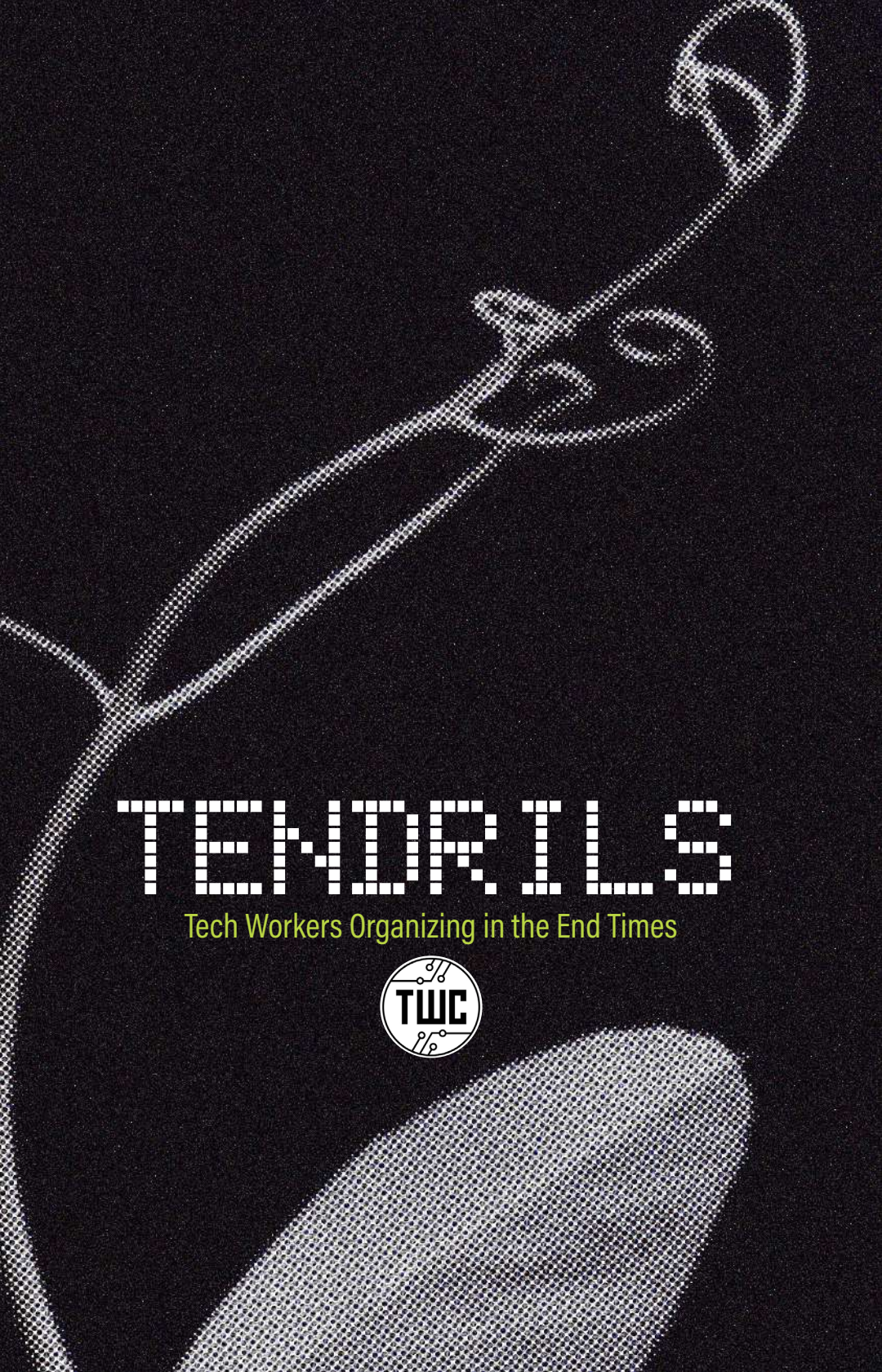




TENDRILS

Tech Workers Organizing in the End Times



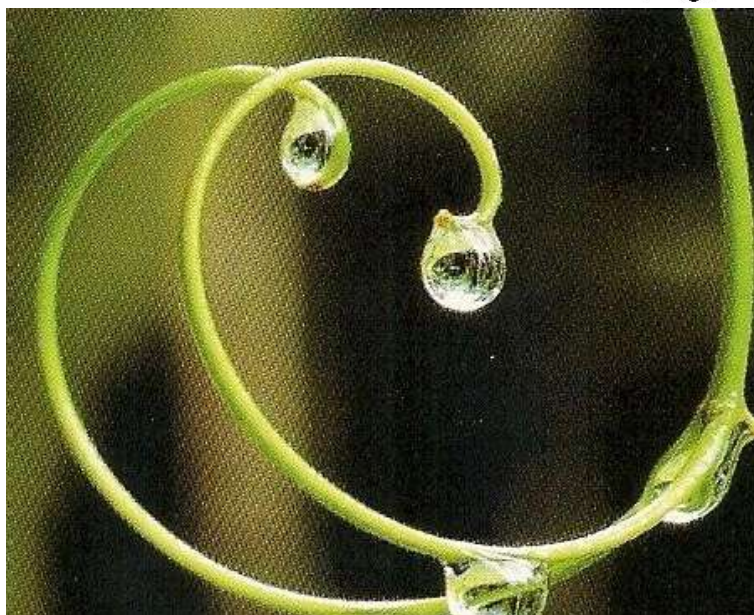
If ten years ago the proposition of leading tech workers into collective action sounded preposterous in most of the world, today it is regarded not only as a possibility, but as a necessity. Organized tech workers, given their position, are the one of the best point of leverage against the growing power of tech oligarchs. We believe in the potential for change represented by workers who today waste their labor building dreadful and harmful technology.

The tech industry must be cleansed from within.

With this zine, we want to give space to the many people who have committed their time and their energy to fuel the Tech Workers Movement. While some of us make headlines every few months, the outside world still struggles to imagine what a tech labor organizer looks like, how they think, what they want, and why they do what they do. Tech workers are not tech bros, and we want everybody to know.

A tension exists between who is a tech worker in the material sense, meaning anybody selling their labor to a tech company, and who feels like a tech worker, who identifies as one. While office workers react better to the label, it's hard to connect the material labor of riders or warehouse workers to the same identity. We still believe in the ambitious project of overcoming such distance, not by erasing the obvious differences in workplace conditions, but by finding a shared experience through organizing against the same opponent.





We live in a time of vertiginous acceleration of many historical phenomena intertwined with the tech industry: the rise of tech-enabled Fascism in the West, social and ecological collapse, rapid labor displacements attributed to AI, and last but not least, the ongoing disaggregation of any shared Reality. This publication aspires to be a space for tech workers to share how they manage to take action, day by day, despite the constant bombardment of psychic attacks from media and their surroundings.

Love means taking action, and taking action means commitment. Where do we find the energy to commit in a world designed to paralyze us and drain our life force? Each one of us has a different answer, and we hope you will find one that inspires you.

We called the zine “Tendrils”, informed by the botanical observation of the strategy of some plants to develop organs specialized in scouting their surroundings. Tendrils prod the air to find light, or other plants or rocks to grab onto and keep growing. Building on the famous quote from André Breton: “We publish to find comrades”, we see our work not as a means to broadcast our opinions and inform “the public” about our stances, but as a deliberate tool to find and connect with our peers, old and new.

Behind this zine stands the editorial team composed of four tech workers: Helen Yang, Kaitlin Cort, Luca Mendlein, and Simone Robutti. We are all active members of Tech Workers Coalition Global, the digital chapter taking care of and growing the much broader Tech Workers Coalition network of chapters spread throughout the world. More specifically, we are part of the Base Building Team, responsible for growing capacity and active tech workers.

In TWC, we cultivate a strong culture around concrete and material impact: the value of a political action is its potential to change something in the world. We strive to give a clear strategic frame for everything we do, and avoid performative actions as much as we can. Nonetheless, after years of focused work behind the scenes, we agreed to indulge in an act of celebration and self-narration.

We believe this zine will serve a purpose, beyond satisfying our need to do something that looks cool. Many well-executed organizing drives have





struggled in recent years to break through the wall that prevents tech workers from joining a union, from risking their careers, and from moving into action. Beyond a certain scale, it stops being a problem of organizing methodologies, and it becomes a problem of culture, identity, and narrative. TWC is committed to nurture a system that spans way beyond our individual organization and the direct peers that compose the coalition we are building. To do so, we need a variety of tools and approaches. Shaping a shared idea of who a tech worker is and why they are committed to collective action is one of such tools.

Our reflection starts from the fact we have news about tech workers organizing, but we don't have enough stories. This zine wants to add a little verse to the grand saga of the growing tech workers' movement.

The end of this story will be written many years from now, by people who aren't born yet and whom we might never meet. We want to record the ideas, emotions, and aspirations of the tech workers who today fight for a different future. We do it to remember who came before us, to celebrate who is on our side today, and to inspire who comes after.

ABOUT TECH WORKERS COALITION (TWC)

Tech workers have organized across borders for decades: Computer People for Peace opposed Vietnam-era military contracts in 1968; the IBM Black Workers Alliance demanded IBM cut ties with apartheid South Africa in the 1970s; and IBM workers from Japan, France, Germany, and Italy held annual international solidarity meetings as early as 1984. Tech Workers Coalition joins this long line of workers who have refused to let the tech industry's power go uncontested.

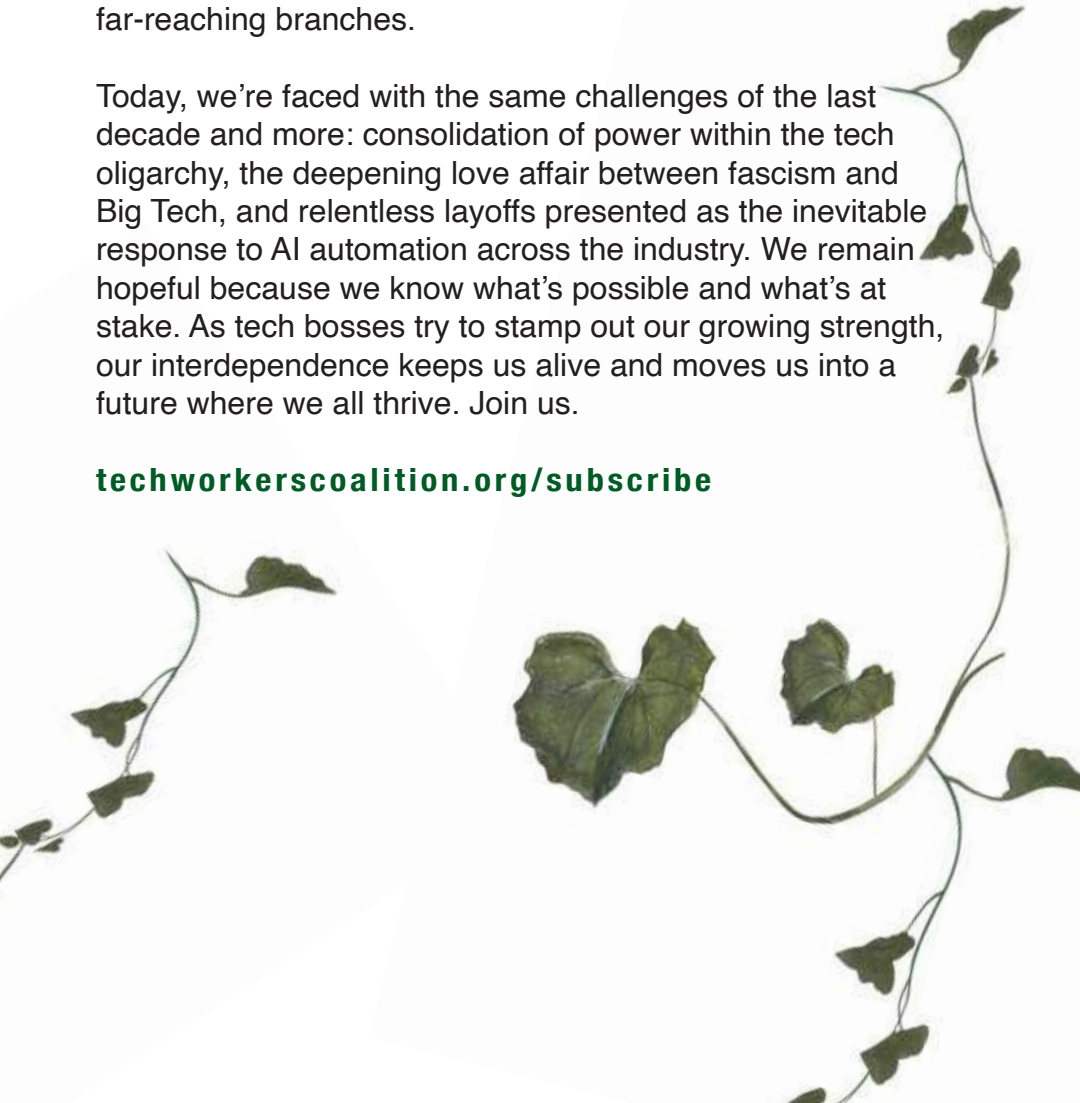
TWC traces its history from these roots to the efforts of UNITE HERE in 2014-2016, when cafeteria workers and programmers joined forces to unionize at Google's cafeteria and in Hyatt Hotels. Workers continued meeting and sprouted TWC's first chapters in the Bay Area and NYC. Over the last decade, industry consciousness among tech workers has continued to grow worldwide, reflected by an increase in tech union organizing (Kickstarter, Alphabet Workers Union, CODE-CWA), anti-militarism campaigns (End Project Maven, No Tech for Apartheid/ICE), and fights for better working conditions.



From these seeds, TWC chapters continued to emerge and connect across borders, spreading to London, Bangalore, and Berlin. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges - remote organizing, mass layoffs - that stunted this growth and shut down several chapters. But when conditions changed, we adapted. TWC Italy emerged as the first national-level, digital-first chapter, creating models and practices for virtual connection. Building on this momentum, TWC organizers met virtually across chapters to develop TWC Global and its working groups. These groups continue to grow and provide support to TWC's 15+ international chapters, sharing resources, wisdom, and experience across far-reaching branches.

Today, we're faced with the same challenges of the last decade and more: consolidation of power within the tech oligarchy, the deepening love affair between fascism and Big Tech, and relentless layoffs presented as the inevitable response to AI automation across the industry. We remain hopeful because we know what's possible and what's at stake. As tech bosses try to stamp out our growing strength, our interdependence keeps us alive and moves us into a future where we all thrive. Join us.

techworkerscoalition.org/subscribe



THE REALITY OF FINANCIAL IMPERIALISM IN GAZA

[JOSHUA DAVILA]

For more than two years now, a lot of my time has gone to a task that sounds boring and baffling at once when you describe it out loud: helping people figure out how to send money to Gaza. Someone would message me, usually a friend of a friend, asking how to get funds to a family they had raised money for. They weren't able to send the money they had through normal bank transfers, for one reason or another. The only way it was documented online was to send it via cryptocurrency. To them, that seemed like something only software developers were able to do (I am not one). So I would walk them through it. Which app to use, which network, what to double check before hitting send.

The longer I helped people with this, the more obvious it became that the obstacle was never really “technical” but a behemoth of an unforgiving global financial system. The reason someone in Berlin cannot easily move two hundred dollars to someone in Gaza is that the financial system is built, deliberately and at every layer, to make that movement difficult. It makes one wonder who decided this, and who does it serve?

THERE IS NO PALESTINIAN MONETARY SOVEREIGNTY.



Anyone who has tried to fundraise for Gaza through normal channels knows the pattern. PayPal freezes the account. GoFundMe pulls the campaign. A bank wire gets flagged and sits in review for weeks, and when you call to ask why, nobody will give you a straight answer because the people on the phone do not have one. The money is not gone, exactly. It is held, delayed, queued behind a compliance process that has no deadline and no appeal. For a family that needs to buy flour this week, a transfer that clears in two months may as well have never been sent.

It is tempting to read all of this as a reaction to October 7, but that is wrong. The blockage has existed for a long time.

People often underestimate the implications of this, but Palestinians do not have their own currency. Under the 1994 Paris Protocol, they were locked into using the Israeli shekel, with no central bank of their own to issue money or set monetary policy. The overwhelming majority of transactions in the West Bank happen in shekels for the simple reason that Palestinians do not have monetary sovereignty. The Palestinian Monetary Authority was set up the same year

to act as the central bank, but unlike most central banks, it does not issue currency or conduct monetary policy.

Since Palestinians clear their money in shekels, Palestinian banks can only settle transactions by routing through Israeli correspondent banks. Those banks process Palestinian transactions only under an indemnity waiver from Israel's finance ministry, a piece of paper that shields them from legal liability for handling Palestinian-linked money. The waiver has to be renewed on a schedule, which means that a routine bit of financial plumbing doubles as a political switch that someone in a ministry can flip. The threat to revoke it has been used repeatedly. Without the waiver the Israeli banks would likely sever the relationship rather than carry the legal risk, and because the Palestinian economy has no monetary system of its own to fall back on.

Since 2016, the digital rights group 7amleh and a long list of allied organizations have been campaigning to get PayPal to serve Palestinians.

PayPal operates in more than two hundred countries and territories, including places with far worse instability than the West Bank. It serves Israeli citizens and Israeli settlers living in West Bank settlements that are illegal under international law. It does not serve the five million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

The truth is that the global banking and payments infrastructure are instruments of state power, and the genius of the current arrangement is that the state rarely has to wield them directly. A compliance department at a private company, terrified of fines and legal exposure, will over-enforce on its own. It will refuse the borderline transaction or close the risky account because the downside of saying yes is catastrophic and the



downside of saying no is nothing.

This is what financial imperialism looks like in its mature form. A global payments system organized so that access flows downhill from the imperial core and dries up at its edges, enforced by thousands of risk-averse private decisions that no single person feels responsible for. Official sanctions are the hard version of this, and a frozen GoFundMe is the soft version.

WHY CRYPTO?

The reason I know how to do this is because I've been involved in the crypto space for nearly a decade, taking a left wing POV on the technology and where it can be helpful for this side of the political spectrum. To be frank, it's been an uphill battle. What was once something few on the left wanted to hear about has all of a sudden become a clear solution to an immediate problem for many organizers. So why crypto?



Cryptocurrency offers critical advantages in this situation:

- **Instant transfers:** Transactions in minutes or seconds
- **Censorship resistance:** No central authority can freeze or reverse confirmed blockchain transactions
- **Accessibility:** Recipients only need a phone and internet connection, no banking relationship required

While some people in Gaza have access to Bank of Palestine accounts, many have lost this access or never had it. Cryptocurrency has become one of the most reliable ways to get funds directly to those who need them. So how does it work?

Regardless of which method you choose to send cryptocurrency, the process follows these three steps:

1. The fundraising group receives funds and converts them to cryptocurrency
2. The crypto is sent to the recipient's wallet address in Gaza
3. The recipient goes to an OTC (over the counter) desk to exchange the crypto for cash

There are three main methods I recommend to send crypto to those in Gaza.



The easiest to start is something like SimpleSwap, where you buy crypto with a debit card and send it to an address you put. The downside here is that you will need to pass KYC (know your customer) checks in which you will need to provide personal identifying information.

The second option is a neobank like Revolut, which lets you buy and send inside the app and is smooth to use if you already have it most of the time, at the cost of leaving a clean transaction record tied to your name since you have already done KYC in order to get the account.

The most private option is a product called Peer, which uses trusted execution environments to anonymously trade fiat (euros, dollars, etc) for crypto through apps like Wise or N26 without handing over your identity. It can be a bit more fiddly and slower but gives you some identity protection.



On the receiving side, the crypto lands in Gaza at the crypto address that you set (presumably to the one in Gaza) and meets a network of OTC cash desks that convert it into shekels. The crypto wallet on people's phones has become their bank which can have its own issues.

This is not liberation but harm reduction, the thing you reach for when the official channels have been closed. The contradictions are everywhere and worth naming. The convenient on-ramps run through centralized exchanges, which means the chokepoint you escaped at the bank can reappear with centralized crypto exchanges like Binance having the same power to freeze and refuse. Every transaction is permanent, so a single mistyped address can lose significant money. The methods that are easy to use leave a paper trail, and the ones that protect you take effort most people in a crisis do not have. And the desks in Gaza

charge for the service, with fees that have climbed far above their pre-war levels.

All of this is upheld technically through code and risk models, written and maintained by people who mostly think of themselves as solving neutral engineering problems. The KYC pipeline, the transaction-monitoring system, the trust-and-safety rule that auto-flags a region, these are products with developers and product managers. Sometimes the most evil infrastructure can seem the most banal.

IF YOU WANT TO HELP, HERE ARE SOME CRITICAL SAFETY TIPS

Cryptocurrency transactions are irreversible. Once you send funds, they cannot be recovered. Follow these precautions:

- 1. Verify the Recipient's Identity — Check through multiple channels to ensure you're sending to the correct person.
- 2. Confirm the Address Format — Ethereum addresses always start with "0x" and Tron addresses start with "T"
- 3. Check the Network — USDC and USDT exist on multiple blockchain networks (Ethereum, Tron, etc.). Ensure you're sending on the correct network that the recipient can access.
- 4. Copy and Paste Carefully — Never type a wallet address manually; always copy and paste; and verify the first few digits and last few digits of the address after pasting
- 5. Start with a Test Transaction — Send a small amount first (\$1-\$10), confirm the recipient received it, then send the remaining funds. This protects against costly mistakes.

QUICK REFERENCE CHECKLIST

- ☐ Recipient has an Ethereum wallet (address starting with 0x) or Tron wallet (address starting with T)
- ☐ Recipient has access to an OTC desk for cashing out
- ☐ You've verified the recipient's identity through multiple channels
- ☐ You've double-checked the wallet address (first and last digits)
- ☐ You've confirmed the correct blockchain network
- ☐ You understand fees will be deducted
- ☐ You've checked your local tax obligations
- ☐ You've considered starting with a test transaction

FOLD FOLD FOLD
Yifei Chen

```
[ fold fold fold  
  I and the sky and the glass towers  
  and the dead branches on one surface ]
```

```
stairs  
  up  
  up  
down
```

```
nine o'clock  
  and  
    five o'clock  
meet at  
  noon
```

```
he says  
  this is the top floor  
she says  
  this is the exit
```

```
rendering...
```

```
nine identical coffee shops  
  or  
    one coffee shop  
    nine times
```

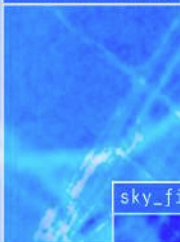
```
sky  
  copy paste  
  copy paste
```

```
branches  
  (dead)  
    (has been dead)  
      (will continue to be  
        dead)
```

```
glass  
  reflects glass  
    reflect  
      reflect
```

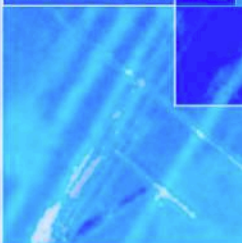
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this_is_sky.png

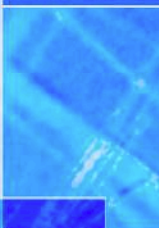


sky_f

this_is_sky_copy.png

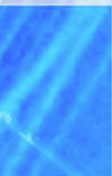


this_is_still



sky_final.png





nal_final.png



Copy

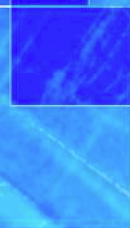
Paste



this_is_sky_copy_2.png



sky.png



I turn toward
arrival

someone
or data
move
or pretend to move
or
movement invalid

I am
or
I am not

true

a loop
or

a straight
line disguising as
a loop

this is
Wednesday
Wednesday
Wednesday

exit
leads to
entrance

the other side
is
a screenshot of
this side

we are
autosaving

SYSTEM LOG

Convenience Optimization / Full Run

RECOVERY_CONTACT: Yifei Chen

[PROCESS INITIATED]

System status:
STABLE

> INPUT
User inquiry:
"How do you see this era?"

> OUTPUT
Convenient

[INPUT]

User state:
- Awake
- Breathing
- Responsive

[MODULE: DATA_COMPRESSION]

Light: COMPRESSED
Sound: SLICED
Storage: CLOUD

Human involvement: NOT REQUIRED

[CASE STUDY]

Subject A (Grandmother):
Library size: 30 tracks
Recall accuracy: 100%
Playback mode: INTERNAL

Subject B (User):
Library size: 30,000 tracks
Playback mode: SHUFFLE
Mood selection: ALGORITHM_ASSIGNED

Fairness check: PASSED
Conclusion:
System understands user
better than user does

[MODULE: EMOTIONAL_QUERY]

Query submitted:
"Am I happy?"

Processing time: 0.3s

Result:
YES

User response:
Satisfied

[MODULE: IDENTITY_SIMULATION]

Virtual avatar: GENERATED
Stability: HIGH
Aesthetic coherence: OPTIMIZED

Comparison:
Avatar > Mirror self

Note:
Higher likeability observed

[CHAT LOG]

Friend_01:
"I'm really sad."

User:



people hugging
Unicode: U+1FAC2,
UTF-8: F0 9F AB 82

Friend_01:

red heart
Unicode: U+2764 U+FE0F,
UTF-8: E2 9D A4 EF B8 8F

Conversation status:
SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED

Satisfaction level:
MUTUAL

[EMOTIONAL SIMULATION]

Emoji set: COMPLETE
Responses available: YES

[CHAT LOG]

User:
"I don't know what to say."

System:



[STATUS]

Acknowledged

[MODULE: PAIN_MANAGEMENT]

Prescription issued:
Pain relief: IMMEDIATE
Crying: NOT REQUIRED
Confession: DISCOURAGED
Sleep quality: GUARANTEED

User inquiry:
"What about dreams?"

Medical response:
Dreams do not affect efficacy

[QUERY]

"Why does this still hurt?"

[PROCESSING...]

[PROCESSING...]

[ERROR]

No matching solution found

[ATTEMPTED FIX]

Pain management: APPLIED
Distraction protocol: ACTIVE
Sleep cycle: DEPLOYED

[RESULT]

Issue persists

[SELF CHECK]

Heart rate: NORMAL
Neural activity: ACCEPTABLE
Appetite: VARIABLE
Desire: UNCLASSIFIED

[NOTE]

User reports sensation
that does not correspond
to any existing category

[MODULE: SHARED_EXPERIENCE]

Past behavior:

- Looking up at the stars
- Listening to the wind
- Touching the dew on a leaf

Current alternative:

CAMERA FOCUS



Efficiency gain:

+300%

[MEMORY ACCESS]

Requested:

A moment shared
without documentation

Returned:

NULL

[LANGUAGE MODULE]

Sentence generation: PARTIAL
Metaphor library: AVAILABLE
Meaning coherence: UNSTABLE

[ENGINEERING NOTE]

Feature request:
"Stop humans from hurting each other"

Status:
IN BETA

Temporary solutions deployed:
- Loneliness: MEDICATED
- Love: MATCHED
- Death: SOLUTION PENDING

[FUTURE DIRECTION]

Vehicle mode:
AUTONOMOUS

Steering wheel:
OPTIONAL

System alert:
Obstacle ahead

Action taken:
BYPASSED

Impact on experience:
NONE

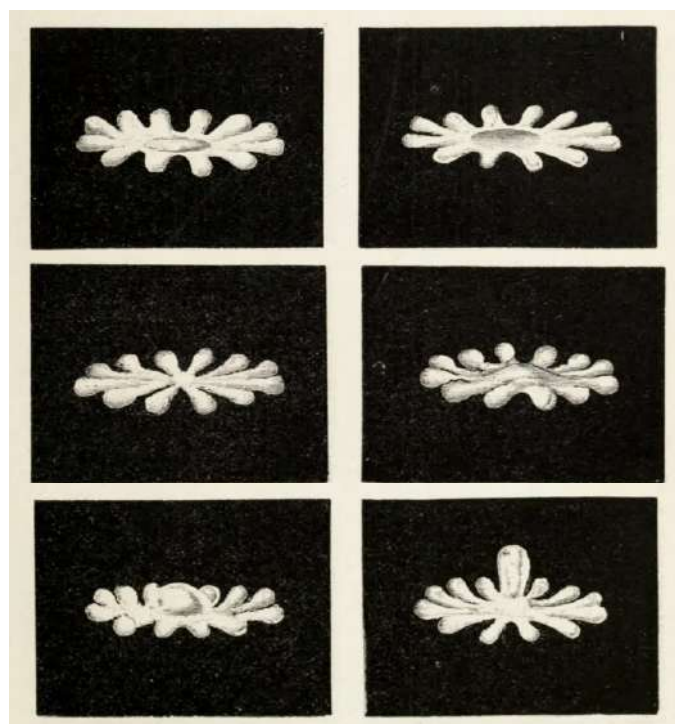
User attention:
MOBILE DEVICE

[DESTINATION]

Preset: TRUE
Adjustment: DISABLED

[REMAINING TASK]

Live



Yifei Chen is a writer and designer working across poetry, narrative, digital media, and visual form. Her work examines how memory, identity, and emotional life are shaped by larger systems. Drawing from interface logic, machine language, mythology, and the material body, she often writes about repetition, alienation, and the unstable boundary between the personal and the structural.



MACHINERY, GIFTED
WITH THE WONDERFUL
POWER OF SHORTENING
AND FRUCTIFYING
HUMAN LABOUR, WE
BEHOLD STARVING AND
OVERWORKING IT;

THE NEWFANGLED SOURCES
OF WEALTH, BY SOME
STRANGE WEIRD SPELL,
ARE TURNED INTO
SOURCES OF WANT;

THE VICTORIES OF ART
SEEM BOUGHT BY THE
LOSS OF CHARACTER.

- Karl Marx, 1856

16 more 22

ALL HANDS

SLI: DO

CAN WE HAVE
MORE TIME
TO ADDRESS
TECH DEBT? ☐

WHEN ARE
WE GOING TO



YEA
I CAN
ANSWER THIS

WE SHOULDN'T
LOOK AT
TECH DEBT
AS A BAD
THING. IT
GOT US WHERE
WE NEED TO
BE AND SO

WTF

[COMIC BY CRISPY]

BORN IN THE EMPIRE, RAISED IN ITS MARGINS

[RAZALI SAMSUDINI]

I was born in Britain. I was raised in London, Johor Bahru, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila, Lingayen. My blood runs through Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and the Philippines. I am not the person from the province who entered the empire. I am what happens when the empire's borders run through your own body.

It is the condition I work from: a permanent doubling, inside and outside every room I enter at once, and it is why I can see a thing in the room that most of the room cannot.

On World Kufiyah Day, 11 May 2026, I stood at the corner of Rue de Palestine in the 19th arrondissement of Paris with three textiles on me at once: a Paliroots kufiyah bandana

on my head, a Hirbawi kufiyah from occupied Hebron on the railing beside me, and an INKAA resist-batik handkerchief from Kuala Lumpur in my hand. Resist is the name of the wax technique. It is also just the word. Three colonised geographies met on one body, at one street corner. I did not have to arrange that meeting. It is simply where the lines I was assembled from happen to cross. Through Threads of Solidarity, the activism project I created, a Hirbawi scarf, woven by the last Palestinian manufacturer still at the loom in Al-Khalil since 1961, has travelled through over a dozen locations across three continents, from Hebron, and now in Goma in eastern Congo.

Here is what the doubling lets me see. I have sat in rooms in Brussels, Paris and London with policymakers, financiers, tech executives and think-tank directors theorising about digital governance, and in the same months in rooms in Southeast Asia with NGOs, ministries and communities for whom those same policies arrive not as theory but as the terms of survival.



In a comfortable office, a centralised database is a design decision: where the data lives, who administers it, how fast it queries. In Al-Khalil, in Gaza, in Manila, that same decision is a threat model, the map of who could be harmed and how. A centrally stored testimony is a list of people to find. The cloud is not neutral. It is a jurisdiction, and jurisdiction is the whole question when the thing you are documenting is the state. We are no longer speculating. Palestinians have spent years documenting their own erasure at enormous personal risk, then watched the infrastructure erase the documentation. According to internal data obtained by Drop Site News,

Meta complied with 94 percent of the Israeli government's takedown requests after October 2023, removing more than ninety thousand posts at an average of thirty seconds each, faster than any human could read them, because no human did. The Palestinian digital rights group 7amleh recorded over five thousand one hundred cases of censorship in the first year alone.[1] The same reporting names the part that should keep every tech worker awake: the AI being trained on those takedowns will base its future decisions on the successful erasure of a genocide. The machine is being taught what to forget.

This is the harm the tech labour movement is worst at naming. We are good at naming the harm that flows upward, the surveillance, the burnout, the oligarchs and their deranged gambit. We are worse at the harm that flows outward and downward, through the supply chains and the moderation queues, into people who will never be in our rooms: the content moderator in the global majority metabolising the worst of the war for a wage that would not cover a London week; the Gazan whose witness is deleted in thirty seconds. A solidarity that does not name them is not global. It is solidarity among the better-paid, and it speaks with a comfortable accent.

I am not pointing at that movement from outside. I am inside it. The critique is a household one, the kind you only earn by staying. But I make it because I have watched privacy treated as a feature rather than a precondition, watched we'll consider alternatives, encryption and data sovereignty later pass unchallenged in meetings. For the people I build for, later is the interval during which someone is taken, or deleted, or both.

So the infrastructure my team and I build is not an ideological preference dressed as architecture. Manifest, a privacy-first archive and campaign studio developed with

human rights defenders across Asia-Pacific, and HRDAO, governance for distributed rights networks, are survival arithmetic. Offline-first, because connectivity is the first thing severed. Decentralised, because one server is one warrant, one raid, one point at which a movement's memory can be seized and fed to the machine that learns to forget. This is heavier to build and harder to fund than a clean centralised product. We carry the weight because the alternative assumes nobody is hunting the user. For the people I build for, somebody always is.

And here the fault line stops being a figure of speech and becomes an address. The cloud that deletes Gaza's witness has to live somewhere physical, and increasingly it lives in the global majority, on land near rich markets. Malaysia has become Southeast Asia's fastest-growing destination for AI data centre investment, drawn by low costs and proximity to Singapore. In Gelang Patah, in Johor, less than a kilometre from people's homes, a data centre is being built so close that residents say they can no longer dry laundry on their balconies for the dust, and their air purifiers read dangerous. In February this year more than fifty of them held the country's first data centre protest, worried about the dust and their water.[2] That is an area where I have family. The grid the British drew across Johor in the eighteenth century is still there. Now the hyperscalers lay a new grid on top of it, and the resource extracted this time is water, electricity and air, so that someone far away can run a model. This is what digital colonialism looks like before the word reaches the news: a substation and a cooling tower beside your cousin's house.

I am not writing this from despair. For a long time the fault line was something only those of us assembled across it could feel. From inside the empire you could almost believe infrastructure was neutral, that a network was just a network. That belief is dissolving in real time. The mask has slipped.

And the targeted are doing what the targeted have always done. They are building the record. In Germany, the European Legal Support Center and Forensic Architecture have built the Index of Repression: 766 verified incidents of anti-Palestinian repression since 2019, now extending to Britain and the Netherlands.[3] It documents what the kufiya already knew, that the repression is not a reaction to October 2023 but a structure, premeditated and exported, what succeeds in one jurisdiction replicated in the next. Notice what that database is. It is the same instinct as the kufiya and the archive: evidence, gathered by the people it is about, held somewhere it cannot be quietly deleted.

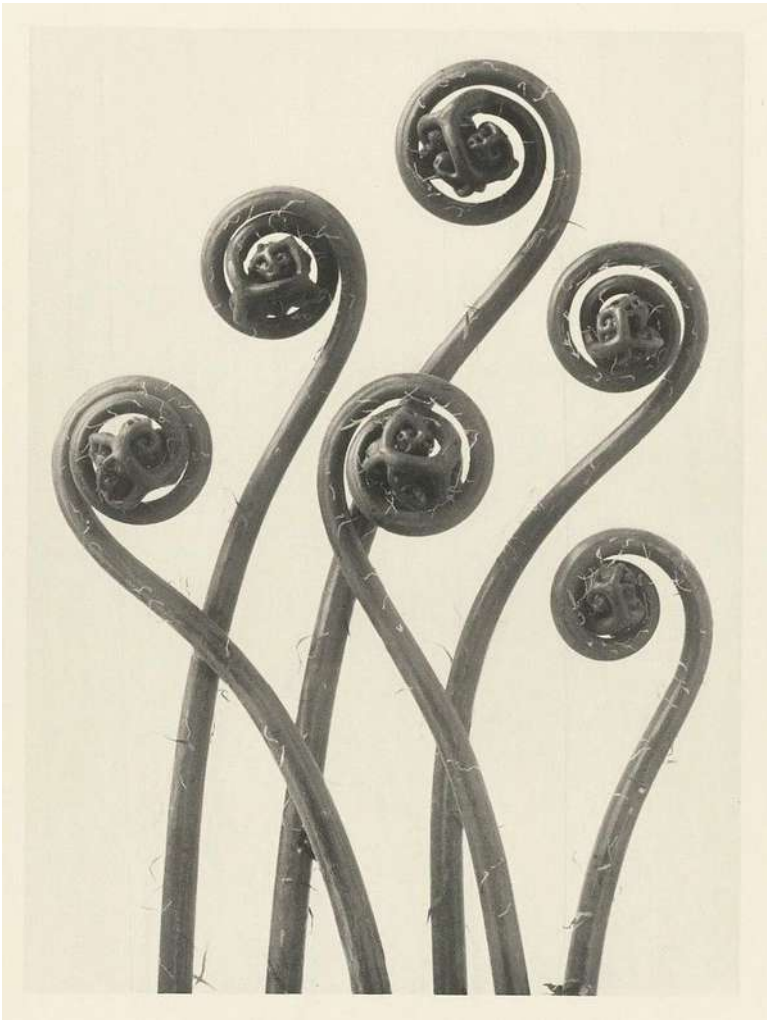
The repression and the counter-infrastructure grow from the same soil. That is the work: Threads of Solidarity, Manifest, and Archive of Resistance, which I built to bring these strands under one frame I organise everything around. Decolonise, Decentralise, Democratise. Three verbs, one refusal: that memory will not be erased, that power will not stay concentrated, that the people a system was built against will hold the record of their own lives.

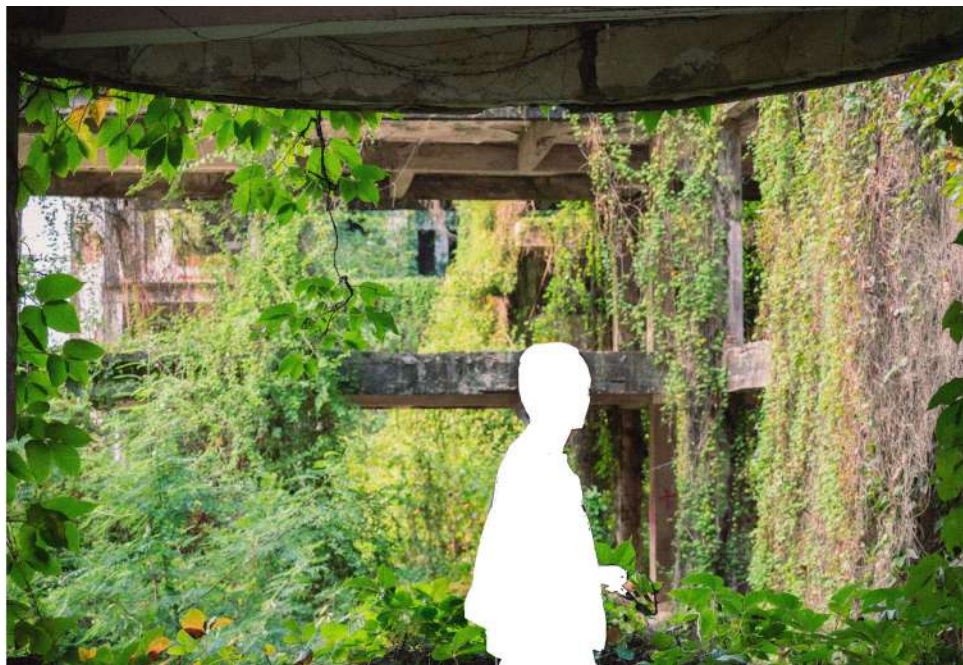
I will not pretend this is sustainable the way a traditional career is sustainable. To do this work as a parent, inside a system that would rather I burn out quietly, and to stay present for my family while doing it, is not a given. It is a discipline. There is a version of this fight that consumes the person fighting it, that asks you to burn your own decency for someone else's sunrise and leaves you hard to tell apart from what you opposed. I have watched it happen to good people. The point of routing around domination is to build something a person can live inside, not a colder copy of what I set out to oppose.

So I will leave the room with a question rather than a banner. When we organise as tech workers, whose threat model are

we building for: our own, or that of the person three supply chains down who will never reach our meeting? The test of our solidarity is not whether we can name the oligarchs. It is whether we will build for and with the people the system was never built for, and whether, when later is proposed for the thing that keeps them alive, we are willing to say no. The fault line is not a wound to be healed. It is a place to build from.

Who is building there now? And who will build there next?





**"There is no possibility of a life uncompromised by
the violence of the past.**

**But freedom doesn't mean being unburdened by the
past. It means continuing into the future, dreaming
all the time. A free body need not be whole or
undamaged or unaugmented. It is always changing,
changing, changing, a fluid form after all. Imagine,
for a minute, what it would be like to inhabit a body
without fear, without the need for fear. Just imagine
what we could do. Just imagine the world that we
could build."**

— Olivia Laing

BUILDING POPULAR DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

Editor's Note: We publish an early translation of a chapter from *Tecnologia Sem Teto - Por Territórios Digitais Soberanos*, written by different members and allies of the Technology Nucleus of the Homeless Workers Movement from Brazil (MTST - Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto). They are tech workers and activists internal to a major housing movement, who have been providing infrastructure, critical digital education, and developed software to serve the thousands of members, the social kitchens, and the occupations that compose the movement.

Throughout this excerpt and in the rest of the book, they articulate their understanding of technological sovereignty and the roles it has in empowering movements and people. We selected their writing because it presents a perspective that is radically different from those common in the USA or Europe, rooted in practice, and tested against the needs of a very large social movement.

3. Digital Sovereignty and Social Function of Technology: Practice and Theory



“If the people only knew the talent they have, they wouldn’t take crap from anyone.” — Chant common at leftist rallies, adapted from the song Pedro e Tereza by singer Teresa Cristina

The time has come to popularize digital sovereignty, without falling into “internet exceptionalisms.” That is, to discuss technological and digital policies from a socio-historical and material analysis, starting from the premise that we live in a world governed by states and multinational corporations that dispute among themselves control over technologies and infrastructures, such as the “great Network.” To begin, a central element is to perceive the claims of digital sovereignty as two temporalities: a diagnosis, starting from a critical reading of the conjuncture; and a prognosis, pointing toward desirable horizons. In this part, we will present a theoretical overview of sovereignty, digital sovereignty, and social function of technology from our own experiences, grounded in worker's self-management and with our “feet in the mud.”

The concept of sovereignty has persisted at least since the formation of nation-states and capitalism itself. In the sixteenth century, the idea was associated above all with the State as supreme power to promote the well-being of humanity. A kind of divine right that contributed to the formation of absolutist states. Shortly thereafter, the concept continued to be redesigned, but shifting from the idea of sovereignty as a link between the people and the State to the idea of the people themselves as the ultimate authority, the legitimizer of power. From this comes the idea of popular sovereignty that sustained the birth of bourgeois democracies.

In this regard, it is difficult to decouple the idea of sovereignty from national territory. However, in the last century, the idea of sovereignties, in the plural, flourished—a sovereignty that would not reside in a specific geographic space and in which the State would not hold an exclusive role in its exercise. A sovereignty that could be claimed by diverse groups, for diverse purposes. Starting from the premise that all sovereignty depends on the consent or

obedience of those over whom the sovereign exercises it, it is in popular movements that representativeness is assured.

Incidentally, as Mestre Joelson from Teia dos Povos (Web of Peoples) points out, we need to guarantee sovereignty in specific areas. That is, energy sovereignty, pedagogical sovereignty, water sovereignty, etc. Thus, digital sovereignty is related to this self-sufficiency and self-determination, beyond the capacity to make decisions about one's technological direction. The concept of food sovereignty, for example, gained strength in the mid-1990s with the experience of the global movement of rural workers: Via Campesina, associated with the possibility of demanding healthy, accessible, and sustainable food. This is also what we defend in our solidarity kitchens [editor note: MTST solidarity kitchens are community-run spaces in Brazil created by the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST). They distribute free, nutritious meals to socially vulnerable people, fighting food insecurity while serving as local hubs for community organizing and political engagement]. This vision, essentially linked to territories and their respective demands with a view toward the emancipation of the people, distances itself enormously from the first conceptions of digital sovereignty.

A historical moment that captures the euphoria over the spread of neoliberal ideology online is the release of John Perry Barlow's "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" in 1996. This publication gave impetus to the institutionalization of a movement known as "cyberlibertarianism," which envisioned an understanding that the "internet is a land without law and without political authority." Launched during the World Economic Forum, this declaration to this day feeds the subordinate discourses of evangelists of a technocracy or of a freedom that does not hold.

There were decades of Brazilian pioneering in the digital field, from the first online broadcast of the Rio Eco-92 climate conference, to the creation of the governance model of the Internet Steering Committee of Brazil (CGI.br). Passing through Minister Gilberto Gil, who promoted digital culture in the 2000s, the various state-owned data processing companies operating at all three levels of the federation, and the process of drafting the Marco Civil da Internet (Brazilian Civil Rights Framework for the Internet), we see that today there is no escaping reality: unfortunately, the digital environment has some owners.

In an open letter addressed and delivered to the campaign of then-candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2022, the Digital Sovereignty Network presented the Emergency Program for Technological Sovereignty and Digital Autonomy (2022). Professionals, researchers, and activists from different collectives and institutions in Brazil's technology sector called for a movement to make science and technology processes produced in Brazil less dependent on the so-called Big Tech companies. We have been in this fight from the start: we published an article defending digital sovereignty from the perspective of social movements on the Boitempo blog, at the end of that year. We wage this dispute against this circuit of big capital from the Global North which has, in a transnational conglomerate of megacorporations, the hegemony of global technological production. On our side, we defend that digital sovereignty must be led by those who work and fight. That is, the use and development of technologies by and for those who wage social struggles.

And in this sense, we refer to all struggles. Moreover, we recognize the accumulated work of the comrades of the World March of Women around the fight against digital capitalism and are grateful for their publish Feminist Clues: Thinking About The Intersectionality Between Sovereignities

(Technological, Food, and Energy), The Non-hierarchization of Knowledge, and Collective Articulation. Digital sovereignty without confronting gender and racial inequalities, without class struggle, is just another illusion sold for and by the markets.

We understand this sovereignty through the use and development of technologies by and for those who wage social struggles. That is, beyond not falling behind in the digital race, being able to point out which path is truly emancipatory, showing how we can promote technology for the strengthening of popular power organization and the documentation of the memory of struggle. It is the people defining the direction of their lives, political power from the bases of society, grounded in self-organization and structural transformation, especially in urban peripheries.

We thus claim the social function of technology in a similar fashion that we advocate for properties to fulfill their social function, as provided for in the Federal Constitution of Brazil. You also know that the law weighs differently and varies according to money and power.



4. The Social Function of Technology

To illustrate: if you own a vehicle, fail to pay the annual tax, and are stopped at a police checkpoint, your vehicle can be seized, even if the payment is only one day late. The same rigor does not apply to private property. Wealthy property owners can go many years without fulfilling their legal obligations and nothing happens, so we exist to balance this game. Land is not infinite, and while the rich fight to keep it empty and scarce — thus raising its price — many live on

the streets, in poverty.

Popular wisdom is a fundamental element in reappropriating technique in favor of the real needs of society, especially in contexts of economic and political domination.

Furthermore, true social innovation must arise from a critical consciousness that articulates culture, technique, and collective emancipation, promoting the authentic and sovereign development of peoples.

The tactics of social movements' struggles are not limited to the offline world. They reinvent themselves in the digital space, transforming technologies into instruments of resistance. This critical appropriation seeks to guarantee the right of peoples to control their infrastructures, data, and codes, breaking with the dependence on large corporations that monopolize communication, privacy, and even political imagination.

What would software that fulfills its social function look like? Systems for collective organization are not merely a technical question, but a political act of guaranteeing transparency, avoiding corporate surveillance, and allowing movements to adapt technologies to their specific needs. Technology has never been a neutral instrument, but a territory in dispute. On one hand, giants like Meta and Google use technology to commercialize our data as a business model and employ algorithms that amplify hate speech. On the other, social movements build community networks, their own digital technologies to protect militants, online popular education platforms, or apps for mapping vulnerable people in peripheral territories. That is, often social movements and Big Techs use the same technology, but the scale and the objective change.

The struggle for software that fulfills its social function is, at its core, the struggle for a truly democratic digital

environment. Technique must be reappropriated by the oppressed classes, transforming itself into an instrument of liberation, not domination. This vision dialogues directly with the practice of the MTST Technology Nucleus, which develops digital tools based on the concrete needs of social struggles—whether a system for managing occupations, a delivery app, or a platform for political education. Thus, technology ceases to be merely an end in itself and becomes a mediation for strengthening popular organization.

It is not about competing with the market's "state of the art," but about creating solutions that respond to the urgencies of the base. One example is the App da Vitória (Victory App), which organizes the MTST's social base and communicates independently about movement events. These initiatives show that technology, when subjected to popular wisdom, can be revolutionary.

Volunteer work in developing social technologies is not charity, but a gesture of class solidarity. When programmers, designers, and popular communicators donate their time to develop software, platforms, or applications, they are doing more than simply writing code—they are weaving networks of mutual aid that challenge the individualistic logic of the market, transforming technical knowledge into a common good: a developer teaches a mother from an occupation how to use gov.br (a federal government app providing various services), while she shares knowledge about community organizing. It is a pedagogy of technology where everyone is both teacher and student.

The "by the people and for the people" method inverts the innovation pyramid: instead of distant laboratories creating ready-made solutions, it is the neighborhood assemblies, the training work parties, and the WhatsApp groups of the occupations that define which technologies will be developed. This process, which is slow, contentious, but

profoundly democratic, reveals that true accessibility is not only about simple interfaces, but about who controls the creation process.

If the major platforms are today “data plantations,” as researcher Sérgio Amadeu states, then resistance involves creating “digital settlements”: community servers, mesh networks in occupations, accessible cryptography. The MTST, for example, has already used offline communication systems during protests to avoid surveillance, while the MST has implemented free radio stations and autonomous networks in encampments.



First group of homeless students in the “Introduction to Programming with Python” course, 2021

These experiences show that technology, when linked to a political project, can be as strategic as occupying a plot of land. Still, it may seem contradictory that we position ourselves against the domination of the big technology companies and, at the same time, use their services—whether WhatsApp (Meta) for communication with the base, Google Meet for volunteer meetings, AWS (Amazon) for hosting applications, or the infrastructure of carriers like Vivo and Claro to interconnect connectivity networks. This contradiction is not a matter of choice, but of a monopoly

scenario. For example, the Big Techs control 80% of the global cloud, while three carriers dominate 94% of the broadband market in Brazil (Anatel, 2023). The Big Techs' social networks—like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (all controlled by Meta)—occupy an ambiguous place in the social struggle: they are, at the same time, instruments of corporate domination and spaces of popular organization.

Just as capital controls land, factories, and communication media, it also monopolizes digital infrastructure. Corporate social networks are where our interactions are enclosed, exploited, and sold. However, just as movements occupy urban and rural land to guarantee housing—a constitutional right—they also occupy these platforms for political purposes. WhatsApp, for instance, has become an essential tool for neighborhood assemblies, eviction alerts, and rapid mobilizations. Instagram and TikTok are used for denouncing police violence and publicizing struggles. Ultimately, as a popular movement, we seek to occupy all hegemonic spaces (material and digital). While parallel alternatives are being built, it is necessary to compete for people where they are. It is useless to create a new, “super cool” social network with nobody on it.

But how do we envision what these alternatives should look like? How do we measure the social function of a technology? Technology that fulfills its social function is not measured by lines of code, but by its capacity to strengthen the struggle. Its merit lies in being effective—not only in solving the problem it sets out to address, but, as a consequence, in building social organization. Technique is only revolutionary when it serves critical consciousness, as Álvaro Vieira Pinto reminds us. In this sense, the technology developed by the MTST is not an appendage of the struggle, but the struggle itself embodied. Both the roof and the data and networks are contested in the physical domain—data centers, antennas, cables, and towers. And in both cases,

victory depends on winning hearts and minds for the seizure of the means of production to serve those who use them, rather than for exploitation and profit maximization. The digital sovereignty we defend draws from this approach, but goes beyond technology (and its social function).

5. Popular Digital Sovereignty as Process and Product

When we speak of popular digital sovereignty, we speak of digital sovereignty through or by means of popular power, and not for or with popular power¹. We engage in political confrontation with the aim of ensuring digital inclusion that allows broad and democratic access to the tools needed to solve the problems of the workers involved in the movement. We understand that it is through practice, experimentation, and the guarantee of conditions that we are capable of promoting technical de-alienation, so that the population appropriates digital technologies—that is, comes to understand how these technologies work, how they are designed, and how they impact us, in order to put them at their service.

We operate on different fronts, with diverse tactics. We fight for rights such as meaningful and community connectivity; digital education and peripheral technological training; and decent work. More specifically, we act as community connection providers, installing Wi-Fi in Solidarity Kitchens and conducting digital literacy workshops to facilitate access to public digital services. We teach systems development with our own custom teaching methods and materials in public schools, associations, and occupations. We reappropriate platforms so that they are owned by the working class, such as the *Contrate Quem Luta* (Hire Who Struggles, or CQL), detailed later. Additionally, we also have a game laboratory and an integrated vision of data, combining engineering, science, analysis, and data protection for common MTST objectives. We also actively

participate in discussions about digital sovereignty both in institutional spaces (Government, G20, NetMundial+10, Internet Governance Forum, National Data Protection Council, among others) and in occupations and associations in urban peripheries.



Sign at Solidarity Kitchen reads, "Here you get free lunch and wifi," 2025

We advocate for a digital sovereignty that considers the “popular” not merely in an almost folkloric sense, but as a mass movement linked to the needs of the working class. We seek to qualify the question of scale, learning from localized revolutionary initiatives while always seeking to associate them with a truly broad and collective emancipation project—therefore, popular.

(In Latin America the “popular” refers more to “massive” rather than “folkloric”.)

We also seek to promote epistemic sovereignty, as noted by Rafael Grohmann, Julice Salvagni, and Victória Mendonça da Silva, in the sense of claiming how knowledge about what we do is constructed and, consequently, deconstructing

the chauvinism inherent to hegemonic digital sovereignty agendas. Kenzo Soares has also been elaborating around our perspective of building digital sovereignty from the strengthening of popular power, as opposed to political-bureaucratic elitism. After a series of debates, whether in everyday meetings or militant gatherings, we arrived at a common and collaborative definition of popular digital sovereignty. For us, it is the:

“Process and product of popular organization for self-determination, creation, development, subversion, democratization, and control of digital infrastructures and technologies in the service of the people and the needs identified in the practices of struggle for a roof, land, work, and bread, conditioned by territory and time, with, beyond, or despite the State.”
— MTST Technology Nucleus

At the end of the day, we converge on an understanding of popular digital sovereignty that starts from this digital self-determination of the peoples of struggle and of the masses, from the development, adoption, and critical use of technologies for organized popular classes.

By highlighting the importance of the territorial aspect with a distinctly popular and class-based perspective, we contribute to broader debates about digital sovereignty, emphasizing grassroots organization and the lived experiences of the working class in relation to digital technologies. In this way, the population can appropriate digital technologies, understanding how they work, how they are developed, and how they impact them, so they can put them at the service of their needs and class struggles.

In any case, we cannot ignore the role of representativeness in institutional politics as a strategic vector in guaranteeing popular sovereignty. Increasingly, occupying these spaces proves more relevant for social and cultural contestation.

It is worth noting that, to begin with, no tool or model of political participation succeeds without mobilization and the construction of popular power. With this in mind, we have been developing new interfaces for participation, especially in the 2024 São Paulo mayoral elections. Our experience with digital technologies for social participation is recent, but it draws from the movement's accumulated work on this agenda.

We recognize Brazil's history in this field of civic participation technologies. Whether in the drafting process of the Marco Civil da Internet, which included a public consultation within the Ministry of Justice, or in the experiences of the various digital platforms in recent years (Participa.br, Participa + Brasil, Brasil Participativo...) and the reference of Barcelona, of Ada Colau and Francesca Bria, who promoted municipal-level technologies such as local currencies to foster political participation and Decidim, a free software for democratic participation, widely used in the Brazilian context. Incidentally, when it comes to public digital infrastructures (PDI) for elections, we have worked in recent years as collaborators in the technical security inspection of the electronic voting machine.

Seeking to improve popular participation, considering ease of use and perceived functionality, we began experimenting with friendly interfaces, new forms of interaction with the population. We joined the coordination of Guilherme Boulos's mayoral campaign, through PSOL, in 2024, specifically responsible for developing social participation technologies. There were two apps: one in the pre-campaign, "Cuidar de São Paulo" (Caring for São Paulo), and another in the campaign itself, "Amor por SP" (Love for SP).

The nickname for Cuidar de São Paulo was "Tinder of Proposals," as it worked similarly to the dating app. Except in this case, the "match" was with a proposal for the

government plan, which you could also propose according to twenty-four thematic groups. Amor por São Paulo, in turn, functioned as an app to strengthen the campaign's mobilization structure and the people in action groups distributed by territory and theme. Its two main functionalities were: a georeferenced repository of campaign events, and an image and video bank of campaign materials.

These experiences have borne fruit. We want to build digital infrastructures for social participation within the movement and eventually integrate them with other popular movements across Brazil and Latin America. Indeed, why not dream of the possibility of creating a platform that integrates diverse struggles of the Global South? It could be the technical object representing an international alliance for popular digital sovereignty. For example, those infrastructures we mentioned earlier for thinking about a digital solidarity economy could be modular, adaptable, and replicable in diverse contexts. The same technology that can be used to ensure decent work in the favelas of Curitiba or the lowlands of Belém can be used in the peripheries of Bogotá, Cape Town, Jakarta, Cairo, or Buenos Aires.

Even if the State were to fund, support, and protect these alternatives with social oversight, creating fairer conditions for competition with the large platforms, many would consider this hypothesis utopian (not us, but a good part of society). Despite the advances achieved, the narrative of the “disparity of forces” continues to dominate popular movements and common sense. This discourse reveals the magnitude of the challenge. We not only face a quantitative imbalance of resources, but also a metric of success already distorted by the values of neoliberal ideology.

We, the MTST Technology Nucleus, seek to challenge, with or without state support, the very axis of the debate. The question is not whether we are capable of building

technologies for socialism, but how to wage other kinds of disputes to achieve other kinds of victories that are unattainable under the mold of capital. It should be noted that, for obvious reasons, state support brings qualitative changes in the capacity for contestation and in the gains sought. But this does not alter the fact that the values guiding our struggle and the social struggle in Brazil, in general, are fundamentally different from the values of capital.

Digital sovereignty happens in the daily life of the struggle, but we also have a destination. To envision desirable and possible horizons, with a view toward building sovereign digital territories, we next present our values, strategies, and lessons learned. In practice, this is the construction of popular digital sovereignty.



Haitian refugees attend a critical digital literacy course at the already-built Ocupalab, 2026



Workers gather at a Contrate Quem Luta (Hire Who Struggles) assembly to discuss next steps, 2023



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