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Weather House

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Weather House

Abstract

This is a film review of *Weather House* (2017), directed by Frauke Havemann.

Keywords

Climate Change, Absurdist film, Minimalism, Apocalyptic

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture (2015). He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



***Weather House* (2017), dir. Frauke Havemann**

This *avant-garde* film seems to be a metaphor for our current world, in which we have become aware of climate change but seem unable or unwilling to address it in effective or rational ways. The characters of the film live in a house in an unnamed location, beset by strange and violent weather changes. Periodically, the action freezes and the time, temperature, and barometric pressure flash on the screen, signally a shift to excessive heat or cold. Rain comes and goes, and external nature scenes show the ground almost writhing in an uncomfortable fashion.

Weather House plays like minimalist cinema, with long shots with little action or dialogue. It also feels like an absurdist play, as the characters interact in superficial ways, seemingly unable to respond with strong emotion to anything and largely unaware of each other's existence. Sometimes a person drops dead on the floor, and the others may ignore this or seem unconcerned. When they do discuss a dead body, they dehumanize it by referring to the person as "it" and are only slightly concerned with removing it, rather unceremoniously. The dialogue that does exist has no coherent content, but signals a sense of apocalyptic foreboding: "The house won't hold." "Anytime now." "I can't stay here." When the characters do interact, it takes irrational forms, as

when a man saws off the legs of a table, or inexplicably strings wires throughout the house, to the consternation of at least some of the others. One character who never speaks appears to have wandered onto the set from the camera crew, as she carries a microphone on a boom and records the conversations to listen to them later; but she eats with them, and changes clothes with the weather, so also exists in the diegetic world of the film. Some characters appear or disappear inexplicably, usually without the others noticing; one man sits silent and stationary, even when another character slowly presses a knife into his arm. The only music is also diegetic, from a small radio that plays the same inane easy listening tune that is oddly out of sync with the disasters taking place in this world.

As a metaphor for climate change, the main point of the film seems to be not only that we have lost control of our world, but also that we are not responding to this situation in a rational fashion. The characters have no empathy for each other, no sense of why they are in this situation, and no intelligent plan to deal with it. They seem aware of the crisis only in a dim way, and if they ever register concern, it is only with the immediate consequences for themselves as individuals. But finally, we do not know why they do the things they do or why they are in the house. Are we also like these people, acting in irrational ways on our environment, with little concern for others or the future? Is this how the end comes, not with a bang but with a whimper? This minimalist apocalypse looks very different from *The Day after Tomorrow*, but in its own way it may be a more damning indictment of our indolence and lassitude. The absurdist comedy has an edge to it. If it is a cautionary fable, let us hope we learn from it.