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Infidelity as Reality: Re-Staging the Global South with Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-up*

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Abstract

In this article, we contend that, in the fields of art and visual culture, the Global South is both an elaborate lie and a radical opportunity for transformation. We investigate Kiarostami's *Close-up* alongside Lacan's psychoanalysis to show how *Close-up's* filmic narrative evokes the same 'polyvalence' and 'slipperiness' as the notion of the Global South. We argue that Kiarostami's *Close-up retroactively* changed Sabzian's fate, and in so doing, Kiarostami's re-staging actively overwrites History itself. We read the same narrative move in the concept of the Global South to suggest that the Global South adopts the Kiarostamian strategy of *infidelity as reality* by using fiction to deploy a vision of the future to transform the past.

Résumé

Dans cet article, je vise à montrer que dans les domaines de l'art et de la littérature l'idée du Sud est à la fois une tromperie, et une notion à capacité radicale de transformation politique. Cette hypothèse nous conduit à traiter le film d'Abbas Kiarostami *Close-up* à travers un cadre conceptuel lacanien. Le geste de Kiarostami est pour nous le geste intellectuel du Sud. Le plan kiarostamien modifie rétroactivement la vie de Sabzian, son héros ; ce faisant, ces choix refont l'histoire. Le concept du Sud relève d'un même mouvement narratif. Nous suggérerons que la stratégie du Sud correspond précisément au geste kiarostamien de « l'infidélité comme réalité », où le Sud recourt à la fiction pour remplacer le passé, rétroactivement, avec ses images de l'avenir.

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Introduction

This article investigates truth, reality, and fidelity in relation to the concept of the 'Global South' by invoking the Kiarostamian gesture of *infidelity as reality* which I claim *Close-up* (1990, کلوزآپ ، نمای نزدیک) depicts. How can we discuss a concept as wide and varied as the 'Global South'? After all, the Global South is a designation which incorporates most of the world's cultures; it also encompasses a multiplicity of different peoples.[1] What exactly is meant by this term in the fields of art, literature, and visual culture? Moreover, what does Kiarostami have to do with it? I argue that while the concept of the Global South might be flawed, in the sense that it might have too wide a gamut of meaning, the designation is crucial in that it articulates a political site of literary, aesthetic and transcultural resistance. I seek to complicate the South/ North divide along the lines of Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo's designation when they state that 'the Global South is only understood in relation to the Global North, both entangled in long lasting historical relations of Western imperial expansion.'[2] I seek to invert Levander and Mignolo's ironic view of the North's self-characterization: 'from the perspective of the Global North, the Global South needs help,'[3] rather, in deploying Kiarostami's *Close-up*, I claim that it is the Global North which needs help. The Global South has been actively shifting, shaping, subverting the North. Indeed as Dilip M. Menon argues, 'what ideas like the Global South do is to give pause to conceptions of untrammeled mobility and fluidity and reassert that we need to rethink the world anew from a different standpoint.'[4] The different standpoint I suggest is none other than understanding the Global South through Kiarostami's perfidious lens, articulating a deceit whose imposture yields a far greater "radio-graphic" truth in return. The concept of the Global South can be weaponized in transcultural and artistic terms to retroactively re-read the Global North, forcing rigid university discourse to make room for a broader range of perspectives and cultures. The deceit performed by the Global South is an elaborate exercise in solidarity, one which mimics the solidarity the viewer has with the impostor Ali Sabzian in *Close-up*. The lie of a shared comradeship, imagined, substantiated, and weaponized to further a common struggle.

Overwriting the Past

The Global South is a hotly debated concept, and despite Aadel Essaadani's claim that '[w]e do not have much time to lose in the philological study of definitions,'[5] we must nevertheless pause on the semantics of this term. For Levander and Mignolo, the Global South 'seems to be a new and powerful ordering system for academic disciplines as well as for geographies, politics, and cultures.'[6] Levander and Mignolo stress that although they view the Global South as an "order," they would like to 'resist the disciplinary ordering through which institutions have graphed methods of analysis and knowledge production onto stable territorial frameworks.'[7] Therefore, a defining feature of the Global South is its inherent instability and oscillation, and this is a positive feature of the concept because it allows the Global South to outplay rigid frameworks of knowledge production. Russell West-Pavlov agrees and argues that the "Global South" 'is a protean term, shifting its meanings chameleon-like across various epochs and contexts. It has come to denote various forms of political, environmental, social, and epistemolo-

The author would like to thank Roland Béhar, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Catherine Dossin, and Serene Richards.

[1] Dados and Connell offer an explanation that 'the phrase "Global South" refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania,' that 'it is one of a family of terms, including "Third World" and "Periphery," that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized. The use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power.' Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, "The Global South," *Context,* Vol. 11, No. 1, taking on the issues (winter 2012): 12-13.

[2] Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo, "Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order," *The Global South,* 5.1, (2011) 4. See also Stuart Hall, "West and the Rest: discourse and power" in, Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, *Formations of Modernity* (Oxford: Polity in association with Open University, 1992), 276.
[3] Levander and Mignolo, "The Global South and World Dis/Order," 4.
[4] Dilip M. Menon, "Thinking about the Global South Affinity and Knowledge," in Russell West-Pavlov, *The Global South and Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018) 34.
[5] Essaadani, quoted in, Russell West-Pavlov, "Toward the Global South: concept or Chimera, Paradigm or Panacea?," in Russell West-Pavlov, *The Global South and Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 3.
[6] Levander and Mignolo, "The Global South and World Dis/Order," 1.
[7] Ibid, 1-2.

gical agency arising out of the erstwhile colonized nations'[8] West-Pavlov highlights the 'polyvalence' and 'slipperiness' of the term, as well as pointing out that 'some scholars […] condemn it as little more than a vacuous rhetorical construction.'[9] However, he does attempt to allay some fears by suggesting that the Global South's 'protean character is far more complex than [some] critiques suggest, for it refers simultaneously to a geopolitical area, global economic process, a collective actor, a discursive event, and a body of theories, paradigms, and texts.'[10] I do not disagree with West-Pavlov, I do not doubt the protean character of the term, and I agree with him that the 'Global South describes all these areas processes, events theories, paradigms and texts.'[11] Nevertheless, the malleability and decentered characteristics of the Global South often means that we would be 'well advised to treat [it] with caution, while remaining open to the potential meaning-making it may nevertheless have the power to release.'[12] It is the 'slippery' and 'protean' characteristics of the concept of the Global South which I read alongside the equally perfidious *Close-up* to draw a parallel in method and outcome.

I contend that, predominantly in the fields of art, literature, and visual culture, the Global South is simultaneously an opportunity as well as an elaborate lie with a tremendous capacity for transformation. Menon captures the trans-formative aspect of this notion: 'the idea of the Global South is an invitation to imagine the world afresh,'[13] stating that 'the Global South is a conception of territory as generated by the movement of people and ideas, rather than as a predetermined space within which movement takes place.'[14] Therefore, here, we try to re-imagine the world anew with the idea of the Global South; it presents an opportunity to re-read, and retroactively re-determine, the history of a "future's past."[15] In effect, somehow inverting Jennifer Wenzel's idea of a 'past's future' which holds that an 'anti-imperialist nostalgia acknowledges the past's vision of the future.'[16] I suggest that the Global South's cunning strategy could be to use its future vision to overwrite the past retroactively. A power which, as Achille Mbembe put it in *Critique de la Raison Nègre,* is frequently deployed by colonial power; 'race et racismes n'ont donc pas qu'un passé. Ils ont aussi un avenir, notamment dans un contexte où la possibilité de transformer le vivant et de créer des espèces mutantes ne relève plus uniquement de la fiction.' ['Race and racism, then, do not only have a past. They also have a future, particularly in a context where the possibility of transforming life and creating mutant species no longer belongs to the realm of fiction']17 West-Pavlov captures the spirit of the present article when he states that 'this is why the "Global South" concept, in its truly radical manifestations or implementations, emphatically does not reinscribe earlier paradigms. Retrospectively, the notion of the "Global South" eschews repeatability of paradigms of change, proleptically, it refuses predictions about the shape of transformations.'[18] The Kiarostamian insight is precisely that; it is an attempt to eschew repeatability and to refuse what was and retroactively reshape anew.

A key consideration when discussing the Global South is its relationship to European colonialism and European theory, and an important pitfall to avoid in dealing with this term is to read the European or Northern territorialization and colonization in a different form. As Menon put it, 'the project of the Global South is a project that aims to study the world with the intellectual inheritance of the world and not merely one part of it. It aims to displace a practice that has studied Asian/ African/ Caribbean experience almost exclusively through

[8] West-Pavlov, "Toward the Global South," 1.
[9] Ibid., 2.
[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Ibid., 7
[13] Menon, "Thinking about the Global South Affinity and Knowledge," 40.
[14] Ibid.

[15] Closely related but nonetheless different to David Scott's idea of 'futures past.' *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.
[16] Jennifer Wenzel, "Remembering the Past's Future: Anti-Imperialist Nostalgia and some Versions of the Third World," *Cultural Critique,* 62, (2006), 7
[17] Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre* (Paris: La Découverte/ Poche, 2015), 41. [Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, tr. Laurent Dubois, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017) 21].
[18] West-Pavlov, *"Toward the Global South,"* 14.

the lens of European theory.'[19] This problematic has no easy solutions, and as Tabish Khair argues, 'in some ways, the creation of a Global South through or counter to colonial European discourses might also inadvertently mark the further denudation of many "globals" and "Souths" that have existed and, in some cases, continue to exist.'[20] However, what if the Global South's counter maneuver is not as straightforward? What if the Global South is a process of re-appropriating one, or many, of the discursive strategies which it had already created? In the present article, we develop a claim which was anticipated by Jonathan Rigg when he suggested that: 'rarely does the flow of knowledge run counter to this stream and even more rarely is it seriously considered that the South might have something to teach the North.'[21] We seek to unearth the manner in which the Global South might instruct the Global North, we imagine and develop a possible intellectual strategy proper to the Global South.

As Hall has argued, 'the idea of "the West," once produced, became productive in its turn. It had real effects: it enabled people to know or speak of certain things in certain ways. It produced knowledge. It became both the organizing factor in a system of global power relations and the organizing concept or term in a whole way of thinking and speaking.' [22] The 'Rest' is essential to how the 'West' imagined itself, showing 'the cultural and ideological dimensions of the West's expansion.' Hall continues: 'for if the Rest was necessary for the political, economic, and social formation of the West, it was also essential to the West's formation both of its own sense of itself – a "western identity" – and of western forms of knowledge.'[23] Therefore, it is uncontroversial to speak in terms of an affective feedback loop when discussing the relationship between the South and North. However, the present article claims that it is the "Rest" which has now furthered the potential to determine the Global North and, in its current form as the "Global South," is not simply a necessary counter-image of the North. In what follows, I attempt to elucidate how I believe this perspective works, in order to highlight the Global South's intellectual strategy.

Closing-in

Close-up exhibits many of the hallmarks of experimental cinema. For example, as we will see, Abbas Kiarostami employs diegetic sound to disorientate and frustrate his viewers. In the final scene, the disintegration in audibility fragments and dismantles any remaining narrative coherence by the film's end. Furthermore, the director deploys a non-linear perspective in the re-telling and re-staging of Sabzian's story. In fragmenting the cinematic narration, Kiarostami throttles the linear simplicity of the 'true' story, while embellishing and highlighting minor details. He is said to have re-edited the entire film as a result of a mangled screening he attended where the projectionist haplessly mixed up the reels at a film festival. Kiarostami 'liked the change in chronology so much that he re-edited the film.'[24] He incorporated documentary footage and interspersed these clips among the fictional scenes which make-up most of the film. Kiarostami reflected later on the ambivalent nature of *Close-up:*

> I personally can't define the difference between a documentary and a narrative film. For instance, *Close-up* is a movie that's based on a true story, with the real characters in the real locations, would seem to qualify as a documentary. But because it restages everything, it isn't a documentary, so I don't know which drawer to put it in.[25]

The film is a retelling of the story of Hossain Sabzian, a Tehranian cinephile, who engages in an elaborate fraud by preying on an impressionable middle-class Iranian family. Sabzian convinces the

[19] Menon, "Thinking about the Global South Affinity and Knowledge," 44.
[20] Tabish Khair, "Muslim Migrants and the Global South," in Russell West-Pavlov, *The Global South and Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 171.
[21] Jonathan Rigg, *An Everyday Geography of the Global South,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.
[22] Hall, "West and the Rest: discourse and power," 187.
[23] Ibid.
[24] James Blake Ewing, "Fiction Criticizing Reality: Abbas Kiarostami and the Cracked Windshield of Cinema," *CineJ Cinema Journal,* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2013): 33, https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2013.7733
[25] Abbas Kiarostami, quoted in, Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami: Contemporary Film Directors* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 116-17.

family that he is Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the well-known Iranian director. Hossain Sabzian cuts a rather pathetic figure throughout the film, which is, undoubtedly, related to the real shame of the actual misdeed which he carried out. Sabzian's misdeed sees him taken to court for a trial of his crime, and *Close-up* intimately follows this trial, continually returning to it as the non-linear narrative unfolds to punctuate Sabzian's story.

Twenty minutes into *Close-up,* Kiarostami makes a cameo appearance on screen. We see the back of his head and fleeting glimpses of his profile, and the camera never directly faces him. Instead, Kiarostami grants the viewer his perspective for the duration of the scene. The director organizes this scene to complicate the notions of reality, truth, and fidelity which *Close-up* problematizes and considers throughout the film. Sabzian is in prison, after having been discovered and arrested for his misdeed. Kiarostami is visiting Sabzian to discuss the latter's duplicitous deeds. Their conversation takes place in an austere room, unimportant clerks and functionaries are about, and Sabzian looks lost. Kiarostami is sitting patiently, and the viewer can make out the jet-black sunglasses for which he is famous. Initially, the viewer is not sure that it is Kiarostami. However, the viewer is granted enough visual clues to quickly realize that this is Abbas Kiarostami, in his film, a cinematic portrayal of his friend and contemporary Mohsen Makhmalbaf's imposter Hossain Sabzian. This scene is our first substantial indication that the film plays with the ambiguity of the fine line between reality and fiction. When Sabzian asks directly: 'and you are…?' the director replies 'Kiarostami.'

Large parts of *Close-up* are re-staged events, and this scene is no exception. However, within the fictional context of the film, this is the moment that Kiarostami first meets Sabzian. Kiarostami tells Sabzian that he came to see him in light of the magazine article about his attempted fraud. The voices of the clerks and prison guards are (overly) present in the scene, muffling parts of the conversation between Kiarostami and Sabzian. Once again, Kiarostami's use of unreliable diegetic sound accentuates the viewer's feelings of frustration, serving to blur the boundaries between fidelity to reality and fiction, recalling the 'polyvalence' and 'slipperiness' of the concept of the Global South. The unreliable audio reminds the viewer not to trust in the mere re-staging of events. Kiarostami and Sabzian's discussion seems intimate, almost stolen from the imposing background chatter. Sabzian recounts that he had previously watched Kiarostami's films, and requests that Kiarostami make a movie about his suffering. However, what is Sabzian's suffering? Kiarostami does not simply capture the facticity of the tangled web of lies that Sabzian pursued as part of his elaborate fraud. He does capture some of the facts, but more important is the representation of Sabzian's suffering as it relates to the plight of others and Iranian society in general. Kiarostami's cinematic representation offers a metonymical representation of Sabzian's deceit.

The film purports to 'document,' yet, as a re-staging, *Close-up*'s cinematic representation lacks the faithfulness to the original event, and, echoing Levander and Mignolo, we could say that *Close-up* resists the 'ordering through which institutions have graphed methods of analysis and knowledge production onto stable territorial frameworks.'[26] In some ways, Kiarostami's *Close-up* rehabilitates the image of the defrauder in its depiction of Sabzian's misdeeds. However, Sabzian's cinematic rehabilitation does not occur because his actions are atoned or repented in the film. Instead, Kiarostami's *Close-up* uses fiction to restructure the entire field of present reality. The fiction domesticates Sabzian's misdeed. The 'reality' is that Kiarostami deploys a 'lie' in *Close-up,* the deceit of the documentary form, which he deploys to capture the events of the story. *Close-up* is a fake, a deceit, a simple fraud, mimicking Sabzian's own. The viewer is enlisted in the misdirection, Sabzian's 'misdeed' is contextualized and relativized which forces the audience to sympathize with Sabzian, since we are no better for tacitly accepting the duplicity on

[26] Levander and Mignolo, "The Global South and World Dis/Order," 1-2.

which we are transfixed. The voice of clerks and functionaries contribute to making the viewer assume the documentary form which we are then forced to question. Kiarostami further complicates the deceit by interspersing the re-staged and fictional scenes with actual documentary footage from Sabzian's trial. Therefore, the deceit is double, because what was real is included. Kiarostami is toying with his audience by duping them into believing the infidelity. Kiarostami has declared, 'we can never get close to the truth except through lying.'[27]

We ought to take Kiarostami at his word, to substantiate what I call the Kiarostamian gesture of *infidelity as reality*. I read Kiarostami alongside Jacques Lacan to contextualize this claim. Lacan's argument that '*la verité surgit de la méprise*,' [the truth emerges out of misunderstanding], mirrors Kiarostami's gesture. As we will argue, the concept of the Global South employs the same *infidelity as reality* highlighted by Kiarostami. We routinely lie and act as though there is such a thing as the Global South when there is no such discernable thing which exists in reality. However, the notion of the Global South weaponizes this fiction to restructure the entire field of reality, crystallizing the intellectual and physical space to further an intellectual project grounded in a decolonized discourse. The concept of the Global South makes room, and fruitful discussions emerge from these lies and fictions.

Clipping Lies

Lacan argued that signifiers clip at a specific time and place to create symbolic meaning. Among the sea of floating signifiers, multiple discourses button together to create a master discourse, a big Other, or some organized 'thing' which then founds the Law that regulates the way subjects of language communicate about a given topic. Of course, Lacan is borrowing from Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique générale*, where Saussure writes that '[si] le signifiant apparaît comme librement choisi, en revanche, par rapport à la communauté linguistique qui emploie, il n'est pas libre, il est imposé.' [The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it'][28] Discourses exist relationally to other chosen discourses, and in the competition of determined meanings, the eventual *doxa* that emerges does so from the clipping together of meaning. This structuralist analysis produces the problem that meaning is only ever merely 'clipped;' relegating meaning to an unsubstantiated buttoning. However, this is not an insurmountable problem for our analytic purposes here, as it might be for positivists or "scientists" who wish to believe they know better than the rest of us.

In placing Kiarostami and Lacan together, we expand Kiarostami's statement that 'we can never get to the truth except through lying;'[29] since Lacan's early motto, '*la vérité surgit de la méprise*,' ['The truth emerges from misunderstandings'] makes the same point.[30] Determined meaning, signifiers, or linguistic reality, is a lie which has been conveniently clipped together by circumstance. Lacan uses the example of Racine's *Athalie* to show this:

> La crainte de Dieu est un signifiant qui ne traîne pas partout. Il a fallu quelqu'un pour l'inventer, et proposer aux hommes, comme remède à un monde fait de terreurs multiples [...] Remplacer les craintes innombrables par la crainte d'un être unique qui n'a d'autre moyen de manifester sa puissance que par ce qui est craint derrière ces innombrables craintes, c'est fort.
>
> [The fear of God isn't a signifier that is found everywhere. Someone had to invent it and propose to men, as the remedy for a world made up of

[27] Abbas Kiarostami, quoted in, Azadeh Saljooghi, "A Bakhtin Reading of Kiarstami's Film *Close-up*," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol 17, No.2 (summer 2008): 189.
[28] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique générale,* (Paris: Payot, 1995), 104. [Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* tr. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 71.]
[29] Kiarostami in Saljooghi, *"A Bakhtin Reading of Kiarstami's Film Close-up,"*189.
[30] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre I: les Écrits techniques de Freud* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 397

> manifold terrors […] To have replaced these innumerable fears by the fear of a unique being who has no other means of manifesting his power than through what is feared behind these innumerable fears, is quite an accomplishment]. [31]

The meaning clipped together is the 'fear of God,' and according to Lacan it was Racine who fastened the different 'fears' together in *Athalie*.[32] In the Lacanian schema, the 'truth' is a statement which has been 'clipped' together. In the act of enunciating a truth, the subject maximizes its meaning, and yet the full, unadulterated truth, in all complexities and contradictions, is not reducible to a statement in language. According to Lacan, 'j'ai déjà dit de la vérité qu'elle ne peut que se mi-dire. Donc, ce que je dis, c'est qu'il s'agit somme toute que l'autre moitié dise pire.' ['I've already said, however, that truth can only come midsay [half-said]. So, what I'm saying is that, all in all, what the other half says is worse'].[33] Lacan's impulse is to claim that truth is only ever 'half-said.' In Kiarostami's case, we could say that the truth is only ever half-captured. Half-documented or *mi-documenté*. *Close-up* is a good example, Sabzian's fraud was re-captured and the story re-told. In the cinematic re-telling, the guilt and shame that Sabzian had felt became *processed.* After the re-staging, Sabzian's emotions become mediated by Kiarostami's direction and are no longer his feelings alone. No doubt Sabzian re-lived the shame and guilt by having to perform his misdeed a second time with the family he had already duped once before. However, the second time around there is not as much at stake. Instead, Sabzian has nothing to lose and has everything to gain. The risk Sabzian took is tamed in the re-staging. Sabzian solicits his cinematic redemption at Kiarostami's hand in the prison scene, and, as we will see, Kiarostami's future film changed Sabzian's past fate. The processing and subjective direction of Sabzian's emotions and circumstances created a new reality; fiction retroactively clipped an altogether new truth.

The director manipulates the distinction between reality and fiction, taking an essential detour via the structure of fiction to contextualize Sabzian's suffering. The aesthetic result is more meticulous than the apparent truth of a documentary film. Kiarostami's vision reflects an unfaithfulness to what is real in order to better portray reality itself. Lacan explains that the 'clipping' of discourses occurs in language, this is partially why so much of the truth remains unsayable because you cannot express it entirely in language since words often fail, neither in enunciation nor in writing. Words are untrustworthy, and there exists a duplicity of language itself: 'le langage joue entièrement dans l'ambiguïté, et la plupart du temps, vous ne savez absolument rien de ce que vous dites.' ['Language entirely operates within ambiguity, and most of the time you know absolutely nothing about what you are saying'].[34] The paradox is that Lacan affirms the ambiguity of language in clear language, which allows for a reading of the ambiguity of language as straightforward, and so taking language at its word.[35] This complication is essential since it allows, according to Lacan, for temporary misunderstandings in his psychoanalysis. Lacan's method of understanding is through this essential detour. 'Au pied de la lettre' Lacan stresses because it illustrates his keen belief in disassociating the subject from their speech. Lacan explicitly refers to language as untamable, yet we must work within its bounds: 'si la psychanalyse habite le langage, elle ne saurait sans s'altérer le méconnaître en son discours.' [If psychoanalysis inhabits language, in its discourse it cannot misrecognize it with impunity'].[36] What is clear is that, as Christina Howells argues, language is 'a marker of absence,' and that 'illusion and imagination have an important role to play in self-understanding.'[37]

[31] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre III: les Psychoses* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 1981), 302. [Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III: The Psychoses,* tr. Russell Grigg, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 266-7].
[32] Lacan, *Psychoses,* 302.
[33] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XIX: Ou Pire…* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 2011), 12. [Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XIX: …or Worse,* tr. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity Press , 2018), 5]
[34] Lacan, *Psychoses,* 131/[115-6].
[35] Lacan, *Psychoses*, 184.
[36] Ibid., 164/[144]
[37] Christina Howells, *Mortal Subjects: Passions of the Soul in Late Twentieth-century French Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 134/138.

Kiarostami establishes the untrustworthiness and ambiguity of images and sounds as the primary component of his cinematic technique. However, *Close-up* does also capture and document events, namely in the courtroom scene. However, the prison scene is not history; it is a mere re-staging of history. Kiarostami manipulates the re-staged scenes in *Close-up*, and these directorial choices and duplicitous images clip Sabzian's misfortune anew. Kiarostami's re-telling of the story is subject to all the usual subjective intricacies of personal bias and vision, and yet, through Kiarostami's imagination, Sabzian's misdeeds are domesticated in his real life.

The primary aim of a detour through fiction is not necessarily to promote clarity. For Lacan clarity of expression, or documentary, is, in a sense, a decoy; false security that does everything to obfuscate the nature of complex concepts. In the *Écrits* Lacan explains: 'l'écrits se distingue en effet par une prévalence du *texte*, au sens qu'on va voir prendre ici à ce facteur du discours, - ce qui y permet ce resserrement qui à mon gré ne doit laisser au lecteur d'autre sortie que son entrée, que je préfère difficile.' [Writing is in fact distinguished by a prevalence of the *text* in the sense that we will see this factor of discourse take on here – which allows for the kind of tightening up that must, to my taste, leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult'].[38] Lacan wants to avoid misunderstandings, yet, simultaneously, wants to maintain the equivocation of language. 'J'approche, vous le voyez, par petites touches,' [I'm approaching, as you can see, by taking small steps'] Lacan says in *Le Séminaire XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant:*

> Je ne peux pas dire ces choses en termes tout de suite affichés – si l'on peut dire – non pas du tout qu'à l'occasion je ne le pratique pas, mais parce qu'ici en cette matière qui est délicate, ce qu'il s'agit d'éviter avant tout, c'est le malentendu.
>
> [I cannot straightforwardly say these things– if I can put it that way – not because I don't do it from time to time, but here, with these delicate matters, our task above all else is to avoid misunderstandings.][39]

Misunderstandings *are* to be avoided, through an only temporary misunderstanding. The temporary lapse in clarity of expression and the temporary misunderstanding is essential to the Lacanian method. There is no need to grasp every sentence and every word. Lacan's final aim is to transmit a fullness of comprehension of delicate concepts that speech and writing themselves make difficult; 'ce qui est important, c'est de comprendre ce qu'on dit. Et pour comprendre ce qu'on dit, il importe d'en voir les doublures, les résonances, les superpositions significatives.' [What is important is to understand what one is saying. And in order to understand what one is saying it's important to see its lining, its other side, its resonances, its significant superimpositions.]'[40] The truth is complicated, it is multi-faceted, and it cannot be easily subsumed. There is also truth in lies. However, Lacan does also leave open the possibility of comprehension in language; referring to his critics who argue he is incomprehensible, he replies: '*on n'y comprend rien,* qu'ils m'ont dit. Remarquez que c'est beaucoup. Quelque chose auquel on ne comprend rien, c'est tout l'espoir, c'est le signe qu'on en est affecté.' ['They told me: "we don't understand anything." Note how that's already quite a lot. Something about which we don't understand offers all the hope in the world — it's the sign that we've been affected.']'[41] We had said that the Global South's 'protean character is far more complex than [some] critiques suggest,' and, indeed, the Global South's subtle and tacit complexity offers us the potential of being greatly affected.[42] Moreover, could we not say the same thing *apropos* the final scene of Kiarostami's *Close-up*?

[38] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits.* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 493. [Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, tr. Bruce Fink, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 412].
[39] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, XV, L'acte psychanalytique* (unpublished transcript). *(Last accessed 28 August 2019) URL: http://staferla.free.fr/S15/S15%20L%27ACTE.pdf.* 22. [Translations my own].
[40] Lacan, *Psychoses,* 131/[115]
[41] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant,* (Paris: Le Champs Freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 2007), 105. [Translations my own].
[42] West-Pavlov, "Toward the Global South," 2.

As Kiarostami shows us in the final moments of the trial; the court has exonerated Sabzian, and the impressionable Iranian family withdraw their complaint. Kiarostami cuts away from the trial scene, plunging the viewer into the chaotic scenes outside a courtroom on the streets of Tehran. Kiarostami, we are also led to believe, has arranged for Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the famous Iranian film director that Sabzian had impersonated, to pick up Sabzian. Shooting the scene from inside a car, a key Kiarostamian motif,[43] we can hear Kiarostami and his cameraman exchange these words:

> *"We lost him."*
> *"He didn't wait in the right spot"*
> *"I can't see him. Stop rolling?"*
> *"We can't redo this shot."*
> *"Now I see him - behind the taxi."*
> *"I see him."*
> *"See him?"*
> *"We just lost sound."*
> *"What do you mean?"*
> *"It's either the jack or Mr. Makhmalbaf lapel-mike. It's old equipment. It's 15 years old."*
> *"The sound's back."*
> *"Will it go out again?"*
> *"It's back for now."*

The scene deprives the viewer of all context and information. There is a temporary lapse in clarity of expression, and the audience has no idea whether this is a re-staging or if the urgency in the dialogue between Kiarostami and his cameraman depicts the real event. The truth is complicated, it is multi-faceted, and it cannot be easily subsumed: Kiarostami needs this shot, they cannot redo it, their wiring is provincial, the audio is prey to a short-circuiting, the soundtrack is cutting out, the voyeuristic camera is shaky, and the ambiguity between fiction and reality coalesce to make the viewer not understand. However, the audience feel something. The viewer is affected the way Lacan claimed language made his readers feel: '*on n'y comprend rien*' ['we don't understand anything.'] When Makhmalbaf grabs Sabzian, and Sabzian collapses into his arms, we are left with the real feeling, *c'est tout l'espoir, c'est le signe qu'on en est affecté.*' ['It offers all the hope in the world — it's the sign that we've been affected.'] Kiarostami chooses not to play a soundtrack over the damaged audio, so we are left with the fragmented ambiguity of the broken diegetic soundtrack. As Makhmalbaf and Sabzian take the motorcycle and drive off we are unable to make out their conversation, filling the narrative space with the same 'polyvalence' and 'slipperiness' of the Global South. Neither language, nor cinema, can convey the whole story or truth, and Kiarostami's point is that there is absolutely no need to grasp every sentence, every image, and every sound.

Radiography

The comprehension of difficult concepts is possible in language, yet language is not what it seems. Language ultimately leaves us feeling wanting: 'l'obscurité, la confusion dans laquelle nous vivons, et grâce à quoi nous avons toujours, quand nous exposons quelque chose, ce sentiment de discordance de ne jamais être tout à fait ce que nous voulons dire. C'est cela, la réalité du discours.' [the confusion, in which we live and due to which, whenever we spell something out, we always have this feeling of discordance, of never being completely up to what we want to say. This is the reality of discourse.'][44] Obscurity is woven into discourse; confusions are a necessary part of expression in-itself. Kiarostami's *Close-up* plays with this same dissonance, the images we are fed are interlaced with real documentary footage and re-staged scenes. Kiarostami is demanding more from cinema than the fidelity of the image to the event that was filmed. Kiarostami argues in *Close-up* that cinema itself leaves us feeling frustrated, that images are trapped between fidelity to the represented event and the potential for mimicry and subjective import. However, Kiarostami's *Close-up* clips a radical unknowability, a feeling, or affectation, which pushes the viewer away from simple expectations of the image as a visual representation of what objectively exists.

[43] Most notably, *Ten* (2002).

[44] Lacan, *Psychoses*, 176.

Kiarostami's gesture invokes a complex relationship between truth and fidelity, and it is this move which I place in relation to the notion of the Global South. The Global South highlights a site of struggle, an endeavor designed to promote and advance a retroactive re-reading of history. The Global South was 'clipped' analogously to the way Lacan believed that language enables the clipping together of the signifiers. The Global South organizes a community tied together by this lie, yet the notion is generative, therefore, exposing the fundamental positive value of lies.

The Global South is directed and governed by collective voices, and Lacan relentlessly argued that we need to be governed by a big Other who acts as the guarantor of our truth. Since this guarantee is only ever half-said, *merely clipped*, it is unstable. The moment that truth is quilted as such 'il faut bien en effet qu'en quelque point, le tissu de l'un s'attache au tissu de l'autre, pour que nous sachions à quoi nous en tenir, au moins sur les limites possibles de ces glissements.' ['There does have to be some point, effectively, at which the fabric of one becomes attached to the fabric of the other, so that we know where we stand, at least with respect to the possible limits of the sliding']. [45] As previously alluded, the quilting point is the moment the tissue of meaning is sewed together to prevent further sliding on the signifying chain. Lacan is synthesizing symbolic power and the arbitrary aspects of language. The collective fixes and chooses the signifier. Equally, the Global South is governed by a collective big Other, and what we ought to avoid is the pitfall that Kiarostami, echoing Edward Saïd, highlighted; 'of course, these days, there is a good market for films and books that portray Iran and Iranians in stereotypical terms. [One can…] easily gain […] popularity by painting an evocative and passionate orientalist caricature of Iranians that would reinforce people's prejudices.'[46] The strict identification along geographical or cultural lines cannot restrict the search for emotions or its representations, Kiarostami continues: 'pain is beyond doubt pain everywhere; I have never heard of an Eastern or Western cancer or of a radiography that would show the nationality, religion, language, or culture of the patient.'[47] We can say that the concept of the Global South updates our social radiographic technology, it enables the capturing of 'a radiographic picture of the human condition' and allows for a picture of 'the human condition in Iran, not tourist photograph of Iranians.'[48] Understanding the *infidelity as reality* of the Global South allows for a more coherent picture to emerge, the fiction it produces focuses on the radiographic narrative of the human condition, beyond the perfunctory documentary elements of cataloguing tourist photographs of people and cultures.

Retroactive Transformation: The Future's Past

Kiarostami's *Close-up* changed Sabzian's fate. It is evident that Kiarostami knew Makhmalbaf before the film was made, and he would have undoubtedly arranged for his friend to visit Sabzian outside the court. As we have seen, within the filmic narrative, the magazine article published before Sabzian's trial details the Sabzian affair, and we are led to believe that this is what piqued Kiarostami's interest and prompted the director to meet Sabzian in prison. The 'media' interest in Sabzian's story, as well as Kiarostami's involvement, could have been a contributing factor to the manner in which the trial focused on clemency. The presiding judge would have been aware of the acute public and artistic interest in Sabzian's misdeed, and so the trial proceeds by exploring the facts of the case and ends with a request for leniency from the aggrieved family. Throughout the courtroom scene, the aggrieved family airs their grievances against Sabzian quite forcefully, and, yet, the remorse that Sabzian had exhibited in the preceding re-staged

[45] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livres V, Les formations de l'inconscient* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 1986), 13. [Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V, Formations of the Unconscious,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017) 7.]

[46] Abbas Kiarostami, "Foreword," in Gohar Homayounpour, *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2012), x.
[47] Ibid., xi-xii.
[48] Ibid.

scenes of the film have prepared the audience for a redemptive pardon by the end of the film. The structure of the fiction influences how the audience interacts with Sabzian's guilt. Kiarostami depicts Sabzian's suffering as symptomatic of wider injustices faced by the members of Iranian society. Kiarostami provides 'a radiographic picture of the human condition,' and in so doing highlights the suffering of an entire community. The duping of the impressionable family occurred as a result of the desperation they faced from a variety of economic pressures, we are told. The poverty that Sabzian lives in is alluded to, and so is his desire to escape and exercise some upward mobility (which eludes his reach). Therefore, Kiarostami articulates an alliance between Sabzian and the middle-class family, demonstrating the societal and economic restrictions and pressures faced by all the actors in this saga. And, the Islamic court becomes a progressive site in the film; it is the physical place where recognition occurs between social groups. The judge seeks 'justice' through compromise and discussion, and Kiarostami shows Islamic law in a positive light. However, would Sabzian have been as easily forgiven if Kiarostami had not filmed the trial? 'I can't promise anything but let's talk and see,' Kiarostami says in the film. Furthermore, if, as Blake Ewing argues, Kiarostami is very present in the film, to what extent does his presence directly influence the sequence of events? Blake Ewing explains:

> 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.[49]

Kiarostami at the time of Sabzian's trial was already a prominent Iranian filmmaker. So was Mohsen Makhmalbaf. It is inconceivable that the judge, who granted Kiarostami permission to film the trial, was not in some way affected by the camera's gaze. The big Other of history judging the Judge's judgement. There is a substantial emphasis on atonement and pardoning by the Judge, which in turn demonstrates the emphasis placed on clemency in the Islamic judicial system. The court repeatedly asks the Iranian family if they will pardon Sabzian, and they do so with the usual caveats about how Sabzian ought to get his life together, passing judgement upon his character. However, what Kiarostami depicts in this scene, I argue, is what Lacan caricatured as the law containing its own impotence. In the symbolic law, the master signifier is organized around the Father's law. Lacan states that the father knows that his son or daughter will, at one point or another, violate his law. The process of breaking the Father's law *is* part of the law itself. Lacan's point is that though subjects can (and do) complain about the Father's law, this does not destabilize the father's ability to impart his idea of what the subject should look like at the end of the process of subject formation. Lacan says that 'c'est pour faire chier père' ['it's to piss off her father'] that a daughter might join the Communist Party of France; but this youthful rebellion ends up reinforcing the father's image of the daughter, which the daughter will then reintegrate. The daughter only joins the Communist Party of France to annoy her father, and so is merely re-integrating his prohibition because the act *engages with the law* that the father had laid down.

> [La fille est] tout simplement englobée dans le monde organisé par le père, s'il n'y avait pas justement le signifiant *père,* qui permet, si je puis dire, de s'en extraire pour s'imaginer le faire chier, et même pour y arriver. C'est ce que l'on exprime en disant qu'il ou elle introjecte en l'occasion l'image paternelle.
>
> [[The daughter] is quite simply enveloped in the world organised by the father, and were it not precisely for the signifier "father," which allows us, as it were, to extract ourselves from that world in order to imagine that we are pissing him off (and to sometimes even succeed in doing so). This is what

[49] Blake Ewing, "Fiction Criticizing Reality,"41.

> we analysts express by saying that, in such cases, he or she introjects the paternal image] [50]

Lacan is consistent in his argument about the Law; there is no redemption in small acts of rebellion in the process of subject formation. Small acts of defiance serve to reinforce symbolic power. *Faire chier père* is always already included in subject development and is, in fact, a mechanism by which the father can exercise his power over his daughter.

The Iranian family in *Close-up* are caught up in a similarly complicated situation. According to the coordinates of the Lacanian structure of the symbolic law, the family petition the Law in order to register their plight with the Judge. Petitioning the court is an ineffectual strategy which takes the family nowhere. However, Kiarostami, in taking an interest in the fate of Sabzian, changed the entire constellation of the prosecution, bending the Judge to the will of the fiction that Kiarostami has created, successfully contesting the Law itself. The infamy of Sabzian's case has been secured, by Kiarostami's involvement. Fiction has had a powerful effect on reality, and the final scene attests to this disintegration of the law. The collapse of the audio is the metonymic realization that the symbolic law has itself been duped by Kiarostami's lie. Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, and Sabzian have outplayed the Law. Kiarostami has captured the deceit and actively partakes in it, shapes and molds it, so that, finally, the truth emerges from the lie, the 'radiographic picture of the human condition' is all that survives. Kiarostami's re-staging the events actively changed History itself; whereas the family contesting the law directly only ever tickles it. As a result of the fiction captured by Kiarostami's lens, Sabzian is granted clemency. Kiarostami did not merely represent Sabzian's suffering; he retroactively amended Sabzian's past crime. In this precise sense, Sabzian got much more than he bargained for from Kiarostami's involvement.

Re-staging Global South

In this article, I suggested that the act of re-staging, rendering fictitious, and outright lying has the potential to, *retroactively*, alter the course of the past. As West-Pavlov argued 'the "Global South" does not give us access to "subalterns" who cannot speak, so much as it opens spaces in which speech can be invented. It does not reveal or recover; rather, it triggers processes of creative renewal.'[51] And, it is in that spirit that I suggest the present article has attempted to elucidate the retroactive tools of resistance in art, literature, and visual culture, which we should seek to think together with our understanding of the Global South.

The Global South is a fictitious lie. However, what we require from this lie is not a redeployment of traditional academic and intellectual strategies; as these canonical methods have only attempted to subsume and pacify the prevailing doxa of university discourse. Instead, we see the Global South as aligned with the Kiarostamian strategy of *infidelity as reality*, where Kiarostami used fiction to deploy a vision of the future to change the past. The Global South's protean character has allowed itself to be adapted in order to perform an exercise in collective power which contests and instructs. University discourse is drowning in its colonial presuppositions, and the modest proposal I offer is to challenge this history by reading perfidy in the idea of the Global South. The Kiarostamian move is to recognize that the Global South is itself *merely clipped*, and is, therefore, a lie which can clip together a new site of resistance inside and outside disciplinary ordering, as Levander and Mignolo had suggested. The Global South continues to re-stage and re-write past events, effectively weaponizing the Kiarostamian gesture. The result is that we would have created space for a broader range of perspectives and peoples; to locate, subvert, and rebuild anew. Sabzian's imposture taught us that the Global South is an elaborate exercise in global solidarity which has the potential to use fiction to

[50] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livres VIII, Le Transfert,* (Paris: Le Champ freudien/ Éditions du Seuil, 2001) 402. [Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII, Transference,* tr. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 341. (Translation modified)].

[51] West-Pavlov, "Toward the Global South," 7-8.

challenge *doxa* and retroactively bend the law's hand; offering a form of solidarity that resembles the solidarity the viewer had with Sabzian, the impostor. The lie of a shared comradeship, imagined, substantiated, and weaponized, to further cultural and transcultural struggles.