monologues by the woman. We learn that she carries a picture of her relatives when working. She complains about the corrupt and indifferent Iraqi politicians who did nothing to prevent the fall of Mosul to ISIS. She also blames the attitude of Muslims, especially the mullas who call people to pray and suffer instead of engaging in their problems and ways of solving them. From the woman's piecemeal story unfolding in her monologues, and the meals she prepares with care, we may presume that at least a part of the filming fell in the holy month of Ramadan (29 June – 28 July, Mosul fell to the ISIS on 4–10 June). This adds a particular bitterness to the movie, because Ramadan with its daily fasting, evening family meals (Iftars) and the crowning holiday of *Eid al-Fitr*, is considered the month of peace and reunion with family. The woman even claims that ‘God is not going to accept our fasting,’ by which she allusively points to wars and hatred prevailing in the Middle East. One of the phone voices tells a story about the slow death awaiting all the Iraqi inhabitants, who are left with no hope for the future. These words are confronted with an amusing image of ducks slipping away from among the cars on one of the city’s crossroads. Contrary to the people trapped in Iraq and exposed to cruelty, the ducks find their way among the cars whose drivers still respect their lives by slowing down their vehicles. In one of the final shots, we see a woman passionately reciting the same sentence, ‘I don’t hear what I hear,’ which along with a zoom on the mouthwash highlights the poignant feeling of despair and helplessness portrayed in the movie. The emigrants are haunted by the news and images coming from Iraq and there is no way to escape from them, nor to find any proper solution for relatives left there. Though the narration is filled with so many different and seemingly absurd images, and might be confusing at first, in fact it creates a very apt and impressive story portraying peoples’ feelings and difficult states of mind. It also shows that both the UK and Iraq are linked together, because their realities overlap in people’s fates, memories and thoughts.

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**Romeo et Kristina.** Dir. Nicolas Hans Martin. 4A4 PRODUCTIONS. 97 mns.
French. 2016.

_Romeo and Kristina_, as the title faintly evokes, is a documentary portraying a love story. Romeo and Kristina are two Roma, and the film follows their romance back and forth from France to Romania, and their attempts to build their lives (at times together, at times apart). But while their fractious love story provides the central thread of dramatic tension, the documentary is much more a portrayal of the wider conditions of European Roma and their attempts to build lives for themselves in France and in Romania.

The opening five minutes of the film are stark: the two protagonists are first filmed rifling through bins before they show the interviewer the site where they first
met, an encampment they were subsequently forcibly removed from. This is the first of a number of displacements that the camera soberly captures taking place in France. The frustrations of the Roma community are given expression through the unobtrusive documentary-maker’s lens: their inability to gain normal employment or end a life of enforced homelessness, and the perpetual movings-on that the police initiate, often accompanied by the confiscation of their home possessions (such as mattresses). Their lives follow a monotonous shuffling from park to railway bridge to park. The discord between the Roma, where only a few speak French and many cannot even write, and the officious, but not necessarily malicious, policemen working at the politicians’ behest is revelatory. So too are the fears that the Roma possess. Kristina reveals that her pregnancy was a surprise to her, as she was hitherto convinced that the French doctors had sterilized her. The film unhesitatingly depicts the Roma’s fate in France, clearly showing their difficulties as a harassed and alienated minority, constantly the victim either of police and political harassment or even violence from the local population. The documentary is exemplary in showing this without the need for any over-moralistic filmmaking intervention, the Roma’s experience speaking for itself.

But the film is not merely a depiction of Roma life in France. The scenes in Romania are perhaps the most intriguing in the film. They contain some of the rare joyous moments: one where Romeo’s family dance merrily along to the radio, another where Romeo lip-syncs to a song in front of an adoring Kristina. Unfortunately, these scenes are also the most tragic: it is in Romania that Romeo and Kristina’s relationship comes apart, and it is also the Romanian scenes that explain the motivation behind their attempts to make a life, as fragile and difficult as it is, in France. Romania can provide no money and no jobs for them, scarcely even enough room for them to sleep. In this atmosphere of desperation, where both are without their own homes (until Kristina boldly builds her own) and without money (Romeo notably having to borrow in order to donate to children carol singers, a moment his mother does not let him forget), Romeo develops a destructive slot machine gambling habit. By revealing the difficulties of their existence in Romania, this film goes a long way to explaining and illustrating why the Roma move to France, and what they are moving away from.

The novelty of the film, and its power, comes from the fact that it gives voice to the Roma. Nicolas Martin, the filmmaker, who first met the couple concerned when he was working as a translator for a French charity at Christmas time, on the whole lets the two protagonists speak and rarely intrudes (only towards the ends of the film do the appeals to ‘Nicolas’ become more evident, and the ensuing questions of acting and performance more problematic). Left to tell the stories of their own tragic lives – Romeo, for example, was left without a father and forced to become a thief in railway stations even as a child – we are given a vital glance into the hidden and disdained lives of the Roma. The film is vital viewing for any attempt to understand
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In 1869, the Scottish explorer and adventurer John McGregor descended the river Jordan from its source to the sea of Galilee and published a travelogue recounting the adventure. The Israeli artists Effi Weiss and Amir Borenstein revisit this encounter, re-exploring this route in contemporary Israel. Taking the same route by car, the two artists use the trip as an opportunity to explore and question contemporary Israel, and ultimately to question their own relationship with it. The time between their journey and McGregor’s also leads to a necessary interrogation of the transformations that have taken place in the space and to its inhabitants: as they ask in an opening onscreen credits, has Israel successfully led to the creation of a ‘new’ Jew, and how do they, Israeli Jews who have left Israel, relate to it?

The mainstay of the film consists of interviews. Much of their candour comes from the touristic setting. The film captures Israelis at rest, relaxing in the beautiful environs of the river, playing and having fun; or those who work in the tourism sector. But beneath these scenes of rest and relaxation are simmering contemporary tensions and the historical remains of recent conflicts. Weiss and Borenstein draw the viewer’s attention to the forgotten war ruins and mock villages, for which there is no tourist information. And the interviewees cannot avoid making reference to some of the contemporary issues: there is hostility towards Orthodox Jews, references to tension with Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, and long discussions (and refutations of) the besieged Israeli mentality. The interviewees are indeed signs of a transformation, but even more interesting is the affirmation made by one of the interviewees that the surrounding land itself has been transformed, the river and its environs turned from swamp into tourist attraction. The film is alive to this double transformation, of the new inhabitants and of the very space they inhabit, and the subject of the film is at once the landscape and those that are interviewed.

The film cuts between those the two artists interview: tourists, tour guides, river lifeguards, local merchants and businessmen, who generally strike a combative but assertive note in their passion for Israel; and the more contemplative and doubtful moments when the two narrators and cinematographers are left alone to question their self-imposed exile. However, by the end of the film, this divide, between interviewer and interviewee and their respective positions, is largely broken.