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Democracy
Equality & Culture
Beyond
the Nation State



TRANSEUROPA

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POLITICS AND CULTURE**

*reclaiming
the cloud(s)*

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Imagine, Demand, Enact

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Yasmine Amal explores the intersections of collective transformation, spirituality, and decolonial thought through an Indigenous and Sufi lens. She is a self-taught artist, political scientist, and mediator. Before dedicating herself to art, she worked for GIZ with a focus on religion and social cohesion. Drawing from her Amazigh heritage, her practice reflects on forms of existence beyond human-centered perspectives. Through abstract landscapes, she considers the relationship between ego and soul, as well as the intimate connection between humans and the living world, while touching upon Theosophical thought.

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Co-organised by Panteion University's Department of Social Anthropology and NCSR Demokritos' Institute of Informatics & Telecommunications, the **Digital Commons Conference** brings social research and technical practice together to explore how digital infrastructures can be designed and governed as commons, supporting collective autonomy. Its Organising Committee includes researchers from NCSR Demokritos, Panteion University and Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

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Homo Digitalis is an Athens-based civil society organisation focusing on the promotion and protection of human rights in the digital age. Since 2018 and through the three pillars of their actions, namely, raising awareness, shaping policy decisions, and strategic legal interventions, Homo Digitalis aims to strengthen the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, when new technologies are used by private or public entities. Homo Digitalis is a member of the European Digital Rights (EDRI) network.

Paul Hourlias is the founder of Parea Radio, an independent, community-led online radio station based in Athens. Through Parea, he works with artists across different cities and scenes, using radio as a space for listening, exchange and collective cultural practice. He is also a DJ and selector under the name Paul Who?, with a long-standing involvement in electronic music, radio and independent cultural projects.

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I Have Rights is a Samos-based human rights organisation. Since March 2022, I Have Rights has provided specialised legal support to more than 1,000 clients and legal information to nearly 2,000 people through its information hotline. I Have Rights documents human rights violations and hate crimes against people on the move, advocates for policy change and litigates against human rights violations. I Have Rights is a member of the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

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Martin-Gropius-Bau, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Athens Biennale and Kyiv Biennial. In 2014 she founded Avtonomi Akadimia, an ongoing artwork and grassroots university in Athens. She is currently touring with her film *Transindigenous Assembly*.

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Spazi Sociali di Reggio Emilia and **Municipi Sociali di Bologna** are grassroots political communities rooted in Emilia-Romagna’s social movements. Through collectively managed spaces, they combine mutual aid, culture, education, housing and migrant struggles, ecological and social justice, and political organising. Moving beyond the traditional social-centre model, they experiment with forms of self-organisation and social infrastructure that connect everyday solidarity with broader struggles for the right to the city and the commons.

Lefteris-Fivos Vasilopoulos is the co-founder of Paremvasi 2030. He is currently a master’s student of Media and Communication Studies at Université Lumière Lyon 2 and Panteion University Athens. He holds a BSc in International and European Studies from University of Piraeus and a DU on International Comparative Studies from SciencesPo Toulouse. Last year he published the book “Politis Erasmus”, describing his experience as a candidate for the 2024 EU elections in France, while being an Erasmus student in Toulouse. Born and raised in Athens, currently living in Lyon.

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TRANSEUROPA

Reclaiming the cloud(s)

In partnership with
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After finding the *Undercurrents* of new political imaginaries and human-non-human ways of being, acting and mobilising in [Venice 2024](#), and igniting *Margins on Fire* through anti-racist and feminist organising in [Paris 2025](#), the 2026 edition of TRANSEUROPA Festival will bring air to our endangered democracies at their Athenian foundations.

Air is a naturally shared resource, yet not treated as a global commons. Our air carries smog beyond borders, into and out of Athens, one of Europe's most polluted cities, along with storms, rains and environmental damage. Our air is controlled, privatisation has led to companies (including aptly named Airbnb) deciding who has access to air, who has access to "clouds", who has oxygen to breathe.

Clouds, both real and virtual, can be understood as spaces of imagination, sites from which to envision other worlds, alternative possibilities and futures beyond the given. The air is also a carrier of voice, of oxygen. The invisible air makes visible our intrinsic codependence, the futility of individualist and violent trajectories, and the necessity of trans-national and trans-species solidarity and organising.

In the context of current EU policies - from the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, to the AI Act, to the European Green Deal's focus on interconnectedness and sustainability - tension lies between the ideals of freedom and commons and the political realities of securitized, nationalised and digital borders.

Democracy also depends on who gets to shape the conditions in which we live. Who has access to clean air, to public space, to information, to safety? Who gets to move and who is stopped at a border? These questions are increasingly difficult to separate from one another. Pollution, climate change, migration, digital infrastructures and the erosion of democratic rights all cross borders as do the forms of solidarity that respond to them. We need forms of democracy that can move across and beyond borders, connecting people, territories and species and enabling us to collectively shape the conditions in which we live.

TRANSEUROPA is a transnational artistic, cultural and political festival organised by European Alternatives since 2007.

It brings together artists, activists, researchers and citizens from across Europe and beyond to work on questions that cannot be addressed within national borders alone.

TRANSEUROPA Festival 2026: Reclaiming the Cloud(s) takes place in Athens at a moment when the political horizon feels increasingly uncertain. Over four days, the festival brings together different practices and perspectives to ask what can still be reclaimed, shared and organised collectively.

The Festival brings together critical reflection, political analysis, artistic practice and collective action, creating spaces to explore, dream, imagine, build alliances and come together to shape the futures we want. The festival brings together people and perspectives that are often kept apart by borders, institutions and established forms of power, creating opportunities to take part, organise and shape the decisions that affect our lives. Across the programme, we are interested in forms of democracy that are participatory, feminist and transnational and in perspectives that challenge both Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism.

The festival programme offers a mix of hands-on workshops, celebrations, collective moments, debates, assemblies and artistic interventions that can be lived as elements of building together an indestructible cloud of resistance and change, that know how to compose and recompose its elements to ensure its permanence and strength.

A short glimpse into the Festival programme may give readers a sense of our intentions and offering:

The festival participants are invited to dig into the main challenges and forms of actions that are key to re-invent and re-vive our democracies: from independent journalism to transnational overviews and comparisons of issues such as democracy and repression through the experience of those who live through the mobilisations following the train accident in Tempi Greece (2023), and the collapse of the train station in Novi-Sad (Serbia) or that of the flamingo revolution in Albania, the civil society mobilisations in support of Gaza, and the mobilization for the environment and the COP31.

Because the way our democracies and Europe can live up to their promises is defined and constituted by the way they treat, welcome and protect the most vulnerable of us, the festival will be an occasion to raise awareness and reflect together on the forms of sur-

veillance and the technological changes that borders our lives and to call together for the political rights of those who have changed country. We will explore how intersectional feminist responses can mobilise against the rise of the far-right.

Then, at the festival, participants are invited to build and fly kites, to create a wind-tower that recycles the polluted air of our cities, to walk together, go spot clouds and look at the day and night sky, to listen to the concert of nature and humans, to read and exchange about care, democracy and ecofeminism in Platon's Academy.

There are different ways of coming together: some to learn or discuss, others to make, celebrate, protest or simply spend time with one another. Together, these different ways of coming together form something closer to a cloud: temporary, shifting and impossible to contain in one place. The programme asks how we might reclaim and occupy the cloud(s): as a commons, as a space for political imagination and as a territory that does not belong to any single nation.

What follows in this journal moves through three breaths, bringing together the voices of the festival's partners, speakers and artists. Breathing is something we do together, something that connects us to one another and to the world around us. Each breath gathers a different set of struggles and possibilities, before opening onto the next. The three breaths are movements within the same collective act: reclaiming what we share, reconnecting our struggles, and making space to imagine what could come next.

The first breath is to **reclaim the commons**: to name the clouds gathering overhead, ask who owns the air and define how we can make it collective.

Antonis Galanopoulos from Eteron, the main partner of the festival, traces how inequality and oligarchy hollow democracy from within, and what the algorithmic age adds to that pressure. **Voula Zotali**, writing from the Digital Commons Conference, insists the cloud has a ground – minerals, water, energy, cables, hidden labour – and moves us from the commons as a thing we share to commoning as something we do, where autonomy means having the collective power to decide how we depend on one another. **Jon Goodbun** reads Athens' heat and

pollution as weapons in a class war, follows the second, computational cloud into the data-centres rising across Attica, and answers with Towers of Winds, passive structures that cool a street with little more than water. **Dimitris Rapidis**, from Eteron, looks at wildfire smoke and at the way automated alerts turn a shared environmental crisis into an individual responsibility: check the warning, stay inside, protect yourself. **Paul Hourlias** tells how Parea Radio began as a stream and a folder of files and became a place, a table people gather around, precisely by refusing to let an algorithm choose what they hear. **Yasmine Amal** takes the question somewhere else, arguing that what we lack is not only clean air or political space, but imagination. Through rain, colour and Indigenous ways of knowing, she looks for the conditions in which other futures might take root.

The second breath is to **reconnect the struggles with an ecofeminist perspective**, because no one breathes alone.

Joulia Strauss reopens an open-air university in Plato's grove – the Avtonomi Akadimia – gathering care, ecofeminism and animism into a transformative educational cloud. **Elke Krasny** shows that the histories of democracy are histories of care, and that care can be both a site of violence and the ground of a solidarity that refuses to stop at the border. **Marta Cillero Manzano**, asks what independent media across Europe might do together that none can do alone, while **Paremvasi 2030**, a youth collective builds a participatory magazine as a space of co-creation. **Julia Lazarus** follows Istanbul's Northern Forests Defense, a leaderless direct democracy that meets state concrete with a language of flowers and beetles, defending life rather than only opposing power. **Anna Orsós** grounds the cloud in the segregated Roma settlements where clean air, water and connection are withheld at once, and where gathering fallen wood to survive is prosecuted as theft. From Samos, **Homo Digitalis** and **I Have Rights** document how biometric gates and an AI-led surveillance ecosystem turn a reception centre into a place of confinement, reducing people on the move to bodies to be tracked. **Zsuzsanna Szelenyi** and **Srdjan Cvijic** listen to the resisters of Hungary and Serbia – why they keep going through fear and isolation, as one illiberal regime falls and another turns to open violence. And **Gresa Hasa** tells of Albania's Flamingo Revolution, where a fight over a lagoon became a mass movement, and its slogan turned from a refusal, "Albania Is Not for Sale," into a proposition: "New Albania."

The third breath is to **reimagine the future**: to make space for political possibilities that are not yet visible.

Niccolò Milanese starts with Chernobyl's drifting cloud and follows it into the present, asking what democratic movements might look like beyond the nation-state. The activists of **Spazi Sociali** and **Municipi Sociali** set down their theses on a Europe still to be constituted, proposing an alliance between rebels and democrats. **Natalia Galgos** moves from the asylum rooms of Lesvos, where survival depended on telling one's story in the West's own grammar of credibility, to cinema as a place where other worlds become possible, the initiative Pixida Films, compass. **Dina Ntziora** offers proximity itself as care: words and sounds as a temporary refuge, felt in the body before it is explained. **Jenny Marketou**'s folly imagines FUNK kinships as a pollinator for other futures.

At TRANSEUROPA Festival, for four days, we will learn to breathe as a collective - with political, cultural, and artistic activities - to rebuild and imagine a feminist, inclusive, ecological, and participatory democratic commons.

Together, we will stir a wind of democracy that won't be deviated by the rising storms of fascism and hate. A wind that brings citizens, young people and marginalised voices into the centre, and gives artists and cultural spaces a role in imagining what comes next. We will reclaim our commons across air, land, water, digital and democratic space, and challenge the ways they are privatised, extracted, polluted, commodified, captured, alienated and instrumentalised. These commons cross borders whether political systems recognise them or not. Air moves across countries, rivers cross frontiers, data travels through infrastructures that span continents, and struggles connect people who may never share the same territory. Reclaiming the cloud(s) therefore also means reclaiming our capacity to act together across borders and to build forms of solidarity that are not limited by the nation-state.

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RECLAIMING

the

COMMONS

Democracy under Threat: Inequalities, Oligarchy and the AI Challenge

Antonis Galanopoulos

Liberal representative democracy has inherent tensions, which have been described as the “democratic paradox”. What we nowadays call “liberal democracy”¹ is the result of the convergence of two traditions: the democratic tradition, based on the ideal of equality and popular sovereignty, and the liberal tradition, based on the ideal of individual freedom and the rule of law. The two traditions are not identical; their articulation was contingent, but not inevitable.

Recent studies argue that contemporary democracy is undergoing changes that could push it either toward elitist forms, with limited popular participation, or toward reactionary forms², where a nominally liberal democracy will coexist with systemic, structural racism. The quality of democracy, both in Greece as well as across the globe, is also affected by power imbalances and unequal political influence caused by ever-widening economic inequalities, the restriction of pluralism in mainstream media, corruption, and the intertwining of political and economic power, which is leading to the oligarchisation of politics internationally. The unequal power of wealth translates into unequal political power and influence over political authority. These inequalities are turning politics once again into a closed affair for the few. The underrepresentation of large segments of society – and consequently the overrepresentation of others – in politics and in the public sphere more broadly cannot be disconnected from the issue of social inequalities³.

A characteristic example of this debate was the confrontation between billionaire Bernard Arnault and professor Gabriel Zucman. Arnault considers Zucman’s proposal for a 2% tax on all properties exceeding €100 million to be a deadly attack that will lead the French economy to collapse⁴. He described Zucman as a far-left activist whose ideology aims to destroy the liberal economy, which he sees as the only system that works for the benefit of all. Another obvious example is Elon Musk’s repeated interventions, not only in the United States but also in other countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany. Musk’s case stands out in particular because he is a key factor in efforts to spread and normalise the far right internationally.

In the Greek context, the shadow of the Tempi train disaster, as well as a series of corruption scandals (wiretapping, agricultural subsidies, and others), has raised questions about the functioning of institutions and the rule of law and has led to a collapse in public confidence in political parties, the government, and the justice system. It is characteristic that, according to the findings of the X-Ray of Greek Voters 2025, a research study conducted by Eteron Institute, the lowest levels of trust are shown for political parties (13.6%) and the media (6.2%).

1. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, 2008.
2. Mondon Aurelien & Aaron Winter, *Reactionary Democracy. How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream*, Verso, 2020.
3. Stefanos Dimitriou, *Politics in Crisis*, Polis, 2025, p. 176 (In Greek). See also Nicholas Carnes & Noam Lupu, *Keeping Workers Off the Ballot: How Democracy Undermines Working-Class Representation*, Princeton University Press, 2026.
4. Jasper Jolly, *Wealth tax would be deadly for French economy, says Europe’s richest man*, The Guardian, 21 September, 2025. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/sep/21/wealth-tax-would-be-deadly-for-french-economy-says-europe-richest-man-bernard-arnault>

Threats to Democracy: Social, Economic and Political Inequalities

The institutional framework in many Western countries, and in supranational organisations such as the EU, is marked by a democratic deficit and by citizens’ growing disappointment with the functioning of democracy. In a recent study by Eteron Institute, a large majority of voters (79.3%) recognise that, despite its shortcomings, there is no better form of government than parliamentary democracy. At the same time, citizens’ dissatisfaction with the way democracy functions is widespread. Some 74.3% of citizens state that they are dissatisfied or rather dissatisfied. The research findings of another project, “Unmute Democracy” (2025), show that the degree of disappointment is correspondingly high. Citizens rate the functioning of democracy below the “pass threshold,” with an average score of 3.85/10. 19% rate it as 0, thereby expressing complete dissatisfaction. The share of those who express complete dissatisfaction is six times larger than that of citizens who are completely satisfied –only 3.1% – rate the functioning of democracy as 10. The lowest ratings were found among young people aged 17–34.

Another objective of that project was to examine what citizens perceive as a threat to the functioning of democracy. Among the options, which represented different political stances, one pair of closely linked threats stood out. These are the corruption of the political system (59.4%) on the one hand, and the lack of justice and impunity (57.6%) on the other. Corruption in the political system and impunity have a decisive influence on how citizens perceive the quality of democracy in Greece, and it is worth considering what this means for citizens’ participation in politics. The third most significant threat is the political and economic control of the media (32.3%), proving once again that the low quality of information affects the quality of democracy itself. Of the 13 options in total, only one more exceeds 20%: economic inequalities that reinforce the power of elites. The last two threats are connected to the unequal influence that specific interests have in the political domain.

According to Eteron’s latest research on economic justice (2026), a generalised and pervasive sense of injustice and inequality prevails in Greek society. Greece is considered an unjust country by a large majority of its citizens (80.4%). There is also near-universal recognition among citizens that inequalities between social classes in Greece are quite or very significant (88.1%). Similarly high levels (84%) are found among citizens who believe that injustices in Greece are greater compared to other European countries. The findings are overwhelming. Inequalities take various forms for different individuals, and we should not ignore cases such as gender inequalities. At the same time, there is a shared

collective sense of injustice linked to the unequal distribution of wealth and the perception that the state favours large businesses. These two issues are further exacerbated in the current period by the cost-of-living crisis and everyday inflation.

Restoring a sense of economic justice is related, beyond the economy itself, to the very functioning of democracy. In other words, beyond the pressures on citizens’ mental health and living conditions in material economic terms, we should ask how this condition of injustice and inequality affects social cohesion, citizens’ trust in the democratic regime and its institutions, and the functioning of the political system. For example, how politically active can people be if they cannot secure a decent livelihood for themselves and their families? How much time can they devote to the search for reliable information and to active political engagement? How much real political influence can they exert against larger economic interests? Precarity and injustice, in addition to their direct consequences for each person’s livelihood, also have secondary effects on the functioning and performance of democracy, and on our ability to live together in a harmonious social order.

Politics, Communication and AI

The well-known dangers to democracy described so far – socioeconomic inequalities, the far right, nationalism, and racism – are now operating in a new environment: against the backdrop of the mediatisation of politics, that is, the forced dependence and adaptation of politics to the media, and the expansion of artificial intelligence. Politics has at its core the value of dialogue, but this dimension seems to be increasingly disappearing nowadays. One expression of this development is parallel monologues and the echo chambers of social media.

The gradual degradation of digital platforms and of the quality of dialogue and content on them has been described by Cory Doctorow as “enshittification”.⁵ Initially, these platforms served as a means of democratising expression and,

for a certain period, became almost a game-changer for the diffusion of information and the networking of citizens, activists, and organisations. Today, however, the situation has changed considerably from the early years of their operation. The digital space increasingly resembles less and less a collective community of communication –even if fragmented and divided into bubbles – and is turning more and more into a privatised field of manipulation, a characteristic example of surveillance capitalism⁶, whose main function is the exploitation of personal data and the securing of profits for techno-oligarchs.

What researchers anticipate is the increasing penetration of generative artificial intelligence into democracy, a development that is expected to have a colossal influence on public opinion formation, since AI algorithms are characterised by both biases and manipulative capabilities. Evangelos Pournaras, who examined this issue, raised a series of critical questions:

*How to reinvent (digital) democracy to address a fast-growing deficit in democratic resilience by such challenges? What upgrades are required to build up this democratic resilience, that is the preservation of participation, representation and integrity in collective decision-making processes?*⁷

Although the threats and risks that AI may pose to democratic politics have been documented⁸ in detail in recent years by academics, non-governmental organisations, activists, and others, these warnings currently seem to be ignored by the broader society. Based on Eteron’s research findings, contemporary threats to democracy arising from the use of AI are not prominent among citizens. Citizens seem to identify far more opportunities than risks in artificial intelligence. However, as Pournaras highlights, there are objective risks in the increasingly certain involvement of AI in voting processes, or in using AI to scale up and establish participatory initiatives, e-voting, and citizens’ mobilisation via social media.⁹

In the face of the inevitable risks brought by the involvement of artificial intelligence with political affairs, there is a growing call for algorithmic transparency and algorithmic accountability. What if we take a step further and begin to imagine ways to turn technology and artificial intelligence into a common good, or explore forms of social ownership of social media?¹⁰ The logic of exiting platforms and fortifying ourselves in “alternative” social media – practically in even more tightly guarded bubbles – is not functional and ultimately reduces our outreach and our understanding of social developments. Similarly, technophobia and a sterile reaction to the technological wave of artificial intelligence cannot be productive in the long term, when new generations will be

native generations of artificial intelligence. A more productive goal for progressives across the globe may be to address the link between profit and technology, between oligarchy and the digital world. We need a modern, progressive vision for the age of artificial intelligence that safeguards autonomous critical thinking and defends autonomous democratic political action.

5. Cory Doctorow, *Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About It*, Verso, 2025.

6. Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, PublicAffairs, 2019.

7. Evangelos Pournaras, *Fair Voting Methods as a Catalyst of Upgrading Democracy: A Trilogy on Legitimacy, Impact and AI Safeguarding*, Eteron - Institute for Research and Social Change, 2026, p. 7. Available at: <https://eteron.org/en/fair-voting-methods-as-a-catalyst-of-upgrading-democracy/>.

8. See indicatively Sarah Kreps & Doug Kriner. How AI Threatens Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 54 (4), 2023, pp. 122-131. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-ai-threatens-democracy/>.

9. Evangelos Pournaras, *Fair Voting Methods as a Catalyst of Upgrading Democracy: A Trilogy on Legitimacy, Impact and AI Safeguarding*, Eteron - Institute for Research and Social Change, 2026, p. 27. Available at: <https://eteron.org/en/fair-voting-methods-as-a-catalyst-of-upgrading-democracy/>.

10. Peter Dorman, Governance of Social Media: A Social Ownership Approach, *International Review of Applied Economics*, 2026, pp. 1-22. doi:10.1080/02692171.2026.2672999.

What lies ahead?

Undoubtedly, we are internationally in a period of realignments and political fluidity. Geopolitical crises, wars, militarism, the challenges of artificial intelligence, the greed of techno-oligarchs, and the climate crisis compose a mosaic that appears threatening. Within this context, the major stake is to try to think critically about what the future of democracy might be. We need to think collectively about how we can successfully articulate social demands for a system that is more democratic, more representative, and more just.

Democracy is not simply the form of a state or a regime. It is a political act, a process that undermines the distinction between rulers and ruled, and for this reason John Keane has defined democracy as the self-government of equals.¹¹ The only guarantee for the future of democracy is the active participation of citizens. It is no coincidence that all the challenges we have examined, even briefly, in this article, from the oligarchisation of politics to the threats of the algorithmic age, have one thing in common: they aim to restrict the participation of the many, turning them, if possible, into silent spectators of the political game. Real democracy means reversing this trend, giving voice, choice, and power back to the many.

***This article draws from research findings from three projects of Eteron Institute conducted between March 2025 and May 2026: X-Ray of Greek Voters, Unmute Democracy, Economic Justice. More details can be found on eteron.org/en.**

11. John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy*, Pocket Books, 2019, p. 865.

Reclaiming the Cloud from Below: Digital Commons and the Ethics of Autonomy

Paraskevi (Voula) Zotali

*on behalf of the Digital Commons Conference
Organising Committee*

The cloud is never only in the cloud. It is in the ground that supplies its minerals, in the water and energy consumed by data centres, in the cables that cross oceans and neighbourhoods, in the labour that trains models and moderates platforms, and in the rules that decide who can speak, know, participate or refuse. Dominant technological imaginaries make these relations appear weightless. Reclaiming the cloud begins by bringing them back into view.

This is the point of departure for Digital Commons: Infrastructures, Design and the Ethics of Autonomy, a three-day conference taking place in Athens on 8-10 October 2026. Co-organised by the Department of Social Anthropology at Panteion University and the Institute of Informatics and Telecommunications at NCSR Demokritos, with parallel activities at AiTHERION, the conference brings social scientists, technologists, designers, artists and practitioners into one conversation. Its collaboration with TRANSEUROPA 2026 grows from a shared concern: how might the infrastructures that organise collective life be defended from enclosure and remade as sites of democratic imagination?



Digital Commons: Infrastructures, Design and the Ethics of Autonomy, Athens, 8–10 October 2026. Visual identity © Γραφείο επικοινωνίας του Ινστιτούτου Πληροφορικής & Τηλεπικοινωνιών

The cloud has a ground

At TRANSEUROPA, Reclaiming the Cloud(s) moves between digital, ecological, political and symbolic clouds. Air and data seem borderless, yet both are governed through material systems and unequally distributed harms. Pollution travels; so do radio signals, biometric records and algorithms. Their routes exceed national borders, while the power to direct them remains concentrated. The festival asks who owns and governs these clouds. The conference approaches this shared question through the infrastructures that give the cloud material form: who builds and maintains them, whose knowledge they recognise, which futures they make possible, and who lives with their consequences?

Across the programme, this materiality comes into focus. Discussions of AI return to minerals, land, electricity and hidden labour. Research on data centres examines the emerging alliance between digitalisation and energy transition, including the transformation of post-lignite Western Macedonia into a prospective node for AI infrastructure. Work on open-source ecosystems asks how collectively produced value is captured by actors that do not sustain the commons on which they depend. Other contributions trace community resistance to data-centre expansion and the legal strategies through which local struggles can expose the material contradictions of supposedly frictionless computation.

“The cloud is never only in the cloud.”

From commons to commoning

Making infrastructure visible, however, is only a first step. A commons is not simply a resource that many people can access, nor is openness automatically democratic. Open knowledge may still rest on unequal labour. Open-source code may be freely available while the wealth built upon it is privately captured. A shared platform can reproduce surveillance, exclusion or informal hierarchies. Even public ownership does not, by itself, determine who participates in decisions or whose values guide design.

The conference therefore shifts attention from the commons as a given resource to the practices of commoning: the situated work through which people establish obligations, negotiate rules, distribute benefits and burdens, maintain systems, resolve conflict and decide what a shared infrastructure is for. Alberto Corsín Jiménez’s opening keynote proposes ‘augural commons’ for forms of digital commoning that do not merely occupy a ready-made domain, but inaugurate the conditions of their own existence. Across the programme, commons emerge less as stable objects than as ongoing political and ethical achievements.

This shift is especially visible in contributions on community infrastructures and relational sovereignty. Research from Latin America and Canada examines telecommunications not simply as services delivered to users, but as systems embedded in collective governance, territorial relations, local expertise and histories of struggle. Work on environmental data and Sámi reindeer herding further shows how

infrastructures mediate competing claims to knowledge, territory and more-than-human life. Together, these cases demonstrate that common infrastructures are sustained not by technical arrangements or formal ownership alone, but through obligations, maintenance, situated knowledge and care.

Autonomy without isolation

These cases sharpen the conference’s central ethical question. Autonomy is often imagined as self-sufficiency: freedom from states, markets, experts or technological systems. Yet no network is independent. Community telecommunications rely on spectrum regulation, hardware supply chains, technical alliances and wider networks. Cooperative platforms operate within hostile markets. Public institutions need open-source communities, while those communities may depend on public investment. The relevant question is not how to escape dependence, but how to prevent dependence from becoming domination.

Autonomy, in this sense, is relational. It is the collective capacity to shape the terms of interdependence: to know how a system works; to participate in decisions about its purpose; to maintain, repair or modify it; to distribute its value; to set limits on extraction; and, where necessary, to refuse. This perspective avoids romanticising either community or technology. Commoning in practice can carry unequal burdens, conceal exclusions and exhaust the people who maintain it. The ethics of autonomy must therefore include accountability, care and the continuing ability to contest collective arrangements from within.

Autonomy is not the absence of dependence; it is the collective capacity to shape the terms of interdependence.

Design is governance

Once autonomy is understood relationally, design can no longer be treated as a neutral technical stage. Interfaces organise attention and behaviour. Metrics turn workers into numbers while hiding the judgements built into evaluation. Data architectures distribute authority over knowledge. AI systems encode decisions about whose cultural materials can be used, how benefits return, and what forms of consent count. Child-safety tools, smart-city systems and digital heritage platforms all make political choices about participation, visibility and risk, whether or not those choices are named as politics.

The conference explores how these choices might be made otherwise. Cooperative music platforms seek fairer relations between artists, listeners and infrastructure. Participatory approaches ask how platform technologies can remain answerable to cooperative values rather than forcing organisations to adapt to the imperatives of software. Artistic practice turns critique into a design requirement for AI commons. Work on citizen science, AI literacy and knowledge infrastructures examines governance not as a layer added after innovation, but as part of the infrastructure itself. Other contributions confront the difficult boundary between openness and protection: commoning under surveillance, collective online safety, embodied and intimate digital labour, and the right of communities to define conditions of access.

A feminist, transnational and ecological horizon

This is where the conference meets TRANSEUROPA’s feminist, transnational and ecological horizon most directly. A feminist approach asks which bodies absorb infrastructural costs and which forms of care and maintenance are made invisible. A transnational approach follows supply chains, platforms, standards, data and resistance across borders without replacing corporate sovereignty with a closed national sovereignty. An ecological approach refuses the fantasy that digital systems float outside material life. It connects AI and data to extractive landscapes, energy grids, water, non-human life and the uneven exposure of communities to environmental harm.

The programme brings these relations into view from many locations: community telecommunications in Latin America and Canada; digital commoning in India; platform labour and redistribution in Cameroon; surveillance and organising in Sri Lanka; cultural and embodied infrastructures in China and Europe; Maya textiles and Indigenous community infrastructures across the Americas; citizen-generated heritage in the Cyclades; and data-centre expansion in Greece and beyond. These are not interchangeable examples of one universal model. Their value lies precisely in the differences they introduce into the meaning of ownership, openness, sovereignty, community and justice.

What reclaiming requires

If TRANSEUROPA asks how the cloud can be reclaimed, the Digital Commons Conference follows this shared question into the institutions, labour, technical knowledge, maintenance, redistribution, legal capacities, collective memories and forms of refusal through which reclamation can take shape. Public infrastructures and participatory processes may be crucial parts of this work. Their democratic promise, however, depends on whether communities and publics can shape the purposes and architectures of technology, and develop the material capacity to act on the decisions they make.

Reclaiming the cloud begins within a world already shaped by colonialism, capitalism, state power and ecological damage. The infrastructures on which we depend carry these histories, but their present arrangements are not inevitable. Commoning refers to the collective practices through which the material, social and ecological conditions of life are reproduced - and through which the question of what kind of life should be sustained, for whom, and according to whose values is continually negotiated. It is therefore not only about sharing or managing resources, but about exercising collective authority over the relations, obligations and forms of value that organise common life. In infrastructural terms, it is also the ongoing work of making dependencies visible and collectively reshaping their terms and the forms of life they enable.

Over three days in Athens, the conference takes up these questions through concrete struggles over digital infrastructures, design and governance. In dialogue with Reclaiming the Cloud(s), it asks how collective authority over these systems might be built and exercised: how their purposes can be defined democratically, how their benefits and burdens can be distributed justly, and how the forms of life they reproduce can themselves become matters of collective deliberation and transformation.

The radio is a place

Paul Hourlias



The future home of Parea Radio during one of the first visits with residents, Athens, 2026
© Themis Sevdali

“Spotify co-founder Daniel Ek’s investment company, Prima Materia, is an investor in Helsing, a defence AI company, where Ek is also co-chairman”

When I started Parea Radio, there was no room you could walk into and say, this is the radio. There was no studio or booth, no antenna, and no physical place connected to the project. There was a website, a stream, a growing folder of shows on my computer and an idea that was still easier to feel than to explain. I knew I wanted to create an independent radio station around music and the people sharing it, but I didn’t yet understand what that might mean beyond putting together a programme and inviting people to contribute.

The first shows arrived as files, but the people behind them arrived in a way I had not really planned for. I didn’t know any of the artists beforehand. Some found Parea themselves, others heard about it through somebody else, and gradually people began reaching out, sending music and proposing shows. Most of them didn’t know each other either. After a while, names on the programme became familiar and the station started developing its own network: people listened to each other’s shows, conversations started, somebody would hear something and get in touch with the person who had played it. It changed the way I thought about what we were building. The radio seemed to exist somewhere beyond the website and the server carrying the audio, in the relationships forming around it.

The name Parea comes from a Greek word that is difficult to translate without making it sound more formal than it actually is. A parea can simply be a group of friends, but the word also describes the experience of being together: the people you sit around a table with, the group that stays for another drink, the conversation that continues even though nobody planned for it to last that long. I liked the name because it didn’t describe a genre or a scene, but what I hoped could form around the station.

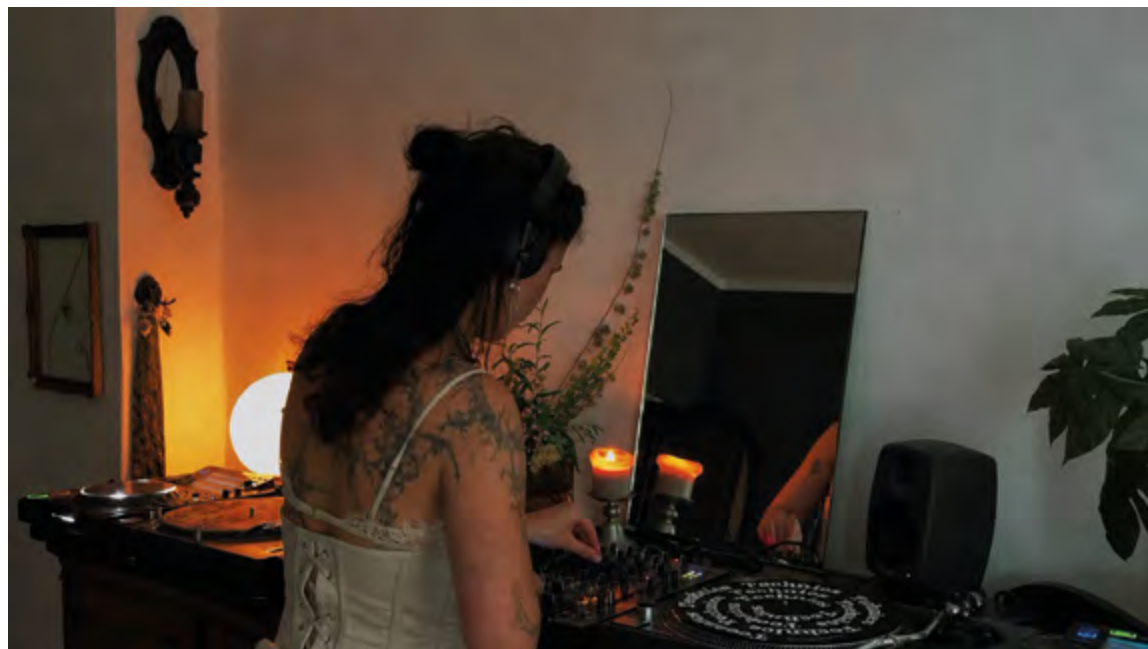
Starting online made that possible before we had a studio. Someone could make a show in Athens, another person elsewhere in Europe could send theirs, and both could enter the same programme. It is easy to overlook how strange that remains: someone can sit alone in a room, record something shaped by their own taste and surroundings, send it away,

and later a person they have never met can spend an hour listening to it somewhere else. The transmission is technical, but what travels through it is personal.

I have been thinking about listening more since starting the station, partly because I deliberately avoid algorithmic ways of discovering music. I don’t use Spotify and try not to outsource discovery to systems designed to predict what will keep me listening. That choice is musical, but it is also political. Spotify co-founder Daniel Ek’s investment company, Prima Materia, is an investor in Helsing, a defence AI company, where Ek is also co-chairman. That sits against my own values and the values we are trying to build into Parea. For me, how we listen and what systems we support are not separate questions.

Radio asks for a different relationship. You arrive halfway through something, you don’t necessarily know what is playing and you cannot immediately decide what comes next. Sometimes you hear a record that sends you down a new path; sometimes something you would never have chosen yourself. Both are part of listening. When I listen to somebody’s radio show, I am not only being shown music I might like; for an hour or two I am following another person’s logic. The sequence might come from records collected for years, something heard last week, music connected to the city they live in, or simply a mood. After listening regularly, you begin to recognise parts of someone through those decisions. In that sense, radio can be a way of giving another person your attention rather than asking an algorithm to give you more of yourself.

That freedom has been part of Parea from the start. Artists have always been able to decide what they want to play and what shape their show should take, within the values we share as a station. I never wanted people to come into Parea and be told how they should sound. In the Greek music scene, I had seen and heard enough stories about closed doors, unanswered messages and people being told no before they had really been given a chance. “Community” has also become an easy word for cultural projects to use, some-



A Parea Radio artist recording a show, Berlin, 2026
© ANAMORPH

times more as a label than a way of behaving. I wanted Parea to be specific about what the word meant in practice. From the beginning I made myself a few simple promises: I would reply to people, I would be transparent about what the station could and could not offer, and I would not reject somebody simply because they were unknown to me or outside an existing circle.

The station's character now belongs to the people who have trusted it with their music. Residents and guest artists have brought sounds, formats and ideas I could never have planned on my own. Parea would not exist in any meaningful sense without the artists who sent a first show to a radio station that was then little more than a stream and an idea, and who kept returning, sharing, suggesting and making space for one another.

There is a contradiction in trying to build this kind of

“radio can be a way of giving another person your attention rather than asking an algorithm to give you more of yourself.”

independent space online. Parea depends on infrastructure that is anything but independent: hosting, streaming technology, social platforms, messaging tools, servers, data centres and cables we rarely think about while listening. **The language of the “cloud” makes all of this sound weightless, though there is nothing immaterial about the systems carrying a broadcast from one place to another. They are owned and governed, and a small radio station like ours has little control over most of them.**

The answer is not to pretend we can exist outside those systems. We can't build our own internet, and independence becomes fairly meaningless if it requires complete self-sufficiency. What seems more interesting is what can be done with the infrastructure available to us. A platform can still help two artists find each other; a group chat can become somewhere people exchange knowledge or organise a project; a website can become an archive. Perhaps the infrastructure we have the most agency over is not the technical layer at all, but the social one: the habits of sharing, trusting, contributing and listening that determine what a space becomes.

I felt this very clearly at our first Parea meetup in Athens. Until then, many of the people involved had mostly existed as names in messages, artist photos and blocks in the programme. Suddenly we were sitting around the same table, talking about what the radio needed, what wasn't working, what people wanted to help with and what we might do together. Some of the discussion was mundane, other parts moved towards events and collaborations, but what stayed with me was simply that the meeting existed at all. A project that had begun through files travelling across the internet had somehow produced a table with people sitting around it.

Now that movement from the online to the physical is entering a new chapter. From the beginning of September,



Parea Radio residents at a community meetup, Athens, 2026
© Paul Hourlias

Parea will have its first permanent space in Athens. We have already visited it twice with residents, inspecting what needs to be done and imagining what it might become. At the moment it is almost a blank canvas, which feels right. We will build a radio studio there, but that is only one part of the plan. More importantly, we want it to become a community space: somewhere for listening sessions, workshops, meetings, small events, collaborations, recordings, conversations and simply spending time together. The residents will help build it, use it and inevitably change it. That feels like the natural continuation of how Parea has grown. We did not build a room and then create its online presence. The online station came first, and the relationships that formed through it eventually made us want a room of our own.

The archive has produced another change in how I understand the station. At first it was mostly practical: radio passes quickly, people miss things, and listeners should be able to return to a programme later. As it has grown, the archive has started to look less like a collection of files and more like a subjective record of a community at a particular moment. It holds people documenting scenes they are close to, DJs moving away from what they normally play in clubs, residents following temporary obsessions, and shows shaped by where somebody was living or what they were listening to that month. None of it claims to be a history. It simply leaves traces.

Small cultural projects and scenes are often poorly remembered. A venue closes, a collective stops organising, a domain expires, an account disappears or a platform changes, and something that occupied a large part of people's lives becomes difficult to find. An archive cannot preserve the relationships themselves, but at least it can say: these people were here, they were listening to this, they thought it was worth sharing.



Residents visiting Parea Radio's new space before work begins, Athens, 2026 © Themis Sevdali

This is part of what makes the radio contribution to TRANSEUROPA interesting to me as well. The takeover will belong to a particular moment; people will broadcast and listen, the programme will finish and everyone will move on. What remains afterwards will not reproduce that moment, nor should it, but the archive can hold onto a trace of it and place it alongside the other people and sounds that have passed through the station.

September feels less like the point when Parea finally becomes “real” and more like another beginning. The physical space gives us possibilities we did not have before, but it also asks the same question the radio has asked from the beginning: what happens when you give people room and trust them to use it? I don't know exactly what the answer will look like, and I would rather not decide it in advance. If Parea is going to deserve the word community, the room should be shaped through the people who inhabit it just as the station has been shaped by the people who broadcast through it.

For now, much of Parea still exists as an invisible signal moving through infrastructure we don't see. Somebody sends something and somebody else receives it, yet around that exchange other things have accumulated: conversations, friendships, disagreements, offers to help, ideas that came from elsewhere and meetings that would not otherwise have happened. Maybe reclaiming the cloud begins somewhere in that shift: not by pretending that a small cultural project can take ownership of the infrastructure beneath it, but by making different use of it, creating relationships that are not entirely organised around prediction, optimisation or consumption, preserving things that would otherwise disappear, and allowing an invisible connection to become something as ordinary and tangible as people sitting around the same table. For the moment, that feels like enough of a definition of Parea Radio: a place we are still learning how to make together.

Heat and Pollution as Weapons in the Class War: Reclaiming the Clouds of Athens

Jon Goodbun

The summer of 2026 saw extreme heat events across Europe. In many respects Greece was spared the worst. Still, according to recently published data from the National Observatory of Athens (NOA), it was still one of the warmest Greek summers on record, averaging 1° Celsius above the 1991-2020 mean, with August around 1.6°C above normal.¹ At the same time, AtmoHub, the specialist atmospheric research platform coordinated by NOA, recorded the effects of a series of wildfire episodes on the atmosphere over Athens and Attica. Significantly, they noted that the air in Athens is affected in different ways at different heights, and is impacted not only by local and bio-regional fires and smoke, but also by continental and beyond air pollution events.

Athens makes these relations unusually visible. Situated in a basin surrounded on three sides by mountains, the city is an extraordinarily dense field of concrete construction, unshaded thermal mass and relatively little green space. It is consequently especially susceptible to both urban heat island and urban pollution island effects, as well as to the feedbacks between them. These conditions are now being amplified by climate change. Extreme heat increasingly combines with drought, forest fires, dust carried across the Mediterranean from the ongoing desertification of the Sahara and Sahel regions in Africa, as well as more local traffic and shipping pollution, fuel-poverty driven wood and rubbish burning, and the multiple consequences of decades of austerity in public services and local government, combined with uneven urban development driven by private property speculation of various kinds.

Thus, heat and pollution are not simply effects of climate change. In the contemporary city, heat and pollution are produced and unevenly organised. Heat is organised through the materials and density of buildings, through roads and traffic, through land values and patterns of investment, through access to trees, water and shade, through working conditions, energy prices and the ability – or inability – to retreat into air-conditioned interiors. Pollution is organised through many of the same systems. The atmosphere is a profoundly political space.

But these conditions are not experienced equally. The impacts of extremes of heat and pollution always play out through existing socio-economic inequalities, intersecting through class, gender, race and legal status. Wealthier Athenians can afford air-conditioning in summer and heating in winter. They are more likely to work in similarly conditioned environments, move around in air-conditioned cars and live in greener, less polluted neighbourhoods. They can leave the city during the hottest periods. Those without these possibilities live and work in environments over which they have much less control.

In previous texts I have described these relations as forms of environmental slow violence.² I increasingly think that we need stronger language: *Heat and pollution are becoming weapons in the class war.*

This of course does not mean that someone consciously picks up heat and points it at the poor. The violence is systemic. Property relations, transport systems, labour conditions, energy infrastructures and investment decisions organise differentiated exposure and protection environments. They produce an atmospheric geography of class. Air-conditioning captures the contradiction particularly clearly. During an extreme heatwave it can be life-saving. Yet the dominant model of individual air-conditioning privatises climatic adaptation: those who can afford it purchase a temporary interior climate while compressors consume electricity and reject heat into already overheated streets. The deteriorating atmospheric commons is compensated for by increasingly energy-intensive private bubbles of climatic protection.

The wealthy are both disproportionately insulated from environmental degradation and disproportionately responsible for producing it. This pattern operates at every scale, from the air-conditioned apartment and car to global patterns of consumption, extraction and carbon emissions. It is commendable that the current administration in the Municipality of Athens has recognised and are responding to this reality. Supported by some genuinely excellent long-term research led both by the Municipality's planning department – I'm thinking in particular of the 'Athens Resilience Strategy for 2030' – as well as important work and initiatives by scientists at NOA and academics at NTUA, a number of important initiatives are now underway in Athens, with the municipality explicitly treating cooling as a social right, and providing a network of cooled spaces during significant heat events.³

1. See https://w2.meteo.gr/article_view.cfm?entryID=4509

2. See Jon Goodbun, 'The Ecological Semiotics of Air Pollution and Heat in Athens', in *Taking Action: Transforming Athens Urban Environments*, edited by Norbert Kling, Tasos Roidis and Mark Michaeli and published by Berlin: Jovis, 2025

3. See <https://www.cityofathens.gr/deltio-typoy/anoigoun-epita-klimatizomenoi-choroi-ston-dimo-athinaion-gia-tous-polites-logo-poly-ypsilon-thermokrasiou/>

Reclaiming which Cloud(s)?

The theme of this year's Trans-Europa Festival is *Reclaiming the Cloud(s)*. The plural is important. The first cloud we have encountered above: the atmosphere itself and the turbulent mixture of gases, particles, heat, moisture, smoke, dust, pollen and living matter within which Athens and its inhabitants breathe. But there is another cloud spreading across Attica: the apparently immaterial cloud of digital computation and data-centres.

The immaterial metaphor of the digital cloud is, of course, misleading. *The cloud is extraordinarily material*. It consists of mines and minerals, semiconductor fabrication plants, fibre-optic and undersea cables, electrical grids and enormous buildings full of servers. It requires land, electricity and water, and produces significant amounts of heat.

A new landscape is currently being constructed across eastern Attica shaped by this second cloud. Microsoft's €976 million Greek cloud investment consists of three data-centres at Spata and Koropi, with a combined specified capacity of 38.4 MW. It was designated a Strategic Investment by the Greek state and has been developed through special spatial plans for strategic investments, partially displacing normal planning procedures. One of the Koropi sites alone occupies more than 100,000 square metres of previously agricultural land.

The scale of the infrastructural consequences is striking. Research by Charis Papaevangelou and Eugenia Siapera estimates from the project's own assessment documents that Microsoft's largest Spata facility could initially consume electricity equivalent to around 82 per cent of the municipality's existing annual electricity consumption, rising to 159 per cent at maximum installed capacity.⁴ They also document local concerns about an already degraded water infrastructure and a proposal to create a more circular system of wastewater treatment and reuse that was rejected because of the additional cost to the investment. Microsoft, for its part, states that its Greek facilities are designed to minimise both energy and water consumption and will use direct evaporative cooling only during the hottest periods – when temperatures rise above approximately 29.4°C – with water recirculated several times before part evaporates and the remainder is discharged into the wastewater system.

There is a peculiar ecological contradiction here. It is precisely during those periods when Attica is hottest, driest and most climatically stressed that water becomes useful for cooling both human bodies and computational machines. At this same moment, Athens is confronting a much larger crisis of metropolitan water supply. The Greek state is planning major new infrastructure to transfer additional water towards Attica from other hydrological basins. This project is not officially justified as infrastructure for data-centres, and indeed it would be wrong to claim that it is. However, their co-existence poses a question which any ecological politics of Athens must confront: Can ecological transition simply mean continually enlarging the territory from which the metropolis extracts water and energy in order to satisfy whatever new demands emerge? Or do we also have to ask: which resource demands are necessary? Who creates them? Whose interests do they serve? And what kinds of collective life do they make possible?

As much as our mainstream media and mainstream political discourse wish to ignore such issues, these questions of large-scale socio-ecological strategic planning are unavoidable. Such plans are currently being made behind closed doors, in the extractivist interests of what Greek economist and political theorist Yanis Varoufakis has described as a new techno-feudalist elite.⁵ It doesn't particularly matter if the new data-centres being built across Attica are powered and cooled by apparently renewable sources. As I have previously argued, following Murray Bookchin: a wind farm owned by a multinational power company is not necessarily an alternative technology!⁶ Decarbonisation without transformations in ownership, land and air rights, and global material relations will simply reproduce existing extractivist systems in new forms.

The questions concerning socio-ecological planning and strategy have over the last decade or two been most powerfully developed around the growing dialogue of proposals, experiments and demands articulated through various Green New Deal proposals, and the discourse around a 'Just Transition'. At its most radical, the Global Green New Deal proposes not simply technological substitution but a just transition grounded in democratic ownership and control, environmental justice and new institutional forms. For example, a Green New Deal cannot simply ask *how can we produce more renewable electricity?* It must also ask: what is energy for? What is water for? What is land for? And increasingly today, what is computation for?

We need as many Green New Deals as there are communities to organise around – and at the same time a meta-dialogue capable of connecting them. Specifically for the context being discussed here, we need to start discussing what

an Athenian, Attic, Greek and European Green New Deal might look like, beyond the extractivist and capitalist lens which has shaped most local and European projects to date. This distinction is close to one recently made by the Greek architect, planner and political ecologist Ilias Gianniris, between a 'Green Transition' and 'Ecological Transformation'. A transition can remain essentially technical, technocratic and economic, he argues. Transformation necessarily involves society itself.⁷

The cloud that models the cloud

We find ourselves today adrift in contradictions. The critique of digital infrastructure cannot mean a simplistic rejection of computation, modelling or artificial intelligence. These tools, in some form, will surely be essential to any progressive socio-ecological project. Properly socialised, they will be key contributors to any radical Green New Deal Dialogue. As James Bridle has suggested in *Ways of Being* and elsewhere, the emergence of artificial intelligences might also provide an opportunity to both question the forms of human intelligence, while recognising the multiple other forms of intelligence already operating within ecological systems. The political question therefore includes asking: what kinds of intelligences and relationships might our computational systems allow us to newly perceive, support and participate within?

I have already praised many local actors for their work recognising the political ecologies of heat and pollution in Athens. I similarly recognise the important progress being made in developing digital models of the city which can help us to understand its metabolisms. The city was one of the European test sites for the EU-funded DUET project – *Digital Urban European Twins* – which used cloud computing and open data to explore how digital representations of cities might allow both governments and citizens to test the consequences of different policy decisions. Its stated ambition was explicitly democratic: digital twins as a way of bringing collective intelligence into complex urban decision-making. More recent pro-

jects are pushing this further into climate adaptation. EUROASIS, for example, is developing an 'Urban Heat Digital Twin' as part of a wider programme combining physical cooling interventions, nature-based systems, climate shelters, heat-health monitoring and new forms of governance. Significantly, the project explicitly commits itself to equity, open science and co-creation.

There is much here that should be supported. But a digital twin is not politically progressive simply because its data concerns the environment. Who owns the data? Who decides what gets measured? Who constructs the model? Which entities become visible within it, and which disappear? Can citizens interrogate its assumptions? Can communities contribute their own sensors and observations? Is it built upon open and interoperable infrastructures, or does the public city become dependent upon proprietary platforms? And, most importantly, who has the capacity to act upon the differences that the model reveals?

There is a further paradox here. Digital technologies promise to make the environmental metabolism of cities increasingly visible. Citizens are encouraged to contribute data. Sensors measure temperature, humidity and pollution. Satellites observe vegetation and heat. Models combine these observations into increasingly detailed representations of urban systems. Yet the computational cloud through which this information circulates can itself remain remarkably opaque, as can the ownership of the data-centre infrastructure upon which it relies. A genuinely ecological digital twin of Athens would therefore eventually have to model the infrastructure that runs the digital twin of Athens. The observer has to re-enter the system being observed.

A radical eco-cybernetic computational model must include its own electricity, water, heat, minerals, cables, buildings and labour. The informational ecology must reconnect with the material and energetic ecology from which it has never actually been separate. The question is not simply whether the city can sense itself, but whether it can learn – and who constitutes the city that is doing the learning. A digital twin could become an extraordinarily problematic instrument of technocratic management and enclosure. But it could also become an infrastructure of ecological commoning.

4. See for example, Charis Papaevangelou and Eugenia Siapera, 'State, platform capitalism and infrastructural power: Microsoft's data-centres in Greece 2.0' in *Platforms & Society*, 2. (2025) <https://doi.org/10.1177/209768624251325525>

5. See Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism*, London: Penguin, 2023.

6. See Jon Goodbun, 'There isn't one Green New Deal', in *Making Futures*, Leipzig: Spector (2022), edited by Markus Bader, George Kafka, Tatjana Schneider, and Rosario Talevi.

7. See Ilias Gianniris, <https://epohi.gr/articles/data-centers-i-nea-kataigida-tis-idiotikopoiisis/?query=51-page-2>

8. See James Bridle, *Ways of Being*, Penguin, 2022.

9. See <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101296211?>

Towers of Winds: Listening to Αθήνα

The various questions set out above have informed a design research project that I have been developing with collaborators in Athens and London in recent years: Towers of Winds, which has developed into a wider investigation into the ecological semiotics of heat and pollution, and how we might simultaneously intervene within, sense and learn from the atmospheric systems of the city.

The ecological anthropologist Gregory Bateson suggested that ecologies always have two metabolisms. One concerns thermodynamic bioenergetics: flows of matter and energy. The other is semiotic, and concerns flows of information, signs and pathways of communication. Ecological thinking and action need both. This distinction has become increasingly important to the project. An early component, which I called *Listening to Αθήνα*, proposed distributing commercial and DIY environmental sensors through schools, balconies, workshops, performances and community collaborations. Networks of temperature, humidity and pollution sensors could contribute to real-time environmental models while simultaneously producing autonomous environmental knowledge for community organisation. Rather than understanding citizens merely as sources of data for a centrally managed smart city, we might understand sensing itself as a form of ecological pedagogy and political organisation: learning collectively to perceive the systems within which we are enfolded.

Alongside this sensing research, we have been actively constructing and testing passive downdraft evaporative cooling structures. The project operates across several possible scales: i. experimental hacking interventions into individual Athenian polykatoikia apartment buildings; ii. approximately five-to-seven-metre community-scale towers; and iii. much

larger 25m high municipal emergency infrastructures. We are currently seeking research funding for the largest scale, but have had great success with the smaller towers, often achieving close to 10°C of air cooling, from our first experimental prototypes at Latraac Skate Bar in Keramikos in 2024, to our more recent street tests outside the Rheomode studio in Kypseli this summer. Weather permitting, we will have a workshop to build and test an iteration of this tower at the entrance to the Trans-Europa festival site opening evening.

The principle is simple. Water evaporating inside a tower removes heat from the air. The cooled air becomes denser and falls, producing a self-perpetuating downdraft and creating a cooler public microclimate with very little energy input, just water. Larger versions, according to our models, might potentially draw much cleaner air down from above the worst layers of street pollution levels in Athens, under the right conditions.

These are not proposed as technological solutions to Athens’ environmental problems. They are experiments, and this distinction matters. The environmental crises now confronting us are of such complexity that it is naïve to imagine that we can simply design or plan ‘solutions’. Indeed, thinking in terms of linear problems and solutions is itself part of the meta-problem of human instrumental reason within complex ecological systems. *We can steer a boat, but we can’t steer an ocean.*

Equally of course, this is not an argument against planning. Quite the opposite. Learning about and working with and the planetary metabolic rifts driven by capitalism requires urgent yet experimental forms of democratic socio-ecological planning. But the complexity of ecological systems requires us to recognise the limits of prediction and control. We need to test many experimental socio-ecological formations, nurture enclaves of otherness and understand projects as incomplete processes capable of learning and co-evolving.

A radical Green New Deal therefore requires new public infrastructures, new forms of municipalism, new cooperative institutions, new relationships between researchers and communities, and new practices of maintenance, care, sensing and modelling. It requires not simply a Green New Deal but a *Green New Dialogue*, and the Towers of Winds project is an attempt to generate learning dialogues with the troubled eco-mental systems of Athena.

Reclaiming the Clouds

In conclusion then, we can say that reclaiming the clouds might mean reclaiming several interconnected commons:

The **atmospheric commons**: the right to cool, clean and breathable air that cannot be restricted to those able to purchase private climatic bubbles.

The **computational commons**: recognising data-centres, networks and artificial intelligence as material infrastructures whose energy, water, land and mineral requirements are matters for democratic socio-ecological planning, and are not to be the enclosed reserves and extractive infrastructure of an emergent techno-feudalist elite.

And the **informational commons**: the sensors, data and models through which cities increasingly perceive themselves, to be held openly enough that inhabitants can participate not merely in being sensed, but can also participate individually and collectively in deciding what should be sensed, how it should be interpreted and what should happen as a consequence.

These aren’t three separate clouds. They are different descriptions of the same ecology. The struggle over them concerns who has the capacity to sense, model and transform the material conditions of collective life. If heat and pollution have become weapons in an atmospheric class war, the task cannot simply be to construct better private defences against them. It is to transform the systems that distribute vulnerability and protection – and to begin demanding and producing the atmospheres, semiotics and infrastructures of the city as a new commons.

10. We exhibited the project at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2025, and worked with two film-makers to produce two film pieces: one more experimental piece on ‘The Eco-Mental Systems of Athena’ with Linn Phyllis Seeger, and one more documentary introduction to the project, made with Gemma Riggs. Both can be found on the Rheomode Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@rheomode-g5p>

Wildfires, Climate Breakdown, and the Politics of Breathing

Dimitris Rapidis

For years now, summer in Athens has no longer arrived quietly; it announces itself through a sun dimmed by an orange haze and an atmosphere heavy with the scent of burning pine. As climate-driven wildfires sweep through the Mediterranean basin, smoke plumes originating in the surrounding mountains of Attica or the coastal pine forests near Porto Germeno spread fear, desperation, anxiety and, above all, disaster. In such recurring moments of public health crisis, the notion that air is an unclaimable, borderless commons becomes an urgent material reality. Air is our most intimate, shared infrastructure -a physical system binding every living body in a state of radical, unavoidable interdependence.

Yet, as the climate crisis deepens, the simple act of breathing is quietly being questioned. Clean air, once assumed to be an infinite, free public good, is rapidly turning into a private commodity. State responses to seasonal infernos have increasingly defaulted to automated 112 emergency alerts. These notifications urge citizens to isolate themselves, close their shutters, and seal their windows, effectively outsourcing survival to individual choices.

For inhabitants with climate-controlled apartments in leafy suburbs of the Greek capital, high-efficiency purifiers, and remote office roles, toxic air might present a manageable inconvenience. But for delivery drivers navigating congested avenues, agricultural workers, construction crews in industrial suburbs of Athens, populations living in poor conditions, and marginalized migrant communities, a burning atmosphere is an immediate hazard absorbed directly into the lungs. This

disparity reveals that air is not merely an ecological medium, but a contested political arena. Just as corporate clouds monetize shared digital spaces, environmental degradation encloses the atmospheric commons, dictating who breathes safely and who carries the physical costs of ecological neglect. Reclaiming the cloud cannot remain an abstract metaphor for digital rights; it must start on the ground, with the air we inhale, establishing clean air as a collective, democratic right.

The state delegates adaptation to the citizens

When environmental collapse destabilizes urban life, public institutions increasingly rely on digital managerialism. Across Southern Europe, climate governance relies heavily on technological systems, such as automated SMS alerts, predictive wildfire indices, satellite monitoring networks like Copernicus, and heatwave forecasting algorithms. During summer heatwaves in Athens, Madrid or Marseille, citizens receive mass digital notices instructing them to shelter indoors and minimize exertion.

This reliance on top-down technocratic warnings conceals a structural failure: the state delegates adaptation to the citizen. While satellite feeds map heat vectors across the Mediterranean in real time, these systems manage symptoms rather than address underlying causes. Digital infrastructure becomes an engine of containment. It issues alerts while state-led systems -such as underfunded fire services, crumbling public water distribution, and fragile electricity grids overtaxed by private air conditioning- remain neglected. The smart city uses notifications to simulate control, framing systemic climate risk as a matter of personal precaution.

The interdependence of the commons

Wildfire smoke and urban heat stress demonstrate the limits of political borders. When pyrocumulonimbus clouds rise from burning pine forests around Attica or south-western France, fine respirable particles cross regional lines regardless of administrative jurisdictions. Smoke clouds reveal what legal boundaries obscure: air functions as an indivisible commons.

Addressing this reality requires moving from isolated personal survival toward public governance. Because air is inherently shared, digital systems, energy networks, and public health infrastructure are connected elements of the same civic foundation. A city's capacity to endure an extreme heat event depends not on private mobile apps, but on shared resources: municipal cool zones, urban canopy restoration, open climate data, and transnational emergency coordination. Connecting digital justice to environmental protection means managing information networks and natural atmospheric systems as public goods rather than commercial assets.

**Heat stress and class dynamics
across Europe**

Atmospheric degradation across Europe affects communities unevenly. While southern cities like Athens experience extreme Mediterranean heat directly, heatwaves in northern European capitals such as Paris, London or Brussels highlight identical structural divisions. Across these urban environments, heat stress acts along socioeconomic lines.

In densely built neighbourhoods of central Athens, like Kypseli, Koukaki or predominately working-class districts across western Athens, dense concrete construction and minimal green leafy cover create intense localized heat islands. Surface temperatures in asphalt-heavy areas remain elevated throughout the night, preventing much-needed relief. Meanwhile, service workers, logistics drivers, and municipal crews must continue physical labour through active heat warnings to keep supply chains running. At the same time, higher-income households rely on private cooling systems that exhaust additional waste heat onto city streets, further raising ambient temperatures for those outside. European climate policies expose a fundamental tension: while the atmosphere is physically universal, the resources to avoid its risks remain unequally distributed.

Policy priorities and steps ahead

Reclaiming the atmospheric commons requires constructing practical, transnational infrastructures focused on public health and environmental equity. To transform invisible digital networks into tools for democratic governance, European cities and community organizations must implement structural policies. Let us share three concrete ideas in this respect.

First, urban adaptation must prioritize physical public interventions over personal smartphone apps. Municipalities should establish expanded urban green corridors, fund systematic tree-planting programs in low-income districts, and construct accessible, public cooling facilities. Local governments must also invest in publicly owned, renewable energy grids capable of supporting municipal cooling systems without driving up carbon emissions.

Second, digital tools should be redesigned to serve public atmospheric data as an open commons. Rather than relying on proprietary software platforms, city governments and civic groups can deploy open-source, community-managed environmental sensors. Broad access to real-time microclimate and particulate data enables neighbourhood councils, labour unions, and worker collectives to enforce clear safety measures, including mandatory paid work stoppages for outdoor personnel during dangerous heat thresholds.

Third, European policy needs to integrate labour rights, digital governance, and ecological planning into a unified framework. Shared cross-border civil protection systems, open-source climate technology, and legally recognized access to clean air are essential components of a democratic commons.

Reclaiming the cloud means grounding political priorities. By rejecting the commercialization of basic life support systems and democratizing the technical infrastructures governing daily life, European communities can build resilient, equitable public spaces and start improving ways of coping with the dire consequences of climate change.

*If anything, rain teaches
us that clouds are the
soil for transcendence
and colours the
sanctuary of change*

Yasmine Amal



The imagination crisis

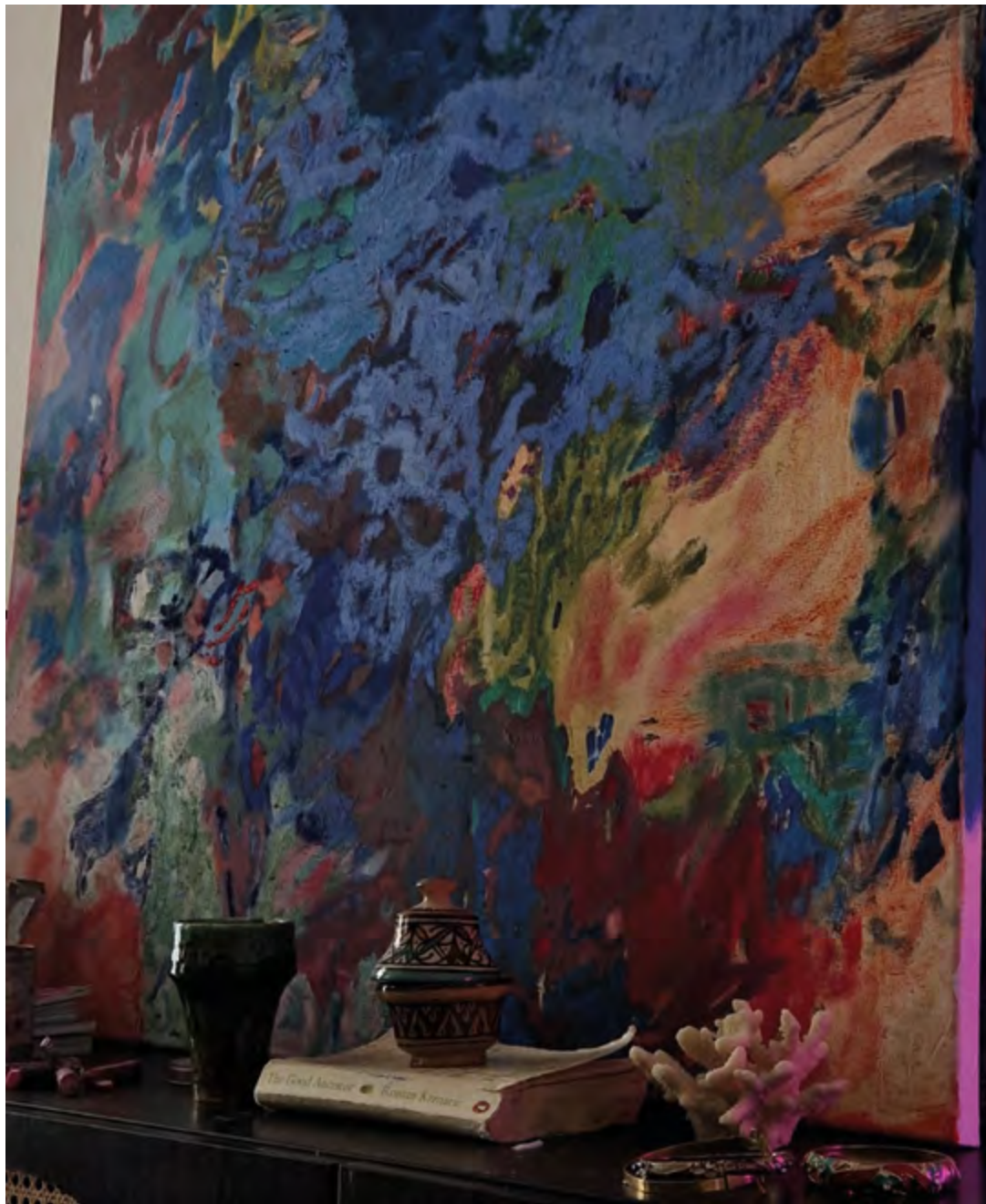
There is one thing that stayed with me from Angela Merkel's legislation period: the term *alternativlos*. She used it repeatedly to frame certain decisions as having no reasonable alternative, particularly during the financial euro crisis, and later in other major policy debates. In other words, she claimed: there is no other way than my way, because circumstances required it. Which is clever, because through that she made the opposition look irrational for demanding different policies. So, in fact, she delivered a diagnosis of today's democracy: braindead.

Long before the euro crisis, thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis were already concerned with the political conditions of imagination and our capacity to create alternatives. The Earth4All research on *The System Within* points to imagination as foundational for system change, as it is a core component of empathy and helps us model uncertainty, relationships, complexity and paradox.¹ If people cannot imagine a different future, they remain emotionally and politically loyal to the present, even when it is un-

*“she delivered a diagnosis of today's
democracy: braindead”*

sustainable. Especially when you come from a system where your imagination is held captive by a four-year legislative system running on conservative values.

1. Jamie Bristow, Rosie Bell, Christine Wamsler, Tomas Björkman, Phoebe Tickell, Julia Kim and Otto Scharmer, *The System Within: Addressing the Inner Dimensions of Sustainability and Systems Transformation*, The Club of Rome / Earth4All, 2024, p. 16.



The Good Ancestor © Yasmine Amal

Hyper-Individualism has system change in a chokehold

I believe that the roots of this imagination crisis lie within hyper-individualism which I understand as the final output of the colonial ecosystem. Upholding colonialism through its pillars of separation and exploitation, hyper-individualism operates in two directions.

On a vertical level, it separates us from time. It privileges the immediate over the long-term, the needs of the present over the needs of the people that we are leaving this world to. In *The Good Ancestor*, Roman Krznaric describes how we have cultivated a short-term brain, one that struggles to

connect our output-oriented thinking with the future, let alone with generations to come.²

Hyper-individualism also separates us horizontally: from one another and from the living world, even healing or inner work became individualized. So, when we turn inward, we often zoom in to a point where we blur the lines until we no longer recognize what connects us to other people, the land and the more-than-human world. Upholding the illusion of being self-made.

This is a paradox of our time, because inner change is indeed crucial for outer change.³ According to Earth4All, policy regulation will not bear fruitful soil until system change

is accompanied by inner change. Yet hyper-individualism has every transformation process fixated on self-optimization.

The future is Indigenous

When philosophers ask how to zoom out, make the full picture clear and expand the horizon of possibilities for our future, they often borrow from Indigenous knowledge systems.

Krznaric for example describes the necessity of becoming a good ancestor, arguing that long-term thinking can deepen our relationship with reality and the world. He draws on the principle of seven-generation planning, associated with several Indigenous North American traditions, according to which decisions are considered in relation to the welfare of the seven generations to come, as well as those that came before us.

Andreas Weber offers the concept of *Indigenialität* as a way of approaching indigeneity without appropriating or exoticising Indigenous peoples, or rendering their struggles invisible. *Indigenialität* means acting in ways that enhance both one's own quality of life and that of the whole.⁵ Rather than claiming indigeneity as an identity, he uses the term to describe a way of perceiving and relating to reality, while recovering an Indigenous or "wild" dimension within ourselves.

For Weber, the use of the term indigeneity shows how deeply our thinking has been colonized. We tend to imagine ourselves as observers standing outside the world, acting upon it through the categories we create. *Indigenialität* challenges this separation by reminding us that we are physically and spiritually part of the reality we perceive.

Reality can be understood as something that is always real, tangible and perceptible, while also being a construct of imagination. Everything has a spirit, everything has a soul, even the world, and every being imagines reality on its own terms. Everything is subject and object at the same time. *Indigenialität* is hence a constant exchange, unity in pluralism, in reciprocity.

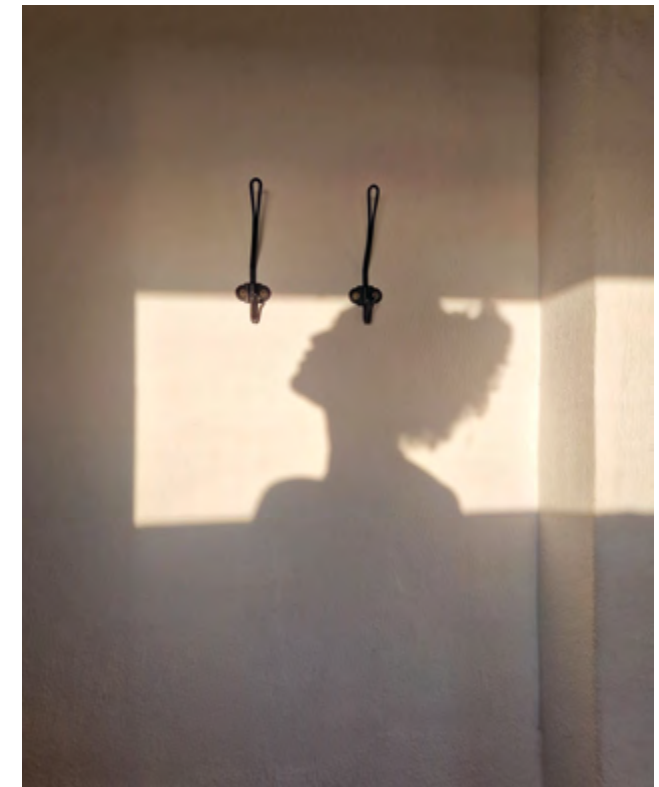
“How do we loosen the categories through which we have learned to see the world? In times of activism and empathy fatigue, how do we reach the Indigenous soul?”

2. Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor: How to Think Long Term in a Short-Term World*, The Experiment, 2021, pp. 86-89.

3. See footnote 1.

4. See footnote 2.

5. Andreas Weber, *Indigenialität*, Matthes & Seitz Berlin, 2024, p. 11.



Light play © Yasmine Amal

Spirituality is intimacy with the world

What changes when we begin from this premise is our understanding of the self. It becomes a permeable being, continuously shaped by what enters it and by what it gives back. To regain an Indigenous soul is thus to be in relationship with the world, focusing on its interwoven parts. So instead of talking about intersections as if connectedness were a scientific discovery, we shall recognize it as a given reality. Everything is connected, and through this perception, the field of interwoven patterns on which the future can be imagined expands.

The thought behind *Indigenialität* is not unfamiliar to other spiritual traditions, including Sufism, the mystical path within Islam, which is my spiritual home. I sense spirituality as a process of osmosis: a permeable membrane between self and world, the visible and the invisible.

The question remains: If imagination is foundational to transformation, how do we actually shift perception, to go from a detached to a communal imagination, as Dr. Darcia Narvaez puts it? How do we loosen the categories through which we have learned to see the world? In times of activism and empathy fatigue, how do we reach the Indigenous soul?

Childlike data

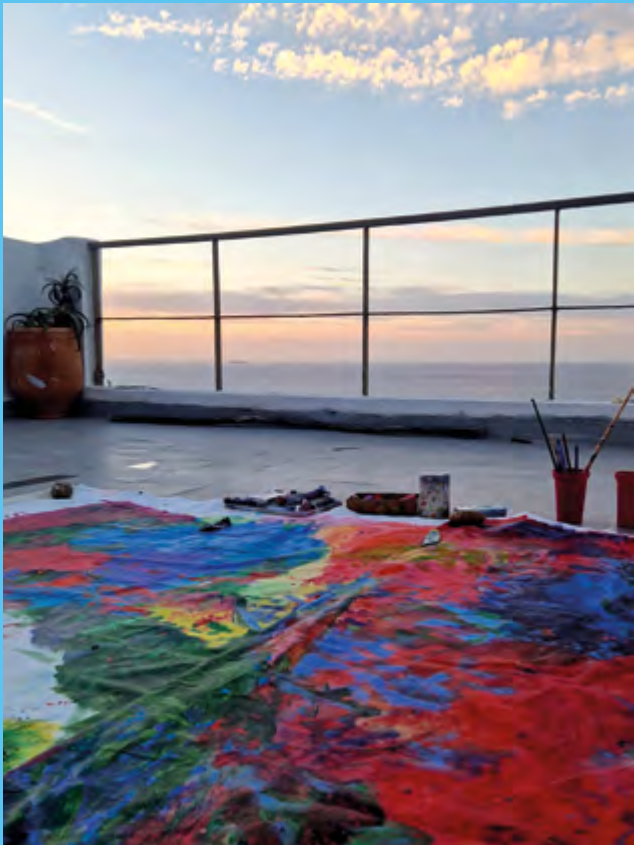
In The Kinship Worldview, Prof. Dr. Darcia Narvaez connects our capacity to sense the interconnectedness of life to the functioning of the right brain hemisphere, which develops rapidly during childhood. Playing outdoors among animals and plants fosters receptive attention, ecological intelligence and practical wisdom. Childhood imagination can therefore become a playground for interconnectedness.

As we grow up, however, education tends to privilege the capacities associated with the left hemisphere: linear thinking, categorisation, intellectualism and problem-solving. The more receptive modes of attention associated with the right hemisphere — imagination and relational attunement — can become less dominant. Yet they do not disappear. We reach them when we loosen our grip on analytical and problem-solving modes of thinking. Narvaez describes this state through the concept of flow: a liminal space in which perception becomes wider and more receptive to relationships between things.

Such a flow-like, trance-like state can be accessed in different, natural, ways: through movement, prayer, meditation. The childlike way of perceiving and interacting with the world, and this receptive state of flow, can both reconnect us to our Indigenous soul.

I reached both through art.

Work in progress in Tanger © Yasmine Amal



Transcendence is just another soil

Working as a policy advisor to the German government, I realized how deep our imagination crisis is. There was little space for uncertainty, difference or, God forbid, intuition. I experienced this particularly strongly as a woman of colour. I was burning out from a junior job with senior responsibilities yet little potential for growth. So, I started to give my artistic career a serious try. Little did I know back then that creative self-therapy would become a meadow in the forest that was my life, where I found the origins of my soul.

Without diving too deeply into the reality of being a spiritual woman in the Western world, before art, I would not have dared to share that the more I paint, the brighter the light I receive becomes. The more I paint, the more my soul remembers that it is connected to a divine existence. It is here that I accessed this state of flow, where I truly experienced transcendence. Like an out-of-body experience, in which I am no longer sure whether I am the one who paints.

The meadow became a sanctuary I build with colours, and within these colours, I met Him. The more I paint, the larger the meadow becomes, the stronger the sanctuary, as if I am dancing with the brush and the trees bend back to make room for Him, for His light. In Sufi tradition, the soul comes to earth, forgetting its origins, and through dhikr, divine remembrance, reaches toward its original state, the *fitrah*. And through art I remembered.

“Art can access a place within the soul that is not oversaturated by politics, information and empathy. For the purpose of this text, I will call this place the original data.”

What might appear as an extreme career change was somehow more like switching lanes: two parallel paths heading in the same direction, the same intention. Yet I found that art has a unique potential for transformation precisely because, at its essence, it can become a spiritual practice. It transcends reality and blurs existing lines. Art can access a place within the soul that is not oversaturated by politics, information and empathy. For the purpose of this text, I will call this place the original data.

Abstract art, in particular, can create such a reset by disrupting the familiar patterns through which our brains recognize and analytically process the world. For Wassily Kandinsky — often described in Western art history as the father of abstraction, a term I resist given the Eurocentric biases through which art history itself has been constructed — the transformative potential of art lies precisely in its ability to confuse and unsettle.

Abstraction opens a door to unlearning and reconfiguring perception, a place for remembering. It brings us closer to a childlike naivety, to a mode of perception before analytical

categories took over. It is something that I love to witness when observers stand before my paintings: when the eye wanders and the mind has not yet caught up. That little gap is where confusion and imagination begin, and you can see the same wide eyes, slightly confused smile, that you see on a child’s face when they encounter something for the first time. Within this moment, transformation makes its baby steps.

Abstract art gives us time to remain with something before we understand it, both as observer and artist. Combined with colours, this becomes even more potent. Theosophical artists such as Hilma af Klint and Wassily Kandinsky actively explored this “power which directly influences the soul” and shared a belief in the metaphysical dimension of abstraction. Every soul reacts to a colour differently as the encounter is a symbiosis of many factors. I understand colours as the eternal languages of the universe, a symbol for interconnectedness, for they emerge from the encounter between matter, light, observer and environment. Blue, for example, can be the result of a symbiosis of multiple factors, creating the illusion of a radiant blue where there is no blue pigment at all. The butterfly may have brown wings, while the structure of its surface and the way it interacts with light create the blue that we see. When this changes, the blue disappears.

“I understand colours as the eternal languages of the universe, a symbol for interconnectedness, for they emerge from the encounter between matter, light, observer and environment.”

Colour speak to the senses, creates harmony or, at least, a dialogue within, and extend beyond the visual capacity of a being. I believe colours remind souls of their eternal structures, ignite a sense of awe, evoke a feeling of transcendence - experiences associated with shifts in self-perception, connectedness and behaviour.

This interplay between soul, abstraction and colour is perhaps exactly what an imagination crisis requires; a disruption of the perceptual framework, a moment of transcendent connection. A reset through confusion, and then a meadow. Here, I learned through Indigenous knowledge systems that everything is connected and through Islam that the self can be transformed when we find the essence of the soul. Within my meadow, I realized that my artistic process was less about expressing myself than becoming receptive, surrendering to the play of observation. And when it rains within this meadow, I learn that the clouds are confusion, and another soil at the same time. For beyond them is the sky and when light comes through, a rainbow emerges. And maybe colours do not show us where to go, as the metaphor would suggest. Instead, they midwife the soul back to its *fitrah*, its original data, re-indigenizing it. If anything, rain teaches us that clouds are the soil for transcendence, and colours the sanctuary of change.



Hilma af Klint at Grand Palais Paris © Yasmine Amal



© Yasmine Amal

6. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Publications, 1977, p. 25.

Reconnecting the STRUGGLES

Avtonomi Akadimia, an Open Air University

Joulia Strauss



From the series „Legal Rights for the Akadimia Platonos Jungle“,
drawing by Joulia Strauss, 2025



From the series „Legal Rights for the Akadimia Platonos Jungle“,
drawing by Joulia Strauss, 2025



Constitution of Care, Tarot Cards by Avtonomi Akademia, Inter Alia, kainkollektiv and Fundacja Performat, drawing by Joulia Strauss, 2026



Ecologies of Care gathering at the Avtonomi Akadimia,
Qi Gong lesson
Photo by Ines Moreira

Avtonomi Akadimia has reactivated the idea of open-air education amidst trees, cicadas and birds, at the very same spot it once existed: at the Akadimia Platonos, a unique grove from where the word *academy* originates.

We will be acknowledging the Akadimia Platonos Grove, as part of the commons, protected by communities living with it. Carried by the air, ideas are born in exchange.

A Dragon who either no longer exists, or does not yet exist, in the physically perceivable world lives in the ether – αἰθήρ – in the “upper air,” or in the “fire air”: the element beyond the four elements, closest to air. The Dragon moves among the clouds, gladly escaping all neurotypicalities*, and teaches us to perceive the catastrophes of our time as a process. The Dragon trusts what it cannot yet see. We will become this Dragon by breathing the air of political healing: Vietnamese Qi Gong.

Elke Krasny at the Avtonomi Akadimia, 2024



We will be acknowledging the Akadimia Platonos Grove as part of a commons, and as such protected by the communities that live with it. Carried by the air, ideas are born in exchange.

Across two gatherings, Athens-based scientists, indigenous activists, artists and curators will unfold their recent books on care, ecofeminism and animism into a togetherness, forming a transformative educational cloud.

Further artistic workshops, screenings and discussions with sisters and brothers who defend the air across our world, all described in this journal or on this website, will enrich this day spent in the unique biotope of the Akadimia Platonos Grove.

** the term used by the philosopher Báýò Akómoláfé while speaking of the monsters in positive light: according to him, the monster is every way that neurotypicality tries to adjust for the edges, all the ways it tries to capture something that doesn't quite fit in into its linguistic frameworks*

Báýò Akómoláfé, “May We Live in Interesting Times,” Schumacher Center for New Economics, 2024

Presentation of artistic posters “*Alright/Wing?*”
curated by Raimar Stange and published by Inter Alia
as part of the Schools of Care project with kainkollektiv
and Fundacja Performat



Care Under Siege: Violence and Solidarity in Democratic Life

Elke Krasny

Care is under siege. The conditions through which human and more-than-human life is sustained are increasingly strained, privatized, commodified, and unequally distributed. The time required to care is compressed by demands for productivity; the labour of sustaining households, communities, and ecosystems remains undervalued; healthcare, housing, education, and other essential forms of provision are subjected to market pressures; and the soils, waters, forests, and other ecological systems upon which collective life depends are depleted, enclosed, or allowed to deteriorate. War, displacement, ecological destruction, political exclusion, and deepening inequality further expose some human and more-than-human lives to forms of vulnerability from which others remain protected. But these conditions are not simply a contemporary crisis. They intensify a much longer history in which the work and conditions of sustaining life have been unequally distributed and organized through relations of power. Care is under siege wherever the conditions that make life possible are subordinated to extraction, competition, and accumulation rather than organized around the time, resources, and relationships needed to sustain life with dignity.

The histories of democracy have to be understood and studied as histories of care: histories of whose voices counted and whose labours sustained life, whose bodies mattered and whose bodies represented other bodies. Democratic societies have never existed outside these arrangements. The capacity to participate in public life has always depended upon practices and infrastructures of care, from

the intimate labour of raising and sustaining human beings to the collective maintenance of homes, institutions, cities, and the ecological systems that make life possible. Care encompasses the work of sustaining human life, but also the broader practices through which social, political, institutional, and ecological worlds are maintained. Democracy has been enabled by forms of care that it has simultaneously marginalized, privatized, exploited, or rendered invisible. The unequal organization of care is therefore not only a social injustice; it is a democratic problem. When the burdens of sustaining life fall disproportionately on some, their time, resources, and capacity to participate in shaping collective decisions are diminished. When the conditions that sustain life are privatized or commodified, matters that concern everyone are recast as individual responsibilities. And when the ecological systems upon which collective life depends are degraded or enclosed, the material basis for shared political life is weakened. Democracy depends not only upon formal rights, representation, and political institutions, but upon the material, social, and ecological conditions that allow people to live, participate, and act together as equals. Those who bear the greatest burdens of sustaining life often have less time and fewer resources to shape the decisions that govern it, while those most insulated from these burdens are better positioned to exercise political and economic power. This is why the crisis of care is also a crisis of democracy.

Care has historically been treated as if it belonged elsewhere: in the private sphere, in enslaved and indentured

labour, in informal networks of mutual aid, or in supposedly non-political acts of maintenance and reproduction. Yet the histories of care are inseparable from the histories of extraction. Colonial economies depended upon the appropriation of reproductive labour as much as productive labour. Enslaved women were compelled not only to work but to sustain households, communities, and future labour forces under conditions of coercion and dispossession. Systems of indenture likewise depended upon forms of social reproduction that remained largely invisible within dominant accounts of economic and political life. These histories continue into the present. As Joy James writes of “captive maternals,” they are “most vulnerable to violence, war, poverty, police, and captivity; those whose very existence enables the possessive empire that claims and dispossesses them.”¹ Global care chains move migrant workers across borders to care for the children, elderly, and households of others, often leaving their own families dependent upon another layer of undervalued care. Care is repeatedly treated as an inexhaustible resource to be extracted, transferred, outsourced, and consumed.

Democracies have therefore inherited the violent and unequal histories of care, yet they have rarely confronted these histories in ways that redistribute power or provide reparations for the conditions they produced. The wealth accumulated through slavery, colonialism, and other forms of coerced and appropriated labour has not been accompanied by adequate forms of reparative justice. Nor have those who cross borders to sustain the lives of others necessarily acquired the political rights of the communities they sustain. Migrant care workers may raise children, support households, care for the elderly, and maintain the everyday infrastructures of social life while remaining excluded from citizenship, political representation, or the right to shape the decisions that govern the societies in which they work. Those who care for a society are not necessarily recognized as belonging to its political community.

The work of care ethicist and political theorist Joan Tronto has been central to bringing this insight into democratic thought. She understands care as a collective practice through which societies maintain, continue, and repair their shared world. Her thinking on migrant care labour also opens onto a more expansive conception of democracy, one that unsettles the assumption that democratic life is contained within the boundaries of the nation-state. Tronto argues that “citizenship is a relational idea.”² In the example she offers, “if you hire a Filipino woman to take care of your grandmother, she becomes a citizen.” The point is deliberately provocative: the migrant care worker is not simply providing a service within a national community but is already participating in the relations through which that community is sustained. Yet her relations of care do not stop at the border. She is also in a caring relationship with her children in the Philippines, just as the person employing her is implicated in these transnational relations of interdependence. As Tronto puts it, “the notion of citizenship loses its national meaning and becomes an idea about relations and about who is in relation with whom.”³

Taken seriously, this proposition asks us to rethink not only citizenship but democracy itself. If democratic life depends upon relations of care that routinely cross borders, then the political community cannot be adequately under-

stood as a territorially bounded national community. The infrastructures of everyday life are already transnational: care workers move across borders, households depend upon remittances and distant relations of support, and the labour of sustaining life in one place is often performed through networks that extend across many others. Yet political rights and democratic representation remain largely organized through national membership. Those who participate materially in sustaining a society may have little or no say in the decisions that govern it, while those who benefit from their labour remain politically insulated from the lives and communities on which they depend. Tronto’s relational conception of citizenship therefore points toward a conception of transnational democracy counteracting borders and centering care.

A feminist politics examines the historical conditions of care produced under democracies and analyses care under siege in order to reimagine democratic life around the conditions under which people and environments can flourish. This means historicising care through the forms of labour, extraction, exclusion, and violence by which some lives have been sustained at the expense of others, and through the political arrangements that have determined whose care counts, whose lives are protected, and whose futures are made possible. Care is under siege not only because it is depleted, commodified, and unequally distributed, but because the social and ecological conditions that make care possible are not organised according to democratic principles. The siege is therefore also a struggle over democracy: over who sustains life, who belongs to the communities sustained by it, and who has the power to decide what is protected, repaired, and shared. Placing care at the centre of democratic thought means confronting the violence through which care is organised and developing forms of solidarity capable of transforming it.

1. Joy James, “The womb of western theory: Trauma, time theft and the captive maternal.” *Carceral Notebooks*, p. 255.

2. Parra Jounou, Iris, and Joan C. Tronto. “Care Ethics in Theory and Practice: Joan C. Tronto in Conversation with Iris Parra Jounou.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 25: pp. 269-285, specifically p. 280. See also: Joan C. Tronto, “Care as the work of citizens: A modest proposal”. In Marilyn Friedman (ed.) *Women and Citizenship*. Oxford University Press, pp. 130-145.

3. Ibid.

Care Violence and Care Solidarity

Care is often imagined as the opposite of violence. Yet violence can operate through care. We call this “care violence”. It appears not only in the destruction of bodies, places, and infrastructures, but also in the histories through which care itself has been extracted: through slavery, racial capitalism, and the asymmetries of patriarchy; through turning bodies into sites of medical experimentation; through withholding adequate healthcare and denying ancestral knowledges the status of spiritual and medicinal care; through insecure housing, hunger, environmental degradation, displacement, exclusion, abandonment, and neglect. Human and more-than-human lives can be placed at risk through policies and institutional arrangements that determine who is protected, whose needs are recognised, whose environments are sustained, and who is exposed to harm.

From the perspective of care, violence can therefore take the form of organized indifference. It occurs when the labour required to sustain life is devalued, when institutions depend upon care while refusing to support those who provide it, when ecological systems are treated as expendable, and when responsibility for survival is shifted onto those with the fewest resources. Violence is structural precisely because it can appear ordinary: as a housing policy, a border regime, a workplace expectation, a neglected public service, an exhausted caregiver, or the gradual degradation of the environments upon which life depends. Care can also be used to enforce the violence of domination. Colonialism, patriarchy, and paternalism have repeatedly justified power through claims of protection, welfare, improvement, or benevolence. To define another person’s needs can become a means of exercising authority over them; to claim responsibility for another’s wellbeing can become a justification for controlling their choices. Care therefore cannot simply be presumed to be emancipatory. The political question is always: who defines care, whose care is valued, whose care is heard?

The question is therefore how relations of care and interdependence can be organised otherwise: not through domination, abandonment, and extraction, but through care solidarity. Care solidarity is the foundation of a feminist practice of democracy because it makes interdependence, unequal vulnerability, and responsibility matters of collective political concern. If care violence is produced through the unequal organisation of the conditions that sustain life, care solidarity counters it by reorganising those relations around shared responsibility, democratic equality, and collective repair.

Care solidarity cannot be based on sameness or identification. Solidarity, too, has often been organised through

exclusions, boundaries, and claims about who belongs within a collective we. Aruna D’Souza’s notion of “imperfect solidarities”⁵ is crucial here because it refuses to make identification a prerequisite for political responsibility. We may never fully understand another person’s experience, history, or position, yet we can still decide that their freedom, safety, and flourishing matter. Solidarity emerges from a commitment to remain responsible across difference. It extends beyond human relations to the places, waters, soils, and other living systems upon which our interdependence rests.

Care solidarity offers a foundation for reorganizing democracy around responsibility across difference: recognizing interdependence without erasing difference, remaining accountable without claiming mastery, and extending democratic responsibility to the human and more-than-human worlds that sustain us. Democracy, then, is not only the right to participate in collective decisions; it is a struggle over the conditions of collective life itself—and over what, and whom, we are prepared to sustain.

4. Elke Krasny, “Situating care in architecture: Violence, sovereignty, solidarity.” In Oren Lieberman and Alessandro Zambelli (eds.) *Situated Ecologies of Care*, Routledge, 2026, pp. 81-86.

5. Ariuna D’Souza, *Imperfect Solidarities*. Floating Opera Press, 2024.

Participatory Magazine: A Youth Media Space of Co-creation

Lefteris-Fivos Vasilopoulos
(Paremvasi 2030)



Paremvasi 2030 - Youth Participatory Magazine Issue #1
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The most common question that young people are asked when trying to be involved in activism, advocacy, politics, and most of all, while searching for work, is “Do you have experience?”. In such a short question, so many doors start closing for a generation that already seems disconnected from most of the traditional common spaces: daily life, workspace, social and political collectives. However, is it the complexity of collectiveness that makes us prefer being closed in an algorithmically personalised world? Is it the pessimism of our times that doesn’t motivate us to get up from the couch and stand up for our rights? Is it that we have so much information in our digital lives that we already feel exhausted when trying to be creative? What can we do about it? How can local actions and grassroots participation change this? How can we be part of them?

These questions have been the starting point for the creation of Paremvasi 2030, an open youth participation network based in Athens, Greece. “Paremvasi” stands for “intervention” and describes our willingness to explore new ways of active engagement. 2030 marks a horizon that gives us room to make future plans but focuses on one thing: The time to act is now.

Paremvasi’s first project is the Youth Participatory Magazine, a collective process of creating a magazine based on participatory methods, co-creation and collective intelligence. During the first experimental issue, almost 100 young people were involved, expressing their views on urban daily life, rurality and how (trans)local bottom-up citizen action can have an impact on reclaiming public space.

Youth Participatory Magazine

In June 2026, Paremvasi 2030 launched the first issue of the Youth Participatory Magazine. The theme of the issue was “Life in the city: Claiming our space in the present”, a topic that emerged through a co-design workshop with 50 participants, held last February. Additionally, we gathered more than 20 contributions (articles and photos) after an open call on social media. It all began as an experiment: a magazine built on co-creation and open meetings, covering topics of participation and citizen initiatives. The project is running in cooperation with InterAlia, a greek-based civic action NGO, and with the support of Eteron Institute for Research and Social Change.

At the heart of the Youth Participatory Magazine lies the concept of Participatory Culture, introduced by Henry Jenkins in the field of Media Studies. According to Jenkins, a participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,, where individuals become active producers, curators, creators and sharers of media rather than mere passive consumers. (Jenkins, 2009). Participatory culture shifts the focus from individual expression to community involvement (Jenkins & Jie, 2024). As a participatory space, our aim is to give room to creative processes, community life, and open dialogue. Through open meetings and co-creation workshops, we give the floor to young participants to collectively design the theme of the magazine and keep a progressive, bottom-up, intersectional approach. These co-creation workshops, though still under development, are grounded in the concept of deliberation. Deliberation, as a broader term, constitutes a foundational element of democratic thought, especially in Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere (1989). Media, as an in-between space, needs to promote the process of deliberation, communicative action, and rationality, an interface between civil society and the political sphere within the public space. In our case, deliberation means that the community can more directly participate in creating and editing the content of the magazine. In that perspective, Paremvasi 2030 aims to create as many mini-public spheres of deliberation as possible, starting from Athens, with the objective of widening its geographical horizon.





Paremvasi 2030 – Open dialogue, June 2026, Eteron Institut © Elpida Vlaikidi

Community of Action

Living in a fast-paced society where everything seems algorithmically isolated and ephemeral, even the small outcome of our effort can be a crucial motivation to continue. As Hartmut Rosa highlighted, we are in a time of “social acceleration” (Rosa, 2013) where there is no time left for discussion and connection. De facto, our daily life rhythm sets a limit to the possibility of taking some time off to discuss. What Rosa proposes is “resonance” (Rosa, 2019), a detachment from the constant motion of late-modern society (aka “everything is moving too fast to handle”) and the creation of interconnected spheres of creativity and coexistence, the pursuit of genuine communication with other people and the environment.

In a simpler and more local perspective, that’s what we want to create. A space of new experiences around civic engagement, a community of recognition, appreciation and constructive questioning. Our magazine aims to give room to experimental actions, to make mistakes, to appreciate the courage of those being exposed for the first time and to imagine how the next step of a progressive idea could look like, a movement built around participation. Of course, the magazine is at its very first steps, with many improvements to be done in every aspect of the process. However, the fact that almost 100 young people dedicated a part of their (usually limited and definitely precious) free time to participate in our Magazine has created a dynamic space of DIY deliberation, new ideas and action.

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Building a European Network for Independent Media

**Marta Cillero Manzano,
on behalf of the Network of
Independent Media**

Across Europe, independent journalists and media organisations are reporting on many of the same questions: what is happening to democracy, how inequality is changing our societies, the politics of migration, the climate crisis, the transformation of work and the growing influence of technology. But these conversations often stop at national borders. A story that matters in Athens may never reach Madrid. A debate taking place in Paris may remain invisible in Palermo. Journalists working on similar issues in different countries may never meet, even when they face the same pressures or could learn from one another.

“This is where European Alternatives sees a need for stronger connections between independent media across Europe.”

At the same time, working conditions for independent journalism are becoming harder. Newsrooms are shrinking, freelance work is increasingly precarious, legal pressure can make investigative reporting difficult and many journalists are working in isolation. Digital platforms have made it possible to reach much larger audiences, but they have also created a faster and more fragmented media environment, where journalists are under constant pressure to produce, distribute and promote their work.

This is where European Alternatives sees a need for stronger connections between independent media across Europe.

We want to explore how a transnational network could help journalists, editors, publishers and media organisations work together in practical ways: sharing knowledge and resources, developing joint stories and projects and helping journalism travel across borders and languages.

The conversations we have started already bring together very different kinds of organisations. There are cooperative and grassroots media, investigative journalists, cultural publications, digital outlets and organisations experimenting with new ways of telling stories and engaging audiences. They include organisations such as Spain’s El Salto and France’s La Déferlante, as well as independent media and emerging

initiatives in Italy, Poland, Greece and elsewhere. They do not have the same editorial model, political approach or organisational structure. That diversity is important. The question is not how to make them part of one model, but what they could gain from working together.

A useful starting point is therefore a simple question: what can we do together that would be difficult to do alone?

There are many possible answers. Journalists in different countries could work together on stories that have European dimensions but very local consequences. Editors could exchange experience on audience development, financial sustainability and cooperative ownership. Smaller organisations could gain access to contacts, expertise and resources that are often concentrated in larger media organisations. Freelance journalists could build professional relationships beyond their own national media scenes. And readers could discover stories from other parts of Europe through media they already trust.

The network should also create space to think about representation. Who gets to speak about Europe? Which communities are still absent from the media? How are migration, racism, gender, class and inequality represented in different national contexts? These questions are not separate from the future of journalism. They shape whose experiences become visible and whose perspectives are taken seriously. A transnational network can create opportunities for younger journalists and for people who are often underrepresented in European media to contribute to these conversations.

There is also a political dimension to how such a network is built. A European media network should not reproduce the same concentration of power that already exists

“what can we do together that would be difficult to do alone?”

within the media sector. Its priorities should be shaped by the journalists and organisations taking part in it. Decision-making, resources and opportunities for collaboration need to be shared in ways that allow different kinds of organisations to participate, including those with fewer resources.

The aim is to make collaboration part of everyday practice: through cross-border reporting, shared editorial projects, exchanges, training, collective research and new ways of distributing stories. Some collaborations may be small and

temporary; others could grow into long-term partnerships. What matters is creating relationships that continue beyond a single event or project.

Europe already has many independent journalists doing important work in difficult circumstances. What is often missing is the connection between them. If journalism is to contribute to a democratic Europe, journalists need opportunities to see what is happening beyond their own national information environments, to work with colleagues elsewhere and to reach audiences across borders.

European Alternatives wants to help build those connections. We are not trying to create one European media organisation or impose a common model on very different publications. We want to connect people who are already do-

“European Alternatives wants to help build those connections.”

ing independent journalism in different parts of Europe and give them reasons to work together. That could mean finding a partner for an investigation, sharing a story across borders, helping a small newsroom solve a problem it is facing, or simply, discovering that a journalist elsewhere is dealing with the same question. In a European media landscape that is still largely organised along national lines, those connections can make the real difference.

WELCOME TO NEW ISTANBUL

Julia Lazarus

This article presents the work of Julia Lazarus, an artist, film-maker and curator. It is based on excerpts from her documentary film “Northern Forests”, a film that focuses on the activities of the Northern Forests Defense (NFD), an ecological activist group from Istanbul, Turkey.

*A longer version of this article has originally been published in the book *The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey* by Pierre Hecker, Ivo Furman, Kaya Akyildiz, Edinburgh University Press, 2022*



Construction site, Istanbul 3rd airport
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)

And one day, the human, one of the guests of this hidden heaven, fell under the illusion that he could be the master of all creatures. He fattened as he consumed; he consumed as he fattened. As the monuments of arrogance he constructed mushroomed in cities, cities sprawled and started occupying hither and thither.

(From the picnic of NFD at Istanbul’s third airport construction site)¹

Concrete stretches over kilometers on the European, as well as Asian, side of the Bosphorus and along the coasts of the Marmara Sea. Istanbul, built on seven hills, is devouring entire coasts, mountains and forests. With its almost sixteen million inhabitants, the Greater Istanbul Area ranks among the largest metropolitan conglomerations in the world, and it continues to grow.

Located north of Istanbul, the Belgrade Forest has been under protection since the sixteenth century due to its importance in supplying water and fresh air to the city. However, the forested area has shrunk from its peak of 13,000 to 5,500 hectares today. Recently it was further divided by the construction of a third beltway connecting Istanbul’s third Bosphorus Bridge to the city’s new airport hub on the shores of the Black Sea. Both projects have been the subject of public controversy. Critics have raised objections both to the massive environmental damage caused by these projects and to the incalculable financial commitments that the state has undertaken.

Some observers also contested the populist discourse surrounding Erdoğan’s mega-projects, which have become an integral part of the ruling elite’s politics. They serve to sup-

port and symbolise not only Erdoğan’s personal claim to power, but also ‘New Turkey’s’ rise to global prominence. Intended to represent mythical greatness they are also operative in the realm of memory politics. Istanbul’s third bridge over the Bosphorus, for instance, was named in honour of Yavuz Sultan Selim. This sultan is known primarily for winning the Battle of Çaldıran against the expansionist armies of the Safavid Empire in 1514, but he is also remembered for his merciless persecution of the Ottoman Empire’s Alevi community in Anatolia. His honouring thus constitutes a clear message of disrespect, denial and depreciation to Turkey’s present-day Alevi population.

One of the most prestigious large-scale projects in recent years was the high-profile air transportation hub in Istanbul. During the construction phase, many names were discussed, ranging from “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Airport” to “Abdülhamid Han Airport.” However, when it was completed in 2019 and opened to the public, it was simply named “Istanbul Airport” to avoid controversy. The airport is part of a master plan for greater Istanbul, which entails the intended relocation of large parts of the population from the inner city districts to newly built satellite towns.² A process that is still ongoing and is changing not only the landscape around Istanbul but also the ownership structure of the land. To better understand what happens here, it is important to know that a

1. Available at <https://kuzeyormanlari.org/2016/10/24/welcome-to-the-dystopia-the-new-istanbul/> (last accessed 25 November 2020).

2. Kuzey Ormanları Savunması, ed. The Third Airport Project Vis-à-vis Life, Nature, Environment, People and Law. Istanbul: Northern Forests Defense, 2015.

large portion of Turkish land used to be owned by the state and in that sense originally belonged to everyone collectively. For instance, the farmers in Gümüşdere, a village north of Istanbul, were able to lease their agricultural land from the state at a very low price. But for several decades now, these leases are expiring and are not being renewed. This has allowed the state to convert more and more agricultural land into building lots, which in turn can be sold at a profit to private investors. In this way, the Turkish government generates revenue that it urgently needs, among other things, to cover the costs of these large-scale developments around the country.

In the greater Istanbul area the next mega-project is Kanal Istanbul, an artificial waterway between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, which is intended to reduce the shipping congestion in the Bosphorus. However, the Kanal and the new residential areas around are advertised to investors in glossy videos, claiming that the greenest city in the world is to be built on what is currently still untouched land, featuring luxurious residential buildings that offer panoramic views of the newly built waterway. In stark contrast to this optimistic outlook, however, are the expected ecological consequences of the Kanal. Its construction is expected to affect the underground currents in both the Marmara Sea and the Black Sea with uncalculable results. And the Kanal could even jeopardize the drinking water supply of the entire metropolitan area. Not to mention, much like the AKP's other gigantic infrastructure projects, the new waterway will destroy the natural habitat of plants and animals endemic to the region.

However, to openly articulate resistance against the government's populist gigantomania has become increasingly difficult in Turkey today. Despite the danger they are facing, there are still a number of ecological activists who persist in organising public actions against the destruction of the livelihood of many for the profit of a few. And their numbers are growing as is the number of construction projects, which are destroying nature.

When I lived as an artist in residence in Istanbul in 2016, I was lucky to get to know a specific group of ecological activists who at the time were organizing the resistance against the government's huge infrastructure projects to the north of the city. When I asked them if I could do a film about them and their work, Kuzey Ormanları Savunması (Northern Forests Defense) kindly agreed to take me on board and I went with them everywhere. I became sort of their friendly embedded journalist, sitting in the backseat of their car, driving with them through the forests of northern Turkey. Sometimes, they asked me to be silent, in order not to betray my German origins. At other points, I was asked to turn off the camera. But most of the time, I filmed, and I filmed, and I filmed. In the end, I returned to Germany with over forty hours of video material.

When editing the film I intended to capture how this group manages to generate the energy necessary for taking on a superior power. How do they try to stop, or at least to hinder and delay, the destruction of the common good for the limited wealth of the few? Indeed, this is symptomatic of a broader development towards violent growth, a key aspect in a pattern of global capitalism that is currently manifesting not only in Turkey, but across the world.

The finished film focuses on developments in Turkey. But by doing so, it also asks a very fundamental question, a question which is relevant to everybody: what kind of world do we want to live in? The kind of world currently being cast in concrete out on the shores of the Black Sea? And yes surely, this movie is a piece of political agitation. It aims to incite those who answer the above question with a resounding 'NO' to become active, rather than to merely sit back despondently. It calls on them to get moving, even if only for the experience of solidarity. In this sense it might be seen as an optimistic film, despite (or perhaps precisely because of) the fact that the present situation does not seem particularly promising.

*"To feel is to rebel. The insatiable appetite of neoliberalism surrounds us, our very existence, the whole planet. We have become a simple homo economicus who calculates everything and anything according to its exchange value. 'Rational man' has already declared his triumph over nature and the world has already been disenchanted. Never in the history of our species has the disruption of the ties that bind us to the whole planet been so severe as today. Towers of arrogance are rising over demolished neighborhoods, leaving thousands displaced. From Mumbai to the north of Istanbul, machines of destruction are relentlessly working to wipe out water and earth, to construct mega projects. Consumption frenzies are fueling the enlargement of an energy sector which is conducive to the violation of ecological thresholds and the exacerbation of the climate crisis. In this age of madness, as Saskia Sassen puts it, we are ruthlessly creating 'dead land, dead water', where life is completely consumed on a scale we have not encountered before. A deep ecologist would have added the clause 'dead spirit' to Sassen's definition. The destruction of nature is draining our own energy, damaging human nature, which is indistinguishable from the whole."*³

The Turkish activist group Northern Forests Defense (NFD) has been organizing resistance to the deforestation and colonization of protected forest and water areas in northern Istanbul since 2013. The group was initially founded in direct response to the Gezi protests. Today, the NFD holds public, wholly peaceful protests against the government's plans to urbanize broad rural areas on the Black Sea coast. The aim is to inform the residents of Istanbul and its environs about the negative impact of these large-scale infrastructure

projects. And they remained active despite the growing state repression. In the interviews I took with members of the group many said to be more fearful of falling into despondency and despair than they are of state repression. And some also added that the solidarity and community within the group protects them from any sense of isolation.

Ali Yıldırım, who founded the NFD alongside other people, says in an interview for the film:

*Before the Gezi movement started, I had already joined the demonstrations against the 3rd bridge. The fact that we will lose the forests was disturbing me very much. And I used to wake up at night, upset that I could not do anything about it. But then during the Gezi movement we learned something. We learned that we can fight for the values we believe in. We discovered that there are alternative ways of doing this and we started to mobilise. We knew that there was a sizable investment there. A huge investment which is backed by the government. We knew that we as a group of activists cannot go and stop this. But Istanbul residents can save their own forest if they want to. We took it as our duty to tell Istanbul residents about this.*⁴

When state repression made it considerably harder to call for demonstrations, NFD started to invite members of the public to take walks through the threatened landscapes. This way the NFD succeeded in bringing people together across party and educational boundaries. The group targets its message not only at the inhabitants of Istanbul, but also at the inhabitants of the surrounding towns and villages and actively seeks to defuse the burgeoning conflict between the expanding city and the surrounding rural areas. It aims to involve the rural population in its campaigns, with the intention of building resilient structures in precisely those areas most affected.

Rüya Kurtuluş, a female member of NFD who is very active in the protests, stated:

*One of the most important things we do at NFD is the villages work. Of course, during our initial visits, we didn't have the kind of relationships that we do now. It was really a mutual learning process. When we go there, we tell villagers about the destruction which the airport, the bridge, the canal project and mines will cause. We explain their adverse environmental impacts and negative impacts on village life. But we also learn lots of things from the villagers. Because they are the best to describe the place, where they live and define the problem there. There are new experiences each time we visit. We are forming very beautiful friendships there.*⁵

The group is organized as a direct democracy. The core comprises perhaps twenty to thirty people. Every Friday,

they hold an open forum. Ali Yıldırım describes this grass-roots democratic process as follows:

*Our first forums were crowded. Usually fifty to sixty people would attend. And we set up some basic rules. One of these rules was that everyone has an equal right to speak and everyone's speech is equally important. And everyone has equal voting rights. And even moderators don't vote, so that he/she doesn't influence others. It was hard to organize this. We faced difficulties again and again. But we built a nice system after a long period by resisting these difficulties. An organization without a leader. An organization whose leader is the forum.*⁶

NFD activities are totally peaceful and focus on quick initiatives:

*We continued to protest like the wind. We protested very often, once or twice a week. All were peaceful protests. We often came face to face with the police and each time we took the same approach: 'This forest is yours as well as ours.' What we defend isn't our own garden. This place belongs to all of us.*⁷

Making a film about an activist group poses a number of challenges. First, it is important to remain aware that my concerns as a film-maker are not identical with those of the group. Even if I as the film-maker sympathize with the group, the film has to tell its own story. Ideally, this story should be timeless. It should deliver a message that transcends history, and continues to be valid even if the political situation changes.

For the narrative of this film, the story of David and Goliath seemed like the most obvious starting point. However, my intention was not only to show how much work and suffering are involved in collective activism against a powerful opponent—but also how much camaraderie and fun the group can develop in the process. The ultimate focus of the film is therefore on the strong sense of community. Besides it is of course important for the film that the protagonists are sympathetic and that the viewer is ready to follow them on their adventures.

3. Kuzey Ormanları Savunması. "Welcome to the Dystopia: 'The New Istanbul'", available at <https://kuzeyormanlari.org/2016/10/24/welcome-to-the-dystopia-the-new-istanbul/> (last accessed 25 November 2020).

4. Ali Yıldırım Transcript translated from Turkish, Istanbul, 2016.

5. Rüya Kurtuluş Transcript translated from Turkish, Istanbul, 2016.

6. Ali Yıldırım Transcript translated from Turkish, Istanbul, 2016.

7. Ibid.

In one scene from the film “Northern Forests” the group works intensively to develop some kind of common ground with the residents who are most affected by the infrastructure projects. This dimension is essential for the group’s political work. We see a gathering of men and a few women in a tea-room in the village of Durusu, north of Istanbul. The room is dimly lit. The men sit in a circle in the foremost section of a large hall. Some sit with their backs to the window, through

which one can see a sun-drenched village street. The meeting was obviously announced with some publicity; some attendants travelled from other towns and villages, while some of the village’s inhabitants went to some lengths to make it. Others seem to be present by accident, however. A group at the back of the hall indifferently continue their game of backgammon.

A young man with a beard starts to speak and invites everyone present to participate in the discussion. A young woman explains that the aim of the meeting should be to find common ground between urban and rural residents, in order to work together against the destruction of the environment. An older man stands up and states that he almost got lost on his way to Durusu because the landscape has been so profoundly altered by the myriad construction sites. Another elderly man interrupts and, with some vehemence, denounces the local administration for allowing a hotel to be built in the middle of a water conservation area. The meeting grows louder, more unruly. It becomes increasingly clear that the interests of city dwellers and those of the rural population diverge markedly. In the end the attempt to reach some kind of agreement is postponed until the next meeting.

In another scene of the film, the camera follows three Turkish men as they drive through a misty forest in a car. The men talk about the coming spring, and that soon the storks will return to the area. They speak of a sea of flowers that will spread over the forest floor. The driver stops the car and they get out to scour the forest floor for the first messengers of spring. The conversation revolves around primroses and violets, and around the age of the trees. One man says that he cannot really believe that these trees are so old, because their trunks are not wide enough. Another observes in response that oak trees grow very slowly.



NFD village forum at the teahouse in Durusu
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)

NFD village forum at the teahouse in Durusu – local residents
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)



NFD village forum at the teahouse in Durusu – NFD members
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)

Road construction works on the coast of the Black Sea
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)





Searching for endemic plants on the coast of the Black Sea
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)

The group leaves the forest and continues the journey. Suddenly, a fog closes around the car, forming a white wall of smoke to the right and left. From this fog, the contours of a huge mechanical excavator gradually appear. The car stops, allowing the excavator to circle us and drive up a steep embankment. One of the three men descends the embankment with a long, loping step. He begins a narrative on nature and language.

At first glance, there is nothing to connect these two scenes. And yet, together, they create a coherent portrait of the group. While the first offers us a glimpse into the work and activism of the organisation, the second shows some of them in a relaxed setting, enjoying the very forest they want to preserve. In order to promote their concerns, the NFD also experiments with the use of language and concepts. They aim to develop an inclusive language that can allow broad sections of society to overcome their speechlessness. The NFD use terms and words that are close to the lived experiences of ordinary people in order to create a new and strong connection between the people of the city and those in the countryside.

Onur Akgün, an NFD activist who joined the group in the early stages of its development, put it as follows:

NFD generates a discourse which tries to use its own position for its purposes, keeps giving hope, showers people with nice feelings. For example, we don't say 'this system is bad', but

instead we say 'this system will change'. Of course, we want to change everything, but we build our movement based on the principle of 'defending life'. Because defending life means defending the right of trees and birds to live, it means defending the ecosystem's rights as a whole. It doesn't matter if it's the AKP or another government in power. While we are showing the will to change in practice, we also avoid the ordinary and homogeneous. In my opinion (we have) consumed anti-government discourses in our way of communication, and in texts which results from our relationship with local people. Thus NFD is forming a discourse on a more inclusive base, while using the discourse and terminology of flowers and beetles is more about life. I see it as a discourse which hasn't been consumed yet.⁸

NFD has always chosen words over silence. In times of oppression, they employ the language of resistance. And they develop their own terminology of hope by deliberately selecting terms from the colloquial language of rural areas and incorporating them into their texts. The unpretentious simplicity of these terms allows them to better reach the hearts of the rural population, they say. This is also fully in line with the group's ongoing efforts to include villagers—that is, precisely those people who would be most affected by the government's plans—in their discourse of resistance. By using exclusively positive terms, the group deliberately appeals to the emotions and memories of the population, thereby carrying the complex counter-hegemonic discourse even to the most remote areas.

In the film I seek to capture this particular sensitivity to terminology. To illustrate what the activists are doing, emotionally loaded and striking landscapes are contrasted with



Vive la Solidarité – La Z.A.D. est partout!
(Source: Still frame, Northern Forests, TR/D 2020, HD, 86min, Julia Lazarus)

images of destruction. After all, in order to continue the fight, you have to know what you are fighting for. I do hope to facilitate the work of the group through this documentary film. Indeed, by portraying them and their struggle, my aim is to inspire others to join and imitate them.

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8. Onur Akgün Transcript translated from Turkish, Istanbul, 2016.

Grounding the Cloud: Structural Racism, Environmental Injustice, and Invisible Infrastructures in European Roma Settlements

Anna Orsós

In contemporary European political and technological debates, “the cloud” is regularly romanticised as an immaterial, borderless space of connectivity, data sovereignty, and ecological transition. Yet, as the call for [TRANSEUROPA Festival 2026](#) highlights, clouds are never weightless or neutral. They depend on physical energy systems, natural resources, concrete infrastructure, and political choices that dictate who is integrated and who remains systematically excluded.

While European institutions discuss artificial intelligence, digital sovereignty, and transparent data networks (“Digital & Atmospheric Commons”), this rhetoric breaks down entirely when viewed from the informal Roma segregated settlements across Eastern and Central Europe. For these communities, the “cloud” is experienced not as an instrument of progress, but as a dual crisis of institutional neglect: a harmful material atmosphere of toxic smoke, water scarcity, and climate stress, existing alongside the total absence of the digital infrastructure required to participate in modern society.

This dynamic is not an accidental failure of development. It is the product of centuries of institutional racism and structural rejection of minority identity. The system operates as an unbroken spiral: educational segregation limits future options, forcing adults into underpaid, dangerous physical labour. These low wages prevent families from securing safe housing or healthy living conditions, locking generation after generation into physical and social isolation. By examining the lived realities of segregated Roma settlements, this article demonstrates that any meaningful effort to “reclaim the cloud” must begin by dismantling the material structures of racialized discrimination.

The Atmospheric Cloud: Environmental Injustice and the criminalisation of Survival

While European green policies focus on corporate decarbonisation and smart resource management, residents in segregated settlements are denied access to the most basic atmospheric commons: clean air, safe housing, and drinking water. Located in former industrial valleys or isolated areas cut off from municipal grids, these communities bear the brunt of environmental neglect.

Field research conducted in early 2026 demonstrates how climate instability severely impacts substandard housing. Without insulation, homes become extreme heat traps during summer heatwaves, with indoor temperatures reaching dangerous levels. In winter, erratic weather and sudden, heavy rainstorms cause surface runoff on unpaved roads, flooding self-built homes, eroding their foundations, and washing contaminated water through communal spaces.

Access to basic ecological resources is systematically restricted. In many settlements, a majority of households lack indoor plumbing or running water. When public standpipes freeze in winter or dry up during summer droughts, women and children must walk several kilometres multiple times a day to collect water, using carts or strollers, with each round trip taking at least half an hour on foot. When residents petition local authorities to extend water lines, they face prohibitive, unaffordable connection fees, effectively trapping them without clean water for decades.

Energy poverty further illustrates this systemic abandonment. Without access to social heating schemes or municipal gas lines, families rely entirely on firewood. During extreme cold snaps, when financial means are exhausted, residents burn old furniture or collect wood from nearby forests. Under current regulations, gathering fallen wood for immediate household heating is prosecuted as theft, leading to fines and imprisonment for household heads. The burning of substandard materials creates a localized, toxic atmosphere – a suffocating smoke that causes chronic respiratory and kidney illnesses among children. Survival strategies forced upon the community by structural neglect are thus met with policing and imprisonment rather than infrastructural investment.

The Invisible Digital Infrastructure: Exclusion by Design

If the atmospheric cloud brings environmental harm, the digital cloud is defined by its stark absence. State administration, educational portals, and public services increasingly move online, assuming every citizen possesses broadband access and personal devices. In segregated settlements, these prerequisite conditions do not exist.

Without electricity grids, internet connections, or computers, Roma children are structurally blocked from acquiring digital literacy. Rather than serving as a bridge to inclusion, the “Smart City” and “Digital Europe” framework creates new barriers. During remote learning or when digital assignments are required, children living without electricity or hardware are penalised for non-compliance.

This reliance on digital administrative systems also enforces mobility barriers. Public transport connecting isolated settlements to urban centers is infrequent and disproportionately expensive for families with multiple children. During the school year, overcrowded buses frequently leave children stranded, causing them to arrive late at school. Because there are no paved footpaths, children must walk through mud and ditches, often arriving at school soaked and dirty without spare clothing. Instead of offering support, educational institutions routinely demand immediate digital or photographic proof from parents to excuse delays. Failure to navigate these tech-centric bureaucratic demands triggers formal child protection interventions. Technology is thus used as an instrument of surveillance and administrative control against poor families rather than a tool for empowerment.

Gendered Inequality and Health Barriers in the Analogue Shadow

The combination of infrastructural neglect and institutional discrimination creates severe hardships for Roma women, who manage domestic labour, childcare, and family health under extreme conditions.

Field workshops conducted in 2026 on health rights and reproductive care highlighted how the lack of local services damages women’s health. Basic medical care is often unavailable locally, as general practitioners routinely refuse to practice in segregated settlements even when facilities are constructed. To access gynecological or prenatal care, women must travel long distances on public transit and face waiting lists of up to four months for an appointment. In hospital settings, women report degrading treatment, denial of pain relief, and physical segregation during childbirth.

Period poverty clearly illustrates the physical reality of these barriers. Basic menstrual products are treated as luxury items due to extreme poverty. To buy hygiene supplies, women must travel long distances to urban centers, spending a significant portion of their daily household budget on transit fees alone –an amount comparable to the price of the products themselves. When public restrooms charge entry fees, women are forced to rely on makeshift alternatives until they return home. In a society where health management and rights information are increasingly platformised, women living without digital access or financial resources are cut off from essential support networks.

Conclusion: Demanding Grounded Infrastructure and Institutional Justice

The call to reclaim the cloud as a commons must be evaluated against the lived reality of institutional racism. A democratic digital or ecological transition cannot take place while millions of minority citizens across Europe are denied clean air, basic utilities, and equal protection under the law.

To move beyond the rhetoric of digital progress, European policy frameworks must address three core priorities:

Environmental and Housing Justice: Treating clean drinking water, electricity, safe housing, and paved roads as non-negotiable human rights. Environmental adaptation funds must directly finance housing insulation, water connections, and clean local energy in segregated settlements rather than focusing on consumer-level responsibility.

Universal Digital Infrastructure: Recognizing internet access, hardware, and digital tools as essential public utilities rather than private commodities. Digital sovereignty must ensure equal educational resources for every child, ending the practice of penalizing marginalized families for structural deficits.

Ending Institutional Racism and Criminalisation: Dismantling segregated schooling systems and ending the prosecution of poverty. State policies must focus on providing fair wages, real employment opportunities, and respectful public services, rather than punishing survival strategies.

Until public infrastructure, clean water, transport networks, and non-discriminatory institutions reach the segregated settlements of Europe, “the cloud” will remain a mechanism of division and extraction. Reclaiming the cloud requires confronting institutional racism at its roots, ensuring that both physical and digital infrastructures serve all communities equally.

“They never tell us anything”: Ongoing Data Rights Violations in the Samos CCAC



This is a segment of a report by Homo Digitalis and I Have Rights, authored by Eleftherios Chelioudakis, Charlotte Hutton, Magdalena Rassmann, Réka Rebeka Rósa and Dimitra Theotok, with the help of the respondents, interview team, and the Safe Passage Fund. The full report, references, and credits can be found [here](#).

1. Introduction

The use of border surveillance technology proliferated in recent years with millions of funds poured into increasingly sophisticated high-tech surveillance to monitor, control and prevent movement of racialized people at European borders. This trend is particularly evident in Greece, acting as a “testing ground” for new technologies.¹

A prominent example for the increased use of surveillance technology on the European external borders is the Samos Closed Control Access Centre (CCAC). The Samos CCAC is an EU-funded “pilot” reception facility located in the remote, north-western area of the Greek island Samos². At least four IT systems – Centaur, Hyperion, Rea, and Alkioni II – deployed in the centre form “an EU-funded, AI-led surveillance ecosystem.”³

Ever since its opening in September 2021, the “dystopian nightmare”⁴ of the Samos CCAC has faced widespread criticism from national and international organisations and the people held in the facility. There have been frequent and consistent comparisons of the CCAC to “prison”⁵, condemnations of its regime of blanket *de facto* detention⁶ and concerns about prevalent inadequate living conditions⁷ and the “intense surveillance and tracking infrastructure.”⁸ Alarmingly, to this day serious concerns about rights violations in the Samos CCAC persist.⁹

A positive step toward state accountability for rights violations against people held in the Samos CCAC emerged in April 2024 with a historic ruling by the Hellenic Data Protec-

tion Authority (HDPa) against the Hellenic Ministry of Migration (MoMA).¹⁰

Following a complaint by Homo Digitalis, the Hellenic League for Human Rights, HIAS Greece and academic Prof. Niovi Vavoula in 2022¹¹, the HDPa imposed with 175,000 Euro the largest penalty ever on a public Greek body. This was a response to several significant violations of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) through the use of surveillance technology in reception facilities for migrants and asylum seekers on the Aegean islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos). The HDPa found data processing practices were unclear, mandatory Data Protection Impact Assessments lacked coherence, and found serious transparency issues concerning the implementation of the Centaur and Hyperion systems. Along with the substantive fine, the HDPa issued a compliance order for the MoMA to comply with its GDPR obligations by July 2024.¹²

This decision was significant not only because of the substantive fine imposed. It also marked an important step in protecting the rights of “data subjects”— people on the move, migrants and asylum seekers – who face structural obstacles and have fewer economic resources to defend their rights. With the compliance order passed since July 2024, this report aims to assess *whether the ruling has been effectively implemented*. Thereby, it aims to counter trends where the use of technology in migration ‘management’ is legitimized to control and surveil mobile populations, often unchallenged and driven by weak state accountability.¹³ Resisting the invasive and expansive use of border surveillance technology is crucial: Its proliferation both reflects and contributes to broader trends and racist narratives of border securitization, border enforcement, and border externalisation, deliberately designed to control and curtail the mobility of people on the move.

Based on 27 semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2024 and March 2025 and a legal analysis, the report finds that the *MoMA did not comply with the HDPa implementation order, in violation with data protection rights of people held in the Samos CCAC*. The report will present this argument in the following way: It will introduce the use of surveillance technology in the Samos CCAC, followed by an overview of the HDPa compliance order. It will then analyse to what extent the compliance order was implemented, contextualise the analysis in broader developments on surveillance technology and conclude with a summary.

1. Petra Molnar. 2020. Technological testing grounds: Migration management experiments and reflections from the ground up. Available [here](#).

2. I Have Rights. 2025. Controlled and Confined: Unveiling the Impact of Technology in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre. Available [here](#).

3. Eleftherios Chelioudakis. 2024. Unpacking AI-enabled border management technologies in Greece: To what extent their development and deployment are transparent and respect data protection rules? Available [here](#). Page 4.

4. Amnesty International. 2024. People seeking asylum detained in EU-funded “pilot” refugee camp on Samos. Available [here](#).

5. Ever since its opening, people on the move have referred to the Samos CCAC as a “prison”. More information on this from [2021](#), [2022](#), [2023](#) and [2024](#).

6. I Have Rights. 2025. The EU-Funded Closed Controlled Access Centre - the De Facto Detention of People Seeking Safety on Samos. Available [here](#).

7. Border Violence Monitoring Network. 2024. Monthly Report: Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports. November 2024. Available [here](#); Amnesty International. 2025. Samos: Unlawful detention and sub-standard conditions must not become a blueprint for the EU Migration Pact. Available [here](#).

9. The Hellenic Data Protection Authority is an independent public body, tasked with overseeing the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), national laws, and other regulations aimed at protecting individuals from the misuse of their personal data.

10. Homo Digitalis. 2024. The Hellenic Data Protection Authority fines the Ministry of Migration and Asylum for the “Centaurus” and “Hyperion” systems with the largest penalty ever imposed to a Greek public body. Available [here](#).

11. Homo Digitalis. 2022. The Hellenic DPA is requested to take action against the deployment of ICT systems IPERION & KENTAURUS in facilities hosting asylum seekers in Greece. Available [here](#).

12. Homo Digitalis. 2024. The Hellenic Data Protection Authority fines the Ministry of Migration and Asylum for the “Centaurus” and “Hyperion” systems with the largest penalty ever imposed to a Greek public body. Available [here](#).

13. Petra Molnar. 2020. Technological testing grounds: Migration management experiments and reflections from the ground up. Available [here](#).

2. Surveillance Technology in the Samos CCAC

The Samos CCAC is equipped with at least four IT systems: Centaur, Hyperion, Rea15 and Alkioni II.¹⁴ As the HDPa decision focuses on the EU-funded systems Centaur and Hyperion, this report limits its scope to these tools.¹⁵

Centaur deploys motion analysis algorithms and transmits CCTV and drone footage to a control room at the MoMA.¹⁶ At least three Greek and two Israeli companies have been involved in the system since 2021: ESA Security, Space Hellas, Adaptit, ViiSights¹⁷ and Octopus¹⁸. The Israeli firms supply military-grade surveillance technology, likely developed on Palestinians, and now reused as part of the EU’s border enforcement infrastructure.¹⁹ This is not only the case on Samos: Israeli technology developed “to control the Palestinian people is made available for Israeli and international tech companies to scale up and export to other countries for repressive purposes.”²⁰ This global circulation of militarized surveillance infrastructure illustrates how technologies of control are deployed from settler-colonial contexts to new sites of border violence and enforcement.

Rea is an internet infrastructure system, allowing access to high-speed internet. Through Rea, personnel of the Asylum Service will have access to the Alkioni II system from all facilities. Additionally, free Wi-Fi will be made available to asylum seekers, exclusively through the use of a Mobile Application that will be developed with the Hyperion system. Finally, the system will allow for the transmission of video and audio from the facilities to the new Operations Center of the

Ministry, as well as to related agencies (Hellenic Police, Hellenic National Defence General Staff, Coast Guard, etc.) via the Centaur system. More information [here](#). Also, see more about the surveillance challenges that arise from this [here](#).

Hyperion meanwhile uses biometric data to monitor movement in and out of the Samos CCAC.²¹ People held in the Samos CCAC are required to scan their fingerprints and biometric ID card to enter, exit and sometimes to move through the facility.²² This is incredibly time-consuming, often leading to long queues at the gates, with people reportedly having to wait up to more than one hour to enter and exit the CCAC. This practice is not only undignified, requiring people to wait outside in adverse weather conditions, but does not take into consideration varying accessibility requirements. What is presented as a tool for “digitalisation of the migration and asylum system”²³ thus becomes another layer of control, restricting the freedom of movement of people. This adds additional obstacles to accessing basic services and necessities such as legal aid.

Data received through a Freedom of Information request also reveals that due to malfunctioning of the Hyperion system, that from October 2024 to at least January 2025 the catering company in the Samos CCAC had to scan every ID card when giving out food to avoid double shows. Due to this practice and frequent overcrowding people reportedly may queue for hours to receive meals,²⁴ further undermining dignified treatment.

14. Alkioni II aims to incorporate existing systems of the Hellenic Police, such as the Information System for Mapping the Traffic of Foreigners as well as systems of international organisations, such as systems of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The project is funded by the EU’s Internal Security Fund and will offer multilingual digital services for asylum seekers who have completed the initial registration and interview process. Through Alkioni II, users will be able to submit supplementary or updated documents, apply for family reunification, file an appeal, withdraw their asylum application, report lost or stolen documents or apply to renew documents. See more [here](#).

15. For more information on the use of technology in the Samos CCAC, and potential rights implications please read: I Have Rights. 2025. Controlled and Confined: Unveiling the Impact of Technology in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre. Available [here](#).

16. Stavros Malichudis. 2022. Asylum Surveillance Systems Launched in Greece without Data Safeguards. Available [here](#).

17. IHR learnt about the involvement of ViiSights in Centaur through submitting Data Subject Access Requests to obtain video footage. The footage obtained was marked with “ViiSIGHTS” and is similar to examples of camera feeds featured on ViiSight’s website. Available [here](#). ViiSights website details that they work in “refugee camps in Greece”. Available [here](#). In January 2025, a Computer Weekly article indicated that Viisights was undergoing insolvency proceedings, casting uncertainty over its future involvement in its operations in the Samos CCAC. See [here](#).

18. Lydia Emmanouilidou uncovered the involvement of Octopus following an in person visit to the control centre in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

19. Anas Ambri. 2025. Stephen Harper’s firm behind spy tech used in ‘dystopian’ Greek refugee camps. Available [here](#).

20. Apoorva P6. 2025. Seeing The World Like A Palestinian. Intersectional Struggles Against Big Tech and Israeli Apartheid. Available [here](#).

21. Stavros Malichudis. 2022. Asylum Surveillance Systems Launched in Greece without Data Safeguards. Available [here](#).

22. I Have Rights. 2025. Controlled and Confined: Unveiling the Impact of Technology in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre. Available [here](#).

23. This is under Greece’s 2014-2020 National Programme. European Commission. 2022. Answer given by Ms Johansson on behalf of the European Commission on 22 December 2022. E-005094/2022. Available [here](#).

24. European Commission. 08.01.2025. Weekly update on the migratory situation in Greece (islands and mainland) 08/01/2025 - Ares (2025) 143701. Received through a Freedom of Information Request.



Credits: Homo Digitalis and I Have Rights

4.5 General Trend Analysis

The analysis shows that the MoMA is falling short in implementing the compliance order issued by the HDPa with regards to the three-part principles of lawfulness, fairness, and transparency. It further underscores MoMA’s continued failure to adequately demonstrate compliance with its legal obligations, thereby breaching the principle of accountability.

Beyond this, the use of invasive technologies against racialized individuals appears to further contribute to problematic developments ultimately reinforcing colonial logics within contemporary border regimes. To contextualize this analysis, the following section will examine how surveillance technologies more broadly function to enforce racialized governance and border regimes. It will then explore how these dynamics are materialising within the Samos CCAC, contributing to the securitization of migration, the dehumanization of people on the move, and the increasing control over movement and mobility.

25. Peter Adey. 2012. Borders, identification and surveillance. New regimes of border controls. Available [here](#).

26. Weaving Liberation. Digital Policing Harms. Available [here](#).

27. Mark Maguire. 2012. Biopower, racialization and new security technology. Available [here](#).

28. Petra Molnar. 2020. Technological testing grounds: Migration management experiments and reflections from the ground up. Available [here](#).

29. Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. 2022. The multiple threats of biometric technology at European borders. Available [here](#).

4.5.1 Surveillance as Border Logic of Racialized Control

From Occupied Palestine, to the US-Mexican border, to the EU borders, as key sites of control and differentiation in human mobility, borders are deeply connected with expanding surveillance and monitoring practices.²⁵ In particular, biometric technologies, like fingerprinting, facial recognition, or iris scans, increasingly serve as tools for border enforcement. Facilitating tracking and control of racialised people and people on the move,²⁶ these technologies reinforce systems of exclusion and discrimination. Scholars have argued that biometric security has long been connected to processes of racialisation, constructing racialized identities and people on the move as a security threat.²⁷ In an environment of “spiralling securitisation” and increasing criminalisation of movement, people on the move are “presupposed to be criminals unless proven otherwise.”²⁸ This presumption is reinforced by the fact that biometric technologies were historically reserved for criminal investigations.²⁹ When applied to people on the move, these tools render movement in itself as a criminal act “that must be surveilled and managed”.³⁰ This construction is used to justify the expansive use of technology and border control, contributing to xenophobia.

Sachseder et al. argue that using racialized bodies of people on the move for data gathering and enhancing racialized constructions of movement as a ‘threat’ and ‘crime’, “re-affirms the need for colonial ordering of chaotic, unknown ‘Otherness’.”³¹ In that sense, postcolonial scholarship traces the origins of surveillance to colonial governance, where data collection and surveillance were not only used to construct racialized distinctions between colonizers and the colonized but also to justify physical intrusions and control.³² In (post)-colonial contexts contemporary monitoring practices serve to regulate and control (formerly) colonized populations³³. Much like borders, surveillance thereby serves to maintain colonial and social hierarchies - “keeping ‘others’ out.”³⁴

30. Petra Molnar. 2020. Technological testing grounds: Migration management experiments and reflections from the ground up. Available [here](#).

31. Julia Sachseder and Saskia Stachowitsch. 2019. The gendered and racialized politics of risk analysis. The case of Frontex. Available [here](#).

32. Tahu Kukutai and Donna Cormack. 2022. Indigenous Peoples, Data, and the Coloniality of Surveillance. Available [here](#).

33. Tahu Kukutai and Donna Cormack. 2019. ‘Mana motuhake ā-raraunga: datafication and social science research in Aotearoa. Available [here](#); Tahu Kukutai and Donna Cormack. 2022. Indigenous Peoples, Data, and the Coloniality of Surveillance. Available [here](#).

34. Alpa Parmar. 2020. Borders as Mirrors: Racial Hierarchies and Policing Migration. Critical Criminology. Available [here](#).

Therefore, modern surveillance extends historical patterns of racialized governance, further embedding colonial logics into contemporary border regimes and serving to justify increasingly hostile migration policies and border enforcement.

4.5.2 Samos CCAC: Surveillance, Confinement, and Dehumanization

Responses from the interviews highlight how the use of surveillance technologies in the Samos CCAC seems to contribute to, reproduce and reinforce problematic trends, namely securitization of migration and dehumanization of people on the move and the control of movement and mobility. This manifests in three ways:

- 1. Framing movement as a threat:** One respondent reported that authorities stated they were taking their fingerprints *“for security reasons, because we are entering Greece.”* This logic is mirrored by the securitized architecture of the Samos CCAC, with barbed wire fences, high police presence and the use of airport style security checks at the entrance of the Samos CCAC.³⁵ The use of such tools rooted in suspicion and control, constructs people on the move as potential threats. These practices reproduce harmful and racist narratives that equate seeking asylum with danger and migration with criminality, justifying surveillance and repression as a response to racialized mobility.
- 2. Objectification and dehumanization of people on the move:** Multiple respondents expressed that they never felt like they could refuse giving their fingerprints and that the *“they (the authorities) take us from one place to another, and we do it (provide fingerprints) without knowing why.”* This suggests that people do not feel as though they have the right to question such practices and exercise their rights, through e.g. receiving information on data collection. People on the move are not positioned as individuals with rights and agency. Instead, they are treated as passive objects of control. This illustrates how surveillance practices contribute to the broader dehumanization of people on the move, reducing them to bodies to be monitored, rather than individuals entitled to dignity, transparency, and autonomy.
- 3. Surveillance as confinement:** One respondent mentioned that the long queues caused by the biometric entry systems and airport-style security checks actively discouraged them from leaving the Samos CCAC. This suggests that even within Greek territory, surveillance technology contributes to in practice limiting the mobility of people on the move, maintaining spatial control and keeping people confined within the isolated environment of the Samos CCAC where people have no or only severely limited access to essential services.

5. Recommendations

To address the ongoing non-compliance with data protection rights raised in this report and to foster the protection of fundamental rights, we call on the EU and Greek authorities to:

- 1. Transparency and Accountability**
 - Make the technical specifications, data sources, and operational methods of Centaur and Hyperion publicly available.
 - Conduct and publish detailed fundamental rights impact assessments for all high-risk technologies used in CCACs.
- 2. Protection of Rights for People on the Move**
 - Provide clear, accessible information to people on the move and workers in the CCAC about the surveillance technologies in use, including their purpose, legal basis, and data processing methods.
 - Replace invasive fingerprinting with less intrusive methods, such as ID cards, to facilitate entry and exit while respecting personal dignity.
- 3. Safeguards Against Discrimination**
 - Ensure that AI algorithms used in Centaur and other systems are free from bias by implementing comprehensive testing and external review processes.
 - Publish regular reports assessing the impact of these technologies on vulnerable populations, including safeguards to prevent discrimination.

35. Airport security checks were intensified after the 9/11 attacks as part of global counter-terrorism efforts. Much like biometric data collection with its origins in criminal investigations, the use of such tools in spaces meant to accommodate asylum seekers contributes to framing this group as a security threat.

The courageous

Zsuzsanna Szelenyi and Srdjan Cvijic

Cacak, Serbia, January 26, 2025: protest following the Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse. © Free editorial use stock. Photo by Dejan Krsmanovic



What makes people stand up to an illiberal regime, even when the cost is fear and isolation? Through the voices of resisting activists, journalists and researchers in Hungary and Serbia, this essay explores why they keep going.

“Are journalists in prison in Hungary?” “No, not at the moment.” “Can citizens compete freely in elections?” “Yes, they can.” “Well, then I do not understand. Is it a democracy or an autocracy?” For years, that was the question Western journalists asked us about Hungary and Serbia. The confusion is understandable. These regimes did not look like the dictatorships of the twentieth century. There are no tanks on every corner. No mass arrests of every critic. Elections were held. Parliaments met. But subsequently, new illiberal governments altered democratic rules and captured institutions of checks and balances in order to distort political competition for their own benefit. The core of democracy was being quietly hollowed out.

Illiberalism is neither an ideology nor a regime type, nor merely a checklist of institutional deformations, according to Zsolt Enyedi. Rather, it is the rejection of the core principles of liberal democracy: limited power, a neutral state, and an open society. Illiberal politics seeks to concentrate power, create a partisan state, and promote a closed society, each with characteristic manifestations. Open violence is usually avoided , until it isn’t. But these regimes are repressive from the beginning. Their repression is often invisible, subtle, deniable and psychologically exhausting.

By targeting independent academia, civil society, and the free press, they suppress alternative viewpoints and manipulate public narratives, creating the illusion that the regime is competent, inevitable and more than anything else unbeatable. Illiberal systems also instrumentalize fear through what Domonkos Sík calls a politics of “juggling with fear,” based on the narrowing of political agency, the reconfiguration of the public sphere, and the internalization of permanent uncertainty among citizens.

As a result of uncertainty and generalized fear, citizens adapt quickly. People, institutions, and even companies participate in the game of the ruling elite, benefit from the system, or simply learn to coexist with it. Those who disagree often choose exit over voice: they become apolitical or leave the country. Only a few openly express opposition. We call them resisters. These are the people who refuse to pretend, and they are courageous.

We found that the civil society activists, journalists, and academics who voiced criticism openly were typically members of the cultural elite, established or nascent. This is perhaps unsurprising. Cultural elites possess the knowl-

edge necessary to identify systemic injustice and the failures of illiberal rulers, and they often have social networks that provide some protection against negative consequences. Yet most members of the cultural elite chose accommodation rather than resistance. Membership in this group was therefore not a predictor of becoming a resister. Nor was it evident that resisters came from liberal or intellectual families.

By the time they reached university, many already felt a desire to use their talents in socially meaningful ways. Dalma Dojcsák, leader of a human rights NGO, recalls that “I found it pointless to just memorise laws. Fortunately, I quickly discovered the human rights track. It sparked my interest: a special course where we could analyze public policy issues, and where I also found a community.” Their key mentors and supporters were often teachers and colleagues rather than family members.

“Becoming a resister” occurred through different pathways. Some were naturally outspoken in the face of injustice and encountered resistance through their professional work , for example, as human rights activists. Most, however, became resisters through a gradual recognition of the repressive nature of the illiberal system around them. At some point, they experienced a triggering event that revealed the fundamentally unjust character of the regime and forced a decision: should they accept arbitrary and undemocratic rules, or resist them?

Sándor Léderer, anti-corruption activist in Hungary, recalls that in 2017, the ruling party accepted a law that required any organisation receiving more than €18,000 in foreign funding to disclose on all public platforms that it was a ‘foreign-funded organization.’ “At that point, many people were still weighing up the possible consequences of a boycott, but we said that this was absolutely a yellow star mentality and could not be accepted.” Mila Pajić, a student and one of the founders of a youth activist collective STAV (Students Against Authoritarian Rule), currently in political exile in Slovenia, described the experience that pushed her into activism as a moment of direct confrontation with electoral fraud in December 2023: “I witnessed firsthand what electoral fraud could look like. I experienced it directly—and I was furious. I think anger is perhaps the most necessary driving emotion behind activism.”

Uncertainty itself can cause serious psychological distress and foster self-destructive coping mechanisms. It often leads to anxiety, chronic exhaustion, and burnout. Burnout, in turn, brings doubts about the purpose and meaning of one’s work. Constant stress and uncertainty strain family relationships and challenge personal integrity.

Stefánia Kapronczay, a Hungarian human rights lawyer, remembers that “In 2018, a few days after the election, I woke up to find that Figyelő [Observer magazine] had published a list of so-called ‘Soros mercenaries,’ and I was on it.” At this point, she became really worried that she would be the target of some kind of violent action. Based on lies and disinformation, such campaigns aim to destroy the target’s professional reputations and isolate them within their communities and society at large.

Other forms of repression reported by interviewees included surveillance and intimidation. Tessza Udvarhelyi, a civic activist who protected people from forced eviction and who later became a local politician in Budapest, says that following the legal harassment she had to endure, she felt that she had been surveilled by the police for years. “I did not dare to go to certain places, not because I was afraid to be raped, but because of political reasons.” Maja Stojanović, a human rights activist and Executive Director of Civic Initiatives, described a moment when she felt completely unsafe “because the state would not only not protect you, but they themselves were the ones behind the attacks.”

While physical violence and direct attacks were largely avoided by Viktor Orbán’s regime in Hungary, Aleksandar Vučić’s government in Serbia increasingly resorted to such methods following the 2024 Novi Sad disaster. When a newly built railway station partially collapsed, killing sixteen people, mass demonstrations erupted across the country. Mihajlo Botić, a student and active participant of ongoing protests, describes one particularly tense protest encounter, when masked men surrounded him and his colleagues: “We suddenly found ourselves walking straight into a group of maybe thirty or forty guys in balaclavas, carrying bats and iron bars. We just covered our heads and walked, hoping they wouldn’t touch us.”

Interestingly, we found that resisters experienced relatively few moral dilemmas. This is understandable, as they generally followed a strong internal moral compass. Their dilemmas typically arose from professional ethics , for example, protecting the identity of information sources , or from leadership responsibilities, such as shielding colleagues and subordinates from increasingly severe consequences. Stefánia Kapronczay described difficult cases in which victims sought legal protection from the human rights team after facing serious injustice, but the organisation had to turn them down. As she explained, “legal action was unlikely to succeed and might not improve either the victim’s situation or the broader cause.”

One particularly common dilemma stemmed from the toxically polarized political arena in these illiberal states. Civ-

ic activists and journalists alike initially tried to remain equally distant from all political camps and maintain some dialogue with ruling party politicians and partisan media. Eventually, however, they had to acknowledge that this was impossible. Power holders refused to engage with them, instead labelling them enemies of the state. Over time, however, acceptance of this reality often brought relief from fruitless efforts and constant anxiety.

Identifying with the role of “resister” was itself a learning process. Those who sustained resistance over long periods developed a range of individual and collective coping strategies. Sharing problems with family and friends was the most natural response, but often insufficient. Many sought professional psychological support during particularly difficult periods. They learned to share responsibility, manage their time, and repeatedly rediscover purpose after highly stressful and frustrating experiences.

Márta Pardavi, co-chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, explained: “Obviously, it’s strange at first when you see your name appear for the first time, but then you just get used to it. We learned very quickly that these things are not about you. They don’t want to deal with the issue you raise, they want others not to believe you. They want to discredit you, humiliate you, pigeonhole you. I think if you can rationalize what their goal really is, then I don’t think one gets very upset about it.” As Maja Stojanović explained, her way of coping with fear was “to imagine the worst-case scenario that might happen, and then come to terms with it,” adding that “once I do that, I’m okay.”

Some managed to transform anger into action. They learned to take pride in small successes and preserve their dignity over time. Taking breaks , even brief ones , proved essential. International travel, conferences, and exchanges with peers facing similar challenges often restored energy and motivation. Encounters with colleagues living under even more repressive regimes fostered humility and solidarity, helping interviewees view their own struggles from a broader perspective.

This research offers important lessons for resisters worldwide and for those seeking to support resistance to illiberalism. First, it is essential to recognize that illiberal systems are oppressive systems. Their aggression is rarely physical; instead, it takes the form of threats, intimidation, humiliation, and isolation, exploiting power asymmetries to make citizens feel powerless, distressed, and insecure. Second, collective learning among resisters is crucial. It helps individuals care for themselves while also understanding the limits of the system, enabling them to take calculated risks. Strategic risk-taking allows resisters to continue their work and gain invaluable

knowledge about how these systems operate. Such knowledge becomes particularly important as regimes begin to weaken.

By 2025, both Viktor Orbán's and Aleksandar Vučić's regimes showed signs of exhaustion. In Hungary, the 2026 parliamentary elections offered a historic opportunity to challenge Orbán's rule. Without courageous civic activists, outspoken scholars, and investigative journalists, citizens would never have learned how fundamentally weakened the system had become.

Illiberal regimes do not last forever. Their power depends on performance: the performance of good governance, the performance of democracy, the performance of stability and invincibility. But the abuse of power becomes more visible over time, and people turn against the power-holders. Once a critical mass of people stops believing in the show, the ruler faces a dilemma. In this situation, Viktor Orbán went on radicalising his tried and tested tools of legal trickery, conspiracy campaigns, and intimidation. But these illiberal techniques actually had the opposite effect.

After a sixteen-year-long rule, Orbán's party suffered a massive defeat in the 2026 parliamentary elections. Orbán's illiberalism collapsed as a house of cards and Hungary entered into a historic phase of complicated re-democratisation. In Serbia, however, Aleksandar Vučić further radicalised, started to use open violence and slid further into authoritarianism.

"Are journalists in prison?" "Mostly not, but they are threatened, smeared, and surveilled." "Can citizens protest?" "Yes, but protesters are beaten and arrested." "Can young people speak freely?" "Some can, but others are in jail facing outlandish charges of trying to overthrow the constitutional order." Vučić's Serbia is showing how quickly the velvet glove can fall away. The ghosts of authoritarianism were always there, and now they are becoming visible.

Like all forms of political bullying, illiberal regimes leave behind profound social and political damage. Those who have resisted them throughout their existence will play a vital role in the difficult process of post-illiberal democratic restoration.

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<https://europesfutures.com/the-courageous/>

Albania's Flamingo Revolution: The Radical Courage to Envision Another Future

Gresa Hasa

What began in late May as a small environmental struggle in the protected area of Zvërnec, within the Vjosa-Narta Lagoon in western Albania, has since evolved into a broad-based mass movement—one without precedent in Albania's post-communist history. Its scale and breadth are particularly striking in a country where, over the past 35 years since the fall of the communist dictatorship in 1991, sustained forms of mass political mobilization have remained relatively rare.

The immediate trigger was a luxury tourism and real-estate development planned for Zvërnec and Sazan Island, backed by Jared Kushner's Affinity Partners and Ivanka Trump. The Albanian government granted Kushner's entity strategic-investor status despite serious and persistent concerns over the project's environmental impact and legal basis. But the controversy quickly proved to be about much more than one development project as it touched a deeper nerve:

the growing sense that, in today's Albania, public institutions are increasingly being mobilized to facilitate private interests rather than to protect the public good.

Initially, the protests involved no more than a dozen local residents and environmental activists. Having accidentally discovered that construction work had already begun in the area, they gathered to demand that the works be halted and that the government explain how the project had been allowed to proceed. Instead, they were met with violence. Private security guards employed by the Kastrati Group, one of Albania's most powerful oligarchic business conglomerates and a domestic actor in the project, attacked the protesters. The violence unfolded in full view of the state police, which stood by and refused to intervene—and, more disturbingly, appeared to shield the attackers.

Although the mainstream media largely ignored the incident, footage of the confrontation spread rapidly across social media, triggering a wave of mass public outrage. For many Albanians, what happened in Zvërnec was immediately recognizable, not as an isolated incident, but as yet another manifestation of a deeper pattern of semi-authoritarian governance, in which Prime Minister Edi Rama increasingly appears to act less as the custodian of public power than as its proprietor: deciding who gets access to the country's land and resources, which parts of the national territory can be handed over to private interests, and on what terms—all while treating public consent, and institutional checks as obstacles rather than democratic obligations.

Zvërnec therefore became emblematic of the convergence of state capture and a crony-capitalist socioeconomic model, in which political power is concentrated at the top while public assets are systematically opened to politically connected private capital. The state thus becomes the broker of privatization, while citizens are left with ever fewer means to contest decisions made in their name.

A parallel can be drawn with Rama's November 2023 agreement with Italy's far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, through which he *personally* committed Albania to granting Italy extraterritorial privileges to establish Italian-administered migrant detention facilities in northwestern Albania. The agreement was negotiated with no transparency, without parliamentary debate or broader public deliberation. The same logic can be traced across various disputes over public land and the country's natural and cultural heritage: in Rrjoll, on Albania's northwestern Adriatic coast, as in Zvërnec, confrontations have emerged between local residents, activists, private developers, and the state police after the government expropriated local landowners and granted a private company strategic-investor status for a 147-hectare tourism project in the Rana e Hedhun and Velipojë coastal areas, despite the project's location within an environmentally protected area. Likewise, the demolition of the historic National Theatre building in Tirana in 2020, despite sustained public protests and fierce opposition from civil society, became another defining example of the state's ability to override collective claims to a cultural heritage site in the name of development.

What is emerging across these cases is not simply a series of controversial development decisions, but a recurring mode of governing territory and public resources. Whether the issue is a protected ecosystem, coastal land, a cultural heritage site, or even an agreement directly affecting the country's sovereignty, the pattern is strikingly similar: decisions with major consequences for the public are concentrated in the hands of the country's political leadership, private interests are granted privileged access to public assets, and

those who challenge these arrangements encounter weak institutional safeguards and, at times, direct coercion.

During what has come to be known as the Flamingo Revolution—named after the flamingos that inhabit the Vjosa-Narta Lagoon and, along with hundreds of other bird species, are threatened from the Kushner-Trump-backed development—the regime has employed a range of tactics to intimidate and discredit the movement. These have included attacking peaceful protesters with teargas and using physical force; arresting, publicly bullying, and intimidating individual activists and ordinary citizens; as well as waging an increasingly aggressive information war aimed at falsely portraying the protests as externally orchestrated rather than as a genuine expression of domestic public discontent.

This is why the language of investment and modernization matters politically. It does more than provide a rationale for opening public assets to private capital; it also frames dissent as an impediment to development and thereby legitimizes its suppression. Political power determines who gains access to economic opportunities and public assets, while economic power, in turn, becomes increasingly embedded in the exercise of political authority. The result is a political economy in which the distinction between public and private interest becomes progressively harder to sustain. What is ultimately at stake, therefore, is not simply who owns a particular piece of land or who gets to build a particular resort, but who has the authority to define the public interest, who gets to decide what belongs to the public, and—most fundamentally—who gets to determine the country's future in its name.

For 35 years, Albania's working class has experienced the consequences of this economic model which promised prosperity while systematically concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a privileged few. Since the collapse of state socialism, the country has undergone a profound neoliberal transformation, in which rapid and dubious privatization and the transfer of public assets helped create new economic elites whose accumulation of wealth was often intertwined with political influence, corruption, and organized crime. Over time, these relationships have become mutually reinforcing: political power has enabled private accumulation, while concentrated economic power has provided the resources, networks, and influence through which political elites reproduce their control. Such dynamics continue to shape the controversies surrounding protected areas, strategic investments, land expropriation, media concentration, and the repression of dissent in Albania. For this reason, the rage behind the Flamingo Revolution should be understood as a reaction to this broader socio-economic order.

Albanians are no longer mobilizing over a single project, or even in opposition to one government, but against an entire political class and the system of power it represents. What has emerged over these past months and weeks is a demand for structural change—a refusal to accept that politics must remain confined to the choices offered by an entrenched establishment. The protests have become a vessel for a much wider range of social and political grievances, with citizens increasingly demanding that those they hold responsible—including Prime Minister Edi Rama and opposition leader Sali Berisha, who was recently released from house arrest in connection with corruption charges—be held politically and legally accountable.

Perhaps the clearest sign of this transformation is the evolution of the movement's own language: the slogan has shifted from “Albania Is Not for Sale” to “New Albania.” The first was a rejection; the second is a proposition. It is a declaration that resistance alone is not enough, that another political and social future must be imagined. Among the greatest achievements of this horizontal, grassroots mobilization is that Albanians have begun to overcome the fear that has kept so many silent for a long time. Through weeks and months of sustained solidarity, they have discovered something more powerful than anger: the radical courage to dream together; to imagine a society in which people are not forced to leave because they no longer see a future at home; in which nature is not sacrificed for private profit, but protected as part of the conditions for human well-being; and in which dignity, security, and belonging are not privileges reserved for the few, but foundations of a new social contract with a place for everyone. The Flamingo Revolution, at its most hopeful, is therefore not only a revolt against what Albania has become. It is an attempt to reclaim the right to imagine—and to build—what Albania could be.

Reclaiming the

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Democracy Searching New Formations of Dignity

Niccolò Milanese



Photo taken by Daniela Beltran at the Rivers of Democracy Route (Northern France)

In 1986, the Chernobyl disaster made real a fear that haunted people throughout the Cold War period of a nuclear explosion. Of course, instead of a deliberate nuclear attack that would potentially provoke an escalation, it was a nuclear accident, but the fears of its effects on individuals were just as legitimate. Across the whole of Europe people asked what those effects might be, and the question of whether and when the nuclear cloud would reach them became a matter of speculation, nowhere more surreally than in France where unprepared authorities at first announced there was zero risk - quite the opposite to what West German authorities were saying - some overly optimistic weather forecasters showed maps with a 'stop' sign over the Swiss alps suggesting the Azores anticyclone would helpfully divert any nuclear fallout away from French territory, and by the end of the year the comedian Coluche made a famous joke encapsulating the absurdity of this national frame that would enter popular folklore: 'we used to wonder what borders were for, well now we know!'

The epoch of the 'risk society' announced by sociologist Ulrich Beck appeared already to be with us, and the need for international organisations that can mitigate and manage shared risks appeared evident. The vision was fundamentally Kantian: if humanity was not going to spontaneously or rationally organise itself into a universal cosmopolitan polity, a series of escalating disasters and crises, or at least the risk of them, would ultimately oblige it to do so. 40 years and multiple, planetary and accelerating crises later, the vocabulary of risk is everywhere in our politics and its experience everywhere in our lives: who is most exposed and who is protected, who is vulnerable and precarious and who is safe, who and what determines these things and what can be done to strengthen defences are at the core of both domestic and international politics. But the cosmopolitan international organisations predicted and called for by Beck are inexistent, weakened or no longer have a clearly cosmopolitan vocation. The borders mocked by Coluche are proliferating and have become vote-winners across much of Europe and beyond. The official institutional vocabulary of democracy itself in Europe has become centred on defence, preparedness and resilience. There is no shortage of real threats to defend against, but the crucial question about every such policy articulated in these terms is who or what is really being defended: *national sensitivities, vested interests, taboos, borders and capital or people, justice, creativity and wellbeing?*

The intelligence of the most effective of the democratic activist movements in Europe today is to centre themselves on a profound sense of dignity: dignity and justice for individual victims and their families, but also against the indignity of living in societies and economies which are dominated by corruption, extraction and deceit. The feminist movements

against gendered violence, to movements for migrants rights against lethal border regimes, to movements for the victims of train crashes in Athens, the student movement in Serbia, the protests against the Gaza war, the Freedom flotilla, all those refusing the legitimacy of the 'Georgian Dream' government, protestors against state capture and corruption in Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Belgium and in so many other places over recent months, and of course the Ukrainian resistance against Russian invasion are all centred on and fuelled by a profound claim for dignity.

To have dignity is not only to be protected, to be safe, to be cared for and loved, to have access to basic requirements of life, including food, housing and family. All of these things are fundamental, and increasingly under threat. It is also to not be lied to, not to be fooled, not to be stolen from. It is not to be misrepresented or obliged to pretend you are someone or believe something you are not or do not; to not have to hide. Not to be dominated. And it is crucial to have the right to take action, to take initiative, to address injustice, destruction and to stand up to cruelty and violence, putting oneself at risk in the name of something more important. So one's own sense of dignity is not unconnected to the plight of others: if we fail in our obligations to others we rightly feel shame, the opposite of dignity. Fostering, preserving, defending this sense of dignity, of a dignified life and a dignified society has become the centre of democratic action at the grassroots on scales from the highly local to global.

To call and act for dignity is of course nothing new. It is a familiar one in revolutions: the 2014 revolution in Ukraine is called the Revolution of Dignity, the Syrian Revolution of 2011, the Tunisian revolution of 2011, the Iranian uprisings in 2018-19 all take the banner of dignity. In the same decade former members of the French resistance memorably called for new generations to recover a sense of indignation. Why does it come back again so strongly today? What is new in its extent is the contradiction inside our democratic spaces, those spaces that are opened up by our being in contact with each other, with experiencing each other, and the inevitable questions of power and agency that are involved in all such relations. Democracy itself is not only or even principally a set of rules and procedures: it is the aspiration of a political space in which each can assert themselves and is recognised as of fundamentally equal worth. The promise of this space is under profound threat today. On the one hand, what engaging in political spaces makes visible are profound injustices both near and far from us, which we are compelled to address, and often feel a shameful helplessness about. On the other side, our physical public spaces and our mediated public spaces are deeply and deliberately privatised, instrumentalised, polluted and intoxicated and our engagement in them is monetised, exploited and its value extracted. Taking

part in them at all implicates us inescapably. Total withdrawal is not a dignified long-term option, as forgivable as it can be for recovery and disintoxication. Attempting to defend or reestablish national public spheres will also not adequately address or simplify this problem – our political lives now inescapably reach across and beyond any such borders and we cannot be blind to the violence of borders themselves. Our collective democratic dignity is therefore searching for new formations and spaces, attempting to feel out new patterns of practical solidarity and political agency, of compromise and coexistence, of plurality and togetherness. These are scarcely visible today in our dispersion, but perhaps just discernible at the horizon if we continue to hold our heads high enough and can together bear the horrors we witness.

Theses On Europe

**Spazi Sociali in Reggio Emilia
and Municipi Sociali in Bologna**



The original text of this article has been written by the comrades of Spazi Sociali in Reggio Emilia and Municipi Sociali in Bologna, two political organizations rooted in urban contexts in Emilia-Romagna, Italy. The genealogy of struggles and concepts that we reconstruct in this reflection emerges from a specific perspective: our own, situated within the movements that have developed in Italy, in a broader European and global context. We therefore do not claim to represent a universal history, and we recognize that this reconstruction will not necessarily correspond to the struggles that have emerged elsewhere, including within the European space itself. We nevertheless hope that these theses may stimulate further reflections, perhaps grounded in different perspectives and histories, while contributing to the construction of a shared imaginary of our Europe. This text is an edited version for the Journal of European Alternatives.

One thing is for certain: if the forms of liberal democracy are in crisis, if authoritarian forms are legitimized as tools for managing contemporary capitalism, and if what we seek is a real form of democracy, then we cannot remain stuck between the collapse of an old world and the emergence of a new one; instead, We must enter the fray to envision our democracy in the age of beyond human capitalism, our beyond democracy, and confront the challenge of building a new political and social framework, more radical than the relation between municipalism and globalization developed in the early 2000s.

If reality has once again become a battlefield, and the latter has entirely different characteristics from those of the past. What we are witnessing, from Palestine to Kurdistan, from Ukraine to the latest moves by Trump, must be read within this general redefinition: who is in charge? Who has the capacity of being, at least for a phase, the leading force within human capitalism? Which combination of subsystems will succeed in organizing it?

The fight for leadership beyond human capitalism involves many actors. At one point it seemed that the Trump Musk combination would become a winning form, but that combination already entered into crisis. Is the Chinese political form the one that will prevail? It may be. The truth is that we are caught up in a never ending quest, one that produces chaos, war, and permanent civil war.

However, as we have seen, all of this is today called into question and no longer has a place within the new phase, that is, within the contestation among subsystems seeking to position themselves beyond human capitalism. At this point, this phase that we call constituent emerges, constituent for a set of reasons that are not revolutionary in the classical sense, nor driven by immediate social uprisings. The general mechanism we have described has broken Europe as it evolved from the postwar period until today.

A discussion on Europe inevitably opens for everyone

Sooner or later, the question arises: if the foundations on which this particular business based union of states was built were to crumble, what other Europe would emerge? On what basis will it be shaped and built? Within what relations will it position itself in the global context? It is evident that Europe still has weight within global supply chains, but it is equally evident that the path it has followed so far is no longer sustainable.

If the actions and reactions of European countries will proceed in a fragmented way, if they will fail to come to terms with the European social fabric, made up of cultural diversity, rights, and freedoms, if they continue to evade the dependencies imposed on them and endured over years of neoliberalism and selective border control, if European nation states will keep acting as the primary actors, then the consequences will be severe, first and foremost for us. And no one will then be able to prevent new wars from breaking out even among European countries themselves. At the same time, it is evident that in the contestation with reactionary and fascist forces over the future of Europe, the outcomes are far from predetermined, and whether or not we are present within this process will play a crucial role.

In a global scenario in which all previous forms are being questioned and every actor plays its own game, we have to find our own space. If it is not the global space, if it is not the nation state, if it is not the old 20th century internationalism, then there must be a space in which to contest and reclaim something, a space in which to matter and exert influence: from cities and territories all the way to the immediate class struggle against post human capitalism.

Acting the constituent phase of Europe: alliance between rebels and democrats

If that is true, we must understand what it means in terms of action.

We are not able to determine the constituent process on our own: if something broader does not emerge, if a wider field is not redefined, we will not succeed. But we can be a part of this constituent phase: a part capable of reading it, traversing it, forcing it, and orienting it. In this sense, we can reuse a formulation that we had begun to use years ago and that has recently re-emerged: an alliance between rebels and democrats.

Being a rebel today cannot mean returning to the nation state or taking refuge in the dream of a model of communism

that no longer exists, by adopting 'red brown' positions and mistaking every enemy of the West for an ally. This is not rebellion, but reaction and conservatism. Being a rebel means being against something and, at the same time, for something that has meaning in the present. The terrain of contestation today is Europe — not Europe as it is, but Europe as a space of rupture, of new material and formal constitution.

There is a major difference between rebels who address the issue of force and power dynamics within the broader framework of building a constituent process, and those who think that everything boils down to doing the "hard and pure" thing, often only in words, while caring little about everything else or, worse, attacking it. If everything remains confined to rebels alone, if one believes that the truth of one's radical perspective cannot be connected with other subjects, other histories, other forms of life, even other species, then rebellion reduces itself to solipsism. It becomes language for those who are already convinced, and it does not affect the level of contestation beyond human capitalism, and therefore it is not adequate to the class struggle underway.

Democrats, on the other hand, does not mean moderates. It does not mean liberals in the narrow sense. It means a field of selection that excludes fascists, racists, sexists, authoritarians, obscurantists, but that does not pretend to reduce everything to our

identity. It is within this context that the possibility lies for many people to see Europe not merely as a distant entity, but as a necessary horizon for constitutional and revolutionary transformation.

If we are not open to this, it would not even be possible to understand why we choose to engage in broader struggles in certain instances, such as voting in referendums. When we vote NO in a referendum, it is not to defend the existing democracy. We do this because that struggle opens up a broader field, where millions of people can identify a common problem: who decides, where decisions are made, with what tools, and what relationship is between institutions and society. In some way, one can see a shared impulse with the Hungarian vote and with many bottom up tendencies that do not find immediate political expression, but that may prefigure a radical transformation of the European material and formal constitution.

For this reason, we use the term alliance rather than re-composition; the latter, in fact, is more closely linked to movements, social subjects, and segments of class that recognize each other and attempt to fit back together. Alliance denotes a political operation. It involves building relations between different actors, shaping direction, influencing common sense,

and opening a perspective that does not belong only to those who first formulated it.

The alliance between rebels and democrats, in this European constituent phase, is fundamental. To understand it and to act on it does not mean watering down our

perspective, nor does it mean renouncing key themes such as radical welfare, redistribution, self government, and freedom of movement. To form alliances means recognizing that the question of Europe requires us to operate within a broader complexity, including with those who today speak of a common defence, European sovereignty, energy independence. Each of these dimensions reflects the crisis of the previous order; therefore, the issue cannot be reduced to mere symbolic gestures, such as planting flags. Rather, it must create broad spaces which, even around these key issues, can point toward the prospect of a radical transformation of Europe: a new constitution, accompanied by a renewed capacity for broad mobilization. The NO KINGS movement in Italy is an example of this.

Finally, as rebels, the crucial point for us remains to define the relationship between cities, territories, and Europe. During the years of globalization, municipalism allowed us not to have to choose between global capital and the nation state. Today, that line of reasoning must be brought to a new level: cities and territories remain the place where practices, conflicts, welfare, mutualism, and self government are produced. The question is how can municipalism, communalism, and grassroots activism in short, the primary arena of action for many comrades relate with everything else today? We cannot answer this question on our own, and we certainly do not want to do so within the confines of the nation state.

Acting the alliance between rebels and democrats therefore means rearticulating such relationships: cities and Europe, self government and government, conflict and institution, material constitution and formal constitution.

Not to defend the Europe that exists, but to contest and shape the one that is yet to come. Not on our own, on a European island cut off from the rest of the world, but within the forces of transformation that especially at this historic moment we must seek out in global upheavals and in global networks of comrades, starting with the Kurdish confederal project.

European beyond democracy

All that we have described produces, in terms of governance, what we have defined as the quest for beyond democracy, which is irreversibly affecting liberal democracies. In an effort to reflect on these dynamics, we have sought to adopt new lenses, forged from some of the most heretical reflections within beyond communism from Abdullah Öcalan to Donna Haraway, from autonomist thought to radical municipalism, from cyborg and technological activist networks to the multitude against Empire and we have sought to apply them to our own context. Within the constituent space, we are convinced, new lenses will be combined to free us from the past and engage with the problems of the transition in a way that is even more suited to shifting the balance of power.

While in Italy, especially at this time, we may still rely on the shield of anti fascist resistance and the defence of the Constitution against attempts to change it, when it comes to Europe we must not only figure out how to bring together those who stand up resolutely against fascists, that is the Antifa, but also how to free ourselves from the rhetorical constraints of resistance in order to imagine the beyond. Precisely because there is no fully established European constitution to defend, we must address the question of what lies ahead.

It is in Europe that we can advance beyond democracy and begin to articulate it.

For example: what does it mean today to say 'No to NATO', 'Enough with the United States'? The significance of these statements today is very different from what it was in the past. These are issues that can be championed by rebels, with conviction and a spirit of resistance, knowing that they are far more concrete than in the past and possess a much greater intrinsic power. These are indeed struggles that must be waged with radical determination, yet they are part of a broader European context.

This would also allow us to find new, concrete terms to define and effectively counter colonialism and imperialism for what they are: from Israeli to Russian forms, to American and Chinese ones, thereby ceasing to refer to a generic Western colonialism but instead identifying in detail the responsibilities of individual European countries and EU institutions as a whole.

Finally, we should continuously investigate how European networks, industrial and technological networks driven by new digital services and cutting edge scientific knowledge move within these upheavals, and how class struggle will unfold.

Credibility, Cinema and Making Another World Possible

Natalia Galgos

January 2020

Interpreter: Why are we on this case for three days now? You are asking the same questions over and over again. He is clearly lying!

Me: His story is very complicated. I am trying to give him every chance to provide a credible story.





I arrived on Lesbos Island in December 2019 to work as an asylum caseworker for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO, now EUAA). Along with the existing team on the ground, interpreters, and forty other new interim caseworkers, I became part of the largest caseworking operation in Europe. I was, by far, the youngest and least experienced of them all.

After shadowing interviews, we were assigned a team leader who monitored our work. As she attended training outside Lesbos during my first week, I conducted my first interview alone and disorientated. It became one of my most memorable cases.

A. was an Afghan national who claimed to be threatened because of his family's political activity. I spent three days interviewing him. As a new caseworker, I wanted to make sure I was following the training guidelines. I knew that, as a healthy man from Kabul, his story needed to be watertight for his asylum claim to be accepted.

During the interview, my interpreter's views diverged from mine. He asserted that the applicant was lying and purposefully confusing me, whilst I, fixated on words, analysed every claim he expressed. I decided to switch interpreters. During breaks, my new interpreter gave me unofficial tips to understand life in Afghanistan, how authorities worked, how Afghan men express themselves, family ties, and so on.

Since 2010, EUAA's role has been to support European Union member states in handling asylum. As an EU body supporting the state, it provides non-binding legal assessments called 'opinions' according to European refugee law. In 2015, EASO started providing operational support to the Greek state.

In January 2020, an 'accelerated border procedure' to 'reduce the time' spent assessing cases was implemented on Lesbos. Caseworkers were expected to assess ten cases weekly and were allowed only two hours to interview each applicant. Moreover, EASO was seconded by the Greek state.



This meant that EASO's independent expertise was now closely monitored by the Greek Asylum Services (GAS).

The procedures switched to Greek, forcing all non-Greek speakers to leave. Team leaders no longer monitored cases. EASO caseworkers morphed into an extension of GAS and worked according to national rather than regional refugee law. Facing legal controversies, we were informally advised to follow GAS guidelines for greater efficiency and less tension between the two offices.

EASO's once common 'belief in disinterested, apolitical bureaucratic rules of procedure, based on a notion of "expertise" that transcends national boundaries and supersedes national concerns' blurred into the deterrence policies embedded in GAS.

On language and culture

It only occurred to me, after working with interpreters for a long time, how little they knew of asylum's legal terminology, and how strong their influence was on cases. I often looked to them to understand the worlds of Afghanistan, Iran, the DRC and elsewhere, worlds that I had to 'legally' analyse on paper without ever having been to them.

Interpreters, with their lived experience, heritage and profession, had truly created a place of mediation for themselves: one where they constantly negotiated their position between the asylum-seeker and caseworkers, playing both insiders and outsiders in the bordering process.

In asylum interviews, we were taught to assess credibility, meaning whether the stories we were told sounded *cred-*



CROSSINGS, London November 2024 – panel discussion with young people and filmmakers after a screening of short films on border crossings

ible or not. For this, we had many 'techniques' that we were trained to follow. Did people remember things chronologically? Were they able to name places and incidents according to the information we had?

Through these techniques, we made assumptions about how someone from another culture and country, one that we had no idea about, would react to exile and survival. I soon learnt that status was received based on how well people told stories within the Westernised logic of 'exceptionalism' (Achiume, 2019), and not necessarily on whether the stories were actually theirs.

The reality was, however, quite far from the legal exercise we were assigned to perform. People spoke different languages, had different upbringings and forms of expression, and had experienced traumatic events that could affect their memory. Their affect and emotions depended on a cultural world that I had only begun to explore through my unofficial interactions with interpreters.

No one accounted for the ways in which these things were culturally bound and remained unexamined during those processes. In the words of Sara Ahmed (2014), emotions 'circulate between bodies' and 'stick' as well as move, so 'even when we feel the same feeling, we don't have the same relationship to the feeling'.

Subjects such as gender roles, respect, pride, education levels, the collective, the self, let alone describing fear were practically impossible to analyse legally.

And really... Why would I want to do that anyway?

On borders and placemaking

There's only so much surprise you can face before you start to consider Greece's border policing as part of its making as a 'crypto-colonial state', a fancy academic term that Herzfeld (2015: 25) uses to describe its 'aggressive policing of the boundary between cultural intimacy and national self-display', and the ways in which it strives 'to achieve [...] a modicum of distance from their self-appointed protectors' (the West), whilst still very much applying their rules and logics to newcomers.

To me, there is still a lot to research about how language, affect and emotions weave into the making of border policies and national imaginings that exclude the waves of migrants reaching Europe today.

But that did not leave me with much leeway to continue the 'career' I had initially set out for myself. So, what was someone like me meant to do?

I went on to do a Master's at the University of London, SOAS, in Migration and Diaspora Studies with Intensive Persian, a very lengthy title that means everything and anything in between.

I decided to continue working in the grassroots sector for a few years after my experience in Lesbos, where I developed the most wholesome relationships I could ever have with people who were liminal, underrepresented and invisible to most of the world.

But the grassroots system burnt me out. My salary was bad whilst I was struggling to pay rent in London, and there was little office support whilst I carried all those stories and people with me. Little by little, I became angry and stuck, which really isn't the nicest feeling to have. But what else was I supposed to do?

I started 'being political' - even if I did not love that term. This meant analysing words more closely as I began to understand the weight they could carry in different contexts. I also started organising with people I thought had talent but were marginalised by bordering, and it turned out I was enjoying it.

Don't get me wrong, it was really hard, and still is. I was constantly exhausted, cycling everywhere between Whitechapel, Kilburn, Harrow and Kensington, trying to make ends meet. I could honestly write a whole essay about that period of my life, but that is for another time.

The point is that everything I did came to me naturally, as a necessity in response to all the emotions I had been carrying from my time in Lesbos and everything that followed. Together with some amazing talent, I worked to create a space where a community could meet other worlds, connect, explain and represent what bordering feels like.

And this is how CROSSINGS came to be: a creative and film campaign that I have been building collaboratively and in solidarity with people with lived experience of forced migration across Europe since 2024.

Through CROSSINGS, we've hosted four screenings and versions of our campaign so far, supporting twelve film-makers and ten campaigners to tell their stories. We've had 348 people come to our (sold out!) events and hear about us, raising awareness of the human experience of crossing borders.

We've worked at the edges of Europe, in Derry and Athens, but also in one of the biggest metropolises of our time, London.

And now, on top of my work, I was volunteering, organising, and producing films and community cinema spaces. Needless to say, this period was beautiful but also chaotic and completely unsustainable.

Cinema & Pixida

Through CROSSINGS, I started loving films and cinema and, more generally, art forms that could create the new spaces of connection that I so needed.

There is just something quite magical about a dark room that forces you to witness the story of others without being distracted or overwhelmed by the rest of the world around you. A black box where you can cry privately, laugh collectively and hold your friend's hand continuously for two hours.

Don't get me wrong, I do not think that such spaces can change everything. But at least they can allow people, including those directly affected by the stories on screen, to find connection in this increasingly polarised world.

Fast-forward to 2026. I've been 'Brexitied' from the UK and have moved back home, as if border policing caught up with me and threw me out of the country before I could do too much damage to its national image.

Life in Athens has just started, and I still struggle to describe what it really looks like. But it matters to me to keep making those connections happen.

I've now registered Pixida Films as an impact production company, and I am building my own little, or big world where I get to set my own terms and work to structurally and

visually create a world of solidarity with those marginalised by our borders through cinema and film.

Pixida means compass in Greek, and I often play with this meaning as my own world compass.

Little by little, things have fallen into place, not because they've stopped moving and I have magically figured out what I want to do with my life, but more because I am now better at naming things when I see them, whilst not overly identifying with every job role I undertake.

Now that I am entering the creative industry as well, many people have told me many things about Pixida: that it is too utopian, that the current politico-social climate in the Mediterranean means it might not pick up.

But I can't stop going. And honestly, I don't want to.

So, as I look into my messy bathroom before starting this essay, I pick up my day cream. Its label says *Don't Hate, Hydrate*, and it makes me smile.

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Proximity of Care

Dina Ntziora

A tapestry of words that weave a place of comfort and care, enveloping me in a warm embrace of solace and ease.

Words that transport me to distant lands, where the air is crisp and the sky so vast and clear. Words that ignite the senses and bring a spark of care to the mundane.

Sounds that soothe the soul and wrap me in a cloak of calm and peace. Sounds that uplift and inspire, and carry me on wings of hope and possibility.

These are the words and sounds that create space: a safe haven to rest and be at ease. A space that heals and nourishes, and moves me through its sheer magic and beauty.



Proximity of Care © Dina Ntziora

Proximity, care and the possibility of another world

Proximity of Care emerged from an exploration of care as both a personal experience and a collective practice. It asks what happens when care becomes not simply an act of responsibility, but a way of being with one another: a practice of attention, presence, listening and generosity.

The work was previously developed and presented as part of *Ecologies of Care* at the Mamidakis Foundation in Greece in 2022, within its Residency Programme. The programme brought together cultural professionals from diverse fields and invited them to explore a shared theme through their individual practices, perspectives and research. Through learning, exchange and experimentation, the residency created a space in which care could be questioned, reimagined and

experienced collectively.

At the centre of this exploration was the theme of **care and wellbeing** (Φροντίδα/Ευδαιμονία). Rather than treating care as something fixed or easily defined, the residency invited participants to consider how the meaning of care might be expanded and redefined in order to imagine a more caring world.

For me, this inquiry begins with proximity.

Proximity is not simply physical closeness. It can be emotional, sensory, imaginative or relational. It can exist between people who are separated by distance, connected through a word, a sound, a memory or a shared experience. It is the feeling of being accompanied, even when no one is physically present.

Words can create such proximity. They can become places we enter, landscapes we inhabit, and gestures of care that travel across time and space. A sentence can hold us. A story can remind us that we are not alone. A voice can create a moment of recognition.

Sound can do the same. It can alter the atmosphere around us, slowing us down or opening something within us. It can provide a moment of calm in an otherwise overwhelming world. Through sound, care can become almost tangible: something felt in the body rather than explained through language.

This is where *Proximity of Care* finds its meaning. It is an invitation to consider how culture can create spaces of refuge, however temporary. Spaces where we can pause, breathe, listen and reconnect with ourselves and with others.

Care does not always need to arrive through grand gestures. It can exist in the mundane, in the small details of everyday life: a voice that speaks gently, a sound that creates calm, a word that carries warmth, a shared moment of attention.

Perhaps these small acts are where the possibility of a more caring world begins.

Related audio work:

Proximity of Care, Dina Ntziora

<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/dina-ntziora/episodes/Proximity-of-Care-e1u08fl/a-a97ugfp>



Previous presentation:

Ecologies of Care, Mamidakis Foundation, Greece, 2022, Residency Programme.

Folly for Songs for FUNK Kinships: A Pollinator for Other Futures

Jenny Marketou



“Imagine you find yourself inside a public garden.”

This is how Elke Krasny begins her introduction to my work, Folly for Songs for FUNK Kinships. She begins by taking us somewhere. She leads us away from the traffic of Vasilissis Sofias Avenue in Athens and into the garden of the Concert Hall, where the artwork is located, where the noise of the city begins to loosen its grip. She invites us to slow down – to touch, smell and listen, and to notice the many beings who share this place. She describes the garden not simply as a setting for an artwork, but as a shared space inhabited by a “multiplicity of beings.”

I think about her words now as I lie on the grass beside the Folly.

For a moment, I forget the city.

The traffic is still there. The engines, the sirens, the construction, the endless movement of Athens continue around me. But inside this garden, something else is happening.

All kinds of birds are calling.

I don’t know what they are saying. I don’t need to know.

I listen.

Above me, the clouds are moving. They have no fixed shape. They gather, dissolve, become something else. Perhaps this is what clouds do. I watch them changing while birds continue their conversations and insects move between flowers. A breeze passes over the grass and across my body.

I think about Anna Tsing and her writing about life in the ruins of capitalism. What stays with me is her attention to unexpected collaborations – to the ways life persists, adapts and creates relationships in damaged landscapes.

We often imagine the ecological crisis as the end of something.

But perhaps crisis is also a condition in which new forms of relation become visible.

The garden is not outside the crisis.

The traffic is here.

Pollution is here.

Climate instability is here.

The histories of extraction that have shaped our present are here.

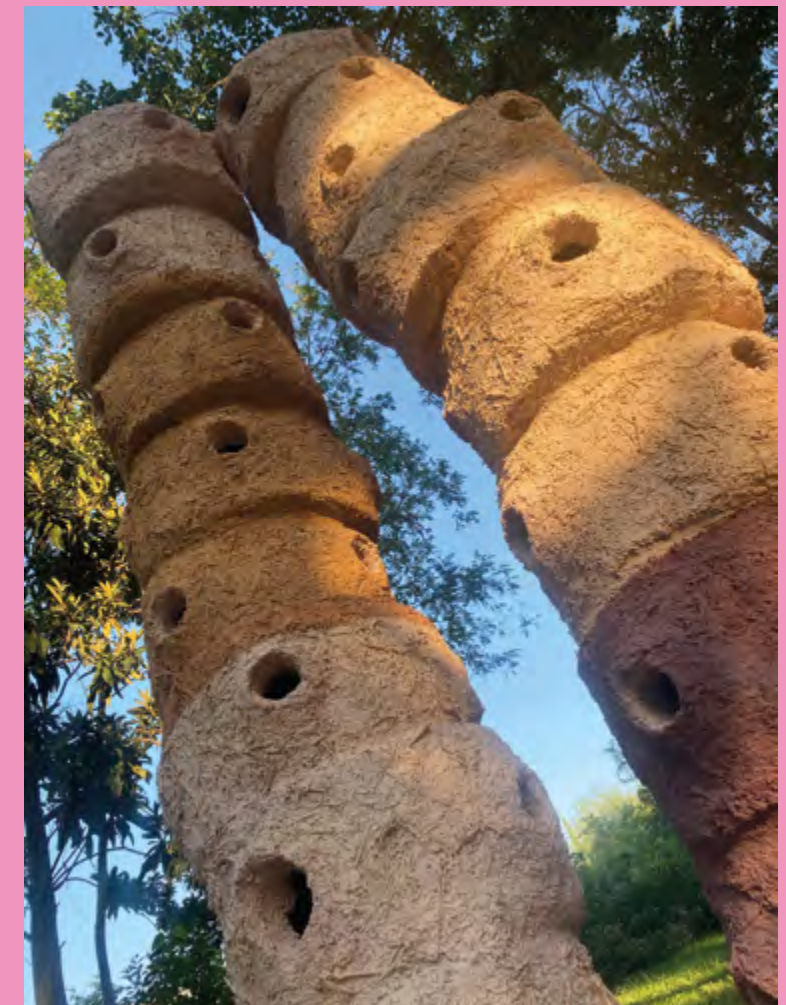
And yet life continues.

A flower opens.

An insect arrives.

A bird builds a nest.

Roots move through the soil.
 Fungi make relations beneath our feet.
 Clouds gather above us.
 Nothing is pure. Nothing is untouched.
 I am not looking for an untouched nature somewhere outside the city. I am interested in the messy, compromised, beautiful worlds that already exist within it.
 The Folly is one such world.
 I have always been fascinated by what I cannot see. Perhaps this is why I make sculptures. I want to make visible - or simply make felt - the things that are usually hidden: the movement of water beneath the ground, the life inside soil, the histories carried by materials, and the invisible infrastructures connecting us to places and to other species.
 Folly for Songs for FUNK Kinships is one of these attempts.
 It is not a sculpture made only for humans. It is a small habitat for birds, insects and other-than-human beings already living in the garden. Made from clay, soil and sand, using ancestral earthen building techniques, it offers places to perch, nest, rest and hide. The materials come from the earth and can eventually return to it.
 I think of the Folly as multispecies architecture - part shelter, part sculpture, part living infrastructure. It belongs not only to those who visit it, but to whoever finds a way into it: a bird, an insect, a plant, a microorganism, perhaps even a seed carried by the wind.
 This is why I call it a pollinator.
 Not simply because bees and insects inhabit it, but because it carries encounters - between species, materials, stories and memories - and creates the possibility for something else to emerge.
 Perhaps this is also why, when I lie beside it, I no longer experience it simply as something I have made.
 A bird lands on it.
 An insect disappears into an opening.
 The clay holds the warmth of the afternoon.
 The wind moves through it.
 The sculpture becomes porous to the life around it.
 It is not a monument to nature. It is an opening for relationships between species, materials, histories and bodies that are already happening around us. Lying beside it, I begin to think about the many networks that surround us. The digital network is one of them: invisible cables, servers, satellites, algorithms and platforms through which information constantly moves. But



the garden is also a network. Roots, fungi, insects, birds, pollen, water, microorganisms, wind and soil are continuously exchanging matter, signals and nourishment.
Both are largely invisible. Both organize our lives without necessarily announcing themselves.
But they operate according to very different ideas of connection.
The digital network has been built to move data, attention and capital with extraordinary speed. It shapes how we communicate, work, remember, desire and understand the world. Beneath the apparent weightlessness of the digital cloud are cables, minerals, data centres, energy, water, machines, workers and territories.
Beneath my body there is another infrastructure.
Roots are communicating. Fungi are making relationships. Water is moving through soil. Insects are carrying pollen. Birds are responding to one another across the garden.
One network moves information.
The other moves life.
I do not want to reject one in favour of the other. Digital networks can connect people, circulate knowledge and enable communities to organize. But I am interested in what happens when we imagine connection through the logic of the living world rather than only through the logic of the machine.
What if a network were organized around reciprocity rather than extraction?
What if infrastructure could mean care?
As I lie beside the sculpture and look at the sky again.
As story comes to me about someone who spent their entire life looking at the clouds.
I don't always remember where the story comes from.
Memory is a cloud.
The garden is a memory of time - not an archive that preserves things unchanged, but one that allows them to return differently.
I think about all the stories humans have told about clouds.
Clouds have been gods, omens, weather, poetry, metaphors, warnings and dreams.
And today we also call the internet the cloud.
I find this strange and beautiful.
We send our photographs and memories into this cloud believing they

are floating somewhere safely.
Meanwhile, another cloud is moving above us.
A cloud of smoke from a distant fire
A cloud of pollen.
A cloud of pollution.
A cloud carrying moisture from one continent to another.
A cloud carrying the consequences of what has happened elsewhere.
The atmosphere remembers.
Pollution crosses borders.
Pollen travels without passports.
Birds cross countries without stopping at immigration.
The cloud therefore becomes, for me, both a metaphor and a material reality.
It makes visible the contradiction between the fantasy of a borderless, immaterial world and the material systems that sustain it.
Here in the garden, I take another breath.
The leaves move.
A bird calls.
The grass touches my hands.
For a moment, the air feels generous.
I think about how much we have forgotten about generosity between species.
A garden is not simply a beautiful place for humans.
It is a meeting place.
The flowers belong to insects as much as they belong to us.
The trees are homes.
The soil is full of lives we rarely see.
The air belongs to everything that breathes.
Perhaps the Folly is asking us to remember this.
Not through instruction.
Through attention.
Through sitting quietly long enough for another species to enter our field of awareness.
Through listening to a sound whose meaning we cannot translate.
Through looking at a cloud without asking what it is useful for.
This feels increasingly important in a time when algorithms are constantly telling us what to look at, what to desire, what to remember and what to forget.



Algorithms are very good at predicting us. They can not predict an ecological imagination.

A messy, poetic, embodied intelligence that does not separate memory from place, or knowledge from feeling.

And perhaps this is also where new forms of collective care begin.

A garden cared for collectively, a shared piece of knowledge, a seed exchanged, a community reclaiming a public space, a digital network used to organize resistance rather than consumption - these may seem like small gestures beside the enormous infrastructures of capital and technology.

But perhaps resistance does not always begin by confronting the largest structures directly.

Sometimes it begins by building another kind of relation underneath them.

A network within the network.

A commons within the system.

A small place where care can circulate differently.

The Folly is not an answer.

It is a place for questions to gather.

A place where stories can cross paths.

Where ancestral knowledge can meet contemporary technologies.

Where human time can meet the slower time of plants and soil.

Where air, sound and bodies meet.

Where a sculpture can become a habitat for imagination.

I think of the Folly as a small commons - not because it has solved the question of collective ownership, but because it refuses the idea that a work of art must belong only to the human who made it.

A bird can claim it for an afternoon.

An insect can disappear inside it.

Rain can enter it.

Wind can pass through it.

A visitor can sit beside it and remember something.

The work changes through these encounters.

Its meaning is not fixed.

Perhaps this is another way of thinking about the future - not as something we design completely in advance, but as something that emerges through relations.

I look up again.

*The cloud has changed completely.
For a moment it looks like an animal.
Then a mountain.
Then a ship.
Then nothing.
I remember that children have always done this - looking at clouds and
seeing worlds inside them.
Perhaps we should do it more often.
The city is still noisy.
The traffic has not stopped.
The algorithms have not stopped.
The machines have not stopped.
The climate crisis has not stopped.
But here, beside the Folly, I can hear something else.
A bird.
The wind.
The leaves.
My own breathing.
I lie on the grass a little longer.
And I think that perhaps reclaiming the cloud begins here.
Not by owning it.
Not by controlling it.
Not by making it more efficient.
But by looking up.
By listening.
By remembering.
By allowing poems, stories, species, memories and forgotten forms of
knowledge to move through us like air.
Perhaps reclaiming the cloud means reclaiming our capacity to imagine
connection differently - to remember that we are not only users of
networks but participants in them, and that our lives depend upon
infrastructures we did not build alone.
The cloud belongs to the birds.
To the insects.
To the trees.
To the rain.
To our voices.
To our memories.*

*To everything that moves through the atmosphere and cannot be
contained.
And perhaps the task of the Folly - this little pollinator in the middle of
the city - is simply to remind us that we are already part of this cloud.
We have never been outside it.*

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