



75th IFFMH: The 2026 Retrospective

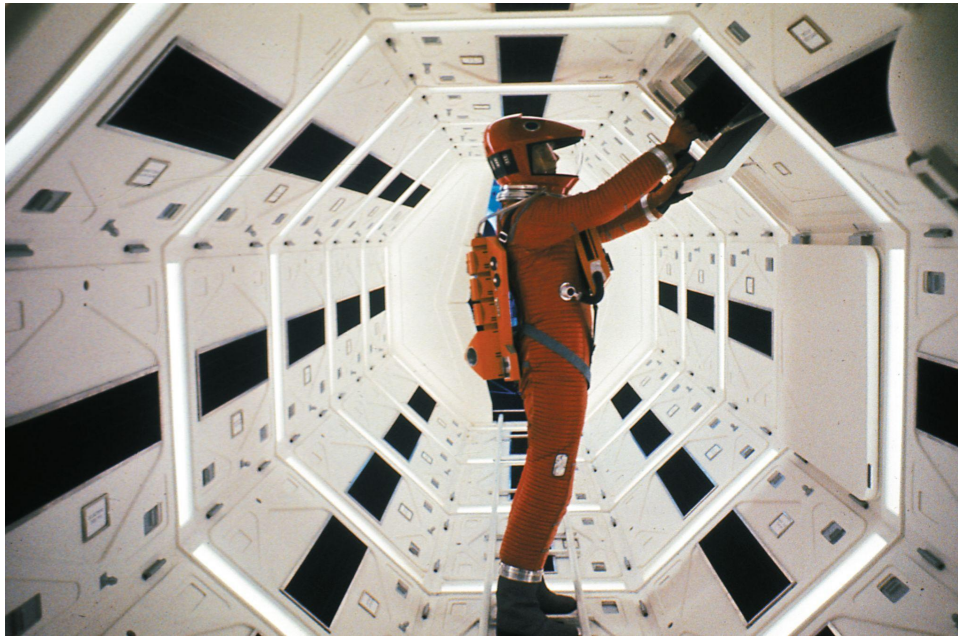
“Back to the Futures – Utopias vs. Dystopias”

Press release – Mannheim, 29 July 2026

What does the future hold? And what can we do to create it? No art form seems to pose this question as persistently as cinema does. Since its earliest days, cinema has conjured up visions of what's to come, explored human hopes and fears, and depicted what we could otherwise not imagine. To mark the 75th edition of the International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg (IFFMH), which will be held from 5 to 15 November under the motto “Imagine Futures!”, this year's retrospective is dedicated to the singular power of cinema to fuel imagination. Entitled “Back to the Futures – Utopias vs. Dystopias”, this compilation of historical cinematic visions of the future is dedicated to the significance that such visions hold for us as human beings.

Hannes Brühwiler, curator of the retrospective, and festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz have selected a total of 12 films made between 1956 and 2023. The programme includes works from Argentina, China, France, the UK, Japan, Senegal, the Soviet Union and the United States that represent a wide variety of genres. These films can be divided into two groups. Some are set in possible futures, where they explore developments in technology and society, addressing questions about AI and the drive for progress. The others are set in the present or the past, but look towards the future, focusing on the hope for a better life, as well as a fear of loss and decline. What all these films have in common is that utopia and dystopia often prove to be two sides of the same coin.

Curator Hannes Brühwiler says: “The cinema has always been a place that lets us imagine, envision and worry about the future. Where else can we ask such probing questions about the human condition and our longings, desires and fears? Our selection of films offers perspectives from diverse cultures on what may lie ahead. We do not see the future as a singular, fixed point, but as an open panorama of possibilities.”



›2001: A Space Odyssey‹ © Warner Bros.

The future as a setting for progress and change

Foremost among all films is Stanley Kubrick's visually and philosophically striking vision of the future, ›**2001: A Space Odyssey**‹ (1968), which catapults the audience straight from the distant past into the third millennium. Released a good year before the first moon landing, Kubrick's film almost obsessively pursues questions raised by technological advancement. Humans and a supercomputer struggle for supremacy while on an unstoppable journey. The cinematography is an experience that virtually shatters the laws of time and space. Spike Jonze, too, explores the ambivalent relationship between humans and machines in ›**Her**‹ (2013), this time as a touching, abstract love story set in the age of AI, a vision of the future that seems surprisingly relevant today. Scarlett Johansson, whose voice alone lends an unforgettable presence to the AI Samantha in ›**Her**‹, returns in Jonathan Glazer's sombre reflection ›**Under the Skin**‹ (2013) as an alien who takes on human form in order to seduce men. Bertrand Bonello's ›**The Beast**‹ (2023) and Michel Gondry's ›**Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind**‹ (2004) both revolve around memory, vulnerability and the question of who we would be if we could not remember past relationships. While Gabrielle (Lea Seydoux) in ›**The Beast**‹ believes in the promise held by DNA purified of emotion, for Joel (Jim Carrey) in ›**Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind**‹ it's the supposed healing power of an erased memory that proves to be his undoing. In both films, the temporal planes of past, present and future are inextricably intertwined. By contrast, the melodrama ›**Mountains May Depart**‹ (2015) by Jia Zhang-ke, one of the leading chroniclers of modern China, spans continents and eras as it foreshadows the transformation of Chinese society and

the price of globalisation right up to 2025, while asking what role one's origin, identity and homeland will play in the future.



›Touki Bouki‹ © trigon-film

The future as a horizon: Hopes and fears

This retrospective also includes works that, while rooted in their own present, offer hope for a better future. Amid social upheaval and political crises, there's a fine line here as well between optimism and doom, utopia and dystopia. With utter intensity, focusing on minute details and gestures, Robert Bresson depicts the pursuit of freedom in ›**A Man Escaped**‹ (1956) as the force that drives his protagonist's actions. The work of the Argentinian filmmaker Hugo Santiago, who lived in France from 1959 onwards, was in turn influenced by Bresson. Set in a fictional Latin American city, Santiago's acclaimed debut film, ›**Invasión**‹ (1969), shot a few years before Argentina became a military dictatorship, feels like a grim premonition. In Andrei Tarkovsky's ›**Stalker**‹ (1979), by contrast, the path followed does not lead to freedom, but straight into a post-apocalyptic landscape. Created against the backdrop of the Cold War and the fear of nuclear war, this Kafkaesque vision of the end times suggests that humanity cannot escape from itself. Djibril Diop Mambéty, a pioneer of the African avant-garde, questions the promise of the post-colonial era in ›**Touki Bouki**‹ (1973). A young couple in Senegal set out to seek a better life in Paris, but mystical incidents prevent them from leaving. One of the key works in this year's



retrospective is ›**Born in Flames**‹ (1983) by the American director Lizzie Borden. Shot in the style of a guerrilla production, ›Born in Flames‹ is a provocative, feminist document of its time. In this socialist utopia, a group led by queer Black women refuses to tolerate sexism and racism any longer. But when their leader dies, the struggle escalates.

But having no future at all makes for the most drama – as in Harold Ramis's ›**Groundhog Day**‹ (1993). In this comedy, which stars Bill Murray as a cynical TV reporter, time refuses to move forward; paradoxically, it is precisely this state of affairs that creates an opportunity to correct mistakes and develop a new perspective. Gaining new perspectives on the future is what all the films in this anniversary retrospective are about. And with that comes a call to sally forth, back to the futures!

The films in chronological order:

- ›**A Man Escaped**‹ directed by Robert Bresson, France, 1956
- ›**2001: A Space Odyssey**‹ directed by Stanley Kubrick, UK, USA, 1968
- ›**Invasión**‹ directed by Hugo Santiago, Argentina, 1969
- ›**Touki Bouki**‹ directed by Djibril Diop Mambéty, Senegal, 1973
- ›**Stalker**‹ directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1979
- ›**Born in Flames**‹ directed by Lizzie Borden, USA, 1983
- ›**Groundhog Day**‹ directed by Harold Ramis, USA, 1993
- ›**Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind**‹ directed by Michel Gondry, USA, 2004
- ›**Her**‹ directed by Spike Jonze, USA, 2013
- ›**Under the Skin**‹ directed by Jonathan Glazer, UK, Schweiz, 2013
- ›**Mountains May Depart**‹ directed by Jia Zhang-ke, China, France, Japan, 2015
- ›**The Beast**‹ directed by Bertrand Bonello, France, 2023

The 75th IFFMH will be held from 5 to 15 November 2026.

The complete schedule for the 75th IFFMH will be announced on 16 October. Tickets will go on sale on 19 October.



Images

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About the IFFMH

With “New Film Experience” as its credo, the IFFMH has been venturing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on and through the art of film since 1952. This makes it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale, and it continues to be a major platform for cultural, social and political dialogue. With each subsequent edition, the IFFMH, as a festival for the public in cinemas, invites festivalgoers to discover the rising stars of the international film scene as well as to follow the careers of established filmmakers and to become more familiar with film in the context of other art forms.

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The IFFMH’s “Imagine Futures!” anniversary campaign is made possible by funding from the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung.

The festival would like to thank its sponsors and partners.