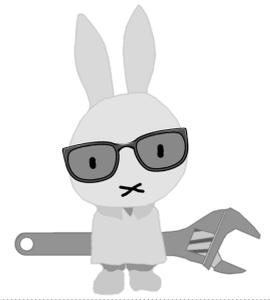


'Planet of the Humans': A (long-form) review of... *the reviews*.

I saw 'Planet of the Humans' when Michael Moore released it on YouTube: *The anticipated Cat.5 storm arrived right on time.*

Paul Mobbs, *The 'Meta-Blog'*, issue no.5, 1st May 2020



Posit: The moment the environmental mainstream ceases to have an impartial stance based on the public interest, but instead one mediated by money, that is the moment ordinary people will turn against it; and by association, the movement as a whole will have lost public support.

Note, if you see a reference such as "[1:17:49]", that is the time index (hour:minute:second) in 'Planet of the Humans' which the discussion at that point relates to. Click on that and the link and it will take you to that point in the film on YouTube – until mid-May when the film is no longer available. After that, use the time index to find the position manually.

To be honest, I chuckled right through

A new Michael Moore film... *what's not to like?*

Well, according to the reviews there's an awful lot not to like in this film. It has many people very excited, though perhaps not in the most rational of ways. Calls have already gone out for [it to be banned](#) (*I thought that's what the "other side" did?*).

Moore is actually on the fringe of this piece, as executive producer. The core of the film is presented and directed by Jeff Gibbs – though, from having read his book, I could see the work of producer Ozzy Zehner running through it like the lettering through a stick of Blackpool rock.

When I got the message that the film was up on YouTube – Moore [released it free](#) for *Earth Day* – I made time to watch it right away:

I chuckled, all the way through (except the animal fat rendering plant[1:21:29] which is pretty gross).

I've spent over twenty years working in this area of research; the core argument of my 2005 book, ['Energy Beyond Oil'](#), was pretty much equivalent to the underlying message of this film, though set in the context of the UK's energy economy.

To hear arguments I've been making for 20 years echoed back at me was surreal. At the same time though, I could also appreciate that Gibbs is pretty

much where I was 20 years ago, and so I could also appreciate the nuances and seeming contradictions that he didn't explore – or yet see the significance of (something echoed [in the review](#) by one of the film's 'experts', Richard Heinberg).

I could do a detailed review of the film here, loaded with the references to [more recent research](#) material which the film skipped over or should have looked at – *but that would be pointless.*

It's pointless as many people – pro- or anti-environmental – have made up their minds already, many without apparently seeing it.

What is more worthwhile to examine is the reaction to the film, as from that we can explore the common misunderstanding people have about renewable energy, not just the content of the film.

At the heart of the film is not a simply a critique of renewable energy, but also the quasi-religious nature of modern society's belief in technology, and how the environmentalism in particular has been caught-up in that. Almost everyone has missed that point. Instead, much of what is posted is based on pre-existing ['memes'](#); as, to a large extent, it is beliefs constructed through the stories modernity tells to itself which have led to our present difficulties.

'Specificity': *the quality of being specific*

If it's publicity you're after there's no such thing as a bad review; and if Michael Moore is anything then it's someone who understands the medium of the media – how to pitch material to get an impact.

Watching Moore's [interview on 'The Hill'](#), what I see is someone who appreciates not only an audience, but how to work that audience to amplify the perception that you want to create. I cannot help feeling the response to the film was not unintended.

There's a word I love: *'Specificity'*. The quality of being specific, clear, and exact. The one thing I see lacking in the many criticism of the film is 'exactness': Many complaints; little data; and rarely any specific reference to the content of the film.

As I listened to the film, in my mind I was logging not just what was said but also its context in the visuals. Like when a guy says the solar array at *Earth Day* (in 2015) would only “run a toaster”^[1:27:02].

My reckoning?: mono-crystalline silicon cells, 5 watts/cell; (6 x 12) 72 cells/panel, making the panels around 360 watts a piece; nine 4-panel strings, makes up a total of about 13,000 watts – which was ten times more than the estimate of 1,200 watts.

A lot of people have [picked that up](#) as one of the inaccuracies of the film. Thing is – *again being specific* – that guy talking toasters had nothing to do with the film, or probably the festival. When Gibbs did find the panel installer, he said that^[1:27:28] the concert was being run from a diesel generator; which, given its size, was probably rated at something like 50,000 to 100,000 watts – *four to eight times more than the solar array's capacity*.

The critics focus on the toaster while ignoring the big black diesel generator – from one of the sponsors of the event, *Caterpillar* – that, contrary to the organisers claims, was really running the show.

And given the film's focus on biomass, the use of a (claimed) biodiesel generator is still questionable.

Again what's significant, as I realised early on at the 'launch' of the [Chevy Volt car](#) (which took place around 2010/11) was that this film had been made over a very long period of time; at least a decade.

Critics have made much of the fact that the film is somewhat '[dated](#)'. *Fair complaint*.

Thing is though, the deals and partnerships between industry and the environment movement have been going on for years, pretty much unchanged. As a key part of the film's case that is a constant irrespective of the period we look at.

The critics also focus on the [energy technology](#) issue to the exclusion of the broader 'ecological' points made in the film, be that: The generation of radioactive wastes^[0:34:40] from [rare earth metals production](#); the depletion of non-energy natural resources^[0:34:44]; or why Al Gore signed^[1:17:49] a deal with a fund manager to promote green energy solutions to climate change before the release of his film, '*An Inconvenient Truth*'.

I've read many reviews of the film, and social media posts. I found that while various claims are made, few are willing to point and say, “*look here*”. Unless complaints reference the specific content of the film are they complaints? – *or are they just sound and fury that signify nothing?*

Much dragging of ideological baggage

Query: Do the much circulated reviews of the film review the content of the film; or, do the reviews seek to impose their own ideological take on the content of the film irrespective of that the film says?

That's an important distinction. If each side in the debate square-off over their usual debating points do any original arguments in the film get ignored?

I saw the film late on the 23rd April (UK time). Scanning around there were a few '[film](#)' reviews. Then I happened across three, more 'learned' ones from polar opposite viewpoints:

The first of those came from [Michael Shellenberger](#). For those who know the name the content of the review will not surprise. Starting out as an environmental academic a couple of decades ago, he has undergone a 'dexterous' shift into more corporate/political-friendly '[ecomodernist](#)' work.

In fact, you can see how fickle Shellenberger's grasp of thermodynamic reality is when [he writes](#):

“In truth, humankind has never been at risk of running out of energy. There has always been enough fossil fuels to power human civilization for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, and nuclear energy is effectively infinite.”

On quite a few occasions over the last few days I've seen various comments along the lines of,

“I haven't seen the film, but if Shellenberger is impressed it must be really bad.”

Let's be clear, Shellenberger doesn't like the film. In [his Forbes piece](#) he's generally poking fun at it:

“We have to have our ability to consume reigned in,” says a well-coiffed environmental leader.

“Without some major die-off of the human population there is no turning back,” says a scientist.

What Shellenberger likes about the film is that it makes mainstream environmentalists painfully unhappy; from which he takes a sadistic pleasure.

Thing is though, he actually suffers from the same flawed, perhaps willingly ignorant beliefs as many of the people he criticises – like the idea that energy can [keep flowing forever](#) (in his case, based on a [demonstrably flawed](#) belief in [uranium supply](#)).

What really concerns me is that so many people should amplify his status by framing their opinions in relation to his polemic rhetoric, rather than forming their own opinion from watching it themselves.

Which leads me to the second review: Josh Fox, maker of the 2010 film on fracking, '[Gasland](#)'.

He tweeted out [a brief note](#) of his thoughts on the film. This was followed-up two days later [with a letter](#) which he encouraged scientists and others to sign, to express objection to Gibbs' film – expanded it into an article for [The Nation](#) a week later.

The letter was clearly written with emotion, exclaiming disappointment about the seeming fall of his mentor, Moore, to “*blatantly untrue fossil fuel industry talking points*”.

The letter was not specific. It contained few references to the content of the film, but instead talked a lot about what other people said we should be doing about climate change without referencing that in the context of the message of the film.

Let's take one key statement he picks upon:

“One of the most dangerous things right now is the illusion that alternative technologies, like wind and solar, are somehow different than fossil fuels... You would have been better off just burning the fossil fuels in the first place, instead of playing pretend.”

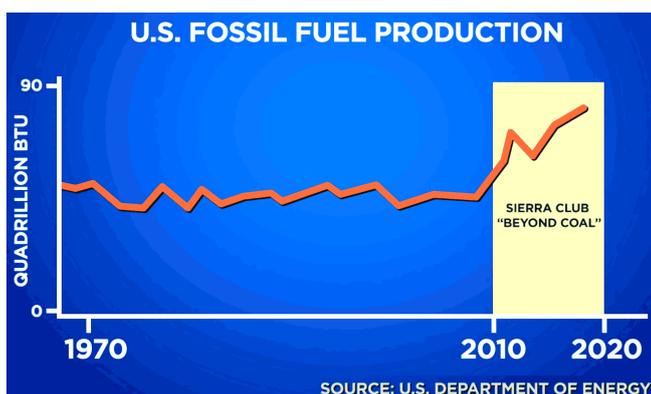
The “...” in there is significant, representing not a few words in a sentence, but a jump of about 8½ minutes in the film's presentation of the issues.

The first part of the quote[0:24:27] is Ozzy Zehner introducing his viewpoint.

What happens then, during the “...”, is: An explanation of how solar cells are made; why as coal plants close they are being replaced by even bigger gas-fired plants – *primarily being run on the fracked gas Josh Fox objects to*.

Then, significantly, Zehner sets context for the next statement after the “...”[0:27:39]:

“When Michael Brune stands up and talk about clean energy he's using solar cells and wind turbines... When Michael Bloomberg stands up and talks about clean energy he's talking about natural gas... The Sierra Club's [clean coal campaign](#) coincides with one of the largest increases in fossil fuel production that we've ever pulled off, most of that



being natural gas.” (see screenshot of graph)

Even then we're not finished with the ellipsis.

Following on from Zehner's summary Gibbs follows-on in voice-over saying[0:28:05]:

“Ozzy's assertion that renewables were not replacing fossil fuels, if true, would up-end all of our assumptions about green energy and what was going to save us. What would happen if I asked the same question to industry insiders?”

Then we see lots of industry talking heads as some sort of sales convention talking about the problems of intermittency, the need for power storage, and without that the need for wind and solar plants to be back-up by fossil-fuelled capacity.

At this point we also see an industry salesman, not Gibbs or Zehner, saying that[0:30:52], *“Some solar panels are built to last only ten years, so it's not like you get this magic free energy, right.”* (my emphasis on the prefix 'some', which appears to be omitted when I see line this quoted in many reviews).

Now they whisk-off to the [Ivanpah Solar Array](#), which burns natural gas for some hours every day in order to allow it to run[0:31:10].

So now, finally we get to the end of Josh Fox's ellipsis: Against the backdrop of a rise in US fossil fuel production which has vastly outstripped increases in renewable energy; the nationwide closure of coal plants which has led to a rash of bigger (fracked) gas plants, with (which the film misses) an operational life-span of at least 30-40 years; the fact that solar and wind are being backed-up by those same gas plants; and while talking about the partly gas-fuelled Ivanpah solar plant, which is in the background at that moment – Zehner says[0:32:17]:

“The whole thing is built with fossil fuelled infrastructure, from the concrete, to the steel, to the mirrors, to the backing on the mirrors. The sun is renewable, but the solar arrays are not... The problem with all of these materials is that it takes an incredible amount of energy to mine and process all of the materials that go into building something like this. You use more fossil fuels to do this than the benefit you're getting from it. You would have been better off just burning the fossil fuels in the first place instead of playing pretend.”

After the ellipsis Zehner was not talking about *all* renewables; or about wind or solar PV; he was referring to the natural gas-burning Ivanpah “solar” plant in the background of the shot at that moment.

As the use of the ellipsis goes Josh Fox didn't split hairs with that one, he was splitting tree trunks.

It would be possible to do a similar treatment to the other points Josh Fox makes in his letter. Again, that's not the issue. The issue is that Fox picks just a few points, even then taken out of context, rather than commenting on the core thesis of the film.

It's not that renewable energy sources "*don't work*"; it's that there is an incompatibility between renewable technologies, and the technological constraints within which they are expected to function within an economy designed for dense, 'always on' fossil fuels. It's an impossible situation.

Thirdly, on 22nd April Bill McKibben [published his response](#) to the points made in the film.

To be fair, given how many years they had to make it, they did rather make a mess of their linkage of McKibben to biomass. He's been writing against its large-scale use [since 2016](#) – however equivocating the approach of other 'environmental' groups and organisations may be on that issue.

More generally though the reason I find McKibben's response to be different and separate from Josh Fox's is because it's far more controlled, and analytic. Fox's letter has a raw, emotional honesty; I find McKibben's statement to be carefully steering away from certain topics, while lamenting the vicissitudes of being an ecological 'social influencer'.

At the top of everyone's critique-list is, of course, 'money'; in relation to which McKibben states:

"As for taking corporate money, I've actually never taken a penny in pay from 350.org, or from any other environmental group. Instead, I've donated hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years in honoraria and prizes. And 350.org hasn't taken corporate money."

This flags up an immediate problem: *What is "corporate" money?* Payment for services rendered, or does it include travel expenses and lunch?

In the film McKibben talks vaguely about donations. I genuinely think he's the sort of guy who doesn't like to deal with that sort of thing and leaves it to others with an aptitude for it (I freely admit that I find finance issues a major drag too).

Does that mean he doesn't know, or he has never asked? In the film, when pressed by a news interviewer [\[1:24:41\]](#) he says [\[1:24:57\]](#):

"The err, I'm trying to think who the biggest funders are. There's a foundation based in Sweden, it's

called the Rasmussen Foundation, which I think has been our biggest funder."

The [Rasmussen Foundation](#) was founded by a Danish glass-making family in 1991. As with most of the large funders and foundations – such as [Rockefeller](#), also mentioned in the interview – while not coming direct from the company's bank account, it's still wealth derived from economic activity.

That's the real issue here: Billionaires are not something which 'naturally exist' in the environment.

They are created by the forces of concentrated capital and economic power – ever since the first 'private citizen' billionaires of the modern era, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford, all of whose wealth was founded off the back of the '[Age of Oil](#)'.

In a sense, they are symbolic of the forces which are destroying the planet. And while I don't doubt that as individuals many billionaires might be committed to their causes, the very fact of their status negates any hope of breaking those forces.

For example, according to [a 2017 study](#) by Oxfam, eight men now own the same amount of wealth of the poorest half of the world's population.

Can billionaires exist in a sustainable society?; or are they in fact a systemic block [\[1:10:22\]](#), not a solution, to achieving the goal of sustainability?

When it comes to the climate it's easy to say, "*it's the fossil fuels, stupid*" – especially if that's what the people paying for lunch and the venue want to hear from you. In reality the systems of trade, commerce, and the economic structures which underpin fossil fuel use, do not exist in isolation from the people who benefit most from that system [\[0:44:05\]](#).

In his reply McKibben deals fairly with biomass, and he skirts around money, but what he leaves silent is the justification for spending time with billionaires and their fund manager finance gurus.

It's McKibben's decision as to whether he believes he should be there or not, and the rationale for the perceived benefits of doing that; and 350.org as a group should also have a clear position – I would presume from internal strategy discussions – as to the measurable benefits of that strategy.

McKibben's reply does not constitute a reasoned answer as to why working with billionaires produces any measurable benefit for the environment – as opposed to the charge from Gibbs [\[1:10:00\]](#), which is that it has facilitated the take-over of the ecological agenda [\[1:23:09\]](#) by finance and capital.

'Cry havoc!, & let slip the dogs of Facebook'

Josh Fox has a big on-line following... [350.org](#) is founded on a big on-line community... many people are in lockdown... *'and presently, this particular part of the planet was plunged into a panorama of public pressure and pleasure through pain'*. (John Cooper-Clarke)

By Friday the 24th those communities had started to share the reviews, with many, like Josh Fox, declaring Moore's transition to pro-nuclear climate-denier to be something akin to the proverbial 'Fall'.

As with Shellenberger, supporters referenced blogs by anti-climate/pro-ecocide neocons on [both sides of the pond](#) as a justification for their condemnation of the film; some dismissed the content as dating back to the ['climate denial wonder years'](#); some simply [dismissed it](#); while others [didn't want to](#) review it, but felt they had to anyway.

Things started to get surreal on the when the film's own distributor, *Films for Action*, told Josh Fox they were going to withdraw it from their site, then decided that might give it more publicity and so encourage others to condemn it instead – which of course gave it even more publicity anyway!

[The Guardian](#) ran a story about the *"call for 'dangerous' Michael Moore film to be taken down"*, citing the *Films for Action* [statement](#) that it was, *"inaccurate, misleading and designed to depress you into doing nothing"*. That statement continued on to say:

- ◆ *"Look up the environmental footprint of a modern wind turbine, or modern solar panel, and you will find that the embodied energy and emissions are offset within a year"* – well actually, no, depending on the size, and whether it's on- or off-shore, those figures cluster around the [two to five year](#) mark, and there's a lot of uncertainty in that data;
- ◆ *"Minerals that are mined should have cleaner footprints for sure, and we can demand that manufacturers buy from proper sources when they don't"* – again, not true, because as metal resource quality falls, as global [reserves deplete](#), the energy and pollution [involved in making](#) them rises, and some [may triple](#) over the next decade or so;
- ◆ *"An electric car I will buy when I need a new car. It will be much more recyclable than my conventional car, and the batteries when they wear out will be used to make new batteries"* – well, that's a biggie, given an expert panel in the UK recently told the government that the resource impacts of introducing electric cars would be, ['challenging'](#).

Films for Action, it appeared, we're obviously not beyond a little 'misinformation' themselves.

More precisely, they are repeating are the consumer messages that, according to Gibbs[0:44:05] in his film, are propagated because people have been given a delusional expectations[0:23:40] for change.

My concern was that people were copying the messages they had received from above, not viewing the film and discussing what it actually said.

Early on in the film Gibbs states[0:20:38]:

"I'm in a strange position. I'm against our addiction to fossil fuels, and have long been a fan of green energy. But everywhere I encountered green energy it wasn't what it seemed."

If you listen carefully you'll find that while not being in the "industrial green" camp, Gibbs is not a climate denier, and nuclear never gets a consideration. *So, as he outlines, who speaks for him?*

Clearly [Vandana Shiva](#) does. Her piece in the film demonstrates[1:08:56] that there are major environmental figures whose positions are similar to Gibbs.

Likewise, many reviews have said how bad it is to attack senior figures in the environment movement. I wonder if any of those people had read [Naomi Klein's](#) book, *'This Changes Everything'* (2014), where she says (p.195, UK hardback edition):

"The Nature Conservancy has been in the oil and gas business for a decade and half. That this could happen in the age of climate change points to a painful reality behind the environmental movement's catastrophic failure to effectively battle the economic interests behind our soaring emissions: large parts of the movement aren't actually fighting those interests – they have merged with them."

"They have merged with them" ... strange, I can't help feeling I've heard that somewhere[1:23:09].

The view from 'over here'

The problem with viewing this eco-film in Britain is that, like so many others, it reflects an awful lot of American values and sensibilities. A lot of the trends it outlines [are same though](#). That's because, in an age of transnational capital, the ideology behind those trends has metastasised across the globe.

['Consumerism'](#) is an economic framework to encourage [psychological](#) or [cultural dependency](#) upon products, through: brand identity; product monopolies; or, by making people believe that alternatives to the product, especially 'own-made', are inferior.

How did we get here? Is it about selling-out?

I think we should look to a famous quote from [Tony Benn](#) from the early 1980s, when neoconservatism took hold in Britain under Margaret Thatcher:

"If the Labour Party could be bullied or persuaded to denounce its Marxists, the media – having tasted blood – would demand that it expel its socialists and form a harmless alternative to The Conservatives, which would be allowed to take office now and again when The Conservatives fell out of favour with the public. Thus British capitalism would be made safe."

In which case, 15 years later, *what was Blair?*

At the end of the 1980s the Green Party in Britain was split between: the "realos" (realists); and "fundos" (fundamentalists). The grounds for their conflict – whether consumerism and industrial society could be made 'green', or must we abandon them.

The 'realos' won. Today you won't hear Greens openly debate the '[end of industrial society](#)', or [ending economic growth](#) (though renamed '[degrowth](#)', it's still as toxic an issue to mainstream Greens), or '[deep ecology](#)' in a public forum.

From a British perspective, as far as I'm concerned the environment movement wasn't sold-out by Al Gore; but by affluence, in the form of the easy credit and the cheap goods of the 1990s boom.

The problem with corporate influence has always been not that it rules, but that it is *selective*: It does not *dictate*, but by supporting one organisation over another a kind of '*survival of the compliant*' takes place; mediating who gets access to resources, or the media, and ultimately the corridors of power.

If the debate over '*Planet of the Humans*' demonstrates anything, it is just how detached and deluded mainstream environmentalism has become.

Let's take the example of Germany:

For the purposes of this discussion I am going to give a special "*surrealism in statistics award*" to a [second review](#) from the *Films for Action* site:

"What the movie showed to back up this claim was a pie chart showing, not German electricity sources, but German energy sources. This includes natural gas used for heating buildings, petroleum products used for transportation, and other industrial uses of energy. Wind may only account for a small percentage of Germany's overall energy needs, but it produces nearly 30% of its electricity, and that is important."

You may have had to read that twice; *I did*. The first time I couldn't believe they said that.

When countries report to the [UNFCCC/IPCC](#) they don't just send details about what they're doing with electricity. They send details of all energy and non-energy greenhouse gas emissions. *Everything*.

It is irrelevant what proportion of a country's electricity supply is renewable. Globally on average 20% to 30% of energy consumed is in the form of electricity. Most Western consumers, however, believe that it must be far more significant than that because of the central role – albeit minor in energy terms – [power plays](#) in affluent societies.

What threw me in that paragraph was the level of self-delusion required to write it – and expect others to consider it valid. Unfortunately, I've seen similar things written about the film across social media, expressing similar ideas. This makes me question amidst the howls of anguish which delight Michael Shellenberger and his clan, not how many people are watching the film but how many are listening.

In a funny way, the film foretold its own reception:

In part, that was Ozzy Zehner saying that, "*The funny thing is when you criticise solar plants like this you're accused of working for the Koch Brothers*";

The other, the beautiful exposition of [Lacanian psychoanalysis](#) by Sheldon Solomon – *my favourite 2½ minutes of the entire film*[\[0:49:20\]](#):

"Then the question is that what happens when you bump into people who don't share those beliefs? Whether you know it or not, that's undermining the confidence with which you subscribe to your own views, and exposing you to the very anxieties which those beliefs were constructed to eradicate in the first place."

Gibbs does not fit into any of the established 'camps' in the mainstream energy and environment debate. He's lambasted in equal measure by both [orthodox economists](#) and the [liberal media](#). That's not necessarily because he's wrong. It's that he's asking them to consider very scary questions, for which they have no will to listen to the arguments.

Whichever side tries to cast this debate for or against one position or another, all seemingly miss what Gibbs' position truly is – again expressed early on in the film[\[0:17:06\]](#):

"They were impressive machines, but is it possible for machines made by industrial civilisation, to save us from industrial civilisation?"

Environmentalism has become a debate about the vicissitudes of affluence, not the state of the planet and our stake in that

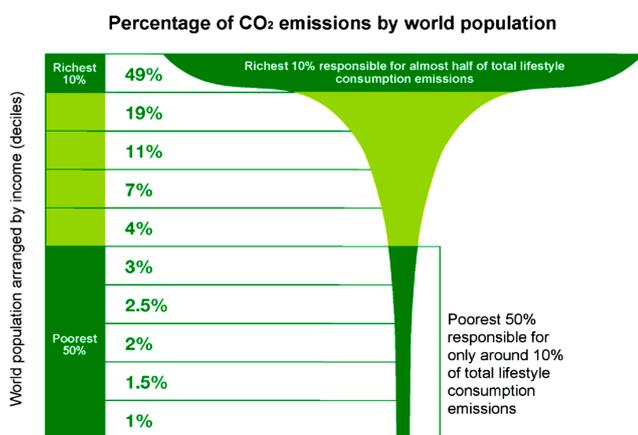
OK, was there anything in the film I disliked?

Yes; the discussion of population.

It's not because it's necessarily wrong, but the way the debate was carried out is not based around the available statistics we have about global population, [consumption](#), and the weight of responsibility for ecological damage across the global population.

That doesn't surprise me in the least.

Having that discussion involves an analysis of [material consumption](#) and [its effects](#), and the stark inequalities within the levels of consumption and [emissions](#) across the world:



The above graph comes from a [2015 Oxfam report](#) on 'extreme carbon inequality', which updates work done by the UN Development Programme's 'Human Development Report' in 1992.

What it shows, in terms of individual [supply chain impacts](#) rather than [national emissions data](#), is that 10% of the people on the planet – *not coincidentally, the most affluent* – emit half of the carbon pollution; the bottom 50% of the global population – *the poorest* – emit only one-tenth.

The reality of that, to modify that well-worn political phrase is, "it's affluence, stupid". If we got the *top 20% alone* to reduce their emissions to the global median, climate change would be "solved" (though how we choose to do that could make other global ecological limits [\[0:44:05\]](#) even worse).

Of course middle class, affluent consumers by-and-large refuse to see this connection because that's a price they cannot consciously comprehend, without (as Sheldon Solomon outlines [\[0:49:20\]](#) in the film) extreme psychological discomfort.

For example, electric cars. The idea that we can replace fossil-fuelled with electric vehicles isn't thrown into doubt due to [technical limitations](#); we self-evidently can build them. The issue is the demand for mineral resources to replace all 1.2 billion cars used today is probably [beyond the capacity](#) of the Earth's [remaining resources](#) to deliver. Hence 'action' in this case isn't an argument over the adoption of electric cars; it's an argument about eliminating most of the demand for the private car.

After trying to have that discussion for many years now, environmentalists refuse to go there because it necessitates a discussion about depletion and lifestyle – and as outlined earlier in relation to the dominance of the 'realos' in the Green Party, they do not discuss the '[Limits to Growth](#)'.

It doesn't matter if you are for or against renewable energy; neither camp will have a serious debate about affluence and ecological destruction.

The factual reality is that the perceptions of our effect upon the planet – and thus how we might change it – are not related to [the physical profile](#) of that consumption. Consumerism does not invite people to 'look under the bonnet' of what allows it to take place.

Consequently, when it comes to devising solutions to that, the public are not only clueless about the [most effective means](#) of reducing their carbon footprint, any discussion must always satisfy the *a priori* condition of maintaining their affluent lifestyle.

The evidential reality is, we need to consume far less; *full stop*. Step one, that [necessitates abandoning](#) the entire concept of [economic growth](#) – *just as the commentators outlined in the film*.

In [an interview](#) about the film on the US political site, *The Hill*, Ozzy Zehner stated a [self-evident truth](#) about the environment movement's myopia regarding affluence and consumption:

"Just this brief virus period in one week has done more than the environmental movement has done in the last thirty years to reduce consumption, and so that should give us the first hint that we've been on the wrong track and need to switch."

Over the 250-year history of carbon emissions there is a [correlation between](#) economic growth and increases in emissions and resource consumption, and recessions and decreases in emissions. Not only do the critics of the film not internalise that argument from the film, *they wilfully ignore it*.

In conclusion... *where I came in*

If this film has one grave error then it is that it believes that the environment movement is 'led' by just a few figures – like Bill McKibben or Al Gore – or represented by just a few organisation with large offices – like the *Sierra Club* or *350.org*.

That's not the reality when you're out working with communities on their problems.

That is the perception, however, maintained by the mass media due to their need to pigeon-hole stories for their audience to easily assimilate. In an interview, if X is a banker and Y is someone from Friends of the Earth, then people already know pretty much what is going to be said – and pretty much everything that follows is just [muzak](#) that people need exercise little rational thought over.

A small piece of me is feeling immense gratification at the moment due to Jeff Gibbs – though it's not only to do with the energy issue.

Twenty to thirty ago I worked with, or worked for on short contracts, most of the mainstream environmental campaign groups in Britain. I got to know them well, and though the distance between us has grown over the last two decades I still number a few within those groups 'friends'.

From 1994 to 1998 I was on the Board of Friends of the Earth. I left, despite requests to stay, because at the time they were proposing to accept money from a wind power company. I opposed it, but the senior management team were moving heaven and heating Earth to make it happen.

The problem is though, out in the real world, outside the metropolitan offices of the major campaign groups and their highly salaried staff, those preconceptions can be a millstone around the necks of environmentalists trying to make change at the local level – outside of that "third sector" bubble.

If billionaires are 'buying the movement' it's not the people or the offices they are buying, it's their

[media access](#) – it's the 'muzak', not the organisation. Just as corporates buy the media access of celebrities, or the [political access](#) of politicians, lobbyists '[buy access](#)' to the audience the environmental mainstream holds.

More fundamentally, for thirty years I have objected to the ecological debate being reduced to one of 'green consumerism' because, put simply, what if you are not affluent enough to consume?

If you look at the ecological debate today it is one based around affluent, middle class values because they are the people who have the economic freedom to 'choose'. In many ways it has reduced itself to a form of [virtue signalling](#); or, as [Thorstein Veblen](#) outline over a century ago, '[conspicuous consumption](#)'. There is little evidence that makes [the footprint](#) of their consumption any better because they are still consuming 'more' than the poor.

The poor do not have that freedom; they have to make do with whatever they can get, irrespective of whether it's 'green' or not. Does that make them bad? *No!* That's because many poor people [already](#) have less of an ecological footprint than many affluent green consumers, precisely because they do not comparatively consume much at all.

In that sense the environment movement isn't doing anything 'wrong', certainly nothing worse than most political parties, social media influencers, and the entire public relations industry. If leading politicians [take cash](#) to represent views of groups other than their electors, why shouldn't eco-groups get the same for 'helping' the cause with cash?

I opposed Friends of the Earth taking money from corporates back then not because 'our enemies' would use that action against us; but because 'our friends' would, if push come to shove, use that action as a reason to distrust what the group was saying to them. For me '*Planet of the Humans*', and the vociferous response to it, vindicates that stance.

The reason that corporate largesses and 'mutual grooming' with billionaires has done such damage to the movement over the last two decades is quite simple:

When you're in a community faced with a development they feel threatens their well-being – be that a village in Wales next to a windfarm, or the Guarani-Kaiowá community evicted from their ancestral lands to grow sugar for ethanol – the moment the environmental mainstream ceases to have an impartial stance based on the public interest, but instead one mediated by money, that is the moment ordinary people will turn against it; and by association, the movement as a whole will have lost public support.