

## Kiarostami's Unfinished Cinema and its Postmodern Reflections

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### Abstract:

Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema* emphasizes the importance of audiences' involvement in a movie by using postmodern images. Some essential points of critically reading his, so-called *half-created cinema*, could be summarized as *self-reflexive style*, *diagrammatical perspectives*, *in-between narratives*, and *Individual minimalism*. The main postmodern achievement of this cinema is focusing on the process of creating meaning through the experience of film. Furthermore, the close-ups function as separate independent units that are constantly generating their implicit affections. In this respect, Kiarostami's unusual works are interpretable by Deleuze's some neologism like *affection-image*. The films are some affective micro-dramas formed in a gap between the audiences' receptions and the close-ups. Despite their postmodern reflections, unfinished movies have no strict disciplines that may limit the process of creating meaning. This paper attempts to present a new approach of reading Kiarostami as an increasing global interest.

**Keywords:** *Kiarostami, Unfinished Cinema, Postmodernism, Critical Reading*

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## Introduction

Iranian cinema, after 1979 revolution, has found a good chance to express itself in a global discourse by making use of its national factors. Abbas Kiarostami has played a great role in this expression during the period. His simple realistic films attracted viewers and provided an opportunity for Iranian cinema to show itself as the most significant art in the coming decades.

*Unfinished Cinema*, a project that Kiarostami setup as an approaching vision of cinema, is still in its primary stages. This study attempts to present a different outlook to the project by describing its particularity and studying its typical elements. Applying postmodern strategies, this type of cinema focuses on a progressive role of filmgoers' participation in the process of re-producing the final purpose of a movie. The research begins its enquiry with some historical considerations respecting the role of Iranian new wave and the place of Kiarostami in the world cinema. Exploring the influential aspect of film, as a cultural medium involved in the socio-political changes of Iran, provides a basic background to discuss on the concept of *unfinished cinema*. Studying the area leads us to reach the factors, which recalls postmodern backgrounds of western literature and arts; puzzle-like narratives, self-reflexive style, diagrammatical perspective of visual sphere and finally,

dramatic minimalism are among the most remarkable parameters.

Employing a descriptive methodology, we will then analyze Kiarostami's recent films such as *Ten* (2002) and *Shirin* (2007) by using Deleuze's postmodern reading of the close-ups. We will explore a kind of Deluzian *affection-image* in his latest works. The research will be concluded after depicting new horizons of Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema* and highlighting the audiences' challenge to get a unique place inside the project.

## Historical Considerations

Any historical approach to Iranian cinema, limited to its socio-political backgrounds, ignores the role of films in making or changing history. 1979 was a historical point for Iranian culture to go beyond the geo-political boundaries and find a global response. The new wave that started in the late 1960s, as a counter movement to Persian mainstream called *Film-e-Farsi*, revitalized itself after the revolution. The historical moment was not simply a political but a cultural at the same time. Iranian movies reflected political images of current history. The pioneer filmmakers shared many common techniques including the use of poetic dialogue and allegorical storytelling dealing with political and philosophical issues. Despite all instabilities, the movies restored cultural effects. In his article about Iranian new wave,

David Bordwell focused on this face of making history by movies not politics: “budgets are bare-bones by Western standards, and by using nonfactor and locations, filmmakers have presented post-shah Iranian culture to a world that knew little of it” <sup>1</sup>(Bordwell,2008,p.161). Underlining the importance of cultural movies, Godfrey Cheshire also believes Iranian cinema deserved to be considered respectfully against Hollywood authority:

*“For Americans who want to look beyond the reductive image of Iran presented by the US media, Iran's cinema offers an alternative that is fascinating, even astonishing, for its artistic sophistication and passionate humanism. At a time when Hollywood has put many national cinemas virtually out of business, and Hollywood itself is dominated by flashy, special effects-laden fantasies, Iran's filmmakers continue to impress world audiences with their distinctive formal ingenuity and dedication to real-life people and problems.”*<sup>2</sup>(Cheshire,2008)

Abbas Kiarostami, today acclaimed as an international filmmaker, is indeed a post revolution effect of Iranian cinema. In 1987, Kiarostami began to gain recognition outside

Iran by ‘Where is the Friend's Home?’ The film was a first of series which completed through the next decade including ‘And Life Goes on’ (1992) and ‘Through the Olive Trees’(1994),called in the West as the ‘Koker Trilogy’ because all three films feature the village of Koker in north of Iran. Kiarostami, however, resists the designation, noting that the films put together only by the accident of place. He has suggested it might be more appropriate to consider as a trilogy the latter two titles and ‘Taste of Cherry’(1997), since these, he says, connected by a theme: *the preciousness of life*<sup>3</sup>(Kiarostami, 2006). A worldwide reading of Kiarostami's artworks established since then. Most intellectual circles noticed him as a unique cultural measure of approaching Iran at the turn of the century. His simple images of experiencing life in itself and new interpretation of reality led critics to the postmodern reflections of Iranian movies. For instance, Cheshire believes “in Kiarostami's universe, it might be said; there are No-things, only relations between things. Likewise, in his cinema: No films, only relations between films-

1. David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice”, in ‘Poetics of Cinema’, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 161.  
2. Godfrey Cheshire, “ The Iranian Cinema”, Beyond the Veil, Firouzan Film, 2008 **Error! Main Document Only.** (accessed Sep 22,2008)

3. Abbas Kiarostami, “ on Taste of Cherry”,Interview by Jamsheed Akrami,and also in Godfrey Cheshire, The Criterion Collection: Taste of Cherry by Abbas Kiarostami,  
<http://www.criterion.com/asp/release.asp/feature/2007/02/23> (accessed July 2006)

- and within them; and between them and us"<sup>1</sup>(Cheshire,2008).

Compared to some intercontinental filmmakers such as *Satyajit Ray*, *Vittorio de Sica*, *Eric Rohmer* and *Jacques Tati*, he often employs techniques of his own invention the so-called *Kiarostami's style*<sup>2</sup> (Kiarostami,2002).In 2006, *The Guardian's* panel of critics also ranked Kiarostami as the best non- American film director.<sup>3</sup> Bordwell thought that his cinema was a remarkable instance.Its low budget film industry, neorealist themes and characters as well as its natural extreme long shots at the background of ordinary life made Iran as a central point of intellectual studies:

*"Kiarostami himself - superb screenwriter, director of exemplary documentaries and fiction films, and experimenter with portable video and Warholian recording (Ten, 2002; Five Dedicated to Ozu, 2003) – stands as an emblem of a culture in love with cinematic*

*artifice but also compelled to bear witness to the lives of ordinary people. Who in the West have predicated that a great cinema, at once humanist and formalist, would have come from Iran?"*<sup>4</sup>(Bordwell,2008,p.162)

Acclaimed directors such as *Martin Scorsese* have commented, "Kiarostami represents the highest level of artistry in the cinema."<sup>5</sup>(Jeffrie,2005) However, his best praise delivered by *Jean-Luc Godard* who said that Film began with *D.W. Griffith* and ended with Kiarostami.<sup>6</sup>(Boni,2008)

### Unfinished Project of Cinema

*Unfinished project of modern cinema* is the first Kiarostami's official reaction against author-based approaches that considered a huge gap between the filmmaker and the audience. After two decades of filmmaking as well as experiencing different styles, he reached particular functions of filmgoers' relation to film, in absence of filmmaker. His personal perception is strongly associated with the

1. Godfrey Cheshire, "Taste of Cherry", The Criterion Collection, Firouzan Film 2008,

[http://firouzanfilm.com/articles &essays/taste of cherry/godfrey cheshire.html](http://firouzanfilm.com/articles&essays/tasteofcherry/godfreycheshire.html) (accessed Sep 22,2008)

2. "Abbas Kiarostami: Biography". Zeitgeist, the spirit of the time, <http://www.zeitgeistfilm.com/directors/akiarostami> (accessed Feb 23,2002)

3. Panel of critics, "The world's 40 best directors", *The Guardian*, <http://www.film.gaurdian.co.uk/features/page/0,11425,1082823,00htm>. (accessed Feb 25,2006)

4. David Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema, p. 162

5. Stuart Jeffrie (Jeffries 2005)s, "Abbas Kiarostami - Not A Martyr", *The Guardian*, <http://www.countercurrent.org/arts-jefferies250405.htm> (accessed April 26,2005)

6. Francesco Boni, "Biography for Abbas Kiarostami", IMDB Mini Biography, <http://www.imdb.com/AbbasKiarostami/biography.htm> (accessed Sep15,2008)

“reader-response theory”<sup>1</sup>(Guerin,2005,pp.35-361)of modern literature and the “*Unfinished project of Modernity*,” philosophically.<sup>2</sup>(Best and Kellner,1991,p.234). It must be said that Kiarostami’s reading is, of course, an intuitive judgment rather than considering the facts or presuppositions. “*Unfinished cinema*” or “half-created cinema” is indeed his first practical attempt to depict ambiguous limits of a post-modern way of watching and reading the images. The audience is considered as a focal point of this uncompleted cinema. It is the main factor of constructing narrative sequences and discovering its own closed or open endings.

The designation, *unfinished cinema*, was first claimed at *Paris Odeon Theatre* in Kiarostami’s text for centenary of cinema on December 1995. He hoped to achieve a new cinematic vision by which the directors would be reflected through the mirror of audiences’ interventions.<sup>3</sup>(Kiarostami,2008).It means when we reveal a film’s imaginary world to the audience, they each try to create their own

world through the wealth of their own experiences. As a filmmaker, he relies on this creative intervention for, otherwise, the film and the audience will die together. Well-made stories, he stated, have one major defect:

“*They work too well to allow the audience to intervene. It is a fact that films without a story are not very popular with audiences, yet a story also requires gaps, empty spaces like in a crossword puzzle, voids that it is up to the audience to fill in; or, like a private detective in a thriller to discover. I believe in a type of cinema that gives greater possibilities and time to its audience; a half-created cinema, an unfinished cinema that attains completion through the creative spirit of the audience, so resulting in hundreds of films. It belongs to the members of that audience and corresponds to their own world. The world of each work, of each film recounts a new truth. In the darkened theatre, we give everyone the chance to dream and to express his dream freely.*”<sup>4</sup>(Kiarostami,1995)

Some essential characteristics of this type of cinema are therefore as follows:

**Self-reflexive style)** Unfinished film is an art form reflecting its preceding images dialectically. *Stephen Bransford* contends that Kiarostami’s films do not contain references to the work of other directors, but do include a myriad of references to his own work.

1. Wilfred I. Guerin..., 5<sup>th</sup> ed, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (Oxford, 2005), 10:[350-361].

2. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, “Postmodern Theory; Critical Interrogations,” (London, The McMillan Press, 1991) 7:234.

3. Abbas Kiarostami, ‘An Unfinished Cinema’, Text Written for the Centenary of Cinema, distributed at Odon Theatre,Paris,1995;also could be found in New Yorkers film official selection, May 2008.

[http://newyorkersfilm.com/wind\\_pk.pdf](http://newyorkersfilm.com/wind_pk.pdf) (accessed May 26,2008)

4. Abbas Kiarostami, ‘An Unfinished Cinema’,1995.

*Bransford* believes his films are often fashioned into an ongoing dialectic: one film reflecting on and partially demystifying an earlier film.<sup>1</sup>(Bransford, 2003) Dialectical modes of his style seem to be a result of conceptualizing the nature within an eternal cycle of reflecting the life on the death and vice versa. Kiarostami's images are hence entirely suspended between fiction and real life, opening film to new formal horizons.<sup>2</sup>(Perez,2005)

**Diagrammatical perspectives)**The visual sphere of this type of cinema is regularly associated with geometric forms. The critic, *Adrian Martin*, underlines Kiarostami's direct perception of the world, identifying his cinema as being "*diagrammatical*". Literal "*diagrams*" inscribed in the landscape, such as the famous zigzagging pathway in the *Koker Trilogy*, indicates "*geometry of forces of life and of the world.*" For *Martin*, these forces are neither complete order, nor complete chaos but rather what lies between these poles.<sup>3</sup>(Le Cain,2003)

**In-between narratives)**The work of these films is found in an ambiguity, an '*in-betweenness*' that avoids superficial endings and calls upon the viewer to consider what he or she is seeing – a cinema of idea that stimulates and, indeed, demands thoughts rather than directly expressing it.<sup>4</sup>(Martin, 2008) Unfinished film is in fact the product of juxtaposing sub-narratives that call audience to participate in the process of creating multiple meaning. *Jamsheed Akrami* explains the notion of Kiarostami's films as remaining '*half-finished*', the viewer being called upon to finish the film in his or her mind, to answer the questions that it poses with the result that each film is a different film for each different viewer.<sup>5</sup>(Akrami,2008)

**Individual minimalism)**This type of cinema often employs minimal effects of sounds and images. In recent years, Kiarostami has increasingly trimmed down the size of his films that reduces the film making experience from a collective endeavor to a purer, more basic form of artistic

1. Stephen Bransford, "Days in the Country: Representations of Rural Space ...", Sense of Cinema, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com>

/contents/03/29/kiarostami\_rural\_space\_and\_place.html (accessed Mar 29,2003) (Fergus 2003) (Kiarostami 1995)

2. Gilberto Perez, "where is the Director?", Sight & Sound, May 5,2005 <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/issue/2005/05/05>

3. Maximillian Le Cain, "Kiarostami: The Art of Living," review of documentary film 'Kiarostami:the Art of

Living', by Pat Collins and Fergus Dally, filmIreland,2003, <http://filmireland.com/reviews/08/28/fdoc.html> (accessed Aug 28,2008)

4. Adrian Martin, "kiarostami: the Art of Living", reviewed by Maximillian Le Cain, 2008.

5. Jamsheed Akrami, "Cooling Down a 'Hot Medium'", Iran Heritage Foundation, (Next page)... [http://iranheritage.com/kiarostamiconference/abstracts\\_full.html](http://iranheritage.com/kiarostamiconference/abstracts_full.html) (accessed Sep 22,2008)

expression.<sup>1</sup>(Akrami,2003) Kiarostami himself quoted in relation to his individual style of minimalism:

*"My films have been progressing towards a certain kind of minimalism, even though it was never intended. Elements, which can be eliminated, have been eliminated. Somebody who referred to the paintings of Rembrandt and his use of light pointed this out to me: some elements are highlighted while others are obscured or even pushed back into the dark. Moreover, it's something that we do - we bring out elements that we want to emphasize. I'm not claiming or denying that I have done such a thing but I do believe in [Robert] Bresson's method of creation through omission, not through addition."*<sup>2</sup>(Nancy,1999,p.82)

Considerable disapproval may yet enter this cinematic approach. In spite of desire to natural evolution, *unfinished cinema* is a particular type which adapting itself to hardly key elements of postmodernism. It is obvious that Kiarostami's practical method of reading the world through the movies needs to be first improved more theoretically by him before experimentally by the audience. The audience has in fact an ironic role in this type of cinema. While any thing is

supposed to be aimed to the audience, he or she often aims to find simply traditional surface meaning inside the film.

### Postmodern Reflections

*Unfinished cinema* is a project being created constantly. Although Kiarostami is inclined to direct experience of objectivity in time and space, like Bazin's perception of reality<sup>3</sup>(Bazin,1972), but his audience is a creator, not a created. Expressing non-located face of the meaning, this type of cinema shows postmodern reflections. The most important of these reflections could be reviewed in the audiences' role during the visual experience of films. A film of this type is not actually produced by the filmmaker, but by the audience. Cinematic time and space of each film strongly depends on viewers' position and their historical moment of watching it. They are the spectators, who re-create the defined yet unfinished sphere and show resistance to any definite conclusion. The most important postmodern achievement of this cinema is focusing on the process of creating meaning through the experience of film. Entering into the imaginary world, the audiences change the

1. Jamsheed Akrami, 'Kiarostami: The Art of Living', film by Collins and Fergus,2003

2. Jean-Luc (Nancy 1999) (Guerin 2005) Nancy, "On Evidence: *Life and Nothing More*, by Abbas Kiarostami", *Discourse*21.1 (1999), p.82.

3. Andre Bazin (Bazin 1967 &1972), 'What is Cinema?', selected and trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1967 &1972).

conditions of interpretation and greatly influence common practice of reading a movie.

In a sense, an *unfinished movie* is needless of critics or theoreticians, but always committed to an interactive dialogue between the audience and the artwork, with or without any critic or even the filmmaker. That is why Kiarostami's films are sometimes difficult to grasp. Some critics like *Jonathan Rosenbaum* tried to explain the issue saying, "there's no getting around the fact that the movies of Abbas Kiarostami divide audiences—in this country, in his native Iran, and everywhere else they're shown."<sup>1</sup>(Rosenbaum,2006). Rosenbaum argues that disagreements and controversy over Kiarostami's movies have arisen from his style of filmmaking because what in Hollywood would count as essential narrative information is frequently missing from his films. Camera placement, likewise, often defies standard audience expectations. In the closing sequences of *Life and Nothing More* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), the audience is forced to imagine missing scenes. In *Homework* (1989) and *Close-Up* (1990), parts of the sound track have been masked, or drop in and out. In fact, the subtlety of Kiarostami's form of cinematic

expression is resistant to critical analysis.<sup>2</sup>(Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum,2003,pp.13-14).

**Kiarostami and Deleuze)** Our postmodern reading of Kiarostami's works are deeply inspired by *Gilles Deleuz*'s thesis on *movement* and his second commentary on *Bergson* in 'Cinema1'.<sup>3</sup> Re-reading Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1911), He argued that we find ourselves, in our cinematic perception mode, faced with the exposition of a world where image is equal to movement. The sets of what appears, he called, *cinematic image*. We cannot say that one image acts on other or reacts to another. There is nothing moved which is distinct from executed or received movement. Every thing, that is to say every image is indistinguishable from its actions and reactions; this is universal variation. Every image is merely a road by which pass, in every direction, the modifications disseminated throughout the immensity of the universe. Every cinematic image acts on others and reacts to others, on all their facets at once and by all their elements.<sup>4</sup>

In his surprising micro-analysis of postmodern *subject*, Deleuze employs a

1. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Fill In The Blanks", Chicago Reader, <http://www.chicagoreaders.com/movies/archives/1998/0598.htm> (accessed May 05,2006)

2. Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Abbas Kiarostami', (Urbana and Chicago:university of Illinois press,2003),pp13-14.

3. Gilles Deleuze, 'Cinema 1',ed., trans.Hugh Tamlinson and Barbara Habberjam, ( London: Continuum,2005) 58-68.

4. Gilles Deleuze, 'Cinema 1',ed.,2005, p.60.



philosophical apparatus which could be traced back in some avant-garde views such as *Mark Rothko*, *Samuel Beckett*, *Jean Luc Godard*. In his distinctive view, everything functions at the time, but along with pauses and ruptures, breakdowns and failures, halting and short circuits, distances and fragmentations, within an *entire* that never succeeds in bringing its various parts together so as to form a whole. That is why, for Kiarostami's readers, the breaks in the process of image making are so much productive. The event could be only the category of multiplicity, in *Deleuzian* term, used as a substantive and going beyond the *One* and *Many*, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity.<sup>1</sup>

The postmodern reflections of *unfinished cinema* are partly seen in the close-ups. In fact, the focal point of these reflections in Kiarostami's works is the close-up. *Ten (2002)* and *Shirin (2007)* are the most remarkable examples among his latest films. Both employing a huge series of close-ups, they have created some narratives that are really bizarre but affective. In Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema*, the close-ups function as separate independent units that are constantly generating their implicit affections. Each film, in this respect, works like an organism consist of huge

assembled micro-organs. Montage has a key role in systematizing the whole and linking the units. The close-ups provide reasonable opportunities, regardless their contents, to reconstruct a particular (non) narrative in a cinematic time and space. In a sense, the nature of structure in *unfinished cinema* is deeply related to the close-ups assemblage.

This unusual kind of applying the close-ups somewhat reminds us a *Deleuz's* reading of their affective polarities (*power and quality*) in *Griffith's* and *Eisenstein's* cinema. *Eisenstein* suggested that the close-up was not merely one type of image among others, but gave an affective reading of the whole film. *Deleuze* thought that this was true of the *affection-image*<sup>2</sup>; "the affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face..."<sup>3</sup> (Deleuze, 2005, p.89). It is both a type of image and a component of all images, but that is not all there is to it. He tried then to explain in what sense the close-up is identical to the whole affection-image. In search of extracting poles, which can guide the readers, Deleuze traced the affection-image from the magnified faces:

"Let us start from an example which is not a face; a clock which is presented to us in close-up several times. Such an image does indeed

1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Anti-Oedipus', ed., trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (London: continuum, 2004) 45

2. That which occupies the gap between an action and reaction, that which absorbs an external action and reacts on the inside.

3. Gilles Deleuze, 'Cinema 1', 7th ed., 2005, p.89.

two poles. On the one hand, it has hands moved by micro-movements, at least virtual ones, even if we are shown it once, or several times at long intervals: the hands necessarily form part of an *Intensive series*, which marks an ascent towards...or tends towards a critical instant, prepares a paroxysm. On the other hand, it has a face receptive immobile surface, receptive plate of inscription, impassive suspense; it is a reflecting and reflected unity.<sup>1</sup> (Deleuze, 2005, p. 89)

It is the combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements, which constitutes the affect. Each time we discover these two poles in something-reflecting surface and intensive micro-movements- we can say that this thing has been treated as a face; it has been envisaged, and in turn it stares at us, it looks at us even if it does not resemble a face. Hence, the close-up of the clock does in the same way. As for the face itself, we will not say that the close-up deals with it or subjects it to some kind of treatment; 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, *affection-image*.<sup>2</sup> (Deleuze, 2005, p. 90)

The unusual close-ups of Iranian actresses in *Shirin* (2007) somehow function as the same way of Deleuze's reading. *Shirin* is a long

version of three minutes short film called *Romeo* (2006). We are facing here with more than a hundred women's reactions to the romantic scenes of Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). Kiarostami attempts to use the sounds and visual effects separately, each as an independent artwork. This is a developed idea of cutting the sounds in an imaginary perspective that first invented by Godard and *New Wave* filmmakers in 1960s. *Shirin*'s images are a repeating series of the close-ups which are being applied in (non) narrative sphere as the long (visual) reactions to the long (sound) actions. The film in fact is a huge composition of images, pictures, music, and sounds. Their reflexive mode expresses a pure affective quality of Deleuze's micro-narratives and close-ups.

Kiarostami has long practiced a 'micro' (or minimal) mode of cinema, in resistance to the *Hollywood* model and its imitators. He is indeed the creator of some *affective* micro-dramas that have been formed in a gap between the audiences' receptions and the close-ups. Multiple readings of these films are, in a sense, the results of a *rupture* between the action and the reaction occupied by the *affection-image*. In Deleuze's view, moreover, everything functions at the time, but along with pauses and ruptures, breakdowns and failures, halting and short circuits, distances and fragmentations, within an entire that never succeeds in bringing its

1. Gilles Deleuze, 'Cinema 1', 7th ed., 2005, p. 89.

2. Gilles Deleuze, 'Cinema 1', 7th ed., 2005, p. 90.

various parts together to form a whole. That is because, perhaps, the breaks in the process of image making for Kiarostami's readers are so much productive. It could be only the category of multiplicity, in Deleuzian term, used as a substantive and going beyond the One and Many, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity.<sup>1</sup> (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.45)

*Ten* (2002), for instance, is a film which resists simple definition. In Kiarostami's *Ten*, a micro-narrative structure is revealed where "[he] is not afraid to let a scene wander off in an unexpected, seemingly random direction, to let each scene become a self-enclosed mini-story of its own."<sup>2</sup> (Rapfogel, 2001) However, *Ten* is not merely an evolution of this (episodic) tendency, but in fact, exhibits a far more radical and self-conscious narrative structure. In *Ten*, Kiarostami adopts a *serial* narrative structure, one composed of ten discrete units, which count backwards in inter-titles rendered as (digital) film-leader graphics. *Ten* is an exercise in *serial* narration where the feature film represents an accumulation of micro-narratives – ten car trips through a series of deleuzian close-ups. This mode of narration demands an audience to

assume a more interactive role. The audience need to backtrack, to revisit material, to identify repetitions and points of difference, establishes a very different dynamic, a structure similar to a spiral in which the effects of nuances are explored rather than a linear narrative that offers a single movement towards resolution.<sup>3</sup> (King, 2005, p.97) In this respect, Kiarostami has long practiced a 'micro'oriental mode of half-created cinema, in resistance to the Hollywood model and its imitators. In fact, he uses cine-conceptual installations that their patterns are open to subtle manipulation and transformation. *Ten* (2002) is such a film assembled from ten separate 'modules' of cinematic time. Each module is internally composed by cutting between the two fixed angles supplied by dashboard-cam. Thus, in *Ten*, compositional principles of repetition and variation are evident at both the macro-scale (the order, duration and repetition of story modules) and micro-scale (variation of film language within a single module). The shape of *Ten* is a deceptively complex one, beyond a simple linearity, implied by its serial structure.

In 2003, Kiarostami also directed *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*, a poetic feature which contained no dialogue or characterization whatsoever. It consists of five long shots of the natural landscape, which are single-take

1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Anti-Oedipus', ed., trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (London: continuum, 2004) 45.

2. Rapfogel, J., "A Mirror Facing a Mirror" in *Senses of Cinema* no. 17 (Nov-Dec. 2001)

[http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/close\\_up.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/close_up.html), Accessed September 12, 2006

3. King, G., *American Independent Cinema*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005): 97.

sequences along the shores of the Caspian Sea. Although the film lacks a clear storyline, Geoff Andrew argues that the film is *more than just pretty pictures*:

"Assembled in order, they comprise a kind of abstract or emotional narrative arc, which moves evocatively from separation and solitude to community, from motion to rest, near-silence to sound and song, light to darkness and back to light again, ending on a note of rebirth and regeneration."<sup>1</sup> (Andrew, 2005, pp. 73-4)

### Kiarostami and Future Audience

In sum, Abbas Kiarostami and his *unfinished cinema* project are facing a lot of challenge. The risk of audiences' overcompensating for their absence by mediating too much in the project is still a main concern of this cinema. This danger itself causes another discussion about the filmgoers' commitment or non-commitment to the experimental regulations of unfinished films. Answering to these aesthetic questions is unavoidable: Where is the limit of participating in artwork? Is the sensible relativity in the nature of these films, reliable or dependable? How must we grasp the multiple meanings of *unfinished cinema* in a postmodern condition? Is there any stability? How should we separate the surface or deep readings of unusual films such as *Shirin*, *Five* and *Ten*?

These all are the problems that their responses will make clear the future of Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema*. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are facing with a new generation of digitalized audiences that love their experience of virtual realities in a cinematic labyrinth such as *Matrix* (2001). The general audiences of future cinema are looking for their own favorite meanings in a complex web of the computerized interactive paths. Their expected dramatic world is indeed a world full of computer game actions. The visual literacy of these audiences seems to help them being actively engaged the game, but passively displaces the reception. They no longer pass time on deep thinking- unless they pass game stages by a password or move forward in an adventurous, risky way.

Realistically, it is necessary to declare that Kiarostami's position will be remained unique and different in new era. While his *unfinished cinema* attempts to involve the general audiences but it always receives an alternative response, sometimes so much praising it or even blaming it. Ironically, the next generation of audiences will decide on the future of *unfinished cinema*, like Kiarostami's prediction, not the critics or even filmmakers. Again, the playful computerized films of Hollywood's new mainstream will reduce the deep readings of the work to the superficial pleasures. The next audiences of cinema will be the current

1. Geoff Andrew, *Ten*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), pp. 73-4.

teenagers who need an ongoing entertainment. The final question is that if the *unfinished cinema*, basically, needs to locate exact place of the audience, or it will become accustomed to the playmates as the next audiences.

In spite of all these problems, Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema* is certainly worth a study because of its implicit effects of postmodernism even if Kiarostami's respects to the future audiences never find a respectful response, mutually. His text for the centenary of cinema is concluded as follows:

*"In cinema's next century, respect of the audience as an intelligent and constructive element is inevitable. To attain this, one must perhaps move away from the concept of the audience as the absolute master. The director must also be the audience of his own film. For one hundred years, cinema has belonged to the filmmaker. Let us hope that now the time has come for us to implicate the audience in its second century."*<sup>1</sup> (Kiarostami, 1995)

## Conclusion

Kiarostami's *unfinished cinema* has great ability to enter an interactive dialogue with the global audiences. A part of its accessible ability is the direct result of Kiarostami's postmodern reading of the absolute objectivity and the nature of image. His low budget, non-conventional style of filmmaking provides the

readers to have their own possible reception, or at least intervention. The active role of audience in reproducing different meanings of an unfinished film never means as a natural disorder or an interpretive confusion, but it indicates a particular vision of Kiarostami to his audiences. The readers of *unfinished cinema* hence are those who are changing the interpretive disciplines of current movies. In this view, Kiarostami and his unusual films such as *Shirin* and *Ten*, are at least the first steps of using national images in the same direction of global expectations. That is why the global vision of *unfinished cinema* is so important for its inventor.

On the other hand, it is necessary not to forget that the project is still shaping itself and needs to be regulated optimistically. Some concerns of this cinema turn to the limits of audiences' share in reading the meaning. It is obvious that universal visual culture continuously is changing and a new spectator is emerging now, with an alternative mode of cinematic reaction. A natural progression of this project completely depends on its tolerance for the audiences today called *digital playmates*.

Despite all these implications and, of course, postmodern reflections of *unfinished cinema*, Kiarostami is still a prominent portrait of Iranian culture and arts. Even if the future audiences do not simply approve his half-

1. Abbas Kiarostami, 'An Unfinished Cinema', 1995.

created films as another objects of knowledge, but the plan must go on alternatively.

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## سینمای ناتمام کیارستمی و بازتاب‌های پسامدرن آن

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سینمای کیارستمی، به مثابه نمونه بارزی از ظرفیت جهانی شدن فرهنگ نمایشی ایران و با تأکید خاص بر نقش مشارکت تماشاگران در فرایند معناسازی فیلم، تأملاتی پسامدرن را برمی‌انگیزد. برخی از مهم‌ترین وجوه خاص این نوع سینمای نیمه-برساخته عبارتند از: سبک خود-بازتابنده، بعدنمایی‌های نمودارگونه، روایت‌های بینا بین و کمینه‌گرایی فردی. ارزشمندترین دستاورد پسامدرن این نوع سینما، برجسته‌سازی فرایند معناسازی در حین تجربه بی‌واسطه فیلم است. به علاوه، نماهای نزدیک فیلم‌های اخیر او، واحدهای معناساز مستقلی هستند که به نحوی فزاینده عامل تکثیر و تولید بی‌وقفه احساس و عاطفه‌ای شرقی است. از این حیث، سبک خلاقانه کیارستمی قابل تفسیر و تطبیق با برخی از مهم‌ترین آرای متفکران سینمای پسامدرن نظیر ژیل دلوز است. فیلم‌های اخیر او، در حقیقت، با بهره‌گیری از جلوه‌هایی واقعگرا و عناصری بومی، روایتگر میکرو درام‌های نوینی است که در بینا بین شکاف میان نماهای نزدیک و دریافت فعال مخاطبان خود شکل می‌گیرد.

واژگان کلیدی: کیارستمی، سینمای ناتمام، پسامدرنیسم، ژیل دلوز، نقد و نظریه

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