

**WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY?**

Self-Representation, Narrative Agency and Ethical Power in Documentary Film and  
Contemporary Audiovisual Culture

***Call for Papers***

***Ethics in Documentary Filmmaking Conference***

***29 October 2026, Ji.hlava IDFF***

***Ji.hlava IDFF, 23 October – 1 November 2026***

*Organised by Ji.hlava IDFF / DOC.DREAM services*

*in cooperation with FAMU – Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in  
Prague*

*Academic guarantor: Assoc. Prof. Jan Motal, PhD*

**Who has the real chance to tell a story in a documentary film — and under what  
conditions? When do people speak for themselves, and when are their lives  
interpreted, framed, translated, or appropriated by others?**

The 2026 Ethics in Documentary Filmmaking Conference at Ji.hlava IDFF invites scholars,  
filmmakers, producers, critics, curators, educators, students, and other practitioners to reflect  
on a central ethical question of documentary and contemporary audiovisual culture: to what  
extent can people tell their own stories themselves?

Rather than approaching representation only as a matter of accuracy, sensitivity, or good  
intentions, this conference proposes a more focused perspective. We are interested in  
representation as a question of narrative agency, authorship, credibility, and power over  
interpretation. Who is recognized as a legitimate speaker? Who is granted visibility? Who is  
heard only through the voice of institutions, experts, platforms, filmmakers, or technologies?  
And what social, political, and personal consequences follow from these conditions of telling?

The conference will explore documentary film alongside a wider field of audiovisual forms  
that engage with documentary reality, including hybrid works, essay films, true crime,  
reenactments, participatory and community-based projects, archival practices, immersive  
media, platform storytelling, and AI-mediated or machine-generated forms of representation.  
Across these forms, we ask how conditions for self-representation are created, limited,  
negotiated, or denied.

We are particularly interested in stories shaped by structural inequality, vulnerability, trauma,  
and asymmetries of power. These may include the experiences of ethnic and racial  
minorities, Indigenous communities, women, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled people, children,  
older adults, migrants, socially excluded groups, and others whose voices are often filtered

through institutional, media, or political frameworks. We also welcome contributions on more-than-human subjects, asking what it means to represent animals, ecosystems, and landscapes in ways that challenge human-centred assumptions about voice, agency, and care.

A key aim of the conference is to connect academic research, film practice, and teaching. We seek contributions that examine not only how the ethics of self-representation can be theorized, but also how it is negotiated in production, embedded in institutions, and taught as part of professional and civic responsibility. We are interested in both critical diagnoses and constructive approaches: forms of collaboration, co-authorship, care, and accountability that may enable more just and sustainable ways of working with the stories of real people.

We invite papers, case studies, practice-based reflections, and pedagogical contributions on topics including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Self-representation, authorship, and narrative agency  
Who owns the story? What does it mean to speak for oneself in a medium shaped by direction, editing, funding, distribution, and reception? How should we think about authorship, voice, testimony, and the right to interpret one's own life?
2. Consent, collaboration, and shared control  
How should consent be understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-time act? What are the ethical limits and possibilities of participatory, collaborative, and co-creative documentary practices? When does shared authorship genuinely redistribute power, and when does it merely mask older hierarchies?
3. Vulnerability, trauma, and ethics of care  
How can documentary practice create conditions for self-expression without exposing people to exploitation, retraumatization, or symbolic pressure to perform their suffering? What forms of responsibility, aftercare, and relational ethics emerge when filmmakers work with vulnerable protagonists or survivors of violence?
4. Epistemic injustice, credibility, and voice  
Whose testimony is treated as trustworthy, intelligible, or publicly valuable? How do documentary forms reproduce or challenge situations in which people are denied credibility, authority, or interpretive agency regarding their own lives?
5. Community authorship, narrative sovereignty, and decolonial perspectives  
What can documentary learn from Indigenous, community-based, feminist, and decolonial approaches that insist not only on better representation, but on the right of individuals and communities to determine the conditions under which their stories are told, circulated, archived, or withheld?
6. Institutions, gatekeeping, and the politics of access  
How do broadcasters, film schools, festivals, producers, funders, archives, and platforms enable or restrict self-representation? What institutional norms decide

whose stories become visible, legible, and legitimate? How do centres and peripheries shape documentary authority?

7. Reenactment, adaptation, and mediated retelling  
What happens when real lives are retold through reenactment, hybridization, fictionalization, or true crime formats? Where are the ethical limits of transforming lived experience into public narrative, especially when living persons, families, or communities remain implicated in the story?
8. Archives, traces, and absent presence  
What does self-representation mean when the archive is incomplete, damaged, silent, or produced by others? How do documentary makers work ethically with fragments, testimonies, and missing records? What politics of visibility shape archival recovery, preservation, and reuse?
9. AI, digital platforms, and algorithmic visibility  
How do synthetic images, deepfakes, voice cloning, recommendation systems, automated moderation, and platform logics reshape who can tell a story and how that story circulates? Can new technologies support self-representation, or do they introduce new forms of displacement, simulation, and loss of control?
10. Teaching the ethics of self-representation  
How can film schools, media studies, and professional training address narrative agency, consent, power, and care? What concepts, methods, and pedagogical tools help students and practitioners think critically about the ethics of speaking about and with others?

We especially welcome contributions that engage with documentary ethics through concrete cases, situated production experiences, or interdisciplinary approaches. Possible theoretical frameworks may include ethics of care, epistemic injustice, participatory and collaborative media, decolonial theory, feminist film theory, critical disability studies, trauma studies, visual culture, media anthropology, and platform studies.

The conference invites participants to move beyond the question of whether documentary represents people correctly and to ask a more demanding one: does it create conditions in which people can enter the public sphere as authors, co-authors, or credible witnesses of their own lives?

By bringing together researchers, practitioners, and educators, the conference aims to open a shared space for reflection on how stories are made, who is empowered or constrained through acts of telling, and what ethical forms of documentary practice remain possible today.

Submission guidelines:

Please submit an abstract of 250–300 words and a short biographical note of up to 100 words.

Send proposals to: [etika@ji-hlava.cz](mailto:etika@ji-hlava.cz)  
Submission deadline: 1 September 2026  
Conference date: 29 October 2026  
Venue: Jihlava, Czech Republic

Selected contributions may be considered for publication in an edited volume.

We welcome contributions from established scholars and practitioners as well as early-career researchers, doctoral students, and emerging filmmakers.

The conference is organised by Ji.hlava IDFF / DOC.DREAM services in cooperation with FAMU – Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. This cooperation strengthens the conference's academic grounding and connects its professional, curatorial and public dimensions with current research and pedagogical debates on ethics in documentary filmmaking. The academic framework is developed in dialogue with Assoc. Prof. Jan Motal, PhD, who acts as the academic guarantor of the conference.

**Conference Board:**

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The Conference Board oversees the academic and programme concept of the conference, the selection of proposals submitted through the Call for Papers, the professional programme framework, and the expert assessment of selected written outputs.

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