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# Abstract

This thesis deals with the post-apocalyptic worlds in the films *The Road* and *WALL·E*. Both films portray a barren world that has made life on earth difficult closing on impossible. The post-apocalyptic notion will be based on the theories of Baishya, Thompson, Jameson and Penley. Thompson argues that an apocalyptic fear is a fear of the future rooted in the present. This notion proves applicable, as the material will show a fear of global ecocide. Baishya describes how the possibility of total human annihilation as become more realistic in later years and what this means to apocalyptic fear. Jameson and Penley discuss how the human race would not be able to cope with an apocalypse since we cannot comprehend the efforts needed to recreate our society. This is evident in the material as they are not able to rebuild the human society on earth.

A post-apocalyptic world is obviously created by some kind of apocalypse. In *WALL·E* the film will suggest that the apocalypse, leading to the death of nature and earth, was caused by over-consumption and the garbage that became a product of this. The mise-en-scene will show how garbage has become an integrated part of cities and nature causing an ecocide. The human race has left the barren planet and lives in space instead. On board enormous space liners the human condition is reduced to a dormant state of living, where people do not even walk anymore as they are flown around.

*The Road* offers no explanation to the apocalypse but focuses on the global ecocide it has caused and how the human race is affected by it. The landscape of the film is barren and harrowing with a complete death of nature. The erosion of society is also depicted by showing the downfall of recognisable objects such as cars and roads but also of brands like Coca-Cola.

In terms of mise-en-scene both of the films use grey and brown colours to depict their setting enforcing the notion of ecocide, not allowing vibrant colours into the depiction.

The thesis concludes that both films are representations of fear, especially the fear of an ecocide that would kill the earth. Both films use objects the audience can recognise to show how the society has collapsed and the human future on earth is bleak. Furthermore it concludes that the human condition in a post-apocalyptic world will deteriorate. It might be into immobile dormant consumers or into a race of survivalist not able to live but only to survive.

# Problem statement

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the post-apocalyptic traits of the films *WALL·E* and *The Road*. The main focus will be on the human condition in and the depiction of the post-apocalyptic world portrayed in the texts. The neoformalistic film analysis will be employed to analyse both the visuals of the texts but also the narrative. The visuals will primarily look at the setting of the texts and how the mise-en-scene is used to establish a post-apocalyptic setting. The narrative will be analysed with a focus on the characters and how the films portray their conditions of life.

The overall purpose will be to investigate how the earth is depicted as a result of an apocalypse and how the human race survives the conditions the post-apocalyptic setting forces on them. Furthermore the analysis will study how these depictions are created from fear.

# Introduction

This thesis will investigate the films *WALL·E* and *The Road* focusing on how they depict the world after an apocalypse. The emphasis will be on the way the films visually depicts these worlds and the people living in them The analysis will be based on the neoformalistic film analysis theorised by David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson with an emphasis on mise-en-scene. This means that the analysis will focus on the way the films use the stylistics to create a post-apocalyptic setting. This entails colour schemes, lighting and choice of costumes etc. Furthermore the analyses will examine the human condition and how the films portray human life after an apocalypse. This will primarily by based on the characters and how they live their lives in the given setting. This projection will draw on the theories of Thompson and Baishya about apocalyptic fear. The apocalyptic fear entails notion of how people cannot conceive what is necessary to making the human condition last after an apocalypse. Therefore it is interesting to examine how the people of these films live their lives and cope with their struggle to survive. Following the individual analyses there will be a section comparing the two films and how they portray the human condition and especially how they differ from each other in this depiction. The curious notion of this will be that there are two different platforms for the human condition. In *WALL·E* the human race has left the earth not living in the actual post-apocalyptic world whereas in *The Road* the human race has remained on earth. The comparison will therefore investigate two different outcomes of a post-apocalyptic world.

# Theory and method

## Post-apocalypse

It can be said that post-apocalyptic literature is a depiction of a collective fear of the future based on the present (Thompson, 2007, pp. 1-2). This means that the projected future is a depiction of a collective fear such as a fear of terrorism, surveillance, disease, atomic warfare etc. and the impacts these issues might have on the way of life. This fear is rooted in the prospect of an annihilation of human life and therefore the future of the human race. This became a collective fear after the Second World War as the threat of a nuclear war became increasingly intensified.

By employing awesome technologies of death and destruction that can extinguish and obliterate human life on a massive scale in a matter of seconds, the threat of an actual post-human era has appeared as a distinct possibility in our global imaginary especially after 1945. (Baishya, 2011, pp. 1-2)

The post-apocalyptic thought is of course based on the notion that not all human life is eradicated in the given apocalypse. The narrative of the post-apocalyptic films often concerns itself with how the human race is close to extension in this new world. This is exemplified in the TV-series *The Walking Dead*, seeing how the zombies are threatening the survival of the human race. The human race are therefore forced to fight for their survival amongst these zombies in what might almost be called a post-human era.

Post-apocalyptic films will often depict these new worlds as dystopian and project a bleak future. Jameson and Penley explain this tendency for dystopia as:

… science-fiction’s affinity for the dystopian is symptomatic of the genre’s “deepest vocation … to demonstrate and dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future,” *and*  that this failure of imagination is not individual but rather collective and ideological… …. Constance Penley suggests “we *can* imagine the future, but we *cannot* conceive the kind of collective political strategies necessary to change or ensure that future,” and that as a result, science-fiction films repeatedly replay resistance to alien invasions in the form of romanticized messiahs or small guerrilla groups, rather than through systemic political change (Thompson, 2007, p. 2)

In relation to this thesis, Jameson and Penley explain how these post-apocalyptic worlds are created in films as a collective inability to image how the human race would react to a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions. Furthering on Jameson’s thoughts on the incapacity to imagine the future it is crucial to notice how the human institutions often crumble in the post-apocalyptic depictions. The pillars of the society that are meant to keep the human race civilised, such as police, governments, military, infrastructure, hospitals and financial institutions etc. are not present in the post-apocalyptic worlds. These structures are destroyed and abandoned as the surviving human beings are fighting for their own survival on a smaller scale instead of them trying to re-establish the old institutions. In relation to the chosen material for this project this is an important point. These texts depict the struggle of individuals and small groups of people, almost resembling tribes, and not larger movements like governmental or military efforts. The point about the inability to imagine a large-scale effort thereby becomes a central part of the reason for the structure of the narratives in the material. As Penley suggests, it is often seen that the characters of post apocalyptic films regress to a rather tribal state where people are gathered in smaller tribes and have to survive of their more primal instincts.

Moreover, it is interesting to view this kind of post-apocalyptic literature as a means of re-evaluating the way mankind lives. Moylan suggest that “Indeed, the infamous “escapism” attributed to sf does not necessarily mean a debilitating escape *from* reality because it can also lead to an empowering escape *to* a very different way of think about, and possibly of being, in the world.” (Moylan, 2000, p. xvii) This is noteworthy in relation to the material because these texts depict a bleak future that could act as a motivation to avoid this kind of future. This point will be elaborated in the following analyses. The term escapism will in this thesis be understood as the attempt to make the audience reflect on the current state of affairs in their own lives but also in the surrounding world. In *WALL·E* it quickly becomes evident that mankind has destroyed the earth, because of over-consumption, which is an obvious reference to way mankind leads their lives today. Investigating this in relation to escapism it is apparent that the objective is to re-evaluate our approach to consumable goods. The film will therefore offer an escape to a different way of thinking. This is an example of how the term will be used in the later analyses. The term will be used to emphasise the critique the films offer on the contemporary ways of life. It allows for an interpretation as the escape not only to be *from* reality but also *to* a different reality. This duality of the term will become interesting when analysing the films to see if they indeed do offer a new way of thought and/or an escape from reality.

## Neoformalistic film analysis

The neoformalistic film analysis is theorised by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson and is an analytic approach that entails both the narrative and the stylistic system of a given film. The approach will therefore provide the tools for a collective analysis of a film both in terms of analysing the narrative and the stylistic system on its own but also in relation to each other. The theory is based on the aesthetic terms of Russian formalism and narratively based on the terms of the French structuralism. These original theories can be applied to various texts spanning different medias whereas the neoformalistic film analysis is media specific to film and similar visual media. This allows for a media specific analysis that provides tools exclusively used for this particular media (Haastrup, 2012, pp. 234-235).

### The narrative system

The narrative system is broadly defined by Bordwell as a series of events that is connected in a cause and effect relationship, which envelops through time and space (Haastrup, 2002, p. 236). Narratives are often based on certain schemata. These schemata are the audience’s expectations, which are based on their culturally learnt cause and effect premise, which is based on their own experiences with film. This means that an audience will have certain expectations before watching a film. A variety of factors produce the expectations. The genre of the film will produce a lot of expectations for the audience. A horror film will enforce an expectation that the audience will experience horrifying shocks throughout the film whereas a romantic comedy will present a heart-warming love story where a couple has to overcome some obstacles in order for them to be together. The expectations are based on the experiences the audience has had with the genre before. Therefore it is important to be aware of these schemata when producing a narrative as these can help the director to play into the specific genre or to surprise the audience with something unexpected. Furthermore, these schemata suggest that watching movies is an active and participating process. The schemata can only be created within the audience if they are participating and absorbing the traits of the film and then there will be an active process in the creation of the schemata within the audience (Haastrup, 2002, p. 236)

One of the elements the narrative system defines is the terms story and plot. Bordwell argues that watching a film is an active perception process (Haastrup, 2002, p. 235). This is an important premise for the terms story and plot. The plot is the narrative as the film presents it. A classic example would be how a crime film would show a murder, then the consequences of the murder, leading to the investigation of the murder and ending in the solving of the crime. The plot is therefore the sequence of events that the film presents, which is not necessarily the chronological order of the narrative. The chronological order is defined by the story. Story can be defined as the chronological order of the narrative, which the audience can construct on the basis of information given by the plot. This is how films become an active perception process as plot and story only can come together if the audience engages in the information given to them. The plot will provide ‘clues’ for the audience to engage with in order for them to create a coherent story (Haastrup, 2002, p. 235). The amount of information the plot offers can be defined as limited and unlimited narration. A limited narration will slowly offer the audience information. An example of this would be in detective film where the audience will get small pieces of the information alongside the main character as they follow the investigation of a crime. It is rare that the audience have more information about the crime or the criminal than the main character has and in this way the film engages the audience by them ‘participating’ in the investigation. The unlimited narration will often mean that the audience has more information than the main character. In a romantic comedy the audience will often know that the two lovers actually both love each other before the characters do. This strategy is also used to engage the audience but in a different way. This will make the audience ‘cheer’ for the lovers and hope for them to realise their love for each other. Even though their schemata will suggest that they will be together by the end of the film the audience will still have their doubts throughout the film. In this way the unlimited narration can engage the audience because they are waiting in anticipation for the characters to learn what the audience already know (Haastrup, 2002, p. 238).

Moreover, the narrative system covers the characters and the audience’s engagement with these. Murray Smith argues that it is important that the audience is able to feel *with* the character as they of course can’t feel the same as the character. This translates to the audience’s empathy for the characters. Even though the audience can’t feel the main character being shot in the arm, it is important that they have empathy for the character when he is shot. If the audience has empathy for the character they will have an immediate and unconditional reaction to the characters feelings. Empathy is the first manner of audience engagement that Smith defines. Secondly Smith defines sympathy as he divides this into *alignment* and *allegiance*. Alignment is achieved when the audience can sympathise with the character, his actions and motivation for these, his principles of moral and his opinions. The audience might be able to identify themselves with the character or identify his values as ‘desirable’ values and thereby align with the character. The third term smith describes is allegiance. This kind of engagement happens even though the character acts immoral or unacceptable but the audience is still able to sympathise with the characters actions. Allegiance occurs when the audience gets an insight to the characters feelings and motivations with which the audience can sympathise. An example could be a character that sets up a bank robbery in order for him to save his terminally sick wife. Even though the audience is aware that he is committing a crime they might still sympathise with his motivation to save his wife and thereby the audience will be able to have a kind of allegiance with the character. The idea of allegiance is the more conscious choice by the audience than with the idea of alignment. Alignment can be defined as how the plot presents the characters while it is the audience that decides if they feel allegiance to the characters. Allegiance can therefore be defined as a more conscious decision than alignment (Haastrup, 2002, pp. 241-242).

In order for the audience to have either empathy or sympathy for the characters it is important that the film presents these characters with human characteristics. Meaning that characters have to show recognisable traits so the audience can relate to the characters as human beings. Once again the audience’s schemata become decisive because it is on the basis of the audience’s schemata, of how they perceive a complete human being, they will judge the characters and have empathy or sympathy. It is important that the film create full characters with relatable morals, emotions and backgrounds, if the audience are to engage with them (Haastrup, 2002, p.241).

The presentation of characters is often tied closely to the presentation of the central conflict of the given film. The audience is introduced to a problem the main character has to solve and thereby the frame for the narrative is set. Furthermore it creates the basis for the audience’s sympathy for the main character, as they want this character to solve the given problem. Most of the mainstream Hollywood films are character driven. The narrative will therefore often be carried forward and develop on the main characters actions and development (Haastrup, 2002, p. 242). Torben Grodal argues that mainstream films appeal to basal and recognisable feelings so the audience are more likely to engage with the film. Love and hate, winning and losing etc. are often used because most can relate to these feelings, which they have experienced at some point in their life. When the conflict is based on feelings the audience recognise they are almost forced into engaging in the film (Haastrup, 2002, p. 244).

### The stylistic system

In the neoformalistic film analysis the stylistic and the narrative system are two separate systems but they are closely connected and should be treated in relation to each other. An analysis of the stylistic system should not just be a list of camera angles, movements, costumes, lighting etc. It should be analysed in relation the narrative and how the stylistic elements drives the film and supports the plot. To understand the choices the director has made, Bordwell and Thompson suggest imagining what other choice the director could have made. This will allow one to obtain a more profound understanding of the choices made. The stylistic system is divided into different categories. These are: photography, which entails camera movements and photographic technique, mise-en-scene, which describes how elements are arranged in front of the camera), cutting, which refers to how the individual shots are put together and then sound, covering how the audio is created in relation to the visual (Haastrup, 2002, p. 252).

As mentioned, photography describes various elements of camera technique. One of these is framing of shots. Shots are described as extreme close-up, close-up, medium close-up, medium long shot, long shot and extreme long shot or establishing shot. The extreme close-up defines a shot the shows a small detail for example an ear or a mouth. This shot is used to put a great amount of emphasis on a specific detail, this shot will make sure the audience can not overlook this specific detail. The close-up is a shot that shows a characters face. This shot is often used to convey specific feelings and reactions, as it allows the audience to focus on the characters face as they react. If the characters on the screen are cropped at the waist it is called a medium close-up, while it is called a medium long shot if they are cropped at their knees. These two types of shots are commonly used throughout a lot of films as they allow for the characters to be in focus but still including the setting, which is also why these shots often can be used for dialogue. The definition of a long shot is that it is a shot that captures an entire character. The establishing or extreme long shot is a shot from far away that can be used to establish the setting of a scene or a transition from one setting to another.

Photography also entails camera angles, which includes high-angle shots, low-angle shots, neutral shot, point of view-shots and crane-shots. The high-angle shot can be applied to make a character look small and vulnerable as the angle suggest that the audience is looking down on the character. The low-angle shot serves the opposite function as this is used to make a person look threatening or powerful, as the audience has to ‘look up’ to se the character. A neutral shot is an angle that is pointing straight at the subject. This is a more neutral shot as this is the angle is suppose to mimic how the audience experience their own life and therefore it could also be defined as an eye-level shot. A crane-shot describes the shots that are done from cranes, helicopters, etc. This is mostly used for establishing shots as a crane or a helicopter allows of a larger shot of a setting. Angles have a great influence on how characters are perceived as they can help portray both power and vulnerability and therefore will camera angles often have a notable influence on the photographic analysis (Haastrup, 2002, pp. 252-253).

Camera movement is defined by three key terms: pan, tilt and tracking. Panning is when the camera moved horizontally on the camera’s axis. Tilting defines the camera movement when it moves vertically on the camera’s axis. A tracking shot is when the camera is moving. This would usually be a dolly shot where the camera is mounted on tracks so it can film a long parallel movement. These terms are an important part of the film discourse and are therefore important to master when using the neoformalistic film analysis (Haastrup, 2002, p. 254).

Filters are also an important part of photography as they help to set the mood of a shot. This can be the case in a night scene where a blue filter is applied so the mood of the scene will become colder and darker. Whereas a desert shot that tries to emphasise the scorching heat most likely will make use of a yellow filter that will help to underline the heat and dust. The filter can thereby be a great help in creating a mood or feeling in a scene (Haastrup, 2002, p. 256).

Mise-en-scene describes the arrangement of everything that happens in front of the camera. Bordwell and Thompson divide mise-en-scene into three categories: setting, costumes and make-up and lighting (Haastrup, 2002, p. 257).

Setting describes the time of the narrative, the space and environment of the film but also the relationship between this environment and the characters. The setting can be created by CGI or in a studio so the director can have total control of the elements. Furthermore it allows the director create an entire environment in front of the camera, which can help the director a lot if they are creating an environment that would be difficult or impossible to find outside the studio. This allows the director to create the scene exactly how he envisioned it. Another option is to shot on location. To shot on location means that the director finds an actual location outside the studio to film. This can create different problems since nature cannot be controlled but it also offers a lot of authenticity to a scene as it is shot in the ‘real world’ (Haastrup, 2002, pp. 257-258).

The setting is extremely important as it sets the scene for the narrative and creates the environment in which the narrative has to take place. The setting can be minimalistic or extravagant according to the narrative. It will also convey the time of the narrative if the film for example is set in the Middle Ages, the setting should then create an environment that will convince the audience that the film actually takes place in the Middle Ages (Haastrup, 2002, p. 258).

Costumes and makeup is another part of mise-en-scene. Costumes and makeup can be used for different purposes and are a powerful element in creating a character but also in representing the time and space of the narrative. Costumes can for example be used to aid in the setting of time of narrative by dressing the characters appropriately to the desire time and style, which could be big dresses for a Victorian timepiece or a futuristic style for a science fiction film. Dressing the characters is important, as it is a part of the collective effort to create the space of the film. Furthermore costumes and makeup have a lot to say about a character and the character’s development throughout the film. Costumes can show the rise or fall of a character. If the character is on the rise of the social ladder his costume will show this ascend by for example evolving for ragged old clothes at the start of the film to suit and tie at the end. But it might as well be the other way around. It could be a man that is knocked down from his social position where the audience will experience his costume becoming more scruffy and untidy. Makeup can also aid in the representations of these states of the character as it can help convey whether the character may be worn by his bad situation or thriving in his good situation. An example would be that a character would wear makeup to make him look dirty and his skin looking worn out if he had been living on the streets. Moreover, costumes and makeup can assist the representation of a character that sticks out from the rest. This might be the case if the character is dressed less fancy than the other characters of a scene or is underdress for a party of people. Then the costume will emphasise the gap between the given character and the surrounding characters, as the character would visibly differ from the group. Costumes and makeup proves to serve many purposes and has therefore become an important part of mise-en-scene (Haastrup, 2002, p. 258).

Lighting is another part of mise-en-scene. Traditionally and basically lighting serves the purpose of allowing the audience to see what happens on the screen, but it serves a variety of other purposes. A classic lighting set-up is a three-point set-up. This set-up is used for the purpose of focussing the light on the main characters of a scene so the audience automatically will turn their attention to these characters, their faces and their actions. This is the classic way of thinking of lighting, as it is primarily used to emphasise the elements the audience has to be aware of. But as mentioned lighting serves other purposes such as setting a specific mood, aiding a certain perception of character or setting and thematic purposes. A great example of how lighting can set moods comes from horror films. In horror films the audience will often experience dark settings with very little lighting. This aids in the creating of fear as not all of the setting is visible to the audience and therefore can contain a variety of surprises. Lighting can also emphasise the perception of a character. This could be is the character is purely lit and thereby wrapped in shadows, which will enforce a perception of this character as shady and as if the character has something to hide. Lighting can also convey thematic purposes. Film noir is an example of this as the contrasts between light and shadow is as an important element of conveying the films’ themes, which often proves to be about paranoia etc. (Haastrup, 2002, p. 259).

Elaborating on mise-en-scene it is interesting to see that the first notions of this theory were that it covered “films immediate perceptual presence, its physical and concrete rendition of space and bodies on screes” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 82). Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, who were amongst the founders of the criticism, emphasised immediacy and presence, believing this to be relevant of how specific a film’s visual elements can be. Furthermore they romanticised the concept of mise-en-scene by reducing it to being the director’s individual notion of spirituality and creativity. This offers a dilemma though as this suggests that generalisation of mise-en-scene traits is near to impossible, as every director would be driven solely on their own spirituality and creativity. Newer thoughts on mise-en-scene suggest that it is “… a series of compositional norms from which directors choose how to construct their shots, scenes and whole films. Individuality re-enters (…) when he or she focuses on how, in an individual film, its subject matter is translated into the specifics of mise-en-scéne” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 82). This means that mise-en-scene classifies the system of visual and audio elements of the film. Mise-en-scene is used as a tool to uncover the elements that might be missed but a casual audience. It might also be specified as a tool to analyse the elements that otherwise would be overlooked or missed. The theory builds on the assumption that a director makes a deliberate choice with everything he puts in front of the camera so there always is a relation between the shot and the subject matter. This is where the mise-en-scene theory becomes a tool of analysis as it evaluates the film “according to the skill and artistry in which subject matter is (…) transformed by the specifics of the film medium” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 83). This explains how the theory can be used to analyse the subject matter as a function of the filmic traits.

Furthermore, mise-en-scene can be divided into three styles: the classical, expressionist and mannerist. In terms of analytical tools all three styles investigate the same visual and audial elements but describe different approaches, which a director can use when creating his film.

Adrian Martin defines the classical mise-en-scene as: “there is a definite stylistic restraint at work, and in which the modulations of stylistic devices across the film are keyed closely to its dramatic shifts and thematic developments” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 83). In essence the classical mise-en-scene describes a style that is not obtrusive and is almost “invisible” as it is motivated by the subject matter of the film. Stating that the style is somewhat invisible refers the way the director can create a style that seems invisible to the audience. By doing so the director can make sure that the subject matter is not corrupted by the style. Martin elaborates: “stylistic effects and decisions *serve* the creation of a coherent fictional world… … what is crucial is that the fictional world be an *embodiment* and *dramatization* of a thematic particular to each film” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 83). The important aspect of this quote is that the stylistic effects serves as means to create the world depicted in the given film. If the film is an example of classical mise-en-scene the effects will not appear for the sake of the effect or style but only because it helps to further the understanding and credibility of the fictional world.

Victor Perkins describes the notion of credibility as: “a narrative fiction film *must firstly* satisfy the realist requirement of credibility, *after which* it may go on to be as creative in terms of shaping meaning and significance as it an, while abiding by the basic restraint of credibility” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 84). He elaborates by arguing: “A narrative fiction film will be credible or not according to whether its images are consistently derived from the fictional world it depicts” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 84). The notion of credibility is understood as the film’s credibility towards the world it is depicting. The reason why demons are credible in an exorcism film is because it has created a world within which this demon’s existence is credible. If the same demon were to appear in a film where the setting would not allow for one to appear the film would lose its credibility. The notion of credibility will therefore have a great influence on the mise-en-scene of a film as the director has to true to what is “permitted” in the world of the film.

The expressionist style of mise-en-scene is defined by Martin as films “whose textual economy is pitched more at the level of a broad fit between elements of style and elements of subject (…) general strategies of colour coding, camera viewpoint, sound design and so on enhance or reinforce the general “feel” or meaning of the subject matter” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 85).

This translates to a style that will have a high degree of credibility but will still have a large amount of, somewhat oversaturated, elements of style that are used to emphasise the style of the film. This can for example be used to emphasise a specific feeling or a specific age of time. In a film as *A Single Man* directed by Tom Ford both of these examples shine through. The film is set in the 1960s and a lot of work has been put into making the setting and the costumes looking like that period of time. Furthermore the main character is homosexual and his sexual urges are communicated using colour schemes and close-ups creating a specific style in the film. The way these elements are arranged furthers the subject matter of the film but these are also somewhat oversaturated and thereby creating a specific style. This provides the film with a specific style that might seem obtrusive but still serves a distinct purpose for the subject matter. The style serves the purpose for the subject matter, not its own purpose.

When the style stops serving the subject matter but rather serves its own purpose it is defined as a mannerist style of mise-en-scene. “Style performs out of its own trajectories, no longer working unobtrusively at the behest of the fiction and its demands of meaningfulness” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 85). The mannerist style of mise-en-scene can be said to be the contrary of classical mise-en-scene. The style does not necessarily serve the subject matter as the mise-en-scene elements are used to create the specific style of the film. The mannerist style of mise-en-scene will therefore seem incredible intrusive as the style becomes more central than the subject matter the film conceives. The style somewhat becomes its own justification. Examples of mannerist mise-en-scene are often seen in the films of Lars Von Trier. In the film *Antichrist* scenes of violence are overly graphic and extremely controversial. Even to the degree where it can be said that the style of these scenes do not necessarily communicate the subject matter of the film but the style is rather used to create an intrusive style that is specific to this film and becomes a stylistic trademark of the film. This also means that the director can impact the movie with his own creative style as he can work with the stylistic elements both in and out of context to the subject matter. Therefor will the directors, that use the mannerist mise-en-scene, often have a specific style in lots of their films, which is more characteristic to the specific director, than the directors that work with a classical approach to mise-en-scene.

When working with mise-en-scene David Bordwell describes an approach he defines as the ‘bulls-eye-schema’. This approach describes a hierarchy of the mise-en-scene elements of the film.

…Characters are central to narrative films (the centre or bull’s-eye of a ‘target’), followed by the setting (the second ring of a target), and then film discourse (the outer ring of a target). There is a hierarchy between the all-important centre (the characters) and the less important periphery (film discourse)” (Elsaesser, 200, p. 87).

Bordwell explains that the characters are the most essential part of any narrative film followed by the setting. The characters are the element that drives the narrative of the film forward and the setting supports them in doing so. Therefore this will be used to some degree in the following analyses. They will also focus on the characters and the setting. As the narrative will not be analysed in depth the same hierarchy will not be evident in the analyses as the emphasis will be on how they interact and influence each other. How the characters are portrayed when living in a post apocalyptic world, how the setting is used to depict this world and then how these elements are dependent on each other. The film discourse will still be the outer ring seeing as the terms of film discourse will be applied in the analysis but the function of the terms are to analyse the characters and the setting. This will be done by analysing how camera angles, music, colour scheming, costumes, etc. function in specific scenes. Therefore the film discourse will remain as an outer ring for the analyses.

Bordwell furthermore defines the ‘expressivist heuristic’ approach to the analysis of mise-en-scene as: “suitable for making sense of films dominated by classical *mise en scene*, in which character’ actions and the settings motive film discourse. Meaning arises from within the film’s action, rather than being imposed from the outside by the director” (Elsaesser, 2002, p. 88). This is fitting for the following analyses as the style carries the subject matter and thereby ‘meaning’. The film’s characters and setting conveys ‘meaning’. This approach focus on the role of the characters and setting and how these are able to communicate the subject matter of the film and its meaning. The analyses will show that the chosen material does exactly this. The films chosen is centred on the characters and their struggles while the setting portrays these struggles visually. Therefore the analyses will need an approach that focuses on these elements.

In the neoformalistic film analysis cutting also plays a role. In essence a cut defines to pieces of film put together but this can be done in several ways that all carry their own purpose. The cut most used is a clean cut. This is the cut most of the audience does not really register because it is used so often and because if done right it can be seamless. But a cut can also fade in or fade out usually from/to a black or white screen. This is often seen when a film ends and it fades to black while the white screen is often used a mediator for a dream or fantasy sequence. Then the picture fades out to a white screen and the fades in to a dream sequence. Furthermore the cuts can overlap each other so one picture fades into another or they can wipe, which means that one picture wipes the other out of the screen in the cut (Haastrup, 2002, pp. 258-259). These cuts can carry a lot of meaning but when looking at cutting it can be especially interesting to look at the cutting technique. There are different ways of cutting various shots into a scene and one of the most common in Hollywood is the continuity cut. The continuity cut’s objective is to conceal the actual cutting and the film structure of a scene. When using the continuity cut there are a number of things to be aware of that can help the continuity. One of these is the 180-degree rule. This rule describes how the camera has to record from only one side of a 180-degree angle of the set. By doing so the audience will still be able to navigate the setting even when cutting between different angles. This is therefore an important tool to create continuity in a scene. Another tool is the match cut. A match cut defines a cut between two objects that have a similar fixation point and is usually somewhat of the same size. Examples of this could be match cutting between two cars in a car chase or match cutting between two faces in a dialogue. Match cutting aids in concealing the actual cut because the elements of each shot is similar and the transition will therefore seem more seamless. Another type of cutting is the jump cut. The jump cut is defined as a cut that “jumps” between two different paths in the narration. This kind of kind is often used when a protagonist has to save the damsel in distress before the antagonist kills the damsel in distress. In this type of scene the cutting will usually show how the protagonist tries to get speedily to the damsel in distress and then cut to how the antagonist is hurting or keeping the damsel constrained. The cutting between these two situations will be referred to as a jump cut. This will help create continuity, as it will seem like two ends coming together. Motivated point of view is also a cutting technique that is frequently used. This type of cut is used to emphasise a specific object that a character looks at. The first shot will be of the person looking at something and the cut brings on the next shot, which will be of the specific object. By using this type of cut it is possible to show the character’s reaction to a specific object and the object or it can be used to make sure that the audience take notice of an important object in the film (Haastrup, 2002, pp. 260-261).

A mentioned, audio is also a part of the neoformalistic analysis. The audio is divided into three subgenres, which are: music, dialogue and effects. Audio is an important part of the perception of a film. If the audience does not find the audio credible, then the visual elements of the film can lose their credibility as well. The audio can be diegetic or non-diegetic. Diegetic audio is the sound, dialogue and music that is recorded on set and can be described as being recorded in the universe of the film. Non-diegetic audio is the opposite. Non-diegetic audio describes the music, dialogue and sound effects that are put into the film in the editing of the film (Haastrup, 2002, p. 262).

When analysing the music of a film there a several definitions to be conscious of. Background music can aid the visual elements in creating a certain mood in a scene. It can be used to emphasise a romantic setting with for example quiet instrumental string music like violins. This could enforce the idea that two characters in a scene are in love with each other. While in a horror film the background music will be sharper and more direct, as to further frighten the audience by building suspense. This can be done by leitmotifs, which can be defined as individual themes. These can be applied not only to a mood but also an individual character. An example of this is the leitmotif of Darth Vader in *Star Wars* (Haastrup, 2002, p. 262). This theme enforced the evil depiction of the character, as the music is dark and ominous and therefore further defines the character. Music as underscoring is when the music harmonises with the visual, almost imitating it. If the music completely imitates the visual it is called Mickey Mousing. A typical example of Mickey Mousing is when the music follows the character’s movements, which is often seen in cartoons. This is often used to create a comical mood as the character might become aware of the music and thereby break the fourth wall (Haastrup, 2002, p. 262).

Sound effects and background noise is also an element of the audio side of a film. Noise or rather background noise covers most of the sounds that is not music or dialogue. This can be traffic noise or barroom chatter etc. This kind of controlled noise is also important in creating moods. This could be the example of a barroom where the scene will seem more credible if there is some kind of noise in the background because the audience’s schemata will expect background noise in a bar. The characteristic thing about the background noise is that it has to be subtler than it would be in reality so the focus remains on the main characters of the scene. The background noise can also function as a masking device if the film wants to convey that the character in the bar cannot hear the conversation at the other end of the bar. In this case the barroom chatter would have to be increased so it is clear that the character cannot hear anything else. Background noise can therefore have different functions depending on the given scene. Sound effects are something that is added to the film in the post-production or editing. Sound effects span across various sounds but could for example be the exaggerated “swoosh” sound of sword or the sounds of punches which usually are more loud in films that in reality. These sound effects are used to emphasise the actions they follow (Haastrup, 2002, p. 263).

When working with the sounds and audio of a film it is important to investigate the dialogue. Dialogue has an undeniably large narratively role as the dialogue between characters develops the narrative but it also has a stylistic function. Which primarily is founded in how the film either uses the dialogue or a voice-over to develop the narrative. Dialogue can function as a stylistic tool if a film makes use of one-liners that helps define the film or series of film it belongs to. Even though the voice-over is used throughout the history of film it is often regarded as a lack of narrative talent, as the film does not have the capacity to convey the narrative without an external narrator (Haastrup, 2002, p. 263).

The neoformalistic film analysis covers a variety of elements spanning from narrative to stylistic. The important thing though is that it is media specific to film or other visual media. It works as a tool to analyse the media specific traits, which in this case is the visual elements but also gives the tools to analyse the narrative in the context of the media. It allows for the analyses to analyse both the narrative and the stylistics but most important to analyse them in connection to each other. That is why this specific method of analysis is chosen for the following analyses.

# A world of garbage – WALL·E

*WALL·E* by Andrew Stanton is a Disney/PIXAR animation film that portrays a world ruined by over-consumption and the amount of garbage produced hereof. “Embedded within its lament over large-scale environmental destruction is a nostalgic fondness for consumer goods, a sentiment that complicates the film’s powerful if heavy-handed warnings about consumerism and environmental pollution” (Anderson, 2012, p. 267). Anderson describes how the film depicts a world destroyed because of consumer goods and what is assumed to be an over-production of these. This influence of consumer goods has furthermore lead to over-consumption of these goods. This is one of the main elements that this analysis will concern itself with. How the human over-consumption can ultimately destroy the world and how this film depicts this destruction. Furthermore the analysis will investigate the human condition, hereby the human way of life in their new ‘habitat’. This exact depicting carries a lot of criticism towards human inactivity, obesity and dependability of technology.

## A world built of garbage

The setting is essential both for the depiction of earth but also for the depiction of the space colony that the human beings now live in. The analysis of the setting will set off in the opening scene. This scene functions as a presentation not only of who produced the film but also of the environment and somewhat the time of the narrative. The scene starts with a shot of stars in space while music starts playing. The music is interesting as it is an old show tune called *Put on Your Sunday Clothes* from the film *Hello, Dolly!*, which is the first element of nostalgia in the film. But what is even more interesting is the text of the song as it foreshadows the narrative of the film. The text is about a world outside of Yonkers and how his friend and him should go experience it by finding adventure. Subsequently the text is about girls in white with lights bright as stars an how they won’t come home until they have kissed a girl. As a narrative foreshadowing it encompass the key elements of the narrative. WALL·E goes on to experience the new world when he follows EVE into space, where the stars are bright. EVE being the girl in white which he will not leave until he has gotten his kiss, which in the film is EVE holding his hand. This is evident of how important background music can be. In this case, foreshadowing the entire film within two minutes. The following continuity cuts are used to shift between different shots of space, showing planets and galaxies before showing the sun. From the shot of the sun the camera slightly pans to the right before tilting downwards to reveal the earth. The composition and camera movements of this sequence could be explained as the tilt downwards is used to show the suns position above the earth as people experience it when they are on earth and therefore it will seem more natural to the audience that the sun is above earth. After the tilt the camera zooms or tracks in on earth. At a distance the earth appear normal but when the camera zooms in on earth and penetrates the atmosphere countless satellites appears almost as a layer of dust surrounding earth. These satellites are the first element to suggest that the time of the narrative is set in the future. Usually when the atmosphere appears in films only a few satellites are shown and the large amount in the shot of *WALL·E* will cause the audience to expect a film set in a future, since so many satellites have been sent into the atmosphere. Furthermore it stands as a symbol of the over-consumption and over-producing which the film concerns itself with. As the camera tracks across the surface of the earth it breaches dusty brown clouds across what looks like mountains in an extreme long shot. As the shot fades into a long shot the ‘mountains’ is revealed as garbage. In the first long shot of the mountains of garbage, windmills stand on top of several of the mountains and when the scene fades into a new long shot of the mountains of garbage structures resembling atomic reactors appear alongside large chimneys. These iconic symbols of energy show that this abandoned world of garbage has struggled with energy and the production of it. It also symbolises a struggle to prevent an ecocide by switching to a more environmental solution of producing energy by windmills. This strings along with the theme of over-consumption and over-producing, which will require great deals of energy. The shot then fades to an establishing shot of a city with numerous skyscrapers creating the skyline. Only when the camera tracks closer to the city the large pillars, once again, turn out to be made of garbage towering over the actual skyscrapers. The camera continues to travel through the city resembling a classic establishing shot of a city with crane shots from above showing the rooftops and streets. These shots normalise the garbage as a part of the earth. Garbage has become a part of nature creating ‘mountains’ and part of the cities as towering structures has been built by garbage. By showing the garbage in these establishing shots where it is integrated in the landscape it emphasises that garbage has become and integrated part of the landscape. Furthermore the colour schemes with the dusty brown colours expand on the point of garbage as the colours make the scenes appear dusty and dirty.

Moreover the sound effects underline the mood of abandonment. The windy sound effects accentuate the sense of loneliness that fills the first scene where no people are showed either.

The opening scene is an example of classical mise-en-scene where the style of the film is used to support the narrative and the subject matter. The scene activates a number of schemata within the audience but turns out to be something completely different than the expected. As described above the film elegantly portrays the garbage as mountains and buildings at first sight only to reveal that they are garbage. By doing so the film’s establishing shots will convince the audience that they are seeing mountains and a city skyline, which they might have seen countless times before, before revealing it as garbage. *WALL·E* uses these establishing shots to make it credible that the garbage is a part of this new earth as the audience might be surprised, but they can relate to the shots, as the composition is familiar. Furthermore the scene presents the issue of this garbage. The cause of the garbage is still unknown but the scene makes it obvious that something has happen to the earth due to garbage.

The introduction of the character WALL·E furthers this point. He is a robot driving the dusty roads of the city collecting the garbage and compressing it into blocks he can stack. This is shown when cutting to a close-up of WALL·E’s hands drawing garbage into a compartment and closing a hatch with the name WALL·E written on it. Then there is a shot of the robot compressing the garbage into a block and then sliding it out. Even though the earth is covered in garbage there is a small effort to clean it up. It is interesting to see the point the film makes about the garbage as it is not destroyed but stacked in towering formations. This seems to be a quite fierce critique of the contemporary way of life, as it insinuates we are moving towards a future built of garbage, as we store it instead of destroying it.

Following this presentation of the setting in the first scenes of the film implies that the responsibility belongs to a corporation called Buy N Large, which is presented through a series of scenes. “The film suggests that the kind of hyper-capitalism represented by Buy n Large facilitates a destructive cycle of mass production and consumption, ultimately resulting in environmental apocalypse and the cultural degeneration of the human species” (Anderson, 2012, p. 268). The name itself is implicitly telling the audience how the consumer society evolved. In stylistic terms this scene presents it by having an extreme long shot of one of the towers of garbage, which then tilts downwards towards the ground to reveal the Buy N Large Ultrastore that sits beneath it. An interesting compositional choice is that even though the tower stands behind the store it can appear as if the tower is actually growing out of the store. This stresses that Buy N Large carries a great responsibility for this garbage. The camera then pans as WALL·E comes into the shot to reveal the extent of the store, which goes as far as the line of sight in the film. The use of the pan is consciously used to make the Ultrastore appear even larger as the establishing shot turns out only to be a small part of the entire structure. The next scenes show that Buy N Large is more than department stores as there are shots of a Buy N Large gas station and Buy N Large bank. The scene that reveals the Buy N Large bank begins with money bills on the ground with the BNL (Buy N Large) logo on them resembling dollar bills, which WALL·E drives over without giving any thought to them. The camera tilts up to reveal the Buy N Large bank creating the connection between the money and BNL. The fact that WALL·E drives across the money without paying any attention to it goes to show the complete collapse of a capitalist society which the BNL otherwise symbolises. In a following scene there is an extreme long shot showing buildings covered in advertisements for BNL. Meanwhile a BNL jingle sounds in the background with the words: “Buy N Large is your superstore, we got all you need and so much more”. These words are also a resounding criticism of over-consumption as BNL admits that they sell more than their customers need. All this culminates when WALL·E drives over a newspaper, which is then cut to in a close-up and says “Too much trash!!! Earth covered BNL CEO declares global emergency”. This states what the audience has already seen but is now confirmed by the headline. The interesting thing about this newspaper is that it is the BNL CEO that declares a global emergency. One would expect a world leader to announce a global emergency, which causes one to believe that society had come to a point where the capitalist powers had gotten so strong that the corporations were in charge before the apocalypse. The BNL corporation is a loud critique of the power corporations can gain in a capitalist society but also of the way people give them power by over-consumption and their dependency of produced goods. The fact that WALL·E drives across money in the street shows how the pillars of a capitalist society can crumple and lose their value. Christopher Todd Anderson describes it as “When WALL-E motors over a bunch of dollar bills (which bear the Buy n Large logo) without noticing… … the filmmakers overtly rejects the idea that wealth should be people’s most desirable goal (Anderson, 2012, p. 272). Building upon this point it can be said that the film shows how it can end in the destruction of our earth if the human race keeps on striving for wealth.

The value put into objects is furthered by WALL·E as a collector. In his home he has collected a variety of know objects. WALL·E lives in an old storage container that is quite worn on the outside with the paint peeling off. The inside is dark only lit by chains of Christmas lights hanging from the celling. This serves two purposes. The symbolic value of the dark is that it symbolises the bleak situation on earth. Furthermore it is used to emphasise the items that the audience can actually see in WALL·E’s home. The low amount of light only allows the intended objects to step forward and be in focus. When WALL·E comes home and the film introduces his home WALL·E pops out a cassette tape from a toaster. While showing he collects old items that the audience recognises as household object it also becomes clear that the film takes place in a time where the original use of some of these object are forgotten. This is evident as WALL·E uses a toaster as storage for his cassette. To make sure this point comes through the toaster is shut in a close-up and the only movement made is WALL·E moving the lever forcing the cassette to jump out of the toaster. Furthermore no smoking signs, toilet signs for ladies and gentlemen and driver’s licenses hang on the walls as art. Once again objects, which serves specific purposes in our society, are used for something completely different, in this case as decorations.

When WALL·E opens his ‘lunchbox’ it is shot in a over the should medium close-up, that allows the audience to see a part of his eyes while focusing on the lunchbox, which indicates that WALL·E looks at the same thing. As he opens it, it contains a spork, a piece of cutlery that combines a fork and a spoon, a zippo lighter and a Rubik’s cube. Especially the Rubik’s cube and the zippo lighter is interesting because the cube is a well-know toy and the lighter is something almost everybody knows. When WALL·E removes the items from his lunchbox it is shot from a low-angle medium close-up so the audience can see him react to the items. WALL·E reacts with admiration for the items as he investigates them closer with an almost childlike curiosity. This is interesting because these are iconic items that the audience most likely will recognise and therefore will WALL·E’s inexperience with them say a lot about how these inanimate objects have lost their influence. This questions the relationship our society has with manufactured goods. “The implication that present-day consumer goods are both garbage *and* objects of potential nostalgic value raises fundamental questions about Western culture’s relationship to the consumer goods that play such a prominent role in day-to-day life (Anderson, 272, p. 272). Anderson describes how *WALL·E* creates a nostalgic bond towards these items of consumer goods but also how the film shows them all as objects of garbage. This must be said to be a critique of how large of an influence consumer goods have on the contemporary society but also of how wrong it might be that the audience can get a feeling of nostalgia because of these items.

The nostalgia that these consumer goods invoke is important: “Because it involves dissatisfaction with the present moment, nostalgia is especially relevant to the study of dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives” (Anderson, 2012, p. 271). What makes this point even more interesting is that a lot of the items WALL·E has acquired are quite dated even for the release of the film. This entails WALL·E’s VCR, the Rubik’s cube, his film *Hello, Dolly!*, etc. This choice can be explained by the fact that it has to invoke nostalgia for the audience and therefore it has to be items they feel nostalgic about and not objects they posses at the release of the film. But it can also be argued that these items are used because it represents the beginning of the culture of over-consumption and the emotional attachment to manufactured goods. By doing so the film depicts not only where the culture of over-consumption has ended but also where it started.

Summarising on the setting and the depiction of earth as a large dumpsite, the film uses a lot of imagery to show has the earth has been desolate as a result of garbage produced by over-consumption. Garbage structures are used to trick the audience at first to believe it is buildings just to learn it is garbage. This is also done to show the immense amounts of garbage that have driven the human race to live in space. As the garbage is depicted as mountains as well it seems homogenous with nature almost consuming nature. The notion of consumer goods as garbage is created as WALL·E digs well-known items out of the garbage to collect it. Thereby becoming a critique of consumer goods of our time and even though we might not see it now, what we buy and use for everyday life is nothing more than garbage. Therefore the film insinuates that the human race is the reason for the destruction of life on earth, exemplifies by the corporation Buy N Large.

## The dormant consumer – the human condition in *WALL·E*

As the world becomes uninhabitable, the human race had to find a solution, which BNL offers them. They have built large spaceships that will fly the people on earth out into space while they clean up the garbage on earth. Their slogan is “Too much garbage in your face? There’s plenty of space out in space. BNL star liners leaving each day. We’ll clean up the mess while you’re away.” This explains why all the people of earth has disappeared as no human being is seen in the shots on earth. They live on space shuttles in space. Besides the commercials this is shown when WALL·E reaches a spaceship as he follows EVE into space, when a shuttle collects her. The first time WALL·E encounters human beings is inside the space liner. He bumps into a hovering chair, which holds a human being. The chair projects a screen in front of the person in the chair, which is an interactive screen with the function of communication with other people. The notion of inactivity and obesity is apparent from the start as the shot of the man in a medium close-up cuts to long shot showing him and the man he is talking to on his screen, who turns out to be right beside him. Even though they are right next to each other they do not even turn their neck to talk to each other but rather use the screen in front of their face. Furthermore the activity they are considering to do is virtual golfing, which would not require much effort from them. As the camera zoom out from the shot of the two people in the hovering chairs an array of people in chairs are revealed. The film then cuts to a series of close-up and extreme-close-up showing the people in the chairs and what the chair provides for the people. But it is also apparent that the people in the chairs are quite oblivious to the things happening around them. Which is emphasised when one of the people on board is surprised they have a gigantic pool on board the ship, as her screen is momentarily turned of. This can be seen as a parallel to how people of contemporary society is more or less oblivious to the problems surrounding them and only relating to the things they can see on a TV- or computer screen. In the following scenes it because obvious that all needs are taken care of without the human beings delivering a real effort. If they need a beverage they put out their hand and call for a robot to bring them one. When they fall out of their chair they need robots to pick them up and put them back in the chair. They do not even have to change their clothes as their jumpsuits can change colour at the push of a button. Anderson points out how this will remind the audience of contemporary American culture:

… we find that rabid consumerism and an obsession with technology have turned the future people into mindless, exaggeratedly obese caricatures. A series of scenes satirizes elements of present-day American culture, including advertising, overeating, entertainment, and social networks. For these future humans zooming about on automated hover chairs, individuality and independent thought have eroded under the weight of corporate power, and although technology provides superficial pleasure, it facilitates a learned helplessness as it blinds people to their own degenerated condition (Anderson, 2012, p. 268).

Especially the last words about the learned helplessness is a serious warning to the way contemporary society is constructed, as it would be unimaginable what would happen if the human race reached such a condition of life.

Furthermore it is interesting to look at the way the people are visually depicted. They are not only obese but have short arms and legs and large necks that makes it look like they have no chins. In addition to this they are clothed in jumpsuits, all consequently resulting in them looking like giant babies. That the film depicts the human beings this way is important as it reflects their behaviour. They are acting like babies who are not capable of taking care of themselves and having to be serviced in every aspect of their lives. The evolution of this obesity is shown when the camera pans across the row of captains the ship have had. Not only does this show the evolution of obesity but it also reveals that the first captain was instated in 2105 and the current captain was instated in 2775. This line of captains clearly shows the audience how the psychical inactivity has evolved. The captains are getting larger the further the camera pans and thereby creates a timeline to show how people have evolved. But it also informs the audience that the star liner has been in space for 670 years, which is incredibly much more than the five years they advertised for on earth. Not only does this show that the human race has reach an almost dormant state in space but also that the state they left earth in was irreversible. Even with robots working on cleaning up the earth the task remains uncompleted after almost 700 years. In relation to the point the film has made against garbage as a result of over-consumption, the state of the human race can be seen as a warning to contemporary society. If we are not careful we might destroy our own earth because we remain oblivious to how we are treating it. Therefore it might not only be a prediction of how the human race could end up but also a warning about how not to be in the present. That the human race has to be aware not only of our over-consumption and the consequences hereof but also aware that we do not end in a dormant state of inactivity just waiting for something to be done for us.

Conclusively the analysis of *WALL·E* has shown a post-apocalyptic earth that is desolate and covered in garbage. The world has ‘ended’ as a result of the garbage the human race has produced. As Thompson describes the apocalyptic fear in the earlier section this is apparent in *WALL·E*. The fear of an ecological catastrophe due to our neglect of the environment is the fear that drives the film. The film shows the over-consumption and –production of the human race, but the fear is how the earth will react to this. In *WALL·E* nothing can grow on the face of the face of the earth before WALL·E finds a single sprout of vegetation after the human race has spend 670 years in space. The humanly created apocalypse caused by garbage, making the earth uninhabitable, is depicted in *WALL·E* where garbage forms the landscape both in nature and in the cities. The film never shows an apocalypse on the post-apocalyptic landscape on earth. The audience will therefore only identify the setting in *WALL·E* as post-apocalyptic because they are bombarded by garbage but also because the setting of the film depicts a harrowing sense of abandonment and loneliness, which is usually seen when a large number of the human population has been eradicated by some sort of catastrophe. In numerous scenes the streets will resemble images of war zones covered by the news media. Therefore the setting will activate schemata about how destruction of a city looks and will thereby acknowledge that some type catastrophe transpired. As mentioned above, the fear is that it is the human race that will threaten its own existence. This is primarily shown through the production of garbage, which the human race is responsible for but also through the human condition in the future. The caricature is extreme but it draws upon conditions of contemporary society. The problems with obesity, increasing inactivity, increased dependency of technology and a lack of general interest to make an environmental change (Anderson, 2012, p 268). The fear is not that these problems will appear but the fear is that the will become worse and lead the human race to the destruction of the earth.

Anderson states: “The film suggests that the kind of hyper-capitalism represented by Buy n Large facilitates a destructive cycle of mass production and consumption, ultimately resulting in environmental apocalypse and the cultural degeneration of the human species” (Anderson, 2012, p. 268). This point made by Anderson encompasses the fear of an apocalypse caused by the human race itself. Over-consumption and –production will have grave consequences in the future according to the film.

The post-apocalyptic world is caused by the human race’s own neglect which they are not aware of in the film. The earth has become a post-apocalyptic desert without vegetation and life while the human race has sought refugee in space where it lives oblivious the condition on earth.

# Fighting for survival – *The Road*

”*The Road* is harrowing and thought-provoking open wound of a film in which a traumatized and terrorized father and son slowly journey through a scorched and barren postapocalyptic landscape, living in constant fear of rampaging gangs of murderers and cannibals, with rape and murder at every bend of the eponymous road” (McSweeney, 2013, pp. 43-44).

Terence McSweeney’s description of *The Road* embodies the bleak and distressing nature of the film. *The Road* is disturbing prediction of an ecological disaster. The film offers no explanation to the apocalypse, only dealing with the post-apocalyptic earth it has left. The book by Cormac McCarthy is so harrowing and offers so little hope that it has given him a place amongst the Great Unfilmable (Romney, 2010, p. 1). Nevertheless John Hillcoat was chosen to direct to adaption for the screen. As McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic world has been deemed unfilmable by many it may help to explain the harrowing and barren setting in the film. The setting will be analysed with a special focus on colours but also on the representation of nature in the film by employing mise-en-scene. Furthermore the characters will be investigated to show the human condition and the degeneration of humanity.

## The world is dying – the depiction of a post-apocalyptic world in *The Road*

Firstly this analysis will concern itself with the representation of the setting. The unnamed father describes the situation in a voice-over in the opening of the film: “Each day is more grey than the one before. Each night is darker – beyond darkness. The world gets colder week by week as the planet slowly dies. No animals have survived. The crops are long gone” (Hillcoat, 2009). In this voice-over he foreshadows the colour scheme of the film but also comments on nature in the film. By employing the voice-over the film handles the problem of how to depict the extinction of animal life and crops by using a narrator to tell the audience. Furthermore the information is important because it plays a part in the starvation of the human race. In relation to the setting it is interesting that the father describes the days as getting greyer and the night darker. This is interesting because this is a vocalisation of the colour scheme of the film. “It is perhaps the color of the film, or the lack of it, that becomes the defining aspect of its mise-en-scène. The overall effect of the bleached palette is one of decay…” (McSweeney, 2013, p. 46). Throughout the film a greyish and brownish colour scheme is used in the daylight scenes, while the darkness is sometimes suffocating in the night scenes. The grey colours are predominant from the start of the film. When the voice-over describes how the word is dying there are close-up shots of their cart, which contains their belongings, cutting to a total shot of the father and the son pushing their cart of belongings. This total shot of the two characters in connection to the background provides a powerful imagery. The characters are in dark costumes and wearing hoods so they seem like outlines of people. In the background there is a barren mountain with few naked trees standing while numerous trees have died and fallen to the ground. Above the mountains are heavy grey clouds that allow no sunlight to enter the shot. As the camera tracks the characters walking along the road the father seems challenged by pushing the cart along. He has to put an effort into it, which could symbolise the struggle he is facing. The struggle of survival he seems to be losing just like nature has lost the fight for its survival and has died around the human race. The scene cuts to an extreme long shot of the two characters to show have small they are in the face of nature’s destruction. In the next shot a lake is seen in an establishing long shot. The shot is not unlike shot the audience might have seen before, but usually a shot like this is used to show the bountiful and colourful nature that surrounds this blue and clear lake. In *The Road* the shot is completely different. The colours are still dark and grey and the lake is filled with dead trees. They almost look like dead bodies floated in the water and are not unlikely to represent the death of nature, as all the hills and mountains stands empty surrounding the lake while all the trees have rolled into the lake to ‘drown’. This imagery is furthered when the film cuts to the next shot, where the trees in the water are shown from a crane shot in a downward angle while panning, to reveal that the trees completely covers the water, making it almost impossible to se the water. This notion of nature dying around them are emphasised when a tree randomly falls behind the two characters. The tree is not close enough to harm them and therefore not a narrative choice to add excitement, but must be said to be a stylistic symbol for the death of nature.

To exemplify how mise-en-scene is used to create a post-apocalyptic setting, the first scene, within which the two main characters encounter other people, has distinct features of a post-apocalyptic landscape. The establishing shot of the scene is an extreme long shot that establishes the setting as a road with a tunnel in the background. Alongside the road there is several abandoned cars and the road is covered in brown dead leafs. The abandoned cars symbolise the broken infrastructure of this setting. Usually the road is for the cars to travel upon but in this shot they are pushed aside and placed alongside the road. This insinuates that cars are not the primarily method of transportation any longer. A cause for this would be a shortage of gas, but the imagery is clear. The dead leafs on the road furthermore insinuates that the roads are not travelled often by cars. As the leafs can cover large parts of the road it means that not many cars can be passing by as this would result in the leafs blowing away. Furthermore the stranded cars on the abandoned road stand as a symbol of the downfall of society “… abandoned vehicles litter the landscape like carcasses. The road on which they endlessly travel was once a symbol of humans’ civilization and progress, but now it is as devastated and decayed as the society in which they find themselves” (McSweeney, 2013, p. 46).

As the camera tracks across the road it captures a dark red car. The car is dark of colour but also extremely dirty. The windows are so dirty that the audience cannot see through them to see inside the car. This would suggest that is has not been used for a long time and has been on the side of the road for just as long. The camera keeps tracking past it to show the protagonists’, the father and the son’s, cart beside a car. This implies that they are sleeping inside this car. As the scene cuts to a shot of the protagonists sleeping in the car this also becomes an important point about this post-apocalyptic setting. That objects are losing their purpose, only to be used for something more critical. As the cars might not be able to drive and transport people, they are able to provide shelter and have therefore been given a new purpose. By ‘transforming’ the purpose of a normal object, as a car, which many people of contemporary society sees as a necessity for their everyday life, helps to emphasise how grave the situation is. The father is woken by sounds from the tunnel, which turns out to be gang roaming the streets. That they will emerge from the dark tunnel where nothing can be seen is an important point as this underlines how the dangers of this post-apocalyptic world can come from almost nothing and emerge from the dark.

“The postapocalyptic landscapes are quite remarkable: the barren environments are nightmarish yet at times hauntingly beautiful… … To recreate such an environment, Hillcoat filmed on the sites of real-life disasters…” (McSweeney, 2013, p. 46). This contrast between the dying earth and the haunting beauty is highlighted throughout the film with a great deal of establishing extreme long shots, which captures both the beauty of the landscape but also the terrifying notion that the earth is dying around the human race. This an example of classic mise-en-scene, as the stylistics supports the narrative and carries it forward. In this incident the struggle for survival is rooted in the two protagonists but also in nature’s struggle, which is presented to the stylistics of mise-en-scene.

In addition to mise-en-scene the audio plays a large role in creating this harrowing post-apocalyptic world. The background music is throughout the film emphasising the dangers and the solitude. It volume is kept low as not to interfere to much with other sounds but kept at a chilling level that helps the images to have the harrowing effect. An example is when the gang on the road wakes the father and the son. In this scene the diegetic sounds of the characters running in the leafs and the car approaching at the same volume as the eerie background music. As the background music blends with the diegetic sounds it assists in creating an eerie mood within the scene because while the diegetic sounds can be heard the background music intensify the scene, as danger is approaching.

The stylistics of the film work together in creating a desolate post-apocalyptic setting by showing the devastation of their world hereby the ruin of the society the audience knows. This is done by the abandoned roads and cars but another example is when the father and son find a can of Coca-Cola:

When the father comes across a single can of Coca-Cola in the back of a rusted old vending machine, he gives it to his son, knowing it may well be the last can of Coke in the world. “What is it?” the boy asks. Such is the global ubiquity of the brand that what twenty-first-century child would not know a can of Coke? What better image to reveal the collapse of corporate capitalism that that shiny red can that has become such an iconic symbol of American cultural and economic imperialism? (McSweeney, 2013, pp. 50-51)

This kind of imagery is interesting because it builds on the notion that the audience will know the Coca-Cola brand. But as McSweeney states, it is safe to assume that they will. Using this universally know brand it emphasises the way society has changed. A symbol of capitalism, which the son does not recognise, shows how the capitalist world has eroded. The capitalist society that it represents is also accused of pushing the world closer to an ecological apocalypse. This point is interesting because even though the cause of the apocalypse has not been given, the world the film depicts is a post-apocalyptic world, following an ecological disaster. All organisms on earth are either dead or dying. Jared Diamond describes how society fear an ecological apocalypse or ecocide:

Many people fear that ecocide has come to overshadow nuclear war and emerging diseases as a threat to global civilization. The environmental problems facing us today include the same eight that undermined past societies, plus four new ones: human-caused climate change, build up of toxic chemicals in the environment, energy shortages, and fill utilization of the Earth’s photosynthetic capacity. Most of these twelve threats, it is claimed, will become globally critical within the next few decades: either we solve then problems by then, or the problems will undermine not just Somalia but also First World societies (McSweeney, 2013, p. 42).

This is exactly the world *The Road* depicts. The film depicts a world that has suffered an ecocide where nature has been wiped out. To emphasise the world that was lost the film uses flashbacks to before the apocalypse. These flashbacks are colourful opposing to the grey colours the film otherwise imposes. The use of colour accentuates the contrast between the dreamy past and the nightmarish present. But the extreme contrast will also underline the fact that the past is lost and cannot be revived. Nature is dead. In the first flashback embraces the natural world showing blossoming trees and brightly coloured flowers and when the scene cut back to the present the colours are dark and grey. This really shows how nature has died and the world has experienced an ecocide.

## The dehumanisation of a race – The human condition in *The Road*

In *The Road* human nature is tested as everybody is fighting for survival. Some have turned to cannibalism to survive while others, like the protagonists, have stayed to their moral compass even though it has brought them to brink of starvation. The important notion is the fact that people are struggling to survive. As all animals and crops are extinct, people has to live of old can goods, stored before the apocalypse or to eat each other. The struggle for survival is made apparent by several things and one of them is the fact that shoes are one of the three most important belongings in this world. The need for shoes shows how people are required to stay mobile and transient. People in *The Road* will resemble homeless people of contemporary society. “In this postapocalyptic world everyone has become homeless, and the concept of community seems to have been lost forever” (McSweeney, 2013, p. 47). The sense of community has been lost which is evident several times throughout the film and embodied by the father. He loses touch with his humanity because of fear and in an attempt to protect his boy. It is seen numerous times that he would rather run than to help other in need. For example when the father and the son enters a house and finds people in the basement, being starved and obviously keeping for eating them, the father chooses to run and close the door behind him to keep them trapped. He could have left the door open and still made his escape with his son. But because his entire focus is on protecting his son he is taking no chances. The same thing is seen when the father is reluctant to help the old man his son wants to help. It is clear that the father no longer sees the human race as a community. Other people are equally dangerous as wild animals would have been. The decline of the father’s humanity can be described as:

The father’s sense of morality has been distorted by his desire to keep the boy alive no matter what, and his trauma and despair have dehumanized him. The clear-cut Manichean dichotomy between good and evil has become indistinct; Hillcoat comments, “You see how this good man’s moral compass starts to slide” (McSweeney, 2013, p. 53).

This is a commentary on how the father slowly but steadily loses his humanity throughout the film. On several occasions he ensures his son that they are still the good guys but at the end of the film he steals the clothes of a man who stole from them, leaving him to a certain death. The interesting thing is to see how the father loses his humanity as he becomes weaker and more desperate to protect his son. In the beginning of the film he feels confident that he can protect his son, but as his health deteriorates he loses the confidence in the task. Furthermore the frustration of leaving his son in this world is obvious throughout the film. At several points in the film he even discuss with himself, if he could kill the boy if it came to that. The father’s degeneration proves to be an example of allegiance as the audience might have sympathy for his immoral acts. When he is acting immoral though it is because he wants to protect his son. In this way the audience might understand his motivation for some of his otherwise immoral acts.

An interesting point about the transient nature of the human condition in *The Road* is that people are not trying to live they are trying to survive. The embodiment of this notion is the mother. She only appears in the flashbacks, which from the start insinuates she is dead. Later in the film her death is shown in a flashback as she walks into the dark of night. A very symbolic image as she leaves her family to be consumed by the darkness. She does not want to live just to survive. But the human condition does not allow people to live as they have done before as society and communities has eroded. People are alone and have to fight for their own survival. This is a clear distinction from how live in contemporary society as society to some degree guarantee their survival and they should focus on living their lives. In *The Road* everything has been cut to the bare minimum and survival has therefore become the first and only concern of the human race.

# Two worlds

When comparing the two films it is interesting to see that both films use a limited amount of colour when depicting these post-apocalyptic settings. Brown and grey colour schemes are employed to emphasise the absence of vegetation and the absence of a foundation for life. The lack of vegetation is a symbol of the earth dying as a result of the given apocalypse. Life on earth does not just entail human life. In *The Road* all the animals are extinct whereas in *Wall-E* the only sign of animal life is a cockroach, which is said to be able to survive even a nuclear apocalypse. Therefore it stands as a symbol of the post-apocalyptic nature where only it can survive. In *The Road* colours and vegetation are used in the flashbacks to before the apocalypse when the main characters lived and not just survived on earth. There are vivid colours giving life to the setting, which stands in clear contrast to the lack of colour in the post-apocalyptic world.

Both films show a planet that has experienced an ecocide; meaning nature has died or is dying. In *Wall-E* nature is smothered in garbage while the audience is offered no explanation to the ecocide in *The Road*. The similarities in the setting are numerous. They show a barren landscape that offers no sign of vegetation or flourishing animal life. An interesting point is that both films offer a glimpse of a hope in the face of the ecocide. In *Wall-E* this is embodied by the plant EVE collects and the cockroach. *The Road* generally offers very little hope. The son is the most significant symbol of hope, but another glimpse of hope for the world after the ecocide is when the father and son find a bug in a box. The bug flies away when the box is opened. In a world where all animal life was said to be extinct it offers some home to find some life that is not human.

The human condition is completely different in the two films though. In *The Road* it is a battle for survival and not a battle for a way of life. They are traveling across the land to survive not looking for a place to settle. People are malnourished as result of a lack of food in a world that is dying. In *WALL·E* the human race has left the earth to survive. It was an escape to survive but with the intension of coming back to earth. But after 670 years in space it can be argued that the human race has settled in space instead of just surviving in space. It is a place of plenty. The have everything needed to survive and given the technology to live as well. Therefore the human race does not experience the same kind of desperation as they do in *The Road*. The human condition is defined by a state of oblivion in *WALL·E* while it is defined by a state of desperation in *The Road. WALL·E* depicts a society where people lives in peace with each other because they have what they need to survive, while *The Road* shows a society where people live in fear of each other and the main characters doing what they can to avoid human contact out of fear for what these desperate people might do to them. The fear ultimately being that they might be killed by other people and be eaten as a result of a widespread hunger. This contrast is visually depicted by the people in *The Road* being skinny and malnourished while the people of *WALL·E* are obese to a point of helplessness. They are not fighting to survive but given the opportunity to live in excess. The fight for survival is emphasised in *The Road* by how food and shoes are the most important things. The need for shoes emphasises the way people has to be on the move all the time to survive, while people in *WALL·E* do not even walk themselves hovering around on chair they are somewhat bound to. Both films depict the deteriorating of the human condition. In *WALL·E* it is the state of helplessness of the people on the space liner and the oblivion towards their situation while in *The Road* it is embodied by the fathers health growing worse throughout the film.

In terms of escapism both films offers an escape to a new understanding of living in the present world. Both films urge the audience to be aware of the consequences an ecocide could have to the way of life for the human race. *WALL·E* furthermore warns the audience not to become like the people on the space liner, which is a valid concern with the problems of obesity and inactivity in many parts of the world. *The Road* on the other hand urges people to live their lives and not only try to survive. Only trying to survive is not a way to live your life but the way to survive a disaster.

# Conclusion

Concluding on this thesis it found that post-apocalyptic film depictions are based on apocalyptic fears about the future based in the present. This simple notion fuels the depictions offered in the material. In both films a global ecocide is depicted. This is done in several ways but the most significant element is that both films have very little colours in their settings. The use grey and brown colours to emphasise the death of nature and the barren landscape it has left. In *WALL·E* nature is consumed by garbage and garbage is the new definition of landscape. In *The Road* the death of nature is differently straightforward. Throughout the film nature is dead and dying around them with examples of trees falling around them stressing the fact that nature is in the process of dying. *The Road* never reveals the reason for the apocalypse and therefore focussing completely on the post-apocalyptic world and what it represents. The depiction in *The Road* can therefore be said to be a general fear of ecocide, not discriminating the cause, only identifying the consequences. *WALL·E* contrarily offers an explanation to the apocalypse, which are over-consumption and an immense production of garbage. This film offers more than a warning about what might happen but also how it can happen. In this way *WALL·E* differs from *The Road* because it identifies the cause of the apocalypse. But when depicting the post-apocalyptic world both films showed similar traits in their mise-en-scene. Amongst these where also inclusion of well-renowned consumer products that some of the characters did not know in the films. Their ignorance towards products the audience experience on a regular basis represents the erosion of the capitalist society.

The notion of the human condition is also vastly different in the two films. In *WALL·E* the audience experience a human race that are obese and inactive. They live through screens mounted on the chairs they hovered on. Any activity they might do is virtualised. This expresses a grave critique of the way contemporary society is constructed. This extreme caricature draws upon problems that are evident in contemporary society concerning obesity and the dependence of technology. So just like *WALL·E* was a grim prediction about the earth, it also serves a serious prediction about the human race if some behaviours are not changed. In *The Road* the human condition is not about living, it is about surviving. People are transients who have to keep moving to survive, either to avoid violent gangs, to find food or to find shelter from the elements. Everybody has become more or less homeless because it is almost impossible to settle down to live. Whereas in *WALL·E* humans live in a kind of space colony closely together, in *The Road* all notions of community has disappeared. People survive on the own or in small groups but they fear each other and do what they can to avoid each other.

In summary it can be said that both films are an expression of a fear of ecocide that will lead to the death of earth. But furthermore both films express a fear for the human race. In both films the human condition has ended in opposing extremes and none of them positive depictions. Therefore it can be said that they are both grim expressions of a fear of the future based in present problems.

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