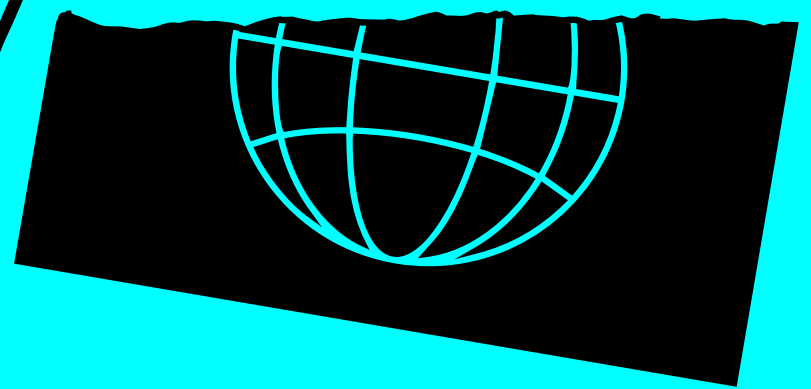


MoneyLab⁸

Minting a Fair Society



CONFERENCE REPORT

Money

Minting a
Fair Society

Lab⁸

LIVE STREAMING
aksioma.org/moneylab8

From 11 May 2020 onward
Every Monday at 5 pm CET

tactics
& practice



INTRODUCTION

Critical thinkers, artists, researchers, activists, and geeks in search of other economies and financial discourses for a fair society.

All along, these have been dark times for the economy, as offshore finance wreaks havoc in the very fabric of cities and communities, and crypto-companies navigate the world in search of their own tax havens. Information leaks from financial paradises have made it clear that the wealthy, influential, and well-connected will still escape taxation. These are the same people turning places like Malta and the Bahamas into luxury apartment zones. At the same time, well-documented Dutch fiscal loopholes cost the world approximately 22 billion euros in lost taxes each year. Corporations like Shell tempt governments with scraps of their ill-gained revenues in exchange for legal residence in anonymous letterboxes. Global business and crypto-speculation have debased national regulations to the competitive logics of an international tax marketplace, and local economies and communities struggle to hold up against privatisation and the mass transformation of jobs to a precarious freelance existence in the gig economy.

Weeks into the corona crisis, it is too early to say which aspects of the global financial system have been thrown into the dustbin of history. Pivotal nation-states are now exploring digital currencies as one tool for post-pandemic stimulus (or austerity). How do the earlier proposals for Universal Basic Income relate to the sudden appearance of helicopter money in some countries? Are the Keynesian money proposals to prop up the Western economies an indication of the end of the neoliberal hegemony? Is the ban on cash during the corona crisis an indication of the arrival of the cashless society?

It is a grim scenario, but perhaps not all is lost. The economy is not – and never was – merely in the hands of faceless corporations and cryptocurrency speculators. [MoneyLab](#) explores the imaginaries of artists, researchers, activists, and geeks in search of other possible economies and urgently interrogates a different financial discourse. It has always asked: can we use technology critically to support alternative values of cooperation and “commoning” in a world that is dominated by individualism and competition?

MoneyLab #8, the first-ever in a post-socialist country and the first-ever virtual edition, features examples far from the mainstream media spotlight. It zooms in on the effects of offshore finance and explores counter-experiments in the realms of housing, care work, and blockchain technology. In the fringes, something interesting is happening: blockchain is no longer

just another tool for capitalist growth obsessions, and people are realising radical visions for fairly-waged care work, redistributed wealth, equitable social relations, and strong grassroots communities. In our world of vanishing cash, corner-cutting multinationals, and weakened social support structures, can community currencies or self-organised care networks strengthen neighbourhoods? What would fair and social housing look like if it was turned into the cornerstone of the economy? Who is building local systems that can stand up against the financialisation of housing in the global platform economy?

MoneyLab #8 sheds light on radical and alternative strategies for self-organisation and pushes on towards new and collective futures situated in resilient local communities.

Initially planned as an IRL conference in Kino Šiška in Ljubljana, MoneyLab#8 was reformulated during the COVID-19 pandemic as a series of weekly streaming events to be held every Monday at 17:00 CET from 11 May to 29 June 2020.

STREAM #1: CRITICAL FINANCE STRATEGIES: THREE MONTHS INTO THE CORONA CRISIS

Brett Scott, in conversation with Geert Lovink

11 MAY 2020

During spring 2019, a fancy new word made the rounds in France: collapsology. What would this entail, a year later? The collapse of certain aspects of global finance, logistics and just-in-time production was announced way earlier. Still, only weeks into the corona crisis, it is too early to say which aspects of the global financial system will be thrown into the dustbin of history. Pivotal nation-states are now exploring digital currencies as one tool for post-pandemic stimulus (or austerity). How do earlier proposals for Universal Basic Income relate to the sudden appearance of helicopter money in some countries? Are the Keynesian money proposals to prop up the Western economies an indication of the end of the neoliberal hegemony? Is the quasi ban on cash during the corona crisis an indication of the arrival of the cashless society?

Special guests: Iztok Hočevar, Tjaša Pureber, Vuk Ćosić and Rok Kranjc

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



CASH, KISSES AND KARAOKE: WHY THE WAR ON COVID MUST NOT BECOME A WAR ON CASH

By Brett Scott

(original [here](#), reposted with the permission of the author)

Covid-19 will be mobilised by the financial industry to push their War on Cash even further, leaving us ever more ensnared within their private digital money empire.

For a number of years I have investigated– and warned about – the War on Cash. This is the slow process by which the banking sector, payments industry, financial technology companies and governments have – in subtle and not-so-subtle ways – tried to wean people off the physical cash system, and to onboard them into the bank-run digital payments system.

Calling it a ‘war’ is controversial, because in the mainstream this process is often described as a peaceful and organic bottom-up move towards a ‘cashless society’ driven by ordinary people. I, on the other hand, characterise it as an aggressive and artificial top-down move towards a ‘bankful society’, driven by the financial industry and many governments. The bankful society is one in which the banks (or platforms built on top of them, such as Paypal) intermediate between even the smallest of payments, seeping between buyers and sellers like a payments chaperone. This consolidates and expands the power of the banking system, gives them enormous amounts of data, and enables them to enter into mega-deals with mega-tech platforms, who also rely on a turn away from cash to facilitate the mega-automation they seek.

The War on Cash prior to Covid-19

The War on Cash has sometimes taken the form of outright attacks (such as when the Indian government aggressively degraded the Indian cash system during their so-called ‘demonetisation’). More often, however, it has taken the form of consistent propaganda (Visa openly talks about their campaign to make cash seem ‘peculiar’ to people), amidst a subtle drive to engineer the market environment in such a way as to make cash increasingly inconvenient to use (such as shutting down ATMs). As these processes unfold, they catalyse network effects in which we find ourselves ‘spontaneously’ beginning to ‘choose’ digital payment (in much the same way that supermarkets inspire kids to ‘choose’ chocolates by placing them at eye level by the checkout counters). Once this catalysing happens, those who wish to resist this turn to the bank system find themselves increasingly forced into compliance by others who have succumbed to it.

But many people still refuse to toe the official banking-meets-tech line, and wish to keep using cash, despite the fact that the economic system around them is increasingly being loaded against this choice. I and others such as Which?, Ralph Nader, Positive Money, and The RSA have come out in praise of cash. We see it as an inclusive, privacy-preserving, public means of payment. I see the aggressive spread of digital payments not only as an attempt to fully privatise the payments system, but also as an attempt to ‘gentrify payments’ – to tell people that they are criminal or dodgy if they do not wish to be absorbed into the giant generic chain institutions of global finance. The payments industry – underpinned by the global banking sector – has managed to convince states that it is noble, or even humanitarian, to make ever-greater numbers of people dependent on the banking system (a system that by no means has their interests at heart), under the cry of ‘financial inclusion’.

Cash is in fact the only form of state money we can hold. In much the same way that casino chips are privately-issued promises (issued by a casino) for cash we might hand in to them as we enter a casino, the ‘money’ we see in our bank accounts is actually ‘digital chips’ issued to us by those commercial banks. These chips are promises – or IOUs – promising us access to state money. We can pass these digital chips around within the private ecosystems controlled by the banking sector, but every time we go to the ATM we are redeeming those chips to exit the banking system (like walking out of the casino). It follows then, that as ATMs get shut down, our ability to exit the banking system goes down too. We are getting trapped inside their private ecosystems. This is in their commercial interests, which is why for many years the private payments industry has used whatever they can to demonise the public cash system, which competes with them. Rather than being showcased as an inclusive form of public payment, cash is continuously accused of facilitating crime and tax evasion, and has long been cast as unhygienic and ‘dirty’.

The War on Cash After Covid-19

Now, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, this latter argument suddenly seems a lot more visceral to many people. Supermarkets, painfully aware of a duty to prevent the spread of the virus, openly order people to turn away from the public cash system and to use the private banking system for payments (‘please use contactless payment’). It is vital that we always criticise and remain vigilant against the growing corporate domination that surrounds us, but this critique has suddenly taken a back seat to the immediate task of slowing the disease spread.

For big corporates, therefore, this has been a perfect opportunity to consolidate and extend their power. Many of them are already too-big-to-fail and governments always rush to protect and promote them first in the midst of a crisis. We have already seen players like Amazon massively expand their power during Covid (as people stuck at home under lock-down turn even more to the digital giants who already dominate the cyberspace realm), but in the finan-

cial sector this same enforced ‘turn to the digital’ is a huge commercial win for the private payments industry (aka. banking industry). They will use Covid forcefully to suppress and undermine cash even more than they already have.

The rise of Amazon and the rise of the digital payments industry is no co-incidence. These players have natural synergies as they all seek to create vast systems of interlocking automation. They wish for, and benefit from, a world in which economies are remotely coordinated via their huge datacentre systems, rather than being negotiated through face-to-face interaction between people on the street. And, while Covid might have forced various forms of positive economic soul-searching amongst people, it has simultaneously played directly into the hands of any player that seeks automation-at-a-distance, which includes both Big Tech and Big Finance.

Indeed, Covid is far more than a blow to the cash system. It is a blow to the face-to-face physical world, which includes cash, but also hugs, doorknobs, shared microphones at karaoke evenings, drunken pub conversations, kissing Tinder dates, dancing at weddings, dancing at beach parties, dancing at church, bench-pressing in the gym, and sharing a cigarette with a friendly stranger you meet outside a nightclub. Yes, cash is another thing in the physical world, and yes, as a physical object it does have the ability to carry viruses. But again, so does every supermarket item, public transport system, Uber car, and – for that matter – digital payments PIN pad.

As an aside, it is in fact not apparent that cash is actually a particular risk compared to other objects in the world. As the Covid pandemic took off, the German Bundesbank (the country’s central bank) issued a press release stating that ‘Cash poses no particular risk of infection for public’, noting that “the probability of becoming ill from handling cash is smaller than from many other objects used in everyday life”. They cited infectiologist (and head of the Frankfurt am Main Health Office) René Gottschalk, who argued that banknotes do not lend themselves to being an infection channel for coronavirus.

Nevertheless, a sloppy journalist at the British newspaper The Telegraph misrepresented the World Health Organisation by writing an opportunistic story claiming that “Dirty banknotes may be spreading the coronavirus, WHO suggests”. This sent the world’s media on an anti-cash bonanza, as they parroted the Telegraph story. This, in turn, prompted the WHO spokesperson to issue a statement saying ‘We did NOT say that cash was transmitting coronavirus’. The damage, however, was already done – it was now official fake news spreading through Daily Mail articles shared on social media and Whatsapp groups.

In the UK, the banking industry took advantage of this, quickly arranging for a rise in the contactless payments limit via the banking lobby group UK Finance. Customers spooked by the dubious anti-cash news articles suddenly found solace in the arms of the banking sector.

The Hidden Side of the Coin

Despite this, statistics show that there was a strong spike in cash withdrawals at the announcement of lock-down. This tells us something very interesting: in the midst of a crisis people value the fact that ‘cash does not crash’. You use cash to exit the unstable and failure-prone banking system, which is why people rush to hoard cash at news of an impending hurricane or war. Central banks refer to this as ‘precautionary demand for cash’.

This alerts us to a broader point, which is that the risks around Covid extend far beyond the actual virus. It has set in motion a major economic downturn, and not only are banks increasingly unstable in the midst of an economic downturn, but they themselves seek to pull back from giving service to those they deem risky. This means they retract lending from small businesses and ignore poorer people who are not as profitable to them as richer people. These people include those who are disparagingly referred to as ‘the unbanked’ or ‘the under-banked’, whose numbers increase during a crisis. This is to say that anti-cash rhetoric from media, supermarkets and governments has increased at the very same moment that the prime providers of digital payments – the banks – turn away from those who most rely upon cash. Make no mistake: the War on Cash is laden with class dynamics, and is often unthinkingly perpetuated by yuppies who have a natural trust for large institutions (which tend to be set up in their interests).

Perhaps you are one of the people that the banking sector likes to offer products to. Perhaps right now you do feel the pull of the digital, and are choosing to become dependent upon distant corporate datacentres to intermediate your interactions with everyone else. Perhaps in the short term that feels less scary to you than entering a shop with breathing human beings. But, in the longer term, a world in which we isolate ourselves whilst relying upon mega-corporates to stand between us is far more scary. The fact that Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos earns \$215 million per day (regardless of whether he turns up to work) is testament to the fact that every time you tell his automated system to send goods to you, you are playing directly into an alliance his company has forged with the banking sector. You use the digital payments system to pay him, and – simultaneously – to pay all the banking execs, while the actual Amazon workers (who face all the frontline risk) make 80 dollars a day.

For centuries the banking sector has rushed head-over-heels to give priority service to people like Bezos while excluding and often exploiting those on the peripheries (misselling products, giving predatory loans, gouging fees and so on). This is why precarious workers have for centuries relied on the cash system, which is public in nature and offers them a way to transact without having to enter a system mostly run on behalf of the Bezos’ of the world.

Amazon, in fact, lobbied against pro-cash legislation in places like Philadelphia because both Big Tech and Big Finance are aligned in their desire to Hoover up more people into their eco-systems, and stitch up the economy in a Matrix-like mesh of digital coordination.

Nevertheless, while Covid appears to play into this, it is also provoking other reactions in us. After months of being locked down and entering this digital Matrix to interact with the outside world, many people are being forced to grapple with what they really feel about the digital world. Do you really want to live there for the rest of time? A fearful retreat into the digital is a short-term solution, but not a long-term one. In the long-term it could have severely negative consequences.

The fact that people rush out into the parks at the first available opportunity is testament to the fact that we are biological, social creatures. The longer we stay indoors, the greater the latent desire builds up for contact with the physical, for dancing in sweaty nightclubs, for raucous embraces at football matches, and for pub quiz nights where everyone stuffs a £10 note as an entry fee into a beer glass.

So let’s hold our nerve. We will have to learn to touch doorknobs again at some point. We will be more mindful of hygiene, but a sci-fi world of automated doors and remotely initiated digital interactions will never feed the human spirit in the way that a dive bar with swing dancing will. I understand that circumstances force us to experiment with the realm of the digital – and this can be positive, especially when it can be used to cut down unnecessary flying (an action which will be needed for the major climate crisis which still awaits ahead of us), but let’s use this time to explore positive alternatives to Big Tech, rather than running into their paternalistic arms.

And, please don’t succumb to the opportunistic push of the payments industry, as they use this situation to push even more in the War on Cash. Yes, cash is physical, and more present to our bodies than the cold crackle of cyberspace. But we too are physical, and a lot more organic than the digital world and the corporations that preside over it. Cash is not our enemy, and those corporates are not our friends.

STREAM #2: BEYOND SOLUTIONISM IN A POST-COVID-19 WORLD

Speaker: Evgeny Morozov (BY)

Moderator: Lenart J. Kučić (SI)

18 MAY 2020

The current crisis, with governments begging tech companies for help, has highlighted the immense appeal of the ideology of technological solutionism. But what is its politics? And how does it relate to the other dominant ideology of the day, neoliberalism? This talk will explore the political effects of technological solutionism, survey its place in today's global capitalism as well as suggest what a post-solutionist politics might look like.

Special guests: Sandra Bašić Hrvatin, Valerija Korošec, Nejc Slukan

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



Sérgio Nunes

S

Question for Evgeny Morozov - Do you agree with the case for public digital media infrastructures by Ethan Zuckerman. And that Wikipedia is currently the only existing kind of such infrastructure? Who can be a driving force in developing these infrastructures? Your Syllabus project seems to bet on a bottom-up approach.

Frankfurt

F

Can there be any "third way" if information technology is deeply rooted in and owned by neoliberal institutions (corporations)? What would be the "third way"? The core of computation is binary (hardware, code): either 1 or 0. Communist or capitalist.

Franziska

F

What is the role of EU venture capital policy in the neoliberalism-solutionism / state-market nexus?

Vienne Chan

V

so far most of the talk is about tech and solutionism, but little on the actual politics. Without undermining the actual suffering and deaths, was wondering more about perspective of COVID as more of a political problem than a technical/health problem that requires a "solution"? What if it doesn't require a (technical) solution per se? In this I mean, COVID affects us unequally, and it is becoming increasingly clear that is the poor who are more impacted.

MajaB.

M

The pandemic presents an opportunity for platforms to rethink the way they operate and the system they operate within. Will platform use the small window of opportunity to become better or not? What is your opinion about what happening right now?now?

STREAM #3: DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND PROXIMITY TRACING

Speaker: Denis 'Jaromil' Roio (IT)

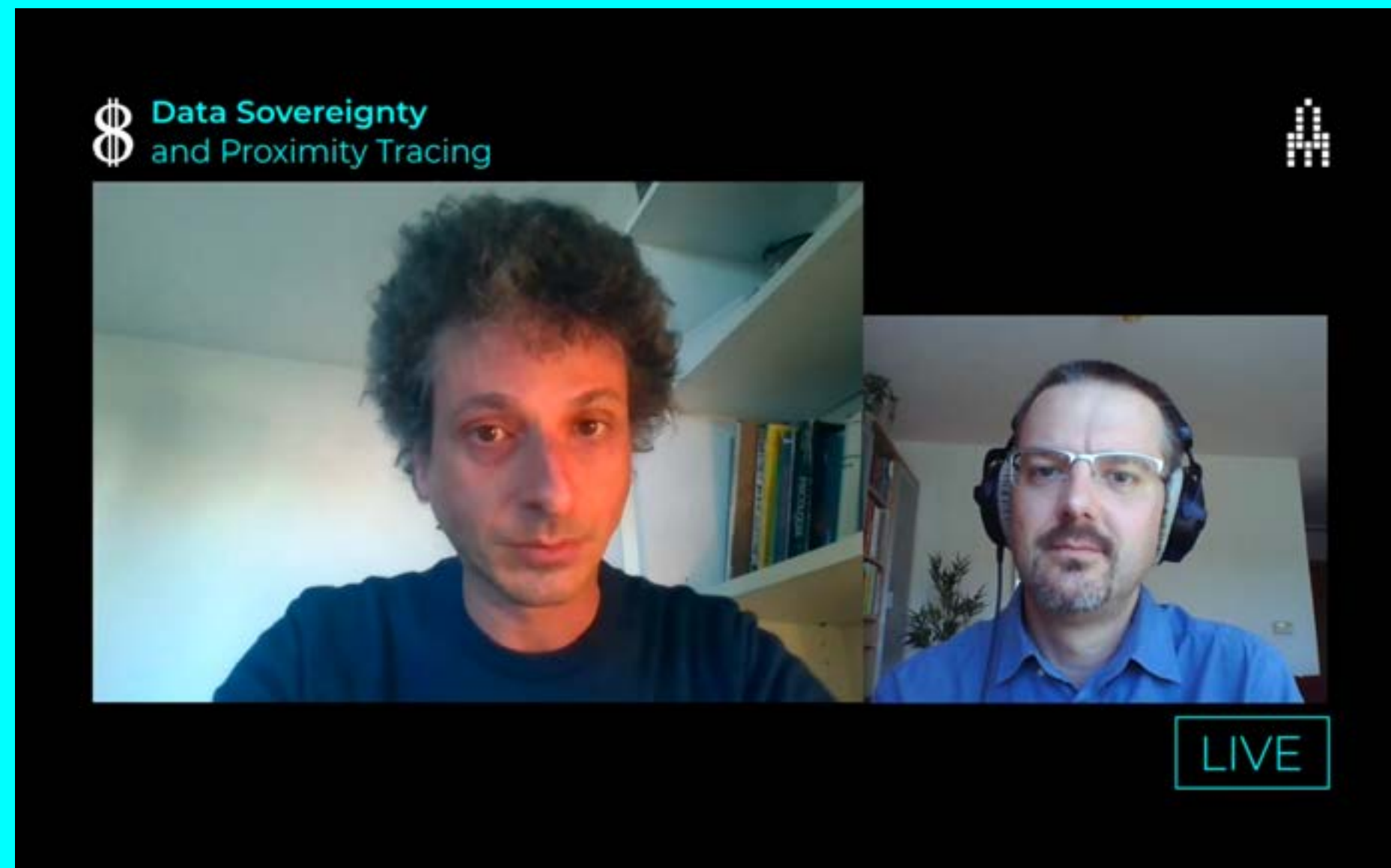
Moderator: Domen Savič (SI)


25 MAY 2020


In his conversation with Domen Savič (Citizen D), Denis 'Jaromil' Roio emphasised that technology is only a means – we have to talk about problems and solutions. In building applications, we need to ask whether we build them in order for us to better understand individuals and society or in order for the applications to better understand us. In addition to decentralised tracking applications, we also focused on mutual credit system, which, according to the testimonies (at least) from Italy, where Jaromil joined the conversation from, might be more effective technological solutions than the systems for tracking infected individuals.


Special guests: Anja Blaj, Andraž Tori, Maja Založnik


[LINK TO VIDEO](#)




matslats  How does tech, particularly blockchain tech, shape people's ideas about monetary theory and monetary innovation?

Igor Pop Tr...  My question is: Where do you see the connection between the financial recession and the hybrid systems in Europe that lack democracy and transparency? I think that not only some Eastern European countries are dictatorships; this is the case with the so called cool countries too.

t_bazz  I have a question for Jaromil (ciao!): How can we preserve our personal freedom as citizens when this might negatively affect the life of the vulnerable people? This is the dilemma, you said technology cannot save us, but how to be free with our mobility being sure we are not harming others? (I also believe that tech is not the solution, btw).

Sami Aras  What is the role of surveillance on CCTV in privacy terms during these kind of global political event? Do you expect policy changes in governmental face recognition tools?

VienneChan  comment rather than Q: going back to Jaromil's initial comment on app is not the solution. if you look at how hong kong has dealt with covid, the city contained the outbreak not with an app, nor with governance, but with a general public understanding and care for each other.

STREAM #4: CARE SOLIDARITY IS DISOBEDIENCE

Moderator: Davor Mišković (HR)

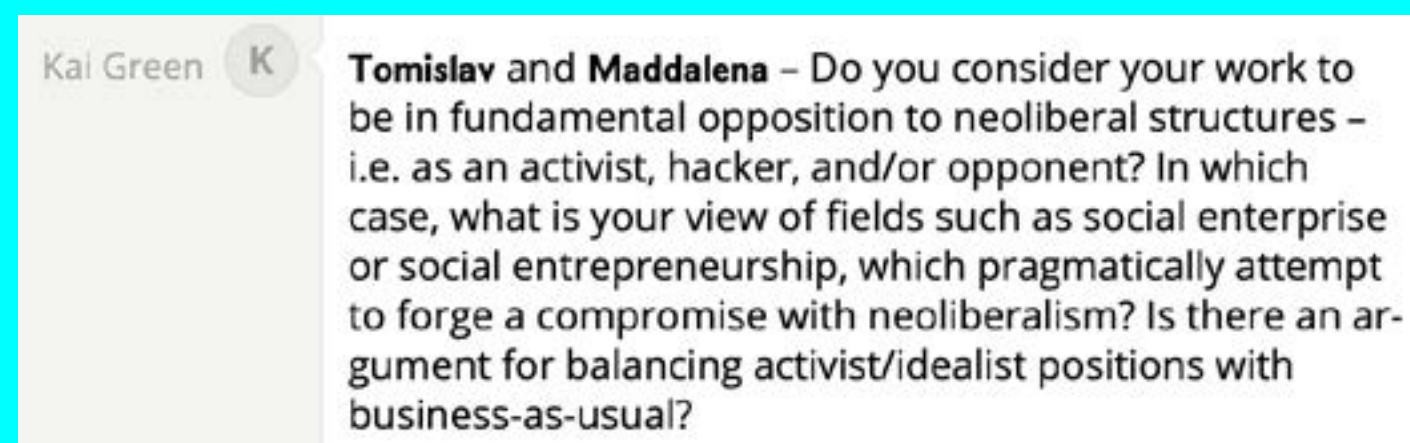
Speakers: Pirate Care / Tomislav Medak (HR); Cassie Thornton (CA);
Maddalena Fragnito (IT)

1 JUNE 2020

Neoliberal policies have re-organised the basic care provisions previously considered cornerstones of democratic life – healthcare, housing, access to knowledge, right to asylum, freedom of mobility, social benefits, etc. – turning them into tools for surveilling, excluding and punishing the most vulnerable, reframing the family unit as the sole bearer of responsibility for dependents. In the light of these processes, a growing wave of initiatives has been questioning the political and economic framework of care and experimenting with its collective reorganisation. On this panel, **Tomislav Medak** will present the research project *Pirate Care* that is gathering diverse self-organised care practices currently opposing the criminalisation of solidarity and prefiguring models for commoning care infrastructures. **Cassie Thornton**, of the *Feminist Economics Department* (the FED), will discuss *The Hologram*, a three-person health monitoring and diagnostic system practised from couches all over the world, on the phone and by many names, to produce a three-dimensional image of each participant's physical, psychic and social health, based on one of the free, experimental care models developed by health workers at Social Solidarity Clinics in Greece during the height of the financial and refugee crisis. **Maddalena Fragnito** will present the experience of *Soprasotto*, a parent-managed kindergarten based in Milan since 2013. She will discuss the concept of “commoning care” by comparing its specificities to the market-oriented “techno-solutionist” hope on digital technologies in order to help society address the reorganisation of care needs.

Special guests: Majda Hrženjak, Lea Aymard, Maja Ivačić

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



“WE DON’T WANT TO GET CARE FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT TAKEN CARE OF”

By Silvio Lorusso

Care, a concept that gained mainstream prominence during the pandemic, was the focus of the fourth stream of the MoneyLab8, moderated by Davor Mišković of Drugo More and including Tomislav Medak (part of the pirate.care network and community center MaMa in Zagreb), Cassie Thornton (artist and author of the upcoming book *The Hologram*, Pluto Press) and Maddalena Fragnito (co-founder of Macao). The speakers presented a vast array of initiatives that show the ambiguities of care, being both an opportunity for the nurturing of interdependence and a site of extraction and exploitation, which is what Maddalena labelled “capitalist care”.

Davor opened up the stream by mentioning the ten principles of healthcare by *Andrija Štampar* and in particular three of them: the idea that informing the people is more important than any law, that in healthcare there should be no distinction between the economically strong and the weak, and that the doctor must also be a teacher.

The Hologram

Cassie Thornton, a US artist based in Toronto, somehow challenged this last principle by suggesting that the patients and their communities should partly become the expert of their healthcare. She presented the Hologram, a model for peer support and mutual aid meant to generate the opportunities for interdependence that don't usually happen within capitalism or are even ostracized within this system. The Hologram emerged in a period in which Cassie and her peers were experiencing economic and housing precarity as well as a limited access to medical care. As Cassie puts it, it was an “intentional community in exile” that formulated a clear question:

How do you organize your own care, before or during an emergency, within a set of completely unstable conditions?

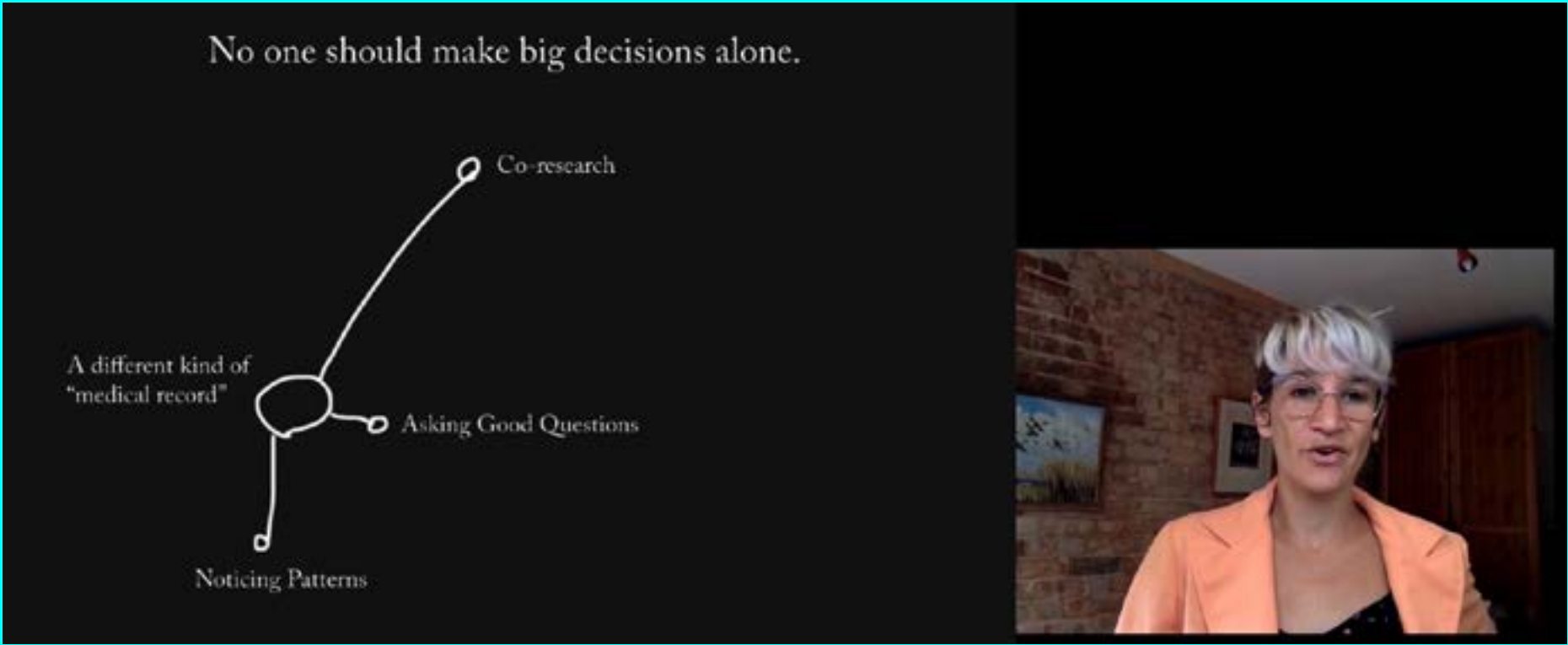
The attention of the community was attuned on the case of Greece, which was at the center of the news back then. They could recognize features of the Greek emergency in their own surroundings, so they found inspiration in some Greek initiatives such as the Social solidarity clinic of Thessaloniki.

The Hologram is an integrative care model which attempts to break hierarchies such as gender or citizenship status. The approach is holistic, but not just in a medical sense: it is attentive

to issues like intergenerational trauma, accumulated debt and class. This is where the name “hologram” comes from: the health of what is traditionally known as patient is considered multidimensional.

The main goal of the model is to distribute the labor of attention and care. The person who gets care, called the expert, shares what makes them healthy to three friends or acquaintances who focus on different aspects: mental/emotional, social, physical. This distribution comes from the will to level the asymmetry between the people who are cared for and the ones that give care. As Cassie puts it, “We don’t want to get care from people who are not taken care of”.

The Hologram also distributes expertise, giving an active role to the person who receives care. Here might lie a critical issue of the model, as it could potentially contribute to the already in progress undermining of medical authority. How can then the Hologram take advantage of scientific knowledge while questioning impersonal medical authority? I wonder if Cassie influenced by Ivan Illich and I’m curious to see if there’s any trace of his critique of the medical system in The Hologram.



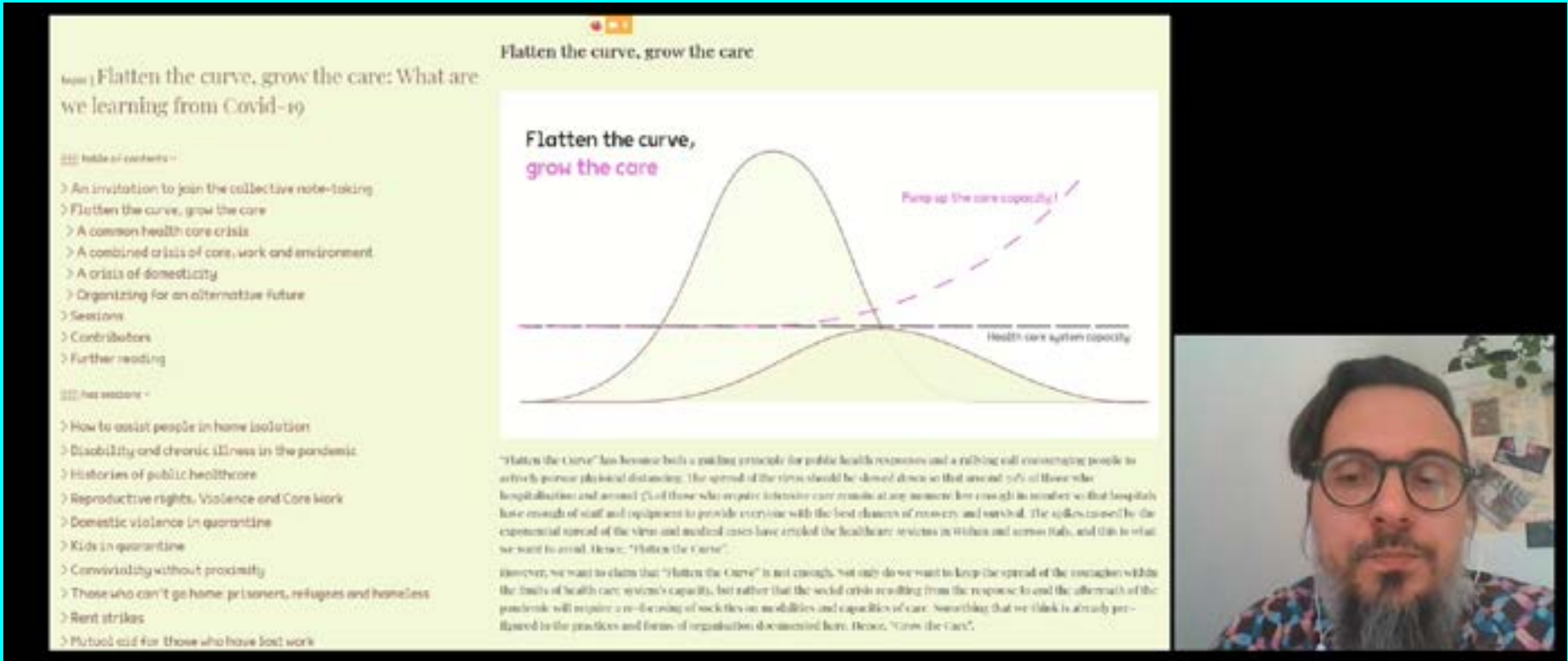
Pirate.care

Tomislav Medak, currently a doctoral researcher at the Coventry University’s Centre for Postdigital Cultures, presented the pirate.care initiative. Pirate care is care that connects people on the ground of mutual aid and acts as a response to the neoliberal criminalization of solidarity. The horizon of pirate.care involves different levels of intervention, such as helping migrants at sea, supporting pregnancy termination, and liberate knowledge. Obviously these are complex territories where, as Tomislav stressed, care is not intrinsically nice but functions as a skilled form of labor that currently doesn’t imply reciprocity.

Pirate.care took inspiration from the online #syllabi movement, where groups of people would form the activist praxis of putting together lists of resources on topics such as games and feminism. The pirate.care initiative is also concerned with the maintenance of technical infrastructure that allows to collect and preserve useful documents. The idea is to prevent the common destiny of a WordPress database breaking and data becoming thus inaccessible. In order to do this work, the pirate.care initiative actively mobilizes institutional resources.

Tomislav gave an introduction of the work they are doing as a response to the covid-19 crisis, which can be summarized with the slogan “flatten the curve, grow the care”, as care was mostly offloaded on the front-line workers (for the majority women and people of color) who didn’t have other choice than go to work.

Tomislav pointed out that “back to normal would be disastrous” as the normal is based on an industrial agricultural system that creates at once food scarcity and food waste. In order to approach this one would have to get away with the seemingly flexible, just in time, hyper-automated chain of production of farming. The way to go is relocalization, better wages for the workers and the strengthening of internationalism. The system of provision should not only be protected, but also reclaimed within anti-oppression frameworks through myriads of rootless struggles (that are already taking place).



Soprasotto

Maddalena Fragnito, cultural activist and co-founder of MACAO, presented SopraSotto, a self-organized nursery which intervenes when and where institutional support is lacking. SopraSotto is based on a series of principles including, but not limited to, the emphasis on community rather than the nuclear family, a sensibility towards the dynamics of social reproduction, a feminist understanding of care.

The parents at SopraSotto also question stereotypes regarding children and education: they don't see kids as "little monsters" that need to be domesticated as quickly as possible to become productive beings. In this sense, SopraSotto acts as a pedagogical battleground to fight "capitalocentrism".

Soprasotto, which includes a space, two teachers, around twenty parents and ten kids, responds to the fact that childhood care is still institutionally tailored on the lifestyle of a segment of the population which is not a majority anymore, especially in urban centers like Milan where economic precarity is common and the work and life time are not allocated once and for all. For Maddalena SopraSotto is a "space designed specifically for children and especially for adults".

In a shocking set of statistics, Maddalena shows the preconditions leading to the necessity of such self-organized structure:

- 3.5% of GDP invested in education in Italy vs 5% average in Europe
- 10 billion euros and 100.000 teachers cut in the last ten years
- 30% school workers are precarious, frequently changing school, etc.
- 81% of school workers are women
- 1 in 7 students doesn't reach the end of first level of school
- 70% of the school buildings are inadequate
- 42% of kids or minors live in domestic overcrowding
- 38% of families don't have a computer
- 8% of families don't have wifi

From this perspective, the digital acceleration experiment propelled by the pandemic – as Maddalena explained – will only radicalize inequality and raise early school leaving: it is simply unconstitutional. What is at stake here is the very full-time school model, which was a relatively recent conquest. This is the risk that, quoting Naomi Klein, the "screen new deal" is bringing to the fore.



During the Q&A, various important issues were raised. Tomislav made clear that the intensive digitization in higher education is characterized by a platformization that goes hand in hand with managerialism. You can't automate without bureaucratizing and such bureaucratization brings power to the managerial class.

Maddalena expressed her skepticism to the mainstream centrality that care acquired, which happened, according to her, in the worst possible way: an implementation of top-down care as well as the re-opening of the productive systems without any structural reflection. This is why she suggested to reboot care on feminist grounds: foregrounding the labor involved, rejecting the delegation of care to a sacrificial class of service worker, and gaining agency in deciding what is essential work.

Furthermore, Maddalena listed a series of protests that show the possibility of internationalism facilitated by open technology, such as the Rent Strike, which started in North America, and later gained favor in European countries like Italy.

STREAM #5: HOUSING HACKING THE CRISIS OF HOME

Moderator: Klemen Ploštajner (SI)

Speakers: Lenart J. Kučič (SI); Forms of Ownership / Vienne Chan (HK/DE); DOMA.CITY / Maksym Rokmaniko (UA), Francesco Sebregondi (IT/FR)

8 JUNE 2020

From empty luxury condos in London to slum clearance in Istanbul, from mortgage debt crisis in Spain to unaffordable rents in Slovenia, we are witnessing different local expressions of the global housing condition. These local crises stem from the real estate-financial complex that has transformed housing into an investment opportunity for an increasingly unequal concentration of global surplus capital. The commodification of housing thus offers lucrative financial opportunities for upper classes, while at the same time contributes to the increasing residential alienation, housing insecurity and expropriation of the commons. States have contributed to these developments by not only deregulating housing markets and privatising public rental stock, but also by employing different entrepreneurial strategies that support private investment strategies while limiting the development of non-profit alternatives. Housing is thus no longer a source of individual or social stability and security, but of constant tension, conflict and exploitation. How can communities, in current conditions of financial plunder and state removal, come together to construct other scenarios? How can we develop new mechanisms of communal control that will once again embed housing markets in local social relations, that will treat housing as a communal resource and human right? Can we imagine another system that will not be based on housing as an investment, but will see it as a home?

Special guests: Maša Hawlina, Uroš Mikanovič, Maruša Nardoni

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



ChoppedC...

C

Question for DOMA: From what you presented it seems that an 'extended' way to tokenize the space could accelerate the social change by intertwining with the blockchain technology it uses. I'm thinking of the Xenofeminist manifesto saying "...The task before us is twofold, and our vision necessarily stereoscopic: we must engineer an economy that liberates reproductive labour and family life, while building models of familiarity free from the deadening grind of wage labour." Home inside DOMA seems extremely flexible. Could you see your platform answering to that specific calling / hacking a home - hacking a nuclear family?

Dominic

D

In the Doma model would investment only be available to residents or would it be open to individual investors?

integroerich

Question for Doma: you make an interesting cross-over between ownership and the commons. Could you explain a bit more about this element?

STREAM #6: TAX HAVENS NORMALIZED GRAND THEFT

Moderator: Anuška Delić (SI)

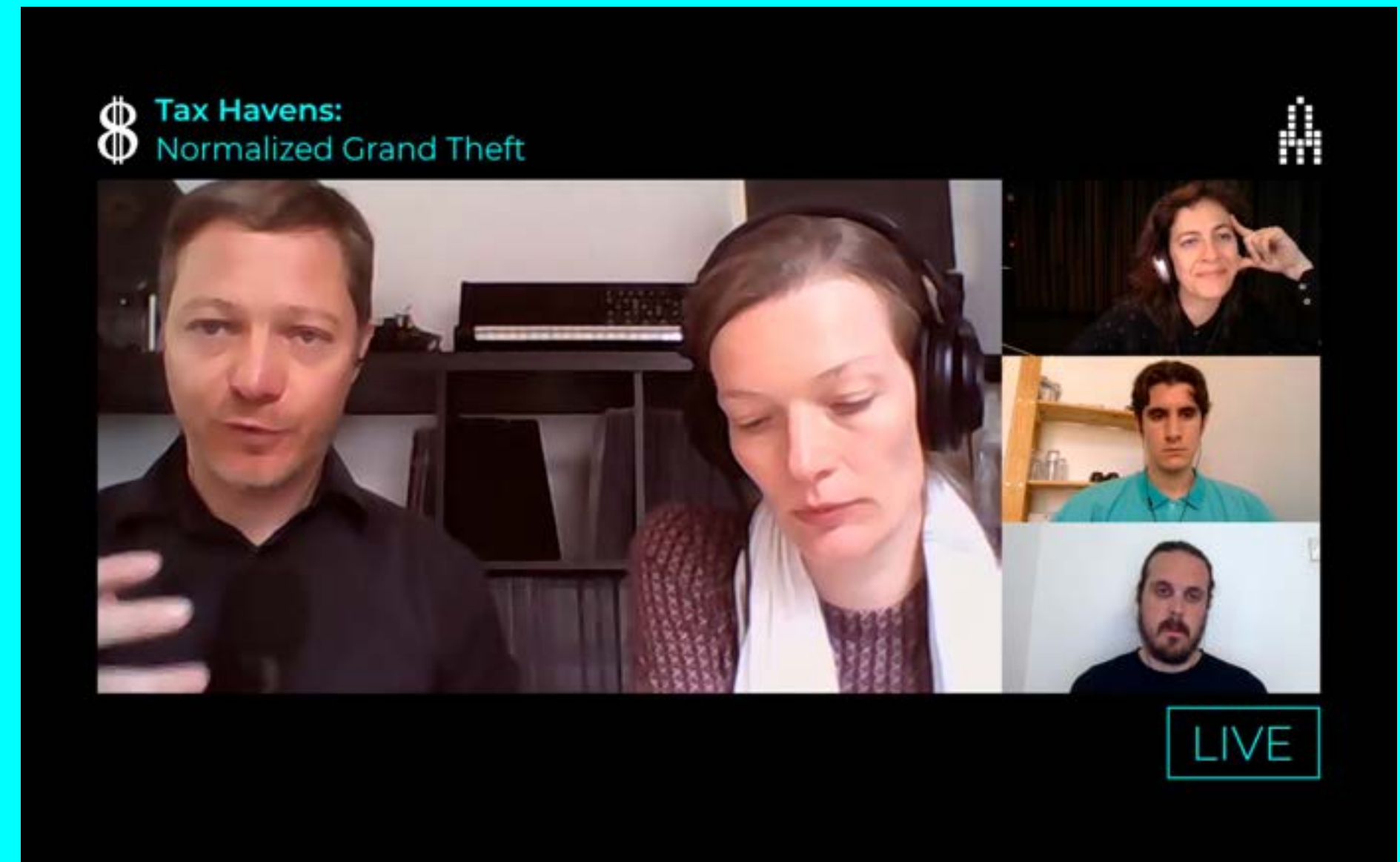
Speakers: RYBN.ORG (FR); Demystification Committee (UK/IT)

15 JUNE 2020

Tax havens are a popular topic for bar rants about The Others, those dirty scumbags who came to possess vast sums of money through means, networks, tools and methods an every-day earthling does not have access to. It is generally assumed the funds are a result of some money laundering/public corruption/criminal operation (as they often are), or of a “perfectly legal and legitimate” tax avoidance scheme. By law, only tax evasion is illegal, while the rest are legal methods of “cashing in” individual benefits, i.e., tax deductions for dependables. The public seemingly responds to revelations by authorities, journalists, and others about the millions in national currencies that have sunk into exotic offshore locations with the resigned realisation that everything will remain the same. This is true, but it also obfuscates the real consequences of tax havens: the millions of euros that never reach a country’s budget and are often a result of transnational crime. After the Panama Papers shook the global markets in 2016, some states fought back by installing registers of beneficial owners. Yet, they can hardly do anything about the flourishing offshore financial industry. To do so would go against the grain of the national economies of giants like the USA, where some states are “onshore” havens. Meanwhile the global public is complicit in this normalisation because, honestly, it is complicated to think about taxes and tax havens, right? Let this panel of investigative artists talking to an investigative journalist make it easier for you. RYBN.ORG will take you on an intimate ride aboard *The Great Offshore*, guiding you gently through offshore finance in infamous locations, like Malta, to help you identify with The Others. Then the Demystification Committee will show you how you can even become one of Them by receiving guidance from their *Offshore Investigation Vehicle* to set up your own global corporate structure.

Special guests: Maruša Babnik, Žiga Perovič, Sebastijan Peterka, Matej Zwitter

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



Abhi A

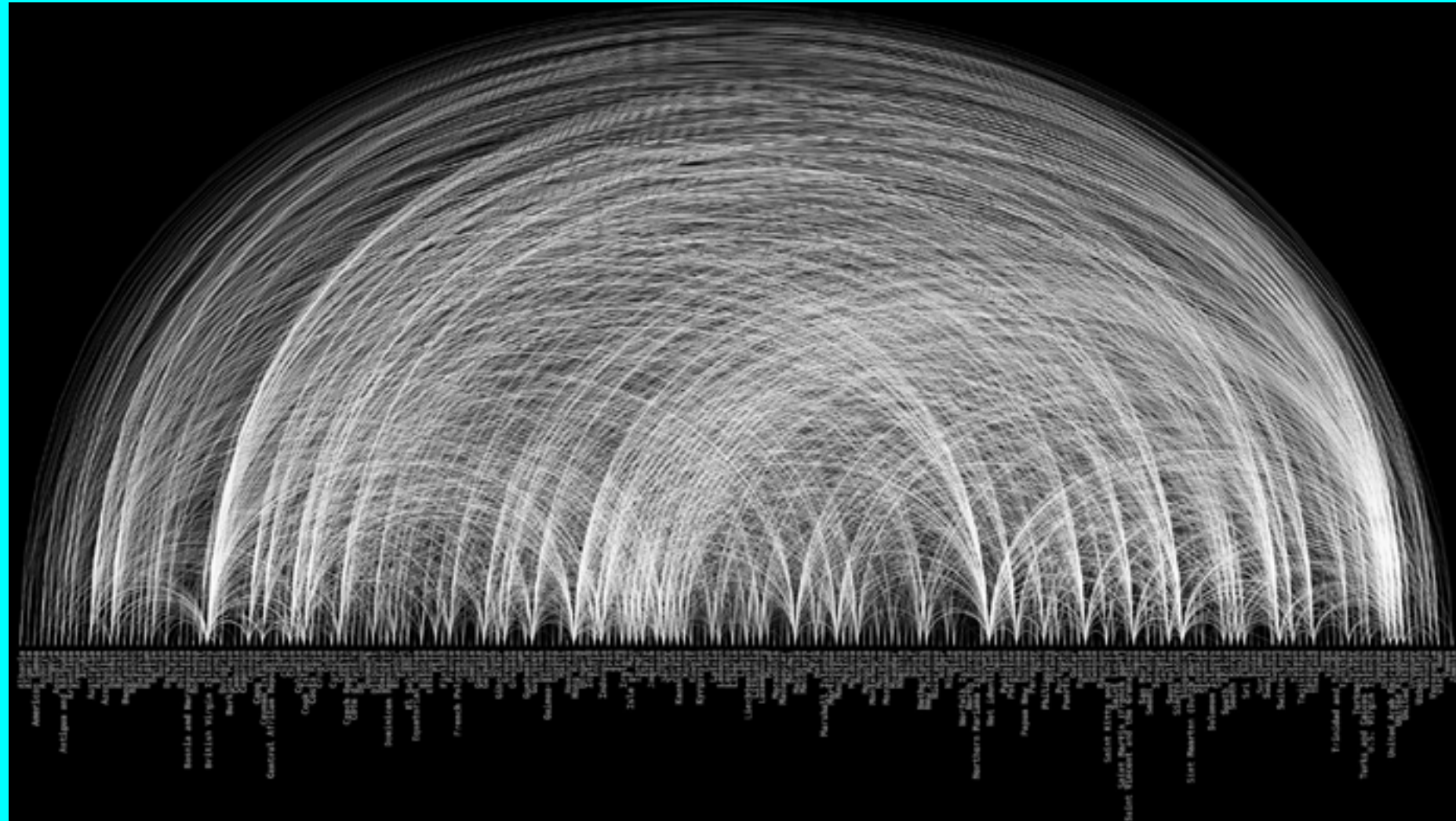
How we see 'offshore' as function of money, as DEmystifi-C does on Interface Chaos?
-What could be possible intervention in this process...to morph it or reduce it or is it better to become part of it ;)?? Does Cryptocurrency amplifies this?

olm-e O

what about local currencies that actually organize off-shore on site and in plain view for local communities? have any thought about the G1 libre currency f.ex. that is still out of the tax scheme ?

OFFSHORING AND OTHER MAGIC TRICKS OF GLOBAL FINANCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH RYBN

Introduction by Max Gorynski. Interview by Nika Mahnič



A data visualisation of all of the nations implicated in the offshoring accounts disclosed by the Panama Papers, and their relations to one another.

From [Panama](#) to [Paradise](#) to the [Bahamas](#) and back, touching upon everywhere between in heaven and in hell (yes, even [Delaware](#)), there are few shores around the world that have yet to, in some way, be made an offshore.

It's an idea that has come to gain considerable weight in the public imagination in the last decade, financial offshoring. The phenomenon is a fundamental bell-weather of increasing globalization. As global markets open up more and more, year-on-year, more businesses are choosing to relocate aspects of their operations, including accounting, to other, more permissive regions of the world.

Offshoring is not, of course, simply a question of canny business strategy. The [Mossack-Fonseca affair](#) in 2016 brought the illegal utilities of offshoring — which begin with simple

fraud and proceed through tax evasion, international sanction avoidance, [corruption](#), and [worse](#) — to wide attention. The unethical dimensions of the practice of offshoring have been subject to intense scrutiny not only by cadres of journalists and academics, but by the public at large as well, at least in the West. This is true particularly since large swathes of ordinary taxpayers, who've seen domestic job volume dwindle as more and more businesses base their operations abroad, have woken up to the cost it incurs for them personally.

One outfit devoted to assessing the means by which offshoring and other methods for financial gain are practiced, is the artist collective RYBN. Theirs is an effort driven by both data-oriented investigation, and by art.

Wonk Bridge's Nika Mahnič spoke to them after their participation at the 8th edition of [MoneyLab](#) conference, where RYBN spoke about their work as part of [Tax Havens: Normalized Grand Theft](#) panel. You can check out the complete recording of that address [here](#). In this interview, they delve into the their background as an organisation; their achievements in databasing; the golden passport phenomenon; and why offshoring was and remains a powerful tool of colonial and very much illiberal dispositions.



The Bank of England. One of the first stops on the “London Offshore Tour”.

Tell us a little bit about your respective backgrounds, what drew you into your specific research and art projects?

RYBN.ORG is an artist collective formed in 1999. Our primary center of interest was related to internet as a medium of artistic expression and as a medium for research — from here comes our growing curiosity for cybernetics, data mining and algorithms. The economy and the [global] financial system, in their contemporary manifestations, offer a privileged vantage point from which to understand the transformations brought about by cybernetics, as well as a stage for artistic interventions.

Over the last two decades, we have conducted extensive research on niche topics related to the cyberneticized economy : we have investigated and documented the esoteric mechanisms of High-Frequency Trading and the [Sub-second Market Microstructure](#), the “[flash crashes](#)” that give rhythm to financial exchanges. With the project “Data Ghosts”, we tried to uncover the eschatological nature of cybernetics, through its relationship to [Kabbalah](#). Our latest investigation, “Human computers”, explores the relationships between computing and the division of Labor, and the [mutations of work conditions within the digital labor regime](#).

With an intimate understanding of the financial ecosystem, and a keen interest for hidden signs and esoteric knowledge, we naturally expanded our investigations towards the [offshore opaque territories](#).

Your Offshore Tour Operator is a situationist GPS prototype, orientated toward a computer assisted psychogeographic drift. It dictates the walk of the user through the ICIJ Offshore Leaks database addresses — including the Offshore Leaks, the Bahamas Leaks, the Panama Papers, the Paradise Papers. In other words, it shows us how channels of offshoring exist all around us.

How do you approach the curation of this database?

The Offshore Tour Operator aims to reveal the ubiquity and the proximity of the offshore industry; [it is all around us, despite] usually being seen as abstract and distant, off-ground. Each of the 785,000 addresses of the ICIJ [Offshore Leaks database](#) has been geolocalized on a map. The Offshore Tour Operator superimposes this 1/1 scale map to the streets, as a second layer of reality, as an echo to the proposition of Vera Tollmann and Boaz Levin in their text “[The City and its Double](#)”. The application drives you in your daily life environment, through familiar streets, and reveals this ‘second layer of reality’ where offshoring mechanism can be found.



A screenshot from RYBN's “Offshore Tour Operator” application, active for a region in Singapore. All dots represent locations implicated in offshoring activities, according to information from ICIJ Offshore Leaks database. — Some text in French —

We didn't conduct any curation over the ICIJ database, just a simple geolocalization of every single entry. We haven't hierarchized the entries relatively to their importance of the role they play in the network architecture, or [with respect to] beneficiaries. Most of them are not even major agents, just the many “little hands” of the offshore system, which could not exist without them. Furthermore, the Offshore Leaks database itself is both partial and obsolete by nature, so the Offshore Tour Operator is also representative of this gap of information. Sometimes, the *dérive* through the city brings you to addresses that are not valid anymore, as their publication incited the unveiled agents to move. In this regard, the Offshore Tour is a hunt for ‘ghosts’, for traces.

However, we do not approach those data as neutral. The *dérives* are the trigger for discussions on the abstraction of finance as well as on the partiality and the obsolescence of data, the necessity of analysis and perspectives. The participants curate themselves the data, try to identify for the missing parts, transform themselves into investigators, etc... Offshore Tours are an invitation to discuss collectively the reality of offshore beyond data, outside the maps and discuss its concreteness in the architecture, as well as in its consequences on state budgets and public services.

Given there was a clampdown on Swiss banking owing to its being ‘over-liberal’ in allowances (leading to Singapore filling that void), do you see any likelihood that there will be organised action against the banks (UBS, Credit Suisse etc.) that enable offshoring, given that so many notable actors benefit from them?

The Swiss Banking sector has been forced to regulate itself as a result of its commercial war states with the United States for the domination of the lucrative Wealth Management sector¹. As a result, the US has probably become the world tax haven leader, though its proxies, the deregulated states of Wyoming and Delaware. While Switzerland had to restructure its Wealth Management sector over the art market and the freeports, and outsource its domiciliation services — shell corporations are now created by the BVI, Singapore, etc.

We addressed this issue at the occasion of Basel’s LISTE Art Fair where we perfected a speculative model that [summarizes offshoring through art](#), taking advantage of the expert audience to refine the model.

Despite new international regulations, changes are essentially cosmetic, not structural. Switzerland has come out of this conflict partly laundered, and its Wealth Management services though art is fully legitimized and normalized. Offshore banking is a concomitant practice to wealth accumulation, a sea snake that changes form and adapts, exploits regulations. This normalisation process of the offshore banking works in a double dynamic : nation-states deregulate more and more to compete with the traditional tax havens (usually set as their own proxies), while offshore practices tend to transfrom in order to reinvent themselves in a pseudo-legal form. A double race to the bottom.

How do you perceive potentially nefarious political influences being subsidised through offshored wealth (i.e. Peter Thiel and his interests etc.)?

The deeper we went with the investigation, and more some important public figures began to appear. Among them, Robert Mercer, Peter Diamondis, Jeff Bezos, Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Donald Trump, etc... They are the architects, the beneficiaires and the promoters of this normalisation process. The names and the public figures are not so important here, as they represent a class system, [the class of neo-illiberalism](#).²

The neo-illiberal system is not based anymore on the old offshore, with its shadow circuits and invisible operations. The new offshore works as a normalized system, legitimized by the economic “necessity” of optimization. These mediatic figures are the biggest promoters of this new version of offshore, built on the ruins of the international regulations that they assault constantly with their lobbying operations. An offshore that is normalized in the mainstream discourse and politically proactive, that assumes without shame its [feudal vision of society](#) — Ayn Rand is the bible ; an offshore that is outrageous in its feeling of immunity and legitimacy ; an offshore that bears a kitsch flavour in the vision of the future they do

1 All started with informations from within, leaked by a whistleblower. Pierre Gastineau and Philippe Vasset have drawn attention over the geopolitical use of the leaks. While some important leaks may never reach a public conclusion, or a trial, or while some whistleblowers remains incarcerated or in exile, others are rewarded by states. Bradley Birkenfeld was awarded 104 millions dollars in 2012 for its cooperation with the IRS services. Edward Snowden is still in exile, Julian Assange awaits its extradition trials. See: Pierre Gastineau, Phillipe Vasset, Armes de déstabilisation massive, 2017.

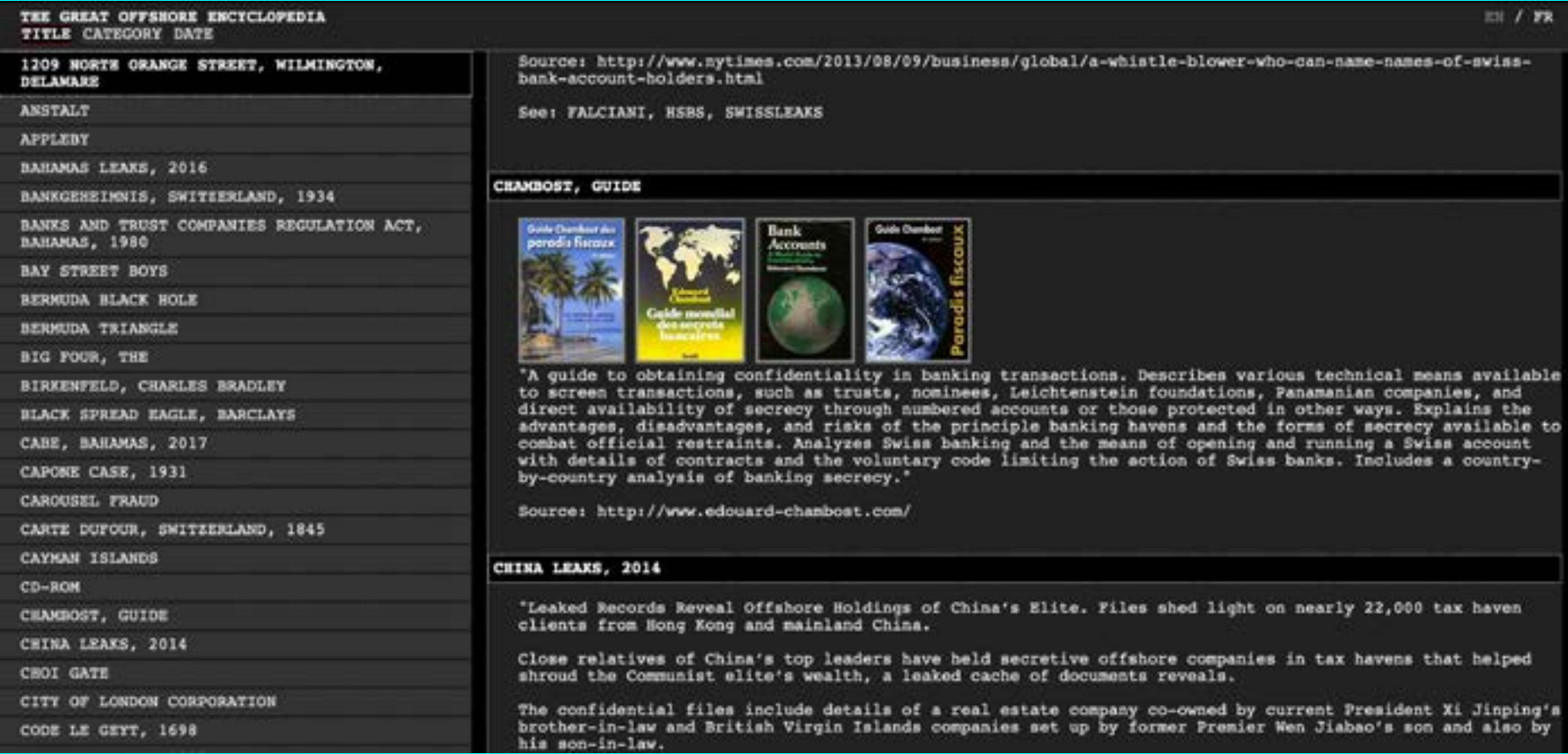
2 To quote Reijer Hendrikse (2020), “Neoliberalism is over — welcome to the era of neo-illiberalism.”

promote ; an offshore whose social politics is philanthropy (another offshore circuits) and “trickle-down”, while their enterprises and politics aggravates the precarity of societies.

Could you tell us more about your last project about golden passports?

The Golden Passports programs, also known as CBI (Citizenship By Investment programs) are one of these normalisation markers of offshore, understood here as a service for the super wealthy. Developped primarily in St Kitts and Nevis, CBI has grown as a normalized service within europe in Cyprus and Malta, [even if its is framed by heavier regulations in many other countries](#). The novelty of these CBI programs are the crudeness of the selling of nationalities at the era of migrations, walls erections and refugees refusal, camps such as Moria, and facist milices that comes to shoot the refugees. These programs emphasizes the ongoing class struggle.

For now, CBI is one of the speculative topics we explore in the next step of the project, a forthcoming publication with UV Editions. Within this publication, CBI is associated to other case studies : asteroid mining and space extractivism programs (the so-called new space), Virtual Financial Assets programs (the recycling by institutional banks of the crypto-currencies), the sea steading programs, and the freeports. These five phenomena are exemplar at different levels on the normalisation of offshore. The book brings together all those epiphenomena into a larger perspective of Offshore, taken as a goverance model. The book includes texts and contributions from James Bridle, Ewen Chardronnet, Max Haiven, Brian Holmes, Aude Launay, Rachel O’Dwyer, Brett Scott, Vera Tollmann & Boaz Levin, Reijer Peter Hendrikse and Rodrigo Fernandez, and many more.



RYBN’s “[The Great Offshore Encyclopedia](#)”

In your Offshore Encyclopedia you include local mythologies, ghost stories and piracy. Could you tell us more about the project and the importance of including other narrative positions?

The Offshore Encyclopedia is a collection of singular stories, narratives, and folklores we have collected during our field investigations in the most remarkable offshore locations.³ We remained very open in the process of accumulation and aggregation : ghosts, witch-hunt, rituals, colonialism, slave ships insurance, marronnage, republic of pirates, topographic maps, calculating machines, sponges culture, plantationocene, mass-tourism, casinos, free ports, omerta, mailboxes, logos, heraldic, etc. resulting in unusual semiotic associations. With this collection, we try to break up with the mainstream narrative of the offshore economy, which frames the phenomenon as marginal and isolable.

The Encyclopedia is an attempt to recontextualize the offshore into a global approach, to open new perspectives, recreate or reveal neglected historical correlations. Borrowing a concept to Donna Harraway, we could see it as an operation to thicken the present⁴ — or as a way to give the investigation a multiperspectivist touch.⁵ The offshore phenomenon needs to be understood as systemic. For this aim, Harraway’s speculative narrative technique can help by establishing a network of relations between disparate elements. As an example among many, Canary Wharf, a big financial center located at the East of London where every big banks and “offshore magic circle” agencies are concentrated, has been built on the ruins of an important harbor of the colonial British Empire, the West India Docks. This land was also called Isle of dogs.

By multiplying those kind of correlations, we can underline how the historical development of offshore capitalism is rooted to colonialism.

With statues of slave owners being thrown in the sea, is it a time ripe for protests against offshore?

Offshore is a political problem, not a technical one. It is a political instrument to perpetuate relationships based on dominance. Offshore is about how to blur and break links between entities and their responsibilities, whether regarding criminal sources of profit (laundering), or how those profits can be socially redistributed through taxes (tax evasion and optimisation) — and by extension debts and bankruptcy. But it serves as well to outsource bad work conditions, in terms of salary and security, ecological impacts on the environment (with, for example, the flags of convenience specialized for boats to be dismantled, the “pavillons corbillards”, [as in Palau](#)). As summarized in the French expression “se *dédouaner* de ses re-

3 incl. The City of London, Dublin, Jersey, Guernsey, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Delaware, the Bahamas, the Caymans, Malta, Luxembourg, The Netherlands.
4 Donna Harraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016
5 Donna Harraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016

sponsabilités” (*clear oneself of responsibility*), offshore provides clean and responsible images for companies and brands, through very efficient tools and adaptive governances.

The offshore industry appears fundamentally as a question of image, and provides a kind of public consent by *default*, a defensive wall to critics and transparency requests, adjusted to what is generally admitted as acceptable or scandalous. So, our suggestion: let’s move the lines of what is acceptable.

[Nicholas Shaxson](#) and Alain Deneault⁶ both wrote on the intricate relations between colonialism and the offshore industry, in terms of historical roots, geographic and geopolitical overlapping. Offshore banking is the perpetuation of the colonial regime, renewed into a system of proxy politics.⁷ We need to apply the decolonial critical tools to offshore.

6 Alain Deneault, “Paradis fiscaux, la filière canadienne, Ecosociété, 2014.
7 See also: Reier Hendrikse et Rodrigo Fernandez article, that describes the indonesian independance as a negociation to perpetuate the Netherlands economical domination after independance. In “Offshore Finance: How Capital Rules the World”, January 2019 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330713868_Offshore_Finance_How_Capital_Rules_the_World

STREAM #7: BLOCKCHAIN RADICALISING THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION

Moderator: Inte Gloerich (NL)

Speakers: Jaya Klara Brekke (UK); Max Haiven (CA); Martin Zeilinger (GB)


22 JUNE 2020


Like many technologies, the radical potential of blockchains and cryptocurrencies to revolutionise the way we work, trade, cooperate and exchange has narrowed as major banks, corporations, and other powerful interests claim this potential for themselves. What has happened to those alternative futures lost along the way? What about the paths not taken in the development of this technology? Or was it fated to be this way? Was this technology cursed from the beginning? This panel seeks to explore the ghosts and spectres of alternative possibilities, of the radical imagination, that haunt today's landscape of blockchain experiments. In an era when blockchains are being used for the purpose of increasing corporate power, of consolidating inequality, or for new forms of surveillance and exploitation, are other blockchain futures possible?


The panellists will seek to recover the political economies of the hacker-engineers, whose stories start with an affiliation to “decentralisation” that emerged out of experiences in pre-Bitcoin cypherpunk, hacker and peer-to-peer network cultures as well as consider money's long history of “epic failures”, in which schemers, dreamers and tricksters have tried, and failed, to steal monetary fire from the economic Gods. Together they will question the task for a truly revolutionary money that would not only bring about a redistribution of wealth, but also a reimagination of value. Among the propositions, we'll hear about exploring how blockchain tech could be used not for “fixing” property-based value systems, but for refusing such systems entirely. Instead of financialising creative practice and further commodifying aesthetic artefacts, can “crypto” resist property as such? How might an unownable digital artefact function on the blockchain?


Special guests: Martin Mihajlov, Miha Artnak, Marina Markežič

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)

realDaniel_...  hi from berlin, jaya! could you mention any examples of existing blockchain projects that take a more equitable approach to decentralized accounting?

realDaniel_...  what do you think about the possibility of artists (who are often exploited by art markets and struggle to make a living off their artwork) using blockchain or other copyright-oriented technology to get paid for their labor? i'm thinking about mat dryhurst's ongoing critique of music copyright and his project Saga.

audelau  @aksioma @marcela I actually have a question for all the guests: what do they think about the fact that in order to interact with a DAO, as empowering or aimed at doing good this DAO could be or would seem to be, one needs to own ETH? What does it fundamentally mean for them to tie voting power to a currency?

ericbarryDr...  e I am interested in this notion of market-resistant property. It would seem that when we remove marketability from an object, the logic of the market swoops in and de-values our labor. Vis a vis the remix movement and "data wants to be free." While we don't want to simply reproduce the conditions of the market, perhaps there is a way of building pockets of resistance into current market conditions. Short of trying to invent an entirely new economy like ECSA.

BLOCKCHAIN IMAGINARIES

By Inte Gloerich

First published at Askioma.org

In the past decade blockchain was pulled from left to right and back again to solve what seems like any issue, achieve any dream. From libertarian anti-state crypto-currencies and new realms of monetization, to platforms for commoning and cooperative organizing. Much like the internet before it, we're now seeing blockchain evolving into what might become a kind of general-purpose technology (albeit still experimental and speculative). This of course makes it all the more important to investigate what kind of social, political and economic worlds it can support.

Is blockchain useful if we want to break open the social imagination, or is it in the end only capable of confirming the status quo? Can blockchain technology help us imagine and work towards a more equitable, open, and flexible world? How are we entangled with others, the natural world around us, and the ledgers that keep track? Who benefits from blockchain and other financial technologies, and what kind of alternative economies can we achieve with them? What does real resistance look like, and what is innovation from below? These are some of the questions addressed in the *Blockchain: Radicalising the Social Imagination* panel session during [MoneyLab #8: Minting a Fair Society](#) organized by Aksioma.

The political economy of the hacker-engineer

Blockchain technology is often quite straightforwardly discredited in critical / leftist circles as serving neoliberal ideals. But, [Jaya Klara Brekke](#) says, there is more to it than this. The technology actually has particular lineages that are worth understanding in a more nuanced way, not in the least because it can contribute to a counter strategy to surveillance-based platform economies.

To do this, Jaya focusses on tracing the motivations and sensibilities of the character of the hacker-engineer that is central to the blockchain development space. As a blend between a hacker (a tinkerer interested in systems and changing them) and an engineer (interested making things work for a specific purpose, creating solutions) this character sees economics as a designable space where behavior could be guided by systems and infrastructures instead of politics. Jaya explains that there are three technological and philosophical allegiances are important to the hacker-engineer when building these systems:

- **Infosec.** The hacker-engineer wants to build resilient, decentralized network structures.
- **Autonomy.** Blockchain critique often focus on economic autonomy in the blockchain space or infrastructural autonomy (i.e. automation) where systems function without the intervention of humans. The hacker-engineer however wants to self-determine their infrastructure, and this is something that we can recognize in the blockchain-based systems for community autonomy that came up with Ethereum. This is a form of autonomy that is worthy of more attention.
- **Cryptography and privacy.** This should be framed in relation to the centralized infrastructural control and surveillance based business models of the platform economy. The hacker-engineer wants to gain not just personal privacy and control over their own data, but builds these systems also to gain a collective form of privacy, with systems that instead of data-extraction run on different kinds of business models.

The possibility of unownable assets on the blockchain

What might an alternative to these extractive business models look like? Who is working in this space, and what directions seem to be most fruitful for the blockchain?

[Martin Zeilinger's](#) work involves intellectual property issues in relation to contemporary art. Researching blockchain systems that deal with this, he shows how the technology often works to support a hyperfinancialization of the art market, art practices, or art itself. For example, [Maecenas](#) is an art investment start-up that tokenizes art works in fragments. People can buy and sell pieces of an art work. Jonas Lund created the Jonas Lund Token ([JLT](#)), a community that controls the artist's practice and life. Interested parties might buy shares / tokens, and collectively decide which commissions he accepts, which grants to apply for etc.

So, how might the blockchain be repurposed for opposite aims? How could blockchain refuse property models rather than perpetuating them? Martin lays out two interesting directions:

The possibility of an unownable digital artifact on the blockchain. This has roots in an idea that was quite prevalent until recently: that digital files are basically unownable, un-copy-rightable, because they are so easily copied and disseminated. Although this was never really the case, blockchain technology seems to only step further away from this idea by enforcing artificial scarcity of individually identifiable digital files. The possibility of an unownable digital artifact on the blockchain seems for now at least to remain a philosophical thought experiment.

Using blockchain for commoning infrastructures. This is in Martin's opinion the more promising direction. He gives two examples:

- [CultureStake](#) by Furtherfield, which is described as a "web-based voting and connection system for decentralised cultural decision-making and investment."

- [Decentralized Autonomous Kunstverein](#), which combines blockchain technology with the history of non-profit art associations in Germany. It is “directed and funded by its members on a voluntary basis, without a permanent space or home jurisdiction, initiating projects however and wherever on the globe its members decide.”

Innovation from below

[Max Haiven](#) frames the question of the possibilities of blockchain as a counter to the status quo even broader. How might blockchains become innovations that are rebellions against the fundamental functioning of capitalism, its architecture and the way it measures our work and value? For him, the focus should not be on the innovation that is promising disruption of finance and tech, but a sort of everyday innovation by the people as they go through life trying to survive in a system that is stacked against them. His example involves a packet of Ramen Noodles.



The well-known prison currency of cigarettes has been replaced in recent years by things like instant noodles. This is due to the fact that the increasingly privatized food services in prisons no longer provide the inmates with enough calories to keep healthy and strong enough to protect yourself in violent situations. In this context, instant noodles became very valuable as a uniform, long-lasting, and fungible form of food. Prisoners can stack them up or exchange them as needed. This, Max says, is innovation from below: an innovation that is made in order to survive a system that does not value you. The example of mass incarceration (or “prison

warfare” a term Max borrows from [Dylan Rodriguez](#)) shows how these systems of exclusion are often highly racialized.

What we can learn from this example is:

- When we think about monetary innovation, we need to start from those that are excluded from the current economic system. Otherwise, it will just repeat the same tendencies again.
- When we think about technologies (and money is one of them) we need to think about what they propose themselves as a solution to. What is the social problem that money tries to solve? And who actually defined this as a problem?
- Instead of coming up with alternative money designs and financial technologies from the top down, we need to see how they might be used by those that are excluded. How these technologies could relate them to grassroots forms of resistance. This is a space of truly interesting experiments.

A FOLLOW-UP WITH MARTIN ZEILINGER AND MAX HAIVEN

By Inte Gloerich

First published on Aksioma.org

Because there was so much to discuss and many questions from the audience, many of my prepared questions for the speakers remained unasked during [Blockchain: Radicalising the Social Imagination](#). After the session I decided to send some of my questions their way anyway. I asked them if they might have time to write a reply. Jaya unfortunately (understandably!) didn't have time on my very short notice, but Max and Martin, provided me with some very interesting responses. Here is a short write-up of my extended question time.

Inte Gloerich: *This is a question about something I experience myself often: when I tell people that my work involves blockchain technology, I see dollar signs, or rather bitcoin / altcoin signs, appear in their eyes. So in terms of radicalizing the social imagination, generally speaking, I would say that is not something the blockchain helps with. How should we relate to this? Is it important that the blockchain is seen as this capitalist money-making technology? Should we just keep working in our niches, or is it necessary to radicalize the meaning of the word blockchain so to speak?*

Martin Zeilinger: I think a 'radicalisation' of the social imagination in relation to blockchain technology can encompass a number of things: perhaps most importantly, that could include inspiring in people a more self-reflexive understanding and questioning of their own immediate, default assumption that blockchain tech is a 'capitalist money-making technology,' as you describe it. What does it mean (or, what might it be symptomatic of) that so many people find it difficult or impossible to think about this technology beyond the conventional capitalist paradigms which the technology is also, supposedly, able to disrupt? Once a more complex and critical notion of blockchain tech gets a foothold in the broader public imagination, it might then become possible to focus more directly on the many potential applications of blockchain tech that address entirely different value systems, such as secure communication and data flows, equitable participation in decision-making processes, or the commoning of digital infrastructures.

Max Haiven: I think one could propose anti-capitalist approaches to using blockchain to solve specific problems of how to organize common life and a less violent methodology of

post-capitalist cooperation, but that would be quite different than valourizing "blockchain" in and of itself. There seems to me to be nothing really radical about blockchains, at least no more so than any other emergent technology. It's instructive to look back on the history of the euphoria for previous "disruptive" technologies, including the steam engine, the telegraph and even the book and see that, in all cases, the development and fate of that technology depended far more on class struggle than on the technology itself. I think the only people served by the argument that any technology is in and of itself "radical" are the rich and powerful, who use the excuse of its allegedly inherently radical nature to mystify the deeply social and historical nature of any technology's use, development and outcomes. Radical uses of blockchain are those, to my mind, that advance radical goals: the abolition of private property, the dignity and abundance to which all humans are entitled, the overcoming of actual power relations (not power in the theoretical abstract sense). I would be excited to see real proposals for blockchain projects that worked towards these ends and made real substantial, risky interventions. Otherwise, I think the overwhelming majority of uses of "radical" or "revolutionary" are just hype, largely to attract investors (of both financial and spiritual variety) to various blockchain gimmicks that typically range from the nefarious to the absurd.

IG: *The Extinction Rebellion asks in relation to the climate crisis: How Normal was Normal?, saying there is no going back. How do you think we can take this current moment of pandemic-enforced change, that at least in some places radicalises social imagination, to have lasting positive effects? Could local currencies, grassroots resistance strategies, alternative organisations, and political activation, contribute to not going back to normal?*

MZ: I would say that the examples you give – local currencies, grassroots resistance strategies, etc. – have already been providing a really strong counterpoint to an awful, normalised status quo in many different contexts. But of course there are important pandemic-related changes to how communities can come together, operate, and act collectively. This context might be an opportunity to start thinking more about what positive, productive, critical contributions emerging blockchain technologies could offer to the new ways in which community action and participation can now happen. Furtherfield's [CultureStake](#) project might be a good case in point – it could be very useful for coming up with ways of making community participation, collective decision-making, etc. resilient, secure, transparent, and fair even in situations where people can't easily come together and act collaboratively in physical spaces.

MH: I think these and more are essential to creating the actual infrastructures of care, exchange, provisioning and cooperation that will allow us to withstand the very strong pressure to "return to normal." We have now, in the pandemic, a breach in the ideological and the material circuits of global racial capitalism, but we humans crave normalcy, even if it is normalcy that is killing us individually or collectively. The only way to withstand our own inclination

towards “normal”, and the very strong pressures to return to it in the name of sustaining capitalism, will be to transform the infrastructures through which life is reproduced as much as possible. So this would mean forging new non-commodified relationships, building new structures of solidarity, new economic platforms, new ways of being (or, in some cases, rekindling older modes of being, exchange and cooperation that capitalism has tried to extinguish, as in the case of Indigenous people’s resurgence). Ideology and ideas are flimsy in the face of material pressures, so it is vital to transform material life and social relations.

IG: *A central theme for MoneyLab has always been exploring new revenue models for the arts and the “creative industries”. How can we find alternative value systems that support creative and artistic work? Perhaps part of the answer lies in complementary currencies, local economies, or non-monetary value systems. How do you think about this? Do you see promising directions for the arts in relation to what we talked about?*

MZ: I think that the value systems you mention have always existed. However, it seems difficult to use blockchain technology in ways that can achieve an effective and enduring resistance to being assimilated into the usual ultra-hierarchical, centralised, and property-oriented circuits of the art world. In this sense, the most visible manifestation of how this technology is taken up in the art world continues to be through blockchain-based art markets. I’m generally very critical of these platforms and their ambitions to create environments of tokenised artworks, financialised creative practice, and artificial digital scarcity. Interestingly, some of the more conventionally successful blockchain artists seem to be the ones who embrace these tendencies, even if it’s in a critical or tongue-in-cheek fashion. Jonas Lund Tokens comes to mind. Last year, María Paula Fernández, Stina Gustafsson and Fanny Lakoubay published a report that takes up exactly these questions – and they called it “There Is No Such Thing As Blockchain Art.” That title isn’t to be taken entirely seriously, of course, but it hints nicely at the tension with which blockchain in art contexts is struggling, namely between resistance to the ideologies and operational logic of financial systems, and assimilation into them.

MH: I am of the unpopular opinion that struggling to create or defend the niche for the survival of “art” or “culture” within capitalism is often narcissistic and even dangerous. I care a lot about artists and other creative workers, but I think the problem is that, to the extent we focus on their fate, we ignore the fact that they are workers under capitalism and what will benefit them/us most are the same policies and transformations that will benefit all workers: guarantees of social welfare, robust shared services, freedoms of movement and dignity, the removal of capitalist discipline. I think artists and “creative”-types can and should experiment with other means of provisioning, sharing and manifesting resources for their reproduction within, against and beyond capitalism. But these will only ever be methods of self-defence within a fundamentally abusive and violent system. I think artists and everyone else need to

turn their intentions towards abolishing capitalism, which does not mean simply waiting around for some fabled revolution. Rather, it takes up the abolitionist question: what needs does capitalism falsely claim to meet? How could these needs be met otherwise? How can we begin, now, to build the institutions and infrastructures to meet our needs without relying on capitalism or access to capital? How can we network our abolitionist efforts to then capsize capitalism as a whole? I actually think those who are today categorized as “artists” and kindred creative spirits have a huge role to play in helping us recognize the urgency and complexity of these questions and calling us to think and feel through their possible answers. But we cannot be satisfied to simply carve out spaces of (unequal) survival within capitalism.

STREAM #8: VALUE EXTRACTION AND THE NEW WORKFORCE OF THE CRYPTOSCENE

Moderator: Aude Launay (FR)

Speakers: Martín Nadal (SP), César Escudero Andaluz (SP), Telekommunisten (CA/UKR), Sašo Sedlaček (SI), Nascent (UK)

29 JUNE 2020

Value is classically said to stem from human labor, and money to represent this value. Although those theories have been made obsolete by, among other things, the subjectivization of value which opened the door to the narratives of financialization, the idea that value should be objectively linked to the steps of its production endures in our economic imaginaries. Whether ‘labor was the first price, the original purchase-money that was paid for all things’ or whether its value was indexed to the profit derived from it—the consequences of which we can see now more clearly than ever when it comes to the wages of ‘essential workers’—the production of value with regards to labor still stands as one of the most pressing issues of the digital evolution.

It is interesting to bear in mind that, in the Western European region, work doesn’t seem to have been socially valued until relatively late—around the 18th century—but has then been largely glorified by the nascent modern education system of the 19th century. An activity traditionally devalued, or even at times condemned, since antiquity, work was then opposed to the spiritual meaning of life (and actually, to military activities too). Human beings were to find self-fulfillment with *otium* (meditation, reflection, poetry and politics...)—or war—, and not with its negation, *negotium* (trade, business...).

After centuries of direct workers exploitation, the late 20th century saw *otium* and *negotium* merge in a new knowledge economy that extracted value from intellectual and cultural work. What some view as a path towards a sort of ‘dotCommunism’ unfortunately mostly led to a ‘data is the new oil’ state of mind. The situation and the history that produced it are of course more complex and it’s an attempt at mapping them through the lense of the massification of interest in cryptography that **Martín Nadal and Cesar Escudero Andaluz** propose with *Economy, Knowledge and Surveillance in the Age of the Cryptocene*.

Not only did data extraction turn each and every internet user into an unwitting worker *by* turning *otium* into *negotium*, but it is also heavily damaging everyone’s attention capacity to the point of seriously reducing our critical thinking ability. This is the question addressed by

Ishtar Gate, a blockchain-based micro-economy-in-the-arts platform devised by the writer and visual theorist Penny Rafferty together with **Nascent**, designed to reward the reading of critical content and its comment with tokens exchangeable in real life. One step further in this return to valuing *otium*, **Sašo Sedlaček** turns some data extraction technologies—such as real-time pose estimation—against themselves, and allows the users of its *Oblomo* platform to mine cryptocurrencies while standing still, and to exchange the product of those physically inactive moments for the workforce of other people willing to, for instance, mow your lawn or wash your car. And what if, in this age of ever-expanding automation, we could evaluate the machinic workforce and transmit it through a currency? Embedding the classical labor value theory in a rational digital cryptocurrency, the *Haket* designed by **Telekommunisten** is intended as a criticism of the Bitcoin architecture and as way to rethink it as a stable currency thus usable as a currency.

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)



Abhi A

Does the current environmental crisis and DLT's enormous energy consumption to be discussed together? Is it a big drawback of blockchain infrastructure? How is to be coped with as in support/critique of blockchains system?

J. Sjol J

Hi -- I had a question about the Haket. I was wondering how the collective negotiates the creation of value (through labor) versus the creation of money, which traditionally takes place as a privilege of national sovereignty. Is there a distinction in the theoretical apparatus of the haket, or is there a value in collapsing that difference?

ARTISTS (ON) WORKING ON THE BLOCKCHAIN

By Inte Gloerich

This blog post covers a panel session organized by Aksioma during the online event series MoneyLab #8: Minting a Fair Society. On the 29th of June, moderator Aude Launay led [Value Extraction and the Workforce of the Cryptocene](#), with Martín Nadal, César Escudero Andaluz, the Telekommunisten (Baruch Gottlieb and Dmytri Kleiner), Sašo Sedlaček, Nascent (Paul Seidler and Max Hampshire). Using their artworks and projects as a guide, the speakers talked about the cryptocene and how labour might be mediated through the blockchain.

“The workforce of the cryptocene? Us!”

Value extraction? From us....!"

Aude Launay opens the event by this sharp framing: don't be fooled by automation and smart contracts, it is us who create the value of blockchains, which is subsequently extracted from us. Are there ways out of this predicament? What can artistic reflections teach us about the implications of the cryptocene?

What is the cryptocene?

Blockchain is often perceived as an incredibly complex technology. Being still in development adds to this ungraspable character. With their work Martín Nadal and Cesar Escudero Andaluz allow people different ways into the topic, allowing them to frame it according to their own personal interests and knowledge.

In their article [Economy, Knowledge and Surveillance in the Age of the Cryptoscene](#), Martin and Cesar propose the term cryptocene to refer to “a period of time featured by a significant use of cryptographic systems and its impact on the surface of the Earth with ecological, economical and political consequences.” The most impressive aspect of the publication is no doubt the massive [diagram](#) visualizing the cryptoscene, of which I have included a small section:

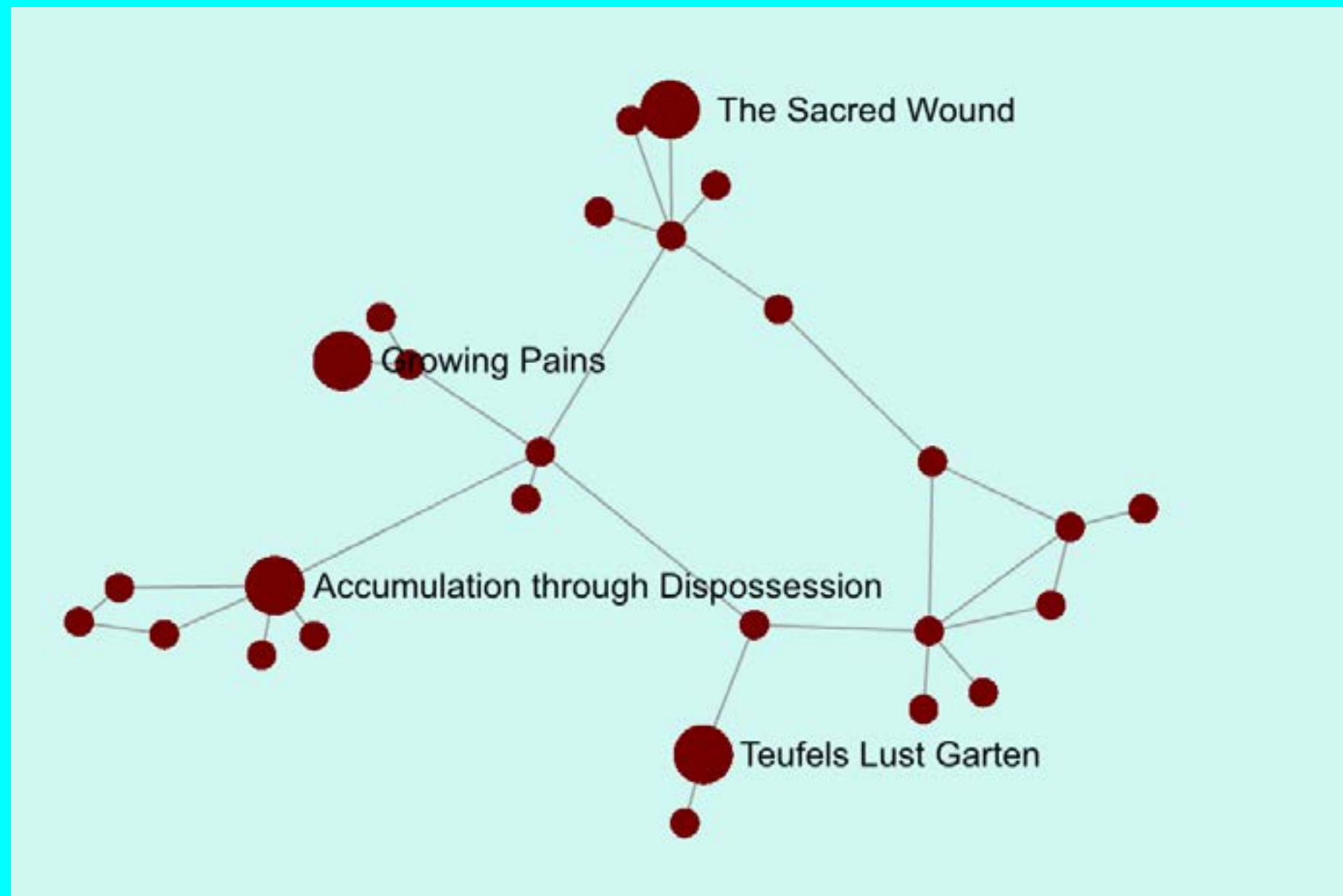


It is possible to lose hours tracing your way through the connections between different cultural lineages and technological innovations as well as critiques and subversions. The main elements of the diagram are the connections between cognitive capitalism, crypto-culture, and blockchain technology. Some of lines take you past cryptoveillance, behavioural algorithms, cryptocolonialism, P2P culture, and the ecological footprint of mining.

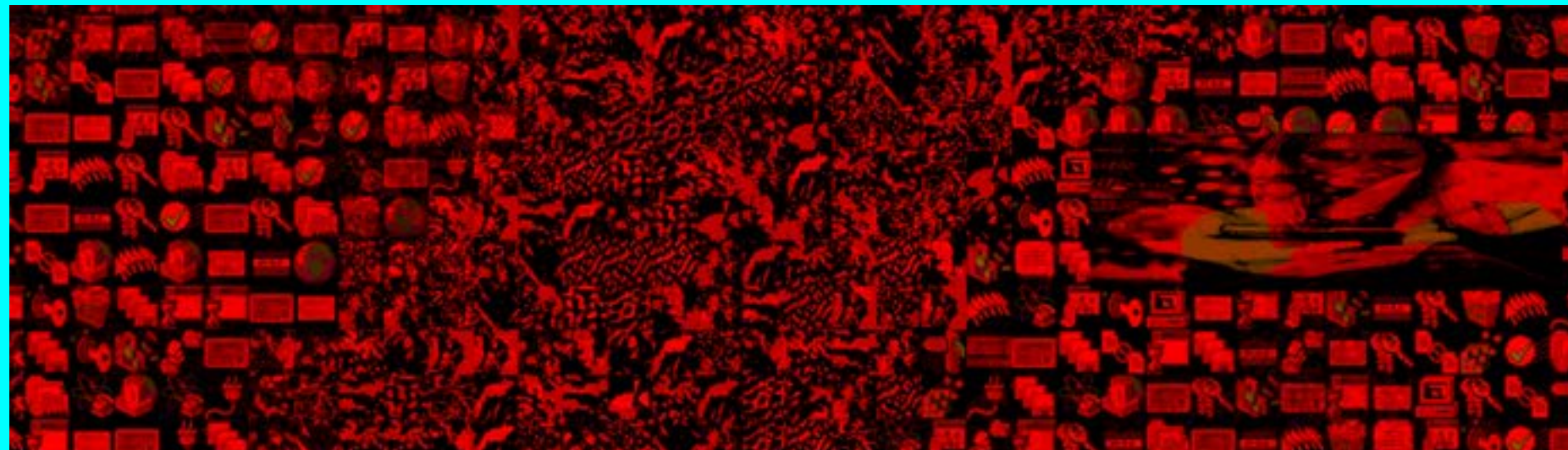
Exiting the 'cene'?

Paul Seidler and Max Hampshire make up Nascent, an artistic project on what they call “exit technology”. Building on the work of [Albert O. Hirschman](#), they explore how technological systems might engage with the notion of exiting, of going outside the company / institution / system. What does work look like on the outside? What is the “minimal viable form” of engagement?

The first project they show is Ishtar Gate, a content platform (made for [Statista](#)) featuring its own currency supporting a “passivity oriented” microeconomy”. Max explains that it is “an attempt to flip the idea of the attention economy in favour of those who are actually going to be engaging with the platform and the projects.” Instead of activity, on this platform, passivity is a value and rewarded. Users gain tokens by interacting (reading, commenting) with content. They can then cash these tokens out to get services from Statista. By making the technical threshold as low as possible (everything runs in-browser for example), the project enables a micro-economy of passivity to emerge.



The second project Nascent present is called [Sprawl System](#). It tries to visualize how and when computation happens in systems. It is conceptually influenced by the work of [Manuel de Landa](#) on markets and anti-markets. He describes localized mesh markets with transparent trade and the contrasting highly organized and monopolized corporate trade in which only the powerful have knowledge of what is going on. De Landa calls the latter anti-markets and we are seeing these in platform economies nowadays, while p2p systems represent the mesh markets. Building on the [Game of Life](#), Sprawl visualizes these different, interacting market systems. They added random elements that cause what seem like explosions of activity (below on the right), pushing away what was going on before. With this project, instead of focussing on decentralization per se, they explore how alternative economies might actually exist in larger systems.

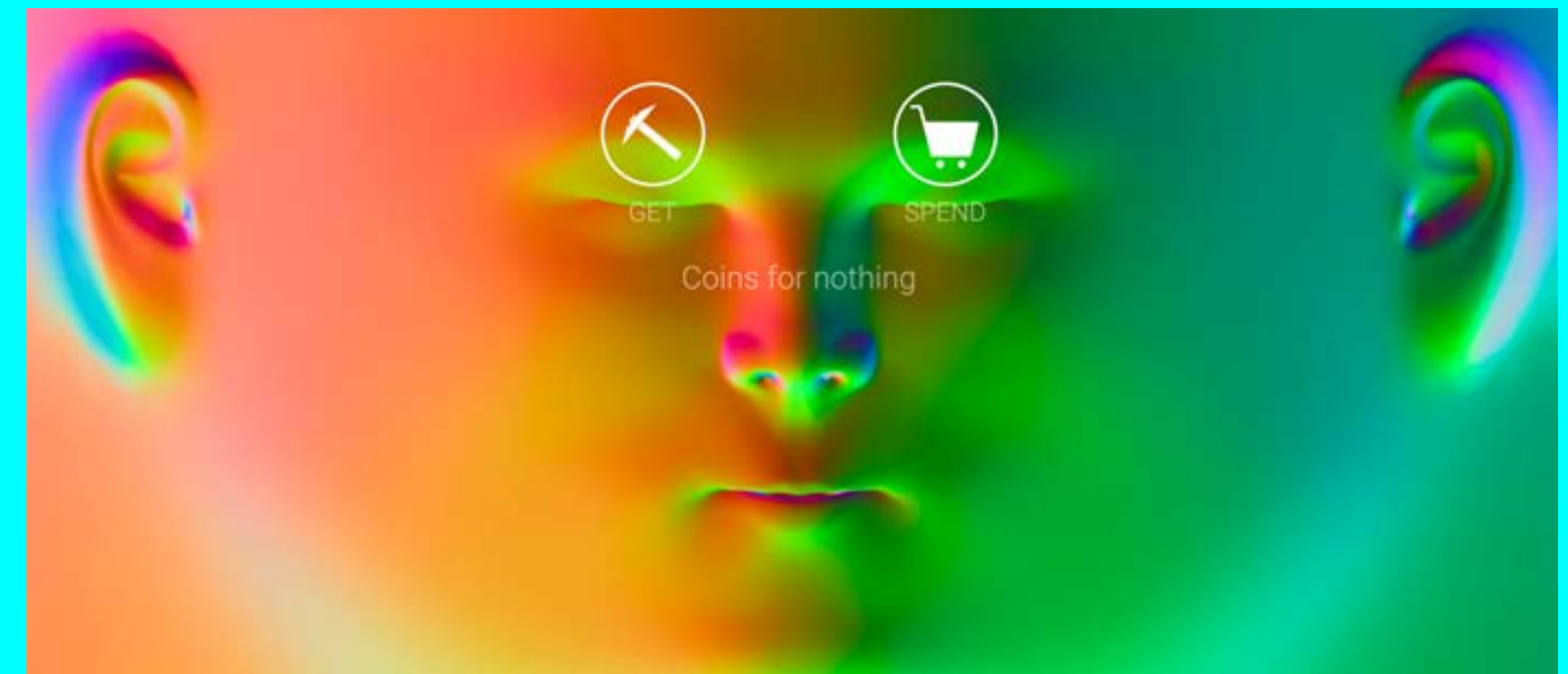


Meditating for coins

We have all seen the pictures of human inactivity circulating during the various local Corona lockdowns. As people were stuck at home, ideas about alternative societies surfaced: UBI, resilient free and public health care system, shorter work hours, etc. But in the end we are rushing back to normalcy as soon as possible.

A development that was already going on before Corona was the advent of artificial intelligence and the idea that robots will take over our jobs. A future without work is not that difficult to imagine. But: how do we distribute wealth if we don't work anymore? What will be the post-work market economy?

In the past decade, money has been continuously reinvented through blockchain technology. Artist [Sašo Sedlaček](#) asks if blockchain can also be used to monetize human inactivity. His project [Oblomo](#) is an exploration of this idea.



It all started with three monks meditating in the Aksioma gallery to mine the first block of Oblomo coins. Right now, everyone can mine the coins themselves by going to the project website and be as still as possible. The system detects movement, and only mines when the user is inactive. In a future feature, users will be able to purchase services and Oblomo products with their coins.

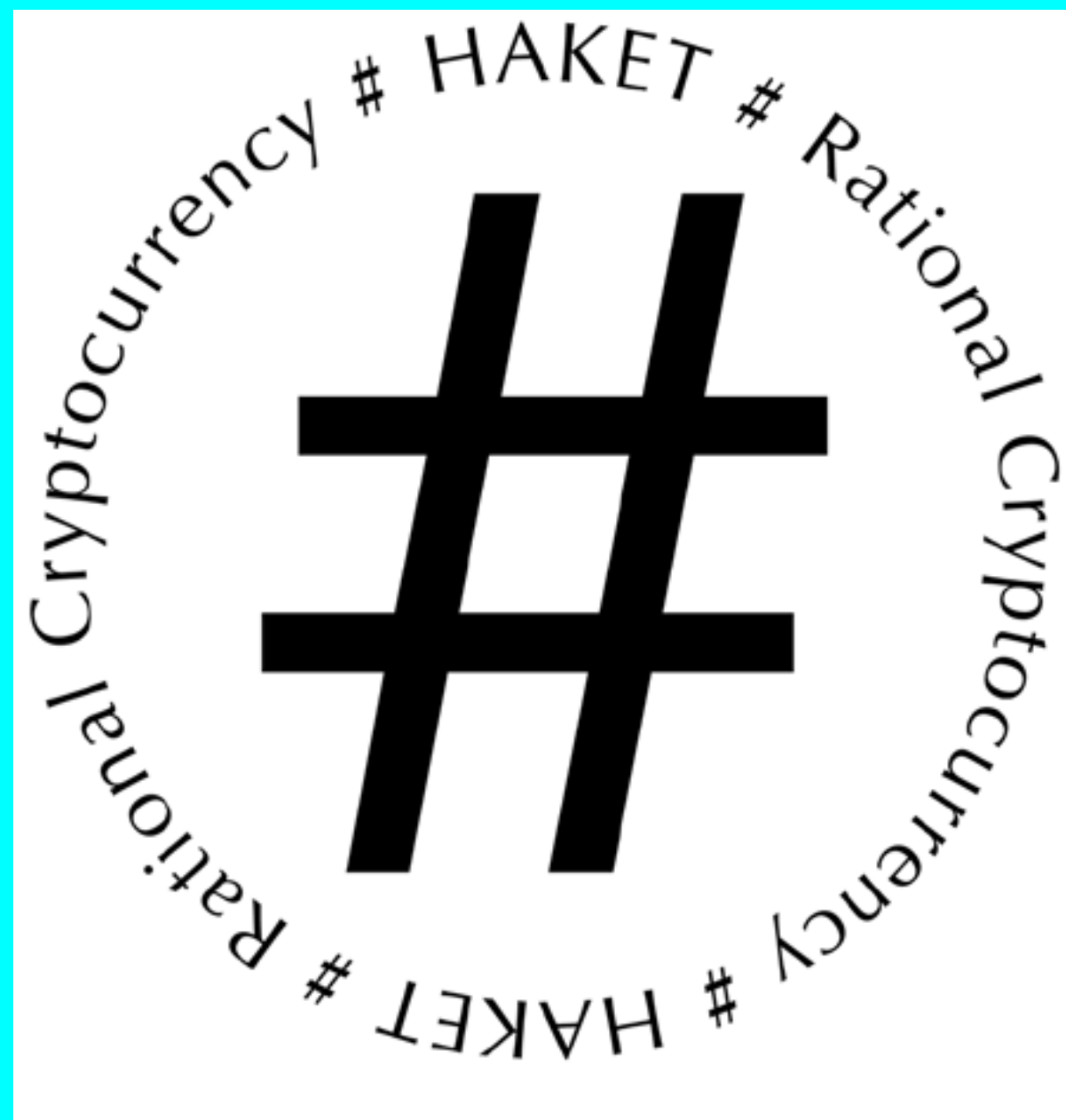
The name Oblomo comes from the novel Oblomov, featuring an incredibly lazy protagonist. Oblomovism is a state of indolent apathy. So, what if, after work has been taken over by robots and we have nothing left to do, this was the center of our economy?

Proof-of-work = work!

Dmytri explains that in financial theory Bitcoins hold no value: they are not a claim on anything. You cannot use Bitcoins to pay your taxes and it's not secured by any other thing of value, so in essence, Bitcoins have no value in this theory. Also in Austrian economics, Bitcoin's value is zero: it is not 'sound money' that is, Dmytri explains, "collateralized in something useful" like gold. Interestingly, only the Marxian school of economics can see Bitcoin as something with value, because it has labour embedded in it. This is exactly what Baruch Gottlieb and Dmytri Kleiner (Telekommunisten) explore in their talk.

They present their project called Haket, which is an alternative to the Bitcoin blockchain. Labour is often quite invisible in the cryptocurrency space, while this is still what is at the root of the value of any coin: "proof-of-work = work!" Prices of cryptocurrencies are able to spike because they are decoupled from the labour that goes into it. To calculate the true value of a Bitcoin, you would need to take the labour that went into it into account, [Dmytri argues](#).

Haket is especially designed to actually recouple the labour and the value of the coin. Every block on the Haket blockchain produces the exact number of Haket tokens as computation was needed to verify it. By building this system, Baruch and Dmytri aim to contribute to a better understanding of how the political economy of network computation is reproduced on a daily basis.



COLOPHON

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