WALL*E – A push-button fable

Contributed by Albert Bates
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Disney is not breaking any new ground with its overly advertised full-length animation, WALL*E. This is just Lady and the Tramp set in 2700 AD.

Nor is Pixar a stranger to the theme of rehabilitating consumer culture remnants that nobody seems to love anymore. Think Toy Story for out-of-fashion toys, The Incredibles for Super-heroes, and Cars for Route 66. It reminds you of the Jawa recyclers who drove their huge Sandcrawler around the Tunisian desert in the first Star Wars. Pixar could change its name to Fixar.

WALL*E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class), a cross between R2D2 and Johnny 5 from Short Circuit, falls for a svelte Japanese-style robot named EVE (Extra-Terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator). EVE comes to realize that WALL*E has inadvertently stumbled upon the key to reclaiming Earth, a living
plant, with roots and leaves and everything, and races back to
space to report her findings to the humans, who are wandering,
Battlestar Gallactica-style, on an endless journey that employs
consumerism in the place of cryogenics.
After 800 years of wandering, the whole colony looks like Super-Size-Me Tele-tubbies.
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The high point of the movie for me was when the colony's captain decides to end the exodus and return to Earth, striding to the console and pushing The Green Button.

The idea that you can suddenly change the course of history by pushing a big green button is itself a very pointed dig at our lack of grasp of the challenges we face and what sustainability will really entail.

At this point, the matrix that was keeping the spaceborne humans happily distracted by television, neon billboards and a Big Gulp! was supposed to instantly switch to reprogram everyone to be happy farmers re-seeding the Earth. I expected to see a machine-assisted reconditioning, like Mr. Incredible squeezing into his old super-suit. I expected organized crash diets and calisthenics. Instead, their flying barcoloungers are all re-routed to the central auditorium so they can get the news from the big screen, instead of the small screen at eye level on every chair.

Eventually, and this should not be spoiling the movie for anyone, the humans re-colonize Earth and turn the rusty brown trashball all green again. This is, needless-to-say, quite a stretch. With skeletons and muscles atrophied over centuries, it is hard to imagine even the most eager new farmers joyfully hoeing beans on rusting piles of metallic and plastic rubbish.

And yet, that part is perhaps the strongest message in the movie, and the reason why this film is so timely. You may want to hold off on buying the family-size tub of buttered popcorn, cheese nachos and extra-large soda on your way past the concessions until after you've seen the people of the future and consider what they will have to do to reclaim their planet.

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