open the depth of human existence. Heidegger stresses that this taking measure of existence is unique to human beings, as simply human beings speak a language and can create poetry and as only human beings understand that they are mortals and encounter death. Heidegger continues that the measure for dwelling poetically has to do with the unknown god, as revealed by the manifestation of the heavens. Put differently, great poetry shows us specific measures that guide our existence. Thus, our dwelling upon the earth will be worthy in accordance with our essence. Heidegger states that those human beings who do not relate themselves to the gifts of poetry, merely passed through life. They do not dwell as they ignore a major gift of great poetry. Living unpoetically is an insipid kind of existence; it cannot bring us to the neighbourhood of thinking, to authenticity, to resoluteness in face of death and to the questioning of being. Great poetry can help the reader or listener to establish a worthy human reason while striving to fulfil the role of the shepherd of Being. It can also help them to transcend the Enframing of the modern technology as its specific taking measure provides a different attitude to measuring and to Being.

[367] Martin Heidegger is quoted in Hubert L. Dreyfus *Heidegger on Art* (draft 9/13/2008), 18.

Iranian specific contemporary context, however, Hamid Dabashi argues: "in post-revolutionary Iran, cinema was effectively replacing poetry, plays, short stories, and novels as the most significant cultural medium."[368] In this context, we can extend Heidegger's appreciation of poetry to Kiarostami's cinema, since it brings forth the abandoned gifts of language: he invites his audience to purely think within the boundaries of cinema as a technological medium, through reciting great Persian poetry in his films which in turn brings out of concealment concepts such as friendship, love, life and death. Moreover, by choosing certain characters like Badii in *Taste of Cherry*, he presents us being-towards-death, and thus, relates us to the Dasein's essence. In *The Traveller* we encounter with the very essence of modern technology which is Enframing. We see a situation where technology loses its meaning as revealing described earlier in the sense of *poiesis.* An immediate casualty is the human relationship to truth. Heidegger describes this distorted relationship fluently: "Enframing blocks the shining-forth and holding-sway of truth."[369] Modern Tehran in *The Traveller* blocks the truth and the essence of being human is affected adversely. People in modern Tehran are spiritually dwarfed. *The Traveller* shines-forth a truth that is modern technology opens up a space in which the connection between human beings is lost (Qassem's failed attempt to talk with a boy from the other side of a glass window), and creates great horror (the last scene where Qassem finds a stadium emptied of humans and anxiously runs out of the frame).

As I stated before, Heidegger sees poetry as the gift of language. In a series of lectures at the University of Freiburg during 1957-1958 which were later published as "The Nature of Language" Heidegger uses poetry to clarify what he believes is the nature of language. Heidegger states that the intention of these

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[368] Hamid Dabashi is quoted in Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy: Shooting Truth*, 40.
[369] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 14.

lectures is to help us encounter "the possibility of undergoing an experience with language. To undergo an experience to something – be it a person, a thing or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us and transforms us."[370] Heidegger stresses that thinking is primal instance of "undergoing an experience with language." He argues that poetry can lead us to such an experience[371]. Being overwhelmed either by a poem or by thinking are moments in which "something befalls us, comes over us, strikes us." Heidegger believes that to comprehend the nature of language we must undergo a thinking experience, which is essentially, an experience with language. However, such an experience is rarely given voice and this is poets who describe the experiences with language. In such instances Heidegger states, language brings itself to language. Heidegger turns to a poem by Stefan George *The Word*[372] to formulate the poet's experience with language. Heidegger argues that in this poem thinking takes place – in particular in the last line of the poem "Where words break off no thing may be" – thinking about the role of words in language and in human existence. He emphasises that such thinking is not possible with science or philosophy. Thinking occurred in such a poem transcends the functional language which rules science and philosophy, and is not argumentative. Kiarostami also has a similar poem to Stefan Goerge's *The Word:*

<div dir="rtl">

به دنبال یک کلمه می‌گشتم

ذهنم یاریم نکرد

به بیراهه رفتم

گم شدم.

</div>

I was searching for a word;

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[370] Martin Heidegger is quoted in forewords of Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 25.

[371] Plato also explains two instances of Socrates being overwhelmed by such moments of thinking in *The Symposium*.

[372] Jussi Backman, "The Transitional Breakdown of the Word: Heidegger and Stefan George's Encounter with Language Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual, 1 (2011): 54-73.

my mind was of no help,

I strayed

and got lost.[373]

Avoiding too much explaining and analysing which can destroy the gifts of this poem, perhaps we should follow Heidegger's statement: "do not henceforth admit anything as being where the word breaks off."[374] Each work of art, Heidegger holds often reveals the truth about the realm of human existence that it depicts. Accordingly, great poetry opens up a clearing for a truth related to human existence to emerge and guide us to dwell poetically. In a scene in *The Wind Will Carry Us,* we hear the voice of a gravedigger, named Youssef, digging a grave. Behzad chats with Youssef whenever he climbs up the hill. Youssef also is one of the invisible characters of the film. Later on Behzad meets Youssef's sixteen-year-old fiancée, Zeynab when he is asking for a pot of fresh milk. He gets directed to a dark cellar in the village (which is a metaphor for grave), where Zeynab guides him through the darkness only with a hurricane lantern to milk the cow. Zaynab is mainly seen from behind and her face hides in the dark. In this moment, Behzad desperately tries to make a conversation with Zaynab who is even refusing to show her face to him after he asks. Behzad recites one of Forough Farrokhzad's poems which give the title to the film:

در شب کوچک من، افسوس

باد با برگ درختان میعادی دارد

در شب کوچک من دلهره ویرانیست

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[373] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*), 149.

[374] Martin Heidegger is quoted in forewords of Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 27.

گوش کن

وزش ظلمت را می‌شنوی؟

من غریبانه به این خوشبختی می‌نگرم

من به نومیدی خود معتادم

گوش کن

وزش ظلمت را می‌شنوی؟

در شب اکنون چیزی می‌گذرد

و بر این بام که هر لحظه در او بیم فرو ریختن است

ابرها، همچون انبوه عزاداران

لحظه باریدن را گویی منتظرند

لحظه‌ای

و پس از آن، هیچ.

پشت این پنجره شب دارد می‌لرزد

و زمین دارد

باز می‌ماند از چرخش

پشت این پنجره یک نا معلوم نگران من و توست

ای سراپایت سبز

دستها را چون خاطره‌های سوزان، در دستان عاشق من بگذار

ولبانت را چون حسّی گرم از هستی

به نوازشهای لب‌های عاشق من بسپار

باد ما را با خود خواهد برد

باد ما را با خود خواهد برد

In my little night, ah

The wind has a date with the leaves

In my little night lurks the agony of destruction.

Listen!

Do you hear darkness blowing?

I look upon the bliss like a stranger

I am addicted to my despair.

Listen!

Do you hear darkness blowing?

Now something is passing in the night

The moon is red, and restless

And over this rooftop

Laden with the fear of crumbling

Clouds resemble a procession of mourners

Waiting for the moment of rain.

A moment

And then nothing,

Night shuddering beyond his window

The earth

Screeching to a halt,

Something unknown watching you and me

Beyond this window.

O green from head to foot

Place your hands in my loving hands

Like a burning memory,

And yield your lips up

To the caresses of my loving lips

Like a warming sense of being.

The wind will take us away

The wind will take us away[375]
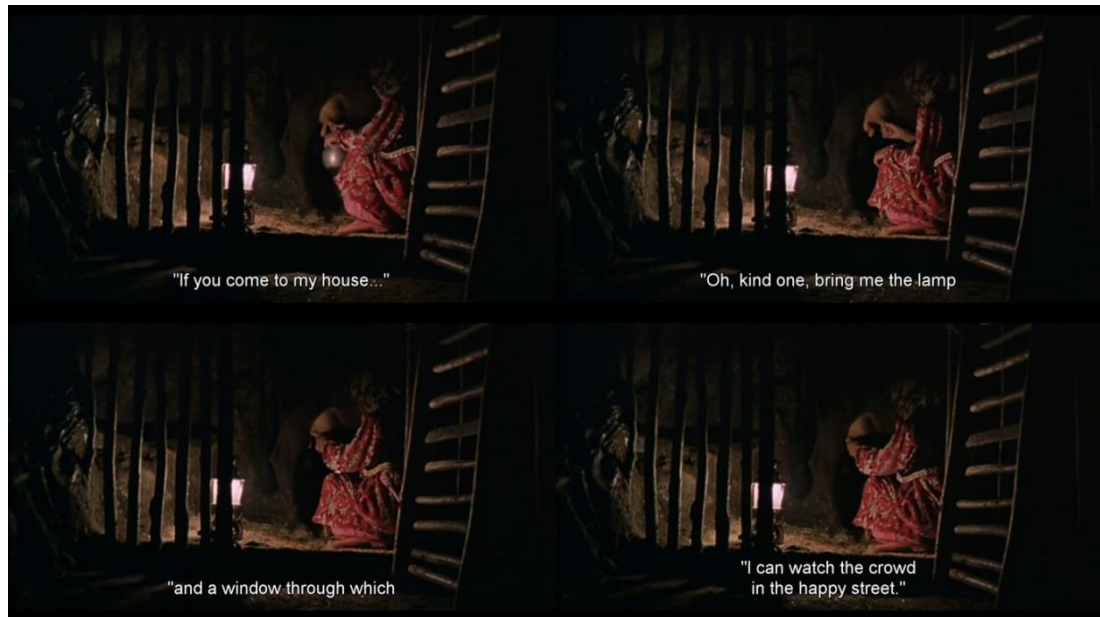
Abbas Kiarostami, four stills from *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), colour thirty-five millimetre film, one hundred and eighteen minutes, © MK2

This poem goes beyond the thingly character of a thing whose truth the work of art reveals[376]. Here, I want to illustrate that Heidegger's approach relates to truths

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[375] Forough Farrokhzad, *The Wind Will Take Us Away* (Port Coquitlam: Nik Publishers. 1997).

[376] For Heidegger the work of art is primarily a *thing*. put differently, this is the thingly character of a work of art that the reader, listener, or viewer first encounter. For instance, this is spoken words that we first encounter in a poem, forms of stone, wood or cement in architecture; forms and colours in a painting; image in cinema. Thus, to answer the question concerning the origin of the work of art, one needs to investigate what is thingly about a thing. As Heidegger points out, the word "thing" can refer to anything, from God to mundane object. He, thus, directs this question to what he calls "mere things." By mere things he means anything which does not live. In this way, Heidegger uses the word "thing" in an almost projective sense. In order to disclose the origin of the work of art, Heidegger first turns to the three accepted ways of interpreting things: thing as a substance with accident, as the unity of a manifold that is given to the senses, and as formed matter. The limitation of first interpretation, Heidegger points out, is that if we define a thing as the reflection of the structure of a substance and its accidents the independence and self-containment of a thing will be lost. For example if we interpret Michelangelo's David as a sculpture of a youth with accidents, the self-contained character of the sculpture along with its beauty and its spirituality will vanish. The second approach - that a thing is what our senses present – is clearly the source of the term the "aesthetic." A work of art

that are quite vital to his thinking about human existence. This poem relates to the anxiety that engulfs the poet. Anxiety is an important concept in Heidegger's philosophy. In his essay *What Is Metaphysics?* the human relationship to anxiety is Heidegger's main concern. To disclose this relationship, he turns to the question concerning the *nothing*. Heidegger argues that the *nothing* emerges in moments of anxiety:

> The nothing reveals itself in anxiety – but not as a being. Just as little is it given as an object. Anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing. All the same, the nothing reveals itself in and through anxiety, although, to repeat, not in such a way that the nothing becomes manifest in our malaise quite apart from beings as a whole. Rather we said that in anxiety the nothing is encountered at one with beings as a whole[377].

A portrayal of the nothing disclosing itself in anxiety emerges in Forough Farrokhzad's *The Wind Will Carry Us Away*. This poem helps to create the situation in which the poet gradually sinks into anxiety and discovers the nothing "at one with

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defined by this interpretation is understood as a thing that provides pleasure through the perception of our senses. To reject this interpretation, Heidegger states: "We never really first perceive a throng sensations." Put differently, our senses and perceptions are always *situated and defined*. We never see mere colours, to do so we must direct our perception away from things, we must see abstractly. When we do so the thing is lost. The third interpretation is that a thing is matter standing together with form. This interpretation is popular approach employed in all art theory and aesthetic. Heidegger claims that this approach has basic limitations resulted from its origin which is to be found in the human relation to the equipment. Interpreting a thing as formed matter, he holds, stems from Biblical religions as well, when Western philosophy mixed with Biblical faith in the Middle Ages where God's creativity was interpreted as uniting form and matter to create the universe. Yet, Heidegger stresses this approach to a thing is connected to the usefulness of equipment. For instance, a hammer is matter that has been formed for human use. The limitation of this approach is immediately emerges when we relate to mere things which have no usefulness. Heidegger indicates that this interpretation is a distorted way of trying to perceive what is a thing. However, a clue emerges from the failure of three accepted interpretations of things, in particular when we try to describe the work of art. He singles out the third approach and states that, as it originates in human thinking about equipment, we should first look for a way to distinguish between the thing and equipment. In order to disclose this distinction, Heidegger asks: what constitutes the equipmental character of equipment. To answer, he invites us to closely look at the peasant woman's shoes painted by Vincent Van Gogh. By its very portrayal of usefulness of the shoes, this painting opens up an additional dimension: the world in which this peasant woman exist, with all her everyday fears, anxieties, difficulties, and joys. The shoes appear in this painting is an entity standing in the light of its being. In this sense, an element of truth concerning the equipmental quality of equipment is revealed: equipment retains its equipmental character simply where it is useful in the world of human beings. By revealing the equipmental character of these shoes Van Gogh's painting discloses a truth concerning equipment as well as a truth concerning the being of these shoes.

[377] Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 95-116.

beings as a whole." In a mode of anxiety the poet sinks into despair. Sinking into despair is a way of letting anxiety triumph, while leaving the person experiencing anxiety impotent to change the situation. In Heidegger's terms, the possibility of emerging from anxiety is to resolutely face death and to act daily on the basis of that resolution. Kiarostami creates an opening for thought by reading us a poem about anxiety and despair in a dark grave-like cellar. He shows us how *nothing* emerges when we are face to face with anxiety. The mise-en-scene of this sequence is set to reveal the truth about our existence, about our anxiety when we resolutely encounter with death. Such a resolution leads to an authentic way of living our life. Thus, in the poem *The Wind Will Carry Us* a truth about anxiety that is vital to human existence becomes unconcealed. Through this film, the viewers learn that dwelling poetically requires relating to the truth that become unconcealed in such great poems and endeavouring to guide one's life in accordance with these truths.

In the conventional approach, we consider a work of art to be beautiful and inspiring. We do not seek to discover in it a truth. But for Heidegger, art is truth, setting itself to work. To address the anomaly between these two approaches, Heidegger discusses the relationship between a work of art and truth which takes up a remarkable part of essay. He argues when one approaches a great work of art of the past, for instance, Sophocles' Antigone, he or she should recognise that it is no longer part of its native sphere, part of a specific social and personal existence that prevailed in the past. Such is true for Hafiz's or Khayyam's poetry. The communal and maybe religious way of life which brought their poetry into being has vanished. Yet, their poetry transcends the milieu, period and mode of existence that created them. Thus, the greatness of the poetry of these great poets is in their standing in

what Heidegger calls "pure self-subsistence."[378] In a conversation between Behzad and a doctor who visited the old sick lady while they are riding on a motorbike through a golden wheat field, Behzad asks: "What's wrong with her?"

Doctor: Nothing, she's just old and weak. She's just a bag of bones and she's not very well at all.

Behzad: Old age is a terrible illness.

Doctor: Yes, but there are worse illnesses: death…

Behzad: Death?

Doctor: Yes. Death is the worst. When you close your eyes on this world, this beauty, the wonders of nature and the generosity of God, it means you'll never be coming back.

Behzad: They say that the other world is more beautiful.

Doctor: But, who has come back from there to tell us if it is beautiful or not?

Then, the doctor recites one of Khayyam's poems:

<div dir="rtl">

گویند کسان بهشت با حور خوش است

من میگویم که آب انگور خوش است

این نقد بگیر و دست از آن نسیه بدار

کاواز دهل شنیدن از دور خوش است[379]

</div>

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[378] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", 40.

[379] Khayyam, Omar. *Rubaiyyat-i Hakim Omar Khayyam*. Tehran: Fardin, 1936.

They tell me the other world is as beautiful as a houri from heaven!

Yet I say that the juice of the wine is better.

Prefer the present to those fine promises.

Even a drum sound melodious from afar.

The lives of the poets who brought into being this poetry are in consequential to the works. Each poets nurturing community with all their glories and failures is also irrelevant. Heidegger states that: "the great work of art stands on its own. It can do so because a great work of art opens of realm, and it belongs in that realm which it has opened."[380] Clearly, it is within this realm that the truth of the work of art emerges[381].

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[380] Haim Gordon, *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenge in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, 69.

[381] Heidegger considers a non-representational work of art, a Greek temple, to address what is involved in the question of the relationship between a work of art and truth. He argues that a Greek temple merely stands in the middle of a valley open up to the sun and the wing and the rain. It does not represent anything but it encloses a statue of a god. The temple opened up for the Greeks who encountered it a realm of relation to the earth and to the divine only through its presence. The temple helped the Greek who related to it, situate themselves in their world. Through the realm of relations which includes human experiences such as birth and death, blessing and cares, destiny and personal choice. It does so because it opens up a world.

"Even a drum sounds melodious
from afar...

Abbas Kiarostami, five stills from *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), colour thirty-five millimetre film, one hundred and eighteen minutes, © MK2

Heidegger asks what is a world? For Heidegger, a world is not the mere collection of things or molecules. He announces that the *world of worlds*. By this he means that a world is a non-objective realm to which we give ourselves through our relating to beings and to Being. This relation to beings and to Being is characterized by birth and death, blessing and curse, act and response. As such the world is fully in being and provides us with a space for our existence and the home. For Heidegger, truth can only disclose itself in a world, and without truth being revealed a world cannot come to being. Therefore, for a world to be established both the relationships to beings and Being and the disclosing of truth are essential. One way for human beings to situate themselves in a world and of being involved in that world is by dwelling poetically. It means that human beings must constantly relate themselves to great works of art and to the truth emerges in them. Thus, the great poetry of Hafiz and Khayyam, if I relate to the world that the great poetry of Khayyam and Hafiz opens to the truth that emerges in each of them, can lead to enhancement of my

existence, and a broadening of my comprehension of reality. When such occurs the world in which I was situated has changed.

Despite the immediate social and historical meanings of Hafiz's ghazal, it has an underlying meaning which is universal, applicable to the past, present and future. His verses do not specify a space and a time. Hafiz treats time as a "timeless commodity"[382]. Much like Hafiz, Kiarostami uses an ambiguous artistic form to articulate his philosophical thoughts, and that is why his films can have several interpretations. In *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami like Hafiz, uses a language which does not indicate a specific time or space. I would like to quote one of Taxidermist's dialogue through which we can clearly see Kiarostami's poetic world-view:

> "Have you lost hope? Have you ever looked at the sky when
>
> you wake up in the morning? At dawn, don't you want to see
>
> the sunrise? The night at the full moon? Refusing them all, you
>
> want to give up the taste of cherry?"

This is how the taxidermist looks at the world, despite the fact that the world is far from perfection it is still a representation of love and beauty and hope – a perspective which can be found in Khayyam's and Hafiz's poems. Clearly, both Badii and the taxidermist represent Kiarostami himself, therefore and similarly, from Kiarostami's point of view, despite all misfortunes and unhappiness in human's life, there are still many wonders to rediscover even in the simplest things such as a taste of cherry. Even in the moments of despair, Kiarostami, much like his poetic counterpart, Sohrab Sepehri, sees beauty:

غروب بود.

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[382] Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetic, Modernity and Film after the Revolution*, 42.

صدای هوش گیاهان به گوش می‌آمد.

مسافر آمده بود

و روی صندلی راحتی، کنار چمن

نشسته بود:

"دلم گرفته،

دلم عجیب گرفته است.

تمام راه به یک چیز فکر می‌کردم

و رنگ دامنه‌ها هوش از سرم می‌برد.

خطوط جاده در اندوه دشت‌ها گم بود.

چه دره‌های عجیبی!

و اسب، یادت هست،

سپید بود

و مثل واژه پاکی، سکوت سبز چمن‌زار را چرا می‌کرد.

و بعد، غربت رنگین قریه‌های سر راه.

و بعد، تونل‌ها.

دلم گرفته،

دلم عجیب گرفته است.

و هیچ چیز،

نه این دقایق خوشبو، که روی شاخه نارنج می‌شود خاموش،

نه این صداقت حرفی،

که در سکوت میان دو برگ این گل شب بوست،

نه، هیچ چیز مرا از هجوم خالی اطراف

نمی‌رهاند.

و فکر می‌کنم

که این ترنم موزون حزن تا به ابد

شنیده خواهد شد."[383]

The sun was setting

The sound of the intelligence of all

Vegetation could be heard

[383] Sohrab Sepehri, *Hasht Ketab,* (Tehran: Tahouri Library, 1987), 304-306.

The traveller had arrived

And had sat upon a comfortable chair

By the lawn:

"I am sad.

I am terribly sad.

On my way here all I could

Think of was but one thing.

The colour of the pastures

Was so dazzling

And the line of the road

were lost in the sadness of the prairies.

What strange valleys

And the horse, do you remember,

Was white

And just like a clean word

was pasturing on the green silence of the meadow.

And then the colourful strangeness of the village by the road,

and then, then tunnels.

"I am sad.

I am terribly sad, and nothing not even these aromatic minutes that are dying on the branches of the orange tree,

nor the sincerity of the word

exchanged between the silence

of the two leaves of this wallflower,

No, nothing can relieve me

from the attack of the emptiness of my surroundings.

And I believe

That this harmonious melody

Will be heard for ever."[384]

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[384] Hamid Dabashi, *Close up : Iranian cinema, past, present and future*, 74.

Using road and windshield camera – Kiarostami's favourite shots – he symbolizes a modern liberated man in search of the meaning of the life, a man who tries to touch the very essence of humanity. Heidegger says: "The Historical Dasein of human beings is from the ground up sustained and led by the being that the poet has experienced in advance, first enveloped, and so installed in the folk. We grasp this happening as a unity when we say: The poets establish being."[385] From a Heideggerian point of view, Kiarostami's cinema cannot be seen as aesthetically pleasing. His films are not filmed to entertain and distract and although they are created using technology. Rather, Kiarostami's cinema gives the "preservers" a space for thought and innovation, thus preparing the "preservers" for what Martin Heidegger calls the "holy"[386]. We – the viewers – are the ones whom Heidegger calls "preservers", and we have a crucial role in Kiarostami's cinema. Refusing to disburden the viewers from thoughts, Kiarostami sincerely believes in their role. He says: "character is like one of those little figurines that architects use in their drawings, to show the scale of the buildings. They are just figures, not people you have any feeling about."[387] Kiarostami's cinema, therefore, is a collective art form for addressing our times of "destitution". And this collective form of art and "addressing" require an "uncertainty" which Kiarostami is master of. Death, the most prominent theme of his films, is the impossible possibility, and similarly *Taste of Cherry* is the uncertain certainty, and the most powerful uncertainty that Kiarostami addresses in this film is the certainty of Badii's mortality and any other Dasein's finitude. Kiarostami re-establishes the singularity of morality as a foundation of a community of equal mortality. As Schmidt puts it:

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[385] Martin Heidegger is quoted in Hubert L. Dreyfus *Heidegger on Art* (draft 9/13/2008), 18.
[386] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 75.
[387] Roth, L., c. Tesson, et al., Abbas Kiarostami: Texts, entretiens, Filmographic Complete (Paris: Cahiers du cinema 2008).

> In light of the relation between Dasein and death…we can say that a community needs to be understood as the presentation to its members of its mortal truth. This amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings, something that Homer's description of the gods makes quite clear. Rather, a community is a presentation of the finitude and the excess that determine finite being. Thus we can say that the death of others – and the way in which such death reveals the character of community to the living – has a privileged role in the exposure of a community to itself. Community is not the space of egos, of subjects that think themselves according to the model of a deathless being; it is rather the space of others. Community is not the fusion of subjects into a higher order, a "we" since that is a coercive gesture no matter how enlightened. Community is rather founded on the knowledge that the other is never able to be grasped or known, never able to be represented or reproduced because in death the other remains forever impossibility out of my grasp. The other remains un-assumable otherness, a freedom that cannot be legislated.[388]

Heidegger rightly says that being human requires to "dwell poetically". That is what Kiarostami does in our times of "destitution" through citing and reading great poetry for us in his cinema and writing poems about the essence of "useless objects," about love, friendship, anxiety, life and death. He creates openness for us, "the preservers," to come closer to the neighbourhood of thinking. He does not try to reveal the "holy" but to prepare the "preservers" for the "holy." As Kiarostami says in one of his poems:

<div dir="rtl">

حاصل کجروی هایم

کوره راهایی است

برای رهروان.

</div>

The harvest of my straying

is a few crooked pathways

for wayfarers.[389]

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[388] Denis J. Schmidt, *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History,* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2005), 188.

[389] Abbas Kiarostami, *Gorg-i dar kamin (A Wolf Lying in Wait)*, 80.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In sum, Kiarostami's cinema can be categorized as a type of modern cinema in which situation does not extend to action and thus a seer character is inevitably created. The emergence of this type of character occurred almost simultaneously as its occurrence in other cinematic movements such as Italian-neorealism and French new-wave. However, it was only after the acceptance of *Taste of Cherry* in Cannes festival of 1997 that West recognized Kiarostami's cinema and the westerners started to study his films. However, there is not even one comprehensive study in the literature that takes Kiarostami's *The Traveller* seriously and analyse it theoretically and aesthetically. Thus, it was my intention for this thesis to show that Kiarsotami's structural and aesthetical characteristics was already existed in his earlier films while West was so pre-occupied by the appreciation of its own cinema.

With this conclusion I summarize key concepts covered in this study, and discuss how the objectives of this study have been achieved. I approached this study of philosophical reading of Kiarostami's cinema with two basic points: 1) to address philosophical questions, concepts, themes that I felt are the real sticking points to reading and studying Kiarostami's cinema, 2) to make conversation between Western philosophical concepts and his cinema in order to: a) philosophically engage his films which are very important contributors to the history of cinema, and b) identify the fundamental concepts that best illuminated as much of his cinema as possible.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, "Kiarostami's The Traveller: a Cinema of Seer," I argued that in what ways Kiarostami's *The Traveller* presents Deleuze's

notion of the cinema of seer. I discussed how *The Traveller*'s character become a seer rather than a doer, and proposed that this film is the initiation of raising a new type of character in Kiarostami's cinema. I drew on Deleuze's definition of modern cinema and its role to make us believe in the link between man and the world when the link is broken, in order to address the function of Kiarostami's cinema – as a modern cinema in Deleuzian sense – in the process of forced modernization in Iran.

In "Chapter 3: Nothingness: The Ultimate Power that Qassem Encounters with," I analysed *The Traveller* employing Sartre's notion of *nothingness* and concluding that Kiarostami's children are modern abstract individuals who encounter with the nothingness at the heart of human existence. Kiarostami builds up a fascinating portrait of an abstract notion of nothingness in narrative structure of film. I argued that *The Traveller* is a modern film discussing its particular way of storytelling which deviates from the traditional one. Kiarostami achieves this with his striking final scenes, representing universal human condition of the character, and the acknowledgement of the element of chance in the story.

In "Chapter 3: Towards a New Political Image: Kiarostami's *Close-Up*," I approached what is arguably a highly controversial question about Kiarostami's cinema: apolitical cinema or political cinema? I addressed two main arguments suggesting that Kiarostami's cinema is politically neutral, deeply conservative and affirming the dominant ideology. I illustrated the relationship between art and ideology by drawing on Marxist criticism, Louis Althusser, Alain Badiou and Walter Benjamin and I concluded that Kiarostami by creating new ideas, forms and genres permits his cinema to distance from the dominant ideology of the society, Iranian authority and Hollywood. Referring to Deleuze's notion of "minor cinema," I argued how politics is represented in Kiarostami's cinema giving a close analysis of *Close-*

Up and a brief mention of *First Case, Second Case*. Deleuze in the discussion of modern political cinema (minor cinema) differentiates modern approach to political cinema from classical. According to Deleuze, in modern cinema people are missing, the boundary between political and private is blurred and people are fragmented (no unified people). In *Close-Up*, by revealing the hidden story of unemployment of a poor printer (Hossein Sabzian) and the middle class family's sons, Kiarostami blurred the boundary between private affair and political. In addition, by portraying several people in the film they simultaneously unified and clashed with each other in occasions. Therefore, the film testifies to a split in the unity of people and 'people' in this film represent the new political meaning. In *First Case, Second Case*, fragmented people is disclosed by using a number of narrators to address a simple incident happened at a school.

In "Chapter 5: The poetics of Kiarostami's Cinema" I addressed the most common description of Kiarostami's cinema: poetics of Kiarostami's cinema, discussing Kiarostami's cinema and poems in relation to Passolini's description of cinema of poetry and Deleuze's crystal-image and Heidegger's writing on poetry. By extensive analysing of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, *Where is the Friend's House?* and *The Traveller*, I deduced that Kiarostami's cinema is stylistically shares the features which Pasolini and Deleuze count for poetics of films such as static shots, self-reflexivity, freeze-frame, rolling things and any-spaces-whatever. I proposed that Kiarostami takes up the position that Heidegger considers for poets in 'destitution' times. Kiarostami attains this position with his poetic cinema, poetry books and reciting great poet's poetry in his films (dwelling poetically). I argued that Kiarostami 'dwells poetically' in this world, revealing the truth through poetry and

providing a clearing for thought. Kiarostami invites the viewers to participate in his open-ended films and to listen to great poetry and thus prepares us for 'holy'.

Kiarostami's cinema is a modern cinema that brings poetry into cinema and reads great poetry for its audience in order to provide them with openness for thought. Kiarostami's cinema is where everyday banality transforms into poetry. This cinema goes beyond the equipment character of things and thus reveals a truth about our existence about our suffering and about the singularity of death. Kiarostami's cinema shows us how to restore our belief in the world in our time of destitution and thus prepare us for the "holy". It is a modern cinema where the politics is not represented but enacted and thus it is a cinema that goes beyond the representation. This is a cinema that does not create a people but it shares with those people who suffer a common resistance "to death, to servitude, to the intolerable ... and to the present."[390] Kiarostami's cinema makes it possible for us to envisage new forms of political subjectivity and to re-establish belief in the possibility of a common world.

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[390] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, (New York: Columbia University Press 1994), 110.

Filmography

1970

Nan va kuche / Bread and Alley

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Taghi Kiarostami. Photography: Mehrdad Fakhimi (b&w). Editing: Manuchehr Oliai. Sound: Harayer Atashkar. Cast: Reza Hashemi, Mehdi Shahrvanfar. Format: 35mm. Running time: 11 minutes. Synopsis: A child is confronted by a hungry dog on his way back to home from a short journey to buy bread. He asks different passengers to help him to go down to get home, but no one pays attention to him. After all, he understands that he has to solve this problem all by his own. He throws a piece of bread for the barking dog and while the dog is busy with eating the bread he escapes to his home.

1972

Zang-e tafrih / Breaktime

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami, based on a story by Massud Madani. Photography: Ali Reza Zarrindast and Morteza Rastegar (b&w). Editing: Ruhollah Emami. Sound: Hrayer Atashkar. Cast: Sirus Hassanpur. Format: 35mm. Running time: 14 minutes. Synopsis: A child boy (Dara) is sent home as a punishment for breaking a window at school. On his way home, he sees some other school boys playing football and steals a ball from them. Chased away by the school boys, he arrives at the outskirts of the city and starts walking along a busy highway.

1973

Tajrobe / The Experience

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami and Amir Naderi based on a story by Amir Naderi. Photography: Ali Reza Zarrindast (b&w). Editing: Mehdi Rajaian. Sound: Hrayer Atashkar. Cast: Hossein Yar Mohammadi, Andre Gwalovich, Parviz Naderi, Mostafa Tari, Firuzeh Habibi, Kamal Ramezani, Behruz Adriun, Morteza Said, Sirus Kakhaki, Shirin Rezvan, Aziz Talebi. Format: 35mm. Running time: 56 minutes. Synopsis: Mamad an orphaned teenager with a working class background works at a photographic studio where he also sleeps at nights. He falls in love with a girl from a richer family and decides to go to her home and ask for a job as a servant. But he only receives a decisive refusal.

1974

Mosafer / The Traveller

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami based on a story by Hassan Rafii. Photography: Firuz Malekzadeh (b&w). Editing: Amir Hossein Hami. Music: Kambiz Roshanravan. Sound: Hrayer Atashkar. Cast: Hassan Darabi, Massud Zandbegleh, Mostafa Tari, Hassan Arab, Sahar Zandbegleh. Format: 35mm. Running time: 71 minutes. Synopsis: Qassem a teenager boy from Malayer is mad about football. One day, he finds out that the national team has a match in the capital Tehran. He decides to run away from home to go to Tehran. To do this he needs to have a sum of money to pay for his journey to the capital as well as the ticket for the game of football. He travels overnight in a long-distance and is overcome with fatigue. He falls asleep just before the match

starts. He wakes up and finds out that he is alone on his own; he runs toward the stadium and discovers that the game is finished.

1979

Ghazie-ye shekl-e aval, ghazie-ye shekel dovvom / First Case, Second Case

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Hushang Baharlu (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Sound: Changiz Sayad. Format: 16mm. Running time: 53 minutes. Synopsis: A short film about the viewpoints of various educational experts and famous political figures from different parties who differ in age, religion and gender and who seem to have different positions in relation to a simple incident at school.

1987

Khane-ye doost kojast? / Where Is the Friend's House?

Production: Alireza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Farhad Saba (col.). Editing: Nemat Allah Alizadeh and Abbas Kiarostami. Music: Amin Allah Hossein. Sound: Jahangir Mirshekari, Asghar Shahverdi and Behruz Moavenian. Cast: Babak Ahmadpur, Ahmad Ahmadpur, Khodabakhsh Defai, Mohammad Hossein Ruhi, Iran Otari, Ayat Ansari, Rafia Difai, Sedigheh Tohidi, Peiman Mohafi, Farhang Akhavan, Tayebeh Soleimani, Mohammadreza Parvaneh, Aziz Babai, Nader Ghulami, Akbar Muradi. Format: 35mm. Running time: 83 minutes. Synopsis: It is a story of a schoolboy's quest to return his friend's exercise book in a neighbouring village, because should his friend fail to hand in his homework once more, it is likely he will get expelled.

After various adventures, he is not able to find his friend's house and night he also does his friend's homework and saves his friend from the teacher's punishment.

1990

Nemay-e nazdik / Close-Up

Production: Alireza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Alireza Zarrindast (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: Kambiz Roshanravan. Sound: Mohammad Haghighi, Ahmad Asghari, Hassan Zahedi and Jahangir Mirshekari. Cast: Hossain Sabzian, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abbas Kiarostami, Abolfazl Ahankhah, Mehrdad Ahankhah, Monoochehr Ahankhah, Mahrokh Ahankhah, Haj Ali Reza Ahmadi, Nayer Mohseni Zonoozi, Ahmad Reza Moayed Mohseni, Hossain Farazmand, Hooshang Shamaei, Mohammad Ali Barrati, Davood Goodarzi, Hassan Komaili, Davood Mohabbat. Format: 35mm. Running time: 90 minutes. Synopsis: The film tells the story of the real-life trial of a man who impersonated filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, conning a family into believing they would star in his new film.

1992

Zendegi va digar hich / Life and Nothing More...

Production: Alireza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kudakan va Nojavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Homayun Payvar (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: 'Concert for Two Horns' by Antonio Vivaldi. Sound: Hassan Zahedi and Behruz Abedini. Cast: Farhad Kheradmand, Pya Payvar, Hossein Rezai, Farkhondeh Feyzi, Moharram Feyzi, Behruz Abedini, Ziya Babai, Mohammad Hossein Ruhi, Hossein Khadem, Massumeh Parvaneh, Mohammad reza

Parvaneh, Shahrbanu Shafahi, Mohammad Bezdani, Mohammad Hassanpur, Farhad Kadimi, Mahbanu Darabi, Leila Noruzi. Format: 35mm. Running time: 91 minutes. Synopsis: After a disastrous earthquake that hit northern Iran in 1990, a director and his son return to the devastated region to search for two boys who had appeared in the previous film by the director a few years earlier.

1994

Zir-e derakhtan-e zeytun / Through the Olive Trees

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Hossein Jafarian and Farhad Saba (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: Farshid Rahiman and 'Concert for Oboe and Violins' by Domenico Cimarosa. Sound: Mahmud Samabakhshi, Yadollah Nayafi and Hossein Moradi. Cast: Hossein Rezai, Tahereh Ladanian, Mohammad Ali Keshavarz, Farhad Kheradmand, Zarifeh Shiva, Mahbanu Darabi, Zahra Noruzi, Parastu Abbasi, Nosrat Bagheri, Aziz Aziznia, Astaduli Babani, Khodabakhsh Defai, Ahmad pur pir Sarai, Vali babai, Fardin Nuri, Najibeh Pur Sadeghi, Hossein Karimi, Hasan Karimi, Reza Ghafari, Esmail Aghajani, Babak Ahmadpur, Ahmad Ahmadpur. Format: 35mm. Running time: 103 minutes. Synopsis: Set in a village in northern Iran that has been devastated by an earthquake. A film crew arrive to shoot a film called `And life goes on'. A young mason who has been hired as a waiter on set plays a small part in the film, and finds that his acting partner is the girl next door with whom he is in love. Her parents, who refused to let them marry before the earthquake, are now dead and, even though her grandmother is still against the match, the man takes the view that now no-one has a roof to love under, all are equal.

1997

Tam-e gilas / Taste of Cherry

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Homayun Payvar (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: 'St. James Infirmary' by Joe Primore. Sound: Jahangir Mirshekari. Cast: Homayun Ershadi, Abdolhossein Bagheri, Afshin Khorshid Bakhtari, Safar-Ali Moradi, Mir-Hossein Nuri, Ahmad Ansari, Hamid Massumi, Elham Emami, Ahmad Jahangiri, Nasrollah Amini, Sepideh Asghari, Davoud Forouzanfar, Iraj Alidust, Rahman Rezai, Ali Nurnajafi. Format: 35mm. Running time: 99 minutes. Synopsis: Taste of Cherry tells a story about a man (Badii), tired of life, who wants to commit suicide. Cruising the outskirts of Tehran, Mr Badii searches for an accomplice who is willing to bury him after he is dead. After encountering various people who refuse to accept his proposal, an old taxidermist is the only person who agrees to accomplish the task. In the middle of the night, Badii climbs into the grave that he already dug. The screen goes black followed by some video shots of the same people who were appeared in the film.

1999

Bad ma r aba khod khahad bord/The Wind Will Carry Us

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz. Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami based on a story an idea by Ramin Rafirasme. Photography: Mahmoud Kalari (col.). Music: Peyman Yazdanian. Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Sound: Jahangir Mirshekari and Mohammad Hassan Najm. Cast: Behzad Dourani, Farzad Sohrabi, Massoud Mansuri, Massumeh Salimi, Bahman Ghobadi, Noghreh Asadi, Alireza Naderi, Rushan Karam Elmi, Reihan Heydari, Lida Soltani. Format: 35mm. Running time: 118 minutes. Synopsis: The story of this film is about a group of documentary filmmakers going to a small mountain village in Kurdistan wishing to produce a documentary film about the villagers' strange and extraordinary death ceremony.

Their subject is a hundred-year-old lady who is sick. Of the group of three we just see one (Behzad) waiting for the lady to die so they can film the burial ceremony. The group are greeted by a young boy (Farzad), who guides them to where they stay and shows Behzad around but he finally turns his back on him. Behzad spends his time exploring the village and becomes involved with the life of the villagers and rethinks his attitude.

2002

Ten

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz. Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami. Photography: Abbas Kiarostami (col.). Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: Peyman Yazdanian. Cast: Mania Akbari, Amin Maher, Mandana Shaerbaf, Roya Arabshahi, Katayun Taleizadeh, Amene Moradi, Kamran Adl. Format: DV. Running time: 94 minutes. Synopsis: The film consists of ten scene, each of which depict a conversation between a female driver and various passengers as she drives in the busy streets of Tehran. Her passengers include, her son, a bride, a prostitute, and an old woman on her way to prayer. One of the main topics of the conversation is the driver's divorce and the aftermaths that have affected her relationship with her son.

2008

Shirin

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. Screenplay: Mohammad Rahmanian based on a story by Hakim Nezami Ganjavi. Photography: Mahmoud Kalari and Houman Behmanesh. Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. Music: Heshmat Sanjeri, Morteza Hananeh and Hossein Dehlavi, Samin Baghcheban. Cast: 114 professional Iranian actresses and Juliette Binoche. Format: DCP. Running time: 92 minutes. Synopsis: 114 Iranian female stars and a French actress mutely watch the story of Khosrow and

Shirin, a Persian poem from twelfth century, staged by Kiarostami. The viewers of the film do not see the development of the text and the story is only told through the women's' faces watching the show.

Other Credits:

1929

Un chien andalou (The Andalusian Dog), by Luis Buñuel. Screenplay: Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel.

1941

Citizen Kane, by Orson Welles. Screenplay: Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles.

1945

Roma città aperta (Rome, Open City), by Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay: Roberto Rossellini and Federico Fellini.

1946

Paisà (Paisan), By Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay: Sergio Amidei and Klaus Mann.

1948

Germania anno zero (Germany Year Zero), By Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini.

1950

Stromboli, by Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini and Sergio Amidi.

1952

Europa '51 (Europe '51), by Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini.

1959

Les quatre cents coups (The 400 Blows), by François Truffaut. Screenply by François Truffaut and Marcel Moussy.

Pickpocket, by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Robert Bresson.

North by Northwest, Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay by Ernest Lehman.

1960

L'avventura, by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni.

La dolce vita, by Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini and Ennio Flaiano.

À bout de soufflé (Breathless), by Jean-Luc Godard. Screenplay by François Truffaut.

1961

La notte, by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni and Ennio Flaiano.

La commare secca (The Grim Reaper), by Bernardo Bertolucci. Screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

1962

L'eclisse (Eclipse), by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni and Tonino Guerra.

1963

Khaneh siah ast (The House Is Black), by Forough Farrokhzad. Screenplay by Forough Farroukhzad.

8 ½, by Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini and Ennio Flaiano.

1964

Prima della rivoluzione (Before the Revolution), by Bernardo Bertolucci. Screenplay by Bernardo Bertolucci and Gianni Amico.

Il deserto rosso (Red Desert), by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni and Tonino Guerra.

Il vangelo secondo Matteo (The Gospel According to Matthew), by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

1965

Khesht va Ayeneh (The Brick and the Mirror), by Ebrahim Golestan. Screenplay by Ebrahim Golestan.

Giulietta degli spiriti (Juliet of the Sprits), by Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini and Tullio Pinelli.

1966

Blow-up, by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni and Julio Cortázar.

Andrey Rublyov (Andrei Rublev), by Andrei Tarkovsky. Screenplay by Andrei Tarkovsky.

1968

Teorema, by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

1969

Gav (The Cow), by Dariush Mehrjui, Screenplay by Dariush Mehrjui and Gholam-Hossein Saedi.

Gheisar, by Masud Kimiai. Screenplay by Masud Kimiai.

1970

Zabriskie Point, by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni.

1974

Asrar ganj darehaye jenni (The Secrets of the Treasure of the Jenni Valleys), by Ibrahim Golestan. Screenplay: Ibrahim Golestan.

1999

Rang-e khoda (The Colour of Paradise), By Majid Majidi. Screenplay: Majid Majidi.

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