



Images between narrativity and documentation: Ammar Al Beik's The Sun's Incubator

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This paper focuses on the practice of filmmaking by contemporary artist Ammar Al Beik, which deals with Syria's political situation from 2011 to the present. I argue that images reveal their political and social agency when they take on a narrative approach unique to the practice of history-writing. Al Beik's filmmaking detaches itself from a mere documentarist intent: his films are less about reporting the facts, and more about commenting on the history of the present through the lens of the individual's experience. His film *The Sun's incubator* (2011) thematizes events related to the Arab Awakening in 2011. The historical events are filtered through the dimension of the quotidian life, observed from the perspective of the artist's family. The setting of the film is the artist's apartment where his family is getting ready to join a demonstration, while the tv-news display images of protesters from Tahir Square. Such "film in the film" strategy acts as a meta-reflection on the agency of images in the context of a political turnover: availability of images through the media activates the spectator, while the constant repetition disactivates them. Al Beik's filmmaking avoids depicting its subject matter directly - the Syrian revolution. He does not record live images of protesters, rather follows the revolution from a domestic, private perspective.

The camera is physically distant from the live events. It does not focus on the outer world, as the documentary practice normally would, rather on the inner world of the individual. This switch is obtained by placing events within a narrative frame: montage allows images to tell a story and confers them with meaning. Images are given a narrative structure to become the means of a critical analysis of the historical circumstances. Images articulated in a story unfold their political agency. Conversely, in the documentarist practice the referent is made directly available: the political and social content derives from the events themselves. Thus, what the documentary is missing is the human component, the individual's perception of reality. Finally, I argue that by placing the subject matter within a narrative frame - one feature of history-writing - Al Beik gives the quality of political and social activism to the art of filmmaking. Acting on images, gives them the power to unfold a critical reflection, rather than leaving them speak for themselves.

KEYWORDS

**Filmmaking,
History,
Critical analysis,
Political and social activism**