MIT Computational Law Report

Tour d'Horizon

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Hello to all human and non-human readers of this research datastream sometimes referred to as a journal. I'm Wassim Alsindi and am happy to be here as Technology Editor at the *MIT Computational Law Report*. It's a pleasure to climb aboard this fine, seaworthy vessel - staffed by seasoned navigators - as we roam uncharted interdisciplinary waters.

Let us now leave the *lawtical* metaphor behind, as we will need to think bigger. This is the first instalment of my column and in it we will embark upon on a *tour d'horizon* voyage: far beyond today's outer edges of the law as we chart possible future trajectories for the synthesis of *silico* and *legis*. More to come on that front.

To set the scene let's try to explain - or indeed *post-hoc rationalise* - what someone like me with absolutely no formal background, qualifications or expertise in law is even doing here. To do this, we're going to borrow a concept from a future column, namely *epistemic trespassing*. In this age of hybrid disciplines where technology is rapidly reconfiguring all aspects of human existence, we must move beyond the knowledge traditions and perceived wisdom of individual domains. To do this requires intellectual bravery, but also self-awareness and humility. We are all epistemic trespassers now, so let's be the good kind.

> *"Epistemic trespassers judge matters outside their field of expertise. We should doubt that trespassers are reliable judges in fields where they are outsiders."*
>
> *Nathan Ballantyne, Mind (2019)*

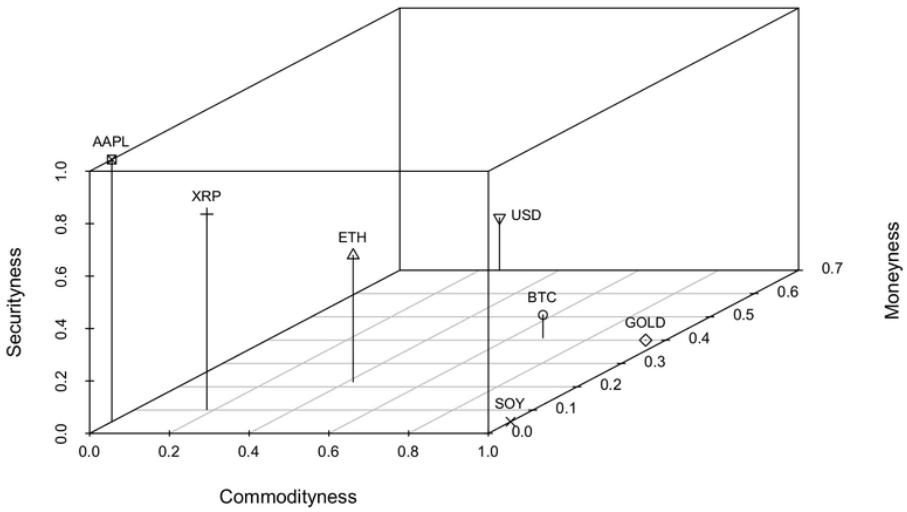
It's such an exciting time to be alive! We are watching "law" transmogrify before our very eyes from an anachronistic, scriptural walled garden into a holistic practice pervasively embedded in everything around us, and the old ways of thinking and doing are no longer fit for purpose. Let's be sure to trespass *respectfully*, together.

In recent times much of my work has been around interdisciplinary approaches to what one might call "cryptoeconomics". By day this involves conceptual design and philosophy of cryptoeconomic systems, such as token economies and cryptocurrencies at *BlockScience*. I find myself at the intersection of systems engineering, data governance, economic incentives and anticipatory regulation. Bleeding edge computational law-related stuff.

Visit the web version of this article to view interactive content.

Wassim Alsindi - Cryptoeconomic Systems Talk @ CESC'20

Previously, I was co-founder and Managing Editor of MIT's *Cryptoeconomic Systems* journal and chair of the associated conference series which are both based at the *Media Lab* alongside the *Computational Law Report*. We undertook a massive interdisciplinary effort to coalesce world-class members of the research, industrial and policy spheres to transcend disciplinary and institutional siloes in order to collectively mint a new scholarly field and launch the publication. Despite my physics background, I found myself getting on best with legal and regulatory minds.



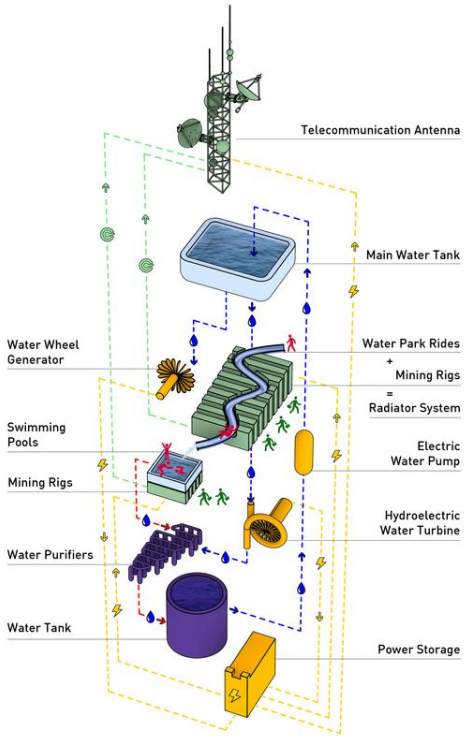
Example of a TokenSpace constructed for legacy and cryptographic assets (2019)

Between 2016 and 2019 I was an independent researcher developing novel conceptual lenses and tools for the analysis of cryptographic tokens and networks. The most notable output from this period was the regulatory epistemology project *TokenSpace* which we'll focus on in an upcoming column, as recent major happenings in the world of cryptocurrency law enforcement prompt a revisit. In a nutshell, TokenSpace provides a conceptual framework for constructing customisable taxonomies for legacy and digital assets, converting semi-empirical discrete and continuous variables into vector space representations. This *cryptoeconomic analysis toolkit* has been presented to regulators, central bankers and policy professionals from multiple jurisdictions. Take a 5 minute trip to TokenSpace here.

Visit the web version of this article to view interactive content.

TokenSpace Lecture for UC Irvine Law School Part 2 (2020)

What is cryptoeconomics anyway? As lawyers, computer scientists, theorists and designers you are doubtless aware of some implications of cryptoeconomics. One doesn't need to traverse the web much before an encounter with legal frictions involving Bitcoin, DeFi or NFTs. Even more striking are the now-regular stories of *pariah states and their citizens* adopting 'alegal' technologies to evade laws of yore - North Korea, Iran and Venezuela provide salient examples. Just as we are all epistemic trespassers now, one might even go as far as to say we are all on the way to becoming cryptoeconomists too.



Ilia Attarpour, Dadbeh Mohebbi Gilani and Ramtin Taherian - JCPOA Tower Crypto-Park, 2019 Evolo Skyscraper Competition (2019)

If you'd like to go deeper, it just so happens that I was recently invited by some colleagues to co-write the 'Cryptoeconomics' entry in their newly launched Glossary of Distributed Technologies which was published in the *Internet Policy Review*. Below is the 'soundbite' definition that we settled upon. We'll have a chance to dig deeper into this - and many other things - as my *partner in epistemic crime* Jaya Klara Brekke will make an appearance on these pages in due course.

> *Cryptoeconomics describes an interdisciplinary, emergent and experimental field that draws on ideas and concepts from economics, game theory and related disciplines in the design of peer-to-peer cryptographic systems. Cryptoeconomic systems try to guarantee certain kinds of information security properties using incentives and/or penalties to regulate the distribution of efforts, goods and services in new digital economies.*
>
> *Cryptoeconomics is an embryonic field at present and can be taken to include several areas of focus: information security engineering, mechanism design, token engineering and market design. This portmanteau of cryptography and economics raises questions regarding the epistemic novelty of cryptoeconomics, as distinct from its constituent components.*

So far we've covered the most obviously law-connected stuff, but I regret to inform you that there's quite a lot more! As this column will be circling back in upcoming weeks, let's be brief and provide only succinct teasers here.



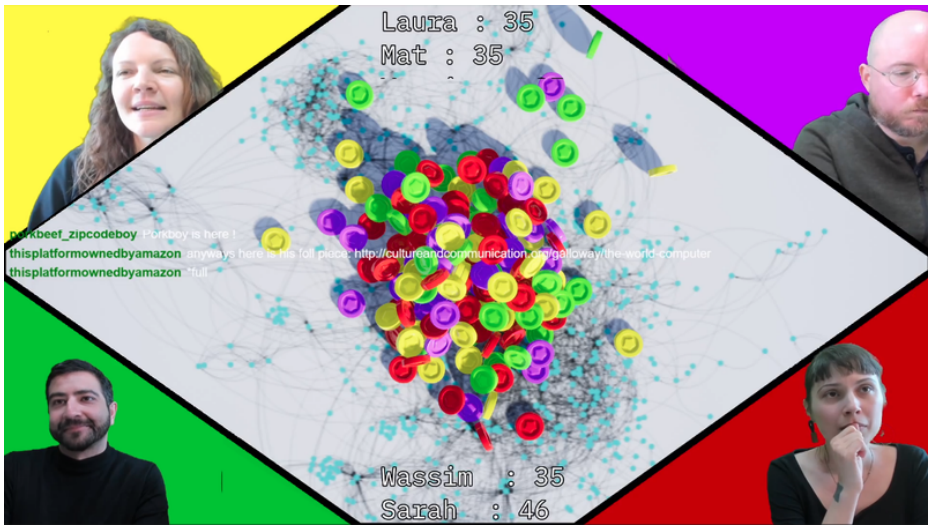
Harm van der Dorpel presenting Mutant Garden in a discussion on *Synthetic & Artificial Life*.

My evenings and weekends are spent sweeping metaphorical floors at a para-institutional research collective we call the *0x Salon*, which I founded just over a year ago in those carefree pre-pandemic times. Our post-disciplinary community of theorists, practitioners and activists holds regular ~~offline and~~ online discussion sessions on unusual topics with quixotic titles such as '*Algorithmic Realism*', '*The Indifference Engine*' and the aforementioned '*Epistemic Trespassing*'. Visit the 0x Salon's PubPub site to read salon reports, poetics and see upcoming open event calls.



A recent salon discussion on *Time & Risk* with coastal ecology oriented collective Alliance of the Southern Triangle.

The 0x Salon is based at the wonderful *Trust workspace for utopian conspiracy* in Berlin, at which we engage in interesting projects, experiments and working groups. A future column will discuss an ongoing project '*Black Swan*' which utilises contemporary technologies such as Quadratic Voting in small group contexts as catalysts for creative collaboration. There was no small amount of 'governance intrigue' when we came to vote on project proposals, which to me were awfully reminiscent of happenings in prototype Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs). Black Swan was presented at the *Moneylab Berlin* conference in late March, at which I participated in a discussion on 'Socialising Tokens' - more on that soon.



Socialising Tokens panel at Moneylab Berlin with Laura Lotti, Sarah Friend and Mat Dryhurst

Hope you found that convincing enough. If not, I'll try again next time with a mix of latest goings-on and project deep dives. Signing off with a few recommended materials for your perusal. *Tweet me @wassimalsindi if you want to discuss any of the above!*

Editor's Picks

Articles:

An Introduction to Extitutional Theory - Schingler & de Filippi
https://medium.com/berkman-klein-center/an-introduction-to-extitutional-theory-e74b5a49ea53

Actually existing platformization: Embedding platforms in urban spaces through partnerships - van Doorn, Mos & Bosma
https://platformlabor.net/output/criticizing-disruption-platformization-discontent

Organic Lubricant - Algorithmic Governance Offline & Online - 0x Salon
https://0xsalon.pubpub.org/pub/debcz7vi

Attacking DeFi with Flash Loans for Fun and Profit - Qin, Zhou, Livshits & Gervais
https://arxiv.org/abs/2003.03810