



MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS 2022 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR HOSTING MARIE CURIE FELLOWS

HOST INSTITUTION

IFILNOVA (FCSH)

RESEARCH GROUP AND URL

Thinking Documentary Film (<https://ifilnova.pt/en/research-groups/thinking-documentary-film/>)

SUPERVISOR (NAME AND E-MAIL)

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SHORT CV OF THE SUPERVISOR

Stefanie Baumann is a researcher at CineLab/IFILNOVA (NOVA University of Lisbon), where she coordinates the working group "Thinking Documentary Film". She obtained her PhD in philosophy in 2013, with a doctoral thesis on Walid Raad's artistic project The Atlas Group. She taught philosophy, aesthetics and contemporary art theory at University Paris VIII (Paris, 2007-2010), Ashkal Alwan (Beirut, 2013), ALBA – the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts/University of Balamand (Beirut, 2012-2015) and the Maumaus Study Program (Lisbon, since 2016). She also worked with the artist Esther Shalev-Gerz as personal assistant from 2005 to 2010, and collaborated with video artists such as Marie Voignier and Mounira Al Solh.

5 SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Baumann, Stefanie. "How to Mediate Reality: Thinking Documentary Film with Horkheimer and Adorno". In *How to Critique Authoritarian Populism: Methodologies of the Frankfurt School*, editado por Jeremiah Morelock, 412-430. Leiden, Boston, Países Baixos: Brill (Studies in Critical Social Sciences), 2021.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444744>

Baumann, Stefanie. "Images of the Real. Introductory Notes 1". *Cinema - Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 12 (2021): 8-21.

<https://doi.org/10.34619/eoua-x5xy>

Baumann, Stefanie. "Between the culture industry and art: Adorno's approach to film".

In *Understanding Adorno, Understanding Modernism*, editado por Robin Truth Goodman, 94-107. New York, Estados Unidos: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Baumann, Stefanie. "On Experience and Illumination: Werner Herzog's Dialectical Relation with Society". In *The Philosophy of Werner Herzog*, editado por M. Blake Wilson; Christopher Turner, 187-201. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London, Estados Unidos: Lexington/ Rowman and Littlefield, 2020.

Stefanie Baumann. "Heterodox mediations. Notes on Walid Raad's The Atlas Group". *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 11 1 (2019): 1633192-1633192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2019.1633192>.
10.1080/20004214.2019.1633192

PROJECT TITLE AND SHORT DESCRIPTION

PHILDOC – PHILOSOPHY AND DOCUMENTARY FILM. MEDIATING THE REAL

Documentary films appeal to philosophical thinking in a particularly challenging way. On the one hand, they raise the problem of the real in an emphatic sense, because they address reality directly and take on an “assertive stance” (Plantinga in LaRocca, 2015) towards it. On the other hand, they encourage us to think the multiple mediations through which something appears as real, pertinent, genuine or true, and thus lead us to problematize the forms and concepts through which such attributions acquire their compelling evidence. For documentaries convey, through their inherent claim to truth, implicit ideas about the very structure of reality, the relation between what appears on the surface and deeper layers of society, and the relation between subjective experiences and their social meaning. Moreover, they carry out an implicit epistemological reflection on the concept of objectivity and its relation to factual accuracy. Hence, they combine a specific claim to veracity with the artistic intervention of the filmmaker, whose aesthetic, thematic and political choices determine how the reality in question is to be mediated. Neither artworks in the traditional sense (i.e. aesthetic constructions entirely created by an artistic subject), nor mere mechanical reproductions of reality, documentaries are “creative treatments of actuality” (Grierson in Kahana 2016). However, many popular documentaries conceal this inherent tension on which they inescapably rely. Resorting to authoritative discourses, conventionalized forms and standardized patterns, they pretend to provide an immediate access to reality. Thereby, they not only corroborate hegemonic ideas and the associated representational schemas, but also shape the perception of reality (Baumann 2021). Far from merely representing reality objectively, mainstream formats contribute to the uniformization of its appearance. By contrast, artistic or independent productions, e.g. films by Farocki, Loznitsa, Akerman, Castaing-Taylor or Sousa Dias, problematize the commonsensical manifestation of reality through artistic means. Consequently, they undertake a transformative immanent critique of conventionalized perceptions and their corresponding conceptual framework. Rather than claiming to represent reality “as it really is”, they wrest it from its alleged obviousness, deflect the focus onto divergent perspectives and carve out a truth content that eludes conventional representation.

This complex, Janus-faced situation of documentary film, its capacity to either endorse or disrupt the appearance of reality as a non-problematic entity, is the starting point for PhilDoc. Our working hypothesis is that the performative potential of documentaries lies, first and foremost, in their formal configuration, in the way how form not only mediates content, but also confers a particular meaning to it. Therefore, following Adorno’s aesthetic theory, we consider form as “sedimented content” (Adorno 1997). Throughout the project, we will undertake an immanent critique of specific films through a dialectical approach, with the aim of extracting the intelligibility of the sensible (cf Rancière 2010) of documentary configurations. Concurrently, we will work on a philosophical concept of form able to address both, social forms and aesthetic constellations, with regards to the reality they address. In this emphasis on form lies the specificity of our approach. For until today, philosophical research on documentary film has mainly focused on theoretical considerations: the claim to truthfulness (Plantinga in LaRocca 2015), the evidential force

of certain features (Currie, Carroll, both in LaRocca 2015) or the delimitation of the genre (Nichols 1991; Renov 1993). Film scholars, on the other hand, mostly expose the political, ethical and aesthetic aspects of documentaries, without problematizing in depth the philosophical concepts they convey. PhilDoc, by contrast, will put the emphasis on the question of mediation and on the critical potential of form, thereby approaching documentary concurrently as a philosophical problem, a form of art, and a socially and politically relevant medium.

SCIENTIFIC AREA WHERE THE PROJECT FITS BEST*

Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC)
(Philosophy, Arts, Film studies)