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REIMAGINING SPECTATORSHIP: UNVEILING THE SPECTATORIAL GAZE WITH LACANIAN REAL IN POST-REVOLUTION IRANIAN CINEMA

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Introduction

In film studies, spectatorship has been a cornerstone of theoretical inquiry, offering insights into the complex dynamics between viewers and the cinematic projection. As the field has evolved, scholars have interrogated the various dimensions of spectatorship, drawing from diverse theoretical frameworks to unpack its multifaceted nature. Though academic film studies has been dominated by Western theories, outside its ambit, there lies a vast fertile area in the global context of filmmaking which remains untheorized. Within this landscape, post-revolution Iranian cinema emerges as a particularly intriguing locus for rethinking spectatorship, offering a rich terrain for examining the intersections of politics, culture, and identity within the cinematic experience. This article offers an exploration of spectatorship in post-revolution Iranian cinema, seeking to illuminate how the act of viewing is intricately intertwined with broader socio-political contexts and theoretical paradigms. By delving into the complexities of spectatorial engagement, from the theoretical underpinnings of the cinematic apparatus to the nuances of gendered gazes and the quest for non-western perspectives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of spectatorship in Iranian cinema and its implications for the broader discourse of film studies.

Spectatorship and Academic Film Studies

As film studies emerged as an academic field in the 1970s, scholars turned to disciplines like semiotics and psychoanalysis to understand how film functions as a language system. These theories, rooted in the idea of larger governing structures, emphasized the viewer's passive role and drew parallels between film-watching and unconscious processes. However, these psychoanalytic models have been critiqued for their assumptions of universality, male-centeredness, and neglect of cultural factors.

Laura Mulvey's influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," challenged the male-centric nature of psychoanalytic theories, arguing that film language caters to male pleasure through the objectification of women. Mulvey suggested that female spectators can only derive masochistic pleasure from such films and proposed the need for a new film language not driven by traditional narrative structures.

Subsequent research explored alternatives to Mulvey's paradigm, including the examination of films aimed at female spectators, known as women's pictures or melodramas, which potentially offer a different cinematic experience. Feminist and minority theorists expanded on these critiques, highlighting the importance of considering race, gender, and sexual orientation in understanding spectatorship. They argued that viewers can resist dominant readings and establish oppositional perspectives based on their cultural and social positions. For example, Manthia Diawara emphasized the role of race in spectators'

interpretations of films, suggesting that African American viewers can identify with and resist Hollywood's stereotypes. Similarly, feminist theorists like bell hooks and Jacqueline Bobo explored the unique experiences of African American female spectators, who face intersecting oppressions of race and gender.

Gay and lesbian theorists further challenged traditional notions of spectatorship, suggesting that lesbian desire disrupts the heterosexual paradigm and offers alternative modes of engagement with films. This departure from psychoanalytic concepts has led to a growing interest in understanding the historical development of audiences and their impact on early cinema, using archival materials to trace changing audience expectations and their influence on film language and industry evolution.

Theorizing Spectatorship in 1970s Psychoanalytic Film Theory

One of the hallmarks of 1970s Psychoanalytic Film Theory is its emphasis on the concept of the cinematic spectator. The use of psychoanalytical approaches in film theory is based on Lacan's rereading of Freud, emphasizing the relation between desire and subjectivity. The fact that film theory's inclination shifted from socio-semiotics to psychoanalysis underscores a paradigm shift in viewing cinema from a critical perspective. After 1970s cinema is no longer seen as an "object", but rather as a "process'. This emphasis on the unconscious in film studies, Robert Stam notes, is known as Metapsychological approach because of its encounter with psychoanalytic construction of the viewing subject. This shift from "object" to "process" resulted in another shift in the focus of analysis----from the production of meaning in individual films to the construction of subjectivity in the film-viewing situation. This latter shift underscores the idea of spectatorship which is of prime importance in the entire discourse of psychoanalytic film theory. The foundational understanding of the cine-spectator within psychoanalysis serves as the primary framework from which all subsequent descriptions in the field emanate. The psychoanalytically inflected theory of spectatorship is distinctively different from the other two approaches, namely, the sociological and the formalist. While the empirical or sociological perspectives on cinema view viewers simply as "real" people attending movies, and the Formalist approaches emphasize conscious artistic interpretations by critically informed audiences, psychoanalytic film theory explores spectatorship through the anamorphic lens of desire circulation. Within this framework, various psychoanalytic concepts, particularly those related to unconscious fantasy and gendered identity formation, are employed to elucidate the intricate processes of imaginative projection and understanding inherent to the cine-subject and the act of viewing. Alain Bergala outlines four key inquiries within the theory of spectatorship, each probing different facets: (1) the motivations driving viewers to the cinema, (2) the construction of the subject-spectator by cinematic mechanisms, (3) the metapsychological framework guiding spectatorship during film projection, and (4) the spectator's role within the film itself. While these questions may initially appear discrete, a deeper examination reveals their interdependence, forming a complex web of psychoanalytically informed viewer constructions. Analysis of the cinematic apparatus addresses questions (1) and (2), while further exploration of the gaze tackles question (4). Question (3), pertaining to the metapsychological "regime" of spectatorship, holds central importance in psychoanalytic theories of viewing and will be the primary focus of this discussion.

According to psychoanalytic film theory, the spectator is not a flesh-and-blood individual, but rather a construct brought into being and mobilized by the cinematic apparatus. This conceptualization portrays the spectator as a dynamic "space" that possesses both creative potential (in the fashioning of dream-like or unconscious fantasies) and a sense of emptiness (open to anyone's occupancy). The cinema undertakes a process of "constructing" this spectator by employing various psychoanalytic principles that establish connections between the dreamer and the film viewer. However, it's crucial to note that while a film shares some similarities with a dream, the cine-spectator and the dreamer are not identical entities. For a film spectator to become the subject of fantasy, a viewing situation must be orchestrated wherein the spectator is made more susceptible and inclined to intertwine his personal fantasies with those presented by the cinematic narrative (Augst, 1981). In dream, this viewing situation is auto generated. It comes into play because of the dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious of the dreamer. This intricate

process hinges upon distinguishing between the real individual and the constructed film spectator. The construction of this cinematic spectatorship involves five key factors: first, a regression to a more primal state is induced; second, a scenario fostering belief is crafted; third, mechanisms of primary identification are set into motion, onto which secondary identifications are subsequently appended; fourth, the cinematic fiction activates fantasy structures, such as the family romance; and fifth, the film's markers of authorship must be concealed to maintain the immersive experience (Stam Burgoyne Lewis 147). These factors collectively contribute to the psychoanalytic construction of the film spectator, elucidating the complex interplay between the individual psyche and cinematic narrative.

Spectatorship and the theory of Apparatus

The cinema's ability to captivate and immerse its audience has long been attributed to the intricate workings of the cinematic apparatus, particularly in shaping the viewer's reception. The term "cinematic apparatus" broadly refers to the complex system of interdependent elements that constitute the cinema-viewing experience. This includes the mechanical infrastructure comprising the camera, lighting equipment, film stock, and projector (Metz 18). Additionally, it encompasses the specific conditions of film projection, such as the darkened theatre, illuminated screen, and the light beam projected from behind the viewers' heads (Baudry 70). Furthermore, the film itself is regarded as a cultural text within the apparatus (Comolli & Narboni 19), while the spectator's "mental machinery" plays a crucial role in shaping the experience, positioning them as subjects of desire (Mulvey 15). Thus, the cinematic apparatus is a convergence of technological and libidinal components, each contributing to the immersive nature of the cinematic encounter.

This process, as outlined by Metz, induces a regression in the viewer, fostering susceptibility to the cinematic fantasy. Central to this phenomenon is the notion of credulity—the cinema spectator is predisposed to believe in the illusion presented on screen, despite knowing its fictional nature. Drawing from psychoanalytic theories of fetishism, particularly elucidated by Octave Mannoni, Metz conceptualizes the spectator's belief in cinema as a form of disavowal—a defence mechanism akin to fetishism. In fetishism, the subject refuses to acknowledge a traumatic perception, instead clinging to an imaginary belief that denies the lack perceived as resulting from castration. This “I know…but, nevertheless" structure epitomizes the complex interplay between knowledge and belief inherent in the cinematic experience. Freud, in his exploration of fetishism, highlights its significance in understanding the splitting of the ego and the symbolic processes at work in the unconscious. Disavowal, as a response to castration anxiety, involves navigating the tension between recognizing sexual difference and fearing paternal castration. It allows for the simultaneous interaction of contradictory meanings, operating primarily at the symbolic level of the unconscious. Metz's analysis underscores the dual nature of the cinema spectator—a double-spectator whose consciousness is divided between the realms of knowing and believing, mirroring the intricate dynamics of the conscious and unconscious mind. In this present study, I would like to propose that this fetishist “I know…but, nevertheless" structure suggests, not the Metzian double-spectator, but the possibility of two different categories of spectators. Borrowing a term from Physics, I call this dynamic space of spectatorship a quantum space. As the basic idea of quantum physics holds that as soon as a potential exists for any object to be in any state, the universe of that object transmutes into a series of parallel universes equal to the number of possible states in which that the object can exist, with each universe containing a unique single possible state of that object. Similarly, the spectatorial space in the realm of cinema, underscores the possibility of multiple spectators. If during the film viewing experience, the spectator successfully undermines the effect of fetishism and is guided by incredulity and thereby not falling prey to the trap of illusory belief, he is a critically informed spectator.

In his examination of the spectator's experience in cinema through a psychoanalytic lens, Metz delves into the intricate relationship between the cinematic experience and unconscious processes. He elucidates a fundamental connection between the splitting of belief—a psychological phenomenon—and primal scenarios in the subject's life. Metz asserts that the unveiling of lack, akin to the scenario of castration in psychoanalytic theory, prompts the individual to bifurcate their beliefs, holding contradictory opinions

simultaneously. This psychological doubling, inherent to the cinematic experience, lays the groundwork for enduring cognitive dissonance, shaping the affective prototype of belief fragmentation. Such insights hold profound implications for feminist criticism, as scholars like Laura Mulvey and Jacqueline Rose interrogate the dynamics between spectatorship, fetishism, and the representation of femininity. Mulvey's interpretation identifies fetishism as a pivotal element in the spectator's engagement with the female image, while Rose challenges the marginalization of the feminine within this framework. Notably, the concept of fetishism is reconceptualized not as a literal absence or lack in the woman, but as a symbolic structure wherein preexisting symbolic relations are enacted. Consequently, the act of viewing the screen mirrors the intricate interplay of belief structures forged during early psychic development.

Cinematic Identification and Spectatorship

Identification poses a significant complexity within spectator theory, drawing distinctions between primary and secondary identification as expounded in psychoanalytic and film discourse. The interpretations of these concepts differ notably between Freud and Lacan, and further elaborated by Baudry and Metz, who extensively utilize the term. In its simplest psychoanalytic sense, identification involves the subject's assimilation of another, either wholly or partially, encompassing both total identification with an individual and partial adoption of physical traits or characteristics. Laplanche and Pontalis elucidate this process, asserting that the subject undergoes transformation, either fully or partially, in accordance with the model provided by the other. They assert, "It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified" (Laplanche and Pontalis 205). This perspective underscores the crucial role of identification in the formation and specification of personality, highlighting its multifaceted nature within psychoanalytic spectatorship discourse.

The psychoanalytic approach to understanding the relationship between the cinema spectator and the film delves deeply into the concept of identification, which Freud himself found challenging to fully define or place within the framework of the psyche. Nonetheless, within psychoanalytic film theory, identification occupies a pivotal role in shaping the viewer's imaginary connection to the film. Alain Bergala emphasizes identification as both the foundational mechanism for the formation of the ego in the imaginary realm and a prototype for various subsequent psychological processes through which the ego continues to develop. In Freud's provisional framework, primary identification involves an early stage of self-constitution modelled on another person, representing an initial form of affective attachment before the clear distinction between self and object emerges. This pre-Oedipal phase is intertwined with oral incorporation and characterized by a blurred boundary between the ego and the other. Notably, Lacan's concept of identification in the mirror phase diverges from Freud's, as it marks the establishment of a dual relationship between ego and other, subject and object, based on both similarity and differentiation. While this initial differentiation arises from identification with an immediate image, it crucially depends on recognizing the self as distinct from and separate to the image. However, there remains a nuanced connection between Lacan's mirror phase and Freud's notion of primary identification, highlighting the intricate interplay between these foundational concepts in psychoanalytic film theory.

In the realms of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, secondary identifications emerge within the framework of the Oedipal complex, a pivotal developmental stage where individuals shape their identities amidst the intricacies of language, culture, and familial dynamics. Here, the subject undergoes a process of self-constitution within the Symbolic realm, while simultaneously negotiating their distinctiveness in relation to parental figures and societal "others." Secondary identifications, marked by a nuanced interplay of affection and hostility, epitomize the complex amalgamation of emotions inherent in human relationships. Parents, in this context, become multifaceted objects of both libidinal desire and aspirational identification, embodying the duality of being desired and emulated. It is crucial to underscore that these identifications lay the groundwork for future relational dynamics, echoing the principle of infantile transitivism wherein individuals project aspects of themselves onto others. For instance, witnessing a peer's distress may prompt a child to vicariously experience the emotional response, reflecting the transference of their own feelings onto external stimuli. This elucidation

underscores the intricate nature of identity formation and relational dynamics within the psychoanalytic discourse, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between individual subjectivity and external influences.

The notion of "identification" in the realm of psychoanalytic film theory goes beyond mere empathetic reactions towards characters in narratives. While common understanding often associates identification with conscious empathy, psychoanalytic identification delves into the unconscious workings of the psyche, distancing itself from cognitive processes. Empathy, characterized by an understanding of another's feelings, contrasts with identification, which involves seeing from another's perspective, rooted in the dynamics of vision and psychic placement. This distinction, though it may seem to rigidly separate cognitive and unconscious processes, is essential for understanding the complexities of spectatorship. Despite the interplay between desire and conscious thought, maintaining this differentiation is crucial. Furthermore, the notion of identification in film theory does not contribute to a unified subjectivity; rather, it forms a heterogeneous amalgamation of imaginary identifications, as termed by Lacan as a "hodge-podge of identifications". This patchwork of identifications underscores the intricate nature of the ego's constitution, revealing a multiplicity rather than a singular identity.

Metz elucidates the concept of primary cinematic identification as the fundamental immersion of the viewer in the act of observation itself. This profound engagement entails the spectator embodying a comprehensive perceptual agency, essentially becoming the creator of cinematic significance. Such identification serves as the cornerstone upon which subsequent interactions with characters and narratives within the cinematic realm are built. It encompasses both a conscious perceptual aspect, wherein the viewer observes the cinematic object, and an unconscious dimension, wherein the spectator becomes ensnared in a domain of fantasy and imagination. This intricate process is intimately intertwined with the gaze of the camera and its surrogate, the projector, which together choreograph the viewer's perception. Positioned metaphorically at the posterior of the head, a locus traditionally associated with the epicenter of vision in fantasy, the camera confers upon the spectator an illusory omnipresence, bestowing the ability to transcend physical constraints and perceive from multiple vantage points simultaneously—an emblematic feature of cinematic encounter. Baudry further clarifies this dynamic by describing the spectator's identification not solely with the spectacle itself, but also with the apparatus facilitating its presentation—the camera serving as a conduit, compelling the viewer to adopt its perspective and perceive as it perceives. This nuanced interplay between perception, technology, and narrative construction underscores the intricate tapestry of spectatorship within psychoanalytic film theory, wherein the act of looking becomes a channel for the negotiation of meaning and subjectivity.

Metz's exploration of spectator identification in cinema draws parallels to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concept of the mirror phase. In essence, Metz suggests that the viewer's ability to engage with a film's narrative hinges upon prior psychological development, notably the formation of the ego during infancy. This initial constitution of the self involves the recognition of objects as distinct from oneself, a pivotal moment where the infant begins to differentiate between self and other. Crucially, this process unfolds through visual perception—the child's encounter with a unified, objectified image sets the stage for future interactions and self-perceptions. Metz contends that this early experience of viewing oneself as a coherent entity shapes the way individuals relate to others and construct their identities later in life. Importantly, the cinematic experience capitalizes on this foundational process, offering viewers a fictional realm in which they can project themselves into the narrative. However, this projection is not without its complexities; the perceived "other" on screen, often idealized or perfected, is a product of misrecognition—a distortion of reality that nevertheless informs the viewer's understanding of themselves and their relationships. Thus, Metz's analysis underscores the intricate interplay between early psychological development, visual perception, and the cinematic medium, illuminating how cinema becomes a site for both reflection and misperception of the self.

A significant aspect of film theory's exploration into the relationship between the primary cinematic identification and the mirror phase lies in the striking parallels drawn between the experience of an infant

facing its reflection and that of a spectator facing the screen. Both encounters involve a fascination with and an identification with an idealized image, observed from a certain distance. This early process of ego formation, wherein the subject constructs its identity through the absorption of a mirror image, constitutes a fundamental tenet in the psychoanalytic discourse on cinema spectatorship and forms the cornerstone for discussions on primary identification. According to this interpretation, the allure of cinema partly stems from its ability to facilitate a temporary dissolution of the ego, wherein the film spectator momentarily "becomes" someone else, while simultaneously reinforcing the ego through evoking the mirror phase. Thus, in a paradoxical manner, the film viewer experiences a dual process of self-displacement and self-reaffirmation, repeatedly reenacting the initial fictive moment of identification and identity establishment. This intricate interplay between ego dissolution and reinforcement within the cinematic experience underscores the complexity of spectatorship and its profound psychological implications.

The notion of spectatorship in psychoanalytic film theory revolves around the transformation experienced by the subject during the mirror phase, as elucidated by Baudry in his initial work. This transformation, from a fragmented body-image to one of totality and coherence, is believed to be mirrored in the cinematic experience, where viewers are presented with fixed, coherent worlds that offer a sense of integration and fulfilment. This concept sparked a significant theoretical debate in France during the 1970s, involving key figures such as Baudry, Marcellin Pleynet, Jean-Patrick Lebel, Jean Narboni, and Jean-Louis Comolli. Discussions, documented in journals like Cinéthique, Cahiers du Cinema, and Tel Quel, centred on the relationship between the cinematic apparatus, the viewing subject, and ideology. The political dimension of this discourse highlighted the potential for an alternative, materialist cinema that emphasized contradiction and the suppression of differences inherent in the construction of the transcendental subject. This emphasis diverges slightly from the psychoanalytic construction of the viewing subject under examination in this discourse. While scholars like Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group, along with Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, exemplified this alternative cinema, their focus was distinct from the psychoanalytic framework scrutinizing the cinematic spectator.

In the realm of psychoanalytic film theory, the concept of spectatorship finds its roots in the Lacanian paradigm, particularly emphasizing the imaginary construction of the self. This paradigm underscores the interplay between the imaginary and the symbolic, with the former representing the allure of the ego. Metz, in his exploration, delves into this interconnection, noting how the imaginary unity of cinema viewing correlates with early narcissistic experiences. Barthes echoes this sentiment, likening the film image to a psychoanalytic lure that captivates the viewer in a dual relationship akin to the imaginary. However, Metz carefully navigates the discourse, stressing the intrinsic relationship between the imaginary unity and the disruptions inherent in the symbolic realm. He contends that the cinematic imaginary presupposes the symbolic, as viewers must first grasp the primordial mirror, which significantly influences their ego formation. Yet, the cinematic screen, as a symbolic apparatus, introduces reflections and absences, intertwining with the complexities of the symbolic order. Metz further delineates between primary identification in psychoanalysis and primary cinematic identification, the latter being the spectator's identification with their own gaze. This distinction underscores the evolution from the undifferentiated state of early childhood to the attainment of the symbolic order, enabling viewers to assert ownership over their gaze. Thus, while rooted in the mirror phase, cinematic identification is a distinct phenomenon, serving as the cornerstone of cinematic engagement. Metz's nuanced analysis thus elucidates the intricate interplay between psychoanalytic theory and cinematic experience, emphasizing the evolution of spectatorship within the framework of symbolic discourse.

Metz's framework finds resonance with Freud's exploration of fantasy in "A Child is Being Beaten" (Freud 66), where spectators are depicted as capable of assuming various identificatory positions simultaneously or successively (Bergstrom 45). Through Freud's analysis, the fluidity of subjectivity becomes apparent, as individuals navigate roles of subject, object, and observer within the fantasy narrative. The pronouns employed in Freud's study—"My father is beating the child," "I am being beaten by my father," and "A child is being beaten" (I am probably looking on)—highlight the malleability of

identity and the shifting dynamics of power and agency within the psyche. In this schema, the subject of fantasy emerges as a dynamic entity, transcending fixed gendered roles and embracing the variable nature of sexuality inherent in psychoanalytic theory (Freud's theory of bisexuality). Consequently, feminist scholarship finds fertile ground in exploring the implications of this fluidity of identification for understanding gender dynamics and power structures within cinematic narratives. Overall, Metz's concept of secondary cinematic identification, informed by Freudian insights, offers a nuanced framework for analysing the complexities of spectatorship, identity formation, and unconscious fantasy within the realm of psychoanalytic film theory.

Stephen Heath's perspective on film challenges the notion of films as isolated entities, instead emphasizing the dynamic interplay between the viewer and the cinematic text within specific historical and social contexts. Heath argues that films are not merely objects of passive consumption but rather active agents in shaping subjectivity. Central to his analysis is the concept of spectator-positioning, which encompasses the ways in which viewers engage with and are positioned by the cinematic narrative. While Heath acknowledges the interchangeability of subject-positioning and identification, he emphasizes the historical dimension of spectatorship while maintaining the significance of unconscious processes. In his examination of narrative space, Heath underscores the fluidity and complexity of spectatorship, highlighting the constant negotiation between presence and absence, unity and fragmentation. Moreover, he identifies the engagement of fantasy structures, such as the family romance, as a key aspect of spectatorship. The family romance, rooted in the Oedipal complex, involves the fantasy of idealized parental figures as replacements for perceived deficiencies in actual caregivers. These fantasies, whether cantered on royal lineage or illicit liaisons, reflect the subject's ongoing negotiation of identity and differentiation from parental influences. Ultimately, Heath's analysis illuminates the multifaceted nature of spectatorship, emphasizing its active and transformative role in the construction of subjectivity within the cinematic experience (Heath 44).

The construction of the cinematic spectator involves a multifaceted consideration of "authorship" and its concealment. The goal is to immerse the spectator in the cinematic experience to the extent that they feel they are actively participating in the creation of the film's fantasy world. However, this immersion necessitates the suppression of the "real" creator behind the film—the implied author—so that the spectator can believe they are the ones generating the cinematic phantasmagoria. As Metz articulates, the spectator "espouses the filmmaker's look," highlighting the necessity of aligning the spectator's gaze with that of the filmmaker for the cinematic experience to unfold (Metz 56). Psychoanalytic film theory delves into the concept of enunciation to elucidate this intricate process of displacement, diverging from narratology in its emphasis on the role of the split subject of the unconscious in enunciative operations. Consequently, psychoanalytic film theory intertwines the spectator's assumption of narration with desire and subjectivity, linking enunciation to the realm of dreaming as a manifestation of unconscious, fantasized operations rather than mere cognitive processes. Thus, the process of enunciation in cinema serves to mask the external origin of the film's fiction, allowing the spectator to become the imagined discursive source of the narrative, intricately entwined with the film's desires and subjectivities (Metz 56).

Psychoanalytic film theory employs the notion of enunciation, drawing from structural linguistics, to underscore the position of the speaking subject as intricately tied to the unconscious and the process of communication. Enunciation, in this context, encompasses both the statement itself (énoncé) and the process of its production (énonciation), which involves not only linguistic elements but also social, psychological, and unconscious factors. Emile Benveniste highlights the relational aspect of enunciation, emphasizing the discourse's connection with a partner, whether real or imagined, individual or collective. When viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis, enunciation becomes a site where unconscious desires manifest, contributing to the formation of both film fantasy and its interpretation by spectators. This perspective underscores the significance of subjectivity in shaping the production and reception of cinematic discourse, highlighting the interplay between conscious and unconscious elements in the construction of meaning within film narratives.

In psychoanalytic film theory, the notion of cinematic enunciation posits that every film has a distinct point of origin—a place from which its discourse emanates. This concept, as articulated by Raymond Bellour, emphasizes the role of the filmmaker's position in shaping the cinematic narrative, rather than focusing on the individual intentions of the director. Bellour's analysis, particularly evident in his examination of Hitchcock's works, highlights how directors utilize their privileged positions to express their own desires through the filmic medium. The terms "CAMERA-WISH" and "FILM-WISH" are coined to illustrate the connection between cinematic representation and unconscious fantasy, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between the filmmaker and the spectator. Bellour's conceptualization of cinematic enunciation elucidates the dynamic interplay between the filmmaker's creative agency and the spectator's engagement with the film, emphasizing the dialectical nature of this process. Thus, cinematic enunciation serves as a framework for understanding both the textual articulation of the filmmaker's desires and the spectator's response to these representations within the cinematic experience.

Metz delves into the intricacies of cinematic enunciation and its connection to the position of the cinematic viewer in his article "History/Discourse: A Note on Two Voyeurisms." He elucidates how this space of cinematic enunciation evolves into the vantage point of cinematic viewing, drawing parallels with voyeurism, a concept deeply rooted in psychoanalytic film theory. In psychoanalysis, voyeurism encompasses the notion of deriving sexual gratification from visual stimuli, often associated with a concealed perspective, such as peering through a keyhole. While the terms voyeurism and scopophilia are sometimes used interchangeably, they represent distinct facets of the erotic component of seeing, with the former denoting a specific perversion and the latter encompassing a more general pleasure in looking.

The Spectator and the 'Gaze': The 'Real' Picture

The detractors of psychoanalytic film theory of 1970s, especially the theory associated with Lacanian psychoanalysis, brought two major allegations against it. One is its universalizing pretensions. In fact, it is because of its claim of universality and hegemony over the other fields of film studies, David Bordwell and Noel Carroll label this theory as "the Theory". The primary problem with this theory is its disregard to the specifics of the cinematic experience in different cultural contexts. The second allegation is its overemphasis on abstract theorisation without any attempt of empirical verification. The present research argues that traditional Lacanian film theorists rigidly and dogmatically applied the tenets of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of cinema. The area of film studies which bears the traces of these allegations most emphatically is the study of spectatorship which depends heavily on Lacan's notion of the gaze. Christian Metz, one of the pioneers of psychoanalytic film theory, asserts, "The spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but also present there and even 'all-present' as perceiver". This duality of presence and absence gives the spectator an almost unqualified sense of mastery over the filmic experience. In this sense, the filmic experience gives a wholly imaginary pleasure to the spectator. Jean-Louis Baudry makes this connection explicit by pointing out that "the arrangement of the different elements— projector, darkened hall, screen— in addition to reproducing in a striking way the mise-en-scene of Plato's cave… reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the 'mirror stage' discovered by Lacan." Our experience of watching film in the auditorium re-evokes the moment of ego-formation of an infant. In the darkness of the auditorium, a spectator, being completely unaware of his separate identity as well as of the sense of time and space, identifies with the stars on the screen who become his ego ideals. Lacan proposed that the sense of an infant's self-identity does not correspond to its real existence as it is based on an illusion. The mirror-image through which the infant's ego formation starts always remains 'other' to it. It is thus paradoxical that the image of the 'self' appears to be 'other'. This self-other dichotomy is present in the process of a spectator's identification with a character on screen too in a complex equation between similarity and difference. According to the Lacanian film theorists, film, like the mirror stage, is an imaginary deception, an inducement fastening us to an underlying symbolic structure. The gaze is a function of the imaginary. But, by focusing entirely on the relationship between the imaginary and symbolic order, the Lacanian film theorists overlook the role of the Real, the third register of Lacan's triadic division of human psyche, in the functioning of the gaze in our filmic

experience. This omission is crucial, as the Real provides the key to understanding the radical role the gaze plays within the filmic experience.

Although in his essay on the mirror stage, Lacan conceives of the gaze as a mastering gaze, later he thought of it in precisely the opposite way. In Lacan's later work, the gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective gaze. The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back. The gaze thus involves the spectator in the image, disrupting his/her ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema. Understanding the gaze as objective rather than subjective transforms our understanding of spectatorial experience. Instead of being an experience of imaginary mastery, as suggested by the traditional Lacanian film theorists like Mulvey, Baudry and Metz, it becomes the site of a traumatic encounter with the 'Real', with the utter failure of the spectator's seemingly safe distance from the image and assumed mastery over it. Thus, the image takes into account the presence of the spectator. The existence of the gaze as an objective gaze suggests that the spectator never looks at the image from a safe distance; he is in the image in the form of a blind spot.

Post-revolution Iranian cinema exemplifies this Lacanian notion of the constitutive gaze, gaze as object petit a. This notion of the gaze takes into consideration not only the subjective perspective of the filmmaker, but one which is also able to identify a gaze that becomes the object of cinematic gaze itself. Nowhere this is better exhibited than in the films of Kiarostami. As Frédéric Sabouraud asserts that in Kiarostami's films, everything revolves around the gaze, emphasizing not only the perception of reality through the characters' vision but also the viewer's engagement with the images. This centrality of the gaze is particularly evident in Kiarostami's 2008 film, Shirin, where the focus lies solely on the act of looking, devoid of any tangible object. The complexity of the gaze in Kiarostami's cinema operates on multiple levels. Firstly, his films are interconnected, as seen in the Koker trilogy, which builds upon previous references, alongside various incidents that disrupt the illusion of fictional representation, all serving to heighten the viewer's awareness of their act of viewing. Despite this self-reflexive approach, Kiarostami is not simply a late modernist akin to Haneke, solely emphasizing the medium's presence. Instead, as Nancy suggests, Kiarostami is more concerned with placing the gaze at the core of represented reality, shifting the focus from the constructed nature of cinematic representation to the constructed nature of reality itself. In fact, the idea of gaze is central to his work. His 'Shirin' constitutes an extreme moment as it presents the pure gaze, the embodied gaze without object, focusing on the act of looking as an isolated event. His system is based not only on the perception of reality through the vision, but also on the vision of the spectator facing the image. He not only speaks about the characters' vision, but his films are organized to expose a gaze that is constitutive in nature. Through the inclusion of the gaze of the camera and the director's gaze in both the narrative and the scopic regime of his films, he creates a representation of reality that is able to grasp the invisible. Jean-Luc Nancy rightly observes, "[Kiarostami] is not interested in the film about the film or within the film, he is not investigating mise-en-abyme", rather he constantly reminds us that we are watching a film by placing the gaze at the centre of the represented reality. In this sense, his cinema is not about the constructed nature of cinematic representation, but about the constructed nature of reality itself. Probably the best example of this constitutive gaze of the character can be found in Kiarostami's Certified Copy (2010). The two main characters, in the course of their short day's trip around the city before James would catch his flight back to England, sits down in a café. The owner of the café mistakes them as husband and wife, and afterwards they start acting accordingly. It is the gaze of the old lady that changes reality in such a way that, at one point of time we become uncertain about the true nature of their relationship. Kiarostami makes us aware that the major issue for him is neither the gaze of the spectator watching the filmic image nor the gaze of the medium distorting reality, but that gaze which operates, often without being observed, within the reality to be grasped.

Interpreting Kiarostami's films, using the Lacanian concept of the Real helps us in understanding the several subtle motifs in the rich fabric of his cinematic canvas. One such motif can be found in the Koker trilogy. In the second film of the series, And Life Goes on…, Kiarostami returns to Koker, in the aftermath of a devastated earthquake in 1990 leaving fifty thousand dead. His camera records the journey

of a film director who wants to find out whether the young actors in Where Is the Friend's House? the first film of the trilogy, are among the survivors of the earthquake. But the tragic earthquake is deliberately left unrepresented by Kiarostami in this film as well as in last one of the series. The lack of any kind of re-enactment creates a situation where the actuality of the invisible yet traumatic event remains beyond question--- exactly like the presence of the order of Real that exists behind any phenomenal appearance accessible to direct experience. We find a parallel to the (un)representation of the earthquake in the Koker trilogy in The Wind Will Carry Us, where we never get to see the old lady whose death is eagerly awaited by a film crew so that they can shoot the burial ceremony. Her invisible presence is emphasized by the restlessness of the protagonist, who checks her situation every day by taking a distant look at her house. It is this exposed actuality of the unseen yet always present gaze that is the Lacanian Real embedded craftily in the fabric of Kiarostami's oeuvre. In Kiarostami, thus, we deal neither with the 'symbolic', nor with the 'imaginary', narcissistic vision. We don't deal with the voyeuristic, fantasizing look either. What we deal with is the 'Real', pure gaze.

The Female Gaze: Breaking the Fourth Wall

As discussed above, in classical psychoanalytic feminist film theory of 1970s, the subject/spectator is assumed to be a heterosexual male who derives pleasure by turning the female body on screen into an erotic spectacle. He is a private voyeur peeping into the lives of others without making them aware of his presence. Borrowing a term from the world of theatre we can describe it as fourth wall spectatorship. In the realm of theatre, the concept of the fourth wall serves as an imaginary boundary between the fictional world unfolding on stage and the spectators observing it. This metaphorical wall invites spectators to suspend disbelief and immerse themselves in the narrative. The significance of the fourth wall lies in its ability to establish a sense of intimacy and realism within the theatrical experience, enabling spectators to engage with characters and narratives on a deeper level. In Brechtian theatre, breaking the fourth wall is a deliberate technique aimed at alienating the audience from the narrative, disrupting their passive consumption of the performance. Brecht's epic theatre often employed direct address, where actors would speak directly to the audience or interrupt the action to provide commentary, thus encouraging critical engagement and reflection on social and political themes. This deliberate rupture of the fourth wall serves to challenge the audience's assumptions and provoke them into questioning the reality presented on stage, fostering a more active and analytical spectatorship. Therefore, while the fourth wall typically fosters immersion and realism, its intentional breach in techniques like Brechtian alienation serves to heighten awareness, prompting spectators to reflect on the deeper implications of the performance. In the dominant first cinema (cinema following the conventional codes of realism prescribed by Hollywood), the spectators are denied place in the scopic field. Thus, fourth wall spectatorship theory proposes the spectator's absence-in-presence.

The Rule of hijab in post-revolution Iranian cinema also assumes the subject/spectator to be a heterosexual male from whose desiring gaze the female body should be protected. So, it is veiled and made desexualized. But the very code of veiling implies that the spectator is always already present, and hence, the image needs to be shielded. This need acknowledges and confirms the ever presence of the spectatorial gaze. As the spectator in Iranian cinema cannot enjoy the status of a private voyeur, his gaze is always present in the scopic field. Thus, post-revolution Iranian cinema disrupts the fourth wall spectatorship by acknowledging the ever presence of the spectatorial gaze in the scopic field.

Kiarostami takes this act of disruption one step further by acknowledging the presence of the female gaze and inscribing it in his cinematic space. Shirin, the last film that he has shot in Iran, exemplifies this notion of female gaze in the most innovative way. It features 100 actresses watching a film based on an ancient Persian tale of Shirin, an Armenian princess. The entire film consists of close ups of head-scarfed women with their looks fixated to the camera capturing their emotional response. The director does not care to show us the simultaneous narrative of the film featuring actual Shirin but offers a series of intimate portraits charged with emotions of many Shirins present in the audience. Kiarostami here

reversed the notion of "the image orchestrating the gaze" postulated by the classical feminist film theory, by foregrounding the female gaze.

In the examination of spectatorship within post-revolution Iranian cinema, Abbas Kiarostami's film "Shirin" emerges as a significant case study illustrating the concept of the female gaze. "Shirin" is a unique cinematic experiment where the audience witnesses the reactions of female spectators as they watch a fictionalized performance of the tragic love story of Shirin and Khosrow, narrated through close-ups of their faces. Kiarostami's choice to focus solely on the female spectators and their emotional responses challenges traditional cinematic norms, offering a compelling exploration of the female gaze within the medium. This departure from the male-dominated gaze prevalent in mainstream cinema aligns with Laura Mulvey's seminal work on the male gaze, which critiques the objectification of women in film and the dominance of the male perspective. By foregrounding the reactions and emotions of women, "Shirin" subverts traditional power dynamics inherent in the act of spectatorship, providing a platform for female subjectivity and agency within the cinematic space. Moreover, the film's emphasis on the emotional and psychological experiences of its female characters resonates with feminist film theory's call for the inclusion of diverse female voices and perspectives in cinema. In this regard, Kiarostami's "Shirin" not only offers a nuanced exploration of the female gaze but also contributes to broader discussions surrounding gender representation and spectatorship within the cinematic landscape. Through its innovative narrative structure and focus on female spectatorship, "Shirin" invites viewers to reconsider conventional notions of cinematic spectatorship and the role of gender in shaping visual narratives.

Furthermore, the breaking of the fourth wall in "Shirin" serves as a pivotal aspect in foregrounding the female gaze. By presenting the audience with the direct gaze of the female spectators, Kiarostami disrupts the traditional boundary between the on-screen action and the viewer, inviting a more intimate and reflexive engagement with the film. This technique aligns with theories of spectatorship that emphasize the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness in the act of viewing. For instance, Brechtian alienation techniques, which encourage audiences to adopt a critical distance from the narrative, find resonance in Kiarostami's approach to spectatorship in "Shirin." By breaking the fourth wall and drawing attention to the act of spectatorship itself, the film prompts viewers to reflect on their own positionality and gaze, particularly in relation to gender dynamics. Moreover, the use of the female gaze in "Shirin" offers a counterpoint to dominant cinematic representations that often privilege the male perspective, thereby challenging conventional power structures and fostering a more inclusive and diverse cinematic landscape. Thus, through its innovative narrative techniques and exploration of the female gaze, "Shirin" emerges as a significant contribution to the discourse on spectatorship and gender representation in post-revolution Iranian cinema.

Non-Western Perspectives on identity formation

In the discourse of cinema, spectatorship refers to the idea of space where the viewer-subject is formed through a relationship between the spectator and what is projected on the screen. The concept of self is integral to the study of spectatorship in cinema because it shapes how individuals interpret and engage with the images and narratives presented on screen. Understanding how the self is constructed and influenced by cinematic experiences helps scholars analyse the subjective nature of spectatorship. By exploring factors such as identity, ideology, and personal experiences, researchers can gain insight into how individuals relate to cinematic texts, leading to a deeper understanding of audience reception and interpretation within the context of film culture. Additionally, studying the role of the self in spectatorship highlights the complex interplay between individual subjectivity and broader cultural forces, shedding light on the ways in which cinema both reflects and shapes societal norms, values, and perceptions.

Non-Western societies construct the notion of self, based on fundamental ontological and epistemological principles that diverge significantly from the individualistic perspectives found in Western traditions, including postmodernism. It is essential for non-Western peoples and cultures to transcend Western paradigms and instead embrace their indigenous cultural heritage in their pursuit of self-awareness, self-definition, and self-affirmation (Karenga, 2003, 2006).

The Western perception of self has historically been characterized as the independent, autonomous entity responsible for experiencing, feeling, and acting, as outlined by Dissanayake (201). This understanding, rooted in Aristotelian ontology, posits individuals as distinct entities preceding social connections. Central to Western philosophical thought and popular understanding of personal identity is the idea of individual autonomy, a concept heavily emphasized by Solomon (199). Descartes' famous assertion, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), is often credited with initiating inquiry into the self as the primary locus of experience, encompassing rationality, imagination, and consciousness (Dissanayake, 2013). Philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant have all emphasized, albeit through varied approaches, the significance of personal thought and experience as the foundation of true knowledge (Solomon 199).

In Western tradition, the concept of self is often seen as a fixed internal structure, referred to as 'self-as-subject', which remains constant despite external changes (Johnson, 1985). Kant, for instance, views the self as the unchanging entity that integrates an individual's experiences over time (Toulmin 77). This perspective emphasizes the individual's active role in shaping social relationships and environments through decision-making (Johnson 18), leading to expectations of environmental responsiveness (Hsu, 98). The tension between internal states and external factors can cause significant anxiety (Johnson 58). Western philosophers like Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant have sought to safeguard individual autonomy against external influences, asserting that social relations could restrict personal independence (Solomon, 194). They argue for the separation from constraining social ties as a means to realize one's unique and independent self. This view of the self as a stable inner structure guiding behaviour across situations has permeated psychological literature and popular culture in Western societies (Johnson 46). However, not all Western thinkers adhere to the Cartesian model of introspective self-identification. Some propose that the self is shaped by experiences rather than being the subject of them. Hegel, for instance, acknowledges that self-consciousness is influenced by interactions with others and mediated through social values (Solomon, 194). Symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists like Mead, Cooley, Dewey, Garfinkel, Goffman, and critics of orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis such as Jung, view the self as a product of interactions with others and the environment (DeVos, 25). Geertz underscores the role of culture in shaping the self (Geertz 73).

Critical scholars agree that the self is a product of social and/or value systems but highlight the contradictions within these systems. Kierkegaard questions Hegel's vision of harmonious self-expression (D. L. Hall 4). Marx's materialism attributes identity production to the economic base, associating consciousness and identity with social classes and ideologies (Hall, 1994). Neo-Marxist scholars from the Frankfurt School critique the production of 'false' identities by the dominant group in capitalist societies, locating identity production in the cultural sphere. British Cultural Studies scholars like Williams and Hall emphasize the role of cultural practices in shaping various identities.

Postmodernism arose as a challenge to the prevailing Western perspective of a stable, cohesive, and intentional self, acknowledging instead the fragmented, inconsistent, and diverse nature of individual identity. According to D. L. Hall, the shift in understanding the self within postmodernism moves away from the traditional modernist concept of a fixed ego-based identity towards a view of the self as a continuous process. In this paradigm, the postmodernist self, or subjectivity, is continually shaped and reshaped through the ongoing interplay of discourse and language, as articulated by Dissanayake (201).

While postmodernism provides a valuable critique of the overbearing aspects of modernity, such as rigid rationality and authoritarianism, it does not entirely break away from its roots in modernity, contrary to postmodernist claims. As noted by Ho and Sardar, although postmodernism rejects the rationality, patterns, and structures of modernity in favour of a more fluid and process-oriented understanding of the self, it remains grounded in Western values and relies on methodologies inherited from the very tradition it seeks to dismantle. Consequently, while postmodernism effectively deconstructs the Western concept of a sovereign and intentional self, it falls short in proposing a new epistemology capable of legitimizing alternative approaches to understanding the self.

While initially positioned as a radical departure from modernity, postmodernism paradoxically exhibits Eurocentrism akin to its predecessor. Despite its emphasis on cultural factors in its discourse, postmodernism tends to confine the concept of culture predominantly to Western contexts. Similar to modernity, postmodernism promotes a form of universalism that presents European and Euro-American cultures as the normative and universal standards, while categorizing other cultures as 'primitive' or 'backward'. Furthermore, like modernity, postmodernism establishes a standardized framework for evaluating actions and events, imposing a single purported epistemological and methodological system. Sardar strongly contends that postmodernism effectively upholds and perpetuates the Eurocentric dominance of modernity. He argues that despite its professed pluralism, postmodernism maintains a fundamentally monolithic stance. Beneath its apparent diversity lies a singular foundation. Its language, logic, and analytical framework are inherently Eurocentric and unabashedly appropriative of other cultures. Rather than representing a rupture or discontinuity from the oppressive modernity, postmodernism embodies a continuation of the same underlying attitudes and actions towards non-Western cultures, which underpinned colonialism, laid the groundwork for modernity, and now find expression in postmodern thought.

The predominant focus on individual autonomy and the distinction between the individual and society in Western philosophical traditions, both modern and postmodern, has hindered the development of a self-concept that values social solidarity, communal well-being, equity, and justice. Chantal Mouffe argues that Western individualism presents a fundamental paradox: prioritizing individual autonomy without much regard for communal engagement ultimately undermines principles of fairness and justice. This emphasis on the primacy of the individual over society is a characteristic feature of Western cultures. Western identity theories, including postmodernist perspectives, fail to adequately grasp the self in non-Western cultures, where individuals are perceived as inherently connected to a network of social relationships. While fragmented and ambiguous identities, celebrated in postmodernism, may signify newfound liberation or enjoyment to Western individuals, they represent a painful legacy of colonialism to the majority of non-Western populations, whom seek to distance themselves from such experiences.

Maulana Karenga, the proponent of Kawaida philosophy, argues that the Western concept of self-centred individualism is not universally applicable nor necessarily optimal for all human societies. Tu Weiming, a prominent Confucian scholar, asserts that non-Western cultures can articulate their notions of self without adhering to Western-centric views. He suggests that while individualism may have historical roots in Western political, economic, ethical, and religious traditions, embracing the essence of self for the sake of equality and liberty does not require endorsement of specific Western ideologies like private property, personal interest, privacy, loneliness, or freedom. In order for non-Western individuals and cultures to establish their identities without being marginalized by Western frameworks, it is crucial to draw upon their own cultural traditions for guidance and support. This process does not advocate for cultural isolationism or a return to a mythical pre-contact era, but rather emphasizes the importance of critically engaging with and dialoguing about cultural heritage within the context of ongoing interactions with other cultures. This approach fosters a continual pursuit of human flourishing.

Conclusion

In its brief scope, this article has endeavoured to explore the dynamic nature of spectatorship in the context of post-revolution Iranian cinema, through its examination of the intersections between the idea of spectatorship and psychoanalytic film theory of 1970s, especially the theory of apparatus, and Lacanian concepts of the Real. In its attempt to offer a critique of the psychoanalytic film theory, this study explores the notion of the female gaze as exemplified in Abbas Kiarostami's "Shirin", and challenging Western-centric perspectives, advocates for the inclusion of non-Western perspectives in the discourse on identity formation. As evidenced by the analysis presented, Iranian filmmakers, like Kiarostami, have employed innovative techniques to disrupt traditional spectatorship paradigms, inviting audiences to critically engage with cinematic narratives and challenge prevailing power structures. Drawing on insights from scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz, and Slavoj Žižek, among others, this study

has demonstrated the rich potential of Iranian cinema to reshape our understanding of spectatorship and identity in a global context. Moving forward, it is imperative for scholars and practitioners alike to continue exploring the nuances of spectatorship in non-Western cinemas, acknowledging the diverse cultural, political, and social contexts that shape audience reception and identity formation. By embracing a more inclusive approach to spectatorship studies, we can foster greater understanding and appreciation of cinematic experiences across cultures and regions.

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