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ABSTRACT

Aristotle's "Rhetoric" offers a model for applying the concept of the enthymeme to the work of film scholars to understand the role of the audience. Used from an analytic perspective, enthymemes emphasize audience reaction to a film, with the focus on how the film is seen, not on how it was made. Applying viewing skills to a sample of narrative films can demonstrate how the speaker and the audience jointly produce enthymemes. Films, then, make use of appeals to the audience (whether to ethos, pathos, or logos), arranged in deductive and inductive orders according to the enthymematic process. When a film is considered as an argumentative process, therefore, two important aspects of rhetoric stand out: first, the filmic argument is audience dependent in that enthymemes are completed through participation; and, second, a rhetorical theory of communication, such as Aristotle's, provides a valuable heuristic device for the critic to account for the filmic argument. By considering films as argumentative, the body of critical work on a film appears as perceptions of the argument; the critic must move to a meta-criticism by taking into account these arguments as consequences of the filmic argument. (JK)

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THE ENTHYMEME AND CONTEMPORARY FILM CRITICISM

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The Enthymeme and Contemporary Film Criticism

Rhetoric, as a theory of communication, is rarely used by film scholars to analyze narrative film. As Laurence Behrens explains, the "rhetoric of film" is a common term, but "critics who use the term, or the concept, usually don't have in mind the distinctive paradigms of classical [or modern] rhetoricians."¹ As the work of film scholars becomes increasingly rhetorical, Behrens' claim becomes more applicable. Understanding rhetorical decisions, Behrens continues, that go into the making of a film could account for not only "its distinctive tone, its flavor, and possibly even its style, but also the power, the focus, and the validity of its argument."² In effect, Behrens returns to Aristotle's classic definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion."³ The element that ties film study to rhetoric is the role of the audience. To understand the role of the audience we also return to the theory of communication developed in the tradition of the classical rhetoricians. Given Behrens' assumption of the argument metaphor of narrative film, the purpose of this study is to apply the concept of the rhetorical enthymeme to the work of film scholars to extrapolate the role of the audience.

Behrens argues that film is persuasive, that "any attempt on the part of a filmmaker to influence our thoughts and feelings [is] an 'argument.'"⁴ The audience's role in this argument seems immediately clear when we turn to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where he states that enthymemes are "the very body and substance of persuasion."⁵ The task, therefore, is one of adapting the basic concept of the enthymeme to the unique characteristics of the rhetorical nature of film study.

Lloyd F. Bitzer defines the enthymeme as "a syllogism based on probabilities, signs, and examples, whose function is rhetorical persuasion. Its successful construction is accomplished through the joint efforts of speaker and audience, and this is its essential character."⁶ Aristotle states there are demonstrative enthymemes, which "draw a conclusion from consistent propositions," and refutative enthymemes, which "draw a conclusion from inconsistent propositions."⁷ In general, the refutative enthymeme is most apparent in the reactions to new and innovative film-making techniques. Jean-Luc Goddard's Breathless (1959), for example, caused a critical stir after its release, because many critics could not come to grips with the use of the handheld camera and jump cutting. Gone, as Arthur Knight describes, were establishing shots and "the carefully planned series of shots that ordinarily would bring the character from a cafe, through the streets, up the stairs, to the door, and into the girl's apartment; Goddard cut ruthlessly from Belmondo rising from his cafe table to Belmondo closing the door behind him in the girl's boudoir."⁸ Knight goes on to point out that many critics drew the conclusion that Goddard was inept, and the film an abomination. Others, however, "saw what Goddard was up to."⁹ Knight explains:

[Some critics] began to question the necessity of showing close-ups of hands turning doorknobs and people eternally walking up flights of stairs. They spoke of the tremendous compression that was possible in film once one had stripped away the niceties and got down to the essentials of character and plot.¹⁰

Since the premises, which set the audience to jointly forming enthymemes with the film, in this case Goddard's editing style, and the traditional way of presenting this type of scene are inconsistent, some critics began to see a

new concept of compression in film editing. The inconsistency opens an area for the entrance of new information.

Premises of a refutative enthymeme are also apparent entirely within the context of the film itself. In other words, we do not have to go to an outside source for an inconsistent premise. Consider the inconsistency of the shots involved in a shock cut, or a surprising moment. It would seem that the filmmakers are relying on the inconsistencies to achieve the effect. The audience does not expect the hands to rise out of the grave, and grab the girl in Carrie (1976). Nor does the audience predict the creature to burst out of the man's stomach in Alien (1979). Yet, the probability of both are there, within the area created by the inconsistency of the premises. David Bordwell refers to this area created by inconsistency as a narrational gap, "any fictional narration can call out attention to a gap or it can distract us from it."¹¹ The filmmaker is in control of the audience's expectations, reasoning the possibilities of what can happen next. In Bordwell's words, a gap of possibilities, which the filmmaker has the choice of bringing attention. Bordwell explains, "if the narration . . . distracts us, we do not form an appropriate hypothesis and the narration can then introduce new information. These successive hypotheses . . . create surprise."¹²

The traditional principles of film editing tend to lean toward the demonstrative enthymeme. In westerns, for example, we often see the hero ride his horse up to a bluff and look off in some direction. From that shot, the film cuts to whatever the hero is looking at, e.g., the burning ranch house. In the following shot, the hero rides off the bluff in the direction he had been looking. It is not necessary to show the burning ranch house and the hero in the same shot to convince the audience that the hero was looking at the burning ranch house and riding toward it. The audience participates by making

certain assumptions prompted by the consistency of the premises implicitly by the filmmaker, and from previous exposure to similar filmic scenes.

Participation becomes a premise by taking the form of reacting to a variety of appeals being generated by enthymemes. As with oratory, a film will often select an appeal, or combination of appeals, to emphasize. The nature of the selection according to Behrens, "will depend on the subject matter, the occasion, the current situation, the nature of the audience, and the speaker's (or the filmmaker's) own personality and needs."¹³ Essentially, Behrens argues, an appeal to logos convinces us that the world portrayed in a film is a "real" world. Logos convinces us that the story is plausible, that it deserves our attention. Appeals to pathos persuade us to react emotionally to the characters, such as whether or not we feel sympathy for the main character. If we are impressed with the quality of the work done by the filmmaker, an appeal to ethos has succeeded. The appeals are not mutually exclusive, and in some cases they are dependent on the preconditioned premises of a viewer.

Hence, audience participation is the major corollary between film and the enthymematic process. The corollary is such that it makes the enthymeme significant as an analytical perspective on film. Enthymemes, like film, do not require an actual oral response from the audience. As Richard L. Lanigan argues, an enthymeme requires "only the imaginative act of discovering inherent material completion."¹⁴ With film, Christian Metz sees the medium releasing "a mechanism of affective and perceptual participation in the spectator."¹⁵ Bordwell refers to enthymeme production as a "hypothesis-forming activity," which "can be thought of as a series of questions which the [filmic] text impels us to ask."¹⁶

As with the traditional editing principles, which were seen as demonstrative enthymeme completion, according to Lanigan, are "an end for the speaker, while it is a starting-point for the listener and is assumed by the listener."¹⁷ The term starting-point is crucial to the filmic enthymeme. It is at that point that Bitzer would say the speaker and audience are jointly producing enthymemes. Nancy Harper refers to this starting-point as a psychological, empirically-based inference, which gives meaning to a specific event. The enthymeme as an analytic perspective, then, emphasizes reaction to the filmic discourse. The focus is on how the film is seen, not on how it was made. Accordingly, Lanigan specifies that a listener need not make the same link in the argument that the speaker intended. Gerald Mast holds that the film-viewing experience is dependent on a viewer's "conviction." The starting-point, for Mast, "implies an internal, emotional response on the part of the viewer, who gladly and willingly accepts a fiction as a kind of truth."¹⁸

Identifying a starting-point, for oratorical as well as filmic argument, is often done in recognizing a suppressed premise. Suppression, the leaving out of a premise, is a controversial characteristic of the enthymeme. Although not a requirement, James H. McBurney argues, "we can safely interpret Aristotle to mean that the enthymeme usually lacks one or more of the propositions of a complete syllogism."¹⁹ In one sense, suppression is related to the probability of a major premise. McBurney describes probable premises as being rationes essendi, which "assign a cause or a reason for the being of a fact."²⁰ To logically predict that the assignment of meaning will be made as the rhetor desires, Aristotle suggests a guideline of maxims by which "we enter the subject of enthymeme[s]."²¹ A maxim "is a statement; not about a particular fact, . . . but of a general nature; yet not a general statement concerning any and every sort of thing."²² Therefore, in another sense,

Lanigan argues that the relationship of maxims and enthymemes is such that Aristotle states, "a maxim plus an expressed supplementary proposition creates an enthymeme, or a maxim is 'like' an enthymeme if the supporting expression is missing or implied."²³

Lanigan is attempting to clarify this issue, which he feels Bitzer has misrepresented. Whereas Bitzer emphasizes the idea of an audience deductively constructing proofs with the speaker, Lanigan holds that a viewer may discover his own completion inductively, resulting in a maxim. Gary L. Cronkhite suggests that Bitzer's idea should be expanded along the Aristotelian concept that enthymemes are deductively rhetorical arguments and that examples are inductive. This leads Cronkhite to argue, "The enthymeme is any form of deductive rhetorical argument, adapted in whatever way the speaker deems necessary to accomplish the purpose of persuasion."²⁴ An enthymematic argument, Harper claims, contains a claim and reasons for support. Whether the starting-point is the beginning of inductive or deductive reasoning is a minor point compared to the variety of responses that make up audience participation in the filmic enthymeme.

We may, however, take into account that Behrens differentiates between inductive and deductive films. Lanigan and Harper are applicable to inductive films, which Behrens describes are generally dominated by logos appeal, because in "almost any narrative film, what we call the theme (whether intended by the filmmaker or not) is simply the propositions which accounts most satisfactorily for the characters, the way they behave, the situations in which they find themselves, the sequences of action and reaction in which they are involved, and the dramatic ends to which they come."²⁵ Conversely, Behrens' description of deductive films is more in line with Bitzer's and Cronkhite's ideas, because deductive films "demonstrate the a priori truth of

some general proposition."²⁶ Behrens clarifies this situation by pointing out, "The filmmaker who works deductively is generally more interested in ideas -- profound ones or trite ones -- than in human behavior, the close observation of which is the basic narrative element of the inductively argued film."²⁷

When the literature of film study addresses the relationship of the audience to the film the ideas are similar to those concerning the enthymeme. As James Monaco suggests, "Analysis of the relationship between the work and the observer gives us theories of its [film's] consumption."²⁸ Monaco's term "consumption" returns us to the concept of starting-points. Farrel Corcoran argues, "The viewer's task is to apprehend the event represented in [a film] sequence."²⁹ Whether the viewer has the skills is a matter of conviction. As Mast argues, "conviction in a moment of a film implies that we know (understand) what the moment means and that we know (feel) what the moment wants us to feel."³⁰ Semiologists, such as Metz and Jurij Lotman, hold that this mimetic act is more fulfilled in film than in any other art, because of the "illusion of reality." Lotman explains, "The audience is conscious of the irreal nature of the [film] event, it reacts emotionally as it would to a genuine event."³¹ In semiotic terms, the enthymematic process is seen as turning signs and signifiers into information (the signified). Umberto Eco explains that an image is perceived as a message that is referred to a given code, "but this is the normal perceptive code which presides over our every act of cognition."³²

In this study we bring these viewing skills to a sample of narrative films to discover how, in Bitzer's terms, the speaker and the audience jointly produce enthymemes. Generally, a narrative film is seen as "a sequential system of encoded signs governed by rules of combination" to discover its

inherent rhetorical stance.³³ We will proceed by seeing how film makes use of appeals, arranged in deductive and inductive orders according to the enthymematic process. Bitzer argues the necessity of this procedure when he states, "persuasion cannot take place unless the audience views a conclusion as required by the premises it subscribes to."³⁴ The goal is to find premises, because, according to McBurney, the function of premises is to "account for" facts rather than to prove their existence.

The premises that comprise an ethos appeal can be seen to reside in the concept of auteurism. Essentially, in Peter Wollen's words, auteurism "implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors."³⁵ In terms of the enthymeme, read operation as joint production, decipherment as the argument, and the revealing of authors as the conclusion. The varying postulates of auteurism differ little from Aristotle's assertion: "The character [ethos] of the speaker is a cause of persuasion when a speech is so uttered as to make him worthy of belief . . . we might almost affirm that his character [ethos] is the most potent of all the means of persuasion."³⁶ As an example, John Ford is one of the heroes of auteurism. The ethos of his work, his character, in films like The Informer (1935), Stagecoach (1939), Young Mr. Lincoln (1939), The Grapes of Wrath (1940), The Searchers (1956), The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962), and many more, is much that not only is his character revealed, but it is also influential. Filmmakers have been so impressed that they put "Fordian" bits in their own films, creating, or recreating, enthymemes based on the ethos of Ford. Writer/director John Milius admits to being influenced by The Searchers: "'I steal from Ford and I don't care' . . . 'There has been a reference to The Searchers in all three of the movies [Dillinger (1973), The Wind and The Lion (1975), and Big Wednesday (1978)] I've directed."³⁷ Similarly, certain directors have established styles which

other directors imitate. Woody Allen's Interiors (1978) is a telling example: Interiors is not like Allen's previous films, rather it is in the style of Ingmar Bergman. As Leonard Maltin's guide points out, "Woody Allen's first screen drama as a writer/director is an Ingmar Bergmanesque study . . ." ³⁸ Ethos, as it applies to the director, is indeed potent. Witness the commercialness of Steven Spielberg's name, even if he isn't the director [Poltergeist (1982); Gremlins (1984); Back to the Future (1985)]. ³⁹ His name can bring people into theatres.

The appeal to pathos resides, for the most part because it is closely related to ethos, in the reaction to the performers. Movie stars become movie stars because of the pathos they construct with the audience. Monaco points out that the studio heads tried to create stars in the old Hollywood system, but they were seldom successful. According to Monaco, "Stars were -- and still are -- the creation of the public: political and psychological models who demonstrate some quality that we collectively admire." ⁴⁰ In the terms of the enthymeme, the star and the audience jointly construct an emotional understanding of how the star (and the audience) will proceed through the events of the narrative. The rhetorical stance of the filmmakers and the stars is to draw the audience into this emotional understanding, so that the audience experiences vicariously the events and situations in the film. The concept of the demonstrative enthymeme has been well suited to the Hollywood star system. The long careers of Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, to name a few, attest the demonstrative enthymeme. The process continues today with the likes of Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Harrison Ford, and Bill Murray. The Hollywood star system, Monaco continues, "depends on creating a strong identification between hero and audience. We see things from his point of view. The effect is subtle but pervasive." ⁴¹

A strong indicator of pathos appeal is the failure in recent years of films with stars not playing their typical roles. The Razor's Edge (1984) did not attract nearly the number of Bill Murray fans that Ghostbusters (1984) did. Clint Eastwood's Honkytonk Man (1982) did not do as well as Sudden Impact (1983), Eastwood's fourth outing as the vigilante cop Dirty Harry.⁴²

Logical appeals are perhaps the most enthymematic, for herein lies argumentation in the most filmic terms. The medium has a vast repertoire of tools (tricks?) to "demonstrate the truth, real or apparent."⁴³ For the critical audience, those of us who view a film for some reason more seemingly profound than entertainment, it is a world dominated by the suppressed premise. Ambiguity is the watchword. A film provides clues, or premises, in its sequential system of codes, but it is left to the audience to draw conclusions. In a broad sense, the body of film theory has been devoted to arguing what Kenneth Burke would term the substance of film's logical appeals. From Sergei Eisenstein's theories on montage. Andre Bazin's What is Cinema?, to semiotics and point-of-view criticism. Film theorists are still trying to come to grips with how films demonstrate the truth, because film has the logical capability to appeal to an audience with an illusion of reality. Filmmaking techniques are so sophisticated today, and the filmmakers so adept, that the real or apparent truth is dependent on the context of the illusion. In Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984), Star Trek III (1984), and Ghostbusters we see the apparent truth of three people jumping out of an airplane with a rubber life raft, a planet exploding at the seams, and a 60 foot marshmallow man walking through the streets of New York. The context of the illusion is made more plausible by technological advancements.

Additionally, the logic of film editing creates a spatial context for the events and characters to work within. Editing principles logically argue

spatial relationships. Hence, analytical editing, shot/reverse shot, eyeline match, and point of view cutting operate as bits of reasoning in a larger, spatial argument. Paramount to the context of the illusion is how editing "argues" the audience into its filmic placement. What the audience is allowed to see, and where they are placed to see it establishes a rhetorical stance based on logos. In the words of Nick Browne, "It refers to the concrete logic of the placement of the implied spectator and to the theory of presentation that accounts for the shaping of his response."⁴⁴

If, as Mast contends, a film viewer "gladly and willingly accepts a fiction as a kind of truth," then narrative film is by its nature an argumentative process. To consider it as such makes it susceptible to a spectrum of rhetorical theories. Two important aspects of rhetoric stand out when considering a film as an argumentative process. First, the filmic argument is audience dependent in that enthymemes are completed through participation. Second, a rhetorical theory of communication, such as Aristotle's, provides a viable heuristic device for the critic to account for the filmic argument. Thereby, the critic argues for his perception of the filmmaker's motives. Rhetoric, then, offers more than just a vocabulary of terms to recount some message from a film. It is a heuristic device for understanding why a message is presented.

For film criticism in general, this type of study offers a process for the critic to bring together the film with its consequences, these consequences being the body of analytical discourse generated by a film or filmmaker. By considering films as argumentative, the body of critical work on a film appears as perceptions of the argument; the critic must move to a meta-criticism by taking into account these arguments as consequences of the filmic argument. Since all criticisms are consubstantial with the film in one form

or another they can be considered as reactions to the filmic argument. Film criticism should not end with recounting the inherent message but should move to accounting for the filmmaker's motives.

NOTES

- ¹ Laurence Behrens, "The Argument in Film: Applying Rhetorical Theory to Film Criticism," Journal of the University Film Association, XXXI, No. 3 (1979), p. 3.
- ² Behrens, p. 4.
- ³ Aristotle, The Rhetoric of Aristotle, trans. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1932), p. 7.
- ⁴ Behrens, p. 3.
- ⁵ Aristotle, p. 1.
- ⁶ Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLV (1959), p. 408.
- ⁷ Aristotle, p. 158.
- ⁸ Arthur Knight, The Liveliest Art (New York: The New World Library, 1979), pp. 310-311.
- ⁹ Knight, p. 311.
- ¹⁰ Knight, p. 311.
- ¹¹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 39.
- ¹² Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, p. 39.
- ¹³ Behrens, p. 4.
- ¹⁴ Richard L. Lanigan, "Enthymeme: The Rhetorical Species of Aristotle's Syllogism," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 39 (1974), p. 214.
- ¹⁵ Christian Metz, Film Language, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 4.
- ¹⁶ Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, p. 38.
- ¹⁷ Lanigan, p. 215.
- ¹⁸ Gerald Mast, Film/Cinema/Movie (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 46.
- ¹⁹ James H. McBurney, "The Place of the Enthymeme in Rhetorical Theory," Speech Monographs, III (1936), p. 67.
- ²⁰ McBurney, p. 56.
- ²¹ Aristotle, p. 150.

- ²² Aristotle, p. 150.
- ²³ Larigan, p. 214.
- ²⁴ Galy L. Cronkhite, "The Enthymeme as Deductive Rhetorical Argument," Western Speech, XXX, No. 2 (1966), p. 133.
- ²⁵ Behrens, p. 5.
- ²⁶ Behrens, p. 5.
- ²⁷ Behrens, p. 5-6.
- ²⁸ James Monaco, How to Read a Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 11.
- ²⁹ Farrel Corcoran, "Toward a Semiotic of Screen Media: Problems in the Use of Linguistic Models," Western Journal of Speech Communication, 45, No. 2, (1981), p. 182.
- ³⁰ Mast, p. 65.
- ³¹ Jurij Lotman, "The Illusion of Reality," in Film Theory and Criticism, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 55.
- ³² Umberto Eco, "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," in Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 594.
- ³³ Corcoran, p. 183.
- ³⁴ Bitzer, p. 405.
- ³⁵ Peter Wollen, "The Auteur Theory," in Film Theory and Criticism, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 681.
- ³⁶ Aristotle, p. 9.
- ³⁷ Stuart Byron, "'The Searchers': Cult Movie of the New Hollywood," New York, 12 (1979), p. 45.
- ³⁸ TV Movies 1985-86, Leonard Maltin, ed. (New York: The New American Library, 1984), p. 429.
- ³⁹ "All-Time Rental Champs," Variety, Weds, 16 Jan. 1985, p. 28.
- ⁴⁰ Monaco, p. 222.
- ⁴¹ Monaco, p. 222.

⁴²"Big Rentals of 1984," Variety, Weds. 16 Jan. 1985, p. 16. The Razor's Edge: \$2,750,000; Ghostbusters: \$127,000,000; Honkytonk Man: "pictures which have paid \$4,000,000 or more in domestic rentals" appear on the All-Time list (above), Honkytonk Man does not appear; Sudden Impact: \$34,600,000.

⁴³Aristotle, p. 9.

⁴⁴Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of Stagecoach," Film Quarterly, XXIX, No. 2 (1975-76), p. 32.

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