

Sky River

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Figure 1: Screen capture from Sky River

ABSTRACT

Sky River is an expanded animation that imagines a future where climate change has radically transformed our landscape and the collateral damage it caused to the hydrological cycle. The project is brought to life through an immersive animated experience that merges 3D animation with an immersive and physical installation

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → Arts and humanities; Media arts.

KEYWORDS

Expanded Cinema, Climate Change, Art and Ecology, Anthropocene, Immersive Environment

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1 DESCRIPTION

In 2015, a team of hydroscience engineers from Tsinghua and Qinghai University proposed a new concept of atmospheric water—white water, an atmospheric collision where water vapours become rain. As a result, the Sky River project was born. It was conceived to be a massive geoengineering project that will identify and extract atmospheric water using satellite tracking and cloud seeding technologies. *Sky River* imagines a future where climate change has radically transformed our landscape and the collateral damage it caused to the hydrological cycle. The narrative of the *Sky River*

is presented from a dual perspective that bridges time: a male voice represents the present, while a female voice embodies the future. This narrative oscillates between the present and future, illustrating a future overwhelmed by increased precipitation due to global warming and rising sea levels. As seawater encroaches on land, compromising water security, humanity is compelled to look upwards in search of fresh water sources in the atmosphere. The project is brought to life through an immersive animated experience that merges 3D animation with physical installations, extending the storytelling beyond the confines of the screen and into the real world. Viewers follow the journey of the protagonists through a desolate landscape marked by an abandoned cloud-seeding tower, traveling from the ocean’s depths to the atmospheric rivers above. The animation culminates in darkness, followed by a haze machine and laser line that illuminate the space. The atmosphere creates a screen-space continuum, providing a tangible representation of the *Sky River*. This artistic choice invites the audience to contemplate and visually engage with the abstract concept of atmospheric water extraction in the era of the Anthropocene.

2 ARTIST STATEMENT

As a media artist, my research and artistic practice are concerned with the role of art and technology in the perception of nature and the ecological crisis. My interest in the nature-culture divide stems from a realisation of the invisible separation between man and nature, which manifests as conceptual and physical divides. Artistically, I am interested in using immersive media technologies and sensors to mediate the divide between man and nature. Technology enables me to create artistic interfaces between man and nature through direct sensing of the environment or non-human entities, as well as interfacing through our cognitive mind. In his book2 “The philosophical roots of the ecological crisis: Descartes and the modern worldview”, Kureethadam argues that the root cause of the ecological crisis is a philosophical divide that emerged during the Enlightenment period, and cites Descartes ontological dualism as a contributor to the often binary ways of thinking in the Western world. This can be observed with the dichotomy between

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utopia and dystopia, ignoring the possibilities of in-between states. In *Sky River*, I contemplate the ontological violence perpetuated on the divide between water and land, wet and dry. We have been conditioned to think through the map, and in doing so, we think of land and water as being distinct entities. But the reality is that water is everywhere, in different forms. Some places are wetter, some less so. The water that we drink originates from somewhere and ultimately flows elsewhere, but it never truly vanishes. It will always resurface somewhere, at some point. It is within this hydrological cycle that *Sky River* is situated. The work invites us to think

about how humanity has been disrupting the cycle of wetness and that we are not outside of this cycle but enveloped within this web of water.

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