

# THE AGE OF STUPID



## PRESS PACK

The new cinema documentary from Director **Franny Armstrong** (McLibel, Drowned Out) and Oscar-winning Producer **John Battsek** (One Day In September, In The Shadow of the Moon). **Pete Postlethwaite** stars as an old man living alone in the devastated world of 2055, looking at "archive" footage from 2008, asking: why didn't we stop climate change when we had the chance?

Produced independently with a "crowd-funded" budget of £450,000, the 89 minute film has been released in cinemas in the UK and will be released around the world in September 2009.

The Global Premiere of the film will be broadcast live from a solar cinema in New York, with satellite links to 600+ cinemas in 40+ countries (some on delay).

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[www.ageofstupid.net](http://www.ageofstupid.net)

# BASICS

Director	Franny Armstrong
Producer	Lizzie Gillett
Executive Producer	John Battsek
Composer	Chris Brierley
Production Companies	Spanner Films & Passion Pictures
Starring	Pete Postelethwaite + 5 doc characters
Running Time	89 mins
Genre	Documentary - Drama - Animation
Subject	Climate change, oil, war & human stupidity
Locations	America, UK, India, Nigeria, Iraq, Jordan, The Alps
Shot on	HD & HDV
Screening Format	HDcam, Digi Beta
UK Release	March 2009
Global Premiere	September 2009
Website	<a href="http://www.ageofstupid.net">www.ageofstupid.net</a>

# REVIEWS



"A Deeply Inconvenient Kick Up the Backside... you won't see a more important film this year" ★★★★★



"Has enough attitude to power a large city... Slaps you round the face...then punches you in the stomach."



"Compelling and constantly surprising... the first successful dramatisation of climate change to reach the big screen" ★★★★★



"Lectures us sternly and pitilessly - but also intelligently and provokingly"



"The most imaginative and dramatic assault on the institutional complacency shrouding the issue" ★★★★★



"Knocks spots off An Inconvenient Truth"



"Fabulously funny... heart-wrenching... visually stunning"



"Bold, supremely provocative, and hugely important... a cry from the heart as much as a roar for necessary change." ★★★★★

# SYNOPSIS

## SHORT (66 WORDS)

'The Age Of Stupid' is the new cinema documentary from the Director of 'McLibel' and the Producer of the Oscar-winning 'One Day In September'. This enormously ambitious drama-documentary-animation hybrid stars Oscar-nominated Pete Postlethwaite as an old man living in the devastated world of 2055, watching "archive" footage from 2008 and asking: why didn't we stop climate change while we had the chance?

## LONG (340 WORDS)

'The Age Of Stupid' is the new documentary-drama-animation hybrid from Director Franny Armstrong (McLibel, Drowned Out) and Oscar-winning Producer John Battsek (One Day In September, Live Forever, In the Shadow of the Moon). Oscar-nominated Pete Postlethwaite (In The Name of the Father, Brassed Off, The Usual Suspects) stars as an old man living in the devastated world of 2055. He watches 'archive' footage from 2008 and asks: Why didn't we stop climate change when we had the chance?

Runaway climate change has ravaged the planet by 2055. Pete plays the founder of The Global Archive, a storage facility located in the (now melted) Arctic, preserving all of humanity's achievements in the hope that the planet might one day be habitable again. Or that intelligent life may arrive and make use of all that we've achieved. He pulls together clips of "archive" news and documentary from 1950→2008 to build a message showing what went wrong and why. He focusses on six human stories:



← **Alvin Duvernay**, is a paleontologist helping Shell find more oil off the coast of New Orleans. He also rescued more than 100 people after Hurricane Katrina, which, by 2055, is well known as one of the first "major climate change events".

→ **Jeh Wadia** in Mumbai aims to start-up a new low-cost airline and gets a million Indians flying.



← **Layefa Malemi** lives in absolute poverty in a small village in Nigeria from which Shell extracts tens of millions of dollars worth of oil every week. She dreams of becoming a doctor, but must fish in the oil-infested waters for four years to raise the funds.

→ **Jamila Bayyoud**, aged 8, is an Iraqi refugee living on the streets of Jordan after her home was destroyed - and father killed - during the US-led invasion of 2003. She's trying to help her elder brother make it across the border to safety.



← **Piers Guy** is a windfarm developer from Cornwall fighting the NIMBYs of Middle England.

→ 82-year-old French mountain guide **Fernand Pareau** has witnessed his beloved Alpine glaciers melt by 150 metres.



# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

**Either we seriously tackle climate change or we wipe out most life on Earth.** The future of our species and everything we have ever achieved is at stake, so it's not a tricky decision, as a filmmaker, to decide which subject to work on. The original plan, back in 2002, was to borrow the structure of Stephen Soderbergh's movie "Traffic": six human stories on all sides of a complex international issue. "Traffic" was fiction/drugs and "Crude" (working title) was going to be documentary/oil.

I hooked up with producer **John Battsek** and agreed we needed a decent budget to make such an ambitious film, but that we also wanted to remain utterly independent. So we came up with a scheme we called "crowd-funding". The complete budget of 450,000 UK pounds was raised by selling "shares" to individuals and groups - including a hockey team and a health centre - who care about climate change. Our 228 investors gave between 500 and 35,000 pounds and each own a percentage of profits of the film, as do the crew, who worked at massively reduced rates. Which leaves us in the powerful position of owning all the rights. My first two films - **McLibel** and **Drowned Out** - have together been watched by 55 million viewers worldwide, and we are planning to smash that record with **Stupid**. After three years simultaneously following six different stories in six wildly-different locations - New Orleans, Nigeria, UK, The Alps, India, Jordan - we held some test screenings of the rough cut. This was May 2007. Disaster. Only people obsessed with climate change could understand all our subtle links. To everyone else it was a hodgepodge of random stories. After despairing a while, I decided to introduce a fictional character, living in 2055, when the planet has been devastated and hundreds of millions of people killed. He is trawling through "archive" footage from now, trying to work out why we didn't stop climate change when we still had the chance. There was only ever one actor in my mind and when I googled "Pete Postlethwaite + climate change" and learnt he was setting up a wind turbine in his garden, I thought we might just have a hope of persuading him... Al Gore's film **An Inconvenient Truth** did a fantastic job at bringing the public up-to-speed on the science of climate. **The Age of Stupid** takes the baton from Gore and examines the moral, psychological and human consequences of our current way of life. We calculated the film's carbon footprint by recording every journey - by foot, bicycle, motor boat, rowing boat, plane, train, car, rickshaw and helicopter - as well as all the electricity, gas, food and equipment used. It added up to 94 tonnes, which is equivalent to four Americans for a year or 185 patio heaters for a month. I definitely think our film is worth 185 patio heaters.



# PRODUCTION NOTES

Franny first thought of the idea for **Crude** (as it was known then) back in 2002. The plan was to borrow the structure from Stephen Soderbergh's film 'Traffic': six interweaving stories circling the drugs trade and refusing to supply easy answers. But where **Traffic** was about drugs, **Crude** would be about oil and climate change.



In 2004 Franny signed up the UK's top documentary producer, **John Battsek**, with the aim of channeling his contacts and experience into a mainstream hit. John won the Best Documentary Oscar in 2001, with his very first feature documentary, **One Day in September**. Since then, he's produced a brace of commercially successful docs on subjects ranging from American moon landings and British pop music to Bolivian tin mining and Korean gymnastics. He loves to fully capitalise on a great film, by releasing soundtrack albums, merchandise and books. He has sold his films for international theatrical release to Miramax, Pathe, Sony Classics and Paramount, to name a few. John responded to Franny's 30 second pitch for Crude with "Love it. Let's do it."

Franny and John were determined to produce Crude/The Age of Stupid independently, in order to give them both full editorial freedom and complete control of the distribution. They came up with the "crowd-funding" film financing model. Essentially, 'shares' were sold to raise the budget, and all crew work at massively reduced rates to keep costs low - but they also received a percentage. This way the production could not only remain editorially and distributionarily independent, but any profits accrued would be shared amongst the people who made the film (the crew), the people who funded it (the investors), the organisations that supported it (the production companies) and the people in it (the stars). The first Funding Event was held in Dec 2004, offering 100 'shares' of £500 each. In one of the most terrifying experiences of the film - scarier even than being held in a kidnap village in Nigeria - Franny stood up and explained the idea for the film to 30 punters in a screening room in Soho. They sold the first thirteen 'shares' that night, which put £17,500 in the kitty, more than enough for low-budget filmmakers to get started. One of the key advantages of crowd-funding, we later realised, is that you do not have to wait to secure a complete budget before you start.

Franny was side-tracked for the first half of 2005 with re-editing her documentary **McLibel** to feature length for broadcast on BBC2, followed by UK and US theatrical releases.

**Lizzie Gillett** had been working for Franny on other projects since 2002 but in Oct 2004 she joined the Stupid team. Starting as an admin assistant, she quickly made herself invaluable and eventually took over the day-to-day producing role, with John becoming the Executive Producer. In June, Franny and Lizzie bought a Sony Z1 HDV camera and set off to find their first character at the Paris Air Show. They were on a mission to find one of the new breed of Indian entrepreneurs busily starting up low-cost airlines. After several weeks of research, Jeh Wadia - a 33 year old Indian from a wealthy family launching a new airline called Go Air - became the firm favourite and was soon signed up.

Over the next 15 months the pair travelled to 6 countries and found the stars of the film; Layefa in Nigeria, Fernand in the Alps, Piers in Cornwall, Jamila & Adnan in Jordan, Al in New Orleans and Jeh in India. They spent many weeks filming in each location, visiting each character between two and seven times over the next two years.



WHERE TRAFFIC  
WAS ABOUT  
DRUGS, CRUDE  
WOULD BE ABOUT  
OIL AND CLIMATE  
CHANGE.

The relentless filming schedule soon drained the bank balance, so Funding Round 2 was launched in Feb 2006, with 40 'shares' of £5,000 each. More and more investors appeared from nowhere as word spread. Over the next two years, the 40 shares were gradually sold and the complete £450k raised. There are now 223 investors from the UK, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Holland, Denmark and France. The investors each own a percentage of the film - as do the crew, who are working for massively reduced rates - and will be paid once a year for ten years.

In March 2007, Franny and editor **David Hill** (who had cut **McLibel**) emerged with a 90 minute rough cut which interwove the documentary stories, as planned. However, it was felt that the film wasn't greater than the sum of its parts and that most of the themes were too subtle for the average viewer to fully appreciate. The production entered a dark few months of brain-racking until the idea eventually emerged to set the film in the future, with fictional character(s) observing the documentary characters from a distance, and reflecting on the barriers that stand in the way of us halting climate change. This also allowed the film to explicitly show what the future will be if we continue as we are.



Over an intensive 4 month script-writing process this idea developed into a scenario in the year 2055, during apocalyptic runaway climate change, with two teenagers living in **The Global Archive**, a storage facility in the Arctic protecting all of humanities achievements from the ravages of climate change, in the hope that intelligent life might evolve - or arrive - and be able to make use of what we have learned.



The rough cut was tested to a select group of friends, investors and crew at the Curzon Soho Cinema in September 2007. Franny and Assistant Editor Andy (aged 35 and 42 respectively) played the teenagers in the future, as a stand-in test before proper actors were cast. In one of the low-points of the production, there was a largely negative reaction.



So the teenagers got dumped. But the future idea was felt to be very strong, so, two days of brainstorming later, a variation was invented and subsequently tested. This time, Franny's dad played an old man in the future. He represented the 30-something generation now, aged 70-something in 2055, looking back with sorrow and regret at everything they didn't do to stop climate change. Rather than the next generation berating us for destroying the planet, this version was dramatically much more successful. Though Franny's dad is no actor, the emotion of the scenario was plain for all to see.

Franny's all-time favourite actor, and the only person she would consider for the role of "The Archivist" is **In The Name of the Father's Pete Postlethwaite**. Stephen Spielberg called him the "best actor in the world" and John had worked with him on a previous production and had got on famously. Franny googled "Pete Postlethwaite +climate change" and was thrilled to find out that not only was Pete in the middle of a comprehensive eco-renovation of his house, including installing a home turbine, but he was quoted as saying 'it is every single person's responsibility to do what they can to stop climate change'. On Dec 17 2007 at 3.27pm, Pete said 'Yes'.

The drama scenes with Pete were shot on Jan 24th 2008, in a carpet warehouse in Willesden, hastily converted into a futuristic storage facility by production designer David Bryan and his team.

Once it was decided that Pete would be looking through all of the media ever produced by humanity, the archive possibilities span out of control. We first approached ITN Source with a proposed deal whereby we had complete access to all their archive (which includes Reuters, Pathe and CBS), in exchange for a token upfront fee and a percentage of profits. Unbelievably, they said yes. We then headed to the BBC Motion Gallery, but were turned away, as the BBC would never agree to such a deal. Two days later, they got in touch to say that a big boss somewhere up the system had overruled their decision and we received our magic BBC login.

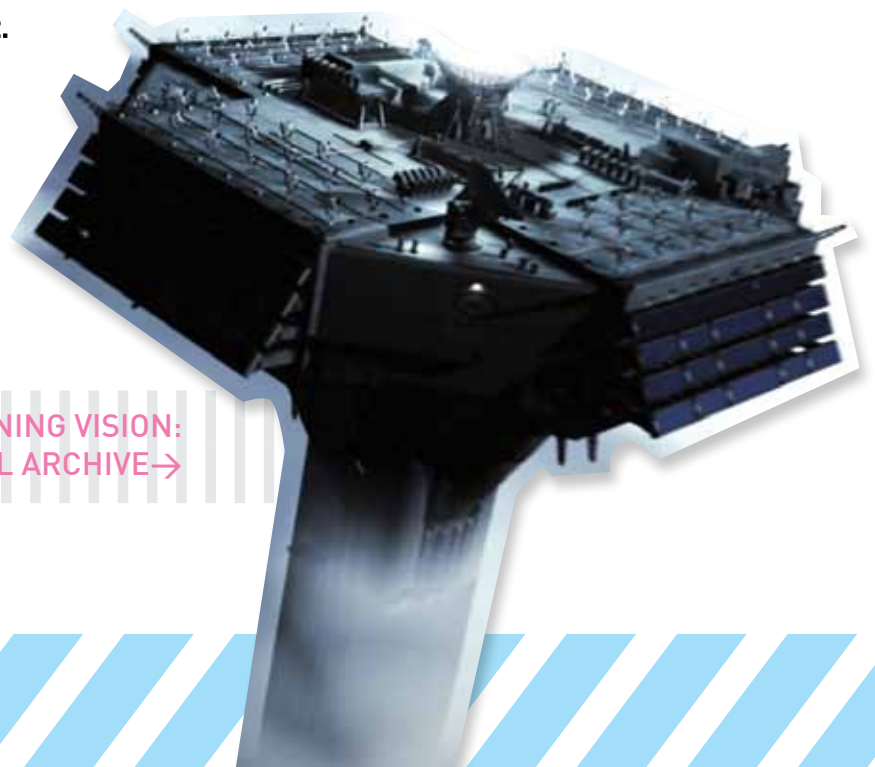
**SHE DECIDED TO  
USE ANIMATED  
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KEY CONCEPTS  
AND BACKGROUND  
MATERIAL**

Franny wanted to stay as far away from traditional documentary styling as possible. In particular, this meant no talking heads and no commentary (both rules were of course later broken, to a small extent). She decided to use animated pieces to explain key concepts and background material. As Pete would be pulling these animations from the archive, they needed to be a wide range of styles and tones, as though they'd come from a variety of sources. The production advertised for animators and soon had a team of 18 boys, all a little blue for lack of sunlight, beavering away mostly in their bedrooms, producing what became one of the film's most impressive elements.

For the music, the intention was always to write a Star Wars-esque orchestral score, which the composer, Chris Brierley, slightly balked at. So he came back with something better and then pulled together all his orchestral friends for a recording session in a donated studio that one of our investors happened to own. We also attempted to clear about 15 famous pop songs, but only succeeded with **Just Cant Get Enough**, **Boots Are Made For Walking** and Radiohead's **Reckoner**.

One of the first public sneak previews of the film was in the **UK Parliament**, where it was said by insiders to be the most well attended event apart from the Campaign for Real Ale launch (and they gave out free beer). It has since screened at the **EU, Dutch, Welsh, and Scottish Parliaments** and has screenings lined up with **Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Foundation** (where he is hosting the panel debate), the **WHO**, **Obama's thinktank**, the **UN**, the **Edinburgh & London film festivals**, and the **BBC**.

**The Age of Stupid production is responsible for 94 tonnes of Co2.**



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# QUOTES

“The stakes are very, very high. They’re through the roof. So when I looked at the subject and what the film is trying to do, there was no option really. I had to do it.” **PETE POSTLETHWAITE**

“This film’s not quite as big as Jurassic Park, but it’s lovely to be on a set where people really want to be there and are committed to what they’re doing.”

**PETE POSTLETHWAITE**

“Four years is pretty long to make a single documentary, but in terms of the task in hand - preventing the extinction of our species forever - it doesn’t seem too bad a use of our time.” **FRANNY ARMSTRONG**

“Age of Stupid is the most ambitious film I’ve been involved with to date. Filmed over four years, five central characters, an on-screen narrator plus a huge animation element, it is a credit to all the team that, despite the many challenges combining all these elements, the film successfully carries the intended message.” **JOHN BATTSEK**

# AWARDS



[www.ageofstupid.net](http://www.ageofstupid.net)

