
Film as Essay

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Abstract

Starting from Edgar Morin’s definition of the essay film, which he elaborated in the 1950s as a continuation of his work in cinema theory, his cinema sociology courses at the Sorbonne and his exchanges with Friedmann, Naville, Barthes, Kracauer and Rouch, and keeping in mind the recent research by the authors of *Serious game*, cinema and contemporary art transform the essay, we explore the ways in which certain documentary films incorporate in their visible form what has traditionally existed outside the frame: their underlying means of creation, their mode of production “with” the filmed subjects, their search for meaning. In this way, research films, experimental films and artists’ films often discover material from which to create forms that undo and critique the existing ones, where filmed subjects embody forms-of-life, to cite Agamben. In order to explore this attempt to blur the boundaries between on- and off-screen, we have chosen as our conductive thread Avi Mograbi’s film *Between fences*, in resonance with the words of the Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari, “To begin a film project is almost a performance and a movement within oneself, an intervention within and on a place, to the point where the place itself becomes transformed once the film is finished [...] the formal dimension of a film is, for me, slave to the gesture which originates outside the film, and which seeks to carve out a place for it in the world.”

Keywords: Edgar Morin, Avi Mograbi, Siegfried Kracauer, film as essay, filming political conflicts

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