Article

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Between Reality and Fiction: Performance, Truth and the Construction of Reality in Iranian Cinema

***Close-Up* (1990)**

Abstract

Iranian cinema has often been associated with realism, simplicity, non-professional actors, everyday spaces and narratives that appear to remain close to ordinary life. Yet the apparent realism of Iranian cinema conceals a much more complicated relationship between reality and representation. Rather than treating cinema as a transparent medium through which reality can simply be recorded, a number of Iranian filmmakers have used cinematic form to expose the processes through which reality itself is constructed, performed and interpreted. This article examines this tension primarily through Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up* (1990), a film that occupies an unstable space between documentary and fiction, testimony and performance,

reconstruction and spontaneous action. The film reconstructs the real-life case of Hossein Sabzian, a working-class man who impersonated filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, while bringing the actual participants back before the camera to perform versions of events that had already occurred. Consequently, *Close-Up* does not merely document an event. It reconstructs the event while simultaneously documenting its reconstruction.

The article situates Kiarostami's practice within the broader development of Iranian cinema, particularly the emergence of the Iranian New Wave before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the transformation of cinematic production under the cultural and institutional conditions of the post-revolutionary period. Drawing on the work of scholars including Hamid Naficy, Negar Mottahedeh, Hamid Dabashi, Alberto Elena, Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, Jonathan Rosenbaum and others, the article argues that Kiarostami's cinema should not be understood simply as an attempt to represent reality more truthfully. Rather, it investigates how truth is produced through acts of seeing, performing, remembering, narrating and filming. *Close-Up* therefore transforms the distinction between reality and fiction into an ethical and philosophical question: if people perform themselves differently when placed before a camera, and if cinema reconstructs reality even when it claims to document it, where exactly does reality end and fiction begin?

Cinema begins with an act of looking. Before there is a story, before there are characters or even words, there is the image: a fragment of the world held within a frame. Yet the moment reality enters the frame, it ceases to be entirely untouched. The camera selects, excludes, rearranges and transforms. What appears to be a record of the world is already an interpretation of it. Between what happened and what is shown, between the person and the role they perform, there exists a fragile and shifting space where reality begins to resemble fiction. Iranian cinema has inhabited this space with particular intensity. Across the history of Iranian filmmaking, the everyday has repeatedly become a site of cinematic inquiry: ordinary faces, streets, houses, children, journeys and conversations have been transformed into encounters with questions of identity, truth and representation. Yet the apparent simplicity of this cinema often conceals a sophisticated uncertainty. What seems real may be reconstructed; what is staged may disclose something profoundly truthful; and what appears to be an act of deception may reveal more about a person than an objective account ever could.

Few filmmakers have explored this instability as persistently as Abbas Kiarostami. His cinema does not ask the spectator to choose between reality and fiction. Instead, it lingers in the uncertain territory between them. His films repeatedly remind us that reality is never encountered without mediation, and that cinema does not simply reproduce the world but participates in making the world visible to us. This tension reaches its most remarkable expression in *Close-Up* (1990), a film born from an extraordinary real-life incident. Hossein Sabzian, an unemployed cinephile, impersonated the celebrated Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf and convinced a middle-class family that he

intended to make a film with them. When Kiarostami encountered the story, he did not simply document it. He returned to the people involved and asked them to inhabit their own memories. The real became a performance; the performance became a film; and the film, in turn, became a new form of reality.

Close-Up consequently unsettles one of cinema's most persistent assumptions: that reality and fiction occupy opposite sides of the screen. Here, they are inseparable. Sabzian's lie is fictional, yet the longing that produces it is real. Kiarostami's reconstruction is staged, yet the emotions emerging from it cannot simply be dismissed as artificial. Even the apparently spontaneous encounter at the film's conclusion exists within the presence of the camera. The question, therefore, is not merely whether what we see is real. The more difficult question is what happens to reality once it is seen, remembered, performed and filmed. It is within this space of uncertainty that Kiarostami's cinema finds its deepest philosophical force.

The history of modern Iranian cinema cannot be separated from the history of Iranian modernity itself. As Hamid Naficy argues throughout A Social History of Iranian Cinema, cinema in Iran developed alongside transformations in the modern nation-state, urbanisation, technology, social structures and cultural institutions. Cinema was never simply imported entertainment. It became one of the spaces through which Iranian society negotiated the meaning of modernity. For much of the post-war period, Iranian popular cinema was dominated by what became known as Film-Farsi. The term itself carried a critical charge, often used by intellectuals and filmmakers to describe commercially oriented films considered formulaic, melodramatic and imitative. Yet by the late 1950s and 1960s, a different cinematic tendency began to emerge. Filmmakers increasingly turned towards social reality, ordinary people and the material conditions of everyday Iranian life. The development of this alternative cinema is generally associated with the Iranian New Wave. Scholars such as Hamid Naficy, Hamid Dabashi and Alberto Elena have examined the ways in which this cinema developed its own relationship with European modernist traditions while remaining deeply engaged with Iranian social and cultural realities.

The emergence of films such as Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow* (1969), Sohrab Shahid-Sales's *Still Life* (1974), Ebrahim Golestan's work and Forugh Farrokhzad's *The House Is Black* (1963) marked an important transformation in Iranian cinematic language. These films moved away from spectacular storytelling and towards marginal spaces, ordinary lives and social contradictions. The camera increasingly became interested in people who had previously existed at the margins of commercial representation. This transformation was not merely aesthetic. It also involved a different conception of reality.

Reality was no longer something that had to be spectacularised in order to become cinematic. The everyday itself could become the subject of cinema. A worker waiting beside a railway line, a child walking through a village, an impoverished family or a person living with disability could become central to a film without being transformed into a conventional dramatic protagonist. This tendency towards realism would later become one of the defining characteristics associated with Iranian cinema internationally. Yet realism in Iranian cinema should not be understood as simple photographic transparency. It often involved metaphor, allegory, non-professional performers and carefully constructed situations. In other words, Iranian filmmakers were developing a cinema that could appear natural while being highly conscious of its own construction.

Forugh Farrokhzad's *The House Is Black*, for example, demonstrates how documentary can become poetic and subjective rather than merely observational. The film documents residents of a leprosy colony, but Farrokhzad's editing, narration and visual composition transform documentary observation into a meditation on suffering, beauty, faith and mortality. The documentary image therefore does not simply reproduce reality. It interprets reality. This tension between realism and construction becomes crucial for understanding Kiarostami. He inherits the New Wave's interest in ordinary life, but he pushes the question further. Instead of asking how cinema can represent reality, Kiarostami repeatedly asks what happens when reality itself begins behaving like cinema.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 created a decisive rupture in Iranian cultural production. The institutional structures of cinema changed, and filmmakers had to work within new ideological and regulatory conditions. Immediately after the Revolution, films were subject to reassessment, and many existing films were banned or heavily edited. The early post-revolutionary period was marked by considerable uncertainty about the future of cinema.

The regulations governing cinematic representation had profound consequences for film form. The representation of women's bodies, sexuality, intimacy, physical contact and other aspects of everyday life became subject to strict restrictions. As Negar Mottahedeh argues in Displaced Allegories, these restrictions did not simply suppress cinematic expression. They also contributed to the development of alternative representational strategies. Allegory, metaphor, indirection and visual restraint became significant components of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema.

This does not mean that censorship should be romanticised as the cause of artistic innovation. Such a reading risks transforming political restriction into an aesthetic virtue. Rather, the important point is that filmmakers responded creatively to the conditions under

which they were working. The restrictions shaped what could be shown directly, while filmmakers developed strategies for suggesting what could not be represented openly.

Hamid Naficy's concept of "Islamicate cinema" is particularly useful here. Post-revolutionary Iranian cinema developed within an environment in which private and public spaces became differently regulated, and where cinematic representation itself was subject to ideological scrutiny. The result was a cinema that often had to negotiate with its own conditions of visibility. This historical context is important for understanding Kiarostami because his apparent minimalism cannot simply be understood as an abstract aesthetic preference. His films emerged from a cinematic culture in which indirectness had become both an artistic language and, in some circumstances, a practical necessity. At the same time, it would be reductive to explain Kiarostami entirely through censorship. His interest in ambiguity, uncertainty and the relationship between spectator and image exceeds the political circumstances of Iranian filmmaking. He was interested in cinema's philosophical possibilities. His films repeatedly question the desire for definitive answers. Instead of giving the spectator a complete reality, he gives fragments and asks the spectator to participate in constructing meaning. This is precisely what makes *Close-Up* so significant. The film does not simply operate within the restrictions of representation. It turns representation itself into the subject.

The story of *Close-Up* initially sounds almost absurd. A man named Hossein Sabzian, a passionate admirer of cinema, meets the Ahankhah family on a bus. He claims to be Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the celebrated Iranian filmmaker. The family believes him. Sabzian tells them that he wants to shoot a film in their house and that their family will participate. Eventually, his deception is discovered and he is arrested. A conventional documentary could have simply interviewed the people involved and reconstructed the case through testimony, photographs and archival material. A conventional fictional film could have hired actors and dramatized the story. Kiarostami does neither. Instead, he brings the actual participants back into the cinematic space and asks them to perform what happened. The film consequently exists in a peculiar temporal position. The event has already happened, but the film asks its participants to repeat it. The repetition is not identical to the original event because the participants now know that they are being filmed. Their memory is being converted into performance.

The scenes of the Ahankhah family encountering Sabzian are reconstructions. Yet they are performed by the people who actually experienced them. The performers are not professional actors pretending to be strangers. They are real people playing versions of themselves. The result is a form of performance that cannot be cleanly classified as either acting or non-acting. Kelen Pessuto's work on *Close-Up* is particularly useful in this regard because she describes the film as a hybrid work that deliberately destabilises the boundary between documentary and fiction. Her analysis emphasises the significance of the "non-actors" who perform their own experiences. The question therefore becomes: what does it mean to perform oneself? We

often imagine authenticity as the opposite of performance. To be authentic is supposedly to be "oneself," while performance is something added from outside. *Close-Up* challenges this assumption. The moment an individual tells their own story before a camera, they are already selecting, remembering, arranging and interpreting their experience. Selfhood itself becomes performative.

Sabzian's impersonation of Makhmalbaf is therefore not simply an isolated act of deception. His performance reveals his intense emotional relationship with cinema. He identifies with the filmmaker because cinema gives him an imagined alternative identity. In ordinary life he occupies a socially marginal position. Through the performance of being Makhmalbaf, however, he becomes someone who commands attention, enters a middle-class household and is treated as an artist. The lie therefore produces a strange form of truth. Sabzian is not Makhmalbaf, but his desire to be Makhmalbaf reveals something truthful about how cinema operates within his imagination.

This is where the film's title becomes important. A close-up traditionally brings the spectator closer to a face, allowing minute details and expressions to become visible. But Kiarostami's close-up does not necessarily provide certainty. It can produce greater ambiguity. The closer we get to Sabzian, the less easily we can categorise him. Is he a criminal? A victim? An artist? A liar? A cinephile? A performer? The film refuses to reduce him to a single identity.

One of the most striking features of *Close-Up* is the way Kiarostami's own presence enters the narrative. He is not an invisible documentarian. His intervention becomes part of the story. At several points, the audience becomes aware that the filmmaker has influenced what is happening. Kiarostami arranges meetings, asks questions and creates circumstances in which the participants speak. The camera therefore cannot be considered a neutral witness. It participates in producing the reality that it records. This recalls a larger debate in documentary theory. Bill Nichols has argued that documentary is not simply a transparent record of reality but a mode of representation involving selection, organisation and rhetorical construction. Stella Bruzzi, in New Documentary, goes further by emphasising performance and the unstable encounter between filmmaker and subject. From this perspective, documentary does not merely capture an already existing reality. Reality emerges through the encounter between filmmaker, camera and subject. *Close-Up* makes this process unusually visible. The courtroom scenes are particularly important. They appear to document Sabzian's trial, but the film also reconstructs the proceedings. Sabzian is not simply being filmed in court. His experience is being transformed into cinematic narrative. His testimony becomes

simultaneously legal testimony and cinematic performance. The film therefore creates a layered structure of reality. There is the original event: Sabzian impersonates Makhmalbaf. There is the legal event: Sabzian is arrested and tried. There is the cinematic reconstruction: the participants repeat these events for Kiarostami's camera. And finally, there is the spectator's encounter with the film. Each layer modifies the previous one.

This is why the film constantly creates uncertainty about what exactly we are watching. Scholarly work on *Close-Up*, including the article "Soft Epiphanies: The Multilayered Narratives in Abbas Kiarostami's Film Close-Up (1990)," similarly emphasises the film's multilayered construction and its unstable movement between documentary and fiction. Kiarostami's achievement is not that he hides the constructed nature of cinema. On the contrary, he repeatedly exposes it. The spectator becomes conscious of the camera's presence and therefore conscious of the fact that every cinematic reality is mediated.

The philosophical centre of *Close-Up* is perhaps Sabzian himself. His deception is obviously fictional: he is not Makhmalbaf. But his emotional investment in the deception is genuine. This distinction between factual truth and emotional truth is crucial. If we understand truth only as correspondence between statement and fact, then Sabzian is simply lying. But cinema can ask another question: what does the lie reveal? Sabzian's performance reveals his identification with cinema. His fascination with Makhmalbaf is not merely professional admiration. It is connected to a desire for recognition and transformation. Through cinema, he imagines a different social position for himself. He becomes someone who can enter spaces that might otherwise remain inaccessible. His performance also exposes the relationship between class and cultural capital. The Ahankhah family recognises Makhmalbaf because of his status as a filmmaker. Sabzian's ability to impersonate him depends partly on the symbolic power attached to cinema. His knowledge of films gives him credibility. Cinema consequently becomes both the object of his deception and the medium through which his deception is transformed into art. There is an extraordinary circularity here. Sabzian pretends to be a filmmaker. Kiarostami films Sabzian pretending to be a filmmaker. The pretense becomes the subject of a film. Sabzian's false identity therefore produces a real cinematic identity for him. This is why the ending of *Close-Up* is so powerful. Sabzian meets the real Makhmalbaf. The encounter is emotionally charged because the distinction between the impersonator and the person impersonated has already become unstable. Sabzian has spent much of the film performing Makhmalbaf, while Makhmalbaf now enters the film as himself.

Yet even this apparently authentic encounter is mediated by cinema. We see it because Kiarostami's camera is there. The real encounter becomes a cinematic event. The paradox is impossible to escape: the camera gives us access to reality while simultaneously transforming it. Reconstruction is often treated as something that makes a documentary less truthful. If an event is recreated, the assumption is that the original reality has been replaced by fiction.

Close-Up reverses this logic. The reconstruction becomes a way of accessing aspects of the event that ordinary documentation could not capture. When the Ahankhah family re-enacts their encounter with Sabzian, they are not simply reproducing facts. Their gestures, hesitations, expressions and interactions reveal how they remember the event. Memory itself is therefore performative The film does not claim to recover an objective version of the past. Instead, it shows how the past survives through people's attempts to narrate and perform it. The reconstruction becomes a space where memory and present experience overlap. This is also why the film cannot be reduced to a mystery about whether particular scenes are "real." The uncertainty is productive. It encourages the spectator to understand truth as relational rather than absolute. A scene may be reconstructed and still reveal something true. A spontaneous moment may be filmed and still be shaped by the camera. A testimony may be sincere and still contain interpretation. A lie may contain an emotional truth. Kiarostami's cinema operates within these contradictions rather than resolving them.

This approach connects *Close-Up* to Kiarostami's broader cinematic philosophy. His films frequently leave gaps that spectators must fill. He does not provide all the information necessary for interpretation. Instead, he constructs situations in which viewers become active participants. The spectator, therefore, becomes another layer in the production of reality.

Cinema often gives spectators the impression that they are watching a completed world. Kiarostami frequently disrupts this illusion. His films contain incomplete narratives, ambiguous endings, off-screen spaces and unresolved situations. The spectator is forced to participate. This becomes especially important in *Close-Up* because the film refuses to establish a final moral interpretation of Sabzian. If Kiarostami had presented him simply as a fraud, the film would have been a conventional story about deception. If he had presented him entirely as a victim, it would have become a sentimental story of social marginalisation. Instead, the film allows Sabzian to remain contradictory. He has committed a deception, but he is also genuinely passionate about cinema. He has harmed the Ahankhah family, but he is also emotionally vulnerable. He wants to become someone else, but his performance reveals something intimate about who he already is. The spectator must negotiate these contradictions. This is one reason why Kiarostami's cinema is often associated with ambiguity. Ambiguity here does not mean that the filmmaker has failed to communicate. It is a deliberate strategy. By refusing to close interpretation, the film allows multiple forms of truth to coexist.

In this sense, *Close-Up* can be connected to Kiarostami's interest in the relationship between visible and invisible reality. The camera shows faces, houses, streets and landscapes, but the meanings attached to these images remain unstable. What appears on screen is never identical to what it means. The spectator therefore becomes part of the film's epistemological structure. We are not simply asking what happened to Sabzian. We are asking how we know what happened.

That distinction is fundamental.

The problem of representation in *Close-Up* is also an ethical problem. What does it mean to turn another person's life into cinema? This question becomes particularly significant because the people in the film are not fictional characters. They are individuals whose experiences have been transformed into a cinematic narrative.

Kiarostami does not completely resolve the ethical problem. Instead, he makes the process visible. The camera remains close to Sabzian's face. We watch him speak about his experiences, desires and humiliation. The spectator is placed in a position of intimacy. Yet this intimacy is mediated by the filmmaker. The film's title again becomes significant. A close-up is often associated with psychological access. By placing a face close to the spectator, cinema creates the impression that inner truth can become visible. But Kiarostami complicates this assumption. Sabzian's face does not give us direct access to his interiority. We still have to interpret his words, expressions and pauses. The face is visible, but the self remains partially opaque.

This point can be connected to broader debates about spectatorship and cinematic looking, including the work of Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey and later theorists of spectatorship. Yet Kiarostami's cinema differs from classical cinematic structures in which looking often produces mastery. His films repeatedly frustrate the desire to possess the image completely. The spectator wants to know the truth about Sabzian. The film continually delays that certainty. This makes the act of watching itself part of the ethical problem. To watch another person is not necessarily to know that person.

Close-Up occupies an important position within Kiarostami's wider body of work because it makes explicit a concern that runs throughout his cinema: the instability of the boundary between life and film.

This becomes especially visible in the Koker films, particularly *And Life Goes On...* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). In these films, the relationship between actual events, fictional characters and cinematic production becomes increasingly complex. The films refer back to earlier films, actors play versions of themselves and cinematic production becomes part of the narrative. The boundary between film and life therefore becomes porous.

Encyclopedia Iranica's account of Kiarostami notes precisely this movement towards self-reflexivity, identifying *Close-Up* as a key point in his exploration of the boundaries between documentary and fiction. This self-reflexivity does not mean that Kiarostami simply makes films about filmmaking. His deeper concern is with perception. What happens when we become conscious of the process through which an

image is created? Once we realise that the image has been framed, our relationship to it changes. The camera stops being invisible. This is one of Kiarostami's most important contributions to cinematic realism. He does not abandon realism. Instead, he makes realism self-conscious. Reality is still there, but we become aware that we encounter it through mediation.

It would be tempting to read Kiarostami's ambiguity entirely as a consequence of censorship. Such an interpretation, however, would be incomplete. Nevertheless, the political conditions of Iranian cinema provide an important context for understanding why indirect forms of representation became so significant. In post-revolutionary Iran, filmmakers operated under regulations concerning the representation of gender, sexuality, morality, religion and political subjects. Scholars including Negar Mottahedeh, Hamid Naficy and Azadeh Farahmand have examined how filmmakers negotiated these restrictions. The important point is that censorship did not produce a single aesthetic response. Iranian filmmakers developed multiple strategies, and these strategies changed over time. Some relied on allegory, others on realism, others on metaphor, and still others on formal experimentation. Kiarostami's response was distinctive because his films often refused direct confrontation. Rather than representing political reality through explicit political narratives, he explored the structures of perception and everyday experience. This indirectness can itself become politically significant. When a filmmaker refuses to tell the spectator exactly what an image means, the spectator is required to become an active interpreter. The film therefore creates a space of intellectual participation. However, it is important not to romanticise ambiguity as inherently resistant. Ambiguity can produce critical reflection, but it can also simply produce uncertainty. Its significance depends on the specific formal and historical context in which it operates. In Kiarostami's case, ambiguity becomes particularly powerful because it is combined with an intense attention to ordinary life. His films do not escape reality into abstraction. They return repeatedly to bodies, faces, roads, houses, landscapes and everyday conversations. The philosophical emerges through the ordinary.

The importance of *Close-Up* ultimately lies in its refusal to choose between reality and fiction. The film does not say that reality is fictional. Nor does it claim that fiction is somehow more truthful than reality. Instead, it demonstrates that the two categories constantly interact. Sabzian's original performance is fictional. But it produces real consequences. Kiarostami's reconstruction is fictionalised. But it allows real people to express experiences that might otherwise remain inaccessible.

The courtroom scenes are reconstructed. But the emotions and relationships within them are not therefore false. The final encounter between Sabzian and Makhmalbaf is real. But once it is placed inside a film, it becomes part of a cinematic construction. Reality therefore does not disappear when fiction enters the frame. It becomes transformed. This is why the distinction between documentary and fiction becomes insufficient for understanding the film. Both documentary and fiction are modes

of organising experience. Both select, frame, exclude and construct. The difference lies not in whether one constructs reality and the other does not, but in how each mode presents its relationship to construction. Kiarostami refuses the fantasy of transparent representation. His cinema says, in effect, that every image has a history. Someone chose where to place the camera. Someone decided when to begin recording. Someone selected one moment and discarded another. Someone edited the sequence. Someone decided how long the shot should last. Someone created the relationship between one image and another. Reality reaches the spectator only through these decisions. *Close-Up* makes us conscious of them.

Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up* remains one of the most compelling examples of cinema's ability to question its own relationship with reality. Its importance does not lie simply in the fact that it combines documentary and fiction. Other films have done this. What makes *Close-Up* distinctive is the way it turns the process of combination itself into the central subject of the film. The film begins with a real event, but that event has already contained an element of performance. Sabzian has pretended to be another person. Kiarostami then reconstructs the event using the actual participants, transforming memory into performance once again. The reconstructed performance is filmed, edited and presented to an audience. The audience then interprets these layers and constructs another version of reality through viewing. Reality therefore becomes cumulative. There is no single moment at which we can confidently say: this is reality and everything after it is fiction. This is not because Kiarostami deliberately deceives the spectator. On the contrary, the film's self-reflexivity repeatedly reminds us that we are watching a constructed object. Its honesty lies precisely in revealing its own mediation. The historical development of Iranian cinema makes this intervention particularly significant. From the Iranian New Wave's rejection of commercial conventions to the post-revolutionary cinema shaped by censorship, cultural transformation and new institutional conditions, Iranian filmmakers developed distinctive ways of negotiating reality and representation. The work of Kiarostami emerged from this history but also moved beyond it. His cinema transformed constraints, everyday realities and formal minimalism into a broader philosophical investigation of perception.

Close-Up consequently asks questions that exceed the boundaries of Iranian cinema. What makes a person who they are? Is identity something stable, or is it partly produced through performance? Can a lie reveal the truth? Can a reconstruction be truthful? Can a camera capture reality without changing it? And perhaps most importantly, what exactly do we mean when we call an image "real"?

Kiarostami does not provide definitive answers to these questions. His cinema is valuable precisely because it does not close them. Sabzian's impersonation of Makhmalbaf is fictional, but his desire is real. Kiarostami's reconstruction is staged, but the emotions that emerge from it are not thereby invalidated. The final encounter is spontaneous, yet the camera transforms it into cinema. Every layer of the film therefore contains both reality and construction.

The boundary between them becomes less like a wall and more like a threshold. Perhaps this is ultimately what makes *Close-Up* such a profound meditation on cinema. It suggests that reality is not something that exists on one side of the camera while fiction exists on the other. Reality is continually produced through encounters between people, images, memories, performances and acts of looking. Cinema does not merely stand outside this process and record it. Cinema participates in it. And this is where Kiarostami's cinema becomes philosophical. He does not ask us simply to believe what we see. He asks us to examine the conditions under which we see it. The truth of the image therefore does not lie only in its correspondence with an external reality. It also lies in the questions the image forces us to ask about reality itself.

In *Close-Up*, the person who pretends to be a filmmaker eventually becomes the subject of a film. The person who lies about his identity becomes, through cinema, more visible than he might otherwise have been. A false identity produces a genuine encounter. A reconstructed event produces an authentic emotional experience. A staged scene reveals something that could not necessarily have been captured through straightforward observation. The film thus arrives at an unsettling but productive proposition: fiction does not necessarily stand against truth. Sometimes fiction is the form through which truth becomes visible. Kiarostami's cinema does not resolve the tension between reality and fiction. It inhabits it. And perhaps that is precisely where its enduring power lies.

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