MELODRAMATIC FRAMEWORK OF ANIMAL RIGHTS DOCUMENTARY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the uses of melodrama in animal rights discourse by examining the documentary Earthlings. In this thesis, I examine the animal rights message of the documentary utilizing the ideology critical approach framed by melodrama to the argument of the following: 1) how melodrama works rhetorically to arouse emotions; 2) how melodrama motivates people to act; and finally, 3) how melodrama works to advance the goals of the filmmaker. Specifically, I focus on the rhetorical strategies of emotionalism, moralization, and polarization. Melodrama indicates the characters that are victimized, reveals the activist as heroes, and discloses the actions of villains who perpetuate evil acts on victims.
DEDICATION

To my son, Slate Van Lewis Evans
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Halfway into the film, Earthlings, viewers are confronted with this scene. Two men use a stick with a choke collar on the end to retrieve a gorgeous animal from a cage. The animal is wrestling at first, and is dragged to another area. The animal is held by one of two men from the tail, while the other man holds up the animal’s head. It’s cold – you can see breath from the men. The animal is longhaired, with soft white fur. With eyes bulging from his head, the animal is panting heavily. An electric rod is shoved into his anus. A metal bar is offered to him—and he accepts it by clamping down; thus, sending the electrical current through his body until, hopefully, he is dead. The next scene is a Chinese Fur Farm, where, after an animal who looks like a Husky is shoved to the ground alive, his head gets stomped on until blood shoots out of his nose. The viewing audience is then witness to a living animal—hung-up by her feet—being stripped of fur by a man pulling the skin from the body. The living body is next dumped onto a heap of skinless bodies, while still alive, and she is shown to be blinking with no skin. The skinless body then moves her head, putting a stripped-of-fur nose under her leg.

This scene comes from the film Earthlings, which was written, produced, and directed by Shaun Monson in 2005. Monson was motivated to create this documentary after observing the treatment of animals while working at an animal
shelter in Los Angeles, California. This scene is representative of the documentary as a whole, which relies on melodrama to depict intensely stark images that are gruesome, and yet intended for the viewing audience to behold. “To a great extent,” according to Josephine Donovan (2006), “getting people to see evil and to care about suffering is a matter of clearing away ideological rationalizations that legitimate animal exploitation and cruelty” (p. 324).

Melodrama, as defined by McWilliam (2000), concerns “the binary oppositions of good and evil, rich and poor, town and country” (p. 59). McWilliam reviews melodrama throughout history, with the use of nineteenth century literature and theatre to develop an argument supporting a postmodern definition of the melodramatic framework for use in scholarly analysis. In his article, McWilliam states, “Melodrama was a moralistic and sentimental kind of play that dramatized the struggle of good and evil and expressed it through the representation of heightened emotions. Stories could be comic or tragic, but all were intricately plotted and stressed the role of chance and coincidence” (p. 59). Melodrama was historically important, in that it allowed for “the possibility that drama could be found in the lives of common people” (p. 59).

Schwarze (2006) develops a definition of melodrama as providing a rich rhetorical framework for communicating, “concerns that are hidden, ignored, or repressed in a culture that operates according to a simplistic calculus of ‘progress’ and ‘economic growth’” (p. 255). According to Schwarze, the melodramatic framework also provides several advantages for the critical analysis of public messages, benefitting the argument with the use of: 1) emotionalism, 2) polarization, 3) moralization, and 4) identification. In the following analysis, I focus on emotionalism,
polarization and moralization. The concept of identification is closely related to the other three concepts and so is woven into the entire analysis.

Scholarship on melodrama sheds light about the ways of discourse relevant to this thesis, insofar as providing ways this rhetorical device of melodrama frames good and evil in the intended message, and motivates an audience to act. For this reason, the melodramatic framework is particularly useful as a lens to provide insight into the study of animal rights discourse. The importance of melodrama as defined is evidenced in the analysis of the documentary. Through the use of melodrama, the voices of animal rights activists are heard in the created messages received by the dominant hegemonic culture.

This thesis explores the uses of melodrama in animal rights discourse by examining the documentary *Earthlings*. I examine the animal rights message of the documentary, utilizing the ideology critical approach framed by melodrama. In the analysis of the documentary, the use of the melodramatic framework will show how melodrama works rhetorically to arouse emotions. Secondly, through the use of the ideology critical approach, the analysis of the documentary will provide evidence in support of the argument that melodrama motivates people to act. And finally, resulting from the analysis of the use of melodrama in this documentary, a response to the argument of how melodrama works to the goals of the filmmaker will be provided. Specifically, I will focus on the depiction of the characters and the storyline, using the emotionalism, moralization, and polarization in the ideology critical analysis framed by melodrama to analyze the animal rights message of the documentary.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Melodrama

“What happens in a slaughterhouse is the variation on a theme of the weak over the strong.” Joaquin Phoenix, *Earthlings*.

As stated by McWilliam (2000), “to investigate the melodramatic turn is to interrogate one of the most significant devices in recent cultural history” (p. 58). A melodrama was historically, according to McWilliam, “a moralistic and sentimental kind of play that dramatized the struggle of good and evil and expressed it through the representation of heightened emotions,” with melodrama allowing for the “possibility that drama could be found in the lives of the common people” (p. 59). He goes on to review the “melodramatic turn,” due to the emphasis of melodrama in the work of historians over the past twenty years.

While McWilliam researches literature and the arts for a definitive and scholarly postmodern definition of melodrama, Blain (1994) searches Burke and Foucault for information relating to the melodrama of political movement discourse. Blain defines melodrama as “a dramatic genre of plays, films, or TV programs” (p. 818), which is
“characterized by exaggerated emotions, interpersonal conflicts, and stereotypical characters” (p. 819). According to Blain, “the creation and maintenance of hierarchies is accomplished through melodramatic enactments of power struggle. Political movements, seen in this light, are dramatic ritual struggles of heroes against villains, good against evil, the just against the unjust, to create, alter, or sustain power” (p. 818).

This leads to a defining moment of the rhetoric espoused by the United States, as researched by Anker (2005). Researching the melodramatic mode inspired by the public discourse, Anker (2005) develops insight into the rhetoric surrounding the day of September 11, 2001, and portrayed by the United States media. Anker defines melodrama as more than simply a film type or a genre within creative literature, “but as a pervasive cultural mode that structures the presentation of political discourse and national identity in contemporary America” (p. 23). In her article, “Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11,” Anker (2005) describes melodrama as a pop-culture narrative that utilizes emotions to supply an unequivocal “distinction between good and evil through clear designations of victimization, heroism, and villainy” (p. 23).

Anker (2005) also argues that melodrama is a “discursive practice” making “truth and justice legible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong” (p. 23). The initial moment that initiates the melodramatic mode “is often a state of ambiguity,” calling for the eradication of “vagueness through polarization and tight resolution” (pp. 23-24). “In reshaping every encounter into a primary conflict between good and evil,” melodrama involves the moralization of “all problems and
relationships” (p. 24). Dividing what Anker calls “the cultural mode of melodrama” into five defining categories, they are listed as follows: 1) moral virtue through heroic actions; 2) three characters—villain, victim, and savior; 3) “dramatic polarization of good and evil”; 4) the yin and yang of emotion and action, creating suspenseful conflicts and resolutions; and, 5) “moral legibility” and encouraged “empathy toward the victim, and anger toward and villain,” through “the use of images, sounds, gestures, and nonverbal communication” (p. 24).

While Anker uses recent events to illustrate her point, Newey looks into the past. The study of Newey (2000) looks at melodrama through historical British theatre productions. In her research, Newey provides rich ground for exploring the melodrama of children working in factories, and insight into their parents’ experience—research revealing the horrifying factory environment in lives of the workers of the 1900’s. Newey defines melodrama as “work and working life exemplifying the willingness of the popular theatre to grapple with contemporary issues, feeding back images of working-class life to largely working-class audiences” (p. 28). Within melodrama, Newey explores dialectical movement taking place between “conservative forces of personal and social reconciliation and the radical impulse towards documentary realism through performance conditions of key productions” (p. 28).

Dissanayake (2003) researches the melodramatic presented by film directors of modern Sinhalese cinema. Dissanayake defines melodrama as “originally a form of musical play” that later became useful for indexing “works of entertainment that contained emotional intensity, exaggeration, sensationalism, strong action, rhetorical
excesses, moral polarities, unappeasable villainy and the triumph of good over evil” (p. 175). Originally used only in reference to drama, Dissanayake states melodrama is later used in evaluating cinema and literature.

Osborn and Bakke (1998) are referenced for their definition of melodrama, which is used in the evaluation of the narrative. Osborn and Bakke describe melodrama “not as a literary form, but as a mode of vision, a way of seeing or sizing up a situation” (p. 221). The authors offer research into the rhetoric of the Sanitation Strike of 1968, which followed twelve days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Osborn and Bakke claim melodrama belongs to the “genus of narrative expression,” answering the questions of members of the viewing audience as to the “how and why” of an occurrence—making impossible any chance happening. “Events occur as episodes within some larger scenario that invests them with the following: 1) meaning; 2) importance; and 3) purpose” (p. 221). Osborn and Bakke state that melodrama “interprets as it personalizes events and provides their moral and emotional coherence,” and that “melodrama in public life is not so much a strategy selected by rhetors as it is a way of living through conflict” (p. 224).

Appel (2008) is influenced by Burke in creating the following “generic attributes in modified form, combined with components of rhetorical melodrama, in a series from tragedy to burlesque to melodrama to comedy” (pp. 190-191): 1) morally disordered scene; 2) guilt-obsessed agent; 3) guilty counteragents; 4) sacrificial act; and finally, 5) redemptive purposes and means. Within the literature of communication research, Appel writes “Burke barely mentions the m-word,” but “some evidence can be inferred from his corpus to support a shift from tragedy to the
terminology of melodrama” (p. 183). Appel goes on to test the “choice of
‘melodrama’ as a generic label for heated or intensely dramatic rhetoric of a political
or social kind has hardly been uniform;” and that this “observation relates particularly,
but not exclusively, to critics who work from a Burkean perspective” (pp. 186-187).

Burke is used by Appel (2008) to research rhetorical melodrama, as does
Schwarze (2006). Schwarze offers a definition for melodrama, as a “recurrent
rhetorical form in environmental controversies,” for the melodramatic frame that
creates “stark, polarizing distinctions between social actors and infuses those
distinctions with moral gravity and pathos” (p. 239). Although, Schwarze argues,
“rhetorical scholarship criticizes melodrama for its tendency to simplify and reify
public controversies and valorizes the comic frame as an ethically superior mode of
rhetoric” (p. 239), it is this melodrama that “offers environmental advocates a
powerful resource for rhetorical invention” (p. 239).

According to Schwarze (2006), scholars who consistently praise Burke’s comic
frame share the desire for “social unification.” This is “assumed to be the telos of
rhetoric” for these scholars, “and the comic frame is viewed as unique in its capacity
to enable unification in divisive situations” (p. 242).

Bsumek (2008) states that Schwarze makes a persuasive argument for
melodrama. “As students, critics, and practitioners of environmental communication,
we are indebted to Schwarze for providing us an exemplary case that highlights the
productive and constructive ‘rhetorical action’ that can be preformed [sic] by
melodrama in an environmental controversy” (pp. 79-80).
Walker (2008) also discusses the argument for environmental melodrama. According to Walker, Schwarze makes a “compelling case for the importance of melodramatic rhetoric”—in as much as the rhetoric is a “part of environmental policy (justice, conflict, and decision making) situations” (p. 85). Environmental melodrama is viewed as having the potential to be transformative and contributing to conflict resolution. “Schwarze’s argument regarding the transformative potential of environmental melodrama has implications for conflict resolution and collaboration” (p. 86). Walker continues to explicate:

If rhetorical action as melodrama polarizes conflict parties, defines outcome as winning or losing, and casts conflict as a moral battle, then constructive, mutually beneficial conflict resolution is not desired or likely. To the extent that melodrama transforms conflict into moral clashes between polarized parties, melodrama’s transformative force generates intractable conflicts (p. 86).

The force of a melodramatic action is likely to create a difficult to control altercation between the opposing parties, which involves risk (Walker, 2008). By describing Schwarze’s 2006 view of “melodrama as transformative,” Walker points to the important role the features of melodrama play in supporting the management and resolution of disagreements: 1) “transcendent discourse”; 2) “conflict escalation”; and, 3) “constructive confrontation” (p. 87). Walker argues that the characterization of environmental melodrama by Schwarze “risks intractability and even violence, so, too, does eloquence that is insensitive to the adversarial party” (2008, p. 87). As Walker gives insight into melodramatic rhetoric of environmental policy, Kinsella critiques Schwarze’s 2006 article by giving insight into melodramatic framing.

Check also discusses melodramatic rhetoric, but through a rhetorical feature. In reference to Schwarze’s 2006 article, Check (2008) discloses the rhetorical presence featured in melodrama. Responding to Schwarze, Check argues the central feature of the “melodramatic narrative is the presence of a rhetorical devil,” and he analyses its “features” (2008, p. 93). Check defines environmental devils as “secular agents that constitute the villains in environmental melodramas” who are “remarkably similar to the theological Devil that inspires them. The religious devil is a fallen angel of God, and thus it represents power” (2008, p. 94). Check also notes “the extent of the devil’s power must be proportional to the degree of guilt society bears” (2008, p. 94), leading to the distinction of the “environmental devil.” According to Check, the environmental devil exhibits the following: 1) dominance; 2) ravenousness; 3) apathy towards produced violence; 4) omnipresence; 5) intimidation; 6) deception; and, 7) pursuer of the vulnerable. This environmental devil evokes an attraction from “many
who admire its qualities,” and “with these features, the rhetorical devil may function as a compelling villain in an environmental melodrama” (Check, 2008, p. 95).

While Check discusses the rhetorical devils of the melodramatic frame, Peterson discusses the strength of Schwarze’s 2006 argument in relation to climate change. “Schwarze makes a strong case for the importance of leaving open the possibility of melodramatic response” (Peterson, 2008, p. 99). Peterson initially is dismayed by the argument by Schwarze, opting for the comic frame, until an examination of the possibilities of melodrama shows how it could benefit the climate change debate.

Schwarze (2008) reiterates the strengths and weaknesses of environmental melodrama in the *Forum* article. A weakness that may cause certain scholars to avoid melodrama, according to Schwarze, is the appearance of devils created out of “potential partners,” refusing them “any possibility of saving face” (p. 104). The author states that placing the rhetorical devil into “moral and political narratives” may permit the devil the possibility of saving face—charting a path to possible “social transformation” (p. 104). Schwarze declares that, “the most fascinating constraints on environmental melodrama lie not strictly in the realm of the symbolic, but where the symbolic meets the materiality of ecological degradation” (p. 104). Schwarze (2008) further discusses the rhetoric of environmental melodrama:

The theoretical issue is not whether a particular rhetorical mode is an “accurate” fit with specific ecological conditions. Rather, it is how certain rhetorical choices articulate the material to the symbolic, constitute persuasive patterns of meaning for diverse audiences, and offer possibilities for action (p. 105).
When discussing rhetoric of melodrama, scholars describe the melodramatic mode as useful in the following aspects: the victimization of the masses, the naming of the villainous, and the calling of the heroic (Anker, 2005; Appel, 2008; Schwarze, 2006). In summary, melodrama is used as a modern trope rhetorically describing the good, the bad, and the victimized.

Animal Rights Rhetoric

“It’s been said that if we had to kill our own meat, we’d become vegetarians.”

Joaquin Phoenix, Earthlings.

There is a defining difference between animal welfare organizations and animal rights groups (Simonson, 2001). According to Simonson, the reasoning of the difference between both is “conceptual and organizational,” with animal welfare organizations preceding the animal rights groups (p. 401). In his article discussing the communication strategies of the social activist group PETA, Simonson defines animal welfare and animal rights as follows: “While animal welfare is about kindly and humane treatment, animal rights pushes a more radical agenda: animals should not be used at all, for there are no essential moral differences between human and non-human species” (p. 401).

The history of the animal rights movement is a topic of focus for the purposes of this rhetorical analysis. It is useful to review the history of the animal rights movement as well as the uses of animals in scientific experiments. With modern animal rights groups working to ease the disadvantages of animals, the Victorian animal anti-cruelty societies worked toward the same ends—often targeting scientific vivisection (Simonson, 2001). Scholarly attention has been brought to the
examination of laboratories during the 1870’s vivisection debates—\(\text{with doors thrust open to the scrutiny of the public eye—through the exposure of scientific experiments conducted on non-human animals in Great Britain (Mayer, 2008).}\)

Darwin’s works discussed by Mayer (2008) are a point of contention for vivisection supporters. Since many involved in the vivisection debates were unwilling to “accept Darwinian claims of biological kinship with their non-human companions, fewer yet were willing to deny their common emotional bonds” with non-human species (p. 404).

Researching vivisection pertaining to the origins of the lengthy animal liberation “revolution” (Kew, 2003), Mayer (2008) discusses the antivivisectionist rhetoric that challenges the “scientific model of social progress used by supporters of vivisection” (p. 411). The antivivisectionists presented “an alternative model of social progress in which the evolution of emotional sensitivity to suffering is central” (p. 411). Where antivivisectionists frequently “based their understanding of animal suffering on their own sympathetic observations of and emotional relationships with animals, primarily domestic pets”—supporters of vivisection considered the observations on many fronts to be affectionate nostalgia (Mayer, 2008, p. 403).

Scholars have also examined the way activists have used media outlets—including books, pamphlets, and newspapers—to convey information that plays a key role in the debates, to inform the public of the argument at hand (Mayer, 2008; Simonson, 2001; Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Simonson (2001) states that during the 1970’s, “the era of hard-edged investigative reporting also saw the explosion of celebrity-focused journalism”—with the ethical restoration of animal rights taking place as
media were encountering new forms of “both segmentation and globalization” (pp. 402 – 403). The author also notes that, “though most of these media involved images and visual texts, they have created what is best described as a loud public environment” (p. 403). People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA’s tactics of using news media are described by Simonson as drawing attention to animal issues through the use of “street-level noise”—sounds that were amplified by the animal rights organization for the “culture at large” (p. 405).

A contemporary social movement, PETA is most concerned with “cultural changes such as identity issues [rather] than with economic or political goals” (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 311). Atkins-Sayre states that though PETA “pushes for economic and political outcomes,” the group’s true challenge comes from the identity-shifting target (p. 311). “Advertising campaigns allow the group to effectively blur the distinction between human and nonhuman animals, inviting viewers to rethink their own identities and, thus, beliefs about animal rights” (p. 311).

The animal rights message provided through the advertising campaign of PETA stretch “our concept of human identity,” making room for animals to have identity (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 318). Atkins-Sayre (2010) discusses the advertisements as follows:

Knowing that humans typically try to “humanize” animals, PETA takes our expectations and toys with them in order to change our perspectives. Beyond the words of the ad, individuals can relate to the expressions of joy or pain that the pictured animals convey. The advertisements defy the expected dualisms (human and animal, culture and nature) by violating those expectations (p. 318).
Through advertising campaigns, this animal rights group uses dualisms to attract the viewer to the issues of animal liberation; and, using dualisms throughout the messages, prepares to weaken the foundation of already accepted identity (Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Still other scholars confront the issues surrounding animal rights through the use of dualism, and identification (Adams, 1991; Plumwood, 2000).

Plumwood (2000) discusses the treatment of animals in terms of the “distinction between being food and being meat,” looking to the dualism of human/animal in the discussion of the animal rights argument (p. 296). As stated by Plumwood:

One way for animal defense to reformulate the fundamental equality the vegan position strives for might then be: no being should be treated reductionistically as meat, but we are all edible (food), and humans are food as much as other animals, contrary to deeply entrenched beliefs and concepts of human identity in the west. This ethical principle is clearly useful to those opposing factory farming: it provides a clear basis for opposing reductionist practices that treat factory animals as living “meat,” and for recognizing the kinship between us and our food (2000, p. 296).

This is a way to start formulating a “less human-centered account of food” that would hopefully be of use to theorists of animal defense (Plumwood, 2000). According to Plumwood, “Only when we can truly acknowledge our own position as food for others will we be [sic] able to carry out the alienated kinds of food practices Adams so rightly denounces” (p. 296). Adams (1991) states that ecofeminism should include animals as part of the discussion, and she divulges six reasons ecofeminists might use for the exclusion of animal rights from the ecofeminist analysis.

As articulated by Adams (1991), ecofeminist theory establishes the following dualisms: “culture/nature; male/female; self/other; rationality/emotion”—with some of the ecofeminist theorists encompassing all under “human/animal” (p. 125). Under
the heading, “Ecofeminism Explicitly Challenges the Domination of Animals,” Adams (1991) defines identification as the means by which “relationships with animals are redefined; they are no longer instruments, means to our ends, but beings who deserve to live and toward whom we act respectfully if not out of friendship” (p. 128).

Scholars discuss inadequacies within the ecofeminist discussion of the animal rights debate with the discussion of ecofeminism from the 1980’s to the present (Adams, 1991; Gaard, 2011).

While Adams (1991) discusses ecofeminism as a viable approach to animal rights issues, twenty years later, Gaard (2011) frames the ecofeminist approach as historically dealing with the antifeminist backlash during the 1990’s. Gaard provides a unique approach to the history of ecofeminism. Through an analysis of articles, authors, and publications, and whether some were denied publication, Gaard reveals evidence of resistance by feminists and environmentalists to the ecofeminist debate.

“An intersectional ecological-feminist approach frames” issues surrounding the “eco-justice issues” of ecological feminism “in such a way that people can recognize common cause across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation—and affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism” (p. 44).

In summary, when discussing the rhetoric of animal rights, scholars often describe the animal rights groups engaged in the animal rights debate as being devoted to the cause of reducing animal suffering (Simonson, 2001; Mayer, 2008; Adams, 1991). As an exemplar, the PETA animal rights campaign, according to Atkins-Sayre (2010), has been successful in accomplishing the following: 1) changes in corporation
policies regarding animal testing; 2) fashion companies changing views on selling fur; 3) attempting change in the science laboratories regarding the treatment of animals, by becoming an opponent in the world of science. Ecofeminism contributes to the discussion of the issues surrounding the animal rights movement, through the utilization of dualism, identity, and history (Adams, 1991; Gaard, 2011; Plumwood, 2000).

*Documentary*

“There is no moral justification for suffering.” Joaquin Phoenix, *Earthlings.*

In the creative aspect of film production, manipulation by the filmmaker is fundamental in all film formats – including the documentary film format. As stated by Galloway, McAlpine, and Harris (2007), “documentary has always been a persuasive, subjective and biased media form—albeit in varying degrees. Therefore heavily biased, controversial or provocative content can be expected and should not be a cause for major concern” (p. 335). The authors describe traditional documentary as “a passive, one-way communication medium” that “can be defined as a monologue between the production and the audient” (p. 331). In contrast to the traditional, the interactive documentary, also called a “webdoc,” provides interactivity within the documentary, building a path for filmmakers to receive communication.

Galloway, McAlpine, and Harris (2007) discuss the nature of the interactive documentary, which impacts the role of the filmmaker as auteur with ultimate control over a production, as does Nash (2012). Interactivity presumes a shift—signaling a
move from passivity to the activity of audience engagement (Nash, 2012). Nash continues with the following:

When interactivity is considered in relation to documentary it is most often understood in terms of the user’s ability to exert control over content. At its [sic] most basic the webdocumentary differs from film and television documentary in that the user plays a role in the presentation of the documentary by choosing the order in which they access content. While interactivity opens up the possibility of multiple informational pathways it challenges the concept of narrative coherence that has been so central to film and television documentary (2012, p. 199).

Nash (2012) discusses the webdoc being “stylistically diverse,” like the webdoc’s “cousins” film and television; however, interactivity is a prime component to the meaning and structure of the interactive webdoc. The structure of the webdoc, when compared with film and television documentary structure, is described as: 1) interactivity operates as the role of linear text editing; and, 2) users may have the capacity to contribute to the webdoc structure (Nash, 2012). Accounting for the previous points of possible user interactivity, the webdoc “might be described as having a collaborative structure” (2012, p. 203).

As Nash (2012) discusses the possibilities of conducting a future textual analysis of the documentary that is incorporated with technology of the 21st century, Althaus (2010) notes the role of historic newsreels as influential documentary film shorts. Althaus points to the need for the analysis of the historically important newsreel that is based on documentary short films. The historical timeframe for this first in worldwide news broadcasting by the moving-image newsreel (Galloway, McAlpine, & Harris, 2007) is described by Althaus (2010) as:
A global system for distributing twice-weekly news films was already in place before the First World War, nearly half a century before television news would begin to attract sizeable domestic audiences and seven decades before CNN would begin distributing news footage once again to all corners of the world (p. 194).

While the demise of the newsreel may be due largely to the growth of televisions, with a concurrent decline in cinema viewership (Althaus, 2010), the growth of the televised nature documentary became a genre that “often maintains a privileged position of authority” (Mills, 2010, p. 193).

Mills (2010) reports that a wildlife documentary series in 2009, consisting of a 10-minute narrated “diary” section at the end of the BBC broadcast, details the “travails of the film crews tasked with making the programmes” (p. 194). The audience is shown the determination of the film crew, “as they battle against inhospitable conditions and recalcitrant animals to capture images of species that have commonly not been filmed previously” (p. 194). Mills documents the assumption that animals have been shown no right to privacy; therefore, the film crew has no need to “determine whether those animals assent to being filmed” (p. 196). Wildlife documentarians ignore privacy in terms of where or what activity an animal demonstrates, unlike the privacy allotted for humans—what makes it to the footage is “fair game” for the documentary storyline.

Where Mills discusses issues involving animal rights, Hinegardner (2009) investigates the films denouncing the relatively recent human rights abuses that have taken place in San Salvador Atenco and Texcoco, Mexico. Using a communication model, Hinegardner states filmmakers, by creating these films, take direct action by “transforming their personal role from bystander to participant” (p. 172). He points
out the “victims of abuses act through telling their stories, filmmakers act through recording and compiling them, and others act through copying and distributing the film or organizing screenings ... Films are reproduced thousands of times, reedited for different purposes, and become part of a collective local memory” (p. 173).

Hinegardner refers to “political practices” that “may not be considered action” by some, because the results of these political practices do not change organizational policies of the community institutions, but makes the following point:

However, to those who practice these activities, they represent political work that is more productive than acting through formal pathways. Human rights videos not only create publics of people who witness human rights abuses according to McLagan’s conceptualization, but they also create opportunities for political actors to participate in organizing against human rights abuses in situations in which legal pathways seem hopeless or inaccessible (2009, pp. 173 – 174).

Scholars suggest that documentary film was basically a “logical progression from the initial forays into the moving image during the late nineteenth century” (Galloway, McAlpine, & Harris, 2007, p. 326). To summarize the difference between modern documentary and the news footage produced for theatres, Althaus (2010) describes three reasons for the newsreel’s reliance on “spectacular material” as follows: 1) “stories needed to have a long shelf life because each newsreel print could be in circulation for as long as a month”; 2) the “limitations in the speed with which newsreels could get pictures out to first-run movie houses”; and then, 3) “people saw movies to be entertained rather than informed” (p. 201). Utilizing the rhetoric of interactivity, Nash (2012) draws on this theory to contribute to our understanding of the webdoc, and the potential of communication, due to the “user’s ability to control and contribute to content” (p. 196).
To summarize, Anker (2005) argues that melodrama is a “discursive practice” making “truth and justice legible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong” (p. 23), and calls for the eradication of “vagueness through polarization and tight resolution” (pp. 23-24). “In reshaping every encounter into a primary conflict between good and evil,” melodrama involves the moralization of “all problems and relationships” (Anker, 2005, p. 24). Atkins-Sayre (2010) argues that through public information campaigns, animal rights groups use dualisms to attract the viewer to the issues of animal liberation; and, by using dualisms throughout the messages, prepares to weaken the foundation of already accepted identity. Galloway, McAlpine, and Harris (2007) state, “documentary has always been a persuasive, subjective and biased media form—albeit in varying degrees” (p. 335). While the literature reviewed in this chapter outlines melodrama, animal rights, and documentary, the following chapter outlines the rhetorical artifact elements that will be analyzed in the selected documentary, utilizing the ideology critical approach framed by melodrama to analyze the animal rights message of the documentary.

This thesis explores the uses of melodrama in animal rights discourse by examining the documentary Earthlings. I examine the animal rights message of the documentary, utilizing the ideology critical approach framed by melodrama. Specifically, this thesis asks three questions:

RQ1: How does melodrama operate to polarize?

RQ2: In what way does melodrama work rhetorically to arouse emotions?

RQ3: In what way does the use of melodrama in this documentary work to moralize in the film?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Documentary films depict an idea, providing a medium through which persuasion can take place. They not only inform, but also persuade. There are elements of the rhetorical in the documentary film movement. Nichols (2001) defines documentary as “a range of rhetorical, persuasive strategies that provide a distinct form of viewer engagement” (p. 568). The messages are meant to persuade the viewer to adopt the perspective of the sender. Since documentaries are persuasive in nature, scholars have an interest in probing the rhetorical dimensions. Consequently, a rhetorical critical method is fitting for application in this analysis of the documentary film, since rhetorical criticism examines the persuasive functions of public discourse.

Foss (2009) defines rhetoric as “the human use of symbols to communicate,” breaking the definition into three primary dimensions: 1) people create rhetoric; 2) the vehicle for rhetoric is symbols; and 3) the purpose of rhetoric is the message (p. 3). Rhetoric is an art form within the realm of communication (Hart & Daughton, 2005).

Hart and Daughton (2005) define rhetorical criticism as, “the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and the unpacking or explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner” (p. 22). Rhetorical critics examine the messages
by analyzing contributing elements, such as: “role, language, arguments, ideas, and
medium to navigate the complications and reduce the confusion persuaders” cultivate
(Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 22). I will focus on how an ideology appeals to an
audience by utilizing polarization, emotionalism, and moralization.

Brummett (2011) suggests studying rhetoric as cultural artifact with potentially
many meanings. Artifacts are characterized as: 1) socially constructed realities; 2)
signs charged with meanings; 3) complex; and 4) material signs of group associations.

Viewing documentary as a cultural artifact, I will examine the rhetorical strategies of
the animal rights documentary, *Earthlings*, for the ways this movement frames its
struggle for the ethical treatment of animals. Nichols (2001) notes documentary is
“the art most fully equipped to engage a mass audience via the meditations of the new
technologies of photographic fidelities and mechanical reproduction” (p. 604).

How do documentaries such as *Earthlings* reach mass audiences? The
following analysis studies documentary as a cultural artifact that relies on melodrama
as an ideological strategy that seeks to undermine mainstream beliefs about humans’
relationships to animals. Specifically, melodrama indicates the characters that are
victimized, reveal the heroes of the action, and divulges the actions of villains who
portray evil-doings onto often-unaware victims.

Previous scholarship has examined animal rights discourse from moral and
ethical worldview perspectives (Adams, 1991; Atkins-Sayre, 2010; Plumwood, 2000).
And scholarship on melodrama has applied the construct to environmental rights; to
the rhetoric of politics and society; and to indicating a boundary between right and
wrong (Anker; 2005; Appel, 2008; Blain, 1994; Dissanayake, 2003; Kinsella,
Bsumek, Walker, Check, Peterson & Schwarze, 2008; McWilliam, 2000; Newey, 2000; Osborn & Bakke, 1998; Schwarze, 2006). In this project, I propose the usefulness of melodrama for examining animal rights activism in film. Nichols (2001) looks at the rise of the documentary, discussing historically the “radical potential of film to contest the state and its law” making the documentary “an unruly ally of those in power” (p. 583). Documentary is like avant-garde film, in that it casts “the familiar in a new light, not always that desired by the existing government” (Nichols, 2001, p. 583).

Ideology refers “not only to belief systems, but to questions of power” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 5). The force of the word ideology “lies in its capacity to discriminate between those power struggles which are somehow central to a whole form of social life, and those which are not” (p. 8). Creating a comprehensive definition of ideology, Eagleton refers to ideology as “a body of meanings and values encoding certain interests relevant to social power” (p. 45). According to Eagleton, the ideological strategy of “legitimation refers to the process by which a ruling power comes to secure from its subjects an at least tacit consent to its authority” (1991, p. 54). He explains the process by which a dominant power utilizes legitimation through six strategies: 1) promoting of beliefs and values; 2) naturalization of beliefs; 3) universalization of beliefs; 4) denigration resulting from opposing ideas; 5) exclusion resulting from competing thoughts; and, 6) obscuring social experience. The animal rights movement is not a movement of the dominant culture, but of the counterhegemonic. Eagleton (1991) suggests an important tactic “by which an ideology achieves legitimacy is by universalizing and ‘eternalizing’ itself. Values and
interests which are in fact specific to a certain place and time are projected as the values and interests of all humanity” (p. 56). Like hegemonic movements, counterhegemonic movements employ universalization to promote their influence and interests. The counterhegemonic animal rights movement relies on ideological strategies of legitimation. Specifically, animal rights discourse relies on the ideological strategy of melodrama to legitimate their cause.

As discussed earlier, melodrama is used as a modern term rhetorically describing characters portraying the good, the bad, and the victimized. According to Anker (2005), a function of melodrama is to make “truth and justice legible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong” (pp. 23-24). Mason (1993) states the point of melodrama is the portrayal of possibilities for an audience, “to give evil a mask in order to replay its inevitable defeat and reassure the virtuous that though their fears be valid, their optimism is justified” (p. 18).

The use of the melodramatic frame provides “a reliance on sharply-opposed characters” whose actions “need not blunt the possibility of political critique. Simplified characterizations can initiate critique by providing a clear and recognizable entry point,” which are useful “for broader discussions of environmental problems among wider audiences” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 248).

The term melodrama is useful as an essential element in the rhetorical dialogue (Kinsella, Bsumek, Walker, Check, Peterson & Schwarze, 2008). According to Schwarze (2006), factors contributing to a negative view of melodrama are actually a source for use in social causes discourse. Schwarze (2006) declares that melodrama combines “oppositional rhetorical actions” with melodrama itself, presenting “a
productive invention resource for countering the ideological simplifications of dominant public discourses and prying spheres of controversy open to a wider range of voices” (p. 255). Given Schwarze’s (2006) observations, melodrama is an apt framework for studying the animal rights documentary.

I examine the animal rights message of the documentary *Earthlings*, utilizing the ideology critical approach framed by melodrama. The melodramatic framework provides some advantages in the ideology critical analysis of the message of the documentary. Emotionalism in the contemporary and cultural mode of the melodramatic narrative, as defined by Anker (2005), is “a cyclical interaction of emotion and action, meant to create suspense and resolve conflict” (p. 24). She continues to explain:

… in which pathos, or deep empathy for the suffering character, drives action, and action drives further pathos; this dialectic [conflict] serves to create cyclical situations of anticipation and anxiety that propel the narrative forward. Pain is usually inscribed within the body of the suffering victim … (pp. 24-25).

In the analysis of the argument, I will be describing the use of emotionalism by the filmmakers, and interpreting the impact on the viewers’ response. The argument is furthered with the use of polarization, which is defined as “the three characters of a ruthless villain, a suffering victim, and a heroic savior who can redeem the victim’s virtue through an act of retribution (though the latter two characters can be inhabited in the same person: the virtuous victim/hero)” (p. 24). In the analysis, I will be investigating the group divisions related through the filmmakers’ depiction of the opposing factions during the film. The argument is also promoted by the use of moralization, expressed as “dramatic polarizations of good and evil, which echo in the
depictions of individuals and events” (Anker, 2005). In the analysis, the investigation reflects the message of right and wrong depicted by the filmmakers of the documentary.

Specifically, I am looking at how an ideology appeals to the viewer through the animal rights message, with the use of the polarization of good and evil, the pathos of emotionalism, and the moralization reflected in the artifact. The focus is on the depiction of the characters and the storyline, using the polarization, emotionalism, and moralization in the ideology critical analysis framed by melodrama to analyze the animal rights message of the documentary.
CHAPTER IV
THE MELODRAMA OF THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MESSAGE IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

While there are a few recent releases of documentaries listing some pertinent issues surrounding the animal rights message, such as Food, Inc. (2008) and Forks over Knives (2011), Earthlings (2005) is the documentary that utilizes 6 years of hidden-camera footage in order to expose the treatment of animals by the human species. Earthlings (2005) will be the focus of the following analysis.

This critique will attempt to answer the following questions pertaining to the use of melodrama by the filmmakers in the documentary: (1) how does melodrama operate to polarize; (2) in what way does melodrama work rhetorically to arouse emotions; and, (3) in what way does the use of melodrama in this documentary work to moralize in the film? These are questions that should offer a look at how an ideology motivates the viewer through the animal rights message.

There have previously been documentaries depicting the management of animals in industry. While Fredrick Wiseman’s Meat (1976) may be one of the earliest documentaries portraying animals and the issues surrounding the use of animals by Americans in the meat industry, Earthlings (2005) offers a look into the
treatment of animals nationally and internationally, providing the viewer with the director’s point of view through images, the voice-over, and music.

While I will focus on the depiction of the characters and the storyline, the following analysis applies ideology criticism in order to explore how melodrama functions rhetorically through polarization, emotionalism, and moralization. Specifically, the following analysis takes into account the ideology of the animal rights message of the documentary, generating insight on the ways the film operates counter-hegemonically, as a challenge to dominant or hegemonic ways of understanding animals and their rights.

I examine *Earthlings* (2005) to explore how the film employs three rhetorical functions. First, I examine the strategy of polarization, including how the film frames the villain, victim, and hero. Second, I look at the strategy of emotionalism, or how emotions are aroused through portrayals of tragedy, pain, and harm. Third, I examine moralization or the ways the film constructs good versus evil and right versus wrong.

The documentary *Earthlings* (2005) is imbued with the overall message of the issues surrounding animal rights. In the next section, I will introduce the background of the film, and discuss the beginning scenes, which portray the incorporation of the polarized villain, victim, and hero. The start of the film is important in setting the stage for the developing narrative, with scenes that take the viewer on a visual and auditory journey demonstrating the planet as a whole; the discussion of racism, sexism and speciesism; and finally, aspects of the treatment of non-humans by humans.
The Opening Scenes

According to the Earthlings.com website, while working on PSA’s about spaying and neutering pets, the writer, director and producer Shaun Monson began obtaining footage of the Los Angles animal shelters. He began to notice the conditions of the treatment of animals, and what actually takes place at these facilities, which inspired the documentary Earthlings (2005). Monson took on the project, which took him 6 years to complete due to difficulties obtaining under-cover footage of the profitable industries portrayed throughout much of the film. Earthlings.com website describes the documentary as follows:

Earthlings [is] an award-winning documentary film about the suffering of animals for food, fashion, pets, entertainment and medical research. Considered the most persuasive documentary ever made, Earthlings is nicknamed “the Vegan maker” for its sensitive footage shot at animal shelters, pet stores, puppy mills, factory farms, slaughterhouses, the leather and fur trades, sporting events, circuses and research labs (p. 2).

Move promoters considered the film something to be cast aside after being produced. And yet, when looking for information pertaining to animal rights, the documentary is now noticeably popular due to the number of activists referring to the movie on social networking and animal rights organizations’ sites. Though there are multiple documentaries describing events that take place in relation to the treatment of animals by humans, my project is the first to examine how melodrama works to the animal rights message of Earthlings (2005) as significant in the “amplifying” of “voices that have previously been muted” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 324).

The film Earthlings (2005) is listed as “documentary/horror” on the Internet Movie Database website IMBd.com. Monson compiled footage with scenes of animal treatment from around the world. While the viewer is first taken from observing
planet Earth from outer space, to being visually delivered to the surface and into the oceans of the planet, a narrator is defining the term *speciesism* while music plays. The opening scene then begins is *in media res*, which translates from Latin “in the middle of things” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). This scene is from the Festival of the Bulls that takes place every year in Spain. It is at this point the viewer is introduced visually to characters on the screen, while the narrator Joaquin Phoenix discusses speciesism; thus, providing the viewer with a verbal storyline to accompany the visual action.

As Phoenix narrates, a camera that has been positioned stories above the street-level action records the images of humans tying a bull to a stake by the horns—pushing and pulling at the bull, while more festival-attenders from the sidelines join in the evening’s activity. The opening scenes provide “a basis for what is to come and initiates us into the narrative. It raises our expectations by setting up a specific range of possible causes for what we see” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 85).

In the next scene, the viewer is visually, and then verbally, directed towards racism. First, there are two separate images of Africans in chains, and next, a group of images that is set during the 1950’s of gathered KKK, or Ku Klux Klan-garbed humans. Phoenix discusses speciesism in terms of racism, and the image then becomes a clip of Hitler speaking in 1929 at Nuremberg. 1920’s Suffragettes are then viewed marching and protesting, with the next scene moving to close-ups of pigs overcrowded in cages. The scene next utilizes text at the top of the screen stating “RACISM,” with a scene of KKK members marching down a street in garb, and holding a huge American flag. Following, the text states “SEXISM,” with Suffragettes again marching, but also with some sort of huge flag. Then, with the
music of Moby continuously supporting the narration in the background, there is a rapid scene-change to a man with rifle sitting on a dead rhinoceros, under the caption “SPECIESISM.” After a few more scenes displaying the role of humans in power-filled positions subjugating the less powerful, the viewer is led to the puppy mills.

The stage is being set in order to ease the viewer into scenes of more explicit action. This is accomplished by introducing the audience to actions conducted by characters portrayed as villains, victims, and heroes. In this way the documentary is relying on building a melodramatic narrative through the use of polarization. The animal rights movement operates persuasively, utilizing the holocaust and slavery as comparison to what animals are subjected. Monson and the animal rights movement use this to persuade, by implying that animal suffering is comparable to the suffering of humans.

Through the visual depiction of characters’ actions, melodrama places the fault line between the change producers and the sufferers. Schwarze (2006) expounds further, that “while melodramatic rhetoric may rely heavily on the testimony of personal experience and the depiction of individual persons, it positions those elements in conflict with other forces to evoke the power relationships at play in a particular situation” (p. 246). By bringing the focus of the audience to the specific actions of a moment in time that has been caught on film, the film producers are able to make a visual point.

**Polarization**

Bowers and Ochs (1971) discuss polarization as a strategy employed by “almost every agitation movement” that has drawn considerable membership (p. 26).
According to Schwarze (2006) polarization “sharpens conflict through a bipolar positioning of characters and forces” (p. 244), which creates a “polarization of characters and positions” as one of the rhetorical actions of melodrama (p. 245). Melodrama “can polarize situations so that victims of environmental degradation might have a voice, complicating public discourse systematically dominated by producers of that degradation” (Schwarze, 2006, p. 255). The characters of villain, victim, and hero are developed through polarization.

A villainous action may be a matter of perspective. It is through the filmmakers’ utilization of polarizing that the characters of the villain, the victim, and the hero are seen as portraying the distinctive qualities that identify them in the film. One way this is accomplished is through editing, either in the studio, or with live shooting as the action is being recorded on film. The director and editor may distinguish how to effectively depict the actions of characters with the studio editing process, as they collaborate (Laurier & Brown, 2011). Laurier and Brown describe the relationship between the director and editor who are editing film as being closely related to multiple authors editing a journal article submission, while remembering “the object for filmmakers is a filmic object and not a textual one” (p. 240).

The villain of the melodramatic narrative portrayed by the media in the September 11th attacks on the United States, is described by Anker (2005) as follows:

Through the figure of the villain that aims to destroy America, melodrama frames a narrative that requires reparation for suffering endured; it demands heroic action in order to challenge any villainous attack on the country. The villain thus becomes the catalyst for state action, and hence for what it means to be an American, for, without the villain, there is no victim and this no hero or heroic feat (p. 26).
Likewise, though visually, it is through the villain of the melodramatic narrative depicted in *Earthlings* (2005) that the viewer observes the actions of humans inflicting pain on non-humans, with the belief that animals are there for their use. Here, the director of *Earthlings* (2005) challenges these preconceived ideas by inviting the viewer to approach the documentary with ideologies on the issues surrounding animal rights. But, via the attacks perpetrated by the villain that are gathered on film, the viewer is being challenged to take note of the suffering the villain is producing through audience membership (Hinegardner, 2009).

However, the documentary relies on polarization in order to challenge preconceived notions, through the set-up of the villain. Hinegardner (2009), in her article describing the 2006 San Salvador Atenco, Mexico, conflicts between political forces and a societal movement, explores how the act of creating videos depicting human rights abuses styles the filmmakers into activists. In her work, Hinegardner discusses the communications model used to look at “films as information conduits,” produced “from communities that have experienced abuses to the ‘outside’ world” (p. 172), also noting how human rights media impacts the viewers, as follows:

The unwanted attention and publicity the films create shame perpetrators of abuses (generally governments or large corporations) into changing policies or decreasing levels of violence. As a result of this conception, researchers have been concerned with the degree to which human rights media can incite people outside of the conflict to act to punish abusers or prevent future abuses (pp. 172-173).

Monson (2005) takes a similar approach through the lens of the camera to remind the viewer who is the victim really. The resulting impact, after viewing a documentary of recorded abuses, may motivate the viewer to action. The goal of the filmmaker is to
motivate the viewer to the message being portrayed or presented (Anker, 2005; Bernard, 2011; Galloway, McAlpine, & Harris, 2007; Hinegardner, 2009; Nichols, 2001a, 2001b). According to the overall definition provided by Nichols (2001b), “we can say documentary is about the effort to convince, persuade, or predispose us to a particular view of the actual world we occupy” (p. 69).

The director threads together the images of racism, sexism, and speciesism. By linking together these three images, the groundwork is laid for the discussion of the animal rights message in the documentary Earthlings (2005). Monson (2005) initiates the viewer with the polarization of human victims of the past, utilizing the topic of racism as a structure for the argument of victimization (Williams, 2001). As previously mentioned, one of the images the viewer first observes is a photograph of an African woman bare-breasted, and in chains. Following is the printed image of a row of people of color, again in chains and tattered cloth, being led away from a mountainous countryside. These are victims depicted as suffering, without the visual presentation of the perpetrators committing the act of villainy. The Ku Klux Klan is then represented visually. Though not committing the actual act of this particular repression, the KKK is a group commonly associated with racism (Hoerl, 2009). According to film critic Linda Williams (2001), “The melodramatic playings of the race card will be best understood, then, as a story cycle brought to life by a circulating set of transmuting icons and melos pointing sometimes to the virtue of racially beset victims and sometimes to the villainy of racially motivated villains” (p. 6). Though briefly mentioned here, I will later include these scenes when discussing emotionalism.
In the melodramatic, the two characters of hero and victim can be embodied in one character (Anker, 2005). The character types exhibited by the director of *Earthlings* (2007) are also one in the same. The scene of the Suffragettes is utilized by Monson (2005) to depict empowerment, while he brings the topic of sexism to the argument. Sexism is shown—not through victimization, but depicting Suffragettes as heroes who eventually overcome the adversity they protested against. As the visual hero is depicted in the Suffragettes marching for equal rights for women, the director argues the heroes of the animal rights debate are the activists who operate against the suffering of animals.

As the aforementioned is an example of victim/hero, the following represents a model of the villainy perpetrated on human beings, as the Holocaust is often used as an exemplar in the rhetoric of the animal rights movement. Odai Johnson (2009) defines “holocaust” as a Greek word for “a total burning” (p. 98), which he utilizes in a description of the Roman invasion of a city in Africa. In his article “Unspeakable Histories: Terror, Spectacle, and Genocidal Memory” (2009), Johnson divulges the lack of recorded history for the communities conquered by the Roman Empire, described as follows:

If terrorism was the harsh voice of empire, equally disturbing – at least to a modern sensibility – was the silence of the vanquished, whose unhistoried voices fell mute in the wake of conquest. Given the scope of the conquest, Rome’s captive subjects represent a sizable silence. Most of their history was so utterly consumed as to be permanently unrecoverable (p. 102).

According to Johnson, the Romans “consumed their victims, one way or another. To erase the vanquished was a Roman preoccupation” (p. 115). Like the Romans, members of the Nazi party in Germany attempted to silence their victims through the
Holocaust, with the persecution of Jews. According to MacDonald (2006), during animal rights discourse, the “Holocaust is invoked in a variety of ways” (p. 417). And thus, Monson (2005) utilizes the comparisons between the victims of the Holocaust, and abuses inflicted on animals.

The images of Hitler and the Holocaust have been utilized in the documentary *Earthlings* (2005) for use in the comparison between suffering humans of the Nazi Holocaust, and the abuses inflicted on non-humans of the animal rights message. Peter Singer (2002) emphasizes the acts of “blatant racism” through experiments performed on “Jews and Russians and Polish prisoners” (p. 83). The author and activist opens the door wider for animal rights rhetoric by developing a comparison between Nazi Germany and animals to which, through the writings of a few others— including vegetarian Isaac Bashevis Singer (MacDonald, 2006; Monson, 2005; Singer, 2002)—the door was first opened.

The comparison between the Holocaust and animal abuse has been cause of considerable controversy, and several animal rights groups have addressed the controversy when disseminating the issues to the public (MacDonald, 2006). Throughout his article, MacDonald (2006) critiques the research and advertising strategies of animal rights advocates and animal rights groups, opening with the statement:

> Ultimately however, campaigns to invoke an Animal Holocaust fail, ironically for the very reason activists cite as the primary cause of animal suffering. Most humans have an inability to empathize fully with nonhumans, especially if empathy implies adopting forms of latent anti-Semitism (p. 418).
The author argues the utilization of the comparison between the Holocaust and animal rights issues may “trivialize” the Holocaust, and explicates, “Morality is on the side of those who seek to retain the cautionary lessons of the Holocaust, while ensuring that its images and symbolism are not abused and trivialized” (p. 433).

By breaking down Hitler, Monson (2005) starts defining the racism argument for victimization. Exhibiting this by polarizing whom the victims of humanity have been visually, the director displays the perpetrators of the villainy inflicted on humans through images of the Ku Klux Klan and Hitler. It is within the argument of the polarization of humans/non-humans that Monson informs the viewer of the issues surrounding the animal rights message. In the next section, I will discuss the utilization of emotionalism in the documentary, by examining the use of the following: 1) the visual versus text; 2) the voiceover; and finally, 3) the music.

**Emotionalism**

Ben Singer (2001) describes emotionalism as, “overwrought emotion and heightened states of emotive urgency, tension, and tribulation” (p. 45). Schwarze (2006) discusses melodrama as a rhetorical framework that “can bring emotion into the foreground, complicating public discourse that takes a purely scientific and technological approach to environmental problems” (p. 255). Monson (2005) utilizes tragedy, pain, and harm found in emotionalism to bring to light issues surrounding the animal rights debate.

The muckraker Upton Sinclair penned a novel touting the evils of the Chicago meat industry in *The Jungle*, first published in 1906. The vivid text exposed the
middle classes to the devastating work experiences of immigrants in the slaughterhouses. In much the same fashion, the documentary *Earthlings* (2005) focuses on the profit of animals being slaughtered at factory farms, through the emotional engagement of the audience visually.

As previously stated, a close-up of a woman in chains is shown at the introduction; following is an image of a row of people being lead out of their country in chains. These are victims of the past depicted as suffering, and the elements within the image intended to move the viewer emotionally. Motifs that are repeated become familiar to the viewer. This is a tool of the filmmaker, utilizing repetition to produce familiarity and insight into the motif, or “any significant repeated element that contributes to the overall form” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 63).

Bordwell and Thompson (2013) state that the viewer may not consciously be aware of the motif, but the filmmaker through editing, and by the subject placement as it is captured on film, content placement is created within the images. The repeated image, with the possibility of differentiations, includes insights of the filmmaker offered to the viewer through the repetition of the image (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, pp. 63-67; pp. 362-369).

According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), the four fundamental properties of the rhetorical form of documentary include: 1) attempting to move the viewer to a new intellectual conviction, emotional attitude, or to an action; 2) creating a convincing position that relies on explicit meaning and ideological implications; 3) emphasis on opinion that appeals to viewers’ emotions; and finally, 4) attempting to persuade the viewer to take a side or to take action (p. 362). Monson (2005) utilizes a
few of the attributes of rhetorical method in the formatting of the documentary
*Earthlings*, thus, promoting the animal rights message through the medium of film. The director attempts to move the viewer to action by appealing to the viewers’ emotions.

Atkins-Sayre (2010) states that “with a more mediated world, notions of the public sphere are changing and movements are forced to draw the media’s attention to create a stage for their message” (p. 314). Monson (2005) utilizes emotionalism in the documentary format, which is a platform for the issues surrounding the animal rights message. The director is presenting the animal rights argument to the viewer through the visuals of the documentary. A subheading within emotionalism is visual versus text.

*Visual Versus Text*

Visual rhetoric is an influential aid in arguments (Atkins-Sayre, 2010; Birdsell & Groarke, 2007; Brummett, 2011; Hoerl, 2009; Pink, 2011). Visuals operate in two ways: visual demonstration, and the visual experience. Within these main points are two themes—direct gaze and surrounding environments.

First in the discussion of visual versus text is visual demonstration. Visual demonstration refers to the validation of an event through the use of an image. The use of image plays “a key role in many kinds of argument, for a variety of reasons” (Birdsell & Groarke, 2007, p. 103). Birdsell and Groarke (2007) utilize various images, such as images from Abu Ghraib prison and the 9/11 Pentagon “destruction,” to illustrate the following five ways a visual image is used, first as flags, demonstrations, metaphors, symbols, and then archetypes (p. 104). Though more than
one of the five examples may be used at one time within an image, one is specifically discussed that is applicable to the documentary *Earthlings* (2005).

Not only does the documentary look at factory farms where animals are slaughtered for food, but also first guides the viewer through the puppy mill, where animals are bred as pets for consumers. Opening with the designated title PART ONE, PETS, the narrator Joaquin Phoenix defines *speciesism* as “allowing the rights of one species to rule over the trivial rights of another species” (*Earthlings*, 2005). The visual journey commences with rows of dogs in cages at an outdoor puppy mill. Dogs are shown as exhibiting abnormal behaviors, like spinning in circles and then, standing over their own excrement that has fallen through the bottom of their cages. These breeder-dogs are shown to exist in undersized cages without veterinary care.

The next series of images are kittens and cats/puppies and dogs. The companion animals are not adopted, and are living in shelters being ethically euthanized with a shot of sodium thiopental for an instant and painless demise. Following are images of the shelter animals killed cost-effectively, either first packed tightly into cages to be gassed in a chamber, or packed tightly into the chamber itself for gassing with others—taking upwards of 20 minutes to complete the gassing process to expiration. Although there are a few close-ups of animals, investigative/undercover videographers are filming the scenes. So, while the animals are filmed in their current environments, there is a lack of intrusion by filmmakers into the environment the animals are experiencing. The camera lens and videographer are absent as a point of focus for the animals to experience along with their surroundings.
It is not until the next scene that the viewer experiences the visual rhetoric of the poisoning of dogs, filmed through the camera lens by a videographer who is present as a point of focus for the dogs during their experience. Dogs are subsequently shown being poisoned with cyanide in video obtained by Monson (2005)—unspecified individuals present the poison to chained and loosed dogs in their food. Throughout the thralls of death, one of the dogs appears to be looking directly into the camera, while Phoenix scrutinizes the actions of humankind.

Brower (2005) comments on the effect of having the focus of an animal’s gaze directed into the camera lens in his study of hunting with photography. In his analysis of progressive-era American wildlife photography of the 1890’s, Brower (2005) discusses the practice of publishing these photographs as a form of hunting by “camera hunters” (p. 13). “The practice depended on a confluence of American attitudes to nature, technological development, and gender identities” (p. 14). After attitudes changed, and this “hunting” was no longer accepted as a precise form, the photographs of an animal’s gaze into the lens of the camera remain. And it is through the gaze of the animal into the camera’s lens that boundaries are broken (Atkins-Sayre, 2010).

Atkins-Sayre (2010) also expounds on the message portrayed to the viewer through the advertisements of humans and the animal world:

The message that animals and humans experience similar emotions begins to erode the barrier between subjectivities. PETA’s ads also encourage viewers to experience the animal world. Faced with descriptions of animals’ lives, habitats, and feelings of pain, viewers are invited to identify with their treatment and to see animals as consubstantial (p. 318).
*Earthlings* (2005) provides a platform for the director in presenting the message pertaining to animal rights. The images offered invite the viewer to witness the experiences of animals who have no control over their environments, and who are shown to experience emotions through their involvement in their surrounding environments. For the camera is better “for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomenon” than the human eye alone (Vertov, 1984, p. 15).

The director provides the viewer with evidence of the issues surrounding the animal rights message. Video shows an adult male shooting at a dog lying by a fence, with the dog then limping/running away from the shooter around the side of the fence. Shadowed by this are images of men placing a dog on a leash into a garbage truck loaded with trash. The videographer records the lack of action of the onlookers, who allow the garbage truck compactor to crush the conscious dog, along with the trash. While the several video images are comprised from a videographer other than the filmmaker’s crew, the images gathered provide a demonstration visually of the animal rights message presented by Monson (2005).

According to Birdsell and Groarke (2007), “an image is a *visual demonstration* when it is used to convey information which can best be presented visually” (p. 105). In certain contexts, an image may impart a message more succinctly than a verbal message; yet, in other contexts images carry advantages with their ease of application to rhetorical pathos (p. 108). Throughout the documentary, Monson (2005) utilizes existing images that have been gathered to present the issues surrounding animal rights.
While film is comprised of single frames of image moving at a specific speed to create the impression of movement, the visual experience of advertising is often a combination of image and text. Describing the advertising campaigns of the animal rights activist group PETA, activist Wendy Atkins-Sayre (2010) comments that the still photographs and text that comprise the visual rhetoric, “shape worldviews (our relationship with animals) through images” (p. 314). The creators of the advertising campaign utilize the power of the visual elements of image by invoking emotional responses in the viewer through comparisons between human/animal. “One of the characteristics of the visual image that makes it particularly effective as a means of proof is the ‘window on the world’ way we view photographs” (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 315).

One way the connection concerning the human/animal divide is illuminated is through the advertisements created by PETA. Various PETA advertisements “invite viewers to reassess animal identity” through emphasizing “shared emotions in human and nonhuman animals” (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 316). Photographs of animals placed in the advertisements position the animals’ gaze at the onlooker, where “the gaze and the close camera angle seem to break the divide that a viewer night imagine between human and animal” (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 317). The gaze of the animal in proximity of, and through, the camera lens conveys a message to the viewer to comprehend the animal as existing other than previously thought (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 317; Brower, 2005).

In addition to visual demonstration, visuals operate through visual experience. The images provided by the filmmaker relate to the plight of animals, invoking a
response to the horror of the environment in which an animal may exist. Though Birdsell and Groarke (2007) emphasize, “Images present situations with much greater impact than mere words do, and thus can convey human pain, suffering, and loss effectively and forcefully” (p. 109), images of situations surrounding animal suffering may also create a much greater impact than text alone. Sontag (1977) describes photographic images as follows:

Knowing a great deal about what is in the world (art, catastrophe, the beauties of nature) through photographic images, people are frequently disappointed, surprised, unmoved when they see the real thing. For photographic images tend to subtract feeling from something we experience at first hand and the feelings they do arouse are, largely, not those we have in real life. Often something disturbs us more in photographed form than it does when we actually experience it (p. 168).

According to Sontag (1977), “One is vulnerable to disturbing events in the form of photographic images in a way that one is not to the real thing” (p. 168). Monson (2005) arouses the emotions of the viewer through the visual experience. The visual experience appeals to emotions of the viewer in the visual information portrayed through the images of the film. In this way, Monson persuades the viewer to the concerns of the animal rights message.

The director applies the written word to accompany the image at certain moments, which informs the viewer during the visual experience. The images of Earthlings (2005) are moving windows, framing for the viewer the message and the issues surrounding animal rights. Atkins-Sayre (2010) states the rhetorical power of the photographs encompassing PETA’s advertising campaign provides the viewer with a peek “into the argument that is being advanced,” and then the author describes accompanying texts as “developing an argument through writing” (p. 315). “It is the
image that might receive the first attention, pulling the reader in and bringing them to read the framing text that helps explain what the advertisement is meant to convey” (p. 316). Monson (2005) utilizes text as a placard, notifying the viewer as to what is about to be presented in the upcoming section, or the specific location and the context of the image being viewed at the time. The evidence being presented visually is the argument of the animal rights message.

As visual demonstration is a powerful tool of persuasion, a second formidable instrument is visual evidence (Sontag, 1977). Through investigating elements of the analogue images of Spanish bullfighting and the digital images of Google Street View, Pink (2011) proposes images are “multisensory” and may be comprehended “as being produced and consumed” in relation to movement and place (p. 7). While Pink does not utilize bullfighting images to counteract the “sport” as Monson (2005) does, there are inferences to be made from both the bullfighting and Google Street View. The image production and viewing of bullfighting are exercises in the physical qualities of still photography; while Google Street View presents the viewer with the opportunity of utilizing “existing experiences of environments to sense what it might be or how it might feel to move through the ‘real’ locality represented on screen” (Pink, 2011, p. 11).

The inference made from Google Street View is that these moving digitalized images allow the viewer to extrapolate from their own experiences what it might be like to move through/in various environments offered onscreen. In future studies, a researcher may inquire whether the viewer negotiates personal experiences when relating to the portrayal of animals in various environments, environments presented
through moving digital images. Monson (2005) utilizes the documentary format to motivate the viewer emotionally through the moving image of the film. Another way the documentary evokes emotion is through the voiceover.

**Voiceover**

The documentary is a medium useful for reaching-out to a mass audience (Nichols, 2001a, 2001b). Whether the viewer has initially considered the issues surrounding the animal rights message through the earlier documentaries, as in the cinéma vérité of Wiseman’s *Meat* (1976), or in the investigative footage of Jennifer Abbott’s *A Cow at My Table* (1998), the documentary *Earthlings* (2005) uniquely utilizes the voice-over strategy of “omniscient narrator” (Bernard, 2011, p. 206) to accompany the visual component throughout the film. The director uses images, narration, and music to arouse emotions in the viewer to persuade the viewer to the animal rights message.

The section “FOOD” is “PART TWO” of the documentary *Earthlings* (2005), entailing the process living animals go through to become food products for consumers. Grierson (1946) comprehends the usefulness of sound equipment for documentary film when transported to the field, and “how many more dramatic uses can be made of sound than the studios realize” (p. 96). The first images are of pigs being cornered, then cajoled by a man with an electric bolt gun saying in a singsong tone, “Oh, I missed. I missed you, Honey. I’ll get you again. I gotch you.” The viewer sees just the hand holding the gun up to the pig’s head, hears the sound “snap,” then the pig falls while convulsing to the floor. The other pigs begin trying to escape.
This is one of the occasions the viewer is privy to a voice spoken, other than that of the narrator.

Music accompanies these scenes, and the sounds of the animals are also heard. While the images role onscreen, the narrator Joaquin Phoenix declares, “What happens in a slaughterhouse is the variation on a theme of the weak over the strong” (*Earthlings*, 2005). These still live pigs are shown being hung by their feet as their throats are slit. All the while, the narrator as the voice of authority offers the audience statistics—the voice-over whom the viewer never sees (Nichols, 2001b, p. 13). Phoenix states, “It has been said, ‘If we had to kill our own meat, we would all be vegetarians’ (*Earthlings*, 2005).

“So where does our food come from?” (*Earthlings*, 2005). Michael Rabiger (1987), explaining the intricacies of *Directing the Documentary*, suggests superior “narration avoids predisposing the viewer in any direction but may justifiably draw attention to those aspects of the evidence—visual or verbal—whose significance might be overlooked if presented in a casual way” (p. 129). Through the question, the narrator steers the viewer to the section that exposes the processing animals experience, when being prepared for death, packaging, and consumption.

The viewer is then delivered visually into the process cows/cattle endure, consistent with the following: “branding” of the face; non-anesthetized “dehorning;” “transportation” conditions induce death, fatigue and trauma; “milking” while shackled to stalls. Phoenix speaks through this presentation, discussing pesticides and antibiotics given to the animals to increase milk production, and the normal lifespan of cows. The viewer is informed female cows are able to live to 20 years or so, while
these milking cows on factory farms live about 4 years before being slaughtered, when they are then sold to fast-food restaurants. According to Donovan (2011), animals are “subjects of a life,” and in the “assembly-line meat production process are even more commodified than human workers in that their very bodies are turned into commodities—consumable objects—in the process” (p. 203).

Within “novelistic narration” of documentary film, according to Avrom Fleishman (1992), there are two distinctly different forms: 1) third person knowledge, as with “external” narration from an “impersonal historian’s” point of view; and 2) first person remembrance, with “internal” narration as “subjective confessions of personal experience” (p. 78). While the narration of *Earthlings* (2005) is derived from a script and storyboard, the external narration described also relates to the non-fiction narrative presented by Joaquin Phoenix as third-person historian.

Nichols (2001b) describes the narration of the documentary as that of the “expository mode,” with this mode as assembling “fragments of the historical world into a more rhetorical or argumentative frame than an aesthetic or poetic one” (p. 105). It is in the expository mode that the voice-of-God, or voice-of-authority narrator, who is likely a proficient male orator commenting openly to the viewer, while proposing a standpoint, advancing an argument, or relating a history (p. 105). Monson (2005) utilizes this mode of documentary film, by relying on “an informing logic carried by the spoken word” (Nichols, 2001b, p. 107).

“Meat” is next, and Phoenix states that “captive bolts” guns are used to knock the cow senseless, but the animal is often still conscious during the slaughter. Visually and verbally, the viewer is presented with an animal hanging in the air, for
the process of the “bleeding” of the animal. This results in the animal still being alive while being bled. And, while the viewer is presented with an image of a man gathering blood from the neck of the hanging animal, the narrator discusses the facts pertaining to this process. According to Nichols (2001b), “expository documentary facilitates generalization and large-scale argumentation,” including the following:

The images can support the basic claims of a general argument rather than construct a vivid sense of the particularities to a given corner of the world. The mode also affords an economy of analysis since points can be made succinctly and pointedly in words (pp. 107-109).

The expository mode of documentary is ideal for “conveying information or mobilizing support within a framework that pre-exists the film” (Nichols, 2001b, p. 109). Monson (2005) promotes the animal rights message by developing the part of the narrator. By using the narrator in this documentary format, the director makes a more convincing argument with which to persuade the viewer. The viewer is witness to the violent actions of humans portrayed on the nonhumans through image and promoted in narration. Thus, the director utilizes the tragedy, pain and harm found in emotionalism.

“Knock boxes” are discussed, which holds the terrified animal being shot in the head by a captive bolt gun. The animal shown is then scooped away, as the viewer is led to a placard stating “kosher slaughter.” Phoenix then defines the Yiddish word for smooth, which is relevant as part of the ritual in creating “the highest standard of cleanliness” of kosher foods (Earthlings, 2005). The rules for kosher butchering that “require minimal suffering,” combined with the use of electric cattle prods, equals desecration of the kosher laws (Earthlings, 2005; Oliver, 2010, p. 277).
According to Monson (2005), this is not the case in the largest kosher animal-meat factory production. Upturned animals breathe blood back into their bodies, while their throats are gutted. Still living and mooing with torn-out tracheas, the animals are dumped in piles while thrashing on the bloody floor. “If this was kosher, death was neither quick nor merciful” (*Earthlings*, 2005). The term “kosher” then becomes of ideological interest, since “ideology is less a matter of inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 9). Monson (2005) presents a term that no longer represents the original definition, but reinforces the argument of the issues surrounding the animal rights message.

The film next portrays “veal,” who are male calves taken from their mothers within two days from birth. These cows are tied in stalls in such a way as to keep from developing muscles, and fed low-iron liquid food. They are shown trying to move while mooing, and the viewer is informed these calves are given four months to live without light before they will be slaughtered (*Earthlings*, 2005). “Pigs” are discussed as being “manufactured,” with the introduction to the viewer of a sow in the gestation crate. This “breeding machine” is kept continually pregnant through artificial insemination, and the “factory conditions” are then shown and discussed.

Still alive and on their sides, piglets are shown dying alone. The image becomes a close-up of one fly-covered piglet—appearing as if trying to squeal by opening and closing his/her mouth. Nichols (2001a) discusses the historical contribution of modernist avant-garde to documentary film, as ingeniously recreating the world’s appearance with images of the world. Contributing to the “historical
potential” of ordinary living, images command “yoking to the oratorical voice of the filmmaker” in order to operate within documentary film (p. 596).

Next is a view of the factory floor, with Moby’s music in the background. “Gestation Crates,” “Ruptures & Abscesses,” “Cannibalism,” and “Waste Pitts” are the texts at to top of the screen, without accompanying narration. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2013), “the viewer’s process of picking up cues, developing expectations, and constructing an ongoing story out of the plot will be partially shaped by what the narrator tells or doesn’t tell” (p. 96). The images, with accompanying music, portray the concepts of the director without verbal account.

“Tail docking,” “ear clipping,” “teeth cutting,” “castration,” and “electric prods” are all processes inflicted on pigs without anesthetic, as the narrator again explains. “Electrocution” and “throat slitting” are forms of slaughter, with the latter remaining the least expensive. “Boiling and hair removal” are particularly gruesome, since many pigs are not dead before being plunged headfirst to suffocate in boiling water.

Monson (2005) complements the image being portrayed to the viewer through the words of the voiceover actor. “In regard to ‘poultry,’ Americans currently consume as much chicken in a single day as they did in an entire year in 1930,” with major companies responsible for the slaughter of 8.5 million birds in a single week (Earthlings, 2005). “Debeaking,” “living conditions,” “battery cages,” “transportation,” and the “slaughter” of chickens and turkeys are discussed, until Phoenix states, “But slaughterhouses do not have glass walls. The architecture of
slaughter is opaque, designed in the interest of denial, to ensure that we will not see, even if we wanted to look. And who wants to look?” (Earthlings, 2005).

The narrator discusses the disease “pfiesteria piscicida.” This disease is more potent than cyanide and attributed to raw animal waste from factory-farmed animals, namely pigs, being dumped into waterways. The narrator considers “whales” and “dolphins” writhing in agony as images of humans slaughtering whales and dolphins roll across the screen. Birdsell and Groarke (2007) state the following:

Some visual arguments are made up entirely of visual elements, but many incorporate verbal components. Authors attempting to construct convincing arguments in real life use whatever means are at their disposal. They tend to see the verbal and the visual as complementary modes of communication, combining them in ways that build on their respective strengths (p. 104).

Phoenix explains facts and statistics to the viewer while the images create an emotional connection to the information the narrator provides. Monson (2005) operates persuasively through the use of the narration, images, and music to promote the issues surrounding animal rights.

Music

Accompanying the visual and verbalized aspects of the documentary is the music, which assists the viewer to the filmmakers’ point of view. Music arouses emotions, and is used to arouse an emotional connection in the viewer to the argument being presented. Grierson (1946), the first to coin the term “documentary” (Nichols, 2001b), describes the use of music as an “elementary power” of silent film, with the filmmaker creating “rhythms and tempos, crescendos and diminuendos of energy,” assisting the presentation (p. 90). In the description of the art of sound films, Grierson
(1946) observes the music of one film as written specifically for creating the atmosphere of the motif (p. 95). Music assists the viewer to the message of the filmmaker.

The discussion of animal rights in “PART THREE, CLOTHES,” asks the question of where the consumer’s clothing originates? “Leather” demands are most prevalent from the U.S.A., Germany, and the U.K. According to Monson (2005), few consider from where the leather originates. “India cows” are purchased from rural low-economic standard families—who sell only after having been assured the cows will live on farms. Thousands or these cows are slaughtered weekly. The cows, who have been treated as family, have their first “shoeing and roping” experience.

The cows then experience “transportation and fatigue,” as they are taken on their final journey. Cows are loaded into trucks without food or water for days, only to experience “tail breaking” by “handlers,” along with “chili pepper” rubbed directly into their eyes as motivation to keep moving. Half of the animals may die on the final journey to their “slaughter,” a slaughter that is horrifyingly performed in full sight of one another. The cows are hacked across their throats with saws and dull equipment, with a close-up into a cow’s eye while she’s being slaughtered.

The music accompanying these scenes is the most understated of the movie, with traditional Indian music influencing the atmospheric effects with gentle resonances. Rabiger (1987) emphasizes the importance of copyright issues involving music and sound, and recommends using original music to keep from being taken to court. The author dismisses the use of a “banal score,” and implies, “It’s better to use
no music than bad music; good sound effects and atmosphere can in any case be a kind of musical composition that has great impact” (pp. 137-138).

According to Simonson (2001), “Noise can be defined as a loud sound, a sound that interrupts signaling systems, or an aesthetically discordant sound” (p. 400). Simonson (2001) describes the use of communication by animal rights groups such as PETA, defining their work of creating a sound-language as, “making social noise and establishing popular rhythm” (p. 400). By these definitions, Monson’s (2005) utilization of news broadcasts, media coverage, and the progressive music culture represented within the film confirms the filmmaker building on the accomplishments of previous animal rights groups.

Describing the music publicity utilized by animal rights groups, Simonson (2001) illustrates the following:

Animal Liberation represented a different kind of noise than news-based controversy. It was unquestionably loud, and powerfully amplified by music media that drew attention to it. But these media sounded in more segmented demographic regions than news-based controversies like the Silver Spring-Monkeys and the lab break in at the University of Pennsylvania (p. 409).

Animal rights groups, such as Animal Liberation, utilized not only print and broadcast news media resources, but the group also “circulated fluidly through the communicative infrastructures of alternative music cultures, which then became vehicles to spread the gospel of animal rights” (Simonson, 2001, p. 409). The animal rights groups previously creating noise through various venues assist Monson (2005) in revealing through sound and image the issues surrounding animal rights.
The music stops for a moment, and then changes with the discussion of “tanning,” becoming still soft, but piano-laden. The images pertain to low socio-economic and injured workers using the harmful chemicals necessary for the tanning process; and then, with the discussion of “retail,” a violin is added. Phoenix discusses the fact major retailers sell Indian leather, while images roll onscreen of leather products in the stores, from cows consumers do not eat.

The music gradually changes to a more spacious electronica sound under the topic of “fur.” Wild-trapped animals in cages are spinning in circles with “cage madness,” and are about to obtain “injuries and slow death.” Phoenix informs the viewer of the lawlessness extended in regards to the killing of these animals, with the least expensive being the norm. Breaking the neck, carbon monoxide poisoning, strychnine, suffocation, and anal electrocution are listed as the methods used. The music is not overpowering, but subtle, allowing for the narration and image presentation to take the forefront.

Phoenix names the types of animals in the cages who will also go through this process, while the viewer travels through the facility with the animal about to be anally electrocuted. Discussing the apparent relationship between the music and image as documentary film, Cox (2011) refers to his sound/image with non-fiction film and No Escape (Cox, 2009). Specifically, the author states, “The trope of travelling represents an attempt at physical escape … This is represented by the piano music, which varies within fairly restricted limits, delineated by close control of intervallic relationships” (Cox, 2011, p. 55). While the author refers to the emotional
lives of humans, the animal traveling to her death will experience no physical escape, signified by Moby’s keyboard music.

The viewer experiences looking into the eyes of the animal during anal electrocution, through the undercover investigator’s camera lens. The proximity of the lens alleviates the remoteness of the viewer, allowing the viewer to transport emotionally into the scene (Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Anker (2005) describes a victim of 9/11, presented televised on a news broadcast. “Through the voyeuristic close-up, viewers were invited to identify with the attack victim’s connoted experience of unwarranted anguish and vulnerability” (Anker, 2005, p. 28).

The animal obviously dies slowly and painfully, with Phoenix describing the ordeal. “Often times this inept procedure must be repeated to actually kill the animal” (Earthlings, 2005). Stacks of skinned corpses are shown, and the narrator states these will be fed to the caged animals. Moby’s music is important, and still present, underlying the narration and images during this ordeal. “Music can sound confident and proud, for example, and if it can induce postures and movements characteristic of confidence, then it ought to be able to induce feelings of confidence” (Robinson & Hatten, 2012, p. 71).

A “Chinese Fur Farm” is visited next, with a dog lifted by the tail out of a cage where he/she once resided. Softly guiding music is prevalent at this point, without narration, while a man steps on the head of a live dog—and blood begins squirting out of his/her nose. Rabiger (1987) ascertains that, “Music should not be a substitute for anything; it should complement action and give us access to the inner, invisible life of a character or of the situation being portrayed” (p. 137). The soundtrack in this scene
does not overpower, but complements what the audience is viewing. The director uses music without narration to bring the action of the characters to the forefront, drawing on the emotions of the viewer in order to bring to light the issues surrounding the animal rights message.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, a breathing and twisting dog is skinned alive while hanging by his/her back feet. Dripping with blood, and only eyelashes left on the body, this dog is viewed on a pile of other skinless dogs. He/she acts as a dog still—placing the nose under the back leg for solace. Again, using the example of 9/11 news broadcasts, Anker (2005) explicates melodrama:

The news viewers can be, if they choose to empathize with her visible pain, “victimized” themselves [sic]. As in any melodramatic narrative, viewers are promised, if they desire to identify with the victim on screen, the designation of virtue via the experience of unwarranted suffering and the guarantee of future heroic reparation to eradicate their undeserved pain.

Though there is no guarantee of future heroic reparation provided to the viewer of *Earthlings* (2005), there is hope of empathy invoked in the viewer. Through the audience participating in the melodramatic narrative, Monson (2005) persuades the viewer into action; thus, the viewer becomes moved emotionally and invested in the contents exhibited onscreen. The viewer is called to become knowledgeable, and the music is used in persuading the viewer to action. “Good music can initiate the emotional level at which the audience should investigate what is being shown” (Rabiger, 1987, p. 137).

Following is the portrayal of clubbing of seals, titled “Canadian Seal Hunt.” Moby is still prevailing, with strong images not requiring verbal explanation, but
music to maintain an emotional connection with the viewer on this journey. “And
music can arouse emotional reactions as a result of idiosyncratic associations that have
nothing to do with what the music expresses” (Robinson & Hatten, 2012, p. 71). The
visual bloody carnage ends with a large seal laying her head on the skinned body of a
small seal.

The scene quickly changes, and the viewer is shown stores filled with fur
clothes; the music of Moby assists the viewer with the change, with an ever-increasing
measure of violins. Discussing ecofashion and celebrity chic, Theresa Winge (2008)
defines “commodity fetish” as a Marxian model referring to “a material object that has
exchange value” (p. 517). This fashion trend is not supportive of the fur industry, with
ecofashion product as high end fashion “imbued with values and empathetic emotions
often associated with animal and human rights,” along with ecological interests (p.
519). Monson (2005) again changes the scene, when a woman’s hand appears on the
price tag of a fur coat, and the attached voice asks the price.

At the end of the documentary the music returns to that of the beginning of the
film. This signifies the end of the film. Capping the beginning and the end of the film
in such a way is an artistic format, creating unity through repetition in the production
(Bordwell & Thompson, 2010).

Monson (2005) describes the conditions nonhumans endure at the hand of
humans. The director informs the viewer of the argument of emotionalism through
image, narration and music. In the next section, I will examine the director’s
utilization of moralization in the documentary concerning portrayals of good versus
evils. Specifically, I will discuss the use of unwarranted engagements and displays of anguish.

**Moralization**

A melodramatic frame has the capacity to interpret conflicts in moral terminologies (Schwarze, 2006, p. 250). Mason (1993) describes moralization as “the struggle between virtue and evil as irreconcilable, absolute opposites” (p. 17). Schwarze (2006) discusses compromise within melodrama as follows:

To the extent that melodrama combines polarization and moral claims, it frames situations as confrontations between the virtuous and the villainous, and encourages audiences to take sides in such confrontations in order to repair the moral order. While it can be argued that the moralizing tendency of melodrama hinders the possibility for pragmatic compromise, this begs the question of whether compromise is always an appropriate rhetorical purpose or objective (p. 251).

Schwarze (2006) argues that melodrama “forces moral questions onto the agenda, complicating public discourse that focuses on technical matters to the exclusion of right and wrong” (p. 255). Walker (2008) discusses environmental melodrama and the conflict between moral communities. According to Walker, it is Schwarze’s view that an escalating conflict increases the force and prominence of the conflict (p. 87; Schwarze, 2006). Anker (2005) examines the “moral legibility” of melodrama, in that “the melodramatic narrative employs the plot devices of grandiose events, unprovoked actions, hyperbolic language, and spectacles of suffering” (p. 24). *Earthlings* (2005) employs two strategies for moralizing conflict. The film depicts particular engagements between humans and animals as unwarranted, and it provides explicit displays of anguish.
Depictions of unwarranted engagements inform the viewer of actions performed by humans concerning non-humans. In the film, “PART FOUR” is presented as “ENTERTAINMENT.” The director of Earthlings (2005) addresses the efforts of the documentary toward animal rights, but not animal welfare. Simonson (2001) distinguishes between animal welfare and animal rights, as follows:

While animal welfare is about kindly and humane treatment, animal rights pushes a more radical agenda: animals should not be used at all, for there are no essential moral differences between human and non-human species—all can feel pain (p. 401).

Moby’s music begins again, with an underlying but motivating sound in his music—a beeping like the backing of a truck. While Joaquin Phoenix touts a quote by Mark Twain of humans inflicting pain for amusement, the viewer is taken to the “Festival of the Bulls, Spain,” where a bull is shown running as if confused down the street, with fireworks attached to his horns.

Monson (2005) presents entertainment acts portrayed as evil acts. The director describes acts of unwarranted engagements, which are actions imposed without justification. The viewer is shown “rodeos,” including information that the animals don’t buck from being wild, but from inflicted pain by a belt attached in proximity of the genitals of the animals. While electric prods and physical/verbal irritations are used to incite the animal, “roping” is used to stop them in their tracks. “Gambling” and “fair grounds” are topics, with the mistreatment of horses, dogs, pigs, aardvarks, and ostriches resulting. “Pigeon bowling” is presented, again with entertainment and monetary gain the motivation.
The film provides numerous other examples of unwarranted engagements.
Phoenix states that loss of habitat is the primary problem of animal related deaths, with hunting taking second (Earthlings, 2005). “Hunting” is expounded, which includes a change to a more energized music rhythm. “Fishing” is also considered a bloody sport, with the pain system of fish equates with that of birds and mammals. The nerve cells of fish are similar to humans, and are highly evolved (Earthlings, 2005). According to Val Plumwood (2000), “The paradox of the sensitive hunter” is useful in clarifying “why typically mechanistic and reductionistic views of animals are able to come to the fore only once hunting is replaced by agriculture, especially industrialized agriculture” (p. 315).

The director exemplifies unwarranted engagements through moralization. Walker (2008) discusses escalating conflict of environmental melodrama. “Although conflict escalation is often destructive, it is not inherently so. Conflict escalation does increase the intensity and visibility of the conflict” (p. 87). Monson (2005) argues animals perform in a circus due to fear of punishment, not for the hope of a reward. Again, the voices of the animal handlers are briefly heard. Then, “Winter Quarters” are disclosed to the viewer through an elephant swaying back and forth in chains, while Phoenix discusses the fact about 95% of the animal’s life is spent living in shackles (Earthlings, 2005).

Monson (2005) utilizes news footage depicting unwarranted engagements to indicate power struggles. Power is defined as “the ability to control events and meanings” (Brummett, 2011, p. 4). Monson (2005) increases the viewer’s awareness of the imbalance of power in the moral argument (Walker, 2008), and sets the stage
for the less powerful to intensify in their approach to conflict. A circus representative states animals are never hit, but “guided” during training by the circus employees during a televised news interview. Following is footage of the animals being hit by trainers. There is no narration at this point, only music that is atmospheric in nature. “In situations where power between the parties is significantly imbalanced, the low-power party may escalate the conflict in an effort toward power parity” (Walker, 2008, p. 87).

In addition to moralizing through depictions of unwarranted engagements, the film utilizes displays of anguish in news footage to indicate the imbalance of power between humans and nonhumans. The music stops with the close-up of an escaped elephant from a circus, and then actual film footage of the repeated shooting of an elephant that tramples a trainer, while making her/his escape from the circus. Discussing privacy issues surrounding wildlife documentaries, Brett Mills (2010) indicates that animals are allotted a measure of rights, just not the same rights as humans. One method humanity differentiates itself from animals is through “assumptions about moral hierarchies and priorities” (p. 197). Monson (2005) presents the actions of the elephant and the trainer to the viewer. The director operates using rhetorical strategies of unwarranted engagements and displays of anguish through which moralization is conveyed.

The next group of images is of elephants with scars in chains, throwing straw. Monson (2005) presents the viewer with a close-up on the eye of an elephant. Atkins-Sayre (2010) argues when animals seem to respond to the human gaze by looking
back, “they judge our actions and character and make appeals to our understanding of good character” (p. 322).

Monson (2005) utilizes displays of anguish to inspire critical thinking of the issues surrounding animal rights. Displays of anguish are described as the exhibited pain and distress of the subjugated and/or suffering. The music begins again with the narrator in the section “zoos.” A familiar image of animals in enclosures, Phoenix discusses the lack of educational instruction offered by the exhibiting of animals in unnatural surroundings, and the natural desire of humans to view the exotic. “What animal would chose to spend its entire life in captivity, if they had a choice?” (Earthlings, 2005). Clarifying feminist care theory, Donovan (2006) argues sympathy toward animals who are in pain/distress does not guarantee a moral response concerning the animal (pp. 322-323). Donovan (2006) suggests the “empathetic response must be supplemented with an ethical and political perspective (acquired through training and education) that enables the human to analyze the situation critically,” determining the party responsible for the suffering, and acting to relieve the suffering (p. 323).

Monson (2005) utilizes the repetition of topics, and through this repetition the director creates a cohesive narrative to persuade the viewer to issues of the animal rights message. Broaching speciesism with displays of anguish, the sport of “bullfighting” is reintroduced with images of humans instigating attacking bulls, leading to the death of the bull. According to Donovan (2011), displays of anguish regarding non-humans for human consumption through visual gratification is exemplified in “crush videos,” where “live small animals are crushed to death by
stiletto-heeled women,” purportedly for sexual arousal of the viewer (p. 209; Oliver, 2008, p. 221).

The director presents the viewer with the final “PART FIVE, SCIENCE,” and then “vivisection.” Through incorporating footage of non-humans undergoing unnecessary experimentation, Monson (2005) utilizes displays of anguish to persuade the viewer to the message of animal rights. The narrator states, “The experimentation on animals contains two fundamental errors in understanding,” outlined as follows: 1) the notion that results obtained from animals are relatable to mankind, 2) the inexorable misconception of investigational learning in regard to the arena of carbon-based life. “Since animals react differently from human beings, every new product or method tried out on animals must be tried out again on man—through careful clinical tests before it can be considered safe. This rule knows no exceptions” (Earthlings, 2005).

The director of Earthlings (2005) persuades the viewer to moralization through the topic of “medical experiments,” with images of non-tranquilized animals in various displays of anguish as operated on, burned alive, and psychologically tortured. Phoenix states, “We know animals feel. They feel fear, loneliness and pain, just like humans do” (Earthlings, 2005). Potts (2010) discusses combating speciesism in feminism and psychology, pointing to the works of René Descartes, the 17th century scientist and philosopher (p. 292). “Cartesian dualism, and its rejection of animal sentience, continues to influence many scientists,” scientists still working in this century with “animals in the context of medical, biological and sexological research or for the purpose of educating psychology students” (p.292). Schwarze (2006) states
melodrama places the “inaccuracy of scientific language on display and highlights its potential moral blindspots” (p. 251).

The documentary *Earthlings* (2005) is the platform the director utilizes in order to present the animal rights argument to the viewer, promoting discussion of the issues surrounding the animal rights message. Kelly Oliver (2008) explicates the philosophical debate over the problems involving animal rights, as the inferiority of animals in relation to women’s rights. Oliver (2008) expounds as follows:

If women’s subordination is in part justified by comparing them to animals, then perhaps one reason why women’s liberation has continued to meet with resistance and continued to bump up against the “glass ceiling” is because of our attitudes toward animals and the deep patriarchal associations between women and animals (p. 215).

According to Oliver (2008), we will continue to discover meanings of the “denigration and exploitation of various groups of people, from playboy bunnies to prisoners at Abu Ghraib who were treated like dogs as a matter of explicit military policy,” pending investigating the “denigration of animals in Western thought,” on both theoretical and “material economic levels” (p. 215).

Monson (2005) utilizes labels and the ways labeling operates rhetorically, informing the viewer to issues surrounding the animal rights message. Schwarze (2006) discusses labeling, stating, “By renaming situations in moral terms,” melodrama empowers activists “to question the appropriateness of calls for compromise that ignore the history of moral slights committed by parties to the compromise” (p. 251). Applied to this study, certain activists, in this case animal rights activists, portray the experience of animals in moral terms—that is, as a power
struggle as good versus evil. Carol Adams (1991) explicates the dichotomy of human/animal, along with the name-changes utilized by the hegemony of factory farm industry. “The impersonal names bestowed on them—such as food-producing unit, protein harvester, computerized unit in a factory environment, egg-producing machine, converting machine, biomachine, crop”—is an attempt at eradicating the animal found in nature to those used at factory farms (Adams, 1991, p. 134).

Monson (2005) argues that it takes nothing for a human to be kind to animals in the final plea to moralization—promoting the animal rights message to the viewer during the conclusion of the documentary. He is inviting the viewer to make a connection of good versus evil by joining the just side in the conflict (Earthlings, 2005). The use of documentary as a format for the animal rights message is successful for the activists, and for the novice, persuading the viewer to the message with the capacity to inform.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Who would want to be eating a dead body?” Carol Adams, *A Cow at my Table*

This is the first type of study to utilize the framework of melodrama pertaining to the animal rights message. Researchers have examined melodrama, but not in this context. While investigating the documentary, I discovered the complexity involved in the use of melodrama. Melodrama functions by appealing to heightened emotions and polarizing may likely work with an audience that is already predisposed to the message—an audience that is sympathetic to the message being portrayed. But the question remains whether the melodramatic framework is persuasive with a hostile audience or with an ambivalent audience.

The director, writer and producer Shaun Monson was inspired to create the documentary *Earthlings* (2005) while working at a shelter in Los Angeles. Animals used as food and consumable “goods” are often raised on factory farms, in conditions most cost-effective for their captors. The portrayal of animals by the media is of happy, healthy and contented creatures. This thesis demonstrates the use of counter-hegemonic documentary as a medium for the animal rights debate. Staged rhetorically to persuade the viewer to the argument of animal rights, the documentary operates counter-hegemonically, alerting the viewer to the issues surrounding the animal rights
message. Compiling research and footage, the director uses the documentary format as the foundation for revealing the ideology promoted by the factory farm industry, and presents his findings to the audience.

Animals have often been depicted as happily offering themselves for use. Many forms of popular media portray animals as products for consumption, whether implied through characterizations in advertisements, news broadcasts, classic cinema, journalism, or social media. Often misleading are labels applied to packaging, visible by the depiction of lifestyle and slaughter processes, such as with “free-range” and “kosher” labeling.

This thesis examined the animal rights message using the framework of melodrama. Discussing the issues surrounding the animal rights message of the documentary brings insights to the use of labeling of animals by the hegemony of factory farms. The viewer may be previously aware of the numerous issues surrounding the animal rights debate, but, through witnessing the evidence provided in this documentary, the viewer may gain information that incites action. This is a desired outcome of the film’s creator. What is lacking is media coverage of the documentary, which promotes the documentary to a possible audience who is not aware of the animal rights culture or issues. Future studies may focus on the lack of information provided through the journalism of popular media as another issue surrounding the animal rights debate. Future studies may also focus on the lack of readily available information provided through African American and Native American scholarship of issues surrounding the animal rights debate.
“Soylent Green is people!” Charlton Heston, *Soylent Green*

Although the documentary is free online, not everyone with computer access who would be interested in watching the documentary is aware of its existence. During research for this thesis, I found *Earthlings* (2005) on many animal activists’ “must see” lists. It seems the active supporters of animal rights organizations are aware of this documentary and the message it conveys. Thus, this documentary becomes a tool in arsenal of the animal rights campaign—creating a more uniform activist group, by uniting group members with a common rhetorical text. The film may also be useful in persuading viewers who have not yet decided on the issues presented, though the images may deter viewership due to the heightened melodramatic framework that seeks to persuade through polarization, emotionalism, and moralization.
REFERENCES


