



World Cinema Goes to Italy. Abbas Kiarostami: *Certified Copy* (2010)

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Abstract. The issue of the relationship between the original and its copy as thematised in Kiarostami's film *Certified Copy* (2010) has been discussed in many articles so far. Instead of engaging itself in a philosophical argumentation, the present article rather proposes a close analysis of visual strategies, not only reflecting the conceptual framework outlined by the title, dialogues and narrative features, but, above all, revealing Kiarostami's first "European" film as a "copy" of some paradigmatic European films. Following Laura Mulvey's term of "gender-specific storytelling," used apropos of Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (*Viaggio in Italia*, 1954), I will focus on the "gender-specific gaze" identifiable in both the Rossellini and the Kiarostami film. I will argue that this latter, together with an elaborated use of "frames" so typical for the Western visual culture, is responsible for a sophisticated imagery ultimately reflecting on the fragile borders between reality and its illusion, an issue of unprecedented actuality in the age of the digital and the new media.

*"I believe that cinema should be granted the
possibility of remaining not understood."*

Abbas Kiarostami¹

Kiarostami's *Certified Copy* has been debated for a long time after its presentation at the 2010 Cannes festival. It has been labelled "ambivalent," "conceptual," "philosophical," and even a "copy" of some paradigmatic films of the European Neo-realism and modernism, as well as a remake of one of Kiarostami's earlier films, *The Report* (1977).² Its ambivalence primarily consisted – besides the enigmatic story – of its curious position between the "socially sensitive" Iranian New Film and a "lighter" European "art movie." In

1 See Abbas Kiarostami in conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy (2005, 88).

2 Aaron Cutler refers to Joachim Rosenbaum, who identified the connection with *The Report*. Kiarostami is not denying it either in the interview (2011, 13).

Thomas Elsaesser's approach, this kind of fusion is characteristic to the so-called "world cinema:" "Formally speaking, in many cases, world cinema seems to be art cinema 'light'. Its treatment of time and space is closer to the mainstream than earlier experimental, avant-garde films or third cinema, and its narratives appropriate or cite conventional rhetorical strategies: for instance, the motif of the journey, quest or chase are almost universal" (2005, 509).³ This is complemented by the "conceptuality" of the film, raising, once again, the issue of borders between reality and fiction (thus emphasising the role of the spectator in conferring a philosophical meaning) in a European setting. While previous movies of Kiarostami dealt with representation as a copy of reality, here the discussion is taken one level further: this time the 'comedy of the couple,'⁴ revealing existential issues of the man–woman relationship is framed – in harmony with the North Italian background – by concepts of the Italian Renaissance concerning the original work of art (as copy of "nature") and its imitation.⁵ The double structure of *nature – representation (original) – its copy* persists as interchangeable, an oscillation all over the film: model–painting and original–copy become equivalent relationships.⁶ The central thesis, repeatedly formulated in dialogues, storyline and visuals, disqualifies the hierarchy between original and copy and emphasises the merit of this latter in guiding us to the former. With this, we are back to the familiar motto of Kiarostami's previous films: *the way to the truth goes through lies* (Elena 2005, 188).

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- 3 He is also defining world cinema as a "reworking of third cinema, which was 'third' in relation to Hollywood as 'first' cinema, and European national/art cinema as 'second' cinema," and initially referred to politically engaged cinema, losing, with time, its political agenda to nowadays "indicate fusion and hybridity of national and international, ethnically specific and globally universal characteristics" (2005, 496). Moreover, its definition would refer to films "as part of the identity politics that has permeated both developed and developing nations," realised "across stories of journeys and discoveries, of everyday lives in harsh natural conditions or under difficult political circumstances." As he points out, world cinema also "dramatizes conflicts between tradition and modernity, hegemony and the margins, global and local, Westernization and indigenization" (Elsaesser 2005, 508–509).
 - 4 Vs. Shirin (2008), a "tragedy of the passion" (see Yousef Ishagpour 2010, 35). Aaron Cutler defines the film as "A genre synthesis of screwball comedies of remarriage and of mid-movement Italian neorealism" (2011, 12).
 - 5 Sándor Radnóti distinguishes between two traditional modes of imitation: that of nature and that the "authors:" the first is called original, so "imitation" or copy can be restricted to the second case (see 1999, 68).
 - 6 As formulated in the film, "The model is the original." László Tarnay points out that for James, the male protagonist, the copy has the same function as the original. Moreover, as Kiarostami suggests, the historical aspect of this relationship is irrelevant, more important is the issue of "context," the original setting of the work of art (Tarnay, 2011).

Many interpretations of the movie are lost in defusing the story of the couple and tend to agree about the improvised, “as if” nature of the unfolding events: the woman, referred to as “She” all over the film and James are constantly improvising (an element specific to Kiarostami films),⁷ either playing that they are married or that they are not (and this is their first meeting), which also explains the ambivalence effect. As László Tarnay points out, the story itself appears as a representation, a “staging” of the dilemma of the original (2011). Actually, from the point of view of the fiction–reality issue – paraphrasing the Aristotelian “what could have been” principle – or a convincing, humanistic representation of interpersonal issues, helped by a double, self-reflexive structure, it is not relevant whether we are witnessing a beginning or an artificially restarted relationship: *the protagonists are playing that they are playing*.⁸

Juliette Binoche’s way of acting is especially full of mannerism, as she seems to be continuously looking into a mirror, “matching” her face to the given situation, just like the female characters of Cassavetes. Her being the only professional actor of the film, this can also be interpreted as a self-reflexive statement about acting or, more specifically, method-acting that still holds very strongly in European and American cinema. She is evidently playing herself as an actress, when, just like a chameleon, she is deliberately changing her well known “film faces,” as well: the Hollywood star, the dramatic actress of European art movies and the almost unrecognisable, everyday face without makeup from Kiarostami’s previous film, *Shirin*. Moreover, as it has been rightly pointed out by Aaron Cutler, in her relationship to James, played by the non-actor Shimmel, watching and following her closely, one can identify the recurrent original-copy motif of the film. This anxiety between an actor and non-actor, just like the blurred line between acting and non-acting, also produces a kind of estrangement beneficial to the film (Cutler 2011, 15), reminding us of works of neo-realist and modernist cinema.⁹

7 Laura Mulvey talks about an “uncertainty principle” in the case of films by Kiarostami (2009, 123), while Alberto Elena emphasises their “misleading” character, responsible for the distancing between films and audience (2005, 187).

8 Contrary to Jean-Luc Nancy’s opinion, who, in his essay on *Life and Nothing More* (*Zendegi va digar hich*, 1991), affirms that the *mise en abyme* structure does not characterise Kiarostami’s films, this can be encountered in the much earlier *Close up* (1990). But Nancy is right in affirming that in all his films “appearances intervene only to underscore the manner in which looking and the real together are mobilized” (2001, 26).

9 As Laura Mulvey points out in the case of *Journey to Italy*, Rossellini did not give any support to his star actors: “As a result, their presence on the screen is uncertain. Icons of stardom, they are also themselves, unsure where the boundary lies between

The original-copy discourse as conceptual framework is synchronised with a continuous “re-framing,” both narratological and visual, also responsible for the distancing effect: besides a variation of the same scene, it can be detected in the multiple framing by the windshield, window- and doorframes and mirrors. The narrative and visual solutions typical to Kiarostami films – such as the aimless lingering around, driving in a space that gradually becomes mythical – are actually ritually “bathed” in the formal arsenal of European cinema. Until this film, in interviews, Kiarostami had related in a confusing way to this, especially to Bresson, the neo-realism, modernism or the French New Wave (See Elena 2005, 16). *Certified Copy* is finally a statement, an evidence of his films’ affinities with European art cinema, appearing, more specifically, as a *certified copy* of the European modernist tradition. But his imitating gesture – recognisable in formal solutions and a conceptual background – does not belong to what Sándor Radnóti calls the “traditionalist” way of imitation, generated by a naive respect for tradition, but rather to the “traditional” one motivated by a “reflected” relationship to the tradition (Radnóti 1999, 71). While Kiarostami’s film actively reflects upon his relationship to European modernism – by deliberately merging his well known formal, visual “signature” solutions with those of European modernism, thus presenting its relation to this latter as interchangeable, the original-copy hierarchy as irrelevant, or even the copy better than the original (because it reinforces tradition), – he is implicitly referring to the relationship of modernism to traditional ways of storytelling in cinema.

This reveals another similarity – besides the obvious storyline and imagery – with Rossellini’s *Journey to Italy*, one of the alleged “models” of Kiarostami’s film. According to Laura Mulvey, *Journey* is arguably the first modern film, in which “new cinema seems to be coming into being before one’s eyes,” through a gender-related distinction between a new kind of narrative favouring “reflection” – represented by the female protagonist – and the tradition of “pushing action forward” – represented by the hero (2009, 113). Besides a similar thematisation of narrative modes, in *Certified Copy* there is also – for the first time in Kiarostami’s work – a gender-specific delimitation of the gaze. It not only continues the discourse on the feminine point of view introduced in the previous two films, but, by turning it towards the external world for the first time, also confronts it openly and systematically with the male gaze.¹⁰ This

performing stardom, as actors or as stars who are forced to perform themselves” (2009, 108).

10 One could argue that this is already happening in *Ten*, where the feminine attitude is confronted with that of a society privileging men, in the taxi driver’s dialogues with her son. But here the clash of attitudes remains episodic, just an aspect of the

gesture ensures the double significance of *Certified Copy* in the work of Kiarostami. On the one hand, it has all the formal and conceptual features of a synthesis, which means that we are witnessing here the birth of a possible new trilogy.¹¹ On the other hand, this closure appears as a new beginning: an opening towards an Occidental tradition of sophisticated, self-reflexive visual representation.

Tahereh's Unseen Look

The film is the third in the line of Kiarostami's films emphasising a feminine point of view – after *Ten* (2002) and *Shirin* (2008) –, a new series interpreted by Laura Mulvey as a return of Tahereh's unseen look from *Through the Olive Trees* (*Zire darakhatan zeyton*, 1994) (2009, 134). Ishagpour even identifies a hidden “intercultural” link between *Certified Copy* and *Shirin*: Arezzo, where She lives, is where Piero della Francesca painted the fresque *Battaglia de Eraclio e Cosroe* (1452–1466), Cosroe being Shirin's beloved husband (2010, 36). As if, considering Francesco's painting as a “window” to the legendary events of Persian history, Kiarostami would justify his choice to make a “European” film in Europe, thus engaging his film in an intercultural dialogue, or rather, *returning the gaze*. The representation of rigidly delimited, gender-specific social roles and a difference between the female and male relationship to truth and reality, reflected in a different attitude to the object of their gaze, also appears as an element of continuity in *Ten*, *Shirin* and now in *Certified Copy*. Men seem to be aiming at the immediate appropriation of what they see, while women appear as trying to understand it, interpret it and make it an organic part of their lives. This very basic difference – as thematised in these tree films – also reflects the paradoxical nature of the female existence: it appears that exactly its very essence, intuition and imagination, remains unnoticed or unvalued by men. That is why waiting for that specific *attention* or *gaze* that discovers the *original* in them is at the core of their being. Or, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, “Looking is regarding and consequently respecting” (2005, 38).

“The model is the original,” says the female protagonist of *Certified Copy*, while her image is reflected on the portrait of Musa Polimnia, a Tuscan version of

heroine's journey of initiation into the new role of “independent woman.” On the other hand, the scenes of arguments with her son are prefiguring the discussion between She and James during their journey by car.

- 11 A logical continuation of the previous one, the *Koker trilogy*, including *Where is the Friend's house?* (*Khane-ye doust kodjast?* 1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994).

La Gioconda. In this palimpsest of images, the issue of original appears as of secondary importance (as if reinforcing James's point of view), but her partner will not recognise the original, the "real thing" in her until she *is representing herself* in the last scene *as a picture*, an odalisque lying on her side, an "objet petit a," with the Lacanian term: the *object of desire* [Figs. 1–2]. Moreover, while posing as a model (the original of all paintings), she is pronouncing James's name stutteringly, just like her brother in law calls her sister, "lingering over her name," a gesture earlier labelled "original" by James. László Tarnay is right when stating that while with this imitating gesture she is obviously expecting her partner to recognise in it a "certified copy" and repeat her sister's loving attitude, she seems to be forgetting that for James a copy is not certified due to its (causal or similarity) reference to the original. As he is repeatedly pointing out, a certified copy is, as it is, an original (Tarnay, 2011). But, on the other hand, she is being spontaneous and intuitive (herself) exactly by apparently forgetting about previous discussions. She is improvising, revealing herself, once again, as "the real thing," an original, *a woman and an actress*. All this is reinforcing Tarnay's observation that the issue of the "certified copy" is a matter of *aspect* in this film, it depends on the gaze (or who is looking at what), or, in Nancy's term, *regard*, responsible for the oscillation characteristic to the film.

Similarly to all his films – as the same Nancy emphasises –, here Kiarostami "substitutes the gaze for images and signs – he mobilizes them, engaging them toward a look and the look towards what is real" (2005, 92). *She* appears here as an odalisque, a well known, recurrent image of the history of painting. All over the history of visual arts – beyond feminist film theory – representations of women are always implying the gaze, i.e. reflecting the socio-cultural parameters of the actual visual culture, a well defined need of the spectator. Hippolyte Taine, one of the theorists of modern painting, is even identifying woman and painting, when saying "one wants to own them and put them on display" (1867, 76). Just like in so many Impressionist paintings (in *Olympia* by Manet, for example), the female protagonist of *Certified Copy*, represented as picture, is not a passive "object of desire," but she is looking back at us, and, by a disturbing contemplation, is engaging the spectator into an "adventure of the gaze."

In the Hollywood film practice, the gaze of protagonists is mostly serving the perfect narrative illusion and it only rarely becomes a distinct topic, like in the genre of the noir and such ekphrastic narrations built around pictorial representations of women like Preminger's *Laura* (1944) or *Woman in the Window* (1944) by Fritz Lang. Contrarily to this, in the European cinema, the alienation of a couple is often reflected in unusual visuals: in the Italian new realism, in modernist films or the French New Wave imagery, the deliberately framed pictures representing uncanny sceneries are "looking back," resisting the

gaze just as female characters are resisting the stereotypical, patriarchal attitude considering them either sexual objects and lovers, or mothers and wives.

In this respect, Kiarostami's film is closely related to Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (1954), *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963) by J. L. Godard and Antonioni's *The Night* (*La Notte*, 1961).¹² Moreover, due to the already mentioned element of uncertainty, the "as if"-likeness, Youssef Ishagpour also detects similarities with *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) (2010, 33). In all these films, the miscommunication of a couple appears as a pretext to a contrastive presentation of major film concepts and principles. Besides, the films of Rossellini and Godard are intertextually related: we see the protagonists of *Contempt* leaving the film theatre where *Journey to Italy* is being screened. Due to its affinities with these paradigmatic films, *Certified Copy* is an evidence of Kiarostami's European heritage, but also that of his intention to "fill up" this latter with new content in a time when the "death of cinema" is being feared. As Thomas Elsaesser puts it, "Europe is being re-colonized by its own former colonials" (2005, 493).¹³ The "Italian connection" is represented by the setting and the topic, while Juliette Binoche represents France, a country that had "adopted" Kiarostami when he was marginalised in his country under the accusation of "Occidentalism." She also stands for the contemporary European "art film," but for the Hollywood stardom-tradition as well, due to a touch of "glamour." Laura Mulvey's affirmation regarding the role of stars in *Journey to Italy* in marking "a point of transition in cinema history," as "the characters enable the film to create an opposition between different kinds of cinemas, divided between modern and conventional modes of cinematic storytelling" thoroughly applies to Kiarostami's first "European film." Even more so, because, as already mentioned, these storytelling directions are divided, in the words of the same Mulvey, "along gender lines" (2009, 109–110).

Italy – Seen by Women and Men

In Kiarostami's films, the car is a space of intimate confessions, situations heavy with tension, while the windshield becomes a representation of the subjective point of view framing sceneries, people and faces leaning in and out, asking for and giving information. In *Ten*, we hardly see anything from the external world: this film is rather the story of an inner journey, staging an

12 See, for example, Frank Kausch (2010, 39).

13 Among his examples there are directors belonging to the Turkish community (Fatih Akin, for example) in Germany or those representing the vibrant Asian community in Britain (like Gurinder Chadha). He also dedicates chapters to Ruy Guerra, original from Mozambique and working, after Brazil, in France, and he repeatedly returns to the case of Latin American Raul Ruíz, making films in Portugal and France.

individual process of understanding and preparation for a new role (that of the divorcee in Iran). The mysterious heroine of *Certified Copy* is taking his partner by car to places that are important for her, a museum, a church, a hotel room, all cave-like, dim places, archetypes of female nature, just like her antiquity shop, where James descends to at the beginning of the film. She is repeatedly trying to attract him into her rather sentimental world susceptible to poetry, mysticism and representations, animated by an urge for interpretations. Her partner resists the temptation, directing his attention to the outer world, the typical Tuscan scenery, the road with cypresses, also well known from the films set in Iran. Rossellini's film starts with this image of the road with cypresses, seen through the windshield of a fancy car. When the husband is taking over the wheel, the parallel conversation leading to the alienation of the two starts: Alexander, the husband (George Sanders) seems to discredit all that his wife Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) is attracted to: the freshly inherited house full with art objects, poetry, but most of all, her "incurable" romanticism. He is apparently harsh, intolerant and impatient. A version of the scene with him asking for wine, from the Italian maid who doesn't understand a word is actually coming back in the restaurant episode of *Certified Copy*: both men are keen to go back to work.

The gender-specific opposition between the modern and traditional storytelling is also valid for *Certified Copy*: "Katherine carves out a space for reflection and journey into the past. Alex is impatient to drive the action forward." Thus masculinity and its anxieties identify with "conventional action-driven narrative and femininity with the kind of cinema that would enable Rossellini's 'essay', that is, his journey to Naples and its past" (Mulvey 2009, 110).¹⁴ Thus, in the film of Rossellini, the couple will move in different spaces, along different narrative lines from the beginning. Katherine is taking the car, is visiting museums and contemplating the everyday life of Italians from behind the windshield. When her gaze is repeatedly attracted by images of mothers and children, her exclamation, "how beautiful they are!" betrays her repressed grief over her childless marriage, well hidden behind an aesthetic statement. The same distant, "windshield-attitude" appears during all her visits and walks: every time she is accompanied by a guide. As Laura Mulvey puts it, Rossellini's film represents "an extension into cinema of the blurred boundaries between the material and the spiritual, reality and magic, life and death," all revealed during "a journey leading to a space of uncanny dominated by the ruins of an ancient civilization" (2009, 104). The museums, churches, the steamy volcano and

14 As Mulvey points out, through this opposition, a "new cinema seems to be coming into being before one's eyes," *Journey to Italy* being considered by many the first modernist film (2009, 113).

Pompeii are symbolic spaces for her, conferring a mythical dimension to the marital conflicts and female–male dissimilarities. In the space filled with statues and busts of Roman historical characters, sort of replying to the allusive comment of the guide about a female torso, while standing in front of a monumental statue, Katherine concludes that “they are just like men today” [Fig. 3].

Similarly, in *Certified Copy* the discourse on the female–male relationship is repeatedly doubled by visual representations of reality, for example in the group of statues we hardly see directly, only reflected in the mirrors of a motorbike admired by James and interpreted by the female character, in a sort of improvised ekphrasis [Fig. 4]. As Ágnes Pethő points out, this is also evoking a similar scene from *Last Year in Marienbad*, where a statue is being interpreted by the characters and the interpretation is applied to their situation (2011, 134). Godard’s *Contempt*, retelling over and over the Odyssey, shows the same *mise en abyme* structure. In *Journey to Italy* and *Contempt*, Capri is a mythical space, where the legendary sirens (the tempters) live, the place where the male protagonists are heading for, only to realise that the magic is gone: the husband from the former fails to start a relationship with the French girl, while Paul from the latter remains unaffected by the charms of his wife, repeatedly trying, just like a siren, to attract his attention. Ironically, their alienation becomes definitive on Capri, the island of “sensual attractions.” But while Catherine, the heroine from *Journey to Italy*, is waiting persistently for her husband (although trying to deny this), scrutinising the sea, like a true Penelope, Camille (Brigitte Bardot) from *Contempt* would follow the modern version of the story, “à la Prokosch,” and leaves with the first “suitor.”

All three films excel in representing alienation both verbally and visually: in *Journey to Italy* it appears as a growing physical distance, dramatically represented in the last scene, where the couple is separated by the religious crowd, while in *Contempt* Camille and Paul are talking to each other through the walls of their apartment. Kiarostami assimilates both cinematic traditions, when he complements the linguistic codes – French is the language of mutual understanding and intimacy, while English, that of the man, rational and practical – with images emphasising distance and difficulties of communication. By doing this, he is multiplying the meanings of the illustration on the front cover of the book being launched in the first scene, responsible for the conceptual framework of the film.

A Double Look: Images with Multiple Meanings

This picture – two statue profiles facing each other –, just like those pictures where we can see a rabbit or a duck at the same time, reveals the essence of all

pictures: ambivalence and multiple meaning [Figs. 5–6]. As a specific type of pictures, called “self-reflexive” by W. J. T. Mitchell (2006) shows the similarity of the two faces, with the gap between them emphasising both the difference and the perspective structure of the whole image. It is like a code that, at the same time, refers to the already mentioned ambivalence-principle, the aesthetic tradition of the original–copy discourse, the visible–invisible opposition, implicitly the issue of authenticity of pictures in the Age of the digital, the problems of communication and cultural differences, the tension between the male and female “ways of looking,” their “opposite directions” and, finally, to the perspective as a symbolic form that the creation of visual illusion of reality relies upon since the Italian Renaissance in Western Culture. This picture is also a synthesis of Persian, Muslim and Western visual representations: an allusion to both figurative and nonfigurative representation, in a frame responsible for the illusion of reality (see also Nancy 2001, 34). Or, as Panofsky points out in his *Perspective as a Symbolic Form*, perspective transforms the painting into a window to reality (1997, 27).

This visual pattern is present everywhere in the film: the road with cypresses, the streets reflected on the windshield, the peculiar use of space between mother and son, then She and James as symbol of their relationship (both of them are following her from distance) [Figs. 7–9.]. Similarly, the *mise en abyme* mirror-constructions are all variations of this image with multiple meaning. The typical Kiarostami-shot – a car in a distance while the conversation is overheard off-shot – has the same structure (the distance between the spectator and the image is “filled up” with the sound, just as the sentimental soundtrack fills up the growing distance between Camille and Paul in *Contempt*).

In *Journey to Italy*, the protagonists are moving in separate spaces from the very beginning, their lonely journeys being reflected in visual patterns such as the parallel, separate beds in the bourgeois bedroom, the position of their chairs on the terrace, the image of white boats circulating between Naples and Capri, their walking separately on the deserted streets of Pompeii, and, finally, the already mentioned closing scene, a symbol of traumatic divorce. [Figs. 10–12.] All three male protagonists, who are seeing in reality and its representations only facts and technical issues (Pompeii just an archaeological site, Musa Polimnia is just another copy, filmmaking is just work and business), are repeatedly confronted with artworks representing harmony and some sort of archaic, mythical idea of communion. While male characters consider art as part of reality, their female partners are discovering signs everywhere and are ready for interpretations: for them, *reality is an artwork, a representation already*. It is not a coincidence that the background for these two contradictory

spectatorial attitudes is Italy, where reality and its representations are frequently overlapping: every square meter is hiding cultural relics, Pompeii being the best example of this.¹⁵

Besides the already mentioned contrastive presentation of narrative traditions and gender-specific gazes, Rossellini's film plays on the duplicity of images, emphasising both the transparency-principle of neo-realism (the picture is a window that opens to reality) and the natural opacity, symbolic nature of all pictures (reality re-framed by the windshield, a museum or an archaeological site). *Contempt* also deals with the gap between representation and "the real thing," human relationships deliberately "translated," distorted by writers, film directors and producers. Kiarostami's *Certified Copy* – of the book, of the reality and the films of Godard and Rossellini – closes with a metaphor of this paradox: the image of an art critic stuck between *an open window and a mirror*. While Aaron Cutler points out the "welcoming frame" – the window – in this closing image (2011, 13), Ishagpour emphasises the "reintroduction of doubt" in the relationship between the gaze and the image, in a moment when everything started to become present, real, through the introduction of the mirror (2010, 34). With this unprecedented consciousness, manifested in the wide use of this metaphor, Kiarostami is not only "enlarging his conceptual working site," but he most specifically reintegrates his work in the three main paradigms of film theory, represented by the metaphors of the frame, the window and the mirror. These have been recently reintroduced and reinterpreted by contemporary film theory, especially by the phenomenological approach emphasising the reversibility between perception and expression, spectator and film.¹⁶ As Vivian Sobchack puts it: "The first two, the frame and the window, represent the opposing poles of classical film theory, while the third, the mirror, represents the synthetic conflation of perception and expression that characterizes most contemporary film theory. What is interesting to note is that all three metaphors

15 Even though *Certified Copy* is not referring openly to the issue of original in the age of the digital, it is tempting to draw a parallel between the two kinds of spectatorships as thematised in the above analysed films and two attitudes of the users of new media that László Tarnay touches upon apropos of the film: *immersion* into a virtual world (a projection of the self into it) and *interactivity*, an active use of the new tools ensuring the enjoyment of this (created) world. But, as he points out, in the case of new media, these two attitudes are interrelated: interactivity is actually ensuring immersion into the created virtual world. He also emphasises that in the case of immersivity the issue of original is irrelevant, as this kind of reasoning is only accessible to somebody able to take a distance from the given world/work of art (2011).

16 See also the recent book of Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, re-evaluating some big chapters of film theory through major "frame-metaphors:" the window, the door and the mirror (2010).

relate directly to the screen rectangle and to the film as a static *viewed object*, and only indirectly to the dynamic activity of viewing that is engaged in by both the film and the spectator, each as *viewing subjects*" (1992, 17).¹⁷ Sobchack goes on in defining the metaphor of the frame as "emblematic of the *transcendental idealism* that infuses classical formalism and its belief in the film object as *expression-in-itself*," the window as "emblematic of the *transcendental realism* that informs realist film theory and its belief in the film object as *perception-in-itself*" and, finally, the metaphor of the mirror that "entails a critical judgment of the cinema that is as damning as it is descriptive. It condemns the very ontological being of cinema as substitutive (rather than expansive) and deceptive (rather than disclosing). It reflects the viewer only to point to his or her subjection to signs and meanings produced by an always already dishonest and subjugating 'other'" (1992, 18).

As we have seen, in *Certified Copy* the complexity of the mirror metaphor goes beyond the representational issues of cinema, also referring to the philosophical-existential problems of a couple and ontological questions of art in general. The windshield, a "signature" figure of Kiarostami's films, appears here as a synthesis of all three representational metaphors: a frame conferring a symbolic interpretation to reality, a window opening to the world and, finally, a mirror disqualifying the two previous interpretations of cinema and leaving us with a confusing and deceptive reflection of reality. As Frank Kausch has observed, the projections are transforming the windshield into a "discontinued tissue of the world, where meaning dissolves in its own repetition."¹⁸ Moreover, the image of the two protagonists reflected through the windshield – a version of the book cover with the two profiles facing each other – appears to him as a compression of the "shot-countershot." Once again, Kiarostami has found a figurative solution representing his alternative to this narratological unit generally missing from his films. The consequent, repeated thematisation and inventive formal representation of looking – and, more specifically, of the feminine gaze – makes a new trilogy of *Ten*, *Shirin* and *Certified Copy*, in Youssef Ishagpour's words "most Iranian and universal" (2010, 39). What we witness happening here, is not only a submersion of Kiarostami's cinema in the modernist and "auteur" tradition of European cinema, but rather European

17 It is worth mentioning here, that *Shirin* seems to be an exception to this rule, by thematising viewing directly as a dynamic, sensual activity, besides a more traditional, psycho-analytical reference to the spectator's identification processes in front of the cinematic screen, in Ishagpour's words: each spectator is "making up" her/his own film (2010, 34).

18 "Un tissu discontinu du monde où le sens se dissout dans sa propre reprise" [Translation by me, H. K.] (Kausch 2010, 39).

cinema becoming world cinema, (re)discovering its cultural identity and importance in the eyes of the Other.¹⁹

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19 On this, see Thomas Elsaesser: “It is as if European cinema first had to learn to be world cinema, with all the dangers of self-othering this entails, before it can be (once more?) European, that is to say, before it recognizes its part in the process of becoming a stranger to its own identity, while no longer understanding this identity only ‘face to face with Hollywood’” (2005, 511).

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List of Figures

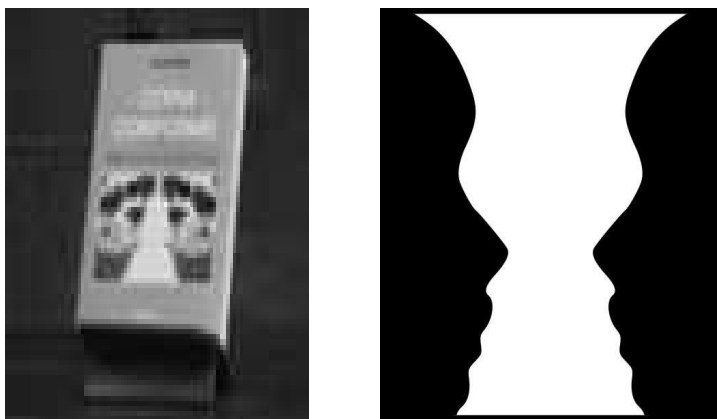
Figures 1–2. The Occidental tradition of representing women and the thematised gaze: Édouard Manet *Lady with a Fan*, *Nina de Callias* (1873) and Juliette Binoche in *Certified Copy* (Abbas Kiarostami, 2010).



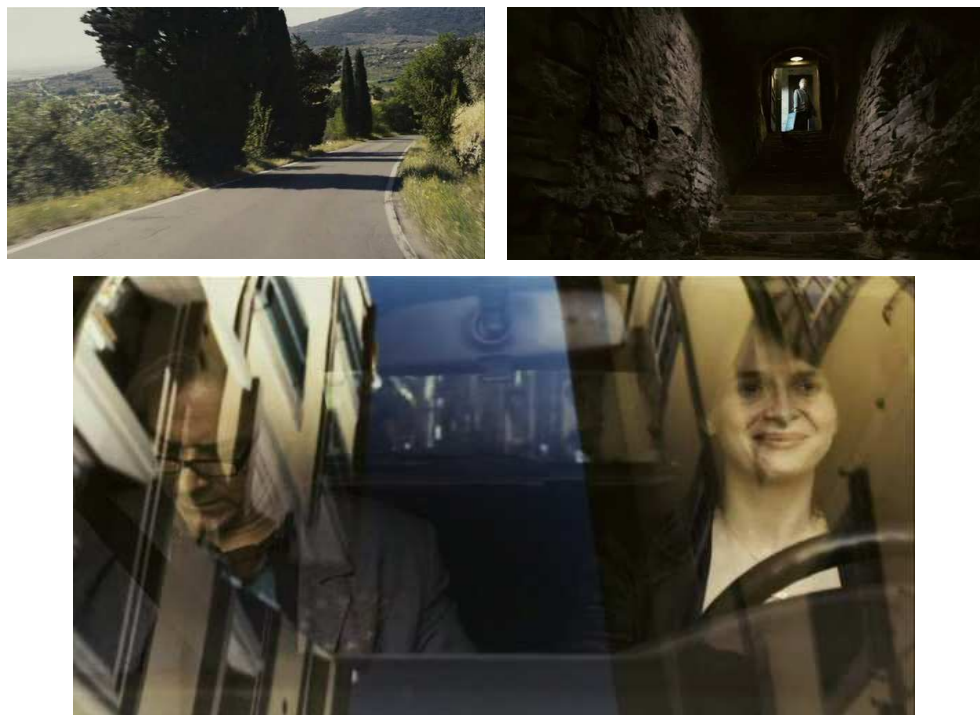
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Figures 7–9. Perspective as a symbolic form becomes a visual pattern in Kiarostami’s film, standing for the tradition of western pictorial representation and revealing human relationships.



Figures 10–12. Composition with parallel lines and perspective as symbolic representation of the alienation in Rossellini's *Journey to Italy*.

