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The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments

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The label “essay film” is encountered with ever-increasing frequency in both film reviews and scholarly writings on the cinema, owing to the recent proliferation of unorthodox, personal, reflexive “new” documentaries. In an article dedicated to the phenomenon that he defines as the “recent onslaught of essay films,” Paul Arthur proposes: “Galvanized by the intersection of personal, subjective and social history, the essay has emerged as the leading non-fiction form for both intellectual and artistic innovation.”¹ Although widely used, the category is under-theorized, even more so than other forms of non-fiction. In spite of the necessary brevity of this contribution, by tracing the birth of the essay in both film theory and film history, and by examining and evaluating existing definitions, a theory of the essay film can be shaped, some order in its intricate field made, and some light shed on this erratic but fascinating and ever more relevant cinematic form.

Most of the existing scholarly contributions acknowledge that the definition of essay film is problematic, and suggest it is a hybrid form that crosses boundaries and rests somewhere in between fiction and nonfiction cinema. According to Giannetti, for instance, “an essay is neither fiction nor fact, but a personal investigation involving both the passion and intellect of the author.”² Arthur’s framing of such in-betweenness is particularly instructive: “one way to think about the essay film is as a meeting ground for documentary, avant-garde, and art film impulses.”³ Nora Alter insists that the essay film is “*not* a genre, as it strives to be beyond formal, conceptual, and social constraint. Like ‘heresy’ in the Adornean literary essay, the essay film disrespects traditional boundaries, is transgressive both structurally and conceptually, it is self-reflective and self-reflexive.”⁴

Transgression is a characteristic that the essay film shares with the literary essay, which is also often described as a protean form. The two foremost theorists of the essay are, as is well known, Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukács; both describe it as indeterminate, open, and, ultimately, indefinable. According to Adorno, “the essay’s innermost formal law is heresy”⁵; for Lukács, the essay must manufacture the conditions of its own existence: “the essay has to create from within itself all the preconditions for the effectiveness and solidity of its vision.”⁶ Other theorists and essayists make similar claims: for Jean Starobinski, the essay “does not obey any rules”⁷; for Aldous Huxley, it “is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything”⁸; for Snyder, it is a “nongenre.”⁹ As these examples indicate, many existing definitions of both literary and filmic essays are simultaneously vague and sweeping. Indeed, elusiveness and inclusiveness seem to become the only characterizing features of the essayistic; as Renov observes: “the essay form, notable for its tendency towards complication (digression, fragmentation, repetition, and dispersion) rather than composition, has, in its four-hundred-years history, continued to resist the efforts of literary taxonomists, confounding the laws of genre and classification, challenging the very notion of text and textual economy.”¹⁰

As José Moure argued, the fact that we resort to a literary term such as “essay” points to the difficulty that we experience when attempting to categorize certain, unclassifiable films.¹¹ This observation flags the risk that we accept the current state of under-theorization of the form, and use the term indiscriminately, in order to classify films that escape other labeling, as the following remark appears to endorse: “The essayistic quality becomes the only possibility to designate the cinema that resists against commercial productions.”¹² The temptation of assigning the label of essay film to all that is non-commercial or experimental or unclassifiable must, however, be resisted, or else the term will cease being epistemologically useful, and we will end up equating very diverse films, as sometimes happens in the critical literature—for instance, works such as *Sans Soleil/Sunless* (Chris Marker, FR, 1983) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, US, 2004), which have very little in common aside the extensive voice-over and the fact that they both present problems of classification.

Of all the features that are most frequently identified in the essay form, both literary and filmic, two stand out as specific, essential, and characterizing: reflectivity and subjectivity. Jean-Luc Godard, for instance, who is widely considered to be an essayistic director, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (FR, 1997–98) suggested that the cinema is a “form that thinks and thought that forms”; elsewhere, he defined himself as an essayist, and specified: “As a critic, I thought of myself as a film-maker. Today I still think of myself as a critic [. . .] Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed.”¹³ In both quotes, Godard stresses the importance of the reflective component of the essay form. If we follow Huxley, this critical component may take or, in the best cases, may combine, three main poles: “Essays belong to a literary

species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-poled frame of reference. There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal.¹⁴ The critical stance, which for Huxley can address different spheres, is a key component of all essayistic forms. Indeed, the most important stamp that Montaigne left on the genre, and that derives from classical philosophical traditions, consists in the skeptical evaluation (from the Latin word *exagium*—meaning weight, test, trial) of the subject matter, which self-reflexively includes the evaluation of the author’s same conclusions. The essay contains and incorporates in the text the act itself of reasoning; as Good writes, “The essay aims, in other words, to preserve something of the *process* of thinking”¹⁵—which is also why Adorno can claim that “In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operation, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet.”¹⁶ In what ways, however, does an artistic essay differ from other forms containing a similar critical engagement, such as an academic essay, or journalistic reportage?

Most if not all accounts of the essayistic also place emphasis on its personal, almost autobiographical nature. Subjectivity is so important to the essay that Montaigne’s motto was, famously, “I am myself the matter of my book”; he wrote not in order to “pretend to discover things, but to lay open my self.”¹⁷ As Lukács put it, “the essayist must now become conscious of his own self, must find himself and build something of himself.”¹⁸ However, the essay film produces a particular articulation of subjectivity; the mere presence of a strong subject does not make an essay film. We can safely argue that Federico Fellini’s films, for instance, were always highly subjective as well as deeply autobiographical; yet, this does not make them all essays—even though the author is at times listed among essayist filmmakers. Furthermore, it could be argued that many documentaries display the source of the act of communication, hence foregrounding their subjectivity; however, as Renov reminded us, invoking Bill Nichols’s words, “standard tropes of subjective editing familiar from fiction films become, in the realm of documentary, the foundation for ‘a social subjectivity [. . .] dissociated from any single individual character.’ Here our identification is with the audience as a collectivity rather than with an individual behind the camera.”¹⁹ In what ways does the subjectivity of the essay film differ from that of other subjective forms, be they fictional or documentary?

An examination of the textual commitments of the essay film, of its deep structures, as well as of the modality of reading that it produces, can help to clarify matters. It is first of all opportune to understand when and where the concept of a filmic essay emerges in film theory, as well as in the practice of filmmaking. The idea of the possibility of expressing subjectivity through film can, in truth, be traced back to the very origins of film theory—in particular, some of the French pioneers influenced by poetic Impressionism, such as

Canudo, Delluc, and Epstein, urged directors to express their inner self and their personal dreams in their films. However, it is in the late 1940s that the reflection on cinematic subjectivity clearly emerges in European film theory, preparing for the formulation of the Nouvelle Vague's auteur theory of the second half of the 1950s. It is within this context that the theory of an essayistic use of the camera first emerges.

A Certain Tendency: The Emergence of the Essay in Film Theory and Film Practice

Guy Fihman believes that the first reference to the term “essay” in a cinematographic context occurs in Eisenstein's notes on his own work, and in particular in an entry of 13 October 1927 dedicated to his project of making a film of *The Capital*: “October presents a new form of cinematographic work—a collection of ‘Essays’ on the series of themes that form *October*.”²⁰ In 1948, in the context of his key reflection on the cinema's ability to express ideas, Astruc had already mentioned Eisenstein's project of illustrating Marx's *Capital*, but did not regard it as an example of the new type of cinema he announced.²¹ Noël Burch, writing on the essay film in 1961, also mentioned another early, unrealized project, Jacques Feyder's idea of a film based on Montaigne's essays.²²

The first contribution explicitly devoted to the essay film is probably Hans Richter's “Der Filmessay, Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms,” which was published on 24 April 1940 in *Nationalzeitung*.²³ In his article, Richter (himself often listed as an author of essay films) announces a new type of intellectual but also emotional cinema, able to provide “images for mental notions” and to “portray a concept.” Its relationship with documentary cinema is explored: “In this effort to give body to the invisible world of imagination, thought and ideas, the essay film can employ an incomparably greater reservoir of expressive means than can the pure documentary film. Freed from recording external phenomena in simple sequence the film essay must collect its material from everywhere; its space and time must be conditioned only by the need to explain and show the idea.”²⁴ Nora Alter comments:

Unlike the documentary film, which presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex thought that at times is not grounded in reality but can be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic. This new type of film, according to Richter, no longer binds the filmmaker to the rules and parameters of the traditional documentary practice, such as chronological sequencing or the depiction of external phenomena. Rather, it gives free reign to the imagination, with all its artistic potentiality. The term essay is used because it signifies a composition that is in between categories and as such is transgressive, digressive, playful, contradictory, and political.²⁵

The transgressive quality that the essay film inherits from the literary essay, its derivation from but also betrayal of the documentary, and its ability to be a

meeting point between intellect and emotion are already identified by this first contribution.

By far the most important of the early contributions, for the impact it had on both the emergent critical category of the essay film and for author theory, is “Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo,” the legendary article by Alexandre Astruc first published in *L’Ecran Français* on 30 March 1948, and translated into English with the title of “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo.”²⁶ Astruc records a new “tendency,” the first signs of a new type of cinema, equally distant from the conventionality of classical fiction film (which he compares to filmed theatre) and from the avant-garde of Surrealism (which he does not consider to be truly cinematic), from the visual experiments of Soviet montage and from the silent cinema, with its static quality. For Astruc, who looks at Renoir, Welles, and Bresson as good approximations of what he has in mind, the new cinema will be able to express thought in a supple, subtle, and efficient manner, in the same way as literature does. This possibility, Astruc argues, has been brought about by technological developments, which will impinge on the distribution market: up to now films could only be shown in large auditoriums, hence production was limited to entertainment products. “But with the development of 16mm and television, the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector, will go to the local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of any form, from literary criticism and novels to mathematics, history and general science.”²⁷ Astruc, hence, is not announcing the birth of the essay film, but of an authorial cinema that is able to produce a variety of linguistic and discursive registers, including the essayistic one, and that applies itself to a range of topics and disciplines, precisely as books do. This is possible because cinema is “gradually becoming a language”:

By language I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of the cinema the age of *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.²⁸

In order for this to fully happen, the role of the scriptwriter and that of the filmmaker must merge: “Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.”²⁹ There is, of course, some affinity between this article and François Truffaut’s “Une Certain Tendance du Cinéma Français,” his 1954 manifesto of *la politique des auteurs* first published in the *Cahiers du cinéma*, not only because of the directors taken as examples of the new “tendency” (Truffaut includes Renoir, Bresson, Cocteau, Becker,

Tati, Ophuls, Leenhardt, and Gance), but also because both manifestos introduce a concept of cinematic auteurism borrowed from literature.³⁰

The first article that analyzed an actual film by comparing it to an essay is, probably, André Bazin's review of Chris Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie/Letter from Siberia* (FR, 1957), first published in 1958 in *France-Observateur*.³¹ Remarking that *Lettre de Sibérie* resembles "nothing that we have ever seen before in films with a documentary basis,"³² Bazin calls Marker's "an essay documented by film," hence highlighting the prominence of the written text over the images. He elucidates:

The important word is "essay," understood in the same sense that it has in literature—an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well. Generally, even in politically engaged documentaries or those with a specific point to make, the image (which is to say, the uniquely cinematic element) effectively constitutes the primary material of the film. The orientation of the work is expressed through the choices made by the filmmaker in the montage, with the commentary completing the organization of the sense thus conferred on the document. With Marker it works quite differently. I would say that the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence.³³

Although placing much importance on the written text, Bazin goes beyond literature and looks at the relationship between text and image, and between shots:

Marker brings to his films an absolutely new notion of montage that I will call "horizontal," as opposed to traditional montage that plays with the sense of duration through the relationship of shot to shot. Here, a given image doesn't refer to the one that preceded it or the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said.³⁴

This lateral or horizontal montage (which recalls Adorno's already mentioned idea of the carpet, in which "thought does not advance in a single direction," and in which "the aspects of the argument interweave"), allows the beauty and intelligence of words to transfer also to the visual component: "The montage has been forged from ear to eye."³⁵ Bazin here analyzes a specific film, and does not propose Marker as a case study of a more ample phenomenon; however, if his comments may be referred to essayistic cinema in general, Bazin's conception is that of a cinema of the word, which cannot do without a poetic, intelligent, written text read by a voice-over. Similarly to Richter, Bazin places emphasis on the meeting between "beauty and intelligence," and on the freedom of the essayist filmmaker, who may use "all filmic material that might help the case—including still images (engravings and photos), of course, but also animated cartoons."³⁶

It is not accidental that, after Richter's 1940 initial announcement, the

two texts that signal the oncoming of the essay film, the first as a prediction, the second as a remark, are both French and linked, although separated by a ten-year interval, to the Nouvelle Vague and the establishment of the *politique des auteurs*. It is indeed in this context that the essay film truly emerges as a cinematic form, although critics have labeled as essays a number of earlier films, even from different geographical areas (for instance, those of the already quoted Hans Richter). However, most contributions on the cinematic essay rightly include among the early examples films by French directors Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Agnès Varda (the Rive Gauche auteurs), and by one of the leading figures of the Nouvelle Vague's other "rive," Jean-Luc Godard. This may be explained by historical circumstances. Pierre Sorlin recalls how already a 1940 law of the Vichy government boosted the production of nonfiction in France, with an increase from 400 documentaries made during the German occupation to 4,000 made between 1945 and 1955.³⁷ Catherine Lupton observes that France experienced a decade in which short filmmaking flourished after the introduction in 1955 of a new system of grants which, together with the work of such sympathetic producers as Anatole Dauman (Argos Films) and Pierre Braunberger (Les Films de la Pléiade), favored the debuts of many young directors in a situation of increased creative freedom.³⁸ Bazin himself, in his above-mentioned piece on Marker, stressed how short filmmaking was at the time "the liveliest fringe of French cinema."³⁹ French short filmmaking historically developed a close association with the personal documentary, either as a result of the influence of poetic Impressionism and Naturalism, as in the case of Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures/Nothing but the Hours* (FR, 1926) and Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice/On Nice* (FR, 1930), or of Surrealism, as in Buñuel's *Las Hurdes/Land without Bread* (SP, 1932), and Painlevé's *L'Hippocampe/The Sea Horse* (FR, 1932). As Lupton argues, the new postwar poetic documentaries, including works by Resnais and Franju, were made in a climate in which, thanks to the Surrealist (and, one should add, Impressionistic) antecedents, the boundaries between documentary and fiction (as well as art film) were fluid, and the filmmaker's personal style in the approach to reality was valued, in contrast to other established documentary practices, and especially those linked to Grierson's legacy: "In France, documentary flourished within a continuum of short film production, and came to be regarded at its best as a mode of personal reflection on the world, more closely aligned to the authored literary essay than the social or legal document."⁴⁰

This first-person essayistic documentary production developed alongside, on the one hand, *cinéma vérité*'s experiments such as *Chronique d'un été/Chronicle of a Summer* (FR, 1961) in which the authors filmed themselves as sources of the act of communication and inscribed the self-reflective process into the documentary; and, on the other hand, the new first-person and autobiographical fiction cinema of the Parisian Nouvelle Vague of the late 1950s and 1960s, with its theorization of the personal "cinema of authors." The

essay provided filmmakers a supple form of cinewriting, able to tackle topics and experiences of various types. Often, it offered a channel to express a committed and political vision of the world, as in the tradition initiated, in particular, by Godard, Resnais, Marker, and by Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy. It is not surprising, then, that in their famous manifesto Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino mentioned the essay film as one of the privileged filmic languages for the development of a Third Cinema.⁴¹

Solanas and Getino's manifesto was first published in 1969, a date by which the term "essay film" had truly become accepted. The same year, in fact, saw the publication of Noël Burch's *Theory of Film Practice*. In a chapter on "Nonfictional Subjects," Burch discusses the essay film as a type of documentary that he sees as particularly current and relevant. For Burch, the first examples of essay films are George Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes/Blood of the Beasts* (FR, 1949) and *Hôtel des Invalides* (FR, 1952),⁴² which differ from the "old-style documentary" because they do not take a "passive subject" but an "active theme": "[Franju's] subject is, in and of itself, a development or rather, an interpretation, of this theme, and it thereby becomes 'active.'"⁴³ Franju's films propose not an objective rendering of reality, but conflicts of ideas; they are meditations, reflections on nonfictional subjects that "set forth thesis and antithesis through the very texture of the film."⁴⁴ These films also represent for Burch "the first use in the documentary film of a formal approach that previously had been exclusively employed in the fiction film."⁴⁵ The essay film, indeed, is a "dialectics of fiction and nonfiction";⁴⁶ it is "a cinema of pure reflection, where the subject becomes the basis of an intellectual construct, which in turn is capable of engendering the over-all form and even the texture of a film without being denatured or distorted."⁴⁷ The accent for Burch is, therefore, on reflexivity, on form, and on aesthetic attitude.

Definitions

While some critics and film reviewers today use the expressions "film essay" and "essay film" in an ostensibly unproblematic manner to label an array of very diverse works of either nonfiction or in-between fiction and nonfiction, some scholarly contributions have attempted to define the field. I will review below, in chronological order of publication, four such contributions which, although brief, are particularly relevant and coherent, and present and summarize arguments that also recur in other works.⁴⁸

In an article titled "In Search of the Centaur,"⁴⁹ Phillip Lopate begins by claiming that we must distinguish between a "reflective, self-conscious style" and a truly essayistic one. Lopate identifies the essay with the literary tradition that starts with Cicero and Seneca and crystallizes with Montaigne and Bacon. He tries to define the essay film's principal characteristics as follows: "An essay film must have words, in the form of a text, either spoken, subtitled, or intertitled"; "The text must represent a single voice"; "The text must represent and

attempt to work out some reasoned line of discourse on a problem”; “The text must impart more than information; it must have a strong, personal point of view”; “The text’s language should be as eloquent, well written and interesting as possible.”⁵⁰ All these features derive from a comparison with the literary essay; the emphasis is firmly placed on the verbal component rather than on the visuals. Indeed, Lopate admits that he “cannot accept an utterly pure, silent flow of images as constituting essayistic discourse.”⁵¹ For the critic, an early example of essay is Resnais’s *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (FR, 1955), with its “self-interrogatory voice, like a true essayist’s, dubious, ironical, wheeling and searching for the heart of the subject matter”;⁵² Resnais’s tracking shots form a “visual analogue” of the voice’s searching. Lopate also discusses a number of other filmmakers and films; his focus is always on the authorial voice and the verbal text, but also on several other questions, including the use of interviews and collage and the contrast between the subjectivity of the voice-over and the predominant objectivity of the camera. While not listing it among the form’s main characteristics, Lopate makes a passing allusion to a feature that, in my opinion, is of key importance for a definition of the essay film; as in the written essay “Readers must feel included in a true conversation, allowed to follow through mental processes of contradiction and digression,”⁵³ the spectators of the essay film must be “forced to acknowledge a conversation” with the filmmaker.⁵⁴ This happens, for Lopate, through the direct address.

In a brief contribution to be found in a volume dedicated to the relationship between film and literature, Timothy Corrigan acknowledges that the essay film, while it can be traced in a documentary practice that extends as far back as the Lumière Brothers, emerges more distinctively in postwar European cinema, and especially in France. Corrigan argues for some dominant characteristics of the essay film:

(1) a usually—but not necessarily—short documentary subject, (2) the lack of a dominant narrative organization (although narrative may provide one of several patterns in the film), and (3) the interaction of a personal voice or vision, sometimes in the form of a voice-over. In the essay film, the interaction of that subjective perspective and the reality before it becomes a testing or questioning of both, and the structure of the film, like the literary essay, follows the undetermined movement of that dialogue.⁵⁵

Again, emphasis is on a personal authorial vision, although the centrality of a text read by a voice-over is less prescriptive than in Lopate. Corrigan had already written of the essay film in a 1995 article, in which he charted the evolution of the essay and its relationship to experience, “in its multiple discursive senses: experience represented in the essay, the experience of representing a subject writing the essay, and the experience of a public receiving that essay.”⁵⁶

In his volume on the subject of the documentary, which collects a number of essays published by the author over the years, Michael Renov touches on the question of the essayistic a number of times. Drawing on that tradition of essay writing, and reflection on the essay, that includes names such as Montaigne, Lukács, and Barthes, Renov focuses on the question of the borderline status of the essay film, and suggests that its subjectivity is not in contrast with its inquisitive attitude, but is, indeed, its marker: “Descriptive and reflexive modalities are coupled; the representation of the historical real is consciously filtered through the flux of subjectivity.”⁵⁷ For Renov, the essay film (seen, in particular, through the example of Mekas’s *Lost, Lost, Lost, US*, 1976) can encompass all the functions that documentaries have displayed since their origin (although at times over- or underfavoring one or more of them): to record, reveal and preserve; to persuade or promote; to express; and to analyze or interrogate.⁵⁸ In other words, Renov restores to the documentary, of which the essay film is an ever more vital component, all those abilities and inclinations that for a long time have not been seen as part of its dominion, in this siding with Stella Bruzzi, who also reminds us that “it is the function of a documentary to provide structure and meaning.”⁵⁹ Renov suggests that “there is no contradiction between the elemental documentary impulse, the will to preservation, and the exploration of subjectivity; indeed, it is their obsessive convergence that marks the essayistic work.”⁶⁰ For Renov, indeed, subjectivity and reflexivity are the staples of the essay film:

While all documentary films retain an interest in some portion of the world out there—recording, and less frequently interrogating, at times with the intent to persuade and with varying degrees of attention to formal issues—the essayist’s gaze is drawn inward with equal intensity. That inward gaze accounts for the digressive and fragmentary character of the essayistic, as André Tournon’s assessment of Montaigne’s *Essays* suggests: “Thought can abandon its theme at any time to examine its own workings, question its acquired knowledge or exploit its incidental potentialities.”⁶¹

According to Paul Arthur, in his already quoted article on the essay film, the elusiveness of the genre defeats attempts of categorization, so much so that contributions such as those by Lopate and Renov “are inconclusive and tend to diverge on issues such as the necessity of spoken narration or irony versus sincerity.”⁶² Arthur also attempts to define the form, and observes that film essays

fracture epistemological unities of time and place associated with documentary practices from John Grierson and Thirties New Deal tracts through Sixties vérité. The binding aspect of personal commentary is typically constituted by voiceover narration enhanced by musical selections, editorial as well as factual intertitles, and is often reinforced by compositional devices. When spoken narration is either subdued or absent, other traces of authorial presence may replace direct speech.⁶³



Interpellation through the gaze: *Sans Soleil*

Arthur also attracts attention to the use of found footage and collage, which produces juxtaposition between the past tense of archival images and the present tense of the commentary, and in which the emphasis is on inquiry rather than on nostalgia, as it is, instead, in pastiche. In terms of the question of authority, for Arthur essay films “confound the perception of untroubled authority or comprehensive knowledge that a singular mode of address projects onto a topic”;⁶⁴ however, he also recognizes that “Argument must proceed from one person’s set of assumptions, a particular framework of consciousness, rather than from a transparent, collective ‘We.’”⁶⁵ Because of their emphasis on the first person, essays are for Arthur very apt to express oppositional positions, and are indeed often used by women directors and artists of color.⁶⁶

Theorizing the Essay: Heresy, Form, and Textual Commitments

All these attempts at defining the essay film are productive in that they identify a number of characteristics that are undoubtedly relevant; and, principally, the two primary markers of the form—reflectivity and subjectivity. However, they also diverge in some substantial ways, perhaps due to that “heretic” factor that characterizes the literary essay first and, consequently, its cinematic versions. While the heretic aspect of the essay should be respected, and an over-theorization of the form avoided, it is important to understand why certain films produce in the spectator the impression of watching an essay, as opposite to a documentary, or a fiction, or a poem, or a travelogue.

At the level of textual commitments (which can be summarized as follows: “I am going to share with you my personal musing about this”), an essay is the expression of a personal, critical reflection on a problem or set of problems. Such reflection does not propose itself as anonymous or collective, but as originating from a single authorial voice; as Arthur writes, “a quality shared by all film essays is the inscription of a blatant, self-searching authorial presence.”⁶⁷ This authorial “voice”⁶⁸ approaches the subject matter not in order to present a factual report (the field of traditional documentary), but to offer an in-depth, personal, and thought-provoking reflection. At the level of rhetorical structures, in order to convey such reflection, the cinematic essayist creates an enunciator who is very close to the real, extra-textual author; the distance between the two is slight, as the enunciator quite declaredly represents the author’s views, and is his/her spokesperson (even when hiding behind a different or even multiple names or personas). The essay’s enunciator may remain a voice-over or also physically appear in the text, and usually does not conceal that he/she is the film’s director. The narrator of the essay film voices personal opinions that can be related directly to the extra-textual author.

One could argue that fiction cinema and documentaries may also present strong or overt enunciators, who speak through a narrator (who can be either internal or external to the narration). In the essay film, however, this choice is structural rather than occasional (as is instead usually the case of fiction cinema); and is personal and individual, rather than social and collective (as often happens in traditional documentaries). Furthermore, the enunciator addresses the spectator directly, and attempts to establish a dialogue. The “I” of the essay film always clearly and strongly implicates a “you”—and this is a key aspect of the deep structures of the form. “You” is called upon to participate and share the enunciator’s reflections. It is important to understand that this “you” is not a generic audience, but an embodied spectator. The essay film constructs such spectatorial position by adopting a certain rhetorical structure: rather than answering all the questions that it raises, and delivering a complete, “closed” argument, the essay’s rhetoric is such that it opens up problems, and interrogates the spectator; instead of guiding her through emotional and intellectual response, the essay urges her to engage individually with the film, and reflect on the same subject matter the author is musing about. This structure accounts for the “openness” of the essay film.

Writing about the CD-ROM *Immemory* by Chris Marker (FR, 1998), Raymond Bellour touched on the question of the essay film, and rightly pointed to the importance of the presence of the spectator and the structure of dialogue:

Still one thing is sure: the subjectivity expressed here with such force and such ease does not only stem from the power to say “I,” of which Marker makes immoderate use. It springs from a more general capacity: the viewer is always taken as a third party to what he sees, through what he hears. Marker’s formula is exchange, in the elective modes of conversation and correspondence. But since he does not believe in the communication under which our epoch agonizes, he

knows that the only real exchange resides in the address, the way the person who speaks to us situates himself in what he says, with respect to what he shows.⁶⁹

Bellour's brief but persuasive reflection attracts our attention to two important aspects of the essay's textual structures: the person who speaks must situate herself in what she says, must display her own subjectivity, and must address the person who watches, who is hence invited to enter into a dialogue. Of course, this dialogue is achieved textually—in the negotiation of the embodied spectator with the text. The spectatorial position is not that of a generic audience; it is not in the plural but in the singular—it is the position of a real spectator, who is directly and personally addressed and summoned. For instance, as Bellour again notices, by varying the mode of address (as well as by giving the right to speak, the right to the image, to an extraordinary mass of people), Chris Marker is able to speak to the single spectator:

In this way the different persons of the verb can circulate even more fluidly through *Immemory* and through all his texts, as well as the commentaries and voices of his films: I, you, he, she, one, we, they, returning finally to "I." This fluidity implies knowing how to address oneself in order to move toward others, and knowing how to touch the other of each one who becomes involved. Beyond humanism, it is a gift of alterity, guaranteed perhaps by an ethos of reserve.⁷⁰

Bellour's comments have been prompted by a CD-ROM—a text normally thought to produce a different, more active type of viewing experience than that of a film; however, the author extends them to Marker's entire cinematic work. This move is, in my opinion, fully acceptable, not only because the interactivity of a CD-ROM is, ultimately, always limited to the possibilities offered and prearranged by its author, but also because Marker in his films attempts to approximate precisely the same type of more direct and involved spectatorial experience achieved by the CD-ROM. And this is true of all essayistic cinema.

The structure of the essay film (as well as of the literary essay), in other words, is that of a constant interpellation; each spectator, as an individual and not as a member of an anonymous, collective audience, is called upon to engage in a dialogical relationship with the enunciator, to become active, intellectually and emotionally, and interact with the text. The spectatorial position is in the singular, because the genuine essay film asks questions and does not offer clear-cut answers; as suggested in an already quoted passage by Montaigne, he wrote not in order to "pretend to discover things, but to lay open my self."⁷¹ The essayist allows the answers to emerge somewhere else, precisely in the position occupied by the embodied spectator. The meaning of the film is constructed via this dialogue, in which the spectator has an important part to play; meanings are presented by the speaking subject as a subjective, personal meditation, rather than as objective truth. It is this subjective move, this speaking in the first person that mobilizes the subjectivity of the spectator. As Christa Blümlinger puts it, the representation of social reality becomes an expression of

the subjectivity through which it is mediated: self-reflexivity is the condition through which the essayist develops his considerations on the world.⁷² The author's personal reflection asks to be either shared or rejected by the viewer. Humanism is, indeed, implicit in the essay structure—the assumption of a certain unity of the human experience, which allows two subjects to meet and communicate on the basis of this shared experience. The two subject positions, the “I” and the “you,” determine and shape one another.

This structure is likely to generate a more personal spectatorial experience than that of a fiction film, which—even when it is the personal/autobiographical product of a strong auteur—rarely addresses the spectator directly, and as an individual; or of a traditional documentary, in which the public may not be addressed overtly, or else may be addressed as the wide audience constructed by the position of generalized authority taken up by the enunciator. Or even of the spectator of a diary or travelogue film, who might have the impression of being let into the private monologue of the enunciator with himself/herself. Vaughan claimed that “What makes a ‘documentary’ is the way we look at it”;⁷³ likewise, it is the spectatorial experience that makes an essay film.

Some of the critical contributions explored above maintain that voice is all-important in the essay film, and that only films with extensive voice-over are essays; some suggest that this element is not absolutely necessary. The fact is that, while in the literary essay the voice of the author is the obvious, required element of the form, the cinema is able to express authorial subjectivity at different levels. As Arthur rightly argues,

Since film operates simultaneously on multiple discursive levels—image, speech, titles, music—the literary essay's single, determining voice is dispersed into cinema's multi-channel stew. The manifestation or location of a film author's “voice” can shift from moment to moment or surface expressively via montage, camera movement and so on.⁷⁴

This complicates matters, but does not take away from the injunction that the essay film is the expression of a single, situated authorial “voice” that enters into a dialogue with the spectator. If this dialogue can be achieved via purely visual means, in other words if the enunciator is able to convey an argument and enter into a dialogue with the spectator through images unaccompanied by commentary, we can call that an essay film. However, the spectator might not easily experience that film as an essay, in the same way in which she might enter into a dialogue with a film that uses both visual and verbal language.

The Inscription of Subjectivity in the Essay Film: Voice-over, Interpellation and the Question of Authority

Central to the essay film, the authorial presence can be achieved at different levels, and through various techniques; for instance, to follow Bill Nichols's

categorization of the documentary, the enunciator is most evident in the “expository” mode, in which we find a “voice-of-God” commentary directed toward the viewer. Here,

The authoring presence of the filmmaker is represented by the commentary and sometimes the (usually unseen) voice of authority will be that of the filmmaker him- or herself [. . .] In other cases such as the evening news, a delegate, the anchorperson, will represent a broader, institutional source of authority.⁷⁵

The enunciator is also evident, although in different ways, in Nichols’s “interactive” documentary mode, in which the filmmaker’s presence in the film is apparent and synchronous to the filming, rather than superimposed in post-production. However, this mode frequently employs interviews in which only the interviewee is seen; in these cases, “the filmmaker is neither seen nor heard, allowing the witnesses ‘to speak for themselves.’”⁷⁶ At times, “Intertitles may provide the other half of the ‘dialogue’ rather than a voice-off [. . .] Although this tactic places the filmmaker ‘on screen,’ in the two-dimensional space of the graphic intertitles, a sense of absence remains.”⁷⁷

The presence–absence of the enunciator is a key point of the essay film. The inscription of the authorial figure can be very direct, for instance by making the filmmaker’s body visible and his/her voice audible. Other times, it can be more indirect, for example through the use of a narrator/spokesperson, or of intertitles, or of musical commentary, camera movements, etc. However, one of the key elements of the essay film is the direct address of the receiver, and voice-over is the most simple and successful way of actualizing such address.

It is necessary here to recall that the pervasive presence of a voice-over, a frequent and characterizing marker of the essay film, has often been accused within documentary theory of producing an authoritarian discourse and superimposing a reading on the pure truthfulness of images. Stella Bruzzi, commenting on the bad reception that voice-over received in studies on the documentary, persuasively argues: “The negative portrayal of voice-over is largely the result of the development of a theoretical orthodoxy that condemns it for being inevitably and inherently didactic.”⁷⁸ In other words, “We have been ‘taught’ to believe in the image of reality and similarly ‘taught’ how to interpret the narrational voice as distorted and superimposed onto it.”⁷⁹ In particular, Bruzzi argues that Bill Nichols in his categorization adopts a negative definition (the “expository mode”) for documentaries with prevailing voice-over, and chronologically and qualitatively describes this mode as the oldest and most primitive. Within this category, as Bruzzi notices, Nichols includes documentaries with formal, open, and poetic types of exposition, hence very diverse films that are only held together by their adoption of the formal element of voice-over. Bruzzi is persuasive when she reminds us that voice in documentary practice is often and simply “an economic device able

to efficiently relay information” rather than for “telling people what to think,”⁸⁰ and that voice can also be used as an ironic or a polemical tool.

The use of voice in an essay film can be all these things—it can be contrapuntal or ironic or polemical, as well as a means to convey information. It is also, fore and foremost, a privileged tool for the author’s articulation of his/her thought (in conjunction or in contrast with sound and image), and hence a prime location of the author’s subjectivity; as well as the main channel of the enunciator’s address to the spectator. However, owing to its overwhelmingly negative reception in documentary studies, the use of voice-over is an often-questioned technique. Furthermore, such a blatant expression of authorial subjectivity obviously raises a whole series of issues, which can be only briefly touched upon here, and that go under the umbrella of the post-structuralist critique of concepts of authorship. These factors potentially cast a shadow of authoritarianism on the essay film. And yet, the opposite can be claimed; as Lopate reminds us, “Adorno, in ‘The Essay as Form,’ saw precisely the anti-systematic, subjective, nonmethodic method of the essay as its radical promise, and he called for modern philosophy to adopt its form, at a time when authoritative systems of thought had become suspect.”⁸¹ The true essay film confounds issues of authority; and it is precisely because of its liberal stance that it is particularly relevant today, when the radical problematization of the existence of objective, permanent, fixed viewpoints on the world has produced the decline of grand narratives and of the social persuasiveness of myths of objectivity and authority. Unsurprisingly, for Lyotard “the essay [. . .] is postmodern, while the fragment [. . .] is modern.”⁸² It is a “genre of absence,”⁸³ in which “there is no truth, just truth-making.”⁸⁴

The Place of the Essay Film

It is important to state one more time that heresy and openness are among the essay film’s key markers. Its positioning at the crossroads of “documentary, avant-garde, and art film impulses”⁸⁵ suggests that we must resist the temptation of overtheorizing the form or, worse, crystallizing it into a genre. It being informal, skeptical, diverse, disjunctive, paradoxical, contradictory, heretical, open, free, and formless, the essay truly is the postmodern “matrix of all generic possibilities.”⁸⁶ The essay is a field of experimentation and idiosyncrasy, to the extent that we can accept Edgar Morin’s comprehensive outlook: “Talking of essay film, I would rather refer to the attitude of he who attempts (*essai*—essay, but also attempt) to debate a problem by using all the means that the cinema affords, all the registers and all the expedients.”⁸⁷

We should, therefore, think of the essay as a mode, which is defined by the above-discussed textual commitments and rhetorical strategies; and explore the ways in which this mode is appropriated, stretched, and reinvented by filmmakers and videomakers. Experimentation and idiosyncrasy are intrinsic to a form that is always and necessarily unique and original. The

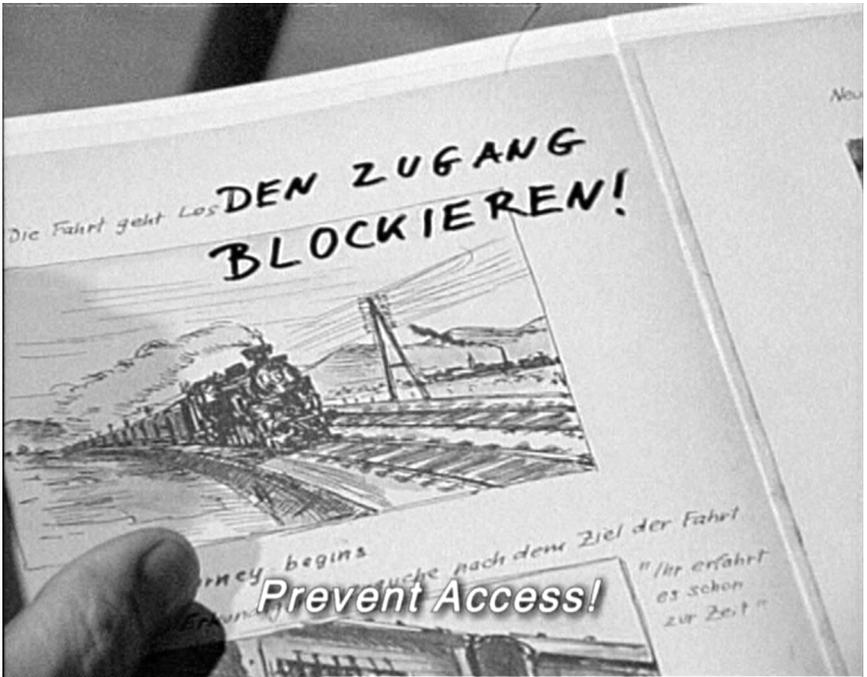
first episode of Alexander Sokurov's *Dukhovnye golosa/Spiritual Voices* (RU, 1995), for instance, is an essay that uses a fixed, single shot lasting approximately forty minutes and extensive voice-over from the director himself, who muses about European composers. Chris Marker's *Level Five* (FR, 1996), instead, mixes documentary subject matter and fictional characters; its enunciator embodies principally in a female narrator, who ultimately proves to be a computer image, an avatar. Almost completely devoid of voice-over, Jean-Luc Godard's *Notre musique/Our Music* (FR, 2004) combines documentary and fiction, re-enactments of real events, imaginary figures and social actors; the enunciator is in the text as Jean-Luc Godard the director, but also uses various narrators and also visual means to formulate his line of reasoning. The first film has been bracketed as a TV program and a documentary; the second alternatively as a documentary, a fiction, or an essay; the third as a fiction (but its fictional status is extremely problematic). Each embraces the textual commitments and rhetorical strategies of the essay film, but articulates them in very different ways.

Identifying what essay is not might further enlighten the definition of essay film. Take the case of Harun Farocki: whereas his *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges/Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (W GER, 1989)⁸⁸ is truly and thoroughly an essay film, other of his works, such as *Ein Bild/An Image* (GER, 1983), *Die Schulung/Indoctrination* (GER, 1987), or *Die Bewerbungen/The Interview* (GER, 1996) are far better described as authorial documentaries. *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* presents a narrator, a spokesperson of the enunciator, who expresses herself through extensive voice-over; her speech is the vocal part of a thought-provoking reflection articulated through words and images, sound and montage. Interpellation is extensively used to involve the spectator in a dialogue with the film, which is simultaneously reflective and subjective, open and experimental. The other three films are nonfictions made for television—*An Image* is the observation of the preparations and shooting of a photograph for *Playboy* Germany, *Indoctrination* is the examination of a weeklong seminar on rhetoric and communication for executives, and *The Interview* looks at seminars aimed at preparing candidates for job interviews. None of the three films employs voice-over.

All three reveal the personal position of their author on a topic, a position that can be inferred by a number of means through which the enunciator intervenes on the documentary material. The films' titles, for instance, and in particular the first two, are telling: "an image" and "indoctrination" add the depth of a commentary to the subject matter. The first attracts our attention to the disproportion between the painstakingly detailed preparatory work and its outcome of "one image"; hence, to the constructedness of any image, to the hidden, elaborate process of creating a shot that must appear as natural as possible. The second title adds a definite spin on what we see—it is an appraisal that clarifies the position of the filmmaker, which is unambiguously critical; it also suggests that the author sees this seminar (and we ought to see



Unanswered questions: *Notre musique*



Interpellation through written text: *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*

it too), as well as the corporate mentality it stands for, as frightening manipulation, brainwashing, and propaganda. Other means are also employed by the director to convey his position in these films, especially montage; it is easy to argue, for instance, that in *Indoctrination* Farocki selected only those moments of the seminar that were particularly telling and revealed the manipulation of the participants into espousing the logic of corporate business. As for *An Image*, the choice of focusing on the photographer and his assistants rather than on the naked model (as well as of not showing the final product of their efforts) conveys the ideological position of the filmmaker. However, it is not easy to maintain that these films are essays. Against the mythical aura of objectivity that has accompanied the documentary for decades, it is important to acknowledge that, to use Bruzzi's words, "all documentaries, because the product of individuals, will always display bias and be in some manner didactic."⁸⁹ All documentaries make an argument, even those that attempt to make their argument look like the pure observation of an unaltered reality—and yet, we do not call them all essays. *An Image*, *Indoctrination*, and *The Interview* are documentaries, presenting factual images in a way that both informs us of certain realities and comments on them. They are quite overtly authorial—the sophistication of the films, the control of image and soundtrack, and the use of montage, all suggest a coherent, strong cinematic project and vision of the world. At times, the enunciator comes to the fore by using a title, a cut, the juxtaposition of two shots; but we, the spectators, do not necessarily feel summoned and engaged in a continuous dialogue with a filmmaker/essayist.

Take now a very different and familiar example: the documentaries of Michael Moore, which have frequently been labeled as essays.⁹⁰ It is obvious that Moore's films are the product of an overt first-person author. Think, as an example, of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which has a strong enunciator, unambiguously identified with the film's real author, who is by now a well-known public figure. This enunciator is embodied in the film in various ways, and most evidently through a narrator (Moore's own clearly identifiable voice-over dominates the film), but also via other means, including the use of irony (which is expressed, for instance, by contrapuntal musical commentary, by the choice of humorous archival images, and by the use of sequences from fiction cinema). Moore is in the film simultaneously as enunciator, as narrator, and as character—and all these figures directly identify with the extra-textual, real author. This seems to agree with one of the main stipulations of the essay; Moore occupies the image constantly, as voice, bodily presence, or commentary, hence we can easily agree that he is a strong enunciator and that his film is very personal. However, Moore does not present his subject matter as a subjective reflection on a problem but as an objective investigation of factual events. Indeed, his is work of reportage, in the tradition of American "muckraking" investigative journalism, which is "hard-hitting in tone, often well rooted in fact, and at times brutal in its exposure of venality and corruption"⁹¹—a tradition in which frequently the



The enunciator as investigative reporter: Michael Moore in *Fahrenheit 9/11*

journalist writes in the first person and becomes a personality. His voice-over commentary is intended for a generic, broad audience; it is not a dialogue, in which the single spectator is called upon to participate in the reflection and in the construction of meaning in an idiosyncratic way that may well be different from that of any other member of the audience. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, spectators are asked to follow the facts, to watch and listen, and progressively discover an objective truth, to which the author holds the key. The film's rhetorical structure is that of journalistic exposé, in which the reporter investigates a topic and discovers scandal, corruption, or controversy and aims to convince the audience of their historicity/factuality. The ambiguity, which may induce critics to talk of essay, lays in the fact that, precisely at the opposite of Montaigne's essayist, Moore "pretends to discover things" together with the spectator. The text, however, is not open, but closed: at all times, the spectator is told clearly where to be, what to feel, how to react, what to find out, what to believe. For instance, contrapuntal music is used to induce us to laugh at George W. Bush's intellectual paucity; sentimental music is adopted to make us participate emotionally in the despair of family of the victims of 9/11. If we want to consider first-person journalistic reportage as essay, then *Fahrenheit 9/11* is an essay; however, if we think of an essay according to the lines explored above, it is not.

The essay film is an open field of experimentation, sited at the crossroads of fiction, nonfiction, and experimental film. As Corrigan argued, however, "despite overlappings, this genre of filmmaking needs to be distinguished from a documentary tradition and an avant-garde/experimental one."⁹² Although sitting at a crossroads, the essay film occupies its own place.

As part of the refereeing process, I was privileged to receive eloquent and insightful comments from Paul Arthur, shortly before his untimely passing. This article is dedicated to him.

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Notes

1. Paul Arthur, "Essay Questions: From Alain Resnais to Michael Moore," *Film Comment* 39, no. 1 (2003): 58.
2. Louis D. Giannetti, *Godard and Others: Essays on Film Form* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975), 26.
3. Arthur, "Essay Questions," 62.
4. Nora Alter, "The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film," *New German Critique*, no. 68 (Spring/Summer 1996): 171.
5. Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 23.
6. Georg Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," in *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), 11.
7. Starobinski, quoted in Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, "Un Art de l'équilibre," in *L'Essai et le cinéma*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2004), 8.
8. Aldous Huxley, *Collected Essays* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1960), v.
9. John Snyder, *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 12.
10. Michael Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 70.
11. José Moure, "Essai de définition de l'essai au cinéma," in *L'Essai et le cinéma*, ed. Liandrat-Guigues and Gagnebin, 25–40.
12. Liandrat-Guigues, "Un Art de l'équilibre," 10 (my translation).
13. Godard, quoted in Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, eds., *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 171.
14. Huxley, *Collected Essays*, v.
15. Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London: Routledge, 1988), 20.
16. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 160.
17. Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton, 3rd. ed. (London: Printed for M. Gillyflower et al., 1700), 254.
18. Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," 15.
19. Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, xviii.
20. Eisenstein, quoted in Guy Fihman, "L'Essai cinématographique et ses transfor-

- mations expérimentales,” in *L'Essai et le cinéma*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin, 41.
21. Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Style” (1948), in *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* by Timothy Corrigan (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 160.
 22. Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 162.
 23. Hans Richter, “Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms” (1940), in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, ed. Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1992), 195–98.
 24. Richter, quoted in Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films: Compilation Films from Propaganda to Drama* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 31.
 25. Nora Alter, *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967–2000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 7–8.
 26. Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Style.”
 27. *Ibid.*, 159.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*, 161. The idea of the flexibility and suppleness of the pen and of writing, and the dream to attain a similar agility in the cinema through lighter and cheaper equipment, are of course at the base of the linguistic developments first introduced by Italian Neorealism and then taken up by the New Waves and by *cinéma vérité*.
 30. François Truffaut, “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (1954), in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 224–37.
 31. André Bazin, “Bazin on Marker” (1958), trans. Dave Kehr, *Film Comment* 39, no. 4 (2003): 44–45.
 32. *Ibid.*, 44.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.*, 45.
 37. Cf. Pierre Sorlin, “France,” in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, ed. Ian Aitken (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2005), 434–42.
 38. Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).
 39. Bazin, “Bazin on Marker,” 44.
 40. Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 48. These and the above observations on the short film do not suggest that essays are by nature sub-feature-length in duration; rather, that the artistic freedom guaranteed by the short, and its combination with documentary in the above-described French context, favored the emergence of the essayistic form.
 41. Cf. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969), in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44–64.
 42. Among later examples he lists Rosi’s 1962 *Salvatore Giuliano* and some of Godard’s films, including his 1962 *Vivre sa vie*.
 43. Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 159.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 164.
47. Ibid., 162.
48. For instance, in some of the essays included in *L'Essai et le cinéma*, ed. Liandrat-Guigues and Gagnebin, and in *La forma que piensa: Tentativas en torno al cine-ensayo*, ed. Antonio Weinrichter (Pamplona: Punto de Vista/Gobierno de Navarra, 1997).
49. In *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically* by Phillip Lopate (Amsterdam: Anchor, 1998).
50. Ibid., 283–84.
51. Ibid., 283.
52. Ibid., 286.
53. Ibid., 282.
54. Ibid., 286.
55. Timothy Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 58.
56. Timothy Corrigan, “The Cinematic Essay: Genre on the Margins,” *Iris: A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound* 19 (Spring 1995): 87.
57. Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 70.
58. Ibid., 74–85.
59. Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (London: Routledge, 2006), 27.
60. Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 81.
61. Ibid., 85.
62. Arthur, “Essay Questions,” 59.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 60.
66. Arthur brings the examples of Agnès Varda, Yvonne Rainer, Jill Godmilow, Ngozi Onwurah, Marlon Riggs, Patricio Guzman, John Akomfrah, Raoul Peck.
67. Arthur, “Essay Questions,” 59.
68. Here and over the following pages, the term “voice” is used as a metaphor for the author’s subjectivity, and not as “voice-over” (although voice-over can be one of the means to express such a subjective, personal viewpoint).
69. Raymond Bellour, “Le livre, aller; retour/The Book, Back and Forth,” in *Qu’est-ce qu’une madeleine? A propos du CD-ROM Immemory de Chris Marker* by Laurent Roth and Raymond Bellour (Paris: Yves Gevaert Editeur/Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997), 111.
70. Ibid.
71. Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne*, 254.
72. Christa Blümlinger, “Lire entre les images,” in *L'Essai et le cinéma*, ed. Liandrat-Guigues and Gagnebin, 56.
73. Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 84.
74. Arthur, “Essay Questions,” 59.
75. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.
76. Ibid., 54.
77. Ibid., 55.

78. Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 47.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., 50.
81. Lopate, *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically*, 282.
82. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.
83. Snyder, *Prospects of Power*, 151.
84. Ibid., 200.
85. Arthur, "Essay Questions," 59.
86. Réda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 92.
87. Morin, quoted in Giovanni Maderna, "Film saggio: Intervista a Edgar Morin," in *Filmmaker 5 Doc*, ed. Silvano Cavatorta and Luca Mosso (Milan: Edizioni A&M, 1996), 4 (my translation).
88. The same can be said for *Videogramme einer Revolution/Videogrammes of a Revolution* (DE, 1992) and *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik/Workers Leaving the Factory* (DE, 1995).
89. Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 36.
90. For instance by Arthur in his already quoted article.
91. Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Muckraking: Three Landmark Articles* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1994), 1.
92. Corrigan, "The Cinematic Essay," 89.