

## From Attitude to the inevitable Tool

*Between Irrelevance and Clue*  
a *RETHINKING GAMIFICATION* contribution  
Christina Kral & YKON

### Part 1

#### Between irrelevance and clue—from attitude to the inevitable tool

*“Within our culture we make an extremely rigid division between work and play. You’re supposed to work in order to earn enough money to give you sufficient leisure time. For something entirely different called having fun or play.” — Alan Watts, Work As Play*

In his animated video lecture Alan Watts, a highly acclaimed scholar and interpreter of Eastern philosophy, reminds us of the power of now and to approach our everyday challenges and tasks with a playful attitude, with a heightened focus on the activity itself, an absolute dedication to the moment in order to perceive living with a continuous sense of wonder — yes, even when washing the dishes. [1]

A few decades earlier, in the mid 1950s, a loose collective of artists and philosophers who called themselves the Situationist International proposed three concepts designed - as Kenneth Goldsmith puts it - “to infuse magic and excitement into the dull routine of everyday life: the *dérive*, *détournement*, and *psychogeography*.” All three proposals were to reframe life and to reclaim dead zones, to instigate a heightened sensibility to our urban surroundings, to critically observe spatial realities and then construct situations to gain new meanings and experiences. The goal was to consciously shift perspective to gain fresh thoughts on old matters. Within their three proposals they conducted for example drifting through the city without a goal, putting alternate titles on street signs, even renaming a symphony without altering the music. By creating these situations or temporal interventions they not only conducted active urban research but also functioned as catalyst for social change and a reorientation of day-to-day life. [2] Even though Guy Debord (one key figure within the movement) spent the later part of his working life developing a critical communication game, called *The Game of War* [3], the former mentioned concepts are not considered to be games. They utilize rule systems and automated directives together with a generally spirited [4] and playful mind to break with closed perception and redundancy that comes with ordinary life.

The concept of automated processes in subversive action and creative production is nothing new. Sol LeWitt, a conceptual and minimalist American artist (1928-2007) went so far to claim: “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art [...]” [5]

And more recently Kate Bingaman Burt an obsessive consumerist, designer and illustrator shared in a creative morning session in Portland that she self-inflicts a rigid rule system, an automated structure to not only provide a conceptual framework for her chaotic nature but to keep her moving and to keep her making. And to restate an established factum: Constraint yields creativity. In Addition she introduces a few more necessities: a concrete goal to achieve, a time frame and setting up an ally-system for holding her accountable to make her accomplish her self-set goals. [6]

Now John Cleese, a British comedian, suggests in his lecture on creativity from 1991 [7] a couple of interesting things: “Creativity is not a talent. It’s a way of operating.” And the key, according to psychologist Donald N. MacKinnon (1903-1987), is to get into a particular mood, a way of operating - an ability to play. Cleese introduces then the two modes of operation: open and closed. The open mode for creative pondering and the closed mode for the implementation of the ideas generated during the open mode. “We need to be in the open mode when pondering a problem — but! — once we come up with a solution, we

must then switch to the closed mode to implement it. Because once we've made a decision, we are efficient only if we go through with it decisively, undistracted by doubts about its correctness." [8]

*"You can't be spontaneous within reason"—Alan Watts*

Cleese then sets up a structural framework for creative production, his open mode. He calls out five essential conditions: First you have to set up a SPACE: "You can't become playful, and therefore creative, if you're under your usual pressures." Second you have to determine a TIME frame: "It's not enough to create space; you have to create your space for a specific period of time." John here directly relates to the historical study of play by Johan Huizinga, where play is distinct from ordinary life, both as to locality and duration. "This is its main characteristic: Its secludedness, its limitedness; play begins at a certain time and at a certain time it is over. Otherwise it is not play." Thirdly, TIME (yes, again): "Giving your mind as long as possible to come up with something original, and learning to tolerate the discomfort of pondering time and indecision." His fourth condition is CONFIDENCE: "Nothing will stop you being creative so effectively as the fear of making a mistake." [9] And lastly HUMOR: "The main evolutionary significance of humor is that it gets us from the closed mode to the open mode quicker than anything else." [10]

If the previous delegates of game-ish practice employed game methods to set up creative work flows, to structure artistic production and shift perception, then the next person found in games and its mechanics a critical design tool to solve complex problems.

Through the 1960s architect and utopian thinker Buckminster Fuller developed the World Game. By his own opinion this game was his most important contribution to our society. The World Game was created as a proposal for an alternate system of pedagogy: a game, rather than a curriculum, as the main platform of learning. It was intended as a tool to formulate competing, comprehensive design-science approaches to all the problems on planet earth. Fuller chose to call his vision a "game" because he wanted it seen as something that was accessible to everyone, not just the elite few within the power structure. [11]

Inspired by Fuller's vision YKON has taken its core ideas and developed a contemporary, more poetic version to provide a fresh perspective on the future of our world. But more on that later.

### Part 2 - Practical Utopias (Materials)

YKON is a Helsinki based collective of artists, designers, game developers, researchers and art historians. YKON shares a deep interest in current utopian thought and practice with a particular focus in the development of creative facilitation tools and formats. Besides operating as a mediator between micronations and other utopian entities (Summit of Micronations, 2003 Helsinki), YKON explores alternate avenues of interaction between people and organizations with a particular focus on games as tools for participatory processes and education. [12]

## Brioni Summit of Practical Utopias 2013

### INTRO

Welcome to Practical Utopias - Brioni Summit 2013.

A fine group of participants representing a wide cross-section of contemporary utopian practices, have been selected to come to the beautifully bizarre Brioni Islands in Croatia. For four days they will engage in a reality game with its goal to share and play with practical ideas that have a potential to change the way we live together.

### PRACTICAL UTOPIA

Practical Utopia is a reflection of the desire to change the current system of society by developing alternative proposals that outline the first practical steps towards long-term processes of change.

Practical Utopia insists on the necessity of Utopia as an intellectual concept interlinking the fantastical and the pragmatic in bringing about social, political and artistic change. The game aims to trigger longer-term thinking and utopian dreaming - beyond the constraints of Realpolitik.

#### *THE GAME*

The Brioni Summit will take the form of a reality game where game rules will define the interactions between our participants. And various sights and infrastructures on the Island will be turned into a playground that will support them to collaborate in novel ways. The set up of this game will free the participants from the norms and constraints of a classical summit.

Since 2005 YKON has developed and tested various participatory formats like for example the Ykon Game. Based on their previous experience YKON has developed a site-specific game just for the Brioni Summit. YKON's approach towards games was inspired by the World Game of wellknown utopian thinker Buckminster Fuller – by his own opinion this game was his most important contribution to our society. The World Game was created as a proposal for an alternate system of pedagogy: a game, rather than a curriculum, as the main platform of learning. It was intended as a tool to formulate competing, comprehensive design-science approaches to all the problems on planet earth.

#### *THE PLAYERS*

The sizable cast of characters include peacekeepers, artists, performers, conflict managers, riot instigators, facilitators, tv broadcasters, educators, activists and theorists either Utopian by default, program or accident. They come from around the world, and one or two places not strictly on the map at all.

#### *THE ISLAND*

The Brioni archipelago is located one mile off the western coast of the Istrian peninsula. The beautiful archipelago has a colorful past; starting with Dinosaurs that inhabited the island years back. Stones extracted from the island built first the palaces of Venice and later the houses in Vienna and Berlin. In 1893 the island became a splendid summer resort for the elite when the islands were owned and developed by Paul Kuppeliwaser. With the help of Robert Koch he eradicated the Malaria transmitting Anopheles-Mücke that had made the island inhabitable at the time. After WW2 the archipelago became part of Yugoslavia and later became Josip Broz Tito's summer residence.

Tito was arguably the central figure in Yugoslavia's experiments with organisational structures that completely transformed its society - Brioni was the place where the Non-Alignment Movement was founded, and where self-managerial socialism met international celebrities and world leaders. This beautiful and provocative island speaks both of the possibility of imagining alternative systems, of restructuring social life, whilst simultaneously problematizing this desire.

#### *BACKGROUND*

The idea for the Brioni Summit of Practical Utopias was born out of the legacy of the First Summit of Micronations which took place in Helsinki in 2003. The summit was attended by State in Time, the Remony

of Ladonia, Transnational Republic and the State of Sabotage. The Summit Of Micronations opened a space for a playful re-conquest of political discourses on autonomy, utopia and self-realisation. The Summit of Micronations acted as a reminder of the fact that nationality and state are very recent mental and socio-historical constructs that could be replaced by other forms of spatial commitment and identity formations. After the summit, the central question – how the imaginative politics of micronations could be turned into a real transformative force – still required further elaboration. Its delegates therefore unanimously voted to hold a 2nd summit at a suitable location, for which NSK State in Time, one of the attending micronations, suggested the Brioni Islands.

The Brioni Summit 2013 is developed and organized by YKON and Drugo More and co-organized by Electra - three innovative groups with an established position in the field of visual arts.

#### *TAKE PART*

There are three ways to take part: You can become a player, if you catch one of the remaining seats in the game. Just check the SMALLPRINT below. You can also join the Public Program on September 28. Or you can take part in the Shadow Summit that will be hosted on this site during the Brioni summit.

SMALLPRINT So you want to become a player, too and play with us for all four days? Hurry, we have reserved 5 extra spaces in the game!

The conditions are simple: 1. send us a letter and tell us why your practice or attitude is practically utopian. 2. If there is still room in the game we'll let you know asap. 3. Once the space is confirmed, please proceed to book your hotel room and trip so we can start envisioning the future together.

Send us an email: [info@ykon.org](mailto:info@ykon.org)

#### *PUBLIC PROGRAM*

On Saturday, 28 Sept. 2013, we'll open up and invite everybody to join us on Brioni. The island will then have turned into a park of practical utopian delights. Take a stroll and engage with our players, participate in micro games and be stimulated by the exchange stations. The stroll will lead you to Tito's abandoned Open Air Cinema where the evening program will commence. We look forward to a late summer's communal celebration sizzling with Utopia.

The public day is part of the notorious Mine Yours Ours Festival, annually held in Rijeka, Croatia. For this year they moved their main event to Brioni to become an integral part of the Practical Utopias - Brioni Summit 2013.

#### *SHADOW SUMMIT*

For those who cannot make it in person to Brioni we will keep a participatory online "Shadow Summit" which will directly interact with the Brioni Summit.[13]

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[1] Video Clip *Work As Play* by Alan Watts can be viewed on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/32040143> and is probably from the early/mid 80s. His conviction resonates and finds recent reincarnation within the Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi), later in the Positive Psychology (Martin Seligman) and Synthetic Happiness 'Movement' (Dan Gilbert). From here – and in more practical terms - it was propagated and revamped by Jane McGonigal and her 'gameful design' call for action.

- [2] Kenneth Goldsmith, an experimental poet, professor and perpetual archivist (Ubuweb), sums up the Situationists' activities very nicely. Found in *Uncreative Writing* on page 36
- [3] [http://www.classwargames.net/?page\\_id=6](http://www.classwargames.net/?page_id=6) — Richard Barbrook, a neo-situationist at heart and author of *Imaginary Futures: from thinking machines to the global village* as well as *Cyber-Communism: How The Americans Are Superseding Capitalism In Cyberspace* regularly hosts Class War Games to teach, play and circulate Guy's and his wife's master piece. <http://www.classwargames.net/>
- [4] In *The Situationists and the City* edited by Tom McDonough one can find instructions of how to conduct a dérive. Yet some argument remains of whether the aimless drifting is best done sober or intoxicated.
- [5] Discovered in *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith on page four
- [6] Best to watch the entire Creative Mornings lecture with a coffee in the morning: <https://vimeo.com/31610153>
- [7] <https://vimeo.com/18913413>
- [8] <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/04/12/john-cleese-on-creativity-1991/>
- [9] This reminds me of Sister Corita's Rule number 8: Don't try to create and analyze at the same time, they're different processes. <https://www.corita.org/component/content/article/21-information-in-education/19-corita-kent-art-rules.html>
- [10] See Footnote [8]
- [11] Not quite Buckminster's version which was somewhat somber and tedious, yet this take on the game by teacher John Hunter implemented in a curriculum for fourth-graders gives a vivid idea of what this 'game' can do: [http://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_hunter\\_on\\_the\\_world\\_peace\\_game.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_hunter_on_the_world_peace_game.html)
- [12] <http://ykon.org/>
- [13] <http://practicalutopias.org/>