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Viewing Film from a Communication Perspective: Film as Public Relations, Product Placement, and Rhetorical Advocacy in the College Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Academics approach film from multiple perspectives, including critical, literary, rhetorical, and managerial approaches. Furthermore, and outside of film studies courses, films are frequently used as a pedagogical tool. Their relevance in society as well as their valuable use in the classroom makes them an important and pragmatic medium deserving further attention. The ability of film to be used in a socio-political way may sustain, challenge or change the status quo, which supports studying film as well as teaching students about the power of film. The purpose of this article is to share the development of a course which points out to students how film is used in society. Film theories are discussed, selected films are reviewed, and class assignments related to the theories and movies are summarized. In particular, this course explores films' relationship to corporate agendas as well as to social justice. This approach to film crosses film studies with rhetoric and public relations connecting the course to other courses often taken by communication majors.

Film provides a moral education . . . and entertainment.

− Susan Sontag, 2003

Film plays multiple roles in college classrooms. First, film is often used as a pedagogical tool (e.g., Adler, 1995; Fain, 2004; Griffin, 1995; Harrison, 2001; Herberman, 2000; Johnson & Iacobucci, 1995; Lenihan, 2002; Metz, 2002; Pally, 1998; Pinhey, 2000; Proctor & Adler, 1991). Although using film to explain, extrapolate or exemplify theory, methods, or findings from research is certainly beneficial to the students, it does not teach them the power, and perhaps the language and grammar of film itself. A second role that film takes in secondary and higher education is one that is central to the medium itself, which is found in film studies courses. Film studies introduces students to the art of cinema, the making of films, and in some cases the movie business. Classes are devoted to such topics as the history of film, film theory, and aesthetics or semiotics of film (e.g., Bell-Metereau, 1990; Breen, 1974; Briley, 2002; Kallich & Marsden, 1956; Monaco, 2000; Thomson, 2004). In these classes films are studied and critiqued

much like literary works in a literature class, often highlighting semiotics. In addition, film is studied with respect to its political, psychological and narrative aspects (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988).

Beyond entertainment, film acts in the capacity of establishing a relation with a public as well as speaking for or of a certain group(s) of individuals. Film creates an image of society and organizations, presents issues, affects policy-making, and promotes certain practices. At times these functions are obvious, at other times, less so. The persuasive ability of film makes it the hallmark of cultural studies and high on the list of influential media (see Hall, 1997; Monaco, 2000). As a cultural artifact movies sit on the precipice of reality, making statements that can be illusively denied by the medium's inherent ability to romanticize even the darkest and cruelest of events. *Brokeback Mountain* advocated empathy for gay men while turning their story into a romanticized tragedy for the voyeur (Grindstaff, 2008).   Isolated critiques of individual films can raise consciousness, but they do not always dig deeply enough into the role that film plays within the socio-economic situations of today.   As such it is paramount that educators teach students about the complex world of film and its interconnections with the communication discipline, and most importantly, the role it plays in society. Thus, a new course--Cultural Studies in Public Relations and Rhetorical Advocacy, was created and taught at Purdue University.

In the following pages, an overview of the course will be provided, which includes a brief discussion of the film theories discussed in the class along with a detailed list of the selected films. One of the selected films *Cast Away* is given greater attention via a full synopsis and a discussion of its remarkable relationship to public relations, product placement and advertising. Student assignments related to *Cast Away* are also presented. Discussions of the relevance of social justice (e.g., *Erin Brockovich*), sexism (e.g., *What Women Want*), and public relations propaganda (e.g., *Black Hawk Down*) in film are also discussed. Classroom exercises related to these films are detailed. A syllabus is attached as an appendix.

In order for students to understand the complex notion of film *as* public relations and film *as* rhetorical advocacy, a basic introduction to public relations theory, rhetorical theory, and film theory were required. Vocabularies for each area were provided before students engaged the films that specifically represented public relations statements or rhetorical advocacy appeals. Students used chapters from Campbell and Huxman's (2003) *The Rhetorical Act* to learn about rhetorical critique and chapters from Toth and Heath's (1992) *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations* to learn about rhetorical theory. In turn, students used chapters from Monaco's (2000) textbook to establish a basic understanding of film terminology. Although any number of texts are available and could be considered, including Mast, Cohen and Braudy's (1992, 4th edition) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* or Lapsley and Westlake's (1988) *Film Theory: An Introduction,* Monaco's book provided an extensive, yet easy to comprehend overview of film theory for the beginning student. Students practiced applying basic vocabularies and theory by analyzing the film *Citizen Kane* before watching and critiquing a series of selected films concerning public relations and rhetorical advocacy. Before

turning to those films, and because most communication scholars are more familiar with rhetorical theory and public relations theory than film theory, a brief overview of how film theory was taught is provided.

Film Theory

Film theory can be approached from a variety of angles (no pun intended). One of the most useful for students of communication, especially those who have recently been exposed to rhetoric and the role of the rhetorical critic, is to enter from the angle of the film critic or theorist. Monaco's (2000) textbook provides a very useful chapter that begins with a description of Mel Brooks' and Ernest Pintoff's satirical and comedic short film on the role of the film critic. It opens with a classic line "Vat da hell is dis?!" and concludes with the critic deciding "I dunno much about psych'analysis, but I'd say dis is a doity pitcha!" (p. 388).

Monaco's (2000) chapter explains the difference between the reviewer and the film critic. Simply put, the reviewer describes in brief and evaluates in general while the film critic describes, analyzes, interprets and judges according to the standards of film theory. As such, the film critic must be familiar with film theory.

As in any field of study, a meta-theoretical framework would be helpful to understanding film theory. Monaco (2000) begins by describing Sergei Eisenstein's theory of film critique, a model based on the film terminology of long shot, medium shot, and close-up as ways to critique movies. The long shot judgments explored the social and political implications of film (e.g., Rocky as an ethnic working class man whose hard work will provide him with the American Dream); the medium shot assessed the human scale (Rocky as a hero who triumphs over his own weaknesses); and close-up judgments analyzed the specific semiotics of the film (Rocky reaches the top of the stairs, a monumental metaphoric device to demonstrate his reaching his highest potential or reaching the pinnacle of what society has to offer in America). Sergei Eisenstein (1949) is probably more famous for his dialectical approach to film itself, suggesting that "art is always conflict" (p. 46). Essays by Eisentein (1949) highlight his loyalty to the working class grounded in Marxist theory.   He would have supported critical theorists' interpretations of film (e.g., Rocky's ethnicity and class relegate him to one of the most grueling means to achieve success--boxing). Second wave feminism post dates Eisenstein's writings; yet feminist film theorists might draw from his insights to explore the angles that marginalize women (e.g., Adrianne is the supporting character—not the lead, subsequently she must rely on Rocky for survival and much of her life story silenced); and postmodern critics could add an exploration of *eternal recurrence* (by laying claim to the study of prequels and sequels as Rocky is forced repeatedly in sequels to suffer his ill-fated position and struggle for success over and over), a concept developed by Nietzsche.

Another meta-theoretical model suggests that we can organize film theories into two categories: form and function. Form speaks of what a film is and function refers to how it affects us. One might be tempted to summarize these into artistic and psychological venues, but that

would oversimplify the matter by leaving out theories that hold promise in other ways, such as feminist film theory. However, a good example of film theory in an artistic fashion comes from Lindsay (1915, as cited in Monaco, 2000) who compares film to narrative and judged film according to its action, intimacy and splendor. He saw film as an artistic endeavor that had its own language. Monaco (2000) suggests that Lindsay was the forerunner of film semiotics. Further, Lindsay may have been well ahead of his time as he advocated film as an interactive medium encouraging audience members to talk during silent films. Interactive film brings to mind the activities associated with the contemporary movie *The Rocky Horror Picture Show (albeit, this is an exception to the average movie experience).*

The second category, function, may best be exemplified by media effects studies which rely on functional or psychological theories, such as uses and gratifications (Blumler & Katz, 1974). This category was heralded by Munsterberg in 1916 (Monaco, 2000) who wrote the academic book, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*.

An instructor might choose either or both of the preceding meta-theoretical models or choose yet another to organize the theories of film that came about in following years, but for a course on rhetoric and public relations, one last model should at the very least be mentioned. Andrew (1976) organized film theory according to a rhetorical framework. Drawing from Aristotle, Andrew suggested that film (and film theory) could be discussed, evaluated, interpreted, and assessed according to four criteria: Raw Material; Methods and Techniques; Forms and Shapes, and Purpose and Value. Monaco (2000) suggests that Andrew's categories can be compared to a model that organizes film according to realism and expressionism. Realism relies on methods and techniques as well as form and shape, in essence, to reflect the world around us (or the world of the film). Expressionism is meant to convey the purpose and the value or the intent of the film. Of course, this circles back to the handling of the raw material.

The course, although this particular version was not, could be designed around film debate in order to teach film theory and criticism. Film theorists such as Arnheim, Kracauer, and Godard offer theories that would encourage lively debate over the aesthetics, functions, and ethics of film. In addition, theorists like Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Balasz could be discussed in light of whether they promote expressionism or formalism. Instead, these theorists and others were introduced in a more basic fashion showing their relationship to language, semiotics, and rhetoric, as well as the dialectic, all of which is discussed next.

Monaco's (2000) final section on film criticism and film theory begins with Metz's (1971) contemporary theory that film is language, a notion that can be traced to earlier theorists, including Eisentein (1949). Metz's theory depends on the concept of semiotics, which holds that culture is language. Theories that rely on semiotics draw from the early anthropological work of Claude Levi-Strauss as well as the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Monaco asserts that semiotics, "Because it intends to be a science" is "far more concrete and intense than any other approach. Yet at the same time, semiotics is often exquisitely philosophical" (p. 417).

Monaco explains the work of Umberto Eco, Christian Metz, Roland Barthes, and others as he addresses the contributions of semiotics and the development of cultural studies.

More recently, Stuart Hall (1997) discussed cultural studies (especially from a linguistic, symbolic, or structurationist approach) in his book, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Hall relies on du Gay's (1997, as cited in Hall, 1997) model of cultural analysis when he portrays cultural artifacts, such as film, as products of representation that are produced for contemporary culture to identify with and to consume (or in some cases challenge or resist). Although Monaco (2000) does not discuss Hall's book, the instructor might find it a very useful addition for developing the lecture on cultural studies. But, of course, Monaco's conclusion should not be dropped; for at the end of his chapter on film criticism and film theory, he points students to potentially rich areas for future studies: postmodern theory and feminist theory.

Film theory automatically engages film terminology—the sign forces us to see an object through its significance, which is achieved primarily through *mise-en-scène* (Monaco, 2000) (although *montage* according to Godard [1972, as cited in Monaco, 2000] is inseparable from mise-en-scène). In addition, camera focus and angle may hint at the theoretical premise or philosophical perspective. For example, *deep focus*, which keeps foreground, middle-ground and background all in focus, forces the viewer to choose what to focus on. This technique is related to existential filmmaking in the sense that one must make choices and thus face existential angst. The movie, *Taxi Driver,* which may not have incorporated this technique nearly as much as *Citizen Kane*, was considered an existential masterpiece in film narrative if not technique. On the other hand, *Citizen Kane,* which employed deep focus, may have done so to keep the focus on Kane no matter where he stood. Although it has also been argued that Welles/Toland utilized deep focus to replicate certain aspects of live, proscenium-viewed drama, in that audience members could choose to focus on any part of the focal plane, whether it was close to or far away from the placement of the camera. In either case, the camera angle in *Citizen Kane* is possibly more famous for not only directing the viewer's attention, but for psychologically manipulating it so the viewer sees the imposing figure, Charles Foster Kane, from depths to heights never before seen to that extent on screen. After introducing the students to relevant meta-theory, theory, and terminology, we watched *Citizen Kane*. Following discussions of *Citizen Kane,* the class engaged in viewing contemporary films to explore their role in creating positive corporate public image or their role in rhetorical advocacy and the search for social justice.

Selection of Films

Each of the films selected for the class carried significant meaning in terms of how film speaks of and to society. A certain number of the films promoted advocacy issues and others leaned toward persuading public perception in favor of corporate America. When talking about films that advanced rhetorical advocacy, as a class, we agreed to define rhetorical advocacy *as a*

symbolic statement that attempts to speak on behalf of certain individuals, groups or specific issues deemed relevant to social justice (i.e., to advocate for a certain position and generally one that has no corporate or government backing). In the past, advocates of particular social issues often had to rely on grassroots movements to gain visibility for their cause, but today film can be a viable means of persuasion. More recently, the techniques of film are being applied to YouTube videos. Thus, defining rhetorical advocacy as a *symbolic statement on behalf of others* was not restricted to film, but could be applied to film. We also agreed to define public relations as *the promotion of products/services and or images connected with the corporate-world to the general public*. We realized and talked about the oversimplification of these definitions even as starting points. For example, public relations are also important to non-corporate organizations from nonprofits like the Red Cross to religious organizations like the Catholic Church, each of which have had public relations problems in the last decade. Public relations can also be applied to non-bureaucratic entities (e.g., a rock band or an individual celebrity). Thus, we expanded our definition as part of a classroom discussion. We also discussed that some grassroots movements have demonstrated fairly sophisticated uses of PR and that rhetorical advocates may find funding from corporate America for various reasons. The commonality across rhetorical advocacy and public relations is that they are each promoting a product, a person, an image, an organization or a cause. An oversimplified bifurcation between public relations and rhetorical advocacy would do an injustice to the complexity of the concepts. Although simple definitions may be heuristically helpful for getting started, the definitions of public relations and rhetorical advocacy should be discussed via classroom debates as well as linked to other courses (e.g., rhetoric, public relations). With that said, we began our sojourn into films with one of the most pronounced films on product placement to date, *Cast Away*. For this reason, *Cast Away* received privileged treatment in class, as it also does in this article.

Cast Away (produced by Twentieth Century Fox in 2000), was certainly not the first movie to exploit product placement, nor will it be the last; it did however mark a critical change in the concept and practice of product placement. Product placement has a longer history than most would imagine (see Galician, 2004), which can be traced back to at least early radio and film from the fifties (student research will reveal even earlier practices of product placement to be discussed in the section on students assignments).   However, product placement is usually traced only as far back as the debut showing of Reese's Pieces in *E.T.* (Wilson, n.d.). Placing a product on scene in commercial movies was considered a form of advertising, but by the time *Cast Away* hit the screens, product placement had morphed into something beyond the standard product placement form of advertising, that is to say, products were not simply placed strategically within view or used as props, but became whole-hearted aspects of the plot.

Early reviews of the movie, in which Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks), a FedEx manager, is driven by the clock to get packages delivered overnight, described the film as a shameless display of product placement-- "one gigantic commercial for a delivery company" (Mapes, 2000, p. 2) where "product placement is no longer just a marketing gimmick; it's an art" (Diaz, 2000, p. 1). Sawyer Brown (2001) thought that reviewers failed to spend enough time

critiquing this new form of product placement and feared that it would be readily accepted by critics and moviegoers alike. Other early reviews focused on the meaning of the film. Kerson (1999-2001) argued that the film was a "social commentary on the emptiness of materialism and the need for spirituality in modern life" (p. 1). Although he failed to substantiate his argument on the spirituality point, he offered an interesting insight on the "intersection of time and space" (p. 1), which others develop at a later date. Some thought the extended use of FedEx was unnecessary (Mapes, 2000) and others saw it as paramount to understanding the meaning of the film (Johanson, 2000).

The character, Chuck Noland, finds himself racing against time to organize a group of Russian FedEx workers into a top-notch delivery team, a task that is portrayed as a struggle at best. His motivational speech is translated into Russian, but not without some cultural alterations. When a flat tire on one of the delivery trucks threatens the timely delivery process, Chuck finds himself and others sorting packages in Red Square where a statue of Lenin is being brought down in the background. Noland takes time out long enough to speak long distance with his girlfriend, Kelly (played by Helen Hunt), mentioning that he needs to find time to take care of a nasty toothache once he returns home.

Noland does return home where a softer, gentler personality is seen; however, still driven by time concerns his Christmas dinner is interrupted by a pager with a message that he must leave again. He is unable to find *time* in his schedule to exchange gifts with Kelly. Instead, the exchange hurriedly takes place in the car en route to the airport. The gift exchange includes a small jewelry box, which presumably contains an engagement ring. Due to the special nature of the gift, they make plans to open the box when he returns. He ironically promises to "be right back," then quickly boards a plane visibly bearing the FedEx logo.

His plane is blown off course and crashes with intense cinematic style. Chuck struggles to survive the storm and eventually finds himself on a deserted island. He is not *alone* for long; FedEx packages from the plane soon wash up on shore. He collects them one after the other and treats them as sacred objects not to be opened. As his ordeal to survive stretches over time, he eventually opens all but one package to find items that will help him survive. The unopened package is symbolic of the hope that he will return to society. Noland's ordeal on the island requires him to give up his reliance on technology and skills that he once prized and seek out more useful skills. Furthermore, he adapts items from the old world to fit his new world—"ice skates become knives, videotape becomes rope, . . .[and the] volleyball is transformed into the marooned everyman's best friend, named, Wilson" (Thorsen, 2004, p. 2).

Wilson helps Chuck maintain his sanity as does a photograph of Kelly given to him encased in a pocket watch as his holiday gift, which he received before he left. Four years on the island leaves noticeable physical and mental marks on Noland (Hanks lost 60lbs. for the filming) and has developed such a strange, albeit understandable, relationship with the volleyball that he almost drowns trying to rescue it at one point.

Noland builds a raft and carefully measures time according to the tides and the seasons (Friedman, n.d.) rather than by a clock (which he was so driven by in his earlier FedEx days) and

eventually sails away from the island. His return home via raft to freighter (plastered with company names) to plane (with strategically placed FedEx logos) reinserts him into a world of products and places him in a new relationship with his old ways of being.   Most critics agree that the movie goes well-beyond product placement. Wilson becomes a character and FedEx becomes the driving symbol of the globalized world in which we live.

Beyond Product Placement: Engaging Students in Research

There are, of course, many ways to engage students in research. Writing research papers is one of those ways. In this course the students were assigned the task of writing a short research paper that explored the theme of 'product placement and beyond.'   They were challenged to find a unique focus and information that would move our knowledge beyond what is basically known about product placement. They were spurred with suggestions about future avenues for product placement, (i.e., based on past research, how did they envision the future of product placement unfolding?). Grounding their predictions in logic required attention to detail concerning research. These relatively short papers (3-5 pages) acted as the source of a brief presentation that followed.

Specifically, the first assignment students had to undertake was to assess the product placement of *Cast Away* and other films and discuss how product placement has moved beyond its original intent to place products in films in order to advertise them. One student, Emily Alexander, defined product placement and traced its history to nickel movies where slide advertisements were shown between reels (see Sengrave, 2004). She also found that FedEx had not paid for its product/service to be used, but did allow FedEx facilities to be used and FedEx employees to act as extras. However, the company did not capitalize on a reciprocal relationship by using the movie to promote itself in future advertising (see Finnigan, 2000). [Perhaps it didn't need to because as the first author of this paper discovered, an internet search based on the terms, *Cast Away* and *product placement* resulted in over 24,000 hits, most of which presumably also included the word, FedEx]. Emily also discovered that 62% of moviegoers find product placement distracting; and, while most are not bothered enough to do anything about it in the U.S. (Atkinson, 2003; although Merrill, n.d. discusses activist's group efforts in San Francisco), that is not the case in Europe. In 1991, the European Commission banned the use of "surreptitious advertising" (i.e., product placement) in film (Rocky, 1991, p. 1). Emily's research on product placement led her to a link between product placement and rhetorical advocacy as she found that the Center for Behavioral Research in Cancer argues that product placement of cigarettes can lead to increased smoking on the part of youths (Wakefield, Flay, Nichter, & Giovino, 2003). She then further explored citizen action groups and their call for the film industry to list all products in the credits. Ironically, while this is intended to act as a consciousness raising-strategy, it may act to reinforce the original advertisement.   Future research may be in order.

Kelly Smith, another student in the class, traced the history of product placement to the classic movie *The African Queen,* where Gordon's gin bottles were thrown overboard by Katherine Hepburn much to the dismay of Humphrey Bogart's character. The company paid for this placement (and displacement) (Neer, 2003). Kelly talked about how products transcend product placement when they are used for purposes beyond what is expected from everyday reality. In *Cast Away*, Wilson, the volleyball, becomes a companion, which makes him/it a character in the movie. Kelly discovered that Gail Christensen, Fed Ex's Managing Director of Global Brand Management, worked with the producers for about two years (Barton, 2000). In short, there is "big business" in show business (Vista group, n.d.). Kelly also discussed film satires of product placement (e.g., *Wayne's World, The Truman Show*) as not only spoofs on the previous but also fodder for more product placement. She thinks the future wave of product placement might lie in the film world's ability to generate new products (beyond what Disney has done with toys --from movies to toys and toys to movies, 2003-2004).

Dan Lindberg, another student in the class, took a different direction in his paper, linking the internet to film product placement and beyond to TV shows and electronic games. First, he noted that sponsorship and product placement is a $3 billion a year business (Hein, 2004) and one that is leaking into the internet. For example, U.S. internet users conducted around 500,000 searches following Oprah's TV giveaway of Pontiacs.   I had mentioned to my students that my own search of "Product Placement" and *Cast Away* had resulted in over (24,000 hits), suggesting that advertising for the film and promotion for FedEx was receiving yet another form of advertising (i.e., reaching the public once again through the internet). Dan justified the use of product placement in film and TV through the numbers of subscribers (approximately 1.9 million) who skip three-quarters of the commercials as a direct result of prerecorded TiVo use (Mack, 2004). We can only wonder how many others are surfing the channels during commercial airing time. TV product placement hit an all time high with the TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and has continued with theme nights being developed for the TV show *The Apprentice in which "entire* episodes will revolve around one brand" (Nuessenbaum, 2004, p. 1). However, the emotional attachment to the product in these TV shows will never compare to the emotional attachment Hanks' character in *Cast Away* felt for Wilson. Emotional attachment is what advertisers may have to reach for in the future.

The future is also becoming a virtual reality within virtual reality. Dan points out that Electronic Arts Sports (EA Sports) games feature a game with virtual ESPN commentators and now have added virtual commercials. When the electronic game players get into the *red zone* (i.e., within 20 yards of the opponent's goal), the virtual screen not only displays statistics for the game, but also a Red Zone (i.e., body-wash made by Old Spice) commercial (Shah, 2004). Those same commercials originally aired at the movie theaters, and are now being featured on TV.

The screening of *Cast Away* was followed by viewings of films including *Erin Brockovich*, *The Insider*, *What Women Want*, *Silkwood*, and *Black Hawk Down*. Each of these movies was coupled with readings from the texts for the class and followed by discussion. The

reader can probably easily see how *Erin Brockovich*, *The Insider*, and *Silkwood* each speak to film as a form of rhetorical advocacy while *What Women Want* speaks to product placement and public relations (for Nike), and the unchallenged notion of materialism.

Performance and Creative Involvement with Film: Role-Playing Erin Brockovich

The discussion of the film *Erin Brockovich* was made livelier through a role- playing exercise. A transcript of an interview with Ms. Brockovich was downloaded from the internet (see Dish Diva, n.d.). Two students played the roles of either Ms. Brockovich or the interviewer/callers. There were light-hearted questions about the way Ms. Brockovich dresses and whether or not she married George. Other questions and answers revealed a more serious side of both the interviewer and Ms. Brockovich. She said that she was "glad the story was told" (p. 2) that "PG&E knew they poisoned the water way back in the 60s and did nothing about it. I'm proud of the film" (p. 5). In addition to the film being about rhetorical advocacy, the students realized that it provided the impetus for others to come forward, that is to say, the movie itself acted as a form of rhetorical advocacy, moving other victims to take action. As Brockovich noted about the movie, "It's brought in a lot of work for the firm. We've had thousands of toxic cases brought in" (p. 2).

Engaging Students: Debating What Women Want as Misogynistic

While the movie *What Women Want* generated a good deal of discussion about product placement, it also stimulated a debate over the social construction of gender, especially of women. At the surface level, a woman (played by Helen Hunt) was portrayed as a capable executive in an advertising firm who knew what she wanted. She had to swim upstream fighting the current of stereotyping by her less than liberated male colleague (played by Mel Gibson) who due to a bizarre accident becomes capable of hearing women's thoughts. This supposedly leads him to overcome his male chauvinistic tendencies. The students were not ready to accept the surface level meaning of the movie without further critique. They asserted that the movie was still blatantly sexist in that Helen Hunt's character could not achieve "true" happiness until she had a husband in her future. Nor could the other female character (played by Marissa Tomei), who achieved her best orgasm with the newly more sensitive Mel Gibson, be considered marrying material.   After all she had "slept with him" without putting up a struggle or having a marriage license in her hand. Students noted other examples of sexism and related them to their readings. Without the readings one cannot be sure that the students would have come to some of the same conclusions that they did. Each of the films was discussed in light of the class readings (see Appendix for a list of movies and related readings).

Raising Student Awareness: Politics and Propaganda in the Film Industry

The final film planned for the class to view was *Black Hawk Down*. One might wonder what a war movie has to do with PR, but as a cultural statement there is more here than meets the average moviegoer's eye.

Black Hawk Down, released in 2001, tells the tumultuous and tragic story of military men lost during a raid in Mogadishu, Somalia. At first glance, this movie's relationship to public relations may seem beyond the proverbial stretch, but upon closer examination it can be argued that it is relevant on at least two counts. First, the actual event was considered "an international PR disaster for the United States" (Howe, 2004, p. 90). Eighteen GIs died in the ensuing gun battle. Second, the film became a public relations message supported by military members who agreed that it "set the record straight—the men carried out their duties with pride and determination—and that they did, in fact, capture the individuals they sought" (Howe, 2004, p. 90). *Black Hawk Down* is also an example of how effective relations are achieved between the government and the military and the film industry. Almost all war films depend upon the government for a variety of necessities including tactical advice (in this case from Harry Humphries, a retired Navy SEAL), weapons, and maintenance crews to care for weapons (also see Seelye, 2002). In the end, the Pentagon flew in "8 combat helicopters and 100 soldiers" and billed the makers of *Black Hawk Down* nearly $3 million (Howe, 2004, pp. 90-91). Furthermore, these necessities did not come without pre-approval. The army has a manual, *Making Movies Guide*, the Department of Defense has a subcommittee for screening movie scripts, and the Pentagon has a Hollywood liaison, Phillip Strub (Howe). In short, military public relations were at the heart of the making of *Black Hawk Down*.

Conclusion

Film is a powerful medium. It has been used quite effectively as a pedagogical tool in the classroom both to explain concepts and highlight theories or theorists. Furthermore, film has been taught as a form of art in film studies classes. In addition, film has been studied for its rhetorical, political, narrative, and psychological aspects (Anderson & Benson, 1991; Lapsley & Westlake, 1988; Mast, Cohen & Braudy, 1992). In this article we highlighted how the multiple approaches become relevant as related to public relations (and advertising) as well as rhetorical advocacy. We believe a course like this one can be well integrated into the communication curriculum by relating it to other courses that students may be taking (e.g., introduction to rhetoric, public relations, advertising).

In this article we described a new course being taught at Purdue University to students of rhetoric and public relations. An overview has been provided which we hope may stimulate others to incorporate such a course into their curriculum. Additional assignments were used in this class beyond what was discussed in this article (the Appendix offers the syllabus with all of the assignments). The course itself was well received by students who collectively ranked it 4.5

out of 5 points. Comments included: (1) Great class! (2) Very informative. (3) I enjoyed all of the readings and all of the projects for this class. There were no negative comments. Although these evaluations are positive, they, of course, do not reflect the full magnitude of the course goals and outcomes.

This course attempted to expose students to the world of film as an active agent in public relations and rhetorical advocacy. It hoped to move students' awareness of film well beyond that of entertainment and to demonstrate how rhetorical criticism allows one to uncover deeper meanings embedded in film. Students studied film theory during the first half of the course allowing them to be better consumers of movies. For example, critical theory and semiotics gave the students a new appreciation for the scene in *Cast Away* where the statue of Lenin is dismantled in front of disinterested FedEx workers, conveying the meaning that capitalism is replacing communism, which has become passé. Du Gay's (1997) cultural concept of film as a consumable product, as well as the benefits of feminist theory, became glaringly apparent in viewing *What Women Want.* Were women really supposed to buy not only those products but that image of who they are? Andrew's theory of film which declares that it ranges from raw materials to purpose and values came to life in *Black Hawk Down*'s use of 8 helicopters and 100 soldiers to achieve a public image with which the Pentagon could feel proud. In addition, students were surprised by and added to information on propaganda. They were especially involved in discussing how films may spur social justice and they became more aware of how film can be used to promote or to challenge corporate dominance. Film, they discovered, is not only explained by theory, but impacts their everyday life.

We hope that in the future more instructors will consider teaching film as a rhetorical act related to public relations and rhetorical advocacy in order to demonstrates its potential persuasion, from corporate initiatives to advocacy of social issues, from making macro-level statements to influencing everyday lives, thus, helping to make students more aware of the power of film to speak, not only to them, but to, for, and about others.

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Appendix
The Course Syllabus
Cultural Studies in Public Relations & Rhetorical Advocacy

COM 491F
Prof: First Author   Semester: Fall 2004
Office: BRNG 2268   Time T TH 10:30-11:45
Phone: 494-3315   Classroom: BRNG B232
Office Hours: TTH 9:00-10:00, Or by appointment

Cultural Studies researchers explore popular cultural expressions in contemporary society. These expressions may come in the form of entertainment or informational mass media messages. They may vary in form from popular books to popular film. Recently Public Relations Experts and Rhetorical Advocates have taken advantage of film, video, and other visual commercial media to express, create, or even manipulate corporate images. That is, they are reaching into popular cultural venues to make their statements. The medium of movies has also been used to advocate for social issues and political change. The focus of this course is to introduce students to Cultural Studies as related to Public Relations and Rhetorical Advocacy. This will require the critical skills of rhetorical analysts with the practical knowledge of public relations practitioners.

Required Texts:
Toth, E.L. & Heath, R.L. (1992). *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Elwood, W. N. (1995). *Public Relations Inquiry as Rhetorical Criticism*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
Packet articles [Can be placed on reserve at the library, used by instructor only as lecture guide or assigned to students for reading]:
Articles or Book Chapters include:
Campbell, K.K. & Huxman, S.S. (2003). The Rhetorical Act: Thinking, speaking and writing critically. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth (chapters 1 & 2).
Monaco, J. (2000). How to read a film: The world of movies, media, and multimedia (3rd ed.) New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press (chapter 5).
Bain, D. (2002). Every midget has an Uncle Sam costume: Writing for a living. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade (chapters 5 & 6).
Plagiarism is not tolerated!

Grading:
Midterm   100 pts.
Short paper   25 pts.
Group presentation   25 pts.
Quizzes   50 pts. (10 pts. each)
Final Exam   100 pts.
Total points   300 pts.

Assignments:
Short Paper—A short paper (3-5 pages) rich in research will cover the topic of *Product Placement and Beyond*. Students should include information that they have read in Elwood, Chapter 5 and Toth & Heath, Chapter 8. Also the students should investigate the topic by gathering other research. Outside research may include journal articles, magazine articles, interview information from NPR, and internet sources. All research material must be cited appropriately (Use APA) (25 pts.).

Group Project—Students will work within a group to create a presentation about politicians as products. The approach may rely on political ads, commercials, documentaries, or mockumentaries. The clip needs to be viewable by the rest of the class. Be sure to rhetorically critique the visual. Organize your presentation! Demonstrate that you have done some research and that you have read the earlier chapters on the rhetorical criticism. (25 pts.)

Quizzes—Quizzes are based on weekly assignments and movies. THERE ARE NO MAKE UP QUIZZES!   There will be five quizzes—10 pts. each.

<div align="center">Tentative Schedule</div>

WEEK 1
Aug 24-26   Introduction and Perspectives -- Systems, Rhetorical, & Critical
Readings: Toth & Heath, Chapters 1, 2, 3

WEEK 2
Aug 31- Sept. 2   What Is Rhetorical Criticism?
Reading: Campbell, K.K. & S.S. Huxman (2003). *The Rhetorical Act,* Chapters 2 & 3. In packet

WEEK 3
Sept. 7 - 9   What Does Film Criticism Have To Do With Rhetorical Criticism?
Reading: Monaco, J. (2000). *How to Read a Film,* Chapter 5 "Film Theory: Form and Function" (pp. 388-425). In packet

WEEK 4
Sept. 14-16   What Does Criticism Have to do with Cultural Studies?
Readings: No readings   In-Class Critique -- film clips TBA

WEEK 5
What does Film have to do with Public Relations & Rhetorical Advocacy?
Sept. 21-23   From the Silly to the Sublime
Readings: Bain, D. (2002) *Every Midget has an Uncle Sam Costume*. Chapter 5, 8, & 12 In packet and Elwood   "Public relations is a Rhetorical Experience" Chapter 1 by Elwood & "Scandalous Rhetorics" Chapter 2 by Brummett

WEEK 6
Sept. 28-30   Review For Exam on Tues.; Midterm Exam on Thurs
Readings: No readings   Handouts: Review Sheet to be given on Tues.

WEEK 7
Oct 5-7   movie—*Cast Away*
Readings: Elwood, Chapter 5 "I am a scientologist" by Courtright and Toth & Heath Chapter 8 "The Corporate Person (Re) Presents Itself by Cheney

WEEK 8
Oct 12   October Break
Oct 14   Product Placement & Beyond
3-5 page paper on product placement and beyond—research required the paper should answer questions concerning the prevalence of product placement, the usefulness of product placement, the how s of product placement and how we have moved beyond to new forms of product identity for purposes of sale and consumption—papers due* discussion of movie, papers, and chapters to follow

WEEK 9
Oct 19-21   movie—*Erin Brockovich*
Readings: Elwood, Chapters 6 & 7 "Plastics" by Paystrup and "From "We Didn't Do It" by Hearit

WEEK 10
Oct 26-28   movie—*The Insider*
Readings: Elwood, "Phillip Morris" Chapter 8 by Holloway & Toth & Heath "Smoking OR Health"
Chapter 12 by Condit & Condit

WEEK 11
Nov. 2 -4   movie—*BMW*
Readings: Elwood "Janus in the looking glass" Chapter 9 by Russel–Loretz and Toth & Heath
"Corporate Communication" Chapter 9 by Conrad

WEEK 12
Nov 9-11   movie—*What Women Want*
Readings: Toth & Heath, "The Automatic Power Industry and the New Woman" Chapter 10 by
Dionisopoulos & Goldzwig

WEEK 13
Nov. 16-18   movie—*Silkwood*
Readings: No reading

WEEK 14
Nov. 23   discussion of political documentaries, commercials and mockumentaries --
candidates as products (tentative)   Students should bring examples from the campaign and short
presentation due* group assignment
Nov. 25   No Class -- Thanksgiving
Readings: No readings

WEEK 15
Nov 30-Dec 2   movie—*Blackhawk Down*
Readings: Elwood, "Critical Theory" Chapter 15 by German

WEEK 16
Dec. 7 - 9
Readings: Toth & Heath "Epilogue" by Heath
Discussion and review for final

WEEK 17
Final Exam Week   time and date TBA