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# ECOCRITICISM IN DISNEY/PIXAR *WALL·E* AND THE DE-GREENING CYCLE

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# ECOCRITICISM IN DISNEY/PIXAR

## WALL·E AND THE DE-GREENING CYCLE

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## RESUMO

Para os humanos, migrar significa não só sobreviver, mas representa também a busca por poder, por exemplo. No caso da América do Norte, a migração dos europeus trouxe consigo a colonização. O ‘jardim exótico’ que conhecemos hoje como os E.U.A. foi ocupado ora pacificamente, ora com violência. Gradualmente, a ideia de abundância natural viria a confundir-se com a de riqueza econômica, democracia e consumo.

Para além da necessidade de se mover no espaço, o ser humano também anseia o movimento no tempo. Para os indivíduos que “sofrem” de nostalgia, o movimento espacial alivia a ansiedade. A questão da origem do sentimento nostálgico tem sido debatida por vários intelectuais de várias áreas do saber. Existe o consenso de que a sociedade contemporânea não está satisfeita com o *status quo* e que um regresso no tempo para compensar algo é um desejo generalizado. A nostalgia e a imaginação possibilitam a construção mental de utopias.

O filme *Wall·E* (Disney/Pixar 2008) mostra como se desenvolve uma utopia do planeta Terra depois de os humanos o terem abandonado e esquecido por consequência da poluição extrema. O conceito de ‘ciclo de des-florescimento’, desenvolvido por mim, encontra-se parcialmente representado neste filme. De acordo com esta teoria, a Terra encontra-se permanentemente num ciclo de florescimento, desflorescimento e repouso. A causa da desflorescimento pode ser natural, ou não.

Esta teoria enquadra-se no discurso ecológico. Com o movimento ambiental, a ecologia ganhou notoriedade e começou a ser integrada em discursos críticos como o feminismo, a história, a filosofia, etc. Quando a área dos estudos literários se apoderou da ecologia, surgiu a ecocrítica. Esta disciplina preocupa-se com a relação entre a literatura e a natureza. Posteriormente, ainda nos E.U.A., a ecocrítica viria a tornar-se popular na área dos estudos cinematográficos.

A ecocrítica oferece-me os instrumentos necessários para conseguir relacionar eficazmente a minha teoria com o filme. Em *Wall·E*, após séculos num estado quase inativo, o capitão da nave toma consciência da sua obrigação moral de cuidar da Terra e, então, luta contra a ditadura orientada para o consumo, no qual vivia toda a população exilada no espaço e, com a ajuda do casal de robôs, Wall·E e EVE, tentam voltar ao planeta. Quando regressam à Terra, o processo de florescimento é acelerado.

## ABSTRACT

For the human species, migration has not only been a matter of survival, but also of empowerment, for example. In the case of North America, the European migration translated into colonization. The ‘exotic garden’ we recognize nowadays as the U.S.A. was at times occupied peacefully, other times with aggression. Gradually, the idea of natural abundance would be associated with wealth, democracy, and consumption.

Besides the necessity to move in space, the human also longs for movement in time. For those who “suffer” from nostalgia, movement in space eases the anxiety. The origin of nostalgia has been subject of debate among several intellectuals of various disciplines. The consensus exists that the contemporary society is not satisfied with the *status quo* and that going back in time to compensate for something is a widespread desire. Nostalgia and imagination may lead to the creation of mental utopias.

The motion picture *Wall·E* (Disney/Pixar 2008) shows how a utopia of the Earth comes to exist after the humans have abandoned and forgotten about it as a result of extreme pollution. The concept of the “de-greening cycle” that I developed is partially depicted in the movie. According to this theory, the Earth is in a permanent cycle of evolution, destruction, and revitalization. The causes for destruction may be natural or not.

This theory fits best into the discourse of ecology. With the rise of the environmental movement, ecology became popular and started being adopted by critical discourses, such as feminism, history, and philosophy. When literary studies seized ecology, ecocriticism emerged. This discipline studies the relationship between literature and nature. Subsequently, still in the U.S., ecocriticism became popular among scholars of cinema studies.

Ecocriticism provides me the necessary tools to successfully associate my theory with *Wall·E*. In this movie, after centuries in a state of practical numbness, the captain of the spaceship realizes that he has the moral obligation to take care of the Earth. With the help of the android couple Wall·E and EVE, the humans, exiled in space, fight the consumption oriented dictatorship they lived under in order to go back to Earth. Once they are on the planet, the greening process is accelerated.

## INTRODUCTION

In this section, I explain my object of analysis and the corresponding instruments. I will begin with a short explanation of the concept of the de-greening cycle, followed by the concept of ecocriticism, and the Hollywood industry phenomenon, while exposing the relationship between the three aspects.

The aim of this study is to explore the presence of what I call the de-greening cycle in a Hollywood movie, *Wall·E* (2008). Being the Hollywood universe a popular and powerful system, it has the capacity of disseminating contemporary scientific or philosophical discourses like no other. Thus, to analyze the existence of the de-greening cycle in *Wall·E* means to study the ecological content of the movie, while potentially disseminating the theory.

While philosophers like Plato, in *The Republic* or Vladimir Jankélévitch, in *L'Irreversible et la Nostalgie* theorized the irreversibility of time, other scientific discourses like biology or ecology also recognized the relevance of the cyclical form as essential to evolution. Religious texts are other examples in which cyclic renewals are represented as imperative processes. This list of approaches to the phenomenon would require a far larger study than the one I am proposing.

My piece of work is focused on the ecocentric aspect of the cyclical phenomena. Although the relationship between the planet Earth and the human is an essential element of analysis, the approach I suggest describes the Earth (as a holistic system) as the ultimate force inside itself. The cyclical process is best observable on a geographical and planetary scale: once the human being explores the natural surroundings, exploits the respective resources and everything is consumed, s/he needs to move out and colonize another region. In turn, once intensive exploitation has stopped, nature can develop again. *Wall·E* deals with this cycle on a global scale, turning recolonization into a planetary issue. The de-greening cycle refers to a process linked to the discourses of geography, biology, and ecology, among others. The cycle follows the sequence: greening, de-greening, and resting or fallowing of the *flora*. The sequence describes a pattern, but it can be manipulated by skipping a step, for example. The de-greening cycle will be further explored in chapter one.

Because I believe my major object of study, *Wall·E*, deals to a large extent with environmental concerns, I selected an ecocritical approach specifically aimed at motion pictures, cinematic ecocriticism, which will include the concept of the de-greening cycle. While the



concept of the de-greening cycle will occupy me in the first chapter, ecology, and environmentalism, and ecocriticism will be the object of the second chapter.

Although ecocriticism has its origins in the field of literature, it has been taken over and redefined within several other disciplines: film studies being one of such instances. The growing presence of ecology as an academic discourse and the recent celebration of environmentalism on the big screen are among the factors responsible for the growing number of ecocritical studies on mainstream and marginal movies. Typically, an ecocritical approach does not seek to give definitive answers or to present solutions to the ecological problems introduced by a movie, but rather suggests readings from perspectives that may not have been taken on previously by the viewer. Therefore, the role of the ecocritic is one of identifying, questioning, informing, and, perhaps, suggesting and provoking the reader/viewer.

Once the viewer has acquired ecocritical awareness, the value s/he attributes to the movie may influence its popularity and authority. Furthermore, this awareness allows for alternative readings outside the cinematic sphere. That is, an ecologically informed individual who is able to produce ecocritical readings may denounce political campaigns as deprived of environmental concerns or harmful to environmental issues. Also, that individual may identify texts as misleading, as they may convey “greenwashing” intentions of a commercial brand or enterprise.

The reach and effects of ecocriticism can therefore go beyond the simple analysis of some popular feature film; ecocriticism has a practical value and builds awareness. Yet, the ecocritic’s approach to a movie may lack popular appeal, timing, etc. For instance, Pixar’s *Finding Nemo* (2003) provides an example of a failed influential ecocritical reading. According to *The Independent*, in an interview with Brice Semmens, a marine biologist, “individuals are releasing their pet fish with the best of intentions, but in the wrong ocean.”<sup>1</sup> Apparently, there has also been “a booming trade in aquarium fish, sparked by Finding Nemo.”<sup>2</sup> Pixar is seen as the responsible entity behind this problem. Although ecocritics such as Lynne Dickson Bruckner have described these same situations (188), they failed in preventing them. The critic does not have the capacity to solve the issue of fish trade presented in the movie, but he or she might have supported Pixar’s message and alerted against the dilemma.

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/finding-nemo-pets-harm-ocean-ecology-565398.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.oceans.com.au/nemo-controversy.html>>.

In 2008, Pixar released a science fiction feature film which, according to *Time* critics, was to become the best movie of the decade.<sup>3</sup> IMDb Critics also awarded *Wall·E* with a score of 94/100.<sup>4</sup> These critiques parallel its commercial success; the estimated budget for the movie was 180 million U.S. dollars and it grossed over 500 million U.S. dollars in national and international cinematic performances (until March 2009), confirming the movie as one of the most successful of that year.<sup>5</sup>

Given the attention *Wall·E* has received and being a product of the Disney and Pixar empire, some attention should be paid to the influence it has on a child's thinking and behavioral patterns. Although it is not possible to calculate exactly a movie's influence, I will discuss how Disney animation pictures in particular have a tendency to impose moral guidelines on its consumers.

To have a notion about how the Disney corporation, including Pixar, shapes the contemporary entertainment industry, it is important to understand its development, context, and ideology. Once this context is given, I will move onto the production process of *Wall·E*, the producers, the intentions and outcomes of the production, the relevance of the Hollywood label, the themes it deals with, and the characters, among other aspects. My emphasis will be on the production context, images, themes, and other references relevant to an ecocritical approach.

*Wall·E* exposes concerns and issues related to numerous contemporary academic discourses: for instance, the powerful feminine figure of the robot EVE may be viewed through a feminist lens; also, the relationship between the human and the non-human or the machine finds a way into the current discourse of speciesism and posthumanism. Consumerism, waste management, corporate greed, and nostalgia are other concepts I will be working with, as well. I believe ecocriticism provides me with the necessary tools to work on these topics throughout chapters two and three.

But, as I have mentioned, the movie can be linked to the thematic of the de-greening cycle and I am particularly interested in what this relationship has to reveal. Yet, a range of context is necessary to get to this point. So, in the first chapter, I will dwell on ideas of nostalgia and human migration, in order to show how they can be applied to the reality represented in *Wall·E*. Since the movie is a U.S. product, the evolution and context of ecology and environmentalism in this nation

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<sup>3</sup> <<http://entertainment.time.com/2009/12/29/the-10-best-movies-of-the-decade/#wall-e-2008>>.

<sup>4</sup> IMDb, the Internet Movie Database, is one of various sites (including the popular Rotten Tomatoes) to which random users and professionals contribute, offering information, comments, descriptions, evaluations, etc. of popular visual productions and the involved entities.

<sup>5</sup> <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0910970/>>.

will be commented on in the second chapter, in articulation also with the identification of the movie with the contemporary stage of environmentalism. Chapter three takes the relationship between ecology and the Hollywood movie industry specifically as its focus, while the analysis of *Wall·E* and the concept of the de-greening cycle will be central in this section. In the conclusion, I will suggest alternative de-greening cycles that are not depicted in *Wall·E*, but are just as intriguing.

## 1. FROM COLONIZING TO GLOBALIZING – AND THE (UN) COMFORTABLE NOSTALGIA

### a) Migration

One essential constituent of the de-greening cycle (based on human experience) is the concept of migration. It is not a strictly human phenomenon since many elements of nature and landscape move between habitats. For this study however, human migration is the most relevant type. Considering the production environment of *Wall·E*, the concept will be centered upon the U.S.A. Migration has been a delicate issue of debate,<sup>6</sup> not only because of economical reasons, but also because of its meaning as a constituent of U.S. history and identity. Today, human resettlement is a global trend facilitated by technological advancements and the breakdown of nationalist certainties.<sup>7</sup>

Migration can occur for various reasons, such as environmental, political, economic, or cultural ones. *National Geographic* identifies various types of migration, which are, among others less relevant for this study, internal and external migration, population transfer (also described as forced migration), return migration, and seasonal migration. Once people migrate, they are considered either immigrants/emigrants, internally displaced people (those who are forced to move into another region in the same country), refugees (people who cross boundaries to avoid persecutions), and when people migrate as a group, it is considered a migration stream (“Marcopolo Xpeditions” 2).

To understand contemporary migration, it is necessary to consider human history. There is no uniform opinion among scientists concerning the geographical origin of the human species. Nevertheless, the dominant entities in the field of anthropology are inclined to promote the idea of an African “Eden,” stating that “migrations have occurred throughout human history, beginning with the movements of the first human groups from their origins in East Africa to their current location in the world” (“Marcopolo Xpeditions” 1). Before leaving the African continent, however, migration occurred intracontinentally. Humans were gatherers and hunters before becoming sedentary. With the practice of agriculture, nomads turned into farmers and their living patterns changed. After having learned how to control fire, they learned how to manipulate the

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<sup>6</sup> Immigration politics has been a fundamental and recurring subject in the political arena. The U.S. State of the Union 2012 Address was no exception; see <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2012>>.

<sup>7</sup> In the European Union, for example, a person can live in France and have a job in Luxembourg, thus paying a relatively small rent and having a relatively high salary.

Earth and divert water. Air was the last of the elements to fall prey to human's ambitions. Before the occupation of aerial space, however, technology and its fellow-traveler faith in progress had already established themselves as the norm in Europe and North-America. The industrial revolution promoted by this intense scientific development led to intense migration that occurred inside the nations (from the countryside to the promising industrialized cities, where money could be made), but also from economically poor countries to stronger ones later on. Humans therefore went from migrating on a local level, to an interregional and intercontinental migration pattern. *Wall·E* moves onto another stage yet, interplanetary migration.

Still, it is not sufficient to adopt only the discourses of anthropology or sociology, and history. Such approximations on the issue bear credibility and authority, but religion also has an important perspective, which deserves attention as well.

Human migration is no rare phenomenon in religious texts. Buddhists, among others, believe in spiritual migration. According to them, the spirit of a dead body flows into another body, which can be a completely different organism. Cases of physical migrations abound in the bible. The flight from Egypt by Moses and the Israelites to find the Promised Land in Exodus is one example. But two other two biblical episodes related to migration are particularly relevant to my study. In the first one, Adam and Eve are created as the first humans. They are given a garden from which they get expelled by God for having sinned. Consequently, they have to search for new land. In another Genesis episode, God instructs Noah to build an ark to save animals and his family from a great flood. Once they get to land, resettlement and reproduction can start anew. Both stories will be explored in greater detail in the context of my analysis of *Wall·E*.

Besides anthropology and religion, ecology also appropriates migration as a major subject of discussion. The awakening of environmentalism along with other factors provoked a growing concern about the future of humankind. If humans are to survive, they will have either to cease polluting or to leave the Earth. Other animals are being extinct as a result of human behavioral patterns, but, according to *Wall·E*'s appropriation of the Gaia hypothesis (discussed later on), at least small organisms will be able to adapt and survive. *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich was published in the U.S.A. in 1968, when environmentalism was being established as a political concern, and suggested a reflection upon humanity itself as a species, instead of the ecocentric perspective, which was becoming the norm. The book's popularity provoked a widespread preoccupation with the human prospect.

This anxiety has become a theme of representation in diverse art forms, namely in film. *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer; 1973) is a Hollywood movie portraying those fears, presenting cannibalism as the result of overpopulation and food shortage. More recently, it was *WALL·E*'s turn to take on the human prospect issue. This time, a group of people is sent to space, preserving humankind by avoiding intoxication from pollution. Movies representing dystopian scenarios have a propensity to reveal humans themselves as humanity's menace. Migration as linked to human decadence and resource exploitation is a common feature in such apocalyptic movies; *Wall·E* and *Avatar* (James Cameron; 2009) are amongst the most popular examples. In both cases, a human occupation of a space away from the Earth is depicted. This movement to an unexplored territory is not a recent fantasy. During the period commonly labeled as the age of the 'Discoveries,' these visions became reality.

### **b) Occupation**

To describe the relevance of the period of occupation of the so-called New World, which was to become U.S. territory, I suggest a perspective which is not so much anthropological, social, religious, historical, or ecological as it is cultural,<sup>8</sup> taking on a discourse centered on group identity.

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, ships were sent from Europe to explore and colonize unknown lands. North-America was one of those 'paradises' where a new beginning was within reach. 1492 is generally regarded as the year Christopher Columbus discovered America, followed by the first successful settlement in North America, Jamestown, in 1607. As promising as the discovery of 'virgin land' seemed to be, the consequent struggle for survival was harsh and what was seen a powerful menace was on the Pilgrims' step – the Native American.

Based on the documentary "After the Mayflower" from the *We Shall Remain* series (Chris Eyre; 2009), the relationship between the Pilgrims and the North-American natives was not marked by aggression and war at the beginning. On the contrary, natives were helpful and accepted the Europeans as alliances against enemy tribes. Still, the arrival of the white people did have early consequences. The natives started becoming sick of illnesses brought to America from the old continent. Also, the animals imported by the puritans had vast areas to their disposition,

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<sup>8</sup> Although the term has been subject to criticism concerning its validity, I consider it practical for the period in discussion in this section. Speaking of culture nowadays may be troublesome, but the ideas of otherness and belonging were relevant for the sake of group identity (when colonizers conflicted with natives). Therefore, I argue for the application of "culture" as a group identity affirmation process or attempt, as opposed to the idea of groups defined by timeless stereotypes by means of transparent codes.

complicating the habits of the native people. As new settlers came to America, more colonies were founded and more space was needed. Land was in short supply in England and the possession of it represented a high social status and wealth. The natives held a different view, though: they saw their land as homeland, identity bound, not as a commodity. But the intensifying occupation eventually forced them to sell their land. To worsen the natives' situation, they depended on the settlers' medicine to cure the new diseases, while intertribal wars made many of them seek the Europeans' protection. These circumstances forced the native people to adopt Christianity as their official belief system and to adopt European costumes, such as using short hair, which, for men, was synonymous with weakness in the natives' perspective. As the settlers' need for help by the indigenous people decreased, their relationship worsened. By then, the Native-American was seen as an obstacle to expansion and the European himself was becoming a hostile figure. According to "After the Mayflower" the rising tension burst into multiple wars from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, resulting in great losses, mostly on the natives' side. The Western military traditions and technologies granted the Europeans the victory and the power balance between both entities had definitely collapsed, favoring the colonizer. This delicate relationship has had its political consequences along the history of the U.S.A. and still is a delicate issue today. With the settlers' expansion to the west, the pressure put on the Native-American populations only increased and since then they have been sent to conservation areas, have been ignored, have been provided with casinos to manage, etc. None of these measures has shown definite success.

To describe the expansion to the west and the constant conflict with the natives, my arguments will follow Patricia Limericks's arguments, in *The Legacy of Conquest*. The expansion to the west occurred soon after the U.S.A. had gained independence from the English crown (1776) and accompanied the civil war (1861 to 1865), up to the end of the eighteenth century. Limerick pays special attention to the Plain Indians, who occupied mostly the central area of the country during the settlers' migration to the west. She describes one issue in particular as responsible for the growing tension between natives and settlers. "On the Plains in the 1930's, the 'acquisitive world' was most actively represented by the fur and hide trade" (Limerick 182). While the indigenous people of the west were largely untainted by European habits, those of the east had already converted to the colonizer's economy-driven practices and religion, thus losing

or weakening their intimate relationship with the natural environment and their preservation and moderation costumes (183).<sup>9</sup>

The civilizing whites saw native behavior and beliefs as savagery, the stage of humankind's childhood, so they represented the natives as greedy, because they did neither use the land properly, nor did they know how to extract the most of it, making it more profitable for everybody (190). Civilization ensued but was not smooth and gave way to several political actions during the 1830s. Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, which put pressure on remaining natives from east of the Mississippi River to migrate to the west. The population transfer resulted in a massacre and other similar political acts were to follow. Political decisions aimed at reconciliation such as treaties, the creation of conservation areas, and the Indian New Deal were also taken, but the results have been controversial.

On the whole, the Native American, deprived from his or her public voice, has been an object of political strategies. Since the early settlements in North-America, the white Anglo-Saxon protestant has revealed a particular tendency towards appropriation and consumption by controlling possible obstacles to those goals. However, not all white people defended those values. According to Limerick, during much of the nineteenth and the twentieth century, George Catlin for instance, opposed consumerism – the white people's weakness – sympathizing with the native's perspectives (201).

### **c) Nature, Wealth, and Consumption**

Consumption and consumerism as modern concepts are strongly associated with capitalism as a political, social, and economic order, one that articulates with the history just described. Besides the appropriation of land, there were other factors favoring the blending of consumption with capitalism. To describe this process, two authors are of particular interest. Both Leo Marx and David Potter reflect upon, while praising, the identity of the U.S.A. and the significance of territory, natural resources, and progress in its development as the model of a capitalist nation. As a consequence, these critics' perspectives focus less on internal differentiation strategies, than on portraying the desire or necessity for international exceptionalism, hence their focusing on economical and political issues.

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the real Plain Indian is a pure being, essentially free from any contamination. In fact, according to Limerick, the natives in general were fond of taking on elements from other tribes or even from the settlers (189).



The 1840s and 50s were characterized by the Gold Rush<sup>10</sup> and the conclusion of the Oregon Trail,<sup>11</sup> which created a migration stream to the west. While the people's attraction to gold suggests their desire for wealth, the railway was an important technological process to create access to land (access to raw material and products) and territory (access to people): it represents the fast paced progress, opening possibilities for faster product and people transportation. The image of the train is central to Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*. Here, the technological progress is contrasted with the idyllic environment that is the hallmark of traditional pastoralism.

Marx recognizes the relevance of pastoralism as a common feature in North American culture, both as a sentiment, in the writings of American authors, such as Mark Twain or Ernest Hemingway, as well as in television series and movies, like the Westerns, or magazine covers, for which the illustrations of Norman Rockwell may be the most iconic ones (Marx 6); or as an imaginative trend, which influenced writers such as James F. Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, and Nathaniel Hawthorne (10-11). But this idealization of the rural values did not go without opposition, as Marx mentions the critiques of this idealization as an impediment to social progress, such as that subscribed by Henry Nash Smith (6-7). For Marx, the image that best describes the essential conflict of the relation between nature and the machine or technology is that of a train invading the U.S. landscape, subscribed by Nathaniel Hawthorne, when describing the *Sleepy Hollow*. This dialogue between the pastoral and technological progress is also present in other literary products, including Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Ralph Waldo Emerson's journal entries. This idealization of ruralism in literary works is not a phenomenon born with transcendentalism. Marx identifies Virgil's *Eclogues* (70 to 19 BC) as the "true fountainhead of the pastoral strain in our literature" (19). The idea of Arcadia as a real space in ancient Greece free from heavy work or pressures is a central concept in Virgil's works and was still influential in the bucolic writings of U.S. writers.

French historian Alexis de Tocqueville, and the American historians Frederick Jackson Turner and David Potter are among those who argued that wilderness was valuable to the Americans yet for other reasons: not because of what it was, but because of what could be made of it. So, besides nature/wilderness and the garden, another crucial element in this scenario – as in *Wall·E* – as well is the machine. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx describes how the machine's invasion of the U.S. garden(s) provoked a cultural and economical revolution whereas other writers, such as contemporary academics and critics, including the author of *The Garden in*

<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist/chron1.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> <<http://www.nps.gov/oreg/historyculture/index.htm>>.

*the Machine*, Scott MacDonald, chose to study the cultural impact of images of landscape and the nature that are captured in literature, pictures and motion pictures. I consider that both the intrusion of the machine in the garden and the capture of the garden in the machine are to be considered with similar attention when analyzing the relationship between nature and film in *Wall-E* later on. The machine, in general, is a human product with a specific propose and without emotional capacities, but I will also have to address this definition, when analyzing *Wall-E*.

In Marx's referential study, the machine is embodied in the train, a symbol of technological progress, just like the pastoral space can be seen as a symbol for spiritual tranquility. However, between 1840 and 1860, the forces of industrialism won the conflict and the U.S.A. experienced what W. W. Rostow called the "take off." Modern societies dominated and guided by the technological imperatives were definitely to stay and develop (26-7). In this sense, the image of the storming in of the train may be seen as the disturbance of psychic health. Even though "America" tended to be perceived as a Garden of Eden for Europeans wishing to colonize it or dreaming about it during the period of the Discoveries, by 1860 it was heading fast paced towards capitalism and what is now commonly referred to as the consumer society.

Considering the distinction between garden and wilderness, though, settlers and dreamers may not have been completely wrong. A garden is, after all, a composition, an artificial setting, dictated by humans, for which initially wild elements are required. Once those elements have been arranged in the desired manner, the wild space becomes a garden. Therefore, the U.S.A. is a garden in the sense of a controlled system or structure. Nature, by contrast and in my opinion, does not rely on human action to exist and ceases to be considered nature once it depends on or is arranged by the humans. Nonhuman constructed environments are not considered gardens for the purpose of this study since the human is the species that manipulates its environment the most, to the point of harming nature in a rhythm it cannot be restored and, thus, the human deserves to be highlighted.

One specific type of garden has had a privileged status among politicians in comparison with the pastoral ideal: the agrarian reality, on which Thomas Jefferson's writings remain a major reference. By the eighteenth century, iconic political figures like Jefferson discussed the importance of agriculture as the foundation of prosperity, the same century the "middle state" condition was seen as the "widely accepted ethical doctrine" (100). According to this theory, the human represents the link between the savage and the "purely rational," thus living, either comfortably or not, in an intermediate state.

As mentioned previously, Jefferson was aware of the significance of land for the young nation. The abundant wilderness was gradually becoming landscape, a space manipulated by human action, dominated by farms and ranches until industrialization took over. In Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he admires the rural environment and the workers living in those areas. After *Notes on the State of Virginia* reached the public, Jefferson's understanding that the farmers were God's chosen people became commonly accepted (122). This interpretation awards the agrarian worker with particular symbolism.

Jefferson recognizes the economic weakness of agricultural economy, but he also admits that the values he desires for the country are not driven by material aspirations. Sufficiency, independence, and happiness are his main concerns, while showing contempt for class divisions and economic/industrial growth (Jefferson 176-7). Marx recognizes that Jefferson sees industrialism as a sickness, but the latter also knows that the Americans may eventually adopt commerce and manufacturing (Marx 135). However, Leo Marx describes the Jeffersonian dream that if the U.S.A. was to be transformed into a garden, "a permanently rural republic," it should be able to avoid power struggles and wars like those in Europe (138). Jefferson's model of the rural ideal was but an illusion, because he knew that the people would end up longing for wealth. Consequently, as pinpointed by Marx, he suggested the import of the steam machine while defending that the factories were to stay in Europe (147). This invention became essential during the U.S.A. late industrialization process in the nineteenth century. Jefferson's passion for modern engineering made him enjoy the machine, but he could hardly have guessed the relevance it would have as the basis of massive factories.

Gradually, the pressure grew towards the introduction of technology. Already at the end of the eighteenth century, Tench Coxe tried to smuggle European machinery into the U.S., although he still assigned industry a subordinate status in relation to the sector of agriculture, thus appealing to the Jeffersonians (Marx 156-7). As Marx sees it, for Coxe, the mechanics present in the industrial processes reflected the laws of nature (162), a rationality that would be reproduced for many decades to come, in order to justify capitalism. The right to wealth supposedly transmitted through religious texts would be one example, which is to be considered further on in this study. Also, as Marx explains, by the end of the eighteenth century, the establishment of capitalist values was becoming inevitable and, for some, even desirable. The belief existed that the industrial system is indispensable for national and individual wealth and for cultural development

and superiority.<sup>12</sup> Although the use of machinery makes human effort less necessary, women and children were able to find occupation as manufacturers, thus providing extra income for the household. The concern with social equality and economic stability as the base values of the democratic system has been constant ever since the nation's birth. It is no wonder, then, that scholars like David Potter felt the need to justify progress with equality, thus establishing a bond between capitalism and democracy. This *Weltanschauung* is the central issue in another reference study on this problematic, Potter's *People of Plenty*.

Many saw it as the divine duty of the U.S.A. to spread these democratic values, in their close articulation with a particular economic system (capitalism), a belief that translated into the imposition of the U.S. social and economic model on other cultures, thus leading to the expansion of the U.S. territory throughout the nineteenth century. This idea of 'Manifest Destiny,' defended and made popular by journalist John O'Sullivan during the nineteenth century, served as the justification to conquer, among other territories, Mexico and the Philippines. Although the label "Manifest Destiny" is not applied anymore, the U.S.A. has gone to war with other countries allegedly in defense of these same democratic values up to today. The Vietnam War and the occupation of nations in the Middle East, for instance, were justified by politicians as missions to free people from tyranny and oppression.

At the time of its establishment, capitalism was the target of fierce critiques, namely from some intellectuals, such as German philosopher and historian Karl Marx, who noted the effects of estrangement and alienation it caused on workers. These central European philosophers realized that the human was adopting mechanical behaviors through their work experience. Marx refers German born philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, following the theses of Sigmund Freud, reconsidered this idea of a mechanical human under a new light. According to thinkers like Marcuse, technological progress is responsible for the repression of the instinctual drives and, therefore, for psychic powerlessness. The stifling of human forces and energies, such as the sexual impulse, is another consequence of the mechanical human (178-9).

Despite these critiques, capitalism made its triumphal way through the U.S. A particularly celebratory appreciation of the industrial progress in the U.S.A. was offered in 1954 by David Potter. In *People of Plenty*, Potter tried to define the U.S. character by exposing data confirming

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<sup>12</sup> Technological progress was defended by other great personalities of the time, for example, Daniel Webster, who regarded technological progress as instrumental in promoting equality and national unity since everybody had access to it (Marx 210).

the abundance of resources and the effectiveness of the people's abilities to extract and transform those resources. The link between abundance and wealth is constantly emphasized. By arguing that "wealth of natural resources has been translated into an unexampled standard of living" (Potter 80), he stands on the side of those who recognize the nation as superior to and more productive than any other in the world. To support this notion of the U.S.A.'s greatness, Potter keeps referring to the nation's values and people as "American" (85), ignoring the other countries on the American continent. By doing so, the U.S.A. is elevated to a continental scale, but everything labeled as American, like the American character, the American values, etc., is actually not more than a quality referring to something related to the U.S.A. This is not to say that all "Americans" are extremely productive. He writes that the Native Americans did not know how to extract natural resources properly (85), reflecting a common idea, as noted by Limerick. Fundamental to take profit from the social value of resources was the human factor. He admits that the people had been blessed with the land's natural richness, but he also notices that other countries had similar luck, but couldn't make proper use of it (86). The economic organization and technological advancements were therefore responsible for human effectiveness.

Potter recognizes another crucial factor for the "American" success: individualist values (87). The need for personal fulfillment and the persistence on individual liberties made possible by the democratic system (established by believers in individual rights) allowed for the fast expansion of the national territory. A man or woman occupying new land promising prosperity and freedom represented and produced territory for the U.S.A.

The very idea of democracy was a political response to those values. This system, according to Potter, was only possible because of the people's capacity to handle it. Abundance available to everybody willing to work, thus providing every individual with the possibility for economic growth, was seen as the basis of democracy and as inseparable from freedom (126-127). After all, there was so much of everything that it was possible to give to some without taking from others, avoiding class struggles and social problems. A nation whose people did not have the necessary aptitude to profit from abundance was not prepared for democracy. In addition, by supporting democracy, people enabled themselves to further increase economic surplus (113). It is no wonder, then, that by believing in these values, the "American" saw everything he or she accomplished as the result of free choice or free will (112). Potter goes so far in defending democratic values that he adopts the rhetoric of "Manifest Destiny" to justify the necessity of spreading democracy throughout the world (117-1188). Although we must bear in mind that

Potter was writing during the Cold War, his views are pertinent because they show the dominant discourse on industrialization in the U.S. for a long time.

Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis officially presented in 1893, which came in line with this history. is based on the argument that the frontier experience was the responsible factor for the molding of the "American" character and of democratic values. Potter emphasizes Turner's view that the west as the space of rebirth and subsequent primitivism, a space of opportunities for the individual and the family willing to trade comfort in the present for prosperity in the future (142-144) and Turner also recognized its importance as a conquering process reenacting and reaffirming the principles of democracy, thus contributing to a nationalist spirit (151-152).

Although Potter sympathizes with Turner's views, he rejects the idea that the closure of the frontier would also mean a possible end to prosperity, foreseeing instead other frontiers besides the geographical ones (157). Potter criticizes Turner for fusing the idea of abundance with that of frontier. Potter does not describe the frontier as an escape valve, for there is no need to escape, because the "American" society is meritocratic and, thus, absent of any class system and consequent class struggle or friction. Also, Potter defends a democratic system based on capitalistic values, while Turner, perhaps because he did not live to see capitalism develop fully from the 1930s onwards, believed in democracy led by rural or agrarian values.

The intensive industrial development, not witnessed by Turner, replaced the symbolic power of the frontier by the power of the big city. The frontier was meeting its end and the people's attention moved to the factories where new hope for work and wealth resided. The role of the factory as a magnet for the working class intensified during the world wars, when men were sent to battle and women had to engage in factory work. This phenomenon confirmed the woman's position as an independent worker, thus increasing the family income and, consequently, its purchasing power.

The wars also stimulated an ongoing debate about the potential of technology. The atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945 caused approximately 200,000 casualties,<sup>13</sup> exemplifying the consequences uncontrolled progress can result in. Even as recently as 2011, nuclear facilities in Fukushima, Japan, built to provide energy, exploded as the consequence of an earthquake. Disasters like these have happened since the first experiments on nuclear energy during the war and the subsequent Cold War, putting people's health and lives at risk when exposed to radiation.

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<sup>13</sup> <[http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med\\_chp10.shtml](http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml)>.

In conclusion, Potter's study of the "American" character is a very optimistic one. Potter praises democracy and capitalism, but he fails to consider the negative effects of the latter; for example, he did not acknowledge the economic reality of those who did not have access to wealth. Potter praises democracy and capitalism, but he fails to consider the negative effects of the latter. With economic monopolies dominated by corporations, the concentration of money, the national market turns into a dangerous playground. With the resulting economic crises, many people end up losing their economic power, thus proving that the democratic capitalist system is not perfect. It also shows that abundance is not a given and that people fail at exploiting natural resources wisely.

At the end of World War II, Europe was devastated and in need of help. The U.S. government proposed the European Recovery program, commonly known as the Marshall Plan. By making Europe dependant on the support of the U.S.A., the Soviet influence could not spread. The adoption of capitalist democratic values by the European nations occurred fast and they are still identifiable today, especially in popular culture. The post-war connection was fundamental to the spread of the U.S. economic model in Europe and set the stage for the dissemination of the 'American way of life' based on consumption. Since then, other vehicles have continued that dissemination, namely the internet. "Soft power," a term coined by Joseph Nye, refers to this nation's capacity to influence other nations through ideological instruments.<sup>14</sup> Companies like Amazon, Google, and Facebook store information from those who make use of their products.<sup>15</sup>

Publicity in particular played a central role in the development of capitalism and consumption. Ultimately, the entities in control of instruments of publicity and advertisement became able to manipulate human behavior or to influence it to a great extent. In a society ruled by consumerism, the acquisition of the most recent trend became a matter of social status. So, s/he who does not consume became a victim to shame, because s/he is seen as not being able to accompany progress. In order to escape the pressure, people often search for comfort in nostalgia, a place and a time they imagine far away from the troubles, uncertainty, and fluidity of contemporary societies.

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<sup>14</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. (New York, Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> The storage of personal information or site usage history makes it possible for the corporations to introduce advertisements aimed at the user's profile. So, besides the globalizing power of the internet, it is also a way to get to wealth fast.

#### **d) Longing for another Reality**

The critique and crisis of capitalism in the last decades may help to explain the feeling of nostalgia that permeates many popular culture products, including *Wall-E*. It is common for commercial products or advertisements to display texts, either visual or not, appealing to a nostalgic feeling in the consumer. From advertisements showing a smoking man on a horse to the old-fashioned movie genre of the Western, images evocative of rural spaces are constantly present in Europe and North-America. Norman Rockwell, for example, made a name out of creating images depicting folk symbols and values during the mid-twentieth century, from traditional barbershops, to soldiers, and scouts, for instance.

Even in politics, nostalgia has a privileged position. Those who sympathize or defend national values tend to praise museums, stories of the nation's past, rituals, etc. Nostalgia is also used as an instrument of debate in political discourse. In *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim; 2006), Al Gore appeals to the viewers by talking about his childhood in the countryside, evoking a feeling of nostalgia to which people are able to relate.

Longman's *Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines nostalgia as a "feeling that a time in the past was good, or the activity of remembering a good time in the past and wishing that things had not changed." Since I consider nostalgia a fundamental element in *Wall-E*, a simple definition from a dictionary is not sufficient to comprehend the implications of the concept. Therefore, I will now introduce a few different perspectives and a historical context that help provide a solid ground for me to look into the relationship between the human and time and space in the movie.

To say that this feeling is a major force in many people's lives is not an exaggeration. Kathleen Steward sees in nostalgia "a negative consequence of attempting to replace postmodern relativism (labeled good) with an essential past based in recovery of a 'self' (labeled bad)" (*Apud*. Murray and Heumann 201). For her, nostalgia is a cultural practice and a social disease. Languages play a relevant role in the conceptualization of nostalgia. The Portuguese language, for example, relates to the feeling through *saudade*, the German Romantics felt the *Wanderlust*, the desire to travel, while the English speakers have homesickness, etc. To give an answer to the emotion, families often escape the big cities and their stressful lives to spend their holidays in rural environments, where they seek to pacify the nostalgic feeling. But a few questions come to mind; do the places from the past provoke this feeling, the people, the colors, the idea of past itself, the fantasy about another space, or even perhaps the wish for an idyllic future? In order to



provide an answer, Sigmund Freud, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and George Steiner will serve as my primary references.

Since the first use of the concept of nostalgia until recently, this feeling was considered a disease comparable to depression.<sup>16</sup> The state of nostalgia was commonly associated with a restrictive, defensive, and static conscience. As I will demonstrate in detail later, nostalgia does not necessarily always lead to these qualities. Freud helps us understand how the longing for another reality as a social phenomenon has been understood and described.

In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Freud shows the frustrations felt by the subject in modern society. Although the experience of pain can be invoked by natural conditions or circumstances and by our own bodies, the most relevant source of suffering is that of human relationships and institutions, when bearing in mind the issue of nostalgia. The latter source of suffering could be controlled relatively easily and yet, the human being does not manage to do so. Freud advances the conviction that if humans were to escape culture and return to the primitive condition, humankind would be much happier (118). Freud describes some factors leading to this growing dissatisfaction with society/culture. The meeting of new cultures during the age of the Discoveries, for once, made the Europeans believe that the natives in the new-found lands led a simple joyful life; the second factor can be described as the pressure to achievement which society puts on individuals, creating a fear of failure that leads to the desire of a primitive life, where social pressure is nonexistent or weak. Also, technological and scientific progress, the aggressive domination of nature, made people realize that these developments did not make them happier than if they lived in a primitive state (120). Therefore, it seemed that the human being craved to return to the state of the newborn child, who was not able to distinguish itself from its environment and, thus, was one with its surroundings. The sense of separation between environment and human appears to be the reason for frustration, in Freud's theory. The satisfaction of desires offers but a short sense of fulfillment, whereas the satisfaction of needs, such as the return to nature, would provide an enduring state of contentment. So, the God-like or the so-called highly developed human turns out to be a highly unsatisfied one. *Wall·E* shows a similar dilemma, but, in opposition to Freud's perception, the movie's characters do not recognize technological progress as something pejorative to human happiness, but rather as an instrument capable of leading humanity towards a satisfying variety of primitivism. Either way, technology is what provides the human being with the capacity of controlling its environment.

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<sup>16</sup> Since the seventeenth century, nostalgia was considered a medical condition. Swiss mercenaries who travelled to foreign regions were described as nostalgic, which is to say that they felt homesick.

According to Freud, culture, as a means of identifying the human in contrast with the nonhuman, is an instrument of interaction among humans and for their protection against nature (122-3). Culture, as an ideological concept, is responsible for the oppression of impulses, such as the sexual drive. The individual is pressured to give priority to society, putting his/her own desires or necessities behind. However, Freud fails by not taking into account the institutions and events that allow the human being a certain space of liberty and free will. In Europe, for example, social revolutions against the monarchy and, so it was believed, to free the people from oppression had already taking place since the eighteenth century.

Capitalism and democracy are concepts that eventually appear to support the individual's pursuit of happiness and prosperity. However, with the emergence of consumerism as the result of the combination of the capitalistic economical system with democratic social values with an emphasis on the individual, this social and political construction became subject to irony. The rise of the 1950s Beat Generation and the subsequent hippie generation confirmed that many understood that the system was but an illusion. The wars in the name of democracy, the menace of nuclear catastrophe as a price to pay for technological progress, the political and economic power of great corporations, and the social and political discrimination against certain groups made many realize that democracy was not synonymous with individual freedom. The hippie counterculture, as a group fighting the political *status quo* and the idea of consumerism, sought for experiences and expressions which would stand in contrast with or which would go against the social norms. The consumption of narcotics, the exhibition of naked body parts, the participation in musical performances like the Woodstock concerts, street demonstrations and rebellion against domestic hierarchy were the means of expression usually associated with this group and, thus, stood in opposition with the conservative society. More recently, along the decade of 2010 a new economic reality came into being. Although the capitalist economic system promises fortunes, it shows to be based on a fragile model. This proved true, once again, on a global scale when the economic bases of several countries crashed. The pro-capitalism attitudes referred previously have become widely criticized even by many U.S. citizens themselves. Social and political tension and conflict have been occurring in countries like Greece, Tunisia, Spain, and the U.S.A. Wikileaks, The Occupy Movement, the Anonymous group, and the "we are the ninety-nine percent" slogan have become popular topics of discussion on social platforms and are all reactions to the global financial crisis.

The Occupy Movement appeals to a wide range of people of several countries and gets them to a specific place to demonstrate against the political and economical *status quo*. The movement is often criticized for its lack of consistency, for lack of a coherent message.<sup>17</sup> I consider the movement as an expression of multiple discontents and therefore it does not need a coherent message, because it has many, and, therefore, it demands several answers. The slogan “we are the ninety-nine percent” is commonly associated with this movement, referring to the percentage of people who have to pay for the mistakes of the one percent among whom wealth is concentrated. Those in control of big corporations and banks, and who have political responsibilities are the ones accused as the corrupt one percent. The Anonymous group in turn is made of hackers, who attack the informatic systems of entities they suspect to be corrupt or dishonest in order to expose or punish them, as does the Wikileaks organization.

I mention these instances of deep discontent because a similar revolution takes place in *Wall·E*, when the people fight the dominating machine to get back to a state of freedom. Before the revolution, it is a corporation that decides what people should wear, think, or how they should be educated; in short, how they should live. Therefore, I complete Freud’s considerations by stating that the human is not imprisoned by social imperatives, but that he or she is capable of attempting to break down those limitations to individual freedom and self expression.

Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset’s perception of the modern human diverges from that of Freud and my own understanding of nostalgia. In his 1930 *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega describes the “civilized” human as being unaware of the complexity of the industrialized world (37). The illusion of material well being as something spontaneous and natural bears resemblance to Potter’s view of the wilderness as a space just waiting to be consumed. Therefore, it is tempting to place Ortega y Gasset’s “Naturmensch” (37) in the context of United States history. As highly “civilized” the *Naturmensch* may be, his or her understanding of the surroundings is naïve and, in this sense, primitive. Freud, in contrast, demonstrates that the individual perceives the artificiality of the environment and tends towards nostalgia as an attempt to escape that reality. As I said, I extend the argument to argue that the human being is also capable of taking action.

Initially in *Wall·E*, the human does not question the mechanisms he or she is surrounded by, but takes everything for granted, thus fitting into the concept of Ortega y Gasset’s *Naturmensch*. However, as the story develops, nostalgia is awakened and the human species does fight the

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<sup>17</sup> <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/occupy-wall-streets-marketing-problem\\_n\\_1098422.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/occupy-wall-streets-marketing-problem_n_1098422.html)>.

artificial world it is living in. However, in the end, a full perception of the complexities of natural processes does not occur since the human protagonist talks about cultivating “pizza plants.” So, the naivety and, consequently, primitivism of the *Naturmensch* is confirmed throughout the movie. I consider *Wall·E* a possible product resulting from the dialogue between Freud’s writing and my contribution to it, and that of Ortega y Gasset’s. Still, the movie’s themes relate to ideas and concepts elaborated by other writers, who help me to “read the film.”

Svetlana Boym divides the concept nostalgia into “nostos” and “algia,” while drawing on the Soviet experience. The first one, *nostos*, meaning home, is related to restoration, to the reconstruction of the lost place (Boym *Apud*. Legg 3). As a political instrument, this component of nostalgia can help normalize values within a group of people, who desire confirmation of identity and wish to escape the tensions of industrialized society, thus promoting stability in time. The second element, *algia*, refers to the longing for something. Movement is constant and space becomes temporalized by cherishing “shattered fragments of memory” (3). While *nostos* builds on the articulation between identity and landscape, *algia* occupies a rather reflective, personal, and, consequently, emotional space. The imperfect process of remembering and imagining is the primary function of *algia*, instead of the stabilization of identity. Consequently, *algia* suggests a potentially positive nostalgia, in the sense of hope.

Jankélevitch attempts a more philosophical approach to the articulation between time, space, motion, and memory, exposing nostalgia as a mental construction, an idealized representation. It is based on an anxiety or desire to distance oneself from something or someone (such as a sin a person cannot forget), longing to recover the time one was free from that disturbing memory, and the desire to recuperate something or someone lost in the past (Jankélevitch 261). It is a matter of lack and excess and, accordingly, of the craving to make present the absence and make absent the present (265). I point out that one feeling to be associated with both sources of anxiety is that of hope to recover a past reality. In other words, while nostalgia embodies the melancholic longing for the past, it can also stand for the expectation of the returning of that past. In short, time seems to have the capacity both to cure the anxiety of the person who desires to reject something or someone, as long as that action is fulfilled, and to invoke the anxiety of missing a past reality.

This is not to say that anxiety is strictly bound to the longing for the past. Jankélevitch shows how it can relate to the future, describing the desire for something yet to happen, as opposed to something yet to return (263). Although anxiety exists, nostalgia does not, if it is to be assumed as the yearning for the return of the past. The positive, which is to say optimistic, potential of

nostalgia is not to be ignored. The idea of what is to come, the future, offers the possibility of option and constant updating, because what is not present yet, is not concluded and, therefore, is or seems valid and possible. I retain this idea in particular because, as I shall demonstrate, it applies to *Wall·E*.

Jankélévitch argues that a person who lives intensively oriented by the imagined future perceives the present with a hint of the past (263). The positive potential is clearly present in the “not yet” feeling, while that of “not anymore” bears a rather pessimistic connotation. The “not yet” feeling is a variety of nostalgia with positive possibilities (also suggested in *Wall·E*) since the basic characteristic of this feeling articulates with the “not anymore” depressive nostalgia Jankélévitch emphasizes: both emotions represent the longing for an alternative reality ultimately created by fantasy; thus, both are nostalgic. Jankélévitch’s perception of nostalgia is relatively a pessimistic one, incurable and provoking desperation. The inability to go back in time leaves the human uneasy and regretful. In *Wall·E*, the “not anymore” and the “not yet” realities are simultaneously present, but the dominating emotion is optimism.

Another feature of nostalgia I have already mentioned that needs further consideration is the construction of time and its articulation with space. Although time is continuous and independent, our conceptualization of it allows manipulation. So, it is possible to establish a division, as blurry as it may be, between the “good old days” and the now, which is fundamental for nostalgia. Living for the past, a distance in time, the individual or group finds a metaphysical refuge (Jankélévitch 346); people live in a physical reality, but their lives are dominated by passivity. I need to recall the relevance of a third division which is fundamental in *Wall·E*: hope placed on the future as a result of an unsatisfying present and a positive past may lead to action. What conditions the result of the nostalgic feeling is hope and the necessary event that incites it. The lack of hope makes people live a passive existence, while its presence may produce the opposite. Even though hope does not necessarily imply action, it certainly is favorable to it.

At the end, what becomes clear is that nostalgia is not the longing for a space, but the longing for the control of time and that there seems to be no end to that uneasiness due to the irreversibility of time. The human being cannot go back to the place in mind and expect that time has not affected that place and so nostalgia becomes the reaction to the irreversible (Jankélévitch 368). Humankind is subjected to the nostalgic condition once the infant suffers the first separation as a human being, the separation from the mother’s body. However, nostalgia is not only the answer to the irreversible, as it also represents the remorse of ingratitude. The person regrets not

having recognized the value of certain events or situations in the past, which he or she attributes to those events in the present. This consideration will provide helpful insight into *Wall·E*, further on. It will be interesting to examine if the movie confirms this position of nostalgia as remorse or if remorse is the result of nostalgia.

Since making the nostalgic feeling disappear seems to be an impossible task, Jankélévitch indicates movement as a kind of remedy (369), thus offering an alternative to omnipresence. Another solution to partially or temporarily calm down the nostalgic anxiety is the arts. Jankélévitch emphasizes poetry, but even more so music, as the language of the nostalgic human (375). As opposed to the lost childhood, music can be experienced endlessly. I suggest video, animated children movies in particular, as another possibility to communicate with nostalgia, to remember the feeling or to allow it to articulate with the movie. The arts serve as a means to invoke the past into the present. The individual's oral, non-musical expressions of nostalgia, by contrast, usually come as complaints. Hope is, after all, a recurring element of the nostalgia for the past (Jankélévitch384).

Also, nature plays a crucial part in the question of nostalgia.<sup>18</sup> Philosopher and literary critic George Steiner relies on the interpretation of the myth of Prometheus proposed by French philosopher Claude Lévi-Strauss's to explain that the domination of fire and the manipulation of binaries made a radical rupture between the human being and the animal possible, which was also a fundamental rupture with nature (Steiner 42-3). As suggested previously, it seems that nostalgia and alienation resulting from the human's social and cultural condition issue from the inability to go back in time and correct the lost connection between the human being and the innocence and sense of holism typically associated with nature (43). The concept of holism is a recurring idea in ecology; it describes the sense of universal connectedness that is greater than the simple sum of its components. The human being regrets the loss of infancy and innocence and, therefore, tries to reattach to nature through artistic expression, social movements, etc., as a way to recover that innocence, to get back to nature and the human origins.

To conclude the theoretical basis of nostalgia and the linkage between the feeling for the past and the hope of its return in the future, I turn to Portuguese historian Rui Bebianno, who adds utopia to the discussion of nostalgia and the arts. He states that the creation of a utopia is made possible by the interplay of memory and the imagination (30). The articulation between the past and action makes it possible for nostalgia to reach towards utopianism (29). Bebianno further describes the

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<sup>18</sup> I suggest that the concept of nature is to be taken as a chaotic process independent from human artificial creations. Although I will be focusing on the issue later on, this definition of nature should suffice for now.

process of creating utopias as universal and not restricted to any period of time in specific; it is uninterrupted and immortal (31): many religions have relied on an afterlife for centuries, the Soviet Union was a utopian project as well, as is the colonization of Earth in *Wall·E*. Whatever analysis and description is given to the modern human's anxieties, ultimately, all come to the result that the frustrated human seeks to compensate for the loss of innocence, the tie with nature.

Obviously, the ultimate representatives of utopianism associated to nostalgia were the Romantics in eighteenth century Europe, who wrote precisely as a reaction to industrialism and all the rational values associated with the Enlightenment. The expression of nostalgia through the arts is a recurrent theme: at the same time that Freud was writing about the discontents of civilization, a group of artists known as the primitivists expressed a deep nostalgia for the past, idealizing and exoticizing regions such as Africa, praised for their underdevelopment and purity of nature. This artistic curiosity extended to musical expression, resulting, for example, in Jazz, which was filtered into popular culture, while world wars and the consequent mistrust in progress further promoted the interest in primitivism.

Throughout time, and because nostalgia is a global phenomenon, also large commercial companies have learned how to commodify it and appeal to various cultures through; especially the entertainment industry knows how to explore that emotion. Arjun Appadurai calls the capacity to appeal to collective nostalgia "Ersatz Nostalgia,"<sup>19</sup> which is a concept that will be developed later.

#### e) The De-greening Cycle

*Wall·E* has a particular take on the idea of the primitive, which articulates with my idea of the de-greening cycle. Freud described this condition of the modern individual in the industrial society, who desires to escape that reality.<sup>20</sup>

Considering the information provided so far, a pattern can be described: the conflict between the desire for progress and the necessity to hold on to a primitive intimacy with nature forms a cycle, a constant movement between two opposite desires. I argue that similar cycles can be recognized in the most different circumstances and places. Several philosophers, historians,

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<sup>19</sup> *Apud.* <<http://www.angelacrow.com/2007/09/18/appadurai-arjun-modernity-at-large-cultural-dimensions-of-globalization/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, technological progress came to offer the possibility to experience the primitive state through broadcasting devices and transportation systems. Reality shows like *Survivor* and drama series such as *Lost* have been international television hits. Also, safaris and ecotourism are attractive alternatives to the beach or the city. Still, to taste the adventure, the use of modern transportation systems is often the only solution.

physicists, etc. have been trying to understand and define these cyclical patterns. Frederick Jackson Turner called it the “perennial rebirth”; David Potter, the “democratic cycle”; Avery Craven, the “cycle of colonization”; Plato, the “kyklos”; Polybius, the “historical recurrence”; the eternal recurrence described also by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche; the idea of rebirth and reincarnation found in religious texts; Poincaré and the “recurrence theorem”; to which we could still add the theory of karma and the yin yang symbol, the oscillating universe theory, etc.<sup>21</sup> It would require a paper longer than this dissertation to describe each of these ideas thoroughly. Since I have already exposed Jankélévitch’s theory, I resort to this philosopher once more to formulate my idea of the de-greening cycle.

When describing his view of the “cosmic cycle,” Jankélévitch states the existence of the great life whose vitality is transmitted through the small individual lives (101). Once one life ends, either resurrection or rebirth can occur. Considering that resurrection has a strong religious connotation, I choose to adapt the idea of rebirth, which is a constantly recurring organic mechanism. Death is fundamental in order to allow the flow of energy to develop into new life or to nourish the already existing. As long as the cycles responsible for the survival of plants and animals persist, death will never be final and plants and animals will appear eventually, unless events superior to the Earth dictate otherwise. The same is valid for matter superior to the human or animal scale. In the universe, the flow of energy that takes place when a star dies, for example, makes it possible for new elements to appear. So, even if life on Earth were to come to an end, the energy of all that is earthly would continue flowing in space. All is constantly being compensated.

I concur with those who do not consider cycles as necessarily strictly repetitive, because the infinitude of possibilities allow for an infinitude of possible outcomes. So, evolution does occur, which does not necessarily mean that there is an objective to life, but rather, that the innumerable possibilities demand constant re-adaptations. In this sense, my position is clearly marked by evolutionism. Jankélévitch supports this idea by stating that the cosmic cycle does not have an end or a beginning, but that it is in a state of constant irreversible becoming (112).

Since Jankélévitch’s analysis is mostly dominated by the anthropocentric worldview and considering the philosophical character of his discourse, his study is valuable to my idea of the de-greening cycle only to a certain extent; to fully develop it, I consider the ecological discourse to be the most productive. Cycles are a constant process and they often contain other cycles

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<sup>21</sup> Some of the examples provided are referenced in Potter (145-151).



within them. Although the human being may be responsible for the existence of some, it is, after all, the cosmic (or a superior unknown) cycle that allows it. The human being is responsible for the creation of the concept of the cosmic cycle. The human mind rejects inexistence, the end. S/he cannot imagine what does not have a form, no color or any quality at all that our senses are able to detect. Some people may find an answer in religion, others in the imagination, others may even try to ignore it, etc. I argue for an ecocentric study, because I regard the human species just as an earthly product, like other life forms, resulting from preexisting cycles that allowed for the human being to develop out of the “primordial soup.” The Earth, by contrast, has the necessary concentrated power to eliminate the human species. Nevertheless, the human is an exceptional animal in the way that it articulates with its environment.

As explained previously, the human desire to control nature has led to imbalances of power between both entities. Applying the concept of the de-greening cycle to the Western experience means to recognize a sequence of events in the order of exploration, exploitation, and recolonization, ending up by starting of the cycle over again. Considering the phenomenon of colonization, this sequence can describe the discovery of fertile land, the consequent exploitation of resources and recolonization elsewhere once the resources are exhausted. Once the European continent had been explored and massively exploited, the humans colonized America. With the occupation of this continent nearing its end, the U.S. and the Soviet Union made their first attempts into space.

This sequence of events, although based on human experience, is an example that justifies my choice for ‘de-greening cycle’ instead of ‘de-greening circle.’ Because a circle presupposes a return to the exact same condition of depart, like Odysseus expected when returning home, and since time is not reversible and cannot be stopped, the circle would not have a practical application, but would merely be matter for philosophy. A cycle, by contrast, presupposes a reenactment of a situation, but does not stipulate the condition of arrival to be exactly the same as the condition of departure. It may even come to an end. The cycle itself is a symbolic reference, rather relative in physical terms, since a spiral can be regarded as a three dimensional cycle. A circle is a mathematical design, precise and predictable, leaving no space for the evolution and conflict typical for the natural development.

The planet obeys to and creates cycles, so it moves and changes, it is born and it will eventually die, it is made of matter and energy and is, consequently, a living form. As such, it develops, or breathes, metaphorically speaking, by periodically destroying itself in part. Since

everything is connected, this process is not isolated, but occurs due to exterior imperatives. Still, considering that destruction occurs on Earth and has the planet itself as its direct agent, I describe these processes as terrestrial. Examples of a periodical destruction on a global scale are the several ice ages, followed by a new environmental reality. Another cycle of a smaller scale but also relevant to renew the environment is the one fulfilled by fire. Matter is consumed and the nutritious ground can create a new ecological niche. Whenever destruction occurs, construction will eventually follow in some form since nothing just disappears. *Wall·E* portrays such an event. Plants and animals that inhabited the Earth ceased to be visibly present (in exception of Wall·E's buddy, the cockroach) the way the humans knew it. Nevertheless, plants are eventually reborn, which implies that the compositional elements of what existed previously transformed into, for example, microorganisms, insects living under the ground, fertilizing the soil, and, obviously, the plants themselves. This evolutionary description reflects the Gaia hypothesis that I will be developing later.

Movies like *Wall·E* and *An Inconvenient Truth* depict the human species as the agent who will cause the next environmental disaster. According to these movies, if the damage done to the Earth is to continue at the same or a higher rate, the climatic and, consequently, environmental conditions on Earth will change drastically. The human impact is causing a new geological epoch, the “anthropocene,” a period “defined by our own massive impact on the planet. That mark will endure in the geologic record long after our cities have crumbled” (Neumann et al 70). I suggest that although the human species was “born” as part of the environment, its evolution has made its actions so powerful and far-reaching that it has become a threat and may lead to precocious destruction. Unless the human manages to control his/her impact, s/he will have to leave the planet, for it will either be inhabitable for this species or natural catastrophes will wipe out all or most of it. At this rate, the planet's next destructive period will be its own death or a new environmental reality radically different from the previous ones succeeding revitalization. Either way, the human will be the responsible agent: “[i]n the past half billion years asteroid impacts and other natural events have caused five catastrophic mass extinctions of plants and animals. Humans may be causing a sixth” (Neumann et al 78).

Several scenarios are possible to emerge out of the human induced apocalyptic landscape. *Wall·E* portrays one such scenario, in which humanity was forced to escape Earth. As the humans return, they have to adapt to the new reality. In order to be able to profit from the nature once again, they first have to create the conditions for the greening process to develop fast. It is not as

much a matter of preservation as it is of conservation. By working the land, the humans do not suffer regression into a more primitive state, but advancement, aided by technology, hence resulting in what I am going to describe as technological primitivism; it is not only a philosophy of work, but also of social life. The humans work hand in hand with technology to provide food, for example. As seen in the movie, not only do humans invest in physical work, they also rediscover communal living and direct interaction. Hence, a new cycle is made possible.

In conclusion, I define the de-greening cycle as a process verifiable on multiple scales (being the global one the most relevant for this study and the focus of the theory itself), in which an entity undergoes evolution, destruction, and revitalization. This process may be repetitive and adaptable. The designation suggests that its application occurs mainly through an ecological lens and that the position adopted is primarily ecocentric. The focus of the theory is what differs it from other theories of cycles. Whereas some describe the cycles of either human history, or human life, the natural phenomena that regulate the life conditions on Earth, etc., the de-greening cycle refers to the three phases of the cycles that regulate the conditions on Earth, including those provoked by natural *and* non-natural agents. Thus, the cycle may be a natural occurrence, as well as an induced one. To illustrate how the consequences and implications of a cause that is not natural vary from the natural ones, I will be applying the concept to *Wall·E*. A more detailed explanation will be offered when I analyze this movie, in the third chapter.

## 2. ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE U.S.A.

### a) Ecology

The relationship between the human and its environment has been a passionate, but also problematic one in the U.S.A. Cultural icons like the Native-Americans, Huckleberry Finn, and Clark Kent provoke a longing for what is usually conceived as nature or the rural environment. However, catastrophes like the one caused by Hurricane Katrina have reminded the U.S. population that nature is not a mere concept offering pleasure or satisfaction, but a force capable of great destruction, ultimately uncontrollable. Ecocritics Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann recall the warning Spike Lee emitted, that if people forget about Katrina, disaster will occur once again (Murray and Heumann 38). Other catastrophes of national proportion include the Dust Bowl storms during the 1930's and the periodical floods along the major rivers of the country and the Mississippi River in particular. Although the U.S.A. has considerable experience with these catastrophes, leading political entities have but recently engaged into open debates related to the environment.

How nature is dealt with, seen, described, and defined varies greatly. In *Keywords*, 1985, Welsh critic Raymond Williams distinguishes between three areas of meaning regarding nature. The first one, he describes as “the essential quality and character *of* something,” the second one is defined as “the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both,” and the third one as “the material world itself, taken as including or not human beings.” Nature has been used to refer to a goddess, as in “mother nature,” to nature gods or spirits, mythical forces, the primitive condition before human society, an original innocence, the quality of birth, etc. Nature as the physical became widely contrasted with what was manufactured and with what the human made of him- or herself during the Enlightenment.

Today, the belief that humans as well as nature in the broadest sense are above all or originally good and innocent continues to persist in certain milieus. Nevertheless, a more recent perspective has emerged particularly among academics. Evolutionism and the concept of natural selection have led to the conceptualization of nature as an active process. This shift in the perception of nature made it possible for the contemporary discipline of ecology to emerge and opened new debates with a focus on the relationship between the human and the nonhuman and how to define both.

Philosophers influenced by a postmodern *Weltanschauung* argue that nature is but a mere artificial construction and that the separation between the human and the other needs to be further questioned. Ecocritic David Ingram refers to the idea of the death of nature as described by Frederic Jameson; while nature was still residual in Modernism, in postmodernism, it has all gone and got replaced by culture (140).

I do not share Jameson's position. Human presence may be felt virtually everywhere on the Earth's surface, but the dichotomy culture/nature, either referring to the physical presence of wilderness or not, is not that well defined as Jameson makes it seem. The presence of the human in a natural habitat, such as a tropical rainforest, does not imply that the human controls that habitat and turns it into artifacts of culture. Contemporary tribes often live in a process of symbiosis with nature; the human does not want or does not have the power to master or control its habitat. This is not to say that humans have a peaceful and harmonious life. Despite the cooperation between the human and the nonhuman, competition and violence are a constant process. Humans may need to hunt and they may need to cut down trees, as well as animals may attack humans who try to hunt down their newborns. Consequently, as passive and respectful the human may be, the romantic image the Western cultures created of the completely innocent primitive human is not realistic.

One delicate issue of debate, also common in feminist studies for example, is whether the human, and the white man in particular (because he has been in a position of power throughout history), is capable and has the moral conditions and authority to speak on behalf of the other, to play the ventriloquist, or not. Even when arguing for the protection or defense of a different species or gender, the person's voice is commonly a reflection of his or her position and not that of the other. If there is be a way to fully comprehend one's experience (through metaphysical processes, for example), it is not (yet) commonly accepted among the most referenced figures in the area of the Humanities. Whatever discourse one chooses to adopt, a complete unification with nature seems as impossible as a complete separation from it; the millennia of attempts to clarify and define the relationship the human and nature in general share has been fruitless (Lease *Apud*. Murray and Heumann 81).

Unless indicated otherwise, when using the concept of nature henceforth, I will be referring to the chaotic but ultimately self-regulatory, evolutionary process. Emphasis will therefore be put on the physicality of what exists or is able to exist without human manufacture. The human species itself, though, shall be included in the concept. Consequently, considering the social order and

system a human invention, it is not natural, although the necessity for it may be. As to the issue of ventriloquism, I believe I capture the nonhuman world within my conceptual domain, imposing my views on it, but there is no avoiding it, given that the nonhuman's voice is always subject to human interpretation. Therefore, I assume that my interpretation is a product of my own construction and understanding of reality.

The study of the relationships between the human, the animal, and the environment is called ecology (from the ancient Greek words *oikos*, the home, and *logos*, the study). It differs from biology in the sense that the focus is on the interactions, rather than on the animal or plant itself. Ecology also differs from environmentalism. Even though an overlapping of the concepts may seem unavoidable in certain circumstances, the terms ecology and environmentalism are no synonyms; in fact, environmentalism is not a discipline, but a political manifestation. Ecology distinguishes itself from the discipline of biology, for example, not only in the sense that its focus is upon the relationships between animals, humans, and the environment, affirming that all is related, but it also and consequently deals with the flow of energies, while questioning the sense of space. Ecology is commonly divided into three different areas of practice, namely field work, laboratory analysis, and theoretical development. Since I will be applying ecocriticism to *Wall-E*, some context about the historical development of this discourse is required. The concept of ecology has become popular to the point of being incorporated into several discourses, such as social ecology, shallow ecology, and deep ecology.

Waste and pollution are major topics of discussion among ecology specialists and they also make up a great part of the ecological content of *Wall-E*. The July 2010 issue of *National Geographic* reports that “some 11,500 objects larger than 4 inches are cataloged in low Earth orbit, shown here. Another 10,000 objects are smaller or in higher orbits.” ‘Kessler syndrome’ is the name given to this condition, in which objects in space keep colliding at high speed, breaking into smaller pieces, resulting in a chain reaction. The implications of such a situation vary between threatening astronauts who have to fly through those objects and obstructing the natural flow of solar energy and light. In *Wall-E*, the Kessler syndrome translates into an Earth mantle, a new layer in the atmosphere (“Clearing Space” 42).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In the specific case of the U.S., overconsumption of resources and toxic emissions are amongst the most problematic issues. The 2011 January issue of *National Geographic* states that “one way to approximate a nation’s consumption is to look at its gross domestic product.” The 2009 GDP of the U.S. was over \$40,000 per person, being the world average \$9,514, which means that the U.S. citizen consumed in average roughly four times more resources than the global average. The nation’s carbon emissions accompany that trend; the U.S. produces four times as much carbon emissions as the global average (“Population 7 Billion” 36-40). Yet, waste and pollution are not the only objects of study in ecology.

In 1973, philosopher Arne Naess coined the expression “deep ecology,” to describe a philosophical approach to ecological issues that allows for a dialogue with discourses such as ecofeminism, cybernetics, and ethics, to name but a few (95). Although “ecology” is above all a theory, Naess further considers the deep ecology’s political implications. Hence, it is distinct from environmentalism, as the former is a study or reflection with political and practical potential whereas the latter is foremost an anthropocentric social and somewhat impulsive movement. Brereton points out the fundamental ethical implications of deep ecology, previously considered by Naess, to include a sense of biospherical egalitarianism, which is the equal right of all creatures to live and blossom and the principle of diversity and symbiosis, referring to the richness of forms as ends in themselves both within human cultures and in the animal world (Brereton 28-9). The human species is seen as a part of the holistic system, not an independent organism. Writers such as Gary Snyder, D. H. Lawrence, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold are among the iconic figures inside the deep ecologists circle.

In turn, Greg Garrard understands the term “ecologism” to refer to a “complex cultural formation,” which “represents an ‘excess’ over conventional political categories,” thus describing what can be considered a middle state between deep ecology and environmentalism (184). Ecologism, commonly treated as or associated with deep ecology, cannot be labeled with a specific political orientation, nor is it a completely independent orientation in itself; it is rather a perspective that allows for an articulation with all other political “-isms.” I understand ecologism to be a more practical variant of deep ecology and a philosophical imperative/ideology or guiding line for politically engaged entities.

One recurrent topic of deep ecology writing is that of overpopulation. This is a sensitive issue since the value of the human species is at the core of the dilemma. While some may argue that the human species is the epitome of creation, others like Thomas Malthus, who realized as soon as the late eighteenth century that the human would come to require more resources than the planet could offer in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, and Paul Ehrlich, who published an influential study on overpopulation in 1968, explore the human’s leaning towards destruction. Similar publications followed, such as *The Global 2000 Report to the President* commissioned by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, and organizations fighting for new political orientations, such as the groups Zero Population Growth and Global 2000, who joined the skeptics. Even the movie industry has depicted Malthus’s prophecies: in *Soylent Green*, the theory that human population will grow so radically that food production cannot sustain such growth is taken to its limits,

showing the viewer how misery and pollution will dominate human life, so that the last nourishing resource will be the human itself. *Wall-E* is another example of a movie portraying the human species as its own destroyer, although the focus here lays on consumption as the cause for disaster.

Devall and Sessions emphasize technology as alienating the humans from nature, from other humans and from themselves (67). Technology also promotes values of destruction that are often responsible for the devastation of stable communities. Devall and Sessions argue that Kevin Robins, who describe the technological utopia as driven by the desire to mater nature, extraterrestrial life, and the human nature itself, are ultimately too radical in their reflections on society (162). Although the idea that a technological *Weltanschauung* leads to the total domination of nature and spontaneous natural processes has become widely accepted, this dystopia of an artificial future takes a different form in *Wall-E*. In this case, technology is not the problem *per se*. Human desire to consume led to the indispensability of technology in the form of robots. Although they are created by transforming natural resources, they are also able to help bring balance back to the Earth's ecosystem. Still, even though robots help to spread life, by the end of the movie the human continues controlling natural resources, though perhaps with more ecological awareness. Deep ecologist and poet Gary Snyder defends a similar reality, in *Four Changes*, where he appeals for a condition in which the human and the non-human can coexist harmoniously with the aid of discrete technology. Science, primitivism and spirituality are the key concepts in a dynamic social system in which people are aware of the importance of respecting and preserving the wilderness. Yet, such a scenario would be possible only through radical change in society.

Although I have already explored the issue while exposing nostalgia, it is relevant to mention consumerism and acquisition one more time as it is a popular subject among deep ecologists as well. People of the Western world work to satisfy not only their needs, but also and perhaps even more their desires. These desires take form in acquisitions which hardly grant long term satisfaction. Enterprises know the power of desire and take it to their advantage, usually through a department called marketing. Knowing people's desires leads to controlling them and creating new ones. It is important for the industry to create the illusion that the costumer is the most important being on Earth if the industry is to grow in terms of economy and power. This pattern nourishes anthropocentric attitudes and the expansion of buying. Thus, the members of consumer societies who live in urban and suburban environments tend to be victims of the capitalist circular



system and have difficulty escaping that condition. Even if an individual were to occupy rural land, the centrifugal force of technocratic metropolitan areas blurred the division between the rural and the urban to a point that total isolation is often an illusion. Still Gary Snyder acknowledged societies' obsession with luxuries and adds the excess of human population to this issue (1-2). The number of human beings should fall drastically to avoid further imbalance and a reconsideration of cultural values is also necessary. In short, although deep ecologists may diverge when discussing topics such as the role of technology, they seem consensual in fighting intensive industrialization and the idea of urban culture and consumerism.

A recurrent name in the circle of socialist ecology is Theodor Adorno. Writing about the importance of figures like Adorno in the field of socialist ecology, Laurence Coupe wrote that they insist that culture is a product of nature and that they appeal to "the idea of a repressed memory of nature in order to criticise modernity, characterized as it is by estrangement from both humanity's natural impulses and from natural scenes and seasons," thus repudiating the separatist tendency of Enlightenment between man and nature, and industrialism (63). Coupe draws attention to Adorno's description of nature as both a repressed memory and a radical promise mirrors the "no longer" and the "not yet" variations of nostalgia, thus confirming the intimate relationship between both concepts (63). I recall the previously explored writings by Freud, who described the human being's anxiety when dealing with the contrast between a disciplined environment and wild nature that led to the desire to go back to an innocent/primitive state, resulting in the cult of primitivism and all that is associable with it, nostalgia and the need of movement.

In the U.S., the defense of nature preservation is said to have begun with John Muir, who also fought against ruthless progressivism. He defended the state of wilderness and rejected the technocratic society of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This deep ecologist cannot be classified as an environmentalist, because this political movement was only to rise several decades after his death. But the awareness raised by people such as Muir led to action. Dam construction became a major topic of debate and several wildlife areas became national parks protected by law. Organizations were founded, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933, the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and Greenpeace in 1971. In 1973, the Endangered Species Act became one of the dozens of fragile laws passed throughout the 70s. At different times, diverse political authorities were drawn into this cause, from Theodore Roosevelt to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter, Al Gore, and Ralph Nader. This is not to say

that all of them protected nature. Those who defend that nature should be disturbed the least possible are categorized as preservationists, and those who recognize the relevance of nature mostly as a supplier of resources for human extraction and manipulation are the conservationists or utilitarians. Conservationists tend to be more successful in the political arena, as they propose and defend economically viable and fast solutions, which are often technological, and because they do not put the *status quo* at risk (Ingram 13). This distinction will be particularly relevant when exploring Franklin Roosevelt's Administration strategy.

A clear distinction of what and who is a conservationist or preservationist is not always possible. Scholar Theodore Roszak demonstrates how the old dichotomies of the Western world have been changing. The "bulwarks of the old Reality Principle," which is to say the traditional dualities culture/nature, spirit/flesh, reason/passion, objective/subjective, and human/nonhuman, among others, do not hold true anymore, for they have become entangled (Roszak 112). This blurriness of the traditional frontiers, the perception of their uncertainty, dynamics and constant changes are characteristics of the postmodern era. The breakdown of the old dichotomies has led to an outburst of the collective unconscious, as it is observable in popular culture (112). *Wall-E* is no exception; the relationship between the two robot protagonists is all but traditionally mechanical. Both express emotions, fall in love, and watch out for one another; all that would be expected from the human species.

Analyzing Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Coupe explores the enduring meaning of traditional dualities and how they articulate in terms of attributed values. The idea of culture, for example, is maintained to be superior to nature, while the same pattern goes for the relationship between reason and nature, male and female, mind and body (nature), master and slave, rationality and animality, reason and emotion, universal and particular, civilized and primitive, subject and object, production and reproduction, etc. (Coupe 119-20). But such descriptions do not seem to hold true in *Wall-E*, where the male and female heroes struggle to get together, rather than over sexual dominance. Nevertheless, the Earth bears a feminine connotation in the movie, considering, among other factors, its capacity to "give birth" and its role as the mother who lets its creation return to the "niche," while the male agent in the figure of the human, the captain, is the one who realizes that he has to take care of that mother, the planet, since it was him who exhausted her, that is, acknowledging his responsibility and the right to retribution on part of the Earth.

Not all deep ecologists rely on morality as the ultimately regulatory force. The de-greening cycle on planetary scale, for example, may be influenced by the moral attitudes of the human agent, but its occurrence is inevitable. Another theory which does not depend on morality is the Gaia hypothesis. According to ecocritic Pat Brereton, this thesis “affirms that the biosphere together with its atmospheric environment forms a single entity or natural system” (18). Furthermore, Gaia is regarded as a self-regulatory, holistic, and living system in which its members’ relations balance the Earth’s conditions. Consequently, it does not depend on environmentalism to regulate itself (unless, perhaps, a menace emerges that is more powerful than the regulatory force). It is also described as seeking progress through cooperation instead of competition and as being goal-oriented, but I do not agree with both these attributions, because Gaia is an entity in constant evolution; it is a process with no ultimate goal but existence itself and where evolution occurs under various conditions, be it cooperation or competition. This allows for a constant remodeling of hierarchies in flora and fauna, for instance. It is neither omniscient nor omnipotent as the name might imply (since it is a reference to a goddess of ancient Greece), but it evolves under chaos, which does not mean that it does not regulate itself eventually. For instance, in the movie *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), Gaia offers the necessary conditions for the dinosaurs to reproduce (a situation the humans tried to avoid), according to the motto “life finds a way,” so that evolution can occur. Chaos and conflict are concepts traditionally bound to the image of the masculine. In *Wall-E*, chaos and conflict do not occur among natural elements on Earth, but it does in space. Therefore, it holds that if the movie was to be regarded through the duality lens, the Earth would definitely be assigned to the feminine sphere.

No matter how the concept of ecology is adopted, be it in deep ecology, green anarchism, ecofeminism, etc., it is always understood as inclusive, subject to new articulations. To sum up, I argue for a *Weltanschauung* based on the Gaia hypothesis theory of a planet that is self-regulatory,<sup>23</sup> holistic, living, and whose members’ relations balance the Earth’s conditions. It is also to be seen as a process whose only intent is existence, in which evolution occurs through cooperation and competition, allowing for constant conflicts over hierarchical positions in flora and fauna. Ultimately, everything has a consequence and all energy has to flow somewhere. Constant evolution implies that perfection does not exist and, consequently, neither does imperfection. Considering the practical chaos inherent in the natural processes explained through

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<sup>23</sup> I would like to stress that I consider this notion of self-regulation an illusion, because the Earth is ultimately guided by superior or/and exterior forces, but, due to space constrictions, some simplicity is needed.

the chaos theory, nature is neither omniscient nor omnipotent in the sense that it does not offer a perfect, static, harmonious environment. It does, however, regulate the earthly chaos eventually as long as this planet lives. Once the damage is excessive, the planetary conditions will ultimately silence the human, unless it has learnt to escape this fate (as shown in *Wall-E*). The human species might even collapse by itself due to overpopulation. Culture as a process of differentiation, however, is not included in this natural system, as Adorno defended; it is a human and mental construction, nonexistent in nature, and does not exist but as a human artifact. Dichotomies are human created concepts, too. Since all is entangled and in motion, total separations do not occur. Also, even if absolute dichotomies were possible, the hierarchies that humans recognize in nature are but an interpretation and would not necessarily reflect the hierarchical conflicts of that reality.<sup>24</sup> The concept of the de-greening cycle includes this definition of the Earth's system and it is this system that is to be taken into consideration in this study.

#### **b) Environmentalism**

Along with the emergence of deep ecology, environmentalism started to gain social and political weight during the 1970s. What originated this social movement in the U.S. is subject to debate since various episodes and entities can be pointed out as having initiated environmentalism. Probably all factors, including the social and cultural environment of the time, contributed to its rise. The New Deal program is frequently associated with the emergence of environmentalism. The consequences of the Manhattan Project during and after the Second World War and the progress in genetic research can be seen as contributing factors, too. Rachel Carson's 1962 book, *Silent Spring* is also commonly credited as another trigger, as her study was the first to denounce how pesticides puts human and animal lives in danger. Others consider it to be Paul and Anne Ehrlich's 1968 *The Population Bomb*, which dealt with the danger of starvation in the following decades due to overpopulation. Space travel and pictures of the Earth from outside the planet's atmosphere are also often seen as the spark of environmentalism. Natural catastrophes and alarming studies have kept environmentalism alive and evolving.

Although Theodore Roosevelt was influenced by John Muir, it was Gifford Pinchot's conservationism he came to adopt. Roosevelt used his political power to promote the protection

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<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of this study, I will be contrasting a plant and its environment in *Wall-E*, which does not mean that the plant is the total opposite of its surrounding, that we face a dichotomy, but that it stands out as an intriguing element of the whole image.

of key areas: Yosemite National Park was the first public park in the world to be protected by law (Brereton 103). Roosevelt used legislation, but he also created entities (the Bureau of Forestry being one of them), donated specimens he had collected during his expeditions, signed natural environments into federal protection, etc. “Roosevelt believed that Nature existed to benefit mankind”<sup>25</sup> and it would be a distant family member who was later to defend this positions during the 1930s and 40s, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1933, under the aegis of the New Deal, in the midst of the Great Depression, the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was created, a group of young men, under Pinchot’s authority, making the land as profitable as possible, by extracting resources, for example, or turning it into recreational spaces. More than three million young men were to join until 1942. In a time marked by unemployment and economical crisis, F. D. Roosevelt’s program offered an escape from that reality. While controlling the natural environment, these men often aided those who depended on the environment, thus promoting the popularity of the new President and the welfare program among democrats, republicans, local and national institutions, poor and rich families, etc. The economic crisis was aggravated by the numerous ecological disasters of the time, such as floods, droughts, and the Dust Bowl, which were partly provoked by the disrespect for nature that had been going on for over a century, during which intensive resource explorations was constant in the name of progress. Neil Maher highlights one situation in particular that provoked the division between conservationists, such as Pinchot, and preservationists, such as the founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir, and the founder of the Wilderness Society, Bob Marshall: the construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley pleased those who wanted to provide water to San Francisco, the conservationists, but worried the preservationists, who put the preservation of wilderness above economic interests (Maher 4). A posterior debate regarding the building of the Echo Park dam in 1955 is often described as what nourished modern environmentalism, whose defenders worried about morality issues rather than economic ones (5). Fifty years after Muir’s death, preservationism became a legislative imperative, known as the Wilderness Act of 1964, it aimed at protecting wildlife areas. Despite the President’s efforts to include as many perspectives on environmental issues as possible, the CCC became too controversial, bureaucratic, and chaotic and it ceased to be funded in 1942. Additionally, the U.S. government was about to engage in the Second World War, so that attention and money went into the war effort. Meanwhile, the Tennessee Valley Authority, a regional agency responsible for the

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<sup>25</sup> <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tr-environment/>>.

protection and development of that region, was also created in 1933, but, unlike the CCC, it still exists. Several projects were designed during the New Deal and although few are active today, many results of those projects, such as the national parks and the dams, continue to shape U.S. territory and culture.

The Second World War and the Cold War showed that progress and technology can have devastating effects when used against a group of people and, thus, should be reconsidered. People learnt that those with great power had access to highly dangerous weapons and that physicists knew how to manipulate energies in order to wipe out entire cities. In addition, fear of otherness, of what is different and threatening needed to be overcome. Consequently, multiculturalism, cultural ethics, religious freedom, tolerance, etc. entered school books and ecology, the study of relationships, gained political force through the environmental movement in the Western world.

In the 1960s and 70s, environmentalism became a pressure group beyond its grassroots origins. In three decades, what had started as a response to and development of the New Deal policies became a movement on national scale. Recent events, among them the Second World War and NASA's space program, obliged people to rethink their position and behavior on the planet. The concept of holism, the idea of becoming as opposed to a definite being, the belief in resistance rather than attack, and the rejection of materialist thinking characterized the counterculture movements, such as the hippies, who were not only composed by environmentalists, but also by antiwar activists, anti-capitalist activists, etc. The environmentalists' awareness did not only enter the political arena, but also the silver screen. The movie industry in particular represented the fears of the environmentalists of the 70s through "prophets of doom" as tragic eco-heroes" (Murray and Heumann 92), characters who experienced the fear of ecological disasters in movies such as the already mentioned *Soylent Green*. Just like this movie, the 1968 book *The Population Bomb* dealt with the issue of overpopulation, which would eventually lead to disaster, thus further fostering fear. In 1970, Earth Day was brought forward by Senator Gaylord Nelson and its outcome was a nationwide demonstration. Only from the 90s onwards did the event take international proportions. Yet, environmentalism did not only transmit messages of fear and pessimism. The Woodstock concerts demonstrated that environmentalism brought people together to celebrate the movement. According to the documentary *Earth Days* (Robert Stone; 2009), the pressure the antiestablishment groups exerted over the government led to the elaboration of a list of

Congressmen who practiced hostile politics against the environment. Seven of them were eventually lost their positions.

The same year, a federal agency drew attention to ecology, which resulted in greater awareness of the human's position on the planet. NASA received support for its space program by Jacques-Yves Cousteau, who realized the ecological potential of the project. Viewing the Earth from the moon would provide a new perspective both of the Earth in particular and the ocean, thus contributing to ecological awareness and to the environmental movement. Consequently, even skeptics of technological progress eventually approved the space flights. The most popularized photograph became that of the "Blue Marble," taken in 1972.

In January 22 1970, President Richard Nixon brought up environmental issues in his State of the Union address. It was also under his Presidency that environmentalism resulted in a federal agency that is still active today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, charged with the protection of the environment and human health. Although the environmentalist movement had had its success, its power was not enough to make the government seize the opportunity of the Middle East conflict and consequent rise of the oil barrel value in the 1970s to switch the country's source of energy. Another problem environmentalism had to face was the opposition from energy enterprises and the workers who depended on environmental damaging activities. Such entities saw their economic income menaced and were forced to defend themselves against environmentalism. Nevertheless, the later maintained its political power and, by the end of the 1970s, the movement had another victory: President Jimmy Carter installed solar heaters on the roof of the White House. Carter was planning to get twenty percent of the nation's energy supply from renewable resources by the year 2000. However, according to *Earth Days*, President Ronald Reagan later reduced the budget on renewable energy research and even removed the White House panels. From Ralph Nader and Al Gore to Reagan and George W. Bush, all have responded to environmentalism diversely. Corrado Poli, author of *Mobility and Environment*, noted that "Al Gore, campaigning for Vice-Presidency, proposed a Marshall-like environmental plan to help the former Communist countries to develop a more efficient and cleaner economy." (18) Although political authorities often tried to establish connections with environmental groups and consult specialists, large scale governmental initiatives often go unfulfilled, such as Al Gore's program, and are polemic and controversial, or else insufficient.

In 1987, the environmental movement grew weak due to the Brundtland Report, prepared by the U.N. Brundtland Commission. The organization's purpose was to unite countries in a common

answer to environmental issues. The compromise satisfied environmentalists and industries at the time, but the solution was but an illusion, since the human's destructive force has not ceased and many natural catastrophes continue to be the result of human action. The organization promoted sustainable development as the attitude to be taken by the industry to avoid pollution as far as possible, without disavowing their profits (18). After all, the forces controlling national economies and influencing public opinion are those of the powerful big corporations. This attitude of greenwashing enterprises is fostered by conservationists and adepts of bright green environmentalism who see timid social actions and changes to be sufficient or who believe in the technocratic system as the answer.<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, sustainable development is a label that puts the consumer at ease, because he or she is led to believe that the products or services that are consumed respect nature. However, the global emergency for drastic behavioral change that many environmentalists and ecologists alert for goes ignored, as certain activist groups and some enterprises focus only on short term and small scale solutions.

In 1992, the U.N. Rio Conference, Earth Summit or UNCED brought together numerous entities on environmental topics. The members signed documents and agreements to protect the environment and the human species and the organization Green Cross International was founded as a result of the conference. Five years later, the U.N. gave continuity to the project by elaborating the Kyoto Protocol, which was signed by the majority of the world's countries. Although some U.S. states have embraced the compromise, it did not get federal approval and continues to be a subject of debate.<sup>27</sup> In 2012, the Rio Conference took place one more time under the name Rio + 20. The same year, the EcoSummit association organized a group of ecological scientists to reconsider sustainable development, thus giving continuity to the Brundtland Report. These are but a few examples of the events aimed at discussing the climate crisis.

As I have been demonstrating, not all politicians and people in general devoted to environmental issues are necessarily passionate activists. Alex Steffen describes how environmentalism can be categorized into three different shades of "greenness." Adepts of light green environmentalism defend personal responsibility towards nature and do not consider environmentalism a political imperative. Dark green environmentalists, or followers of

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<sup>26</sup> Greenwashing has become increasingly popular, especially among large scale corporations. Environmentalists often use the term "lite green" when referring to brands such as McDonald's, Nissan, Bridgestone, and Air France. These names argue for sustainable development by painting features of some products green, using recycled material, planting trees, etc., while emitting high amounts of carbon dioxide, consuming large quantities of natural resources, covering vast areas of soil with the companies' infrastructures, etc. Enterprises have developed techniques to mislead the public with images and colors typically associated with nature.

<sup>27</sup> <<http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/dossiers/changement-climatique/position-americaine.shtml>>.



ecologism, believe in political responsibility and rebel against industrialized capitalism and consumerism. They desire post-materialism, a state freed from materialistic value systems and they tend to be associated with deep ecology. Bright green environmentalists also see the political institutions as responsible for implementing environmentalism as a policy, but, contrary to dark green, they consider technology to be potentially useful in environmental matters.<sup>28</sup> According to these descriptions, *Wall-E* offers bright green environmentalism as the solution to the already dystopian scenario. In this study, I choose to refer to environmentalism as the social movement aimed at protecting human and nonhuman health. It is a popular movement which reflects but a slight connection with deep ecology and ecology in general and may, or may not, defend the progress of technology.<sup>29</sup>

The conferences, reports, data, theorizations, etc. tend to have but a moderate social appeal, whereas movies and documentaries dealing with ecological and environmental content often become relatively popular and manage to appeal to a wide audience. Records, statistics, and prognostics have been the tools of environmentalists off and on the screen to defend a cause. For example, the animal protection agency PETA released a documentary in 2002 named *Meet your Meat* (Bruce Friedrich; 2002), exposing footages of animal cruelty. In 2008, Robert Kenner released *Food, Inc.* (Robert Kenner; 2009), a documentary featuring entities such as politicians and farmers, which shows footage of abusive behavior both to employees and animals in corporate farming, while describing the damage to the environment and to health that these production patterns result in. In this movie, the topic of fast food is the most relevant when dealing with consumerism and resource consumption. As stated in *Food, Inc.*, business in the shape of monopolies and corporate farming is given as the problem and they are powerful enough to influence the government. Meanwhile, organic farming has become a viable source of economic income, thus attracting the capitalist system. These two documentaries promote awareness and offer environmentalists the rhetoric tools they need. But it was the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* that managed to fuse Al Gore's political authority with the ecological discourse for the big screen, extending considerably the debate on climate change. It is actually rare that ecofilms, such as this one, gain a popularity status comparable to that of environmental movies.

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<sup>28</sup> <<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/009499.html>>.

<sup>29</sup> While nature exists outside human manufacture practices, the concept of environment puts the human in the center of the surroundings. Environmentalism and ecological behavior or ecologism also differ. Again, the former concept puts the human at the center, whereas the latter defines the human inside of the holistic system.

### c) **Ecocriticism in the U.S.A.**

Ecocriticism is a discourse that emerged in the Humanities, more specifically as an alternative to traditional literary criticism, following the growing awareness of environmental issues. I will now focus on its emergence also because ecocriticism will help me clarify the distinction between the concepts ecofilm and environmental movie.

Ecocriticism, in a general sense, is the study of the relationship between cultural texts and nature, a definition that is not only applicable to literary ecocriticism, but also to its manifestations in other fields. Given the encompassing and vague definition of the term, there are no specific instructions on how to study a text ecocritically and what discipline holds the exclusive instruments to perform an ecocritical study, so that an approach done by an ecologist may vary considerably from that done by a film critic, whereby both are entitled to ecocriticize a work. Indeed, philosophy, psychology, and ecology are disciplines that may contribute to a substantial ecocritical reading. William Howarth adds to the definition of ecocriticism that it is the result of a tradition of combining literary with scientific writing, which includes the early formalists, the New Critics, structuralism and semiotics, structuralist critics of myth, and anthropology (165). The ecocritic recognizes the relationship between what is commonly considered a dichotomy: culture v. nature; he holds the role of a judge in the play between culture portrayed in literary works and its relationship to nature (163).

Several reading strategies have been developing in the discourse of ecocriticism and criticism in general; critics may choose to perform an analysis based on thematic explication or on symptomatic reading, for example. The former “explores meaning, which is covert or symbolic and is often artist-centered, intending to reveal an individual director’s underlying vision,” while the latter “looks for repressed (ideological) meaning in the text, such as gaps between its explicit moral framework compared with aspects of its style or semantic structure” (Brereton 36-37). For this study, I choose to apply a strategy which includes the two previously mentioned, while working with discourses related to criticism, such as audience theory.

Ecocritics are interested in the representations of nature, how it is dealt with and what values are associated with it, if it is just another word for wilderness or if wilderness is not even present in the work, how space or place is represented and what is its relationship with wilderness and the human species, how and if ecological issues are addressed, etc, both in popular and non-popular culture. Although the term as it is known today has its origins in the 70s, the Modern Language Association only attributed an official status to ecocriticism in 1988. Ecocritical approaches on

literary works had already been performed previously, but the label of ecocriticism was not yet in circulation. William Rueckert is often credited to have been the first to use the term, namely in a 1978 essay with the title *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's 1996 *The Ecocriticism Reader* and Lawrence Buell's 1995 *The Environmental Imagination* are commonly referenced as the two major works responsible for the popularity ecocriticism enjoys today. Although ecocriticism started off in the U.S., it did find its way through European literary criticism through Jonathan Bate, for example, who is commonly regarded as the British academic who drew attention to the ecological aspects of Romanticism (Coupe 13), and the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment.

Since the emergence of ecocriticism in the field of literary and cultural studies, it has spread to other areas of study, such as the arts, and the motion pictures in particular. David Ingram draws attention to the year 1990, when *The Hollywood Reporter* described a new movie genre as "film vert" (Ingram vii). It applied to movies which dealt with issues related to ecology, especially habitat depletion, which is not to say that all were documentaries. To distinguish movies which openly explore ecology from those in which ecological or environmental issues are explicit and central to the plot but not the focus itself, I make use of the terms Paula Willoquet-Maricondi describes in *Framing the World*: "ecocinema" and "environmentalist" films (43-45). The former is a label that describes movies, including documentaries, dealing directly with ecological or environmental issues. To the latter, I will be referring to as environmental movies, or films, etc., as they may be portraying issues related to the environmentalist movement, but, at the same time, they may not be following an environmentalist agenda. All artistic production can be read ecocritically, given that all either deal with ecological issues or not, so both the presence of those issues or the lack of them can be subjected to ecocritical analysis. Nevertheless, my position is that only those movies in which environmental or ecological matters are exposed are to be considered environmental movies. Considering the blurriness of this limitation, as it also happens with ecocinema, some debate over the (sub)genre categorization of a work may be unavoidable in some cases. I consider *Rango* (2011) as an example of a Hollywood environmental movie, whereby the "human" action makes up the plot and an ecological issue, water shortage, is the central element in the story. Ecocinema, by contrast, has "consciousness-raising and activist intentions, as well as [the] responsibility to heighten awareness about contemporary issues and practices affecting planetary health" (Willoquet-Maricondi 45). A film falling under the subgenre of ecocinema tends to adopt the rhetoric and visual patterns of the documentary genre. *Dirt! The*

*Movie* (Benenson and Rosow 2009) is an example of the ecocinema phenomenon, or simply ecomovie or ecofilms. In *Dirt! The Movie*, specialists discuss the importance of dirt to life, adopting the description oriented discourse typical of the discipline of ecology, while interviewing authorities on the issue at hand. In terms of focus, ecocinema is distinctively ecocentric and tends to adopt the narrative and imagery patterns of documentaries, while environmental movies are commonly anthropocentric and nature related issues appear merely as secondary to human action.

When dealing with anthropocentrism, discourses such as speciesism and posthumanism may be brought up in parallel. A species is commonly considered a group of beings that can interbreed. Speciesism is the attribution of different values to a given creature due to its species membership. Those who make use of the discourse of speciesism tend to use it to criticize anthropocentric attitudes towards other species. As a term, it is often applied in other discourses, such as feminism, in order to question the male/female contrast, for example. For this study, speciesism is a relevant tool specifically when contrasting the human and the anthropomorphic nonhuman. As it happens with speciesism, posthumanism may be associated with several discourses. I will apply the concept as a subgenre of science fiction, which deals with the state of the world once the human power or presence has weakened. Hans Moravec, a robotics scientist, uses different terms to describe a condition that can be labeled as posthumanism. He wrote:

Engaged for billions of years in a relentless, spiraling arms race with one another, our genes have finally outsmarted themselves (...) What awaits us is not oblivion but rather a future which, from our present vantage point, is best described by the words “postbiological” or even “supernatural”. It is a world in which the human race has been swept away by the tide of cultural change, usurped by its own artificial progeny (...) within the next century they [the machines] will mature into entities as complex as ourselves, and eventually into something transcending everything we know.<sup>30</sup>

As I will demonstrate later, this futuristic condition is portrayed in *Wall·E* to some extent.

Although the ecocritic’s object of analysis is the film *per se*, many studies include other elements, such as the production process and context, the merchandise, the director’s biography, and the audience’s reception. This approach may help to either unmask companies that use

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<sup>30</sup> <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-08-16-kruger-de.html#footNoteNUM3>>.

environmental movies or ecomovies to greenwash their label or to praise those who invest a considerable amount of energy or/and money in protecting nature.

As I mentioned previously, ecocritics often fail in their attempt to be noticed and valued. The Pixar production *Finding Nemo* had an outcome that may not have been expected by the studio and to which ecocritics might have drawn attention to before it was too late. Fish trade intensified and some tried to save their “Nemos” by releasing them into the wrong ocean. The warnings made by ecocritics such as Bruckner in “*Bambi and Finding Nemo*” should have been provided and perceived before the movie’s release. In cases like this, the ecocritic should not only be seen as a judge, but also as a consultant, roles that would require the ecocritic to be involved at the beginning of the production process as a consultant, during the production as an adviser, and after the movie’s release as a critic.

The rising popularity of environmental movies and ecomovies translates into movie festivals specifically dedicated to nature oriented films. In Brazil, Festival Internacional de Cinema e Video Ambiental (FICA) and Festcine Amazônia, for example, take place annually, as do the Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital in the U.S., and the American Conservation Film Festival, also in the U.S., among others.

Ecocritical publications are released in various formats, from paperback books to online journals and their popularity does not seem to decline. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment lists sixty ecocritical and environmental journals written in English.<sup>31</sup> The popularity of literary works on ecocriticism and ecocritical works is reflected in the high number of publications. Alone in August 2012, at least four books were published in English, namely *Ecopoetics*, *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, *Feminist Ecocriticism*, and *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism*.<sup>32</sup>

Even though ecocritical analysis has become a popular instrument among literary and film studies scholars, it may also be applied to videogames, advertisements, music videos, newspaper articles, events, etc. Some critics, like Greg Garrard, have already shown interest for alternatives to be taken as he linked ecocriticism to the Google Earth phenomenon, in his 2011 book

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<sup>31</sup> <<http://www.asle.org/site/papers/manuscripts/journals/>>.

<sup>32</sup> Knickerbricker, Scott. *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012)

Nichols, Ashton. *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Rust, Stephen, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

Vakoch, Douglas A. ed. *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012)

*Ecocriticism*. The games “Mass Effect 3,” “Civilization IV,” and even any “Pokémon” version, for example, may also offer substantial topics or matter for the ecocritic to explore. So do the music videos made for Michael Jackson’s “Earth Song” or the Live Earth event, to mention a few.

#### **d) Hollywood and Ecology**

Environmental movies and ecomovies have become particularly popular objects of study among ecocritics. For the purpose of my analysis, I am interested in the dynamics this ‘new art’ establishes with the viewer. When watching a movie, the viewer is not a passive figure; against Frankfurt School interpretations that reduce film to a manipulative exercise, theorists like the one highlighted by Brereton, namely John Fiske, argue that films and other texts must offer the viewer expected contradictions he or she is able to relate to (Brereton 35-36). In the case of *Wall-E*, the relationship between the viewer and the movie seems nonexistent at first. However, as the relationship is established between the captain and a musical from the past, the identification process becomes easier, while the dynamics in the movie are intensified. Thus, the Pixar team proposes a position that shares the Frankfurt School’s awareness of social decay and Fiske’s emphasis on the relationship between the viewer (and in this case, listener) and the movie.

Citing the words of critic and theorist Fredric Jameson, Brereton shows that any ideological work of mass culture is simultaneously utopian. In order for manipulation to occur, the public needs some genuine a fantasy bribe (Brereton 23). Hence, the viewer is also a consumer of ideology who is constantly negotiating the power balance of the relation. If the ideological power in/of the motion picture is effective and the consumer assumes his role in this power relation, he/she becomes a subject. Louis Althusser called this process “interpellation.” Though the consumer may have become the subject, power negotiations persist and as long as they do, the power balance may shift.

The power relation that occurs between the consumer and the motion picture (industry) is therefore not limited to a one-on-one interplay; power negotiations also occur between the motion picture and social groups. As the industry’s ideological power is projected onto the screen throughout the U.S.A., the Hollywood entities and movies start interfering with the hegemonic power, that of political institutions. Despite the criticism Hollywood had to endure, especially at its beginning, the filmmakers became the new mythmakers and holders of cultural power. The profit the film industry extracts from these situations does not merely translate into power, but

also into economic gain. The same result is obtained when exhibiting movies portraying contemporary cultural trends.

To determine the exact impact the industry had/has on society is impossible. Bruckner explains vaguely to what degree nature oriented movies in specific manage to exercise cultural power. She wrote that in “this cultural moment [. . .] children are less likely to receive knowledge about the nonhuman world from an interested adult than from the media and popular culture, especially animated films” (187).

Environmental education is not only a matter of nature protection, but also of human wellbeing. Movies such as *Garbage Warrior* (Oliver Hodge; 2007) and *Food, Inc.* expose the battle between governmental and private institutions and people whose health and happiness is at risk because of those entities’ nature or landscape and animal related policies and acts. Such a scenario is considered a struggle for environmental justice.

In *Garbage Warrior*, the viewer is shown the difficulties a group of environmentalists faces when they try to build ecologically sound homes in a deserted area. In this case, the enemies are the U.S. law system and politicians. Republican Senator Leonard Lee Rawson is shown in this documentary to state that “you cannot prove global warming as a fact; good science cannot prove global warming. It’s a myth.” The other example, *Food, Inc.* exposes how large companies process and sell food and the consequences of their practices.

I consider movies that follow a documentary-like structure and focus on environmental justice, such as the two previously mentioned, as marginal ecomovies, because they are, first of all, anthropocentric. Despite the popularity of such movies, many Hollywood studios prefer to promote environmental movies. The latter tend to be economically more rewarding and draw more attention from critics and the public.

Westerns are among the most ancient and popular genres that portray issues related to the nonhuman world. The preoccupation with nature has spread to all possible genres and, as environmentalism and ecology gained mainstream popularity, the subgenres environmental movies and ecofilms started gaining visibility as well. Meanwhile, the disaster film has become one of the subgenres that most often connects with environmental films; *The Day after Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich; 2004) is one example. This movie is also an example of how the Hollywood industry promotes environmental education as an emergency. The need for environmental education was no Hollywood epiphany, since already in 1987 there had been an international conference on environmental education in Moscow. Hollywood is however sometimes accused of

over-simplifying the issues at hand (Ingram 1), as can be observed in the movie *FernGully* (1992). The guilty villain is at times well defined and obvious and the solution to the problem is ever so often easy to point out and to put into practice that the plot can not but unfold into the traditional happy ending. The character of the hero in turn did not change much since the beginnings of environmental movies. Commonly, Hollywood depicts the ecohero as an outsider who may become a hero by accident, as in *Wall·E*. His/her role often reflects openly the search of the human place inside the holistic system. However, this ‘recipe’ is not particularly popular as more complex plots, including in the animation genre, tend to attract more attention. In these complex movies, the villain is often the human species itself and the problem is too far reaching to be easily solved, thus offering the consumer an open and often tragic ending.

The genre science fiction does not commonly confront or contrast the human species with the otherness in the form of nature as wilderness, but rather with the artificial human or alien otherness. Sci-fi evolved by partially drawing on the Cold War fears of human devastation, conspiracy, atomic energy, invasion, toxic waste, mutations, etc. At times, the human is shown to feel the need to protect itself against the menaces of otherness. In other instances, both entities become allies in the pursuit of a common goal: “These filmic agents question the ecological status quo and often affirm the need for a more radical assertion of the post-human consciousness, especially through their relationship with their environment” wrote Brereton (31). Rethinking the relationship between the human and the nonhuman not only paves the way for a new dialogue between the humans and other species, but also for new relationships between humans and nonhuman forms of life in any shape and color, including plants, wildlife, and aliens. Occasionally, the confrontation with the otherness that is depicted in these movies is also a confrontation between the male and the female, as seen in *Wall·E*. Ecofeminists can feed on these cultural texts to elaborate on their own cause and produce their cultural texts on ecofeminism to further contribute to the debate. The postmodernist figure of the cyborg in particular offers matter for debate on the post-gender politics of ecological consciousness as this creature has a fractured identity (186). Donna Haraway did this in her 1985 *A Cyborg Manifesto*, in which she argues for the breakdown of the old male imposed values and social system. Cyborgs do not need a stable and essentialist identity and neither do humans, since all categorization is but a social construction. Through the illustration of these other beings and the various alternative realities and futures it puts forth, the science fiction genre works against the idea of absolute truths.



Ecomovies do not build on a complex plot to pass on ecological preoccupations. Instead, they focus on persuasive rhetorical discourse. One classic ecomovie that relies on Aristotle's classical modes of persuasion (proof, authority, and *pathos*) is *The River* (Pare Lorentz; 1938). With the help of government funding, Pare Lorentz created the 1938 documentary as a propaganda film in favor of F. D. Roosevelt's dam projects. It promotes the Tennessee Valley Authority as the solution for the people who lived from agriculture and who saw their labor repeatedly destroyed by the Mississippi river's destructive force (Murray and Heumann 38-39). The movie portrays technology and progress as the instruments against natural disasters, thus promoting conservationism while ignoring the option of letting nature develop freely, which would be the preservationist's attitude. Whereas some nature documentaries make little use of the rhetoric power in their use of description, others, such as the already mentioned *An Inconvenient Truth*, contain political agendas and, consequently, rely more on Aristotle's modes of persuasion. The collective ecomemory and nostalgia that is established is favorable to create an emotional bond between the consumer and the rhetorician.<sup>33</sup>

Hollywood's commitment to the representation or treatment of the nonhuman in movies has been well received by audiences. What often goes unseen is the studios' (lack of) commitment with the nonhuman outside of the big screen. One step towards damage control of the filmmaking processes was taken in 1989, when the non-profit organization Environmental Media Association was founded with the aim of encouraging and supporting environmental education in the entertainment industry (Ingram 20-1).

*Hooper* (Hal Needham; 1978) is among the movies whose filmmakers allow themselves to portray the ecological consequences of movie production. The filmmakers of other movies, such as *The Matrix Reloaded* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski; 2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski; 2003), try to compensate the destruction they caused by planting trees or recycling the sets, asserted Murray and Heumann analyzing the data provided by other critics (2-3). The Al Gore production crew, for example, teamed up with *NativeEnergy*, an energy providing company focused on renewable energy sources (Murray and Heumann 179).

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<sup>33</sup> Nowadays, the role of encouraging ecologically sound behavior is not restricted to studios, filmmakers and specific organizations, as popular figures have used their cultural power to do the same. For Earth Day 2011, Fox assembled the stars of its television series, including Joshua Jackson from *Fringe* and Omar Epps from *House*, to tell the viewers what measures they could take to reduce human damage on nature.

### 3. *WALL·E* AND THE DE-GREENING CYCLE

#### a) Nature and Animated Hollywood Movies

When applied to fully animated feature films,<sup>34</sup> computer and hand-drawn animation in particular, the ecocritic's attention is less on the production process than on textual analysis, historical context description, and reception theory. Whereas live action features often produce a considerable amount of pollution and waste, animated movies do not harm the environment to the same extent. While a live action explosion of a vehicle or house may cause air and noise pollution, and requires a large quantity of energy, explosions in animated movies are produced in the computer, requiring solely energy and perhaps some paper to illustrate the scene in advance. Furthermore, although sculpting artists and painters are often employed to create certain scenarios or figures for animated movies, the chosen structures are usually small scaled and small in quantity. Live action movies, on the other hand, are often filmed on large scale sets built specifically for that one movie. My study of *Wall·E* will concentrate on textual analysis, taking in particular consideration the eco-ethical elements, in liaison with cultural and philosophical issues, but also on reception theory and historical context.

Animated movies which can further be classified as environmental movies have become a trend in Hollywood. Between 2005 and 2012, movies under such classification achieved high popularity and generally positive criticism; examples are *Happy Feet* (2006) with a 6.6/10 evaluation, *The Simpsons Movie* (2007) with 7.5/10, *Rango*, scoring 7.4/10, and *The Lorax* (2012) with 6.5/10, according to IMDb users. It is true that movies such as *Happy Feet* and *Rango* do not put the human *per se* as the story's protagonist, but since the animals are highly anthropomorphic and the ecological issues are mere backdrops of human action, I take such movies as environmental. Even short animated pictures with an environmental orientation, such as *The Incident at Tower 37* (2009) get noticed on the IMDb platform (with a user rating of 6.3/10).<sup>35</sup>

In order to further demonstrate that environmental movies have not only become popular, but that they are by now one of the leading subgenres on the big screen, I recall the extraordinary box office success and critically acclaimed movie *Avatar* (IMDb critics attribute a score of 83/100).<sup>36</sup> *Avatar* is, like *Wall·E*, the result of the fusion of animation and live action. By contrast, the

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<sup>34</sup> When referring to animated movies, I will always be describing movies which are exclusively or almost exclusively animated, unless indicated otherwise. Although *Wall·E* is composed by occasional live action footages, the movie is almost entirely animated.

<sup>35</sup> <<http://www.imdb.com/>>.

<sup>36</sup> <<http://www.imdb.com/>>.

classification of *Wall·E* as an animated movie is less troublesome, considering that the live action elements occupy less projection time than those in *Avatar*. Some of the environmental themes found in both these blockbusters cross one another; for example, both portray the human's necessity to conquer and exploit, both elaborate on resource depletion, on space exploration, and on the lost paradise fantasy. Some production techniques are also common; for instance, both movies feed on the science fiction tradition of confronting the human with the other, be it the inhabitants of a foreign planet or the emotional robot, and of creating utopian and dystopian worlds. Furthermore, these motion pictures make use of computer animation alongside with live action to create different realities. In *Avatar*, this distinction helps to contrast the human with the alien world; in *Wall·E*, it emphasizes the passing of time, rather than space. I stress that computer animation distinguishes itself from traditional animation, because, among other reasons, it offers a sense of tridimensionality, which allows for an approximation towards live action that hand-drawn animation does not attain. Since I consider the topics of time and space to be relevant for this study, I will return to them later on. Although both movies would provide valuable examples of the de-greening cycle, *Avatar* only goes as far as to show the attempt to explore and exploit, whereas *Wall·E* portrays all three steps, exploration, exploitation, and recolonization. In order to fully engage in the motion picture *Wall·E*, I find it helpful to offer a brief description of the evolution of the Disney and Pixar studios.

### **b) Disney and Nature**

In 1923, two young brothers by the names of Walt and Roy Disney established Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in Los Angeles. After Walt's death in 1966, Roy took on the responsibilities until his death in 1971.

White paper offered the Disney team endless possibilities to create fantasy motion pictures and Walt took this advantage to empower what is one of the economically most successful companies today. The Disney team kept developing new techniques and features for their productions. According to film critic Robert Sklar, some of the factors for this success were the input of music and sound features, as well as the use of the multiplane camera, allowing for tridimensional effects (199), which, nevertheless, were far from nowadays Pixar quality. Progress did not only take place at the technological level, but the company also switched from the early Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies films, which were, above all, fantasy worlds, often grotesque, to idealized worlds, glorifying, for example, beautiful and domestic girls and brave

young men. This transition can be exemplified with *Three Little Pigs* (1933) and its moralistic implications. Sklar compares Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* to the Disney productions. He argues that although people might be tempted to believe that modern life is more sophisticated than "savage" life, both are different and "savage" people may even lead more complex lives than those in the modern world. The same argument is to be considered when comparing the fantasy to idealized Disney movies (Sklar 199).

The Disney company grew at a fast pace out of its initial small status and much of the credit is given to Walt's charisma. A clear-cut distinction between the company and the man may even be difficult at times. All this success was reflected in the name's cultural power. Sklar wrote that "no Hollywood filmmakers of the 1930s were more consistent or coherent in their efforts at cultural mythmaking than [. . .] Walt Disney, and the director [. . .] Frank Capra." (197) Despite Disney's power, his movies were subjected to occasional censorship. The lifeline of The Walt Disney Company and of Walt was not only marked by its economic and cultural success, but also by its failures, polemics and controversies.

The company's motion pictures range from the classic Mickey Mouse series and the 90s feature films to digital Pixar animations. Under the specific Disney label, products and advertisements are projected to appeal to a family focused market (Wasko 185). Consequently, although the name is frequently associated with children entertainment, the company also manages to attract an adult audience. All of the Disney industry's production, be it under the Disney label or not, obeys to strict policies and targets a specific type of consumer, depending on the company's intention. Walt himself provided a definition of what Disney is: "Disney is a thing, an image in the public mind. [. . .] They know what Disney is when they hear about our films or go to Disneyland. They know they're gonna get a certain quality, a certain kind of entertainment. And that's what Disney is." (*Apud.* Wasko 221). It is this almost universal presence that is frequently criticized. "Over-commercialization" of the so-called New Disney (the idealizing Disney) has made it possible for the company to penetrate many people's lives, whether they want it or not, be it through motion picture entertainment, sport events, or merchandizing, among other aspects of commercial mass culture (Wasko 224).

Critic Janet Wasko writes that Walt and the company represent what "America" represents, namely business, progress, individual initiative, love for fun, innocence, optimism, sense of fair play and of what is right, ingenuity and cleverness, but also conservatism, homophobia, Manifest Destiny beliefs, ethnocentricity, cultural insensitivity, superficiality, lack of culture, etc. (224)

Recently, however, Disney has been working on some of these accusations. The movie *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), for example, portrays a strong African-American feminine protagonist and her male sexy counterpart in a world where Jazz music and lifestyle, one of the major cultural cornerstones in the U.S., is constantly being evoked. This is not to say that Disney has gone through an epiphany, but that it answers to criticism and the consumer's demands.<sup>37</sup>

Disney has also been criticized for the exploitation of its manufacturers and for its invasion of both foreign geographical and cultural territory and national economical and cultural territory. The French government, for example, offered the company special conditions for the construction of its theme park, thus proving the name's political influence and cultural power (Wasko 99-101). Disney has also been occupying territory in real estate, entertainment and leisure, performing arts, television, in the merchandise industry, and in sports, to exemplify just a few areas.<sup>38</sup> Considering the implications and responsibilities associated with it, I do not believe that a clear limitation of what a Disney product is can be drawn. Instead, I choose to select only those motion pictures that are clearly marked by the Disney logo at the introduction as Disney movies.

According to the documentary *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Chyung Sun; 2001), despite all economical initiatives and power, the image Disney movies create is one of innocence and nostalgia or, as Henry Giroux puts it, "Disney has made a spectacle of innocence." By evoking certain textual elements, either in the form of images or not, the company is able to appeal to its audience's nostalgia, promoting not only a sense of global imagination and memory that obey to the same patterns, but also global nostalgia. So, a child in Germany who has seen the same Disney movies as a child in the U.S. will share similar memorized texts, concepts, ideologies, etc. Arjun Appadurai recognizes that we live in globally imagined worlds rather than local imagined communities. One of the elements that compose the social imaginary, namely what he calls the "mediascapes,"<sup>39</sup> sets of images, such as advertising posters, which can impact on the physical landscape and manipulate a person's perception of reality is partly responsible for the phenomenon I have already mentioned, which is "Ersatz Nostalgia." According to this concept,

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<sup>37</sup> This movie also shows that some stereotypes in the Disney motion pictures do not hold true anymore. For example, while most movies did not contain explicit sexual references, this story's main male figure is remarkably sexy and impulsive; also, whereas classic Disney feature films rarely depict working women, the female protagonist of this film is a hard working, apparently asexual, single African-American girl from New Orleans. In contrast, in *Aladdin* (1992) the main characters, for example, do not work and although Aladdin is attracted to Jasmin, sexual references do not go beyond courtship through material exhibition and the hero-saves-damsel-in-distress routine. Still, trademarks like the happy ending resulting from the establishment of harmony and balance and the obvious villain figure are maintained even in *The Princess and the Frog*.

<sup>38</sup> The "brand" owns the Celebration estate, hotels, resorts, cruise lines, Radio Disney, Buena Vista International, Imagineering, the Mighty Ducks, ESPN, ABC, etc., making information control a possibility (Wasko 59-61).

<sup>39</sup> <<http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-appadurai/>>.

an image may invoke a nostalgic memory of loss without the viewer having ever lived it. The Disney company, and Pixar in particular, uses *Ersatz Nostalgia* in several motion pictures, offering the consumer a set of images he or she believes to be able to relate to, while assuring that another later visualization of that motion picture will awake nostalgia for what the product represents, which is the lost childhood, the past. The film industry, and Pixar in particular, learned how to take advantage of collective nostalgia, offering a place of comfort and stability in the midst of postmodern relativism and dynamics. Animation in general has as its primary target audience youngsters, thus creating a link that adults recognize, particularly in the Western cultures. Consequently, adults often consider animations as children entertainment, relating it to childhood, thus to nostalgia. In short, Disney is able to represent childhood through *Ersatz Nostalgia*, appealing to potential consumers of all possible ages and cultures. Nostalgia can be thus primarily created by the nostalgic person, but it can also be infused by an outside entity. Although the recovery of the past, this agony that Jankélévitch recognizes as the nostalgic feeling itself, may be impossible, the preservation of a symbol is possible; in the case of mass entertainment, this symbol often comes in the form of a DVD. It is, after all, a fast and direct way to experience pleasure as the momentary achievement of that lost past.

Besides the animated motion pictures, Disney also produced documentaries, thus promoting the idea of the company as an educational institution (Wasko 145-6). Although the company already produced a series of nature films under the label True-Life Adventures, it was only in 2008 that Disney founded Disneynature, a division responsible for the production of nature documentaries. The company started working on these profitable nature documentaries during the 40s and they've been awarded various prizes, including Academy Awards. Despite the educational potential and the environmental relevance of these pictures, Walt Disney considered himself merely an entertainer (146-9). Often, the animals, for example, were highly anthropomorphized and the stories promoted moral values. These pictures are edited and they are dramatized through the background music and the narrator's text; the interaction between the various organisms is described according to human concepts and values; animals are given names, they are attributed the roles of heroes and villains that follow a plot, they obey to human clichés, and they are patronized as if they were pets (148-9). Wasko, citing Margaret King, argues that Disney films in general have a greater cultural impact than the Sierra Club or *Silent Spring* did (151), which shows that children may easily be influenced by the *Weltanschauung* presented

in these movies and that this influence may guide a culture's behavioral patterns, including the eco-ethic principles.

The Disney corporation further insists on its "greenness" by dedicating some of the company's internet space to nature and the environment. On <[www.thewaltdisneycompany.com](http://www.thewaltdisneycompany.com)>, for example, Disney offers detailed descriptions of the ecological projects it is involved in. According to the company, it is not only a matter of practicing sustainable attitudes inside the Disney corporation, but it is also their goal to "inform, empower and activate employees, business partners and consumers to take positive action for the environment."<sup>40</sup>

In 1987, former Disney CEO Michael Eisner committed the company to a project outside of the Disney universe. Together with other Hollywood names, Eisner participated in the promotion of the Environmental Media Association. Disney has also teamed up with Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures Society, effectively taking action in reef protection. Conversely, the company also maintains "strong ties to other less environmentally minded multinational corporations: AT&T, General Motors, General Electric, Kraft Food, Kodak, and United Technologies" (Bruckner 195-6).

Another controversial topic when describing the relationship between Disney and nature is the company's theme parks. Although the 1994 Disney America theme park construction was eventually cancelled due to environmentalists' protest, another theme park did become a reality in 1998, when Disney's Animal Kingdom opened to the public. This animal-themed park represents yet another large scale commitment to nature, while being also a source of income for the company.

Due to the success and popularity of Disney's motion pictures and television programs, consumers witness the company's commitment (or lack of it) towards eco-ethics presented in movies such as *Bambi* (1942), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Pocahontas* (1995) and how this code of ethics plays with the company's image and business philosophies.

Although the 1942 motion picture *Bambi* is credited as an early example of an environmental movie, this status did not grant it ecocritical immunity. Ecocritic Lynne Bruckner eulogizes the movie in that it "succeeds ecologically [. . .] in the centrality it assigns to nature and the nonhuman world," but it must also be pointed out that it portrays the patriarchal hierarchy and values typical in Western human societies (190). In this environment, all animals seem to exist in

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<sup>40</sup> <<http://corporate.disney.go.com/citizenship2010/environment/overview/educationandaction/>>.

harmony until the humans start destroying their habitat, thus creating a perhaps oversimplified contrast between aggressor and victim.

Even though *The Lion King* also depicts a male oriented reality, the figure of the human agent is left out. Still, as it also happens in *Bambi*, the animals are anthropomorphized both physically and in terms of behavior and values. *The Lion King* can be seen as an example of how the company philosophies are transferred onto the wide screen, in this case, the reinforcement of an ecological hierarchy, which evinces conservative values typical of the Disney company until the acquisition of Pixar.<sup>41</sup> The idea of a cycle is not only the subject of one of the teachings of Simba's father, Mufasa, but it also applies to the plot of this film and that of *Bambi*'s; the movies start with the birth of the monarch's son as the sun rises and, by the end of the film, the son takes the place of the dead father in the hierarchy, reestablishing order and harmony among the animals.

*Pocahontas*, in turn, offers a different perspective on power relations. Indeed, all settlers are male and the Native-Americans follow an authoritarian masculine leader, but this masculine presence and power is whom the feminine protagonist fights against, ultimately with success. Besides the feminist implications of the movie, the ecological content is substantial, as well, since the film bears witness to the Plain Indians' sacred hoop philosophy, "a holistic conception based on holism of life as an endless dynamic unity within which all things are connected" (Ingram 51), thus calling to mind a theory that obeys to a similar characterization, the Gaia hypothesis. However, it does not go without flaws: ecocritics, such as Ingram, criticize the homogenization of the Native-American tribes and the false habits portrayed by the movie, noting as well that it serves as a "greenwashing alibi" for Disney when "placed within the context of the poor wages paid to workers in Haiti employed to sew Pocahontas pyjamas" (53).

### c) Pixar and Nature

An update to the Disney image was officially provided in 2006, with the acquisition of Pixar. It was originally founded as The Graphics Group under the Computer Division of Lucasfilm in

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<sup>41</sup> Simba, the young prince, tries to negate his place in the social hierarchy, but due to the circumstances this attitude provoked, he abandons the state of anarchy and finds his way back into the monarchy. Unless that order had been restored, peace would not have come to the reign dominated by tyranny during the absence of the rightful king. While the movie represents a patriarchal hierarchy, it also describes the circle of life, which constitutes an example of a specific de-greening cycle, through the voice of the protagonist's father. According to Mufasa, everything is connected in the food chain. This cycle further helps legitimizing consumption in a controlled environment. Consequently, it is to be assumed that consumption is a natural process and that everybody has a role to play in this process, including the company who sells the goods to be consumed, Disney (Ingram 24).



1979. Seven years later, Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple, was to buy the division and name it Pixar Animation Studios, thus establishing a relationship between both entities, which will be recognizable and relevant when analyzing *Wall·E*. The computer animation company's first short motion picture under the new name was *Luxo Jr* (1986), directed by John Lasseter, the chief creative officer at Pixar and the Walt Disney Animation Studios. This production was the first computer-generated imagery (CGI) film nominated for an Academy Award, opening the way for CGI feature films to 'invade' the film industry. CGI animation had already been introduced in live action and hand-drawn animated movies, such as *Jurassic Park* and *The Lion King*, but only in 1995 did the first fully CGI feature film enter the cinemas under the title *Toy Story* (1995), again a Pixar production.

The purchase of Pixar opened up new options for Disney; for instance, it became possible for the studio to offer the consumer the illusion of 3D without the need of special equipment, such as 3D glasses. Disney eventually went on to produce its own digital animations, such as *Chicken Little* (2005) and *Bolt* (2008). This new cinematic reality offered new possibilities, but it also brought about new challenges. It was important for Pixar, particularly at its beginning, that the viewers did not expect from CGI what they had become accustomed to with live action and hand-drawn motion pictures. On Facebook, Pixar posted, "more important than realism is believability" (09 January 2012) and Lasseter further stated that the goal at Pixar was "to make something believable in a make-believe, fantasy way" (*Apud*. Bruckner 197). For the production of *Finding Nemo*, Lasseter encouraged the team working on the movie to get certified in scuba, in order to get directly in touch with the reef (*Apud*. Bruckner 196).<sup>42</sup>

Another fundamental difference between hand-drawn and live action productions and CGI is the space they have at their disposal. Computer animation artists have a digital space that is infinite and they are free to manipulate that space however they wish to without major responsibilities towards ecology, unlike the other hand-drawing and live action. *Wall·E* was created in that digital space and the movie itself keeps evoking images of the universe, the endless space itself, and of planet Earth, yet another major endless surface, offering the viewer multiple layers of endless spaces.

Spaces and worlds often contrast and clash in Pixar movies. Pixar shows that it is aware of its representational potential during the opening seconds of *Toy Story*, for instance, which suggests

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<sup>42</sup> *Toy Story* is an example of Pixar's production techniques and artistic and representational preferences. By investing in the plastic visual, the company was able to keep a distance between the protagonists – toys – and humans. When representations get too close to Pixar's stylized realism is described among the studio members themselves as "hyper-reality" (*Apud*. Bruckner 197).

there are alternative realities created within one representational alternative, a self awareness that is reinforced in *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), where two worlds coexist and where each door a monster enters leads to another space of the other world.

The happy ending feature is common in Pixar movies and traditional in Disney productions as well. However, Pixar distinguishes itself from Disney not only through the representational and production techniques they use, but also through the movies' moralistic content. Whereas animated movies exclusively signed by the Disney studios tend to offer the viewer a setting dominated by interchanging romantic and joyous atmospheres, a man and a woman who fall in love and have to fight all odds in order to establish a romantic relationship, a possessive and dominant villain that is well defined as such from the beginning, and morals that favor the company's capitalist interests.<sup>43</sup> Pixar movies follow different orientations. In general, the setting does have its romantic elements, but they are rather secondary. The protagonists are mostly nonhumans whose primary concerns are not related to heterosexual love and their counterparts are less obvious and intimidating. The moralistic values Pixar transmits do not appeal to consumerism as openly as many Disney productions do. In *Cars* (2006), as well as in *Toy Story 3* (2010), and *Wall-E*, Pixar shows that new shiny things are not necessarily better than old things and that old toys and machines should be taken care of and cherished. So, the image that is created around Pixar is not one relating to consumerism, but one that evokes ideas of durability and quality.<sup>44</sup>

Whether products commercialized by corporations are to be considered art or not, is a matter of discussion. With *Wall-E*, Pixar searches to establish its creation as a form of art, digital art. As the credits pass along the screen, episodes of human evolution are shown in the background. Although these episodes are computer originated, they are introduced as if they had been created as cave paintings, Ancient Egyptian paintings, Impressionist paintings, etc., ending with motion images digital animation. Although digital animation is among other artistic canons, it is distinguished by its fluid motion feature and by the relatively extensive time during which it is presented.

Another relevant difference between most of Disney feature length animations and Pixar animations is their reference in time. While Disney is mostly retrospective, particularly in their

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<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, *Cinderella* (1950), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *Hercules* (1997).

<sup>44</sup> Since Pixar is related to Apple and this relationship is best evinced in *Wall-E*, these characteristics do promote the idea of durability and quality in Apple products, thus promoting capitalism. Apple/Pixar invests in products that are to be thought of as offering superior quality, creating a barrier against a threatening competition in terms of informatics, the Asian market and their often low-priced but poor quality goods.

most successful motion pictures, Pixar is rather contemporary or futuristic. Nevertheless, Pixar appeals to the nostalgic feeling, especially in the *Toy Story* series (1995, 1999, 2010), *Cars*, *Wall·E*, and *Up* (2009). Since children do not yet possess a large supply of potentially nostalgic material, the nostalgic resource of the Pixar movies appeals mostly to adults (as in the case of *Cars*).<sup>45</sup>

Besides the cases of *Cars 2* and *Wall·E*, emphasis on nature and ecological or environmental issues appears also in the 2003 release *Finding Nemo*, a motion picture portraying underwater nature and the process of exotic fish trade. The villain, although perhaps not aware of this status, is the human who promotes reef depletion through fish trade. The anthropomorphic features of the fish offer the consumer the possibility to relate to them and to feel sympathy.<sup>46</sup> *Finding Nemo* was the first environmentally oriented feature length movie and the fifth Pixar produced, hence defining the image of an environmentally aware company.<sup>47</sup>

#### **d) *Wall·E*, the Making of**

In terms of ecological thematic, few are the digitally animated movies that have achieved a comparable success to that of *Wall·E*; IMDb critics' score attribution of 94/100, its commercial achievement,<sup>48</sup> and the praise critics gave to the movie classify it as one of the most successful movies of the 2000s<sup>49</sup> and confirm the movie's relevance not only as an environmental movie, but also as an animated movie, and a motion picture, hence justifying its privileged position in this study.

<sup>45</sup> Collective *Ersatz Nostalgia* is best exemplified in *Cars*, a motion picture celebrating car culture, namely U.S. classic car culture. McQueen, the protagonist, gets lost in route 66 on his way to a championship. He is then taught how to become a better driver by an old-timer, who was an iconic model in the past. The setting is marked by mountains shaped like Cadillac parts, as if the car was a part of the environment. Considering its international box office success, this nostalgia exists also beyond U.S. borders. With *Cars 2* (2011), Pixar seems to give an answer to criticism; the movie does not celebrate U.S. specific car culture as openly as the first movie. Also, fuel consumption and air pollution are major themes in this sequel. *Cars* made £2,668,986 during the opening weekend in the U.K. alone. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317219/business>>.

<sup>46</sup> As it is usual in the Disney universe, Nemo, the clownfish protagonist, lives with one parent only, after his mother disappears while defending her eggs from a predator. Due to the movie's format as digital animation with hand-drawn animation inspired visual elements and appealing characters, it is attractive to a young public, but the contemporary issues that are described and the nostalgic potential also appeals to adults. The animals are taken from their natural habitat and put in an aquarium (given they survive the transportation), where they live with fish species different from their own, often even from a different habitat.

<sup>47</sup> Other companies that produce digital animation movies have also tried to elaborate on environmental and ecological topics, the creators of *Rango*, Blind Wink Productions/Nickelodeon, being one example, as are 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Animation with *Rio* (2011), DreamWorks with *Madagascar* (2005), and Universal Pictures with *The Lorax*. Although competition in terms of digitally animated environmental movies is still growing, many have been the companies that have already followed (Telotte 220).

<sup>48</sup> The estimated budget for *Wall·E* was 180 million U.S. dollars, grossing over 500 million U.S. dollars in national and international cinematic performances until March 2009. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0910970/>>.

<sup>49</sup> See the previous reference to *Time*.

*Wall·E* feeds on the science fiction genre, rather than the genres typically associated with Disney, fantasy and romance (although the latter is, nevertheless, an almost constant presence in *Wall·E*).<sup>50</sup> In order to further compare *Wall·E* with Disney and the Hollywood universe at large, a model provided by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson known as that of “Classic Hollywood Cinema” is useful to a certain extent.<sup>51</sup> This model recognizes that typical classic Hollywood movies are mainly set in the present and external world; the individuals in these films have clear motives which trigger the actions and consequences composing the plot; the main characters have a goal and they have to confront antagonists or obstacles to reach their goal; these characters reach their goals and the film ends with a resolved plot line; these movies share the emphasis on clear causes and effects of actions; and the typical Hollywood movie is subjected to film editing techniques that assure a clean and linear development (David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson *Apud.* Wasko 114). These descriptions show in many Disney movies and most of Pixar productions. *Wall·E* seems to be exceptional, since it does not depict a present world; the individuals in the movie do show clear motives that bring about actions and consequences; the main characters have a goal (or start pursuing a goal during the plot) and an antagonist; the characters do reach their goals and the traditional happy ending is achieved, but the film also offers room for continuity. Accordingly, I choose to classify *Wall·E* as a motion picture that inherited the Hollywood formula and depicts alternatives to the old norm; hence, a marginal movie picture in the milieu.

Ian Shaw considers *Wall·E* to be “Pixar’s darkest and most mature of all releases” until 2010 and he calls attention to the fusion of science fiction, romance, and chaplinesque elements that composes the movie (Shaw 392). David Denby, from *The New Yorker*, further wrote that “WALL-E blends two kinds of science fiction – the post-apocalyptic disaster scenario and the dystopian fantasy derived from Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, in which people are controlled not by coercion but by pleasure” (*Apud.* Shaw 392). *Wall·E* follows science fiction features, but it can be read as a reaction to postmodernism as well; “the consistent project of the Pixar films is to suggest ways to get back, to map out alternatives to a postmodern retreat from

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<sup>50</sup> Whereas science fiction deals with imaginary content that is to some degree plausible, fantasy commonly resorts to supernatural phenomena. Often, fantasy merely describes an alternative to reality (which is not the case for this comparison in particular).

<sup>51</sup> I point out that Hollywood is not a homogeneous industry and that generalizations exclude the most distinctive and perhaps praised works. Also, a listing of all traits that compose the Hollywood productions pattern is hardly, if at all, possible and such a list would be easily contested. Nevertheless, the features identified by these critics are useful guidelines.

the real and from the world” argues J. P. Telotte (219), affirming the productive and optimistic nostalgia I have signaled before and that is often a key ingredient in science fiction movies.

Many science fiction motion pictures focus on space. The creators of *Wall·E* managed to establish a plot in which the awareness of space, be it digital, universal, planetary, etc., is constant, but in which time, an indispensable component of nostalgia, is also crucial. The passing of time allowed the plants to grow during the human’s absence and made it possible for the humans to forget about Earth and rediscover it and, as the credits roll, the creators remind the viewer that the process of colonization had just began anew, as in the beginning of a new time. Not even the de-greening cycle can be considered outside the passing of time and the location in space.

The apocalyptic content of the movie qualifies it for a more specific label rather than the generalist term science fiction, namely posthumanism. By 2805, or even sooner, the capacity to influence and manipulate the environment typical of the human species will be transferred to the machine, human action will gradually become obsolete and the robot will take its place. In *Wall·E*, no clue is given to whether the robot turned the human obsolete before or after the human species abandoned the Earth, but the possibility that I am going to assume for the purpose of this study is that the machine started replacing human action by the time the human species entered space and started losing muscle strength. At this point, posthumanism became a reality in this motion picture.

*Wall·E* is an example not only of the recent science fiction genre and the posthumanism subgenre, but also of a modern production process and imagery, following the successful Pixar tradition. As explained previously, computer animations such as *Wall·E* articulate with hand-drawn animation and live action movies, at times coming close to the techniques of hand-drawn animation, as in the case of caricature-like human representations, at times feeding on live action, as seen in the mall scene. In this scene, the virtual camera does not seem to be steady, giving the sensation that the virtual cameraman had difficulty in following the characters’ dynamics. Whichever the techniques may be in a certain scene, *Wall·E* constantly evokes a sense of 3D, typical in Pixar productions. As soon as the opening images appear, the sensation of depth is created with the diving of the virtual camera from the universe towards the surface of planet Earth, passing through and among satellites, debris, clouds, and finally buildings. Pixar had already used the 3D effect inside buildings, on dirt, the streets, in the sky, under water, etc.; with *Wall·E*, Pixar takes 3D to the ultimate level, the universe, an accomplishment made possible not

only by creative thinking, but also by specific computer animation software, primarily RenderMan and Real-D.<sup>52</sup> Dedication and the necessary programs are also responsible for the cautiously drawn details that fill the movie; characters, as well as objects, shadows, environments, etc. offer the viewer high picture definition. As the credits run, however, 3D becomes obsolete. The images of the evolution of visual art follow the imagery typical of 2D productions. Even as digital animation comes to occupy the screen at the end of the credits, 3D is not invoked (possibly because many early computer animations, such as videogames, were only 2D animations).<sup>53</sup>

The creators did not only invest intensely in visual aspects, but also in acoustic effects. Ben Burtt, the sound expert who had already worked on major productions, such as George Lucas's *Star Wars* saga, had the responsibility of providing the viewer with acoustic pleasure that could replace the expectation of an oral dialogue (that is scarce during the first half of the movie). In terms of musical pieces, some may be highlighted due to their symbolic implications. The song "Put on Your Sunday Clothes" from the movie *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly; 1969) is played repeatedly during the movie. The dance features that compose the movie provoke admiration in Wall·E and make him want to dance along the music. The lyrics of the particular song appeal to adventure in an urban environment and to the joy of life, dancing, and flirting. *Hello, Dolly!* further nourishes in Wall·E the desire to establish physical contact with another being, both through dancing and by holding hands. A second musical reference is established through Richard Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra,"<sup>54</sup> which suggests great achievements and evolution. In *Wall·E*, it comes up when the captain learns to stand up on two feet, thus accomplishing a milestone in human evolution that had been forgotten. Strauss divided the poem into nine sections, according to the original. The titles of these sections could be loosely adapted as titles to episodes in *Wall·E*; the most adequate are perhaps "Of the Great Longing," relating to Wall·E's

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<sup>52</sup> RenderMan, Real-D, and Marionette are examples of computer programs commonly used in Pixar. The team has been developing the software since the beginning to create ever more stunning images.

<sup>53</sup> Accompanied by music and the background images, the Pixar team devoted some space to remember a coworker, Justin Wright, who died of a heart attack. The team also put in a note, encouraging the viewer to visit the Pixar website in order to get to know the members. At this point, Pixar seems to be working against the image of a company despising its artistic members, which was Disney's image. Still, professionalism and perfectionism typical of Disney did get followed by Pixar. As in *Bambi*, Pixar also resorted to subject experience. Still during the credits, thanks are presented to numerous entities that deal with the themes presented in the motion picture.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) contains various elements and themes that can be recognized in *Wall·E*, one of them being Strauss's work. Auto, the protagonist's counterpart and the character who almost manages to put an end to Wall·E and EVE's romantic relationship, has a camera at the center of the wheel that resembles an eye, similar to HAL 9000, in Kubrick's movie. Unlike many Hollywood productions, including Disney's, the hero's opponent is not obviously bad and does not redeem once defeated.

desire for contact, “Of Joys and Passions,” describing the feelings Wall·E shows when he falls in love, and “The Dance Song,” the moment Wall·E finally gets to dance in space with EVE.

Although I consider the ecological theme to be most appealing, the love story between Wall·E and EVE also deserves attention. The first one to fall in love, Wall·E, is an unconventional robot; he possesses curiosity and emotions, including passion for music and dance. “WALL-E seems to embrace the indefatigable worker traits of Harold Lloyd characters and the romantic love for a seemingly unattainable woman of Charlie Chaplin’s Tramp films, all within the Buster Keaton storytelling model,” wrote Murray and Heumann, describing the protagonist.<sup>55</sup> Both the personality and the structure of Wall·E’s body are similar to that of E.T. from *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg; 1982) and to that of *Short Circuit*’s Number 5 (John Badham; 1986).

In both motion pictures, *Short Circuit* and *Wall·E*, Apple’s products/design patterns are present. Apart from the less obvious elements that may recall Apple in *Wall·E*, there is one figure in particular that seems to have come out of an Apple factory, EVE.

The love story may have been the focus of the Pixar team, yet it does not mean that the viewer shares this interest. How s/he processes the information may vary and to me personally the ecological content is the most appealing.<sup>56</sup> *Wall·E* can be viewed as a “greening” film, which is not to be confused with the process of “greenwashing” I described in the previous chapter. Applied to *Wall·E*, the term greening refers to the creation of an image that is benevolent towards nature by showing the joy and possibilities nature offers the human being, whereas human waste is presented as nature’s enemy. By doing so, Pixar rejects the idea of consumerism and, consequently, of capitalism associated with Disney/Pixar. The timing of the release of this greening motion picture could not have been better for Pixar, considering the economic crisis and the corporative greed directed revulsion that ensued. Given the movie’s context, I recognize its tendency towards producing pleasure, rather than empowering environmentalism or ecologism.

As the plot develops, several references to and similarities with other environmentally or ecologically oriented works can be pinpointed. The most evident influence seems to be the biblical episodes and images that deal intensively with issues of life and death (the bearers of earthly fertility, Eve and Adam, Noah and Moses, the guides to fertile land, and Jesus, the

<sup>55</sup> <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/Walle/2.html>>.

<sup>56</sup> As to the love story, *Wall·E* reflects plots from the cinematic universe and from Disney in particular. The evolution of the relationship between Wall·E and EVE and these characters’ personalities can be recognized, for example, in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *The Aristocats* (1970), *Aladdin*, and *Tarzan* (1999), but also outside the big screen under the title “E.T.,” a music video starring Kanye West and Katy Perry.

sufferer for human sins). Literary works that may have influenced the movie include T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, all of which portray the (lack of) power of nature over human civilization and civilization's or nature's decay.<sup>57</sup>

#### e) **The Machine in the Garden and the Garden in the Machine**

In *Wall-E*, as I will demonstrate, the plant is not necessarily representative of the power of nature. At this point, it is useful to apply the distinction that was made previously between nature, garden, and machine. I recall that nature is able to exist without human interference, a garden is a landscape constructed by humans, and a machine is an entity which does not possess free will.

The apocalyptic scenario the humans from the motion picture left behind confirms what I consider to be Bill McKibben's precipitated statement that we have "killed off nature – that world entirely independent of us which was here before we arrived and which encircled and supported our human society" (*Apud*. Brereton 152). To illustrate the seemingly sterile planet, faded colors of dirt and blowing sand, the sky, and piles of waste dominate the setting until the appearance of the plant.

The waste landscape, for which no ideal solution as to how to get rid of has yet been provided, constitutes one of the 'gardens' that are captured by the lens of the virtual camera. The camera itself is the instrument that allows the viewer to contemplate the alternative reality, the virtual garden that is on the screen. While the machine captures gardens inside of it, it is itself a virtual machine within a virtual garden/reality.

Another garden bears the name Axiom, the spaceship owned by Buy-n-Large. It is a constructed and highly controlled environment in which the weather is always "a balmy 72 degrees and sunny" and where humans are obliged to live; no wilderness or spontaneity is rendered visible. This international corporation also controls human wishes and behaviors. The humans behave like machines since they obey the company without hesitation, as shown when the speaker announces that the color trend has changed, taking everybody to adopt the new fashion at once. The individuals seem to be devoid of critical capacity and do not contest the power of BnL, which is the political authority. BnL fulfills the consumerist needs of the human

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<sup>57</sup> Leslie Mormon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) and *Ecotopia Emerging* (1981) are also pointed out as bearing some similarities to *Wall-E*'s main topics. Outside the field of green literature, the epic journey and the nostalgic content of Homer's *Odyssey* are reproduced through an alternative plot and imagery in *Wall-E*. Cinematic references and similarities further comprise movies such as *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumbull; 1972), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas; 1998), *I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence; 2007), and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Rupert Wyatt; 2011), among others.



species, leaving it ideologically satisfied and, thus, immobile and ignorant of utopian alternatives. This impotence allows for the consumption oriented educational policies practiced inside the Axiom to further contribute to the standardization of human behavior. Although the spaceship was built as a luxury cruise liner, it also keeps alive the people who escaped the intoxicating Earth. Due to necessity, the Axiom explores the universe (reminding of the U.S. empire and its expansionist tradition.) While promoting the Axiom, BnL uses the slogan “At BnL, space is the final fun-tier,” which implies that the initial purpose of the ship was touristic. The positive connotation of ‘frontier’, resonating in the pun ‘funtier,’ echoes the writings of previously mentioned scholars, such as Potter and Turner, helping us keep in mind the importance of this imagery in U.S. culture. The description of the space frontier as the final frontier supports Potter’s criticism of Turner’s view that the geographic frontier of the U.S. was the ultimate frontier. In the motion picture, the capitalist values Potter defended turned global. However, the democratic values he insisted upon in association with capitalism have turned into capitalist totalitarianism. People are shown to have equal access to material possessions, but they are also fully controlled by the capitalist system.

The Axiom can be described as a garden, but also as a machine, considering its mechanical properties. The universe, however, is not to be seen as a garden since human impact and the configuration of space has been practically none, yet. The universe is the largest natural macro space of nature known to the human species. Etymologically, Axiom refers to a logical statement assumed to be true, which bears symbolic value in the movie. While the name promotes credibility and confidence, it may as well be a description of the mechanical people inhabiting the cruiser. They assume the Axiom and all that it represents to be “true,” in the sense of not misleading, trustworthy; they do not even think about questioning the system.

On Earth, Wall·E and later EVE are the robots occupying the garden of waste, as it were. Even before showing the Earth’s surface, the camera captures the Kessler syndrome apparently turned real: the satellites and the debris that surround the planet, as if they formed a mantle, a dead machine, whose core is a nature deprived planet. The garbage piles shown in the documentary *Waste Land* (Lucy Walker; 2010) offer but a glimpse of the dystopic future that is portrayed in *Wall·E*. Wall·E’s garden includes skyscrapers made of trash, cultural artifacts, toys, vehicles, and a ship cemetery (which exists already nowadays in several countries); the landscape left by the humans definitely confirms the anthropocene theory. In short, the planet looks like a fallen empire in ashes and Wall·E is the hero trying to rebuild it.

His task is compensated when a plant is discovered. At the end of the movie, a large surface on Earth is shown to be covered by plants, which raises the question whether these plants would have grown without Wall·E's help. I see the boot in which Wall·E puts the plant to be a representative icon of physical work, which leads me to the conclusion that Pixar wants the viewer to associate the plants with the protagonist's action (and hard work). This reading would affirm that all those plants form a garden and did not come to existence by the Earth's capacity to regulate itself. I support the hypothesis that after some time and through natural selection and evolution outside human control a garden becomes a natural space. This idea that hard work is productive and helps human progress is the variation of capitalism Pixar portrays as benefic, contrasting with the purely consumerist capitalism that does not require any work and dominates life in the Axiom.

The singular plant that is discovered first, this micro garden, is kept in a major garden, namely Wall·E's house, and, as soon as detected by EVE, in the female robot's interior. Since some of the robots, including EVE and Wall·E, are highly anthropomorphized and have the characteristics of gynoids and androids, the act of transporting the plant in her interior has several implications which transcend the literal meaning. Once the plant and Wall·E enter the Axiom, anarchy and human dynamics come to dominate the pace of the story.

#### **f) The Android**

Before EVE's arrival, Wall·E's only company is a cockroach and although there is interaction between them, there is no oral communication. He does not have the capacity to communicate through oral dialogues since there is no need for him to. Due to his near to loneliness, Wall·E has to entertain himself; he finds pleasure in the observation of the universe, he watches *Hello, Dolly!*, he collects objects, and he works. The labor he performs is comparable to that of the CCC, both work(ed) to transform vast territories into areas suited for human needs and desires. This directive of Wall·E is kept alive until EVE shows up. These field worker traits make it easy for the viewer to identify the protagonist with the U.S. icon of the hard working male.<sup>58</sup> The objective of the construction of the Wall·E model was merely utilitarian, as his name suggests: Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class. While doing his job, Wall·E actually performs the tasks of an architect, a waste manager, and a construction worker.

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<sup>58</sup> Another possible association could be made between Wall·E and Michael Reynolds, from the ecomovie *Garbage Warrior*, who is also shown building structures out of waste.

Despite its mechanical appearance, Wall·E also looks like a toy that is powered by solar energy, providing the necessary aspect to attract a younger audience. Just like a plant, Wall·E relies on sunlight to survive, indicating that the human species definitely realized the necessity of investing in nature friendly and self-rechargeable technologies. This specific interplay between nature and technology is an example of bright green environmentalism. Technology is therefore the link between lost nature and humankind. The personality Wall·E developed allowed him to be not only self-rechargeable, but also self-sufficient and virtually immortal, in that he learnt how to substitute his broken parts with those from other robots, a capacity the others did not seem to have.

Wall·E, apparently the only remaining exemplar of the robot model, shows personality traits which are not usually recognized in Western societies: for instance, he does not show any interest in a wedding ring he finds, but he does keep the box it was found in. Wall·E does enjoy rhythm and dance, which is a common feature in humans. The act of dancing allows the animal to release energy rhythmically in order to impress a potential partner, to celebrate, to communicate, etc., an ability Wall·E makes use of for the same purposes. Additionally, the interplay between music and image he is drawn to makes him long for contact and affection. The song “Put on Your Sunday Clothes” and the corresponding cult motion picture evoke past U.S. pop culture and invoke *Ersatz Nostalgia* in Wall·E and, possibly, the viewer. In his house, which also functions as a museum and playground, Wall·E keeps a collection of artifacts that are common in Western societies.<sup>59</sup> Wall·E’s emotional complexity makes it possible for him to express aesthetic sensibility for these objects. These traits (which may be attributed to humans as well as to nonhuman animals) inside the metallic case qualify Wall·E to be considered an android. As the plot develops, other mechanical robots and the mechanical humans in the ship also become androids/humans.

Similar to the D.C. and Marvel tradition and other science fiction works, the character mutates into a being that is more sophisticated in some way than other individuals of the same species due to an exterior circumstance. How Wall·E came to be an emotional being is not explicitly shown in the movie, but considering that it was an electric charge between EVE and the mechanical Wall·E that made him regain personality, near the end of the story, I assume that it was a natural phenomenon, more specifically the impact of lightning on Wall·E that altered his electronic functions and fueled him with personality. The image of a life form touched by a

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<sup>59</sup> This is a detail shared with *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal; 1971) and *I am Legend*, as is the relationship the protagonist shares with his sidekick in the post-apocalyptic scenario, which is, in the case of *Wall·E*, the cockroach.

source of energy as the reason for its being recalls Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, thus provoking a potential association of Wall·E with the first human in the Bible, Adam.

Wall·E is not just the only android of his model presented in the motion picture, he is also the protagonist and the hero. At times, Wall·E can be described as a tragic hero, which Joseph Meeker describes as “a creature of suffering and greatness... [with] enormous... capacity for creating and for enduring pain, for following a passion to its ultimate end, for employing the power of mind and spirit to rise above the contradictions of matter and circumstance, even though one is destroyed by them.”<sup>60</sup> The scene in which Wall·E is crushed by Auto is an example of a situation in which he becomes a tragic hero. Although the hero's motive is a selfish one since he seems to suffer simply to please EVE, his actions do make it possible for humans and nonhumans to return to Earth. Other times, Wall·E's clumsiness turns him into a comic hero, who is “durable even though he may be weak, stupid, and undignified.”<sup>61</sup> Wall·E becomes a comic hero as soon as he gets inside the Axiom. This small android rams all that crosses his way in search of EVE, causing chaos along the way. Nevertheless, the confusion he provokes is accidental and his moral innocence and naivety are kept throughout the plot.

One entity that remains on Earth when Wall·E goes after EVE and who is still there when they return is the cockroach, Hal. This creature is an extremophile as it is able to survive harsh conditions other species, including the human, cannot. It is able to survive natural phenomena as well as human induced devastations. It is the only organism that is shown to inhabit the Earth alongside Wall·E. Despite Hal's toughness, it is conditioned to the status of pet in the relationship with the android. Wall·E takes care of it by providing shelter and food.<sup>62</sup>

Although Hal's and Wall·E's physical designs may be comparable since Wall·E is an android, an entity that shares features with organic beings, and, thus, possesses a case that could be described as an exoskeleton, these two characters are distinct in their position on the evolutionary scale. The modern cockroach originated during the Cretaceous and survived until today whereas Wall·E is a futuristic species of sentient beings, the androids. Nevertheless, they do have traits in common. Besides their ability to survive climatic extreme situations, “cockroaches are considered garbage collectors in terrestrial ecosystems” (Bell, Roth, and Nalepa 182), a peculiarity shared

<sup>60</sup> *Apud.* <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/WallE/2.html>>.

<sup>61</sup> Meeker *Apud.* <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/WallE/2.html>>.

<sup>62</sup> This is another aspect that resembles human habits and behavior. The domestication of insects, reptiles, and amphibians has become a recent trend in Western societies. Young people often prefer cockroaches, spiders, turtles, snakes or frogs than the traditional dog or cat. The former require less attention as they need not to be taken out for a walk, they do not need to be brushed or entertained. All these animals need is a customized terrarium and sufficient alimentation.

with Wall·E. Additionally, cockroaches may be of foremost importance in the nutrient recycling process in areas such as deserts, caves, and forests and they may contribute to pollination (191). Like Wall·E, these creatures are subtle workers; the cockroach is the hero acting under the radar. While the android “plows” the land, Hal fertilizes it. The latter’s capacity to ensure a plant’s health by taking care of the decomposition process and by spreading nutrients makes it possible for some plants to grow without the necessity of much water.

Another anthropomorphic character besides Wall·E is EVE, the Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator, whose physical traits resemble a white egg. If Wall·E can be associated with Adam, then EVE reflects the image of Eve. Besides the egg’s significance as a symbol of fertility, EVE also transports the first post-apocalyptic plant inside of her, making her the carrier of organic life on Earth, a plant that enables human evolution. The plant is given to her by the first one to carry that promise of prosperity, Wall·E, thus suggesting a metaphoric sexual act. While she carries the plant, she becomes immobile and a blinking symbol appears on her chest as if it were the beating of a heart. Furthermore, EVE is the second android to enter Wall·E’s world, following the same sequence as the creation of man and woman, in the Genesis. As a story inspired by religion, Wall·E and EVE’s environment represents the Garden of Eden, which is still void of organic life.

Her announcement is made by a red dot on the dirt, which awakens Wall·E’s curiosity. This, in turn, leads him to EVE and, eventually, to conflict and the resulting evolution, but also to feeling, in this case, love. Since various androids in the Axiom have personality and her design is more futuristic than that of Wall·E, I consider EVE’s personality to be a technological achievement of the humans. Like Wall·E, EVE also possesses free will: as soon as she is stationed on Earth and the ship leaves, she dances freely through the air, ignoring her directive of seeking signs of organic life. Once again, open space is seen as the representation of freedom. Right from the start, Wall·E is fascinated by this elegant creature, but he also keeps some distance, especially once he witnesses her firepower. EVE is heavy, but she also has the capacity to float, she is fast, strong, and courageous as the viewer realizes following plot developments. By contrast to EVE’s “city girl” profile, Wall·E recalls the U.S. cliché of a low middle class worker – timeless, romantic, perhaps outdated, and dusty.

After all, the story is built up in the traditional Hollywood scheme country boy meets city girl. However, this encounter evolves two androids of different generations, colors, and parts of the universe. One leitmotiv keeps being brought to play during romantic situations – fire. Despite its destructive force, it causes fascination and holds both androids together, be it due to ships

colliding with each other, generating an usually romantic atmosphere, or a small lighter. Even though they do not share the same language, EVE teaches Wall·E some words and they manage to communicate mostly through gestures. They start learning from one another and the process of falling in love begins.

As soon as both arrive separately at the Axiom after EVE detected the plant, Wall·E enters a new world of new machines, androids, and mechanic humans. Eventually, he sets free the androids that were imprisoned due to their malfunctions and becomes the group's accidental and fearful leader against Auto, the ship's reactive autopilot who has control over it. Auto is not an android as he is programmed to prevent the human species from returning to Earth, a directive he follows until being switched off. The planet was thought never to recover. As if to emphasize its mechanized effectiveness, this robot is the only character that is fully voiced by a computer program, Apple's MacInTalk.

The members of the freed group are the ones who come to challenge the *status quo* and search for an alternative coexistence. Wall·E himself ridicules the harsh discipline and order by soiling the floor and the body of the ship's cleaning robot, an attitude that makes the robot break the disciplinary rules by jumping out of the guiding lines to follow Wall·E, the foreign contaminant. Eventually, this robot befriends Wall·E. The confrontation between the group of androids and humans and that of the security robots and Auto is a confrontation between revolutionary utopianism and the intellectual numbness induced by consumerism oriented totalitarianism. In conclusion, Wall·E's nostalgia for interaction and contact, and also for the greatest representation of nature known to humankind, the universe, becomes a possibility to fight for, thus confirming the positive potential of nostalgia in the movie.

As mentioned previously, the human capacity to use technology separates the human species from nature and from its peers. A technological society promotes destructive objectives and values whereby its ultimate perspective is the total domination of nature and the spontaneous natural processes, an artificial environment (Devall and Sessions 67). *Wall·E* illustrates a different reality; the role technology had in alienating the human species from nature is not explicitly provided in the movie, but technology is shown to encourage, for example, non-face to face dialogue, when the humans make use of video screens to communicate while traveling in their hover chairs. On the other hand, *Wall·E* also shows that technology can be used to fight this condition. It is a technological product, the robot, which makes it possible for the human to idealize and work on a reality in which people talk with each other directly. Once that reality is

achieved, humans and robots work together to cultivate the planet's resources. Despite the cooperation between androids and the human species, both groups are well distinguishable not only by their physical traits, but also by the way they inter- and intra-act.

Several species appear as agents in *Wall·E*; the human is the most powerful one since it is the one who is ultimately in control of all other species. The cockroach is at the bottom of the list considering its pet status. I also classify the androids as a species, because of their similarity to humans in terms of behavior and shape. This species is in between the controlling human and the animal pet in the power relationship as they are, indeed, sentient beings, but also instruments built for human oriented purposes. Since the other robots do not express emotions and will, I do not consider them a species, but mere programmed instruments.

Both the humans and the androids fear and protect themselves against otherness; the captain shouts at the sight of Wall·E, Wall·E hides from EVE, and he is also intimidated by the security robots. The fear of the unknown creates an unbalanced power relationship between two members of the same species, Wall·E and EVE. In order to protect himself, Wall·E hides and keeps a certain distance, whereas EVE does not hesitate to fire upon a possible menace. The relationship both share evokes a familiar scene: the white sophisticated explorer meeting the last specimen of a "primitive" indigenous culture, which is a common fantasy of the U.S. imaginary related to the conquest of the American continent. Eventually, the passion Wall·E expresses for EVE is answered and a romantic relationship develops.

Meanwhile, in the Axiom, the (mechanical) human species does not interact face to face and, consequently, love is not physically consumed. Human babies do exist under the care of robots, but it is not explicitly shown how they come to existence. Human and nonhuman animal traits, such as the exchange of affection and the expression of emotions seem to be characteristics of the androids' personality, rather than that of the mechanical humans portrayed in the movie. Evolution, so it appears, nearly excluded the human from nature, turning it almost into an automated robot.

The android, however anthropomorphic it may be, is still an instrument of the utilitarian humans, thus evincing the movie's anthropocentric orientation. The only signs pointing towards an alternative to speciesism are offered by the romantic interaction between Wall·E and EVE and, towards the end of the motion picture, when robots and humans work together, side by side, for a greater purpose and to extract natural resources from the land and water.

The mutuality between Wall·E and EVE develops gradually due to the persistence of the protagonist and is definitely asserted when they dance in space and when they hold hands. Interest for the opposite gender through hand contact also occurs between the two humans who first interacted with Wall·E. The hero's emotional climax is attained the moment he is touched by an electric current sent by EVE, an exchange of energy that resembles the human kiss. This act is repeated after Wall·E lost all personality as a consequence of the reassembly he had to go through after his confrontation with Auto. Only through a kiss does Wall·E regain conscience.<sup>63</sup> As discrepant as the power balance may be, the protagonist and the corresponding romantic partner learn from one another and fight for one another.

### **g) Human Numbness, Technological Action, and Animal Persistence**

As romantically devoted as Wall·E may be, until the appearance of EVE, his focus was on his daily work routine. Before the departure of the human species from Earth, they had created the Wall·E robots with the directive of cleaning up the outcome of over-consumption – waste. In *Wall·E*, technology is depicted as the result of ecological problems and, thus, it is set apart from consumerism. Indeed, as under the term greenwashing today, a strategy I described previously, BnL embraces environmentalism as a marketing strategy. Although prices are not mentioned, BnL advertises the Axiom as a holiday cruiser that entertains the consumers while the company commits itself to cleaning the Earth. The company is unable to reverse the effects of pollution and the supposed trip ends up being a process of migration. Whereas these people, the ecological exiles, survive the dystopian reality of Earth and a future generation manages to return, the fate of those left behind or who traveled in other ships is unclear. Governmental institutions are not mentioned, nor need they be, since BnL is not only a global company, but also the political authority on Earth.

The political influence of the false gods of consumerism is kept alive even after the cruise ship left the planet. The interior of the Axiom resembles a “temple of consumption” even more than a shopping mall. The quantity of people that occupies the place could represent a community, but they are no community since face to face interaction does not occur while they travel in the stream of humans, isolated. These individuals are slaves without knowing it.

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<sup>63</sup> This ending contradicts the ending of Disney's environmental movie *Pocahontas* given that in the latter the couple does not consume the inter-racial relationship, a choice that leaves less room for the viewer to imagine a possible extension of the narrative, contrary to *Wall·E*. Still, the power balance between Pocahontas and John Smith and between EVE and Wall·E is similar; the feminine character is self-sufficient and strong while the masculine partner is the one who needs to be saved by Pocahontas/EVE.



Ironically, although they are flying in space, they are also imprisoned physically and mentally by consumerism and its consequences.

Other aspects that rule the everyday life of humans, such as a labor system or religion are not explicitly provided in the movie. However, considering the discipline and numbness, or long term “alienation” in the Marxist sense, that controls the humans, and taking also into account the element of technological progress, I believe that there would be no need to practice religious rituals besides consumption, nor would it be necessary for humans to produce anything by themselves. The human species turned into the *Naturmensch* at some point, committed itself uncritically to BnL. If the company’s status is the result of the human need to consume or if it creates the need to follow consumption patterns is unclear. Considering the movie’s context, though, I regard both possibilities as equally true; the human desires to fit in and the company provides the necessary items while assuring its social influence. *Wall·E* relates the consumer society to the contemporary viewer by showing live action clips of the CEO who was in charge when the Axiom went to space, which is a near future s/he can relate to: 2105.

All the waste and consumption left the Earth with no resources and in ruins. The movie opens with images of this reality, thus suggesting that the ecocentric de-greening cycle is at the second phase, resting, after the Earth has been de-greening and before any possible greening. As to the anthropocentric perspective, the humans are paralyzed in the process of recolonization, which precedes the processes of geographic exploration and resource exploitation/depletion. The human absence and Wall·E’s “farming” make it possible for the greening process to restart. If the humans had colonized another planet, such as Kepler 22-b, while the Earth was resting, the other planet would be de-greening and the Earth had still some time left to finish the greening process. Given that the human process did not develop, I foresee that this species would start exploring during the greening process, probably preventing the planet from recovering fully, which would force the human either to reconsider forceful exploitation or to abandon the Earth shortly after arrival.

During the resting phase, the Earth is recovering from the product of the latest destructive force, human waste, converting it into usable nutrition. The devastation portrayed in the movie may be the first that was not naturally caused and, consequently, may also be precocious since it is not caused by a natural force. If, however, we admit the possibility to discover that other beings inhabited the planet before the humans and cultural and genetic anchors and references (such as time classification, the human body, etc.) were left out, the motion picture could be considered a

narrative involving a highly evolved being of any kind and of any time. In this case, there could be another species from a previous cycle floating out in space or inhabiting another planet after having abandoned the Earth. The de-greening cycle, among others, exists regardless of human existence or perception, but the Earth may come to depend on it if the Earth gets too weak or if devastation is too extreme.

Throughout the cycle we live in, migrations related to ecological events have occurred repeatedly. The first humans, for example, were gatherers and hunters constantly switching their locations with the aim of finding new sources of food. Since the human developed the capacity to destroy faster than nature could repair, the potential “Eden” began disappearing. Be it the American continent or the Amazon tropical forest, when industrialized human cultures lay hand on resources, little is left of nature. Referring to Frederick Jackson Turner, Brereton explains that the former saw the U.S.A. as such a culture, stating that the transformation of nature into commercialized urbanization is the central saga of the nation (52). Nevertheless, to say that the humans should not interfere with nature at all would be misleading. Other animals do manipulate nature and nature itself is a chaotic and evolutionary process. It is not the control over nature *per se* that turns the human into a destructive force, but *how* the human makes use of that power in terms of space and intensity. For instance, some primitive cultures are known for the wise use of resources and respect for nature.

Destructive power made the Earth a climatically unstable wasteland. At times, Wall·E is able to calmly watch the stars, other times, sandstorms similar to the Dust Bowl storms witnessed in the U.S. sweep the ground. The seemingly spontaneous climate dynamics contrast with the mechanical dynamics of robots and mechanical people inside the Axiom. Space also differs substantially between both worlds. Wall·E, a small robot and his pet, have a vast landscape to move freely, while the inhabitants of the Axiom have to obey narrow guiding lines if they want to avoid collisions. The skyscrapers Wall·E built out of trash fill in the vastness with shades of grey. Although the sun shines, the water does not reflect in intensive blue. Apart from the green of the plant, few are the colors that stick out in comparison to the colorful neon lights of the advertisements that fill the Axiom.

Despite the dynamics and color brightness inside the ship, the humans are barely able to move, not to mention walk. Migration took place, but it resulted in practical stagnation; they are not connected to their home planet anymore and the desire to live is barely present. They do experience pleasure, but are neither joyful nor motivated. Their whole existence seems to be

merely a burden on themselves. This migration towards oblivion and near to stagnation may seem somewhat contradictory, but even nowadays it is a reality lived by individuals and families who migrate into a land they do not know and in which they are not comfortable. Often, they have little motivation to do any more than working to sustain the family, for example. The movie shows the consequences of inactivity. The humans in the movie became severely overweight not only because of the modification of the bone structure due to the low gravity factor, but also because technological progress allowed them to be transported in hover chairs, to be served and protected by robots and to communicate with each other digitally. The humans became cyborgs, beings that evolved by fusing their organic bodies with technological instruments, such as prostheses. In addition, the humans do not need to have sexual hormones; sexuality, a primitive instinct, does not seem to exist beyond courtship, or as they put it, a “holo-date,” to describe a holographic romantic encounter. Women do not invest in their appearance in order to stand out, but rather to fit in; they wear short hair and look more or less all the same. Men do not try to stand out, either; besides the color of their skins, no other traces suggest uniqueness. How human babies are born is not shown, but considering the medical advancements we are witnessing, I assume them to develop *in vitro*. Not even as young children do humans have the opportunity to interact physically with adults. Instead, they are brought up and taught by robots. As a result, hormones do not develop much and social experience is kept at a minimum. These are examples of factors that explain how the human species developed to look like obese children. The evolutionary process did not alter the human adult structure into a different shape, but into a different *stage*.

Other factors for obesity include the humans’ eating habits and the lack of physical exercise. During the entire movie, no human is shown eating vegetables or fruits. Instead, they are offered a free “septuacentennial cupcake in a cup” as a celebration gift for the seven hundred’s anniversary of the cruise. As to sports, they do practice tennis, for example, but only virtually. A robot performs the actions for the human while s/he sits in the chair, controlling the robot’s movements with one finger, as if it were a videogame.

To the physical numbness is added homogeneity (until the arrival of the plant). Apart from the captain, who still has some desire for autonomy as he grumbles about not being able to do more than just the morning announcements, no other human stands out from the crowd. Everybody follows the same trends, uses the same technological devices, all are obese, etc. Life in the Axiom is a suffocating routine, a boring world without strength. Nothing happens that might be qualified

as artistic creation, no conflict exists between the humans, there are neither debates nor impulsive intervention of any kind or criticism. They seem to have no purpose. The omnipresent discipline leads to cohesion, stability, and predictability, while the nonexistence of tradition and nature expands this condition to include individualism, the absence of nuclear families and their respective values, the incapacity to recognize icons and objects from the past, as provided by the example of the captain's inability to recognize a manual or even earth, etc. He does not seem to have a past to refer to, no experienced memory.

Although there may not be a physical authority, Auto is the anti-protagonist and, thus, the representative of consumerist ideology and of BnL. By revolting against Auto, humans and robots fight the instrument of political power, such as the school system. Auto tries aggressively to maintain the control over human life, refusing to let the humans decide over their own bodies in a new ecological system.

The (r)evolution that eventually takes place is only made possible by the appearance of the plant in the ship. In order to get home, the humans have to go through the process of growing up in a matter of minutes. The sight of the plant awakens the captain's curiosity, strong emotions, and the sense of morality, for he feels responsible for it and the planet. Wall·E causes bafflement among humans since he is an atypical creature, he also provokes human face to face contact and mutual interest, as two people touch each other accidentally while calling out for Wall·E. Only during the process of awakening does the couple who came into contact with Wall·E realize that the ship had a pool. Auto in turn generates conflict when he disobeys the captain. This situation creates the need for the humans to stand up and fight in order to take command. Responsibility is awakened as Auto inclines the ship and the humans have to catch the falling babies. The battle against Auto also calls for direct cooperation between humans and robots as they want to save Wall·E. At the end, humans are walking out the ship on their own feet, while the captain fantasizes about growing "pizza plants" on the fertile dirt, thus affirming his will to work and the prospect of self-sufficiency. The captain has learnt to take charge and, as it happened during the evolution of the human species, the need or advantage of standing up and walking has enabled him to fight the enemy and to explore its habitat. Ultimately, humanity is able to recolonize. Freud's observation that culture is built on the abandonment of instinctive drives and that beauty, cleanness, and order are high on the list of cultural demands remains true (126-33). In the Axiom, humans were numb, because they got comfortable; they were made believe that they were satisfied. It seemed that consumerism and technological progress were the equivalent to high

cultural standards. As it turns out, the illusion of satisfaction is not good enough. The stifling mechanisms and psychic powerlessness described by Marcuse (*Apud*. Marx 178-9), for example, did not completely eliminate and substitute human instincts. The ship's inhabitants prefer conflict, adventure, and work over a comfortable, but dull, cultural condition. The technological achievements which made it possible for the human to experience near god like perfection in that it became able to substitute its bodily utility with technological instruments, such as the hover chair. The android, perhaps the human's most successful creation, continues by its side, while a new cycle develops.

During the entire story, the android is the key entity that makes it possible for the human species to return to Earth. The articulation between the Wall·E robots, the android in particular, and the plant in the boot has the potential of encouraging the idea that technology/progress and hard work allow for the de-greening cycle to carry on. Were it not for Wall·E's capacity to set free some of the Earth's slumbering energy resources by creating the necessary niche for it to transform into plants, the planet would perhaps have died, which would have also been the end of the planet's de-greening cycles.

Although the CEO of BnL had already given up the project to clean up the Earth, the android persisted. He compressed waste into blocks, which he used to create skyscrapers and, thus, he cleaned the dirt and it became possible for sunlight to hit the ground and provide the necessary ingredient for photosynthesis. Unlike the plants shown at the end of the motion picture, the first plant Wall·E found did not grow on open ground and under the sunlight, but in an old container. However, it was Wall·E who released it from that enclosure and, perhaps, made it possible for it to survive.

Wall·E is a similar creature to Pinocchio: a human creation brought to life by a superior power. A religious perspective might suggest that humanity had the intention or necessity of redeeming itself and God, who would be represented by thunder, gave the humans that possibility by providing Wall·E with life and a divine mission.

Wall·E's directive is demanding. Unlike fire outbreaks or floods, the destructive force in *Wall·E* does not enable nature's rebirth right after the end of the destruction, because the piles of waste contain elements such as rubber and metal, which may take centuries to decompose. The protagonist follows his directive throughout the years, performing the same operations without anybody to keep him company but the cockroach.

After Wall·E discovers the plant and EVE is taken back to the Axiom, he follows her into the ship. Although the plant may have caused a more intense reaction among humans, which ultimately led to cooperation and revolution, Wall·E was the one who set free and joined the androids, the physical force of the revolution. The confrontation between the security robots and the rogue robots asserts the androids' decision to fight the *status quo*. After he has become the leader of the androids and prevented the security robots from stopping the movement, his role as an indispensable character may be questioned. The captain had already fallen into eco-nostalgia, the nostalgic feeling for a past amid nature, and was fighting Auto. It may be argued that Wall·E's role was crucial, as he blocked Auto's attempt to dispose of the plant. However, knowing that life was possible on Earth, the captain might have eventually turned off Auto and flown the ship onto the planet. In terms of community spirit, Wall·E had a major role. Besides uniting the androids, alongside with the captain and the plant, he provoked human interaction and the collective urge to help him as he gets slowly broken by Auto. To the anxiety of the captain to recolonize the Earth is added EVE's urge to rebuild and revive Wall·E. After the computer recognizes the plant, the way back to Earth is traveled at high speed.

EVE is also an indispensable character as it is her who creates the link between Wall·E, the plant, and the humans. In comparison to Wall·E, EVE is more aggressive and authoritarian. Yet, as her personality develops, she becomes more caring and, at the end, it is her who builds the protagonist anew and who provides him with life one more time. Her personality as well as her role in the plot make it possible to draw analogies and divergences between her and characters of religious texts. Assuming a comparison between EVE and Eve, I regard the planet to represent Eden, in which case consumerism corresponds to the original sin and the move into space to the expulsion. In this context, the plot describes the return of the humans to Eden. EVE, then, is considered a human and the first sinner. *Wall·E* suggests a different approach to that image. EVE does not sin unless putting her directive second, allowing dancing and flying freely to be her first priority is to be viewed as a sin. Instead, she reverses the original story. Her strong but also caring character makes it possible for the humans to go back in time in the sense of returning to paradise. In short, the image of the female sinner imposed by the Genesis turns into the image of a powerful gynoid in a story that promotes ecofeminism. I also recognize a second significant analogy to another religious character: on the ark, Noah sends a dove to find land. After a while, the dove returns with an olive branch in its beak, revealing that land is in reach. EVE follows the

same sequence. First, she is sent out to find fertile land. Then, she returns to the ship with a plant, indicating that recolonization has become possible.

To awake the human desire to go back to land/Earth means to evoke ecologic nostalgia, or econostalgia. In *Wall·E*, nostalgia is not expressed towards a local point, but towards the planet as a whole entity. The awakening is made possible by the discovery of the plant, a symbol of the fertile Earth. The act of discovering further leads to curiosity and pleasure. Until the awakening, econostalgia was not present in the people's daily routine. Not even the great vastness of space was exciting enough to appeal to people's awe and nostalgia.

The negative aspects of nostalgia are not confirmed in *Wall·E*. Among emotional displays like hope, regret, and anger, an ultimately deep state of sadness related to the return to the past is not shown. So, it would seem that it is not correct to write about nostalgia in the movie. Perhaps it is only a tale about colonization. Then again, the settlement of new land is all about imagining a reality other than the traditional. Even in *Wall·E*, the captain of the space ship is mesmerized by the pictures portraying life on Earth and fights to get "back" to that other place where the human race developed, but which he has never been to. This longing for the other space or time is elemental for the idea of nostalgia. So, the movie suggests the presence of an optimistic nostalgia of the past. What awakens the adventurous spirit of the captain is nostalgia. It is therefore not to be seen as a merely negative emotion.

What breaks the monotony and awakens hope is the arrival of the plant. Econostalgia makes the human evolve as intense emotions come up and muscle strength is put to use. Besides the confrontation between the captain and Auto, the former also discovered the joy of dancing when his feet started moving to the sound of music and when he searches for a definition of dancing. Gradually, the primitive body and brain functions are awakened. Once activated, the captain does not rest until his desire to return is fulfilled.

Yet, econostalgia is still an *Ersatz Nostalgia*, made possible by a computer. This nostalgic feeling is not a reaction to childhood memories, but to an articulation of digital images provided by a computer, thus allowing the captain to experience a utopian fantasy world. Utopia, particularly in this case, is an imaginary construction based on past images and situations the nostalgic captain never experienced, which allow him to create mental pictures of an alternative idealized present or idealized future, much in the sense described by Rui Bebiano. The Earth does exist, but it is not merely perceived as such, it is rather idealized as a utopia. Only when the

captain sees the images of the Earth EVE previously recorded does he realize that the planet is, after all, a dystopian place. Nevertheless, his fascination with the planet is maintained.

As soon as the captain realizes that humans have a moral obligation to take care of the plant and the planet, he regards the situation seriously. It seems that his optimism is replaced by remorse for not having appreciated the planet in the past. Living according to the ship's standards is no longer an option; for humanity has to move on. The illusion of satisfaction in the Axiom is definitely destroyed as the captain acknowledges that he prefers to live rather than merely survive. The plot of the movie is built around the decision to return, considering that it portrays the act of returning to Earth, how it came to happen, and what followed.

Despite the captain's desire and need to return to what is now considered home, the image that he created of the world continues distorted and unrealistic, as exemplified by his idea of planting "pizza plants," which further indicates that the plant awakened human imagination, but also that the human is still tied to the *Naturmensch* condition because s/he does not (yet) comprehend the complexity of nature. The reference to "pizza plants" may be read a provocation by Pixar: while at the center of the capitalist and consumption oriented system, it is aware of the artificiality and, perhaps, leads the viewers to feel intrigued when hearing the expression that fuses nature with consumption and which does not sound right.

Besides the meaning of the term "plant" in the context of flora, it can also be associated with technological progress. The nuclear power plant, for example, is a byproduct of heavy industrialization and consumerism which have led to questionable consequences such as industrial farming, which may be seen as at least partly responsible for the human species to (have) become unhealthy and a *Naturmensch*. Had a nuclear power plant exploded, the effects would be similar to that portrayed in *Wall·E*: an abandoned, intoxicated, colorless and odorless landscape would have emerged. The contrast exists between a power plant of intensive production and a "real" plant, which, at the end, comes to substitute the artificial power supplier. The latter is not a constant threat and does not cost anything.

The resting phase takes its time, as does the decomposition process with its intensive sense stimulating characteristics that are practically absent as most of the trash is made of slowly decomposing matter, such as plastic. Organisms, including mushrooms, could accelerate decomposition, but they would not be able extract the necessary nutrients from these objects to survive. Fungi are among the important agents in each of the natural processes described by the



de-greening cycle. The humans will eventually face this scenario and act upon it with the motivation provided by the econostalgia and the sense of responsibility.

Although people do not seem to share the captain's econostalgia from the beginning, they follow him. Even before the captain took the leading role, it was he who controlled night and day, a god like power he did not seem to value much as it is a part of his daily duty. The nostalgic feeling that relieves him from that routine is at the core of the revolution, which, at the end, leads to community integrity, as people act together to support the captain's decision to go back to Earth. The objective of the movement is to restore the lost home – a nostalgia that focuses on *nostos*, rather than *algia*, to apply Boym's theory. Consequently, the humans do not follow the Romantics' *Wanderlust*, nor do they hold on to nostalgia as the reaction against the irreversible or move to cure the loss of the past as suggested by Jankélévitch. Instead, they become sedentary and stabilize, they work to reverse the past and build a community without getting paralyzed by the nostalgic feeling. Here, the positive potential of nostalgia results in effectively constructive utopianism.

In the movie, the Earth is viewed as a home, but as an unknown world as well. So, the captain assumes the role of an ecopioneer, similar to the U.S. icon of the Wild West pioneer, who paved the way for "civilization." As the credits roll, images of agrarianism are projected, invoking yet another icon, one of the pillars of early U.S. economy, the farmer. Besides the movie's recalling of the national cultural imagery and thus appealing to the U.S. audience, it also represents Pixar's status as a hard working pioneer in digital animation. By watching the movie, the audience itself may be likely to experience either nostalgia or *Ersatz Nostalgia*, if identification with the motion picture takes place.

The migration from city life to the rural landscape that is portrayed in *Wall-E* is common in highly industrialized Western cultures, as people grow tired of stress and seek the tranquility of the land. By returning to the planet, humans do not look for relaxation; they want to live, to work the greening land. Unlike during the colonization of America, there are no indigenous people to fight with or vast forests to extract resources from, this time around. The progress towards technological primitivism becomes a reality.

## CONCLUSION

The motion picture industry, particularly the digital animated Hollywood environmental movies, bears ideological power that is particularly effective among young people. The ecocritic studies these cultural texts and presents conclusions potentially interesting not only for film lovers, ecologists, filmmakers, etc., but also for parents who are concerned about the content children filter from literary and audiovisual entertainment, from books to videogames.

As the ecocritic unmasks processes of greenwashing, alerts towards erratic ecological data in a popular film, converts ecological content of movies into ecological theories, such as the de-greening cycle - in short, promotes ecological consciousness -, s/he helps us “read” films like *Wall·E* more thoroughly.

For instance, ecocriticism enabled me to conceive of further scenarios, based on the de-greening cycle concept, alternative to that suggested in *Wall·E*. I argue for two possible outcomes that might have occurred had the characters of Wall·E and EVE not intervened, by evoking the Gaia hypothesis.

One scenario portrays the death of life on the planet. Gaia, or the Earth, is not an omnipotent entity, as the action of the human species ultimately proved. The latter corrupted too such a degree the holistic system it was born in that the planet lost its self-regulatory force and capacity to restore its resources and ecosystems. The Earth, as it happens with abundance as well, is not infinite and constant, but undergoes change or dies. The plants are not given the possibility to grow due to the lack of usable dirt and the Earth’s energy is stuck until some major event, such as a collision, changes the Earth’s position and puts an end to the possibility of life or destroys it completely.

Yet, in the second scenario, if the Earth, which is to say, microscopic surviving organisms, has enough time to transform all the waste into nutrients and if internal activities still allow for life on the surface, a new cycle begins, either with or without the human species. The beginning of a new cycle after the old one ended in an almost complete loss of biodiversity means that new ecological systems emerge and develop. Perhaps a new species emerges as extraordinarily successful in using instruments and spreading the species to a point that it too starts destroying its environment and has to either cease its activities or disappear. This setting allows for a consideration of the human not as a god like creature who learnt to totally control its environment, but as just another element of nature, an “event” that causes de-greening because

nature allows and needs it. Since the ultimate terrestrial force is Gaia, humanity is subjected to natural phenomena that might, eventually, reduce human power if necessary. In short, humans are a natural necessity.

There is, however, another possible scenario that can be explored by articulating both the Gaia hypothesis and Wall·E's interference. In this case, Wall·E merely serves as an accelerating agent to an Earth which would eventually become fertile if some major force would not stop her. The protagonist thus compensates the accelerated de-greening of the Earth brought on by the humans. The motivations to aid the planet may be several, including ethical principles and the anxiety to return home.

These examples of possible scenarios of transitions from the resting phase to greening, both those based on the Gaia hypothesis and those that are not, represent possible models of the de-greening cycle.

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*FernGully: The Last Rainforest* (1992) dir. Bill Kroyer, Australia and U.S.A.

*Finding Nemo* (2003) dir. Andrew Stanton, U.S.A.

*Food, Inc.* (2008) dir. Robert Kenner, U.S.A.

*Garbage Warrior* (2007) dir. Oliver Hodge, U.S.A.

*Happy Feet* (2006) dir. George Miller, Australia and U.S.A.

*Hello, Dolly!* (1969) dir. Gene Kelly, U.S.A.



- Hercules* (1997) dir. John Musker and Ron Clements, U.S.A.
- Hooper* (1978) dir. Hal Needham, U.S.A.
- I Am Legend* (2007) dir. Francis Lawrence, U.S.A.
- The Incident at Tower 37* (2009) dir. Chris Perry, U.S.A.
- An Inconvenient Truth* (2005) dir. Davis Guggenheim, U.S.A.
- Lady and the Tramp* (1955) dir. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske,  
U.S.A.
- The Lion King* (1994) dir. Roger Allers, U.S.A.
- The Lorax* (2012) dir. Chris Renaud and Kyle Balda, U.S.A.
- Luxo Jr.* (1986) dir. John Lasseter, U.S.A.
- Madagascar* (2005) dir. Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath, U.S.A.
- The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, U.S.A.
- The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, U.S.A.
- Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (2001) dir. Chyng Sun. U.S.A.
- Monsters, Inc.* (2001) dir. Pete Docter, U.S.A.
- The Omega Man* (1971) dir. Boris Sagal, U.S.A.
- Pocahontas* (1995) dir. Michael Gabriel, U.S.A.
- The Princess and the Frog* (2009) dir. John Musker and Ron Clements, U.S.A.
- Rango* (2011) dir. Gore Verbinski, U.S.A.
- Rio* (2011) dir. Carlos Saldanha, U.S.A.
- Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) dir. Rupert Wyatt, U.S.A.
- The River* (1938) dir. Pare Lorentz, U.S.A.
- Short Circuit* (1986) dir. John Badham, U.S.A.
- Silent Running* (1971) dir. Douglas Trumball, U.S.A.

*The Simpsons Movie* (2007) dir. David Silverman, U.S.A.

*Soylent Green* (1973) dir. Richard Fleischer, U.S.A.

*Tarzan* (1999) dir. Chris Buck and Kevin Lima, U.S.A.

*Three Little Pigs* (1933) dir. Burt Gillett, U.S.A.

*Toy Story* (1995) dir. John Lasseter, U.S.A.

*Toy Story 2* (1999) dir. John Lasseter, U.S.A.

*Toy Story 3* (2010) dir. Lee Unkrich, U.S.A.

*Up* (2009) dir. Pete Docter, U.S.A.

*Wall·E* (2008) dir. Andrew Stanton, U.S.A.

*Lixo Extraordinário / Waste Land* (2010) dir. Lucy Walker, Brazil.

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