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### End of the World: A Rhetorical examination of the trailer for "2012"

In today's entertainment minded society, it is difficult to find movies that are simplistic in nature. Most film companies must focus on making their trailer depict a movie that is exciting, action-packed or extremely adventurous to the audience. This tactic stems from the film company trying to make the most money from the most possible viewers buying a ticket for their movie. This tactic can lead to some very exciting trailers, as well as others that appear to be over the top. All in all, the main focus of a trailer is to get the most extensive use of the effect of ethos, pathos, and logos on the audience to convince them to see their film. The following essay will take this analysis of rhetoric and apply it to a recent film trailer. The trailer for the film "2012" provides a heart-pounding series of apocalyptic clips that draw the audience into an excited, emotional state in order to present the movie as a thrilling and true vision of the demise of humanity. Director Roland Emmerich relies heavily on ethos and pathos to create the most dramatic and engrossing film trailer he can to ensure that audiences will be captivated.

Even if you aren't able to identify with the trailer right away, the aspect of 2012 being a cataclysmic date is enough to capture one's interest. The trailer takes off with the idea of 2012 being the final year of the earth. This idea is formed with the discovery of the Mayan calendar failing to exceed beyond the year 2012. It claims that "Mankind's earliest civilization" had

“Warned us” with their dating of the planet. Many give credit to this ancient society’s supposed “prediction”, especially since they were able to construct such an advanced calculation of dates and times, as well as structures that are geometrically advanced for their given time period. This historical background gives the film a sense of relevance to the audience. If these findings are true, it would mean a greater desire within the viewers to see what this film has to offer in terms of information regarding the fate of humanity. Not only does the trailer present the film in the light of historically significant findings, but its release is just a few years shy of the date which the film purports the cataclysmic downfall of life on earth will occur. Such a close timeline would inspire much curiosity and interest within the audience, building up a stronger desire to see the film. The trailer presents insight into this significant date while the film itself contains another defining aspect. Its director, Roland Emmerich, is also the director of the slightly recent global warming epic “The Day After Tomorrow” and the science fiction thriller “Independence Day.” These two films alone make quite a résumé for any aspiring film director. Although Independence Day is more alien invasion oriented, it was quite a popular film for its time. “The Day After Tomorrow,” on the other hand, was a big budget film that focused on the issue of global warming, which was a very hot topic to the public both then and now. If Credit for directing these films is given to the director in this trailer, than the audience will instantly give much more credibility to the film. These films establish his credibility as a director, and add momentum to the trailer itself, as both of the movies mentioned contain ideas relative to “2012” in the form of end of the world events and horrible natural disasters. With these references noted within the trailer, a great amount of ethos is built up.

This credibility established within the first few seconds of the trailer is what sets the stage for the drama that follows soon afterward. Now that the audiences trust and attention have been



gained, the director can reinforce his point with highly emotional clips that play on people's sense of safety, security and protection. Enter a television news reel that depicts chaos all around the world in foreign countries with a mass suicide being committed near an ancient burial ground. This reinforces the idea of life threatening events and adds to the emotional weight of the clip as death has been introduced so soon as a major playing factor in the film. Audiences would desire to see just how dramatic the film is if it involves such a serious topic. Among large crowds and religious gatherings is an image of the statue of Jesus near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil crumbling to pieces, and an atomic blast. The first could be symbolic of the hopelessness of survival. Although simply a statue, the image of a religious figure falling to pieces brings a spiritual and emotional depth to this earth shattering event, which would impact many who watched this quick scene in the clip. They would develop a sense of personal connection to the trailer, especially those with a religious background, meaning the crumbling statue is most likely a hook geared towards attracting religious persons. The atomic blast resonates with the idea of destruction. Any and all who see this trailer, no doubt, understand the horrible effects of large scale bombs and radiation. These images are what bring a suspenseful and even fearful effect to the clip, meaning many would see this film as an opportunity to see what it would really look like if we were to endure the end of the world.

Audiences who have watched the clip thus far are now emotionally hooked on the screen, waiting to take in the next horrendous view of the last days on earth. To bring the trailer even closer to the everyday family, the following scene depicts a Father with his children in a recreational vehicle. This scene draws compassion from the audience as they watch the family, seemingly enjoying a simple vacation, suddenly in the midst of a terrible meteor shower. The director plays on the Vulnerability inherent within children as he thrusts them into the middle of

this perilous situation. Parents, adults, and children would all feel extremely disturbed at this glimpse of everyday life colliding with natural disaster on an unbelievable scale. These negative or fearful emotions would create a desire within the audience to see this conflict resolved, adding more emotional weight to the trailer. Each of these elements within only the first 45 seconds of a two and a half minute clip has created an extremely poignant beginning to the trailer. Anyone watching would be tinged excitement at seeing such an awesome display, while also being reminded of its possible truth. The emotion and credibility that have been established mix together to create an overwhelming pull on nearly any audience of any age. After establishing the credibility, Pathos has become this director's most important friend.

The only true logos contained in this trailer is that of the final date and current condition of the environment. Beyond these few aspects, there isn't much logos at all; being that the film itself is just a fictional representation of an event that is only speculated to occur. This lack of logical appeal is what causes the trailer to contain so much ethos and pathos, in order to draw the audience in. Herein lays the main focus of the trailer, to rely heavily on credibility and emotional manipulation to attract an audience within nearly any context. The Hollywood movie mindset is manifested within this film trailer through and through, creating a thrilling, but logically shallow appearance that does exactly what its purpose is intended to do; gain the most profit from a major motion picture centered on entertainment, not intellect. Though it doesn't provide the logical reasoning that an analytically minded individual would desire, it is a successful trailer in that it captivates the audience through the thrills and excitement it promises to deliver while providing multiple points of credibility and relevance to the audience.

Word Count: 1,310



## Works Cited

Hollywoodstreams. '2012' *trailer HD*. Online video. June 18, 2009. Web. 7 Sept. 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz86TsGx3fc>

## Reflective Paragraph

After successfully completing my project paper, I feel much more confident in my ability to analyze a text through the eyes of rhetorical analysis. When I started my paper, I was unsure of my direction, attempting to establish the main focus and claim of my paper. I was unsure of what to follow. Although this method may not seem orthodox, I decided to develop a sort of "guideline" with which to compose the rest of the paper. The next part of the project was finding the textual examples that support my thesis. I found how they bring the purpose of the trailer into focus. With that, I felt I had more confidence in fully expressing my analysis as it relates to the audience as well as developing a strong and concise conclusion that puts an appropriate seal on the paper. My analysis was lacking in depth, and it took some time for me to formulate the right words to say as far as relating the audience all the way to the main point. All in all, I feel fairly proud of my paper as I have accomplished the purpose I had set out to. Although there were some questionable areas in the paper, with the extra one on one writing I gained a much better view of what I was doing well, and what needed to be reworked within the paper. After the revision process I think I can present a solid, fluent essay that meets the criteria of the assignment and comprehensively explores the purpose of the film trailer.