

PROVE IT! CLIMATE CHANGE FILMS AND THE SKEPTIC

by

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ABSTRACT

Science and natural history documentaries can be an entertaining and effective way to teach the public about a scientific topic. The topic of climate change presents a unique set of problems that require that a successful climate change film must rethink how the science is presented. Climate change is unique in that it has been so politicized that not only is it controversial, but a whole segment of the population (including those in government) simply doesn't believe that climate change exists. So each climate change film must be seen as an argument, and as a political document, if its goal is to persuade a skeptic that climate change does exist and needs to be actively addressed by the public and by government.

Aristotle's rhetoric is a valuable foundation for creating a persuasive climate change argument in a climate change film. Each of Aristotle's proofs provides a guideline for persuasion. But these proofs are not complete without knowing how to frame your argument. Framing is a valuable cognitive political tool, used by conservatives for decades, and because each climate change film is a political document, framing is a necessary tool for the climate change filmmaker to use.

INTRODUCTION: THE RHETORIC OF CLIMATE CHANGE

There is something profoundly daunting about making a documentary about climate change. If a filmmaker were to make a film about, for instance, lions, she wouldn't risk coming across a large segment of the viewing public who would say, "Well, I don't *believe* in lions." Possibly only evolution can be compared to climate change in that, no matter how much evidence is put forth through science, there are many people who simply don't believe in them. One crucial difference between evolution and climate change, however, is that climate change is happening *now*; it is destructive to our environment, our species, and our way of life; and by our actions we can change the outcome. So an effective discourse about climate change is crucial. The largest impediment to this effective discourse, and resulting action, is the profound politicization of climate change by conservatives. This politicization has created staunch skeptics both in government (the people who can change policies), and in the general public (the people who can change both government and their lifestyles).

How a climate change film tells its story, how it presents its argument, will determine if the film can reach the skeptics and change their viewpoint, or if it will simply end up "preaching to the choir." The supportive methods for making a persuasive argument are addressed by Aristotelian rhetoric. Bill Nichols states that rhetoric is "the means by which the author attempts to convey his or her outlook persuasively to the audience" (134). If the goal of a climate change documentary is not just to inform its viewer of facts, but also to persuade skeptics of the validity of climate change science, then rhetoric is how the filmmaker will attempt to do this. Rhetoric's "emphasis is less

on meaning than effect” (Nichols 134), so how the skeptical viewer responds to the film, not the meaning or intent in the film or by the filmmaker, is the indicator of how persuasive the film was.

Aristotle states that there are two main ways by which a film’s persuasiveness can be strengthened. One way is through *inartistic proofs*, which is essentially evidence. This evidence can consist of “witnesses, confessions, documents, objects: those material representations brought from the world for us to see and hear” (Nichols 134). Thus, inartistic proof in a climate change film consists of scientists and their science. This would normally make up the bulk of a climate change film, or any science film for that matter. This evidence can be seen as the *facts* that most scientists and documentary filmmakers rely upon in order to inform their audience about global warming. Most climate change films in the past have relied primarily upon inartistic proofs. Unfortunately, “evidence in documentary often depends on the indexical bond of the film image with what it represents” (Nichols 134), and in the case of climate change, this indexical bond is seen by the skeptic as compromised from the outset and so the evidence will be suspect, or even dismissed in its entirety.

Another way in which to strengthen a documentary’s persuasiveness to its audience is through what Aristotle referred to as *artistic proofs*, which “depend on the quality of the text’s construction, [and] the persuasiveness of its representations or truth claims” (Nichols 134). Artistic proofs can be seen as the tactics used by the author in order to increase persuasiveness. Artistic proofs can, in turn, be separated into three categories. *Ethical proofs* refer to the perceived moral or ethical character of the

“speaker,” whether that means the narrator, the scientist being interviewed, the main “character” that the film is about, or even the filmmaker herself. For instance, in the film An Inconvenient Truth, how the viewer perceives Al Gore’s character is an ethical proof, and is crucial to how persuasive the film is to this viewer. Another form of artistic proof is *emotional proof*, which uses images or vernacular to play upon a viewer’s often pre-existing emotional frame of mind on an existing topic or representation. The third form of artistic proof is *demonstrative proof*, which is “based upon demonstration or example, where convincing the audience takes priority over the demonstration’s factual merits” (Nichols 136). Nichols further states:

The demonstration may be real or apparent without rhetorical consequences so long as it is persuasive. Evidence has a role to play here, but a demonstrative proof concentrates on making evidence persuasive, not on ensuring that it is fair, accurate, or even authentic. Since falsehoods damage an argument if they are discovered, demonstrative proofs often rely less upon false claims than on half-truths. (136)

The climate change films that have come along in the past have been very effective at informing people of the *facts* of climate change (inartistic proofs) but did little to change the minds of skeptics, often causing a backlash and deepening the divide between the believers and skeptics. They presented an argument that was not persuasive to the skeptic.

So what is the best way to persuade a climate change skeptic about the validity of climate change science through a documentary film? I would never presume to tell any filmmaker that I have the recipe for persuading the climate change skeptic. But by using Aristotelian rhetoric, I can explore the different aspects of climate change films and the methods that they use, with varying degrees of success, and suggest new avenues of

persuasion for future films. First, by looking at the foundation of rhetoric, I will discuss how argument and rhetoric are related and why any climate change film must involve argument. Next, by looking at the relation between rhetorical argument and politics, I will discuss why I believe nearly all documentaries are inherently political, and why climate change films especially need to be treated as political films by the filmmaker, and use political techniques, if they are to persuade the skeptical viewer. Following this, I will look at how Aristotelian rhetoric can be used as an argument for and against objectivity, and how conservative climate change naysayers have parasitized attempts at objectivity on the topic. And finally, I will explain that while inartistic proofs are necessary to convey scientific facts about the topic, facts in and of themselves are never going to be enough to persuade skeptics. By taking Aristotelian artistic rhetoric a step further and looking at an argument cognitively, I will discuss how *framing* must be used in any climate change film in order to be most persuasive. Framing is a more evolved form of artistic proof that must be used (and has been for many years by conservatives to *negate* the idea of climate change) in order for a climate change film to be persuasive enough to convince the skeptic of the validity of the science and overcome their deep-set predispositions about it.

RHETORIC, PERSUASION, AND ARGUMENT

If we are to claim that argument is important in climate change documentary, it is important to understand what argument is, its relation to Aristotelian rhetoric, and its relation to documentary films in general. The proposal that climate change documentaries be made as arguments is actually in alignment with traditional notions of documentary. The Oxford English Dictionary describes an argument as “a statement or fact advanced to influence the mind,” and also as “proof, evidence” (115). Therefore, in essence, in a documentary we are offering the viewer evidence in order to influence her mind on that topic. In fact, Bill Nichols states in Representing Reality, “Implicit in this text-centered definition of documentary is the assumption that sounds and images stand as evidence and are treated as such, rather than as elements of a plot” (20), and that “argument about the world, or representation in the sense of placing evidence before others in order to convey a particular viewpoint, forms the organizational backbone of documentary” (125). Documentary filmmakers use the elements of film in order to present to the audience evidence that will support their argument. So in documentary, argument is the backbone of the film, used with a desire to persuade, and rhetoric is the mechanism that the filmmaker uses to achieve that desired effect. Arguments rely on rhetoric to be persuasive.

If argument forms the organizational backbone of a documentary, then it implies that some form of political agenda is present. Dictionary.com defines the word *political* as “based on or motivated by partisan or self-serving objectives.” If someone presents

commentary on or makes an attempt to sway social condition, history, government or human nature, then this is inherently political. This presentation can be blatant, covert, indirect or even unintended, but if it falls into this realm then it is political. And because of the nature of the human mind, it is virtually impossible to create anything, especially a documentary about climate change, without making some sort of comment on the human condition, even if this comment is directed at the creator herself. We are all subject to the influence of our own histories, communities, biases and experiences. The act of creating can either assimilate or reject these influences, yet each scenario will have the end result of being political comments. Some people believe we can overcome the political by amassing knowledge and experience of other cultures and/or belief systems, yet while this may *influence* a person's cultural identity or belief system it can never overcome them, and therefore overcome the political. Experiences and knowledge are inherently political because they are filtered through past knowledge and experience, each in turn influencing the next, thereby negating the notion of pure experience or knowledge, and thereby negating the notion of a documentary that is not political.

Most people who view documentaries, if asked to define the term *documentary*, will use words like *real*, *reality* or *realism* somewhere in the definition. Certainly the general documentary audience entertains an assumption of a strong indexical bond between what they see on the screen and the "true nature" of what is depicted. Most documentary viewers believe that documentary filmmakers do not *create documentaries* so much as they *document reality*. Suspension of disbelief is not something that most documentary viewers believe should be required when viewing these films, yet because

the idea of reality itself is a construction the perception of it is subject to political influences.

Any individual's concept of the "reality" of climate change (or any of their concepts of reality) is a reflection of that person's current working paradigms and social experiences. As Jen-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni state, "Reality is nothing but an expression of prevailing ideology" (Comolli and Narboni, 25). The concept of reality is simultaneously a reflection of social and political mores and an instrument for persuasion and manipulation of those mores. And documentary, being perceived by the public as a re-presentation of reality, therefore carries similar power as tool of persuasion and power as symbol of ideological paradigm. Of course, many times there are multiple, competing prevailing ideologies about a topic at work in a society at any given time. This is the case with climate change.

It is valid to ask the question "how much power does documentary really have"? Can a climate change film, or any film, really change the way people think or behave? What is the point of painstakingly creating your argument if in the end you're just making a science film that will inform, but not ultimately change anyone's mind? In 1995, Kirwin Cox of the National Film Board of Canada polled forty-eight scholars and filmmakers. They were asked to list the ten documentaries that they believe had changed the world. After much deliberation, the people polled had to settle instead for documentaries that had exerted some local "influence," because they could not come up with films that had created any sort of monumental change (Gaines 90). This would tend to discount the notion of documentary as powerful political tool. But influence does not

need to be overt to be present, and change does not need to be cataclysmic and global to be felt as a force over humankind. Take for example Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will. Today this film is acknowledged as blatant Nazi propaganda filmmaking. Yet this recognition comes with the benefit of hindsight and knowing the results of this political regime's reign. There may have been no global, cataclysmic change recognized at the time the film came out and it was then perceived by many as simply a documentary about the rise of a new political power, but it is difficult to measure how pivotal this film was in the eventual genocidal murder of 6 million Jews in Germany. I think it is safe to state that the film had some significant impact as a vehicle of political rhetoric. Documentary, as a vehicle of political rhetoric, *can be* profoundly influential, and this upholds the notion of the power of documentary as a force for political stasis or change.

OBJECTIVITY AS PERSPECTIVE

Sound and images in film are not only evidence in support of the filmmaker's argument; they are also evidence of the *filmmaker's* politics and ethics. It is impossible for a documentary to successfully advance an argument without simultaneously "outing" a filmmaker in terms of where they stand on an issue. This is directly related to Aristotle's artistic ethical proof. This proof is based upon the "morally and ethically unassailable character of the speaker. This proof is often assigned to on-screen commentators and television anchorpeople as well as to the journalistic principle of 'balanced reporting' and the general sense of unbiased or 'fair' treatment of a subject" (Nichols 134). The viewer, then, may be influenced not only by an argument in a documentary, but by the knowledge that an argument *is* taking place and the filmmaker stands on one side of that argument. It is impossible to separate the concepts. This may translate as beneficial to "influencing the mind" of the viewer, who may be influenced by the argument in the film *and* by the filmmaker's passionate stance on one side of the issue. Conversely, it may hurt the argument and the ability to influence the mind of the viewer because, while the argument in and of itself may or may not be persuasive, the viewer is aware that the filmmaker is not unbiased and therefore feel that the information contained within the film may be manipulated or, at worst, fabricated, in order to maximally benefit the advancement of the argument.

An Inconvenient Truth is an example of a film where the filmmaker has very overt politics and an overtly political social character that affects the message of the film. The documentary won many awards, and was instrumental in winning Al Gore, the writer and

narrator, a Nobel Peace Prize. By most accounts, this film would be seen as a great success. If a viewer is already a fan of Al Gore, then his political reputation will likely enhance the message for them. If the viewer may not be a fan of Al Gore, but is a progressive who believes that climate change exists and has global ramifications, then the political nature of the filmmaker would also be a benefit. But what about someone who is a conservative and is a skeptic about climate change? The political nature of the filmmaker, and his strong ties to one side of the issue of climate change, may turn the viewer off and therefore render the message (the argument) unsuccessful. If the filmmaker or social actor in the film allows their politics and agenda to be *too* present in the film, then they run the risk of losing their more skeptical viewers.

This directly raises the idea of objectivity in documentary. As stated previously, I believe that it is impossible to make a documentary without some sort of political assertion to it. But what about attempts at objectivity by the filmmaker? Objectivity in documentary has been offered up as a standard of truth in a medium that is frequently seen as re-presenting truth. Nichols states:

Objectivity enters in... as a way to convey the apparent truthfulness of what is said or claimed or to mask the partialities of the reporter. Even when the reportage or documentary moves more clearly toward advocacy, effectiveness often depends on satisfying this expectation of impartiality.

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While pure objectivity is impossible, how far should a climate change documentary filmmaker go in their attempts to convey all angles of the story in an objective manner?

First and foremost, it should be made clear that objectivity itself is merely another perspective. “Nonjudgmental, impartial, disinterested, and factually correct, objectivity

nonetheless offers an argument about the world” (Nichols 127). While journalistic institutions have traditionally placed great value on objectivity, partly to safeguard their unassailable characters, and therefore the Aristotelian ethical proof of their claims, this objectivity is a construction, a way of strengthening the bond between journalism and truth claims. And because documentary is often seen as having a similar *indexical* bond to truth claims, documentary filmmakers often feel that they must work under the same restrictions of objectivity. Often the deployment of these ethical proofs has consistently “relied upon the avoidance of emotionalism as evidence of fair-mindedness, coupled with spontaneous amazement, disbelief, fear, horror, amusement, and so on as evidence of a ‘natural’ or commonsensical human response to events that call for such display” (Nichols 190). So while these detached, institutional, contrived deliveries do satisfy any desire on a viewer’s part for objectivity, they may ultimately not be the best means of persuasion.

While one is in the process of asking, with so much seemingly incontrovertible scientific evidence on climate change there is available, how there could still possibly be skeptics out there, it is necessary to look at the role that objectivity has played in public perception of this topic. Objectivity, it seems, can be not only somewhat of a burden, it can actually create a scenario whereby information is skewed in the public opinion far beyond the merit of the opposing viewpoint. Kevin Armitage states in “State of Denial: The United States and the Politics of Global Warming” in the journal Globalizations (referencing a study done by Boykoff and Boykoff, 133):

...in order to achieve ‘balanced’ reporting, the ‘prestige’ newspapers in the United States—specifically the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los*

Angeles Times and the *Wall Street Journal*—all offered roughly equal space to peer-reviewed science and those who claim global warming is not scientifically credible. In this way a superficial adherence to ‘balance’—that is, reporting ‘both sides’ of a debate—distorted evidence and the overall understanding of the issue. Though many in the media accurately reported the story, overall the media provided ‘balanced coverage of a very unbalanced issue’ (Armitage 425).

And “when it comes to coverage of global warming, balanced reporting can actually be a form of informational bias” (Boykoff and Boykoff 126). In this case, the attempts at maintaining strong ethical proof have created a situation where there is a public perception of a paucity of scientific consensus on the issue of climate change. And this manufactured objectivity indirectly supports a stance that the conservatives have worked hard to create: that in which the subject of climate change is still one of uncertainty and lack of technological information. Under these circumstances it seems to the public to be entirely reasonable for these conservative policy makers to be skeptical about climate change, and therefore they should be too. Objectivity has exacerbated public confusion about the topic of climate change, and this should be strongly considered by the filmmaker making a climate change documentary.

Even more insidious than simple overzealous over-reporting is the fact that in attempts to be balanced and objective, the media has allowed itself to be a venue for pseudoscience, falsified information and public manipulation. Conservatives, knowing of a likely backlash if they were to attempt to undermine the values behind climate change, opt instead to undermine the scientific certainty behind it. This could not be accomplished by simply relying on “balanced reporting,” so much more complex measures had to be undertaken: measures that have been presented to the public as

science but actually have little to do with valid climate change research by respected scientists. Oklahoma Republican Senator James Inhofe actually took to the floor of the Senate and “cited novelist Michael Crichton’s recent anti-environment thriller, *State of Fear* (Crichton), both as a source of scientific information—he called it ‘the real story about global warming’—and as an accurate depiction of the environmental community, whose worry over global warming he ridiculed as ‘hysterical’” (Armitage 417-418). As amazing as this may sound, many people in the general public get their scientific information from “sources” such as these, and the only thing truly preposterous is that Senator Inhofe was the chairman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works at the time!

Conservatives have very successfully exploited “perception of risk” frames. They claim that the climate change science is questionable, and with so many uncertainties surrounding it, it would be imprudent to take drastic action because it may end up having large financial and social costs. These uncertainties are very few, and getting fewer by the day, but the mere fact that *any* uncertainty exists is enough for them to hang onto and exploit. In reality, “consensus as strong as the one that has developed around this topic is rare in science” (Kennedy 5513).

Conservatives also rely on the dubious “science” of institutes and councils that give themselves names that denote environmentalism and conservation, but are actually conservative think tanks funded by corporations or entities with financial interest in NOT changing policy in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (such as the fossil fuel industry). These organizations, such as the Information Council for the Environment

(ICE), skew public perception of scientific consensus on climate change by relying on non-peer-reviewed pseudoscience and delivering doctored information. And the public, as well as policy-makers, are notoriously unable to discriminate between science and pseudoscience. “Again and again, like a mantra, we heard calls for ‘sound science’ from Members [of U. S. Congress] who had little or no experience of what science does or how it progresses” (Brown ii). But despite an overabundance of scientific information coming their way from the scientific mainstream, and a call to action from unbiased sources such as the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) who claim that the overwhelming evidence called for us to begin mitigating the effects of humans on global climate changes, any decisive action was halted by obstacles presented by “conservative financial elites and fossil-fuel-related vested interests,” which have been a driving force in the “environmental backlash” (Lahsen 143). So media objectivity in the climate change debate created a “skeptical-science” vacuum which conservatives filled with misinformation and misleading pseudoscience. Objectivity has not served the public well in this instance. This is a crucial factor to be taken into account when creating a climate change documentary. A climate change documentary filmmaker must carefully decide what time and attention to give skepticism about climate change in attempts to be balanced when this attempt may well undermine the whole message within the film.

FRAMING SCIENCE, FRAMING POLITICS, FRAMING FILM

For an “argument” to be persuasive, all aspects of Aristotelian rhetoric should come into play when making a climate change documentary. Yet some of the rhetorical proofs are more effective than others at persuading skeptics in different situations. It’s a matter of balancing these rhetorical proofs so that all are incorporated but with different measurements in order to be most effective. The rhetorical proof that hasn’t been adequately addressed yet, and is critical to making a persuasive climate change film, is *artistic demonstrative proof*. To reiterate, this proof, based upon demonstration or example, states that “convincing the audience takes priority over the demonstration’s factual merits” (Nichols 136). Demonstrative proof is not about manufacturing information; it is about placing information in front of an audience in such a way that the effectiveness of the message is the point, not necessarily the message itself. It is about using whichever technical and artistic means the filmmaker has available that are necessary in order to persuade the viewer. This proof can overlap with the other proofs. The whole point is *persuasion*. This is not just a technique for filmmaking, or storytelling in general, it is a technique used in politics to gain further political and public support. In politics it is referred to as *framing*, and this framing is an important tool for the climate change filmmaker to use in order to be persuasive to skeptics.

It may seem strange to have to state this, but the issue in question in terms of climate change’s cause for concern and reform is not politics or filmmaking, but *science*. Climate change is a science, subject to all of the rigors and peer reviews that other sciences are. So because this is the foundation of the climate change political debate, and

the foundation of climate change films, it makes sense that climate change *scientists* also need to change how they frame science to make it significant to skeptics as well as environmentalists. Most of the American public gets their scientific information from the media. So most scientists believed that the more technical information that is available to the public via the media, the more this public will agree with obvious scientific findings. “So if science alone drove public responses, we would expect increasing public confidence in the validity of the science, and decreasing political gridlock” (Nisbet and Mooney 56). Unfortunately this is not the case. According to the Nisbet and Mooney article in Science, “research shows that people are rarely well enough informed or motivated to weigh competing ideas and arguments” (56). And as previously shown, the American public has been shown a misleadingly “balanced” view of the climate change debate, which they are apparently not capable of deciphering on their own. They take the scientific information presented and “use their value predispositions (such as political or religious beliefs) as perceptual screens, selecting news outlets and Web sites whose outlooks match their own” (Nisbet and Mooney 56). The strongest scientific message, if filtered out by a person’s pre-existing value screen, will have absolutely no effect on that person’s opinion on that matter. Technical scientific messages seem to be especially susceptible to being screened out because they are, simply by their technical nature, outside of the layperson’s frame and therefore discarded in favor of frames that include repercussions or consequences of the science if it turns out to be fallible. “In many cases, scientists should strategically avoid emphasizing the technical details of science when

trying to defend it” (Nisbet and Mooney 56). This also applies to climate change documentaries.

As stated earlier, documentary films are arguments, and political assertions of one form or another, so it stands to reason that documentary filmmakers need to adopt political techniques, essentially making a political documentary and using the tactics of presenting a political argument, if they want to make a climate change film that will reach these skeptics and generate changes in policy, attitude and behavior. One of these techniques, long used by conservatives to successfully sway public opinion on a number of topics, is framing (Lakoff 16). Conservatives have long recognized that cognitively, the human brain does not respond to facts, it responds to how information is framed (Lakoff 17). More recently progressive politicians and, as we’ve seen, even scientists have realized that in order to regain a foothold on topics such as climate change, they will have to learn how to effectively frame arguments as well. If facts (inartistic proofs) are never enough in and of themselves, filmmakers tackling the topic of climate change must also learn how to properly frame their arguments if they are to have the maximum possible impact amongst the widest possible audience.

Framing takes the concept of Aristotelian artistic demonstrative proof a step further by not only stating that persuasion is the primary objective and ultimately more important than truth, but by essentially giving methods for achieving that end. Politically progressive filmmakers tackling climate change will ignore the concept of framing at their own peril, for this is what Democrats and progressives did for decades with the result being a public that has been misled and misinformed despite being bombarded with

a barrage of facts from the progressive left on topics such as climate change, evolution, economics and a woman's right to choose. The reason for this is that cognitively, human beings do not respond to facts, they respond to framing. Our brains take information in, from very early in our lives and from various sources, and create frames that further information either fits into or does not. When it comes to something such as voting in a political election, it seems common sense that people would vote in their own best interest! But this is NOT the case (Lakoff 18)! People vote what fits into their frames, which is essentially their identity and values. And as Lakoff states, “[We know from cognitive science that] people think in frames... To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frames. If the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off” (17). This applies to the issue of climate change because conservatives have created a frame around the issue, which has been accepted by a large number of people, and scientists and progressives have been pelting these people with facts that are simply bouncing off. So the people whose frames already match the message of the scientists and progressives will see these facts and absorb them into the foundation of their frame, strengthening it, while the skeptics will ignore the facts. This is where the phrase “preaching to the choir” comes in. And there is merit in this tack, but if the goal is to persuade skeptics then this tack is mostly useless.

METHODS OF FRAMING

One popular conservative use of framing, which has been very successful for them is the use of Orwellian language. Orwellian language is essentially using language that connotes the opposite of what intent or action it describes. It “hijacks” the other side’s language in order to create a frame that people will understand and identify with, but carries this too far and crosses the line into misinformation and outright lies. Conservatives used this Orwellian language to lull liberals into thinking that they were acting progressively, compassionately and quite out of their usual character. The premiere language expert from the conservative camp is Frank Luntz, who has written a number of books (for conservative politicians only!) on how to use language to further right-wing agenda. Lakoff describes one section of one of Luntz’s books as such:

For example, in last year’s [2003’s] edition, the section on global warming says that science seems increasingly to be going *against* the conservative position (my italics). However, conservatives can counter the science using [the] right language. People who support environmentalist positions like certain words. They like the words *healthy*, *clean*, and *safe* because these words fit frames that describe what the environment means to them. Therefore, Luntz says, use the words *healthy*, *clean*, and *safe* whenever possible, even when talking about coal plants or nuclear power plants. It is this kind of Orwellian weakness that causes a piece of legislation that actually increases pollution to be called the Clear Skies Act. (22-23)

So while framing does mean deliberately wording your argument in language that conservatives and skeptics won’t repel, it does not mean lying to people or deliberately misleading them. The Aristotelian demonstrative proof could, in theory, be used to justify this method. One might even argue that this method has worked for conservatives so should be considered a viable tool for all sides, but ultimately a misinformed public

can turn out to be a dangerous public, and lies can be discovered, so well-framed honesty is always a better option.

But framing isn't just about language, it's about ideas. A lack of frame means a lack of an idea (Lakoff 24). This is a phenomenon known as *hypocognition*, and it's something the progressives had been suffering from for a long time. They simply didn't have a fixed idea about some of their key topics. This creates a lack of language to convey it, and therefore a lack of persuasive muscle. Lakoff describes a study done in Tahiti in the 1950s by an anthropologist and therapist named Bob Levy. Suicide had been very common in Tahiti, and he wanted to know why. Apparently, "Tahitians did not have a concept of grief. They felt grief. They experienced it. But they did not have a concept for it or a name for it. They did not see it as a normal emotion... They lacked a concept they needed—and wound up committing suicide all too often" (24). So, in making a climate change film, it is important to have a clearly defined concept behind the idea of climate change, and in turn the language to convey that concept will come much more easily and be much more persuasive.

Framing is also about values. The goal is to address an idea like climate change in a way that embraces as many value systems as possible. Many of the conservative public have a frame in their mind of climate change reform as a bunch of "tree huggers," which to them is an assault to their value system. This means that any information about climate change that brings this frame to mind will automatically be rejected. So the topic has to be presented in such a way as to address another cognitive frame that will be in consonance with the person's value system. If a filmmaker addresses climate change

from an economic frame or a national security frame, which are typically the realm of the conservatives, then she has a better chance of having her information “stick” and not bounce off because it does not fit the skeptical viewer’s frame. This can also be looked at as addressing the situation strategically. This is something the conservatives are very good at. This means taking one issue where the “arguer” wants a certain outcome, seeing what other issues are addressed by that outcome, and using one of the other issues which may be less inflammatory to gain support for the outcome. Many different outcomes in many different areas may come about from one strategic initiative. Lakoff uses the idea of getting money for alternative energy (an initiative which does not fit into many conservative’s frame) and presenting it strategically. It can be strategic because “it is not just an energy issue or a sustainability issue.” According to Lakoff (31), it is also:

- A jobs issue: It would create two to four million jobs.
- A health issue: Less air pollution means less childhood asthma.
- A clean water, clean air issue.
- A species issue: It would clean up environments and habitats.
- A global warming issue: We would be making a contribution to lowering greenhouse gases without a program specifically for global warming.
- A foreign policy issue: We would no longer be dependent on Middle Eastern oil.
- A third world development issue: Every country, no matter how “underdeveloped,” can make its own energy if it has the appropriate alternative technologies. Such countries would not have to borrow money to buy oil and pollute their environments. And they would not have to pay interest on the money borrowed. Furthermore, every dollar invested in energy in the third world has a multiplier effect of six.

So it is easy to see why it would be very beneficial to present a problem strategically. A filmmaker, like a politician, may wish to strategically directly address just one less

inflammatory issue, but will reap the benefits of action on many issues if this is done persuasively.

Before a filmmaker begins a documentary on climate change, it is important for them to investigate how they can most persuasively frame their argument in order to win over skeptics. This is specific to the film, the message, and the filmmaker, so must be tailored to each film individually. But Lakoff does outline a series of general guidelines that will help any documentary filmmaker to create a film that will not only inform, but also gain additional support for taking decisive steps against climate change. These guidelines are (Lakoff 33-34):

1. “Recognize what conservatives have done right and where progressives have missed the boat.”
2. Don’t just re-use conservative language and framing. “If you keep their language and their framing and just argue against it, you lose because you are reinforcing their frame.”
3. “The truth alone will not set you free.” Don’t just speak truths, *frame* truths.
4. “Speak from your moral perspective at all times. Get clear on your values and use the language of values.”
5. “Understand where conservatives are coming from.” This will help you to predict what they are going to say and be prepared for it.
6. “Think strategically, across issue areas.”
7. “Think about the *consequences* of proposals. Form progressive *slippery slope* initiatives (my italics).”
8. Remember that people align themselves with “their identity and their values, which need not coincide with their self-interest.”
9. “Unite! And cooperate! “
10. “Be proactive, not reactive. Play offense, not defense. *Practice reframing, every day, on every issue.* Don’t just say what you believe. Use *your* frames, not their frames.
11. “Speak to the progressive base in order to activate ‘swing voters’. Don’t move to the right.”

Following these steps requires that filmmakers be more thoughtful and deliberate in their treatment of climate change, and not just reiterate the science involved. This should

become an automatic part of their construction of artistic demonstrative proof, and should also be a factor when constructing ethical and emotional proofs as well. It's all part of the framing.

CONCLUSION

Aristotelian rhetoric creates a foundation for persuasive argument, so therefore it also creates a foundation for documentary films about climate change. These films need to be persuasive to an audience that is at best ill informed yet receptive, and at worst completely skeptical about the existence of the topic. Scientific technological information, the inartistic proof of the climate change film, presents evidence for the argument but cannot be relied upon exclusively to be persuasive to the skeptic. The artistic proofs, which include ethical rhetorical proof, emotional rhetorical proof and demonstrative rhetorical proof, must be brought in as persuasive weapons. Yet each of these proofs must be deployed with an understanding of how framing works, and how framing needs to be used in the specific case of each climate change film. Because rhetorical ethical proof brings the character of the filmmaker and/or on-screen personalities into question, the filmmaker's choice of this character, or narrator, should involve an investigation into how this person will be seen to fit, or not fit, into the frame of the skeptic. Al Gore did not fit the climate change skeptic's frame of someone trustworthy, so they immediately dismissed what he had to say. Rhetorical emotional proof also needs to be checked for framing viability. The image of polar bears balancing precariously on shrinking ice flows is effective framing for environmentalists who respond emotionally to this sad image, but the global warming skeptic will have a frame that can explain it away as hype and hoax, and so it ends up NOT being an emotional proof for them because it bounces off of their emotional framework. It may even end up reinforcing their conservative viewpoint if they see it as emotionally manipulative.

While rhetorical demonstrative proof seems merely to give the filmmaker “permission” to frame, it actually carries greater power than just that. Demonstrative proof in climate change films includes examples of worst-case scenarios should we ignore the scientific warnings and the planet heats up as it is predicted to do. This can be very persuasive if framed properly. These examples may be just conjecture, but demonstrative proof is an “end justifies the means” proof whose goal is persuasion no matter the cost. Because climate change is a predictive science as well as a hard science, if a filmmaker follows the guidelines for framing as with those outlined by George Lakoff, then there are many frames available for the documentary filmmaker to counter the existing conservative rhetoric and create a new understanding of human impact on climate change and how to take actions to mitigate it.

In making my climate change documentary, I tried to incorporate as many concepts of framing as I could. Because my film is set in the future, many of the “predictions” played out within it cannot be proven because *they haven’t happened yet*. But because I believe that the effect of spelling out these predicted consequences will be persuasive to the viewer I include them in the film. This is indicative of demonstrative rhetorical proof. I tried to be frame the argument not from a left-wing progressive standpoint, but from the frame of a normal, non-partisan citizen experiencing the effects of global warming, and the massive changes that it engendered, on an area that she had been intimately familiar with and cherished. I bring into the frame economics, society, wildlife, landscape... strategically as many aspects as I could in hopes of fitting as many frames as I could, and also to give a sense of the domino effect of climate change itself. I

tried very hard to be clear on my values in order to be able to frame them more clearly, and I didn't just counter the conservative argument using their language but used my own progressive language—but not in an alienating or condescending way. My message addresses people with different identities by describing the various ways in which climate change will affect their lifestyle, whichever kind of lifestyle that may be. But most of all, in making I'm Here In Glacier..., I didn't just barrage the viewer with a series of scientific facts. I tried to give a sense of the emotion of climate change consequences in hope that this would be the most persuasive argument for any kind of viewer, conservative *or* progressive. Because it doesn't matter how progressive you are, if we don't quickly begin mitigating the effects of human impact on climate change, we will ALL feel the consequences.

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