

Visible Evidence XX
Stockholm, Sweden
August 15-18, 2013

Call for proposals

In 1990, a group of American scholars were provoked by the marginalization of documentary in the scholarly field of film studies. Their initiative for an international conference series resulted in *Visible Evidence*, first organized in 1993 by Jane Gaines at Duke University. In concert with this initiative appeared a number of influential books, such as *Representing Reality* (Bill Nichols, 1991), *Blurred Boundaries* (Bill Nichols, 1994), *Theorizing Documentary* (Michael Renov, ed., 1993), and *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations* (Brian Winston, 1995). Ever since, these volumes have been followed by related and complementary work in the growing academic field of documentary studies. The annual event of *Visible Evidence* (<http://www.visibleevidence.org>) has infused and keeps on inspiring the cross-disciplinary research on documentary film and media. The conferences have also encouraged and provided an important dialog between scholars and filmmakers, including opportunities for practitioners to screen new films and to present work in progress.

The international importance of *Visible Evidence* is remarkable, as a travelling conference that moves across the globe, this year to take place in Canberra, Australia (December 19-21, 2012), co-hosted by the Australian National University and the National Film and Sound Archive (<http://hrc.anu.edu.au/visibleevidencexix>).

The 2013 edition of *Visible Evidence* – its 20th anniversary! - will convene August 15-18 in Stockholm, hosted by the Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, and organized in collaboration with the Royal Library, Filmform The Stockholm Archive of Art Film and Video, and the Swedish Film Institute. In line with the previous conferences, *Visible Evidence XX* will address the history, theory, and practice of documentary cinema, television, video, audio recording, digital media, photography, and performance.

Proposed panels and presentations may address any aspect of documentary film and documentary screen cultures, or any theoretical or historical approach to documentary. At the same time, demarcating its 20th anniversary, *Visible Evidence XX* will pay special attention to a set of problems that have been subject to recurrent articulation during these two decades of conferences and related scholarship. These are salient issues that call for further exploration, new theoretical and historical insights in scholarly work, and which reverberate, or are subject to conceptual work, in film and media.

Proposals for panels and presentations to VE XX may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

Experimental Ethnography

Ethnographic film is traditionally described as a cultural practice connected to the social sciences, a branch of anthropology, as well as an aesthetic practice within a category of cultural production, a subgenre of the documentary tradition. While the ethnographic relies heavily on the implied truth claim of photographic and filmic representation, experimental work in film and media resonate with conceptual explorations of sound-image materiality, the visceral impact of rhythm in moving images, or of film images simulating dreams and desires. These are practices that often bring attention to the devices of camera inscription, mediation, or projection through which the represented motifs are bound to transform. Experimental film

also in the sense of avant-garde practices engaged in a polemics to provoke material changes to the practices and products of cinema.

Looking back at the previous editions of Visible Evidence, panels, presentations and screenings have often related to “experimental ethnography”. Attention has been paid to the historical intersections of documentary and avant-garde cinema, to the ethical and ideological implications in filming the other. Catherine Russell’s *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Duke University Press, 1999) stands out as a recurrent reference. In line with Russell’s account of experimental ethnography as “a critical method produced in and through film and video”, we encourage historical and contemporary approaches to these intersections of experimental form and anthropology, while also reassessing related concerns of subjectivity and self-representation, of drama documentary and social representation. For VE XX, we suggest more broadly to acknowledge “experimental ethnography” as a hybrid form in historical and contemporary media practices, foregrounding the productive (or problematic) meeting of seemingly oppositional impulses.

Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Postcolonial perspectives on cultural identity and representation in moving images.
- Life stories in re-enactment (first person docs, longitudinal docs, drama documentary, animation).
- Social representation in video art and film installations.
- Cultural representation and social media.
- Film as a tool in social research.
- Documentary concerns of visual anthropology and social psychology.

Affect, Agency and Social Mobilization

In *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (2011), Elizabeth Cowie defines the documentary as “an embodied storytelling that, while a narrativizing of reality in images and sounds, engages us with the actions and feelings of social actors, like characters in fiction”. Highlighting the importance of emotional engagement with the seen, Cowie proposes a return to the concept of identification in order to understand how, as “a matter of knowledge” “we must identify with facts and recognize their meanings”. Inspired by Cowie and others’ approaches to “documentary desire”, we propose, for Visible Evidence XX, a special attention to the consequences of the interdisciplinary affective turn, or *die Wende zur Emotion*, for the study of documentary cinema.

While inviting further theorizing of documentary viewing beyond problematic dualisms between rational understanding and emotional response, the affective turn in cinema and media studies also occasions a rethinking of the debates around instrumentalization of affect. It urges to re-examine the legacies of ‘committed documentary’ and, more broadly, the variety of affective rhetoric (from melodrama, to shock, trauma and spectacle) in documentary practices and, conversely, uses of documentary for mobilizing affect. Whereas historical studies of affective mobilization often have focused on state propaganda, we especially encourage investigations of historical and contemporary cases of mobilizing affect for political agency and social activism. These may include the extensive, ubiquitous documentation of ongoing social and political actions, movements and insurrections as well as the uses of documentary practices to articulate contemporary and historical structures of feeling: experiences of injury, hurt and violence, vulnerability and precariousness. This occasions, furthermore, investigations of affective strategies for preventing engagement as identification.

Papers may address but are not limited to the following topics:

- Documentary viewing as affective engagement
- Aversion to attachment: mobilizing affects in documentary practices (independent, institutional, historical, contemporary)
- Documentary in/as activism (e.g. histories of feminist, queer or antiracist activism)
- Affective politics of documentary (e.g. histories and practices of ‘committed documentary’, critiques of instrumentalization of emotion)
- Melodrama and documentary aesthetics of emotion

Documentary Art; Documenting the Arts

Implied in this theme is the recurrent overlaps in the history of cinema between artists’ and filmmakers’ experimental approaches to camera perception, and the various modes of forging and orchestrating people, places, and past events, which characterize the aesthetics and attractions of documentary narratives in moving images. There are simply, and have never been, any clear division between experimental film and video, and documentary filmmakers’ creative treatment of actuality. We encourage theoretical perspectives and conceptual approaches to innovative form, elaborate soundscapes, montage, or alternative platforms for the display and experience of recorded sound-images.

Live art events are founded on a philosophy and aesthetics that emphasize the ephemeral and singular of the here and now, yet documentation has proven central. Anything from spontaneous informal documentation by the audience, to professional filmmakers hired to document the event, these often scattered and overlooked records are central for the understanding of these art forms as well as for their repeatability, for establishing a canon, and the possibility for writing the history of the live arts. *Documentary Art; Documenting the Arts* encourages contributions that also may help to fill this blank in the history of documentary cinema.

Another facet of this theme concerns the postwar genre of the “Arts documentary”. In postwar Europe films of contemporary art developed into a creative venue of documentary filmmaking where experimental cinema merged with educational narratives, broadcasting media, and the poetics of the film essay. Critics of the time observed the aesthetic experience of viewing paintings and sculptures animated by means of the camera eye, the moving image, and the cinematic montage. Reviewing *Van Gogh* (Alain Resnais, 1948), André Bazin famously celebrated Resnais’ exploration of the canvas, “stripping Van Gogh of his yellows.”

In the light of the ongoing discussions of the migration of a documentary sensibility, or mode of address, into new arenas, *Documentary Art* aligns with documentary images and the appropriation and transformation of film in the art gallery. We would welcome theoretical and case-oriented considerations of installation film and video art, including the ways in which installations and performances engage conceptually with documentary problems of, for example spectatorship, affect, collective memory, or veracity.

Papers may address but are not limited to the following topics:

- Tensions and conflicts articulated in the encounter between art and documentary practices
- The filmic and photographic documentation of live art events, such as, performance art, art happenings, dance, street-art activism, or certain site-specific art.

- Portraits of individual artists, individual artworks, or the documentation of the creative process. This includes both educational documentaries, works for television and experimental approaches to the art documentary where the documentary form follows, or confronts, the subject matter.
- Artworks that engage, or are informed by documentary discourse.

Alternative Archives

The material and philosophical aspects of the moving image as a temporal object, and of cinema as a “technology of memory” (Bernard Stiegler), suggest that in due time every film and media representation turns into a document. This implied archival status of moving images are not less compelling today, although “the record” seems often to be detached from its traditional materiality and physical location. The production and re-production of media memories has always been at the core of documentary theory, and the potential allegory of the film as an archive tends to be even more pronounced in documentary filmmakers’ committed outlook on the present and the past.

Previous *Visible Evidence* conferences have brought attention to the multiple signification of the archive in the different practices and technologies of documentary; how archive traces are being used to express historical truth claims, to infuse narrative imagination, or even to contest the testimonial functions of archive material in media culture. Presentations and screenings have reminded us of the overlooked archives of recorded sounds and voices, or how animated films and video installations may stress documentary experience beyond the visual. Institutional and ideological perspectives of the archive have been accounted for in case studies on the potential articulation of memory in moving images, of memory work and trauma, or of untold life stories beyond official versions of History.

The suggested conference theme refers to “alternative” in the sense of emancipatory counter-cultures or complementary archive practices, but also in the sense of “subjugated film histories”, a term coined by Patricia Zimmermann in *Reel Families. A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indiana University Press, 1995). To this may be added that even major national archives, which indeed contain material of considerable cultural and historical significance, are being overlooked or disregarded, destroyed or closed down, protected from public access, or simply devoid of scholarly attention. For example, as elsewhere in Europe, the national history of public television fuses with that of documentary filmmaking and, yet, the importance of a major archive such as that of the Swedish Radio Corporation has only briefly been acknowledged.

Papers may address, but are not limited to, one of the following topics:

- Private archives: Amateur film, home movies and Internet cultures of domestic representation and private archives.
- Historical and contemporary perspectives on preservation, regulation, and cultural heritage.
- The reuse of archival material or “found footage”: strategies of compilation and orchestration.
- Broadcasting media and educational film
- Explanatory abstractions and the spectacular in science films.

Panel, Workshop, and Paper Guidelines and Deadlines

We especially encourage pre-constituted panels in order to strengthen the thematic coherence of the conference, but you may also choose to send a proposal for an individual paper. These are the options regarding your proposal for VE XX:

- (1) You may propose a pre-constituted panel, or be one of the three suggested presenters of a pre-constituted panel.
- (2) You may to send in a proposal for an individual paper presentation.
- (3) You may propose a workshop (4-5 people) in relation to one of the suggested conference themes.

Panels may consist of 3 speakers with a maximum of 20 minutes speaking time each. All presenters are encouraged to provide a title, an abstract of max 150 words, 3-5 key bibliographical references, name of the presenter and institutional affiliation.

Workshops may consist of 4-5 people, and the idea is to copy the constructive workshop model used at the conference in NY 2011, according to which workshop presenters can present up to thirty minutes collectively of prepared or informal material. However, the emphasis of workshops is on the open, unstructured exchange of ideas between all workshop participants.

Please note that as a participant you may submit only one paper proposal, either to the open call or as a part of a pre-constituted panel. As for rejected panel proposals, individual papers will be considered for the open call and may be accepted as such. Participants in workshops may also propose individual papers or contribute to a pre-constituted panel.

Panel and workshop organizers are asked to submit panel proposals including a panel/workshop title, a short description (up to 100 words) of the panel/workshop and information on all the presenters/papers as listed above.

If you prefer to send a proposal for an individual paper presentation, please make sure to provide a title, an abstract of max 150 words, 3-5 key bibliographical references, name of the presenter and institutional affiliation.

Please submit your proposal **before January 31, 2013**. We will make sure to have a conference website by the beginning of January, where you may submit your proposal in a submission area by filling in a form. For questions regarding VE XX: Conference assistant Sofia Bull and organizer Malin Wahlberg will receive your e-mails at the following address: vexx2013@ims.su.se.

Best wishes, the Stockholm Conference Committee:

Malin Wahlberg (Department of Media Studies, Section for Cinema Studies/Stockholm University)

Anu Koivunen (Department of Media Studies, Section for Cinema Studies/Stockholm University)

Patrik Sjöberg (Cinema Studies/Karlstad University)