

WALL-E: A Robot That Reminds Us About Being Human

Popović, Ana

Source / Izvornik: **Journal of the International Symposium of Students of English, Croatian and Italian Studies, 2018, 61 - 77**

Conference paper / Rad u zborniku

Publication status / Verzija rada: **Published version / Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:172:113982>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2023-06-01**

Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of Faculty of humanities and social sciences](#)



FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET SVEUČILIŠTA U SPLITU

**ZBORNİK RADOVA
MEĐUNARODNOG SIMPOZIJA MLADIH ANGLISTA,
KROATISTA I TALIJANISTA**



**ZBORNIK RADOVA MEĐUNARODNOG SIMPOZIJA
MLADIH ANGLISTA, KROATISTA I TALIJANISTA**

**JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF
STUDENTS OF ENGLISH, CROATIAN AND ITALIAN
STUDIES**

Izdavač/Publisher

Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet/
University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Poljička cesta 35, 21000 Split

Odgovorna urednica/Chief

Gloria Vickov

Glavni urednik/Editor-in-chief

Gordan Matas

Urednice/Editors

Ana Ćurčić, Andrea Jović

Recenzenti/Reviewers

Eni Buljubašić, Gordana Galić Kakkonen, Antonela Marić, Nikica
Mihaljević, Magdalena Nigoević, Jurica Pavičić, Ilonka Peršić,
Antonija Primorac, Anita Runjić-Stoilova, Simon John Ryle, Nataša
Stojan, Boris Škvorc, Brian Daniel Willems

Naslovna slika/Cover photo

Dorotea Grgatović

Grafički dizajn/Graphic design

Neda Mandić

Lektura i korektura/Language editing and proofreading

Andrea Jović

Tisak/Print

Redak d. o. o.

Naklada/Edition

150 primjeraka/150 copies

Adresa Uredništva

Poljana kraljice Jelene 1, Split
itheom.split@gmail.com

ISBN: 978-953-352-026-1

Zbornik je objavljen prema odluci br. 003-08/18-06/0015 donesenoj na sjednici Fakultetskog vijeća Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu dana 25. rujna 2018.

SADRŽAJ/CONTENTS

- 1 UVODNIK/EDITORIAL
3 UVODNA RIJEČ DEKANICE/FOREWORD BY THE DEAN

ČLANCI/PAPERS

- 4 Ivana Caktaš
Heterotopija igara i ustopija apokalipse u trilogiji Margaret Atwood Ludi Adam
- 22 Mirela Dakić
Tko je Herculine Barbin? O (ne)identitetu autobiografije
- 43 Janis Paiders, Elina Plume
Use of place names in the subtitle corpus of highest-grossing movies of the past 20 Years
- 61 Ana Popović
WALL-E: A Robot That Reminds Us About Being Human
- 78 Judith Schneider
Nature and Technology in David Mamet's The Water Engine
- 98 Milica Stanković
Consumerism and Mass Media in the Early Works of Thomas Pynchon
- 120 Natalija Stepanović
KAKO SMO PREŽIVJELE POSTKOLONIJALIZAM: Pravo na identitet u dramama fragile! i Nevidljivi Tene Štivičić
- 147 Danica Stojanović
The Postmodern Other in the Populist Society
- 168 Victoria Vestić
Harry Potter, Heteronormativity and Pronatalism – the Villain as the Antinatalist

Ana Popović
University of Zagreb
apopovic1803@gmail.com

original scientific paper

I would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb for the financial support of my studies and research.

WALL-E: A Robot That Reminds Us About Being Human

Ecological themes have in recent years started to become part of cinematic production, especially in the genre of animated film which serves as a platform for creating alternative realities to depict a reflection of the reality we live in. Disney and Pixar's 2008 animated movie WALL-E is the perfect example of such an approach to representing the Anthropocene. The movie is set in a post-apocalyptic future which is a consequence of the human obsession with consumption and technology. Despite having survived the apocalypse and continuing its way of living in a "consumer paradise" aboard a spaceship, the human race has deteriorated mentally and physically, to a point where humans exist almost as machines. In contrast, a non-human machine, the robot WALL-E, is given agency and human-like qualities, in order to awaken humans from their state of dependence on consumption and lead them back to a life in harmony with nature. By juxtaposing a non-human agent and non-reactive humans, the movie opens a critical perspective of the human treatment of their environment in the capitalist system and points to the most pressing issues of the Anthropocene, while at the same time offering a solution in renouncing anthropocentric ignorance and resisting the hegemonic consumer systems in place.

Key words: Pixar, Anthropocene, consumerism, capitalism, ecocriticism, cyborg, post-apocalyptic fiction.

INTRODUCTION

WALL-E is a 2008 animated sci-fi movie hit that won the hearts of both children and adult audiences. This Disney-Pixar co-production uses the genre of animated film to tackle some of the most pressing issues of today. It is disguised as a children's movie about the romance between two robots, when in fact it stands tall among the most prominent artistic representations of the problematic of the Anthropocene. *WALL-E* presents a strong critique directed at the contemporary consumer culture and its disregard for environmental issues. Its anti-capitalist and environmentalist logic serves as a warning against a post-apocalyptic future that the human race is summoning through its careless behavior. The genre of animated film serves as an ideal platform to expose such complex issues in a light-hearted way, allowing for an alternative vision of reality, which is visually attractive and playfully packaged, while at the same time exposing ominous threats to human existence on Earth.

The movie is centered around a robot, namely Waste Allocation Load Lifter: Earth-class (shortened, WALL-E), who roams the Earth some 700 years in the future with the task of compacting garbage. The Earth, zoomed in from space, at first appears to resemble the satellite images the viewer usually associates with it, but as the camera draws closer, the hills are identified as piles of garbage and the cityscape is made up of skyscrapers built from trash compacted by robots like WALL-E. However, he is the only one of his kind that still performs the job and in his isolated life he finds pleasure in collecting human artifacts as memorabilia. His hobby is the first sign of WALL-E's human-like personality, which develops rapidly after he meets EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator), another robot sent to Earth from the spaceship Axiom to inspect it for signs of life. The exiled human race lives on while their planet recovers from the after-effects of hyper-consumerism and the consequential eco-catastrophe, but due to terminal damage inflicted on Earth, humans still live on the Axiom 700 years later in a highly-technologized world of their own. As WALL-E falls in love with EVE, he eventually shows her a dirty boot that carries a plant inside, which triggers EVE to immediately return to the ship and notify the captain of organic life on Earth, signaling that the planet is again inhabitable. When the ship's autopilot Auto tries to prevent the humans' return to Earth, WALL-E inspires a

group of freed bots and humans awakened from their object-like, purposeless existence to fight for their right to return to Earth and re-establish their lost way of life in harmony with nature.

The movie's plotline is the first indication that *WALL-E* is environmentalist-oriented and that it serves as a criticism of the contemporary ways of life, warning about the complex issues such as the environmental apocalypse and the deterioration of the human species. This paper analyzes the Anthropocene apocalypse represented in *WALL-E* through its anti-capitalist and eco-critical discourse constructed on the transposition of responsibility to a non-human object. By humanizing a robot and giving him the voice of warning, the movie opens up a critical perspective that the humans of today are often blind to. This paper examines *WALL-E* as ecocriticism directed at the consequences of anthropocentric behavior that disregards its effects on the environment and the deterioration of the human race as a consequence of capitalist culture. Concepts such as nostalgia for a better past, overconsumption as the cause for apocalypse, human disregard for the planet's and their own well-being and the Disneyesque conquest of love over all evil (in this case, corporate capitalism) come together to form a strong critique of the modern ways of life in the Anthropocene.

ENVIRONMENTAL APOCALYPSE IN *WALL-E*

The apocalypse is often used in ecocritical films to represent a threat to the Anthropocene condition. The Anthropocene, defined as “the new era in which humans are functioning as geological agents” (DeLoughrey 2014: 273), is inseparable from the concept of environmental consciousness and the critique of human behavior destructive to human environment. *WALL-E* is only one of many movies, even animated ones intended for children audiences, that presents the topic of the Anthropocene through apocalyptic representations. According to ecocritical literature, this new geological era is marked by human destruction of life-supporting conditions on planet Earth (Mirzoeff 2014: 230), including the conditions that support human life itself. It is clear from the opening scene of the movie that *WALL-E* has an environmentalist and ecocritical agenda, brought forward through a depiction of an apocalypse caused by anthropocentric overconsumption, untroubled

by consequences and marked by blind faith in the system of capitalism.

The depiction of this condition is often carried out in cinematic representations as an apocalypse. The representation of an apocalypse brings forward two points. First, it demonstrates the unsustainability of our way of life by disrupting the myth of progress, as Ginn suggests (2015: 7). Constant development of technology, globalization, economy and other systems that make up the capitalist reality of today suggest that our civilization is in the state of constant progress. However, this is a progress of only one way of life, and one that disrupts the life of our planet and biosphere. Ginn therefore suggests that the Anthropocene apocalypse “undercuts the familiar modern narrative of progress” and demonstrates that the future is not possible with the perpetuation of the current way of life. Instead, it stands for a “deeper challenge of crafting new ways to respond with honor and dignity to unruly earth forces” (Ginn 2015: 7). Second, the apocalypse “provides an emotionally charged frame of reference within which complex, long-term issues are reduced to monocausal crises involving conflicts” (Garrard 2004: 105). Framing apocalyptic narratives as phenomena with determined causes, which are solvable when these causes are eliminated, helps identify the attack on anthropocentrism and thus offer some solution and alternative to the imminent threat of eco-apocalypse.

The apocalypse represented in *WALL-E* exhibits these features. It is portrayed as the result of overconsumption that arises from contemporary consumer culture. In their consumer frenzy, humans created more trash than their planet could handle. As a newspaper headline that the viewers can catch a glimpse of in the movie indicates, the specific reason behind the deterioration of human civilization and its habitat is that there was simply “Too Much Trash.” Human consumer habits led to the destruction of the planet's biosphere to a point where there was no organic life left but humans themselves, and they were forced to leave the planet. Leslie calls *WALL-E* a “glimpse into our future world” (2017, n. p.), signaling that the globalist and capitalist habits of humans in the movie represent anthropocentric ways of life presently being enacted in the real world. The audience recognizes and identifies with consumerist behaviors of the Axiom's residents; what is represented in the film is only an exaggeration of the contemporary phenomena related to capitalism,

consumerism, rapid development of technology, etc. The reason that the movie evokes a strong sense of anxiety in its audiences is because it touches upon their own realistic fears. Scott believes these to be “fears about meaninglessness, apocalypse, and oblivion” (2014: 150). In other words, the movie disrupts the fantasy of progress that 21st century humans perpetuate. However, it provides reasons and solutions to the crisis at the same time. By reducing the crisis to one harmful pattern of behavior as its reason and suggesting the solution is within our reach, the movie is intended to raise awareness and encourage changes.

ANIMATED REPRESENTATION OF CONSUMER CAPITALISM

Anderson notes that the movie identifies three entities that are to blame for the environmental apocalypse, namely the global corporations, consumers as individuals and the overwhelming technology (2012: 268), all of which are part of the consumer capitalist culture of today. He explains that the movie's critique is directed mainly at the contemporary tendency towards big corporations gradually substituting the nation-state as the center of power, with Buy N Large as its main representative that encourages hyper-consumption, resulting in both the ecological apocalypse on Earth and the “cultural degeneration” of humanity (2012: 268). Much of the trash depicted as building material for the skyscrapers holds the label Buy N Large (Leslie 2017, n. p.), associated with the consumerist giant that made such a world possible for humans. Overconsumption, or as Anderson identifies it, gluttony, is the main reason behind such a hyper-production of trash that led to the apocalypse (2012: 268). The brand of Buy N Large stands for the sin itself, as discernible from its name. Humans, even though pointed out as offenders by Anderson, are not to blame to the same degree. They are depicted more as victims of the capitalist system, than they are as beings responsible for its creation and perpetuation (even after the destruction of the whole planet). Even technology itself becomes a culprit; when humans are awakened from their anesthetized state and encouraged to think for themselves, realizing that what they were doing was wrong, the ship's autopilot tries to stop their comeback to Earth. Humans have to fight against technology to restore their

previous way of life in connection to nature.

Nicholas Mirzoeff calls the cultural phenomenon depicted in *WALL-E* the AICS – autoimmune climate-changing capitalism syndrome, defining it as “an autoimmune capitalism that seems determined to extract the last moment of circulation for itself, even at the expense of its host lifeworld” (2014: 215). In other words, humans perpetuate capitalism that is destructive to its own environment, blind to the limits and consequences of overconsumption. Mirzoeff believes that the Anthropocene is blind to its own effects, with humans ignoring the effects of capitalism on our own and our planet's health, aware that such a way of life is unsustainable, and yet expecting there to be a final authority that will restore order once the line is crossed (2014: 217). Corporations play a significant role in this new world order. Mark Fisher suggests that corporations such as Buy N Large have become the new villain in Hollywood production (2010: 12). *WALL-E* is the perfect example: the corporation is the sole culprit for the planet's destruction, holding a monopoly over all human consumption. Humans, on the other hand, are infantilized and nescient. They are machine-dependent, or in other words, consumption-dependent, unable to think or act on their own. They are rid of the blame, since their lives are led for them by the corporate system. In line with Mirzoeff's understanding of AICS, humans are blind to their own wrongdoing, and subjected to the power of corporations as a greater authority. Therefore, they are not liable for taking part in bringing about the apocalypse.

This point is further stressed by the fact that even though humans are portrayed in the film as animated characters, there is still a live action extract inserted in the movie featuring a human actor rather than animation. The live action excerpt is Buy N Large's CEO's address to humans, which stands out from the animated part of the movie as something that does not belong to the cheerful, comical and visually beautiful realm of animated film, but rather to the grim reality of today. The reality framed by the live action scenes represents what Fisher describes as a way of fighting capitalism by invoking the Real – in this case, an environmental catastrophe. He says about *WALL-E* that it is based on the fantasy

that the infinite expansion of capital is possible, that capital can proliferate without labor – on the off world ship Axiom, all labor is

performed by robots; that the burning up of Earth's resources is only a temporary glitch, and that, after a suitable period of recovery, capital can terraform the plane and colonize it (2010: 18).

Since capitalism is hard to represent visually, *WALL-E* turns to the representation of an environmental apocalypse as its consequence. The movie is an example of “Green critique,” which suggests that capitalism is unsustainable as it is built on what could only be a fantasy, presupposing limitless resources and non-dependence on Earth as the only habitat for humans (Fisher 2010: 18-19). To best demonstrate the unsustainability of such a system, movies often turn to the apocalypse as a way of disrupting the system and showing its consequences.

HUMANS AS THE ULTIMATE CONSUMERS

Despite the fact that the movie is a critical dystopia directed at overconsumption, as Hall describes it (2011: 248), even the apocalypse does not put an end to the capitalist system. 700 years after leaving the Earth because of waste contamination to a degree where it becomes uninhabitable, humans are still under the control of the same corporation that led them to an environmental apocalypse. They live aboard the spaceship Axiom where they perpetuate the same way of life as they had on Earth. The Axiom is a consumer paradise: humans have nothing to do all day but lie in their hover chairs and consume food and technology. They are represented as ultimate consumers, living their lives relying on technology to carry out their daily tasks and simplest actions in their place. Reduced to their status of consumers, the whole human race has lost its recollection of planet Earth and the human culture on it; as Edney and Hughes put it, “[t]he only systems that make sense are capitalism and digital circuits” (2010: 44). While waiting for organic life to appear on their home planet again, humans continue with the same capitalist lifestyle provided by the same corporation that made Earth uninhabitable. The human behavior in *WALL-E* represents a strongly anthropocentric view, proving that even though they have destroyed all other forms of organic life on Earth, humans can still be content if their addiction to consumerism is satisfied.

Preprogrammed by the capitalist system, humans are

represented as the ultimate prisoners of consumer goods and technology: they are passive recipients of the simplest daily tasks. Technology performs everything in their stead – they are moved around, fed and changed much like infants (Leslie 2017, n. p.). Even in this nightmarish depiction of a prospective version of human life, however, life is shiny and colorful, and people seem to be content in their hover chairs. The Axiom is portrayed as a bright high-tech realm of consumerist heaven. It stands “[i]n stark contrast to the decayed landscape left behind . . . a brave new world, alive with consumption” (Shaw 2010: 395). The viewers consuming the movie can easily recognize themselves “in the corpulent, tech-dependent, spoon-fed, infantilized remnants of the human race” (McNaughtan 2012: 755). Yet, there is a sense of anxiety in identifying with the people in the movie, which arises from the fact that they have no control over their lives. The mental and emotional capabilities of humans have, too, been affected by the pervasiveness of technology and consumerism in their everyday lives. Humans are “bored and sedentary, and as infantile in mind and shape” (Herhuth 2014: 56). They play no role in their own lives, without even realizing it, which is why the agency is shifted towards the non-human realm.

The potential for change and progress (as the progressive course of human culture has come to a halt after their transposition to the spaceship) can no longer originate from humans. The desire for ever more consumption has replaced the concern for the environment, Hall notes, but also the concern for anything else; humans are turned into “metaphorical robots” (2010: 255), living bodies whose functions and actions are no longer necessary because they are extended or replaced by machines. With the control of the human body, as well as mind, transferred to technological constructs, while at the same time ascribing human traits to a non-human object, the movie opens up the question of what it means to be human. Blameless and actionless, humans are reduced to living and breathing hover chairs, ready to adopt any new form of consumption offered to them by the capitalist system in place. The ability to think and feel is thus taken away from the lifeless human race and awarded to an object, a robot whose role is to question the hegemonic scheme, rethink his and the humans' role in the life of all beings and inspire a reaction, in both the humans on screen and those in front of it.

BETWEEN HUMAN AND ROBOT: WALL-E

Non-human protagonists are a regular occurrence in animated movies. They allow the producers to take certain thematic issues out of their regular context and insert those issues into an alternative reality where they might be considered from a different perspective. Ursula K. Heise identifies two strategies that animated movies employ to this aim. Anthropomorphic animals and objects modeled on human behavior are one such strategy. Another are such subjects' plasmatic bodies (Heise 2014: 303-304). In *WALL-E*, both strategies are applied. The protagonist is a thinking robot that exhibits a range of emotions, and whose body, as well as the bodies of other robots, can be understood as plasmatic in that it engages “with increasing mechanization and commodification” (Heise 2014: 304). The movie's protagonist corresponds to these descriptions. He is a moving box made for one simple task of compacting trash, and yet he develops consciousness and grows into a being whose intelligence and even emotional intelligence surpass those of infantilized humans. His body, “not humanoid at all,” as Bernard describes it (2011: 55), bears no resemblance to a living being, thus requiring from the viewers to completely change the perspective when trying to understand such a being. Animated movies have a tendency to assign agency to the unexpected subject, thus questioning the audience's preconceived concepts of what is human, natural or lively (Heise 2014: 305). Such a technique serves to open up new perspectives on the systems in place and discover a view that is not entirely anthropocentric.

In his hybrid composition, *WALL-E* can be identified as a cyborg, an “organism incorporating biological and electro-mechanical elements” (Garrard 2004: 183). Cyborg agents are a regular occurrence in science fiction movie production, bringing new forms of life into perspective and thus challenging the comfortable anthropocentric views of the world of the viewers. For Donna Haraway, cyborgs are identified as “creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (1991: 149). In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, she identifies cyborgs as post-human forms of life, designed for the purpose of challenging dual oppositions that contemporary culture and society take for granted, such as the antitheses between artificial and natural or body and mind (1991: 152). Through its cyborg protagonist, who is a hybrid

composite of all of these elements, *WALL-E* subverts the postulates of human society and constructs a post-human perspective that offers an alternative system of power and relation.

The new perspective that the robot offers is primarily focused on environmental concerns. *WALL-E* is the first to understand that the world as it has been for the past 700 years is not the only one that could be. He recognizes the flaws of surrendering to the will of a capitalist system that continues to destroy all forms of life. *WALL-E* represents the epitome of anti-consumerism, as he surpasses his preprogrammed behavior and manages to differentiate himself by rising above consumer uniformity (McNaughtan 2012: 760). And *WALL-E* is able to do so because he is not influenced by the previous cultural codes of the commodities that represent human life on Earth. He develops an individual taste for objects and ascribes them the meaning he likes, taking from them the lessons he himself wants to learn, instead of those imposed by the consumer culture. On one such occasion, he stumbles upon a diamond ring and keeps the box, while throwing the diamond away, simply because he likes the box more. He copies certain behavioral patterns from the cultural remnants such as old movies, but otherwise has no idea about the capital value of things. Rather, he appreciates their emotional and personal value, exhibiting nostalgia towards a past that he was never part of.

While *WALL-E*'s fascination with all things human is endearing in its sentimentality, it is hard not to notice that it is still a kind of an obsession with objects. The robot is a passionate collector of all things human. In his little container house, he has a collection of human artifacts that give out the first trace of emotion and warmth in the movie after the initial images of barren Earth covered in trash. Among all that trash, *WALL-E* finds things that used to mean something to humans, such as Christmas lights and compact disks with which he decorates his home, Zippo lighters and sporks that he does not know how to use, and other consumer goods treated by the robot as treasure. The movie is contradictory in its depiction of a consumer robot who is at the same time anti-consumerist. *WALL-E* copies human behavior and constructs their consumer culture even though he has never encountered it directly. The remnants of human existence on Earth help him in his attempt to recreate human life. Nevertheless, he manages to grow into an anti-consumerist and responsible being, by developing a range of emotions, among which,

oddy, is his primal identification with the natural world. Despite the general anti-consumerist message of the film, the audience is endeared by WALL-E's care for collecting manufactured goods (Anderson 2012: 267), as it gives WALL-E's character a sentimental side that humans possess themselves and that is reflected in the meaning they ascribe to physical objects. The reason why WALL-E develops differently from humans is due to his life in isolation, free of a corporate force to push him into overconsumption. Again, the blame for the terrible outcome of human overconsumption is placed entirely on the corporation, as without its influence, WALL-E is free to develop into a sensible consumer, while staying aware of his surroundings and maintaining his emotional consciousness. The idea that humans could have been able to do so as well represents the utopian impulse of the movie, by raising awareness and inviting the audience to apply the same principles (Hall 2011: 258).

RISING ABOVE PROGRAMMED SYSTEMS

In the grim critical dystopia, *WALL-E* produces the necessary sign of hope. By giving the robot the opportunity to show human-like qualities, the movie's director Andrew Stanton is trying to portray the desire to “to try and figure out what the point of living [is]”. He denies the environmental orientation of the movie, claiming instead that the main theme is the way “[i]rrational love defeats life's programming” (qtd. in Weintraub 2008, n. p.). The victory of love over evil systems of power is one of the most common themes in Disney production. In *WALL-E*, it is manifested in two ways: as the power of romantic love that can overcome all obstacles, as well as the love of the planet and its living beings, be it humans, animals, plants or cyborgs. WALL-E serves to disrupt the human-robot routine and upset what Herhuth refers to as “the standardized, rationalized, and programmed practices of life and labor” (2014: 56). Instead, WALL-E recovers spontaneity, impulsiveness and compassionate love – the emotional elements of living that used to be associated with the humankind, but now require a robot to be reawakened in humans. In Herhuth's own words, “humans have forgotten a vital part of their humanity that WALL-E restores” (2014: 56).

Herhuth believes that the robot protagonist stands for the human capability of abstract desire (2014: 57). He strays from his

directive daily task of compacting trash and expands his range of activities to express his interest in the archaeology of human-inhabited Earth. He then abandons all his efforts when a “girl” comes into play. Through this process, WALL-E becomes a “‘person’ enough to serve as the hero” (McNaughtan 2012: 762). As in most examples of Disney romance, the “male” protagonist falls in love with the “female” one, who first ignores his efforts, only to discover his heroic qualities later and fall in love herself. He performs his romance, learning about it from the cinematic representation of romance as featured in the musical *Hello, Dolly!* which WALL-E has on tape. While his emotions stem from a capability for love that is an after-effect of WALL-E's absorption of the pre-Axiom human culture through human memorabilia, without the overwhelming influence of destructive authoritative systems he is free to develop this emotion into a spontaneous and innocent affection, unlike humans, whose contact with each other is reduced to machine-governed communication through screens. Following WALL-E's arrival aboard the Axiom, human beings do, however, start perceiving their surroundings and each other after the robot disrupts their routine. Eventually, a love story between two humans, John and Mary, starts developing as well. But, as Edney and Hughes point out, “it occurs at such a perfunctory level as to be a mere shadow of the film’s real love story between WALL-E and EVE;” there is no elaborate courtship involving dancing, singing and holding hands, as with their “robot counterparts” (2010: 49). It is nevertheless a sign of awakening of the human spirit in their previously automated and underdeveloped social interactions.

In line with the nostalgic representation of heterosexual love, which is a sentimental homage to the “lost cinematic world” of classical Hollywood (Scott 2014: 153) and its timeless “courting rituals” (2014: 154), lies also the idea of eco-nostalgia based in the memory of a pastoral Earth (Murray and Heumann 2009, n. p.). Earth as shown on the Axiom’s monitors is portrayed as a pastoral idyll, revisiting images of humans living in harmony with nature. Much like WALL-E is nostalgic for artifacts of human culture that he has never seen in use, so are humans nostalgic about the Earth that they have never lived on. The only encounter they could ever have with the blue and green planet is through images on their screens. Nevertheless, even though it is a mere simulacrum of the home that the human race

was forced to abandon, such representation of Earth still evokes nostalgic feelings of homesickness and encourages humans to action. Only when faced with the alternative vision of reality, one that is synchronized with nature rather than consumerism, do humans awaken from their state of passive existence and surrender to the capitalist system, and are they reprogrammed towards another goal. Such a turn is recognized in Deep Ecology as the “primal identification of humans and the ecosphere” (Garrard 2004: 21), suggesting that humans were originally programmed to function within such an environment, and later reprogrammed by the capitalist system to grow into perfect consumers. The return to Earth and nature is, therefore, a kind of a homecoming, centered around the reconstruction of a way of life translated to them by visual representations on screen, on a planet they have never known. Even though people aboard the Axiom are not really returning to their own home, but that of previous generations, their desire to return indicates that there is indeed an inherent connection to the Earth that motivates this journey. Just as WALL-E has to return to Earth to live, as he can only find spare parts for his mechanical body among the piles of garbage, so do humans. As Edney and Hughes note, for humans, the journey back to Earth is crucial for them to start living, rather than merely surviving (2010: 51).

The movie provides a dose of hope in offering a solution to avoiding the rapidly approaching tragic fate for the humankind and planet Earth. Carloyn Leslie proposes that the movie questions the idea of “what it means to be ‘human’; how humans and machines can coexist in harmony; and how we can go about reversing the seemingly irreparable environmental damage we are currently inflicting on our planet” (2017, n. p.). To all that, *WALL-E* offers the same answer: it is in the ability to wake up from the preprogrammed state that we are currently in and start taking action. As Allen puts it, “‘WALL-E’ makes it clear that anyone, whether robot or human, can transcend what we are supposedly programmed by our culture to be or do” (2008, n. p.). This point is proven in the narrative first by WALL-E's evolution towards a state of awareness and emotional intelligence, when he surpasses his programmed capabilities of only compacting trash and develops feelings and aspirations, then by EVE, who is taught by WALL-E to develop the same abilities, and finally by humans aboard the Axiom. In their mindless state of merely existing,

humans have no need or urge to care for themselves, others or their surroundings. They are programmed by an extreme version of consumer culture to exist in a state of total comfort that requires no effort on their side. But as WALL-E disrupts their routine, they manage to escape this programmed state and reawaken their sense of belonging to a society, a culture, and finally a place, the planet that they left behind centuries ago.

CONCLUSION

WALL-E is a children's tale only at first glimpse. This playful animated comedy explores some of the greatest problems of modern generations and warns about the imminent dangers evoked by human behavior. The ecocriticism represented in the movie is directed at the human generations of today, even though the movie takes place in the far future. By exposing the problematic anthropocentric attitude of human beings and pointing out the impossibility of the retention of such an attitude, it constructs a frightening view of the future of our planet. The movie is an explicit call for action against overconsumption and technological dependence. Considering that this is an animated children's movie, it does not lack a happy ending following the apocalypse. In fact, it is in this happy ending that the movie proposes a solution to the current ecological crisis. The main point that the director Andrew Stanton is trying to prove is that humans can and should be responsible for their own fate, as well as the fate of those around them. By taking control of their lives and refusing to submit to the will of inexistent hegemonic authorities, the human race can overcome the ecological issues it faces. The people in *WALL-E* have given up on leading a meaningful life, surrendering to capitalism and technology, living in a dream-like state of constant consumption. It takes a robot in love to teach humans that there is more to life and that preprogrammed systems can be overthrown by simple attempts to think and feel. Perhaps the same robot can teach the humans behind the screens the same lesson, before we lead our planet to a similar apocalypse.

Works cited

Allen, Charlotte (2008). "Wall-E Doesn't Say Anything." *Latimes.Com*, <http://www.latimes.com/la-op-allen13-2008jul13-story.html>. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Anderson, Christopher Todd (2012). "Post-Apocalyptic Nostalgia: WALL-E, Garbage, and American Ambivalence toward Manufactured Goods." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol 23, no. 3, 267-282. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/10436928.2012.703598. Accessed on 12 March 2018

Bernard, Carol A. (2011). "Performing Gender, Performing Romance: Pixar'S WALL-E." In: R. C. Neighbor and Sandy Rankin (eds.), *The Galaxy Is Rated G: Essays on Children's Science Fiction Film and Television*, Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland And Co., 53-63.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth (2014). "Satellite Planetarity and the Ends of the Earth." *Public Culture*, vol 26, no. 2, 257-280. Duke University Press, doi:10.1215/08992363-2392057. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Edney, Kathryn A. T., and Kit Hughes (2010). "Hello WALL-E!: Nostalgia, Utopia, and the Science Fiction Musical." In: Mathew J. Bartkowiak (ed.), *Sounds of the Future: Essays on Music in Science Fiction Film*, Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland And Company, 44-66.

Fisher, Mark (2010). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Hants, UK: Zero Books.

Garrard, Greg (2004). *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.

Ginn, Franklin (2015). "When Horses Won't Eat: Apocalypse and the Anthropocene." *Annals of the Association Of American Geographers*, vol 105, no. 2, 1-9. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/00045608.2014.988100. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Haraway, Donna J. (1991). "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth

Century.” *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 149-182. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Hall, Alexander C. H. (2011). “‘Manmade Mess’: The Critical Dystopia of WALL-E.” In: R. C. Neighbor and Sandy Rankin (eds.), *The Galaxy Is Rated G: Essays on Children's Science Fiction Film and Television*, Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland And Co., 248-261.

Heise, U. K. (2014). “Plasmatic Nature: Environmentalism and Animated Film.” *Public Culture*, vol 26, no. 2, 301-318. Duke University Press, doi:10.1215/08992363-2392075. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Herhuth, Eric (2014). “Life, Love, and Programming: The Culture and Politics of WALL-E and Pixar Computer Animation.” *Cinema Journal*, vol 53, no. 4, 53-75. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Leslie, Carolyn (2017). “WALL•E: A Ray of Hope in a Ruined World.” *Screen Education*, vol 88, 16-23. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

McNaughtan, Hugh (2012). “Distinctive consumption and popular anti-consumerism: The case of Wall*E.” *Continuum*, vol 26, no. 5, 753-766. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/10304312.2012.664116. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas (2014). “Visualizing the Anthropocene.” *Public Culture*, vol 26, no. 2, 213-232. Duke University Press, doi:10.1215/08992363-2392057. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Heumann (2009). “‘WALL-E’: from environmental adaptation to sentimental nostalgia.” *Ejumpcut.Org*, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/WallE/>. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Scott, Ellen (2014). “Agony and Avoidance: Pixar, Deniability, and the Adult Spectator.” *Journal Of Popular Film And Television*, vol 42, no. 3, 150-162. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.1080/01956051.2014.881773. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

Shaw, Ian Graham Ronald (2010). "WALL-E's World: Animating Badiou's Philosophy." *Cultural Geographies*, vol 17, no. 3, 391-405. Accessed on 12 March 2018.

"WALL-E." (2008). Walt Disney Picture, Pixar Studio Animations.
Weintraub, Steve 'Frosty' (2008). "WALL-E Q & A with Writer/Director Andrew Stanton." *Collider*, <http://collider.com/walle-q-a-with-writerdirector-andrew-stanton/>. Accessed on 12 April 2018.