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A WAY OF RESISTING (ATHENS DATA GARDEN), 2020

Ein Gastbeitrag von Kyriaki Goni

A way of resisting (Athens Data Garden), 2020 is a semi-fictional narrative that explores alternatives to data storage and tech monopolies. Whereas the storage capacity of DNA is extraordinary and science already looks into that, this poetic narrative does not suggest the storage of data in plant DNA, it rather seeks to open up a dialogue about alternative infrastructures, resilient interspecies collaborations. The plants as one of the oldest organisms on the planet, already bear in them the DNA of the world. Could we learn from them?

In the ever growing climate emergency the work also addresses the increasing demand for data centres and maintaining our dependence on technology.

Like all my installations A way of resisting (Athens Data Garden) as well is built like an ecosystem or a world, where different actors take part. Some actors do exist, some are fictional. Dear audience, I consider you to be the first actor. Let me introduce you to the rest of the group.

The plant

Micromeria acropolitana is a small, rare, perennial plant endemic to the area of the Acropolis of Athens. It was first spotted and collected in 1906 but the first scientific reference to the plant was made in 1908. It was thought to be extinct for 100 years when it was rediscovered in 2006. The plant is extremely hard to spot and the people who know its whereabouts do not reveal it. At the exhibition you can see the plant in a protective dazzle through an AR app.

The location

Representations of the Acropolis focus always on the undisputed achievement of the Parthenon and its significance to the western civilization, but never on the rock's flora and fauna. In the drawing, a part of this natural ecosystem comes to the fore. Parthenon is almost invisible and underneath a huge root network, tangled and rich, nervous and robust but at the same time sensitive is present.

Four researchers are interviewed and the video calls are part of the installation. Dr Fister with her team managed to store in and retrieve data from plant DNA in 2016. Dr. Tsounis rediscovered micromeria acropolitana in 2006. Dr Hogan investigates data genomics and data centers and Dr. Perello is an expert on agriculture and cyber security.

The secret data garden community Data Gardens host plants with a narrow geographical and ecological spectrum. Small secret communities around the world store their digital memory in the plants' DNA while worshipping them and keeping them safe. They recognize plants as other kinds of intelligence and use polyphonic songs to tend them and communicate with them. The installation The mountain islands shall mourn us eternally (Dolomites Data Garden), 2022 features the second Data Garden after Athens Data Garden and it was commissioned and presented at the 8th Gherdeina Biennale in Italy, curated by Lucia Pietroiusti and Filipa Ramos.

The artist narrates in the video her three meetings with the Athenian Data Garden community that took place in spring 2020 in Athens. In the video all actors of the installation come together.

Bonus 1

What would you store in the DNA of your plant? I chose a short poem by my beloved grandpa. A long textile print presents the poem. Instead of letters, the poem is translated in zeros and ones and then in the four nucleotides of the DNA chain. Seek the encoding scheme next to the poem and try to encode your name.

Bonus 2

Western philosophy has perceived for centuries the natural world through strict hierarchical structures with plants at the bottom deprived of any intelligence. Some contemporary researchers trace the historical roots of the present ecological crisis in this particular understanding of the natural world. A 16th century hierarchy structure has been deconstructed and is presented in the installation.

Data Garden was published on the occasion of the Data Garden solo exhibition in 2023 at Blenheim Walk Gallery in Leeds, UK and can be downloaded here.

*The work was initiated with a commission by Onassis Stegi Athens, where was first presented as a solo show in September 2020. The installation has received the Greek state prize INSPIRE2020.

Further information <https://kyriakigoni.com/projects/data-garden>

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