

## MONEY BOX

There is a passage in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, over which I have always wondered and fantasized. It is when she describes the effect of a small inheritance, of knowing that in her purse, until the day she dies, there will always be two, ten shilling notes. "A fact" she says, "that still takes my breath away." In a sense, what she is describing is a feeling of unbroken maternal plenitude, of being taken care of, of having one's needs met in perpetuity. An alternate relation to the law which we know as money can be found in the compulsive gambler, who, when he places a bet, is always asking a question of destiny, or "Does my father love me?" If he wins, then he has beaten the father, but the burden of his patricidal wishes is too heavy to bear. Therefore, the gambler always plays to lose.

Potlach, the ritual squandering or lavishing of gifts performed by the Haida and Kwakiutl tribes, in order to shame or gain status over a rival, is the ultimate form of divestment, or letting go, as coppers tumble by the armload into the sea. Recently, the Republic of Ireland declared a tax amnesty in an effort to replenish the state's dwindling coffers. Unexpected millions were raised and along with them a surprising feeling of national catharsis and unburdening, which, in the words of one taxpayer, left the nation "better able to sleep at night". These releases counter the anal attachment to money, the heart-quickening fear of parting with one's moolah, (the thrill of the gambler or the real need of Woolf). But in all, I never found in simply looking at the paper and coin what Walter Benjamin saw. I saw the banal where he saw... "...The innocent cupids frolicking about the numbers, the goddesses holding tablets of the law, the stalwart heroes sheathing their swords before monetary units, [as] a world of their own: ornamenting the facade of hell."

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