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Alternative Freedom
Directed by Twila and Shaun

Review by Gena Hymowech

In Twila and Shaun's poorly-executed new documentary "Alternative Freedom," Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Foundation, says of commercially-driven software: "It's like a car that you can't buy. You can only rent it, and the hood is welded shut with a lock that only the manufacturer can open." Stallman is talking here about how copyright law limits what users can do with non-free software. According to "Alternative Freedom," copyrights, which can also be applied to published articles, Xboxes, and digital music, are damaging our creativity, our progress, and, most importantly, our freedom.

If you haven't been following the subject in the news, don't worry. "Alternative Freedom" can fill you in on all you've missed: We learn how Stallman has been trying to work around these copyright laws; why a publisher refused to release MIT grad Andrew Huang's book about Xboxes; how non-profit organization Creative Commons is working to change the perception of the copyright; and why DJ Danger Mouse received a cease-and-desist letter from EMI for producing a song.

Though "Alternative Freedom" raises some interesting questions about the rights copyright owners and users have, it ultimately falls short of living up to its premise. The movie has a cheap look and a confusing narrative that gets in the way of its message. Co-directors Twila and Shaun apparently didn't think to contact anyone from the opposing side, so as a result, we feel like we're not getting the full story. (And we probably aren't.) The film goes overboard at times as well. (We understand how serious the situation is; we don't need to see footage of a nuclear bomb attack.) The editing is atrocious. (When one of your subjects starts talking about the movie "Soul Man," it's time to shut off your camera.) Worst of all, the movie is incredibly boring. "Alternative Freedom" might have worked as a PBS special, but as a film, it fails. And that's really a shame, considering the importance of its subject matter.



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