

Public Discourse & Climate Change

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CCS Intro course, October 2013

How do we communicate about climate change?

Let me count the ways...



Based on concentration changes, the RF of all WMGHG in 2011 is 2.83 [2.54 to 3.12 W W m⁻² (*very high confidence*). This is an increase since AR4 of 0.20 [0.18 to 0.22] W m⁻², with nearly all of the increase due to the increased abundance of CO₂ since 2005.

IPCC AR5 Technical Summary, 2013

Rolling Stone

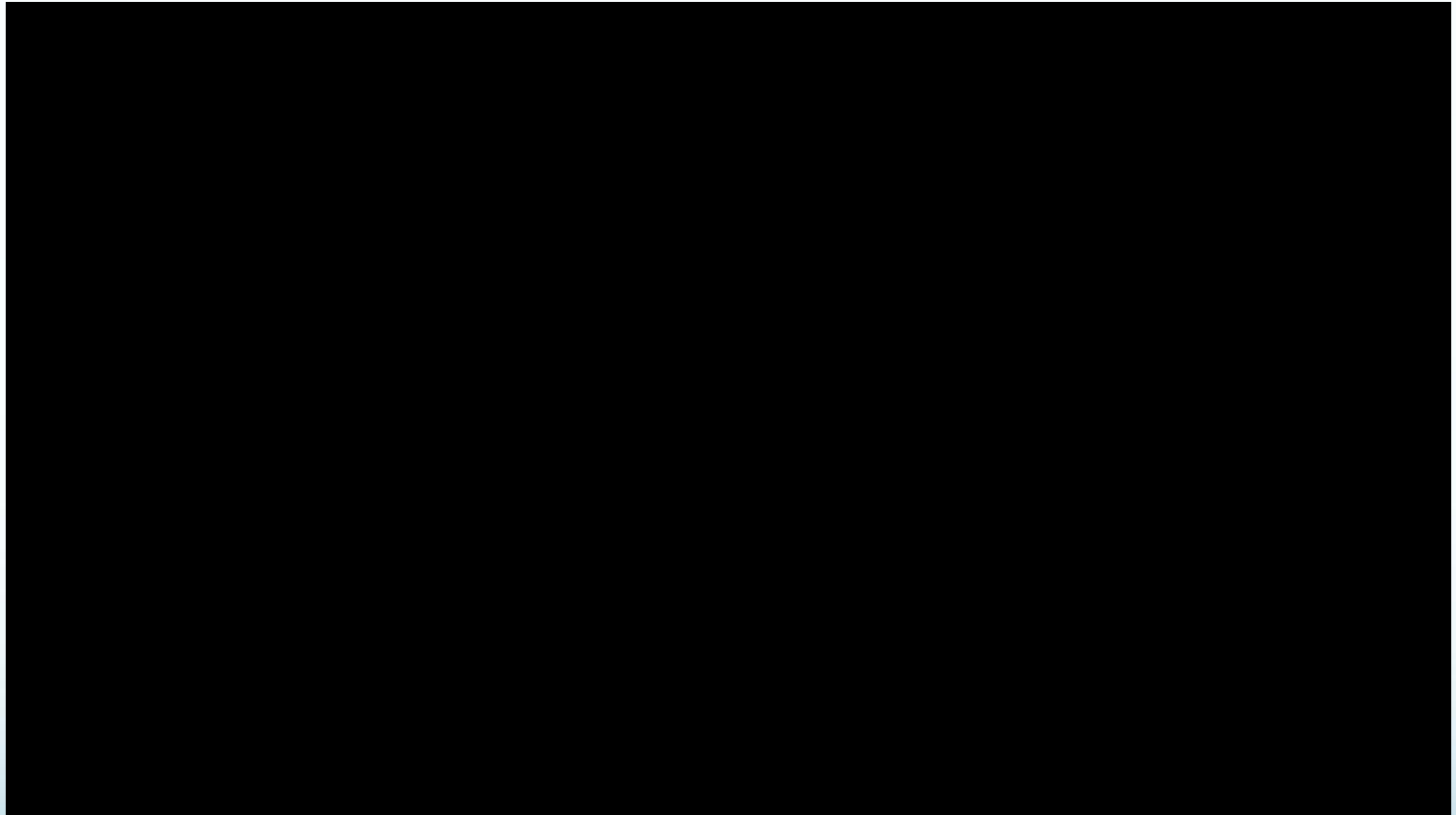
Issue 1096
January 24, 2009 \$4.99
rollingstone.com

YOU IDIOTS!

MEET THE PLANET'S
WORST ENEMIES

Inside the Battle Over Global Warming

We Can Solve It (2008)



A massive carbon tax or a cap-and-trade rationing system would likely cost more than the damages it would prevent.

Either would be an impractical, panicky reaction that would be both more expensive and less effective than targeted technology development.

~Jim Manzi, *The New Republic* June 22, 2010

Vanishing Act: How Climate Change is Causing a New Age of Extinction





WINDMILLS
NOT
OIL SPILLS.



STOP THE
TRANSCANADA
PIPELINE

Build Nebraska

WINDMILLS
NOT
OIL SPILLS.



Protect Our
Water - NO
to XL Pipeline

WINDMILLS
NOT
OIL SPILLS.



~~KEYSTONE XL~~

JUST NO!

FUTURE

FOR

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SP

BuildNebraska.com

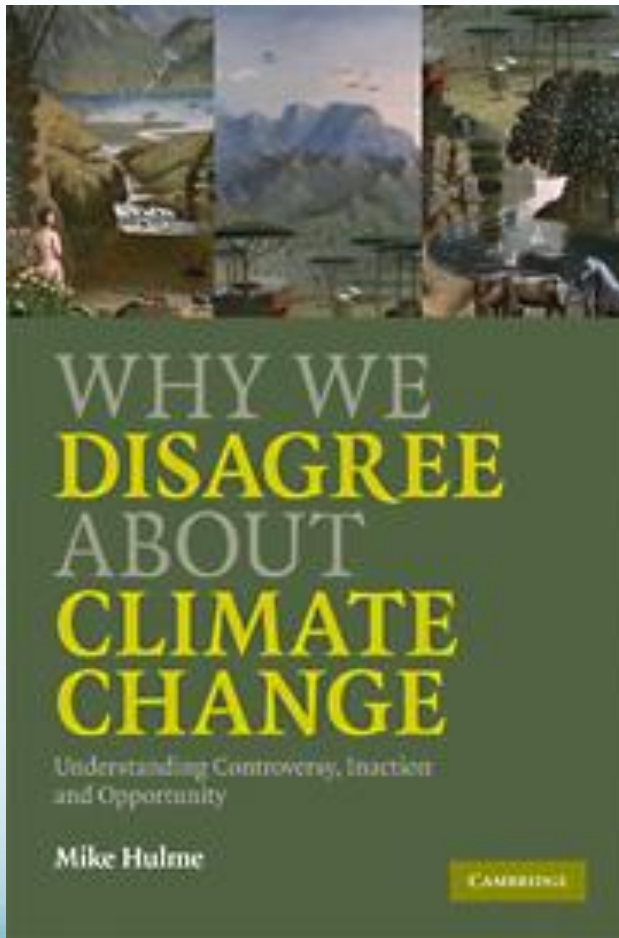
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Climate change is a

cultural idea,

not simply a physical reality.

Why We Disagree about Climate Change



- Mike Hulme; Tyndall Centre, UK
- Environmental scientist by training
- Climates have both physical reality *and* cultural meaning

Climate change is an idea that carries as many different *meanings* and *interpretations* in contemporary political and cultural life as do [“democracy,” “terrorism,” or “nationalism”].

(pg.
322)

The Fundamental Issues

What meanings get attached to climate and climate change?

How do these meanings shape belief and action?

How do these meanings empower some interests over others?

Not...

- **What is the physical reality of climate change?**
- **What will get people to accept the scientific evidence?**
- **How do we persuade people to support climate-related policies?**

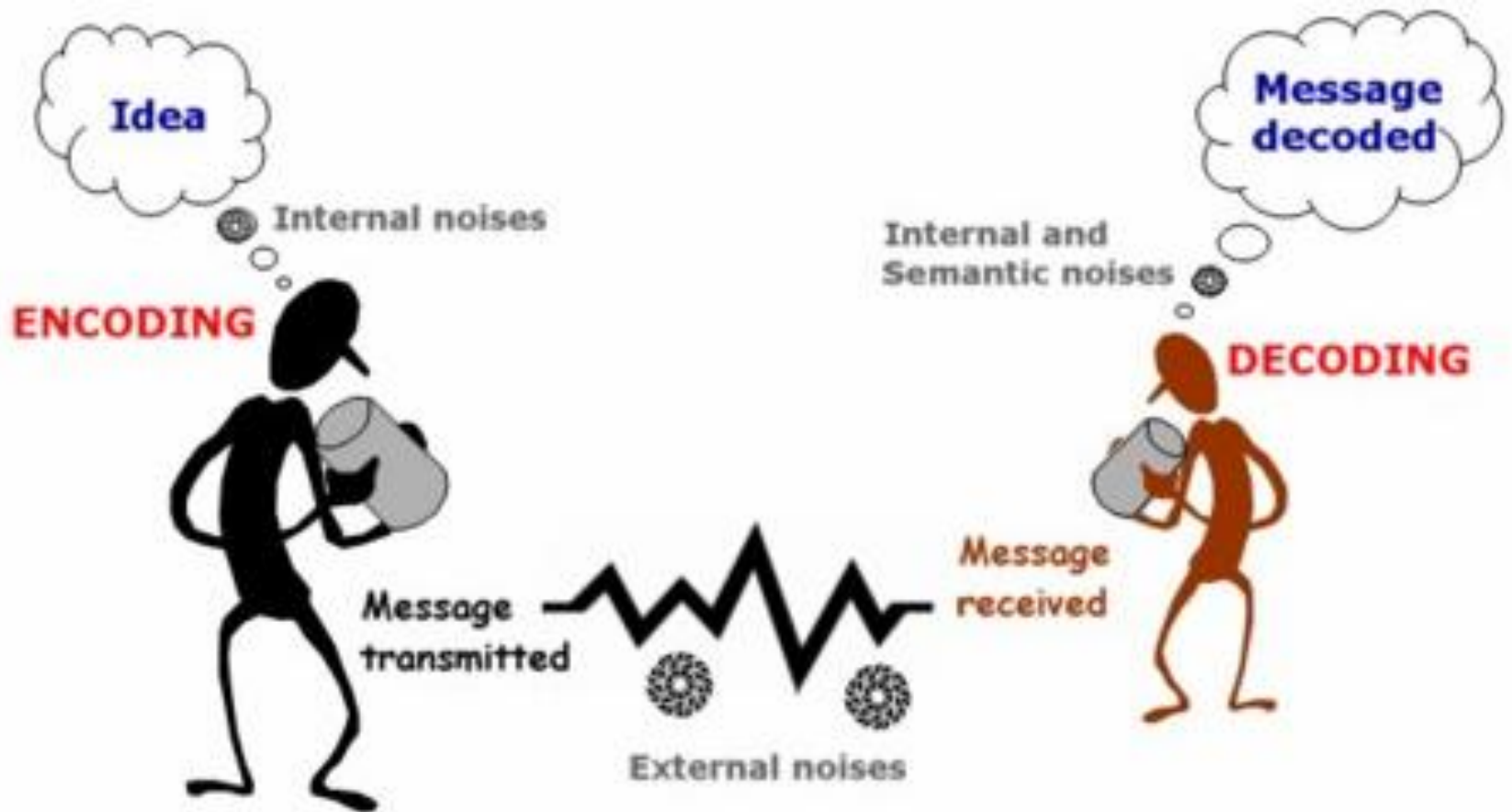
Today's Agenda

- **Provide models of comm relevant to CΔ**
- **Explain framing**
- **Observe rhetorical strategies**
 - **Visual rhetoric—images and image events**
 - **Narrative patterns**

Information-Deficit Model

- Scientists possess information
- Public lacks information (“deficit”)
- Correct info leads to “right” action decisions
- Media’s job: conduit for information

Deficit Model



Communication as “transmission” or “transfer”

Deficit Model: Problems

- Views communication as one-way flow
- Treats mediating factors as “noise”
 - Individual attitudes & values
 - Social & political contexts
 - Other messages *...Al Gore...*
- Presumes “rational actors”
- Privileges “technocratic” (expert-driven) decision-making

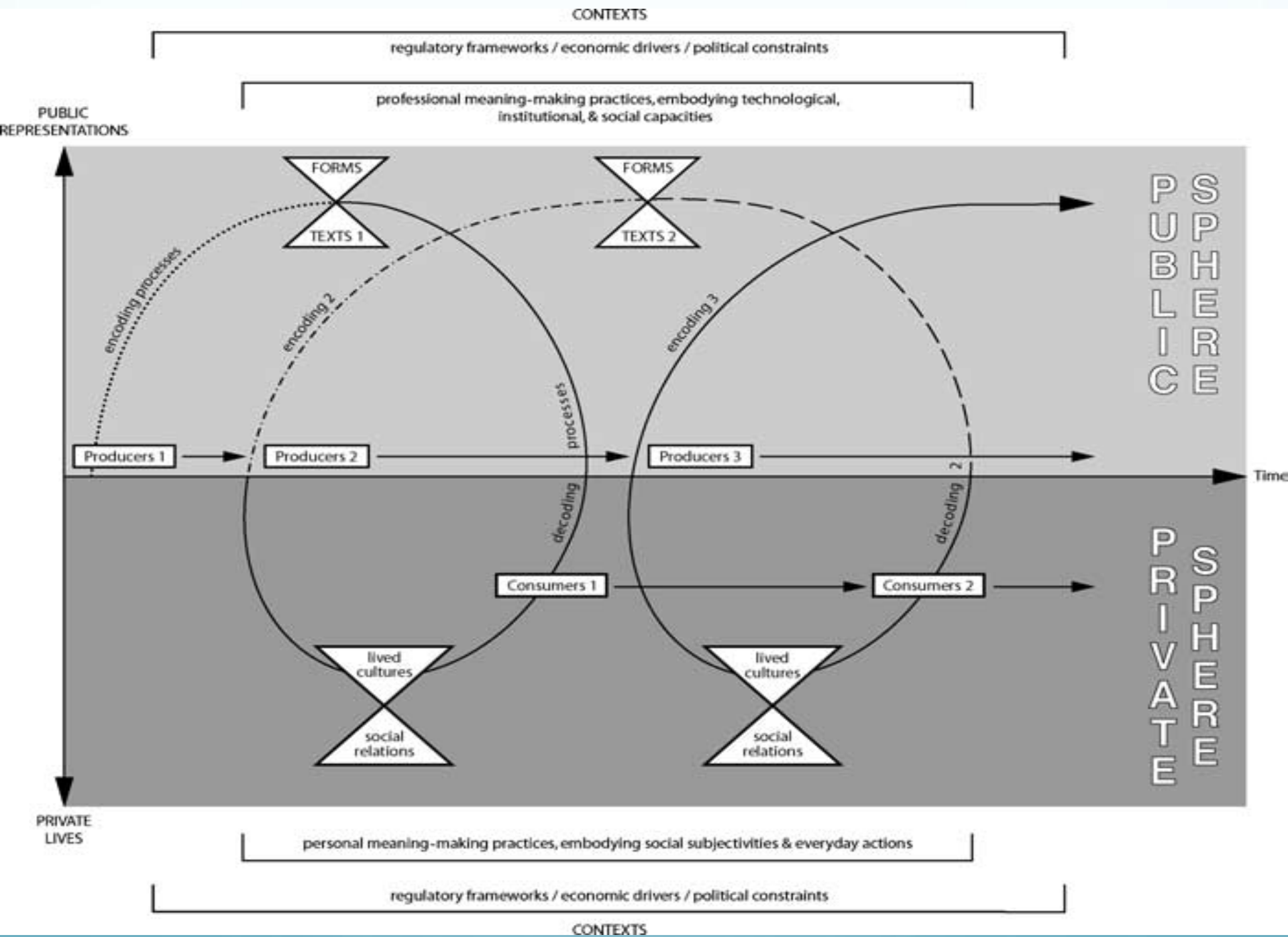
“People and organizations who adopt this mode of reasoning are very likely to end up frustrated.”

(Hulme 218)

Cultural Circuits Model

- Communication viewed as “circulation”
- Multiple messages, constantly reinterpreted
- Everyone is sender and receiver
- Media as main “site of struggle” over meaning

(Carvalho and Burgess, *Risk Analysis* 2005)



One of the reasons we disagree...

“...we receive *multiple and conflicting* messages about climate change

and

***we interpret* them in different ways.”**

(Hulme 215)

Steve's Top Ten

- Know your audience
- Identify credible messengers
- Focus on local/observable impacts
- Focus on immediate impacts
- Focus on health impacts

Steve's Top Ten

- Focus on solutions, not just problems
- Link personal action to political action
- Link climate change to related issues
- Build communication among peers
- Tell stories

Frames

- Frames = organizing themes or storylines that give meaning to events
- Used by journalists to tell a familiar story
- Used by advocates to strategically advance interests, preferred policies

Frames

- “To frame is to *select* some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more *salient* in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”

(Entman, *J of Comm* 1993)

“This is a story about...”

- Scientific uncertainty
- Progress/innovation
- Economic competitiveness
- Justice/equity
- Pandora’s box
- Public accountability
- Political tactics & personalities

The “Luntz Memo”

THE ENVIRONMENT: A CLEANER, SAFER, HEALTHIER AMERICA

The core of the Democrat argument depends on the belief that “Washington regulations” represent the best way to preserve the environment. We don’t agree.

- 1) *First, assure your audience that you are committed to “preserving and protecting” the environment, but that “it can be done more wisely and effectively.”* (Absolutely do not raise economic arguments first.) Tell them a personal story from your life. Since many Americans believe Republicans do not care about the environment, *you will never convince people to accept your ideas until you confront this suspicion and put it to rest.*
- 2) *Provide specific examples of federal bureaucrats failing to meet their responsibilities to protect the environment.* Do not attack the *principles* behind existing legislation. Focus instead on the way it is enforced or carried out, and use rhetorical questions.
- 3) *Your plan must be put in terms of the future, not the past or present.* We are carrying forward a legacy, yes, but we are trying to make things *even better* for the future. *The environment is an area in which people expect progress*, and when they do not see progress being made, they get frustrated.
- 4) *The three words Americans are looking for in an environmental policy, they are “safer,” “cleaner,” and “healthier.”* Two words that summarize what Americans are expecting from regulators and agencies are “*accountability*” and “*responsibility*.”
- 5) *Stay away from “risk assessment,” “cost-benefit analysis,” and the other traditional environmental terminology used by industry and corporations.* Your constituents don’t know what those terms mean, and they will then assume that you are pro-business.
- 6) *If you must use the economic argument, stress that you are seeking “a fair balance” between the environment and the economy.* Be prepared to specify and quantify the jobs lost because of needless, excessive or redundant regulations.
- 7) *Describe the limited role for Washington.* We must *thoroughly* review the environmental regulations already in place, decide which ones we still need, identify those which no longer make sense, and make sure we don’t add any unnecessary rules. Washington should disclose the *expected cost* of current and all new environmental regulations. *The public has a right to know.*
- 8) *Emphasize common sense.* In making regulatory decisions, we should use best estimates and *realistic assumptions*, not the worst-case scenarios advanced by environmental extremists.

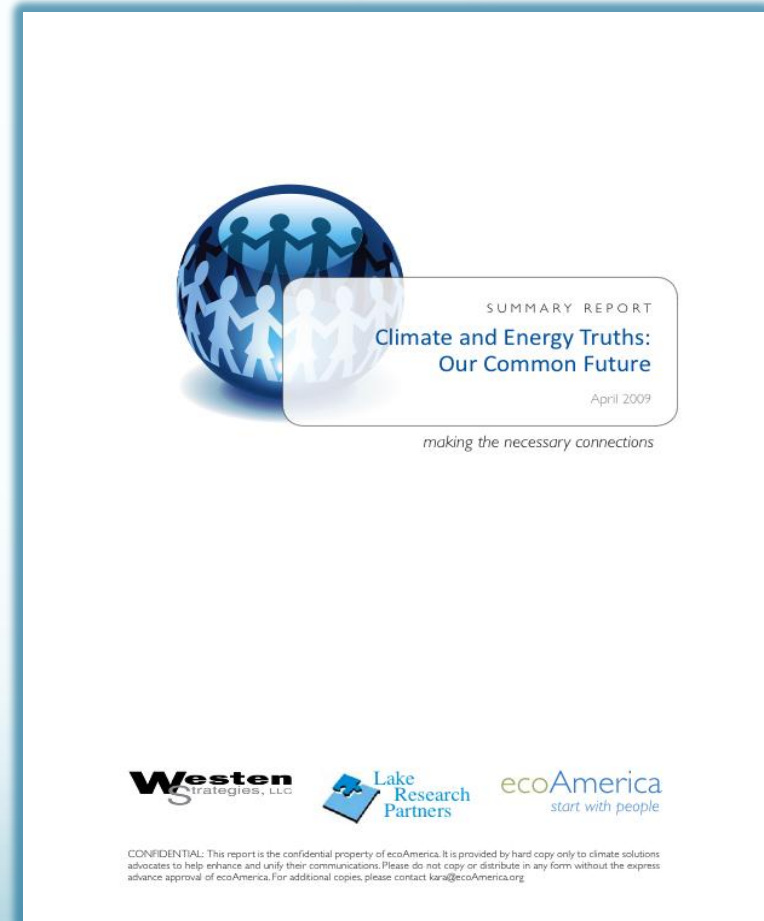
- Frank Luntz, 2001-02
- Rhetorical handbook for Republican candidates
- Based on survey rsch, in-depth focus groups

“Winning the Global Warming Debate”

- “The scientific debate remains open.”
- “Americans want a free and open discussion.”
- “Technology and innovation are the key in arguments on both sides.”
- “The ‘international fairness’ issue is the emotional home run.”
- “There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science.”

Climate & Energy Truths

- ecoAmerica 2009, with Lake Rsch, Westen Strategies
- Rhetorical handbook for climate advocates
- Based on survey rsch, in-depth focus groups



“Trans-Partisan, Winning Messages:” Freedom & self-sufficiency

- Key finding: Voters are more engaged around the energy debate than the climate change debate.

“Freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency are at the heart of who we are as a nation, and they should be at the heart of our strategy for energy independence in the 21st century.”

“Trans-Partisan, Winning Messages:” Made in America

“The best way to bring jobs and prosperity back to this country is also the best way to end our dependence on foreign oil and protect the Earth we leave our children:

to build things in America again, starting with wind turbines, solar panels, and energy-efficient products that say ‘Made in America.’”

**WHERE IS AMERICA FINDING MORE THAN
A CENTURY'S WORTH OF CLEAN, DOMESTIC ENERGY?**



Well, it's about a mile beneath our feet, domestic natural gas and oil reserves locked in shale rock. As technology has improved, we now have the ability — through hydraulic fracturing coupled with horizontal drilling — to safely recover vast supplies that before were out of reach. And building on decades of shale drilling experience and lessons learned from every new well drilled, we continue to ensure the safest proven practices are applied to protect the environment.

These resources have the potential to transform America's energy security for multiple generations, while creating jobs and growing our economy. In fact, experts estimate these reserves alone hold more than a century's worth of clean natural gas.

It's America's energy. Let's unlock it for generations to come.

RIGHT BENEATH OUR FEET.



American Power Depends on American Coal.

Coal is America's most abundant energy source.

Coal is America's most affordable energy source.

Coal provides nearly 50% of America's electricity needs.

Coal keeps that electricity affordable for millions.

America needs jobs.

America needs economic growth.

That won't happen without electricity generated from coal.

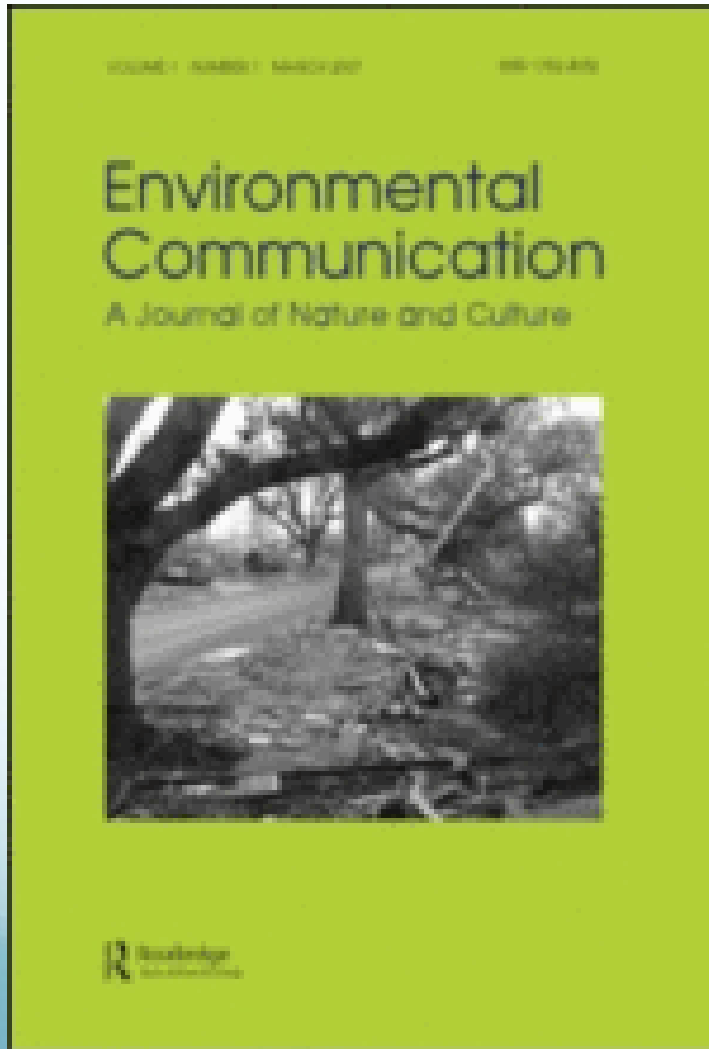
Keep the Lights On, America.



Find out more at:

www.facesofcoal.org

Are Frames Enough?



- *Env Comm* 4.1 (2010)
- Perpetuates top-down, one-way communication
- Generates weak support for means, rather than deliberation about ends.
- Fails to mobilize

Journalistic Norms

- Personalization—*persons*, not issues
- Dramatization—*conflict*, not continuity
- Novelty—what's *new*, not what's chronic
- Authority-Order—voices of establishment, reassurance
- Balance—equal coverage, regardless of validity

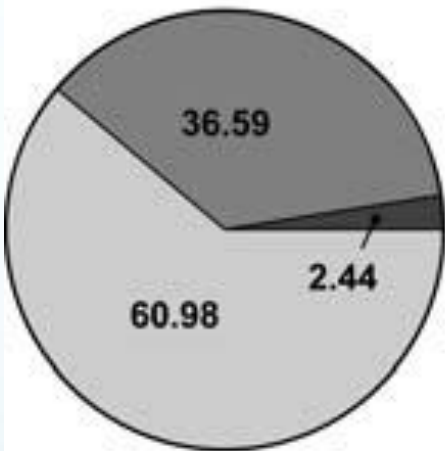
“Balance as Bias”

- Prestige press 1988-2002
- On causes of warming, majority (52%) of articles gave “balanced” treatment (human v. natural)
- On solutions, 78% gave balanced treatment (immediate & mandatory vs. voluntary, cautious)

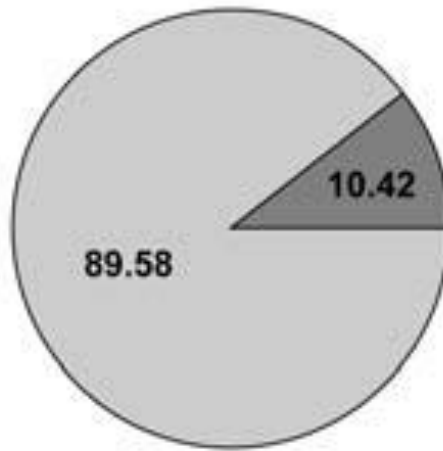
Boykoff & Boykoff, *GlobEnvChg* 2004

But things have changed...

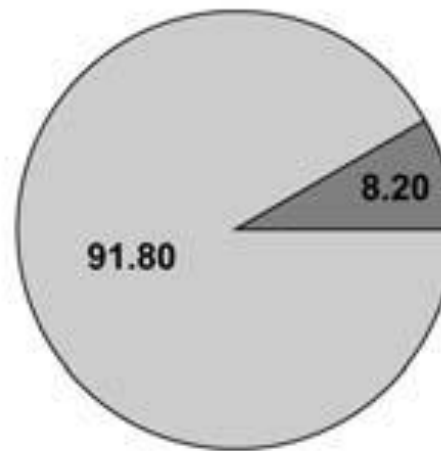
2003



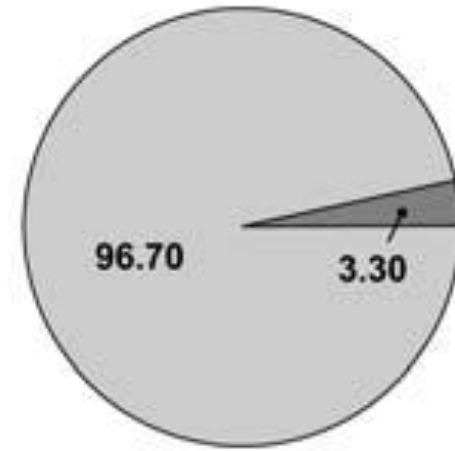
2004



2005



2006



Balanced accounts of anthropogenic contributions

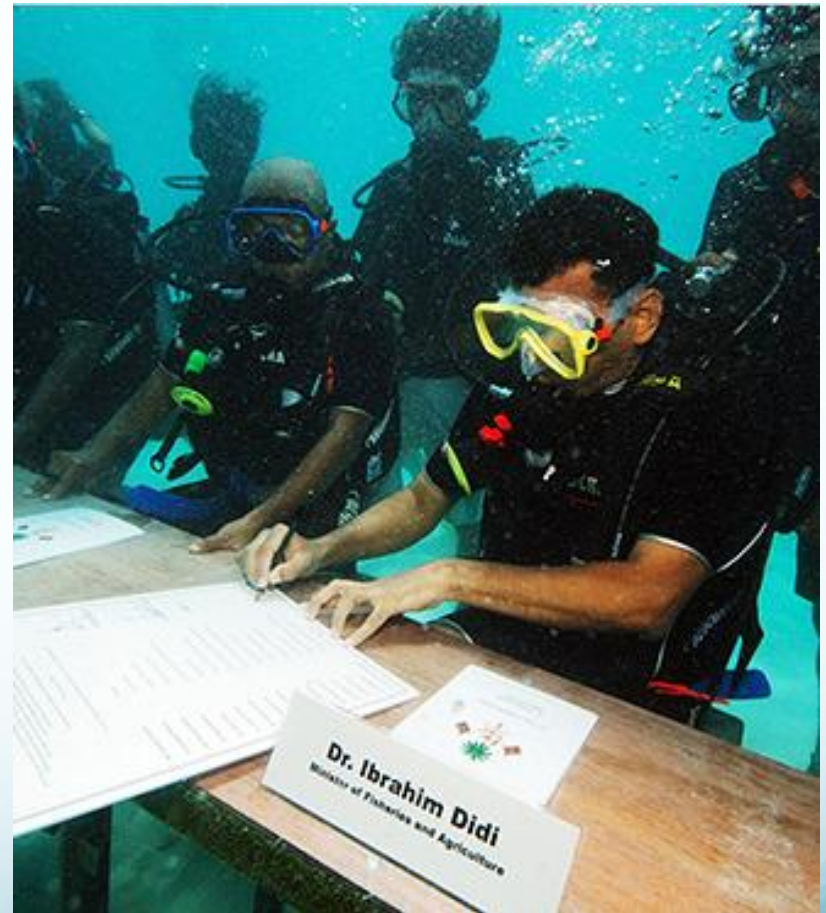
Anthropogenic contributions depicted as significant



Anthropogenic contributions depicted as negligible

Boykoff, *Area* 2007

Visual Rhetoric



Shepard Glacier

Glacier National Park, MT



1913

*W. C. Alden photo
USGS Photographic Library*



2005

*Blase Reardon photo
USGS*

Images

Not just neutral “icons” that reflect reality!

- Inhabit a point-of-view
- Resonate with certain ways of seeing nature (as resource, as ‘sublime’)
- Leave things out of the frame
- Are interpreted differently by different people

Image Events

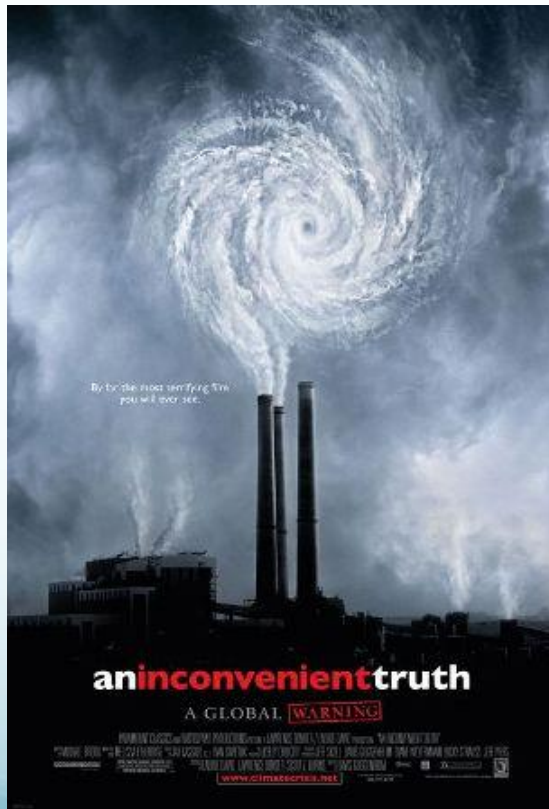
Staged events that attract TV, photojournalists

- Capitalize on journalistic norms
- Function as an attention-getting device

But what else can they do...?

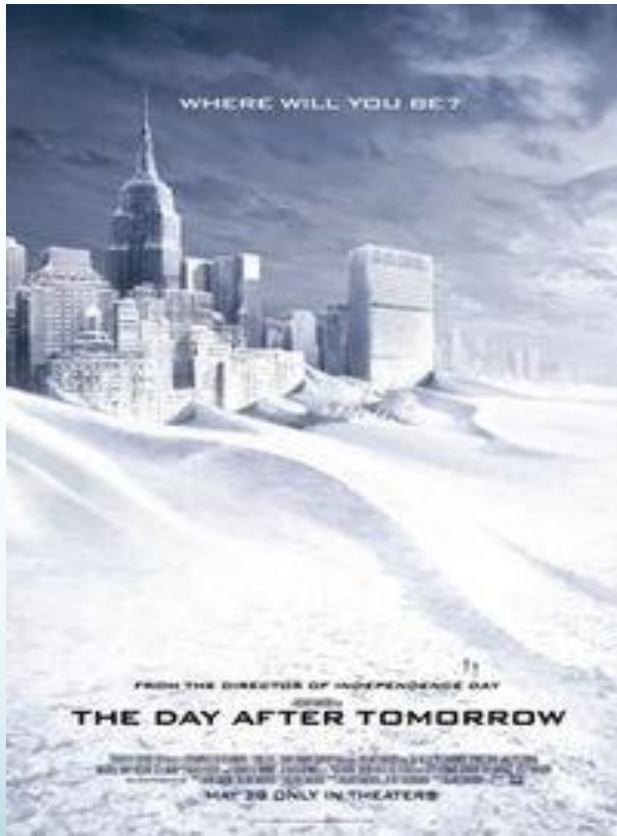
- Reveal hidden practices
- Reach far-flung audiences
- Contest dominant meanings

Rhetorical Strategies: Narratives



- Recurring stories with similar plotlines, conflicts, characters
- Can be fictional or factual (or both)
- Can shape perception, motivate action

Apocalyptic Rhetoric



- Issues warnings of crisis, catastrophe
- Challenges assumptions of Progress
- Invites charges of exaggeration, alarmism,

Killingsworth & Palmer 1996

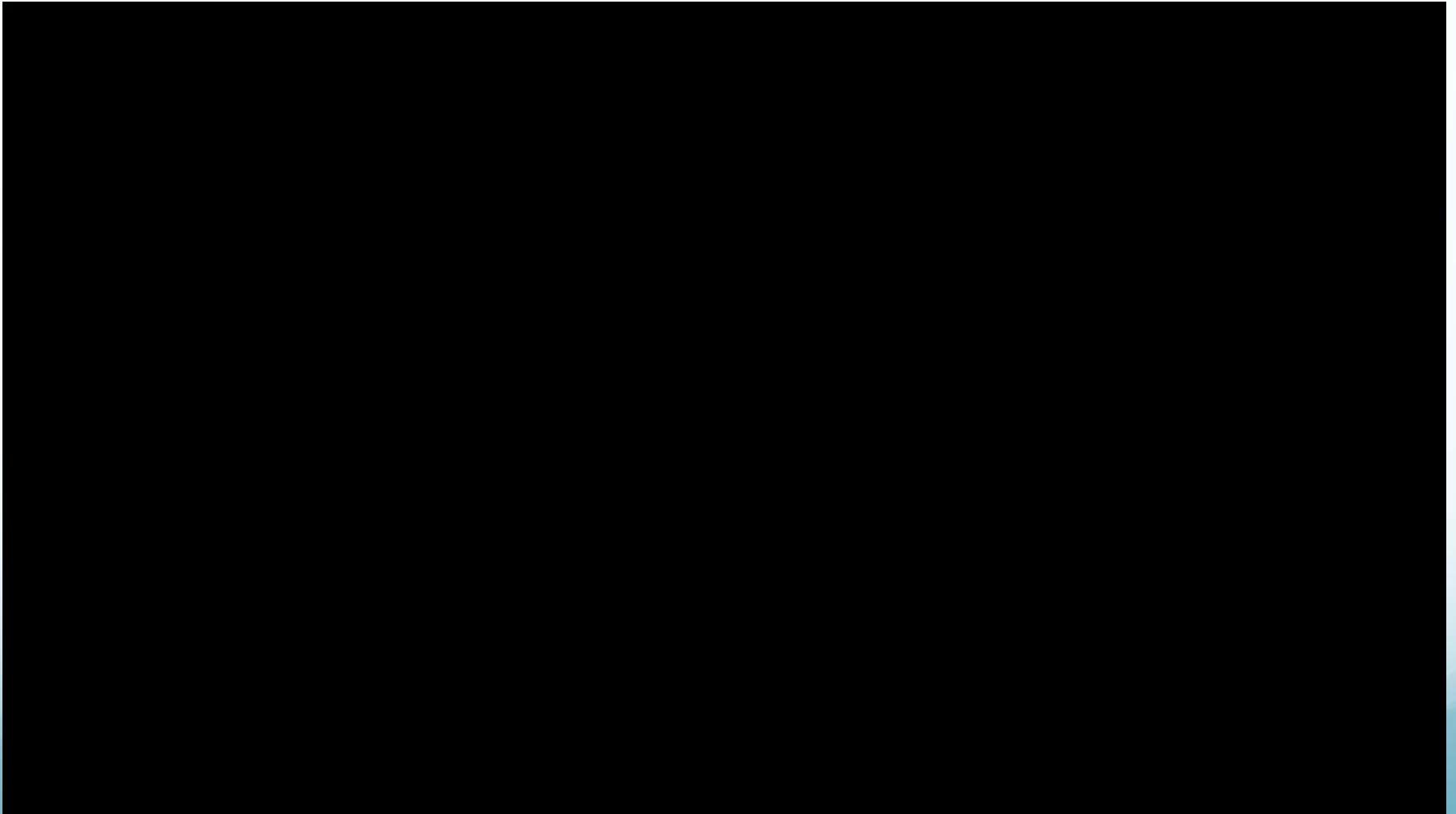
Industrial Apocalyptic

- Narratives that constitute the imminent demise of an industry or a broader economic system

Combines with burlesque frame:

- Gross violation of traditional principles
- Caricature and scoffing dismissal of one's opponents

Industrial Apocalyptic



Industrial Apocalyptic

- Neoliberal (anti-regulatory, free market) appeals
- Neoconservative (patriotic) appeals
- Solution: not radical social change, but rejection of opponents & return to tradition

Environmental Melodrama



- Clear hero, victim, and villain roles
- Moral, emotional appeals sharpen conflict
- Invites charges of polarization

Schwarze, *QtlyJSpch* 2006

Environmental Melodrama

“But what all these climate numbers make painfully, usefully clear is that the planet does indeed have an enemy – one far more committed to action than governments or individuals. Given this hard math, we need to view the fossil-fuel industry in a new light. It has become a rogue industry, reckless like no other force on Earth. It is Public Enemy Number One to the survival of our planetary civilization.”



Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” *Rolling Stone* July 19, 2012

A Question of Conflict

- Which conflicts are emphasized/downplayed?
- How does the conflict shed light on a larger, more systemic problem?
- Does the conflict focus on short-term problems or long-term challenges?
- Whose voices are included/ignored?

Parting Thoughts

What are the fundamental barriers to climate action?

“[The] state of public opinion raises critical questions as to the effectiveness of 20 or more years of public education, outreach, and engagement approaches used to render a complex scientific issue meaningful and actionable for lay audiences.”

Moser and Dilling, *Oxford
Hbk Climate Society*, 2011

What Stories are Needed?



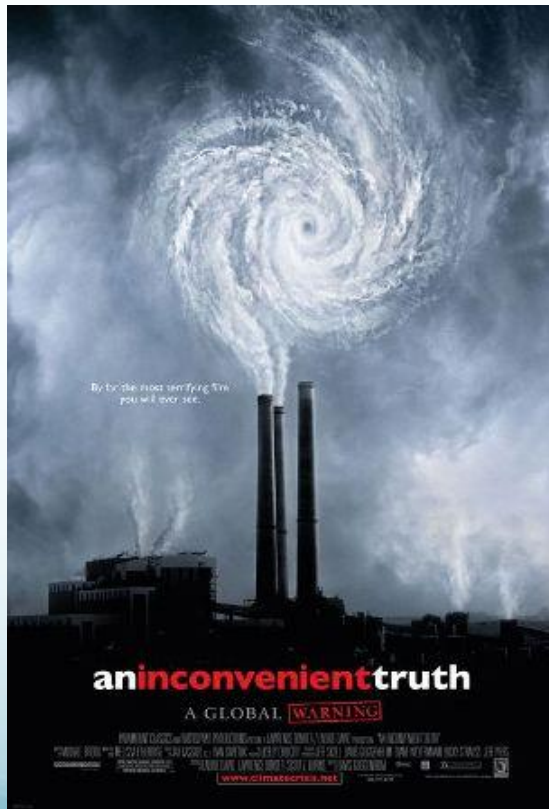
Spring 2014

COMX 347/ CCS 379/ ENST 391

Communication, Consumption, and Climate

TR 9:40-11:00 am

An Inconvenient Truth



- “Tempered” apocalyptic for scientific citizenship (Johnson, *RhetRvw* 2009; Spoel et al., *TechCQ* 2009)
- Mythic quest uniting jeremiad, autobiography, documentary (Rosteck & Frenz, *QJSpch* 2009)

An Inconvenient Truth

As this popular documentary reflects, our contemporary cultural meanings of nature [climate change??] may not be either one or the other, but may well be as contradictory and as incongruous as the symbolic action that animates this film.

(Rosteck & Frentz, 16)