# tangents

MSAAD 2025 · Andre Barros Santos

Columbia GSAPP

Tracing Practice through Matter, Data, and Territories

**tangents**

~~Tangents~~ assembles a curated body of work that approaches architecture not from its disciplinary center, but from its peripheral sites of entanglement, tension, and rupture. From the geopolitics of sediment in the Mekong Delta to the digital sovereignty of Tuvalu; from unearthing Harlem's sacred wetlands to the representational politics of climate displacement, these projects examine architecture's intersections with colonial legacies, legal thresholds, and technological infrastructures.

Each project becomes a tangent—an oblique entry point into architecture—that, when traced together, begins to outline a broader conceptual circle: a practice defined not by disciplinary closure but by its commitments across terrains and urgencies. Rather than centering form-making or technical solutions, these works retool architectural knowledge to uncover suppressed relations, unsettle inherited frameworks, and cultivate speculative imaginaries and worlding practices rooted in reciprocal entanglements.
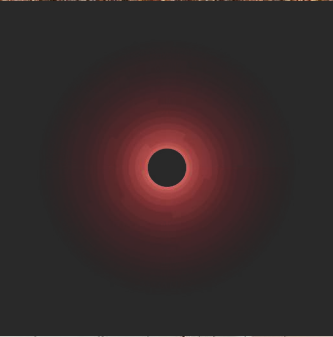
Together, they delineate an evolving architectural approach that engages from the edges—resisting the resolutive impulse of the "architectural project" in favor of partial, situated, and sometimes precarious alignments. Here, architecture is not a solution but a method: a way of navigating the material, ecological, and epistemic arrangements we inhabit. Across these tangents, what emerges is a practice attuned to contradiction, relation, and the uneven negotiations through which space is assembled, contested, and reimagined.

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# Unearthings

*Adv. V - Harlem After Property*
Emanuel Admassu + T.A. Anoushka Mariwala
*In partnership with*
Thomas Gomez Ospina

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Unearthings

Site registers - life persists



Site registers - tensions

In 2016, archaeological excavations at the 126th Street MTA Bus Depot confirmed the presence of a 17th-century African burial ground by the river in East Harlem. More than 100 fragmented human remains were found beneath layers of concrete and contamination—evidence of a long, ongoing history of enclosure, displacement, and erasure.
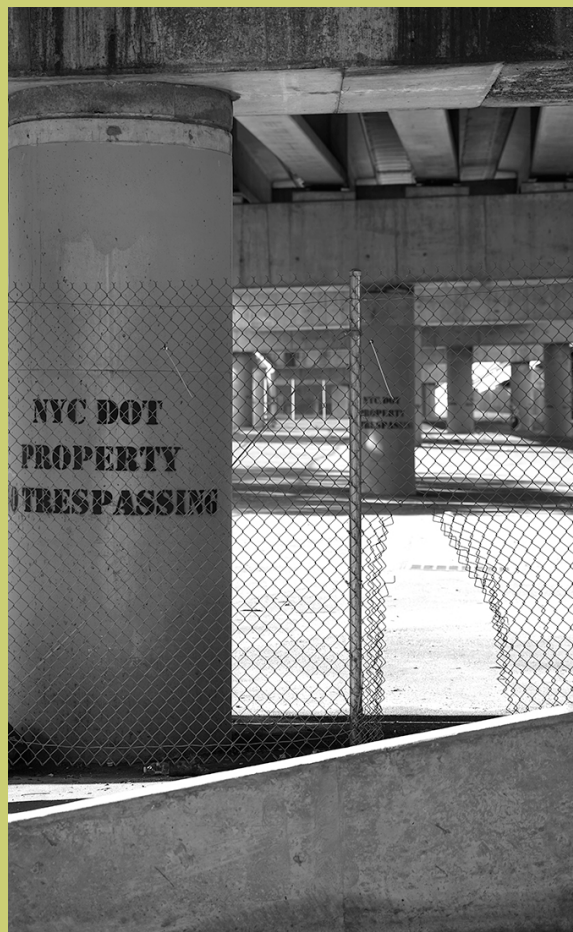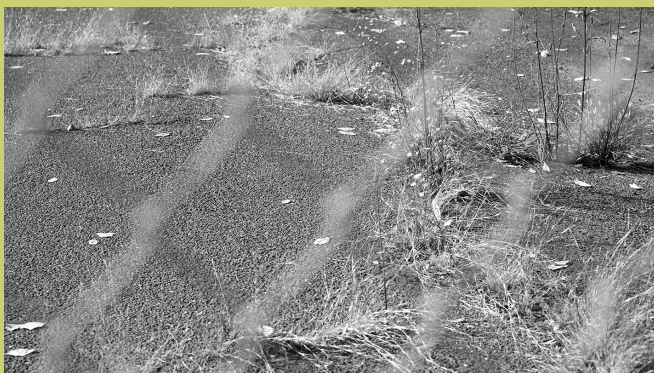
Once a marshland known as Muscota—homeland to the Lenape and Wecasqueek peoples—the site was absorbed into Dutch colonial strategies that commodified land and life. Initially treated as residual and undesirable by the settles, it became a burial ground for enslaved and free Africans. Over time, as land became increasingly valued, desecration took many forms: grazing, soil displacement, construction, and petrochemical contamination. Today, the city's mixed-use redevelopment plan threatens to stabilize this history through a memorial that, while claiming to honor the dead, legitimizes speculative development and the displacement of present-day Black and Latinx Harlem—on a site projected to flood regularly within the century, rendering its redevelopment both geologically and ethically unstable.

This project emerges from the interrogation of architecture's complicity with regimes of property and dispossession. The burial ground—long obscured by infrastructural neglect—became a site where histories of enclosure and resistance converge. We foreground Black, Brown, and non-Western epistemologies and artistic and spatial practices as frameworks for design, centering modes of representation that resist narratives of closure. ▶▶

Unearthings



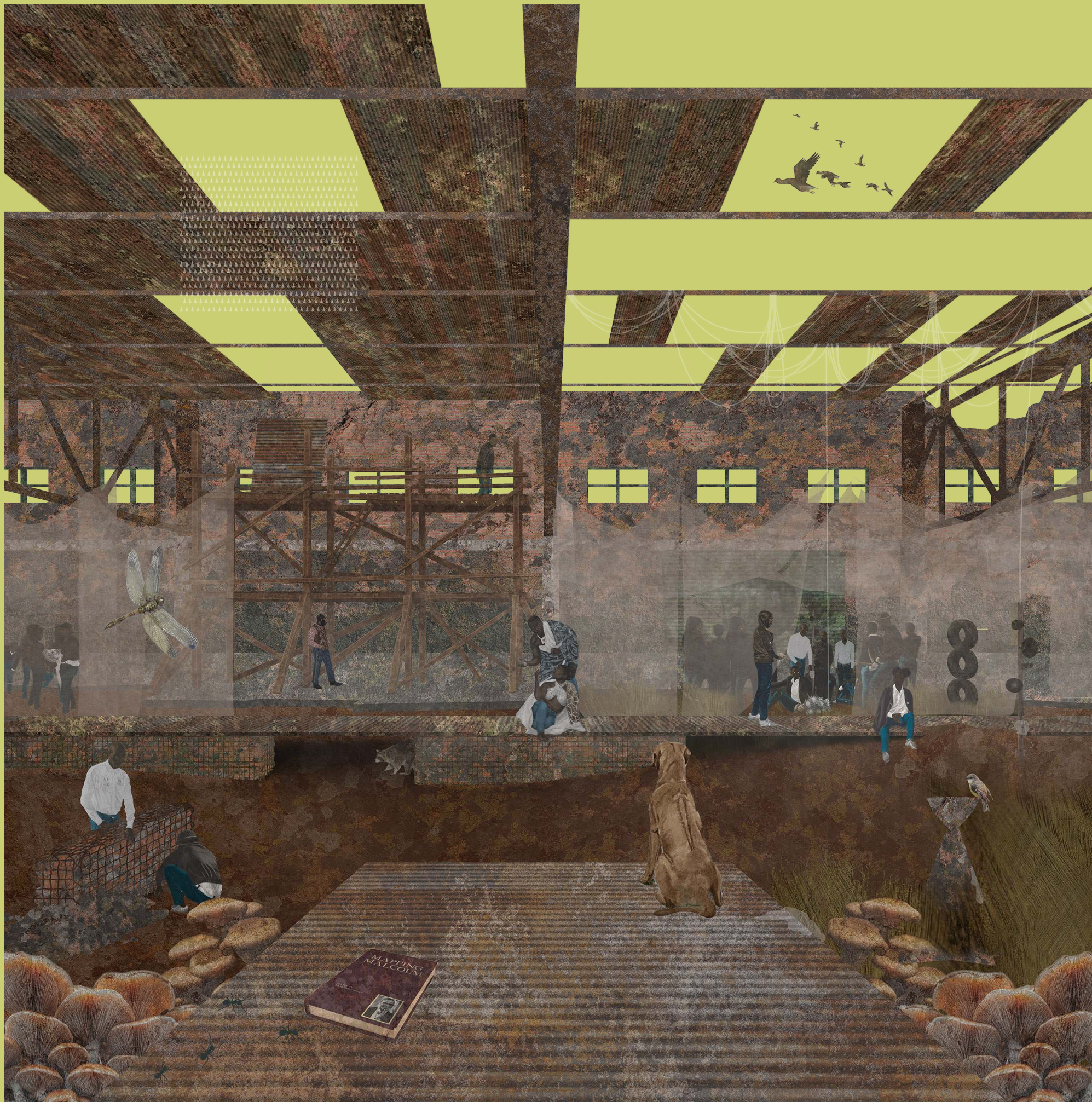Harlem After Property

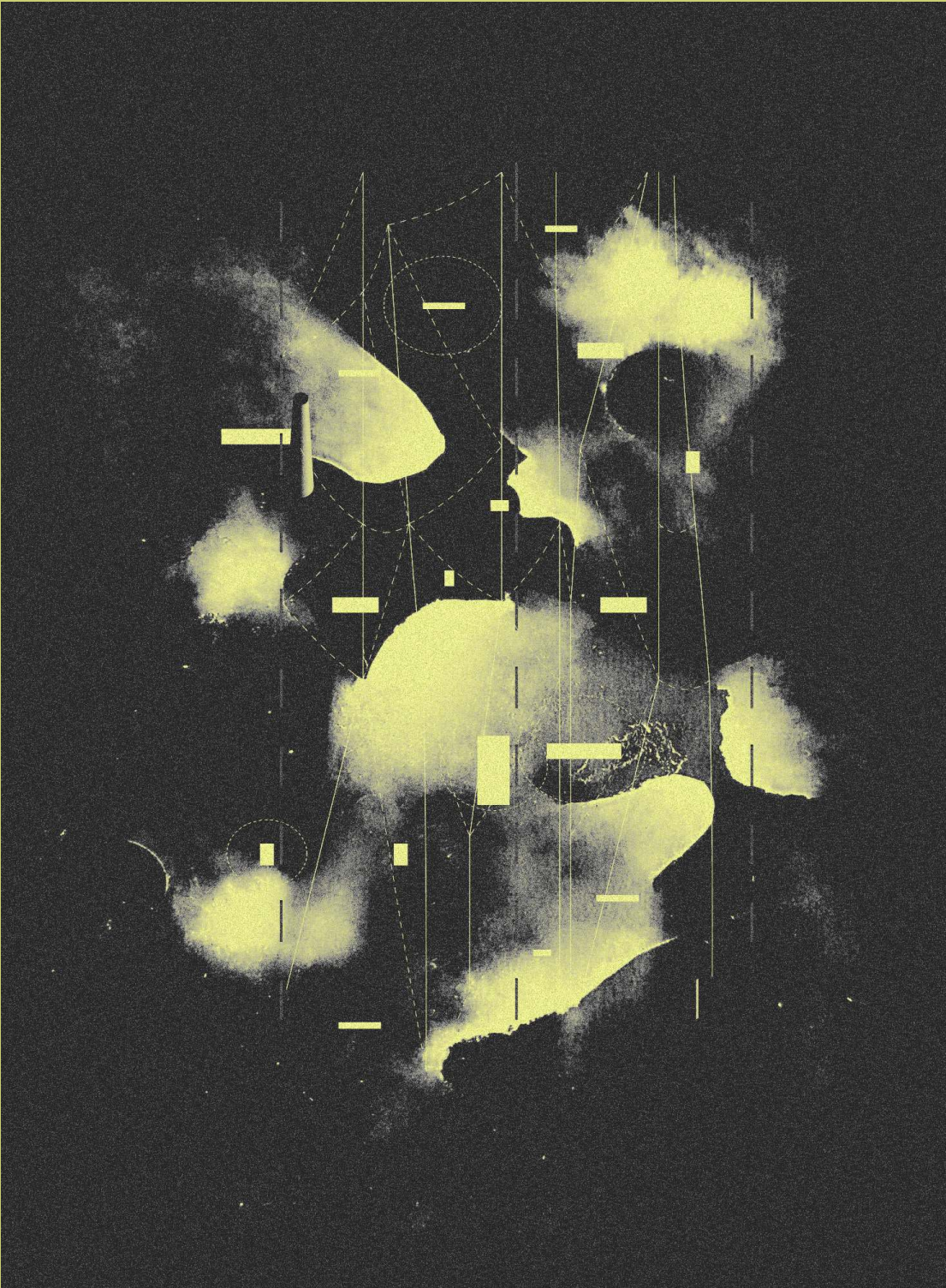Conceptual model  - shroud

Site model

Property, as institution and epistemology, rests on binary distinctions—nature/culture, living/inert, human/non-human—that structure hierarchies of disposability. These logics still determine which lives, lands, and things are deemed valuable, or can be erased, contaminated, discarded. If the burial ground is now sacred, the depot remains expendable—a site whose utility is exhausted, but whose violence continues. What if we refused these separations altogether? In the face of rising seas and ecological crisis, this project draws from other ways of relating to matter and memory—ways that unsettle the separations imposed by property regimes.

Drawing on Harry Garuba, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and other thinkers in new materialist and animist thought, we ask how architecture might recognize the aliveness of all things—and the inseparability of matter and meaning—especially in memorializing sites of immeasurable violence. ▶▶

Imani Jacqueline Brown's research on "Forest Island" offers one such framework: in Louisiana, enslaved people preserved groves within sugarcane fields to bury their dead—crafting architectures of memory through planting, not planning. These gestures resonate with burial practices across West and Central Africa, and with Indigenous communities such as the Xavante of present-day Brazil. These lineages allow us to see the bus depot not as inert infrastructure, but as a layered site of memory—scarred, yet capable of nurturing life.

Wetlands—fluid, in-between territories long cast as residual zones by settler regimes—have also been spaces of Black and Indigenous resistance. Fugitive ecologies—from the Dismal Swamp to the Underground Railroad to La Ciénaga—are places where life persists against encroachment. This project draws on fugitivity as both political and spatial practice, guided by the writings of Beatriz Nascimento and Eleeze Kelley. We do not aim to erase what exists or return to nostalgic past, but to invert the shroud of property—allowing life to persist in safety. Rather than replace the depot with a monument of stone, we propose a slower, messier, generational process: allowing the site's scars to guide its healing through and with the soil. ▶▶

Unearthings

Harlem After Property





Reference images
Burial groves from "Forest islands of our ecological diaspora" by Imani Jacqueline Brown
"Negroes hiding in the swamps of Louisiana" from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Unearthings

Harlem After Property

Unmakings

Fugitivity as spatial practice

Decay becomes a method. The concrete is perforated, the soil allowed to breathe, and native species—cattails, sedges, grasses—are reintroduced to nurture hydrology and biodiversity. Contaminated zones, already inhabited by microorganisms feeding on hydrocarbons, are not remediated toward purity, but supported in their ongoing regeneration.

The roof is gradually dismantled and reassembled into platforms for gathering, storytelling, and ritual—spaces that shift with the movements and negotiations of soil, water, and life.

As the river rises, water is welcomed back. Rust and sediment return to the soil. The architecture continues to decompose. The wetlands extend beyond the depot's limits, reconnecting the burial ground to the Harlem River—and to emergent rituals of memory and care that remain fugitive to commodification. ■

Harlem After Property
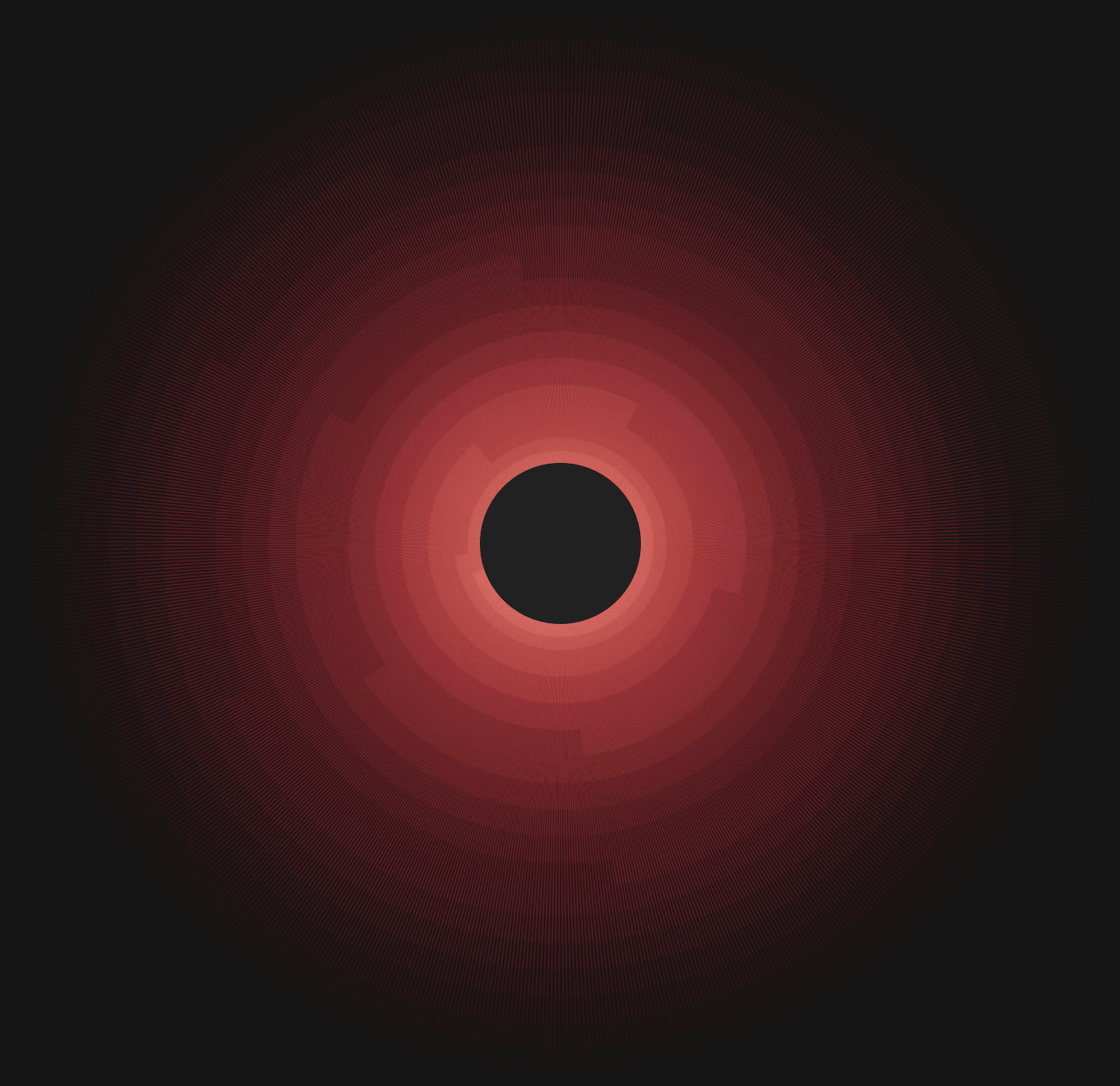
Unearthings

Harlem After Property

# Stolen Years

*Data Visualization for Architecture, Urbanism and the Humanities*
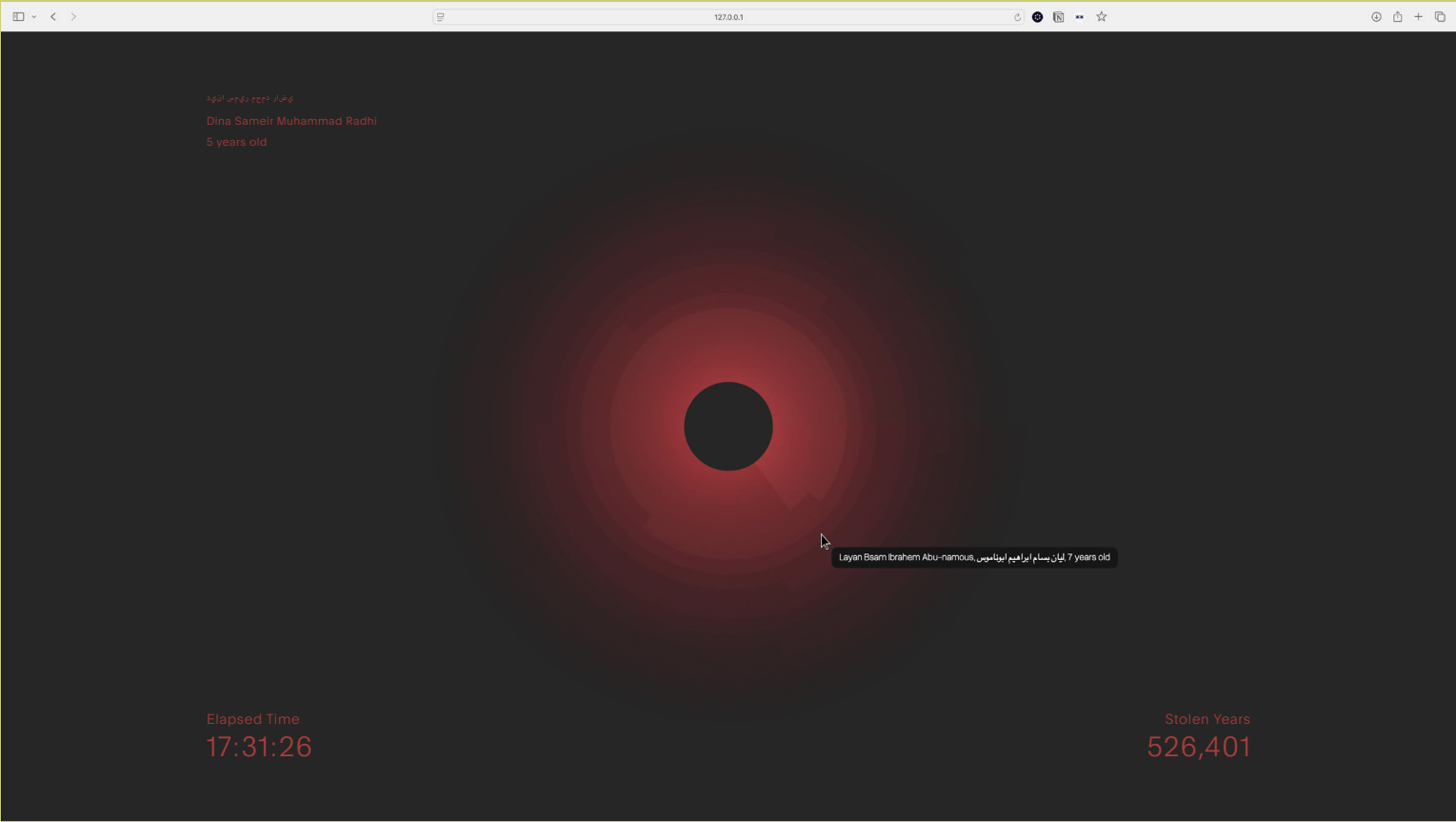Jia Zhang

*In partnership with*
Ki-Sang Yi

Stolen Years
752,757

This web-based visualization was designed and coded in an attempt to begin to acknowledge the immeasurable scale of violence in Gaza. Drawing from the open-source database of Tech for Palestine, the project focuses on martyred children—those aged 17 or younger—whose lives were taken by the ongoing occupation. Rather than aiming for statistical legibility, it offers a slow and excruciating form of witnessing.

The piece takes the form of a genocidal clock. Each line represents a single child's life, extending outward before being violently cut short—based on the 2023 life expectancy of 75 years. The animation runs over 24 hours, drawing one line every seven seconds, gradually accumulating more than 11,000 children lost (as of May 2025). Rather than visualizing death alone, the piece traces the futures interrupted—a register of time and potentiality stolen.

Through its slow unfolding, the project resists the reductive promise and quick consumption of data. It unsettles the desire for resolution, legibility, or overview. It implicates the gaze—and the viewer—through the act of closing the tab or looking away. It offers no completion, no catharsis—only absence, line by line.

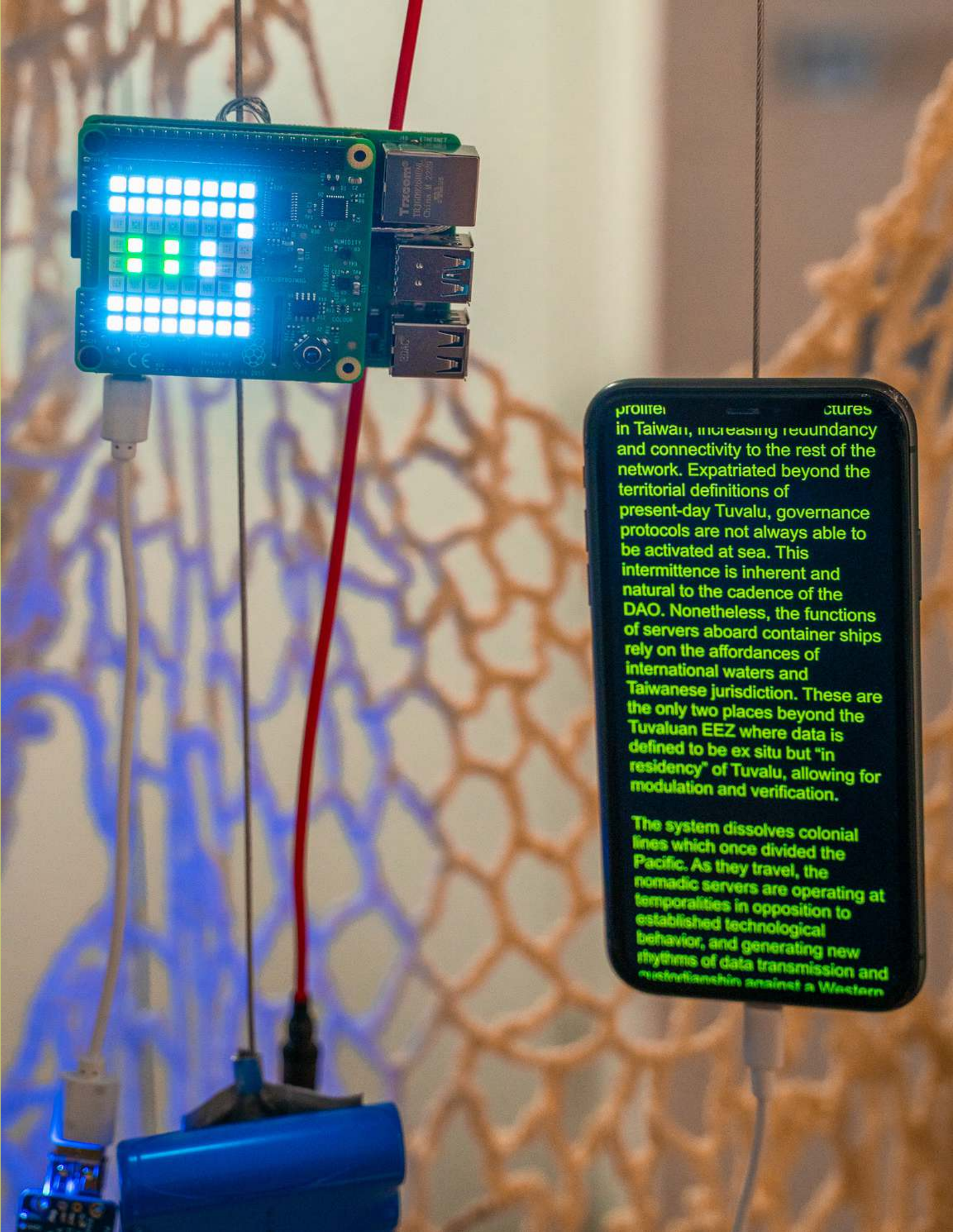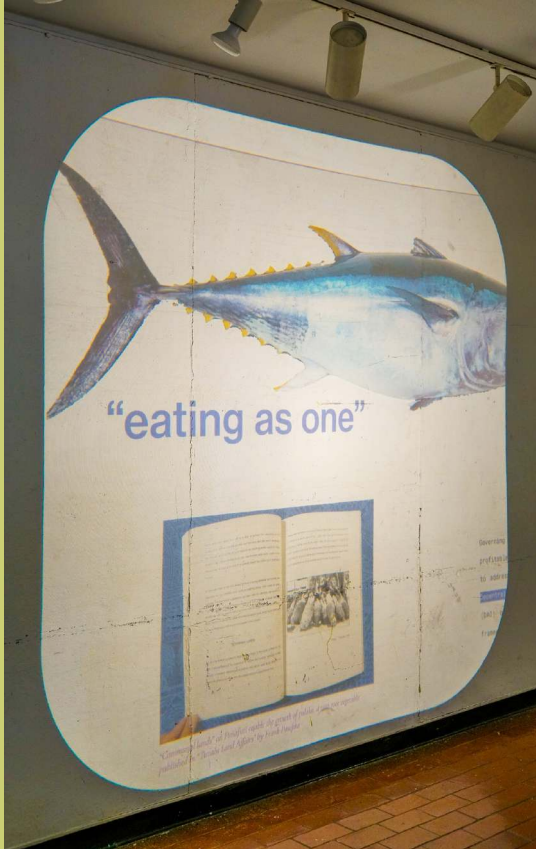Data Viz. for the Humanities

Stolen Years
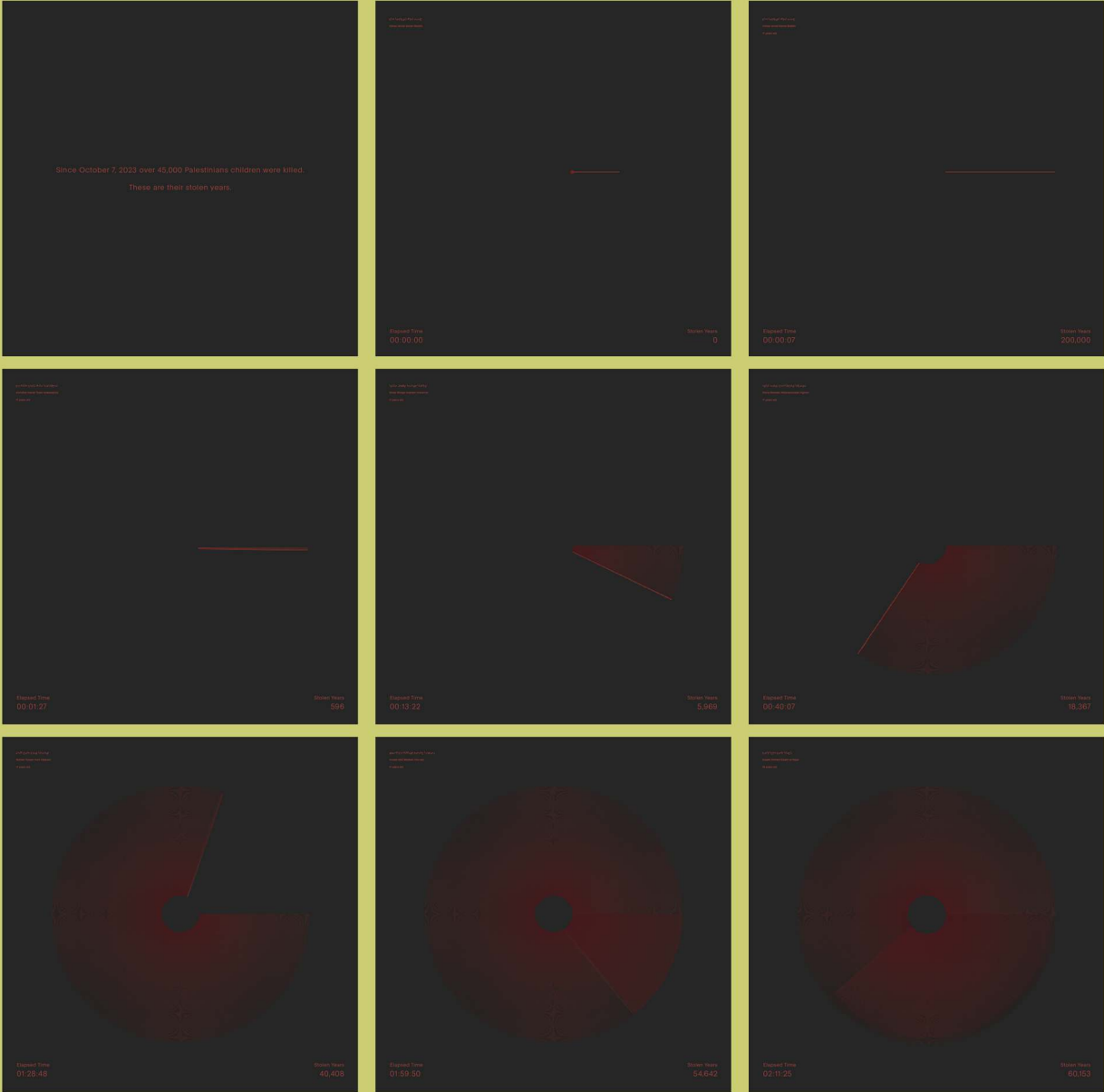
Data Viz. for the Humanities
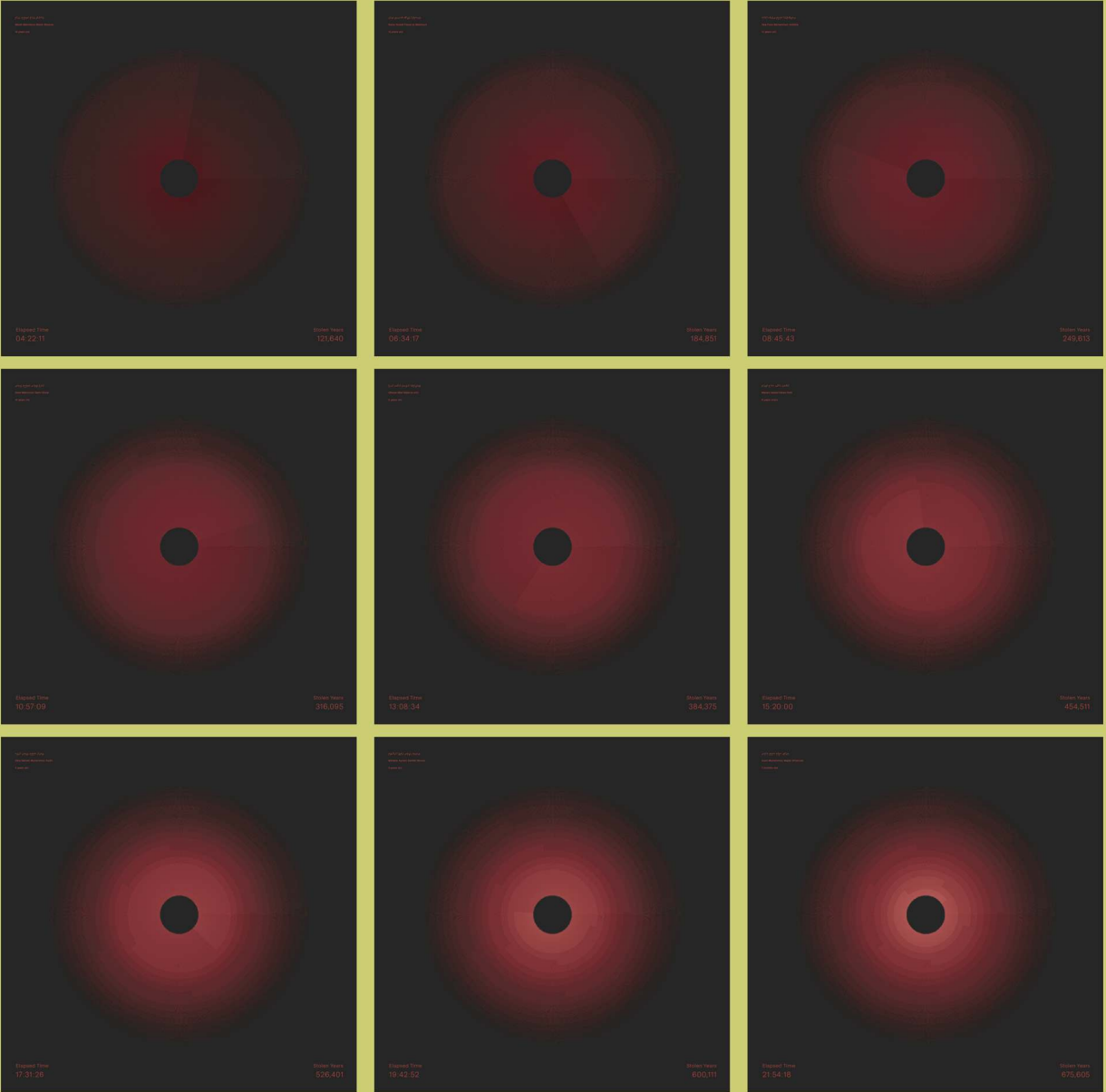
# Servers, Sensors, Ships.

*Adv. VI - Data Mourning Clinic*

Marina Otero Verzier + Daniel Miller +  T.A. Carmen Chan

*In partnership with*

Holly Baker + Xiaoxiao Jiang



prolifer                ctures
in Taiwan, increasing redundancy
and connectivity to the rest of the
network. Expatriated beyond the
territorial definitions of
present-day Tuvalu, governance
protocols are not always able to
be activated at sea. This
intermittence is inherent and
natural to the cadence of the
DAO. Nonetheless, the functions
of servers aboard container ships
rely on the affordances of
international waters and
Taiwanese jurisdiction. These are
the only two places beyond the
Tuvaluan EEZ where data is
defined to be ex situ but "in
residency" of Tuvalu, allowing for
modulation and verification.

The system dissolves colonial
lines which once divided the
Pacific. As they travel, the
nomadic servers are operating at
temporalities in opposition to
established technological
behavior, and generating new
rhythms of data transmission and
custodianship against a Western

Final exhibition - performative reading



Final exhibition - overhead projection

Final exhibition - acetate scroll



Tuvalu's future is being reimagined through digital infrastructures that promise continuity amid climate precarity. Proposals for a "digital nation" have gained global attention, offering persistence through data: digital arks, 3D representations, and blockchain bureaucracies distributed across international data centers. While grounded in urgent and well-intentioned efforts to safeguard sovereignty, these approaches risk entrenching Tuvalu further within techno-extractivist paradigms. They may abstract Tuvaluan life from its ecological and relational foundations, and reproduce dependencies on systems that expedite the very crises they seek to navigate.

*Servers, Sensors, Ships* reorients Tuvalu's capacity for innovation toward architectures of attunement—digital, relational, and ecological. What kinds of infrastructures and institutions can persist when land and sovereignty are unstable? How might forms of social relation be extended beyond the human, involving pluralities that continuously re-form the bioregion of Tuvalu? This project responds to these questions through three interlinked instruments: self-hosting *servers* that resist extractive cloud infrastructures; a low-tech governance framework grounded in plural *sensing* and more-than-human participation; and speculative imaginaries of liquid sovereignty enacted through *vessels* and seafaring kinships.
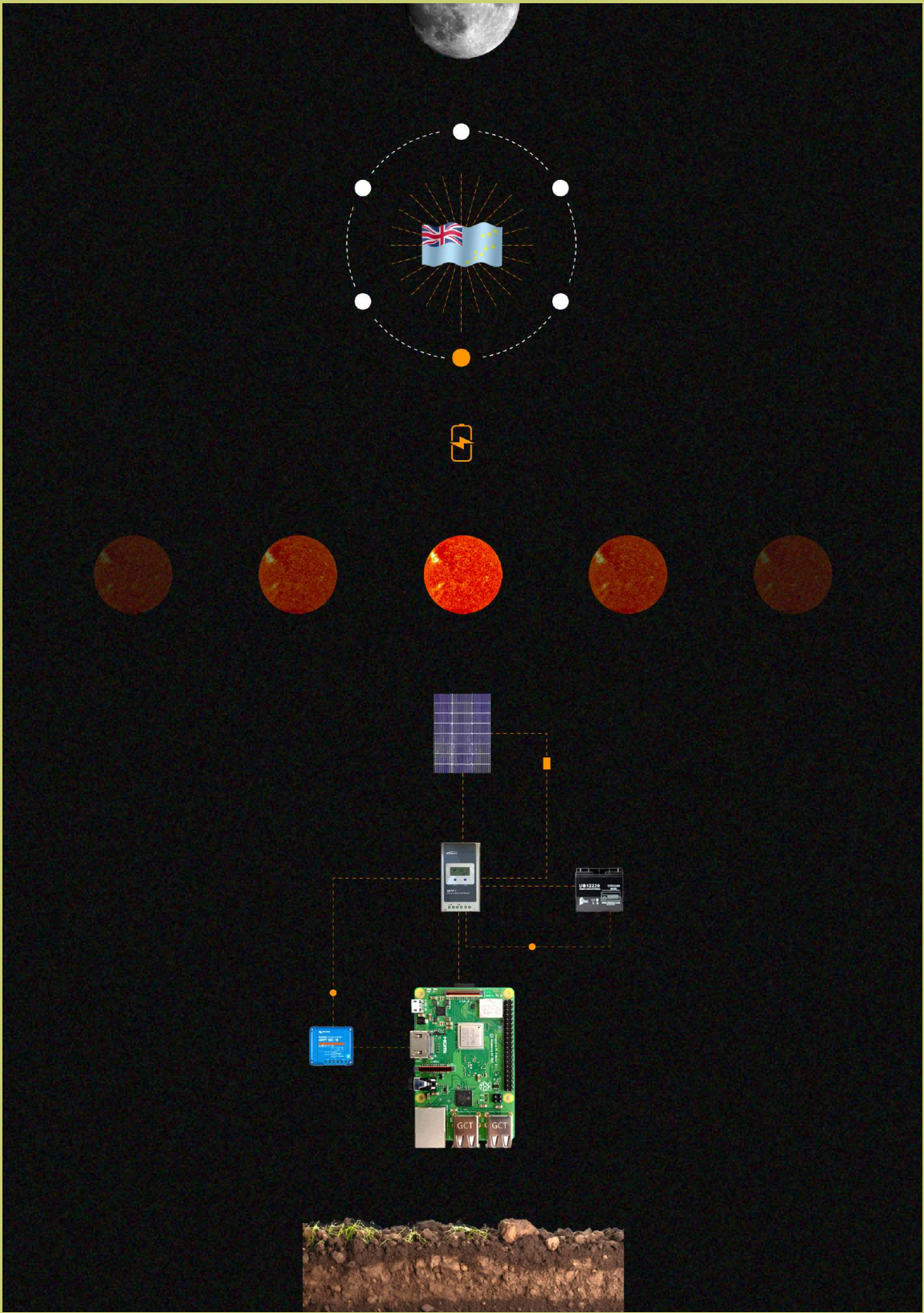
The research and prototyping were exhibited as a sculptural installation, combining obsolete devices, a solar server, and a performative reading of the research across a 370-inch long acetate scroll using an overhead projector. ▶▶

Data Mourning Clinic
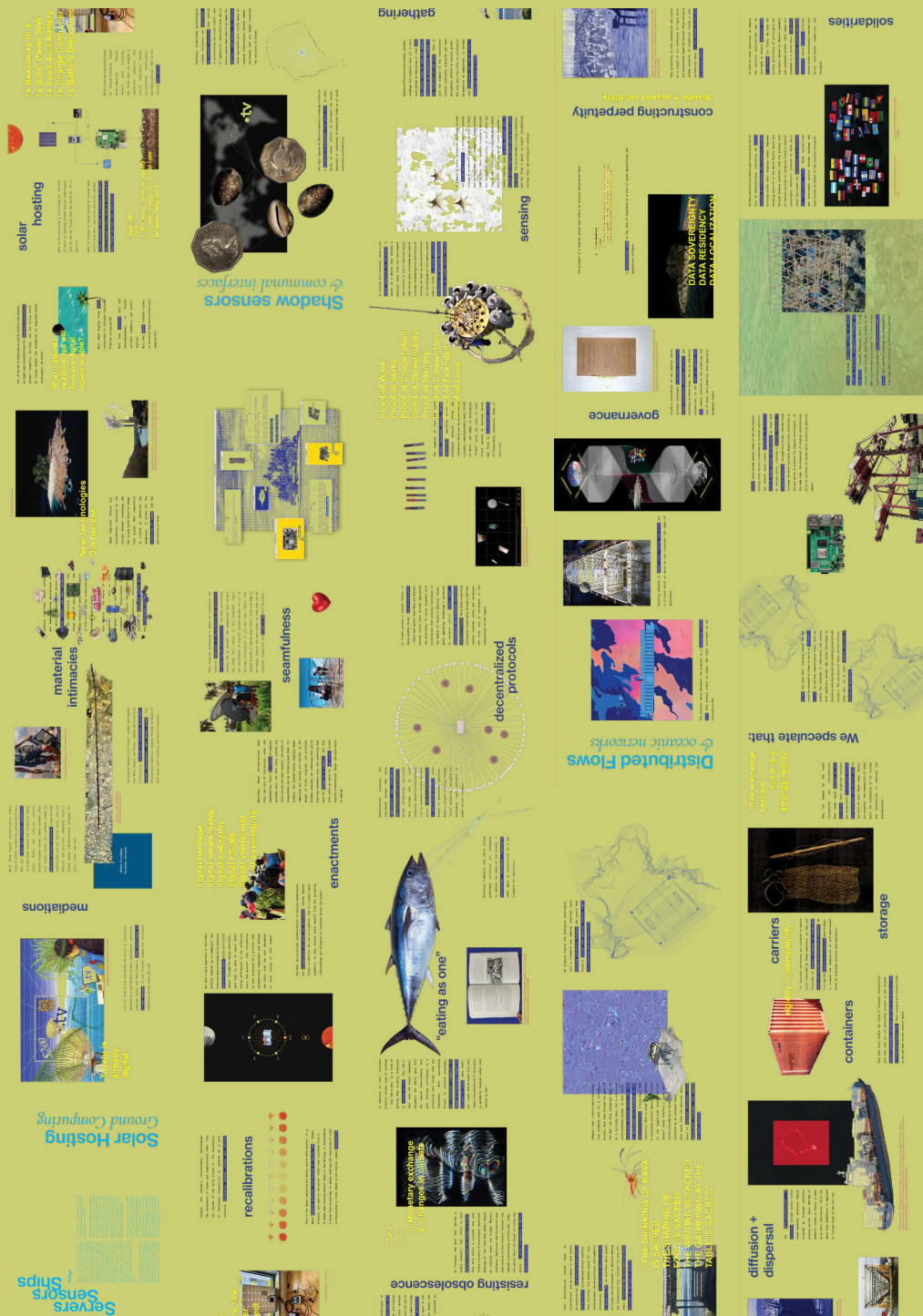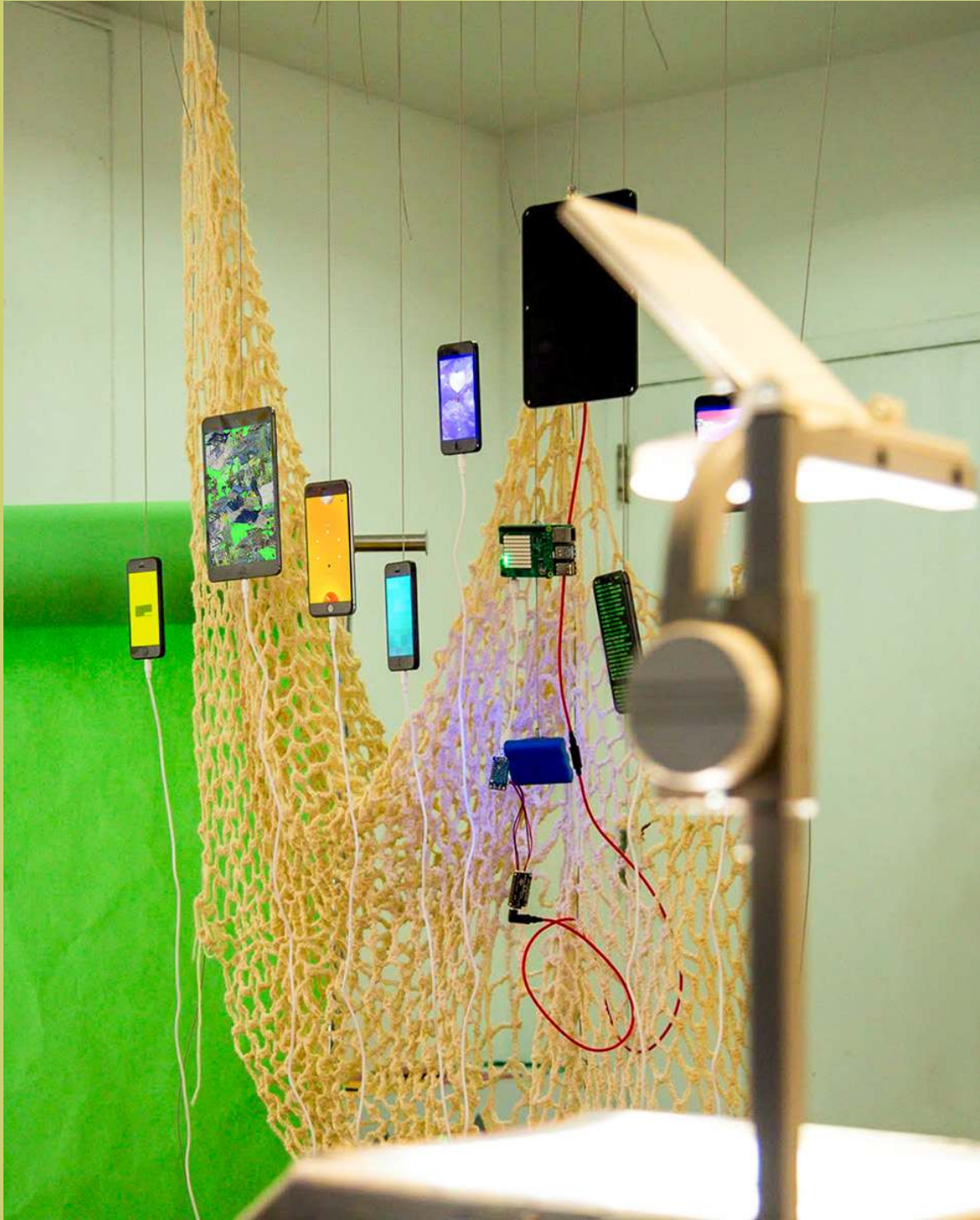
*Act I.*

*Solar Hosting, Ground Computing*

Tuvalu is already, in many ways, digital. Daily life is increasingly mediated by smartphones, satellites, and cloud infrastructures that shape how Tuvaluans relate across space and time. While these systems enable forms of affect and preservation, they also deepen dependencies on extractive supply chains and market logics. Seamless interfaces and cloud metaphors obscure the mineral, labor, and ecological footprints of computation, enabling the outsourcing of harm. As Tuvalu explores digital sovereignty, the stakes are not just technical but ontological: will digital infrastructures replicate systems of dispossession, or embody Tuvaluan values of care and reciprocity?

Solar Hosting offers a counter-model: a distributed, self-hosted network of reused devices that reorients digital time. Instead of assuming constant uptime, digital presence follows the sun—routing Digital Tuvalu to wherever energy is most abundant. Rather than a seamless product, Tuvaluan digital presence becomes a situated, ephemeral yet material process of worlding. The limits of energy and bandwidth dispel habits of digital excess, inviting new rituals of compression, deletion, and maintenance that make computing a form of communal attunement. Maybe an upload waits until midday, or streaming pauses when it rains. These shifts invite a rethinking of technological heritage, where relationships to software and hardware—through practices of making and repair—become collective, generational, and embodied—on Tuvaluan terms, and on Tuvaluan time. ▶▶
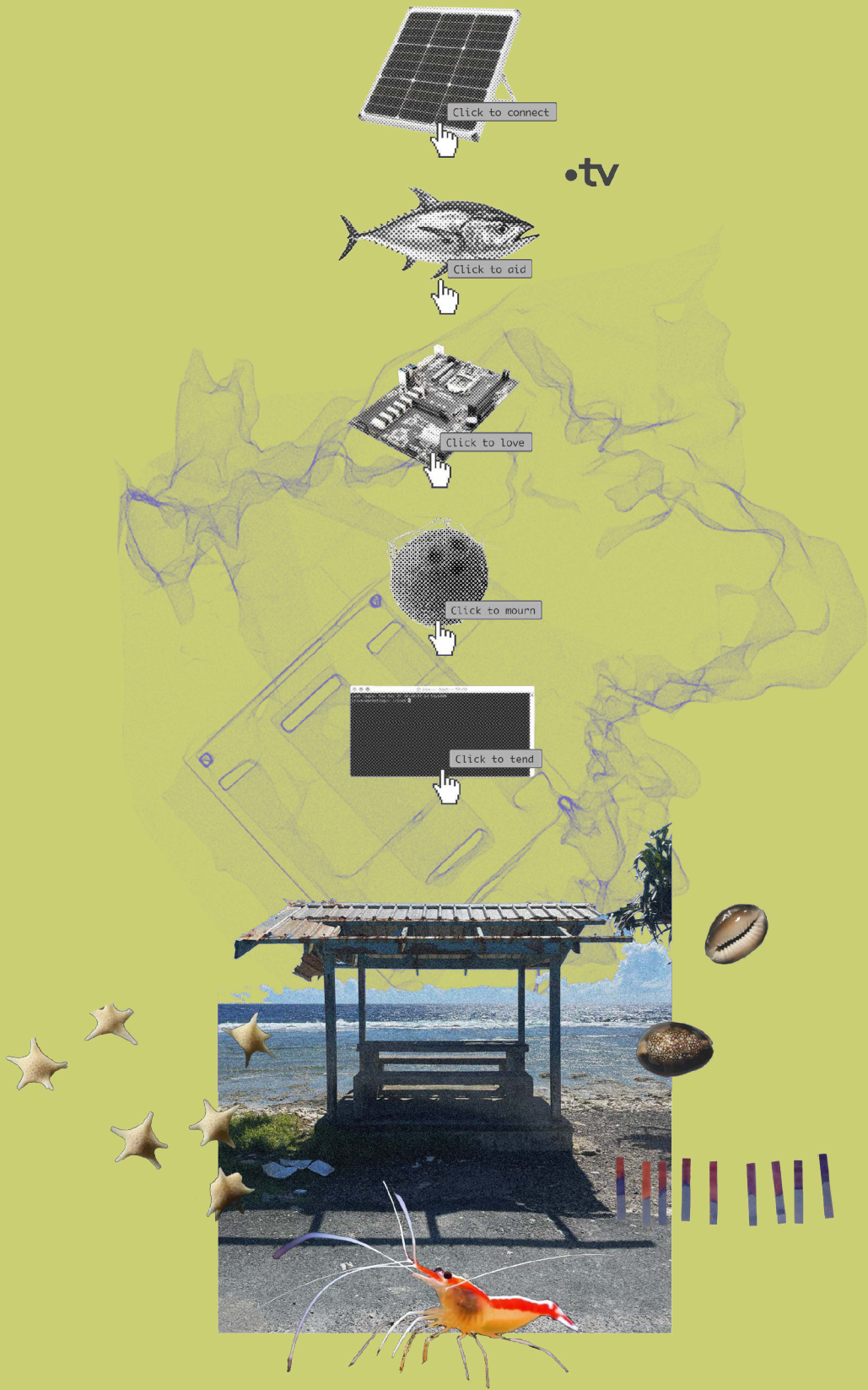
Servers, Sensors, Ships

Data Mourning Clinic

Servers, Sensors, Ships



Data Mourning Clinic

Click to connect

.tv

Click to aid

Click to love

Click to mourn

Click to tend
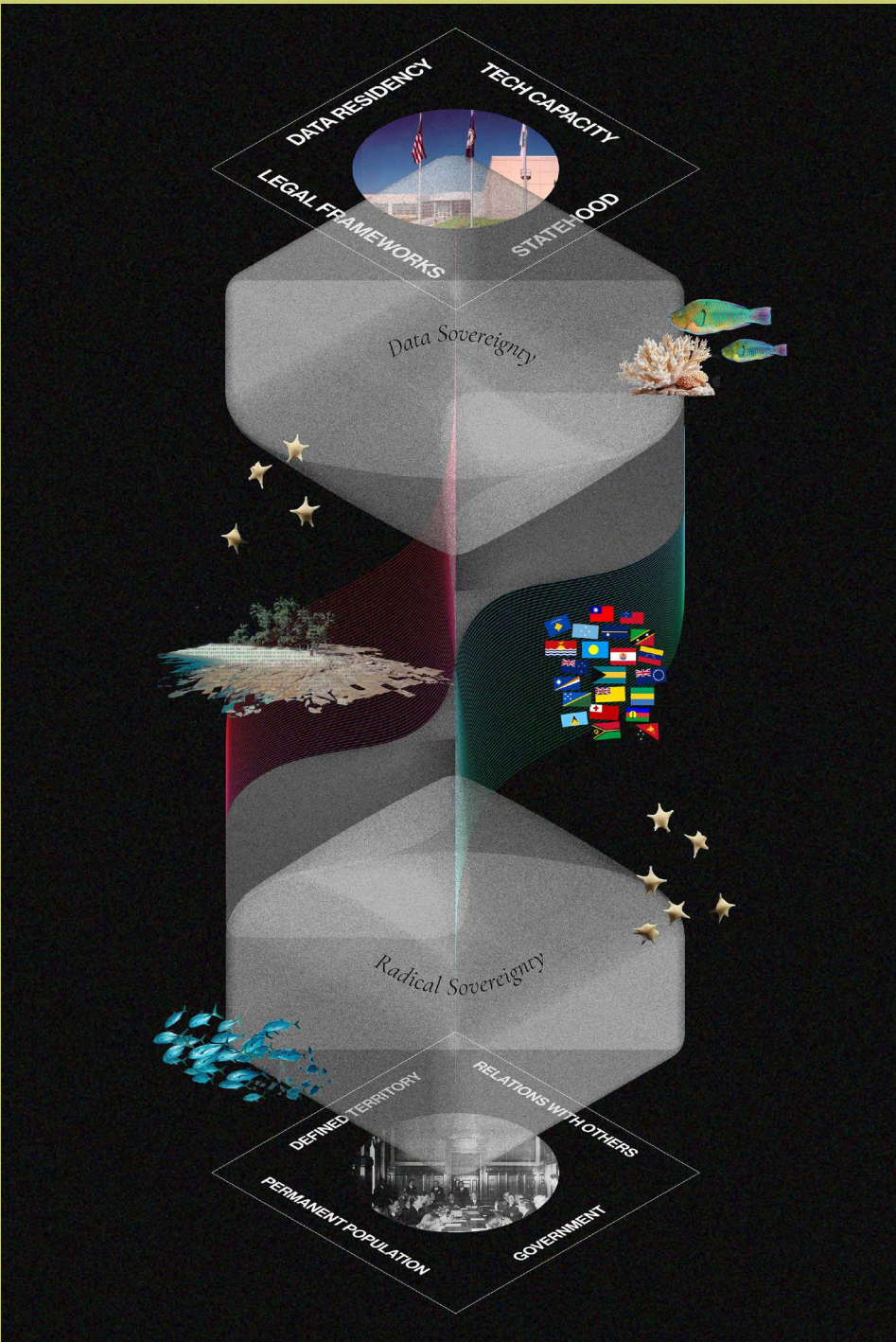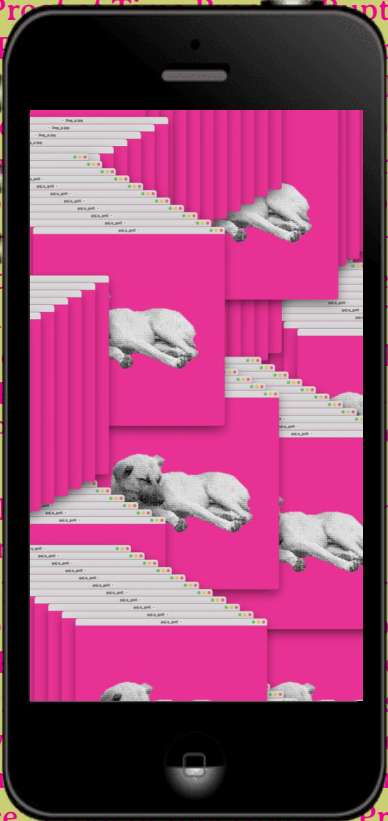
*Act II.*

*Shadow Sensors, Community Interfaces*

In Tuvaluan, the word *tau* signifies both "monetary exchange" and "climate change." This doubleness reveals a deep entanglement between economic and ecological dispossession—where imposed currencies and rising seas both stem from colonial and extractive regimes. Alongside *tau* stands *kai fak-a-taki*, a reciprocal gifting practice meaning "eating as one." It resists transactional logics, centering shared provision and relational responsibility. These values offer a lens for evaluating governance technologies that promise decentralization while reproducing asymmetries of control.

This act proposes a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO) grounded in reciprocal stewardship. Instead of extractive protocols like proof-of-work, decisions are validated through situated forms of presence, care, and intergenerational relation. Sensing occurs across scales—via digital instruments, oral knowledge, and ecological cues such as cloud patterns, sand flows, and foram vitality. Blockchain protocols mediate forms of sensing to give these entities legibility within governing systems, allowing for direct transspecies negotiations.

Forams—single-celled organisms vital to Tuvalu's beaches—act as sensors in themselves, sustaining the atoll through slow accretions of sand. But resilience efforts like jetties and seawalls often obstruct these flows. What if, instead, such decisions had to pass through the space of the DAO, where multiple species vote through different forms of intelligence? The kava huts spread across the islands become the physical interface for these rituals of deliberation—where stewards gather, interpret signals, and vote through off-chain rituals. Validation is done through plural forms of proof: of absence, of proliferation, of friendship, or trust. When solar power is available, a host uploads the outcome. ▶▶

Servers, Sensors, Ships

Data Mourning Clinic

Proof of Cooperation Proof of  Turbidity Proof of Stewardship
Proof of Proliferation Proof of Connection Proof of Bleaching
Proof of Devotion Proof of Consensus Proof of Disappearace
Proof of Change Proof of Time Proof of Rupture Proof of Care
Proof of Conflict Proof of Replenishment
Proof of Growth Proof of Empathy
Proof of Submerge of Regeneration
Proof of Silence Proof of Friendship
Proof of Saturation of of Obliteration
Proof of Depletion Proof of Erosion
Proof of Reclamat Proof of Scarcity
Proof of Dispersal Interdependence
Proof of Abundan Proof of Slowness
Proof of Stillness Proof of Collapse
Proof of Tension P of Contamination
Proof of Flooding Proof of Entropy
Proof of Friction naly Proof of Rise
Proof of Recession Proof of Absence
Proof of Neutralit oof of Pollination
Proof of Grief Pro f of Vulnerability
Proof of Security on Proof of Affect
Proof of Dignity P st Proof of Return
Proof of Legibility oof of Reciprocity
Proof of Agreemen roof of Saturation
Proof of imbalance Proof of Inheritance Proof of Mutualism
Proof of Dignity  Proof of Contamination Proof of Flooding
Proof of  Salinization  Proof  of  Planning  Proof  of  Affect
Proof of Nurture Proof of  Love Existence Proof of Belonging
Proof of Absence Proof of Return Proof Anomaly Proof of Time

*Act III.*

*Liquid Sovereignties, Distributed Flows*

Tuvalu's digital nationhood presents a paradox: in declaring its continuity through digital infrastructures, it leans on juridical and technical forms designed by other states—systems rarely built to accommodate relational sovereignty, ecological temporality, or collective kinship. The claim that Tuvalu "shall remain in perpetuity" risks reproducing the very logics of boundedness and abstraction that have materially failed the territory. Yet Tuvalu's constituency has never been landlocked. Its contours extend across oceans, sustained by diasporic movement and maritime labor—especially through vessels that bind Tuvaluan seafarers beyond its Exclusive Economic Zone.

This final act imagines these vessels not as neutral carriers, but as sovereign sites in motion. Around 50% of Tuvalu's domestic income comes from seafarers working abroad—many spending long stretches detached from the islands yet embedded in its relational fabric. These ships already inhabit legal liminality, floating between jurisdictions. What if they became more than economic outposts or legal fictions? What if they hosted solar embassies, distributed sensing, and tools to extend Tuvalu's more-than-human governance across oceanic space? As mobile stewards, Tuvaluans at sea could mediate decisions, transmit observations, and anchor governance in movement rather than stasis.

Kava huts on land remain central—spaces of ritual and deliberation—now imagined as portals for exchange with their floating counterparts. Seafarers contribute not as distant representatives but as active participants in a distributed ecology of care. Ships docking in Pacific ports become temporary nodes of activation, leveraging legal and infrastructural alignments to assert Tuvalu's continued presence. Sovereignty is enacted through dispersed acts of maintenance, alliance, and return. Tuvalu persists not as twin, but through networked relations across land, sea, and code. ∎

# Sand Patch

*Climate Justice + Digital Reenactments*

Catherine Griffiths

Sand Patch



Climate Justice + Digital Reenactments
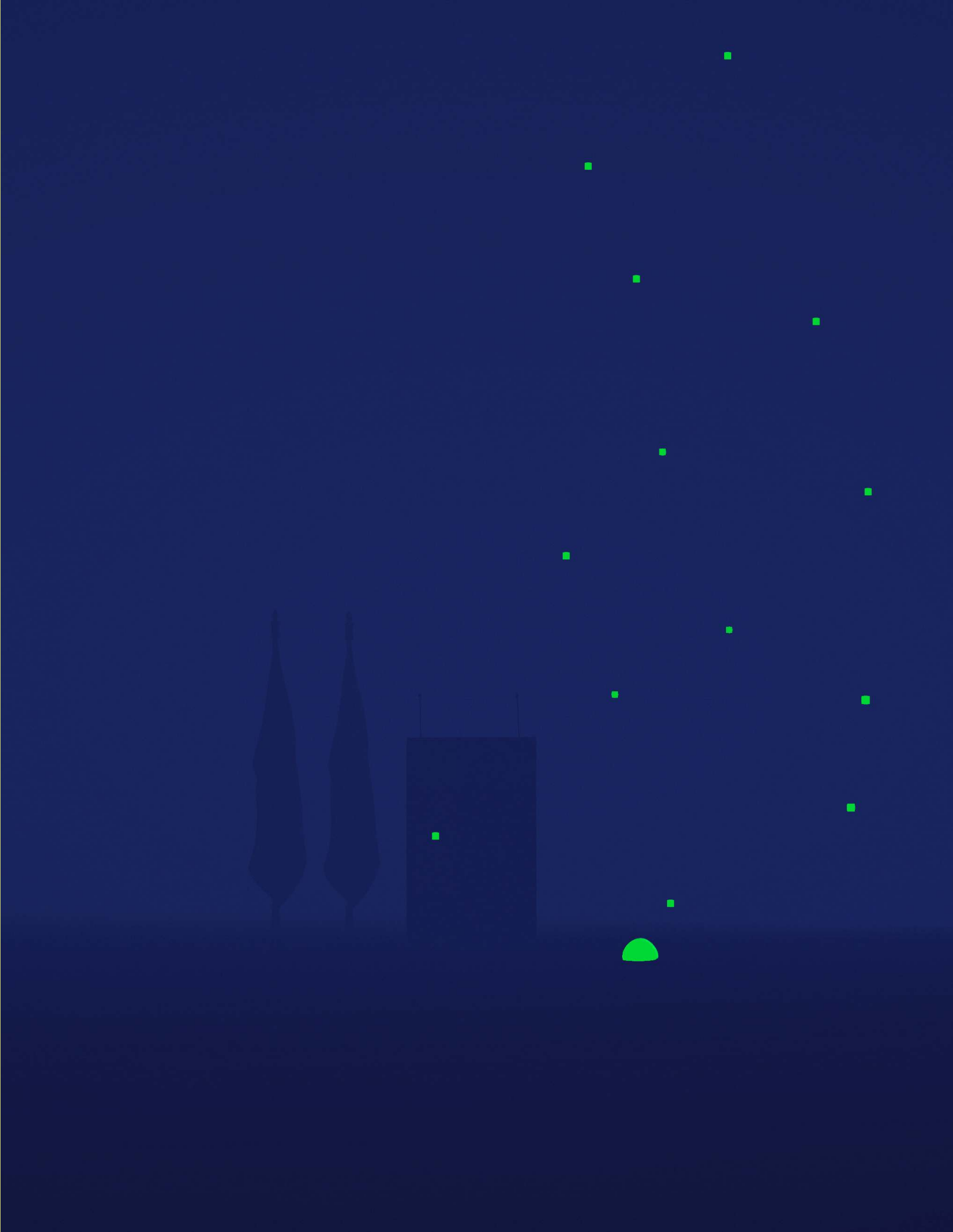
Sand Patch is a sound based, speculative game/3D environment that explores the politics of representation surrounding the Oceanic nation of Tuvalu. It responds to dominant portrayals of Tuvalu as a "sinking nation" already lost to climate change—apocalyptic images that, while aiming to mobilize global action, often flatten lived realities, reinscribe colonial logics, and frame Tuvalu as already absent. Rather than correct or replace these portrayals, the project experiments with a more open, poetic mode of engagement. It assembles a fractured, mnemonic terrain from field recordings, oral testimonies, photogrammetry scans, and archival media—an environment that affirms contradiction and multiplicity.

The work also engages Tuvalu's recent announcement to become the "First Digital Nation" by uploading its territory into digital archives and metaversal platforms. While this move asserts sovereignty and agency through digital means, it raises questions about what is preserved, what is excluded, and what kinds of representational logics are reproduced. Sand Patch does not critique or celebrate this gesture, but sits with its ambiguities—refusing both attempted simulation and outright rejection of digitality. ▶▶

Tuvalu has long been framed as a symbol of climate collapse—a "canary in the coal mine" invoked in global discourse. These framings risk enacting a form of defuturing, foreclosing political and imaginative possibility by treating Tuvalu as already submerged or virtual. As Fernando Domínguez Rubio argues, fragility is not an inherent condition but a representational effect. Against this backdrop, the project foregrounds Tuvalu not as symbolic ground to be projected onto, but as a contested and lived landscape.

The conceptual framing draws from Denise Ferreira da Silva's notion of fractal temporality and Epeli Hau'ofa's oceanic thinking, and builds on Gonzalo Frasca's non-Aristotelian game design as well as Stephanie Dinkins's speculative worldbuilding through digital spaces.

The environment was assembled from field and archival materials, including scans collected by the Data Mourning Clinic, testimonies from the Tuvalu Visualization Project, and an original soundtrack. Familiar entities—boats, kava huts, seawalls, corals, airports—are reassembled into a suspended, dreamlike landscape. Scattered coconuts emit soundscapes from Tuvalu—street chatter, karaoke, humming machinery—and release short pixelated testimonies when clicked. These voices, sometimes hopeful, sometimes fearful, sometimes skeptical, resist narrative closure and highlight the plurality of Tuvaluan experience.

The project is a space of experimentation that leaves open the question of how places and people are represented and remembered in digital space. The process also raises questions that remain unresolved: What does it mean to work with material from a place I do not belong to? Can digital forms do justice to lived experience? These tensions remain with the project—and perhaps become its essence. ∎

Kava hut

Sand Patch

Climate Justice + Digital Reenactments

I do not believe in sea level rise. I see it
as part of natural change.

I want to go to New Zealand or
Australia for a good life.

I enjoy fishing the most. I really like
finding food for my family.

I enjoy sitting down here, feeling the nice breeze, and
watching my grandchildren playing in front of me.

If this island beocomes uninhabitable, I will
get a boat and escape to some l

My dream is to become a Seaman
because I want to see the world.

I think the sea level is rising but there is nothing I can do.
I want to become a pastor in the future.

Coconut dialogues

# Sediment Rights

*Adv. IV - Climates <> Models <> Images*
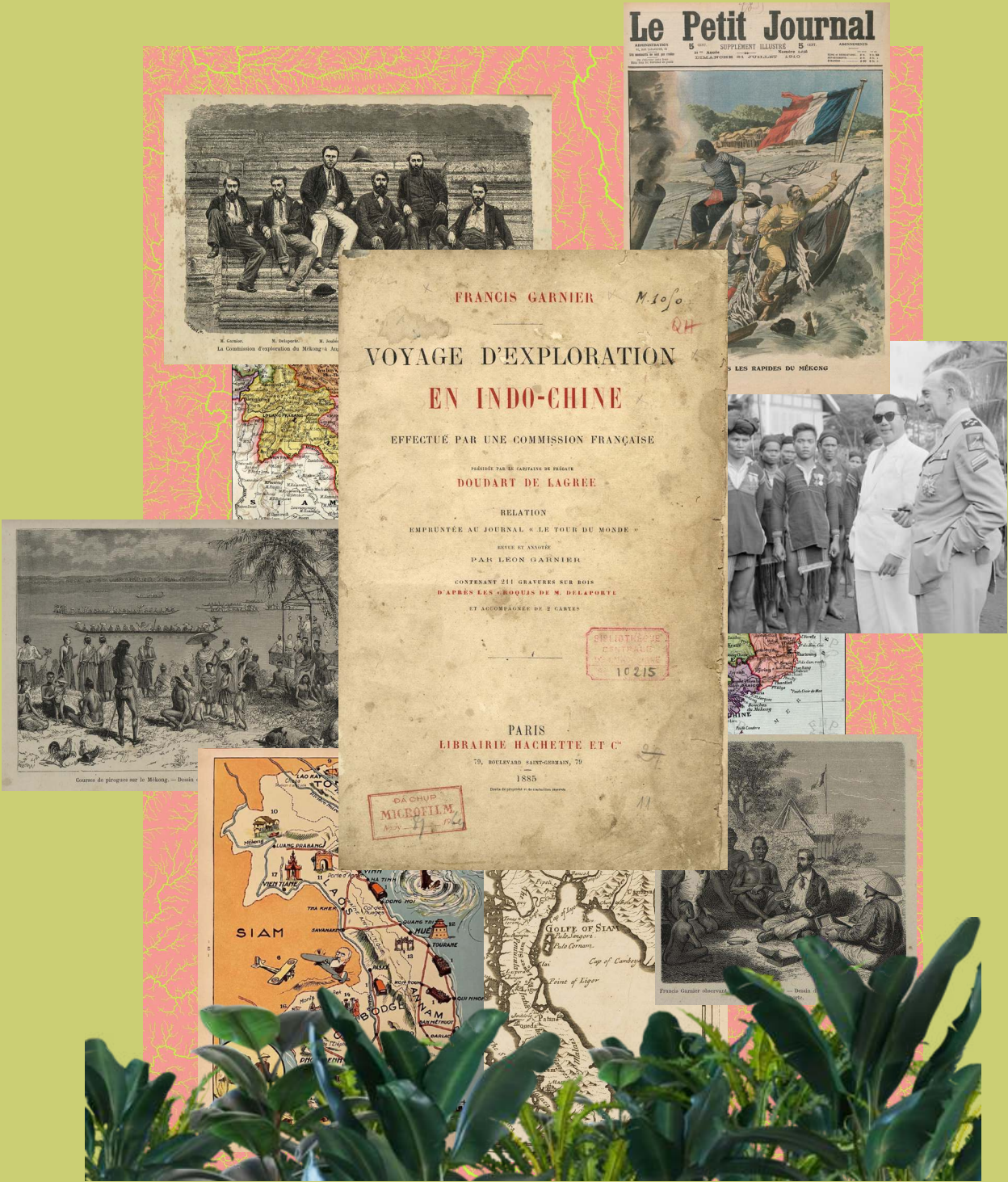
Marco Ferrari + Elise Hunchuck

T.A. Vaishnavi Kumar

Sediment is the lifeblood of the Mekong River. Its murky brown waters—formed by millennia of erosion carrying material from the Tibetan Plateau to the South China Sea—have shaped one of the world's most fertile and ecologically rich deltas. Through cycles of deposition and accumulation, sediment flows have historically nurtured the Mekong Delta and sustained the livelihoods, ecologies, and cosmologies of the many communities along its banks. Until recently, this liquid-ground mixture moved freely across fluid, overlapping boundaries—entwining the plural ethnic groups and more-than-human relations that compose the river's body.

With the rise of postcolonial nationalism came sovereign claims over every fracture of the river. What was once a shared and shifting waterway has been transformed into a development corridor, subdivided and optimized for extraction. The upper basin's steep terrain is now deemed "ideal" for hydropower dams, while the lower basin's loose sediment is aggressively mined and reshaped by levees and agricultural infrastructure. Sediment has become both a commodity and a byproduct—captured upstream by concrete walls, dredged downstream by industrial pumps. As a result, the Mekong's waters have shifted from opaque brown to emerald green. Today, only 25% of its historical sediment load reaches the delta.

The project examines mapping as a method for engaging with climate collapse and worlding otherwise. Rather than treating cartography as a neutral tool, it approaches mapping as a political act—entangled in extraction, abstraction, and control. It aims to reorient contemporary cartographic software and tools to expose occluded dynamics, assemble dispersed knowledges, and speculate on missing data. ▶▶
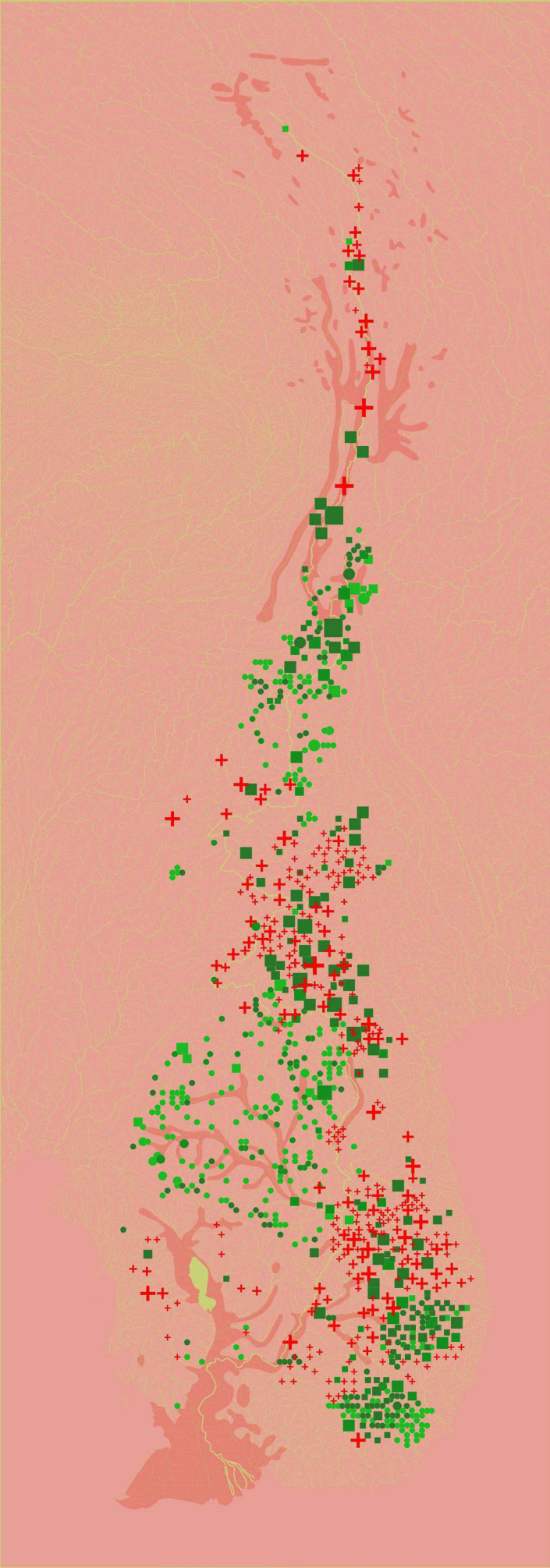
Sediment Rights

Climates <> Models <> Images

Sediment Rights

Climates <> Models <> Images

Sediment Rights



Water management

Hydropower

Small dams (<15m)

Medium dams (15-50m)

Large dams (50-150m)

Mega dams (>150m)

1950s 2000s 2020s

Future dams

Through the synthesis of multi-scalar datasets—and by compiling information from scientific reports, journalistic releases, and manually scanning satellite imagery—I developed the first freely accessible, comprehensive spatial visualization of all major and minor dams across the Mekong basin. As both a tool of development and a closely guarded state apparatus, no such unified map previously existed to trace this distributed system across the six nations that fracture the river.

The resulting cartography renders the river as an infrastructure of extraction: a layered, transnational machine engineered to arrest, divert, and accumulate sediment. The river is mapped as a disrupted and contested system—its vitality shaped by patterns of accumulation, interruption, and loss. By linking upstream damming to downstream collapse, the project insists the Mekong be understood not in fragments, but as one entangled and contested system. ▶▶

Map of the more 1,000 dams across the Mekong Basin

Sediment Rights

At the delta, the effects of sediment deprivation are compounding. The geological process of progradation—by which sediment extends land into sea—has reversed in less than a century. The land is now subsiding at rates up to four times faster than global sea-level rise, displacing humans and more-than-humans alike. While scientists attempt to calculate the river's sediment deficit, upstream countries proceed with dozens of new dam projects. The river's fractured jurisdiction—divided between six states—renders coordinated response nearly impossible, as upstream nations continue to compromise the lifeworlds downstream.

Building on the dam mapping and data on soil types and partial sediment flows, a speculative three-dimensional model of sediment retention was developed. This model visualizes accumulation and blockage not as isolated technical side-effects, but as indicators of a model of geopolitical control—revealing how infrastructural decisions reshape the basin's geologies and ecologies in uneven ways, with Vietnam disproportionately bearing the costs of upstream interventions. ▶▶

Climates <> Models <> Images



Tibetan Plateau

Mekong Delta
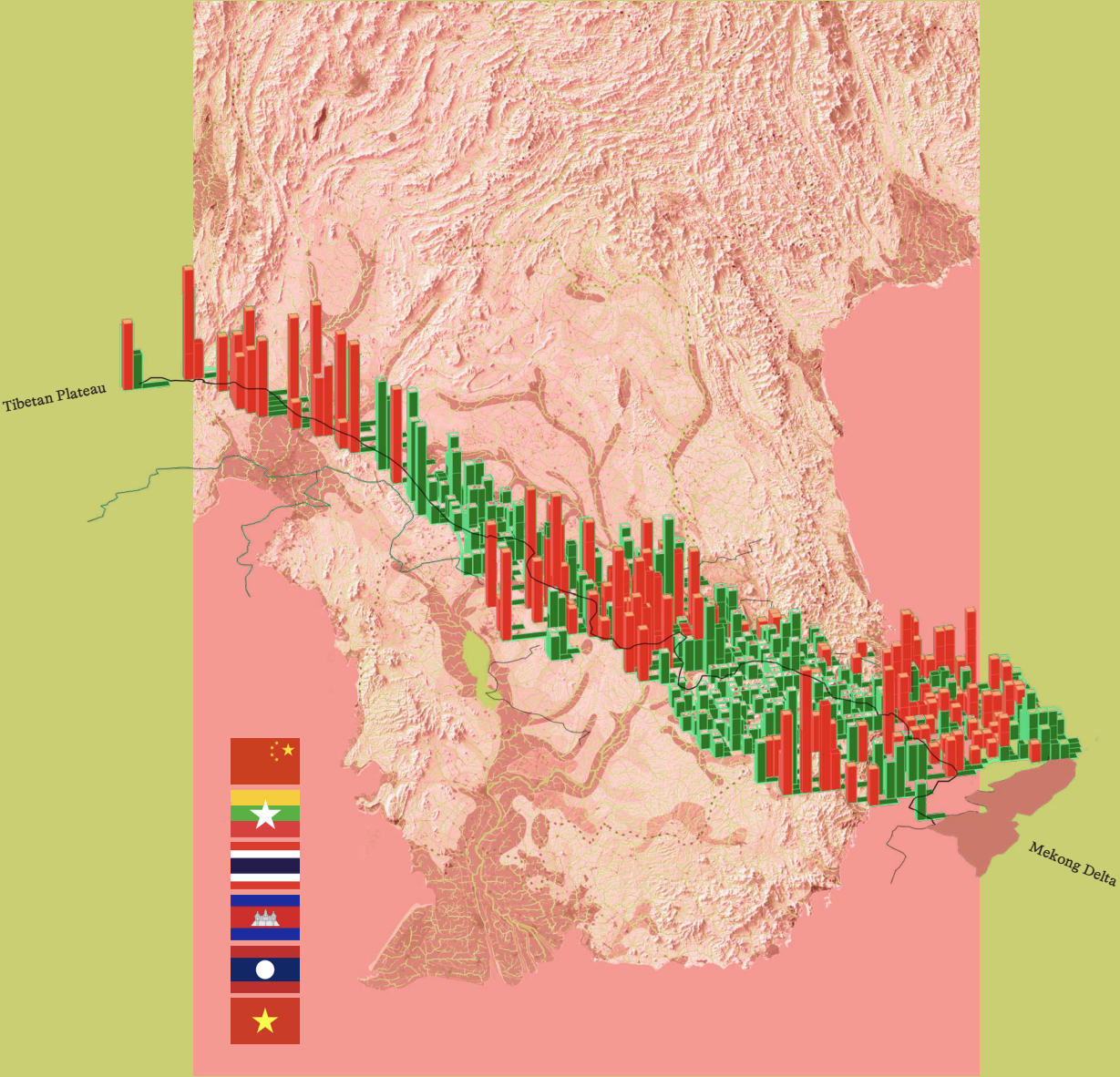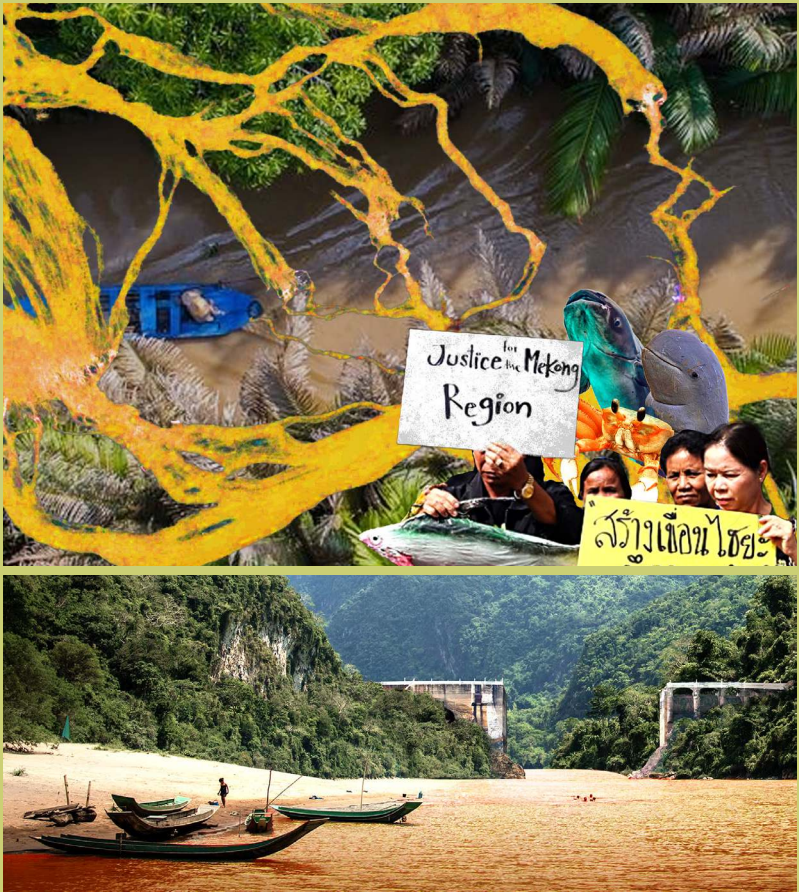
Sediment Rights is not simply a call for more sustainable management. It is a challenge to the very legal and epistemic frameworks through which nature is rendered governable. Environmental law has largely failed to protect the fluid elements—water, air, sediment—that defy fixed borders, stable value, or single authorship. The Mekong's sediment crisis makes visible how colonial cartographies, postcolonial development agendas, and neoliberal climate adaptations converge to render deltaic life expendable.

If deltaic futures are to be viable, they must be muddy. They must recognize that what accumulates is never only silt, but relations. To defend sediment's right to flow is to defend the possibility of life downstream. ∎

Afterlives of Biopiracy &
Heatherwick's Seed Cathedral

# Seeds of Empire

*Transscalarities*
Nicolay Duque-Robayo

On March 14th of 1876, the Amazonas ship arrived in Liverpool after a more than 8,000-kilometer-long transatlantic journey from the tropical rainforest of Manaus. Inside it, 70,000 seeds of Hevea brasiliensis, the tree responsible for the rubber boom of the Brazilian economy, were brought in secrecy by the British Henry Wickham with the aim of establishing rubber cultivation in the eastern British Empire.[2] This act would earn Wickham the moniker of "father of biopiracy," although much discussion looms over whether he was a simple thief or a product of his time. While the freelancer earned infamy, the institution that commissioned him - the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew - would instead be glorified for reshaping the world.[1]

Yet, Wickham's commission was not an isolated event but part of a larger imperial project of biological plundering—one that continues to structure power imbalances between Global North and South. Biopiracy has not disappeared; it has merely adapted, embedded within corporate-driven legal frameworks that extend Western concepts of ownership over land, bodies, and genetic material. Today, under the guise of conservation, progress, and efficiency, these structures continue to dictate who controls biodiversity and who is excluded from its benefits. ▶▶

While first thought of as "royal whims" or "entertainment for the masses," botanical gardens quickly rose in status as the British Empire awoke to the strategic potentials of botany.[2] A mutually beneficial relationship between the colonial enterprise and Kew developed with the intent of bioprospecting, transferring, and developing specimens with potential economic purposes for the empire.[3] Many of these specimens returned to England on the same ships that transported enslaved Africans to the Caribbean, being identified, picked, and transported by enslaved or indigenous hands, who were occasionally rewarded, but never acknowledged. [4] These communities, however, did not passively submit—many deliberately misled colonial botanists or withheld plant knowledge to prevent its exploitation—revealing how botanical "discovery" was never a neutral or benevolent practice but a deeply contested process entangled with violence, erasure, and resistance.

Today, the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew holds over 8.5 million items,[5] including the most diverse wild plant species genetic resource on Earth, the Millennium Seed Bank,[6] popularly called "Noah's Ark for plants," home to 2.4 billion seeds, encompassing more than 40,000 individual species spanning over 190 different countries.[7] This collection was the centerpiece of the 2010 United Kingdom's pavilion at the Shanghai World's Expo, popularly called the "Seed Cathedral" by Thomas Heatherwick. Under the Expo theme of "Better City, Better Life," the design aimed to "explore the relationship between nature and cities" by inspiring "reverence" for Kew's growing collection and exalting the institution's role as a steward of planetary biodiversity through its goal of archiving 25% of the world's plant species.[8] The pavilion's exhibition with its 60,000 fiber-optic rods encasing Kew's collection, proposes seed archiving as a sublime spectacle, reinforcing the UK's position as a benevolent player of global sustainability while obscuring the extractive ties that made such an archive possible—the institution's legacies of bioprospecting, displacement, and loss, effectively positioning itself within a broader design trend that aestheticizes ecological preservation in an apolitical manner while shying away from confronting

Additionally, the design misses the opportunity to critically address the real relationship between modern cities and the natural environment—that of expansionism and habitat destruction—which has made global seed archiving appear as a contemporary necessity. By presenting seed storage as a sublime spectacle, the architectural object naturalizes the prevailing technocratic discourse of scientific salvation, ultimately undermining more collective, place-based approaches to ecological action and ▶▶

structural reform to counteract the forces endangering biodiversity.

In Bangladesh, a former British colony, western biological "banks," "cathedrals," and "archives" are challenged by the less spectacularized typology of the Seed Huts—communal hubs for situated, dynamic, and decentralized exchange of seeds that facilitate prosperous multispecies relationships across generations, even when challenged by periodic cataclysm.[9] Unlike the Millennium Seed Bank, which extracts biodiversity for storage in a distant vault, Seed Huts operate within the landscapes they sustain, resisting the dominant conservationist logic that detaches biodiversity from the people who cultivate and depend on it.

Seed archiving, then, is not a neutral act but one embedded in a long history of extraction, slavery, and dispossession—one that cannot be omitted or forgotten.[10] Perhaps the growing demands for reparations from the Global South, along with Kew's own call in 2020 to re-examine its colonial ties signal the emergence of a more critical lens through which to read institutions like the Millennium Seed Bank[11] and, consequently, the architectures complicit in their designs. The Bank's official launch at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit—an event dedicated to sustainability— ironically retraced Kew's history back to Brazil, ▶▶

the very place where, nearly a century earlier, the contraband of rubber seeds had led to social and economic collapse. In this light, the Millennium Seed Bank and its 2010 Expo pavilion appear not as a rupture with Kew's colonial past, but as its direct continuation, reinforcing longstanding structures of control under pretenses of planetary care. ∎

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