Call for Papers

**DOCUSOPHIA:**

**Documentary/Philosophy International Conference**

May 22-24, 2018

**Conference Venue:**
The Steve Tisch School of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University
The Tel Aviv Cinematheque

**Organizing Committee:** Dr. Shai Biderman, Dr. Shmulik Duvdevani and Dr. Ohad Landesman (Tel Aviv University, The Steve Tisch School of Film and Television)

**Executive Producer:** Tal Avidan

There is a century-old tradition of defining documentary in philosophical terms. Yet, this tradition seems to miss the most intelligible (yet, conspicuously evasive) aspect of documentary praxis: its conceptual entanglement with philosophy itself. This entanglement is oddly mirrored in Carl Plantinga’s characterization of the documentary as an “asserted veridical representation,” or in John Grierson’s famous depiction of documentary as “a creative treatment of actuality.” Such characterizations install the most adamant relations film has with the highly charged philosophical concepts of truth, reality and the real. These relations are at the heart of the documentary practice, and are essential to any working definition of documentary cinema.

Indeed, how do we think of the notion of documentary and of specific documentary films in philosophical terms? how do documentaries deal with philosophical issues? A recently published anthology edited by David LaRocca titled *The Philosophy of Documentary Film: Image, Sound, Fiction, Truth* (2016) testifies to the ever-growing connections, both scholarly and in practice, between the two disciplines. Prominent filmmakers such as Errol Morris, Terrence Malick (in his 2016 IMAX documentary *Voyage of Time*) as well as films like *What the Bleep Do We Know?* and *Is The Man Who Is Tall Happy?* are exploring philosophical, theological, scientific and abstract questions in a unique and unprecedented way.

Thus, such an engagement is especially timely and topical because of the pressing need to reconfigure the philosophical outputs of documentary’s new horizons as a developing practice. Characterized by unprecedented theatrical success and accelerated aesthetic evolution, documentaries today have been breaking new grounds, entertaining arguments based on uncertainties and incompleteness by prioritizing elements of subjectivity, fiction, and drama. In this second film-philosophy conference—devoted to the entangled relations between documentary and philosophy—we wish to consider the significant makeover that documentary studies has gone through lately to fit these changes, and further explore the significant place that philosophy may hold within contemporary documentary studies.
Considering how fiction and fact have been recently intertwined in non-fiction subgenres (e.g., the mockumentary, the drama-documentary or the 'hybrid film'), it becomes essential to redefine what we now mean when we say “documentary films”, and to assess the nature of their truth claims. Following its recent spread into new virtual and social platforms and increased venture into the realm of television, philosophizing about documentary must invite us to rethink what defines it as a practice, a genre, a medium or a filmic strategy, and how this definition is always dynamic. When subjective authorial voices are assertively flaunted in video diaries, essay-films and performative documentaries, a new set of philosophical questions that relate to performance, ethics and authorship is in need of reconsideration.

The conference will also coincide with the 20th installment of DocAviv, the Tel Aviv International Documentary Film Festival, which will take place between 17-26 on May 2018. DocAviv has carefully carved its niche today as one of the leading documentary festivals worldwide, and it is the only festival in Israel dedicated in its entirety to documentary films. We are excited to participate with DocAviv next year and happy that our conference attendees will also be able to enjoy such an important celebration of documentary cinema.

We aim to bring together in our conference leading and emerging scholars and filmmakers to investigate together such issues and enhance ongoing dialogues both within documentary studies and philosophy individually and also between these discourses. We welcome a range of papers that might be conceptual, theoretical or practice-as-research in orientation.

We are interested in papers, for example, in the following broad areas:

1. New takes on the ontology of the cinematic image in the digital age.
2. Video essays and philosophizing about film through film.
3. The meeting between philosophy and poetry in documentary films in general and essay films in particular.
4. Documentary in the age of film-philosophy: specific films (analysis and theory) and filmmakers (documentarians).
5. Documentary, theory and/v.s. praxis.
6. The real and reality through philosophy (Cavell, Plato, etc.).
7. Documentary and epistemology.
8. Documentary-as-objective (Noël Carroll) vs. the dismissal of such an approach (Brian Winston).
9. Ethical issues in the age of crowd-sourced and social networks documentaries.
10. Documentaries on philosophy and philosophers.
12. Theological debates dealing with religious subjects and faith in documentary.
13. Philosophical provocations on the elusive fiction/non-fiction divide.
14. Philosophical inquiries into fraud and deception in mockumentaries.
15. Phenomenology and documentary (e.g., cinema verite, experiential documentary).
16. The philosophical premises and goals of ethnography in documentary cinema.
SUBMITTING PROPOSALS:

Please send an abstract (up to 300 words in length, including the research objectives, theoretical framework and methodology) and a brief biography (100 words maximum), by December 15th, 2017 to tau.docuphil@gmail.com. Each proposal must include title, name(s), affiliation, institutional address and email addresses of the author(s). Notification of acceptance/rejection of abstracts will be sent by February 1st, 2018.

Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by participants.

For further enquiries, please contact the organizers directly: Dr. Ohad Landesman (lander@post.tau.ac.il); Dr. Shai Biderman (bidermans@post.tau.ac.il); or Dr. Shmulik Duvdevani (duvdeva@post.tau.ac.il).