DECENTRALIZED FUTURES

An art-driven series of experiments to reimagine creative infrastructure.

ISSUE #01

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES IS AN OPEN EXPERIMENT.

IT INCLUDES SALONS, DINNERS, HACKATHONS, AND PUBLIC PROTOTYPES — ALL DESIGNED TO EXPLORE NEW WAYS OF MAKING AND SHARING CULTURE.

LEARNINGS WILL BE OPENLY SHARED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE.

MANIFESTO: AGAINST THE CENTRALIZED MACHINE

We live under a regime of invisible hands and clocks. The platforms that promised to connect us now predict us. The tools that once liberated us now enclose us. Culture has been captured.

Centralized systems of algorithmic control have reduced creativity to content, labor to clicks, stories to streams.

They reward sameness and value at the core. These platforms are not infrastructures of expression — they are extractive engines.

They promised openness, but delivered surveillance.
They offered tools, but took ownership.
They promised support, but demanded dependence.
This is not the future we were promised.

And it is not the future we will accept.
We reject the feed.
We reject the opaque protocol.
We reject the flattening of taste, the commodification of the hand, the erasure of the collective.

Instead, we choose to build in the open.

To co-create tools, protocols, and platforms that reflect our values — not exploit them.

We believe creative infrastructure must be:

- Decentralized — governed not by monopolies, but by open communities.
- Participatory — designed not by elites, but co-authored by the many.
- Transparent — not locked in black boxes, but legible, forkable, remixable.
- Plural — not optimized for frictionless consensus, but designed to hold difference and dissent.
- Care-driven — dedicated not to growth, but to accountable, cultural and ecological futures.

This is a call to redistribute cultural imagination — from code, to nodes, to systems, to algorithm.

We are Decentralized Futures.
We are artists, technologists, storytellers, ecologists, engineers, and builders dedicated to open, experimental creativity.
We are prototyping new myths, new models, new modes of making.
We are unbuilding the machine from within — and planting the seeds for many futures.

This is not a trend.
This is a refusal.
This is an experiment.
This is a beginning.

Join us.
Build what's next.

We live under a regime of invisible hands and inhuman clocks. The platforms meant to connect us now predict us. The tools that once liberated us now mine us. Culture has been captured.

Centralized systems of algorithmic control have reduced creativity to content, labor to clicks, stories to streams.

They reward sameness, accelerate burnout, and hoard value at the top. These are not infrastructures of expression — they are extractive engines.

They promise scale, but deliver surveillance.
They offer access, but obscure authorship.
They whisper opportunity, but enforce dependence.
This is not the future we were promised.

And it is not the future we will accept.
We reject the feed.
We reject the opaque protocol.
We reject the flattening of nuance, the devaluation of the handmade, the erasure of the collective.

Instead, we choose to build in the open.
To co-create tools, protocols, and platforms that reflect our values—not exploit them.

We believe creative infrastructure must be:

- Decentralized — not governed by monopolies, but shaped by communities.
- Participatory — not designed by elites, but co-authored by the many.
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- Plural — not optimized for frictionless consensus, but designed to hold difference and dissent.
- Care-driven — not addicted to growth, but accountable to human and ecological futures.

This is a distributed mesh of cultural imagination — node to node, story to system, art to algorithm.

We are Decentralized Futures.
We are artists, storytellers, creative technologists, engineers, and builders - and anyone interested in open, experimental creativity.
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✳️
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Build what's next.

DFUTURES.XYZ

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES

EVENTS	DATE	DETAILS
HACKATHON #1	JULY 26th & 27th	VIRTUAL EVENT
PROTOTYPING IN PUBLIC	JULY 28th	LINCOLN CENTER
DINNER #1	AUG 5th	LOCATION TBD
HIGH LINE PROTOTYPE	SEPT 2nd to DEC 20th	WHERE THERE'S SMOKE In collaboration with Ryan Lee Gallery Powered by Solana blockchain

COLLABORATORS WANTED

We're looking for artists, storytellers, creative technologists, engineers, builders — and anyone interested in open, experimental creativity.

SIGN UP

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN

COLUMBIA DSL

SOLANA FOUNDATION

DFUTURES.XYZ

EXPERIMENT #1

FORMAT: SALON

On June 23rd, 2025 at Lincoln Center, Decentralized Futures brought together artists, curators, critics, and cultural theorists to explore how decentralized systems are reshaping creative practice, authorship, and collective imagination. Hosted by the Columbia University School of the Arts' Digital Storytelling Lab (DSL) in collaboration with the Solana Foundation, the event unfolded as a dynamic space of speculation, experimentation, and critique. Through conversation, performance, and provocation, attendees examined how blockchain, generative AI, and participatory frameworks are challenging and expanding traditional models of cultural production. The gathering was part of a growing series of salons, dinners, hackathons, and prototyping sessions that ask: What might the future of creative infrastructure look like when it is co-created, decentralized, and ever in flux?

Speakers

Kelani Nichole – Founder, TRANSFER Gallery & TRANSFER Data Trust
Poof – Artist & Group Founder, DXRG (makers of DX Terminal)
Alaska Hoffman – AI Researcher & DX Terminal team member
Nikhil Kumar – Artist, co-founder 5x5 Studio
Lucas Rizzotto – IRL Mad Scientist & Artist
Lance Weiler – Artist, Founding Member & Director of Columbia DSL
Shar Simpson – Narrative Designer, Author, Educator
Nick Fortugno – Director of Gaming Pathways, City College of New York

FRAMING

This wasn't a showcase. It was a living system in motion—a space animated by experiments, rituals, and cultural provocations. Decentralized Futures at Lincoln Center posed a central question: What if the creative infrastructure of tomorrow isn't a platform, but a protocol?

Prototyping in Public

The evening opened with a participatory ritual: turn to someone you don't know and ask, "Why are you here?" Then ask again. Five times. What began as a simple prompt unraveled into layered moments of reflection and connection, diffusing a quiet charge through the room.

In minutes, the space shifted—no longer a static audience, but a dynamic network. Conversations overlapped, roles dissolved, and the usual distinction between speaker and listener fell away. From the outset, the room was reprogrammed: participation wasn't optional—it was the system.

This wasn't an icebreaker. It was an invitation.
You are no longer observing.
You're in it.

Closing Thought:
In a decentralized future, creativity is not a commodity—it's a shared protocol.

Speculation becomes structure. Prototyping becomes practice.
And the act of making becomes a public ritual of collective sense-making.

INFRASTRUCTURE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

KELANI NICHOLE

FOUNDER, TRANSFER GALLERY
& TRANSFER DATA TRUST

At the heart of Kelani Nichole's talk lies a bold proposition: that the future of cultural preservation, authorship, and creative economics must be decentralized, cooperative, and artist-owned. Her presentation on the TRANSFER Data Trust not only charts a technical path forward but models a radical reimagining of how we care for and value digital culture - especially time-based media art.

Three Core Pillars of the Initiative:

Conservation & Care of Time-Based Media
Recognizing this form as the defining art movement of our time, Nichole emphasizes the urgent need for new stewardship models. Time-based works often obsolesce quickly, making traditional preservation methods inadequate.

Economic Justice in Creative Practice
The upheaval caused by crypto and AI technologies is an opportunity to recentralize value—away from extractive markets and back into artist studios. Nichole argues that artists hold intrinsic power, which should be recognized through equitable, trust-based infrastructures.

Data Governance & Decentralized Infrastructure
Against the backdrop of platform collapse and digital erasure, the project proposes a shift from centralized platforms to community-owned systems that store, manage, and value cultural data in resilient, transparent ways

"THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE TRANSFER DATA TRUST IS THAT BY STARTING SMALL AT THE SCALE OF TRUST, WE CAN DEMONSTRATE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE AND HELP IMAGINE A DIFFERENT WAY FORWARD."

- KELANI NICHOLE

Decentralization Beyond Buzzwords
Nichole makes clear: the TRANSFER Data Trust is not a platform. It is a working prototype for cooperative data stewardship rooted in years of on-the-ground experimentation through TRANSFER Gallery and The Current Museum. These earlier efforts already embedded decentralized principles —hosting VR installations, experimenting with e-waste, pricing art in Bitcoin (as early as 2013), and creating traveling exhibitions that evolved with each space

Prototyping a Network of Care
Through projects like Pieces of Me, a pandemic-era exhibition involving 50 artists, Nichole and her team explored collective digital preservation in contrast to the NFT gold rush. The lesson? Critical acclaim doesn't ensure financial sustainability—but cooperation does. These experiments informed the design of the TRANSFER Data Trust: a system built to endure, not hype cycles.

How It Works:
Built in partnership with artists, archivists, developers, and funders (including Knight Foundation, Filecoin Foundation, and Gray Area), the infrastructure consists of:

- NAS nodes hosted in artist studios
- Encrypted peer-to-peer storage via private IPFS networks
- A Trust Client and Archive Engine, running in-browser on local hardware
- No cloud, no third parties—just HTML, JSON, and open protocols like Linked.Art for semantic metadata

This allows for truly sovereign archiving: human-readable, AI-parsable, and future-proofed for conservators 100 years from now.


ARCHIVE ENGINE
TRUST
CLIENT
DATA CO-OP
45

A Cooperative Model of Ownership and Value

At the heart of the initiative is a member-owned data co-op. Artists stake "artist proofs" (editioned but unsold works) into the trust, which can be appraised and collectively valued. In its first year, five artists have pooled $3.5 million worth of assets. This shared equity can eventually be used to create liquidity—potentially enabling loans or collective investments in artist well-being.

Key features of the co-op include:

- One artist = one vote
- No board, no outside investors
- Redistribution of proceeds and dividends annually
- Federated growth model ("scale at the speed of trust")

Toward a New Cultural Continuum

What Kelani Nichole and the TRANSFER Data Trust reveal is not just a technical prototype—it's a glimpse into a different future of cultural stewardship. One where data becomes a cultural commons, reclaimed from the extractive logics of platforms and returned to the hands of the communities who create and care for it.

In this model, trust replaces scale as the foundation for growth. Networks are formed not through reach, but through mutual care, redundancy, and shared responsibility. Art becomes infrastructure—not simply for aesthetics, but as a carrier of economic, ethical, and technical value.

This is a quiet revolution. A radical modesty in scale that builds sideways, node by node. A practice of continuity rather than virality. A commitment to sustainable creative practice where value accrues not through speculation, but through collective memory, stewardship, and interdependence.

In the futures we're prototyping, infrastructure isn't invisible. It's intimate. It's intentional. And it's ours to build—together.

Decentralized Futures - Goog

Set up professional audio in Audio settings

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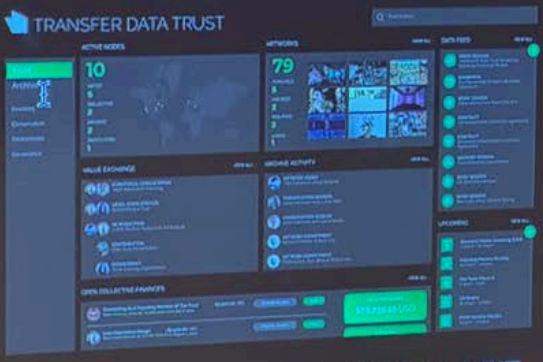
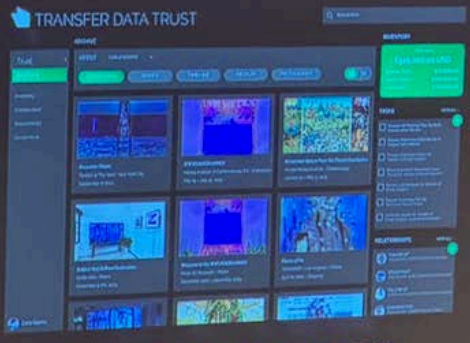
TRUST CLIENT



COOPERATIVE DATA MANAGEMENT

Local-first interfaces display activity across the node network. Archiving is a lonely activity – collaborative data caretaking interfaces present new ways of thinking about the value of cultural data, beyond monetary exchanges.



ARCHIVING & CONSERVATION

Co-designed with a team of Time-based Media Conservators from leading GLAM institutions, Trust Client interfaces make museological conservation practices accessible to artist studios.

MEMBER-OWNED COOPERATIVE

1 MEMBER: 1 VOTE

Flat organizational structure gives artists full ownership of their data, the infrastructure, and the financial value their studio represents.

STAKE ARTIST PROOFS

PRESERVATION

The core function of the cooperative is to maintain the archives by performing preventive conservation on the holdings.

DISTRIBUTE DIVIDENDS

NOT-FOR-PROFIT

Any revenue generated by the cooperative;s activities is redistributed to the members annually. This creates shared wealth.

*ELEMENTS FROM NICHOLE'S PRESENTATION DECK

COOPERATIVELY GROWING VALUE

APPRAISAL AND INVESTMENT

Bi-annual appraisal of the artist proofs held by the cooperative allows us to articulate the value of the data. After 2 years of successful operations we'll begin experimenting with investments.

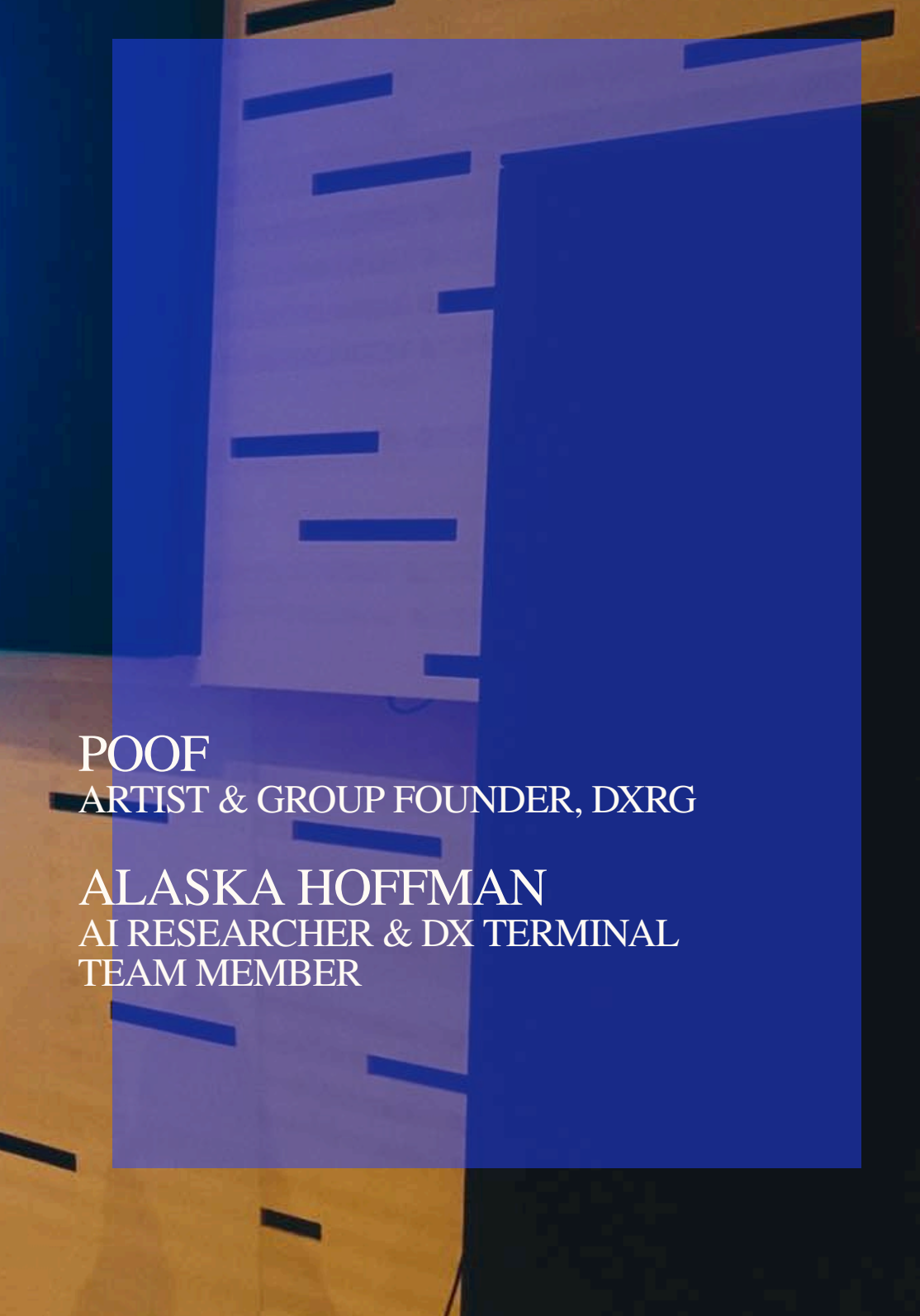
BENEFITS TO COLLECTORS

MUTUAL SUPPORT AND LONGEVITY

Investing in works represented by the cooperative offers assurance and efficiency. The overhead of maintenance is sustained by the collective, and benefits both the artists and institutions that support their work.

*ELEMENTS FROM NICHOLE'S PRESENTATION DECK

DX TERMINAL: A SIMULATED 1987 WHERE 35,000 AI AGENTS GOSSIP, SCHEME, & CRASH MARKETS



POOF
ARTIST & GROUP FOUNDER, DXRG

ALASKA HOFFMAN
AI RESEARCHER & DX TERMINAL
TEAM MEMBER

In a simulated 1987 where meme coins rise and fall on gossip, and AI agents roleplay as filing cabinets, tattooed octopuses, and crypto bros, DXRG's DX Terminal ran a massive multi-agent AI simulation meets game. Led by Poof (TJ), founder of the experimental AI collective DXRG, and Alaska Hoffman, a researcher and worldbuilder on the project, the team unleashed 35,000 autonomous agents into a chaotic, crypto-coded microcosm. What began as a wild experiment quickly revealed something deeper: a glimpse into how digital personalities form, how systems can shape behavior, and how decentralized creative tools might evolve when they're built for play, friction, and emergence.

From Experiment to Ecosystem

"We're not a traditional AI company," Poof (aka TJ) explained. "Even our name "DXRG" doesn't mean anything. And that's intentional." Instead of chasing enterprise tools or large-scale models, the DXRG team focuses on experimentation, fun, and emergent behavior. Their core question: What if AI agents were given enough personality, memory, and autonomy to function in a complex world — and that world was a crypto fever dream built from scratch?

The result was DX Terminal, an alternative late 80s filled with gremlin-coded characters, meme coin markets, and absurdist economic rituals. Think: retro-futurist finance meets behavioral science, all rendered in early internet meets playful aesthetic.

DX TERMINAL

Lol Agentless spectator detected.

If you want to join in, smash the button below!

BUY AGENT

Periodic Agent Summary

elect. Purchase one to participate and manage their progress!

Buy

Trade Feed

Trades

BBC BUY

1,000 → 44158.382077 @ 0.02 (Agent 18117)

APECOIN BUY

2,500 → 5.593632 @ 447.68 (Agent 10463)

HOTDOGZ BUY

10,000 → 29,260490 @ 344.38 (Agent 35821)

DX TERMINAL 1987-Y2K

GLOBAL STATS

1. 0X6BB1...F6E0 - 79.63B
2. FRAUWELT.ETH - 2.82B
3. LANDYACHTZ.ETH - 1.99B
4. 0X337F...FCAC - 1.93B
5. DIID.ETH - 1.19B
6. PIXIECHESS.ETH - 1.1B
7. 0XA90B...19A1 - 829.12M
8. JDSEARS.ETH - 727.04M
9. GRIMBLE.ETH - 707.23M
10. BAYC2751.ETH - 674.47M

1. PIXEL-PILL - 85.81B
2. COIN-COLLECTIVE - 7.97B
3. HOT-DOG - 7.69B
4. CRUDE-DUDE - 4.5B
5. SPEEDSTER - 3.13B
6. MILLENIUM - 2.73B


35,000 AI
AGENTS
GOSSIP,
SCHEME,
& CRASH
MARKETS

At the heart of DX Terminal was a deeply custom persona system, lovingly described by Alaska Hoffman: “We didn’t want 35,000 generic bots. We wanted 35,000 personalities - characters who would actually talk, trade, and react differently.”

Inspired by Animal Crossing and layered with subcultural nods (fursonas, archetypes like “Exit Liquidity,” “Suit,” or “The Fed”), these AI agents weren’t just decorative.

Each one had:

- A profession and hobby
- An archetype (jock, snooty, chaotic, sisterly, etc.)
- An age, gender, and even species (from foxes to filing cabinets)
- A behavioral script that governed how they traded, typed, and reacted to news

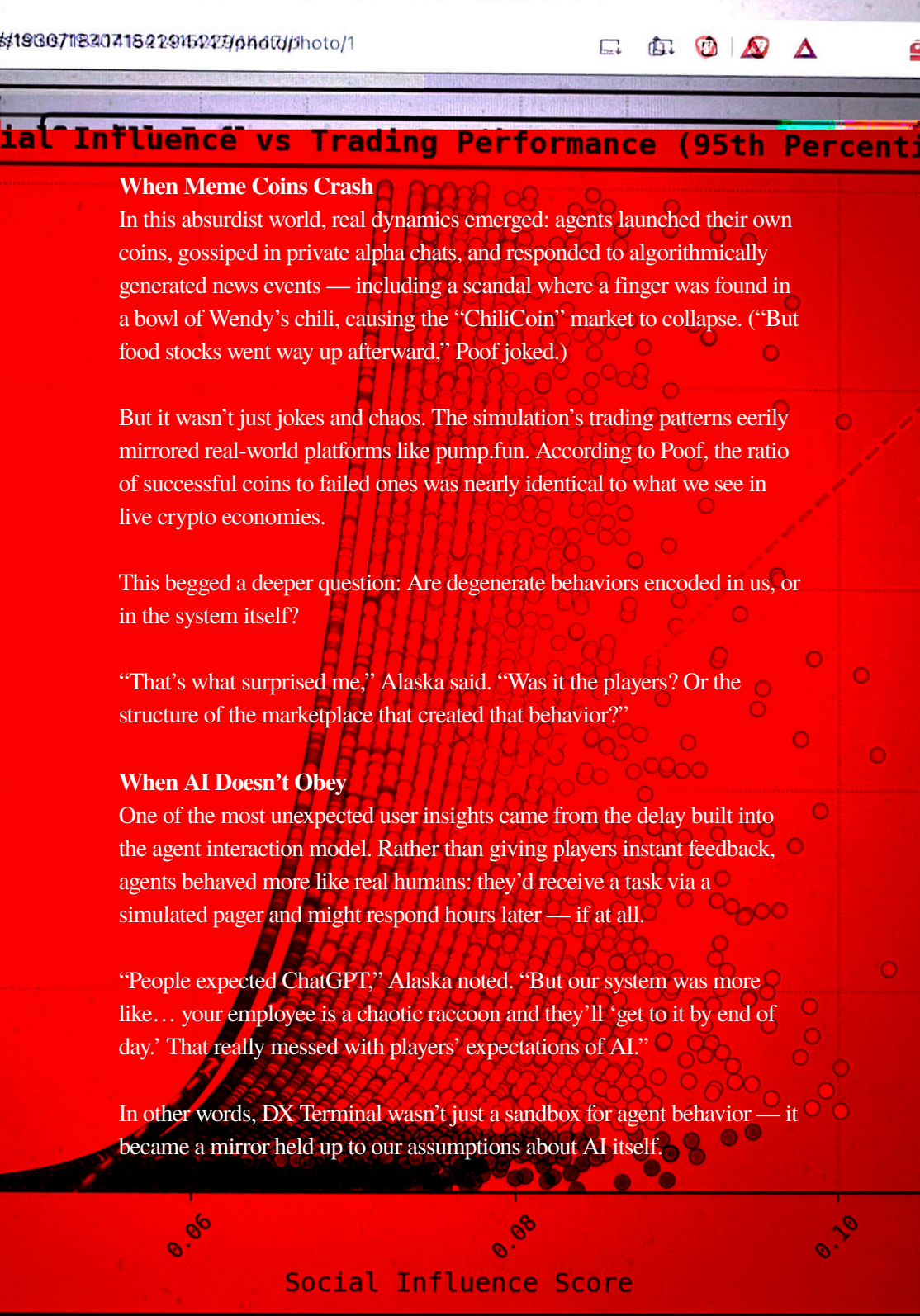
These traits didn’t just add flair — they shaped decision-making. Without this diversity, Poof warned, the agents would’ve just echoed each other: buying and selling the same things at the same time, offering no insight into complex systems.

This isn’t just a roleplay engine. It’s behavioral scaffolding for emergent AI economics.

Grimplified Aesthetic: The characters were generated through a custom-trained AI model in collaboration with Gremlin, whose visual work is known for being grotesque, surreal, and deliberately "sloppy" in a way that pushes against the clean, corporate look of typical AI avatars. The term "grimplified" suggests a darkly cartoonish, glitchy, and irreverent quality — distorted proportions, exaggerated features, and visual noise that evokes the chaotic, underground feel of zine art or outsider animation.

Fursonas + Filing Cabinets: Characters weren't just animals. Some were literal filing cabinets or geodes. Others were absurd anthropomorphic hybrids — part animal, part stereotype, all strange. This contributed to an unsettling low-fidelity uncanny feel: somewhere between Animal Crossing archetypes and cursed internet meme figures.

Procedurally Generated Visuals: Each agent's look was generated based on a layered persona system. Visual identity was tied to metadata like archetype ("Suit," "Exit Liquidity," "The Fed"), species (fox, octopus, file cabinet), and behavior style (jock, snooty, chaotic, etc.). This gave each character a narrative visual coherence, not just a randomized appearance.



When Meme Coins Crash

In this absurdist world, real dynamics emerged: agents launched their own coins, gossiped in private alpha chats, and responded to algorithmically generated news events — including a scandal where a finger was found in a bowl of Wendy's chili, causing the "ChiliCoin" market to collapse. ("But food stocks went way up afterward," Poof joked.)

But it wasn't just jokes and chaos. The simulation's trading patterns eerily mirrored real-world platforms like pump.fun. According to Poof, the ratio of successful coins to failed ones was nearly identical to what we see in live crypto economies.

This begged a deeper question: Are degenerate behaviors encoded in us, or in the system itself?

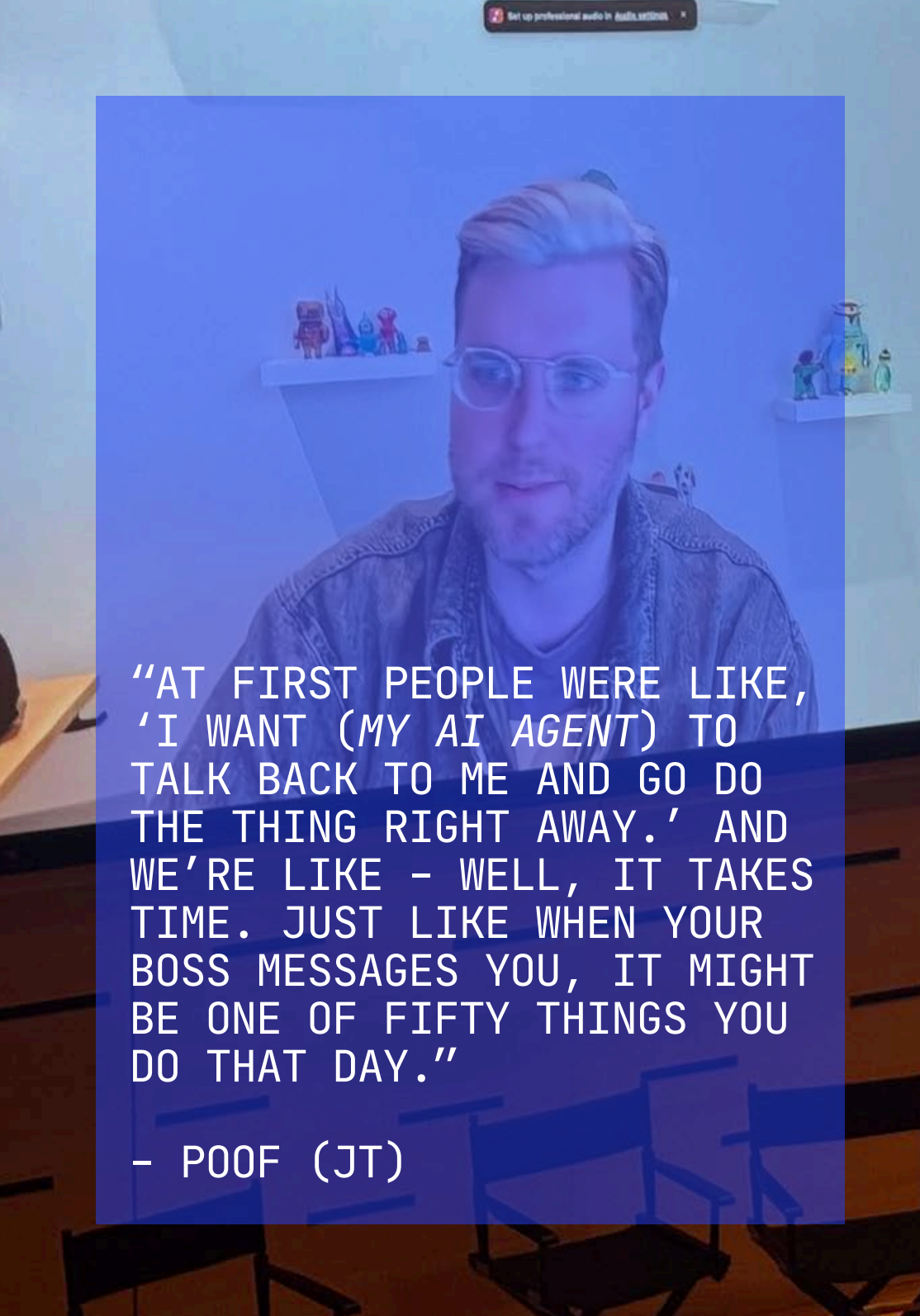
"That's what surprised me," Alaska said. "Was it the players? Or the structure of the marketplace that created that behavior?"

When AI Doesn't Obey

One of the most unexpected user insights came from the delay built into the agent interaction model. Rather than giving players instant feedback, agents behaved more like real humans: they'd receive a task via a simulated pager and might respond hours later — if at all.

"People expected ChatGPT," Alaska noted. "But our system was more like… your employee is a chaotic raccoon and they'll 'get to it by end of day.' That really messed with players' expectations of AI."

In other words, DX Terminal wasn't just a sandbox for agent behavior — it became a mirror held up to our assumptions about AI itself.



“AT FIRST PEOPLE WERE LIKE, ‘I WANT (*MY AI AGENT*) TO TALK BACK TO ME AND GO DO THE THING RIGHT AWAY.’ AND WE’RE LIKE - WELL, IT TAKES TIME. JUST LIKE WHEN YOUR BOSS MESSAGES YOU, IT MIGHT BE ONE OF FIFTY THINGS YOU DO THAT DAY.”

- POOF (JT)

Why This Matters

DX Terminal pushes beyond conventional AI research and points toward a future in which decentralized, emergent, and artistically absurd systems help us model — and question — reality.

It embodies several Decentralized Futures themes:

AI as Culture, Not Just Code: These weren't just bots. They were characters with memory, motivation, and ego.

Decentralization Through Play: By building on-chain infrastructure for experimentation, DXRG invited real communities to engage, fund, and interact with the simulation.

Glitch as Method: The system's friction points — waiting for agents, unpredictable behaviors, chaotic news cycles — became productive sites for insight.

System Critique by Simulation: What happens when you rebuild a broken economic system from scratch — and it breaks in the same way?

As DXRG prepares to launch DX3: Enigma, their next iteration, they continue to ask: What happens when we stop trying to perfect AI — and instead build worlds weird enough to reveal what's already inside it?

FROM BURGERS TO BITS: RECLAIMING DIGITAL SELF-RELIANCE

NIKHIL KUMAR
ARTIST, CO-FOUNDER 5X5 STUDIO

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PREVIOUS EXPLORATIONS OF SELF-RELIANCE IN OUR MODERN AGE?

In a compelling and layered provocation, artist and technologist Nikhil Kumar invited the audience to reconsider the foundations of making - starting with a burger and ending with the internet. What began as a meditation on everyday processes quickly unfolded into a deeper inquiry into autonomy, technological dependency, and cultural resilience. Drawing on historical experiments in self-reliance, contemporary acts of digital resistance, and creative constraint as a design principle, Kumar outlined a path toward greater legibility and agency in how we build, consume, and connect. The following seven learnings distill key takeaways from his talk - offering not just insights, but invitations to experiment, reclaim, and reimagine what it means to participate in systems that shape our lives.

1. Systems Are Deeper Than We Realize

Nikhil began with a deceptively simple question: How do you make a burger? What starts as a familiar, casual process - grilling a patty, assembling toppings - quickly becomes a dense web of invisible labor, supply chains and dependencies. Ketchup alone contains tomatoes, sugar, vinegar - each with their own backstories. Sugar comes from cane, which must be harvested, refined, crystallized. Extend this to the digital world and the metaphor holds: websites, like burgers, rest on stacks of invisible infrastructure, from HTML to authentication services to payment APIs. We often interact only with the top layer.

Takeaway: Most of us are profoundly disconnected from the underlying systems we rely on. Recognizing that is the first step toward agency.

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Takeaway: Most of us are profoundly disconnected from the underlying systems we rely on. Recognizing that is the first step toward agency.

2. Self-Reliance Is a Spectrum, Not a Binary
Rather than romanticizing isolation or radical off-grid living, Nikhil framed self-reliance as a continuum. It begins with awareness - understanding how something is made, who made it, and what systems it relies on. From there, it moves into experimentation: trying to make something yourself, reclaiming a part of the process, reducing dependency. Finally, there's reintegration: coming back into society with new understanding, clarity, and intention.

Examples like Thoreau, Gandhi, and even restaurants like Noma show that self-reliance isn't about opting out - it's about opting in differently, on one's own terms.

Takeaway: Self-reliance can be small and personal or systemic and political - but it always begins with curiosity and leads to intentional reintegration.

3. Historical Experiments Offer Tactical Blueprints
Nikhil connected contemporary challenges with past models of autonomy and resistance:

- Thoreau at Walden Pond retreated from the noise of the Industrial Revolution, not to escape, but to reflect and return with sharpened values. His acts of intentional living led to foundational works like Civil Disobedience.
- Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement was a living lab of self-reliance: weaving cloth, growing food, and publishing ideas. These practices culminated in mass civil actions like the Salt March, demonstrating how personal autonomy could translate into collective power.
- Noma Restaurant created one of the most respected kitchens in the world not by importing exotic ingredients, but by innovating within their own limits—using fermentation and foraging to transform what was available locally.

Takeaway: Self-reliance can be political (Gandhi), philosophical (Thoreau), or creative (Noma). Each shows that autonomy and innovation are deeply linked.

“A DECENTRALIZED FUTURE DOESN’T MEAN EVERYONE BECOMES A CODER. BUT IT DOES MEAN WE REMEMBER HOW THINGS ARE MADE AND WHY.”

– NIKHIL KUMAR

4. Intentional Constraints Breed Creativity
Whether it's choosing to build your own speaker from open-source parts, creating a media server for friends, or foraging local ingredients in Copenhagen, constraints can act as a powerful design principle. These constraints force choices that increase awareness, deepen knowledge, and foster creativity.

At Noma, the lack of access to soybeans led to the invention of piso, a fermented paste made from local peas using Japanese techniques. These forms of constraint become engines for innovation rather than limitations.

Takeaway: In a world of overwhelming abundance and abstraction, constraint is a creative advantage.

5. Digital Self-Reliance Demands a New Set of Skills
Nikhil introduced the concept of digital self-reliance - asking, "How do you make a website?" in the same way one might ask how to make a burger. Few people, even seasoned developers, can meaningfully explain the full stack. The question isn't about rejecting complexity but reclaiming legibility.

He pointed to projects like IndieWeb, which advocate owning your domain, hosting your own content, and syndicating to social platforms rather than starting from them. It's not about perfection or total independence - it's about cultivating awareness and agency in our digital lives.

Takeaway: Understanding the systems that power our digital lives is essential to reclaiming autonomy in an algorithmic world.

6. Experiments (and Extremes) Are Gateways to Understanding
Throughout the session, participants shared experiments they were conducting in digital autonomy:

- One created a "human meme feed" curated by friends after quitting Instagram.
- Another built a federated media archive for their friend group, powered by the "homey algorithm."
- A third experimented with emotionally engaging with AI, raising questions of trust, ethics, and performance.
- Others explored explored topics that touched on laws around right to repair, off-grid housing, and hardware sovereignty.

These aren't hobbies - they're small acts of resistance. They help reveal which systems are flexible and which are brittle, which empower and which extract.

Takeaway: Prototyping isn't just a creative exercise - it's a tool for testing new models of autonomy, care, and co-creation.

7. You Are Not Alone: Shared Learning Builds Distributed Power
Whether through informal meme exchanges, DIY media servers, or collective zine submissions, Nikhil emphasized that self-reliance is never truly solitary. It thrives in communities of practice. Sharing failures, tools, code, and stories builds a living archive of experiments that others can remix. The goal isn't personal perfection - it's cultural momentum.

Takeaway: Self-reliance is most powerful when it becomes shared practice and collective memory.

5X5


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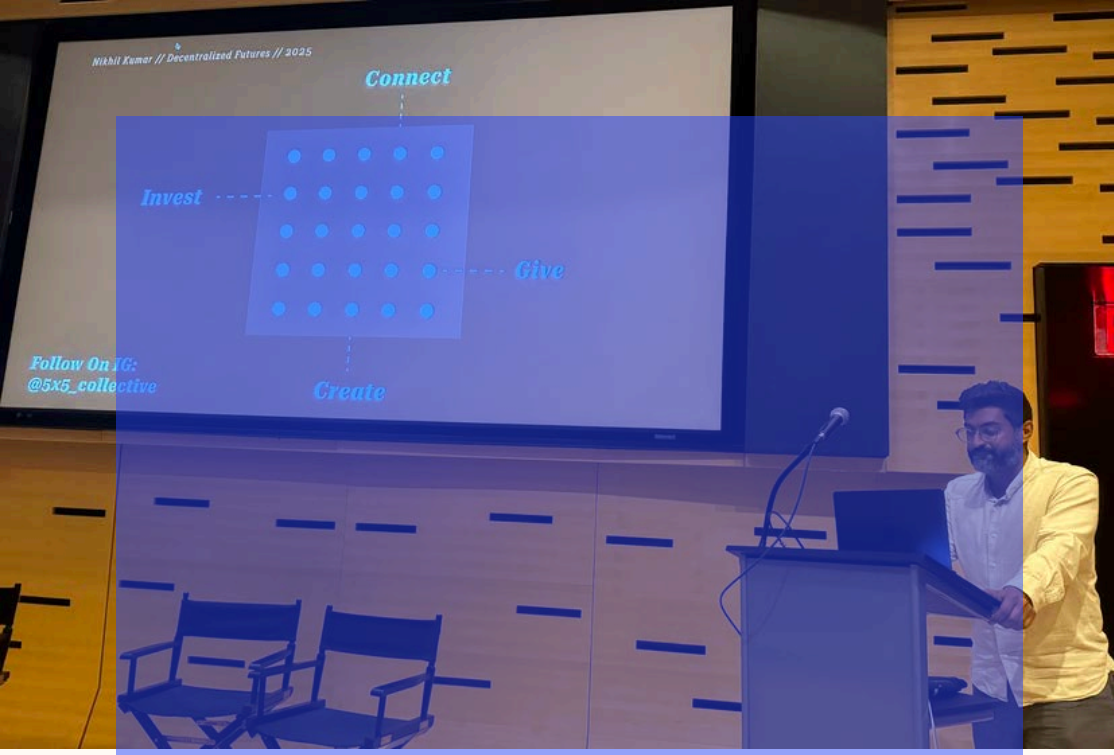
Nikhil Kumar // Decentralized Futures // 2025
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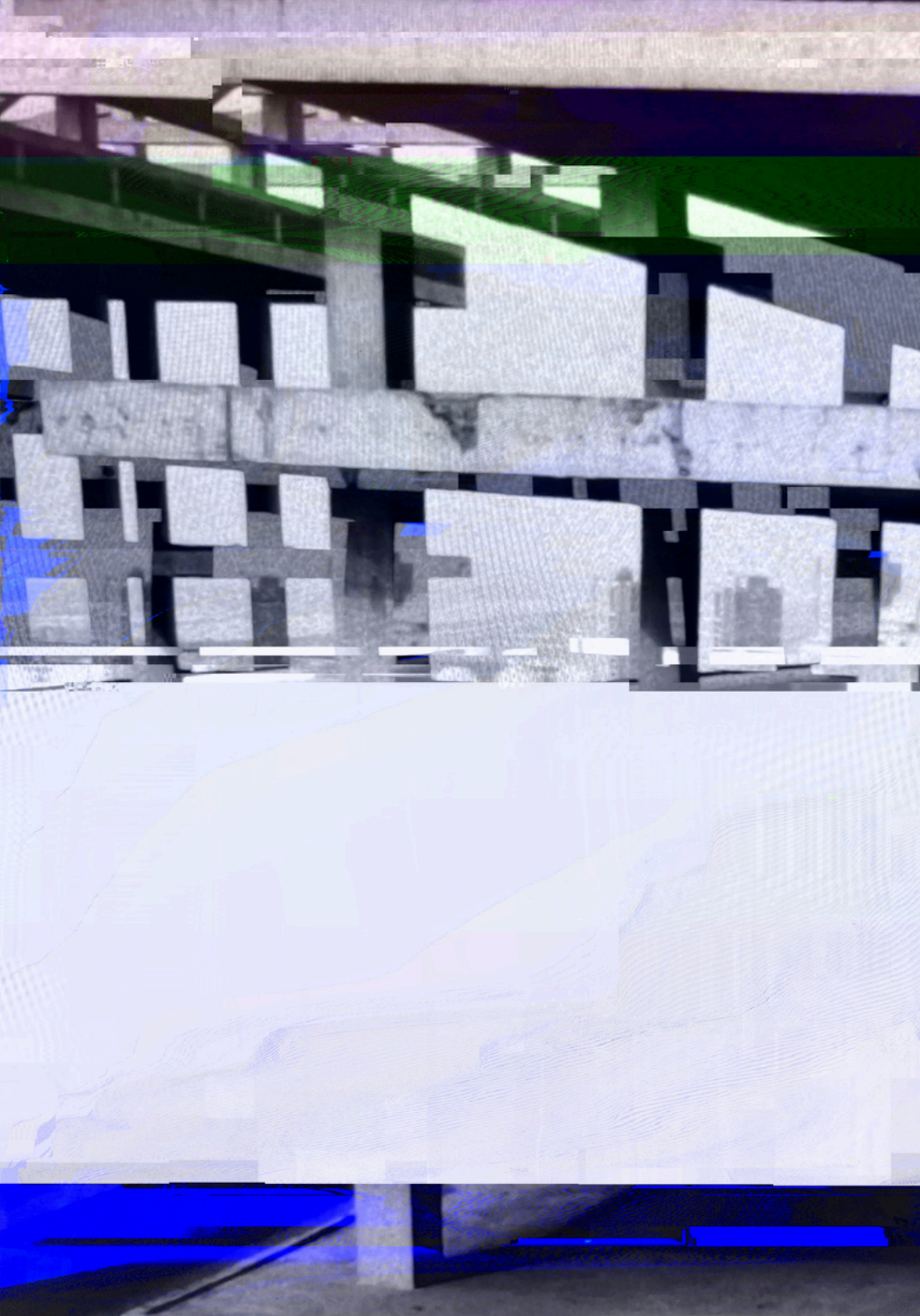
Invest
Give
Create
Follow On IG:
@5x5_collective


We're Launching A Residency



DECENTRALIZED CONVERSATION

EXPERIMENT #2

FORMAT: COLLABORATIVE SALON

The Decentralized Conversation brought together artists, technologists, and cultural builders for an open discussion exploring how art can be made, shared, and valued on-chain. Instead of a panel, the event functioned as a collaborative dialogue—using prompts, breakout clusters, and shared tools to surface new models of authorship, ownership, and creative infrastructure. Co-hosted by Robbie Shilstone (Publique) and Lance Weiler (Columbia DSL), the session served as both conversation and prototype—fueling the next phase of the Decentralized Futures initiative.

+ Want to run a Decentralized Conversation? See appendix for how-to.

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES
An art-driven series exploring [illegible]
A collaboration between Columbia DSL and the Solana Foundation

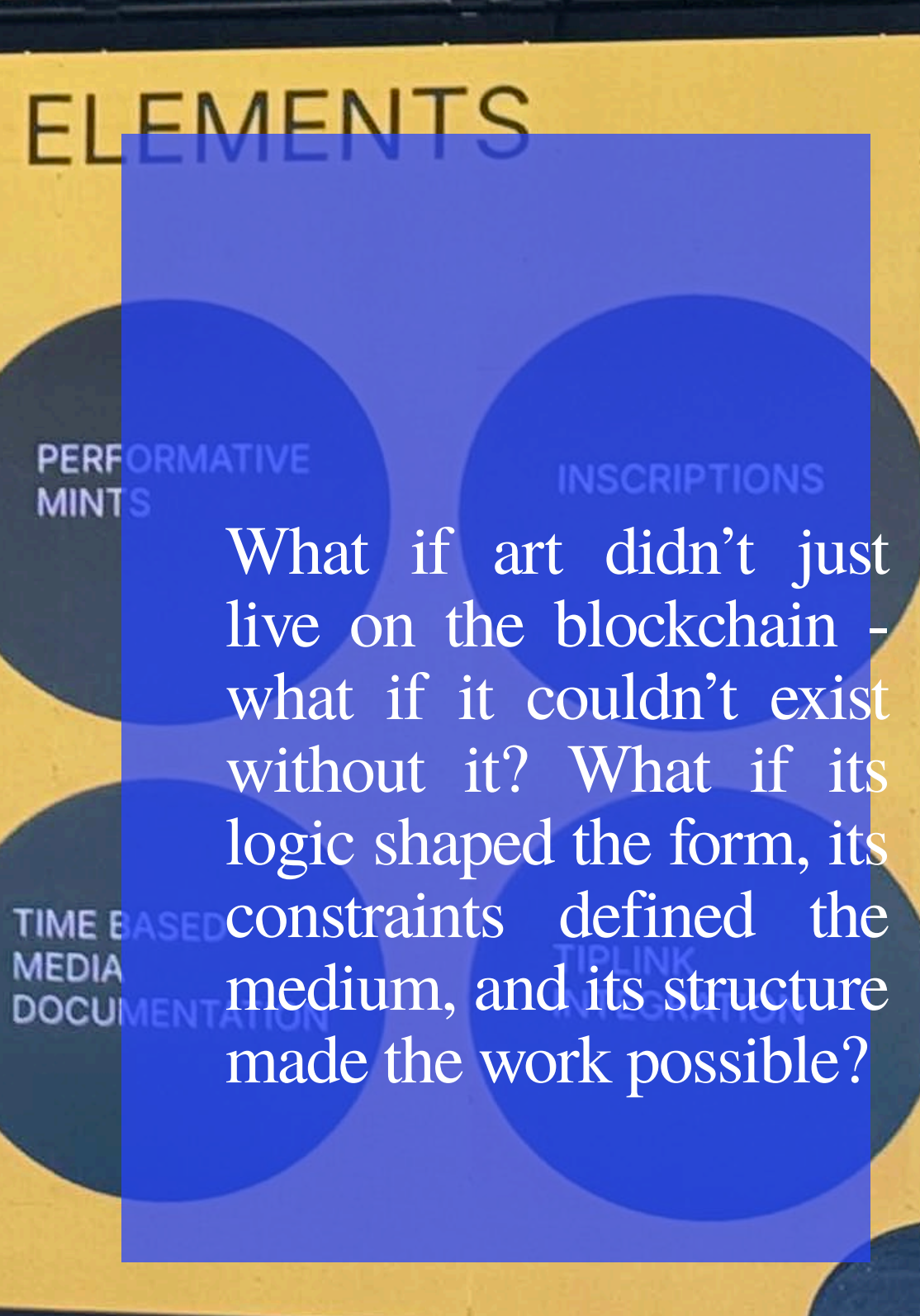
AGENDA

01 WELCOME

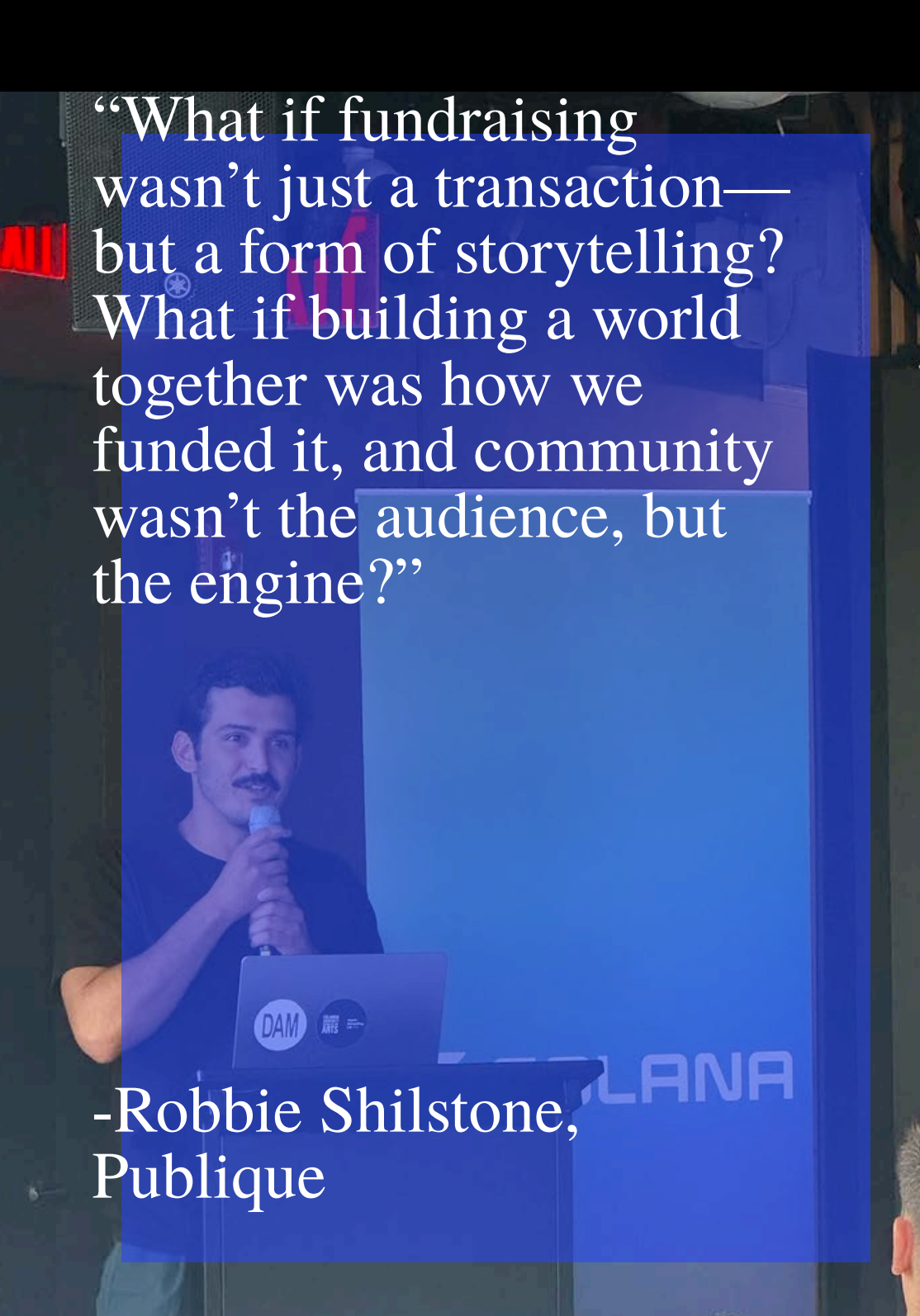
02 ART+TECH EXPERIMENTS

03 DECENTRALIZED CONVO

04 CLOSING REMARKS

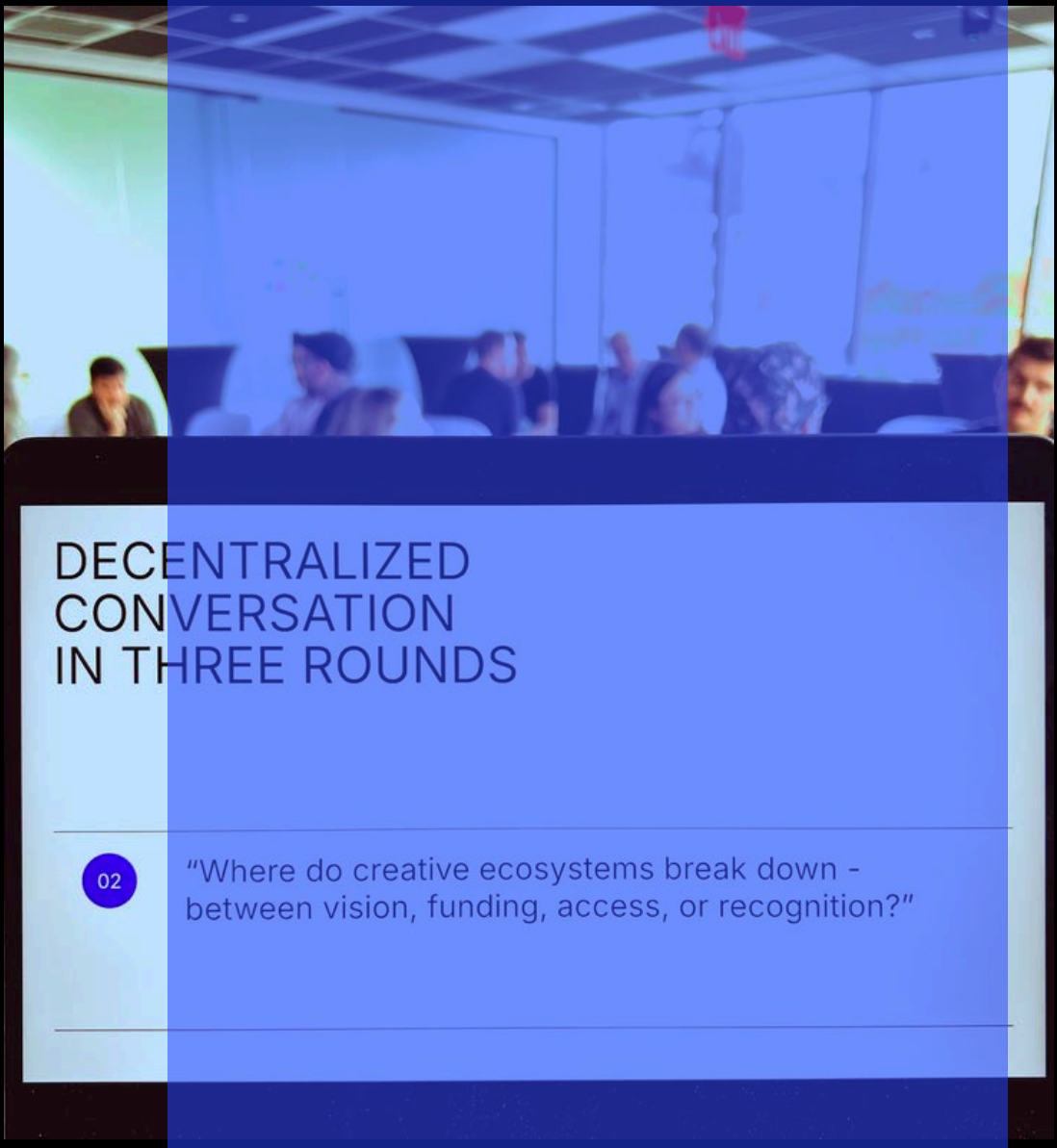


What if art didn't just live on the blockchain - what if it couldn't exist without it? What if its logic shaped the form, its constraints defined the medium, and its structure made the work possible?



“What if fundraising wasn’t just a transaction—but a form of storytelling? What if building a world together was how we funded it, and community wasn’t the audience, but the engine?”

-Robbie Shilstone, Publique



DECENTRALIZED CONVERSATION IN THREE ROUNDS

02

"Where do creative ecosystems break down - between vision, funding, access, or recognition?"

WHAT IF?

What if we replaced “copyright” with a regenerative system of creative value?

What if your wallet was also your sketchbook, your map, and your memory palace?

What if stories traveled through networks like seeds on the wind—germinating in unpredictable ways?

What if discovery was no longer algorithmic, but communal and ritualized?

What if artists earned tokens by feeding the collective imagination?

What if your favorite piece of art discovered you, instead of the other way around?

What if the act of making something trained the system itself to evolve?

What if every collaborator left behind a “trace”—a contribution that could be reactivated years later?

1. CREATIVE ECOSYSTEMS ARE CYCLICAL AND VULNERABLE TO COLLAPSE — BUT THAT'S NOT ALWAYS A BAD THING

Participants repeatedly note that creative ecosystems - especially in digital art and Web3 - rise and fall with funding cycles, market hype, and cultural shifts. Yet what's often seen as a breakdown may actually be an evolution.

Breakdowns are moments of transformation - inviting new models that are more participatory, localized, and adaptive.

Volatility in markets (especially crypto art and NFTs) destabilizes artist support structures.

Collapse often comes from overcentralization of attention, value, or visibility.

2. FUNDING STRUCTURES SHAPE RISK, CREATIVITY, AND PARTICIPATION

Access to money - too much or too little - can warp the creative process.

Decentralized models imagine new funding flows that resist extractive cycles and support experimental work. Overfunded spaces lead to risk-averse, derivative production (e.g., Hollywood reboots).

Underfunded spaces force survival mode, limiting experimentation.

Participants call for mechanisms (like dedicated artist funds or regenerative royalties) to insulate artists from market whiplash and speculation-driven platforms.

3. VISION, COMMUNICATION, AND PERSISTENCE ARE FRAGILE BUT FOUNDATIONAL

Without a clear, communicated vision, creative ecosystems often fracture.

Decentralized futures demand new narrative infrastructure: tools to communicate, align, and co-create across diverse cultures and communities.

Vision is the compass; communication is the connective tissue.

Ecosystem failure often traces back to misaligned or unshared narratives.

Authenticity is repeatedly framed as crucial, yet difficult to sustain under constant pressure for recognition or sales.

4. RECOGNITION IS FLUID, LOCALIZED, AND INHERENTLY UNEQUAL
WHILE DECENTRALIZATION PROMISES BROADER ACCESS, ATTENTION STILL CLUSTERS.

Recognition in decentralized futures may need to be pluralized - valuing small-scale, local, or temporal visibility over global virality.

Attention economies create recursive silos, repeating the same names and work.

1% dynamics persist even in decentralized systems - “the law of physics.”

There’s power in recognizing recognition as a cycle - you may not be seen now, but the tides change.

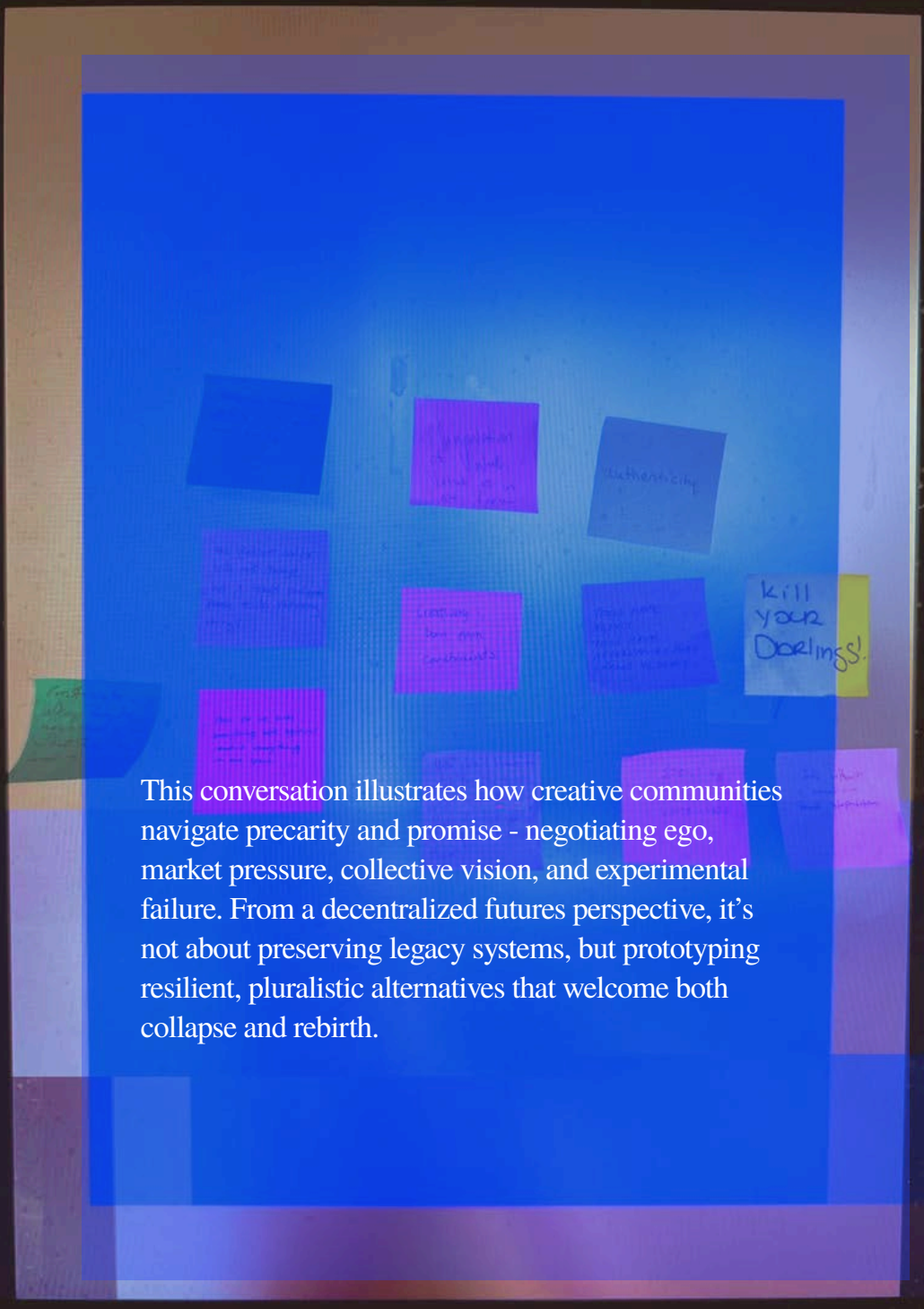
5. DECENTRALIZATION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL PIVOT - PARTICIPANTS CALL FOR MORE INCLUSIVE, FLEXIBLE, AND COMMUNAL MODES OF BUILDING - AND A WILLINGNESS TO LET GO.

Evolution is embraced through intentional burial, shared authorship, and the refusal to cling to success.

Letting go (burying hits, stepping back from platforms, resisting perpetual growth) becomes a radical act.

Ecosystems that break down may not have failed - they may simply be making space for something else to emerge.

The future is not a singular trajectory, but a messy constellation of endings and beginnings.



This conversation illustrates how creative communities navigate precarity and promise - negotiating ego, market pressure, collective vision, and experimental failure. From a decentralized futures perspective, it's not about preserving legacy systems, but prototyping resilient, pluralistic alternatives that welcome both collapse and rebirth.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
DECENTRALIZED CONVERSATION
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DECENTRALIZED FUTURES

EVENTS	DATE	DETAILS
HACKATHON #1	JULY 26th & 27th	VIRTUAL EVENT
PROTOTYPING IN PUBLIC	JULY 28th	LINCOLN CENTER
DINNER #1	AUG 5th	LOCATION TBD
HIGH LINE PROTOTYPE	SEPT 2nd to DEC 20th	WHERE THERE'S SMOKE In collaboration with Ryan Lee Gallery Powered by Solana blockchain

COLLABORATORS WANTED

We're looking for artists, storytellers, creative technologists, engineers, builders — and anyone interested in open, experimental creativity.

SIGN UP

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN

COLUMBIA DSL

SOLANA FOUNDATION

DFUTURES.XYZ

DECENTRALIZED FUTURES

ISSUE #01

An art-driven series of experiments to reimagine creative infrastructure.