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[Dystopia is Not the Future](#)

Talks & Screenings

22 October – 15 November 2025

Barbican Centre

Optimism is a radical act. What might happen if we leaned into compassion, and imagined better worlds; and dreamed them into existence?

Launching this autumn **Dystopia is Not the Future** is a new series of talks and screenings that reflects on the challenges of our time – from the rise of authoritarianism to the climate crisis. Creating a platform for debate and discourse, and a space for critical review and collective thinking, **Dystopia is Not the Future** considers the systems that we participate in and that act upon us – and how we might reimagine them for good.

Leading thinkers from the worlds of politics, technology, culture and environment, including climate author **Andreas Malm**, **Pussy Riot** artist and activist **Maria Alyokhina**, tech critic and science fiction author **Cory Doctorow**, filmmakers **Asif Kapadia**, **Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian** and cultural curator **Nate Agbetu** will come together across this series of talks and screenings to ask how we move from this darkening moment and allow ourselves to be emboldened by hope, community and collective action.

Devyani Saltzman, Director for Arts & Participation at the Barbican, says: *“The need for the ideas explored in this autumn’s series of talks and screenings couldn’t be more urgent. At a time of overwhelm in the face of escalating authoritarianism, climate collapse, human rights violations, and social inequality it’s important to find a way to make space for critical conversations and lean into optimism in dark times. Optimism then, perhaps, is a radical act. What might happen if we leaned into compassion and collective visioning of better worlds?”*

Dystopia is Not the Future launches a new strand of Talks and Ideas programming that expands the Barbican’s role as a centre for contemporary ideas, literature and conversation. As one of the core pillars of our 2025–2030 Artistic Vision, this series brings together leading thinkers and creators from around the world to explore urgent questions shaping our present and future.

The series is curated by Susanna Davies-Crook, Curator of Public Programmes at the Barbican.

Panel Talk with Asif Kapadia, Nate Agbetu, Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian, Rebecca Lewin and Robin McNicholas chaired by Cary Rajinder Sawhney

Wed 22 Oct, 7pm

Cinema 2

A panel debate exploring innovative and radically optimistic visions of the future with **Asif Kapadia** (filmmaker), **Nate Agbetu** (curator, Associate Lecturer), **Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian** (filmmaker, creative director and designer of experiences), **Rebecca Lewin** (Head of Curatorial Programme at Future Observatory) and **Robin McNicholas** (Cofounder/Director of Marshmallow Laser Feast). Chaired by **Cary Rajinder Sawhney** (Cinema Curator, Filmmaker, Director of the London Indian Film Festival).

While mass media often overwhelm us with visions of dystopia, many of these artists and curators across art forms are offering works that engage with new ways of thinking about the world with enlightened discourses on the future, such as humanity's mission in outer space, fresh ways of thinking about the environment, or the positive effects of AI and new technologies.

Asif Kapadia is an Academy Award, BAFTA, and Grammy winning director. His films and documentaries include *Senna* (2010), chronicling the life of Brazilian racing legend Ayrton Senna, *Amy* (2015), a profile of singer Amy Winehouse, and the 2024 lift-the-lid investigative doc/fiction feature *2073*.

Nate Agbetu is a cultural curator, educator and filmmaker who highlights emergent thinking through research, art and speculative design. Their practice exists in the liminal space between culture and social innovation, manifesting in the form of everything from community gardens to films, lectures and arts programming – imagining new futures through creativity and knowledge exchange.

Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian Ph.D (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, and cultural activist with over a decade of experience working to document and build platforms that support plurality, the creation of organised communities and impossible productions, public events, expeditions and projects with socio-political impacts.

Rebecca Lewin is a writer and curator whose work focuses on the intersection of research, ecology and creative practice. She is currently Head of Curatorial Programme at Future Observatory, the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition. Lewin co-curated the Design Museum's 2025 exhibition *More than Human*.

Robin McNicholas is co-founder and director of the award-winning creative artist collective Marshmallow Laser Feast (MLF). He has directed XR, immersive experiences, virtual production, large-scale installations and live performances.

Cary Rajinder Sawhney MBE is the UK's leading curator of South Asian cinema. Formerly at the British Film Institute, he was Head of Diversity. He was programme adviser to the London Film Festival for many years and is currently CEO and Programming Director of the London Indian Film Festival.

Screening: *Doppelgängers*³ (PG)

UK/Armenia/Algeria/France 2025, dir Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian, 113min

Wed 29 Oct, 8.45pm

Cinema 3

This radical space documentary asks how we might conceptualise visions for space exploration that avoid repeating history's mistakes on earth.

***Doppelgängers*³** is a creative experiment in which director **Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian**, and her two doppelgängers journey to build a new civilization on the moon – one that defies power structures and patriarchy, rejects planetary exploitation, and involves a polyphony of voices composed of members of diasporas around the world.

In this quest to design a moon utopia, Nelly speaks to scientists, cultural leaders, LGBTQA+ rights activists, artists, horror filmmakers, economists, astronomers, and an archaeologist-winemaker. Her crew travels to the Astroland Interplanetary Agency in Spain, where they venture deep underground to emulate what life would look like for early settlers on another planet. However, as the analogue space mission takes unexpected turns, the future remains as uncertain as the condition of Schrödinger's Cat.

Panel Talk: Andreas Malm in conversation with Adrienne Buller

Sun 2 Nov, 3pm

Theatre

Best-selling author and activist Andreas Malm joins political economist and author on climate, finance, and inequality Adrienne Buller to discuss what we face when we talk about climate catastrophe and asks how we can come together with hope for change.

As scientists, tech giants and politicians are looking to technology for solutions to the impending collapse – from carbon removal to blocking sunlight – this talk examines promises of magical future redemption and asks what needs to happen next.

For over fifty years, global warming has been part of the public consciousness, yet little has been done to halt rising temperatures. Fossil fuel infrastructure continues to dominate, and the tipping point of 1.5 degrees warming looms ever closer. Malm, one of today's leading climate voices, issues this address at a moment of extreme urgency as ice-sheet loss, species extinction, ecological dieback, and permafrost thaw converge with escalating human catastrophe, famine, and mass migration.

Marking the release of forthcoming book *The Long Heat: Climate Politics When it's Too Late* (written with co-author Wim Carton) Malm talks to chair Adrienne Buller to map the new frontlines in the struggle for a liveable planet. Together they call for action, refusing apathy in the face of crisis and insisting on the climate revolution that is long overdue.

Andreas Malm teaches human ecology at Lund University, Sweden. He is the author of, among other books, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* and *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire*.

Adrienne Buller is a political economist and author on climate, finance, and inequality. She is founder and host of The BREAK—DOWN, a platform on capitalism, nature, and climate, launched with Common Wealth. Her publications include *The Value of a Whale - On the*

Illusions of green capitalism for which she won the 2024 Zencey Prize in ecological economics, and *Owning the Future - Power and Property in an Age of Crisis* (with Mathew Lawrence).

In partnership with Verso

Panel Talk: Maria Alyokhina (Pussy Riot) in conversation with James Ball

Sat 8 Nov, 3pm

Frobisher Auditorium 1, Level 4

Age recommendation 16+

What do you do when your country becomes a repressive authoritarian state? Renowned artist and activist Maria (Masha) Alyokhina of Pussy Riot joins award-winning investigative journalist James Ball for a powerful conversation about resistance, courage, and survival under authoritarian rule. The event marks the release of Alyokhina's much-anticipated memoir, *Political Girl: Life and Fate in Russia*.

Political Girl starts in 2014, the year when Russia invaded Crimea. Putin was re-elected president, again, and several political prisoners were amnestied and released early from prison. Maria Alyokhina was among them.

She had spent two years in a penal colony after performing the punk prayer 'Virgin Mary, Banish Putin' with her friends in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. They had warned the rest of the world of the dangers of authoritarianism, but the Russia she finds when she gets out of prison is even more oppressive. What can you do, she asks, when your country has been seized by all-powerful men who are waging war against another country and their own citizens?

Maria Alyokhina is a political activist, artist and member of Pussy Riot collective. Her first book *Riot Days* was highly acclaimed and translated into many languages.

James Ball is an award-winning journalist, broadcaster and author, fellow of the think-tank Demos, and the political editor of *The New European*. He has worked as the global editor of TBIJ, a special correspondent at *BuzzFeed UK* and special projects editor at *The Guardian*. James is the author of multiple books, including *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered The World* and *The Tangled Web We Weave: Inside The Shadow System That Shapes the Internet*. His most recent book, *The Other Pandemic: How Qanon Contaminated The World*, was published by Bloomsbury in July 2023.

In partnership with Allen Lane

Panel Talk: Cory Doctorow in conversation with Sarah Wynn Williams

Sat 15 Nov, 3pm

Frobisher Auditorium 1, Level 4

Age recommendation 16+

Is life online getting worse and worse? Leading tech critic and science fiction author, Cory Doctorow shares strategies for how we might reclaim the internet.

"Enshittification", Doctorow's term, and word of the year in the UK, USA and Australia, describes the decay of online platforms. In this talk, Doctorow comes together with tech

policy expert and critic Sarah Wynn Williams to explain why it's all getting worse, whose fault that is, and what to do about the misogyny, conspiratorialism, surveillance, manipulation, and fraud that have taken over the Internet.

Doctorow sets out the symptoms, the diagnosis and the cure to these metastasising platforms and with special guests asks, what can be done.

Cory Doctorow is a science fiction author, activist and journalist. Recent books include *Radicalized* and *Walkaway*; *How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism*; *In Real Life*; *Poesy the Monster Slayer*. His latest book *Attack Surface* is a standalone adult sequel to *Little Brother*. He works for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, is a MIT Media Lab Research Affiliate, a Visiting Professor of Computer Science at Open University, a Visiting Professor of Practice at the University of North Carolina's School of Library and Information Science and co-founded the UK Open Rights Group.

Sarah Wynn-Williams is an author, former New Zealand diplomat and international lawyer. She joined Facebook after pitching a job and ultimately became Director of Global Public Policy. After leaving the company, she published a best-selling book and has continued to work on tech policy.

In partnership with Verso.

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Tickets

Standard - £13 for Cinemas 2 & 3, £15 for Frobisher Auditorium and £19 for the Theatre

Young Barbican - £6 for Cinema 2 & 3, £10 for the Frobisher and £12 for the Theatre

Members - 20% off

Booking fee: £1.50

Barbican press room

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About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), our Resident Orchestra, and a London base for the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our Artistic Associates the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Darbar Arts, Cultural and Heritage Trust](#), and [Serious](#), who produce the [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), alongside other associates and partners including [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), and [Trafalgar Theatre Productions](#).

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