MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Racing Rhetoric: A Burkean Analysis of Ecodocumentary Rhetoric

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The Major Research Paper is submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Professional Communication

Ryerson University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

9/12/2015

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Abstract

Ecodocumentary films such as <u>The Cove</u>, <u>An Inconvenient Truth</u>, and <u>Sharkwater</u> have demonstrated the power to influence audience behavior, establish public discourses, and inspire social change. This MRP explores promotional videos for a new ecodocumentary, <u>Racing Extinction</u> (Psihoyos, 2015), which explores the possibility of a sixth mass extinction of species, and what humans may be able to do to stop it. As such, this MRP attempts to discover more about the persuasive process, audience engagement, and how ecodocumentaries can work to enact social change. Using the Burkean concepts of dramatism, guilt-purification-redemption, and identification, this research analyzes the rhetoric of three promotional videos by assessing their dramatistic elements, how audiences may identify with the narratives therein and, to make a statement about their motives. The three videos have been selected to both exemplify the language of the filmmakers, and represent their two distinct objectives: to sell tickets, and to create social change. This research provides an examination of the persuasive tools used by the <u>Racing Extinction</u> filmmakers, and an overview of the levels of audience engagement online. For Burkean scholars, this research begins to fill key gaps in analyzed content. Through analyzing the promotional content for <u>Racing Extinction</u>, I seek to improve the scholarly understanding of the persuasive processes associated with ecodocumentary rhetoric.

Keywords: Ecodocumentary, rhetoric, Kenneth Burke, environment, dramatism

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Documentary films such as <u>The Cove</u> (Psihoyos, 2009), <u>Sharkwater</u> (Stewart, 2002) and

<u>An Inconvenient Truth</u> (Guggenheim, 2006) have been recognized for having an ability to create

behavioral change and transform audiences into advocates for the environmental causes

presented in the films (Lamar, 2013, pg. 1; Hackley, 2012, pg. 5). These environmental

documentaries (or ecodocumentaries) are powerful forms of rhetorical communication which use

storytelling as a way to persuade and inform audiences. Narrative has been historically used as a

tool of persuasion (Fisher, 1989), especially within the genre of documentary film making. For

example, the political documentary <u>Triumph of the Will</u> (Riefenstahl, 1935) follows the story of

a 1934 Nazi rally, and is often considered one of the most effective pieces of propaganda of all

time (Nichols, 2001). These narratives are of significant interest to communications scholars as

documentaries often communicate messages that effectively encourage social change, often

while exposing the realities of the world (Hackley, 2012, pg.5). Relying on the identifiable

narratives to draw audiences in, documentaries such as <u>The Cove</u>, which exposes an inhumane

dolphin farm, and <u>An Inconvenient Truth</u>, which exposes unstainable human-environment

interactions, can create movements for social change within society (Hackley, 2012, pg. 5).

The creators of a 2015 documentary, <u>Racing Extinction</u> (Psihoyos, 2015), share similar

goals. The film claims to "expose the hidden world of extinction with never-before-seen images

that will change the way we see the planet", and seeks to inspire social change in order to

prevent what the filmmakers call, the "sixth mass extinction" (racingextinction.com). The

Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS) are the filmmakers responsible for <u>Racing Extinction</u> and

are best known for their previous film <u>The Cove</u>. Although <u>The Cove</u> has been hailed for its

ability to create awareness for a little known issue (dolphin slaughter), it has also been criticized

for its inability to motivate audiences to take actual action in preventing the issues highlighted by

the film (Lamar, 2013). The OPS claims to have much larger ambitions for Racing Extinction,

which is set to be released in December 2015 ("Racing Extinction Director's Statement).

Subsequently, the filmmakers have released over 18 online promotional videos for the film.

These videos range from exciting trailers to informative mini-documentaries which address very

specific environmental issues. Rhetorically, these videos are compelling because they seemingly

contain two distinct objectives: (1) to sell tickets to the final film, and (2) to create a movement

which will "change the world" (racingextinction.com). In this project I would like to gather

insight into the ability of ecodocumentary promotional videos to transform a viewer into an

advocate for the cause of the film. Through analyzing the promotional content for Racing

Extinction, I seek to improve the scholarly understanding of the persuasive processes associated

with ecodocumentary rhetoric.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecodocumentary

Documentaries "give a sense of what we understand about reality itself to have been, of

what is now, or of what may become" (Nichols, 2001, pg. 2). These 'tangible representations' of

reality can be viewed as powerful forms of rhetorical communication designed to influence the

decision making process of audiences (Schoen, 2012, pg. 6). In the case of environmental

documentaries (ecodocumentaries) such as The Cove (Psihoyos, 2009), Sharkwater (Stewart,

2002), An Inconvenient Truth (Guggenheim, 2006), or Racing Extinction (Psihoyos, 2015),

narratives work to expose issues concerning human-environment interactions (Schoen, 2012, pg.

6; Lamar, 2013, pg. 1; Hackley, 2012, pg. 5). Ecodocumentaries overtly strive to "inspire

personal and political action on the part of the viewers, stimulating their thinking so as to bring

concrete changes in the choices we make…as individuals and societies" (Willoquet-Maricondi,

2010, pg. 45). However, despite this aspiration the actual action taken by audiences often falls

short of the filmmakers intended goals (Selheim, 2013; Galloway et al, 2007; Whiteman, 2009).

For example, An Inconvenient Truth, which created significant public concern for climate

changed, failed to achieve the reforms outlined in the film, including a CO_2 cap and trade system

(Rohner, 2013). The successes and failures of documentaries to motivate action, on the part of

audience members, has been well studied, often on a case specific basis.

     The successes of documentaries to persuade audiences is often witnessed through their

ability to set the agenda for advocacy communities, leading to greater prominence of an issue

within public policy debates (Whiteman, 2009, pg. 473). Films such as an Inconvenient Truth

(Guggenheim, 2006), which influenced the climate change debate, and Kony 2012 (Invisible

Children, 2012), which directed public attention towards African war criminal Joseph Kony

(Briones et al, 2013), are some of the more prominent documentaries to demonstrate this

capability. Turner (1999) emphasizes that the power of films to organize communities around a

particular topic is representative of narrative being an essential social function. While

ecodocumentaries have often been successful at increasing public awareness and concern for the

issues in the film (Leiserowitz, 2004), they rarely achieve the level of social change the

filmmakers aspire to achieve.

     The failures of documentaries are also well noted within film scholarship. For example

Selheim (2013) notes that filmmakers of The Cove assumed that its audience would take action,

but a lack of meaningful audience connections outside the movie experience, and a narrative that

segregates the communities the film seeks to change, caused it to fall short of its goal (Selheim,

2013, pg. 135-136). Selheim (2013) claims that filmmakers of <u>The Cove</u> provided few tools for audiences to actually engage with the issues (pg. 136). Despite the OPS claiming that their social media following was a success of the film (<u>www.opsociety.org</u>), Selheim (2013) argues that they failed to use the internet to its full potential, causing a failure to form advocacy communities. Conversely, <u>Kony 2012</u> (Invisible Children, 2012), which provided audiences with a vast array of social media and web 2.0 tools, opened the filmmakers up to criticisms which drew audiences out of the narrative and took away from the films intended goal (Briones et al, 2013).

Renov (1993) notes four fundamental modalities that apply to the goals of all documentary films (1) to record, reveal, or preserve (2) to persuade or promote (3) to analyze or interrogate (4) to express (pg. 21). Persuasion in particular, which Renov (1993) considers the dominant trope for documentaries, is driven by narratives built around the 'truth claim' (which says "believe me, I'm of the world") (pg.30). This 'truth claim' is reliant on the implication of what narrative theorist Fisher (1984) would call 'good reasons' that are driven by emotional engagement with content. Documentaries engage our emotions in a way that stimulates active responses (Lamar, 2013, pg. 17) and "transform the unacknowledged questions … into potential subject matter" (Renov, 1993, pg. 31). Through understanding the capabilities of narrative as a tool of rhetoric, it is possible to begin understanding and analyzing the persuasive power of the ecodocumentary.

Narrative Theory

Ecodocumentaries rely narratives in order to draw audiences in and advance their goals of audience persuasion. Narrative theory is widely applied to anything from online advertising (Ching et al, 2013) to the role of narrative as a paradigm for all human communication (Fisher,

1984). Turner (1995) notes that the role narrative plays in the success of film is equated to two possibilities: (1) narrative is a property of the human mind, such as language; and (2) narrative serves an essential social function (pg. 102). Although narrative is common to all cultures (Turner, 1995, pg. 99) the cinematic tropes a documentary (or film for that matter) abides by can vary significantly. In the case of The Cove, Selheim (2013) claims the filmmakers leveraged the Hollywood Thriller trope. North American audiences were familiar with this style of narrative, and were more easily drawn into the story of the film. Japanese audiences, however, were not familiar with the trope which hindered the success of the film in the very community it sought to change (Selheim, 2013). Lack of a familiar narrative structure can hinder the ability of audiences to construct 'good reasons' to take action as the result of viewership.

Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm presupposing five concepts: (1) Humans are essentially story tellers; (2) Human decision-making is reliant on "good reasons" which vary in form; (3) The production and practice of good reasons is contextual; (4) rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings; and (5) the world is a set of stories (Fisher, 1984, pgs. 7-8). Through this paradigm Fisher (1984) examines the possibility that narrative is far more effective at influencing action than that of 'traditional rationality' (i.e. arguments built on facts, statistics, and logic). Fisher's concepts have gone on to be applied to several fields of study including communications and advertising.

In advertising, narrative rhetoric has been shown to create high emotional responses in audiences, which are likely to influence decision making processes (Ching et al, 2013; Ling & Chan, 2013). In contrast to traditional rationality, narratives allows audiences to become "lost in the story and experience the concerns and feelings of the characters"(Deighton et al, 1989, pg. 335). Kirkwood (1992), in an analysis of Fischer's paradigm, calls narrative 'the rhetoric of

possibilities' (pg. 33) attributing its persuasive ability to the ability of audiences to be drawn into

a story. More specifically, an audience's ability to identify with the 'language' of the narrative

convinces them that the possibilities of a story are within their grasp (Kirkwood, 1992, pg. 33).

The effectiveness of this has been witnessed in advertising studies which have found consumers

who experience narrative transportation "perform less critical evaluations of facts and arguments,

produce fewer counter-arguments, and report more positive overall responses, including

favorable attitudes towards the advertisement" (Chang, 2009: as cited by Ching et al, 2013, pg.

415). Advertising has found narratives to be particularly effective when attempting to change

consumer beliefs towards a brand but less effective in directing very specific behavioral action

(Ching et al, 2013, pg. 415). Notably, this is reflective of the successes of some documentaries,

which have influenced public discourses heavily, but failed to create audience action.

Kenneth Burke

In principle, narrative theory can be attributed to the foundation of rhetoric and

communication laid out by early philosophers such as Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas

(explored by Burke 1969a; Burke, 1969a; Fisher, 1989; Foss et al, 2014). However most modern

scholarship on narrative, and the analysis of rhetoric through the lens of narrative, is a result of

the framework developed by Kenneth Burke. Recognized as a prominent 20th century thinker,

Kenneth Burke is a specialist in symbolic action, with much of his work focusing on "language

and its nature, functions, and consequences" (Foss et al, 2014, pg. 189). The term 'language' is

used by Burke to describe any symbolic action which contains meaning, including but not

limited to, images, sounds and words. Language is the primary mode of provoking human action

and, rather than a way of conveying information, can be considered a mode of action (Burke,

1969b, pg. xvi). Language can also be leveraged to symbolically inspire action between individuals, this is often regarded as 'the art of persuasion', or rhetoric. Rhetoric, as it is described by Burke (1969b), is "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (pg. 41). The prevalence and emphasis on symbols within Burke's work culminate in his 'definition of man' in which he defines humans as the "symbol-making, symbol-using, symbol-misusing animal" (pg. 16). By this understanding, symbolism is an integral part of the persuasive process, by which an individual's response to language (symbolic action) may heavily influence personal and even societal behavior.

Burke's framework has been used to analyze and construct rhetoric in a wide range of academic disciplines, and has been regarded as an effective tool to provide analysis of the language within modern documentaries (Schoen, 2012, pg. 40). Notably, Burke's theory "suggests that the dramatic structure of a text implicitly works to seek the identification of the audience, so the text will be rhetorically organized to achieve this" (Schoen, 2012, pg. 44). Using the framework of Burke's concepts allows this research to look closely at the processes by which audiences are persuaded, and the motives of the rhetors responsible. Of significant interest to this research is that Burke allows us to how ecodocumentary audiences are persuaded to take action, and how they decide what type of action to take.

Dramatism

In order to effectively analyze language as a form of action, Burke (1969b) developed dramatism, a concept which seeks to answer "what is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?"(pg. xv). Dramatism suggests that human motivation can be revealed through an analysis of drama, which can be simplified into a pentad of key terms: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose (Burke, 1969b, pg. xv). The relationship (or ratios) between

these terms reveals both the foundation of rhetoric and the human motivations behind it. Burke

(1969b) claims to use the pentad for its simplicity, defining each term as follows (pg. xv):

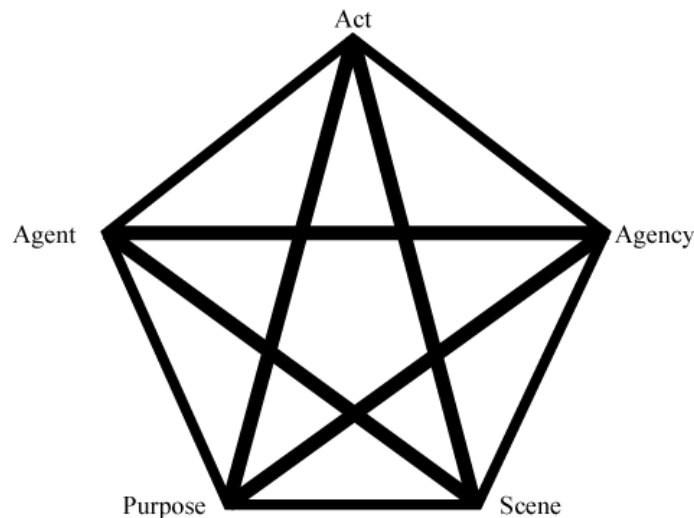Act: What took place, in thought or deed?

Scene: Background of the act, the situation in which it occurred

Agent: What person or kind of person performed the act?

Agency: What means or instrument "he" used?

Purpose: Why?

Figure 1. Burke's Dramatistic Pentad

These five terms allow for ten possible relationships between dramatistic elements, which

Burke calls ratios. These ratios are significant as they "suggest a relationship of propriety,

suitability, or requirement among the elements" (Foss et al, 2014, pg. 200). In other words, each

term calls for certain characteristics in a relationship. Analyses of these ratios may reveal

motives, with Burke (1969b) emphasizing the importance of the scene-act and scene-agent ratios.

Scene-act and act-scene ratios are the most revealing as neither an agent nor an act can exist

without the scene in which it is contained (Burke, 1969b, pg. 15). Foss et al (2014) provide the

example of a church scene, in which acts such as praying would belong, whereas a cartwheel would not (scene-act) (pg. 200). Similarly, the act of praying would often call for characteristics of faith in either the scene or the agent.

Burke (1969b) defines an act as any verb "that has connotations of consciousness or purpose" (pg. 14). Verbs which do not fall under this description can be described as motions, which do not carry meaning (Burke, 1969b, pg. 14). Additionally an act must be committed freely by an agent in order to properly analyze the act-agent relationship, meaning that 'actions' which an agent is forced into doing are also considered motions. An agent is the author of an act, which is representative of their characteristics, however their acts are also what make or remake the agent. As Burke (1969b) states "They would be his product and/or he would be theirs"(pg.14). To draw once more on the example provided by Foss et al (2014), the act of praying would call for characteristics of faith in either the scene (i.e. a church) or the agent (i.e. a faithful person).

Dramatism, in short, claims that "looking at symbol use as drama attends to the meanings the speakers or authors are trying to advance, and the kinds of results or changes they expect as a result" (Schoen, 2012, pg. 41). Schoen (2012) argues that documentaries contain elements of drama actively in that they invite identification with audiences. Dramatism, Schoen (2012) notes "suggests that the dramatic structure of a text implicitly works to seek the identification of the audience, and so the text will be organized rhetorically to achieve this" (pg. 44). Political advertisements often provide a very clear example of this, in that they depict a politician as being 'a man of the people' in order to persuade voters to act a certain way.

Identification

Persuasion is dependent on a process that Burke (1969a) calls 'identification'. Based on the Aristotelian perception of rhetoric Burke (1969a) claims that "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his"(pg. 54). To Burke, persuasion is the result of identification, and an individual can only be persuaded in so far as they identify with the properties or substances of another (Foss et al, 2014, pg. 190). Rhetoric is thus an attempt to bridge the inevitable divisions between individuals through identification (Foss et al, 2014, pg. 191). The important distinction to make is that identification is not merely relating to a person but rather "seeing one's identity bound up with the conflict of the drama, its goods and evils, and its outcomes" (Schoen, 2012, pg. 44).
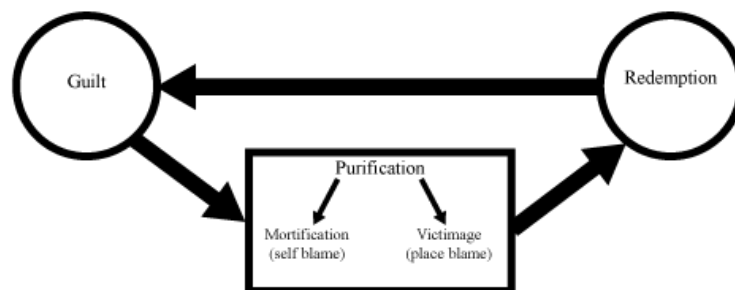
Identification can occur in a number of ways. It can occur intrinsically, or through rhetorically constructed language. Burke (1969a) notes four forms of identification: Consubstantiality, identification to interests (pg. 22); Property, identification to material (pg. 23); Autonomy, identification to actions (pg. 27); and cunning, identification to character or class (pg. 36). These four forms are by no means inclusive, and it is possible for an individual to identify with any number of symbols. Identification can also occur simultaneously with division, For example, the United States and Russia, although ideologically different nations, joined forces in World War II under a common enemy.

Guilt-Purification-Redemption Cycle

Burke (1965) argues that all motives arising in human communication, and thus the drivers of persuasion, arise from guilt, redemption, purification (pg. xxxi). Guilt and the need for redemption are "ever present and a constant irritant" (Foreman, 2013, pg. 28) within structured

(hierarchical) societies. Humans will "inevitably fall short of their notions of perfection" (Foreman, 2013, pg. 29), making guilt, and persuasion, an inevitable human process. Burke (1965) claims that guilt should not be viewed as a result of personal shortcoming, but rather the culmination of hierarchical embarrassment within different social structures (pg. 278). As discussed by Foreman (2013) these hierarchies can include businesses, friendships, families, religion, and many other groupings (pg. 31). If an individual feels that a traditional hierarchy is lost, no matter how subtle, it will create a sense of guilt (Foreman, 2013, pg.31). An example that will be prominent in the subsequent analysis of this paper is the natural hierarchy, including where individuals may feel humans fit within the 'web' of nature. Disruption of natural hierarchy could include placing humans as prey (such as the popular blockbuster film Jurassic Park), or as the agent responsible for destroying natural environments. Both of these scenarios would result in a feeling of guilt.

Figure 2. Guilt-purification-redemption cycle

Avoiding guilt, or purifying oneself of guilt already felt, is the root of any action, as it is the premise of the motivations behind it. Burke (1965) claims that humans will seek to purify their guilt through a number of possible acts including victimage (placing blame on another vessel) or mortification (victimizing oneself) (Foreman, 2013, pg. 29-30). Redemption, the final process in Burke's cycle, is the acknowledgement and forgiveness of guilt. This guilt-

purification-redemption model has been used by Burke and subsequent scholars in unison with the dramatistic pentad, and theory of identification, to draw strong conclusions about persuasive communication.

Application

Within Burke's major works, <u>A Grammar of Motives</u> (1969a), *A Grammar of Rhetoric* (1969b), and <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u> (1966), Burke applies his concepts primarily to other written works. Despite this his concepts have been expanded and applied to a wide variety of mediums including (but not limited to) film (Schoen, 2012), speech (Bobbitt, 1992), advertising (Hershey & Branch, 2011), and virtual worlds (Jeney, 2000).

In <u>A Grammar of Motives </u>(1969b) Burke uses a system of "scope and reduction" in order to prove the viability and universality of his concepts. Scope and reduction serves to prove universality of a particular symbolic action through expanding its scope, and ensuring it is still a reduction of the same reality. For example, in proving his concept of dramatism Burke applies the scope and reduction system to the pentad of terms. In the case of the term act, Burke (1969b) looks at its absolute summation, by determining what could considered the 'ultimate act'. Considering there to be no greater act, Burke (1969b) determines the 'Act of Creation', in which a higher power creates the known universe, as the absolute summation of an act (pg. 61). Burke (1969b) also goes on to apply scope and reduction under the presupposition of other ideological beliefs including evolution, naturalism, and pantheism. Ultimately this system allows Burke (1969b) to conclude that "all statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of them (the dramatistic pentad) and to terminate in them" (pg. xvi). Burke (1965) also uses scope and reduction in <u>Permanence and Change</u> in order to attribute the motives of human communication to guilt, purification, redemption, or victimage (pg. xxxi). In essence, Burke is saying that all

human communication can be looked at as drama (through the dramatistic pentad), and in doing

so reveal the motives of human action. Those motives can then be reduced to such an extent that

they may be considered the result of guilt, purification, redemption, or victimage.

The scope and reduction system is also used by Burke, and other scholars, to reveal

representative anecdotes of larger narratives. For example, Bobbitt (1992) uses the dramatistic

pentad to deconstruct Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, positioning it as a

representative anecdote for the civil rights movement. Bobbitt (1992) achieves this connection

through using dramatistic analysis to connect the elements of Dr. King's speech with the cultural

narrative for the civil rights movement, and public discourse. In doing so Bobbitt (1992)

concludes that Dr. King's speech enforces cultural assimilation, which has allowed it to become

a symbol for the civil rights movement (pg.245). Bobbitt (1992) also goes on to argue that Dr.

King's speech is a "symbolic enactment of Burke's guilt-purification-redemption" (pg. 20)

model in that it is an act of redemption, but also creates an environment for purification on the

part of audiences (pg. 87). Bobbitt (1992) uses the guilt-purification-redemption model to reveal

the persuasive appeals at work in Dr. King's speech, concluding that the speech's rhetoric

exploits a sense of guilt in the minds of readers (pg. 245). By applying both dramatism and the

guilt-purification-redemption model to a single piece of constructed rhetoric, Bobbitt (1992)

demonstrates that Burke's concepts often work together to provide insight into the persuasive

process.

Burke's concepts have also been applied to digital spaces through adapting the

dramatistic pentad. Through clarifying and rephrasing dramatistic terms, Jeney (2000) extends

the Burkean system of rhetoric into what she calls "the domain of internetworked symbolic

action" (pg. 1). Jeney (2000) clarifies the terms act, agency, scene, and purpose through

associating them with terms related to human-computer interaction. User (agent), task (act), screen (scene), and purpose serve to fill the modified pentad Jeney (2000) developed. Through then using Burke's (1969b) scope and reduction technique, Jeney proves the viability of her modified pentad and clarifies their application to digital discourses.

Finally, and most importantly, Schoen (2012) applies Burkean concepts to the genre of documentary films. According to Schoen (2012), Burke's concepts are unique in rhetorical analysis as they allow scholars to "treat documentary very broadly as both produced by the filmmakers and interpreted by audiences" (pg. 40). Analyzing a number of modern documentaries through the dramatistic framework Schoen (2012) demonstrates that: (1) documentaries contain the elements of drama as described by Burke; and (2) drama within documentary "invite audiences to salve all manner of psychological incoherences and resolve them symbolically" (pg. 162). Schoen's (2012) conclusions allow us to validate the application of dramatism to documentary films, and the possibility for it to reveal the ways in which audiences may identify with a narrative. However to his own admission, Schoen (2012) does not address dramatistic ratios in order to reveal the motives of either the filmmakers or the agents within the films (pg. 45). In other words, scholars have demonstrated that while the dramatistic model is applicable to documentary film, it has yet to be applied in a way that reveals the motives of the filmmakers or the agents within their constructed narratives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As one of the latest ecodocumentaries, Racing Extinction's (Psihoyos, 2015) filmmakers have set a goal of encouraging social change (Streep, 2015). Set to be released in 2015, Racing Extinction has the opportunity to build on the lessons of previous successes and failures, and

leverage both its own narratives and modern communication tools to persuade audiences. Because the film has not yet been released I have chosen to treat the films promotional content as both representative of the films narrative, and representative of a piece of persuasive advertising – which seeks to both sell tickets to the final film, and advance a larger activist agenda. Using Burke's concepts as a framework by which to analyze the narratives of this content this research will seek to answer: What do the Burkean dramatistic ratios within Racing Extinction's (Psihoyos, 2015) promotional video content reveal about how the filmmakers aim to persuade audiences, even before the film has been released?

By exploring the relationships between the dramatistic terms we are able to reveal the motives contained within the promotional narrative and on the part of the rhetor (in this case the filmmakers). With this understanding it is possible to also analyze the motives, and subsequently the rhetoric, through the lens of Burke's Guilt-Purification-Redemption model. Thus, by understanding the motives of the filmmakers and the processes involved in the rhetoric within their promotional videos this research will seek to answer: do the motives of the filmmakers, and of the agents depicted within the promotional video content, fit within the context of Burke's (1965) guilt, purification, and redemption model, and if so how?

Building on these first two questions, this research will develop a strong grasp of the narrative construct and rhetorical processes associated with the promotional online videos. With this information, as well as through examining the broader environment surrounding the videos (i.e. social media and interviews) it will be possible to explore the differences between the objectives, motivations, and tools used to promote Racing Extinction and those used for previous ecodocumentaries such as The Cove. Based on the differences found, and scholarship which assesses the failures of previous documentaries, this research will seek to answer: How do the

filmmakers of <u>Racing Extinction</u> begin to address the failures of previous ecodocumentaries through their promotional video content?

These research questions will serve to address gaps found in the literature review, provide insight into the rhetoric of ecodocumentary promotional videos, and examine the ongoing evolution of how ecodocumentaries intertwine with digital spaces and work to more effectively (or less effectively) create social change. Notable gaps within the literature which will be addressed include the lack of scholarship which applies Burkean analysis to content contained within digital spaces, and a content specific breakdown of the dramatistic traits of an ecodocumentary film (others apply the terms more broadly). Also through this research filmmakers and scholars may gain insight into the rhetorical processes of ecodocumentary promotional videos, which are often divided between two objectives, the goal of (1) creating social change, and (2) the goal of selling tickets. Finally, as <u>Racing Extinction</u> is the most recent 'blockbuster' ecodocumentary it has been developed on the knowledge of the previous failures of documentaries seeking to inspire social change. With that in mind, this research will provide a broad look at how the construction of ecodocumentaries, and the level of engagement of the filmmakers, has evolved to more effectively (or less effectively) engage audiences, and inspire action.

METHOD

Data Collection Method

The research questions outlined above are focused on the online videos produced in promotion of <u>Racing Extinction</u> and the issues surrounding the film. As a result, two data sets are required to properly answer the three research questions. The first set of data is three promotional

videos uploaded by the film makers to the OPS vimeo.com channel

(https://vimeo.com/opsociety). The following three videos will serve as primary data for this

research paper, and represent three different connotations of guilt of the filmmakers.

1. "Racing Extinction" Trailer (https://vimeo.com/95903058)

2. Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter (https://vimeo.com/117815581)

3. Racing Extinction: Introduction (https://vimeo.com/105793285)

In addition to these three videos, which will be closely examined, eight additional videos

on the channel will be reviewed and referenced in order to reinforce the findings of this paper:

(1) Racing Extinction: Reduce Carbon, Save Species; (2) Sea Shells Dissolving;

(3)illUmiNations: Protecting Our Planet #ProjectingChange; (4) Racing Extinction:

illUmiNations; (5)Racing Extinction: The OPS Team; (6) Saving Species: The Grasshopper

Sparrow; (7) FLIR: The Invisible Made Visible; (8) Racing Extinction Director's Statement.

The second data set required is statistical social media data which can be examined to

determine levels of audience engagement with the first data set (promotional videos). Although

this research will not seek to assess the quality of engagement, it will seek to assess the number

of viewers who take action by sharing (through retweeting on Twitter, or sharing on Facebook)

or engaging (liking on Facebook, 'thumbs up' on Vimeo) with the online videos. This data will

be collected in the form of "Tweets" on Twitter.com which make direct reference to the videos

from the first data set, as well as "Like" and "comments" on Facebook.com, and "Thumbs ups"

on Vimeo.com. Tweets have been collected using a proprietary service, whereas Facebook.com

and Vimeo.com statistics have been gathered manually. Following the Racing Extinction film

festival premier at Sundance Film Festival, tweets were collected using a proprietary service

called Tweet Archivist (tweetarchivist.com), which collects and provides statistics on specific

hashtags and users. This data set has been restricted tweets which contain either

"#racingextinction" or make mention of the filmmakers "@Extinction_OPS". The Tweet

Archivist software has collected the following information:

> Username, Time, Language, Profile Image, Location, Hashtags, Text, URLs, User
>
> Mentions, Media, Follower Count, Name

> Of the above data, Hashtags, Text, and URLs, will serve to provide context to the rhetoric

of the first data set. Tweet Achivist data has been collected from 1/26/2015 to 4/26/2015. This

spans three months after the films festival premier and encompasses a period when all three

promotional videos had been released.

Method of Analysis

Burke's dramatism model, guilt-purification-redemption model, and his concept of

identification provide the theoretical foundation for this project's analytical methods. The use of

these concepts to analyze rhetoric or language is often referred to as Burkean Analysis. My first

research question will be addressed through identifying the act, agency, scene, purpose and agent

– the pentad of dramatism - and qualitatively addressing their relationship in order to reveal the

motives, and the core rhetoric of the filmmakers. Multiple methods of analysis will be employed

in order to properly encompass all of the dramatistic terms. Act, agent, and purpose will be

analyzed through a qualitative discourse analysis, and scene and purpose will be analyzed

through a qualitative multi-modal content analysis.

Discourse Analysis

A qualitative discourse analysis will seek to identify the characteristics of act, agents, and

purpose within the selected <u>Racing Extinction</u> promotional videos. Scene and agency will also be

assessed through a content analysis, discussed later. Looking at the language within the videos as

modes of action rather than simply information provides insight into the motivations of the

rhetors (i.e. what exactly they want audiences to do and why). An analysis of different

dramatistic ratios will be conducted on all three of the primary videos, and when necessary the

themes will be reinforced by supplementary analysis of additional OPS videos, OPS online

content (i.e. webpage, twitter, social media) and interviews. Analysis of discourse beyond the

scope of the videos in question will be necessary to properly analyze the characteristics of

dramatistic elements outside of the realm of the film, notably when determining the motives of

the filmmakers.

A close examination of dramatistic ratios (i.e. agent-scene) will look at exactly what is

being "said" in each video and the motives behind it. This will begin by identifying the elements

of the narrative which define the dramatistic terms through looking at the discourse of each video

(and supplementary data when needed). The dramatistic terms will be defined according to

Burke's (1969b) framework: Act: What took place, in thought or deed

Scene: Background of the act, the situation in which it occurred

Agent: What person or kind of person performed the act

Agency: What means or instrument "he" used

Purpose: Why?

Once the terms are defined their ratios will be examined to reveal motives of the rhetors

(filmmakers) or agents within the videos, and provide insight into the persuasive process. In

order to verify the accuracy of each analysis the motives revealed will then be categorized (as per

the scope and reduction system) to align with Burke's (1965) guilt-purification-redemption

model.

Content Analysis

Qualitative multi-modal content analysis serves to identify the scene and agency within Racing Extinction's promotional videos. Content analysis is at times also used to advise the analysis of purpose, agent and act by assessing visual cues within the videos. The content analysis will be focused on the attributes of the videos themselves rather than the platform / webspace (i.e. Scene as the space depicted in the video, rather than Scene as Vimeo.com). Exceptions to this are made in subsequent sections which determine the viability of the filmmaker and animals as an agent, and Vimeo.com as agency.

Dramatistic Framework

Burke's (1969b) ideas on dramatism and rhetoric have been adopted to apply to mediums which were not explored by Burke within his writings. Notably, scholars have worked to apply Burke's analysis framework to the realm of online discourse (Jeney, 2000) and film (Schoen, 2012). In order to further adopt Burke's dramatism to analyze the rhetoric of online video, the following connections must be made to the dramatistic elements of agent and agency.

Expanding the scope of Agent

One of the advantages of Burkean analysis is the universality of its application to all language (or symbolic action). By this notion, this analysis is not limited to the confines of the narratives we see within the chosen videos, and instead we can apply dramatistic terms more broadly. Through looking at symbolic action within the videos, and at the videos themselves as a form of symbolic action it is possible to better understand the motives of the filmmakers. Thus, in order explore the motives of the filmmakers more thoroughly, this research will recognize them as an agent within a dramatistic pentad. In A Grammar of Motives Burke (1969b) defined the ultimate agent as "The Creator", reducing all acts back to a single origin (pg. 174) similarly,

this research will expand the scope of the pentad to apply to the filmmakers so long as it can be reduced to still apply to the realities of the narrative. This expanded scope is also important as it allows us to better understand the suspected duality of purpose within the chosen videos: to both (1) promote the final film and to (2) inspire social change.

Across all three of analyzed videos we see animals and non-human entities (such as nature as a whole) anthropomorphized. Human characteristics are attributed to animals in a number of ways, most often through either the acts they visibly perform, or through audio narration. Neither Burke nor subsequent scholars assess the possibility of an agent to be a "non-human", and Burke (1969b) specifically refers to agents as humans in multiple definitions. Despite this, we see non-human (or 'humanesque') agents all the time in popular cinema and advertising, and some narratives are told entirely through personified agents (i.e. Finding Nemo). In order to justify the qualification of animals as agents in scholarship, we can look to advertising, a medium which frequently personifies animals in order to achieve persuasive goals. Delbaere et al. (2011) demonstrate that the personification of non-human entities in "advertising can be a powerful persuasive tool" (pg. 127). Reflective of the ability of narrative advertising to create strong emotional responses, personification has also proven to be more likely to create positive emotional responses, and positive attributions of brand personality (Delbaere, 2011 et al. 2011, pg. 127). Through Delbaere et al.'s findings we can see that animals are capable of being identifiable agents within rhetorical narratives. While anthropomorphism within ecodocumentaries (and film as a whole) is a subject well worthy of study, this project will not touch on the topic beyond using it to qualify animals as agents within a narrative.

Vimeo.com as Agency

Following the foundational meta-analysis of the filmmakers as an agent within the dramatistic pentad, it is similarly important to distinguish agency, or the means by which they are communicating (Burke, 1969b, pg. xv). Reflective of Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of the *organon*, or instrument, Burke (1969b) regards agency as both a result of human purpose, as well as traits which can transcend their purpose and form organizational structures of their own (pg. 281). Agency can range significantly from material properties, such as the funds required to buy something, to a form of language, such as a false statement required to tell a lie (Foss et al, 2014, pg. 199).

The principal agency the filmmakers use to communicate and persuade (in the context of the analyzed promotional videos) is Vimeo.com, and more broadly, streaming video services. It has been previously recognized that Burke's system of analysis does not seamlessly transition into digital spaces, and a framework has been developed to validate the extension of the Burkean system online (Jeney, 2000, pg.53). Jeney (2000) recognizes that within computer mediated discourses the agency of communication could be attributed to a diverse range of "instruments' from the computer, screen, internet, or even the code that holds it all together. Thus the agency of online rhetoric can be distinguished as "two-fold", being both attributable to the hardware and the software (Jeney, 2000, pg. 66). Jeney (2000) notes that the software, such as Vimeo.com, is what users are most engaged with and is often where symbolic action occurs (pg. 66), with hardware interactions being more closely reflective of what Burke (1969b) calls *motions* (those actions which do not carry meaning).

In addition to Vimeo.com being considered the agency of the filmmakers we can also distinguish agency within particular scenes of the promotional video content. As outlined

previously when determining filmmakers as the agents, the agency within these scenes is so minimally depicted that their significance is subsequent to that of the broader pentad, in which we opt to view the filmmakers as agents.

ANALYSIS

Video: "Racing Extinction" Trailer

Summary

The "Racing Extinction" Trailer (2015) is a 2:39 promotional video which provides brief glimpses of dramatistic elements presumably present in the final film. The trailer uses a diverse range of scenes accompanied by voice-overs to provide a brief story of a problem, a revelation, a solution, and a call-to-action, intermixed with a thriller espionage story. Audio dialogue within the trailer includes symbolic statements such as "it (OPS) uses *covert* operations to expose harm to endangered species" (0:23) and "we're definitely not welcome here" (0:45) which apply genre expectations to the narrative. For the purpose of thorough analysis, the acts within the trailer can be divided into two categories, those committed by the characters/agents presented within the scenes depicted, and those committed by the filmmaker (or narrator via clipping) within the scene of the video.

Scene-Act

Within the "Racing Extinction" Trailer, there are five distinguishable types of scene-act ratios portrayed, which are placed in hierarchy, with the final archetype being given the most emphasis through a combination of time allotment, volume, pace, and musical score. The themes of the scene-act ratios within the trailer are: (1) Wildlife (2) The Extinction; (3) Espionage Thriller; and (4) Social Change. Together these ratios reflect, contrast, and interact with each

other to create a narrative which seeks to entertain, identify with, and subsequently persuade audiences.

Wildlife

Throughout the "Racing Extinction" Trailer wildlife, such as whales, dolphins, manta rays, and chimpanzees are shown, often in contrast with other scenes which demonstrate the destruction of their natural habitat. I refer to these scenes containing destruction are classified later as "the extinction". Within many of the wildlife scenes, the only distinguishable agent is the filmmaker, who acts through cutting the visuals as well as the audio narrative.

A number of wildlife scene-act ratios within the trailer combine scenes of wildlife performing their natural 'motions' (Burke's word for acts without meaning), with descriptive audio narrative (an act). Given that much of this audio narrative cannot be attributed to an identifiable agent, this research instead attributes it as an act of the filmmaker who created the scene-act ratios. Through this means the filmmakers often present audiences with distinct sub-narratives that exist within a particular scene. For example, within the first few moments the filmmakers present audiences with scenes of pristine ocean life, specifically manta rays and coral reefs, and apply the narrative: "why would we (agent) want to disrupt (act) something that has taken millions of years to evolve" (0:15 – 0:19). Seeking identification of autonomy with the audience's interest in not "disrupting" nature, this scene-act ratio frames the contrast between what has been done, and what we need to do – which is presented later on in the larger narrative.

While most wildlife within the trailer does not meet the requirements to be regarded as agents, as they do not perform any acts, certain exceptions can be made for animals that are depicted as acting in cooperation, or compassionately, with human agents. In these cases, the actions of the animals are depicted to symbolically contain meaning, thus qualifying them as acts

rather than motions under Burke's model. Examples of this include a chimpanzee (agent) hugging (act) an elderly woman (agent) (2:18), and seals (agent) being released (act) from cages by a group of people (agents) (2:26). These scene-act ratios intrinsically anthropomorphize the wildlife depicted which allows for audiences to identify with the animals as agents, in that they are consubstantial with certain traits of the animal (such as compassion). These scene-act ratios, which depict animals as agents, are presented in quick succession and accompanied by an audio narrative symbolically describing a need for social change. Specifically we see several wildlife scene-act ratios cut together with the sub-narrative "Better to light (act) one candle than curse the darkness (scene). So many people (agent) sit back and say 'we're screwed', but you know what? That one candle, maybe someone else with a candle will find you. And I think that's where movements are started" (2:23-2:35). This closing sub-narrative, contrasting the opening one discussed earlier, directs audiences who experience identification with the larger narrative with a solution by which to take action. While the solution in this case is metaphorical, we will discuss later how it is symbolic of the filmmakers push to present Racing Extinction*'s* viewership as an act of social change.

The Extinction

Within the "Racing Extinction" Trailer the filmmakers include several scene-act ratios detailing "The Extinction". These include oil rigs (0:14), pollution (0:15), asteroids (0:19), and deceased wildlife (0:46). These scenes are presented early on in the trailer and are accompanied by a somber musical score. Extinction ratios are the least prevalent of the four types and do not depict human agents. While limited in presence, extinction scenes play a valuable role in the rhetoric of the narrative in two ways. Firstly, through contrasting extinction ratios with scenes of established hierarchy, they enforce the drama of guilt. For example, contrasting a scene of a

beautiful and lively ocean reef with a scene depicting an oil spill symbolically attributes the

disruption of natural hierarchies to human action. This is significant because we understand that

the guilt felt by the disruption of hierarchies is the principal source of all human motivation.

Consequently, by depicting the destruction of the natural hierarchy of the planet the filmmakers

provide audiences (who identify with the narrative) a possible motive for action. This application

of guilt within the trailer is explored further in the coming sections.

The second important role extinction ratios serve is to better align audiences with the

motives of the agents depicted elsewhere in the trailer, providing context to their acts and

justifying the purpose of the video. More specifically, we see agents within the video participate

in a scene-act ratio I call espionage thriller. By providing audiences with a motive for action,

they can better identify with the agents who take action based on presumably similar motives.

Espionage Thriller

Similar to the OPS's previous film <u>The Cove</u>, <u>Racing Extinction</u> conforms to Hollywood

tropes (Lamar, 2013), which serve to assist the viewer's ability to engage and be transported by a

story, as the viewers are already familiar with the story archetype (pg. 53). The <u>"Racing

Extinction" Trailer</u> (2015) is an example of the filmmakers once again reflecting the "espionage

thriller" archetype commonly seen in fictional theatrical films. Arguably, western viewers will

immediately identify with the contents of the trailer for this reason alone. Notably, Lamar (2013)

critiques OPS's use of the espionage thriller archetype in <u>The Cove </u>(2007) as the theme only

identifies with western viewers and left Japanese viewers, the subject of the film and potential

agents of change, distanced from the theme of the film as it is not a familiar narrative within their

culture. Through established cinema conventions, audiences are immediately able to identify

with, and be drawn into, the narrative (Turner, 1995). In effect, espionage thriller scenes enable

western audiences to better engage with the rhetoric of the video, in that they easily identify with several elements of the narrative.

As previously discussed, the contrast between scenes of wildlife and scenes of extinction, illustrate the disruption of hierarchies, and subsequently guilt. This guilt is arguably the driving force by which audiences may justify acts which conform to the espionage thriller trope and be persuaded by the content presented. In other words, because the narrative has presented audiences with an identifiable motive they may better justify the acts of agents within the video, which in some scenes may appear immoral (i.e. spying, breaking and entering, ect.). Similarly, the acts of the agents within the espionage thriller trope, become attributable to purification or redemption.

Of the three videos analyzed, "Racing Extinction" Trailer is the only video to include scene-act ratios which depict traditional Hollywood narratives, other than the characteristics of documentary. This is important as it demonstrates that this video, more so than the others, is conforming to the trailer genre in that it identifies with audiences who seek an entertaining blockbuster film, rather than social change 'propaganda'. These espionage thriller scene-act ratios put the trailer in an interesting position of seeking consubstantiality, and as a result persuasion, with a very broad audience. As such, we can look more closely at the trailer as rhetoric constructed to inspire viewership of Racing Extinction in addition to the larger social change aspirations of the OPS.

Social Change

Appearing as the dominant objective (or purpose) of the final Racing Extinction film, scenes depicting social change, in a variety of forms, make up just under half of the duration of the "Racing Extinction" Trailer. These scenes begin with an on-screen call to action (act), "Join a

Specialized Team" (1:30) and go on to include a range of symbolic imagery. Scenes of modern society, such as cities (1:49-1:51), scenes of humans and nature (1:55 – 1:58), scenes of sustainability symbols such as Tesla (1:35 – 1:40), and scenes of community (2:00;2:05;2:08) all work together to symbolize a hope for change, which can be reduced further to symbolize redemption under Burke's guilt-purification-redemption model.

The scene-agent depiction within the video that best captures this theme of social change, is a group of children (agents) shown to be engaging (act) with a film, presumably Racing Extinction (2:44). This scene is followed by an on screen prompt (act) by the filmmakers (agent) that reads "Change the way we see the world", directly associating the act of engaging with the film, as an act of social change. This would indicate that the purpose of the trailer is to symbolically tie the act of viewership (of Racing Extinction) with an act of social change. We can see this reiterated again through audio narrative (act) which is paired with the previously discussed scenes of modern society. Language such as "When you're talking about losing all of nature, it's not a spectator sport anymore. Everyone has to get involved somehow" (1:59-2:05) exemplifies a characteristic typical to the OPS (and many other ecodocumentaries) in that they outline a clear call-to-action, but often fail to specify what the said action is. Through looking at the dramatistic term purpose, and its relationship to the OPS as an agent, we can begin to reveal the motives of the video, and how this call-to-action can work in the favour of filmmakers despite not being specified.

Agent – Purpose

With two distinct categories of agent (within the trailer, and the filmmakers) comes two possibilities of purpose, those suggested by the agents within the film, and those that exist when we look at the "Racing Extinction" Trailer as a whole. At first glance, we are able to assume two

possible objectives for the trailer. First, the objective that is clearly stated by the trailer, and the

filmmaker (discussed in following sections), to create a social movement aimed at protecting the

environment and preventing 'mass extinction'. Secondly, a basic understanding of the film

industry allows us to understand that the traditional purpose of a trailer is to promote audience

attendance of the final film. Between these objectives we can dissect two very different possible

motivations: to change the world, and to achieve commercial success. Through analyzing the

agent-purpose ratio of the trailer we gain insight into how these objectives are interrelated into a

single purpose, and connected by a single motive.

Purpose

Purpose serves as perhaps the most interesting of the dramatistic traits we are able to

analyze within "Racing Extinction" Trailer. Burke (1969b) explains that purpose is an

intellectual generalization of the process towards "the Good" (pg. 295). In other words, purpose

is the subjective (to an agent) aim towards a positive outcome. Because the filmmakers

presumably have two separate positive outcomes they are seeking to achieve with the trailer, the

agent-purpose ratio becomes a compelling look at how the OPS simultaneously aims to achieve

both outcomes. Earlier, through the scene-act ratio, we revealed that some persuasive language

directed audiences towards watching Racing Extinction upon its release for entertainment value,

while other portions of the narrative sought to inspire social change.

By combining these findings of the scene-act ratio we can predict that the purpose of the

trailer is to symbolically connect the act watching Racing Extinction with personal action in

favour of environmental protection.   This should come as no surprise, as it is the expectation of

a film trailer to promote viewership of the eventual film, however this is typically motivated by

commercial, and financial success for the film and consequently its makers. Though an analysis

of the filmmakers (agent in this agent-purpose ratio) and their previous work, we will reveal that

the motives behind this purpose are far less traditional than that of a Hollywood film.

Oceanic Preservation Society (Agent)

Making their film debut in 2009, with Academy Award winning documentary <u>The Cove,</u>

the Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS) is a non-profit organization headed by photographer and

filmmaker Louie Psihoyos (opsociety.org). The OPS "creates film … inspiring people to save the

oceans" (opsociety.org). Psihoyos, the director of <u>The Cove</u> and <u>Racing Extinction</u>, as well as a

prominent character in both films, is consistently vocal about his understanding of the

capabilities of film to create social change. In 2014 the OPS released an online video of Psihoyos

explaining that he has "seen the power of media to create social change" ("Racing Extinction

Director's Statement", 2014, 0:03), and in interviews he often emphasizes the ability of

narratives to make audiences care about a previously unrecognized subject (Streep, 2015). With a

historical perspective, statements made by Psihoyos and the OPS regarding the objectives of <u>The</u>

<u>Cove </u>are particularly revealing of the agent-purpose ratio and their motives as rhetors. In a 2010

interview, Psihoyos noted "we're not in it for the money … it's an attempt to try to change the

world using the world's most powerful medium" ("Louie Psihoyos Interview – The Cove", 2010,

1:58).

From within the <u>"Racing Extinction" Trailer</u> itself our understanding of the filmmaker

agent is far more limited, but still revealing. At 0:21 the filmmakers are given on screen

credibility from an overlay stating "From the Academy Award Winning Filmmakers of The

Cove" accompanied by the voice of Psihoyos describing OPS as "A group I formed. It uses

covert operations to expose harm to endangered species" (0:21 – 0:25). These contrasting

definitions of the agent, both as the filmmaker, and as a covert group further distinguishes the

agents within the film, as vastly different (among acts and motives) than those who created the film. From this understanding of Psihoyos and the OPS we can begin to understand the agent-purpose ratio more definitively. In essence, our understanding that the agent symbolically connects film viewership with social change reinforces the conclusions made in regards to purpose earlier. Consequently we find that the rhetor (OPS) does not appear to be motivated by financial gain, but rather by a subjective desire to change the realities of society.

Motives

The relationships between the dramatistic characteristics of the "Racing Extinction" Trailer reveal the motive behind the persuasiveness of the video to be the commercial success for the yet to be released Racing Extinction film. This goal is intrinsically connected with the filmmakers premise that media can be a powerful tool for social change. In other words, because the filmmakers intrinsically believe that film can be a powerful tool of social change ('Racing Extinction Director's Statement', 2014), we can consider viewership for the final film to be interconnected with the creation of a social movement. In analyzing this as the motive it is important to draw on Burke's (1969b) distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motives (pg. 46). Intrinsic motivations being those that are internal to the rhetor, based on personal characteristics, and extrinsic being those which are implied by their surroundings. Commercial success for the film can be viewed as an extrinsic motive in that it is derived from the scene in which the agent (filmmakers) act (pg. 46). As mentioned previously, it is the symbolic expectation of a trailer to persuade audiences into viewing a film, in this way the scene "supports" this motive.

Through both the scene-act and agent-purpose relationships a dominant theme of social change is present. As a motivation this can appear to be both intrinsic and extrinsic. The agent-

purpose relationship reveals historic intrinsic motivations on the part of both the OPS and

Psihoyos. This is reinforced by the scene-act relationship which reveals the push for social

change as the dominant visualization within the trailer. Social change as a motivation however

can also be viewed extrinsically in that the encompassing ecodocumentary scene supports acts

which inspire personal and political action on the part of audiences (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010,

pg. 45). Applying the scope and reduction system we can also see how this motive can be

reduced to appear as an iteration of guilt.

Guilt, Purification and Redemption

The "Racing Extinction" Trailer, created out of a motivation for social change, and

motivating audiences to view the final film, draws a strong connection to Burke's (1965) guilt-

purification-redemption cycle. Intriguingly, as the filmmakers act (produce the video) to redeem

themselves of guilt felt by the disruption of a natural hierarchy, they simultaneously force that

guilt upon audiences – offering them an outlet of purification, likely through a form of victimage.

While audiences identify with the objective of the agents in the trailer, as well as the struggle of

the wildlife depicted, they feel guilt for what Burke would refer to as a disruption of hierarchy /

perfection. According to Burke (1965) this form of guilt is the driving force of persuasion and if

felt strongly enough would cause audiences to take action in order to "purify" themselves. In this

case the filmmaker's present viewership of Racing Extinction as an act by which audiences can

complete the guilt-purification-redemption cycle. Similarly we can look at the filmmaker's

creation and development of the trailer as an act motivated by purification (and ultimately guilt)

through both victimage and mortification. Within the trailer we see the filmmakers place blame

on a 'Mr. Lee' who was "culling and processing whale sharks" (1:13) (victimage) as well as

humanity as a whole (mortification).

Audience Response

Released on Youtube.com on January 22nd 2015, the week in which Racing Extinction premiered at Sundance Film Festival, "Racing Extinction" Trailer was heavily shared across all of the OPS social media platforms. As of August 2015, the Trailer remains the OPS's most popular online video related to the Racing Extinction film, with over 78,000 views on Youtube.com (plus an additional 212,384 views from a previous upload of the trailer), 372,000 views on Facebook, and an unlisted number of views on Vimeo.com.

Audience engagement for the trailer includes over user 8,100 "shares", and 1,900 user "likes" on Facebook, 282 "likes" on Vimeo.com, and 713 "thumbs up" on Youtube.com. Additionally users have engaged by commenting and adding to the conversation surrounding the film in a number of ways. This has included over 140 comments on Youtube, 126 comments on Facebook, 21 comments on Vimeo.com, and as of July 12th 2015 over 200 tweets share the video directly. While these interactions between users and the content provide further insight into the effectiveness of the filmmaker's rhetoric and audience motives for behavioral change. Notably, audience engagement surrounding "Racing Extinction" Trailer is predominantly interested in viewership of the final film. Comments such as "Where do I see this?" ("Courtney Kirkpatrick", Jan 28 2015, Facebook.com) and "When is this coming out cause I'm dying to see it" ("Jacob Mamiye", Mar 2015, Youtube.com) are most common and are reflective of the filmmakers motives explored earlier. Reflective of the guilt, purification and redemption model used to assess the content itself, users are often seen exhibiting guilt in their engagement as well, "Ashamed to be part of the human race sometimes."(Facebook.com, June 7 2015) and "I can't watch this because it will make me feel horrible" ("Lamujermaslinda", Aug 2015, Youtube.com). A final set of audience engagement, which puts into question the effectiveness of the video's

rhetoric, are comments which question how their authors can take action, examples include, "Let us know what we can do to help." ("Green TV", Mar 2015, Vimeo.com) and "How can I be a part of this?" ("Jo Ellison", Jan 23 2015, Facebook.com).

Overall audience response to "Racing Extinction" Trailer provides additional insight into the dramatistic analysis made of the video. The audience engagement assessed predominantly reflective of both the guilt-purification-redemption model and of the dramatistic characteristics within the film. The viewer comments assessed appear to not only align themselves with the motives and purpose of the trailer, but also seem to have become drawn into the films narrative. The level of online participation with the videos as well as the types of comments suggest that audiences have in some way identified with the narratives and have been persuaded to take action.

Video: "Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter"

Summary

Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter is a 2:55 video released by OPS on Vimeo.com on January 31st 2015. Shared on Twitter accompanied by the quote "There's this incredible web where we're all connected." - @louiepsihoyos"(Twitter.com), this video appears to have much less of a connection to the Racing Extinction film, and its commercial success, compared to the previously released trailer. The video compiles interviews with identifiable agents and accompanies their audio with relevant video content. The video emphasizes the significance of sharks to the world's ecosystem, the impact of the shark finning industry, and also the role humans have played in negatively impacting the environment. The video does not include a direct call-to-action or traditional cinematic narrative (such as espionage thriller). The narrative

instead is derived from the relationship between humans (agent) and sharks (agent), and its impact on the world's oceans (scene). The narrative of the video contains distinct agency, purpose, and acts that can be analyzed to reveal the persuasive processes involved and the motives of the OPS in their construction of the video.

Agent – Act

Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter is ultimately a narrative of how humans are acting, as agents, to drive sharks to extinction, and how that act is effecting the world's oceans (scene). Understanding the dramatistic relationship between the agent and act is important to determine the motive of the OPS for creating the video and how audiences may, or may not, identify with the narrative. Of significant importance to this ratio is the inclusion of sharks as agents. Drawing on the framework provided regarding anthropomorphized agents, the agent-act relationship of Why Sharks Matter allows us to see how audiences may identify with non-human agents.

Agents

The Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter presents several identifiable agents operating on different levels and within different scenes, there are the filmmakers, the interviewees, wildlife, sharks, individuals within the video, and humans on a broader scale. This analysis will focus on the principal agent of the narrative within the video, humans, or "us". Within the context of the video humans are described in varying ways, from "us" (0:10) to "they" (1:12) or even objectively as "humans" (0:29). This generalization of humans as a single agent works to expand the scope of their acts and, while possibly less identifiable, serves to more effectively show their effect within the agent-act ratio.

The viewer is introduced to humans as a symbolic agent by various interview segments, placing emphasis on the relationship between the agent and the natural world. To Burke (1969b) these descriptors are synonymous with the agent, which is defined by their idealizations (pg. 172). By this understanding the agent is defined within the video as (1) A hunter (0:43 – 0:46); (2) financially motivated (1:01-1:10); and (3) technologically specialized (2:16-2:19). Coincidentally, this depiction of humans is reflective of Burke's (1969b) impression of modern thought, which he claims is focused on "scientism" (pg.214). Through this concept Burke (1969b) implies that human thought exhibits the characteristics of science by: (1) being technically specialized; (2) rationalizing based on money; (3) departing from natural conditions (pg. 215). If Burke is accurate in his description, the broad human agent of the video would be identifiable to audiences on the level of consubstantiality and cunning, presumably persuading audiences in favour of the agent. Through the acts humans perform within the video however, a strong contrast is drawn between humans and another agent, sharks, to the extent that audience identification with the human agents could initiate a guilt redemption cycle.

Similar to humans, sharks are idealized as agents within the video. They are described through audio narrative as (1) historic (1:47); (2) "rulers of our oceans" (1:54); and (3) responsible guardians (1:57). Although as agents, sharks are unlikely to be intrinsically identified with by audiences, their acts in contrast to those of humans arguably rhetorically produces identification of autonomy (morality) with the audience. For example, audiences may identify with the role sharks play as agents "responsible for regulating and maintaining the balance across our entire oceans" (1:58), and more importantly feel guilt for the acts committed by humans which have disrupted this natural hierarchy. Furthermore, as shown in advertising,

identification with anthropomorphized agents is likely to create a more positive emotional

response with audiences (Delbaere et al., 2011).

Act

"We (agent) hunt (act) some species to oblivion" (0:43 - :0:46) describes Dr. Stuart

Pimm, an interviewee within the video, simultaneously pointing out both an agent and act of the

narrative. The majority of acts visibly performed by humans within the Why Sharks Matter video

can be attributed to the "hunter" idealization of the agent. As hunters humans are seen fishing

(0:36-0:40), sorting/cleaning (0:47-0:57, 1:11-1:15; 1:19-1:28; 1:41-1:45; 2:05 – 2:16) and

consuming (0:59-1:02) sharks. These acts are placed in direct contrast to either (1) the motions of

nature (seemingly) untouched by humans (0:00-0:26; 1:29-1:38; 1:45-2:04; 2:24-2:35) or (2)

humans acting in cooperation with nature (0:26-0:31). The hunting idealization, which is

represented by acts visibly performed in the video, is supplemented by the audio narrative which

serves to frame humans as disrupting a natural hierarchy. A clear example of this is the closing

metaphor which notes that "species are like a house of cards. You cannot just sort of take one

card out of the deck, and not expect the deck to crumble" (2:26). These acts suggest to the

audience the audience that there is a universal guilt to be felt for the actions of humanity. If the

audience should identify with the agents of the video (or their idealizations) it is likely that

audiences will join the filmmakers in their pursuit of purifying action (and a desire for social

change). Later on in this analysis, I will explore, through scope and reduction, how the motives

of the filmmakers of Why Sharks Matter are symbolically pressed upon audiences through a

narrative which evokes feelings of guilt.

Agent – Agency - Scene

This intrinsic relationship between agent and act is reflected in other relationships as well. In agent-agency we see technology as the dominant agency employed by humans in the video (technological specialization), and agent-scene reveals an emphasis of the market dependency on shark fins (financially motivated). Within the video author Elizabeth Kolbert identifies the agency of humans by claiming "we have these prehistoric brains, and we have this god like technology" (2:16-2:19). Visually this is reinforced by depictions of modern cars (2:20), heavy machinery (1:27), fishing fleets (1:08), and other technologies that assist humans in the act of hunting. These scenes, as well as the discourse of interviewees depict a financial motivation to the hunting of sharks. Shawn Heinrichs, a marine conservationist, notes the shark fin trade is worth in the neighborhood of $1 billion (1:04). Arguably audiences, who Burke (1969b) claims are financially motivated, would identify with this rhetoric, enabling them to more prominently acknowledge the disruption of natural hierarchy it has caused. This combination of an identifiable narrative with a clear depiction of actions which disrupt hierarchy make the motives within the narrative clear. Furthermore we can begin to reflect similar motives upon the filmmakers through our understanding of them as agents, as explored earlier.

Motives

The OPS Why Sharks Matter video provides a strong example of the early stages of the guilt-purification-redemption cycle. The dramatistic relationships within the video reveal, quite clearly, the motives of human agents within the narrative. Strong associations between acts which cause a disruption of hierarchy, and a contrast between characteristically different agents (sharks vs. humans), work to construct a persuasive narrative driven by guilt. The dramatistic relationships of the video are primarily intrinsic in that they are reliant on the idealizations of

sharks and humans as agents, and the metaphorical characteristics which serve to define them. The acts performed by the human agent reflect the fact that they are (1) hunters (2) financially motivated and (3) technologically specialized, and vice-versa. This allows audiences to experience autonomous identification, as they have likely committed acts motivated by similar idealizations. So how then, if these identifiable agents are depicted as antagonists, does the video work to persuade audiences to take action?

The acts of the human agents in the video are depicted as being motivated by a financially driven social hierarchy and the avoidance of guilt within this hierarchy. The agents hunt, consume, and profit from the killing of sharks as that is the expectations of their social order. Audiences however, are presented with another hierarchy, the order of nature – where sharks and humans stand in the motions of the global ecosystem. While audiences may be consubstantial with the "humans" as an agent, they are simultaneously shown by the filmmakers how the acts of humans disrupts the natural order (or hierarchy). Arguably this would illustrate a disruption of hierarchy and failed perfection, which Burke (1965) claims would trigger guilt within audiences.

Purification - Redemption

With guilt as a motive for audiences to take action, a potential shortcoming of the video is its failure to provide a clear call-to-action in which audiences can "purify" and "redeem" themselves. The only possible route to redemption on the part of audiences is a video description (on Vimeo.com) which encourages audiences to "SIGN THE PLEDGE to ban the trade of shark fins in Texas, Rhode Island, Vermont and New Jersey". This was noted as a shortcoming to the OPS pervious film, The Cove, as well, in that audiences did not know how to actually go about engaging with the issues (Lamar, 2013). It appears that for the filmmakers themselves, the

production, and composition of Why Sharks Matter is motivated, not by financial gain, but as an attempt to purify or redeem guilt felt as a result of the disruption of a natural order. In the case of this video, that natural order is between sharks and humans, however similar videos have been produced which appear to contain the same motivational grounding. "Racing Extinction: Reduce Carbon, Save Species" (vimeo.com/OPSociety) draws on the natural order of coral reefs, and "Saving Species: The Grasshopper Sparrow" (vimeo.com/OPSociety) focuses on the natural order between humans and the grasshopper sparrow. These can be seen as either purification or redemption under Burke's model as they both place blame (victimage) and themselves are an act of redemption.

Audience Response

Viewed by over 355,000 users on social media, Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter attracted less viewership and engagement than "Racing Extinction" Trailer on all mediums other than Twitter. Although Why Sharks Matter is Racing Extinction's second most viewed video on their Facebook.com page, with over 350,000 views, 3,649 shares, and 830 "likes", the video has only 34 comments. On Youtube.com this number is significantly lower with only 1,519 views (as of August 2015), 40 "thumbs up" and 8 comments. While number of views is not public on Vimeo.com, Why Sharks Matter has 12 comments, and over 200 "likes" (as of August 2015).

As a result of having no clear call-to-action for viewers, it becomes difficult assess success of Why Sharks Matter. Under the assumption that the filmmakers are seeking to redeem their own guilt through informing audiences (and thus viewing the narrative of Why Sharks Matter as predominantly informative) the video's success can be rated through viewership alone. However in the broader narrative of the OPS and Racing Extinction, explored earlier, we can determine that audience behavioral change is an overarching objective. By this notion audience

engagement, particularly the comments on the Facebook.com version of the video show a clear division between audiences who feel guilt from the narrative, and those who deny the contents of the video. Notably several users made remarks regarding prevalence of sharks, and shark related attacks in their geographical areas, a topic that is not discussed in the video, but is clearly a way in which many viewers identify with the animal / agent. It can be argued that while these viewers did identify with the human agents, they failed to identify with the scene or acts which disrupted the natural hierarchy (and led to guilt). Despite any push back by viewers with differing opinions, the online petition which was linked to in the Facebook.com video description was successful, having achieved 128% of its goal and reaching over 1,800,000 people (Thunderclap.it).

On Twitter, Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter was linked to substantially more than any other Racing Extinction video, having been shared more than 493 times (Between January 23rd and June 12th 2015). The engagement on Twitter, at surface value, demonstrate users desire to take action in response to this video, over any of the others analyzed. The only link which was shared more often on Twitter (in association with #racingextinction) was the Racing Extinction website which was shared over 2500 times between January 23rd and June 12th 2015. Without assessing the quality of this kind of engagement, we can see that audiences are inclined to take some form of action in result of the Why Sharks Matter narrative.

Video: "Racing Extinction: Introduction"

Summary

Racing Extinction: Introduction is a video narrative of the symbolic relationship between two agents, one trying to tranquilly sing, and one whose recklessness is silencing their voice. The

2:16 video, released two months following the "Racing Extinction" Trailer provides a

metaphorically driven overview of the impact humanity has had on the rate of extinction and the

"song of the planet". While visually the video follows a single agent (Dr. Michael Novocek) as

they walk through, and observe a museum of taxidermy animals, symbolic language and aptly

timed imagery tell a story of an agent-agent relationship between humanity and the planet.

Reflective of the other two analyzed videos, Introduction also anthropomorphizes certain animals

to the point that they can be regarded as agents.

Scene - Agent

Racing Extinction: Introduction contains several scenes which serve to present a narrative

in which humans and "the planet" are symbolic agents. The most prominent scene of Racing

Extinction: Introduction follows Dr. Michael Novocek as he travels through the American

Museum of Natural History. Within the museum a diversity of taxidermy species are presented,

often coinciding with the audio narrative of the video. Species ranging from elephants (0:07), to

whales (0:18) are depicted, symbolically representing "the planet" as an agent and reinforcing

the narrative which is explored by interviews and audio voiceover. The planet, or animals (as

visually represented) are personified through the audio narrative as an orchestra or musician

(0:00-0:23; 1:46). Reflective of Why Sharks Matter, "The orchestra" is placed in contrast with

humans (or "us).

As Burke (1969b) explains, the agent and the scene they are placed in are characteristic

of one another, for example a scene which has a brutalizing effect, would call for brutalizing

characters (pg. 9). By this understanding we can see the museum scene as largely symbolic of the

characteristics the filmmakers seek to attribute to the agents. Just as a museum is characteristic of

learning and the past, humans are characterized as the reflective learner, and animals (or nature)

are characterized as the objectified victims. Unlike the depiction of humans in Why Sharks

Matter, Racing Extinction: Introduction uses emotionally driven scenes. An example of this is a

sub-narrative which explains the song of the last male ʻōʻō "singing for a female "who will never

come" (1:00 – 1:12), assigning characteristics to the human agents in the video. Similarly this

sub-narrative characterizes nature as a victim of human acts through using love to personify the

recording of the last ʻōʻō. Within Introduction, we see a very different idealization of humans (as

agents) than in Why Sharks Matter. This 'friendlier' idealization of humans as the reflective

observer, rather than the catastrophic destroyer of nature, is significant to understanding the

comparative effectiveness of the rhetoric. Notably, as I will discuss later, Introduction was

significantly less engaged with by audiences, and coincidently the disruption of hierarchy within

the narrative is less clear.

Analyzing the scene-agent ratio within Introduction we see one agent who is idealized in

a predictable way, reflective of the scene, and another who is idealized primarily through a

metaphor, which is sparingly reflected in the scene. As a consequence, it is predictable that an

audience would be less entrenched in the narrative due to limited opportunities to identify with

either the agents or the scene.

Act – Agent

The act –agent relationship of Racing Extinction: Introduction is unique in this data set in

that many of the acts are either symbolic or historical. Predominantly within the video nature is

described (and heard) as "singing", and humans are described as "killing the voices" (0:22). The

acts of humans as they are described by interviewees are drastically different than how they are

depicted within the video. Similar to the characteristics revealed by the scene-agent relationship,

the acts of agents depicted within the video are broadly speaking either an act of reflection or

informing. Examples of this include Dr. Christopher W. Clarke's narrative of the male 'ō'ō (1:00 – 1:12), and a testimony by Dr. Stuart Pimm's regarding the rate of extinction (0:24 – 0:39). However symbolically human agents are described as "driving species to extinction" (0:33) or "plucking" species out of existence (1:42). Descriptors which distance the idealized agent from both their acts, and the consequences of those acts. As a result the video creates two very different idealizations of a single agent.

The acts of nature depicted in Racing Extinction: Introduction rely predominantly on their personification as an orchestra or singer. At various points in the video song birds are heard (0:01 – 0:20; 1:00 – 1:15; 1:36 – 1:54), often correlating to visual representations of nature (taxidermy animals). The only time however that audiences are presented with a visual representation of the "singing" act itself is the sub-narrative of the male 'ō'ō which features a video, and audio recording, of the songbird. In this sense the act of nature as an agent is largely implied and imaginative. In fact, it is primarily the scene of the last male 'ō'ō which attributes agent like characteristics to nature, in that the songs are otherwise presented as "motions" (actions which contain no motive) rather than acts. By attributing the 'ō'ō's song to love purpose is given to the act of song present throughout the video, anthropomorphizing nature as an agent. To conclude the analysis of this ratio, we see that it is reflective on the scene-agent ratio its lack of opportunities for identification with the audience. Similarly we see a large disconnect between the idealizations of the agents in that we only see human agents depicted one way within the scenes, but they are idealized in two ways by the descriptions of the acts. Likewise the counter agent to the destructive idealization of humans, nature, is weakly associated as an agent within the video, relying predominantly on the metaphorical quest for love by an extinct bird.

Motives

Given largely implicit and imaginative acts (and agents) both the narrative and subsequently the motives of <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u> prove far more intrinsic than the previously analyzed videos. The narrative is so implicit that audience identification with agents in the video is arguably minimal, with identification being largely reliant on agent interests (i.e. learning or romance).

The persuasive motive of <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u> appears most clearly, through dramatistic analysis, as guilt for undescribed human actions which have harmed the planet. It then appears that the human agents within the video have sought to purify the guilt primarily through reflection and informing. For audiences this connection is weak, and any motivation for change is reliant primarily on the guilt that may (or may not) be generated from the minimal identification with the symbolic agents. Even then, should audiences be persuaded to act, the video provides no clear call-to-action or method in which they can purify and redeem said guilt.

Audience Response

Released in September of 2014, <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u> is unique from the previously analyzed videos both in content and social media exposure. Released only on Vimeo.com, <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u> received an undisclosed number of views, 45 "likes" and 6 comments. The video was shared at least 14 times on Facebook.com by independent users, but never by the filmmakers themselves. Between January 23rd and June 17th the video was also tweeted 22 times on Twitter.com in association with #racingextinction, including once by the filmmakers. Limited filmmaker support on social media for this video results in an engagement landscape which is almost entirely driven by audiences, rather than promotion by the filmmaker.

DISCUSSION

In anticipation of the release of <u>Racing Extinction</u>, this project of dramatistic analysis reveals varying motives across multiple promotional videos produced by the filmmakers, The Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS). Taking a Burkean approach, dramatistic analysis seeks to reduce "the subject synoptically while still permitting us to appreciate its scope and complexity" (Burke, 1969b, pg. xxiii). The analysis of the dramatistic relationships within the narratives of three OPS promotional videos, <u>"Racing Extinction" Trailer</u>, <u>Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter</u>, and <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u>, reveal the motives of the OPS as well as the rhetorical processes that persuade audiences towards particular actions.

The Rhetoric

The three videos analyzed for this research each contain distinct motives, and methods of persuasion, which together reveal some of the tools the OPS filmmakers use to persuade audiences to attend the film. Particularly, through understanding and exploring the dramatistic properties and their relationships, we can see how audiences may (or may not) identify with the narratives presented, and begin to analyze the motives involved. These motives include not only those of the filmmakers, who themselves take action when creating the videos, but also the agents within the videos and the audience members who are also persuaded to take action (if the rhetors are successful). The rhetoric, or persuasive language, of these videos includes not only the words spoken or appearing on the screen, but also visual language. For example, in addition to the audio narrative in <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u>, we can look at the visual portrayal of taxidermied animals as symbolic representations of agents which are, in this case, put in contrast with humans (as another agent).

The dramatistic analysis conducted reveals several opportunities for audiences to identify with the narrative. In the analyzed videos we see identification which is driven by consubstantiality and autonomy. More specifically, audiences are most often presented opportunities to identify with the interests of agents within the narrative, or their autonomous principles. An example of this is the depiction of human agents within <u>Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter</u>, as 1) A hunter; (2) financially motivated; and (3) technologically specialized. Reflective of the scientism, which is engrained within humanity (Burke, 1969b, pg. 215), these autonomous principles of the agents within the video, allow viewers to identify with the agents, regardless of their moral grounding (in this case they are presented as antagonists). Burke (1969a) argues that this form of identification is possible despite moral alignment, as audiences are likely to identify with the principles of the action in different ways (in this case, hunting, financial gain, and science) (pg. 27). Similarly within the same video, we can see a means by which audiences may identify with the interests of the sharks (as they are presented as an agent). Notably, it is the narrative push for sharks as "maintainers of the natural hierarchy" which is likely to drive identification with audiences who, according to Burke (1965), aspire to maintain hierarchy in all their actions.

Across all three of the assessed videos we experience a narrative that is constructed to attribute the acts of human agents to the resulting scene (which is typically symbolic of extinction) in contrast to "natural agents" in a tranquil and beautiful scene. These relationships are representative of Burke's (1969b) framework which argues that the "scenes both realistically reflects the course of the action and symbolizes it" (pg. 3). By this understanding we can see that the human agents are consistently tied to "the extinction" through a process of both direct blame (through narration) and also their relationship with the scene in which they are presented.

Through the scene-agent relationship, as well as others across all three videos, we see a common motivator that can be aligned with Burke's (1965) guilt-purification-redemption model. With a narrative that draws heavily on elements of guilt, or disruption of hierarchies, we can see the acts of the filmmakers, and the agents presented (particularly within "Racing Extinction" – Trailer) as being motivated by the purification, and redemption of guilt. Through acts such as "covert espionage" and educating on the extinction of species, as presented in the trailer, we can see the filmmakers working to address guilt felt by the disruption humans have caused on natural hierarchies. Victimage and mortification are both used by the filmmakers in separate instances. In the case of "Racing Extinction" Trailer blame is placed (victimage) on a 'Mr. Lee' and in Why Sharks Matter we see a broad mortification of humanity as a whole. Similarly, the presentation of dramatistic relationships which define and illustrate the disruption of this hierarchy, imply guilt for audiences who have identified with the narrative. Arguably this guilt is a result of the scene-act relationships presented in all three videos. This is most evident in Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter where the act of hunting is both visually presented and described audibly. It is possible that Why Sharks Matter produces guilt most effectively, with its more significant social media engagement as possible evidence of this.

Addressing Previous Failures

Using metrics including viewership and number of comments/shares, this research assessed the audience engagement with Racing Extinction's promotional video content. As discussed throughout the analysis, these metrics were used to assess the *level,* rather than *quality*, of audience engagement. The video which most successfully encouraged audience engagement online was "Racing Extinction" – Trailer, as revealed by an analysis of social media participation

and video viewership. With over 500,000 online views, the trailer's narrative appears to draw

audiences into the story, and build excitement for the final film. While this does not reveal the

success of the video's rhetoric, which is aimed towards increasing viewership of the final film, it

does demonstrate the audiences ability to identify and connect with the narratives characteristics,

a crucial element of narrative persuasion (Deighton et al, 1989). Notably, this level of

engagement on social media by audiences can be viewed as an important step in mitigating the

past failures of ecodocumentaries. In particular Selheim (2013) notes The Cove failed to properly

enable audiences to take action after having left the theatre. In other words, the OPS did not tell

audiences where they could go to take action which would address the issues in the film.

Although The Cove sought to persuade audiences to take action, particularly online (Hackley,

2014, pg. 8), it failed to provide audiences with specific ways to engage socially (Selheim, 2013,

pg. 132). Similarly, all of the analyzed videos, fail to provide audiences with an immediate way

in which they can take action. In fact, the primary way (as revealed in the dramatistic analysis)

by which audiences are encouraged to purify their guilt is through viewership of the Racing

Extinction film, which is not set to be released until December 2nd, 2015 (racingextinction.com),

almost a year after the trailer's release.

Similar failures, in terms of how audiences can purify guilt derived from the narrative,

can be seen in the other two analyzed videos as well. The narratives of both Why Sharks Matter

and Introduction provide audiences with few clues as to how they can take action against the

"attacks on nature" depicted in the videos. As noted previously, Racing Extinction: Why Sharks

Matter, does provide a link to a petition within the videos description (and on related "tweets" by

the OPS), however according to Selheim (2013), who critiques the success of The Cove, these

petitions fall short of accomplishing the "energy to incite widespread, sustainable change" (pg.

130). In briefly assessing the success of the rhetoric however, it is important to note that the petition which was shared on social media, alongside the video, reached its goal substantially (125% of the required signature). Notably, Racing Extinction: Why Sharks Matter, was the most successful video (in terms of shares) on Twitter, possibly due in part to having a purifying action which audiences could take to address the guilt presented in the narrative.

A major critique of ecodocumentaries is that they often alienate the communities which they seek to change. In the case of <u>The Cove</u>, Lamar (2012) notes that a negative portrayal of the Japanese characters reduce the receptiveness of the audiences they are trying to change (pg. 55). Both <u>Racing Extinction – Why Sharks Matter</u> and <u>Racing Extinction: Introduction</u> attempt to mitigate this issue by placing blame / negatively framing humanity as a whole. Unfortunately where these two videos succeed in addressing this issue, the <u>"Racing Extinction" Trailer</u> fails.

Audio narratives and accompanying visuals within the <u>"Racing Extinction" Trailer</u> consistently point to specific communities which have either acted in favour of or against environmental protection. For example, as the audience is shown a market stall containing animal parts, Louis Psihoyos states that "basically everything endangered in the world is for sale in China" ("Racing Extinction – Trailer", 00:36). The video then goes on to characterize an agent, Mr. Lee, as an antagonist within the thriller espionage trope. Although the trailer does not necessarily reflect the cultural characterizations of the final film, this fails todirectly address the concerns presented by Lamar (2012) and others (Selheim, 2013) regarding their previous work. Selheim (2013) notes that <u>The Cove</u> positions itself as a politicized ethnographic documentary, rather than ecodocumentary, by pitting "upper-class, American elite against a poor, non-white Japanese fishing village" (pg. 136). A similar comparison is drawn in "Racing Extinction" –

Trailer, where an "elite" team, infiltrates Chinese markets in attempt to reveal their secret practices.

One other critique of Selheim (2013), which the filmmakers address is that The Cove, and many ecodocumentaries like it, seek to inspire widespread social movements, but limit access to their film to those who are willing to pay to see it (pg. 138). Racing Extinction, which was sold to the Discovery Channel following its premier, is set to premier on television in more than "220 countries and territories around the world" (racingextinction.com/the-film). Many documentary scholars also call on filmmakers, who seek to create social movements, to better leverage online platforms in order to form online communities and organize advocacy actions (Selheim, 2013, pg. 138; Hackley, 2012; Cieply, 2015). Although the OPS videos analyzed do not contain calls-to-action which promote the creation of online advocacy groups, the high level of online sharing that occurred for videos such as Why Sharks Matter present a real possibility of better social media engagement on the part of the filmmakers. We do not however, see online engagement at such a level that reflects successful film / social media social movements, such as that created by Kony 2012 (Briones et al, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Within the promotional videos for the soon-to-be released Racing Extinction we can see relationships between dramatistic properties which reflect and reinforce the accuracy of Burkean concepts. Using Burke's dramatism framework, as well as his concepts of identification and the root of motives (guilt, purification, and redemption), this research has revealed persuasive processes that are leveraged by the Racing Extinction filmmakers. The OPS works to persuades audiences by leveraging narratives which depict the disruption of natural hierarchies, while simultaneously using victimage (placing blame) on agents with which audiences may identify.

Connecting audiences consubstantially to agents which are in destructive relationships with nature, the filmmakers present a narrative which inspires audiences to take action. However where the rhetoric of these promotional videos succeed, we see several failures on the part of the OPS in empowering audiences to take action.

Reflective of the previous failures of documentaries which seek to inspire social movements, Racing Extinction's promotional videos appear to continue along a trend of failing to provide audiences with the tools necessary for them to take meaningful action, as well as distancing themselves from certain communities in favour of a stronger narrative. Within the Racing Extinction trailer as well as Why Sharks Matter, we see filmmakers create a strong distinction between the human agents capable of taking action, and those which have caused "the extinction" in the first place, distancing certain communities from the identifiable narrative of the film. This victimage of certain communities was recognized by scholars in assessment of The Cove, and has not been appropriately addressed. Additionally this research has revealed no distinct support for online communities seeking to engage in the social movements depicted or called for within the trailer, and alluded to in the other promotional videos. Notably, audiences appear to be left to figure it out themselves, with any opportunities for action offered by the filmmakers being limited to online petitions.

It is important to note that the motives and purpose behind the "Racing Extinction" Trailer, as revealed by the dramatistic analysis, suggest that the filmmakers may intentionally fail to empower audiences at this time. This is because it is the intent of the filmmakers to symbolically connect the act of viewership with the larger goal of environmental protection. And limited viewership may yet prove to be one issue the OPS has successfully addressed by selling Racing Extinction's distribution to the Discovery Channel. This allows the film to be far more

accessible to audiences than previous documentaries which were restricted by the price of

admission to a movie theatre (Selheim, 2013).

      To close, this research explores the dramatistic properties of ecodocumentary

promotional videos and measure online audience engagement to reveal the rhetorical processes

that occur within the documentaries' narratives. Racing Extinction's aim to change disruptive

human behaviors against the environment by using guilt felt from the disruption of natural

hierarchies. Where the Racing Extinction promotional videos fail, is that audiences are often left

without direction to take action. As Burke's framework suggests, we cannot consider the findings

of these dramatistic relationships to be definitive or all-encompassing answers to the question of

how the persuasive process operates. We can, however, take these findings as insight into the

question of "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it"

(Burke, 1969b, pg. xv). While their aspirations may be to mortify audiences around the world,

for decades of negligent human activity, the filmmakers of Racing Extinction may still prove that

guilty few can change the world.

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