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400 Parts Per Million: An Eco-Political Music Video

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400 Parts Per Million: An Eco-Political Music Video

Abstract

400 ppm is an eco-political music video which encapsulates climate crisis and climate justice in three minutes flat. It is an intervention in popular political ecology/economy, aimed at those who are uneasy with the increasingly obvious deterioration of the living systems of which we are an inextricable part.

Keywords

Climate Change, Eco-Politics, Environmental Politics

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400 ppm

Link to 400 ppm Music Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4_AfzUXLSU

In January 2015, scientists recorded atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide above 400 parts per million on a regular basis – the first time such a level had been detected so early in the calendar year. It is well established that levels of CO₂ above 350 (already well above the preindustrial norm of 275 ppm) spur global warming. We are now experiencing the effects: extreme weather, droughts, rising sea levels, thawing permafrost, etc. Levels above 450 will most likely put the planet on an inescapable course toward catastrophic climate change.

400 ppm is an eco-political music video, which encapsulates climate crisis and climate justice in three minutes flat. It is an intervention in popular political ecology/economy, aimed at those who are uneasy with the increasingly obvious deterioration of the living systems of which we are an inextricable part.

The song begins from basic observations – symptoms of the crisis – and then shifts to the ideological problem of denial, softened in recent years by massive Corporate Social Responsibility advertising and complemented by the emergence of ‘silver-bullet’ geo-engineering schemes. At the song’s midpoint, its bridge identifies the structural drivers of the crisis: carboniferous capitalism, and the contradiction between compounding capital accumulation and the principle of homeostasis which governs the biosphere. The next verse underlines that point and invokes, with the wheel of fortune, a financialized casino-capitalism inured to its material ‘externalities’. Wes Carroll’s spirited guitar solo is accompanied by images from Canada’s notorious Tar Sands of bitumen extraction and what it leaves behind. But at this point the video begins to arc toward hope, with footage from the Tar Sands Healing Walk (featuring Cree activist and writer Clayton Thomas-Muller) – an annual event since 2010 bringing together Indigenous activists, environmentalists and others. The last verse gestures toward a just transition – a power shift – to a post-capitalist future that combines global justice and solidarity with ecological stewardship, and that abandons the consumer-capitalist logic of always having more, in favour of *buen vivir*: ‘living well’. To get there, we had better start healing what Karl Marx called the metabolic rift between capitalist extractivism / accumulation and the conditions for a vital ecosystem. Mass popular struggle, building on but going beyond the September 2014 People’s Climate March (the final image), is a necessary condition for such a radical remaking of our world.

Lyrics

400 parts per million

The oceans keep rising and the weather's getting more extreme
Africa is sizzling and the polar caps are losing their sheen
400 parts per million and the future's looking hungry and lean

It's hard to talk about it; soft denial's now the status quo
A techno-silver bullet nicely placed will let our footprint grow
400 ppm – we should have quit this scene a long time
ago

Pipe dreams, trading schemes, bitumen shunted downstream – you know that it's a
frackin' crime
Carbon capture clean coal, drilling at the North Pole – they're forcing endless growth
upon a finite planet

It takes a lot of energy to make the wheel of fortune turn
And at the rate the wheel is spinning won't be long before the whole place burns
400 parts per million, that's a nasty little lesson to learn

If we don't want false solutions then we need to make a power shift
Convert the rule of capital to eco-networks fueled by gifts
400 ppm – it's time to heal the metabolic rift.