

The cove analysis



The Cove: Analysis of Rhetorical and Cinematic Strategies The general reason for a documentary is to put forth factual information while attempting to convince the viewing audience of a specific point of view. The film crew behind 'The Cove' does this in a way that is informative and accurate, while presenting the information in a manner that allows the viewer to draw their own opinions. 'The Cove' follows famous Dolphin Trainer-turned-activist Ric O'Barrey into the dangerous land of Taiji, Japan, where dolphin genocide is occurring.

The 'dolphin trade' that is taking place kills thousands of dolphins every year. While those behind the dolphin-capture and trade suggest that it is a Japanese tradition to murder dolphins for food and other goods, most of the civilians of Japan are completely oblivious to these affairs. Though many are against it, the phenomenon that is dolphin-capturing has not been stopped. This film makes a point to teach the audience about the events in the cove of Taiji, raise awareness of the inhumane dolphin-slaughter, and gain support and funding to stop the dolphin decimation.

In order to persuade viewers to want to fight for the lives of these cetaceans, the film makers and producers use a series of rhetorical strategies, cinematic techniques, and recurring motifs to draw the audience in and capture their hearts with a pitiful and sympathetic understanding. "The Cove" has caused me to lament with the dolphins living in the cove of Taiji, compelling me to actively attempt to end dolphin-massacre, which is exactly what this successful documentary set out to accomplish.

In order to convince the viewers of their point, director Louie Psihoyos and activist Ric O'Barrey use a combination of the rhetorical strategies logos,

ethos, and pathos. The most prominent strategy applied in this film was the use of pathos. Pathos is defined as ‘ an element in experience or in artistic representation evoking pity or compassion. ’ (Mirriam-Webster) This strategy was first made prevalent as we watched dolphins being held in captivity. Even when they weren’t in their natural habitat, the dolphins were smiling, making an immediate connection with the viewer.

Another moment when pathos is instated occurs when Ric emotionally recounts the personal story of the well-known and loved Flipper committing suicide in his arms. Not only does this invoke a sense of emotion in the viewer but it automatically puts us on Ric’s side, as he fights against anyone trying to harm them. The most conspicuous use of pathos is when we actually witness film of the dolphins being treated terribly and coldheartedly murdered by the Japanese dolphin traders.

The image of innocent sea creatures being killed, grabbed, and run over by boats instantly lurches the viewing audience into distress, which is the reaction set out to attain by the film makers. The second rhetorical strategy used in this film is logos, or the appeal based on logic or reason (RPI. edu). The film makers present us with this method throughout the movie when statistics about the dolphins are projected on a black screen. This gives viewers straight information that seems unbiased and factual, in a sense that no images or scenes interact with the information given.

Logos is also used when Ric is explaining to the viewer that dolphins have high levels of mercury. He makes the connection that if the Japanese people knew how high the mercury levels were, they would stop eating them. Also, many people are scammed into eating dolphin while assuming a purchase of

another animal. So, the fact that many Japanese citizens have high mercury levels, and in many cases, mercury poisoning, means that dolphins should stop being consumed as a food source. This makes sense based on logic and reason.

The last rhetorical strategy used in this film is ethos, or the ' appeal based on the character of the speaker. An ethos-driven document relies on the reputation of the author. ' This is obvious throughout the film, as Ric and Louis gain our confidence and trust as valid sources. They are able to attain our certainty by supplying us personal accounts of their scientific background. Also, we find out that Ric O'Barry is one of the most famous dolphin trainers in the world. His connection to the well-known television show, Flipper, puts him in an honest and authentic position in the viewers eye.

This film used not only rhetorical strategies to convince the audience of a specific viewpoint, but also well-known cinematic techniques. Because the style of this film is a documentary, the actuality of this film automatically makes it more believable, plausible and realistic. If this was a film only based on true events and used actors or scripted stories, it would be harder to side against the dolphin traders, and seen more as a sad, entertainment type movie. Throughout the movie, the voice of the director or the activists is playing while the clips are being shown.

This not only allows them to speak directly with the viewer, but lets beliefs and annotations flow freely. The exposition of a film is ' background information, regarding setting, characters, and plots. ' It is important in ' The Cove' because an introduction to the matter at hand is necessary, and it also

presents the initial position and stance regarding the issue. In the film, montage clips are often used showing dolphins in distress and captivity. These clips are often juxtaposed to scenes of wild and free dolphins, roaming the ocean and jumping through waves.

This creates a sense of drama, and gives us something to compare and contrast. It sets up a ‘good and bad’ or ‘right and wrong’ which is important when proving a point. A very common technique used in this film, as in most documentaries, is the interview. Well-qualified scholars and activists, divers, and volunteers were chosen carefully. Interviews can be very helpful when trying to get point across because specific questions can be asked to get certain answers. The setting of an interview is also taken into account. For example, in Ric O’Barry’s interview, we see that there is a dolphin painting in the background.

We also can see that he is in a home-like setting. This is easily relatable and makes us think that his life revolves around the small cetaceans. Also, the fact that those being interviewed are all in accord shows that the view and opinion is shared by many, and is therefore a valid belief. Some of the most persuasive information comes from the repeated structures throughout the movie. Camera angles, lighting, and background sound effects all are chosen carefully and attempt to convince the viewer of a specific attitude. For example, we quickly note that the Japanese dolphin traders are the antagonists of this film.

Every shot we see of the man named ‘personal space’ is from a personal camera and tends to be very close-up. The obvious protagonists are the main ‘characters’ because we are able to sympathize with them. A dolphin

is shown drowning after taking its last breath. Once this scene is over, the camera turns to the two divers, and shows that their faces are filled with sorrow. Concurrently, we see the men laughing as dolphin is drowning right in front of them. These scenes were not chosen at random, but rather were selected to further intensify the cruelty of the traders and capitalize on the glory that we see in our narrators.

Lighting has a large part in the mood of a film. Whenever the editor's want us to view something as 'bad', shots that are dark, dramatic, or in night vision are shown. This contrasts the bright colors and lights that accompany our dolphin heroes in scenes and interviews. The music and sound effects also affect the manner of a film. For instance, whenever we were meant to feel happy, aquarium music would play, as opposed to the deep and dark lighthouse bells ringing when the dolphin cove was on screen. I believe that the most effective technique used in this film was the feeling of suspense.

Many of the images were captured through 'hidden camera.' This provides a sense of reality and lets us know for a fact that what we are seeing is raw film. Also, the sense of secrecy reveals how urgent this situation is. Although this, in my opinion, was the most persuasive, the combination of every strategy was necessary to the documentary's success. This film was able to use cinematic and filmography techniques along with a strong sense of rhetoric to generally convince the viewers of the makers' beliefs and point of view on the topic at hand.