

World(s)-Making through Data Work, Activism, and More-than-Human Encounters

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Abstract

This *Crossing Boundaries* section hosts thought-provoking contributions in which scholars reflect on their situated engagements with commoning and caring. The authors examine how they try navigating the tensions, synergies, overlaps, and ruptures between their research agendas and the knowledge politics of the commons and care across digital infrastructures, grassroots activism, and more-than-human relations. Yana Boeva explores how caring and commoning are not only theoretical frameworks for understanding digital technologies, but also deeply entangled practices, often entailing voluntary or precarious labor, that are essential to technology. This framework highlights the tensions shaping these practices, from exploitative care work to exclusions tied to expertise and power in digital commons. Jonas Fritsch offers an autoethnographic account of affective and more-than-human encounters at the margins of research, reflecting on how long-term engagement with urban ecologies generates careful world-making that blurs the boundaries between research, everyday life, and ethical commitment. Finally, Cindy Kohtala reflects on scholar-activism within grassroots technology milieus, arguing that both design and STS scholarship inhabit the so-called ivory tower and the world beyond academia, and therefore engage in forms of “edgework”.

Keywords

caring; commoning; more-than-human relations; digital infrastructures; scholar-activism.

Care and Commoning by Convergence: Foregrounding Essential Practices and Values for an AI Era

Yana Boeva

Looking back on the past two decades in the development of digital media and computer technologies reveals a stunning array of umbrella terms and descriptors of their influence across societal domains. Not too long ago, we still were (and are) in an information age, encountered big data and the “society of algorithms” (Burrell and Fourcade 2021), had brief stints in the Industry 4.0 and longer ones in the platform economy, are continuously

participating in the digital transformation of many things, and recently have hastily transitioned into an automation and artificial intelligence (AI) period. These developments do not progress linearly or overwrite each other. As scholarship in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and its adjacent fields of history of technology, information studies, digital sociology, and critical data studies has shown (Bowker 1993; Wajcman 2017; Suchman 2023), these phases recursively and sometimes counter-chronically shape each other. Take, for example, the recent series of global AI summits since 2023, which brought together government leaders, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society to discuss the economic potential and threats of AI, as well as the place of many countries in the AI arms race. At the same time, the dominance and dependence on Big Tech, combined with the implications of the last presidential election in the United States, sparked debates and launched initiatives in Europe to promote locally developed tech alternatives. Similarly, individual governments as part of their digitalization strategies, be that Denmark, France, or the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, have started ditching Microsoft and its growing AI platformization of services, opting for open-source solutions such as Linux, LibreOffice, and other locally developed and hosted alternatives. These cases reveal the intricate sociotechnical ecosystems and the difficult-to-untangle relationships between the public and private sectors, scientific research and its commercial applications, and local communities of practice and global supply chains, shaping contemporary societies (Andrejevic et al. 2023).

STS has demonstrated on many occasions and with many examples that contemporary technoscience is not a single-handed endeavor of technology developers and their economy, but is co-produced with governmental support and interests, the voluntary as well as unpaid labor of users and microworkers, and public-domain knowledge and infrastructures. Extensive critical scholarship on data, algorithms, and the digital transformation of work, knowledge production, and everyday personal use demonstrates that practices of caring and commoning actively (re)configure these technologies and our interactions with them (Edwards et al. 2011; Bucher 2018; Delfanti and Frey 2021; Jarke et al. 2024). Despite these apposite empirically grounded insights, acknowledging any contribution to the development of recent digital and automation technologies and data, but also co-ownership, beyond that of tech companies, remains a peripheral phenomenon in public debates and imaginations. In that sense, a more comprehensive discussion of contemporary automation technologies from the perspectives of care and the commons is needed, given their essential role in this technoscientific production.

From a digital perspective, both care and commons, and their manifestations in different practices, have been explored as mostly separate accounts. Prior research foregrounds actors, organizations, and practices (Pink et al. 2018; Burrell and Fourcade 2021), the sociotechnical and politico-economic characteristics and conditions of data work and technology production (Helmond 2015; Tubaro et al. 2020), and the cultural values that inform them (Söderberg 2010; Dourish 2016). Taken together, this work has demonstrated a complex interplay of alignments and overlaps between care and commoning. For instance, there is the careful collection of public data on pollution, noise, and traffic, but also the policing of marginalized communities within urban environments, along with the curation and maintenance of openly accessible databases in the public domain (Pritchard et al. 2018; D'Ignazio and Klein 2020). At the same time, there are disruptions and tensions, such as when open-source principles are

co-opted by major technology companies (Rieder 2022; Widder et al. 2023). This contribution to *Crossing Boundaries*, thus, seeks to explore and discuss some of the implicit, binocular interactions between care and commoning in the context of contemporary digital and automation technologies, considering their growth and global spread, as well as their implications for democratic knowledge production and civic engagement.

2. Pluralizing Care for/in/with Data

The growth of digital and computational technologies and processes has been demanding ever more diverse data to develop, train, and implement them broadly. Tech companies' hunger for data has not only created the wrong impression that data is out there and up for grabs, but also that it is often easily accessible and manageable. However, there is no such thing as "raw data," as Lisa Gitelman (2013) reminds us. Data – whether digital or analog – is sometimes defined, sometimes discovered, but also sampled, created, articulated, processed, structured, and interpreted by those who interact with it. Scholars in the interdisciplinary field of critical data studies have documented and called attention to these different modes and practices that are integral to data work and (everyday) digital infrastructures yet remain mostly invisible (Irani 2015; Miceli and Posada 2022). Given the prominence of scholarship on data practices and the datafication of public welfare services and administration, particularly in the Nordic countries as forerunners (Redden 2018; Hoeyer et al. 2019; Kaun and Liminga 2025), it comes as no surprise that a care perspective has enriched this discourse. Data work is frequently hidden from plain sight and broader narratives, yet it is also "careful," as Irina Zakharova and Juliane Jarke (2024) emphasize. By "care-ful," they mean that it is part of community practices and mundane activities. Considering data and data work from a care lens means highlighting that data is local and relational (Loukissas 2019; Poirier 2024).

Care, as feminist STS scholarship makes clear, exposes the situated perspective of invisible actors and practices and becomes a form of ethics in practice (Mol et al. 2010; Suchman 2007). In the case of digital and algorithmic systems, for example, this means that data workers, similarly to nurses and care-takers in healthcare, ensure that these systems function smoothly or produce relevant results, often in the absence of the promised "full automation." Thus, Zakharova and Jarke invite us to embrace care as both analytical and agentic perspective moving from care as critique in datafied societies to "buildings communities of care" (2024, 652). The care turn in digital scholarship, thus, highlights the multiplicities of practices, the embedded relationships, and affective dimensions that data and digital technologies consist of and thrive upon yet which tech developers and proponents tend to downplay.

This pluralization of care is enacted in three entangled and recursive modes. The first one, *care for data*, describes the "care-ful" collection, preparation, and maintenance of research, specimen, or citizen-related data by scientists, in museums, libraries, and citizen centers. As noted above, data is never raw, and to make it meaningful for its particular context, actors engage in digitizing specimens, enriching metadata, cleaning, (re)formatting, verifying data, and many other data-related activities (Plantin 2019; Davies and Holmer 2024). Knowledge infrastructures (Edwards 2010), as public institutions, but also the (digital) commons, rely

on these dedicated data practices. The second mode, *care in data*, recognizes the various relations between data and human actors connected to them that the universalizing narratives of computation (Lee and Ribes 2025) tend to flatten or obscure. As an umbrella term, “data work” is frequently described as tedious, boring, and easy to automate. At the same time, machine learning algorithms promise to uncover and predict new patterns in literally anything from the data, thus suggesting that context and experience become redundant. However, studies on the implications of algorithmic and data-driven systems in public administration or school education demonstrate that replacing human-centered interpretation of data with score-based data analytics or “displacing the human subjects themselves as objects of care and attention” (Seaver 2021, 525) can be detrimental for shaping people’s lives, since no machine learning system or algorithm provides any of the often-embodied understanding of an individual’s situation. Finally, this leads to *care with data*. This mode represents the potentials of data and data practices to support sustainable and socially desired developments. Recent years and technopolitical developments have brought forth a range of data-rescue and knowledge-creation initiatives, such as the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative to save US public environmental records from removal (Rojas et al. 2025), various digital platforms for landscape and biodiversity preservation (Urzedo et al. 2023), or generally improving knowledge on environment and climate change through data (Edwards 2010; Lin 2025).

Care in the digital realm, as these modes emphasize, and, following Lindén and Lydahl (2021), is both a practice and an ethical-moral orientation. This raises pressing questions about whose practice and whose ethical and moral values. For critical scholars on data, activists, and those caring, this lens lets us seek answers that recognize difference, experience, affect, and power. However, care, in its various forms, does not align well with technology design and technologists’ interests such as scalability, marketability, and heteronormativity, because care is enacted in situated and less privileged ways (Powell et al. 2022; Seaver 2021). Still, it is exactly care as approach and perspective – the situated assemblage of researcher and researched – that reveals the hidden labor and data work underlying automation, which enables digital technologies to scale. In a way, as I discuss in the next section, care does not *care* for the digital product but how it is maintained, drawing parallels to the commons and commoning.

3. Putting Commoning First

Within the commons model, digital commons represent only a subset of the broader commons-based ecosystem, with its distinct practices, sites, actors, and cases of peer production (Dulong de Rosnay and Stalder 2020; O’Neil et al. 2020). For the sake of simplicity, in this and the following sections, I drop the word “digital” in front of commons and commoning as its practice of maintenance and sustainment (Poderi 2020)¹. The concept and ethos of the commons have significantly shaped our contemporary digital technologies and our interactions with them, as evidenced by research on free and open-source software (Kelty 2008), peer production and decentralized internet (Bowker et al. 2009; O’Neil et al. 2020), and data sciences (Plantin et al. 2018; Plantin 2019).² Instead, I want to focus on a few important aspects that share contours with care in relation to the contemporary digital context.

Digital technologies and infrastructure, much like their more tangible, physical equivalents, require maintenance and care (Dulong de Rosnay and Stalder 2020; Poderi 2020). Failing operating system updates, rarely interoperable data and software, misspellings or different spellings in file names and datasets affecting data processing, bots spreading misinformation on Wikipedia, abandoned tech documentation, or the ingenious acts and workflows human users come up with to cope with imperfect systems have been documented widely in academic research and public media. Elsewhere, some of these peer-to-peer practices have even been called the “plumbing” of technology (Musiani 2012). Unlike commercially developed digital technologies embedded in organizational contexts, which, in theory, have the means to support this maintenance, most commons depend on voluntary contributions, collaborative authorship, and, thus, shared values and responsibility. This may seem as a clear-cut distinction but in practice, as scholarship on peer-to-peer production has pointed out (Berry and Moss 2006; Velkova 2016; Poderi 2020), commons strongly require defining “ownership of means of production, technical architecture/design, social organization/governance of work patterns, ownership of the peer-produced resource, and value of the output” (Dulong de Rosnay and Musiani 2016).

Turning these requirements into practices, such as open access academic publishing but in fee-model-based subscription journals or the use of public-domain data to train machine learning models, has been critiqued by scholars, voicing concern that the commons are influenced by and co-constructed with liberal legal and economic frameworks (Berry and Moss 2006; Dulong de Rosnay and Stalder 2020; Thylstrup et al. 2022). Simultaneously, the celebratory and idealized image of the commons and the debates about openness as its core principle enable what legal scholar Melanie Dulong de Rosnay has framed as “common-swashing:” “appropriation of the semantics and the message of the commons for commercial purposes without endorsing its values” (2020, 11). In her ethnographic study of the Blender community, media scholar Julia Velkova points out that a problem is that the idealization of the commons conceals “a critical debate about the ways in which this open gift economy functions; who benefits from it and how; and what remains out of sight, hidden deeply under the paradigm of openness” (2016, 1). Both the legal-economic conditions and the celebratory imaginary of commons and its related concepts – broadly emerging from a Western and male-centered technology development perspective – have overlooked and deliberately devalued as commensurate feminist, non-binary, differently abled, and non-Western cultures and practices, even seeking to impose upon them their understanding and traditions of openness (Boeva and Foster 2016; Toupin 2020). Instead, as the “infrastructuring” of the commons unfolds, be that as part of the stack of most commercial software technologies or in advanced computational practices, developed within academic research communities (Boeva and Kropp 2024), the possibility of achieving the opposite of openness increases.

These speak to a broader problem of technoscientific innovation: both imaginaries and narratives tend to foreground the output or results of that innovation and neglect the vast processes and involved actors behind it. If, in this case, commons as the umbrella term means that output, commoning would be the process of creating, maintaining, and further developing the commons. However, as Poderi (2020) rightfully points out, commoners as involved actors and commoning as practices are framed either as “collective subjectivities” or as a topic of niche study in peer-production research. In seeking the “stabilization” in a classical SCOT

manner (Pinch and Bijker 1984), what becomes hidden is the affective or care dimension “that characterizes the commoners-commoning relationship” (Poderi 2020) needed for its accomplishment. The efforts, emotions, the built-in relationships, the kind of skills exceeding purely technical ones, but also resentments and disappointments are all vital and valuable elements of digital and automation technology interactions and their production, as Poderi continues:

By focusing on affect, it becomes clearer that for commoners caring for the commons is anything but taken for granted. It is an ethical and political labour that needs to be continuously (re)affirmed and which both triggers and is triggered by affective states. (Poderi 2020, 40)

Returning to the examples from the beginning, this asks about how commons-inspired initiatives for digital sovereignty can account for that. Launching an initiative on “EU-made” open-source alternatives addresses only a small part of the problem. Transferability of skills and work routines into new digital environments is not “interoperable” with digital systems, as empirical research on the digital transformation of public sectors and organizations has demonstrated. Aspiring independence from commercial tech providers requires true and sustained commitment to commoning with care in mind, for instance, “[elevating] nontechnical contributions as essential to the project,” as signaled in a best practice guide by the Digital Commons Policy Council (Daly et al. 2024). Again, this raises questions: Who can commit to commoning, and who cannot? If not, what remedial measures are available? But also, what defines a nontechnical contribution, knowing that every technology is a sociotechnical assemblage without clear boundaries? In that sense, commitment entails thinking first with local communities rather than with dominant innovation paradigms, something that a care perspective on data practices, digital transformation, and automation has frequently stressed.

4. Increasing (the) Overlaps of Care and Commoning for Just Technological Futures

Care and commoning are not just frameworks for understanding digital and automation technologies. They are also deeply entangled practices that often remain invisible in technoscientific narratives. Acknowledging these interactions poses challenges, especially as the socio-technical ecosystem consolidates under a few dominant technology companies and their technologies. This consolidation sharply contrasts with earlier visions of digital participation and democratic collaboration – values that shaped internet development, open-source communities, and our current digital infrastructures. Thinking care and commoning together shows these practices – whether through voluntary contribution or precarious labor – are essential to technology, yet are often devalued or made invisible by dominant innovation narratives.

At the same time, a critical tension emerges when examining the distinctions between care and commoning in the digital realm. While commoning often arises from deliberate choices and shared values, much care work in data-driven systems persists within colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist structures, where participants engage out of necessity rather than conviction. Microworkers training artificial intelligence, content moderators flagging harmful material,

and those engaged in the mundane yet crucial work of data maintenance rarely participate as commoners but as workers, often inadequately compensated or recognized. Conversely, digital commons initiatives often require higher levels of technical literacy to participate, potentially limiting who can contribute and whose voices shape these spaces. These asymmetries demand greater attention as we envision future alternatives to technology provision.

The rise of generative AI intensifies these concerns. Contemporary generative models have been trained extensively on materials drawn from the digital commons – open-source repositories, digitized cultural heritage, open-access scholarship – yet their developers frequently fail to acknowledge or reciprocate value to these communities (Noroozian et al. 2025). This extraction resembles what scholars on peer-to-peer production have called the “tragedy of the commons,” in which limited actors maximize profit from shared resources, while the commoners who sustain these collections through their labor receive nothing in return, or even worse, suffer exhaustion and burnout (Poderi 2020). Simultaneously, the emergence of synthetic content and AI-generated material threatens to pollute the commons themselves, placing additional burden on those already engaged in invisible maintenance and curation work.

The initiatives toward digital sovereignty emerging globally – from European alternatives to Microsoft products to French development of independent videoconferencing infrastructure – represent potentially meaningful shifts in technology politics. However, true commitment to commoning with care requires sustained attention to whose practices and values inform technology development, sustained funding and institutional support beyond technical development, and meaningful engagement with local communities and their needs rather than imposition of technological innovations. This draws a few critical questions: How can large initiatives for digital sovereignty sustain the affective and relational dimensions of care and commoning without reproducing existing exclusions based on technical expertise, literacy, or access? What structural conditions and support systems are necessary to prevent the suffering and alienation that frequently accompany engagement in care work and commons contribution? And, as AI systems increasingly shape welfare provision, public administration, and everyday life, how might care and commoning perspectives inform more just and responsive technological futures? Recognizing care and commoning as co-constitutive of contemporary technoscience demands a fundamental reorientation in how we conceptualize digital innovation, governance, and participation. As STS scholars and engaged researchers, we bear responsibility for foregrounding these often-displaced perspectives and practices, challenging the “noisy” narratives of techno-progress with more “care-ful,” attentive accounts of how our digital worlds are actually maintained and by whom.

Notes

¹ I am well aware that a natural habitat, as an example of commons, is very different from, for instance, an online community platform. A natural habitat, such as a small forest, might be tended by tax-funded municipal care workers alongside conservationists and outdoor activists, and be freely accessible to everyone, whereas an online platform for neighborhood sharing of information and goods can be voluntarily maintained but remain a closed, communal infrastructure. Opposite constellations are similarly possible.

² A detailed overview of concepts, historical developments, and empirical studies on commons is beyond the scope of this reflection. For a comprehensive overview, see the *Handbook of Peer Production*, edited by Mathieu O’Neil, Christian Pentzold, and Sophie Toupin (2020) as well as the discontinued *Journal of Peer Production*.

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At the Margins of Research: Affective Encounters and Careful Worldmaking

Jonas Fritsch

How do we as researchers allow ourselves to be touched by the world in a way that propels us to touch back? What is the resonance between theory and practice in such affective encounters? And what worlds are made at this intersection between caring for and caring with? And how might we understand this blurring between research and not-yet-research as a form of becoming-research that propels new labs of living-with across human and more-than-human actors?

This article takes its point of departure on a bicycle moving through an urban garden – Byhaven at Sundholm – in Amager, Copenhagen, somewhere in the Fall 2015, not long after I had taken up a position in interaction design at the IT University of Copenhagen (ITU) after living most of my life in Aarhus. As will become clear when reading the article, what at the time seemed like a tranquil pedalling exploration of a new neighbourhood has ended up becoming increasingly entangled in the development of my professional practice. I know now that it led to an engagement with more-than-human dimensions across social, mental and environmental ecologies which profoundly influenced the creation of my research Lab, the Affective Interactions & Relations (AIR) Lab at ITU (<https://airlab.itu.dk/>). I know the encounters that I had in that urban garden over the years developed into multiple research and teaching collaborations exploring these ecological explorations through sonic design experiments, urban design concerns and affective data collection. However, I also know that I have not yet taken the time to tell the story about how these worlds came to be, and how this initial bike ride and encounter with the human and non-human actors populating Byhaven and the Sundholm area. And I believe that this might be a story that can contribute to the aim of this special issue, because it essentially is one about complicating, dissolving and crossing boundaries; disciplinary, professional/personal, human/non-human/more-than human, to name a few.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway 2016)

I am intentionally framing this article as “a story,” with all the power and limitations this brings. As Haraway points out, every story is in itself a form of worldmaking, and how we tell it, changes the worlds we create. This story is told based on more than 10 years of engagement with Byhaven, drawing on both written fragments (field notes, unsuccessful research applications, article drafts), images/sound recordings/videos, workshop findings, design experiments, interviews and more. It extends previous explorations of how to articulate that which we sometimes “leave out” when we tell more formalized stories about what constitutes “research” (Kofoed and Fritsch 2023). It might be seen as a form of “undisciplined writing” (Fritsch et al. 2022) that draws on autoethnographic and vignette-oriented ways of bringing forth knowledge that was not there before, because it was hiding in the not-yet-articulated dimensions. In this piece, I use the term “at the margins of research” to unfold this. In doing so, I draw on Star who argues that marginality is an experience of living simultaneously “inside” and “outside” many different networks and of continuously becoming a multiple actor-subject (1991). This resonates with a more contemporary “call for action” by Stengers who argues that scholars and researchers must allow themselves to be touched by current sensible events in the present to change things (2019). In this article, I will argue how existing at the margin requires inhabiting “critical zones” and in-between, relational spaces of thinking-feeling at the intersection between research and (other forms of) life. Further, I will argue that taking the time to “tell stories differently” might function as an invitation to interrogate the juxtapositions between “marginality” and “centrality” as ever-changing currents across STS and design – and quite possibly beyond.

But let’s get back on the bicycle in 2015. At the time, I was trying to find the most direct bicycle path from my home to the university, which, due to the street planning in the neighbourhood, was not a straightforward task. After some months of searching, I started returning to a path that would take me through an area – which I later discovered was named Sundholm – that I found intriguing, where I would pass through an urban garden, namely Byhaven; a place I could also overlook from my office on the 5th floor in the ITU building. On my daily commute, I would take the route with Byhaven and its chickens and rabbits, enjoying the atmosphere and feel of the space, but always on a bicycle in motion, just passing through.

In 2017, this changed. As part of an ongoing research project on *Affects, Interfaces & Events*, I decided to host a workshop in the garden with some colleagues to explore what we called “Urban Fabrics” (Fritsch and Thomsen 2014). Specifically, we wanted to map and explore the entanglement of digital infrastructures across social, environmental and mental ecologies (Guattari 1989; Fritsch 2019) as well as human and non-human actors using the BThere design method (Eriksson et al. 2006). The main element of the BThere method is to print a large map of an area and then go to that area and start populating the map with observations across different layers, while engaging in conversations with the people in the area. We have reported in more detail in the findings of that workshop (Fritsch and Samson 2020) but for present purposes, I would like to zoom in on two things that now, seen in retrospect, have been instrumental in shaping my research agenda in the last 8 years.



Figure 1.

A collage from the BThere workshop; in the top left corner you see a screenshot from the Sonic Contours, the yellow names to the right are wifi-names we discovered when moving from ITU to Byhaven, and in the middle you see the annotated Google Map and a non-human participant. Photo by Jonas Fritsch.

First, we encountered the daily responsible for the Urban Garden, Emil. Emil told us about the story of the place, how it was both a regular urban garden but was also used for social rehabilitation through gardening for people affiliated with the nearby Sundholm shelter. Emil referred to them as the users of the garden, and how they were often homeless and with some form of substance abuse. Further, Emil told us that even though the area was loved and appreciated by several people and users, it was still continuously subject to change – even threats – from the ongoing processes of gentrification sweeping over a number of areas of Copenhagen in the name of urban redevelopment. At the time, this meant that there were plans to convert a rather large area of the urban garden to build a parking house that would secure municipal revenue streams. During the data analysis after the workshop, this issue made us reflect on the question of value; what are the different forms of value that intersect across the different stakeholders in Byhaven? Value for Emil and the users was not economic or monetary value, which on the contrary seemed to be the driving force behind the parking house project and the municipal urban planning. Further, it also foregrounded the emergent and processual quality of the place; nothing was settled and the resources to keep the place running had to be renegotiated on a yearly basis. It also raised questions about ownership and the commons; whereas the urban garden was for everybody, a parking house would be for paying customers only.

Ever since that day, I was constantly anticipating the construction of the parking house to begin; an imaginary symbol of the capitalist capture and the conversion of city-near nature

into monetary revenue streams of surplus value. I was thinking: how can I as a person and researcher, and we as a university, engage in what's happening in our own neighbourhood – and potentially make a difference in this process?

On my way to work I would now normally say hi to Emil to hear about how things were going, and I got to meet some of the users of the garden and heard their stories. I started inviting colleagues over for lunch in the garden and created small student research projects that used the urban garden as a case for design work. And I started using design research and other methods to explore why it was so difficult to translate the value produced in the urban garden into a format that could be understood and recognized by the decision-makers and systems that were involved in the urban renewal projects. This led to a growing research engagement on how to partially capture and translate affective data on the lived quality of the place for human and non-human actors, where more researchers got involved, and where we met with more people from the site. We used experimental walking and listening methods with and without technology to attune to the place (e.g., Springgay and Truman 2018; Oliveros 2022) and developed an installation that would allow us to zoom in on the sounds of the place, hence the name *Sonic Zoom*. We did breathing and meditation sessions in the garden and regularly went there for lunch and coffee. We also hosted a visit in our university Lab (AIR Lab) for Emil and some of the users of the garden, since we found out that the large road between the garden and the university worked as a hard boundary both for us at ITU and the people from the urban garden at Sundholm, and wanted to break that barrier. We started drafting research applications and writings about our engagement and mobilized larger networks and stakeholders.



Figure 2.

Sonic Zoom in use at Byhaven. Photo by Jonas Fritsch.

At some point, we asked Emil about the status on the parking lot. He said it had been postponed due to increased pricing for construction work; apparently the building lot was tied to the development of another lot, and together they were too expensive to kick things off. In the meantime, construction of two major new residential buildings on the parking lot between ITU and Byhaven had begun, which was very palpable evidence that the gentrification process had not stopped entirely, but only been displaced to other areas in the vicinity. It also meant that the garden was no longer visible from my office.

The collaboration came to a hard stop during COVID due to the national lockdown (first from March 2020 lasting until Summer 2020, and then again from December 2020 to March 2021). Due to the national restrictions, it was against the law to gather in groups, especially when it comes to extra vulnerable people such as many users of the garden who had, e.g., pulmonary diseases such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). We kept in touch via phone with Emil and others from the garden, hearing about their experiences which were very mixed; there were challenges, especially regarding physical compassion and the increase of drug trading, but also an increasing number of people were using the garden as a place of relief during the lockdown. It was, however, also a challenging time to do site-specific research in general.

One day, in the Autumn 2020 while visiting the garden, we found a large crowd of people gathered there. We went into one of the greenhouses to check out the tomatoes. One of the people from the crowd also went into the greenhouse, and we asked him about the group. He said that it was a group of municipal workers, also from the urban development sections, that were visiting Byhaven as part of an inspiration tour. He then told us about some of the projects



Figure 3.

Collage of more-than-human entanglements in Byhaven (above) and the development site between the university and Byhaven over time (below). Photo by Jonas Fritsch.

he had been involved in planning, one of which was at the nearby school. We somehow ended up asking him about the plans for the area, and the parking house. He said that it was in fact no longer on the table for the time being – but that when it was being planned, he was just hoping that the case would not land on his desk. He was a local person and had known about the area for years and did not want to be part of deciding to build a parking house in Byhaven because he really liked the place and did not want to see it change. In the Summer of 2025, construction started in the area – but not for a parking house, but rather an expansion of the nearby youth prison’s courtyard area. In the meantime, Emil had moved on to other projects, and my engagement with the area was awakening again after a time where I had focused on other projects. We talked to the new daily leader, Erik, who said that after this construction, there would be no further plans involving the urban garden area – at least that he knew of. Our conversations with Erik were part of getting more involved in a new urban redevelopment project carried out at the entire Sundholm Area after a period of less direct engagement due to other spinoff projects.

The above vignette departs from a passing-through to a situated engagement with a site and its inhabitants due to an affective encounter that touched me in a way that propelled me to touch back, resulting in a growing engagement, which is still proliferating, albeit at a slower pace and less directed than some years ago. This oscillation between touching and being touched also echoes Spinoza’s definition of affect as “an ability to affect or be affected,” which are always two facets of the same event. This basic definition has been taken up by Brian Massumi who argues that this affectation happens in-between, blurring the traditional boundaries between what might be seen as an object or subject (2009, 1). Further, by proxy of Deleuze’s uptake of Spinoza, Massumi emphasizes that “a power to affect and be affected governs a transition, where a body passes from one state of capacitation to a diminished or augmented state of capacitation” (*ibid.*, 1f). This transition is felt, in the unrolling of an event, that leaves a trace and can be re-activated across other events. According to Massumi, this line of thinking emphasizes bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, inclination – in dynamic *relation* to each other:

If there is one key term, that’s it: relation. When you start in-between, what you’re in the middle of is a region of relation. Occurrent relation, because it’s all about event. Putting the terms together, you realize straight away that the relational event will play out differently every time. In repeating, it takes up the past differently. In taking up the past differently, it creates new potentials for the future. The region of occurrent relation is a point of potentiation. It is where things begin anew. Where things begin anew is where they were already present in tendency. (Massumi 2009, 2)

Looking at the personal vignette above through this wholly relational understanding of affect and Stengers’ call for an active research engagements that blurs the boundaries between any easy separation between “research” and “life” – or sensible events – more generally allows us to explore what happens at the margins of research; in those areas where the distinction between research and not-quite/becoming-research. Byhaven is an example of how I, as a body moving through a space, allowed myself to become affected and start touching back – sometimes in projects that were more attuned to traditional research methods and practices, but also in ways

that were continuously questioning and moving my research towards a clearer ethico-political engagement with a site I had developed an affection for. This research interest has been in a constant processual flux of becoming shaped by both conceptual foundations, calls for funding, collaborators, user needs and technological explorations. From a research side of things, what has been striking is the continuous ability of the site to sustain a form of research interest.

Because “nothing comes without its world” we do not encounter single individuals, a meeting produces a world, changes the colour of things, it diffracts more than it reflects, distorts the “sacred image of the same”. (Haraway 1994, 70 in Puig de la Bellacasa 2012)

If we are to further conceptualize this engagement, it can indeed be understood as a continuous form of pluriversal worldmaking-with the site and the multiple collectives mobilized along the way (Schön 1987; Haraway 2016; Escobar 2018). My relation with Byhaven developed into a careful engagement exploring the material, ethical and affective entanglements through experimental interventions (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). As articulated in the quote above, the encounter with Emil as described in the vignette was indeed a meeting that ended up “producing a world” – but only because it was allowed to unfold, and because I started “caring about” the site. Here, I draw on Schrader’s distinction between “caring for” and “caring about” where the former entails the often-gendered labor of caring for somebody in need, and the latter concerns an affective relation. As Kofoed argues:

Caring for somebody is usually goal-oriented, as it involves an “effort to improve the situation of a patient” (Mol, 2008, p. 23). [...] Beginning to care about something or someone implies an opposite move, namely the transformation of the limit that places someone outside our socially sanctioned scope of care (Schrader, 2015, p. 668). (Kofoed 2024, 11)

Looking at Byhaven, we can identify a number of entangled and sometimes conflicting caring practices dressed in different guises and on a number of levels; that of the users – both “regular” urban gardeners and the socio-rehabilitating gardeners – towards cultivating the garden, that of Emil towards preserving the garden for the users, that of the municipality towards developing the city – and that of us as researchers moving into the site. In reality, it might be argued that the line between caring for and caring about is also not easily upheld in (research) practice.

In the case of Byhaven, this careful and ethico-political engagement has also been one related to commons and commoning, and nature as a site of affective socio-nature encounters and co-becomings (Singh 2017). And whereas this was the initial site that catalyzed this conceptual orientation, the encounter with Byhaven has also travelled into other sites such as a contested nature reserve near Copenhagen, Amager Commons, and an emerging urban development in the Southern part of the city, Jernbanebyen/Spor 10. In the first case, we explored different ways of caring for the commons reported through “undisciplined writing” and problematizing the limits of caring through research (Fritsch et al. 2022). In the second case, we became part of the very first steps in the realization of a novel urban development and were allowed to follow the ways in which values emerged and were spread into the early stages, sites and communities developed in the project. Here, it was very interesting to

follow the developers' ambition to, in collaboration with the municipality, create a social community that would precede the actual development process. However, we also saw that the values about participation and ecological impact had a hard time when encountering the reality of development and investments. Both cases, however, emerged directly as a result of the engagement with Byhaven and the stakeholders we had teamed up with, e.g., Gehl Architects. Again, this is an example of how an initial commitment to world-making through socio-nature encounters might be sustained across sites and move into new collaborations and encounters. Whereas this in itself is hardly revolutionary, it adds to the potential field of exploration opened when allowing yourself to become touched and start re-worlding.

Conceptually, the research carried out in and around Byhaven has been filtered through pre-existing agendas around, e.g., affective and emotional approaches to interaction design (e.g., Fritsch 2018; Fritsch 2021; Fritsch 2025). In turn, this research agenda has been coloured and modified through experiences "in the wild." It is my experience so far that this will necessarily be a process of mutual resonance – and in this case it has provided enough vibrational affect to sustain the engagement. However, during the last almost decade there have been periods of deep engagement, and periods of detachment. COVID was a rupture, and the same might be said about the changing employees in Byhaven. But also very practical arrangements such as kids starting in school leading to a different bike path that did not go through the garden have had an impact on this. Research engagements as a form of care can be unstable at times. The parking house story is also interesting since it foregrounds how an engagement with urban space is always an engagement with the temporary and larger socio-economic flows of people and money. And how the power of that which might happen has an immediate effect on the things that are happening, also when it does not materialize.

One of the things we do as researchers to sustain initiatives is to try to secure funding, which in the case of Byhaven never materialized, even though we sent in six different applications to various funding bodies over the years. Naturally, the process of writing up applications and inviting collaborators into networks might be seen as a mobilization of interest in itself – but having no funds, and receiving funds for other projects, also diverted the attention. However, in the period where we have not received funding, Byhaven has been presented to more than 400 students in many different courses, having multiple colleagues visiting, presenting the work we have done there in multiple talks and panels, and much more. This naturally troubles the notion of centrality and marginality, since it can be argued that Byhaven has been a central pedagogical element – but that is a different, yet complementary, story to tell. At present, we are seeing a resurging interest and we are writing up new articles and sending in new funding applications. And then, of course, there is this piece, which might simultaneously be seen as a re-enactment and feeding-forward of the previous engagements into the present – and of re-centering the marginality of the research into novel directions.

The story about Byhaven can also be framed as a design research engagement where different methods and techniques were tried out in collaboration with human and non-human actors across ecologies in an attempt to map and identify design opportunities for strengthening communities, increasing psychological wellbeing and capturing affective data for urban planning processes. During the years, we have drawn heavily on Anna Tsing's ideas about developing different arts of noticing oriented towards the more-than-human through multispecies attunement

(2021). According to Tsing, new arts of noticing emerge when the body and senses attune to other values than the habitual. In our work, we have often explored how digital and interactive technologies might enable the body and the senses to explore, discover and qualify aspects of reality that are previously hidden or unrecognized. And returning to Stengers, Spinoza and adding Daniel Stern (1985), it is about allowing yourself to be touched by sensible events and use that affective capacitation to develop novel forms of attuning to the unfolding of life at the margins of research, as an engine for directing research to the things that we truly care about. This involves, following Moore and colleagues (2021), a form of “careful risk-taking” in the re-making of relations and, ultimately, of the world. Further, as should be clear when reading this text, the margin is never a fixed site, but in continuous movement, folding and in-the-making. Attending to this becoming can enrich research practices across STS and design towards new existential territories and engaged impact in a world in tension. It is my hope that this piece provides a certain entry point for this required collective experimentation across disciplines.

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World(s)-Making “Out Here” in Scholar-Activism, in the Milieu of the Between

Cindy Kohtala

For design and STS scholars engaged with situated communities offering alternatives to extractivist capitalism as “commoners,” how do these engagements cause us to reflect on our own positions as commoners ourselves? STS does clearly engage with analysis and critique of “Big Tech,” for example (Birch and Cochrane 2022), as well as related efforts of alternative digital commoning projects (Perperidis and Tsekeris 2026), with scholars emphasizing such endeavours as worthy of STS attention (Papadopoulos 2018; Sciannamblo et al. 2020). Commoning here denotes the *ongoing-ness* of stewardship of things, resources, livelihoods, by a

collective, in ways that enable people to experiment with new lifeways (Bollier and Helfrich 2012; Poderi 2020; Perperidis and Tsekeris 2026). Many scholars – myself, my colleagues, as a “we” – have been embedded in sustainability materialist and alternative technology communities for years or decades, researching *with* them more than *on* them, to explore increasingly urgent socio-ecological questions often unaddressed by universities, governments or markets (Hess 2016; Berglund and Kohtala 2020). Our identities blur from academics reading climate science and updates on further transgressions of the planetary boundaries to people working together with care in our own urban milieu on things that seem to matter (Temper et al. 2018; Berglund and Kohtala 2020; Schlosberg 2025; Houtbeckers 2025). World-making “out here” with social groupings, in the wild and in a way that necessarily blurs academia and activism, appears more and more to be the only option available. Yet the very between-ness, of becoming, of entering with others into an alternative space-time as commoners, is fraught and fragile; patriarchal trappings and rigid identities-practices in polarized worlds shunt us away from the messiness and confusion that accompany commoning (Velicu and García-López 2018; Kohtala et al. 2019; Prendeville and Kohtala 2023). Thinking through Judith Butler, Irina Velicu and Gustavo García-López (2018, 57) caution us against instrumentalizing thinking of the commons as for or against capital power, but rather as bounded human selves who are “mutually constitutive but also mutually vulnerable.” I ponder how to get myself and ourselves from here to there in the messiness and vulnerabilities of scholar-activism.

“Civic engagement” and “participation in society” are increasingly seen as vital elements of democratic societies in collective stewardship of webs of life on planet Earth (Marres 2015; Coles 2016; Kely 2017). As the crises we face are multi-scalar and volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, “social innovation” or “grassroots innovation” – that is, grassroots movements’ attendant sociomaterial experimentation with new practices and infrastructures – are for many scholars not *sufficient* for the sustainability transformations needed, yet both *necessary* and thereby worthy of study (Seyfang and Smith 2007; Olsson et al. 2017; Schlosberg 2025; Kuu-Park et al. 2026). Yet how social innovation is often referred to in scholarship – at arm’s length as if viewing a surgical operating theatre from above – appears to me to distance us from the very real effects of a world on fire, the embodied experiences concomitant with change and building alternatives that are affective and often highly visceral (Berlant 2016; Poderi 2020). What does it take to make worlds together with our interlocutors in ways that actively practice care? Such worlds entail prefiguring sociotechnical infrastructures that seek to common knowledge production rather than enclose it (Perperidis and Tsekeris 2026). These world space-time fragments grow in a one-world world of academic managerialism, the death of expert knowledge, increasing academic precarity, and patriarchal scholarly practices on the one hand, and a milieu of activist in-fighting, increasing polarity and disinformation, and fragmented attention to community governance on the other (Prendeville and Kohtala 2023; Gül et al. 2025). We as scholars are transversing worlds on fire *in here* in academia as well as worlds *out here* in civil society with communities.

The world *in here*, of scholarship and conventional academia, continues to struggle with the effects of neoliberalism and audit culture, while encountering ever-new catastrophes concerning the crisis of expertise and university defunding in the face of encroaching authoritarianism. Natural scientists sit in committee rooms and wonder aloud if they need to

“become activists,” while others are arrested on picket lines, whether the protest pleads for peace, demands climate action, resists job loss, or protects diversity and inclusion initiatives. Researchers are siphoned into the quicksand of productivity tools – global corporate software packages oriented to capitalism-driven business instead of learning and research environments, not to mention AI tools – in order to meet obsolete and anti-knowledge-commons achievement metrics in an impossible global competition for fee-paying students and external research funding (Srigley 2018; Jowsey et al. 2025; Thrift 2025; Gül et al. 2025). In Europe, such technology use especially by universities and governments is increasingly seen as contravening General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles on data collection and privacy, and calls for “technology sovereignty” have been rising in importance for some European Union nation-states at both regional authority and citizen levels (European Commission 2026; Pierucci 2025). In Finland, for instance, a bottom-up citizens’ initiative for legislation on “digital independence” is currently gathering signatures.

In universities, there have always been informal academic collectives using and building independent and free, open source infrastructures (softwares, databases, repositories) for collecting and sharing their work aimed at knowledge commons, sometimes in tandem with citizen science initiatives and sustainable materialist activism (Schlosberg 2025) having similar “free and open” ethos. There appear to be increasing numbers of researchers who want to gain or improve these skills, regarding them as a key part of the commoning they aspire to, yet meeting technical and technical-cultural hurdles. The Bits of Freedom association in the Netherlands has run “privacy cafés” for more than a decade, digital STS scholar Janet Vertesi launched the Opt Out Project several years ago, Tactical Tech is said to have reached two million people with its Data Detox Kit, and critical engineer Julian Oliver runs courses in digital hygiene and security, as well as in deploying and maintaining sovereign, self-hosted cloud services. These examples number among hundreds of small and large not-for-profit intermediaries aiming to foster digital literacies among activists, civil servants, academics and ordinary citizens, as well as the co-production of alternative social-digital infrastructures. We *in here* increasingly scrutinize how entangled our daily practices are with “Big Tech” ecosystems (Birch and Cochrane 2022), at the university, in the field and at home, inducing unease if not sheer anxiety. Little wonder that scholars and scholar-activists are writing articles titled with tired or leery questions (Winner 1980; Law 2015; McKibben 2022), embittered utterances (Thrift 2025), and cursewords (Eubanks and Schaeffer 2008; Springer 2016; Graeber 2018).

Through engaging with alternatives *out here*, we are enjoined to see tech itself rather as socio-technical relations and interdependence: as *commoning* and *care*. Transitioning to tech tools that accord more with our scholarly and personal values, entails learning to use and domesticate, for example, free, open office applications and cloud services; alternative communication platforms that use channels or sub-groups (Mattermost) and that include decision-making tools (Loomio); free, open video and audio meeting software (Jitsi, Big Blue Button) and social media (various Fediverse applications); and the principles of low carbon websites and low carbon computing. As these may be the tools our interlocutors in the field use and develop, they become “rhetorical technologies” (Baudry et al. 2021) that invoke and represent the digital sovereignty community we aspire to join. This means joining an alternative technology’s *design constituency* and using and co-producing *counterartifacts* (Pfaffenberger 1992). Scholarly engagement with grassroots

commoning groups in this way is a different sort of “academia without walls,” still aimed at strengthening the links between research work and social justice (Pereira 2016), yet with different conceptions of how change will occur and what constitutes knowledge (Houtbeekers 2025).

Cognizant of principles of environmental justice and thinking-acting practices in webs of life, we note technology rather as more-than-technology and even more-than-sociotechnical, understanding it as the set of “techniques, tools, and systems of knowledge applied by humans across cultures and throughout history” (Paulson 2024, 75): that is, world-making, involving material flows and very real material impacts on vulnerable communities (*ibid.*). The world-making we imagine is not exactly the pragmatism of eco-modernism, where the transformation needed will be wrought through design and technological innovation while the world stays the same, nor is it a naïve utopianism of entanglement *all the way down* that still maintains some sense of anthropocentrism and privilege. If, as underlined by Susan Paulson (2024), we perceive the societal structures underpinning technology that need to change – by continually asking how colonial, class, gender and race systems are enmeshed with technologies, that then in turn produce and reproduce marginalization and destruction, we might gain insight into *how* such regress may be otherwise. In this sense, commoning is deeply ecological (Vetter and Fersterer 2025).

Yet the freedom spoken of in the context of *convivial* technologies, where commoning is concerned with bottom-up, reflexive experimentation with alternatives; the entwining of individual and collective autonomy enacted through technology, as conviviality; and the freedom to care for each other (Vetter and Fersterer 2025; cf. Illich 1973), is not the same freedom of free, open source software (F/OSS), nor is openness the same as accessibility or commons. F/OSS development by tech collectives is rife with controversy. Its “free and open” discourse has never been associated with liberatory freedom nor openness to marginalized communities (Dunbar-Hester 2019; rms-open-letter 2021), not to mention environmental justice, which renders any commoning discourse by so-called p2p commons communities open to be questioned (Kohtala et al. 2019; Prendeville and Kohtala 2023; Dannemann 2023). In particular, distributed, indieweb (“dweb”) initiatives and grassroots software development labelled as community technology, community informatics or civic tech (Tarr et al. 2019; Walker 2020; Murillo 2025; Gehl 2025; Troncoso and Utratel *n.d.*) are digital commons initiatives with very material implications and practices that play out in situated, embodied experiments on the ground. Many projects appear to fight informational-commons enclosure on the surface, yet continue to purge from their ranks valuable contributors (due to race, sex, gender and other factors) who are seen as raising political questions. All this is because code is still deemed apolitical and neutral, and the inordinate influence of the sociotechnical culture of Silicon Valley, the Californian ideology (Barbrook and Cameron 1996), provides the baseline of success. Moreover, several independent tech movements are inspired by or have already been subsumed into projects that actively incubate hate, while commercial F/OSS platforms explicitly collaborate with fascist actors. Some of this has already been noted as accelerationism, as articulated by scholars including Timnit Gebru and Émile P. Torres (2024) regarding generative AI corporate figures and sponsors espousing eugenicist ideologies. These tendencies, “rhetorical technologies” of a very different kind, stand in stark contrast to the cooperatives and collectives who explicitly orient to principles of degrowth, *autonomía*, community economies and feminist economics (Temper et al. 2018; Varvarousis 2019; Perperidis and Tsekeris 2026; Troncoso and Utratel *n.d.*).

The latter, who may also be scholar-activist collectives, build interstitial, prefigurative and situated practices oriented to pluriversal political ontologies. Moreover, many of these scholar-activists are themselves subject to a life of precarity in an academic environment of hiring freezes, yet possess valuable research and knowledge on how to live in new alternative webs-of-life.

Design and STS scholarship is both *in here* in the so-called ivory tower and *out here* in the world. Design has to be both, always. If design research is not rooted in practice, it dies; but, what practice? Whom or what does design and design research serve? Design academia is in the throes of questioning its knowledge practices, including research engagements with knowledge holders “out here” (Brereton et al. 2014; see also Costanza-Chock 2020). STS too has wondered about how it is “engaged” (Sismondo 2008), or how STS can better “make & do” with its interlocutors (Forlano et al. 2012; Downey and Zuiderent-Jerak 2021). Romand Coles calls such engagement “edgework” (Coles 2016). But what happens at the edges?

In a recent issue of *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, Martin Savransky (2025) wondered how scholars and collectives alike will survive our current onslaught of catastrophes:

[I]f it is now a matter of learning how to think and live in the rubble of capitalist devastation, the question becomes how to learn to pay attention to what lurks in the folds and snags of the present, what insists and persists inside and in spite of it. (Savransky 2025, 1128)

He turns to Isabelle Stengers and thinks through Philippe Pignarre and Stengers’ (2013) presentation of the *interstice* as a point of departure, a situation or an in-between. The interstice is not an innovation incubator or even a boundary object; it is a state of possibility between what can yet be imagined within the devastation of the present. Pignarre and Stengers speak of the image of the interstice as “a problem ‘that gathers together,’ not of a problem to be resolved” (*ibid.*, 112, *emphasis in original*).

Interstices bring to mind the anarchic notion of how interstitial practices aim to create the building blocks of the future society within the “shell of the old” (Carson 2021; Wright 2010); the interstice thus belongs to that “shell” or “bloc,” but is not defined against or in relation to it (Pignarre and Stengers 2013, 110). Savransky thus terms it the *milieu of the between* (2025, 1129). I have thought of makers’ and hackers’ skill at articulation work (Star and Strauss 1999) as interstitial, their ability at technical interoperability, building workarounds at the interstices between technical-cultural worlds (Kohtala 2018). Yet Stengers’ thinking “by the middle” of the interstice is immaterial, or perhaps a-material. The conceptual power of the interstice lies in how it holds possibilities for political openings, for drawing in and commoning based on the situation. In maker culture, sustainable materialist activism, and community technology collectives, the milieu of the middle holds space for postcapitalist organizing that breaks from its commodifying discourses (Sivek 2011; Lange and Bürkner 2018; Smith 2020). For Angelos Varvarousis (2019), it is during moments of crisis, in particular, when there is opportunity for

[O]pening up a field of experimentation with new practices and ideas that are simultaneously products and producers of the new social imaginary significations emerging due to the destabilization of the prevailing older ones. (Varvarousis 2019, 501)

The milieu of the middle is both pragmatic and utopian, practice and speculation.

Pignarre and Stengers were reflecting on the Seattle anti-globalization protests of 1999 in *Capitalist Sorcery* (2013), and the dynamics that come with activism, ideologies, group in-fighting, praxis and principles. For them, the interstice presents a possibility and a “process which asks its protagonists not to express themselves but to become capable of being obliged to think by the situation and for the situation” (*ibid.*, 131). Commoning requires, not principles so much as awareness of patterns, connectedness and interrelatedness (Vetter and Fersterer 2025). When working with communities *out here*, participatory design scholar Yoko Akama (2014) has become attuned to a sense of between-ness, a liminality that may remain outside of our conscious attention but is the rhythm of our relationality in communal work. As the interstice engenders plurality, it cannot be taken hostage by a pure position without closing down, even while the risks of authoritarianism and effects of current polarization and hate vectors still give us pause (Coles 2016; Varvarousis 2019; Dannemann 2023). For us, scholars and communities alike, caring about commoning, we wonder if we can get ourselves back into the *milieu of the between* where experiments at the grassroots matter, to think not of problems, but to think by the middle. Freedom is not the free of open source; it is the freedom to care for each other.

Arundhati Roy (2003) wrote,

The time has come, the walrus said. Perhaps things will get worse and then better. Perhaps there's a small God up in heaven readying herself for us. Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing. (Roy 2003, p. 75)

I imagine the *interstice* not as a place or a practice, but a space-time that is needed before prefigurative and interstitial practices can begin to be collectively created; a thing that can be seen like a star, only by looking at it through one's peripheral vision. In academia *in here* and in activism and civil life *out here*, knowing how to see and be in the *interstice* matters in this current political moment, so that we may experience the many we's and I's relationally and sense how to co-govern. The world(s)-making this entails, our coming together and commoning together as commoners, is a subject worthy of STS attention. It is a practice that is worth you and me and they coming together as a *we* in a way that does not erase difference or mess, but rather makes life in common.

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