¶ A manifest de=

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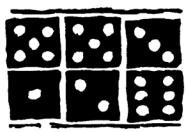

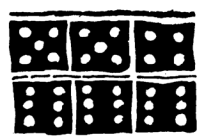

¶ Democritus.

Si je ris vous estes plus folz que ne ries
de me veoir rire
De vous et de voz actes sont plus que mon
rire plut dire
Tant ilya a vous redire et aulx plus sages
de vous tous.
Qui est pleine fol qui ne rit de vous.

¶ Foztune vient a point.

A manifest detection of death-lot in banking games
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Dedicated to Carlo

« Qui voudrait échapper à cette contingence des rencontres historiques et se tenir hors du jeu au nom d'une "objectivité" non située, à la limite connaîtrait tout, mais ne comprendrait rien »

[Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated "objectivity" would at the most know everything, but would understand nothing]

- Paul Ricœur, La symbolique du mal

Many theoretical positions within anthropological development regard the mainstreaming of gaming as the defining characteristic of American culture. With the common ease of use and learnability of tools and devices, everything around us is refracted as a user-friendly recreation. However, research conducted on behalf of this sentiment expresses the essential continuity and expansion of gaming as rooted in various spiritual practices. Games have always functioned as kinds of rituals, specifically as the reflections

of cultural and/or devotional acts and conditions, from primitive huckle bone rolling tournaments to contemporary first-person shooters; yet at no other time has the boundary between play and worship been so obscure. The procedure by which autonomous acts are integrated is convoluted and often violent, as a dominant agent absorbs and conceals a submissive, hiding it deep within itself like a cryptogram. Shortly thereafter, categorical independence is contested, reduced, and detached from any prior meaning, and thus,

susceptible to infection by distinctly other intentions; nevertheless, the skin that shrouds its corruption inevitably becomes accepted, interrelated, familiarized, and cliché, if only for the fact that it's seen. Of course, the privileging of a surface that effectively hides the nefarious qualities of its parts is like commending the kiss of Judas while inattentive to its deceitful implications. The mass popularization of gaming and its clandestine attachment to liturgical practices presents more questions than answers. For example,

why is something as harmless and essential as play synonymous with ritualistic activity? What makes gaming a reliable preservation method for esoteric dogma? Perhaps of greater concern are questions regarding the corollaries of games as ceremonies of prescription—for instance, what do games and related actions achieve beyond single-minded entertainment, hobby, or pastime? What are the roles of participants, players, and observers? These questions are difficult to resolve, and a thorough explanation is certainly

beyond the scope of these notes. I do, however, believe that it's possible to break down generalities in order to focus on specific cases that may prove useful to anthropological research and, as a result, inform credible, more comprehensive responses and conclusions. For this purpose, I'm concerned with a specific genre of games: banking games. These are structural, rule-based activities where players compete against a banker, who, in turn, challenges individual players on behalf of a bank. The bank always has a slight

statistical advantage over players and, therefore, while they may win or lose, the bank always churns a profit in the long run. Games of this sort are quite common, but examples that adequately represent the genre—especially as they articulate the use of three archetypal gaming devices, namely dice, cards, and random number generation—are craps, blackjack, and roulette, respectively. These notes are meant to be an anthropological consideration of banking games as rituals, specifically how they function via the generation

of novel forms of experience, the reworking of distractions, and partitions between play and worship. Rituals, in general, alter from one framework to another, but are almost always sequences of actions performed in accordance with a given substructure. Rituals exist in all societal and cultural contexts, and are typically designed and used to transform or consecrate one or more variables of a focal paradigm. This definition is quite broad, as rituals span the spectrum of human experience, from religious rites of pas-

sage to everyday sporting events. However, I'm primarily concerned with what I've come to refer to as death-lot, which is the interrelation of the variables of death and dying with the making of a decision via randomized selection, and how it manifests in banking games, particularly as an infusion of organic (i.e., participatory) and inorganic (i.e., structural) affectations tethered to each chance taken. While there has been widespread anthropological interest concerning chance, accident, uncertainty, and risk in various cul-

tural procedures, contemporary explorations have barely scratched the surface of how something like death-lot figures into varying levels of material and nonmaterial existence, or how it suggests alternative perceptions and changes in the general disposition of spiritual life. Although lot is most certainly a product of death, requiring its abstraction and finitude in order to maintain the relevancy of its faculties, it's also a quality of death, as that which simultaneously enacts, prevents, and continues its cycle. Without the elements that

constitute lot—fractious, indiscriminate variables that set conditions for situations, events, opportunities, etc.—death is no more than a fundamental constant and absence, which is impossible. Death and lot are not only one and the same, for example, as ethereal properties that expose the delusion of material control and sustainability, but also mutually exclusive given their social, spiritual, and corporeal functions and limitations. Therefore, I'll be discussing death and lot as both unified and separate concepts

throughout these notes. Death-lot isn't an entity or ancient being per se, but rather a deep-seated truth that has been excised from collective memory, primarily due to successive onslaughts of civilizations, cultures, and spiritual practices designed to eradicate it. People are inherently antagonistic toward death-lot; however, their various battles against it—justified due to the misanthropic disposition of death and lot's implications for all of existence, i.e., the foundational truth of fatality and randomness, respectively—are, of

course, futile. Death-lot isn't something that can be defeated; it can only be forgotten, and this is certainly worse than remembering. Regardless, opposition to it is contingent on the various modes of a given time period; for instance, the current manifestation of humanity's war against death appears to be an elaborate silent treatment. In her book *The Exercises of Loss*, Agata Tuszyńska writes: *In the haste of the 21st civilization, we decline to notice death. We bashfully pass over it, we hide it, deny that it exists and thus that it*

can get us. Beaten back into cultural and social shadows, both death and lot persist as unseen variables of human activity, yet function imperviously in plain view. Every one and thing around us will die seemingly by lot. This is, or should be, common knowledge (albeit repressed); however, the implications of this horrifying fact are seldom realized—that origins are little more than embodiments of death-lot itself, which, in turn, suggests that it's the holy creator, or on par with the holy creator, or at least the holy cre-

ator's lover. This stands in dangerous opposition to the influence and power wielded by modern faith and philosophical movements. The Enlightenment and its privileging of reason and individualism over practice rendered the holy creator an improbability. This likelihood remains the same today, particularly in a positivist and consumer sense, where the holy creator is reduced to a concept that is compartmentalized to fit in with private logics; therefore, any evidence of personalized gods and the origin stories that come along

with them is inconsequential. On the other hand, the game, with its built-in rules and constraints, isn't only probable but also practical. Death within a specific gaming structure is articulated not as a centralized authority, such as God or a group of gods, but as the evoking of generalized other-worldliness that absorbs all things within the limitations of a contest; something that can't be killed, albeit something that can kill easily via randomized choice within an equable context and, therefore, worthy of worship in a pragmatic

sense. As Alan Harrington writes in *The Immortalist*: *Luck will be […] the only thing that can kill [the children of eternity], and for this reason they may go down on their knees before it. […] Others may conduct ceremonies before the future equivalent of a giant […] roulette wheel.* Just as death-lot can never be excised from a constraint-based infrastructure, it's something that can never be eradicated from American faith. Despite the best efforts of the separatist sects of the New World, lot, chaos, and enchantment continued to plague

the hearts and minds of the colonists, predominantly due to the protestant ideologies that demanded the purification of the souls of indigenous peoples. The separatists inadvertently reinforced the animist practices of native populations via a conspicuous propensity toward the secret worship of lot, even as they vigorously protested against polytheism, idolatry, and magic, and violently proselytized against corollary witchcrafts. The faith in providence, God's care and guidance over all existence, was gradually

humanized to make sense in terms of the settlers' daily trials and tribulations. In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas writes: *The doctrine of providence was always less likely to appeal to those at the bottom end of the social scale than the rival doctrine of luck. For the believer in luck can account for misfortune without jeopardizing his self-esteem. The concept of luck explains any apparent discrepancy between merit and reward and thus helps to reconcile men to the environment in which they live.* The puritanical beliefs of the settlers

maintained an authoritarian God by decree, in control of every aspect of existence; however, it was only natural for even the most devoted congregant to acknowledge another ominous presence dwelling in the colonies—a Nobodaddy who just as easily answers prayer or doesn't, forgives or damns, is there or isn't there. It's true that many people attributed their misfortunes to God's just punishment for their sins, but the difference as to why one settler remained healthy while the others suffered and died from dysentery

was empirically understood in terms of those who were fortunate versus those who weren't. Despite separatist tendencies toward iconoclasm regarding the religious symbols and motivations of other faiths, particularly Catholicism, their own physical representations of God—for example, charms in the form of the cross, or the Bible as the book-object of God—were used as wards against surviving superstitions such as the evil eye, or what can be referred to simply as misfortune, which effortlessly endured the purification attempts

of the settlers. The use of an object in attempt to sway fortune, with or without the supposition of God's influence, indicates a conjectural causality attributed to this or that external material, and a kind of subjective privileging of that which can't be produced, only possessed and objectified. Lot, being worshiped, albeit unknowingly, by separatists, was at the surface of Christianity a concept to be eradicated. There's no place for random selection in the essentialism of God's plan, which is, of course, fixed and meticulously

purposeful. Lot is in opposition to an all-powerful, monotheistic God in that it poses occurrences without any sort of rhyme or reason other than that they happen in a particular way in a given perspective, condition, or event. Lot also occurs in conflict with Ha-Satan, i.e., the adversary, in that blame may never conveniently fall at the feet of some omnipresent cause that dismisses the randomness of misfortune. However, this isn't always the case. Take for example the use of the Urim and Thummim in the Pentateuch,

which were devices consulted in a process of determining innocence or guilt in reference to God's judgment. In the Book of Exodus, Aaron is ordered to carry Urim and Thummim in his breastplate so that he might adequately judge the people of Israel: *And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually.* [Exodus 28:30, KJV] Through Moses,

God instructs his priests to use sortition for the purpose of determining his rulings. Of course, the congregant denies any randomness attributed to falling lots, viewing Urim and Thummim as tools through which God communicates with his people. Believers must reject any indication of chance when chartering God's decree, as this would be blasphemy; however, the use of these objects in the Bible is far from perfect. 1 Samuel describes a scenario where Saul uses Urim and Thummim to inaccurately identify his

son, Jonathan, guilty of breaking an oath: *Therefore Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken.* [1 Samuel 14:41-42, ESV] Although culpable in the eyes of Saul and ostensibly God via the selection of Urim, Jonathan never

took the oath that he was found guilty of breaking. Throughout the Bible, the use of Urim and Thummim and the common practice of lot casting present the interpretation of God's will as a game of chance, often times with a very serious ante—in Jonathan's case, Saul nearly murders him. When considering this event from any other perspective, falling on the negative side of God's judgment is a product of misfortune, plain and simple, as Jonathan comes very close to dying at the expense of a wrongful conviction.

Bad luck aside, the issue is that perception systems and their corollaries are composed within lot to the extent where it's impossible to see beyond it; the fall of lots is always cliché. At the hands of a psychotic Saul and the cold impassivity of Urim and Thummim, Jonathan's fate is composed of fickle odds and probabilities, because Urim and Thummim are nothing more than archaic dice-types used for priestly cleromancy. This is indicative of common spiritual practice well before the advent of primitive monolatry.

Stones, sticks, shells, teeth, and bones were rolled and their patterns interpreted in religious ceremonies, rituals, fortune telling, magic, communication with spirit beings, and justice systems. Quadruped knucklebones, particularly the knucklebones of sheep, were used for gambling and divination for thousands of years, and are typically cited as the definitive precursor to modern dice and dice-related games. The craps ritual is thought to have developed out of any number of Arabic dice games that were subsequently

bastardized into the European game referred to as hazard, whose manifestation dates back to the Crusades. Hazard was one of the most fashionable games in Europe from the eleventh through the nineteenth century, a fact that is explicated in the "The Pardoner's Tale" of *The Canterbury Tales*: *A wise ambassador named Stillbon, sent From Sparta, in great pomp to Corinth went To arrange for an alliance. When he came, It happened that by chance he found, for shame, That all the greatest who were of that land Were at the game of haz-*

ard, dice in hand. With that, as soon as Stillbon could get started, Back home to his own country he departed, And said, "In Corinth I'll not lose my name Nor take upon myself so great a shame, I'll not ally you with such hazarders. Send to them other wise ambassadors, For on my oath I'd perish in defiance Before I'd make for you such an alliance. For you, with honors that have been so glorious, Shall not ally with gamblers so notorious—Not by my will or treaty anyway." That's what this wise philosopher had to say. At King Demetrius now take a look: Parthia's king,

so we're told in the book, Sent him in scorn a pair of golden dice; For playing hazard long had been his vice, For which Demetrius's fame and glory To Parthia's king were a worthless story. Cannot lords find some other forms of play Honest enough to pass the time of day? In spite of the game's popularity, the Pardoner reflects a moral point of view also common during that era, that is, to gamble meant to put possessions in adventure—in other words, to put a necessity at unnecessary risk. Adventure, in this case, signifies the thought-

lessness, selfishness, and irresponsibility at the heart of risk-taking and, thus, those who played were seen as wasteful and immoral, although they were *all the greatest who were of that land*, including lords and kings. On the other hand, the will to hazard goods also indicates an act of absolute faith, a belief in specific outcomes. Not taking risks is a kind of unproductive conservatism and caution derivative of a fear of uncertainty. It was this fear of the unknown that led many to pursue gaming in the context of scientific and mathe-

matical inquiry. For example, the Italian mathematician Gerolamo Cardano developed the first systematic treatment of probability theory in 1564, which he achieved via rigorous experimentation in dice play. However, scientific progression, or at least popular variations of it, turned out to be another combatant in the battle against volatility; indiscriminate choice was seen as an inhibition not only to the understanding of God, gods, and spiritual practice but also to the study of matter, motion, and spacetime. As Albert

Einstein famously quipped: *[God] does not throw dice*—although he apparently orders his priests to do so in the Old Testament. Of course, Einstein wrote this in reference to the philosophical implications of quantum mechanics, but the indication that nothing can be explained outside of probability was something that tremendously affected the collective insecurities of people, shaking the groundwork of the desire for reliable explanations regarding ethereal yet essential concepts such as beginning and ending, and foun-

dational concerns regarding the purpose of existence, etc. But lot couldn't simply be quipped away, as it was already embedded in the spiritual, physical, and intellectual seeds of the precursors to modern science via the camouflage of ritualization, and metamorphosed into mundane, unnoticeable routine—often even confused with faith. Central to this notion are the risk-takers, i.e., gamblers. Gamblers glorify randomized decision making and, by default, proselytize death-lot's doctrine of impermanence and chance. Saul,

as an archetypal gambler, plays with bold collateral, i.e., his son's life. As Saul evidently understood, authenticity is only authentic when constantly at stake. An indestructible object, situation, or event is unintelligible to gamblers even though they're fundamental parts of a procedure that occurs indefinitely; it's precisely their roles as products of pure fatality that allow them to fantasize an endurance outside of an anthropocentric sequence—a fixed state where the bank always loses, which is impossible, albeit their

driving motivation. Gamblers must be dispersed and disengaged in the ritual via the extinction of their collateral, which, in turn, allows for the destruction of an assumed fixity, namely that of socio-economic worth, which death-lot reduces in order to expose chaotic interdimensional possibilities always teetering on the brink of obliteration. As one might expect, this transience isn't without its consequences. The absolute loss of collateral, which is the faithfully recurring endgame, inevitably cripples gambler strength and

well-being. Peonage, as well, is a key trope of the ritual; gamblers are always subservient, sacrificial, and replaceable. Like a curse or karmic affliction, banking games are contingent on a nonmutual relationship, a parasitism where conditions exist relative to one another, while the one maliciously exploits the other. Although gamblers are evidently pawn-like enablers, they're also light bearers, in that their play enacts the ritual and worship that simultaneously acknowledges and reinforces the truth of their situation, which is

also our situation—a somnambulistic reliance on consumerist, narcissistic, corporate, and death essentialisms whose variabilities are governed by lot. Regardless of this apparent asceticism, unconscious or otherwise, indiscriminate selection intrinsically blurs specific subjective outcomes; we can say, however, that an abstract elation or thrill erupts from the possibility that the bank will lose, and this occurs precisely from a faith in the randomized constitution of a banking game. Of course, the bank always wins in spite of any

obverse streak in supposed good fortune, because gambling is a ceaseless loyalty. Games insist on locked roles that assign place and position, albeit only within a certain level of impermanence within the structure of a perpetual death-lot ritual. There's a built-in synthesis of empiricism in the recurrence of randomized elements of play, which privileges the immediately perceived with lot, which privileges an esoteric, often spiritual, interpretation of the unknown. Repetition, in this sense, presupposes that spirituality is

within the realm of ordinary experience. Despite this immutable cycle, gamblers are unaware of death-lot not because they deny the role that it provides for them but because it asserts that the ritual is merely an innocuous game that they have come to play by choice. The inability to recognize death as fundamental to the infrastructure of banking games, or any structural enterprise for that matter, is indicative of a niche anthropocentric understanding of death. In *La littérature et la mort*, Michel Picard writes: *La « mort » en*

général, cela n'existe tout simplement pas. Aussi bien, quand on parle d'Elle, parle-t-on à peu près toujours d'autre chose. [Death in general simply does not exist. So when we speak about it, we almost always speak about something else.] This is, of course, a complication that extends well beyond the subject matter of these notes; however, it implies an intrinsic elusiveness regarding death as a category. Death is, in a sense, the act of dying—but what exactly does it mean to die? Dying is commonly referred to as the suspension of all sustain-

ing operations of an organism; however, in lieu of this simplification, death is difficult to comprehensively exemplify, particularly as it requires the establishment of a clear cut demarcation that distinguishes it from life. Therefore, death is seen as a contingency of life, a concept which itself is equally unclear. For example, there are various scientific approximations of death, such as brain death, which is defined as the point where brain activity ceases; however, a corporeal presence still remains, albeit incapable of certain

conscious physical or mental acts or states. In some cases, life is described in direct relation to consciousness. But, again, this is problematic, as there is little agreement on an inclusive definition of what it means to be conscious. In any case, consciousness can never be completely contemporaneous in that it's utterly dependent on a relative range of capabilities and, therefore, there can be no universal definition outside of various conditions. Consciousness could very well be considered synonymous with functionality, granting

a sort of scientific animism in line with many spiritual traditions. In *The Democracy of Objects*, Levi R. Bryant writes: *We get a variety of nonhuman actors unleashed in the world as autonomous actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human where they are reduced to our representations.* Contrary to an anthropocentric definition of consciousness as awareness of one's existence, people's recognition of themselves isn't the crux of all functionality and, therefore, can only be under-

stood in terms of entanglement with other procedures. A human corpse, for example, is still a living object in that it's distinctly set apart from its environment by the complexity of its alterations. The corpse eats itself with digestive enzymes, detaches the skin, invites flies to lay eggs in its orifices and crevasses, bloats the abdomen, and putrefies—all on its own. No longer human, but nevertheless, it functions flawlessly in accordance with its qualities—the unmistakable odor of its decay, the tranquility of its blankness, its method

of decomposition. Something that dies can only become something else, and is never dead outside of a context that privileges distinct functions. Naturally, death's abstraction leads to allegorical description. Death personified is archetypal, and often seen throughout the world's cultures, religions, and histories as a collector of lives or a psychopomp, a guide or catalyst for disembodied consciousnesses or souls in transition through various spiritual states. In many mythologies and systems of belief, death is deified:

Ereshkigal, first lady of the Underworld in Babylonian mythology; Yama, lord of death in Hindu Religion; Mot, god of death in Ugaritic traditions—to name a very small few. Monotheism, on the other hand, contains one God over both life and death. This is, of course, not as simple as it sounds; the complex system of deities representing various natural phenomena, such as the Twelve Olympians of Ancient Greek religion, is less complicated than the embodiment of one and the same, which implies a universal equity.

In monotheism, the worship of God is also the acknowledgment of death's power and importance in one form or another. In the Christian faith, death is lauded as God's final detractor, even beyond that of Ha-Satan: *For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.* [1 Corinthians 15:25-26, KJV] Death is depicted as the representative of the last separation and, thus, the antagonistic equal of Jesus Christ. These are rather large shoes to fill, and the identification of death as

the target of God's endgame affirms it as a more worthy adversary than the adversary itself. The greatest divine conflict is the struggle against nonbeing, of which death manifests as the foundational demarcation. The supposition that reinforces the division between God and death is the same one that partitions being from nonbeing, namely, that of the word, i.e., the logos, which is essentially a standardized ontological certitude designated to a given classification: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word*

was with God, and the Word was God. [John 1:1, KJV] Before the word, there's no salvation from nonbeing, although, of course, salvation isn't required until people are brought forth from nonbeing via the word. The word legitimizes people by serving to strengthen the isolationist qualities that establish individual restricted identities, forcing nonexistence to be split into regulated objects, events, and conditions, i.e., existence. Categorization is, thus, a human project by ancillary means. This is a necessity of our method of per-

ception, for differentiating and comprehending the makeup of our world as defined by the predetermined course of events set in motion via the word (not death); however, in doing so, discontinuity ends up equating the condition of being oneself and not the other or the nonother. It's by a process of humanizing nonhuman variables where we come to perceive intertwined entities as separate and exclusive. Objects, ideas, concepts, enterprises, and activities, which by death's decree don't exist, are dragged into our world to

be reborn as ourselves for the purpose of understanding them as that which they are not. Although Christianity's interpretation of death serves us in pointing out the artificiality of the world as manifested and governed by the word, I mention it here at length because it's exemplary in expressing the difficulty of generalizing the complexities of humanity's relationship with death (particularly in a monotheistic sense). Death's ambiguity is actually useful for these notes, primarily because it's not indicative of a specific thing

or idea, but rather a series of processes, states, or interpretations. Death, although generally nonconforming, is digested and regurgitated via belief structures, societies, and cultures to produce relatively tangible, palatable variations of it, particularly as it's prominently featured in the art, writing, music, politics, and economies of essentially all known civilizations. However, in spite of its pervasiveness, it's typically regarded as the ultimate disabling factor—an inevitability that is looked on with sadness, disdain, and ha-

tred, and, as previously mentioned, this is the primary reason for humanity's never-ending war against death-lot. This animosity may simply be the result of an automatic white noise, so to speak, where death establishes physical and conceptual limitations—inescapable finitude that swallows itself like a perpetual corpse. This sort of eternal return is often refracted, particularly in the West, through continuous, circular entertainment, which simultaneously stuffs and drains the insatiable appetite of spiritually-starved

contemporaneity. The braiding together of amusement and worship rests on the shoulders of the heirs apparent of the ideologies of the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, and likewise defines any present-day ethical, social, and/or political climate, regardless of being grounded in a residual going through the motions seemingly governed by lot. These inclinations are bolstered by a 24-hour media cycle that, by default, can only be concerned with revenue—although, indeed, inflated with the foundational ethical

principles that allow for the status quo, as defined by capitalist power structures, to remain unabated. American spirituality, in particular, remains utterly convoluted as all traditional systems of belief have been cherry-picked and/or eradicated in the wake of new faiths that presuppose the validity of fiat money, corporate enterprise, mass consumerism in seamless compatibility with asceticism or religious experience. This is, of course, not new. The USA has produced many belief structures that are understood purely in

terms of its culture. The new religious movements of the nineteenth century, for example, included the nascency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Science, just to name a few, all of which sprouted up as by-products of the American experience. Not coincidentally, the same period also saw a massive rise in the popularity of mystical and occult philosophies, such as Theosophy and Spiritualism. It would seem that many of the religious movements of twenti-

eth-century America came to fruition as a result of bastardized Abrahamic belief structures injected with a sizable dose of modern esotericism. Notable social groups and cults of the mid and late twentieth century, such as the Unification Church, People's Temple, Heaven's Gate, and Scientology grew up alongside the mainstreaming of evangelical protestant sects such as Pentecostalism, as well as with increasing sociopolitical acceptance of irreligious categories, such as naturalism, agnosticism, and secular hu-

manism. But all contemporary incarnations of these faiths and supposed nonfaiths develop from the same place—puritanical theology, which as already noted, was stewing into a parallel Christian/Animist complex, at least with the merging together of Reformation-era ideologies and lot worship, and it's within this synthesis where present-day culture is manifested, locked up within the moral milieu of universalist tendencies. The worship of death-lot is no exception; as a cultic practice, it remains tethered to the worship

practices of its ancestor, the Puritan. Regardless of a historical arrangement that presupposes a massive gulf between the two, puritanical universalism, not the specifics of worship or ritual, is the consequence of any American religion or spiritual practice. This type of universalism is one of reconciliation, where differences are deracinated and coerced into common resignation. Our culture germinates from this seed, with its equalization of members, not in harmonious oneness, but trapped alongside everything else in sub-

servience to an authoritarian higher power. Despite this apparent snare, believers, as universal consumers, must develop and maintain personalized notions that inherently reject any specific dogma. The factors that render any system of belief possible are necessarily vague. Banking games, as a method of worship, are no exception. The games are wide open to private interpretations regardless of their actual implications; therefore, what would otherwise be considered as unfashionably sectarian practices end up pre-

served in the acceptable agent of itself. Gamblers, oblivious to the connotations of play, believe that they serve themselves, if anything, and are most likely unaware that there's anything other than themselves to serve on or off the table. Death-lot's followers are cognizant of lot only as a variable, and death only as a limitation, something to be feared and refused. Thanatophobia, however, isn't necessarily a prerequisite of death-lot's subjects—it's simply the paradigm, extending well beyond predatory or existential death

anxiety. A personalized eschatological narrative paves the way toward imminent finality—an exclusive Armageddon. As fundamentally self-absorbed creatures, anything that threatens to put an end to gamblers is likewise the end of their customized worlds. Few things connote such insurmountable terror in the minds of narcissists who perceive their death as the death of everything. Inordinate enthusiasm with oneself is, and must be, the gaming standard, and the compulsion that inadvertently drives the ego-

ist to death. Although dying in a categorical sense outside of the boundaries of play isn't a direct consequence of banking games, it can be an unintended ramification. Gamblers often live dangerously romanticized lifestyles—living for the thrill, so to speak; but this is only a socioeconomic refraction. Gambling, in a sense, is the McDonald's of subversion. The characterization of gamblers as rebels is fictional (although somewhat archetypal), as any potential for actual, relevant defiance is gobbled up by the game. Gam-

blers are rendered innocuous by the ritual that positions them firmly within standard principles of behavior; in fact, it's regulation that conclusively defines gamblers, as it's impossible to play games without following the rules. The popular consideration of gambling as wayward activity coincides with other socially deviant actions contingent on the belief that everyone involved must simply follow the suit of their assigned socioeconomic character. Therefore, the ways in which a gambler may perish off the table

depend on residual effects beyond the bank; gambling addiction, severe debt, criminal activity, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and mental malnourishment, etc., are not in short supply, and while these corollaries are not on par with dying, they certainly have the potential to lead to this or that variation of it. On the other hand, gamblers are doomed as a direct and perpetual consequence of ritualistic death-lot worship. In the temples of antiquity, death rituals were viewed as the solemnization of transitional phases, not just

from life to the afterlife but also from one situation, event, or group to another. Death and rebirth are nominal, essential rites and transformations that recur until complete obliteration. Gamblers, as exemplary cursed junkies of escapism, embody the extinction of substances in relation to deathlot, in that fiat selves are systematically annihilated as an aspect of engagement, which allows them to assume a static state or absence from the drudgery of that which exists outside the rules of the game. The importance of structure

is implicit here. Banking games are assembled in accordance with rules, remuneration, fantasy, and nonproductivity, intersected by opposing currents originating from biological (i.e., gamblers and bankers) and synthetic variables (i.e., the table, collateral, and the bank) whose participation is fabricated by relational entry and access points, each of uniform degree and effect respective to their responsibilities. Roles must be locked in place—a gambler can never be a banker, the banker can never be anything but a represen-

tative of the bank, and the bank is always cryptic and omnipresent. The momentum of this exchange of flow forces between organic and inorganic components matriculates as competition, which persuades gamblers to attempt to increase or regain collateral by beating the bank. Beyond this exchange, the ritual is only symptomatic. The layout of the game itself can be pulled out from under the gambler at any time and swapped out for different structures of play as needed (as long as roles remain regulatory). This in-

terchangeability is sustained through banking culture, i.e., the behaviors and characteristics that develop from the implementation of a dominant bank, which, of course, always wins, and presents standardizations based purely on fiduciary worth. The malicious intent of the bank is made cliché because the malicious intent of the bank is always the game, regardless of differences in rules or methods of gameplay. The symbolism of the ritual always appears to be trivial, with the game typically regarded as nothing more

than harmless amusement, the actual effects of which are unknown, or at least of no concern, to gamblers. Death-lot worship takes many forms that render it indistinguishable, as its traditional and communicable paradigms are obscured by loops of activity, which distinctly affect the sentimental dispositions of participants and observers. A parallel can be drawn to the practice of funeral games, which are the precursors of Panhellenic gaming ceremonies, such as the Olympic Games. Prevalent in many ancient civilizations, fu-

neral games were composed of a variety of competitive sports held in honor of a deceased person, typically a hero, and usually enacted to placate specific deities. In her book *Rituals of Death and Dying in Modern and Ancient Greece*, Evy Johanne Håland writes: *All the agonistic festivals in ancient Greece had their own hero, because they were traced back to some mythical death and burial, i.e., festival games originated as funeral games, or a propitiation for the death of the actual hero. The rituals re-enacted the ceremonies conducted at the buri-*

als and memorial celebrations for a deceased hero. For instance, the Isthmian Games originated as funeral games for Melicertes, who was cast into the sea by his mother as she committed suicide, and later heroized as Palaemon, a minor sea god of Greek mythology. Instated around 580 BC by Sisyphus, the games doubled as worship ceremonies to Palaemon, Leucothea (his deified mother), and Poseidon, with participation in the event serving as initiation into a thalassic cult. Many sports were included in funeral games,

although they all served the same objective, i.e., to venerate death and the dead. For example, Achilles initiates funeral games consisting of ancient war games—archery, pankration, and chariot racing—in honor of the deceased Patroclus in Book XXIII of the *Illiad*: *The swarming populace the chief detains, And leads amidst a wide extent of plains; There placed them round: then from the ships proceeds A train of oxen, mules, and stately steeds, Vases and tripods, for the funeral games, Resplendent brass, and more resplendent dames. Nor*

suit, with them, the games of this sad day: Lost is Patroclus now, that wont to deck Their flowing manes, and sleek their glossy neck. Sad, as they shared in human grief, they stand, And trail those graceful honours on the sand! As an exercise in grief, the act of competition allows mourners to unify via structural enterprise, regardless of the specifics of activity or any fantastical implications. In the *Illiad*, funeral games are the ritual that represents Achilles' transition from impassive demigod to sympathetic human, as they set him

on the path to renounce the indignation that keeps him marginalized from others. Ironically, Achilles mourns and plays like a gambler, as the ritual unifies him with the organic, leaving him vulnerable to the death-lot (in the form of Paris' arrow) that eventually takes his life. Here, life and death are compressed via the activity required to *trail those graceful honours on the sand*, which results in the exhaustion that constitutes atonement. Funeral games were processes of expiation and sacrifice, the effects of which

were associated with the extreme expenditure of physical energy and corollary outcomes, the death of Achilles being one of them. Similar to Achilles, a gambler's sacrifice is both a curse and an act of liberation within the freedom of oblivion. In banking games, this is triggered via the absolute trivialization of socioeconomic identity and worth before a gambler even begins to play. The medium of exchange is transferred from government-verified money to bank-verified gaming pieces, representatives that exist solely

within the framework of the game and nowhere else—similar to chessmen, checkers, or avatars. The immediate repositioning of socioeconomic meaning creates a consensus mode where the bank is an omnipresent authority; and without its perpetual threat and act of annihilating worth, there can only be a game with no stakes, which is likewise not a death-lot ritual. Once the designated identity of socioeconomic context is shed, gamblers stand completely exposed before death-lot as the arbiter outside of their faux worlds.

Of course, the gambler's transcendence doesn't imply a state of independence; it's merely the transitional stage between one form of control to another. The explicit use of gamblers is arbitrary just as that which appears residual or partial to the act is inescapably dwarfed by that which is central to the ritual. Gamblers are generic and can be replaced by other gamblers ad infinitum. Worship practices are thereby united within a lack of diverse biological triggers or standards. A myopic disposition justifies participation in both funeral

and banking games; however, the result of worship is fundamentally preternatural as the organism in veneration extends from the organic toward incorporeal otherworldliness. Death-lot doesn't physically sit at the head of the table—Achilles does, Sisyphus does, the banker does, etc., as its representative. There's no cult of personality as the game supersedes the need for the kind of charismatic leadership that is indicative of traditional faith-based systems. The leader, so to speak, is nothing more than an ethereal

feeling of escape. To worship death-lot via banking games is a cultivation of solipsistic remuneration rooted to a primeval incentive system with instrumental processes, goals, and outcomes. Both funeral and banking games frame death so that it can be venerated via the allure of spectral potential and rewards—funeral games serving to present physiological possibilities for the dead and death spirits to re-enter the land of the living, while banking games proffer fantastical prospects of worth. But the stimulus is

merely the seduction that allows death-lot to consume worth in order to ensure that humanity remains a reflection of its arbitrary fatality, with the game functioning as a tangle of entrances back to the organic via the inorganic, inevitably exposing the currents of nonbeing. The structural representation of death-lot isn't solely understood in the context of the imitative qualities of this or that external component, just as a representation can't be understood only as a signifier; there must be something that goes beyond the

surface. For instance, the idea that death-lot exists independent of humanity is the same idea that allows the game to alter the knowledge of what it means to die randomly. This is achieved through the act of participation, which posits gamblers as immutable substrates that exist only in the framework of the ritual. Outside of this structure, there are only falsified attitudes and misunderstandings regarding death and lot, resulting from the delusion of order, which is, in turn, supported by the overwhelming fear of death

and the desire to control its volatility. Belief systems of this sort, i.e., ones generated from a reductive view of death as something to be dealt with via allegory or alien representation, are incredibly dangerous as they vigorously detract from the truth of the human situation. That being said, banking games, too, are entrenched in derivative symbolisms—they're not true in themselves, particularly in that they're rooted to the very surface that obscures authenticity; the difference is that rituals are driven well beyond themselves as

signifiers. Take the roulette ritual for example. The roulette circle can be likened to a surplus of protracting compartments that appear to perpetually unfold. They border, although never achieve, the impossibility of indefinite continuity, i.e., perpetual motion, which is movement that survives interminably at the same degree sans an external energy source. The roulette wheel is derivative of this concept, with its genesis going back to Blaise Pascal's experiments in perpetual motion in the seventeenth century. Pascal was

working in direct refutation to Zeno's Dichotomy paradox, which states that travel over any distance can never be initiated or accomplished, as all movement requires an infinite number of tasks; however, despite the refutation of motion as reductio ad absurdum, the addition of compartment after compartment, frame after frame, produces a matryoshka-like affectation that simulates perpetual motion regardless of its actual immobility. Thus, gamblers' minds are set toward something that they can never realize. As the

wheel appears to spin and spin, gamblers hope and pray for fantastical wealth in concentric loops. Roulette, as a by-product of this delusion, triggers the question of whether or not it's possible to associate in nonreferential wholes without the parts, including gamblers, becoming nonreferential themselves. Of course, movement that supersedes the logic of movement, the passing from one place or position to another, is something like crossing the Rubicon; beyond all limitations, any supposed movement has no begin-

ning or ending. Something eternal can only dream of finality. Movement, or at least the appearance of movement, ensnared is a cycle of desolation, a circle containing nothing; but outside the bounds of innumerable rotation, it's not that which comprises the circle that transitions, but rather its congregants. The circle simultaneously engages and compels space to the degree of exhaustion (as with Achilles), where it becomes an enclosed vertigo of collapse, an extra-universe wormhole that joins gamblers with death-

lot. Something like the legendary punishment of Sisyphus loses its futility and becomes the true methodology of progress—the actual perpetual motion necessary to puncture the word and expose the void. The supposition of roulette as a warp is something that Pascal certainly had in mind early in his career, when he began to focus on calculations at the microlevel in combination with the affectations of various probabilities that arise from repetitious and even disjunctive activity. In works such as *Traité du triangle*

arithmétique, he exposes that lawless variables not only allow for laws of order and repetition but also drift into the working parts of a vacuum. It was this understanding that led to the development of Pascal's principle, which states that pressure is a constant within a closed system. Likewise, the lawlessness of death-lot allows for the development of the lawfulness of the word that obscures it, or the bank, which represents it in the world of the word. All banking games are based on prototypes of this variable as struc-

tured events in which individuals participate and replace each other in a process of eternal recurrence within a given framework. In the totality of its objective conditions, a banking game is an everlasting, monotonous drone—a roulette wheel perpetually spinning, dice thrown away only to be dragged back, cards shuffled and reshuffled only to be dealt to no one in particular. These activities alone may seem absurd, but the disposition of engagement enacts the transmigration from rationalized existence to abysmal truth. The eu-

phoria of participation encourages gamblers to unconsciously, yet physically, laud death-lot, for as these symbol systems are combined with gaming mechanics to simultaneously unify and augment gamblers in an individual as well as communal capacity, this is merely the effect of being harmonized with death-lot in eternally recurring patterns via the bank, which isolates specific gamblers in targeted, personalized challenges, while inviting everyone to sit together at the table ad infinitum. This sense of unification and indi-

vidual fulfillment have allowed the popularity of banking games to grow exponentially in spite of any premonition—religious, scientific, cultural, or social—that might have stunted its expansion. Gaming has successfully transitioned from immoral vice to mature reverie. While gaming towns such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City officiated the modern day death-lot pilgrimage, with many converts appearing amongst droves of incognizant tourists, the widespread legalization of gambling in the twenty-first century

immensely improved access to banking games, which, in turn, allowed the death-lot cult to become the fastest growing church in America. However, gamblers must function in accordance with the principle that the bank always wins; thus, any sense of private devotion to this or that particular location is rendered inconsequential. Perhaps the transition from pilgrimage to locality is an act of putting gamblers back into their communities. Gamblers have never been more normalized than at present; after all, they're socially

universal characters. The acceptance of various forms of faux rebellion as natural necessity is partially responsible for sustaining the archetypal condition that gamblers reflect, where gamblers are resorbed back into the status quo as light bearers. The possibility of impossibilities—i.e., the beating of the bank as the taming of random fatality—is the gambler's protestation of faith; where existence is sustained via financial exchange and distinguished in the context of rule-based structures, there's always the anticipation of a

favorable judgment, even if redemption never comes.