

The Second Fall of Man

A Filmic Narrative of Consumerist Interiorities in WALL·E

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Guilt-Free Consumption

Pixar's *WALL·E*¹ (2008) is an excuse for this essay to think about questions of ecology and consumption through an architectural lens. And much like the movie, this chapter, too, adopts a dichotomous structure. Similar to *WALL·E*, the first part of this chapter focuses on our ecological crises and the second half addresses mediated spaces of consumption. Rather than a thematic homogeneity, it is the animation that brings cohesion to the theoretical discussions. And rather than filmic techniques and processes, it is the cinematic narrative that feeds the arguments.

While the freedom and power of the cinematic narrative to fictionalize unexplored spaces, cities, and landscapes has made it a rich source of inspiration for those involved in the design of the built environment, Hollywood's post-apocalyptic productions have often failed to generate a viable utopian alternative to the hyper-consumerism that has exceedingly deepened our ecological crisis. Colonizing space offers a blank slate to reinvent a socio-political order that is devoid of the malpractices of human history. But despite the escapist, redo mentality of outer-space

1. In this essay, "WALL·E," when italicized, refers to the animation. Otherwise, it signifies the main character of the movie. This logic does not apply in direct quotes from other sources, as the original format has been kept.

utopias, much of Hollywood's sci-fi fantasies retain the same ill-informed logic of hyper-consumption that initially brought about the disastrous consequences. Despite the tabula-rasa convenience of imaginary outside worlds in films such as *Interstellar* (2014) and *Elysium* (2013), the supposedly utopian colonies are nothing more than a cleaner, well-maintained, solar-powered version of the suburban consumerism that was complicit in the socio-ecological apocalypse in the first place. It is as if picturing the end of the world, as Fredric Jameson famously proclaims, is easier than imagining the end of capitalism.²

The end of the pre-Anthropocene world would not have been preventable with solar-paneled water heaters, reusable straws, and "half-rotten and expensive 'organic' apples," as Žižek sarcastically suggests. "The predominant ecological ideology," Žižek writes elsewhere, "treats us as a priori guilty, indebted to Mother Nature."³ And how do we reconcile with this environmental guilt? More consumption; eco-consumption. "Blending environmentalism with consumerism," writes Tae-Wook Cha, "resolves two major forms of guilt at once. It alleviates both environmental anxiety and consumer desire by encouraging the consumption of products that contribute to a cleaner environment."⁴

Feeling the pressure of the ecological superego that constantly monitors our deeds to repay our debt to nature, "[we] regress to frantic obsessive activities: recycling paper, buying organic food, just so that we can be sure that we are doing something . . . but I am not ready to do anything really radical and change my way of life."⁵ The vast number of wind turbines pointlessly-rotating among mountains of garbage and the decaying corpses of hundreds of formerly solar-powered robots in *WALL·E* may in fact be a reminder that when facing a crisis of grave magnitude, without a global political will, such minor interventions will not save the planet.

2. Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

3. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), 423.

4. Tae-Wook Cha, "Ecologically Correct," in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 305.

5. Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 53.

But “what if ‘saving the planet’ were [sic] not the issue?” This question is posed by Timothy Morton in response to a discussion about *WALL·E*. “Saving the planet,” he continues, “relies on a conceptual distance that is precisely part of the problem.”⁶ When it comes to the audacious claim of “saving the planet,” the dark humor of George Carlin powerfully captures the critical position of dark ecology. “Saving endangered species,” he suggests,

is just one more arrogant attempt by humans to control nature . . . Leave nature alone. Haven’t we done enough? We’re so self-important . . . and the greatest arrogance of all: “Save the planet!” . . . We don’t even know how to take care of ourselves yet! We haven’t learned how to care for one another and we’re gonna save the fucking planet? . . . I’m tired of these self-righteous environmentalists; these white, bourgeois liberals who [are] trying to make the world safe for their Volkswagens! Besides, environmentalists . . . don’t care about the planet—not in the abstract they don’t. You know what they’re interested in? A clean place to live: their own habitat . . . The planet will be here for a long, long, long time after we’re gone.⁷

And a long time after we are gone, this human-less, desert-like, garbage-ridden world of rubble and decay is what the post-apocalyptic narrative of *WALL·E* depicts, and even romanticizes. This longing for a “trash planet,” which was the original title of the movie,⁸ is quite uncharacteristic for a film (let alone an eco-didactic, children’s animation), especially when

6. Timothy Morton, “We had to destroy Nature before ecology could save it,” *Ecology Without Nature* (blog), July 12, 2008, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2008/07/we-had-to-destroy-nature-before-ecology.html>.

7. George Carlin, “George Carlin: Saving the Planet – Full Transcript,” *Scraps From the Loft* (blog), August 22, 2019, <https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/2019/08/22/george-carlin-saving-planet-transcript/>.

8. Tim Hauser, *The Art of WALL·E* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008), 11.

compared to the limitless cinematic imagination of sci-fi productions that aim to expand human territory beyond this planet. After all, space, as the media, from popular culture⁹ to political discourse,¹⁰ reminds us, and as *WALL·E* refreshingly satirizes,¹¹ is the final frontier.¹²

Abandon Ship!

WALL·E, as one would expect from an animation made primarily for an audience of children, is clearly a didactic film, if not purely ideological. Given its not-so-hidden biblical references, the film has received praise from religious commentators.¹³ After all, the Axiom, as a vessel with the mission to transport the last of all living species to safety, resembles Noah's ark. And much like Noah's dove who brought back an olive branch as a sign of proximity to habitable land, the Axiom would send out Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluators (EVE) in search of vegetative life forms. But as the unconvincing line up of these three words that are forcefully put together to generate the desired abbreviation suggests, the main theological reference of the film is to Genesis: EVE and WALL·E, and a group of primitive *Homo sapiens*, abandon their heavenly lives for life on a clearly less-desirable earth.

9. The rhetoric of "Space: The Final Frontier" is repeated at the beginning of each episode in the 1966 TV series *Star Trek*.

10. "New Frontier" was a common theme in John F. Kennedy's acceptance speech in the 1960 presidential election.

11. Life on the Axiom is advertised in the film with the slogan, "Space: The Final Fun-tier."

12. In his now-disqualified frontier thesis, Frederick Jackson Turner argues that the frontier experience stripped European immigrants of their heritage and civilization. By forcing them to adopt survival skills from the Natives, it offered them qualities such as appreciation of individualism and democracy. The thesis has been rejected for its historical inaccuracies, American exceptionalism, and racist/chauvinistic views. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966).

13. *Movieguide*, an online venue with the mission "to redeem the values of the entertainment industry, according to biblical principles," gives *WALL·E* four stars for its "Biblical worldview." It praises the film for its manifestation of "virtues that Christians and most conservatives would commend," and for its "very strong Christian, redemptive worldview without mentioning Jesus." "Wall-E: 'Great Love Conquers Time and Space,'" *Movieguide*, <https://www.movieguide.org/reviews/walle.html>.

But what the conservative proponents of the film fail to see is its subversive adoption of biblical narratives. While the “fall of man” aims to show its audience that their temporary life on the earthly dwelling will pass away and they should, through a virtuous life, seek return to their eternal house in heaven, *WALL-E* seems to prescribe a second fall, not through expulsion, but with a choice that requires courage, sacrifice, and hard, messy work. This anti-transcendental position in articulating a theme that is clearly ecological is best justified by Timothy Morton in his 2009 *Ecology without Nature*.

“Ecology without Nature,” as Morton proclaims, “examines the fine print of how nature has become a transcendental principle.”¹⁴ In the book, Morton investigates how the idea of nature “is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category.”¹⁵ Much like how William Cronon showed that the concept of wilderness is “quite profoundly a human creation,”¹⁶ and a product of civilization that hides its unnaturalness, and similar to how Alan Liu asserted that there is “no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government,”¹⁷ Morton discusses how the concept of nature, as an arbitrary textual signifier, refuses to maintain semantic consistency. It is a container that holds collective projections, expectations, and aspirations that constitute our subjective identity. Throughout centuries, the concept has housed our subliminal aestheticizations, romantic fantasies, nostalgic longings, primitivist inclinations, sadistic admirations, and guilt-driven venerations. The concept of nature in any given time says more about us and the internal consistencies of our aspirations than any imaginary external referent.

14. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

15. *Ibid.*, 27.

16. William Cronon, *The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995), 7.

17. Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 104.

It is following Morton's logic that Žižek proclaims "the first premise of a truly radical ecology should be, 'Nature doesn't exist,'"¹⁸ certainly not in a fetishized, transcendental, anthropocentric way. In ecological discussions, this anthropocentric approach to nature (a natural consequence of subject-object dualism) is often regarded "as the fundamental philosophical reason for human beings' destruction of the environment. If we could not merely figure out but actually experience the fact that we are imbedded in our world, then we would be less likely to destroy it."¹⁹ But canonizing Nature, putting it on a pedestal, and admiring it from afar, as a pristine untouched wilderness beyond human contamination, "re-establishes the very separation it seeks to abolish."²⁰

This is where Morton's commitment to flat ontology helps de-anthropocentrize nature. Flat ontology is a theory that suggests all objects have the same degree of being-ness as any other object. A rusticated part from a broken garbage disposal machine, in this viewpoint, exists equally to an overweight person playing virtual golf. The reality of their existence is non-hierarchical and irreducible. A diamond ring's ontological value is no more than its felt box. Flat ontology, as Levi Bryant asserts, "rejects any ontology of transcendence."²¹ Likewise, Morton's ecological thought abandons the concept of nature as some sort of a transcendental unified whole, external to human thought and culture, within which beings reside. Ecology, once situated on a flat ontological plane, would not privilege humans over non-human agents. A cockroach in a de-aestheticized ecology is no less cute than a fluffy bunny thumping his foot; a messy urban ecology is as real as some artificially bordered national park.

18. "Žižek on 'Ecology without Nature,'" *Harvard University Press Blog*, November 6, 2007, https://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2007/11/zizek-on-ecolog.html.

19. Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 64.

20. *Ibid.*, 125.

21. Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 245.

The landing of the Axiom should thus be read as an attempt to bring down humans from the privileged, subjective position they have occupied and immanently relocate them on a flattened ecological system that includes technology and urbanity, as well as pieces of Styrofoam cups from hundreds of years ago. The flatness can additionally be extended to the hierarchical relationship between the physical and the virtual.

The Ecoethics of Consumption

But how does developing an ecological ontology that deviates from anthropocentrism and transcendentalism lead to forms of action? In the introduction, I discussed how small measures of ecological consumerism are often frantic activities aiming to reassure our a priori sense of guilt that despite (and sometimes because of) our continued consumption, we have not remained passive. Žižek explains the logic of ethical consumerism through a simple but frighteningly clear example—the Starbucks logic:

Are we aware that when we buy a cappuccino from Starbucks, we also buy quite a lot of ideology? . . . it is usually always displayed in some posters there, their message which is: “Yes our cappuccino is more expensive than the others but,” and then comes the story, “we give one percent of all our income to some Guatemala children to keep them healthy. For the water supply for some Sahara farmers, or to save the forests, enable organic growing coffee, whatever, whatever.” Now I admire the ingenuity of this solution. In the old days of pure simple consumerism, you bought a product and then you felt bad. “My God, I’m just a consumerist while people are starving in Africa.” So the idea was you had to do something to counteract your pure distractive consumerism . . . you contribute to charity and so on. What Starbucks enables you is to be a consumerist and . . . be a consumerist without any bad conscience because the price for the counter measure for fighting consumerism is already included into the price of a commodity. Like, you pay a little bit more and you are not just a consumerist but you do also your duty towards environment.²²

22. Slavoj Žižek, “The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology (Transcript/Subtitles),” *Žižek.uk*, December 24, 2016, <https://zizek.uk/the-perverts-guide-to-ideology-transcripts/subtitles/>.

But regardless of their motivation, be it self-reassurance or selfless activism, such small measurements of “sustainability” are clearly insufficient in the face of the ecological crisis we face. “No amount of individual action,” according to a *CNN Business* report, “will address the magnitude of the problem.”²³ In the built environment, both in practice—where the obsessive accumulation of points in pursuit of LEED certificates is the standard measure of sustainability—and in academia—where chunky graphic arrows on student sketches are somehow proof of including wind direction and sunlight in the design process, or renderings with a ghosted entourage of a happy group of racially diverse children (and often an over-excited dog) reflects attention to local community—such symbolic gestures, as necessary as they are, are nevertheless forms of folk politics at best and are thus insufficient.

Folk politics, as defined by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, is a form of political action that is reactive and therefore remains a defensive strategy and a form of resistance: it privileges horizontalist grass-roots movements from below at the expense of not engaging in structural change to socio-economic power relations at a global scale; it refuses to move beyond the sphere of immediacy to include mediated activism; it is incapable of planning long-term strategies; it fetishes small organizational practices; it is obsessed with personal forms of direct democracy; it focuses on the local and the spontaneous; and it is thus shown to be “incapable of articulating or building a new world.”²⁴

Localism, as Srnicek and Williams elaborate, “represents an attempt to abjure the problems and politics of scale involved in large systems such as the global economy, politics and the environment. Our problems are increasingly systemic and global, and they require an equally systemic response.”²⁵ Small-scale actions, local economies, and immediate communities, as important and necessary as they are, are incapable of absorb-

23. Rachel Ramirez and Alexis Benveniste, “Meaningful Ways Individuals Can Put Pressure on Corporations to Solve the Climate Crisis,” *CNN Business*, August 10, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/10/business/what-can-you-do-about-climate-change/index.html>.

24. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015), 5.

25. *Ibid.*, 43.

ing the systemically interconnected nature of today's problems, including the ecological crisis. The enormity of the ecological crisis we face requires forms of political agency that can effectively organize to undertake the difficult labor of constructing persistent political structures that address complex global issues in the long term.

The Broken Robots

A form of large-scale action that has a clear agenda, is organized, disturbs the dominant forms of social order, and revolutionizes the masses is narrated in *WALL·E*—in a cartoonish way, of course. The revolution is not pessimistic towards technology; robots accelerate²⁶ the revolution and are an integral part of the post-revolutionary society/ecosystem. It is true that WALL·E (both the film and the character) hints at questions about human essence.²⁷ The anthropomorphic robots of the film, with their strong individuality, compassion, sensation, and love, are, as the film expects us to understand, much more human than the devolved, childlike, obese creatures on hovering chairs, floating endlessly in their world of idleness, leisure, and complacency. After all, as John Lasseter, *WALL·E*'s executive producer, suggests, “there’s more humanity in this little robot WALL·E than there is in all the beings up on the Axiom.” But this human-like quality of the robots does not take away from the film’s optimism towards a harmonious ecology that includes technology.

A harmonious ecology, however, needs to distance itself from discourses that, as Daniel Vella discusses elsewhere in this book, only grant preservational value to constructed, discrete categories known as species at the expense of the uniqueness of each individual being. In the exhibitionary

26. Accelerationism is a sociopolitical theory built on the premise that a combination of rapid technological change and an aggressive form of capitalism will inevitably trigger radical change.

27. “The film’s presentation of a robot protagonist who develops sentience, intelligence, and human characteristics,” as Eric Herhuth suggests, “raises questions about the essence of the human and what the stakes are if a discernible human essence manifests in entities that are politically and ethically treated as other than or less than human. Central to the human essence presented in the film’s robots is a self-fashioning quality demonstrated by their deliberate choices . . . The presence of such an essence provides the political justification for apparent equal treatment of robots and humans in the society that emerges at the film’s end.” Eric Herhuth, “Life, Love, and Programming: The Culture and Politics of Wall-E and Pixar Computer Animation,” *Cinema Journal* 53 (2014): 53.

order of the Axiom,²⁸ best represented in the scene where a Soviet-era Sputnik 1 satellite is demonstrated in the captain's cabinet, outdated beings are discarded while a sample of the species is mummified for its display value. WALL·E signifies this overlooked individuality.

What makes WALL·E and the rest of his robot crew qualified to lead the revolution is not the clichéd sentiment that their cute, zoomorphic emotions bestow some form of humanity in them, it is rather their brokenness that gives them their superpowers. The broken tool theory, as Graham Harman expands on Heidegger's famous example,²⁹ describes how a piece of functioning equipment like a hammer withdraws from our conscious perception and only becomes present-at-hand when broken.³⁰ "It is this very tool," proclaims Morton,

that is the "saving power" of which Hölderlin and Heidegger speak, a mute, brutal thing resonant with all the anthropocentric force of accumulated human prejudice. The Pixar movie *WALL·E* is the story of how broken tools save the Earth . . . In *WALL·E*, the broken tools are two obsessive robots: one, the protagonist, with his melancholy collection of human trinkets; the other, a cleaning robot whose compulsion to wipe every surface forces him between two closing sliding doors at a crucial juncture.³¹

WALL·E is considered a "foreign contaminant" to the social order of the Axiom, and is, according to Jim Reardon, one of the film's screenwriters, "willing to screw up the equilibrium of everything that exists—just because he's in love."³² WALL·E has the power to "affect other robots so much that they betray their programming or go beyond it."³³ His army of revolutionaries is basically a group of crazy robots who escape from some sort of a futurist, robotic madhouse. Simply by being dislocated

28. For a discussion on how modern forms of representation and knowledge take part in the construction of the colonial order, see Timothy Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989).

29. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Revised Edition of the Stambaugh Translation*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010).

30. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2011).

31. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 23.

32. Tim Hauser, *The Art of Wall·E* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2008), 12.

33. *Ibid.*, 126.

from their asylum, they disrupt the meticulously engineered order of Axiom, symbolized in the patterns that direct the movement of bodies, goods, and services. This unlikely army of rebels are instantly considered “rogue robots” by the dominating system of Buy-N-Large (BnL)—a corporate state that has monopolized economic activities and usurped governmental powers.³⁴

The marginalization of this group of non-conforming robots that fail to follow the directives of the dominant social order is much more meaningful when we consider the clinical vocabulary that justifies their exclusion from the larger robotic society. Concepts such as the repair “ward” and “diagnostics” in *WALL·E* allow for a Foucauldian reading of the power structure on the Axiom. By looking at the history of medical institutions in the West, Foucault discusses how the authority of the medical gaze was appropriated for the socioeconomic interests of power.³⁵ He particularly looks at the medicalization of insanity to illustrate how the concept of madness was socially constructed as a means to confine socially undesirable individuals.³⁶ The undesirable robots are incarcerated in a medical deck through clinical justification, possibly because they deviate from the “normal” robotic behavior and thus disturb the dominant social order on the Axiom through the sheer power of their individuality and non-conformity. And the spatial layout of the Axiom, which Ralph Eggleston, *WALL·E*'s production designer, refers to as an “antiseptic, sterile environment,” is complicit in enforcing this order.³⁷

34. BnL, as Addey observes, “uses the exact same typeface and color scheme as real-world retail giant Costco Wholesale Corporation.” Dave Addey, *Typeset in the Future: Typography and Design in Science Fiction Movies* (New York: Abrams, 2018), 187.

35. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

36. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

37. Ralph Eggleston, “Design with a Purpose: An Interview with Ralph Eggleston,” by Ron Barbagallo, *Animation Art Conservation*, 2009, <http://www.animationartconservation.com/design-with-a-purpose,-an-interview-with-ralph-eggleston.html>.

To understand the imposing order of the Axiom, an archeology of its morphological inspirations becomes unexpectedly helpful. From touring cruise ships and studying robots at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to attending lectures from Apple designers,³⁸ the Pixar team had sought inspiration anywhere they could. Eventually, a range of themes, spaces, objects, and technologies inspired the crew, from the streamlined surfaces of Apple's designs and the futuristic yet organic forms in the architecture of Santiago Calatrava to the artwork of John Berkey, gentlemen's clubs in Las Vegas, the Mars rover film, and Seattle's Space Needle.³⁹

But "the single biggest influence for [the Axiom]" as Eggleston emphasizes on multiple occasions, was an exhibit of original sketches, drawings, artifacts, models, and promotional material of Tomorrowland.⁴⁰ Tomorrowland is one of the themed areas of Disneyland that depicts an advanced, space-age future. The first Tomorrowland opened in 1955. The exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California that inspired Eggleston and his team was called *Behind the Magic—50 Years of Disneyland*. It was a travelling show that originated from the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, honoring the fiftieth anniversary of Disneyland.⁴¹

The production team's attraction to Tomorrowland might have been mostly visual, as Anthony Christov, *WALL-E*'s set art director, implies that the team was shocked by "the colorful, almost retro naiveté of 1950s and 1960s design sensibility."⁴² This purely aesthetic sensibility that somehow felt right for the city-scale interiority of the Axiom's BnL social model

38. The involvement of Apple in the design of objects and spaces in *Wall-E* even included a phone conversation with Steve Jobs and a day of consultation with Apple design head Jony Ive at the Pixar headquarters. Addey, *Typeset in the Future*, 196.

39. Eggleston, "Design with a Purpose"; Hauser, *The Art of Wall-E*, 100–101; Addey, *Typeset in the Future*, 189, 214, 217, 220.

40. "Our main inspiration," Eggleston reminds us elsewhere in his interview with Barbagallo, "was paintings of the future by Disney artists designing the original Tomorrowland at Disneyland." Eggleston, "Design with a Purpose." But the effect of Tomorrowland on the design of the Axiom is voiced by many other members of the team as well. For Hauser, for example, "Walt Disney's ultramodern redesign of his 1967 'World on the Move' inspired the Axiom's optimistic futurism." Hauser, *The Art of Wall-E*, 100–101.

41. Karal Ann Marling and Donna Braden. *Behind the Magic: 50 Years of Disneyland* (Dearborn, Michigan: The Henry Ford Museum, 2004).

42. Hauser, *The Art of Wall-E*, 101.

nevertheless hints at a deeper unconscious political awareness. After all, as architectural historian Vincent Scully observes, “when we come upon a place of absolute vernacular integrity, where people are also buying things . . . we are reminded of Disneyland.”⁴³

But what is the cause of this unconscious association? For one, as American architect Charles Moore responds, Disneyland is not free.⁴⁴ To access its public life, one must pay. Second, it delegates civic responsibility to private development, and by doing so it has transformed public space into a commodity. Since Disneyland’s opening, according to Chuihua Judy Chung, “the use of commercial private space as public property has become commonplace,” so much so that “[it has] resulted in the radical conversion of the city, from public to private . . . [and] noncommercial to commercial.”⁴⁵

But aside from the commercialization of public space, Disneyland is also about control. “Disney strives to control . . . the built environment,” as Terry Brinkoetter, a Disney representative, puts it. “We believe that to the degree that an environment can be controlled, the appropriate reactions of people within that environment can be predicted.”⁴⁶ This combination of environmental control, commercialization of space, and privatization of civic realms can be further traced back to Disneyland’s source of inspiration.

When looking further into the Axiom’s family tree, genes of consumption and control keep showing up. According to Chung, one of the most influential sources of Walt Disney’s utopian vision was Victor Gruen.⁴⁷ Gruen, who is known as the inventor of the shopping mall, contributed 44 million square feet of shopping to the postwar city. But Gruen’s main ambition was to extend the logic of the mall to the entire city. This may further

43. Vincent Scully, “Disney: Theme and Reality,” in *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture*, ed. Beth Dunlop (New York: Disney Editions, 2011), 9.

44. Charles Moore, *You Have to Pay for the Public Life: Selected Essays of Charles W. Moore*, ed. Kevin P. Keim (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001).

45. Chuihua Judy Chung, “Disney Space,” in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 280.

46. *Ibid.*, 282.

47. *Ibid.*, 288.

explain Walt's interest—after all, he too intended for EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) to be a model for future urban developments. In his book, tellingly titled *Shopping Towns USA*, Gruen justifies his proposed merger between urbanity and shopping.⁴⁸ As Leong puts it, “for Gruen, the mall was the new city.”⁴⁹

Leong, however, goes on to suggest that, for Gruen, basing the template of urbanity on malls is tied to his deep desire for order.⁵⁰ Law, order, stability, and control—concepts that come up rather frequently in Gruen's book and prerequisites to the uninterrupted flow of consumption—possibly explain why Walt Disney owned multiple copies of Gruen's books and later used them as inspiration for his Disney World. The same combination of order and consumption might also have attracted Pixar artists in their search for a formal language for the Axiom.

Enjoy-n-Large

But behind the axiomatic space of consumption rests an axiomatic mentality of excess. To uncover the hidden psychology behind axiomatic consumption, Žižek's concept of the “anal father of enjoyment” is illuminating. Unlike the Freudian oedipal father who commands the subject to sacrifice enjoyment as a price for entry into the social order, excessive enjoyment is the directive from the anal father. While both the oedipal and the anal fathers, as Felicia Cosey clarifies, “function as an authority that mediates the relationship between the subject and objects in her environment,”⁵¹ with the loss of the oedipal father's authority in the capitalist social order, the anal father has filled the void with the demand of excessive enjoyment. “With global capitalism,” writes Fabio Vighi, “we enter a ‘post-historical’ era dominated by the ubiquitous injunction to consume in excess.”⁵² This excess and aggression is a result

48. Victor Gruen and Larry Smith, *Shopping Towns USA: The Planning of Shopping Centres* (New York: Reinhold, 1965), 11.

49. Sze Tung Leong, “Gruen Urbanism,” in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 381.

50. *Ibid.*, 384–85.

51. Felicia Cosey, “What Wall-E Can Teach Us About Global Capitalism in the Age of the Anal Father,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 12, no. 1 (2018): 12.

52. Fabio Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 11.

of the subject being persistently reminded of how she has failed to meet the level of enjoyment by the Other.⁵³ Any delay in consumption can thus cause anxiety in meeting the anal father's expectation. This strive for immediate consumption is perfectly captured in the advertisements by BnL, e.g., "drink now," "hungry now," "run now," and "consume."⁵⁴

Cosey has provided a thorough account of the parallels between the unrestricted culture of consumption on the Axiom and Žižek's theory of the anal father of enjoyment,⁵⁵ and therefore its repetition in this chapter is unnecessary. What is relevant here is the role of private urban interiorities disguised as public space, functioning as a site for hedonistic hyper-consumption. The Axiom epitomizes a capitalist utopia that seems devoid of its defects, particularly the exploitation of labor, social segregation, and wealth inequality. It is post-labor (thanks to full automation or machinic enslavement, if you will), class-less, and provides all imaginable public services and amenities for the welfare of its citizens.

The Axiom is a fully controlled, well-tempered, interconnected, inverted city full of neon lights, floating screens, super-sized malls, interior plazas, artificial lakes, AI-monitored movements, automated amenities, self-driving individual and public transportation, computer-augmented sports, and total automation. It is an endless interiority; no citizen of the Axiom has ever experienced its exterior. Is it not that this sealed, inescapable interiority follows the logic of shopping malls? Is it not that shopping, as Leong and Weiss suggest, "has historically preferred to do away with outside"?⁵⁶

The seemingly infinite extent of this confined space, as paradoxical as it may seem, is both the cause and effect of the desire for total control. The controlled environment of an air-conditioned space, as Leong and Weiss show, causes the "explosion of the depth of the interior, creating spaces

53. *Ibid.*, 12.

54. Addey, *Typeset in the Future*, 186.

55. Cosey, "What Wall-E Can Teach Us."

56. Sze Tung Leong and Srdjan Jovanovich Weiss, "Air Conditioning," in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001).

increasingly divorced from the outside [and] increasingly inescapable.”⁵⁷ This magical ability “in providing a year-round climate of ‘eternal spring,’” as Gruen unapologetically suggests, is a conscious attempt by architects and engineers to pamper the shoppers and thereby “contribute to higher sales figures.”⁵⁸ “The city,” in Leong’s words from two decades ago, “is being configured according to the mall,”⁵⁹ and this is by no means a speculation of a sci-fi future.

Yet, while Earth is filled with towers of garbage, it is the Axiom that is the junkspace par excellence. As Dietmar Meinel observes, “Buy-n-Large superstores, megastores, ultrastores, malls, banks, transit stations, gas stations, and trains litter the landscape as prominently as the junk itself.”⁶⁰

Junkspace, as Rem Koolhaas articulates, “simulates the city. . . . Monumental partitions, kiosks, mini-Starbucks on interior plazas.”⁶¹ Continuity, he continues, “is the essence of junkspace; it exploits any invention that enables expansion, deploys the infrastructure of seamlessness It is always interior, so extensive that you rarely perceive limits; it promotes disorientation by any means.”⁶² Intended for the interior, junkspace, according to Koolhaas,

can easily engulf a whole city. . . . outdoors itself is converted: the street is paved more luxuriously, shelters proliferate carrying increasingly dictatorial messages, traffic is calmed, crime eliminated. . . . The global progress of Junkspace represents a final Manifest Destiny: the World as public space.⁶³

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, 123.

59. Sze Tung Leong, “And Then There Was Shopping,” in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 132, emphasis added.

60. Dietmar Meinel, *Pixar’s America: The Re-Animation of American Myths and Symbols* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

61. Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace,” *October* 100 (2002): 186, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779098>.

62. *Ibid.*, 175.

63. *Ibid.*, 186.

The pseudo-public space of a consumerist city is the natural habitat for the children of the anal father. According to Todd McGowan, to avoid situations that may require surrendering enjoyment, the subject retreats from public spaces to private ones.⁶⁴ The shared and egalitarian nature of public space, according to McGowan, demands a willingness from the subject to share the public sphere with others; private spaces, however, allow subjects to exclude any form of compromise in their quest for enjoyment. This retreat to private space paradoxically does not increase the subject's enjoyment, but rather results in an ever-increasing desire to maximize its means of enjoyment.

Ecological Odyssey

When designing the environments of *WALL·E*, Eggleston and his team were speculating on questions such as, "what were humans thinking? . . . Why were they unable to solve the problem?"⁶⁵ These questions are posed in the past tense because the narrative of the animation occurs in a dystopian future, but perhaps they should remain a matter of bygone inaction because, with the lack of political will to confront our ecological crisis, *WALL·E*'s prophecy is more imminent than we would like to accept.

"The futuristic city" of Eggleston's vision, "based on consumerism run amok, where advertising has become more important than the product itself,"⁶⁶ is unfortunately not as futuristic as he would hope. City planners, as McMorrough observes, have already adopted the consumption model of the mall as a blueprint to envision the city itself:⁶⁷

64. Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

65. Eggleston, "Design with a Purpose."

66. Ibid.

67. John McMorrough, "City of Shopping," in *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. Chuihua Judy Chung et al. (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 194.

As a result of this diminishing of the city as a vibrant force, and the decreasingly delineated public realm, the reconstituted world of the mall established shopping as the principal means left by which to perceive urbanity. Operating as a model for envisioning the city, then, the shopping mall has proliferated to the extent of conditioning the experience and planning of the city.⁶⁸

But what *WALL·E* has failed to grasp is that Gruen and Disney's vision for extending the theme park logic of control and consumption to cities has already materialized. The presence of mediated space of virtuality is way beyond the visible forms of mediation in screens, models, and renderings. Assuming there is some emancipatory power in putting down the phone, turning off the TV, exiting the game, or shutting off the headset is naïve. To think that human characters immersed in "holo-dates" and "virtual golf" will rise to overthrow the order of consumption simply because they are able to see beyond their screens is wishful at best. Their moment of realization is limited to the great discovery that the Axiom has a pool. But the pool, the trees, and even the sky above them is also part of their simulacra: the screens simply mask the virtuality of the Axiom. As Baudrillard brutally reveals,

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland . . . Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.⁶⁹

Floating in the blissful virtuality of our shopping towns, we may need an unsettling wake-up call towards the ecological conditions that affect us. The ship of excessive enjoyment will continue its disastrous course as long as it remains on the current capitalist autopilot while localist sentimentalities of folk ecology are doomed to fail, as did "operation clean-up" in *WALL·E*. Enviropreneurial marketing is the new consumption model,

68. *Ibid.*, 201.

69. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Glaser Sheila Faria (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2020), 12, 13.

much like how “blue is the new red.” Landing in the messy reality of our complex and ever-changing ecosystem requires disturbing the socio-political orders of mass consumption as well as abandoning the transcendental high ground of “saving nature.”

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