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Assumptions about Audience in Advertising Films

Through analysis of the movie trailer for Lars von Trier’s new film, *Melancholia,* it is possible to discern how assumptions made about target audience effect advertising. This particular trailer uses a variety of rhetorical techniques to appeal to three distinct audiences with different assumed interests and desires.

*Melancholia* is an artistic, psychological film about the end of the world. The trailer begins with provocative imagery that foreshadows psychological turmoil to the tune of Wagner’s theme from *Tristan und Isolde.* The trailer then cuts to a distinctly different scene portraying how a marriage quickly turns sour as tension mounts and relationships begin to deteriorate. Meanwhile, the characters use scientific instruments to track the advancement of Melancholia, a planet that threatens to collide with Earth. The trailer concludes with footage of supernatural images and psychological trauma.

The predominant target audience for this trailer is educated adults interested in art films, yet the producers attempt to expand this niche market by subtly employing rhetorical techniques that invite potential viewers seeking romance, science fiction, and suspense. The blatant artistry featured in the trailer, as well as the emphasis on love and relationships, encourages presumably female audiences interested in art and drama. However, the producers emphasize scenes of science fiction in the hopes of summoning male audiences. These features, along with the psychological suspense implied in the trailer, signify that the film is meant to appeal to all genders. Further, the artistic imagery and complex subject matter suggests that the trailer is designed to entice an educated demographic of students and recent college graduates (aged 20’s and 30’s) but the producers simultaneously invite young adults interested in romance and science by including footage of weddings and telescopes. Thus, the producers strategically incorporate different rhetorical techniques that cater to the assumed desires of three different types of audiences: an educated elite interested in artistry, young girls interested in romance, and their men that wouldn’t mind seeing a science fiction film with special effects.

 Because the producers of *Melancholia* wish to excite an audience interested art films, the movie trailer incorporates all aspects of Gesamtkunstwerk, or collective artwork. The beautiful imagery featured in the trailer’s introductory section coincides with the drama in both the music and Kirsten Dunst’s emotional narration, “We’re alone; life is only on earth, and not for long.” Most educated arts-enthusiasts would recognize the significance of the Tristan theme in combination with destruction; most would even appreciate its use in the context of an arts film where the music, script, cinematography, and acting all work together toward one artistic expression. If this were not enough, the producers pander to typical arts film expectations by listing awards and praises. Finally, the trailer plays with association by emphasizing Lars von Trier, a director renown for his visually distinctive style, and Kirsten Dunst, an award-winning actress who recently appeared in a gorgeous cinematography-focused film, *Marie Antoinette.* The producers are assuming that the artistic crowd will appreciate and respect these references enough to come see the film.

 In an effort to appeal to a younger audience of girls that presumably love romance, the producers use rhetorical techniques associated with romantic film trailers. After the artistic introduction, the trailer utilizes stock expectations of romantic film, keeping the love story at its focus and recounting a plot full of obstacles and unfortunate circumstances that threaten to destroy relationships. The music, both the cool jazz associated with the wedding and the intense return of the Tristan theme, indicates the emotion while fragments of impassioned dialogue and dramatic action imply the events in the plot. Finally, Dunst, along with her attractive co-stars, is used to associate the film with the chick flicks and romantic comedies of her past. As she spends most of the trailer in a wedding dress fighting with her new husband and consoling her child, the producers hint at an exciting, dramatic love story that the younger girls can appreciate in the midst of all that confusing cinematography.

 Although the science fiction aspects of the film are probably only intended to address a particular social concern of the writers, they are portrayed as focal points in the trailer in order to tempt younger male audiences assumed to be attracted to science and special effects. After spending precious seconds luring in audiences seeking romance, the tone of the trailer shifts to report depictions of a science-based phenomena. The characters gather in expectation to see the planet Melancholia, indicated by clips of Dunst looking through a telescope and graphs of outer space shown on a laptop screen. Realistic, romantic moments are interrupted by supernatural images and talk of fear, culminating in a final image of two planets in near collision. Kiefer Sutherland, star of the serial drama television show *24*, is much more prevalent in this section of the trailer in order to associate the film with action-packed thrillers.

 These three aspects of the trailer amalgamate in the last few moments, demonstrating how romance, supernatural circumstances, and artistry come together to produce a suspenseful movie that simultaneously appeals to a broad spectrum of audience interests and demographics. The combination of scenes incorporated into this trailer is extremely strategic and deliberate, designed to appeal to the assumed interests of a specific audience demographic. These assumptions are instrumental in shaping the film industry in pop culture.