

Om Anavekar

Dr. Skye Anicca

Strategic Writing

19 March 2021

### Cultural Analysis Final Draft

The ongoing battle against the novel coronavirus and the subsequent lockdowns have illustrated the immense reliance people place on technology. Children as young as six are using tablets and laptops to access their classes, and sales via online-shopping and food-delivery services have skyrocketed. It is more than likely that this dependence will only grow post-pandemic, as society returns to normal.

The 2008 motion animated film *Walle* paints a picture of this dependence to the extreme. The story follows Wall-E, the last robot left on an abandoned planet Earth. Several centuries ago, due to pollution and the depletion of natural resources, air toxicity levels made Earth uninhabitable. This forced all humans to flee the planet on massive starships, living in space and waiting for Earth to be livable once again. Unfortunately, this time never comes, and humans remain onboard their space-cruisers, living lives of luxury and dependent on their robotic stewards. All the while, Wall-E continues his directive of collecting and compacting garbage, until he meets EVE, a probe from the AXIOM, a human ship. The story follows their adventures as Wall-E, EVE, and other robots onboard the AXIOM attempt to bring humans back to planet Earth.

While the movie's focus is on the bond between Wall-E and EVE, it is filled with elements tied to technological dependence and control. One of the antagonists of this story is Buy and Large, or BnL, a megacorporation that owns nearly every aspect of human existence.

The conglomerate was solely responsible for the destruction of Earth and built every non-human character in the film, including Wall-E and EVE. *Walle's* depiction of humanity, as well as the ubiquitous presence of Buy and Large—a corporation comparable to megacompanies like Google and Amazon— illustrates the consequences of overdependence on technology within a society and the power it gives to those willing to exploit it.

The film assumes that its audience has seen dystopian elements in literature or pop-culture, as it begins with such a scene. The camera flies around a barren Earth, as “Put on Your Sunday Clothes” from the musical *Hello Dolly* echoes in the background. The dust clears to see colossal piles of garbage engulfing skyscrapers, wind turbines, and decaying nuclear reactors. The use of the *Hello Dolly* song with the desolate landscape utilizes irony and a touch of sarcasm to lure its audience. Its jolly lyrics and tune are repelled by the devastated landscape. As Wall-E navigates through the rubbish, it is nearly impossible to miss the hundreds of BnL logos littering the area. Everything from gasoline to currency to Wall-E himself is plastered with the overbearing symbol. Even the owner of the corporation, shown briefly on an abandoned holographic billboard, is titled ‘Global CEO’, a clear indication of the company’s influence. The integration of BnL within the film forms a strong connection with the idea of consumerism and control. Many individuals have the first-hand experience of this. A prime example is the ubiquity of Google services or Walmart products in current society. If these products or services suddenly ceased to exist, there would be widespread disorder as people’s routines are disrupted. The fact that the lack of these amenities could cause chaos is a clear indicator of its control over its users. Another tie to overdependence emerges within BnL’s jingle, “Buy and Large, superstore. All you need, and so much more! Happiness is what we sell, that’s why everyone lives BnL!” (Newman 0:00-0:20). Like “Put on Your Sunday Clothes”, this jingle plays from the loudspeakers in a jolly

and calming manner, once again tying to the irony of the situation. Furthermore, the jingle describes BnL products as “All you need and so much more,” insinuating that the company has everything one requires. The filmmakers use this line to establish the corporation’s attempt to make people dependent on them. Additionally, by describing their products—which is nearly everything in existence—as “happiness,” it is implied that having products or material goods will make individuals happier. This idea circles back to overdependence and corporate control. Many individuals are experiencing this directly due to the lockdowns, with people placing increasing dependence on services such as Amazon Prime and DoorDash for essential activities. While these corporations don’t explicitly state that they ‘sell happiness,’ they are becoming an increasingly larger component of our lives.

The second act of the film follows Wall-E traveling to the AXIOM. This instance reveals to the audience the state of the humans, proving that BnL’s attempts to make people dependent upon them were wildly successful. As Wall-E wanders through the passageways of the behemoth spaceship, the audience gets their first glimpse of human life. The humans are sedentary, overweight beings relying on hovering chairs for transport. Their conditions are so dire that they are unable to stand or walk and need robotic assistance if they fall out of their chairs. Their physical ability is not the only human feature that has changed. The humans also appear to have lost a majority of their intelligence and are completely unaware of their surroundings. This is shown when due to Wall-E’s clumsiness, a human snaps out of her video screen and looks in awe at the beautiful nebulas and surroundings around her. Another example of the loss of intelligence is within the captain of the AXIOM. Despite his high position, his sole role is to prepare morning announcements and summon a cup of coffee from the bridge, letting his robotic autopilot take care of the ship. When confronted with Wall-E and EVE, he begins to research

Earth, looking with wonder as he rediscovers social activities such as dancing and farming. The filmmakers push this idea to the extreme when the captain is required to read the ship's manual. Even though it is a simple book, he struggles to open it until his autopilot assists him, much to his amazement. Despite the loss of mobility and intelligence, none of the humans appear to be unhappy. They live their lives onboard the AXIOM in a state of ignorant bliss, enjoying food, drinks, and limitless entertainment. The filmmakers use these scenes to further bolster the effects of overdependence on technology. The use of advanced technologies such as hoverchairs, holo-screens, and fully autonomous ship demonstrates the negative effects of excessive technology. Moreover, the deluge of BnL products and devices—including the ship itself—reignites the idea of consumerism and corporate control being a catalyst for overdependence. The people on board the AXIOM have lived their entire lives in space, allowing BnL to run every aspect of their existence. Comparably, the pandemic has revealed that the United States acts like an AXIOM of some sort. The country's technology infrastructure and abundance of corporations enable many citizens to wait out the lockdowns with all the resources and entertainment they desire. While *Walle* was released far before the pandemic, it creates a picture similar to current events. The filmmakers' portrayal of humans as immobile, naïve creatures sculpts a scene of how excessive dependence on technology negatively affects societal progress.

The film concludes with a final battle between the BnL autopilot and the captain of the AXIOM. As the captain learns more and more about Earth, he begins to realize the confining state he and his passengers are in. His autopilot, AUTO, does not heed his orders and continues to follow its directive and remain in space. "I don't want to survive! I want to live!" (WALLE 1:22:11-1:22:35), exclaims the captain during an argument with AUTO. It is at this moment where the filmmakers reveal the raw consequences of technological overdependence to the

audience. The filmmakers structure the scene such that the audience is alongside the captain, finally understanding that BnL, the ship, and AUTO are all a means of control through dependence. In response to this revelation, and the subsequent mutiny of AUTO, the captain stumbles off his chair, and for the first time in 700 years, takes a step. As he staggers toward AUTO, the passengers watching below begin to abandon their hoverchairs and get up one by one. This sequence paints a picture of self-reliance and independence, as the humans break free of their technological bonds and the captain overpowers AUTO, sending the ship back to Earth. The filmmakers sculpt the third act as humanity's finest hour, illustrating to the audience the incredible euphoria of technological independence.

*Walle's* use of BnL and its portrayal of humans effectively illustrates the effect of overdependence on technology and exposes the control this dependence provides to those in power. Although the film premiered in 2008, themes explored in the film can be observed today. The rise in social media has caused an avalanche of apps doing everything in their power to keep users online. Networks and websites are shaping narratives or actively taking down non-conforming content –while this may be proactive and helpful if executed ideally, it is often tainted with personal biases and ulterior motives. The idea of dependence and control has been present since civilization but has arisen drastically over the 21st century. A critical question arises from this discussion. How much dependence is too much dependence? Technology plays a crucial part in current societies, and its impact will only grow with the wave of innovation. Our communications speed has shortened from months to mere seconds via instant messaging and social media. The advancement in medical imaging and assistive technologies has saved countless lives. *Walle* itself is a product of innovation; computer animation, 3D rendering, and raytracing were impossible just 30 years ago. However, excessive technology has resulted in less

time spent on exercise, new forms of crime, and a skyrocketing source of waste, as consumers throw away their old devices for next year's model. Ultimately the weight of this battle between innovation and individuality lies on the backs of the innovators. The engineers, designers, and scientists creating the technology of tomorrow must consider the effects of their work on the people of tomorrow. While *Walle* is a family film, its delve into consumerism and overdependence on technology demonstrates to kids and adults alike the importance of guiding the path of innovation.

Works Cited

Michael Crawford - Topic. "Put On Your Sunday Clothes." YouTube, uploaded by Michael

Crawford, 31 July 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhBKjdb3Qss](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhBKjdb3Qss).

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

DVD.

Thomas Newman - Topic. "BNL." YouTube, uploaded by Thomas Newman, 13 Dec. 2018,

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju\\_2R\\_HmE28](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju_2R_HmE28).