



The AFI DOCS Interview: TRAIN SURFERS Director Adrien Cothier

Description

June 21, 2016

In Adrien Cothier's short film TRAIN SURFERS, thrill-seeking young men tempt fate doing stunts on Mumbai's high-speed trains. AFI spoke to director Adrien Cothier ahead of the film's AFI DOCS premiere. He is a New York-based filmmaker who cut his teeth working on the set of Wes Anderson's FANTASTIC MR. FOX.



Adrien Cothier on Twitter: “Very proud to have TRAIN SURFERS premiere at this year’s @AFIDOCs festival. <3 [#8221;https://t.co/aeK67ool4X””](https://t.co/aeK67ool4X)

What led you to documentary filmmaking?

My background is in narrative filmmaking and advertising. In both, I always try to recreate a certain reality whereas in documentaries, you have to use reality in order to create a narrative. This organic creative process led me to docs. There is definitely something pure about a documentary. The goal with TRAIN SURFERS was not to make a commercial film, clearly, but rather, to expose a certain truth about the world we live in.

What inspired you to tell this story?

I was finishing my first semester of grad school and had decided that I needed to get out of my comfort zone and explore a part of the world I had never seen. India seemed like a perfect mix of spiritual and adventurous journey. While I was researching where to go, I ended up on a viral video of a “train surfer” in Mumbai. I had never seen anything like it. It was a strange mix of absolute beauty and danger. I instantly called my friend and producer. I told him that if there’s a chance we can meet somebody like this, we had to document it, no matter the cost. That’s how it all started.

How did you find your subjects?

It wasn't as hard as I expected it to be. I started researching local news stories of teenagers getting arrested for train-surfing. The more I accumulated information, the closer I came to understanding that this phenomenon happened in a few specific areas of Mumbai. Then, I hired a local translator in order to get in touch with the surfers in case we encountered them. After two days of waiting in train stations, we saw a teenager on the roof of a speeding train. We chased him down and convinced him to let us meet him again with his friends. The next day we went to visit him in his home.

What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

Filming on the trains or outside the tracks is completely forbidden in India. I think this phobia came from the terrorist attacks in south Mumbai in 2008. Since then the police have been extremely weary, especially with tourists like myself. We had to hide the camera as much as we could and shoot without any permits. At the end, I think that our gorilla approach gave us incredible footage in which the audience can really feel taken on a forbidden ride in the world of the kids.

What do you want audiences to walk away with after screening your film?

I'd like them to realize that all around world, the exact same human dynamics are happening but under very different social circumstances. Whether in the rugged outskirts of Mumbai, these kids are in many ways behaving in the same way that New York kids would. In this way it's a story about friendship and I'd like people to feel it. But I cannot deny that it's also a story about how being trapped in a life of poverty with very few chances of changing your life and how this will impact the decisions you make as a young person.

Why do you think Washington, DC, is a valuable location to screen your film?

This doc is definitely not political but its intrinsic message deals with the notions of freedom, poverty and the pursuit of happiness, which to me are clear American values emanating from the declaration of independence displayed in DC.

TRAIN SURFERS plays before the feature film *VISITOR'S DAY* on Thursday, June 23 and Sunday, June 26. Buy tickets [here](#).

(Source: American Film Institute Magazine/AFI Blog)

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Date Created

June 22, 2016

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