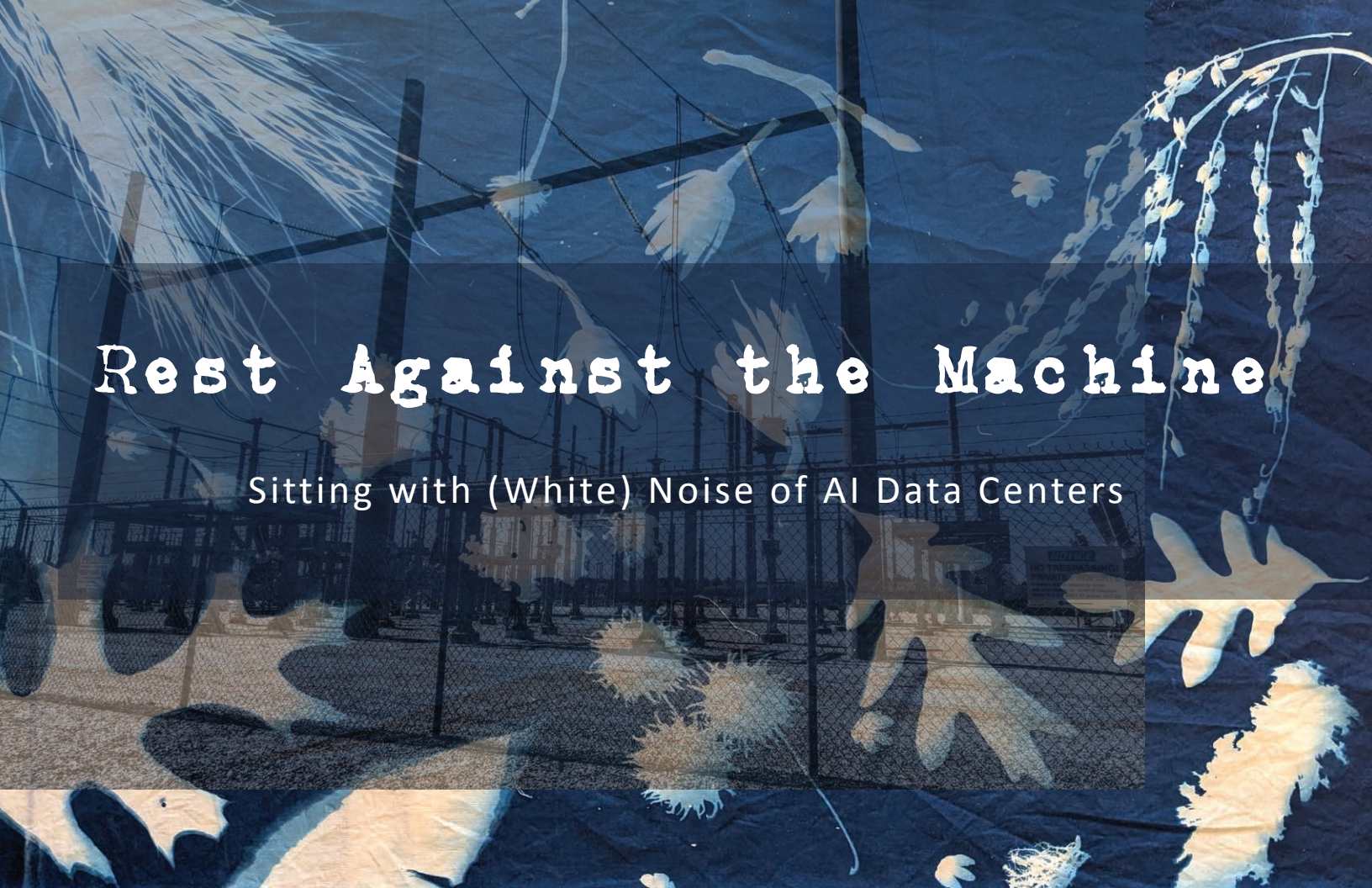

Rest Against the Machine
Sitting with (White) Noise of AI Data Centers

About

This audio-textile installation reflects on the infrastructural noise produced by AI data centers. Framed through the lens of disabled ecologies, which understands environmental destruction as inseparable from bodily harm. It examines how these disruptions are felt across thresholds of perception, and invites rest as a form of attunement—and subtle resistance—to the extractive, productivity-driven logics of rapidly expanding AI systems.

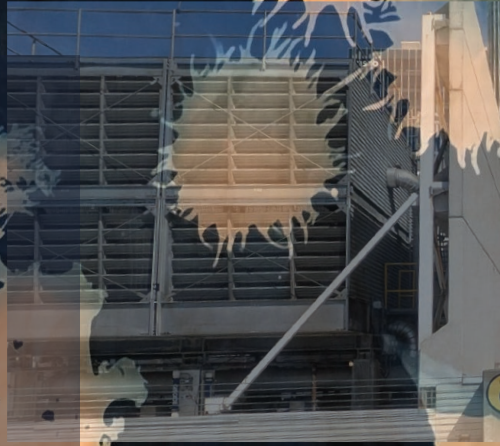
Sound recordings from hyperscale facilities in the Atlanta region are embedded in pressure-activated floor cushions, playing as ambient white noise that could be easily tuned out. As one rests, infrasound gradually emerges, making perceptible what typically lies beyond human hearing.

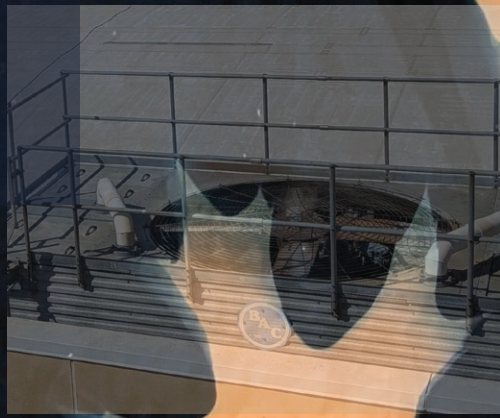
Cushions are wrapped in cyanotype textiles printed with plant materials gathered near data center sites. The collaged botanical patterns evoke more-than-human ecologies displaced by extractive infrastructures, while remaining entangled in shared environmental exposure with their human inhabitants.

Assemblage of Sounds

It is increasingly common to hear about -- and hear -- the disruptive impacts of hyperscale data center noise on nearby communities, particularly in rural areas. But what constitutes this “noise”?

Data center noise emerges from multiple infrastructural components: the continuous whir of ventilation fans, the mechanical drone of cooling towers, the electrical buzz of transformer stations, and the intermittent rumble of backup generators, among others. Together, these elements form a layered sonic assemblage that produces the noise associated with AI data centers.





Capturing Infrasound

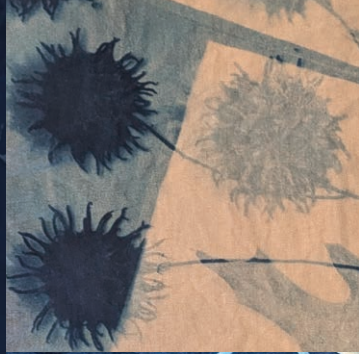
Data center noise is not always audible. In many cases, it is partially obscured by sound barriers, intermittent in operation (such as generators), or experienced more as a chronic, low-level presence than a distinct event. Much of its embodied impact arises from imperceptible low-frequency infrasound emitted by hyperscale facilities. These vibrations can travel long distances, pass through conventional barriers, and have been associated with symptoms such as nausea, anxiety, dizziness, and sleep disturbances among nearby residents.

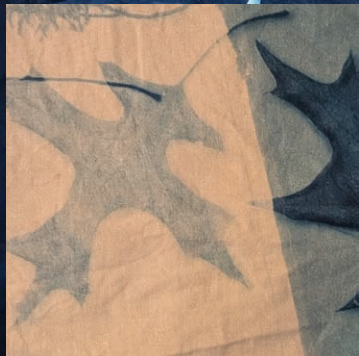
In this project, infrasound is captured using the RedVox app, which records subtle fluctuations in air pressure through a phone's microphone and barometric sensors. The resulting recordings are translated signals that render these otherwise inaudible vibrations into perceptible sounds.

Sun-Printed Textiles

Cyanotypes, or sun printing, is used to capture the material traces of the landscapes on which AI infrastructures are situated. Cyanotype is a photographic process in which light-sensitive fabric records the silhouettes of objects exposed to sunlight. In this work, botanical materials collected from sites adjacent to data centers are printed onto fabric, forming an alternative “data set” of the same landscape.

These prints are assembled into low cushions that sit close to the floor, re-situating the body in proximity to the ground. The cushions become a tactile reconstruction of the landscape that can be physically encountered, inhabited, and rested upon.





Invitation to Interact

Each cushion carries a different component of this sonic assemblage: cooling systems, ventilation, electrical infrastructure, and backup power.

You are invited to rest on the cushions, to sit with these sounds as they layer into an ambient white noise, at times perceptible, at times easily tuned out.

As your body comes into contact with the surface, infrasound recordings from the same infrastructures will begin to emerge, inviting reflection and attunement to these sonic disruptions that move between perception and imperception.

Suggested Readings

1 Brigstocke, Julian, and Noorani Tehseen. 2016. “Posthuman Attunements : Aesthetics , Authority and the Arts of Creative Listening.” GeoHumanities 2 (March 2016): 1–7.

2 Dustin Edwards, Zane Griffin Talley Cooper, and Mel Hogan. 2025. “The Making of Critical Data Center Studies.” The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies 31(2): 429–46.

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6 Sunaura Taylor. 2024. Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert. University of California Press, Oakland, CA, USA

7 Vic Tandy and Tony R Lawrence. 1998. “The Ghost in the Machine.” Journal of te Society for Psychical Research 62(851).

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