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Abstract

This article argues that Abbas Kiarostami uses documentaries and fiction films to examine the distinction between reality and fiction. Through the use of an arthouse style of filmmaking, the insertion of a surrogate director into the narrative, and a recurring breakdown in technology, Kiarostami demonstrates that film's ability to capture reality is a flawed, sometimes broken, endeavor.

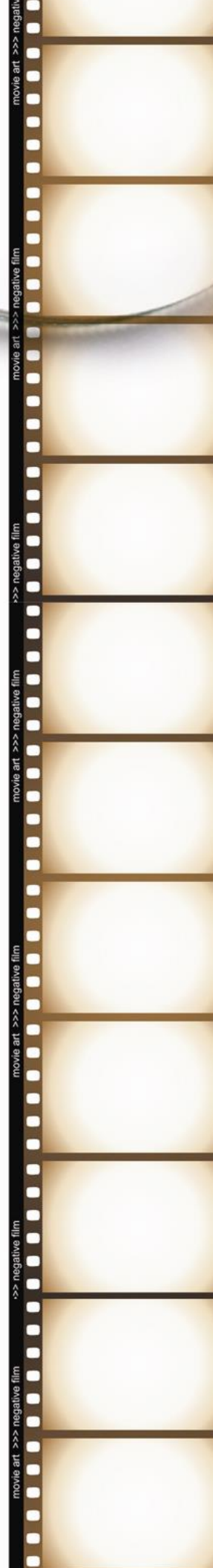
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Traditionally, there is a clear distinction between reality and fiction in film. The documentary film exists in the realm of reality while almost all other forms of filmmaking are fiction. Even at a cursory glance, there are exceptions to this division. Numerous filmmakers have made films based on true events, reenacting historical events, but with a number of creative liberties. And there are a number of documentaries that contain fictional elements or stories, such as Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (1973). Jackson Ayres (2012) says Welles' film challenges assumptions of originality and authenticity and that the film is self-consciously an interrogation of art (7). One of the ways the film does this is through the fictional last act about lost Picasso paintings, which Welles passes off as fact before revealing that the entire story was a sham. But, in general, there's a conceptual divide, the notion that what one sees in a documentary is captured reality, the moment as it happens, or at least a faithful reenactment of reality, while recreations of historical events—even if they have factual roots—are perceived as staged and fabricated.

Documentary filmmaker Jill Godmilow says, “Unconsciously embedded in these forms called documentary is the conceit of ‘the real,’ which substantiates the truth claims made by these films. These general notions about documentary film produce a fairly limited understanding of what non-fiction cinema can be and do” (Shapiro 1997: 80–81). Hülya Önal and Meral Özçınar (2001) say, “Documentary and fictional films have been persistently conceived of as two distinct and separate traditions; the cinema of reality (recording of reality) and the cinema of fiction (constitution of reality)” (3562).

The traditional understanding of the documentary is that the camera passively captures the reality in front of it. The role of the documentarian is to logistically figure out how to capture this material and to be in the right place at the right time. The assumption is that a film that captures its subject in reality is unhampered by the aesthetics and staging of fictional filmmaking. Therefore, it is assumed that the documentary represents reality while all other films, even if based on fact, are constructed, a play of fiction to some extent.

Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami's pseudo-documentary *Close-Up* (1990) blurs the divide between documentary and fiction filmmaking. It captures the real-life court case of Hossain Sabzian, a man who gains the trust of the Ahankhah, a wealthy Iranian family interested in the arts, by passing himself off as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, one of Iran's most famous directors. Kiarostami learns about the case after Sabzian is arrested, goes to meet him at the court, and gets both the courthouse and all members involved in the case to let him film a documentary about the events. By reconstructing the meeting of Sabzian and the Ahankhah family and orchestrating a conclusion for the film, Kiarostami complicates traditional conceptions of reality and the role of the director in documentaries.

Godfrey Cheshire (2010b) argues that this mix of documentary and fiction is both an exaltation and questioning of the auteur (para. 4), although Cheshire (2000b) also argues that the film exalts Sabzian in order to justify his unhealthy cinematic obsession (para. 16). Hamid Dabashi (2001) says that the power of the film is that it doesn't matter whether it begins as a reality or a fiction and that once Kiarostami enters the equation, he is able to doubly negate the real in order to affirm reality (67). While it is vague what Dabashi precisely means by "doubly negating reality," it could be interpreted that Kiarostami's fiction, when compounded with Sabzian's fiction, ends up affirming reality. Both critics suggest the same idea: While

Kiarostami deals in a quagmire of deceptive fiction in *Close-Up*, he does it in such a way that ultimately affirms cinema. However, this neglects the underlying modes of deception Kiarostami exposes as part of the filmmaking process.

Kiarostami also explores the ambiguities between reality and fiction in the Koker Trilogy. This impromptu trilogy consists of *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *And Life Goes On* (1992), and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). Each film is a fictional film, and each refers back to the previous film, exposing its nature as fiction. *And Life Goes On* was made in the aftermath of the 1990 earthquake in Iran. In *And Life Goes On*, the director and his son try to find the two lead actors from one of Kiarostami's previous films: *Where is the Friend's Home?*. Filmed in the real ruins of the earthquake, *And Life Goes On* gives the audience a glimpse of the tragic aftermath and appears to take on the form of a documentary even though it was scripted by Kiarostami. *Through the Olive Trees* is about the film crew making *And Life Goes On*. It, too, appears to be a documentary, but once again Kiarostami is not capturing reality as it happens. Through the use of a surrogate director in the narrative, Kiarostami revisits scenes in *And Life Goes On* from the perspective of making the film.

In order to show how Kiarostami breaks the boundaries between reality and fiction, this article will examine *Close-Up* and the Koker Trilogy. It will demonstrate the difficulty of a true film reality by examining the use of aesthetics, the role of the director, and the technical breakdown at the end of *Close-Up*.

The Fiction of Reality

John Grierson says that “[D]ocumentary was from the beginning...an ‘anti-aesthetic’ movement. We have all, I suppose, sacrificed some personal capacity in ‘art’ and the pleasant

vanity that goes with it” (Önal 2011: 3562). In *Close-Up*, Kiarostami heightens the art of filmmaking in order to make the audience aware of how the film works as a constructed art. According to Grierson, aesthetics should not be at the forefront of a documentary, but in Kiarostami’s documentary, aesthetics override the documentation quality. In *Close-Up*, the audience is given the impression of watching events as they occurred, but Kiarostami includes aesthetic elements that expose how the film is reconstructing the reality of the story.

For example, the film opens on a reporter and two policemen riding in a cab to the Ahankhah home to arrest Hossain Sabzian. En route, the reporter strikes up a conversation with the cab driver about the man they are going to arrest and how he deceived this rich family. This exchange conveniently serves as exposition for the audience. Once they arrive, instead of following the reporter and the police into the house to view the arrest, the camera remains outside and watches the cab driver as he gets out of the car, looks at a pile of yard rubbish outside one of the homes, and picks out several flowers from the top of the heap. He kicks a spray can down the road and the camera follows the can as it rolls down the hill. Gilberto Perez analyzes the purpose of the scene: “The point is not merely to tell us the story but to make us aware of our path to the story” (Elena 2005: 88).

There is no documentary value to this moment; it’s an aesthetically charged moment akin to the long, lingering takes Kiarostami has become known for in his later fiction films. The cab driver is inconsequential; he plays no significant role in the story. In a more straightforward documentary, the camera would follow the reporter and police officers as they make the arrest, making a document of the moment as it happens. But since Sabzian was arrested before the film began shooting, the sequence is a recreation. Instead of trying to reconstruct this moment, the film stays outside with the cab driver. By lingering on the cab

driver as he waits for the reporter and police to come out, Kiarostami creates a space in time that deprives the audience of information and constructs something that is not documentary truth. Through this creative aesthetic, *Close-Up* creates a distance from reality even while purportedly capturing it.

Furthermore, a recreation of the arrest of Sabzian is shown later in the film. Kiarostami told Cheshire (2000a) that he got the idea to reorganize the film when the projectionist mixed up the reels at one film festival. He liked the change in chronology so much that he re-edited the film (7). Alberto Elena says that “When, in the middle of the hearing, someone says that ‘some things are more complicated than they seem’, Kiarostami is undoubtedly winking at the audience, who by this time are already fairly disorientated with regard to what they are seeing.” Elena (2005) further elaborates that the director denies any traditional linear storytelling in order to create a segmented structure that mixes real images that may or may not have been manipulated in the editing process, reconstructions that look like documentary takes, flashbacks, interviews, dead time sequences, and the same scene filmed from a different perspective. The lack of clear references to time force the audience to constantly reconstruct the scenes they are shown, making them question their perspective, which Elena says results in “an uncomfortable but productive state of uncertainty” (87-88).

On an organizational level, Kiarostami disorients the audience by depriving them of a clear frame of reference in any given moment. Therefore, the distinction between a recreation, an after-the-fact interview, or footage captured as it happened becomes ambiguous to the point that it is difficult to distinguish what is captured as a document and what is constructed. It also becomes uncertain whether or not a valuable distinction can be made. If one is unable to clearly

and easily distinguish where recreation ends and reality begins, is trying to call one moment in *Close-Up* real and another fiction a distinction worth making?

All of these elements serve as a prompt to the audience that the film is not a document of truth, but a construction. In many ways, *Close-Up* aesthetically and structurally takes on the patterns of a fictional art film as opposed to a traditional documentary. There are still documentary trappings, such as the spattering of interviews and the filming of the court case, but there are also elements that suggest a precisely constructed moment that could only exist in a fictional film.

Close-Up even has visual bookends. In what Elena would designate as a dead time sequence, the cab driver's act of picking up a small handful of flowers from the rubbish dump is mimicked in the final moments of the film when Sabzian picks up a bouquet of flowers to give the Ahankhah family at the end of the film. One could argue that this is mere coincidence, but given that Kiarostami devotes screen time to both the cab driver and Sabzian picking flowers, and more than just a fleeting moment, it is better to assume that it is a deliberate inclusion.

Kiarostami's two films after *Close-Up*—*And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* (the second and third films in the Koker trilogy)—extend the complications of the relationship between reality and fiction in film. David Oubiña says,

Each film [in the Koker trilogy] documents the one before, and, in turn, becomes the fictional motif for the next. In this extraordinary series of palimpsests, where each film overwrites its predecessor, Kiarostami moves constantly between the two poles of fiction and documentary: there is no clear distinction between the two registers, but rather a complex system of permutations. (Elena 2005: 108–109)

And Life Goes On also deals with Kiarostami's inability to capture reality. Like the events that precede the court case in *Close-Up*, *And Life Goes On* is unable to capture the real-world event; it is only able to reflect upon the aftermath. In this case, it is an earthquake that devastated the area in which *Where is the Friend's Home?* was shot. A director (a standin for Kiarostami) and his son go searching for the two lead actors from *Where is the Friend's Home?* In the wake of the earthquake.

Laura Mulvey (2006) writes that instead of trying to close the gap between the missed event and the filming of the aftermath, Kiarostami acknowledges it. The film takes the reality of the tragedy and uses fiction to translate the event. The search for the two boys is delayed by the stories of survival and tragedy encountered along the way. Eventually, the film is brought to a stop as it tries to transition from the disaster to the idea that "life goes on" (128–129).

A sequence in which the director has a conversation with a newly married man demonstrates this idea of life going on. The married man says he and his wife married in the aftermath of the quake and that they have been living in destitute conditions for the past few days. It's a moment that shows that even amidst the death and destruction of the earthquake, the promise of life continues.

Elena (2005) says, "Kiarostami nevertheless rejected the 'emergency report' style, and went to exactly the opposite extreme from sensationalism. In fact, not a single shot was filmed during these location-finding trips; instead, everything was reconstructed after the event according to the requirements of the film" (94). Kiarostami even said, "I shot one part [of the film] five months after [the earthquake] and the rest eleven months later [...] It was all a reconstruction, although it looked like a documentary" (Elena 2005: 94).

While *And Life Goes On* appears to be a document about the aftermath of the earthquake, it's another instance where Kiarostami has distanced the film from reality. Not only is there a fictional conceit that creates a gap in reality, but also a gap between the event and the time it was captured on film. By distancing the film from the tragedy, Kiarostami avoids capturing immediate and sensational images of the aftermath. Instead, the film is a recreation. Yet, the film is presented in such a way that it's perceived as a documentary, suggesting that what is seen is the true aftermath of the devastation. The rubble and makeshift camps that the audience sees may be part of the aftermath of the earthquake, but they are not the immediate aftermath that is suggested by the fictional conceit that the father and son are searching through the immediate aftermath of the earthquake for the two young actors.

In *And Life Goes On*, Kiarostami manipulates the audience's perception of space and time in order to present them with something that has the appearance of a real document, shot in the style of a documentary, but is largely a fabrication. Unlike *Close-Up*, there are not necessarily demarcations within the film to make the audience aware of this deception; it is only through his next film that Kiarostami unmasks his deceit.

Through the Olive Trees is a fictionalized account of the behind-the-scenes filming of *And Life Goes On*. Kiarostami casts Mohamad Ali Keshavarz as a surrogate director to stand-in for himself. Keshavarz opens the film by telling the audience that he is "the actor who plays the director" and that they are about to hire actors on location. The female producer comes by and interrupts him, saying that the girls that have come for the audition are ready. Stephen Bransford (2003) says in the moment where the producer tells him the girls are getting hungry, the film moves from a self-reflexive pseudo-documentary into a work of fiction. Keshavarz goes from being "the actor who plays the director" into playing the director; explaining the film

in one moment and then acting out the film the next moment. “Slippage in this scene occurs on the level of genre as we move back and forth across the boundary between documentary and fiction, but the slippage also involves a temporal component as well, as we shuttle from the acknowledged past context of ‘were hired’ to the obvious present context of actors ‘being hired’ before our very eyes” (para. 2).

Elena (2005) says, “In reality, from the moment of the first sequence—the presentation to camera made by the actor who says he is the film’s director—*Through the Olive Trees* is deliberately situated in ‘undecided territory’ halfway between fiction and documentary, what is ‘real’ and what is ‘filmed.’” He says this leaves the audience floundering among various levels through which they watch the movements of the film. It invites them to be carried away in the confusion and narrative obscurity, a web that Kiarostami delights in weaving (115).

Dabashi (2007) talks about the arbitrary nature of the boundary between reality and fiction in *Through the Olive Trees*:

In a telling scene that captures that circuitous arrival in the really fantastic world that Kiarostami generates, Keshavarz-cum-Kiarostami addresses a group of young schoolboys who have been cordoned off in a corner to watch the making of the film and says to them, “children, you are not supposed to cross this line to come over here where we are making the movie. Do you mind if I come to your side?” Then he proceeds to go to their side, thus transgressing the visible line—a rope—that is to separate reality from fiction. The director takes one of the children’s school texts and quizzes them on their knowledge of local geography. Now, at this very moment, and as soon as he has passed beyond the rope, the director is in the land of Oz, in the realm of the (un)real. With that move, the whole fictive borderline between fact and fantasy is visibly and literally crossed. The border crossing is by far the most revolutionary event in Kiarostami’s cinema. With the crossing of that rope, Kiarostami makes a fictive representation of himself, an actor, crosses the border from the fiction of making a film called *Through the Olive Trees* into the actual world of its behind-the-scenes, which is itself the fictional world of making *And Life Goes On*, which was the factual world of finding out what happened when an earthquake destroyed

the region that Kiarostami had filmed in his fictional narrative film called *Where is the Friend's House?* (310–311).

By designating a physical boundary within the film to distinguish reality from fiction, Kiarostami not only presents the audience with the divide, but also demonstrates that the film is unable to contain itself within the boundaries of fiction. By having the director step over into reality, Kiarostami brings the film into the realm of the real. While the moment in the film is staged, it is endemic to the philosophy of the film, to both draw and maintain a distance from reality in spite of the fact that it too has become part of the movement of what is real.

But, once again, it becomes hard to distinguish what is real and what is fiction. Elena (2005) explains,

The confusion between the various levels of reality and narrative [in *Through the Olive Trees*] is intensified by the absence of any ‘punctuation marks’ (the flashback to the cemetery), the numerous point-of-view shots (from inside vehicles, basically) which nearly always restrict the audience’s view, and the constant use of off-camera (the whole conversation between the teacher and Mrs. Shiva in the sequence that follows the credits). (115)

Through the Olive Trees takes on the structure of *Close-Up*, failing to clue its audience into whether or not the moment they are watching is fact, fiction or a flashback. Likewise, it is not always made clear whose perspective they are following. This disorientation makes the distinction between reality and fiction ambiguous, at best. According to Jean-Michel Frodon (2007),

Cinema is based on recording of actual physical ‘objects’, including bodies, faces, light, etc. Therefore it documents these objects, whatever fictional use is made of them. And on the other hand, no documentary is ‘pure recording of reality,’ it always depends on choices, which are ways to ‘tell the story’. Even video surveillance in a shopping mall needs to choose angles,

lenses, frames, etc. The art of filmmaking is always the art of specific combinations of these two horizons. Never a pure fiction, never a pure reproduction of reality. (126)

Actor, Director, Mediator

In separate interviews with Cheshire (2000a), both Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf gave contradictory accounts of who came up with the idea for *Close-Up*. Makhmalbaf said he already had the idea to make a movie and showed Kiarostami the news article about Sabzian's arrest. According to Kiarostami, the article was already out on his desk when the two were discussing a script Makhmalbaf had written. Kiarostami didn't think much of Makhmalbaf's script, so he changed the subject to the article and convinced Makhmalbaf they should make a film about it (6–7). Even from its inception, authorship becomes a complicated subject in *Close-Up*.

Dabashi (2001) says that it makes little difference whether or not one starts with fact or fiction; at some point it begins to unravel. Kiarostami steps into this confusion, subjecting everything to double erasure by having the real people “reenact” what happened. This leads Dabashi to conclude that Kiarostami confirms reality by double negating it, allowing Sabzian to become an actual actor in a film and having the family feature in a film (67).

And, while Dabashi makes a strong argument that Kiarostami validates Sabzian, there is also an argument to be made that, by double negating reality, Kiarostami is not confirming reality, but reflecting on his role as director in the film and questioning how the director bends reality to his own ends. Kiarostami's role in *Close-Up* is not to document the event, but to ascribe and write meaning into the story, to create a fiction. Furthermore, Sabzian as a fake director allows Kiarostami to explore the deception of the director.

According to Cheshire (2010a), the film should align the audience with the duped bourgeois family, but instead follows Sabzian. He says that perhaps this is because Kiarostami wants to redeem Sabzian's guilty obsession because he shares it (para. 16). Aligning the audience with Sabzian cannot be discounted. While there is merit to what Cheshire says, it ignores how Sabzian is also portrayed in a negative light. Sabzian deceives the Ahankhah family, and, by making him the subject of the film, Kiarostami is able to explore the role of the director as a deceiver. Sabzian is a perfect embodiment of this idea. He comes into the Ahankhahs' lives and leads them to believe he might put them into a film. He ends up getting money out of the family for a fiction, something that will not happen. By focusing on Sabzian, Kiarostami is able to capture a story in which the director is a fake and a charlatan, a man of deception and tricks, one who is not honest or true. And, in the same way, Kiarostami becomes his own trickster throughout the film.

Cheshire (2010a) points out that Kiarostami orchestrated most of what happened in the courtroom. Much of Sabzian's testimony is scripted, even though Kiarostami claims it was based on things Sabzian had said. And the audience can hear Kiarostami conducting the testimony, as he is heard asking Sabzian a number of questions in the trial while off-camera (para. 34).

Kiarostami's presence in the film introduces uncertainty about whether or not the subjects are being truthful about themselves. At one point in the court case, Kiarostami asks Sabzian if he is being honest or if he is just playing another role. After all, Sabzian has already deceived the family in private. With both a filmmaker and camera in the room, is Sabzian only continuing his performance? Therefore, getting to the truth becomes a problem. Is Sabzian being honest? Can the film capture reality or does the presence of the camera make everyone a

performer, everyone acting in a way that makes them appear how they want to be perceived? And through Sabzian, Kiarostami draws his own honesty and the honesty of the director into question.

Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa (2003) points out that Kiarostami makes an appearance on camera when meeting Sabzian in prison. His voice is heard when speaking to the judge, the family, Sabzian in the courtroom, when inquiring about Sabzian at the police station, and in the final moments of the film when talking to his film crew. Saeed-Vafa says all these moments make the audience aware of the filmmaker's power, "both as a judge and as someone who intervenes in reality" (65).

While these reports do not give insight into the extent to which Kiarostami manipulated things behind the scenes, it does make it clear that he is not a passive observer. He is literally a voice in the film, a part of the conversation. Kiarostami has written himself into the film, becoming part of the story. In a traditional documentary, his role would be to capture reality from a distance, not to enter it. This is not akin to other documentary filmmakers who comment on their films or perhaps appear in interviews; rather, he is making himself part of the proceedings of the court case and becomes a mediator of the events. Not only is he making a film that mediates this story to the audience, but he also serves as mediator among Sabzian, the family, and the court, an overseer who orchestrates events.

By developing a story for this film, Kiarostami writes his fiction into reality. By seeking a certain outcome in the court case and by scripting some of Sabzian's speeches, Kiarostami is able to convince the family to drop the charges of the case. Furthermore, the film is able to conclude with Sabzian meeting the man he pretended to be: Makhmalbaf. This sequence makes

for a literal reconciliation between the fiction and reality. But the final sequence further complicates the idea of a complete reconciliation between reality and fiction.

Observing Sabzian becomes the seed of an idea that Kiarostami uses in his next two films. Both *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* feature surrogate directors that Kiarostami uses to explore the realities of filmmaking. It also allows him to look back at his own deceptions in film. Bransford discusses a scene in *And Life Goes On* in which Mr. Ruhi, an actor from *Where is the Friend's Home?*, talks about his role in the film, complaining about how he was made to look older and points out his house in the film, which was not his actual house. Bransford (2003) says this self-reflexive scene exposes the fabricated nature of the film. It also makes the audience aware that what they are watching now is also a fabrication, which allows Kiarostami to remind the audience that space itself is constructed and cinema is part of that construction. Bransford also discusses how filmmakers often make rural space and villagers look more archaic and older than they really are. It's an idea he brings up again in *Through the Olive Trees* when the director insists an actress wear a dress that makes her look more "traditional" even though she complains that no one wears that kind of dress these days. The director and producer insist, and eventually the actress ends up wearing the dress for the scene (para. 62).

While both of these scenes take place within Kiarostami's fictional films, they expose the reality of filmmaking. In *Through the Olive Trees*, the director places his own fictional notion of what is right or what should be represented over reality. Bransford (2003) exposes the divide of urban and rural people. In both films, the director is an urban outsider, coming into the rural area and being in some ways at odds with what he experiences. In both cases, the

directors have portrayed/are portraying the rural environment in such a way as to make it Other. And to do so is to misconstrue and misrepresent reality (para. 14).

In another moment, the director is a stickler for one of the lines over how many people the young man lost in the earthquake. The actor keeps saying the actual number of family members he lost in the earthquake (which may or may not be true), but the director insists on exaggerating the number. It's a scene where it's hard to tell where reality ends—if it begins at all—and where the fiction begins.

Breaking Reality

In the final moments of *Close-Up* Sabzian rides on the back of Makhmalbaf's motorcycle, embracing him. They stop to pick up flowers and continue on their way to see the family Sabzian deceived. On a narrative level, the sequence suggests a reconciliation between the fictional Makhmalbaf and the real Makhmalbaf and a potential reconciliation between the fictional Makhmalbaf and the audience, a sort of symbolic apology to the audience for the deception of film.

During the sequence, Kiarostami and his crew are following the motorcycle, shooting from a bus. The real Makhmalbaf is wearing a microphone that keeps cutting out as the film is being shot. The audience can hear Kiarostami and his crew complaining about the equipment failure. There is also a fragmentation of the image as at least a section of the sequence is shot through the cracked windshield. These elements suggest a technical breakdown in capturing the reconciliation. Even though the relationship is symbolically redeemed by the narrative, the aesthetics of cinema undermine (and perhaps even override) this union with both the sound and the image breaking. While it is possible budgetary or time constraints forced the crew to use a

truck with a broken windshield and faulty sound equipment, it is more likely that it was deliberately used in order to further emphasize the technical breakdown that accompanies the concluding moments of the film, a breakdown of the core senses of film: sight and sound.

Rosenbaum (2003) says the fiction of failed sound equipment is “reportedly either a half-truth or an outright lie that has the same basic effect as the wry pretext for turning off the sound in *Homework* (1989): it is an invitation for the viewer to step back from a climactic scene and reflect” (15). And Elena points out that Kiarostami uses the same technique in *Orderly or Disorderly?* (1981), where a disappointed film crew is heard on the soundtrack complaining about the fact that they can’t get the orderly take they are attempting to film. “The impossibility of filming in an ‘orderly’ way triumphs in the end” (32-33). Elena (2005) concludes that, at the end of *Close-Up*, “Kiarostami no doubt wishes to respect the privacy of the meeting. But, as usual, things are more complicated than they seem” (90).

One could argue that Kiarostami suffers an unusual stroke of technical breakdowns, but having three failures in the span of 10 years that coincide with the climaxes of all three films suggests that he is deliberately subverting expectations in order to make the audience reflect on what they have been watching.

Conclusion

It must be reiterated that Kiarostami affirms reality through these films as well. In *Close-Up*, the narrative reconciliation between the fake and the real Makhmalbaf does have weight to it, but this is only part of what is going on in the scene. To take this interpretation as final and definitive is to ignore the aesthetic techniques through which the film captures this moment. In order to gain a holistic picture of the complexity of Kiarostami’s cinema, one must

also explore how he critiques and breaks down reality in film. Both *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* offer the potential for reconciliation between the fiction of film and the reality of life, but never quite reach that point.

Kiarostami blurs the line between reality and fiction. In *Close-Up* this takes the form of both the stylistic features of the film that demonstrate an art film sensibility as well as the scrutinization of the honesty of the subjects of the film, questioning whether or not they are playing roles. In *And Life Goes On*, the presentation of the real aftermath of a real earthquake is married with the fiction of a search for two young actors. And *Through the Olive Trees* is simultaneously a fiction about making a film and a document of the filmmaking process in *And Life Goes On*.

Kiarostami also muddles this divide by exposing how the director becomes an active part of shaping the audience's perception of reality. Behind-the-scenes knowledge of *Close-Up* demonstrates that Kiarostami scripted certain scenes. Furthermore, he's a voice in the film that begins to shape the reality of the court case and influences the final verdict on Sabzian. The role of the surrogate director in both *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* also exposes how the director exaggerates or stereotypes reality, with both men shaping the audience's perception of the rural world in a way that does not correspond with the reality of rural people's lives.

Close-Up's conclusion demonstrates the nuance of Kiarostami's views on reality and fiction in film. On the level of the narrative, fiction and reality have been reconciled: the fictional Makhmalbaf and the real Makhmalbaf are united. However, as the film attempts to capture this "truth," a truth that was likely scripted, the audio equipment begins to fail and the crew complains as the audience watches the sequence of reconciliation. Furthermore, the image

itself is shattered at several points as the camera gazes out of a cracked windshield. There may be a metaphorical reconciliation between reality and fiction, but Kiarostami's film is ultimately unable to capture it satisfactorily.

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