

Our Present Misfortune: Games and the Post-bureaucratic Colonization of Contingency

*Nosso revés atual: games e a colonização pós-burocrática
da contingência*

RESUMO

A antropologia está se voltando para um novo compromisso com uma questão central de Weber: como as pessoas entendem a distribuição da sorte no mundo? O recente exame de nossa disciplina dos usos do passado nos leva a perguntar como as posições em relação ao futuro são produto da lógica cultural e alvo de interesses institucionais. Neste artigo, traço o envolvimento com a contingência na antropologia e no pensamento social e, em seguida, comparo a postura indiferente em relação ao futuro encontrado na sociedade grega com a disposição diferente do domínio individual dos jogos no domínio digital, como em Second Life, mas também no jogo mais antigo patrocinado pelo Estado Grego: Pro-Po. Esses exemplos ilustram como os jogos são cada vez mais o espaço de esforços institucionais, tanto para se apropriar da criatividade quanto para gerar subjetividades distintas.

Palavras-Chave: contingência, games, Grécia, instituições, Second Life

ABSTRACT

Anthropology is turning toward a new engagement with a central question of Weber: how do people come to understand the distribution of fortune in the world? Our discipline's recent examination of the uses of the past prompts us to ask how stances toward the future are both the product of cultural logics and the target of institutional interests. In this article, I trace the engagement with contingency in anthropology and social thought, and then compare the nonchalant stance toward the future found in Greek society with the different disposition of individual gaming mastery in the digital domain, such as in Second Life, but also in the longest-running Greek state-sponsored game: Pro-Po. These examples illustrate how games are increasingly the sites for institutional efforts both to appropriate creativity and to generate distinctive subjectivities.

Keywords: contingency, games, Greece, institutions, luck, performance, Second Life, technology

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By no means do we live in a post-bureaucratic era, but we are in a moment in which certain institutions are implementing techniques that might usefully be termed 'post-bureaucratic' as part of their projects to do a number of things, such as to cultivate legitimacy, domesticate and exploit creativity, and generate subjectivities about a disordered world and its indeterminate future. In significant respects, these techniques rely upon the cultural form of games— that is, upon the contrivance of indeterminate outcomes within semi-bounded arenas characterized by a compelling mixture of constraints and sources of contingency. But games as a cultural form are not new, even if their treatment in anthropology has been sporadic and uneven. In examining the playing of games, anthropology can, at its best, reveal how stances toward the open-ended quality of experience through time are embedded in cultural logics, for example, as in Paul Festa's (2007) examination of mahjong in Taiwan, or in several of the distinguished contributions in this issue (Mosko's article is a particularly apt example). My work on Greece was conducted in a similar vein—to see how the playing of games evinced culturally shaped attitudes in Greek society toward the chanceful quality of experience and thereby to move beyond a narrow treatment of the topic in terms of unexamined chestnuts such as fate.

Since the time of that research (the mid-1990s), however, games have become a primary technique by which the institutions that architect our digitally mediated experience enlist our participation, profit from our creativity, and cultivate distinctive subjectivities. My aim in this article is to show, through a comparison between Greece and my more recent work on Silicon Valley, how the current use of games in digital media, by significant architects of our digital lives, trades on the deeply human engagement with contingency that this special issue calls upon us to rethink.

We are beginning to see what anthropologists perhaps should have been the best prepared to recognize for quite some time: how human dispositions toward the aleatory quality of experience point toward neither the persistence of a pre-modern mind-set nor a performative post-modernism, but instead display a wide variety of different understandings of the relationship between action and experience. They are the product of the always moving meeting point between open-ended experience oriented toward the future and the irretrievable past, and they entail both the project of meaning making in the wake of the unexpected as well as the practical dispositions that shape engagements in the fraught moments of indeterminacy themselves. While such culturally embedded dispositions toward the indeterminate future are overdue for examination by anthropologists, this task is made all the more urgent given the ways in which such attitudes are increasingly the target of institutional projects.

CONTINGENCY, EXPERIENCE, AND SOCIAL THOUGHT

In the first decades of the last century, Max Weber asked a central question: how do people make sense of the distribution of fortune in the world? What Weber recognized was the way in which the open-ended unfolding of experience, with all its indeterminacy, generates a challenge of meaning. The Protestant entrepreneurs about whom he wrote needed to understand not only their bad fortune but also their good fortune, in order to legitimize it. We are reminded that it is not only the damaging contingent events—those that generate suffering, as medical anthropology has so powerfully explored—that make this demand of us. The contingency of our ongoing encounter with the world, Weber suggests, is experienced as a potentially never-ending quandary, one that he explores most extensively through the concept of theodicy.

The contingent is, to speak according to the philosophical usage, that which is not necessary—that which did not have to happen. The classic example of it is the universe in which only black swans happen to have been born. The importance of recognizing the contingent nature of human experience appears again and again at the edges of distinguished thought in academe over the past 150 years. Louis Menand (2001) has shown how the pragmatist philosophers, following Darwin and also as a result of their experience of the Civil War, took the contingent nature of the universe as ineradicable. Of particular note here is Oliver Wendell Holmes's own label for his philosophical outlook. He eschewed the label 'pragmatism' in favor of "what he liked to call his philosophy of 'bettabilitarianism'" (ibid.: 217), that is, the idea that every time we act, we make a bet with the universe that may or may not pay off (see Malaby 2009b). In a similar vein, none other than James Clerk Maxwell—the physicist and mathematician so beloved by Silicon Valley programmers that his famous equations are worn on T-shirts—rejected, of all things, the positivist notion of determinate cause and effect: "It is a metaphysical doctrine that from the same antecedents follow the same consequents ... [I]t is not of much use in a world like this, in which the same antecedents never again concur, and nothing ever happens twice" (Campbell and Garnett 1882: 483–489; see also Hacking 1983)^[1]. Such a rejection recalls Darwin's own commitment to the contingent nature of natural processes, a commitment that was so provocative that it led John Herschel to deride his theory of natural selection as the "law of higgledy-piggledy."^[2]

Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) has gone beyond positing the irreducible contingency of every life, specifying heuristically its various sources. Pure randomness, he suggests, generates contingency in a way that is usefully distinct from the social guesswork beloved of game theorists in economics, and this is furthermore usefully distinct from the performative contingency that marks anyone's attempt to act in the world in ways that may fail or succeed—such as the socially poetic actions of Greek men described by Herzfeld (1988). I would add that the indeterminacy

of meaning itself is another source of the open-ended quality of our experience, having in mind Wittgenstein's (1969) writings about language as an open-ended game, of a sort.

One can multiply the examples beyond the space that is available in this article. But to bring the discussion around to our discipline specifically, in anthropology we can see how the ideas of Heidegger and the phenomenologists have influenced some scholars, who argue that we should make room for the awareness and experience of disorder in the world. The idea of 'thrownness' was developed most powerfully by Michael Jackson (1989), who entreated anthropologists to cease taking for granted the idea that social actors are not aware of the arbitrary contours of their being in the world. Talal Asad (1993: 7, 17; 1994) has suggested that the deployment of power is intricately tied to control over the perception of probabilities and the exploitation of ambiguity. Other social theorists have addressed explicitly this issue of the politics of the contingent as a growing awareness of the social construction of reality demands a more careful examination of how both individuals and institutions (particularly nation-states) account for unexpected events. Sally Falk Moore (1975) has also sought to direct our attention to the importance of indeterminacy in the unfolding of social events. In a very similar fashion, for the so-called practice theorists (Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Marshall Sahlins), life is game-like precisely because it has this open-ended quality. It is a quality that is experienced, practically, by social actors, giving the lie to projects that put the final accounting for events to agency, on the one hand, or structure, on the other (see Malaby 1999). And as I have already mentioned (but it bears repeating), medical anthropology is deeply informed by an awareness of what Arthur Kleinman (2006: 225) refers to as our uncertain and unmasterable human condition. While on the whole this literature may commit the error of assuming that the indeterminate is necessarily a source of suffering, the question of suffering and the challenges it presents to meaning are intimately connected, again, to how people come to understand the distribution of fortune in the world.

But the centrality of contingency as a facet of human experience and its possible implications for the questions we ask as anthropologists have been continually obscured, not only by a modernist faith in an underlying order that must manifest itself in many ways, but also by a postmodern suspicion that the performativity of representation renders all other constraints and sources of contingency moot. I cannot improve on the powerful indictment of this latter strain of thought offered by Graeber (2012) in the first of these two special issues on luck and contingency. I note only that the performativists' emphasis on the untrammelled realm of representation (based on a colossal misreading of J. L. Austin, for whom the conditions under which speech acts took place were utterly consequential) perhaps most damagingly erases the practical engagement with the indeterminate and the way that it frames the possibility of exerting some limited

agency. This is agency that is measured not in terms of the realization of one's will upon the world, but rather by being in the position to have any effect on outcomes at all, even in terms of unintended consequences— that is, agency as described by Giddens (1984: 5–9). As both Mosko and Sangren explore productively, the nature of agency amidst the vast array of constraints and sources of possibility in human life is variously elaborated across human societies and in ways that invalidate the tendency to read human engagements with the contingent through a narrowly Western lens (see Mosko's discussion of *laki* in North Mekeo). While I hesitate to go so far as Sangren by suggesting that in these elaborations of the nature of agency we can see a deeply human desire for omnipotence, it is clear that the unfolding of indeterminate events often raises questions—which are then culturally elaborated—about the nature of the relationship between human action (individual or collective) and what happens to happen, as it were.

Yet much has stood in the way of such productive inquiry. For William James (1902), the religious attitude was most usefully defined as a total stance toward the world that asserted the existence of an enduring order behind the apparent chaos. Such an assumption about religious attitudes worldwide has echoed through anthropological treatments of the subject over the century since James's famous lectures. But, interestingly, James specifically had to exclude a different kind of totalizing disposition, which he saw in Voltaire and Ernest Renan—the *je m'en fichisme*, the rejection of transcendent order and the proffering of an attitude of readiness to confront whatever the fundamentally capricious world may throw one's way (see Malaby 2009b). This move by James (which excluded from his purview the very attitude toward the world that characterized the pragmatists themselves) should prompt us to bring culturally shaped attitudes of *je m'en fichisme*—differently elaborated, of course, in any context—into our field of vision. When we ask how people come to understand the distribution of fortune in the world, we are asking how they understand the complex concatenation of constraints and possibilities, including those engendered by their own actions (but ultimately not reducible to them), while avoiding any assumption that social actors may, consistently throughout their experience, subscribe to a totalizing and ordered picture of the world.

None of this is to say that human experience is not often dominated by routine, pattern, and predictability. It is intended only to understand the degree to which, as expressed by Jackson (1989: 15), "the anthropologist's preoccupation with regularity, pattern, system, and structure has to be seen as less an objective reflection of social reality than a comment on his personal and professional need for certitude and order." If we are ready to grapple in a more sustained way with the presence of the contingent in human experience, we will be in a better position to understand how culturally shaped attitudes toward the messiness and complexity of life are currently becoming the object of institutional interest.

GAMES IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL PRODUCTION

For much of modernity's reign, the classic nation-state of the West, and many of its other modernist institutions, pursued the promise of control through order. More properly, this project was carried out by combining the imposition of order with the cultivation of belonging, often achieved through the cultural form of ritual. In the supremely ordered and ordering bureaucratic logic of rationalization, the unexpected, the outlier, was that which proper procedure and categorization would eliminate, even if (in fact, crucially, if), in practice, consistency was never realized. Order, Michael Herzfeld (1988: 69) has written, is "one of the most tenacious of 'absolutes' posited by the exponents of Western rationality," and the strategic essentialism of the bureaucratic claim to order was exposed by the messy practicalities of the every day. The nation-states and other large-scale institutions, such as corporations, hoped that efficiency and productivity were to be found at a final, ordered destination of perfectly organized and controlled people, systems of classification, and problem-solving technologies.

But perhaps this hoped-for destination did not include meaning. Meaning, as Weber suggested, is not rationality's strong suit. Ritual, in all its ordered spectacle, thus became the cultural form through which meaningful belonging could be cultivated. Now, however, many such institutions have found and are perfecting a different cultural form, that of the game. When games are understood as a domain of contrived contingency that, if done well, is both compelling and capable of producing meaningful outcomes, then the creators and sponsors of games have the opportunity to architect contingent experiences that can generate meanings and subjectivities for individuals while also doing work for capitalism.

Google is one such institution. It created a game to accomplish an enormously valuable task that would otherwise have been cost-prohibitive to undertake: the labeling of its vast corpus of billions of images, culled from its scouring of the Web and cached on its servers. By their nature, the images cannot be searched for by text (except, poorly, by their filenames and related text-based information). But they become effectively searchable once they are tagged with descriptors—keywords that describe the image—and such tags must be added by human beings who can make sense of the often complex images. To have employees or contractors do the work of labeling these images would have been extremely expensive, so Google developed a game that ran from 2006 to 2011—the Google Image Labeler game—whose participants, people from all over the world, labeled its images for free. Two players were anonymously paired for each game. The players were shown the same image for two minutes and then tagged the image with as many descriptors as they could. If both players typed in the same descriptor, they received game points. The players could record and compare their 'high scores' (if they were registered

users), but otherwise the points had no value. Google succeeded in leveraging the contrivance of contingency to command the attention of thousands of individuals who collectively performed unpaid work for the company.

Another example is TopCoder, a business founded in 2001 that hosts competitive online programming contests. Winners receive cash prizes but lose the commercial rights to the code they produce. The contests are biweekly, and a larger one, the TopCoder Open, is held annually. During the contests, the competitors code (i.e., write software for) solutions to complex real-world problems. Here, game design forms the incentive to participation, specifically the application of effort and cultural capital (competence) to perform in a compellingly contrived, indeterminate system—a game. TopCoder's players are competing to demonstrate programming ability by applying their expertise to a novel problem in urgent circumstances, against time and against each other. The success of the enterprise depends on TopCoder's ability to tap into this playful competitive mode or disposition, which is governed extrinsically by an ulterior profit motive, geared toward practical applications of the winning solutions after the fact. In his work on marketing, Kalman Appalbaum (2004) found an emerging distinction between the lower-level and dismissively labeled 'creatives' and the higher levels of management, which had successfully found ways to exploit the former's creativity. This suggests that along with the use of games to attempt to cultivate creativity (and extract its products), we should also notice the implicit distinction here between the 'players' and the sponsoring institutions that create the conditions for such play. What we are beginning to see is the bifurcation of creativity, which is separating those who are creative within a ludic system from those game designers who creatively contrive the ludic system itself.

But the use of games is not limited to the exploitation of creativity. Take Back Illinois was a game created by Ian Bogost (2007: 140–142) for the Illinois House Republican campaign in 2004. The game was Flash-based, meaning it could be played within a Web browser, and it was prominently available on the campaign's Web site. In the small window for the game, players saw a section of a city from an angle slightly above (what game designers call 'two and a half D [dimensions]'). The game included several 'subgames' and called upon the player to make adjustments to policies (such as, in one of the games, caps on medical malpractice damages) in order for public life to flourish over the course of one year (time ticked away steadily during the game). Success in each game was implicitly coded (in the form of a claim embedded in the software architecture), rather than explicitly stated, to align with Republican policies.

Similarly, and also in 2004, Kuma Games created John Kerry's Silver Star, a game created to contribute to the 'debate' over Kerry's Vietnam War experiences. In the game, the participant played the part of John Kerry, piloting a swift boat up the Mekong Delta. The claim of the makers was that playing such a game would help individuals decide for themselves what must have

happened. Games such as these make knowledge claims in new ways, implicitly in the code itself, and persuade the player in new ways as well (Bogost 2007). Rather than a performative representational claim about politics and reality, the game involves the player's practice and seeks to cultivate a disposition or 'practical reason' (Sahlins 1978) about the subject at hand.

In differing ways, these games are being used to appropriate labor and creativity and to make knowledge claims in new ways. In all of them, the successful game, as always, must provide the proper balance between routine and surprise, between pattern and novelty, to be compelling and to command the attention of its players. But these new efforts by technological institutions evince a further and specific set of assumptions: they put forth an ideal of individual mastery of complex systems that I have termed 'technoliberalism' (Malaby 2009a). Linked to the post-World War II era of technology and programming, this ideal has an overriding faith in technology, a suspicion of conventional modernist (top-down) institutions, and a (liberal) conviction that the aggregate effects of individual engagement with technology, both within and beyond the market, will generate social goods.

Technoliberalism is the attitude found among the programmers and hackers currently being examined so fruitfully in the work of anthropologists Gabriella Coleman (2004) and Christopher Kelty (2005), who show how the practically political nature of these programmers leads them to architect certain ideals into their creations while denying their personal participation in political discourse. In a similar way, Natasha Schüll's (2012) work on the design and production of computerized slot machines illustrates how the contrivance of compelling, open-ended experience has reached unprecedented scope and effectiveness with the advent of digital technology. In virtual worlds such as Second Life, developed in 2003 by Linden Lab (see Malaby 2009a), and in the examples above, the digital architecture evinces a picture of the human/user as an individual (rather than a social being) who seeks mastery and is eager to be provided domains within which to gain and display this mastery.

But such new institutional attempts to shape the human encounter with open-ended experience do not encounter a vacuum. In many respects they collide with existing cultural logics of engaging the indeterminate, and such has been the case in Greece. There we can witness the rise of state-sponsored gambling that, in important respects, promoted a subjectivity concerning chance and institutions that presaged the efforts we can see around us today. We see an encounter between an established Greek cultural disposition toward the indeterminate—what I have termed 'instrumental nonchalance' (for which most illegal gambling provided a context)—and the relatively recent institutional project wherein young men are called upon to demonstrate their individual mastery of football (soccer) as mediated by the state.

INSTRUMENTAL NONCHALANCE AND THE RISE OF PRO-PO

In Greece, and for some time, the government has sought to raise revenue through the sponsorship of gambling. Founded in 1958, the state-owned Greek Organization of Football Prognostics (OPAP) is the exclusive operator of lotteries and sports betting games in the country. This monopoly accounts for its status as the largest betting firm in Europe, and it has in recent years come under increasing scrutiny and pressure from the European Union, which wants Greece to open up its gambling market to competitors. Some may recall the riots in Greece in December 2008, sparked by the murder of a 15-year-old student who was shot by an Athens policeman. One of the issues that figured prominently in the riots was political corruption, and the most immediate and specific example that the protesters pointed to was the state's then recent action (illegal, under EU law) to shut down the newly opened offices of competitors to OPAP's monopoly on Greek citizens' legal gambling.

When one considers OPAP as a state-sponsored gambling company^[3], it is quite easy to look first to its lotteries and scratch ticket games, which after all are in many respects identical to those common in other nation-states. But what is less often commented upon with regard to OPAP is where it began and how it started its efforts to colonize Greeks' engagement with chance with its first game, Pro-Po—a game very much unlike a traditional lottery. What is Pro-Po? While it has undergone several minor revampings over the course of its more than 50-year existence, its major features have remained unchanged. Players fill out a form that is printed anew each week. On it are 13 upcoming football matches to occur over the next seven days (most on the weekend). Players must pick, for each match, which team will win ('1' designates the home team, '2' the visiting team) or predict a tie (designated by an 'X'). After the week's matches are played, the players who have correctly selected the winners split a jackpot. The matches selected are always a mixture of familiar ones from leagues in Europe and more far-flung matches from obscure leagues around the world. At the time of my research in the mid-1990s, there were eight games during the week from different football leagues worldwide. Jackpots, usually totaling between several hundred thousand and a million drachmas (between about \$1,000 and \$4,000), were exceedingly rare and, when they did occur, were often shared.

In the course of my research at the time, I did not pick up on what made Pro-Po so distinctive or the nature of the relationship between players, institutions, and chance that it suggested. I was drawn instead to the very widespread illegal and informal gambling that takes place in coffeehouses, clubs, and homes, and also to the scratch ticket and conventional lotteries that were OPAP's other offerings (Malaby 2003). Through them I came to understand a widespread and distinctive disposition toward the indeterminate, one that characterized in particular Greek

men, although not exclusively. This attitude of instrumental nonchalance encountered in Greece not only bespeaks a player's approach to the flow of indeterminate outcomes in games such as poker, backgammon, or dice, but also shows more broadly how many (male) Greeks seek to demonstrate how they engage the vagaries of experience in whatever domain they are found. As I have previously described it (Malaby 2003: 20–21):

Instead of concerning oneself with squaring the outcomes in a gambling situation with one's place amidst them through the use of one trope of accountability or another, many gamblers prefer to present themselves as completely unconcerned about these outcomes, placing themselves above the fray, as it were. This "instrumental nonchalance" is a difficult pose to put into practice, as it is the presentation of a subtle but unbreakable manifest conviction that neither favorable nor unfavorable results are important, a seamless unflappability. In a way, this is a kind of performance of non-performance, as it is a resolute refusal to play along, so to speak, but one which is paradoxically effective in bringing about preferable results ...

This ideal of unconcernedness, of "instrumental nonchalance," is paradoxically effectual, as it is the lack of concern over winning that brings success. This idea is consistent with what Herzfeld calls the "ethos of imprecision," where those engaged in social relations evince a casualness about monetary exactitude, an "economic carelessness," such as in financial or other exchange transactions between neighbors, kin, or friends (Herzfeld

1991: 168–176). The difference here, however, is that a transaction between individuals is not necessary for one to have an opportunity to present this posture. Instead, any risky situation provides one a chance to appear unconcerned, and yet paradoxically thereby more likely to attain one's objective.

In the course of my research, this disposition and the cultural logic about contingent circumstances that it manifests arose time and again as I came to see a number of Greeks act across several domains of their experience—including one who faced the certainty of imminent death but also its indeterminate timing (see Malaby 2002). Contained within it is not only a recognition of the indeterminate unfolding of social experience, but also an ethos about one's own actions amidst that uncertainty—how one's own agency can be brought to bear on such outcomes and potentially influence them in one's favor. The result is a performative challenge that leads not to omnipotence but rather to a constant testing of oneself against each outcome as it appears. The good and the bad, each must not matter, and if they do not, only then do the fruitful results multiply^[4].

In the mid-1990s, the segment of the Greek population that played Pro-Po, however, evinced a very different approach to contingency and their own agency amidst it. These were typically young men between the ages of about 18 and 30, at the oldest. In every case that I encountered over the course of my research (during which I spoke to more than 30 Pro-Po players), these young men were very dedicated football fans and extremely knowledgeable about not only the Greek teams but also the premier league teams throughout Europe and the major national teams throughout the world. Unlike most players of state-sponsored games, who usually purchased

lottery or scratch ticket games quickly on their way from one errand in Chania to another, Pro-Po players would typically get the ticket for the week's matches, take it with them to a café, and begin researching that week's teams, using football and sports-focused newspapers and magazines. As I note in my earlier work, they would take my presence as an opportunity to do yet more research, asking my opinion about the United States national team, if it was on the list that week, or other national or league teams from North and Central America. These players were eager to master the complex system of international football and to demonstrate their prowess in predicting the week's matches as selected and provided by OPAP. In doing so, they thereby hoped to beat not only other players (ideally by having the only winning ticket), but OPAP itself, which clearly sought to bedevil their chances through its careful inclusion of the obscure.

In Pro-Po, one can see a distinctive set of promises about individual players' performative competence and an architected array of carefully selected games. This approach speaks to a player's subjectivity in a way that is entirely different from instrumental nonchalance in a number of respects. First, players do not hesitate to display publicly their active interest in maximizing their chances through research, and they correspondingly do not seek to show any strategic unconcernedness about the outcome. They stand out against players of other games in their eagerness to show their mastery. In a sense, these players are, in stark contrast to the nonchalant, *striving*. Second, the players do not voice a problematic relationship with the Greek state as the mediator of this form of game playing. As I have discussed extensively elsewhere (see Malaby 2003), whereas for other games the Greek state is seen as the capricious and corrupt enemy (something to hide from or to cheat through tax evasion), for Pro-Po players the state seems, to put it simply, unproblematic—or beside the point. The state's legitimacy as the operator of this game is unquestioned; instead, the state is seen as simply providing a context in which an individual player's skill can be tested.

In Pro-Po, the government-owned gambling agency cultivates a different relationship among individuals, chance, and institutions than that which prevails in most Greek gambling. Players are called upon to engage the complex and indeterminate outcomes of global football matches as mediated by the state's selection of them. A promise of reward for skillful performance draws players into a relationship with the state that is marked by something other than the typical Greek antagonism toward it. Instead, the state provides a legitimate context in which individual football fans (almost exclusively young men) seek to display their individual mastery of a global hierarchy of football teams and leagues. The state agency, however, carefully selects a set of matches from the familiar to the obscure so as to make masterful prognostication a tantalizing but effectively impossible prospect.

We can recognize in Pro-Po a disposition that in certain respects is strikingly similar to that found in Google's game, TopCoder's competition, and Second Life's infinite landscape of program-

mer possibilities. It is (unlike other Greek state gambling games) resolutely individual, putting the player in an individual relationship with the state, as opposed to setting a group of players against the state. Calling for the mastery of a complex and global system, it challenges football fans to prove just how knowledgeable and smart they are. Second, the player's relationship to the institution that sponsors the game is not antagonistic. Instead, and interestingly, it seems to mark a subjectivity whereby the players' aim is to align themselves with the institution's selections. In other words, their successful mastery of the game, evinced through a completely correct ticket, speaks more powerfully than anything else (even their own knowledge of football) to how OPAP's mastery of football 'prognostication' and their own are one. Finally, the institution uses technology to architect this chanceful enterprise, which is shaped not only by the actual submission of players' tickets (read by machines), but by OPAP's gathering of information about possible matches and its use of statistical reasoning for its own purposes.

This last point is particularly interesting and merits further comment. While I was unable to gain access to OPAP's procedures during fieldwork, it seems reasonable to speculate (as suggested by the institution's name) that statistical reasoning and complex simulation are the primary tools that lead to the selection of matches each week. It seems likely that the operators of the game at OPAP, like most sports book operators worldwide, have a very precise expectation about how likely it would be in any given week for a player to win the jackpot. Its selectivity and profitability rest on such precision. OPAP is playing a different game from its players, however, as it does not need to predict match results. It needs only to select matches that create a landscape of possibilities that tantalize players into attempting mastery while remaining ultimately indeterminate.

The contrast in Greece between instrumental nonchalance and techno-mediated individual mastery strikes me now as presaging the kind of collisions between digitally architected game-like domains and existing cultural logics of the indeterminate that are currently taking place. To close, then, I would like to suggest a parallel between the kind of alignment that Pro-Po players aspire to through their successful performance and the simple and largely unremarked-upon second button on that most famous of Web home pages, Google.com.

■ FEELING LUCKY?

Google's famously Spartan home page has long been home to three elements beyond the colorful logo. These are the search bar, the search button, and a second button, with the label 'I'm Feeling Lucky'. Upon entering search terms and clicking the search button, the familiar listing of results is returned, ranked according to Google's complex search algorithms. Those rankings reflect, in a way that has vast economic consequences (given the interest in commercial and other Web sites in increasing their 'page rank'), an alignment between the user's capacity to conceive of and type in search terms that index their goals and Google's own complex assessment and organization of the information available across the Web. One can immediately notice the 'global hierarchy of value' of which Michael Herzfeld (2004) wrote in the context of Greek artisans. This is a global hierarchy with which millions of people contend every day in a game-like fashion. Will the user type in terms that are effective? Will Google return effective results? The link between action and event is open-ended and relates individual mastery of the complex semiotic realm of possible search terms with Google's digitally architected regime.

When a user chooses instead to use the 'I'm Feeling Lucky' button, the stakes of alignment between the individual and Google become even more magnified because the user is immediately taken to the first Web page that would have been listed had the conventional search button been pressed. We may usefully ask of this encounter to what extent a successful arrival at just the page the user wanted could carry with it something like the magical or divinatory associations that are explored in many of the contributions to this special issue. Google's labeling of this second button only heightens the association, turning the meeting point of individual searcher, who is seeking to display mastery, and the architected value of Google's organization of the Web into the occasion for luck. Like the players of Pro-Po, I would suggest, a bringing together of individual, institution, and contingent outcomes is on display in a way that highlights a particular kind of subjectivity. In the context of digitally mediated experience, this strange kind of luck points toward an engagement with the contingent unfolding of experience that foregrounds individual mastery, eschews certain kinds of sociality, and backgrounds institutionally shaped digital architecture.

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- [1] On 11 February 1873, James Clerk Maxwell gave this talk to the Eranus Club (of former members of Cambridge ‘Apostles’). The talk is titled “Does the progress of Physical Science tend to give any advantage to the opinion of Necessity (or Determinism) over that of the Contingency of Events and the Freedom of the Will?”.
 - [2] Darwin (1992: 423) quotes Herschel’s comment in a letter to Charles Lyell, dated 10 December 1859.
 - [3] As of June 2008, the Greek state now owns 34.4 percent of OPAP. Previously, it was the sole owner.
 - [4] It bears mentioning that, in contrast to some of the contributions to this special issue, the role of religion—in this case, the Orthodox Church—in shaping the cultural logic of chance where I worked on Crete was so muted as to be nearly undiscoverable. The gamblers and (almost without exception) the non-gamblers with whom I worked were disdainful of the Church’s ideas, if they ever came up at all.