

"For the love of money..."

Text of Dialogue

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Introduction:

In a society conditioned down to a 6th-grade-level short attention span with little interest left in anything other than entertainment, the truth is tedious, terrifying or too difficult to believe -- even when it is needed to preserve whatever rights we still possess. This series is dedicated to those willfully ignorant people for who the truth is too much to handle.

The 5th Estate Presents:

DISTURBING AMERICA

Part 1: "For the love of money..."

BOGGS:

It's unbelievable! It's unbelievable. It can't -- It can't be real. ... But I know it is real.

TEXT:

In 1990, the Secret Service raided the studio of artist J.S.G. Boggs. To date, none of the confiscated items have been returned.

BOGGS:

It was much worse when they raided my house. They broke everything up, they kicked everything around and threw things around, and said terrible things to me and about me, and uh, you know... They told me that I was gonna be arrested, and then they went to court and said that they never said that, and it's a lie, and I have it on videotape, that they said, "Can we arrest him?"

TEXT:

Among the items confiscated: a pair of boxer shorts.

BOGGS:

You know, the fact that they're not gonna give me back my boxer shorts, just goes to show how crazy these people are. And, you know, sooner or later, and it may be later, they will have to show what they consider to be illegal. And the thing that I'm also fighting for, and very afraid of, is that they want to destroy this work. And if they destroy it before the public gets to see it, then the public will never know what a tragedy of injustice this is. So it's very important to me, that even if I can't get the work back, that I ensure that this work is not destroyed. Unfortunately, it's too late for the first group of material that they seized in 1990... It was materials to make an exhibition catalog for a museum show... and they've already destroyed it.

TEXT:

The Purpose of the Art

BOGGS:

The main purpose of my work is to explore and enjoy the world through the visual experience. Rather than reading text, there are other ways to access the world and other ways to comprehend the relationships that exist in the world of ourselves to ourselves, and ourselves to each other, and ourselves to other entities and structures, things as concrete as sidewalks, and things as abstract as social groups or religion and politics, how the human mind works, and how the human spirit works. How is it, for example, that we determine value? And how is it, for example, that we would value one thing over another? What is it, how is it that we engage in that process? And how much of that process is something that we do through the visual experience? Sometimes somebody comes to you and they say, "This is a 5-dollar bill, and it's worth more than a 1-dollar bill." Or, let's take a more concrete example. Here's a 1-dollar bill, and here's a 10-dollar bill. We are told that this is worth ten times more than this. Yet they're both the same size, they're both the same aesthetic quality, they both weigh the same amount, they both smell the same, they're made out of the same materials, they're printed on the same presses. What is it that makes this object worth ten of this object? What is it that makes this object worth one-tenth of this object? And what is this relationship? And how do we come about that? I use this to illustrate the ways in which determinations are made without the aid of visual experience, or very little of it. And yes, there's a one and a zero here, and there's a one there, so that's a little bit of visual experience, but the reason why we value one over the other so distinctly has very little to do with our experience of this visually.

TEXT:

On Wall Street: D.W. Wright, Consultant for history archives at J.P. Morgan & Co.

WRIGHT:

A work of art can be used in barter very easily. In fact it's happening every day between collectors and dealers; who determines the value of a particular work of art and how does anyone agree on what that value is? Now some of that is set by the marketplace, and recognized historical records of what that artist has sold for or what a work of art like that has brought in the marketplace, but some of it has to do purely with perception, perception of rarity, perception of cultural importance, desire, or, even false expectations or expectations of any kind, response to marketing, all those human foibles can come into "How do you assign value to a work of art," or "What is its barter value?" If I have a painting and want to trade it for two of your paintings, how do we agree that my one painting is worth two of your paintings? That whole concept of barter can, and is often, applied to works of art. So works of art can often act as a kind of a currency, and currency can sometimes be called works of art. And that's exactly what Boggs makes reference to too, I think. And he doesn't even need to articulate that, I think people understand that. So if you've got something that he's made, that is seemingly both a work of art and currency, people are conflicted in their response.

SHANNON (Off camera):

Did J.P. Morgan ever collect bills as artwork?

WRIGHT:

Pierpont Morgan never collected currency as far as I know, but he did have one of the most important collections of coins in the world, mostly ancient coins, some medieval. And he collected them, again, because of their value as miniature works of art. He loved the nature of their wrought, or molded, or etched images. But he also collected them systematically, just as he did everything else in his life. He wanted a comprehensive collection. It was part of the Morgan Library for many years and then it was lent to the American Numismatic Society, was looked at by scholars for many years, and later on in the 1960s it was dispersed, the Morgan Library Trustees decided to sell it because they couldn't take care of it. But he did have a very important collection of coins. So it would be interesting to know more about how he came to make the coin collection but I assume that it's on the basis that he had his other collections and that he was interested in the cultures that produced them, the images on the coins, the art history that went into creating the coins, and in that he had something in common with Boggs as well.

TEXT:

Boggs in the eyes of the Secret Service: A Societal Threat

WRIGHT:

This is interesting though, this is indicative of how large a threat he represented to the society at large.

SHANNON (off camera)

What was the threat?

WRIGHT:

Yes, what exactly is the threat? But again, you can only infer what the threat is. I mean we don't know without them telling us. But one can guess that his interest in duplicating the dollar bill or any currency implies to them in their minds that he's threatening the very basis on which the society is founded. Which would explain the extremity of the measures to which they went, that he was coming dangerously close to undermining something which was a basic building block of the society's values, that is, the face value of the currency, or the way currency is used or perceived. So, if people start to question the basis on which the basic currency of the culture is empowered, then that really is a societal threat, and that would, I think that would explain some of the extreme reaction to what he did, yes.

TEXT:

Chairman Greenspan

WRIGHT:

Mentioning Greenspan is very interesting though because there are people in this country now who feel that Greenspan is more powerful than the President, that, in fact, the country's being run

by an unelected person, the head of the Federal Reserve, who makes the choices that are the most directly connected to our daily lives. So that speaks to something about the perception of, "The most important thing in your life is the value of the dollar, and the most powerful person in your daily life is the person who is determining what the value of the dollar is going to be!" That's interesting! And, to some extent, Pierpont Morgan was fulfilling that same role. He paid a huge price for it though, he became a kind of media target, he became a kind of icon of wealth and influence, as you say, his name was almost synonymous with the concept of money. But he didn't think he was above the system or removed from it in any way I don't think. It evolved, it happened to him, he was thrust into this position of having to solve the crisis, and then the role fell to him, as a kind of one-man Federal Reserve as a result of his actions. But I don't think he set out to do it that way, or tried to rise above the system in any way. But that is something very interesting about the turn of our century, that the people in charge of determining interest rates, credit, the Federal Reserve structure, would be perceived as the most influential, the most important policymakers of our time. That does speak directly to what people think is important in their lives. The dollar.

SHANNON (off camera)

Do you see Boggs as being maybe, that's why he's drawn so much attention?

WRIGHT:

Absolutely. And he's visionary in some ways. He's put his finger right on the concept that we've been talking about, right on the hot button of what's driving the society. So, to make anyone who's daily engaged in commerce or making a living or living in society, which is all of us, to make anyone re-examine the concept, or the priority or the value of all the structures that are based on this one assumption of the nature of money, is really interesting and is very... it's a kind of visionary thrusting of a finger into all the perceptions, misperceptions, values, and assumptions of the society, it's really quite interesting.

BOGGS:

You know, money is so wonderful and so valuable and so practical because it moves with such speed. It changes hands in an instant. Nobody stops to look, or think. On the one hand it's what makes it so good, but on the other hand it's what makes it so bad. Because people need to stop once in a while at least to look, and think about what it is that they're doing. You know, they're accepting little pieces of paper which are art. It's portraits, it's landscape, it's abstract geometric, artwork, pigment on paper, you see? And people can't stop all the time to think about this but once in a while, they have to stop and think about this. And people don't stop and think about this. And so... I think the Secret Service doesn't want anybody to stop and think about this, in fact I know they don't want anyone to stop and think about this. The whole idea that anyone would stop and think about this scares the beJesus out of them.

BOGGS:

You know, this is not how our government is supposed to treat us. And I'm outraged that my government would treat one of its citizens this way. In this case it just happens to be me, but I think it's a good example of how, if this had not happened to me, and you came and told me that this happened to someone, I would find it very difficult to believe that it was true. I would be

thinking that someone was distorting the facts to make the government look bad. And it's an example of how, we once, as Americans, I want, as an American, to believe that my government is good, and is working for the people, and is working for the right way, the right thing, for everything that the Constitution talks about. And when you asked me earlier whether DC was a good place, it is a good place, but it's very frustrating for me because I go to the monuments, and I read what is written there, and I see all of the tourists reading about freedom, and about rebelling against tyranny, and I believe all of that stuff. But what is happening is... it doesn't match up.

It's beyond ironic, it's so far beyond ironic, that it's painful, that it is horrifying and scary.

I also know the difficulty, the tragedy, the bullshit that has gone on in history, not all of it but some of it. And the way that this country has... has so often been in conflict with its stated philosophy.

Times Square Interviews:

1 - Young Tourists

BOY 1:

This isn't worth anything, this is a memento from Turkey. But to me, money is like, it keeps you alive.

BOY 2:

With no money we'd have nothing because people work to make stuff! It wouldn't be produced because nobody works for free!

SHANNON (off camera)

So, what if there was a barter system?

BOY 2

It'd just be anarchy.

GIRL:

There'd be no rewards in life. No.

2 - On phone with actress in Israel

SERGEI:

If there was a worldwide boycott of money, would you join?

WOMAN (on phone):

No.

SERGEI:

Why?

WOMAN (on phone):

Because I would just fly above and laugh. Why would I join if I can just sit around and be entertained for the rest of my life?

3 - Guy from Texas

MAN:

A boycott of money?

SERGEI:

Right. Worldwide.

MAN:

I haven't the faintest idea, I never even thought about such a thing.

SERGEI:

Well, like there would be no money, if people just, like, stop using money. Would you join it, or would you not? And if you do, and if you not, why?

MAN:

You gotta have some medium of trade. If it's not gonna be money it's gotta be the barter system, one or the other. I reckon.

4 - New Jersey kid

SERGEI (off camera):

If there would be a worldwide boycott, like, not to have money at all, would you join it?

BOY:

No!

SERGEI (off camera):

Why not?

BOY:

Because I'm a materialistic fuck! I enjoy everything that regular people don't! I like goods over people! I would sit in a pool of money rather than talk to somebody for 50 years straight! I don't like people, I like money!

5 - Hispanic guy

MAN:

Oh, you mean, okay, that sort of question... a world without money. I think it would be more or less of a peaceful world, less conflict, less problems. They say money talks, bullshit walks, well, it would be a whole bunch of bullshit, altogether, I mean money. That's what it creates. It's just more problems. It's a form of currency but, there's a good side and a bad side to everything. I think if people weren't so greedy about money and stuff like that, I think business and relations would be

much better.

6 - Jamaican guy

SERGEI (off camera):

If, like, the world would boycott money for one day, say, like, a worldwide boycott, would you join it or not?

MAN:

I could. It's just a state of mind, how ya feel at the time.

7 - African-American guys

SERGEI (off camera):

What do you think, like, can you imagine the world without money at all?

BOY:

It'd be a much more peaceful place.

MAN:

Much peaceful.

BOY:

It'd be better.

MAN:

I think it'd be a much more survivable place than it is now.

BOY:

You wouldn't have everybody trying to take from everybody.

MAN:

...take from everybody. You know what I'm saying?

BOY:

They wouldn't be dog eat dog.

MAN:

That's true. That's really true.

8 - Hasidic man 1

SERGEI (off camera):

What do you think about money?

SHANNON (off camera):

If there was no such thing as money?...

<man walks away, disinterested>

9 - Hasidic man 2

SERGEI (off camera):

May we ask you a question? We're doing a documentary on money. What do you think? Can you imagine the world without money?

<*man walks away, disinterested*>

10 - Hasidic man 3

SERGEI (off camera):

May we ask you a question? We're doing a documentary on money. What do you think?...

SHANNON (off camera):

It's about value. How do you assign value to money?...

<*man walks away, disinterested*>

Closing Shot:

Inside Catholic cathedral near Rockefeller Center, a "Visitor Offering" box.

TEXT:

For more information:

www.jsgboggs.com

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