



Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-Garde Film

Jeffrey Skoller

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Avant-garde films are often dismissed as obscure or disconnected from the realities of social and political history. Jeffrey Skoller challenges this myth, arguing that avant-garde films more accurately display the complex interplay between past events and our experience of the present than conventional documentaries and historical films. *Shadows, Specters, Shards* examines a group of experimental films, including work by Eleanor Antin, Ernie Gehr, and Jean-Luc Godard, that take up historical events such as the Holocaust, Latin American independence struggles, and urban politics. Identifying a cinema of evocation rather than representation, these films call attention to the unrepresentable aspects of history that profoundly impact the experience of everyday life. Making use of the critical theories of Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze, among others, Skoller analyzes various narrative strategies - allegory, sideshadowing, testimony, and multiple temporalities - that uncover competing perspectives and gaps in historical knowledge often ignored in conventional film. In his discussion of avant-garde film of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Skoller reveals how a nuanced understanding of the past is inextricably linked to the artistry of image making and storytelling.

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