

Self-reflection in Modernism, Post-Modernism and Abbas Kiarostami and Jean Luc Godard's Cinema

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Abstract This paper, has presented film-making frameworks relying mostly on modern and post-modern movies and the essential expression of self-reflection. The post-modern movies are in some respects different from the modern and classic ones. However, they still benefit from past achievements. The element of self-reflection is obvious in Godard's works which connotes the reality of their filming. In especially most of his latest works, Abbas Kiarostami also takes benefit from this technique. The present article analyses these two directors' viewpoints and presents the obtained influences on classic, modern, and post-modern movies. The expression of self-reflection in their works leads to art maturation. The obtained results of this research offer the related covert and overt values benefiting from the influencing process of three decades and the effect put on spectators in 15 phases. These results are considered qualitatively and quantitatively of great importance.

Keywords Post-Modernism, Kiarostami, Godard, Self Reflection, Modernism

1. Introduction

Innovation in cinematic art should be considered from different aspects. One of the major questions in this regard which have not yet got the definite answer is the question of how modernism entered cinema. Not only is the definition of this expression's essence is somehow difficult, but also the distinction of its historical origin, regarding the functionalism, is obscure. Now, this obscurity is considered as one of the most important elements of post-modernism. "Post-modernism is an ambiguous concept. However, its non-essentialist or anti-essentialist power is hidden in its eclectic form, is reactionary and does not have a stabilized concept. Its pluralism also provides the possibility of positive and negative readabilities" (Hayward, 2012, 34). Most experts, like Jurgen Habermas and his colloquies, believe that post-modernism follows modernism, since modernism is an untended process. The definition of post-modernism is actually in a unit framework and is bound

to a series of principles. In fact, we can say that post-modernism definition is paradoxical, since it is in direct contrast to every definite term or definition (Lyotard, 1984, p. 88). Post-modernism destroys every concept which has transformed to an idol. It means that all the stabilized structures of art are constant in societies. The suffix of "Post" raises many questions. One is that if this suffix means "after something", will it also connote the school after modernism.

One of the post-modernism interests is the question of the most important human beliefs. In fact, it raises problems and challenges the definite, like the concept of theatre, cinema, and especially art. Structuralisms and post-structuralisms have raised such problems which are still in challenge. One of the cinematic approaches which make the spectators think about the nature of film is to show them that whatever they see is actually a film and nothing more. It actually reminds the process of movies watching and does not let the spectators travel in fictional world. This is called as self reflection process.

2. The Formation of Post-Modernism in Art

According to the philosophical and rational principles, post-modernism follows a winding way. Post-modernism does not reject modernism, but changes its methods. In a surface view, there are no great differences between modernism and post-modernism. These two styles have also different similarities. The main difference of these concepts is that post-modern art does not recognize a post art from a sublime one. "Post-modernism is the symbol of destruction point among the transcendental art and the common culture" (Jameson, 1983, p. 133). One of post-modern art principles is the subject of arrangement. However, it does not mix various styles. If there is collage in modern art, we will see Bricolage in post-modern art. Post-modern art considers ordinary peoples' lives and never separates itself from this aspect. A post-modern artist blends himself with common people's understanding capacities and benefits from the modern and classic art. "Post-modernism in art criticism view, like the imaginative art, rejects modernism, as well as believes that modernism never existed before" (Lyoton, 1999, p. 397).

However, it is worth mentioning that this movement points to the medium of cinematic art and shows the film's self-reflection. Godard in all his films respected the cinema's history. In fact, we can say he himself, had written the history of cinema. With the element of self reflection, cinema can talk and challenge imaginatively about itself. The use of visual images in a movie causes the self-reflection process. "Cinema itself can only narrate its history. Cinema also can construct a work of art through video (Ishaghpour, 2005, p. 42).

3. The Manifestation of Post-Modernism in Cinema

Post-modern cinema has occupied a special time and place. In modern era, this concept is specialized to some experts as David Lynch, Jim Jarmosh, and Quentin Tarantino. The mentioned people have a different view from their past experts. According to the post-modern philosophical issues, there are some special elements for post-modern cinema. Those movies can be titled as post-modern ones that carry the post-modern concepts. Noel Carol believes that "post-modernism in cinema is comprehensible as a post-structural film" (Bordwell, 2008, p. 189). Before considering other aspects, the post modern cinema associates mainly with the film-maker's world outlook or the cinematic theoreticians. Nobody can consider this style as a special one, since there is no definite framework in post-modernism. In fact, we can say, that this kind of cinema is a mixture of different styles. After modernism, the concepts regarding cinema originate from theory which has a direct effect on the narration. Maybe the best idea is that what kinds of films have the concepts of post-modern world outlook. Few movies prove to be true in this manner. There are movies which contain post modern elements but are not considered as one. Most of Godard's works have post-modern symbols, such as, time deconstruction and self reflection.

Kiarostami also considered as one of the post-modern directors. In order to arrive at a familiarity with the post-modern cinema; we should consider the post-modern world in it. Peter Wollen in 1990 was the first to use this expression regarding cinema. In the present article, we have tried to bring some limited movies as an example which carries post-modern themes. There is a very important similarity between modernisms and post-modernism which is actually the enjoying of technology. It is worth mentioning that the enjoy in post-modernism is the act of destroying modernist viewpoints. In modern works, there are no relations among people and industrialization in the most crucial point. Post-modernism also emphasizes industrialization, enjoys it and functionally uses it.

4. Self-reflection

Self reflecting element, which was recognizable in

Godard's works, exists in modern literature, art and cinema. Post-modernism also had accepted this concept, since it uses all the modern and classical elements in its own way. "The self-reflection element associates mostly with modernism rather than post-modernism, and without a doubt it can prove the reality of post-modernist paradoxical aspects. Self-reflection attracts the attention to art and proposes the credit put on the reality" (Hutchen, 1966, p. 45). Self-reflection places the compiler in a different way from the other film of fiction's characters. The constructor should get away gradually and it is the spectator himself who should create an art work. "this is the general characteristic of modern art. In this structure, the creative effort attracts the attention toward the construction of expressional framework" (Cosebier, 1976,p. 260).

5. Jean- Luc Godard and self-reflection

Jean Luc Godard was one of the film-makers who had the boldness to clearly challenge the concept of cinema into his works. It means that Godard constantly raises a question related to the actual concept of cinema in his works. What is cinema? The new movement in cinema which is a modern season in its history is a beginning to deconstruct all the strong cinematic rules. Godard, I his first long movie, "Got out of Breath", 1959, deconstructed most of the cinematic principles such as the rule of 180 degrees.

Godard's works contain post-modernist elements. However the period of his film-making was in the era of post-structuralism. In fact, post-modernism reapplies most of post-structuralists' principles. It is worth noting that one can not consider post modernist and post structuralist viewpoint as being the same. Because of this fact, Godard's films, even those made in 60s, are considered as post modern. "It is not true that post-modernism functionally uses post structuralism, but we can say instead that the authors practically applied post-structuralist ideas in their works" (Bertens, 2008, 164). Godard convinces the spectators to return to cinema and have a more subtle viewpoint by presenting key concepts such as reality, the visual reality, the reality image, montage, time in cinema and the power of video. The characters are no longer those shadows on platonian cave but it is the spectators who are transformed to real shadows. "The oldest myth regarding the cinema origins is the fiction of Plato's cave in which entangled people observed the shadows in front of themselves. They were far from the spirited world which was the source of every reality" (Ishaghpour, 2002, p. 89).

On the other hand, Godard's challenge with Walter Benjamin's speeches was to some extent, in harmony. The reproduction of art works especially the mechanical one is a point which makes these two artists more similar. Benjamin in his article, "the mechanical reproduction of art work", raises the concept of aura and emphasizes that this aura is destroyed in the era of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin, 1970, p. 9). Godard also accepts the mentioned saying.

"Video was one of the cinema's embodiments which later was changed. This is true in television programs which have no creativity (Ishaghpour, 2002, p. 31).

Benjamin believed that video destroyed the greatness of cinema. In fact, we can say that video gradually removes the backboard personals and transforms the cinema as a light reflect on images such as "King Lear" movie in 1987 or "Shirin" by Kiarostami. By the movie titled as "the wind will takes all", Kiarostami begins to benefit from the visual camera. Godard also was greatly influenced by Beresht and his epic theatre.

By means of this innovation, Brecht, wanted the viewer not to be drawn into some sort of illusion, and instead have a critical approach towards the action. He wanted to continuously remind the viewer of the fact the scene being watched is not real and thus prevent the viewer from any kind of identification with the characters. "Brecht's theatre is in fact concerned with conveyance of meaning rather than providing an exact illusion of the reality." (Fortier, 2002, p.35)

Self-reflection is a method by means of which a movie talks about its own being, the cinema, and in a wider scope, the Media. Resorting to this technique, Jean Luc Godard, constantly reminds the viewer that *he is watching a movie*.

Breaking down the unity of time and place, ignoring the 180 degrees rule, various jump cuts, references to his own movies and other movies in the history of the cinema, using archived documentary images, combining black and white and colorful images, frequent use of handy cams and producing deliberate vibrations, putting texts on pictures and use of videos, using flat and planar pictures in movies, omission of story and screenplay, or in other words, converting narratives to counter-narratives or even grid or resomatic narratives are all components of Godard's cinema. There is a distinction in his works: he uses cameras and other cinematic and video equipments in addition to the story itself, in order to convey the meaning. "In Godard's works, we can say that a direct recording of sound combined with the noise and abnormal echoes existing in the environment does occur which is equal to using real locations filmed by handy cams; this suggests that the event being recorded is not real but the act of shooting itself is real." (Bordwell, 2012, p. 179)

For Godard, images and the reflection of light on the images in the Cinema does matter. Therefore in his movies, Godard, is in search of decreasing the equipments used in process of production to the extent that in the movie *Histoires du cinema (Histories of the Cinema, 1998)* he films a history using images which depicts the power of assembly and videos. Prior to Godard the movie makers tried to expose the audience to the unity of time and place. But with Godard's first works all these rules were broken. One of Godard's techniques of providing self-reflection is the use of flat images which for instance in the film *To Live One's Life* (1962) can be seen; in this movie the actors are faced placed in front of flat and solid walls. "Reference" is another component of Godard's works. For example in the film *To Live One's Life* the movie *Jeanne d'Arc* is watched in the

movies. Moreover in his films we can see lots of references to different cinematic genres and "B" grade Hollywood movies. In *À bout de souffle* (Breathless, 1960, p.143) Jean-Paul Belmond's face is very similar to that of Hemphry Bogart. In his films sometimes the camera moves by itself in opposition to the character's direction; for instance in the opening scene of *Alphaville* (1965) the camera runs faster than Lemmy Caution. Although his works were political and intellectualized, he sometimes tried hard to make a work popular. This was done about "Breathless". Godard is much more concerned with viewer than the work itself. However he still enjoys using and playing with cinematic tools. This playing and enjoying the tools is one of the important characteristics of post-modern cinema. In Godard's method of narration some tools and elements can be seen which are now considered as elements of postmodern cinema. For instance, in his works sound and picture do not match. The construction of his works and his method of conveying meanings by means of pictures and more importantly, his method of narration, with no doubt makes us believe that his aim is to impress the audience which of course makes his works practically incapable of being analyzed. In order to understand Godard's cinema we not only must be aware of the meaning of art but also should know about the historical situation, time and location of his shooting the films. In fact Godard paved the way for the postmodern cinema by his method of narration and using of collage and Bricolage elements. But he still differs from this cinema for in some occasions he cannot get rid of elements associated with the modernist cinema. For example it is very hard for ordinary people to connect with his works while in the postmodern cinema the ordinary people can also enjoy a movie.

6. Abbas Kiarostami; Postmodernism and Self-Reflection

Kiarostami's cinema seemingly differs greatly from that of Godard. But the works created by these two can be analyzed regarding the criteria associated with the postmodern cinema and the idea of self-reflection. After making the films *Taste of Cherry* (1376) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1378), Kiarostami chose a new path by shooting the movie *Ten* (1381). Of course with a analytic approach we can see some elements of his recent works including *Ten* (1381), *Five* (1382) and *Shirin* (1387) in his previous works as well. After filming the movie *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1378) he has constantly tried to decrease the backstage crew and make his films with the simplest methods and the least costs. For instance he uses digital camera to shoot his movies. Andrew pointed out that: "Cinema is no longer an expensive voluminous art of the past. It is all about analyzing the individuals and the way man can find himself in this method of thinking." (Andrew, 2005, p. 13)

Reference is considered as one of the components of Kiarostami's works which is also an element of postmodern cinema. Mostly he refers to his own works. This can

obviously be seen in his two works “*Where is the Friends Home?*”, and “*Life and Nothing More*”. On the hand his some works remind the audience of his other works in an indirect manner. “My every film breeds another film.” (Andrew, 2005, p. 23)

In Kiarostami’s cinema narration is omitted by the omission of the director. He, in his recent works mentioned above, uses the “self-reflection” element much more than before. Besides trying to the Cinema as a media and the work being released, he tries to omit the director as well. In other words, he considers the audience as the chief creator of the work, without the work is not complete. By borrowing the element of “reaction” from drama he bases he cinema on “reaction”. This is done in its most unusual way in his movie *Shirin*. “How can we make a film with no conversation in it? If pictures let the audience interpret them we’d better say nothing in order to let the audience have their own interpretation whatever it is. If we say nothing anything can potentially happen. This way we transfer the power to the audience.” (Andrew, 2005, p. 109) In *Taste of Cherry* the camera is so close to Badihi that we obviously understand some one (the cameraman) is sitting next to him; this is when Kiarostami draws attention to the act of shooting the movie. This method is also employed in the movie *Ten*. Kiarostami uses the car as a kind of location. His vast use of car can be considered as postmodernist characteristic because in postmodernism machine and technology are employed in an enjoyable way; unlike the modernist Cinema, the postmodern cinema does not confront with industrial societies. “Ten portrays the dual performance of cars. A car is a private place or territory which observable and moveable but is usually known as a public territory.” (Andrew, 2005, p. 82)

Sometimes in Godard’s works by means of close-ups and camera motions, he draws attention to the act of shooting. There is no action and reaction similar to that of classic or modern films. In the movie *Five* the camera only shows a sea; this is the simplest way to inform the audience that a device is recording everything. In this film there exist no action, reaction or narration. What matters to Kiarostami is the reaction from the side of the audience and not a procedure of “action-reaction” in the film. In fact it can be said that Kiarostami’s cinema is fully focused on “reactions”. In the ending scene of the movie *Taste of Cherry* we see Kiarostami in the state of shooting the movie. Godard is also sitting behind control desk of the video device in the ending scene of *Numéro deux (Number Two, 1975)*. One of the simplest instances of employing self-reflection is when a director shows himself in his movie. In another sequence in the movie *Taste of Cherry* a girl asks Badihi to take a photograph of her and her fiancé. Photographing is an action which reminds us of life and memories. This action reminds the audience of the act of shooting movies. In *Alphaville* where Lemmy Caution and the woman are passing the corridor, the camera records them from the foreshore and moves backwards; the deliberate vibrations of the camera obviously draws the

attention of the viewer to the act of shooting. Kiarostami in his movie *Close Up (1990)* talks about reality and artistic reality (i.e. image of reality and reality of the image) and by the title he chooses for his movie he depicts his great interest in close-ups. He has done this in his previous works as well. Close-ups provide an unusual image because in reality it hardly occurs for the viewer to see someone this close. Therefore, the viewer concludes that this view is provided by mechanic device. In this film Kiarostami not only shows Mohsen Makhmalbaf but also himself. What is reality and its image? “In this film Kiarostami narrates the reality in so many different ways that the viewer is forced to have many suppositions about what is real and what is not.” (Andrew, 2005, p. 36)

Separate decoupage of sound and picture is another factor in self-reflection. Kiarostami uses this technique in his movie *Shirin*. In Godard’s cinema also it can not be understood which sound is associated with which image. In fact sounds are not dependent on pictures and act independently. In the movie *Le Petit soldat (The Little Soldier, 1960)* images of the past are seen accompanied by sounds of the present.

“By minimizing the realistic motivation regarding the mentioned sounds he makes us relates them to an omniscient designer’s power.” (Bordwell, 2012, p. 213)

In some of Kiarostami’s movies there exist no opening, no middle point and no ending. The movie *Ten* is a good example: although it is arranged according to Kiarostami’s will but the sequence can easily be changed. In *Taste of Cherry* also it is not important where the narration starts, and even if we put the ending at the beginning or in the middle of the film there appears no difference. The movie *Shirin* has basically no beginning and no ending. The movie *Hello Cinema (1994)* by Mohsen Makhmalbaf is a great example of movies with grid narratives. In this film both self-reflection and grid narrative is employed: Makhmalbaf wants to make a movie and for this purpose he tests some actors. They do not know all this will be a movie by itself because Makhmalbaf acts in front of them and therefore the viewer and the actor are merged this way. All the backstage crew can be seen in the film. There are constant references to the Cinema in this film. In Godard’s cinema lack of a distinctive opening, middle point and ending is also observable. This is not clear where the movie starts and where it does end: we can put any sequence in another place without a little bit of change happening. In the movies *Shirin*, *Five* and even *Ten* since there exist no story and motion, existence of a beginning or ending is not meaningful. In Godard’s cinema referring to the Cinema is done through making a change in the method of narration, using cinematic assembly techniques and camera motions. But in Kiarostami’s cinema self-reflection is done mostly through changing the method of narration or its omission.

7. Conclusion

Art works of Kiarostami and Godard are not alike that much and even are not in one similar path or direction. Their works have many things in common with the modernist cinema and both are directors who have not followed the normal rules of film making; instead they have both created new waves. Godard is closely connected with the "French New Wave" (Nouvelle Vague) which was a deconstructionalist movement. But he has also shot narrative movies. Kiarostami also began his work by making narrative movies, but they both broke the rules and did not get stuck in a definite framework. They both followed their own rules in the process of filmmaking and both have their own specific styles. Although both belong to the modernist world in regard to their insights, they have postmodernist attitudes. Elements and components of their works are now known as characteristics of postmodern cinema. Self-reflection is one of these elements which nowadays can be seen in the Cinema especially in the postmodern Cinema. Self-reflection which is very similar to the spacing (separating) done by Brecht, is now known as a characteristic of Godard's cinema due to his extreme use of it. Kiarostami has also employed this technique not only in his recent works but also in his all previous ones. Self-reflection means: to refer to the process of filmmaking and, in general, the media. Postmodernist movies have many things in common with the modernist

movies (breaking narratives, references, intertextuality, and innovative use of cameras) but unlike modernist movies they do not ignore traditions. These works do not restrict the viewer to the world of cinema; instead they direct the audience towards historical books about art and cinema. Hence, references (or in other words, the advantages the postmodern cinema takes from other forms of art) prevent the viewer from being drawn in the world of the film. That is these references help the viewer not to be drawn into an illusion of reality; rather the viewer is aware that whatever he sees is a movie totally made by a human being exactly like a painting. Self-reflection can be seen in works which focus on the Cinema itself in a way the viewer is aware that what he watches is just "made". This element is frequently used in the postmodern cinema. Postmodern filmmakers refer to the essence of Cinema by means of references to the media, filmmaking systems and video devices. The reason for still considering Kiarostami and Godard as postmodern filmmakers is that although most of their works belong to the modern era, postmodern characteristics are obvious in their works. Chart (1) depicts the process through which the viewer is affected along with a comparison of Godard's and Kiarostami's works. And Table (1) reviews this process with regard to classic, modernism and postmodernist cinemas.

Chart (1):

A) Classic

Communicational atmosphere of the component, the audience and the artistic work

Action by the component → Artistic works → Reaction of the audience

B) Godard's cinema and post-structural cinema

Action by the component → Artistic works ↔ Reaction of the audience

Self reflection

C) Kiarostami's cinema and postmodernism

Communicational atmosphere of the component, the audience and the artistic work

Action by the component → Artistic works ↔ Reaction of the audience

Recording Reactions

Self reflection

Table1. The process through which the viewer is affected with regard to classic, modernism and postmodernist cinemas

The process through which the viewer is affected	Classic Cinema	Modern Cinema	Postmodern Cinema
The connection between reality and truth	Reality and truth do match	A vague separation of reality and truth;	Replacing reality with reality
Ending films	Closed ending (certainty)	Open ending (uncertainty); Godard- Kiarostami	(uncertainty) Godard- Kiarostami
Method of narration	Linear narrative (Aristotle) -----	Non-linear narrative Godard- Kiarostami	Grid narrative; Kiarostami
How the content is perceived	One single text	Multiple texts Godard-Kiarostami	Intertextuality; Godard-Kiarostami
Type of attitude	Traditional worldview	Modernist worldview	Mixture of tradition and modernism/ lampoon and satire
Type of culture	Cultural ascendancy	Cultural conflicts	Combination of cultures Godard- Kiarostami
Type of technology	Promoting technology and machines Kiarostami	Rejection of modern world; Godard	Enjoying the technology Godard- Kiarostami
Realistic point of view	realistic	Escapist Godard- Kiarostami	Seemingly Real Anarchism; Godard- Kiarostami
Time and Place	Unity of time and place	Vagueness of time and place	Lack of time and place
Point of View	Objective point of view	A mixture of objective and subjective	Objective and subjective points of view become indistinguishable
Communicational aspect	Message centered	Art for art's sake / cinema centered / media centered	Mixture of medias / media-centered
The connection between the character and the story	Narrative is superior	Characters are superior; Kiarostami - Godard	Turbulence in the story and characters; Godard-Kiarostami
Mélange	Distinction of the kinds	Collage ; Godard	Bricolage Godard
Cinema narrated by cinema	In search of whys? Whats? And Hows? Godard-Kiarostami	Self reflection; Godard-Kiarostami	Self reflection; Godard-Kiarostami

Post Script

1. David Lynch (Missoula, Montana, U.S., 1946): His films are full of surrealist symbols, meticulous sequences and dreamlike images. His cinema is somehow sarcastic regarding current filmmaking systems especially the Hollywood. *The Elephant Man (1980)* is one of his best works.

2. Jim Jarmusch (Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, U.S., 1953): He is known as the major proponent of American Contemporary Independent Cinema. Traveling, combination of different cultures, poetic structures, satire, sarcasm towards industrial societies (which are results of modernism) are some characteristics of his films. Of his works we can mention *Mystery Train (1989)* and *Coffee and Cigarettes (2003)*. He always combines different cultures to provide something new and abnormal.

3. Quentin Tarantino (Knoxville, Tennessee, U.S., 1963): He dropped out of school at a young age and worked at a video rental store where he reviewed the world cinema. He had his first filmmaking experience in the year 1992 by shooting the movie *Reservoir Dogs*. This was a low cost dark heist movie. Popular stories, references and mixtures are some chief elements of his cinema. *Inglourious Basterds (2009)* is another movie shot by him.

4. Jean-Luc Godard (Paris, France, 1930): He is the most successful filmmaker associated with the French New Wave and the most political directors in the history of Cinema. He broke most of the cinematic rules with his first long film. He is one of the first filmmakers to employ Brecht's idea of separating. Breaking the 180 degrees rule is one of his innovations. *Histoires of the Cinema (1998)* is one of his best movies.

5. Peter Wollen (London, 1938): He is the husband of Laura Mulvey who is a feminist theorist. His theories are combinations of structuralist ideas and symbolism of Charles Peirce. He was also a proponent of the author's theory. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (1969-1972)* is a book by Peter Wollen which is about Cinema. He used this term for the movies for the first time in the year 1990. He considered Tim Burton's movie *Batman Returns (1992)* as a manifestation of the modern world.

6. Tim Burton (Burbank, California, U.S., 1958) : He is a strange filmmaker whose method and films remind us of our childhood. His visual style and quirky-themed movies are under the influence of horror films made in the 1920s and 1930s and also expressionist movies of the Germany Cinema. Of his prominent works we can name: *Batman Returns (1992)*, *Edward Scissorhands (1990)*, *Sleepy Hollow (1999)*, and *Sweeney Todd (2007)*.

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