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The Age Of Chance: Gambling And Western Culture (review)

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to light their social functions in their institutional development.” (Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin, p. 22). According to Varda, the goal is to “... highlight the complexity of the relationships that are interwoven among various ways of exercising power, the formation of knowledge, and systematic forms of subjectification” (p. 107). The focus is on the creation of a more “reflexive knowledge.” Cultural history helps us “... to elaborate theories that take into account the conditions in which systems of representation and symbolization are formed, in order to avoid two reductionist tendencies ... in the social sciences: the historical/transcendental, and the empirical/psychological” (Varda, p. 110).

The book is worthwhile because the reader is forced to re-think some of our basic assumptions as we attempt to speak about the past. Yet the task is as difficult today as it was for Popper in the 1930s as he tried to provide a scientific way forward that left “historicism” behind (1960). The enormity of the task became even more apparent as I tried to re-read Popper as a cultural historian.

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Gerda Reith, *The Age Of Chance: Gambling And Western Culture*. London: Routledge, 2002, 207 pp.

Reith's *The Age of Chance*, first published in 1999, provides a rich discussion of the place of gambling in western culture, which will stand as a significant contribution to the sociological and cultural analysis of the topic. Also, with its interest in the place of chance in modern culture, the book contributes to social-

theoretical debates concerning rationality and irrationality in late modern societies. A broad cultural study of gambling such as this is most welcome: a common lament among those who have studied gambling sociologically is that the topic deserves more attention. This complaint has been voiced in various places, including the introduction to the sociological work of Downes et al, *Gambling, Work and Leisure: A Study Across Three Areas*, which appeared in 1976, and twenty years later in McMillen's important multidisciplinary anthology *Gambling Cultures* (1996). Reith's book is timely, certainly for North American scholars: beyond the first wave of legalized gambling in the 1960's and 70's, we have witnessed the second wave, casino expansion, which began in the 90's, and all indications point toward the legalization of internet gambling — the third wave — as policy makers concerned with dollars lost to offshore internet gambling sites will keep the wave rolling. The current legalization and expansion of gambling is a global phenomenon.

While gambling has attracted attention in psychology, primarily in relation to problem gambling and pathological gambling, Reith for the most part refrains from wading into these waters, but nevertheless locates the medicalizing of gambling in the long interpretive tradition of gambling condemnation. She situates her own work within "the tradition of license," and this is good from a sociological perspective because it allows her to respect gambling as a multi-faceted and rich institution, which has persisted despite various historical and cultural prohibitions. Her broad cultural and interpretive focus nicely develops the significance of gambling, for example, in Chapter One, "The Idea of Chance," showing its importance for the development of probability theory, and also for thinking about life in late modern societies, where, in her view, chance has become an ontological category. On this she continues a line of thinking in philosophy and social theory that has sought to give chance a stronger place in the analysis of modern life, drawing upon thinkers such as Nietzsche and Ian Hacking (1990).

Reith's approach to the topics of gambling and chance draws upon a wide variety of sources and disciplines, from her historical and sociological discussion of the development and stratification of games of chance in "The Pursuit of Chance" (Chapter Two), and "Playgrounds — Modern Gambling Sites" (Chapter Three), to her more philosophical-aesthetic approach to the topic of gambling as play in "The Experience of Play" (Chapter Four). I particularly enjoyed the latter, which draws upon a wide range of literary and philosophical sources. In developing the theme of gambling as play, she extends arguments developed by sociologists such as Goffman ("Where the action is") and Simmel ("The Adventurer"), and draws upon the insights of such thinkers as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Walter Benjamin. While the gambling as play theme has been developed elsewhere (see the Introduction to Downes et al. 1976) her phenomenologically oriented discussion is refreshing in that it seeks to

understand the meaning of gambling through the analysis of the structure of the gambling experience. Her discussions of the devaluation of money for the gambling experience, and gambling as unproductive expenditure, provide interesting insights for thinking about postmodern economics and forms of consumption.

The discussion in Chapter Five, "The Magical-Religious Worldview," is perhaps most interesting from a social-theoretical perspective, as it explores the avowed rejection of probability thinking by modern gamblers. While Reith is interested in the contexts in which gamblers demonstrate their alternative belief systems, her discussion provides a possible avenue for thinking about the place of these belief systems outside the gambling contexts. How does gambling demonstrate a desire or longing for alternate meanings and beliefs, and, how are such alternatives demonstrated and lived outside the gambling contexts in the face of societal rationalization? Reith's discussion of gamblers' magical-religious worldviews however, must be contrasted, not only with the institutionalization and commodification of chance, which she discusses, but with the broader processes of rationalization that shape the modern gambling experience itself.

One might ask whether her view of modern gambling as a rejection of rational calculation is not overstated. Given her discussion (in Chapter Two) of the links between gambling and financial speculation, the development of capitalism, and the "calculative attitude" in the 17th and 18th centuries for example, one wonders if — and why — modern gambling is a rejection of rationality and calculation. Perhaps then the term modern gambler is too general and needs better definition. Is the modern gambler a financial speculator?, a professional gambler?, a government promoting gambling for revenue generation?

Reith's emphasis on the magical-religious worldview opens a theoretical gap between actors' meanings and social structure that calls for further reflection. In Weberian style, Reith seeks to preserve the alternative beliefs and subjective meanings of gamblers. And she performs an interesting hermeneutics of the relationship of gambling and security. But it is interesting to consider the sociological links between actors' meanings and a changing social structure or world where alternative belief systems are called into being. On this she makes links to the theme of ontological insecurity developed in the sociology of risk and risk society work, but her emphasis on chance (rather than risk) could be taken in interesting directions. The modern orientation to chance, demonstrates aleatory and agonistic orientations. While gamblers appear to reject chance, the modern gambling houses leave nothing to chance.

Reith has written an engaging book, rich in historical, literary and philosophical examples, which will be of great interest to sociologists, historians, and cultural studies analysts interested in the topics of gambling and chance. While it is not explicitly theoretical, it nevertheless contributes to contemporary

sociological discussions of the place of rationality and irrationality in late modern societies, and has some commonality with the risk society work on this theme. It may also be situated in relation to discussions of postmodern economics.

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Stephanie A. Shields, *Speaking from the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 214pp.

Speaking from the Heart is a book that belongs in the hands of students. It is one of those rare books that calls out to be taught and engaged. Written in a conversational voice it draws learners into its crevices, and, like the best within the tradition of the essayist, it offers rewards to readers that encourage a close and careful reading of the text.

This is a text firmly grounded in the liberal arts. The author moves freely and eloquently from the *Phaedo* to conventional contemporary psychological research on emotion — from popular culture to 19th century social theory. By so doing, the author models the need for interdisciplinarity as one engages the problem of emotion and gender as lived experiences. It is a book that adopts multiple vantage points for analysis as it moves from chapter to chapter. While Shields' perspective as a psychologist is an important reference point throughout, this text prioritizes the examination of the relationship between emotion theory and gender studies above disciplinary orthodoxy. The result is an engaging and challenging rendering of emotion and gender. Those working within the extended tradition of interpretive sociology will find much in this work that is friendly to their theoretical inclinations. Shields emphasizes the symbolic qualities of emotion and emotionality. Her understanding of emotion is located relative to the self and the interest or stake a person has in everyday life. Shields argues, "Emotion is taking it personally."⁽⁶⁾ This deceptively simple assertion is a valuable point of departure. From an interest in emotion as intersubjectively accomplished comes a more general interest in the meaning of