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## Design your own utopia (or dystopia) with this card game on Kickstarter

by April Joyner



As the political climate stands right now, roughly half of the country is cheering our current trajectory. The other half is in abject fear of it. What might it be like to imagine a completely different society altogether?

That's the question posed by *Investing in Futures*, a card game developed by More&More Unlimited, a group of four Brooklyn-based tech artists: Marina Zurkow, Sarah Rothberg, Surya Mattu (whose work we've previously covered) and Marc DaCosta. Participants draw cards that depict conditions, from climate to political structure, for their imagined society. Their job is to fill in the details and create artifacts — food, tools, communication devices — that illustrate what that society would look like. The project is currently on Kickstarter, where it's designated as a "Project We Love" by Kickstarter staff. With a week left to fundraise, the team has nearly tripled its \$2,500 goal, with over \$7,300 raised thus far. The campaign ends Friday.

*Investing in Futures* grew out of an exhibit by Zurkow and Rothberg at Bitforms Gallery last year called "More&More (the invisible oceans)." The exhibit explored the effect of shipping logistics on the global economy. After the two, along with Mattu, were accepted into the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's residency program, they began digging deeper into the economics, history and politics of logistics. (DaCosta joined the project after its inception.) What they found was a complex, overwhelming system that seemed, in Rothberg's and Zurkow's view, to engulf the concept of individual or even national authority.



“There’s a tremendous amount of agreement that this flow of goods doesn’t have anything to do with nation-states,” Zurkow said. “In fact, logistics would prefer to have no nation-states because they impede the flow of goods, as we’re now seeing with Trump and this imposition of potentially a 20 per cent tariff [on Mexican imports]. So that’s sort of the backdrop, looking at this space’s inevitability and how oppressive and claustrophobic that [is].”

The game doesn’t include advocacy for any particular political philosophy, Zurkow said, though she conceded that it has a “materialist Marxist, work-oriented bent,” at least in its current stage of development. But, Rothberg added, the game allows players to explore their own personal values and discuss them with others in a playful setting. In their tests of the game thus far, she said, players have quickly devised ideas for quite complex societies whose internal logic may not be apparent to outsiders — a similar concept to culture shock when traveling from region to region.

For instance, Rothberg described one scenario during a play test in which the society’s inhabitants were forced to move up to hilltops in response to climate change. In this imagined future, the players were all doctors with different specialties, but they could only communicate within 100 feet with each other. So they developed a method of communication for emergencies: a song and dance with a refrain that would identify the specialties of each doctor, in order to pinpoint the location of help.

“I know that sounds totally insane,” she remarked. (Yeah, kind of!)



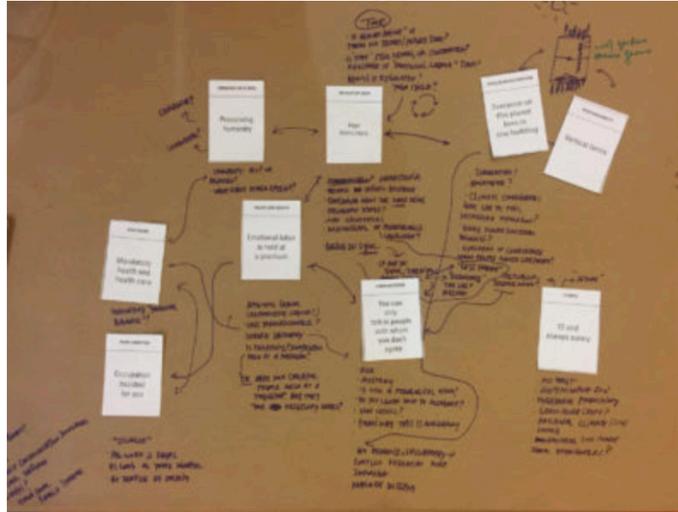
This podiatrist communicates with his fellow hilltop doctors through song and dance.

While the centerpiece of the project is the physical, in-person game, it will be augmented with a few tech components. One is featured as a limited-edition reward on the Kickstarter campaign: pony up \$2,000, and the More&More collective will create a custom virtual-reality experience of the future society you design through the game. (As of now, no one has claimed any of the three available slots.) But don’t fret if you don’t have the dough. Rothberg told Technical.ly that regardless of whether the reward is claimed, they plan to design some VR environments depicting selected alternative futures.

“We think it would be fun to bring people to actually inhabit these worlds that they created — that they can think of a world and feel it materialized visually,” she said.

In addition, More&More is planning to create an online gallery of the futures players create: an “EP-COT of parallel futures,” in Zurkow’s words. On one level, it’s a way for the game’s creators to get

feedback from players on their experience with the game. But on another level, it will represent something like an online museum of the future, full of people's imaginings of what alternative societies could look like.



What future society is in the cards? It's all in the luck of the draw. (Courtesy photo)

Those futures may run the gamut from utopian dreams to dystopian nightmares, as in one play-test scenario that Zurkow recounted. The players drew cards that designated a future society whose climate was consistently sunny and 72 degrees (Fahrenheit, we assume) and whose social structure was matriarchal — with a tendency toward cannibalism. To compensate for drought and unhealthy soil and to maintain gender dynamics, the team came up with an, er, interesting solution.

“To keep control as matriarchs, we were going to kill 80 percent of our sons, so that males would never get the upper hand, and we would use them as fertilizer,” Zurkow said.

Yikes.

Rothberg said the group is continuing to tweak some elements of the game.

“It can be dark still, but we want it to be not so dark and so detached from reality that it doesn’t feed back into understanding how to rethink the present moment,” she said.

Indeed, Zurkow said she hope the game inspires participants to realize their own agency.

“There’s two things I hope people get out of this,” she said. “That they understand that the present-tense kind of offerings that they have are not static and are not the only options people have in living on this globe. And the second is just connecting to their own creative capacity to imagine, in small and large ways, shifts in the way that they exist.”