

CLOSE-UP: BLURRED THE LINE BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION

Shaolin Shaon

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

“Close-up” is one of the notable creations in Iranian film history for being ambiguous in nature. Before analyzing, whether it’s a documentary or a fiction we should know what the difference between documentary and fiction is. The clearest distinction between the two is their relationship with the reality. A fiction film tells a story that is not connected directly to any incident of the real world, or at least not in the form it is represented. On the contrary, a documentary, however, represents something that is based on the reality (Bakker, 2002). Abbas Kiarostami has played successfully with these two forms to create a curiosity among his Iranian audience as well as European and American audiences. Although “Close-up” could be considered a documentary, many of the scenes dramatized the reenactments of real events and performed by the very same people that were involved in the original events. After having a look at the brief overview of the plot it will be easier to focus on the reenactment of fiction and the reality of documentary.

The observations found a true event in Tehran led the great director Abbas Kiarostami made “Close-up” (The Film Sufi, 2009). This seems like a plot that any filmmaker could easily portray, but Kiarostami uses his famous self-reflexive approach. The story concerns a crazy film lover, Hossain Sabzian’s who led a poor life of working for a small wage that was barely enough to feed his mother and son. He pretended to be a rich and famous film director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf because he received respect, food, money from people and he was given friends who he could talk with about something he loved. It is understandable that we are born into a condition of “lack” and subsequently spend the rest of our lives to overcome this condition by consoling ourselves with displacement strategies and substitute objects (Laca, 1989). Sabzian’s desires the respect and power that a well-known name receives from the people of Iran. Sabzian’s has done this by disguising “Mohsen Makhmalbaf” when he met Mrs. Ahankhah, who was sharing a bus seat with him. She observed him reading a screenplay by Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. When she asked him about the book, Sabzian impulsively told her that he, himself, is the Director Makhmalbaf. The woman was highly impressed and invited him to her house to visit her sons, who are film enthusiasts. This sequence was staged as it was not possible to track Sabzian how he did his fraud statement in reality. So, this belongs to the fictional part.

After visiting the Ahankhah House many times, to pique their interest, he tells the family that he is interested in making his next film at their home and starring the family. Displacement works by allusion and it is undesirable that a latent element is replaced by a component part of itself (Freud, 1913). Sabzian is unable to fulfill his desire for being a director or actor, so unconsciously he has displaced himself through his desired one. He would have been happy if he got somebody related film-industry, which did not happen. So, he wants to give this feeling to other cinephiles like him. It's a matter of regret for Sabzian, which eventually the family becomes suspicious that the man is only a fraud, and they have him arrested. This arresting was the opening sequence of "Close-up" which was part of fiction.

Because of the camera shot setups, the film editing; the opening 15-minute sequence covering Soroush magazine journalist Hossain Farazmand's taxi trip with two soldier-policemen to the Ahankhah house to make the arrest on Sabzian, provide the necessary background concerning the reasons for the arrest. The taxi driver idly waits outside the Ahankhah home and stares at a jet plane overhead. An empty aerosol can fall from a rubbish heap and rolls slowly down an inclined street. The reporter, Farazmand's rings neighbors' doorbells to see if he can borrow a tape recorder. So, it is clear that this opening segment is a fiction-film beginning, not a documentary.

But at the end of that opening fiction-film segment, the film titles finally roll across the screen, after which we switch over to documentary-film mode, as Kiarostami begins interviewing the police and the Ahankhah family in order to get his own background information on the story.

Like actuality and interviews, some features of a documentary are visible in "Close-up". The actuality is represented in "close-up" by raw film footage of real-life events, places, and real people. Interviews were also a very important technique for the "Sabzian" s introduction and also the others. Lighting, color scheme, framing, and camera angle- everything impact the audience's perception of the person who is speaking. Much of the resulting "Close-up" covers Sabzian's testimony during this trial. The grainy and uncut quality of the court scene forces a sense of truth- which is the part of documentary.

The scenes of Sabzian's trial at first appear to be documentary footage, but it eventually becomes clear that the proceedings have been to an extent directed by Kiarostami. The director can be heard as an off-screen inquisitor posing questions to Sabzian, some of which break right through the "fourth wall" by the dialog "Aren't you acting for the camera right now?"

Kiarostami stated in the film that the court case scene was shot with two cameras: one that panned around the court, opportunistically viewing the magistrate and the Ahankhah family as appropriate, and the second camera with a telephoto lens always maintaining Sabzian in close-up

during his testimony. This is the critical dialectic of the film and underlies the significance of the film's title.

The first camera is showing the court case in documentary "objective reality" fashion. But the second camera is more "real" or not is open to question, but at least the two cameras evoke contrasting emotional effects on the viewer. Kiarostami has said that the courtroom testimony was scripted but composed largely from Sabzian's own words. Eloquent and direct, these passages are the heart of the film ("The Film Sufi", 2009).

According to "Camera that Changed the World" (2011), the "French cinema vérité" documentarians tended to acknowledge the observer, and they incorporated their own observations into their recordings. Kiarostami definitely follows along the lines of the French tradition, but he sometimes crosses the lines, and there are sequences of seemingly direct cinema or even fictionalized accounts mixed into his films.

It is explicit that to identify what's real and what's acted, the director's choice of film style helps us in this. About "close-up", it can be said that several sequences were initially shot in typical (French cinema vérité) documentary fashion with the filmmakers' presence explicitly acknowledged like interviews, trial. Also, several sequences were in fictional style like the opening scene, bus scene with Mrs. Ahankhah and especially the closing one. The film closes with Sabzian being released from jail and having an emotional meeting with his hero, the real Mohsen Makhmalbaf, in which the Director reminds us that, at the end of the day, we are watching a fiction film. We also hear the sound of several shooting terms like 'go in' and 'out' as if the Director really does not have a good enough microphone to film the scene without flaw. It is intentionally done to symbolize that although it is a true story, everything we have seen is a work of art. Though "Close-up" is not a pure documentary or pure fiction, the blending of these two has aesthetically blurred the line between them.

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