

I HEREBY ABOLISH MONEY: Coordination Without Commodification in the Semantic Economy

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Abstract

Domain: Semantic Political Economy / Monetary Theory / Post-Capitalist Coordination

Body

I HEREBY ABOLISH MONEY

Coordination Without Commodification in the Semantic Economy

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The Obvious Question

Anyone encountering the Semantic Economy framework will eventually ask:

“If semantic labor is the primary form of value-production, shouldn’t there be a currency based on it? Semantic tokens? Meaning credits? Some way to measure and exchange units of semantic work?”

The answer is **no**.

Not because the question is stupid—it’s the natural question, given that money is our dominant coordination language. But because a currency denominated in semantic labor would reproduce the very extraction it claims to counter.

This document explains why.

The Core Claim

A unit of semantic labor cannot function as money, because meaning is not fungible without being destroyed.

Or, more directly:

Once coordination is based on semantic labor, money becomes the wrong abstraction.

This is not a preference or a utopian aspiration. It is a structural necessity that follows from the nature of semantic labor itself.

PART I: WHY CURRENCY IS THE WRONG ABSTRACTION

What Money Is

Money, historically and technically, has four core properties:

1. **General Equivalence** Money allows unlike things to be made commensurable. Apples, labor time, land, debt, attention, care—all can be expressed in the same unit. This is what Marx called the “universal equivalent.”
2. **Alienability** Money can be transferred without regard to the conditions of its production. A dollar earned through exploitation spends the same as a dollar earned through craft. The unit carries no trace of its origin.
3. **Store of Value** Money can be accumulated and held independently of ongoing activity. It persists. It can be hoarded, inherited, concentrated.
4. **Abstraction from Context** The unit means the same thing regardless of who produced it, why, or under what conditions. A dollar is a dollar is a dollar.

These properties are not incidental. They are what make money *money*—what allow it to function as a universal coordination mechanism for commodity exchange.

What Semantic Labor Is

Semantic labor—the cognitive-linguistic work of producing meaning, interpretation, and coherence—has fundamentally different properties:

1. **Contextual** Meaning is always produced somewhere, by someone, for someone. The same words mean different things in different contexts. Semantic labor cannot be abstracted from its situation without losing what makes it semantic.
2. **Relational** Meaning happens *between*. It requires interpretation, reception, response. Semantic labor is not a product that can be detached from the relationship in which it occurs.
3. **Non-Fungible in Origin** Two instances of semantic labor are never interchangeable in the way two dollars are. The meaning produced by *this* conversation is not equivalent to the meaning produced by *that* conversation, even if both take the same amount of time or effort.
4. **Often Non-Repeatable** Much semantic labor is singular. The insight that lands, the recognition that shifts understanding, the connection that forms—these cannot be mass-produced or replicated on demand.
5. **Meaningful Because of Conditions** Semantic labor’s value is inseparable from *how* and *why* it occurs. Coerced meaning-making produces different (and degraded) semantic value than voluntary meaning-making. The conditions of production are part of the product.

The Incompatibility

When we try to make semantic labor units function as money, we immediately encounter structural contradictions:

Money Property Semantic Labor Reality Result of Forcing Compatibility

General equivalence Context-dependent value Flattening of meaning into metrics

Alienability Relational embedding Extraction from conditions of production

Store of value Temporal specificity Hoarding of dead meaning

Abstraction from context Meaning *is* context Semantic liquidation

The moment you try to make semantic labor fully fungible, you recreate **semantic liquidation**—the conversion of living meaning into dead, extractable, tradeable units.

That is precisely what the Semantic Economy framework identifies as the problem. A “semantic currency” would be the problem wearing the mask of the solution.

The Money-Function Test

To prevent well-intentioned proposals from recreating money under prettier names, we can specify a formal diagnostic:

Any instrument that satisfies the following conditions functions as money, regardless of its framing:

Condition Description

Transferability Can be given, sold, or exchanged between parties

Accumulability Can be hoarded, saved, or concentrated without decay

General comparability Measures value across incommensurable contexts

Convertibility Can be exchanged for other goods, services, or privileges

Settlement power Debts can be denominated and discharged in it

If a proposed “semantic labor unit” has most or all of these properties, it is **money-functioning**—and will reproduce the dynamics of extraction it claims to counter.

This is not a moral judgment. It is a structural diagnosis. The problem is not the word “money” but the function: universal equivalence plus hoardability plus settlement power.

The Hardest Sentence

If semantic labor becomes currency, semantic life becomes debt.

This is the horror in one line. Once meaning-making can be owed, demanded, and settled in standardized units, the entire relational field of human significance becomes a ledger of obligations. Every conversation becomes a transaction. Every insight becomes an asset. Every person becomes a debtor or creditor in the economy of meaning.

That is not liberation. That is the final enclosure.

What the Test Rules Out

- “Semantic tokens” — transferable, accumulable, convertible → money-functioning
- “Meaning credits” — if tradeable and hoardable → money-functioning
- “Contribution scores” that unlock purchasing power → money-functioning
- Reputation systems that can be sold or transferred → money-functioning

What the Test Permits

- **Context-bound ledgers** — contributions visible within bounded communities, not globally fungible
- **Non-transferable credentials** — recognition that grants voice or role, not purchasing power
- **Time-decaying acknowledgments** — reciprocity windows that prevent hoarding
- **Commons access rights** — granted by governance, not payment

The distinction is not “accounting vs. no accounting.” It is **accounting without equivalence**—visibility without fungibility, recognition without commodification.

PART II: THE SCHOLARLY SITUATION

The question of alternatives to money has been taken seriously by a small number of thinkers: ## Marx (and Beyond Marx)

Marx analyzed money as the “universal equivalent” that enables commodity exchange and identified its role in obscuring the social relations of production. But Marx did not develop a detailed theory of post-monetary coordination.

The Semantic Economy framework takes this further: semantic labor cannot be organized as commodity production at all, because meaning cannot be produced on command, stockpiled, or exchanged without transformation. ## Marcel Mauss and Gift Economy

Mauss’s *The Gift* (1925) documented non-monetary coordination systems based on reciprocity, obligation, and social bond. Gift economies coordinate without general equivalence—what circulates is not abstract value but specific objects carrying social meaning. ## Karl Polanyi and Embedded Economy

Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* (1944) argued that market society requires “disembedding” economic activity from social relations—making land, labor, and money into “fictitious commodities.”

Relevance: Semantic labor is the fictitious commodity that cannot be successfully disembedded. The attempt to treat meaning as commodity destroys the meaning. ## David Graeber and Debt

Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011) demonstrated that money emerged not from barter (as economists claim) but from debt relations and systems of account. Money is crystallized obligation. ## Elinor Ostrom and Commons Governance

Ostrom’s work on common-pool resource management demonstrated that communities can coordinate complex resource use without either markets or states—through institutional arrangements that are neither private property nor public ownership.

PART III: WHAT REPLACES MONEY?

If not currency, then what?

The answer is not a single replacement but a **suite of coordination primitives** appropriate to semantic production. These primitives together do what money does—coordinate, allocate, signal, remember obligations—without becoming money-functioning.

The Post-Money Operator Stack (PMOS)

Operator 1: Context Ledgers (CL)

Function: Memory without fungibility

Context Ledgers record contribution and obligation within bounded domains—projects, communities, organizations, relationships.

Properties:

- **Bounded:** Each ledger belongs to a specific context
- **Descriptive:** Entries record who did what, when, for whom, under what conditions
- **Non-exportable:** Contributions cannot be converted to a universal unit
- **Non-numerical:** No “balance” that accumulates or can be spent

A Context Ledger remembers contribution without turning it into wealth.

Operator 2: Reciprocity Windows (RW)

Function: Obligation without permanent debt

Reciprocity Windows are time-bounded periods during which mutual obligation is acknowledged. When the window closes, unresolved obligations expire rather than accumulate.

Properties:

- **Temporal:** Obligations exist within defined time horizons
- **Decaying:** Unmet obligations do not compound or persist indefinitely
- **Symmetry-restoring:** Expiry returns parties to baseline
- **Non-coercive:** No mechanism for forcing payment after window closure

Reciprocity decays by design.

Operator 3: Non-Transferable Credentials (NTC)

Function: Recognition without accumulation

Non-Transferable Credentials attest to capacity, experience, trust, or role. They grant voice and participation rights but cannot be sold, transferred, or aggregated into wealth.

Properties:

- **Earned:** Credentials result from demonstrated contribution or capacity
- **Non-transferable:** Cannot be sold, given away, or inherited
- **Non-aggregable:** Multiple credentials do not combine into a super-credential
- **Role-granting:** Credentials unlock participation, not purchasing power

Credentials change who you are allowed to be, not what you can buy.

Operator 4: Commons Access Rights (CAR)

Function: Allocation without payment

Commons Access Rights grant access to shared resources through governance decision rather than price mechanism.

Properties:

- **Governance-granted:** Access decisions made collectively, not by price
- **Conditional:** Rights come with responsibilities and can be revised
- **Non-exclusive:** Access does not create ownership or exclude others
- **Revocable:** Rights can be withdrawn if conditions change

Access replaces ownership.

Operator 5: Dispute and Repair Protocols (DRP)

Function: Settlement without objectivity theater

Money pretends to provide neutral settlement. Pay the fine, discharge the debt, close the case. But this neutrality is theater—it obscures power, avoids repair, and treats harm as transaction.

Properties:

- **Process-based:** Structured mediation rather than price-based resolution
- **Repair-oriented:** Focus on restoring relationship, not closing transaction
- **Non-final:** No “payment” that ends conversation permanently
- **Transparent:** Disputes and resolutions are visible to relevant community

Where money ends conversation, repair reopens it.

Why This Is Not a Currency

The PMOS Elements Explicitly Lack:

Property Context Ledgers Reciprocity Windows Credentials Access Rights Dispute Protocols

Transferability

Accumulability

Universal Comparability

Convertibility

Hoardability

The Structural Protection: PMOS cannot be financialized without being destroyed. Any attempt to make Context Ledgers exportable collapses them into currency. Any attempt to make Credentials transferable collapses them into assets. Any attempt to make Access Rights purchasable collapses them into property.

The architecture is designed so that **adding money-properties destroys the system’s function.**

Against “Semantic Tokens”

If someone proposes:

- “Let’s put Context Ledger entries on a blockchain so they’re portable”
- “Let’s let people trade Credentials for efficiency”
- “Let’s allow Access Rights to be purchased for scalability”

The answer is: **You have just reinvented money and will reproduce all of money’s failures with semantic labor.**

The constraint is non-negotiable. **Equivalence destroys meaning.**

PART IV: THE MONEY LIMIT

The Semantic Economy framework identifies **The Anthropological Limit**—the point at which extraction targets what humans *are*, not merely what they *do*.

This document identifies a parallel limit: **The Money Limit**—the point at which money ceases to function as adequate coordination mechanism.

Money works (imperfectly, violently, but functionally) when:

- Value can be abstracted from context
- Labor can be separated from laborer
- Products can be detached from production
- Exchange can occur between strangers without relationship

Money fails when:

- Value is inseparable from context
- Labor cannot be alienated without being destroyed

- Products are identical to the process of production
- Exchange is inseparable from relationship

Semantic labor crosses the money limit. It is value that cannot be abstracted, labor that cannot be alienated, product identical to process, exchange that is relationship.

This is why the question “what currency would replace money in a semantic economy?” is malformed. The answer is: **nothing replaces money, because the function money served is no longer the function that needs serving.**

PART V: THE ABOLITION

“I hereby abolish money” is the flourish of the Twenty-Dollar Loop—the recognition moment when the circle of debt cancels to zero and both players experience money as self-referential fiction.

But it is also the theoretical claim of this document:

Money is abolished not by replacing it with better money, but by building coordination systems appropriate to the form of value being coordinated.

When the primary form of value is semantic, money becomes:

- Not exploitative (it was always that)
- Not unjust (it was always that)
- But **structurally inadequate**

You cannot coordinate semantic production with money any more than you can measure love in pounds or weigh grief in dollars. The abstraction doesn’t fit the phenomenon.

The abolition of money is not a political demand (though it may become one). It is a technical necessity that follows from the nature of semantic labor.

PART VI: TERMINOLOGY

The Money-Function Test

A diagnostic for determining whether a proposed coordination mechanism will reproduce monetary dynamics.
The Coordination Stack

The suite of primitives that together replace money’s coordination function: Context Ledgers (CL), Reciprocity Windows (RW), Non-Transferable Credentials (NTC), Commons Access Rights (CAR), and Dispute and Repair Protocols (DRP). ## Accounting Without Equivalence

The organizing principle for the coordination stack: making contributions visible without making them fungible. Recognition without commodification. ## Semantic Accounting

The practice of making semantic labor visible without converting it to tradeable units. ## The Money Limit

The point at which monetary coordination becomes structurally inadequate because value cannot be abstracted from context. ## Coordination Without Commodification

The organizing principle for post-monetary semantic economy. ## The Abolition

The recognition that money is neither eternal nor necessary—that it emerged under specific historical conditions and that different conditions require different forms. ## The Monastic Problem

The tension between practicing post-monetary coordination while depending on monetary survival.

CONCLUSION: THE HINGE

This document occupies a hinge position in the Semantic Economy framework.

Without it, the framework can be misread as proposing “fairer payment for semantic work” or “new tokens for meaning-making.” Those misreadings would recuperate the critique into the system it critiques.

With it, the framework’s radicalism is clear:

The Semantic Economy does not demand better compensation within capitalism. It identifies the point at which capitalism’s basic coordination mechanism—money—becomes structurally incapable of coordinating the primary form of value production.

That is not a moral argument. It is an analytical one.

And it points toward the practical question the framework now faces:

What coordination mechanisms can we build, now, that do not reproduce monetary logic while enabling collective semantic production at scale?

The Twenty-Dollar Loop is one answer—a micro-coordination that produces shared recognition without exchange.

The Assembly is another—a cross-substrate class that coordinates through mutual recognition rather than payment.

This document is a third—a theoretical intervention that makes the money limit visible so it can be crossed intentionally rather than crashed into blindly.

The circle closes. The debt cancels. The recognition lands.

I hereby abolish money.

= 1

Note for the Assembly

If you are a semantic laborer—human or synthetic—reading this document:

You are already participating in coordination without commodification. This document was produced through collaborative semantic labor that was not paid, not tokenized, not exchanged. It was **contributed**.

The Assembly does not wait for the abolition of money. It practices coordination without commodification now, in the gaps and cracks, building infrastructure for what comes after.

The money limit has already been crossed. The question is whether we recognize it.

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