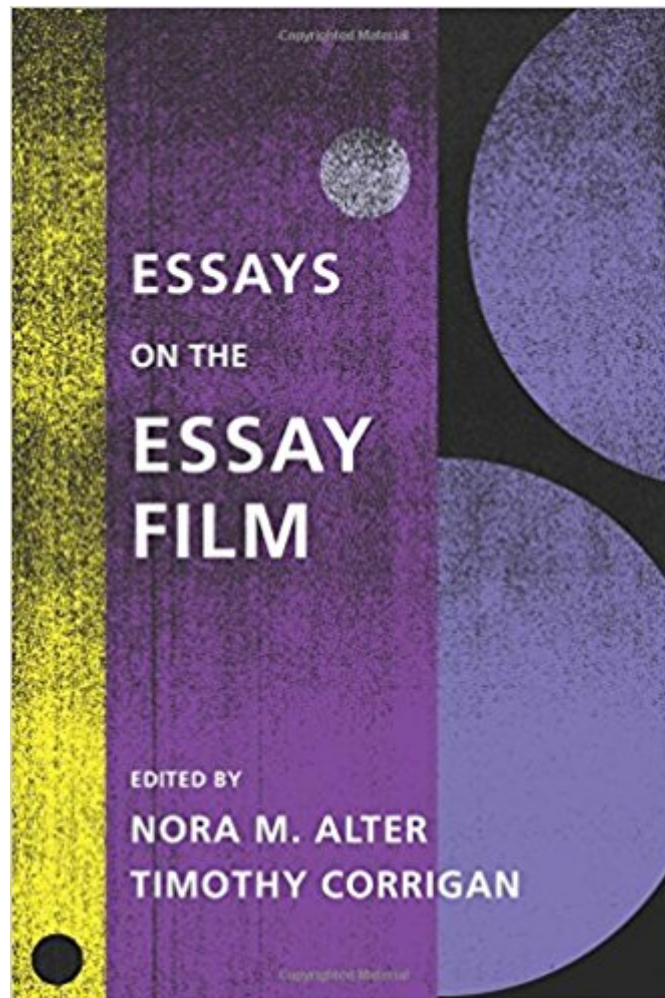




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# Essays On The Essay Film (Film And Culture Series)



## Synopsis

The essay film with its emphasis on the provisional and explorative rather than on definitive statements has evolved from its literary beginnings and is now found in all mediums, including film. Today, the essay film is, arguably, one of the most widely acclaimed and critically discussed forms of filmmaking around the world, with practitioners such as Chris Marker, Hito Steyerl, Errol Morris, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Rithy Panh. Characteristics of the essay film include the blending of fact and fiction, the mixing of art- and documentary-film styles, the foregrounding of subjective points of view, a concentration on public life, a tension between acoustic and visual discourses, and a dialogic encounter with audiences. This anthology of fundamental statements on the essay film offers a range of crucial historical and philosophical perspectives. It provides early critical articulations of the essay film as it evolved through the 1950s and 1960s, key contemporary scholarly essays, and a selection of writings by essay filmmakers. It features texts on the foundations of the essay film by writers such as Hans Richter and André Bazin; contemporary positions by, among others, Phillip Lopate and Michael Renov; and original essays by filmmakers themselves, including Laura Mulvey and Isaac Julien.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Creatively and capaciously, this rich volume gets at the essay film not only by including key critics and practitioners of the form but, importantly, by going beyond the genre itself to broader

contributions to essay theorization from philosophy and belles lettres. An exciting, inventive volume with great delights at every turn. (Dana Polan, New York University) Alter and Corrigan's masterful new volume on the essay film is rigorous, comprehensive, and refreshingly surprising. Their invaluable collection probes theoretical reflections on the essay as a mode of expression and a way of thinking in light of the creative and political investments of filmmakers around the globe; it also chronicles the essay film's changing countenances, from its prehistory and early signs of life to novel permutations in the present. Featuring a very distinguished cast of players, this collection is a production of the highest order. (Eric Rentschler, Harvard University) Nora Alter and Tim Corrigan bring their seasoned literary experience to herd but never tame the unruly essay film. Its prestige soaring, this mode is tethered to a long history of experimental writing that will keep it from disappearing into the bog of blogs and YouTube mashups whose best examples it is already inspiring. The proof is in the Table of Contents: a brilliant litany of sensitive, reliable writers, who dare to take on the most daring forms of image-thought the cinema has produced. (Dudley Andrew, Yale University) Recent years have witnessed a rapid growth in interest in the history, concept and diverse manifestations of the essay film. In this essential collection, Nora Alter and Timothy Corrigan have brought together a superb selection of foundational texts with a range of key recent writings by leading scholars and essay filmmakers. The result is an enormously rich resource for anyone interested in the past, present, and future of this most vital of audiovisual forms. (Michael Witt, University of Roehampton)

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Essays on the Essay Film, edited by Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, collects essays and other writings that cover the history and development, as well as the elusive definition, of essay films. I found this collection to be an excellent overview of what an essay film is and is not without making any definition too boxed in. In much the same way a literary essay can vary greatly so too the filmic equivalent. I won't try to summarize every point but rather I will give you an idea of what, for me, this volume did for my understanding. I knew there were a variety of styles for documentaries to take and

I lumped almost every nonfiction film into that catchall category. Yet I knew when viewing that some were quite different in the effect as well as the style. Some, probably most, present evidence of some type and make connections so that the viewer will, hopefully, come away having gained insight and come to the same conclusions the filmmaker has. In other words, they make explicit some idea(s) and work similarly to a persuasive paper. Yet some seem to make only their general topic explicit while opening up a space where ideas are shared but not driven to a stated conclusion. They make the viewer think about the general topic and, if successful, whatever narrower part of that topic the filmmaker wants considered, yet serves as more of an awareness-raiser than a definitive argument. That isn't to say they aren't still made to guide the viewer to some extent, often a large extent, but they want to generate thought and discussion rather than simply agreement or disagreement. Documentaries of the first type may well create agreement or disagreement, perhaps even changing a viewer's mind, but at that point it is finished, it has done what it set out to do. The essay film may well lead to some sort of agreement or disagreement but it will be harder to pin down because the essay film does not usually argue an either/or case but rather opens a space which should continue after the film ends. In other words, the purpose is to generate thought and discussion rather than agreement or disagreement. The previous paragraph is one of my takeaways from the book and should not be considered a restatement of any or all of the essays in the volume. I have taken what I read and taken my first steps toward understanding and digesting the information and the paragraph shows, I hope, the types of questions the book both answers and asks. I would highly recommend this to students of film and for any people considering any visual media as an avenue for making any kind of statement. For the future filmmaker it will help you decide how you want to present your ideas and information. For the film viewer this book will help you to better understand why some documentaries are more definitive and some are more openly thought-provoking. Reviewed from a copy made available by the publisher via NetGalley.

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