



GAMBLING, DIGNITY, AND THE NARCOTIC OF TIME IN TOKYO'S DAY LABORER DISTRICT, SAN'YA

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Every Saturday and Sunday, a steady flow of men can be seen heading from the old day laborer and skid row district of Tokyo, San'ya, in the direction of the nearby Rokku entertainment area of Asakusa. As if they had taken on the musty complexion of the newspapers they carry tucked under their arms or in their back pockets, they can be recognized by their monochromatic, frayed clothing and their ghostly outer appearance. Be it on foot or by bus, everyone has one destination: WINS, the off-track horse-race gambling (*keiba*) hall of Asakusa. Aficionados arrive early, even before opening, standing impatiently in a small crowd waiting for the shutters to open and the gambling to commence. By noon, especially on Sundays, when the high-profile races are screened, the six-story WINS building is buzzing with crowds clumped around TV screens hanging from the ceiling. Many also sit on the staircases and in the few open spaces, or by the walls and in the corners of the hall, peering at the small print of the newspaper statistics spread on the floor before them. With a pen in one hand and a stack of blank betting cards by their side, they write on top of the statistics, only to fill in the numbers of their bet in the circles of their betting card, after which they purchase their gambling ticket from the machines lined up against the front wall.

JRA 日本中央競馬会
BETTING CARD
W / P / B/Quinella/Quinella/Exacta/Q/Place/Teis/Trifecta
【単勝/複勝/持連/馬連/馬連/ワイド/3連複/3連単】投票カード

前日発売
0 (表面)

場名 中山
レース番号 11
3歳・2歳目
3歳・3歳目

単勝/複勝
持連/馬連/馬連/ワイド
3連複/3連単

金額 単位 倍率

100 100 100

Figure 1. Betting card. At WINS, plastic pencils were provided for gamblers to indicate the location of their race, the number of their race, the order of their horses, and the amount of their bets on the betting card.

2017年3月8日
中山
11 レース
QRコード
第77回 (G1)
皐月賞

TRIFECTA
3
連
単
TRIFECTA

1 2 3 *** 100円
1 2 4 *** 100円
1 2 5 *** 100円

結果発表

Figure 2. Gambling ticket. Discarded gambling tickets were strewn across the floors of WINS, where a janitor swept them away.

On almost every Sunday between 2011 and 2013, one group of middle-aged men from San'ya could be found in this crowd of gamblers, starting their weekly pilgrimage at an eatery in Asakusa before liquor had gotten the better of them. Sundays for them passed in a blitz. By two or three o'clock, the men would be back in San'ya to watch the main races at a sordid dive bar outsiders would have been loath to enter. By this point, they would either be trashed or at the peak of conviviality: watching the races, singing karaoke, drinking, and eating with a pile of cash lumped in the center of the table.

I gambled, imbibed, and worked with this group of men at construction sites during these two years of fieldwork. For at least six months, I was totally immersed in their lives: working four days per week, waking at six or earlier, coming back at six or later, then drinking, gambling, eating, sleeping, sometimes in the same room, and waking, only to work again. In rare instances, I accompanied them in an ambulance to hospitals. Having housed as many as 15,000 male laborers in the decades after World War II, by 2012, San'ya's population of men had diminished to about 5,000. According to its active laborers, fewer than 50 others worked in the

area, and almost all of these were in their fifties. Aside from these active workers, the remainder of San'ya's populace was considered either too old or physically unable to work. Living in the two-storied wooden bunkhouses that still lined San'ya's alleys, these men constituted an anonymous mass of rapidly declining individuals whose stigmatized penury precedes the collapse of Japan's bubble economy in 1991 by several decades, and whose life expectancy in 2021 remains twenty years below Japan's average. Almost exclusively composed of men, this vanishing population lives beyond the relatively visible orbit of what [David Slater and Patrick Galbraith \(2011\)](#) have described as "the collapse of middle-class masculinity" in Japan, or the collapse of Japan's middle class at large ([Allison 2013](#)).



Figure 3. The exterior of a dive bar in San'ya. Photo by Klaus K.Y. Hammering.

Grounded in my time with San'ya's workers, I consider how the negative excesses of their lives away from the construction site counter a biopolitical discourse of economic productivity, conferring dignity in place of the death-inducing effects of exhaustive labor. Rather than rest their bodies in San'ya for another day of manual labor, these men repeatedly and insistently gambled themselves into debt. Moreover, they routinely gambled at local San'ya venues that were illegal, and therefore backed by the *yakuza*, the Japanese organized crime syndicates, all while drinking their bodies into ruin. In what follows, I examine how the solicitation for mutual recognition through gambling did not consist only in the assertion of a vulgar form of masculinity.¹ Gambling, drinking, and engaging in (or stopping) the occasional brawl enabled the men to recognize each other as social beings, and as men, but there was more to gambling and risk-taking than a scripted performance



Figure 4. A standard bunkhouse in San'ya with single-room occupancy. Toilets, microwave (there was no kitchen), and a common bathing area were shared.

Photo by Klaus K.Y. Hammering.

of masculine social status. As an act of staking one's reputation as a "man" (*otoko*), gambling simultaneously transformed the abstract time of the workday into an immediate experience of contingency, thereby enabling time to emerge as what [Walter Benjamin \(1999b, 12\)](#) described as a "narcotic" that reclaims the time lost to the deadening effects of manual labor.² By foregrounding the initial thrill of gambling as a narcotic, I show how this transformation consists in a reclamation of "experience" (*Erfahrung*), that is, of a past event that has been folded into the present through a narrative form that informs the entirety of one's life ([Benjamin 1968](#)).³ For rather than winnings, it was the production of debt that carried over into the everyday lives of these men, and it was credit that testified to the accountability and reputation of a man in San'ya.⁴

In its eminently social dimensions, gambling in San'ya invokes the "character" that [Erving Goffman \(1967\)](#) once depicted as a compensation for the routinized predictability of office work among male casino gamblers in his 1967 "Where the Action Is," or that [Thomas M. Malaby \(2003\)](#) has described in Chania, Greece, as a self-constitution enabled through exposure to contingency.⁵ It is at games like craps, roulette, and, especially, off-track horse-race betting ([Kruse 2016](#)) that the social and vertiginous dimensions ([Caillois 2001](#)) of gambling in San'ya can be encountered in different social contexts.⁶ In fact, insofar as the initial "hook" of a "near miss" ([Schüll 2012, 97](#)) is concerned, we may even liken the appeal of the gambling practices that follow to that of slot machines. But this is also where the

affinities end. For the day laborer's desire for self-constitution through a narrative form of experience contrasts sharply with the asocial "self-liquidation" sought by gamblers in the "machine zone" of slots, as [Natasha Dow Schüll \(2012, 222–27\)](#) depicts gambling in Las Vegas. Unlike women and men seeking an escape at slot machines from the vagaries of human relations in the service industry, the manual laborers of San'ya seek, above all, to restore mutual recognition and sociality. Whereas [Schüll \(2012, 226\)](#) explicates the asocial dimensions of the gambler's desire to reach a "zero state" at slot machines, I examine the initial thrill and social aspect of gambling. So too, whereas Goffman, Malaby, and others suggest the ignominy of losing, I disclose a scene in which an individual attains dignity by exacerbating his debts. Although the desire for victory emerges across the gamut of gambling practices, day laborers in San'ya rejuvenated the waste of their bodies through gambling to reconstitute their social selves in time. Holding themselves accountable for their debts, they solidified their dignity as men of their word. And this is where the *otoko* of San'ya exercises agency: by augmenting and harnessing the negativity of utter deprivation that would have consigned him to a premature, anonymous death.



Figure 5. One of San'ya's more dilapidated bunkhouses. The faded signs by the entryway state that rooms are available for ¥1,700 (\$17 USD) per night. Photo by Klaus K.Y. Hammering.

EXHAUSTION AND THE ABSTRACTION OF TIME AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

For the construction workers of San'ya, the enjoyment of gambling stood in contrast to the construction site. There, the prevention of accidents required

attending to dangerous contingencies yet, at the same time, it also demanded a deadening to the possibility of these contingencies ever coming to deadly fruition. Thinking too much about the ever-present possibility of accidents would have made work impossible, so the men had to invest energy in maintaining a certain “shield,” as Sigmund Freud (1961, 30) once wrote, to block out this possibility.⁷ Confronted with the specter and penetrating shock of an accident bound to happen at some point, San'ya workers at the construction site had to block out direct exposure to material contingencies. It was as if they labored in an abstract temporality imposed on them by capital, in which the time of production had been emptied out of the interruptive (yet inevitable) force of accidents and other hindrances.⁸ At the end of the workday, workers from San'ya were drained to the point of fatigue, since the tasks imposed on them required that they expend their energy as efficiently as possible. In so doing, they also deadened themselves to the physical environment of the construction site—depriving them of a sensorial experience of the world that they could call their own.

In one of many comparable tasks, a typical San'ya day laborer had to coordinate his movements with a thirty-ton excavator. To drive a metal pipe into the earth, he had to hold this pipe with one hand, and with the other, instruct the operator of the excavator to move its beak forward and down, so that it clasped the tip of the pipe. At this point, the man on the ground had to “run out of the way,” because once the beak pushed down, the pipe was plunged into the earth. It went without saying that, if a finger was caught between the beak and the pipe, or if a foot remained stuck under the pipe, the force of the excavator would have torn it off. And sometimes, just when the excavator released its hold, the pipe bounced back toward the face of the worker, shredded across its tip. But the danger of this had become commonplace. So too, when dust particles flew in the air, San'ya day laborers either turned their faces or wrapped a towel over their mouths. If a worker stepped on a nail, he ignored the injury until lunch break, when he could run by a pharmacy. Even downright exhaustion left no choice but to carry on. Likewise, scaffolders from San'ya knew what would happen if they fell from a height of thirty stories, since it had happened to others. One man related what passed through his mind, when looking down from such a height: “If I fall from here, I will die.” Nevertheless, he continued to work without the encumbrance of his safety gear. In this way, the possibility of accidents had to be bracketed and repressed as if it did not exist.

At the construction site, the working day was subdivided into docket of time (8:30–10:00, 10:30–12:00, 1:00–3:00, 3:30–5:00) that fused this expendi-

ture of bodily energy with the duration of time. Reflecting a nineteenth-century imperative to understand motion in terms of time and space (Rabinbach 1992, 84–119), the day was divided into sections whose passage was experienced in anticipation of a safe ending, across which energy was spent. Time was compartmentalized, with the body occupying the centerpiece of this compartmentalization, because laborers from San'yā had to know that, by the time it was 3:00 p.m.—or by the time they were fifty or sixty years old—they still had enough energy left to make it until the end of the day.⁹ At the age of fifty-six, one man explained that, to get through the day, especially when doing demanding physical labor, he needed to pace himself in accordance with the break periods held between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m., 12:00 and 1:00 p.m. (lunch), and 3:00 and 3:30 p.m. It was only the thought and certainty of an upcoming break that enabled him to continue, a little more, until the next break. Only slacking enabled him to subvert the top-down management. Of course, the best kind of working day was the “easy” (*raku*) one, one less demanding or that ended early, but the only type of work that occasionally ended early was cement work, and this was determined by the pace of the machinery. If the mixers arrived on time, the day could end as early as 3:00 p.m. If not, it could extend past 5:00 p.m. And it was for this reason that, during cement work, the spaces of the floor came to represent the passage of time. Because every floor was divided into equal-sized apartment blocks called “slabs,” each uncemented slab signified a compartment of time. To calculate the remains of the day, workers counted the number of remaining slabs. Thus, time passed and constituted the abstract measure of bodily expenditure. Yet, unconcerned with the material contingencies of the construction site, this was a specific form of time, one oriented toward the future in a future anterior mode in which the workday, like the portions of the day, *will have ended* (Lyotard 1984, 81). At least one person had to bring either a wristwatch or phone out to the construction site, so the men could ask each other, sometimes every five minutes, if the time for a break had arrived yet. If a watch was on hand, it was possible to get a head start. Otherwise, they had to wait for other workers to head back to the changing rooms. In the summer, when workers were regularly hospitalized for heatstroke, the stretch between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. felt especially long. At those times, it was better not to look at the watch, to stick it out, and be relieved that time had passed when one finally dared a glance.

A capitalist conception of value inhered to this regimentation of energy, since it is the commodity form, or rather, money that precipitates the abstraction of “labor power” into units of time. The quantification of labor power is immanent

to the exchange of a subsistence wage for manual labor. However, it is only in its total expenditure that labor power emerges as “labor power” proper; that is, when wages were exchanged for “labor power” at the construction site, overseers expected that laborers exhaust themselves in maximum productivity (Rabinbach 1992; Marx 1997).¹⁰ Unlike Japan's salaryman or members of its service industry, the figure of the day laborer therefore renders explicit the limits of the body, and of the etiolation of sensory impressions necessary to the smooth performance of capital accumulation. While the salaryman and convenience store woman wait for breaks as much as anyone, biopolitics had been dispensed with in San'ya, and its laborers were discarded without consideration for their reproduction. They were the long-lost sons, husbands, and fathers who had trouble supporting even themselves and who were no longer expected to take care of others, not to mention themselves. Rather than expressing a social metabolism, labor power at the construction site therefore entailed an utter deprivation of energy in which laborers consisted of nothing but a means toward the extraction of value. It is the violence of this rationalization that constituted the hierarchical relationship between overseers and workers at construction sites, where conditions of exchange dictated that manual laborers be worked to the point of exhaustion and, eventually, death. The group of men I worked with had no choice but to endure death-inducing fatigue.

In fact, both of the men I will refer to in the following had already been diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses. Kentarō, a burly, fifty-seven-year-old, no-nonsense construction worker had been diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver. And Akira, a former member of the *yakuza* who had risen to the rank of lieutenant (*kashira*) and whose muscles had once been bulging, had been diagnosed with a tumor. Still, they worked, drank, and gambled. For it was precisely their reduction to a point of utter deprivation that compelled the emergence of a dignifying counterdiscourse to the death-inducing discipline of the worksite. The exigency of this counterdiscourse instigated the conversion of leftover wages into the daily excesses of liquor and gambling, the latter of which involved an altogether different experience of time and contingency.

DOUBLING THE TEMPORALITY OF THE WORKING DAY

The group veritably lived according to two distinct calendars. One was the regular, endless workday schedule; the other, that of gambling, supplemented the first with the ever-present possibility of incommensurable winnings. After a week of work, the thrill and intoxication of gambling, the high of skirting close to the win of coincidence, rejuvenated the body and implied an aptitude for seeking out

the contingent precisely where the shock factor would be greatest. Like Benjamin's poet of modernity, the gambler in the crowd sought the encounter with the penetrating shock of the accidental, which, as every manual worker knew but repressed, was bound to reoccur at some point.

In fact, when Kentarō stayed in a bunkhouse, he kept track of the winning lottery from day to day. He would record the numbers in columns on the back of a calendar hanging in his room, enabling him to track number patterns and anticipate future numbers. If the number 3 had not appeared for a long time, the likelihood of it appearing went up, and vice versa. Within limits, Kentarō could rely on mathematical laws of probability to predict future numbers, but there were any number of ways to play the lottery, each of which was considered equally legitimate. One way was to have a computer assign a number on the basis of a calculation of probability. Another was to seek out online predictions or tipsters. And another was to doggedly "chase" (*oikakeru*) the same number, over and over again, maybe because the gambler had previously won with that lucky number, or because it signified an auspicious calendrical date. Of course, 4 (*shi*) signified death (*shi*) and was generally considered less auspicious, but over time, numbers became intimately personal and disregarded any form of rational calculus. More importantly, gamblers could avail themselves of whatever technique felt right, and Kentarō had made it a practice to begin his days by purchasing a lottery ticket, doubling the monotony of the working day with a repetitious gambling practice. He had yet to win big at the lottery, but when Kentarō was strapped for cash, he would say, "It's okay, the lottery will come."

Whether in a state of immediate readiness to gamble, or having lost so much that they had decided *not* to gamble, the group remained in continuous contact with gambling in one form or another. On the train rides to work and during breaks in the changing rooms, the statistics and predictions (*yosō*) for races—be it horses, boats, or bicycles—were always in someone's hands. This would spur occasional conversation, as one person might peer over the shoulders of another and remark: "Number 7 is real likely to win, eh?" (*Nanaban atama ga katai nā*). Even if someone had decided to stop gambling, they always seemed able to recount the circumstances of upcoming races: the odds, the stakes, which horse and jockey were strong, and what combinations would give the highest yield. And if it was a less well-known race, a mere glance at the statistics seemed to give them instant insight into the intricacies of the race in question. Gambling, and especially betting on horses, formed such a locus of social knowledge that the group could communicate in a string of ciphers—#7, #3, #13, #1; and in combination: #7 #3,

#7 #1; and in triplets: #13 #7 #1, #3 #13 #7—that were instantly recognizable to the other interlocutors.

What everyone in the group hoped for, as, undoubtedly, every gambler, was a big win. Everyone, moreover, had a story of how they had won a considerable amount of money in the past. Akira would recount how he had won ¥150,000 (\$1,500 USD) on an off-chance bet he had hardly thought about. Kentarō recalled the time he had won ¥500,000 (\$5,000 USD), and how incredibly good the noise of the machine had sounded as it counted his money—pure sound of excess—before he flicked the cash into his pocket. And two other men won big sums in the two years I was there—one of them, repeatedly. Such experiences were said to be formative of the inveterate gambler, because that was how one became “hooked” (*hamaru*). Then there were stories of people who had bought cars or houses with profits from gambling, yet everyone knew it was impossible to make a “living” (*seikatsu*) from gambling. Overall, the men lost more than they won. But still, every time the screen at WINS or a dive broadcast the returns on main races, it confirmed that someone out there had taken the jackpot. Moreover, everyone in the group had their theory of how to achieve incommensurable winnings, and it all began with ¥100 (\$1 USD).

THE ARTISTRY OF GAMBLING AS MOTOR-CONNECTIVITY TO FATE

It was common to compliment victorious gamblers, because gambling was not regarded as a mere game of chance, but rather, as one that required a certain skill and knowledge. This aptitude was differentiated from skills at the construction site. For as an occupation that was freely entered into, gambling did not constitute labor, but appeared as expenditure in the absence of production, as the squander of time, money, and an embodied acumen.¹¹ Whether it was horses, bicycles, the lottery, an array of Japanese card games, or, on rare occasions, dice games, the winner always received congratulations and applause. When one individual won ¥100,000 (\$1,000 USD) several times in a row on horses, Akira looked at the man's numbers, only to remark: “And to think that he wins with this” (*Kore de katsun damon nā*). Someone might say to a winner, “All the credit to you” (*Sasuga da nā*), and on the floors of WINS, gamblers commended one another, while the winner stood tall. Yet the skill and knowledge of the gambler was of a very specific type, and seemed to involve instinct (*kan*) far more than rational forethought or calculation. This instinct could lead the gambler to seek out the tipsters who sold predictions on the street as much as it could lead the lottery-gambler to purchase

a computer-generated ticket, or to fill out their own divinations. But in order to exercise this faculty, it did not suffice that the gambler divine an outcome. He also had to place an actual bet, meaning that he had to render himself vulnerable to the fateful passage of time, activating his nerves in anticipation of the results.¹² And it was for this reason that horse gamblers stood rooted to their spot during the initial stage of a race, silently reining in their energies, only to release them in an unruly flood of excitement, jubilation, or dejection, as losers turned their backs and winners raised their hands in victory. Simply predicting an outcome, as every gambler knew, did not have the slightest significance if a bet was not placed. It was one thing to predict, and quite another to gamble. The artistry of gambling was only disclosed through the practice of risk, in an embodied battle (*shōbu*) with fate: of staking one's money. This also gave the lie to the tipster, for the failure of the tipster to bet only indicated that contact between the nervous instincts and fate, or coincidence, had been severed.

Hence, the key to gambling, Akira would say, was “not to think about it too much” (*amari kangaenaide*). The group would laugh at the bets that I placed, sometimes even passing my numbers around, slanting their heads with a wry grin, as if there was little chance the horses would come in as I had bet on them. Even if they did, it would not make any money, since I had simply mixed up the highest-ranked horses, and thrown in a wild card. Admittedly, when I won three consecutive races, each garnering me ¥100 for ¥100, it elicited the laughter of the group once again. Yet when I placed bets on horses that seemed highly unlikely, but not guaranteed *not* to win, the group would laugh, only to retract by saying: “I don’t know, it might come with that.” For they were all believers in “beginner’s luck,” as if gambling necessitated a faculty in short supply for the seasoned gambler. In thinking or knowing too much, the connectivity of nervous instinct to the futurity of numbers was sacrificed.

There was, indeed, a less rational factor to knowledge of gambling. Kentarō, for instance, observed that after decades of playing flower cards, “for some unknown reason” (*naze ka shiranai kedo*), cards from the pine (*matsu*) suit tended to appear toward the bottom of the deck. But there were as many pine cards in the deck as cards in the other suits, and there was no reason why cards of the pine suit should stick to the bottom of the shuffled deck. Similarly, Kentarō noted that sometimes in gambling, the same numbers kept repeating for some inexplicable reason. In horse races, in which the starting lanes of horses had nothing to do with their likelihood of winning, such repetition occurred when the same numbers kept winning, regardless of the race. When this happened, someone might note:

"Oh, it's #7 again" (*A, mata nanaban da*). Or, fed up with missing the mark, somebody might shout: "What, it's #7 again?!" (*Eh, mata nanaban kayō?!*). Such patterns were "strange" (*okashī*), since they defied rational expectation and made it seem as if the numbers led a life of their own, intimating other forces at work.¹³ To induce an embodied accord with the numbers, there was a distinct sense in which "thinking," "studying," and predicting number configurations yielded nothing—yet had to be done to be set aside and forgotten.¹⁴

Once a gambler started winning, it might happen that he went on a veritable winning streak, winning one race after the other until their fortune could no longer be dismissed as a mere fluke (*magure*). Their aptitude, rather, demonstrated an escalating audacity grounded neither in rational knowledge nor intelligent prediction, but in the dangerous certainty of an abiding motor-connectivity with fate. When saying that it was best in gambling "not to think about it too much" (*amari kangaenaide*), Akira therefore mimicked the gesture of quickly sketching in a card, as if responding instantaneously to a spur-of-the-moment instinct and "feeling" (*fiiringu*), because keeping in touch with the numbers necessitated a blind gesture of the body, "beginner's luck," that responded automatically to infinitesimal shifts in the nervous instincts. Writing the numbers with a heavy hand would have involved too much consciousness. The trick in gambling, rather, was for the nerves of the body to remain in touch with "fate."

The first bout of any winning streak therefore arrived unexpectedly, before the confidence and certainty of repetition set in. Akira would recall how, just as he was about to leave WINS one day, he decided to place one final bet, for the hell of it. Hardly looking at the newspaper statistics, skimming, and sketching what felt right, he placed a ¥100 bet (\$1 USD) on a trifecta: the hardest configuration to win, meaning that three horses have to finish precisely in first, second, and third place. And just as he was about to leave, he moved his eyes back and forth from his ticket to the screen, squinting to see whether the last numbers on the screen matched his own, still in disbelief when he withdrew ¥150,000 from the machine. This very same Akira would go through slumps in gambling, so much so that he would quit, cursing, "There is never enough money." But when he won, he won repeatedly, as he did one day in San'ya. First at boats at a hole-in-the-wall dive bar, then at bicycles at an open-air sushi bar. Akira walked back and forth between the two vendors, placing bets, collecting money, scanning the statistics as if seeing through them, and commenting on races as if he had seen them before. The crowd of marveling regulars turned to him, basking in the sunlight, and called him "sensei."

Everyone knew of an incident in which someone had won several million yen at this hole-in-the-wall dive bar. Not knowing quite what to do, the owner had gone to his guarantor, the local *yakuza*, to collect the money. Otherwise, everyone said, “no one will gamble there.” The next day, this same person gambled at the open-air sushi bar, also backed by the *yakuza*, and won several million yen again. Once again, the crime syndicate backed the loss, only this time, the person was told never to return, as if his victories bespoke a sustainable acumen. Everyone could recount the incident, as if they shared in these victories. It is this motor-connectivity with contingency that inscribes itself on consciousness as a memory, folding the past into the present in a form as evident in the repeated stories of victory told by day laborers in San’ya as in the preeminent story of gambling: Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Gambler*.¹⁵

THE CONTINGENCY OF COINCIDENCE AND TIME AS A NARCOTIC

Alas, motor-connectivity to the winning numbers could only be confirmed in the final instant of danger when the winning numbers were revealed. It was also this concentration of risk in a suspended, revelatory moment of time out of time that entailed a transformation of the abstract time of the working day into an experience of contingency and that caused the gambler to repeat the act. Akira placed that bet of ¥150,000 barely a minute before it was too late. Likewise, with quick dice games, it was the very moment and gesture of throwing the dice that decided the outcome. So too, when teaching me games in which the aim was to pull an identical pair of flower cards, one man would half-jokingly, half-seriously insist that I hold the pair of cards together “real tight, real tight!” (*gyutto, gyutto!*) before slowly sliding the one card down to reveal the other, as if holding them tight and leaning one’s body into them could make the cards bleed into each other. In other games, in which it helped to pull identical cards from the deck, it was common practice to throw the cards down fervently, with “spirit” (*kiai*). Different games had different rhythms, and various displacements of the intoxicating instant of truth. With horse racing, boats, and bicycles, the last possible moment to place one’s bet was separated from the race by a period of five minutes. Yet as gambling races proper, they demonstrated the qualities of precipitation and jeopardy—of missing the mark—that Benjamin discerns in gambling, or that Schüll explicates as the “hook” that initiates the fledgling gambler’s repetition compulsion.¹⁶ With horses, this moment did not arrive until the end of the race, when the animals accelerated into a sprint, and at WINS, the final seconds of a race were therefore

accompanied by loud shouting and exultation. Condensed into an immediate experience of contingency, time was thus transformed into a narcotic for the San'ya gambler.

As much as the pleasure of winning, just missing the mark also propelled the gambler to repeat the act. Everyone would talk of coming close to winning. Maybe the same two horses on whose victory they had bet would win, but in the opposite order from their bets! Watching the last fifteen seconds of any horse race left one enthralled with horses sprinting toward the finish line, and with the possibility that anything could happen. Another way to achieve the singularity of an incommensurable win, however, came in the sheer negativity of loss—a propensity toward self-destruction that proved most compatible with the group's liquor intake. But it was first and foremost the *form* of the transformation of time that proved addictive. Regardless of the outcome, every single race (but particularly high-profile ones with vast sums at stake) exposed gamblers to the possibility of overturning the objective conditions of their lives, a possibility proffered to them in the form of compressed time. For as Anatole France wrote, gambling is “the art of producing in a second the changes that Destiny ordinarily effects only in the course of many hours or even many years” (qtd. in Benjamin 1999b, 498–99).¹⁷ Contrary to the seemingly endless time of the working day, in which time was emptied out in anticipation for it to have been done, and the nerves of the body exhausted in an unrelenting necessity of registering, blocking, and protecting against contingency, time in gambling deceptively suggested the possibility of making infinite gains in an instant.

After a week of exhaustive labor, liquor thus loosened the nerves, and gambling seemed to redeem time. The experience of having once won haunted the gambler, so that he sought to repeat it, and the gambler was “hooked” (*hamatteru*) by that lucid first experience of winning, as if the contingency of the event had pierced his consciousness. Contrary to the construction site, where consciousness had to register and buffer all sorts of dangers, gambling therefore involved a drive to repeat the original coincidence of winning. The gamblers of San'ya desired the experience of shock and coincidence that replicated the first encounter.

LIBERATING THE NERVOUS INSTINCTS TO CLAIM SIGNATURE WINNINGS

It was the “protective shield against stimuli,” erected so relentlessly by the intellect at the construction site (Freud 1961, 30), that the worker sought to penetrate.¹⁸ To enable this penetration, the statistics in the newspaper took the place

of consciousness at the workplace. Where consciousness otherwise would have exhausted itself in outlining and weighing an endless list of details, the newspaper provided this information ready-made. By doing the work of intellect for the gambler, the statistics facilitated the experience of gambling by liberating it from the drudgery of distilling the endless minutiae of prerequisite information. The newspapers thereby functioned as a mere means of holding a surfeit of information in check, without acting on it. This allowed the gambler to apprehend upcoming races in broad strokes, releasing the instincts to do the work of scanning, sketching, and reacting to the minutest shifts in patterns to divine a winning code. The sheer excess of statistics, already abstracted into a readily digestible form, made evident that the gambler could not aggregate their entirety. Instead, the gambler wrote on top of the statistics with a marker, circling here and there, and in their own shoddy handwriting numbered the horses.¹⁹ The point was not to “study,” but to shut out information.

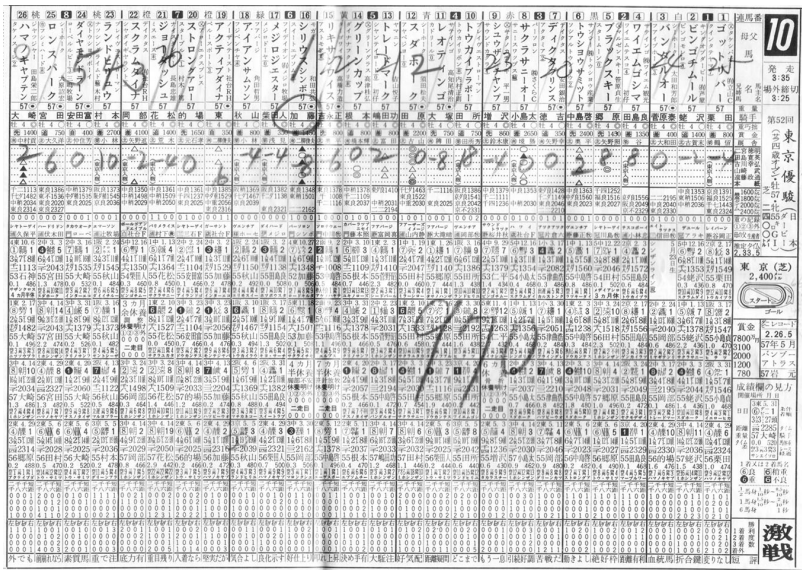


Figure 6. Image of newspaper statistics from one horse race, overwritten by the gambler's hand. Like discarded gambling tickets, such newspaper pages could be found on the floors and in the garbage cans of WINS.

When gamblers spoke of horses, it was purely in numbers, as if the horse or jockey did not matter.²⁰ Sure, there were famous jockeys and horses, such as Yutaka Take who rode Deep Impact, or Secretariat in the United States. Yet when it came to filling in the betting card, horses were indicated in numbers, and rows

on rows of odds determined the final wins. With the exception of the names of the horse and jockey, and a particular characteristic of the horse, every other piece of information was written in numbers. Yet while the language of gambling was thoroughly abstracted into numbers, in its secrecy, the gambling ticket bore the signature of the gambler from the moment of its inscription. Ticket numbers had to be kept secret, so that they could not stand apart from the person who had written them, preempting an awkward situation in which one's numbers were the same as "someone else's" (*hoka no hito no*).

Although of baseball, on which everyone also bet, one man in the group spoke of the Hiroshima Toyo Carp as a team owned by Mazda, a car company that was not in the same league as major manufacturers, such as Nissan or Toyota, and of its players who were also underdogs. But they played with their "might and main!" (*isshōkenmei!*). Nor did they use many foreigners. In fact, the one foreigner on the team was underpaid, and he was "doing his best!" (*gambatteru!*). In short, the Hiroshima Toyo Carp relied on their own strength, without purchasing outside help, and "everyone knows of them." Alongside his observation that mahjong, like "people" (*ningen*), is about "sticking it out" (*tsupparu*), this man disclosed his life philosophy in the bets he placed on underdogs. So too, Akira would speak of being a "man" (*otoko*), and of the importance of "seeing things through" (*suji o tōsu*). Oftentimes, their ticket numbers reflected their favorites, as well, and it was this quality that personalized the ticket, set it on its way to a singular value, and that rendered its final monetary value their very own.

In this way, the necessity of making a claim to one's gambles in the name of masculinity sprung from the abstracted form of money and the commodity itself. The act of gambling must be considered over and against the wage of the working day. For it was the wage that determined the value and the abstract form of time through which value was conferred on San'ya's day laborers, whose bodies were emptied out until, finally, they were deemed altogether unusable.

EXPERIENCE AND THE COMPULSION TOWARD NEGATIVITY

Working from Freud's writings on repetition and trauma, Benjamin recognized a formal congruence between the automatic motions of the gambler and the factory worker. By describing a similitude of form in the repetition of bodily motions, he proposed that, at least on the surface of things, the drudgery of menial factory work constituted an analogue to the repeated act of throwing dice at craps or placing a bet at roulette (Benjamin 1968).²¹ At the end of my first day working in ditches, with an excavator circling above, Kentarō said: "You see,

there's nothing much to it, work is merely the repetition of this" (*taishate koto nai desho, shigoto wa tada kore no kurikaeshi*). And, indeed, in repeatedly anticipating the contingency of shock or accidents and screening out their possibility (at work), the drudgery of the construction worker forms a counterpart to that of the gambler on a losing streak, who, on the other hand, seeks out the shock of the accidental but fails repeatedly to experience it. With the notable exceptions of victories, near coincidences, or gamblers deliberately bent on self-destruction, in both gambling and manual labor, consciousness winds up operating as a "screen against stimuli," consigning the possibility of experience—of contacting stimuli such that they affect and inform the entirety of one's life—to a mere "hour in one's life" (Benjamin 1968, 163).²²

Yet social conditions in San'ya caused gambling to emerge as part of a counterdiscourse to the propriety of economic productivity, and not merely as an analogue to the repetition of labor. Everyone in my group shared the necessity of elaborating alternate forms of sociality, for they had failed in the eyes of their families and general society. And while their arrival in San'ya marked the end point of a trajectory of failed masculinity, its space of face-to-face relations offered the possibility to reverse the abject conditions of labor to which they had been reduced. Everyone knew that workers from San'ya were mostly called on to complete dirty, dangerous, and demeaning labor, and unlike gambling, such labor conditions rarely received comment, and certainly not with glee. Working days consisted in lifting heavy rocks while wearing steel-reinforced boots, if you had them; shoveling in a ditch, next to a thirty-ton excavator; or hammering away at walls to ensure that cement, which burned through bare skin, flowed into them properly. Yet the deadening effects of this draining monotony were overturned when an accident occurred, that is, when a body was pierced or wounded. Then, after work, first-hand witnesses would relate in detail how the floorboards had been loose, how so-and-so had plunged to the floor below, and how the white bones had protruded through the wound. When accidents occurred, the instinctual nerves of the body were activated to their utmost, and through narration, the event was transformed into a story, replete with suspicions that so-and-so had faked the fall to get insurance, as well as work-related safety lessons. Otherwise, the shield of consciousness or intellect sacrificed the content of sensory impressions by intercepting and registering stimuli at disconnected moments in time. The intellect thereby foreclosed experience by bracketing off and containing the event within the past of linear time, as yet another moment within a homogeneous succession of occurrences.

But clearly a difference remains between the necessary repetition of labor, which the worker would not do without remuneration, and gambling, which the gambler engages in even if he incurs debt. As with any narcotic, in gambling there is the initiating thrill, followed usually by diminishing returns of excitement and the occasional “near miss,” until gambling finally reverts to the drudgery of labor.²³ Much as they strategized about how to begin with ¥100, spread their bets, and augment their stakes, gamblers in San’ya sought, above all, to draw out the high of near misses as they calibrated their gambles and punctuated their day with races of their choosing. Moreover, when it came to horses, bicycles, or boats, the order of the races was structured to reverse the law of diminishing returns, because the main races were scheduled at the end of the day, and at the end of the week, on Sundays. The order of the races predisposed day laborers in San’ya to prolong the initiating thrill of victories, near misses, and self-destructive conduct, and when they stopped—which they did, “I quit!” (*yameta!*)—it was when the excitement had turned to drudgery, when they had reached a thoroughly excessive financial limit, or quite simply, when the last race had finished. Gambling in San’ya therefore assumed the form of concentrated sessions of inebriated social activity, which lasted half a day at most, since these sessions were quite possibly as extractive of energy and as self-destructive as manual labor itself, and for most individuals, they concluded naturally when the exhilaration calmed down. These concentrated sessions constituted a form of gambling, moreover, whose temporality was composed of punctuated bursts of intensity in an intensely social scene, recalling the exhilaration of craps that Schüll (2012, 18) observes at casinos, the social dimensions of Goffman’s “character,” and the repetitive temporality of Clifford Geertz’s (1973, 447–48) Balinese cockfight as a “process that reoccurs rather than a continuous one.” But for the San’ya day laborer to establish his recognition as a “man,” the energies of his depleted body operated as a vehicle that transformed the instrumental regimentation of time into an event of excessive expenditure that allowed for the past to be folded into the present. Through gambling, the lost time of manual labor remained to be actualized as a durative and curative experience, because construction work commits time to seriality without hope. Only “experience,” Benjamin (1968, 180) wrote, “rids man’s soul of obsession with time.”²⁴

This obsession with time recalls its compartmentalization, and the day laborer’s obsession with the workday to *have been done*. While the material content of the workday was emptied out in attention to the contingencies of accidents, the time of this working day had been abstracted in the assignation of a monetary value to the labor of the construction worker. In commodification, the commensu-

rable form of the subsistence wage was thereby constitutive of work as a passage of empty time, and of the day laborer from San'ya as an object of capital. At the end of a day at the construction site, the day laborer stood emptied out on the train platform, numbed in the body and wondering where the day had gone. Robbed of experience, this fatigued body was reinvigorated through the act of gambling, in which the form of money was proffered to the day laborer with the possibility of winning an incommensurable value. The very form that robbed work of content was transformed into the promise, or wish, of attaining singular value.

The seduction of gambling thus resides elsewhere than in the prospect of victory. Indeed, the gambler seeks the catastrophic, and hence, the *risk* of gambling and the excess of expenditure it requires in repeated losses, or wins. Except for the rare occasions of winning streaks, in San'ya, it was the near coincidences that were excitedly announced over drinks, propelling the gamblers. How close the horses had come to arriving in the correct order! Only a hair's breadth separated gamblers from coincidence, and losers repeatedly complained how many times their horses had arrived in inverted order. Inevitable shortcomings triggered repetition—unto exhaustion. In the absence of a victory (which often went unannounced, so that winners could dispense of their money discretely), the reality of gambling oneself into debt constituted the social fact of the scene. Nonetheless, these were eminently boisterous, effervescent gatherings, at seamy dives, in which liquor and snacks were accompanied by arm-wrestling or the occasional knife fight, and in which San'ya's gamblers repeatedly lived for the intoxicating moment of seeing their horses turn the corner. At the peak of their conviviality, everyone in the group was in debt by a few thousand dollars. This was a considerable amount, given the precarious availability of work and daily earnings of only ¥12,500 (\$125 USD). But they imbibed and gambled away their wages, holding one another accountable for their debts, because it was the reputation of the entire group that allowed its members to borrow from bars and eateries. After gambling, it was the condition of one's losses and indebtedness that was commented on and enacted through regular repayments, as a burden born with dignity. And it was in this way that, while each race promised incommensurable wins in the form of time, compressed into a narcotic, there existed a reversibility to this promise: the narcotic could be experienced in loss, and the incommensurable could be achieved with certainty in the negativity of debt. Once, Akira was expelled from a local non-profit organization and decided to blow ¥200,000 (\$2,000 USD) in one fell swoop. By squandering such large sums of money, he created as memorable an event as victory. And although such moments of expenditure were rarely as deci-

sively wasteful as Akira's, the day laborers made it common practice to dial up the stakes of their gambles, constantly placing their reputation on the line, keeping the thrill of gambling with them. In this way, in gambling as in life, a losing streak was never simply a losing streak. It was one that the day laborer had taken charge of and exacerbated in transgression of conventional propriety, so as to claim his worth in the negative excesses of liquor, gambling, and his accountability in debt.

It was not just victory, then, that would actualize the value of time, transform the contingent into experience, and inscribe the circumstances of the gamble on memory. Rather, the repeated exposure to self-destructive loss allowed day laborers to carry these losses into the present to constitute a socially recognized self. On Monday mornings, on the train to work, the previous day had not simply been consigned to the dustbin of history: as if the embers were still aglow, the group conversed about the near misses, and if someone had declared a big win, news had traveled across town. Perhaps not everyone told the story of their losses, but they did not have to, since everyone shared in this indebtedness, and each of their bodies had been reactivated in an exhaustive exposure to the self-incurred shock of losses. Consigned to seriality without hope, the day laborer-turned-gambler therefore emerges as a poet of modernity and shock. As Benjamin (1968, 193–94) wrote of Baudelaire:

Baudelaire battled the crowd—with the impotent rage of someone fighting the rain or the wind. This is the nature of something lived through (*Erlebnis*) to which Baudelaire has given the weight of an experience (*Erfahrung*). He indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock.²⁵

In the “impotent rage” of having been robbed of experience, Baudelaire sought to raise the shock sensation of modernity to the level of experience. Yet precisely when “the sensation of the modern” would have been attained, the price of the experience of shock is disclosed in the “disintegration of the aura.” So too, in the victory of coincidence, the gambler's aim is sacrificed, thereby producing the ground for repetition. For the commensurable form of money can never give enough, and it was the conversion of the ticket into money that effaced the dream of an incommensurable win. Conversely, losing precipitated an enduring negativity of debt that tested and testified to the character of a man, because unlike a solitary victory, debts forced him into relations with others in which he had to uphold his obligations.

MASCULINITY, CREDIT, AND RECOGNITION IN INDEBTEDNESS

It was not simply money but their social reputations and accountability as men that the group risked in gambling, for incurred debts raised the question of whether a person was good for their word/money. Everyone in the group was in debt to an eatery or bar, which they would also frequent on credit, and some venues would even lend them money on request. Akira seemed to bear the burden of his debt gracefully, complaining that he was “deep in debt” (*shakkin darake*), but typically turning a negative into a positive by noting that not everyone could borrow money: it required a good reputation. Yet debts and black-market interest rates did, indeed, prove burdensome. Kentarō even remarked that he was so in debt that his “neck will not turn” (*kubi ga magaranai*). But this burden also served as an indicator of a man’s social prowess, even when he wound up returning double his original debt.

At the beginning of every month, Akira, Kentarō, and the others would make trips to pay their monthly installments, which never seemed to diminish—it took Akira two years to reduce his debt of ¥200,000 (\$2,000 USD) to a manageable amount. It was in this manner that, by incurring excessive debts, the stakes and significance of gambling became amplified to involve “esteem, honor, dignity, respect,” as Geertz (1973, 455) wrote of the pain and pleasure of “deep play.” For by gambling beyond their means, men staked their very social existence. Staking one’s self was also what an *otoko* did: in gambling, as in fights, an *otoko* was good for his word. Hence, it was said of mahjong: “If you give in, it’s finished” (*magetara owari*). With credit giving testimony to a man’s accountability, the question was how much negative value or debt an *otoko* could accrue without letting others down. For the sordid creditors of San’ya held individuals in the group accountable for one another, and their debts were made known to everybody through passing remarks and monthly repayments, such that indebtedness constituted a condition of being an *otoko*, one that countered a statist discourse of productivity, much as illegal gambling did.

Every day, someone gambled illegally in the open, but they also knew from experience that the regular police would not conduct arrests on account of illegal gambling, because a special police department dealt with such cases.²⁶ Insofar as danger was suspected, everybody refrained from exhibiting the illegal elements of their conduct, which functioned as a marker of their territory, as a sign of irreverence for the legal, proper conformity of general society. Precisely on account of the negative excesses of their actions, signification had to remain in place: San’ya was “our town” (*orera no machi*), in which one gambled on the sidewalks. So too, while

most in the group let up on gambling only when losing had turned to drudgery, they also set limits to their losses, before they angered their creditors too much.

For others, gambling assumed a self-destructive character that collapsed into a negativity without limit, especially when gambling losses were exacerbated by other, external failures. For instance, while one man might not have gambled away at games the ¥30,000,000 (about \$300,000 USD) borrowed from the *yakuza*, he did invest it in unsuccessful business ventures and shamelessly mixed business with pleasure as he traveled around Japan. Yet when his labor subcontracting and business ventures started to fail, he disappeared from San'ya, and rumor had it that the local *yakuza* organization would kill him when they found him, if he did not wind up in jail first.²⁷ Akira, too, explained that he turned to gambling after getting into a verbal fight at a local non-profit organization. Feeling hurt, he decided to blow a couple of hundred thousand yen, transforming the commensurable form of money into a singular negativity that was hard for him to return. Yet unlike the meth-driven man described above who decided to blow ¥30,000,000, Akira did stop gambling when he lost several hundred thousand yen. His original conduct had thrown caution to the wind, but Akira was reckless in a manner that enabled him to assert his self-possession, and to successfully impose himself on his fellows in San'ya, who recognized his character.²⁸ By setting a limit, albeit a thoroughly excessive limit, to their gambling debts, not to mention their drinking and fighting habits, the group harnessed negativity in their favor.

By a strange inversion, therefore, singular debts incurred through gambling coincided with incommensurable winnings, and it was by sticking it out in this negativity that the day laborers and gamblers of San'ya laid claim to a life otherwise consigned to that of the anonymous manual laborer, worked to death. As a solicitation for recognition from other men in the area, gambling sought to master the abjection of San'ya by countering the death-inducing form of the subsistence wage, and by transforming the modern passage of empty time into an experience of contingency that created debt and sociality. This was a negativity achieved through the repetitive and embodied exposure to the contingencies of gambling, the risks of which were often compounded by the unlicensed, illegal character of the local gambling venues at which men staked their reputations. But it was also precisely this transgressive aspect of gambling that allowed men in San'ya to repulse the normative gaze of upstanding society, and that allowed them to comport themselves with a dignity recognized by their fellows, insofar as they made good on their debts. Credit, thus, emerged as the foremost sign of their accountability and of their singular value as an *otoko*. Like boxers on the ropes, however, the men

had a limit to the amount of damage they could endure without collapsing, and the excessive lifestyles of individuals in San'ya foreshadowed their death, if not that of the day laborer district itself. Ultimately, as it was said of construction work, gambling, fights, and liquor: "The bill catches up with you."

ABSTRACT

This article examines the social practice of gambling among stigmatized construction workers in Tokyo's vanishing day laborer district, San'ya. By considering the abstract temporality of surplus extraction imposed on the manual laborer at the construction site, and the deadening effects of this discipline on his sensorial experience of the world, the article demonstrates how the enactment of masculinity through gambling involves a transformation of the abstract time of the working day into what Walter Benjamin has described as a "narcotic." Whereas manual labor demands that the construction worker shield and numb himself against interruptive contingencies of accidents and material stimuli, the gambler seeks an embodied exposure to the penetrating contingency of victory or defeat in a moment of risk. The article argues that the form of this transformation of time propels the gambler, and that it is through debt and credit that he actualizes his reputation as a man. [manual labor; critical theory; gambling; masculinity; credit; Japan; time]

NOTES

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1. See Tom Gill (2001), Edward Fowler (1996), and James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (2003) on day laborers and masculinities in Japan. Beyond Japan, Elliot Liebow (1967), Philippe Bourgois (2003), and Kathleen M. Millar (2018) address similar scenes of dignity in abjection, and notably, Clifford Geertz (1973) himself depicted the stakes of the Balinese cockfight in terms of social status.
2. Of gambling, Benjamin (1999b, 12) observed that it "converts time into a narcotic."
3. For Benjamin's analysis of "experience" (*Erfahrung*), see Benjamin (1968).
4. That credit constitutes the social reputation of a man should recall any number of ruminations on debt and the social form of Marcel Mauss's gift, in which "the productivity of debt can also be understood in terms of a primary relation that puts debtor-creditor relations at the very base of social relations more generally" (Roitman 2003, 212).
5. See Thomas Malaby (2003, 147) for a consideration of gambling as a crystallization of "chanceful life into a seemingly more apprehensible form."
6. See Roger Caillois (2001, 24) on the vertigo (*ilinx*) of gambling.
7. Writing after World War I, Freud (1961, 30) theorized the compulsion to repeat unpleasurable experiences as the effect of a penetration of this "protective shield against stimuli." Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1986), too, illuminates how the repression of the specter of accidents constitutes a hallmark of modernity.
8. Alfred Sohn-Rethel considers this abstraction of time and space as implicit to the exchange relation itself. He writes: "Time and space rendered abstract under the impact of commodity exchange are marked by homogeneity, continuity, and emptiness of all natural and material content" (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 49).

9. Consisting of a repetitive isolation of movements, this compartmentalization recalls the analogous relationship that Benjamin describes between factory work and gambling: "The ivory ball that rolls into the *next* compartment, the *next* card . . ." (Benjamin 1968, 179). See also Natasha Dow Schüll (2012, 203–7).
10. I draw specifically on Marx's chapters in volume 1 of *Capital*: "The Sale and Purchase of Labour-Power" and "The Working Day" (Marx 1997).
11. Caillois (2001, 5) makes this seminal distinction between labor and "play," as "an occasion of pure waste."
12. Of this experience, Erwin Goffman (1967, 261) observed that the gambler must "expose himself to time, to seconds and minutes ticking off outside his control."
13. Here the repetition and coincidence of numbers approaches what Richard Klein and William B. Warner (1986, 6), drawing on Jung, have described as "significant coincidence," which "may be defined as a conjuncture of events so unlikely or implausible that to call it accident seems less reasonable than to assume some intentional, motivated connection."
14. In a notable analog to off-track betting floors, Caitlin Zaloom (2006, 151) expands on the importance to financial traders of "learning not to calculate."
15. Readers of Benjamin will note that I push back against his rather hopeless presentation of gambling as an analog to factory work, particularly in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," although he writes elsewhere that the gambler must maintain "contact between his motor stimuli and 'fate'" (Benjamin 1999a, 298). Or as Mollie, a slot machine gambler, puts it, "this vibration between what I *want* and what *happens*" must remain intact (Schüll 2012, 171).
16. "Danger," Benjamin (1999a, 298) writes, "is the most important factor in gambling, alongside pleasure (the pleasure of betting on the right number)." Of course, at slot machines, this seduction quickly gives way to the drudgery of the "zone" (Schüll 2012, 96–97).
17. Notably, (the thrill of) this compressed moment of time recalls what Charles Livingston has called "sustained indeterminacy" (qtd. in Schüll 2012, 199).
18. Freud (1961, 30) wrote of this "protective shield against stimuli" specifically in relation to modern warfare, mechanization, and machinery. See also note 7 of this essay.
19. See Schüll (2016, 570–74) for a similar explication of the heads-up display in online poker, which "releases players" from keeping notes.
20. The abstraction of the gambling ticket and the statistics in the papers recall Marx's elaboration of the dual character of the commodity form. In exchange value, Marx (1997, 128) noted, the commodity does not contain "an atom" of use-value or quality, which is to say that, in itself, the money-form cannot provide the ground for the qualitative, singular reputation of an individual.
21. As a compartmentalization of time, Benjamin (1968, 177) writes that because "each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceding operation as a *coup* in a game of chance is from the one that preceded it, the drudgery of the laborer is, in its own way, a counterpart to the drudgery of the gambler."
22. And Benjamin (1968, 163) continues to observe that the intellect assigns "to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents."
23. Gerda Reith (1999, 138) opposes the drudgery of labor to the excitement of gambling. Yet it should be noted that at slots in Las Vegas, Schüll (2012, 222–27) reveals an asocial merging of machine, body, and consciousness—the "machine zone"—in which "near misses" truly appear to induce a deadened state of Freudian repetition compulsion.
24. Time, Benjamin (1968, 180) says, remains to be actualized as a *durée*, which Henri Bergson himself describes as "past and present melting into one another" (qtd. in Reith 1999, 141).
25. Buck-Morss (1989, 275) reminds of the transformative possibilities of "impotent rage" into the political: "Action is the sister of the dream."
26. Malaby (2003, 33) writes of "concealment and revelation" in gambling insofar as they establish and protect "an intimate sphere."

27. Georges Bataille (1985, 119–20) writes of expenditure in which “the accent is placed on a *loss* that must be as great as possible.”
28. Lest he lose the “very *stakes* [he] hoped to *win*,” Akira maintained what Jacques Derrida described as a “respect for death” in the Hegelian dialectic, necessary to signification, because if he was to succeed in imposing himself on others and being recognized on his own terms, limits had to be placed on a “negativity *without reserve*” (Derrida 1978, 255).

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