Using Money to Suspend Heavy or Fragile Objects

by

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ABSTRACT

The author suspends a 700-lb steel money safe from the ceiling, using ropes constructed from approximately 10,000 United States $1 bills. The role of money in this artwork is compared and contrasted with the role of money in artworks by other contemporary artists. It is noted that the presence of money has an irritating effect on most viewers, and hypothesized that this effect is based on the installation’s exposure of differences in financial wealth between different persons. Accordingly, a proposal is made for the reduction of economic inequality by wasting the excess wealth of the very rich, and it is suggested that the author’s artwork both enacts and visually supports this proposal.

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ARTIST’S STATEMENTS
My work with money is an attempt to not understand. It is like the old trick of staring at a word until it loses all meaning. I will myself to concentrate on money’s physicality. Folding and weaving the bills, I forget their usual meaning. I begin to not understand.

Why would I want this? It is a matter of comfort. Understanding says:
— Money is a symbol and an instrument of power.
— Its purpose is to equate unlike quantities.
— I live well and others starve.
— Their starvation equals my luxury.

Understanding money is painful. It tells me things I would rather not believe. Not understanding provides comfort.

Inside my studio, folding and weaving the money, I take comfort in its physicality. Outside, understanding enforces itself. The pain returns.

Not-understanding is unsustainable. So I have choices. Live with pain. Or change the world.
Money is everywhere. Century after century, it has pushed aside traditional practices, permeating and creating “economies” along the dual axes of geography and semantics.

Money is everything. As a liquid takes the shape of its container, money takes any meaning we give it. It is convertible to anything except nothing.

Money is the language of commerce. As a language, its use follows grammars of convention and law.

Money is the language of commerce. Language poetry is the deconstruction of poetry. So money poetry is the deconstruction of commerce.

This is the end of metaphor.
Many people react to money as to an obscenity. But the true obscenity is within them. A mark without connotation cannot offend—only referents offend. So those who are offended by symbols, have dirty minds.

As words carry the fog of grammar around them, so money travels amid the stench of conventional commerce. This is obscenity. My goal is to rid money of this smell. A new grammar is necessary.
DECLARATION OF MARKET INTENT

1. The selling price of money objects shall be the face value of the money used.

2. Resale prices shall be limited to face value by binding contracts.

3. Objects may be disassembled and the money returned to circulation.
INTRODUCTION
This book is written backwards. Its subject, an installation called Using Money to Suspend Heavy or Fragile Objects, appears near the end. Before it are arranged various texts, in decreasing order of abstraction. This introduction, the beginning, presents the broadest and most general arguments, which are necessarily at some remove from the physical work.

At the end of this essay, I will describe my work as an argument for the reduction of economic inequality, through the voluntary wasting of personal wealth by wealthy individuals. In doing so, I will oversimplify both the work itself, and the rhetorical position I am attributing to it. In the context of the essay, the oversimplification makes sense. This introduction attempts to fill in some detail.

In advocating waste over redistribution, my position is distinct from that of other would-be economic equalizers, who urge that the wealth of the rich (either taken by force, or surrendered voluntarily) should immediately be made available to the poor.

My position is rhetorical, but I believe it is necessary, because I am wary of arguments founded on a belief in widespread absolute (as opposed to relative) poverty. Certainly some are desperately poor; and those who are not, must be obliged to help them. We are missing the point, however, when we confound this obligation with a desire to improve the average condition of humankind.

Far from alleviating poverty, partisans of improving the (material) human condition tend to justify poverty by justifying concentration of wealth. Concentrated wealth is useful, they say, because it funds projects and technologies which, eventually, benefit all people. Yet at the same time they acknowledge that such projects are motivated (even, should be motivated) by individual gain. So it is unsurprising that not only the direct profits, but also the improved conditions themselves, remain at all times poorly distributed. I believe that this continual state of uneven distribution — relative poverty, driving what Marx called “the exploitation of man by man” — weighs far more heavily on contemporary humanity, than any absolute lack.

So I would argue that material progress be de-emphasized, and equalization of power and social relations made the primary goal, regardless of the absolute material level at which such an equilibrium can occur. Due to limited resources, it is clear that the level of equilibrium will be below the material level of my own life as an upper-middle-class American. And, unless currently unsustainable resource streams can be replaced, it seems possible that even the material level represented by the average of current conditions may one day prove unsustainable. If this should happen, then the necessary reductions must be accepted gracefully, until a sustainable level is reached; for only when all approach the point of starvation, should conflict and exploitation be judged unavoidable.

I am aware that what I am saying seems hopeless. I would replace the pursuit of growth, with pursuit of sustainable equality. Yet the evidence suggests this contradicts both human nature (which seems to seek material gain, as compensation for some primordial lack); and even the nature of all life (which, oblivious to its environment, seeks local growth as the basic good). But I say it anyway. Where better for a philosophy of sacrifice to take hold, than among those who clearly have more than they need? And even if
my audience is limited to a narrow subset of this class, can we not still provide a movement-towards, if not a reaching-of, the desired condition of equality?

Wasting, then, over redistribution: because for those with more than can be provided for everyone, equality begins not in ensuring that others have more, but in accepting less ourselves.

In *The Accursed Share*, Georges Bataille notes that growth, the natural process of life, is necessarily balanced by other processes, such as death and decay. Drawing the parallel in human economies, Bataille describes growth as a tendency toward the over-accumulation of productive capacity. Like biological growth, this tendency must also have its opposite; which in the most destructive and extreme case, is war. But Bataille also describes a series of lesser destructive practices, such as sacrifice, which are integrated with daily life in some societies. In these societies, he implies, such practices may actually lessen the occurrence of violent conflict, by ritualizing the necessary destruction of productive capacity.

This theory, I believe, has significant parallels to my own work. The theme of ritualized waste, as a balance to excessive growth, should be clear. But there are other similarities. In his introduction, Bataille describes the state of the world: it is, he says, a state of abundance, extreme excess, and maximum fullness, such that destruction is necessary for new growth to occur. This has a parallel in my own circumstances, of significant inherited wealth. Finally, even the formal aspects of my project, the forms and methods of pre-industrial craft, have echoes in the earlier societies which Bataille describes.

Specifically, and by way of moving towards acknowledgements, I would like to thank John Ochsendorf, of the Building Technology Program at MIT, whose experience with Inca grass-rope suspension bridges provided valuable inspiration to the construction and testing of dollar-bill ropes.

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PLATES
Tom Friedman
*Untitled*
1999
Yves Klein
Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity
Zone No. 1, Series 4
1962
Cildo Meireles

Above:
Inserções em Circuitos Ideológicos: Projecto Cédula
(Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Cédula Project)
1970

Above, right:
Zero Centavo
1974-78

Right:
Árvore do Dinheiro (Tree of Money)
1969
100

JSG Boggs
SF100
1988
Santiago Sierra
8 Foot Line Tattooed On Six Remunerated People
Espacio Aglutinador, Havana
1999
Luis Camnitzer

Signature by the Inch
1971-73

Two Identical Objects
1981
Mark Lombardi
Casino Resort Development in the Bahamas c. 1955-89 (detail)
1995
Andreas Slominski

*Raising of Street Lamp for Placement of Tire*

1997
I SHOULD EXPLAIN
I SHOULD EXPLAIN. A lot of people have made art out of money, or about money, and I should say why mine is different. Money can be about anything, because you can trade it for anything in the world, and so it can mean that thing. So money is like a fluid, it is slippery. And it is even more slippery when used by artists because when an artist presents money, it is usually not as part of an exchange, at least not a literal exchange of money with the viewer. So there is nothing to fix its meaning as there is in a traditional financial exchange. Its meaning floats and it is specific to different artists and different works.

There are two kinds of work I would like to talk about: work which looks like mine but is not like mine, and work which does not look like mine, but in which I am interested because I see similarities between what it is doing and what I want to do. The first kind is work that presents money, either real money or literal depictions of money, which people often mistakenly think is similar to my work, because they are similar on the surface. Of this literally-presenting-money work, there are various types, and one type is so far from what I am doing that it is not worth talking about much. This is where the image of money is used in work that functions very differently than in my own project. These may be easier to confuse and so I should speak of some of them at greater length.

The first one is Yves Klein's series of work called *Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity*. In this series Klein sold something called "immaterial pictorial sensitivity", which was really a non-thing. Klein's work as a painter was to reduce painting down to its "essence" which in his opinion meant a plain rectangular canvas, with just one color on it, often bright blue which was his favorite color. This blue color and a few others (like gold) held mystical significance for him, and so he sought to reduce the experience of art to the experience of just these pure colors. But in *Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity* he had the idea to reduce art even further so that it was not an object at all. Nowadays this is a pretty dull idea but this was 1962, before Performance Art and even before most Conceptual art. So what Klein did was, somehow he talked collectors into buying this non-object, and then he went with them down to the river Seine, in Paris, where he lived. And there he would have them give him some gold bars. In the picture I have these are little tiny gold bars, 10 grams each, and he is getting 16 of them from the buyer. And then, he would throw the gold bars into the river. Maybe all of them, or maybe half of them or less, but he would throw some gold into the river. And then
he would make a receipt for the buyer, and then they would burn it together, like a little ritual. And that was it. That was the work, and there was no object left over afterwards. And clearly the work lasted anyway, because here I am writing about it. So the work exists as the transcription of the work, but not in any kind of art object.

So Klein was able to boil the artwork down into almost nothing, but something remained. In one sense what remained are the transcriptions but, even before that, there was the action, which the transcriptions describe. And this action was a transaction of money. So Klein decided to boil art down to its absolute essence, and this is what it boiled down to, which was getting paid. And then maybe throwing away some of the money, and burning a receipt, but first getting paid. So in addition to the work transcribing itself into the history of art, this action would also get transcribed in another history, the history of money. Because even if it was not kept by Klein, the buyer paid money.

Now the question here is, that money was spent, and for what? This is the question which the work asks the viewer. And since we know that the money was spent for art, the real question then becomes, what is art? And we know from Klein's other work that he was interested in this question already. So this series Immortal Pictorial Sensitivity is not really art about money, but art about art. Money was just the last medium Klein had left to him, after he threw out all other media. He used a money transaction, perhaps because money transactions are considered important and usually recorded, and this helped ensure that the work itself would be recorded. But Klein did not really question the money or the money-transaction. Rather he relied on the money-transaction as the solid ground, against which to contrast the possibility of a new kind of art.

There is other work like this which uses the gap between one value (what is spent) and another (what is received) to ask a question or make a point about art. One example is Cildo Merciles' Tree of Money from 1969. This is a stack of bills, specifically Brazilian one-Cruzeiro notes, because Cildo is Brazilian. Each bill is folded in half, into roughly a square shape, and 100 of them are stacked together, and held with rubber bands, and put on a white pedestal like a sculpture. This sculpture is displayed with a note, which explains that this piece is made of 100, one-cruzeiro notes, but that actually it is worth 2000 cruzeiros. And probably it is worth a lot more than that now, because it has been a long time since 1969, and in the meantime Cildo has become more famous.

Like Immortal Pictorial Sensitivity, this work is like a trick or a joke, and it asks the viewer a question. What has happened to the other 1900 cruzeiros, which presumably were paid for the work at some point, but which were never part of it, because there are only 100? And the answer is, Cildo has them. And the question is, what did he do for them? And the answer is, he made the artwork. So by folding up the bills and putting on rubber bands, and calling it art, Cildo added value to the bills and that value will now cling to them, because both values are now combined to make up the artwork, as long as we believe these are the authentic bills and not just a copy of them, and so forth. And so the extra value, which is originally the artist's labor, along with other labor — the labor of his dealer, maybe, and the critics who write reviews of him, and the quarry workers who cut the stone to build the walls of the gallery — all this value combines with the 100 cruzeiros, and travels with them through the art market. And by now after several other exchanges a lot of additional value has also combined with those bills, so they are worth a lot more even than the 2000 cruzeiros that Cildo said they would be worth in 1969.

So this work is not really about money either, it is about the art market, and it questions just what it is that makes art worth money in the first place, and then even more money as it is passed around and bought and sold.
There is another artist who does similar work now, and in fact specializes in this kind of work. His name is JSG Boggs, and he draws money. He's American, so he draws dollar bills, and he has drawn every bill from $1 up to $1000. And he draws other money also, because when he travels, he draws the currency of whatever country he is in. He draws these pictures of money, and then he goes into stores, or to his friends, and when he wants something he says, this is my art, give me what I want, and you take my art instead of money. And he gives them the amount of art-money, which the thing would cost in regular money, no matter how long it takes him to draw a $1 bill or a $5 bill and whether one is five times as much as the other.

Now after a while Boggs was pretty well known for this, or so the story goes, and so people everywhere know him and will happily accept his drawings of dollar bills, because actually they are worth much more than their face value, so you would have to be stupid not to take one from him. Because it seems there is a huge legion of Boggs collectors out there who are happy to pay more for a Boggs bill than its face value. And there are even people who will follow Boggs around, and buy his bills from the places where Boggs originally spent them, and then sell them to his collectors for a profit. So this work of Boggs is also about the market, it points to the secondary market in artworks and so it is about that market as much as it is about money itself. It functions very much the same as Cildo's Tree of Money.

Now as far as I know, Boggs has only ever done this same kind of work, but Cildo is well known for a lot of other kinds of work besides, and some of these are with money too, and they function differently. They are not primarily about the secondary exchange market for artworks, but about something slightly different. One group of these are dollar bills that Cildo got printed, or rather pieces of paper which look like dollar bills, and in one case, a piece of metal which looks like a coin. And on this so-called "money", Cildo would print a zero where the value should be. So it is money, but with a value of zero. And Cildo never tried to sell these pieces, he gave them away, and he did not limit the number of them that he made, he made a huge number of them, and so this was not about trying to make money by selling art, and it was certainly not about other people making even more money by re-selling it. So it was not really about the art market, or it was, but indirectly, because it was about not participating in it, or trying not to participate in it, but rather doing something different, by giving the art away to anybody that wanted it, for free.

Now in the time since Cildo made these, we have learned to see works like this in a cynical and jaded way. So we might point out that the gift is not really such a gift, because it gives people a reason to remember and think of Cildo, and this works like an advertisement, and adds to the value of his other works, which are sold for money. And also we know looking back that at some point Cildo stopped making this work, so even though he made an unlimited number for a while, and gave them away for free, he did not establish a way for them to continue getting made forever. So now the number is limited, even if it is large, and so there may be people who are willing to pay for them. But I don't think Cildo expected these cynical readings, I think he was just trying to be different and propose a sort of alternative system of art, a nicer system, by giving things away for free. I think the cynical reading came later, because we have seen many more gestures of the sort of Cildo was making by now, and realized they don't always function as Cildo intended. So looking back on it now, we might say that this work has failed, but we should be careful to separate our own cynicism, from the spirit in which Cildo intended the work.

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1970. This is a project in which Cildo stamped various things onto banknotes with a rubber stamp. And this work is even less about the art market, than the other pieces we have looked at from Cildo and from Boggs. Of course our cynical after-the-fact reading of it (as advertising) still applies but let’s shut that out for now, and look at what Cildo was trying to do. And the biggest clue is the title. *Insertions Into Ideological Circuits.* Now what is the ideological circuit? The ideological circuit in this case, is the system of using money, where we have all these little bits of paper we pass around to each other, and we trade them to each other in exchange for everything under the sun, and so they go around and around and around and lots of people see them before they at some point get returned to a bank, where somebody finally decides they are too old to be used anymore, and throws them out or recycles them. But meanwhile they have all sorts of meanings to all sorts of people, and they also have a kind of meta-meaning, which is exchange itself. This is the sense, I think, in which the circuit is ideological, because the very idea of using these bits of paper to represent things we need and trade for them, represents and carries a burden of a certain ideology. And by insertion, Cildo means he will insert something into this circuit, perhaps some other ideology, or some thought of his own, and it will be carried by the circuit as the bill is passed on to various people, and they will see his message. And the insertion of ideology is clear, because of what Cildo writes, which on at least some of the bills is “Yankees go home.” Which is a rejection, obviously, of America, or at least of America’s influence in other countries, like Brazil, where Cildo is from.

Now this project also uses money, and real money, money is the medium of the project. But again the project is not primarily about money, and this is clear because of the title, which makes it very clear what the work is about, and also because Cildo used “ideological circuits” other than money, and used the same title for those pieces as well. In one project, *Insertions Into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project,* he stamped messages on returnable glass Coca-Cola bottles, and these worked the same as the money, they would get passed around as the bottles were bought and returned and refilled and sold again. And in another project, he bought space for his messages in the classified section of newspapers, so people would see them that way. So both Coca-Cola bottles and newspapers are also circuits, and carry a burden of ideology, and he is inserting himself into them. So this insertion is what the project is about, and not really about money.

But now this project begins to get at something interesting, which is a bit closer to what my project is about, which is power, and the distribution of power between different people in society. Because the ability to insert one’s ideology, and have it passed along, is power, and these projects demonstrate that power may be taken or appropriated in these very simple ways, by people without special access, or special skills, who perhaps would not otherwise have a lot of ways of expressing power.

In my work I am concerned with money as a form of power, and with seeking greater equality in the distribution of that power. So I will now talk about another group of work which relates to my own, and this is work in which money does not appear literally at all, but where power (including monetary power) is the subject of the work. And the first of this work is by Santiago Sierra.

Santiago Sierra is a Mexican artist, or really not a Mexican but a Spanish artist, who went to live and work in Mexico, which was a Spanish colony. Sierra’s work is about payment. What he does is pay people. And he does so in a way which is very offensive, because of who he pays, and how much (or really how little) he pays them, and what he makes them do in return for the payment. Basically, he chooses very poor people, and he pays them as little as possible, and he has them do stupid pointless things, so they don't get to feel like...
they are really accomplishing anything, but are just working really hard to accomplish nothing. Here are two titles of Sierra projects:

*Lifted out wall of a gallery, leaning over by 60 degrees and held up by five people*, Mexico 2000

*Remunerated Workers*, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles 2000

In the first project, Sierra made a temporary wall in the gallery, which was not attached to anything but just sitting on the floor, and during the show he paid five people to hold it up, so that it was leaning over at an angle of 60 degrees. Four of the people would hold it, and one would use a protractor to make sure it was at the correct angle. And in the second project, Sierra made some very heavy blocks of cement, which could only be moved using crowbars and ropes, and paid people to drag them around the gallery, not to any particular place, but just keeping them moving for the entire day.

Now when I say Sierra's work is about power, this is how it is about power. First it is about Sierra's power. Sierra has a lot of power, because he has a lot more money than the people he pays. So he takes advantage of that and has them do something stupid. And the things he has them do, though servile and pointless, really are no worse for them, and maybe better, than other things desperate people do for money, like working in sweatshops or selling drugs or guns or prostituting themselves sexually. In one project he even pays people to get tattoos of a line across their backs, and even in this case Sierra can say that it doesn't really hurt them, in fact it may be better for them than other things they could do for the money. So Sierra uses his own power, his power to pay people to do pointless things, to show you that they have almost no power, because they are poor and desperate and will do anything for money. So in addition to Sierra's power, the work is about the powerlessness of the people who are paid. Their powerlessness not only in relation to Sierra, but in relation to all the other ways people are exploited every day, which in many cases are much more harmful and demeaning, and certainly more widespread, than what Sierra does.

And this work makes you want to cry, it makes you angry, it makes you hurt, to see Sierra point out all the awful things that go on in the world. So it also makes you question your own power, because you get so angry and mad and indignant about these things that are going on, and you want them to stop, because they aren't fair, but you can't do anything about it. You can't. And the one thing that you can do pretty easily, and a lot of people do, is get mad at Sierra, and claim that Sierra shouldn't do this, because the least he could do is not add to the misery of the world. But Sierra would say that it is better to point it out, and have you angry about it, than to do nothing, and that the little misery he causes is worth the larger goal of having you angry, because maybe if you are angry then one day you will find it in yourself to lift yourself out of your powerless rage and do something about it. Other than denouncing Sierra, that is.

Now I would like to add another point to this discussion, which is more subtle. It has to do with efficiency, and with context, and with why I think Sierra's work is so offensive, in fact even more offensive than the exploitation he is criticizing. Sierra wants you to think about exploitation in the world outside his work. But other kinds of exploitation, sweatshops for instance, though much more widespread, are exploitative for a reason. Clothing companies exploit workers because they need to sell clothes cheaply, so there is a limit on what they can pay. I'm not apologizing for sweatshops, but there is an economic logic to their exploitation. A clothing company needs several worker-hours to make each shirt, and millions of shirts to make its owners rich, so their richness is spread over millions of worker-hours, and millions of useful shirts. Whereas Sierra's work makes so much money out of so little. Not all the money goes to Sierra, but a lot of money is made from his works, by a lot of peo-
MANIFESTO

by Luis Camnitzer, 1982

I presume to be a revolutionary artist, with a vision for the world and with the mission of implementing it: to eradicate the exploitation of man by man, to implement the equitable distribution of goods and tasks, to achieve a free, just and classless society.

In order for my mission to succeed, I have to try to communicate with the highest possible percentage of the public, something only possible with a great amount of production and a good system of distribution for my products.

The production needed to reach the public who might be converted to my ideas cannot be realized through a limited, craftsman approach. I need means of production that are as efficient as possible and assistants who can perform those tasks that do not require my creative effort, but can be executed under my instructions.

Having limited funds to acquire equipment, I have to extend my ingenuity to find good buys, to profit from errors by the sellers, to bargain to my advantage; that is, to act with more intelligence than those who would exploit me if I weren’t careful.

Having limited funds to employ assistants with the salaries they deserve, I have to try to pay as little as possible, prolong working hours for the same money, try to achieve a maximum of productivity with a minimum of expense. If this operation should leave some money left over, it should be invested in more equipment or in employing more people under the same conditions.

The biggest problem for the distribution of my work is competition. Other artists, sharing as well as opposing my ideas, interfere with my potential contact with the public. The public spends money on works that are not mine, money that would be useful to improve and increase my means of production, works that distract their attention from my revolutionary aims. I have to be able to establish my work over those obstacles.

I cannot physically eliminate the artists competing with me, but I can try to harm their image, spread rumors, create rifts between them and their dealers, and generally, try to sabotage their distribution systems.

With some luck and some manipulation I can then add these distribution networks to mine and ensure my preeminence in the public’s view. Thus I will increase my sales which will allow me to acquire more and better means of production. I will be able to consider gaining access to other audiences, an international public.

The day when my revolutionary ideals will become a reality therefore could be near.
ple who are richer than the people who held up the wall. You know this, because the work is displayed in expensive museums, which sell pictures of it in the expensive books in the bookshop. And all this money is made based on so few hours of labor of the exploited workers, who hold up walls or drag cement blocks or get tattooed.

So given that all this money is made, it seems only fair that the wall-holders could be paid more. It would make no competitive difference to Sierra's overall enterprise, in the way it would to the sweatshops, if the workers were paid twice as much, or ten times as much, or however much Sierra thinks is truly fair. But it would make a difference, because it would change the content of the work. So Sierra's exploitation is not necessary for economic reasons. Rather it is deliberate, and necessary only for conceptual reasons, and this makes it seem even crueler, and more offensive, than the other exploitation, which Sierra is trying to critique. And so we think of Sierra as a hypocrite, because he does exactly what he is against, without really even needing to do so.

I will return later to the question of efficiency, by which I mean that Sierra's work squeezes so much impact (both economic and emotional) from such small actions. But first, I want to talk about Luis Camnitzer. Camnitzer is also a political artist, but he goes about it differently than Sierra. He has even written something about exactly the problem of hypocrisy, which Sierra falls into (Manifesto, reproduced on the facing page).

So Camnitzer has many of the same political opinions as Sierra, in terms of thinking that power should be more balanced, that there should not be situations in which one person is so powerless and so hurt by another person's power. But instead of doing exactly what he opposes to make a point of this, Camnitzer rejects that possibility explicitly with his ironical "manifesto." And he's right because what Sierra does is very hypocritical. Very strong, very efficient, but ultimately a failure, because anyone can recognize the hypocrisy of it, and this distracts from Sierra's point. So instead of making a big offensive controversy, Camnitzer makes small gestures, very conservative, normal, object-based artwork made with simple materials. But Camnitzer also makes a point of being ethical in everything he does, he resists the bargain with the devil that Sierra has made.

One example of Camnitzer's work is Signature by the Inch, from 1971-73. In this piece Camnitzer writes his signature on a piece of paper, writes it very large, and the paper has a ruler mark at the bottom, so you can see just how big the signature is. And then Camnitzer prices the work according to how big the signature is, at $7 per inch. On the bottom half of the page he puts a calculation, which shows the price per inch, and how many inches, and how much the material cost, and how much the gallery charges for its commission, and other fees like labor and "conception," and then the total. So Camnitzer shares every detail of how the price is constructed, and you can judge it for yourself, whether it is a fair price to charge. And in this case the total is $232.53, and I would say that is very fair, I would pay that happily. Because although Camnitzer is not a superstar right now like Sierra is, he has still achieved some recognition and I doubt that this piece would go for $232.53 today. So this work is also like Boggs' work and Cildo Mereiles' Money Tree in that it points to the art market and how money can be made there, by the artist and his dealer, and later by collectors or speculators.

Another Camnitzer work involving money is Two Identical Objects from 1981. This is a photograph of two pieces of paper, and it looks like Camnitzer has folded them in half, crumpled them up, and then let them go so they partly uncrumple. And the two pieces of paper are exactly the same size, and have been folded and crumpled in the same way, and are even arranged the same way on top of the table or whatever they are sitting on. But that is the end of the way the objects are identical, because you can see that one of them is a $1 bill, and the other is some printed paper cut out of
a magazine or something. So these are not at all identical objects, because one is money, because of what has been printed on it, and who printed it, and what you can do with it, which is anything you want. One carries power, the power to be converted into anything that is “worth” $1, and the other lacks this power. So this work is perhaps the most “about money” of all the work I have been talking about, because what it really asks is, What is money, and how is money different than this other thing which is just like it? And the answer is, It is different in the power it has to be converted into something else, which the other paper lacks.

And yet even though Two Identical Objects is directly about money and its power, the work is relatively conservative, compared to Sierra’s work, and even compared to Signature by the Inch, because the sphere of the work does not include any real-world transaction. The work is self-sufficient as an object, which is printing on paper, which is also what money is of course. But money is never self-sufficient as an object, because its power comes from transactions, and those transactions express power relations. Relations between real people, some of whom have to waste their time doing tedious things for money, while others get fat and rich, and they get poor and thin, or maybe even get hurt by what they have to do.

Now Sierra’s work is in some sense more contemporary than Camnitzer’s. Because Sierra’s work involves direct transactions in the world, while much of Camnitzer’s work comments on the world from within the realm of representations. So Sierra might argue that his work has more actual power to change the world, to fix the things he does not like, because he is out in the world engaging with people, and not in the studio making photographs of little bits of paper. And Sierra might be a really bad person to make this argument, because the actual form of his engagement is so hypocritical, but he represents a younger generation, which has started to make this argument about Camnitzer’s generation.

Another artist who was a member of the older generation, but who was 100% dedicated to expressing real-world power relations, was Mark Lombardi. Lombardi would research complex transactions that took place in the real world, like real estate deals for instance, and all of the people involved, and what they paid each other, and how they related to the other people involved. And then he would express this as well as he could by drawing a diagram of it, and those diagrams are his work. So in one sense he was totally engaged with the real world, and with real world problems, by showing you things that you would never think to look at, and wouldn’t have the patience to research by yourself even if you thought of it. Looking at his diagrams you start to question what is the meaning of all these transactions, all these relations between all these people. What does it mean for you? And you don’t know, because the diagrams are very cryptic, a lot of information is missing from them, and you haven’t heard of most of these people and places and companies, and yet you get the sense of everything being connected, and it draws you in. This is Lombardi’s point I think, that these things should matter to you, because in some way it is connected to you, what these people do does impact you. So you are drawn into the politics of it, what you can (or probably can’t) do about it, and also you think about what you do, and how it must also affect others in the same remote ways that these people affect you.

Andrea Fraser, unlike Lombardi, is an example of the younger, activist generation. Fraser is a kind of real-world performance artist. You could say that Fraser’s career is one big performance, and not in the sense of being a pop star like Andy Warhol or a cult figure like Joseph Beuys. Fraser is best known for leading tours in museums. These are a kind of joke on what museums do normally which is have employees who give tours to “interpret” the art in certain ways, usually as it has been written about in art history books already. The tour guide talks about the art and teaches you to think
about it the “right” way. But Fraser’s tours are different because she does not talk about the art the right way, in fact she might spend a lot of the time not talking about the art at all, but about the museum, or what she is thinking about while she is designing the tour, or what you might be thinking about as you listen, like where the bathroom is, or the other people in the museum. And I think this is because Fraser is suspicious of looking at art the “right way,” of there being a “right way” to look at art. I think Fraser thinks this just one example of a kind of teaching that gets people to always look at things the same way, which in the end might keep them from changing things than might need changing. So she makes a joke of it, and gets you to think outside the box, and this is her “insertion into ideological circuits,” because she breaks up the circuit (the museum tour) by putting herself into it. But she doesn’t put in heavy opinions like “Yankees Go Home,” instead she just talks about silly things or maybe about the art or about the museum, but in a different way than you would expect, and so you think about the circuit itself, she folds the circuit into the circuit. And this is a powerful, real-world thing to do. It disrupts the flow of power in the usual circuit, the power to enforce a right way of thinking, and it uses her power instead to make you think about something else. I’m not sure what you are supposed to think about, but at least you have to come up with some of it yourself, and in doing so you begin to experience your own power, which I think is what Fraser wants.

Another Fraser piece that is more explicit in talking about power is Inaugural Speech (1997). This was a performance where Fraser gave a speech at the opening of an art festival in the border area of San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico. Already this context has a lot to do with power issues, issues of third world versus first world, which are in part issues of money, and also control of borders and who can go where, and so forth. And Fraser gave this speech before an audience which included many important officials, both officials of the exhibition, but also government officials, because the Mexican government (though not the American) gave a lot of money to support the exhibition. So there was an official public ceremony, with government officials present, and lots of people giving speeches. And the usual way to give speeches at a thing like this is to be very boring, and just thank all the people you are supposed to thank, and say how wonderful they are, and how wonderful the art is going to be, and what a wonderful thing this is for everyone, and generally just be very positive and thankful. But Fraser was not. Instead she made a joke of the speech, she thanked people but she also said exactly what she thought, and a lot of it was not very nice, because it was clear that she was angry. For instance when she thanked the board of trustees, she thanked them for all their hard work but also for the exclusive private party they had given, and how fine and expensive the food was, and how gracious the servants. She talked about how the funding for the arts was being cut everywhere, especially public art, and also funding for programs for poor people. She named the officials who were in the audience, who had supported the cuts, and she generally made a mockery of the speech, and used it as an occasion to present her very sharp and harsh and cutting opinions about the event and the people involved.

In doing things like both the speech and the tours, Andrea Fraser defines her role as an artist not as making things but as providing a service. The service is inserting her viewpoint and making people think about the structures and relations of power in the institutions that hire her, which they would not normally think about. Fraser intervenes directly in these institutions, and in these interactions—with viewers, but even more with the people who run the institutions, the people who work there, and the people who support them financially. So her interventions directly alter the balance of power in the institutions.
But Fraser's practice as a method of activism is limited by her focus on relations within the art world. In many works she limits her audience directly—by addressing herself directly to members of art institutions, and not to the general public. And in others indirectly, because even in works that are directed toward the public, like the tours, she appears to be presenting specialized, art-world issues, which may not seem relevant outside of the art world. Of course they are, but if you don't already know and care a lot about the art world, a lot of what she says might go over your head, or you just might not care much about it.

So I have talked about some artists who make work directly with money, and others whose work does not literally include money, but who I feel are relevant because they talk about power, and power is what I mean to represent by using money. Now there is one other artist I would like to talk about who is not quite in either category, and he is Andreas Slominski. One of the interesting traits of many of Slominski's sculptures is this: He goes to great effort to do something fairly minor. For instance here are a few of these projects:

- **Raising of Street Lamp for Placement of Tire** (1997)
- **Moistening of Stamp** (1997)
- **Bucket of Water** (1998)
- **Folding Rule** (1999, Edition for Parkett #55)

The common theme of these projects is their using complex means to achieve a simple result, which might easily have been done some other way. In **Raising of Street Lamp for Placement of Tire** Slominski worked with city officials to tear up the ground around a street lamp, lift the lamp, using a crane, several feet above the hole, place a bicycle tire around the bottom of the lamp, re-lower it into the hole, reconnect the wires, fill in the hole, patch up the sidewalk, and all this just to have a bicycle tire sitting around a pole. He could easily have put in one from on top. In **Moistening of Stamp**, he contacted officials at the zoo and arranged to visit the zoo to have a giraffe lick a stamp which he then used to mail a letter. Besides contacting the officials and traveling to the zoo, it was also necessary to entice the giraffe to stick out its tongue and lick the stamp, which apparently it took its time in doing. In **Bucket of Water** Slominski hired plumbers to install a pipe from a bathroom out into the middle of a gallery shop to fill a bucket of water (he placed the bucket there before and had the tap installed above it). Then the plumbers removed all the piping again leaving only the bucket, full of water. Finally in **Folding Rule** he sold a two-meter folding ruler, by mail order because it was an edition sold through a magazine, but instead of shipping it folded up, he specified that it be delivered unfolded, so it was much more difficult to package and transport than it needed to be. So what happened here is that enormous resources (including, clearly, money) were expended to do things which, as sculptures, could have been achieved much more cheaply.
ow we are talking in the end about my work here and what is interesting to me about Slominski’s work in relation to my own is this: the waste, the spending itself as the point of the project. And what this has to do with power is this: It is the muting, the voluntary withholding of power (the power being the resources which are used, sufficient to do some much more “powerful” action, being directed instead around and around in circles and the end result being a much less “powerful” action than could have been done).

This presents a problem similar to works discussed before. Just as Yves Klein did, Slominski seems to make money disappear. Where does it go? And once again we can answer, cynically, as we did with Cildo Meireles’ Zero Dollar, that it goes into Slominski’s career or into the valuation of his other work, or that it will be recouped by Slominski being invited to do more projects, and by all the money which will be made by various people off those projects. And yet with Slominski we are not led so quickly to this cynical reading, as we were with Cildo Meireles or with Santiago Sierra, because Slominski’s sculptures and actions are not about money, or payment, or exploitation, or anything serious at all, but instead seem to be rather playful.

And that’s not all. Not only is Slominski’s work not transparently about money, but the missing value, the difference between what is spent and the final effect achieved, has the opposite sign from these other works; instead of Meireles or Sierra spending little to achieve a great market value or strong emotional impact, we have Slominski spending a great deal, to achieve relatively little impact. With Meireles or Sierra, an excess seems to have been gained with little effort, so the work appears efficient, and leads us to a cynical reading; but with Slominski, an excess is instead lost through great effort, and the work appears inefficient, and we have trouble being cynical. Rather than cynicism, the inefficiency or waste leads to a reading of the work as lighthearted, or frivolous or even magical.

This quality, of intentional inefficiency or waste, is also present in my own installation, Using Money to Suspend Heavy or Fragile Objects. But whereas in Slominski’s work the waste occurs amid an atmosphere of fun and games, my own work is more serious. I am concerned about a serious situation, a pervasive imbalance of power (which is in part due to inequality of wealth), and I wish to argue for waste and inefficiency as a serious remedy. In my work, to the extent that waste takes on qualities of frivolity or fun, this is only a strategy which I hope will make a serious argument go down a little easier.

My work is about money. Specifically it is about a lot of money. What I do in this installation is I use a great deal of money — and I use it in the “wrong” way. I do not trade it or invest it as you are supposed to, but instead I use the bills physically, awkwardly but also whimsically, to do something difficult and pointless, which is hang a 700-lb steel safe from the ceiling. Like Slominski, I could have accomplished this with a lot less money, if the point was just to hang a safe from the ceiling. But of course this isn’t the point of the work. It is an excuse for putting $10,000 cash in front of you.

So the dominant quality of the work is not ropes and a safe and the quaint homegrown miracle of engineering by which it hangs. It’s all that money, physically present, right in front of you. You aren’t used to seeing that. And it is really offensive. But the impact, the precise way in which it offends you, depends on your own situation. Because the offense is personal. You see my money there doing
something pointless, and you think about how much money you
yourself have. Either you have enough that you could also do this,
or you don’t. But it offends you either way.

Let’s say you don’t have enough. You work for a living, you pay
the bills every month. Maybe you are lucky and you have some
savings, which represents your vacation or your retirement or your
kids’ education. Maybe you even have $10,000 in savings, because
it’s not really that much after all. But you wouldn’t do this with it,
because it doesn’t make sense. For one thing, cash can get stolen,
and even if it doesn’t you need your money in the bank, earning
interest, or invested so it can grow. You can’t afford to play with it,
and make silly ropes out of it. Because money is scarce. Your money
is as scarce as your time, because you work for it. You might hate
your job, or you might enjoy it, but either way part of you will resent
me having all this money. This money which clearly gives me a lot
of time, time that I don’t have to work, time to sit around and play
with money, which I clearly do a lot of.

So if you have less money than me, you resent what I am doing.
It makes you feel exploited. Because in the end, exploitation is
what money is about, and what my project is about. But it’s differ-
ten than Sierra’s work. The exploitation in my work is not the
exploitation of a few lower-class Mexicans, offered up to symbolize
the exploitation of a million other lower-class Mexicans. No, it’s
more personal—the exploitation in my work is your exploitation.
It’s your exploitation by your bosses, your landlords, the CEO’s who
profit when you buy your groceries and your gasoline.

But then, you’re not sure if you should hold it against me per-
sonally, because I’m not the one exploiting you here. That much
is pretty clear. My work is making you feel bad, but I have also
sweetened the experience, I’ve given you something fun at the same
time. It’s like a magic trick, which is wonderful, if you like that kind
of thing. And even if it’s not your taste, you can see the effort I put
into it. And that effort counts. That sweetness makes you more
likely to believe me when I tell you, I may want you to feel bad now,
but it’s for your own good. For all of our good. Because we need to
see this, we need to think about these things, and I am not asking
you to feel bad and think about uncomfortable things so that I or
others can make money from your experience. In fact the opposite,
because the work is not for sale, and I have not been paid for it, and
would not ask to be, and will do everything I can, to make sure I and
others will not exploit your experience either, in future situations
where similar work may be presented. But meanwhile, none of this
changes the fact that the work is very hard to swallow. Because even
if I’m not the one exploiting you, I am reminding you that others
do. And that’s something you prefer not to think about.

And what if you have a lot of money, as much as me or even
much more? Then your experience is different. Because you too
could do this. You too could not work, could play with your money
all day, make funny things out of it and show them to people. But
you don’t. You keep your money hidden, because it makes you un-
comfortable. You might tell yourself that it is for your retirement,
or that you are putting it away for your children, though it may be
more than many happy children will spend in their whole lives. You
tuck it away in stocks and bonds and CD’s and real estate, and you
dress simply and live below your means, because you don’t like to
be in this position relative to other people, where they can see how
much money you have. You want to have civil conversations with
your employees, and even with your less wealthy friends, without
your money getting in the way. So to you I may feel like a traitor.
I may irritate you, flaunting what you are careful to hide. And you
tell yourself that you hide it for others, for those who have less, be-
cause you don’t want them to feel bad. But really the hiding is firstly
for you, to protect you from feeling bad, from being uncomfortable
around them.
Edwina was an assistant on Using Money to Suspend Heavy or Fragile Objects.

The ad on Craigslist asked for help setting up an installation. My reply stated my little experience and the answer was that the job required someone to help fold pieces of paper. At that moment I had my doubts. It seemed kind of sketchy and I was suspecting this could be one of those pyramid schemes like Amway or something. When I had the interview I was surprised to see a pretty young guy surrounded by stacks of money, a scale and braided dollar bills. He explained that my role consisted in folding one dollar bills that would be assembled into sticks that would be braided into ropes that would make a ladder that he would use to climb one of the MIT buildings. The job seemed boring but the idea of seeing the piece complete was not. So in exchange for my Mexican passport I got 300 dollars all in ones.

I could not help myself from constantly peeking into my purse, it was the first time I’d seen so many bills, 300 dollars appeared to be so much more and I felt an urge to spend money. I had to stop and grab a beer on my way home. As soon as I got home I started working, I sat in the middle of my living room, fixed a cup of tea and put some news on the radio. By the time I had done 100 my fingertips were green and had blisters, the view of the money around me got me cranky, even more knowing I needed $300 to make my rent. I went on to do the next hundred with tape on my fingers and using an ID to fold them tighter. Then I noticed I wasn’t paying attention to what the reporter was saying, but instead I was doing math in my head, thinking of how much money I was making. I felt like running away.

I hated myself for being decent when I returned the folded ones, and this time I got 500. And had to assemble them. It made me feel proud to be moving to the next level, and I started getting into it. Somehow I felt important, like one of the sticks that made the braid was me or something. My boyfriend got home that night and his eyes popped out when he saw me surrounded by money. At that point it was mere paper to me, but his surprise reminded me that it had an attributed value. I started throwing the bills up in the air over and over and told my boyfriend I was selling one dollar sticks of dope.

The assembled sticks were hard to carry around, they made me paranoid. So I wrapped them up in newspaper while getting around. One time on the bus the tip unwrapped. People where looking my way, but it wasn’t so much the money they were surprised at, but the way it was assembled. I felt funny. It had gone from dollar bills to paper and from paper to dollar bills presented as paper.

I met the rest of the crew latter on, and we worked together a few times in the studio. I loved hearing all our complaints, checking out our green hands and sharing techniques to make it easier, and the things we thought while working with money were the same, we all needed some, we all joked with people about our job and all were paranoid while carrying it around. And we all treated it as paper while talking. Good thing since the thought of stealing was null even while I was surrounded by it. The feeling was reinforced by looking at the techniques the artist used, using this pasta maker was one of them, or wetting the bills in these huge garbage cans.

There was one day that we were filmed. We had to wear green robes, be silent and keep folding money this girl was constantly putting beside us. The repetitive movement and the synchronized sound of the bills being folded and thrown to a pile in the middle made me feel exploited. I hated not being able to stop or talk and I felt I could not make a mistake. I felt humiliated by having money so present. I started thinking of sweat shops and making a mental check on my attire, on my Nike tennis shoes, my jeans from the Gap.

The installation progressed and we started a rope. I was more interested in seeing if it would hold the weight of the artist than anything. By that time I wasn’t going to the studio that much, and I kind of lost track of how it was going. Later on I was invited to the reception of the exhibit and I was surprised to see two ropes holding the weight of the safety box where the artist used to store all the money. I did not know how to think of that money anymore. I felt part of the installation, proud it was strong enough, but the money made me feel alienated from it. I stopped thinking about my role in the piece, but that of the money and it seemed lame. I preferred seeing it as paper being braided, being used as a material and the weight it withstands. I felt like cutting the rope and letting the safety box fall over my thoughts.
Alejandro Cesaro is an artist and curator.

Jed's recent work involves the exhibition of large quantities of money.

Bills are braided to create ropes from which a safe is later suspended.

The engineering behind the project is clever and skillful.

Braiding is a technique that signals to a pre-industrial mode of production. A safe might signify banking, a symbol of a later stage in the development of capital.

Valuables are usually kept inside the safe, not the other way around.

All this is a very literal reading, a description, not an analysis.

The form taken by the material employed, may well be an anecdotal excuse. The end intention of the piece is apparently to blatantly display vast amounts of money.

Has this money been “activated” in a way that differs from more standard modes of transaction? Is its exhibition merely a sadistic exercise of power?

What is the piece ultimately proposing?

Following are a few questions that attempt to aid my better understanding of the work.

1. What is the primary goal of exhibiting, literally flashing your wealth?
   Is it therapeutic? Is it a vengeance?
   What new information / perspective does it add to the predominant economic model?
   Does it in itself propose a new mode of operating within it?

2. The work appears to be about modes of production. If so, I would think the strategy would be to generate alternative modes of socialization. In other words, to somehow activate subjectivity through interchange.

   Then, why is the physical manifestation of the piece necessary, and why does it need “money” as material?
   A fetish, takes the place of a lack; what is that lack?

3. What is the role you assign to paper money in relation to the different discourses of representation and simulation?
   (Simulation understood as equivalency between sign and real.)
   What is this equivalency signifying?
   (Downgrading of being into having, having into appearing, notion of spectacle, etc.)
Whereas what I am doing is the opposite, right? I put my money in the open and play with it, I am not afraid to show you how much money I have and how much I enjoy it. But of course, you get a sick creepy feeling from this display, and this is because actually I don’t enjoy it at all. I feel how you do, slightly guilty, even though in my case (unlike you, maybe) I inherited every cent of my money and didn’t exploit a soul to get it. But still I don’t like it. So instead of hiding it, as you do, I waste it. I waste it by playing with it, by not investing it, by weaving ropes and fruit baskets out of it and making rules to ensure that nobody will profit from them. And why do I waste it? Because I want to get rid of it. Simple as that. I don’t like how it makes me feel, I don’t like having that much power over others, and being rid of it will make me feel better.

But it’s not simple as that, of course, or I could give it away and be done with it. And I know this would not make me feel better, but only put me in the position of people who do not have money, ripe for exploitation by those who do, and so feeling bad for another reason. So instead of giving it away all at once I waste it slowly and lavishly, displaying the waste as I go, making a point of it, and yet taking care to avoid exploiting others as I make my point. Because as long as the difference between having money and not having it is so great, as long as money gives rich people power and leaves poor people vulnerable to exploitation, I cannot be comfortable. And so I must use what power I have, which is what money I have, in combination with my skills and education, to make my argument, to argue for an equalization, so that rich and poor alike can feel some relief from the oppression that is money. And if in doing so, I waste what excess money I have, and end up closer to the average I would seek, then I can be happy at least, that I have done my part to make us all feel better. And I can beckon to those still richer than me, and say hey, it’s not so bad down here, so let me help you with that burden, I can always waste some more.
USING MONEY TO SUSPEND HEAVY OR FRAGILE OBJECTS
began working with $1 bills in the fall of 2002. I had used money in my work before, in the form of coins and gold, but I was looking for a way to engage with it more directly. Bills seemed like the most basic form of money, the thing people would think of most often when they think of money.

For me money was a material which was easy to get, and which was loaded with personal and family history. In my very first college art class assignment, I made a piece using about $400 in dimes. I had collected the dimes in a box all through high school. Sometimes I would put them on a table to count them and it always struck me how if you pushed them together they would line up in a honeycomb pattern. Of course all coins do that, but dimes are the smallest American coin and have the most value for their size. So the honeycomb pattern in dimes is especially intense because you can pack the most value into a small space that way.

A couple years after the dimes piece, my father's mother Janet died and left me about $700,000. I had no idea my grandmother had that much money before she died. She had always been very political, and as a liberal she often spoke critically of rich people. She worked at an art museum and collected
prints and sculpture. I inherited her liberal politics and her love of art long before I inherited her money. The year before she died, I had taken a semester off from school to run an Internet poster-art advocacy campaign. It was just after Newt Gingrich’s “Republican Revolution” in the House of Representatives and the conservative attack on social programs was at its height. I made a lot of posters with the theme of “Tax the Rich” and posted them on the Internet, which was new at the time. I got others to contribute artwork as well, and we coordinated “saturation postering” days when we would print out the posters and put them up all over the country at the same time.

After Jannie died, I started spending her money on art right away. At first I made work which was simply expensive, but after a while I realized I could not ignore the money but had to focus on it.

To start I had the idea of getting a lot of money out of the bank and making a video where I would get naked and throw it up in the air. I went to the Fleet Bank branch in Central Square and told the manager what I wanted to do. I told him I was an artist and I wanted to make a movie where I threw money in the air. He knew exactly what I was talking about. “Like taking a bath in it,” he said. He was excited to help, and I was grateful for his excitement and his understanding. I had guessed I would need around 20,000 bills to make it look good, so I told him I wanted to get out $20,000 in ones.

I didn’t think they would have that many one-dollar bills right there, but I was surprised when the manager told me his branch didn’t ever handle that much cash. But he called his friend at their Harvard Square branch, where he said they could get it, and we agreed that I would pick it up the next week.

When the day came I was really nervous. I had to borrow a car because I didn’t feel comfortable carrying the money on the bus or even in a cab. I had calculated the size and weight of it before hand. It would weigh about 40 pounds. I brought along a big canvas duffel bag to carry it home in.

My friend Sanjit came along to videotape, because he thought it was important to document everything, but the guards saw the camera and told him to turn it off while he was inside the bank. We went downstairs to where the tellers were and Sanjit tried to look inconspicuous while I waited in the special
business-customer line. I already had a business account because I had been selling toilet paper for a while and had a website and accepted credit cards. I always felt kind of funny standing in the business-customer line because I've never felt like I had a real business, but just a lot of money. But I stand in them anyway because it's more convenient, and it seems like what they expect.

I got up to the front and presented my $20,000 check to Chris, the business account teller. I told him I was there to get the ones and he said "oh, you're the movie guy." He asked me if I had something to carry it in and I showed him my duffel bag. So he told me to wait by a little door that led off the main room and he would come and get me in a minute. Then he put the "next teller" sign in his window and went into the back.

The door opened and he let me into a short hallway that led to the back of the bank. It had a door at each end like an airlock and there was nothing in there except a table and an empty rack of wire shelves. Chris left me in the airlock a minute while he went into the back again. He came back carrying the money in a corrugated-plastic crate from the US post office, the kind with a warning on the side about the penalties for using it for things other than mail. I held open my canvas bag and Chris counted the money into it. The bills were stacked in bricks of 1,000 — ten bundles of $100. Each bundle of $100 was wrapped with a blue and white paper band, and the bricks of 10 were held together with rubber bands. A few of the bricks were brand-new bills, wrapped in shrink-wrap plastic instead of rubber bands, with a sticker with numbers and bar codes on the outside of the plastic.

When I left the little room I was so nervous I walked right past Sanjit and headed for the elevator. He followed behind me trying to film without the guards seeing. I felt like he was my personal security guard following me around with the camera, but I also felt like I was robbing the bank. We had to take the elevator back upstairs and then walk though the whole ground floor of people working in cubicles and behind customer service counters. I walked past them with my canvas bag and I could feel them looking at me and wondering if I was robbing the bank. I was sure everyone knew what was in the
What else would you have in a big lumpy canvas bag walking nervously out of a bank?

When I got out on the street it was about 100 yards to where my car was parked around the corner. The bag was getting heavy and Sanjit was still following me with the camera and I felt foolish. Halfway to the car a homeless man came up and asked for some change. I wondered if it was a dream and I said “sorry” and kept walking like I usually do. As I passed him he muttered, “all that money in the bag and you won’t even give me some change.” I don’t know if he saw me come out of the bank or if he was joking, but it creeped me out either way.

I put the bag in the trunk of the car and drove home and put the money under my sofa.
It took me a couple days to recover and get ready to make my video but soon enough I did it. I figured I should be naked in the video, because I wanted there to be nothing in it except me and the money. My apartment was really small, and I had to stand the couch up on end to make an empty spot on the floor with no furniture. This would be my stage. My apartment had shitty brown carpet and baseboard heaters that were falling apart and coming off the wall. Later, when I was cleaning up, I spent half an hour picking dollar bills out of the crack between the heaters and the wall.

I turned on the camera and stripped naked and lifted up the couch. The money was underneath it in the bag. I took the 20 bundles out of the bag and stacked them up in a little wall in front of me. Then I realized I wanted to pile the loose bills in front of me, so I picked the bricks up and restacked them off-camera. The camera was on a tripod and it was hooked up to my TV set, so I could watch as I was recording. I took the rubber bands off of one of the bricks, and pulled the stacks of $100 out from their blue paper bands, fluffing the bills with my hands so they would lie in a random-looking pile on the floor. The bills stuck together, and it was hard to make them lie in a random-looking pile. It took longer than I thought. I took ten of the bundles apart and then
I realized how hard it was going to be to put them back together. The bank managers had told me I would have to bring them back in stacks of 100 and I didn’t have any idea how I was going to count all those bills and bundle them up again. So after $10,000 I decided that was enough and I left the other ones in the stacks.

I knew the scene I wanted in my head which was me throwing the money in the air and it falling down all around me. I sat cross-legged in front of the camera. The pile of money was in front of me and I started by just running my hands through it. It was still clumpy but I threw some up in the air anyway. It came down all clumpy. Then I looked on the monitor and saw myself sitting there in the vast expanse of shitty brown carpet with just a pile of money in front of me. That was no good, I wanted the money all around me, so I spread it out. I moved back a bit to center myself on the monitor and started throwing it again. It was really hard to get the effect I wanted. I wanted tons of money in the air, but it kept falling faster than I could throw it. So I threw faster. I threw faster and faster and faster, and it looked like I was having a tantrum. With each throw I picked up more money from right in front of me, and then some of it would fall behind me, and soon there was a bare spot in front of me. So I started spinning around on my knees, swooping my arms to pick up as much money as possible and have it fall down evenly around me.

I did three or four takes of that and then I did some other things. I lay down in the money and rubbed it around on my skin. Then I sat still for a while and tried to meditate with it all around me. I did a few takes where I would gather as much money as I could in my arms, then stand up and hold it in a bear hug with my arms crossed across my chest. I would stand still for as long as I could while the bills slowly came loose from my hug and fluttered back down to the floor.

After a while I was sitting there cross-legged and naked on the floor in the middle of the money, thinking what to do next. I felt like eating the money, so I put a bill in my mouth. Then I put another one in my mouth and another and chewed. I couldn’t bring myself to swallow them, so I chewed them into the smallest wads I could and stuffed them into the corners of my mouth and
stuffed more and more into my mouth that way. I gagged on the eighth or ninth one and spat them all out. My lips and the inside of my mouth were all cut up with papercuts.

I couldn’t think of too many more things to do with the money, so toward the end of the tape I jacked off on it. I wanted to see if I would be able to. The money itself seemed disgusting and dead and boring but the experience of throwing it and the other things I had done had been exciting. I wanted to see if I could shut out the disgustingness. In the end I couldn’t keep an erection with my eyes open, looking at the money, instead I had to shut them and fantasize about something else. But on the tape you don’t see my face, just my hand and my penis and the money all around on the floor.

I made a couple other tapes in the days after that, trying to do other performance-art things with the money, but everything after the first day was kind of stale. So eventually I put the camera away and tried to see what I could make with the money itself, using it in a physical way.
After making a bunch of small experiments with folded and woven dollar bills, I decided I needed to concentrate on bigger projects. After all, this was my thesis! I liked the way the dollars worked in ropes, so I decided to hang things with them. Sanjit had suggested the safe already, but I wanted to do an action. So I decided I would make a rope ladder and climb up on it. I would call it “Stairway to Heaven.” The ladder was a pretty big undertaking. I had been folding the bills myself to make my experiments, and it was a lot of folding! The little box had taken over 100 dollars and the bigger fruit basket was nearly 300. The fruit basket had taken all night, or maybe even a couple of days.

It took me a while to figure out how to make a ladder. The ropes I had made so far weren’t really ropes but straps, because dollar bills are flat, so the things you can make out of them also tend to be flat. It seemed easier to design a ladder out of flat straps than to try to make round ropes out of dollar bills which were flat and wanted to stay that way. That meant I couldn’t tie anything. Also, most rope ladders are not made of only rope. Usually the rungs are made of a stiff material, like wood or metal. The sides are made out of rope, which is why it’s called a rope ladder.
I thought for a while and sketched things out. It would work best if the sides were continuous, one straight piece from the top to the bottom, so there would not be any joints or weak points. It was easy enough to make long pieces for the sides but how could I make the rungs? And how would I attach them? I couldn't tie them.

Finally I realized I could make a series of loops, each loop being the square hole between two rungs of the ladder. The sides of the loops could be lashed to long vertical pieces for reinforcement, and the tops and bottoms of the loops could be lashed together to make rungs. So now that I had a design, I calculated how many bills I needed to make the ladder.

It was something like $12,000. I had that much money and I wanted to show it, but it was a lot of folding. I knew I could never do it myself by the time the thesis was due. I would need help. I thought of my friends but they were all pretty busy. Sanjit had a full schedule teaching, and Joe was a student in the architecture department where they work them like dogs. Joe barely had time to get a beer, so it didn't look like he was going to be folding 12,000 dollar bills for me.

I procrastinated a long time, because I would have preferred to do everything myself, but it was impossible. Finally my girlfriend Nazgol convinced me to post an ad on Craigslist for assistants. Craigslist is an Internet site where you put free classified listings, and it had worked for Nazgol in the past. She sold an old Frank Gehry poster for $50, and when she moved and had an extra day to use her U-Haul, she hired herself out as a truck driver to recoup her moving expenses. So I put the ad on Craigslist for Artist Assistants. I wrote that the job was working on an installation, and that it involved folding a lot of paper. I didn’t think it was a good idea to try to explain the whole job in the ad, better let them write back and then I would explain it to them.

Craigslist had worked before for Nazgol but I was blown away. It seemed like everyone in Boston was looking for a part-time Artist Assistant job folding paper at home. I had written that you could do it at home, and I guess that attracted a lot of people. I got twenty responses in the first hour and fifteen the
next. After I had sixty people or so I cancelled the ad, because I didn't want to deal with more of them.

I deleted about half the responses, the obvious idiots or the people who came off as too eager or otherwise suspicious. Then I wrote to the rest of them, explaining that the paper that was to be folded at their home was dollar bills, so I would need a deposit. I told them about the ladder and attached some pictures of the experiments so they could see what I was talking about. The part about the deposit was delicate. I didn't want it to sound like a scam, where the ad says you can make easy money at home, but first you have to pay to get started. But there was no way around it. I wasn't going to give people hundreds of dollars to fold up at home, without getting some kind of deposit.

A lot of people wrote back and said it sounded sketchy, or didn't write back at all. One guy even wrote back to say: "Sorry, but I don't like the idea of having to leave a deposit, or give you some money to start work on your project. I understand why you would ask this, but I think it is presumptuous. Good luck."

That made me angry, but mostly because I knew he was right. It was presumptuous. Here I was hiring people, and obviously the reason people would want a job is to make money. But then they have to have money to start? And on top of that, the job was folding up my money, which I must not need too badly, if I can pay to have it folded up. So it stunk all around. It stunk, but I needed to get the ladder built. So I resolved to be as nice as possible, and pay well (or as well as I felt comfortable, considering how easy and stupid the work was), and try not to hold it against myself.

Of the people who wrote back the second time, four came for interviews and I hired all of them. These were: Analucia (or “Chia”), Edwina, Tim, and Jessica.

Chia came first. She was wearing a Chia Pet shirt. She was energetic if not hyperactive, and learned fast, and wanted to start right away, and that was fine with me. She gave me a $300 check, and I gave her 300 ones to fold.

Edwina came next. She was from Mexico, and she presented a problem. I didn't care that she was Mexican—she was not legal to work, but I didn't give
a fuck and neither did she, in fact we both are the kind of people who would break those laws just to spite the government. Who are they, thinking they can tell us what to do, who can work and who can't? Plus, even though I was going to pay people $10 to $15 an hour to work at home while watching TV, using an illegal Mexican just seemed to make sense. But the real problem was not Edwina's immigration status, but that she didn't have a checking account, or a credit card, and certainly not $300 bucks in cash to give me.

But she was really cool and enthusiastic, so I let her leave her passport. It occurred to me that the passport could be fake, or stolen, and she could take the $300 and not come back for it. But who would go trolling around on Craigslist, in the Arts/Media Jobs section, looking to defraud someone making dollar-bill sculptures with a fake passport scheme? It didn't seem likely, and even if someone would do that, I didn't think it would be Edwina. So I set aside my paranoia, took her passport, and gave her $300 to fold.

Tim was next. Edwina and Chia had been a bit high-strung, but Tim was level. He seemed like a person who could sit there for hours doing the same thing, and not get bored, or let his attention wander for even a second. He said he had worked on art projects before, and he had worked as a machinist at a speaker factory. He seemed overqualified, but I liked that he had been a machinist, because I have done a lot of machine work myself. He was between jobs, so folding money was a good gig, even it did not take advantage of his skills in the most complete way.

Tim wanted to bring his deposit in cash, and that freaked me out. What kind of guy would be comfortable exchanging $500 in cash for 500 one-dollar bills to fold at home? And he didn't want to start with $300 like the others, he wanted to start with $500, because he could see how fast he would fold it. He said he lived far away, and he wanted his trip to be worth it. I imagined he was a drug dealer, having all that cash, or maybe a counterfeiter. What a great opportunity for a counterfeiter, just bring me the fake money, and I give you change in perfectly good ones! No more buying things you don't need and then selling them, or whatever counterfeiters do. But then, like with Edwina, I wondered what counterfeiter would go looking for an artist's assistant job
on Craigslist? I was still suspicious, but I figured a don't-ask-don't-tell policy was best, so into my file drawer went Tim's $500 in twenties and out the door went my $500 in ones.

Two days later he called to say he was ready to bring them back. He was the first of the three to call and I couldn't believe he had done them already. I had never actually folded $500 myself in one sitting, because in my experiments, I would fold what I needed, and then stop and weave them together. But Tim was focused and efficient, and he was in this to make money, not to play with it. He said he hoped it was OK, but he had folded my $500 so fast, that he went to the bank and got $500 more out and folded those too. I nearly shit myself. Tim was a keeper, assuming he was for real. But what could I do? If they looked like $1 bills then they were $1 bills to me, and they would be $1 bills to whoever I paid them to. Who counterfeits $1 bills anyway, and who ever thinks to check them?

The last of the first four assistants was Jessica. She had a regular day job doing something that I never really remembered what it was, maybe publishing, or nursing, or something like that. She seemed like a regular girl and I couldn't figure out what attracted her to something as weird as my project. She was the opposite of Tim, she always took a long time to bring a batch of bills back and she never folded them that well. She would take so long that she was only making $30 or $40 a week, and I wondered why she kept coming back. I think she liked hanging out in the studio. Besides folding at home, the five of us would work in the studio once a week, weaving the folded bills into the ladder.

Later on, when I switched from the ladder to hanging the safe, I hired 20 more people to fold one batch of $500 each. I used Craigslist again to find them. I hadn't noticed in the first round, but nearly everyone who responded were women. I ended up hiring 19 women and 1 man.

By that time I had gotten used to working with Chia and Tim and Edwina and Jessica, but I felt shitty all over again hiring the second group of people. I had reduced the pay and I knew they were only going to do one batch each,
so they could barely get up to speed. It felt much more exploitative. I trained them in groups of five or ten and didn’t even remember their names.

There was one woman in the second group, an Icelander named Sirry. She was bitchy and tough and beautiful, and she had a problem with work. When she came back after doing her batch of $500, she said she had been looking for work for months, and nobody would hire her. She begged me for more work. I could see why people wouldn’t hire her, because she had a terrible attitude, but she was fast and did neat work. So I gave her what I could after that. She did much better work than Jessica, so I fired Jessica and replaced her. I don’t remember how I fired her but she was the first person I had ever fired. I dreaded it beforehand, but it wasn’t as bad as I’d thought.
I was not content to mutilate money with my hands. I needed more power over it, more leverage with which to destroy its power over me. In reality, the machine I chose to help me was a pasta maker. But in my head I called it the “meatgrinder.”

When I first got the meatgrinder I realized it also had a shredding attachment, for cutting flat sheets of pasta into strips.

I thought this might not be sharp enough for dollars but I tried it and it worked perfectly. It was a beautiful sight, that crispy new $1 bill going through the serrated rollers and coming out the other side like herbal confetti.

Joe came in that night and saw the new pasta machine there on the desk and he had to try too. He fished a $1 bill out of his wallet and dropped the end into the rollers. Slowly he put his hand on the crank and started to turn. The bill inched its way into the machine and when the first shredded bits appeared on the other side, Joe looked up with a maniacal grin. It was so stupid it was beautiful. He cranked the rest of the bill through laughing hysterically and then after that we did another one.

After that, we decided enough kicks for one night and get back to work.
Later, I needed to know how strong dollar bills were, so I would know how thick to make the ropes to hold the safe up. I was still planning to climb the ladder myself, without getting permission from the university, but hanging the safe had to be approved by an engineer.

The strength of the ropes would be affected by their thickness (the number of bills in cross-section), as well as by the way they were woven together.

I had first tested the ropes by pulling on short pieces between my two hands. For more leverage, I would put a loop around my foot and pull on the ends. And for even more, I would put the loop over a sprinkler pipe in my studio and pull myself up on it. But these tests did not give numerical results. I wanted to hang a safe from the ceiling, and the engineer wanted numbers. So I had to find a lab.

I walked all over MIT looking for a lab that could test ropes. Finally I found one that could do it, but their machine did not have the right grips. The grips are the parts that grab onto the material to be tested. The lab's grips were not large enough to grab my dollar-bill ropes, so I had to make my own. I made the parts for them in the machine shop. It took a few days. The man at the lab was very busy and I was having a hard time making an appointment for the
test. Finally he called me late one afternoon and said I should come over right away. I was at the machine shop when he called, and had just finished making the parts for the grips. But I had not welded them together yet.

I like to make beautiful objects, whether they are to be shown as artwork, or just used as tools for making something else. So I had worked on the grips for much longer than necessary. The grips only had to hold rope, but I wanted to make all the edges smooth and all the surfaces shiny.

I was planning to weld the grips in my studio, but now I didn't have time to go back there. But the lab also had a welder, so I brought the grips in pieces for the lab man to weld. I would have welded them myself, but his welder was a different kind than mine and I didn't know how to use it. So he welded the pieces together. He did it really fast and messy, and I went in the other room because I couldn't watch. When he was done my beautiful grip-parts were covered with soot and weld-spatter. But they were welded together, and we started the tests right away.

First we tested $1 bills which were not assembled into ropes, just folded up in quarters, to see what was the strength of a single bill. The lab man and his friend made a lot of jokes about the “strength of the dollar.” It turned out that the strength of the dollar is about 60 pounds. The machine tested the dollars by gripping onto the ends. It was important to put a little piece of paper between the dollar and the metal jaws of the grip, so that the force of gripping would not cause the dollar to break right at the jaw. That would be a “bad test.” We put the dollars in the grips and tightened them, and then the machine would start to move the upper grip very slowly higher. It made a quiet humming noise while it did this. You could barely see it move. As it moved the lab man watched numbers on the console. There was a red number that would show how far the upper grip had moved. There was also a computer where the force of the pulling was shown and recorded. The farther the upper grip moved, the more it stretched the dollar, until the dollar tore. The computer recorded the force and the maximum force it recorded was the strength of the dollar.
So the red number would go up and the bill would get tight and then it
would snap and the lab man would turn off the machine.

For the single-dollar tests we tested three new dollars and three old dol-

lars. The three new dollars held 59.6 pounds, 58.5 pounds, and 61.2 pounds.
The old dollars were weaker. They held 49.5 pounds, 55.6 pounds and 51.3
pounds.

Actually, the computer measured in Newtons. There are 4.44 Newtons in
a pound. After each dollar snapped, the lab man would tell me its strength in
Newtons and I would write it on a piece of paper and divide it by 4.44 to see
how many pounds it was.

After we finished testing single dollars it was time to test the ropes I had
brought. I had two of the the loops we were using to make the rungs of the
ladder, and a piece of the thicker rope that would reinforce the sides. I put the
new, weld-spattered grips on the machine. The regular grips grabbed onto the
ends of the dollars, like pulling on a stick between your fingers. My new grips
had rollers, that went inside the loop, and pulled it like you would stretch a
rubber band.

The lab man started the machine, and the force numbers on the computer
started to climb. The lab man read them off every second or two. The upper
grip moved higher very slowly. The lab man got impatient and pushed a but-
tton to make it move faster.

The strap got very tight and then it started clicking. The lab man was
still reading numbers off the computer screen but they were not getting any
higher. The machine kept humming and pulling at the strap very slowly, and
the strap kept clicking. We put our faces near the strap and tried to see what
was hapening. It was hard to see but we figured that the bills must be slipping
apart instead of breaking. In these straps there were long fibers that went the
length of the strap and smaller fibers that went crosswise to hold them togeth-
er. The bills in the lengthwise fibers hold together by friction. They are folded
together in an interlocking way so that just the friction of one bill against the
other holds them from slipping apart. The more the dollars are folded over,
the more they press against each other and the harder they are to pull apart.
So a 1/4 fold fiber (with the bills folded in half twice) is weaker than a 1/8 fold (where they are folded three times).

The strap we were testing was 1/4 fold and the fibers were woven. In a woven pattern the fibers go in two directions, kinking over and under each other, and the kinking also helps keep the bills from slipping apart. But as the machine pulled, it was pulling out all the kinks so the fibers were straight. That left only the friction to keep them together and 1/4 fold did not give enough friction. The clicking was the sound of the bills slipping apart, bit by bit, to accommodate the longer length between the two grips. The rope was stretching out. It had reached its maximum strength and now it was breaking, but very slowly.

The lab man turned the speed up even faster. The rope clicked faster and now we could see it pulling apart. It was definitely broken. The lab man turned off the machine and I recorded the maximum strength. 1166 Newtons or 266 pounds.

266 pounds is more than I weigh, so it was strong enough for the ladder, but the design was flawed. The dollars were slipping apart rather than breaking. The inefficiency was unsatisfying. A good design would break rather than slipping.

We tested another two straps made in the same way, and they slipped as well. Finally we tested a small piece of 1/8 fold strap. It held nearly as much as the other three straps, even though it was much smaller. The extra fold made the difference, and I knew that the new rope design, for hanging the safe, would have to use the extra fold. I didn’t like to learn this, because the extra fold was a lot of work. But there it was.
Often the remnants which are cast off during a production process are as interesting as the final product. This is especially true when working on a metal lathe.

I worked on a lathe for several days while making the ropes to hang the safe. The assistants I had hired folded $1 bills into quarters, and assembled them into sticks of 12 bills. The next step was to fold the sticks in half again into 1/8 the width of a dollar. After that, I would braid the 1/8 fold sticks into ropes, softening them with water as I braided.

Folding the 1/4 fold sticks in half was difficult, and hard on the hands. To fold one stick was nothing but twenty would take an hour and would leave your fingers aching. To hang the safe I needed nearly a thousand. I could not fold them all myself, and I did not want to use the assistants, because doing a good job was difficult and painful. Besides, I had spent enough on assistants. The point was to braid money into ropes, not spend it on assistants.

I first made a machine like a sheet-metal break to fold the sticks. But it was slow and cumbersome. The pasta maker was the next generation. I made a special attachment that would guide the stick into the rollers, and start folding it in half at the same time. Then the rollers would grab the end, pull the rest of the stick through the attachment, and crease the fold.

The original pasta maker was built for rolling soft pasta dough, not stiff sticks of dollar bills, so I had to make new rollers for it in the machine shop.
A metal lathe is a machine which turns a piece of metal. Usually the pieces you work on are cylindrical. While the metal is turning, a blade comes up against it with great pressure and shaves off some of the metal to make the cylinder smaller. The shavings that fall off are scrap, and the smaller cylinder is what you are after. Yet often the shavings are more interesting than the piece you are supposed to be making. They come in all different shapes—flakes and strings and dust. The spiral is one of the most common shapes. There are many kinds of spirals, tighter or looser, bigger or smaller, flatter or thinner.

Earlier, I had made a round rope like a whip out of dollar bills. And when I took it apart, one of the strings of bills retained the shape of a spiral. It reminded me of the spirals from a metal lathe, and now I was using a metal lathe, making spirals of metal, as I rebuilt a pasta maker to fold more dollar bills.

The machine shop was very busy. Students from all the different science departments were in there, working on projects. Some of them were working for research labs, making parts for robots or turbine blades or rocket engines or who knows what. The students would be assigned by their lab to make something out of metal, and they would show up at the machine shop not knowing what to do. There was only one guy who worked there, and he would have to show them everything, so he was also very busy. Besides asking him how to use the machines, students would ask him for scraps and chunks of metal that he kept around the shop. You were supposed to bring your own materials, but you always needed some little thing that you hadn't thought to buy, and often there was a piece lying around the shop that would work for you. The machine shop guy knew this as well as anyone, and he liked to help people, giving them a piece here or there. But he was always on guard against people coming to him first, relying on him for free material in the first place and not just in emergencies.

When I first showed up to rebuild the pasta maker, the machine shop guy was pretty accommodating. But as the days went on, he got busier. There were more and more other students, and my own project got more and more complicated. The first sets of rollers I made did not work, and I would revise the design and try again, and each design was more complicated and difficult
than the last. Also, I needed very little material, and did not know where to buy it, so I never brought my own, but used whatever was in the shop. So I was constantly pushing the machine shop guy's limits, and testing his patience.

Finally he told me that I couldn't use the shop anymore, because he was too busy with the science students and their laboratory projects. I realized then that I hadn't told him what I was doing with the pasta maker, so he thought I was rebuilding it just for fun. I told him it was part of my thesis to rebuild this pasta machine, that I was redesigning it to fold strips of dollar bills from which I would make rope, which was academic research under the auspices of Course 4, Architecture.

He already knew I was in the Architecture department, and he had said he liked Architecture people, because we were one of the few departments that were hands-on and knew how to make stuff. When I told him the pasta rollers were for my thesis, he let me use the shop all I wanted, and stopped complaining when I asked him for bits of metal.

After I had finished the machine and made the ropes and hung the safe, I dropped by to give him an invitation for the opening. He had already got one in the mail. He said he thought there was something funny about this work. He said he thought it must be a "statement against money."

I've been thinking about your installation he said, and I've decided you must be making some kind of statement against money.
o that was it, that was the project. As I said in the introduction, this book was written backwards. The introduction is the real conclusion.

Still, it seems like there should be something to read at the end. So I am including this story, *Theft in a Pastry Shop*, by Italo Calvino. A friend of mine pointed it out to me early on in the project, around the time of the videos, or the first experiments with weaving dollars. I can see why she pointed it out, because it also deals with excess, and what to do with it.

When I invited the machine shop guy to the exhibition, he said I must be making "some kind of statement against money." I think this story must be another such statement.

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“Come on,” he replied. And he walked along in silence, through streets empty as dry rivers, with the moon following them along the tramlines, Dritto ahead, gazing around with those restless yellow eyes of his, his nostrils moving as if they were smelling something peculiar.

Baby was called that because he had a big head like a newborn baby and a stumpy body; also perhaps because of his short hair and pretty little face with its small black mustache. All muscle, he moved so softly he might have been a cat; there was no one like him at climbing up walls and squeezing through openings, and Dritto always had good reason to take him along.

“Will it be a good job, Dritto?” asked Baby.

“If we bring it off,” answered Dritto—a reply that didn’t mean much.

Meanwhile, by a devious route that only he knew, he had led them around a corner into a yard. The other two soon realized that they were going to work on the back of a shop, and Uora-Uora pushed ahead in case he was left as lookout. It always fell to Uora-Uora to be lookout man; he longed to break into houses, search around, and fill his pockets like the others, but he always found himself standing guard on cold streets, in danger from police patrols, his teeth chattering in the cold, and chain-smoking to calm his nerves.

Uora-Uora was an emaciated Sicilian, with a sad mulatto face and wrists jutting out of his sleeves. When on a job he always dressed up in his best, God knows why, complete with hat, tie, and raincoat, and if forced to run for it, he’d snatch up the ends of his raincoat as if spreading wings.

“You’re lookout, Uora-Uora,” said Dritto, dilating his nostrils. Uora-Uora took off quietly; he knew Dritto and the danger signal of those dilating nostrils, which would move quicker and quicker until they suddenly stopped and he whipped out a revolver.
“There,” Dritto said to Baby. He pointed to a little window high off the ground, a piece of cardboard in place of a broken pane. “You climb up, get in, and open for me,” he said. “Be sure not to put on the lights: they’ll be seen from outside.”

Baby pulled himself up on the smooth wall like a monkey, pushed in the cardboard without a sound, and stuck his head through. It was then that he became aware of the smell; he took a deep breath and up through his nostrils wafted an aroma of freshly baked cakes. It gave him a feeling of shy excitement, of remote tenderness, rather than of actual greed.

Oh, what a lot of cakes there must be in here, he thought. It was years since he had eaten a proper piece of cake, not since before the war perhaps. He decided to search around till he found them. He jumped down into the darkness, kicked against a telephone, got a broomstick up his trouser leg, and then hit the ground. The smell of cakes was stronger than ever, but he couldn’t tell where it was coming from.

Yes, there must be a lot of cakes in here, thought Baby. He reached out a hand, trying to feel his way in the dark, so he could reach the door and open it for Dritto. Quickly he recoiled in horror; he must be face to face with some animal, some soft slimy sea-thing, perhaps. He stood there with his hand in the air, a hand that had suddenly become damp and sticky, as if covered with leprosy. Between the fingers had sprouted something round and soft, an excrescence, maybe a tumor. He strained his eyes in the dark but could see nothing, not even when he put his hand under his nose. But he could smell, even though he could not see; and he burst out laughing. He realized he had touched a tart and was holding a blob of cream and a crystallized cherry.

At once he began licking the hand, and groping around with the other at the same time. It touched something solid but soft, with a thin covering of fine sugar—a doughnut! Still groping, he popped the whole of it into his mouth and gave a little cry of pleasure on discovering it had jam inside. This really was the most wonderful place; whatever way he stretched out his hand in the dark, it found new kinds of cakes.

Suddenly he became aware of an impatient knocking on a door nearby; it was Dritto waiting to be let in. As Baby moved toward the sound, his hands bumped first into a meringue and then into an almond cake. He opened the door and Dritto’s flashlight lit up his little face, its mustache already white with cream.

“It’s full of cakes here!” exclaimed Baby, as if the other did not know.

“There isn’t time for cakes,” said Dritto, pushing him aside. “We’ve got to hurry.” And he went ahead, twisting the beam of his flashlight around in the dark. Everywhere it touched it lit up rows of shelves, and on the shelves rows of trays, and on the trays rows of cakes of every conceivable shape and color, tarts filled with cream that glittered like candle wax, piles of sugar-coated buns, and castles of almond cakes.

It was then that a terrible worry came over Baby, the worry of not having time to eat all he wanted, of being forced to make his escape before he had sampled all the different kinds of cakes, of having all this land of milk and honey at his disposal for only a few minutes in his whole life. And the more cakes he discovered, the more his anxiety increased, so that every new corner and every fresh view of the shop that was lit up by Dritto’s flashlight seemed to be about to shut him off.

He flung himself at the shelves, choking himself with cakes, cramming two or three inside his mouth at a time, without even tasting them; he seemed to be battling with the cakes, as if they were threatening enemies, strange monsters besieging him, a crisp and sticky siege which he must break through by the force of his jaw. The slit halves of the big sugared buns seemed to be opening
yellow throats and eyes at him, the cream horns to be blossoming like flowers of carnivorous plants; for a horrible moment Baby had the feeling that it was he who was being devoured by the cakes.

Dritto pulled him by the arm. “The till,” he said. “We’ve got to open the till.”

At the same time, as he passed, he stuffed a piece of multi-colored spongecake into his mouth, a cherry off a tart, and then a brioche—hurriedly, as if anxious not to be distracted from the job at hand. He had switched off his flashlight.

“From outside they could see us clearly,” he said.

They had now reached the front of the pastry shop, with its showcases and marble countertops. Through the grilled shutters the lights from the street entered in streaks; outside they could see strange shadows on the trees and houses.

Now the moment had come to force the till.

“Hold this,” said Dritto, handing the flashlight to Baby with the beam pointing downward so that it could not be seen from outside.

But Baby was holding the flashlight with one hand and groping around with the other. He seized an entire plum cake and, while Dritto was busy at the lock with his tools, began chewing it as if it were a loaf of bread. But he soon tired of it and left it half eaten on the marble slab.

“Get away from there! Look what a filthy mess you’re making,” hissed Dritto through clenched teeth; in spite of his trade he had a strange respect for tidy work. Then he couldn’t resist the temptation, either, and stuffed two cakes, the kind that were half sponge and half chocolate, into his mouth, though without interrupting his work.

Baby, meanwhile, in order to have both hands free, had constructed a kind of lampshade from tray cloths and pieces of nougat. He then espied some large cakes with “Happy Birthday” written on them. He circled them, studying the plan of attack; first he reviewed them with a finger and licked off a bit of chocolate cream, then he buried his face inside and began biting them from the middle, one by one.

But he still felt a kind of frenzy, which he did not know how to satisfy; he could not discover any way of enjoying everything completely. Now he was crouching on all fours over a table laden with tarts; he would have liked to lie down in those tarts, cover himself with them, never have to leave them. But five or ten minutes from now it would be all over; for the rest of his life pastry shops would be out of bounds to him again, forever, like when he was a child squashing his nose against the windowpane. If only, at least, he could stay there three or four hours...

“Dritto,” he exclaimed, “suppose we hide here till dawn, who’ll see us?”

“Don’t be a fool,” said Dritto, who had now succeeded in forcing the till and was searching around among the notes. “We’ve got to get out of here before the cops show up.”

Just at that moment they heard a rap on the window. In the dim moonlight Uora-Uora could be seen knocking on the blind and making signs to them. The two in the shop gave a jump, but Uora-Uora motioned for them to keep calm and for Baby to come out and take his place, so that he could come in. The other two shook their fists and made faces at him and gestured for him to get away from the front of the shop if he didn’t want his brains blown out.

Dritto, however, had found only a few thousand lire in the till, and was cursing and blaming Baby for not trying to help him. But Baby seemed beside himself; he was biting into doughnuts, picking at raisins, licking syrups, plastering himself all over and leaving sticky marks on the showcases and counters. He found that he no longer had any desire for cakes—in fact a feeling of nausea was beginning to creep up from the pit of his stomach—but he refused to take it seriously, he simply could not give up yet. And the dough-
nuts began to turn into soggy pieces of spongecake, the tarts to flypaper, the cakes to asphalt. Now he saw only the corpses of cakes lying putrefying on their marble slabs, or felt them disintegrating like turgid glue inside his stomach.

Dritto, meanwhile, was cursing and swearing at the lock on another till, forgetful of cakes and hunger. Suddenly, from the back of the shop appeared Uora-Uora, swearing in his Sicilian dialect, which was quite unintelligible to either of them.

"The cops?" they asked, already pale.

"Change of guard! Change of guard!" Uora-Uora was croaking in his dialect, trying hard to explain how unjust it was to leave him starving out in the cold while they gorged themselves with cakes inside.

"Go back and keep watch, go and keep watch!" shouted Baby angrily, the nausea from having eaten too much making him feel savage and selfish.

Dritto knew that it was only fair to Uora-Uora to make the change, but he also knew that Baby would not be convinced so easily, and without someone on guard they couldn't stay. So he pulled out his revolver and pointed it at Uora-Uora.

"Back to your post right now, Uora-Uora," he said.

Desperately, Uora-Uora thought of getting some supplies before leaving, and gathered in his big hands a small pile of little almond cakes with nuts.

"And suppose they catch you with your hands full of cakes, you fool, what'll you tell them?" Dritto swore at him. "Leave them all there and get out."

Uora-Uora burst into tears. Baby felt he hated him. He picked up a cake with "Happy Birthday" written on it and flung it in Uora-Uora's face. Uora-Uora could easily have avoided it, but instead he extended his face to get the full force, then burst out laughing, for his face, hat, and tie were all covered in cream cake. Off he went, licking himself right up to his nose and cheeks.

At last Dritto succeeded in forcing the till and was stuffing into his pocket all the notes he could find, cursing because they stuck to his jammy fingers.

"Come on, Baby, time to go," he said.

But Baby could not leave just like that; this was a feast to be talked over for years to come with his cronies and with Tuscan Mary. Tuscan Mary was Baby's girl friend; she had long smooth legs and a face and body that were almost horselike. Baby liked her because he could curl himself up and wind around her like a cat.

Uora-Uora's second entrance interrupted the course of these thoughts. Dritto quickly pulled out his revolver, but Uora-Uora shouted, "The cops!" and rushed off, flapping the ends of his raincoat. Dritto gathered up the last few notes and was at the door in a couple of leaps, with Baby behind.

Baby was still thinking of Tuscan Mary, and it was then that he remembered he might have taken some cakes for her; he never gave her presents and she might make a scene about it. He went back, snatched up some cream rolls, thrust them under his shirt, then, quickly realizing that he had chosen the most fragile ones, looked around for some more solid things and stuffed those into his bosom, too. At that moment he saw the shadows of policemen moving on the window, waving their arms and pointing at something at the end of the street; one of them aimed a revolver in that direction and fired.

Baby squatted down behind a counter. The shot did not seem to have hit its target; now they were making angry gestures and peering inside the shop. Shortly afterward he heard them finding the little door open, and then coming in. Now the shop was teeming with armed policemen. Baby remained crouching there, but mean-
while he found some candied fruit within arm's reach and chewed at slivers of citron and bergamot to calm his nerves.

The police had now discovered the theft and also found the remains of half-eaten cakes on the shelves. And so, distractedly, they, too, began to nibble little cakes that were lying about—taking care, though, to leave the traces of the thieves. After a few moments, becoming more enthusiastic in their search for evidence, they were all eating away heartily.

Baby was chewing, but the others were chewing even more loudly and drowned out the sound. All of a sudden he felt a thick liquid oozing up from between his skin and his shirt, and a mounting nausea from his stomach. He was so dizzy with candied fruit that it was some time before he realized that the way to the door was free. Later the police described how they had seen a monkey, its nose plastered with cream, swing across the shop, overturning trays and tarts; and how, by the time that they had recovered from their amazement and cleared the tarts from under their feet, he had escaped.

When Baby got to Tuscan Mary's and opened his shirt, he found his whole chest covered with a strange sticky paste. And they stayed till morning, he and she, lying on the bed, licking and picking at each other till they had finished the last crumb of cake and blob of cream.
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