

# I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE

## PRESS NOTES



*Winner of the Directing Award: U.S. Documentary  
2022 Sundance Film Festival*

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76 minutes

[Film Website](#)

[Publicity Materials](#)

Facebook [@ididtseeyouthere](#)

Twitter [@IDidntSeeUFilm](#)

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Film Website [ididtseeyoutherefilm.com](#)

## SYNOPSIS

As a visibly disabled person, filmmaker Reid Davenport sets out to make a film about how he sees the world, from either his wheelchair or his two feet, without having to be seen himself. The unexpected arrival of a circus tent outside his apartment in Oakland, CA leads him to consider the history and legacy of P.T. Barnum's Freak Show and its lingering presence in his daily life in the form of gawking, lack of access, and other forms of ableism.

Informed by his position in space, lower to the ground, Davenport captures indelible images, often abstracted into shapes and patterns separate from their meaning. But the circus tent looms in the background, and is reverberated by tangible on-screen interruptions, from unsolicited offers of help to careless blocking of ramps. Personal and unflinching, *I Didn't See You There* forces the viewer to confront the spectacle and invisibility of disability.

Offering both a perspective and stylistic approach that are rarely seen, Reid brings an urgently needed storytelling eye to filmmaking with a documentary that is powerful and emotional, thoughtful and raw, intimate and political.

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

### Reid Davenport

There is a curiosity about disability that is sometimes as brazen as that of spectators of the circus Freak Show. And so often, I bear the brunt of it. As a visibly disabled person, there is what feels like a determination from strangers that I am irreparably different. The sidewalk at times turns into a stage, and I can't control it. On that stage, I am looked at without being seen.

I see film after film exploring disability in a clichéd, misguided way. Rarely am I able to relate to stories about disability on screen. I wanted to be able to portray my perspective in a way that would be difficult to fetishize or romanticize. So instead of turning the camera on myself, I turned it outward. Doing so allowed me to capture the devastation of a stranger's gaze, the emptiness of being ignored, the physical weight of doors, and the beauty I am privy to as a wheelchair-user and person with spasticity. In many ways, this film is an invitation to see through my eyes, a formal strategy successfully used in Chantal Ackerman's *News from Home*, Kristen Johnson's *Cameraperson*, and RaMell Ross's *Hale County This Morning, This Evening*.

All of the footage in the film is shot by me from my literal point-of-view. The motivation for this is two fold: to jar viewers with shots from a camera held by my spastic body or mounted to my wheelchair, and to unequivocally rebuke the norm of disabled people being seen and not heard. In this film, viewers listen to my voiceover without ever seeing the entirety of my face.

The footage is unconventional, but not meant to be read as "the best I can do"; as special. Instead, it will be read as aesthetically pleasing in its own right. The legendary disability scholar Paul K. Longmore wrote about how disability is generative and how impairment produces talent, skills, and opportunities that otherwise would not be realized. I literally see the world differently than most people, whether it's my lower situated angle from my

wheelchair, my subconscious cautionary heightened perception of the ground I walk on, or the comparatively weakening muscles in my left eye. In this vein, the transitions between different shots will be driven primarily by aesthetic congruences in composition and shape rather than narrative considerations.

The right time to make *I Didn't See You There* was 50 years ago, was 10 years ago, is perhaps going to be 20 years in the future. But if this film makes my so-called unique perspective a little more common, a little more nuanced, a little more boring even, then I will have chipped away at the corrosive legacy of the Freak Show, a legacy that still resonates within all of us.

## **PRODUCER'S STATEMENT**

**Keith Wilson**

In 2018, I met Reid in a Downtown Oakland cafe because I was stuck. Recently, I had begun working on a feature-length film (now a live documentary) about the late performance artist and teacher Frank Moore who used a wheelchair and was labeled by many as controversial and creepy. Reid was an enthusiastic supporter of me creating a nuanced and formally adventurous portrait of a person with a disability. He was also unafraid to call me out on my ableism, my myopic approach to the material, and my limited understanding of disability history and theory. I was grateful for his honesty, insight, and facetious humor about it all.

I was grateful to have Reid's candor and I was already a fan of his past short films. But it wasn't until he shared some early test footage from *I Didn't See You There* that I understood the resonance and generosity of his filmmaking. His thoughtful, kinetic camerawork captured so much - the weight of a stranger's stare, the existential riddle of a fly trap, the shapes and patterns of the built environment, the energetic joy of moving through the world in a wheelchair. Reid's cinematic strategy made me feel unstuck, alive, present. I knew the project needed to become a feature.

As a producer, director, and artist, I want to engage with work that delights, surprises, implicates, and generates. It is my honor to be the producer of *I Didn't See You There*, and I look forward to propelling audiences towards its bold, joyous, much-needed lens and language.

## DISABILITY LANGUAGE

Below, please find guidelines provided by Director and Subject Reid Davenport regarding writing about I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE:

- I, along with many other disabled people, identify with “disability” (and all its iterations) as a political identity. The reasoning behind this is that disability is a social construct, rather than a medical phenomenon. Along the same lines, I do not identify with a medical diagnosis. You will not see a named medical diagnosis in any materials released from the film team.
- When using disabled, people wonder whether they should say “people with disabilities” or “disabled people.” Both are valid. My rule of thumb is for non-disabled people to refer, when appropriate, to someone as a person with a disability unless asked by that person to use other language (i.e. disabled person).
- Stick to the word “disability” and its iterations *when relevant*. Other terms like differently-abled, special needs, handicapable, impaired, limited, wheelchair-bound are problematic.
- When sharing and publishing media from the film, please use image identifications for people who are blind or low-vision. You can see examples throughout the film’s social media.
- Framing disabled people as inspiring, courageous, etc. is dehumanizing and othering. The media at large has perpetuated these storylines to the detriment of disabled people.
- A line in the film that ended up on the editing floor was “I’m sick of people telling me that I have a unique perspective.” This idea of uniqueness equivocates ableism (“oh, I didn’t know that because I’m unfamiliar”), others, and devalues my work as a product of utilitarian considerations rather than artistic skill.
- Family-members and those involved in disabled lives are overly represented and usually used as reference-points, if not proxies, to disabled people. It is important that disabled people have agency and represent themselves.

Below, please find additional easy-reference guidelines regarding terms to use while writing about I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE. These guidelines are courtesy of the National Center on Disability and Journalism.

### ABLE BODIED

*Background:* This term is used to describe someone who does not identify as having a disability. Some members of the disability community oppose its use because it implies that all people with disabilities lack “able bodies” or the ability to use their bodies well. They may prefer “non-disabled” or “enabled” as being more accurate.

*NCDJ Recommendation:* The term “non-disabled,” and the phrases “does not have a disability” or “is not living with a disability” are more neutral choices. “Able-bodied” is an appropriate term to use in some cases, such as when referring to government reports on the proportion of able-bodied members in the workforce. In some cases, the word

“typical” can be used to describe a non-disabled condition, although be aware that some in the disability community object to its use.

## **WHEELCHAIR/WHEELCHAIR-BOUND/CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR**

*Background:* People who use mobility equipment such as a wheelchair, scooter or cane consider the equipment part of their personal space, according to the United Spinal Association. People who use wheelchairs have widely different disabilities and varying abilities.

*NCDJ Recommendation:* It is acceptable to describe a person as “someone who uses a wheelchair,” followed by an explanation of why the equipment is required. Avoid “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound” as these terms describe a person only in relationship to a piece of equipment. The terms also are misleading, as wheelchairs can liberate people, allowing them to move about, and they are inaccurate, as people who use wheelchairs are not permanently confined to them but are transferred to sleep, sit in chairs, drive cars, etc.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **REID DAVENPORT**

#### **Director / Director of Photography**

Reid Davenport was recently named to DOC NYC’s “40 Filmmakers Under 40” in 2020. His first feature film, *I Didn’t See You There*, has been supported by Creative Capital, Doc Society’s New Perspectives Grant, Cal Humanities, the Ford Foundation, and the NBC Studios Original Voices Fellowship. Davenport was also named a 2020 Points North Fellow and a 2020 Bay Area Video Coalition MediaMaker Fellow in connection to the film. He is a 2017 TED Fellow where he gave a TED Talk at the annual conference in Vancouver. His film awards include the Enerson Foundation Production Grant (*RAMPED UP*), the Artistic Visions Award at the 2016 Big Sky Documentary Festival (*A Cerebral Game*) and Best Short Documentary at the 2013 Awareness Film Festival (*Wheelchair Diaries*). Davenport is also a podcaster whose video podcast, *Basic Able*, was fully funded by The Henry Ford Foundation in 2018.

Davenport is the co-founder and chief executive officer of Through My Lens, a nonprofit with a mission to amplify voices of and issues related to people with disabilities through original content, media consultancy, and personal instruction. As an undergrad at George Washington University, Davenport studied with filmmaker Jason Osder, with whom he now collaborates, and in 2016 he received a Master of Fine Arts in Documentary Film & Video from Stanford University.

## **KEITH WILSON**

### **Producer**

Keith Wilson is a filmmaker and visual artist based in Athens, Georgia. His films have screened at Sundance, the Berlinale, South by Southwest, documenta14, the U.S. National Gallery of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. For his in-progress live documentary film, the *Untitled Frank Moore Project*, he was a 2019 North Points Fellow and a 2018 BAVC Mediamakers Fellow. He was the recipient of two Kenneth Rainin Foundation grants from the San Francisco Film Society. Wilson's short documentary film *The Tree* premiered at the 2017 DOC NYC Film Festival and screened at MoMA's 2019 Doc Fortnight program. He was the producer, director of photography and editor for Annie Sprinkle and Beth's Stephens' feature documentary *Water Makes Us Wet*, which premiered at documenta14 in Kassel, Germany. In 2013, he was the director of photography and producer for *INTERIOR. LEATHER BAR.*, a hybrid documentary feature that premiered at Sundance and was released theatrically by Strand Releasing. He is a current member-owner of New Day Films where he served on the Steering Committee and is a Lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his Master of Fine Arts in Film Production from the University of Texas-Austin, and grew up on a cul-de-sac in suburban Atlanta.

# CREDITS

Directed by  
Reid Davenport

Produced by  
Keith Wilson

Edited by  
Todd Chandler

Executive Producer  
Alysa Nahmias

Executive Producers  
Bryn Mooser  
Kathryn Everett  
Andy Hsieh

Executive Producers  
Dawn Bonder  
Marci Wiseman  
In Association with  
Breezy Circle  
Ajna Films  
XTR

JustFilms | Ford Foundation

Director of Photography  
REID DAVENPORT

Additional Camera  
KELSEY

Featuring  
KELSEY  
BECKY  
CARSON  
LISA DAVENPORT  
DANIEL LEE

Associate Producer  
SASHA LEITMANN

Fiscal Sponsor  
THROUGH MY LENS

DI Facility  
NICE DISSOLVE

Colorist  
NATACHA IKOLI

DI Supervisor  
PIERCE VAROUS

Online Editor  
CHRIS KENNY

Post-Production Sound  
GIGANTIC STUDIOS

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& Re-recording Mixer  
TOM PAUL

Supervising Sound Editor  
ANDRÉS E. MARTHE GONZÁLEZ

ADR Mixer  
TRISTAN BAYLIS

Sound Effects Editors  
TOM BAYLIS  
PETER RUSSELL  
AI MIYATAKE

Additional Sound

Field Recordings  
ERNST KAREL

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Additional Editing Consulting  
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AVRIL JACOBSON

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DAVE TECSON

Post-Production Supervisor  
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DANIEL CHÁVEZ-ONTIVEROS

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FOCUS MEDIA LAW GROUP

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KIM MATULLO

Poster Design  
CASPAR NEWBOLT

Captioning  
CHERYL GREEN

Audio Description  
CHERYL GREEN

Intern  
DIANA CADENA

### **Songs**

#### *Spacewalk*

Written by Troy Herion

Performed by Thomas Giles and Troy Herion Courtesy of Troy Herion Publishing

#### *Squids*

Written and Performed by Troy Herion Courtesy of Troy Herion Publishing

#### *Laundromat*

Written by Troy Herion

Performed by Charlie Culbert and Troy Herion Courtesy of Troy Herion Publishing

#### *Keepers*

Written and Performed by Troy Herion Courtesy of Troy Herion Publishing

#### *Naked (a showing of scars)*

Written by Walt McClements

Performed by Walt McClements

Courtesy of American Dreams Records

*Thresholds (through a hole in the fence)* Written by Walt McClements

Performed by Walt McClements  
Courtesy of American Dreams Records

*Pine Trees*

Written by Mary Lattimore  
Performed by Mary Lattimore  
Courtesy of Ghostly International

*Bunker Dreams*

Written by Brian Horst  
Performed by The Noisettes  
Courtesy of Brian Horst

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ANDREA MEDITCH  
CHI-HUI YANG

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VIOLETA BAVA	MAYA CUEVA
EMILE BOKAER	JASON DASILVA
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SISA BUENO	KIM DAVENPORT
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HELEN EDELMAN  
ROBBIE FLORES  
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MICHAEL GIBBONS  
RACHEL GREGG  
SWATI GUILD  
MILTON GUILLEN  
JULIA GUNNISON  
JAMES HAMILTON  
ALEXANDRA HANNIBAL  
NIKKI HEYMAN  
ERIC HYNES  
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NIEMA JORDAN  
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ISARA KRIEGER  
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CATHY KUDLICK  
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NICO OPPER  
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MICHAEL PALMIERI  
RENÉE PASTEL  
ISAAC POOL  
KELLEN QUINN  
BRITTNEY RÉAUME  
TRACY RECTOR  
RODRIGO REYES  
RYAN ROBINSON  
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RODRIGUEZ  
RUTH SAMOLO  
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JEFF SEELBACH  
JON SESRIE-GOFF  
ALICE SHEPARD  
LESLIE SINGER  
BRETT STORY  
ALEX TEPLITZKY  
MAFALDA TREDE  
STEPHANI VICTOR

ALANA WAKSMAN  
KIMBERLEE WEBBER  
GABRIELLE WILLIAMS  
CLAUDIA WILSON  
OTTO WILSON-BALON

SAM WILSON  
SASHA WORTZEL  
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