

Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas. By Natasha Dow Schüll. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012. Pp. xiv+442. \$35.00.

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Gambling, particularly machine gambling, invokes key concerns in sociological thought, and in the beautifully crafted ethnography *Addiction by Design*, Natasha Dow Schüll takes us on a journey from the inner life of gamblers to the broader social climate that they play in, using rich narrative accounts of their experiences, interwoven with sharp theoretical insights, to locate addiction within the structures and practices of late capitalist societies. The gambling industry has increased exponentially in size and power in recent years, with global corporations driving technologically innovative games that steadily colonize new markets within the United States and Asia, generating profits that are increasingly influential sources of revenue for states. Gambling machines are central to this global advance and account for some 85% of industry profit.

Against this backdrop, Schüll begins the book with a striking spatial image: a road map designed by Mollie, a machine gambler, to illustrate the circuits of influence gambling has on her life, or the “experiential landscape” of gambling. Schüll uses the map as a conceptual tool to take us on an ethnographic tour de force of the gambling spaces of Las Vegas: casinos and strip malls, recovery groups and drugstores, academic conference halls and industry seminars. During our exploration, we meet many players like Mollie, whose “machine lives” are captivated by “the zone”: an affective, trance-like state in which time, space, and even the value of money dissolves in intense play. In the zone, winning is reduced to an unwelcome distraction while continuous play becomes an end in itself.

Through the deceptively simple technique of moving outward from the interior workings of machines, into the ergonomics and design of gambling environments, and finally into the bodies and minds of the players sitting in front of them, Schüll builds up a compelling narrative that links the phenomenological experience of play with the wider structures of con-

sumer societies. As such, the arguments in this book extend beyond gambling to address the wider implications of our relationships with technology, touching on issues around bodies and desires, governance and control, knowledge and reason, as well as the role of the state, industry, academia, and even therapy in creating particular kinds of material worlds and affective states.

Throughout all of this Schüll's ambitious aim is to undertake a "phenomenology of human-technology," or "materialist phenomenology" (p. 9) that is based on Bruno Latour's ideas of coproduction: the focus on "the ways in which objects and subjects act together, through their encounters with each other" (p. 19) runs as a leitmotif throughout the book. There are no inanimate objects in this encounter: casino architecture and ambience, as well as player-centric machines and tracking technologies, are designed with one goal in mind—to keep individuals gambling for as long as possible, maximizing what is known in industry circles as "time on device" and encouraging them to play "to extinction": to the point where funds run out. These technologies create recursive loops between players' desire to stay in the zone and industry goals of profit maximization, meaning that the creation of addiction becomes a joint enterprise between technology that encourages play "to extinction" and gamblers who willingly seek it out.

The argument for coproduction could be rather unsatisfactory, given the subject matter, if the role of power was not addressed at some point, and Schüll tackles this head on. She notes that the respective contributions of humans and machines are not equivalent, for human actors bear "particular accountabilities" when it comes to human-machine exchanges, namely in the generation of "scripts" that program machines to work in particular ways. Moving beyond Latour, she argues that this network of structures and practices transcends the instrumentality of disciplinary forms of control and represent a form of Deleuzian "continuous control." As she puts it: "While the structural, decorative, and ambient environment of the casino is certainly geared to influence patrons' conduct, its *modus operandi* is to coax rather than restrain, reward rather than punish, steer rather than transform" (pp. 50–51). This fact undermines the notion of a mutually beneficial symbiosis between what players want and what the industry offers. The relationship, she argues, is asymmetric: "The gambler not only *can't* win, but *isn't playing to win*, while the gambling industry is playing to win all along" (p. 75).

The analysis of power here is both nuanced and forceful. By carefully amassing information from games designers, casino owners, and players, gracefully interwoven with theoretical material on technology, Schüll makes the role of machine and environmental design in the coproduction

of addiction abundantly clear. She leaves space for ambiguity, however, and never loses sight of the complex and shifting normative terrain in which designers parse the ethical issues of their occupation, casino operators focus on keeping up with the competition, and gamblers play to stay in the zone.

In analyzing the asymmetrical coproduction of addiction and its relation to wider sociological themes, Schüll transcends polarized debates about the “location” of addiction and reaffirms the importance of gamblers as bearers of cultural values. More than this, she casts them as expert members of the zone in which they are caught: “a zone that resonates to some degree . . . with the everyday experience of many in contemporary capitalist societies” (p. 24). This idea is one of the more provocative raised in the book and one that invites future inquiry: the suggestion that machine gambling may be regarded as an exemplary site of intensified consumption and the zone its phenomenological expression.

Original, ambitious, and written with elegant lucidity, *Addiction by Design* presents us with a narrative that is as compulsive as the behavior it describes. The book repositions debates in the field of gambling and will surely become a classic text in studies of society and technology.