
2040: a solutions narrative

DAMON GAMEAU

ABSTRACT Aware of the complexity of the ecological dilemmas his young daughter would have to face in the future, Damon Gameau made a documentary that was an experiment in using solutions as a motivator and an experiment in trying to kick-start the public's imagination. In this article, he discusses the film and the actions that have stemmed from it, including the 2040 Regeneration project. He sees education as central to this cause.

As the father of a two-year-old daughter, I often felt overwhelmed by the constant torrent of dystopian stories about our collective future. As she got older, how was I going to communicate the complexity of all the ecological dilemmas she would have to face? I decided to make a documentary and write a book for her and others of her generation. I wanted to get an in-depth understanding of the predicament we are in but also wanted to be able to tell my daughter about the solutions that might exist. The result is the 2040 Regeneration project, which is a visual letter to my daughter showing her what the world could be like in 2040 if the solutions I discovered were widely implemented today.

A solutions narrative around our environmental concerns has been severely under-represented. Early on in my research, I spoke to an environmental psychologist, Renee Lertzman. She told me that when we only hear information that comes with a charge of fear, dread or anxiety, it can shut down the parts of our brain where we problem-solve and think creatively. We can experience paralysis and disengage from the subject. I realized that this may be happening to a huge number of people around the world when it comes to our environment.

'To be truly radical', said the novelist and academic Raymond Williams (1988), 'is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing'. And so began a four-year process of making *2040*. It was an experiment in using solutions as a motivator and an experiment in trying to kick-start the public's imagination. I called the film an exercise in 'fact-based dreaming'.

And what started out as a film about climate change actually ended up being a story about the regeneration of our soils, our oceans, our ecosystems and our communities.

Since making the film, I have implemented many changes in my own life. I've switched my search engine to a browser called Ecosia, which uses the profits generated to plant trees. My family has a Subpod composting system, because if food waste was a country, it would be the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases. We sold our car and bought a second-hand electric car that charges from our rooftop solar, and I've got an electric bike that I ride around too.

To help others make some changes, we set up an Impact campaign off the back of the film. People can go to our website and 'activate their plan'. It means you are given actions that resonate with you personally and ones you are passionate about. Research says that people are more likely to stay engaged if they connect with their action instead of just being offered prescriptive actions like 'eat less meat' or 'ride to work'.

It has been wonderful to see the engagement of these actions, and it speaks volumes to the psychology of using solutions to motivate people. Many of the solutions depicted in the film have now been brought to life via our online 2040 Regeneration community. We have raised a million dollars to bring small-scale 'micro-grid' technology to Australia; we have crowdfunded the first seaweed platform in Tasmania; farmers have signed up to 'Carbon8', which provides them with income for putting carbon into their soil; and perhaps most promising is the 21,000 teachers who have downloaded our free lesson plans and shared the concepts of the film with an estimated 940,000 students across Australia. Educating our children and giving them powerful solutions to focus on is perhaps the best weapon we have. If they value nature and understand its importance to our own well-being, then they are more likely to fight for it and ensure its regeneration.

What has become clear in the 10 months since the film's release is that people are sick of feeling overwhelmed and frustrated by the lack of leadership in this space, and are ready to channel all that energy into direct action. We just need to keep providing them with more opportunities to engage.

I was lucky enough to be in the room at the recent United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York when Greta Thunberg threw down her challenge to world leaders. It sent a ripple wave through the whole room, and most discussions for the rest of the week were influenced by the urgency she conveyed. But urgency is the why; solutions are the how. The two need to be equally represented.

I find legitimate hope when meeting or listening to the wave of passionate activists who are falling in behind Greta Thunberg. Many of the emerging climate leaders are young women and men (predominantly women) who are articulate on the subject and are driven by a ferocious and unwavering purpose. But I also find hope away from the bright glare of the mainstream media spotlight. Lurking in the shadows are millions of engaged people who are

rolling up their sleeves and trying to solve this crisis. We need to shift the spotlight onto them and inspire more people to join the cause of regenerating our living systems.

By 2040, I'd like to see many of the solutions I've discovered rapidly upscaled. I'd also like to see a shift in how we understand our connection to the natural world. I hope that we don't see ourselves as separate from it anymore, and we don't treat it as an externality within our economic system. If we value nature and make it more visible in our metrics, we will care for it more than we do today.

I'd like to see the momentum of *2040* continue to grow so we can turn the Regeneration movement into a global one. We recently released the film in Europe, with North America and China to follow later in 2020. We are currently crafting specific impact campaigns for those regions. Right now, I can't imagine doing anything else for the rest of my life. Nothing is more important than this. I feel very grateful to be alive at this moment, as I have come to see climate change as feedback from our system; it presents us with a wonderful opportunity to fundamentally change the way we interact with each other and our planet.

It is a chance for all of us to play a role in changing the course of history. Not many humans before us have been offered that. But it will take all of us. 'The greatest threat to the planet', said the explorer Robert Swan, 'is the belief that someone else will save it'.

Reference

Williams, Raymond (1988) *Resources of Hope*. London: Verso.

DAMON GAMEAU is an author and film-maker. *That Sugar Film* was Damon's first film, which became the highest-grossing Australian documentary of all time. His most recent film, *2040*, has had similar success. Damon was nominated as the New South Wales Australian of the Year in 2020 for his work in starting the Regeneration movement. *Correspondence:* damon@regenpics.com

