

WALL-E: Past, Present, and Future

The 2008 film WALL-E, produced by Jim Morris, and co-written by Andrew Stanton and Jim Reardon, follows the story of a robot, WALL-E, on a mission to clean up a desolate Earth. Upon first viewing the film, WALL-E may seem like nothing but entertainment for children. However, the details of the film suggest that there is an underlying message about human practices that would cause the almost extinction of all life on Earth.

Andrew Stanton, Jim Reardon, co-writers, and Jim Morris, film producer, use details, colors, and a medium often seen in media targeted towards children in an effort to warn humanity of future tragedies that result from over-consumption, neglect of the environment, and automation. Through the filmmakers' efforts, the film implies that choices of the past can be used to prevent present and future tragedies, though, choices of the present cannot entirely revert the result of choices in the past. Furthermore, choices made in the future also do not revert the result of choices in the present or past.

In order to adequately explain the meaning of the thesis, here is what is to come. First, the past, present, and future will be defined in the context of the thesis. Second, the goal is to establish the importance of the past, present, and future to the argument. Third, I will present my reasoning for deciding on the argument. Next, evidence to support the thesis will be presented. The evidence portion will attempt to support two outstanding claims. The first is that the filmmakers used aspects often found in children's media to target children and influence their future. The second is that past choices can influence the present and future, however, present choices cannot influence the past and future choices cannot influence the present or the past. Last, the implications of the thesis and its claims will be taken into consideration.

The past, present, and future I will refer to throughout my argument are presented in multiple contexts. For the most part, the past means 2008. Since the current year is 2023 when I refer to the past in the context of myself or current events it means 2008. The present can have two different meanings depending on the context. If I speak in relation to myself or to current events then the present means 2023. However, if I am speaking in relation to the filmmakers the present may mean 2008. The year 2023 is my present and 2008 is the filmmakers' present. The future simply refers to the time after the release of WALL-E.

My argument is that the filmmakers use colors and a medium often seen in media targeted toward children in an effort to warn humanity of future tragedies that result from over-consumption, neglect of the environment, and automation. In addition, the film implies that choices of the past can be used to prevent present and future tragedies, though, choices of the present cannot entirely revert the result of choices in the past. Furthermore, choices made in the future also do not revert the result of choices in the present or past. My goal is to use the film, WALL-E, to understand how decision-making in the past, present, and future affect each time period.

As a child, it was easy to become wrapped up in the bright colors, pretty illustrations, and action of WALL-E. At the time, WALL-E just seemed to be a fun story about a robot on a mission to save Earth. The dire situation in the film felt unrealistic because as a child I did not understand the scientific and political implications of the film. Nor did it feel like the topics presented by the film were imminent. However, now that I am an adult watching WALL-E, I understand the film differently. Having studied and understood politics and science, I am able to discern details that would require more knowledge than that of a prepubescent child. WALL-E is a film for children's entertainment, however, it also sought something greater. It sought to

positively influence the mind of any child who watched it by making them aware of topics they would run into later in life. The film presents consumerism, capitalism, over-consumption, natural disasters, climate change, and extinction. That is what made me choose WALL-E as the topic of focus.

I am unsure of whether the filmmakers' attempt to influence children through WALL-E was successful. Currently, the world still suffers from the same consumerism, over-consumption, environmental destruction, and ambition to automate that was present in WALL-E. However, the world is more aware of the consequences of our human practices. The crisis in WALL-E has not happened in our world. Even so, it seems as if we are well on our way to sharing the same crisis as the humans in WALL-E. Though, unlike the humans in the film, we do not have the means to run away from it.

Childhood is a critical period of development, therefore, the media a child consumes during that time influences the way they see themselves and the world around them. Children's media is distinctly different from media consumed by the masses because it uses practices that specifically target young audiences. Children's media takes on an array of forms: TV series, books, films, and more. The subject of analysis, WALL-E, is a film. What WALL-E shares with common examples of children's media is its medium and color usage. WALL-E uses animation as its medium coupled with vibrant colors to be more appealing to young audiences. I believe that the filmmakers used animation and vibrant colors to attract young and impressionable children.

Animation is seen often in children's media. For example, the extremely popular children's Youtube channel, Cocomelon, and the iconic children's show, Baby Shark, both use animation. These massively influential forms of media targeted towards children share the same

art medium as WALL-E. Children are often associated with freedom and creativity because as children they lack the responsibility to view things with realism. For that reason, children have more creative freedom. Animation is associated with children's media because of its potential for creativity. Animation is able to express creativity in a way otherwise unimaginable. It gives the artist the freedom to create whatever it is they want. For children, a medium without creative boundaries is appealing. Animation is able to reproduce the fantasies that would be created by a child's imagination. Children are able to see and hear the things their minds could only imagine through animation. In that way, animation has become a medium of art that is attractive to children. The filmmakers of WALL-E deployed animation as the medium in order to get the attention of children.

The filmmakers of WALL-E use vibrant colors throughout the film to further enhance the attraction it would have on children. Colors are associated with emotion or are used to express meaning. In society, color is used in a variety of ways. For example, signs, traffic lights, and warning labels use color to express meaning. Similar to animation, the reason why color is so important to WALL-E's filmmakers is because color is linked to creativity. Color is a boundless form of expression. Artists are able to use color to enhance or take the place of whatever they cannot solely express through words and figures. The filmmakers of WALL-E have used color in the way that artists do. The vibrant colors that appear in WALL-E are visually appealing. A child would be drawn to the film because the colors make it stand out. When a film is bright and has unique colors it draws attention.

In addition, the colors also have a mental effect on the children. As stated previously, colors are associated with expression and emotions. According to Patricia Valdez and Albert Mehrabian, in a study about the effects of color on emotion, "The color red was associated with

"exciting" and "stimulating," both of which imply pleasure and high arousal. Blue was associated with "secure/comfortable" and "tender/soothing," which imply pleasure and low arousal" (p. 396). WALL-E's use of color gives the children in the audience a way to actively engage with the film. When the color red flashes on the screen the children sub-conscientiously feel excitement. When the color blue flashes on the screen the children feel calm. It is the invocation and fluctuation of emotion that further draws the attention of the child audience.

By using the methods of children's media, the filmmakers would be able to transfer information about environmental destruction, consumerism, and capitalism into the easily impressionable minds of children. In the future, when the children that watched WALL-E grow into adults they would be aware of the potential consequences of human practices. The children would be able to potentially change the future, and our present, through the filmmakers' decisions.

Now that I have explained how the filmmakers of WALL-E used aspects of children's media to draw in an audience of children, I will analyze the details of the film to address the second part of the thesis. The second part of the thesis states the film implies that choices of the past can be used to prevent present and future tragedies, though, choices of the present cannot entirely revert the result of choices in the past. Furthermore, choices made in the future also do not revert the result of choices in the present or past.

The first detail is at approximately 1:19:54 in the film. In the scene, the babies on the Axiom are being taught the alphabet. The babies are wearing red clothes which is the same as the adults who have escaped the system of capitalism and consumerism of Buy N Large. The color of the babies' clothes implies that they are also outside of the system of capitalism and consumerism of Buy N Large. As children, they are not able to participate in the system Buy N

Large has created. However, when the children become adults then they will be able to participate in Buy N Large's system. The children's minds are impressionable. That is why in the same scene the children are being taught to become a part of the system. "A" is for Axiom, your home sweet home. "B" is for Buy N Large, your very best friend'. Buy N Large's goal is to influence the future of the children's lives by teaching them while they are still impressionable.

The filmmakers are using a similar method to influence the future of our world. The filmmakers have attracted an audience of impressionable children by using aspects of children's media. They sought to teach the children of their present, our past, that there will be future consequences of human practices. The consequences are displayed by the desolate depiction of Earth in the film. Through the filmmakers' method, it is implied that their present decisions, our past, can influence the future. It is difficult to determine whether or not WALL-E specifically has had an impact on the future. However, there is evidence that perspectives on human practices that may destroy the Earth have evolved since 2008. The United States' most recent president, Joe Biden, was elected partly because of his vow to shift America into more sustainable practices. The popularity of cars that use clean energy, like Tesla, has increased over the years. This is not evidence that WALL-E has changed our future but it is evidence that a past decision like electing a pro-climate president can change the future.

The following detail occurs at 1:29:38 in the film. In the scene, the humans have returned to the desolate Earth to rehabilitate the planet and humanity. The captain of the Axiom says "You kids are going to grow all kinds of plants". Then the camera pans over terrain where an abundance of plants have grown back on the desolate planet. I believe that the idea symbolized by this scene further supports that past decisions can influence the future, but, present and future decisions cannot entirely revert decisions of the past. The captain is relying on the children that

will be the future generation of humanity to grow the plants that restore Earth. In that way, the Captain's decision will influence the future. Not only will the Captain's decision affect the Earth's future it will also affect the perspective of adults in the future. The adults that grow from the children will potentially be more aware of the consequences of human practices. Even more so, what is interesting about this scene is that the plants that grew back are all the same. The Captain's decision may have changed the future but it could not completely change what had already happened. The Earth's lack of plant diversity is the result of humanity's past decision to let all life go extinct. Humanity's present decision may have allowed plants to grow back in the future but the effects of their past decision still lingers. The situation presented in this scene reflects my argument that past decisions can influence the future, but present and future decisions cannot entirely revert decisions of the past.

In the context of our world, past decisions in the United States were made that harmed minority communities such as Native Americans, Black people, and Asian people. Even though America has tried to reconcile and repair these communities with decisions after the fact, the effects of the past decisions still linger. It is simple for a decision in the past or present to influence the future but it is difficult vice versa.

The implications of this revelation about the relationship between the past, present, and future are dire. The filmmakers of WALL-E used a medium and colors related to children's media to draw in a young, impressionable audience. They attempted to teach the children of the past that in the future the consequences of neglecting the environment, consumerism, over-consumption, capitalism, and more will lead to the destruction of all life on Earth. The actions of the filmmakers imply that past decisions can influence the future, but, present and future decisions cannot entirely revert decisions of the past. Knowing this, the humans of our

world will have to be more careful with the decisions we make. Humanity gets one chance to make the right decision because when time passes we cannot go back and change it. Humanity can attempt to correct its past mistakes in the present or future but it will be futile because what has already been decided is fixed in time.

Works Cited

Stanton, Andrew, et al. WALL-E. Burbank, Calif., Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2008.

Valdez, Patricia, and Albert Mehrabian. "Effects of color on emotions." *Journal of experimental psychology: General* 123.4 (1994): 394.