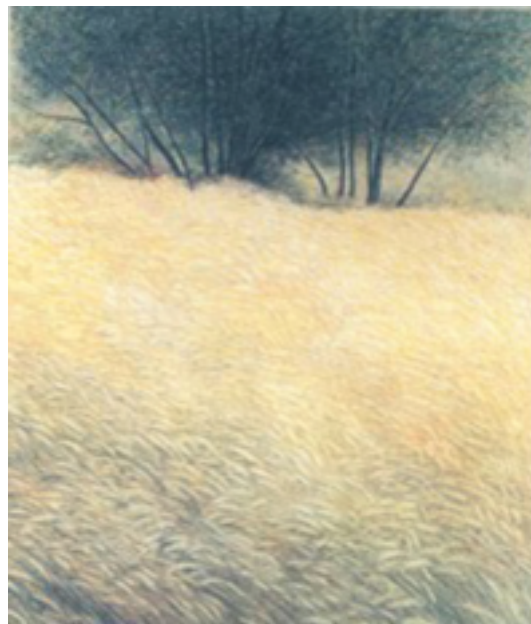


**'Absolute Mobility' in Abbas Kiarostami:
From Nature to Cinema***

* All images are courtesy of
Museo Nazionale del
Cinema (Torino).

... any art is a totality opened onto others, and
configured with them, so to touch them.

(Jean-Luc Nancy)



Abbas Kiarostami, oil on canvas

The Poetic 'Veil'

I am talking about the cinema being like poetry,
possessing the complicated qualities of poetry, and also
having the vast potential of poetry.

To have the capabilities of a prism.

(Abbas Kiarostami)

The splendid haikus, written by Abbas Kiarostami as the core of his 'total art', are simple, concrete and earthly, yet able to evoke awe and wonder. Their inside is touched by a question that spares nobody, neither the poetic self nor the reader, the former constantly prone on something s/he does not comprehend, the latter exposed to the always-open-chance of 'belief':

¹ *Walking with the Wind.*
Poems by Abbas Kiarostami
(Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 2001), 150.

The more I think
The less I understand
The reason for all the whiteness of the snow.¹

I got drunk
With a drop of wine
Believe it or not.²

In the indefinite origin of an insecure knowledge (Kiarostami speaks of 'inadequacy' at the origin of the work of art, but also of 'tension' and 'attention'), and in view of future testimony (the necessary 'fulfilment' of creation), poetic attention turns to its only possible subject: "Because the only love that increases every day in intensity, while the others lose strength, is love for nature".³ Natural love touches the page of poems with the everyday intensity of the animal world, woven with (images of) roosters, grasshoppers, rooks, honeybees, doves, wild geese, dogs, caws, old turtles and little birds, lizards, flies, dragonflies, worms, swallows, serpents, trouts, fire flies, jackals, eagles, owls, mosquitoes – 'thousand insects', 'thousand bats', 'thousand thoughts'.⁴ Love for the vegetal world is, in its turn, knitted with (images of) falling apples, blooming gems, rhubarbs and clovers, nameless and unfamiliar flowers, and, *encore*, sunflowers, cherry blossoms, persimmons, callas, chrysanthemums, violets, jasmines. And, yet, there are the trees, so many trees: planes, pines, oaks, willows, cypresses, elms, sycamores... The colours of the flowers and the majestic stature of the trees draw signs across the sky: "Light, air, breath... an ambience of passage, the crossing and the refraction through which the image makes itself."⁵ Their figures emerge through the mist, are covered in snow, dissolve among the clouds. They disappear and reappear; their un-making leaves space for a poetic 'contact' knitted by the work of an incessant spider:

Before sunrise –/ the spider/ already gone to work.
The spider/ stops/ and takes a moment's break/ to watch the sun rise.
This time/ the spider/ brings together/ the branches of the cherry and the mulberry.
The spider/ eyes its handiwork with satisfaction/ between the cherry and the mulberry tree.
The sun beams/ its first golden rays/ on the majestic mantle that is the spider's web.
Gently/ the spider/ is shooed away/ from the old nun's hat.
The spider's harvest/ of two days/ is left in ruins/ by the old housekeeper's broom.
This time/ the spider/ begins/ to weave/ on the silk drape.⁶
At the end/ the syndicate/ has not recognized/ the work of the spider.⁷

The geometrical, friable and illusory precision of the weaving of the 'objective-animal'⁸ is marked, since its very beginning, by interruptions and unions, by the glory of the workers' pride, by breakings and disavowals. What thread will the tapestry of 'the singing/in the heart' be knitted of?⁹ Could it be that the *veil* – the spider's 'majestic mantle' – inscribes such signs of the world (testimonial 'wounds', they are called) so as to translate

² Abbas Kiarostami, *Un lupo in agguato. Poesie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 186 (my translations). Kiarostami is a 'total' artist, being involved in poetry, photography, filmmaking, painting, carpentry, children's book illustration, credit design for feature films, commercials, and many other artistic expressions.

³ Abbas Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti, a cura di, *Kiarostami* (Milano: Electa, 2003), 58 (quotations from this text, which collages different interviews to Kiarostami in one long 'retrospective', are my trans.).

⁴ Kiarostami, *Walking*, 99; 215.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami. L'evidenza del film* (Roma: Donzelli, 2004), 33 (my trans.). In the "Introduction" to their translation of *Walking with the Wind*, 6, Ahmad Karimi and Michael Beard write that Kiarostami's poetry can be compared to "flashes of lightening between stretches of darkness. We like the image ... for its speed. The illumination cast by these poems manifests itself suddenly, and the subjects are in constant motion".

⁶ Kiarostami, *Walking*, 42, 46, 90, 96, 97, 101, 129, 130.

⁷ Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 98.

⁸ Marco Vallora, "Guardare lo sguardo", in Barbera and Resegotti, 89.

⁹ Kiarostami, *Walking*, 200.

its weaving into the airy indication of something else, for instance, a flight,
a *volé*¹⁰

¹⁰ The 'veil' affected the destiny of Kiarostami's *Tribute to Teachers* (1977), submitted to the then education minister Ganji to be shown in the presence of the Shah on Teachers' Day. The short film was censored because of the presence of too many veiled women, provoking Kiarostami's comment: "This is the problem of our country. There was a period when the chador was forbidden by force, there was a period when it was reinforced. And nobody understands that there is a group that can do without, and a group that can do with. It is the meaning of freedom". Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 133.

¹¹ Kiarostami, *Walking*, 108.

¹² Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 78, 80, 102.

¹³ Kiarostami, *Walking*, 227.

¹⁴ Ibid., 237.

¹⁵ Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 184. It is his 'pedagogical' desire: "I don't approve that the spectator is undervalued or exited. I don't want to provoke consciousness or create guilty feelings. At least, I believe that one should tell a story in such a way that he or she does not feel guilty". "Due o tre cose", in Barbera and Resegotti, 54.

The nun/ caresses the silk fabric: would it do/ for a gown?¹¹

Flight/ is the prize of the silkworm/ who has woven around itself/ a silk fence.
The wounds of thousand needles/ on a silk drape.
On Monday morning/ the wind carries/ the veil of a student/ away from the line.¹²

A caress and a questioning, the silkworm turned into a butterfly, the diligent work of weaving, a dispersive trajectory – what matters is that the veil *volé* surfaces a geography without oppositions or dialectics: "Not east/ not west/ not north/ not south/ only this spot I am standing on now".¹³ 'Here and now': could it be the insurgence of an identitary position? In truth, Kiarostami's poetic veil modulates a fragile sense of existence, the birth of an experience made of randomness, arbitrariness, unpredictability, and uncertainty. On the page, the poems inscribe the hesitancy of steps on difficult paths, the necessity of echoes, the company of shadows, the (weightless) pauses and the (aimless) journeys opening the eyes and tuning the ears into an acute attention to the surroundings. It is the random 'chance' of what they see and hear that creates the poetic strength of the space, the place where poetry can register Life (already, and always, the emergence of a 'kinetic' vision) in its mirages, its tears, the words left halfway, the appeals and the excesses:

Forgive my sins./ Forget them - / but not so much/ that I forget them completely.¹⁴

From my tongue/ has come/ what needn't be said/ my feet dared where they should have not gone.¹⁵

Photo-graphy

"... a solitary tree is more of a tree than many trees"
(Abbas Kiarostami)

'What needn't be said – where they should not have gone': for the poet-photographer Kiarostami, (excess of) language signifies (excess of) 'movement'. Poetry approaches the natural universe, establishes a contact, surveys Life's randomness; the image needs to absorb this poetic landscape, aiming at creating 'movement' out of the static lines of representation. It is what Kiarostami's 'graphy' does: his extraordinary photos, never taken from rigid, localizable or fixed viewpoints, are the persistent products of

the fruitful plant of his ramified imagination.¹⁶ They originate, as before, in the desire for union with nature: “It is nature that leads me” – Kiarostami confesses – “It is nature that decides, it is nature that prepares the scene”.¹⁷ Offering their gaze to nature, the photos exist in the basic prodigy of black and white (the first experiments were colourful, framing summer fields and isolated oaks on hill slopes),¹⁸ exposing – as if on a loom, a tambour, a frame, a canvas – the silent traces of gravity, the grace of an uncertain world, the imprint of repeated visions: scriptural images in their primal burst, ‘still life’ written with a vegetable alphabet, pre-historic graffiti where time is spacialised, lost, uncalculated.

The recent corpus of Kiarostami’s photos can be divided into a bifocality of disjointed presences, linked by ‘oneiric’ condensation’ or ‘musical’ counterpoint: “A small gem/ shouts its existence/ inside the wooden rind of a cherry”.¹⁹ There are (the photos of) the ‘Trees’ on the ridges of silent mountains – should we listen to the critic’s uneasiness: “those trunks are too lonely ... planted like dispersed cartridge in planes of snow”? It would be better to share the ‘spleen’ of the poet-photographer: “It is like a window that opens onto a landscape, a moment of melancholy, a lonely tree fixed through what it is in front. That tree functions as a person. You think you would never change it for all the other trees in the world. This tree promises constancy. You have a rendezvous with it. You go and the tree is there”.²⁰



Dispersion and constancy: just the blink of an eye, and the landscape opens onto (the photos of) the ‘Roads’ written on autumn scenes, followed by telegraph poles (always, the question of ‘communication’!), surmounted by cloudy skies. You rarely see passers-by; the roads simply traverse barren landscapes, zigzag on the earth, draw their infinite directions – literally, with no beginning and no end. Shot from above, from below, from aside, they go up and down, sometimes parallel, other times crossing, always inscribing virtuality and potentiality: “... a road extending towards a place you don’t see can open onto an unknown world”.²¹

¹⁶ Photography, considered by Kiarostami as a purer art than cinema, being relieved from the burden of narrative, originated out of the uneasiness felt at the time of his attendance of the Academy of Fine Arts, when studying painting: “I felt hopeless in front of the canvas and that hopelessness motivated me to paint even more. Maybe the discovery of the camera substituted the therapy of painting”. “Al lavoro”, 57.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸ ‘Snow White’ and ‘Roads and Trees’ (both 1978-2003). See also the colour series ‘Rain’ (2006) and ‘Trees and Crows’ (2006). In the documentary ‘Roads of Kiarostami’ (2005), the artist notes that, both in Persian poetry and in Japanese Haiku, ‘roads’ serve as a metaphor to signify ‘life’. See Robert Avila, “*Experience III*”, Abbas Kiarostami: Image Maker”, www.sf360.org (n.p.).

¹⁹ Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 86. In the opening of the “Conversazione tra Abbas Kiarostami e Jean-Luc Nancy”, in Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 57, Persian miniature is said to often represent ‘trees and sinuous paths.’

²⁰ Respectively, in Vallora, 92, and Nancy, 64-65.

²¹ Kiarostami, “Due o tre cose”, 56.



This world is mysterious, with no sound, ‘without history’, and, thus, on perennial ‘transformation’. Its only vocation is to touch the spectator’s eye with the writing of its border, the frame of single moments of passion and pain, the inscription of grace and wonder, the absolute emergence of the ‘image’: “The important thing is how you frame it. Everything. When I take a picture, I ask myself if I will print it or not. I usually hesitate, but I end up doing it, anyway. In the precise instant I place an instantaneous inside a frame like a pass-partout, all of a sudden it becomes more attractive, and when I look at it through the mirror frame it seems completely plausible to me. That is why I believe that the idea of framing a subject in an image is as important as the content”.²²

²² Kiarostami, “Al lavoro”, 66.

Absolute Mobility

... to *diminish*. It was not to undo, certainly, but to diminish, that is, at the time I understood nothing of this word, even more I was intrigued by it, if not in love with it, to proceed to the *diminution* of points or to reduce the stitches of a work in progress. In order to *diminish*, needles and hands had to work two stitches at once, to play more than one anyway.
(Jacques Derrida, “A silkworm. Points of view quilted on the other veil”)

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... some elements are highlighted while others are obscured or even pushed back into the dark. And it’s something that we do - we bring out elements that we want to emphasise. 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.
(Abbas Kiarostami)

The poem, the image: it is time for the gaze to be touched by Kiarostami's 'intensified cinema' - "pushed from its inside towards an essence that takes it away from representation to turn it towards presence".²³ Knitting and evidence: if the poetic veil inscribes the graphic frames of movement, it can also provide the 'screen' for the 'putting-into-motion'. From within an art Kiarostami still cannot define – if not as what appeals to the spectators, according to their singularity –, his 'abstract films' bear the signature of 'absolute mobility'. It is an indefinable cinema; still, it keeps knitting the contemporaneity of its subjects (a piece of news, the event of an earthquake, the construction of a city, a funeral) to the desire for an ethics of pedagogy, thanks to the ethical investigation of its nature as 'skin', 'pellicle', and 'illumination'.

Here and now, on the general tambour of Kiarostami's cinema, the poetic spider weaves the single fragments of a vision with those preceding and following it.²⁴ It is the moment when the photographic frame animates with the infinite (im)pressions exercised by the cinematic gaze on the spectator's eye (windows, mirrors, colours, volumes, views...) – what emerges is the deep and delicate justice of the image made of approach and distance, attraction and release, traction and displacement...²⁵

Passion starts...

The love of facing a camera...
being in a negative way is better than not being.
(Abbas Kiarostami)



Close up is a theoretical and radical film, made 'on-the-spot' in 1989.²⁶ "It is not a work of mine... It made itself, it was born by itself"²⁷: the neutrality of its making, by questioning the relationship between documentary and fiction, consists of the re-enactment of the real story of somebody who

²³ Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 20.

²⁴ Kiarostami received international acclaim with *Close-up* (1989); he created *And Life Goes On* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1993); he paused on *Taste of Cherry* (1997); he seemed to leave cinema with *The Wind will Take Us Away* (2000). Among these films, from the closest to the farthest, the threads of internal connection are tight: *Close-up*, from near, and *The Wind will Take Us Away*, from the distant and forgotten Kurdistan; *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* knitted to the preceding *Where is the House of My Friend* (1987) as to create the 'Koker' trilogy, Kiarostami's majestic investigation of law and infancy. See Laura Mulvey, "Repetition and Return: the Spectator's Memory in Abbas Kiarostami's Koker Trilogy", *Third Text*, 84, vol. 21 issue 1 January 2007.

²⁵ "Probably in this way, Kiarostami's image is extended between the two poles of tradition in his country... the more properly Persian pole of a major figurative art, one of the most ancient in the history of Mediterranean art, and the Islamic pole where abstention from figuration is brought to a climax by its monotheistic tradition. ". Nancy, 23.

²⁶ It is an expression used for *Close-up* and *Homework*, Kiarostami's two films based on real events.

²⁷ Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 141.

cheats a Teheran family by pretending to be the famous filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The man promises them participation in a film, he is then discovered and sent to prison – his desperation, quoted in a newspaper, touches Kiarostami's attention: "From now on I will be a piece of meat of an animal with no head, and you can make of me whatever you want"... I thought he was speaking to me, it was me the public he was referring to, and I needed to do something for him".²⁸ Indeed, what the director can do for the 'criminal' is to connect the judicial aspects of the Law to the 'art' of cinema, its absolute safety, the power of its desire, the transcription of its passion. From 'close up' – the instance of Law is documented in the scenes of the court and the trial; on its *côté*, the cinematic 'dispositif' focuses on the man's unconscious by investigating his motivations and pains:

It is the task and the responsibility of art to look at things from close-up, paying attention to humanity and learning not to judge too quickly. In this occasion ethics determines aesthetics: the law looks in the large field, while art uses the close-up. That's the reason why I entitled the film *Close-up*.²⁹

In the prison, the hidden camera frames Sabstian's love for cinema, his dream of becoming a director, the hope that his suffering will turn into a 'film'.³⁰ The film that '*Close-up*' is: the court, the trial, the hall, the judge, the different versions of the crime, the fake project of the film, forgiveness, liberation... at the end of the 'film', a motorcycle carries the criminal and his idol, the real Mohsen Makhmalbaf, away from the scene. You don't hear what they say; the sound band is damaged; what you see is that, on the door of the cheated family, peace is re-established...

Continuation/Concentration

When the earth will have experienced a violent trembling;
when it will have expelled its burdens from its bosom,
man will say: "What may this mean?"
On that day, earth will tell what it knows.
(*Evidence* and *The Earthquake*
Suras 98 and 99 of the Qur'an)

It is a very fragile peace, that which gives way to the catastrophic event par excellence: the earthquake, which destroyed Northern Iran in 1990, the same area where *Where Is the Friend's House?* was shot.³¹ 'Have the two children playing in the earlier film, survived?' is the question that echoes throughout *And Life Goes On* (or *Life and Nothing More*), the film-reportage, the fiction of a documentary (filmed six months after the disaster) which proves to be a faithful testimony by refusing to let us know if,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 176.

³⁰ The filmmaker confesses that "In *Close-up*, I am the impostor". "Al lavoro", 129.

³¹ *Where is the Friend's House* (1986) is the first work by Kiarostami to receive international acclaim, awarded with the Bronze Leopard at Locarno Film Festival in 1989.

among the twenty thousand children who died, there are also the two little actors – no ‘sentimentalism’ or ‘happy ending’. What we know, instead, is that the earthquake has made tabula rasa of a world: from its emptiness, another world starts to gaze around, touched by the need for survival offered by reality: “the desire of the inhabitants to survive... an extraordinary instinct for life, their enthusiasm to carry on living.”³²

Kiarostami witnesses the instinct for the ‘continuation’ of life by means of the ‘continuation’ of his cinematographic pellicle. His camera is strapped onto a car, one among the many – the film opens with a myriad of emergency cars blocked at busy junctions.³³ The camera glues, through its eye, our gaze to the movements of the figures inside the car: a father-driver, in search of the two little actors, and his son who, thanks to the openness constituted by childhood, is able to survey the absolute transformation of the world around him: “In a more rational way compared to the father, he accepted the illogicality and instability of the earthquake, he played with a grasshopper, he was thirsty for life.”³⁴ Life-thirst is not given as a story; it is differently shown in the very action of opening up lines of escape out of the ruins, in the return of vital effort, in the dignity of the survivors, the sun that warms the skin, the natural presence of the mountains opposing the human disaster, the instinct for life.

Outside the tunnel, that opens up the vastness of the catastrophe before our eyes, in a world populated by walkers desperately searching for a path among the ruins, the father and his son, not wanting to obstruct the emergency work, take a side alley. Along the drive, they stop to inquire about the little actors. The memories of the earlier film come back through the voices of its actors: still, nobody knows what the fate of the two children has been. Indeed, knowledge is provided by its reflection in the frame of the car-mirror, in the square of its window, Kiarostami’s invitation to the concentration of the gaze: “The fact of delimiting an object, by excluding everything else, emphasizes its beauty.”³⁵

³² Kiarostami, “Al lavoro”, 129.

³³ “My car’s my best friend. My office. My home. My location. I have a very intimate sense when I am in a car with someone next to me. We are in the most comfortable position because we don’t face each other, but sit side by side. We don’t look at each other; we do so only when we want to. We are allowed to look around without being rude. There is a big screen in front of us, and the side views.... the most important thing is that the car transports us from one place to another.” Kiarostami, “Al lavoro”, 184.

³⁴ Kiarostami, “Al lavoro”, 180.

³⁵ Kiarostami, “Al lavoro”, 67.



Concentration, movement, and future: the car reaches a tent camp where the child, impatient to leave the ‘ball-car’, decides to stay, while his father continues for Koker. On the way, his car breaks down; by a miracle, it

³⁶ Ibid., 156. Kiarostami thinks that, even if the father and his son cannot find the two little actors, they discover the important truth that 'life goes on'.

³⁷ When asked of the female roles in his films, Kiarostami replies that "I don't like the role of women as mothers, women simply as lovers. Or women as victims, beaten, long-suffering. That's not my experience. Or women as exceptional. I don't like showing exceptions. Or women as heroes, it doesn't correspond to the real situation. And there's another role, women as decorative objects – not only in Iranian but in world cinema." See Walsh, "The compassionate gaze".

³⁸ Acquarello, "Through the Olive Trees: Life as Art, As Life", 2000 Sept-Oct, 9, www.sensesofcinema.com.

³⁹ For Alain Bergala, "Il bambino, la legge e la concatenazione", in Barbera –Resegotti, 78, the need that "reality testifies something in order to film it" is an aspect used by Rossellini that proves Kiarostami's interest in Italian Neorealism: his use of non-professional actors, the location shootings, the naturalistic settings. In 1992, he was awarded the Rossellini Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

⁴⁰ According to Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 182, it is the poetics of the 'dream' to become central: "... the ending of the film is more

starts again; it overcomes a bend, goes through a second one; it stops again to give a ride to the man who has helped to restart it: "... the face of this man is covered by a gas cylinder. It is a way to bring the abstraction of the character to the extreme. By not showing his face, I have shown not only a character but a whole population, not a single destiny but the destiny of all."³⁶

The 'Mystery' of Life

The destiny of all, the destiny of two, more than two – *Through the Olive Trees* is a simple, complex and beautiful film, that brings three directors to the screen: Kiarostami behind the camera; the actor who played the director in *And Life Goes On*; the director of *Through the Olive Trees*. In this 'film within a film within a film', the plot is extraordinary: once again, the scene opens with a car, this time driven by a woman, the production secretary.³⁷ She is going to the cinematographic set, built as a stage and clearly defined by ropes, where the shootings prove difficult and long: the amateur actor is shy and embarrassed by the presence of the young Taherè; Hossein, who substitutes him, asked the girl in marriage to her parents who refused their permission; they died during the earthquake, and it is now her grandmother, the interpreter of a strict Law of the Dead, who impedes their union. The result is that Taherè refuses to speak to Hossein. The director-*documenter* might replace them both;³⁸ instead, by acting as a putative father or a demoniac demiurge, he wants to see what happens, how the situation will evolve. In fact, he is intrigued by Hussein who, against all odds, relentlessly pursues his love: "In Iran resources are very scarce. Persistence becomes a trait".³⁹ He talks to him, urges him to try again, tacitly supports him up to the last attempt when the boy follows Taherè 'through the olive trees.' What happens there? The gaze concentrates on reality, nothing more nothing less. The real has already intruded in the filmmaking by means of the rain stopping the shooting: "... twenty days spent contemplating that wonderful landscape made me enter a state of meditation... I told myself that I could... give space to the dream, I could at the end suggest a positive reply from the girl".⁴⁰ Hussein and Taherè now leave the scene, walking in a distance that turns them into little geometrical points lost in the landscape. What is taking place between them? Distance, remoteness, the gaze glued to the vanishing signs... and the attention can only further concentrate: Hussein runs back to the set, maybe with Taherè's positive answer? It is not to be known: 'through the olive trees', "the secret takes all its consistence of the real, without disappearing or transpiring."⁴¹



dreamlike rather than something that is possible in reality. Because those two people have become very close to nature. And they've metamorphosed into small white flowers. And they grow slowly closer together and they almost become one. As Shakespeare says, we're more like our dreams than we are our real lives".

⁴¹ Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 22-23.

'Unveiling'...

Cinema keeps going on its own, indefinitely, as if it were a virtually indefinite unveiling of itself: on the one hand, each new unveiling may conceal another artifice, and it conceals it by necessity; and on the other, what is to be unveiled is nothing "in itself."

(Jean-Luc Nancy)

Love for cinema, love for life, love among humans: the cinematic gaze can now turn into the most intense hymn to the mystery of 'Death'. In Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, poetic echoes of Emile Cioran ("Without the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself long ago") weave into a famous Iranian lyric: "The butterfly flies round a candle, and slowly, to see it better, it gets so close to the flame as to burn itself, inevitably."⁴² In the film, the curious butterfly translates into an intellectual wrestling with the thought of suicide: a middle-aged man appears in his Range Rover, driving along a dusty landscape – the industrial suburb of Teheran – heading towards an unknown destination: "I soon thought that a film that spoke of death, had to have more movement than the previous ones, because the theme required more action, just to contrast death." In its incessant 'touring', the car stops three times, encountering a young soldier, a seminarist and a taxidermist; the driver confesses to them the 'negative capability' (Keats) of what he is looking for: somebody who will help him cover his suicidal corpse the following day.

In Kiarostami's tactful cinema, the camera viewpoint enriches and pluralizes by contracting and extending: the intellectual quest links with the seminarist's juvenile fear, the authority of religion, the wisdom of the taxidermist – "a philosopher who has acquired the awareness of true values by means of experience, simply through life", "somebody who kills life in order to learn how to live. He kills birds to embalm them, to preserve them, and in a certain sense, to conserve their life, offering them

⁴² When not otherwise indicated, the quotations for *Taste of Cherry* are in Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 183.

a form of eternity". It is the man who accepts the terrible task proposed by the driver, after confessing that he, too, touched by the suffering of existence, has thought of suicide, but then realized that, in so doing, he would lose the 'taste of cherry'... Is it a metaphor for Life itself, and its sensuous pleasures? In the austere journey of this film (along the abstract borderline between life and death), experience and acceptance mark a crucial moment of change: the intellectual observes the sun setting; he goes home, takes a taxi, reaches the rendezvous. Here, sitting under a tree, he looks at the landscape (according to Kiarostami, the construction of a city, Teheran or any other city, has a strong kinship with 'the acceptance of responsibility'). The man lies in his burial hole, impassively observing the moon above him. All of a sudden, the sky gets dark, the screen turns black: "Life – as cinema – comes from light, and, in the meanwhile, life and cinema are one thing... 'non existence' which, in my view, leads directly to death".⁴³

⁴³ "I don't leave the blank spaces just so people have something to finish... I leave them blank so people can fill them according to how they think and want". David Sterrit, "A Taste of Kiarostami", *Senses of Cinema* 9 (Sept-Oct, 2000), www.sensesofcinema.com.



As light returns, the last image of *Taste of Cherry* reveals a sense of open air, of human activity, the reality of the world as a series of pictures to be discovered: soldiers marching up the hill, the area survey by a cinematographic crew, the cameramen preparing the scene, Kiarostami giving the start to his next shooting...

... the 'Talisman'!

The wind will carry us away
The wind will carry us away
(Forough Farrokhzad)

The Wind Will Take Us Away is the next 'gusset' of Kiarostami's vision: by envisioning the waiting, the empty space, the nothing, the film opens with unidentified voices coming from the inside of a car, uncertain on the road that will bring them to Sha Dareh, in Kurdistan.⁴⁴ Before entering the village – a little town with white walls and steep winding pathways built into the mountains – a child proposes to guide, through its labyrinth of caves, the 'engineer', as everybody calls him, who is in reality a reporter (Behzad Dourani, the only professional actor in the film) sent to the village to document the primordial funeral rites of the area. The child's grandmother is dying, but she never dies. While waiting, the journalist speaks to Teheran with his mobile telephone, functioning only on top of a hill. The camera accompanies him from close-up, in his continuous and nervous trajectories up to the location for the cellular phone signal, its 'mobile' communication. Here the unexpected happens: somebody is digging a ditch in the ground; you cannot see him, but you hear him explaining to the journalist that his work will bring electricity to the village, the 'transit' of modernized civilization. Unexpectedly, a landslide covers the man; the journalist lends his car to bring him to hospital. It is the turning point of the film: in the enforced pause, he starts noticing the intense beauty of the natural world around him. Night falls, and the old woman dies; the morning after, the 'ethnographic' project does not proceed: the reporter is only able to 'steal' a photo from the rite. It might seem a failure; in fact, it signs the translation of the poetic 'veil' into the photo-filmic *vol*:

Photo *prise au vol* in the two senses of the word; instantaneous photo stolen, as all photos are, all the images of a film: is a certain 'vol' the condition for the gift of a gaze? Do you need to subtract the real in order to realize it? must a photographer be a thief?⁴⁵

An instant more, a click, and the cinematographic vision opens, in its absolute and tactful attention, to the mystery of the 'image'. It is the most intense and enigmatic synthesis of life, love, death, passion, continuation, crossing, the construction of the self, and the gaze on the world: the reporter drops the 'talisman' given to him by the digger, a human 'bone', into the river. Silent and attentive, the camera follows its aquatic path, its floating downstream; the lasting cartilage runs on Kiarostami's film, keeping its secret, carrying it 'elsewhere', in other poetic writings, on other photographic landscapes, towards other visions still unexplored, still to be thought of...

⁴⁴ In this film, eleven characters are 'veiled': "We don't see some characters, but we do feel them. This shows there is a possibility of being without being. That's the main theme of the movies... At the end you know you haven't seen them, but you feel you know who they were and what they were about... This is actually an invitation for the spectators to participate in the creation of a work." Shahin Parhami, "A Talk with the Artist" (14 June 2004) www.synoptique.ca.

⁴⁵ Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 22.

