



The Materiality of Monetary Value in Martial's *Epigrams*

This paper examines representations of money in the epigrams of Martial. I argue that Martial's poetics are deeply influenced by some of money's economic functions, even if many of these functions are approached through networks of *amicitia*. By engaging with the indeterminacy of what can be called exchange value, Martial identifies an aesthetic dimension that becomes central to his humor. The form of value described by his paradoxical poetics of cash implies a category of matter that is at once sensuous and abstract, autonomous and dependent upon other modes of valuation. I focus on the sensuality of this abstract matter, its failure to become entirely impersonal, and on Martial's habit of using deictic language to gesture to its presence. Such an aestheticization of monetary value differs from more familiar techniques of using vivid language to flesh out moral or satirical attitudes to wealth or the ways in which it is acquired. It instead approaches the instability of money as an object of inspiration in its own right, one that supports the epigrammatist's habit of taking up postures throughout his corpus of poems, and of maintaining a degree of detachment between his voice and its pronouncements.

KEYWORDS: Martial, epigram, money, commodity, aesthetics, materiality, fungibility, slavery, abstraction, coins

Addixti servum nummis here mille ducentis,
 ut bene cenares, Calliodore, semel.
 nec bene cenasti: mullus tibi quattuor emptus
 librarum cenae pompa caputque fuit.
 exclamare libet: 'non est hic, improbe, non est
 piscis, homo est; hominem, Calliodore, comes.'
 Mart. 10.31

Yesterday you sold a slave for 1,200 sesterces
 so that just once, Calliodorus, you could dine well.

But you didn't dine well: the four-pound mullet you purchased
 was your whole dinner, from head to tail.
 One is tempted to shout: "Wicked man, *this* is no fish—it's a human!
 It's a human you're eating, Calliodorus."

What is money? We know what it can do: store value, mediate exchange, act as a unit of account, serve as a means of payment. But these functions do not exhaust the question of money as an institution that embodies a commensurability between things. This paper will argue that the epigrammatist Marcus Valerius Martialis, better known as Martial, locates a form of aesthetic experience in indeterminacies surrounding monetary value. I show that for Martial monetary exchange is conceptually and phenomenologically messy. The capacity of this messiness to be productive for humor stems from a disinterest in establishing desire as a stable ground for price, or vice versa. We might assume that the *pretium* that obtains for an item depends somehow on a complex of values that are ultimately determined outside of the market. From a different angle we might recognize the force prices have in social life, as when Martial repeats the cliché that, even with the same taste, "partridge is more expensive [than black grouse]; therefore, the former bird tastes better," *carior est perdix. sic sapit illa magis* (13.76.2).¹ Martial intentionally has it both ways in his epigrams: as he shifts through the various postures into which his poetic persona contorts, we see both exchange value and use value offer a temporarily fixed point of reference for the other's fluctuations. This shifting amounts to a poetics of fungibility itself, one that plays around with the materiality of exchange value.² In this article I focus on three aspects of this poetics: the way monetary abstraction in the epigrams becomes curiously sensual, its less than total ability to become autonomous and elide human agency, and Martial's use of deictic language to gesture towards the presence of money.

To see these elements in action, consider epigram 10.31. Calliodorus sells a slave and buys a fish to eat in one sitting. One familiar way to read this poem would be in light of the intensification of character studies in Latin and Greek skoptic epigram in and after the Neronian period, a trend in which Martial plays no small part.³ But just as interesting as Calliodorus is the transaction and what it implies about transmutations in the market. The poem opens with a view to

1. All translations in this article are my own. Throughout I use the Latin text from Shackleton Bailey's 1990 Teubner edition.

2. More generally, Martial's poetic project is heavily invested in material objects and the theme of materiality; Saleme 1976 is foundational on this topic. See Roman 2014: 301–321 on the sophistication with which Martial invokes the materiality of books; Rosati 2017 on ekphrasis and objects of luxury in Martial; Blake 2015 on the aesthetics of so-called everyday objects. Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, most obviously turn objects into poetry.

3. For an overview of skoptic epigram and its relation to popular joke traditions see Floridi 2012. On Martial's interaction with contemporaneous Greek epigrammatists, especially Lucilius, see Neger 2014; Fitzgerald 2007: 27–29; Nisbet 2003: 14–35 with the review by Richlin 2005. Sullivan 1991: 78–93 points out parallels and contains earlier bibliography, supplemented by Floridi 2014: 88–90.

yesterday, *here*, setting Calliodorus' auction and meal securely in the past: *Addixti ... cenares ... cenasti ... emptus ... fuit*. The first line moves through discrete stages, from slave, *servum*, to coins, *nummis*, and finally to their number, *mille ducentis*. By lines 3 and 4 these coins have evolved into a four-pound mullet, so big that it resembles a festal or funereal procession. In the final two lines the epigram leaps into the present moment of Martial's outrage: *libet ... est ... est ... est ... comes*; the occasion of the poem turns out to be now. Time is confounded along with the referent of *hic*: the demonstrative points to a macabre coexistence of fish and enslaved human. All of the formerly discrete elements blur together in the sensual immediacy of the image of a cannibalistic Calliodorus, and the poem strategically fails to take the fungibility between mullet and slave, which is embodied by counted coins, as a pure abstraction. Martial thus supposes the inability of money to autonomize itself totally from the goods for which it is exchanged. Human and fish cling like contaminants to the pure exchange value that would be absolutely interchangeable in the form of coins as homogeneous units of value. This stickiness holds together the poem's outrage.

Epigram 10.31 turns two extraordinary instances of monetary exchange into a movement that produces a residue for Martial to point to with *hic*. Importantly, this residue is not qualities of the fish or the slave that resist the operation of market exchange, vitalities and singularities that cannot be subsumed by commodification. Rather, the punchline depends on both identities being transported and aggregated through exchanges. We do hear of coins as well, but they operate as numbers. That the slave is discarded via numerical abstraction, namely in a sale, is precisely what keeps the slave at the *cena*, so to speak. Because the *servus* is *mille ducentis*, Martial exclaims, he is also the *mullus*. The risk with my reading up to this point is that we allow it to remain one-dimensional. Martial is cagey with the concluding couplet, the key word being *libet*. He does not commit to the interpretation just spelled out but offers it as a mirage that glimmers until faith in the absolute abstraction of monetary exchange can be restored. Couched as optional, the punchline does not revert to outright delusion, however. It obliges us to entertain an occluded dimension of the social act that is buying and selling, even in the face of an unspoken retort that any monetary equivalence between humans and mullets is merely pragmatic. But it still allows for recourse to the normative situation wherein money is a neutral medium, devoid of all traces of those items whose value it embodies.

Thus, the aesthetics of Martial's humor can capture opposing tendencies in the logic of this type of exchange. It is impossible to expunge from monetary value all the non-monetary values—in this instance, humanity itself—that subtend it. On the other hand, this last statement rings too sentimental in that the humanity preserved through the exchanges in 10.31 is not the full, integral identity of the *servus* who, we might add, is already a nameless item of property at the poem's outset. Again, Martial is not characterizing the meal of Calliodorus as that which has resisted the logic of sale. *Piscis* and *homo* are simultaneously devoured because

of a mischievous sort of abstraction that is at once material and abstract, heteronomous and autonomous. The coins belong to an autonomous regime of value composed entirely of self-identical units, which we can just call numbers. But the coins are also made meaningful elsewhere, in the cultural value that is registered in enslaved humans and upmarket fish. This point leads to the final piece of the riddle of 10.31: the rhetorical purpose of the poem, its skoptic nature that I shelved at the outset of this analysis. Everything coheres ultimately because we are hearing about one owner of property, Calliodorus. He conducts the transactions; he is evidently poor enough that the *nummi* do not disappear anonymously into an *arca* or *loculus* or *sinus*;⁴ and it is all an atypical, noteworthy set of maneuvers. The traceable line between Calliodorus and his money leads to the fish-man in the concluding couplet.

Epigram 10.31 provides a sample of the complicated representation of monetary value found in Martial's epigrams and its importance to the aesthetics of Martial's humor. Throughout his corpus Martial senses a logic of commodification that can be sketched out here using the determinations of autonomy and heteronomy. Items that pass through a commodity phase—foods, clothes, humans, books, etc.—are taken out of their singularity and placed in a field of other commodities, valued according to other things.⁵ But this heteronomy is possible via money, which signals the moment when the value of a commodity acquires an autonomy from non-monetary values invested in its use. Moreover, even as the monetary value of something allows it to be commensurate with other items, it also mystifies their connections. Items become nodes in a more or less loosely woven veil of prices. If we then isolate price as it is manifested in coins, we arrive at a second dualism. In Martial's world coins themselves are functionally numbers that are composed of self-identical units. Yet coins are also singular configurations of matter, replete with associations: the life of each coin gives it a rich semiotic existence, allowing it to suggest a host of metaphors, not least in moral discourses. Two paradoxes then entangle themselves. To be valued in terms of other things, an item obtains a monetary value that is autonomous from itself and from other things. To grasp this purely numerical monetary value, coins must be tangible, and in being so they obtain idiosyncratic material histories.⁶ The metaphysical strain placed on monetary value often goes unnoticed in life. But time and again Martial permits his readers access to it without deciding absolutely on the set of

4. Such as the *loculi* described in the *Apophoreta*: 14.12 (*loculi eborei*), 14.13 (*loculi lignei*). For the *sinus* as a place to hold cash see, e.g., 5.16.7–8. See n.56 below for *arcae*.

5. For a foundational understanding of commodification as a phase see Appadurai 1986: 13–16.

6. Compare Seaford 2004: 2 on modern money, a point he uses to explore money in the Greek world: “[W]hatever the associations of modern money (conscious or unconscious, universal or specific), its central and predominant function—requiring precisely its identity in all contexts, unaffected by any incidental associations—is to embody abstract value as a general means of payment, of exchange, of the measurement and storage of value. It is precisely this absence or marginality of specific symbolic associations or meanings that arose from, and permits, its general effectiveness. But might not symbolic associations arise from precisely this function?”

questions that emerges. Money's materiality in the epigrams is therefore understood through a humor that is immanent.⁷

A few caveats are needed. This is not a paper about a coherent and directed cultural poetics of money in Martial's epigrams. Much of interest could be said about how the vivid language Martial uses to describe the stuff of coins does the work of a broader set of attitudes, identifications, and symbolisms. For example, true to his self-presentation as the barely remunerated freeborn *cliens* caught between commercial and beneficial networks of exchange, Martial complains in 1.99 about a once-liberal friend who, coming into a windfall of ten million sesterces, becomes overly parsimonious: now his dinners are put on *nigrae sordibus monetae*, "for the dregs of darkened money" (1.99.13). The epithet could be said to rub off on the stingy host, and the coins also resemble the "half pounds of leaden [silver plate]," *plumbea selibra*, brought home disappointedly by the guests (1.99.15).⁸ The properties of coins could also be said to connote jealousy. In 10.74 Martial laments that Scorpis, a celebrity charioteer, carries off "fifteen heavy sacks of gold in one hour, hot [from the mint]," *una quindecim graves hora / ferventis auri ... saccos*, while he, the poet, only gets "one hundred leaden [coins] in a whole day," *centum ... plumbeos die toto* (10.74.4–6).⁹ Diminishing returns for attendance at *salutationes* are felt in the physical properties of the money. Martial's choice of words goes beyond the mere identification of denominations. Elsewhere coins brightly or dimly reflect attitudes towards modes of acquisition and social turpitude. Martial threatens to become a *causidicus* in book 5, noting that this employment would be more lucrative than poetry and juxtaposing wine and cash: *plurimus Hispanas mittet mihi nauta metretas / et fiet vario sordidus aere sinus*, "Many a sailor will send me casks from Spain and my pocket will become dirty with sundry bronze" (5.16.7–8). In book 9, when Martial praises Domitian for putting a halt to castration and the traffic in child prostitutes, we see the image of an infant wailing for "dirty bronze coins," *sordida ... aera* (9.7.4).¹⁰ Amidst colorful descriptors such as these I am not looking for a stable moral program, ethical discourse, or subject position that might be distilled through a study of the lexical semantics of money's materiality, nor—as my argument implies—do I suspect it possible in this way to pin Martial down on the benefits or detriments posed by monetary evaluation to his world, or even to society at large.¹¹

7. See Dressler 2016: 10 on how Plautine comedy aesthetically enfoldes social forms. For the relationship between money and poetic form in Greek tragedy see Seaford 2018: 59–89, 421–32; see also Wohl 2015: 4–8 on poetic and political forms in Euripides.

8. See Citroni 1975: 303 on the identification of bronze and silver plate. Chemical compounds build up on metal coins over time, and coins can also accumulate a dubious grime along their travels, *aerugo*.

9. I take this passage to mean that the coins seem leaden, but Thornton 1980: 348 argues that lead *tesserae* were sometimes used as "peasant's money" or small denomination coinage, not their intended use. On Scorpis see Syme 1977; Ciappi 2001; Tafaro 2016.

10. See also 9.5.6. Henriksén 1998–1999: 83 rightly rejects Shackleton Bailey's argument that the child is merely begging for coins.

11. An approach now exemplified by Coffee 2017. See also Kleijwegt 1998; Spisak 1998.

Nor is this article primarily about a related issue: the exchanges—poetic, material, financial—between Martial and his audience, whether named *amici* or an anonymous, generic readership.¹² The passages cited in the previous paragraph could be pressed into two scholarly discussions, both revolving around the nature of patronage in Martial's day. First, there is the question of Martial's wealth as an historical figure: to what extent do his mentions of money constitute documentary evidence of his own standing? Perhaps the best attempts at biographizing Martial in this regard assume an unreliability that comes from his use of multiple first-person voices in the poems.¹³ On the other hand, we may focus on the rhetorical uses of money in networks of *amicitia*.¹⁴ We do not have to think exclusively of patronage, however. Martial's realism with money matters—a habit that once underwrote a view of him as a “chronic beggar”¹⁵—exposes the self-definitional tropes of epigram or first-person literature more generally to economic realities typically set apart from the *locus amoenus* of song. Such exposure may have reinvigorated the literary scene in Flavian Rome, caught at an impasse of hackneyed forms, saturated by bloviated, out-of-touch writers of epic and tragic poetry.¹⁶ Money, finances, the sometimes luxurious, sometimes nauseating world of Roman consumption: all of this would serve to imbue the epigrams with an effect of reality, a conviction that they were born from something that might be called life itself.¹⁷

12. On Martial and patronage see White 1975, 1978; Saller 1982, 1983; Spisak 2007. On the generic reader in Martial see Spisak 1997; Williams 2002; Larash 2004.

13. The question of Martial's sincerity in describing his financial situation and his relative wealth is a vexed one. See Nauta 2002: 39–51 for an overview of the different voices in Martial and the status of the *ego* voice in the epigrams. Nauta 2002: 51–58 turns to the question of wealth, providing citations of the key passages, and concludes (57–58): “[W]e cannot seriously doubt that Martial was indeed caught up in a web of obligations to patrons, and that the material support of these patrons made no negligible contribution to the life-style he carried on as a Roman knight, an owner of slaves and of real estate.” See also White 1978: 74–92; Tennant 2000. Contrast the conclusion exemplified by Allen et al. 1970: 345: “While a literal interpretation of Martial's conventional epigrammatic treatment of literary patronage could produce a picture of Martial as the shabby, starving poet of the third-floor garret, our author has deliberately included in his epigrams autobiographical material that he must have intended as a correction to such a false impression.”

14. See, e.g., Woolf 2006: 98: “Poverty for Martial is a (tatty) cloak put on for some purposes and not others, and we should not expect coherence in his self-representation. . . . When Martial puts on the poor poet's *persona* it is almost always to achieve a distance from wealth, when his attack is directed against wealth, the wealthy or the abuse of riches.” See also Spisak 2007: 2: “[I]n fact, behind Martial's alleged preoccupation with money and his seemingly excessive praise of friends and emperor is a sophisticated system of social exchange or reciprocity that was fundamental to friendship, business, politics, and sense of community in the ancient Roman world.”

15. Post 1908: xiii.

16. See, e.g., Gold 2003; Rimell 2008: 7–11. Martial was hardly the first Latin epigrammatist to find in urban poverty a new way to express a Callimachean literary paradigm, and so we should think of his gesture as an intensification of what is found in Catullus, for example, rather than something totally new; as Marsilio 2008: 930 puts it, “for Martial and Catullus and their chief literary models, poverty is crucial in the articulation of literary aesthetics.”

17. As at 10.4.7–10: *quid te vana iuvant miserae ludibria chartae? / hoc lege, quod possit dicere vita 'meum est.' / non hic Centauros, non Gorgonas Harpyiasque / invenies: hominem pagina nostra*

The importance of money to Martial's poetic project has not gone unnoticed. But if we are to understand the literary or rhetorical uses of money in Martial's epigrams, we must appreciate Martial's investment in money's material complexity or, put otherwise, its ontological messiness. The readings of epigrams that follow move through Martial's corpus with the assumption that this corpus was meant to be read and reread. Without getting into all the various ways in which the book architecture of Martial's collections has been discerned, I should say that I follow the line of thinking that prioritizes a paradigm of text over one of occasionality.¹⁸ Accordingly my readings flip back and forth, ranging from book to book, not, however, at the expense of attention to historicity. The debate over how and when and why Martial's books came into being returns us to the question of patronage. One solid conclusion is that Martial took poems that he wrote for specific occasions or that he compiled into pamphlets for select audiences and, however successfully, attempted to distribute them more widely via booksellers, thereby monetizing his poetry in multiple networks and formats.¹⁹ I am not interested in qualifying this maneuver as some sort of artistic compromise. Rather, the strong disjuncture perceived between commercial and beneficial profit renders the materiality of money even more complex in its social valence. In its various aspects as a gift, a loan with or without interest, and a primarily commercial object, money exists in the epigrams across demarcated spheres of life, not unlike Martial's poetry itself.

In Martial's day monetary value most readily took the form of coins made of gold, silver, bronze, lead, and copper alloys. Metal came from mines, old coins, bullion, and crafted objects. Making new coins involved weighing metal and stamping it with iconography, enhancing the ability of a piece of metal to belong to the symbolic order of experience.²⁰ The nature of Roman money, however, is considerably more complex, not least because commodities and cashless transfers

sapit, "What advantage do pithy jokes on worthless paper have for you? Read this, about which life can say, 'It's mine!' You will not discover Centaurs and Gorgons and Harpies here: my page tastes like a human being." See Gold 2003: 596 on Martial's "pretense of neutral realism." See also Rimell 2008: 96–97.

18. See Fowler 1995: 224; Holzberg 2004–2005. For the alternative viewpoint see White 1974, 1996. Starr 2001 surveys more generally the expectation of flexible readerly interpretation that is built into the ancient literary tradition; see also Starr 1991.

19. Fitzgerald 2007: 30 suggests that a potential for commodification was latent in epigram itself: "Short, formally closed, and evoking, ideally, a smile of pleasure, delight, or admiration, the epigram was a form waiting to be commodified." For an introduction to the various publication formats mentioned by Martial see Roberts and Skeat 1987: 24–29; Nauta 2002: 91–141 is also helpful. See Harnett 2017 on Martial and the codex specifically. See then Roman 2014: 310: "[T]he relentlessness of Martial's presentation of the book as a material object for sale at the bookshop may also have the effect, paradoxically, of bringing the book's literary qualities more insistently to the fore. ... The relentlessness of Martial's materialist fiction thus creates the basis for a striking polarization of hermeneutic options: the reader must either accept the problematic fiction afforded by the text's literal account of itself, or assume a literariness the text persistently disavows."

20. See Lo Cascio 2008: 161 on the jurist Paulus' distinction between *forma publica* and *substantia*: it is the former that is said to make money.

also must be taken into account.²¹ The use of money, which had both state and economic purposes, was deeply embedded in institutions that were not driven by market mentalities, and the presence of money in ancient sources cannot be taken as evidence for the monetization of exchanges or of society as a whole.²² My reason for foregrounding monetary value here is that even in his patronage-centered social world, Martial emphasizes money's capacities as a means of exchange, store of value, and unit of account. Indeed, Martial's interest in money is paralleled only by Petronius in the literary tradition.²³ The epigrammatist's terminology for coinage combines a generalizing view of money with the rational language of fractions.²⁴ Sometimes he dispenses with the denomination altogether, simply giving us a number.²⁵ The numericity of coinage in Roman financial language thus extends his broader habit of enumeration. Counting is one of Martial's favorite poetic operations: he assesses the value of things, people, and social relations in numerical units, tallying prices, expenditures, revenues, loans and debts, inheritances, and gifts.²⁶ Not least, he counts his own poetry by the book, poem, line, and word.²⁷ In his world numbers signaling income are easy enough to fabricate, but in general Martial uses numerical units of wealth to establish a conviction of truth and authority, most officially when he models himself after the censor.²⁸

21. On cashless transfers and the difference between money and coinage see Verboven 2002: 132–39; Harris 2006; von Reden 2012: 276–79. Harris 2008 argues for the existence of credit money in Rome.

22. Howgego 1992; Verboven 2009; Scheidel 2010; Bransbourg 2011; Elliott 2020: 20–50. Bernard 2018 and Aarts 2005 are useful here as well. Coinage reforms were important to Domitian's rule; see Carradice 1983: 141–50, 153–66.

23. Bodel 2003.

24. Once, at 11.70.7, money is called *pecunia numerata*, but above all Martial prefers the term *nummus*, using it in thirty-two poems. This word is probably an abbreviation for the *nummus sestertius*, the usual denomination for accounting, or perhaps the *nummus dupondius*. It could also be a generic, catch-all word for any denomination of currency in the Augustan system. More precise terms exemplify the Roman logic of measurement. Around ten times we find the word *sestertius* (2½ *asses*) and once the diminutive *sestertiolus*. *Centum quadrantes*, the bronze *quadrans* being ¼ of an *as* and cropping up also about ten times in the corpus, form the *sportula* given to clients, for example at 1.59.1 or 3.7.1. The word *as*, which originally is a unit of measurement (a unity, divided into twelve parts—*unciae*—in the duodecimal system), is equally common. Twice, however, it features in the legal phrase *ex asse*, characterizing at 3.10.5 and 7.66.1 not money per se but the transfer of an inheritance to a sole heir (*OLD* s.v. “as” 3, 4). *Denarius*, originally meaning ten *asses*, shows up half as much, as does the word *moneta*, which Martial uses to refer to coins as well as a mint making coins. We do not find other denominations such as *quinarius*, and in the single instance of *semis*, at 11.105.2, it just means one half. *Bes*, *quincunx*, *triens*, *sextans*, and *semuncia*, names for coins from the Republican era, are unsurprisingly used only for measurements of volume.

25. See, e.g., 6.10.1: *Pauca Iovem nuper cum milia forte rogarem*, “When recently I was asking Jupiter for a few thousand...” Sometimes a denomination or the word *nummus* will appear elsewhere in the epigram, but often, as with 6.10, the reference to money is clear from context.

26. Rimell 2008: 94–139 provides an overview of this tendency in Martial; her argument is that numbers operate as an effect of reality in the epigrams. See also Hardie 1983: 70; Sullivan 1991: 3–4.

27. See, e.g., 2.1, 5.2, 5.15, 6.1, 8.1, 8.3, 8.20, 9.84.

28. See, e.g., 5.23.3: Bassus attempts to cheat his way into the equestrian section by wearing expensive Tyrian purple garments but, as Martial observes, no cloak can substitute for the requisite four hundred thousand sesterces. The poet takes the side of Domitian in his enforcement of the *lex*

The rhetorical reduction of coins to the honesty of numbers is only one dimension of Martial's interest in money. Coins are also physical objects and, as stuff, they are useful for affecting displays of wealth and can become the site of emotional bonds. We see this with gold coins, especially those given as gifts. The term *aureolus*, which fits into Martial's meters more readily than the cretic *aureus*, appears six times in the corpus. It can underscore a high price, as when a prostitute called Galla charges regulars two or four *aureoli* but gets *aureolos denos* from a customer to remain quiet about his unspecified sexual kink at 9.4.3. More often, the gold of these coins creates an aesthetic experience that detracts from their ability to be handed over promiscuously, and *aureoli* become singular objects conveying affection between individuals. Along with sardonyxes and emeralds Chloe gives her boyfriend Lupercus *centum dominos novae monetae*, "one hundred masters from a new minting," with the implication that they too will be jewelry (4.28.4–5).²⁹ Why spend shiny new coins when you can wear them, show them off?³⁰ Elsewhere, at 12.55.7–8, Martial juxtaposes *binos quater a nova moneta*, "eight [coins] from a new minting," with a pound of expensive perfume, *libram Cosmiani*. In 12.65 he likewise ponders what to give Phyllis after a long night of sex. Options include perfumes, Spanish wool, or *de moneta Caesaris decem flavos*, "ten blondies from the imperial mint." Phyllis instead asks for an amphora of wine, rounding out a list of things notable for their voluptuous properties. Suggestive of one-of-a-kind objects like cups or jewels, the precious metal of *aureoli* differentiates them from each other, from other coins with the same value, and from numbers in the abstract.³¹ This much is implied about currency in the passages just cited, even if it is not clear that they all refer to gold coins.

On the other hand, many coins are eventually rendered useful only as money. The gleam of new coins signals their ability to be taken out of monetary circulation and become jewelry, for instance. But the aging of coins circumscribes their uses,

Roscia theatralis by mentioning the number that cuts to the truth of Bassus' social status; see Canobbio 2011: 280–81 on the historical context. 5.25 covers the same territory. For specious numbers see, e.g., 5.35: Euclides, dressed in luxurious scarlet, boasts about two hundred thousand in income from a farm at Patrae, among other things, but he is betrayed when a key falls out of his pocket, revealing him to be a mere *ianitor*.

29. See Moreno Soldevila 2006: 250 on coins as jewelry. The principle is made explicit in the adjacent epigram, 4.29.3–4: *rara iuvant: primis sic maior gratia pomis, / hibernae pretium sic meruere rosae*, "Rarities are pleasing: thus, greater favor belongs to first fruits; thus, winter roses deserve their price."

30. Not the only purpose of gold coins, of course. Lo Cascio 2008 provides an overview of the use of gold as *pretium*, noting its low velocity of circulation and particular use as a store of wealth but also its ready mobility in comparison with silver coinage. Jongman 2003 emphasizes the importance of gold coin for transferring inheritances and largesse.

31. These coins begin to recall gold given explicitly as a gift at 8.18.9: *aurum et opes et rura frequens donabit amicus*, "Many *amici* will give gold and wealth and land." We see the parsing of gold and coins in a similar list at 3.26.1–2: Candidus shares his wife with the public, unlike his wealth: *solus... nummos, / aurea solus habes*, "You keep your coins to yourself, you keep your gold to yourself." *Aurea* here may mean gold cups, so Fusi 2006: 249; or, following Friedländer 1886 ad loc., gold dishes.

marking out the one purpose remaining for such grubby, worn bits of metal. The older they become, the more they become coins; that is, *only* money. Coins with a grime or patina—the *nigra moneta* mentioned at 1.99.13, for instance—refuse to be discarded. With signs of age clarifying their use, these coins become undying embodiments of exchange value.³² Their qualities bring them closer to existing as pure quantities. Epigram 12.57 stages this zombie-like status as the potential to survive regime change. The poem contrasts the noisy pulse of city life with the leisure and space for thought afforded by Martial's farm in Nomentum, however humble and poorly watered: *sicci parva rura Nomenti / laremque villae sordidum* (12.57.1–2). Along with scolding teachers and noisy bakers, it is those who work with various metals that keep Martial from living his proper life in Rome:

negant vitam
 ludi magistri mane, nocte pistores,
 aerariorum marculi die toto;
 hinc otiosus sordidam quatit mensam
 Neroniana nummularius massa,
 illinc balucis malleator Hispanae
 tritum nitenti fuste verberat saxum;
 Mart. 12.57.4–10

They deny me life:
 schoolmasters in the morning, bakers at night,
 the little hammers of coppersmiths all day long;
 over here the indifferent moneychanger rattles his
 stinky counter with a heap [of coins] from Nero's day,
 over there a man hammering Spanish gold dust
 lashes the worn stone with a gleaming mallet.

Unlike with the *aurea massa* mentioned at 3.31.4, almost certainly a heap of *aureoli*, we are left uncertain as to the denominations handled by the *nummularius*. Having outlived both the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties, these coins—understood as *Kleingeld* by Hultsch and Friedländer—are all but literally defaced: presumably, they bear the face of Nero, still useful for corroborating monetary value even after decades of violence.³³ The coins are juxtaposed with the copper and gold surrounding them in Martial's annoyed impression of the street, while the dynamism of the workers in copper and gold recurs in the act of exchanging

32. Compare Žižek 1989: 18: “[W]e have touched a problem unsolved by Marx, that of the *material* character of money: not of the empirical, material stuff money is made of, but of the *sublime* material, of that other ‘indestructible and immutable’ body which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical—this other body of money is like the corpse of the Sadeian victim which endures all torments and survives with its beauty immaculate.”

33. See Friedländer 1886 ad loc. I take it for granted that this epigram was composed after the death of Domitian.

money. As an indiscriminate mass they merge into a collective unit, fused into a lump like not-yet-crafted metals. But also, not unlike piles of nuggets, they are a multiplicity capable of jostling audibly, transferable as particles that can be assembled and dissembled into greater or lesser values. Martial's proleptic use of *sordidam* implies grime: the coins smudge and dirty the counter with their arcane residue. The double valence of the adjective in the phrase *sordidam mensam*, meaning filthy and, borrowed from the *nummularius*, stingy, differs markedly from the defensible humility of Martial's farm, *laremque villae sordidum*. The only way to redeem these bits of metal is to keep them in circulation.

A most obscene image of the wear inflicted on coins comes in epigram 2.51, a poem that puts an arresting spin on the notion of coins as numerical tokens that people treat as exact equivalents despite their material differences. In probing Hyllus' *prurigo* or itch for anal sex, Martial aligns sexual practices and spending habits with the anonymous friction that coins show as their legacy of so many exchanges.³⁴

Unus saepe tibi tota denarius arca
 cum sit et hic culo tritior, Hylle, tuo,
 non tamen hunc pistor, non auferet hunc tibi copo,
 sed si quis nimio pene superbus erit.
 infelix venter spectat convivia culi
 et semper miser hic esurit, ille vorat.
 Mart. 2.51

Often when a single denarius remains in your whole
 cashbox, and it's worn down more than your asshole, Hyllus,
 still, the baker won't take it from you, nor the innkeeper,
 but any cocky guy with a massive dick.
 Your impoverished belly watches the banquet of the asshole:
 the former always starves pitifully while the latter gorges itself.

Hyllus, whenever he is down to the dregs of his cashbox, spends his remaining denarius to satisfy one appetite, ignoring his stomach. Elsewhere Martial makes the same connection between mouth and anus, each of which feeds on something.³⁵ The denarius of 2.51 is not merely a prize for competing hungers, however. Its form anticipates the choice that Hyllus will make, implying through its wear that he has made it many times before. The coin vies with the *culus* for promiscuity, being more worn, handled by more people, in more transactions. The epigram thus develops an analogy between penetrative sex and spending, centered around a compulsive personality who engages in each without restraint. Every iteration of buying

34. The same *prurigo* features in 4.48. Epigram 9.57 describes a worn anus with language similar to that of 2.51.

35. 12.75.3: *pastas glande natis habet Secundus*, "Secundus has butt cheeks fed on acorns (i.e., the tips of penises)."

or copulating returns him to a site of friction. The *culus* and *nummus* have anonymous histories of use populated by generic figures: *pistor*, *copo*, *si quis...* *superbus*. Every user leaves a trace of presence in a place where matter is repeatedly chafed: a gleam of silver or ruddy glint of flesh, perhaps. Epigram 2.51 invites attention to the non-feature that is wear, a patent effacement of features or, in response, a secondary bulging. Use as numerical tokens precipitates the movement of coins to a material stage ever more appropriate for their ideal existence as property without properties. And yet, at the same time, a noticeable, material property remains or indeed emerges, as is made all too clear in this anal allegory of monetary abstraction. No matter how much their practical existence as numbers causes them to become worn, coins are never just numbers rubbed featureless.

The schizoid life of coins is lived also by uncoined metals. Partly, this slipperiness between categories involves the range of lexical meanings for certain metallic terms. With the word *aes* or *aera* in the plural, Martial regularly indicates either bronze or alloyed bronze coins or any coin not made from precious metals.³⁶ He also uses this term to describe objects made from bronze, such as statues or bowls.³⁷ It is not difficult to tell when Martial refers to coins with this word and when he refers to something that, properly speaking, is not money. The distinction is less clear with *argentum*, silver, most commonly a commodity weighed by the pound.³⁸ In epigram 7.53, Martial suggests uncoined silver as a viable alternative to money because of its standardization and fungibility. An *amicus* called UMBER annoys Martial by regifting his haul from the first five days of the Saturnalia to the poet. The list of items includes foodstuffs and cheap household goods such as writing tablets, toothpicks, a sponge, and a napkin. The conclusion puts these recycled gifts into perspective:

vix puto triginta nummorum tota fuisse
munera quae grandes octo tulere Syri.
quanto commodius nullo mihi ferre labore
argenti potuit pondera quinque puer!

Mart. 7.53.9–12

I think the gifts, which needed eight robust Syrians
to carry them, cost barely thirty sesterces all together.
How much more conveniently, and with no exertion,
could five pounds³⁹ of silver have been brought to me by a boy!

36. See, e.g., 1.76.3–4: *Pierios differ cantusque chorosque sororum; / aes dabit ex istis nulla puella tibi*, “Put aside Pierian songs and the sisters’ choruses; none of those girls (i.e., the Muses) will give you bronze.”

37. See, e.g., the bronze castanets, *Tartesiaca ... aera*, at 11.16.4.

38. See, e.g., 3.62.4.

39. Galán Vioque 2002: 324 points out that *pondera* means the same thing here as *libra*; compare Petronius, *Satyrica* 31.10 for silver cups marked with their weight.

The punchline links the cost of the gifts to the silver for which they could be substituted.⁴⁰ Silver would have the convenience of cash, which gleams as a charitable estimation of cost in line 9. Both would be more convenient than the unwieldy mass of gifts. Martial's preference for five pounds of silver is implicated in the contrast between eight struggling Syrians and the *puer* who would deliver it by himself, appearing as the very last word of the poem. The gifts are worn out by circulation as the Saturnalia moves past its climax, while the silver, like the boy, would arrive with strength undiminished.⁴¹ Treating uncoined silver as quasi-cash, Martial relies on a logic of monetary substitution both to contrast and to synthesize. The silver and the boy carrying it are hardly equivalent to the trivial gifts and robust Syrian slaves. In being more valuable and convenient, the silver also takes on a subtly erotic charge from the boy. The libidinal energy of this poem breaks down the divisions between gift, money, and the intermediary *puer*, who, himself part of the gift, absorbs and throws back the force of erotic attachment.

Epigram 7.53 illustrates that, both as price and as a principle of fungibility, monetary value operates in social relations, even in the context of gift exchange. Martial's humor works by taking up a certain posture regarding this situation: he notices monetary value, points to it, makes it explicit, and draws out connections that would seem not to exist in any real sense. The same logic is at work in a more aggressive poem in book 4 that lacks the erotic overtones of 7.53. In 4.15, Martial scolds Maecilianus, an *amicus* who had asked the poet for a loan of one thousand sesterces.⁴² Martial denied this request, but Maecilianus followed it by asking for a large dinner plate and some serving vessels. The poet responds as if Maecilianus were trying to pull the wool over his eyes: *stultus es? an stultum me credis, amice? negavi / mille tibi nummos, milia quinque dabo?*, "Are you stupid? Or do you think I am stupid, friend? I refused you a thousand coins; will I then give you five thousand?" (4.15.5–6). That is, because the tableware would be worth five thousand sesterces, it would in effect be a loan worth five times more than the original amount. Even though Maecilianus only asks for cash once, we are dealing with a set of objects that are considered the same in type if not degree. In a six-line poem that contains five numbers, Martial speaks in the voice of a creditor, flipping between days and money. His indignation presupposes an awareness of the monetary value that pervades the world of things whether it appears directly in the form of loaned cash or cryptically in the form of gifted utensils. But it also relies on

40. I pass over part of the joke here: the silver would be more convenient *and* more valuable than the gifts, hence the proposed exchange is not between equal things. Compare 8.71, where a patron sends gradually less and less uncoined silver for the Saturnalia to Martial, who counts down the weights.

41. Richlin 1992: 40 discusses the technique of ending poems with the word *puer*, an erotic surprise or the answer to a sort of riddle set up to equate disparate things. Pederasty is a central theme in Martial; see Sullivan 1991: 207–210; Richlin 1992: 32–56; Obermayer 1998. The discussion of *pueri* and *cinaedi* at Williams 2010: 203–214 draws heavily on Martial.

42. 4.15.1–2: *Mille tibi nummos hesterna luce roganti / in sex aut septem, Maeciliane, dies*, "When you were asking yesterday for a thousand coins [to have] for six or seven days, Maecilianus..."

Maecilianus' strategic obliviousness. In asking for a second favor, he suppresses what then comes off as a crass way to consider non-monetary gifts. The different materializations of monetary value support the incompatible postures and sensibilities of epigram 4.15.

The idea of money as a protean form of value that habitually disguises itself appears at length in an epigram that alludes to the Saturnalian practice of making imitation foods out of wax or mud.⁴³ Caecilius, the "Atreus of gourds," loves squash so much that he instructs his cook to shape it to look like every other dish.⁴⁴ The plant becomes first, second, and third course: ersatz cakes, dates, lentils, beans, mushrooms, sausages, and so on. Over seventeen lines of hendecasyllables, Martial indulges himself in recounting all the different forms into which Caecilius' pastry chef "arranges manifold layers of gourd meat."⁴⁵ Then, in the punchline, Caecilius and the culinary artifice itself are characterized as *gauche*:

sic implet gabatas paropsidasque,
et leves scutulas cavasque lances.
hoc lautum vocat, hoc putat venustum,
unum ponere ferculis tot assem.

Mart. 11.31.18–21

In this way he fills platters and small plates
and smooth dishes and hollow bowls.
This he calls elegant, this he considers lovely:
to serve one item on so many plates.

The verb *ponere* means "to serve" when used in the context of food, but, coupled with the noun *assem*, Martial allows for another meaning, "to spend."⁴⁶ That is, the final word could simply mean a unit, namely one item of food. It could also be a copper coin, and so, with some license, the line could be translated another way: "to spend a dollar on so many dishes." Caecilius' craftiness is really just penny pinching. One thinks of Trimalchio's pride in a similar party trick at the *cena*. The cook in that scene, aptly named Daedalus, had fashioned foods out of pork: *ita crescam patrimonio, non corpore, ut ista cocus meus de porco fecit*, "So I will expand in my wealth and not in my waist, since my cook has made those dishes from pork" (Petron. *Sat.* 70).⁴⁷ Read against the scene in Petronius, Martial's use of the term *assem* becomes all the more conspicuous. Martial puts money itself on the plates. Add to this the repetition of *hoc*: the poet points emphatically to the

43. For the practice, see Schmeling 2011: 286 on Petron. *Sat.* 69.9. Trimalchio is a model for Martial's Caecilius; poetic imitation is all the cleverer given the topic of imitation foods.

44. 11.31.1: *Atreus Caecilius cucurbitarum*.

45. 11.31.9: *multiplices struit tabellas*.

46. *OLD* s.v. "pono" 5, 14.

47. See Cucchiarelli 1999 on the connection to mime: the commonality is the manipulation of something (food, the actor's persona) into different forms.

culinary magic as if to money alchemized over and over again. The gourds make palpable—pulpable, we could say—the numerical dimension that allows goods to be commensurable in the marketplace. Martial’s satire obliges us not to take homogeneity too literally. Supposing that money actually is all the things that it can buy risks sharing the mentality of someone who wants to eat only foods that are blandly flavored squash, despite the skill of the cook in dressing up their appearance.

Caecilius’ pathology cautions against a sort of analysis that isolates monetary values straightforwardly from the different flavors, textures, tastes, and smells that make up the feast of life, so to speak. This lesson instructs the reading of epigram 11.70, which pleads with Tucca not to sell prized slave boys who were purchased for a considerable amount. Martial calls the weeping slaves *domini*, “masters,” adjusting the typical inversion of erotic elegy wherein the *puella*, the love interest, becomes a *domina* controlling the elegiac poet:

Vendere, Tucca, potes centenis milibus emptos?
 plorantis dominos vendere, Tucca, potes?
 nec te blanditiae, nec verba rudesve querelae,
 nec te dente tuo saucia colla movent?
 ah facinus! tunica patet inguen utrimque levata, 5
 inspiciturque tua mentula facta manu.
 si te delectat numerata pecunia, vende
 argentum, mensas, murrina, rura, domum;
 vende senes servos, ignoscent, vende paternos:
 ne pueros vendas, omnia vende miser. 10
 luxuria est emere hos – quis enim dubitave negatve? –,
 sed multo maior vendere luxuria est.

Mart. 11.70

Tucca, can you really sell [boys] bought for a hundred thousand,
 can you really sell your weeping masters, Tucca?
 Don’t their allurements move you, their words and artless cries,
 their necks, wounded by your tooth?
 Oh outrage! With tunic lifted the groin is visible from either side, 5
 their cocks are inspected, fashioned by your hand.
 If counted-out cash delights you, sell
 silver, tables, murrine ware, farms, your home;
 sell old slaves (they will forgive you), sell your father’s slaves:
 sell everything, wretched man, so you don’t sell the boys. 10
 Buying these is extravagance—who would doubt or deny it?—
 but selling them is a much greater extravagance.

This poem, quoted in full, demonstrates thoroughly the ontological confusion internal to monetary exchange. We are well past a mere calling into question of the

extra-monetary basis of price. Martial brings the reader in and out of the seller's mindset by encircling Tucca's inspection of the boys, described at a stage of remove, with advice addressed directly to him. As Tucca lifts the boys' garment and handles their genitals, it is as if he already fingers the cash that will be counted out in their sale.⁴⁸ It will be recalled that this is the only instance in Martial's corpus where he uses the term *numerata pecunia*, emphasizing the double nature of money as stuff and number, as enumerated matter. Indeed, the curious bite marks on the boys' necks—*dente tuo saucia colla*—could resemble test marks cut into coins to ascertain their validity.⁴⁹ Tucca sees three things in place of one: the boys, the numerical value that is their sale price, and the coins embodying this price. Like Calliodorus in epigram 10.31, he bites into flesh that is both human and monetary.

These enticing, spectral bodies, all too tangible but haunted by the presence of at least three separate identities, inform Martial's pleading as well. The original purchase price of one hundred thousand sesterces is an eroticized amount in his epigrams.⁵⁰ As noted, in calling the boys *domini*, Martial invokes the literary trope of *servitium amoris*. But this noun also creeps into his vocabulary of coinage, as in the already quoted expression at 4.28.5: *centum dominos novae monetae*. In addition to a reference to the sex slaves, we can read *plorantis dominos* as "weeping masters," that is, coins. The jarring image of weeping coins synthesizes Tucca's desire for cash with his attachment to the slave boys. A similar ambiguity occurs with the demonstrative *hos* in line 11: does it gesture only to the boys? Moreover, after observing the way Tucca fondles them, Martial segues inferentially to "if counted cash seduces you..." That is, when the poet returns to persuading Tucca at line 7, he uses the verb *delectat* in such a way that the elision between desire for cash and erotic interest in the boys becomes complete; to talk about the boys is to talk about money. Rendering the *domini* into cash would monetize the fungibility between them and other commodifiable items. But also, as the paradox goes, it would conceal their interconnections. By aiming to restore the slaves to the heteronomous field of Tucca's property, Martial pushes against the tendency towards

48. Compare 10.55.7 on Marulla, who weighs penises before and after ejaculation, noting the difference down to the *scripulum*: *non ergo est manus ista, sed statera*, "Therefore, hers is not a hand but a scale."

49. See Melville-Jones 1990: 76–77 on test marking or test cutting coins.

50. The numerical value appears in 1.58, where Martial regrets not giving a *mango* that much for a *puer* of his own. The amount is high but not without historical parallels: see Citroni 1975: 193–94; Bodel 2003: 275 on the number in Petronius. Compare 3.62 and 2.63, where a man pays the same amount to have sex with Leda in the *via sacra*. 11.29.5–8 finds Phyllis masturbating the poet to no effect. He urges her to get him off by promising *milia centum*, no doubt riffing on Catullus 5: *blanditias nescis: 'dabo' dic 'tibi milia centum / et dabo Setini tugera certa soli; / accipe vina, domum, pueros, chrysendeta, mensas.' / nil opus est digitis: sic mihi, Phylli, frica*, "You don't understand sex talk: say 'I will give you one hundred thousand and I will give a fixed amount of acreage in the soil of Setia; take wines, a house, boys, dishes inlaid with gold, tables!' There's no need for fingers: *this* is how to masturbate me, Phyllis!" The verb *dare* has a charged meaning here as the term for both paying for and providing sexual services; compare 7.75, where it is used in both senses.

autonomy in monetary valuation. His rhetorical strategy would impose the aesthetic form of Tucca's desire for the boys *qua* money *qua* coins onto nearby objects—everything else that Tucca owns, that is.

The comparatively greater luxury found in selling the slave boys, *multo maior luxuria*, draws attention to changes that occur in monetary value over time, analogous to the physical growth and enhanced sexual appeal of the *pueri*.⁵¹ Money exists across time: exchanges stabilize values that can continue to fluctuate. In the rationalizing language of accounting, epigram 10.75 tracks the falling market value of a prostitute named Galla, a figure whose numerous appearances in the epigrams coincide with requests, demands, delays, and refusals.⁵²

Milia viginti quondam me Galla poposcit
 et, fateor, magno non erat illa nimis.
 annus abit: 'bis quina dabis sestertia', dixit.
 poscere plus visa est quam prius illa mihi.
 iam duo poscenti post sextum milia mensem 5
 mille dabam nummos. noluit accipere.
 transierant binae forsan trinaeve Kalendae,
 aureolos ultro quattuor ipsa petit.
 non dedimus. centum iussit me mittere nummos;
 sed visa est nobis haec quoque summa gravis. 10
 sportula nos iunxit quadrantibus arida centum;
 hanc voluit: puero diximus esse datam.
 inferius numquid potuit descendere? fecit.
 dat gratis, ultro dat mihi Galla: nego.

Mart. 10.75

Once upon a time Galla sought 20,000 from me
 and, I confess, that woman was not too much [to pay for].
 A year goes by: "You will pay 10,000 sesterces," she said.
 That woman seemed to me to ask for more than before.
 Now, after six months, when she comes asking for 2,000, 5
 I will give 1,000 coins. She declined to accept.
 Two Kalends or maybe three had gone by,
 she volunteers the price of four gold pieces.
 I didn't pay it. She ordered me to send 100 sesterces;
 But even this sum seemed too burdensome to me. 10
 A meagre dole joined me to 100 *quadrantes*.
 This she wanted: I told her it had been given to a boy.

51. Compare 7.14: a *puella* lustily waits for the *mentula* of a boy to grow into its proper size.

52. See, e.g., 2.25: *das numquam, semper promittis, Galla, roganti. / si semper fallis, iam rogo, Galla, nega*, "You never put out, you always promise, Galla, when I come asking. If you're always deceiving me, now I'm asking you, Galla: say no!"

Could she go any lower? Oh yes she could.
 She offers for free, Galla offers to pay me: I decline.

Galla once commanded a price of twenty thousand sesterces, *milia viginti*. A year later that number drops to ten thousand, *bis quina sestertia*, then, six months later, to two thousand, *duo milia*. Martial next offers one thousand, *mille nummos*. Two to three months later, Galla seeks four hundred sesterces or four gold coins, *aureolos quattuor*. Martial's language of time passing in this instance, *transierant binae forsane trinaeve Kalendae* (7), may recall key dates in financial calendars, the Kalends by which creditors could reckon *usura* owed on a loan.⁵³ Galla's *pretium* then falls to one hundred sesterces, *centum nummos*, then to the meager contents of Martial's dole, *quadrantibus centum*. This paltry amount Martial claims to have given to a *puer*, perhaps one of Galla's professional rivals. In the punchline, Galla ends up offering to pay the poet for sex, an offer he declines: *dat gratis, ultro dat mihi Galla: nego* (14).⁵⁴ The salient humor in the poem comes from different meanings of the verb *dare*: to pay, to put out, to give as a gift, to give up.

As the numbers drop, we become estranged from Galla the human. Her identity is not so much erased as subsumed by currency amounts that are plotted in passing time. Martial gives no reason for the decline in her sexual desirability. We might suppose old age or overwork or the fading of novelty, but the only story told is by numbers and the poet's unexamined, unchallenged impressions. The money she can make from selling herself replaces her age. For instance, after the first year and first markdown, one could be excused for understanding *illa* as *summa* in line 4: *poscere plus visa est quam prius illa mihi*. A similar ambiguity occurs in line 10, after the request for one hundred sesterces: *sed visa est nobis haec quoque summa gravis*. Galla is the subject of the verbs on either side of this line. Now one could be forgiven for mistaking her as the subject of *visa est*, at least before reaching the line's penultimate word. When Martial gestures dismissively to payments proffered, accepted, or denied, he gestures to Galla. The poem comes to read as a movement of abstraction with two sides. While it isolates the values for which Galla can exchange her sexual services with Martial, it turns Galla herself into a corporealization of monetary value. Line 12, on the *sportula* sought in vain, is then perhaps the most eerie and disturbing: *hanc voluit: puero diximus esse datam*. Once more the use of a deictic pronoun confuses Galla with the price of her services. If Galla by now is materially coextensive with money, she must at this moment hear about the value of her own body—no, *her body itself*—from a desperate distance. Martial has already dispensed with her, so to speak; it is she who has already been given, *esse datam*, in all the ways this poem brings into play. Even so, Galla persists as a willful negotiator, a hybrid cluster of intentions

53. See Mankin 1995: 87 on Hor. *Epod.* 2.67–70.

54. Shackleton Bailey 1978: 287–88 explains the meaning of *ultro dat* in this line.

that—necessarily for the humor of the poem—operates, accepts, and compromises, moving steadily towards the paradox of a prostitute who pays to sell herself.

With fluctuation and change in mind, I return now to the monetary dualism of enumerated matter. Creditors can extract *usura* by realizing money simultaneously as a number recorded in a ledger book and as cash in the possession of debtors. A brief image at 8.44.10–11, from a poem that reminds its readers that wealth is fleeting, recalls this profitable fact in the juxtaposition of glowing coins and loan records: *superba densis arca palleat nummis, / centum explicentur paginae Kalendarum*, “Although your arrogant cashbox glows with heaped up coins, although one hundred pages of the Kalends unfold...” The pages contain the *nomina* of people who owe *usura*. Of course, the nearby cash is yet to be put out at interest, but it illustrates the principle at work here.⁵⁵ Money’s power to generate more money stems from it being in two places at once: a number by a name on a page and coins in the hand or wallet. The ledgers unfold automatically, *explicentur*, rustling with their own fecundity. In this context it makes sense to discover Martial drawing a comparison between two sorts of power: the strongbox of wealthy lenders holds over people a power not unlike that of the master.⁵⁶ Twice the *arca* is said to “whip up” wealth, *flagellat*, suggesting the compulsion attendant upon lending at interest.⁵⁷ In each passage *arca* is the subject of the verb, impersonally driving profits. More explicitly, at 3.31.3–4, debtors are enslaved to an inhuman mistress: *et servit dominae numerosus debitor arcae / sustentatque tuas aurea massa dapes*, “And numerous debtors serve a strongbox mistress, and heaps of gold prop up your feasts.” These passages offer a variation on the notion of coins as masters. The gleam of this gold does not detract from its ability to be currency, as with the gifted *aureoli* mentioned above. Martial understands the animacy of cash to reside in the dual nature of its existence.

Epigram 6.27, which might suggest an analogy for the revenues of money lent at interest, likewise juxtaposes the theme of duplication with images of growth and enrichment that occur over time. Martial addresses Nepos, the poet’s neighbor twice over, living both at Rome and near Nomentum. Nepos is urged to seize the day and drink his good wine, presumably with the poet:

Bis vicine Nepos – nam tu quoque proxima Florae
incolis et veteres tu quoque Ficelias –
est tibi, quae patria signatur imagine vultus,
testis maternae nata pudicitiae.

55. See 5.42.3 for the terms *sors*, principal, and *usura*, interest. 2.44 rattles off *nomina*, the names of indebted people but also the loans themselves.

56. The term *arca* appears frequently; see, e.g., 1.76.5, 2.30.4, 2.44.9, 3.31.3, 3.41.2, 5.13.6, 5.42.1, 8.38.11, 8.44.10, 10.15.4.

57. 2.30.4, 5.13.6. I follow the influential interpretation of Friedländer; see Canobbio 2011: 189–90 for a comprehensive overview and the notion that *flagellat* simply refers to the straining of a chest crammed with coins, the image we get at 10.15.4: *non caperet nummos cum gravis arca tuos*, “Although your freighted strongbox could not hold your coins...”

apparatus of his Teubner edition, that we are not to imagine the daughter drinking new wine but old wine that is new at present. Martial telescopes the stages of development for wine into lines 7 and 8, capturing its different temporal stages. The exact use for the bronze coins remains unclear, nor is there any indication that the daughter or father will lend at interest. In blurring the distinction between the jars of cash and *mustum*, however, Martial may be suggesting that capital can enrich itself as passively as wine that improves in the cellar. That much is at least hinted at by the blending of wine and paternity with coinage. The unnamed daughter is stamped with her father's face, *signatur*, not unlike a coin.⁶⁰ He is thus "twice-neighbor," *bis vicine*, in another sense: residing both in himself and in his daughter's countenance. Moreover, the power of a *domina* (the word describing the daughter in line 8) can be, as we have seen, synonymous with the compulsion latent in cash or the cashbox. Both images—the daughter who is her parents in another timeframe and the *mustum* that is likewise aged Caecuban or Falernian—provide a way to analogize the potential for money to exist in multiple places at once. In other words, the *usura* of a loan is as much already present with the principal, *sors*, as matured wine is there in freshly pressed juice. The form of presence is for the one a mathematical percentage, for the other a biological potential of vinification.

As I have argued in this article, there is a multimodal object that appears throughout the epigrams: monetary value itself. Money for Martial is a sensual abstraction, a presence to be pointed to, with a life of its own but never entirely autonomous from the items and people that give it value. What makes this object so fascinating when it informs the aesthetics of Martial's humor is that it begins as a social form. Martial can structure the humor of epigrams around the fact that money is variously different things to different people, while the abstractions that are required for its functionality are at once enacted and strategically unthought. Thus, in each of the poems that I have discussed here, the poet can draw attention to postures that correspond to one or more modalities of money. He too can take up and put aside his own and other perceptions of monetary exchange. Calliodorus' cannibalistic meal, the slave boys who are also gnawed coins and seductive numbers, Galla's diminishing, numerical body at once inside and outside of her intentions and desperation, the fleshy gourd meat of Caecilius' dollar, the denarius of Hyllus that refuses to be rubbed out even as its utility as currency propels it through ever more frictions, the daughter stamped with her father's likeness, inheriting jars of bronze fortified like wine: all of these objects have a strange, spectral materialism that fluctuates in poetry because it can be seen to do so in social life. If Martial's sustained interest in paradox allows him to be the poet of life itself, I have argued here that we can use the materiality of money to feel out the

60. OLD s.v. "signo" 7; see Lo Cascio 2008: 161 on the wording of the *lex Cornelia testamentaria: vultu principum signatam monetam*.

presence of society in the epigrams, perceiving the quotidian as an immanent form of humor.

To conclude, I consider one more poem and suggest that it also points to the materiality of monetary value. Epigram 1.41, which attacks a rival poet named Caecilius, aims to puncture his pretensions to urbanity by asserting that Caecilius is on par with an assortment of people with servile or otherwise disgraceful occupations or identities:

Urbanus tibi, Caecili, videris.
 non es, crede mihi. quid ergo? verna es,
 hoc quod transtiberinus ambulator,
 qui pallentia sulphurata fractis
 permutat vitreis, quod otiosae 5
 vendit qui madidum cicer coronae,
 quod custos dominusque viperarum,
 quod viles pueri salariorum,
 quod fumantia qui thumatla raucus
 circumfert tepidis cocus popinis, 10
 quod non optimus urbicus poeta,
 quod de Gadibus improbus magister,
 quod bucca est vetuli dicax cinaedi.
 quare desine iam tibi videri,
 quod soli tibi, Caecili, videris, 15
 qui Gabbam salibus tuis et ipsum
 posses vincere Tettium Caballum.
 non cuicumque datum est habere nasum:
 ludit qui stolidi procacitate,
 non est Tettius ille, sed caballus. 20

Mart. 1.41

To yourself you seem urbane, Caecilius: you're not,
 trust me. What then? You are a buffoonish homeborn slave,
 that which a transient from across
 the Tiber is, someone who swaps
 glowing sulphur for broken glass, what the 5
 chickpea man is for the encircling crowd,
 what the snake lord and tamer is,
 what the cheap slaves of men who sell salt fish are,
 what the hoarse cook is, bringing around smoky
 sausages to the lukewarm food stalls, 10
 what an urban poet, not the best one, is,
 what the pederastic pedagogue from Cadiz is,
 what the talky mouth of the old cocksucker is.

So, stop appearing to yourself what you
 appear as only to yourself, Caecilius; you 15
 who could beat Gabba with your wit
 and Tettius Caballus.
 It is not given to everyone to have a nose;
 the guy who jokes stupidly, without
 shame—he is not a Tettius, but a hack. 20

The poem uses anaphora of *quod* to drag Caecilius through a list of individuals offering goods and entertainment for sale in the streets of Rome. It compares him, in concluding, to the well-known Augustan-era *scurra* Gabba and to Tettius Caballus, presumably also “un famoso buffone.”⁶¹ Martial chooses the second name in anticipation of the punchline: Caecilius is a hack, a nag, a pack horse, *caballus*. The conclusion makes it clear that Caecilius’ aspirations to urbanity manifest themselves in some type of witty literary activity, which Martial calls *salibus tuis* or *stolida procacitate*. The non-literary activities of the street are combined both with whatever form of song Caecilius engages in and with that of the *non optimus urbicus poeta*.⁶² The essence of Caecilius, which is also the essence of his entertainment, is found in this set. The pivotal phrase *hoc quod* works as the mode of identification between Caecilius and the other exemplars of “this thing that” he is. Martial settles on a term for Caecilius—namely *caballus*—only indirectly and after threading his way through a manifold identity.

In other words, we could say that Martial points with a deictic pronoun, *hoc*, to something, *quod*, that is both heteronomous—defined by all the street people listed in the poem—and autonomous: Caecilius himself, a singularly bad author. In 1.41, a poem that compulsively gathers scenes of street commerce, the underlying principles of exchange and fungibility are embodied in the actions of the *transtiberinus ambulator*, a “transient from across the Tiber.” Opinions diverge on the exact nature of his occupation. He is “one who swaps glowing sulfur for broken glass,” *qui pallentia sulphurata fractis / permutat vitreis*.⁶³ I follow the argument of Harrison that bits of sulfur “provided for a multiplicity of needs in everyday life” in Rome. Martial is therefore referring to a person who deals in purified sulfur chunks or flakes (hence *pallentia*) rather than sulfur already processed into matches or tapers.⁶⁴

61. Citroni 1975: 135. Gabba is mentioned also at 10.101.

62. An earlier generation of commentators would capitalize *urbicus*, making him Urbicus, a writer of Atellanæ and *exodia* mentioned by Juvenal at 6.71. But see Friedländer 1886 ad loc. against taking *urbicus* as a proper noun.

63. Perhaps he exchanges a type of match or taper—i.e., the *sulphuratum ramentum* of 10.3.3, used to transfer fire from one place to another—with odd bits of glass, as suggested by Howell 1980: 193–94. But for what purpose is the glass acquired? Leon 1941 postulated that broken glass bits would be added to molten glass to improve its quality. Another possibility, one that lends itself by analogy to the tessellated style of Martial’s poetry, is that these bits were used by makers of mosaics; see Smyth 1947. Scholars seem to agree at least in debunking the old theory that the sulfur would be used to glue together broken glassware; see Harrison 1987: 203.

64. Harrison 1987: 205.

The *ambulator* would seem to deal in broken glass and sulfur bits, to be motivated by the acquisition of either commodity, and to be willing to swap the two, shuffling his wealth through various forms. The little bits of sulfur are then a quasi-money, glowing like the cashbox replete with coins mentioned at 8.44.10: *superba densis arca palleat nummis*. They would easily crumble into smaller pieces, as with coins which may be broken, so to speak, into smaller denominations. To the *ambulator*, they are valuable primarily as something that can be readily exchanged, useful for this purpose precisely because they are used for so many purposes. The verb *permutare* means “to give and take reciprocally, to exchange.” But that general meaning here blurs with more specific ones, such as “to give up (commodities, possessions) while receiving others in return” or, in the passive voice, “to be received as equivalent for other coins.”⁶⁵ That is, *permutare* connotes the fungibility in monetary and commodity exchange and, we might add, in the poetic form of this epigram.

In modelling itself on monetary exchange, epigram 1.41 is repetitive (the form *quod* alone appears nine times) without being reductive. It illustrates how the commensurability between things made possible by money is not a simple enactment but something that can proliferate a multiplicity of identifications even as it emerges in different domains of life. It also illustrates the difficulty of naming commensurability or fungibility as such. Caecilius may be a *caballus non urbanus*, but Martial's investment in the list of vendors far outweighs the force of this label, or the earlier slur *verna*. The closest Martial comes to reaching the essence of Caecilius is in the pronouncement of *hoc*. The demonstrative points to some immediate substance, the matter of the rival poet that must be swapped time and again, like sulfur for glass. We are prompted to wonder about the interiority of Caecilius. As Martial puts it, picking up a phrase from the first line: “So, stop appearing to yourself what you appear as only to yourself,” *quare desine iam tibi videri, / quod soli tibi, Caecili, videris*. The basis upon which Caecilius finds himself urbane remains unknowable, unshared, although Martial does let us know that something idiosyncratic is going on inside his rival's head. Caecilius retains some degree of autonomy from the intrusion of Martial's list. What is Caecilius thinking?, Martial would have us ask. A more interesting question, to expand away from 1.41, is: Apart from human desires, what interiority does money have? How does money appear to itself?

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65. *OLD* s.v. “permuto” 1, 2.

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