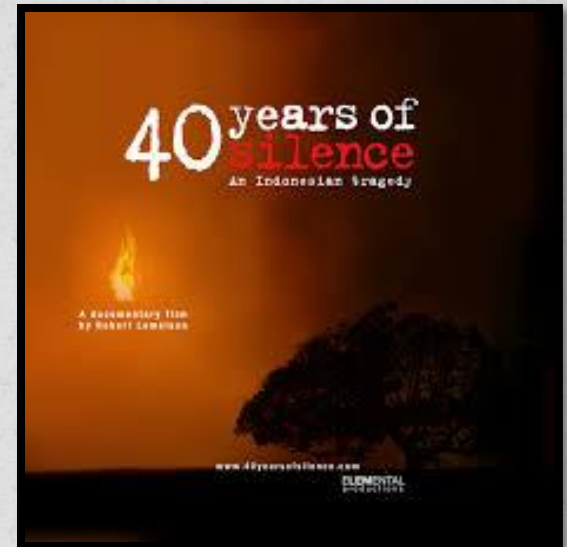
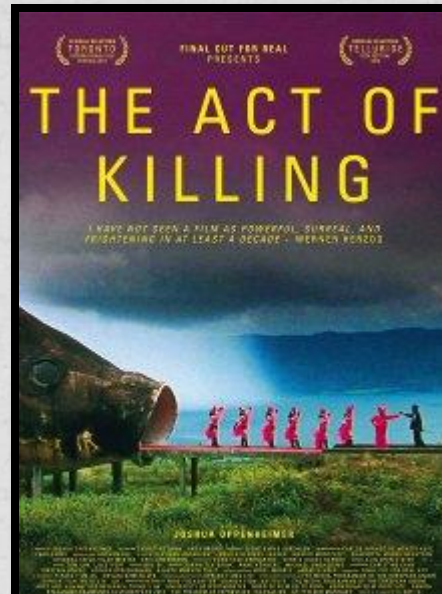
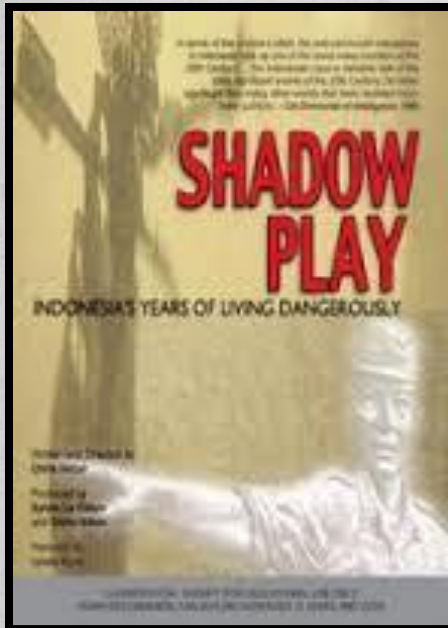


# Rhetorical Form in Documentary

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Exploring the Indonesian Mass  
Killings: 1965-1966

# Documentary and the Mass Killings



# Politics and Rhetoric

- “Given the visual nature of contemporary politics, the practice of documentary, both filmic and photographic, is central to our understandings of conflict and justice” (Tyson 178).



# Rhetorical form in Documentary

- A type of documentary film in which the filmmaker presents a persuasive argument (Bordwell and Thompson 362).
- Goal: persuade the audience to adopt an opinion about the issue presented and perhaps to act on that opinion (Bordwell and Thompson 362).

# Factors in Rhetorical Form

- First: the documentary addresses the viewer openly, trying to move him or her to a new intellectual conviction, emotional attitude, or action (362).



# Factors in Rhetorical Form

- **Second**: subject of the film is usually not an issue of scientific truth but a matter of opinion; the filmmaker tries to make the particular position convincing by presenting different types of arguments and evidence (362).



# Factors in Rhetorical Form

- **Third**: The filmmaker often appeals to our emotions, rather than presenting only factual evidence (362).



# Factors in Rhetorical Form

- **Fourth**: The film often attempts to persuade the viewer to make a choice. That may be big or small but rhetorical form asks you to take a side, perhaps take action (362).



# Types of Rhetorical Argument

- While filmmakers use all kinds of arguments to shape our choices, often they present them as if they were simply observations or factual conclusions (362).
- The filmmaker uses rhetorical form to try and get the audience to accept debatable arguments (362).

# Arguments from Source

- Some arguments are taken to be reliable sources of information.
- Film may include firsthand accounts of events, expert testimony at a hearing, or interviews with people assumed to be knowledgeable (362).



# Subject-Centered Arguments

- Sometimes, the film appeals to beliefs common at the time in a given culture – a subject-centered approach relies on evidence to support the film's argument such as statistics, research findings, eyewitness testimony, etc. (362-363).



# Viewer-Centered Arguments

- Beyond appeals to authority, the film may make an argument that taps into the emotions of the viewer (363).
- Sometimes, emotional appeals can disguise the weakness of other arguments of the film (363).



# Genocide documentary: Re-traumatization?

- Genocide documentaries always carry the risk of re-traumatization, as visual interventions often work in unexpected ways (Tyson 180).
- In *The Act of Killing* (2012), violent scenes of interrogation, torture and execution are restaged, and graphically performed by the protagonists in order to fulfill the director's ambition to excite pity and catharsis; however, this excess can disconnect viewers from ethical reflection and instead serve simply to entertain (Tyson 180).

# *The Act of Killing* (2012): A critical response

- **2013 post-screening student surveys in Java:** Based on the audience responses, Tyson, professor of Southeast Asian politics, concluded that **the film is not therapeutic for the traumatized; nor does it reclaim history by challenging official versions of the 1965-66 genocide, nor does it seek truth, national reconciliation, or transitional justice”** (181).

# More critical responses

- Film critic Jennifer Merin suggested that “insufficient historical context explains film’s failure to become a serious indictment; instead, results in a sensational representation of the past, an ‘obscene treatment of genocide’ that risks re-traumatizing victims” (Tyson 181).



# *The Act of Killing* (2012): Opposing viewpoint

- Criminologist Nicole Rafter believes the film “**breaks decades of silence...leading to collective memories of the genocide, and constitutes a public criminality through addressing monstrous crimes that push us toward ethical action, bringing an end to impunity**” (Tyson 183).



# Purpose of Rhetorical Form in Genocide documentaries

- Genocide documentaries tell stories, offer visual representations of cultural others, and create subversive images that can encourage a range of responses from spectators (Tyson 186).
- However, the most important impact of documentary and their rhetorical forms is the intellectual debates that they provoke (Tyson 186).

# Works Cited

- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2017.
- Tyson, Adam. "Genocide documentary as intervention." *Journal of Genocide Research* 17.2 (2015): 177-99.