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## Special Issue
Philosophy and Gambling: Reflections from Macao

Editors: Mario Wenning & Fiona Nicoll


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# Editorial:

# Philosophy & Gambling: Reflections from Macao

Mario Wenning, Fiona Nicoll

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# EDITORIAL

# Philosophy and Gambling: Reflections from Macao

Mario Wenning, Fiona Nicoll

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Contemporary gambling spaces, representations and practices are in need of a critical interpretation that is informed by interdisciplinary approaches in the humanities as well as social sciences. To better understand the unique role of gambling in past and contemporary societies, East and West, it is helpful to come to terms with the deeper meaning gambling practices have in our lives, and what significance they hold as distinctive anthropological phenomena.

This special issue includes contributions that were initially presented at the conference "Philosophy of Gambling" held at the University of Macau in October 2019. Macao's gambling market is one of the largest in the world, and it plays a central role in contemporary gambling studies. The event created a forum in which scholars either specialized in gambling studies, or with an interest in gambling as a cultural praxis, could engage in constructive dialogue. Some of the contributions from the conference in Macau are featured in this special issue, together with other relevant contributions. Articles span the fields of philosophy, cultural studies, communication studies, and anthropology.

References to gambling are ubiquitous in philosophy and the arts, even if they tend to occur at the margins and below the surface of mainstream discourses and artistic genres. In this introduction we will start by turning to one genre, namely the depiction of gambling in film noir. We will then briefly summarize the contributions included in this special issue, including as they relate to Macao.

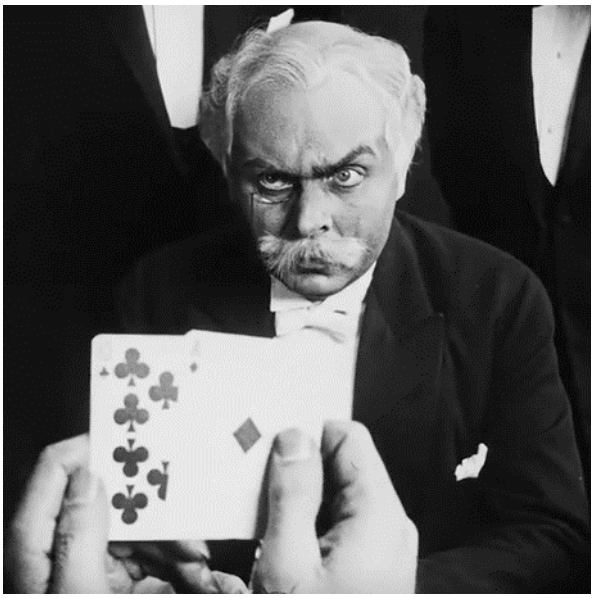
## Gambling in Film Noir

Before turning to the depiction of gambling in film noir, it may be helpful to start with some general remarks about this genre. Film noir emerged from German expressionist film in the 1920s and 1930s. Major directors include Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. The genre is influenced by, to use Ricoeur´s phrase, the "masters of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970): Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Their analysis of what happens in society and in each person´s psychic life below the surface of orderly self-control has served as the theoretical background for the noir genre that is aptly characterized by the attribute of being "noir" or dark. The main period of Hollywood Noir was in the 1940s and 1950s represented by, among others, the directors Orson Welles, Josef von Sternberg, Nicholas Ray and Alfred Hitchcock. The noir genre not only presents obscure atmospheres and plots, but it is also subversive of mainstream cinema. In particular, Hollywood noir serves as a mockery of mainstream Hollywood film, e.g., Westerns, in breaking down established conceptions of action, plots, and heroism. Most film noirs undermine the appearance of Hollywood protagonists marked by stereotypic gender and beauty ideals as well as predictable narrative patterns. Noirs break with the reified cinematic representation of heroic action and happy endings by presenting the human condition as entangled in existential contradictions that cannot be easily avoided, resolved or transformed into a struggle between good and evil in which heroes win over villains.

Common cinematic features of film noir include grim urban settings, cramped interiors, gloomy atmosphere, unusual camera angles, and changing speeds. The protagonists are shady characters who inhabit an extra-legal space at the margins of society. There has been a recent upsurge of interest in film noir from the perspective of film philosophy (Oliver & Trigo, 2003; Pippin, 2012; Conard, 2006). Film noir is interesting from a philosophical perspective because it breaks with the assumption that human beings are agents who possess: (1) a clear understanding of the meaning of their intentions and actions, and (2) control over their desires, intentions, and the consequences of

their actions. Instead, film noir presents human agents as: (1) being part of complex and often opaque, entangled, and contradictory plots, (2) engaging in "foolish" actions in spite of knowing better, and (3) simultaneously performing self-reflection and exposing the limits of this reflection and the limits of control.

One example to illustrate these themes from early film noir is that of Dr. Mabuse, the protagonist in *Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler: An Image of Time* (Fritz Lang 1922). Dr. Mabuse, also referred to as the great unknown, lives a double life: (1) a respected medical doctor and (2) a puppeteer who tricks people (e.g., the other protagonist Hull) through his hypnotic, even demonic, powers. The film reveals a radical transformation of modern temporality where acceleration and standstill coincide. In a key gambling scene, the clock races forward and suddenly stands still. It documents how the expansion of modes of gambling have been extended from the action on the casino floor, to the stock market, and to role play in modern society.



Screenshots from *Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler: An Image of Time* (Fritz Lang 1922)

One is tempted to ask: Why is gambling a recurring theme not only in this classic work, but more broadly in the genre of film noir? An obvious answer is that gambling takes place beneath the surface of order. In games of chance, the gambler willingly engages in more or less controlled risk-taking. The gambler's actions are, at least in part, determined by, depending on one's perspective, chance or fate rather than human reason and mere skill. Just like the characters in film noir, the gambler is subject to misinterpretations by himself as well as by others. Thus, Hull, the protagonist in the gambling scene depicted above, does not notice

that he has what it takes to win. His winning hand, a ten of clubs and the ace of diamonds, remains unnoticed to him, even though it is right in front of his eyes. He is being hypnotized by his fellow player Dr. Mabuse, who is introduced as Hull's friend, even if Hull claims that he does not know him and has never met this friend before.

As a second example demonstrates, film noir draws on gambling in luring viewers to exotic spaces that subvert conceptions of order. The film *Shanghai Gestures* (1941) by von Sternberg is set in underworld Shanghai. In his autobiography, von Sternberg recounts his experience of a casino-theater in postcolonial Shanghai that prompted him to make the movie:

> On the surface the city was a picture of order, divided into sectors where the citizens of half a dozen nations had their own courts and, until 1923, their own post offices where letters could be mailed with stamps issued by the United States, Hong Kong, France, Japan, Russia, Germany and, at times, even India. But underneath the surface, or around the corner, it was something else, and that is where I went. (…) I spent a pulsating three hours in a turbulent branch of the theatre known as the Great World (…) It was a condensed world, and as complex as if it had not been squeezed together (…) When I had entered the hot stream of humanity, there was no turning back even had I wanted to. (von Sternberg, 1965, pp. 81-82)

The "Great World" in Shanghai was a six-floor building stacked with "every variety of entertainment Chinese ingenuity had conceived". It included, according to von Sternberg:

> "gambling tables, singsong girls, magicians, pickpockets, slot machines, fireworks, bird cages, fans, stick incense, acrobats, and ginger (…) actors, crickets in cages, pimps (…) midwives, barbers, and earwax extractors (…) jugglers, herb medicines, ice cream parlors, photographers (…) exposed toilets (…) shooting galleries, fan-tan tables, revolving wheels, massage benches, acupuncture and moxa cabinets, hot towel counters, dried fish and intestines (…) a stuffed whale, story tellers, balloons, peep shows, masks, a mirror maze, two love-letter booths with scribes who guaranteed results, rubber goods, and a temple filled with ferocious gods and joss sticks (…) tightrope walkers (…) seesaws, Chinese checkers, mahjongg (…) lottery tickets, and marriage brokers". (von Sternberg, 1996, pp. 82-83)

The Casino World in Shanghai Gesture (1941) seems to present a melting pot where East meets West, a dreamworld of a luring anticulture. The temptation of evil coincides with the promise of infinite possibility. As the protagonist Victoria (Gene Tierney) puts it: "Anything could happen here". In contrast to this sense of possibility, the casino turns out to be a trap: Money rises to the house while unfortunate players keep on falling into an inferno. Colonial tensions persist in spite of cosmopolitan pretensions. The promise of infinite possibility turns into the settling of debts and a lethal encounter with the unacknowledged past in the form of Victoria's mother: the Chinese dragon lady and casino owner Gin Sling (Ona Munson) depicted below. Gin Sling ends up killing her daughter Victoria as an act of revenge against Victoria's British father and also as an act of self-destruction.


Screenshots from *Shanghai Gesture* (von Sternberg, 1941)

The third example highlights that gambling in film noir presents the deliberate acceptance of radical twists of fate and loss of control. In von Sternberg's and Nicholas Ray's *Macao* (1952) the figure of the gambler is that of a drifter who is conscious of wasting time. Nick Cochran (Robert Mitchum) is a cynical, yet honest, ex-serviceman who finds himself caught up in a chase in the Portuguese enclave of Macao. In one of the gambling scenes in the casino "Quick Reward", he overstretched his luck by consciously engaging in the gambler's fallacy (addressed by Nahum Brown in this special issue). Good luck turns into bad luck, not rarely due to overstretching one's initial good luck. The gambler is a sympathetic outlaw who acts in spite of hesitations and against his better insights. In the end Nick turns in the mobster and casino owner to the international police. He continues sailing with his lover Julie and is inadvertently rewarded by being cleared of a former shooting charge. Unlucky in gambling, lucky in love.

Screenshots from *Macao* (von Sternberg and Ray, 1952)

Film noir presents us with an archeology of modern times and practices in which the gambler figures prominently as a hero and a victim who plays and is being played. Gambling representations in film noir reveal the human capacity of letting ourselves be fooled deliberately. We take it that the conception of human agency presented in film noir is better suited to approach the cultural praxis of gambling than, for example, models such as that of game theory with its assumptions about fully rational agents engaged in calculations exclusively aimed at profit-maximization. Instead, the modern gambler in film noir is depicted as playfully overstressing her luck to the point of self-destruction with the promise of occasionally winning. We will now leave the movie theater and turn to the distinctive aspects of gambling highlighted by the contributions included in this special issue.

**Contributions**

The first piece, "On Card Games", is to our knowledge the first English language translation of a fragment written by Hegel. The text was originally composed in 1798 when Hegel was living in Frankfurt. This rich and densely argued document addresses the relationship between gambling, on the one hand, and understanding, judgment, and god, on the other hand. Hegel distinguishes gambling in modernity from the role of art in Greek culture. The modern gambler is restless and lacks the calmness of spirit typical of Greek works of art. Hegel is interested in a typology of different kinds of gamblers. In particular he discusses the "cold" or dispassionate gambler. In contrast to the rare case of the dispassionate gambler, most gamblers are interested in the play of the passions of fear and hope. The document reveals that the philosopher of reason, necessity, and the absolute spirit, himself an avid card player of the card games L'Hombre and Whist, was captivated by the way in which gambling captures the spirit of the modern age. While gambling is distinguished from reason and morality, it is a significant activity for two reasons. First, gambling allows human beings to rehearse their understanding and power of judgment. Secondly, gambling makes explicit the - usually only implicitly tolerated - role of chance in human affairs.

In "Absorbed in Play and Gambling: Gadamer and Csíkszentmihályi", Csaba Olay presents a phenomenological approach to explain "how and why playing and gambling are attractive for us" (p. 126). Drawing on Gadamer, Olay emphasizes the ontological character of play. Not only does play exceed subjectivist interpretations, it is amusing, and liberates us from the seriousness of life, while creating a different sense of playful seriousness. The article then turns to

Csíkszentmihályi´s conception of flow. Flow is an optimal experience consisting in "a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand and the situation" (p. 129). Olay identifies an analogy between Aristotle's distinction between poiesis and praxis and the distinction between "heterotelic" and "autotelic" actions in flow psychology. While praxis is autotelic in being intrinsically meaningful, poiesis is heterotelic in being directed at a goal exterior to the activity at hand. Gambling, and in particular, games of chance are interesting to consider in this context, first, because they have the potential of being pleasurable even though the outcome is not based on personal skill. Yet, they create an illusion of having some control of an unknowable future. To pursue the question whether there is a "dark flow", a form of being absorbed that is pathological and leads to addiction and a loss of autonomy, the paper distinguishes episodic experiences from those that contribute to lasting human growth and flourishing.

In her contribution "Daring to Play Oneself: Gambling, Psychoanalysis and Practical Self-determination", Judith-Frederike Popp addresses the relationship between play and autonomy. More specifically, she interprets daring, understood as the willingness to take a risk as "a fundamental attitude of playful openness towards the uncertainties of life" (p. 135). When subjects gamble in a non-pathological manner, they play themselves and let themselves go. Gamblers alternate between moments of determining who they are – or might be – and moments of letting themselves be determined. This playful self-experimentation is achieved only as long as subjects feel secure in a certain environment. Moreover, they need to be supported by an empathetic other. Drawing on psychoanalysis as well as anthropology, Popp demonstrates that daring to play oneself is an essential component of practical reason. Subjects suspend the pressures of self-identification and self-control rooted in a one-sided construction of rationality. "Becoming a person", Popp demonstrates, "involves an existential dare that everything will go as planned as well as the willingness to accept the reality that everything will continue differently than planned" (p. 140). Ending with methodological reflections, the paper cautions against the potential tendencies of gambling philosophers to either pathologize or romanticize the figure of the gambler. Instead, Popp calls for a critical as well as interdisciplinary interpretation of the potentials of diverse gambling practices.

Rick Dolphijn's article, "What Matters in Macao: Situating the Game in the More-than-Human City," critically engages with the space of Macao to formulate an original provocation within accounts of play and games that are constrained by 'the normal game'. Drawing on the work of architects and anthropologists, and the philosophy of Deleuze, he offers an account of game and play that is "materialist" and "nomadic" rather than "transcendentalist" and "sedentary". Traversing examples of play spaces and architectural innovations that are designed to transform dominant paradigms of human subjectivity, Dolphijn considers Macao within a broader project of reimagining human and non-human entailments of urban space. His original intellectual journey illuminates an infinite and ideal game of chance that is ultimately uncontainable in the safe and enclosed environments of commercial gambling architecture.

In "The Gambler's Fallacy: Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox and Kierkegaard´s Response", Nahum Brown focuses on the mistake in reasoning that consists of inferring from independent past events to make predictions about the future. Rather than an unwarranted lapse in judgment, the gambler who commits the fallacy may believe that skill is relevant in games of chance, or that the future is not radically independent of the past or that she possesses special perception that allows her to make warranted predictions based on past patterns. Brown relates the gambler's fallacy, with its emphasis on the psychology of the gambler, to Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox. According to the latter, a future event, in this case a sea battle, appears to be both determined and undetermined, which contradicts the law of the excluded middle. Aristotle resolved the paradox by distinguishing a determined past that combines necessity and actuality from a still undetermined, possible future. There is a necessity of actualization (the sea battle will or will not happen), but no determinate actualization of future events (the sea battle must happen). Kierkegaard tries to resolve the paradox differently. A strong advocate of indeterminism, he rejects Aristotle's conception of necessity. Brown distinguishes two interpretations of the gambler's fallacy and defends the one according to which the gambler believes that the future can be revealed rather than assuming that the gambler can influence the future. Ultimately, she "is the person who forgets that the past has come into existence, and from this forgetfulness, thinks that the future can be combined with necessity, as if it were a matter of skill whether the gambler can learn to see how the future will fork" (p. 158).

In their contribution "'Almost the Same but not Quite': The Camouflage of Play in Digital Gambling Iconography", Fiona Nicoll and César Albarrán-Torres explore recent shifts in the visual dimensions of gambling platforms. They identify a tendency in which "gambling can be camouflaged as play and playful entertainment can be camouflaged as gambling" (p. 168). The creation of spaces of "safe risk" in which consumers are confronted with familiar themes draws on new techniques of meta-communication. The contribution draws on two case studies related to "Sex and the City" and the Robinhood investment platform. The iconographic adaptations of "Sex and the City" shows how popular film iconography is being transformed from the image of sexually liberated

metropolitan woman to objectifying women to serve patriarchal forms of entertainment and consumption. The example of Robinhood demonstrates the camouflage of finance as play in digital investment schemes with often very real consequences. The contribution concludes by offering a critical reflection on what is concealed in the camouflage of play and gambling: "Behind the world of cute kittens, sexy girls out on the town, and redistributive Robin Hoods, powerful machines of economic extraction are at work" (p. 171).

Building on themes of architecture and containment, Kah-wee Lee focuses on the strategic capture and containment of the Integrated Resort (IR) both as a concept and as a set of material and discursive practices of cultural space-making. He begins his article, "The Myth of the 'Integrated Resort': Selective History, Retrospective Branding, and Fungible Assets," with examples of current corporate discourses through which the IR appears as an imported model of economic development through which Asia can normalize commercial gambling expansion. He demonstrates how the highly selective histories on which this representation of the IR relies not only enable its retrospective branding but mask its role as a portfolio of fungible assets for global corporations. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork within industry events and architectural analysis, he shows how a pervasive myth of a transnational IR model of economic growth in Asia obscures the political negotiations between gambling corporations and national and subnational governments on which large casino projects ultimately rely.

This special issue has been enriched by a fascinating illustrated commentary by Richard Fitzgerald and Mark R. Johnson. The authors link consumers' experiences created by the thematic architecture of Macao's casino resorts to the Great Exhibition, held in London in1851 to showcase the diversity and scope of the British Empire's colonial territories. Taking readers on a tour of some of Macao's most iconic yet generic spaces, their essay reveals the unique cultural landscape that makes this former Portuguese colony and Special Administrative Region of China as fascinating for international intellectuals and tourists as it is for the millions of Chinese gamblers whose gambling sustains its economy.

We also include a timely and topical book review by Sheyla S. Zandonai exploring Janet Ng's important 2019 monograph, *Dreamworld of Casino Capitalism: Macao's Society, Literature, and Culture*.

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### *Editor Details*


Mario Wenning is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Andalusia. His work focuses on social and political philosophy as well as aesthetics from an intercultural perspective. Recent publications include the coedited volumes The Human-Animal Boundary (Lexington, 2018, 2021), Environmental Philosophy and East Asia (Routledge, 2022), The Right to Resist (Bloomsbury, 2023) and Intercultural Philosophy and Environmental Justice between Generations (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). He has edited special issues of Kritike (2021), Revista de Cultura (2020) and Thesis Eleven (2017) and translated German philosophers into English. Before moving to Spain, Wenning worked at the University of Macau for thirteen years and held visiting appointments at Kyoto University, the Goethe University of Frankfurt, UC Berkeley and Fudan University in Shanghai.

Fiona Nicoll is Professor and Alberta Gambling Research Institute Chair in Gambling Policy. She is the author of *From Diggers to Drag Queens: Configurations of Australian National Identity* (2001), *Gambling in Everyday Life: Spaces, Moments and Products of Enjoyment* (2019) and co-editor of *Transnational Whiteness Matters* (2008) and *Courting Blackness: Recalibrating Knowledge in the Sandstone University* (2015). She has also contributed numerous articles and book chapters to scholarship in the following areas: critical race and whiteness studies, queer theory, Indigenous sovereignty, law, feminist studies, reconciliation, cultural economy and critical cultural studies.

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# On Card Games: A Translation of Hegel's Über das Kartenspiel

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Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel [i]
*On Card Games* (1798)

The inclination to play *card games* is a chief characteristic of our times. *Understanding* and *passion* are the properties of the soul active in it. The former [understanding, MW] searches for the rules and applies them at any moment through the power of judgment. This is why people of profound reason who have brilliant imaginations are often bad players; it is not only because they are incapable of becoming interested in the game, but also because their power of judgment is not that well-trained to consistently apply the rules to daily life. Passion is what primarily arouses interest. A cold [i.e., dispassionate, MW] player, who is also not motivated by an addiction to win, plays card games as a way to practice the faculties of the understanding and the power of judgment. But otherwise, beyond the pleasure of winning, these games are interesting because they produce the alternating passions of fear and hope, which makes playing cards so universal. These games create a spirit that cannot coincide with the calmness of disposition (*Ruhe des Gemüts*) that has something sublime about it; this calmness radiates from all of the Greek works in spite of the play of the passions. It reveals itself in the highest swing of passion as long as humans are still human and not whipped by a demon. This passionate, restless mood of spirit is what characterizes our age (*Zeitalter*), and thanks to it, card games are spread widely. Just as with the interest of passion, in the activity of the understanding, even if it is exclusively present in the gambler [i.e., without the interest of passion, MW], there is not the slightest spark of an ingredient of reason present. This is why in an otherwise innocent game there is nothing more noteworthy (*auffalender*) than hearing the name "God" being used in conjunction with it. Generally speaking, however much we allow fate to partake in the smallest of things, especially in such things which seem to belong to the realm of chance, we are reminded of this fact while playing (in particular, in games of chance (*Hazardspielen*) where the happiness of a - not necessarily evil, but perhaps only tempted - man and his family often seems to hinge on a few cards).

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel
*Über das Kartenspiel (1798)*

Neigung zum *Kartenspiel* ist ein Hauptzug im Charakter unserer Zeit. *Verstand* und *Leidenschaft* sind die Eigenschaften der Seele, welche dabei tätig sind. Jener sucht die Regeln auf und wendet sie als Urteilskraft alle Augenblicke an. Daher Leute von tiefer Vernunft und glänzender Einbildungskraft oft schlechte Spieler sind, nicht bloß, weil sie sich nicht für das Spiel interessieren könnten, sondern weil oft ihre Urteilskraft in beständiger Anwendung von Regeln auf das tägliche Leben nicht so geübt ist. Leidenschaft ist, was hauptsächlich Interesse gibt. Für den kalten Spieler, der zugleich nicht aus Gewinnsucht spielt, hat das Kartenspiel besonders von seiten des Verstandes und der Urteilskraft Interesse als Übung derselben. Sonst aber ist, außer der Lust nach Gewinn, der Wechsel der Leidenschaft in Furcht und Hoffnung der Umstand, der das Kartenspiel so allgemein macht ein Geist, der unmöglich mit Ruhe des Gemüts, die etwas Erhabenes an sich hat, die alle griechischen Werke bei allem Spiel der Leidenschaft atmen, die im höchsten Schwung der Leidenschaft, solange der Mensch noch Mensch ist und nicht von einem Dämon gepeitscht wird, sich noch mächtig zeigt, - bestehen kann. Diese leidenschaftliche, unruhige Stimmung des Geistes ist es, die unser Zeitalter charakterisiert und dem auch das Kartenspiel seine Verbreitung dankt. Wie bei dem Interesse der Leidenschaft, so ist auch in jener dabei vorkommenden Tätigkeit des Verstandes, auch wenn sie allein im Spieler sich findet, kein Funken eines Ingrediens von Vernunft vorhanden. – Daher auch bei einem sonst unschuldigen Spiel uns nichts auffallender ist, als den Namen Gott in bezug darauf nennen zu hören. Denn sosehr wir im allgemeinen die Vorsehung auch an den kleinsten Dingen, besonders an solchen, die uns in das Gebiet des Zufalls zu gehören scheinen, teilnehmen lassen (zumal bei Hazard-spielen oft das Glück eines nicht bösen, vielleicht nur verführten Mannes und seiner Familie an einigen Karten hängt), so sehr fällt es uns auf, dabei daran erinnert zu werden.

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, "Über das Kartenspiel [1798]", fragment 18 of "Fragmente historischer und politischer Studien aus der Berner und Frankfurter Zeit (ca. 1795-1798)", in: *Werke 1: Frühe Schriften*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1986, p. 445.

[i] Trans. Mario Wenning

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# Absorbed in Play and Gambling: Gadamer and Csíkszentmihályi

Csaba Olay

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# Absorbed in Play and Gambling: Gadamer and Csíkszentmihályi

Csaba Olay [a1]

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**Abstract:** One of the most apparent features of playing and gambling is how easily people become engaged and absorbed into playing and gambling. In some cases, people lose themselves in playing and gambling to the extent that addiction might occur. This paper seeks to contribute to the phenomenology of play and gambling by attempting to describe how and why playing and gambling are attractive for us, and how we get absorbed in playing or gambling. In doing so, I disregard the difference between play in a broader sense and gambling with whatever stakes where in the latter case the risk inherently belongs to the activity. To get a nuanced description, I focus on two prominent theories that clarify different aspects of the phenomenon of playing. First, Hans-Georg Gadamer's analysis of play gives an account of how playing is like submerging into an independent reality. Second, I follow Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's conception of meaningful activity which he called "flow". The main interest of the paper will be the problem of what it means to enter and to indulge in the context of play, and how we come to immerse ourselves in the process of playing and gambling.

*Keywords:* phenomenology of play, absorption, flow, happiness

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## Introduction

One of the most apparent features of playing and gambling is how easily people become engaged and absorbed into playing and gambling. In some cases, people lose themselves in playing and gambling to the extent that addiction might occur. This paper seeks to contribute to the phenomenology of play and gambling by attempting to describe how and why playing and gambling are attractive for us, and how we get absorbed in playing or gambling. In doing so, I disregard the difference between play in a broader sense and gambling with whatever stakes where in the latter case the risk inherently belongs to the activity. To get a nuanced description, I focus on two prominent theories that clarify different aspects of the phenomenon of playing. First, Hans-Georg Gadamer's analysis of play gives an account of how playing is like submerging into an independent reality. Second, I follow Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's conception of meaningful activity which he called "flow". The main interest of the paper will be the problem of what it means to enter and to indulge in the context of play, and how we come to immerse ourselves in the process of playing and gambling.

Gadamer (1989) seeks in his masterpiece *Truth and Method* to describe what play is. His basic claim is that play is an autonomous context that prescribes certain goals that the players try to reach. In his argument, which is motivated by the elaboration of the ontology of artwork, he characterizes play as something essentially delimited against the rest of reality, with the liberating effect of previously given ends. From this angle, playing a game is being free from the permanent task of existence, which consists of projecting purposes and seeking to reach them. This demarcation against reality and real life is the reason, Gadamer thinks, why gaming can be so attractive and amusing.

Concentrating rather on the process of getting involved in an activity, Csíkszentmihályi (1991; 1994) elaborated a concept that tries to explain why we can submerge into certain activities, even if for the impartial observer they seem to be tiring, superfluous, and meaningless. His concept of "flow" is designed to explain the experience of streaming in the activity we are engaged in in a specific manner. His deeply Aristotelean conception of "flow" develops the basic point that each activity, even monotone, and mechanical ones, might be the source of a pleasant contentedness. By this claim, he tries to answer the

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question of how one can be deeply immersed in activities. His analysis throws light on how gambling can be conceived of as a flow experience.

In addition to the description of playing, it will be claimed that absorption and involvement have a positive and negative form depending on whether they remain under some control or not. The autotelic activities Csíkszentmihályi describes with the popular term "flow" share with passions and addictions that they draw us into themselves. His conception, I will assert, can be fruitfully used to describe our engagement in playing. It will also be shown that gambling is only attractive for those who can be absorbed into it, viz. for those who find a flow experience in gambling. However, while flow-activities offer us the possibility of spending enjoyable time, passions might and addictions do have destructive consequences. Therefore, the difference between flow-activities and addictions will also be briefly discussed. The paper will refuse that "dark flow", as introduced in recent literature, is a productive application of Csíkszentmihályi's conception. In connection with it, in the last part of my paper, I give some reasons why flow-activities are promising candidates for constitutive elements of a conception of happiness.

**Gadamer's Theory of Play**

Hans-Georg Gadamer' philosophical hermeneutics uses the analysis of play as a model for the ontology of artworks, viz. for developing how works of art exist. His interest in the process of playing and games should be seen in this framework, and he is much less involved, say, in an anthropology of *homo ludens*. It should also be added that the model clarifies not only the work of art but also the texts or works of humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The ontology of the work of art develops a structure of understanding a meaningful whole which is also informative for the humanities since texts as typical objects of humanities need a similar understanding as works of art. And this establishes the connection between the two first parts of Gadamer's masterpiece *Truth and Method*.

In elaborating play as a model of how art exists, Gadamer develops two fundamental points. First, the surplus of play against the subjectivity of the player should be recognized to refuse the idea that the most essential factors of art lie in the subjectivity of the subject. Play is a closed area, a separate region which we must enter into if we really want to play. This conception takes a mastery of the rules of the game as a precondition of playing. Thus, Gadamer writes: "The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 103). This feature appears both in the fact that playing requires leaving the seriousness of life and in the fact that play demands involving ourselves in it.

The second major point for Gadamer is that play is realized in each playing activity, and in this sense, playing is where the play shows itself. This somewhat mannered formulation means that it is football or tennis that we encounter in each match we see, even if each match is different. Here we must highlight the structure of being the same in different constellations, since it makes play for Gadamer an attractive model in describing the mode of being of works of art. It is easy to see that in the case of works of art we have a similar opposition that belongs together: the unity of the work and the plurality of its interpretations. In the same way as the players make the play real in every instance, each interpreter of the work of art makes it real in each interpretation.

The second point offers a decisive step in Gadamer's fundamental thesis concerning the ontology of art. It is essential for how works of art exist that the work of art becomes real only in its performance or presentation (*Darstellung*). Works of art are in need of being presented or interpreted, and so they are accessible for us only through their interpretation. "A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resound" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 115). In the case of music, most of us could not make much use of the score, because we cannot read it. The unavoidability of performance or presentation constitutes the structure that makes play theoretically interesting for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. "Play is structure [*Gebilde*] – this means that despite its dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly presented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is also play, because – despite this theoretical unity – it achieves its full being only each time it is played" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 116).

The analysis of play, in addition, illustrates a further essential feature of Gadamer's theory of art, viz. its anti-subjectivist approach. Motivated by his academic teacher, Martin Heidegger, the anti-subjectivist strand in his thought consists in a critique of interpretation schemes and models in terms of constitutive accomplishments of a subject or subjectivity. Gadamer wants to criticize the typical modern way of grounding philosophy in subjectivity. He claims that the ideal of method is intimately bound to the primacy of the subject in philosophical thinking. It is this "subjectivism" against which he, following Heidegger's path, tries to develop his position. In his view, the "subjectivization of aesthetics" takes place in the Kantian critique, and it is an integral part of the project of *Truth and Method* to "desubjectivize" aesthetics.

The desubjectivization in aesthetics amounts to saying that a work of art might be regarded as filled with a content that the recipient of the work of art can experience.[2] With regard to aesthetics, this critique means to refuse an understanding of the aesthetic experience as a special state of the subject or subjectivity. The concept of play serves as a counter-model to a subject-based interpretation of aesthetic experience, since Gadamer conceives the whole of play, and not the subject or the subjectivity, as the fixpoint in the process of experiencing art. The analysis of play, thus, helps to overcome various versions of subject-philosophy which tend to describe the consumption of works of art as an "aesthetic consciousness […] that confronts an object" (*das Gegenüber eines ästhetischen Bewußtseins und seines Gegenstandes*).[3]

Turning now to Gadamer's description of play, the first characteristic feature of his approach is that he doesn't focus on regularity and the rules of play. In opposition to some philosophers of language, for example Gottlob Frege or Ludwig Wittgenstein, he is not interested in understanding what rules are and what it means to follow a rule. Instead, he highlights something in play that already involves the automatic, self-evident mastering of the rules. In Gadamer's sense, we are not yet in the game if we deal with the rules, if we have to reflect, for example, what moves can be made with the knight or bishop in chess. This would mean that we are not able to enter the play as a complex net of possible strategies, plans, and steps. We have to be familiar with the whole of the game, having interiorized not only the rules, but possible strategies, means, and techniques of winning. This level of knowing a game lies beyond the knowledge of the rules.

In connection with his emphatic understanding of participation in a game, Gadamer claims concerning the activity of playing that a play is something like an autonomous context that prescribes certain goals that the players try to reach. For this reason, he characterizes play as something essentially delimited against the rest of reality. Therefore, Daphné Dragona seems to misunderstand Gadamer's point here when she presents his theory as a description of the domination of play over the players (Dragona, 2010, p. 161). Gadamer's point is, rather, that entering play means to leave behind the ordinary pursuit of our ends, since the game defines for us what we should seek to do while playing. This demarcation against reality and real life is the reason, Gadamer argues, why playing the game can be so amusing and can have a relieving effect. Playing a game is getting disburdened from the permanent existential task, which consists of projecting purposes and seeking to reach and to realize them. Taking play seriously is, in turn, a precondition for the liberating effect of the game. Indulged in the process of playing, we do not need to deal with the urgencies of our life, with the sorrows and projects we ordinarily seek to solve or to realize (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 102-103). From this angle, living a human life is connected to the existential burden of setting goals and pursuing them. This structure might be called the seriousness of life, and playing a game liberates us in an inspiring way from this seriousness.

Putting aside the question of how the seriousness of life should be conceived, it has to be emphasized that there is a corresponding specific seriousness of play, too. Play needs to be taken seriously, and someone who doesn't follow the prescribed goals of the play with sufficient urgency destructs thereby the play. She is *Spielverderber* (a spoilsport), as Gadamer puts it.[4] An essential point implied in this observation is that playing has an unavoidable moment of activity. Play differs from narcotic states in that it should be more than simply stepping out of conscious everyday life through forgetting everything in passivity.

To sum up, Gadamer's phenomenology of playing shows that play is a space, a net of possible steps and strategies demarcated from ordinary life.[5] Playing the game is characterized by certain goals the following of which gives us the special joy of absorption in the game. This immersion is motivated by the state of being liberated from the "pursuit of happiness," from setting goals and seeking to reach them. Last but not least, Gadamer suggests that the playing activity is inadequately conceived if understood on the basis of mastering the rules of the game. In the full sense of the word, playing needs to be, at least to some extent, a routinized activity where knowledge of the rules no longer arises as a problem. Let us turn now to Csíkszentmihályi's approach to how we get involved in activities of playing and gambling.

## Csíkszentmihályi's Conception of Flow

Mihály Csíkszentimhályi's work has its place, as is well-known, in the tradition of humanistic psychology, which has often been regarded as a kind of middle course between behaviorism and psychoanalysis or, more broadly, psychodynamic psychology. One of the fundamental convictions of this approach is the attempt to overcome psychological reductionism. The leading hypothesis of humanistic psychology might be

[2] It should be remarked that Gadamer's judgement is somewhat ambiguous as to whether the subjectivization in question may be traced back to Immanuel Kant or to Friedrich Schiller.

[3] Gadamer, 1989, p. 102. See on this Olay 2007, chapter 3.

[4] Mathias Fuchs offers a different account of the *Spielverderber* claiming that they could be considered from a pragmatic angle not as opposites or destructions of play, but rather belonging to the play (Fuchs, 2010). It is unclear, however, how the spoilsport who doesn't really want to reach the goals implied in the game could meaningfully belong to it.

[5] For this reason, Reith (2005, p.132) mistakenly emphasizes Gadamer's idea that repetition is the essence of play. Gadamer grounds not a phenomenology of playing, but the ontology of the artwork on this conception – meaning that every interpretation of the work of art is a kind of repetition.

captured in the idea that lower forms of human behavior should be studied in the light of higher ones instead of founding psychology either on animal experiments or on pathological persons. Leading figures of the movement such as Rogers, Maslow, and Csíkszentmihályi pursued research on higher accomplishments and reaches of human nature that could serve a basis for psychology (Polkinghorne, 2015). They formulated the challenge to interpret human persons primarily with regard to their highest potential and most complex activities (Moss, 2015, pp. 3-4; see also Berlyne, 1981, and on the historical predecessors Pléh, 2006).

This approach was specified by some as an attempt to establish self-actualization broadly understood as a central concept, which was not without ambiguities, as Weckowicz (1981) pointed out. Weckowicz succinctly describes how there were three different ways to understand the "self" in self-actualization for the American humanistic psychologists. The first way was to understand the self in the formula in the Aristotelian interpretation, according to which human beings already at birth have entelechy, or potency, to realize the common human essence. In this case, the unfolding process toward this end is determined, since the essence of humanness is already potentially present from the outset, and it follows that individual differences are unexpected outcomes and play a marginal role. In a second understanding, individual differences are ascribed more weight in realizing potentials. Under adequate conditions individuals develop their proper characteristics, realizing through this process their particular, individual essence. The third interpretation claims that existence precedes essence, in so far as the person is not determined by an essence (common or individual), instead she transcends and creates herself by her deeds.

The context of Csíkszentmihályi's flow theory, thus, is the research on self-actualization broadly understood. It is exactly his interest in higher levels of human functioning that is relevant in the present argumentation. Notably, he elaborated a conception that tries to describe and explain how and why we can submerge into certain activities, even if for the impartial observer, these seem to be tiring, superfluous, meaningless, and so forth. The concept Csíkszentmihályi uses for his explanation is "flow", and the term itself already highlights the experience of streaming in the activity we are engaged in. In his path-breaking 1991 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csíkszentmihályi develops the theory that people are happiest when they are in a state of *flow*—a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand and the situation. This state means that people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. Obviously, playing and gambling can be cases of such an analysis, since they are especially attractive and sometimes even seductive by giving us occasion for deep immersion into them.

A further relevant aspect of Csíkszentmihályi's approach for present argumentation consists of the clearly formulated connection of flow experiences with a theory of happiness. The telling title of the first chapter of the book *Flow* – "Happiness revisited" – clearly indicates this aspiration. He explicitly mentions that his work intends to find a sort of answer within the framework of modern psychology to the ancient question: "When do people feel most happy?" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 2). Even if this doesn't mean automatically an answer to how experiences of intensive happiness fit into a happy life or well-being, it is, in any case, an important element for having a comprehensive conception of sustainable happiness. Csíkszentmihályi's key idea lies in the insight that happiness is not something that simply happens. Happiness is neither an outcome of good fortune or chance nor something we could buy for money. Instead of being dependent on outside factors, happiness is a result of our interpretation of outside events. "Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy." (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 3) We will return to the details of the problem of happiness in section 3.

Csíkszentmihályi's point of departure is that even if we have no control of many aspects of our life, there are moments when we do feel controlling our actions and mastering our fate. On such rare occasions, we have "a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment" which indicates for us what life should be like (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 3). And such experiences deserve to be regarded as optimal ones, since they are pursued for their own sake, they are ends in themselves, in Csíkszentmihályi's terminology, they are "autotelic", as opposed to "heterotelic": "The term 'autotelic' derives from two Greek words, auto meaning self, and telos meaning goal. It refers to a self-contained activity, one that is done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 67). As we shall see, this distinction profoundly resembles Aristotle's division between *poiesis* and *praxis*.

The structure of the optimal experience is described by Csíkszentmihályi as the opposite state to psychic disorder or chaotic mind. Psychic disorder can be characterized by disturbances and threats that the self is trying to decline and overcome. In the state of flow experience, on the contrary, "the information that keeps coming into awareness is congruent with goals" so that "psychic energy flows effortlessly" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 39). Flow experiences are, then, situations where our attention invested into achieving our goals operates without hindrance. The metaphor of streaming underlines the loss of self in the process of doing something, and it has been advocated by

interviewed persons in order to depict what it was like to be in top form.

In summarizing the detailed description of the flow experience, Csíkszentmihályi captures its structure with a condensed list of eight major elements: Enjoyment is connected to a chance to complete the confronted task (1), where we are able to concentrate on our activity (2). The concentration is made possible by clearly defined goals (3) and immediate feedback (4), and the activity is engaged, but effortless in a distance to worries of everyday life (5). The person gains a sense of control over one's actions (6), while having no concern for the self (7), changed perception of the duration of time, in so far as time might seem to pass very rapidly (8) (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 49).[6]

With regard to these structural features, it should be noted that other humanistic psychologists, for example, Abraham Maslow paid comparable attention to higher levels of human functioning. In a similar vein, Maslow describes persons he calls "self-actualizers" as follows: "One is in the moment, fully in the present, in the NOW. There is a loss of self, or ego, or sometimes a transcendence of self […] Actually the two, self and selfless, become a single unity. […] A formerly hidden truth, a revelation, is stripped of its veils and finally, almost always, there is the experience of bliss, ecstasy, rapture, [and] exhilaration" (Maslow, 1971, p. 62). The changed relation to duration is highlighted in the quotation as well as the intensive enjoyment analyzed by Csíkszentmihályi.

Furthermore, an important feature of optimal experience should be noticed here. It is that flow experience falls under the category of enjoyment, which overlaps without being identical with pleasure. Pleasure might be defined as satisfaction of an expectation or need, while enjoyable activities have "gone beyond what he or she has been programmed to do and achieved something unexpected, perhaps something even unimagined before" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 46). In Csíkszentmihályi's view, enjoyable events are such, in contrast to mere pleasure, that we change after experiencing them; we have become more complex, and so our self has grown, even if this connection might become looser. In addition, experience of pleasure does not presuppose investment of psychic energy, while enjoyment is linked to intensive attention and the sense of accomplishment built thereupon.

Csíkszentmihályi's conception of flow became popular with a broad public without there being sufficiently emphasized in the literature how much the theory of flow is embedded into the context of classic Greek philosophy. Although he himself was well aware of this connection, he didn't take interest in a careful contextualization of his work and gave no specifications as to his references. Thus, he characterizes the claim that the control of consciousness determines the quality of life as a simple truth that has been known for a long time: "It was clearly recognized by Aristotle, whose notion of the 'virtuous activity of the soul' in many ways prefigures the argument of this book, and it was developed by the Stoic philosophers in classical antiquity" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 20). The Ancient Greek context and the implied Aristotelean heritage in the first place are very interesting in our argument, since they illuminate how this attractive contemporary position implicitly relies on the distinction of *poiesis* and *praxis* in Aristotle.

To show this, it suffices to remind that what Csíkszentmihályi calls heterotelic and autotelic activities are, in fact, very similar to the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* made by Aristotle. The characteristic difference of these two types as Aristotle describes lies in the relation of an activity to its end. Csíkszentmihályi's innovation compared to Aristotle might be seen in the emphasis laid on the joyful property of the autotelic activity. In order to clarify this innovation, let's have a look at Aristotle's distinction.

Aristotle's classical distinction between production (*poeisis*) and action (*praxis*) distinguishes activities that have no ending in the sense of a point where they are finished from activities the end of which is reached when the product is ready.[7] The latter type of activities are in-finite in the sense of having no end, being never completed so that they can only be stopped. The distinctive feature underlying the opposition is the relation of activities to their ends. Consequently, the distinction is grounded in the assumption that human activity always has a teleological structure, in so far as it always follows a final end. Some activities have an end, a final product or work that might be opposed to the activity itself, such that they might be distinguished. Other activities have an end that cannot be separated from them. Aristotle settles this opposition by the terms *poiesis* and *praxis*, which were later translated into scholastic terminology as *actio transcendens* and *actio immanens*.

A fundamental point of Aristotle's distinction is that the fact of having no final product does not make a certain type of activity senseless. Activities of this type carry their end themselves, in the doing of that activity itself. This end is fulfilled in every moment of doing the activity, and it is the reason why there is no terminal point as in the case of producing processes that come to such a point when the production becomes completed. Praxis type activities, Aristotle argues, are

[6] Reshotko observes that in forgetting time we transcend our human condition and become more godlike (Reshotko, 2009, p. 15).

[7] Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that "making and acting are different" (VI 4, 1140a1-5), "for while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end" (VI 5, 1140b6f). There is some controversy in the literature on Aristotle whether this distinction might be made in a discrete form, and some criticize Aristotle for not being able to give sufficient criteria to separate productions and actions. It is also discussed whether the distinction concerns simply the descriptive level, i.e., two different descriptions of a certain type of action, or the distinction is more essential claiming that actually there are two different types of action that cannot be reduced to each other (Vigo, 1996, pp. 206-207).

pursued for their own sake, and this property can easily be recognized in Csíkszentmihályi's description of autotelic experience. Furthermore, Csíkszentmihályi's argument results in the claim that life as a whole should be transformed into a flow experience. This idea has a clear counterpart in Aristotle who explicitly says in the *Politics* that life as a whole is rather an action and not production (Politics, I 4, 1254a7).

As mentioned above, the innovative aspect of Csíkszentmihályi's argumentation lies in his attention to the affective quality of the praxis type activity. Aristotle rarely comments on this aspect of action, although he claims that acting has a positive emotional component which is a result of successful moral education. The virtuous human being feels pleasure when acting virtuously, and the specific pleasure is a result of the moral education characteristic of the community in question. Moral education, then, is expected not only to form and to train morally praiseworthy character traits or virtues, but to couple them with a pleasant emotional coloring. It is not really developed in Aristotle's considerations concerning this point how the emergence of such an affective coloring could come about.[8] At this point, Csíkszentmihályi's theory highlights descriptive moments of a state in which an activity proves to be significant for us in such a way that we retrospectively find it enjoyable. There is, however, an important constraint for this claim. Aristotle doesn't restrict his analysis to actions extended in time, whereas Csíkszentmihályi's concept of flow works well for activities that take time. To illustrate this, recall that it is indifferent for moral action, which is paradigmatic for Aristotle's praxis type activities, whether that action lasts long or not. Examples of flow activities, on the contrary, are in each case lasting.[9] Play and gambling are particularly such activities, viz. processes involving the passing of time.

Last but not least it should be noticed that, although not intending to analyze games of chance in particular, we find some interesting, albeit somewhat contradicting considerations concerning gambling and flow experience. The first remarkable feature of gambling from the vantage point of Csíkszentmihályi is that here we have no control of the situation, which is constitutive of enjoyable activities: "Games of chance are enjoyable, yet by definition they are based on random outcomes presumably not affected by personal skills" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 61). The second property of such activities, on the other hand, is that "[a]leatory games are enjoyable because they give the illusion of controlling the inscrutable future" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 73).

The seeming contradiction disappears if we consider that Csíkszentmihályi evokes here Roger Caillois' classification of games into four groups based on the kind of experience they offer us (Caillois, 1958). First, "agon" is the category for games with competition as the distinctive feature (e.g., sports), while "alea", second, signifies games of chance in general. Caillois names, third, "ilinx" activities altering consciousness like skydiving. And fourth, "mimicry" is the term for activities that create alternative worlds and contexts, like theater and arts (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 72). Specifically with regard to games of chance, Csíkszentmihályi's reference to Caillois could be completed with the fine observation of Gerda Reith who claims that the hesitancy between excitement and boredom makes repetition to be a fundamental characteristic of such activities. "[B]ecause a game ends so quickly, it must be repeated, and this is one of the most essential features of play. The gambler plays in order to experience the tension and expectation of a game, but because it is over almost as soon as it begins, it must be continually repeated" (Reith, 2005, p. 132).

Since Csíkszentmihályi explicitly connects to his description of the optimal experience the problem of human happiness, let's try to assess how the preceding considerations can be relevant for a theory of happiness.

**The Role of Flow Experiences in Happiness**

As already underlined, Csíkszentmihályi considers his theory of flow to be a contribution to a conception of happiness. Roughly speaking, two major candidates might be held to be the basis of happiness: pleasure and meaningful activity. It is easy to show that pleasure is a state that cannot be continuously realized or brought about. Consequently, for a theory of happiness meaningful activity seems to be more fruitful – "praxis" in Aristotle or "autotelic" activity in Csíkszentmihályi. It is important here that Csíkszentmihályi makes a relatively sharp distinction between pleasure and enjoyment. Pleasure belongs essentially to life, in so far as it means the satisfaction of various homeostatic needs such as sleep, rest, food, or sex. But pleasure cannot provide happiness, because it doesn't contribute to the psychological growth and complexity of the person. Pleasure has the structural weakness that it can provide only episodic satisfaction so that happiness cannot be founded on it. Csíkszentmihályi completes this aspect with the additional argument that pleasure doesn't contribute to the psychological growth and complexity of the person. The advantage of flow experiences for a theory of happiness lies obviously in the fact that these activities give us a long-lasting contentedness.

Even if the concept of flow seems to be useful for a theory of happiness, an ambiguity should be highlighted. It is the question of specifying the activities that might bring flow experiences for an individual. The ambiguity lies in the tension between the paradigmatic examples Csíkszentmihályi gives and some passages,

[8] Annas (2008) tried to connect virtuous action with the flow experience, and to do this, she emphasized Aristotle's analogy between acquiring a virtue and learning a skill.

[9] This is an objection against identifying action in Aristotle's sense (praxis) and flow experience.

which clearly state that each activity can be adapted or transformed so that it produces an optimal experience. Given that people work or interact with others throughout most of their lives, it would be highly important, if possible, to transform these activities into flow experiences (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 7). Despite its significance, it might be, however, doubted that this is true for each activity. It seems far more probable that we individually connect optimal experiences to different spheres of action or diverse situations, and it is characteristic of us what activities we tend to immerse in. In other words, not everything can be a flow experience for me. Assembly line workers can "transform" their activities into optimal experience in the rarest of cases.

For a theory of happiness founded at least partly on flow experiences, there remains an additional internal problem: the possible ambivalence of the flow experience. Csíkszentmihályi himself emphasizes the possibility that an enjoyable activity becomes predominant, and in this sense addictive in one's life: "Thus enjoyable activities that produce flow have a potentially negative aspect: while they are capable of improving the quality of existence by creating order in the mind, they can become addictive, at which point the self becomes captive of a certain order, and is then unwilling to cope with the ambiguities of life" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 62). The structural change lies in losing conscious control over this activity, which becomes a necessity that confines other important aspects in the background (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 62; Csíkszentmihályi, 1994, p. 207; Dixon et al., 2018, p. 76). Losing control over the activity means, in fact, losing self-control (Steizinger, 2010, 35ff; Ludovico, 2010, p. 155; Fuchs, 2010, p. 174). Dixon and his colleagues – building on the work of Partington et al. (2009) – proposed to introduce the term "dark flow" for the negative version of flow experiences (Dixon, 2018, p. 77).

A motivation to propose the term "dark flow" has been Dow Schüll's description (2012) of the "zone" of machine gambling with reference to the conception of flow. Dow Schüll designates as the "zone" the environment of slot machines where players become completely absorbed in the game. She argues that the "zone" is characterized by the decisive psychic shifts and desubjectifying effects of flow. Gamblers "forget themselves" and feel carried forward by the setting they are acting in like the figures Csíkszentmihályi depicts. Dow Schüll states the difference in that for the latter "flow is life affirming, restorative, and enriching – a state of 'optimal experience' that enhances autonomy in day-to-day life. Repeat machine gamblers, by contrast, experience a flow that is depleting, entrapping, and associated with a loss of autonomy" (Dow Schüll, 2012, p. 167). Furthermore, Dow Schüll highlights the escape dimension in the conception of flow, although she emphasizes much less Csíkszentmihályi's additional point on the escape from everyday life that is implied by the flow experience. Csíkszentmihályi underlined that "this escape does not represent a descent into entropy, as when one dulls one's senses with drugs or simple pleasure; it is an escape *forward* into higher complexity, where one hones one's potential by confronting new challenges" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1994, p. 184). Therefore, it is misleading when Dow Schüll criticizes Csíkszentmihályi's conception of flow for not taking into account "the profit motives behind the design of user flow" (Dow Schüll, 2012, p. 167), since in Csíkszentmihályi's view flow experience presupposes becoming more complex, and so manipulation by design is not a convincing idea. Further critique is formulated by Nicoll in her discussion of the theory of flow where she blames Csíkszentmihályi for some underlying assumptions she thinks to be reminiscent of a modernist Enlightenment attitude. In doing so, Nicoll takes him to be a representative of positive psychology. Nicoll thinks that "[a]n implicit distinction between better or worse ways of being human is clear in the language used by Csikszentmihályi to describe the experience of groups who have either experienced colonization or chosen to reject the affordances of modernity – notably, Indigenous people and Amish communities" (Nicoll, 2019, p. 59). It might well be that Csíkszentmihály used formulations suggesting such views. However, the core of his conception of flow is not grounded on such assumptions. An attitude approving progress and modernity is not implied in his theory of flow experiences. Put otherwise, the presupposition is not needed in the description of flow as optimal experience.

Furthermore, there is the example of rural life in small villages in the book *Flow* that clearly shows that flow is not bound to modernizing tendencies. It might well be that Csíkszentmihályi has false expectations about the healing potential of his flow theory in modern society, but he is not an ardent proponent of modernity. Even in *The Evolving Self* he mentions "places like Bali or some isolated villages in Europe, where a variety of traditional crafts are still practiced at a high level of skill by every member of the community" (1994, p. 184).

Returning to the theory of happiness, Csíkszentmihályi intended with the concept of flow to address a problem that is often connected to happiness: the question of the meaning of life. Beyond doubt, the connection between happiness and the meaning of life is disputed. Their connection is, however, an attractive idea, for activities being ends in themselves offer us good candidates to give meaning to or at least partly generate meaning in one's life. Certainly, the meaning of one's life cannot be exhausted by pleasures and satisfactions, not even by flow activities. But in all likelihood, the latter play an important role in ensuring that one's life has meaning.

Csíkszentmihályi formulates the problem with regard to the discontinuity of enjoyable activities, so long as they are not integrated in a meaningful framework. His theory of flow had given a description of

a certain type of activities. The question of the meaning of life implies the additional problem of how individual actions can be connected in the context of a single life. And this is the difficulty Csíkszentmihályi addresses under the heading of the meaning of life. Career, human relationships, as well as other flow activities might lose their enjoyable quality in the long run so that episodic enjoyment cannot guarantee the meaning of one's entire life. His proposal to address this difficulty is to transform life into a unified flow experience:

> If a person sets out to achieve a difficult enough goal, from which all other goals logically follow, and if he or she invests all energy in developing skills to reach that goal, then actions and feelings will be in harmony, and the separate parts of life will fit together – and each activity will "make sense" in the present. (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, pp. 214-215)

This meaning is not a goal which would be the same for each individual, since there is no universal meaning for human life in general. Despite this, Csíkszentmihályi insists that we can give meaning to our life, if we find an overall goal that sufficiently orders our life, while presenting clear objectives and rules of action as well as a way to become involved. This consideration helps to distinguish depressing activities of "dark" flow from those that make us more complex. It is not only the focus on the present, but also the harmonious fitting in a series of activities that proves an activity to be "bright" flow, rather than "dark".

Csíkszentmihályi's approach to the meaning of life is, in the last analysis, functional: the meaning of life should give a coherent framework for one's particular efforts and actions, and it should bring at the same time sufficient tension and motivation for the individual's life independently of the question whether there is an 'objective' meaning of it. This idea raises, however, the danger of moral relativism; in certain passages, Csíkszentmihályi seems to be aware of this problem, e.g., when equalizing Mother Theresa and Napoleon from a purely psychological point of view. The suggestion that the biggest beer-bottle collection in the neighborhood would suffice as the meaning of one's life is in no way convincing (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, p. 216).

**Conclusion**

Drawing on Gadamer's theory of play, this paper has described why gaming is amusing and liberating at the same time. As a second step, the paper has examined what Csíkszentmihályi's conception of flow can contribute to understanding playing. The last section considered the contribution of flow experiences to the problem of happiness and meaning of life. By way of conclusion, we see that the two positions complement each other.

In the first part of the paper Gadamer's description made clear that playing is like submerging into an independent reality. Play turned out to be an autonomous context prescribing certain goals that the players seek to realize. The liberating effect of this structural demarcation from the rest of reality is characterized by Gadamer as being free from the permanent task of existence which consists in projecting purposes and seeking to reach them. This is an existential explanation of why gambling relieves the burden of the seriousness of life.

It has been elaborated in the second part how Csíkszentmihályi developed a conception that tries to explain why we can submerge into certain activities, even if they seem to be demanding or meaningless. The concept of flow explained the experience of streaming in the activity we are engaged in in a specific manner. Csíkszentmihályi's conception thus offered an account of how we can be deeply immersed in various activities. The paper has clarified the complex structure of flow experiences, and special attention has been paid to the affinities between Aristotle and flow theory. Whereas Csíkszentmihályi explains well the possible engagement in flow activities, the addictive tendency of gambling, it seems, cannot be covered by his theory. The seriousness of life, as Gadamer elaborates, has to be guarded in the background in order to avoid an exaggerated submersion in gambling. It might be that Csíkszentmihályi doesn't have a clear answer to the question what constitutes the growing complexity of the person, but he doesn't have the problem of not being able to distinguish addictive gambling from flow activities.

The last part of this essay considered some reasons why flow-activities are promising candidates of constitutive elements of a conception of happiness. We saw that the flow theory is promising for the question of the meaning of life, since activities which are ends in themselves are good candidates to give meaning to one's life. It has been explained, in addition, why there is a need to integrate separate episodes of flow experiences. A purpose of this paper was to show that absorption and involvement have positive and negative forms depending on whether they remain under some control or not.

Finally, two limitations should be noted. First, there is another set of problems in connection with the meaning of life which is not even addressed by the flow-conception: the problem of authenticity. Practices that give me a lasting sense of satisfaction might be connected to me, in so far as they do not give similar satisfaction to others. Nevertheless, it might be objected that I possibly fail to become who I really am when I involve myself in such autotelic activities. Second, we should remark that the paper's investigation was limited with regard to an account of risk or chance in playing and gambling. A partial reason for this can be found in the Western philosophical tradition which, primarily, had an ambivalent attitude

towards luck and fate. The ambivalence is based on the fact that, to oversimplify, philosophers since Plato and Aristotle were compelled to acknowledge the role of luck in a happy life, having hardly any conceptual means to theoretically neutralize fate. Put otherwise, since the beginnings, philosophy as a way of life often tried to marginalize the role of luck, to delimitate the power of goddess Fortuna. This can easily be illustrated by the first considerations of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* which make a distinction between those things in our power (*prohairetic* things) and those things not in our power (*aprohairetic* things). The conclusion drawn by Epictetus is paradigmatic, in so far as he declares what lies outside of our control to be irrelevant for human happiness.

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# Daring to Play Oneself: Gambling, Psychoanalysis and Practical Self-determination

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# Daring to Play Oneself: Gambling, Psychoanalysis and Practical Self-determination

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**Abstract:** The critical intention of this article does not focus on a comprehensive socio-cultural evaluation of gambling. Rather, its perspective is guided towards ways of picturing gambling and the subject of the gambler in different theoretical contexts. It is argued that one might expand philosophical conceptions of practical self-determination by taking an interdisciplinary look at gambling. However, such an attempt runs into the danger of painting an overly simplistic picture of self-control as self-continence, which can be found in theoretical approaches pathologizing the gambler. In order to avoid such an outcome, an interdisciplinary analogy combining psychoanalytical and philosophical thought is presented. This analogy brings together the perspectives of the analysand and the gambler. By confronting these scenarios of human agency, it is shown that practical self-determination depends on instances of daring that can be related to certain gambling practices, too. The interdisciplinary view on gambling highlights its potentials for self-exploration, without neglecting the fact that an appropriate realization of such a self-exploration requires experiential and interpersonal conditions that often collide with the harsh reality of gambling practices.

*Keywords:* practical self-determination, personal identity, psychoanalysis, daring, critical methodology, interdisciplinarity

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## Introduction and Methodological Remarks

When taking into view contexts and phenomena of play and gambling,[2] there are several aspects that can be linked to issues concerning human existence on a broader scale. The aim of this paper is to connect the willingness to gamble and the willingness to meet the challenges of practical self-determination as a person.[3] The line of argument will join these two perspectives by referring to a representation of *daring*. It follows the hypothesis that daring can be conceptualized as a fundamental attitude of playful openness towards the uncertainties of life. Its value lies in an intensive experience of the oscillation between reflective orientation and self-guidance on the one hand and engaged suspension of this self-guidance on the other. When grasped in the right way, this characterization of daring enables one to take a differentiated look at the willingness to take a risk as a relevant part of human existence. The willingness obtains its relevance from referring to the fragile balance between destructive and constructive forces of being an individual person in the world. The possibilities of realizing this balance as part of self-determination, however, are seriously put at stake when daring loses its playful character and develops a forced influence on the acting subject. At first glance, gambling represents the end point of such a development: casinos and arcades appear as places where subjects get sucked into a space of futile hopes and forced repetitions.

This paper does not aim to deny the problems of gambling or the socio-economic power structures that are involved in maintaining them. Instead, it will discuss how these problems are not adequately encountered by installing a theoretical perspective, which focusses on pathologizing or condemning gambling and the gambler solely from an abstract point of view. Such accounts fail to question idealized understandings of human capacities, practices and habits. They tend to presuppose conceptions of 'normal' self-control, which then are normatively applied on seemingly 'exotic'

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[2] This first use of the term gambling necessitates an important clarification: When using it, I mean the mostly American coined institution of contemporary gambling in modern societies. There are interesting accounts of determining cross-cultural conceptions of gambling, which I cannot take into account within the limits of this paper (see Pickles, 2016).

[3] In short and with a view to the prefixes of 'self-' used: The argumentation of this paper promotes the view that self-determination relies on regulative and context-sensitive self-guidance instead of fulfilling a fixed and absolute scale of self-control and self-continence.

practices like gambling. Such an approach, which prioritizes abstract ideals of the self towards the concrete manifold of human practices, can be found in philosophical accounts of self-determination, too. However, it is not without alternatives. There are approaches comprehending the human self as always already embedded in a rich field of inner and outer relations. Existentialists combine the appreciation of this relationality with a characterization of human existence being determined by ineluctable tensions between freedom and despair. Since daring and play possess relevant functions in this characterization, the existentialist outlook serves as an orientation in this paper for developing an interdisciplinary perspective on gambling and self-determination. Gambling is explored as a looking glass, under which the complex human relationship with ideals of self- control and self-continence becomes apparent. The goal is to paint a picture including fruitful dimensions *and* destructive aspects of the relation between daring and self-determination. The discussion of gambling shows how both dimensions and aspects can be present in human agency. The argument will take the following form. Firstly, I will present a conception of practical self-determination, which relies on a dialectical handling of the capacities of reason. By questioning rationalistic ideals of self-determination, the idea will be strengthened that the process of determining oneself is not appropriately recognized by installing an ideal of reflective self- continence. Instead, it is more accurately comprehended as an ongoing experience alternating between instances of determining and instances of being determined. This experience enables the agent to acknowledge her self-relation as an open process of change and transformation. This part also explores the idea of self-transformation being essential for self-determination by characterizing its main element as a practice of daring being realized under specific experiential and interpersonal conditions. At the end of this chapter, the philosophical perspective is opened up by building an interdisciplinary bridge between existentialist ideas and psychoanalytic models. This leads to two insights: Firstly, it becomes clear that practical self-determination constitutes itself through scenarios of playfully trying out different dimensions of being oneself. This process involves risky forms of suspending secure and comforting patterns of behaviour, which is why in psychoanalytic practice, the focus lies on a cognitive and affective framing of the analysand and her experience. Secondly, the psychoanalytical setting shows that daring to open up towards new perspectives on oneself depends on feeling secure in a certain environment and being supported by an empathic counterpart.

The idea of playing oneself under secure conditions can be extended to other realizations of human agency and self-determination: play is not only a major part of the human upbringing but also pervades adult forms of agency in actualizations of dreaming or creative imagination. When it comes to situations determined by specific interpersonal relations, there are also potentials for playing oneself in game scenarios. This is the point where gambling can be taken into view. In order to challenge pathologizing approaches, I will draft an analogy between psychoanalysis and gambling in the second and third part. This analogy brings together the perspectives of the psychoanalytical analysand and the gambler. Its aim is to explore gambling in its potentials to realize the daring being that is essential for practical self-determination. The focus lies on self-comprehension through interplays of body and psyche, experience and reflection on the one hand and interpersonal involvement on the other. Both factors are essential for practical self-determination and crucial in evaluating practices of gambling. Together, they reveal that self-guidance has an ambivalent structure, showing itself in some instances of the gambler's perspective. This ambivalence has a lot to do with daring as experience of living through the fragility of the self and its proneness to inner and outer conditions. However, the analogy has its limits: Gambling is not the same as psychoanalytical practice. It can lead to illness and loss. The loss of self-control, however, can be seen in a more diverse light by parallelizing the perspectives of the analysand and the gambler. Taking their similarities into view delivers a unique view on the fact that suspension of control can be actualized in productive daring under certain circumstances and in certain environments.

The concluding part addresses the more general question, to what use a philosophical perspective can be put when it comes to gambling. I will argue for the view that philosophy should use its interdisciplinary potential to provide a differentiated perspective on what one can learn about the dynamics of practical self-determination by taking a look at gambling *and* its evaluation. In order to strengthen this approach, I will argue and demonstrate that it is possible to combine insights from philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology when it comes to relating self-determination and gambling. In the end, an interdisciplinary perspective delivers the insight that gambling can be viewed as a unique mirror of the human ambivalence towards the loss of control, the contingency of life and the dependence on others.

## The Fragile Balances of Practical Self-determination

When it comes to philosophical accounts of human agency, there is a tradition of identifying its overall goal with becoming an autonomous and free person, which involves the idea of practical self-determination. This tradition is mainly based on the hypothesis that human beings obtain capacities and skills that enable them to act according to their goals and wishes, so that they are able to realize a conscious self-relation (Davidson, 2001). This way of capturing agency can take a strongly normative route: to realize practical self-determination, actions have to fulfil certain conditions, on which

agents can fail. When it comes to systematizing these conditions, the focus over the course of the development of modern philosophy shifted from identifying certain actions – preferably ones of moral and ethical worth – as being central for being a self-determined and therefore autonomous person to specifying certain *formal* features of agency as a guarantee for securing a proper self-relation. In the history of philosophy, there has been a strong emphasis on linking these features with reference to the human capacities of reason. One of the founding fathers surely is Immanuel Kant who rediscovered the term self-determination for modern times (Kant, 1785/2012). Today, this approach can be found in analytic Kantian philosophers in general (Lovibond, 2004; Velleman, 2009) and for example in Christine Korsgaard's position in particular (Korsgaard, 2009). According to her view, the universal end of all human agency is practical, rational self-determination and it is fully realized by stepping back and reflectively gaining control over one's practical conduct. Human agents are able to practically grasp themselves as individual persons when they take a practical standpoint towards their behavioural activities and "pull themselves together" (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 214) in order to successfully perform an act of self-guidance and self-control.

Despite containing mainly formal conditions, such a model sets the bar high for practical self- determination and agency. In order to constitute herself, an agent has to exercise rationality understood as self-controlled reasoning from a neutral standpoint of reflective distance. Moreover, Korsgaard argues for an ethically and morally rich conception of self-determination: Only a constant exercise of reflexive reasoning enables the agent to grasp herself as person with an evaluation system and a potentially valuable way of living. Only rational agency, which fulfils said conditions, leads to being a person and living a good life.

There are of course other ways of framing the self-determining potentials of human agency. Some focus on counterparts of reason in the spirit of David Hume's rehabilitation of the passions (Hume, 1739/1975),[4] others question the possibilities of self-determination under modern circumstances like the critical theorists of the *Frankfurt School* (Jepsen, 2012). The main aim here, however, is not to discuss tensions between different lines of thought in philosophy. Instead, the goal is to defend the approach that a philosophical conception of practical self-determination as the normative goal of human agency should take a turn that takes into account the comprehensive reality of this agency and its concrete experience as self-determining process. According to my view, the lifelong process of becoming oneself as an individual person cannot be determined by simply identifying moments of rational control or the passionate loss of it and putting them together to form a chain of actions.

In order to gain an appropriate picture of practical self-determination, one has to acknowledge the procedural execution of individual acting practice through a personal perspective. As Bernard Williams (1985, pp. 76-77) stresses, truthful self-understanding can only be lived and evaluated *from within* the perspective of the agent, saturated with experience and its phenomenal qualities. But why exactly should such an account be preferred? To answer this question, one has to concretize the idea of becoming and creating oneself in agency. This can be done with the help of two factors that are going to be linked to the acting context of gambling later: the factor of lived through transformation or unexpected change in self-understanding and the factor of being determined by social or interpersonal dynamics of appreciation. Both factors contribute to a picture of practical self-determination not as a hypothetical mass of isolated moments of reflection but as a lifelong process of establishing a balance between seemingly rational self-control and seemingly irrational self-delimitation. In this line of thought, to establish a truthful connection with oneself means to appreciate an attitude of openness towards the fact that self-determination always also entails dimensions of uncertainty and underdeterminedness. It also means to appreciate the idea that there is a unique value in letting go the claim of a distanced overview. Besides Williams, Martin Seel (2002) also combines this idea with a self-critical look on philosophy. Both of them characterize the philosophical outlook as perspective with a strong tendency to idealize rational fixations and distanced reflection. This tendency gains concrete form for example in the problem of philosophical approaches to grasp phenomena like practical irrationality without explaining them away or condemning them in an ethical or moral way.

The remaining part of this paper will follow the methodological direction of these authors, but with a certain twist, which in turn comes with a significant extension: The aim is to concretize the open attitude as practical readiness to dare, to take an existential risk or gamble. This includes both an object-related and a methodological step. Concerning the first, grasping the openness as an attitude of risk and daring also means to take a look at the material conditions of realizing it: What does it mean to put oneself, as a human being with body and psyche at stake? What kind of experiential qualities and affective states are linked to it? These questions refer to the fact that most of the philosophers mentioned tend to stay within a rather abstract picture of self-determining scenarios. The methodological step opposes the tendency of philosophical perspectives to rationalize by confronting

[4]This philosophical tradition can be linked to psychoanalysis, too. Hume's rehabilitation of the passions finds a conceptual response in George Klein's theory of the "vital pleasures" (Klein, 1976).

it with perspectives and scenarios that tend to resist clear-cut conceptualization and evaluation when it comes to characterizing human agency and self-determination as act of distanced reflection. The starting point for both of these steps is another philosophical point of view: the existentialist tradition. Its pioneers and representatives like Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus focus on human existence being determined by ongoing struggles, the absence of secure norms of reason and morality and a radical coercion of subjective freedom (Aho, 2020). In this line of thought, the following aspects are especially important for my argumentation: These authors emphasize the role of existential 'moods' suddenly occurring in human lives (Aho, 2020, p. 86). These experiences permeate body and psyche of the individuals and shake them from the routines of their everyday selves. The moods can be determined not only as suitable fundament for the idea of practical self-determination realized in scenarios of unforeseen self-transformations. They can also be connected with certain ways of characterizing experiences of gambling. I will return to this parallel later. For now, it is important that this existentialist illustration of the fragile nature of human perspectives and selves also involves daring as a fundamental part of human agency. This idea is developed especially by Simone de Beauvoir in her conception of subjectivity (de Beauvoir, 2004). She emphasizes that to act means to take existential risks since humans are underdetermined and do not have the opportunity to take control over their lives (de Beauvoir, 2004, p. 139).

At this point it becomes clear what the other philosophical traditions miss: It is not enough to simply state that humans are determined. Actualizing her unique joining of philosophical clarity and literary concreteness, de Beauvoir conveys how all we can hope for in realizing ourselves is a "situated freedom" (2004, p. 85). We have to physically and psychologically work through and accept the fact that we need others and certain circumstances to transcend our contingent facticity. This is not a one-time thing: We have to risk our unstable self again and again by interacting and planning with others without being able to control their agency. The success of this practice, in turn, depends on how we experience the interaction with the other. Whether and how our facticity is transcended with the help of others is not a matter of abstract planning but of how the interaction is cognitively and affectively realized and experienced. The risk of agency is only comprehended in the full sense when one goes along with how near and far the agent is to someone, how the other feels freed or intimidated by him or her. In order to acknowledge this dependency of becoming oneself in agency on fragile interactions with others, one has to take both the psychological and the physical aspects of subjective experience and intersubjective contact into account. An existentialist thinker who acknowledges this point thoroughly is Maurice Merleau-Ponty: He develops theories of perception and human interaction that truly acknowledge the fact that we are not only connected with other subjects but are always already touching them and even overlapping with them. Our physical experience that provides the fundament for our self- understanding and limits it at the same time is determined by what other subjects do with their body and psyche (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 1968).

These existentialist insights enrich the idea of daring being crucial for practical self-determination: They make it clear that this process has to be comprehended not in the form of an abstract decision but as a way to put oneself at stake as a physical being, rendering oneself vulnerable not only by doing something but at the same time by exposing one's feelings in an environment and space already shared with others, their experiences and feelings. In order to get all of these qualities and fragilities into view, a philosophical perspective has to move from the abstract space of reasons towards concrete scenarios taken as intensive illustrations that are able to convey the complex interplays of inner and outer conditionalities.

A contemporary example of how this can be done is provided by Jonathan Lear. In his approach towards becoming oneself, he integrates the qualities of experiencing self-transformative processes by taking exemplary scenarios into view. Here, daring takes form not only in thoughts, decisions and actions but in the sound of a cracking voice or the density of interactions full of affective tensions that let the space between the subjects appear like a fighting arena (Lear, 2011, p. 61). This leads me to the next part of this paper, since the reason why Lear is able to combine abstract theories and concrete experiences also lies in his second profession as a psychoanalyst. Hence, the reference to existentialist ideas opens up the philosophical perspective towards other disciplinary connections – by highlighting the relationality of human existence as an interdisciplinary intersection point.[5]

## Conditions for Transcending Control – From Psychoanalysis to Gambling

There are several reasons why psychoanalysis is introduced at this point of my argument. It links abstract conceptualization to concrete acting-scenarios. Moreover, psychoanalysis commits itself to appreciate the irrational dynamics of human agency while at the same time having a comprehensive ideal of self-understanding (Gardner, 1993). Based on a unique interplay of theory, technique and practice, it establishes a self-reflective perspective on practical self-

[5]Interestingly, this connection is possible despite many existentialists being vivid opponents to psychoanalysis (Aho, 2020, pp. 15-16.) According to my opinion, this has very much to do with existentialism having a problem mainly with the traditional Freudian psychoanalysis and its tendency to paint a strictly scientific picture of human relations. Since my argument refers to more current developments in psychoanalytical research, these problems fade into the background.

determination (Warsitz & Küchenhoff, 2015). According to psychoanalytical thought, to understand oneself in one's unique form of being and becoming an individual person relies on daring to question oneself. This questioning is not actualized in reflection alone but in experiences of letting oneself go and suspend one's self-continence under certain circumstances. These circumstances are directly linked to the perspective from which self-determination is theoretically grasped: In psychoanalytic practice, the analyst provides a context in which the analysand is able to confront herself with unknown aspects and dimensions of her self. She is supported by the intersubjective relationship with the analyst that guards her from her fears of losing control.

Psychoanalytical practice shows how it is possible to think about self-determination as a concept whose conditions have to be worked out in concrete situations of intersubjective understanding so that the phenomenon itself can be evaluated in its truthfulness and sincerity. Especially modern psychoanalysis roots this line of thought in the fact that human self-relations are determined and permeated by the relationships the individual has experienced (Fonagy et al., 2004). Against this background, practical self-determination has to be understood as a practice of balancing a need for interpersonal appreciation and a need for independent self-assertion (Honneth, 2000). The psychoanalytical setting does not claim to help the analysand to gain back definitive self-continence but to establish a space where she does not have to fear interpersonal disappointment or other negative consequences for not having herself under control. The goal lies in promoting an attitude of serenity towards the unpredictable or opaque conditions of being and becoming oneself.

This dynamic perspective on self-determination roots in both pessimistic and optimistic beliefs about human existence: On the one hand, psychoanalysis regards human agents as beings determined by their vulnerability. On the other hand, it recognizes the creative powers of the human mind and soul (Lear, 2017). This point leads to the second main part of this paper: Like some philosophical accounts (Cremonini, 2012), psychoanalysis regards play as a central part of human development and thriving – subsumed in Johan Huizinga's concept of "homo ludens" (Huizinga, 1938/2011). Psychoanalysts like Donald Winnicott emphasize the point that the world-building powers of the human psyche can be traced back to the creative powers of phantasy and their realization in imaginative play that stems from early childhood (Winnicott, 1969). This power is linked to practical self-determination, too: In psychoanalysis, play and self-determination find together under the directive of trying something and trying to dare something or even oneself. This form of playful self-testing happens, first for its own sake and under protected interpersonal conditions.

With regard to the considerations in the previous section, it is important here to emphasize the role of how this situation is affectively experienced especially on the physical level. On the one hand, psychoanalysis is based on the understanding that self-determination and self-transformation can only be reached by sincerely working through affective mindsets and histories. This understanding commits the analyst to establish a space where the analysand feels safe and cared for. On the other hand, this also means that the analysand has a space where she can safely allow dimensions of herself that need to be tried and acted out to come up. In this process, her body plays a main role – as instrument of resonance, expression and enactment. Combined, these conditions direct psychoanalysis to take affective experiences and their physical conditions very seriously. This, in turn, hints towards another parallel of psychoanalysis and existentialism: Both not only claim to acknowledge the experiential dimension of determining oneself but also take into account that this determination relies on certain interpersonal conditions referring to a space of overlapping physical relations. In both psychoanalysis and existentialism, conceptualizations of intercorporeality (German: 'Zwischenleiblichkeit') can be found (Scharff, 2020). In psychoanalysis, self-transformation relies on playfully daring to try and test oneself through physical expressions and experiences. By doing this, one puts oneself on display, which is buffered by the analyst providing a space of being mutually interrelated where the analysand is being held without her boundaries being violated.

At this point, the aim is to parallelize the idea of self-determination through playful daring with perspectives of gambling in order to take a look at the potential of this picture outside the unique situation of the psychoanalytical setting. On first glance, this might appear as a peculiar move, since gambling is not the typical form of purposeless play. Instead, it is sometimes characterized as its darker, irrational counterpart (Fletcher, 2003). This strategy, however, tends to be a part of discussions that moralize and pathologize the context of gambling. My aim is not to join in this tendency due to two reasons: Firstly, it entertains a distanced point of view. Secondly, it blurs the fact that gambling and play definitely share certain capacities.

Hence, I do not plan to pathologize gambling and gamblers with the help of psychoanalytic frameworks. As a philosopher, my goal is rather to bring together perspectives of psychoanalysis and gambling studies in order to illuminate the conditions of practical self-determination and to look for an appropriate way of evaluating its realizations in common human practices. The aim is to establish a balance between the disciplines and phenomena without introducing a strong kind of hierarchy in theoretical perspectives or in types of agency. It is powered by a theoretical intuition: that the linking of psychoanalytical and gambling perspectives shows how practical self-determination comes with

risks that cannot be avoided because they constitute the seriousness of the matter. Becoming a person involves an existential dare that everything will go as planned as well as the willingness to accept the reality that everything will continue differently than planned. This combination determines human agents in a unique way. The perspectives of psychoanalytical analysands and gamblers share some major aspects when it comes to this situation of daring: They combine a playful practice of dealing with contingency with the threat of existential and unforeseen change of one's most personal constitution in body and psyche. Hence, their shared observation throws a different light on self-control: Self-determination relies on being able to suspend self-continence without getting lost in this suspension. The risks of such a limitless loss, however, still have to be made clear. This task is faced by exploring the circumstances of gambling in the next part. The perspective of the gambler is faced with a main condition of the analysand's experience of playful daring leading to transformative self-determination. It depends on a concrete spatiotemporal constellation, interpersonal company and interrelatedness. In the concluding part, I will argue for the general hypothesis that this amalgamation of psychoanalysis and gambling contributes to a philosophy of gambling: It not only connects gambling to agency and self-determination but the theoretical exploration of gambling to other ways of thinking about agency and self-determination, too.

**Gambling as Trial for Practical Self-determination**

Before moving on in the argument, it is necessary to make some introductory remarks about the general nature of gambling. These remarks concern two factors: the activity of gambling and the perspective of the gambler. Since the aim is not to explore historical or socio-cultural causes of gambling, I will not try to give a comprehensive picture of gambling and gamblers as such. Instead, some selected features will be highlighted by referring to anthropological definitions of the phenomenon: Gambling constitutes a form of mostly collective and institutionalized activity, which involves subjects "committing valuable items to an event or series" (Pickles, 2016). In other words, they place material bets in order to gain a win from it. This activity has a broad variety of realizations reaching from traditional poker games, over race bets and complicated casino games to slot machines. Gambling has a very strong connection to play and games (Smith & Abt, 2012). As already mentioned, it sometimes is characterized as an adult version of children's play.[6] However, according to my view, one should not stop at simply stating such an analogy: Apart from the fact that children also gamble (Puzo, 1977), such a view runs into danger of oversimplifying the complex relation between play and gambling.

At first glance, there seems to be two major differences: Firstly, gambling involves serious bets and stakes with the potential to give rise to existential consequences. Secondly, gambling involves a very particular combination of competence or skill and contingency; gambling activities do not reward effort and training the same way as most games, since they mainly rely on probability and luck (Abt & Smith, 2012, pp. 125, 129, 132). These differences, however, do not change the fact that referring to play is a major part of understanding gambling as a unique form of human agency: Gambling unites a playful context with a situation of serious daring.[7] This feature has the potential to shape the gambling subject. Thomas Holtgraves argues for the view that gambling promotes character-development, since it challenges the ways in which an individual agent handles the contingency and injustice of win and loss (Holtgraves, 1988). This character-building, in turn, depends on the social collective, in which the gambling takes place. Holtgraves talks about "self-presentation" but these processes can be characterized as aspects of self-determination, too.

Up to this point, gambling has been connected mainly to the following characteristics: It is a form of agency that involves serious daring, represents a certain version of play, puts the individual character of the agent under test and depends on a certain kind of company. All of these points can be linked to another property of gambling, which is highlighted by Mario Wenning (2017): temporality and timing. Gambling is able to confront its gambler with a unique feature of her human existence by installing a specific kind of temporality – time comes to a halt, when everything is set and luck takes place (Wenning, 2017, p. 92).

These characteristics in turn can be linked to the psychoanalytical practice in general and the perspective of transformative self-determination of the analysand in particular. In gambling, the agent is confronted with "fortuna" (Wenning, 2017, p. 83), the unpredictability of life in general and her own way of living it in particular. This confrontation opens up the possibility to experience both the fight with the loss of control and the importance of accepting it, and even the possibility of gaining some valuable insights into one's own character reacting to this wish to have control. The gambler can actively and sensually play with her self-presentation as winner or loser, but at the same time, she has to deal with an imbalance of effort or competence and the results that she cannot control but can interpret as fate or destiny. Both aspects of her situation are caught in a unique form of temporality, which itself cannot be controlled but only lived through. This unique temporal experience has

[6] From a psychoanalytical standpoint, this statement is not quite right: According to its frameworks, children's play is transferred to dreaming in adulthood.

[7] Furthermore, gambling and play share another main aspect of human existence: the joy of competition.

similarities with the experience of *moods* the existentialist thinkers present as fundamental modes of human existence and change of life practices: These are realized as unique affective shifts from the everyday experience of oneself as a steady being towards a sudden realization of one's own volatility and contingency (Aho, 2020, p. 87). These *moods* come with the experience of being cut off from the regular spatiotemporal embedding in the world and finding oneself in a certain atmosphere that first of all and mainly is felt in a physical way. They entail constructive and destructive powers, opening up opportunities to be shaken from self-deceptions and leaving the subject prone to inner and outer forces. Such a state and experience can be ascribed to the gambler, too, however it depends on certain circumstances whether it has potentials for authentic self-determination, to which I will come back in a moment.

These characteristics can also be found in psychoanalytical scenarios of self-determination: Time comes to a halt when the analysand dares to experience both self-guidance and its loss, to suspend her fixation on self-control and enters into a realm between play and reality, as-if and serious consequences. In this moment and setting, it is possible to encounter oneself through seemingly irrational acts and transform one's own understanding of self-determination. Lear takes the view that such moments are found in everyday life too, but have a special appearance in psychoanalysis. He highlights the fact that this procedure cannot be grasped as a moment of distanced reflection but has to be appreciated as experience with unique qualities of intensity and awe (Lear, 2011). According to my view, both psychoanalysis and gambling offer perspectives, in which this tension of practical self-determination becomes apparent in its specific qualities of experience: Analysands and gamblers encounter themselves in unforeseen ways that may even appear as being haunted by hidden or unpleasant aspects of one's self. Such encounters are important for an openminded and truthful self-understanding. However, since they require breaking planned and reflective agency, they depend on perspectives of risk-taking and daring as important features. They are able to establish a momentary balance between determination or orientation and contingency. In this picture, practical self-determination takes place *between* guiding one's character and person and being determined by past realizations of this guidance. The determination by the past is experienced as "causality of fate" (Habermas, 1994, p. 330). The wandering between extremes of determination and being determined is present and experienced in its unique qualities in the perspective of the gambler, who is free and unfree, in control and lost, and inhabiting a standpoint of deliberated action and anxious thrill at the same time.

The level on which this interplay of control and its loss is realized can be named as some form of rehearsed agency: Both in psychoanalytical and gambling perspectives, agents try to expose themselves to the uncertainties of becoming a person in real life. In some sense, the circumstances are sheltered in both cases, as analysands and gamblers can in principle willingly face the boundaries of self-control and active self-determination without being necessarily consumed by it. However, the limits of the analogy between psychoanalysis and gambling come into view at this point, too. Firstly, the parallel of inducing rehearsed agency is limited. While on a very basic level, both analysands and gamblers have the freedom to try themselves out, a closer look reveals that the analysand tries to test her inner world while the gambler plays with the outer world. One can also say that while the analysand learns to identify her tendencies to act out her wishes and fears, the gambler acts them out and realizes her gambling activity as some kind of sublimation. If this is the case, however, another potential of gambling is actualized, which leads to the second limit of the analogy: Gambling does not have an inherent commitment to well-being and thriving like psychoanalysis. Especially with regard to its economic foundations, gambling tends to promote addiction and compulsion instead. This, however does not have to be the case: The gambler's perspective can involve the right kind of free daring and playing oneself. This, in turn, also depends on another parallel with the analysand's perspective, which leads back to the analogy. Its practical realization depends on the right interpersonal context and environment – one of the reasons why psychoanalytical practice cannot be replaced by a casual talk with friends. However, psychoanalysis relies on a very specific counterpart: the analyst and her guidance in the psychoanalytical conversation. In gambling, the other subjects do not play the same role. If at all, they seem to constitute an adverse or even hostile environment of competition, against which the gambler has to stand up.

This first characterization is one-sided, though, which I would like to clarify by taking a closer look at the limits of interpersonality in gambling: In her ground-breaking book *Addiction by Design*, Natasha Dow Schüll (2014) presents a painfully accurate analysis of the machine gambling industry of Las Vegas. In this context, no fruitful daring and trying is found, only compulsion and despair. The reasons for these circumstances are the following: Dow Schüll's analysis focuses on the fact that machine gambling is constructed so that gamblers are caught in an externally determined relation to the machine. They enter the "zone" where self-guidance is given up and lost for the vague promise to escape the hardships of everyday life. Here, it becomes apparent what happens when the fragile balance between determination and being determined is lost. Gambling has the potential to provide an exercise of practical self-determination by mirroring its main dynamics. It is able to actualize a fragile balance between the constructive and destructive dimensions of existential daring by changing between playful thrills and threatening

contingency. When the *zone* takes control, however, there is no balance and gamblers lose themselves under the disguise of entertainment.

This is an interesting point because the failure to actualize potentials of self-determination is bound to interpersonal circumstances and a certain environment: Analogous to psychoanalysis, the potential of daring in gambling depends on social and situational conditions. Gambling tables are not therapy couches and the perspective of the gambler is not focussed and determined on another human being like the perspective of the analysand and its focus on the analyst. However, Dow Schüll's analysis points to the possibility that the capacities of the gambler's perspective to experience self-determination depends on the interaction with real or virtual companions. Daring to play oneself does not mean to surrender to external forces but to find ways to play with them and to identify them in their most common manifestation: the determination by oneself and other human beings. This manifestation of determining forces has a productive dimension for the agent; it represents *both* dependence and appreciation as individual. However, the combination is not possible when the gambler is confronted only with machines being programmed to deceive her. What is needed is a coming together of agents having the same starting conditions. Fitting examples or even role models might be found in friends playing poker or groups collectively playing the lottery and sharing experiences of the fleeing nature of winning and losing as well as of hopes, thrills and suspense. The crucial point here lies in the level of concrete experience and its affective effects of balancing the ominous and playful qualities of daring with the feeling of not being alone. This becomes even more apparent when one takes into account what Dow Schüll says about the material environment that is installed in order to get the machine gamblers into the *zone* (Dow Schüll, 2014, pp. 39f.). On the architectural and design level, everything is done to build a seemingly sheltered space that corresponds with bringing the gambler on the unique, somehow otherworldly temporal level of experiencing the game. One might think that the installation of nooks with dimmed light and sound in the casinos that Dow Schüll discusses provides a space where the gambler feels safe on a physical level. One might compare this to the modern trend of "cocooning" for example. However, on closer inspection it becomes clear that this security tends to be corrupted: The installation of spatial and temporal security is designed to control the gamblers and their affective relation to the game in order to capitalize on it (Dow Schüll, 2014, pp. 49f.). It does not focus on opening space for gambling subjects to find an individual balance between daring and determination. It provides an instrumental security by shutting off the gamblers from the gaze of other subjects. They do not sit around a table, trying to read each other's eyes while maintaining a poker face – which could be a playful practice of exploring overlapping physical territories. They are kept fixated on a display. Instead of being acknowledged and related to on an interpersonal level, the gambler is caught in a dimension where the balance between control and its suspension is lost, while this loss is hidden behind soft carpets and ambient lights.[8] The gambler's experience relies on deception, which is crucial in a negative way since self-determination is bound to sincerity. A further point of interest about Dow Schüll's approach concerns the fact that she analyses and criticizes the way industry representatives and especially certain researchers *talk* about gambling: They often fail to problematize the strategy of economic monopolies seeking to maximize earning money from the affective investment of gamblers. Instead, the ambivalent status of gambling practices is explained by focussing on the problematic character of the gambler and her pathological tendencies (Dow Schüll, 2014, pp. 275f., 290f.). A hypothesis which also can be found in other texts seems to refer to the idea that these tendencies have something to do with a lack of self-control. Some theorists like David Fletcher even defend the view that gambling is some kind of dangerous activity in that it triggers a general human tendency to lose self-control (Fletcher, 2003). In this context, the perspective of the gambler sometimes appears like a spectre for normal human beings – the gambler gets stigmatized.

I join Dow Schüll's approach in encountering this line of thought in the following way: Pathologizing, demonizing or even romanticizing the perspective of the gambler fails in two important regards. Firstly, it stigmatizes gambling subjects in blaming them for everything wrong about gambling while neglecting socio-economic conditions and responsibilities at the same time. Secondly, by ascribing fixed conceptions of self-control and other human capacities to the phenomenon in question, it tends to ignore the possibility that gambling can highlight ambivalent features of seemingly 'normal' human agency and self-determination. At this point, there is another possible analogy that should be drawn – both psychoanalysis and gambling are often confronted with the presumption that only pathological or sick individuals engage in them. This ascription is fruitless as far as it presupposes a fixed understanding of normality and pathology that cannot be questioned or challenged. Such understandings, however, presuppose a serious and open confrontation with said phenomena. When it comes to self-determination and its conditions, this also means to take these forms of human agency seriously in

[8] This does not mean, however, that material environments cannot play any constructive role for experiences of self-determination, daring and self-transformation. There is not enough room in this paper to explore this thought to a greater extent, but for the sake of the interdisciplinary focus of my argument, I want to highlight the fact that there are psychoanalytical approaches that focus on the role of material objects and environments for self-understanding, too. See (Searles, 1960).

challenging common conceptions of the relevance of self-continence and self-control. The interdisciplinary look at the gambler's perspective shows how self-determination does not only involve playing with one's self-understanding but jeopardizing securities and even getting entertained by it – assuming the environmental and interpersonal circumstances are right.

**Some Implications for a Philosophy of Gambling**

This paper is shaped by the theoretical intuition that a philosophy of gambling should not start with the question of whether gambling is a valuable human practice or not. This does not mean that it cannot include strong normative principles and evaluations. Nevertheless, in my view, philosophy is well-advised to step back from an immediate evaluation and recollect its own critical and methodological capacities that involve questioning common conceptions, definitions and terms of human practices and self-understandings on a more general level. This specifically includes its own disciplinary self-understanding as well as those of other scientific disciplines. In some studies of gambling, the phenomenon tends to get explored and conceptualized under a fixed conceptual frame: Gambling irritates otherwise stable human capacities of orientation and control, therefore it should be handled with caution. Terms like self-control and pathology play a main role in this context. Such an approach should raise some critical questions especially since it may come with serious ethical or moral evaluations about gambling preventing a valuable way of life and about gamblers' failure to fit the mold of a 'normal' since self-controlled person.

Instead of adding its voice to this chorus or trying to counter it by romanticizing gambling and the gambler, a philosophy of gambling should try to take a critical glance on the theoretical practice of simply incorporating such a unique phenomenon into existing understandings. The first question should not be whether gambling meets the conditions for self-control. Instead one should ask if the conceptualization of self-control as a major point of self-determination is appropriate to understand the potentials of the diversity of human agency illuminated in practices like gambling. At this point, Dow Schüll's methodological approach provides an orientation for aspects and attitudes that are crucial for such an endeavour: Putting her anthropological point of view into a very unique use, she does not simply quantify her research object – gamblers – with the help of fixed categories of evaluation. Instead, she focuses on qualitative research and engages with her interview partners and their stories in order to draw an extensive picture of how gambling is practiced. In doing this, her approach is similar to psychoanalytical methods: Both of them aim to take the actual experiences of subjects into account in order to develop an understanding of human practices, agency and self-determination that integrates their ambivalences, ambiguities and balances into an engaged theoretical point of view. Here, sincerity unfolds as a norm not only of self-determination but of the methodological perspective, too. They also share a practice of empirical research, an institutionalized activity philosophy, as such, is not part of. However, this paper aimed to demonstrate that philosophy can relate to other disciplines in order to establish an account open to conceptual analysis as well as the diversity of acting practices and open to truthful references to the actual subjects determined by taking their perspectives seriously. Phenomena like gambling seem to hide on the brink of agency at first. On further inspection, they reveal the human ambivalence towards control, contingency and dependency on others in a unique way by referring to concepts like fate, luck, irrationality or destiny, which themselves tend to escape theoretical reflection. However, these nevertheless name phenomena that can be experienced as comprehensive qualities of a personal agency leading to an encounter with oneself. By opening up towards interdisciplinary lines of thought, philosophy can avoid neglecting the potentials of these phenomena.

Against this background, it is reasonable to draw one preliminary evaluative conclusion: Gambling as such, like other forms of agency, is not good or bad, but entails a potential to open up perspectives on the self-determination potentials of daring. From the perspective of the gambler, the actualization of this potential depends on interpersonal relations and a sincere environment. From the perspective of theoretical exploration, an appropriate theory of these actualizations depends on a self-critical analysis of fixed conceptions and ideals as well as an open attitude towards their diversity. This paper explored such an analysis with the help of interdisciplinary perspectives. Following the spirit of openness, these considerations might be developed further in a critical sense that refers to the spirit of the *Frankfurt School* of critical theory: Gambling, as well as human agency as such, has to be discussed as phenomenon and as symptom of societies. A philosophy of gambling questioning conceptual frameworks being focused on pathological structures and seemingly fixed ideals of self-continence leads to the question whether they reproduce a blindness towards societal powers and responsibilities. This view limits an open and critical discussion of self-determination, a term which originally promises the realization of freedom and autonomy. Such a limitation takes place whenever theoretical frameworks confuse freedom with an idealized picture of self-control.

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

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Philosophy and Gambling: Reflections from Macao

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

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**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 though 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

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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 20st 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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# The Gambler's Fallacy: Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox and Kierkegaard's Response

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**Abstract:** I offer a conceptual study of Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox and propose that analysis of the paradox, as well as of its various solutions, can help to shed light on the psychology behind and the structure of the gambler's fallacy. I compare Aristotle's response to the paradox with Kierkegaard's subsequent response in his chapter of *Philosophical Fragments* "Is the Past More Necessary than the Future?" I argue that proponents of each solution lead us to a different diagnosis of the gambler's preoccupation with predetermination and future determination.

*Keywords:* the gambler's fallacy, the Sea Battle Paradox, possibility, necessity, Aristotle, Kierkegaard

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## Introduction

One of the biggest mistakes of reasoning we make when we play games of chance is to assume that independent events happening in the past help to reveal the course of the future. If a fair and unbiased coin toss results in tails nine times in a row, it is compelling but fallacious to think that the next coin toss has a greater than fifty percent chance of resulting in heads. This mistake of reasoning is commonly referred to as the "gambler's fallacy". The gambler's fallacy happens when we mistakenly view the history of independent patterns in the past as exposing the determinations in the future of contingent outcomes. What causes us to make this mistake of reasoning? What causes the gambler's fallacy to be so compelling?

Patrick J. Hurley offers an answer to this question in his popular logic textbook *A Concise Introduction to Logic*. Hurley views the gambler's fallacy as a variation on the false cause fallacy, which occurs whenever "the link between premises and conclusion depends on some imagined causal connection that probably does not exist" (Hurley, 2015, p. 149). The reason why the gambler's fallacy is so compelling, Hurley argues, is because the gambler mistakes a false cause with a real cause, or sees the independent pattern of the past as having a legitimate effect on the future. "The false cause fallacy is often convincing," Hurley writes, "because it is often difficult to determine whether two phenomena are causally related" (Hurley, 2015, p. 150). We are sometimes tricked by causal connections, especially when they occur over a long period of time or when we do not have all of the information we need to judge the causal relationship. Hurley's analysis suggests that one reason why we are compelled by this fallacy is because we are sometimes confused by whether there is a legitimate causal relationship between the past and the future. Based on this analysis, the gambler commits a lapse in judgment in a similar way to how a superstitious person sees causal relations as going beyond the facts of existence.

Although a person who believes a black cat crossing the street is a bad omen does appear to have committed the false cause fallacy, the superstitious person might nevertheless object that we do not have enough information about the facts of existence, and that once we do grasp these facts better, we will eventually recognize a legitimate causal connection between the black cat and future bad effects. This possibility of ambiguity over false and real causes also reinforces the fallacy. The gambler thinks that perhaps there is skill involved in these games of chance after all, or that the future is not as independent of the past as most people think, or that he or she is "touched" by superhuman perception.

The logician Jonathan Weisberg gives a different answer than Hurley gives to the question of what causes the gambler's fallacy to be so compelling. In *Odds &*

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*Ends*, Weisberg (n.d.) claims that we are compelled to commit the fallacy because of a shift in the point of view of the gambler. When we start to play a game of chance, Weisberg reasons, we begin from the correct insight that it would be quite rare for a fair coin toss to result in heads nine times in a row. When these rare patterns do happen, we are sometimes compelled by the erroneous idea that the next coin toss has a higher probability of going the other way. This is the case because, although the probability of a coin resulting in heads nine times in a row was already quite low, the probability from the point of view at the start of the game of it landing on heads ten times in a row is even less likely. This leads to an inferential error. Assuming the game is fair, the next coin toss has, of course, a fifty percent chance of resulting in heads. Weisberg views this as an issue of point of view (using the roulette wheel in the following quote as an example):

> Imagine the gambler's point of view at two different times: before the ten spins of the wheel, and after. Before, the gambler is contemplating the likelihood of getting ten black spins in a row:
>
> _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _?
>
> From that vantage point, the gambler is exactly right to think it's unlikely these ten spins will all land on black. But now imagine their point of view after observing (to their surprise) the first nine spins all landing black:
>
> BBBBBBBBB_?
>
> Now how likely is it these ten spins will all land black? Well, just one more spin has to land black now to fulfill this unlikely prophecy. So it's not such a long shot anymore. In fact it's a 50-50 shot. Although it was very unlikely the first nine spins would turn out this way, now that they have, it's perfectly possible the tenth will turn out the same. (Weisberg, n.d., see section 4.1)

In different ways, Hurley and Weisberg both effectively explain why the gambler's fallacy is so compelling, even though it is obviously a fallacy of reasoning. Both explanations offer significant insights into the psychology of the gambler. My aim in this article is to outline a third explanation through the recognition that the gambler's fallacy shares a lot in common with Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox. This third explanation is not meant to conflict with Hurley's and Weisberg's insights about the fallacy, but is meant, rather, to be in addition, to help to shed light on the ontological complexities that predispose us, psychologically, to commit the fallacy. I argue that what is at stake in the gambler's fallacy is a misunderstanding about the determination of the future. The gambler's fallacy is about more than an erroneous calculation over the nature of chance in a game. It is about more than the conflation of the gambler's point of view at two different times, one before the game begins and the other after an unusual pattern happens. Certainly, these false cause factors contribute to our desire to commit the fallacy. However, I claim that there is also a modal paradox underlying the gambler's fallacy, and that this paradox should be understood in addition to Hurley's and Weisberg's analysis. The modal paradox has to do with a confusion over the differences between the three grammatical stages of time (the past, present, and future). When we commit the gambler's fallacy, we hold an incongruent view of the future as both indeterminate and yet already determined. Since Aristotle articulated this paradox through his example of a sea battle, I will analyze his description of the problem as well as his solution. I will then outline Kierkegaard's response to Aristotle as a way to explore the paradox and its solutions in more detail. In a final section, I will qualify the relationship between the logical consequences of the Sea Battle Paradox and the psychological disposition of the gambler's fallacy, and argue that the paradox is an important element for only one interpretation of the gambler's fallacy.

The general claim I make is that we learn a lot about the ontology behind and the psychology of the gambler's fallacy when we view the Sea Battle Paradox as a significant component of the fallacy. The subsequent explication I offer of Aristotle's and Kierkegaard's respective solutions to the Sea Battle Paradox, and the comparative contrast that goes along with this, aims to expose, not only the relationship between the gambler's fallacy and the paradox, but also various ways out of the paradox. I hope that this analysis will be valuable to readers who are interested in the historical implications of the gambler's fallacy, but also to readers who want to come to terms with the conceptual nature of Aristotle's paradox and solution, as well as Kierkegaard's solution. As a result of the comparison of the solutions, I claim that, for Aristotle, there is a deep separation between the future and the past, while, for Kierkegaard, emergence in time cannot have the character of necessity at all.

**Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox**

The Sea Battle Paradox is one of the strangest riddles of Aristotle's whole corpus. There have been a number of excellent studies of Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox. For example, see Anscombe (1956), Frede (1985), Hintikka (1964), and Lowe (1980). In division 9 of *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle proposes that because things are always in one way or the other in the past (e.g., the sea battle either happened or it did not happen; the coin toss either landed on heads or tails; the gambler either won or lost at baccarat), isn't it the case that things are determined to happen in one way or the other in the future as well? (Aristotle, 1984, 18a28-19b4). The reason why Aristotle calls this a paradox is because of an incompatibility between two claims

about the future: (1) from the perspective of the future, the possible appears to be in both ways, or at any rate, its way has not yet been decided. Before tomorrow becomes actualized in the present, the event of the sea battle seems not yet to have been determined – it might or might not happen. Before the coin lands in actuality, it has not yet been determined to be either heads or tails. However, (2) it is equally true that whatever comes about in the present will be in only one or the other way. Everything that *is* is always only an affirmation or a denial (by the law of the excluded middle). Future possibilities will also have to affirm or deny, and cannot be in both ways. From the perspective of the past and the present, proponents of the paradox view the future as already one way or another, already an affirmation or a denial. It is determined. We just do not yet have access to which way it is. But this does not mean that it is not already in one of these ways. Once something becomes determined in the present and the past, it appears as if it was always going to be this way.

Bivalence is at the heart of the paradox. The present is always divided into the *is* and the *is not*. The past is always divided into the *was* and the *was not*. Aristotle recognizes this in the opening sentence of *De Interpretatione* 9 when he writes: "with regard to what is and what has been it is necessary for the affirmation or the negation to be true or false." (Aristotle, 1984, 18a28-29). Aristotle emphasizes that this bifurcation happens of necessity. The present and the past must be divided. Actualization is, essentially, the modal version of the law of the excluded middle. "If one person says that something will be and another denies this same thing, it is clearly necessary for one of them to be saying what is true – if every affirmation is true or false; for both will not be the case together under such circumstances." (Aristotle, 1984, 18a35-39). The sea battle either happens or it does not happen. If someone asserts that the sea battle will happen tomorrow, this is either true or false. Moreover, whatever does come about cannot be undone or taken back. In this sense, the present and the past are determined as what they are and were, over against what they are not and were not able to be. Obviously, the sea battle cannot both happen and not happen. The coin toss cannot show both sides. Either the player or the banker wins at baccarat.

We feel the force of the Sea Battle Paradox when we ask, specifically, about the bivalence of the future. Isn't it the case that whatever will be will also either affirm or deny, but not both? "If it is white now," Aristotle explains, "it was true to say earlier that it would be white; so that it was always true to say of anything that has happened that it would be so." (Aristotle, 1984, 18b10-11). The present and the past cannot be undone or taken back. We feel the force of the paradox when we ask, "how could it be different than this in the future?" Isn't it also either one way or the other, either true or false? Doesn't the law of the excluded middle also divide the future in the same way as it divides the present and the past? The coin toss lands on heads. Isn't it true to say earlier that it would land on heads? Certainly, it is determined to be heads once it does land on heads. When we look from the perspective of the present and the past, isn't it the same for the future? The coin toss that lands on heads was always going to do this. As Aristotle says when speaking from the terms of the paradox: "there is nothing to prevent someone's having said ten thousand years beforehand that this would be the case" (Aristotle, 1984, 18b33-34). There is an element of causal determinism built into the paradox. We know perfectly well what the future had in store for us once it is in the present and the past. The gambler knows perfectly well once the cards are revealed whether the banker will have taken the hand or not. Once the present comes about, it cannot be undone. But it then also appears, from the perspective of the paradox, to be determined in the future as well. It seems determined to have always been the way that it is in the present and the past. The Sea Battle Paradox is triggered by the strangeness of this thought.

As a brief digression, let's restate Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox in terms of the analytic philosophy of time debate. This debate has become quite popular with excellent introductory volumes published recently (e.g., Dyke & Bardon, 2013; Curtis & Robson, 2016). The philosophy of time debate originates as a response to McTaggart's classic distinction between the A-theory and B-theory of time, and has to do generally with the question of whether all or only some of the three stages of time can truly be said to exist. While the intricacies of this debate extend beyond the scope of this article, I would like to borrow from one of the fundamental ontological distinctions (the distinction between eternalism and presentism; Curtis & Robson, 2016, p. 67) to help to articulate the Sea Battle Paradox more precisely. Proponents of eternalism claim that all three stages of time – the past, present, and future – equally exist. In contrast, proponents of presentism claim that the present exists but that the past and the future do not exist. Borrowing from this terminology, we can restate Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox as a paradox produced from the conflation of eternalism and presentism. The paradox comes about when we hold both that (1) the future exists and is already predetermined, as per eternalism, but also that (2) the future only exists once it has emerged into actuality in the present, as per presentism. The paradox comes about because these two views are held together but are at the same time incompatible. Either the future exists and is already predetermined, or it is open and does not exist until it becomes present. Yet, the paradox emerges as a form of fallacious thinking from the ambiguous conflation of these two equally compelling and yet incompatible views. The specific result of this conflation of eternalism and presentism is that we have the tendency to view the future as already determined but as not yet revealed to us in the present. Given the deterministic nature of the future, it might seem that the paradox is primarily under the domain of

eternalism; nevertheless, the subtlety here is to recognize that what makes the paradox paradoxical in the first place is the mixture of eternalism and presentism. That the future is already determined is an effect of eternalism. But that the determination of the future has not yet been revealed (and potentially cannot be revealed, although the gambler disputes this detail) is an effect of presentism.

Aristotle attempts to solve the Sea Battle Paradox by arguing that although the law of the excluded middle is necessary, neither side of the exclusion, that is, neither the affirmation nor the denial, is necessary of itself. In this way, Aristotle can be interpreted to reject the eternalism element of the paradox, which makes the position incompatible. It could not be otherwise than that the sea battle either will or will not happen. But that it will or will not happen remains undetermined until the present moment, when either its affirmation or denial comes into existence through actualization. If something is merely possible in the future, it might be but it also might not be. This conception of the contingent future lingers even in the present and the past. What is and was cannot be undone, of course, but we also know that whatever is or was could have been otherwise, in the sense that the future could have been either way. Tomorrow becomes today. The sea battle happens. Now it cannot be undone, and yet, of course, it could have been its opposite. The present and the past are marked in this way as much by a conception of what had been future contingency, of a contingency which has been determined in the present and the past only because of actualization.

Essentially, Aristotle claims that actualization is itself the embodiment of the law of the excluded middle, and that because actualization must occur, things must come into existence in one way or another. The future contains multiple possibilities of all sorts of ways that things could go. But in actuality, the way is always one. What was a multiplicity becomes a singularity. To actualize the future means either to affirm or deny but not both.

Does the affirmation (or the denial) *remain* true or does it *become* true? To claim that it remains true and that there should be a way to know this in advance is to immerse oneself in the paradox. Aristotle's solution, in contrast, builds from the assumption that the affirmation (or the denial) *becomes* true with the actualization of the future in the present, but that, unlike the past, which can no longer be undone, the future has not yet bifurcated and a determination has not yet emerged.

Aristotle concludes from this that the future is ontologically distinct from the past and the present. The future cannot be said to fully exist. It only exists in a determinate way once it has come into existence in the present as the actual. A by-product of his solution is that, while the present and the past share the commonality of being determinate and therefore, in a sense, irrevocable and necessary, the future is altogether different. Aristotle's strategy for solving the Sea Battle Paradox is, therefore, quite simple: because the tenses of time are ontologically distinct, and the future has not yet been determined, it would be a mistake to characterize the future as having the same necessity that comes from the irrevocability of the past. In other words, we should not conflate the necessity of actualization (e.g., either the sea battle will or will not happen), the necessity of the excluded middle, with the necessity of determinate actualization (e.g., the sea battle must happen). Anyone who is preoccupied with the paradox – the gambler, for instance – and who projects the certainty of the past onto the future as well, fundamentally distorts the nature of modal and temporal reality. Aristotle recognizes that the past and the present are determinate and cannot be undone. The mistake of the Sea Battle Paradox comes about, however, when we project the determinateness of the past and the present onto the future. By marking off a significant difference between the past and the future in terms of existence and non-existence, Aristotle attempts to save us from this distortion of reality.

## Kierkegaard's Response to Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox

What is the change, if there is a change at all, when something comes into existence? Does anything really transform in the process of actualization? Is there a difference between the past and the future? Is the past somehow more necessary than the future? Is the future, conversely, somehow more contingent than the past? These are the sorts of questions that Kierkegaard asks in his chapter "Is the Past More Necessary than the Future? Or Has the Possible, by Having Become Actual, Become More Necessary than It Was?" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 73.) Although Kierkegaard does not mention it by name, it is clear that his chapter is intended to be a response to Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox.

We should recognize that, by asking these questions about what happens when something comes into existence, Kierkegaard is not asking about transformations that occur *from within existence*. He is not asking about the change from one determinate state of being into another determinate state. Instead, he is asking the more elusive and yet more substantive question of whether there is any real change in the constitution of something when it goes from possibility to actuality, from the future to the past, or from non- or projected existence into existence. Because transformations that occur *from within existence* do not have the quality of coming into existence from a state of non-existence, these sorts of transformations, while prevalent in everyday experience, are not of the same subject matter as that which Kierkegaard addresses in the chapter. In contrast, the investigation Kierkegaard proposes has to do with the modal and temporal nature of things, which change in status. But then the question arises of what kind of change this is.

If we follow Aristotle's reasoning in his response to the Sea Battle Paradox, our first instinct would be to answer Kierkegaard's questions by asserting that there is, indeed, something that changes in the transformation from possibility into actuality, as from the future to the present. There is a change in terms of necessity. What is merely possible can or can *not* be. It is open and free of determination. However, the present and the past, in becoming actual, have become determined. They can no longer be otherwise than they are. When presenting this view of an Aristotelian ontological distinction between the past and the future, Kierkegaard echoes the phrase from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "what's done cannot be undone" (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 222; Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 75). People who are preoccupied with the Sea Battle Paradox find themselves in conflict about whether this determination should also carry over into the future. In contrast, people who follow Aristotle's rebuttal respond to Kierkegaard by saying that, yes, the past is more necessary than the future. Aristotle's solution to the riddle comes from his claim that there is a significant ontological distinction to be made between the past and the future. The past is bound together with necessity in a way that the future is not.

In contrast to Aristotle, and as an alternative solution to the paradox, Kierkegaard claims that coming into existence can have nothing to do with the necessary:

> Can the necessary come into existence? Coming into existence is a change, but since the necessary is always related to itself and is related to itself in the same way, it cannot be changed at all. All coming into existence is a *suffering* and the necessary cannot suffer, cannot suffer the suffering of actuality – namely, that the possible (not merely the possible that is excluded but even the possibility that is accepted) turns out to be nothing the moment it becomes actual, for possibility is *annihilated* by actuality. Precisely by coming into existence, everything that comes into existence demonstrates that it is not necessary, for the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary *is*. (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 74)

In order to articulate the paradox at all, Aristotle has to concede that it is possible for the necessary to come into existence. Kierkegaard argues, to the contrary, that the necessary never comes into existence. "The actual," he writes, "is no more necessary than the possible, for the necessary is absolutely different from both" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 75). According to Kierkegaard, Aristotle makes a category mistake when he claims that "everything necessary is possible". For example, Aristotle claims in the *Metaphysics* Book *Theta* 9.8B that eternal substances (*eidos*) are the perfect and total unity of actuality and possibility (potentiality, *dunamis*) together (Aristotle, 1984, 1050b7-1051a3). This conception of the necessary has continued from Aristotle into the contemporary analytic tradition with the axiom of necessity, which states that if something is necessary, then it is, of course, also possible. Modal logicians claim, as a basic inference of modality, that anything necessary infers that it is also possible (Fitting and Mendelsohn, 1998, p. 5). The implication here is that while the future is not yet a unity of actuality and possibility, in the sense that the future remains unactualized until it is present, the present and the past are, for Aristotle, a unity of the actual and the possible together. They are the possible once it becomes actualized, a process that both removes the contrariety (i.e., the notion that the future is open to both affirmation and denial) and also makes the quality of the event concrete and factual. This unity of actuality and possibility is at the same time a specific conception of the necessary, a form produced from the irrevocability of the present and the past. Kierkegaard rejects this specific conception of the necessary as the unity of actuality and possibility when he writes: "how could there be formed from this heterogeneity [of possibility and actuality] a unity that would be necessity, which is not a qualification of being but of essence, since the essence of the necessity is to be?" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 74).

Kierkegaard's solution to the paradox is, in this sense, quite different from Aristotle's solution. While Aristotle argues that there is a stark separation between the future and the past, Kierkegaard claims, instead, that the past is no more necessary than the future, that the actuality of possibility is always a process of coming into existence, and that the necessary is absolutely different and cut off from this process since it always only *is*. Kierkegaard offers a distinct modal vision of reality, which is quite unique in its own right. The necessary is not the product of combining actuality and possibility in some way; nor is it a limitation of the possible; nor is it an affirmation of the actual. Although it is true that the past cannot be altered or changed, this unchangeability is altogether different from the necessary. According to Kierkegaard, the tenses of time, as well as the constant emergence of actuality out of possibility, and the constant loss (or, in Kierkegaard's strong term, "annihilation") of the possible – are expressions of the freedom of concrete reality. Coming into existence is the embodiment and proof of contingency. Reality is completely divorced from the necessary. It is the constant enactment of freedom itself. This makes Kierkegaard a strong advocate of indeterminism, while Aristotle is still a moderate advocate of determinism, in the one sense that he views the necessary to be the unity of actuality and possibility, and views the past to be this unity as well.

Proponents of Aristotle's solution share a commonality with people who are initially tricked by the Sea Battle Paradox. Advocates of both of these positions make the same mistake of assuming that the present and the past have anything whatsoever to do

with the necessary. The only difference for Aristotle is that the necessity of the past does not carry over into the future. This saves Aristotle from the paradox, but according to Kierkegaard's account, Aristotle continues to repeat some of the same thinking of the paradox.

Kierkegaard's own solution – which completely divorces the necessary from the relationship between actuality and possibility – has the advantage of both rejecting the paradox while also rejecting the claim that the past is somehow more necessary than the future. In this way, Kierkegaard's response salvages the insight, which is central to the paradox in the first place, that the future is not ontologically distinct from the other tenses of time. Instead, he takes the necessary out of the matter altogether. The paradox emerges when we say that the future is as necessary as the past. Kierkegaard rejects this by saying that neither the past nor the future has anything to do with the necessary. Possibility is that which can (or can not) come into existence. So possibility has nothing to do with the necessary. This is Kierkegaard's reasoning. Aristotle makes the mistake of applying the necessary to a specific type of possibility. He claims that eternal things are the perfect coincidence of possibility and actuality together, and that the necessary itself is the absolute unity of possibility and actuality. According to Kierkegaard, Aristotle should have said that, because the necessary does not come into existence at all, there is no way to apply a concept of possibility to it. Since it is outside of emergence in time, the necessary should not be viewed as a unity of possibility and actuality. Conversely, although the determinations of the past and the present cannot be undone, it would be a mistake to conflate their irrevocability with the necessary.

In doing this brief explication of Aristotle's and Kierkegaard's respective solutions to the Sea Battle Paradox, my aim is not to argue in favour of one or the other solution, but rather to begin to explore how these various responses to the paradox prepare the way for a diagnosis of the gambler's fallacy. Aristotle's initial solution can be viewed as plausible in the sense that, by arguing that there is a stark ontological distinction to be made between the future and the past, Aristotle acknowledges the indeterminacy of the future while, at the same time, interprets the past as irrevocable. The upshot of Kierkegaard's subsequent revision of Aristotle's solution is that, by removing the concept of necessity from the stages of time entirely, Kierkegaard claims that the emergence of time is the constant expression of freedom. As a further development of this analysis, let's turn to the question of the relationship between the Sea Battle Paradox and the gambler's fallacy.

## The Relationship between the Sea Battle Paradox and the Gambler's Fallacy

Aristotle's Sea Battle Paradox is usually considered to be primarily a logical paradox about semantics. The paradox is usually interpreted to be about the truth value of statements in the future. Is it the case that the event of the sea battle – which will either happen or not happen tomorrow – already has truth value in the future? And if it does already have truth value, is it somehow possible to know this truth value ahead of time? Based on this interpretation, we might come to the conclusion that the problem Aristotle has uncovered deals with *logical* necessitation only, but does not thereby bear significance for a gambler who is caught up in the psychological dimensions of false thinking about the determination and causation of the future. But I disagree with the exclusivity of this interpretation. I contend that, although Aristotle's paradox is primarily a logical and semantic problem, it is nevertheless productive to apply it to the psychological condition of the gambler's fallacy. There is nothing in Aristotle's text to suggest that the logical implications of the paradox cannot also be applied to causation and psychology. After all, logical fallacies are, generally, causal and psychological applications of logical structures. Moreover, there is a real upshot to viewing the logical complications that arise from the paradox as a central element of the fallacy. We gain a better grasp of the intricacies of the fallacy if we expose the underlying ontological complexities inherent in the temporal and modal nature of time.

However, I am not claiming that the Sea Battle Paradox is the same as the gambler's fallacy, nor that the logical implications of the paradox alone lead directly or sufficiently to the psychology of the gambler. I am only claiming that the anticipation brought about by the assumptions that the future is determined, that its determination has not yet been revealed, but that it could possibly be revealed ahead of time – is one of the central conditions of the gambler's fallacy. The gambler's fallacy comes about when the gambler assumes that the future is already determined but that some work would have to be done on the part of the gambler to reveal this future determination in the present. The logical implication of the Sea Battle Paradox is, therefore, only one of the elements that contribute to the complex nature of the fallacy. The other main element of the fallacy is a false cause inference between the patterns of the past and the projected patterns of the future. This second element should be viewed as an addition to the applied logical structure of the Sea Battle Paradox. It is this "false cause" element of the fallacy, which, in different ways, Hurley and Weisberg both effectively come to terms with in their respective analyses. What needs to be added to their analyses is the ontological dimension, which leads to the gambler's supposition that the future *should be* as determinate as the past, however difficult this determination is to reveal in the present.

If we look closely at the details of this additional false cause inference, which combines with the complexities of the logical paradox to produce the fallacy, we will see that there are really two different types of false cause

inference that are common to gamblers, but that only one type leads to the gambler's fallacy proper:

(1) A determinate pattern of the future can be *revealed* based on a determinate pattern that is known to be true of the past, even though the game is a game of pure chance.

(2) By blowing on dice or somehow channelling luck, the gambler can *influence* the determinate result of the future.

I contend that only (1) is the gambler's fallacy proper. (2) is a different type of false cause fallacy, which is often related to games of chance and gambling, but which should not be mistaken for the gambler's fallacy, and which does not draw from the logical implications of the Sea Battle Paradox. To see this, let's look at (1) and (2) in more detail.

Based on (1), the determinate pattern in the future already exists and the gambler can learn to see this pattern by interpreting the pattern of the past and coming to recognize what the past shows about the future. In this respect, the gambler's activity is passive. The gambler does not attempt to influence or change the results of the determination of the future, since this determination is assumed to have already been fixed, but merely to reveal these results in the present, to see them clearly, and to gamble accordingly. However, based on (2), the gambler attempts to determine the result of the future by taking an action (e.g., blowing on the dice, etc.). This is a significantly different type of false cause fallacy because, in (2), the gambler tries to actively change the determination of the future, rather than to passively reveal the determination. The implication here is that, based on (2), the future is not already determined, or at least not completely determined, since there might still be a way to influence the outcome. (2) is still a false cause fallacy, nevertheless, because the gambler mistakenly thinks that blowing on dice or somehow channelling luck is a viable way to dictate the course of a game, which is, in fact, purely based on chance. While this is a popular false cause fallacy that relates to gambling, since it draws on the idea that the gambler can change the course of events, it should be recognized as a different type of fallacy from (1), which embodies the pure form of the gambler's fallacy.

Even when we focus on (1), we still cannot say that the Sea Battle Paradox is the same as the gambler's fallacy. All we can say is that the logical implications of the Sea Battle Paradox help to produce the psychological attitude that the future is determined and that work would have to be done – e.g., deciphering the patterns of the past and relating these to the future – to reveal this determination. The gambler's fallacy combines this with the assumption that there is a causal inference between the patterns of the past and the future. The gambler assumes that the past, present, and future are really one interconnected series of determinations, while forgetting the fact that the game is pure chance and that the determinations of the past cannot show us anything about the future. As a by-product of assuming that the future is already determined, the gambler assumes also that there is more consistency between the three stages of time than there is. Based on this attitude, the difference between the future and the past is merely the difference of revelation. The future and the past are both equally determined, and are both thoroughly interconnected in this determinate pattern; however, the future has not yet been revealed, while the past has. From this perspective, actualization is merely the process of revelation, not the process of emergence or transformation. In this respect, the gambler's fallacy comes about when the gambler thinks that it is possible through skilful interpretation of the past to uncover the future ahead of its actualization. The gambler tries to view the future as if it were a stage of time that does not have to undergo transformation. This is fallacious, either because the purely random determinations of the future already exist but cannot be uncovered ahead of time (which fits a coherent model of eternalism), or because, as Aristotle and Kierkegaard both argue in their respective responses, the future has not yet been determined.

Based on the Aristotelian response to the Sea Battle Paradox, we view the gambler as someone who projects necessity and predetermination onto the future by conflating the ontological distinctions between the tenses of time, in other words, by projecting the necessity of the past inappropriately onto the future. Or, based on Kierkegaard's response to Aristotle, we view the gambler as a character who fundamentally misunderstands the ontological nature of "coming into existence." The gambler is the person who forgets that the past has come into existence, and from this forgetfulness, thinks that the future can be combined with necessity, as if it were a matter of skill whether the gambler can learn to see how the future will fork.

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# 'Almost the Same but not Quite': The Camouflage of Play in Digital Gambling Iconography

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**Abstract:** Digitally mediated social networking is now an ordinary aspect of everyday life and gambling platforms are designed accordingly. This article explores how changing iconography has facilitated gambling's rapid integration within social media and interactive entertainment products and platforms. While there is a substantial literature in cultural studies of digital video games and virtual worlds, most of the academic literature on gambling addresses clinical and regulatory challenges associated with problem gambling. As a consequence, the role of visual iconography, gameplay, narrative and soundscapes in constructing cultural spaces and products of gambling has been largely neglected. Critically engaging with established and emerging theories of mimesis and play, we explore how visual design facilitates the growth of new markets for gambling in a digital culture that privileges interactive forms of consumption.

*Keywords:* gambling, iconography, digital media, camouflage, social identities, mimesis

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## Introduction

Our aim in this article is to develop a theoretical framework to account for how social relations of power operate within and through the iconography (visual design and its systems of symbolization) deployed in digital platforms of gambling. Our study of the systems of images and symbols mobilized in different kinds of gambling platforms will show how and to what effect cultural meanings of play are rearticulated through digital gambling products that are increasingly integrated with social media and video games. We will also explore how these meanings seep into other spheres where money and risk converge, such as global capital and casual stock trading. We argue that, rather than being either distinct from or convergent with other forms of commercialized entertainment, gambling spaces and products are increasingly shaped through processes of camouflage. Our conclusion explores implications of this research for existing theories of gambling and play.

## Theorising Gambling Iconography

Gerda Reith argues that, until quite recently, gambling games have been "characterized essentially by their separateness, both temporally and spatially, from everyday life" (2006, p. 257). Gambling's graphic design emerged from specific values, meanings and spatial regimes generated over three centuries of more or less strictly regulated games for money in Western Europe and its settler colonies (Huizinga, 1955; Caillois, 2001; Goffman, 2006; Kingma, 2011). While regulated commercial gambling is now recognized and tolerated in many jurisdictions as a legitimate business and a valued contributor to state revenues, it is not without criticism and reliably produces news of corruption, compulsive consumption, or fraud. Embedding gambling within ubiquitous platforms of digital, online and mobile play has become a profitable strategy for gambling providers and has advanced the cultural normalization of risk-taking activities (Young, 2010, p. 258). As gambling products change through their entanglement with other kinds of media platforms and texts, they come to resemble environments with which consumers are already familiar. Customized iconography enables developers of products – including videogames and financial apps – that are not currently classified or regulated as gambling to incorporate features that invite gambling behaviours.

Before proceeding further, we need to address a paradox that has vexed gambling and play researchers

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over the generations. How is it possible for gambling to be experienced both as inextricable from everyday life and a fun site of escape from its demands? A useful starting point is to revisit Roger Caillois' (2001) account of play as a sphere of free, separate and unproductive social interaction governed by rules and make-belief. Caillois provides four typologies of play, much referenced in game studies: agonistic, aleatory, mimicry and vertigo. Agonistic play describes active competitions of strength, intellect and skill between players; aleatory play foregrounds chance over the agency of the player; games of simulation or mimicry involve a loss of self through identification with another human or non-human entity, such as an avatar in digital environments; games of vertigo or ilinx produce physical disorientation or heightened states of consciousness such as trance or spirit possession. This expansive account of play is not only useful in contexts where the border between platforms and practices of gaming and gambling have become blurred; it also provides a way to understand power relations involved in this development (see Young, 2010, p. 260). Below we will see how synergies between transnational gambling, entertainment and social media industries have enabled products to be camouflaged as sites of play, fun and "safe risk".

While "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 2006) is one way to understand the blurring of distinctions between media delivering gambling, entertainment and play, we will argue that camouflage is a strategy used by commercial interests within an agonistic competition for players/consumers. For various legal, political and cultural reasons the convergence of gaming and gambling is incomplete and, arguably, impossible. In research on social gaming developers and online gambling executives, anthropologist Rebecca Cassidy found that apps developed for social gamers were more likely to offer expansionary spaces of self-development and collaboration, with world-making and fun rather than taking winning and financial gain as the primary focus (Cassidy, 2013). Thus, she concluded: "The encounter between social gaming and gambling is framed by social and organizational differences …and profoundly different understandings of player motivation" (Cassidy, 2013, p. 82). Rather than flattening important epistemological and moral distinctions between gambling and gaming by overemphasizing processes of convergence, the concept of camouflage allows exploration of the ambivalence between gambling as a term associated with adult entertainment, greed and vice – on one hand – and play as a term with connotations of creativity, childhood and wonder – on the other.

As new opportunities for gambling, finance, and play become continuously available through apps on our mobile devices, heightened uncertainty arises about where playful recreation ends and extractive commerce begins. Gambling, understood as a transaction that involves the purchasing of risk, is camouflaged as benign, everyday entertainment. Our definition of camouflage as applied to gambling will draw on several theoretical sources. Gregory Bateson's account of mimesis and meta-communication (1972/2006) uses the example of animals "play-fighting", both as training for actual combat and as combat in itself. In human contexts where cultural meanings and social practices are elaborated through language, play is a meta-communicative activity that is equally unstable (Bateson, 1972/2006, p. 319). We also draw on Jacques Lacan's reflections on mimesis to understand how commercial gambling operators operate within and actively shape shifting cultural boundaries between gambling and play: "It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (cited in Bhabha, 1984, p. 125). And we are influenced by Homi Bhabha's investigation of the intersubjective ambivalence generated by encounters with that which is "almost the same but not quite" (1984, p. 130). At the level of player/consumer experience, this ambivalence prompts unsettling and vertiginous questions such as: Is this just a game? Am I playing for real? Is this still fun? Who is really in control? How do I get out? Should I go 'all in'? After briefly mapping some historical shifts in gambling iconography below, we will present two detailed case studies of the camouflage of play.

**Domesticating Gambling Iconography**

Historically, gambling has occupied a liminal position in Western cultures, distinct both from more "improving" recreational spheres of games and play as well as from the serious spheres of industrial and government activity. Gambling iconography has long had gender and race-based connotations. As Jackson Lears argues in his cultural history of luck in America, agonistic games were initially linked with white men and aleatory games with women and African-American people (2003, p. 99). While the former was associated with a "culture of control" and the latter with a "culture of luck", both kinds of gambling were seen as a potential threat to the "domestic ideal" that developed in the nineteenth century and persisted through the twentieth (Lears, 2003, p. 86). He describes the domestic ideal as "… an intimate providential order, where risk and uncertainty were kept at bay by love… [The home] was on the front line of the cultural war against chance – an agency of progress, a means for preparing productive rational citizens" (Lears, 2003, p. 172). After the prohibition era, a division of space emerged to exclude practices of gambling from domesticated spaces of everyday production and consumption. Regulated gambling was contained in flourishing casino resorts of cities like Las Vegas, Reno and Atlantic City, far from the mostly white American suburbs where the culture of control governed the family and related social institutions. A distinctive cultural iconography for

gambling was elaborated through urban planning, architecture, analogue gambling devices and interior design. These traditions of gambling and urbanism have been exported to Macao and other parts of the world via the establishment of venues owned by transnational operators such as Wynn and MGM.

An important characteristic of the iconography of gambling spaces during the second half of the twentieth century was its ambivalent relationship to other cultural and historical spaces within the Western imagination. For example, the luxury of the casino resort was almost the same but not quite as the mis-en-scene of spaces of games for money associated with European aristocracy; themed resorts in Las Vegas were modelled on the attractions of Disneyland, archaeological sites such as the Egyptian pyramids, European cities like Paris and reproduced the experience and amenities of mega shopping malls. Pervasive cultural codes of luxury, excitement and entertainment not only demarcated gambling spaces as physically separate from everyday life; they arguably encouraged consumers to remain cognizant of gambling's unique risks. However, since the mid-1990s visual elements of analogue gambling cultures have become important in making digital spaces feel familiar and welcoming, yet exciting, to consumers using desktop computers.

The confluence of deregulation within many national (e.g., Australia, Canada) and subnational (e.g., Nevada and Missouri in the United States) jurisdictions and the rise of transnational casino resorts, together with the upsurge of digital media platforms and practices, had profound effects on gambling's graphic and aural design. While increasingly sophisticated visualizations of space are appearing in online gambling platforms that resemble virtual worlds and video games, digital gambling has become ubiquitous in casinos and other physical venues. This is not limited to electronic gambling machines; digital visualization processes and platforms are increasingly mediating traditional table games like roulette, sic bo, baccarat and blackjack via large screens in venues. Licensing deals with transnational entertainment industries, mainly Hollywood studios and other U.S.-based cultural industries, have transformed the sights, sounds and feel of many gambling products in venues and on desktop and mobile devices.

**Figure 1**. Slot machine themed after the Ellen DeGeneres Show


Image retrieved from: Nyphinix13: SLOT-a-h'lic's Channel, "–GT - The Ellen Degeneres Show 3 Different Slot Bonuses BIG WIN", YouTube, January 18, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU03zbG8870 (Accessed August 8, 2016.)

The profitable marriage between gambling, Hollywood and celebrity culture (Figure 1) forged in the mid-twentieth century is evident on almost every terrestrial casino floor today. We might observe a Michael Jackson-themed electronic gaming machine featuring state-of-the-art audio-visual and haptic effects on the casino floor. Or we might investigate a licensed slot machine, based on the hit television series *Game of Thrones* which includes several screens of information packaged as "rules" even though its outcomes are based on a random number generator. This kind of imagery is still referenced in many digital gambling spaces such as online casinos, social casino apps, online sports betting sites and slot machines. Browsing the internet, we can observe celebrities recruited as spokespersons for online gambling operators, such as Samuel L. Jackson, who in the past has promoted the online and mobile sports betting platform Bet365. These ads are often elaborately produced and resemble environments in Hollywood high-concept sci-fi cinema. However, gambling's infiltration of media spaces and platforms in everyday life has not entirely eroded prior (and morally loaded) distinctions between the cultures of control and cultures of chance identified by Lears (2003). As we will see below, gambling iconography continues to appeal to and reproduce embodied forms of social identity.

**The Iconography of Digital Gamble-Play Media**

Gambling effectively migrated to mobile devices in 2007, when the iPhone was launched. This process has seen technocultural shifts such as the development of iconography based on feminized values of cuteness, romance and domesticity. Consider the effort by gambling providers to appeal to young women and other fans of "cute culture". Designers endeavour to make gambling look and feel harmless by incorporating elements of popular culture and imagery that infantilizes adult games of chance. In cute slots, imagery that we might ordinarily associate with children, along with the symbolic dichotomy of care/domination that the gambler establishes with animal characters featured on and in these games, is an essential part of the amusement, as is the sociality that may be released by cuteness.

The use of cuteness (or *kawaii*, as it is understood in Japanese-influenced global culture) as rhetoric is evident, for example, in a game called *OMG Kittens!* produced by SG Interactive, which frames gambling with images of cats, collars, milk bottles and yarn (Figure 2). Rather than being merely decorative, these visual elements attach affects to gambling by invoking childhood, domesticity, and a simplistic idea of femininity and human-animal relations. Reels roll and a tabby kitten appears on the screen when the player is lucky enough to hit a jackpot and music begins to play. The advertising for *OMG! Kittens* is similarly focused on cute affects as it asks: "Who couldn't use a cuddle from time to time - especially from Mr. Whiskers, Tiger, or Bubbles?". The gamer is then invited to "Come and enjoy the incredible cuteness and potential for big wins in *OMG! Kittens*" (Hollywood Casino, 2016) thereby explicitly invoking the affective potential of cuteness in its offer to the consumer.

**Figure 2.** OMG! Kittens slot machine


Image retrieved from: SDGuy 1234, "LIVE PLAY on OMG Kittens Slot Machine", YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSentSHhDpM (Accessed July 17, 2022.)

Because this interface, which works across various platforms and devices, is themed around kittens, it falls within the tradition of cute domesticated animals in television shows and movies, as well as intertextual cultural forms such as cute cat memes and the extremely popular genre of cat YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok videos. As a dominant aesthetic of digital spaces and a *de facto* cute species (O'Meara, 2014; Wittkower, 2012), domestic felines have inspired numerous memes, videos and remixes that are now commonplace in participatory and fandom cultures. Their incorporation within gambling iconography contributes to a broader process of domesticating commercial gambling industries, which normalizes games of chance. In both of these examples, we can see a repertoire of culturally familiar iconography being used to generate a sense of comfort for players within commercial gambling spaces. This reveals an orchestrated effort to use other media consumption practices, brands and narratives as a camouflaged gateway into gambling. As such it exemplifies processes of camouflage at the heart of platforms that Albarrán-Torres (2018) calls "digital gamble-play" media.

Digital gamble-play is the product of two related but distinct cultural processes. First, gambling practices become more game-like. Second, certain gaming practices, such as social casino apps, adopt the appearance of gambling. In one dimension, the "fun" aspects of gambling are privileged over winning or losing, establishing new dynamics of seduction and control. In another dimension, gambling practices are commonly staged in ways that resemble video games. As gambling becomes increasingly interlinked to other forms of entertainment media, corporations are further able to sell products that equate "fun" to the consumption of what organizational theorist Robert P. Gephart calls financial "safe risk" (2001). A fundamental trait of the "spectacular society" in which gamble-play operates is "the use of simulations to produce safe risk as a consumable service or commodity" (Gephart, 2001, p. 141). Gephart explains:

> Financial safe risk emerges in images that depict organizationally produced financial or economic activities, services or products as safe, fun forms of entertainment and investment which can be legitimately pursued with limited concern for or likelihood of extensive problems or negative financial impacts. (2011, p. 146)

Digital gamble-play platforms de-emphasize traditional gambling iconography's focus on monetary exchange (with chips, cash and so on) and the associated affective economy of winning and losing. Instead, they highlight immaterial pleasures and fantasy values of entertainment generated by Hollywood and other global cultural industries. This has seen brands such as Caesars Entertainment become incorporated into the everyday life of social media users through gaming apps where players can gamble for play currency. Puncturing the *magic circle* (Huizinga, 1955; Moore, 2011; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) that historically separated gambling from everyday routines, these products let real and simulated wagering intermesh with the player's daily activities.

We are not simply seeing a proliferation of digital gambling iconography: Iconography is being used to make gambling products initially appear to us as something else, as a space of online erotica, a space of playful engagement with our favorite movie or television show, or a space of ethnic identification. So how is iconography working to reconfigure gambling spaces and products as familiar aspects of entertainment and social media consumption? And how are existing and emerging forms of identity being reinforced and contested through the camouflage of play in gambling sites and platforms?

One of the most resilient aspects of digital gambling iconography is a dependence on stereotypes anchored in histories of sexual and colonial conquest and cultural appropriation. Consider, for example, the popular product *Día de los Muertos / Day of the Dead*, which exhorts players to "Score big and take your winnings to the grave!". IGT promotes this game as a "heavily-themed graphic package [which] celebrates the popular Mexican religious holiday, 'Dia de Muertos'". This machine features 3D graphics of skeletons, mariachi bands, pan de muerto (a traditional pastry) and altars for the dead, a free interpretation of the hybrid Indigenous-Catholic celebration. While this title could certainly be read as an example of exotica in slot machine design (we can think of other slots such *as More Chilli!*, *Mystic Panda* or *Gypsy Moon*), *Day of the Dead* is directed at the Latino community in the US, particularly Mexican-Americans, as well as Latinx tourists. This cultural identification is further instigated by the availability of a Spanish language version, *Día de los Muertos*, in some US states, including the gambling hub of Nevada, which in pre-COVID times had a large influx of affluent Mexican tourists.

The following section presents two case studies to explain how processes of camouflage work to both unsettle and reinforce regimes of value and social distinction in digital gamble-play. We will see that, as digital gamble-play negotiates tensions between user agency driven by enjoyment (gaming) and industry calculation driven by profit (gambling) it moves towards the exploitation of compulsive play and compulsive communication. This makes digital gamble-play a powerful site of "signifying practices" (Hall, 1997). Below we explore a detailed example of iconographic adaptation that traverses a theme from a source in popular literature, through iterations in Hollywood television and cinema, to a gambling machine and an online slots game oriented towards adult male players.

**Sex/ism and the City:**
**Gender, Space and Power in Digital Gamble-Play**

The following example illustrates the entanglement of gambling iconography with a "post-feminist" politics of gender as elaborated by Angela McRobbie:

> [P]ost-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. (2004, p. 255)

This broader ideological context has re-empowered patriarchal fantasies of erotic possession and domination, which circulate as (apparently) benign signifiers within the digital landscape of entertainment and play of which gambling industries increasingly form part.

*Sex and the City* – adapted from Candice Bushnell's book, written as a collection of newspaper columns – was a publishing hit from the late 1990s and quickly adapted as a long-running HBO television series (Bushnell, 1996). The narrative was later extended in two movies in 2008 and 2010, and in 2021 HBO launched a reboot, *And Just Like That*, with three members of the original cast. In 2010, in a licensing agreement between HBO and IGT, a *Sex and the City* slot machine was launched (Figure 3). Although the game is also available to play online (Figure 4), the product designed for venues is distinctive and popular; unusually tall and visually striking, its multiple "frames" appear like windows of the iconic New York skyscrapers in the series on which it is based. Featuring voice-overs from the show's leading man (Mr. Big, a (pre-presidency) Trump-like financier) and based on characters from the hit production, the game was clearly designed for fans of the franchise. As IGT's Chief Marketing Officer put it: "We're thrilled to offer fans and slot players this superior gaming experience. The slot machine is filled with all the fun and fashion we've come to expect from Sex and the City, and it's the perfect accessory to any girls' night out at the casino" (IGT press release, 2010). Note the metaphoric description of a gambling product as a fashion "accessory".

**Figure 3.** IGT's *Sex and the City* slot machine cabinet


Image retrieved from: FAMNYCMAGEDITOR, "Sex and the City slot game: a huge hit among fans," F.A.M.E NYC Magazine, September 4, 2014. http://famenycmagazine.com/2014/09/04/sex-and-the-city-slot-game-a-huge-hit-among-fans/ (Accessed July 4, 2015.)

**Figure 4.** IGT's *Sex and the City* online slot machine


Notice the visual and thematic similarity with Sex and the City which incorporates the narrative of the popular TV show into the gameplay. Promotional image. Image retrieved from: http://media.igt.com/images/gl_12438.jpg (Accessed July 4 ,2015,)

**Figure 5.** Live Casino Direct's *Gems and the City* online slot machine


Image retrieved from: http://www.livecasinodirect.com/games/online/gems-city/ (Accessed 27 October 2014.)

This framing of gambling as an "accessory" provides a thematic link to an online gambling product titled *Gems and the City* promoted by gambling portal livecasinodirect (Figure 5). While the television series, film and gambling machine are licensed adaptations, the substitution of "gems" for "sex" designates a distinct product. Intertextual connections with the game and the earlier book, television series, film and slot machine are evident in the promotional blurb:

> Two model brunettes and two beautiful blondes line the reels of *Gems and the City* slot machine. Dazzling in diamonds, the girls as well as the poker run symbols are studded with diamonds and the images are all colorful, sparkly, and soft with curves and sensual slot style. (Live Casino Direct, n.d.)

As with the licensed gambling product, the iconography is clearly coded as feminine, romantic and playful. References to diamonds evoke questions to do with "marriage and the modern woman" that drive the narrative of *Sex and the City*.

A third game, *Girls and the City*, developed by Slotomedia, is promoted through Facebook via Suggested Posts that, through an algorithmic selection process, exposes individuals to content based on their past activities, social interactions and profile in the social networking site (Figure 6). While this game is anchored in *Sex and the City*'s intertextual universe, it clearly appeals to other kinds of desires and players. Advertised as "Fun Australia Games for Men", *Girls and the City* employs quite different cultural codes from those in the texts described above, containing images of women that resemble erotic dancers in adult clubs, sites of sexual-economic exchange with their own codes and set relationships of power (Frank, 2007).

**Figure 6.** Promotional material for the *Girls and the City* online slots.


Contrary to Sex and the City, this product is designed for male players.
Image retrieved from: http://slotomedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/screen-02-1.jpg (Accessed July 4, 2015.)

While the games discussed previously refer to relatively benign pleasures of female bonding, heterosexual marriage and conspicuous consumption in the Big Apple, *Girls and the City* brings together two offline cultural spaces, the casino and the strip club, that are often associated with crime, abuse, vice and problematic forms of consumption. Strip clubs are commonly depicted in other digital entertainment platforms, most noticeably mainstream video games such as *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar Gamers, 2008), *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010), *Hitman Absolution* (Square Enix, 2012) and *Metro Last Light* (Deep Silver, 2013). Whereas in *Girls and the City* user agency consists in gambling (triggering the virtual reels) for play money, in these video games, players can demand lap dances, beat up or even kill the women. In both instances, however, fun is associated with some sort of violent male control over women's bodies.

*Girls and the City*'s gameplay is described in quite different terms compared to the gambling platforms discussed previously. The *Sex and the City* slot machine and the *Gems and the City* online games are described in promotional material with reference to gendered aesthetic and entertainment values. In contrast, *Girls and the City* is described in ways that emphasize details of play, winning and voyeuristic pleasure. References to addiction and sexual conquest trigger connotations of

agonistic and aleatory gambling practices, as well as video gaming:

> While the sensuality is there, it is very much understated and is not in your face. As such, it enhances the feel of the slot machine and allows the user to focus on playing the game, rather than being distracted by titillation… It is sexy, sensual and luxurious yes, but it also is most importantly, a very enjoyable and addictive 5-reel pokie with plenty of Wilds and Scatter features to keep beginner and more experienced players playing and focused on what they need to be in order to maximize their chances of winning… If you like looking at half-naked girls while playing slot machine then that's a bonus too. (Slotomedia, 2015)

All of these examples are symptomatic of a digital media context in which gambling can be camouflaged as play and playful entertainment can be camouflaged as gambling. While gambling with real money appears as glamour and consumption in *Sex and the City* and *Gems and the City*, in *Girls and the City* gaming with play money is rendered 'edgy' through the iconographic evocation of an urban underbelly of vice replete with sex for sale.

The choice of the term 'girls' not only references the familiar terminology of sex industry promotions which offer "Girls! Girls! Girls!"; it also constructs a particular tone of dialogue with the original *Sex and the City* concept. The book and other licensed products explore the romantic dilemmas of the sexually liberated metropolitan woman able to have it all. *Girls and the City* self-consciously appropriates this iconic representation of female agency in the service of patriarchal containment. If *Sex and the City* reconfigured urban space as the single woman's oyster – offering pleasures of romance, friendship and guilt-free consumption – *Girls and the City* seems to restore women to their commodified place as objects – and quite literally prizes – of male flaneurial pleasure in urban landscapes of legal vice. Our second case study demonstrates how iconography is used to disguise gambling mechanics of popular finance apps which reliably transform investors into players, and in some cases, addicts.

## This is what Risk Looks Like: Robinhood and the Piracy of Serious Play

The digitalization of money facilitates screen-based representations of finance which, in turn, become available to "gamblification". We have argued elsewhere that:

> Finance is the prism through which transformations of self are filtered in capitalist societies. By infiltrating domestic spaces and the flows of everyday life through mobile devices, financial markets offer a promise of the sudden improvement of one's life conditions. This is strikingly similar to the mirage of success presented by gambling. In digital finance and gamble-play, a life-changing event is seemingly within reach. That moment of hesitation or decision can make or break the promise of a better future. Money becomes immaterial, a metaphor for hope and broken dreams. Digital currency alters the dynamics of finance. (Albarran-Torres, 2018, p. 223)

Valued at $1.2 billion dollars, the much-criticised Robinhood platform enables first time traders to invest for free (with no trader commission) using micro-transactions. Its seductive premise is that financial trading should be democratized, enabling ordinary individuals to participate in global financial markets. In contrast to heavily hedged and diversified corporate trading portfolios for which individuals or members of pension funds pay stock brokers large sums, Robinhood enables users to trade low quantities of shares based on synchronous representations of market data. The app's sleek green interface features colour coded graphics that continually track price movements; players can simply participate in trading by deciding when to press 'buy' and 'sell' buttons, a procedure much like the instinct-driven nature of slots gambling. (Figure 7)

Over the past four years, Robinhood has attracted critical scrutiny, not only from the financial establishment but from agencies and individuals with expertise in problem gambling. Harms to consumers, including several high-profile suicides, have been documented and analyzed in media reports (Graw, 2020; Klebnikov & Gara, 2020). A common thread of these stories is how rookie "investors" became hooked on the pace of trading and other affordances of the trading platform itself. In early 2021, the platform was at the centre of the GameStop share craze, as it stopped its clients from buying shares of the embattled videogame retailer in a move that some saw as protection of the financial establishment. GameStop shares were bought en masse to increase profit for casual stock traders who were encouraged to buy via Reddit boards. Buying GameStop shares soon became a viral action, a sort of digital, financial flash mob dance.

Robinhood clearly addresses itself to the investor-as-gambler by presenting both market data and options of interactivity in a way that resembles online poker platforms, such as *PokerStars*. (Figure 8) And, in an age of "responsible gambling apps" provided by several online wagering companies, it appears to give investors freedom to withdraw funds or halt trading when losses rapidly accumulate. Unlike gambling products, however, the app does not provide specific information about where to seek help if addiction is experienced nor does it provide information about the process by which the app generates wealth for its owners and investors.

It appears that – in contrast to online gambling and establishment stockbroking – the company does not impose a house edge or benefit from a rake.

Robinhood's US website explicitly compares its business model to that of a bank. When users' cash is idle, Robinhood makes loans secured by investment in gold, currencies stocks and bonds in the same manner of establishment financial institutions. It also generates profits by offering margin trading and paid-premium versions of the app.

It is not difficult to see how the rhetoric of democratized finance, the illusion of control provided by the app's interface, and the appearance of banking work together to provide an attractive service to citizens living through unprecedented market volatility following the Global Financial Crisis and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Robinhood has been successfully marketed to millennials who are tech savvy, familiar with micro-financial transactions in their everyday consumption of media, videogames and shopping and suspicious of large corporate financial institutions, as well as often burdened with large student debts. Through this process, it has engaged a new generation of "traders" who are more familiar with how to play videogames than with the intricacies of financial markets. The camouflage of finance as play can have devastating consequences.

In June last year, a 20-year-old Robinhood user committed suicide after seeing an erroneous display of a $730,000 negative balance on his account. Perhaps the qualities of mimesis and vertigo that make the platform so sticky induced a behavioral response of self-extinction. Perhaps the appearance of this overwhelming number triggered a feeling that the young trader's economic life was "game over" (See Nicoll, 2013, 2019, 2022). This case and others show that, while playful platforms disembody and dematerialize the markets from which the app generates its numbers, consequences of failing at the game of trade for individuals are ultimately material and embodied.

**Figure 7.** The casual stock trading app Robinhood enters deeper into the user's everyday life via mobile devices.


Image retrieved from promotional material: https://medium.com/canvs/robinhood-5-reasons-the-stock-trading-app-has-cracked-application-design-2e2c727f0735 (Accessed July 13, 2022.)

**Figure 8.** Stock trading apps draw from the design, and look and feel, of poker and other gambling apps.


Image retrieved from promotional material: https://www.playusa.com/online-poker/apps/ (Accessed July 13, 2022.)

As another example of gamble-play media, Robinhood exemplifies the opacity of digital gambling products which we have described as the "camouflage of play". The app offers an experience that is almost like professional trading on stock markets but not quite; almost like a videogame but not quite, almost like a slot machine but not quite. It is in this space of ambivalence that potential for enjoyment as well as serious harm arises for its users. Rather than realizing the redistributive promise implied through reference to an eponymous medieval social justice warrior, the platform is difficult to distinguish from the "vicious games" anthropologist Rebecca Cassidy (2020) critically investigates in her study of commercial gambling industries.

**Algorithmic Iconographies**

We have explored the incorporation of gambling within digital media of gaming and entertainment across a plethora of online platforms. We have also considered how, in the competition for consumers, transnational entertainment industries are exploiting synergies within and beyond traditional gambling domains. It is much less true today than when Reith's landmark study of games of chance in Western culture was published that gambling is "strictly demarcated from the everyday world around it" (Reith, 1999, p. 1). Rather than being contained within the space of a casino or gambling venue from which self-exclusion is possible and sometimes encouraged, the zone of digital gambling today is often both intimate and interactive. We have seen that gambling iconography in a digital age retains aspects of the fetishism, which Homi Bhabha argues drives stereotypical discourse (Bhabha, 1994). However, it is equally driven through the algorithmic device of the proxy, in which binary data about the individual – and the deductions that emerge from that data – take the place of individuals themselves. This section explores the algorithmic processes used to deliver games to individual players, whether at home or via smart cards within venues.

Algorithms are designed to ensure that we are presented with iconography that we like and that we like the iconography that we are presented with (Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Carah, 2014, Striphas, 2015). Our digital footprints become proxy for a self, which is affected by and responsive to flows of media content from different commercial providers. In contrast to the rudimentary social interpellations accomplished through commercial broadcast media texts (Hall, 1973), algorithms enable a customised address to potential players. Unlike traditional casino gambling, digital gambling media use iconography to establish continuous engagement with users, offering an experience that can evolve with their preferences.

To play for real or play money online is to participate in interactive process where we touch digital platforms and leave traces of our cultural tastes and consumption patterns so that developers can move us towards further engagement. By partaking in online social networks, users are categorized as consumers for digital marketing purposes, generating "algorithmic identities" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 168). These "algorithmic identities" enable gambling to be more

easily camouflaged as other kinds of play and fun in our everyday lives. The immersive zone described by gambling researchers (Woolley & Livingstone, 2010; Schüll, 2014), then bleeds out into users' routinized digital media consumption.

Klaus Jensen (2013) reflects on the cultural work of algorithms through the lens of Bateson's (1972/2006) account of meta-communication:

> We are defined socially by who we communicate with, in what codes, but certainly also by the content of our communications and their place in wider networks of meaning and community. It is for this reason, not least, that the trails of meta–communication motivate big–data analyses by businesses and security agencies alike. (Jensen, 2013, "Conclusion")

Algorithms mobilise aleatory, agonistic, vertiginous and simulated elements of play as meta-communication to target iconography at actual and/or potential consumers of gambling and financial products.

It is easy for providers to disavow predatory interests in specific populations by pointing to the computing infrastructures that drive their customised marketing. Negative outcomes of consumers' enjoyable engagement with "financial safe risk" (Gephart, 2001) can then be slated to the individual choices of dysfunctional consumers' choices rather than to the very effective marketing of familiar cultural products to specific demographic groups. However, the collection and analysis of aggregated data used in promotions does not absolve gambling organisations from responsibility for individual and social harms caused by their products. There is no reason to believe that the misogyny and racism we have found in gambling iconography is disconnected from the lives of those who design algorithms which are used to classify social media users and deliver content to us.

This section has investigated the role of algorithms in shaping gambling iconography to uncover new markets via the proxies our data generates. Our discussion highlights the limits of critiques focussed on deceptive commercial practices that could be easily ameliorated through tighter regulation of media content and advertising related to gambling. Instead, minimising (if not eliminating) individual and social harms resulting from gambling marketing needs to proceed from an understanding of the techno-cultural processes that structure digital communication at this historical moment.

## Conclusion

This article has linked cultural processes of play to broader relations of power that shape cultural practices and social identities in online and offline spaces of everyday life. We have explored gambling iconography as a form of meta-communication that is rearticulating consumers' relationships to familiar products and spaces of consumption and entertainment. While licensing deals between gambling corporations and Hollywood film and television industries create more gambling opportunities for fans of specific popular culture texts, gender and ethnic stereotypes fuel the iconography of many digital gambling products. We investigated how iconography reinforces a sense of "safe risk" for "players" in online spaces of democratised finance. And we explored the role of algorithms in producing data about the iconography players/consumers prefer and in uncovering new markets to which iconography can, in turn, be adapted.

In formulating a critical response to some of the examples of digital gambling iconography we have presented, we feel a little like tourists in an unfamiliar city who accidentally wander into a strip club and then complain to management about gender exploitation. The question one immediately anticipates is: "Well, what are you doing here?" Rather than becoming embarrassed by this question and turning away, it is our role as critical researchers of gambling to open a conversation through which we and other scholars might develop some compelling answers.

The role of iconography in endowing even the most voracious gambling products with a genuinely playful dimension demands much closer attention. Bateson argued that, in the absence of meta-communicative processes such as play "… the evolution of communication would be at an end. Life would then be an endless interchange of stylized messages, a game with rigid rules, unrelieved by change or humour" (1972/2006, p. 317). Our research suggests that the reproduction of social agonisms through digital gambling iconography's camouflage as play is often more disturbing and violent than endearing and amusing. Behind the world of cute kittens, sexy girls out on the town and redistributive Robin Hoods, powerful machines of economic extraction are at work. More research is needed to unpack the intimate connections between the camouflage of play in gambling products and platforms and continuing games of war over territories, bodies and environmental resources which are deepening social inequalities, exacerbating global health pandemics and accelerating catastrophic climate change.

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# The Myth of the "Integrated Resort": Selective History, Retrospective Branding, and Fungible Assets

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# The Myth of the "Integrated Resort": Selective History, Retrospective Branding, and Fungible Assets

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**Abstract:** The expansion of the casino industry in Asia over the last two decades has purportedly given rise to a new development model known as the "Integrated Resort" (IR). Within state, professional and public discourses, the IR is often defined in three ways: 1. it evolved from large multi-attraction casino projects in Las Vegas; 2. it is distinguished by the fact that the casino occupies a small area of the property but makes a large contribution to its total revenue; and 3. the casino helps to make non-gaming attractions like museums financially viable. While not all factually inaccurate, I argue that these claims are strategic representations that legitimize and promote the IR in this part of the world. By triangulating different sets of discourses and participating in industry events like the Global Gaming Expo, I unravel the politics of these claims and trace their shifting effects as the IR is translated into various forms of regulatory controls and corporate practices. The emergence of the IR signals a historical moment in the normalization of commercial gambling in Asia, and shows how this transition can proceed through an architectural medium.

*Keywords:* Integrated Resort, Asia, myth, casino development, normalization, architecture

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"In summary, a reasonable working definition of an Integrated Resort is: A multi-dimensional resort that includes a casino that takes up, say, no more than ten percent of the resort's public floor space, but where the casino generates at least US$300 million in gaming revenues."
Macdonald & Eadington, 2008, p. 40

"[Gaming] allows us to invest in things like a museum or some aspects of entertainment that have a lower rate of return, and maybe wouldn't make sense on a standalone basis."
George Tanasijevich, CEO of *Marina Bay Sands*, quoted in Cohen, 2020, p. 73

"The IRC acronym first surfaced in 2010 to describe *Marina Bay Sands* and *Resorts World Sentosa* in Singapore, but the basic theory behind an Integrated Resort Casino goes back at least to the early 90s, to glitzy landmark developments like the *MGM Grand* in Las Vegas."
PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016, p. 3

## Introduction

How can we explain the dramatic expansion of the global casino industry in Asia over the last two decades? In this article, I trace and unpack the "Integrated Resort" (hereafter IR) as a form of concrete myth. By concrete myth, I mean that the "Integrated Resort" is a discursive construct as well as a business model and architectural object that conceals the political and economic interests binding the industry to its patrons and customers in the new markets of Asia. It appeared around 2007 as a "new" type of large-scale multi-attraction development model that is gaining prominence in the major metropolitan centres of Asia. Though it appears to be no different from the casino-resorts in places like Las Vegas, there are distinct qualities to the framing of the IR that demand critical attention. In the opening quotation, the IR, as presented by two eminent gaming scholar-professionals, is defined around the casino which is small in size (no more than ten percent of the resort's floor area) but

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large in revenue contribution (at least US$300 million). The CEO of Singapore's *Marina Bay Sands* (MBS) maintains this inverse relationship by pushing the casino further into the background – his statement uses museums to sell casinos, as if the latter is a means to an end. Taken together, these discursive manoeuvres have the dual effect of effacing the casino while positioning the casino industry as the foremost proponent of large-scale tourist development in Asia. Yet, while the first two quotations attempt to distinguish an IR from a typical casino-resort, the final quotation smooths out the distinction. It presents a linear history of the IR by stretching its origin from Singapore back to the iconic mega-projects of Las Vegas in the 1990s (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016). As the rest of the article will show, these frames have also become the accepted doctrine, repeated unproblematically by casino developers, financial analysts, governments, gaming regulatory bodies and various pro-casino lobbies.

Macao and Singapore play a significant role in the myth of the IR – not only are they the major portals into the Asian market, they have overtaken Las Vegas by a large margin as the most profitable gaming jurisdictions in the world (McCartney, 2015, p. 527). Their global ascendance has spurred other cities and countries in Asia to rethink their positions vis-à-vis commercial gambling. Pro-casino lobbies in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines refer to Macao and Singapore to push for casino development with varying degrees of success. The outsized role of these two cities becomes more apparent when we scan the much larger geography of casino expansion in Asia. The uplands of Southeast Asia closest to the Chinese border are rife with casinos catering to cross-border trade, tourism and Chinese investments, both licit and illicit (Nyíri & Lyttleton, 2011; Sims, 2017; Than, 2016). Yet, these casinos in places like Poipet, Mongla and Bokor have little to no audience outside of their specific jurisdictions, being produced through extraterritorial arrangements that do not translate easily into "best practices" that other cities can follow. Rather, it is in the metropolitan centres, where casino development becomes highly visible to local citizens and a global audience alike, and where the gaming industry becomes absorbed into the formal urban economy, that the IR has emerged as an object imbued with narratives of corporate success and political legitimacy.

In this article, my focus will be on examining the truth-claims captured in the opening quotations. The objective is not to show whether they are factually (in)correct, but to show how they facilitate the expansion of a particular model of casino development in Asia. What is the context of these claims, and what are their mystifying effects? How do these claims acquire an unquestionable status? These questions are not unfamiliar to scholars who have shown how gambling in general gradually became normalized in the Western context. The search for tax revenue, shifts in social attitudes toward leisure and risk, advances in gambling technology, and the corporatization of the casino industry delineate the general contours of this transition (McMillen, 1996; Munting, 1996; Reith, 2002; Nicoll, 2019; Schüll, 2012, to name a few). Given the scale and prominence of casino development, it is not surprising that architectural form and representation also plays a role. Al (2017) and Schwartz (2003), for example, follow the changing architecture of Las Vegas to show how the industry reinvented itself to appeal to popular culture and the American fantasy of a suburban utopia. This strategy has appeared in other guises where local cultures and identities have been expressed architecturally so as to win the support of the voting community (de Uriarte, 2007; Kingma, 2008; Taft, 2016).

In Asia, a similar historical transition is taking place but the specific politics of this purportedly new development model known as the IR has not been fully explicated (see overview by Zhang, 2017). Indeed, if "problem gambling" has become one of the master concepts of the gaming industry today, shaping public policy and industry practice in almost every way, then we should also pay attention to the IR as its architectural medium. There is a strange resonance between the two – one claims that gambling disorder affects only a small percentage of the population, just as the other stipulates that the casino occupies only a small part of the overall development. The ideology of limited harm works behind these shrinking numbers, and helps to normalize large scale commercial gambling today.

I begin by examining the claim that the IR's origin can be traced to Las Vegas. Following the hospitality and tourism literature that gaming scholars used to make this claim, I reconstruct a forgotten timeline where the term "Integrated Resort" was used to signal an emerging trend towards master-planned multi-facility destination resorts in the 80s, particularly in Southeast Asia. The erasure of this timeline by the industry not only narrows the concept of an IR into one where the casino is indispensable and always present, it also facilitates the exportation of a specific model of casino development from mature jurisdictions in the US and Australia to new markets in Asia. Next, I turn to the inverse relationship between space and revenue that purportedly differentiates an IR from other casino-resorts. Returning to the parliamentary debates in Singapore around 2005, I show how the relative proportions of gaming and non-gaming space constituted a key site of negotiation between the state and the concessionaire. However, when the industry began to brand their properties as IRs, this process of negotiation was erased and the IR turned into a marketing strategy that draws upon the respectability and success of Singapore's casinos. Finally, I turn to the public-fronting claim that casinos are necessary to fund other non-gaming tourist attractions. Tracing the internal discourse of the industry reveals a different picture – IRs are a portfolio of fungible assets and the casino is a core asset rather than a means to an end. For

*Las Vegas Sands* (LVS), the corporate strategy has been to sell off its non-core assets, primarily retail malls, to finance the expansion of its core gaming-related assets. Doing this critical work requires me to triangulate different sets of discourses produced for different audiences. Sources examined include professional-academic literature, trade magazines, annual corporate reports, shareholder meeting transcripts, governmental legislation and public media. In addition, I draw insights from my ethnographic work at the annual gaming events which I have been attending regularly since 2016, such as the Global Gaming Expo and the ASEAN Gaming Summit.[2]

**A Selective History**

A search of the term "integrated resort" in the hospitality and tourism literature would show two timelines. One appears abruptly around 2005 when the Singapore government announced that it would award two licenses for casino development in the city-state, and another, largely forgotten, appears throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s when global trends in tourism gave rise to master-planned destination resorts around the world. The historical specificity of these two timelines is largely ignored by Ahn and Back (2018) in their literature review of research published between 1991 and 2017 on "integrated resorts". By projecting the current definition of an IR (where gaming is central) back into history, they present a linear timeline that originates in mid-20th century Las Vegas, even pinpointing Jay Sarno[3] as the progenitor of this concept of casino development (Ahn & Back, 2018, p. 96). Yet, all the papers published before 2004 that used the term "integrated resort" or its variants refer to a wide range of tourism developments, none of which contained casinos. By collapsing the two timelines, Ahn and Back's literature review produces a selective history of the IR.

As I will argue, this selective historical account has the effect of drawing a linear trajectory that connects Las Vegas directly to Asia, thus positioning casino experts as highly experienced and sought-after players of a narrowly defined model of tourist development. To debunk this myth, I do the critical work of restoring the forgotten timeline to understand the significance of its temporal divergence from what is known as an IR today. The objective is not to replace one definition of the IR with another, supposedly more accurate and authoritative. Rather it is to dislodge the industry's monopoly over a name by placing it in the broader historical context of global tourism, particularly in Southeast Asia. Like Ahn and Back, I reach into the hospitality and tourism literature in search of traces of the IR concept. Shorn of their presentist lens however, this literature becomes much more murky. Scholars and industry players were generally not consistent in how they named and categorized different types of tourist products. With the exception of a few key papers, there was no attempt to define an IR with such exactitude as witnessed today. Yet, it is clear that the idea of a master-planned tourist destination hosting a mixture of attractions has been evolving since the 1970s.

The general shift toward master-planned multi-attraction resorts started to pick up momentum across Australia, the US and Asia-Pacific with the advent of global tourism and post-industrialization (Elliott & Johns, 1993; Hall & Hamon, 1996; McCleary & Meeske, 1984; Stanton & Aislabie, 1992). While they took many forms, the industry generally categorized them based on setting/amenity mix, seasonal differentiation (winter ski lodge versus summer beach resort, for example), or market segment and management model, and these categories shifted in response to changing vacation patterns and development trends (Brey, Morrison & Mills, 2009). What unified them was a "dramatic departure from the unplanned strip development that characterized the growth of many early tourism destinations" (Elliott & Johns, 1993, p. 6). This new trend included "mega resorts" such as the Hyatt Regency Complex (Hawaii), "integrated theme resorts" such as Disney Park and "urban resorts" such as Grand Hyatt Jakarta. As Smith (1992, p. 211) notes, "central to the idea of integrated development is control" – centralized management was supposed to eliminate incompatible use of land, maintain a consistent ambience, provide economies of scale, and spread out the cost of development over a longer time-frame. Such properties were conceptualized around separate profit- and loss-making businesses supporting each other through different stages of liquidity while bringing specialized expertise to specific components.

It was in Southeast Asia, where international tourist arrivals jumped 18-fold between the 1960s and 70s, that the development of master-planned multi-attraction resorts was most energetic. These projects were much larger than in other parts of the world, and their expansion was propelled by international aid agencies like the World Bank, multi-national hotel chains, governmental support and the international tour and airline industry (Wood, 1979). Often located in remote coastal locations, developers made use of abundant cheap land and labour as well as natural environmental assets to attract business and leisure travellers from the West and the Asia-Pacific. By the 1990s, scholars were labelling such properties as "integrated resorts" and beginning to detect a pattern in their composition. Hotels, residential properties, retail and golf courses

[2] During my ethnographic work in the industry events, I identified myself as a researcher and professor from the National University of Singapore. I generally interacted with other participants in the exhibition areas and made use of the network sessions to speak with specific informants. As part of the ethical clearance for this project, I am not required to obtain consent from my informants during these events. However no informants will be identified in my presentations and publications.

[3] Jay Sarno was a casino developer who built Caesars Palace and Circus Circus in Las Vegas in the 60s. Gaming historian David Schwartz (2013) credits him for inventing the design template that inspired modern Las Vegas.

constituted the core, supported by other attractions such as theme parks, health spas, conference halls, and water sports (Smith, 1992; Stiles & See-Tho, 1991; Wong, 1998). International hotel chains such as Four Seasons, InterContinental, Marriott Hotels and Resorts, Hyatt Corporation, Accor and Sheraton Corporation led this wave of expansion and their properties could be found in most of the major tourism projects in Southeast Asia.

During this period, the hospitality and tourism literature made no reference to casino development. Neither was casino gambling mentioned as part of the overall ensemble of an IR. This silence attests to the peripheral role of casino gambling within the formal circuits of tourism. Strict controls on gambling – from outright criminalization to state monopolization – pushed casino development out of the agendas of non-socialist Southeast Asian cities looking for capital investment from the developed world as well as institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations. The exceptions were the casinos located at Genting Highlands (Malaysia) and Christmas Island (Australia), which came about through a different network of patronage and capital (Chambers, 2011; Reed, 1979). Stanley Ho, the casino monopolist of Macao, made some forays to Singapore and the Philippines in the 1970s, but only managed to open a few standalone casinos in Manila until his political ally and the dictator of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, fell to the revolution in 1986 (Lee, 2019, p. 20).

In this historical timeline, the IR was a tourist product that ostracised the casino. It belonged to a global wave of tourist development that responded to the perceived failure of an earlier phase of ad hoc expansion, which for many observers was captured in the case of Pattaya (Thailand). Between 1970 and 1990, as the number of hotel rooms ballooned from 400 to 22,000, this beach-resort was beset with environmental pollution, overcrowding and rampant commercialism (Smith, 1992, pp. 209-210). After Pattaya, Nusa Dua (Indonesia) and Desaru (Malaysia) became the first master-planned IRs in Southeast Asia. Though both projects started at about the same time in the 1970s, Desaru stagnated and never achieved the intended scale of development. In contrast, Nusa Dua, also a beach-resort, progressed from planning to near completion in the same period of time. Financed by the Indonesian government and the World Bank, it occupied a site of 230 acres and featured eight five-star beachfront hotels, an 18-hole golf course, shopping centres, a convention centre, and undeveloped sites reserved for future residential development (Hussey, 1982; Lihou-Perry, 1991; Schansman, 1991; Smith, 1992, pp. 214-215). The success of Nusa Dua influenced subsequent tourist development in the region, such as the massive Bintan Beach International Resort in the Riau Islands. Over 60 times the size of Nusa Dua, the project was spearheaded by both the Singaporean and Indonesian governments to create what a scholar (Wong, 1998, p. 94) calls an "amalgam of integrated resorts".

In Southeast Asia, IRs past and present are pathways into the global capitalist order. At the broadest level, they are defined by the complementarity of core and supporting businesses. The two timelines belong to the same trajectory of global tourism where major corporations expanded overseas through a combination of franchise licensing, expertise transfer and/or direct ownership (Go et al., 1990). Yet, by reconstructing the forgotten timeline, we can also begin to see how they diverge. The IRs in Nusa Dua, Desaru and Bintan depended on cash flow generators like the sale of vacant land and residential units as well as financial support from governments and international organizations. They followed a "plug in" model of development where governments would finance and build the essential infrastructure, while private corporations would lease land parcels to build their hotels (Astbury & Janssen, 1996). In contrast, the IRs today depend on the casino to generate most of their revenue and are financed entirely by private corporations, often including the necessary infrastructure. In the earlier timeline, the objective of the business model was to distribute risks among multiple stakeholders and spread out the cost of development over a long timeframe. Such massive projects often took more than 20 years to complete. On the contrary, IRs today are investments designed to turn a profit as quickly as possible. Casino concessions in major Asian jurisdictions like Macao, Singapore and Manila are awarded on 10 to 30-year tenures, which means that IRs are expected to begin construction, open for business and establish positive cash-flow within this timeframe. When LVS opened its first casino in Macao in 2004, it turned a profit within nine months (Simpson, 2008). The same company projected that it would recoup its investment in MBS, the most expensive IR when it was built in 2007, within five years (CNBC, 2010). Finally, between the two timelines, IRs have begun to migrate into cities. While almost all the IRs of the past were located outside of cities to take advantage of cheap land, the major IRs in Macao, Singapore and Manila today are positioned as catalysts of urban development. As such, they are embroiled in distinct politics around urban segregation, planning dysfunction and speculative real estate investment (Kleibert, 2018; Lee, 2014; Shatkin, 2014).

Ahn and Back's (2018) selective history expunges the earlier timeline of tourism, in which the casino industry was absent, from a new timeline where the casino industry is, ironically, the sole narrator. It should not be surprising that this expungement also reorients the historical origin of the IR, substituting Johor and Bali for mature gaming jurisdictions in the US and Australia. This is not merely of academic interest - I have encountered this selective history in many informal conversations at the annual gaming events. A particularly representative moment happened at the "G2E-Asia" convention I attended in 2016, where a panellist called the current version "IR 2.0" and claimed

that the original IR emerged in Las Vegas when large convention centres became integrated with casinos. Very similar to Ahn and Back's presentism, he uses the current popularity of convention-led casino development to anchor existing properties in Las Vegas as the original, and it is no coincidence that the properties cited in his presentation are owned or operated by companies competing in Asia today. Furthermore, he predicts that the future evolution of "IR 3.0" would earn less from gaming, cater more to tourists, and be located near urban centres, effectively selling the IR to potential new markets. To the critical listener, there is little distinction between history and advertising. Indeed, when the origin of the IR leads one back to Las Vegas, it is from Las Vegas that proponents of the industry draw its architectural and business models as "historically tested" formulas. The IR is far more than just a name – it is a monopoly of the imagination, one that closes the historical distance between Las Vegas and Asia and facilitates the exportation of a business model from one to the other.

**Retrospective Branding**

While the timeline of tourism development in Southeast Asia has little purchase in the industry today, Singapore's intervention around 2005 was a significant milestone. In the opening quotation, Eadington and MacDonald gave their definition of an IR in 2008, almost immediately after Singapore's casinos opened. Their definition is a reproduction of the official representation of an IR in Singapore. However, it ignores the intense process of negotiation between the concessionaires and the Singaporean government that ultimately gave rise to the IR as built. Reduced to a set of numbers, the industry turned the IR from something that is peculiar to Singapore's political milieu into a proprietary product that it can claim possession of. To demystify the IR, I return to Singapore's intervention and trace how the industry gradually co-opted the name for itself.

Casino gambling was a controversial subject in Singapore because the ruling party had maintained a strident anti-gambling stance throughout the post-independence era. The only other form of legalized gambling was the state-sponsored lottery, and like many postcolonial Southeast Asian countries, this lottery was justified as a way to fund nation-building projects. In this climate, proposals to develop casinos in Singapore had always been turned down on ideological and moral grounds (Lee, 2017). The emergence of the IR around 2005 was thus intimately linked to how the ruling party attempted to reverse its own policy without undermining its legitimacy. During the period of intense public discussion, the official discourse consistently submerged the casino under the lexicon of family-friendly recreation and corporate tourism (Bullock, 2014; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019; Wee, 2012; Zhang & Yeoh, 2017). References were made to casino-resorts in Las Vegas where gaming contributed to only "30-50%" of the property's revenue (Lim, 2004). At the parliamentary debates where the decision was finally made to legalize casino development, then-minister of National Development laid out the general contours of an IR that would remain till today (Lim, 2005, col. 80):

> [It is a] large-scale development offering multiple world class attractions. ... an entire complex of classy hotels, luxury shops, fancy restaurants, spectacular shows, convention centres all found in one single destination. The gaming component will occupy not more than 3-5% of the total area of the IR development.... Casino gaming is an important part of the mix, but only a part.

The key connection between ideology and policy rests on the relative proportions of gaming and non-gaming areas. On one hand, the emphasis on the smallness of "3-5%" framed the casino as merely a means to an end, directing public attention to the larger project of the IR with all its world-class tourist attractions instead. On the other hand, the proportion functions as a technical measure with which the government bends the casino industry to invest in non-gaming facilities that would benefit the tourism industry at the national scale. Between 2005 and 2008, as the two IRs were built and the regulatory framework put in place, the control of gaming area was finalized as a cap of 15,000 sqm for each IR (Casino Control (Casino Layout) Regulations, 2009).[4] As far as I am aware, in no other mature gaming jurisdiction did such a regulation exist at that point in time.

What is the mythical effect of this number, expressed as either as an absolute number or a proportion? It masks the exchange of political legitimacy and economic interest that is peculiar to Singapore's context, and transforms the IR into a replicable product that can be calibrated for other jurisdictions. As I have shown elsewhere (Lee, 2019), what the concessionaires proposed during the bidding for the casino licenses was eminently incompatible with the Singapore government's vision of an IR. The first proposal by LVS presented a financial projection that shows how the casino, even if it were to take up only 3% of the floor area and 4% of the construction budget, would earn 80% of property's revenue (Lee, 2019, p. 224). This potentially undercut the government's representation of the IR. Yet, from the operator's perspective, these numbers were an economic reality, if not opportunity. An IR may have the same suite of facilities in Asia and the US, but given the different market conditions, it would earn far more from casino gambling in Asia. Macao's performance, not Las Vegas',

[4] This was altered in 2020 to become 16,000 sqm for MBS and 15,000 sqm for Resorts World Sentosa. See Casino Control (Casino Layout) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

was the proof. Furthermore, the initial architectural schemes by the bidders resembled those of Las Vegas-style thematised resorts, while the government desired a modern design that referred to the cultural and financial capitals, rather than casino cities, of the world (Lee, 2019, pp. 222-226). It was only through rigorous and prolonged negotiation that the IR emerged in its final form as something co-produced in the unique regulatory and political context of Singapore.

To the keen observer, the subtle vacillations of the gaming and non-gaming spatial allocations continue to outline the negotiations that stretched from the production to the operation of the IR. In 2019, when the Singapore government renewed the 10-year exclusivity period for both casino concessionaires and allowed them to expand their properties, the official discourse was renewed. Despite the fact that the law limits gaming area to an absolute number, the government chose to present the expansion as a ratio. It stressed that though the gaming area would increase for both properties, it would actually *decrease* as a percentage to the total floor area of the expanded development - "from the existing 3.1% to 2.3%" (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019). Furthermore, it made explicit that the expansion was awarded *because* of the additional investment committed by both concessionaires to non-gaming facilities, such as a sports arena and an oceanarium. The IR thus continues to find its techno-political expression in the form of a ratio between gaming and non-gaming area. It signals to both the public and the concessionaire that the expansion of the concessionaire's interest (gaming area) is contingent on the state's interest (non-gaming area) expanding at an equal or higher rate.

What is omitted from the government's statement is that, since its opening, casino gaming had contributed to 70-80% of MBS's total revenue every year (LVS Corp., *Annual Report*, 2009-2017). Indeed, while the industry pays lip service to the narrative that the casino occupies only a small portion of the IR, it is generally antagonistic toward any restrictions on gaming area or tables and dissuades other jurisdictions from adopting them.[5] Where hosting governments have less bargaining power or are less inclined to intervene, controls on gaming area appear to remain in form but retreat in substance. For example, in the early stages of the IR conceptualization process in the Philippines, a modification of Singapore's regulation was used which pegged the number of gaming tables and machines to the number of hotel rooms. By 2013, this ratio had relaxed, and three years later, it was replaced with a cap on gaming area calculated as a percentage of the total floor area of the property (Melco Crown, 2013; PAGCOR, 2016). Similarly, when Japan decided to emulate Singapore's IR model, the government opted for Philippines' version of a percentage cap. A sharp-eyed analyst notes that "even with this 3 percent regulation, a casino double the size of that in *Marina Bay Sands* … could be built under a plan drawn up by Osaka" (Osaki, 2018).

While restrictions on gaming area vacillate along with the migration of the IR, the industry enthusiastically rebrands its projects and properties as "IRs", recognizing that Singapore's intervention had inadvertently improved its respectability in this part of the world. A senior gaming analyst claims:

> Before the success of Singapore, gaming was considered a fairly sleazy business in Asia. After Singapore, other jurisdictions considered establishing or expanding their gaming industries – Vietnam, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, now Japan. (quoted in Cohen, 2015)

Among all the casino concessionaires in Singapore, Macao and Manila, LVS is perhaps the most aggressive in rebranding itself for the Asian market. After around 2007, in its submissions to the US Security and Exchange Commission and on its official website, LVS began calling all its major US properties "IRs" even though they were built decades earlier. Similar to how a selective history makes the IR appear to be something that can be imported directly from Las Vegas, this form of retrospective branding assimilates the IR into existing corporate rhetoric and practices, and marks another step toward the industry's co-optation of the name. For example, LVS explains that it groups its properties in Las Vegas (The Venetian and The Palazzo) as "a single integrated resort" because of their similar "types of service and products, the regulatory business environment … [and] organizational and management reporting structure" (LVS Corp., *SEC Form 10-K*, 2008, p. 4). At a shareholder meeting, Wynn Resorts management (2014, *Q2 Earnings Call Transcript*) explained that

> when we say integrated resorts, a very important word to us, we mean that the entire place is held together, the enterprise, by a notion of who our customers are, and how we are going to appeal to them.

The "truth of the concept", they continue, is its profitability. And for companies like Melco Crown Entertainment which only came into existence in 2004 to bid for one of Macao's gaming subconcessions, the CEO would state simply that

> we are predominantly an integrated resort developer with a keen interest in gaming … we do believe that the gaming component is necessary to do all the fun and crazy things that

[5] Informant 21, 22 July 2016.

we do (Melco Crown Entertainment, 2014, *Q3 Earnings Call Transcript*).

Especially for companies looking to compete in Japan, where the government has begun the process of legalizing and awarding licenses for IR development, claiming the label of the IR as one's own, however defined, has become de rigueur. The competitive advantage of this branding is no mystery. As LVS clarifies to its shareholders repeatedly, a successful track record helps to sell the product and gain early mover advantage in new markets. Before 2008, it used its properties and track record in Las Vegas to sway the opinions of governments and communities. After 2008, the reference has shifted to Singapore, particularly MBS, as *the* model of IR development:

> Marina Bay Sands continues to serve as the most important reference site for emerging jurisdictions that are considering large-scale integrated resort development. It is obvious that that would put us in an advantageous competitive position as a candidate for emerging market opportunities when the first thing they are saying is, they want a Marina Bay Sands, nice based iconic structure, and that's what we specialize in. Both Japan and Korea have extensively mentioned MBS, Marina Bay Sands, as their model for integrated resort development … We have prepared and presented in Korea, one of the most iconic buildings ever, will turn out to be the most iconic building in the world and we hope and we believe that it's received a very, very strong reception, a positive reception. (LVS Corp., *Q3 Earnings Call Transcript*, 2014)

While state-produced official discourse negotiates a balancing act between economic gain and social harm, shareholder reports negotiate between the fact of numbers and the mood of investor confidence. The various iterations of the IR do not simply present the brute economics of the casino industry - they are also a form of boosterism motivated by the pressure to return value to shareholders and open new markets. In contrast to how the Singapore government represents the IR, a key transformation has happened in the internal discourse of the industry: restrictions on gaming area are no longer a constitutive part of what an IR is. Rather, they have become externalized as *risks* that act on the IR. In this reformulation, Singapore's MBS is replicable without any reference to regulatory controls that are specific to each jurisdiction. Just as the Singaporean government sanitized the Las Vegas product to legitimize casino gambling in the city-state, the industry has also appropriated the Singaporean product to support its expansion to other parts of Asia.

**Fungible Assets**

If there is a discursive common ground between the global casino industry and its hosting governments in Asia, it is that the revenue from casino gaming makes investment in world-class non-gaming facilities financially viable. In this final section, I unpack this aspect of the myth of the IR.

When the casino industry in Macao hit the peak revenue of about 45 billion USD in the year of 2013, attendees at the "G2E-Asia" convention were delirious with joy. Several panels were dedicated to the development of Hengqin, a part of mainland Chinese territory connected to Macao in the west. Everyone was looking to increase capacity by building more hotel rooms and infrastructure. In a panel I attended, a market analyst summarized the explosion of the industry over the last decade from the perspective of finance:

> If I just give you some statistics, the market cap of the whole gaming space in Macao has gone to $120 billion today. That's 37 times more than what it was at the bottom. You don't have to pick the best stock. You just have to invest in the sector to get your money multiplied 37 times. (Author's fieldnotes, 2013)

He was speaking to an audience which no doubt profited from this windfall. Not only were there hoteliers, casino developers, regulators and other service providers, there was also an entire ecology of institutional investors - financial consultants, bankers, traders and lawyers. At every G2E convention I have attended, they were always present offering financial and legal advice depending on the state of the industry. Four years earlier, when the industry was in its doldrums in the US, a bank representative shared with the audience how companies could emerge from bankruptcies with a better capital and operational structure. In 2019, when I asked a Deutsche bank executive at the Japan Gaming Congress how optimistic he was about Japan's progress toward casino legalization, he shared that a specific casino company had just launched a bond issue to raise capital and this was a good sign that, after decades of non-decision on the part of the government, Japan might finally be the next frontier.

When investors around the world partake in the spoils of an urban project, the territoriality of IR development diffuses into networks of debt, credit and ownership. A single property may in fact be a group of assets owned by different investors, managed under different agreements and subject to different debt obligations. Here, we turn to one meeting between LVS management and its shareholders in 2009. While the group was going through the details of how to tide over the financial crisis by "deleveraging", CEO Sheldon Adelson reminded the crowd what the business plan was:

> And I would like to make another point that seems to get lost in the shuffle of figures and that is our original business plan. Our business model was to build core and non-core assets, sell off the non-core assets at the right time and pay down or pay off all financing related to building the core assets … So we expect overall that our original business plan will be amply executed in Singapore by selling the cash flow of the retail mall in Singapore and either substantially reduce or eliminate the total debt to build Singapore. (LVS Corp., *Q2 Earnings Call Transcript*, 2009)

The same strategy was implemented in Las Vegas when the company sold the retail mall in its flagship properties, *Venetian Hotel & Casino* and *The Palazzo*, to General Growth Properties (GGP) in 2004. Under the agreement of this sale, GGP owns and manages the mall in accordance with the theme of the entire property, while LVS leases a small amount of space for the theatre, gondola retail store and the canal (LVS Corp, *SEC Form 10-K,* 2015, pp. 21-22). In 2013, LVS attempted to sell off the retail mall of MBS, but the plan was scuttled by the Singapore government. Four years later, the company floated the idea again. The sale would free up liquidity for the company to finance its expansion in Japan and South Korea (Leong, 2017). Analysts surmised that the government was wary that this "cut and run" strategy would reduce the company's commitment to Singapore and its non-gaming facilities, and would likely insist on LVS retaining a majority share of the mall (Leong, 2017).

For LVS, an IR is a portfolio of fungible assets. The core assets in the portfolio are the casinos, hotels and convention centres. As the capital needed for winning licenses and building IRs breaches the multi-billion-dollar mark, joint ownerships between casino developers, hoteliers, investment firms and entertainment studios have become the norm. In Macao and Manila, for example, most of the major casino properties involve joint ownership/management between the concessionaire and external partners, especially with hoteliers who provide brand recognition and market reach. This continues the historical trajectory of large-scale multi-attraction tourist developments in Southeast Asia which, as the previous section shows, brought different industry groups and funding agencies together to create one master-planned destination. The main difference, of course, is that IR development today is spearheaded by the casino industry under a privileged state-concessionaire relationship.

When the industry and its hosting governments insist publicly that museums are only financially viable with casinos, they are only presenting half of the story. The other half of the story is that, at least for LVS, *it is the retail malls that finance the casino and its expansion across Asia*. This expansion strategy should be contextualized against the waves of corporate restructuring, debt-financing and focus on shareholder value that have shaped the US gaming industry for several decades. While total debt of major casino operators along the Las Vegas Strip remained relatively constant at about $1B through the 1990s, it grew exponentially after 1998 to hit a peak of $18.3B in 2008, when the industry was crippled by the financial crisis (Schwartz & Christiansen, 2012). During this crisis, a number of large projects halted in Las Vegas, such as the $9.2B CityCenter by MGM Resorts, and some prominent companies went into default (Schwartz & Christiansen, 2012, p. 200). This was also the period of aggressive expansion by LVS into Asia – the company had just won the license to build MBS in Singapore and also committed to developing a few sites in Macao. Compared to its peers, LVS' appetite for risk was relatively high – where companies would usually obtain the necessary financing before commencing construction, LVS opted for the riskier route of "just-in-time" financing, allowing it to raise capital along stages of construction and make money before the property opened (Benston, 2009). Not surprisingly, the financial crisis almost pushed the company to bankruptcy, its share plunging from a peak of about $140 to as low as $1.38 within a year. Eventually, major Singaporean banks extended a credit facility of $5.44B in return for the company's commitment to prioritize the construction of MBS over other projects in Las Vegas and Macao (LVS Corp., *Annual Report*, 2007, p. 54).

Understanding the IR as a portfolio of fungible assets complicates any attempt to define a property as a fixed ratio between different uses or spaces. Instead, the relationship between its parts is fluid, as which asset is most profitable to keep or sell at any one moment depends on the capital structure of the company and its operating context. In this speculative environment, debt is a measure of risk management, allowing capital to multiply by drawing fictitious value from the future and shed its territorial fixity by separating ownership from operation. Yet, as Christophers (2009) notes, treating property as a financial asset sets itself up against other interests that do not simply treat it as such. In Singapore's case, the state protected its own interest by helping to raise capital for the IR project, while preventing the concessionaire from disbundling its assets to finance expansion elsewhere. The active role of the state in the processes of financialization to achieve extra-economic goals has also been observed in China and other parts of Southeast Asia (Zhang & Wu, 2022).

To be sure, the business model of LVS is not representative of all casino companies, which may rely more heavily on operational revenue, land banking and other financial instruments, rather than selling off assets, to fund expansion and increase shareholder value. But it is important to note that all the major concessionaires in Singapore, Macao and Manila are publicly-listed companies that operate under the pressure of debt financing. Between 2000 and 2018, the

cycling of assets, debt and credit to finance further expansion in Asia reverberated throughout the boardrooms of many of these companies.[6] Then, by 2020, as the global gaming industry was rocked by the COVID pandemic, acquisitions and mergers provided one of the few options for growth. LVS sold all its properties in Las Vegas and Pennsylvania to focus on Macao and Singapore. MGM Resorts ramped up its "asset-light strategy" that involved reducing owned real estate while growing its operational and management portfolio, particularly in the area of online gaming and E-sports.[7] As the frontier of profit shifts to the East and into the virtual realm, some casino companies are clinging less to their underlying real estate while experimenting with flexible property ownership structures that allow them to move capital across various parts of the world more easily. In this restructuring, gaming remains the core asset of these companies, not the means to build museums or other non-gaming facilities.

## Conclusion

For much of the latter half of the 20th century, commercial gambling was a pariah industry in the Asia-Pacific region. The spectacular expansion of casino development in Macao, Singapore and the Philippines over the last 20 years marks a historical transition. In this paper, I focus on a particular model of development, known as the IR, that is gaining prominence in the Asia-Pacific. More than just a name, I argue that it is a concrete myth that cloaks the complex politics that bind the casino industry to its host governments.

As my analysis shows, the myth of the IR is written by different authors. It is not always coherent, especially when we are attentive to the different sets of discourses produced for different audiences. The casino industry plays a dominant role in making explicit the historical link between Las Vegas and new markets in Asia, while both the industry and the Singapore government play up the idea that the casino is only a small part of the IR. Outside of Singapore however, the industry co-opts the label of the IR selectively. It aims to retain the respectability of the Singaporean brand, while persuading other jurisdictions to relax restrictions on gaming space. Finally, the industry and hosting governments in Asia all reinforce, in varying degrees of conviction and for different objectives, the myth that the casino is the means to finance the non-gaming attractions of the property. Yet, when we look closely into the corporate reports and listen to what the industry says to its shareholders, the IR as a unified property transforms into a portfolio of fungible assets and the casino as a core asset is not the means but the end. In the case of LVS, it is actually the retail malls that finance the expansion of casinos in different parts of the world.

The general observation in this paper follows the historical trend in the West where gambling gradually became normalized in society. With respect to the casino industry, scholars have long pointed out that commercial gambling rode on the coattails of tourism to enter major urban markets in Australia and the US throughout the 1980s. Indeed, Eadington, one of the scholars who offered the definition of the IR in the opening quotation, was much more critical in his earlier scholarship. Looking at the rise of non-gaming entertainment in Las Vegas in the 80s, he argues that these were merely "excuses" to induce visitations to the casino (Eadington, 1984). Observing New Zealand in the 1980s, Leiper (1989, p. 274) notes that "tourism seems to be a … kind of Trojan Horse in the strategy of the pro-casino lobby".

As a metaphor, Leiper's "Trojan Horse" captures a moment of entry under some form of subterfuge. The architectural form of the horse appeals to me. Yet, the metaphor is problematic because it assumes that the receiving country is being invaded by external powers. As the myth of the IR shows, the effectiveness of the subterfuge can partially be attributed to the host government. It is thus more accurate to conceive of the myth as being co-produced, and this partnership is liable to change over time. If the last 20 years have given rise to the IR at the moment of entry to new jurisdictions, it is equally important to trace its evolution over the next few decades as the industry reveals itself inside the city walls. Perhaps, the IR will shed parts of its myth as they become irrelevant, or new guises will emerge in response to enduring contradictions. In either scenario, researchers should continue to analyse the dynamic processes of normalization as new gambling projects appear in our region.

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[6] I refer primarily to publicly-listed US companies which make regular submissions to the Security & Exchange Commission and whose shareholder reports are publicly available, namely Las Vegas Sands, Wynn Resorts, Caesars Entertainment and MGM. I also refer to Asia-based companies such as Melco Crown Entertainment, Galaxy Entertainment, SJM, Bloomberry Resorts Corporation and Genting Berhad, though their documents are less comprehensive.

[7] Based on this strategy, it sold the real estate of Bellagio, Circus Circus, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay and CityCentre in Las Vegas but leased back parts of these properties to continue operating its business in gaming and entertainment. It also sold MGM National Harbor's real estate in 2017 to its own real estate investment trust, MGM Growth Properties. Finally, in 2021, MGM Resorts acquired the operations of luxury hotel and casino Cosmpolitan (Las Vegas) from Blackstone Real Estate Partners while the real estate was sold to the Cherng Family Trust. Source: Various press releases, 2017-2021, https://investors.mgmresorts.com/investors/news-releases/default.aspx

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# Mind the Gap: The Fantasy and Façades of Macao's Themed Resort Casinos

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# Mind the Gap:
# The Fantasy and Façades of Macao's Themed Resort Casinos

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**Abstract:** This article is a commentary by Richard Fitzgerald and Mark R. Johnson, written for the Philosophy and Gambling: Reflections from Macao special issue of *Critical Gambling Studies*.

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The Great Exhibition of 1851 held at the Crystal Palace in London was a showcase of the British Empire designed to demonstrate to the world Britain's role as an industrial powerhouse. Britain was at the height of its power and the event attracted exhibits of art and colonial raw materials from around the world, but most prominently from the four corners of the British Empire. The showcase of industry and cultures of the Empire bore testament to the power of Britain and its dominion around the globe where the sun never set, and it was always over the yardarm in some corner of the empire. The essence of the Great Exhibition was to display the power of Britain by bringing the world to London. In doing so the exhibition showcased Britain as the powerhouse of the global industrial economy, and presented its citizens and the newly emerging wealthy this power through the range of the goods produced.

Some one hundred and seventy years later China is now experiencing a similar boom, with the economy experiencing sustained growth and projected to overtake the US before 2030. The resulting rise in incomes lifting many out of poverty and creating a new middle class has also created an empire-sized population with money to spare, and a thirst for international travel, high end shopping, and gambling. However, while high end shopping is possible, international travel, due to the pandemic, is not - and on top of this there are no casinos in Mainland China. However, in Macao all these things come together and the territory has been developed specifically to cater to these particular desires. As a Special Administrative Region (SAR), Mainland visitors require a visa to enter Macao. There are 41 casinos operating 24/7 and, along with massive gaming floors, each of the casinos is littered with the same high-end designer shops. No matter which casino you are in, you can always get a Louis Vuitton bag. Unlike Hong Kong - its sister SAR across the Pearl Delta – which represents the international engagement of business, trade, commerce and financial services, Macao represents a place of fun and leisure, a holiday destination, and the amusement park of China.

A central part of this amusement park is the context of Macao as an "exotic" destination with its still visible and highly promoted Portuguese heritage sanitized and colonized for tourists with pastel-colored buildings, street signs in Portuguese, black and white calçada paving, and the promise of authentic Portuguese food. On top of this, while many US casino operators are currently 'de-theming' their casinos (Curtis, 2017), Macao continues to embrace the practice of theming with open arms, with the two latest casinos to open in 2021 being the Londoner Macao themed on swinging 60's London with a Houses of Parliament exterior façade, and the Lisboa Palace, which is designed to look like a massive European palace. Along with these 2021 casinos, Macao has the Venetian, which is themed on mediaeval Venice, the Parisian, which is themed on 18th Century Paris, and Studio City, which is themed on 1930's Hollywood. The themed casinos are all adjacent to each other along what is called the Cotai Strip; Looking down the Cotai Strip it is then possible to see Venice, Paris, Hollywood, London, and a European palace, all in the same place.

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*The Cotai Strip. Studio City, Parisian, Venetian with the Londoner to the right.*[2]

The themes of these casinos are not random but represent iconic and desirable international tourist destinations for Chinese tourists, reproduced in Macao. In Macao there are no 'Chinese' themed casinos either by country, landmark, mythology or cities, such as the Orleans or the Golden Nugget in Las Vegas. In the theming of the casinos there are no domestic locations or references, such as the Great Wall or the Forbidden City, with the overall emphasis in Macao being instead on *international* travel. In this way tourists not only cross the border to enter Macao from Mainland China into what has become a desirable place to visit with its visible European heritage, but once in Macao there are more desirable international destinations to visit, offering the illusion of global travel in one location. Once in Macao the hotels and services are designed around luxury and opulence with the routine level of service making even the budget traveler feel important. While Hong Kong engages in global trade, Macao attracts the globe to it by building massive cathedrals to gambling where people can see, marvel and enjoy the fruits of China's economic power. These casinos can be seen to represent the ability of China to attract the world to the geographically convenient and the culturally and linguistically familiar Macao. The idea of "bringing these destinations" to Macao is also a central theme of the advertising. When promoting the impending opening of the Parisian Casino in 2016, the advertising focused on how it was capturing the authentic Paris and Parisian way of life and replicating it in Macao, in essence claiming that its designers have been to Paris and brought it back to you, so you don't have to go. Similarly, the Londoner was advertised via David Beckham going to various places in London and putting a sticker that said "To Macao" on various objects and buildings.

**Macao, A City of Façades**

Of course, until recently, many Chinese did travel the globe, becoming a major tourist population to be catered for. However, if one currently can't travel due to the pandemic-related travel restriction, or one lacks the time or money to travel to these exotic destinations, Macao offers the consumer these destinations just a short walk or bus ride across the border. The border between Macao and Zhuhai is one of the busiest in the world with just shy of 40 million visitors in 2019, and the main Gongbei land border between Macao and Zhuhai records up to 500,000 people crossing the border on any one day. The population of Macao is around 650,000, so when combined with the rest of the daily

[2] All photos, unless otherwise noted, were taken by the first author, Richard Fitzgerald.

border crossings this almost doubles the population in a day. With the main source of gamers coming from China and the government taking over 40% of gaming revenue in tax (with gaming tax being 78% of the entire Macao economy)[3], it is not hard to see why ensuring the border between China and Macao is open and safe, while keeping everyone else out has been a priority during the pandemic.



*Senado Square Macao[4], The original Lisboa and Grand Lisboa[5], Ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral, Macao[6]*

As mentioned, there are over 40 casinos in Macao ranging from older and smaller ones to the massive new constructions arranged along and around the Cotai Strip. The first modern casino, the Lisboa, must have seemed like it had landed from outer space, especially with its light of multiple-colored circles reminiscent of the arrival of the (voice of the) Mysterons from Captain Scarlet. Yet it is now dwarfed by its sister hotel the Grand Lisboa, with - whatever one thinks of the architectural style - a striking gravity-defying design based on Brazilian show girls' costumes. This highly distinctive building now dominates the surrounding area and has become an icon of Macao.

However, despite such a striking design, like many of the casinos in the main downtown area of Macao the design of the building retains the familiar architecture of many world casinos as large glass-clad buildings of gold and silver. They are arresting and spectacular but not really out of the ordinary, architecturally, as *casinos* (Simpson, 2018). This is also the case inside these casinos where the gaming floor takes up the biggest space on ground floors, with restaurants and hotel rooms above. Moreover, these casinos are mostly designed as mainly casinos, with little attention to families or children. The main aim is to keep the gambler at the table while making them feel special through excellent service and providing ways of spending any money won on gold, jewelry, designer handbags or manbags, and fine restaurants.

**The Resort Casinos**

While the rapid development of the casino industry in Macao is fascinating with many stories of wealth, corruption, shady characters and gangsters willing to shoot up cars and casinos in pursuit of the lucrative money lending and laundering services, Macao has begun to seek to diversify the casino industry and provide a more family-friendly face. Since 2007 the development of resort casinos was encouraged to diversify the economy, being designed to also cater to the mass tourist market with large shopping malls, water parks, arenas able to host large events, convention centers for trade shows and children's entertainment. The result of this was the creation of 'Cotai', a strip of swamp between the islands of Taipa and Coloane south of the main Macao peninsula where the Lisboa casinos are located. In joining these two islands Macao named the land 'Cotai' and it was here that the new experiment in family friendly casinos was initiated through building the massive resort casinos. The strip, modeled on the Las Vegas strip, began with the opening of the unusually large Venetian in 2007, the largest casino in the world; The strip area is now nearing completion with the opening of the Lisboa Palace, the third of the franchise, in 2021. This development on the

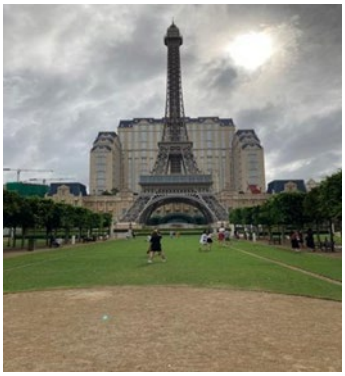
[3] Macao SAR Government Portal. "Statistics". https://www.gov.mo/en/content/statistics/
[4] Image credit: Paolobon140, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Santa_Casa_da_Misericordia,_in_Largo_do_Senado,_Macao.jpg
[5] Image credit: Bjorn Christian Torrissen. Wikimedia Commons. https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Lisboa
[6] Image credit: Jakub Hałun. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:20091003_Macau_Cathedral_of_Saint_Paul_6542.jpg

Cotai strip has now become a major tourist hub with mass crowds moving through and between the casinos. However, unlike the areas surrounding St Paul's ruins or the narrow walkways of Old Taipa Village, this strip was designed for mass movement both inside the buildings and between them. The wide pavements and large passageways linking casinos complement the design within the buildings to allow people to move through and between buildings in air-conditioned comfort. Thus, although based on and hosting some familiar Las Vegas casino franchises, the themed casinos serve a different purpose than in the US, with the selling point of the themed casinos to bring Venice, Paris, London, Hollywood, Europe to you. Their purpose is to provide a fantasy world, their design an idealized façade to envelop the shopper and the family, rather than the gamer, as the themes are only rarely carried into the gaming floor.

**The Façades and Fantasy of Space, Place and Time**

While there is a central strip along which many of the casinos explored in this article are located, the Cotai strip is not really a strip but arranged in a grid layout with other casinos either side of the strip. These casinos tend to be of the same ilk of the big glass boxes, except for the massive Lisboa Palace that seems like a whole town across from the main cities on the strip. Aside from the Lisboa Palace, the resort themed casinos are also mostly connected to each other through air-conditioned walkways or a short walk across a road. So, from the medieval streets of Venice, tourists can walk to 18th century Paris, the swinging streets of London, or 1930's Hollywood, in minutes.

Having everything on your doorstep obviously cuts down on costs, long flights and immigration lines, and avoids the traffic congestion, fear of terrorism and racism abroad, and now Covid. While each of the casinos is designed around different locations, through their idealized façades, they also exist in different historical periods, providing not only the façade of place outside and inside but also a temporal façade that tourists can wander through and be part of. It is then interesting to take a walk through the casinos to examine how they reproduce and represent an ambient time and place, beginning with the first and arguably the most complete reproduction: the Venetian Macao.

*The Lisboa Palace from the Champ de Mars, The Parisian also from the Champ de Mars, The Londoner and The Venetian*[7]

**The Venetian, Macao**

When you visit Macao, the place to start on your world tour is arguably the Venetian. It is the oldest of the themed casinos, has the oldest setting - medieval Venice - is centrally located, and is the largest. The Venetian has one of the biggest indoor spaces in the world and undoubtedly the one that shows off the themed casinos most impressively. The first to open on

[7] Image credit for The Venetian: Wikimedia Creative Commons.

the strip in 2007, the Venetian boasts a spectacular design on the outside with the façade of medieval Venice including the Rialto Bridge, Doges Palace and St Mark's Tower.

Impressive as the outside is, it is inside where the carefully curated 'wow' factor comes into force. It is here that groups of tourists on cheap day tours are guided through the buildings with their badges identifying their number and the particular tour group as they are led in a Chinese dragon formation by the guide with a stick held high, usually with some kind of small soft toy attached to the top. Whichever way you enter the Venetian, either from the front from the Cotai Strip or the rear from the bus and taxi park, you are confronted with a spectacular vision. From the front you enter into a massive high gold gilded corridor with vaulted ceilings with classical paintings in the style of the Sistine Chapel. From the rear you are guided to a large escalator that as you ascend and look back reveals the massive gaming floor. From this view you reach the top of the escalator and step into St. Mark's Square where your senses are further confused by the sky above your head. It takes a moment to remember that you are indoors and that the sky must be painted on the very high roof. This is replicated many times a day as tourists encounter it for the first time before regaining their senses to begin taking pictures and filming. What makes the Venetian unique is that unlike leaving it at one or two 'wow' moments it creates a series of 'wow' moments as you move through the building and which continually surprise you and puts you in awe of the attention to detail that envelops you.

*'Wow' moments in the Venetian.*

Once you have got over the indoor sky in St. Mark's Square, you might look to the left and right and see that the architectural theme continues both ways. The black cobbled streets underfoot, the clouded sky above, and the medieval buildings housing the shops completely envelop you as you walk along the banks of the canals. During the day it is permanently dusk, providing a cool evening atmosphere - which is of course the best time for shopping and eating. After midnight when the shops and restaurants are closed, the lights are dimmed and it becomes night time. The scene is then further brought to life through the inclusion of opera singing from some of the balconies and actors dressed in carnival costumes engaging the tourists and the gondola rides with gondoliers serenading passengers, as well as overhearing shoppers, as they float along the canals. While other casinos use similar techniques, it is the Venetian that stands out, as evidenced by the

continuing stream of tourists consistently impressed by their first encounters with these spectacles at exactly the same moment.

**The Parisian, Macao**

A short walk away from the Venetian is The Parisian. Though not as large as the Venetian, it uses many of the same techniques including presenting the overall façade of the building in the shape of an idealized château and various design elements 'brought back' from Paris. With a representation of Apollo's Fountain from Versailles, a half size Eiffel Tower and Paris Metro-inspired green ironworks with visible rivets at the entrance, as you enter the lobby you are confronted with the Winter Fountain. To your left and right are the hotel services and lobby where you enter the Louvre to check in.

While Napoleon rides triumphantly into the lobby (the horse is not live but the rider actually is), on the first floor the streets of Paris await with ladies and gentlemen dressed in 18th Century costumes strolling along the Champs-Élysées, tipping their hats to you, onto Napoleon's statue and the perennial Can-Can Dancers. While here there is the obligatory food court of various Asian foods there is also a French Brassiere, cunningly called The Brasserie, and decked out to look like a classic French restaurant with a marble pre-serving console in the middle and even a large Manet style pre-distressed mirror behind the bar.





*The Parisian, Macao*

**The Londoner, Macao**

The Londoner is one of the latest themed casinos, which opened January 2021. Although strictly a renovation of an existing casino, the Londoner is a $2 billion architectural restyling. The outside has been restyled to represent the British Houses of Parliament, including Big Ben, along with an assortment of black marble lions dotted around the entrance and the British flag festooned throughout. Interestingly this is the only casino where a national flag is prominent, unlike the flag of France in the Parisian or the US in Studio City.

Inside there are objects from London "brought back by David Beckham" including a replica of the Eros statue, marble statues of various kings and queens, a replica mews where you can park your Mini, blue plaques indicating where famous people lived and, with a hint of schadenfreude in relation to the opening simile, there is a 'Crystal Palace' atrium. You can have lunch at Gordon Ramsey's Pub or Churchill's Table

where the Mad Hatter conducts his afternoon teas. You can also ride in a Black Cab where the cheeky cabbie speaks fluent Mandarin and where the cab is always hijacked by David Beckham. While the Spice Girls play on the radio promising to tell you what they really, really want, Beckham leans back to tell you about this other place called the Londoner Macao and promptly drives into a wall and through a portal which whisks you away from the rain-soaked streets of London to arrive at the Londoner, Macao. Without thinking too much about why you wanted to go to Macao or how much the cab fare cost, Beckham introduces various restaurants as you arrive.


*Enjoying a cab ride from London to the Londoner with David Beckham. The Mews, Beefeater, Eros, and a blue plaque indicating where Charles Darwin lived when in Macau.*

With the first author having been stuck in Macao since early 2019, not being able to leave due to not being able to return as the borders to foreigners are firmly closed, this idealized version of London even engenders nostalgia and belonging, as something of home. Moreover, as 95% of tourists are from the mainland, westerners have started to unintentionally become part of the fantasy by just walking around the place and being present within Macao's global dreamscape. Along with the knowing wink of the performance of British bobbies doing a dance routine to the theme tune of Monty Python's Flying Circus (the reference being lost on most of the tourists), it is also tempting to dress up as Austin Powers or John Cleese's Minister for Silly Walks and walk around saying groovy to everyone before ordering two pints of lager and a packet of crisps at Gordon Ramsey's Pub and Grill.

**Studio City, Macao**

Next door to the Parisian, but with no air-conditioned walkway between them, stands Studio City Macao. This striking art deco building inspired by Gotham City has two massive silver statues standing outside and has a striking figure 8 Ferris Wheel in the middle of the building. Once inside, however, it is at first glance the least impressive of the themed casinos. The streets do not seem as bright or busy as the Venetian and have a shadowy eeriness about them as you walk down the 'street' past the shops towards Times Square. In here there is no fake 'sky' to represent the time of day and the top of the shop façades seem to disappear into the darkness. However, on closer inspection you realise that high above your head are dark gantries with film lights suspended and pointing in different directions. The streets are not then a replica street in Hollywood, but a film set of Anytown, USA. The high camera gantries work to layer the fantasy and façade as you walk through a film set between filming. The dimmed lighting and the buildings disappearing into the shadows deliberately produces the feeling of a slightly spooky empty film lot. What is also interesting is what is replicated in the food court. Here we are no longer in an "average" slice of imagined Americana but rather most definitely in Macao. Macao itself is replicated in the food court and based on Rua da Felicidada or 'Happiness Street' on the Macao peninsula. This famous street with

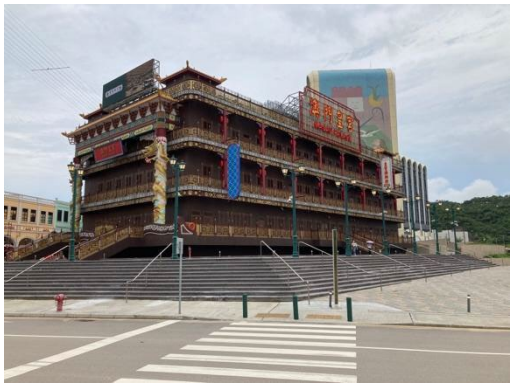
its red shop-fronts is on the list of must-see places to visit as a tourist and a place to buy the required food souvenirs to take back to China. Studio City then recreates the street, along with the wavey patterned calçada paving of Senado Square. But this again is under film lights and gantries - the actual street in Macao then becomes a film set where you can buy lunch and also buy the necessary authentic food souvenirs, all without leaving the casino.



*Studio City, The food court in Studio City, a street in Studio City.*

**The Lisboa Palace and Lisboeta**

Replicating Macao is taken to a new level with the opening of the Lisboa Palace and adjacent Lisboeta shopping mall. The Lisboa Palace built to resemble a European château is many times larger than the similar looking Parisian. Inside, however, there are no famous European streets to stroll through on the ground floor, offering instead rather clinical marble with many large, commissioned artworks representing the history and culture of Macao, often including the Lisboa in them. The first-floor shopping may be designed on a theme, but at the time of writing is not yet open. It is the Lisboeta where the themed action takes place. However, this is not themed on the cobbled streets of Alfama in Lisbon or the Ramblas in Barcelona but of Macao, of the streets of Macao, of 'old Macao' with Portuguese style pastel-colored buildings, calçada paving and even a replica of the floating Casino Macao Palace.




*The Macau Palace, and shops from Old Macau.*

This now derelict casino still exists in Macao's Inner Harbor and was the one featured in the James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), as the place where Scaramanga collected his golden bullets (the casino depicted in the Macanese scene in *Skyfall* (2012) is entirely fictional). This old casino along with the pastel-colored Portuguese buildings and calçada paving having been expropriated after the handover (Zandoni & Amaro, 2018) are themselves expropriated (for a number of Macao and Casino walkthroughs see videos posted by Urban Canvas: Streets of Hong Kong & Macau on Youtube). This, then, brings us full circle as the Lisboa creates Macao in Macao as an idealized tourist destination alongside Venice, Paris, Hollywood and London. In doing so it sells the promise that they don't even need to visit 'Macao' as they will bring Macao to you and so you can continue spending money here.

## Reflections

The opening of the Lisboa Palace brings to a close the current round of casino building in Macao, with the final two adding London and Macao to the territory alongside Venice, Paris and Hollywood. The Lisboa is also the largest themed façade and certainly "wins" the ever-present competition between casino owners over who has the biggest. However, and returning to the original simile, Britain's power in the world began to decline after the Great Exhibition, whereas with the ongoing pandemic the softness of the economic model of Macao is beginning to show. The competition for the most opulent and spectacular buildings come with a high price to build, service and keep running along with the cost of attracting visitors through staging events and attractions. While the appetite and ability for travel outside China has been severely curtailed, Macao is potentially in a unique position to take advantage of the pent-up spending from China, yet the sheer number of visitors required to fuel this industry is proving a major problem as tourism remains less than half that in 2019, even on a good day. Thus, while once it was a sure bet for a casino to open and immediately be profitable, only time will tell if this funding model will be sufficient in the face of long-term travel restrictions and sudden lockdowns. But with Macao one learns never to predict what will happen next. One of the first things you learn when living in Macao are the sayings that Macao has its own common sense, and that Macao is unique. This, as you come to learn is not just a saying but is a way of life; It really does explain the confounding and inexplicable and so, whatever happens in the future, Macao promises to remain a wonderous and monstrous enigma, a fascinating place to visit and even more so to live in, for the scholar of gambling cultures and practices.

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# Book Review: Ng, Janet. (2019). Dreamworld of Casino Capitalism: Macao's Society, Literature, and Culture. Cambria Press. 257 pp. ISBN: 9781621964278

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# Book Review

**Ng, Janet. (2019). *Dreamworld of Casino Capitalism: Macao's Society, Literature, and Culture*. Cambria Press. 257 pp. ISBN: 9781621964278**

Janet Ng is Professor of East Asian Literature in the Department of English at the City University of New York. In *Dreamworld of Casino Capitalism*, she dissects the disenchantment ensuing from failed promises of emancipation brought by exponential economic growth in Macao triggered by gambling development. It provides a candid, if not gloomy, portrait of a city in search of its own humanity, 'trapped' in a global corporate culture and tourist utopia that dictate the use of space and the death of the collective.

More specifically, the book sheds light on the lifestyles, expectations and identity struggles of Macao residents through the soul-searching and soul-opening paths of literary and film narratives produced in Macao by people who live or have lived there following the 2002 gambling liberalization. It presents the reader with powerful imageries throughout, weaving together stories and excerpts from fiction books and essays as well as film descriptions with elaborate theoretical discussions that channel us back to the world of academia.

Ng sets off to understand the nature of places of financial capitalist culture in the wake and ripening of the unfulfilled project of modernity. In the **Preface**, she argues Macao is the epitome of such places of global capitalist fantasy, "a product of global corporate vision […] nurtured under Neoliberal policies" (p. xiii). Here and throughout the volume – organised into eight chapters – she takes stock of some of Walter Benjamin's seminal works on modernity and the experience of metropolis (i.e., *The Arcades Project*, *Illuminations*) to reflect on Macao's recent urban and socio-economic transformation under a seemingly more unrelenting version of capitalism, which she likens to the act (risky) and nature (random) of gambling. While providing great insights on its genesis as a social practice, Ng traces gambling's relationship with the development of financial capitalism. "If Paris is the capital of nineteenth-century industrial modernity, casino cities like Las Vegas and Macao capture the culture and ethos of our twenty-first-century financial system" (p. xii). In this world, dreams – of consumption, social mobility, and different lives – are cast and shattered.

**Chapter one** provides the bulk of information necessary to understand Macao's conversion into the world's gambling capital. *Dreamworld: Macao and Twenty-first-Century Casino Capitalism* stands in lieu of introduction to the book, describing the city's historical relationship with gambling as an economic activity-turned-state industry, and some of the political processes that have allowed its shaping into a modern casino locale. The introduction of Chinese zoning technologies with the establishment of Macao as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), for one, continues to feed China's ideological paradox vis-à-vis gambling: an illegal activity in the mainland while being Macao's *raison d'être* (pp. 26-27). It is also in this chapter that Ng traces the parallel between the rise of gambling as an industry and the rise of the financial economy, reminding us that their speculative nature is conjured up in the idea of *casino capitalism*. The gambling industry promotes the reign of "corpocracy" (p. 32) that defines the private control of human and environmental resources and public space, sweeping off local culture and identity. Thus, Macao's overreliance on the business is concurrently the source of its staggering economic growth and accumulated wealth and of its main plights.

**Chapter two** captures some important findings permeating Ng's work, embodied in the idea that Macao's glitzy atmosphere is shaded by gloomy moods. In *Feeling Bored in the Party Capital*, the author examines how the city's "transformation into the entertainment and gambling capital of the world has resulted in mental dissonance among its residents" (p. 60). The city's exuberance – with its lavish casinos, diverse tourist attractions, and extravagant performance productions – is matched by lack of enthusiasm. This "atrophy of experience" (p. 52) is portrayed in stories by local writers in which different characters witness Macao's rapid changes with perplexity rather than inspiration. To these young men and women, the casino 'fantasy' leads to profound boredom, withdrawal from one's feelings, and individual alienation from family and romantic relations. At best, their disengagement from society

under an overbearing tourist-centric agenda conveys a sense of suffocation and disapproval of the *status quo*.

In **Chapter three**, Ng focuses on Macao's heritage industry and the search for answers to historical erasures following the city's gambling boom and the appropriation of several of its UNESCO-listed sites for tourism purposes. In *The Struggle for Memories in the City of Heritage*, she wonderfully describes and analyses a novel reflecting on a collective history, set in Macao during the early years of Communist China (1954-1967), and a film delving into an individual past, built upon an anachronistic style set to evoke Josef von Sternberg's 1952 film, *Macau*. Underlying both narratives is the story of a new form of *colonization* sparked by unfettered economic development transforming the cityscape beyond recognition to its inhabitants. These are works that invite the audience to acknowledge the disappearance of a Macao that was once known to its citizens or a lifestyle and a sense of community that no longer exist. In showing how people choose to reanimate places of memory and identity, this chapter provides great insights on how history has been usurped to serve the volatile interests of a consumption-oriented economy with no particular respect to the culture of place.

**Chapter four** provides a strong critique of gambling as a state project, exploring its efficacy as a metaphor for contemporary life and the illusion of 'self-agency' under a (capitalist) system where one exerts virtually no control. Embracing gambling as a form of work, Ng claims, equals an attempt to redress uneven social development and redistribute wealth and social resources, arguably signalling a failure in governance (p. 94). *The Gambler*'s leitmotif alludes to the eponymous short novel by Feodor Dostoevsky, of which characters engage in one way or another in risky behaviour to attain instant wealth, one's love, or a way out of work. The stories analysed in this chapter take up a similar vein, with Macao casinos arising as the site of desperate dreams ensuing from lives caught up at violent economic transitions that impart individuals with the burden of their own fates: the state withdraws from its social responsibility conveying a neoliberal narrative that transfers the ability for success and the load of failure solely to the individual. In this dreamworld, "dreams come and dreams go" (p. 100).

Exposed in **Chapter five** are Macao's social and cultural divides and the continuous subjugation of transient workers who reach the city to fill in the lower ranks of the gambling industry. In *City of Sojourners*, Ng bases her analysis off the work of writers who are not Chinese nor born in Macao, who have settled in the city at some point in time. In particular, she delves into a novel that narrates the life dramas of a group of foreigners of the upper and lower classes who converge in the protagonist's café, "a shelter from the hostile environment outside" (p. 139). Here, Ng exposes the inherent contradictions underlying the official narrative of multiculturalism celebrated by the Macao SAR Government and the reality of segregation and discrimination many migrant workers encounter as they try to fit in. These are the disenfranchised classes, mostly composed of women, who "do not have any social standing let alone cultural and political influence on the society of Macao" (p. 122), and whose aspirations for a more dignified life continue to be frustrated in the global exchange system.

**Chapter six** delves into crime and detective fiction with the genre being particularly used as an allegory for Macao's transformation under unrestrained capitalist forces and people's attempts (mostly futile) to cope with it. In *Walking the Murderous Landscape: Crime Stories*, Ng returns to the theme of consumption and spectacle-as-distraction to discuss how different urban archetypes relate to Macao's new enclosed spaces inside casino complexes: those who exist under the shopping arcades' lights, i.e., the gawker or tourist, and those obverse to such bright displays, i.e., the detective. Throughout the chapter, the author skilfully summarizes a couple of stories conveying social traumas and pathos that throw a depressing allure to the city, depicted as a place of vice where even the police are greedy and deceiving. A central idea characterizing the genre, that a sense of justice and balance is re-established through law enforcement (p. 168), is thus frustrated. The brutality and violence revealed towards a case's disclosure is what these crime narratives are about: an allegory for Macao's traumatic 'coming of age' in the era of casino capitalism and people's struggles to adjust and exist in this new environment.

**Chapter seven** expands on heritage as an industry and as part of continuous efforts to re-define Macao's cultural narrative harnessing the city's Portuguese imprint as the most distinctive trait of its urban identity. Ng's strong critique about the representation of the city's past at the Macao Museum – a loose collection of objects and symbols with "hardly any history or social narrative, let alone reflections on the political world of Macao" (p. 177) – reinstates her discussion on the culture of consumption and superficiality that define the alienation informing many spheres of life in Macao. In *Extraordinary Treasures in a City of Old Things*, she reflects on the ways people reassess history by highlighting the role of another urban character introduced by Benjamin, the collector, capable of reorganizing our past to evoke a new world. She does so by examining one novel in which several characters engage in reanimating fragments of their past in ways that challenge official narratives, stripping them of their commodity value, the only way to open up "the possibility of politics" (p. 196).

A society that no longer relies on the wisdom found in *storytelling* as a community event, prizing individual effort and material accomplishment to the detriment of collective life, is the focus of **Chapter eight**. Here, Ng questions the possibility of restoring a sense of community in a "fast-moving world where monetary

transactions seem to replace traditional human exchanges" (p. 199). In a society that has undergone profound social changes and struggles with alienation, people's dreams and imagination also seem to have vanished. *Tales of Contemporary Lives* examines an unconventional crime novel with many parallel fictional worlds embedded within it, filled with a series of violent crimes. It portrays a decadent society that operates according to casino rules and practices in which bluff, lies, and risky behaviour prevail, and people are depicted as both criminals and victims as they are strongly affected by the casino culture. Rumours and gossip displace traditional forms of communication, such as communal stories, which are indeed "community building, affirming, and instructive" (p. 210). Revealing our inevitable connectedness to one another, the novel is itself an act of storytelling at the center of social discourse, communication, and social change (p. 226).

Ng closes her book with an **Epilogue** that reiterates the idea of Macao as a microcosm of casino capitalism and the need to cautiously approach the 'miracles' of economic growth. Although the scale has changed from its predecessors in the rise of nineteenth century capitalist centres, the sense of alienation and anxiety that seize Macao residents under its overwhelming twenty-first-century transformation is undeniable. In capturing their ennui and resignation, the city's fiction writers have been ultimately a dissonant voice, defying the dominant narrative of "stability and prosperity" while "working to change the narratives of the city" (p. 231).

China's position regarding gambling in Macao has pivoted vertiginously since. Harsher measures to curb corruption, the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism, and recently enacted stricter gambling regulations have shaken the confidence in its continuity there in the long run. Ng's book provides an important outlook on the industry's character and impact before its transformation and (now impending) decline in the city.

This is a captivating and enlightening work on Macao's unprecedented and unexpected development and the many social and cultural dilemmas arising from it. It is a remarkable contribution for scholars in the social sciences and humanities working on Macao, gambling development and policy, and urban and identity studies. It provides an insightful account of forms of accommodation, contestation and subversion to gambling as a form of life, inviting further consideration about the future of cities under casino capitalism and the importance of alternate narratives to redirect development.

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