Rhetoric In Film

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Introduction

At its simplest, a film is a series of messages being sent to an audience, and the success of any film is determined by the way these messages get across. We may not even be aware of it, but we are only intrigued, moved and informed because of the rhetorical arguments used to deliver these messages. We receive them through lighting, dialogue, camera angles, music, etc. and although we rarely analyze these details, they, even more than plots, establish the stories we grow to love.

This is a rhetorical investigation to determine the most common messages about environmental issues in popular films today, as well as identify the key components to make a rhetorical argument in this medium. To accomplish this, twenty-four movies (six films from four genres: Documentaries, Children’s Films, Disaster Films, and War Films) will be dissected. Of course, to properly assess anything a correct understanding of the subject must be attained. Research has been conducted to improve the accuracy of this evaluation, and has allowed the movies watched to be seen through the critical eyes of a producer: not only considering the success of the product shown, but comparing it to the possibilities that were not chosen. This is a compilation of the research, results, and conclusions made through this analysis after identifying the most popular environmental messages seen in recent movies of different genres, as well as determining elements that compose an effective rhetorical argument in film.
Background

Argument and persuasion always involve a speaker and an audience. Although the audience for a movie is thought to be special, the use of rhetoric to persuade it is the same. The director becomes the speaker, and viewers become the audience in the classical sense of the word.

There are many different media that a speaker can now use to bring his message across to many different audiences. These different media each bring their own strengths and weaknesses stemming from individual characteristics and perception in society. For example, an article in a ‘tabloid’ newspaper would not have as much credibility as one from a nationally published paper. Society creates ethos for an artifact through perception of its genre or sub-genre. Popular film studios benefit because they have access to a great deal of money for distribution. This forces some of the weaker film attempts out and allows the genre as a whole to enjoy more credibility. The amount of credibility varies among the many sub-genres of popular film, depending on their content. When speaking about the environment, a documentary film is expected to have a more of a profound message than a comedy. However, because film combines so many elements that can be used to create an argument about the environment, genres such as comedy often do contain a message about the environment in the background.

The strength of film is that there are so many facets that can contain arguments or evidences for the speaker to convince the audience with. The original medium of rhetoric, that of one speaker presenting his argument orally to a group of listeners, had to rely upon only the speaker’s usage of body language and vividly descriptive imagery. In a film the speaker can use dialogue between characters, the soundtrack, the scenery, the angle of shots, or one of the other details included in a film. The disadvantage of having this many elements is that unless they are closely monitored, the overall rhetorical vision and argument may not be clear. If a film contains a soundtrack of light and happy music, but the image on the screen is of baby seals being brutally killed, the argument that the speaker is trying to make is unclear. When the speaker uses all of the pieces together as one, however, the speaker can create an extremely powerful piece of rhetoric.
The use of visuals in popular film is one of the medium’s greatest strengths. Unlike in print or strictly audio media, the speaker does not have to rely upon the audience’s imagination to render an example exactly as they are describing it. Since the speaker can create the exact example of what he wants to show in the film, the audience can see precisely what they are supposed to see. The usage of different kinds of shots, such as close-ups, allow specific parts of the film’s content to be used as a proof of the speaker’s argument. Likewise, the speaker can use wider shots such as long shots to establish the setting or bring things into perspective for the viewer.

The environment in popular film is not always the main subject, but it is always present in some form because of the visual element of film. It forms part of the setting, which means that even if the shot is not about the environment, the way it is treated during the shot speaks about the film’s stance on the environment. For example, if in a war film the soldiers are constantly using trees, rocks, and other pieces of natural cover to help protect themselves, the film is speaking rhetorically about nature without it being a theme whatsoever in the film. Indeed, most popular films do not include overt messages on any particular topic. Many casual movie viewers would believe that popular films that the movies they watch send are based on narration. However, rhetoric and narration assist and bolster one another. A film featuring a natural disaster such as a volcanic eruption would feature the environment as a character in the narrative of survival. This usage of the environment as a member in the conflict makes the argument that humans are powerless against the forces of nature. This could also be considered a theme of narration, exemplifying how much narration and rhetoric compliment each other in film.

The speaker of a film is really the director of the piece, not the actor or narrator. This means that he must present his argument in the same way that a speaker in any other rhetorical medium would, with the exposition to begin, and then the arguments and evidences presented. Although he has many other people on staff to help handle the details of creating the film, his rhetorical vision is what controls the smaller elements. The other person who has the greatest control over the rhetoric of a movie is the editor; the order of events and angles creates a
compelling argument. Since the job of editing a film is often shared between the editor and the director, they combine to form the speaker’s role during the final stages of production.

Watching a film in order to analyze it rhetorically involves more than just trying to listen to the words spoken by the characters about the subject. While amateur film can achieve much of the same effect rhetorically as the popular and widely distributed genres, the advantage of a larger budget and state of the art resources allow major film companies to perfectly envelop a narrative with whatever argument they choose. This entire package is what makes film such a dominant form of both entertainment and instruction in the society of today. Making a movie that both informs and moves, while at first seeming to have roots in theatre, in fact draws as much if not more background from classical rhetorical structure.
**Documentaries**

**March of the Penguins**

This movie is a tale of the lives of Emperor Penguins narrated by Morgan Freeman. It is a “story of survival, of life over death, but it’s more than that really: it’s a story of love.” This brief quote embodies the entire story of the Penguins’ struggle against their Antarctic environment to reproduce, the main conflict being the relationship between the penguins and the vast wasteland that hinders all forms of life. Overall, although a glimmer of hope is always shown amidst the trials these penguins face, the audience is found pitying the penguins because of their battle until the birth of their chicks and eventual return to the sea.

As with all films music and camera shots are key elements in the presentation of this story. First of all, orchestral music is used presumably because of its distance from any social groups or genre. The scores are in major keys creating upbeat and jovial tones during moments of play and excitement, and then appropriately melodic and romantic during scenes of intimacy between the penguins and their chicks. During moments where survival is uncertain music is replaced by natural sounds like the scream of a predator or the violent 100 mph winds that beat against the penguins. At the same time wide angles and pans show the vast beauty of the landscape as well as the dangers. These shots also are used to show the communal cooperation of the penguins as they mass themselves together for protection. Close ups are used during the tender scenes to reveal the parents’ affection for each other, as well as a parents’ affection for a chick.

The Narrator of this film also plays an important role. The North American version has Morgan Freeman telling the story of the Penguins. From a rhetorical perspective, Freeman has excellent ethos, which is undoubtedly why he was chosen for this role. He is a respected actor with a calm and evocative voice that appeals to any audience. Had director Luc Jacquet chosen a less popular and less appealing narrator it is likely the film would be less effective.
Like in most nature documentaries, logos plays an important role in conveying the setting and the realities of survival. The 70 km walk the penguins traverse to reach their breeding ground, -73-degree-weather they must endure, and the 100 kph winds they must withstand are all facts that help convince us that the penguins’ lives are constantly in danger.

Nevertheless, the most important element is how the film appeals to its audience. Any time an audience views anything an internal question arises: can the audience see themselves in the action? Nature documentaries achieve this by anthropomorphizing the subject matter, making what is not human seem human. Narrative lines like “legend has it that one tribe stayed behind,” not only refer to the Penguins being the only creatures in this wasteland, but to the communal or tribal feelings we identify within ourselves as well. The narrator also achieves this when he says “they’re not that different from us really. They even engage in contact sports.” These pathos driven statements appeal to the viewer so that they no longer see a mysterious black and white bird that cannot fly, but someone they can relate to.

*March of the Penguins* and similar styled documentaries utilize rhetoric to portray and explain the beauty of creatures, but also mirror what we see as beautiful within ourselves.

**Grizzly Man**

*Grizzly Man* is the story of the amateur film director and self professed nature activist Timothy Treadwell and the life he led up until his death alongside Amie Huguenard at the hands of a Grizzly bear. Narrated and directed by Werner Herzog, the film is an analysis of Treadwell’s beliefs and actions while he lived in an Alaskan Bear Sanctuary. The film focuses primarily on Treadwell’s internal conflicts and his feelings for the bears as his saviours.

The film features interviews of Treadwell himself, as well as some of his own filming. Most of Treadwell’s material is comprised of personal rants regarding the bears and the environments in which they live, and several longer outbursts concerning those he felt were destroying ‘his’ tranquility and the sanctuary. Herzog’s interviews seem somewhat unnatural, but he also leaves the camera running a longer after each interview to catch the awkward silences.
that mock interviews create. Long fly-over pans are also used to show the enormity of the sanctuary and, at one point, how the glacier that divides the sanctuary from civilization.

*Grizzly Man* is arranged so that the audience understands Treadwell’s death from the outset. The bulk of the film is centered on understanding Treadwell’s motivations as a filmmaker and as a person. The final portion of the film focuses on director Werner Herzog’s own interpretations and beliefs.

The language Herzog uses concludes that Treadwell was a tortured soul who went too far. He states that, “facing the lens of the camera took on the quality of a confessional,” in regards to Treadwell’s ranting about the ‘demons’ he faced. Herzog does balance the rhetoric in some sense by interviewing people like Sam Egli, a bush pilot, and Sven Haakanson Jr, a museum director, who did not believe Treadwell’s work was beneficial or even sane, while other interviews showed Treadwell’s detachment from reality. The interview with Larry Van Daele revealed that Treadwell “would act like a bear,” and scared those who went with him on his excursions. Other interviews illustrated Treadwell’s definite confusion, especially when Marc Gaede recalls that Treadwell, “wanted to become like the bear.”

The director himself attempts in many places to create his own ethos. The first example is when he shows himself listening to the tape of Treadwell’s final moments and tells Jewel Palovak that she should destroy the film, and refuses to put those moments into the documentary. The second example is during Treadwell’s tirade about park services where Herzog mutes his voice out of respect for those being spoken about.

For the audience some of the most engaging moments are Treadwell’s own footage. Treadwell in many sections seems to lose himself in fury and curses everything and anyone that prevents him from enjoying ‘his’ sanctuary. The audience is grabbed by Treadwell’s instability and yet this is balanced by Herzog’s look at Treadwell’s life before his move to Alaska. Interviews with his actor friend Warren Squeeny, who seems to be overacting his own role, expose that before living with the bears Treadwell became a drunk, discouraged mainly by his
losses: he was the second option for Woody in “Cheers” and losing his scholarship for swimming due to a back injury.

The logos used in this film was innate. All viewers know and understand the Grizzlies are violent, temperamental mammals that should be respected and admired from a distance. Treadwell has brought himself too close to the bears and has therefore invited disaster.

The film ends by showing the audience that Treadwell’s delusions and anthropomorphic beliefs were what killed him. Treadwell was not a bear and regardless of how long he stayed among them he would never become one. As Herzog points out in the end of this film, the analysis of Treadwell’s need to be a part of this world says a lot about who we are as humans.

The Corporation

In the United States corporations are seen as a legal ‘persons’. What this film, The Corporation, attempts to do is use case studies to analyze their character and psychology as legal ‘persons’. The film shows the rise of the corporation historically as well as what some have done to fight back. Many celebrated authors, journalists and filmmakers are interviewed, as well as CEOs like the former CEO of Shell, and corporate interest spokespersons like Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Michael Moore, Ray Anderson. The main conflict centers around the corporations social responsibility and the repercussions of its actions on a global scale.

The rhetorical balance for the argument is fairly even. Logos drives home the points while Pathos captures the audience’s moral conscience at scenes of disfigured cows, absent minded politicians, and toxic waste. Interviewing celebrated cultural figures like Chomsky, Klein, Moore and Anderson creates the directors’ ethos.

Images showing the environment are typically showing the degree of advertising that has come to overwhelm public space. Along this same line of thinking images of a man spraying fake snow in the Disney run town of Celebration are used to emphasize the superficiality of public space in the hands of corporations projecting their images. There are also numerous images that testify to the degradation of the environment like shots of cows and frogs that have
mutated because of chemicals, like the heart rending site of swollen udders caused by Monsanto’s bovine growth hormone Posilac.

Through the first section of the film the directors attempt to establish an appropriate metaphor for the corporation. Most of these metaphors are derived from the natural world. Bush’s metaphor that there are a ‘few bad apples’ ruining the image of corporate America is seen as unsuitable. The film then attempts to find new more relevant metaphors for corporations. Like an eagle, ‘soaring clear eyed, competitive’ and whale imagery of a ‘gentle big fish’, are tossed aside, as the film’s dominant metaphor describes the corporation as psychopath. Other nature metaphors are used to explain the costs associated with environmental damage, such as a shark when the corporation is described as an ‘externalizing machine’. This image is a reference to the shark’s image as a “killing machine.”

Problems with the film do arise because, rhetorically speaking, the film is heavily weighted towards anti-corporatism. The narrative voice of Mikela J. Mikael is robotic and monotone to convey the artificial nature of a world of corporate advertising and branded landscapes, but this comes across as cliché and is therefore not so effective. Likewise, there is not enough positive evidence shown in the area of environmental responsibility. Interviews with Ray Anderson explain how he took the world’s largest carpet manufacturer and reduced its effects on the environment by a third, but the audience never learns how Anderson achieved this feat. With slightly more emphasis on how things can change without a revolution, the film would have more weight and be accessible to a larger audience. This all being said there is certainly enough pro-corporate rhetoric in society that an anti-corporate can only attempt to balance the arguments.

An Inconvenient Truth

This film is directed by David Guggenheim, and combines to stop or reduce climate change and Al Gore’s climate change slide show with his story up until its creation. There is an overall tone of urgency throughout the film as the truths about climate change and the need for action are revealed.
The film is structured much like a speech. Al Gore sends off his audience with the now famous line, “I’m Al Gore, I used to be the next President of the United States of America.” He instantly seems to build rapport with that comment.

Logos drives the factual arguments contained in Gore’s slide show. The retreat of the glaciers is illustrated by comparing what they were to what they are now. Some notable examples of this are the now famous image of Patagonia, as well as an Image of Glacier National Park in the United States. Another, perhaps more dramatic, example is Gore’s graph which shows the last 600,000 years of carbon and heat fluctuations. Gore points out the obvious correlations between the two and uses an elevator to show the current and projected levels.

Gore uses pathos by showing the affects of climate change on people’s. Images of Katrina as well as Mayor Ray Nagin’s desperate pleas for help evoke sympathy from the viewer. The tales of drowning Polar Bears have the same effect.

It is Al Gore’s ability to bind the piece that makes the film an excellent argument. Gore resonates with the audience through humor, as well as his personal story. The tale of the Gore family farm is meant to make Gore’s life a personal concern. Originally the family farmed tobacco, but upon Gore’s ‘protector’ Nancy’s death from lung cancer the family switched to beef. Gore recounts that once the family realized they were part of the problem they knew they had to do something. Similarly, Gore’s morality and humor are shown in the metaphor of the boiling frog. Gore saves the frog before its death stating that, “It’s important to save the frog.”

Obviously the film emphasizes lowering greenhouse gases heavily, and yet counter-arguments are not simply glossed over. A good portion of the film focuses on arguments against climate change. Good examples of this are included are found by Gore in a survey of 928 articles on climate change put out by the scientific community. This survey found that not one of the articles in the survey discounted findings on global climate change yet. Gore juxtaposed this against news articles where over 50 percent stated that there were doubts about the science. Another example is the argument that focusing on climate change will harm the economy. Gore shows that most nations have higher emission standards, even China, and that the top selling
automobiles are foreign cars that have higher standards. A video of George Bush screaming almost tyrannically that, “we’ll be up to our neck in owls and out of work for every American” is included, but countered by Gore humorously stating that without an Earth gold bars don’t mean much.

The film ends positively by explaining what can be done to halt climate change. This is needed so that the audience does not feel overwhelmed and powerless. Gore gives numerous examples of how the audience can change emissions and states that in America political will is “a renewable resource,” drawing parallels to the environmental movements as well as those in power whose income is based off fossil fuels.

**Tsunami: Wave of Destruction**

This film is essentially a compilation of numerous clips in the Indian Ocean during and after the tsunami of 2004 that killed approximately 300,000 people. Charles Gibson, from ABC’s Good Morning America, hosts a retrospective look at the calamity including coverage from fellow anchor Diane Sawyer.

Rhetorically speaking the film plays a lot on the audience’s emotions. The music used is melancholy compositions of guitar and string. For dramatic effect, voice recordings from the day the tsunami hit are played and are spliced with footage of the waves crashing against the shore. These produce the effect of having both visual and auditory events unfolding, although there is little likelihood that they are similar instances.

The film also attempts to take a larger issue and relay it on a common individual level. For example, one reporter describes the tsunami as, ‘a tragedy of individual lives and individual loss’. This is best seen through the overarching arrangement of the film. The larger issue of the tsunami is presented first and then the piece dives into the meat of the story by focusing on how the tsunami has affected the lives of its survivors. At one point Diane Sawyer is seen in a makeshift tent interviewing numerous young children looking forward to going to school the next day. Likewise the film uses the story of Petra Nemcova to connect the audience to someone
they recognize. Although no actual interviews are shown with Nemcova the audience is told her tragic story. She lost her boyfriend while she clung to a palm branch when the tsunami first hit.

Both the visual and auditory presentation along with the deductive reporting enhances the audience’s response to the pieces. While attention is paid to the facts, like why the tsunami happened and the raw numbers of the tragedy the focus of this film is around the audience. The film takes the raw news and presents it dramatically.

The film also uses celebrities to enhance its own image and respectability. Good examples of this are Diane Sawyer who is sent to ask the hard questions to Colin Powell about why America only donated 15 million initially, and Powell who is accepted with little question. It is the act of questioning that is important because it enhances her rapport as a journalist.

Likewise, the reason Charles Gibson is chosen as the narrator is because he is a respected anchor and reporter. Gibson invites the audience to be a part of the news several times saying “well if you can imagine”. His utilizes metaphor to convey information in a mixture of teaching and dramatics while he narrates as well. The power of the earthquake off Sumatra that caused the initial surge of 108 feet is equated with the power of an atomic bomb going off. The speed that the waves traveled towards shore is also equated with the speed of a jet fighter. Finally, the whole tragedy is described by Gibson as the “classic tale of man’s struggle against the power and unpredictability of nature.”

What the film does well is connect the audience with the actual events of the tsunami, despite the loss of factual discussions that were cut to maintain the interest of the audience. These facts could have answered how aid was provided, as well as why initially so little was done on behalf of the survivors.

**Baraka**

*Baraka* is a brilliant piece of rhetoric. The film relies entirely on the images of a single day and music to support the overall thesis: the praises of a spiritual, natural earth instead of an industrialized humanity.
The film utilizes no text or narration, and so arguments are made visually. Cuts and sequences are used to highlight certain aspects and contrast them against others. An excellent example of this includes several images of an empty concentration camp cut in between images of prisoners. The audience is expected to assume that these are images of prisoners from this concentration camp. Then an image of piles of human skulls, legs or arm bones is shown concluding that this is the fate of these prisoners. The piled human bones then becomes piles of armaments guarded by what appears to be African guerillas. What all these images combined convey is an argument against the atrocities of war, especially on a human level. There is a logical sequence from image to image and the audience is captivated simply because of the power of images used.

Arguments for a natural, spiritual world are conveyed similarly. Throughout the film most images of spiritual rituals like dance and meditation are shown communally: an extended image of men ritually waving their hands in different directions to a drum beat and an elder’s instructions, an African tribe chanting together, Muslims at Mecca praying and numerous others. What all these images convey similarly is a sense of activity, community and excitement. This is contrasted by images of urban environments where there are homeless families sleeping on the streets or prostitutes in doorways or strip clubs. Images of urban environments are never shown as communal. Even the everyday flow of a city’s citizens is juxtaposed by the mechanics of a chick processing plant where a chick is being branded and sorted. This is followed by an image of travelers leaving the subway through turnstiles. This comparison is further enhanced by film technique. The images of commuters are time delayed to correspond with the same rhythms of the chicks being processed through a series of conveyors.

Music is used to convey the tone and theme of the images. For instance, in the previously mentioned sequence of images comparing pedestrian flow and mass production, the music is a rhythmical drumbeat echoing a beating heart. This tempo reinforces the comparisons by giving them a unifying background language from which to be interpreted. Similarly, images of a natural world are ambient and composed largely of flute melodies and drum rhythms. What the
ambience of this music does is enhances the spirituality of the composition through the tone of the music.

This being said, in several instances music is also not used to enhance the larger arguments. In the previously mentioned instance of the men waving their hands in ritual dance the music is dropped and their chants are heard. These chants are used because they only help to emphasize the power of the ritual dance and lend understanding. In contrast, during a close up image of a chainsaw cutting through a tree, music is again not used so that the sound of the chainsaw can destroy any sense of tranquility. When the audience hears this they understand that it is destructive and cannot enhance the pro-environment argument.

Another quite interesting piece of rhetoric is the way people are portrayed. Throughout the film spiritual leaders and followers are shown in action. This is countered in many instances by a long fixed image of a person or a persons face. With their eyes staring directly at the camera and their bodies fixed in one location without movement, the image can be haunting and yet convey so much about the character. This is meant to slow or stop the movement of the piece, and a focus on humanity.

Rhetorically speaking the film conveys its arguments creatively. Unfortunately there is little room for depth because although a picture can communicate many things, it cannot say other important things directly.

**Genre Summary**

What documentaries all have in common is that they are all attempting to persuade their audience to one side of an argument. Concerning environmental arguments there are two primary poles: first, the political pole of protectionism versus consumption, and second, the mythical pole emphasizing nature as a destructive force versus being a sacred life giver. Documentaries take different approaches to rhetoric than other media because they are overtly persuading whereas other media tend to convince people covertly. Due to this difference, most films in this genre utilize a relatively standard structure for argumentation: introduction, body of evidence, refutation of other opposing ideas and a conclusion.
Film as a medium allows unique rhetorical tools and so is shaped by these. The visual is the most important rhetorical element because film is a largely visual medium. The visual then tends to convey most of the information. Images can be used to create logos by juxtaposing two images either through cut, fade or displaying both at the same time on the screen. Some excellent examples of this are Baraka and An Inconvenient Truth, although all the films studied used this technique in some fashion. Likewise factual arguments can also be obtained by complementing the visual to other aspects of the medium such as narration or text.

Techniques of visual rhetoric can be used to create empathy within an audience. Images that display animals being threatened are an excellent example because people naturally sympathize with others. Likewise a visual of a chainsaw cutting through a tree shortly following the image of a lush rainforest encourages protective opinions that can then be fed with even larger arguments. This being said, footage shown can activate pathos in many ways other than sympathy. An image of a young penguin or an inquisitive fox appeals emotions in a different way.

The respect the audience has for the filmmaker or narrator can also be enhanced visually. If the film relies too heavily on clichéd images or uses visuals to make excessive logos or pathos-based arguments, the audience may become skeptical of the filmmaker’s intentions. If the narrator is portrayed as someone the audience cannot respect then the film can lose its credibility, especially if the film is structured around the respectability of the narrator.

Music and sound are highly effective tools for enhancing the tone or setting of any film, and can help better persuade audiences of visual messages. For instance, playing electronically synthesized music or altering narration to sound robotic evokes a futuristic or industrial climate. Within the same sounds a menacing or mechanical tone can also be set. Most nature conveying films use natural instruments or sounds, meaning noises that are not distorted or simulated. These sounds were most often used to convey tranquility and peace. Similarly, music is used to enhance a scene’s atmosphere. The best example of this is in Grizzly Man where the filmmaker
uses folk music to help develop two ideas: images of the cowboy and the myth of the great frontier.

Narration was often used to lead viewers to a better understanding of the image. The narrator would either introduce an image, pre-constructing its meaning or simultaneously narrating and directing an explanation for the audience. Narration in several cases used the ethos of the narrator to its advantage. The best example of this is the use of Morgan Freeman to narrate *March of the Penguins* because Freeman has gained public credibility and, therefore, further enhances the film’s own respectability.

**Children’s Films**

**Cars**

Lightening McQueen is a self-centred racecar. McQueen gets lost on his way to the Piston Cup race in California and learns there is more to life than winning a race. With the help of the townspeople of Radiator Springs, McQueen realizes friends and family are what life is about.

The main conflict in this movie is between McQueen and the townspeople. They want him to fix the road he wrecked, but McQueen doesn’t think he should have to do it because he is a famous racecar. The message the audience receives from this movie is that no one is better than anyone else, and although McQueen thinks his famous status is going to free him, the right thing to do is fix what he ruined.

The ethos of the writers is damaged because of word choices. Words such as “hell”, “idiot” and “dumb” come out of McQueen’s mouth frequently. As a children’s movie, these words should have been left out. McQueen says out loud “you gotta help me, you can’t leave me here. I’m in hillbilly hell. My IQ is dropping by the second. I’m becoming one of them” for the first time to a couple of lost tourists. This confirms for the audience that McQueen’s mind has been corrupted. He thinks that because he is different and comes from a city he is better than them.
The destruction of McQueen’s mind is also evident at the beginning of the movie when he is envisioning his American Dream: screaming fans, models by his side, a personal helicopter, awards, photo shoots, red carpet appearances, being a hero to others, a videogame made after him, a house in Hollywood etc. This type of fame is the fantasy in most North American minds: personal wealth and fame. The ideology being that wealth is the most important thing.

The subject of Radiator Springs is believable to the audience because many parents watching the movie can relate to the changes that have been made to small towns and road construction in the last 50 years. Roads have been built to save time and for convenience. Logos in this movie is also shown through the idea of city people being more conceited than small town people. The message McQueen sends to the audience is that he is smarter, faster and thinks only of himself. Doc points this out by saying: “When was the last time you cared about something other than yourself?” to McQueen and McQueen can’t even answer the question.

Sally instigates the sympathy the audience feels towards the small town and their hardships. Sally shows McQueen that “the road didn’t always cut through the land like the interstate, it moved with the land and how it rose, how it curved.” During this time, the music in the background was a slow sad country song: “Long Ago” (See the clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUxACOJiz2c). Sally continues to say that “cars didn’t drive on it to make great time, they drove on it to have a great time”. The purpose of music in this scene is to activate the emotions of the audience and it does. Audience members, especially adults, realize that saving a little driving time has cost them the sight of beautiful scenery and stability of small towns.

The vanishing and reappearing of Radiator Springs on the map during the movie is a symbol of how society can lose track of what is important in life. Eventually everyone will realize there is more to life than wealth and fame. The character of McQueen is the movie’s example of this. When McQueen realizes that what he was missing in life was family and friends, the movie is complete.
Finding Nemo

Finding Nemo is an animated movie about a father trying to find his son. After a sudden shark attack Marlin loses his wife and babies except for one, Nemo. This event causes Marlin to be very over protective, not wanting anything to happen to his only son. Nevertheless, Nemo’s desire for freedom causes him to rebel temporarily, and as a result, is captured by a scuba diver. Marlin searches the ocean with his friend Dori looking for until they find him in Sydney and the three of them live happily ever after.

The genre of this movie is children’s film, but the target audience also includes adults and families. Nemo’s capture evokes strong emotions from the audience. The audience feels sorry for the father who is left with absolutely no family. The audience also feels a sense of relief and excitement when Nigel tells Nemo what his dad has been through coming to find him.

Disney and Pixar have created many good family movies and this is one families will enjoy because it is about friends and family. The writers of the movie build ethos when Dori tells Marlin that “trust is what friends do”, because friendship is something all audiences should appreciate.

Humans in this movie are portrayed as neither good nor bad. The only humans are the scuba divers, the dentist and his patients. Human waste is a problem that shows up many times throughout the movie. When Marlin and Dori get close to Sydney, the water becomes cloudy and Dori doesn’t even want to swim in it. The water is murky and grey/green in colour and looks very polluted. These scenes of murky water are very subtle and many audiences may not even notice it. A pollution sign the audience should notice is the specks of matter in the ocean near the city. Marlin and Dori have a hard time seeing where they are going or what kind of fish they are talking to because the water is so polluted.

At the beginning of the movie, Marlin and Dori tell the sharks that a human took Nemo. One shark says: “Humans, they think they own everything” and the other shark says: “Probably American”, a subtle insult to Americans. This reflection on the American people is that they are domineering.
The idea of pollution is a subject that is reasonable for the audience to believe because it is a global problem that is getting worse. The movie is set in Australia, but the pollution problem in the ocean exists everywhere on earth.

Finding Nemo is a movie about a father’s love for his son. When Nigel tells Nemo about his dad’s travels, Nemo learns to appreciate his dad. Nemo starts to idolize his dad because he conquered his fears of the ocean because his dad loved him. When Marlin arrives in the dentist office to save his son, Nemo yells: “that’s my dad!” because he is so proud. Marlin and Nemo’s trust in and love for one another is evident when Marlin allows Nemo to save Dori and the other fish from some fisherman. After the adventure is over, the father and son are together and now share a stronger bond. Their love for one another is obvious when they exchange the words “Love ya dad”, “Love you too son”.

Finding Nemo is a movie that captures some of the problems in our world such as; pollution and selfish North American mentality. The movie also teaches that every family should stick together and go to great lengths for the ones they love.

Over The Hedge
Suburbia has taken over the animals’ territory. R.J. is a racoon who needs to collect a lot of food for the bear in six days because he was caught stealing from the bear. R.J. finds the foragers and tricks them into helping him collect food. R.J later realizes that friends and family are more important than keeping a promise to the bear, which is the moral story for family entertainment.

Over The Hedge is a children’s movie, which not only entertains its audience, but also educates them about the realities of today’s society. Although this movie is a comedy targeted for children and their parents, the subject is very serious which allows children and their families to become more aware of how humans destroy the environment when new buildings are built. Hammy even says: “It never ends” referring to the hedge and humans taking over the land. Consumerism is deteriorating the environment. Although no statistics are used in this movie, the
strength of the logos is seen when R.J shows the foragers the map of the sub-division and where their remaining forest is.

Pathos is used when the audience starts to feel sorry for the animals. Every audience, young or old, knows that food is necessary to survive and the animals have very little land left to find food in. This is also a problem in today’s society. If humans keep building on (destroying) agricultural land, there won’t be anywhere to grow food. The destruction of life is evident when the atom bomb symbol is used twice in the movie. The world wide problem of starvation is shown through the use of the globe. Three times in the movie the world is shown from outer space.

A feeling of shame is felt throughout the movie as humans realize they’ve taken more than they need. There are shots of half eaten fast-food left at a truck stop, garbage’s filled with half used food items, and R.J. even says “they take away more than they need”. This implies that humans unnecessarily consume and waste a lot more than they need to. This is a reflection on society that DreamWorks is trying to engrain in children’s minds and show the adults.

DreamWorks Animation has built its credibility through many comedic animations such as Shrek, Shark Tale and Madagascar. The credibility DreamWorks gains by making this movie is increased because of current environmental issues. DreamWorks is building upon issues that are sensitive for everyone and need to be addressed now. When children watch this movie, they may become more aware of taking only what they need and even help their parents consume less. Entertainment is the number one reason why people watch movies, but it has become clear that through children’s movies, serious adult issues are raised.

The portrayal of humans in this movie is important because they are shown to be over consuming, animal hating, and emotionless. The first shot of a human is Nancy, who is on the phone in her SUV driving recklessly in the neighbourhood saying: “No I can talk, I’m just driving”. This kind of word choice makes the audience laugh because most people do talk on the phone while driving even though they are not suppose to. So what is the real message here? Do humans try to defy the rules? Are humans careless about their environments?
In analyzing *Over The Hedge*, the audience may realize that humans can become careless, emotionless, wasteful consumers. The character of R.J is representative of a human; being knowledgeable, wasteful and consuming more than needed; “It’s called a hedge and its not to be feared, my amphibious friend. It is the gate way to the good life”.

**Ice Age: The Meltdown**

*Ice Age: The Meltdown* is about the journey Manny, Cid, Deago, Ellie and her brothers have to make to save themselves from the flood. All of the animals that live in the valley have to avoid drowning because the ice is melting due to global warming. Throughout the movie, Manny the mammoth is struggling with the thought of being the last mammoth on earth until he meets Ellie. When Manny saves Ellie and the meltdown is over, everyone is saved and the herd of friends live happily ever after.

*Ice Age: The Meltdown* is a children’s animated movie about making a family and keeping your friends close. The serious matter underlying the story is that global warming is an important issue that everyone needs to be aware of and take action towards correcting. The first line of the movie is “This global warming is killing me”, a bold first line, but very important to set the tone of the movie. A couple of minutes later in the movie Fast Tony states “the world is coming to an end”, which is untrue in the movie, but an actual concern in real life.

The music in this movie is very important because it adds a comedic touch to the seriousness of global warming. An example of comedic relief in a scary situation is when the hawks break into song and dance about how they are going to eat everyone when they die. Cid is the character who combines humour into the moral lesson of the movie as he sings about starvation, becoming extinct and being eaten. The audience can watch the movie and laugh while the issue of global warming remains.

The topics of starvation, flooding and dying are topics that give the movie ethos. Cid: “We’re living in a melting world, buddy. You’re going to have to face your fears sooner or later”. This line was well written because it reflects the importance of society coming to terms
with global warming today. Many people cast the issue aside but regardless of whether people want to address this problem, everyone is going to face this fear, and the sooner we do the better off the world will be in the future. Cid also points out that in order to build a future, everyone needs to let go of some of the materialistic possessions: “you need to let go of the past, so you can have a future”. This echo’s how North American people need to stop being so selfish for the sake of generations to come.

Fast Tony is a character that builds the audiences logos towards the subject because he strongly reflects people in today’s society. He is always trying to sell something even at the expense of others. At the end of the movie he says, “we made it, we’re going to live. Well I am anyway”. This is an indication of a selfish person. Many people think global issues are someone else’s problems to fix, when it is really everyone’s obligation to do something. Everyone needs to take responsibility for the world’s problems and fix them together. The Meltdown is not an example of fixing the problem because all the animals do is run from it, and Mother Nature miraculously clears everything up. Unfortunately, this is not reality and the audience needs to realize this.

Ice Age: the Meltdown is a movie meant to entertain and educate others about global warming. Although statistics aren’t used, the seriousness is obvious because of the panic and questions the animals have such as: how are we going to live? And what are we going to do? These are questions humans need to be thinking about as well.

Shrek
Shrek is an ogre who embarks on a journey to rescue the feisty Princess Fiona tin order to get back the deed to his beloved swamp. Lord Farquaad, who is too cowardly to rescue Princess Fiona himself, has taken Shrek’s land from him and promises to give it back in exchange for the princess. Shrek unexpectedly falls in love with Princess Fiona while she is a human, not knowing that she is an ogre as well. When Shrek finally tells Princess Fiona that he loves her, they kiss and the spell cast over her is lifted.
This entertaining animation is for all audiences. The use of the older fairy tale characters allows the audience to remember how wonderful fairy tales are and begin the journey of another fairy tale that they can add to their collection. The use of the famous fairy tale characters also bridges the gap between generations. Shrek is a story for the entire family to enjoy and an addition to any fairy tale anthology.

The ethos of this movie lies in the accuracy of the characters. Shrek is set in medieval times and the presentation of that time period is fairly accurate. The environment and land are treated with respect and the characters only take what they need. This is evident when Donkey and Shrek hunt for their food and use only dead trees to burn on their adventure. All of the clothing and Shrek’s home décor is natural looking and environmentally friendly.

As an animated fairy tale, the audience can accept that an ogre is fictitious while the idea of friendship is realistic. Although Shrek does not want a new friend, Donkey is determined to befriend Shrek, and Donkey says, “only a true friend would be that truly honest”. Shrek eventually admits that he likes Donkey by the end of the movie when he says, “that’s what friends are for”.

Pathos is created in the movie as the audience gets to know Shrek’s character. Shrek has lived most of his life alone because everyone is afraid of him: “they judge me even before they know me. That is why I am better off alone”. He has put up defensive ‘walls’ that prevent others from being involved in his life because humans want to kill him. Even though he is different, there is a good ogre inside who knows the difference between right and wrong and has feelings. A misconception the townspeople have is that ogres do not have feeling, but Shrek has many feelings for his home, Donkey and Princess Fiona. Shrek even says to Donkey: “for your information, there’s a lot more to ogres than people think. Ogres are like onions, onions have layers, ogres have layers”. The message is that there may be more to someone than we can tell. Until someone gets close enough, they will never know all the good things about someone else. When two people share a relationship, the layers of someone’s personality are revealed.
Shrek points out that people in our society are very quick to judge others. "You know, you’re not exactly what I expected" Shrek says to Princess Fiona, and she replies “Well, maybe you shouldn’t judge people before you get to know them”. Even though Shrek already said he didn’t like being judged by others he judged Princess Fiona, which is similar to hypocrisy today. This is the message DreamWorks wants the audience to remember: no one should judge or be judged.

The Little Mermaid

Ariel is a mermaid whose father is King Triton, king of the sea kingdom. When Ariel and her best friend Flounder the fish go on an adventure, Ariel falls in love with Prince Eric who is a human. Although Ariel is forbidden to see humans, she goes against her father’s orders and becomes a human for three days hoping to make Prince Eric fall in love with her. It takes all of her courage and determination to make her dream come true and save her father’s kingdom from Ursula the sea witch.

The Little Mermaid is set apart from the other animated children’s movies in this analysis because it does not deal with any world environment topics. Instead The Little Mermaid is a love story that teaches that life as a human is better than any other life on earth.

Ariel’s fascination with the human world is evident early in the movie. Her first song is about wanting to be a human because life above water is better. This is a common misconception for many people because everyone thinks “the seaweed is always greener in someone else’s lake” according to Sebastian. In Ariel’s first song she foreshadows the main event of the movie by singing “what would I give to live where you are. What would I pay to stay here beside you? What would I do to see you smiling at me… part of your world”. This song tells the audience that Ariel is going to give up something important to be with the man she loves. Ariel later leaves the most important people in her life, her family, to be with Prince Eric. This message is not a good one for children because no one should leave their family behind. This is a family movie, but the message is that you should leave your family for love’s sake.
This love story has a positive message, but it is particularly popular because it appeals to mankind’s love of love. Audiences want to see a happy ending where a boy and girl fall in love. But the question is: should people ever leave their family for love?

The young audience members of this movie have a strong connection to the characters in the movie because they are human like. Half of the mermaids and merman’s bodies look human and all of the other sea creatures have humanlike features such as, teeth, lips, and the ability to speak English and breathe above water. All of these humanlike features build ethos and logos for Disney because the audience can relate to the characters and the script. Many of the audience members may even want this scenario to happen to them in real life because humans are naturally interested in falling in love.

The opposing views in this movie come from Ariel’s dad, King Triton and Sebastian. They both believe that staying away from humans is the right thing for Ariel to do and that humans are “all the same: spineless, savage, harpooning, fist eaters, incapable of any feeling”. King Triton may have said this to keep his daughter from falling in love, but he also makes the point that humans do as they please. Sometimes humans do not take into consideration the consequences of their actions.

Ariel’s naïve character is representative of people who are oblivious to the harm humans do to the environment. “I don’t see how a world that makes such wonderful things could be bad,” she says while looking at the manufactured goods she has collected from shipwrecks. The world that makes wonderful things can be bad because humans often do not recognize how harmful materialism is.

**Genre Summary**

In each movie there were ideas or symbols the audience could relate to. For example, in *Ice Age: The Meltdown*, Ellie says “I thought fat guys are suppose to be jolly”. Ellie is talking about Manny the Mammoth but is making reference to Santa Clause. Santa Clause is a worldwide symbol that everyone can relate to. In the *Ice Age* movie, the use of a boat that will carry all the animals when their land and homes are flooded by the meltdown is representative of
Familiarity is important in children’s movies because children and their parents can relate with animals, even though they are human.

In real life, animals are nothing like humans, but in these animated films they are human-like: walking on two legs rather than four, speaking in English, singing, dancing and falling in love. All of the movies stressed the importance of having a family and standing as a unit through good and bad times. In the movies *Cars*, the family consisted of some small-town shop owners, and in *Ice Age: The Meltdown*, Manny and Ellie become a couple to make a family of their own. In *The Little Mermaid*, a different message is sent to the audience about the family unit. This message was that people should pursue what they love. In the end, Ariel becomes human and marries the man she loves, but she leaves her family behind in the Sea. This is realistic because eventually most people will leave their parents and siblings to start a family of their own. This is also prevalent when Princess Fiona decides to be an ogre and start a family with Shrek.

Materialism and the destruction of land are also important themes throughout the movies. These two themes all contribute to the idea of the American Dream. The producers of these films incorporate the American Dream in their themes because it is familiar and increasingly prevalent in today’s society. In *Cars*, Lightening McQueen fanaticizes about winning the Piston Cup and all the fame associated with winning: screaming fans, awards, photo shoots, a house in Hollywood etc. This materialistic fantasy of materialism represents the ambition of many people, particularly Westerners.

Destruction of land is seen in *Cars* when the characters discuss the creation of the interstate highway that passes through the land, and in *Over the Hedge* when suburbia is built over a beautiful forest. In these two examples, the destruction of the land is portrayed as bad, but accepted as a part of human nature.

The societal myths of how people should live are applied in all six films. Each movie is different in terms of content and characters, but they all tell the audience that the most important thing in life is having friends and family. The movies also teach the audience about themselves as humans and the environment. In the *Cars* movie, the audience is taught about how self-
centered humans often act and the how materialistic goals all people set do not increase happiness. In *The Little Mermaid*, the audience is taught that humans are a higher rank in society than fish. In the *Ice Age* movie, global warming is the main topic. All of these examples show the audience that our ‘American Dream’ style of living is not necessarily the best style.

*Ice Age: The Meltdown* reveals myths about the society today. It exposes the truths about our Western culture. The past and current destruction of land is not shown in the movie, but the effects are. The animals have to leave their homes because the world is melting. With a little logical thinking the audience can figure out that the animals that live off the land were not the one who caused the meltdown. Therefore, the blame is pointed towards humans.

**Disaster Films**

**10.5: Apocalypse**

*10.5: Apocalypse* is the story of an earthquake that threatened the existence of the United States. Dr. Samantha Hill, a seismologist, is called upon to solve the problem that is causing severe earthquakes and various other natural disasters along the Western Coast of the United States. With the help of her father, she uncovers a theory that the continent of North America may be splitting in half due to volcanic eruptions caused by the Earth’s plates moving too quickly. After flooding, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes, Hill manages to construct a plan that stops the earthquake from splitting through a nuclear plant that would have killed millions of people.

The main conflict is man versus nature as a team of people race to stop a violent earthquake that risks the lives of Americans. The main characters, Sam Hill and her father, are important in developing the significance of the environment because they recognize the devastating effects it will have on the lives of the people on the West Coast. This sets an anxious tone for the film because the threat of death against so many people is constantly emphasized.

Music was not an important tool in setting the tone of the film. The only specific audio was the sound effects used during volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters. Stillness in
areas untouched by disaster was contrasted to the overpowering sounds of catastrophe. The lighting was often dark, creating the feeling of danger throughout the film. Long shots were used to show the immense landscape inhabited by only tiny figures that believed they were in control of their environment.

The movie is unrealistic because the events are considered impossible. The film reflects on recent disasters (ex. the Tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina) to evoke emotions from the audience, but the idea behind the plot is so exaggerated people focus on that instead. It is rhetorically unbalanced as the director focuses too much on pathos and not enough on logos. There is also low ethos because the movie is not made by a popular studio and does not feature any well-known actors that would add credibility. It is also unconvincing because only one view of the environment is shown. Humans had nothing to do with the disaster that caused the negative view of the environment and they are powerless to stop it. Nature is never shown as beautiful or useful. The audience observes only one opinion of the environment it is inconsistent with what people know from their own experience.

This film follows the pattern of most disaster movies in that it portrays the environment negatively as a force that is destructive and completely out of human control. However, in many other movies concerning natural disasters there is an underlying sense of retribution that does not exist in 10.5: Apocalypse. Usually humans are shown as having been a part of the destruction of the environment and in the end it destroys human life, but that is not the case in this film. While this sets the movie apart from others in its genre, it still follows the basic pattern of displaying the environment as dangerous and harsh.

**Alive: The Miracle of the Andes**

*Alive* is the story of a Uruguayan rugby team whose plane crashes in the Andes Mountains, forcing them to survive on barely as food in freezing weather conditions. In the Andes they face a harsh environment and struggle to stay alive through blizzards and avalanches. After over a month of living in the remains of the plane, several team members venture west through the mountains to seek help. When they arrive they send helicopters back to rescue their remaining teammates.
The main conflict in the film is man versus nature as the rugby team battles the environment to stay alive. Perhaps the most important character in the film, Nando Parrado creates the contrast between the power of nature and the endurance of human beings through his determination to return home.

Throughout the movie the absence of music is obviously noted. Still silence is often used to set a tone of somberness and desperation. This silence is quickly ended by the loud rumblings of avalanches that take the lives of some of the men. After the storms or disasters in the movie, the silence returns and leaves the survivors appearing in awe at the force with which nature has struck. Also setting a somber tone are the long camera shots that pan the mountains, showing the expansive environment and how insignificant the plane and survivors are in comparison.

The story is captivating and very realistic because of the rhetorical balance. There is equal focus on pathos, logos and ethos throughout; one does not appear to be more important than another. The film uses the audience’s emotions of understanding and sympathy while the survival story is accurately told since it is based on true story. The narrator is one of the survivors of the crash and has much ethos because he was there. Alive is also realistic because several real images of the environment are displayed. At the beginning of the movie the characters exclaim at the beauty of the snow-covered mountains, later these very mountains threaten their lives. The film captures the interest of the audience through the contrasting views of nature, as well as though the sense urgency created by conflict. The story is realistic and unexaggerated.

Alive, like other movies in the adventure genre, showcases the immense power of the environment and the little control humans have over their lives in the face of dangerous environmental conditions. Nature is portrayed as beautiful for only a small portion of the film, and then the destructive qualities empower the sense of peace that first accompanied thoughts of the environment. The audience leaves the film having witnessed two sides of nature, but only remember the negative aspects.
The Day After Tomorrow

The Day After Tomorrow describes the story of Professor Jack Hall, a climatologist who is trying to give insight into the potential Ice Age that is descending on the Northern Hemisphere. Complicating the situation, Hall leaves on a dangerous journey North to save his son who is trapped inside a library in New York. Throughout the movie the characters face various natural disasters such as hurricanes, tidal waves, floods, and blizzards. Hall eventually reaches his son, but by that point what the movie calls intensified global warming has already destroyed much of the Northern Hemisphere.

The main conflict in The Day After Tomorrow is man versus nature as sudden global warming threatens the world with natural disasters that prove the power of the environment. The main characters, Jack Hall and Sam Hall (Jack’s son), play significant roles in displaying the controlling nature of the environment because instead of attempting to stop the weather they accept the conditions and plan accordingly, realizing there is nothing they can do.

Throughout the film music is not used to enhance the disastrous tone, but special effects are used to vividly display the catastrophes taking place around the world. Instead of using audio to set the overall tone in the movie, the director uses camera shots to show the desperate situations the characters are in. Long shots are used to show the vast environment; these shots usually include people, who appear trivial in the face of nature.

Although the audience’s interest is maintained by focusing on a steady flow of natural disasters, the film is completely unrealistic because it is rhetorically imbalanced. The audience is captured using pathos; the film aims to instill a sense of panic that will keep them watching, but the lack of evidence supporting the knowledge about global warming is unconvincing. The disaster in the movie is not reasonable up against the presuppositions the audience believes when viewing it. The film makes claims through an artistic style that deduces the fear that this would occur if global warming was intensified. Another reason the credibility of the movie is lost is that only one view of the environment is shown. There is no hope; it is expected that the audience accepts that the world will freeze. The measures that can be taken to prevent this are not discussed and only the damaging force of the environment is portrayed.
The Day After Tomorrow follows the typical structure of movies about natural disasters and how they show nature primarily as destructive. This particular movie does so to an extreme extent by showing the environment becoming increasingly vicious and without a solution. This uncertainty paired with the exaggeration of a modern day Ice Age creates an unrealistic story thus making this portrayal of the environment seem unreasonable. This is a link to the trailer of The Day After Tomorrow: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uglwYp4eop8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uglwYp4eop8).

The Perfect Storm

The Perfect Storm is the story of six men who died in the North Atlantic Ocean in 1991. Billy Tyne, the captain of the fishing boat the Andrea Gail, has recently been unsuccessful at sea and decides he will go out one last time to catch fish and bring home money. Despite the angry objections of the men’s wives and girlfriends at home, six men decide to make the trip ignoring warnings of bad weather. Once at sea, they head into unknown territory and refuse to acknowledge everyone who pleads with them to turn home before a disastrous storm strikes. After realizing the danger of the ocean the men turn back, and unknowingly head into the middle of the storm that takes all of their lives.

The main conflict in the film is man versus nature as the crew tries to battle a storm that is just too powerful. The main character, Billy Tyne, pressures the rest of the men to stay out at sea regardless of the weather forecasts, but in the end even he realizes that he is no match against the environment.

During the film, music is mainly used to enhance the scenes involving interpersonal conflicts, mostly concerning the relationships the men shared with others they left back home. The music is used to evoke emotions in the audience and to create a sense of understanding. A somber and hopeless tone is set through the scenes showing the fear and desperation of the family and friends left on shore. A feeling of hopelessness is also portrayed using long camera shots that show giant waves tossing the tiny boat back and forth. Quick camera movements and dimness add to the dangerous, ominous feeling of this environment.
The Perfect Storm is rhetorically balanced and as a result it appears very realistic. There is not an excessive focus on the audience because the purpose of the movie is to relay the story of men who lost their lives fighting nature. The storm and the way the crew fought to save their lives are believable because this claims in this story were proved using evidence that was empirically gathered. The audience cannot doubt the situation because the events actually took place. This film also shows different aspects of the environment. The overall understanding at the beginning of the movie is that the environment provides for people because it allowed these men make a living and others to eat. However, after the storm ravages the ocean, the audience also views a damaging side of the environment. The storm kills the men and the environment is seen to be a more damaging than useful. The events leading up to the death of the crew build a sense of excitement in the audience and the movie uses a lot of foreshadowing to hint that the environment will cause devastation.

The Perfect Storm is an excellent example of how most movies about natural disasters portray the relationship between man and nature: man’s futile attempts to outlast powerful weather conditions end in the loss of life. Although humans have had a great impact on the environment, this film makes it obvious that the environment still has control over all aspects of life.

Twister

Twister is the story of a team of tornado-chasers, two of which are in the middle of a divorce. Bill is a former storm-chaser who goes to Oklahoma to get his wife to sign divorce papers so he can marry his current girlfriend. His wife, Jo, has created a machine that will allow tornados to be measured more accurately thus allowing for improved warning systems for the area. Bill and Jo join forces once again in hopes of placing the new device in the midst of a forceful tornado. Competing against another group of storm-chasers, Bill and Jo use their instincts to successfully implement the measuring device.

The main conflict in the movie revolves around nature; tornado-warning systems must be improved because too many innocent people are losing their lives in dangerous storms. Bill and
Jo are important characters because they believe they have a chance to succeed against the environment. The movie takes place in Oklahoma and many long camera shots are used to show the beauty of the fields and nature. These shots are accompanied by pleasant music that enhances the serene feeling of the environment. The film also uses close ups to show the fear on people’s faces as tornados approach. During these intense scenes there is no music. Instead there are loud winds and frantic yelling. Long shots are used later to better showcase the destruction and debris over the formerly calm fields. Though the shocking storm scenes create a sense of urgency for the audience, there is an underlying tone of hopefulness. After a tornado strikes the sun always comes out again and it feels as if the main characters will eventually succeed.

The film focuses mainly on presenting the story through pathos. The main conflict of creating a warning system for civilians activates emotions of sympathy for the characters in the movie. The audience thinks about how the story could relate to them and as a result they want the plan to go well. Logos is a secondary method of presentation for the story because many technical terms are used and this displays significant knowledge of the subject. The movie has relatively high ethos because well known actors play the main characters (ex. Helen Hunt). The ethos as well as the balanced view of the environment makes the story seem plausible. Nature’s beauty and destructiveness are contrasted against one another well in the film. Peaceful shots of nature are shown that capture how perfect it can be, but the film also shows scenes in which the environment is damaging. These views are presented equally and the audience gets to understand both while still maintaining interest in the film, clinging to the hopes that the calm scenes establish.

As with many movies in the adventure/natural disaster genre, *Twister* depicts nature’s ability to promptly turn on humans, devastating all that is in its way. The ruins that are left behind after a tornado strikes emphasizes the control that the environment has over man’s choices and their lives.

**Dante’s Peak**

*Dante’s Peak* takes place in the small town of Dante’s Peak where scientist Harry Dalton is investigating a dormant volcano. Upon assessment of the situation, Dalton urges the city
council to issue a warning to the city council to issue a warning to the city as he realizes that the volcano is indeed dangerous. His boss however, refuses to listen because he fears that if the volcano does not actually erupt the real estate prices will drop and they will lose an important deal. Eventually Dante’s Peak does erupt and many lose their lives because they were not properly warned about the oncoming disaster. Among these problems, Dalton and the mayor of the town must also rescue her children from the volcano and the story becomes a race to save their lives.

The main conflict in the film is man versus nature as it depicts the struggle of the inhabitants to escape the massive volcanic eruption that threatens their lives. The most important characters, Dalton and Rachel Wando (the mayor), show the relationship between the environment and humans in the face of a natural disaster. While they eventually succeed, they confront many events that display the power of nature and the helplessness of humans in those situations.

Throughout the movie music is often used to create an even greater sense of panic. During high suspense scenes, including those where people are evacuating the town or crossing acid lakes, the music is intense and faster paced than the slow calm music that can be heard during the rescue scene. The opening scenes showing the beauty of the environment are also accompanied by soft, pleasant music. Also contributing to the urgent tone of the film are the camera shot choices. Long shots are used to demonstrate the powerful volcanic eruption as it destroys all things in its path. Quick camera movements create a sense of hysteria during the movie and are exceptionally useful to maintain the audience’s interest.

The movie focuses too much on manipulating the way the audience feels. The love story developing between the two main characters, and the desperate race to save the lives of two children have the audience concentrating solely on emotions. Because the use of pathos being the focal point of the film, the fact that it has some scenes are unrealistic and would usually be considered absurd is ignored and replaced by feelings of sympathy for the characters. The one aspect that makes the movie seem reliable is that two views of the environment are shown. At the beginning of Dante’s Peak the perfect little town and its cozy atmosphere are described as
“snuggled up against the mountain”. Later, it is this same mountain that takes the lives of many innocent civilians. This contrast portrays the environment as both peaceful and violent. Because two differing opinions are exposed, the movie appears to be reliable and that helps keep the audience interested. Another approach to maintaining appeal is the constant stream of events that lead up to the rescue. This sequence of events leaves the audience feeling that the purpose of the movie is accomplished.

Overall, Dante’s Peak displays the standard conventions used in classifying adventure/natural disaster films. A predominantly negative view of the environment is shown as it is usually shown destroying human lives.

Genre Summary

The genre of adventure/natural disaster films has many distinct characteristics that define how the environment is portrayed. In these movies the main conflict is always man versus nature as the main characters are usually struggling to survive under threatening weather conditions. This causes the audience to view the environment as a force that is always harmful towards humans. Disaster films also generally have the same type of musical themes. Music is used to develop specific emotions in the audience. Fast paced music and loud sound effects evoke a sense of panic while slow, pleasant music is used during scenes concentrating on secondary conflicts between people. The camera shots are also important in films about natural disasters. Long shots are always used at some point to show the vast landscape compared to the minute figures of humans. This tells the audience that the environment is significantly more powerful, and is more in control of human beings than human beings are of the environment. The most common tone in this category of films is urgency. The conflict is always about the race to save lives and thus the audience feels an urgent need for the characters to succeed. The audience’s emotions are an important aspect of the rhetorical balance in adventure/natural disaster films because they are the central method in which the story is presented. The movies focus on captivating the audience by diverting the audience’s attention away from the notable lack of logo and ethos. Many of the films seemed unrealistic because of low ethos and the improbability of many of the events. The presuppositions that the audience maintains while watching the movies are not consistent with the content in the films, but most audiences do not notice this because
they are so emotionally involved. While there are many common trends in natural disaster movies, the most obvious is the negative view of the environment that is depicted. Nature is always plays a rival to humans, and because of the opposition nature causes, it is disliked. Some films present the environment as sacred as well, but the audience still ends up remembering nature as damaging because the deaths of characters remains in their thoughts instead of the beautiful images shown earlier in the film. Adventure/natural disaster movies always portray the environment as destructive and harmful.

**War Films**

**Apocalypse Now**

*Apocalypse Now* is the story of US Army captain Benjamin L. Willard during the Vietnam War. Willard is sent into the jungle to find and assassinate the US Army Special Forces Colonel Walter Kurtz who has gone insane. The journey upriver becomes bizarre and crazy as Willard becomes confused about his true purpose in the jungle. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola who also helped write the script, this film is based loosely on Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness*.

The jungle environment is a very interesting battlefield. The North Vietnamese used guerilla tactics very effectively against the Americans. The Americans in the Vietnam War did their best to ravage the land and use it to their own strategic advantage, through shelling, bombing, burning, and dropping napalm and Agent Orange on the jungle in an attempt to take away the Viet-Cong’s guerilla advantage. In essence, the Vietnamese people are actually part of the environment in this war so the relationship between man and nature in this film is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, man dominates nature by the complete and utter destruction of the jungle. But on the other hand, the same environment is also dangerous because enemy guerillas could kill you before you even see them. Moreover, the jungle is what made Kurtz go crazy, and makes Willard start to lose his sanity. So while man may control nature as a whole, the war in the jungle also controls man, and steals part of the soul.
The film opens with an excellent scene that shows the chaos and destruction of war: a burning jungle, smoke, helicopters, and the close up shot of an upside down face. This is integrated with the sound of whirring rotors and the song “The End”. This movie is one of the rare war films where scenes are not accompanied by a symphonic or instrumental soundtrack. With the sad music and the sad face superimposed over the devastation in the background, this scene immediately activates the viewer’s emotions, and engages the audience.

Another powerful emotional scene in the film does involve a symphonic score, and shows a group of helicopters flying toward a small Vietnamese village. This village is very natural, and seems like part of the environment. Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” plays in the background along with rotor noise. The scene contains a series of close-ups of the soldiers gearing up alternated with distant shots of the approaching helicopters. At one point in the scene, the camera cuts to the village, and there is silence except for the inaudible murmurings of the terrified villagers as they scamper in different directions. The music, along with the camera cuts, builds up suspense and the viewers’ sense of the impending doom, and the silent portion foreshadows what is to come. Following the silent section, fire and explosions obliterate the jungle below, and the soldiers land in a haze of smoke and a flurry of enemy fire.

Apocalypse Now is one of the only war films with a theme that leans toward any environmental basis (among other themes). One particularly famous scene is the acclaimed ‘napalm’ scene where Lt-Col Kilgore says to Willard: “You smell that? Do you smell that? Napalm, son. Nothing else in the world smells like that. I love the smell of napalm in the morning … The smell, you know that gasoline smell, smelled like… victory.” This is a good instance of the many ways that the film speaks out against man’s regression to utter savagery in war, and the annihilation of natural environment.

Enemy at the Gates

The film Enemy at the Gates takes place during the Second World War at the battle of Stalingrad. The main character is Vasily Zaitsev, a young Russian shepherd boy from the Urals. Upon being drafted into Russia’s Red Army, Vasily demonstrates an extraordinary talent for
marksmanship, and consequently becomes a propaganda icon. After being transferred to the sniper division, his effect on the German morale leads the enemy to import their most skilled sniper in an attempt to end the threat.

The city of Stalingrad has already been bombed into absolute oblivion at this point, and the battle between the two snipers is fought in an environment that is mechanized. Distant shots like the one below are used in the film to showcase the utter destruction and total absence of nature, which plays heavily on the emotions. The mood of despair is controlled by wide-angle shots of the devastation, in with the sounds of explosions, bullets, shouting, and screaming. This film is a prime example of man strategically shaping the environment to gain an advantage during the war. Nothing natural exists in the city anymore but small charred sticks that were once trees. Nature is never shown as beautiful or benevolent. But this is the environment that, as a sniper, Zaitsev has no choice but to work with. However, despite the lack of nature, the mechanized environment is still an environment.

The sniper is a very interesting character, because it is the sniper’s job to be stealthy and blend in with the environment. Without the environment, the sniper is seen and subsequently shot. So the environment, whether mechanized or natural, is the sniper’s saving grace, and thus the sniper must be part of the environment in order to move about undetected. In one scene in the film, Zaitsev is shown in a broken building, lying in a pile of debris, relatively invisible until he opens his eye and says “I am a stone, I am a stone.” This scene is a good example of how the sniper must actually be a part of the environment. Interestingly, the film is based on a book called War of the Rats. The life of a sniper is akin to that of a rat, creeping through broken, abandoned buildings, slinking through piles of rubble, skulking in the shadows, slithering through pipes, and jumping at the slightest noise. This is another analogy describing a sniper as one with the surrounding environment, unseen like a rat.

Aside from the heaps of rubble and broken down buildings, the sniper even finds cover in the piles and piles of dead bodies, which are also part of the environment. The constant pounding of bombs being dropped on the city from the planes above provide noise, which allow a sniper to fire his shots without being heard.
Thus, this film is a perfect example of how the mechanized environment can be portrayed visually just as effectively as a war fought in nature.

**Lawrence of Arabia**

*Lawrence of Arabia*, which claimed 7 Oscars in 1963, is set in the Arabian Desert during World War One. Private T.E. Lawrence, fighting for the British Army in the Middle East, is transferred from headquarters in Cairo to the Arabian Desert to unite the Arab tribes and lead them against the Turks. As the film progresses, the formerly bumbling, clumsy Lawrence metamorphoses and he begins to question his personal identity, violence in war, and his allegiance to Britain versus the Arabs. The desert terrain allows Lawrence and his band to employ guerilla warfare tactics effectively against the Turks. The surrounding environment parallels his regression from his refined, gentlemanly conduct with the British to primitive savagery with the Arabs.

Cinematographically, this film is a masterpiece. One character they do not formally introduce is the desert, which might have had more influence on the events than even Lawrence himself. The desert is ferocious, unpredictable, unforgiving, and deadly, but when Lawrence is asked why he likes the desert, he replies by saying “it’s clean.” So to Lawrence, the desert is serene, it’s unspoiled, above the war, and untamable. The Arabs are admirable because they are in tune with the desert. They don’t fight against it, but rather respect its power, and ally with it; a concept the British do not understand. The desert is portrayed very well through the use of sounds, music, and camera angles, particularly wide-angle shots.

Wide-angle shots are especially useful to portray the desert in this film because they help to convey a sense of its vastness and its dominance over man. These shots work in tandem with the symphonic musical score to have a great effect over mood. Scenes like this are shown repeatedly throughout the film to emphasize that nature is the omnipotent force, in control, not man.
Another powerful example is shown at the end of the film, where Lawrence and his companions ride directly into the raging fury of a gigantic sandstorm. The scene is dominated completely by the massive cloud of swirling, howling wind and dust that holds the travelers completely at its mercy, with the power to choose whether they live or die.

In addition to the desert environment, water is also portrayed to symbolize achievement, success, or victory. Nearly each instance of accomplishment in the film is followed by reward of water. Crossing a stretch of desert is rewarded with an oasis or well, capturing a city that was deemed impossible yields the Mediterranean Sea, the return to Cairo immediately earns lemonade, and when Lawrence gives his victory report to the general, their conversation takes place in a flowing fountain. So nature is also a reprieve.

Therefore, no matter how much artillery each side holds, nature controls man’s ultimate destiny. The environment can be benevolent in the way it helps Lawrence’s guerilla tactics. But the environment can be harsh and angry, at which point the characters have no choice but to leave their fates at the whim of the desert. Those who fail to properly respect the desert perish by it, but it is also a powerful ally.

Thin Red Line

The film Thin Red Line takes place during the Second World War on the island of Guadalcanal in the South Pacific Solomon Islands. This is a very interesting film for many reasons. For one there is really no main protagonist in the film. Instead, each character gets equal screen time. This helps the main premise of the film, which is to show the varying perspectives, opinions, and experiences of each of the characters. The meandering plot allows a very philosophical, insightful look at war from a variety of different viewpoints. However, the plot is not the most important part of this film.

Malick’s fantastic visual poetry, even more than intrigue, makes this film brilliant. The effective use of imagery in the film helps convey a message that war is natural, that forces of conflict exist everywhere, even outside of the war. Contrasting the violence of war with the serenity of nature, and superimposing tranquility over destruction accomplish this. This also helps ground a scene in reality. There are dozens of examples of heated battle scenes in which
the camera will abruptly cut from the fighting to focus on some element of nature, and then jump right back into the heat of battle. This technique amplifies the destruction and also conveys the idea that war is a natural state. For example, in one intermediary scene, the shot cuts to a flock of birds circling around in the sky. Other times battle scenes cut to the shots of a tree, a parrot, some grass waving in the wind, a baby bird, and a snake. Another technique used to convey the idea of war being natural is to show images of ‘violent acts’ in the natural environment, for example, a crocodile, and a close-up of a tree being choked by a vine. Malick’s clever imagery conveys the premise that a war is not at all separate from the environment in which it is fought.

One interesting character is Private Witt, who begins the movie apparently AWOL, living with a native tribe. He is a very insightful, philosophical character. He is eventually taken back to the war that he previously lost enthusiasm in, but returns to the tribe a second time. He initially thinks he has “seen another world” until he realizes the people of the native tribe also fight among themselves, as well as suffer from diseases. The collection of proudly displayed skulls attests to that. Witt is a testament to the portrayal of nature as a reprieve, frequently relishing the beauty of nature, and the bliss that the environment brings by providing an absence of combat. Witt also brings up the idea of war causing humans to regress into savagery when he says “War don’t ennoble men, it turns ‘em into dogs...poisons the soul.”

So while Thin Red Line may be difficult to follow, because the audience must derive its own conclusions based on the images displayed and the obscure nature of the narrative, the film ultimately proves at the end that it is possible for humanity to resist urges to destroy ourselves. Much like in the natural world where although instances of violence do occur, it is possible for peace and beauty to exist. This film delves deeply into how mankind is a part of nature, and that humans are natural beings. As natural beings, we have the capability to thrive even in situations that are treacherous and unforgiving. While many lives are claimed in Thin Red Line, and bodies pile up among Guadalcanal’s serene sea of grassy hillocks, some men live, proving that we as humans possess the grim resolve to survive in hostile conditions.

Platoon
Director Oliver Stone certainly synthesized a fantastic piece of filmmaking in the motion picture *Platoon*. The story follows an infantry platoon in the US Army during the Vietnam War. The Platoon consists of 30 men, all armed with M-16’s, grenades, and big egos, and most of them are at least partially insane. The protagonist is Private Chris Taylor, who comes from a typical upper-middle class family. Feeling that it is unfair that rich kids like him get exempted from service, he drops out of college and volunteers for the infantry. The plot follows the operations of the platoon and shows how the men change as the war progresses. Taylor struggles with morality as the two platoon leaders vie for power: the ethical, compassionate Sgt. Elias; and the ruthless, evil Staff Sgt. Barnes.

The film itself does not showcase environmental destruction as much as other war films, but does portray how the environment is exploited in war, though it is not necessarily ‘shaped’ or ‘sculpted’ to man’s advantage as much as it is portrayed in other films. *Platoon* does not contain very many attritional or overly strategic battles, mostly ambushes because in the jungles of Vietnam, ambushing is one of the more effective forms of attack. In this type of war the environment plays a large part in dictating strategy. Close shots help to portray this in a big way; for example, they are used effectively in a shot of Taylor digging a foxhole, or another clip of the platoon marching along a beaten path, where only the boots and the dirt are shown. The environment dictates strategy more than strategy dictates the environment.

One excellent example of nature used as a reprieve is the famed quote from Sgt. Elias: “I love this place at night. The stars, there’s no right or wrong in them. They’re just there. This demonstrates that to soldiers the sky, the moon, a tree or a flower can offer a respite from conflict and destruction. Ironically, by the same token, the tree that a soldier is having spiritual connections can be holding an enemy VC who can jump out and shoot at any moment. So though nature offers a lull from fighting, it is a false reprieve, a misleading deception, because war does not stop for a tree.

The film contains a great deal of graphic violence, which does engage the audience’s emotions. However, rather than empathy or compassion, horror is experienced. The vivid
imagery of atrocities and war crimes committed really engage the audience and evoke strong feelings in the audience.

The main theme of the film basically shows the audience that as man, we have a primordial urge to kill each other. The regression of the soldier to a feral, primitive state is exemplified in this infantry platoon when the majority of the soldiers go crazy. This is a common occurrence in many war films. Platoon is one of the best portrayals of combat in a jungle environment and it effectively outlines man’s gradual descent into savagery as the jungle tightens its grip on the human soul.

Windtalkers

The film Windtalkers takes place during WWII, with the US Army invading the island of Saipan. The Americans have developed a new code based on the Navajo language. The story follows two Navajo code-talkers in the Marines, Ben Yahzee and Charlie Whitehorse, who come from the Four Corners area of the USA. Each code-talker is assigned to an officer for protection of the code (not the code-talker), and Yahzee gets paired up with disenchanted, shell-shocked Sergeant Joe Enders, played by a slightly miscast Nicholas Cage. The Navajo code was never broken, and was instrumental to victories in the Pacific Theatre for the Americans.

Although the film was rhetorically mild in some aspects, much can be said about the effective use of sound and music. Like most war films, Windtalkers really engages the pathos of the audience. The mood of a scene is affected greatly by the sounds and music used. An effective technique that recurs throughout the film is the use of dominating sound effects along with slow-motion close-ups. For example, a shot of a Japanese soldier writhing in slow-motion agony while being riddled with bullets, the sole focus being his audible screams of excruciating pain. Another example is a shot of smoldering forests, accompanied by the deafening sounds of explosions. One of the major characters carries a flamethrower, which basically epitomizes destruction. The jet of flame the weapon emits cuts a swath of devastation before it, torching trees, machines, fortifications, and human beings. This strong imagery is in tandem combined with the sounds of flames and screaming are followed by a poignant instrumental score which really evokes strong emotions from the viewer.
Also, there is an interesting contrast between the home front and the island of Saipan. Consider the shot below. A bright, beautiful, blue sky, dotted by a couple of clouds, the sun is shining, and the ocean stretches for miles. This is a peaceful picture. At home, nature is striking and serene, where at war the environment is destroyed, smoldering, full of enemies, and generally an obstacle that must be conquered.

The Navajo are wonderful characters: very spiritual, reflective, and attuned to the environment despite the savagery of the wartime devastation. This is an interesting point that the film makes because throughout the film, the Navajo are always referred to as the ‘savages’ by their ignorant comrades. There is an excellent contrast between the war and the end of the film which is set in Yahzee’s home where he conducts a memorial ceremony under a peaceful, picturesque blue sky dotted with clouds and mesas. This scene also evokes pathos and concludes the film perfectly by providing a balance between peace and conflict. Thus, Windtalkers is an excellent film that is full of emotion, and may have only been deemed a box-office failure because it had followed the films Saving Private Ryan or Thin Red Line.

Genre Summary

In what was formerly a very narrow genre of film, the evolution of the war movie has led to an enhanced portrayal of the world war is fought in, although the concept of the environment itself is generally an ambiguous concept within the genre. It is very common for films of this genre to take a stance as anti-war or pro-war, but for the most part, sociopolitical messages directly relating to the environment and environmental issues are absent; nothing that overtly says “save the whales” or “free the trees” or “stop pollution” like in many other genres. However, the war genre is unique in how the environment is portrayed. While war films lack a stance on environmental issues, they do include a very distinct and interesting depiction of the environment, which is sometimes difficult to identify. Nature is an integral part of war films, and is used very well to help develop characters and represent important themes. Using the films Apocalypse Now, Enemy at the Gates, Lawrence of Arabia, Platoon, Thin Red Line, and Windtalkers as a case study, this essay will demonstrate how the war genre effectively uses the
wartime environment to reflect man’s degeneration to savagery, to contrast against destruction, and to depict ways that in conflict, nature controls man and vice versa.

A common theme in war films is how war causes man to regress to a ruthless, inhumane, bloodthirsty, primitive state. Applied in most war films, this technique uses a passive individual as the protagonist; one who is unfit for combat and obviously out of place in the war, but then slowly descends into barbarism as the environment slowly tightens its grip on the soul. This trend is exemplified perfectly by the main characters in each of the aforementioned films, but especially Lawrence of Arabia and Apocalypse Now. Interestingly, the character’s metamorphosis or degeneration is reflected by activity in the environment. Excellent metaphors for this are the desert in Lawrence of Arabia and the jungle in Apocalypse Now. The desert is a perfect environment to reflect the transition the Pvt. Lawrence goes through, and the journey through the desert environment in the film parallels the change in Lawrence’s personality. The desert is quiet and peaceful in the beginning of the film, but as the war intensifies, and as Lawrence becomes wilder, angrier, the desert too starts to be shown as furious, hostile, violent, and deadly. Fierce winds, dust, and angry sandstorms are all images to represent the internal workings of Lawrence as he transforms. Perhaps the best example of mankind’s perversion in war is Apocalypse Now, where the jungle, totally reflects the nature of the soldiers. As Cpt. Willard travels upriver to find Col. Kurtz, who has become insane and begun to commit atrocities, Willard himself begins to turn crazy as well. Willard’s journey through the jungle is strange and twisted. He encounters soldiers who have been abandoned by the US Army, left to fight for their lives. With no commanding officers, they just run amok through the jungle, often shooting at nothing at all, just firing into the darkness. The further upriver he goes the more he finds the situation to be increasingly desperate and anarchic, and the soldiers more wild and insane. The word rage, though it expresses a loss of self-control does not quite explain the nature of these soldiers, fury is better description, conveying a destructive, wild state bordering on madness. The jungle epitomizes ‘the horror’: the feral, savage disposition of these men that is dark, mysterious, bizarre, and almost surreal, and in addition to the war, the jungle itself claims many lives, and corrupts the souls of many others. Thus, while in war films men suffer a downward spiral into the primeval symbolized by the environment they are fighting in. Pvt. Witt
in *Thin Red Line* describes it best when he says “war don’t ennable men, it turns ‘em into dogs… poisons the soul.”

Another effective portrayal of nature in war films is to contrast it against destruction. This is accomplished by interspersing serene natural images with the utter chaos and destruction of the war. This use of contrast conveys the magnitude of the annihilation, but also evokes strong emotion from the audience more than if the scene were shown without the natural elements. In the film *Windtalkers*, the battlefront on Saipan contrasts interestingly with the home front, specifically the Navajo territory in the Four Corners area of the USA. A Navajo from the area, Pvt. Ben Yahzee, is launched suddenly from a beautiful, sparsely populated, isolated area into the overwhelming chaos of war. The stark contrast between the two areas is a great source of pathos, generating empathy for Yahzee and despair at the utter destruction and violence on Saipan. In the same way that the two environments contrast, Yahzee contrasts with the other American soldiers; he is very spiritual, peaceful, and reserved, but is swiftly immersed among egomaniacal warmongers. This showcases the horror of war well. But probably the best example of natural imagery in any war film is director Terence Malick’s visual poetry in *Thin Red Line*, which shows dozens of examples where tranquility is superimposed into devastation. One particularly powerful scene involves a hill of long grass waving in the breeze, with bullets flying over the grass, and explosions in the background. Men are dying everywhere, but in the middle of the scene the film cuts to the image of a baby bird covered in mud, staggering around struggling to walk. This imagery very powerfully contrasts conflict with nature, and works largely on the pathos of the audience as well. Other similar cuts in the film include images of a flock of birds, a parrot, a snake, and a tree. In war films the use of contrast between nature and violence not only controls the mood, but it can also ground a scene in reality and provide a scale to measure devastation.

One of the most common portrayals of nature in war films is the relationship between man and the environment. Frequently nature is a casualty of war as it is caught in the crossfire, but just as often nature can dominate man in the war, environment can dictate strategy and claim lives. Amidst the utter chaos and devastation of war, the environment can be totally decimated by man, as soldiers dig trenches, build fortifications, set up mines, and furiously bomb the
territory, all in order to shape the environment to some strategic advantage. This is the case in most war movies, especially in Vietnam War films like Apocalypse Now and Platoon where napalm and Agent Orange were used rampantly in an attempt to force the jungle into submission. But by the same token, just as man dominates nature, often the opposite can be the case as well. Nature can bring cold weather which numbs fingers or jams guns, fierce seas can destroy convoys of ships before the troops even reach the front, or miles of mud can suck men down to their deaths. For example, in Lawrence of Arabia, the desert can swallow whole armies with its vastness, can kick up violent sandstorms, conjure large areas of quicksand, or simply let you die of thirst. Another interesting case is in Enemy at the Gates, where although Stalingrad has been bombed completely to rubble, and the environment dictates strategy as the snipers must crawl through debris, hide in rubble, and basically live like rats. The environment makes the ultimate decision whether the sniper lives or dies; a friendly shard of glass, a piece of brick wall, even a pile of dead bodies can often be the only thing that separates the sniper from life and a bullet in the forehead. Therefore, while soldiers often use nature to work to their strategic advantage during the war situation, nature acts as a third party that is sometimes benevolent and helpful, other times vengeful and angry.

Thus, while war films may not contain environmental themes or overt messages about environmental issues, they are not absent from the genre. Through a thorough analysis of the war genre, it is apparent that the portrayal of nature is an integral part of these films, helping develop characters, control mood, display imagery, and more often than not, develop an extra character in the film. In any case, nature in war films is not something to be taken lightly; to have nature as an ally is to have victory.
Discussion

The goal in watching these twenty-four movies was to identify the popular messages concerning the environment in recent films and specific genres of film, as well as determine the important elements in making a rhetorical argument in this medium. After reviewing each film’s analysis four main themes were found to recur throughout, and as expected, there were common opinions about the environment found within each genre. The four main themes in all films were the anthropomorphism of nature, the omnipotence of nature, current sociopolitical arguments and opinions, and humanity as a destroyer.

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics, behaviour or form to anything that is not human. Similar to the way a man may call his Miata ‘his baby’, elements in nature are said to carry out human actions: winds howl, waters rage, the sun beats down on us, etc. In films, however, nature is not merely described like a human would be, elements in nature become characters. This is most evident in children’s films. Out of all six children’s movies watched only Disney and Pixar’s Cars did not include talking animals as the main characters, instead automobiles spoke in their place. The others included anything from talking fish to talking mammoths. However, anthropomorphism is not limited to talking animals or trees. Consider most disaster films. Although there may be a human antagonist that must be defeated, the main conflict is usually a terrible storm, drought, or freezing temperatures. Without nature there is no plot because it is a main character. Similarly, the environment plays an important role in war films, sometimes as a third enemy that both armies must battle against, or as an ally that can help if cooperated with, like the sniper must do in Enemy at the Gates.
The omnipotence of nature is a theme in most stories because it is and has been a reality for humans since the creation of the earth. On one hand the environment has the power take people’s breath away, and in a much less beautiful fashion it can put an end to lives and ruin all of the things mankind works so hard to manufacture and protect. Humans being powerless against nature is a fact, thus making it is impossible for this theme not to be included in films. Nonetheless, because it is assumed, viewers rarely take note of the fact that human characters are forced to accommodate nature, and the cooperation is never forced the other way around. Still, this theme is always obvious in Disaster films. The contrast between nature’s good and bad omnipotence is seen in The Perfect Storm. The main characters are fisherman and, therefore, completely depend on the environment to support their families and themselves. Unfortunately, the sea they rely on becomes their watery grave. Another excellent example of this is found in Alive: Miracle of the Andes in which the main characters begin the movie acknowledging and admiring snowcapped mountains, unaware that they would struggle to survive on those same mountains later on because of their cruel conditions. Some even lose the battle. Less evident examples from other genres include Baraka’s argument that dwelling amidst nature can result in a more harmonious lifestyle, the unpredictable and dangerous desert environment in Lawrence of Arabia that also helps Lawrence execute war tactics, and the instances that demonstrate how the ocean can help or hinder the mission of a tiny fish in Finding Nemo.

A recent trend in Hollywood is the inclusion of environment-related sociopolitical opinions as themes in films. This is due entirely to the negative consequences of common lifestyles today that continue to be discovered. Basically people have realized that the systems and inventions created to increase standards of living have backfired severely, and the damage must at least cease if not be reversed. This is a serious issue that has forced the revision of government and corporate policies across the globe, and has obviously attracted attention from the media. An Inconvenient Truth is a documentary that was produced to enlighten audiences of the frightening effects mankind’s pollution has caused. As well, the goal of The Corporation is to reveal that corporations as legal entities are psychopaths: emotionless killers and destroyers. A documentary is informative, and is designed to send a particular, shamelessly biased message so
it is no surprise that some films of this genre directly address this topic. What is incredible is where else related arguments are being made.

In the same way that sociopolitical themes are becoming increasingly common, more and more films are blaming mankind for being so destructive. This is a theme in itself, but also argues in light of sociopolitical debates. The Day After Tomorrow is a special Disaster film because nature’s fury within the plot is a result of man’s ignorance. Global warming causes quick and unforeseen climate changes that devastate the earth, sending the message to audiences that drastic measures must be taken to address this problem. Even more surprising, is that these issues are the focus of Children’s Films. Shrek, Over the Hedge, Ice Age: The Meltdown, and Cars deal directly with global warming, man’s lack of appreciation for the environment, and loss of green space for the construction of cities and suburbia. Unlike sociopolitical themes, humanity as a destroyer has been a focus of films for a very long time. The main difference being that previously individuals have been instructed to respect the environment more in the process of its exploitation. Because the problem has gotten out of hand, films are now pleading with governments to take serious action. Sociopolitical themes, as well as mankind’s destructive nature, have only recently become so common and will only continue to gain prevalence in film. This is proof that the current issues the world deals with will always find a place in Hollywood.

The four themes that have been discussed recurred in almost each movie watched in some way. Still, within each genre there were other specific ideas that dominated rhetorical arguments.
Documentaries are appeals made through the medium of film, and are, therefore, blatantly persuasive. They pitch ideas, facts, and rebuttals boldly, which allows them to include a lot more information supporting their cause. They are primarily informative, and when it comes to the environment they commonly include themes that debate the extent to which mankind should protect or exploit the environment, exemplified in An Inconvenient Truth and The Corporation, or discuss whether the environment is more sacred, like in Baraka, or destructive, like in Tsunami: Wave of Destruction. There are basically two arguments: one that concerns the way mankind treats the environment, and the other concerning the importance of the environment to us.

Typically documentaries aim to influence masses of people and create big changes. In contrast to this, children’s films are designed to teach individuals lessons that will change them internally and raise moral standards. This is because children are still dependent on their parents, are still growing, and are still very impressionable. As well, although children aren’t the only audience of children’s films, it is easy to see why these types of themes would gain the approval of caring parents. In fact one of the two most popular themes in children’s films is the importance of family. Parents enable children to watch movies and are obviously impressed when a film, such as Finding Nemo, teaches their kids to love their parents or siblings more. Therefore, the importance of family is almost always a successful theme for a children’s film. Secondly, children’s films deter viewers from materialism. Because humans are selfish and have unlimited wants, people can never be told too often or too early that ‘stuff’ can’t make people happy. Again, most parents want their children to watch movies that
promote noble ambitions, as opposed to greedy ones. The plot of the very recent movie, *Cars*, exemplifies this, as a superstar car realizes that friendship is more satisfying than fame and riches.

Children’s films often convince children to follow their dreams, and tell them they can do anything they put their minds to. Countering those messages are the themes found within disaster films, all of which humble audiences and encourage mankind to understand their place in the environment. To clarify, disaster films do not mean to diminish the importance of people or social networks. Love stories, human strength, and friendship are highlighted by the struggles endured in each tragedy. Prevalent themes are the importance of relationships, and that the power of a person’s will can be great. In *The Perfect Storm*, the fishermen lose their lives, but in *10.5: Apocalypse*, *Alive: Miracle of the Andes*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Twister*, and *Dante’s Peak* humans survive, and the battle reveals to them their own strengths and strengthens their relationships with others. At the same time, in most disaster films people often die because the main message is that humans are still powerless in some fights with nature. Regardless of someone’s strength, sometimes forces in the environment are humanly impossible to withstand. This is not meant to discourage people, but humble them so that they will render their respect to the untamable environment that we exploit and live within.

Out of all the genres studied, war films best exemplify mankind’s relationship with nature, as war after war soldiers cooperate with and struggle against it. The environment has the potential to be man’s best ally or greatest opposition, and that decision is out of man’s hands. More than this however, war films use the environment to emphasize the pathos appealing arguments they present: most commonly emphasizing changes in people, and the destruction caused by war. In *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lawrence’s growing violence and hostility is paralleled by the dangerous sandstorms that develop in the desert that began the movie peaceful. Captain Willard is sent to look for Colonel Kurts in *Apocalypse Now*, and both end up going mad because of the primitive jungle environment they are in. This doesn’t just make an argument about environments, but human nature as well. Even more, nature is effectively used in most war films to highlight the destruction war causes. Not only do audiences get to see once unhurt lands get torn apart, but in many cases beautiful or miraculous images found in nature are interspersed
throughout a film to contrast the unpleasant scenes of battle. The best example of this is found in *Thin Red Line* in a scene that features a hill. On the hill long grasses blow in the wind as bullets fly overhead and explosions are seen in the background. The audience can see men dying, and in the middle of the scene the film cuts to the image of a mud-covered baby bird struggling to even walk. The clip of the baby bird is crucial in giving the audience the necessary perspective to receive the messages being sent.

This study has determined the main environmental themes that are found within film, but the rhetors that deliver these messages to audiences deserve even more appreciation than the lessons that are taught. In every scene numerous messages are sent so effectively that they intrigue us, cause us to emote, convince us of facts, etc., and that is not by coincidence. Skill and creativity are employed to send strong rhetorical arguments that demand our attention.

The most dangerous, and certainly most ignorant, mindset a movie producer could ever have is that there is one right way to produce desired reactions from an audience. There are definitely foolproof strategies that cause audiences to emote or think in a particular way: triumphant music will always create a tone of victory, and black and white colour settings will always activate a sense of antiquity. However, producers cannot rely on these surefire techniques alone. They need creativity because although a strategy that is tried and true may always work, something new may work better. The construction of an exceptional film is dependent on discovering the best method for sending each and every rhetorical argument.

Finding the best method is directly dependent on the message being sent, and the other methods used throughout the entire film. It is not enough to know that an audience must feel sad
during a particular scene, why they must matters. This posed a challenge in analyzing the films because whatever message was received was evaluated, and no one but a film’s producer can know if it was the intended message. As well, because there is no correct way to portray an idea and the success of each technique depends on the situation, it is virtually impossible to make specific conclusions about sending particular messages. Comments can only be made about the reactions certain techniques induce, though in reality different combinations of techniques determine the effectiveness of a scene, and the arrangement of the combinations used throughout the entire production determine the success of the film. The decisions in composition that seem to have the most significance on delivering messages dealt with camera angles, lighting, sound and stylistics.

The camera ultimately determines what we see in any scene. More than this, however, camera angles determine what we focus on, and highlight different messages in different settings. When a camera is far away, a long shot can be established that allows more of the setting to be seen. This is not just for a better perspective about the character’s environment, this type of shot is often so that audiences can make a comparison between the subjects in the scene,
and the environment they are in. Figure 5 is a long shot from The Perfect Storm, which makes a statement about man’s inferiority to nature, as the boat is helplessly being consumed by a wave. Mid-range shots help to focus on the dialogues and events within a scene. They allow the bodies of characters involved to be seen, probably from the waste up, and the setting they are in to be recognizable as well. Close ups are primarily used to highlight details. Close ups of objects send us messages about textures, faults, etc., while a close up of a person allows us to focus much better on facial expressions and emotions. There are many interesting ways to incorporate these shots, but one especially notable camera angle involves shooting a scene from a characters’ perspective. This is a very effective way to make an audience feel like they’re really in the story.

Lighting plays an essential role in any film. It easily sets the mood for a scene, and often plays on the predetermined thoughts audiences have of light and dark. Light is generally associated with goodness and happiness, while darkness can evoke a gloomy, dangerous or mysterious tone. Figure 6 is a snapshot from Over the Hedge in which light makes a pathos and ethos-based argument about the how much better the grass is in this scene, and the trustworthiness of the grass. The way lights are used and move can also create a sense of excitement, tranquility or busyness. Finally, shadows are essential in highlighting detail. Light and shading are essential in emphasizing two-dimensional features: the beauty of a woman, or rough texture of the bark of a tree.

The importance of sound and music was made very obvious through this study. It was essential in setting tone or emphasizing pathos-based arguments. For example a war scene could be shown in silence, with the original sounds of explosions or gunfire, or to a soundtrack. Different soundtracks make very different statements. Continuing with the example of a battle scene, a clip could be accompanied with tranquil music that contrasts the madness that is being
shown, or to exciting, triumphant or furious sounding music that echoes the audience’s emotions about the fight. Sometimes it is appropriate just to have natural sounds. It allows the audience to make decisions about characters and the story on their own, and keeps scenes more natural. This is best for scenes that make strong and clear messages simply through the dialogue and events shown. Then of course, there is a soundtrack for every emotion, and adding appropriate music to a scene can more powerfully evoke emotions. The importance of sound is demonstrated in the following clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1I4Qs_k6p0.

Finally, creativity is essential in determining the style a scene or entire movie is edited in. For example, the order of events in a film can be rearranged so that the story is told as a past experience, a narrator’s comparison between past and present, a character’s dream, or someone’s present life. As well, scenes can be shot in black and white to show antiquity, film can be edited to look unprofessional and appear as a home video, and the options can go on and on.

With such a huge variety of choices, it is a wonder how filmmakers decide how to present a scene to send messages to us. Thankfully, audience members can trust that in most cases, messages are probably sent in the best way possible. The makers of popular films are masters in the art of sending rhetorical arguments through film, and are so passionate about their work that they know better than viewers do what they need to see and hear to be communicated with.
Conclusion

Movies induce emotions, create passions, and establish convictions within people. They send messages like many other media, but there is certainly no medium that can connect with audiences quite like film can. It is the ultimate storytelling vehicle of today. After examining twenty-four popular films for environmental themes and rhetorical techniques, the first conclusion that can be made is that movies are packed with messages. In a single scene numerous messages are being sent about people, where they are, what is happening, what the people do not know, etc., and as the list continues it only gets harder to evaluate rhetorical content. There were two main challenges in this study.

The first main challenge in studying rhetoric in film has already been alluded to, and that is that there are far too many messages in each film. This makes it almost impossible to identify all of the messages included, and very difficult for all to be dissected. This is a lengthy report, and, even so, the only messages specifically discussed have been the main themes in each film that are specifically concerned with the environment. An investigation that broke down each rhetorical argument made in twenty-four movies would undoubtedly result in more accurate and thorough conclusions. However, that would be a tedious job, and the results would remain similar to the conclusions of a less painstaking study such as this one.

Secondly, assumptions must be made. Investigators of rhetoric in film are not writers, producers or directors. They do not know what kind of tone a scene was meant to create or the specific feelings the audience was intended to feel. Ignorance only leaves investigators to assume that the messages received are the messages the rhetors meant to send. This is a tragic and unavoidable obstacle that prevents the identification of rhetorical flaws in film, which would lead to more accurate and applicable conclusions. Unfortunately, there is no way to reconcile this lack of knowledge.

In spite of the challenges faced, research and critical thinking has still allowed conclusions to be made. It has been determined that the anthropomorphism of nature as well as its omnipotence are environmental themes that will always find their way in film. Nature is not
boring. It is lively and powerful, and this makes it easy for humans to relate to it through anthropomorphism, and recognize its control over mankind. Because audiences grasp these concepts and nature will never cease to be active, these are timeless messages.

As well, due to the dangers our world now faces because of pollution, wastefulness, and ignorance, mankind’s concern for the environment will be argued in films more and more. People have always exploited the environment and this reality has always been present in films, but recent events have increased the seriousness and prevalence of sociopolitical arguments and themes that present mankind as destructive in every medium. Film is no exception.

There were also environmental themes that accompanied each genre based on the nature of each type. The content normally featured, the audience to be reached, and the types of arguments each genre typically presents determined the messages to be sent: Documentaries logically discuss man’s treatment of the environment (exploitation or protection) and the environment’s significance to man (sacred or destructive); Children’s Films stress the importance of family and discourage materialism; Disaster films demand the fear and respect of the environment; and War Films express the help or hinder relationship man has with nature, and the similarities of the environment to man.

Finally, determining the main themes in popular films today, has allowed the rhetorical components of film to be recognized and evaluated. Messages in film are primarily determined by camera shots, lighting, sound, and stylistics.

Camera shots are important because they determine the perspective from which the audience watches, what people see, and what the focus of the scene is. Long shots place characters in perspective; mid-range shots concentrate attention on dialogue and events; close-ups highlight details and emotions; and angles determine the audiences view, which in turn effects their involvement in the film.
Lighting is used to illuminate and establish setting, but it can also make pathos and ethos based arguments when light and dark are paralleled with good and bad. Lighting decisions set the tone of a scene, while shade along with light is needed to reveal depth and beauty.

Sound and music influence the way images are perceived. Producers can use sound effects, soundtracks or silence to modify the feelings instigated by visual arguments.

Directors, producers and editors have the most freedom when it comes to style. Stylistics determines how a story is told and also help set the tone in scenes. There are far too many style options to discuss, but to name a few, editors can play with the order of events in a film, exposure, colour usage (tints, black and white), etc.

It is not easy to command the attention and interest of an audience for the length of time a film does, but rhetors in the movie-making business are successful because they are committed to it. Different methods and techniques can be discussed to know end, but the key component to persuasion in film is a studio determined to send a message in the best way so that audiences receive nothing short of a brilliant lesson and story.
Works Cited


