

*To Bob Calle, my father,
the first to see each of the works included in this book,
from the first down to the very last.
And whose eyes I will miss.*



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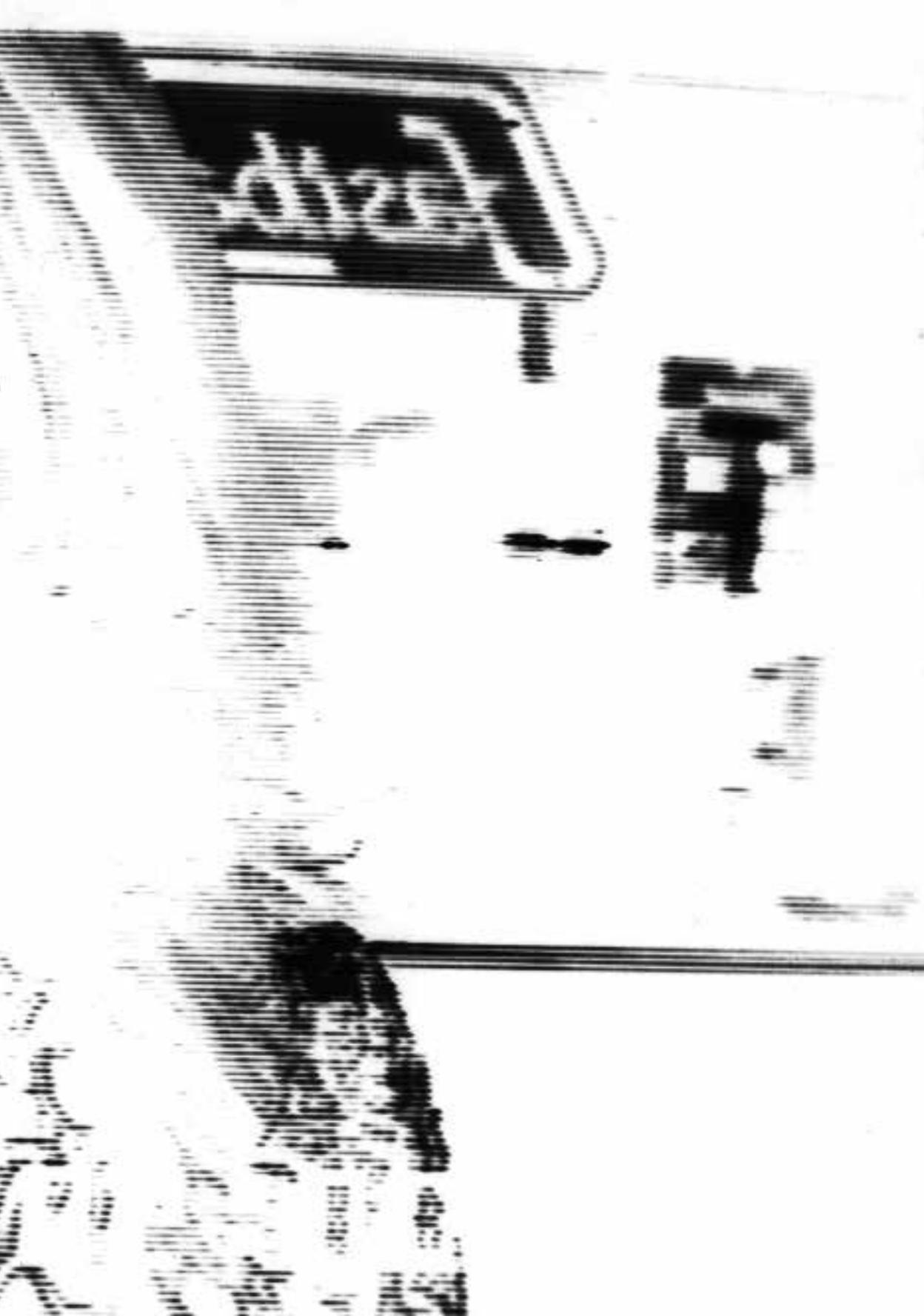












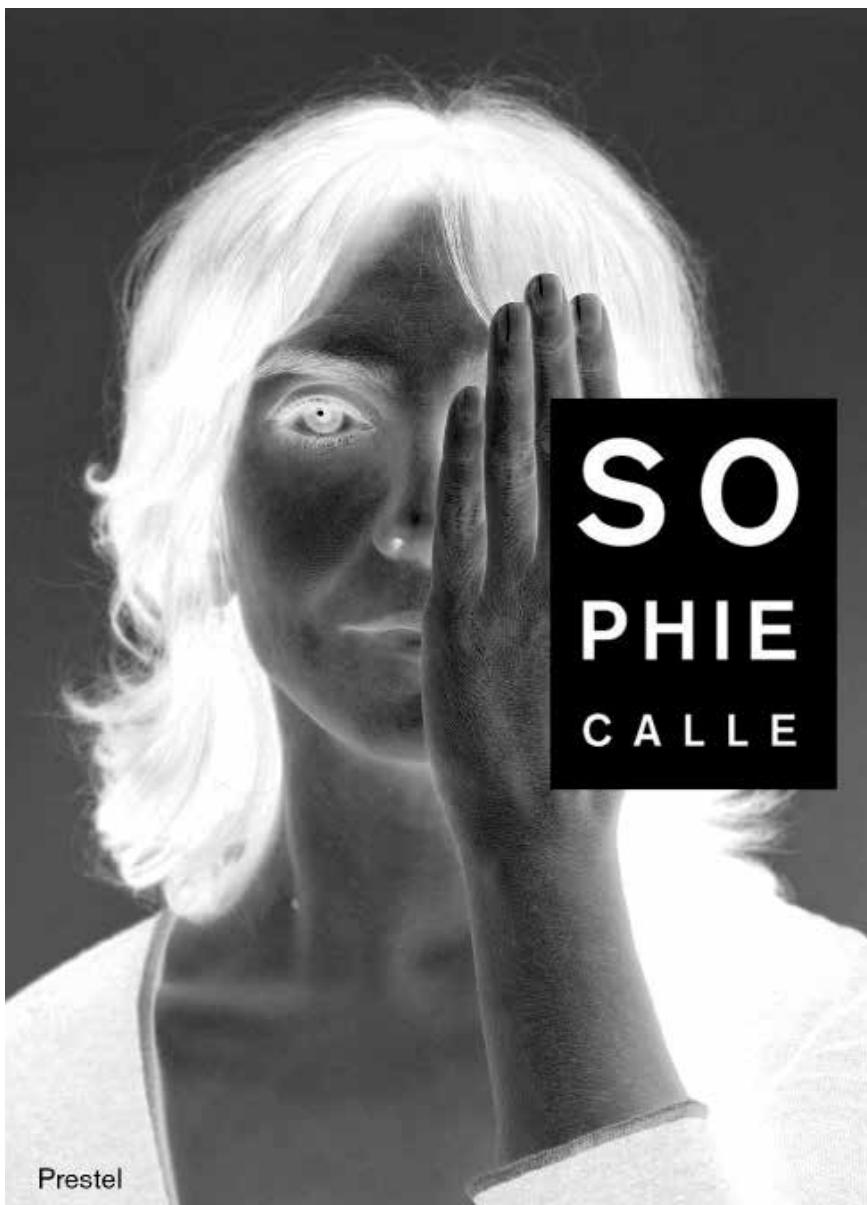
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Cash Machine, installation view, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2003





Prestel

In 2003, a book was published to accompany the exhibition *M'as-tu vue [Did You See Me]*, held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. That book contained projects created by Sophie Calle between 1979 and 2003, and ended with *Unfinished*. Thirteen years later, *Ainsi de suite [And So Forth]* picks up where it left off.

AND SO FORTH

**SOPHIE
CALLE**

**AND
SO
FORTH**

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LOOKING AND LOOKING BACK

Interview with
Marie Desplechin

Marie Desplechin: *M'as-tu vue* [*Did You See Me*], your previous catalogue, ended with words and pictures taken from *En finir* [*Unfinished*]. Shall we pick up from where you left off?

Sophie Calle: Turning back the clock is a good way to start.
— *En finir* was like a cemetery of dead ideas. In it you drew up the catalogue of a quest, thirteen years of projects that didn't work. And then you exhumed a certain number of them, the safe, suicides, secrets. Are you bringing them back to life? — The thing is that the projects that didn't work weren't necessarily failures. At the time I was looking for an idea and I didn't know what to do with what I had in my hands. But in fact, for someone who can only talk about what's lacking or missing, failure offered a subject. And then, recently, as I was looking for new projects, I thought once again about those projects that hadn't found their place. They were like notes, except that everything was there. I just had to make something of them. One example, the story of the safe. In *En finir*, where I first mention this idea, I had jotted down: "Keep for later". The idea came back to me the day I decided to exhibit a work about money at the Galerie Perrotin in Hong Kong. It involved asking the two partners in a couple to each tell me

a secret. I installed two safes in their home and I locked each secret away in a safe. The same thing for the suicides. There are others. The *preium doloris*, which I'm still working on, and the essay on money that Baudrillard wrote at my request. *En finir* is the place where stories are kept on ice. — **You make lists. I've seen you rereading them, arranging them, appraising them, sorting them and even throwing them away. Can this be compared to the trove of material in *En finir*?** — Not really. It's true that I spend quite a lot of time making notes and lists, but I've never gone rummaging through my lists to find an idea. I use them just to arrange things, and put my mind at rest. When I open the folder called "Potential Ideas and Projects" and I see four pages of ideas scroll by, which, on the face of it, are bad ideas, I have the illusion of having lots of possibilities in front of me, so I don't need to worry. — **That's your life insurance** — It reassures me. The fact of jotting down the idea and storing it away possibly means that I don't really believe in it. — **In your career, it seems that everything that comes into being has its source in an older work.** For example, *La Dernière Image* [*The Last Image*] that you presented in 2010 seemed to follow on from *Les Aveugles* [*The Blind*], which dates back to 1986. — When I was looking for people who were born blind, I met a lot of people who had been able to see. Quite simply because it's more common to lose your eyesight than to be born blind. I already wanted to ask them what the last image was that they could remember. — **Why didn't you?** — I'd just shown *Les Aveugles* and I was afraid of repeating myself. The arrangement would have been the same: a photo next to a text, with the last image in the place of the imagined image. I was afraid of being accused of having no more ideas. Back in 1991 I'd asked some blind people to describe to me the monochrome they lived with, and I compared their answers with artists' quotes about the monochrome. But that was different. I didn't want to present *La Dernière Image* in the front line. I waited to slip it quietly

into something larger – a book or a group show. — **So what made you decide to come back to it, twenty-four years later? Are you no longer afraid of repetition?** — It was the right moment – and that rescued me from repetition. I was invited to Istanbul. I was given three months to work with students and produce a personal project at the same time. Now if there's one thing I hate, it's being forced to find an idea in a context I'm not acquainted with and, worse still, in a language I don't know. To deal with all that, I made a condition: I arrive with an idea that I'll work on if I don't have a better one on the spot. — **So you got to Istanbul with your idea for *La Dernière Image*?** — No, my idea was to walk through Istanbul with a blind guide, to visit the city with someone who knew it but had never seen it. — **Is that what you did?** — Yes, and it was a bad idea. For a start, I don't speak Turkish, and the translation destroyed all flow and all poetry. Above all, my guide was absolutely bent on proving to me that Istanbul held no mysteries for him. It was, “There's a pharmacy over there, isn't there? And over there there's a boulevard with a stop light on the left, isn't that so?” The project fell flat on its face in a single day. But the associations I'd contacted had organized lots of meetings with blind people for me. I found myself with all those appointments and not much time. It was the moment to bring out *La Dernière Image*. — **And your students?** — It turned out that they weren't satisfied with the contract offered them by the city, which was the European Capital of Culture that particular year. That was our starting point, the terms of the contract between the city and the students. I did nothing. Well, I was their teacher. — **Not long after that, it was in Istanbul again that you produced *Voir la mer* [See the Sea]. There, too, the idea came from an earlier project?** — Not at all. During my first stay, a journalist told me about an article that described “people who had never seen the sea” as a social category. The very poor. I was struck by that. I went back to Istanbul a

few months later. — **You went with film-maker Caroline Champetier.** **Why didn't you do the filming?** — I'm capable of filming easy things. I've done that, but with that project things were hazardous. I wanted to ask those people, when they'd finished looking at the sea, to turn towards me and show me those eyes that had just seen it for the first time. I had to capture the look in their eyes. I absolutely couldn't afford to make a mistake — I couldn't do three takes of a first time! So I asked Caroline, and I was quite right to do so. — **Exceptionally — and it's even a first time — there are no words at all in *Voir la mer*.** — Even before we started, I knew I wouldn't be asking them to describe the sea for me. I didn't see what kind of answer they could give. What can you say in front of the sea? That it's huge? That it's impressive? We all say the same things. And then they were coming to see the sea, not to answer my questions. I didn't want to bug them. — **Who were those people? How did you meet them?** — I'd taken on an Istanbul girl, Ela Atakan, who got in touch with neighbourhood associations. As a result, twelve or thirteen people agreed to spend the day with us and be filmed. We fetched them by bus, two days running. The women came with their children. The route we took avoided roads by the sea and we ended up having lunch in a café, with a sand dune between it and the sea. Then we went with them, one by one, arm in arm. They kept their faces down or put their hands over their eyes. Once beside the water, they lifted their heads up. — **All the while that they were looking at the sea, you were filming them from behind.** There's a paradox when you're planning on filming a look. — I'd met a documentary film-maker who'd advised me to position myself opposite them. But then it wasn't the sea they'd be seeing, it was my camera, and me. So we put the main camera behind them, and another one at the side. I filmed the first woman sideways on. What I saw was unbelievable, she was talking to the sea, and crying. I was embarrassed. I shouldn't have witnessed that

scene. It reminded me of TV images. By filming them from behind, we were looking at the sea with them. In the end, it was just as moving. When they turned towards us, and only at that particular moment, we filmed their eyes. Each film stops when their eyes start looking somewhere else. — **You didn't do any filming, but you took photos.** — In the end I didn't use them. They can only be found in the catalogue. It's a project without any sound and without photos, and filmed by a film-maker. But I didn't feel dispossessed. — **It seems that ideas go looking for you more than you go looking for them. It seems sometimes that it's the event that's in control. What was the trigger for *Last Seen...*?** — A robbery. In 1990, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston was robbed. Six pictures, five drawings and two objects disappeared, among them Vermeer's *The Concert*. I liked that painting so much that I used to arrange to meet journalists in front of it so that I had an excuse for looking at it more often. One female journalist even claimed that I was so obsessed by it that it was me who must have stolen it. In her will, Isabella Stewart Gardner forbade anyone to add or move a canvas after her death. So the places where the missing pictures were hung have remained empty. When I went back to the museum, their absence leaped out at me. I took photos and I asked the museum staff, curators and guards to describe the missing pictures for me, based on what they remembered. — **You tend to act on a principle of exhaustion rather than repetition. Every idea you work on is part of a very long time frame.** — There are twenty-two years between *Last Seen...*, in 1991, and *Que voyez-vous? [What Do You See?]*, in 2013. That search for the absent image came even earlier. It began in 1989 with Bonnard's *Nu dans le bain*. At the time, the Musée d'Art moderne in Paris had asked me to do something with its collections, and I focused on the space left empty by a work on loan. The notice or label announcing that absence is called a *fantôme* [ghost]. The following year, in 1990, I did the same

thing with five pictures at MoMA in New York. — **You didn't encounter any reluctance at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum?** — No. Even if I did call three days after the theft of the Picasso. They were emotionally shattered, but the curator said yes right away. Rather than thinking that it might point a finger at the museum's shortcomings, she said to herself that the intervention of an artist might bring them some comfort. Later, she even added that my presence had been the only positive thing about that ordeal. In London, after the theft of the Turners, the Tate Gallery reacted similarly. Talking and sharing in the birth of a new work seemed, for them, to have a therapeutic value. It was only in Paris that I met with a firm refusal, a year after the theft. — **Things don't stop there. You went back to Boston again...** — Four frames that were too big to be taken away had been left behind by the thieves. The museum had them restored and then put them back up. In an even more dramatic way, that hanging accentuated the void left behind by the canvases that had disappeared. When I went back to the museum in 2013, I was struck by the potential images that emerged from that limited absence. That time around, I talked with visitors, some of whom didn't even know that the pictures had been stolen. And if the Vermeer and the Rembrandts are found tomorrow, I'll make a new work. So yes, I retrace my steps, but that's because the situation has evolved. I reread things, and present them in different ways. — **"And so forth"?** — Yes, that sounds right.

Unfinished

Unfinished (1988–2003)

Suicide (2014)

Secrets (2014)

Collateral Damage. Targets (1990–2003)

Unfinished

1988–2003

In collaboration with Fabio Balducci

In 1988, an American bank invited me to do a project. Their automatic tellers had video cameras that filmed clients as they went unsuspectingly about their business. I managed to get hold of some recordings. The images were beautiful but I needed an idea to go with these faces. *Unfinished* explores the history of this research, analyses fifteen years of inconclusive attempts, delineates the anatomy of this failure.



1988. How it all started

Their automatic tellers had video cameras that filmed clients as they went unsuspectingly about their business. Right at the start of my research, the bank's private detective gave me seven stills taken from these recordings.

A series of three shots showed a woman at the wheel of her car stopping in front of a machine and presenting a check.

Two minutes eighteen seconds later... She looks anxious.

One minute and twenty-eight seconds go by. The transaction is accepted, her face lights up. It was a stolen check.

Second series of four images.

26 August 1983. 21.54.05. A woman takes out some money.

21.54.09. She is replaced by a man on the screen.

21.54.20. The man knocks the woman senseless.

21.58.07. A bare-chested associate appears in front of the lens.

It was as if the camera was admitting there was nothing it could do if you were attacked. It's just there for the money. I wanted to see more. I viewed the surveillance tapes. The hidden cameras that are trained on clients all night and all day reveal them to us when they think they are one-on-one with their money. I didn't know what to do with these images. They were saying something, but what? They were about surveillance, money, solitude? I wanted to give it more time.

...

1990. I come back

I needed to find an idea to go with these faces that I hadn't forgotten. I began by photographing the bags of money, the notes kept in the strong rooms. Not much there.

I asked the employees how much money their hands actually touched every day, and to give me ten associations that this word money brought to mind. The results went something like this: money – teapot – apartment – family – work – holidays – laughter – love – ephemeral – death.

Which contracted to: money – death.

I superimposed the corresponding sum and words over each image. I photographed these hands that touched \$5,000 or \$5,000,000 of money-power, money-world, money-self, money-paradise, money-debt, money-love. Yes, but now?

Of course there was the beauty of the outstretched hands, the poetry of certain associations. Simple? Too simple?

After that a cooperative security agent offered me some documents filched from the police station. Instead of traditional targets, the cops trained by firing at mugshots of petty criminals behind bars. I tried to find out what crimes they had committed. I wanted to know if one of them had been hit by a real projectile. If the image of his face pierced by a bullet from a revolver had caught up with him. Nothing. Trifling sentences. All alive. They had dodged the shots.

...

Time was moving on. Still nothing. I declined the bank's offer. I kept thinking that these images were not enough in themselves. They needed text. This text that is me. My trademark: *image and text*. If I showed found documents, without adding my own experience, I would be betraying my own style. Meanwhile I managed to steal three surveillance tapes. You never know.

...

1994. Help!

I had come to a dead end. I suggested that Jean Baudrillard write captions for the photographs. He churned out four pages. He talked about the security of money, the world of automatic distribution. He compared the machine to a polling booth, a urinal, a confessional. Now I had images taken by a machine and a text written by someone else. What was my role in all this? I needed to act.

...

1995. Research

I interviewed clients at the distributors.

What do you think of this machine? What were you thinking of during the operation? How much have you taken out? What are you going to do with it? Do you like to touch it or do you prefer to look? Does it have a smell? Does it bring happiness? What kind of sum can bring happiness? Do you have a lot? How much is a lot? How much more do you need?

...

1997. Back to square one

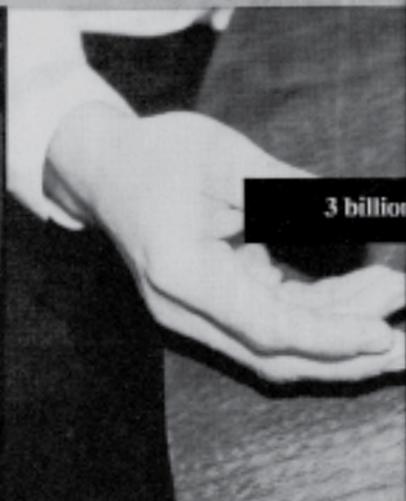
Start from the beginning. Go back and observe once more these thousands of faces on the screen. Photograph them. Let's recapitulate: if three tapes each record eight days and as many nights, then you have 108,000 images per hour × 24 hours × 8 days

How much money do you touch daily?



(S. money transfer representative)

money dollar Washington Washington D.C. president leaders
outstanding people award-winning olympics nations world



(J. investment manager)

money power money power
money power money



(N. manager of managers)

money paying bills taxes high drinking fun spending money
trips Europe Venice



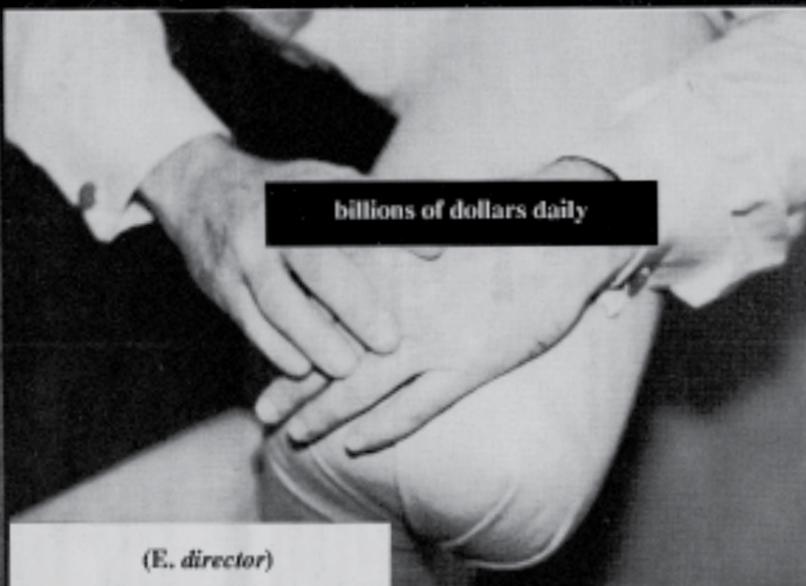
(D. Brinks messenger)

money heavy silver coins
transfer money good job nice

What do you think of when you hear the word 'money'?



money power money power

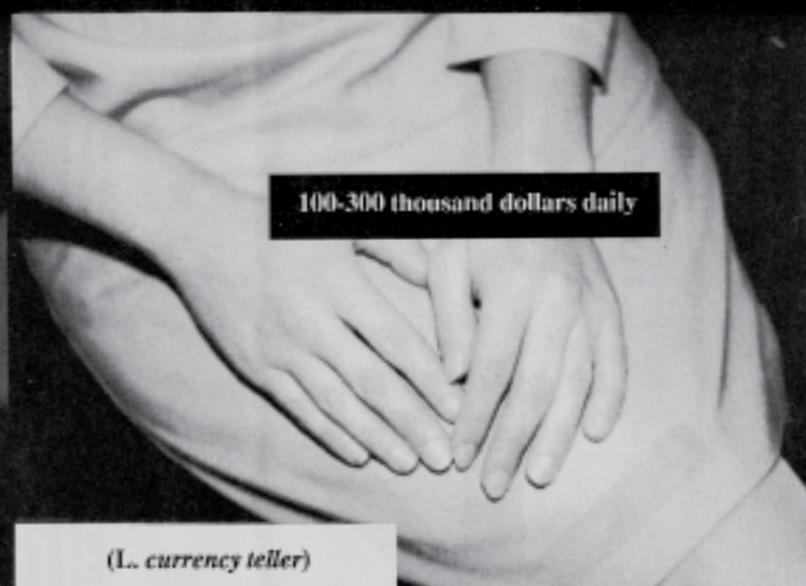


(E. director)

money cash 10 dollars lunch food wine enjoyment happiness
satisfaction contentment happiness



billions of dollars



(L. currency teller)

money shopping grandchildren family children love husband
death eternity being with the lord heaven

heavy metals precious metals job
rate me

× 3 tapes. About 62 million, two hundred, eight thousand views. That's a lot of photos for no story. Now I know why I had been watching them flit past for nearly ten years. Were they beautiful at least? Or were they flawed?

I imagined an empty room. A single portrait. One man facing his money.

...

1998. Secret money

Maybe I should have avoided the subject. Baudrillard compared the wicket to a confessional. So I asked people to sell me their secrets: 20 dollars for a simple story, 200 for a real confession.

I got two fine secrets. For free.

Except that they could stand alone. I really wasn't getting anywhere. Either the ideas were bad, not worthy of the images, or my projects had a life of their own.

From secrets I went to safes. Find a couple and get each person to tell me a secret. Install two safes in their home and lock up their secrets. Keep the keys. They will have to live together with each other's secrets. This has nothing to do with the bank photos. I've ventured too far. Keep this for later. Just need to find a couple of victims. I'm lost.

...

2001. Money and feelings

After reading an essay on suicide I came back to the monument to the dead.

They say that when the London police fish corpses out of the Thames, they can tell whether the drowned person was heartbroken or bankrupt. Lovers' fingers are cut up by their efforts to cling on to the piers of the bridge. In contrast, the debtors just seem to sink, without a struggle, like blocks of concrete.

...

2002. I am overcome with doubt

I kept looking for the question that would get me out of this. The miracle question.

Out of despair, I decided to see a hypnotist. Is it because money is an enabler that I am unable to find an angle on it? What if I was mistaken, if the images were not interesting, if I had known, unconsciously, from the beginning that they were banal, that it wasn't a problem of text, of format. I have given everyone time to get fed up with these surveillance videos, these angles, these stripes, this poor quality.

I had all that, yet I just sat there wondering if it was beautiful. Without realizing that time was getting on. That the secrets, the outheld hands, might in fact be more worthwhile than these portraits which prevented me from doing anything for 14 years because my ideas seemed so slight compared to their power. Since time is money, my idea must have borne fruit: 14 years at an annual rate of interest of 3%. There's hope yet. I really must put this business behind me.

...

When I came out of my hypnosis, I was relaxed, but no clearer about the money.

...

2003. Deliverance

That leaves video. A fine artist's video. Sequences flitting past at the same rhythm as the bank tapes. Don't touch a thing. The original document. Get right up close to these faces. There was nothing to add. Years of failed attempts only to come back to the starting point. If this is the final form, it's even worse than I thought. Total capitulation.

Well, since that's where I am, why not accept these images as they are, without a story. Just for once. Say nothing. After years of not letting them be mute, that's difficult. Silent photos, SI-LENT. No. I am going to vampirize them, to interfere with them. That's the thing. This is the anatomy of a failure. This accepted fiasco is now part of the program. Talk about failure because lack is all I can talk about. Go back in time. Towards my little pile of incomplete ideas. Show these outstretched palms, human targets, sad faces. Stop questioning them. Fifteen years it's been dragging on. Get rid of these people. Give them up, as they are, all on the wall, side by side. Get shot of them. End it. **MAKE THEM PAY.**



They say the police can distinguish between people who drown themselves for love and those who drown themselves for money. Lovers change their minds, their fingers scraped from clinging to the piers. Debtors sink to the bottom like slabs of concrete.



