

BRAVE NEW WORLD GAME

Natalie Bookchin, *agoraXchange*

A more radical rethinking of war gaming can be found in Natalie Bookchin's *agoraXchange* project. If war emerges as politically and economically motivated conflict between nation-states, what happens when you eliminate the power and support of nations? This is the question behind Bookchin's project. Launched at London's Tate Gallery in March 2004, *agoraXchange* is an online forum for culling ideas, rules, designs, code, and gameplay for the formation of a multiplayer game designed to challenge the current world system. Participants are asked to reflect on the four decrees that form the new political order. They include: 1. Citizenship by choice not birth; 2. No inheritance; wealth is redistributed at death; 3. No marriage, or no State jurisdiction over kinship relations; 4. No private land rights but lifelong leases for non-harmful uses of land to individuals and organizations. Selections from the manifesto describe the premises behind this collaborative effort to recreate the State using game technology:

We put forward *agoraXchange* to elicit collaboration for challenging a world in which myths about birthright result in violence and suffering within and among nations and families. We urge eliminating the laws responsible for nation and marriage because we believe that these institutions misshape our material and psychic lives and constrain the imagination in ways that stunt us all.

We are disturbed by the familiarity and even acceptance of war among much of the world's population, where each day on average hundreds will die from bombs, guns, machetes: over six million dead in wars since 1989... We also believe human beings deserve an earth that has air that is not toxic, water that is uncontaminated, and an infrastructure that affords everyone basic education and health care.

agoraXchange.

Finally, we see the travails of war, hunger, restrictions of movement, environmental degradation, the lack of compassion in our political institutions and in our families, as largely rooted in laws that use birth for assigning us our place in life... It is the laws giving us inheritance and kinship that determine whether one will have access to the hundreds of trillions of dollars in wealth from estates or whether one will grow up in poverty. It is marriage law that produces the family tree, whose roots are always national.

Our present political institutions are not natural or inevitable, but an experiment gone awry, a utopia for the paranoid.²³

While *agoraXchange* differs dramatically from the other politically motivated structures that have produced the war-game genre, it embodies a similar belief in gaming as a technology well adapted for producing specific values and behavior. Its slogan, 'Make the Game, Change the World', echoes the objective of Buckminster Fuller's 1969 *World Game*:

To make the World work
For 100% of humanity
In the shortest possible time
Through spontaneous cooperation
Without ecological offense
Or the disadvantage of anyone.²⁴

