

HonarAndishi

HonarAndishi is a combined Persian word implies "Thinking through/with Art"

HonarAndishi / The second Sundays of each month / 6pm / 18 Kendall St. Harris park NSW 2150
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And now 2020 with all the concerns and worries that holds! We are nurturing our hope for this year and wish everyone a wealth of happiness.

In this first issue of the year, we remember some of our most prominent Iranian figures that we lost in 2018, and we will continue our journey by analysing one of the most acclaimed movies by *Abbas Kiarostami*, *Close up* (1991). We are employing the adaptational criticism in line with our current focus. In fact, HonarAndishi takes every opportunity to talk about *Kiarostami* as a constant source of philosophical thinking in cinema.

You will notice that this edition has more pages with more lengthy articles besides being more diverse. Well, our newsletter has been grown in a way that requires us to call it HonarAndishi Journal now! With your help and contribution, this will be an achievable dream. So hopeful and excited, we are waiting for you!

Amir Hadi Nojournian, Afshin Forghani

CLOSE UP, REALITY APPROPRIATION AND ABBAS KIAROSTAMI IN THIS SESSION



Abbas Kiarostami (1940 - 2016)



Nosrat Karimi (1924 - 2019)

Nosrat Karimi, veteran artist and stage director passed away on December 3rd 2019. He is a renowned personality in the Iranian history of theatre and cinema. He studied film direction in Prague and worked after that as an assistant director and actor in Rome. Returning to Tehran, *Karimi* worked as a filmmaker. He made many movies and TV films, gaining fame nationwide. His multi-potentiality and creative mind were limitless, and his critical reflections on traditional values in the society was stunning. Although he was banned from screen and stage after the revolution, his cultural contribution continued through teaching, writing and making stunning sculptures.

HonarAndishi respectfully honours his memory and holds the wealth of his art, dear.

F A H R E N H E I T 4 5 1

and Ideological State Apparatus

Ashin Forghani



Louis Althusser (1918-1990)

“I am the leap into the dark”

Captain Beatty in Fahrenheit 451 (2018)

Fahrenheit 451 ruined my sweet dreams of Jules Verne’s worlds, the thrills of Arthur C Clarke’s outer space, the wonder of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, the excitement of Isaac Asimov’s robotic future or the youthful adventure of The White Mountains by John Christopher. It was different. Its tone, its world, its words were somehow like a bridge between the apocalyptic Sci-Fi genre and George Orwell’s political allegories. And still something more than that. Bradbury chooses a lyrical and descriptive, poetic prose style which mesmerises the reader. Read these lines for example, where he describes a river near the end of the story as “mild and leisurely, going away from the people who ate shadows for breakfast and steam for lunch and vapors for supper”. (1)

What did we find so shocking? Why did we, my friends and I, turn silent when we watched Francois Truffaut’s cinematic version of the novel? Back then, and even now, we agreed that it was the frightening discovery that we were living the story; I was in our school’s library when books were collected and destroyed, and we all experienced how our school texts would change in front of our eyes every single year. We realised that the Sci-Fi genre is not about an imaginary future. Rather it talks about our present time and its future consequences with an intriguing observation. It shows us the hidden dimensions of our current affairs, our lifestyle and more than anything our society’s ideology. So it makes sense to employ an Althusserian approach in this adaptational critique of the novel and its screen versions (novel by Ray Bradbury 1953, film directed by Francois Truffaut 1966, TV movie directed by Ramin Bahrani 2018). I will show how the story fits within the theoretical aspects of the State Apparatus - the way that Louis Althusser suggests - and how those assumptions function in the novel and adaptations.

What is *Ideology*?

Before Marx, the word ideology was applied to the knowledge (-logy) of the origins of ideas (ideo-). However, Marx and Engels changed this definition forever. In their eyes, the world has an economic infrastructure, atop which sits a superstructure, including legal and political institutions as well as ideology. And what is ideology? As Luke Ferretter explains: Marx and Engels “thought of ideology as the sum of the forms in which men and women were conscious of the production relations and of the class struggle by which their society was in reality constituted.” (2) Althusser paused right there. It didn’t feel right. So he went back and studied Marx again and again. If people’s consciousness can change the world or if their ideas can transform the production relationships in society, then what is the difference between Idealism and Marxism? Marx and Engels both emphasised the materialistic essence of their theory. They couldn’t simply rely on the consciousness of individuals as the motor engine of society. But this notion was lost in the humanist environment of scholarly debate at the time. So Althusser, a pure Marxist, recovered Marx’s original intention with his own redefinition.

1) Ideology is not just about consciousness

First of all, Althusser tried to expand the terrain of ideology. He writes:

Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with ‘consciousness’: they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their ‘consciousness’. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. (3)

In other words, ideology “comes to us primarily in the form of obviousness - common sense, popular opinion, what everybody thinks, what we take for granted.” (4) We are so immersed in it that we don’t question it, nor even think about it. How could we? In Fahrenheit 451, while Montag starts to deal with his doubts, his wife and her friends look increasingly robotic to him. What appears natural to them seems very strange to the reader/narrator.

How weird ideological behaviour can look like from the outside! Religious rituals might sound like a nonsense comedy to a non-believer. Watching a game with hardcore fans when they shout and cheer furiously might make an uninterested witness laugh or cry.

Yet Art can put you in a position where you look at yourself from afar. Art reveals the inconsistencies!

But how can Art achieve such a goal? Well, one use of Art is to display ideologies in practice. Marx would add that it does so if you “read” the artwork symptomatically, and by that he meant reading the unconscious of the text through hidden and apparent cues. The writer is not out of the realm of ideology, but as he tries to reflect on the vastness of life in a limited format of his Art, he inevitably creates a small world in which you can see the nature of things more profoundly. Althusser writes:





Oskar Werner as Guy Montag in *Fahrenheit 451* (1966)

I believe that a peculiarity of Art is to 'make us see' (nous donner à voir), 'make us perceive,' 'make us feel' something which alludes to reality. ... What Art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing,' 'perceiving' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of knowing) is the Ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as Art, and to which it alludes. (5)

For Althusser and his follower Pierre Macherey Art is like a window through which you can see and feel the actual current of life. And bear in mind that this wholeness doesn't come solely via a narrative, importantly it also comes through aesthetics, style and the mood of the work.

For instance, in *Fahrenheit 451* Bradbury employs exactly the sort of poetic prose style that is in dispute with the embedded authority of the diegetic world that wishes to vanish literature. This self-reflecting quality translates to Truffaut's cinematic style. His jump cuts and continuity disruptions of time or space in narration serve to underline the specifics of cinema, forcing us to acknowledge their effect, to "see" the cinematic devisings. These techniques imply that Art is immortal, and its presence cannot be ignored. At the end of the recent TV movie adaptation of the novel by Ramin Bahrani, Beatty kills Montag just as he releases a bird to fly through a hole in the roof. The whole scene is a well-known Shiite Islamic symbol for martyrdom, indicating the immortality of the soul (living bird) and the redemptive act of being murdered for the sake of something good. Unlike in Bradbury's version, Bahrani's Montag in a sense kills himself to save the world – yet the possibility of a Saviour surely is itself an ideological statement. The scene also stands against the so-called "American dream", where the emphasis is on the agency of every character in changing the world, a premise that proposes that an individual can achieve whatever he or she wishes in a world of equal opportunity, namely America.

Regarding film style, one can also point out the excessive use of bold colours like red and yellow in Truffaut's version serving to remind the spectator of the enforced simplicity of society – and yet these alarming colours also suggest an underlying anxiety.

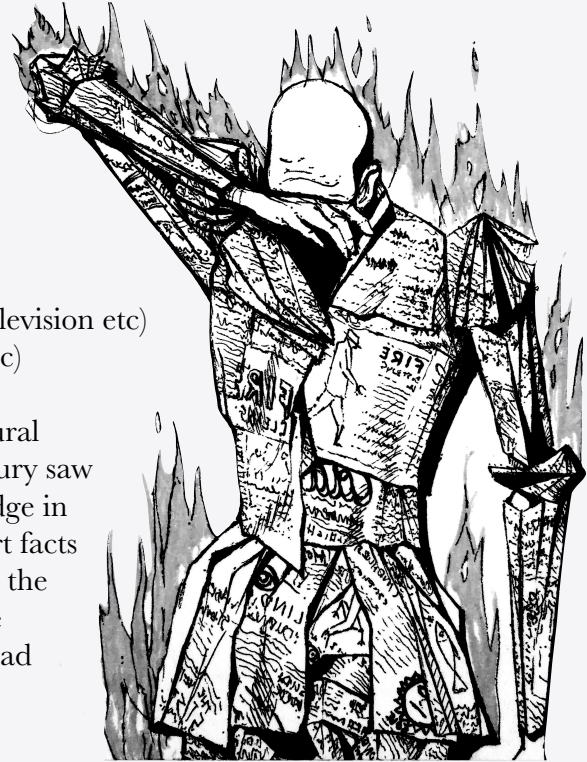
2) Ideology is the real core of the State Apparatus

The main concern of Althusser was finding a clear answer to this question: if the struggle between the classes within society is based on exploitation, how can the exploited class, namely the proletariat, tolerate injustice? How come the majority allow themselves to be used? Marx would insist that the state enforces its authority through law and order. Althusser admits the importance and calls it the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). (6) But it's not the only apparatus. There is a silent force within every person that secures the state, and that's ideology. He termed this force the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). In the ISA various forms of institutions and offices, as well as media, are working to create a sense of contentment and obedience among individuals. Take religious beliefs

for example. The hierarchy of status among believers that facilitates passing the words of God in due course grounds the power and authority of the holy leaders. These beliefs need to be implemented directly and indirectly through various organisations that are apparently distinct and specialised - institutions such as:

- the religious ISA (the system of the different churches, mosques and so on)
- the educational ISA (the system of the various public and private schools)
- the family ISA
- the legal ISA
- the political ISA
- the trade union ISA
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television etc)
- the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports etc)

In the case of Fahrenheit 451, the fear of cultural dominance by TV in the 50s is evident. Bradbury saw how TV was replacing the richness of knowledge in books; it turned out to be much easier to distort facts with factoids in the new medium. In the novel, the RSA has been condensed in the form of a Fire Station Organisation that finds outlaws who read any book and burns their books, persecutes the readers and if necessary burns them too. Throughout the book, high-velocity jet noises are mentioned, and we know (or imagine!) that there is an ongoing war.



But the power of the state is not limited to such repressions and violence. In a lengthy discussion Beatty, Montag's boss, explains to him that "It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time." And Faber, an underground reader, asserts to Montag that "Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord." So, it's not surprising that Montag's wife, Mildred, has no dream more ambitious than having another TV wall screen in their room, and everyone sends their kids right after birth to schools. But if the ideology is so formidable how can anyone escape it, or more precisely, how can anyone see it? We will answer this key question later, but first we need to learn more about the workings of ideology.

3) Ideology is Materialistic

Ideology is so apparent and surrounds us so thoroughly that we don't see it. But that doesn't mean that it's in our heads. Althusser insisted that ideology is a materialistic presence, albeit not in the sense that our shoes or our chairs are. He refers to the materialist nature of Marx's theory. Marx was committed to discover the dynamic of a given society and history in general in a totally non-idealistic way. He was not satisfied with Hegelian reference to consciousness as the prime engine of history. Instead he proposed Historical Materialism, in which the class struggle and means of production

and exploitation work at the core. This materiality is as real and present as ideology in Althusser's eyes. You can see it in every minor behaviour, details of clothing, the way of talking, eating and decorating the house. It's tirelessly at work. It's worth mentioning that Althusser did not believe that ideology is all we have. He repeatedly made clear that there is a reality which he called science (or Marxism) and then ideology. And this enabled him to stand at the scientific horizon and look at the prevailing ideology from the outside. He could see how our lives follow our ideology's rules unnoticeably. (7) He writes:

We shall therefore say, considering only a single subject (such and such an individual), that the existence of the ideas in which he believes is material in that his ideas are his material acts inserted into material practices regulated by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which (hardly by accident!) his ideas derive. (8)

From a material point of view, ideology works not hypothetically but realistically. So, an art critic should detect these tactile cues in the form and content of artwork and interpret the work to make it understandable for the audience. Here I deliberately distinguish between understanding and interpreting. By "understanding", I mean the sort of art comprehension that readily is available to all audiences, whereas "interpretation" refers to the act of constructing the meaning of the artwork. (9) It's not hard to comprehend the kind of future that Truffaut creates, which is a combination of very old-fashioned references (antique telephones and ordinary kitchen appliances) and futuristic elements like aerial metro and interactive flat TVs. He desired to build a resemblance with our times and lead the audience to the shocking hidden allegory. However, you can go further, pick out the upside-down metro, the uniformity of clothing and dull faces, the stupidity of the TV programs and the absurdity of files with behind-the-head photos, to demonstrate something much more absurd: everything reduced to its most basic form, which looks like that desirable thing, Equality.

Isn't this the trick of traditional dictatorships? Ignorance is the mainstay of the stability of power, but it should be wrapped in the sweet garb of Equality, and this, in turn, should be translated to Freedom and Justice. But how can you achieve such ignorance? Not by possessing knowledge but by deprivation. Beatty explains: "We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to





Fahrenheit 451 (François Truffaut- 1966)

make them cover, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it.” This is interpretation.

4) Ideology has history

But ideology is not real, right? Well! If you assume history is a series of actual events in the real world, then the false perception of the world cannot have a history. Surely ideology is like a dream, in a pre-Freudian sense. Surely it's artificial and unrelated to the real world. But Althusser disagrees. He writes

In The German Ideology, the thesis that ideology has no history is therefore a purely negative thesis, since it means both that: 1) ideology is nothing, being pure dream, ... and 2) ideology has no history, which does not at all mean that it has no history (quite the opposite, since it is but a pale reflection, empty and inverted, of real history), but, rather, that it has no history of its own. (10)

Furthermore, he suggests that, first, ideology has a material existence, and second, even though ideology does not represent the real existence of people, still, it portrays their relation to those real conditions of existence. Now, of course, we have entered the Freudian era. Dreams are not just for nothing! We have to learn their language. So, what might we achieve by studying the History of Ideology and not Ideological History? Here, Althusser borrows a term from Lacan, *méconnaissance*. He explains

We understand that ... ideological representation imparts a certain 'representation' of reality, that it makes allusion to the real in a certain way, but that at the same time it bestows only an illusion on reality. We also understand that ideology gives men a certain 'knowledge' [connaissance] of their world, or rather allows them to 'recognise' themselves in their world, gives them a certain 'recognition' [reconnaissance]; but at the same time, ideology only introduces them to its misrecognition [méconnaissance]. Allusion-illusion or recognition-misrecognition — such is ideology from the perspective of its relation to the real. (11)

Lacan, on the other hand, explains that during the mirror stage when we get a sense of integrity and ego, there is a stream of misrecognition.

[The ego is] in its very origins, a repository for the projected desires and fantasies of larger others; the child's image is a receptacle for his/her parents' dreams and wishes, with his/her body image being always-already overwritten by signifiers flowing from the libidinal economies of other speaking beings. Hence, recognising the ego as "me," as embodying and representing an authentic, private, unique selfhood that is most genuinely my own, is tantamount to misrecognising that, at root, the ego ultimately is an alienating foreign introject through which I am seduced and subjected by others' conscious and unconscious wants and machinations. (12)

So Althusser leads us to the desired base of ideology which in retrospect reveals real history-making forces. (13) In Fahrenheit 451, capitalism wishes to give all citizens a false recognition in a pseudo-family form (all TV characters called cousins) and imposes a certain kind of patriotism that is nothing but the act of maintaining the state. And in doing so creates a pseudo-history (George Washington is the founder of Fire Station to burn books; houses were always fire-proof), an Ideological History. In contrast, Faber and his like-minded compatriots draw a different scheme of history, the History of this Ideology. But where are we as individuals within an ideological system?

5) Ideology and interpellation

Considering the French root of the word, interpellation means "to shout at" someone, and simultaneously "to question" them. Something along the lines of "calling for interrogation". Althusser uses this term to explain some aspects of the relationship between individuals and ideology;

"We shall go on to suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way as to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call Interpellation or hailing.



Michael B. Jordan & Michael Shannon in Fahrenheit 451 (2019)



Oskar Werner & Julie Christie in Fahrenheit 451 (1966)

It can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace, everyday hailing, by (or not by) the police: 'Hey, you there!'... The hailed individual turns around. With this simple 180-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognised that the hail 'really' was addressed to him and that 'it really was he who was hailed' (not someone else)... All Ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, through the functioning of the category of the subject."(14)

In other words, interpellation creates subjects out of supposed individuals. You are who your ideology tells you you are! The cinematic adaptation of this concept is embodied in the Mildred/Clarisse binary, for example. Truffaut intentionally chooses the same actress, Julie Christie, for both roles. As Mildred, she is engulfed in the ruling ideology. Her mind and body have been shaped through ISA in line with her so-called family in TV programs. Whereas Clarisse, as a potential alternative substitute, is an outlaw, free-minded, vibrant and dynamic. Searching for the meaning of happiness, she continually questions things that have been assumed as given. And that's why she is a threat. By looking at these two versions of being, grasping the idea of Individual vs Subject is not hard.

However, the line differentiating these two characters is much more delicate and muddy. Take Mildred, for instance. Even though she seems happy in the movie, Montag discovers her unconscious, having poisoned herself. Why has she done that? There is a moment in the middle of the film when this paradox in her personality shows itself more plainly. In the scene Mildred and Montag are arguing about what is right and what is



Oskar Werner & Julie Christie in Fahrenheit 451 (1966)

not, in front of a mirror that duplicates the image of Mildred and splits her character into two opposing figures. Here, the mirror reflects the duality of Mildred bewilderingly lost between her Individuality and her Subjectivity. On the other hand, when you focus on Clarisse in the movie, you may say that she rides from one subjective to another one, rather than being an emblem of Individuality. As a matter of fact, turning to a book-man looks like a parody of Individuality.

This duality shows itself the best in the Montag/Beatty duo in Bahrani's version.(15) Beatty is knowledgeable, as he is in the novel, but more than that, writes in his solitude on small piece of papers and burns them afterwards. He notes how

miserable life is and how "consciousness is much more than the thorn; it is the dagger in the flesh". He is already confronted with his Subjectivity within the State and acting as expected feels desperate and ruined. He understands Montag because Montag is his other possibility in life should Beatty choose another way of living. Beatty is the discerning character of Bahrani's movie, the one who sees everything clearly and yet his job is to serve as guardian of the State. For him, ideology is non-existent because he is aware of that and feels trapped. Montag, on the other hand, is a confused character, who has discovered the conflicts within the State but acts rather emotionally to oppose the brutality of the system. He is on the verge of transforming to a new subjectivity out of his old identity.



Fahrenheit 451 (François Truffaut - 1966)

6) Ideology and its intrinsic conflicts

A popular misconception says there is only one ideology or just one ideology at a time. Fortunately, it's not true. In any given society, there are many ideologies at work. They may be in conflict or peacefully run alongside each other. It's true that in the end it is the ruling ideology that paves the way, but the very existence of different ideologies makes conflict a gateway, an escape from the ruling ideology albeit not an easy gateway to pass through:

Although each class produces its own ideologies ... Althusser emphasises that the ideologies of the subordinate classes are correspondingly subordinate discourses. Even the protests of the proletariat tend to be expressed in the terms of bourgeois ideology, because as the dominant ideology, these are the terms in which every class 'spontaneously' thinks and speaks. This is what Althusser means when he writes that 'bourgeois ideology dominates other ideologies'. (16)

Nevertheless, when the subject inevitably confronts these conflicts, he will start casting doubt on his accepted given truths, and that will be the starting point of "seeing" the ideology. So the ideology is not the ultimate trap at the end.

In Bahrani's movie, Montag recalls memories of his father, who used to be a fireman as well. He remembers that his father, as his role model, was also secretly reading books. Coming across Clarisse, from the lower class of society, also opens a new view to the forgotten way of life. He notices the paradoxes that inadvertently he couldn't see before, like the importance of trust (the cafe scene in Truffaut's version, when Clarisse and Montag watch an informer) or the disappearance of laughing faces, or people self-medicating (numbered pills in Truffaut's or eye drops in Bahrani's). And that's how Montag begins his journey of transformation. In a way, the novel and its adaptations are about this determining conflict within the ISA – these three works of art are confident that, regardless of the power of authority, no-one can destroy our imagination and the expression of our creative minds in the form of art. And this is the hope I share with them.

Footnotes

1. Or when Montag sees Clarisse for the first time, he writes “He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, himself dark and tiny, in fine detail, the lines about his mouth, everything there, as if her eyes were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact. Her face, turned to him now, was fragile milk crystal with a soft and constant light in it. It was not the hysterical light of electricity but-what? But the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle. One time, when he was a child, in a power-failure, his mother had found and lit a last candle and there had been a brief hour of rediscovery, of such illumination that space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them, and they, mother and son, alone, transformed, hoping that the power might not come on again too soon”
2. Ferretter, Luke, 2006, **Louis Althusser**, Routledge
3. Althusser, Louis, 1969, **For Marx**, trans. B. Brewster, London and New York: Verso
4. Ferretter, Luke, 2006, **Louis Althusser**, Routledge
5. Ibid
6. The State Apparatus is the sum of the institutions by which the ruling class maintains its economic dominance — the government, the civil service, the courts, the police, the prisons, and the army, and so on. *ibid*
7. However, as soon as you start questioning it, it's no longer ideology, and this is the gem of Cartesian methodology that makes it more coherent to science. Maybe it's a pathway to reality: start questioning everything and look at your surroundings as you see them for the first time. Doesn't this sound familiar? Isn't it the same notion of the power of defamiliarization of Art? And if that's so, is this the concealed power of Art in demystifying the ideology? Althusser would find this a progressive idea. He writes: "The real difference between art and science lies in the specific form in which they give us the same object in quite different ways, art in the form of 'seeing'; science in the form of 'knowing'."
8. Althusser, Louis, 1971 **On the Reproduction of Capitalism**, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, 2014 London and New York: Verso
9. It is also different to excavating the meaning, or playing hide-and-seek with invisible ideas which the artist intentionally plants somewhere. See Bordwell, David, 1989 Making Meaning, United states, Harvard University Press
10. Althusser, Louis, 1971 **On the Reproduction of Capitalism**, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, 2014 London and New York: Verso
11. *The phrase is from* Althusser, Louis, **Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and other essays** trans. B. Brewster et al., London and New York:Verso, *retold from* Ferretter, Luke, 2006, **Louis Althusser**, Routledge
12. Johnston, Adrian, **Jacques Lacan**, The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
13. “We misrepresent the world in ideology because we want to do so, because there is some reward or benefit to us in doing so. The nature of this reward differs with respect to the class position of the individual living within a given ideology — a factory hand believes in God in a different way from a factory owner — but in every case, in Althusser's view, ideology misrepresents reality because people want it to do so.” Ferretter, Luke, 2006, **Louis Althusser**, Routledge
14. Althusser, Louis, 1971 **On the Reproduction of Capitalism**, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, 2014 London and New York: Verso
15. In one of the first scenes of the movie, we see a brutal theatrical fight between Montag and Beatty that reminds us of *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher) where both characters are actually two aspects of one person.
16. Ferretter, Luke, 2006, **Louis Althusser**, Routledge



Jamshid Mashayekhi & Fakhri Khorvash in *The Curse* (Naser Taghvaei 1973)

The paradox of intimacy in the Iranian new wave cinema

Amir Hadi Nojoumian

This transcript was originally presented as a lecture in November 2018 during a seminar on *Iranian Cinema and Sensuality* held in *Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)*. Recently in December 2019 during the Sydney Persian Film Festival it's been noted that many feature films focused on the issue of love and intimacy (*African Violet*, *Talla*, *Numbness* and *Seven and A Half*, to name a few). *HonarAndishi* represents this text to reflect on the turbulent relationship between the Iranian New Wave Cinema and the issue of intimacy.

In this piece the position of the Iranian new wave cinema in relation to the cinematic expression of love and intimacy is discussed. The Iranian new wave cinema is a part of the 150 years old intellectual movement, so its goals and achievements should be interpreted in relation to that. It is argued that both before and after Islamic revolution of 1979, Iranian cinema had an uneasy relationship with the concept of intimacy and sensuality. Prior to the revolution, you could see sensuality which was often deprived of emotional intimacy and after revolution, intimacy without sensuality. This is what I call the paradox of intimacy in Iranian cinema. Both positions are profoundly political and should be understood in the context of the wider history of modern Iran and its struggle towards embracing "new" while trying to preserve the "old".

*Before the revolution, presentation of sensuality without intimacy was a conscious choice made by filmmakers who saw the sexuality in cinema as a western value enforced by the governmental modernisation agenda. They considered it a distraction from their intellectual's "noble" and often left-wing causes. On the other hand, after the revolution, intimacy without sensuality was an obligation through restrictions set by the traditionalist state. Here, two sequences from Abbas Kiarostami movies *Gozaresh (The Report, 1977)* and *The wind will carry us (1999)* have been reviewed as a representation and example of this argument.*

In recent times, Iranian cinema has been the epicentre of international attention to Iranian art and culture. Iranian directors won multiple prestigious international film festival awards over the last 30 years. A recurrent question is regarding the reason behind absence of sensual pleasure and physical intimacy in Iranian movies.

The most straight forward answer is to blame censorship and governmental restrictions. This is a well established fact that sexual love and intimacy hasn't been well represented in Iranian cinema. While a superficial assessment may relate this only to post revolutionary restrictions and censorship, a study of Iranian cinema shows this



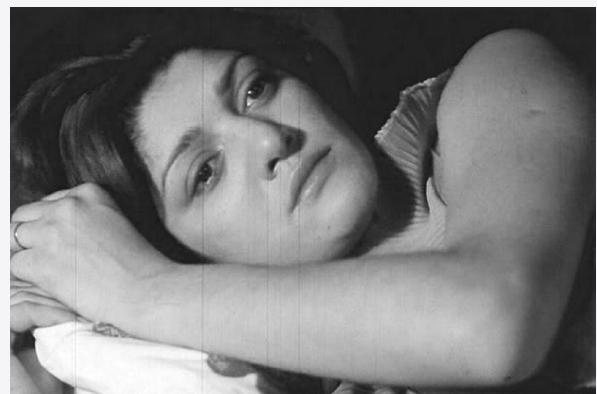
Mohammad Mosaddegh (1882-1967)

phenomenon is much older, it is almost as old as Iranian cinema itself. Persian poetry has a very long history of describing love and even physical intimacy. While describing sensuality in lyrical poetry is familiar, non contentious and open to interpretation, whether it is spiritual or bodily, earthly or heavenly, showing it on the silver screen is another matter. This absence could be noted in other forms of visual art like painting and sculpture. This is most likely related to the strong religious and traditional beliefs of the ruler class and the ruled mass alike. While revealing uncovered body has a long tradition in western culture [going back to Greco Roman era], in the Islamic and Persian culture, it is a very novel phenomenon requiring bold choices. As a result, the visual presentation of sexuality becomes the battleground of the traditional values versus modern aspirations.

Intellectual movement during the last 150 years went through 3 distinct phases. These phases represented themselves in the Persian literature and art as well. During this time, Iranian intellectuals tried to define Iranian identity in relation to modernity. Phase one in the late 19th and very early 20th century is the time of amazement and great optimism towards the west and its modern values. Phase two in the mid 20th century is characterised by nationalism and caution towards foreign influence. Phase three in the late 20th century is known by strong anti-western sentiment and traditionalist trends. It is

important to emphasise on the fact that visual presentation of sensuality has been perceived as a western imported value, a distraction from social reform and even a form of cultural invasion rather than a tradition with long-standing presence in Persian literature.

One of the fundamental characteristics of this movement is its deep political conviction. During the last 20 years, prior to Iranian revolution, the Iranian intellectuals saw modernisation as a state sponsored capitalist agenda rather than a progressive and liberating plan. During this time and especially after the 1953 coupe against elected secular prime minister *Dr Mohammad Mosaddegh*, the relationship between the intelligentsia and the state became increasingly sour. Meanwhile, Iranian intellectual movement became heavily influenced by the leftist and Marxists ideology and looked at Shah's reforms with suspicion. A strong trend toward praising



Shohreh Aghashoo in *The Report* (1977)

From top: the first two are from *The wind will carry us* (1999), then *The Report* (1977), *The Blue-Veiled* (1995) and *Nargess* (1992)



traditional values and resistance towards modernisation and westernisation characterise the literature and cinema of this era. After the publication of the book *Gharbzadegi* (*Westoxification* by *Jalal Al-ahmad* in 1962), the opposition to state sponsored westernisation extended to any form of artistic expression of sexual intimacy as well. Even a poet like *Forough Farokhzad* only became accepted and praised within the intellectual circles after she changed the focus from bodily love to social criticism in her later poems.

The New wave movement within the Iranian national cinema distinguished itself from the mainstream, commercial and popular cinema (*Filmfarsi*) by its strong connection with contemporary Persian literature and a dark and often realistic approach towards representation of social issues. One of the first movies of this movement was *The Cow* by *Dariush Mehrjoui* (1968). Absence of sensuality in this film set the standard for many other directors who followed his path. While in commercial and popular cinema the “bad girls” were singers and dancers who needed to be saved by the traditional often religious male and brought back to where they belonged i.e “home”, in the new wave cinema they were often completely absent or at most had the same position and fate as the commercial cinema. You could look at *The Deer* (1974) and *Gheisar* (1969) by *Masud Kimiai* as an example. *A simple event* (*Sohrab Shahid Sales* 1974), *Tranquility in the Presence of Others* (*Naser Taghvaei* 1972) and *Prince Ehtejab* (*Bahman Farmanara* 1974) are other examples.

The sensuality without intimacy in Gozaresh (The Report 1977)

Gozaresh is a movie about the life of a middle class family in crisis. The husband is unfairly accused of embezzlement and is losing his job and the wife has no understanding of his situation. There is a scene in the middle of the film showing the couple in bed. While the physical aspect of their sexual encounter is hastily presented, ironically their conversation shows no emotional close connection. During the sequence, woman asks man to apply for a loan in order to purchase a house! *Firouzkouhi* (the husband) but, is lying and as *Kiarostami* shows it beautifully, hides himself behind the shadow of his own hand. Their intimacy has no romantic and emotional aspect. It is more

similar to a financial transaction. As *Alberto Ellena* puts it, “this is a movie in which you see no hope”. This sequence is an example of the way the new wave directors perceived the reality of Iranian life; “love” crushed and disappeared under the heavy load of a dysfunctional society.

The intimacy without sensuality in The wind will carry us (1999)

22 years after *Gozareh* and 20 years after the revolution *Kiarostami* makes another masterpiece in which modern culture ie *Behzad* meets pure nature ie *village*. There is a sequence in which *Behzad* goes to an underground cave in which a girl, *Zeynab*, is milking a cow. This sequence in which this man enters the very personal space of a woman in darkness is highly sexual without being a sex scene. We see how two worlds are colliding and how *Forough Farokhzad* poetry is recited by *Behzad* while the girl is becoming aware of herself outside her current position. *Behzad* talks about love in her very close and personal space.

As *Dr Azadeh Fatehrad* in her thesis on status of women in post revolutionary Iran puts it:

“He walks along the path to the basement and again repeats: “It’s so dark in here.” Walking along a narrow passage, he calls out: “Is anyone here?” Zeynab appears and invites him to come in; she is holding a lamp in her hand by the dim light of which she guides him. Behzad: “Can you milk the cow for me?”, continuing “it is so dark; how do you work in here?” Zeynab: “I’m used to it. I work here. And you will get used to it too if you stay long enough.” Behzad: “I’ll

be gone before I get used to it.” The milking room is dungeon-like, dimly lit by the small light that reveals a glimpse of Zeynab. The minimalist nature of the setting of this scene is what gives it its symbolic strength: Zeynab, Behzad, the cow, and the contrast between light and darkness.”

This sequence is saturated with intimacy although there is no physical sensuality.

In recent years *Nargess (1992)* and *Rusari Abi (The Blue-Veiled, 1995)* by *Rakhshan Banietemad* looked at earthly love with a more positive outlook but in the absence of physical intimacy. She uses symbolism of opening a door, reaching out hands and extreme use and overuse of gaze as a way to imply sensuality.

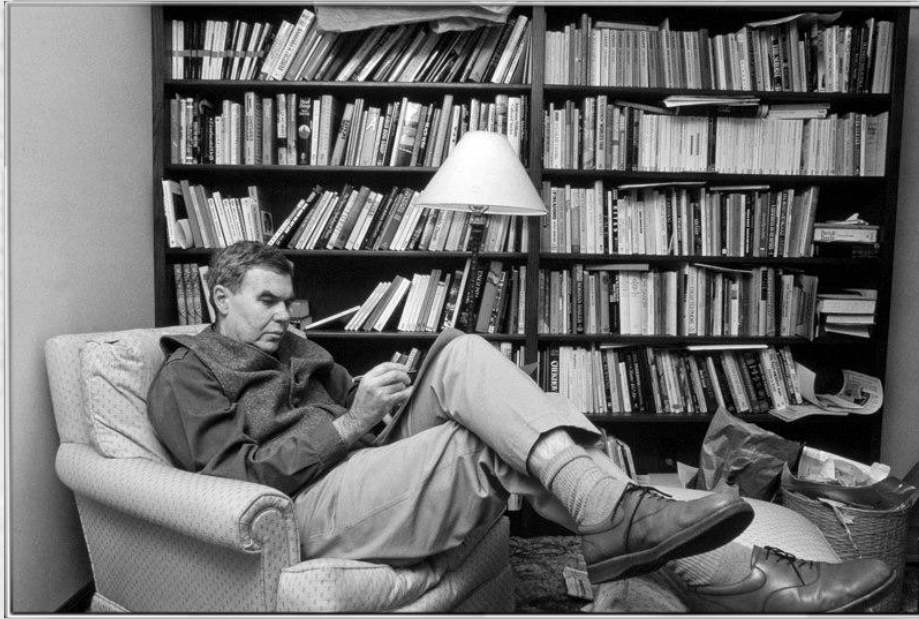
As discussed, physical intimacy and sensuality has rarely if ever been shown, let alone celebrated, in Iranian intellectual cinema. This is the result of an unresolved conflict between the traditional values versus modern aspirations. In early years of Iranian new wave cinema the sexuality when it was rarely shown, was often in a negative context and without love and emotional intimacy. In recent years though, an attempt has been made to show the love and sensuality, although in a very symbolic and with strong use of indirect references (boiled-over milk in a scene after the man released from jail and joins his wife in “*A man of integrity*” by *Rasoulof*). This paradoxical relationship is deep rooted in unresolved ambivalence, undecidedness and suspicion of Iranian culture towards both traditional values and modern aspirations alike.

A man of integrity (Mohammad Rasoulof 1987)



F E A R

Raymond Carver



Fear of seeing a police car pull into the drive. Fear of falling asleep at night. Fear of not falling asleep. Fear of the past rising up. Fear of the present taking flight. Fear of the telephone that rings in the dead of night. Fear of electrical storms. Fear of the cleaning woman who has a spot on her cheek! Fear of dogs I've been told won't bite. Fear of anxiety! Fear of having to identify the body of a dead friend. Fear of running out of money. Fear of having too much, though people will not believe this. Fear of psychological profiles. Fear of being late and fear of arriving before anyone else. Fear of my children's handwriting on envelopes. Fear they'll die before I do, and I'll feel guilty. Fear of having to live with my mother in her old age, and mine. Fear of confusion. Fear this day will end on an unhappy note. Fear of waking up to find you gone. Fear of not loving and fear of not loving enough. Fear that what I love will prove lethal to those I love. Fear of death. Fear of living too long. Fear of death. I've said that.



Bahar Ghahramani is a passionate poet member of HonarAndishi who has a number of publications both in Persian and English including "A Horse Who swallows his Neigh"; A Collection of Poems in Persian, "Shedding Shadows"; A Collection of Poems in English and Persian and "The Northern Hemisphere in a Sandglass"; Translation of Selected Poems of more than Twenty Contemporary American and Canadian Poets.

Here are a few pieces of her poems translated to English.

When it Rained
Got equally wet
the dead soldiers
in the opposite fronts

You rained
in the street
I was all wet
Behind the
window ...

The butterfly
Whose cocoon
Was burst
in Spider's web
A burden
on her shoulders
Her wings are



Once
He had destroyed the bridge
Turned around
Waded into the water

*I am used to two maniacs
Coexisting in my chest
One bangs head against its wall,
The other
Scratches it
The former,
before dating you
The later,
After ...*



Sina Arbabzadeh is an avid photographer and musician based in Sydney. Having developed his photography skills in documentary, candid and fine arts, he strives to create a unique vision in his photographs to express his style which he believes is related to three words; Time, Location and Concept. His recent exhibitions includes *On the Banks of Zayandeh-Rood* (Head On Photo Festival, Sydney, 2018) and *Made of Eyes* (Gaffa Gallery, Sydney, 2017).





February Session

PART ONE

- Panel Discussion on *Close up* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990) and adaptational criticism

PART TWO

- Screening *Stage of History* (Sahand Sarhaddi, 2019)
- Poetry Corner; *Fear* by Raymond Carver
- Group Discussion

Stage of History

(Sahand Sarhaddi, 2019)

On which stage does history what we call humans' individual and collective actions and interactions present itself or is performed? Is there an analogy between where history takes place and a theatre stage? What if this hypothetical place is right next to a theatre stage? Is staging history possible on a set other than that of classical theatre? Which one of these two plays would create a cathartic experience, in the sense of Aristotle's Rhetoric, for the audience? Do places carry the spirit of history or historical events? To what extent has the passage of years enriched the spirit of places? What is the spectator's position in this play of history? In theatre audience members are free to glance at any corner of the stage they desire. They are free to choose between the real (historical) event and the symbolic (staged) event. One might claim that history is in fact determined by the movement of eyes.

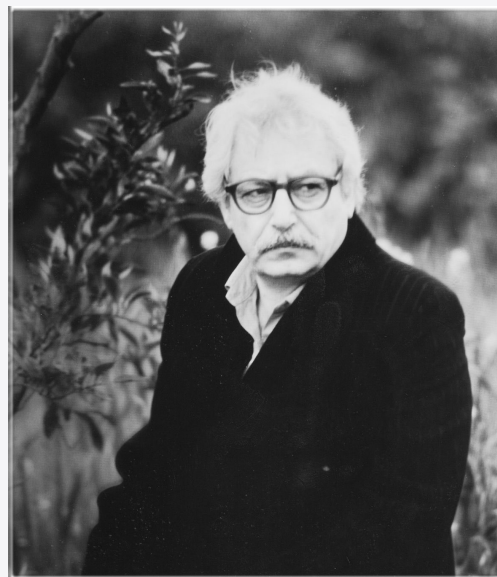
From the film statement



Thank you for all you have left us



The artist **Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian** with one of her works in 1975. She emerged as a key actor in the worldwide development of abstract art . She died in Tehran in 2019. She was 96



Jamshid Mashayekhi, one of the “top five actors of Iranian cinema” who starred in many acclaimed movies, died at Tehran’s Erfan Hospital in 2019. He was 85.



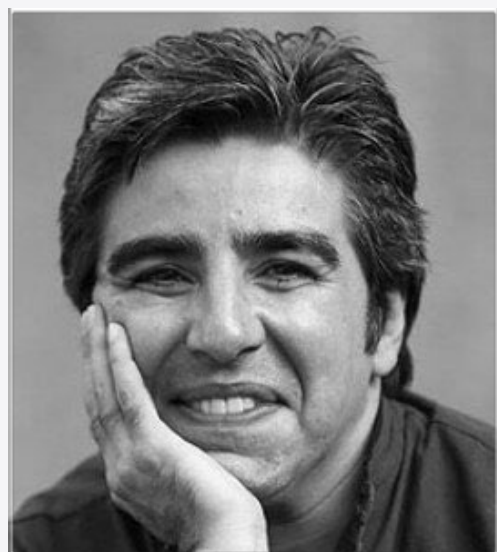
Celebrated composer **Hossein Dehlavi**, who was mostly famous for connecting traditional Iranian music with Western classical music, died at his home in Tehran in 2019 at the age of 92.



Actress **Shahla Riahi**, who presented herself as Iran’s first female director in 1957 by making “Marjan”, died of Alzheimer’s in 2019 at 93.



The prolific stage and screen actor **Hossein Moheb Ahari** who starred in numerous memorable TV series, movies and plays, passed away at a Tehran hospital after a lengthy battle with lymphoma in 2019 at 67.



Screenwriter **Khashayar Alvand** died of a heart attack at his home in 2019 at 51.



Voice actor **Reza Abdi**, who was mostly famous for playing roles in the popular radio comedy programs died at 88.