

Cryptocurrency: Money as Medium

- [Arena](#)
- [Slack Invite](#)
- [Slack Channel](#)
- [TNS class site](#)
- Class info
 - Times: Monday & Wednesday 2:00pm - 3:40pm
 - Building: Johnson/Kaplan 66 West 12th
 - Room: 406
 - Date Range: 8/26/2019 - 12/16/2019
- Instructor
 - Grayson Earle
 - earleg@newschool.edu
 - Office Hours: after class on Monday by appointment

Description

Cryptocurrency emerged as a means of decentralizing the financial system and making banks obsolete. Its detractors cite the ways in which it reproduces systems of capital. A critical engagement with this emerging technology is the responsibility of artists and researchers, who must find creative grounds with which to explore this new paradigm. To this end, it is important to recognize the ways in which various modes of engaging with monetary systems have already contributed to our understanding of currency and the possibilities of blockchain technology.

This class examines the history and theory of cryptocurrency, artistic interventions into currencies, and speculative futures in the imaginary of alternative economics, smart contracts, and futurist artworks. This class is a studio/seminar hybrid, so students should be prepared to read, discuss, create, and critique.

Course Learning Objectives for Students

- Gain a broader understanding of the historical and social factors leading to the increasing presence of computational systems in our lives
- Engage in project-based and collaborative learning that utilizes computational/algorithmic thinking
- Work through the social and political implications of computational technologies and develop an accompanying ethical framework and tools of resisting power structures and prefiguring new futures
- Use computation as a tool to enhance their liberal arts education—to better analyze, communicate, create and learn
- Appreciate the challenges of equity and access posed by increased reliance on computational technologies as well as their potential to reinforce existing inequalities in society
- Think critically about the ways they and others interact with computation including understanding its limits from philosophical, logical, mathematical and public policy perspectives

Projects & Assignments (subject to change)

- Virtual Virtual Stockmarket (10%)
 - Students spend \$100 USD (not really) on any three coins.
 - Students must write 250 words on why they chose these particular coins in such a way that demonstrates research.
 - At the end of the semester, whoever has the most fake fake money wins (+2% extra credit).
 - Trading is allowed during the semester, but can only occur between students in this class, and all trades must be documented.
- Currency Parasite (40%)
 - In the vein of the Harriet Tubman stamp, "Where's George?", or Stamp Art, create a layer for an existing currency.
 - This can range from being purely aesthetic to acting as an intervention.
 - You must put your work into circulation and document the creation and dispersal.
 - In creating your currency, ask yourself: "How will people encounter

this? How do I want them to feel when they do?"

- Classcoin (10%)
 - Students must successfully mine X number of Classcoin to receive a passing grade on the project.
- Final Project: Create a Blockchain Company or Work of Art (40%)
 - Groups (or solo) create a speculative cryptocurrency/blockchain project. Write a whitepaper, create a website, market your project. Once complete, pitch your project during class. Be sure to investigate existing projects in the vein of what you are attempting.
 - These projects don't need to come into fruition, but they need to feel real in all aspects: A presentation, branding, interaction with the real crypto community, diagrams, etc. are all ways of achieving this.
 - Feel free to create this in the mode of existing projects in the blockchain ecosystem, or to re-imagine the technology, or simply be as absurd or experimental as you would like.

Schedule

week 1 (8/26 & 8/28)

Introductions, Relating Art and Money

- Monday
 - Course Introduction
 - [Join Slack](#)
 - r/place
 - [slides](#)
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [If You Don't Have Bread, Eat Art!: Contemporary Art and Derivative Fascisms](#) by Hito Steyerl from Artists Re:Thinking the Blockchain
 - [Rai Stones via Wikipedia](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [On the Maintenance of Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft](#)

week 2 (9/2 & 9/4) no class 9/2

Intro to Bitcoin

- Wednesday
 - Activity: Classroom Bitcoin
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Bitcoin Whitepaper](#)
 - [The Great Chain of Being Sure About Things](#) *optional*
 - Homework
 - Research a cryptocurrency other than Bitcoin and bring back notes to class for discussion

week 3 (9/9 & 9/11)

Bitcoin continued

- Monday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Brief History of Bitcoin](#) (also on Canvas)
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [Blockchain Religion](#)
 - [Artists Ai Weiwei and Kevin Abosch Are Using the Blockchain to Make Us Question What's 'PRICELESS'](#)
 - Virtual Virtual Stockmarket discussion

week 4 (9/16 & 9/18)

- Monday
 - Place Virtual Stock Market bets
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - David Graeber - Debt: 5000 Years - The Myth of Barter (ch2)
- Wednesday
 - TBD

week 5 (9/23 & 9/25)

Intro to Criticism of Bitcoin, Darkweb

- Monday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Something from Nothing: A Tale of Cryptocurrency](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [RAFiA PayBlackTime](#)
 - Intro to Parasite Project
- Wednesday
 - Screen Deep Web documentary
 - In advance of this, read [The Rise & Fall of Silk Road](#)
 - And listen to [Radiolab - Darkode](#) *optional*
 - Parasite Proposals due Monday

week 6 (9/30 & 10/2) no class 9/30

Darkweb

- Wednesday
 - Darkweb Safari
 - In preparation for this, please download [Tor](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [Random Darknet Shopper - Mediengruppe Bitnik](#)
 - Discuss Parasite Proposals

week 7 (10/7 & 10/9) no class 10/9

Introduction to Web 3.0, Ethereum

- Monday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Buterin Interview](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - Plantoid

week 8 (10/14 & 10/16)

Smart Contracts

- Monday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - Immutability Mantra from [Artists Re:Thinking the Blockchain](#) page 233
 - [What is an ICO?](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [Cryptokitties](#)
 - [Cryptopunks](#)
- Wednesday
 - Guest Speaker [Sarah Friend](#)

week 9 (10/21 & 10/23)

Crypto-libertarianism, Facebook

- Monday
 - Discuss Text(s)

- [TechCrunch - Libra](#)
- [Ian Bogost - Cryptocurrency Might be a Path to Authoritarianism](#)
optional
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [Laurel Ptak - Wages for Facebook](#)
 - Check-in for Parasite Projects

week 10 (10/28 & 10/30)

Terra0, Video Game Economics

- Monday
 - Guest Speaker via Skype, Max Hampshire of Terra0
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - Terra0
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Skins, Chips, and Stone of Jordan](#)
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - eToy War

week 11 (11/4 & 11/6)

- Monday & Wednesday
 - Present Parasite Projects

week 12 (11/11 & 11/13)

Mining

- Monday
 - Mining: Software & Hardware
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - Nadal Critical Mining (from Artists Re:Thinking the Blockchain)
 - [ViaBTC Rises: How A Mysterious Miner Could Decide Bitcoin's Future](#)
 - [Mining Bitcoin with pencil and paper: 0.67 hashes per day](#)
OPTIONAL
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Work(s)
 - [HARVEST by Julian Oliver](#)
 - [Clickmine](#) by Sarah Friend
 - [Bail Bloc](#) by Grayson Earle and The New Inquiry
 - Mining workshop in preparation for Mining Classcoin

week 13 (11/18 & 11/20)

Hyperdemocracy

- Monday
 - Introduce Final Project
- Wednesday
 - Discuss Text(s)
 - [Meet the Man With a Radical Plan for Blockchain Voting](#)

week 14 (11/25 & 11/27) no class 11/27

- Monday
 - Final Project check-in

week 15 (12/2 & 12/4)

- Monday & Wednesday
 - Final Project workshop

week 16 (12/9 & 12/11)

- Monday & Wednesday
 - Present Final Projects (5 minute presentations)

week 17 (12/16)

- Course re-cap, turn in Final Projects