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Non-visibility and the politics of everyday presence: A spatial analysis of contemporary urban Iran

Dibazar, P.

Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Dibazar, P. (2016). *Non-visibility and the politics of everyday presence: A spatial analysis of contemporary urban Iran*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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2. CARS

Kiarostami's Embodied Cinema of Mobility

This chapter is about how cars and driving are integral to the lived experience of the contemporary everyday street. Its point of departure is the consideration that cars have not only had a huge influence on the material urban forms and infrastructures around the world, but have also become “a common feature of everyday life itself” (Thrift, 2004, p. 46). In contemporary Iran, cars, traffic, and congestion are familiar features of all big cities. For the majority of Iranian middle-class urbanites, driving a personal car or using a shared taxi are desirable and affordable ways of everyday mobility in cities, greatly facilitated by the low price of gas in the oil-rich country. Even though the time spent on the streets in cars and taxis – moving or stuck in traffic – constitutes a significant part of daily life in Iranian cities, in common or critical language it is mostly disapproved of, as wasted and unimportant, connoting negative feelings of a residual time and space in which nothing of significance happens.

The space-time of mobility in this sense evokes everydayness in its most tedious and uninteresting aspect. Such an image of automobility concerns a system that, even though helpful and necessary for transferring people and goods, is detrimental to human societies because of its dehumanizing effects, imbuing daily times and spaces with alienation and individualization. People in their private cars conjure up the image of disconnected individuals moving in their cocoons, disconnected from the city during their transit and alienated from each other, whose mode of interaction with the city is reduced to a visual absorption of the sights and signs of the street in passing. In addition to posing threats to the sociability of cities, cars also seriously endanger the liveability of cities, as a result of their toxic emissions. They also produce enslaving effects, as they conquer the urban space by expanding exclusive zones of automobility – such as streets, roads, highways, and parking lots – from which human bodies are warded off and kept out. They delimit walking and regulate pedestrian flows, and therefore bring human socialization and interaction under their control.

Against this tyranny of the car, walking has gained significance in recent years, as a natural and environmentally friendly way of navigating in space and relating to it. Walking is seen not only as a way of traversing space, but also as a critical tool for seeing and sensing the city differently, and finding new ways for

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connecting to space and appropriating it (Solnit, 2000). In this sense, walking could be seen as a means of resistance against the disadvantageous consequences of automobiles, but also against the stifling effects of the systems of urban planning and governance at large. Walking is integral to the various practices of urban exploration that are concerned with discovering residual and forgotten spaces, encroaching upon the guarded and excluded environments, and laying claims on the city (Garrett, 2013). The walker – as psychogeographers advocate – employs playfulness and creativity in order to manoeuvre and uncover new possibilities for action and interaction in space. In recent years, there has also been an increasing interest in philosophizing on walking, suggesting its impacts on the well-being of the mind and body, and helpful for boosting creativity – in support of which the wanderings of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and many contemporary writers are alluded to (Gros, 2014; Solnit, 2000). All this suggests pleasure in walking and, in comparison to the driver's operation, celebrates the freedom that the walker enjoys in absentminded wandering.

What makes walking so fundamentally different from moving in cars is considered to be related to the incorporation of the body and mind of the walker in the act of walking. The joy of walking is essentially related to the feelings and perceptions that the body receives as a result of being in space. In addition, urban walkers can liberate themselves from systems of urban control, basically, because they bring into play a diverse range of bodily movements, gestures, expressions, and performativities: bodily faculties by which they are able to “open up pockets of interaction over which they have control” (Thrift, 2003, p. 109). Most notably, Michel de Certeau (1988) considers the embodied and enunciative capacities of walking to be fundamental to myriad possibilities for resistance that he envisions in everyday practices. De Certeau's practitioner of everyday life is ultimately a walker who navigates, performs, and reads space in footsteps. Such a celebration of walking and its bodily functions permeate critical studies of the everyday city, which favour the conditions in which everyday life unfolds on foot – on side-walks, markets, pedestrianized streets, playgrounds, and busy neighbourhoods – over spaces where the automobile takes precedence over the pedestrian – such as the margins, the sprawl, and the peripheries.

Partly as a reaction to such an unfavourable treatment of automobility, there has emerged, in recent years, a great interest in studying the everyday features of mobility – such as driving, commuting, and waiting in traffic or in public transport

systems – suggesting their significant effects on urban cultures and the everyday lived experiences in creating new meanings, associations, and affects (Miller, 2001; Moran, 2005). Most notably, a huge body of work in geography, anthropology, and sociology has focused on the mobile, relational, and fragmented sense of place that is enacted through diverse forms of mobilities (Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). A starting point for such studies has been not only a recognition of the significance of cars to urban cultures, but also a critique of the traditions of spatial analysis which, in celebrating the urban walker as a type of absentminded flâneur, evoke a romantic idea of city life that does not comply with the lived experience of many people around the world. The idea of the cheerful and autonomous walker does not necessarily apply to people who live or work in suburbs, whose everyday travel to far-away destinations depends on systems of automobility (Thrift, 2004). In other words, the concept of walking evokes a certain privileged lifestyle that is pertinent only to particular geographies and urban centres.

My concern in this chapter is neither to celebrate the car, nor to disapprove of its undesirable effects in everyday life, but to find ways of critically examining it on an equal footing with walking. To do so, it is important to focus on “an extraordinary complex everyday ecology of driving”, which could be “as rich and convoluted as that of walking” (Thrift, 2004, pp. 45-46). A “phenomenology of automobility” has to take into account multiple “embodied cues and gestures which work over many communicative registers and which cannot be reduced simply to cultural codes” (Thrift, 2004, p. 46). Driving, in this way, can be seen as a highly emotional activity that embodies different systems of mobility. The technology of the car is “closely wrapped up in the body” of the driver, whose feet, hands, body, and mind work closely with the car’s gadgets and equipment of control (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 101). The car, in this sense, could be seen as an extension of the driver’s body rather than a container for it (Dant, 2004).

In this chapter, I consider cars as providing conditions for interacting with the everyday and generating meaningful associations in space. Cars do more than just facilitating movement in the city; they are “key means of timing the spaces and spacing the times of the city”, of creating fragments of “little times” and displacing the objective clock time (Amin & Thrift, 2002, pp. 100-101). Cars therefore offer various possibilities for the creation and promulgation of spontaneous, non-regulated,

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and personalized spatio-temporalities. They could be said to have “reorganized time and space, ‘unbundling’ territorialities of home, work, business, and leisure that were historically closely integrated” (Urry, 2007, p. 120). The consequent “fragmented time-schedules” enable a more creative use of time and the possibility of holding more than one job for the urban dispossessed, whose daily times are about “the juggling of the conflicting time disciplines of paid and unpaid work” (Sheller & Urry, 2000, p. 249).

This is of great importance to Iranian society, where many middle- to lower-middle-class urbanites rely on several informal jobs for their living, in addition to multiple social responsibilities, which necessitates effective daily time management (Bayat, 2012). Driving a personal car as an unauthorized, but commonly acknowledged, shared taxi is a common practice for many people in search of a secondary source of income. A “modus-operandi of personal transport” (Tehran Bureau, 2011), such an employment of personal cars has produced a particular car culture of passengering – “hitchhiking-slash-carpooling with total strangers” (Elmjouie, 2015). In the confines of this space, and for the duration of journeys on the streets, strangers often discuss politics and share views on social matters. This mode of co-presence and dialogue in cars, Asef Bayat suggests, contributes to the creation of a “political street”, which denotes “the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices” (2010, p. 13). In this chapter, I therefore focus on cars as “a key form of social interaction” in cities (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 100).

Consequently, in this chapter I am concerned with cars as “means of habitation, of dwelling” (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 100). Such an otherwise contradictory notion of dwelling in mobility introduces new ways of being public and disrupts the polarity conventionally maintained between the public and private (Adey, 2010, p. 89). Since, in urban theories, this dichotomy is generally coupled to the associations of the sphere of the public with visibility and of the private with invisibility (Brighenti, 2007, p. 332), I argue that, by instigating dwelling in mobility, the car challenges the orders of visibility and their correlated meanings. The liminality of the space inside a moving car enhances conditions of being privately in public and publicly private – invisibly visible and visibly invisible. By creating temporary and mobile conditions of privacy on the streets, which remain unnoticed in the ebb and

flow of everyday life, this chapter argues that the car performs as a non-visible mode of presence on the streets.

Cars in Iran do indeed evoke a certain youth culture of fun and recreation, where many young people spend significant amounts of time in cars, driving around and cruising on the streets (Mahdavi, 2011). As a private bubble in public, the car also encapsulates trivial practices that are officially considered illicit under the Iranian codes of public conduct, and are otherwise curtailed in public, such as listening to unauthorized music and heterosocializing (Mahdavi, 2011, p. 157). Pardis Mahdavi describes this youth culture as follows:

Though they are moving through the public sphere, the car gives them a sense of agency, a sense of control over their own bubble, or a segment of their lives. Many of them also felt that cars brought about independence, as they felt secure in the knowledge that they could speed away from angry parents or morality police in a difficult situation. The car for these young people, has become a sacred place, perhaps one of the only spaces in which they feel that they have full autonomy. (Mahdavi, 2011, p. 157)

In this chapter I do not intend to outline a certain car culture as ‘Iranian’, but to analyse the significance of the socially habituated modes of inhabitation and socialization in cars to everyday life in Iran. In the following, I will investigate cars in Iran by analysing films. I contend that, in the past decades, a cinema of the car has developed in Iran, which makes extensive use of the conditions of dwelling in mobility. An iconic case in point is *Taxi, Tehran* (2015), a film entirely filmed within a car on the streets of Tehran, which gained international attention when it received the Golden Bear award in the 2015 Berlin Film Festival.

This Iranian cinema of the car stands in contrast to the familiar car scenes in world cinema in different ways. Unlike the implications of escape from urbanity in road movies, cars in Iranian films are particularly urban elements and depict everyday moments of being on the streets. Rather than making cinematic spectacles of fast cars, in chase scenes for instance, these films mostly focus on the interiority of the space within a car that moves with a familiar and reasonable speed. Unlike the cold and gloomy sense of alienation that the interiority of wandering cars in the work of such

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directors as Wim Wenders or Jim Jarmush evoke, the interior of the car in Iranian films is usually a vibrant space where friends or family members spend a pleasant time out together, a place where social and intimate relations develop.

In short, the car in Iranian films is a space filled with emotions and affect. It is also often a feminine space, which grants women mobility in the face of multiple forms of immobilization and enclosure that affect their free movement in Iranian cities (Milani, 2001, p. 102). In a great number of Iranian films, automobiles evoke a sense of extending women's bodily presence in public and the actualization of female urban *flânerie*, they "serve as a safe meeting place, a contained and private location for making acquaintance with the world outside the bounds of home, class, tradition, and law" (Khalili Mahani, 2006). They are also instruments and spaces of female rebellion (Khalili Mahani, 2006).

In this chapter, I focus on the car scenes in the films of Abbas Kiarostami. Almost all of Kiarostami's feature length films produced since 1990 – with the exception of the experimental *Shirin* (2008) – include significant scenes shot in and of cars. Cars are especially prominent in *Zendegi va Digar Hich/Life and Nothing More* (1991), *Ta'm e Gilas/Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *Dah/Ten* (2004) – the latter film being shot entirely in a car. Saturating the screen and filmic time, cars in these films suggest a world of inhabitation in mobility, and produce a visually distinct cinematic language. This chapter is therefore about the operational logic of cars in instigating a cinema of mobility in Abbas Kiarostami's cinema. It aims to uncover the cinematic effects that Kiarostami creates through automobility.

Kiarostami's cinematic style is particularly pertinent to the study of modes of non-visibility in this dissertation, because it famously relies on the "absent" and "the hidden" for the development of the story (Lippard, 2009, p. 31). In Kiarostami's films, crucial events often unfold off-screen or in indiscernible situations such as in the dark or in super long shots. Most notably, Laura Mulvey (2006) draws attention to Tahereh's pivotal but "unseen look" in *Zir-e Derakhtan-e Zeytoon/Through the Olive Trees* (1994). In an impassioned speech to the silent and mostly out-of-the-frame Tahereh, Hossein, her former suitor, says that he is aware of Tahereh's positive inner feelings towards him, because of the suggestive look that she had once returned to him. Mulvey writes:

the camera registers Hossein's intense gaze but gives no indication of Tahere's look. This missing moment becomes a crucial point of uncertainty in the film. It inscribes Tahereh's impossible position, caught between family and suitor. But it also bears witness to the guidelines for the cinematic depiction of relations between the sexes established by the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance. (Mulvey, 2006, p. 139)

Rather than the absence, I focus on the modes of presence that Kiarostami activates in his cars. Rather than shunning away from intense looks, I claim that Kiarostami's cars set in motion a mobile regime of looks. They extend the presence of bodies on the screen, and mobilize their affective registers.

In the following, I analyse the intertwined spatial and aesthetic regime that builds on the car's mobility in Kiarostami's films, and think through the social and cultural points of critique that such mobility offers. My main argument is that Kiarostami evokes a mobile mode of sense experience, which both mobilizes and critiques socially and culturally constructed regimes of spatial signification, visual communication, and cinematic production. Kiarostami's body of work not only outlines the potentialities that the car enables as an in-between mode of dwelling, but also builds upon the car's modality as an intertwined social and aesthetic regime that functions within the realm of everyday life and, by being attentive to its own modes of production, eludes the policing of the space and images.

On the Move: Wandering Cars and Extended Presence

Once one recalls Abbas Kiarostami's films, the image that stands out distinctly is perhaps that of a car and a driver – and one or more passengers. Godfrey Cheshire writes: “As a car slows on a dusty road in Iran, a man inside asks passersby for directions. Of all the images in Abbas Kiarostami's films, this one must be the most recurrent, the most emblematic” (Cheshire, 2000). The conjunction of the image of the car in Kiarostami's films with that of a countryside road touches on probably the most symbolic of all themes in Kiarostami's films: the journey. From early on in his career, as Geoff Andrew explains, the theme of the journey builds a “structural basis” (2005, p. 22) for a number of Kiarostami's early films that feature school kids on the way home, away from home, or in search of a friend's home. Yet, it is not until the

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middle of his career, in *Life and Nothing More* (1991), the second of Kiarostami's *Koker* trilogy, that a car supplements the film's journey and becomes inextricably bound up with it.

Life and Nothing More is about the journey of a filmmaker – Kiarostami's on-screen surrogate – who, accompanied by his son Pouya, sets out on roads in his own car towards the earthquake-stricken town of *Koker*. In the days following the devastating earthquake of 1990, the filmmaker travels to the area to find out about the lives of two local boys, the Ahmadpour brothers, who had formerly played the lead roles in Kiarostami's first film of the *Koker* trilogy, *Khane-ye Doost Kojast/Where is the Friend's House?* (1987). Since it is by and within a car that the travellers set out on arduous roads to their destination – never leaving the car except for short intervals – the car's functional logic in this film exceeds its instrumentality in the actualization of physical movement in space, and acquires a status essential to the cognitive and sensory development of the film's journey.

The intertwining of the car and the journey in *Life and Nothing More* draws upon a number of associations. To begin with, the car influences the narrative development of the story in peculiar, and somewhat counterintuitive, ways. In contrast to the implications of speed, swiftness, and ease of movement that the car customarily carries, in *Life and Nothing More* it precipitates a slow and difficult movement in space. *Life and Nothing More* begins as a car journey with a clear quest: to search for the Ahmadpour brothers. In the course of the journey, however, the search for the two boys gets “delayed” by roads that are inaccessible due to heavy traffic or devastations caused by the earthquake (Mulvey, 2006, p. 128). Forced to take detours, the car moves slowly through this arduous geography, loses its direction and never reaches its initially intended destination. During these endless diversions, the car encounters new people, scenes, and events that might at first seem irrelevant to the main storyline of the film – or at best digressions from it. The extended mobility of the film therefore creates multiple narrative diversions and slows down the filmic tempo to a somewhat open ending: the filmmaker does not find the two brothers, but hears of their survival from locals. Such a narrative and geographical expansion, coupled with a perpetual sense of suspension of the filmic event, contributes to what Laura Mulvey calls Kiarostami's “aesthetic of digression” (2006, p. 125).

As the journey repeatedly gets redirected into roads that stretch out and lead elsewhere, the car's extended presence on the roads (and in the story) injects a

“perpetual sense of movement” (Bransford, 2003). Within the circular geography of the car’s endless wanderings and meanderings, the viewer is caught in a web of routes that seem to lead to nowhere. Not only does the car’s constant mobility imbue the film’s journey with a sense of disorientation, but it also creates typically Kiarostamian encounters and dialogues that revolve around the idea of ‘nowhere’; ‘Where are you headed?’, the traveller often asks people he meets on the roads; ‘Nowhere. We are heading nowhere’ passers-by reply (Bransford, 2003). The purportedly aimless wandering of the car and the expanded time of the journey therefore reinforce a sense of mobility. Kiarostami himself, in an interview with Geoff Andrew, states: “the journey is very important to me. It’s like all my roads: you don’t know how far they go, there are no signs telling you where they lead, and you don’t know where they end. But it’s important just to be moving” (Andrew, 2005, p. 7). The car, I wish to demonstrate in this chapter, is not only instrumental in sustaining this perpetual sense of movement, but is also fundamental to the more sophisticated processes of mobilization that Kiarostami’s cinema of mobility aspires to.

As the constant slow wandering of a car in Kiarostami’s films imbues the physicality of the journey, the character of the traveller becomes intertwined and inseparable from that of the driver, who, by implication, travels as he drives. Kiarostami’s interest in driving and the figure of the driver is played out to the fullest extent in *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *Ten* (2003), which are set predominantly in a moving car in the city of Tehran, and whose main characters could best be defined as ‘drivers’. *Taste of Cherry* depicts Mr Badii driving around the outskirts of the city in search for a person who will agree, in return for money, to aid him in his suicide plan by burying his dead body. He rambles around dusty roads in the hilly fringes of Tehran, scouting like a hunter for the right person to give a ride to, and tries to talk his would-be accomplices into the job while having a drive together in his car. Kiarostami’s interest in the disposition of a driver is even more stressed in *Ten*, which is set entirely in a car and is comprised of ten short episodes in which Mania, the female driver, drives towards home, a confectionery, a friend’s house, or just moves around the streets of Tehran without a proper destination in mind. Accompanied by one other person in the car in each episode, the driver’s conversations with her passengers constitute the film’s storyline.

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What all these films have in common is that the more the car wanders on the roads and streets, the more it transmits a sense of dwelling in motion. Kiarostami's characters travel, work, talk, discuss, cry, laugh, and share in the car – in short, they dwell in it. Such a sense of mobile habitation is additionally emphasized by the fact that Kiarostami typically avoids the interior space of the home. The car, in other words, could be said to stand in for the unseen realm of domesticity in his films. During the press conference of his latest film *Like someone in love* (2012), following its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, Kiarostami was asked to comment on the reasoning behind his love for shooting long sequences in cars. Unhappy with the question, he responded:

I have previously talked at length about the car, let me skip it this time. It always strikes me why people do not ask the question 'why' when [a scene is shot] in a conference hall, in a house, or in a room. It is as if all locations are suitable for filming except the car. As soon as you shoot in the car people ask why. The car is a place like other places. (Cannes Film Festival, 2012; my translation)

Kiarostami treats mobility and fixity with notable equality. He rejects the commonly favourable valuation of the latter – as authentic, historically embedded, and loaded with meaning – for the often almost completely neglected spatiality of the former. Kiarostami's spatial understanding, I suggest, resonates closely with the mobile, fragmentary, and relational notions of place that studies of mobilities (sometimes referred to as Mobilities discourse) offer in relation to conditions of globalization and heightened mobility. Scholars concerned with mobilities share a standpoint with Kiarostami in that they define themselves against sedentarist traditions in spatial analysis. These traditions either disregard situations of dwelling in mobility as spatially insignificant, abstract, and therefore unworthy of analysis, or else criticize mobility as the force that dissipated authentic apprehensions of place, which it supplants with ungrounded placelessness (Cresswell, 2004, pp. 22-46). Peter Merriman, for example, criticizes the way in which geographers and anthropologists have commonly defined place as being “meaningful, lived, rooted, organic and symbolic sites with which individuals develop fairly long-standing attachments”, and have therefore denigrated temporary spatial conditions as “ageographical”, “abstract”,

and “placeless” (2004, p. 146). Instead, he supports the range of attempts in recent writings on space that strive “to rethink movement and mobility as not simply occurring *in* or *across* space and time, but as actively shaping or producing multiple, dynamic spaces and times” (Merriman, 2012, p. 1). Such a dynamic understanding of place-making, Merriman writes, leads to an appreciation of “transient, mobile and momentary senses and experiences of dwelling”, which in turn may be effective in creating hybrid notions of home and sociality (Merriman, 2004, p. 146).

Kiarostami’s cars respond to such a relational conceptualization of space in mobility, in which “place is constituted through reiterative social practices – place is made and remade on a daily basis” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 39). By setting his characters in wandering cars, Kiarostami breaks away from the conventional regimes of representation in which space – as fixed and stable – is bound within particular regimes of identification and carries specific symbolic meanings. In this way, he strives to set a relational and fragmentary process of place-making in motion, one that is constantly shaped, deformed, and reshaped through the interactions of the car with the geography in which it moves. Kiarostami’s cars are not disconnected from their surroundings – one does not get the feeling of being alienated and cocooned in the car – but are very much in negotiation with the geography through which they pass.

“It may seem trivial”, Bransford (2003) writes, “but the side windows of cars in Kiarostami’s movies are almost always open”. In *Life and Nothing More*, for instance, the slow, bumpy, noisy, and uneasy mobility of the car enacts a relational sense of place in the making, which stays conscious of the geography and the means of its own navigation. Attentive to his surroundings, Kiarostami’s slow driver repeatedly stops, steps outside, looks around, converses with the villagers, and gives a lift to the passers-by he meets on the road. It is through such repetitive physical interactions that a mobile, vibrant, and lively sense of place is made in *Life and Nothing More*, which neither complies with the symbolic gestures of freedom and speed that cars typically carry in road movies, nor with the feelings of deep sorrow and grief that an earthquake-stricken geography might be thought to evoke.

More specifically, Kiarostami’s spatial understanding concerns the contained space within a moving car and the sense of dwelling in mobility that it enhances. One spatial characteristic of the car’s interiority is that it fosters conditions of co-presence. The car not only provides a space of inhabitation for the driver, but also for one or

two passengers. Kiarostami is especially interested in the possibilities for interaction and socialization that the co-presence of the driver and passengers in a car generates. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the sense of perpetual mobility that the car in *Life and Nothing More* evokes, Kiarostami highlights the interiority of the car as the only safe and reliable roofed space in the earthquake-stricken region. Pivotal to this sense of inhabitation in the car is the temporariness of inhabitation inside it, which resonates with that of the tents and temporary dwellings set up for the survivors of the earthquake, and its perpetual wandering, which forms parallels to the wanderings of the homeless who have lost their houses in the earthquake. How Kiarostami treats a mobile and relational sense of place as generative of conditions of co-habitation in the car is the focus of the following section.

Dwelling in Mobility

Co-habitation inside a car by way of passengering – giving lifts to passengers and riding along with them for a limited period of time – plays a key role in creating a sense of dwelling in mobility in Kiarostami's films. Such car-sharing practices deprivatize the space of the privately owned car (Urry, 2004). They amount to the creation of a "collective private transport" that tends to "gather together the disparate situations where a number of people – be they friends, families, acquaintances, or colleagues – find themselves sharing a vehicle more, or less, informally" (Laurier, et al., 2008, p. 2). Cohabiting in moving cars enacts particular modes of communication. For example, Laurier et al. suggest that "once you add a passenger cars become places of talk and places where the expectation, unlike an elevator, is that we will talk" (2008, p. 7). Sheller and Urry, in addition, describe the ways in which automobility produces new bonds of domesticity through "social relations such as the 'back-seat-driver' or the common dependence upon a partner for navigation and map-reading" (2000, p. 746). Kiarostami's drivers always seem eager to lose a little of their privacy in favour of creating such temporary conditions for sociality by way of passengering. They engage in deep conversations with their passengers in order to acquire information on the local issues (*Life and Nothing More*), negotiate a deal (*Taste of Cherry*), or to discuss common issues of interest (*Ten*). Kiarostami is keen on creating temporary conditions of publicness within the contours of private cars.

Such a spatial hybridization, conversely, amounts to conditions of privacy to be lived in public. Among Kiarostami's films, *Ten* is particularly acclaimed for its

creation of a private space, away from home, in a wandering car on the streets of Tehran (Andrew, 2005; Caputo, 2003; Orgeron, 2008). Two episodes in *Ten* are particularly renowned for the intense moments of intimacy created in the car: episode 4, which centres around the driver's attempts to console her highly emotional, broken-hearted, desperate, and uncontrollably crying friend while driving (figure 2.1); and episode 2, in which the passenger – with whom the driver has established a sort of kinship after randomly passengering her for the first time in a previous episode – shares her feelings about her lost love relationship and, in a highly affective gesture, momentarily lets her scarf slip from her head so that she can share her despair (as symbolized in her shaved head) with the driver (figure 2.2).



Figure 2.1. *Ten*.



Figure 2.2. *Ten*.

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Critics have mentioned that in *Ten*, by creating a feminine space in the car, Kiarostami has been able to create a parallel world of domesticity that is better accommodated for the regime of representation in Iranian cinema. Since the depiction of unveiled female bodies or contact between opposing genders is prevented in Iranian cinema, a realistic representation of the private life in Iran seems unattainable. Kiarostami's digression from the interior to the exterior then could be regarded as a genuine tactic for bypassing such inconveniences without losing credibility (Andrew, 2005, pp. 60-61). In other words, by eluding the home and staging his films in public spaces, Kiarostami could be said to recuperate unrepresentable domestic scenes within public orders of visibility.

By relocating such intimacies inside a wandering car, however, Kiarostami achieves something more substantial. Insistently creating a hybrid space of interiorized publicness and exteriorized privacy in the car, Kiarostami sets the notions of publicness and privacy in motion. Eluding spaces designated specifically as public or private, Kiarostami sets his characters free from sets of behaviours, gestures, functions, and emotions attached to their socially defined roles as mothers, children, husbands, lovers, sisters, or friends. He therefore allows his characters to surpass their intended *place* in society and to flourish as subjects in the making. He sets off a relational and fragmentary process of subjectivation, enacted in liminal times and spaces, performed in everyday conditions of embodiment. What the car entails is therefore a mobile bounded space that extends, disrupts, disseminates, and hybridizes the social roles attributed to subjects of different gender, age, occupation, and social status. Emphasizing the spatial liminality of the car, Kiarostami destabilizes the system of social organization that allocates certain subjects, behaviours, and emotions to specific places and times.

Kiarostami's cars directly address such a cultural system of spatial signification and provide a cinematic critique of it. In *Taste of Cherry*, for instance, the suicidal Mr Badii struggles to create a different sense of relating with the world, from which he seems alienated, by inhabiting his wandering car. His insistence on inviting would-be accomplices to his suicide plan inside his car, in order to maintain a discussion with them while driving together, is in part an attempt to set his passengers free from the set of relations to the world that they customarily inhabit. In order to convince his passengers to agree to his eccentric request, Mr Badii repeatedly reminds them of the spatial and temporal character of their simple 'drive together' and asks

them to forget, for the duration of their short trip, about the kind of reactions that they might have had to the idea of suicide and the person committing it in their daily lives. He tells his second passenger, the Afghan seminarian, that he does not wish him to engage in a religious discourse on suicide, since, had he wished for that kind of argumentation, he would have visited him in his school rather than taking him on a short trip in his own car. It is as if by driving along in the car, Mr Badii expects his passengers to diverge, even momentarily, from performing their asserted roles in society, and to build new sets of relations that do not pertain to the world outside.

Similarly, in *Ten*, for the duration of the short journeys on the streets in Tehran, the liminal spatiality of the car generates possibilities for the materialization of a complicated, uneasy, and dynamic mother-son relationship that transcends the positions they hold in the privacy of their homes. As a divorced mother, living with a new partner, and the son of divorced parents, living with the father, the mother and son in *Ten* have difficulty establishing a private space of their own in any of the homes they live in. Far from all the homes in which they seem not to belong together, the car becomes their temporary space of inhabitation. Their time spent together in this condition of in-betweenness, moving between homes, is uneasy and tense, and is marked by numerous moments in which they get angry, raise their voices, and shout at each other. The mother and the son repeatedly express their need of uninhibited pronouncement of normally uncommunicated feelings. The resulting unfettered explosions of utterly intimate but complicated verbal assaults, accusations, expectations, and emotions is marred by the condition of being publicly on the street. In the middle of one of Mania's uncontrollably loud rushes of emotions, the son reacts 'ok mom, just don't shout on the street'. The mobility of the contained interiority of the car on the public streets of Tehran in *Ten* concerns a re-articulation of the contours of home, rather than the development of a mobile parallel to it.

However, Kiarostami does not celebrate the sense of liberation from social ties that such hybridization of space entails. Rather, he questions the power dynamics that sustain social relations. The spatiality of the car simultaneously liberates its occupants from certain positions they hold in daily life, and coerces them into new forms of power relations sustained in the car. Having a hold over the means of mobility, the driver is commonly thought to impose his/her command within a car. The passengers, on the other hand, could feel subservient to the will of the driver, locked in space and

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time. Captive to the powers held by the driver, they might feel trapped into a discussion against their will, locked in a situation from which exists no escape without the consent of the driver. As Laurier et al. explain, the opportunities for different relationality that the car fosters can precisely be premised on “an obligation to make passenger talk”, rejecting them the choice to “walk away from or walk into a conversation with another speaker” (2008, pp. 7-9). In *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami’s driver exerts such an authoritative pressure on his passengers by making them listen to his eccentric demands under a condition of mobility from which they seem to have no escape. Distinctly uncomfortable and reticent under the obligation to carry on a situation of co-habitation over which he has no control, Mr Badii’s first passenger steps out and runs away as soon as he finds the opportunity (figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3. *Taste of Cherry*.

However, the forces of domination in the car are not always in favour of the driver. In *Ten*, the confrontational discussions between the mother and the son, the driver and the passenger, effectively show the dynamism of the authoritative positions in play within a moving car. The son feels confident enough to seize the moment and recklessly express his rage at his mother, to shout at her and accuse her of being a selfish mom, since the mother’s confinement to the steering wheel leaves her with no other choice than to concede to her son’s will and to listen carefully (figure 2.4). Not only the mother’s confinement to the driving seat and the primary task of driving holds her back from taking recourse in the sort of parental punitive measures that are applicable at home – such as locking up the child in his room or forbidding him from watching TV – but also their position in the publicness of street, with cars passing by and people peeping inside, requires behaving properly.



Figure 2.4. *Ten.*

Laurier et al. explain the simultaneously empowering and coercive dynamics of the car with regards to the conditions of parent-child cohabitation:

children find the car is a good place to talk to parents. With no one else there to distract their parents or carers they get time with mum as mum, dad as dad, grandma as grandma etc. whereas in other settings they might be competing with, say, mum-as-friend-to-someone-else, dad-as-cook, dad-as-TV watcher or mum-as-homeworker. Even so, in the car children as passengers have to deal with their parents' responsibility as drivers. Children's desire to occupy the front-seat is thus all the more understandable, since in this position they have fullest access to the captive parent (carer or grandparent). (Laurier, et al., 2008, p. 12)

Kiarostami mobilizes the authoritative dynamics that the confined time-space of the car provokes. Such dynamism builds the essence of Kiarostami's spatial apprehension of the car. I have tried to explain that the space inside a moving car not only provides a setting for a relational sense of inhabitation in motion, but also activates the process of disarticulation and re-articulation of social relationships. The resulting relational, embodied, and lived sense of place, in an ever changing process of making and remaking, stands in contrast to most common depictions of automobility in cinema and the theorizations of its spatiality in film analyses.

The driver, it is usually invoked, inhabits a secure and rather comfortable – but lonesome and alienated – space in the car, detached from the world and disengaged from it in meaningful ways. This notion entails that the driver’s human capacities for communication are reduced to an abstract level, as he is held back by the practice of driving. Such a condition of heightened mobility, devoid of authentic elements of spatial attachment, is then thought to foreground the visual at the expense of other sensorial faculties. Through the framing of the windshield and the side windows, the driver is said to connect to the world only as a detached observer, watching the world in motion. The spatial disconnectedness of the space inside a fast moving car from the world outside has mostly led critics to devalue the regime of the visual that it entails as too abstract, quick, and alienating. Margaret Morse (1990), for example, has famously claimed affinity between the visual experience of driving on a freeway and that of watching TV, as both experiences, in her view, account for the coupling of abstract conditions of spatiality with alienating regimes of visibility.

In the following pages, I analyse the regime of visibility that corresponds to Kiarostami’s spatial understanding of the car. The particular regime of visibility that he activates through automobility not only relies on the relational sense of place-making that is set in a moving car, but also develops a particular, car-based visual language, which disrupts – one might say poses a critique of – the established regimes of the gaze in cinema. This is not to say that Kiarostami downplays the position that his drivers, or passengers, hold as observers. Indeed, as a car moves on winding roads in hilly landscapes in *Life and Nothing More*, its driver looking for pieces of evidence in the aftermath of the earthquake, one gets the impression that the subject of the driver/traveller develops into that of a ‘seer’ – one who meticulously ‘observes’ (Mulvey, 2006, p. 129). However, I suggest that the gaze that the mobility of the car evokes in the drivers and passengers – and, by implication, the audience – is as dynamic as the spatiality of the car that Kiarostami invokes.

Mobilizing the Look

In *Life and Nothing More*, Kiarostami emphatically provides a multiplicity of looks in and from the car, in various directions and with different durations. From early on in the film, Kiarostami’s camera captures the driver and the passenger (the father and son in the story) in the act of observation, lingering on their respectively curious and fixed looks out of the window, into the geography through which the car passes (see

Figures 2.5-6). Subsequently, Kiarostami's camera takes the place of those observing eyes and rests its own gaze in the direction of the character's looks (see Figures 2.7-8).



Figure 2.5. *Life and Nothing More*.



Figure 2.6. *Life and Nothing More*.

So far, Kiarostami's technique of shot construction adheres to a classic method of establishing cinematic points of view. However, as the film goes on, Kiarostami complicates the process of identification with such implied subjective points of view by multiplying the shots of the onlookers and their (intended) view-points and, further, interchanging between them irrespective of their logical sequence. Moreover, Kiarostami complicates the process of visual identification by inserting shots that cannot be realistically associated with any of the characters' points of view. For instance, the camera's long take and stable position in (figure 2.8), continuing uninterrupted for 38 seconds, comes across as an impossible view-point for the driver, who cannot possibly be looking sideways while driving for such an extended period.

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Such a comprehension ignores the indications of subjective referentiality that the combination of cinematic techniques – the sequence of editing (the scene directly follows figure 2.6), the position of the camera, and the development of the narrative – provide in the first place.



Figure 2.7. *Life and Nothing More.*



Figure 2.8. *Life and Nothing More.*

The uncertainty that follows sets Kiarostami's viewers free from developing a strong sense of identification with the characters on the screen. One gets the impression that, towards the middle of the film, it becomes hardly possible to associate a scene definitely with the driver's, the passenger's or simply the camera's gaze. For instance, 67 minutes into the film, where Kiarostami provides a long take looking forward onto the road (Figure 2.9), continuing for 100 seconds, his camera's look is completely severed from a specific subjective position and stands on its own. Such long looks into the landscape embrace at least three positions of spectatorship: the driver, the passenger, and the camera itself. The viewer is prompted to assume the look of a fixed camera in a mobile car, which, at the same time, is not entirely foreign

to that of the driver or the passenger. Upholding such varying – but not necessarily dissimilar – spectatorial positions, the system of automobility emerges as embodying the camera’s gaze in Kiarostami’s cars.



Figure 2.9. *Life and Nothing More*.

Kiarostami builds an interdependent system of mobility, the visual language of which is developed in alignment with its techniques of spatial movement. In contrast to such methods for generating cinematic movement as the handheld camera and fast editing, Kiarostami’s effects of mobility are developed mainly by fixing his camera to a slow moving car and fixating its gaze onto objects in motion. Kiarostami attunes his camera to the car’s interior stillness. In *Ten*, Kiarostami’s two fixed cameras remain focused symmetrically on the driver and the passenger, while capturing random scenes of the street in motion through the side windows. Kiarostami’s sparse use of editing in these scenes has the effect of further fixating the viewers’ eyes on the two characters, and attuning them to the specific pace and aesthetics of the car/camera’s mobility. Most notably, the first scene in *Ten*, a single take with the fixed camera focused on the passenger (the son in the story), continues for 16 minutes without a cut, move, zoom, or change in the focus (Figure 2.10). In this way, Kiarostami’s viewer is propelled from the start to adjust to the film’s system of mobility and to assimilate its regime of visibility.

It might initially seem paradoxical and confusing that a filmmaker persistently produces movement by deploying an incessantly wandering car in order to eventually provide conditions of fixity – in a way, immobility. Asked about the function of still imagery in his cinema, Kiarostami is eloquent and explicit in his response to Jean Luc Nancy:

I'm increasingly convinced of this image's ability to call things up powerfully, of the way it allows the spectator to enter it deeply and come up with a personal interpretation. But in the shots where there's motion, where one element enters at one point and exits at another, there's less concentration, the viewer's attention cannot remain mobilized. It's like going on a trip. I cross the main hall of a train station and I walk past hundreds of people. But the only person I'll remember is the traveler who'll sit across from me, when I'll have time and take a good look at this person. Perhaps I'll have walked past him or her before, but I won't have had the time to concentrate my attention on this person. Now the motionlessness lets me look at this person fixedly, like an image. And then my ability to construe things is set in motion. The details of the face, other faces that it calls up will start taking shape in my mind. In fact, just as I'm settling down like a camera, this person is arranged like a subject and becomes fixed like a still image. It makes me think of Bresson's camera, which allows this time for *fixations*. (Nancy, 2001, p. 87; emphasis in original)

By creating conditions of fixity in mobility, Kiarostami mobilizes the looks in two opposite ways. On the one hand, arrested in the fixed frame, Kiarostami's viewers are provoked to look sharply at the centre of the image, interrogate it in depth and read it carefully. Having kept their looks fixed on the faces of the drivers and passengers, the viewers gradually become "more aware of the subtle cartography of the almost imperceptible gestures, movements, and facial expressions" of the bodies held to the car's seats, and start to engage emotionally with the image (Grønstad, 2013, p. 27). On the other hand, as fleeting sights of the everyday street go by in the depth of the image, framed by the car's side windows, Kiarostami's fixed camera produces a plethora of light, unfocused, fast, and inattentive looks that linger over and beyond the centre of the image and supplement – one might say, free – the viewer's otherwise captivated gaze. Such a rich regime of looks is activated in complete alignment with the car's system of movement, and highlights the effects of its mobility.

Indeed, mobility and fixity do not stand in contrast to each other, once the relational nature of the notion of mobility itself is taken into account. In other words, one cannot approach mobility without endorsing the 'immobilities' that it entails. As Jörg Beckmann explains, one is never just "at rest" or solely "on the move" in

conditions of mobility, but constantly oscillates between “various movements and non-movements” created through mechanical or digital means (2004, p. 85). He writes, “the body is arrested in the driver’s seat while the person commutes to work, and the net-surfer stays at home while the virtual self roams cyberspace. Who can say how mobile these travellers are? Who can say if they are movers or the moved?” (Beckmann, 2004, p. 85) In describing the co-existence of mobility and fixity in such conditions of being “mobile without necessarily performing movement”, Beckman draws attention to the concept of ‘motility’: “Motility means neither immobility nor mobility, it describes the motile stages where people are physically, virtually or residentially not quite at rest and not quite on the move” (Beckmann, 2004, p. 85).



Figure 2.10. *Ten*.

Not only do the bodily posture of the inhabitants of a moving car (the driver and passengers) resonate with the implications of motility, but the regime of their looks also directly responds to conditions of motility. The practice of driving itself relies on a complex and expanded field of vision, comprised of looks that differ in intensity, temporality, and fixedness. The driver’s eyes respond to “shifting modes of vision and attentiveness” while driving, as they are trained to simultaneously look in different directions and be alert to the visual information available on different surfaces – such as the rear view mirror and the side view mirror (Adey, et al., 2012, pp. 173-179). This regime of looks in a car gets even more complicated when a passenger accompanies the driver and demands his partial visual attention. The visual regime associated with automobility therefore is based on “extensive periods of engagement and observation”, enacted through sharp and focused looks, in

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combination with situations of “distracted attention” that entail looks that are indirect, averted, and which hover beyond the direct field of vision directly available to the driver (Adey, et al., 2012, pp. 173-179). Kiarostami builds upon the operative regime of looks in the car in order to create a visual language of shifting gazes.

To further explicate the principles guiding the looks in Kiarostami’s car scenes, I want to turn to Negar Mottahedeh’s (2008) description of the ‘averted gaze’ in Kiarostami’s cinema. Kiarostami’s application of the principle of the averted gaze, Mottahedeh believes, concerns the specific “commandments of looking” in Iranian cinema that abandon the direct male-female exchange of gazes and ask for “visual modesty” (2008, pp. 8-10). In her analysis, she draws heavily on Hamid Naficy’s analyses regarding the operative logic of an “Islamicate gaze theory”, present in Iranian cinema, which propounds adopting an “averted or veiled look” on the principles of the “hermeneutics of modesty”, propagated in Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979 (Naficy, 2012, pp. 106-107). By responding directly to the requirements of a modest gaze, Mottahedeh explains the ways in which Kiarostami is able to not only evade censorship, but also create a visual language of “averted” and “unfocused looks”, which, through its distinct system of shot construction, effectively counters “the ideological function of suture” and undoes “the voyeurism embedded in the conventions of dominant cinema” (2008, pp. 121-126).

To explain the mechanism of the averted look in Kiarostami’s films, Mottahedeh provides a careful and illuminating analysis of a particular car scene in *Through the Olive Trees*, and explains the ways in which the intended effect of aversion is produced in accordance with the technology and aesthetics of mobility. Although Mottahedeh’s analysis is not particularly focused on cars, I want to establish its significance for my argument by briefly recapitulating her insightful analysis, and stressing the instrumentality of the car in the construction of such visual aversion.

The aforementioned scene begins with a fixed shot of the right (passenger) side window of a car (figure 2.11). It follows from the information the audience receives in the previous scene that Shiva plans to step into her car and drive off.

The camera enters the truck with Shiva. But it does not shift. The camera acts as if it has come in the driver’s side door, lens first, and remained there facing the passenger side window. The car moves forward, so we assume that Shiva has taken her place in the driver’s seat facing forward and that she is once

again driving the car. But this time, when the car moves, the camera resists the conventional point-of-view association with the look of the driver (or the car). Rather than look ahead with Shiva as she drives forward, the camera looks out the side window at the greenery passing along the roadside. It maintains an ‘averted gaze’. (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 122)



Figure 2.11. *Through the Olive Trees*.



Figure 2.12. *Through the Olive Trees*.



Figure 2.13. *Through the Olive Trees*.

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On the way, the car passes two young passers-by and the fixed camera momentarily captures them. Keeping the camera's fixed gaze on the passenger's window all along, the car stops, moves backwards, and stops in front of the two youngsters as the camera frames their faces. At this moment Shiva, the driver whom the viewer has not seen but whose presence is assumed, starts a conversation with the two boys (figure 2.12).

Throughout the conversation between Shiva and the village children, the camera looks out the window on the passenger's side. While we can now assume that the camera has adopted Shiva's look as she looks at the boys outside the car's side window, the sequence refuses to provide the conventional reverse point-of-view shot from the perspective of the children looking at Shiva. This reverse point-of-view shot would consolidate this assumption on our part. That linkage fails to materialize, and as the car moves on again to its destination, the camera captures fields of green, children, and the villagers' new school tent in the side-view mirror, stubbornly maintaining its averted gaze. The camera never looks forward, not once. (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 124)

Throughout the sequence, the camera obstinately holds on to its initial position, capturing the two boys momentarily in the wing mirror as it moves ahead after that short break (figure 2.13). The viewer is provided with the possibility of adapting momentarily to the driver's potential fleeting look at that wing mirror. The driver's look steps in and out of the camera's steady position, and the viewer is prompted to simultaneously adjust the camera's look to that of the driver and to break that connection as the technology of automobility demands. Mottahedeh's analysis explains clearly how Kiarostami succeeds in "dissociating the camera from the look with which the narrative has identified" (2008, p. 125). Furthermore, it shows the ways in which such a process of dissociation is subsequently broken by the moments in which the unwavering camera adopts particular looks (of the driver, for instance) when the combination of the logic of driving and the film's narrative demand. Kiarostami's camera therefore neither rejects nor establishes firm positions of identification, but rather creates an interdependent and shifting regime of looks. By stubbornly maintaining an averted gaze, it effectively assimilates the looks of the

driver, the passenger, and the viewer into the regime of looks particular to the technology of mobility.

Interestingly, the principle of the averted gaze corresponds closely to the way looks perform in social interactions in the car. Within the car, it seems that there exists no obligation to look in a certain way or in a certain direction in order to hold a serious discussion or sustain a strong emotional bond. Mutual engagement in socialities maintained in the car does not rely on reciprocal eye contact, as people do not normally exchange views by exchanging gazes, but rather look in different directions while their bodies are seated facing forward. Yet social bonds created in the car do not lose strength as people avoid looking directly at each other and let their looks disperse. Such non-face-to-face conversations, sustained through non-reciprocal looks, necessitate a method of cinematic address different from the established format of shots and reverse-shots. Kiarostami pays particular attention to the regime of looks in a car, wisely adapting his cinematic style to its dynamics to produce a creative, but modest, visual language in accord with the terms of mobility.

By being attentive to the dynamics of mobility, Kiarostami not only tactically finds a way to evade control over looks in Iranian cinema – the result of which, some have argued, has been the absence of the female gaze – but also subverts the power relations contained in the practice of looking in, and at, films, as constructed historically in cinema by evoking gendered, sexualized, and desiring regimes of gazes (Mottahedeh, 2008, pp. 8-12). Although the dissociative and autonomous character of the gaze in Kiarostami's films, and the critique of the language of cinema that it supports, is a point already made in film analyses, I believe that the instrumentality of the car in this construction has been mostly overlooked. Stephen Bransford, for example, suggests that Kiarostami's "objective" approach to visuality is conditioned by avoiding elements encouraging the audience to "identify subjectively" with his characters, and could lead to either completely doing away with the entire system of cinematic identification, or opening up "the possibility for identification with *all* of the characters" in his films (Bransford, 2003). Similarly Jean-Luc Nancy believes that, in Kiarostami's films, "we are not dealing with sight – seeing or voyeuristic, fantasizing or hallucinating, ideative or intuitive – but solely with looking: it is a matter of opening the seeing to something real, toward which the look carries itself and which, in turn, the look allows to be carried back to itself" (2001, p. 18). It is by

studying the visual language of looks, enacted through the mobility of the car that one can best understand the mechanism through which Kiarostami establishes such a different regime of looks. The objective and autonomous essence of looks in Kiarostami's cinema, in other words, is closely related to and depends upon the car's system of mobility.

An Embodied Cinema of Everyday Interaction

In addition to issues of spatiality and visuality, Kiarostami's use of the car connects to his methods and tactics of filmmaking. In his use of cars, Kiarostami not only debases socially and culturally constructed regimes of spatiality and visuality, but also deregulates the regimes of control to which the processes of cinematic production are subject. The mobility of the car influences Kiarostami's direct presence or absence during the shooting, and determines the levels of control that he is willing to exert on the acting (of mostly non-actors) and editing. During the shooting of *Taste of Cherry*, it was Kiarostami himself who sat in the car next to his characters, occupied the seat of the driver or the passenger, and played as the unseen party to the discussions carried out in the car. Each time Mr Badii discusses his suicide plan with a passenger, he is actually talking to Kiarostami and, in effect, being directed by his responses in this process. Conversely, each time a passenger responds to Mr Badii's demands, he is actually responding to Kiarostami's role-playing as the suicidal Mr Badii behind the wheel. The confined spatiality of the car and the averted system of gazes that the specific shot-reverse-shot construction of mobility enacts aid Kiarostami in eventually editing himself out of the film's narrative.

In *Ten*, Kiarostami achieves different effects by, conversely, absenting himself almost entirely from the shooting site. Kiarostami fixed his cameras in the car and sent his cast off to the streets, only to watch the recorded material and select scenes later, when the short journeys of the car were over. By absenting himself from the shooting set, Kiarostami deliberately limited his control over the filming process. He simply let things happen and waited until the editing stage to have a say over what had already been recorded (Andrew, 2005; Krzych, 2010). This way, however, Kiarostami does not simply grant a position of control to his driver, but rather mobilizes the notion of control so as to build a complex system of affective engagement. Even though the driver/actor entertains a certain level of autonomy in the absence of Kiarostami's direct directorial control on the streets, the

unpredictability of the everyday flow of life impedes upon such autonomy. Both the car's movement and the conventions held within it are influenced by unanticipated happenings on busy streets. Stuck in the system of automobility, on several occasions in *Ten*, Mania has to negotiate other drivers on the streets, ask for the help of a police officer at a busy junction, and argue for parking space with the shop owner who does not want her car parked in front of his shop (figure 2.14).



Figure 2.14. *Ten*. Mania negotiates for her parking space

Detecting such dynamics of control unfolding on screen, the viewer is drawn to affectively participate in the act of driving and urban navigation, over which no one seems to have full control. The film's "affective economy" (Orgeron, 2008, p. 197) is enacted through such an embodied process of driving:

Engaged as she is in an evolving form of self-authorship, Mania's mobility itself is a critical, physical expression of her attempts at control, and there is an undeniable, palpably realist pleasure in seeing this control express itself randomly. Allowing for the uncontrolled, in other words, is Mania's principle form of control. (Orgeron, 2008, p. 197)

Furthermore, the combination of the semi-autonomous driver, the fixed camera, and Kiarostami's absence from the filming set gives rise to numerous moments that in conventional cinema would have been regarded as residual and unimportant. Kiarostami's fixed camera highlights the facial gestures of the driver and the

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passenger not only during conversations in the car, but also in moments when no significant action happens. Kiarostami's emphasis on residual everydayness is most emphatic at one point in *Ten*, when, after Mania parks her car and leaves to buy a cake, the camera remains as it was in the car, focused on the passenger (Mania's sister) waiting for Mania to return (see Fig. 2.15). Viewers might feel uncomfortable watching these uneventful moments, but they do not feel unreasonably compelled to do so because they can situate these moments of waiting as a segment of the practice of driving, which is what the whole film is about. Kiarostami's car therefore casts an eye on "what people actually do when they are 'doing nothing'" (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p. 4), and therefore accounts for the everyday in its most trivial, familiar, uneventful, and even tedious form.



Figure 2.15. *Ten*: Residual footage

By being attentive to such residual spaces, times, and practices, Kiarostami builds an embodied and affective unit of mobility that shifts along with the rhythms of everyday life and engages with "those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day" (Highmore, 2002, p. 1). Accordingly, the mobility of the car, coupled with the absence of the director, provides the conditions for Kiarostami's fiction to join the flow of everyday life on streets. Kiarostami's cars do not interrupt the everyday through the mechanism of film's production; neither do they build a simulation of the everyday in fictive or documentary formats. Instead, they join the everyday in its blend of documentation and fiction, absence and presence, and action and re-action.

Kiarostami does not simply show the reality of everyday life on the streets, but actively engages in producing, transforming, and mobilizing the interactive spatial and visual regime that constitutes the everyday.

Everyday life is imbued with different forms of embodiment that shape our sensorial relation to space. Embodiment concerns the notion that the relationship of a subject to its world is primarily lived rather than rationally understood, that perception is always situated in the bodily orientation towards the world (Dant, 2004, p. 71). Indeed, the lived experience of the system of automobility is not foreign to the concept of embodiment. The experience of driving is an embodied experience, in which the bodily and cognitive faculties of the driver and car interact, and build one conjoined sensorial unit. Tim Dant (2004) draws on Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of Perception to explain the ways in which the car becomes incorporated into the driver's body as an extension, just as a blind person's stick forms an extension of his/her body. The driver establishes a perception of the car's dimensions and capabilities, just like he has of his own body. Skilled drivers never think while driving, but rather feel the driving experience through the car, and they do not wait a second to think whether or not they (their car) can pass through a certain gate, for instance.

As a result of a repetitive process of everyday interaction, drivers extend their bodily perception to include the body of the car, situating it as an extension to their own body. Through the process of habituation, as Tim Dant explains, driving turns into "an embodied skill that becomes a taken-for-granted way of moving through space" (2004, p. 74). As a result, the driver's experience of being in the world – his sense of speed, for instance – "becomes a skill embodied through the vehicle, not only its dials and controls but also its sounds and vibrations" (Dant, 2004, p. 74). For drivers, the experience of driving a car then becomes "an aspect of bodily experience that they carry into all their other perceptions and engagements with the material world in a way that they take for granted and treat as unremarkable" (Dant, 2004, p. 74). Dant (2004) suggests that one cannot dissociate the driver's agency from the car, but has to acknowledge an embodied concept of driver-car as performative in the act of driving. "The car does not simply afford the driver mobility or have independent agency as an actant", he writes, "it enables a range of humanly embodied actions

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available only to the driver-car” (Dant, 2004, p. 74). This assembled social body then performs on the level of the everyday:

The assemblage of the driver-car produces the possibility of action that, once it becomes routine, habitual and ubiquitous, becomes an ordinary form of embodied social action. People who have become familiar with the driver-car through participating in the assemblage become oriented to their social world, partly at least, through the forms of action of which it is capable. Social institutions – legal systems, the conventions of driving, traffic management – develop to embed the coordinated habits of driver-cars within the social fabric. The use of cars is not then simply functional, a matter of convenience, nor is it reducible to individual, conscious decision. Like the wearing of clothes or following conventions of politeness, the actions of the driver-car have become a feature of the flow of daily social life that cannot simply be removed or phased out (like dangerous drivers or leaded petrol). (Dant, 2004, pp. 74-75)

Dant here directs attention to the assemblage of the driver-car as an embodied social being, an ordinary practitioner of everyday life. Such a conceptualization of embodiment is crucial for understanding the lived experience of driving as socially and culturally embedded in the everyday. The assemblage of the driver-car is therefore subject to various forms of social control, and, at the same time, resistant to those structures of domination as a result of its endless repository of bodily moves, expressions, and performativities. By aligning his cinema to the technology of mobility, Kiarostami not only presents a real and honest portrayal of the everyday dynamics of driving, but also creates an embodied unit of cultural influence in itself. He orients his audience’s affective mode of engagement with the film to the forms of spatiality and visuality manifest in a driver-car assemblage. Kiarostami’s drivers, passengers, camera, and filming techniques interact in creating an embodied concept of a driver-passenger-camera-filmmaker-car. The functioning of this assemblage is central to the affects of everydayness and non-visibility that Kiarostami’s cinema pertains to.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the car as a spatio-temporality that offers possibilities for non-visible modes of presence on the streets, possibilities to remain unnoticed and unobtrusive within the ebb and flow of the everyday. I have examined the car as portrayed and employed in Abbas Kiarostami's films, where the car encapsulates an embodied social agent that performs in accordance with the mundane, recurrent, and inconspicuous practices of the everyday, remaining unobtrusive and attuned to its multiple rhythms. In this way, Kiarostami not only succeeds in depicting the everyday, but also in transmitting the process of cinematic production to the experience of the everyday. The car therefore functions as a means of engaging with the everyday city during filming, facilitating production on the streets in a way that does not disrupt the everyday flow – as conventional filming procedures would – but joins it and lends itself to its multiple uncertainties and trivialities.

In this way, I have also argued that the car is instrumental to the cinematic style of Kiarostami. I have explained the ways in which, with the use of a mobile car, Kiarostami deconstructs the conventional spatial and visual regimes of signification, through the enactment of a relational sense of place-making and an averted regime of looks. In doing so, he not only succeeds in complying with the rules and regulations of depiction in Iranian cinema, but also cunningly creates a distinct aesthetics of mobility that subverts the premises based on which those regulations are made. In this cinema of mobility, the behavioural, sensorial, and cognitive experience of Kiarostami's drivers and passengers closely embody the mobility of the car and the camera that it carries. Kiarostami creates an averted regime of gazes that corresponds closely to the mobility of the car. Kiarostami's long shots from the front window of a moving car effectively make "camera and car seem interchangeable" (Rosenbaum & Saeed-Vafa, 2003, p. 22). In addition to the camera, Kiarostami and his filming crew get attuned to this assembled body, acquiring its habits and embodying its functions in the process of filming. In other words, the filming technology joins the embodied driver-passenger-camera-car to form a comprehensive assembled social being. Analysing the car in *Ten*, Krzych refers to habitual, sensorial, and embodied influences that the car, driver, passenger, and the (digital) camera have on each other in generating "auto-motive conversations", a "form of connection between human and technology that entails no fundamental point of divide" (2010, p. 34).

CHAPTER 2

Kiarostami's cinema therefore enhances the car's mobility by stretching the process of embodiment (of the driver-car) to include the cinematic apparatus. What follows is a car-driver-passenger-camera-director that joins, rather than disrupts, the everyday and orients the viewers' modes of engagement with space and visibility. The embodied car-driver-passenger-camera forms an in-between state of presence that remains unobtrusive in its performance on the street and in its cinematic depiction on the screen. Kiarostami is only able to pose social and cultural critique by orienting the affective mode of the audience's engagement with the film towards the embodied unit of a driver-passenger-camera-filmmaker-car.