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How to Let Go of the World (And Love All the Things Climate Can't Change)

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Abstract

This is a film review of *How to Let Go of the World (And Love All the Things Climate Can't Change)* (2016), written and directed by Josh Fox.

Author Notes

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How to Let Go of the World (And Love All the Things Climate Can't Change)

(2016)

Written and Directed by Josh Fox

Josh Fox's documentary *How to Let Go of the World* begins by bringing the viewer up-to-date on the results of climate change. The news is not good. Given his account of climate change, I am much less optimistic about our future than is Fox. My conclusion, based upon what Fox describes, is that we are doomed. Fox, however, believes that we have a choice and that if each of us makes the right choice (or makes many right choices) we can save the planet. Actually, the planet will remain. It is the human race that is not likely to survive. I don't believe we will make the right choices, even if the right choices are available, as Fox predicts. Remember that many Republicans are still denying the existence of climate change. Toward the end of the movie, the background music is the Beatles' "All You Need is Love," indicating Fox's optimism. But, the very case he makes for the damage of climate change seems to belie this optimism.

Even though Fox and I disagree about the probable outcome of climate change, the film introduces us to some interesting issues related to climate change. First, Fox claims that climate change is, in part, the

product of our increasing economic inequality. It's not just that the rich get richer, but also that the richer they get, the more damage they do to the planet. Think of those who destroy the rain forests. They become more and more wealthy. But they do so at the expense of the rest of us and at the expense of the planet. Think of those who develop huge cities. How does all of that concrete impact the environment? The developer gets richer and richer, but at what cost? Or, consider those who are rich because of our use of fossil fuels. Oil and coal executives get rich by promising energy independence and more jobs. But this is akin to drug lords promising independence from the Mexican cartels and the creation of more jobs in America. If getting a job means destroying the planet, are we really interested in having more of those jobs?

Second, Fox argues that climate change is a matter of human rights. Don't people have a right to continue to live in their homes and on the surrounding land? Yet, climate change is raising the level of the oceans and soon Pacific Islanders will lose the islands upon which they live to the rise in ocean levels. So, those who use coal and other carbon sources are in fact violating the rights of people who wish to continue to live on their native lands.

Third, the movie raises the question of what "development" means. The argument is that by destroying the rain forests, for example, undeveloped or underdeveloped peoples can get jobs and raise their standard of living. This means that they can own more consumer goods. The standard of development here is amassing wealth and consuming more consumer goods. Fox asks us to consider a different view of development. Maybe better health care for all is a better sign of a developed country than the number of cars purchased each year. (Fewer cars also will mean better health.) Maybe an excellent education for all is a better sign of a developed country, rather than how many non-stop flights there are between major cities. Maybe spending more time with your family is a better sign of development than being able to get a job that requires you to work 80 hours per week. Fox asks us to consider what a "developed" country looks like: he suggests that it may not look like one where wealth and consumer goods are the standard of development.

When I saw the title of this film and read the synopsis in the SFF catalogue I was under the impression that the purpose of the documentary was to consider what human beings should do (love all the things that climate can't change), knowing full well that climate change will destroy the human race. I thought that "letting go of the world" meant realizing that we would become extinct and mourning that loss; and, that "loving all the things that climate can't change" meant being with family and friends, reading a good book, listening to music, smelling new mown grass, and enjoying the sunset. In other words, getting our priorities right or putting our house in order. But, maybe these are just the things Fox thinks we can do to save ourselves. For all of this climate/consumption/development/priorities business, only time will tell.