



"*The Mirror* is best characterized as two films. The first is this seemingly simple narrative of a girl, lost without her mother, looking to make her way home. This film looks at Tehran through Mina's eyes. The second film contained within *The Mirror* is everything that occurs after the moment when the fourth wall is broken and Mina declares that she no longer wants to act. The second film looks for Mina as she careens through the Tehran traffic making her way home. By the time the second film takes place, the viewer is no longer certain whether Mina's attempt to get home on her own is a "real" problem faced by the young actress or that the actress continues to play this role, aware that the film crew has followed her long after her stated desire to leave the production. The second film, as it were, analogizes the difficulties of making a film with the limitations of mobility in the metropolis."

– From Sara Saljoughi, "Jafar Panahi's *The Mirror*: On Political Film in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema," *Film International*, vol. 69, no. 12 (2014).

The Mirror Iran, 1997 (95 mins)

Written and directed by
Jafar Panahi

Cast:
Mina Mohammad-Khani
Kazem Mojdehi
Naser Omuni
M. Shirzad
T. Samadpour

Production: Jafar Panahi and
Vahid Nikkhah-Azzad

Cinematography: Farzad Jadat

Editing: Jafar Panahi

Assistant Director: Hassan
Yektapanah

Sound: Mohammad Reza Delpak
and Yadollah Najafi

Language: Persian

"One of the most profound shifts that occur after the film splits into its own double lies in the fact that we no longer have access to Mina's gaze: it has been unshackled from the camera. There are no longer any point-of-view shots, she no longer appears in close-up and she is frequently obscured by objects – cars, buses, trucks, trees, people, walls – and at times she is completely hidden from view for extended periods of screen time. The camera tries to track her movements from a car; however, its capacity to do so is severely limited by the heavy traffic, one-way streets and large squares, whose radiating alleys and avenues siphon and disperse the vehicles in multiple directions. At one intersection, the car is stopped by a traffic cop. Although we can't hear his voice, his gestures suggest that he is asking to see a filming permit, which someone in the car produces. The cop then directs the car down a small one-way street, with Mina nowhere in sight. Once again, we are reminded of the act of filming, the conditions of production and the state regulation of the industry.

Just as the presumed innocence of children in post-revolutionary Iranian films grants them a high degree of mobility through a range of social spaces, as a pedestrian Mina can move through the streets with a high degree of fluidity. In contrast, the camera is effectively shackled to another apparatus: the motor vehicle. The camera is still subject to limitations and restrictions defined by the trajectory of the roads, the traffic flow, the presence of traffic cops and the requirement of a permit. Mina moves with fewer restrictions, allowing her to occasionally slip away from the camera's and spectator's gaze. Since Mina is still wearing her microphone, we continue to hear her voice and the sounds around her, even when she disappears from view. On one level, this provides a meditation on the limited and limiting possibilities of the camera in Iranian cinema, which cannot be freely omniscient. On another, it effectively splits sound and image, dividing our sensorium.

Each time Mina slips from our gaze, our attention is split between seeing and hearing. Gone is the harmonious focalization evident in the scene on the bus. Mina's voice still serves as our anchor; however, given the difficulty of maintaining close proximity to her, we might struggle to ascertain the source of the other sounds around her. Occasionally, the microphone falters, causing the sound to cut off and on. As such, the film begins to train us to both listen closely and also to search the image carefully: the camera alone cannot be relied upon to direct and focus our gaze."

– Adapted from Michelle Langford, *Allegory in Iranian Cinema: The Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

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