CORRECTIVE LENS

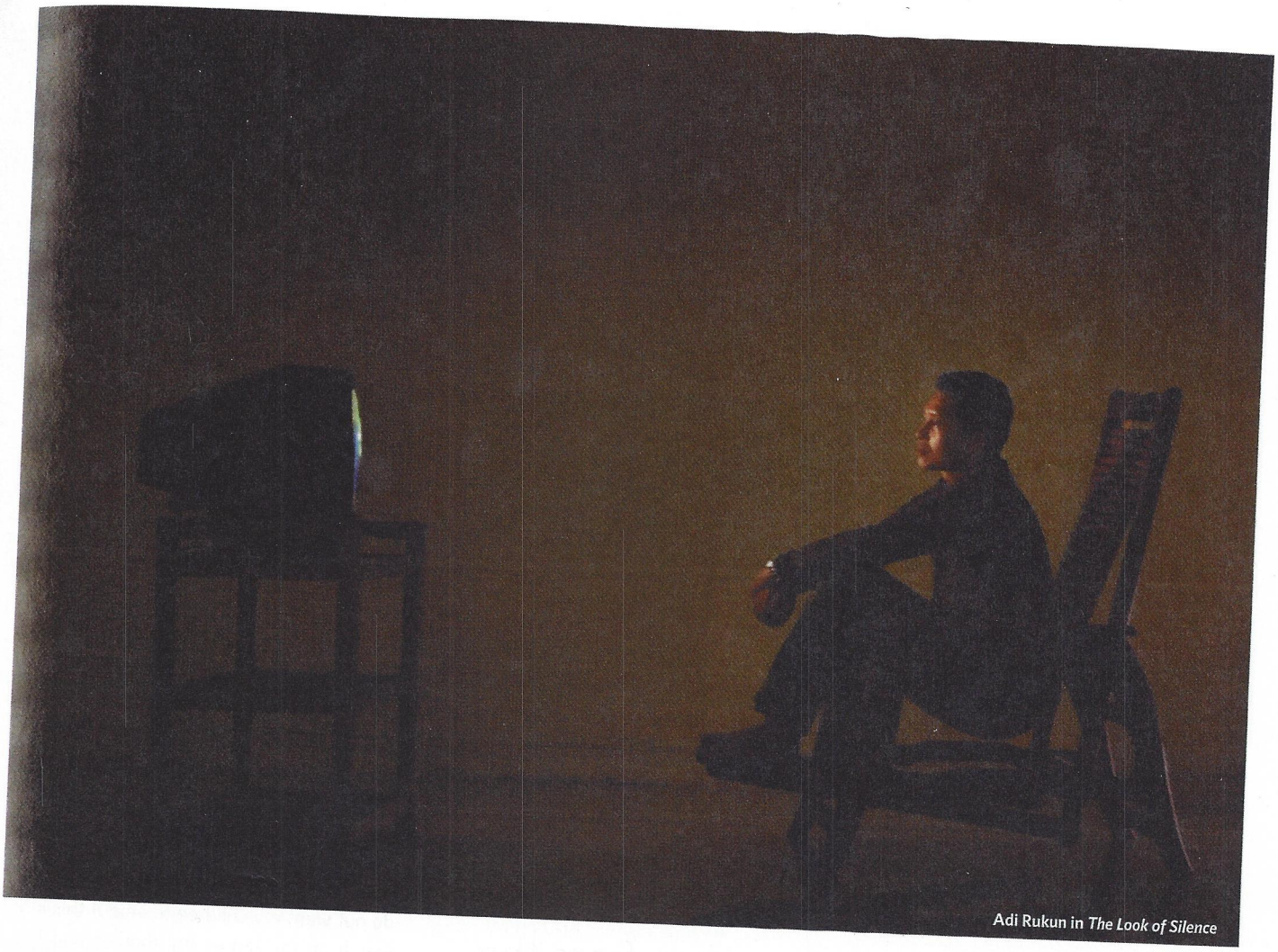
Filmmaker Magazine SUMMER 15

With *THE LOOK OF SILENCE*, JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER completes perhaps the most astonishing documentary double-header in history. His epochal *The Act of Killing* mixed historical inquiry with psychodrama and performance to expose the lingering traumas left in Indonesia by the genocide there almost 50 years ago. In *The Look of Silence*, he changes filmmaking style and emotional register but not subject matter. Focusing on victims and their families rather than the killers, Oppenheimer answers critics of the previous film with a quieter yet equally profound work that speaks to not only politics and documentary practice but memory and "societal self-delusion." RAY PRIDE talks with Oppenheimer.

While promoting *The Act Of Killing* — his punchy, audacious, madly performative, deeply troubling masterpiece about the legacy of genocide in Indonesia 50 years later — Joshua Oppenheimer didn't much let on that there was a second, complementary feature in the works. While editing the first film, and before his secondary subjects in the government and paramilitaries knew what a bold, damning document he had fashioned, Oppenheimer shot a round of elegant, formally restrained interviews with his earlier subjects through the offices of his collaborator, Adi Rukun, an optometrist whose older brother had been murdered. Among a range of substantial achievements, Oppenheimer formally anticipated the critique some purists would lodge (veteran documentary commissioner Nick Fraser among them), embodying Godard's dictum that the only true criticism of a film would be to make another film, even if it is self-critique. *The Look Of Silence* responds lucidly to those who found revulsion rather than revelation in his depiction of the gaudy, cinema-fashioned fantasies of petty gangsters who still terrorize their neighbors decades later.

"*The Act of Killing* exposed the consequences for all of us when we build our everyday reality on terror and lies," Oppenheimer has written. "*The Look of Silence* explores what it is like to be a survivor in such a reality. Making any film about survivors of genocide is to walk into a minefield of clichés, most of which serve to create a heroic (if not saintly) protagonist with whom we can identify, thereby offering the false reassurance that, in the moral catastrophe of atrocity, we are nothing like perpetrators."

In a mid-June conversation, I caught up with Oppenheimer via FaceTime between his Japanese and British publicity tours, and while his voice was strained from press and his customary hour-plus post-screening Q&As, he remained the loquacious conversationalist, who warms to a theme and quickly sets it ablaze. Of his film about the eddying damage visited upon the victims, we talked about the impunity with which he and Adi were able to challenge the still-proud killers from a strikingly different angle than their earlier interviews; what differentiates the "authentic" from the "typical" in documentary; how *The Look Of Silence* is like a poem as well as the films of Ozu; and how the metaphor of willful moral blindness and literal myopia, as demonstrated through eye exams performed by Adi while he gently prompts their subjects to once more describe



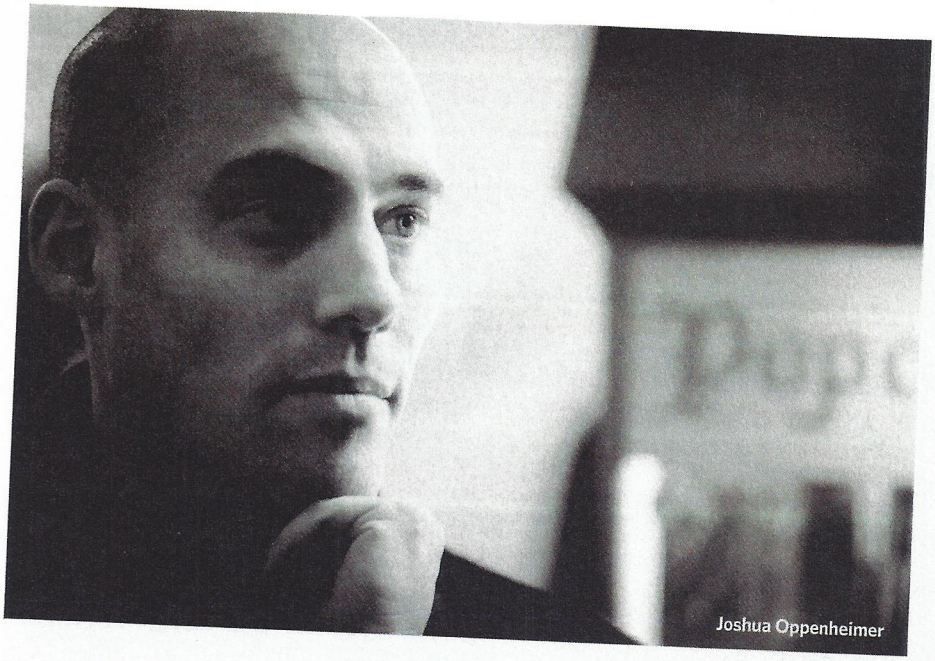
Adi Rukun in *The Look of Silence*

their worst exploits, became a powerful and mysterious metaphor, even though it began as a pragmatic choice to maintain Adi and Oppenheimer's crew's safety in the face of unapologetic murderers. Pick any half-dozen interviews with Oppenheimer: they rhyme, dovetail and eloquently extend the conversation into our modern historical moment.

How did the production of* The Act of Killing *and* The Look of Silence *overlap? The older material that Adi is studying in preparation for the confrontations with the perpetrators was shot between 2003 and 2005, when I was [first meeting the people] I could find across the region, at the request of Adi, really — survivors from his village as well as the broader Indonesian human rights community. All of that was shot before I met Anwar Congo [the lead figure of *The Act of Killing*]. The bulk of the film was shot in 2012, after I finished editing *The Act of Killing*, but before it was released.

So people knew you had been shooting footage of figures from the paramilitaries and the government. Did that affect how fast you worked? Did you have to be secretive? No, on the contrary. The fact that we had shot *The Act of Killing*, but it had not yet been screened, was the condition of possibility for making *The Look of Silence*. When Adi first told me that he wanted to confront the perpetrators, I said, "No, it's too dangerous." Then he explained why it was important to him, and his reason was so moving and so significant, consequential, that I thought to myself, "Is there some way we can do this safely?" And going back to speak with my Indonesian crew, we realized that I was famous across that whole region for having shot *The Act of Killing*. You recall from *The Act of Killing* that Indonesian state television produced a talk show celebrating the film before it'd even come out. Adi wanted to confront the men who were actually involved with killing his brother and the others at Snake River, and the other massacres. They would have all thought that I was very close to their highest-ranking commanders, a man like the vice president of the country, the head of the paramilitary movement nationally — all of whom now, I believe, hate me since *The Act of Killing* came out. Now, of course, Anwar Congo and I remain close. Herman Koto and I remain close. Adi Zulkadry, the other, third main character in *The Act of Killing*, has passed away. But, fundamentally, that didn't make it more dangerous to film; it's what made it possible to confront the perpetrators. Indeed, it was that sense that I was close to the power structure that allowed me finally to be able to film with the survivors, just exactly what I wasn't able to [do] safely back in 2003 when I started.

You just said that Adi gave you a very moving reason. What was it? When I returned in 2012, I did not yet know Adi would be the main character in the film. I only knew that he would be my main collaborator. After all, he was the one who first encouraged me to film the perpetrators, and he was the person who was organizing my efforts to meet survivors back in 2003, before the army threatened them not to participate in the film. I'll back up a little bit. In 2010, at



Joshua Oppenheimer

PHOTO BY DANIEL BERGESON

> "[Adi] said that he hoped that when the perpetrators would acknowledge what they did was wrong, he would then be able to say, in response, 'Thank you.' He would be able, in response, to separate the crime from the human being and forgive the human being, and in that way, be able to live with his neighbors in peace — as neighbors, as human beings instead of as victim and perpetrator."
>
> — JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER

the end of shooting *The Act of Killing*, I gave Adi a small video camera to use as a kind of notebook to look for images that might serve as metaphors to inspire the making of the second film. When I returned in 2012, I asked him, "How do you think we should begin our work?" You see, throughout the editing of *The Act of Killing*, Adi had been sending me tapes, and I'd been watching them. He said, "There's one tape I didn't send you because it's so meaningful to me." And he took out the tape and, trembling, put it in the camera and pressed "play" and started to cry as he played me the one scene that Adi shot that is in *The Look of Silence*. It's the scene at the end, where his father's crawling through his own house, lost, calling for help. And crying, he said to me, "This was the first day that my father couldn't remember me or my siblings or my mother. And we were all together for the end of Ramadan." It's a holiday in Indonesia like Thanksgiving in the United States. Everyone comes together. He says, "We were unable to comfort him all day because he was confused and lost and frightened. We could not comfort him because we had become strangers to him. And it was terrible not to be able to help him, and I couldn't bear just watching him helplessly crawling through the house lost.

"And so, not knowing what else to do, I picked up the camera and started to film." And he said that after filming started, he felt angry with himself, "Why am I filming, why can't I help?" And then he explained to me: "I realized suddenly why I was filming: it's because this is the day that it becomes too late for my father. It's no longer possible for him to heal because he cannot remember Ramli. He cannot remember the son whose murder destroyed our family, destroyed his life, destroyed my mother's life, in many ways. And yet, he hasn't forgotten the fear. He's a man trapped." He felt that the crying out for help wasn't just dementia and confusion; it was the terror that went back, that stemmed from Ramli's murder. And he said, "My father, to me, was like a man locked in a room who can't even find the door, let alone the key." And then, he said, through his tears, "I do not want my children to inherit this inner fear from my father, my mother and from me. And I think, if I can visit the perpetrators gently, with an openness and a clear attempt, clearly coming to listen and not to take revenge or to attack, they will welcome my arrival as a kind of unconsciously long-hoped-for opportunity to have peace with their neighbors and get their guilt off their chest." After all, ever since I started filming the perpetrators for him back in 2003, he always saw the boasting as a sign of guilt. I started to see [it that way] when I met Anwar and started making *The Act of Killing*, but he saw it in the beginning.

He said that he hoped that when the perpetrators would acknowledge what they did was wrong, he would then be able to say, in response, "Thank you." He would be able, in response, to separate the crime from the human being and forgive the human being, and in that way, be able to live with his neighbors in peace — as neighbors, as human beings instead of as victim and perpetrator, afraid of each other. And I said, "Let me go home and talk to my crew and think if this is possible, somehow." You know, you don't just say

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Adi Rukun's children in *The Look of Silence*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DRAFTHOUSE FILMS AND PARTICIPANT MEDIA

PHOTO BY DANIEL BERGERON

no to something like that! And that's when we realized we could perhaps safely do this, because, as I said, the perpetrators would be afraid of offending their commanders.

But I also thought two more things, one of which I told him. I thought we would not get the apology that he was hoping for, that we would fail. After working for five years with Anwar, he's not able to consciously and consistently acknowledge that what he did was wrong. When he glimpses his guilt, unmediated or unprotected by lies, it's overwhelming, it's painful and he literally chokes on it. It's a visceral, physical, devastating reaction. And I felt that to protect themselves from that, the perpetrators would not so easily just say what they did was wrong, and I told him that. I said I hoped I was wrong, but this is what I think will happen. In trying to film these confrontations with gentleness and to seek in the subject the silence, the complicated and rich emotions that the perpetrators will no doubt exhibit when confronted by you, perhaps we'll be able to show how torn the fabric of this society is. We'll be able to make visible something invisible, namely, the abyss of fear and guilt and fear of guilt — for the perpetrators, at least — that divides Indonesians from each other, and sometimes even Indonesians from themselves, and certainly Indonesians from their own pasts. And I said, "If we can do that, we can then inspire a younger generation of Indonesians, people your age and younger, to recognize how urgently needed truth, reconciliation and some form of justice are. Perhaps, I'm hopeful, if I can figure out a way of doing my job correctly, we can succeed through the film in a bigger way, [even if] we fail in the individual confrontations."

One more thing I realized, which I didn't tell him, was that when I saw this footage that Adi shot, I knew that this should be as much a film about memory and oblivion as it is a film about [forgiveness] and coexistence. I realized the whole movie should be a kind of poem composed in memoriam — a backward-looking poem that is dramatic, to be sure, because the confrontations were dangerous, but a poem composed in memoriam to all that's destroyed. Not only the dead, who of course can never be awakened, but also the lives that come after. What does it do to Adi's father, never to be able to heal and to have to live half a century terrified? I felt that the litmus test of whether I'd succeed or fail in this project to show what this silence looks like in a poetic form is whether I can end the film with the scene that Adi shot in such a way that it works for at least some of my viewers.

I like your description of The Look of Silence as "a poem about a silence born of terror, about the necessity of breaking that silence." Does that make the effort more "cinematic," than merely an example of nonfiction or documentary, however we define those things? When did it occur to you to consider the project as a poem? I knew all the way back from January 2004 that I would be making two films about two fundamentally complementary aspects of the present in Indonesia. I emphasized the present, because I think neither of the films are about the past, as such; neither are historical films. Rather, instead, they would be about impunity today, the lies and fantasies of stories that the perpetrators tell themselves so they could live with themselves and the terrible effects of those stories when imposed on the whole society, the corrupting effects. And, of course, *The Act of Killing* is a flamboyant kind of film. It's tropical Hieronymus Bosch, a fever dream.

HOW THEY DID IT

PRODUCTION FORMAT: **HD** • CAMERA: **Sony EX1 and Canon 5D** • FILM/TAPE STOCK: **Cards and hard disks** • EDITING SYSTEM: **Final Cut Pro** • COLOR CORRECTION: **Nucoda at Hinterland**

Adi and Rohani Rukun in *The Look of Silence*

> "How does one [film] an ordinary, everyday landscape: for example, the space by the river where the two men go down, taking turns playing victim and perpetrator, footage I shot in 2004, and that inspired the making of both films? How do I re-haunt that landscape and make it clear that this is a landscape where ghosts have yet to be, where the dead have never settled?" – JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER

GO BACK & WATCH

THE EMPEROR'S NAKED ARMY MARCHES ON In Kazuo Hara's nerve-shredding 1987 documentary, Japanese World War II veteran Kenzo Okuzaki tracks down members of his old unit to belligerently demand the truth about why two of his comrades died. (The answer: cannibalism.) • **CHILE, OBSTINATE MEMORY** Patricio Guzmán's landmark *The Battle of Chile*, which chronicles the overthrow of Salvador Allende's regime, was long banned at home. In this 1997 documentary, Guzmán shows the film to the Chilean public for the first time as they come to terms with what it shows. • **THE EYE OF VICHY** Claude Chabrol's unnerving 1993 film — an anomalous foray into nonfiction — is a compilation of pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic propaganda put out by France's Vichy regime.

And it has to be, because it's about escapism and guilt. It's about storytelling. Especially in the uncut *Act of Killing*, called the "director's cut" in the United States, it stops being a documentary altogether at some point. I always knew I would make the second film about what does it do to human beings, to families, to have to live for 50 years, for most of their lives, half a century, in fear. Just when I shot *The Look of Silence*, I'd edited *The Act of Killing*, and I see the uncut version of *The Act of Killing* as being both deeper and more poetic than the shorter version, which has been cut to emphasize the political story — necessarily, I think, because you can't understand everything, the emotional layers in *The Act of Killing*, if you don't first have the political story.

Because every sequence in the uncut version of *The Act of Killing* culminates in these abrupt cuts to silence, I felt that the second film, [there would be] these kind of haunted landscape tableaux. These are abrupt shifts in the perspective of *The Act of Killing*, from the perpetrators to the absent dead, whom I hope haunt every frame of *The Act of Killing*. [In] *The Look of Silence*, it should be as though the audience enters any one of those haunted tableaux, the landscape shots, and imagines what would it be like to have to rebuild a life amidst the rubble, surrounded by the still-powerful perpetrators. What would that do to one's body, to how one thinks, with the way one remembers and forgets, and the way one loves? I just was at a screening in Tokyo, and the Japanese writer Saeki Kazumi, a friend of mine, said, "You know, when people are tortured to death, they die with their eyes open and unfocused." And the haunted spaces in the uncut *Act of Killing* and in *The Look of Silence* are spaces haunted by ghosts who died with their eyes open and out of focus. How does one look with focus and precision at that haunting? How does one [film] an ordinary, everyday landscape: for example, the space by the river where the two men go down, taking turns playing victim and perpetrator, footage I shot in 2004, and that inspired the making of both films? How do I re-haunt that landscape and make it clear that this is a landscape where ghosts have yet to be, where the dead have never [settled]?

That's akin to what Ozu does with his triads, where he cuts away from the family drama to elements in the landscape or in the city and

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suggests, "There is order and calm, but I am going to return to the family drama." It's very interesting that you say that, because that was one of my key [influences]; especially for thinking about the confrontations, I made a close study of Ozu's work. I mean, I've always loved Ozu's filmmaking. I knew that when we were about to film the landscapes, the meaning lies between the words, in what goes unsaid. Of course, Ozu understood that cinema is a terrible medium for words, that it's a medium for subtext and doubt. But when we speak of the landscape shots, they are similar to Ozu's triads, but Ozu is sort of showing a normality that continues. I think that, if you look at how the landscape shots work in *The Look of Silence*, they work rather differently. They superficially resemble the triads. But, in fact, what happens is that the pain, the sadness, the hauntedness of the dialogues, the conversations either between Adi and the perpetrators or Adi and his father or Adi and his mother or Adi and his wife extend out into the landscape. It's a principle way that the film constructs and imagines — and maybe the correct word actually is conjures, because it evokes ghosts, a haunted landscape of fear.

Superficially, the device of Adi's eye exams of the perpetrators sounds like it shouldn't resound so powerfully, that it would be too on-the-nose. When did you first realize the device would work? It's a big question because, indeed, for a metaphor to work in cinema, it must always have an enduring mystery. If a thing is too obvious and you can simply explain what it means, it no longer works. It becomes obvious and pat and trite — a simple comment by the director, like an overwrought score. At first thought, the eye exam served a very practical purpose. It was clear to me that we needed to find a way in the confrontations for Adi to be able to prolong the discussion. We needed to be able to have two parts to each confrontation. There had to be a first part where a perpetrator would volunteer to Adi the same information he had told me back in 2003, 2004, 2005, when I had first filmed him. Adi, of course, knew what the perpetrator had done by watching my old footage. But if Adi went to him and said, "I know you did this because of what I saw in Joshua's old footage," the perpetrator would of course rightly feel trapped. It was important the perpetrator willingly tells Adi what he has done.

Having heard and then seen how Adi would test older people's eyes and ask them their memories about 1965, I could see that this was something that could be prolonged for as long as necessary, until all of the important stories that the perpetrators had told me years earlier were told voluntarily to Adi. So that would, of course, create a safer basis for the confrontation and the dialogue that would follow. And, of course, one is less likely to attack an optometrist. You're disarmed when you're in the optometrist's chair or the dentist's or doctor's chair. So, it served a practical purpose. Back in 2007, Adi was already seeking out older patients in order to have the chance [to learn more]. He was using his eye tests as an opportunity to ask older people about what they'd experienced in 1965, because ever since he'd met me, he was trying to make sense of what had happened to his family, to his country, to his village, to make everybody so afraid. So, I'd understood that here was this man going around testing people's eyes; [there's] the sort of obvious layer of trying to help people see, who are willfully blind.

At the same time, it was something you

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want to see, the one that I tried to make, is one that has real emotion, real hope and fear and anxiety about the desire to be *affirmed*.

That is the trick of the movie — you're always wondering, who's using who? Who is manipulating whom? And they both badly want a genuine connection, but maybe for different reasons, if the reasons why matter at all. I think it's safe to argue that this was a deep, deep connection, for [Lipsky], at least. But it's also two people with an agenda. So maybe they're being genuine, but maybe this was an elaborate bit of dinner theater or a tap dance or a chess game or whatever the cliché is. They're just performing for each other endlessly, playing off what they think the other person wants because they both understand the other person's job in this situation.

Wallace is accused repeatedly by Lipsky of intellectually slumming it, or intellectually being faux, pretending to be just a regular guy in a fake way. Imagine having spent several days with someone, and someone accused you of that, essentially discrediting every word you've said and action that you've done. Especially for someone who's wrestled with those issues so much, it's probably very painful. It would be like, "What the fuck is the point of any of this?"

I think Wallace desperately, desperately, desperately wanted to be present and to find joy in being present in the company of other people. And I think, like many people who've wrestled with depression, finding that joy could be very hard.

Could Wallace just see more than other people could? Is that what all great artists have? And is that what Lipsky's character is so jealous of, and why he can't take his pain seriously? Have you ever been to Anne Frank's house in Holland?

I haven't. Okay, so Otto Frank, Anne's father, was being interviewed on television, like 20 years after the end of World War II, like, the mid-60s. The interviewer says, "Did you think that your daughter was exceptional?" And he said, "No. I thought she was a pretty ordinary girl, just interested in the same thing that other girls were interested in. And then, when I read the diary, I was shocked. I realized I didn't know her at all." He said, "The only conclusion I can make is that children are always an utter mystery to their parents," which I extrapolate to mean we're all mysteries to each other. There's a limit to how much you can ever know anyone else. That revelation can be really terrifying, when you find yourself in a serious relationship or when you question any relationship — it all feels very abstract and kind of ... built out of smoke. But I do think there's certain things, certain very universal experiences, even dumb things, like primetime TV and 7-Eleven Slurpees or whatever, that are just so universal and stupid, that it's the foundation of our humanity. Far more than highfalutin conversations about God, which is so subjective. But we can definitely say, "I like going to watch this silly John Woo movie and watch stuff explode. It makes me feel a little bit better than I did before."

Those are some of the themes Wallace was always talking about — Americana, banality, sports, fast food. He would write about philosophy, and then he would write about a porn convention. He would use a folksy Americana thing like a lobster festival in Maine to write about the ethics of taking something else's life, and our inability to care that it feels pain. It was these normal, everyday things. It's not a conscious high/low, like, "Oh, I am erudite, I like art and trash." It's more, "Let's just like the stuff that makes us really happy and be honest with ourselves."

The key is to like what you like without qualifying it all the time. Like what you like without qualifying it. That's having an honest experience. I think that's it, right? I think Wallace was just, like, trying really hard not to qualify the experience he was having, even though he was the subject and Lipsky was the journalist and the stakes were Rolling Stone and the angle was about his public perception. Like, I think he genuinely wanted to just enjoy the experience for what it was. He really wanted to, but there were certain limitations. One of them was just that he was tired and just wanted to go home.■

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have to build in cinema, both in the way you shoot it and in the way you edit it, and in the way you introduce it in different scenes. It wouldn't have worked, it wouldn't have had this effect, if I filmed Adi testing people's eyes in reportage style. It's done very carefully. I can maybe describe that best through the example of Inong, the perpetrator who's wearing the bright red glasses, the first image in the film. It's also the image on the poster. Adi's testing his eyes. Inong starts the discussion by saying that everybody in the village is afraid of him. And while Adi's testing his eyes, framed by these red glasses, Inong is telling these unimaginably haunting stories. For example, a woman, a brother who handed over his own sister to Inong's death squad to be killed and then went crazy. [He speaks in a] provocative whisper as though he's trying to impress and to frighten. And we can see immediately exactly why all of his neighbors are afraid of him. These horrific details pour out of his mouth, and Adi is using the eye test to protect himself, by sort of swallowing hard and saying, "Okay," swapping the lens and saying, "Okay, do you see more clearly or less?" And sort of oblivious to this frame of reason that the test lenses somehow maybe embody, he keeps coming out with these stories that are the stuff of nightmare. When I saw that, I shifted the canvas of it with a frontal close-up on Inong, because I felt this was a very important tableau almost out of Dante. Here was this man, these horrific, horrific stories and the futile effort to provide a kind of moral frame. It's mysterious and difficult to describe. It's something bigger than the simple explanation of a man trying to help people who are myopic, or willfully blind, and it is because it's bigger and more complicated and more mysterious that it does ultimately work in the way it does in film and doesn't become too on-the-nose, as you put it.

A lot of filmmakers, fiction filmmakers, particularly, seek that mystery as well, the idea being that they themselves don't understand the symbols as they go through the process; that that is something revealed later. In the case of some filmmakers, it's the interview and film festival process, where an audience brings something new. You do really long Q&As, you do articulate interviews: do you find you are still learning more about what you've made from these intrigued audiences and intent interviewers? I feel a responsibility to be a midwife, a little bit, to these two films, because their impact in the world has such a profound influence in Indonesia. So, I've taken the time, despite the fact that while releasing *The Act of Killing* I was editing and finishing *The Look of Silence*. And now, while releasing *The Look of Silence*, I am starting a new project. I take a lot of time to

bring the films out and to travel with them, more than maybe some filmmakers. And it has to do with what these films are. To travel that much with the film would be unbearable if I was repeating myself all the time. A certain amount of repetition is inevitable. But, I really do try to use the Q&As and the discussions and interviews as an opportunity to have new thoughts about the work. And you're absolutely right; the words that I have to describe the films are things that are an attempt to understand instincts that I have while working. They're an attempt to explain it in a different form. The impulses and instincts arise when working in images and sounds, but they're not the thoughts I'm having in my head, for the most part, while I'm making the film.

Could you venture a little bit on what constitutes an honest "authentic" moment in nonfiction? Your work doesn't align with the traditions of direct cinema that Harvard, one place where you studied, has aligned itself with, historically. One of the great phrases, of course, is Werner Herzog talking about ecstatic truth. Plus, you've mentioned magical realism in relation to some elements of your films. What are the limitations? Do you feel there are limitations in depicting, what I'll call, just for the moment, authenticity? Well, I think that the simulation of moments that might occur if the camera were not present — which kind of defines some so-called fly-on-the-wall documentary, so-called works of direct cinema — that simulation [is] actually emulating what one expects the viewer would find authentic. Or, by simulating what the world might look like if the camera were not present, one might avoid surprising moments because they wouldn't seem likely or real or natural. That could encourage a tendency to depict the *typical* rather than the *authentic*. I would distinguish the typical from the authentic as the distinction between a postcard image of a place, of a life, of Ramadan, and the complexities that one might find if one went with open eyes and avoided the typical. I think that one recognizes the authentic immediately, unconsciously almost. One recognizes it instantly as that which is real because it is not what you expected. And if you're concerned with working with your participants to simulate a reality in which the camera is not present, one might avoid the unexpected, because one would think, "Well, that's not what one would find, if the camera isn't present. If the camera is not present, it should look typical, everything should be expected." And instead of authenticity, you get the typical.

The whole distinction between direct cinema as one school, and more interventionist modes of nonfiction filmmaking as another school, is misleading. We should understand all documentary, all nonfiction cinema, indeed, all cinema, even fiction cinema, as a process where within the overall space of making a film — I go to very far lengths, despite what maybe some people viewing the film might imagine, to ensure that the process is safe for everybody. I am proud that in neither of my films — and I'm on a little tangent here — but in neither of my films has anybody ever been hurt, even injured, let alone come to danger or been attacked.

So, within the overall safe space of making the film, I see that the task of the filmmaker is to create occasions with the participants and the crew in which everybody — participants [and] crew — are pushed beyond their comfort zone. In a way, fundamentally, we're reviewing the deeper questions and, hopefully, the most important questions that the film could be asking. And those occasions are the channel, are the portal through which the authentic emerges.

The films are brutally specific about five decades of Indonesian history. But, when you place these films in the American culture, in the Japanese culture, in the German culture, they resonate heartily with the political rhetoric of the present day — societal self-delusion and so on. The films are so specific — well, there's that bromide, they're so specific they become universal. I think that's because they avoid a kind of journalistic or historical account. They provide only enough information as required for the viewer to understand the next scene. They have a frame at the beginning, so that you can grasp the beginning. And when you need information, it's dripped in. It's at very precise moments, hopefully, only what the viewer wants to know at that moment. And so the film doesn't become a kind of account or primer about Indonesian history. *The Act of Killing* maybe approaches [that] a little bit, especially in the uncut version, a kind of primer on the deep dynamics of corruption in Indonesia today. But I think the films avoid being about Indonesia as such by focusing on the perpetrator and the men around him in *The Act of Killing*, and one family in *The Look of Silence*. Instead of becoming smaller, they grow, because they could be your brothers. Rohani could be your mother. Rukun could be your father. Adi's children could be your children. And suddenly, the film becomes about all of us. It ceases to be a window onto a far-off world. It becomes a mirror.■

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us could quite describe. And I think this relates to your question. I am a director and there is this blonde girl. This exploitation and the idea of male subjectivity — everything was in this movie. It became such a complicated movie about fascism, the Holocaust, women... The cameraman, the director and the female actor. It was so complicated, that in the evenings after the shoot, we are not innocent. I want to be innocent and a little bit stupid during shooting. I want to be dumb. A film is a reflection of two years writing scripts and talking to people and getting money. We always reflect, reflect, reflect. So, when we shoot, there must be some levity. And this was not possible in *Phoenix* because we all had to reflect about so many things. I was so relieved in the moment when I said to Nina that Nelly is a person who makes her own freedom. She's leading the choreography. She's getting out of this cave. She's moving away from the gaze of this "director." She's leaving us and we can't follow her any more. This was a relief for me.

There would be a certain dark poetry if, after this film, you were never to work with Nina Hoss again. I understand what you're saying. We have, in fact, made the decision to take a break from one another. I already have an idea for a new project for her, but we need some time apart.

Could you have cast Hoss in the role of Nelly had you never worked with her before? This wouldn't have been possible. We talked about this Nelly character when we were working on *Barbara*. I wrote the script together with Harun Farocki, and we wrote it for Nina. We actually physically had a picture of her in front of us. She was also part of the development. I'd call her, and we'd go for a walk and talk about the subject of the movie. She's a very reflective and clever actor, and she knows that this is also a movie about acting and costumes and being on a stage in front of a man who thinks he's in