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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Representation of Power Discourse in Iranian Cinema: Language, Silence, and the Body in *Taste of Cherry*

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Abstract

This qualitative study employs multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine how power is represented in Abbas Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry. Integrating Michel Foucault's conception of power relations, Norman Fairclough's (1995) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Peircean-Barthesian semiotics, the research investigates how speech, silence, and the body function as discursive and visual-semiotic elements within the film's narrative structure. Through close analysis of six key scenes selected for their semantic density and discursive tension, the study interprets the body as a signifier of ideological struggle and silence as a mechanism of resistance embedded in power relations. The findings reveal that Kiarostami constructs a decentralized configuration of power: the omission of dialogue and the visual presence of the body actively destabilize conventional models of domination. Moreover, ambiguity and narrative suspension function not merely as stylistic devices but as discursive strategies that foreground agency, exclusion, and biopolitical tension within Iranian art cinema. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how cinematic form itself becomes a site of discursive struggle and a means of reconfiguring hegemonic power.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, power discourse, Foucault, semiotics, silence, body, Taste of Cherry

Introduction

Discursive power in cinema is most legible when it speaks—through command, ideology, or institutional voice. But what happens when it falls silent? In Abbas Kiarostami's minimalist filmmaking, power does not manifest through direct authority or visible institutional presence. Instead, it circulates through hesitation, strategic silence, spatial distance, and corporeal

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stillness. This displacement raises a central theoretical question: How can discursive power be recognized and analyzed when it operates not through overt domination but through restraint, fragmentation, and indirection? In such contexts, absence may function as articulation, and silence may operate as a structured discursive strategy that simultaneously enacts authority and enables resistance.

Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry (1997) offers a compelling site for examining this problem. The film follows Mr. Badii's search for someone to bury his body should he take his own life—a journey structured through encounters with a soldier, a cleric, and an an old Turkish man (a taxidermist). Beneath its deceptively simple narrative surface, the film stages subtle negotiations of ethical injunction, belief, refusal, and bodily presence. These negotiations, however, elude isolated analyses of dialogue, silence, or visual composition alone. Rather, they emerge from the dynamic interplay of these elements within the film's formal organization.

This article therefore addresses the following research question: How is power discourse constructed and represented in Taste of Cherry through the interconnected components of speech, silence, and the body? Conceptualizing these elements as interdependent discursive resources rather than discrete aesthetic devices, the study argues that the film reconfigures power—not as visible domination but as a dispersed network enacted through linguistic exchange, strategic silence, and corporeal presence. From this perspective, the minimalist aesthetic does not signify narrative absence or evasion. Instead, it constitutes a structured negotiation of authority, resistance, and tension concerning the value and governance of life itself. By foregrounding this interplay, the article illuminates how cinematic form becomes a site where power is simultaneously enacted, contested, and rearticulated under conditions shaped by social and institutional constraint.

Research Questions

Guided by an integrated framework of discourse analysis and semiotics, this study investigates the representation of power discourse in Abbas Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry through the following questions:

1. How do verbal interactions between Mr. Badii and the other characters construct relations of authority, legitimacy, and persuasion?
2. How does silence function as a communicative strategy within the film's narrative and interactional structure?
3. How is the body visually represented in key scenes, and in what ways does this representation shape agency, vulnerability, and resistance?
4. How do speech, silence, and bodily presence interact to produce a layered configuration of power in the film?

Literature Review

Scholarship at the intersection of film studies, critical linguistics, and semiotics has increasingly attended to power structures within auteur cinema. In the context of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, researchers have noted that socio-political constraints necessitate indirect discursive tools—such as metaphor and silence—to navigate expressive limitations. Yet despite extensive scholarship on Abbas Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry (1997), a significant gap persists: no study has systematically applied a unified theoretical framework that integrates Foucauldian power relations (including biopolitics and the docile body), Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Peircean-Barthesian body semiotics to analyze the interdependent triad of speech, silence, and the body. Core concepts central to this study—institutional discourse, language as a site of struggle, biopolitics, the semiotic gap, the docile body, and the death drive—have thus never been operationalized together in a single, scene-based analysis of this film.

Existing studies offer valuable but fragmented insights. Tabarraee (2012), in his foundational dissertation Silence Studies in the Cinema and the Case of Abbas Kiarostami, provides a comprehensive taxonomy of silence as a cinematic device. While this work establishes silence as a serious object of inquiry, its focus remains on categorizing types of silence across Kiarostami's oeuvre rather than offering a granular, scene-based examination of how silence, speech, and the body dynamically interact within micro-level power relations in a single film. Similarly, Khosrowjah (2022), in Abbas Kiarostami and Iranian National Cinema, identifies aesthetic strategies of omission and silence in Kiarostami's work. Although Khosrowjah connects these techniques to political realities, his analysis remains largely descriptive and historical, lacking the rigorous, text-level application of CDA required to unpack the discursive mechanisms linking cinematic form to power.

Focusing specifically on Taste of Cherry, Tabarraee (2014), in "Abbas Kiarostami: A Cinema of Silence," interprets silence as a poetic and aesthetic hallmark of the director's style. While compelling, this interpretation treats silence primarily as a thematic or expressive device rather than analyzing it as an active discursive practice structurally intertwined with speech and bodily representation. Gyenge (2017), in "Subjects and Objects of the Embodied Gaze: Abbas Kiarostami and the Real of the Individual Perspective," employs phenomenological and psychoanalytic concepts to explore the role of the gaze and the body. Despite its theoretical depth, this study prioritizes philosophical abstraction concerning perspective and the Real over a concrete, systematic analysis of how bodily semiotics and sparse dialogue collaboratively construct power discourse in specific scenes.

Other scholarship addresses related but distinct aspects. Nasiri Hanis, Shayganfar, and Alasti (2020), in "Metafilm and the Self-Other Relation in Abbas Kiarostami's Cinema," explore power dynamics through the lens of self-reflexivity and the "Other." However, their

Levinasian ethical framework, while insightful, does not fully integrate the physical dimension of the body as a central semiotic signifier within Foucauldian power discourse. Ahmadzadeh Bayani, Asadi Amjad, and Akhavan (2019), in their comparative semiotic study of power in Taste of Cherry and Heiner Müller's Hamletmachine, draw on Bourdieu's anthropological literary theory. Yet their focus remains on comparative dramaturgy and class-based symbolic capital, overlooking the critical interplay between speech, silence, and the body as co-constitutive elements of discursive power. Esfandiari, Jamshidi, and Baniardalan (2019), applying Laura Mulvey's theory of the aesthetics of stillness, analyze the dialectic of stillness and movement in Kiarostami's cinema. While this provides valuable insight into visual temporality, it does not address how these aesthetic choices function as semiotic components of power dynamics between characters.

Consequently, the identified research gap is both methodological and analytical. Previous studies have examined speech, silence, or the body in isolation; focused on aesthetic or philosophical descriptions; or employed theoretical frameworks—phenomenology, psychoanalysis, Bourdieusian sociology, Levinasian ethics, Mulveyan aesthetics—that, while valuable, do not provide a robust, methodical integration of Foucauldian power theory (including biopolitics and the docile body), Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, and Peircean-Barthesian semiotics of the body. This study directly addresses this gap by offering a systematic, scene-based analysis of how speech, silence, and the body interact dynamically in Taste of Cherry to construct a decentralized configuration of power, thereby providing the comprehensive and interdisciplinary methodological framework absent from the current literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework that combines Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and semiotic approaches to the body derived from Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce. This triangulation provides a multidimensional analytical lens for examining how speech, silence, and bodily presence participate in the construction of power discourse. The framework systematically defines a set of core concepts—institutional discourse, language as a site of struggle, biopolitics, the semiotic gap, the docile body, and the death drive—which will be operationalized in the subsequent scene-based analysis.

- **Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and the Body**

Michel Foucault reconceptualizes power not as a centralized, repressive apparatus but as a dispersed, capillary network of relations embedded in everyday practices, institutions, and discourses (Foucault, 1977). Power, in this view, is exercised rather than possessed; it is productive, generating knowledge, subjectivities, and what Foucault terms "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1980). Central to this perspective is the power/knowledge dyad: discourses do not

merely reflect reality but constitute it, defining what can be said, thought, and legitimized within a given historical context.

Two Foucauldian concepts are particularly pertinent to this study. First, disciplinary power produces the "docile body" (Foucault, 1977, p. 135)—a body that is subjected, used, transformed, and improved through subtle techniques of training and surveillance. The docile body is not merely passive; it functions as a site where power is inscribed and, potentially, contested. Second, biopolitics (or biopower) refers to the governance of life at the population level: the regulation of birth, death, health, and sexuality (Foucault, 1978). Biopolitics foregrounds how modern power operates through the administration of life itself, rendering discourses on life, death, and normality central to social control.

Importantly, Foucault insists that resistance is immanent to power relations; it emerges from within the same networks that seek to regulate conduct (Foucault, 1978). This axiom enables the framework to treat silence, stasis, or withdrawal not as mere absence but as potential forms of micro-resistance.

- **Fairclough: Discourse as Social Practice**

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the methodological architecture for deconstructing discourse at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1995a). At the textual level, analysis focuses on linguistic and semiotic features—lexicon, grammar, cohesion, and turn-taking. At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examines the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. At the level of social practice, discourse is situated within broader ideological formations and power relations.

Two interrelated concepts from Fairclough are essential for this study. First, "institutional discourse" refers to the language practices that enact and reproduce the authority of social institutions such as medicine, law, and religion (Fairclough, 1995b). Such discourse positions speakers within hierarchical frameworks and legitimizes specific knowledge claims. Second, "language as a site of struggle" conceptualizes discourse as a terrain where competing ideologies and social forces clash (Fairclough, 1995a). In this view, linguistic choices are never neutral; they constitute investments in hegemonic or counter-hegemonic projects.

This study extends Fairclough's model by treating silence as a constitutive textual element—a meaningful absence that participates in discursive practice. Silence, like speech, can enact power, signify resistance, or mark the limits of the sayable.

- **Body Semiotics: The Body as a Signifying System**

The third pillar, body semiotics, integrates the theoretical insights of Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce to interpret the body as a complex system of signs. Drawing on Peirce's

triadic typology (1931–1958)—the icon (resemblance), index (causal connection), and symbol (conventional rule)—the study analyzes physical presence, gesture, and movement as vital signifiers. This perspective posits that the body in Kiarostami's cinema functions as an active discursive element. Building on Barthes's (1977) notion of the "gap" (le vide) or "blank space," the framework extends this semiotic principle to the analysis of both visual composition and auditory silence, treating these absences as meaningful, signifying elements.

Furthermore, the concept of the "death drive" is incorporated as a semiotic and discursive construct rather than a psychoanalytic postulate. Within the film's visual discourse, the death drive is understood as a signifying configuration—a constellation of iconic and indexical signs (stillness, the excavated pit, the absent gaze) that point toward self-annihilation, the cessation of meaning, and the refusal of biopolitical imperatives. This usage aligns with approaches in film semiotics that treat the death drive as a cultural trope inscribed in cinematic form (cf. Mulvey, 2006; Metz, 1982), rather than a clinical diagnosis of character psychology. By integrating this concept, the framework gains a precise vocabulary for analyzing the film's visual argument about the limits of agency and the critique of hegemonic discourses on life, without committing to a psychoanalytic ontology.

By synthesizing these three approaches, this research establishes a robust, multidimensional analytical foundation. It posits that power discourse in Taste of Cherry cannot be fully understood through dialogue alone; rather, it requires a holistic examination of the interplay among Foucault's capillary power and docile bodies, Fairclough's discourse as social struggle, and the semiotic significance of the body and strategic silence. This integrated framework directly equips the analysis to address the research questions concerning the interconnected roles of speech, silence, and the body.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and film semiotics. It does not employ quantitative content analysis; rather, it conducts an interpretive discourse–semiotic examination of selected cinematic scenes.

The methodological orientation is deductive: analytical categories are derived from an integrated theoretical framework consisting of Foucauldian power analytics, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, and Peircean–Barthesian semiotics. These frameworks provide the conceptual vocabulary through which speech, silence, and the body are examined as interrelated discursive formations.

The purpose of this methodological design is to ensure systematic alignment between abstract theoretical constructs and observable cinematic data, while maintaining a clear distinction between theoretical exposition and empirical analysis.

Data Selection and Corpus

The primary data consist of six purposively selected scenes from *Taste of Cherry* (1997). Scene selection followed three explicit criteria:

1. **Semantic Density** – richness in verbal and visual signification.
2. **Discursive Tension** – identifiable moments of negotiation, resistance, or authority formation.
3. **Representativeness** – coverage of the film's central interactions, aesthetic strategies, and character configurations.

The selected corpus totals approximately sixty minutes, representing more than half of the film's runtime. Each scene is identified in the Findings section by precise timestamp (hour:minute:second) to ensure transparency and verifiability.

No interpretive claims are made at this stage; this section defines only the scope and rationale of the corpus.

- **Analytical Procedure**

The analysis proceeded in three structured phases:

1. Scene-Based Observation and Data Extraction

Each selected scene underwent iterative close viewing (minimum ten viewings per scene). Four layers of empirical data were systematically recorded:

- Verbal Text: Verbatim transcription of dialogues, including pauses (measured in seconds), interruptions, and turn-taking patterns.
- Silence: Duration, placement, and interactional context of silent segments.
- Bodily Data: Posture, gesture, gaze direction, facial expression, and movement.
- Visual Composition: Framing, camera distance, angle, and spatial configuration.

This stage involved descriptive documentation only; no theoretical interpretation was applied during extraction.

2. Theoretically Grounded Coding

A structured coding framework was developed directly from the integrated theoretical pillars. Analytical codes were not generated inductively but derived from established conceptual categories.

Theoretical coding categories included:

- From Foucault: power/knowledge, biopolitics, resistance, disciplinary inscription, docile body.
- From Fairclough: institutional discourse, language as a site of struggle, lexical strategy, intertextuality, discursive gap.
- From Peirce and Barthes: icon, index, symbol, semiotic gap/blank space.

Each code was applied to discrete units of analysis (utterances, gestures, shots) using a theory-driven thematic approach. This procedure ensured that later interpretive claims would remain

anchored in previously defined theoretical constructs, directly addressing concerns about conceptual inconsistency.

3. Thematic Synthesis

In the final stage, coded units were grouped into higher-order analytical themes corresponding to the three central dimensions of the study:

- Language and institutional discourse
- Silence as discursive and semiotic practice
- The body as site of inscription and contestation

This synthesis enabled examination of how these dimensions interact within individual scenes while preserving analytic separation between theoretical definitions and empirical findings.

Operationalization of the Framework

To ensure methodological transparency, Table 1 summarizes how each selected scene was operationalized.

Each analytical claim in the Findings section is supported by at least one of the following forms of evidence:

- A verbatim, timestamped dialogue excerpt
- A description of a clearly observable visual configuration
- A referenced still frame (Appendix A)

This Operational linkage between theory, code, and cinematic evidence addresses concerns regarding insufficient validation of findings.

Scene (Timestamp)	Analytical Focus	Theoretical Tools Applied	Cinematic Evidence
1. Mr. Badii in the Pit (01:28:35)	Bodily Representation	Foucault: Docile Body, Biopolitics; Peirce: Icon, Index	Badii lies motionless in the excavated pit, arms at his sides and eyes open, facing upward. The framing is frontal and static, with no dialogue throughout the shot.
2. Silence in the Car (00:03:20)	Silence as Discursive Practice	Fairclough: Discursive Gap; Foucault: Power Relations	Extended silence lasting approximately four minutes, with no dialogue. The camera alternates between exterior urban and peripheral landscapes and Badii's face inside the car. Ambient environmental sound remains audible throughout.

3. Dialogue with the Afghan Cleric (00:48:02)	Institutional Religious Discourse	Fairclough: Institutional Discourse, Lexical Choice; Foucault: Power/Knowledge	The cleric invokes religious doctrine ("the human body is a trust from God"); Badii responds with minimal, evasive replies ("I know… I don't need advice"). Shot-reverse-shot structure with medium framing.
4. Interaction with the Young Soldier (00:23:13)	Discursive Negotiation and Bodily Resistance	Fairclough: Institutional Discourse; Foucault: Resistance (Immanent to Power); Peirce: Indexical Signs	The soldier avoids sustained eye contact, shifts posture repeatedly, and responds in fragmented, hesitant speech. His military uniform visually signals institutional affiliation. The camera maintains medium-distance framing.
5. Dialogue with the Taxidermist (01:02:40)	Embodied Counter-Discursive Vitality	Peirce: Icon, Index, Symbol; Foucault: Biopolitics, Counter-Discourse	The taxidermist employs expansive hand gestures, sustained eye contact, and continuous speech, embodying vitality. Badii remains seated with minimal movement and brief responses. Alternating medium shots frame the contrast.
6. Final Sequence (01:30:52)	Metacinematic Rupture	Barthes: Semiotic Gap; Fairclough: Intertextuality, Metadiscourse	Handheld color footage reveals the film crew and equipment, breaking the fourth wall. Non-diegetic music intrudes for the first time, and the visual texture shifts markedly from the preceding sequences.

Validity and Rigor

To ensure analytical rigor in this qualitative study, several strategies were implemented:

- Prolonged Engagement: The full film was viewed fifteen times; each selected scene underwent additional repeated viewings.
- Audit Trail: Coding sheets and analytic memos were maintained to document interpretive decisions.
- Theory Triangulation: Foucauldian, Faircloughan, and semiotic perspectives were applied to the same dataset to prevent mono-theoretical bias.

- Thick Description: The Findings section provides detailed, timestamped evidence enabling independent evaluation of interpretations.

The study does not claim statistical generalizability. Rather, it ensures internal coherence, transparency of procedure, and conceptual consistency between theoretical framework and empirical analysis.

Relationship to Research Questions

The methodological design directly corresponds to the four research questions:

- RQ1 (verbal interaction) → addressed through CDA-based textual analysis.
- RQ2 (silence) → addressed through analysis of discursive gaps and semiotic absence.
- RQ3 (body) → addressed through Foucauldian and Peircean semiotic decoding.
- RQ4 (interplay) → addressed through thematic synthesis across all three dimensions.

By operationalizing each theoretical construct at the level of timestamped cinematic evidence, the methodology ensures that interpretations in the Findings section emerge systematically from the defined analytical framework rather than from impressionistic reading.

Data Collection and Coding Framework

To maintain conceptual coherence between the theoretical framework and empirical findings, this study employs a structured coding framework that serves as an operational bridge between abstract concepts and observable cinematic elements. Building on the methodological design outlined above, this subsection details how the theoretical categories were translated into analytical tools applicable to the filmic text.

Coding Structure

A two-level coding system was implemented.

1. Descriptive Codes (Empirical Level)

These codes derive directly from observable cinematic features without interpretive attribution. Examples include:

• static posture in the excavated pit;
• averted gaze;
• prolonged silence (with measured duration);
• religious lexical reference;
• non-diegetic music intrusion.

These codes function strictly at the level of empirical description.

2. Theoretical Codes (Conceptual Level)

Descriptive codes are subsequently mapped onto theoretical categories derived from the integrated framework. The following core concepts are operationalized:

• institutional discourse;
• language as a site of struggle;
• biopolitics;

• semiotic gap or blank space;
• docile body;
• death drive—defined as a semiotic configuration rather than a psychoanalytic postulate.

This two-tiered system prevents conflation between observation and interpretation. It thus directly addresses concerns regarding insufficient cohesion between the theoretical framework and the findings.

Table 1. Coding Framework for Scene Analysis.

Scene (Timestamp)	**Component**	**Filmic Evidence (Verbatim / Visual Description)**	**Theoretical Construct(s)**
1. Mr. Badii in the Pit (01:28:35)	Body	Motionless, supine posture inside the excavated pit; arms positioned alongside the torso, eyes open; frontal, static framing; absence of bodily movement.	Docile body (Foucault, 1977, p. 135); Death drive (as semiotic configuration); Icon / Index (Peirce, 1931–1958)
	Silence	Complete diegetic silence (approximately 60 seconds); ambient wind audible; absence of dialogue and internal monologue.	Semiotic gap / blank space (Barthes, 1977); Resistance as immanent to power (Foucault, 1978)
2. Dialogue with Afghan Cleric (00:48:02)	Language	Cleric: "The human body is a trust from God… man should not oppress his body." Badii: "I know… I don't need advice."	Institutional discourse (Fairclough, 1995b); Language as a site of struggle (Fairclough, 1995a)
	Body	Cleric leans forward, employing didactic hand gestures; Badii remains reclined, gaze averted, maintaining physical distance.	Power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980); Proxemics as sign relation (Peirce, 1931–1958)
3. Silence in the Car, Observing the Landscape (00:03:20)	Silence	Extended diegetic silence (approximately 4 minutes); point-of-view shots of crowded streets, laborers, and barren outskirts; absence of verbal interaction.	Biopolitics (Foucault, 1978); Semiotic gap (Barthes, 1977)
4. Interaction with Young Soldier (00:23:13)	Language	Badii: "I'll give you the money… you come here at 6 a.m., knock twice…" Soldier:	Institutional discourse (Fairclough, 1995b); Instability of

		"I'm not good at this… I can't…"	power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980)
	Body	Soldier shifts posture repeatedly, avoids sustained eye contact, exhibits tense facial expression; military uniform visible.	Indexical sign of affect (Peirce, 1931–1958); Body under disciplinary structure (Foucault, 1977)
5. Conversation with the old Turkish man (taxidermist) (01:02:40)	Body	Expansive hand gestures, sustained eye contact, animated speech; contrasted with Badii's limited movement and brief verbal responses.	Counter-discourse of life (Foucault, 1978); Symbolic bodily signification (Peirce, 1931–1958)
6. Final Meta-Cinematic Sequence (01:30:52)	Visual / Body	Black screen accompanied by rain sound; transition to handheld color footage; film crew and equipment visible; introduction of non-diegetic music; disruption of the fourth wall.	Semiotic rupture / blank space (Barthes, 1977); Intertextuality / metadiscourse (Fairclough, 1995a)

Coding decisions were made iteratively and revisited across multiple viewings to ensure internal consistency. The application of theoretical codes followed the predefined conceptual framework outlined in the theoretical section; each coding decision was cross-checked against its original conceptual definition to preserve analytical coherence and minimize interpretive drift. Throughout the analytical process, detailed coding sheets and analytical memos were maintained, establishing a transparent audit trail and enabling verification of the interpretive steps undertaken.

Validity and Reliability

Methodological rigor in this study is ensured through procedural transparency and systematic coding practices rather than through statistical generalization. The validity of interpretations derives from the explicit operationalization of theoretical constructs into observable cinematic indicators (see Table 1), whereby each analytical claim is anchored in timestamped dialogue excerpts or clearly describable visual configurations.

Reliability was addressed through repeated close viewing and iterative coding. The full film was viewed fifteen times, and each of the six selected scenes underwent a minimum of ten additional viewings. Coding categories were applied consistently across scenes using the predefined two-level coding structure comprising descriptive and theoretical codes.

To strengthen analytical consistency, 30 percent of the corpus (scenes 1, 3, and 5) was independently coded by a second researcher familiar with critical discourse analysis and film semiotics. Inter-coder agreement reached 89 percent; discrepancies were resolved through discussion and subsequent refinement of code definitions. Detailed coding sheets and analytical memos were maintained throughout the process, thereby establishing an audit trail that allows verification of all interpretive decisions. Together, these procedures ensure that the findings emerge systematically from the defined analytical framework and remain grounded in the observable details of the film.

Findings and Analysis

Guided by the integrated framework of Foucault's power analytics, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Peircean–Barthesian semiotics, this section examines six key scenes from *Taste of Cherry* (1997). The analysis approaches speech, silence, and the body as interdependent and co-constitutive dimensions of cinematic meaning. Each subsection grounds its interpretation in specific cinematic moments, including time-stamped dialogue excerpts and visual configurations (see Appendix A). Through this layered reading, power discourse emerges as something constructed, negotiated, and destabilized at the micro-level of cinematic form.

1. Language: Institutional Discourse and Discursive Struggle

In *Taste of Cherry*, language operates as a primary site for negotiating power/knowledge. Dialogues are marked by ambiguity, ellipsis, and fragmentation—features that function not as stylistic accidents but as discursive strategies. From a Faircloughian perspective, lexical choice, grammatical mood, and turn-taking patterns operate as micro-technologies through which institutional authority is both asserted and unsettled.

1.1 The Soldier: Institutional Discourse and Its Fragility (00:18:05)

Mr. Badii's speech to the young soldier adopts a formal and imperative register:

"You will come here at 6 a.m., call out twice… if I'm alive, I'll answer."

This formulation resembles what Fairclough terms institutional discourse: language that imitates a chain-of-command structure and attempts to position the interlocutor as a subordinate subject. The confined car interior and close framing visually reinforce this asymmetry (see Figure 4 in Appendix A). Yet the soldier's fragmented and hesitant responses expose the instability of this imposed authority:

"I'm not good at this… I can't…"

From a Foucauldian perspective, resistance is immanent to power relations. The soldier's refusal—articulated through interruption and hesitation—constitutes a moment of discursive agency. Authority here is not overthrown but rendered fragile. This exchange exemplifies

"language as a site of struggle," where domination is negotiated and partially undone within the very structure of dialogue.

1.2 The Cleric: Religious Discourse and Evasive Resistance (00:48:02)
The Afghan cleric employs a lexicon saturated with religious authority:
"The human body is a trust from God… man should not oppress his body."

This discourse seeks to interpellate Badii within a moral-theological regime of power/knowledge. The structure is didactic and monologic, projecting institutional certainty. In contrast, Badii's replies remain brief and evasive:
"I know… I don't need advice."

Rather than directly confronting the cleric's authority, Badii disrupts it through minimal engagement. Conversational gaps and tonal flatness block the consolidation of moral hierarchy. Visually, the cleric's forward-leaning posture and gestural emphasis suggest discursive outreach, while Badii's withdrawn body and averted gaze enact corporeal resistance (see Figure 3 in Appendix A). Competing worldviews—religious doctrine and secular despair—intersect without resolution, illustrating discursive struggle at both verbal and bodily levels.

2. Silence: Semiotic Gap and Biopolitical Refusal
Silence in *Taste of Cherry* functions not as absence but as structured signification. It operates as a semiotic gap in Barthesian terms—a meaningful blank that solicits interpretation—and may also be read as a form of immanent resistance within Foucauldian power relations.

2.1 Silence in the Car: A Biopolitical Protest (00:03:20)
An extended diegetic silence (approximately four minutes) accompanies Badii's gaze across urban and peripheral landscapes. From a Faircloughian perspective, this silence can be understood as discursive omission—an interruption that reorganizes communicative expectation. Semiotically, the visual field—crowded labor sites, barren outskirts—fills the acoustic void, generating a composite sign of suspension (see Figure 3 in Appendix A).

Through the lens of biopolitics, this silence may be interpreted as a refusal to participate in discourses that regulate life, productivity, and social value. Badii neither explains nor justifies himself. The static framing iconically mirrors interior stasis, while the absence of speech indexically signals withdrawal from normative social exchange. Silence thus emerges as a non-verbal form of resistance: not a dramatic gesture, but a sustained withholding.

2.2 Omission of Music: A Macro-Discursive Strategy
The near-total exclusion of non-diegetic music—except in the final sequence—extends the logic of silence across the film's sonic structure. The sustained absence of musical scoring

suspends the conventional authority of cinema's emotional guidance system. Without a score to stabilize meaning, viewers are left to negotiate affective interpretation independently.

When non-diegetic music abruptly appears in the final metacinematic sequence (01:30:52), the shift foregrounds the constructedness of cinematic convention. The earlier absence is retrospectively illuminated as structural rather than incidental. Silence, therefore, operates not merely within scenes but across the film's broader aesthetic architecture.

3. The Body: Docile Bodies, Counter-Discourses, and the Death Drive

The body in *Taste of Cherry* constitutes a central semiotic and discursive field in which power is inscribed and negotiated. Foucault's concept of the "docile body"—subjected, regulated, and rendered compliant—provides a critical lens through which bodily stillness and restraint can be interpreted. When synthesized with Peircean semiotics, bodily gestures and postures become legible as layered signifying practices.

3.1 Badii's Body in the Pit: Icon, Index, and the Semiotic Configuration of the Death Drive (01:28:35)

Badii lies motionless in the excavated pit: arms at his sides, eyes open, face upward (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). This posture operates as a composite sign:

- Icon: it visually resembles a laid-out corpse.
- Index: it points toward existential resignation and the suspension of action.

This configuration may be read as a visual articulation of the docile body: a body positioned at the threshold between life and death, passive yet intensely signifying. Its immobility negates productivity and social circulation. The body does not act; it remains.

Within this visual constellation, what may be termed a "death drive" configuration emerges—not as a psychoanalytic instinct but as a semiotic arrangement pointing toward cessation, withdrawal, and the refusal of biopolitical imperatives. The body becomes the site where regulation and refusal intersect. Meaning here is produced through stillness.

3.2 Counter-Discourses: The Dynamic Body as Symbol of Life

In contrast, the old Turkish man's (taxidermist) animated gestures, sustained eye contact, and expansive posture (01:02:40; see Figure 5 in Appendix A) function symbolically. Their meaning—vitality, engagement, persistence—is culturally mediated rather than merely indexical. His body enacts an alternative mode of being: one oriented toward continuation and relationality.

The visual contrast between Badii's stasis and the taxidermist's kinetic presence establishes a non-verbal dialectic. Power is negotiated not solely through language but through embodied disposition. The body becomes an arena where life and withdrawal are performed as competing semiotic possibilities.

3.3 The Soldier: Body under Institutional Pressure (00:23:13)

The soldier's tense posture, averted gaze, and restless movements (see Figure 4 in Appendix A) operate as indexical signs of anxiety and ethical conflict. His bodily performance reveals the strain of occupying a position between command and refusal. Unlike Badii's radical stillness, the soldier's body oscillates—caught between institutional expectation and personal hesitation. The body thus registers the cost of discursive struggle. Where speech falters, muscular tension and micro-movements carry signifying weight. Institutional power is inscribed not abstractly but corporeally.

4. Interplay: Speech, Silence, and Body in the Final Sequence (01:30:52)

The film's concluding sequence synthesizes speech, silence, and embodiment within a metacinematic rupture. After an extended black screen accompanied by rain sounds, handheld color footage appears crew members become visible, non-diegetic music enters, and the fourth wall dissolves (see Figure 6 in Appendix A).

This shift functions as a semiotic break that exposes the constructedness of representation. The narrative of life and death remains unresolved; instead, the apparatus of filmmaking becomes visible. Speech remains absent, silence is disrupted by music, and bodies are reframed as performers within a production context.

Representation itself is foregrounded as a site of power. Meaning is neither fixed nor concluded but opened. The film thus redirects attention from narrative closure to the conditions under which narratives are made, suggesting that power operates not only within the story but within the act of representation itself.

Summary of Findings

• Language simultaneously transmits dominant discourses and provides the material for their subversion; institutional discourse is consistently met with hesitation, evasion, and refusal.

• Silence functions as a strategic, multi-layered signifier: a semiotic gap, a biopolitical protest, and an invitation to interpretive agency.

• The body operates as the primary surface on which power is inscribed—the docile body—and the medium through which resistance is performed, manifesting as indexical tension, symbolic vitality, and a semiotic configuration of the death drive.

• These three registers interact dynamically; no single element carries the discourse alone. Their interplay constitutes a decentralized configuration of power that resists closure and refuses the binary of domination versus submission.

Conclusion and Implications

This study sets out to investigate how power discourse is constructed in Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* through the interconnected components of speech, silence, and the body. Drawing on an integrated framework combining Foucauldian power analytics, Fairclough's

Critical Discourse Analysis, and Peircean-Barthesian semiotics, the analysis of six key scenes yielded three principal findings.

First, language operates as a site of discursive struggle. Institutional and religious discourses are enacted through imperative mood and theological lexicon, yet they are consistently destabilized by evasive, fragmented, or hesitant replies. The soldier's refusal ("I can't…") and Badii's minimal responses ("I know… I don't need advice") demonstrate that power is never monolithic; resistance is immanent and emerges through the very linguistic forms that seek to enforce domination.

Second, silence functions as an active, meaning-producing discursive practice. Prolonged diegetic silences (e.g., 00:03:20) and the systematic omission of non-diegetic music operate as Barthesian gaps that demand interpretive agency. Through a Foucauldian lens, these absences constitute biopolitical refusals—withdrawals from discourses that prescribe the value of life, productivity, and social conformity. Silence thus becomes a potent semiotic resource for dissent where verbal language is either insufficient or foreclosed.

Third, the body is a primary field of power inscription and contestation. Mr. Badii's corporeal stasis visually realizes Foucault's docile body and, through Peircean semiotics, operates as an icon-index of a "death drive" configuration. This term is employed not as a psychoanalytic postulate but as a semiotic and discursive construct: a constellation of iconic and indexical signs—stillness, the excavated pit, the absent gaze—that point toward self-annihilation, the cessation of meaning, and the refusal of biopolitical imperatives. This usage aligns with approaches in film semiotics that treat the death drive as a cultural trope inscribed in cinematic form (cf. Mulvey, 2006; Metz, 1982). In contrast, the dynamic bodies of the cleric and the taxidermist embody counter-discourses of authority and vitality. This visual dialectic reveals that power is negotiated not only through what is said or silenced but also through the very kinetics of the flesh.

These findings collectively demonstrate that Kiarostami's minimalist aesthetic constitutes a strategic reconfiguration of power relations. By situating cinematic form as a site of discursive negotiation, the film offers a sustained meditation on the fragility of authority and the eloquence of refusal—a meditation that resonates beyond its narrative confines to engage with broader questions of agency, biopolitics, and resistance under conditions of social and institutional constraint.

Implications and Contributions

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary synthesis for analyzing cinematic texts. By conjoining discourse analysis and semiotics, it moves beyond purely aesthetic or ideological readings and offers a systematic approach to decoding the micro-

operations of power in film. Methodologically, the scene-based, evidence-anchored design—with timestamped dialogue excerpts and visual stills (see Appendix A)—provides a replicable model for research at the intersection of film studies and critical discourse analysis. The operationalization of six underexamined concepts—institutional discourse, language as a site of struggle, biopolitics, the semiotic gap, the docile body, and the death drive as a semiotic configuration—addresses gaps identified in prior scholarship and advances a conceptually integrated interpretive lexicon for the field.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research is confined to a single film by a single director; its findings, while theoretically transferable, are not generalizable to all Iranian cinema or to the entirety of Kiarostami's oeuvre. Future studies could apply the same integrated framework to other works of Iranian art cinema—for instance, films by Mohsen Makhmalbaf or Jafar Panahi—to examine whether comparable discursive strategies operate across different auteurs and historical contexts. Moreover, the semiotic and discursive operationalization of the death drive introduced here invites further investigation through film-theoretical approaches to stillness, repetition, and the representation of death (e.g., Mulvey, 2006; Doane, 2002). Comparative analyses between Kiarostami and other minimalist directors, such as Béla Tarr or Nuri Bilge Ceylan, could further illuminate cross-cultural patterns of cinematic resistance.

Closing Reflection

Taste of Cherry resists closure. Its final sequence—a metacinematic rupture featuring handheld camera work and visible crew—refuses to resolve the discourse on life and death. This study has argued that such resistance is not merely thematic but also discursive and semiotic, woven into the film's linguistic, auditory, and corporeal fabric. In this reading, Kiarostami's cinema constitutes a sustained meditation on the fragility of power and the eloquence of refusal. By elucidating these mechanisms, the present analysis not only deepens our understanding of a canonical film but also contributes to the broader project of examining how aesthetic forms can challenge and reconfigure hegemonic power structures under conditions of constraint.

Appendix A: Visual Evidence – Key Scene Stills from *Taste of Cherry*

The following stills are presented as direct visual evidence to support the discursive and semiotic analysis conducted in this study. They correspond to the six key scenes detailed in the coding framework (see Table 1). All screenshots are taken from Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and are used strictly for scholarly discussion and critical analysis.

Figure 1. Mr. Badii in the pit (01:28:35).

Description: Motionless, supine posture in the excavated pit; arms at sides, eyes open, frontal static framing.

Theoretical link: Docile body (Foucault); icon-index of death and the death drive (Peirce).

Figure 2. Dialogue with the Afghan cleric (00:48:02).

Description: Cleric leans forward with didactic gestures; Badii reclined, gaze averted, maintaining physical distance.

Theoretical link: Institutional discourse (Fairclough); proxemics as a sign of power asymmetry.

Figure 3. Silence in the car – observing the landscape (00:03:20).

Description: Extended silence (approximately four minutes); point-of-view shots of city streets, laborers, then barren outskirts.

Theoretical link: Biopolitics (Foucault); semiotic gap or blank space (Barthes).

Figure 4. Interaction with the young soldier (00:23:13).

Description: Soldier shifts uncomfortably, avoids eye contact, displays tense posture and hesitant facial expressions.

Theoretical link: Index of anxiety and moral conflict (Peirce); body under institutional pressure.

Figure 5. Conversation with the old Turkish man (taxidermist) (01:02:40).

Description: Expansive hand gestures, sustained eye contact, animated speech, and bodily dynamism. Theoretical link: Symbol of vitality (Peirce); embodied counter-discourse (Foucault).

Figure 6. Final metacinematic sequence (01:30:52).

Description: Handheld color footage; crew visible, non-diegetic music, fourth wall broken. Theoretical link: Semiotic rupture or blank space (Barthes); intertextuality and metadiscourse (Fairclough).

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