

EXPLORING THE NARRATION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE IN THE WALL-E MOVIE

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ABSTRAK

Meneliti Narasi Tindakan Kolektif dan Pentingnya Konservasi Lingkungan dalam Film Wall-E. Film animasi “Wall-E” yang diproduksi oleh Pixar tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga menyampaikan pesan penting mengenai pentingnya aksi kolektif dan konservasi lingkungan dalam menangani krisis lingkungan yang dihadapi oleh planet kita. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali pesan lingkungan melalui pendekatan analisis wacana kritis di Film “Wall-E.” Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis wacana kritis yang dikembangkan oleh Norman Fairclough, kritik kajian film ini ditujukan untuk menggambarkan perilaku manusia yang memiliki implikasi pada lingkungan. Teori yang menjadi dasar penelitian ini adalah teori komunikasi lingkungan yang dikemukakan oleh Robert Cox. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi interaksi antara elemen visual, audio, dan naratif dalam film, serta elemen-elemen tersebut berkontribusi pada pembentukan makna dan kesadaran mengenai pentingnya konservasi lingkungan. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa “Wall-E” secara efektif mengusung isu-isu seperti polusi, sampah, deforestasi, konsumsi berlebihan, dan ketidakpedulian manusia terhadap planet. Selain itu, film ini juga memberikan kritik sosial terhadap budaya konsumsi moderen dan menekankan pentingnya dialog serta partisipasi dalam upaya menjaga keberlanjutan. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan baru tentang peran media dalam meningkatkan kesadaran lingkungan dan mendorong tindakan kolektif untuk mengatasi krisis yang ada.

Kata kunci: budaya konsumsi, kajian film, keberlanjutan, komunikasi lingkungan, wacana kritis Fairclough

ABSTRACT

The animated film “Wall-E”, produced by Pixar, is not only for entertainment purposes, but also conveys important messages about the importance of collective action and environmental conservation to face the crisis of our planet. The aim of this study is to examine environmental messages in the movie “Wall-E” with the help of critical discourse analysis. The method used is critical discourse analysis, which was developed by Norman Fairclough. The criticism in this film study is intended to describe human behavior that has an impact on the environment. The theory on which this study is based is Robert Cox’s environmental communication theory. In this study, the interaction between visual, aural, and narrative elements in the film is examined and these elements contribute to the formation of meaning and awareness of the environmental crisis. The results of the analysis show that “Wall-E” effectively conveys themes such as

pollution, waste management, deforestation, overconsumption, and human indifference to the planet. In addition, the film is also socially critical of modern consumer culture and emphasizes the importance of dialogue and participation in sustainability efforts. It is expected that this study will provide new insights into the role of media in raising environmental awareness and encouraging collective action to overcome the existing crisis.

Keywords: consumption culture, environmental communication, Fairclough's critical discourse, film studies, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The environment plays a crucial role in human survival. It provides everything humans need in the form of ecosystem services, such as trees that provide clean air, water that is a source of life, and even the ozone layer that protects humans from UV rays (Hill, 2010). Therefore, we must be cautious in its use to prevent environmental damage. (Ahada & Zuhri, 2020). If the environment is not cared for and utilized wisely, it will be damaged over time, ultimately hurting future generations (Yulya, 2022).

Among the various environmental issues, deforestation (loss of natural forest cover) is one of the most prominent in Indonesia, making a significant contribution to two natural disasters: floods and forest and land fires (Agustina, 2021). In addition, the waste problem is also a serious concern, where Indonesia produces more than 100 tons of waste that is difficult to decompose (Clara et al., 2021). Environmental pollution refers to the process by which living things, substances, energy, or other components enter the environment, or changes occur in the ecological structure due to human activity or natural processes. This results in a decline in environmental quality to a certain level, which prevents the environment from functioning properly according to its intended purpose (Wahyudin, 2017).

Indonesia still faces challenges in waste management because existing infrastructure and technology have not kept pace with the pace of urbanization. This situation is further exacerbated by low public awareness of household waste management and a lack of understanding of the negative environmental impacts of waste, particularly plastic waste (Briandana et al., 2024).

Environmental communication aims to provide the public with information about environmental damage and efforts to preserve it. Environmental communication is a means of educating the public about the importance of climate protection through various communication media (Syakbani et al., n.d.).

Today, humans no longer live freely interacting with their environment but are gradually surrounded by technologies, organizations, and systems of their own creation. These forces influence humans, leading to their dependence and loss of independence (Putra, 2017).

Interaction generally refers to the relationship between individuals or between individuals and groups, where each party exhibits behavior that can influence the other. In the context of film, interaction refers to the way a story develops through the movement and interaction between its characters. For interaction to occur, social contact and communication are required,

which encompass various types, including verbal, physical, and emotional interaction (Devi & Utami, 2021).

Film is an audiovisual communication medium used to convey messages to a group of people in a specific location. As an effective mass communication medium, film can reach a large and influential audience, thanks to its audiovisual nature, which allows for the delivery of rich stories in a short amount of time. When watching a film, the audience can seemingly transcend the boundaries of time and space, witnessing various aspects of life and even influencing public opinion (Asri, 2020).

Amidst the various challenges facing our environment today, film often serves as an effective tool for conveying important messages about environmental conservation. With inspiring narratives and stunning visuals, many films successfully highlight environmental issues, encouraging audiences to reflect on the impact our actions have on the planet.

Beyond its entertainment function, film also serves as a non-formal educational laboratory, influencing and shaping the culture of everyday life through the narratives it presents. Film is considered an appropriate medium for representing and constructing realities of life without being influenced by ideological conflict and contributing to the preservation of national culture (Dewi, 2017).

Along with technological advances, not only has the way literary works are presented changed, but also the form of literary works themselves. One technology that has influenced the world of literature is the creation of animations based on various

stories, including animated folktales, fables, legends, and novels. As they develop, animated films incorporate various literary elements, including visuals, music, and narrative. The genre of literary works plays a significant role in reflecting the attitudes and ideas of society, which are reflected in the work (Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2020).

Films that reconstruct social reality depict the world we inhabit more creatively and aesthetically, thereby drawing the audience's attention. This makes films often used to convey certain ideologies, as the audience indirectly accepts them and have the potential to change their perspectives (Surahman et al., 2022).

The use of film media can convey various social values that can influence the audience. With the advancement of the film industry, films have become a means to convey moral messages and remind the audience about goodness. *Wall-E* is an animated film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The main character in this film is a robot named Wall-E, which was released on June 27, 2008, and directed by Andrew Stanton. The characters in the movie *Wall-E* are mainly composed of mechanical elements (S, 2013).

In the early 22nd century, a mega-corporation called Buy N Large (BnL) controls Earth's economy, including its government. Because Earth is filled with unrecycled trash, the environment has become so polluted by electronic waste that humanity's survival is threatened. To prevent humanity's extinction, Shelby Forthright (Fred Willard), CEO of Buy N Large, organizes a mass evacuation from

Earth for five years using a fleet of executive spaceships called the Axiom, which provide everything humanity needs and are equipped with automated robots to serve them.

This study aims to analyze the environmental messages conveyed in the film “Wall-E” to understand the impact of excessive consumption on our planet. Wall-E will be examined using Robert Cox’s Environmental Communication Theory. Wall-E is selected due to its uniqueness in terms of message delivery. Compared to sci-fi movies such as *After Earth* (2013), *Elysium* (2013), and *Avatar* (2009), Wall-E did not employ a complex narrative to explain environmental conditions, but instead used simple conversations between the main character. In terms of visualization, Wall-E presents the audience with a simple picture rather than a complicated one. The combination of those factors provides a unique experience for the viewer, allowing them to see and understand the message in the movie without needing to hear complicated dialogue or view complex visualizations.

Cox (2013) defines environmental communication as the study of how we interact with and discuss the environment, and the impact that communication has on our perceptions of the environment, ourselves, and our relationship to it. Environmental communication serves as a pragmatic and constitutive tool for understanding and studying the environment, including our relationship to it. It is a symbolic medium used to construct understandings about environmental issues and to negotiate various societal responses. In addition to environmental management, ecological communication also encompasses the study

of public opinion and perceptions (Heldi Yunan Ardian, 2018).

Robert Cox (Tan et al., 2019) explains that environmental communication encompasses both pragmatic and constitutive concepts, which help humans understand the environment and establish relationships with nature, ultimately aiming to reach a common understanding of environmental issues. Environmental communication, as proposed by Robert Cox, has two functions: pragmatic and constitutive. The following is an explanation of these two functions in Robert Cox’s book, “Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere,” as quoted in (Lembaga et al., 2020) 1. The pragmatic function aims to help address environmental issues through educational environmental communication, encompassing academic, warning, mobilization, and persuasion functions. 2. Meanwhile, (Wahyudin, 2017) explains that the constitutive function is a process of encouraging people to view nature from two perspectives: as a threat or as a source of natural resources (Syakbani et al., n.d.).

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing the critical discourse method developed by Norman Fairclough.

The analysis developed by Norman Fairclough focuses on how to connect micro-texts to the broader societal context. Fairclough created a discourse analysis model that contributes to social analysis by combining the tradition of textual analysis, which typically views language within a limited space, with the broader social context. Fairclough’s primary focus is on viewing language as a social practice. His analysis focuses on how language is shaped

and influenced by social relationships and specific social contexts (Fauzan, 2013).

Fairclough (1989) refers to his understanding of language using the term discourse. According to Fairclough, the concept of discourse is a form of “social practice” that has three implications. First, discourse is an integral part of society and cannot be separated from it. Second, understanding discourse as a social practice shows that discourse is a social process. As society develops and changes, discourse (language) also undergoes processes and developments. Third, discourse develops in accordance with existing conditions in society. There is a dialectical relationship between language and social conditions, where social conditions influence discourse, but discourse also influences social conditions (Fauzan, 2013).

In the film “Wall-E”, the discourse displayed reflects the social and cultural conditions of modern society which is very consumerist, also depicts discourse as a social process that develops along with changes in society, the film “Wall-E” also highlights the dialectic between discourse and social conditions. The discourse in the film, such as the dialogue between characters and the narrative conveyed, is influenced by social conditions that depict the environmental crisis and the impact of a consumerist lifestyle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study findings of the film Wall-E accurately illustrate the intricate interplay among humans, technology, and the environment. The character Wall-E and his interactions with Eve illustrate a profound message of optimism and the potential for

restoration despite significant environmental degradation. Although technology may frequently intensify reliance and disregard for health and sustainability, the video also illustrates that it possesses the capacity to aid ecological conservation initiatives when employed judiciously. By emphasising the detrimental effects of overconsumption and neglect of nature, Wall-E invites viewers to contemplate their environmental responsibilities.

Wall-E spends his days collecting and compacting the garbage that has accumulated on Earth. He works alone, accompanied only by a cockroach amidst a massive pile of trash.

Hundreds of thousands of trash-shredding robots known as Wall-Es were left on Earth to clean up the environment. These robots were programmed to compact and stack the e-waste that had filled the land, thus facilitating the dissolution process. The piles of e-waste compacted by the Wall-E robots reached the height of skyscrapers. However, the project was halted because Forthright predicted that by 2110, Earth would be too polluted and no longer habitable for humans. By 2815, some 700 years later, only one Wall-E remained functional.



Figure 1 Wall-E Collects the Trash, Then Compacts It and Arranges the Pile of Trash
(Source: Wall-E Movie Trailer, duration 00:11:13)

Wall-E Collects Trash

Hundreds of thousands of trash-shredding robots known as Wall-Es were left on Earth to clean up the environment. These robots were programmed to compact and stack the e-waste that had filled the land, thus facilitating the dissolution process. The piles of e-waste compacted by the Wall-E robots reached the height of skyscrapers. However, the project was halted because Forthright predicted that by 2110, Earth would be too polluted and no longer habitable for humans. By 2815, some 700 years later, only one Wall-E remained functional.

The pragmatic function of the scene where Wall-E collects and compresses the piles of garbage that have accumulated on Earth clearly demonstrates the profound impact of excessive consumption and environmental neglect that have occurred over the years. In this sense, Wall-E symbolizes the tireless efforts of individuals to repair the damage caused by humans. Although he is only a small robot, his commitment to cleaning and caring for the environment reflects the hope that individual actions, however seemingly trivial, can contribute significantly to broader change. Through Wall-E's struggle, the film encourages viewers to reflect on their responsibility towards the environment. It emphasizes the importance of collective action in the face of the increasingly pressing ecological crisis.

Another thing that can be observed in the scene of the mountain of garbage on Earth is the strong interaction between the environment and humans. The scene shows that the Earth remains in poor condition even after prolonged periods of human neglect. This phenomenon demonstrates that the absence of humans does not necessarily improve the Earth's condition. This occurs because the Earth also requires

the presence of humans who are responsible for addressing existing problems, mitigating potential impacts, and evaluating existing conservation processes. In the definition of the environment, there are points of interaction between all existing components. Therefore, humans and the environment must be present and complement each other in their interaction process (Waters, 2020).

Other movies, such as *After Earth* (2013) and *Elysium* (2013), also share a similar theme: humans abandon Earth and attempt to live in space or on other planets due to environmental conditions. In the film *After Earth*, the abandoned Earth is depicted as a planet with extreme climate conditions, yet it has abundant healthy vegetation cover, indicating that the Earth can survive without humans. However, Wall-E conveys another message related to human-environment interaction, emphasizing the need for humans to be responsible for managing the environment, specifically e-waste. The message is beautifully constructed by visualizing a pile of e-waste that reaches skyscraper heights. This scene aligns with the theory that the materials in e-waste, such as plastics and metals, are difficult for the environment to degrade (Hill, 2010). Therefore, this scene effectively conveys a meaningful message through its visualization.

The Constitutive Function of this scene, through its powerful visual representation of environmental damage, effectively shapes the audience's perception of the serious consequences of irresponsible human actions. Evocative images, such as the piling up of garbage and the degraded landscape, not only reflect the negative impacts of excessive consumption patterns but also emphasize the urgency to act. In this way, the film underscores the importance of collective responsibility for

the environment, prompting the audience to acknowledge that every individual has a crucial role to play in protecting and preserving our planet. This message fosters awareness of the need for collaboration and collective action to address the ecological challenges we face, and inspires hope for a more sustainable future.

The scene provides an opportunity to analyze how discourses about consumption and waste are shaped and conveyed to audiences. The massive piles of garbage that dominate the Earth's landscape serve as a powerful symbol to critique the consumerist lifestyles of modern society. This visual not only reflects the direct impact of excessive consumption behavior but also illustrates how a mindset that prioritizes instant gratification and disregards environmental concerns can lead to severe damage. By highlighting this reality, the film encourages viewers to reflect on the consequences of their actions and reconsider the values underlying their lifestyles, emphasizing the importance of shifting to more sustainable practices to protect our planet.

The Discovery of a Small Plant

Wall-E discovers a small plant growing among the rubble and plants it in an old shoe. He cares for the plant and tries to protect it. The pragmatic function of this scene, where Wall-E finds a small plant, is a symbol of hope and the potential for regeneration, showing that even though the environment has suffered significant damage, there is still an opportunity to repair and restore damaged ecosystems. This plant not only symbolizes life surviving in the midst of emptiness, but also reminds us that every effort to preserve and care for nature can have a positive impact. With the presence of these plants, the film conveys the message

that positive change can begin with small steps and that, with proper attention and effort, we can restore the balance of nature. It encourages viewers to believe that a better, more sustainable future is still within reach, provided we are willing to invest in caring for our environment.

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The discovery of a small living plant is also used as a symbol of hope in another movie called *The Lorax* (2012). Despite using the same symbol, *The Lorax* employs a lengthy narrative and storyline to explain what is represented by the small plant, which has a story behind it. In contrast, *Wall-E* treats the small plant as an object that suddenly found itself out of nowhere. Moreover, a straightforward narrative in the movie prompts the viewer to question the value of the small plants and begin to form a perception while watching the scene.



Figure 2 Wall-E finds a small plant
(Source: Wall-E Movie Trailer, duration 00:11:47)

The Constitutive Function of this scene effectively shapes the audience's perception of the importance of protecting and preserving nature, emphasizing that everyone has a role to play in this endeavor. Through powerful visuals and a profound narrative, the film conveys the message that even seemingly insignificant actions can have a significant impact on the environment. By illustrating how simple steps, such as planting trees or reducing waste, can help restore the ecosystem, this scene invites viewers to reflect on their responsibility to the planet. This message not only raises awareness of the importance of collective action but also fosters hope that positive change can be realized if we are all willing to contribute, no matter how small.

Discourse analysis is used to explore how this small plant symbol serves as a representation of hope and sustainability, reflecting the potential for regeneration amidst widespread environmental degradation. The plant not only symbolizes the persistence of life but also serves as a reminder of nature's resilience and ability to recover when given the opportunity. Furthermore, this symbol can be seen as a sharp critique of human indifference to the environment, which often ignores the consequences of its actions. By highlighting the contrast between the hope represented by the plant and the damage caused by human behavior, this analysis prompts us to reflect on our responsibility in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem. Through a deeper understanding of this symbol, we can better appreciate the importance of collective action in preserving the environment and creating a more sustainable future.



Figure 3 Humans in space ships
(Source: Wall-E Movie Trailer, duration 00:40:03)

After years of living on a spaceship, the humans aboard the Axiom have suffered significant calcium loss, becoming morbidly obese and unable to stand or walk. All their activities are handled entirely by robots, and they appear completely dependent on technology without any awareness of their surroundings.

Man in Space

After years of living on a spaceship, the humans on the Axiom have suffered significant calcium loss, resulting in them becoming morbidly obese and unable to stand or walk. All their activities are handled entirely by robots, and they appear to be utterly dependent on technology without any awareness of their surroundings.

The pragmatic function of this scene clearly demonstrates the consequences of neglecting the environment and over-reliance on technology. By depicting the negative impacts of such behavior, this scene reminds the audience of the importance of reconnecting with nature's roots and fostering a more harmonious interaction with it. This message encourages us to recognize that a healthy relationship with the environment is not only crucial for the sustainability of the ecosystem but also essential for our individual well-being. Through its powerful imagery, this scene invites the audience to rethink

the values underlying modern lifestyles and consider steps that can be taken to achieve a balance between technological advancement and environmental conservation.

The Constitutive Function of the Scene
This scene shapes the audience's perspective on how technology can create a distance between humans and their environment, while emphasizing the importance of awareness of the impact of unsustainable lifestyles. By showing how dependence on technology can lead to a disregard for nature, this message invites the audience to reflect on their relationship with the environment. This awareness is key to understanding the consequences of our actions and encouraging change towards a more sustainable lifestyle. Through this understanding, it is hoped that the audience will better appreciate the importance of maintaining a balance between technological advancement and environmental preservation.

A critical discourse analysis of this scene reveals that representations of modern society often reflect an alienation from the environment, with reliance on technology a central theme. This reliance not only demonstrates progress but also results in a decline in environmental awareness, where individuals become disconnected from nature and unaware of the impact of their actions on the ecosystem. Therefore, to achieve a balance between technological advancement and environmental preservation, society needs to develop a deeper awareness of the impact of its reliance on technology, using media as a tool to drive positive and sustainable social change.

The interaction between Wall-E and Eve demonstrates the relationship between

technology and nature. Eve, a robot designed to seek out life, collaborates with Wall-E to protect the plants. This interaction illustrates the pragmatic function of technology, demonstrating that it serves not only as a tool that can distance humans from their environment but also has great potential for positive use, such as in environmental conservation efforts. By leveraging technological innovation, we can develop effective solutions to address various environmental issues, including more efficient resource management, improved air and water quality monitoring, and the advancement of renewable energy development. Furthermore, technology can support ecological awareness and education through digital platforms, enabling broader dissemination of information on sustainable practices. Therefore, if used wisely, technology can be a partner in our efforts to preserve and protect the environment and create a more sustainable future for future generations.

Wall-E and Eve's interaction

This constitutive function shapes the viewer's perception of the potential for collaboration between humans and nature (or robots) to reverse environmental damage. By depicting the harmonious interaction between technology and ecosystems, viewers are encouraged to recognize that this collaboration is not only possible but also crucial for creating practical solutions to pressing environmental challenges. For example, the use of robotics in habitat restoration or reforestation projects demonstrates how technology can support conservation efforts. Furthermore, these collaborations raise awareness of the shared responsibility for protecting the environment,

inspiring viewers to contribute to similar efforts in their own lives. Thus, these representations not only shape perceptions but also encourage proactive action to preserve the environment, highlighting the importance of synergy between human innovation and natural forces for a more sustainable future.

The relationship between Wall-E and Eve in the film reflects the hope for a synergy between technology and sustainability, with Eve serving as a symbol of innovation that seeks to revitalize the Earth. However, the film also critiques the neglect of environmental aspects, as seen in the condition of the humans on the Axiom ship who experience health problems due to dependence on technology, such as calcium loss and obesity. The humans on the Axiom become morbidly obese and unable to stand or walk, utterly dependent on robots for daily activities. This dependence creates a bleak picture of the future, where technology, although designed to make life easier, actually leads to a loss of physical abilities and a disconnection from the environment. In this context, the relationship between Wall-E and Eve not only reflects the hope for Earth's recovery but also highlights the risks that arise from excessive dependence on technology, which can neglect human health and environmental sustainability.



Figure 4 Wall-E and Eve's interaction(Source: Wall-E Movie Trailer, duration 00:28:30)

CONCLUSION

The research results of the film Wall-E effectively depict the complex relationship between humans, technology, and the environment. Through the character of Wall-E and his interactions with Eve, the film conveys a powerful message of hope and the possibility of recovery in the face of severe environmental damage. While technology can often exacerbate dependency and neglect health and sustainability, the film also shows that technology has the potential to support environmental conservation efforts if used wisely. By highlighting the negative impacts of excessive consumption and disregard for nature, Wall-E encourages viewers to reflect on their responsibility towards the environment.

The film highlights the importance of collaboration between technological innovation and conservation efforts in creating significant change. In this regard, Wall-E serves as a symbol of hope, showing that even though the environment has suffered severe damage, there is still a chance to repair and restore damaged ecosystems. This message encourages viewers to realize that every small action, such as protecting the environment and reducing waste, can have a significant impact on the sustainability of our planet.

Wall-E invites us to believe that positive change can start with small steps and that a more sustainable future is still possible through collective awareness and action. By raising audience awareness of the impact of their behavior on the environment, the film serves as a call to action, encouraging individuals and communities to contribute to the protection and preservation of our

planet for future generations. Through its straightforward narrative and compelling visuals, Wall-E not only entertains but also inspires us to become agents of change in addressing increasingly pressing ecological challenges.

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