

SXSW Film Review: The Look of Silence

BY ANNE S. LEWIS

TUE. MAR. 17 2015

Oppenheimer returns to the scene of The Act of Killing

This is the companion film to Joshua Oppenheimer's Oscar-nominated *The Act of Killing*, which focused, unconventionally, on the unrepentant perpetrators of the mid-Sixties Indonesian genocide where, following a military takeover of the government, a million Indonesians were brutally murdered in a Communist purge by uniformed thugs.

The Look of Silence is about a family of survivors who discover from the first film's footage the gruesome details of their son's heinous murder. Remarkably, 50 years later, with the military still in power, members of the death squad – unpunished and proud of their atrocities – live amidst the still-terrified families of their victims. When Adi, a 44-year-old (later-born) son of the aforementioned family, hears the revisionist lies about the genocide that his children are being taught at school, he bravely sets out to confront his brother's killers and get them to acknowledge their crimes.

The series of amazingly nonconfrontational, soul-probing conversations that Adi has, camera running, with the perpetrators and their progeny reveals the many looks that 50 years of silence can take. Denial figures heavily in the mix, though there are some breakthroughs. An amazing film.



SXSW review: “The Look of Silence” looks at true evil

March 14, 2015

Joe Gross

As P.T. Anderson says in “Magnolia,” “We might be through with the past, but the past ain’t through with us.”

This is profoundly true in “The Look of Silence,” the sequel to Joshua Oppenheimer’s extraordinary 2013 film “The Act of Killing” (Drafthouse Films distributed both), in which Oppenheimer interviewed men who participated in the 1965 Indonesian coup that led to the slaughter of roughly a million Communists, intellectuals and ordinary citizens.

Many of the men participated in reenactments of the murders and seemed to show little or no remorse or even much reflection on what they had done.

“Look” focuses on one particular family of one of the victims. Village optometrist Adi Rukun’s much older brother Rimlie was slaughtered (particularly gruesomely and traumatically for his parents) by death squads before Adi was born.

Adi’s mother, a very old woman who takes care of her even older, increasingly senile, husband, freely admits Adi was a replacement child. Their bodies and mind almost act as a metaphor for the stress and exhaustion Indonesia’s regime has put on its people. If a government refused to remember something, eventually its people won’t either.

In keeping with the title, “Look” is a very different film than “Act” — much calmer, less theatrical. Much of that is due to Rukun’s amazing calm at viewing footage from “Act,” men who were directly responsible for his brother’s death, men whom elementary schools lionize rather than condemn.

During eye exams he’s administering, Adi discusses his brother’s death with various men who participated in the killings. All of them are much older men. It is extremely hard to tell how they feel about the damage they have caused. Were they caught up in the moment, the mob mentality that can accompany a political upheaval? Did they fear for their own lives if they did not participate in these atrocities or were they gleeful in their killing? They have no interest in interrogating their own culpability and even Adi posing the question at all sends their collective backs up, even as they admit to, say, drinking the blood of the slain.

One man is still in political power, but most fall back on a following-orders defense, vague threats or some variation on leaving the past alone. How the survivors have kept from going mad is extraordinary, and Adi's calm in the face of true evil is a wonder to behold.



The 10 Best Films I Saw at SXSW

By Ryan Lattanzio

March 23, 2015 at 4:00PM

With South by Southwest 2015 officially over, we appraise the best of the fest, from indie world premieres to films off the fest circuit.

4. "The Look of Silence" (Venice premiere)

Denmark-based director Joshua Oppenheimer joins the ranks of truth-seekers Albert Maysles and Werner Herzog with this companion to "The Act of Killing." Oppenheimer artfully turns to the victims of the 1965 Indonesian killing machine that wiped out thousands of innocent people, including the brother of Adi, who movingly asks the perpetrators: "Why?" Unlike so many documentaries today — artless and/or po-facing — Oppenheimer is actually directing, and you can feel his voice guiding us through the messy leftovers of human atrocity. This tremendous film won SXSW's Audience Award for documentary.

Drafthouse Films releases on July 17, 2015.

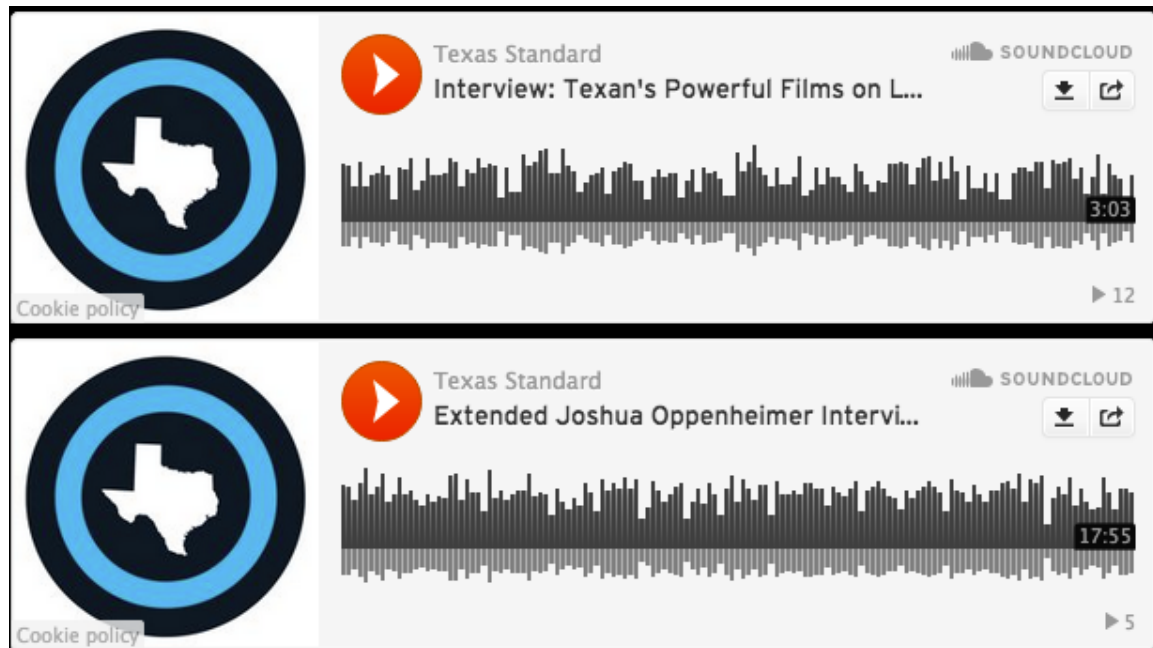
INTERVIEW: TEXAN'S POWERFUL FILMS ON LASTING EFFECTS OF INDONESIA'S GENOCIDE

The SXSW Film Conference marks a sort of homecoming for MacArthur genius and Oscar-nominated filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer.

By Laura Rice

March 17th, 2015

Also published on <http://tpr.org/>



Audio of interview available as Soundcloud links on Texas Standard website.

Oppenheimer's 2012 film, *The Act of Killing*, looks at how the perpetrators of Indonesia's military coup cope with their past. His new documentary, *The Look of Silence*, follows victims of the coup and how they continue to live alongside the people who killed their family members.

On Being a 'Texas' Filmmaker:

"One of the things, given that I left here at two (years old), that delights me is that somehow Texas has kind of a magnetic attraction all over the world. And so in every biography of me, at every film festival, it doesn't say 'born in the USA' or 'American' it says 'Texan' or 'Texas born' or 'born in Texas.' So it's a mark of pride for me. It's a little bit exotic, even for me, because I left here when I was so young... My father was a professor at UT and my mother was doing a lot of community and civil rights movement and immigrants rights movement legal work. I think my sense that we can't really feel comfortable with the lives we lead when we know that our comfort depends on the suffering of others is something that I learned from my mother. And she got her start with all of that here in Austin."

On What Happened in Indonesia in 1965:

“There was a military coup in which the military, together with American support, began a program of genocide, really, where they exterminated the entire Indonesian left. They either put people in concentration camps for decades, many people died from starvation in the camps, or they simply killed people. They set in motion a killing machine where, within six months, somewhere between half a million to two and half million people were killed. Many targeted because not they were real leftists but because they were ethnic Chinese.”

On Why He Made Two Films:

“I always knew that I would make two films. From the very beginning. Back in 2004, I filmed two men, two death squad leaders, taking me down to a riverbank and they took turns playing victim and perpetrator, sort of reenacting how they helped kill 10,500 people at one spot, one clearing. And then, at the end, they produced a small point and shoot camera and posed for snap shots as kind of souvenirs of a happy afternoon out. But, for me, this was one of the worst afternoons of my life. I had this awful feeling that I had wandered into Germany, 40 years after the Holocaust, only to find the Nazis still in power. And I knew at that point, within hours really, I knew I would make two films. One about the stories the perpetrators tell themselves, the lies they tell themselves to justify their actions to themselves and then tragically impose on a whole society. And that’s *The Act of Killing*. And then I knew I would make another film, equally contemporary, about what it does to a human being and to a whole society to have to live for 50 years in fear and in silence. And that’s *The Look of Silence*.”

SILVER SCREEN RIOT

SXSW Review: THE LOOK OF SILENCE

Written by Matt Oakes

Published: 19 March 2015

In psychology class, you learn about the concept of diffusion of responsibility, a sociopathic event that explains that when more people are present or complicit in an unfavorable event, the less personally responsible that group will feel for its outcome. The public murder of Kitty Genovese - in which a woman was stabbed to death in NYC but not one neighbor alerted the police - is a tragic true-to-life example of this but no piece of fiction or nonfiction has better captured the ghastly phenomenon than Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence*.

A companion piece to Oppenheimer's fascinating and Oscar-nominated *The Act of Killing* - in which Oppenheimer had Indonesian death squad leaders reenact murders they committed against 1960s national "communists" - *The Look of Silence* probes similar material but from a new angle. At its center is spirited ophthalmologist Adi Rukun, a soulful survivor of the genocide whose older brother was slain in particularly grisly fashion. While *The Act of Killing* saw Oppenheimer struggling to unclog the pipes of these monsters' emotional stoppage, *The Look of Silence* sees Adi ask the hard questions about his brother's sadistic slaughters. His inclusion makes the affair gut-wrenchingly personal and it's a ghastly, breathless thing to watch him refuse to back down in the face of these cold psychopaths. He's unshakably convinced that there is some threshold; that a dying Darth Vader's confession to Luke that he was right, good must exist somewhere in there. He is the harbinger of that emotional transformation and he won't step out of the ring until they've at least shown evidence that they're attempting to process the baggage he lays at their feet.

At first, they brag about their role in the killings, envisioning themselves as some brand of Hollywood war heroes - the Stallones and Schwarzeneggers of Indonesia. They describe their actions in brutal detail. Often they laugh as they recall specific details - slicing people open and dragging their intestines hung out; slicing apart a woman's breast and how the insides looked like "coffee filters"; cutting off a human penis after repeatedly stabbing and beating him. They casually confess that they drank human blood...in order to stay sane. In the same sentiment, I love that irony (is there anything more insane than drinking human blood?) and am absolutely horrified by its seeming veracity. These people are chilled and emotionally demented, whether from their cannibalism or otherwise. After they've spilled their glorified tales of saving their country from the malice of the communists (they mention more than once how the US's disparaging portrait of communist influenced

their biases), Adi drops the truth bomb: my brother was murdered under your watch, likely by you or your people.

And then the story changes. "Well, I wasn't directly involved", "What district did he live in? Was it this district?". And again and again, "I was just following orders." All of history's worst events can be traced back to the excuse of men following orders and Adi doesn't let them off that easily. And yet, amazingly, he is not vindictive or revengeful in his desire to have these mass murderers come clean. In fact, in every confrontation, he sizes the older men with glasses to better "help them see". The irony there again is both beautiful and tragic. His intention is earnest; he truly wants to forgive them - and even help them - but without any admission of guilt, there is no foundation for forgiveness.

Where Oppenheimer tried to amp up the surrealistic elements of the tragedy with tactful, tasteless (on the Indonesian butchers' parts, not his) reenactments in Act of Killing, he allows silence to sink in here. The film is essentially without a score and moments of Adi staring at video footage of his brother's executors are thick with stillness or crickets dully chirping. The natural beauty of Indonesia is juxtaposed by its decrepit political stature and Oppenheimer illustrates the dichotomy with sharp visual precision.

As the agents of genocide repeat "The past is past", the delicacy of Indonesia's current political balance becomes a focal point of fiercely high intensity. At one point, a politician threatens Adi - you don't want things to go back to the way they were, do you? You know how easy that would be, don't you? In a culture of passive ignorance and totalitarian fear, *The Look of Silence* is everything and actually has the power to change the world. It's nervously hopeful and yet completely crushing. It left me hollow, speechless and yet full of life and true fury. It is a film that all human beings should be required to watch, if only to learn an invaluable lesson in empathy and what the world might look like without it.



Movie Review: "The Look of Silence" (SXSW)

by Stephen Silver on March 19, 2015 at 3:54 pm

Two years ago Joshua Oppenheimer made "The Act of Killing," one of the most astonishing achievements in the history of the documentary form. In the film, Oppenheimer spoke with a group of men who had led death squads in Indonesia in the 1960s, local gangsters who executed thousands of "communists," were never punished in any way for their crimes, and in fact wished to make "movies" re-enacting the killings.

Now, Oppenheimer has made another film, "The Look of Silence," telling the "other side," as it were, of the story: That of those killed and their families.

"The Look of Silence," which played at South by Southwest as well as other recent film festivals, isn't quite as electrifying as "The Act of Killing" - that first film had things that have never been seen before, starting with a Leno-like talk show in which the studio audience cheered on a bunch of war criminals. It's a bit more conventional. But it's still a skillfully made and essential film.

Produced during the same years-long production period as "The Act of Killing" - and because Oppenheimer cannot safely return to Indonesia, it won't be a trilogy - "The Look of Silence" focuses on Adi, an optometrist whose family was touched by the genocide. Adi - who is said to be in his early 40s but could pass for 25 - travels around the region and confronts some of the architects of the slaughter, some of whom were directly responsible for the brutal murder of Adi's brother.

We see Adi's elderly parents - including his malnourished, dementia-stricken father, as well as other relatives, and debates over how to confront the horrors of the past ("Stop living in the past - like the military dictatorship taught us!" - is only the most memorable talking point.)

Most chilling of all are the scenes in which Adi, while administering eye exams, confronts the men about their crimes. On more than one occasion, one of these old men even confronted the director himself and tells him to turn off the camera.

Sure, "The Act of Killing" was more ostentatious, from the ridiculous movie costumes to that insane talk show to that amazing scene, in the present day, of a

high-ranking government minister leading a rally in a chant of “Kill the Communists.” “The Look of Silence” is more straightforward, but still very special.

In all, the whole thing is a remarkably daring project, and if you look at the closing credits, as in the first film, more than half of the credited names are “Anonymous.”

Earlier in the festival, Alex Gibney drew a “controversy” for making a movie that angered Apple and may have even inspired a few people to walk out of a screening early. He ought to have a talk with Joshua Oppenheimer about what real daring filmmaking looks like.



SXSW INTERVIEW: JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER GOES BEYOND THE SURFACE OF HIS DOCUMENTARY DUOLOGY

Written by Aaron Hunt

19 Mar 2015

I had a most appreciated privilege to screen *The Look Of Silence*, the follow up to 2012's groundbreaking *The Act Of Killing*, at this year's South By Southwest. I was further pleased to meet the director of both films, Joshua Oppenheimer, and talk to him about some of the formal aspects and differences between the two. What I gathered was an incredible insight, with the unusual requirement of patience and compassion.

The films document the lives of the perpetrators and survivors of the Indonesian Genocide. The leaders who led the massacre of over a million people, remain in power to this day. Both films seek the humanity beneath it all.

Q. Whenever I'm thinking of a documentary idea, I have this fear that people may find the idea self-interested, or exploitative [for the sake of my own success]. Did you ever deal with that fear [for these films]?

A. Well I think these two films are kind of unique. I really was first encouraged to film the perpetrators by the survivors who had asked me to come and make a film about why they were afraid, about what it means for them to live surrounded by the still powerful man who killed their relatives. So I felt very much making this film that I was not an outsider making a film, because I wasn't making a film for me I was making a film for them, and for Indonesia, and that's true with both movies. I think as I'm thinking about my next project, I certainly believe that the purpose of art is to hold a mirror up that we can look through to contemplate who we are. And that can't be self interested, because that mirror is inherently valuable. So no I don't worry about being exploitative. And also when I think about making a film, I know I'm going to become very close to the people that I'm filming, and we're going to take a long journey together that will transform both of us. So it's about finding fellow travelers and undertaking a deep exploration. Even with *The Act Of Killing* Anwar Congo saw the uncut version of the film, and he was very moved by it, he was silent for a long time, he was tearful, and he said "Joshua this film shows what it's like to be me". And he and I remain in touch, now it's every couple of months, but for a long time it was every week, and you feel love for each other. So I think that with the high ranking politicians in *The Act Of Killing* who Anwar brought in, and who perhaps thought were only helping to make a film that would glorify Pancasila

Youth's role, and the Paramilitary's role at slaughtering the left, they feel betrayed by the film and they hate it. But even if they were exploited to make the film, it was for an end that I feel was much more important.

Q. On The Directors Cut...

A. ...And that cut, it's two hours and forty minutes, it's the original cut of the film. It's called Director's Cut here but it's not a Director's cut, because Director's Cuts are always made afterwards and out of regret. This is just the film, this is how it was released in every country in the world except for the United States where we shortened it by 40 minutes to get a wider theatrical release. So if you go on Netflix, The Act Of Killing Director's Cut that's it. I think it's maybe ten minutes longer here, because it's been slowed down to 24fps from 25fps.

Q. That's interesting they had to cut it down for a U.S Release...

A. You know cinemas are subsidized in much of Europe so they don't have the same pressure on them to get in as many screenings. Maybe people have more free time, so a longer film doesn't deter people, and people aren't used to watching films with subtitles... There's lots of variables to it I think.

Q. How was it being around these Death Squad Leaders, were you constantly uncomfortable, did you feel drained?

A. People often asked me with The Act Of Killing, [if] I was afraid making this film. And I was not really physically afraid, I was emotionally afraid, and it was kind of draining that's a good way of putting it (laughs). Because it was just so painful, and to go into the most painful aspects of what we are and what we do completely open, trying to not defend myself, even trying not to build up a defensive shell which is inherent in saying "You're a monster! You're a psychopath!" Which I knew wasn't true. I recognized that this behavior was not abhorrent it was what everyone was doing. A psychopath is unusual, but this is what everyone was doing of that milieu. So to go into that realizing, every act of evil in our history has been committed by human beings just like us, [so] therefore no matter how monstrous the action the person is not a monster.

Then of course the person, with abandon, [will] throw himself into embracing the worst of what he's done despairingly, and then become a kind of monster. But it's still out of his humanity that he does that. To go into that open, means you're vulnerable. To get close to Anwar meant I had to be vulnerable to him. I don't know how to make a film about another human being from a distance, and I think it's antithetical to the purpose of art to judge and to condemn. We condemn the crimes, but we must never condemn human beings as artists. So that was painful and draining. Making The Look Of Silence was frightening, physically frightening, because we were confronting them. That's never happened in Indonesia, and it's never happened in the history of documentary film. There's never been a

documentary made, where survivors confront [the] perpetrators while the perpetrators are still in power. So we were afraid all the time while shooting *The Look Of Silence*.

Q. In both films humor plays a critical part, in what way do you think it worked differently in *The Look Of Silence*?

A. I think there's one kind of humor that plays a very important role in *The Act Of Killing*, which is much less present in *The Look Of Silence*, and that's this sort of surreal absurdity. What the men are doing becomes quite absurd at times. That's maybe a kind of genuine comic relief that's rooted in our need to say this is not us. And there's a little bit of that in *The Look Of Silence* too, in some of the old footage Adi's watching. But because that old footage is framed by Adi's Gaze it doesn't have that same absurd quality, it's more painful. I think there's a kind of humor in both films which is the more important kind which is really the same. And [that] comes from us liking the characters. When Anwar's showing off his new teeth, or Herman's singing a song to us in the middle of the Uncut version, he sings a song to us about going to a movie on a Friday Night. We love him because he's so open to us. And that seems to offer relief, it seems to make the film easier, but actually it makes it harder. Because we become close to these men and feel them as human beings, and then when they do something terrible five minutes later, we're vulnerable to them. We haven't protected ourselves psychologically by distancing ourselves from them. *The Look Of Silence* is full of moments of tenderness and humor with the family. With the daughter and the old mother. For example when she says she won't sleep with her husband because he smells bad, and Adi says "well why do you have so many children?" and she says "Well when we have to do it we do!". She's like a hundred years old it's hilarious, and the audience of course laughs. But those moments make us close to them, and we love them, and become open to them because they're wonderful. And then of course we feel their plight as survivors. We feel the silence, the fear, the unresolved trauma, the inability to heal that much more painfully. So in both films that kind of humor, where we open ourselves and embrace these characters whom I love, so you love. And that of course feels like relief, because it's a nice feeling, but that makes the overall film that much more painful.

Q. In *The Look Of Silence*, I felt the space was tighter, more condensed. Was that a conscious structural or composition choice?

A. I think there's a couple things. I think *The Act Of Killing* is an epic in a way, particularly the uncut *Act Of Killing*. It's two main characters and their relationship. And this is not so true of the shorter version but really true of the uncut film. The two main characters become a kind of vessel for a whole society, and a whole expose of a society. Maybe in the shorter film it's more of a portrait intercut with a political expose. In the longer film there's a synthesis that occurs where it's kind of vast. And this is maybe, more intimate perhaps. And it really relies on close up, as a vehicle for empathy. So during these intense confrontations between Adi and the perpetrators I'm trying to film both parties in close up because I'm emphasizing

fear, and doubt, and paralysis, and moments where people can't communicate. Moments where apparently nothing is happening, but we suddenly understand the peaceful silent quality of the whole is actually not really peaceful; it's actually the result of a kind of tense and delicate equilibrium of complex forces and oppositions that are exerting tremendous pressure, but can't burst forth. So my big influences in making *The Look Of Silence* were Ozu and Bresson. And both [of] those directors use close ups in this way, where supposedly nothings happening, but everything is happening, there's tremendous drama. And I try to do that there and of course that creates this intimacy and this tighter feeling that I think you're talking about.

Q. I was also going to ask, because you have this kind of very deliberate structure and composition, are you ever going to work with fictional films, or other types of filmmaking?

A. I think it's nice though, to put this pressure on the non-fiction form! I don't mean pressure [as] in adversarial pressure. Just what happens when you bring these cinematic techniques to non-fiction. I don't know. At the moment I'm very much interested in what happens when people play themselves, what happens when you allow people to stage themselves in whatever way you wish. Certainly I'm asked this question a lot, and what I think I love most about cinema is [that] it's my way of exploring the world I live in. And I think you can do that in a way by getting really deep into a story that you need to tell, and really deep into the layers of performance that would make a masterpiece of a fiction film. But it's a different kind of exploration when actually using your camera to intervene in the world, to make things happen in the world that should have happened long ago. Like long ago the boastful perpetrators of Indonesia should have made a musical to expose the bankruptcy of their own moral vision. But it hadn't happened until I provoked it. Long ago a survivor should have confronted the perpetrators and said "Hey let's talk about this" if not to get the apology, because he doesn't get that, then at least to expose how divided people are from each other. And that didn't happen until Adi and I provoked that, created that reality. So this idea of kind of using the camera to intervene in the world, and also to create these occasions that themselves are cinematic gems I hope, that [are] carefully staged so that we can see all the most urgent and important things.

You see I could've shot these confrontations with one handheld camera, rushing back and forth trying to follow all the words and follow all the drama...But I felt really what I should do, this has never happened before, it's unprecedented, both the confrontations and the kind of portraiture with the survivors. I should set up the camera as sensitively as possible, so that I am able to pick up on the details where the deeper meaning resides. A furrow in someones brow, a look of worry... So of course the scenes are carefully constructed cinematically, but in order to capture those elements that would have not been visible with a more dynamic hand held attempt to document an occurrence. I'm trying to see beyond the surface and pick out these little details that really embody the truth of the occasion. And I guess that's some of the same tools you use when trying to figure out the *mise en scène* and the

great camera work for a great fiction scene. But I'm doing it for a different reason and that's what still motivates me, this cinema as exploration more than storytelling.



THE LOOK OF SILENCE - Review

Written by Aaron Hunt

There is no silence in this film. When tense confrontations come to a close, a grinding ambience of humming insects fills the void. Or, indeed a literal quiet does come, so the mind fills the space with the cries of the victims, who loom over Indonesia awaiting the miasma to fade and a confession to dissipate the plumes. Where, in *The Act Of Killing* you had to fight the fever dream to find the depths of the horror, *The Look Of Silence* positions you on the other side of the fumes.

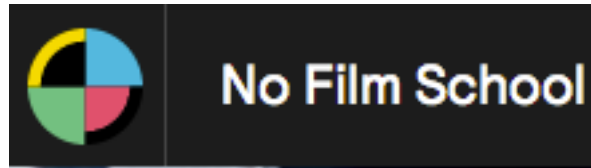
Oppenheimer has found a story so thick with irony, symbolism, and coincidence, that you'd think it was written. We meet Adi, an optometrist, born after the genocide had taken his brother and left wounds on his family. As an effect he ages marked forever by forces invisible to him. A genocide he did not witness, a brother who he did not meet. It festers, and he seeks the perpetrators to heal. A series of confrontations then follow. Adi tests their eye sights, and proceeds to test the extent of their disillusion. He only seeks an apology and an admission that would allow them to exist on the same terrain. But the reactions, and revelations that come of it are not mine to spoil.

I can assure you that Oppenheimer reveals himself to be one of the great formalist. I have seen it done in narrative filmmaking, but I have never seen it so prevalent in the documentary form. In *The Act Of Killing* we're often served medium shots. It's more of a sprawling epic, with a few intimate moments in between. In *The Look Of Silence* space feels condensed, close ups or tight spaces leave little room in the compositions for the intensity to mellow. Shots of super saturated almost toxic green vegetation, and barren interiors are our only forms of respite. In an Ozu film Ebert would have coined them pillow shots. But given the context the effect is not so comfortable. Instead they punctuate the horrors lingering just beneath the surface, letting the past rise up in ways only our imagination can compensate for (because the film deliberately offers no historical footage).

To play with form in the documentary landscape seems like a daunting task. But Oppenheimer's an authority you trust. His approach always feels rooted in truth, and his artistic flourishes are enlightening in ways incommunicable through other means. Everything from the editing (Cut from murder reenactment to Orange peeling), to the sound design (The haunting buzz), to the cinematography (Condensed shots), to the reality of these moments, feels part of an exceptionally

crafted whole. Like the best films, it moves like music. It develops a rhythm and mood that it builds on the entire way through. Watching this film, I felt the presence of the audience despite the introspection it requires. I felt some sort of mutual wavelength. There was dead silence, and there were laughs, but everyone seemed drilled into the depths of this thing. To feel an audience this in tune; I think that's strong evidence of a filmmaker in full control of his craft.

What's collected here is something of considerable power. By the time the credits of anonymous craftsman peeled down the screen, I was speechless. The audience visage softened, the Q&A afterwards was gentle, and people had to clear the swelling in their throat to talk again. I looked to the woman next to me who I had met before the screening and we looked at each other differently than before. We all shared something that had made us immensely vulnerable. I had trouble discussing it afterwards, and even thinking of questions to ask Mr. Oppenheimer the day after. I even felt less charmed about the Midnight Screening I planned to attend. I'm rarely effected this strongly. What's there to say about films these powerful? Of course you should see it. *The Act Of Killing*, and *The Look Of Silence* will not be forgotten, they're the sort of timeless relics that feel timeless as you watch them, and yet make great waves in the present.



Unpacking 'The Look of Silence' with Oscar-Nominated Director Joshua Oppenheimer

Mitch Van Hove
March 19th, 2015

The man behind the silence-breaking exposé on the Indonesian genocide of 1965 (The Act of Killing) follows up his discoveries with the equally powerful companion film The Look of Silence.

Few films leave you changed upon viewing them, but the weight, power and grace of these two films signal their impact as unignorable. I had a chance to sit down with Joshua in his hotel room at SXSW to discuss how his latest film compliments The Act Of Killing. The film delves into the personal quest of Adi (a man whose brother was slain in genocide) as he strives to uncover remnants of humanity after 50 years of silence.

Link to interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Noz84f6NSlw>

Formally the films are very different, but for me equally powerful and really are both must-sees. Have you seen either film? Let's talk about them below.

South China Morning Post

The Look of Silence is a harrowing companion piece to The Act of Killing

By Edmund Lee

March 18, 2015

Copenhagen-based American director Joshua Oppenheimer has been deservedly lauded for accomplishing an unprecedented feat of non-fiction filmmaking with his acclaimed documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012): he got the perpetrators of brutal acts of torture and mass murder to gleefully reenact their crimes against humanity with elaborate costumes and special effects make-up on movie sets.

In tracing the events of the Indonesian massacres of the mid-1960s — which took the lives of up to a million people, including suspected Communists, ethnic Chinese and opponents to the military dictatorship that came into power in 1965 — Oppenheimer let his remorseless subjects bask in the glory of their atrocities so that, just maybe, they would eventually atone for them.

It is debatable whether the resulting sickening spectacle is justified by the faint prospect of fishing out the sense of guilt buried deep inside these faces of evil. But at least the absurd aftermath of that historical atrocity — which sees many of the perpetrators amass large fortune and continue to hold privileged positions in governments throughout the country — has been brought to the attention of a wider audience.

In *The Look of Silence* (2014), essentially a companion piece to *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer turns his camera to the massacre victims and their relatives for a much more intimate inquiry into the horror of genocide. Centring on Adi, a forty-something optometrist who was born after his brother was killed by the neighbouring villages' elders, this film follows him around as he conducts eye exams and poses confronting questions to the culpable.

While his parents live on into their very old ages with the traumatic memory of their eldest son's murder, Adi must contend with the feeling that he was born as a replacement for his brother — who was seriously wounded by the paramilitaries, but somehow escaped and sneaked back home, only to be taken away again to face a gruesome death at a riverside execution spot in 1965.

Adi only manages to extract refusal to comment — as well as palpable threat of reprisals — from the perpetrators. But it is the killers' families who provide this film with its most morally conflicted moments. In a climactic exchange, Adi insists on playing a 2003 video of a since-deceased patriarch to his family, who refuse to accept that the killer authored a book to further boast about his murderous exploits.

By charting the personal, *The Look of Silence* paints a stark portrait of a country still struggling to heal its 50-year-old wounds due to the participants' unrepentant ways; they cling on to various forms of self-delusion, including a myth that the killers could avoid going insane by drinking the victims' blood. As for the victims' families, they have little consolation.

Movie Review - 'The Look of Silence'

TIM FALKENBERG

MARCH 18TH, 2015 - 1:53 PM

This review contains more plot discussion than a typical Mxdwn Movies review, and what some might consider to be spoilers. I found it impossible to talk about this movie without discussing some elements of the story in detail, and while I don't believe reading this review will negatively impact your experience of the film, if you are worried about such things please feel free to skip down to The Verdict and join the full discussion as soon as you've had a chance to see it.

The Look of Silence is one of the most remarkable films I'm likely to see in a long, long time. I've only seen a small portion of The Act of Killing, to which this is a companion piece, but where that film focused on the killers in the Indonesian genocide in 1965, this one focuses on one of the victims. The film is co-directed by Joshua Oppenheimer and an Indonesian man only known as "Adi," who conducts most of the interviews in The Look of Silence. Adi's brother Ramli was killed in the genocide shortly before Adi was born, and now Adi is interviewing many of the men involved in Ramli's killing.

In the course of gathering stories for The Act of Killing and this film, Oppenheimer actually interviewed the two men who physically put knife to flesh and killed Ramli, among many others. In fact, Ramli's killing included some remarkable details, and took place (apparently) in a relatively small village, so the killers even remembered him by name and re-enacted parts of his specific murder. Intercut throughout The Look of Silence is footage of Adi watching the interview with these two men.

The Look of Silence draws its name from the primary attitudes of Indonesians to discussing the '65 mass killings. Willful ignorance and denial of culpability are the go-to responses. When Adi interviews those who were involved in the killings – the district head of the organized men who carried out the killings, a local politician come to power as a result of the genocide, and even his own uncle, a prison guard, among them – two tactics are repeatedly used when Adi tries to assign any kind of responsibility for what happened. First, each tries to pass the buck to the people who were over them, usually with some assertion of duty or public service (the killings were supposed to be ridding the country of communists). Second, they just stopped talking, claiming they didn't want to talk about politics and – more

commonly – wanted to leave the past in the past. The past, the genocide, these are “old wounds.” Everyone gets along now, they say (clearly not the case, if the intimidation tactics Adi faces are any example), so why open up sore spots long closed over?

Paradoxically, it’s probably Adi and his family (and those like him) who have the most righteous claim to fresh violence (editorial note: if such a thing does indeed exist), but the very reality of Adi’s presence interviewing these people is proof of motive other than revenge. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that Adi would like first to just find a killer or killer’s family willing to accept responsibility for their own actions, nevermind find someone ready for something as complex as remorse. Adi’s actually willing to forgive, he does so in an instant at even the smallest apology from a killer’s daughter, embracing both her and her father even as the man is trying to hasten the end of the interview.

What becomes apparent through these conversations, especially the ones which turn from genial to sour, is that so much of the population wants nothing more than to feel good about themselves and their relatives. The unwillingness to talk about the genocide stems from something deeply human: the knowledge of shame. These people have something to be ashamed about, but life is easier if they don’t have to acknowledge it. As long as Adi’s not there asking probing, direct questions, they don’t.

Oppenheimer has clearly chosen a phenomenally consequential subject and some good partners, but what makes *The Look of Silence* a cut above the rest is the subtle artistry that’s layered in. It begins with the footage of Adi watching video of Ramli’s killers, but extends from there in a number of capacities. Adi’s mother and father weave in and out of his interviews. Within the interviews, there’s a tendency for the camera to linger longer than is polite, thrusting the impetus to speak out on its subjects and holding on Adi’s often grieving face. And maybe most beautifully, shots of hopping butterfly cocoons pepper the film at a few choice moments, including the ending. The cocoons look like little pebbles, except they skitter and shiver as though whatever surface they sit on was being violently shook. It’s the idea of potential rebirth, potential beauty which is now so utterly fragile but which might emerge from this tremulous period, and it ties the movie’s thematic material together. Where is love? Where is peace? Where is truth? Where is the wrath or mercy of God, or maybe even both at once?

Where is Indonesia, and what will emerge?

the look of silence interview

The Verdict: 5 out of 5

I don’t cry easily in movies; *The Look of Silence* nearly had me half a dozen separate times. This part of Indonesia’s history is full of pain that radiates through the

present day, and Adi and Joshua Oppenheimer have captured it in a way that is utterly humanizing to those on both sides of the divide. It's an unbelievable documentary subject, and it's complimented by shrewd, beautiful artistic filmmaking and the drive to probe further than is polite in a space where no such thing actually exists.

SCREEN DAILY

'KRISHA', 'Turbo Kid', 'Look of Silence' among SXSW Audience Award winners

By Ian Sandwell

22 March, 2015

This year's festival saw over 150 features screened, including 102 world premieres and 14 North American premieres.

SXSW has unveiled the winners of this year's Audience Awards.

Trey Edward Shults' KRISHA and Scott Christopherson & Brad Barber's Peace Officer repeated their Jury Award wins in Narrative Feature and Documentary Feature, respectively, while RKSS Collective's Turbo Kid (Midnighters) and Joshua Oppenheimer The Look of Silence (Festival Favourites) took the Audience Award in their categories.

Other winners included Josh Lawson's The Little Death in Narrative Spotlight, Michael Showalter's Hello, My Name is Doris in Headliners and Todd Rohal's Uncle Kent 2 in Visions.

All Audience Award results were certified by the accounting firm of Maxwell Locke & Ritter.

This year's SXSW screened over 150 features, consisting of 102 world premieres, 14 North American premieres and 11 US premieres. 106 shorts screened as part of ten curated shorts programmes.

FULL LIST OF AUDIENCE AWARD WINNERS

NARRATIVE FEATURE COMPETITION - KRISHA, Director: Trey Edward Shults

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE COMPETITION - Peace Officer, Directors: Scott Christopherson, Brad Barber

HEADLINERS - Hello, My Name is Doris, Director: Michael Showalter

NARRATIVE SPOTLIGHT - The Little Death, Director: Josh Lawson

DOCUMENTARY SPOTLIGHT - A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story, Director: Sara Hirsh Bordo

VISIONS - Uncle Kent 2, Director: Todd Rohal

MIDNIGHTERS - Turbo Kid, Director: RKSS Collective

EPISODIC - Mr. Robot, Director: Sam Esmail

24 BEATS PER SECOND - Landfill Harmonic, Directors: Brad Allgood, Graham Townsley

SXGLOBAL - Kings of Nowhere, Director: Betzabé García

FESTIVAL FAVOURITES - The Look of Silence, Director: Joshua Oppenheimer

SXSW FILM DESIGN AUDIENCE AWARD WINNERS

EXCELLENCE IN POSTER DESIGN - Pink Grapefruit, Designer: Simon Dargan for Musta Lunta

EXCELLENCE IN TITLE DESIGN - The Fitzroy, Designers: Chris Tozer, Marko Anstice

RUSHPRINT

A meeting with the greatest documentary filmmaker

by Oda Bhar

March 14, 2015

There is an arrogance in believing that you as a filmmaker can go in and be the one who forgives, as if you were God, says Joshua Oppenheimer. After the Oscar-nominated shock documentary "The Act of Killing" He gives us the masterpiece "The Look of Silence," about a man who confronts his brother's killers.

By showcasing mass murderers who boast of killings and reconstructs them as scenes from favorite films their shocked Joshua Oppenheimer a whole world with the documentary The Act of Killing. Most importantly was the debate sparked in Indonesia, about abuses in nearly fifty years had been taboo to talk about. In 1965 performed paramilitary groups heinous purges with government blessing, under the pretext that the victims were communists. This voiced rare, but was an efficient way to acquire international support, especially in the US. Since the assailants put in power got victims never redress, and their families have lived in constant fear of reprisals. It is significant that most Indonesian workers listed as "anonymous" on the marquee, which repeats itself in the sequel. The director still think the new movie will be experienced less shocking.

It will be easier to identify with the people, because we ask the audience put themselves in the victims' position. How would it be to build a life when your relatives have been killed, and you are surrounded by the killers? What does it with body and your memory to have been afraid for fifty years, with the ability to love, grieve and be whole? I think of The Look of Silence as a poem about silence, although it largely contains drama.

Joshua Oppenheimer is American living in Denmark, and his films have Norwegian Piraya Film as co-producer. Having cut finished The Act of Killing, but before it got premiere, he went back to Indonesia and recorded The Look of Silence. The title hints at a state where speech is taboo, and more specifically to a scene where the protagonist Adi, a 44 year old family man from North Sumatra, sitting silently and watching footage of two men who describes the murder of his brother, Ramli. Later we see him confront these and other predators. The conversation begins friendly and low-key, without the murderers know who he is, but gradually changes in the direction of resistance and sneaky threats. As a spectator it is easy to be sitting with my heart in my throat. Oppenheimer admits that the project was risky, and believes Adis personality has a lot of credit for that went well.

I think that Adi is so gentle, dignified and empathetic that the assailants did not know quite how to react. He speaks a language they have never before spoken; Empathy language. Although they are used to threats and violence language and it is as if they can not quite believe that conversation takes place, says Oppenheimer.

The legend of Ramli

That movie is based on the fate of Adis brother Ramli was not accidental. History of Ramli had Oppenheimer known since he made his first film in Indonesia, The Globalization Tapes from 2003, about farm workers on a palm oil plantation would unionize. Something like had no one dared since 1965, when organized workers were the first to be subjected to Communist accusations. Ramli was the leader of the cooperative in the village, a simple farmer who could barely read, but over the years the story of him grown

His name almost always came up when we talked about the killings. People could say, "I can take you to Ramli's grave," "you know what happened with Ramli?" Or "my brother knew Ramli." It was as if Ramli was a synonym for the entire massacre. I think it was about witnesses, that people actually had seen Ramli be killed. To talk about him was a way to determine that the events had taken place, and insist on their own spiritual health. Not being able to talk about anything like that can make you crazy, because it catches you in a trauma. They treated the trauma by talking about Ramli, a story absolutely everyone knew.

After The Globalization Tapes workers would that Oppenheimer was making another film, and he began to interview the victims' families. Because of harassment was this difficult to implement, and the idea of exposing the assailants were born. In the meantime he had become acquainted with many that would be important to work with The Act of Killing. From Ramli's family were the first he met his parents and a brother who had been a schoolboy when Ramli was killed. Adi was born a few years after 1965 and was received by his mother as an answer to her prayers for a new son to replace Ramli.

It was a nice family and I enjoyed them all. But one day came home from Adi big city where he lived, and threw himself very soon into the film project with passion and energy. I got the impression that he was not traumatized quite the same way as the others, since he was born after the killings.

I wanted it to be enough time where Adi listened to the assailants, before he turned the situation and confronted them with whom he was

Family Secrets

The massacre was only the beginning of the suffering of the survivors, who were stigmatized by "fuzzy family background". Adi was the only from the village who took education, because no other thought it was some joke when there were no jobs for them anyway. In high school, he was ridiculed by the teacher as "class communist", which made him angry, but also curious. In childhood had no one dared to tell him much, for fear that he would talk about it at school, where several of the assailants worked.

*Adi grew up without knowing what had happened while he noticed that everything was wrong. For him, the films were a way to find answers to. He was one of those who most strongly expressed desire that I should make *The Act of Killing*. Seeing in the early material that perpetrators actually told what they did, caused many to ask me to show it to the world. Adi went further and said that anyone who saw this would realize that something was still terribly wrong. Like me, he was less concerned than the story itself shadows it casts being then.*

Confrontations in *The Look of Silence* was Adis own idea.

When I went back to Indonesia in 2012 I did not know he would be the main character, although we had planned to cooperate. Once we met again, he said: "I have spent seven years trying to watch recordings with the assailants. Now I have to face them. "First I replied that it was too dangerous, but he did not give up. "This is my way to get my family out of fear prison on," he explained. Then I thought that if there was a way to do this safely, so we were forced to do it, says the director.

Illusions and hopes

Oppenheimer had become well acquainted with several assailants, and knew that they felt like part of the film project. That they had confidence in him would provide some protection, and presumably make them open for new encounters. Then came the idea to use Adis profession that frame.

How much I explained ahead depended on how much I relied on the individual. Most often said that I would bring a friend who was interested in this part of the story, and filming the conversation to get a local perspective. I also said that he was optician and could offer them free eye exam. It acted partly about security, to put them in a passive position. At the hairdresser, dentist and optician you the in a way defused. Meanwhile I thought that it could extend the discussion. I wanted it to be enough time where Adi listened to the assailants, before he turned the situation and confronted them with who he was and his own moral judgment. Later it dawned on me that his profession could also be a powerful metaphor for vision and blindness.

While the director was keen frames, wanted Adi influence.

He hoped to get the perpetrators to acknowledge that what they did was wrong, so he could forgive them. At this point, he was disappointed, but I think that to present the movie public has renewed optimism his. Although the perpetrators not changed attitude, he sees that the world supports him. He was with the film festivals in Venice, Telluride and Toronto and at Jakarta premiere in November, and everywhere he gets a standing ovation. He hoped that the killers would understand, but now it dawns on him that the world can show them the truth.

While working with *The Act of Killing* got Adi dealt a camcorder.

*I asked him to collect images he thought was powerful as metaphors or expressions of family experiences. He made many recordings, but only one is in *The Look of Silence*. He cried when he showed me the sequence, where it now demented his father creeps around the house and do not recognize. He cries and wails and thinks he's landed in a stranger's house.*

The sequence has been criticized by some international film reviewers, though think it goes on dignity loose for the old man. Oppenheimer says he also hesitated, but was convinced by Adi.

He told me that his father had had a bad day, with much forgetfulness and confusion. The family tried to embrace him, and comfort, but it only made him more scared. At one point found Adi that filming was loving he could do, to be a witness to the incident. I asked why he thought the situation needed a witness, handet not just about a confused man? No, Adi interpreted the father had forgotten the past, but not the feelings that came with it. He said: "My father is trapped in a prison of fear." Adi interpreted the painful memories came to the surface, without father remembered enough to rewrite them.

To not play God

*Oppenheimer believes that he himself could have filmed sequence of the rescue his father, since he had not the son's proximity to him. Meanwhile, he disagrees with those who believe that a filmmaker should put down the camera and comfort. He mentions the final scene in *The Act of Killing* as another moment where this attitude would have been devastating. There we see Anwar Congo, the film buffs killer who strangled hundreds of victims with a wire, visiting the scene and suddenly start convulsing.*

Where I had to fight against an impulse to go and embrace and comfort. I would do it, but something stopped me. Along the way, I learned that there are times where you do not need to intervene. Previously I had lost an important moment when Anwar began to tremble under a reconstruction. I put my camera to check if he was ok, but was unable to comfort him, and afterwards I regretted terribly. I wasted a moment it could be valuable for enormously many people to see, just because I naively thought that I could comfort.

He stressed that a filmmaker can never force reconciliation.

There is a sort of arrogance in believing that you can go in and be the one who forgives and embraces, as if you were God. These horrendous memories is not something you can hold for someone who has done something. Something similar may have been the case when Adi failed to comfort her father. Perhaps projecting Adi that he believes his father's anxiety had with the past to do, maybe it was just simple confusion and existential fear of going astray. Yet it was obviously not something another could set right, says Joshua Oppenheimer.



True/False 2015 Wrap-Up

Written by Pete Timmermann

Thursday, 12 March 2015 21:32

In all, True/False 2015 was as great as I've come to expect from the festival.

In two and a half days at the 2014 True/False Film Festival I saw ten movies, of which nine were excellent and one was so-so, and we got an ice storm in the middle of the fest. For the 2015 iteration of the festival, again I saw ten movies in two and a half days, with this time eight being excellent and two being disappointing, but the weather was very nice for the whole fest. It's like a puzzle—which one was the better experience? Either way, 85% excellent films in the festival over two years is an awfully high percentage, so there's no need to quibble over deciding which year was the better of the two.

True/False is of course Columbia, Missouri's annual weekend-long documentary film festival, which right now bears some similarity to the South by Southwest Film Festival as it was about twelve years ago—each year it keeps getting bigger and bigger and more and more noticed and attended and important. This probably because of that programming—the festival has long had a reputation for being of reliable quality, and when you can keep that up as programmers of course the festival's going to grow.

The best film of the 2015 fest is one that could have been predicted by any attendees of 2013's T/F, or just anyone who's been keeping up with modern documentaries at all. The film of which I speak is *The Look of Silence*, MacArthur Genius Grant winner Joshua Oppenheimer's follow-up to 2013's masterpiece *The Act of Killing*, an alum of T/F 2013 (not to mention Oscar nominee). One might think that *The Look of Silence*, which is on a similar subject as *The Act of Killing* and was knocked out by Oppenheimer in a relatively short amount of time after the release of *Killing*, would be something better suited to being a special feature on *Killing*'s home video release. This is not the case, though; *The Look of Silence* is yet another full-stop Great Film from Oppenheimer, and stands on its own from *The Act of Killing*, if for some reason you haven't seen that film. (That said, seeing one film will enrich the other—the order in which you watch them isn't terribly important.) *The Look of Silence* primarily follows Adi Rukun, an optometrist in Indonesia whose older brother was a victim of the genocide covered in *The Act of Killing*. In *Look*, Adi calmly confronts those who committed the genocidal acts (who are still in power, by the way, so the making of this film put Rukun and Oppenheimer's lives in danger), often while checking their vision in a routine checkup. The obvious antecedent to this film is less

The Act of Killing than it is Shoah, and (despite that Shoah is one of the most respected documentaries ever made) my initial impression is to say that The Look of Silence is the better film—content aside, Joshua Oppenheimer is frankly a stronger filmmaker than Shoah's Claude Lanzmann.

tf_400I went into the festival most looking forward to seeing The Look of Silence, so perhaps it isn't surprising that that's the film I wound up liking the best. Among films I hadn't heard of going into the festival was Khalik Allah's Field Niggas, which is quite a find—it's a beautifully photographed hour-long documentary shot entirely at the intersection of 125th and Lexington in Harlem, a known hotspot for drugs and criminal activity. Field Niggas is composed almost entirely of footage of 125 and Lex's regulars, many of whom are homeless, and you listen to its residents speak while looking at their faces, though the film wasn't shot with synchronized sound, which is to say that their mouths aren't moving as you're listening to them talk. Allah's background is in still photography, and when many of his subjects were being filmed they assumed Allah was taking a still photograph of them, so their near lack of movement adds to the dreamy, hypnotic quality of the film. And despite its title (an allusion to Malcolm X's speech "Message to the Grass Roots") and inclusion of the footage of cops choking Eric Garner to death on Staten Island (which event took place as Field Niggas was shooting), Field Niggas is not an overly political film—it's more a film about culture and people, and doesn't seem entirely unlike something that Godfrey Reggio and Errol Morris would make together, were they ever to team up.

Here's a good place to point out that T/F is great about bringing directors, subjects, producers, etc. in to do Q&As after their films screen. The Look of Silence had Oppenheimer in person, which is a huge deal, and perhaps even more amazing was the presence of Adi via Skype. One of the more memorable moments for me of T/F '15 came during the Q&A for Field Niggas, when an audience member asked Allah why he decided to keep his own voice in the film, prompting his subjects to speak at length about various things. Allah explained that one of his favorite documentarians is Werner Herzog, and he was basically just emulating Herzog in approaching his interview style that way, as Herzog's personality is always a big part of his films. Now, I adore Werner Herzog myself, but what really lodged this in my head is that when Allah answered this question, none other than Joshua Oppenheimer was sitting directly in front of him—front row, center seat, amongst all of the regular festival goers—and Oppenheimer's The Act of Killing was produced by Herzog. Did Allah realize this in the moment? I'm guessing not. I wouldn't even expect him to have recognized Oppenheimer, unless he'd just been at one of the two prior screenings of The Look of Silence when this went down. Anyway, it was sweet, and all parties involved came off very well.

The biggest ticket of the festival was to Alex Gibney's new film, Going Clear, which is an adaptation of Lawrence Wright's book of the same name on the Church of Scientology. I had a hard ticket to the first screening of the fest of this film, so was only made aware later just how hard it was to get in—that first screening was held

in the 1200-seat Missouri Theatre, and I came to find out that at the film's start time there were still more than 300 people outside, hoping to get in, when it was officially announced that the auditorium was full. (Comparatively, big auditoriums in St. Louis, such as the Hi-Pointe or the big screen at the Tivoli, have less than 500 seats.) Gibney's filmmaking style is often a bit dry for my tastes, but *Going Clear* is his best film since 2005's *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*. If nothing else, *Going Clear* deepened my already vast appreciation for Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master*. There's a running debate in the film regarding whether Scientology should be considered a religion by the IRS, which seems somewhat silly—they're founded on obvious lies, populated by crackpots, and are a danger to society... sounds like a religion to me! Maybe a more interesting question is where the IRS draws the line on this type of thing—I don't remember the Branch Davidians getting any tax breaks.

tf_300 Apart from *The Look of Silence*, there was a fair amount of daredevil filmmaking in this year's festival. Chief among them were Sundance alums *Cartel Land* and *(T)Error*, with the former exploring how cartels are shaping the face of Mexico in the present, the latter looking at the FBI and how it uses informants to catch suspected terrorists in the making. *Cartel Land*, directed by *Escape Fire*'s Matthew Heineman, features a lot of just stunning, truly scary footage of a grassroots campaign of Michoacán cartel fighters, and during these sequences the film is nothing short of incredible. It gets a little bogged down with less interesting or vital footage following what's going on on the Arizona side of the border, but despite that misstep, it's still a pretty great film. *(T)Error*, on the other hand, starts out a bit slow as it follows its FBI informant, Shariff, as he tries to catch a potential would-be terrorist named Kalifah, who is a Pennsylvanian white boy turned Islam convert, who conducts himself as a caricature of how a would-be jihadist would. What makes the film stand out at first is that Shariff allows the film's directors, Lyric Cabral and David Felix Sutcliffe, to film him without telling the FBI that he's got two people following him around with a camera. But then what really makes *(T)Error* stand out amongst the stellar company of the rest of the festival is that, about an hour in, Cabral and Sutcliffe also start interviewing Kalifah on the sly, with no one being told anything—Shariff doesn't know they're talking to Kalifah, Kalifah doesn't know they're talking to Shariff, the FBI doesn't know Shariff is talking to the directors, Kalifah doesn't know the FBI is after him... it's as interesting as it sounds. Which is to say, very.

The remaining successes of my festival jaunt this year were Brett Morgen's *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck*, Bryan Carberry and Clay Tweel's *Finders Keepers*, and Morgan Neville and Robert Gordon's *Best of Enemies*. My past experiences with Morgen have been uniformly disappointing—he has a tendency to make films about subjects I'm fascinated in (*The Kid Stays in the Picture*, *Chicago 10*), but the end result has always been lacking, and so I was nonplussed when I first heard a while back that Courtney Love agreed to give him access to tons of previously-unreleased materials of Cobain's to aid in the making of this documentary. As it turns out, *Montage of Heck* is easily Morgen's best films—all of the unreleased stuff is

interesting, Cobain's mother (who is one of the interviewees here, as is Love) is an interesting character, and a lot of individual scenes stand out as being particularly strong, such as a part where teenage Kurt is trying to lose his virginity, set to a string quartet version of "Smells Like Teen Spirit." Also, Morgen gets bonus points for being the only filmmaker at a screening I attended pay tribute to the recently departed documentarians Albert Maysles and Bruce Sinofsky, both of whom I love (and the latter a T/F alum himself).

Finders Keepers was easily the funniest film in the festival—it's about a man who buys a grill at an auction, only to find a human foot in it, and then the battle between him and the foot's original owner over legal possession of the severed limb. The film suffers a few minor problems—it doesn't seem to trust its characterization and is constantly re-telling you who each person is (a problem shared with *The King of Kong*, whose director, Seth Gordon, is a producer here), and it insultingly subtitles the southern-accented characters. But even the questionable subtitles served their purpose, as people were laughing themselves stupid at the film, and it allowed for you to not miss any dialogue.

That leaves *Best of Enemies*, about the televised debates between Gore Vidal and William F. Buckley during the 1968 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. The film goes to great pains to not take either's side, but I couldn't help but interpret it as favoring Vidal. Perhaps this is simply because I favor Vidal between those two men, so of course I'd be prone to reading it that way. Anyway, *Best of Enemies*, like *Finders Keepers*, is good for a chuckle, and handy as a history lesson and study of modern political coverage besides.

Of the two subpar films I saw, I can only speak about one. For the first time in several years, I attended one of T/F's "secret screenings" this year, which are under perma-embargo, which means that I can't ever tell you what it was. No matter. I didn't like it, and feel no need to dwell on it. That leaves *The Visit*, Michael Madsen (no relation to Mr. Blonde)'s sort-of mockumentary about how the government would handle an alien arriving at Planet Earth. It's interesting in theory but boring and a little frustrating in execution, which is pretty much how I felt about the only other Madsen film I've ever seen, 2010's *Into Eternity*.

In all, T/F '15 was as great as I've come to expect from the festival. Despite being a huge movie lover and hating basically all sports, I know plenty of people who don't hesitate to take a daytrip to Columbia to catch a Mizzou football game, and yet I don't know very many St. Louisans who attend True/False. This is a grievous oversight that I plan to personally do my part to change in the coming years.