

Allison Gooch

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A completely digital environment has no boundaries, so a movie created in such an environment has the opportunity to be defiant of pro-filmic reality and to experiment with a different mode of representation. However, in Disney-Pixar's *Wall-e*, the filmmakers use special effects in a digital environment in order to mimic film techniques used in live action movies. Walt Disney himself claims that "I definitely feel that we cannot do the fantastic things based on the read, unless we first know the real," (Thomas, 71) and the goal of his company has always been to imitate the real. This lends to a very human and "realistic" approach in filmmaking that emphasizes certain humanistic beliefs and actions. In fact, for a Disney production, it is surprising to see such a representation of so many human issues of our times. There are several key motifs in the movie that are very well represented by the director's choice of film elements including environmentalism, consumerism, religion, and gender roles.

The first major theme of *Wall-e* is the representation of human influence on the earth's environment, which is accented by many classic characteristics of a real camera. Additionally, the scenery is striking due to the complexity of the entirely computer-generated environment. The opening of the movie includes several panoramic and aerial shots of the earth and landscape, which emphasize the vast expanse of human waste. These establishing shots show a brilliant use of one of the advantages of using computer graphics – that is, the ability to create many copies of the same thing with slight variations. Furthermore, the long shots and high camera angles emphasize the similarities among the desolation and destruction. As typical in digital filmmaking, there are many shorter shots edited together with graphic matches and fades between shots to create a montage; in *Wall-e* this montage helps to show the theme of environmentalism.

When we are first introduced to Wall-e as the main character, the director uses framing of Wall-e outside the typical center or two-thirds rules – this helps to include the other mise-en-scene that are important to the plot. In fact, the director chose to use either very high or very low angled shots at first in order to establish the character as well as the setting. An added feature in regards to the environmental theme is Wall-e's costume – the solar panels give him his power, and the director includes a shot of Wall-e sunbathing to increase the viewer's awareness of energy alternatives. This is important because the choice of this costume and prop on a very "loveable" character allow for the audience to accept these items as useful and desirable. The genre choice of adventure mixed with animation and science fiction helps to make the point about saving the environment of a futuristic world as well. In fact, animation is only helped by the choice of a science fiction narrative, because the viewers do not have expectations about how a futuristic world should be and it makes the story that much more believable. It seems as if the director wants to create feeling of concern for the future of the human race, and the movie as a whole is very effective to these means.

Wall-e's environmentalist theme also shows the negative impact of a technology-based society. Towards the end, the robots and machines on the Axiom are very against the return to earth, and the autopilot "Auto" begins a mutiny and uprising against the human captain. It is as if the machines are afraid that they would be of little use in a world where farming "pizza plants" is prevalent. The name choice of "Axiom" for the spaceship is also very interesting in the context of the machine's control – axiom is defined as "a universally accepted principle or rule," "a self-evident truth that requires no proof," or an "authority." It would certainly be scary to dream of living in a world where machines have absolute authority, but of course as in all Disney movies the characters are able to overcome the obstacles that lie in the path of "doing the right thing." In

addition to Disney's portrayal of the negative impact of human neglect of the environment, Wall-e shows a negative view of the directed human interest in money and objects.

Wall-e is laced with incredible consumerism and the resulting lazy attitudes of the human characters, and the animated yet realistic medium allows the audience to accept this challenge to today's living standards. As we see Wall-e travel through the earth's environment, we can see ads for "Buy N Large," a corporation that promotes rampant fast food consumption and luxury. Later in the movie as we travel through the Axiom, it seems almost humorous yet true that the ads contain the following words: eat, shop, drink, buy, pay later, auto, win, fun, consume, live, and live your dreams. The movie becomes extremely self-conscious by this use of intertextuality – these ads have more meaning to the viewer because they can recognize the similarity and irony of the ads to ads we see in our everyday lives. Many metaphors and symbols are also used throughout the movie such as "cupcake in a cup," "regenerative food buffet," and "welcome to the economy" to show the skewed viewpoints of the human characters. All the advertisements are presented digitally on screens or holograms and use very saturated, bright colors, which increase the perceived desirability of the advertised products. This use of visual icons and diegetic inserts shows the effects the advertisements have on the future of the human race – they are very impressionable and come across as mindless and sluggish. Later in the movie, however, the Captain challenges these commercialized statements by saying that he "doesn't want to survive" he "wants to live!" which implies a greater meaning and purpose to living.

Another major theme throughout the movie is transportation in a mainly anti-gravity situation. The director chose to accentuate the fast-paced transportation with a highly mobile camera, which is typical of movies created in an entirely digital field. The director uses fast motion and many tracking shots to engage the audience in the fast-paced lives of the future as well as to

show the ability of the camera to move about without the effects of gravity. In regards to transportation in the film, the human characters are told to “please remain stationary” and get around on their own personal motorized chairs and “people movers.” Also related to consumerism are the human characters’ costumes – the costumes stress their instant reactions to the advertisements around them and their exaggerated obesity. Additionally, their costumes are entirely digital, which is a very interesting choice – as soon as they see an ad for the “new blue” outfits, they all just click a button and they are suddenly dressed in blue. This is a special effect that is only possible within a digital animation medium, and functions as a metonymy to represent the characters as a whole. The convenience and laziness is only allowed, however, while they are connected to their chairs, which emphasizes a realization and costume change in the end of the movie. Props were also used extensively in the movie to give the setting a feeling of mass consumerism – the babies on the ship even play with virtual toys. The consumerism, of course, is caused by a shifting human focus to a media-based world.

Wall-e does a good job of portraying a mixture of old and new media by showing examples of both and showing an eventual regression away from the apparent “dangers” of new media. This is highlighted by the advantage of a digital environment of being able to show any combination of media that may be available in the real world. In the beginning of the movie, the director uses establishing shots that include views of newspapers, billboards, and televisions. There is a definite use of frame in frame as well as a combination of live action with animation, especially in the repeated shots of Shelby Forthright, the CEO of Buy N Large. In regards to the use of various forms of media in Wall-e, there is much irony. For instance, the movie itself is much a product of the rapid expansion of new media representation and platforms. The CEO’s last name is also ironic – “Forthright” is defined as “directly and without evasion,” “not roundabout,” or “to face a problem

squarely." Clearly he faces the problems he has created with his Buy N Large style consumerism by abandoning Earth and creating a new era of consumerism in outer space. He is in fact only solving the problem in a "roundabout" fashion, and it takes the humans 700 years to recover and realize their mistakes.

We cannot ignore the amazing use of sound in Wall-e as a form of expression by use of media. In fact, for the first half of the movie there is actually no dialogue at all, and yet the audience is drawn to the personality and charm of the protagonist. The only reason this is possible is due to the incredible sound design. There are many sound bridges between shots and combinations of diegetic and nondiegetic sound within the movie that help to create the world the audience experiences. Most importantly, the robot noises are so expressive that we viewer can understand the "thoughts" and "emotions" of Wall-e and Eve even when they don't speak any English. In an environment that includes no live action human actors, it is astonishing to note that communication can be expressed with such few sounds. You could practically listen to the movie without watching it at all and still find yourself amused and satisfied. This notion is exactly what the filmmakers were after – Disney states "a good study of music would be indispensable to the animators...a study of rhythm, the dance – the various rhythms that enter into our lives every day" (Thomas, 285).

Alternative forms of media are also expressed in the budding love theme of the movie: the theme is established through sound and a frame in frame when Wall-e watches the Hello Dolly video through his iPod. Inside Wall-e's home, we see the use of Christmas lights and props to create a nostalgic reaction and recollection of the past. The director features this by using some older forms of media and like VHS tapes and an old NES video game. We see the classic use of artifacts from other Pixar movies stacked amongst the shelves of Wall-e's home, which is a piece of

extradiegetic knowledge enjoyed by the fans of Pixar movies. These include Rex from Toy Story and flamingos from one of Pixar's short films. The media use on the Axiom is also interesting – it is entirely pervasive: computers control everything and information is transferred instantly, such as the notifications of “rogue robots.” There are also interesting media-based reflections of Earth on the Axiom – there is a fake sun or moon on the ceiling at all times and even palm tree holograms near the swimming pools. There is an interesting relation to the use of a real camera when you notice the flickering ads in the digital world – it is almost like the “flicker” we see in the first motion picture creations. Another traditional camera effect that lends to the study of media is the idea of light, focus and camera aesthetic: clearly the lights used in an environment that doesn't need to be correct within physical boundaries can be played to the director's will. For instance, there are many soft lights from a variety of diegetic sources used primarily throughout the movie, but in addition there are many bright lights and colors that can only be accurately represented in a digital world. Due to new computing algorithms for particle physics, textures, and shapes, Wall-e's lighting is taken to a whole new level of digital expertise – there is a clear indication of traditional lighting ideas applied to make Wall-e look more “realistic.” Disney even included traditional “problems” incurred when using cameras for live action, including some instances of bad focus and lens flares. However, in addition to media and technology, there are also two human-centered themes included in Wall-e, which are religion and gender roles – a very interesting choice for a Disney production.

Religion is surprisingly a major theme throughout Wall-e, which helps to combine animation with “real” movie ideals in an intriguing manner. There are many references to the Christian biblical understanding of creation and salvation, and symbolism is key to this illustration. The name choices of the various characters reflect this highly Christian-related theme: Eve, John,

and Mary are some of the main characters. The name choice of Eve is also ironic if you compare Eve's origin in the Garden of Eden to the Earth as shown in the movie. The warnings of "Caution – rogue robots" show the world's reaction to a savior figure and also highlight the robot's exodus from containment and worldly judgment. Also, you could consider "leave while we recover Earth" to be some sort of twisted version of the Noah's ark idea, but where they only save humans and at first have no intention of returning to Earth. Wall-e's trail when he is flying around in outer space is white, which follows a biblical symbol of "washed clean in the blood of the lamb" and other representations of innocence and mercy. This use of color, both in costume and light, is significant throughout the movie. At the end of the film, Wall-e is "resurrected" by Eve when he is given new computer parts – the green light he shows reflects his new life. The movie uses all these references in a seemingly neutral or even positive fashion. The examples are clearly given yet abstract and subordinate to the overall plot and themes of the movie. In fact, the use of mainly diegetic components in addition to a restricted range of information and shallow depth of information indicate a strict holding to cultural standards and acceptance of "rules" often imposed by religion. Some people even argue that environmentalism, as covered earlier, is almost a new type of religion in itself – Wall-e as a whole, on the other hand, seems to point more towards Christianity and cultural boundaries. In addition to the sensitive topic of religion, Wall-e addresses the new power of women and representation of men.

Gender roles play a relatively small yet key component in the understanding of the futuristic world created in the movie. The director uses cliché sexual symbols in Wall-e – The spaceship that delivers Eve, the city buildings, and the captain's headquarters are all shaped like phallic objects, which indicate an object of power. Also, in the case of human sexuality, she is completely smooth and perfect while he is rough and hard working. These costume materials are exaggerated by the

fact that he is attracted to her looks, abilities, and power and she is attracted to his experience and personality – a reflection of typical human attraction. Also, Eve’s “costume” is interestingly egg-shaped, which draws a parallel to her as a female character and her ability to help bring new life back to earth. The binary opposition of the relationship between the two robots calls attention to Disney’s establishment of a “couple” within social bounds – a non-sexual attraction and a typical heterosexual couple. There are some romantic gestures from Wall-e including candlelight, a “romantic gondola ride,” and etched names inside a heart like we sometimes see on trees in the real world. However, at times where physicality is key, like the “kissing” scenes (which, by the way, there are only two), there are often other distractions that draw away from the sexual aspect. The animated characters also portray very human-like actions and have human-like body parts, which help to create recognition of gender. For instance, we are made to recognize Wall-e’s eyes and feet through his behaviors – when one eye is damaged he seems to be blind, when he comes into his “house” he seems to take off his “shoes.” The theme of handholding is repeated often during the movie and is only the beginnings of a physical relationship. We may also recognize the robots’ “emotions” as angry, sad, embarrassed, etc, which is Disney’s way of playing with real world human behavior. Color is used primarily in the robot’s lights to show their character, emotions, and fears. For instance, Eve’s colors were primarily blue and distant while Wall-e shows a warmer yellow color.

The director of Wall-e chose to use reflexive elements of a real camera in a computer graphics medium to accentuate the possible reality of the future he imagines. There is a frequent use of camera aesthetic that suggests a realistic world, but the clearly closed ending suggests a dream-like representation of the world as perfect and wholesome, which still fulfills the Disney tradition. Disney has the great capability of avoiding truly sensitive topics like death and loss and maintains

this idea even today. However, Disney movies are not only for children – adults who see this movie will see more and begin to have a deeper understanding of today’s culture. Disney is showing a real push towards representation of ideas and issues while on its outer layer keeping their movies “rated G.”

Sources

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