HOME documentary - Earth's unsustainable energy and environmental situation - with critical review

Contributed by Greg Jalbert and Jan Lundberg
14 July 2009

The film HOME by Yann Arthus-Bertrand is a beautifully shot panorama of the Earth and the damage done to it by modern humanity. It includes a moving narration about the evolution of the Earth, nature, agriculture, humans, and the crises of habitat destruction, energy depletion, climate disruption, degradation...
of the environment, health, economic disparity, and more. They are well integrated in the film, but many assumptions in the script make this film hard to recommend unless accompanied by a reality check on energy and the value of traditional ways.

Statements such as "education is a privilege" treat upbringing and learning as if they are only modern phenomena. The same thinking produce the statement "The memories of thousands of years' scrabbling for food [as hunter gatherers] faded [with the agricultural revolution]." So-called primitive societies work less and have tighter families and community. HOME goes on to claim "For humanity, agriculture is a prerequisite of survival." What about how people survived before 6,000 years ago?

Fascinating statistics include "Half the population of the world tills the soil, over three quarters of them by hand." And one quarter of the world lives as all of us did 6,000 years ago with only the energy available from the sun and biomass of the area.

"A liter of oil produces as much energy as 100 pairs of hands in 24 hours."

"In the United States, only 3 million farmers are left. They produce enough grain to fee two billion people. But most of that feed is transformed, as in all industrialized countries.. for livestock or biofuels."

"Over the last century, three quarters of the varieties developed by farmers over thousands of years have been wiped out."

Thirteen thousand liters are required to produce one kilo of beef, while 100 liters of water are required for one kilo of potatoes.

Ninety-five percent of soy farms in the Amazon region, which has shrunk by 20% in the last 40 years, goes to Europe for livestock and poultry. So a forest is turned into meat.

But the narration reveals a lack of understanding of the implications of peak oil. Additionally, technology is romanticized, guaranteeing that the Earth's crisis will not be solved by those wedded to present concepts:

"This pocket of sunlight [fossil fuels] freed humans from their toil on the land. With oil began the era of humans who break free from the shackles of time."

The assumption is that energy extraction can be sustained, as in "Oil might run out; we can still extract oil from the tar sands of Canada." Not that the film makers wish to see that, but they are not aware of the inability of tar sands to satisfy

much demand when conventional oil extraction is already starting its plummet.

Helpful perspective:

"The concentration of carbon dioxide hasn't been so high for several hundred thousand years. Humanity has never lived in an atmosphere like this."

"Greenland's ice contains 20% of the fresh water of the whole planet. If it melts, sea levels will rise by nearly seven meters."

But:

"Everybody can prosper and earn a decent living... Let's be responsible consumers; think about what we buy..." These are outmoded concepts. The Earth has too many people for everyone to prosper. Instead of earning a decent living, we need to live decently. We must stop being consumers, and avoid buying by making and bartering what we need.

"All we have to do is cultivate the sun" to replace the energy used that is 80% from fossil fuels. -- Sounds like a nice thought, if you think we need so many appliances and believe they can somehow be manufactured for long. This film is part of the technofix lobby and the delusion of progress for civilization. The film makers have no concept of the limiting role oil plays in the technofix industries, nor how these technologies only produce electricity (and not nearly as efficiently as the cheap oil that is gone).

The chief sponsor of the Home movie is the PPR Group, which includes fashion-clothing companies employing a total of 80,000 people. The top management no doubt feel proud comfort for putting a nice feather in its cap. Unfortunately, this film is another case of people understanding the severity of the crisis and then turning it into an opportunity for perpetuating nearly the same status quo.

At best, good intentions can save some forests, cut back some on greenhouse gas emissions, but trends will not turn around until the capitalist model of growth is terminated for lack of energy and materials. Petrocollapse will take care of this. But after how much damage? This is why people need to be the change we need now, rather than waiting for governments and corporations (or some old-time revolution) to make things right -- they will never do it because of corruption by the greedy and predatory.

HOME: View the trailer for the film on YouTube on the Internet

The entire movie HOME (English with subtitles, 1 hour 33 minutes) by Yann Arthus-Bertrand is available for viewing on YouTube and the English version has been viewed by over 2 million people. There are versions in Spanish, French, German, Arabic, Russian and other languages.

HOME (English with subtitles)

HOME Project

http://www.youtube.com/user/homeproject

The film is available in many different languages.

HOME official website

http://www.home-2009.com

and goodplanet.org

The compelling and captivating film works partly because of the high-resolution cinematography used to present our high resolution global environment, documenting the wide time span of terrestrial evolution through to the present. Clearly explained is the urgent situation that we must resolve or our planet will suffer more deep catastrophic damages from climate and environmental disruption. We just wish there was less obsession with the renewable energy industries as "the answer."

The style of the film makes it quite educational for audiences of all ages. There's a vast number of local and global issues that must be resolved. This film shows us the interconnected dependency of these issues. Expect to see this film used in elementary school presentations all the way through universities, neighborhood gatherings, movie theaters, corporate presentations and more. The gravity and urgency of the global environmental quality of life crisis affects us all. So will false "solutions" along with the dismissal of ancient, proven ways of surviving and thriving.

In overview of the images near the end, where the "solutions" are presented, the solutions presented are technological and industrial in nature, reconstructing the power sources with wind, solar, geothermal, and wave energy, clean coal, and more jobs. But many of the details and challenges are left out, so it is up to the reader to learn more about the science and magnitudes of various problems and "solutions." It all must be accounted for in appropriate sustainable relationship to the reality of energy from petroleum.

Is our behavior controlled by industrial grids of electricity and transportation, resource usage, products, food availability?

Where is the promotion for behavioral change? For local agriculture? For vegetarian diets? Sometimes it is presented in HOME, but subtly, between the lines as implications or evocations.

The last lines put each of us squarely in the context of responsibility, although in chasing a Holy Grail of so-called clean energy: "We know that the solutions are there. We all have the power to change, so what are we waiting for?"

* * * * *