

WET

MAY/JUNE 1979



Eggy Pop

Eat Me Architecture

White Magic for the Lovelorn

Eschatological Chic

Gourmet Bathing

\$1.50

The Well Heeled and the Walking Wounded

Money's alright, if you don't take it too seriously." So said a successful friend in the tax shelter business. "Of course," he continued, "one must never let them know that...the rich take their money very seriously indeed."

The broad subject of money is really too unwieldy to deal with here, or maybe anywhere. It is the armature around which much of our lives are built, yet we don't spend much time examining its real effects and purposes. I don't want to become the Sylvia Porter of WET magazine but I did run my own brief survey. Friends, acquaintances and strangers (some of whom might already be enemies) were questioned as to their attitudes towards money. A Donna Reed Quixote, I went tilting at the windy opinions of the comfortable class.

MONEY AS THE TIE THAT BINDS

Another actor, Paul Sand (starring in a soon-to-be-released feature, *Main Event*, with Streisand and O'Neal) touched on the lopsided financial arrangements between men and women — women who clandestinely loathe their spouse's support, and vice versa. Sand recalled the men in his family and their unfulfilled dreams of becoming artists or architects. They made excuses for their lives, saying "Well, I met your mother, had a family...you know, once a man has certain responsibilities..." Relationships of indentured servitude have, at last, gone out of style. Women are now supporting themselves, thus altering somewhat the financial concept of marriage.

So, money is corrupting and is a dangerous buffer against reality, making people pretentious and friends resentful. It either limits the choices in life by robbing one's time, or opens vast confusing horizons for which one must take responsibility. But for all the complaints about the burdens of extra cash, I unfortunately couldn't find anyone willing to part with even a small sum freely. Gold-plated paranoia abounds. Diamond broker Sheri Gasche noted, "It's too bad, but most wealthy people socialize together from fear of being taken advantage of." Poor things...just so many birds in a golden cage.

"THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU AND ME."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

"YES, THEY HAVE MONEY."

— Ernest Hemingway

MONEY, IT'S A DRAG... — Pink Floyd

Surprisingly, the spiritual and financial largesse of the sixties still lingers. I recognized the peculiar reverse snobbery, a status attached to not spending money — like crusty families of immense but aged wealth who refuse to redecorate the living room. The last decade has left a generation embarrassed to be rich, a little guilty at having too much. Yet this is 1979 and the "haves" want to keep what they've earned. Their seeming disinterest in spending is laminated over a sharp awareness of hard cash in the bank. Those who have money better understand the need for it.

Jeff Bridges provided a perspective on this attachment. As an actor (King Kong) and the son of an actor (Lloyd), his has been a well-cushioned background. "Ultimately, I think money should be used for God's work, for the betterment of the world and the individual." He continued, "I sound like a religious fanatic; I'm not. But I can't imagine being rich-rich, like the Shah of Iran, and not using that money to get the world more together." But Jeff doesn't give money, he gives time. "I recognize the negative effects but I'm very attached to my money." He's put his time into producing a benefit to end world hunger, but he won't hand money to a hungry bum on the street. "People just do that to relieve their guilt."

Time and money are trade-offs, with time often the more valuable commodity. A large share of money is spent "saving time," using jetcopters, WATS lines and catering services. The irony is that more time would be available if people weren't so busy minding their bank accounts.

"DON'T TRY TO KEEP UP WITH THE JONESES, DRAG THEM DOWN TO YOUR LEVEL."

— Quentin Crisp

"Spending and money are extremely relative." Dale Kern, West Coast bureau chief of *Women's Wear Daily*, said, "If someone is making \$40 million a year, \$10,000 for clothing just isn't that much. Attitudes are changing. People are buying more expensive clothes and cars, because they can't afford to buy a home. Especially here in L.A., where even a reasonable house can cost \$100,000, there's nothing to save for anymore." She continued, "The world has become very impersonal, so we want to surround ourselves with our possessions, with beautiful things. Status buying is a real lack of individual taste; it's safe. But it's really an illness when it's keeping up with the Joneses."

"MONEY DOESN'T TALK, IT SWEARS."

— Bob Dylan

The poverty of status was exemplified at the V.I.P. Toy Store on Santa Monica, a boutique of mini-Lear jets and Rolls Corniches. A clearance sale of \$49,000 Bentleys had attracted a lively crowd, many sporting belt buckles that matched the hood ornaments. I had spent many minutes glowering at a Gucci Cadillac Seville when a salesman of Persian mien asked if he could be of assistance. Apparently miffed at wasting time with a writer, and an impecunious one at that, he snarled, "And just what the fuck is WET magazine?" A fair enough question, I suppose, but the undisguised bad manners seemed quite at home with the thick-pile carpets.

If spending money is relative, so is having it. Having can be a string of polo ponies or a string of pearls, cocaine and silk stockings or tortillas and beans. And the idea of ever having "enough" is naive. Exposure to money erodes naivete and soon implants a sophistication as to its true function. The uninitiated and the "have nots" are only exposed to Madison Avenue's projection of the "good life." Thousands of underpaid sales clerks and secretaries spend paychecks in conscious emulation of what they believe to be the manner of the moneyed. Madison Avenue smiles.

But money has less to do with shopping than power. The trappings of wealth are just symbols. What the "haves" have, is the power to execute their decisions, to exercise their wills more freely than those working just to survive. The small wealthy percentage of the population that makes its presence felt and forces change has been a constant throughout history. The super-rich have survived revolutions and wars and they are still with us.

My own last word is that it's damn inconvenient to be without money...what pundit-in-residence John Appicella has called "Fuck You Money." F.Y.M. is that which allows one to make creative decisions about life and work without business considerations. Disciplined action on the behalf of self or society just seems ludicrous after an eight-hour day at the wallpaper store.

Sadly, I can offer no solutions here — just some views — and a homely closing from Sophie Tucker, "I've been rich and I've been poor, rich is better."