*Hoy, Estelle, 'To Beecoin Or Not to Beecoin', **Spike Magazine #70,** February 2022*

SPIKE

To Beecoin or Not to Beecoin

"Proof of Stake – Technological Claims"
Kunstverein in Hamburg
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Despite being quite specifically a child of long-term tinnitus from 1990s internet dial-up sounds (if that term is not too vibrant), Super Mario Brothers, and California Games, I went to Hamburg to check out "Proof of Stake – Technological Claims". The group show initiated by the Kunstverein and artist Simon Denny reflects on themes of technology, organisation, and ownership, accompanied by a symposium, a seminar with students, and two publications. But being a philistine is precisely why an encounter with "Proof of Stake" is critical. Central to the show sit tech-art's social, economic, and political conditions, namely ownership, the monetisation of reification, and the observability of power; *observability* is perhaps the operative word, specifically when it comes to web-based practice.

Online discourse is perpetually undermined by the fiction of ownership, by our pretty digital souls being surveilled, counted, micro-managed, ghost-written, looted, traceable. So here we are, some of us, liking tech-art while simultaneously trying to like technology, while simultaneously schizo-paranoid about which Calvinist techno-imperialist is watching our shitty dark-web searches: adult diaper cream, low-brow Marxist readers for time-poor factory workers, and virgin dictionary searches: "wtf is Beecoin?"

"Proof of Stake" demonstrates this discourse of visibility by highlighting and dividing the flows of technology and data into potentially irreversible operations that are traceable, advertised, promoted, published, and plundered – creating an exhibition of masterful accessibility, transparency, and a heavy-duty obfuscation of proprietorship. The show is anything but ambivalent. It never agrees on any one brand of encryption code for ownership. I'm thinking of Sarah Friend's *clickmine* (2017) unravelling extractive mechanisms across multiple congested contexts through a metaverse property/mine simulation that issues tokens on the Ethereum blockchain. With each click on a computer keyboard, you can "mine" a virtual plot of land and buy new power-ups. As wealth is created, it is also destroyed. It's no secret that the Bitcoin and Ethereum blockchains operate on the reified monetisation of hermeneutics. *Cha-cha-cha.*

In a conspicuous rendering of accessibility/inaccessibility, Yuri Pattison's installation *Lockchain (1-out-of-n locks)* (2021) presents a heavy chain of padlocks strung across the entryway like a drawn, fuck-off moat. The gallery attendant asked me to choose a padlock number for a key to access the show. 101, I told them, congratulating myself on my wit before I fumbled with the key so long that I lost courage and instead contorted my arthritic body under the chain like an inferior wild woman at a limbo party. The invigilator looked either impressed or unimpressed – a hieroglyphic assault I was willing to accept if I could at least gain access. It's concrete proof that not all stake a claim to the hierarchical interior workings of institutions themselves.

Anyhow, technology isn't always a place for the realisation of postmodern utopias, but rather a melancholic graveyard of postmortem dystopias: Brave Blue World? In tracing technologies, every free-floating signifier has an address, says the imagination. In Luke Willis Thompson's ongoing work *Sucu Mate* (2012–), a microfilm reader displays photographs of a Fijian graveyard, tombs of undocumented ethnic Chinese, victims of savage forced labour, tackling questions of traumatic histories and Imperialism. Who and what is worth recording? Who owns what and whom? Siteless topographies lack the fixed aura of ownership – ownership is not lost but rather supplanted by a different aura. Data flows become gravely *re*-territorialised, and this displacement – this abject address, undermining questions of ownership – is perfectly, terrifyingly traceable. *Sucu Mate* asks us to observe a minute silence for those named but nameless, whose lives are owned and exploited by a colonial power.

"Proof of Stake" issued an exhibition glossary for people such as myself: twelve pages of uninflamed, accessible definitions of tech terminology written by Gen Z's for Gen XYZ's: Hardware wallets, P2P, Ethereum, Blockchains as art, Bitcoin whitepaper. A glossary taking the whitewash out of accessibility in an exceedingly unpatronising way – low-key, unpuzzling, easy-to-read taxonomies. Makes learning hard shit fun – itself a kind of gamification? A thoughtful provision for Amazon cage workers and museum staff both, and ultimately an acknowledgment that, of all the readings one could make of this show, an argument for inaccessibility is not one of them.
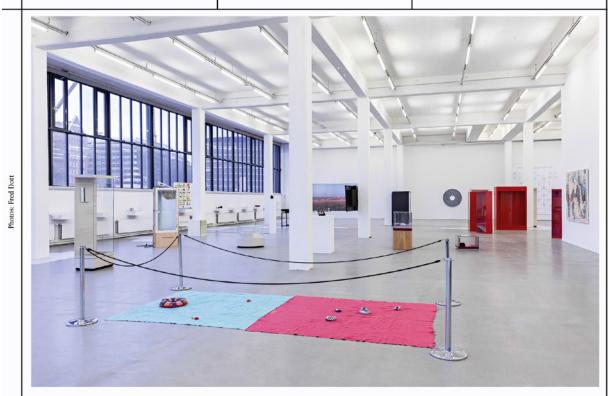
So is "Proof of Stake" heaven or hell? Well, it's both and neither. The show is a brilliant constellation of political, environmental, racial, and reification-related questions for naturalised tech artists and continental philosophy majors alike, but even more so, a tech triage nurse for paranoiac people still using Hotmail. It's one helluva interaction with ownership, accessibility, and power: claiming a lot about structures that claim a lot. And according to Denny and his band(width) of merrymen, there's a shit tonne at stake.

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Photos: Fred Dott

View of "Proof Of Stake – Technological Claims", Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2021

Yuri Pattison, *Lockchain (1-out-of-n locks), 2021*