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HOLLYWOOD AND ECOLOGY

Raising awareness through cinema

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ABSTRACT

The thesis analyses three Hollywood movies: *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), *Wall-E* (2008) and *Avatar* (2009) and how they differently present the theme of ecology. Even though directors may not have the ecological theme in mind, the thesis highlights the ability of each movie to raise awareness for a huge number of audiences on environmentalism. The analysis includes explorations of politics, comedy, and fantasy as crucial factors for the reception of the ecological message. Despite the different interpretations that a movie can elicit, by presenting such a complicated theme, the thesis concentrates on the power of image that a film could provide, especially thanks to the potential of a Hollywood production company. As a conclusion, the thesis takes in consideration a more recent film, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*. This documentary film is the sequel of *An Inconvenient Truth* and released eleven years after, in 2017. It is useful to demonstrate how the climate crisis remains an impending issue and, more than ever, a theme necessary to be discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to show how climate crisis is presented in cinema, through the analysis of three different films: *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006), *Wall-E* (Stanton, 2008) and *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009). The three films were made in USA and produced by different Hollywood companies. They belong to three different genres and have been chosen to present a more comprehensive scene of the theme: *An inconvenient Truth* is a documentary, *Wall-E* is an animation movie and *Avatar* is the quintessential Hollywood blockbuster.

Climate crisis is the most crucial problem of our age, constantly shown through media and films; therefore, one of the objectives of this thesis is to demonstrate how cinema can raise the awareness of a great number of audiences in this new geological era called the Anthropocene.

1.1. THE ANHTROPOCENE

Contemporary critics and scholars have classified our geological era as the Anthropocene. According to Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, the word Anthropocene comes “from the ancient Greek words of *Anthropos* meaning ‘human being’ and *kainos* meaning ‘recent, new,’ [indeed] the Anthropocene is the new epoch of humans, the age of man”, (White 2018: 5). The Anthropocene is characterized by the impact of humankind on the global environment, so massive that the planet left the old era of the Holocene to enter a new geological era. According to Daniel White, in his book *Film in the Anthropocene*, “for the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated” due to the massive emission of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a period that coincides with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (White 2018: 5). Scientists have demonstrated, during the last decades and through analyses of the polar ice, that the air trapped inside them showed an high concentration of carbon dioxide and methane; carbon dioxide is the toxic gas originated by the Industrial

pollution, emitted inside and detained by the atmosphere; this detainment produces the augmentation of the temperature of the Planet, better known as Global Warming. In addition, there is another crucial event that caused climate change;

According to British geologist Jan Zalasiewicz, nuclear testing introduced to the planet such isotopes as caesium-137, plutonium 239 + 240, and americium 241 that existed nowhere on Earth before the atmospheric testing and everywhere on the planet after it. [...] Beginning in July 1945 [by the United States] nuclear bombs around the world were detonated “at the average rate of one every 9.6 days until 1988 (Fay 2018: 64).

Atolls in the Marshall Islands and in French Polynesia became selected places for nuclear testing by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, since their annexation by the country. According to Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, islands could be considered an allegory for the whole planet,

The island is perhaps the most essential constellation for figuring the planet. Due to the part-for-whole function of allegory the island concept of bounded space has been a popular synecdoche for our “Earth Island”. [...] Due to the long history of European colonization of Caribbean and Pacific archipelagos [...] western discourse configured the tropical island in terms of vulnerability, isolation, remoteness, nonhuman nature, and historical “purity” in terms of species development and of a cultural isolated from the flows of modernity” (DeLoughrey 2019: 166).

Their destruction would be interpreted as anticipation of a “nuclear planetary future” or, more generally, a “premonition of environmental destruction on a more global scale”; in fact, isolated islands are not only selected sites for nuclear detonations, especially the islands in the Pacific Ocean are endangered spaces because of the sea-level-rise. The islands sinking appears allegory for the planetary pollution which has, among the other things, a direct connection to the nuclear weapons tests because of their emission in the atmosphere of radioactive elements (DeLoughrey 2019: 167, 171) Jennifer Fay in *Inhospitable World, Cinema in the time of the Anthropocene*, wrote that in 2011 *The Economist* declared, with the short and alarming title “Welcome to the Anthropocene”, the clear scientifically proven shift from the Holocene to the

Anthropocene. The alarm, both sincere and ironic, invites humans to search for a solution to the problem of climate crisis (Fay 2018: 129, 130). Indeed, the article reported as a subtitle “*Humans have changed the way the world works. Now they have to change the way they think about it, too*” (The Economist, 2011).



Figure 1.1. attached image to *The Economist* article “Welcome to the Anthropocene”, in 2011

1.2. THE ECO-TRAUMA CINEMA

In Anil Narine’s *Eco-Trauma Cinema*, Barbara Creed says that humankind acts only for their own good and has the capacity to render Earth inhospitable for all species; therefore, she quotes the film *Darwin’s Nightmare*, directed by Hubert Sauper, saying that “humankind is the most invasive species of all” (Narine, 28). She analyses and finds five levels of the traumatic experience, depending if the individual is a victim, a bystander or a witness, which will be better discussed in the chapter about *An Inconvenient Truth* and the non-fiction documentary (Narine 2015: 25-45); therefore, according to her the eco-trauma cinema *mise en scène* this evolution/devolution of humankind,

Eco-criticism is a clearly a dynamic branch of contemporary critical theory. It makes undeniably clear that popular media, eco-themed literature (Kerber 2010) and commercial and documentary film have played central roles within the contemporary environmental movement since its inception in the 1960s. (Narine 2015: 7)

Stanley Cavell, quoted by Fay, talked about the cinematic image which has the power “to show the unseen”; films, despite their enjoyment and fantasy, induce the usage of images as a medium of promoting and calling to action. According to DeLoughrey, “visual allegories are vital for imagining climate change”, and this might be one of the reasons for the rise of climate crisis documentaries, and of popular media and films about the “isolated, atemporal and primitive tropical island” mentioned before.

Imagery and visual media appear of great importance to show a new globalized allegory of “an island-as-a-world” which is now facing the problem of sea-level-rise, anticipating a planetary future; the documentary mode with a survivalist plot appears to be the more useful for “suggesting their appeal to the western audiences for which they were made”; 9/11 disaster, in fact, caused a distance between the modern west and the South Seas and influenced “a post-9/11 global disaster narrative that now extends to the environment”; some of these films are, for example, *Time and Tide*, *Before the Flood*, *There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Noho*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The King Tide: The Sinking of Tuvalu*, which are produced by, not only the United States, but countries from all over the world, such as Germany, New Zealand and Australia.

Another tool of visual allegory is to propose an ecological critique and, quoting Claude Lévi-Strauss, to mourn “a loss [that continental viewer] never experienced”, in order to register and rescue islands forever, as if it is a message for future beings. Moreover, this nostalgia and yet activism from the Pacific islanders could become a world-wide imperative to inspire and practice better care of the future.

On the other hand, during the Cold War and the years of nuclear tests, islands used to be seen in a completely different way; due to the history of colonialism and imperialism, islands were seen only as passive nature, as colonial laboratories “visited by colonizers, [...] anthropologists, [...] and tourists”; for this reason, “hundreds of

Hollywood photographers and filmmakers were hired by the U.S. military [not to promote any ecological message, but] to produce a spectral aesthetics of violence”; for example, films such as *Operation Crossroads at Bikini Atoll* and *Operation Greenhouse* are produced to provide pleasure in visualizing islands’ destruction, without any knowledge about the “slow violence” of radiation and contamination that U.S. was inflicting to Pacific Islanders for generations (DeLoughrey 2019: 171 - 196)



Figure 1.2. *Operation Crossroads at Bikini Atoll* (1946)



Figure 1.3. Spectators of a nuclear test as if they are at the cinema (*Operation Greenhouse* 1951)

Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film: The redemption of physical reality*, presents a similar point of view about photography and the power of image; “cinema’s antireferential depiction of nature and [...] this unfamiliar view may actually redeem a disenchanting reality after the apocalypse”; moreover, Kracauer says that “Cinema in his account may guide us to nonteleological, highly particularized, and above all estranged modes of perception. This is as close to enlightenment as we are likely to come after the apocalypse” (Fay 2018: 156-170). Quoting Roland Barthes, “the age of the photograph is also the age of revolutions” and according to DeLoughrey,

Film privileges the immediacy of the spectacle, a point well understood by the AEC, which capitalized on the dramatic explosions of nuclear weapons all over the United States and Micronesia [...]. Nevertheless, film relies on affective imagery in its ability to provide narrative and oral testimonies, graphs, emblematic images, sounds, and visceral senses of climate change that suggest that visual media can be especially influential (DeLoughrey 2019: 177).

Islands discourse may be directly referred to the three films taken in exam; *An Inconvenient Truth* is the typical genre used to talk about the sea-level-rise and it actually talks about it; *Wall-E's* happy ending would remind of the characteristic survivalist plot of the post-9/11 global disaster films extended to environmentalism; *Avatar* post-colonial interpretation deals with the history of European colonization, endangered indigenous and nature, colonial and military science and going-native western people; like the characters of *Avatar*, filmmakers, photographers and anthropologists go native while studying and experiencing the wild “island” of Pandora.

1.3. ORIGIN OF ECOLOGICAL STUDIES

Bateson and Mead's studies are crucial, because they lead to a “mental ecology of film in the Anthropocene” (White 2018: 214);

In 1939 Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead returned from three years of research in Bali and New Guinea, where they had innovated in their use of photography and film as ethnographic media”. [...] Bateson and Mead faced the same problems of representation as their colleagues relying solely on words (Ira, 1988).

According to White, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead provided studies on biology, body movements and behaviour of Balinese people, shaped by social and cultural climactic sequences; Daniel White, considering Bateson's studies, wanted to demonstrate how media ecology provides a “transdisciplinary perspective”, creating links between communication theory, cybernetics, on one hand, and disciplines across life and social sciences and the humanities on the other”; [...] “the study of media environments, technology, techniques, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs” (White 2018: 211, 237).

1.4. THE POWER OF COMEDY

Films in the time of the Anthropocene are characterized by the paradigm that humans and nature simultaneously influence each other and that humans have the desire of

controlling nature, even though those films may have an innocent realism sake; according to Jennifer Fay, the films of Buster Keaton, such as *Steamboat Bill, Jr* (1928), try to recreate on location weather disasters such as cyclones and windstorms or, more easily, like in *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), patiently waiting for them thanks to the schedules of Meteorology;

Thus, Keaton’s weather comedy is an early aesthetic paradigm of the Anthropocene. Keaton builds towns to scale on location, which he then destroys with his weather, all for the sake of entertainment (Fay 2018: 17).

Buster Keaton, indeed, wanted to amuse the audience, creating comicality through Art, thanks to the fact that they are “random and unexpected” and simultaneously, “spectacular but survivable” (Fay 2018: 47).



Figure 1.4. Buster Keaton filming an artificial storm (*Steamboat Bill Jr* 0:59:56)

However, fabricating artificial windstorms and cyclones produces more realistic effects than the real disasters; filming real disasters during their exact happening is, indeed, extremely arduous and life-threatening; for this reason, recreating disasters happens to be easier and effective, “following the Hollywood norm of fabricating weather in the controlled space of the studio” (Fay 2018: 16).

1.5. THE ENVIRONMENTAL GENRE

Before talking of any other genre, it is necessary to mention film Noir and how it proposes the environmental theme; “Noir is the genre most devoted to the arts of bad living and it turns routine quests into thrilling, doomed narratives in which the everyday grab for power, wealth, and contentment is turned against itself and returns to itself in the form of a violent end”. According to Guattari, there are three “ecologies” of Film Noir; the first type of Noir’s ecology is the Environmental Ecology, called “Tenancy”; this first type of film is characterised by a non-intentional purpose of being green and of spreading any green message; examples of Environmental Ecology are films such as *Kiss me Deadly* (1955), or *House in the middle* (1954); they take in consideration the environment, that we are used to, to be destroyed; moreover, they emphasized a shift from *homo economicus* to *homo ecologicus*, thanks to their characteristic of not being intentionally green.

The second type of Film Noir’s is the Social Ecology, characterised by a present-tenseness in which generally a murder takes place; “[it is] a genre about death, dead ends, [about] a culture that critiques the [...] optimistic futurity that uphold the culture associated with the Great Acceleration”. Here are named films such as *Chinatown* (1974) and *Gun Crazy* (1950).

Finally, the third type is the Mental Ecology, which takes for granted the inexistence of a future; “Actuarial film noir is the drama of the individual’s inability to counter the supra- human trend of behaviour; it is the story of people misconstruing as contingency the absolute predictability of human action at mid-century” (Fay, 2018, p.99 - 120).

Maurice Yacowar identifies a disaster genre characterized by the dramatization of “people’s helplessness against the forces of nature”. Many Eco-films fit into the disaster genre that Yacowar identifies and it is recognizable among the cycles of films between the 1970 and the post 1990, as listed by Anat Pick; the revenge-of-nature cycles of horror films in the 1970s “reflected anxieties about some aspect of environmental destruction and pollution”. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s nature is depicted as hostile, while environmental forces are reduced in favour of industrial expansion, it is the cycle of films such as *Predator* (1987). With the beginning of the 1990s, a new cycle of eco-films began; they depict a nature desirous of harmony but disrupted by humans and also, it is the time for films such as *Wall-E* and *Avatar* which “counter environmental threats with the promise of salvation through reworking of the biblical ark trop” (Pick 2013: 180-82).

1.6. ENLIGHTENMENT REASON

Contemporary critics and scientists proclaimed that the on-going process of the global warming is irreversible; however, the call to action of humans would contribute to slow-down climate crises, even if not invert it; as a consequence, films in the Anthropocene would use the power of photography and image, not only to send ecological messages to contemporary humans, but to leave a trace of us for future beings (Fay 2018: 201-206).

An example of the impossibility to fight the effects of the Anthropocene are the Three Gorges Dam, in China:

As an environmental measure, the dam was designed to extend the capacities of Chinese green energy and cut carbon emissions into the future, while also protecting Chinese citizens from the Yangtze’s devastating floods. Yet the dam has subsequently brought about landslides, earthquakes, silt accumulation, and the rapid extinction of freshwater species because of blocked migratory routes and preponderant water pollution. [...] The Three Gorges Dam, in other words, demonstrates that our efforts to fight the effects of the Anthropocene produce new environmental problems that even bigger future projects will be designed to address. The negative dialectics of the Anthropocene extend Enlightenment reason to its catastrophic end. (Fay 2018: 134)

As Fay says, “the Anthropocene extends Enlightenment reason to its catastrophic end” (Fay 2018: 134); Enlightenment is, indeed, directly related to the contemporary environmental issue; during this exact period, scientists such as Joseph Black discovered the existence of the carbon dioxide, and James Watt invented the condensing steam engine, in 1784. Irreversible environmental troubles which humans are encountering today emerged from the age of the Enlightenment and Enlightenment ideas about the relationship between humanity and nature could be considered contemporary; Roy Porter enlightened an interesting paradox: “Enlightened man [...] wanted to discover Nature unspoilt by man; and yet, when he found it, he could not resist the impulse, if only in the imagination, to ‘improve’ it, aesthetically or agriculturally” (Porter 1990: 319).

In sum, this thesis takes in consideration that humans, from the late eighteenth century, are part of the Anthropocene era and that films try to understand how important it would be to propose on the screen the theme of ecology; more specifically, the extent to which films can raise awareness on a target audience about environmentalism; in fact, as Brereton says, “for eco-scholars cinema enables audiences to begin to recognise ways of seeing the world”; in particular, eco-cinema would promote an “eco-centric sensibility” and offer an “alternative to conventional media-spectatorship”, by inspiring personal and political action and stimulating “our thinking so as to bring about concrete changes in the choices we make daily and in the long run, as individuals and as societies, locally and globally” (Brereton 2016: 46-50).

2. AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). The film is a non-fiction documentary, directed by Davis Guggenheim and it has Al Gore as voice-narrator and protagonist. Al Gore is a politician and the Vice Democratic President of the United States, who lost the election against George Bush in 2004. He has always been interested in ecological issues and in this film, he talks about Global Warming to the public of a conference. The documentary alternates scenes of the conference with excerpts of Al Gore's past life, about his family and house, "evoking [indeed] both personal and universal ecological memories" (Brereton 2016: 52), such as the first scene of the Caney Fork river that flowed near Al Gore's family farm, soon to show images of the Hurricane Katrina and the ecological trauma that this devastation provoked on the living people (Narine 2015: 56).



Figure 2.1 The Caney Fork river (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:01:12)



Figure 2.2 Devastation of the Hurricane Katrina (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:03:16)

2.2. THE NON-FICTION DOCUMENTARY GENRE

According to Pat Brereton, *An Inconvenient Truth* is “the most cited example of eco-cinema [...] at least from a documentary perspective”; according to Anat Pick, it is “the fifth most commercially successful documentary in the history of cinema” (Pick 2013: 241) and, according to “Flo Stone of the Environmental Film Festival”, it is “a decisive moment for environmental documentary” since, after it, “no one asked anymore what [non-fiction film-makers] were trying to do” (Narine 2015: 56).

First of all, a discourse about the genre of documentary is necessary; in fact, according to Musser, it was the first genre used by filmmakers to talk about environmental issues,

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a host of environmental issues related to global warming, energy, pollution and our food supply became increasingly urgent even as US president George W. Bush and other world leaders refused to take them seriously. Documentary

film-makers responded, and by the end of the decade, the environmental documentary had emerged as the pre-eminent genre in this nonfiction mode, at least in the US and Europe. (Narine 2015: 46)

Musser continues with an analysis of three areas of investigation concerning: the history of environmental documentaries, “the ways in which environmental cinema are nonfiction instances of what Narine calls eco-trauma cinema” and the documentary tradition about its truth value (Narine, 2015, 46-68). This chapter takes in consideration all of these three fields and, in addition, the raising of awareness in the audience.

The first concerning point is historical and, according to Nichols (Narine 2015: 46), there are three elements that play a crucial role in the affirmation of the genre, “the self-understanding of its practitioners, the texts that are the product of that practice and a constituency of viewers”. The formation of the environmental documentary depends on the rapid changes of documentary practice and a development of dynamic environmentalism; E.Burton Holmes, in 1896, provided a number of motion pictures of geysers, the grater falls of the Yellowstone National Park; Holmes’ program offered the view of the natural resources of a park even though devastated by the industrial development, without the interest of rethinking the world, but simply showing it to the audience as it is; the motion pictures provided a more truthful and complete view of the world than the static images; finally, the fact that the documentarist directly experienced the park, made him an autobiographical essayist and his program a rhetorical authority.

According to Musser,

these aforementioned achievements did not constitute a distinct, recognizable genre. Some were associated with the social issue documentary; others with the nature or wildlife documentary, which has flourished over the last eighty years. (Narine 2015: 50)

However, “the term documentary had become well-established by the mid-1930s” with *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) or *The River* (1937) which became more

critical on environment issues and, moreover, they insert victimized people by ecological disasters,

Many of the people who appear in environmental documentaries are traumatized by ecological events and devastation. Their lives have been upended, and they feel compelled to speak— to bear witness to their trauma often as a way to begin to take action and also begin the process of recover (Narine 2015: 47);

Citizens in *An Inconvenient Truth*, by the way, are only shown but they do not speak, leaving their trauma to our imagination, as in these first non-fiction documentaries of the mid-1930s (Musser in Narine 2015: 49-56).

2.3. THE ECO-TRAUMA

Trauma due to ecological disasters is called eco-trauma; according to Narine, the history of the definition of trauma came from the Victorian research on hysteria; according to Freud, trauma is “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” of the individual; Judith Herman’s definition of trauma is “[an] event [which] generally involves threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death”. Trauma Studies emerged and many critics, agreeing or disagreeing on an equal definition of trauma, question themselves if trauma is an “individual” or a “society-wide experience” (Radstone 2000, Sturken 1997, Walker 2005 in Narine 2015: 2).

Critics that are questioning if trauma is an individual or a collective experience and the three responses of victims to the trauma, are important issues to take in consideration, thinking about an ecological discourse.

Judith Herman analysed the experience of trauma and she found three features of it: “the traumatic event”, “the victim’s response” and “his or her ensuing condition”. However, according to Herman, traumatized victims are exceptionally those who directly experienced the traumatic event; Kaplan, by contrast, lists five “levels of trauma [...] depending on one’s position as victims, bystanders or witness”:

1. Direct experience of trauma (trauma victim).

2. Relative or close friend of trauma victim or clinical worker brought in to help the victim (close but one step removed from direct experience).
3. Direct observation by a bystander of another's trauma (also one step removed).
4. Clinician hearing a patient's trauma narrative—a complex position with both visual and semantic channels; it involves the face-to-face encounter with the survivor or the bystander within the intimacy of the counselling session (also one step removed).
5. Visually and verbally mediated trauma, that is, viewing trauma on film or other media, or reading a trauma narrative and constructing visual images from semantic data (two steps removed). (Narine 2015: 4)

As the list suggests, the audience of mass media is in the fifth position, two steps removed from direct experience; even if not considered a direct witness of the event, the audience can be traumatized by the view of an ecological disaster and take, as a consequence, ecological actions; according to Narine, in fact, the trauma can produce three responses:

First, we want to combat the trauma but relent because we feel overwhelmed by its magnitude; second, we want to disavow the trauma; and third, we want to make meaning from traumatic events, primarily as a coping strategy. (Narine 2015: 5).

It is a key example of how mass media and environmental documentaries can leave a message in the audience.

From these examinations of eco-trauma, eco-criticism is a contemporary critical theory and was born to analyse eco-trauma in cinema and other fields; Rachel Carson's non-fiction book *Silent Spring* (1962) "became a rallying point for this movement".

According to Narine, as the thesis will analyse better in the future chapters, fiction narratives found more massive audiences for their superficial approach to the ecological theme than the non-fiction films (Narine, 2015, 8-14); in addition, the eco-trauma, according to Musser, appears to be easier to present in fiction, rather than in non-fiction films, such as *Soylent Green* (1973) or in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). However, as Narine says, non-fiction films fascinate the public with the power of reality,

In the 1920s and 1930s, some environmental films took the form of the social issue documentary [...]. Musser therefore works from the premise that wildlife documentaries were “an expansion of human vision, a means of entering into a world that was invisible to the human eye, an extension of the physical body of the subject, allowing for the creation of pleasure by bringing animals in their natural habitat closer to humans” (Horak 459). The environmental documentary’s impact on public discussions of environmental issues cannot be measured, but Musser’s history of the form helps us understand our present fascination with eco-documentaries. In these contemporary films, this book suggests, we are watching a horrible, traumatic accident unfold slowly and in countless realms, from the destroyed coral lining the floor of the ocean to the melting polar ice caps. Can any of us discuss global warming without *An Inconvenient Truth*’s time-elapsed images of shrinking glaciers coming to mind? (Narine, 2015, 15)

Also Pat Brereton discusses the difference between fiction and non-fiction films; he, on the contrary, explains how only certain types of documentaries are the best in raising awareness,

These and other eco-scholars [such as, Willoquet-Maricondi, Scott MacDonald] suggest that only certain types of independent lyrical and activist documentaries may be thought of as eco-cinema, simply because they are the most capable of inspiring progressive eco-political discourses and action among viewers. (Brereton 2016: 47)

However, Pat Brereton explains how “all types of film, from the excess of a commercial Hollywood blockbuster, alongside the most rarefied [...] ecological art-house narrative” can influence the “general public consciousness”. (Brereton 2016: 47).

2.4. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

At this point, the importance of raising environmental awareness is an issue that has to be better analysed, since it is crucial for the role of non-fiction documentaries and for the problem of truth value; the two discourses are linked to one another, since if a documentary lacks credibility, it may not reach a massive audience.

Firstly, *An Inconvenient Truth* seems to have contributed to achieve a tipping point in the environmental discourse,

In 2006, environmentalism achieved a tipping point. Between the impact of Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and a series of natural disasters, environmentalism went from being the work of activists to an everyday concern for regular people. Now more than ever, people are talking— and doing something —about the environment. Conserving energy, buying locally and simply thinking more about consumerism overall are some ways people are going green. ("Environmental Media Association Awards" n.p., in Narine: 61).

It is another key example of the power that Hollywood could have on the audience and, in particular, on the mainstream media; according to Kay Armatage, the wave of environmental documentaries diminished rapidly, but it left a trace on the West television,

Although *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) sparked a surge of interest, theatrical revenue for such documentaries dropped off rapidly, leaving television as a main outlet for environmental content. (Pick 2013: 264)

According to David Ingram, there are some aspects that contributed to the effectiveness of *An Inconvenient Truth*. First of all the Aristotelian theory of rhetoric is helpful to understand how eco-cinema persuade its audience,

Drawing on Aristotelian theories of rhetoric, Mark Minster (2010: 29, 37) similarly attributes the film's effectiveness as ecocinema to its attempt to persuade its audience less by 'logos', or an appeal to evidence and logical reasoning, than by 'ethos', an appeal to 'the character and authority of the speaker', and 'pathos', an appeal to the emotions of the audience. (Pick 2013: 241)

Ingram says that the act of persuasion of *An Inconvenient Truth* comes much more from the authority figure of Al Gore (*ethos*) and from the emotional appeal of the audience that himself generates; as Stephen Rust says,

the film employed 'melodramatic affect to present a persuasive argument on global warming', and thereby made a significant intervention in debates over climate change in the United States (Pick 2013: 241).

Also Pat Brereton's point of view coincides with that of a narrative's success based, among other factors, on the *pathos*,

The narrative succeeds not only because of its predictions and persuasive cognitive logics, but also because of the deep eco-memories and emotional affect that it evokes. Gore's film – albeit directed by Davis Guggenheim – powerfully argues for a widely held nostalgia for a better, environmentally cleaner world. (Brereton 2016: 52)

Regarding the topic of nostalgia, Murray and Heumann deeply discussed its effects on the audience, referring in particular to *An Inconvenient Truth*,

Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann see environmental nostalgia—the eco-memory it evokes—as the key to the film's rhetorical success. This strategy, however, depends on making the audience aware of current trends in climate change—and the difference between then (circa 1970) and now as well as between now and the future. (Narine, 2015, 58)

Another important role for the success of this documentary should be the political aspect that, willingly or not, is evoked; *An inconvenient Truth* was released during the period of the Iraq War documentaries, and it shares a characteristic with them: the political connotation of Republicans vs Democrats; Al Gore is a Democrat and the success of the film, as Musser says, helped Democrats to win some seats in the US House of Representatives and Senate, bringing global warming to a wider public; the problem is that audience, seeing Al Gore on the screen talking about environmentalism, associate it to the Democrat parties and, consequently, “[it] inclined many [Republicans] to dismiss global warming” (Narine 2015: 56). Politics was really pressing in that year, as Musser says,

As Gore asserts, “There are good people who are in politics in both parties who hold this at arms length because if they acknowledge it and recognize it, then the moral imperative to make big changes is inescapable.” In one section of the film, a young Al Gore is seen questioning a NASA scientist who admits that the final paragraph of what he delivered was not written by him and did not reflect his scientific assessment. This is followed by a section in which statements by a

scientist are taken out of a policy document because their conclusions did not conform to the Bush administration's position. (Narine 2015: 57)

it is a pattern that documentaries, after *An Inconvenient Truth*, tried to avoid; filmmakers continued to produce but did not screen these films in the midst of a political campaign to avoid to be politically critiqued and lose credibility. *Fields of Fuel* by Joshua Tickell, for example, won the Audience Award for Documentary in 2008, when Obama was in office. By this year there is in fact a new wave of environmental documentaries which are more focused on the environmental traumatic destruction rather than on the government as villain (Narine 2015: 61, 62); thereafter, the political connotation of *An Inconvenient Truth* could encapsulate both pros and cons regarding the effect on the audience, depending on a Republican or Democrat point of view.

2.5. THE POWERFUL FIGURE OF AL GORE

Ingram is also questioning why Al Gore's credibility should be based mostly on *ethos* and *pathos* and not on *logos*, which means on "evidence and logical reasoning". It seems that the credit for *An Inconvenient Truth's* success mainly belongs to the figure of Al Gore, who has the power of enchanting the audience emotionally, thanks to his "single voice of reason" (Narine 2015: 63). His powerful figure is expressed on the screen through the choice of the shots; in the first scenes, his appearance is anticipated with a series of middle close-shots, the camera is behind him and his face is never framed; then, when his face is finally shown to the audience, the protagonist is often introduced with numerous close-up shots through all the documentary, showing usually only his face and often zooming on his eyes:



Figure 2.3 Middle-close shot of Al Gore (An Inconvenient Truth 0:02:00)



Figure 2.4 Close-up shot of Al Gore, from a low-angle (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:02:43)

The low-angle, in addition, which means that the position of the camera is lower than the character, gives him more authority.

However, Al Gore's credibility should have its major base on the scientific content that he lists, considering the type of issue presented. There are several mistakes "committed" by Al Gore during his discourse in the conference, which influenced his loss of credibility. The "mistakes" which the thesis will take in consideration are listed in the books of Anat Pick and Anil Narine and, in addition to them, there may be other reasons why the scientific elements of *An Inconvenient Truth* had not been taken seriously.

First of all the political involvement of Al Gore is one of the reasons why the audience belonging to the opposite political party of the Republicans, could consider his discourse as unreliable; however, Felicity Mellor talks about a politics of accuracy, which allow the film not to be only judged, but to bring the debate to open rooms for other debates, in order to "[provide] support for climate change sceptics arguing

against the need for political action to mitigate global warming” (Ingram in Pick 2013: 242).

Another reason why the documentary lead to scepticism is the invisibility of social processes,

Documentary filmmaker and theorist Michael Chanan (2008: 129) makes a similar point in distinguishing between the problems of representing different types of ‘invisibility’ in documentary film. His analysis also sheds useful light on the textual ambiguities produced when there is an attempt to represent the science of global warming on film. He points out that physical causes, such as the wind, can be shown in film through ‘the visible signs of their effects’. However, social processes are invisible and consequently much harder to represent. (Ingram in Pick 2013: 242).

Mellor continues saying that it is highly debated, indeed, if causations of global warming are social (anthropogenic) or physical (natural) or even a combination of the two; the fact that Al Gore chose examples of the effects of global warming that, as he claims, are considered anthropogenic rather than only natural, maintains the debate open.

Moreover, as already discussed earlier, Al Gore’s voice is interpreted by the audience as “the single voice of reason”, but it has a discrepancy; the problematic with the narrator’s voice regards words and commentaries chosen to mediate, for the public, the Science involved; as a result, he seems to obfuscate scientific issues, but it could be a strategy; in fact, according to Pick, Al Gore is willingly not clear in order not to risk to provoke disagreement in scientists; Gore wants, indeed, to emphasise his discourse on truth, through a narrative of scientific certainties and, as Muller says, to demonstrate that the state of truth of doubts concerning global warming is indeed a lie; the choice of the title, for example, could not be a coincidence (Pick 2013: 243-246); Truth with a capital letter is a meaningful sign of what the goal of the director would be,

The state’s reliance on ambiguity and uncertainty is an effective strategy of obscuration. Complexity and ambiguity is normally the domain of liberals. In short, the lack of a clear truth—of scientific certainty—becomes the state endorsed truth. The goal of An Inconvenient Truth has been to confront these doubts (the state truth) and show that they do not exist. It is thus

important to assert that no peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals deny the reality of global warming. In short, Gore and Guggenheim strive to show that the state's truth of doubt is a lie. (Narine2015: 57).

For this reason, the chapter is going to analyse those "mistakes", taking in consideration arguments, counter-arguments and scientific claims made by competent scholars, such as Douglas Walton, Maarten Hajer and Bruno Latour to try to demonstrate the reasons of Al Gore's choice of words and scientific examples and also to demonstrate that even though Al Gore's speech may be full of mistakes, it did not influence its effectiveness on the audience.

2.6. AN UNCLEAR DISCOURSE

First of all, according to Maarten Hajer, real life situations, especially when they are used to argument policy decisions, need to be simplified; it is possible through a translation into a discursive closure, which means not to leave the argument open to multiple interpretations; the IPCC's Third Assessment Report in 2001 "formed the basis for the narrative of scientific consensus and epistemological certainty over the theory of anthropogenic global warming that was central to the claims made by *An Inconvenient Truth*"; as a consequence, the epistemological closure of Al Gore's discourse gives certainty, but it also raises disagreement in the sceptics which accuse him of not telling the truth.

Paradoxically, by not telling the truth, Al Gore is giving uncertainty and it results as one of the reason for his success; as Bruno Latour says, "uncertainty [is] an inevitable ingredient of crises in the environment" which lead the argument to be openly discussed; Carl Plantinga also says that if there is no certainty, everything is possible and this theory of approximate truth is attributable to Gore's speech; in addition, as Mike Hulme asserts, there is no ultimate truth "because we have different understandings" (Ingram in Pick 2013: 253).

Thereafter, the examples under scrutiny are about the Kilimanjaro, the hockey-stick graph, the ice melting and its consequent augmentation of the water level. Firstly, Al Gore mentioned the Kilimanjaro's ice as a valuable example of the melting of ices, but

he could not choose a more questionable example; according to two papers published in 2004 and pointed out by Christopher Horner, global warming is not the cause of the melting of Kilimanjaro's ice (Pick 2013: 244,45) and also scientists agree with the fact that various possible factors are responsible of the event (Narine 2015: 58); Al Gore may have chosen Kilimanjaro primarily for its fame but it is not true that global warming is not the cause of the melting of the glaciers; however, he would have made a better choice by selecting any other glacier melting for which global warming is indeed the cause. Secondly, through the so called hockey-stick graph, Al Gore provides support for the demonstration of unprecedented temperature rise in the last century; the graph "showed a correlation between global temperatures and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere" but it happens to be disingenuous to claim it as certain and to consider the graph undisputed;



Figure 2.5 The hockey stick graph: the blue line is the global temperature, the red one is the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Both grows simultaneously throughout the centuries (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:22:13)

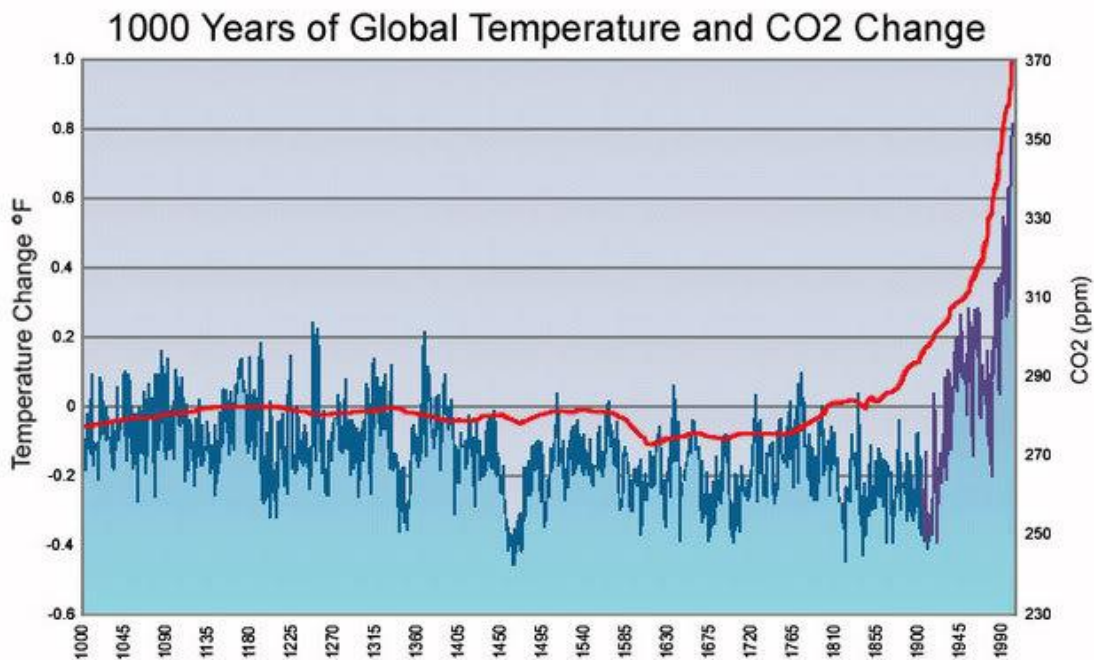


Figure 2.6 A clearer version of the hockey stick graph (Google)

as the IPCC’s Third Assessment Report in 1990 says,

New analyses of proxy data for the Northern Hemisphere indicate that the increase in temperature in the twentieth century is likely to have been the largest of any century during the past thousand years (Pick 2013: 247,48)

The difference between Al Gore’s speech and the IPCC Report is the choice of the word ‘likely’; what the IPCC suggests, Gore states as undisputable truth and it causes many critics; in Gore’s defence, he may have been influenced by the statement of the head of the NASA, James Hansen, who believed that the IPCC underestimated “the urgency of the need of mitigation policies against anthropogenic global warming” (Pick 2013: 249). The third example is another vocabulary omission; Gore presented on the screen a series of places in which the ice melting of Greenland would provoke their devastation because of the consequent augmentation of the water level;



Figure 2.7 Example of a possible situation in Manhattan, after the augmentation of the water level (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:58:14)

he uses the present tense for a more emphasis but he has been criticised for having raise too much alarmist; among the possible reasons, it would be another influence by Hansen's statement; the IPCC report says, in fact, that,

Ice sheet models project that a local warming of larger than 3°C, if sustained for millennia, would lead to virtually a complete melting of the Greenland ice sheet with a resulting sea level rise of about seven metres' (Pick 2013: 250)

Al Gore simply omitted the reference to 'millennia'; however, the climate modeller at the NASA, Gavin Schmidt and a co-author of the hockey-stick graph, Michael Mann admit that they did not hear Al Gore giving any timescale, leaving the event's happening uncertain, but, as the thesis earlier exposed, uncertainty is the key element for the effectiveness (Pick 2013: 250,53).

2.7. REASONS FOR AL GORE'S MISTAKES

More in detail, the reasons of Al Gore's "mistakes" could be synthesized in one political and in one about the limits of the filmic time; firstly, Gore's rhetoric of scientific truth, providing undisputable certainties despite the counter-arguments, would be a political response against the Republicans, which exploit uncertainties and doubts for political ends,

As BBC environmental journalist Roger Harrabin wrote in 2007, this right-wing political campaign explains why Gore made his film a 'polemic', in which, as he put it, 'assumptions became assertions and worst-case scenarios became the norm' (Harrabin 2007: 2). 'The sceptics', he continued, 'knew that they did not need to win the battle of climate facts, they just needed to keep doubt alive'; Gore's film was a response to 'that often cynical campaign, attempting to put climate change beyond doubt and remove ambiguity from presentation of the scientific facts' (ibid.: 2-3). In doing so, Gore simplified the equivocations and uncertainties in the IPCC's Third Assessment Report of 2001. (Pick 2013: 247).

Finally, the time constraints of the filmic medium are an impending limit for the narrative; as Maarten Hajer says, "in documentary film, of course, time constraints are even more pressing "(Pick 2013: 243); for this reason, simplification becomes necessary, as Al Gore provides with his rhetoric of scientific truth,

Like all media, including books, the expository documentary film has formal limits as a knowledge-producing medium. The evidence Gore presents in his film is necessarily selective,

then, because of the nature of the filmic medium itself. [...] Of necessity, however, *An Inconvenient Truth* presents Gore's pre-formulated slideshow on global warming, and so tends to gloss over problems and counterarguments. (Pick 2013: 245)

As a consequence, simplification due to limited time, could lead to weak or incomplete argumentations "but not necessarily fallacious", according to Douglas Walton (Pick 2013: 243); however, Gore's "accelerated apocalyptic time-delayed" evoked great reactions in the audience,

Jeff Skoll, CEO of Participant Productions, the film's production company, said of Gore's slideshow on global warming that it 'presented the urgency of what's going to happen not in the next twenty to fifty years, but in the next five to ten years' (Thompson 2006b: 29). This sense of imminent and sudden catastrophe allowed for the promotion of the documentary film as a hybrid of popular melodramatic genres such as disaster science fiction, horror and the thriller. The trailer and poster used the tagline, 'The scariest movie you'll ever see', while the first advertisement for the film, published in the *Los Angeles Times* on 21 May 21 2006, read: 'It Grabs You Like A Thriller with an Ending that will Haunt your Dreams'. Eugenia Peretz's review from *Vanity Fair* was given prominence: 'Should be seen by everyone who cares whether or not the human race will still exist in fifty years' (*Los Angeles Times* 2006, E1). (Pick 2013: 249).

Another example of the importance of time acceleration is the time-lapse photography; as Brereton points out, environmental issues encounter the temporo-spatial problem, which means that the audience could not visualize, in two hours of film, prolonged causes and effects of climate crisis; however, the time-lapse photography, which Al Gore used to present the melting of glaciers in his power point, helps to overcome this problem; the pioneer of this technique is Godfrey Reggio, which used it in *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi*; then, in 2012, after *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Chasing Ice* showed better the phenomenon, with the "stunning time-lapse photography of James Balog",

Balog's solution employs the use of photographic stills taken from the same vantage point and separated by years; thus presenting the unfolding ecological crisis before our very eyes in breath-taking simplicity through the use of time-lapse photography [...] (Cubitt in Rust et al.: 280). (Brereton 2016: 53,54).



Figure 2.8. Al Gore's example of glacier melting from 1928 to 2004, through the time-lapse photography (*An Inconvenient Truth* 0:17:00)

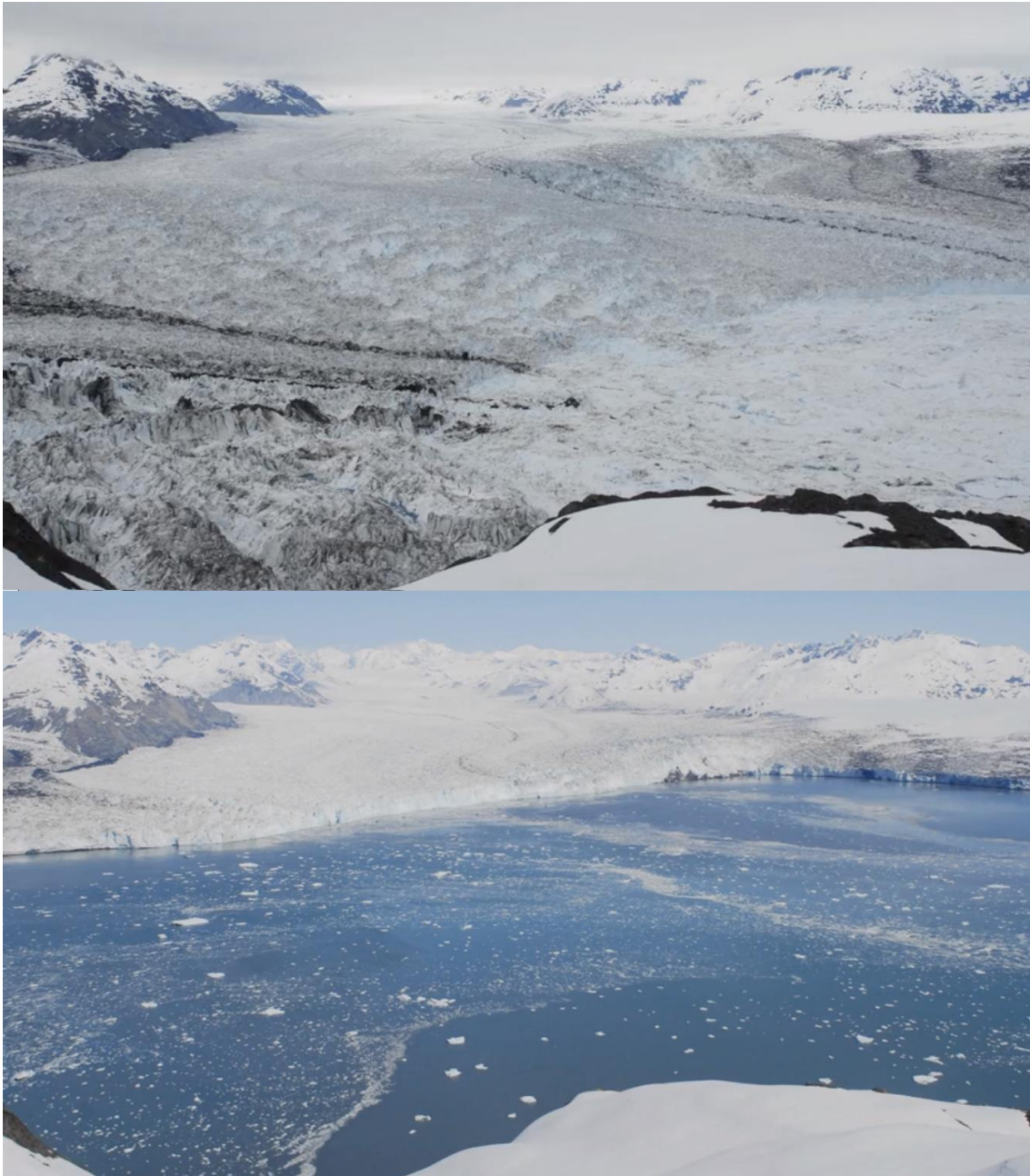


Figure 2.9. James Balog's example of glacier melting, in only six months, through the time-lapse photography (*Chasing Ice* 1:09:42, 1:09:57)

In sum, the effectiveness of *An Inconvenient Truth* does not only depend on scientific accuracy, but also, as Pick says and as the thesis had demonstrated, on other criteria; according to Jane Gregory and Steve Miller, probability wins on certainty because of its interpretability,

The challenge for documentary films about global warming is that the methods and findings of climate science are understood and communicated to the public as effectively as possible. This will involve an understanding of science as probability rather than as certainty. (Pick 2013: 253).

Willingly or not, the alleged left-wing discourse of certainty used by Al Gore, against the political of uncertainties of the right-wing, happens to help the debate on global warming to be openly discussed; moreover, Al Gore's rhetoric of scientific certainty results in uncertainty, which happens to be much more effective for raising awareness on a target audience, in this case, explicitly American; as Brahic says, despite Gore's oversimplification, "it remains the most comprehensive popular documentary on climate change science I have seen" (Narine 2015: 60).

*What gets us into trouble
is not what we don't know*

*it's what we know for sure
that just ain't so*

(Mark Twain, quoted by Al Gore)

3. WALL-E

3.1. WALL-E VERSUS AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The effectiveness of *An Inconvenient Truth* is not as considerable as that of *Wall-E*. This Hollywood animated blockbuster was directed by Andrew Stanton in 2008. The most important element for the analyses is “its potential to raise environmental awareness” (Narine 2015: 166,67). *Wall-E* is different from *An Inconvenient Truth* for its explicit irony and romance; it is the reason why an environmental message could be successfully received by a target audience, which may be classified by families, adults and children, or by random young and older individuals, more or less particularly enthusiastic about ecology. As Brereton says,

this cautionary animated satire on consumer culture and environmental waste for the modern world – pushing the implicit assertions of *An Inconvenient Truth* to its ultimate conclusion – has rightly received much praise for its engaging storyline (Brereton 2016: 56)

Moreover, Michael Phillips argues that,

WALL-E presents a grimmer future for our planet than Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, and that “its strains of comedy and pathos” make the film nothing less than “a transforming experience”. (Narine 2015: 167)

Therefore, the director has always denied of having an ecological theme in mind, but despite it, the film raises a successful environmental awareness.

3.2. WALL-E’S EMOTIONAL STORYLINE

Wall-E’s storyline has a crucial role for the impact on the audience; thanks to its “funny and emotionally engaging love story, *Wall-E* turns eco-trauma into post-apocalyptic romantic comedy” (Narine 2015: 166); Wall-E, which stands for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class, is an anthropomorphised little robot; every day, he compacts garbage into piles taller than skyscrapers and he grabs and collects objects that he finds along the way, bringing them to his “little museum of consumer trash” (Narine,

2015: 167). The diegetic time is the 28th century and the viewers understand, since the first scenes, that the little robot is left alone on Earth, with a cockroach as only friend and actually living creature. The first turning point of the story is the arrival of EVE, which marks the beginning of the romance; Wall-E falls in love with her, firstly he starts to follow her, trying to avoid her laser cannon, and then bringing her to his home, showing her his collection of lost items; among the trash, Wall-E shows her a little green plant when,

consistent with her “directive”, EVE takes the plant and automatically enters a deactivated state except for a blinking green beacon. Wall-E doesn’t understand what has happened to his new friend, but, true to his love, he protects her from wind, rain, and lightning, even as she is unresponsive” (Imdb.com).



Figure 3.1. Wall-E showing the little plant to Eve (*Wall-E* 0:27:19)

The situation changes when the space-ship which brought EVE to the Earth, comes to reclaim her; at this point, Wall-E who has lived alone for centuries, cannot bear the

condition of living without his true love and so he launched himself into an extreme and dangerous adventure outer space. The second turning point of the story begins when Wall-E boards on Axiom, the cruise ship in which humanity, or better what is left of it, lives there for centuries. The third and final turning point comes when the little green plant is revealed, to the human captain of Axiom and to the machine AUTO which “supervises” his mansions, thanks to Wall-E and EVE; the captain discovers the real intention of AUTO, which is of not allowing humanity to return home, even if there is a possibility of restoring the planet; the emotional happy ending shows Wall-E and EVE, which has fallen in love with him too, reunited; humanity, that boards on Earth, starts the restoration.

3.3 FROM ECO-TRAUMA TO POST APOCALYPTIC ROMANTIC COMEDY

Combining highly aestheticized images of total environmental devastation and human degeneration with a funny and emotionally engaging love story, WALL-E turns eco-trauma into post-apocalyptic romantic comedy—a fact that makes its biting critique of American-style consumerism palatable for a mass audience. (Narine, 2015: 166)

The key element for the effectiveness of a message to be received by the audiences, is to emotionally engaging them; if the story touches their heart, they will take it more seriously and the call to action may be more successful. A story, to touch the heart of the public, firstly allegedly needs irony; contrary to what one would assert, according to the newspaper Ecology

these more humorous approaches do not necessarily weaken the films’ potential to convey a serious message. On the contrary, according to Murray and Heumann, “the same environmental message [can] be presented at least as effectively in a comedy in 1985 or today as it was in a more serious science fiction film in 1954” (Narine, 2015: 166).

Unlike Buster Keaton, who amuses his audience by creating comicality through the unexpected disasters of the weather, Wall-E amuses and emotionally engages his audience thanks to its humour. According to Murray and Heumann, “comic eco-

disaster films and comic eco-dystopias can very effectively comment on problems, dangers and grievances in their contemporary societies using humour, dramatic irony and hyperbole to get their critique across” (Narine, 2015: 166); the emotional engagement provides a more effectiveness of the message on the public and, in the case of *Wall-E*, about the global environmental disaster, even though it was not intended by the director and Pixar Animation Studios; in addition, according to Murray and Heumann, “laughing about the environment and its degradation may not only stimulate awareness; [it] may also point out a path towards change” which means an effective call to action; according to the cognitive film theorist Noël Carroll,

Movies [...] “are objects that are well constructed to elicit a real emotional response from our already existing emotion systems”[;] the emotions we experience when watching a tear-jerking melodrama, a scary horror film or an arresting suspense drama are not really different in kind from the “real” emotions we have in our everyday lives. What’s different is that in life “our emotions have to select out the relevant details from a massive array of largely unstructured stimuli” (Carroll 28). When we watch a film, on the other hand, “the filmmakers have already done much of the work of emotionally organizing scenes and sequences for us through the ways in which [they] have foregrounded what features of the events in the film are salient” (Narine 2015: 167).

It is exactly what happens in *Wall-E*; it contains all the key elements of the three types of comic disaster movies, which conceive the spread of the environmental message without any obstacle:

Following Maurice Yacowar, Murray and Heumann list three types of comic disaster movies: films that have classical “happy endings,” films that satirize the disaster they depict and films that parody established genre conventions (see Ecology 111). *WALL-E* arguably combines all three elements in its plot line, as it unfolds its humorous vision of a post-ecocidal world before our eyes. Despite its light hearted approach to ecological disaster, the film was lauded by a large number of reviewers for its potential to raise environmental awareness. (Narine 2015: 165,66)

Anil Narine quotes Noël Carroll who remark that “the audience’s faculty of cognition and judgement” are important for the success of the film; the “*emotive focus*” of the

individual is crucial for the interpretation of the conveyed message (Narine 2015: 167,68).

In addition to humour and romance, Wall-E provides an eco-hero as protagonist and breath-taking animated images, which maintains high the emotional response of the audience for all the length of the film.

3.4. THE COMIC ECO-HERO

One of the crucial elements of the post-apocalyptic romantic comedy is the presence of a comic eco-hero; *Wall-E* is the best example for “the fact that its title-giving main character is arguably the best non-human comedian Pixar Animation Studios has ever brought to cinema screens”. According to Noël Carroll, Anil Narine says that all the romantic comedies have as “central to the emotional engagement of the audience [...] the main character or hero of the story”. Moreover, Anile Narine says that the eco-hero Wall-E follows the maxims of the romantic comedy, listed by Bill Johnson, “(1) true love does exist, (2) there’s someone out there just for us, and if we could only find them, we would experience true love, and (3) romance can overcome all obstacles”; as a consequence, Wall-E is not only an eco-hero but he becomes a comic eco-hero and, for this reason, he wins the heart of the audience because he overcomes his obstacle with the “light touch” of the romantic comedy (Narine 2015: 168).

However, despite the fact Wall-E is not human, he is anthropomorphised and “unmistakably gendered male” (Narine 2015: 170); he grows his own personality by learning human emotions, affection and sociability all by himself, thanks mainly to a videocassette that he found among the trash; the videocassette is a 1969 movie version of *Hello, Dolly!* that he keeps watching for centuries; it shows him a little excerpt of human culture, with the highlight on the action of holding hands, which is, according to the director Andrew Stanton, “the most intimate public display of affection”; however, Wall-E does not know what the action means, but it catches his attention and he would like to experience it. He has the opportunity to imitate it with EVE during her sleep mode, after having locked inside her the plant, but he fails miserably, producing comicality.



Figure 3.2. The holding hands scene of *Hello Dolly!* through the lenses of Wall-E's eyes (*Wall-E* 0:07:32)

Wall-E's personality, however, lacks consciousness of the ecological problem on Earth; for example, he does not understand that the little green plant is an extremely important discover for the future of humanity and the Planet; however, paradoxically, his indifference about the environment may produces comicality, evoking emotional appeal and being another aspect useful for the environmental awareness in the audience.

In fact, one of Wall-E's main characteristic as a comic eco-hero, is that he acts heroically but unintentionally, because "his only reason [...] is to be close to EVE"; according to Joseph Meeker,

the comic eco-hero does not necessarily act out of high-minded idealism and may even be "weak, stupid or undignified" (158). Because he does not have heroic intentions, Murray and Heumann explain with recourse to Meeker's definition, the comic ecohero "tend[s] to bumble and

require[s] a community of allies to succeed” (Ecology 111). WALL-E is exactly such a bumbling hero, kind-hearted and curious, but also naïve and a little timid [...]. WALL-E’s boyish charm seems wonderfully human but not exactly heroic. And as with most comic eco-heroes, his heroic deeds are more fortuitous than actually intended. (Narine 2015, 172)

Since Wall-E generates sympathy in the audience, he may be the most important key for the success of the film:

In WALL-E, the emotive focus of the audience is shaped in such a way that we want the little hero of this romantic comedy to succeed, that we hope he will be able to win his beautiful EVE and live with her happily ever after. As Plantinga explains, character sympathy “is pleasurable in itself, but it also ensures strong emotional responses, because when the audience cares deeply about a character, it also has deeper concerns about the unfolding narrative” (Narine 2015: 173)

Even though Wall-E is the protagonist, there is another character which is considered the true eco-hero of the story, which is the captain of the ship Axiom; he differentiates himself from Wall-e because he becomes aware of the ecological problem, he “realize[s] and formulate[s] the ethic dimension of the situation of both the planet and humanity” and lead the story to its happy ending.

However, Andrew Stanton has always denied the intention to bring on the wide screen the theme of ecology, but unwillingly he successfully did it; therefore, he involuntary becomes an eco-hero. It does not mean that Stanton was not aware of the ecological problem, but that he only uses “the ecological aspect and the complacency aspect of humanity [...] to focus on the biggest issue, which is people caring about one another” (Narine 2015: 175).

3.5. THE EMOTIONAL HAPPY ENDING AND THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Another example of the importance of the emotional appeal for the success of *Wall-E* is the happy ending, which regards both the love and the ecological storyline; the emotional sphere regards the fact that the audiences has grown sympathy for the little robot that they want him to succeed and win the heart of EVE. Therefore, “the fact that the film combines the happy ending of its love story with this human return to

earth increases our emotional involvement on the latter”; it is for this reason that the ecology becomes so important for the audiences, because they are influenced by the happy ending of the love story between Wall-E and EVE that they want to extend the happy ending to all the nuances of the film.

However, despite the fact *Wall-E* is a classic children’s animation film and has implicitly a target audience, among them there could be liberal and conservative people; as already discussed, Republicans and Democrats could interpret a movie in two different ways,

Charlotte Allen, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, affirms that ‘*Wall-E* champions hard work, faithfulness to duty and the fact that even a dreary job like garbage collecting can be meaningful and fulfilling’. Such sentiments support hegemonic class structures and work practices, while at the same time promoting a right-on sustainable agenda. (Brereton 2016: 146)

According to Pat Brereton, the liberal political part of audiences could find it positively provocative because of the environmental message proposed; conservative audiences, on the contrary, could find in it deep conservative values (Pat Brereton 2016: 57,58), because of the catastrophic consequences of a regulative consumerist society, in which humans receive all they need, leading to the “Earth’s downfall” (The American conservative 2008).

Therefore, as a matter of fact, the purpose of the movie could not be a call to action, since younger generations who watch the film, and the adults who accompany them, are not “necessarily [...] environmental activist [or] members of the ecological choir”, on the contrary, they would rather primary search entertainment; however,

the younger ones among the audience may decide that they need to do something to prevent the destruction of the planet they currently live on. While time might not matter much after total global ecocide has taken place, they might have learned from WALL-E that it matters a lot if we want to prevent it. (Narine 2015: 176)

In sum, the emotional appeal could also contribute to spread the environmental message and influence one's choice of ecological activities, especially younger individuals.

3.6. *WALL-E* DYSTOPIAN FUTURE AND SOCIETY

The breath-taking animated images contribute to convey an emotional response in the audience; they are characterised by open landscapes with a sublime connotation, and they appear as interpretations of a dystopian and futuristic environment. For example, the open scene shows a Planet Earth completely encircled by a “thick layer of space-junk”, and the audience immediately feels that there is something wrong with it (Narine, 2015: 168):

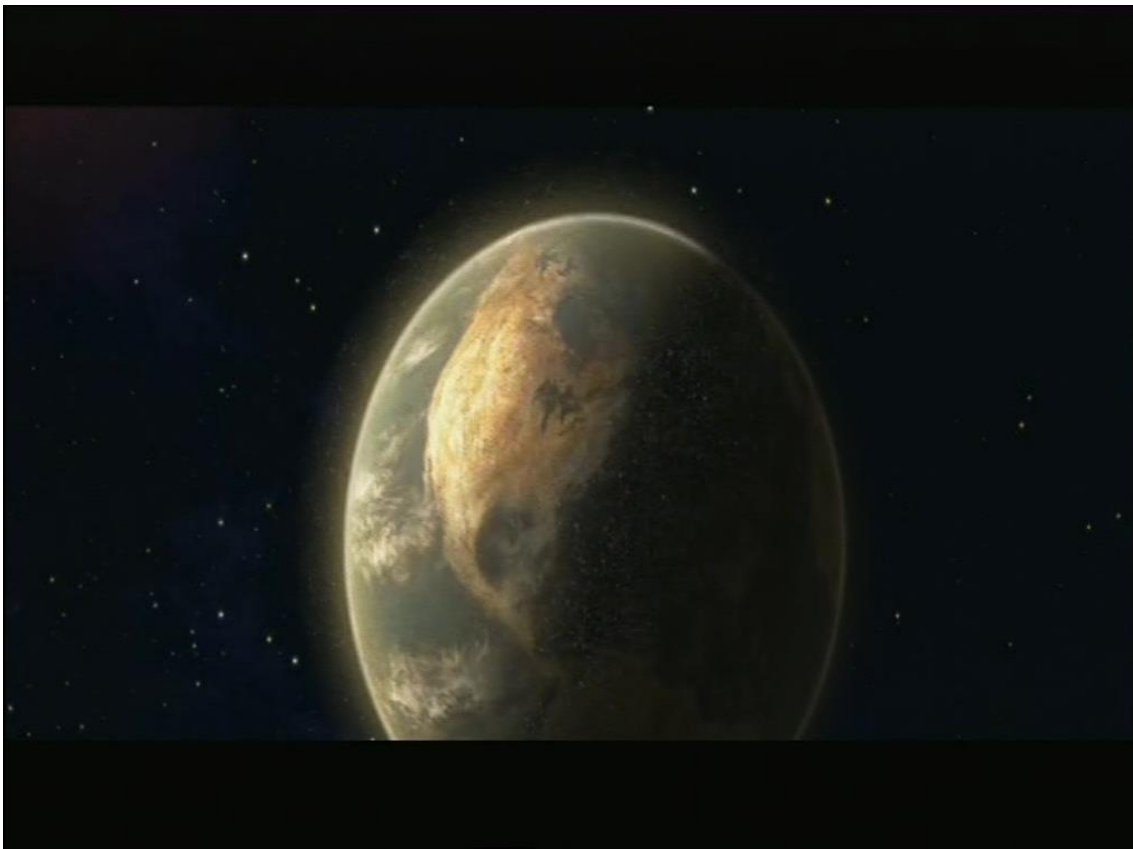


Figure 3.3. Outer space vision of Earth, encircled by trash (*Wall-E* 0:01:10)

from the very first seconds, the audience is already captured emotionally by sublime views of an environment half scary and half attractive because new and disrupted:

The camera then zooms down to the surface of the earth, flying over dark mountains of garbage, wind turbines and the remainders of nuclear power plants, and then offering a bird's eye view on towering skyscrapers built of trash in the golden afternoon light of a beautiful and seemingly hot day. [...] and as the camera gets closer to the surface, we realize that there is no life on the streets of this city, and that they are instead covered with heaps of trash. (Narine 2015: 168)



Figure 3.4. Zoom on Earth's surface, with buildings of trash taller than skyscrapers (Wall-E 0:01:35)

Another suggestive picture is when Wall-E and Eve “dance” outer-space near the spaceship Axiom; the scene is full of romance and sublime:

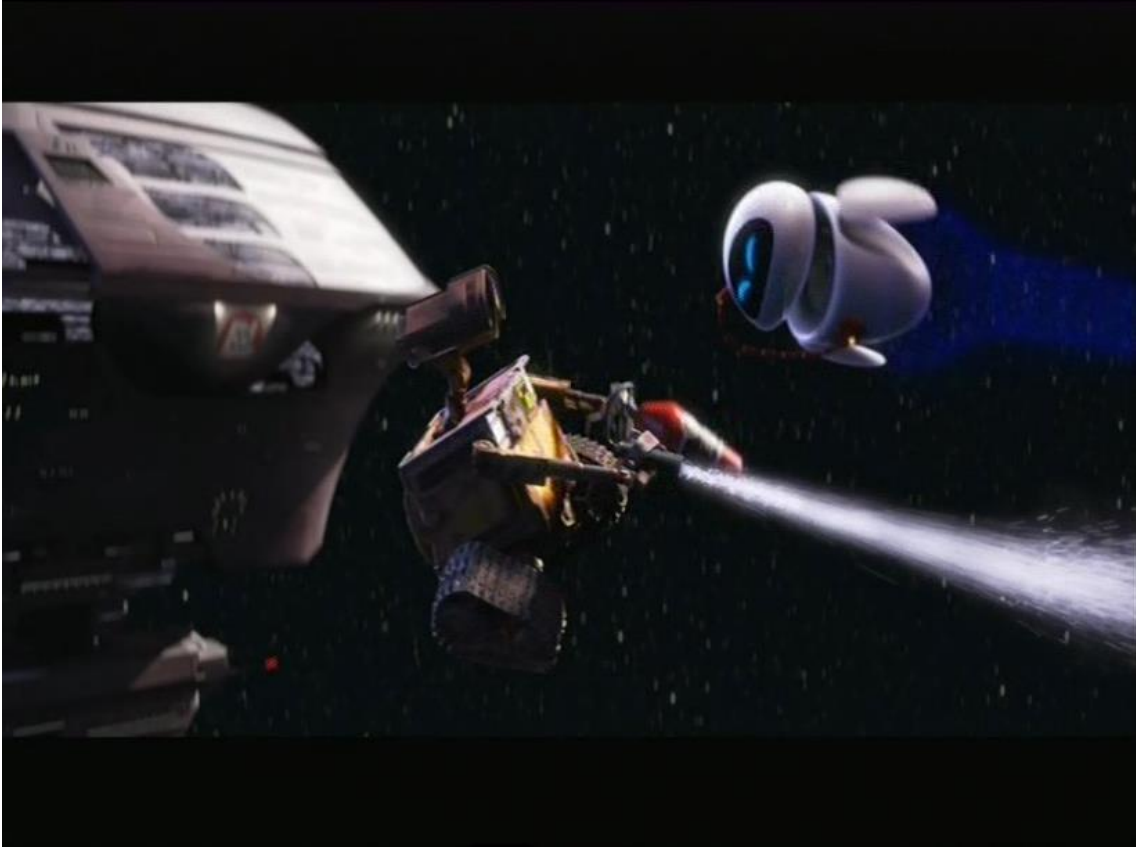


Figure 3.5. Wall-E and Eve dancing outer space near the space ship Axiom (*Wall-E* 0:57:36)



Figure 3.6. Wall-E and Eve dancing outer space near the space ship Axiom (*Wall-E* 0:58:49)

Therefore, one of the problems which a fiction movie like *Wall-E* could raise is the question about reality; it means that the boundary between the real and the fantastical is unclear; however, audiences should focus their attention on humanity's habits and not on the disruptive nature shown; it means to consider it as a director's interpretation of what the future would be if humans will not change the way they act about, for example, pollution and waste,

These are existential quandaries about basic human needs, communal values, and cycles of human ignorance and self-destruction that have little to do with the threat presented by nature's fury. In fact, it is the nature of people, too often capable of devastating the natural environment and other living things, that comes most sharply into focus when disastrous events unfold. It should be unsurprising, then, that psychologists and psychoanalytically trained scholars in the natural and human sciences have intervened in the changing and problematic relationship between our environment and ourselves. (Narine 2015: 12)

As a consequence, even though *Wall-E* is animation, it does not mean that it does not provide truth, "as film theorist Bill Nichols argues, every film is a documentary—if not of actual people or events, then of a time, its automobiles, hairstyles, developed and undeveloped spaces" (Narine 2015: 13).

Moreover, dystopic gives to the film a tragic connotation, making it a "terrific comedy and biting satire"; in addition, as Ursula Heise says, "apocalyptic narrative [...] is a common feature [...] that deal with global environmental risk scenarios"; it means that global ecocide, in which ecology is killed by humanity, is usually interpreted as a total destruction of the biosphere, as it happens in recent movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *2012* (2009), *The Road* (2009), *Knowing* (2009) or *Interstellar* (2014). Differently from the movies mentioned, *Wall-E* is not only post-natural but also post-human, placed in a time in which humanity does not populate Earth for centuries; this is another reason why it is considered a post-apocalyptic romantic comedy.

3.7. OTHER ETHICAL PROBLEMS: HYPER-CONSUMPTION

The allegory of the futuristic society provides considerations on other ethical problems, especially related to the North American society, such as hyper-consumption, which is worth to be briefly analysed (Anile Narine 2015: 19); according to Pat Brereton, a strategy to “keep the masses satiated” is the reminiscent of Roman times and the “bread and circuses” which stands for an easy entertainment usually used by the Western culture,

After the robotic couple helps humanity return to earth the final credits, interspersed with images of the new revitalized civilization, begin. This future is illustrated using roughly seven art historical periods: prehistoric cave paintings, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, ancient Greek pottery painting, Roman/Byzantine mosaics, Renaissance drawing, Impressionist/Post-Impressionist painting and 1980s computer animation. This odd leapfrog through history not only remains firmly within the Western tradition but erases whole swathes of time including the bulk of the modernist project. (Hrag Vartanian 2008)

The characteristic of this futuristic artificial society is that people are controlled and they do not make any personal decision, “much less forage for food”:

Wall-E follows a similar path, with its more contemporary obese-looking animated humans, drip-fed on synthetic food and thereby becoming more supine and docile in their massive spaceship, having all their corporeal needs serviced by a mechanical under-class. In such an artificial futuristic age, the allegory suggests, humans have lost the capacity to appreciate the importance of scarcity, frugality and striving for basic needs, alongside more normative evolutionary human desires around freedom to control one’s destiny. (Brereton 2016: 58)

Wall-E’s further message is in fact of ethical nature; as a consequence, the movie becomes a food consumption allegory, suggesting a solution for the excessive waste, since it represents a danger for the health of Earth,

Within such allegorical storylines, science fiction in particular offers a cautionary glimpse into a dystopic future in which our insatiable hunger and general rapaciousness threaten to destroy the planet, eating away at our basic humanity, as cogently represented in earlier classics like Logan’s Run and Soylent Green. (Brereton 2016: 58)

The public, that as already discussed earlier is obviously differentiated, experiences the dystopic society when Wall-E arrives on the Axiom, the space-ship that contains and controls what is left of humanity; humanity appears to be the American stereotype of black and white people in obese-looking, which also represents the American nightmare,

they are homogenized—and that means Americanized—to the extreme. They all speak American English, wear the same clothes, ride on the same gliders and drink the same liquids. They all have lost their capacity to move (due to obesity and severe bone loss), to communicate or to do anything else but consume. (Narine 2015: 171)

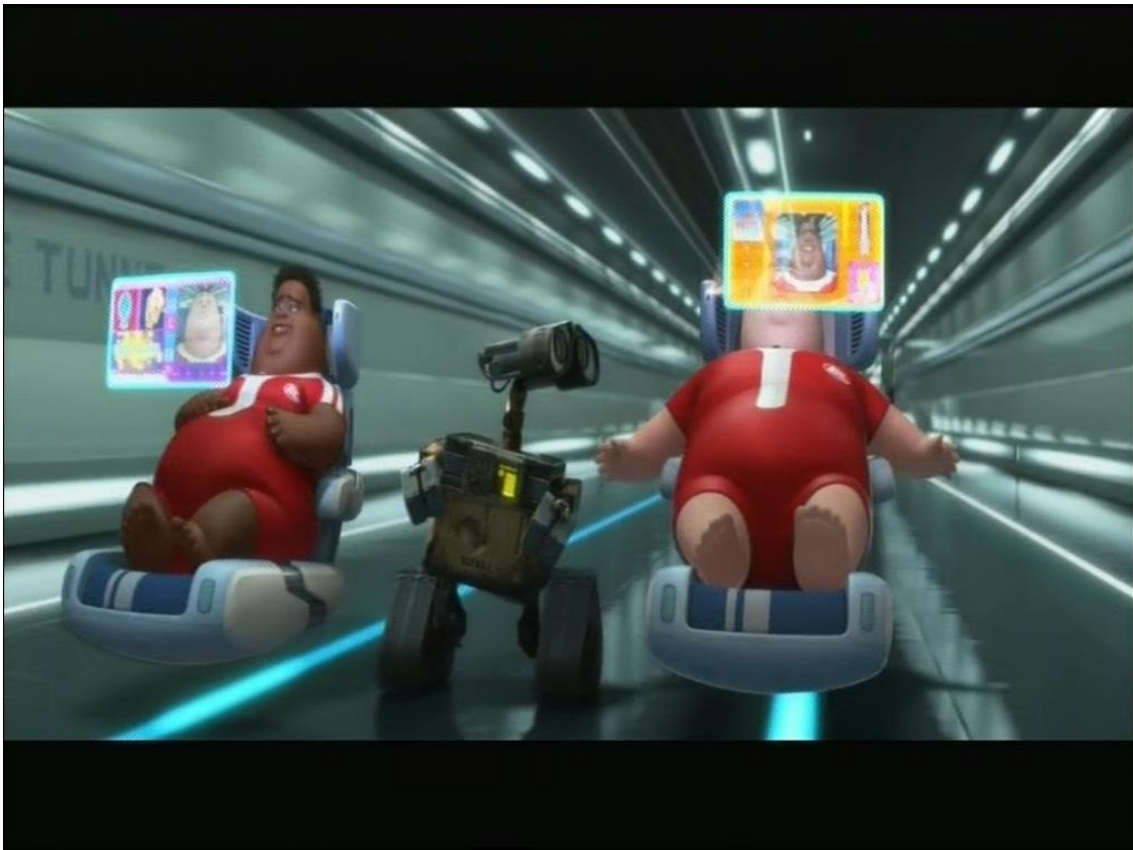


Figure 3.7. Humans on the Axiom (Wall-E 0:37:52)

Even on this case, the ethical message receives a much more effect thanks to the humour involved; the audience is amused in seeing “degraded humans who have

mindlessly destroyed the planet and condemned themselves to a senseless life in outer space” (Narine 2015: 171).

In sum, dystopic scenarios and humourism have been allegedly an effective dualism for spreading both the ecological and ethical message; in particular, the release of previous environmental documentaries in the beginning of the millennium contributed for its effectiveness, providing a prominent massive audience in a yet prominent ecologically aware context (Anile Narine 2015: 19).

4. AVATAR

4.1. AN ECO-BLOCKBUSTER

Avatar was directed by James Cameron in 2009; according to Pat Brereton, Hollywood has the important role of presenting films like “the highly influential blockbuster *Avatar*” which are “such mainstream Hollywood texts [that] serve to privilege what can loosely be characterised as a form of Western ecological guilt, which in turn highlights growing ethical concerns for our unsustainable planet” (Brereton 2016: 78, 95). The chapter considers many aspects of the ecosystem of the planet Pandora, regarding technology, ecology, spirituality and the consequent paradoxes that the narrative provokes; the old western genre of *Avatar* “has been transformed into a contemporary form of science fiction spectacle”, which may result in a re-adaptation of an old prejudice regarding exotic indigenous, fauna and flora (Brereton 2016: 156). However, despite the discrepancies, the environmental message that the film provides remains the most important factor; in fact, the whole planet of Pandora may be considered a unique and giant mental ecosystem which uses a new form of technology, based on the interconnection between all the living beings (Brereton 2016: 98).

4.2. A BRIEF SUMMARY

The protagonist, Jake Sully, is a paraplegic marine who agrees to take over his brother’s contract with a corporate-military entity; he travels to the moon Pandora, which orbits the planet Polyphemus, light years away from Earth, and inhabited by the indigenous population of the Na’vi Omaticaya.



Figure 4.1. View of the sky from the moon Pandora (Avatar 0:32:11)

Jake's twin, the scientist Tom, is dead and he is the only one who perfectly fits in his avatar, a genetically-bred human Na'vi hybrid, through which he could be able to walk again. Jake Sully enters the science department under the lead of Dr. Grace Augustine, whose purpose is to study the ecosystem of Pandora. However, at the base, there is also Parker Selfridge, the base commander and representative for the Resources Development Administration that oversees all military operations lead by the Colonel Quaritch; Selfridge and the Colonel have the opportunity to use Jake's military skills in favour for their real objective of the operation: Jake is asked to persuade the natives to move away from their Home Tree, because it is a huge deposit of the mineral unobtainium, a potent source of energy that can bring cheap power back to a dying Earth; as reconnaissance, Jake would receive the surgery to regain use of his legs. Jake, Grace and all the scientists crew lands in the forest for researches, but they get attack by the creatures of Pandora and Jake gets lost; he survives the night only thanks to the encounter with the native Neytiri, which happens to be the king's daughter and engaged with the warrior leader Tsu'tey. At first, brought to the king, Jake hides his secret military mission and obtains to be trained, by Neytiri, on the Na'vi culture and language. Jake learns more and more the native's culture, reporting increasingly less to

the Colonel and Selfridge. At some point, Jake is ready for the important rite of choosing and riding a “ikran”, a flying creature of Pandora, by making a bond with the tendrils of their queues. Thereafter, Jake and Neytiri sleeps together under the “Tree of voices”, a place of prayer. After this, Jake has changed completely his mind but it is too late, because, in the morning, a military operation entirely disrupted the sacred Tree and the Na’vi decide that they want war against humans. Jake declares his original secret mission and becomes a traitor for both the Na’vi and humans; however, Jake regains Omaticayan’s faith because he successfully bonds with the most dangerous creature of Pandora, a toruk, winning as a consequence the title of Toruk Mato. Jake leads the Na’vi on a terrible final battle against humans, winning the war. The fight provokes numerous deaths, among them also Grace and the king; however, the happy ending shows Jake’s choice of definitely transferring his consciousness to his avatar through a ceremony under the spirit of Eywa; he then opens his eyes ready for a new beginning.

4.3. THE NATURE-SPACE

According to Anat Pick, the nature-space refers to a physical place with a particular form of nature; in the case of *Avatar*, the nature-space is the jungle, forest or rainforest, as it is called in the screenplay of *Avatar*, characterised by intersections of human-animal and human-nature. The depiction of nature by Hollywood depends on “commercialisation, capitalist greed and power” which results in an envisioning of nature that is “vulnerable, dynamic, hostile or even vengeful” (Pick 2013: 177, 178); even the character of Grace, head of the scientists’ crew, states that Pandora is “the most hostile environment known to man”, even though she should stay by Pandora’s side. Pandora is the name of the jungle and it is open to numerous interpretations, both positive and negative; the rainforest may be considered benevolent from a spiritual point of view, but also malevolent considering the danger that it constitutes for the first approach of the protagonist, Jake Sully. Therefore, *Avatar* belongs to the post 1990 cycle of films, in which environment is depicted both as threat and salvation,

Avatar, which is, in box office terms, the most successful eco-film in the cycle, melds together these themes of environmental defence, ecological balance and salvation with spiritual rebirth. At the same time, the film reveals a range of cultural meanings assigned to nature-spaces such as jungles, wilderness and forests that operate across a continuum from hostile terrain to places of vulnerability and endangerment. (Pick 2013: 182)

Jungle, rainforest and wilderness, that in *Avatar* are descriptions of the same setting, often have different connotations: the jungle is “in need of discipline”, the rainforest “in need of nothing but [...] protection”, and wilderness is a place for quiet and “challenging recreational activities”; it is the reason why Anat Pick uses the more general term of nature-space to refer to any of them in other circumstances; moreover, despite the fact that nature is considered the antithesis of human production,

Nature-spaces are, however, the products of human activity in the sense that they are both the imagined spaces of cultural narratives (filmic, literary and so on) as well as being physically bounded geographical places which are identified, classified and named (Pick 2013: 182)

In *Avatar* nature-space passes from jungle to rainforest and to wilderness across the narration; in the first scenes, Jake Sully lost himself in the dark and threatening jungle; he is challenging to survive the wilderness and fight against unknown new beings like the viperwolves. Then, thanks to the “harmonious relationship” of the Na’vi with the environment, the hostile place becomes a “glittering landscape”, a rainforest “in need of protection”. Finally, in the last scenes, Pandora generates an “alliance between animals and humanoids in the face of an impending ecological threat” (Pick 2013: 177). Even though *Avatar* depicts nature in new different ways, audiences could recognize the nature-space because it is known and used in other filmic narratives such as *Tarzan* (1999), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Predator* (1987) or *Dances with wolves* (1990); the rainforest would become a comfort zone, which may be a positive base to build up a successful ecological story.



Figure 4.2. The known nature-space of the rainforest (*Avatar* 0:23:16)

4.4. TECHNOLOGY: FANTASY VS REALITY

A film like *Avatar* raises up troubling questions on the dichotomies between fiction and non-fiction; Hollywood's digital visual effects, in the last decades, provides increasingly "similar instances of real-world ramifications", disorienting the viewer on the clear distinction between the real and the fantastical,

The cinematic world—now aided and sometimes hampered by easily malleable D-cinema formats and digital visual effects— becomes its own world, another reality we begin to inhabit with the full range of our senses, much like the paraplegic hero, Jake Sully, does in the speculative eco-trauma film *Avatar* [...]. Indeed, after returning to their lives, following one or two viewings of *Avatar*, thousands of viewers wanted to "return" to the world of Pandora, where the action takes place. *Avatar* explores this sentiment in the character of Jake himself, a young man who, having lost the use of his legs, is exhilarated by his new life (and body) in Pandora's natural paradise [...]. For their part, many viewers felt they had been to Pandora, surrounded by its 3-D vegetation, and they became depressed by the fact that Pandora did not exist beyond the cinematic frame. (Narine 2015: 11)

Audiences' experience is so highly touching and emotional that the reception of the ecological message should be powerful, in the same way,

The global importance of this ecological allegory can be appreciated at one level, by recalling how the 3D spectacle banked \$2.98 billion within the first two years after its release; 73 per cent of which came from outside of the USA. (Brereton 2016: 101)



Figure 4.3. The floating islands of Pandora (*Avatar* 0:53:20)

Moreover, Daniel White explains how digital effects have an important role in the waking of an “ecological mind”, theory of Gregory Bateson,

Emerging film technologies like 3D digital imaging and motion-capture for kinetic modeling provide a viewer experience that opens the way for the audience, imaginatively with Jake Sully, to become immersed in cyberspace and in turn Pandora-space. The kind of awareness proposed—beyond the spectacular success of the film as mass entertainment yielding record profits at the box office (White 2018: 250).

However, technology in *Avatar* is not only an aspect of the cinematic frame, but it is also part of the narrative; all the ecosystem of Pandora is allegedly based on a new form of nature, which “represent a more sophisticated form of technology”; as Grace says “There is some kind of electrochemical communications between the roots of the trees, like the synapses between neurons. [...] It’s a Global Network and the Na’vi can

access it". In fact, the Na'vi have the ability to create bonds, through their queues, between themselves and all the living creatures on Pandora's ecosystem; they seem to be cat-like advanced forms of beings, which have developed their bodies to be in connection with nature, in order to be more ecological. Finally, in the final battle scene, the Na'vi, animals and nature, work together as a unique brain to fight against the impending enemy: humanity; the ecosystem of Pandora demonstrates it is able to protect itself, and it may be one of the reasons of the successful reception of the environmental message, as Brereton states "General audiences need this first-hand creative imaginary of a Platonic idealised and harmonious environment to fully appreciate what might be lost"; moreover, Carolyn Michelle has recently taken in consideration various audience studies concerning *Avatar's* influence on environmental awareness; this studies would permit "much more broad-based evidence" in order to "take on board [the] ability to promote pro-environmental messages, particularly around the sacred right of 'nature' to protect itself" (Brereton 2016: 101, 102).

Therefore, from a philosophical point of view, Pandora's ecosystem would represent an interpretation of philosophers' researches and studies about truth and reality. As the character Grace says "I'm talking about something real, something measurable in the biology of the forest"; according to Brereton, Grace sees "their recondite molecular structures and the electrical signals through which they communicate, believing these to be the true mechanism of reality". It seems to be applicable to the Hegel's perspective about Spirit and Nature; according to Lawler,

the unifying principle [...] binds all these parts together; the Spirit that makes Nature more than just an assortment of separate elements that interact in interesting ways, namely a unified whole in which rocks, plants, and animals are all organically connected parts (Brereton 2016: 100).

Regarding Truth, Ellen Grabiner adds that medial knowing, in the sense of technology and digital effects, would provide the "seeing outside the screen"; it means that,

technology becomes, as Heidegger argues, *poiēsis* “making” or, more typically, “poetry” as the creative process of “revealing” (*Entbergung*) out of “concealment” (*Verborgenheit*) (Heidegger 1977, 11). The encompassing vision of *Avatar* becomes one in which technology arises out of nature as a form of embodied awareness in the idioms of virtual digital and biotechnology, the “poetry” of which is rendered experientially in Cameron’s cinematography. (White 2018: 252)

Technology is the vehicle to reach *Alētheia*, the Greek word meaning “truth”, and it is visible during the scene in which Neytiri teaches Jake the meaning of “I see you”; “in *Avatar* the linkage between seeing and knowing has been re-formed” since there is “an approach to the visual [...] in which letting go of knowing precedes *seeing*” (Grabiner 2012: 8).

4.5. ECOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

Avatar’s ecological message is effective especially thanks to the idea of an ecological planet; this ecological idea has, in addition, a religious reading.

Pandora’s ecosystem can be relatable to the Gregory Bateson’s theory of the ecology of mind,

The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by ‘God,’ but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology. (White 2018: 249)

This larger Mind does seem the Spirit, named earlier by Lawler, which interconnects all the living beings; according to Latour, “Pandora is [...] a *mental ecosystem*” (White 2018: 277) and a “superorganism and goddess called Eywa” (Brereton 2016: 96), or Gaia; according to White, in fact, Pandora would be an attempt of manifestation of Bateson’s ecology of mind: “the Gaia hypothesis, the idea that all of the ecological and physical components of a planet are interconnected”. Therefore, the idea of Gaia recalls the “image of a nurturing Great Mother, protecting the balance of life [which is] a pantheistic and deep ecological vision in which energy continuously flows through

discrete bodies of organic life” (Brereton 2016: 98). Spirituality is recognizable through other aspects, such as the “Hindu idea of the Avatar—an embodiment for the incarnation of a god” and the numerous names used from Indian and Greek mythology (White 2018: 249). These factors may contribute to provide a more solid idea about ecology.

Avatar's strong eco-effects, in addition to the modern digital effects, are also due to its traditional narrative structure, especially through the aspect of the “baby-Jake”; Jake Sully would represent the innocence of a child, whose mind is empty, like a “tabula rasa”, and ready to be completed with new knowledges,

On one of his first missions into this alien landscape, Jake wanders off to do some exploring of his own. He is fascinated and delighted with the awesome beauty and life-affirming properties of the planet's life forms. [...] Jake later describes himself to Mo'at, the Na'vi tsahik (the spiritual leader of the clan), ‘as an empty cup, signifying in part that his outlook on the world isn't biased by scientific preconceptions’ (Lawler in Dunn 2014: 107). Such appetite and endorsement for being totally open to nature's pleasures and richness are often ascribed to the innocence of the child (Brereton 2016: 99)

It reminds of Rousseau's studies on education and the “good savage”, as he says, “the wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning” (Rousseau 1762: 1).

The audience, like Jake, is fascinated by the marvellous Pandora, especially due to his non-complete alienation; James Cameron, according to Pat Brereton, explains the importance of defamiliarizing the familiar without completely alienating the audience,

so as not to introduce representational realities that would otherwise distract audiences from the narrative, or for that matter so completely alienate them that they would presumably find it too difficult to relate to the storyline in the first place. (Brereton 2016: 99)

As a consequence, the audience, like the characters of the story, has the chance to explore the environment on a further level, beyond the primary common sense, and understand the truth of climate crisis,

at a prosaic and common sense level, which echoes the layman's supposed lack of appreciation of such connections, the UN übermale scientific military leader Selfridge retorts: 'what the hell have you people been smoking out there? They're just goddamn trees.' Selfridge sees only the surface image and meaning of vegetation such as the trees, reminding us at another level of abstraction that most audiences and citizens apparently cannot understand much less appreciate how to handle the long-term consequences of climate change. Meanwhile the scientist Grace further perceives 'their recondite molecular structures and the electrical signals through which they communicate, believing these to be the true mechanism of reality.' While Jake as 'innocent' and 'pure' like a child goes on to learn to appreciate the holistic natural beauty and wonder of this alien habitat, becoming much more self-contained within his newfound (deep ecological) holistic eco-system. (Brereton 2016: 100)

If the audiences reach the second and third level of Grace's and Jake's, it means that the environmental message, that the film conveys, has been spread successfully;

we actively follow Sully from an innocent outsider and 'one of us', towards becoming a deep environmentalist insider, albeit within an alien culture, who in turn realises and learns to embody the core ethics and values of such a rich habitat. (Brereton 2016: 103, 104)

more similarly to baby-Jake, the audience have the chance to take a journey and, in the end, easily appreciate and trust more in the amazing world of Pandora.

4.6. POSTCOLONIAL INTERPRETATION AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

Another aspect to be discussed is that a postcolonial interpretation of *Avatar* complicates and calls into question the ecological understanding; the themes involved, and subjected to a second interpretation, regard the use of technology, the relationship of human-animal, human-nature and the image of Gaia. First of all, according to Gautam Basu Thakur, technology would represent the imperialistic view of eurocentrism; as a consequence, technology becomes the colonizer and nature the colonized. On an extra-diegetic level, CGI and photography violently impose imagination on the audience, which consequently loses its power of realism and falls into a "bag of tricks",

Digital techniques become “forced imaginations” [...] —if we understand imagining in the literal sense of imaging something not subjectively, as the former term typically denotes, but objectively in the 3D virtual and biotic sense of the avatars represented (re-presented) in Cameron’s film. Every representation is an interpretation, a relocation, a recontextualization, that removes the imaged creature from its indigenous niche and inserts it into another for the imager’s purposes rather than in terms of its original ecological design. As Bateson comments, “If you allow purpose to organize that which comes under your conscious inspection, what you will get is a bag of tricks—some of them very valuable tricks.” (White 2018: 253)

One of the first effective factors which would suggest a postcolonial influence, is the depiction of the Na’vi Omatycaia as anthropomorph and sexist form of aliens; according to Pat Brereton,

Cameron insists on emphasising a gender/sexist embodiment of such aliens. ‘Let’s focus on things that can create otherness but are not off-putting’. The director is further quoted in The Huffington Post, as quipping that his female alien must have breasts – ‘She’s got to have tits’, even though ‘that makes no sense because her race, the Na’vi, aren’t placental mammals’ (Brereton 2016: 96)



Figure 4.4. Visible breast of Neytiri (*Avatar* 0:58:17)

Moreover, choosing the colour blue for their skin and depicting them as a brand new race of catlike, the indigenous of Pandora do not resemble any “non-white otherness”; in this way, the “tumultuous reality of race relations and gender binaries that still dominate contemporary culture” is avoided (Brereton 2016: 98) and their dominion may be considered of minor relevance from the point of view of a distracted audience. Moreover, humans belonging to the diegetic universe of *Avatar* seem not ready to understand the ecological mind of Pandora,

Like modern colonialism on Earth, RDA’s intervention is carried out by a team of scientists like Dr. Grace Augustine, entrepreneurs epitomized by Parker Selfridge, and soldiers (of fortune)—most prominently, Colonel Quaritch and Jake Sully. What they all have in common is narrow conscious purpose instrumentally oriented toward a strategic goal: the exploitation of Pandora’s mineral wealth for the extraction of profit (White 2018: 254)

Besides the Colonel Quaritch and the base commander Parker Selfridge, whose purpose of exploitation is uncovered, also the other characters present intrinsically a postcolonial attitude; the scientists, with their aim of studying Pandora’s ecosystem, result in the desire of controlling it; as confirmation, Grace, in her death scene and despite the beauty of Eywa surrounding her, just says “ I need to take some samples”.



Figure 4.5. Scientist taking samples (*Avatar* 0:25:27)

Jake Sully initially starts his journey as an infiltrate of the RDA and, despite his “change of heart”, he demonstrates his postcolonial attitude of dominance towards indigenous people, Neytiri and animals, during all the length of the film. As already discussed, Jake at his first meeting with the nature-space, has to impose his dominance on two dangerous creatures, a “titanothera” and a “thanator”; the last one, more similar to a terrestrial panther, forces Jake to seek refuge inside the forest of Pandora; however, during the night, he has the opportunity of revenge by fighting against numerous viperwolves and he is pleased when Neytiri kills one of them, in contrast to her displeasure, showing no respect for the spirituality of the Na’vi. Finally, Jake demonstrates his white male hegemony by taking dominance over Neytiri and the most dangerous predator of Pandora, a toruk, becoming Toruk Mato; in the last case, Jake uses his queue to force an interconnection and it “constitutes a turning point in the film’s narrative and discourse of subject-production”; exhibiting himself as dominator, Jake gains the indigenous’ trust and the power to represent and save Pandora (White 2018: 256).



Figure 4.6. (*Avatar* 1:51:21)

However, not only the human characters present postcolonial aspects,

The narrative makes it clear that the Na'vi knowledge of the forest and their interconnectedness with the environment attenuates the threat of the jungle that is experienced by the humans (Pick 2013: 183, 184)

It is, in fact, through his training to become an “ecologically sensitive native” that Jake gains the ability to dominate predators; in fact, through the use of his queue, Jake has to take control over a dire-horse and an ikran; in the dire-horse scene, Neytiri indulges him by saying “You may tell her what to do, inside”; however, both scenes have been criticised as being a depiction of rape,

The violence of the action; the forced ‘bonding’; the close-up on the animal’s pupil, which dilates massively as Jake forcibly connects himself to the bird; and Jake’s comment as the animal lies ‘broken’ on the ground, ‘That’s right, you’re mine’, followed by Jake’s first flight on the back of the ikran that he now controls with his mind all work to reinforce, even valorise, the brutal subjugation of animals against their will. . Readings of the scene as rape can be explained by referring to an earlier animal encounter when Jake is instructed to ride the direhorse, in this case a ‘docile’ female. When Jake connects queues with the direhorse, Neytiri tells him to ‘feel’ the

animal, her heartbeat, strong legs and so on. This scene establishes that bonding is a sensual experience, but the boundary between sensual and sexual bonding has the potential to blur. (Pick 2013: 188)



Figure 4.7. The rape scene (Avatar 0:50:29)



Figure 4.8. The rape scene (Avatar 0:50:34)

Another example which clarifies the Na'vi's relationship with animals is the comparison of two killing scenes; in the first meeting with Jake, Neytiri kills a viperwolf and she is deeply concerned about it, "Don't thank. You don't thank for this. This is sad. Very sad only. They did not need to die"; but later, Neytiri is not concerned while hunting and killing a deer-like creature; in fact she does not care about "the suffering of the animal but instead [about] the wastefulness of the killing" (Pick 2013: 189). As already discussed earlier, in fact, nature-space contains intersection of human-animal and human-nature which Animal Studies indicates as different,

seen through the lens of Animal Studies, Avatar reveals distinctions between animals and 'nature' that remain unresolved within many discourses on the environment. Animals are treated as expendable in discourses that construct particular forms of nature [...], as vulnerable and in need of defence. (Pick 2013: 178)

The Home Tree and the Tree of Souls, are symbols of spirituality and the Na'vi do not dare to hurt them in any way; in fact, bad connotations are allegedly attributable to the animals that lives the rainforest and not to the nature itself. It depends on the influence of some categories of difference about gender, race, class, disability and age that, according to Claire Molloy, they "are deployed to maintain particular structures of power and oppression", in fact,

Avatar provides a holist view of nature that promotes a problematic concept of interconnectedness, wherein the nature-space provides a backdrop for the contest of hegemonic masculinity to be played out and where animals function as obstacles to be defeated, dominated and controlled. (Pick 2013: 190)

As a consequence, the hegemony of the white male figure also influences the depiction of the nature-space; Pandora becomes feminised and carries the image of a nurturing Great Mother, as suggested by Pat Brereton, becoming a rain forest in need of protection; it is a "paternalistic form of environmental protectionism" (Pick 2013: 178).

In sum, the question is if *Avatar* is to be considered an eco-analysis or a reiteration “of the same old anthropocentric prejudices under the cover of a fleshy new veneer”, due to the paradoxes that the postcolonial interpretation reveals (Pick 2013: 156); especially, this chapter shows that there is a thin boundary between protecting and controlling, and this dichotomy could be attributable to the attitude of the scientists towards nature and indigenous, of Jake towards Neytiri, and also of the Na’vi towards the other creatures of Pandora.

4.7. BEYOND THE CONTRADICTIONS

Despite the contradictions encountered, such as the eurocentrism of technology, the feminised image of Gaia, the hegemonic white male figure and the ambiguous depiction of aliens, the success of *Avatar* was unavoidable. According to White, quoting Chakrabarty, capitalism is useful to understand climate change and its consequences, and it may be also one of the influences for James Cameron’s choice of narrative; postcolonialism may not be one of the interpretations of the film, but a direct and useful criticism to make people think,

The success of *Avatar* triggered an interesting chain reaction, which is a lot of groups that are involved with indigenous issues and the environment and energy and so on have come to me saying, you know, “How can we use the success of the film to continue to raise awareness, not just a generalized kind of emotional reaction, but a very specific awareness on different battles that are in progress right now around the world?” ... And I thought, well, OK, fine, this is an opportunity to maybe do some good, beyond just the film itself. I mean, I thought, you know, as a filmmaker, as an artist, I put my story out there, you know, and people react to it, and they draw their own conclusions, and that’s it for me. I’m over and out, you know? (White 2018: 260).

One of the most crucial factors which affords an effective spread of the environmental message is to have adapted *Avatar* into a “more flexible and versatile media [that] will survive in the new information environment”; by creating a Gaia’s mental ecosystem, *Avatar* provides a revolutionary media instrument which seems to translate humans into nature and to make them a whole,

Perhaps *Avatar*'s greatest promise as a work of film art is its startling Nietzschean project. In Cameron's work, not only do "our writing instruments work on our thinking," as the visionary philosopher opined about his typewriter (1987, 172; 2002, 18; see Chaps. 2 and 7, in this volume), but the filming instrument gathers the potential to transform its cinematographers and viewers in body and mind. Is this Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Overhuman) rising from new media? Will we be able to say of film what he said of "Architecture for those who wish to pursue knowledge": "We want to have us translated into stone and plants, we want to take walks in us when we stroll through these hallways and gardens" (2001, 160, § 280, italics in original)? (White 2018: 278).

Cameron's postcolonial criticism raises awareness thanks to the deep issues proposed, to the digital media which made the audience a direct witness of indigenous exploitation, and to the sympathy for the protagonist Jake.

However, as Cameron adds, it is not enough to provide emotional reaction; according to Thakur, in fact, the film mainly provides entertainment, but the real purpose should be to be able to make people to act (White 2018: 260).

5. AN INCONVENIENT CONCLUSION

5.1. LEAVING A MESSAGE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

One of the arguments taken in consideration by the thesis is that cinema and the era of the Anthropocene might be characterized by the same features; humans, which have always had the desire of controlling nature, have actually become ecological agents in changing the geology of the planet. Movies that shows apocalyptic disasters, in which the entire planet is completely disrupted, use spectacular digital effects and increasingly new form of technology that recalls that desire of controlling and shaping nature, as Buster Keaton in the 1920's did in studio by fabricating artificial weather (Fay 2018: 16). Cinema usually shapes reality in its favour, like humans changed nature in favour of agricultural and industrial civilization.

According to Pat Brereton, the movies that take in consideration the topic of environmentalism cannot be simply synthesized from an ecological perspective, since the eco-textual analysis is only one of the possible readings. Those stories serve “to highlight a range of possibilities” regarding environmentalism and regarding the ecological future of the planet and, in particular, to leave a message (Brereton 2016: 74); in fact, according to Jennifer Fay, photography and image which characterized the last century of the Anthropocene would be useful to leave our trace for future beings (Fay 2018: 201-206). James Cameron's point of view on this aspect is that raising awareness on the ecological message is not enough, “*Avatar* doesn't teach [...] anything specific” and what people truly need is action.

Cinema has the potentiality to raise awareness on a target audience but only humanity has the potentiality to change the world.

5.2. AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH, WALL-E AND AVATAR

The analysis of *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Wall-E* and *Avatar* shows successfully that cinema has the ability of raising awareness of a great number of audiences. Despite the three films belong to three different genres, they use different modalities to give their audiences a strong ecological message. The non-fiction documentary genre of *An*

Inconvenient Truth seems, on a first examination, to be the more valid way to propose such an important topic; the non-fiction characteristic of showing reality grants more credibility to the argument; in particular, as the first chapter discusses, the use of real images of real disasters is useful to connect audiences to the eco-trauma and possibly call them to action. The success of *An Inconvenient Truth* is especially due to the powerful figure of Al Gore, who recalls to the public his political past and ecological interest. The film remains one of the most cited eco-documentaries and the first that allowed a turning point in the affirmation of non-fiction films. However, the animated romantic comedy of *Wall-E* and the blockbuster *Avatar* demonstrate that not only non-fiction documentaries can address environmentalism with credibility. *Wall-E*'s power to raise environmental awareness could be related to its irony and romance thanks to its comic eco-hero and emotional storyline; the audience is more emotionally engaged when amused; humour wins on tragedy in terms of awareness on ecological issues. Last but not least, *Avatar*'s way of addressing the theme is diegetic and extra-diegetic; ecology is all around characters and audiences who becomes direct witnesses of the story, thanks to the realisation of the idea of an eco-planet. Pandora, which is realistically put on screen thanks to the new forms of technology and digital effects, shows what humanity and Earth could aim to resemble and what might be lost if humans remain motionless in front of climate crisis.

No genre may be more valid than another to express environmental concerns; the most important factor is how people, whether adults, youth, children, families, groups or individuals, more or less interested in the ecological issue or already engaged as environmental activists, may react to the film. They may think more about the climate crisis, how to reduce its dramatic causes and consequences and maybe take it more seriously to a higher level by activating ecological attitudes. *An Inconvenient Truth* is one of the most commercially successful documentary films, *Wall-E*, despite its director did not have the ecological theme in mind, raises a great environmental awareness anyway, and *Avatar* is the second film in the top list of lifetime grosses. The crucial point is to talk about climate change and these three movies prove that

Hollywood has the power to successfully contribute to the discussion and spread of the issue.

5.3. AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL: TRUTH TO POWER

An inconvenient Truth, *Wall-E* and *Avatar* were respectively directed in 2006, 2008 and 2009; therefore, a more recent film could be useful to analyse if the eco-critical approach has changed in ten years and if the climate crisis remains an impending issue, necessary to be discussed. *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* is an effective example of how the topic is more than ever of primary importance; the film is directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk in 2017, eleven years after the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*. It proposes an update on Al Gore's fight against climate crisis to raise awareness and recruit more and more people belonging to old and new generations of environmentalists, toward activism. In the ten years between the two documentary films, Al Gore, even though sometimes discouraged by the several denials and oppositions, founded a world training program to educate and train people on the subject, called Climate Reality Project, by continuing to show his slides in climate leadership trainings around the world.

5.3.1. NOW AND THEN, A COMPARISON

One of the first issues that *An Inconvenient Sequel* tends to clarify is that the major problem is not only global warming; the temperature rise is only the first of the consequences of the industrial pollution, due to the emission of toxic gases in the air which increases an extra-detainment of ultraviolet and x-rays inside the atmosphere; the Earth's atmosphere is in fact a "thin shell" and it has become a dump for "110 million tons of heat-trapping global warming pollution" that humans put into space "every single day" by burning coal, oil and gas. The temperature rise is, in turn, the cause of climate change or, better, climate crisis; climate has always changed but humanity is now facing a real crisis, which includes worst cyclones, floods, droughts all over the world and new weather phenomena such as rain bombs. According to Al Gore "every storm is different now because it takes place in a warmer and wetter world";

the heat energy is, in fact, absorbed by oceans which progressively evaporates, provoking a level-rise of water vapor in the sky with a consequently moisture in the whole planet. More than ever violent and destructive storms are due to the cross, in the oceans, of based storms with warmer ocean waters; in 2013, in the Philippines, the city of Taboacan got attacked by an unprecedented violent storm; survivors narrated the fact as if it was a “wall of water rushing in”; the storm caused millions of climate refugees and millions of people were killed. Rain bombs are instead a consequence of a concentration of water vapor “thousands of kilometres from the oceans over the land, and then much more of it falls at the same time”, causing a terrible form of rainfall.



Figure 5.1. example of a rain bomb in Tucson, Arizona, as water splashes off the city (*An Inconvenient Sequel* 0:49:19)

Phenomena did not stop or slow down their process but, on the contrary, they augmented and worsened. If in 2006, the hottest year resulted to be 2005, at the time of *An Inconvenient Sequel*, the hottest was the year before, 2015; the highest temperature reached was 51C° (123.8 degrees Fahrenheit) in the city of May in India, the heat killed thousands of people and streets were physically melting. As Al Gore reports the words of a TV comedian, “the way you know global warming is real is if the

hottest year ever is the year you're currently in"; this is the proof that temperature is rising year after year and that the last one will be always the hottest.

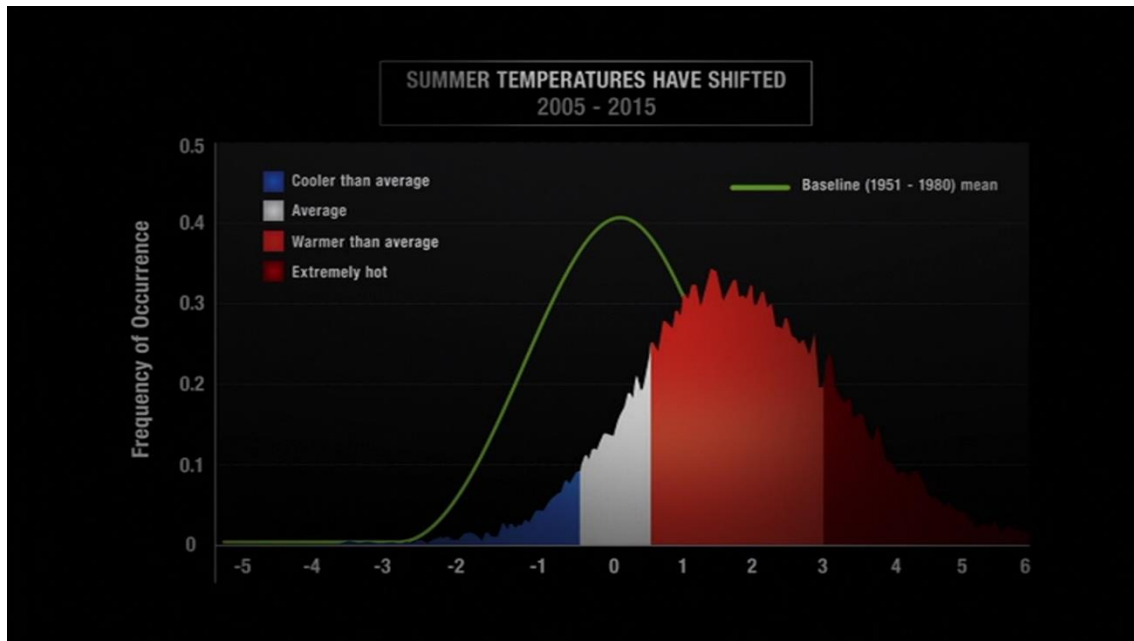


Figure 5.2. Summer temperatures shift from 1951 to 2015 (*An Inconvenient Sequel* 0:07:43)

The graph shows that the curve, which represents summer temperature, from 1951 to 2015 have gradually shifted to the warmer side. According to Al Gore, this are the “first time statistically significant numbers of extremely hot days”; in the last ten years “extremely hot days have become more numerous than the cooler than average days” and, in 2016, “warmer than ever and extremely hot days are more than the average and the cooler than ever days”; Al Gore explains that there are still average or cooler than ever days, but that warmer than ever and extremely hot days “are much more numerous”.

Other extreme consequences of global warming are the fast expansion of tropical diseases and fires. Al Gore, through graphs and maps, illustrates how the warmer temperature seems to cause changes in the balance between microbes and human beings; heat is crucial for diseases like zika virus in which the incubation rate inside mosquitos is accelerated and so it is its expansion of cases. Therefore, the temperature-rise provokes absorption of moisture from the land, increasing dryness

and consequent fires, in places such as Chile, Syria and Australia; since the documentary dates back to 2017, it talks about fires which happened in Australia before that year, in 2013, but it would not be necessary to highlight the fact that bushfires are, in 2020, threatening and devastating Australian lands, forcing people to evacuate and endangering animal species such as Koalas and Kangaroos.

According to Al Gore, scientists agree that the dots connect and that media shows cause and effect of global warming. Prediction becomes reality and climate change, that people in 2006 considered an exaggeration, is now indisputable.

5.3.2. GLACIERS SITUATION AND SEA-LEVEL-RISE

The sea-level rise and glaciers melting continue to be a critical situation. According to Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Sequel*, one of the most criticized scenes of *An Inconvenient Truth* was the prediction of the sea-level-rise in the world trade centre memorial; prediction in 2006 happens to become reality only six years after when, in October 2012, a huge quantity of water flooded in the 9/11 building site, proving the real and impending alert of climate crisis.

In *An Inconvenient Sequel*, Al Gore visits the Swiss camp climate station in Greenland, where the surface mass balance decreased of 12 metres in only one year. The glaciers situation has increasingly worsened; due to high temperature, ice literally explodes and where 30 years before there were big ice sheets, now there is only water. Thanks to the director of the swiss federal research institute, Konrad Steffen, the phenomenon of the “swiss cheese” is well explained; the ice melting creates a tiny moulin, a little water flow, which lately originates a “round hole” that “goes straight down” to another “big moulin”; water sink beneath the glaciers, diminishing the friction and causing its rapid slipping toward the ocean. It is the reason why ever more cities are at risk for sea-level-rise, such as Miami beach in Florida which is the number one city at risk in the world, and others in the west Africa and the Maldives.

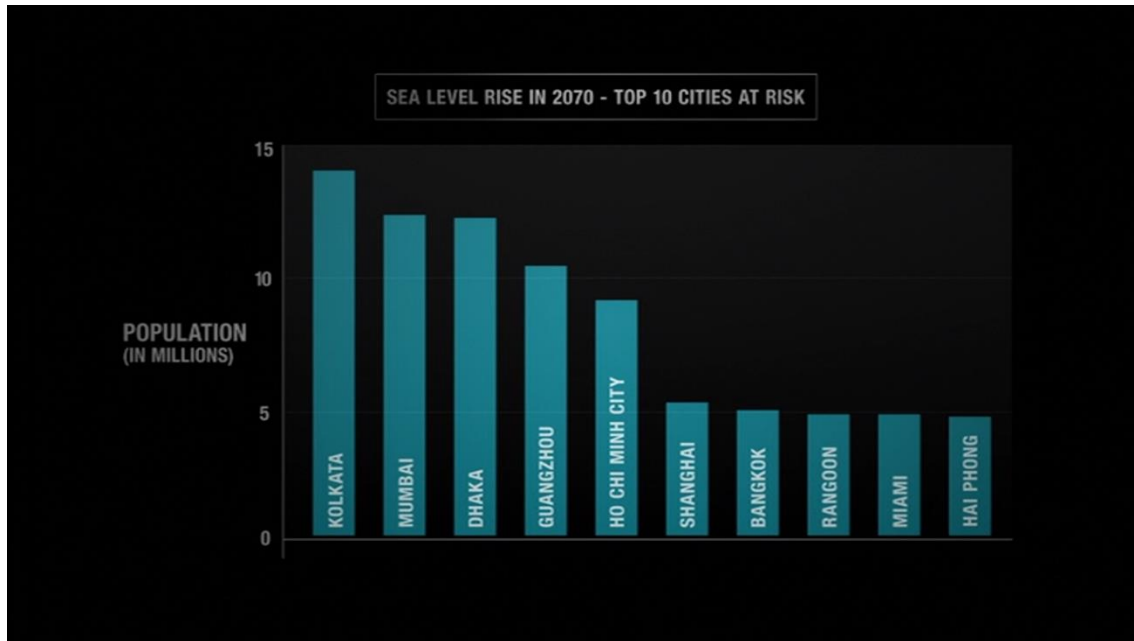


Figure 5.3. Prediction of sea-level-rise in ten cities by 2070 (*An Inconvenient Sequel* 0:17:25)

5.3.3. OBSTACLES BY POLITICS

One of the major obstacles seems to be the democracy crisis and the fact that politics administration seems to have been hacked. According to Eric Schneiderman, the New York state attorney general, “companies and denial organizations [such as the America Petroleum Institute] have actively tried to destroy the market, to suppress investment in renewables”; investigation for fraud on ExxonMobil, as Al Gore suggests, took place. These monopolies “fear disruption” and try to “crush down” the competition by violating the law and triggering a rising price of solar and wind energy. As a consequence, countries like India were going to build four hundred of new coal plants because 300 million out of 1.25 billion people “are without access to energy” and conventional energy of fossil fuel is more accessible than the renewables. The Indian minister of state for energy, Piyush Goyal, during a public conversation with Al Gore, accuses the United States and the developed world of not “coming forth with significant amounts of support, and [that they] seems to be creating more impediments”. It is for this reason that Al Gore activates himself to find a solution and to convince India to sign the Paris Climate Agreement, in the occasion of the UN Climate Change Conference in 2015, and abandon the coal energy; the founder of

SolarCity, Lyndon Rive, accepted Gore's suggestion to give to India the technology of a "silicon-based bifacial PV cell that yields high conversion efficiencies"; in return, India signs the climate treaty, together with other 187 out of 196 states, to reduce greenhouse-gas-emission.

Al Gore encountered another political obstacle when he proposed the project of the satellite DSCOVR in 1998. According to the article "Who Killed the Deep Space Climate Observatory", written by Bill Donahue, the satellite would remain fixed in place and continuously stream back to Nasa video of Earth, in order to have "a clearer vision of our world" and to offer an "early-warning device for solar storms", as Al Gore states. Unfortunately, two months after the inauguration of George W. Bush, the satellite launch got cancelled; in addition, "the administration decided to remove off the satellite all the climate instruments and all the camera"; in doing so, humans lost the opportunity for a turning point in the climate situation in 2001.

Another huge impediment to the ecological movement happened in 2016, with the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States; Trump, even before his election, always expressed his disbelief in the climate crisis and his disagreement about the renewable energy investment; talking about the global warming summit in Paris in 2015, he says "I think it's ridiculous, we have bigger problems right now and [...] talking about global warming being the biggest problem facing this country is insane. [The President] ought to get back to work and solve the ISIS problem"; moreover, he has also expressed his willing to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate treaty. The agreement or disagreement with environmentalism in the United States, as already discussed, seems to be associated to the political party affiliation; Donald Trump, George W. Bush are conservative Republicans and they "dismiss global warming" (Narine 2015: 56); Al Gore, in turn, is a Democrat and, as a consequence, conservative republicans tend to associate environmentalism to him and the oppositional party; but it would be only a prejudice. The mayor of Georgetown in Texas, in fact, agreed to a green energy initiative, even if he is a conservative Republican; in 2016 the city was 90% renewable and attempted to achieve 100%. The reason of his decision is not his political affiliation but the common-sense, as he says,

“wouldn’t it just make sense, from a common-sense standpoint, the less stuff you put in the air, the better it is? [...] You don’t need scientists to debate that. [...] Don’t we have a moral and ethical obligation to leave the planet better than we found it?”

5.3.4. HOW TO REACT AGAINST CORRUPTION

According to Al Gore, hope and solidarity are the right basis for aiming a global changing and it would be a real turning point if the whole world mobilizes; the yet achieved outcomes are not sufficient, but they are necessary “to keep the pressure on”. The agreement between SolarCity and India is the proof that solidarity could be part of the solution. The UN Climate Change Conference took place in a moment of terror, just 2 weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris at the Bataclan and at the Stade de France, which caused hundreds of dead and traumatized people; the same night of the attack, Al Gore, which was preparing for the event on the climate conference, was going to talk on a 24-hour global broadcast covered live around the world, in an attempt to reach and mobilise people in every nation to support “more ambitious outcomes” for the climate. The coincidence caused many to connect those events; people find solidarity in deep despair and, as a consequence, search for positive changings; the fight against global warming becomes, for many, a war in which to choose between life and death, between a better future for Earth and its destruction. In the meanwhile, renewable energy projects of solar and wind power around the globe increase; as Gore says, “the world gets more energy from the sun each hour than the entire global economy uses for an entire year” and in Chile, for example, the solar market produced 848 megawatts at the end of 2015 and attempted to reach 13.3 gigawatts by the end of 2016. He makes a similar statement about wind energy, “wind could supply [...] 40 times the entire global demand for energy” and the market grows year after year, exceeding projections; for example, as Al Gore states, “in 2010, the goal of 1 gigawatt was exceeded by 17 times over, and [in 2016] it will be exceeded by as much as 73 times over”.

Another move towards global changing has been, thanks to Barack Obama in 2015, the launch of the Deep Space Climate Change Observatory DSCOVR, previously cancelled.

The project was so important for Al Gore for another reason; according to him, both in *An Inconvenient Truth* and *An Inconvenient Sequel*, when people see Earth from space, they naturally and easier feel the connection of a shared home. The “blue marble” is a picture taken in 1972 from the Apollo 17 and, before 2015, it was the only one that showed Earth almost completely illuminated, because the sun was behind the spaceship. Al Gore encouraged the idea of a brand new and more contemporary picture to recreate in people that same feeling of sublime and connection; in the film, the two images are proposed one after the other, and they are accompanied by a loud “oh” of surprise which came from the public of a leadership training conference,

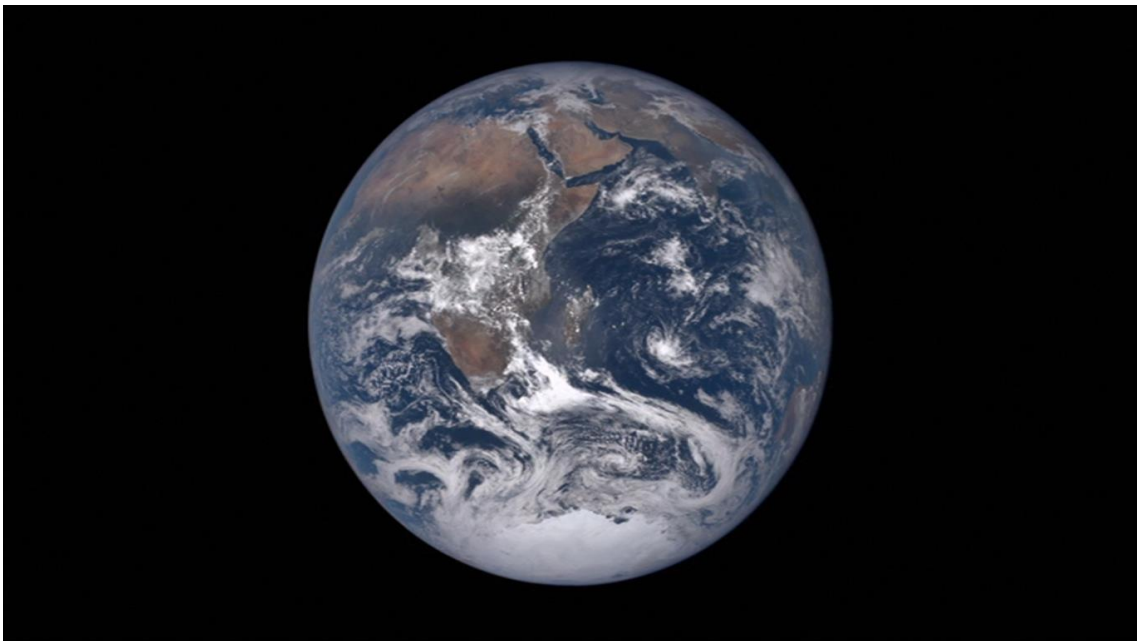


Figure 5.4. The new “Blue Marble” picture, taken in December 2015 (*An Inconvenient Sequel* 1:25:09)

The modes of filming used for *An Inconvenient Sequel* seem to be the same of *An Inconvenient Truth*; for example, the same shots for Al Gore’s first public appearance have been chosen, putting the camera behind him; scenes of climate leadership trainings and Al Gore’s private moments, public interviews and personal conversations, discourses on political obstacles and real images of natural disasters are alternated as to emotionally engage the audiences, to inspire a moral feeling, in order to allow them to understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong. As discussed

earlier, the conservative Republican mayor of Georgetown, in Texas, decides to turn the city green by appealing to his common sense; polluting the planet is wrong, using renewables to try to save the planet is right.

As a conclusion, Al Gore during a public speech at the end of *An Inconvenient Sequel*, talks about environmentalism in terms of morality, in front of a restrained group of younger and older individuals, may belonging to the environmental movement,

This movement to solve the climate crisis is in the tradition of every great moral movement that has advanced the cause of humankind, and every single one of them has met with the resistance to the point where many of the advocates felt despair and wondered “How long is this gonna take?”. Martin Luther King famously [answered] “How long? Not long. Because no lie can live forever. [...] Because the moral arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice” [...]. We are close in this movement. We are very close to the tipping point beyond which this movement, like the abolition movement, like the women’s suffrage movement, like the Civil Rights Movement, like the anti-apartheid movement, like the movement for gay rights is resolved into a choice between right and wrong. [...] It is right to save the future for humanity. It is wrong to pollute this Earth and destroy the climate balance. It is right to give hope to the future generation. It will not be easy, and we, too, in this movement will encounter a series of no’s. (Al Gore: 2016)

“After the last no comes a yes,
and on that the future world depends”
(Wallace Stevens, quoted by Al Gore)

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