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MONEY AS WE KNEW IT?

I am persistently plagued by a strange vision of wealth, triumph and liberation. However much I fight it, I cannot extricate myself from that dream: suddenly, I see myself swimming in gold.

Léon Bloy, *Diary*, 19 June 1902¹

Throw a dollar at me, would ya? How does it feel to have a million thrown at you?

Carl Barks, 'Letter to Santa'²

MONEY GIVES US pleasure, Brecht needlessly told us, but that is not what will be meant here—not the kind of pleasure ignited by money because we lust after the unlimited opportunities it promises. We should rather be thinking of something more banal and mysterious: of the intrinsic sensuousness of the actual money itself—small metal discs, or oblong strips of rustling, crackling paper. In Balzac, an artist tries to marry into a bourgeois family; he carelessly remarks that money is there to be spent—since it is round, it must roll. The father of the family, reacting with the deepest mistrust, replies: 'If it is round for prodigals, it is flat for economical people who pile it up.'³ The opposite approaches of the bohemian and the rentier (by the end of the tale they have comfortably fused) converge in images of the concrete pleasures of money. Both are thinking of the ways in which hands unconsciously encircle coins, a physical sensation. One man high-spiritedly lets them roll loose, the other deliberately stacks them on top of each other, with greedy precision. The spendthrift and the miser both *feel* the coins between their fingers.

The object of the following capriccio is the invisible stamp of this physical contact in our daily lives—and its gradual disappearance. Its concern is with the experience caught in one of the finest stories by Karen Blixen: 'Mr. Clay said, "The sailor told the others that he had held a five guinea

piece in the palm of his hand, and that he felt the weight and the cold of gold upon it”.⁴

It could be that in the near future Benjamin’s concept of aura—which in simple terms means that something assumes a particularly intense and melancholy power of fascination at the moment of its disappearance—might apply to money. Are not those of us born before 1990 the last generations that really know money, the last for whom familiarity with it is second nature? Not in the sense of a monetary economy at large—which is certainly not vanishing, but flourishing as never before, indeed celebrating the most disastrous victories—but that of an intimate, daily contact with coinage and banknotes. We have been used to money as an object for so long that it comes as a tiny shock to visualize what will disappear in a monetary system without cash: money (we will soon be saying) ‘as we knew it’.

To anticipate this future: contrary to every repetition of *non olet*, it was once possible to be repelled by money (Arno Schmidt: ‘out of spite, get all the coins cleaned before touching them’;⁵ and in certain exclusive hotels, guests indeed had their money washed overnight). You could also play with it—as a worry bead, or a spinning top on a table. That parents warned: ‘Money is not to be played with!’ made it even more attractive to children, most of whom at one time or another played a game of skill, not just for but actually *with* money, throwing coins to make them land as close to the foot of a wall as possible. The coin was plaything and reward in one, as posterity will be able to study in old films—think of Steve McQueen in *The Cincinnati Kid* or Danny Aiello in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Money was an oracle: heads or tails. A coin could be the prop for big, dramatic gestures—Claude Akins inviting an inebriated Dean Martin to fish his silver dollar out of the spittoon in *Rio Bravo*. In *River of No Return*, Marilyn Monroe singing ‘One silver dollar’ . . . But it is better

¹ The journals of Léon Bloy quoted here are collected in *Le Mendiant ingrat* (1892–1895), Paris 1898; *Mon Journal* (1896–1900), Paris 1904; *Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne* (1900–1904), 1905. References are by date.

² *Walt Disney’s Christmas Parade* No. 1, November 1949. This and the following comic books are without pagination.

³ Balzac, ‘La Maison du Chat qui pelote’, *La Comédie humaine I: Études de Mœurs: Scènes de la vie privée*, Paris 1951, p. 48.

⁴ Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen, ‘The Immortal Story’, *Anecdotes of Destiny*, London 1958, p. 158.

⁵ Arno Schmidt, *KAFF auch Mare Crisium*, Karlsruhe 1960, p. 256.

to stop here, Westerns alone unleashing a cataract of such recollections, of which readers can no doubt evoke a few of their own.

Among the many celebrated or legendary coins—from Judas's thirty pieces of silver to the doubloon that Ahab nails to the mast—worryingly recalled by the narrator in Borges's 'El Zahir', one of the most striking is that which betrayed a fleeing Louis XVI at Varennes. Embossed on every coin of the realm, the image of the monarch acts as a 'Wanted' poster when the king tries to escape unrecognized. This homecoming of hundreds of thousands of coins to their individual origin has something dizzying about it. The effect is similar to those strange limit-cases of exchange constructed by Stevenson in 'The Bottle Imp', in which the characters need an ever smaller denomination to sell the diabolical object on to the next person for a lower price than they paid for it, or Mark Twain's story 'The £1,000,000 Bank-Note', in which the denomination is so large that you never need to break into it, since no-one can give you change or would even expect to receive money from anyone so rich. Yet the mystery of money lies not so much in such extreme cases as in its mere material existence as a physical object. 'The clerk in Terry Kelly's said *A crown!* but the consignor held out for six shillings, and in the end the six shillings was allowed him literally. He came out of the pawn-office joyfully, making a little cylinder of the coins between his thumb and fingers'—the fleetingly tangible and meaningful object of a vignette in *Dubliners*.⁶ Are we getting closer to 'the riddle of the money fetish' Marx harped upon?

Circulation as sin

On 12 April 1904 Léon Bloy⁷ wrote of his landlady: 'This wretch, whose last hour on earth will no doubt soon be here, will be leaving this

⁶ James Joyce, 'Counterparts', in *The Essential James Joyce*, London 1948, p. 79.

⁷ Léon Bloy (1846–1917) was a critic, ruthless polemicist and writer of prose fictions (Borges included some of his fantastic tales in his *biblioteca de Babel*). As a youthful bohemian in Second Empire Paris his conversion to a radical and mystical Catholicism led him to oppose not only the hated bourgeois world (and a Church forgetful of Christ), but also the literary *beau monde*. His diaries, two novels (*Le Désespéré*, 1886, and *La Femme pauvre*, 1897), acerbic stories and historico-religious treatises (among them *Le Salut par les juifs*, 1892, surely the most astonishing celebration of the Jews ever written by a confirmed anti-semiter) form an impressive body of merciless criticism of bourgeois society by an ardently poor and passionate reactionary.

miserable world on her way to the Throne of Judgement with the bread of my innocent children in her yellow-toothed maw.' Rarely has hatred been distilled into such venomous expressions as in the writing of this Catholic mystic of the Belle Epoque. Did he belong to it? *Per negationem*, in his anarchic loathing for a bourgeois world order, a loathing that sprang from a painfully lived spirituality. Who else would have dared to write, after a fire at a charity bazaar in Paris in May 1897, in which a number of aristocratic benefactresses lost their lives:

when reading the first reports of this frightful disaster, I had the clear and delightful sensation of an enormous weight lifted from my soul. Only the low number of victims somewhat diminished my joy. At last, I nevertheless said to myself, at last! AT LAST justice begins to prevail.

In Bloy, arson—in any and every sense—figures as a sublime handiwork. He who also called himself 'the Ungrateful Beggar' wrote of the form of his bourgeois existence: 'Thus I go begging like someone who asks for alms at the door of a farmhouse, only to return and set fire to it later'.⁸

Few people have given as much thought to money as Bloy. He needed to think about it every day since, along with his wife and his children, he was constantly exposed to desperate poverty; which makes his diaries not only a quarry of the most disconcerting ideas, and register of the most raging obloquies, but a chronicle of grotesque disputes with landlords and butchers. 'With deep sighs we empty our children's tiny money-boxes'—'Lack of money mysteriously characterizes my life to such an extent that, even when I don't have any money at all, it seems to *dwindle even further*'.⁹ Moreover, with considerable speculative effort he eventually made money into the centre of a strange mystical theology, which has always remained deeply suspect to the Church. Its central insight is that money is nothing but Christ crucified. The circulation of money is the continuation *in perpetuo* of Christ's suffering upon the cross. From every piece of defiled coinage—all money not given unconditionally to the poor is, and remains, cursed—stares out the face of Christ, punched and spat upon by the rabble. (We should not forget that Bloy took descriptions by Catholic mystics and, in particular, the visions of Anna Katharina Emmerich of Dülmen of the 'agony of our Lord Jesus Christ' for absolute truth.) Money is simultaneously and indissolubly both the curse and the deliverance of the world. The tendering of a few coins

⁸ Bloy, *Journal*, 21 October 1894.

⁹ Bloy, *Journal*, 9 October 1902 and 8 April 1893.

over a shop-counter opens an abyss that reaches to the heart of the universe. For money, which is always extorted from the poor and always withheld from them, is in all truth 'the suffering of Christ': at once never-ending horror and mysterious promise of salvation. The landscape of Bloy's mental universe can only be hinted at here. But rarely has an author developed figures of thought by which to immerse himself with such intensity in the most trivial aspects of his daily life and, at the same time, to distance himself so uncompromisingly from anything to do with the present.

Bloy's writing is strewn with gimlet observations about money. But in a masterly stroke he set the *summa* of his mystical *theologia pecuniae* where one would least expect it—in a work that scans and analyses the commonplaces of the bourgeois world. His *Exégèse des lieux communs* is close to Karl Kraus's technique of satirical quotation. Bloy lets everyone talk their necks into a noose without interrupting them. He simply collects the dismal mottos of bourgeois life and subjects them to what could be described, strange though this might sound, as a technique of mystical satire. He notes what is being said: 'you are a character'—'a heart of gold'—'playing with fire'—'you have to run with the pack'—'you only die once'; and then deciphers the mysterious truth of these phrases, by means of a theology that unrelentingly relates them to the whole—on the grounds that, 'like everything that originates from imbeciles or scoundrels', they must have a deeper meaning. The category of the social unconscious would have been alien to Bloy, but he suggests something similar: an echo of transcendental truth that reverberates compulsively through the void of bourgeois unconsciousness. In the web of these phrases, which have only partial equivalents in English, money looms as large as in Bloy's clairvoyant fantasy: 'time is money'; 'judge him by the colour of his money'; 'put a bit of money to one side'; 'don't turn your nose up at money'—in French, *on ne crache pas sur l'argent*, one does not spit at it. Of the habitual use of 'on', Bloy writes: 'Every time a bourgeois opens his mouth, this mysterious *on* sounds like a money-bag being dumped heavily on the floor of an adjoining room where someone has been murdered.'¹⁰

Time and again, elevation of the abstract immateriality of money to the level of the mystical leads to sudden, unheard-of intensification of it as

¹⁰ Bloy, *Exégèse des lieux communs*, Première série, Paris 1902; Deuxième série, Paris 1913.

sensual. A passage in Bloy's comment on the phrase *retrer dans son argent*—burying oneself in one's money might be an approximation—proposes: 'In an insane kind of way, one ought to imagine something like a river or an ocean of money in which people could bathe at a certain time of year. They would talk of the money season, just as they now talk about the season in Trouville or Evian'.¹¹ To this the reader of today might juxtapose an image utterly foreign to Bloy, yet perhaps secretly and oddly linked to his way of looking at the world. For who else would exclaim, 'I miss my daily bath. My money bath, of course', if not Donald Duck's Uncle Scrooge, the richest duck in the world.

Rolling in gold

Carl Barks's comic-book stories of Uncle Scrooge—a spin-off from the Disney cartoon series—offer a canonical encyclopaedia of libidinous relations to money.¹² His Scrooge is obviously related to Dickens's miser and kindred *topoi* of European comedy from Molière to Antiquity; but he far surpasses these classical embodiments of avarice. Uncle Scrooge's famous money-bin contains a hilly landscape made out of coins, interspersed with banknotes, in which he spends his time. He likes to announce the ritualized programme of actions the money-drive imposes on him with reiterated phrases: 'I dive around in it like a porpoise—and I burrow through it like a gopher—and I toss it up and let it hit me on the head'. Clearly recognizable in this trio of money joys are three movements of any playful child: leaping into the pond, rummaging under the duvet and—the earliest gesture of delight—tossing toys high up into the air. The impressive massif of Uncle Scrooge's money, the backdrop and punch-line of so many of Barks's stories, might by its sheer volume

¹¹ Bloy, 'On . . .', *Exégèse*, Première série, CLXXVII.

¹² Carl Barks (1902–2000) was born and raised on a small farm in rural Oregon. He left school at 14 and worked as a woodcutter, tanner, mule-driver, cowboy, rail repairman and printer's hand. A self-taught cartoonist, he submitted his drawings to magazines across the Midwest and was eventually taken on by the *Calgary Eye-Opener*, in the midst of the Depression. Barks was hired by Walt Disney in 1935 and by 1937 was originating storyboards for Donald Duck. In 1942 he left the studio to work with Western Publishing, which held licences to several Disney characters, including Donald Duck. Barks authored and illustrated comic strips with his duck characters until the 1970s. In Germany, translations of the Barks comics for the weekly *Mickey Maus* magazine were originally done by the art historian Dr Erika Fuchs, who filled Barks's speech bubbles with allusions to Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and Wagner, along with humorous alliterations and wordplay.

obscure the crucial fact that for Scrooge McDuck ('world's richest duck and darn well going to stay that way') all coins are individual. This gigantic accumulation of 'dough'—to use the idiom of Scrooge's disrespectful antagonists, the Beagle Boys, a gang of safe-crackers for whom indeed only its volume counts (which, according to the magical laws of this narration, in the end prevents them from pulling off a successful robbery)—is for Uncle Scrooge a concentrate of intimacy, in which every item is saturated with memory. Every plunge into the immeasurable pile of money on which he sits and argues with his nephews unearths some particular recollection; 'This silver dollar—1898! I got that in the Klondike! And this dollar—1882! I got that in Montana.'¹³ Often the memory is of triumphant renunciation: 'Oh, oh! I recognize that dime! It's one I didn't spend at the World's Fair in 1907!'¹⁴ The recollection always serves to bestow uniqueness upon a coin. Each one is of vital importance. If a disaster befalls his fortune, it is usually through one single coin, for instance the dime that Donald sneeringly throws into his uncle's top hat in *A Christmas for Shacktown*, when Scrooge has gone, as an experiment, to beg in a park before Christmas; this little dime, tossed through the skylight into the jam-packed money bin, causes the whole enormous mass to plunge into the abyss.¹⁵

Ravenous for every new coin, Scrooge rages: 'I need it to make the pile deeper', as he wallows on the ever-growing heap.¹⁶ In a world which knows the strictly regulated ballet of flirtation and jealousy, but neither love or sex, his motion is the nearest thing to a sexual act. In a key episode of a classic tale, Uncle Scrooge goes to the doctor because he is not feeling well. The examination shows that his pores are blocked with gold dust. 'Do you roll in gold?' the doctor asks in disbelief. Blushing, Scrooge intimates that he doesn't want to talk about it.¹⁷ Like an echo, the same question is repeated at the end of the story; again the magnate blushes, with the expression of one whose perversions risk exposure. From a clinical point of view, Scrooge's relationship to money is indeed polymorphously perverse: all his senses partake of his passionate attachment—sight; sound (the jingling of money!); especially smell; even taste (at least when a banknote is being kissed); not to speak of

¹³ *Uncle Scrooge in Only a Poor Old Man*, Dell Four Color 386, March 1952.

¹⁴ *Disneyland Birthday Party* No. 1, October 1958 ('Uncle Scrooge and Gyro').

¹⁵ *A Christmas for Shacktown*, Dell Four Color 367, January–February 1952.

¹⁶ *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* 124, January 1951.

¹⁷ *Uncle Scrooge* 8, February 1955.

touch, as he rolls about in his accumulation of hundreds of thousands of coins, each of which, inexplicably, remains 'individual'.

Naturally, such fetishism of every individual coin leads to a total suspension of exchange. Scrooge is not going to hand over any money—to do so is so repugnant to him that, when once forced to spend some money in order to avoid entering a higher tax bracket, he has to employ (and, paradoxically, pay) Donald for the task. Sensual fixation on the money itself eliminates exchange, because the coin is so desirable that nothing can compete with it. (From the other side of the world, the theology of the ungrateful beggar also cancels any principle of exchange: redemption lies in alms alone—*something for nothing*.)

It has sometimes been emphasized how much the stories of Donald and Uncle Scrooge owe to the unstable and impoverished early life of Carl Barks, the graphic artist chiefly responsible for designing the world of Duckburg for the Disney company. Certainly the scenario in which the leading man, Donald Duck, regularly loses his job, is never able to repay the money he borrows, and—he, too!—has to break into his nephews' piggy bank when an unexpected yet unavoidable expense bears down, reflects the life-world of the comic-reading public of the day with startling directness. The Ducksaga thus has more in common with burlesque low-life comic strips like Willard's *Moon Mullins* than with other 'funny animals' comics. The universe depicted here with grotesque harshness is one in which financial transactions are conducted almost exclusively in cash (in keeping with Barks's background in the world of the little man, in the era of the wage packet)—all the more strikingly, as the sums become larger. In Duckburg, cash is pushed across the counter; if a significant acquisition is involved—the purchase of a car, a hotel or a racehorse—then an entire sack of money crashes onto the table, or you hear the slap of thick wads of banknotes. Cashless transactions are meaningless. If they feature at some point, then the cheque is immediately turned into an *object* again—a quiddity of paper on which, in a hotel fire for example, the ink of the signature is smudged by the sprinkler system.

In such episodes the cheque, too, serves as the prop in a comedy, as elsewhere the receipted 100 or the bundle of valuable stocks and shares inside a safe that cannot be opened: objects that have the same melodramatic function as the mysterious papers in Victorian novels—wills, love-letters, evidence of secret marriages or hushed-up births—which are not just

documents but enigmatically vibrating generators of action. Yet in Barks their importance to the story is limited. Large sums are represented by coins, served up as a metallically sparkling heap of money from which, here and there, green banknotes poke out like decorative lettuce leaves on restaurant platters—an analogy that is indeed the punchline of the plot in one story ('How Green Was My Lettuce').¹⁸ In Duckburg's quiz shows you can win a barrel of money. When Uncle Scrooge crosses the street with a wheelbarrow full of money, the passers-by are pleasantly excited rather than surprised. 'What a character'—'Wotcha got there, pop?'—'Is it for real?'

Lost gestures

What is all this supposed to mean? I believe it is a piece of the historical past of the money experience as well as of individual memory residue, focused in the burning-glass of an unbridled comic imagination. Scrooge's money-gestures—to some extent those of all Duckburg's inhabitants—preserve patterns of behaviour from times of old (biting the suspect coin to find out whether it is counterfeit) as well as a rich repertoire of childhood experiences. Scrooge's privileged Super-Coin—the legendary lucky 'first dime'—is something like a congealed memory of the incomprehensible attraction that money may have for a child who is not yet familiar with it. The dime is the central cult object in Scrooge's collection, and its magical powers are highlighted by the unending interest that the witch *Magica De Spell* takes in it. These powers, though, accrue to it precisely because it is otherwise nondescript; other exhibits singled out as 'my first dollar' or 'my first million' do not possess them. A passage from 'Tales of Our Schooldays' by Machado de Assis may shed some light on this magic spell:

Carefully, he produced [the silver coin] and showed it to me from a distance. It was a coin from the days of the King, probably twelve *vinténs* or two *tostões*, I don't remember exactly; however, it was a coin, and such a coin that my heart began to pound wildly . . . I wanted to keep it at home, telling my mother I had found it in the street. I was feeling it all over so it wouldn't get lost, rubbing my fingers over its embossed surface, almost reading its inscription by touch alone, and had the burning desire to peer at it.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Uncle Scrooge* 51, August 1964.

¹⁹ Machado de Assis, 'Conto de escola', in *Obra completa*, vol. II, Rio de Janeiro 1962, p. 551.

It seems that in the counter, parallel, ideal and delusionary world of Duckburg all manner of sensuous everyday gestures and childhood myths congregate under the rubric of 'money'. These are, of course, linked to the fairy-tale figure of Uncle Scrooge, but along with his unimaginable wealth, there is also the conspicuous other end of the spectrum of financial existence: Donald's eternally precarious lack of means ('Uncle Donald, have you got any rare coins?'—'Kids, *any* coins I get are rare coins!'²⁰). Abundance and scarcity are experienced at close range in these stories. Money hurtles around people's ears, rolls away down steep slopes, rains down from the sky, disappears down a drain, is hidden and found, freezes and melts. The brazen jingle of money on the counter, the glinting coin abducted by a bird or flattened by a steamroller (like the pennies of one's childhood, illicitly planted on tram lines), the legend of the rare mis-struck piece, the dime swallowed by a small child, the banknote gnawed by a rat—we are in a world where our experience of money is extremely haptic and attracts all kinds of rumours and legends. Fine in its naive affectivity is the way the Duck family, after a stroke of luck or a successful coup, tends to kiss the coin or the banknote so easily and unexpectedly come by, or acquired through hard work (plump little red hearts fly all around this touch of the lips). In such enthusiastic appropriation, the elated possessor reacts not so much to cash value, as to the sum of his adventure with this singular piece of money—a quite particular unit of currency.

Does it make sense to hang the two strange parts of this diptych side by side? Perhaps it does. Bloy and Barks undertook, I believe, the most consistent subversions of the abstract exchange embodied in money that have ever been attempted in literature. For Bloy, every cash payment was made to appear as an outrageous metaphysical scandal, a monstrous cosmic mystery: Christ feels every purchase like a punch in the face. For Barks, the matter-of-fact tones of a fairy-tale helped show the reversion of monetary currency to a fetish object: Scrooge knows every coin personally. If you imagine—blasphemously—drawing a line between these extreme positions, they intersect at the bewildering point at which each monetary transaction becomes again something irreducibly particular, unique. This may seem banal, but is in fact totally outrageous. For our entire economic existence is based on the equalization of every act of exchange into a uniform continuum in which everything specific

²⁰ *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* 130, July 1951.

(effort, accident, power) gets lost. The remnants of some particularity in money (like the tear in the banknote; or the unbelievably rare fifty-cent piece with the stamp of a certain mint, of which children speak only in whispers) once perhaps left an absurd, minuscule space for reflection, in which this pure equality was still clouded or questionable. It will now be closed.

You could still compare a coin to the moon—poets have done so in days gone by. The coin itself remains, astonishingly, one of the few objects of perception continually and immediately surrounding us which, through long-established habits and fantasies, connect us across the millennia to Antiquity—like bread and wine, our shoes, the dog, the knife, indeed the moon. Now poetry is not everyone's cup of tea, and it may be thought no great change if, in the near future, metaphors to do with coins no longer direct us to our everyday lives but to the historical prop-room where lyres and swords are hung. There is, however, another kind of poetry in the familiarity which slips into the unconscious of our daily doings. What will change are small gestures, ordinary experiences of contact with others. Everyone can compile their own small list. You no longer have the satisfaction of putting the correctly counted-out sum on the shop counter, and being thanked by the sales assistant. You don't get change counted out into your palm any more. You will no longer find foreign coins in your pocket. Formerly, passers-by would often ask for small change to use in a telephone booth: this microscopic interaction was probably the first victim of the era of the credit card.

The result will be a momentous trifle: certain gestures will no longer be possible. You can throw the money owed an impertinent creditor at his feet in cash, but you cannot make an electronic bank transfer contemptuously. Historically, of course, numerous gestures have already disappeared, but for the most part, others have taken their place—there probably are less 'characteristic hand movements' on a steamer than on a sailing ship, but there are some. What will take the place of the extensive repertoire of gestures associated with coins and banknotes? You can flirt promisingly with a credit card, make a show of the platinum version when paying in a restaurant, but this is merely a derivation; you can do it just as well—if not better—with crisp, high denomination banknotes or with a bulging (or elegantly slim) wallet. I can think of only one distinctive gesture (I believe it can be attributed to the early days of the credit card, especially in the United States), but it has something

woefully ridiculous, indeed often ruefully self-mocking about it: the vertical dropping down of a long, linked row of plastic compartments filled with credit cards, ten, twenty, *I've got them all*. And then, yes, another gesture of aporia: that helpless, absurd, but irrepressible reaching out into the void when the cash dispenser confiscates an insolvent card. This is a gesture on the dividing-line between two epochs; on this line stands, of course, the cash machine that still yields, against the card, those—archaic—banknotes. You want to clasp the money in your fingers, and instead: nothing. This silent response is extremely powerful. (The unexpected disappearance of cards or tickets in vending-machines seems, incidentally, to be an experience that often induces people to start talking to the apparatus.) However, this scene stands sublimely alone; the credit card is not an object that generates gestures.

I have no idea whether this further step—‘naturally’ inevitable, for a consistent capitalism—into exchange abstraction, the contemptuous stripping of any vestiges of concretion from money, will make it any easier for us to see through what used to be called the *Verblendungs-zusammenhang*, the blinding universal delusion generated by alienation. (That the pathos of this formula now seems very strange to us may be an indication that the delusion has indeed become universal.) The more extreme abstraction just holds another secret, the *true* mystery of money, people will claim. That goes without saying. But the tiny disappearing mystery of the coin did hold a particular paradox, grounded in its intertwining of the sensuous and the abstract—the persistence of small, foolish, yet also magical incursions of pleasure into the great stream of abstractions that is circulation. Will we sometimes think back to that ‘also’ as a missed opportunity for everyday reflection? Charon demands coins as his reward, with which we therefore close the eyes of the dead.