

WORKSHOP REPORT

Athens, 23–24 June 2026

NHMA Passementerie / Benaki Museum

the-making-of-creativity.com

Material Encounters

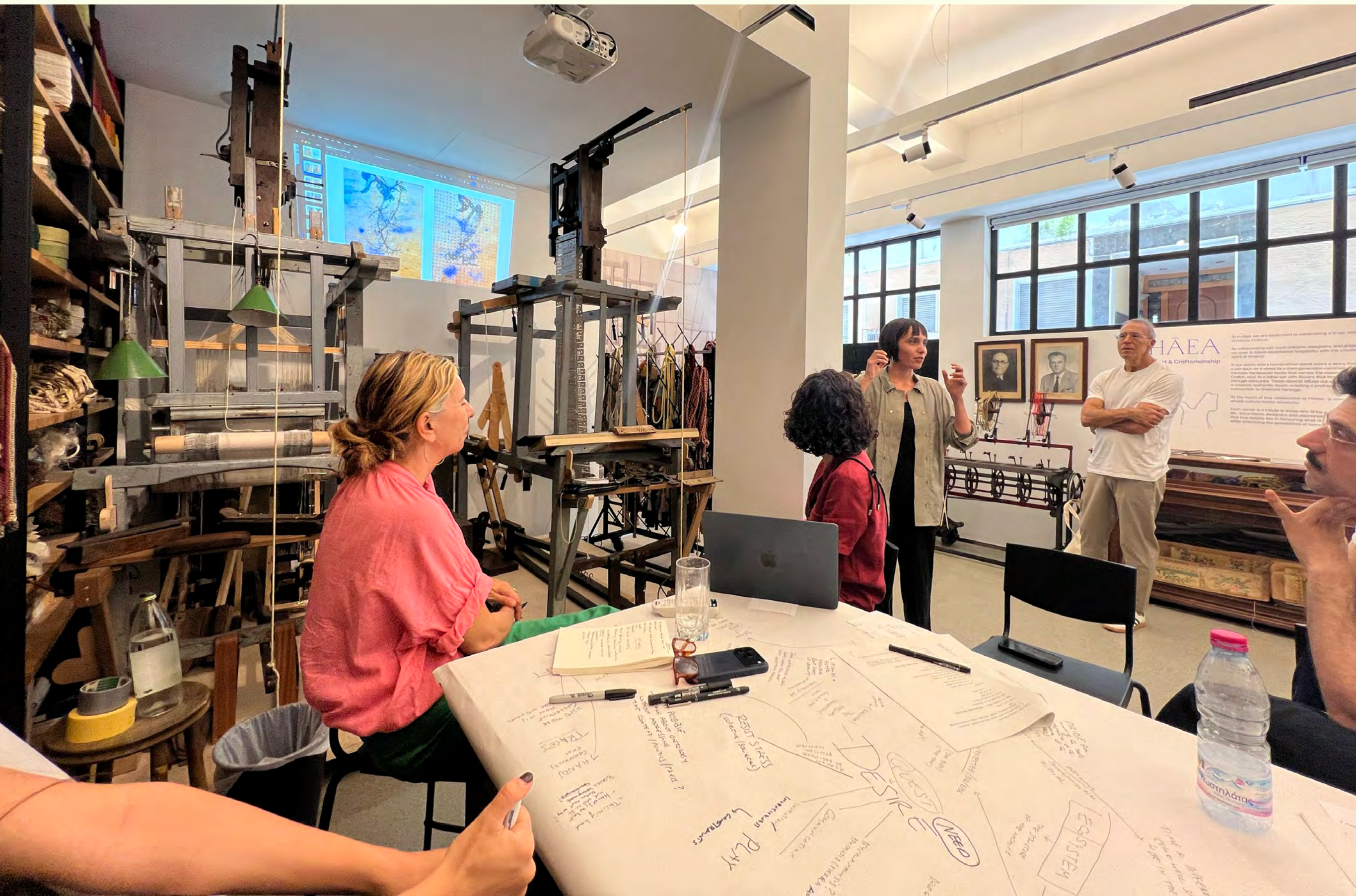
Creativity in the times of AI

Introduction

Material Encounters: Creativity in the Times of AI was a two-day, invitation-based workshop that brought together a small group of practitioners and researchers to investigate creativity as a relational process between minds, materials, and machines. The workshop took “material encounters” as both its topic and its method: rather than approaching creativity as an abstract capacity or a purely cognitive phenomenon, it asked what becomes visible when we begin from the material conditions of making, from tacit knowledge, from resistance and constraint, from the rhythms of process, and from the social and affective atmospheres in which creative work is shared. Attention was also given to how computational systems and AI complicate established distinctions between tool and material, intention and response, control and collaboration.



The workshop was developed in direct relation to the monograph *Material Encounters: Creativity in the Times of AI*, under contract with Oxford University Press, co-authored by Caterina Moruzzi and Despina Papadopoulos. The workshop's purpose was twofold: to generate material and perspectives that can be integrated into the book, and to strengthen international collaborations between the University of Edinburgh and the Athens-based creative artistic and research community.





The workshop was organised and convened by **Dr. Despina Papadopoulos** (Artist & Researcher, Philosophy Machines) and **Dr. Caterina Moruzzi** (Chancellor's Fellow in Design Informatics, University of Edinburgh). Live documentation was provided by **Kevin Walker** (Artist & Researcher, Philosophy Machines). The invited participants were **George Adamopoulos** (creative coding, Uncharted Limbo), **Susan Atwill** (sound artist and ceramics researcher), **Stratos Bichakis** (media artist and composer), **Alexandra Bissa** (weaver), **Natalia Manta** (visual artist and potter), **Grace Iro Pappas** (sculptor and interactive installations), **Maria Sigma** (weaver), **Viki Steiri** (musician and interdisciplinary artist), and **Maria Tsilogianni** (architect and designer working across critical theory and HCI). The workshop was also supported by intern **Maria Averof**, currently studying at RISD and working across materiality, tradition, and layered processes through drawing, sculpture, and wearable objects. **Virginia Matseli** is an ethnologist and Head of NHMA Passementerie / Benaki Museum.



DAY 1

Discussions & demonstrations

Across the two days, the workshop moved between conceptual framing, demonstration of practice, hands-on exchange, and collective synthesis. The opening sessions discussed key concepts such as intentionality, desire, process, and materiality, not in order to produce a fixed definition of creativity, but to establish a shared set of threads that could be returned to as participants showed their work and tested unfamiliar practices.

Demonstrations focused on moments when materials resist, surprise, or guide, making visible the tacit knowledge embedded in sustained material engagement: how affordances are learned, how limits are discovered rather than assumed, and how competence is negotiated.



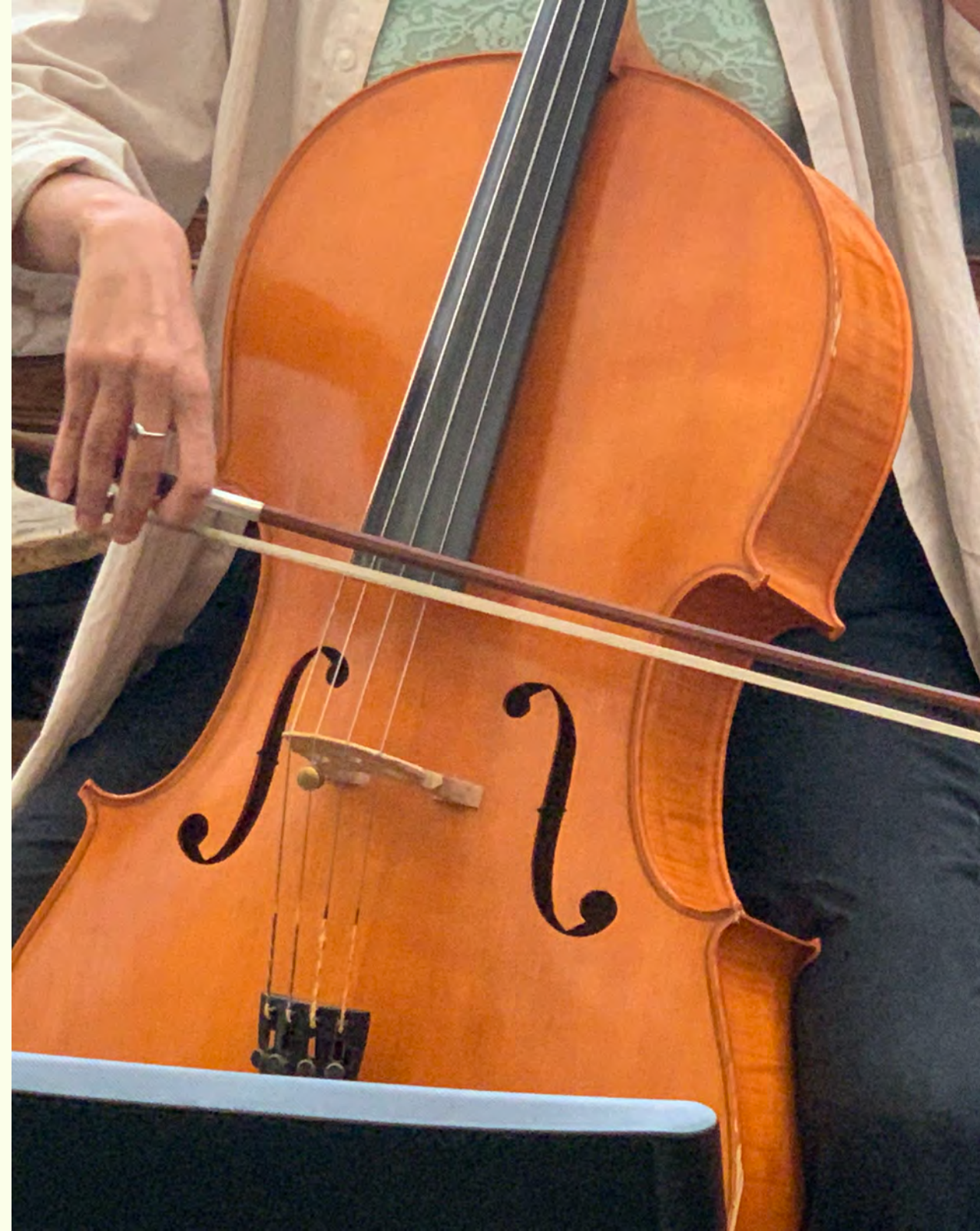


DAY 2

Material exchange



Material exchange created opportunities to defamiliarise practice across domains, bringing participants into contact with each other's tools, materials, and methods, and surfacing assumptions about skill, control, and creative agency. A key methodological feature was the workshop's responsiveness: the structure of the second day was intentionally kept flexible and was adjusted in light of insights and dynamics from the first day, underscoring the workshop's commitment to process not only as a theme but as an operating principle.



The topics discussed remained anchored in a small set of shared questions that are central to the workshop's conceptual frame. Participants returned repeatedly to **material resistance** and **agency**, asking how materials assert their logic and what it means when a material "talks back." **Temporality** was equally central, not only in the obvious differences between the drying of clay, the patient construction of textile structure, the rendering of images, or the training of models, but also in the quieter time required for attention, trust, and learning.

Alongside these guiding questions, a set of concepts surfaced repeatedly in participants' reflections as relevant conditions for creativity across diverse practices: **respect, care, process, vulnerability, curiosity, narrative**, and the time needed for a **process** to unfold.

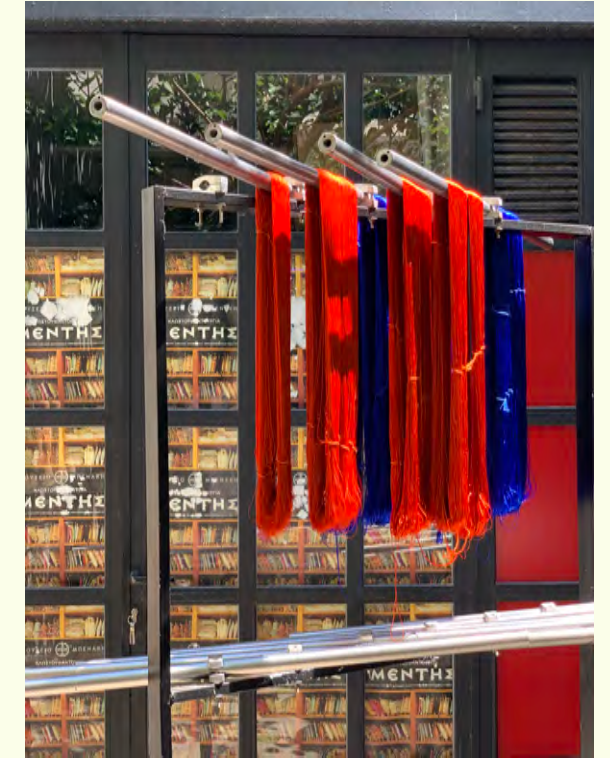
One of the most notable outcomes of the workshop was the consistently high, positive energy in the room, paired with an openness that participants described as uncommon even among experienced professionals. The organisers' framing, and the workshop's refusal to categorise people into "theory" versus "practice" roles, helped create an environment in which participants felt able to expose vulnerabilities, share unfinished gestures, and experiment publicly.

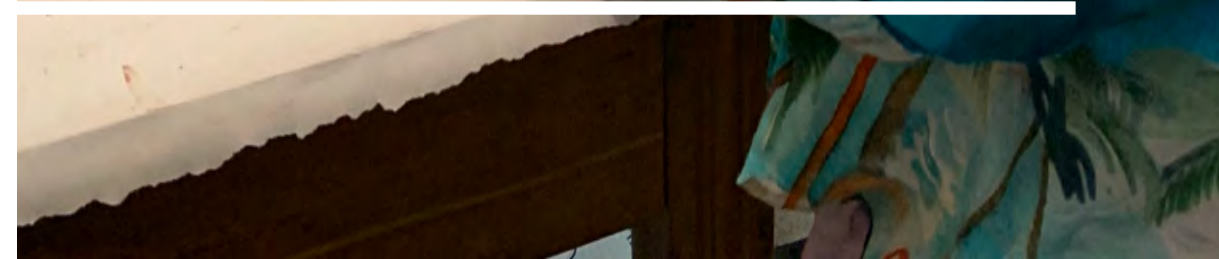
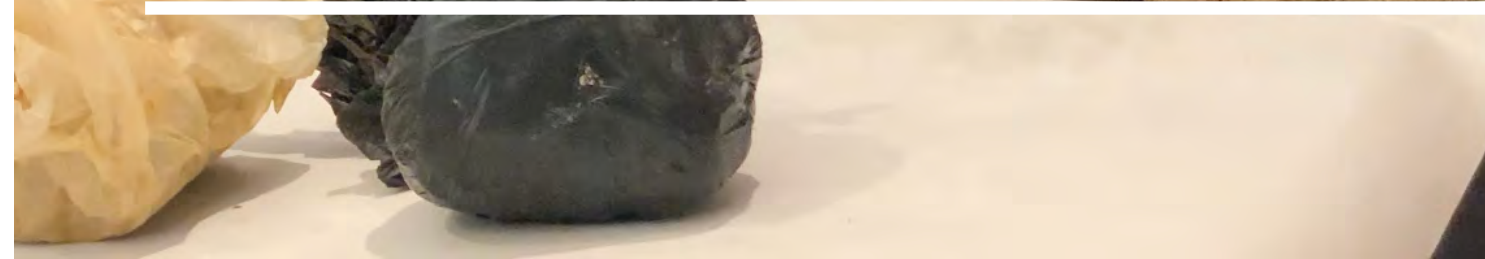
The balance between conceptual discussion and embodied practice made it possible for ideas to travel through hands and materials, and for making to function as a mode of inquiry. Although the workshop did not begin with an explicit intention to create a community, a sense of community and a desire to continue the exchanges emerged as a clear consequence of the two days together.

The venue



Hosting the workshop in the NHMA Passementerie / Benaki Museum (6 Polyfemou St., 118 54 Athens, Greece) proved integral to the workshop's success and coherence. The passementerie offered a lived environment of technē, where craft, machinery, repetition, and material histories are palpably present. The sound and movement of the machines, the atmosphere of production, and the intimate proximity of tools and textile processes reinforced the workshop's attention to the temporalities of making and the ways creative agency is distributed across bodies, materials, tools, and systems. The embodied experience of being together in that space—sharing the room, meals, and informal conversation alongside formal sessions—contributed to the overall conditions of trust and generative exchange. In a workshop concerned with AI and computational mediation, the passementerie grounded discussion in a longer lineage of making technologies, keeping attention on material response, constraint, and craft intelligence as more than metaphor.





This workshop taught me new things and reminded me of how we learn in the first place. It opened a space of possibility, one entwined through conversation, curiosity, making, and encounter. There was joy in meeting you all, whose experiences, practices, and ways of thinking were wonderfully different yet similar to my own. Each conversation became another thread, each another crossing point from which unexpected ideas could emerge.



I loved the rhythm of the weaving machines, the way they'd been restored and built, encouraging divergence and teamwork. True collaborators! The background layer of our new ways of communicating and combining what we already knew, but also not presenting things as fixed. Our thoughts could become interlaced, reconfigured and remade (rewired!) through collective exploration of these materials. Combining existing things in unanticipated ways.

What I keep thinking about is the haptic quality of the experience. Thinking happened through our hands as much as through words. Acts of making are like gestural thinking maps that we could share. This kind of creativity is generous - a willingness to hold ideas lightly enough that they can be transformed by others, generating ideas, solutions and connections.

Travelling to Athens from England felt meaningful to me. Physical proximity still matters. To share the same room, the same materials, uncertainty and discovery, is to create a strength of connection that virtual spaces can rarely reproduce. These occasions also become the beginning of something else. Conversations that continue across distance, collaborations that extend beyond geography, and a closeness that makes future encounters feel already possible.

In our reality that values speed, this workshop reminded me of the quiet importance of listening carefully, listening to materials, making together, and allowing curiosity to lead. If technē, craft, and creativity are to flourish in the times of AI, perhaps they begin here—in the willingness to gather, to share, to weave our ideas together, and to discover that something entirely new can emerge between us as humans first.

—Susan Atwill

As an artist and an academic, I see incredible value in bringing together this select group of people. The careful curation of the participants has brought out fantastic overlap of our values in our fruitfully contrasting practices. Weavers and a cellist, creative technologist and craftswomen, all coming together into a tightly knit space of collaboration and with an eagerness for contextual analysis.

What is special about this workshop is that any outcomes will naturally sprout out of a valuable research and not the other way around (i.e. contextual analysis to arise as an afterthought to bringing related work together). In being in a very results oriented market, there's little to no space left for creatives to deliver on valuable research that underpin our practice. Approaching creation of new work in this manner will inevitably bring rise to unique outcomes of immense creative and academic rigour.

—Grace Iro Pappas



Thank you for creating such a thoughtful and inspiring experience. I arrived at the workshop somewhat skeptical about the need to define creativity. I have always felt that creativity is something we instinctively understand through making rather than through words. However, the conversations throughout the workshop made me realize that, particularly in a time when AI is reshaping our understanding of creative work, finding ways to articulate what creativity means is becoming increasingly important. Defining it is not about limiting it, but about recognizing and protecting what is



uniquely human. At the same time, I believe it is equally important that we continue trying to define creativity through making itself, through materials, processes, experimentation and embodied knowledge, not only through language.

What I valued most was the people. Bringing together practitioners from such different disciplines created an environment where every conversation opened up a new perspective. There was a genuine generosity in the way ideas were shared, questioned and developed collectively. It felt like a space where curiosity was encouraged and there were no right or wrong answers, only opportunities to explore.

I also loved the balance between thinking and making. Working with materials, experimenting with processes and allowing ideas to evolve through our hands reminded me that creativity is rarely linear. It grows through play, collaboration, observation and unexpected connections.

I left feeling inspired, energized and full of new questions. More importantly, I left with new relationships and a renewed confidence in the value of bringing people together to think, make and learn collectively. In an increasingly digital world, sharing the same physical space, exchanging ideas face to face and making alongside one another feels more valuable than ever.

I truly hope this workshop was only the beginning of a much longer journey. It feels like the start of an important conversation, one that I hope will continue to evolve through future gatherings, collaborations and acts of making. Thank you for creating such a generous environment. I feel very fortunate to have been part of it.

—Maria Sigma

It's rare for me these days to find myself in places where I feel safe to let my guard down, and connect with other artists about the messy, troubled, imperfect realities of our practices.

When we are asked to speak publicly, as artists or technologists, what is expected from us is usually some form of success story, a coherent narrative, a profound truth, a witty statement that feels meaningful and important.

What you created was first and foremost a forum that allowed us to lower our personas, and expose our artistic selves for what they are: vulnerable, uncertain, indeterminate. I am not sure how this happened. It could be the beautiful space, a few sq. m. frozen in time, between two Jacquard looms looming over us in an indeterminate state between defunct and operational, spools of colourful threads in every corner, cables, markers, clay blocks and wax pellets, a projection on the ceiling(!) of a neural network reconfiguring its fuzzy knowledge base in real time. Or it could be the people you chose to fill this room, perhaps sharing a common predisposition to leave our



egos outside the door. It's quite possible that the format itself — equal parts structured, with well-thought-out questions, and open-ended, with live demonstrations — was the key to unlocking this precious way of collaboration.

I was quite unsure about the results of this workshop, due to how diverse our practices are, at a surface level. How could I, a creative coder, meaningfully interact with traditional textile designers, sculptors, and an experimental cello player? It was an immense surprise, during the first two hours of the workshop, to see how resonant — not necessarily similar — our approaches, anxieties, and references were in response to the mother question "What is the definition of Creativity?" and the offspring questions that spawned from it. It seems that our languages might be different, but the words, sentences, and essays we craft talk about complementary worlds. Worlds that can fit together like puzzle pieces. What feels particularly important is that we approached our crafts through critical Play: oscillations between making and thinking, touching matter and exchanging literary references, speaking from a position of knowledge and then being humbled as we clumsily tried instruments for the first time. It was fun and liberating.

I left the workshop with an intense desire to contaminate my art form, to let the processes of others teach me, to pay close attention to and understand tools and instruments that have remained exotic to me until now. Surprisingly, at the end I found something like optimism in spite of current AI developments. AI is a technology that compresses by design: time, data, processes. But nothing in that room could have been compressed. Maybe this is the way forward, if we fear losing ourselves to AI: invest in our relationships with other artists, form coalitions, meet and co-create in real life.

Seek out the things that refuse to be sped up.

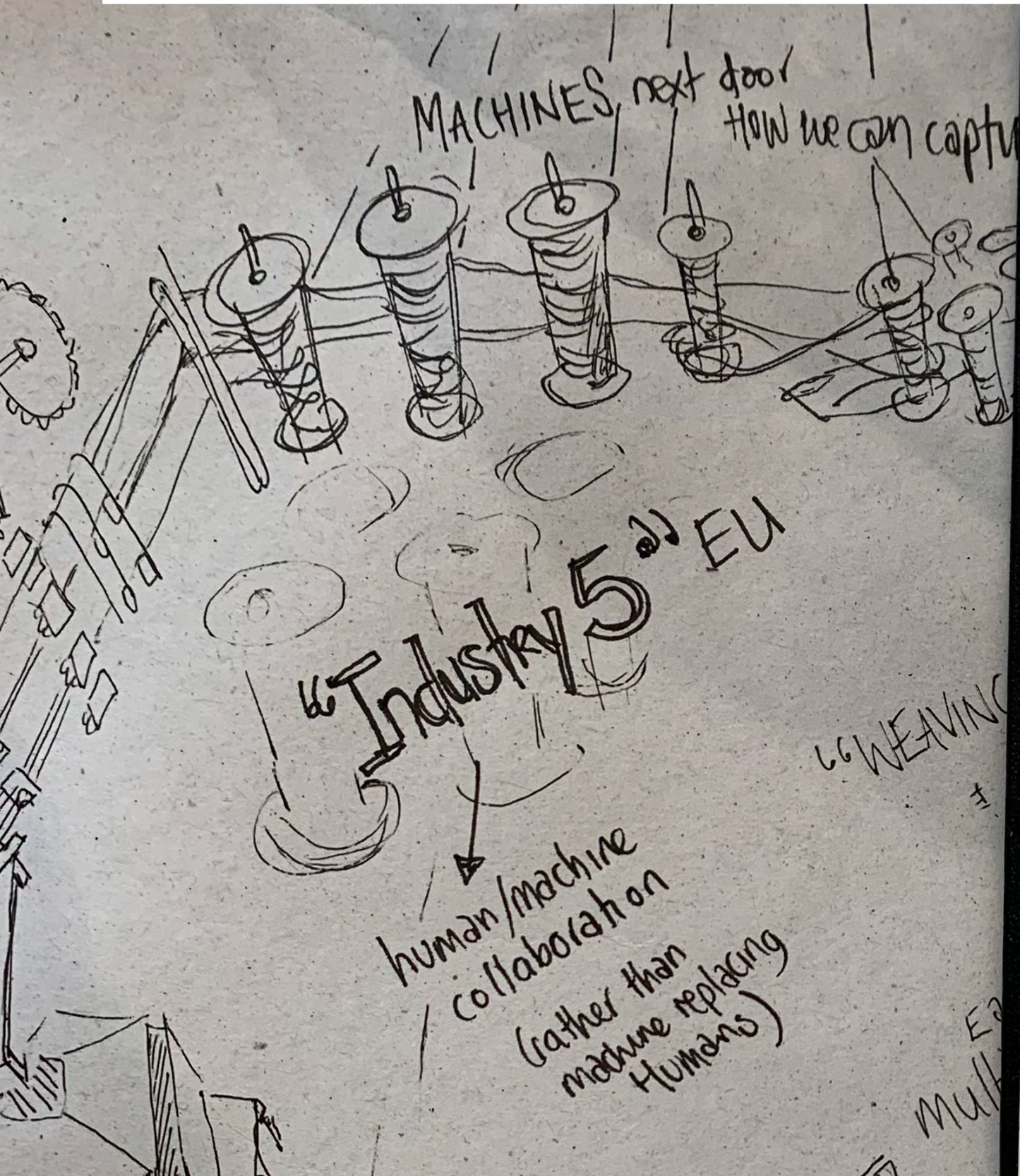
Do we need to define Creativity? I can't say for sure. I am looking forward to your book for that. What I can say confidently, after this workshop, is that it's vital to talk about Creativity, try to (re)define it, question our assumptions about it, find ways to protect and nurture it, and exchange our deeply personal stories about it. I truly hope for this to be the start of a long collaborative process. Working title: Hands.

—George Adamopoulos

How do they find REPLACEMENT PARTS?

Inventing
Combining things
in new ways

Next steps



GENERATING Ideas
Solutions
Connections

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The next steps following the workshop are threefold. **First**, the organisers will continue work on the Oxford University Press monograph, integrating workshop insights, language, and episodes of practice into the book's developing framework for understanding creativity as relational and materially mediated in the times of AI. **Second**, the team will publish full documentation of the workshop, and will also release a blog post reflecting on the two days, the main conceptual and methodological takeaways, and what the workshop suggests about “workshop as research” as a way of producing knowledge that is simultaneously conceptual, social, and material. **Third**, building on the strong sense of collective momentum that emerged, the organisers aim to develop Material Encounters into a regular convening—potentially on an annual basis—where each iteration concentrates on one of



Grace Iro Pappas, Maria Averof, Despina Papadopoulos

the workshop's core topics, such as material resistance and agency, tool versus material, working with versus working on, material logic and constraint, or temporality and response. The intention is for this to become a sustained platform for collaboration and a growing community of practice and research across Athens and Edinburgh, with longer-term partnerships and support shaping future editions.

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Contact: despina@philosophymachines.com