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RECLAIMING A(RT) FUTURE

Speculative Storytelling and Eco-Centrism in Film Art Installations at the *International Film Festival Rotterdam 2024*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the *Art Directions: Installations* program at the 2024 *International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR)* as a site for experimentation in film art installations, analyzing how these works engage with expanded cinema, new media spectatorship, and pressing socio-environmental issues. As *IFFR* continues to position itself at the intersection of film and contemporary art, its film art installation program offers a lens through which to explore the evolving relationship between the curation of visual media, spectatorship, and speculative storytelling. Through a thematic analysis of the 2024 *Art Directions* program, this paper identifies three key recurring themes: (1) a focus on future livability through speculative storytelling, (2) an eco-centric and post-anthropocentric reconfiguration of human and non-human relations, and (3) a multi-modal reflection on the cinematic apparatus within the festival context. The installations reject modern anthropocentrism, instead envisioning potential futures that range from techno-positive

models of sustainability to experimental, utopian, or dystopian imaginaries. By dismantling and reconfiguring elements of the cinematic experience, these works create hybrid assemblages that incorporate deepfake personas, archival collages, extended reality, and transmedia storytelling. Drawing on perspectives from film festival studies, posthumanist theory, and media studies, this study argues that *IFFR's Art Directions* serves as both a continuation of and departure from traditional film exhibition, transforming the festival space into a laboratory for media experimentation. In doing so, these installations not only challenge dominant modes of spectatorship, but also critically engage with global ecological, geopolitical, and socio-political crises through the confluence of visual and digital technologies.

KEYWORDS: *International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR)*, screen-based art installations, new media spectatorship, speculative narratives, eco-centrism

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RECLAIMING A(RT) FUTURE: SPECULATIVE STORYTELLING AND ECO-CENTRISM IN FILM ART INSTALLATIONS AT
THE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM 2024

In a press release following the closing of the 53rd edition of the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2024, it is said that the festival hosted “253,500 visits across its programme of 424 films, including 183 world premieres, complemented with a variety of multidisciplinary programmes including Art Directions, IFFR Talks and more.”² According to managing director Clare Stewart, these numbers affirm the festival’s recent strategic “recalibration” to achieve “impact over scale” by programming 31 feature films fewer than in 2023, with the festival still surpassing the 252,000 visitors of the previous year. Owing to this change after the two years of pandemic-related challenges, the festival organization is able to continue its long-standing focus on independent films and filmmakers, on talent and project development initiatives (*Hubert Bals Fund*), the film market (*CineMarkt*), and on its development of young audiences.

In addition to the reduction in the number of feature films included in the festival, it is of interest to note that the press release foregrounds the festival’s lateral “multidisciplinary” components, the *IFFR Talks* and *Art Directions*. As a bridge between visual and performing arts, the peripheral curation of installation art at *IFFR* not only serves to diversify the program but also aims to legitimize the film festival’s claims to “aesthetic merits.”³ As cultural gatekeepers, film festivals generate cultural, social and economic capital by circulating films and awarding artists. In addition to the centrality of Bourdieu’s perspectives on capital, film festival scholarship also refers to ‘distinction’ as the social construction of taste and the circular processes of cultural legitimation in which European film festivals such as *IFFR* engage.⁴ The film art installation offers possibilities for programmers, curators, industry professionals and general art- and culture-minded audiences to enhance their film festival experience. Because of their innovative installation formats, *Art Directions* draw into focus *IFFR*’s ability to reflect on contemporary media spectatorship and to serve as a laboratory to experiment with digital and visual cultures.

² “IFFR Records Strong Visitor Numbers During Impactful Edition,” *IFFR*, 2024, <https://press.iffir.com/234396-iffir-records-strong-visitor-numbers-during-impactful-edition>.

³ Marijke de Valck. “Fostering Art, Adding Value, Cultivating Taste: Film Festivals as Sites of Cultural Legitimization,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, 100-16. (London: Routledge, 2016), 102.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

IFFR: THE FILM FESTIVAL AND THE ART WORLD

The association of major film festivals such as *IFFR* with the world of contemporary visual and performing arts is part of an established tradition. One of the first major multi-day film festivals, the Venice Film Festival, was first held in 1932 as part of the Venice Arts Biennale. Film festival scholar Marijke de Valck notes that this alignment of film with “the high arts” was a strategic one, through which the Venice Film Festival “created a new international space for the celebration of cinema as artistic achievement,” rather than viewing it merely as cheap entertainment for the masses.⁵ In describing the major phases in historical festival development, de Valck observes that from 1968 until the 1980s, the idea of festivals as protectors of the Arts took hold of the sector, as they established market spaces and funds for world cinema to subsidize the international aesthetic avant-garde.⁶

In Rotterdam, *IFFR* was first organized in 1972 as an initiative by the ‘Rotterdam Arts Foundation - Film International.’ Since then, the festival’s attention to the multidisciplinary, experimental, challenging and reflective dimensions of cinema has consistently marked the further development of the festival, as documented in the festival’s online archive.⁷ Over the years, the film art installation program has become an integral component of *IFFR*, as “another way of expressing alternative cinema within other media formats.”⁸ The festival’s continuity as a laboratory for film art and its experiences eventually led to a reintegration of the film festival in the arts festival, as most of the art installations curated in the context of *IFFR* (25 January–4 February 2024) also take part in the Rotterdam Art Week (31 January–4 February 2024), organized in parallel to the film festival.

Because of this close association between film festivals and the art world, and *IFFR*’s self-proclaimed mission of “push[ing] the limits of cinema,”⁹ the current paper analyses the film art installations at *IFFR 2024* in light of their take on expanded cinema, media spectatorship, and major social issues they address. As Kate Mondloch puts it, “[s]creen-reliant installations are . . . a provocative fusion of filmic/cinematic (or, more broadly, moving-image media) and artistic/sculptural concerns”¹⁰ that can lead us to reassess our relations to contemporary media technologies as “screen subjects.”¹¹ Mondloch posits that in contemporary Western “societ[ies] of

⁵ De Valck, 102.

⁶ Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

⁷ “Archive,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/archive>.

⁸ Tiffany Pritchard, “IFFR: Spaces Within: Art and Film Installation,” *Screen Daily*, February 3, 2016, <https://www.screendaily.com/rotterdam/iffr-spaces-within-art-and-film-installation-/5099737-article>.

⁹ “Art Directions: Installations,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/art-directions-installations>.

¹⁰ Kate Mondloch, “Introduction: Screen Subjects,” in *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*, xi-xxi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xvi.

¹¹ Mondloch, xxi.

the screen,” media spectatorship is situated in the space *between* viewers and screens. In both the content that is communicated and in the presentation of its film art installations, *IFFR* addresses past and present discussions on media spectatorship in relation to digital visual technologies, and speculates about its future directions. In what follows, *IFFR*’s 2024 *Art Directions* program is analyzed as a specific case study that examines the film art installations’ potential for the “provocative fusion” of cinematic and installation art.¹²

RESEARCH DESIGN

On its webpage, the *Art Directions* program is described as “the space where the festival steps out of the screening room and pushes the limits of what cinema can be.”¹³ At seven galleries and spaces across Rotterdam, the artistic program included the presentation of eight film art installations, four *Sound//Vision* performances, and six immersive media set-ups. The installations are curated to emphasize two main objectives of the festival: to take the film festival out of the screening room, and to explore the potential of producing and experiencing cinema. This paper focuses on the eight screen-reliant film art installations that were part of the 2024 *Art Directions: Installations* program, and does not consider the *Sound//Vision* performances¹⁴ and immersive media VR presentations that were scheduled simultaneously, since they did not make explicit use of screen media.

The data collection occurred in several stages before, during and after the installations’ exhibition at *IFFR 2024*, held from January 25th until February 4th. The gathered data include the content and presentation of the installations, the catalogue descriptions, researcher-made photo and video recordings of the installations and their situational contexts, observational fieldnotes, and notes on the roundtable *IFFR Talk* with several of the artists.¹⁵ The data thus consists of fieldnotes, recordings, and textual and visual media that were coded and studied to answer the research questions on the curation of new media spectatorship and the social issues that the film art installations addressed. Additionally, the study includes the results from a visitor survey that was designed in collaboration with *IFFR*’s marketing department. The survey was set up to gain insight into the profiles, experiences and evaluations of those who visited the free *Art Directions* program, individually or as part of the guided *Art Directions Walks* that introduced small groups of visitors to

¹² Mondloch, xvi.

¹³ “Art Directions: Installations Archives,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/art-directions-installations>.

¹⁴ E.g. The singular live sound performance *The End* by Lolo & Sosaku, 2023.

¹⁵ “Talk: Art Directions,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/events/talk-art-directions>.

six of the installations as part of the festival.¹⁶ The survey was accessible online through QR codes printed on posters at the installation venues. The *Art Directions* program was organized in different venues across the city center of Rotterdam, including designated art spaces such as *V2_Lab for the Unstable Media*, *Frank Taal Galerie*, *Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen*, *OX Space* and *Gallery JOEY RAMONE*, as well as in the departure hall of the Rotterdam Central Station.

The subsequent analysis is structured around the main themes that were found to recur in the data. Throughout the immersion into data, and its successive review and analysis, the research largely followed the different phases of thematic analysis.¹⁷ Given the specific context and temporality of the festival's installation program, immersion and participation were central to the research, since its aim was to analyze the installations as embedded in the different art spaces and the film festival venues in Rotterdam, alongside other visitors. As the analysis of the research data shows, the film art installations do not only open up questions surrounding new media spectatorship, but they also address the relations between society, culture, technology and the environment. These broad epistemological and ontological discussions in fact emerge as central themes in the respective artworks. Specifically, the analysis of the research shows three recurring themes, including new media spectatorship in the context of multimodal and expanded cinema, speculative storytelling and narratives of future liveability, and lastly narratives of technological determinism in relation to posthumanism and eco-centrism. The following chapters first discuss the film art installations' use of screen media and their links to new media spectatorship, after which the analysis of recurring themes is elaborated in more depth.

ART DIRECTIONS: INSTALLATIONS AS SPATIALLY EMBEDDED SCREEN MEDIA

Asunder

In *V2_Lab for the Unstable Media*, an interdisciplinary center for art and media technology in Rotterdam, a custom-made 144 CPU supercomputer was linked to a “three-channel video projection” that blends “artificial intelligence with environmental exploration,” titled *Asunder* (Brain, Oliver, Sjöln, 2019, Germany). The in-

¹⁶ A total of thirty-five visitors fully completed the survey, with the majority of respondents falling within two key age brackets: 35–44 and 55–64 years. Approximately one-third of the participants identified Rotterdam as their place of residence, while others were based in various cities across the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as some cities from countries such as Croatia and Germany (Berlin). Nearly half of the respondents reported working in the cultural sector, with professions including curators, film directors, producers, writers, and film editors.

¹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

stallation can be described as an automated, noninteractive environmental management tool that suggests and models improvements to a set of preprogrammed landscapes and urban centers around the world. The three screens continuously analyze parameters relating biospheric conditions, and subsequently calculate and visualize how the dire biospheric conditions could be improved (see Figure 1).¹⁸



Figure 1: *Asunder* (Brain, Oliver, Sjölen, 2019, Germany). Photograph by Jasper Vanhaelemeesch.

Godide & Cloud migration

The Frank Taal Gallery exhibited two short films by South African artist Phumulani Ntuli. *Cloud migration* (Ntuli, 2021, South Africa) reflects on the preservation of visual media in digital archives by presenting a collage-style animation using Irish photographer Alfred Duggan’s images of an old mining community in South Africa. *Godide* (Ntuli, 2021, South Africa) is Ntuli’s second work in the program, and presents a “stop-motion odyssey, following Godide, a fictional character who travels through imaginary geographies” as an exile following Portuguese colonization.

DUCK

DUCK (Installation) (Maclean, 2024, United Kingdom) serves as the installation counterpart to Rachel Maclean’s latest spy thriller. Projected in OX Space, a versatile creative meeting place in the center of Rotterdam, the installation transformed a dark room into an immersive environment reflecting the short film’s themes, colors, and mood. The green-walled, wood-paneled interior, accented with surreal neon green lighting, mirrored the film’s setting of a British private members club. All on-screen characters are AI-generated deepfakes, with Maclean performing as

¹⁸ Tega Brain, *Asunder*, 2019, video installation, <https://tegabrain.com/Asunder>.

Sean Connery, Marilyn Monroe, and other well-known actors (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: *DUCK* (installation) (Maclean, 2024, UK). Photograph by Jasper Vanhaelemeesch.

the_living

the_living (Solomon, 1997) comprises a series of video performances that show the artist's "digital persona" in the late 1990s, being online 24/7, and interacting in virtual video conferencing environments from unlikely locations, such as a swimming pool, or an ice cave. At *IFFR 2024*, the short videoclips were played on screens across the different festival venues. The video art transcended the fixed art space to be projected arbitrarily on screens at several *IFFR* locations that were otherwise used for promotional or informative purposes.

Unfolding

A key concern in the presentation of the art works resides in their embedding in surrounding spaces, both in dedicated art galleries and in public spaces. *Unfolding* (Fehres and Conroy, 2024) included the exhibition of video art in a temporary cubic structure in the departure hall of Rotterdam Central Station (see Figure 3). The video, set in the year 2070, presents a surreal yoga session guided by instructions from an off-screen narrator. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied by a live yoga performance.



Figure 3: *Unfolding* (Fehres and Conroy, 2024) at Rotterdam Central Train Station. Photograph by Jasper Vanhaelemeesch.

We will definitely talk about this after the last air raid alert stops

We will definitely talk about this after the last air raid alert stops (Yefanov, 2024, Ukraine) “presents a neon-coloured utopian vision set in a postwar city, where humanity strives for harmony with nature through a recultivation programme.”¹⁹ The installation, a video animation with narrative subtitles, makes use of three screens, to the left, front and right of the audience. Its animations indirectly refer to the war between Ukraine and Russia, and imagine a postwar society in modeling a ‘city of the future,’ in which ecological balance is restored, cities are overgrown with reforestation, and extinct species return (see Figure 4).

¹⁹ “Art Directions: Installations,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/art-directions-installations>.



Figure 4: *We will definitely talk about this after the last air raid alert stops* (Yefanov, 2024, Ukraine). Photograph by Jasper Vanhaelemeesch.

Drawing Probable Conclusions/Conclude with Probable Drawings

Drawing Probable Conclusions/Conclude with Probable Drawings (Barba, 2024) is Rosa Barba's multistage, multisensory installation, unfolding over the course of a week at *Depot Boijmans van Beuningen*, one of Rotterdam's largest contemporary art spaces. Spanning an entire floor, the installation started as an orchestral arrangement in the beginning of the festival week, and culminated in a live vocal performance at the end of the festival (see Figure 6). The installation was set in an open space, where decontextualized cinematic artifacts and screens were scattered without a fixed sequence, while old-fashioned film projectors cast flickering lights onto visitors, screens and walls. Large rectangular see-through colored plates are suspended from the ceiling and moved by the currents of air created by passing audiences. The live performances constituted a multisensory culmination to the festival-art nexus, as singers' vocalizations reverberated throughout the space, bouncing off the artefacts and the live audience, either sitting or moving through the space. All the while, the projectors provided seemingly randomized impulses of light that were emitted on the colored plates and the screens, walls, and visitors and performers who surrounded them. By bringing together sound, light, projection technology, audiences and performers in an installation that included a non-conventional location and prevented complete immersion, the multisensory performance deconstructed media spectatorship as an embedded and embodied experience.



Figure 5: *Drawing Probable Conclusions/Conclude with Probable Drawings* (Barba, 2024) at Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. Photograph by Jasper Vanhaelemeesch.

NEW MEDIA SPECTATORSHIP

The experience of new media spectatorship can be described as the spatialized and embodied experience of spectacles of sound and vision, of projected images, still or moving, on a screen or a screen-like surface in a space designed for that purpose. In the case of the film art installations at *IFFR 2024*, this implies an analytical emphasis on the interfaces between viewers and screens.²⁰ As the preceeding descriptions of the forms and modes of presentation make clear, *IFFR*'s screen-reliant film art installation program offers the chance to reflect on new media spectatorship and expanded cinema. When asked how the art installations challenged traditional cinematic narratives, survey responses were diverse. Some participants felt uncertain whether they did, while others noted that the installations expanded the boundaries of cinematic storytelling by incorporating multiple media, enhancing immersion, and breaking down the conventional constraints of film format and narrative structure. Transmedia projects such as *the_living* (1997), *Asunder* (2019) or *Duck* (2024) choose multiple media platforms to showcase (parts of) their storytelling universe.²¹ The use of mixed media is also clear in *Unfolding* (2024), in the approach to the live yoga performance that accompanied the video art, itself characterized by a use of visual collages. In addition, the installations were characterized by the use of a multiplicity of screens in various setups, or by linking of the presented visual media to larger art projects (*the_living*), online platforms (*Asunder*), archives (*Cloud migration*), or other live or recorded performances (*Drawing Probable Conclusions/Conclude with Probable Drawings*).

²⁰ Mondloch, xxi.

²¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

Survey respondents also mentioned that the installations challenge cinematic conventions by “expanding and educating,” by “exaggerat[ing] several themes, focus, experimental design,” “not obeying laws of cinema,” “not using only 2D,” by being “more immersive,” “expanding visions,” resembling “cinema complet,” by focusing on “interaction, experience rather than story, being part of the happening,” or “by adding different media possibilities.” The installations *DUCK* (2024), *We Will Definitely Talk About This After the Last Air Raid Alert Stops* (2024), and *Asunder* (2019) were cited by survey respondents as leaving the most significant impression. Descriptions of what made the installations memorable included terms such as “immersion,” “otherworldliness,” “thought-provoking,” “timely,” “future utopia,” “hypnotizing,” “topical urgency,” “intelligent & exciting,” “positive message,” “complexity and impact.” These responses highlight the impact of the installations in terms of both aesthetic experience and thematic depth.

When asked about suggestions to improve the program, visitors mentioned that they desired a greater emphasis on interaction with the installations. Suggestions for improvement also included a clearer signalization and enhanced accessibility of the installation locations. Overall, participants strongly agreed that *Art Directions* enriched their festival experience, broadening their understanding of cinematic possibilities. The following chapter thematically analyzes the installations to note recurring instances of speculative storytelling, eco-centrism and technological determinism.

THE WORLD WE WILL LIVE IN: STORIES OF A SPECULATIVE, ECO-CENTRIC FUTURE

The film art installations at *IFFR* are examples of speculative storytelling, in the sense that they deal with distant, uncertain and volatile futures. In their envisioning of future liveability, the installations present stories that broadly explore the relationships between society, technology and the environment. In the narratives, technological advancement is linked to the most urgent ecological, geopolitical, social and postcolonial concerns and crises in contemporary Western societies. Whereas innovation is always characterized by change, and technology is in a perpetual state of development, the social questions and skepticism surrounding these phenomena keep recurring. Whenever an innovative technology is first introduced to mass audiences, the question is raised whether the technology improves and facilitates livelihoods, or whether it poses a threat to humanity. This duality can be seen in the film art installations, too.

Debra Solomon’s *the_living* (1997) includes screened performances from a techno-optimistic interpretation of a future that, by now, has already passed. Solomon’s work as performer and videographer took place some years into the popular-

ization of the Internet in 1997, when the idea of being online 24/7 and videoconferencing with the rest of the world felt both liberating and claustrophobic, echoing the tensions between communicating via new technologies and physical isolation, which resurfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, in the three-screen video installation *We will definitely talk about this after the last air raid alert stops* (2024; Figure 4), Ukrainian artist Yuri Yefanov envisions a future in which cities allow nature to take over and restore balance. The eco-centric approach is optimistic and utopian in its eco-centrism. The installation implies that the use of advanced technology will enable the cities of the future to be guided by the constructive and bewildering logic of nature, rather than the destructive force of man. The motivation for the work comes from the artist's war-torn homeland Ukraine, where the previously highly fertile black soil has been polluted by the heavy metals contained in mortar shelling as a result of the invasion by Russian armed forces. The work envisions a utopia of reforestation, of a fictional exteriorization of the environment in which nature takes over, and eventually dinosaurs return to roam the earth.

Phumulani Ntuli's installations are relative exceptions to the speculative narratives in that they do not explicitly address a future, but rather look back to a colonial past by the use of digital archives of photographs and multimedia collages. In the stop motion animation short films *Godide* (2021) and *Cloud Migration* (2021), the artist creates the protagonist of his animated stop motion films by compiling archival photographs of miner colonies in South Africa during the Apartheid regime. These photographs are compiled in a collage so as to shape the protagonist whose individual journey, alongside themes of migration, identity and colonization, is the topic of the short films. In another installation that makes use of technology for a positive end, Ntuli looks back at colonial history to reclaim a sense of identity through revisioning and remixing archives and photographs.

In dealing with humanity's crises and technologies, installations such as *Asunder*, *We will definitely talk about this after the last air raid alert stops*, *Unfolding*, and *Duck* present technologies as from a predominantly eco-centric approach. They suggest that technologies such as artificial intelligence and extended reality can be used to support or overcome human agency for the sake of restoring ecological balance. However, while this perspective could be ascribed to a techno-positive or techno-utopian perspective, some of the installations at the same time question AI technology's management and decision-making abilities.

In Maclean's deepfake AI spy thriller *Duck (Installation)* (2024), the deepfake characters break the fourth wall and arbitrarily change the plot and narrative to reveal and subvert the tensions between fiction and reality, between media as a construction, but most of all as a manipulation that obfuscates what is 'real' and what is not. As explained before, *Asunder* is a supercomputer, a data-driven "environmental manager" that fictionally analyzes cities around the world, and suggests

recommendations to rebalance elements of “natural resources, social justice, sustainable production and wildlife preservation” (2019). Human concerns are decidedly not at the center of the suggested modifications, which can lead to absurd recommendations “[a]s it relocates cities, merges nations, straightens coastlines and shifts rivers.” For example, for the city of Amsterdam, the system recommended to “transplant Brazilian wetlands” into the area to restore the ecosystem, and Vienna is advised to “increase density. Relocate Shenzhen to Vienna.” Through ironic, impossible and at times humorous predictions and calculated eco-centric models, the work raises questions about technological determinism in using computational models to solve global challenges to humanity.

Such ironic and dystopian approaches to AI technologies are also present in the futuristic yoga tutorial of *Unfolding* (Fehres and Conroy, 2024), where an off-screen narrator, the personification of the natural element ‘air,’ both motivates and admonishes the exercising human by giving increasingly challenging instructions. *Unfolding* seems light-hearted, but its tone is full of irony, anxiety and warning, as the air admonishes the human: “you are burning up” and “you need me.” At the end of the tutorial, the simulated world in which the tutorial takes place turns out to be a VR simulation during which a male figure is standing in a living room, in the year 2070, experiencing the virtual reality as a digital extension of the physical world. This indicates the normalization of both digital escapism and isolation anxiety that echoed many people’s feelings during the pandemic lockdown of 2020-2022, during which YouTube yoga tutorials as well as neoliberal digital wellness apps flourished. Similar to such YouTube videos, the yoga session is interrupted by ironic advertisements that promote wearing a sun visor against global warming, put forward the idea that you can save the Earth by not giving birth, advertise a brand of bottled water that contains 100% water, or a hotel in outer space in which you can stay away from the polluted earth.

CONCLUSIONS

The thematic analysis of the 2024 *Art Directions* program revealed three main recurring themes. Firstly, the installations are marked by their shared attention to future liveability, addressed through different forms of speculative storytelling. Secondly, the storytelling revolves around perspectives on humanity that foreground eco-centric and post-anthropocentric subjects and relations. Thirdly, in the specific ways the visual media art installations are created and presented, *IFFR’s 2024 Art Directions* program also offers multimodal reflections on film exhibitions in a film festival context.

The installations’ speculative narratives mainly deal with how to address both current and present crises of humanity, and geopolitical, ecological, identity-

based, social, or postcolonial violence. The speculative narratives present a straightforward rejection of the anthropocentrism of modernity, and a hopeful imagining of potential futures. As the analysis elaborates, some works reveal a techno-positive attitude and point towards an active instrumentalization of art, technology and nature in prototyping future societies and modelling sustainable living spaces, while others are more skeptical in imagining their post-anthropocentric futures.

The *Art Directions* program at *IFFR* is multifaceted. In terms of content, creation, exhibition, and reception, the installations resemble the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total art work, by blending various elements of visual representation and engaging with the cinematic apparatus. The latter is accomplished, not in a straightforward rendering of the cinematic experience, but rather through de- and reconstructing it. By reconceptualizing visual art to serve the respective messages, the film art installations form collective assemblages²² that posit posthumanist, trans-type subjects and realities in the form of deepfake persona, fictional creatures, archival collages and extended reality imaginings.

In their respective assemblies, the presented visual media are characterized by the same ambivalence that mark the study of visual and digital media. In their specific manifestation as installations, they present images that can simultaneously be analog and digital, mechanical and manual, material and immaterial, still and moving, printed and projected, personal and collective, visible, acoustic or verbal.²³ This “confluence of visual and digital technologies”²⁴ makes the screen-based art installations appropriate media to study the posthuman convergence²⁵ and the transversality that marks the response to contemporary global crises and technological advancements.

The *Art Directions* program is described by *IFFR* as the continuation of the festival outside of the screening room.²⁶ The analysis of the installations confirms the view of the program as a laboratory for film art experimentation, as the *Art Directions*’ film art installations correspond to Kate Mondloch’s description of screen-reliant installations as a “provocative fusion” of moving-image media and artistic concerns.²⁷ By dismantling and repurposing elements of the cinema apparatus, the *Art Directions* encourage the visitors to reflect on the complexities of contemporary media spectatorship. ▣

²² Ian Buchanan, *Assemblage Theory and Method. An Introduction and Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 33.

²³ Paolo SH Favero, *The Present Image: Visible Stories in a Digital Habitat* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2-4.

²⁴ Favero, *The Present Image*, 2.

²⁵ Rosi Braidotti, “Transversal Posthumanities,” *Philosophy Today* 63, no. 4 (2019): 1181-1195.

²⁶ “Art Directions: Installations,” *IFFR*, accessed September 6, 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/art-directions-installations>.

²⁷ Mondloch, xvi.

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