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Rick Dolphijn

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What Matters in Macao: Situating the Game in the More-than-Human City

Rick Dolphijn, ^{a1}

^a Utrecht University

Abstract: In contrast to the dominant ideas of how 'game and play' work, which I label 'transcendentalist' and 'sedentary' my study on Macao proposes an alternative, 'materialist' and 'nomadic', perspective. This comes down to thinking 'game and play' not as an 'artificial' activity that takes place in a safe, enclosed environment, but as an elementary part of life, crucial to how imagination works, and to how imagination is entangled in the materiality of the urban sphere. After mapping an alternative history of how to think 'game and play' differently, working with anthropologist Karl Goos, architect Aldo van Eyck, artist Constant, and in the end philosopher Gilles Deleuze, I engage with the city of Macao, its architecture, its politics, and its gambling practices. I use fiction authors Leslie T. Chang and Louis Borges to show, finally, how Macao, in contemporary China, equals the infinite game of chance, materialized; the much needed other in its contemporary urban landscape.

Keywords: Macao, Punto Banco, play, architectural theory, New Babylon

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Humanism and Play

Though it is a word used very often in everyday settings, and thoroughly entangled with contemporary culture, there is little consensus on the history of the word "game" and its etymological roots. The same goes for "play" and actually also for the Germanic "spiel". All three terms seem to refer to "pulling a trick" in a friendly way, though "game" (contrary to the other two terms) may also refer to playing in an unfriendly way (where having fun with people turns into making fun of people). The word "game" is probably related to the Gothic word *Gaman*, which, interestingly enough, means "fellow human being", or "companion". I find this intriguing because it may explain why we consider playing a game, or just "being playful" such a very "human" feature. Or at least, in the study that had such an unprecedented impact on what would later be referred to as game studies (or ludology), Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938/1955), it is all too clear that being playful is actually what makes us human.

Before Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was fully accepted within academia, and long before Huizinga published his work, Karl Groos published two books in which he carefully distinguishes humans and animals through how they value "play" sociologically. Referring to the Aristotelian *phantasia*

aisthètikè, the idea that there is also a limited number of non-human species equipped with "imagination", and who are subsequently able to give form to their lives "differently", Groos stresses that both "higher animals" (a selected group of mammals) and humans, are able to *learn behavior through play*. The books were originally written in German as *Die Spiele der Tiere* (1896) and *Die Spiele der Menschen* (1899) and subsequently translated into English as *The Play of Animals* (1898) and *The Play of Man* (1901). Groos questioned the strict opposition between animals and humans, and this long tradition of human exceptionalism (or humanism), that played such an important role in the mechanical worldview of Descartes, which told us that only the human mind (the "I think", the cogito) was able to live outside of pure mechanical extension. Also known as Cartesianism, this idea gained importance since the early 17th century in Europe and in large parts of the Muslim world and has remained popular up until today.

Groos' ideas, after closer inspection, were actually much more revolutionary than that, as he seems to hint at what we may call a more-than-human idea of game and play; he was the first one to show in a major study that the bodies of young animals (predominantly determined by fixed behavioral movements) and their brains (consisting of "incomplete" neuromuscular

¹ Corresponding author. Email: r.dolphijn@uu.nl



systems) are formed and expressed in their early years *through play*, meaning that their very being (body and mind), however limited, grew from the imaginative and creative relationships with the material world that surrounds them. In *The Play of Animals* (1898, pp. 23–24), he summarized this as follows:

Without it [play in youth] the adult animal would be but poorly equipped for the tasks of life. He would have far less than the requisite amount of practice in running and leaping, in springing on his prey, in seizing and strangling the victim, in fleeing from his enemies, in fighting his opponents, etc. The muscular system would not be sufficiently developed and trained for all these tasks. Moreover, much would be wanting in the structure of his skeleton, much that must be supplied by functional adaptation during the life of each individual, even in the period of growth.

Groos' idea is that both physical adulthood and a developed rationality are a consequence of a childhood in which playing was crucial, since it is in the *playful negotiation* with one's material environment that growth (mental and physical) takes place. That idea has had an enormous impact on what I propose to call *a materialist and nomadic theory of game and play*. Materialist because it emphasizes the material (and that which matters); nomadic because it always starts from the relationship, from how change works.

This materialist and nomadic theory of game and play should be considered the alternative to the much more generally accepted ideas regarding game and play. We might label these Cartesian, or modern, but perhaps it is helpful to label them in contrast to the alternative, *a transcendentalist and sedentary theory of game and play*. Transcendentalist because it emphasizes a rational idea more or less detached from the material world; sedentary because it starts from the fixed order of things. This dominant tradition accepts the dualisms so central to Cartesianism, as they are opposing mind and body, but also human and animal, human and world, nature and culture, to name just a few. Transcendental and sedentary theories of game and play emphasize that game and play should be considered as "separate" from the "real" world, as an exercise in thought distinct from "reality". In the already mentioned *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga (1938/1955, p. 13), sums up its key thought:

Play is a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.

Another important thinker in this tradition that fits the (implicit and explicit) emphasis on dualisms, would be Lev Vygotsky (1978, pp. 93–94), who, in his influential essay, "The Role of Play in Development", starts by making an oppositional distinction between the child (who "desired" play as activity) and the adult (who taught). To be very clear about this: this transcendentalist and sedentary theory of game and play is the dominant theory in the field (see how it completely dominates the ideas of Donoff & Bridgeman, 2017). Also, in contemporary works on game and play, much interested in online gaming, so-called serious gaming and actually everything the digital revolution is offering us in terms of game and play, the humanist reading of game and play is prevailing. Without necessarily making too many references to them, I think scholars like Ian Bogost (with his emphasis on boundaries and on controlled environments; see 2016), neatly follow the humanist (transcendental and sedentary) lines of thought that Huizinga (1938/1955) and Vygotsky (1978) set out before him.

But what if we would take the materialism hinted at by Groos (1898, 1901), much more seriously, this tradition which, as announced above, practices a materialist and nomadic theory of game and play? It is a tradition that rather than starting from the human (the Cartesian "I think"), starts from the "more than human" or from "all that matters" to 21st century life. My claim is that over the years, this alternative tradition has offered us a much more engaging theory of game and play. I consider this alternative tradition to be much more urgent, and needed, in order not only to reflect on how we live our lives (living in a more-than-human-world), but also consequently on what we consider "the real".

Walking in the City, Playfully

The materialism at work in Groos, became an important resonance for architectural theory. Especially with how the situationist designers, rooted in dada and surrealism, reimagined public and private space, starting from the importance of play as Groos imagined it. Aldo van Eyck's playgrounds, his ideas and designs from the early 1950's onward, practice this materialist theory of game and play. This is evident in the *Burgerweeshuis* (civilians' orphanage) in Amsterdam. Especially his playgrounds were famous and show that a good design is about anticipating all sorts of (mutual) future relationships. Van Eyck's revolutionary designs are therefore to be seen as an invitation to explore the unexplored dimensions of space. And the only way to do this is by using our own bodies differently, finding new ways to fold in, to bend, and to curve.

This search for new alliances, new sympathies, for finding grip, balance, and stability in ways one did not expect to find it, shows how van Eyck was interested in the imagination, without this being anything close to "an imaginary situation" (in response to how, for instance, Huizinga (1938/1955) and Vygotsky (1978) think about play). Also, van Eyck's playfulness has

nothing to do with installing an alternative set of architectonic rules. Quite the opposite: playfulness is about exploring the impossible, about roaming the unexpected, about opening our eyes to the unforeseen. Playfulness is dangerous (which is also why he referred to the constructions in his playgrounds as “risk-averse designs”): It has no boundaries; it is not controlled. In the playgrounds, this also means his designs don't represent an “existing” object or form (there is no “car” or “house” to be “recognized” in his playground designs). Van Eyck's webs of steel bars encourage the user to move differently, climb differently, simply by proposing “new directions”. Or, as my neighbor's then three-year-old son so rightly expressed it the other day returning from his walk around the block (encountering a curved steel bar): “There was an igloo and a bat... and the bat was me”.

Van Eyck's designs are much more revolutionary than the “ready-made ludic interventions” that designers and artists are introducing in the cityscape today (think of the “water squares” and the permanent interactive artworks that can be found in every major city center today). Van Eyck's designs are not “finished objects” created for the human being, nor do they ask for a response. They do not call for interaction, they do not work with a series of scripts. His designs explore a different city that only takes shape in play (between the playful child and all that matters in the situation). Because of the design, everything involved is undergoing a change together (the people, the materials, the game). All that matters imagines and learns together; it is the playful entanglement between the bodies and the minds, which puts them in a joint process of growth.

In a brilliant article entitled “When Snow Falls on Cities”, van Eyck (2008, p. 108) imagines:

Look, snow! A miraculous trick of the skies – a fleeting correction. All at once, the child is Lord of the city. The child is everywhere, rediscovering the city whilst the city in turn rediscovers its children, if only for a while.

Snow is not only giving the child (in all of us) new thoughts, new strengths. It also gives the city new roads, new forms, new centers and new outskirts. It is easy to imagine how Van Eyck's ideas match with the situationists' motto to “find the beach beneath the street!”. It is easy to see how his thoughts, for instance, match with the work of the artist Constant Nieuwenhuys, whose “ideal” long-term project, New Babylon, also starts from playful interaction (quoted in Wark, 2015b, para. 13):

Every square mile of New Babylon's surface represents an inexhaustible field of new and unknown situations, because nothing will remain and everything is constantly changing.

Note however, that by referring to Constant's project as “ideal”, I am not labelling it as “transcendental”. Here, the word “ideal”, is not opposed to the real, ergo, it is not used in the Platonic sense of the word. The ideal, from a materialist point of view, should be seen as a model that aims to make us “see” something (from the Greek *idein* which means to see), not in the so-called future, but in the here and now. It oscillates between the foreseen and the unforeseen but in that sense, is actually much more real than the cities as we, predominantly, live them today, which are in many ways amalgams of historical misfortunes and adaptations, overcoded by the political, economic and social powers that be. When discussing New Babylon, its “reality” is what Constant emphasizes time and again (Nieuwenhuys, 1960/1998, p. 131):

I prefer to call it [New Babylon, rd] a realistic project, because it distances itself from the present condition which has lost touch with reality, and because it is founded on what is technically feasible, on what is desirable from a human viewpoint, on what is inevitable from a social viewpoint.

Reclaiming reality is exactly what, more recently, drove the writings and designs of Madeleine Gins and Arakawa (2002, 2006). Their motto “architecture against death”, which led to writing (poetry and academic work), to parks and to houses, practices a similar take on realism. Starting from playfulness, their designs ask for an ongoing explorative commitment, promising the nomads who wander through their houses and cross their parks, a never-ending and playful life (for the moment). And such a life necessarily continues and perseveres in being in-transformation. It has to move and migrate, interact and intervene. And this is why being playful, for these thinkers and designers, necessarily moves beyond a ‘human’ presence. Rethinking game and play, they start from the intra-action, from allowing new alliances to blossom. Gins and Arakawa therefore stress that the human being is never the starting point of any exploration, rather, it is the end. They call this “organism that persons” and emphasize that architecture (the constructed environment) therefore also makes the human being. As they conclude (2002, p. 44):

Environment-organism-person is all that is the case. Isolating persons from their architectural surrounds leads to a dualism no less pernicious than that of mind and body.

In what way, can we see this real and ideal playfulness in urban spheres? Situationism has always been greatly interested not so much in individual designs or designers, but much more in how playfulness is at work in the way we live the cities, and in what way these cities allow a particular playfulness to be realized.

The playgrounds, as designed by Aldo van Eyck, but also the snow as he brought this up, should be seen as “interventions”, as ways in which the city “reverses its destiny”, as Arakawa and Gins would say. Of course, this is not just a call to fellow human beings. As designers and architects (and poets) they are much more interested in how urban spheres as a whole, are able to “reverse their destiny”. How do all of us, human and non-human comrades, experience a city which is livelier, earthlier and more convivial?

It is interesting to look at those places that can be labelled “playful urban spheres”. Some of the bigger amusement parks deserve a label like that and there are, in every world city, districts that one might think of, which are somehow “playful”. I’m thinking of areas like Roppongi in Tokyo, a major club area with all the fun one could wish for (and more). The red-light district in Amsterdam and the Montmartre area (with the Moulin Rouge) in Paris, and Patpong in Bangkok, are other examples of urban spheres in which playfulness is what matters: individual buildings, often excessively decorated with lights, designed to lure everyone in; street scenes seem to ask for more interaction of the crowd. In good and in bad ways, “games are being played” everywhere. It is no coincidence that these are rough areas too, areas where the rule of law is often not easy to maintain, where alcohol and drugs, violence and sex, are more present than elsewhere in the city (especially at night). Of course, there is no need to be negative here; let us not forget that these are also the areas where people laugh an awful lot more compared to the city suburbs, where everyone gathers to have a good time, where people get into lively discussions, and where they happily spend (or waste) loads of money. Attracting visitors from all over the world, the districts mentioned, are much more than just the shady sides of the city.

In rare cases, there are cities where playfulness is not limited to the playground, to the event of snow falling from the skies, or even to particular areas which are radically different from the rest of the city. There are cases where the entire city is taken over by the game. You might think of Las Vegas, Monte Carlo or of Atlantic City, as examples of such places. But then you haven’t been to Macao.

The Game is What Matters in Macao

Macao, until 1999, was a Portuguese colony. It was the first colony in China (for a good overview of its history see Cheng, 1999). Its long history is still to be found in many different parts of the city, where colonial constructions from the early 16th century onwards, are mixed with Chinese-style building blocks. After its history as a key settlement (since 1557) in the trade routes between East and West, the rise of neighboring Hong Kong together with many other geopolitical changes, caused Macao, at the end of the 19th century, to start its search for another means of survival, which brought it to gambling. The reunification with China in

1999, the immense economic rise of China, and the persistence of its (very serious) gaming culture, caused Macao, especially in the last ten to fifteen years, to become the absolute gambling capital of the world; it generates seven times the size of revenue compared to Las Vegas. Interesting, from our perspective, is the fact that much of its current growth is linked to its land reclamation policies. Cotai, or the Cotai strip, which connects the islands of Taipa and Coloane, is perhaps most famous, serving more or less as the new “heart” of the city, but there are many more (smaller) land reclamation projects expanding Macao in all other directions. Surrounding the old parts of town, and pockets of residential areas, the new land is practically always designed for play.

The game played in Macao is the simplest of the casino games; almost everywhere people play Baccarat punto banco. Without a complex set of rules or long-lasting games, the version of Baccarat played here is a plain game of chance between a player (punto) and a bank (banco); draw at least two cards and the one player whose deck comes closest to nine (the lucky number in Chinese, as it sounds like longevity, everlasting) wins. No cheating, no strategies, no secret bonds with other players. Baccarat punto banco is like the throw of the dice, all about chance, hoping for the lucky number.

Could we say that Macao, like New Babylon, is an inexhaustible field of new and unknown situations? Stripped from the complexities of everyday life, the rules and regulations that have captured us all in a net of social, political and economic realities, better known as “everyday life”, Macao offers us an alternative, in the game, in the city. Luck, chance, longevity, is what matters here, and not just at the tables in the casinos: It matters everywhere.

This quest for luck, chance, longevity - it’s almost a pilgrimage for those who decide to travel to Macao, and, not unlikely, spend their family fortune all by themselves, in confinement: It is only the punto and the banco that count. Macao is much more radically focused on gambling than Vegas for that matter. This is also why the Cotai strip is not like the Las Vegas strip, which is much more a public space, a common place for social activities where people meet each other, where they see and are being seen and where entertainment and music, fountains and light shows make a busy promenade. In Macao, it is the inside of the casinos that matters. Some casinos, especially those large casinos built by Western entrepreneurs, still have something of a ‘façade’ (think of the Venetian, and the Parisian, both owned by Las Vegas Sands, the largest casino company worldwide) but in the end, what matters in Macao, or perhaps, in Asia (see also Dolphijn, 2005) are the endless possibilities of the inside.

Most well-known, in this sense, is how the Venetian (a copy of the Venetian in Las Vegas, which copied “a scene” of the city of Venice) has a duty-free shopping section with a Venetian canal (with gondolas-on-a-leash) running through it, on the second floor. The clear

blue sky, the semi-Gothic houses and high bridges, are supposed to express the theme of this casino. It is important to note that these constructions are not built to “resemble” the Las Vegas version nor the “original” canals of Venice, Italy. Phenomenologically, a walk through the Venetian, then reminds us of the “Macao roads” that Dung Kai-Cheung’s starts with in *Atlas* (2012). Presumably it is an ancient and almost forgotten saying which claims that every street must have a counterplace, somewhere in the world. For Dung however, a counterplace is not a copy, it is not a controlled environment (as Bogost, 2016 would put it), within which a “free activity” (Huizinga, 1938/1955) can safely happen. On the contrary, walking in the Venetian you quickly understand that you are part of a game called Venice, that includes both the old city and the Venetian in Las Vegas, but that also includes the entire city of Macao, and even the city as such. Even those who have not visited Venice before know perfectly well, that the Venetian Macao plays with Venice, its words and its things. A counterplace is necessarily invisible and unknowable, which is why it persists in existence, why it performs every other place or road *in a certain manner*. A counterplace is a crystal in space, reflecting so many other places playfully, brilliantly. A counterplace is ideal.

In short, and coming back to my previous point, there are three ways that the urban sphere of Macao shows us the materialist and nomadic theory of game and play. Firstly, the high-end baccarat tables, the Venetian Macao, the Cotai Strip, the city of Macao, cannot be placed ‘outside’ of reality at all: Of course, they play the imagination, and by doing so, they are real as real can be (if only because imagination is our most elementary instrument of “world-making”). Secondly, the practice of play is never about following a strict set of rules, also not when it comes to the city’s architecture (can we honestly say cities like this are subject to any architectural style, to rules of design that are followed by its designers?) On the contrary, it is because of the absence of rule, that all of Macao’s spheres come alive. Thirdly, and lastly; there is nothing ‘safe’ about the games being played here. Again, rather the opposite is the case; the environment is everything but safe for those who are seduced to placing a bet. Many of the gamblers end their stay in the city completely bankrupt, and are visited by triads after they return to their hometown in China, who insist that they pay back their debts to the last (Hong Kong) dollar. Offering an alternative to everyday life, the city of Macao “allows” for reversing one’s destiny, as Arakawa and Gins (2002, 2006) would say.

The Playful City

I would like to read the city of Macao as a playful city, as a space where the materialist and nomadic theory of game and play is at work, where the “ideal” game, as with Constant and van Eyck, and perhaps with Arakawa and Gins, dominates the scene, but where we can also find traces of what can be considered the “normal”

game. The normal game, which should be seen as the dominant idea of gaming in theory, from Aristotle to Huizinga to Bogost, as discussed above, offers in my view only a limited perspective on what game and play are about. To be more precise, the transcendental and sedentary theory of games and play, as I referred to it, perhaps has something to say about how games have been institutionalized today, how normal games have created their own reality. But my claim is that their notion of the normal game tells us very little of why the game matters. It tells us nothing of the playfulness of humans (*Homo Ludens*, the title of Huizinga’s famous book), and why game and play are of such great importance to everyday life. What we consider the normal game, is the zombified game, an artificial abstraction that ‘lives’ only in our memories, that merely reminds us of what being playful was all about.

The ideal game, on the other hand, can teach us a lot about what happens when snow falls on the city, and its children (followed by their parents) invent the city anew. This time the game tells us a lot about how we relate to our human and non-human companions. The ideal game teaches us about the playfulness that runs through the veins of Macao, that feed the Macao roads and buildings, its people... and its banks.

Gilles Deleuze, in his 1969 book *The Logic of Sense*, spends one chapter (called the “Tenth Series of the Ideal Game”) thinking about the difference between the normal game and the ideal game (for a more detailed overview of Deleuze’s fascinating readings of game and play, read Johnson, 2018). Throughout this book, Deleuze (1969/1990) explores the nonsensical, and the way in which sense follows from nonsense (nonsense then, “reveals” sense and is not the absence of sense at all). The game, for Deleuze, plays a key role in the logic of sense, and thus we can expect that his ideas extend far beyond the board of chess or the deck of cards. Perhaps echoing the situationists, Deleuze understands that play and game concern life as a whole, the more-than-human-society as a whole. Play and game decide that which matters and that which does not.

Key to the way he conceptualizes the ideal game is his analysis of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (its sequel). Deleuze starts the chapter by wondering about these very uncommon games that Alice is confronted with throughout these books. Think of the cactus race in which one begins when one wishes and stops at will and the croquet match in which the balls are hedgehogs, where there are pink flamingo mallets, and the loop soldiers who endlessly displace themselves from one end of the game to the other (1968/1990, p. 58). It is in particular the procedurality of these games, that reveal what Deleuze here conceptualizes as the ideal game that makes these games different from the “normal” game to which he opposes this.

More or less in line with what I called the transcendental and sedentary theory of the game, at the start of this text, Deleuze’s “normal game” works

with a prior set of categorical rules which determine hypotheses, which divide and apportion chance, which organize the game into really and numerically distinct successions, and which end with victory or defeat. This brings him to the conclusion regarding the rules of the normal game, and offers great insight into how some of the theorists mentioned above think about normal games. In contrast to, for instance, Huizinga (1938/1955), who claims that the normal game is a “free activity” by means of which the young explore and prepare for their adult life, Deleuze rightfully concludes that the normal game actually puts a limit to both chance and human activity. By being so dependent upon pre-existing rules, rules that determine, for the larger part, the narratives according to which the game will develop and even what the outcome of the game will be, there is actually very little freedom to be found in the normal game. On the contrary, the normal game seems to act much more as a vehicle for disciplining the young and restless, for “playfully” making them accept the rules of society and the role they, eventually, can play within this society. The normal game, in other words, sets a moral very much in line with how society actually works.

In line with this, and contrary to what is often claimed (from Huizinga to Bogost), Deleuze shows us that the normal game is *not* taking place outside of the present, but on the contrary, it *serves* the economic, social and political realities of the day. Its formal rules may order us to close off some parts of the real (framing the game), or to secure some elements in it, but in the end, it is fully endorsing the norms that the present lives by. And, as such, the normal game is not teaching you about life at all. As dangerous as a rollercoaster, as lethal as a haunted house, the controlled, unreal or ‘artificial’ situation that is offered to us in the normal game, has remarkably little to do with the unbound opportunities that playfulness has in store for us. The normal game fences the normal; it situates the normal and secures its borders.

Ideal games, on the other hand, are by no means limited, and therefore have much more to say about “what chance can do”. Also, as they liberate the body and mind procedurally and indefinitely, opening up an indefinite number of relations between the player and the played with (whoever they are), the ideal game actually introduces us to the infinite number of possibilities that the world has in store. Instead of a moral, the ideal game offers us an ethics: It questions the good. In the ideal game (as Alice -the nomad- keeps on discovering) anything can happen; there is always a new reality unfolding, each one even more fantastic than the other. Playful creatures, always unwilling to follow any pre-existing rule, will always introduce her to the next impossibility. Following her travels, we know that anything will happen, because there are absolutely no rules and regulations that prevent this.

This is why Deleuze says that the ideal game makes no sense and has no reality. On the contrary: *it is precisely in being nonsensical that the ideal game is real.*

Being playful by heart, by will, and by chance, the ideal game does not follow rules and thus does not “fit” the social, political and economic structures of reality. The ideal game has to make no sense, since “sense” is completely irrelevant to its procedures. Why wouldn’t the loops in croquet endlessly displace themselves? Why wouldn’t the balls be hedgehogs? Why wouldn’t we rebuild the Eiffel tower (half-scale); a Venetian canal on the first floor; or the Grand Lisboa, Macao’s tallest, ugliest, and most iconic building; the winged Nike, the Goddess of Victory; a bolt of lightning on an immense globe covered with gold colored glass?

In being nonsensical, in realizing what no other city in the world has realized before, in being vulgar and magnificent, dangerous and extraordinary, Macao is not interested in the normal game at all. Its sole aim is longevity, the everlasting, the good, the lucky number: nine. Being nonsensical, not securing anything as a precondition of the game, in fact putting any possible condition of the game immediately at stake, is what brings forth this ideal game. Warding off any form of security, is what allows the ideal game to experiment with all the tensions that surround us, is what involves everything in the game, is what puts everything at stake. Yes, you can lose everything you own, and much more, in a single Baccarat game which can all be over in a blink of the eye. Or you get lucky, and the good life lasts forever.

Babylon is Nothing but an Infinite Game of Chance

In his reading of Constant’s *New Babylon*, media theorist McKenzie Wark opposes New Babylon to the New Moloch, a grim idea of the city, also known as the megalopolis, the result of 20th century Capitalism, the main architect of the current megacities that now dominate China. Wark quotes a book *Factory Girls*, by Leslie T. Chang (in Wark, 2015a, p. 143):

Her first day on the job, Min turned seventeen. She took a half day off and walked the streets alone, buying some sweets and eating them by herself. She had no idea what people did for fun.

No doubt, Min dreams of luck, of longevity. And no doubt, this luck, this longevity, cannot be found in the New Moloch. The rules and regulations of everyday life, the economic, social and political normalities that organize her life, are very difficult to change. But then, Macao, is always able to intervene in the “present condition”, as Constant says. Macao is able to question the realities presented to Min, offering to change her future and her past (a bright future makes a miserable past). Macao is the untimely, the alternative to the ticking clock of the factory. That is how it shows the materialist and nomadic theory of game and play at work.

In his seminal story “The Lottery in Babylon”, Jorge Luis Borges (1941/1999, pp. 101-106) has more to tell us about what (New) Babylon is actually about. His Babylon is obsessed with a lottery which makes time, and space actually:

As everyone knows, the people of Babylon are great admirers of logic, and even symmetry. It was inconsistent that lucky numbers should pay off in round silver coins while unlucky ones were measured in days and nights of jail. Certain moralists argued that the possession of coins did not always bring about happiness, and that other forms of happiness were perhaps more direct.

Isn't this exactly what Macao is about, how Macao (New Babylon) functions as the ideal counterplace of the other Chinese cities (New Moloch), and the lives it produces? Isn't this what the game of Baccarat punto banco, the Cotai Strip, the whole city of Macao has to offer to the millions of Mins, working in the New Moloch; searching for luck and longevity as a means to change their lives forever? Borges ends his essay concluding “Babylon is nothing but an infinite game of chance” (1941/1999, pp. 106). And he is right. Macao is nonsensical and ideal, and therefore it is real; Macao matters because the city as a whole is the game of chance.

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Author Details

Rick Dolphijn is Associate Professor of Media and Culture at Utrecht University (the Netherlands), and Honorary Professor at Comparative Literature, University of Hong Kong (PRC). His books include *Foodscapes* (Eburon/University of Chicago Press 2004), *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (Open Humanities Press 2012, with Iris van der Tuin). He edited (with Rosi Braidotti) *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life* (Brill/Rodopi 2014/5) and *Philosophy after Nature* (2017), and most recently *Michel Serres and the Crises of the Contemporary* (Bloomsbury Academic 2019/20). His new monograph, *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, recently appeared with Bloomsbury Academic.

ORCID

Rick Dolphijn  [0000-0002-2145-5579](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2145-5579)