This past summer, more than one hundred international film scholars and filmmakers gathered at Indiana University (Fig. 1) for the twenty-fifth iteration of Visible Evidence, a conference focused on documentary and non-fiction film. This organization convenes abroad as often as in the United States. Though Bloomington, Indiana is not one of the most easily accessible North American cities, the long-standing international footprint of the conference was evident in the wide range of presenters, who travelled from Italy, Japan, England, Israel, and Singapore among other locations to be present at this event. From August 7 through August 11, participants shared research findings, filmmaking strategies, and critically debated the current status of documentary studies and practice.

The conference featured well-known figures such as Rick Prelinger, Michael Renov (Fig. 2), and Linda Williams, but equally as impressive was the high-quality work of the many local graduate students. With fifteen program participants from the host institution, and a dedicated plenary session on the Kinsey Archive, Indiana University was consistently present as much more than a forum for this event. The panel “Against Mutual Exclusivity: Documentary and Performance” stood out as one of the strongest I attended and was composed mostly of current or recent graduate students from the hosting institution. In addition, Indiana University Press, which has numerous titles in documentary studies—including a new edition of Introduction to Documentary by Bill Nichols and an anthology on the annual Flaherty seminar...
Documentary filmmaking in the Midwest was more broadly represented by a plenary session dedicated to the Chicago-based Kartemquin Films, a non-profit film collective behind such works as *Hoop Dreams*, *Life Itself*, and, more recently, *Abacus: Too Small to Jail* and *Minding the Gap*.

Were I pressed to name the strongest two presentations (out of more than 30 that I attended), I would mention talks given by PhD candidates: “Filmic Resistance Against the Everyday: Su Friedrich’s Re/Mediation of Present in *I Cannot Tell You How I Feel*” by Alina Predescu (University of California, Berkeley) and “‘Do I Get a Chance to Say Who I Want to Play My Life?’ Documentary and Metatheatricality in *Every Little Step*” by Jamie Hook (Indiana University Bloomington). Predescu attended to Friederich’s most recent film, which covers “the tenuous process of the moving of Friedrich’s 93-year-old mother, Lore, to an assisted living facility.” She continued, “The metaphor of the house that crumbles from Friedrich’s 1984 film *The Ties that Bind* becomes here the reality the filmmaker resists by arresting it under a magnifying glass in an attempt to hold time still. The film is Friedrich’s means of coming to terms with the change, as the filmmaker lives through her filming, and uses the act of recording to mediate the process of moving.” Predescu’s presentation effectively situated Friederich’s film among her other works while primarily attending to the filmmaker’s effective pairing of stylistic choices with the subject of *I Cannot Tell You How I Feel*. Jamie Hook analyzed the 2008 film “*Every Little Step*” which follows the audition process for the 2006 Broadway revival of the renowned musical *A Chorus Line*, originally directed and choreographed to overwhelming critical and popular acclaim by Michael Bennett in 1975.” Hook comparatively analyzed the
more recent documentary with a more straightforward film adaptation of *A Chorus Line* from 1985. He argued, interestingly, that the more recent documentary is more effective in conveying the central purpose of Bennett’s original project, in which the real-life stories of Broadway performers are played individually by different actors whose own backgrounds and personalities meaningfully intersect with the scripted parts they perform. According to Hook, the newer documentary demonstrates “the potential for complicated and surprising ontological configurations to emerge when the coherency of the real and the fabricated, as symbolized by documentary and performance, is disordered through the documentation of scripted material performed within a context whose reality—with all of its tangible stakes and urgencies—is on full display, such that the real and the performative begin to refract each other in prismatic ways.” Thank you to both of these presenters for sharing the text of their presentations so they could be quoted at length here.

Panels, plenary sessions, and workshops varied considerably in their focus and scope. For example, one workshop was devoted exclusively to the director Bill Greaves, a plenary session was devoted to two films by Deborah Stratman, while another panel was dedicated to the recent public television series *The Vietnam War* (directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick). On the other hand, some panels were much more eclectic. For instance, the “Practices of Historiography” panel included both filmmakers presenting their own work (the nephew of Montgomery Clift, Robert Clift, discussed his new film *Unmaking Monty* as seen in Fig. 3) as well as critical studies papers (Dimitrios Latsis presented “Early Nonfiction Films about the History of Cinema,” and Nicole Keating delivered “Visualizing History: Conversations with

Though the conference touched on an impressively broad range of subjects, there were some notably absent topics. For example, I was surprised to see that there was not a single paper on the representation of sport. There was also no work on Mexican film or about the US/Mexico border at a time when this subject is so prominent in the national consciousness. Such absences at conferences are almost always due to the lack of proposed work by presenters, and not the selections of the conference committee. With such a diverse range of topics discussed at Visible Evidence, these subjects would presumably have been included but for the absence of proposed papers or panels on these subjects. It is also worth noting that Visible Evidence remains a fraction of the size of much larger conferences, such as the annual Cinema for Society and Media Studies (SCMS) conference. For example, where Visible Evidence ran a maximum of six events concurrently, the SCMS 2019 conference featured as many as 20 panels at the same time. Thus, some gaps in coverage are more understandable at the smaller, more focused conference.

Considered as a whole, the Visible Evidence conference admirably fulfilled the organization’s advertised scope on the printed program: to explore a “wide range of cultural, political, social, historical, ethnographic, aesthetic, and pedagogical questions and perspectives from fields such as film studies, communication studies, anthropology, architecture, art history, ethnic studies, queer studies, history, journalism, law, medicine, political science, geography, sociology, urban studies and gender studies.” A survey of the program confirms this ambitious scope, with panels dedicated to music, photography, geography, sexuality studies, tourism, historiography, trauma studies, industrial film, ethnography, news journalism, ecology, archival studies, and data visualization.

In addition to work that connected with a diverse range of academic disciplines, there were also a number of panels that focused on film production. Workshops featuring practitioners covered subjects such as experimental film, interactive digital media, and film programming. Beyond workshops and panels, Visible Evidence included numerous screening sessions. Most of these screenings were devoted to relatively unknown films, but evening screenings or plenary sessions featured more renowned filmmakers such as Sergei Loznitsa (Austerlitz) and Bill Morrison. Morrison not only attended and spoke at conference, he also debuted a short film about Bloomington, Indiana, Buried Breaking Away, which played on the final night along with Dawson City: Frozen Time.

The presence of so many screenings alongside more traditionally academic panels put me in the mind of actively viewing films during the half-week conference as much as studying them. After conference events ended one evening, I viewed the following films through subscription services that night: Symbiopsychotaxiplasm, Every Little Step, and Planet of Snail. Via streaming services such as FilmStruck, Fandor, and Amazon Prime, I was able to preview films I had not heard of otherwise before making a decision about which concurrent panel to attend.

Visible Evidence XXV is also to be commended for including a broad range of films beyond the documentary cannon. While well-known and conventional documentaries were, deservedly, the subject of some analysis, so too were more liminal or marginal genres and films. For example, Laurel Westrup (UCLA) delivered a paper on music videos and Gabrielle McNally (Northern Michigan University) on “citizen surveillance as an emerging documentary form.” Notably, even when panelists delivered papers on seemingly well-covered films, they often approached the subject in expansive, unexpected ways. For example, Marian Petraitis (University of Zurich) gave a paper on Seven Up that focused not only on the well-known, original British series but also on the series of international spin-offs it inspired, most notably a version in the Soviet Union that began in the 1990s.
The organization’s website succinctly lists prior locations of this gathering: Visible Evidence conferences “have been held on five continents, most recently in Istanbul, Turkey (2010); New York City, USA (2011); Canberra, Australia (2012); Stockholm, Sweden (2013); New Delhi, India (2014); Toronto, Canada (2015); Bozeman, USA (2016); and Buenos Aires, Argentina (2017).” The next Visible Evidence conference (XXVI) will take place at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles from July 24-28, 2019. Possible attendees in North America should note that the 2019 conference is at an unusually accessible location. Based on the call for contributors posted on the “Visible Evidence XXIV” page, the next conference promises to be diverse and wide-ranging in its scope of coverage: “VE XXVI will feature the history, theory, and practice of documentary and nonfiction cinema, television, video, audio recording, digital media, photography, and performance, in a wide range of panels, workshops, plenary sessions, screenings, and special events.”

WORKS CITED


