

FILMIC PERFORMANCE – AUTHENTICITY AND *THE APPLE*

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Abstract: Performance is overtly untheorised within the debates that surround film studies even though ideas about realism are very well rehearsed. What might be some of the issues raised by the scrutiny of film performances within the wider context of the visual arts? How might issues of performed authenticity relate to contemporary concerns that mark out reality as being the problem of the moment? As the work of both Samira Makhmalbaf (*The Apple*, 1998) and Abbas Kiarostami (*Close-Up*, 1990) testifies, contemporary Iranian cinematic practices very often utilise the idea of restaging lived experiences. Non-professional actors re-perform their ‘original’ experiences and the director creates a narrative from these authenticities. In this context, the feature film format is refigured in order to re-think the role of the performative and the nature of truth within the realm of the moving image. Power relations and the ethics of realism are further complicated through the explicit manipulation by the film director and overt interventions both within and outside the film. This paper will look at the historical context for this form of realist performance by making connections between this contemporary practice and earlier models of film and performance.

Film studies remains conservative in its scope of analysis—there are distinct parameters of what has historically been scrutinised and hence there remain many areas that are still to be considered. One of the areas that remains untheorised is the role that performance plays in film. Debates about acting remain peripheral to the articulation of substantive theories about spectatorship, authenticity and realism. Discourses about film and realism have too often been tied up with arguments about national cinemas, credible or believable storylines in mainstream narrative cinema or authentic displays of emotions in art and world cinema.¹ For example, in mainstream cinema: the authentic representation of an illegal Sicilian family organisation is theorised more in terms of it reflecting America in crisis than about what an Italian American director or indeed Italian American actors can bring to *The Godfather* in particular.²

In Italian cinema of the post-War era, Italian Neo-Realist films attempted to address the ethics of realism through utilising the social and political conditions of the moment as its subject matter. As opposed to trained actors, real people were often used in this era of filmmaking – Eisenstein’s idea of *typage*³ was purposely inscribed and the external appearance of the people would be utilised within the performance of the film in order to heighten ideas of authenticity and truth. Many techniques from documentary were used (for example the use of original newsreels in the work of Rossellini⁴) and the poor quality black and white film stock (which was of variable gradations due to the actual film stock that the directors had access to during and after the War), all added to the presumed authenticity of the films being produced. Vittorio De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves*⁵ of 1948 does away with mainstream narrative as we might know it from the American model and bases a whole film on the theft of a bicycle. The impact of this theft is felt by an entire generation of poor Italians who were driven to steal from one another in order to survive. Interestingly, here, De Sica chose a range of non-actors in order to aid his project and each of the cast members were selected both for the fact that they were to represent a particular modality but also

because they were actually living the part that they were portraying. The literalness and presumed authenticity of this acting has informed some of the debates in relation to questions of national cinemas. The filming conditions of the era, whilst helping to inform the aesthetics of the actual films being made, have also helped to encapsulate a very specific politics of practice. This is a film about a long-term unemployed man called Antonio Ricci who is given employment at the start of the film on the condition that he has a bicycle through which he will be able to perform the job (putting up film posters to advertise cinematic film releases). He already had to pawn his bicycle (a common practice in post-War Europe where commodities of any kind translated into money for food) and hence has to get it back by exchanging it for his used bed linen. The bicycle is subsequently stolen on his first day of work and the entire narrative of the film is centred around his attempts to find the thief; and the safe retrieval of the necessary commodity would ensure a happy ending to the film. However, this never happens and the non-happy ending sends the reverberating message for an entire generation of Italians that was forced to emigrate, suffer from malnutrition, and indeed live out the non-happy ending in real terms.

Ricci (played by the non-professional actor, Lamberto Maggiorani) represents a generation of Italians that faced long-term unemployment both inside and outside the frames of the film, and working in a film production was better than being continually unemployed.⁶ Each of the characters acting as his family is representative of the common experience of the era—Bruno, the little boy who plays the son and Lianella Carell, who played Ricci's wife Maria, were both non-professional actors.⁷ The role performed by Bruno (played by Enzo Staiola) is significant in many ways and Bazin has written about the way the child, not yet a man, is not only a witness to his father's humiliation at having his bicycle stolen but is also to his father being doubly humiliated by being witness to his thwarted attempts at recovering it.⁸ There are many potentially sentimental moments in the film, often inevitable in films with children, but De Sica refrains from exploiting this emotion and at every turn cuts the audience expectation so that our own mode of being in the world is underscored with the level of our own privilege.

The first day of employment for Ricci is performed in noir lighting (very reminiscent of the Film Noir genre that was being heralded in America at exactly the same moment that the Neo Realist works were being made). The aesthetic marker of this work is too often romanticised by film scholars through their focus on the powerful resonance of partial lighting and rarely do they dwell on the fact that this family does not have running water or continuous power for electricity. The layering of authenticity here is such that the truth of the experience is situated through an aesthetic privileging that often excludes the politics of framing—Noir films in America would often shoot night scenes at night through utilising extensive filters that enhanced the overall look of a frame and heightened its realism. The very early morning light and dark witnessed by Ricci and his son provide for us the context of the working day – we assume the child (of around eight years old) is going to school and are shocked by the cold realisation that his father is walking him to his place of employment as a child labourer at a petrol pump. All working hands are useful and Bruno understands this as he joins his father in pursuing the stolen bicycle. For Bazin, the child matures into a man by the end of the film as his father's disappointment at the reality of the situation that is poverty becomes his reality too.⁹ If childhood innocence had masked his ability to fully understand his family's predicament despite his own employment being a harsher reality than most of us have ever had to endure, by the time the film concludes, Bruno evokes the pain that grownups carry with them when ideas for self improvement have run out.

De Sica had many problems trying to get the film financed and it has entered legendary folklore that he was offered American money to make the film, but on the

condition that the main protagonist should be a leading movie star such as Cary Grant.¹⁰ De Sica declined this financial offer and hence made a much cheaper film but one that reflected the politics of the era in such a way that leaves us with a distinct marker of cultural history that tells us as much about performance gestures (both inside and outside of the film) as it does about this era of political, social and cultural history.¹¹ In the same way that Hollywood was missing the point when they suggested Cary Grant in the leading role, it would be a mistake to consider the various moments of authenticity within films such as *Bicycle Thieves* as giving us a particularly more honest insight into Italy during its post war era.¹² The authentic look of war-torn Italy, with its bombed buildings and fascist architecture adds to the knowing function that location performs in movies. The non-artifice of a pre-tourism Rome in the late 1940s heightens our awareness of both the emotional and the lived poverty of the characters in *Bicycle Thieves*. In this respect, location shooting, often the marker of authenticity, can usefully and easily work to perform certain predetermined functions.

Performing the real person, as opposed to the assigned character, could be interrogated in all sorts of additional ways when one considers the impact of adaptation from book to film, or indeed from screenplay to film. The politics of this practice implies all kinds of ethical dilemmas about the wider arts that are of relevance to the idea of outsourcing performance, which scholarship needs to consider. This begs the question, what do re-performing experiences, that had previously been actually lived, tell us about the world. The historical and political dimension of the Italian Neo Realist work can be argued to be specific to the era¹³. However, I would argue that the politics of this practice lives on and is evidenced in the most interesting of contemporary cinematic practices—Iranian cinema. Contemporary Iranian cinema is very much influenced by Italian Neo Realism and the filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf has utilised this idea of lived realism in her own work. It is this contemporary practice that I now wish to move on to.

If we consider the actual substance of much of the performative specifics of this contemporary phenomenon we can see certain repetitive tropes appearing within many of the works bracketed under the term Contemporary Iranian Cinema. Like Italian Neo Realist films, much of this Iranian cinematic practice uses versions of re-enactment, non-actors, authentic locations, and stories in order to explore the politics of the country in the contemporary era. Overwhelmingly, the directors are both orchestrating and documenting the narrative content both at the same time and this double function immediately raises key questions. Re-performing narratives actually lived as well as performing ‘live’ experiences in front of the camera are both critical features of contemporary Iranian films. I only have time to explore one film here.

The early cinematic re-enactments, for example, sporting events, which were recreated so that a wider audience could have access to the original boxing match,¹⁴ is something different from the idea of re-performing lived experiences. Indeed, re-enactments of once live art works (from Yoko Ono’s re-enactment of *Cut Piece* in Paris in 2003 to the artworks of Jeremy Deller) are not uncommon to us as acts of performance within the domain of the visual arts.¹⁵ Many contemporary art practices incorporate participation from the audience in order for the art works to exist as art works at all – the recent work of the British artist Juliette Blythman, *Please Water the Plants*, relied upon her brother attending to the plants at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London every day in order for the art works to survive.¹⁶

Daily survival in the film *The Apple* is made difficult for the two children who form the central protagonists of this compelling film made by the then 18-year-old filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf.¹⁷ The film is a performance of the real life narrative about a very poor family in Tehran in the late 1990s whose twin 12-year-old sisters are literally not allowed to participate in modernity and are kept locked inside the family home. The metal-barred front door is kept locked at all times and the two

sisters (Zahra and Massoumeh Naderi) who have never been socialised, cannot walk or speak properly. Thus their sense of childhood has been one shared between the two of them alone. The narrative is made all the more compelling by the fact that the mother, whilst often in the background of the drama, is blind and has her face covered throughout the entire film. The parents' 11-year reluctance to allow their daughters out into the world is broken by complaints to the local social services by neighbours and this action forces change within the family. A social worker is assigned to force the parents into allowing the children to step outside of the home and the narrative of the film presents us with the ethical dimensions of her worthy attempts at bullying the family into modernity set against the parents' desire to follow their own set of religious beliefs. The father explains that he fears his daughters will mix with boys and that he is the only one who can see what the consequences of this could be.¹⁸ Equally, it is made apparent from the opening frames of the film that he cannot afford to give his children the kinds of things that other modern children expect – the sole family income is the small monetary handout that he begs for in return for saying prayers.

There are many compelling scenes in *The Apple* in relation to the ideas of modernity and there are some extraordinary moments when, for example, one of the girls sees her own reflection in the mirror for the first time. This scene is, of course, made all the more extraordinary when we recognise the fact that she is learning to know herself in front of the film camera. This tradition of children¹⁹ as witnesses to the adult world seen in many Iranian films²⁰ is very much in the vein of Italian Neo Realism. In *The Apple*, the relationship to children that we might otherwise have is complicated by the fact that the children, the parents and nearly everybody else in the film perform the entire version of events in front of the camera over a period of 11 days. The filmmaker became interested in the story at the point that it got television media coverage and she immediately approached the father—hence the family's enforced entry into modernity was a mediated one right from the outset. The literal poverty experienced by the family in the film is matched by the emotional poverty performed throughout the film's narrative. For example, the opening frames makes this apparent through the caged child's hand attempting to pour water through the metal barred door onto a dying plant. It remains unclear whether the filmmaker offered the parents money²¹ in order to participate in the making of the film as they do not seem to make any stipulations about the objectives of the film, although the father does see this opportunity as a way of being able to give his account of the story.²²

Like other 'reality based' systems of contemporary media, we might already be asking what happens to the family once the cameras disappear (a short time after the film was completed, the children are taken into foster care and are now doing very well at school²³) and what are we to make of this system or actuality and performance? Filmmaking as a moral medium²⁴ is an even more complex idea in the digital era given the range of possibilities now on offer in relation to making moving images. The ethical implications are wide ranging and the director has spoken about the role that she took as that of the onlooker rather than the storyteller²⁵ and she insists that the protagonists within the film "were all performing themselves".²⁶ She had to make little or no intervention because she could not have known their story as well as they did. She felt that as a director, she could direct the action and direct the performers to some degree, but that she could not have told them how to perform who they were in front of the camera because only they could do this in an authentic manner.²⁷ To authentically be yourself in front of the camera is a very interesting idea here. How much does the fact that a particular incident, actually happening 'live' in front of the camera, aid in creating a particular version of emotional intensity precisely because it is happening in front of the camera? The family's only access to

any form of media was levelled at the point at which they entered into it as the main object of its gaze.²⁸ Their ability to navigate the power of the camera must be considered in relation to this, even though the director insists that the film was a collaborative endeavour and that the film was being constructed together.²⁹ In addition to this, given the edited 11-day timeframe compressed into an 84 minute narrative film, *The Apple* takes on a signification that is greater than its Western docu-drama status.³⁰

Was this film an important political reportage and well-intended object of performance for a filmmaker who, by her own admission was an onlooker into a story that fascinated her and many other middle class Iranians in the late 1990s?³¹ The family had limited resources in every sense—in the film, the father (Ghorban Ali-Naderi) says that he had only ever been educated for four winters. Nonetheless, the anguish and anger that he performs, the dishonour that he felt that he had received through the original news of their story³² being exposed through the media offers up all kinds of additional questions about the nature of performance. The mother's (Zahra Saghrisaz) attempt at controlling her own image (both intentionally or unintentionally) can be understood through her utter refusal to meet anybody's gaze—her blindness does not mean that she remains unaware of what her daughters are doing at any given time, or indeed, where the camera is positioned. In much the same way that the blind mother in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*,³³ in one of the most pivotal sequences of the film, is able to articulate her position that all of this filming is unhealthy³⁴, the mother in *The Apple* averts her gaze and her face is never seen, although her cursing is often heard.³⁵ Much of our attention is focused on the father simply because he is the subject of much of the narrative gaze and his performance is underscored through the language of the central patriarch. The mother affords herself a much more controlling position in relation to the gaze and also in relation to how much she is prepared to perform for the camera.

The parental consent given on behalf of the children was given with the assumption that the children would be able to perform themselves—to literally act out their entry into modernity. The ability to act oneself in front of the camera comes from the desire (matured or otherwise) to recognise oneself—some photographic theories have led us to this common assumption.³⁶ One once stood in front of the still camera hoping not to blink; one now gazes into a friend's mobile phone camera wondering how many mega pixels it will take to re-create the 'real you'. In *The Apple*, life does not mirror art but art is created in order to speak about a story to a wider audience. Its performative endeavour is both within its narrative and outside of it. The work of art here performs the very act of modernity that the parents seem so against and Samira Makhmalbaf enables a national news story to become global. The perception of contemporary Iran is enhanced rather than tarnished since it is possible that our own 'back yard' might yield comparable stories not yet filmed.

What happens when such a story, whose implications are obviously wider than the context of contemporary Iran, gets viewed in a culture that assumes its modernity in probably the same amount of measurement to the direct opposite percentage to that of the family being interrogated here? Can a Western audience ever know what an inauthentic performance might look like in this context? Indeed, could an Iranian one do? What might acting and performing be made up of in this context? The quality of the performances is something that left some British reviewers of the film uncomfortable.³⁷ How much is the director, Makhmalbaf acting out her own role as both authoritarian director and concerned teenager? She has spoken about her desire to force change upon the lives of these two girls and that the filming made this possible for them³⁸. In addition, the promotion of the film enabled the director herself to experience a level of freedom (to travel to America and Europe) that would not

have otherwise happened.³⁹ Does the politics of this practice mitigate its importance as a fascinating insight into a particular moment of cultural history?

There is only a brief opportunity here to discuss the role of the audience—as spectators we are asked to perform and make meaning of a state of affairs probably quite unlike anything we might ever have experienced in our everyday lives. The multiplicity of personality traits exhibited by the characters involved—the question of which is their real self and which is the preformed version—forces complicated truths from the participating and viewing audience members. The reality of the narrative becomes disputed through the filmic realism that proposes to force us into believing what we see in front of us. The ‘truth’ of the story is as perplexing as the various questions one might have of the motivating forces behind the reasons why each of the characters in this film would be prepared to experience the pain of the mediated encounter. The trauma that is doubly experienced is made all the more curious by their choice of medium through which the world has come to know the story. The temporal image is here assisted in created multiple readings of the ‘original story’ due to the cultural complexities inscribed in the specifics of the narrative content. The consumption of this film in a Western context adds a significant layer of questioning that makes visible the invisible. Corporal authority of the power of the image and its repetitive viewing is significantly framed here within the political context of Iranian censorship laws prohibiting the display of unveiled women, for example.

The director is astute in how she deals with this significant impediment—one lived out by Samira Makhmalbaf as an Iranian woman working as a filmmaker. The performances in *The Apple* allow the mother to be represented legally and also for her own identity to remain unknown to the wider world. Her ‘acting’ would be difficult to assess, if only because she is never actually acting for the camera—her performance is akin to the known documentary style footage and she has no gaze to give to the camera that is filming her. Equally, the 65-year-old father in the film speaks Farsi and has no noble clothes through which we might judge him for anything other than what he is—an elderly beggar whose hope has left him. He is a man doing the best that he can in giving his two daughters a life that he can afford—he does not perform his poverty, it is there for all to see.

The social worker performs her duties within the context of a system that she believes in – she believes the children need to be socialised and she sees it as her job to enforce this socialisation upon the parents, regardless of their wishes. Her particular performance is striking because she appears to be the one who is the most knowing of both the camera and of the moral duty that she is performing in releasing these girls into modernity. She literally acts out of a moral sense of appropriateness for the common good of the community and it is painful to watch her shout at the exasperated father that the girls should be allowed to play outside the house. We, the audience, know that this instruction will put the children in danger, if only because they do not know what ‘play’ is and we become complicit in their performance of a stage in their life where they have to learn for the first time how to be children. The fact that this education should have to happen in front of the camera is very uncomfortable for the viewer as well as being evidently difficult for the parents to endure.

The performance of the camera, and the collusive role played by the audience is important to consider here. The camera literally acts as a way into this lived experience—firstly through the story that had already been mediated via the news media of television and secondly through the making of this film.⁴⁰ The camera performs different functions, both within the narrative and outside of it. The wider implication of the film is evidenced through a range of scrutiny points and various knowledge productions are made apparent to us by the film’s distribution into the wider global market.

When any artwork goes out into the world it is impossible for the artist to pre-empt how the audience may respond. What happens to films when they are transported (and translated) into a very different culture to the one being scrutinised within the world of the film is also difficult to predetermine. Samira Makhmalbaf has had to defend herself from criticisms and accusations of making films that were deemed to collude with a non-Iranian audience's existing prejudices about a country that they might not otherwise know much about. The obvious disquiet felt towards the director and her film by some members of the Anglo-Iranian community at the London Film Festival at the premiere showing of *The Apple* in 1998 has to be considered here.⁴¹ Their sense that the film might present the (Western) viewing audience with a limited understanding of the cultural framework of the film's content is understandable.⁴²

In conclusion, the painful voyeurism exhibited in *The Apple* makes this cinema a cinema of disquiet and in turn this extraordinary disquiet is only made possible by the strength of the performances. The pathology in and around the film—the director's desire to make the film and the performers' desire to experience their lives on camera is what makes the film both compelling and difficult to digest. Contemporary Iranian cinema has given us many consistent examples of performances that steer our attention into truth seeking. The historical tradition of this contemporary phenomenon (another purveying earlier example would have to include Kiarostami's 1990 film, *Close-Up*, a film that I do not have sufficient time to discuss here) allows us to reconsider the place and space of performance within the cinematic.⁴³ Contemporary cinematic practices that compliment the problem of authenticity, for example films made by directors such as Gaspar Noe or Michael Haneke and their cinema of extremes, tend to utilise violence as their markers for truth.⁴⁴ Without depicting physical violence, the complexities pointed at in *The Apple* and its cinema of disquiet will remain with the audience a long time after having participated in its performance.

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¹ For a more recent look at some of these issues, see *European Cinema, Face to Face with Hollywood*, Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

² The Godfather – Parts 1 (1972) and Part 2 (1974), Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. An interesting intervention that does attempt to argue about the wider parameters of the film is by Vera Dika, in *The Representation of Ethnicity in The Godfather*, in *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy* (ed) Nick Browne (Cambridge University Press, 2000). Pp 76-108.

³ This idea is developed through many of the essays in *The Eisenstein Reader*, Richard Taylor (BFI, 2008).

⁴ For example, in Rossellini's *Paisa* (1946), actual newsreels are used in order to advance the episodic nature of the flow of the narrative. For further discussion on this see *Paisa and the Rejection of Traditional Narrative Cinema* in *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*, Peter Bondanella (Cambridge University Press, 1993) Pp 64-82.

⁵ The original Italian film title is *Laddri di Bicicletta*, the American release title is *Bicycle Thief*, and I am using the British film title release here.

⁶ Unemployment was at its peak in 1948: 2,142,000 of a population of 46,000,000 were out of work. See *De Sica's and Zavattini's Neopopulism in Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* by P. Adams Sitney, (University of Texas Press, 1995) Pp 91.

⁷ Adding another layer of complexity to the narrative address, the voices in the film were dubbed – see *The Blurred Image of Cities in European Cinemas, European Societies – 1939-1999* by Pierre Sorlin (Routledge, 1994) Pp 121.

⁸ For a fuller discussion about the relationship between the father and the son, see *Bicycle Thief* by Andre Bazin in *What Is Cinema? Volume 2* (University of California Pres, 1971) Pp 47-60.

⁹ As above.

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion about this, see *Bicycle Thief* by Andre Bazin in *What Is Cinema? Volume 2* (University of California Pres, 1971) Pp 56.

¹¹ Lamberto Maggiorani talks about how he is once again made unemployed subsequent to making the film and eventually finds work as a bricklayer. See *Ladri di Biciclette* in *De Sica & Zavattini – Parliamo tanto di noi* by Paolo Nuzzi & Ottavio Lemma (Editori Riuniti, 1997) pp103.

¹² See *De Sica's and Zavattini's Neopopulism in Vital Crises in Italian Cinema*, P. Adams Sitney (University of Texas, 1995). Pp 93.

¹³ Vittorio de Sica has said *Bicycle Thieves* is dedicated to the suffering of the humble. See *Perche Ladri di Biciclette?* La Fiera Letteraria, February 6, 1948, reprinted in translation in *Springtime in Italy – A Reader in Neo-Realism*, edited by David Overbey (Talisman Books, 1978).

¹⁴ Examples might include, *Men Boxing* (1891) William K. L. Dickson, or *Leonard-Cushing Fight* (1894), William K. L. Dickson, with assistance from the photographer William Heise.

¹⁵ *Cut Piece* was originally performed in 1964 at the Yamaichi Concert Hall in Kyoto, then in the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in the same year and the following year it was performed in the Carnegie Hall in New York. It was most recently performed in 2003 at the Theatre le Ranelagh in Paris. Jeremy Deller's film *Battle of Orgreave* (2001) was directed by Mike Figgis and with the aid of a historical re-enactment expert, Howard Giles, consisted of a re-enactment of the violent confrontation between the police and the miners in Orgreave, South Yorkshire (8 June 1984). It was one of the defining moments of Britain under Thatcherism during the year-long National Union of Mineworkers strike and the film is intercut with original photographic stills from 1984.

¹⁶ This was part of the *Nought to Sixty* exhibition series on at the ICA in London, July 2008.

¹⁷ Shot in both video and film – out of necessity some of the film was shot with video since the government in Iran controls film stock distribution. For a wider analysis of the historical and political context of this work, see *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*, by Amir Rizā Sadr (I.B. Tauris, 2006).

¹⁸ The language spoken in Persian with English sub-titles and the film is an Iranian-French co-production.

¹⁹ Children are also often making the actual films, for example Hana Makhmalbaf (Samira's younger sister was eight years old when her first film, *The Day My Aunt Was Ill* was selected for screening at the Locarno Film Festival in 1997 and her recent film *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame*, has just been released as I write, 2008. See *Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When We Were Children* by Hamid Reza Sadr in *The New Iranian Cinema – Politics, Representation and Identity*, edited by Richard Tapper (I.B. Tauris, 2002) Pp 227-237.

²⁰ *The White Balloon*, (Jafar Panahi, 1995) and *The Children of Heaven* (Majid Majidi, 1997) are notable examples of which there are many and a more recent film would have to also include *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame* (Hana Makhmalbaf, 2008).

²¹ This remains unconfirmed by all sources checked.

²² In an interview with Charlotte O'Sullivan for *The Guardian* (13.12.1998), Samira Mahmalbaf states that she never asked the mother's permission to film her, but however, she found the father to be willing to participate in the film.

²³ Samira Makhmalbaf's official website is under the Makhmalbaf Film House site – www.makhmalbaf.com.

²⁴ See *Moving Pictures at Cannes* by Ron Holloway, 1998.

²⁵ Samira Makhmalbaf spoke about this during the Q & A session of the premiere of *The Apple* at The London Film Festival in Leicester Square, UK, October 1998.

²⁶ The film was scripted and edited by Samira's father, the filmmaker, Mohsen Mahmalbaf.

²⁷ As above. Interestingly the director received many criticism from the floor (mainly from Anglo Iranians in the audience) with complaints ranging from the fact that she was too young to understand the complexities of what making such a film and having it shown within a Western context might do to non Western audiences perception of contemporary Iran to the fact that she herself was a very privileged and educated middle class woman who was being judgemental about something that she had

no right to be commenting upon. The director was very forthright in her responses to these criticisms and had obviously heard them before.

²⁸ In essence, the performers are taking part in improvising their open roles in front of the camera.

²⁹ See the interview with the director by Nick Bradshaw in Time Out Magazine, 16-30 December 1998.

³⁰ Significantly, in Britain the film is often classed as a ‘docu-drama’, in Iran it is most definitely a film. For a brief discussion on this issue, see *The Teenager Who Turned Politics into Art* in The Guardian, 11 December 1998. For a wider analysis of the historical and political context of this work, see *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*, by Hamid Rezā Sadr (I.B. Tauris, 2006).

³¹ The film has been characterised in the West as offering a simple spontaneity rather than a more complex self-reflexiveness. See the interview with the director by Nick Bradshaw in Time Out Magazine, 16-30 December 1998.

³² During the course of the film, he explains to the social worker that he feels that the media news coverage of his family’s story had misrepresented him and hence dishonoured him.

³³ Great Britain, 1960.

³⁴ Although blind, the mother of the central female protagonist, played by Maxine Audley is the first to ‘see’ that her photographer and filmmaker landlord is not all that he seems to be.

³⁵ Many of the Western reviews of *The Apple* (see the international reviews posted on the official website - Makhmalbaf Film House site – www.makhmalbaf.com.) comment on the mental health of the mother and focus on her cursing of the children as an insight into her emotional stability. One might want to question the heightened intensity that suddenly having a film crew move into your home might add to an already difficult situation.

³⁶ See *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* by Roland Barthes (Hill and Wang, 1982) and *The Work of Mourning* by Jacques Derrida, (University Of Chicago Press, 2003).

³⁷ See Friday Review in The Guardian by Simon Hattenstone, 11 December 1998.

³⁸ Samira Makhmalbaf spoke about this during the Q & A session of the premiere of *The Apple* at The London Film Festival in Leicester Square, UK, October 1998.

³⁹ As above.

⁴⁰ See essay by Sheila Johnstone, *Quality Ruling the Roost* in Sight and Sound International Quarterly by Sheila Johnstone, January 1999.

⁴¹ This disquiet was very much in evidence during the Q & A session of the premiere of *The Apple* at The London Film Festival in Leicester Square, UK, October 1998, where a very feisty Samira Makhmalbaf responded in a very robust manner to these criticisms.

⁴² Importantly, the director lives in a county that on the one hand has a family that literally lock their daughters out of modernity and on the other hand produces a woman filmmaker who is able to tell their story.

⁴³ This film is a re-enactment of the real-life events that follow an imposter, Hossein Sabzian, who pretends to be the film director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf in order to make a film about a middle-class family. Kiarostami’s film mixes documentary and fiction and he interviews Sabzian in prison and films his trial, together with using all of the original members of the narrative within his own film.

⁴⁴ Most relevant example would include films such as *Irreversible* by Gaspar Noe (2002) or *Hidden* by Michael Haneke (2005).