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## On Blowing Up the Pokies

### The Pokie Lounge as a Cultural Site of Neoliberal Governmentality in Australia

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What distinguishes studies of [governmentality] from histories of administration, historical sociologies of state formation and sociologies of governance is their power to open a space for critical thought. This arises from their pre-occupation of a family of questions arising from a concern with our own present.

Nikolas Rose<sup>1</sup>

And I wish I, wish I knew the right words  
To blow up the pokies and drag them away.<sup>2</sup>

'Blow Up the Pokies', The Whitlams, 1999

In 1999 The Whitlams, a popular 'Indie' band named after a former Australian prime minister whose government was controversially sacked in 1972 by the Governor-General, released a single titled 'Blow up the Pokies'. Written about a former band member's fatal attraction to electronic gaming machines (henceforth referred to as

'pokies'), the song was mixed by a top Los Angeles producer, a decision which its writer, Whitlam's frontman Tim Freedman, describes as calculated to 'get it on big, bombastic commercial radio'. The investment paid off and the song not only became a big hit for the band, it developed a legacy beyond the popular music scene. Freedman was invited to write the foreword of a 'self-help manual for giving up gambling' and appeared on public affairs television shows to discuss the issue of problem gambling.<sup>3</sup> I will use the lyrics of 'Blow up the Pokies' to frame the central themes addressed in this article: the spaces, technologies and governmentality of gambling. Following a description of the pokie lounge, I will explore what cultural articulations of resistance to this site tell us about broader social and cultural dynamics of neoliberal governmentality in Australia.

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Regulated gambling industries have become increasingly significant components of the cultural economies of many post-industrial democratic nations over the past two decades. In spite of this, sustained academic cultural studies of gambling are just beginning to emerge in a field whose established areas of focus now include celebrity and fandom, critical cultural theory, film and television studies and new media. In contrast, a comparatively rich body of work is forming within disciplines of sociology and anthropology, including studies of sports betting, Indigenous gambling and sovereignties, gambling in Western culture ethnographies of horse-racing and lottery gambling, gambling in sociological theory and studies of the interface between entertainment and gambling in the contemporary 'gaming complex'.<sup>4</sup> Research on intersections between gambling and economics is comparatively rare but no less important, and includes studies on the economics of pokies in Australia and the cultural history of 'finance'.<sup>5</sup> At a moment when the social uses and aesthetic qualities of video and computer games are receiving increasing recognition, it is timely to consider how cultural meanings and social values are embedded in gambling forms and products.<sup>6</sup> Whether we are conducting semiotic analyses of the role of 'Vegas' locations in Hollywood cinema and television, the appropriation of footage and sound effects from blockbuster movies to enhance online slot games<sup>7</sup> or the development of and participation in gambling games in social networking sites (SNSs), it is likely that cultural studies will make an

increasingly significant contribution to gambling studies and that studies of gambling will form a more significant area of cultural studies research than has previously been the case.

Cultural research on gambling in Australia is scarce. *Gambling in Australia*, an edited volume with essays on psychological, economic, political and ethical issues raised by gambling was published in 1985, the period immediately prior to the period of deregulation on which this article will focus.<sup>8</sup> Since then, apart from Jan McMillen's edited academic collection *Gambling Cultures* and Tim Costello and Royce Millar's generalist text *Wanna Bet*, there are no dedicated texts which explain how gambling has shaped and been shaped by recent developments within Australian history and culture.<sup>9</sup> Instead, academic research on gambling in Australia has been most clearly shaped by shifting contexts of regulation as political leaders seek 'hard figures' to support policies to address 'problem gambling'. Until very recently, most of the knowledge about gambling produced within the academy and circulating within popular culture was generated within medicine, psychiatry and psychology, with the interdisciplinary fields of public health and social work also developing significant insights.<sup>10</sup> Much of this research is focused on identifying causes, diagnosing and treating the condition of 'problem gambling'.<sup>11</sup> The method of this work is clinical and/or statistically based and its central concerns are with the 'cognitive errors' made by gamblers who expect to win and how gambling works as a type of 'addiction' similar to substance and process addictions. Having noted this, the cultural studies approach to gambling developed in this article will not be opposed to understandings generated within physical and psychological sciences and presented as 'truth' emanating from somewhere outside regulatory prerogatives. Rather, as I've argued elsewhere, representations of problem gambling which circulate in popular culture draw on the social authority which is attached to science.<sup>12</sup> These representations, in turn, have practical effects on the government of gambling, re/producing a stereotype of the 'problem gambler' which is then explicitly or implicitly defined against the 'recreational gambler' as an idealised national type.

Before embarking on discussion of the pokie lounge, I want to stress the importance of local contingences in determining how gambling is socially valued and practically organised in any given instance. Comparative reference to American

literature on regulated gambling over the past two decades is instructive here. In spite of several US studies from the mid 1990s suggesting that regulated gambling industries might not be the panacea that economic modellers and politicians initially assumed, processes of deregulation gathered pace in Australia over this period.<sup>13</sup> By the late 1980s the legal operation of poker machines in New South Wales clubs was increasingly perceived by adjoining state governments as poaching on their potential taxation revenue. Large clubs with pokies positioned on the borders of New South Wales and Queensland (in the north) and Victoria (in the south) became popular destinations for busloads of tourists.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1990s both Queensland and Victoria allowed pokies to be operated by pubs and clubs, followed closely by South Australia in 1993 and Tasmania in 1997. Western Australia is the only state to have so far resisted allowing pokies to escape from its Burswood Casino. While the jurisdictional organisation of gambling means it is culturally articulated in terms that are as state-based as they are national, gambling's 'Australian-ness' is persistently invoked across a variety of contexts, from sports broadcasting and documentary television representations to the 'dinkum blue' iconography found in many pokie games.



Figure 1a: Entrance to pokie lounge, Royal Exchange Hotel, Brisbane, 2010

Source: Fiona Nicoll



Figure 1b: Banner advertising pokie lounge, Royal Exchange Hotel, Brisbane, 2010

Source: Fiona Nicoll

Simultaneously reflecting and contributing to broader processes of social and demographic change in Australia's cities from the late 1980s, the pokie lounge can be approached as an ordinary cultural space through which practices of gambling shape the social identities and everyday experiences of citizens and consumers in Australia. My decision in this article to focus on pokies is not to ignore the existence of televised wagering and Kino instant lotteries for which pubs, clubs and casinos have increasingly dedicated spaces. Rather, it is to emphasise that whereas lottery, racing and sports betting more frequently occur in newsagents, dedicated TAB agencies or via telephone and internet services, the pokie lounge is the natural and custom-built 'home' of most of Australia's poker machines. Although New South Wales clubs and casinos in other Australian capital cities had provided spaces of pokie play from the mid 1970s, the pokie lounge was uniquely grafted onto the existing social institution of the suburban pub. The transfer and perversion of the pub's previous cultural meanings and uses has been the source of considerable

disquiet, as we will see in the case of pub-rock, which was displaced by the arrival of pokies.

—THE POKIE LOUNGE AS A NEW CULTURAL SPACE IN THE AUSTRALIAN SUBURB

There was the stage, two red lights and a dodgy PA  
You trod the planks way back then  
And it's strange that you're here again, here again  
  
And I wish I, wish I knew the right words  
To make you feel better, walk out of this place  
and Defeat them in your secret battle  
Show them you can be your own man again.<sup>15</sup>

'Blow up the Pokies' tells a familiar story about pokies' transformation of 'the pub' as an iconic Australian cultural institution. The first lines of the song evoke the pub as an improvised performance space and the setting for the addressee's former confidence as a member of a rock band, which is contrasted to his subsequent experience of the pokie lounge as entrapping and de-masculinising. In a moving interview on SBS TV's community forum program, *Insight*, Freedman recounted a former band member's 'addiction' to the machines as his inspiration for 'Blow Up the Pokies'. Freedman later discovered his former band mate had hung himself at work after putting his wages into a pokie. The social stakes in the emergence of the pokie lounge on the Australian suburban landscape could hardly be raised higher.

Stories about pokies' impact on the suburban pub are stories about the transformation of social relations of power and cultural institutions in particular places over time. It is useful to begin discussion of the pokie lounge in Australia with comparative reference to an American study by David Schwartz. Schwartz examines how concerns about illegal gambling businesses in inner cities from the 1950s were addressed by the development of Las Vegas as a national space of mass tourism centred on legal gambling activities. He argues, "Tying casino resorts to the suburbs, which they mined for consumers ... permits students of history to see the rise of casino resorts within the perspective of other historical changes'. Within the casino resorts of Vegas' 'Strip':

dining and entertainment were relatively cheap ... Then, with relatively small casinos, there was nowhere near the segmentation in high- and low-end play that is seen today. This created the illusion of a 'classless' social milieu, in which stenographers and chief executive officers rubbed elbows. Contemporary writers remarked on the apparent absence of barriers to sociability within the casino, painting the picture of a place where everyone was as good as his last roll.<sup>16</sup>

The casino resort effectively quarantined gambling as a cultural practice in time and space to protect middle-class suburbanites from fiscal and social damages associated with excess consumption. And, like the Australian pub, the Las Vegas casino resort was designed to capitalise on myths that celebrated the egalitarian character of American democracy.

Although not untroubled by controversy, the pattern of casino legalisation and development in Australia's cities and existing tourist destinations from the mid 1970s broadly echoes the processes outlined by Schwartz where the concentration of legal gambling within a handful of specially designated venues promised to service middle-class market demand while preventing illegal gambling's growth. This makes the pervasive iconographic and design features which reference 'Vegas' within Australian pokie lounges less incongruous than might initially seem to be the case. Importing signifiers from an historical moment and socio-geographic location in which participating in gambling was a clear rupture of everyday experience arguably eased gambling's settlement into the ordinary suburban heartlands from which it had hitherto been banished.

As a new cultural space, the pokie lounge needs to be situated within broader social processes of urban development in Australia from the 1960s that processes that Colin Long Kate Shaw and Claire Merlo describe in a recent book on Melbourne's suburbs as having forced the poor 'to the urban edge in search of cheap land'. They note that:

the well off, well educated and culturally progressive have reclaimed the inner areas, which they share uncomfortably with the remaining public housing tenants. The stereotypical image of urban deprivation is no longer the ragged urchin in the back lane of a Fitzroy terrace, but the single mum in a rented brick veneer in a distant suburb shunned by neighbors who,

encouraged by the rhetoric of 'mutual obligation', think of the poor as 'work shy' or in some other way 'undeserving'.<sup>17</sup>

This choice of the 'single mum' to encapsulate stereotypical images of the undeserving poor in the neoliberal suburban cultural landscape is not difficult to associate with the feminised figure of the pokie lounge gambler in Australian popular culture. The pokie lounge figured prominently in a television sketch comedy show, *The Wedge*, set in the fictional Australian suburb of 'Wedgedale'. The show's two 'pokie girls', Sherine and Leane, were depicted as gleefully neglecting their children as they misspent their time and welfare benefits in the pokie lounge of the Wedgedale Tavern.<sup>18</sup> In a very different generic register, director Ana Kokkinos recently chose a pokie lounge in her film *Blessed* as the scene through which to depict one of her characters as an immature and perhaps cognitively impaired single mother.<sup>19</sup>

To some extent, cultural representations of pokies as a poor substitute for recreation for disadvantaged citizens in the suburban fringes of Australian cities reflect actual patterns of pokie lounge distribution. Research by Charles Livingstone on the distribution of pokies by Local Government Area in Melbourne found:

the poorest 27.6 percent of metro Melbourne's population had about 33 per cent of the pokies and spent a third of all expenditure in 2002–03, whereas the richest quarter of the city's population had 16.2 per cent of the pokies and contributed a much more modest 15.6 per cent of revenue in the same year.<sup>20</sup>

A similar pattern exists in Brisbane, with Treasury data showing that residents in the low socioeconomic area of Logan lost 8.6 million dollars in 2008.<sup>21</sup> A sense that Australians in low socioeconomic areas are being stalked by heartless merchants of pokies is conveyed in a simple email a reader sent to the *Courier Mail* website after this figure was reported on the newspaper's front page under the headline 'Pokies Hold Sway in Logan': 'I have a sister in law in Logan and it breaks my heart to see what pokies have done to her and her family.'<sup>22</sup>

The choice of the term 'lounge', rather than 'room' to promote and describe spaces in Australian pubs which house pokie machines is significant. It simultaneously evokes luxuriousness and an earlier cultural configuration of the pub in which the 'ladies lounge' was a small space segregated from the large bar

area where men drank in a sparsely furnished and functional environment that was sometimes tiled for ease of cleaning. Many Australian pokie lounges are modelled on the interior design of casinos. As Livingstone observes in his study of Melbourne's clubs and pubs:

venues seem increasingly to be facsimiles of each other. It is as though there were a representation of the perfect pokie venue stored somewhere in the design department of each operator, of which each renovated hotel venue presents a simulacrum. Clean paint, clean carpet, friendly staff, dining room with standard or sometimes a little upmarket pub food, handy automated teller machine in the foyer, ample parking, convenient location, free cappuccino, and sometimes snacks brought around as you play.<sup>23</sup>

While these features provide a sense of continuity between pokie lounges and the predictable satisfactions provided by suburban supermarkets and fast-food outlets, the diversity of pokie lounges should also be acknowledged. The term 'pokie lounge' can be used to promote and describe a variety of pokie gaming contexts, from purpose-built spaces in hotels containing forty or more machines to regional and remote pubs in which three or four machines are separated from the main bar by a temporary screen. In most cities there are pokie lounges which cater for specific customer groups at different times of the day, from the traditional pub clientele base of workers *en route* to their homes, parents between appointments with childcare or schools to shift workers seeking to wind down in the early hours of the morning.

Australia's larger pokie pubs bear little or no resemblance either to the tile-walled 'watering holes' that dominated in the period prior to the 1970s or to the dark and grotty venues, transformed at night by 'the stage, two red lights and a dodgy PA' into pub-rock's stomping ground. Prior to deregulation of pokies, the only regular gambling activities hosted by pubs were fund-raising raffles and the annual two-up games that form part of the post-parade rituals of Anzac Day. It is instructive to refer briefly here to an account of the pub provided in *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*, published in 1987, the period immediately prior to pokies' arrival in this cultural space.<sup>24</sup> The authors begin their study by analysing the changing social roles, values and identities associated with the suburban pub as a space which mediates other Australian spaces such as the suburban home, the beach and the workplace. In particular, they explore the pub's strongly masculine

meanings and uses as a 'home away from home' and as a temporary egalitarian community providing escape from the social hierarchies of the workplace in the first part of the twentieth century. These meanings and uses are then contrasted with the reconfiguration of the pub as a space of rebellious subcultural performance in the form of 'pub rock' from the early 1970s.

In addition to nurturing Australian popular music's leading talents for two decades, the pub rock scene opened this space for women's participation, primarily but not exclusively as audiences, and began to loosen its bonds with a patriarchal (and frequently racist) national social order. It was in this context that a band like The Whitlams could form a productive association with a particular pub, the Sandringham Hotel, in Sydney's inner-western suburbs and gain a local following as the initial basis for their subsequent national and international musical career. The band's decision to name themselves after a prime minister whose brief period in power is associated with social changes including women's liberation, multiculturalism and Aboriginal land rights reinforces cultural narratives of the pub's transition from an exclusionary space of predominantly white male bonding to an inclusive space of youthful rebellion and creative energy. In addition to telling a story of individual tragedy, then, 'Blow up the Pokies' can be read as a broader social critique which is regularly expressed when Australian creative producers and fans bemoan the fact that 'pokies have killed live music in Australia'.

From the cultural perspective expressed in 'Blow Up the Pokies', the losses entailed by gambling's deregulation extend beyond the sufferings of those individuals classified as 'problem gamblers' to include the loss of a valued sub-cultural space which fostered communities bound by their localised enjoyment and support of particular bands. But nostalgia for the pub-rock era should not prevent due consideration of the role pokie lounges have played in promoting social inclusion of Australians alienated from the lingering norms of pub culture. For queer, non-Anglo, disabled, elderly and Indigenous Australians who may experience overt or covert discrimination in venues which provide other forms of paying entertainment such as cinemas, restaurants and nightclubs, pokie lounges, like casinos, might provide a 'home away from home'.

Rather than seeing the pokie lounge as a ubiquitous feature of Australian suburbia, then, it is more accurate to see it as a formative aspect both of particular

*kinds of suburbs* and of *specific parts of suburbs*. While the inner cities are places where regular pokie players share space with upper middle-class people who wouldn't be seen dead in a pokie lounge, there are some suburbs in which almost every hotel has pokies and others where owners of licensed venues emphatically reject this form of entertainment. Recent public health research confirms the role of location in determining whether individual and social harms arise from pokie consumption, promoting geographer David Marshall's call to other researchers to attend more closely to 'local, contextual environments of gambling'.<sup>25</sup> In spite of emerging knowledge about the importance of pokies' cultural and spatial locations, problem gambling discourses in Australia often attribute direct responsibility for harm to pokies themselves.



Figure 2: Pokie at Royal Exchange Hotel, Brisbane, 2010

Source: Fiona Nicoll

Don't, don't explain  
Lots of little victories take on the pain  
It takes so long to earn  
You can double up or you can burn, you can burn  
  
Flashing lights, it's a real show  
And your wife? I wouldn't go home  
The little bundles need care  
And you can't be a father there, father there.<sup>26</sup>

In these verses of 'Blow up the Pokies', Freedman draws attention to how the fascination exerted by pokies tears consumers from their spousal and family responsibilities. With their 'show' of 'flashing lights' and music, pokies dramatise the opportunity they offer players to 'double' their winnings by using the 'gamble button', a choice that might equally 'burn' them to zero. Domestic routines of 'care' may seem a pale substitute for this adrenaline fuelling 'entertainment'. We have seen that pokies more than any other form of legal gambling are most strongly associated with the social scourge of 'problem gambling'.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to all other gambling forms, from horse and greyhound racing and sports betting to Kino, bingo and lotteries, their popularity appears to transcend the social distinctions of gender, age and ethnicity which pattern participation in other kinds of gambling.<sup>28</sup> At the time of writing, Queensland government figures for expenditure on the state's forty-five thousand pokies in 2007/08 was over double that for spending on casinos, lotteries, wagering and Kino combined, prompting an ethicist and representative of Queensland's churches to declare that the figures 'confirm the worst picture of the predominance of gambling and its doubtful effects in our community'.<sup>29</sup>

To describe pokies as a 'new cultural technology' might seem peculiar since they existed both illegally and illegally in Australia for decades prior to deregulation from the early 1990s. Doubts about the recreational and moral value of pokies in particular had been formulated as early as 1974 when the Western Australian Royal Commission into Gambling characterised their playing as:

a mindless, repetitive and insidious form of gambling which has many undesirable features. It requires no thought, no skill or social contact. The

odds are never about winning. Watching people playing the machines over long periods of time, the impressionistic evidence at least is that they are addictive to many people.<sup>30</sup>

Although this characterisation of pokie gambling as mindless and addictive reads as strikingly contemporary, current concerns about pokies as a new cultural technology of gambling are directly related to the 'high intensity' which distinguishes pokies in Australian casinos, pubs and clubs from their mechanical predecessors as well as from many of their international counterparts. It is not simply that pokies are a technology associated with anti-social and addictive gambling practices; the losses sustained by players can be rapid and massive.

In 2000, the Productivity Commission reported that Australian pokies enabled gamblers to lose \$720 per hour on average during continuous play at their upper limit compared to \$130 and \$52 per hour for British fruit machines and Japanese pachinko machines respectively.<sup>31</sup> The Productivity Commission's most recent draft report published in 2009 gives even higher figures for the intensity of Australian pokies, reporting that players of the latest machines are able to spend \$1200 per hour.<sup>32</sup> The inexorable march of pokies into the suburban landscape from the early 1990s also functions to support critics' beliefs in the machines' predatory qualities. In contrast to the period before deregulation when most Australians (apart from those who frequented NSW clubs or visited Las Vegas) would rarely have encountered a pokie, by 1999 there were 133 machines per ten thousand adults in Australia compared to twenty-nine and fifty-nine for the US and the UK respectively.<sup>33</sup>

A further reason the cultural technology of the latest generation of pokies has become the focus of public debate about problem gambling may be shared characteristics with other screen-based cultural technologies such as videogames and television around which discourses of addiction have circulated for some decades. As a screen-based form of 'continuous betting', it is quite common for these machines to be described as 'the crack cocaine of gambling'.<sup>34</sup> Concerns that a new generation of pokies has provided a uniquely addictive experience of gambling are reminiscent of anxieties about heroin addiction after the invention of the hypodermic syringe made the delivery of opium more efficient.<sup>35</sup> And they find some support in ethnographic research by anthropologist Natasha Schull on the 'digital

gambling interface' based on interviews with industry players and consumers of pokies in Las Vegas. In contrast to nostalgic depictions of high rollers gathered around green felt covered tables transfixed by the roll of a dice or the turn of a card, Vegas casinos have been progressively taken over by pokies. Not only does pokie gambling occupy 77 per cent of casino floor space, it generates over double the combined revenue of other gambling forms and, in some venues frequented mostly by locals, generates up to 89 per cent of revenue.<sup>36</sup>

Schull argues that the current generation of pokies has departed from its predecessors as technologically savvy designers have both responded to and cultivated consumer demand for 'a dissociated subjective state that gamblers call the "zone" in which conventional spatial, bodily, monetary and temporal parameters are suspended'.<sup>37</sup> The result is a cultural technology that is increasingly attuned to individual consumers' preferences and rhythms up to the point where playing itself becomes unnecessary and total absorption in the machine's digital processes is accomplished. In conjunction with her description of technologies currently under development to make digital gambling expenditure (including from credit accounts) effortless, Schull presents us with the spectre of a fully customised machine specifically designed to extract maximum value as it plays its players. Considering Australia's role as a key producer and consumer of high intensity pokies over the past two decades, it is not surprising these machines are experienced and represented as new and highly risky cultural technology of entertainment.

—THE POKIE LOUNGE AS A FIGURE OF NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think anyone would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is not simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasures, forms knowledge, produces discourse...

Michel Foucault<sup>38</sup>

And I wish I, wish I knew the right words  
To blow up the pokies and drag them away  
'Cause they're taking the food off your table

So they can say that the trains run on time

—Another man there was made the trains run on time<sup>39</sup>

In the final verse of 'Blow up the Pokies' the addresser seeks to make an intervention. But rather than hauling his friend off to a counsellor, the fantasised object of violent intervention is the cultural technology of the pokies themselves. Pokies are charged with reducing his friend to the abject poverty evoked by the lyrics 'taking the food off your table' so the state government can improve its infrastructure. The final lyric of the song draws an explicit link between the cultural technology of pokies and the fascist state by invoking the figure of Mussolini, the Italian dictator famous for making 'the trains run on time'. This lyric is suggestive of broader neoliberal processes of dismantling redistributive taxation arrangements and privatising welfare and infrastructure functions in the name of 'efficiency', which have arguably taken more than food off the tables of Australian pokie players over the past two decades.

Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality provides a useful point of entry to understanding the pokie lounge as a cultural site of power and resistance. Since Foucault's death in 1984, theoretical work on governmentality has evolved from an initial focus on the disciplinary logic which connects various independently functioning institutions of modern states to encompass neoliberal social contexts produced by processes of market deregulation and new kinds of global interdependencies. Governmentality is a useful concept for cultural studies of gambling because it enables comparisons to be drawn between configurations of cultural, economic and political forces which shape social institutions, subjective experiences and understandings of citizens in different times and places. In this context the Australian pokie lounge provides a site in relation to which we might address questions Foucault posed about the techniques of self that have made us 'what [we] are today'? And what can we learn from power struggles over this cultural site about broader cultural processes by which 'through some political technology of individuals we have been led to recognize ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as part of a nation or of a state'?<sup>40</sup>

Nikolas Rose's account of neoliberal governmentality builds on Foucault's work to explore how citizens are increasingly governed as producers and consumers through our 'powers of freedom'.<sup>41</sup> Historians and sociologists of gambling have

applied the concept of governmentality to understand how discourses of addiction have increasingly individualised the subject of gambling through regimes of surveillance, diagnosis and therapeutic treatment.<sup>42</sup> In this context, for example, Gerda Reith counters medical and psychological paradigms to present a 'genealogy' of the problem gambler as a dysfunctional consumer within late capitalism.<sup>43</sup> James Cosgrave and Thomas Klassen investigate the historical role of the state in the 'current discursive transformation of gambling activity from deviance to leisure'.<sup>44</sup> And Sytze Kingma demonstrates how the design of cultural spaces of casino gambling in the Netherlands from the early 1990s mandates consumers' 'responsible enjoyment' of legal gambling as one commodified entertainment form among others while precluding modes of consumption that betray addiction or entail processes of labour such as professional gambling.<sup>45</sup>

The pokie lounge can be seen as one aspect of wider processes of neoliberal governmentality that have embedded highly individualised constructions of freedom and responsibility across a range of social institutions, enabling businesses that traffic in 'legalised vice' (such as gambling, alcohol and tobacco) to generate substantial profits while bolstering tax revenue for state governments.<sup>46</sup> As James Doughney points out, the creation of a 'poker machine state' does not simply represent the rejection of redistributive justice agendas funded through income tax; it has seen the active redistribution of wealth in a highly regressive fashion through the relatively heavy tax burden carried by lower paid workers and welfare recipients as consumers of pokies.<sup>47</sup> Proposed changes to minimise individual and social harms caused by pokies are strenuously opposed by industry stakeholders in the name of individual freedom. Thus, the chief executive of Clubs Queensland recently responded to Productivity Commission proposals to limit bets and cap expenditure on machines by questioning 'why the "poor decisions" of problem gamblers should impact on the enjoyment of recreational pokies players. It's time we moved away from an ever-encroaching nanny state.'<sup>48</sup> The appropriate governmentality of gambling is constructed here in neoliberal terms that clearly privilege individual choice and responsibility over the imposition of benevolently intended state regulation. Having situated the cultural space and technology of the pokie lounge within a broader regime of governmentality, in the next section I will

explore what different forms of resistance to the pokie lounge tell us about broader tensions within neoliberal Australian society.

—RESISTING THE POKIES

[A] society without power relations can only be an abstraction ... [but] to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary, or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined.

Michel Foucault.<sup>49</sup>

Gilles Deleuze observed that for Foucault, 'power is not homogenous but can be defined only by the particular points through which it passes'.<sup>50</sup> To examine the cultural politics of the pokie lounge is one way of coming to terms of what is unique about the way neoliberal processes of deregulation and regional and global economic integration have been played out in the everyday life of Australian suburbs. While the pokie lounge is easily represented as the locus of corporate and government power to which Australians should collectively 'just say no', Foucault's account of governmentality unsettles circular political arguments that implicitly or explicitly pit an individual or collective subject of freedom against repressive 'state' power or regulation. In the current political context where neoliberalism is being blamed for an array of social and moral ills in public debates by an array of public actors from the prime minister down, it is important to ask what is being produced by various forms of *resistance* to the pokie lounge.

The first example of resistance to the pokie lounge I want to consider is a 'netizen' activist campaign called Pokie Act, organised by lawyer, media manager and retailer, Paul Bendat, to 'Make Pokie Places Kid Free'.<sup>51</sup> As the pokie lounge has become established as a permanent fixture in many suburban pubs, criticisms have been directed at larger venues that specifically attract the custom of families and even provide entertainment facilities including playgrounds for small children and video gaming consoles for older children. Rather than encouraging parents to go home to their children after a session on the pokies, it appears that some pubs are actively inducing parents to bring their children along to enjoy their own 'gaming experiences'.<sup>52</sup> Pokie Act was inspired by the successful internet campaign to elect

Barak Obama; it raises funds, hosts petitions and videos and maintains an active blog, a media archive and wiki. The campaign's ultimate aim is to see the implementation of National Principles of Responsible Pokie Gambling, which requires the removal of venue advertising to attract children and signage to warn parents against leaving children in cars as well as security checks of car parks. Pokie Act also features a short slideshow showing images of pokie hotels in Melbourne that market themselves as providers of family entertainment accompanied by a melancholy classical music track.

In addition to its obvious functions of political lobbying and exposing the duplicity of the large and avowedly 'family oriented' retail corporations that own and operate many of Australia's pubs with pokie lounges, Pokie Act has produced a new kind of consumer activism around gambling. Part product and part service, pokie gambling is a complicated site for consumer activism. Whereas a product can be found faulty and the standard of a service can disappoint, there is a shared understanding between consumers and providers of gambling in the marketplace that consumers may well be 'throwing our money away' whenever we gamble. In this context, Pokie Act's Wiki, 'Pokie Watch', enlists ordinary consumers to act as responsible gambling inspectors. It aims to improve 'self-regulation of responsible pokie gambling practices' by providing a map of pokie venue locations and a checklist of regulations with which operators are currently supposed to comply.<sup>53</sup> In addition to ensuring pokie lounges are 'kid free', these regulations include the provision of clear signage about winning probabilities and gambling help services and rules to exclude service of food and beverages in designated gambling areas. Whereas the surveillance that is routinely carried out in pokie lounges by venues is directed at enforcing appropriate gambling behaviour (preventing people from aggression towards the machines or other gamblers, for example), the counter-surveillance of 'Pokie Watch' reorients the pathologising gaze to the venues' corporate owners, naming and shaming them as irresponsible, exploitative and culpable for social damages to families in particular.

Traditional cultural forms and media have also been enlisted to mount resistance to negative social impacts attributed to the pokie lounge. *Playing Pokies* was a 2005 theatre production organised by Steve Dobson, a community development worker attached to the Church of All Nations which sits at the foot of

several public housing towers in the inner-Melbourne suburb of Carlton. Staged at the nearby theatre *La Mama*, an iconic performance space where some of the nation's most influential playwrights cut their teeth, the play was developed in 2005 with the assistance of students from the Victorian College of Arts and acted by residents of the public housing estates who had experienced problems with pokies. This localised creative response to the social effects of pokie lounge can be appreciated when we consider findings by Doughney in 2001 that the majority of

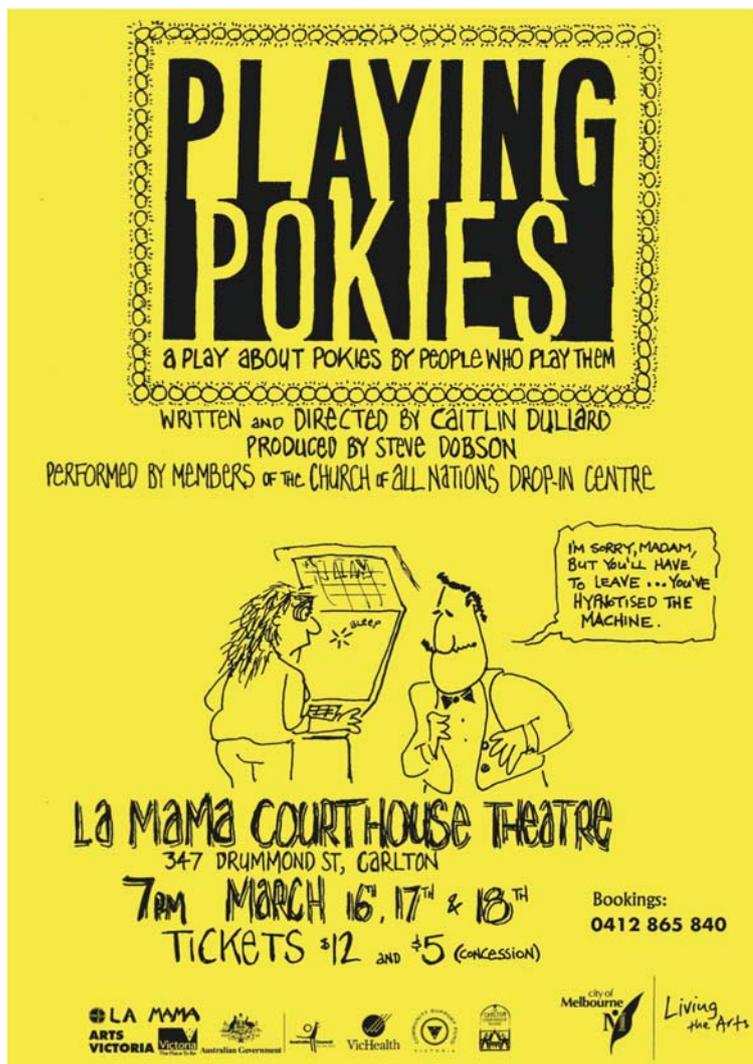


Figure 3: *Playing Pokies* poster

Source: Steve Dobson, reproduced with permission

people who play pokies do so in venues within walking distance, or 2.5 kilometres, from their homes.<sup>54</sup> And in Melbourne's gentrified inner city area of Yarra, the majority of pokies are located within one kilometre of high-density public housing estates. In addition to learning new skills and providing a therapeutic forum to express anguish about the negative effects of pokies on their lives, Dobson saw *Playing Pokies* as an opportunity to reclaim a more positive 'pub experience'. After the play's short run, he organised a weekly social event for the performers to enjoy a meal and a few beers in a local pub without pokies.<sup>55</sup>

Another example of resistance to the pokie lounge is a campaign against pokies within a rural shire in Victoria following the application by local publicans for gaming licenses. The *Indigo Shire Draft Gaming Policy* was developed to keep the shire a 'pokie free zone'. In this document, the 'power' of state government, hotel owners and pokie manufacturers was clearly opposed to the interests of a local community seeking 'freedom' from pokies. In addition to the potential problem of pokie addiction, the shire mounted a case against the licenses on aesthetic and cultural heritage grounds:

Fear has been voiced that the introduction of [pokies] could reduce the number of tourists and may reduce the uniqueness of this area in tourists' minds ... With many areas in the Shire listed as historic sites concern has been expressed that venues with EGMs would be encouraged by the machine owners to display inappropriate signage thus devaluing the aesthetic value of some streetscapes.<sup>56</sup>

Through objections to the tacky neon signage which advertises the blue-collar entertainment choice of 'pokies', the council aligned itself with middle-class tastes for what are taken to be 'authentic' signs of local history such as colonial architecture and cottage heritage industries. Having accomplished freedom from pokies, the shire incorporated this into its tourist branding, producing a large poster featuring a photograph of an impressive colonial building in the town of Beechworth announcing 'Beechworth has no pokies ... enjoy your stay. Beechworth ... a rich and vibrant community without pokies'.

It is interesting to observe how this promotion of the town as a 'pokie free' destination for heritage tourism might negotiate the historical role of gambling in this particular cultural site. Beechworth was founded and developed after the disc-

**Beechworth  
has no pokies...  
Enjoy your stay.**



**Beechworth ... a rich and vibrant  
community without pokies**



Authorized by Vic Isell • Photograph by Vivienne Harvey • Supported by Beechworth and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc.

Figure 4: Poster, Beechworth and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc.

overy of gold in the 1850s. According to Jan McMillen, the gambling game of two-up 'was played extensively on the eastern states goldfields where diggers had few other recreational outlets'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the decision taken primarily by European and Chinese men to seek their fortunes on the Victorian goldfields when success and a healthy return were less likely outcomes than failure, illness and death (with homicidal white racism a constant threat to Chinese men) was the gamble of a lifetime. A sense of pokies as a new cultural technology is reinforced through the construction of a pokie-free shire as being continuous with older forms of gambling like two-up which can be nostalgically remembered and celebrated as 'Australian' in the same historical register as the cultural institution of Melbourne Cup Day.

Poker is all about self-control ... It's all about bankroll management, chip management. If you're playing a tournament, you have to think about how you can manage the resources you have in front of you to acquire your opponent's resources ... You couldn't be any sort of poker player over any period of time if you didn't have self-control.

Andrew Woods, executive director, Global Poker Strategic Thinking Society<sup>58</sup>

The examples presented above are all explicitly concerned with critiquing the pokie lounge as a symptom of the excesses of neoliberal governmentality (the inadequacies of self-regulating industries, the social isolation of the poor within gentrified urban spaces and the destruction of unique local heritage values) from a position outside the field of gambling. I now want to introduce what is perhaps less an example of explicit resistance than an implicit challenge to the dominance of the pokie lounge within the cultural space of the pub. The last decade has seen gambling on 'Texas Hold 'Em' poker become massively popular—as televised 'sport', as internet recreation and as a form of entertainment in private homes. As a consequence, several pubs have been hosting low-stakes poker tournaments, partially reclaiming the activity of gambling from the pokie lounge and reiterating an entrenched cultural distinction between skill-based and chance-based gambling forms.

An important difference between the examples of resistance examined in the previous section and the challenge staged by poker tournaments to the pokie lounge is that the latter is immanent to the field of gambling in Australia. I'd suggest that this challenge extends beyond the judgements it facilitates about individuals' taste in gambling forms to pose questions about our very fitness for success in a neoliberal social universe aptly described in Jon Stratton's analysis of recent Australian cinema texts as 'dismiss[ing] the idea of society and valouris[ing] not only the individual but the individual whose moral outlook is founded on looking after themselves first before anyone else'.<sup>59</sup> And while Pokie Act, *Playing the Pokies* and the creation of a 'pokie-free shire' all centre on problems caused by the cultural space and technology of the pokie as a fixed social location, the poker tournament



Figure 5: Poker tournaments advertised at a hotel with a pokie lounge, Albion Charles Hotel, Melbourne, 2010

Photo: Fiona Nicoll

celebrates a neoliberal subject of gambling that is more consistent with what Ghassan Hage refers to as 'transcendental capitalism'.<sup>60</sup> So whereas the pokie lounge is associated with social and geographic isolation and abject identities such as the single mum, the old aged pensioner and the unemployed youth, poker gambling is constructed as the preferred game of mobile and successful individuals. And while the pokie lounge is designed as a comfortable space within the pub where individuals can coexist with minimal social interaction, the socialities afforded by poker are much more flexible. In addition to playing in pub tournaments, you can play with strangers online or face to face in casinos; you can organise a friendly poker night at home or play within geographically dispersed friendship networks through social networking sites.

The extent to which the game of poker has become a metaphor for how to survive and thrive in neoliberal capitalism can be seen in the symbiotic relationship

between cultural practices and representations of poker and a wider celebrity culture through which individuals increasingly construct our social identities and values.<sup>61</sup> It is not just that televised poker provides a reasonably accessible and engaging forum for celebrity fundraising events, successful poker players have passed over into the realm of celebrity in their own right. A good example is the Australian poker champion Joe Hachem who recently launched a reality television series called *Poker Star* that received eighteen thousand applications from would-be contestants (compared to eight thousand received by the immensely popular *Master Chef* competition). Hachem articulates the rationale for the show:

Basically I know how popular poker is, I know I am the envy of so many people who would like to live my lifestyle. I wanted to give somebody that opportunity ... [The show] highlights the skills we need in poker and in life ... I wanted to do a show that shows the qualities that are needed at the poker table, which are actually the same qualities you need in life.<sup>62</sup>

The near-impossibility of imagining a reality show hosted by Australia's most successful pokie machine player (except perhaps as a segment on a sketch comedy TV show) underscores the regime of cultural distinction that separates those who prefer poker from those who play pokies.

The worldwide poker phenomenon can be understood as a response to the governmentality of gambling that is 'productive' in the Foucaultian sense. More or less 'ethical' versions of what it means to be a subject in late capitalist neoliberal societies are currently being elaborated through its relatively flexible cultural form. In contrast to the masculinist, Orientalist and Aboriginalist iconography of pokies which appears to be calibrated to suit the fixed social locations to which they are exported, the relatively transnational iconography and language of poker provide an excellent fit for the globalised subjects of transcendental capitalism. The Lebanese heritage of Hachem as Australia's champion player and reality show celebrity acquires salience in this context. Only months after he celebrated his World Series of Poker victory in 2005 by waving the Australian flag and leading the popular nationalist chant of 'Aussie Aussie Aussie/ Oi Oi Oi', hundreds of Anglo-Australians converged on Cronulla Beach in Sydney wrapped in the same flag to join a day of 'Leb-bashing' aimed at securing this space as a white cultural possession.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to the abject figure of the non-Anglo migrant desperately searching for

'social hope'<sup>64</sup> while entrapped by the seductions afforded by the suburban pokie lounge, Hachem embodies the realisation of an Australian dream of participation in a global sphere of transcendental capitalism where anyone can make it through perseverance, application and the gumption to make 'one's own luck', however the cards fall.

The use of poker as a metaphor for a life well lived is stated explicitly in the opening sequence of *The Poker Star* in which Hachem introduces himself as 'husband, father and poker player' who adheres, in each of these roles, to 'the code'.<sup>65</sup> Eight episodes of the show focus on one of the following elements of this code: 'reading people'; 'focus'; 'bluffing'; 'composure'; 'recall'; 'endurance'; 'courage'; and 'charisma'.<sup>66</sup> Apprentice poker stars are taught these qualities by being made to endure various stressors such as sleep deprivation, memory testing and lack of family contact. By announcing himself as a 'husband and father' first and then as a 'poker player', Hachem advocates an ethical technology of the self which is diametrically opposed to the subject supposed to inhabit the pokie room. A graphic representation of this latter subject is found in posters and pamphlets produced by the Queensland Government's Wanna Bet campaign designed to encourage 'responsible gambling'. Unhappy punters are depicted in dark sepia tones addressing the viewer with thoughts externalised in statements such as 'I'll pay you back—I don't have a gambling problem' in a harsh scratchy font. At the bottom of each poster is a question attributed to an implied addressee: 'Wanna bet?'

Unlike the poker stars who adhere to Hachem's ethical 'code' of gambling, pokie players' relationships are depicted as irretrievably damaged, illustrated for example by a poster depicting a woman's miserable face over which the caption 'It'll be OK. The kids can have cereal for dinner' is scratched. Inappropriately dependent on others for financial help and incapable of fulfilling their obligations to those, such as children, who are dependent upon them, these gamblers embody a failure or refusal to avail themselves of what Nikolas Rose describes as 'technologies of autonomy' through which appropriate relationships between individuals and significant social others are defined, established and maintained.<sup>67</sup> Research by Richard Woolley and Charles Livingstone suggests that 'the zone' into which pokie players report themselves as being pleasantly transported is closely linked to an escape from the

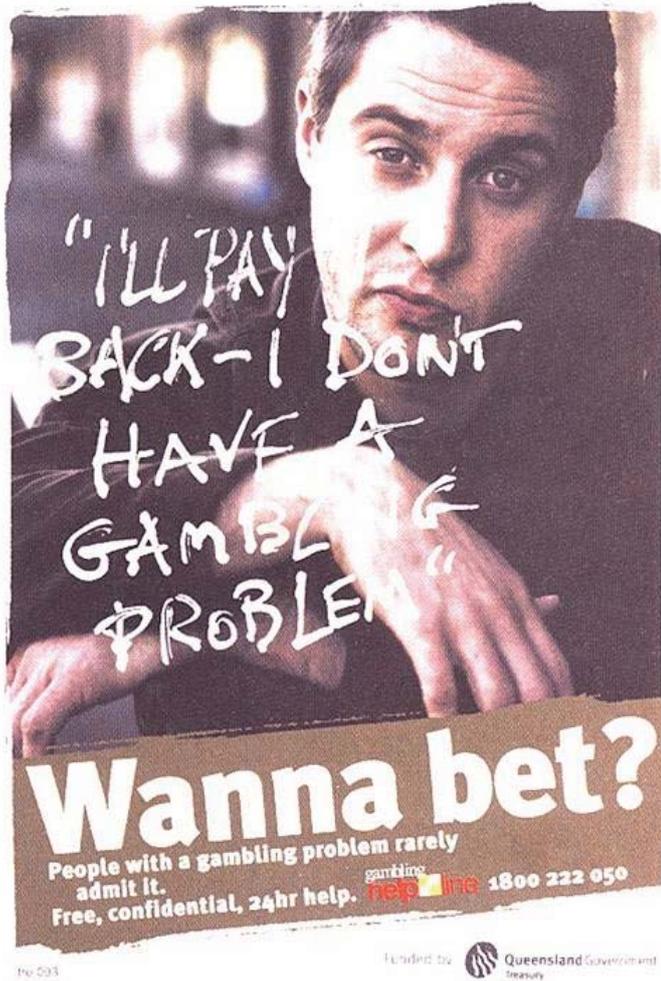


Figure 6: Wanna Bet? Poster

Source: Government of Queensland

institutional demands placed on social roles such as 'parent', 'worker', 'partner' or 'friend'.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, the pokie lounge appears as a refuge from precisely the demands of 'the code' through which Hachem stipulates the correct way of being a 'husband, a father and a poker player'. A thorny issue raised by regulatory representations in the Wanna Bet campaign, however, is that the accusation of parasitical dependence levelled at pokie players can be and frequently is redirected towards state governments for their 'addiction' to the revenue generated by the miserable players these images depict.

Since the Commission's last inquiry, jurisdictions have generally given much greater emphasis to harm minimization and less to revenue imperatives ... Nevertheless, many of the most promising options for harm minimization remain largely unexploited.

*Draft Report of Productivity Commission, 2009*<sup>69</sup>

What has this analysis of the pokie lounge shown us about the broader work of neoliberal governmentality in Australia? I began this article by introducing the Whitlam's hit song 'Blow Up the Pokies', a fantasy of pure resistance to the pokie lounge produced at a moment that was arguably the height of its powers in the late 1990s, prior to regulation schemes designed to address the issue of problem gambling raised by the first Productivity Report into Australia's gambling industries. After exploring the pokie lounge as a new cultural space and technology in the suburban pub, I engaged Foucault's critique of the repression hypothesis to account for its productive effects of power and resistance. The arrival of low stakes poker competitions was then used to highlight the pub as a cultural theatre for the performance of competing gambling subjectivities. I suggested that the gambling form of poker offers individuals an opportunity to 'blow off' the pokies and embrace an alternative ethical technology of neoliberal self-hood.

Battles waged over the place of pokies within the cultural space of the pub would be much less significant if they did not amplify inescapable dilemmas for all Australians. Whether we are deciding to manage our own superannuation, to enter or exit the housing market or worrying about how global warming will affect our housing insurance premiums, there is a growing sense that gambling is an unavoidable aspect of everyday life relative to even a decade ago.<sup>70</sup> Most recently, the international trade in 'derivatives' fuelled by the US sub-prime property market triggered a global crisis which unsettled the boundary between a feminised sphere of 'gambling' and a masculinised sphere of 'risk-management' which had previously anchored a specifically 'financial rationality'. As Marieke De Goede explains:

female unruliness, deviance and prostitution are recurrent themes in the construction of discourses of danger and gambling that underpin the articulation of financial rationality ... In conjunction with these particular and gendered notions of danger, then, a particular notion of security was

constructed to carve off a legitimate realm of finance. A specifically masculine and supposedly scientific notion of certainty and foresight became articulated in opposition to [the Goddess of Luck] Fortuna's dangers.<sup>71</sup>

It is in this 'finopolitical' context that we can understand the prevalence of tropes of gambling in academic and media discourse on the global financial crisis (GFC).<sup>72</sup> For example, Irish economist and author David McWilliams describes the causes of the GFC in his award winning documentary *Addicted to Money* as follows: 'Banks stopped seeing risk as a threat and saw it as an opportunity—the biggest gamble in history—turning the global economy into a giant casino'.<sup>73</sup>

I have argued elsewhere that one of the cultural effects of the radical deregulation of financial practices overseen by neoliberal political regimes is that we increasingly distinguish ourselves as individuals within social hierarchies not on the basis of whether or not we gamble—that we are *all* gamblers in some way or another is axiomatic. Rather, the question becomes one of *how we gamble* and, most importantly, of whether our preferred mode of gambling is skill based, like poker, or passively dependent on the outcome of a random number generator, like pokies. Having said this, the effects of tightened regulatory regimes in the wake of the GFC are beginning to be seen in everyday cultural representations and practices. For example, a recent advertisement for the new National Australia Bank venture, UBank, declares in stylish font that 'saving is the new spending'.<sup>74</sup> It will be interesting to see how the popularity of poker as an online and offline cultural practice is affected by processes of reregulation designed to reinscribe clear boundaries between financial and gambling institutions and subjectivities.

Investigating the cultural site of the pokie lounge has also drawn attention to a paradox of neoliberal governmentality: powers of freedom conferred through *self*-regulation are nevertheless mandatory. Within the cultural field of gambling in Australia these powers have been enabled both through what governments permit (deregulation of pokies) and through what they fail to be responsible for (individual and social casualties of pokies). But this may be about to change. One of the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's latest report on Australia's gambling industries is that 'Governments should implement by 2016 a universal pre-commitment system for gaming machines'.<sup>75</sup> This system would enable

gamblers to pre-set irrevocable spending limits enforced by pokies that are technologically capable of identifying each individual player. If policy prescriptions of gambling 'regulation by code' are fulfilled it will no longer be a matter of blowing up or blowing off pokies; the pokie of the future will be technologically empowered to blow individuals off before we play these machines in self-destructive ways.<sup>76</sup> Exactly how this will transform the cultural space of the Australian pub and the role of the pokie lounge within it remains to be seen.



Figure 7a: Feature video  
Screenshot: Fiona Nicoll



Figure 7b: Feature video  
Screenshot: Fiona Nicoll

I have spent my entire life studying randomness ... The more I think about my subject, the more I see evidence that the world we have in our minds is different from the one playing outside ... Luck is the great equalizer because almost anyone can benefit from it ... Randomness has the beneficial effect of reshuffling peoples' cards, knocking down the big guy...

Nassim Taleb<sup>77</sup>

It was a beautiful day  
Don't let it get away  
Beautiful day  
Touch me  
Take me to that other place  
Reach me  
I know I'm not a hopeless case.

Lyrics from U2 song 'Beautiful Day' used as soundtrack over footage of winning pokie feature on YouTube<sup>78</sup>

I have examined how the pokie lounge as a new cultural space and technology in Australia is linked to the development of specifically neoliberal forms of governmentality and considered some different forms of resistance to it. I will conclude with some reflections on the subject of pokie machine play. As a foil against which the desirable form of gambling subjectivity embodied in the professional poker player is articulated, the pokie player tends overwhelmingly to be spoken for and through problem gambling discourses. Further contributing to the opacity of pokie play is a lack of everyday cultural representations of the practice. Advertisements for pokies such as Konami's 2004 brochure promoting 'Dangerously Good Games' are illuminating but circulated to venue owners in hospitality conventions rather than among a wider audience. It is also difficult to photo-document the 'action' in pokie lounges, even as a participant. Apparently venue staff are explicitly instructed to actively prevent this from happening. To convey a richer sense of the social and psychic life of this cultural site I will briefly consider a representation of the experience of pokie play that periodically appears on YouTube.

Vindicating Foucault's critique of the 'repression hypothesis', venue prohibitions on capturing the experience of pokie play seem to have spawned a genre of 'pokie porn' on YouTube where gamblers depict the 'money shot' equivalent of a 'feature win' in progress. A 'feature' on a pokie is a sequence of 'free games' where winnings can be significantly multiplied. So if you have a 'feature' where the multiplier is ten, every credit you win will be multiplied by ten. Features are also where the most impressive graphic animations and musical effects of the machines come into play. In contrast to familiar characterisations of the pokie lounge as a space of social dysfunction where solitary gamblers compulsively push buttons like zombies, these videos often capture sound and vision of their producers' friends and family members winning on pokies. As such, they afford a glimpse of the problematic pleasures which haunt the best efforts of various institutional actors to regulate and/or resist the cultural space of the pokie lounge.

I'd suggest that the pleasure registered in these videos is not entirely accounted for by the concept of a 'zone' at the heart of pokies' addictive power. For in contrast to the anti-social experience of entering a 'zone' where winning and losing cease to matter, pleasure in these exhibitionist videos centres very much on the matter of winning and on winning's mattering in a context of statistical improbability. And while the pleasure of winning in the pokie lounge is an intensely localised experience in the first instance, with one's partner, spouse, friends, family members or neighbours being most likely to directly witness it, these videos also suggest that it is capable of being shared by pokie machine players in other times and places.

Having begun this article with a discussion of the power of Freedman's 'big bombastic' pop song as a vehicle to express anger at pokies' invasion of the space of pub rock, I want to end it by considering how another pop song is made to work in a YouTube clip of a pokie feature posted by 'Kingjoko'. A little more care than is usual for this genre of representation (typically filmed on mobile phones under conditions of venue surveillance) has been put into this video. It begins with a title frame which reads "'Indian dreaming" Big Pay day'. Footage of a feature on Aristocrat's popular Indian Dreaming machine then commences with U2's hit *Beautiful Day*, a song with a simple uplifting melody and lyrics that evoke transcendence in the everyday in a harsh and containing world through lines including 'No space to rent in this town', 'You're out of luck' and 'The traffic is stuck and you're not moving anywhere.'

Overlaid on footage of a feature win, the lyrics of *Beautiful Day* become suggestive of how pokie play is entangled with a broader problem that Wall Street trader and author Nassim Taleb identifies as ‘randomness’.<sup>79</sup> Taleb’s study of randomness is dedicated to identifying as precisely as possible the limits of what can be known and predicted about a given event occurring or not occurring. Whereas skill-based gambling forms like poker and blackjack enable one to maximise the probabilities of success and insurance and gambling industries are carefully built on mathematical strategies to manage the unpredictability of chance events, ‘randomness’ helps us to understand the specific problems and pleasures delivered by the pokie lounge. In particular, the YouTube feature videos convey a powerful sense of how objectively random events are played out through the subjective pleasure that individuals experience as winning.

The specific cultural entertainment offered by the pokie lounge might be found in those rare moments when the objective probability of losing seems alchemically transformed into the subjective realisation of the possibility of winning. This entertainment is not only discontinuous with those staged during the pub’s prior eras of white male bonding and subcultural rock; it is perhaps also uniquely disarming of external and internal forms of resistance. The disciplinary techniques of the self which Joe Hachem’s reality television series aims to cultivate in his apprentice ‘poker stars’ become redundant in a cultural space where players actively wait to see who will be lucky. And regardless of how vigilantly PokieWatch’s citizen-inspectors ensure that the odds against winning the maximum prize are plastered around venues, individuals will continue to play these machines simply because there is no definitive way of proving that they *won’t win* the jackpot. As Kingjoko’s feature video humorously suggests, somebody somewhere is going to have a ‘beautiful day’ in a pokie lounge on any given day.

I will conclude by recalling a conversation with Michel Horacek, founder of the Czech Republic’s first gambling enterprise, Fortuna, which encouraged me to explore the resistance randomness poses to neoliberal governmentality. Taking a historical view, he explained that, in contrast to current understandings of the way that chance is organised in gambling and non-gambling domains, it was the prerogative of the ancient goddess Fortuna to bestow luck on individuals *regardless* of the recipient’s character or deeds. He saw this as the heart of gambling’s

resilience and cultural significance prior to, during and after the communist era when it was officially prohibited. Nothing could be further from Fortuna than the techniques through which we are exhorted, in poker as in life, to 'make our own luck' in a variety of neoliberal social contexts. While the objective probabilities of winning at gambling and non-gambling pursuits consistently demonstrate the wisdom of this neoliberal orientation, in life as in poker, Fortuna's occasional appearances in the pokie lounge speak seductively of an alternative social universe in which one only need to be in the game to win it.

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Governing, Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> 'Blow Up the Pokies', *Love This City*, CD Album, Black Yak/Phantom, produced by Rob Taylor, Tim Freedman, Daniel Denholm and Joe Hardy, 1 November 1999. Lyrics:  
<<http://www.lyricsdepot.com/the-whitlams/blow-up-the-pokies.html>>; accessed 19 November 2009.

<sup>3</sup> <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arojCYIqxYY&feature=channel\\_page](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arojCYIqxYY&feature=channel_page)>; Tim Freedman in Simon Milton, *Stop Gambling: A Self-Help Manual for Giving Up Gambling*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001; Tim Freedman on 'Playing the Pokies' forum, *Insight*, SBS TV, 29 April 2008, <<http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/episode/index/id/20#watchonline>>; accessed 15 July 2009; Freedman on 'Pokies Threaten Live Pub Music', *7.30 Report*, ABC TV, 22 August 2000, <<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/stories/s166414.htm>>; accessed 15 July 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Woolley, 'Commercialisation and Culture in Australian Gambling', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, April 2009; Jessica Cattellino, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2008 and Eve Darian-Smith, *New Capitalists: Law, Politics, and Identity Surrounding Casino Gaming on Native American Land*, Wadsworth Thompson Learning, Belmont, 2004; Steven Andrew Light and Kathryn R. L. Rand, *Indian Gaming and Tribal Sovereignty: The Casino Compromise*, University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, 2005; Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007; Dale Mason, *Indian Gaming: Tribal Sovereignty and American Politics*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2000 and Yale D. Belanger, *Gambling with the Future: The Evolution of Aboriginal Gaming in Canada*, Purich Press, Saskatoon, 2006; See Gerda Reith, *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture*, Routledge, 1999; See Sytze Kingma, 'Gambling and the Risk Society: The Liberalization and Legitimation Crisis of Gambling in the Netherlands', *International Gambling Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, June, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See James Doughney, *The Poker Machine State: Dilemmas in Ethics, Economics and Governance*, Common Ground Publishing, 2000 and Marieke DeGoede, *Virtue, Fortune and Faith: A Genealogy of Finance*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> For a good example of cultural studies work that unsettles assumptions about the occularcentric form and functions of video gaming to highlight (kin)aesthetic aspects, see Bryan G. Behrenshausen, 'Toward a (Kin)Aesthetic of Video Gaming: The Case of Dance Dance Revolution', *Games and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2007, pp. 335-54

<sup>7</sup> See for example the range of Marvel cartoon and movie themed slot machines available at Virgin Casino. <<https://www.virgingames.com/casino/GameMenu.aspx?menu=SLOT>>; accessed 23 December 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Caldwell, Brian Haig, Mark Dickerson and Louise Sylvan (eds), *Gambling in Australia*, Croom Helm, Sydney, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Jan McMillen, *Gambling Cultures*, Routledge, London, 1996; Tim Costello and Royce Millar, *Wanna Bet? Winners and Losers in Gambling's Luck Myth*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> For a public health approach to Maori gambling see Lorna Dyal, 'Gambling: A Social Hazard', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, vol. 21, no. 19, March 2004 and Charles Livingstone 'Desire and the Consumption of Danger: Electronic Gaming Machines and the Commodification of Interiority', *Addiction Research and Theory*, vol. 13, no. 6, 2005, pp. 523-34 and Helen Keane Keane, *What's Wrong with Addiction?*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Gambling was first classified as a disease in the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III)* in 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Fiona Nicoll, 'The Problematic Joys of Gambling: Subjects in a State', *New Formations*, no. 63, February 2008, pp. 101-18.

<sup>13</sup> See in particular Robert Goodman, *The Luck Business: The Devastating Consequences and Broken Promises of America's Gambling Explosion*, Free Press Paperbacks, New York, 1995.

- <sup>14</sup> See Costello and Millar, *Wanna Bet?*, pp. 157–60.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Blow Up the Pokies'.
- <sup>16</sup> David Schwartz, *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond*, Routledge, New York and London, 2003.
- <sup>17</sup> Colin Long, Kate Shaw and Claire Merlo, *Suburban Fantasies: Melbourne Unmasked*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2005, pp. vii–viii.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Wedge* was aired on Australian television in 2006 and 2007 on Network 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Ana Kokkinos (dir.), *Blessed*, released 10 September 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> Charles Livingstone, 'Pubs, Clubs, Pokies and other Suburban Spaces', in C. Long, K. Shaw and C. Merlo (eds), *SubUrban Fantasies*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2005, p. 195.
- <sup>21</sup> Hannah Davies, 'Pokies Ban: Council Says Leave our Battlers Alone', *Courier Mail*, 5 March 2009, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Posted by Edward, 1:29am 11 March 2009, <<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/comments/0,23836,25168462-3102,00.html>>; accessed 21 July 2009.
- <sup>23</sup> Livingstone, 'Pubs, Clubs, Pokies and other Suburban Spaces', p. 201.
- <sup>24</sup> John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner, *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987.
- <sup>25</sup> David Marshall, 'Gambling as a Public Health Issue: The Critical Role of the Local Environment', *Journal of Gambling Issues*, no. 23, June 2009, p. 66, <<http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue23/pdfs/05marshall.pdf>>; accessed 10 December 2009.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Blow Up the Pokies'.
- <sup>27</sup> Research findings that pokies are favoured by up to 85 per cent of gamblers with a recognised 'problem' seem to validate these concerns. See Charles Livingstone and Richard Woolley, 'Risky Business: A Few Provocations on the Regulation of Electronic Gaming Machines', *International Gambling Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, December 2007, p. 361.
- <sup>28</sup> The 1999 Productivity Commission's *Report into Australia's Gambling Industries* found that bingo, lottery tickets and internet casino games were the only gambling forms in which women participated more than men; 56 per cent of young people have played pokies compared to 39 per cent of adults overall and that men of all ages were over represented as wagerers, sports and casino gamblers. Findings cited in D. Marshall, J. Houghton and N. Harris, *Young Men and Gambling in the ACT: An Exploratory Study of Attitudes, Perceptions and Engagement, Final Report, September 2005*, ANU Centre for Gambling Research, 2005, p. 18.
- <sup>29</sup> Stefanie Balogh, 'Pushing our Luck: Queenslanders Pump 3.2 Billion into Gambling', *Courier Mail*, 26 May 2009, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>30</sup> *Draft Report of the Productivity Commission Report into Australia's Gambling Industries*, p. 14.

- <sup>31</sup> Regulatory regimes of Australian states have shaped the way pokies function as a cultural technology in several ways. In addition to their voracity, pokies in most jurisdictions are designed to accept notes of between \$20 and \$50 and pay out directly to gamblers in \$1 coins.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Draft Report Key Points', <<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/gambling-2009/draft/key-points>>; accessed 19 November 2009.
- <sup>33</sup> Royce and Millar, *Gambling's Luck Myth*, pp. 77–8.
- <sup>34</sup> Tim Costello, 'Rudd's Crack at State Pokie Habit' *Herald Sun*, 1 April 2008, np, <<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/opinion/rudds-crack-at-state-pokie-habit/story-e6frfiffo-1111115936714>> (accessed 10 December 2009).
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- <sup>36</sup> Natasha Scholl, 'Digital Gambling: The Coincidence of Desire and Design', *The Annals of the American Academy*, no. 597, January 2005, p. 72.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 73.
- <sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power' in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1977, p. 119.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Blow Up the Pokies'.
- <sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Political Technology of Individuals', in Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988 p. 146.
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## Vol 17, No 2 (2011)

### Disciplining Innovations: New Pedagogies in Cultural Studies

co-edited by Nick Mansfield and Nicole Matthews

The themed section of this issue analyses the experience and future of pedagogical innovation in cultural studies, focusing on a variety of questions and issues. Has technological innovation allowed flexibility and an extension of the curriculum, or merely been used to reduce face-to-face teaching hours? Has the consistent demand to plan and report on teaching programs encouraged forward thinking or burdened academics with bureaucratic demands? Have universities truly internationalised their curriculums or merely exploited upwardly mobile international students? Has pedagogical innovation advanced or compromised the university's ethical commitments: to social justice, equal access, human rights and environmental sustainability? What broader cultural developments does the consistent call to innovate in the classroom reflect?

The rest of the issue contains a wide range of innovative articles, new writing and reviews.

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