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# Gambling, capitalism and the state: towards a new dialectic of the risk society?

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## ARTICLE

# Gambling, Capitalism and the State

Towards a New Dialectic of the Risk Society?

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### *Abstract*

In this article I explore the relationships between commercial gambling and late capitalism. In particular, I am interested in the societal forces that produce gambling as a contemporary form of consumption, which I define as the state-sanctioned commodification of chance. As a theoretical entry point, I employ the typology of games devised by French sociologist Roger Caillois in his 1961 volume *Man, Play, Games*. Specifically, I develop Caillois's distinction between competitive or *agônistic* games (the ancient Greek word meaning contest or challenge) and those based on chance or *alea* (the ancient Greek for playing at a game of chance of any kind). I extend these categories beyond a concern with the individual game to explore the tensions between the increasingly *aleatory* trends of the risk society, the *agônistic* forces of gambling production (i.e. the state and industry) and the *aleatory* nature of individual consumption. I argue that the expansion of gambling products is due to the state's own position as *aleatory* subject with late capitalism. I suggest that the concern with the risk minimization of the risk society and the massive expansion of *alea* through gambling are dialectically related. In other words, the risk society produces a corollary – a demand for risk – in the production of *alea*. This contradiction is resolved through the consumption of *alea* as a form of controllable, bounded, and individualized risk, one that is able to be consumed free of the broader global anxieties of the risk society. Finally, I argue that *aleatory* consumption itself opens up the possibility of a series of misrecognitions between production and consumption, ones that, in combination with the ideology of chance, conceal the *agônistic* realm of production by enabling consumers to adopt individualized orientations towards consumption. This means that the consumer can both manage the risks of the global society and engage in personal risk taking behaviour in a dialectic relation.

### *Keywords*

*agôn* • *alea* • capitalism • gambling • risk society • the state

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, gambling in western societies has emerged from the shadows of dubious morality into the light of mainstream consumption, a transition encouraged by the secularization of social life, the rise of consumerism, industry development and regulatory liberalization (Reith, 1999). The opportunities for state-sanctioned gambling have grown enormously. Indeed, between 80–90% of the populations of most western societies consume commercial gambling products (Abbott et al., 2004; Productivity Commission, 1999; Sproston et al., 2000; Wardle et al., 2007; Welte et al., 2002). My purpose in this article is to align this consumption of chance with the sociology of the risk society (Beck, 1992). The question I seek to answer is, given that the management of risk is a fundamental organizing principle within the risk society, how is it that risk has been concurrently and successfully commodified on a mass scale through the production of commercial gambling? More specifically, how have the relationships between modernity, the state, and gambling consumption been reconfigured to produce the mass global commodification of chance that we are currently witnessing?

To establish clear definitions of conceptual categories, particularly as they relate to the production and consumption of chance, I draw on the work of French sociologist Roger Caillois, who, in his 1961 book *Man, Play and Games*, developed a functionalist account of the relationships between chance and society. Specifically, I reemploy Caillois's distinction between competitive or *agônistic* games (the ancient Greek word meaning contest or challenge) and those based on chance or *alea* (the ancient Greek for playing at a game of chance of any kind).<sup>1</sup> I extend these categories beyond a concern with the individual game and equate them with two realms – the *agônistic* forces of production or supply, and the *aleatory* realm of consumption or demand. This adaptation is used to describe the contemporary configuration of the state–consumer relationship, where the *agônistic* imperative of the state is increasingly, and ironically, dependent on the mass production of *alea*. The state, despite its dramatic failures to manage global *alea* (as evidenced by the latest episode of global overaccumulation of capital) has nonetheless been dramatically successful in the commodification and production of *alea* through regulated gambling. In this way risk is abhorred and feared as well as celebrated and embraced. To explain this apparent contradiction, I propose a dialectic relationship between the global risks of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) and the individualized risks of consumption practices. I argue that regulated gambling is one side of this dialectic, a side that is overlooked in general formulations of the risk society,

but one that is necessary to explain the neoliberal transformation of risk from the level of society, via to the state, to individual consumers.

### ALEA, AGÔN AND GAMBLING GAMES

Caillois (1961) was interested in how an analysis of games may provide insights into the social structure and organization of different societies. As the basis for his investigation, he developed a typology of play through which he classified all the games of any given culture. In the context of western societies, Caillois developed a binary distinction between competition or *agôn* and chance or *alea*. *Agôn* stresses the ability of contestants to surmount obstacles and opponents to achieve victory. The point of the game is to have a player's superiority recognized. To achieve this goal, it is important that the practice of *agôn* leaves the player to his or her own devices in order to produce the best game of which he or she is capable. It is equally important that the game is played within fixed limits, with the rules applied consistently and equally to all players, in order for the victor's superiority to be beyond dispute. This competition is: 'like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph' (Caillois, 1961: 15).

Within this category, Caillois includes sporting contests and their many subdivisions, as well as various competitive games such as checkers, chess and billiards. In stark contrast, games of *alea* consist of those games where the outcome is rendered completely independent of the player. In these cases winning is the result of luck or fate as opposed to triumph over an adversity (Caillois, 1961: 17). *Aleatory* examples cited by Caillois include dice, roulette, and lotteries – the common games of chance. The fundamental characteristic of these games lies in the player's passive attitude, who does nothing but anticipate the outcome. Unlike *agôn*, in *alea* the player not only refrains from trying to eliminate the injustice of chance, but rather 'it is the very capriciousness of chance that constitutes the unique appeal' (Caillois, 1961: 17). The important distinction is that in *agôn* contestants rely upon their own abilities and seek to minimize the role played by chance. Conversely, with *alea*, it is the submission of the self to the forces of chance and fate that constitute the attraction. In the words of Caillois:

*Alea* supposes on the player's part an attitude exactly opposite to that reflected in *agôn*. In the latter, his only reliance is upon himself. In the former, he counts on everything, even the vaguest sign, the slightest outside occurrence, which he immediately

takes to be an omen or token – in short, he depends on everything except himself. *Agôn* is a vindication of personal responsibility, *alea* is a negation of the will, a surrender to destiny. (1961: 17–18)

However, the analytical power of Caillois's *alea-agôn* distinction lies at the level of society rather than the individual game. According to Caillois, it is the opposition of *agôn* and *alea* as *social* forces that produce the fundamental tension from which commercial gambling emerges as form of consumption. The explanation for gambling, Caillois suggests, resides in the *agônistic* structure of society, one characterized by polarities of wealth and poverty, glory and obscurity, and power and servitude, even in the relatively egalitarian societies. As Caillois puts it:

most people are unable to dramatically change their station in life. From this arises the nostalgia for the crossroads, for immediate solutions offering the possibility of unexpected success, even if only relative. Chance is courted because hard work and personal qualifications are powerless to bring such success about. (1961: 114)

Thus, in Caillois's view, the inequitable nature of *agôn* at the societal level demands a counterbalance, one that is neatly provided by the democratizing force of *alea*, a force that abolishes social distinctions by eliminating the importance of work, experience, and qualifications (Caillois, 1961: 17). From this perspective, *alea* is a necessary compensation for *agôn*. Caillois presents *alea* as a social safety valve – one that reconciles the contradictions and tensions that exist within affluent capitalistic society. In this way, the very opposition of *alea* and *agôn* paradoxically affords them a basic form of compatibility or parallel function. It is this relationship that not only provides a functional explanation for the existence of gambling, but also explains why gambling, or a fascination with chance, can arise in *agônistically* orientated capitalistic societies. That is, the consumption of chance is a response to the competitive nature of capitalistic society in which life chances and opportunities are inequitably distributed.

While Caillois has been criticised for failing to adequately explain the meanings of consumption (Downes et al., 1976), I argue that his idea of a dialectic relation may be relevant at the higher level of abstraction, at the societal level of gambling production. To explore this idea I use the concept of *agôn* as a starting point from which to examine the relationship between gambling consumption, the state, and society. To this end I use *agôn* to

describe the desire of the gambling industry and government to manipulate the outcomes of chance, to predetermine the outcomes in order to maximize revenues. In this sense, *agôn* may also be equated with the desire to minimize chance and risk, to provide a framework for the unfolding of events where all elements are manageable by the contestants or manipulators of the system. I equate *agôn* with both the marketplace competition of industry and the associated interventions by the state in the form of taxation and regulation. It is here that I commence my analysis of the state production of *alea*.

### THE STATE AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF GAMBLING

As Ritzer (2000) argued in his book the *McDonalidization of Society*, the mass commodification of goods is possible due to the increasing rationalization of the 'means of consumption', a phrase that describes the range of enabling structures that streamline consumption through the management, control and subconscious manipulation of consumers. In a subsequent article, Ritzer and Stillman (2001) focus on one specific form of the means of consumption – the modern Las Vegas casino hotel. These authors suggest that such casino developments are paradigmatic 'cathedrals of consumption', characterized by use of simulation, the implosion or erosion of boundaries (i.e. between gambling, shopping and travel), time-space compression (following Harvey, 1989), and heavy use of surveillance technologies. Together these characteristics are integrated to attract and manage consumers. The key point I wish to draw out here is that these 'cathedrals of consumption' both rationalize the provision of *alea* and simultaneously use it as a mechanism of what Ritzer and Stillman describe as *enchantment*, a form of self-illusory hedonism (derived from the work of Campbell, 1987). The process of enchantment is important as it acts as a counterbalance to the forces of rationalization, it breathes new life into tightly managed systems of direct and subconscious consumer control (Ritzer, 2005). I suggest that the enchanting ideology of *alea* is not only central to the means of consumption with casino mega-resorts, but is also able to animate a variety of consumption contexts.

This elevation of *alea* to a paradigmatic 'means of consumption', more so than other 'products', is possible precisely because of its immateriality. As Baudrillard (1981) argues, it is the symbolism attached to the transaction that is important, in that the act of exchange is itself an experiential or ideological product. In this sense *alea* is a form of consumption that is post-commodity. *Alea* is reflective of a society that is more concerned with the production of desire than with the consumption of individual

commodities. Thus, the symbolism of *alea* is the symbolism of late capitalism, one that is divorced from external reference points, but is able to rely on its own inner logic. In this formulation, *alea* exists as a produced consumptive practice, where the logic and rationale are found not through reference to external social values (e.g. religion, morality, class), but through symbolic circulation (Jansson, 2002; Lash and Urry, 1994). Thus, an important implication of the immateriality of *alea* is that production and labour are increasingly replaced by consumption and leisure. In this formulation, *alea* is centrally positioned within consumer culture, predicated on a new social and moral basis of spending, one that necessitates a shift away from traditional social values based on hard work, thrift and savings. In the words of Cosgrove and Klassen (2001: 6): 'With the rationalization of gambling activities through the large-scale impersonal forms of gambling, economic morality is no longer subjected to social or religious ethics, but to the pure movement of money or its circulation'. Reith (2007: 36) describes this change as the celebration and promotion of a new kind of 'consumption ethic', replacing an ethos of production and accumulation with a 'state-sponsored fantasy of the big win'. Its celebration is, as Reith (1999) argues in *Age of Chance*, a defining characteristic of the consumer society.

The rise of *aleatory* consumption presented the state with a dilemma. On one hand it stood to benefit from the liberalization of an economically lucrative industry while, on the other, this change was potentially impeded by moral objections to gambling that had held sway since the Victorian era and which were institutionalized within the practice of the state, particularly with regard to gambling regulation (Reith, 1999, 2007). In other words, there emerged a tension between gambling as a celebrated form of consumption and the existing ideological basis of governance. As a consequence, the state was pressured to reconfigure the ideology of gambling consumption to align it with the emerging economic relations between consumers and the state associated with the transition to a consumer society (Husz, 2002; Kingma, 2004). It became necessary to overturn the criticism of gambling as a morally questionable or economically unproductive activity in favour of its re-incorporation into the social world in terms of a morally-sound consumptive practice (Husz, 2002; Wilk, 2001). Consequently, an industry-state partnership was formed that reconstructed and promoted the notion of *alea* as a consumer product, an entertainment, a desirable expression of consumer sovereignty and choice (Neary and Taylor, 2006; Nibert, 2006). This involved the recasting of *alea* as a recreational and leisure choice through the commodification of gambling, particularly through *en masse* rebranding and relabelling of products (Cosgrave and

Klassen, 2001). Indeed, the fantasy of the big win is perhaps the ultimate capitalistic product, one that offers realization of all consumer dreams. Such fantasies are highly marketable and increasingly form the basis of media campaigns advertising both private and state-run gambling products (McMullan and Miller, 2008, 2009). For example, in Sweden the investment by gambling companies in advertising increased four fold in the decade up to 2006. One company, Svenska Spel, a large state-owned company that operates lotteries and sports betting, spent 25 million Euros on advertising, an outlay that placed it in the top six largest advertisers in the Swiss mass media (Binde, 2010).

State lotteries are clear examples of the state's heavy involvement in the production of *alea*. Rather than simply take a back seat, regulate the industry and enjoy revenues, the state has become a key provider of gambling services globally. For example, the World Lottery Association, an organization formed to advance the interests of state-sanctioned lotteries, boasts a membership of 76 nations across five continents (World Lottery Association, 2009). The involvement of the state, with its massive advertising budgets, suggests that the commodification of chance has not been caused by a change or expansion in the *aleatory* principal per se, but by the increasingly aggressive forces of *agôn* (i.e. the state and industry) that reframe and repackage *alea* to encourage mass consumption. In this vein, Neary and Taylor identify '(A)n intensification of state power which attempts to colonize the world of gambling, charity and culture and make them increasingly functional for the neo-liberal accumulation of capital' (2006: 344). If we accept this argument, then the state is positioning itself not as a beneficiary of production (the traditional fiscal base of the state) but as a generator of consumption. The idea here is to attract and control the 'means of consumption' (Ritzer, 2000) rather than directly controlling the 'means of production' (Marx, 1976). Not only is *alea* central to the reproduction of the symbolic relations of late capitalism, but it is also intrinsically linked to the reproduction the material relations between the neoliberal state and its consumers. Indeed, the extent to which the state has become involved in gambling is nothing short of remarkable.

## THE ALEA OF CAPITALISM AND THE AGÔN OF THE STATE

It is clear that the state is attracted to the revenues available through *aleatory* expansion. Although it is regressive, gambling revenue is 'easy money' in that its legitimation, and in many cases nationalization (i.e. through lotteries), has transformed it into a form of voluntary taxation (Abt, 1996; Eadington, 1996; Neary and Taylor, 2006; Smith, 2006). Indeed, *alea* has

become increasingly important to the finances of the state (Doughney, 2004; Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone and Woolley, 2007; Ronalds, 2002). From a political economy perspective, gambling is a regressive form of revenue generation, an efficient commercial form of exploitation of the desire to engage with chance (Doughney, 2004; Livingstone, 2001; Volberg and Wray, 2007). In this sense, the production of *alea* legitimates socio-economic inequality and supports the *agônistic* status quo (Nibert, 2006). Within this system the state adopts a dualistic and contradictory role, as agency for the simultaneous protection and economic exploitation of its citizens (Doughney, 2002, 2004; Livingstone, 2001). However, the enormously lucrative nature of *aleatory* production could not have been predicted. It is a historically-specific phenomenon, one that obscures the deeper question of why such a revenue stream is so important to governance itself, an importance that overrides the charter of the state to protect the welfare of its citizens. In short, the state's dramatic appropriation of *alea* demands further explanation.

To understand the state's involvement in gambling, we need to first understand the pressures to which it has been subject over the past several decades, the threats and risks that have emerged, as well as the natures of its response to those risks. Over the past two decades the idea of risk has become central to the sociological explanation of modernity following the publication of Beck's *Risk Society* (1992). Beck was interested in the implications of the range of global risks associated with industrialization (e.g. global warming, pollution, resource depletion). These risks are increasingly generalized, global, intergenerational, and incalculable in their consequences. In response, Beck argues, social organization has moved from a concern with the distribution of wealth to a concern with the distribution and management of risk. A previous social concern with the distribution of 'goods' has given way to a concern with the minimization of 'bads'. In short, rather than eliminating scarcity, the risk society is concerned with the reflexive elimination of the risks introduced by modernization itself. As a consequence, individuals increasingly organize themselves around risk 'positions' in an attempt to minimize their respective exposures, an orientation that produced new forms of social and political formations. Consumers are forced to self-organize to manage risk, and this risk management, rather than class struggle, becomes the central axiom of modernity.

The state itself has been forced to reorganize along principles of risk management. In this context, Nearly and Taylor (2006) analyse the role of risk in the reconfiguration from Keynesian planner to neoliberal state in post-war Britain. In the same vein as Beck, they argue that the intensity of

recent change and the global magnitude of potential risks make the calculability of the future increasingly problematic. The state itself is consequently subject to the uncertainties of contemporary capitalism (Beck's industrialization), a global *alea* that it is ill-equipped to bear. Specifically, the Keynesian planner state is no longer effectively able to calculate and insure against these risks on behalf of its citizens (a configuration Neary and Taylor describe as the 'law of insurance'). The subordination of the planner state to the forces of globalization (i.e. abstract power of money and law) has meant that both levels of social welfare and access to employment have become increasingly *aleatory*. In this way social security risks are transferred from the state to the citizen – the citizen is no longer subject to state insurance but to the chance or *alea* of the global market. The key point is that the state has changed the form of its intervention accordingly, from an *agônistic* to an *aleatory* interventionist mode (Neary and Taylor, 2006). It is these new mechanisms that Neary and Taylor (2006) describe as the 'law of the lottery', a situation where the state no longer has the policy control to maintain aggregate levels of employment, resulting in the impacts of unemployment becoming a matter of chance. In the words of Neary and Taylor:

The neo-liberal restructuring has involved the simultaneous restructuring of the economic, political and ideological aspects of the capital relation. The political deconstruction of the institutions of the welfare state and the economic deregulation of the market has thus been accompanied by the development of an ideological focus on chance and risk as the political and economic recomposition of new modes of state intervention premised on these principles. (2006: 351)

In a similar vein, an analysis of the role of the state in US gambling by Abt concluded that: "The problems of creating real economic opportunities for people through a combination of their own hard work and government investment in new capital-producing infrastructures has been ignored in the growing reliance on "luck", "chance" and unearned "windfall" profits' (1996: 197). Thus, the existence of the global *alea* of the risk society has reconfigured the contemporary neoliberal state so that modes of state intervention are increasingly *aleatory* in response to risk. From this perspective, the uncertainties or *alea* of late capitalism produce an *aleatory* state form, where the state manages risk through the production and control of consumptive practices, ones that locate risk in the consumer rather than the state. The key question, then, is how the state, in the context of its dramatic

failure to manage the effects of global uncertainty, is able to commodify the attractions of *alea* so successfully?

### PRODUCTION OF *ALEA* BY THE STATE

It is clear that the state/industry complex produces *alea* in response to its own position as *aleatory* subject. This means the state is committed to the production of *alea*; that is, to marketing and selling (both materially and ideologically) a range of consumer products based on chance (e.g. lotteries, electronic gambling machines, sports betting and race betting). As a consequence, an increasing range of gambling products is produced through the process of product differentiation. For example, there is currently not one but eight weekly lottery draws at the national level in Australia (including Monday Lotto, Oz Lotto, Wednesday Lotto, Powerball, 6 from 38 Pools, Saturday Lotto, and \$2 and \$5 Jackpot Lotteries). This differentiation enables the sale of chance to an increasingly diverse range of consumers through the continual development of heterogeneous products aimed at particular market segments. As Cosgrave and Klassen point out:

Governments, and the marketing firms they hire to promote gambling products, must constantly revolutionize these products and advertise aggressively to create and sustain interest in them. The creation of new gambling products and the marketing of those products to the public demonstrate the increasing commodification of gambling activity whereby this activity becomes a form of commodity fetishism. (2001: 10)

The mass production of *alea* has become possible in large part due to technological changes that the state and industry have been able to successfully harness. New technologies have resulted in the reconfiguration of the social relations of the game itself. A pivotal change has been the replacement of labour with technology at the point of exchange. In the case of gambling machines, human labour has been removed from the immediate production of gambling and replaced with linked random number generators, individually presented by electronic devices, in an increasingly private relationship between subject and machine (Livingstone, 2005). The technology of the networked random number generator is driving a merging of gambling media, a 'desegregation process that makes possible one-stop gambling venues where different gambling media are combined in a single site' (Austrin and Curtis, 2004: 41). Consequently, the sites of gambling consumption are undergoing a trend towards similarity or convergence – the blurring of traditional social distinctions between types of gambling

venues – in localized versions of Ritzer and Stillman’s ‘cathedrals of consumption’. This convergence enables venues to stimulate demand through the combination of gambling forms (Miers, 1996). As a case in point, sporting and services clubs in Australia transformed from non-gambling public venues with a community benefit charter during the 1980s and 1990s to become contemporary suppliers of integrated gambling products. A typical club now offers electronic gaming machines (EGMs) or ‘poker machines’ (these are similar to the US style slot machines), keno (a form of continuous electronic lottery), sports betting, and race betting (e.g. horses and greyhounds). In this way, a homogenized yet differentiated *aleatory* product is created (Young and Tyler, 2008).

In addition, the distribution of *alea* has been facilitated by the introduction of remote communications (e.g. internet, mobile phones and digital TV). As a result, the consumption of *alea* is increasingly effortless or barrier-free. For example, a survey conducted in September 2009 by the UK Gambling Commission found that 10.6% of 8,000 adults surveyed had participated in at least one form of remote gambling through a computer, mobile phone or interactive/digital TV (Gambling Commission, 2009). This proportion had increased from 7.2% in 2006, a finding explained largely by the growth in online lottery participation. In Australia, the Productivity Commission (2009) has recently proposed changes to the *Interactive Gambling Act 2001* that will allow for Australian web sites to provide interactive gambling services to Australian customers, an activity that is currently prohibited yet worth an estimated \$700 million AUD annually.

To summarize my argument so far, the consumption of *alea* has risen to a central place within contemporary capitalistic societies. The commodification and legitimation of *alea* within the *agônistic* framework has meant that the state is involved in commercial gambling, both as a regulator and financial beneficiary, to an unprecedented degree. The desire to produce *alea*, necessitated by the emergence of the global risks of the risk society that create the state’s own position as *aleatory* subject, is then differentiated, legitimated, and promoted to consumers in a partnership between state and industry. Aided by technological developments, *alea* has been successfully sold and discursively reproduced as a consumptive practice. The production of *alea* has not only increased but also widened to include, for the first time, the middle class, ironically the group traditionally most hostile towards gambling, in a shift that has ‘normalized’ the activity (Reith, 2007: 35). Herein lies a key contradiction. On one hand, the risk society thesis argues that social practice is increasingly organized around the management and

reduction of risk. On the other hand, we are presented with the en masse production and consumption of risk through the commodification of gambling. How then do we reconcile these apparently contradictory relations?

### A NEW DIALECTIC OF THE RISK SOCIETY?

The mass production of *alea* by the state, the possibility of an *aleatory* state form and ideology, and the massive consumption of *alea* or chance by entire populations, raise a direct challenge to the risk-society thesis (Beck, 1992, 1995; Giddens, 1990, 1991). In the risk society, the ‘taming of chance’, the need to control for risk of the contingent, to minimize the uncertainty associated with threatening events or probabilities, has risen to become the primary goal of western social life (Hacking, 1990). There exists a contradiction between the need of the individual to minimize global risks and the simultaneous engagement in mass-produced *aleatory* risk. In other words, the risk society appears to create its opposite – a society based on the mass production and consumption of chance. As society organizes to minimize global risk, a concurrent latent demand for risk-taking is produced, a demand that the state has been evidently able to exploit with remarkable success.

To resolve this tension I suggest that risk, as conceptual category, contains within it a dialectic relation between global undifferentiated risk (associated with anxiety) and individual differentiated risk (associated with pleasure). On one side of the dialectic is the risk society. These risks are explicitly *global* in that they are unbounded, external, intergenerational, systemic (in that no-one is immediately accountable), and affect all of society. They are *undifferentiated* in that while they are distributed according to class, risk positions are not solely class positions due to their global nature (e.g. flow on effects down the food chain, effects of nuclear fallout, etc.). Global warming affects all humanity, but in locally different ways. The individual is relatively powerless over these risks despite the risk position occupied.

The antithesis of the risk society is risk taking for pleasure – the consumption of *alea*. *Aleatory* risks (i.e. gambling products) appear as personal choice, are bounded, temporally specific, class patterned, internal, and are the responsibility of the individual consumer. This risk is *individual* in that it is the expression of subjective consumption preferences. It is *differentiated* in that each individual operates as individual consumer with control over their consumption practices (except, one could argue, in the case of the problem gambler or ‘flawed consumer’ [Bauman, 2007]). In other

words, there is a perceived degree of control over these forms of consumption. *Alea* thus becomes a consumer choice, the ability to engage in risk in a way that is bounded and controllable. Therefore, these risks are less associated with generalized societal anxieties. They can, and have been, discursively manipulated into the realm of pleasure and entertainment. *Alea* allows the latent demand for risk to be controlled, and represented in the fetishized money form of the commodity. In this way, consumption of *alea* can be individualized successfully. It can be incorporated into the individual biography, the set of consumptive practices that define identity. This bounding allows for unprecedented engagement with risk. It enables a set of consumptive practices (e.g. lotteries) that now celebrate risk and chance.

The synthesis of these two sides of the dialectic is achieved through the mechanism of the *aleatory* society where the state inverts global anxieties into individual pleasures. Here the *agônistic* commodification of *alea* results in the global sale of differentiated risk. In this configuration, risk is *global* in that individual engagement with bounded risk operates through the international *agônistic* machinery. It is *differentiated* in that individual consumers have an increasingly wide range of consumption products to choose from, even though these are produced by a unitary *agônistic* base. Both previous moments of the dialectic exist in the synthesis in that global anxieties drive the risk position of the state while the latent desire for pleasure within the individual is now awakened and harnessed by the state to the global industry of desire production. In this synthesis, *alea* is the dominant ideology and this is manifest in the massive consumption of gambling products. However, the synthesis itself reveals a further contradiction. As Caillois made clear, on one hand *alea* is about chance, the possibility of unexpected and underserved success. Yet if it is *agônistically* produced, *alea* becomes mere illusion in that chance per se is replaced by systematic control of outcomes and economic exploitation of consumers. Obviously, *alea* remains paradigmatic despite this materialist subversion. This begs the question of how the individual consumer navigates the synthesis. In other words, how is the space between *agôn* and *alea* managed at the level of consumption to facilitate this global industry?

## THE CONSUMPTION OF ALEA

Lotteries are a clear example of the societal celebration of chance within consumer culture (Casey, 2003; Husz, 2002; McMullan and Miller, 2009; Reith, 1999). However, a tension arises when this form of immaterial consumption is contrasted with the exploitative *agônistic* system of production. In the case of lotteries, the reconciliation of this tension is achieved

via a discourse of community benefit, a discourse that overcomes the oppositions to regressive revenue generation (Cosgrave and Klassen, 2001; Nibert, 2006). For example, the UK National Lottery revenues have been used to establish a lottery fund (the 'Big Lottery Fund') which, according to its website, has raised £23 billion for 'good' causes since 1994. In other forms of *alea*, such as EGMs, the community benefit argument is less convincing as is the celebratory side of the risk dialectic. In the case of EGMs, the fact that a computer program is used to produce the outcome game indicates that the role of skill, or *agôn*, on the part of the player is non-existent, at least in any objective sense. EGM production is purely *agônistic* because the odds are predetermined by algorithm, there is no chance of longer term wins, and money accrues to the production side at carefully calculated proportions. In Australia, for example, where EGMs dominate the gambling landscape, and are widely available in almost every town and city, the minimum return to players is 85% of the amount bet (Queensland Government, 2007). In addition, the rhythms of play are determined and reinforced by win schedules that program individual responses (Abbott, 2006; Dickerson, 1996; Dowling et al., 2005; Griffiths, 1999; Livingstone and Woolley, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2008). EGM consumption would appear to make little economic sense to consumers who may resist this sort of economic exploitation. This is where the ideology of *alea* is so important, one that elevates chance into the mainstream of consumption. Manufacturers of EGMs, for example, go to great lengths to differentiate their machines through *aleatory* symbolism. This is reflected in the names of popular Australian machines such as 'Black Rhino', 'Dolphin Treasure', 'Geisha', 'Indian Dreaming', 'Mega Bucks', 'Queen of the Nile', 'Shogun', and 'Treasure Chest' (Livingstone et al., 2008). Much like Ritzer's enchantment, *alea* provides a type of illusory superstructure, one that has enough cohesion in its internal logic to exist successfully, indeed prosper, on top of an *agônistic* and contradictory reality. *Alea* acts, paradoxically, as a democratizing discursive that overlays and obscures *agônistic* power relations. It is a subterfuge or mirage, one necessary to maintain the power relations that determine the flow of resources. In this way the ideology of *alea* harnesses desire to a rationalized, individualized economic framework.

This is not to suggest that the relationship between production and consumption is simplistic or uni-dimensional. The sphere of individual consumption is complex in that people bring different orientations to the game that open up possibilities for both *aleatory* or *agonistic* consumption. To continue with the example of EGMs, there exist individual misrecognitions where *alea* and *agôn* are confused at the level of the individual

consumptive act. *Alea* does exist on the side of consumption, but only at the level of the moment of the individual event (i.e. each press of the button), which involves no skill, just a chance of winning at predetermined probabilities. This single consumptive transaction may be considered discrete and conceptually unhinged from the stream of consumptive moments of which it is a sequence. It is this false possibility of the moment that keeps people playing. The possibility can, by definition, only exist once. Repeated attempts turn gambling into voluntary taxation as the odds are weighted in favour of the house. This enables a transient *aleatory* world of consumption that does not reflect or recognize the mode of production. Only when a consumer keeps gambling over time do the force of *agôn* becomes increasingly recognizable.

*Agônistic* orientations are equally possible on the side of consumption. In these cases either the *alea* of the *individual gamble* is misrecognized as *agôn* (i.e. the ‘gambler’s fallacy’ which incorrectly assigns a relationship to independent events), or the *agôn* of the *player* is confused with the *alea* of the individual event (i.e. the carefully encouraged ‘illusions of control’ [Langer, 1975]). This form of misrecognition is common as evidenced by studies of EGM players which show that that many people do approach EGM play strategically (Dickerson, 1996; Griffiths and Delfabbro, 2001). These orientations allow for the transformation of *alea* into *agôn* at the point of consumption. In these instances, *alea* is not really consumed in Caillois’s sense (by abandoning to fate), but by the player reacting to the *aleatory* ideology in an *agônistic* way by trying to control the outcome. There has been a transformation of the *agôn* (of the state) to *alea* (of the game) to *agôn* (of the consumer). Thus, the *agôn* of the consumer is actually a misrecognition of the *agôn* of the producer. The irony is that the players do not make the distinction between the *agôn* of production and their own internal *agôn* – and this causes them to play the system competitively.

Given these misrecognitions, and the vested interests involved in their perpetuation, the sphere of *aleatory* consumption is complex and fraught with ambiguities. However, it is these very misrecognitions that allow individuals to engage with risk in individually oriented ways, ones that allow them to construct their own risk biographies, both by managing the global risks of the risk society, and by managing and controlling the micro risks of gambling consumption. The risk society, while demanding risk management and mitigation, simultaneously produces a demand for risk within the sphere of individual consumption. This consumption, through the ideology of *alea* (of lotteries or EGMs) both disguises the material basis of production and allows chance to be individualized through social practice. The

corollary of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992), it would seem, is the 'age of chance' (Reith, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

My contribution in this article has been to offer a critical analysis of the production of gambling in contemporary capitalist society, based on an adaptation of *alea* and *agôn* at the macrostructural level. It is evident that over the past two decades the state and industry forces of *agôn* (the system of production) have harnessed those of *alea* (the realm of consumption) to an astonishing degree. I have argued that this expansion is due to the state's own position as *aleatory* subject within late capitalism. As part of the state's response to globalized financial risks, it has reconfigured structurally and ideologically to use *alea* as an organizing principle, resulting in the massive commodification and selling of chance. In this way, I suggest that the concern with risk minimization of the risk society and the massive expansion of *alea* through gambling are dialectically related. In other words, there exists a flip side to the risk society, one where the state has successfully been able, despite its complete failure to deal with global financial and market risks, to commodify and sell chance remarkably successfully to individual consumers. The risk society produces a corollary – a demand for risk – in the production of uncertainty. This in turn raises a contradiction between the demands of risk avoidance on one hand and the mass production of risk on the other. I argue that this contradiction is resolved through the consumption of *aleatory* risk as a form of controllable, bounded, and individualized risk, one that is able to be consumed free of the broader global anxieties associated with the risk society. From this perspective, *alea* is a discursive device for reproducing consumer desire and converting that desire into a predetermined flow of resources within the *agônistic* system. Finally, *aleatory* consumption itself opens up the possibility of a series of misrecognitions between production and consumption, ones that, in combination with the ideology of chance, conceal the *agônistic* realm of production by enabling consumers to adopt individualized orientations towards consumption. This means that the individual can both manage the risks of the global society and engage in personal risk-taking behaviour in dialectic relation. If we accept that the meta-*alea* of late capitalism drives and determines the *agônistic* production of *alea*, that global risks are increasing, and that technological advances will continue to open doors for the production of gambling products, then the production and consumption of *alea* must logically continue to increase, to diversify and to reach new social classes. We could expect the risk society to have a growing antithesis in

consumer culture where the celebration of *aleatory* risk becomes an increasingly important organizing principle of modernity.

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## NOTE

1. Two other categories, while not central to the arguments I present in this article, complete Caillois's typology. *Mimicry* describes those forms of play based around the assumption of an illusory personality. Mimicry also crosses in adulthood as evidenced by theatrical presentations and some forms of traditional dance and celebration. To form a complementary pairing with mimicry, Caillois's fourth and final category is *ilinx*, the Greek term for 'whirlpool', which is a concern with the pursuit of vertigo, or a desire to temporarily alter perception, to obtain a sense of sudden disorder.

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