

## Demain (Tomorrow) — in Search of an Encouraging Future for Humankind

By Naoyuki Haraoka



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The future is unpredictable, but human beings always want to know what it will be like. The French documentary film *Demain* (2015), directed by actress Mélanie Laurent and journalist Cyril Dion, provides an encouraging interpretation of the future of the world (*Photo 1*). Today we unfortunately have many negative outlooks for our future offered by various experts, centering on concerns about political instability, economic crises, global climate change, explosive population growth, and the aging of society. Can we save the world and successfully tackle the challenges facing both the earth and human beings?

The two makers of this film, which won the prize for best documentary at France's prestigious César awards in 2016, envisage a future built up by ordinary people in local communities or companies who are working hard now trying to improve the quality of life, and probably not by political leaders, though it is not explicitly stated in the film. The voluntary efforts of such people will lead to a world in which there is better agriculture, environment, economy, democracy and education than now. In short, the film delivers a large dose of optimism about our future. It consists of many short but true stories based on interviews with scientists, business people, economists, engineers, politicians, and school teachers, and offers the seeds of solutions to some of the key challenges facing human beings, such as environmental issues, the population explosion, economic and political instability, and poor education.

The natural landscapes captured in the film will remind viewers that they are living on a beautiful planet, and the agreeable smiles on the faces of the people interviewed enhance the film's feel-good factor as they talk about their contributions to the survival of the earth. I would like to share this optimism and confidence in human beings' capacity

to develop a better future in this film review.

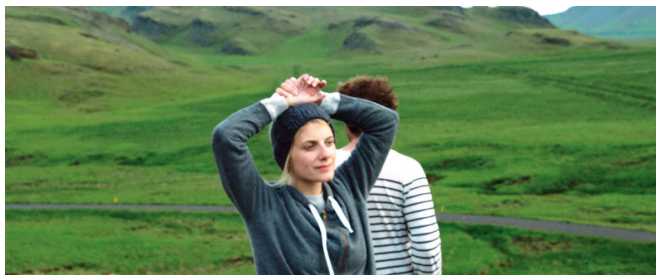
### In the Beginning

In 2012, a group of 21 scientists published an essay in the distinguished science journal *Nature*, warning that if we continued with our current lifestyle of producing and consuming in an industrial society, humankind would disappear due to serious shortages of water and food, explosive population growth, and global climate change, all brought about by the spread of industrialization all over the world.

Mélanie Laurent, who was expecting a baby boy at that time, was shocked by this report and concerned about her son's future. She began asking herself how humankind could avoid this disastrous future, and decided to start a journey around the world with her journalist friend Cyril Dion to look for solutions (*Photo 2*).

Even before 2012 when the article was published, we had been warned of such risks, but not to the extent of mentioning the possibility that human beings could become extinct. The Club of Rome, a global think-tank consisting of distinguished scientists and other leading intellectuals concerned about the future of the earth, published a famous book *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, warning that there would be constraints to economic growth, which was then believed to be the answer to all problems surrounding humankind such as poverty, inequality and social unrest. The constraints to

Photo 1: © MOVEMOVIE – FRANCE 2 CINÉMA – MELY PRODUCTIONS



Mélanie Laurent & Cyril Dion

Photo 2: © MOVEMOVIE – FRANCE 2 CINÉMA – MELY PRODUCTIONS



They started a journey to look for solutions for the world

growth that they had in mind were just like those that worried Laurent — food, water, the environment, etc.

Since that book appeared, although we have had some periods when we were not necessarily so enthusiastic about pursuing solutions to these problems, some attempts have been made. Governments, international organizations, large companies, and politicians have been working hard for the past 20 years to cope with these global challenges. A number of international climate change meetings called the Conference of the Parties (COP) finally reached a framework of an agreement called the Paris Agreement at COP 21 in Paris in 2015 for the reduction of CO2 emissions, a major source of global warming. Food and water shortages due to explosive population growth have been tackled by biotechnology companies producing organic food and by makers of sea water filtration systems.

However, the solutions to saving the earth from these problems introduced in the film are rooted closer to home, in our neighborhood communities. Laurent and Dion want to tell us that we can find solutions in our own daily lives and it is our responsibility to solve these issues, and thus we should take initiatives in our communities. No matter how small each effort may be, it will prove invaluable. There are two reasons: one is that these small efforts will accumulate into something bigger and have a larger impact, and the other is that unless individuals are aware of the impending crisis and make their own efforts to address it voluntarily, the crisis will not be mitigated. The filmmakers' journey started with agriculture in addressing the issue of food.

## Journey to Save the World

Urban farming is their first theme in looking for solutions to food shortages. Detroit was an industrial city in the 1950s where the majority of residents were working for the US automobile industry. After the 1960s when the industry started to decline in the face of severe international competition, many of the car factories closed and many residents were unemployed. The population plunged from a peak of around 2 million to 700,000. But remaining residents who had been poor and unable to get enough food started producing food in urban farms for self-sufficiency by taking advantage of the spaces which used to be factories. They have now around 1,600 urban farms in Detroit. This concept of urban farms has spread since then to other US cities and to cities all over the world.

Todmorden, a market town in northern England, is known as the birthplace of “Incredible Edible” — a gardening project for self-sufficiency in which the residents planted hundreds of kinds of vegetables and fruits in the public flower gardens at the center of the town to be shared by all. “Incredible Edible” started in 2008 in Todmorden and has now spread around the world through networking movements.

Le Bec-Hellouin, a small village in Normandy, has a model farm of permaculture (permanent agriculture). No herbicides, fertilizers, machines or petroleum are used on this farm, where growth is left in

the hands of nature, and where good high-quality harvests result. The farm can achieve biological diversity as well as contributing to CO2 emission reduction.

Farming without using petroleum reminds us of the next key issue — energy. Four episodes are introduced in this film as petroleum-saving and environment-friendly projects in the community.

In 2012, the Danish capital Copenhagen published a new urban plan aimed at achieving perfect carbon neutrality by 2025, meaning the amount of CO2 emissions from human and industrial activities would be equivalent to the amount of CO2 absorbed by forests and other natural phenomena. The plan includes constructing wind turbine generators, exploiting geothermal power, shifting energy use by large enterprises from coal to biomass, and encouraging residents to use bicycles for transportation. The film shows many citizens today in Copenhagen commuting by bicycle between their home and working place. In the plan, 50% of residents would use bicycles for commuting by 2025, a vivid model of a new urban lifestyle.

Already in the 1970s, Reykjavik, the capital city of Iceland, changed its energy policy from one based on petroleum to one based on renewable energy sources such as geothermal energy due to the first oil crisis. Now the city is earning money from these renewable energy sources.

Reunion Island, an overseas department of France, is known as the place where the agri-energy business was started. Agri-energy is a renewable energy source that takes advantage of the roofs of greenhouses for farming, using them as solar panels to produce solar energy for the farm's neighborhood.

San Francisco, meanwhile, is promoting a “zero waste” project to turn all waste in the city into recycled energy towards 2020. With 80% of total waste already turned into recycled energy now, San Francisco is regarded as a symbol of zero waste in the United States.

The issue of waste is the next major issue in the film.

Pocheco, a company in Lille, northern France, that makes recyclable and biodegradable envelopes, has been doing an ambitious job for the past 20 years to achieve an integration of economy and ecology. It is convinced that an environment-friendly production system achieves higher productivity and in fact it has achieved full-time job creation as well as reduction of working hours. Their story reminds me of the Japanese steel industry or automobile industry having achieved high labor productivity while observing strict regulations introduced to protect the environment from pollution in the 1970s when the Japanese economy was in the midst of the so-called high-growth era. It is true anywhere in the world that environmental restrictions can enable businesses to raise productivity by introducing more energy-efficient technologies.

The creation and success of local currencies in Totnes and Bristol in southwest England is certainly helpful in enhancing awareness among ordinary people of the need to save energy and achieve environmental sustainability. The “Transition Network” movement started in Totnes in 2006 aimed at preventing excessive dependency on petroleum, and community-building initiatives along with this objective have resulted

in the sharing of gardens and fields in the whole town, as well as encouraging landowners to lend land to residents who have none. This movement eventually created a local currency, the Totnes pound. With local currencies residents can purchase food or materials mostly within their own town and do not have to go outside it, thereby saving time and energy for transportation and CO2 emissions.

In the US, there is a network among local business entrepreneurs helping them in creating jobs, money and food in their communities. Around 35,000 entrepreneurs in the US are members of this network. How can such individuals and communities attempting to change existing lifestyles make their views known among the public and how can they become influential in politics?

This is a key question for our democracy. David Van Reybrouck, a Belgian historian and writer, in the film proposes the random drawing of lots to select parliamentary representatives, as was adopted in ancient Greece. According to him, our democracy is losing its dynamism today and could be revitalized by such a method of choosing political representatives. Each representative chosen at random would feel pressed to be more responsible for making the right decision for all the people, just as in the case of the jury system in criminal trials.

The film gives two examples of such democracy.

One was in Reykjavik where, in aiming to solve the political and economic turmoil in the national economy following the financial crisis in 2008, 1,000 citizens chosen at random made a policy proposal and founded a new constitution for Iceland in the interest of its citizens. The other was in an Indian village called Kuthambakkam not far from Chennai, where in 2006 they had a village council meeting consisting of representatives of all the families in the village. The Indian caste system, which is characterized by rigorous class distinction, inequality and discrimination, was then completely abandoned in this village and all the families' representatives were elected equally. In both these cases, individuals must have been able to feel their own influence affecting politics directly.

Education is the film's final chapter and shows what it would be necessary for each individual expected to play a key role in changing our society and lifestyle to learn in order to save the human race from extinction.

Finland has been engaged in reforming its education system for 40 years and is today clearly seeing the fruits. In 2000, 15-year-old Finnish kids showed the best academic performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment organized by the OECD. To find their secret of success, Laurent and Dion visited an elementary school in the suburbs of Helsinki and learned about their education philosophy (Photo 3). The relationship between teachers and students is not a hierarchical one. Teachers do not punish students and they talk with students in a much less authoritative way than in schools in other countries and it is to be noted that there are no exams. Mutual trust is the key to their relationship. Students are allowed to talk with teachers and among themselves any time freely and openly. In order to make a student feel comfortable with the

Photo 3: © MOVEMOVIE – FRANCE 2 CINÉMA – MELLY PRODUCTIONS



An elementary school in Helsinki

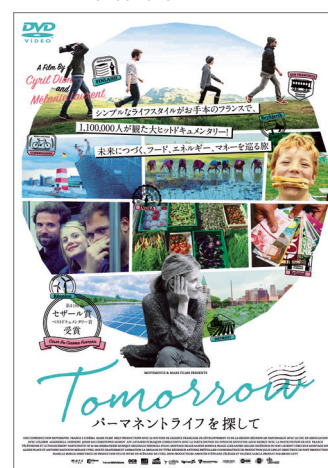
school, teacher training is key and teachers need to study children's psychology during their training. The most important lesson for the students in the school is to understand each other's differences and that diversity and tolerance must be key elements in our society.

## The Final Message

The important messages in *Demain* lie occasionally in what is not clearly mentioned in the film. The key message is that the filmmakers are not looking for "bad guys" responsible for this crisis of the earth and humankind but looking for volunteers to save the world. Although occasionally some interviewees mention global giant companies in somewhat negative terms, the filmmakers are not interested in who the "bad guys" are and believe in the value of our own efforts to reform our lifestyle rather than asking others to change. Keywords in this film are generosity and trust in human beings. We should keep our hope, since so many individuals are now doing their best to reform our civilization. Above all, community is a key concept. A community is the best entity for achieving our goals more efficiently and millions of successful communities would lead to a lasting solution.

This optimism makes the film very touching. I am sure you will enjoy watching it, as much as you would tasting delicious food in a nice restaurant (Photo 4). **JS**

Photo 4: © MOVEMOVIE – FRANCE 2 CINÉMA – MELLY PRODUCTIONS



The cover of the Japanese DVD of the film, with the title Tomorrow – In Search of "Permanent Life". It is now on sale from Mid-Ship Inc.

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