



CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Rob Kovitz



Messieurs et Dames !

Les moins d'argent les moins d'oeuvres les moins de diuinité au sein que de la just. Penult. de la salubrité en récompense de
ma bonté. Mais que vous m'allez dire le monde des les autres m'ont. Nos actions d'homme je ne les rends pas
je les donne pour des misérables fruits je en donne deux pour une je donne une aigle au car-celle au grand tout. Je
je vous donne une fondation pour des les autres. En avoir la grande misère.



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Treyf Books
Keep Refrigerated

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Published by Treyf Books
5-193 Furby Street
Winnipeg, MB Canada R3C 2A6
www.treyf.com
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A version of this project was first published in
Scapegoat 04: Currency, Winter/Spring 2013.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

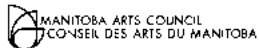
Kovitz, Rob, 1963-, author, artist
Capital of the world / by Rob Kovitz.

Includes bibliographical references.
Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-927923-05-4 (pbk.).
ISBN 978-1-927923-06-1 (epub).
ISBN 978-1-927923-07-8 (pdf)

1. Kovitz, Rob, 1963-. 2. Artists' books--Canada. I. Title.

N7433.4.K68C36 2014 700.971 C2013-908423-1
C2013-908424-X

Financial assistance for the creation and production of Treyf Books is
sometimes provided by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Arts
Council, and the City of Winnipeg through the Winnipeg Arts Council.



10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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WritingResource.info, *Capital Letters (Printable Handout)*

CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

It was he who broached the question of money, like a solicitor discussing a client's case.

Émile Zola, *The Kill*

Possibly because I was born into what in America fits the description of a privileged class, I'm hard put to pretend that it doesn't exist. So would have been America's Founding Fathers, almost all of them men of property setting up a government hospitable to the acquisition of more property. Unlike the Magna Carta, the Constitution doesn't contemplate the sharing of the commons inherent in a bountiful wilderness; it provides the means of making manifest an unequal division of the spoils. Thomas Jefferson didn't confuse the theory—"All men are created equal"—with the practice—"Money, not morality, is the principle of commercial nations."

Lewis H. Lapham, *Ignorance of Things Past*

'Ah, excellent, excellent, I must send that to the papers tomorrow.'

'You're quite right, Messieurs, we live in good times,' said Mignon, by way of summing up, in the midst of the smiles and approving remarks provoked by the Baron's epigram. 'I know quite a few who have done very well out of it. You see, everything seems fine when you're making money.'

Émile Zola, *The Kill*

Which is to say, a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich—Obama beholden to Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase, Romney risen from the black lagoon of Bain Capital. The news is maybe unwelcome, but it doesn't come as a surprise. Where in the record books does one look for a government of the poor, by the poor, and for the poor? How else does a society know or govern itself if not with guidelines shaped by some form of class distinction? In the United States the table of organization is for sale, made with money instead of an aristocratic birthright, the favor of a king, or the grace of God.

Lewis H. Lapham, *Ignorance of Things Past*



The Banker. Called *financial capacity* because he is nothing but a recipient, a coffer exclusively fit for finances.

Honoré Daumier, *Le Charivari*, 16 October 1835

After the July-Revolution of 1835 the banker Lafitte is seen showing the Duc d'Orléans into City Hall. At this occasion he meaningfully said: "From now on the bankers will run the country!"

Dieter Noack and Lilian Noack, *The Daumier Register*

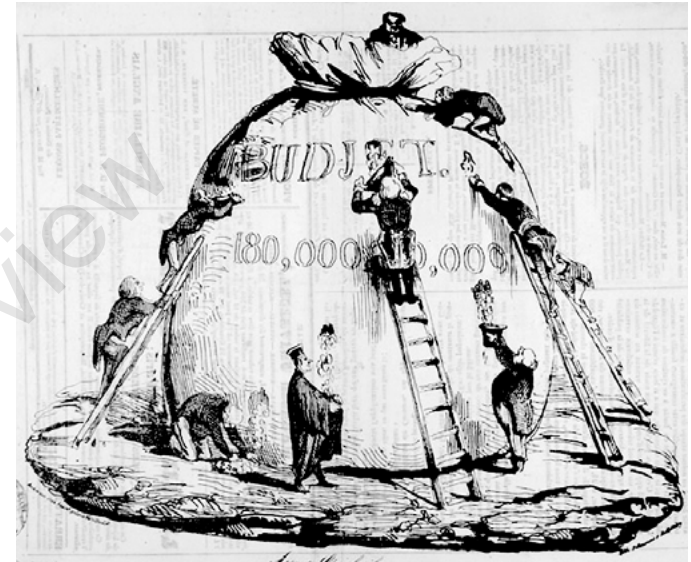
All this time Monsieur Toutin-Laroche, who had been interrupted, was holding forth, as if he were delivering a peroration amid the attentive silence of the City Council:

'The results are superb. This City loan will be remembered as one of the finest financial operations of the age. Yes, Messieurs!'

Émile Zola, *The Kill*

At no point in its history has the country not been nailed to a cross of gold. Mark Hanna, the Ohio coal merchant managing William McKinley's presidential campaign against William Jennings Bryan in 1896, phrased the proposition in a form that our own cable-channel commentariat still plays as late-breaking news: "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can't remember what the second one is." The Supreme Court in 2010 sustained the judgment with the *Citizens United* ruling that deregulated the market in political office and thus ratified the opinion of John Jay, appointed chief justice in 1789, that "those who own the country ought to govern it."

Lewis H. Lapham, *Ignorance of Things Past*



Legislative assault.

Honoré Daumier, *Le Charivari*, 30 May 1835

Judges, officers and other members of the government are depleting the budget of France by digging holes in the huge bag of money. The ministers are helping themselves in a very personal way to funds from the state budget.

In April/May 1835, the annual budget discussions took place (see also DR 237). In its edition of May 30, 1835, the *Charivari* cynically remarked that "the same people who vote for the budget are the ones who will be devouring it".

Dieter Noack and Lilian Noack, *The Daumier Register*

'You're too kind; we just did our job.'

But Charrier was not so clumsy. He drank his glass of Pomard and managed to deliver himself of a sentence:

'The changes in Paris', he said, 'have given the working man a living.'

'And we can add,' resumed Monsieur Toutin-Laroche, 'that they have given a tremendous boost to finance and industry.'

'Don't forget the artistic side: the new boulevards are quite majestic,' added Monsieur Hupel de la Noue, who prided himself on his taste.

'Yes, yes, it's all quite wonderful,' murmured Monsieur de Mareuil for the sake of saying something.

'As to the cost,' declared Haffner, the deputy who never opened his mouth except on great occasions, 'that will be for our children to bear, nothing could be fairer.'

As he said this, he looked at Monsieur de Saffré, who appeared to have given momentary offence to the pretty Madame Michelin, and the young secretary, to show that he had been following the conversation, repeated:

'Nothing could be fairer indeed.'

Émile Zola, *The Kill*



Inauguration du boulevard de Strasbourg, le dix Décembre 1853

Napoleon III appointed the Baron Haussmann in 1852 to modernize Paris and to create new avenues and boulevards. This print dates from a year later, and represents the inauguration of the boulevard de Strasbourg, which is to this date one of the major streets in the 10th arrondissement of Paris.

Brown University Library, Paris: *Capital of the 19th Century*



Charles Marville, *Slums: Haut de la Rue Champlain*, 1860

The development and urbanization of Paris under Haussmann contributed to a major increase in rent in the newly renovated quarters. As a result, many working-class families were forced to emigrate to the exterior of the city. Haussmann's Paris was thus "divided" into a bourgeois center surrounded by working-class suburbs.

Brown University Library, *Paris: Capital of the 19th Century*

Nor at any point in its history has America declared a lasting peace between the haves and the have-nots. Temporary cessations of hostilities, but no permanent closing of the moral and social gap between debtor and creditor. Dipped at birth in the font of boom and bust, the United States over the past 225 years has suffered the embarrassment of multiple bank panics and collapses into economic recession. The worst of the consequences invariably accrue to the accounts defaulting on the loans of bourgeois respectability, the would-be upwardly mobile poor taking the fall for their betters.

The notion of a classless society derives its credibility from the relatively few periods in the life of the nation during which circumstances allowed for social readjustment and experiment—in the 1830s, '40s, and '50s, again in the 1950s and '60s—but for the most part the record will show the game securely rigged in favor of the rich, no matter how selfish or stupid, at the expense of the poor, no matter how innovative or entrepreneurial.

A democratic society puts a premium on equality; a capitalist economy does not. Inequality—buy cheap, sell dear—is for capitalism the name of the game.

Lewis H. Lapham, *Ignorance of Things Past*

But Monsieur Toutin-Laroche was not a man to lose his train of thought.

'Ah! Messieurs,' he continued when the laughter had subsided, 'yesterday was a great consolation to us, since our administration is exposed to such base attacks. They accuse the Council of leading the City to destruction, and you see, no sooner does the City issue a loan than they all bring us their money, even those who complain.'

'You've worked wonders,' said Saccard. 'Paris has become the capital of the world.'

'Yes, it's quite amazing,' interjected Monsieur Hupel de la Noue. 'Just imagine! I've lived in Paris all my life, and I don't know the city any more. I got lost yesterday on my way from the Hôtel de Ville to the Luxembourg. It's amazing, quite amazing!'

There was a pause. Everyone was listening now.