This special issue and its following companion issue (Social Analysis 56, no. 2) are concerned with the ways in which fortune, luck, and chance are conceived in a range of different societies.

This first special issue, attempts to trace the semantic field encompassed by terms glossed as ‘fortune’, ‘luck’, and ‘chance’ and their role in constituting distinct economic cosmologies, along with conceptions of vitality, kinship, and relatedness, by answering the following questions. How can we account for different ontologies of luck, fortune, and chance? To what extent are they commensurable? How are fortune and luck related to the presence or absence of indigenous idioms of randomness or chance? Are there societies without luck and societies that display great anxieties about the control of the flows of fortune? How do fortune and luck relate to indigenous conceptions of risk and danger? How is the power of fortune inherited and transmitted, harnessed and contained, lost or deployed? How is fortune employed as a kinship idiom for negotiating identities or conceptions of prosperity and reproductive vitality? How are fortune and luck made visible in distinctive materialities and generated through the circulation of things?

Hopefully, these contributions will help to reinstate ethnography as a prime method for understanding how human beings think about luck and harness fortune in order to tame contingency or to catalyze the serendipities of their quotidian lives.

Preface

Introduction: Natural Philosophies of Fortune — Luck, Vitality, and Uncontrolled Relatedness

Giovanni da Col (Cambridge)

The Sword, the Sponge, and the Paradox of Performativity: Some Observations on Fate, Luck, Financial Chicanery, and the Limits of Human Knowledge

David Graeber (Goldsmiths College, London)

Is There Fortune in Greater Amazonia?

Peter Gow (St Andrews) and Margherita Margiotti (Bristol)
Vital Energy: The Current of Relations

Stephen Gudeman (Minnesota)

The Elementary Economies of Dechenwa Life: Fortune, Vitality, and the Mountain in Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

Giovanni da Col (Cambridge)

The Three Duties of Good Fortune: ‘Luck’ as a Relational Process among Hunting Peoples of the Siberian Forest in Pre-Soviet Times

Roberte N. Hamayon (EPHE Paris)

The Dangers of Excess: Accumulating and Dispersing Fortune in Mongolia

Rebecca Empson

Knowledge, Morality, and Causality in a ‘Luckless’ Society: The Case of the Chewong in the Malaysian Rain Forest

Signe Howell (Oslo)

Beneficial Bonds: Luck and the Lived Experience of Relatedness in Contemporary Japan

Inge Daniels (Oxford)

Afterword: The Lottery of Babylon, or, the Logic of Happenstance in Melanesia and Beyond

Roy Wagner (Virginia)

SPECIAL ISSUE No 2. Social Analysis 56, no 2.

Future and Fortune. Contingency, Morality and the Anticipation of Everyday Life

Edited by Giovanni da Col and Caroline Humphrey (Cambridge)

As with the preceding companion issue (Social Analysis 56, no. 1), this volume is concerned with the ways in which fortune, luck, and chance are conceived in a range of different societies and how these concepts are employed to negotiate the contingencies and uncertainties of everyday life. Taken together, the articles gathered in this second collection deal with human
attempts to project their desire for mastering uncertainties about the future while solving the moral predicaments of fortune’s proportions and their management in everyday life. Ranging from Melanesian and Greek gamblers to online gamers and Siberian hunters, from lay Chinese mathematicians of fate to young Mongolians, the ethnographies in this special issue reveal the creative potentials of practical matrixes for calculating luck and mobilizing diverse ‘technologies of anticipation’ of the future. A few of the articles present rites to invoke fortune, gambling, or games as practices to master contingency and as generative fields of agentive creativity and subjectivity.

What is the role of idioms of luck and fortune in the formation of accounts of events? What is the role of fortune and luck in everyday moralities, ethical decisions, and the constitution of personhood? How does fortune relate to concepts of value, desire, fame, and prestige? How do cosmologies of luck and fortune manifest in contingent singularities and temporal views? How are different hierarchies of luck and fortune related to specific domains of temporal action? What is the relation between fortune, moral agency, and destiny? How is a fortunate future anticipated and produced with hopeful and creative acts of engagement with misfortunate events or fatalistic worldviews? The essays gathered in these pages will hopefully add a vigorous and attuned anthropological voice to the recent chorus of interdisciplinary interest in the themes of contingency and gambling and in the category of the future.

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