

INTRODUCTION

Subjects of Luck—Contingency, Morality, and the Anticipation of Everyday Life

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Abstract: This introduction illustrates the modalities in which different societies imagine the tension between the impersonal and individualized aspects of fortune and fate. After briefly discussing the role of contingency, fortune, and gambling in the formation of subjectivities, we outline how different societies confront the moral conundrums arising from fortune's unequal distribution in the world. We highlight how luck orientations presentify the future by the deployment of what we name 'technologies of anticipation'. Luck and fortune can be seen as conceptual techniques for short-circuiting temporal subjectivities by creating a crack in time—a space of 'compossibility'—where events deemed to be fatal and inevitable become negotiable. We conclude with a reflection on dice, randomness, and acts of gambling in which not merely subjectivities but the fate or fortune of larger social aggregations—including the cosmos—is deemed at stake.

Keywords: anticipation, everyday, fortune, future, gambling, luck, morality, subjectivity

In short, the very manifesto of structuralism must be sought in the famous formula, eminently poetic and theatrical: to think is to cast a throw of the dice [*penser, c'est émettre un coup de dés*]. (Deleuze [1973] 2004: 175)

The Quasi-Event of Luck

"It follows that to the Zande witchcraft *is a normal event of everyday life*, through which he may suffer at any hour of the day or night." This statement, made by Charles Seligman (1937: xvii; emphasis added) in the foreword to the unabridged edition of Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, illustrates a society where 'events' are conceived neither as major historical



happenings or contingencies domesticated by cultural logics, nor as events conceptualized as images encompassing and concealing actions and aesthetic forms to be decomposed by a performative ‘seeing’ (Strathern 1990).¹ Unfortunate events, such as tripping on a root, suffering a cut, or being struck down with illness, punctuate the domain of human activities, reversing the ground upon which episodic luck is incessantly figured (Wagner 1987, 2012). ‘Lucky’ events, such as catching a delayed bus at the last minute, seizing a good deal while shopping or trading, landing a large fish, or sailing with favorable weather, inhabit the everyday life of human beings and shape the mundane background of the boring and the repetitive, the trivial and the oblivious. An ethnographic difference percolates into the perceptual regime and bifurcating temporal perspectives following a misfortunate or lucky event. An event might become a ‘coincidence’ that is isolated, bracketed out—one’s attention might be suspended. Or a happenstance might involve, as in the Azande’s case, an endless trailing of causal connections aimed toward the future, the activation of the attention or an “excess of wonder” (Eco 1992: 50) at the signs or signatures of the world. Whereas misfortune is perceived as an obstacle, a loss, or an obliteration, the ethnographies contained in this issue show how events of fortune and luck entail anticipated perspectives on exhausting potential futures, constituting imagined viewpoints on almost-happening series of best possible worlds. Taken together, the articles assembled here unfold the manifold temporalities of fortune and elucidate how fortunate futures are anticipated or produced and how subjectivities are revealed or crop up in the process.

With fortune, one never knows whether the potential is enough or what the exact state of one’s fortune is. Thus, fortune and luck constitute a special category of happenstances, being always almost-happenings, the ‘quasi-events’ of everyday life. A quasi-event is not an ordinary fact but a unique fact of the everyday, *one that forces a shift in attention toward what will happen next* (cf. Stafford, this issue) *or toward what might have happened*—a mishap, an omen, a winning, a sign of hope. The quasi-event of luck does not provide certainty but rather constructs a fertile universe of doubts. Such a universe underlies the desire of the compulsive gambler who cannot stop playing: he rejects an ultimate determination of his cosmos (cf. Sangren, this issue) since he can constitute his freedom and bridle the omnipotence of his desire within a space of ‘compossibility’ where anything might happen. Where an event would mark major subjective transitions, such as radical ontological shifts from humanity to divinity (Sahlins 1985), a quasi-event allows only an ephemeral assemblage of subjectivity. Serres ([1982] 2007: 225) gives a similar description when defining the role of the ‘quasi-object’ in the game of *furet* (ferret):

The quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject. He who is not discovered with the *furet* in his hand is anonymous, part of a monotonous chain where he remains undistinguished ... This quasi-object, when being passed, makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual. If he is discovered, he is “it” [*mort*]. Who is the subject, who is an “I,” or who am I? The moving *furet* weaves the “we,” the collective; if it stops, it marks the “I.”

In the companion issue, da Col (2012a) reflects how hierarchy and motility are critical companion aspects that accompany luck terms. Either forces such as *mana*, grace, and fortune are bestowed by gods, or gods are believed to have primary access to them. Thus, it is not surprising that the possession of fortunate forces is imagined as engendering moments of cosmological mobility (cf. Broz and Willerslev, Pedersen, this issue). By ‘luck’, humans may temporarily acquire special perceptual powers—such as seeing invisible creatures or foreseeing events by anticipating time—or to achieve forms of authority, resulting in the common association of leadership with great luck in influencing critical events or achieving favorable outcomes against all odds. The previous issue also shows how the circulation of lucky objects may parallel the circulation of vital reproductive substance. However, while kinship substances are a ‘reactive’ potential—to use a chemical metaphor—luck and fortune may also be prophylactic and anticipatory, allowing forms of temporal and subjective ‘hacking’ through their management (cf. Broz and Willerslev). The problems of the gambler, the Calvinist, or the fortune investor (cf. Guenzi, this issue) are therefore similar, since, as subjects, they constitute themselves by proactively anticipating a fortunate future. It follows that fortune and luck could be excellent heuristics for revealing the role of contingency in different social formations. As Battaglia (1999: 114) writes, “ethnography must be willing to embrace its own under-recognized capacity to engage and to ‘own’ contingency and ambiguity—its capacity, as a technique of knowledge production, to generate productive uncertainties and disjunctive possibilities for social engagement.” The contributors to this issue show how multifarious cosmologies of luck and fortune are manifested in singular ontologies of ‘presentation’, defining in different ways the tension between the transcendental domain of contingency and the individualized elements of fortune-like forces. What does it imply to be successful in a hazardous gamble against life itself? How are cosmologies of luck and fortune manifested in contingent singularities and temporal views? Who are the subjects of fortune, and what could we gain from ethnographies of contingency?

Subjects of Luck

In Malinowski’s (1966) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, the subject of luck comes up in his remarks on the danger of Trobriand sailing: ocean navigation is the utmost test of a man’s luck. While ‘economic luck’ concerns the prosperity of a man in relation to his clan, sailing luck is personal and clearly flashes into view when Malinowski remarks on a man’s exclusive privilege to use the term *toli* (ownership) with regard to his canoe, with which his good luck in sailing is associated. While economic luck is distributed, being the outcome of the collective agency of a clan’s magic, sailing luck is individualized, owned by a singularity. Thus, Malinowski (ibid.: 328) writes: “A man, whether he be rich or poor in partners, may, according to his luck, return with a relatively big or a small haul from an expedition. Thus the imagination of the adventurers, as in all forms of gambling, must be bent towards lucky hits and turns of

extraordinarily good chance. The Kula myths feed this imagination on stories of extreme good luck, and at the same time show that it lies in the hands of man to bring this luck on himself, provided he acquires the necessary magical lore.”

In a similar fashion, Prytz-Johansen (1954: 86) writes that the Maori *mana* is an impersonal force that yet can be contained and owned by a singularity: the *mana* of the group is mustered and magnified by the chief. Anticipating by more than a decade Deleuze’s famous reflections on virtuality and actuality, Prytz-Johansen writes: “The dynamic element in *mana*, the unfolding, is brought out strongly when the word is used as a verb. The verbal character makes the aspect of *mana* as a communion or fellowship recede into the background, which is only justified if we do not forget that the dynamic element cannot be active except against this background” (ibid.: 90).

While the Maori idea of *mana* illustrates a univocal, ‘nuclear’ ontology, in which all manifestations of luck-like forms are encompassed within one linguistic referent, other ethnographic contexts reveal how fortune and luck make visible the relations between different scales and social sets. Aptly, Rio and Smedal (2009) describe this movement as one of ‘totalization’ and ‘detotalization’, contracting and waning between sets of agents counted as singular entities and expanding and waxing into larger aggregations and multiplicities-in-themselves. Thus, the Tibetan *yang* (da Col 2012a) and the roughly equivalent Mongolian *hishig* (Empson 2012) both point to fortune as a bounty or grace attached to valued things (or people) that can be detached and collected in ‘containing’ entities such as chests, vases, houses, villages, counties, or nations, as well as non-human domains such as forests and mountains, which are ‘perspectivally’ conceived as the abodes of deities.

In contrast, Humphrey and Hürelbaatar (this issue) discuss the particular kind of singularized, yet impersonal, subjectivity evoked by Mongols through the notions of *hiimori* and *sülde*, which are forms of animating vitality (or fortune) associated with the mobile cosmic forces that are, in principle, available to any (especially male) person.² Here, fortune and luck are individualized in active subjects, supporting and orienting the gestures and the conduct of their agents or positively bridling them. Yet despite individualization, *hiimori* and *sülde* remain an impersonal spark of rising or falling fortune within its human subjects. This is an example of the idea that whatever engenders achievement and wealth requires the accumulation and bold deployment of a lucky and vital element, which Mary Douglas (1970: 149) describes as the mark of a “success cosmology.” Fortune favors the bold, and thus it is not surprising that, among the Maori, Prytz-Johansen (1954) suggests that the prosperity/fortune of *mana* is related to *maia*—evenemental luck—the latter differing from the former by requiring active will, a display of bravery, an act of subjective determination. A similar idea is discussed in the article by Pedersen (this issue), who argues that this kind of ‘bravery of fortune’ goes with hope and a commitment to a particular understanding of time. Young men in contemporary Ulaanbaatar, Pedersen explains, operate with a forward-oriented trust, “engaging with events of the future as if they have already happened.” Instead of the meaning of an event being established retrospectively, there is a continual colonization of the

present by the future. Yet this is “an ‘impossible’ (unrealizable) future that is subject to inherent destruction, transformation, and renewal.”

There is another sense in which luck, fortune, and the fortuitous in general raise the question of individual subjectivities, for there is no culture in which people do not have available alternative meanings for events. Laurence Goldman’s (1993) *The Culture of Coincidence* touches on some of the concerns about the ontology of chance outlined in the previous special issue (cf. da Col 2012a) and is a polemic against the anthropological tendency to follow meekly in the wake of Lévy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard, both of whom argued that concepts of coincidence and accident are absent from non-Western theories of misfortune “because nothing that so harms a human being can be truly accidental” (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 63). Goldman (1993: 268) maintains that anthropology has neglected the ethnographic evidence of thinking about accidents, having been led into a cul-de-sac by its doctrinal heritage, which analyzes misfortunes only in terms of the religious-cosmological (e.g., witchcraft, sorcery, discourses on evil) and medical domains, and by its comparative methodology, which contrasts whole cultures while presuming the absence of a plurality of explanatory modes within them. Goldman insists that ‘accident’ is an available idea for Huli people. A house suddenly burns down overnight. One of the two women living inside escapes with all her children and pigs, while the other is burned to death. The villagers are divided: some say that such a terrible thing must have been done deliberately (the woman who escaped had set fire to the house and in effect murdered her companion), while others say, no, it was just an accident. The conundrum in the case of the Huli is that the distinction between ‘arson’ and ‘accident’ is difficult to register because of the varied and unfamiliar ways that intentionality is encapsulated linguistically. As Goldman puts it: “The resolution of timbre, tonal colour, depth, and positioning of the voices of accident or murder, inculpation or exculpation, requires the most sensitive of instruments—the analytical tools of linguistics applied to the record of dispute speech” (ibid.: 270). In the case of the Mongols, deploying the range of alternative explanations for a single fortunate/unfortunate event is socially nuanced. If a respected or high-ranking person experiences a misfortune, people are likely to attribute it to chance and say that he or she is ‘unlucky’ (*azgüü*). But they will hesitate to say that such a person is ‘without *hiimori*’, for doing so would imply a moral criticism, a point to which we shall return.

Mosko’s article in this issue penetrates further into this idea of accident and can be read as a critique of the notion as employed by Goldman. Mosko argues that the conceptualization of accident as “impersonal probabilistic chance” is derived from “Western possessive individualism.” The Mekeo notion of *laki* derives from the English word ‘lucky’ and refers to something caused by forces outside the subject’s control, but it has adapted to cultural and ritual classifications and practices such that it differs radically from impersonal probabilistic chance. In his article, Mosko examines how *laki* is associated with the notion of *tsiapu* or ‘hot’—“the indigenous descriptor for every kind of agency or effectiveness”—and analyzes the traditional practices (*kangakanga*) with which ‘hot’ (effective) and ‘cold’ (ineffective) *laki* are inextricably involved. Mekeo “dynamics of partible personhood” complicate the notion of individualization:

'hot' skills are transmitted lineally by parents to children, but they are construed as effective only after a lifetime of gift-giving, detachment, and circulation of 'hot' parts of a person, such as tobacco, money, and labor. Even gambling, which might at first seem predicated on a notion of 'pure chance' adopted from Europeans, is part of this process of constant transformation. The winner is deemed to be such because his or her gambling fortune is 'hotter' than others, due to the carrying of gambling charms (*katsi tolina*), constructed with the help of secret ancestral powers, spells, and ingredients, which are also employed in traditional warfare, hunting, and courting charms.

Mosko contrasts the Mekeo *laki* with European notions of luck, arguing that the latter's association with possessive individualism is predicated on a separation between subjects and the objects that they own. Such an idea is perhaps even necessary for a society where individuals are assumed to be the agents of their own success but often are not. This could be a starting point for Thomas Malaby's article in this issue, which takes another look at anthropology's engagement with contingency (cf. Malaby 2003), although here he focuses not so much on the property-owning, capitalist environment as on what he calls "post-bureaucratic" techniques. If contingency was one way of understanding the distribution of fortune in the world amid the rationalizing bureaucratic logic of modernity, it has a different role (in the form of gambling and, more generally, games) in the age of digital production. For example, the Google Image Labeler game, which was online from 2006 to 2011, got its vast corpus of billions of images labeled by players from all over the world, who did it for free. Contrasting this type of game with Greece's state-sponsored Pro-Po, a football (soccer) pools game, Malaby argues that, one way or another, games are increasingly the sites of institutional projects, "both to appropriate creativity and to generate distinctive subjectivities" in a "disordered world with [an] indeterminate future."

Malaby's description of such games reveals a tension between individualization and the extrinsic, contingent quality attributed to fortune. The games promote techno-mediated individual mastery, but this co-exists in Greece with a long-standing cultural logic that is not specific to any group of people—an "instrumental nonchalance" whereby all gamblers present themselves as casually unconcerned about the outcomes. Malaby suggests, however, that the new "digitally mediated experience" overrides this cultural tendency and promotes a different subjectivity that backgrounds the "institutionally shaped digital architecture" while promoting the possibility of achieving "individual mastery of complex systems"—which everyone at some level knows to be unmasterable.³

The collaterals of the subjectivities at stake in fortune-related activities are visible in the contributions on gambling contained in this issue and stem from a relation between self-production and anxiety concerning knowledge about the future. According to the theorists of the 'risk society' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990), the process of industrialization and neo-liberal capitalism have resulted in the emergence of reflexively conscious subjects, capable of 'free choices' that reduce the risks coming from their environment. Nevertheless, risks may become innumerable and increase the opportunities of choice, making such subjects *too* free. A risk society may paradoxically generate further

uncertainties through an excess of subjectivity, and too many precautions may not so much result in the reduction of risk as in the increase of the craving for the liberating power of luck, which is what the rise in gambling activities seems to suggest.⁴ Unsurprisingly, most of the recent ethnographies of gambling or fate-calculating practices emerge from China (cf. Sangren and Stafford, this issue). In the context of China's embrace of global capitalism and renewed popular preoccupation with economic prosperity, Julie Chu (2010: 260) has explored the rise of mahjong gambling as an elusive form of "value production through other-worldly means." Chu argues that gambling in China is an anti-Weberian form of ethical cultivation, an outlook that is directed at seizing the fleeting opportunities of an elusive market and that views fate and its agents—gods, the state, the invisible hand of capitalism—as never beyond one's reach.

Gambling and lottery thus seem to intensify in times of either economic upswing or crisis and could be conceived as forms of exchange dealing with the production of 'hyper-value'. Highlighting the relation between luck and regeneration of vitality explored in the companion issue, Klima (2002, 2006), in what he names 'funeral casino', shows how death rituals in Thailand are followed by an intensification of exchange and gambling. Klima (2006: 40) writes: "[T]he time of calamity and misfortune is the time to let caution go to the wind, and play games of pure risk and chance, and at the same time work up that surplus value that is given over, in gifts to the family, to the Buddhist monks, and ultimately to the dead. The whole production is a massive aid-package delivered in a time of need." Gambling and lottery thus resemble economic actions aimed at producing the maximum profit in relation to the smallest possible investment, demonstrating the possible existence of miraculous capitalistic responses. Yet, ultimately, the gained fortune must be redistributed and recirculated with the components of one's personhood such as fame or prestige (cf. Mosko and Swancutt, this issue), as if a system of generalized exchange and a totality of moral relations would become visible following a fortunate event.

We suggest that gambling-derived subjectivities are predicated on distinctive economic modalities of fortune. While fortunate substances or 'energies' result in a 'centripetal' ritual process for obtaining or harnessing luck—being connected to social activities of preservation and the reproduction of vitality, such as marriage and alliances—gambling is a 'centrifugal' economic modality aimed at displaying vitality, revisiting notions of value and 'licit' wealth, and repositioning subjectivities. However, this centrifugal fortune is predicated on a performative paradox. Fortune can be demonstrated only in events, yet one needs to act, to perform, in order to display its miraculous properties. When confronted with its effects, fortune seems *a posteriori* the result of a series of necessary events or actions, a topic to which we shall return. This paradox of performativity applies also to fortune-related beliefs and is illustrated by Graeber (2012) in his discussion of the Malagasy concept of *hasina*:

If someone is directing a charm against you—love medicine, for example, or something intended to make you ill or drive you insane—it can work only if you know about it and if you actually believe that it will work. This, I was often

assured, is why I was safe: such devices never work on foreigners. At the same time, assurances like these were completely contradicted by actual practice, since people would regularly consult with curers to see if their illness, bad luck, or other misfortunes were actually caused by some magical charm that they might not be aware of. The situation would lead to endless quandaries. “Ever since I moved to this village,” one urban-educated young man told me, “people have been trying to ensorcel me. Of course, it doesn’t work because I don’t believe in any of that nonsense.” “Yes,” said his sister, resignedly. “I thought I didn’t believe in it either. But I guess I must believe in it because I keep getting sick all the time!”

The Distribution of Fortune in the World: Morality and Ethics

Throughout different histories and societies, the relation between the impersonal and the individualized nature of fortune has generated the conundrums of the moral qualities and virtues that humankind should develop in the face of fortune’s fickleness. This brought Aristotle (1996: II:4–6) in the *Physics* to distinguish between *automaton*, the ‘natural’ chance events in the world, independent from human intentionality, and *tuche*, chance insofar as it affects agents capable of moral actions. This distinction moralized fortune and luck and erected a defense against them in the form of rationally tempered behavior and virtue. Luck is thus employed as a moral trope for handling sudden movements and accumulation of wealth. As Malaby’s and Sangren’s articles in this issue also note, Weber, in his neglected argument on the ‘theodicy’ of good fortune, considers the question of morality in light of the ethics of managing good fortune in the contingency of the ongoing encounter with the world. For Weber ([1922–1923] 1992: 271): “The fortunate is seldom satisfied with the fact of being fortunate. Beyond this, he needs to know that he has a *right* to his good fortune. He wants to be convinced that he ‘deserves’ it, and above all, that he deserves it in comparison with others. He wishes to be allowed the belief that the less fortunate also merely experience his due. Good fortune thus wants to be ‘legitimate’ fortune.” Our contributors to these special issues provide accounts of the problem of the morality of fortune in several different contexts: post-contact developments in Papua New Guinea (Mosko, this issue), neo-liberal economies in Mongolia (Pedersen, this issue), Buriad pastoral herders (Empson 2012), and Siberian hunting societies (Hamayon 2012). In this issue, three articles in particular—those by Broz and Willerslev, Swancutt, and Stafford—focus on this theme.

Luck draws attention to the morality of games and deploys a peculiar scenario of redistributive ‘justice’ since it allows the possibility of absolute contingency in allegedly necessary and egalitarian systems. In this scenario, luck may be conceived as being in a state of ‘quantum uncertainty’, beyond the individual yet not entirely out of one’s grasp. For the hunting societies of Siberia, Broz and Willerslev suggest that deception is part and parcel of the game of luck, a game that should always remain ambiguous. In a move similar to Mosko’s critique of probabilistic chance, they take issue with the importation of the Western idea of luck into other environments. Thus, the idea that luck is fundamentally immoral or is dependent on previous actions is alien to these

societies. A definition of luck as being either positive or negative, as desirable or unwanted, as arising from sharing and reciprocity or gift and theft, remains uncertain. Among the Yukaghirs, a successful kill might be seen as either an act of generous sharing or as an act of reciprocity, while in the Telengit case the transaction between hunters and spirits could be perceived either as a gift from the local master-spirit or as a theft on the part of the hunter. Broz and Willerslev hence argue that both authorized and unauthorized hunting luck, achieved in the idiom of either sharing or reciprocity, are therefore “homonyms and synonyms without being reducible to one or the other.”

The ambiguity and deceit involved in hunting luck no doubt relate to the irreducible fact that fortune in this case involves success in taking life. Yet in other contexts where luck is conceived as prosperity, good health, successful progeny, and, at the very least, avoidance of misfortune, different moralities come into play. In the companion issue, Daniels (2012) shows how in contemporary Japan people accumulate luck by circulating auspicious items, thereby cultivating positive relations with deities and other people. Similar to the case in Mongolia, where it is women who are mainly responsible for accumulating and retaining fortune (Mong. *hishig*, cf. Empson 2012), Japanese women take on the domestic circulation of material luck signs for the care of ancestors and gift exchange. Thus, the trick with luck, as Broz and Willerslev also show, is to keep it circulating, to sustain its mobility, and to maintain it in a state of controlled uncertainty—especially at the ‘right’ distance. Analogously, Valeri (2000) suggests that any concept of taboo is predicated on the determination of an ontology of distance between subject and object: what is prohibited is what elicits either excessive proximity between the subject and the object (such that they are conflated, one with the other) or excessive distance (involving radical emotional or physical separation). Misfortune, the natural consequence of taboo violation, is prevented through the avoidance of actions that pertain to the unavoidable aspects of everyday life: touching certain objects, interacting with food or drinks, uttering specific words, refraining from invading certain spaces, differentiating locations for treating certain substances that cannot co-exist in the same place, and so forth. Taboo is an ontological ascription for preserving the distance between undifferentiated entities or buffering the impact of the encounter between excessively diverse beings. Valeri (*ibid.*) goes on by arguing that ‘space’ between things in the world is needed for subjectivities to be maintained, a space that is annulled by the violation of taboos. Thus, he writes: “In sum, a rough diagrammatic relationship seems to exist between the contrast of misfortunes and the contrast of taboos: an absolutely overwhelming misfortune matches an absolutely encompassing taboo” (*ibid.*: 76). Herein lies the answer to the close relation between taboo and misfortune: the misfortunate universe is the one without voids and interstices for subjectivities to be generated. Luck, on the other hand, cannot be excessively distant, since what is too new or unknown is not apprehended as lucky but as uncanny, nor can fate be totalizing without becoming doom.

Katherine Swancutt addresses the ambiguous quality of ‘fate-fortune’, not in terms of Guenzi’s ‘it must be there, now I have to find it’ or Sangren’s tension between fate and the striving of desire, but as a “sliding scale” between

indebtedness and a “priceless gift.” The Nuosu of Yunnan Province summon fate-fortune at the end of every shamanic ritual to attract both material prosperity and “those priceless human capacities that confer fame upon a person,” such as charisma or shamanic expertise. Such rites are considered to be ordeals, and only especially talented shamans gain enough recognition to be invited again, entering into an “economy of ordeals” from which they can extract fame and fortune. Yet for the Nuosu, fate involves the notion that “the human soul takes the form of a soul-spider (*yvr*),” and this extraction is counted as a kind of debt-creating predation, which must be transcended and reconfigured as tribute in order for unalloyed prestige to accrue. The economy of ordeals is future-oriented—more prestige means more invitations that allow for more fame and fortune—but it is also inherently dangerous, since the greater the glory, the more likely that resentful, debt-owning others will engage in predation of their own and deplete the lucky one of her or his resources. Fate-fortune in the Nuosu case appears to be an eternally unstable circuit, constantly flung back by diverse ‘feedback loops’. Confirmation of an event as truly anticipating good fortune is impossible because of the ever-present possibility of its sabotage in the future.

Let us return to the relation between morality and fortune. This raises the issue that the philosopher Bernard Williams (1993), in his post-Nietzschean attack on Christian-type morality, termed ‘moral luck’. Williams writes that when he first introduced the expression ‘moral luck’, he expected it to be taken as an oxymoron (*ibid.*: 251), since the absence of luck had conventionally been seen as central to moral action. However, as Williams (1981) and Thomas Nagel (1993) demonstrate in their classic discussions on the topic, everyday judgments and practices commit people to the existence of moral luck—that is, to the idea that an agent can rightly be treated as an object of moral judgment despite the fact that much of what a person is being evaluated for is not under his or her control. If morality depends on making good decisions about matters under our control, the fact that overall judgments about one’s decision can depend on external and uncontrollable factors shows that there must be some other kind of value that supersedes morality. As Nelkin (2008) expresses it: “[M]orality can only insulate itself from luck at the expense of foregoing [this] supreme value.” In the end, Williams (1993) concludes that we should care less about morality and more about ethics, where ethics is understood to address the most general question of how we should live.

These matters are taken up in the article by Charles Stafford, which discusses agency and responsibility in relation to good and bad fortune in a village in Taiwan. The life of one his interlocutors, Mr. Zhou, had been marked by tragedy—his wife and the mother of his four children had suddenly died. The question that Stafford raises is whether people deserve what happens to them. In Taiwan, Stafford notes, there are alternative “ideal-type accounts” of good and bad fate. The tragedy could have been determined by cosmological mechanisms or by the intervention of gods/ancestors—or it could have been created by the subject himself, especially in his relations with other people.⁵ Stafford’s subtle analysis argues that people like Mr. Zhou know something about the “fatefulness of life” that they “would not have grasped in exactly the same way, had they not

encountered personal tragedy.” Mr. Zhou threw himself into the work of being a good citizen. Whatever kind words people in the village may have said to him, it was as though ‘bad luck’ could not be all there was to it. The ‘uncleanness’ of death clung to him by association, even if the tragedy was completely beyond his control. We suggest that his determination to reject the status of a “passive victim” of fate and to intervene in his own life through personal effort can be seen as something like the ethical project mentioned by Bernard Williams.

Times of Fortune: Anticipation, Production, and Investment

As some contributors to this issue show, the problem is not how to account for the past but how to present the future—what we refer to as ‘technologies of anticipation’. When Lévi-Strauss ([1950] 1987: 62–63) defined *mana*-like terms as providing a “surplus of signification,” he also regarded their effect as “a distribution of a supplementary ration [for] the very condition of the exercise of symbolic thinking.” Subjects thus emerge not as bounded entities occupying a place, nor as sites of imaginary extensions, but as effects determined in a topological way. Thus, Deleuze ([1973] 2004: 175) highlights structuralism’s inclination for certain games and plays: “It is no accident that Lévi-Strauss often refers to the theory of games, and accords such importance to playing cards ... The noblest games such as chess are those that organize a combinatory system of places in a pure *spatium* infinitely deeper than the real extension of the chessboard and the imaginary extension of each piece.”

Similarly, fortune-like terms are supplements that carve out a space of freedom and tension for the subject to appear in the management of them (Broz and Willerslev, Humphrey and Hürelbaatar, this issue). Imaginative operations performed on a fortunate state of affairs may be conceived as forms of resistance against fate, producing their own intentional arcs of temporality, the human habitus of projecting time in front of ourselves amid the flow of anticipated expectations. In this sense, the generation of luck creates the capacity to short-circuit one’s temporal subjectivity and to produce a gap in time where events deemed to be fatal and inevitable may become positively possible. Take the example of omens, events that indicate some fortune or misfortune in the future. In some societies people are beset with such signs on all sides, and this seems to give rise to a particular apprehensive subjectivity. In northwest Mongolia in the early 2000s, for example, herders perceived omens in the unusual ‘look’ (*züs*) of wild birds and animals, domestic livestock, and the weather, or in their own dreams. Encountering everyday objects in non-quotidian circumstances, such as a ritual, was also considered to be omen-like or productive of prosperity or loss. Thus, during New Year ceremonies, young people should present the elderly with something considered to be a good omen. This might be a pair of socks, trousers, or shoes, or a bottle of vodka or a vase—any item whose ‘mouth is turned upward’, ready to receive and contain *hishig* fortune. All artifacts suggesting movement (e.g., bridles, whips, saddles, bicycles, cars, ropes used for packing) are good omens, while, conversely, items that face

downward (e.g., overturned pots), or that maim people (e.g., knives), or are considered polluted (e.g., dirty clothing or combs), or are used to stop movement (e.g., hobbles, manacles, chains, binding straps) are all bad omens and inauspicious. Children would be instructed not to touch such things if they were found on the steppe, and if they did, this would be linked with a coincidental illness (Oberfalzerová 2006: 28–30). Suspicious and fearful, the herders would refrain from action rather than make a mistake, explaining that “[t]he basis of the Mongolian character is apprehensiveness (*sejigleh zantai*)” (ibid.: 21–22). The situation is no different in the contemporary Mongolian city, where strange-looking people rather than animals are bad omens, and it is normal to take into account the lucky/unlucky character of the numbers encountered in urban life (phones, cars, buses, prices, etc.) when making daily decisions.

A simple temporal structure for an omen would appear to be a sign (in the present) and a predicted result (in the future). However, as Humphrey (1976) has argued, the relations conceived between the signs and the results are diverse and not causal in any straightforward sense. They can be linked by diverse logics, including synchronicity: when you see the omen, it is already bad for you. Furthermore, surrounded by an infinite possibility of omens, a person does not even perceive something to be a sign unless a ‘result’ (created by her concern, interest, anxiety, desires) is already a potentiality within her, even if subconsciously. This means that in practice the omen does not always ‘happen to you’, but is sometimes deduced *a posteriori*, as in the following case. A Mongolian man met a businesswoman to make a deal, but she was unexpectedly difficult, and the deal did not come off. The man described the event later to his father, troubled with financial difficulties, who asked, “What did she look like?” Hearing that the woman had flayed nostrils (a sign of being nervous and unreliable) and big lips (prone to evil gossip), the father immediately concluded that meeting a woman with such an appearance was in itself a bad omen. Never mind the deal, something else might be going to happen, and it would be best to go to the monastery and have a prayer said to avert the misfortune.⁶ We see in such cases that omens are not just sets of folk sayings that exist as cultural items in a single plane; rather, they are complex temporal constructs by means of which subjects link (double up) temporally separated experiences (Broz and Willerslev, this issue). Cosmologies of luck and fortune allow for the possibility of envisioning the co-existence of multiple worlds and events as not being mutually contradictory. In this cosmological imagination, luck is an ‘operator’ for conceiving the best of all possible futures by generating ‘spaces of compossibility’.

An event could indeed be lucky yet equally indicative of misfortune in the future. For example, when a Tibetan mushroom collector in Dechen (cf. da Col 2007) unexpectedly discovers a hidden spot in the forest that hosts several large specimens of the pricey matsutake variety, he is happy at first and imagines that his episodic luck (*lhango*) or family fortune (*yang*) may be favorable. Yet, at the same time, he is extremely suspicious since that fortunate event may be an omen or a harbinger of a misfortunate future. Extremely fortunate matsutake collectors are said to have been killed in car accidents or struck by other kinds of misfortune. A man never knows the state of his configuration of fortune: one

event is already multiple, as it needs to encompass at least two events in order to be fortunate. The second event is required in order to define retroactively the first one, yet the crucial point is that the ‘after’ makes the ‘before’ what it ‘already was’. The contingent reveals that it was necessary. Hence, fortune can only be enjoyed too late, never at the ‘right’ moment. Thus, a successful technology of anticipation always incorporates the future into itself and is actually ‘counted-as-two’, with two being the minimal structure of the fortunate event.

A number of contributors discuss strategies of anticipation, focusing not so much on averting misfortune as on warranting the fruition of good fortune. Caterina Guenzi’s article shows how diverse Indian idioms of fate and causality (karma theory, divine agency, demon activity, sorcery, etc.) are “translated into the language of planetary movement,” whereby “qualitative ideas are transformed into quantified and visible data.” It is according to these data that one’s *bhāgya* (lot, share, fate, but also luck, fortune, wealth) is determined. Not only humans but also land, houses, animals, and cities, as well as the Indian nation, are all endowed with a ‘lot’, and this very fact means that people can access a wide variety of information and steer a way through various fates. Here, the ‘counted-as-two’ aspect of fortune works in an idiom different from the case of the omen. Guenzi expresses this by referring to “two levels of reality”: “the horoscope corresponds to the ontological level where things *are*” (you *know* that you have money), “while people’s perceptions are put on a phenomenological level where things *seem* to be” (you *feel like* you do not have any money). The astrological session has the task of aligning these two levels so that people may get what is their due. This is achieved by means of techniques of anticipation, by the task of reckoning the astral configuration of the moment to reveal a client’s allotted boon or the place in which it will be found.

Steven Sangren addresses the Chinese idea of fate: seemingly inexorable, it is somehow to be accommodated with the moral/cultural imperative of self-exertion. Chinese philosophical notions of fate as natural and automatic, or the Confucian theory of ‘waiting for destiny’ (exert your utmost in moral endeavor and leave the rest to fate), fail to account for the enduring prevalence of fortune-telling, gambling, divination, and similar practices in Chinese society. Sangren adopts a psychoanalytically informed focus on desire to explain the connection between existential concerns and processes that produce fortune. Returning again to Weber and his Calvinists, who avoided fatalism by striving practically to demonstrate their place among the elect, Sangren suggests that the same tension—to control, in the face of fate, “who and what we are or shall become”—is present in China, where it is connected not so much to a cultural logic, as in the Weberian case, as it is to a universal human desire for omnipotence. The engine of fortune-producing activity, from ancestor worship rituals to the ‘deep play’ (Geertz 1973) of mahjong, is the human universal of desire, which Sangren sees as the “emergent effect of our encounter with precisely the fact that we are *not* omnipotent.” In a similar fashion, Festa’s (2007: 113) analysis of mahjong in Taiwan shows that, unlike women, who employ conventional forms of divination, men are equally concerned about their fate but are socially assertive and would rather divine fate through mahjong by mustering strategy, luck (*shouqi* or *yunqi*), skill, and expressive style.

Clearly, there is no single subjectivity to be connected with the concept of fortune, if only because the ideas that we associate with this term form variable clusters, even in a single society. Thus, Morten Pedersen notes that in Mongolia it is people leading settled lives who are preoccupied with accumulating *hishig* fortune, whereas the volatile young men conducting business in Ulaanbaatar want to experience something different. Out to make a business coup, with their *sülde-hiimori* vitality flying high (see Empson 2012; Humphrey and Hülrelbaatar, this issue), they also seem little prone to the dread associated with perceiving omens on all sides. Rather, as Pedersen sees it, they live by “the work of hope.” With hope, each business deal is a certainty, and although it does not come off, it is succeeded by another certain deal, and yet another—but not with growing doubt, as would be the case had these men been operating practically or rationally in the fashion described by Bourdieu. As Pedersen explains it, “irrational optimism” creates a different version of the time construct that we mentioned earlier. Here, rather than seeing the future as folded into the present, Pedersen starts with ‘the moment’, which spills out and overflows its possibilities. Only by “living for the moment” do these young men become “whole persons.” With hope’s exalted awareness of the virtual potentials of the present, the normal order of before/after is reversed for these men, who are “‘radically certain’ about what is to come next.” Their future does not need to be predicted; instead, it is already known and is appropriated as a model for actions in the present.

Conclusion: Gambling and the Cosmos

The work of Anna Tsing (2000) reminds us that, in many a global scene, hope illuminates what she calls the ‘economy of appearances’. In such an economy, entrepreneurship and financial gains rely on the dramatization of investment, the telling of stories that ‘must be true’ in order to kindle investor enthusiasm. “Hope’s ashes,” she writes, “are inflamed even by ridiculous claims ... In speculative enterprises, profit must be imagined before it can be extracted; the possibility of economic performance must be conjured up like a spirit to draw an audience of potential investors” (ibid.: 117–118). Tsing observes that in this drama “the more spectacular the conjuring, the more possible an investment frenzy” (ibid.: 118). Her remark takes us once again to the miraculous, the extravagant—indeed, the ‘all or nothing’—aspect of gambling.

Holbraad (2010) has recently observed how divination in Cuba implies invention and creativity out of a set of preordered cosmological elements that could explain all of the events in the world. Here, gambling, by paying attention to every single sign and clue during games, unfolds a generative process of self-creation through a creative summoning of the whole potential of the cosmos. Thus, it is not surprising that in many societies, dice-throwing is conceived as a primordial cosmological act of the division of unity and the creation of difference. In the Hindu context, a cosmic game of dice brings the universe from a state of indifferentiation to one of separation. Before the game, God is androgynous, but during the game the divinity turns inside out: Śiva and his

female counterpart Pārvatī appear, and the victory of the goddess secures the evolution and reproduction of the cosmos (Handelman and Shulman 1997). The ancient Indian ritual of royal consecration implied a game of dice where the stake of the game was the king himself—“the embodiment of the cosmic order” (Heesterman 1957: 156)—who had to be ‘produced’ by gambling. As the king was “brought forth from the dice” (ibid.: 154), the cosmos was recreated. Before entering the world of humans, the Tibetan hero Gesar must win a dice-throwing challenge against his heavenly brothers. On earth, his powers of luck are so great that he can throw 13 with two dice (Calkowski 1993: 35).

Walter Benjamin (1999: 510) once suggested that gambling is an erotic act, involving a passion for cheating on fate. Humphrey and Hürelbaatar (this issue) show in the case of the Mongolian *hiimori* that luck/fortune is an impersonal force that invites a peculiar form of “momentary subjectivity,” a “positive affirmation of chance” through the exercise of “freedom from limitation.” *Hiimori* implies an “intimate merging with elemental and formless things—wind and dust” and a “suffusion of the self with the most external, the boundless.” By engaging a deployment and verification of the presence of vitality, gambling—like the ‘ordeals’ of Nuosu shamans (Swancutt, this issue) and the business coups of young men in Ulaanbaatar (Pedersen, this issue)—could be regarded as a bio-economic diagnosis, a Maussian technique of the body. A successful dice throw highlights different bundles of bodily humors: for example, wind (for Tibet, see da Col 2012b) or heat (for China, cf. Chau 2008; for Melanesia, cf. Mosko, this issue). Despite chance being wild, fortune impersonal, or fate predetermined, the characters presented in this issue are agents who refuse both the raw determinism of fate and the chaotic science of probability and actively engage in a humanizing process, whereby Nietzsche encounters Lévi-Strauss on the dice table. With the dice warmed up, cooked within one’s hands, each throw is a feast. Not a mere moment of consumption but an event where the cosmos is engaged and challenged to reveal itself.

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Notes

1. For an inquiry on the relation between the event and the everyday, cf. Das (2007).
2. Cf. also da Col (2012b) on the Tibetan notion of *lungta*.
3. It is interesting to note that the use of games to inculcate particular, directed subjectivities is not only a contemporary phenomenon. The Mongols have for centuries been devotees of chess, in which the queen's ability to make a long diagonal move is called the 'queen with enthusiasm' (*berse urma-tai*). The noble descendants of Chingis Khan, however, play the queen 'without enthusiasm' (*urma-ügei*) as a mark of mourning for the great emperor's death, and they say that they will resume the bold move only when he returns after a thousand years. We see here also a form of political subjectivity, for the 'queen with enthusiasm' move is likened to long military campaigns across frontiers, which were likewise forbidden during the long period of mourning (Rinchen 1955).
4. Among the notable anthropological literature on gambling, see Papataxiarchis (1999), Binde (2005), Sallaz (2008), Bosco, Liu, and West (2009), and Cassidy (2010). General discussions of games of chance and gambling are to be found in Köpping (1997) and Reith (2002).
5. For a nuanced analysis of the relation between personal character and fatalistic explanations, cf. Herzfeld (1993: chap. 5).
6. Baasanjav Terbish, personal communication, July 2011.

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