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MDD x BLM

The Commodification of Bears Ears

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Part I: Research



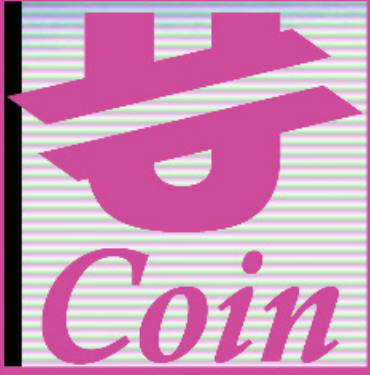
How do we defend Bears Ears from capitalism ?

Initial Research

At the beginning of the project many of our studio discussions were centered around the dichotomization between man and nature. This illusory division has enabled us to distance ourselves from the commodification and subsequent destruction of these beautiful ecosystems. One search for Bears Ears uncovers an endless tirade of threats and problem that the land faces however I intended to look beyond limiting the impacts of intrusion on the land and examine the fundamental cause of why this land was

so vulnerable.

My initial research was centered around Marx's theory of land appropriation along with investigations into alternative forms of economies, this was subsequently supported by research about the resource extraction industry and its role in reducing the land protections of Bears Ears.



Side effects may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, headaches, dizziness and disorientation, weakness and fatigue, hair loss, internal bleeding, infections, bloody vomit and stool, and low blood pressure.



Project Objectives

One of the major challenges during this project was finding ways of designing for an unknown space. Having never been to Bears Ears and with limited visitation during pandemic restrictions this project provided an opportunity to find alternative ways to speculate on the futurity of this space. Delving into speculative forms of designing challenged me to reimagine not only how my process can be applied to larger more abstract issues but what a designed intervention can look like, taking precience from projects such as Thomas

Sebeok's Atomic Priesthood and Neri Oxman's Land Totem I began an investigation on how physical intervention can protect against the abstract.

From this research I identified three main objectives: Firstly to identify the existential threats posed to Bears Ears. Secondly to reconnect individuals to the physical consequences and dangers of transactional capitalism. Finally to imagine new forms of existence within a seemingly monolithic economic framework.

EOI Plots >\$1,500,000

Hard Rock Mines
Uranium Claims >\$1,700,000,000
>\$75,000,000

Uranium Mines

Oil Wells >\$12,000,000,000

Land Exploitation

The exploitation of Bears Ears is vigorous and chaotic, the profits to be made from the natural resources of the land are astronomical: Oil, Coal and Uranium all drive the craze to parcel out this land. These industries are responsible for untold horrors in pursuit of profit, but the reality within capitalism is that such huge value is too large to be ignored. The culprit behind the destruction of bears ears is not some cartoonishly sinister oil executive, but rather a value system that positions individuals to benefit more

from the destruction of land than the preservation of it.

This map shows how the massive profit margins from fossil fuel and uranium extraction incentivised the massive reductions in land protections. This land faces very real threats and continuing to sit back and watch corporations whittle away at it to increase margins is absolute injustice.



"Oil and Gas Wells." Utah GIS Portal. Utah Department of Natural Resources, Oil, Gas and Mining Division. Web. 13 Apr. 2021.
"Campaign Contributions, including from a Utah Operator, Preceded Creation of Federal Uranium Stockpile." The Salt Lake Tribune. 22 Feb. 2021. Web.
"AL Drove Trump's... Grand Staircase." Mar. 2018. Web. 13 Apr. 2021.

“Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: its violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals with their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective,' systemic, anonymous -quite literally a conceptual violence, the violence of a Concept whose self-deployment rules and regulates social reality.”

-Slavoj Žižek



Figure 7: Image Enhancement with Dynamic Range Reduction Using the FFT.

System Abstraction

I spent much of my research convinced I would be able to track down an antagonist, some single source that could bear the blame for the atrocities that have happened here, but that idealism ignores the reality of these systems of destruction. Capitalism and even broader systems of oppression have become so overlaid with nonconsenting actors and forcible commodification that trying to assign blame or even causation becomes an endless game of finger pointing subjective morality.

This abstraction is reinforced by modern forms of transaction. The deep rooted nature of modern capitalism means destruction happens before any transaction even takes place. By the time the consumer is able to engage with the system the entire question of “Should we drill X land for oil?” has been not only answered, but swept under the rug and forgotten about.



Grave Robbing

Vandalism

Commodification

Commodification poses such an acute threat to this land not only by providing profit incentives for its destruction but by unjustly stripping the land and its inhabitants of their agency. This is most prominent in the practices of graverobbing, oftentimes locals that are slighted by their local economic system turn to destroying native ancestral sites in search of artifacts they can sell for large sums of money. This appropriation of ancestral property is colonial violence that disrupts the culture of those who originally inhabited

and stewarded this land and their ancestors. The nuances of these forms of cultural violence are lost on auction sites where collectors can buy “Genuine Native Indian Pottery: Great Value” with the push of a button all from the comfort of their couch.

Part II: Framing



Is "management" without appropriation even possible?

Ethics

The harsh reality is capitalism precludes ethical engagement and visitation with land. Trying to find forms of mutually beneficial engagement is pointless when we already create irreparable death and destruction in the pursuit of fossil fuels.

The monetary value of this land, while exuberant, is nothing in comparison to the immeasurable sacred value that it holds to many of the native people that inhabit it. continuing to allow the blatant destruction of this land is cultural erasure and eliminates the last traces

of an existence free from capitalist reign.

Non-Abstractable *Physical*

Intrinsic Value

Difficult to Store
Indivisible

Dangerous in *“Plausible”*
large quantities

Considerations

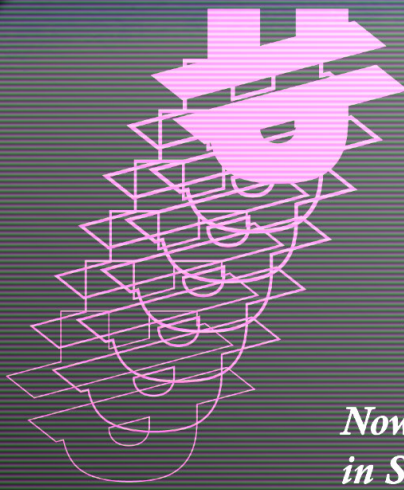
The physical form of the currency provided an opportunity to shape an entire economic experience. Reimagining a transaction as something as taxing and cumbersome on the user as it is on the land on which it takes place creates a moment of reflection, showing the user the reality of the system that they are participating in.

One of the most important aspects of the currency to me was that it could only exist in physical form. Tying the value of the currency to a material standard, in this case uranium, meant that the

user has to be physically present at the time of transaction, making them fully aware of the sincerity and significance of the interaction.

Cumber
-some

Part III: Outcomes

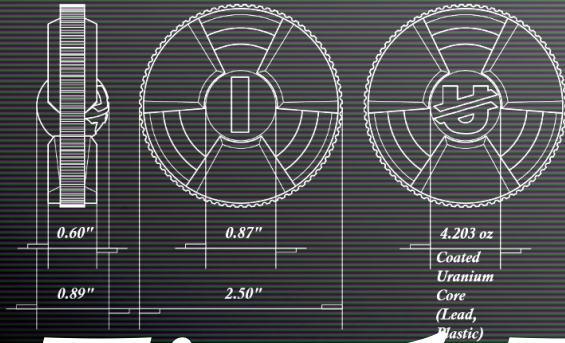


Coin

		U
USD	▲	7.493
CAN	▼	9.394
MXN	▼	150.357
EUR	▼	6.624

*The worlds first uranium
standard currency.*

*Now available
in San Juan County!*



*Each coin emits
approximately 1 millisievert
of radiation.*

Final Form

The final form of U-Coin reimagines currency as something that is physically dangerous to the user, the more wealth an individual hoards the more dangerous it becomes. U coin would be made of a 4.203 oz uranium core coated in lead and titanium, with an ideal radiation level of approximately one millisievert per coin. At these specifications an individual would start to feel minor effects of radiation poisoning at around 100 coins and would reach a dangerous level of radiation at around 1000 coins. U-Coin's value

is defined by the value of the uranium within each coin and at current US market value would be worth about \$7.49 each.

Uranium standard means that each coin maintains its value regardless of the economic system.

Economy

Initial exchange creates an opportunity to redistribute the wealth to San Juan County.



*Exchange point
“ATM” concept.*



Implementation

The implementation became the point of realization for me, this project and broader system exist as a purely conceptual outcome to enable critique. Therefore, implementation became a sort of theoretical game, not simply asking the question “how might people live in a world like this?” but the deeper more sinister question “How far might capitalism go to sustain itself?”. The conclusions are comical, Lead lined briefcases, one way ATMS on the edges of towns, and swimming pools full of coins would populate a retro-futuristic dystopia.

These commical outcomes lay the groundwork for more pragmatic ideation; “How can we be more mindful of the transactions we currently take part in?” Or “How can we create land relationships free from these transactional frameworks?”

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