



2040 Review hope for the future?

When you ask someone to think about the impact of global warming, there's a high chance that melting ice will come up in the conversation. Last week, my friends and I watched a programme on TV about this very topic. The programme reported how a new study has claimed that polar bears will be wiped out by the end of the century. A clip showed these beautiful animals struggling to find food, and the presenter, moved to tears, asked a scientist to explain why polar bears were in such trouble and asked her what people could do to help. It was a difficult watch and one of my friends asked if she could turn the TV off. But, whilst it is natural that we would want to shield ourselves from the dire state of the environment, it is imperative we face up to the situation if we are to make any headway in addressing the problem.

Warnings about the effects of climate change are becoming harder to ignore. According to media reports, the situation is bleak. It is now believed that the polar ice caps are melting six times faster than in the 1990s. At a recent environmental conference, international scientists once again insisted that governments take urgent steps to address this potential catastrophe. However, although many companies have promised to reduce emissions, and many people want to do what they can, the truth is that many people feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and are left wondering what possible difference their actions can make. For writer-director Damon Gameau, this feeling of paralysis was the catalyst for a new film, *2040*, in which he encourages us to question this mindset. Gameau claims that the film is 'an exercise in fact-based dreaming' and that his intention is to present a vision of a different future – one in which people live in greater harmony with nature. For those who are daunted by this seemingly ambiguous language, don't be put off. In the film, Gameau focuses on the solutions to environmental problems, and inventions and initiatives in renewable energy, zero-emission transport, and regenerative agriculture that already exist, but which have not yet been exploited to their full potential.

At the beginning of the movie, he introduces us to his four-year-old daughter, Velvet, and explains that concern for her future in a 'rapidly deteriorating environment' is the motive behind his research. In a projection of the year 2040, a now-adult Velvet glares accusingly into the camera. 'What were you guys *thinking?*' she demands, incredulous that the older generation could ever have accepted trade practices that were so detrimental to the environment. Later, we see Gameau sitting on a plane that he describes as 'spewing out carbon'. In one review I read, the critic accused Gameau of being a hypocrite for travelling this way, and criticised him for not using alternative means of transport. Gameau himself admits to hypocrisy, but reminds us that he has no choice, since our entire system is built on fossil fuels. In this, he is acknowledging that change cannot happen overnight.

During the course of the film, Gameau visits a village in Bangladesh where for many years the inhabitants relied on kerosene as their primary energy source. But the installation of solar panels and solar boxes has meant that these villagers can now share power through a micro-grid. That this has brought about great transformation in their lives is obvious. Gameau takes us on a walk around the village at night – where lights powered by the grid mean that people can now gather safely and watch sport on television for the first time. Moreover, the sharing of power has enabled the village to become self-sufficient and not dependent on electricity suppliers.

Gameau also visits a research centre in Massachusetts, where scientists are looking at how underwater seaweed forests could be used to absorb carbon, as well as being a potential food source and biofuel. He also stops by in Los Angeles, and presents some thought-provoking ideas about how the motorways that are constantly jammed might one day be given over as space for trees and other vegetation. Gameau points out the foolishness of personal car ownership, and envisions a day when people will summon a driverless car only when they need one. Whether he is specifically referring to the US, it's hard to tell, but 2040 seems rather premature as a cutoff point for American drivers to give up their vehicles.

As with his earlier work, *That Sugar Film*, Gameau makes extensive use of computer graphics and humour in conveying his message. Vox pops from children not only express the desire for 'more trees', but also 'chocolate rain'. Such moments of light-heartedness are welcome, and make a refreshing change from the doom-and-gloom documentaries that dominate the Internet.

For me, Gameau's film presents an alternative view of the future that gives us hope instead of filling us with fear. If you are someone who is concerned about the future of the planet, and wants to learn more about what we can all do, then I recommend you see this encouraging and positive film.