ABSTRACT

BRIAN ROBERTSON. The Video Camera and the E-Meter: Self-Exposure, Concealment, and Scientology’s Performative Style. (Under the direction of Professor Maria Pramaggiore.)

A notable subgenre of internet videos on the subject of Scientology is one in which active Scientologists confront protestors and critics directly. Despite the general intelligence, PR savvy, and decency of most Scientologists, the people in these videos are shown time and again behaving in extreme ways, exhibiting a level of cruelty and malice that seems to prove the critics' case about the harmful nature of the Church and its practices. In this essay, I examine two such videos, examining their backgrounds and the role of internet video more generally in critics' and former members' war against the Church. Finally, using the historical and ideological material of the Church alongside some philosophical ideas from classical film theory, I advance a theory as to the origins of the Scientologists' unusual behavior on camera - one that gestures toward a more general theory of Scientology's unusually intimate relationship with cinema, and its particular appeal to performers.