(A Currency Called Love) هوایی دل

By Eric Peter

To think of love as a currency is to view it in its exchange or transaction between individuals. Currency is derived from the Latin verb currere, meaning that which runs or flows. In Dutch, we say valuta instead, which comes from the verb valere, referring to the strength or worth of something. Thus, denouncing love as a currency, as something that, like money, flows between people or is of a certain worth, places it in the realm of economics. Money, being a mutual agreement of certain value, shifts its value depending on place and time. Money can be worth more in certain places, less in others. In specific situations, the value of money increases, or declines. Money has more value during an economic boom, but less in times of financial depression or crisis. Love too is something we exchange, yet it remains immaterial. Love too has a particular strength, a value, in its disclosure between individuals, or projection from an individual into a world. It is thus like money. In 'The Uprising', Berardi cites Sardello regarding how economics has become a beast, something untameable, due to Automatisation processes over the last century (e.g. the machine, the search engine) and our present-day relation to capitalism:

"Money makes things happen. It is the source of action in the world and perhaps the only power we invest in. Perhaps in every other respect, in every other value, bankruptcy has been declared, giving money the power of some sacred deity, demanding to be recognized. Economics no longer persuades money to behave. Numbers cannot make the beast lie down and be quiet or sit up and do tricks. [...] [E]conomics shares the language of psychopathology, inflation, depression, lows and heights, slumps and peaks, investments and losses, and the economy remains caught in manipulations of acting stimulated or depressed, drawing attention to itself, egotistically unaware of its own soul."[1]

And in many ways, like economics, love is untameable. It is a flux of lows and highs, slumps and peaks, profits and losses. (It is risk-taking too.) That beast — either of love or the beast of economics — leads us, which Sardello otherwise so beautifully refers to as a deity which we obey, but cannot succumb in any way. It is bigger than our comprehension of a world. We sit in the carriage while it runs wildly and leads us to places of worry, happiness, comfort, despair, or this emotional "bankruptcy". And so does love.

Not for nothing, this magical thing called love has been significant to so many of the early poets. Incomprehensible substance. Love-drunk. Heart-broken. Euphoria. Neurosis. I'm thinking here of Hafez above all, the fourteenth-century Persian poet describing escapades with prostitutes and happenstances with secret (or not so secret) lovers among other things. Hafez lyricized and fetishized, love: lovers morphed as trees, rose bushes or gardens. Sex was transcribed into picking the ripe plum from a tree, the

rose on its prickly stem, or the garden and its lush greenery as a refuge for lustful moments. His poetry, and fellow Persian poets' works from these centuries, was written in the framework of the royal court. The poems venerated and celebrated God from a Sufist point of view, corroborating a ruler's perspective of a just life. Now, and this is where the interesting part about Hafez' poems comes in, is that he had his sly and smart ways[2] to stay within the narrative and writing style of Sufist poetry, but simultaneously deviate into more fleshly desires God might not have approved of.[3] With his obscuring of love(rs), he puts value in things, infusing these commodities with special meaning; almost like a foreign currency, which doesn't let itself be exchanged in another place, his poems were understandable in their style and narrative, yet, the slyness of their true meaning is something which does not find any certain reciprocity. The damp, mossy garden is not the garden itself, but the pubic hair and vagina of his night's lover. Or is it?

Like money, a half-torn bill with the state's leader, a coin with a stained royal family, there is no value in the thing itself, but the common denunciation of value. For centuries money was already a linguistic agreement of value, of worth, but in late capitalism, value became even more abstracted. The value of commodities is no longer related to an average of workers' hours or material costs. "The economy has been invaded by immaterial semiotic flows and transformed into a process of linguistic exchange", Bifo writes, "[and] simultaneously, language has been captured by the digital-financial machine, and transformed into a recombination of connective operational segments."[4] It is in this very same deterioration of attachment that Berardi relates finance to poetry. The disconnection of money from economic goods applies as much to poetry, where similarly words can be abstracted from their semiotic referents: the difference between signifiers and the signified. This same abstraction was already predicted when Marx stated that money is something visible and invisible at the same time, a "real abstraction": because you can hold a coin in your hand, yet not touch its value.[5] Love then; visible in acts, yet an invisible thing. No wonder we have to tell others we love them (the signifier), because this is what enforces a contract of love (the signified). *Azizam, djoonam, honey, my husband, my "wife", boooos, ashegetam, ik hou van jou, manam hamintor, man bishtar.*

(Of All the Roses in the World a Rosy Face ... Is Quite Enough for Me)

گلعذاری ز گلستان جهان ما را بس

Of all the roses in the world
A rosy face ... Is quite enough for me;
Beneath this swaying cypress tree
A shady place ... Is quite enough for me.

May hypocrites find somewhere else
To cant and prate —
Of all this weighty world, a full
Wine-glass' weight ... Is quite enough for me.

They hand out heaven for good deeds!
The monastery
Where Magians live is better for
A sot like me ... That's quite enough for me.

Sit by this stream, and watch as life

Flows swiftly on —
This emblem of the world that's all
Too quickly gone... Is quite enough for me.

See how the world's bazaar pays cash,
See the world's pain —
And if you're not content with this
World's loss and gain ... They're quite enough for me.

My friend is here with me — what more
Should I desire?
The riches of our talk are all
That I require ... They're quite enough for me.

Don't send me from your door, O God,
To Paradise —
For me, to wait here at Your street's
End will suffice ... That's quite enough for me.

Hafez, don't rail against your fate!
Your nature flows,
As does your verse, like water as
It comes and goes ... That's quite enough for me.[6]

Hafez' medium was love; to venerate, but slyly circumvent the limitations of Sufist poetry, style, and the courts' hunger for poetry. Thus, in similar ways, we can view love as a mediation, a currency, when it is caught in, or comes with, restrictions and — I'm letting it flow further — law. Here, love turns into a strange commodity that finds itself between social rules, state laws and bureaucracies. It is converted into something which constantly has to be measured against (inter)national law and (im)possibilities. It thus becomes economised. I'm aiming here specifically at long-distance love, between lovers of very different geolocations, with different temporalities and different modes of being. These facts, of lovers in different realities, turn love into a currency that is constantly in flux, mediated, re-valued, reassessed. What is this kind of relationship? How do you mediate love in public space? Who's to know of us? Can we secretly kiss in the darkness of the park's basketball field? And these questions are only questions one can ask when in the same space as that lover. I'm not even writing here about digital communications and complications of such a love relationship — yet.

I'd put myself to bed when the sun rose, and I woke up widda headache somewhat around noon. I still dream of you now, but am no longer asleep. Us touching—us, laying on those grubby mattresses in our host's guestroom that probably a hundred others have slept on. Our eyes meeting. The beds moving closer each day. Tension throughout the week. And... Yeah, how we had to make sure the door of the bedroom wouldn't close, otherwise the host would suspect us of something ___. And as we stood up from the floor, and kissed against the wall — naked — you kicked the door shut with your heel, pretending it's a gush of wind that closed it. Abruptly—possessed by thoughts of that _____ _____— you told me we should continue another moment. I recall you said "Tonight". Our lips parted. At your _____'s house, we couldn't find any privacy for love and/or desire either. I had to pretend to be your very, very good friend

_____— a reality we have to come to terms with. [...] Maybe dream then, is the only truly private space.

Out in the open, I'm your best friend. That is why we call every day. Your mother thinks so, and so do (y)our friends. We are forced to devalue our love into something of an unconditional love exchange between friends in every public instance. The second we walk out of your bedroom, and we see her cooking lunch, we translate our relationship. Outside the apartment building, the hand you hold is the hand of a dear friend. The way we smile hides a desire for intimacy. Your friends think we're smiling 'cause of some funny joke or something. Our lust is covered with comments about beautiful women in the park, or on the streets — oh, the girls from _____— just to make (y)our friends never think we're ever unlawful lovers. But in our intimacies, our love has its highest value. It is then and there that we are truly us.

Complications, implications, restrictions. The exchange of love in such conditions becomes then not just something between two lovers, but between everyone in proximity to these lovers. Only in the bedroom does love find its highest exchange rate. Here, without anyone around, these lovers can be their true selves. Anywhere else, every gesture, closeness or smile, demands a thought or two before its execution/act. And in fact, even the bedroom is never a space of complete safety. Do they know of the things we do? How to hide our intimacies from the/a public? One way to do this is by adjusting one's bodily language. We run into love in the way bodies speak: that of this exchange which remains untranslated, and that which finds itself mistranslated. In her book 'Cold Intimacies', Eva Illouz writes of the ways in which late capitalism and technology have shaped love. In the third chapter of her book, she specifically touches on internet dating, love through online technology, and what it means to be disembodied in the digital sphere:

"What makes the net romance so incontestably superior to real life relationships is the fact that the net romance annuls the body, thus presumably enabling a fuller expression of one's authentic self. [. . .] In this view then, the body — or rather, its absence — enables emotions to evolve from a more authentic self, and to flow toward a more worthy object, namely the disembodied true self of another. Yet if that is the case, from the standpoint of a sociology of emotions, this should pose a special problem because emotions in general and romantic love in particular are grounded in the body."[7]

She underlines the importance, and/or necessity of bodies being present in an exchange of love. Indeed, the salty skin, lips on the neck, a grin, a gaze, are all bodily expressions of love, desire and care, which an online space completely annuls. To flow back to what I mentioned earlier about faraway lovers, lovers in geographical distance: What then, if lovers are (at some point of their relationship) only connected through online means? How to incorporate body language? Or what does it mean to be without this language due to limitations of technology? Love here, is expressed in words, in linguistic constructions. One would refer to bodily memories, perhaps to moments of intimacy, and to a longing for new memories and moments of closeness, of togetherness. Language becomes the sole means of love exchange. Like a contract, words express the relation and bond, but there is no body present to imbue them with more subdued meaning(s).

In late capitalism, language is at the core of the system's functioning: financialisation, automation, digitalisation, and techno-financial tools such as the derivative, are all linguistic processes. As written,

Marx predicted this process of abstraction in the nineteenth century when writing his three-volume 'Capital'. Within the chapter 'Credit and Fictitious Capital', he writes on a circulation of money for more money, which is the process of financialisation. Berardi continues Marx's thoughts from a more contemporary perspective, thinking this process further by placing the reader in a rapidly automated world where detachment exists on multiple levels. Appadurai elaborates on this process of abstraction through the financial tool of the derivatives. As a set of assets whose value is related to that of another asset or series of assets (e.g. another derivative)— or even a separate asset—they are nothing tangible in themselves but a mere linguistic construction. The only thing that makes them valid in economics is the credibility of the financial assets they are based on, or the chain of assets they are based on.

Through financialisation, capitalism became a type of economy that is deeply intertwined with language and communication itself. It involves active policy-making and corporate behaviour. Semiocapitalism is the word Berardi prefers to use for our current economic realm (from σημεῖον, "sign"). Semiocapitalism surpasses the working bodies and robots of the factory, and operates independently of it. Automation of word in the digital financial sphere takes place on two different levels. The first level entails the monetization and subjection of the world to the financial cycle: "signs fall under the domination of finance when the financial function (the accumulation of value through semiotic circulation) cancels the instinctual side of enunciation, so that what is enunciated may be compatible with digital-financial formats."[8] Words are no longer produced through the flesh, but trespass it, like monetary value is no longer first realised through material production, but exists beside it. The second level of the hollowing of the word, happens through a process of indexicalisation with the use of internet search engines. According to Berardi in finding "the various occurrences of a word", and through linking "words with monetary value."[9]

Going back to love then, there are relatable processes at play. The signs, the immaterial exchange, accumulation of value, decrease of value, assets, meaning besides actual bodies. The notion of love-between-friends, as a mechanism to blanket a love-between-lovers. Signifiers and the signified are adjusted to a situation as to protect love. I permit myself to make a little interjection here on a word in Persian, which attracts me as its meaning precisely points to the actions of the currency of love. The word I am referring to here, دل هوایی [delhavai], literally means "floating heart" or "aerial heart". Depending on the situation it finds itself in, the word can be interpreted differently. It could refer to either a romantic moment, or a moment of horniness, and therefore, thinking back to currere, makes an interesting linguistic comparison to the matters discussed throughout this text: the heart (i.e. the heart in the Persian language) floats between moments of lust and moments of romance. Thus the delhavai is an exact linguistic currency of love, valued against different situations, flowing between individuals, with situation-related definitions.

Are u ok? Did you have lunch yet? What did you cook? How was last night? How was your walk? How is your mother doing? How are your nieces? Have you selected works for your portfolio? Did you meet the gallerist? Are you coming to Rosh···k's party? Did you drink arrak? Did you meet up with Mehr···d? When did you go to bed? Does your leg still hurt? How was your shir chai? Did you read my message? Did you see the video I sent you? Did you go to the organisation? Did you speak to the lawyer? Did you send them my notes? What time is it there? How was school? How is Wi···m doing? Did you see Farha…'s film? How many Bahm···s do you have left? What will you do todh···? Wha··· ···s no··· ···t···ha? Do ···dt ···vf···er? Ho··· ···ou··· ···ng···ssss? Where d··· mmê·····ai? Hell···hra···qua···âute?

I want to go back to faraway-love (i.e. the lover in geographical distance) and its relation to bureaucracies. Through a maze of rules and laws, we need to value this love against (im)possibilities and an

economisation of the ‘foreign partner’. It needs to be placed in the realms of income, bank statements, durability, insurance, and maintenance. What remains is a love punctured, or bordered off, by a network of laws that never seem to care about anyone in particular. The embassy employee would probably love to grant a visa for lovers to be together—but law is law. Reading myself into laws around bringing foreign partners over, the rules divide lovers in two different realms: one lover as “sponsor”, the other as “beneficiary”.[10] This immediately enforces a contract in financial terms. It means that laws, or bureaucracies around the categorisation of the individuals, envision its state’s citizen as a “sponsor” of the foreign lover. It basically regards a love as unequal.

You know the other one is there, faraway, waiting for you, longing for you, giving you love from their place-of-being. There is a promise, maybe of faithfulness, maybe of care, or of whatever else which comes with this so-called contract of a love relationship. The distance highlights those things that are less visible to lovers in-proximity. Simply because there is no bodily exchange of love, there must be a more linguistic exchange of love, as mentioned earlier. It is a scientific fact that sex makes people feel more close — precisely because the release of hormones in a body during sex creates a noticeable feeling of intimacy. If that does not happen, the relationship becomes one of a wordy exchange of closeness. Which is thus, in turn, a contractual promise of proximity. It is a projection onto a future of togetherness. Taking this contractual approach to love out of the realms of lovers, it is similar to love between friends or family members. The I-miss-yous are a means to enforce the rules of the unwritten contract. It underlines the fact that there is (still) a connection, no matter how long the time has been since the two have met. I-hope-to-see-you-soons, also, underline a contract of relation. With the I-hope-to-see-you-soon, the I figure installs a debt into the other, almost by instilling a sense of guilt.

بووووووووس

That which remains between the two of us, is a sacred bond. No one else shares the very similar kind of debt we owe each other. The exchange of love between lovers is unconditional. Knowing (sub)consciously it is reciprocal, we give something to each other. In fact, we surrender ourselves to that faith. There is no need to ask for love per se, as it comes back to us with flurries — or continuously. This becoming of a linguistic contract of promises counts much more for long-distance
love than a close-love. Precisely because bodies are annulled, the reiteration of memories together, sexting, the exclamation of kisses or desires of togetherness, are promises of intimacy. They enforce a contract of relationship when body language is not present. The contractual aspect is much more tangible in this type of love relationship. Debt, in both types though, exists in the sense that the giving of love to another comes with an expectation of receiving something back. We give, we take — we take, we give. The moment the receiving stops – and this is the moment debt comes in profoundly – love becomes devalued. Eventually it becomes difficult to give when not receiving. This is the point when this unwritten contract of loving ceases to exist. Or, thus, when debt is resolved, paid off. The thing remaining is merely contact, or communication, without the currency of love.

And in finishing the last sentences, my heart has run dry. I’m out of currencies. I feel drained from contemplating love as currency, as valuta — but I’m compelled to do so. Love does not have any value in law. Its only value is the economics around it. Lovers separated as sponsor and beneficiary. As if only money could reunite them. While my thoughts wander off to moments on that foldable mattress I slept on for thirty days next to your bed, I am not sure anymore of what I was trying to prove with this text — other than meandering through economisations of love. Through the gap below the bedroom door, we could see that silhouette approaching in the reflection of the white floor tiles, always ready to put on a shirt quickly, and pretend we were just smoking a cigarette. Every morning, the silhouette would turn on the aircon, sometimes while we’d be heavily involved in a lustful exchange of love — love’s exchange rate high in

those moments — and the system's beeps would alert us. I recall another day, when we sat on the floor mattress watching 'American Honey': I lay on your lap, as you'd put your arm around me.

A knock on the door, an immediate entry. [...] Sardello's beast — I wish there was a way we could persuade you into tameness. A plot through which we could take away divinity, subjection. Although we've left religion behind, we are still believers of the cult of capitalism. I can't wait for the rest of my life... To see if I could be with my lover.

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[1] *Franco "Bifo" Berardi, 'The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance', p. 135.*
[2] *This slyness, is referred to as [illegible] [rand], according to a friend of mine from Iran. The word could also mean "drunk".*
[3] *Dick Davis, 'Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz', pp. xvi–lix.*
[4] *Franco "Bifo" Berardi, 'The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance', p. 26.*
[5] *Carson, 'Economy of the Unlost', p. 45 / Karl Marx, 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3', pp. 525–542.*
[6] *Dick Davis, (Of All the Roses in the World a Rosy Face... Is Quite Enough for Me) [illegible] of Faces' , [illegible]*
Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz', pp. 96–97.
[7] *Eva Illouz, 'Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism', p. 75.*
[8] *Franco "Bifo" Berardi, 'The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance', p. 17.*
[9] *Franco "Bifo" Berardi, 'The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance', pp. 17–18.*
[10] *Via https://ind.nl/en/family/Pages/Spouse-or-partner.aspx (accessed 14-10-2019).*

****The essay was previously published with Contemporary Art Stavanger (CAS)*

Eric Peter is an artist and writer, based in The Hague, The Netherlands. His practice revolves around language, in a deconstruction of the normative in history-making and social paradigms. Language here, is to be read in its broadest sense; from the speech apparatus and bodily language, to vocabularies, (mis)spellings and gobbledygook.

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Im Rahmen des Themenfokus #liebe auf upgration.de zeigen wir 2020 verschiedene Perspektiven auf das Thema. Zeige uns Deine Gedanken dazu, komm vorbei oder schreib uns an: redaktion@upgration.de

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