

19 and 20 July 2013: Kunsthof Casino – Kunsthof Playschool and the aesthetic paradigm traversing them

In the second place, it made the lottery secret, free and general. The mercenary sale of chances was abolished. Once initiated in the mysteries of Baal, every free man automatically participated in the sacred drawings, which took place in the labyrinths of the god every sixty nights and which determined his destiny until the next drawing. The consequences were incalculable. (Jorge Luis Borges)

This is the idea that the economy is basically a game, that it develops as a game between partners, that the whole of society must be permeated by this economic game, and that the essential role of the state is to define the economic rules of the game and to make sure that they are in fact applied. What are these rules?

[...]

In the idea of an economic game we find that no one originally insisted on being part of the economic game and consequently it is up to society and to the rules of the game imposed by the state to ensure that no one is excluded from this game in which he is caught up without ever having explicitly wished to take part. (Michel Foucault)

The two events at Kunsthof on 19 and 20 July, *Kunsthof Casino* and *Kunsthof Playschool*, are a double homage to Michel Foucault and Jorge Luis Borges. To Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France (1978-79)* on the liberal art of government and modern governmental technology in which Foucault focuses on two forms of neo-liberalism: German post-War liberalism and the liberalism of the Chicago School. And to Jorge Luis Borges' short story *The Lottery in Babylon* (1941), in which with the power of fictional ambiguity he tells the story of the Game of chance as the Game of life with its one bio-natural law determining the cosmos.

The two events transversally bring together Casino and Playschool through a difference of art practices animating a new subjectivity and immeasurable multiplicity. This is why they take place at Kunsthof one day after the other. For some, it may sound odd, or a form of eccentricism to bring together the casino, gambling and the Game of chance, with the factory of school where knowledge is usually gained and produced. If an interdependency between the process of learning and play can be traced from Plato to Freud and all the way to contemporary computer-based learning games, with the two events the idea is to traverse the Game of chance as the Game of life in a time of biopolitics in which knowledge is the main engine perpetuating (social) production and reproduction in cognitive capitalism with its aesthetic *dispositif*, i.e., the art of governing, which tends to turn the whole of life into a game of free choice and competition in a determined field of action.

On 19 July, in a peculiar situation Kunsthof Casino inverts the rules of the Game of chance, or re-introduces new rules, or no rules, stimulating the public to re-invent them in direct participation or just contemplation in a performative twist to complicate and complete the performances. The Game of chance as a machine has "another origin than the state apparatus" and betrays the law as instituted by the frozen state. The public is invited to take part in ludic practices that stimulate the true passion of gambling bordering on trance, and exaggerate desires. They are even asked to take

the risk of madness and of losing one's mind, reaching all the way to a blind spot in the works of sensation and unregulated play of Lisa Schiess's *Salon de jeu*, Franziska Koch's *Jack Black* with Jacky Poloni, and Zoë Darling's *Labyrinth#2 – A Game of Chance*.

On 20 July Kunsthof Playschool is a never-ending school of life, of which the public will share only a monumental ephemeral juncture between the sensual and cognitive, where singular and subjective enunciations will empower different self-learning processes, because epistemology determines the existence of bodies as the plasticity of knowledge directly modulates these bodies and their entire life. This raises the question of who and how is excluded from the paradigm of knowledge. Because we believe that there is an other political ontological horizon in which the theater of the function of knowledge is not measured by grades and awarded diplomas, and can produce subjective forms of singular learning, processes in which knowledge passes from one body to the others in the epistemic production, blurring the normative modes of recognition. To be present in this school is more important than to be represented in an integrated and populist democracy in crisis. Kunsthof Playschool consists of lecture-performances and screenings: Fokus Grupa's *The Rises and Falls of Art Politics*, Romy Rüegger's *Who and how is are the.they.us invisible?*, Francesco Ragazzi & Francesco Urbano's, *Ich, Du, Er, Sie. This Lecture would be better in the dark*, Kika Nicolela's *Face to Face*, and Ronaldo Morelos' *Como Querem Beber Agua: Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio De Janeiro*.

Kunsthof Casino and Kunsthof Playschool pass back and forth between *le hasard objectif* with its deskilled labor and immaterial practices in the mind-expanding stimulus of disorder, and *Le Grand Jeu* which demands skills and action concerning the body and life, to produce a heterogeneous dimension and transform oppositions between immaterial and material, and the value of subjectivity attached to the Game of chance. This allows a multiplicity of bifurcations of its rule in which the aesthetic is no longer equated to beauty, but becomes an ethico-aesthetic form of composition and recomposition.

In the games of chance so dear to the Surrealists, Breton understands *le hasard objectif* as intensifying the marvelous and poetic appearance in the world, in its unpredictability, as both an auto-destructive and creative event disrupting the harmonious patterns of reason, as a technique of a-singularization and individuation aimed at accessing the pre-existing mind. This process is stimulated by disorder and relations of forces that irrupt through small holes pierced by chaos in the totality and solidity of daily life. This is a creative rupture with the discourse of the aesthetics of beauty, which gives way to convulsive beauty, in the direction of becoming a creative involution in the system of coordinates.

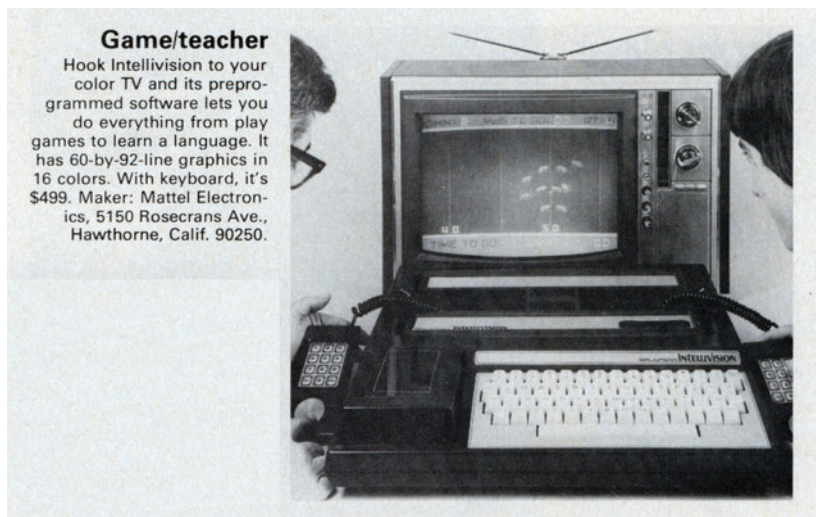
Le Grand Jeu breaks with the earlier surrealist game practices of non-serial, singular rituals of automatism, and brings a new direction into the games. It is a Game of chance devised by Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and Daumal, in which they connect 'chance' and 'life,' and 'grace' and 'action'. The force of beauty, which triggers one's own life in a non-ordinary way in the Game of chance. Because *Le Grand Jeu* is the big Game of life which can be played only once, from day to day, every day – "in the sense in which life itself is a one-off, unique chance at winning or losing." The big Game brings the idea through which the surrealists develop art practices of daily life in which the boundaries between art and life are blurred. "The members of *Le Grand Jeu* state that they wish to play the game 'à tous les instants de notre vie', as if, with every moment in time, the challenge is renewed,

and the game starts afresh, with equal chances of winning or losing. The rule of the 'big game' contains yet another paradox: the loser wins." ¹

Today the neo-liberal art of governing blurs the distinction between life and game. Because of that, the stake is the production of aesthetic universes as practices of resistance and creative struggle (Gilles Deleuze) in order to reinvent the aesthetic paradigm and re-appropriate the aesthetic *dispositif* of everyday life. This is the art of becoming, which means to learn how to inhabit the world in a better way and how to act and make a work of art of one's own life. (Michel Foucault) But this action in the event as a process of subjectivation is not determined by the Grace of Le Grand Jeu, but animated by the affect of all the forces participating, which is without a face, without charming eyes, no longer a matter of form or even of formless, but a pure unformed (Gilles Deleuze) in which there is no longer a model, a grace, a beauty. These forces and their actions are neither psychological, social nor organic: "Spontaneity and receptivity now take on a new meaning: to affect or to be affected." (Deleuze)

The legislation system treats as Games of chance all those games that do not require particular skills on the part of their players, while any Game of chance involving monetary stakes is considered gambling. A Game of chance bearing any trace of knowledge and skills, as in Black Jack which relies on intuitive knowledge, lies between gambling and non-gambling. It is thus not accidental if in cognitive capitalism with its aesthetic *dispositif* which deskills labor, the main protagonists are immaterial and affective labor.

We can look forward to two evenings without losers and competition! For the two days, all numbers are lucky! Get your chance!



Intellivision: Game/teacher (June 1979)

¹ Ramona Fotiade, "Le Grand Jeu: Speech and Silence on the Boundary of Surrealism," in *ead.* (ed.), *André Breton – The Power of Language*, Elm Bank Publications, 2000, p. 214.

Three Short Stories of the Lottery: Fictional, Mythical, Factual, of the materialist evolution of the Game of chance

This is the fictional short story of the lottery, in which as in every good fiction things remain unclear in ambiguous depth, and yet as we read on we are no longer sure whether the lottery still exists, because it has completely dissolved. In fact the lottery is everywhere! From time to time we discover proof of its reality in the cry of birds or the traces it leaves in the rust and dust. Such is the story told by Borges in his fictional dystopia *The Lottery in Babylon* (1941). It is a dizzy land where reality is produced by the Lottery and governed by the shadowy corporation, which is the basis of reality and permits all life to exist. In the State of Babylon there is no other law than the law of the Lottery itself. The lottery is the only cause, and its effects move the subjects in the social coordinates. No random patterns, which means that “Babylon is nothing else than an infinite game of chance.” In reality the number of drawings is infinite (and the balls are simple arithmetic units). The law of the lottery postulates that all players are equal, and are equally taking part in the game, where with each drawing they cross distinctions in the limited field. “The lottery in Babylon was a game played by commoners.” And yet for some unfathomable reason the poor remain poor in Babylon, and the rich remain rich.

In fact the operation of the corporation, called the Company, accepts total power through an intensification of chance, a periodical infusion of chaos into the cosmos, where “every free man automatically participated in the sacred drawings,” dutifully filling in their cards at random and sending their encrypted message which would determine their destiny, until the next drawing. This makes the *dispositif* of the Lottery the perfect synthesis, and correspondingly the State of Babylon a self-evolving system.

The lottery in Babylon is governed by The Company and its apparatus. During the evolution of the lottery, the Company minimized its operation, as a governmental technique to secure the function of the lottery, only through limitation and its control, in order to guarantee the integrity and freedom of all men in Babylon to be in the game. In these circumstances there is no need of sophisticated mathematics to predict the future, because it is produced automatically. As a result, men in Babylon are free subjects of chance captured at random. This is a land of no blame, no guilt, no free will. There are no interpersonal relations outside the mediation of the lottery system. Let us call it autopoietic, i.e. the de-ontologized realm of second-order observation. Following Wittgenstein’s language game, George Spencer-Brown in *The Law of Forms*,² a work of formal mathematics and philosophy, develops the self-referential calculus of indications and distinctions, a method he calls an ‘autopoietic system,’ a self-productive system. To draw of distinction means to be in a game: “by

² G[eorge] Spencer Brown, *The Law of Forms*, The Julian Press, 1972 (1969). “LoF became something of a cult classic, praised in the Whole Earth Catalog. Those who agree point to LoF as embodying an enigmatic “mathematics of consciousness,” its algebraic symbolism capturing an (perhaps even the) implicit root of cognition: the ability to distinguish. LoF argues that the *pa* (primary algebra) reveals striking connections among logic, Boolean algebra, and arithmetic, and the philosophy of language and mind.” (Wikipedia)

calling it, you confirm it, by crossing it, you cancel it.”³ In order for the process to start, it has to “draw a distinction in the first place.”⁴

The pre-history of the lottery of Babylon starts out, like the history of every machinic mechanical body, simply with the sale of tickets. Gradually, over the centuries, the lottery evolves from a mechanical machine into a sophisticated system of non-monetary elements, with no coins and merchants. The system becomes science and nature, intervening directly into the life of its subjects. All citizens are clients of the great Company, which achieves purity of form of its order, and invisibility. The lottery is the bio-law of nature, both natural and secret in a hidden variable way, full of the esoteric of numbers. It is a secret decision of the Company that provides the social security and control of the system. The lottery, performing its silent function, leads to public indifference, as in every blind system. The Company shuns all publicity. There is no political horizon or any other appearance and possibility of action besides those produced by the lottery. There is no visual and sensual immediacy, no other pleasure and desire besides those of chance and the winning or ill-omened number that inscribes itself directly into the bodies of the men.

This is the mythical story of the lottery, which, it is rumored, was invented in China. If the favorite game of the emperor was xiangqi, or Chinese chess, as the game of the state and of his despotic endeavors which he practiced playing with himself or with one of his closest counselors who enjoyed the privilege of being chosen by him. The game developed in close and intimate contact face-to-face in the most interior spaces of his palace, from which would devise his strategies for expanding and governing his empire, such that he could generously raise taxes without angering his subjects. This is how he was in need of a new device which would allow him to fulfill his mission while giving his subjects the same pleasure and satisfaction that he was getting from playing chess. Bearing in mind the circumstances and goals this new game could not be as complex as chess, and would have to be exterior, covering the entire territory of the empire so as to be easily governed by the state apparatus. Because his idea was rather to take than to give, lest he increase their expectations and hopes for change by chance. This is why he introduced the lottery as an imperial game through which he could levy a new and irregular tax in the empire, motivating his subjects to participate by offering them a chance to change their destiny, giving each of them a truly equal chance to choose in order to win or lose staking his own chance, since the new game chose the winner at random. The game is blind, like fate (and death), and thus shows no interest in the social rank of the players. This gives each of them the potential opportunity to find his luck by chance in the same measure, enjoying equal possibility and the same chances in the limitedness of unequal social and economic imperial order. The lottery is the highest good and mercy of the emperor towards his subjects, the transmutation of the despot’s power into a grace of power, a guide to happiness. All of this made the subjects truly happy, so that they participated freely and with verve, paying piece by piece the amount required instead of bursting out in anger about the levy of a new tax. In fact if this story is true at all and happened once upon a time, one can say that its result remains quite visible to this day. Because it is the introduction of the lottery which allowed the emperor to raise the funds for constructing the Great Wall of China with no bloodshed, in peace, which indeed turned out to be the best for his subjects since the wall protected them from the Barbarians.

³ Dirk Baecker (ed.), *Problems of Form*, Introduction, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

In the late Roman Empire as the imperial power was on the decline it became more expensive for the emperor and the state apparatus to maintain sufficiently exuberant spectacles, the lottery turned into a new wide-spread imperial game. At the same time it provided a way to levy additional tax for the maintenance of the foundations so that they do not collapse. In medieval Europe the lottery as a game of chance remained an unknown practice for a long time. When it gradually made its appearance it was first as a practice of charity, often associated with the church, to distribute smallish gifts to the poor of the parish, or as an exchange between them that comes close to that of a gift economy. The lottery as a game of chance in Europe is practiced for the first time in the 17th century in the Netherlands and later in England, with the introduction of a monetary stake. In this new stage of its evolution the lottery spreads rapidly in Europe and from there back into the world.

What has been described until now is the mythical past of the lottery before it turns into a true technique of the state apparatus with its contemporary governmental practices. Now come the facts. Until the beginning of the 20th century most forms of gambling, including lotteries, were illegal in many countries, in most Europe and in the U.S.A. Immediately after the end of WWII legislation is liberalized to allow most forms of gambling not only to be legalized, but also industrialized and capitalized. Monetary value and cash stakes are officially introduced and by the 1960s turn into a sector of its own in the economy of the spectacle, services and tourism. Most forms of gambling are entirely technologized and optimized, relying on a network system like television and later the Internet. In the 1980s some games of chance are appropriated by the state apparatus and turned into a regulative game, such as the national lottery which later develops into transnational forms of cooperation and alliances asserting common markets and political interests. At the same time, as a governmental technique it is a new system of taxation and (re)distribution for projects concerning public development, which coincides with the liberalization of the market and the introduction of neo-liberal democracy.

The State lottery plays a crucial role in social and cultural policy as a form of redistribution that separates the economic and social systems by exonerating the economic sector from some of its responsibilities with respect to public, educational, cultural, or environmental projects. An example is the UK national lottery with its social impact of publicly re-distributing money taken directly and freely from the population, a tax of one pound for each lottery ticket, rather than from big business and companies. On the basis of this, the State lottery provides direct support to 'good causes' in the arts, heritage, health, education, environment, community and charity sectors. As a result, according to the Arts Council England, over the past 20 years art in the UK has enjoyed a period of most fruitful development, incomparable to other historical periods, thanks to the link made between cultural policy and the national lottery. They call it 'sustained investment.' The introduction of the principle of state funding for the arts through the national lottery 'has transformed the cultural landscape', as 'more than 2 billion pounds of Lottery funding has been awarded through the Arts Council, over 1.4 billion pound of which has been spent on buildings. Around 100 new theatres, galleries and art centers have been created.' These have been the focus of urban and rural regeneration, bringing renewed vitality to neighborhoods, cities and regions across England. Indeed the development of the State lottery in the UK is an example of a swiftly growing bureaucratic network which periodically expands its number of jobs. The winners usually get their money paid out directly, and the lucky sum in most European countries is income tax-free, or the tax rate is quite low.

(Text: Dimitrina Sevova)