

THE EXTRACTION OF RELATIONAL VALUE IN THE CULTURAL DOMAIN

A Lacanian-Psychoanalytic Deconstruction of Political Economy

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Abstract

Under the symbolic crisis, as the reproduction of signifiers cheapens the sign, value migrates toward relation, which the sign cannot reproduce. A prior work stated the general theory of this migration and of capital's capture of relational value. This paper addresses that capture in the cultural domain, and advances six contributions beyond the prior account. It distinguishes the symbolically guaranteed domain, whose value rests on the scarcity of a sign, from the relational domain, whose value is relational at its root and whose sign is an outer shell, and it argues that the cultural domain, as a relational domain, is reached by the crisis through the stripping of the shell and the exposure of the relational core. It develops the guarantee mechanism, and divinity as the site to which what exceeds the individual is attributed, at the level of a general definition distinguished from its Lacanian and other realizations. As its theoretical center it states the alienation of the structure of desire: capital, unable to reach the drive that circles *das Ding*, seizes the mediation through which drive is structured, which is culture, and reroutes that structuring toward a commodified object, so that drive is demoted to desire, a movement that is at once, in the register drawn from Marx, alienation. It follows the exclusion this works from an economic into an ontological register, draws out the dialectical point that capital profits because the relation is real, and reaches the ontological claim that capital, having arisen from relation, cannot become a relational subject and can only hold relation as an owner. The paper advances no proposal, and leaves to the reader the recognition of where a given cultural circuit stands and to whom its value returns.

Keywords: relational value; cultural domain; alienation of the structure of desire; drive and *das Ding*; the guarantee mechanism; generative justice; relational divinity; Lacan.

AI usage statement: The ideas, claims, and theoretical framework of this paper originate with the author. AI tools were used as an aid in drafting and revision. Every sentence has been checked by the author line by line, and the origin of each idea verified, so that the author takes full responsibility for the content.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present moment is marked by a crisis in the symbolic order. The signifiers by which meaning and worth were secured have lost the scarcity on which their function rested, and as the reproduction of signs is cheapened, the older labor of producing desire through a scarce mark grows difficult. Value migrates, under this pressure, toward what the reproduction of signifiers cannot dissolve, which is relation. The present author has developed this crisis at length, and has given, in prior work, a general account of relational value and of the way capital captures it once value has migrated toward the bond. That account states the general theory. The present paper stands beside it and addresses questions it left open.

Those questions concern the cultural domain. The prior account established a general theory of the capture of relational value without asking in which domains the migration of value bears most heavily, without a theory of the mediation through which relational value is given a livable form, without reaching beneath desire to the drive that circles the place no commodity can occupy, and without posing the question of the guarantee on which worth is finally secured. The cultural domain is where these questions gather. It is a domain in which value is relational at its root and the sign is an outer shell, and it is for that reason reached by the symbolic crisis in a particular way, its shell stripped and its relational core laid open to capture. This paper takes the cultural domain as the site at which to ask how capture there proceeds, and it does so by way of a psychoanalytic reading joined to the political economy of relational value.

The paper advances six contributions beyond the prior account. It reads a specimen of extraction in the cultural domain, a discourse that presents a relational disposition as a purchasable personal virtue, and gives its anatomy at the level of the structure of desire. It follows the exclusion worked by this capture from an economic exclusion into an ontological one, by which those who cannot pay are held outside the very field in which relation is made to appear possible. It develops the guarantee mechanism, and divinity as the site of the guarantee, at the level of a general definition distinguished from its several realizations. It states, as the theoretical center, the alienation of the structure of desire, the rerouting by capital of the mediation through which drive is structured, and shows the demotion of drive to desire and alienation to be one movement. It draws out the dialectical point that capital profits because the relation is real, and profits more as the relation grows more real. And it reaches an ontological claim, that capital, having arisen from relation, cannot enter relation as a co-generating subject and can only hold it as an owner, so that what capital meets in the age of relational value is a problem in the philosophy of the subject.

The stakes exceed the cultural field taken as one industry among others. If relation is the value that survives the cheapening of the sign, then the terms on which the relational core of a cultural form is mediated, owned, and either circulated or captured become a central question, and this paper is an attempt to state that question at the depth the mechanism requires. The argument proceeds by analytic and conceptual necessity and treats its specimens as illustration rather than proof, for reasons stated where the problem is set out. It advances no proposal, and leaves to the reader the recognition of where, in a given cultural circuit, the relation stands.

2 THE SYMBOLIC CRISIS RECALLED

The argument of this paper rests on a diagnosis developed at length in prior work, and that diagnosis is recalled here only as far as the present argument requires.¹ The signifiers by which meaning and worth were once secured rested on a scarcity that has collapsed. When a sign can be reproduced without limit, instantly and at negligible cost, it depreciates, and the mark that held its value by being withheld from most can no longer perform that office. This is the crisis of the symbolic.

The crisis has a political-economic face, and it is this face that concerns the present paper. The engine of consumer capital ran, for a long period, through the signifier. It built lack in symbolic form, made a person want a thing by making the thing a mark of identity, and drove desire through the scarcity of that mark. As the reproduction of signifiers is cheapened, creation and labor are cheapened with them, and the older work of producing lack through the

¹The crisis of symbol and subject in modernity is developed by the present author in the foundational work cited below, and the political economy of relational value under that crisis in the work on relational value. This section states what those works establish, without repeating their argument.

signifier grows difficult to carry out, since a mark that anyone can now generate conceals nothing and withholds nothing. Value migrates, under this pressure, toward what the reproduction of signifiers cannot dissolve. That residue is relation, the jointly lived and unrepeatable history of a bond, which cannot be forged while its real coherence is absent.

Two developments follow together, and they are one process seen from two sides. The older circuit that sold the unreachable image grows fatigued, and capital opens new frontiers in the language of connection, community, and belonging. The difficulty of the one circuit and the opening of the other are the same event, the political-economic expression of the symbolic crisis. The prior work established this migration as a general account of relational value and its capture. The present paper takes that account as given and turns to a question it left open, which concerns the domain in which the migration bears most heavily and the mechanism by which capture there proceeds.

3 CULTURE AND ITS ASSOCIATED THEORY

To locate the domain in which the migration of value bears most heavily, the term culture must be given a working sense, and the theory that has thought it must be recalled in outline. The concept has a genealogy, and the movement of that genealogy is itself instructive, since it travels from an inventory of contents toward an account of culture as a field of power.

Tylor took culture as a complex whole, the sum of the knowledge, belief, art, custom, and habit acquired by a person as a member of a society [15]. Culture in this sense is an inventory, a list of the contents a society transmits. Geertz recast it as a system of meaning [3]. Culture became a web of significance that persons themselves have spun, a structure of symbols through which they make their experience intelligible, so that the unit of analysis moved from the contents to the symbolic order that binds them. Turner showed that this symbolic order is not inert [14]. Ritual generates a force, moves those who pass through it, and touches, at its edges, what lies beyond the symbol, so that culture is seen to act upon its participants and not merely to classify them. Williams and Hall drew the consequence for power [16, 4]. Culture is a field in which meanings are produced, contested, and made to prevail, a site where the authority to define the common sense of a society is distributed unevenly, and where the making and reading of signs is bound up with the relations of domination that run through the society at large.

This genealogy yields the distinction the present paper requires. Two things travel under the one word, and they must be held apart. There is the symbolic content of a culture, the web of meaning through which a group makes its experience intelligible, and there is the symbolic economy of a culture industry, the arrangement by which that meaning is produced, circulated, owned, and made to yield a return. The first is culture as a form of life. The second is culture as a field organized for the extraction of value. The two are not separate in fact, since the industry works upon the form of life and the form of life is reshaped by the industry, and the distinction is drawn for analysis rather than in nature. What the following sections examine is the point at which the second bears upon the first, the point at which a symbolic economy organized by capital operates upon the relational core that a cultural form of life generates.

4 THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXTRACTION IN THE CULTURAL DOMAIN

The claim of this section is that the cultural domain is one of the regions in which the symbolic crisis bears most heavily, and that it bears there in a manner particular to it. The claim is stated with care. It is that the cultural domain is one such region among several, and not the sole site

of the crisis, and the argument for its severity proceeds by a distinction between two kinds of domain.

4.1 TWO KINDS OF DOMAIN

Domains differ in what their value rests upon, and this difference decides how the crisis of the signifier reaches them. In one kind of domain the value rests directly upon symbolic scarcity and symbolic guarantee. The luxury good, the art market, the brand, and purely symbolic finance hold their worth by a mark that is withheld, credentialed, or underwritten, so that the foundation of the value is the scarcity and the guarantee of the sign itself. Call these the symbolically guaranteed domains. When signs become reproducible without limit, the crisis strikes the foundation of these domains directly, since the very scarcity on which their worth was built is what has collapsed.

In another kind of domain the value is relational at its root. Education, the cultural and idol field, intimate life, and community hold their worth in a bond, a shared history, a jointly generated experience, and the sign that attends them, the credential, the ticket, the persona, is an outer shell upon a value that is not itself symbolic. Call these the relational domains. The crisis of the signifier does not strike the foundation of a relational domain in the same way, since the foundation was never the scarcity of a sign. It reaches the relational domain by a different route. It strips the outer shell of its credibility, exposes the relational core the shell had covered, and opens that core to a capture that works upon the structure of desire. The target of this paper is the relational domain, and the symbolically guaranteed domain is set beside it as a contrast, the better to show that where the symbolic foundation of the one gives way, capital turns toward the relational foundation of the other.

Education is a clear instance of the relational domain. Its value is the formative relation between teacher and student, and the credential is the shell. When the credential inflates and its scarcity gives way, the value does not vanish, since it was never the credential. What occurs instead is that the relational core is laid bare and made available to an economy that would capture it. The idol and cultural field is a second instance, and it is the one the paper examines in its dialectical case below.

4.2 THE SPECIMEN PRESENTED

A specimen of extraction in the relational domain may be presented here, its mechanism reserved for the later analysis. A class of magazines devoted to small goods and cosmetics, set against the symbolic background of a luxury shopping district, propounds the claim that *amae*, the disposition to be received and indulged within a trusting relation, is a personal virtue, one that ought to be acquired and that may be acquired through the right purchase. The disposition it speaks of is real, and it is relational at its root, since one presumes upon and is indulged by another only within a bond of trust. The discourse presents this relational disposition as a personal quality that consumption can confer, and this presentation is offered here as a phenomenon to be recognized. Its anatomy, the account of how a relational movement is rerouted toward a purchasable object, belongs to the analysis of the mechanism below, and is not anticipated here.

The specimen is offered as an illustration and carries no weight of proof. The argument of this paper does not rest on the specimen, and could not, since a single phenomenon settles no general claim. The specimen makes visible, in a recognizable instance, a movement that the later sections establish on other grounds. The distinction between illustration and proof is observed throughout, and its methodological ground is stated in the section on the research

problem.

5 THE PRIOR MECHANISM OF CAPTURE AND ITS EPISTEMIC LIMIT

The prior work gave an account of how capital captures relational value, and that account is recalled here in order to mark where its vision reaches and where it stops. The recalling is brief, since the account stands in the work cited, and the purpose here is to expose its epistemic limit, which the present paper is written to pass.

5.1 THE CHAIN RECALLED

The prior work described the capture of relational value as a formal chain. A relational property is stripped from the relation in which alone it arises and named an attribute that a person may possess. The constitutive lack is disguised as the lack of that attribute. The attribute is bound to a commodity, and the commodity is offered as the object of desire. Desire is the current that runs through this chain, issuing from a place capital can neither produce nor satisfy, and capital reroutes that current and draws off value at each rerouting. This account holds, and the present paper does not revise it. It captures the operations by which the capture proceeds, and it does so at the level of desire and its object, the level at which desire circles the *objet a* and capital administers the fantasy that supports it.

5.2 THE LIMIT OF THE ACCOUNT

The account reaches the operations of capture and stops at the threshold of three questions it was not built to answer. Naming them is the work of this section, since they are the openings the present paper enters.

The first concerns what lies beneath desire. The prior account works at the level of desire, which circles the *objet a*, the object that may be substituted and that capital supplies. Beneath desire lies drive, which circles *das Ding*, and drive is more primitive, is not extinguished, and does not admit of substitution. The prior account does not reach drive, and it does not ask what capital does with respect to a movement that circles a place no commodity can occupy. The question of drive is left outside its frame.

The second concerns culture. The prior account treats the capture of relational value without a theory of the mediation through which that value is given a livable form. It does not thematize culture as the process by which a relational movement is structured, and so it does not locate the point at which capital inserts itself, which is precisely that process of mediation. Culture, as the mediating term, falls outside the account.

The third concerns the guarantee. The prior account describes a migration of value and a capture, without asking on what the effect and the authority of value, meaning, and order rest, and where that resting place has moved. The question of the guarantee, the final ground on which worth is secured and the site to which what exceeds the individual is attributed, is not posed. It is the deepest of the three openings, and the methodology of this paper takes it up first.

These three, drive and *das Ding*, culture as mediation, and the guarantee, are the limits of the prior vision. They are not faults of the prior account, which answered the questions it set itself. They are the questions it did not set, and the present paper is the setting of them. The section that follows states them as the problem to be addressed.

6 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The prior work and the theory recalled above supply what is known. Against that ground, four openings define the problem this paper addresses. They are stated in order, the last of the four being the target at which the whole analysis is aimed.

6.1 THE ESTABLISHED GROUND

It is established that the reproduction of signifiers has cheapened the sign, that value migrates under this pressure toward relation, which the sign cannot reproduce, and that capital captures relational value through the structure of desire, by a formal chain that strips a relational property, reifies it, and binds it to a commodity. It is established that the justice of a relational circuit is decided at its origin, its field, and within its circulation, and that the reality of a relation settles none of these. This is the account the present paper takes as given and does not revise.

6.2 THE OPENINGS

The first opening concerns the priority of the cultural domain. It is not yet shown that the cultural domain is one of the regions in which the crisis bears most heavily, nor by what feature a domain is so exposed. The distinction between the symbolically guaranteed domain and the relational domain, and the account of how the crisis reaches each, is required to establish this, and it is owed as an argument rather than assumed.

The second opening concerns the reach of the prior account, which works at the level of desire and its object. It stops at the threshold of drive, does not thematize culture as the mediation through which a relational movement is structured, and does not ask on what the effect and authority of value rest or where that resting place has moved. Drive and *das Ding*, culture as mediation, and the guarantee lie outside its frame, and bringing them within a frame is the epistemic task the paper sets.

The third opening is the target of the paper. The prior account shows that capital reroutes desire toward a commodified *objet a*. It does not show what capital does with respect to drive, which circles *das Ding* and admits of no substitution, nor how the relational core that lies near that unfillable place is reached and drawn upon. The question is how capital, by way of an alienation worked upon the structure of desire, touches and extracts the drive and the relational core that circle *das Ding*, when drive itself is beyond its direct reach. This is the question the mechanism of this paper answers.

The fourth opening concerns the frameworks. The problem is addressed by several frameworks at once, the theory of the guarantee, the Lacanian account of desire and drive, the framework of generative relational being with dialectical materialism, and the ethics of relational reproduction. It is required that these be brought together without one being made to absorb the others, and that their bringing-together be a synthesis in which the tension among them does the work, rather than a reduction to a single master framework or a loose placing of them side by side.

6.3 THE METHODOLOGICAL POSTURE

The argument proceeds by analytic and conceptual necessity, and treats empirical phenomena as illustration and not as proof. The reason is not a preference for abstraction. It is that an inductive demonstration, which would gather instances and infer a tendency, cannot establish a claim of necessity, since past instances do not entail what must follow, and the difficulty is the

classical problem of induction. The paper therefore says that a relational domain is structurally susceptible to the capture it describes, and not that it has been demonstrably overtaken, since the claim is about a structure and its liabilities rather than a measured outcome. Specimens are offered to make a structure recognizable in an instance, and the weight of the argument rests on the analysis of the structure.²

7 DIVINITY AS THE DIALECTICAL-MATERIALIST DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUARANTEE MECHANISM

The deepest of the openings named above concerns the guarantee, the final ground on which the effect and authority of value, meaning, and order are secured. This section develops an account of the guarantee and of its historical movement, and it does so at the level of a general definition, distinguished from its several realizations. The prior work traced a sequence of sites to which the excess beyond the individual has been attributed, and that sequence is presupposed here rather than restated.³ What this section adds is the general structure of which that sequence is one realization, and it is this general structure that the present paper requires, since the question of how different domains are reached by the symbolic crisis turns on where their guarantee is lodged.

7.1 THE GENERAL DEFINITION

A guarantee mechanism is the site at which value, meaning, and order acquire their effect, the place where what secures worth is finally lodged. Divinity, in the sense used here, is the place to which what exceeds the individual is attributed. The development of divinity is the historical migration of the site of the guarantee, the movement of that place from one lodging to the next. The account given in the prior work, from a transcendent source to the sign and toward relation, is one such migration, read as a materialist sequence.

The guarantee mechanism, and divinity as its site. A guarantee mechanism is the site at which the effect and authority of value, meaning, and order are finally secured. Divinity is the place to which what exceeds the individual is attributed, and the development of divinity is the migration of the site of the guarantee from one lodging to the next. At the site of the guarantee there is always a void, a place where no positive foundation rests that could secure worth once and for all. While the material conditions of a given lodging hold, the void is covered. When those conditions are exhausted, the void is exposed, and the guarantee is forced to migrate.

The core of this definition is the void at the site of the guarantee. There is no positive foundation, no final bedrock, that could underwrite worth without remainder. A lodging of the guarantee holds while its material conditions hold, and covers the void for that duration. When

²There is a further reason for declining the positivist and inductive route, internal to the diagnosis of this paper. Positivism arises as one of the expressions of the symbolic-divine order, the methodological form taken by a guarantee lodged in the observable sign and the settled measure. To enlist it to demonstrate the failure of that same order would be to judge the order by one of its own products, and the demonstration would move in a circle. The analytic and conceptual route is adopted in part to avoid this circularity. The point is noted here and not developed, since it opens a reflexive question the present paper does not need to settle.

³The materialist sequence of the sites of the guarantee, from a transcendent source, to the sign, to relation, is set out in the prior work on relational value. The present section states the general structure of which that sequence is one realization, and does not repeat the sequence.

those conditions are exhausted, the void is exposed, and the guarantee migrates to a new lodging whose conditions have meanwhile matured. This movement is dialectical and without a guaranteed terminus. It is not claimed that a relational divinity is destined to ascend and to hold the site securely at last. It is claimed only that the site of the guarantee migrates as its material conditions are exhausted, that the migration is driven by the exposure of a void rather than by a purpose working toward an end, and that the direction of the present migration can be read from the conditions now exhausted and those now maturing. The account is materialist, non-linear, and without teleology.

7.2 THE LACANIAN REALIZATION

Among the realizations of this structure, the Lacanian one is developed here, since it is the realization through which the mechanism of capture will be stated. In it the site of the guarantee is occupied by the big Other, the symbolic order that underwrites meaning and secures the subject's address to the world. The void at the site is the lack in the Other, the mark that the Other does not itself possess a final foundation and cannot answer for the whole, and it is written

$$S(A/),$$

the signifier of the lack in the Other, the point at which the symbolic order registers its own incompleteness. The symbolic divinity of the sign is the lodging of the guarantee in this Other. The crisis of the symbolic is the moment at which the reproduction of signs without limit voids the credibility of this lodging and exposes the lack in the Other, $S(A/)$, the void the sign had covered. Capital operates upon this exposed void. It suspends the *objet a* over the void and, with the fantasy that one might fill the void by acquisition, draws value from the subject's movement toward that promised filling. What operates here upon the exposed void is the same operation the mechanism of capture will describe in the cultural domain.

7.3 OTHER REALIZATIONS

The general structure has realizations that are not developed here, and two may be marked so that the account does not present the Lacanian realization as the whole. The teaching of emptiness, that no thing possesses an own-being and that whatever arises does so in dependence, realizes the structure at the point of why the guarantee can come to rest only in relation, since a site with no own-being cannot be a final bedrock and what stands has always the character of the dependent and the relational. The thought of the uncarved and the movement of return in the way, the fecund emptiness from which the ten thousand things proceed, realizes the structure at the point of how a new guarantee comes to be generative rather than merely posited. These realizations do not reduce to one another, and the fuller treatment of the emptiness at the site of the guarantee is left to the foundational work. They are named here to hold the Lacanian realization in its place as one among several.

8 DESIRE AND DRIVE

The Lacanian framework supplies the terms in which the mechanism of capture is stated, and the distinction it turns upon is the distinction between desire and drive. Its notation is introduced here, since the mechanism will be stated with it.

Desire has no true object. Its cause is a constitutive lack, the empty place that opens when the subject enters language and loses a supposed original completeness. To face this empty

place directly is anxiety, and desire cannot run while facing it. Desire requires an object that veils the empty place and appears to be the very thing the subject lacks, and this object is written

$$a, \quad \text{the } \textit{objet } a,$$

the object-cause of desire. The subject that circles this object is the barred subject, the subject divided by its entry into language and marked by the lack it carries, written $\$$. The relation that binds the barred subject to the object, and lets desire run in a bearable way, is the fantasy, written

$$\$ \diamond a,$$

in which the poinçon $\diamond$ names the several relations, of envelopment and of framing, by which the subject is joined to the object that supports its desire. The *objet a* may be substituted, one object giving way to the next, since it holds its place by veiling the empty place and not by being the thing itself. This substitutability is what capital has learned to work. It supplies the *objet a* in a manufactured form, binds it to a commodity, and reroutes desire through purchase, and the failure of each object to fill the lack is reworked into the motion that carries desire to the next.

Drive is more primitive than desire, and it circles a different term. Where desire circles the *objet a*, drive circles *das Ding*, the Thing at the place of the lack itself, the unsymbolizable core around which the earliest organization of the subject formed. The distinction is the distinction between an object that stands in for the lack and the empty place itself.

$$\text{desire} : \text{circles } a \qquad \text{drive} : \text{circles } \textit{das Ding}$$

Drive does not admit of substitution in the way desire does. It does not seek an object that would replace another, and it is not extinguished by any object, since its circuit is the circling of the empty place and not the pursuit of a thing that would fill it. Drive belongs to the Real, to what the symbolic cannot capture, and it is for this reason beyond the direct reach of any operation conducted in the symbolic register. Capital cannot touch drive itself, and this limit follows from where drive lies rather than from any contingent circumstance. The consequence is deferred to the mechanism, where the question becomes what capital can do when the movement it would capture circles a place no commodity can occupy. The answer given there works upon the process through which drive is given a livable form, and leaves drive itself untouched.

9 GENERATIVE RELATIONAL BEING AND DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Two further frameworks are required, one for the constitution of the subject and the field in which value is generated, and one for the historical and material character of the forms this generation takes.

9.1 THE RELATIONAL SUBJECT AND THE GENERATIVE FIELD

The framework of generative relational being takes the subject as the ensemble of its social relations rather than an isolated individual, and takes relation as the field in which what is most the subject's own is generated rather than held prior to the relation. Value, on this account, arises in relation and belongs to the relational subject that generates it, and it is not a possession that any party holds apart. Culture stands, within this framework, as the mediation through which drive is structured, the process by which the movement that circles *das Ding* is given a form in which it can run within a relation. This places culture at a definite point, between the drive that belongs to the Real and the relation in which the subject comes to be, and it is at this point that the analysis of the mechanism will locate the intervention of capital.

9.2 THE DIALECTICAL-MATERIALIST CHARACTER OF THE FORMS

The forms this generation takes are historical and material, and they are read here in the terms of dialectical materialism, held to a disciplined version. Material conditions constrain the forms without determining them, and the account preserves contingency and the openness of the process, refusing a teleology that would read history as the working-out of a destined end. The forms of extraction are historically specific and therefore historically alterable, deposited by particular relations of production and liable to change as those relations change.

This yields the ground for a claim developed later, that the extraction capital works upon relational value is a historical escalation over its earlier operation upon the signifier. The earlier operation worked upon a mark and its scarcity. The later operation reaches toward the structure of desire itself, toward the movement that circles the empty place, and in reaching there it touches what lies nearer the constitution of the subject than any mark did. The escalation is a movement of the same logic onto deeper ground, and it meets, on that ground, a weakness that the later sections name, the incapacity of the form of ownership to enter the relation it has reached. That capital reaches so deep and cannot, in its own form, keep from extracting there, is the tension the analysis will draw out. The framework is laid here, and the tension it prepares is carried to the sections on the mechanism and the ontological position of capital.

10 THE DIALECTICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE FRAMEWORKS

Four frameworks have been laid, the theory of the guarantee, the Lacanian account of desire and drive, the framework of generative relational being with dialectical materialism, and the ethics of relational reproduction that will supply the criterion. The problem set above requires that they be brought together in a particular way, and this section states what that way is before the mechanism draws upon all of them at once.

A synthesis is not a reduction. It would be a reduction to take one framework as the true one and to read the others as its incomplete expressions, so that the Lacanian account became a psychology of the economic, or the economic account a sociology of the drive, or every term resolved into the language of the guarantee. Each framework has an epistemic standing of its own, and reaches a face of the object that the others do not reach. The Lacanian account reaches the structure of desire and the place of the drive, and cannot state on its own the historical and material specificity of the forms that work upon them. The dialectical-materialist account reaches that specificity, and cannot state on its own the constitution of the desire that the forms capture. The theory of the guarantee reaches the site at which worth is secured and its migration, and cannot state on its own the ethics by which a circuit is judged. The ethics of relational reproduction reaches that judgment, and rests in turn on the account of the subject that the framework of relational being supplies. No one of them contains the others.

A synthesis is not an eclectic placing side by side. It would be an eclecticism to set the frameworks in a row and to draw from each as convenient, leaving the tensions among them unaddressed, as though they were tools in a drawer rather than accounts that make claims upon one another. The frameworks do make claims upon one another. The Lacanian placing of drive in the Real presses upon the materialist account of what capital can and cannot reach. The materialist insistence on historical specificity presses upon the apparent timelessness of the psychoanalytic structure. These pressures are not to be smoothed away. They are where the work is done.

The synthesis proper is the letting of these tensions sharpen and resolve within an emergent structure, which is itself the new position from which the mechanism is stated. The frameworks illuminate one face of the object each, and the object shows itself in the whole only when the

faces are held together under their mutual pressure. The account of the mechanism given below is the emergent structure in which the tensions are worked, the demotion of drive stated in the Lacanian register and alienation stated in the materialist register showing there as one movement, the guarantee and its void supplying the site on which capital operates, and the ethics of reproduction supplying the measure by which the operation is judged. The synthesis is polyphonic in that the frameworks continue to speak in their own registers, and it is dialectical in that their tension is carried into a new structure rather than dissolved. What that structure is, the mechanism states.

11 DRIVE, RELATION, AND CULTURE AS MEDIATION

The mechanism to be stated in the next section rests on an account of how drive, relation, and culture stand to one another. This section gives that account, and its central move is to place culture as the mediation itself rather than as an outward expression of something already complete.

Drive is a force, and it belongs to the Real. It circles *das Ding* and does not, of itself, have a form in which it can run within a relation. Relation is a field, the field in which the subject is constituted and in which value is generated. Between the force and the field there must be a process that gives the force a form the field can carry, and culture is that process. Culture is the mediation through which drive is structured into a form in which it can run, the working process by which a movement that circles the empty place is given a shape that a relation can bear.

This must be stated precisely, since a looser statement would misplace what follows. Culture is not the expression of a drive that stands complete behind it, and it is not a code in which an already-formed content is written out. To treat culture as expression or as code is to imagine the drive as finished prior to its mediation, and the mediation as a garment thrown over it. The account here is otherwise. The structuring is the mediation, and the mediation is the process in which the movement of drive comes to have a livable form at all. There is no formed movement lying behind the process, waiting to be expressed. The movement acquires its form in the process, and the process is culture.

A healthy culture structures drive toward generation within a relation. It gives the movement that circles *das Ding* a form in which the circling runs within a bond, so that what is sought, to be received, to be held, to be witnessed, is sought in the relation where alone it can be generated, and is generated there without the empty place being filled or claimed as a possession. This is the structuring that a healthy culture performs, the giving to drive of a form in which it generates value within relation and leaves the empty place open.

Because culture is the mediation, it is the point at which capital can intervene. Drive itself is beyond reach, lying in the Real, and the relation is the field in which value belongs to those who generate it. What lies between, exposed and workable, is the mediating process, the structuring through which drive is given its form. An operation that would capture the value generated in relation, and cannot reach the drive that feeds it or command the relation that generates it, can seize the process that stands between them. The mediation is where the structuring happens, and for that reason it is where the structuring can be diverted. This is the position from which the mechanism of capture is stated, and the next section states it.

12 THE ALIENATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF DESIRE

The preceding sections established that culture is the mediating process by which drive is structured into an operative form, and that this mediating position is the point at which capital enters. This section states the mechanism proper. It is the theoretical center of the paper, and it is what the title names.

A difficulty must be met before the mechanism can be stated. Drive circles *das Ding*, belongs to the Real, and is not reachable as such. Nothing external operates upon drive directly, and capital is no exception. If the account were to claim that capital captures drive, it would claim the impossible, and the mechanism would fail at its first step. The resolution lies in the distinction already drawn. Capital does not operate upon drive. It operates upon the process by which drive is structured into an operative form, which is to say upon culture. Drive remains beyond reach, and the mediating process through which drive is given a livable shape does not. That process is exposed, and what is exposed can be captured.

The alienation of the structure of desire. Capital captures neither drive nor its constitutive lack. It seizes the mediating process through which drive is structured into an operative form, and reroutes that structuration from its course toward relational generation onto a course toward a commodified *objet a*. Drive is thereby demoted to desire, its non-possessable relational core misrepresented as a purchasable object. The product of a relational generative activity is appropriated by capital and set over against the subject as an alien object that governs and draws upon its desire. This demotion of drive to desire and this appropriation of a relational product as an alien governing power are one process described in two registers.

Two accounts converge on this single process, and neither reduces to the other. The Lacanian account names it the industrialization of the substitution of *objet a* for *das Ding*. Drive, in a healthy structuration, circles the empty place and generates value in the circling, without ever filling the place and without needing to. Capital installs, at the site of this circling, a fabricated object that promises to fill the place and is sold. What was a circling around an unfillable emptiness becomes a pursuit of a purchasable thing, and the pursuit is engineered to fail so that it may resume. The substitution is not invented by capital, since the fantasy that veils the empty place is prior to it. What capital adds is the industrial scale, the systematic manufacture of the substitute and its binding to a commodity, so that the structuring of drive is routed, at volume, through purchase.

The account drawn from Marx names the same process alienation. The generative activity is relational, its product is relational value, and that product is appropriated by an owner who stands outside the relation. Once appropriated, the product does not merely leave the subject. It returns as an alien power that governs the subject, presenting itself as the object the subject must acquire in order to be adequate, and drawing value from the subject at each acquisition. The relational core that the subject generates in common is taken, reified, and sold back as the very thing whose lack the subject is made to feel. This is alienation in its general form, the product of one's own activity confronting one as a hostile and governing force, transposed from the labor of the hand to the structuring of desire.

The demotion of drive to desire, described in the Lacanian register, and alienation, described in the register drawn from Marx, are the same mechanism. The substitution of a commodified *objet a* for the circling of *das Ding* is the form in which the relational product is appropriated and set over against the subject. This identity is the theoretical claim of the paper, and it is what the title states.

The chain of capture set out in the prior work described the operations by which this appropriation proceeds, a relational property stripped from its relation, reified into an attribute, bound to a commodity, and offered as the object of desire.⁴ The present account does not repeat those operations. It states what they amount to when read at the level of the structure of desire. The four operations, taken together, are the rerouting of the structuration of drive from relational generation onto a commodified object, and that rerouting is the demotion of drive to desire, which is alienation. Written at the level of desire, with the current of desire supplied through it, the chain reads

$$\underbrace{\text{lack}}_{\text{constitutive}} \longrightarrow \text{desire} \longrightarrow \underbrace{\$ \diamond a}_{\text{fantasy captured}} \longrightarrow a_{\text{commodified}} \xrightarrow{a \text{ fails}} a' \longrightarrow \text{extraction},$$

in which desire is the current that runs through the chain rather than a link within it, issuing from a place capital can neither produce nor satisfy, and the failure of the commodified *objet a* is reworked into the passage to the next. What the formula records at the level of desire, the mechanism reads at the level of drive: the same rerouting is the demotion of drive to desire, the veiling of *das Ding* by a manufactured and saleable *objet a*. The prior account gave the operations. This account gives what the operations are.

12.1 THE SPECIMEN

A class of magazines devoted to small goods and cosmetics, set against the symbolic background of a luxury shopping district, propounds the claim that *amae*, the movement of seeking to be received and indulged within a trusting relation, is a personal virtue, one that ought to be acquired and that may be acquired through consumption.⁵ The specimen is a discourse rather than any particular publication. It exhibits the mechanism with unusual clarity, and its capture may be read in four moves that recover, at the level of desire, the operations of the chain.

Amae, in the first place, is a movement generated only within a relation. One does not presume upon a stranger. The disposition to be received and indulged is the proof and the product of a relational depth, a movement of drive structured, by a healthy culture, toward being held within a bond. It is relational at its root and cannot be held as a private possession.

The discourse strips this movement from its relation and names it an attribute. To be a person who is worthy of indulgence, to possess the quality of one who may be cherished, becomes something one is said to be able to acquire and to display. The movement, severed from the relation in which alone it arises, is recast as a wearable personal trait. The step is decisive, since an attribute can be mediated by a commodity where a relation cannot.

⁴See the prior work on relational value under the symbolic crisis for the four operations of the chain of capture. The present account does not restate those operations. It redescribes what they amount to at the level of the structure of desire.

⁵The term *amae* names the disposition, healthy in its relational setting, to presume upon and be indulged by another within a bond of trust. Its phenomenology has been described as a marker of a particular culture. It is treated here as one culturally borne form of a general movement, the structuring of drive toward being received and held within a relation, rather than as the property of any single culture.

The discourse then misrepresents the non-possessable as purchasable. To be received and held, which is generated only in a relation and possessed by no one, is presented as a qualification that the right purchase confers. The small good and the cosmetic are offered as the means by which one becomes worthy of being cherished. What cannot be bought, because it exists only in the circling of a relation, is counterfeited as a thing that the correct acquisition secures.

The structuring of drive is thereby rerouted. A movement that, within a healthy culture, would be structured toward being held within a bond is redirected toward the acquisition of a commodified object that stands in for the bond. Drive is demoted to desire. *Das Ding*, the unfillable place around which the movement toward being held would circle, is veiled by an *objet a* that is manufactured and sold. This is the alienation of the structure of desire in the specimen, the industrialized substitution of a purchasable qualification for a relational movement that no purchase can secure.

12.2 FROM ECONOMIC EXCLUSION TO ONTOLOGICAL EXCLUSION

A consequence follows that reaches past the economic. When the structure of desire is alienated in this way, and the relational core is re-bound to a commodity that must be bought, those who cannot pay are held outside a second time. They are already held outside economic wealth by the market. They are now held outside the relational system that capital has come to mediate, since entry into the counterfeited relation is gated by a purchase they cannot make.

The exclusion is not merely from a good. It is from the mediated field in which relation is made to appear available at all. Where capital has interposed itself as the mediator of the relational movement, and has bound the appearance of that movement to a commodity, the one who cannot pay is excluded from the very field in which the movement is presented as possible. What was in principle available to anyone, since a relational movement depends on no scarce mark, is re-enclosed behind a price. The division of economic wealth is thereby reproduced as a division of relational wealth, and the exclusion deepens from an economic condition into an ontological one, a holding of the subject outside the field in which it might have come to be through relation.

12.3 THE LOCUS OF THE CONTRADICTION

The contradiction lies in the alienation of the structure of desire, and not in a substitution at the level of expression. An earlier formulation would have located the mechanism in a capture at the level of the code, as though the commodity were another expression of a drive that remained otherwise intact, and as though capital merely swapped one sign of the movement for another. That formulation understates the mechanism and misplaces the contradiction. The commodity is not a rival expression of an untouched drive. The structure of desire itself is rerouted, its object displaced onto a fabricated thing that capital has installed, its movement demoted from the circling of an unfillable place to the pursuit of a purchasable one. What is deconstructed here, in the loose sense of the term and not the sense given it in textual theory, is the cultural circuit that capital has built to appear natural and to appear good, the circuit in which a relational movement is made to pass, at volume, through a purchase. The appearance of nature and of good is dismantled by showing the alienation beneath it.

13 THE GOOD CULTURAL CYCLE AND THE ONTOLOGICAL POSITION OF CAPITAL

The mechanism stated in the preceding section describes how a cultural circuit is captured. A standard is now required by which a captured circuit may be told from one that is not, and by which the position capital occupies with respect to relation may be named. The standard is the ethics of relational reproduction, developed by the present author in prior work, and its projection onto the circulation of value in the manner of generative justice, which asks who holds the mediating field, to whom the value returns, and who sets the rules of the circuit.

13.1 THE CRITERION

A cultural circuit is good when it satisfies the principles of just relational reproduction and when the value it generates returns to each of those who generate it in common. A circuit that has been captured fails this standard. The principles are stated in the prior work and are recalled here as the criterion of this section.

The principles of just relational reproduction. A just relational reproduction satisfies five conditions. *Generativity*: it preserves the possibility of the continued becoming of the relational subject. *Co-reproduction*: the shared experience is reproduced through the participation of the relational subject, and not through the unilateral determination of one party. *Non-exploitation*: it does not depend on the instrumentalization or the sacrifice of one subject for the benefit of another, and this is the floor. *Counter-power*: since every reproduction of shared experience generates interpretive power, a just reproduction preserves at the same time the capacity to question, revise, and renegotiate that power. *Subject preservation*: it does not achieve unity through the elimination of the other as a subject, so that difference is preserved and reproduction remains possible.^a

^aThe principles are stated in the prior work on the theory of relational reproduction. They are taken here as jointly necessary conditions, each bearing on the circulation of value in the cultural field.

Read against this criterion, the capture of a cultural circuit shows its injustice at three of the five conditions at once. Capital defines the rules of the field, the personae, and the narrative on its own authority, so that the shared experience is fixed by one party rather than reproduced through the participation of the relational subject, and co-reproduction is violated. The participants bear the cost, in time, in feeling, and in health, while the surplus is drawn to the owner of the field, so that one side carries the cost and another takes the gain, and non-exploitation, the floor, is violated. The authority to interpret, to set the rules, and to distribute the surplus is fixed in the hands of capital, and the participants have no standing to question or renegotiate it, so that counter-power is violated and the arrangement is frozen against contest.

13.2 THE STRUCTURALLY CONSTRAINED CO-CREATOR

The participants in a captured cultural circuit occupy a structurally constrained position. A cultural field is not a political community. A political community retains, in principle, the capacity of its members to act in common to remake its rules. A cultural field organized by capital does not extend this capacity to those within it. The participants generate the relational value on which the circuit runs, and are in this sense its co-creators, yet they hold no command over the rules, the surplus, or the ownership of the field. Their options are compressed toward individual exit, which the industry institutionalizes as a regulated departure. The position is

named here without a further judgment attached to it. What matters for the argument is its structure: those who generate the value have no share in the command over it, and the sole avenue left open to them is to leave.

13.3 THE ONTOLOGICAL POSITION OF CAPITAL

The analysis to this point permits a stronger claim, which concerns what capital is with respect to relation. The claim requires care, since it is easily met by the observation that enterprises stand in relations of every kind, to their participants, their audiences, and their markets. The claim is not answered by that observation, and to see why requires a distinction between two senses in which one may be said to stand in a relation.

A relational subject, in the sense given by the framework of generative relational being, is constituted in its relations and generates in them what it could not generate alone. It is a constitutive member of a jointly generated whole, placed within the relation and altered by it. To be a relational subject is to be given over to the relation and reproduced through it. This is the sense that the ethics of relational reproduction governs, and it is the sense in which value comes to belong to a shared whole rather than to any party standing apart.

Capital does not stand in relation in this sense, and the reason lies in how it comes to be and in how it then acts. Value arises in the common generative activity of relational subjects. That value, accumulated and organized, is what capital consists in, so that capital arises from the relational activity it later comes to mediate. It is, in its origin, a product of relation. Yet capital takes the form of ownership, and through that form it turns back upon the very field from which it arose and seeks to hold it. To hold a field as an owner is to stand toward it from without, to possess it as an object rather than to be given over to it as a member. The relation between an owner and the thing owned is external, transferable, and leaves the owner unaltered, where the relation that constitutes a relational subject is internal, non-transferable, and alters the one it constitutes. Capital, having arisen from relation, does not return to it as a co-generating member. It turns upon it as a holder.

Capital cannot be a relational subject. Capital arises within the common generative activity of relational subjects and is in its origin a product of relation. Taking the form of ownership, it turns back upon the field from which it arose and seeks to hold it as an object. It can organize, coordinate, and occasion relation from without, and it cannot enter relation as a co-generating member of the whole, since to hold a field as an owner is to stand toward it externally, and to be a relational subject is to be given over to the relation and altered by it. The inversion by which a product of relation turns to hold relation is the ontological form of the alienation stated in the preceding section.

Three levels are welded in this claim, and they are one structure seen three times. At the ontological level, capital arises from relation and, in the form of ownership, turns to hold it, so that it cannot return to relation as a co-generating member. At the level of mechanism, this is why its operation upon relation can only be the alienation of the structure of desire set out above, a holding and a rerouting from without, and never a joint generation from within. At the ethical level, read in the terms of generative justice, the same inversion is legible as the failure of the value to return to those who generate it in common. A product of relation that turns to hold its own source is precisely a circuit in which the generated value is cut off from its generators and appropriated at the point of origin. The systematic violation of co-reproduction, of non-exploitation, and of counter-power is not a moral charge added from without. It is what this inversion comes to when the criterion of generative justice is read across it, the ontological

position of capital showing, on its ethical face, as the interruption of the return of value to its co-creators.

This resolves an apparent objection. Capital is, in the analysis of classical political economy, a social relation, and it might seem that to call it no relational subject is to contradict this. The social relation that capital consists in is a relation of production and of power, whose structure is external and asymmetrical, a holding and a commanding of one pole over another. This is not the constitutive and mutually given relation in which a relational subject is generated. That capital stands within a social relation of this kind is the very manner of its externality to the relational subject, and not a manner of its being one. The two senses of relation must be held apart, and once they are, the objection dissolves.

The consequence may be stated plainly. Capital can organize, coordinate, and occasion relation, and each of these is an operation upon a field held from without. It cannot become a member of the jointly generated whole, the shared subject in whose name the value would belong to those who generate it. When value arises from relation itself, it belongs to the shared subject that generates it, and capital, which arose from relation but holds it as an owner, stands outside that whole as the owner of the field. What capital meets, in an age when value comes to rest in relation, is a problem in the philosophy of the subject rather than a problem in economics, and it is not one that a better arrangement of the same form can resolve, since the obstacle lies in the form of ownership itself.

14 A DIALECTICAL CASE: CAPITAL'S UNWITTING CONSTRUCTION OF A RELATIONAL DIVINITY

The mechanism and the ontological claim may be brought to bear on a case that shows their working and their limit together. The case is a model of the idol enterprise in which the value is lodged in the connection among members and between members and their supporters, rather than in an unreachable image held at a distance. It is treated here without naming, as a structure rather than a firm, and the reading given to it in the prior work is carried forward and restated from the standpoint of the mechanism of alienation.⁶ The case must be held in a double focus, since it is at once two opposite things, and their coincidence is the whole of its interest.

14.1 JUST AT THE ORIGIN, CAPTURED IN THE CIRCULATION

The origin of the model is just. The lack it answers is the native human wish to connect and to be witnessed, and it manufactures no deficiency and gates no entry by a purchase. In this it differs from the specimen of the magazine discourse, which manufactures a lack and binds its repair to a commodity. The model answers a lack that every person carries, and its origin is on that count innocent.

The injustice enters within the circulation. The relation the model generates is real. There is genuine joint authorship, the supporter's witness and participation truly shaping the member's course, and a real return from member to supporter, a bond that rises as it runs. And this real bond is made the material of extraction. The relational value the bond generates is drawn off by the owner of the circuit, the connection bound to the ticket and the ballot, so that affection is routed through consumption and the surplus generated within the relation passes to the one who owns the field. By the criterion recalled above, the model is captured within its circulation,

⁶The same case is read in the prior work on relational value under a criterion of generative justice, where it is the dialectical specimen. The present treatment restates it from the standpoint of the alienation of the structure of desire, and does not repeat the earlier reading.

the value that the co-creators generate returning to the owner of the field rather than to them.

14.2 CAPITAL PROFITS BECAUSE THE RELATION IS REAL

The dialectical point lies here, and it is the point at which the mechanism of alienation shows its full edge. The extraction does not run despite the reality of the relation. It runs by way of it. The sincerity of the members produces a real connection, the real connection accumulates a shared history, a memory, an identity held in common, and this accumulation raises the relational value that the circuit can draw upon. The more real the relation, the greater the relational value generated, and the greater the surplus available to be extracted. Capital profits because the relation is real, and profits more as it grows more real.

The sincerity in question is a native human wish to connect and to be witnessed, and it is not a false need that capital has manufactured. This is what sets the case apart from the manufactured origin, and it is what makes the extraction so efficient. A real circling toward *das Ding*, the genuine movement of drive toward being witnessed, is occurring in the field. Capital, in the same field, alienates the structured part of that movement, the mediation through which the drive is given its form, and reroutes it toward the commodified object, the ticket and the ballot. The real relation and the alienation are wound together, the one feeding the other, so that the circuit extracts most where the relation is most genuine. This is the mechanism of alienation seen at its sharpest, the demotion of a real relational movement into a commodified desire performed upon the very sincerity that gives the movement its worth.

14.3 AN UNWITTING CONSTRUCTION OF A RELATIONAL DIVINITY

Read from the standpoint of the guarantee, the model may be seen to do something it did not set out to do. It turned from the unreachable image, the quasi-transcendent divinity of the idol held at a distance, toward a value lodged in the bond, and in doing so it touched, before the theory of it existed, the relational form of the guarantee. When the model arose the symbolic crisis was not yet manifest, and its turn toward the reachable bond was therefore not a strategy calculated against a visible crisis. It was an intuition ahead of its historical meaning, a reaching toward relation as the site of value before the exhaustion of the symbolic site had come into view. In this sense capital, by way of the cultural form, unwittingly began to construct a relational divinity, a lodging of the excess in the bond rather than in the sign, and it did so as if it had sensed the defect of the symbolic site before that defect was legible. The prescience is real, and it belongs to the structure of the model rather than to any intention read into a person. Its later public statements, that the connection among the members is the thing most precious and most its own, may be taken as the moment the intuition became conscious of itself, and are cited as statements made rather than as evidence of a private motive.

14.4 THE WEAKNESS OF THE CAPITAL FORM

What the case proves is exact and twofold. It proves that capital can reach relation and generate a real good cycle, and it proves that capital cannot, within its own form, keep from enclosing that cycle and drawing off its surplus. The advance and the limit are two faces of a single act. The way the model breaks the symbolic limit is the way it makes relation a commodity, and the more perfectly it generates a real good cycle the more efficiently it renders that cycle extractable, since the surplus extracted is exactly what the good cycle produces. Its advance is the condition of its exploitation, and its exploitation is the form of its advance.

The limit met here is the weakness named in the section on the ontological position of capital. The model reaches relation, and cannot enter it as a co-generating member, since capital arose

from relation and holds it as an owner. It can construct, at the level of the cultural form, the outward shape of a relational divinity, and it cannot occupy the place of the relational subject in whose name the value would belong to those who generate it. Having reached relation, it cannot in its own form refrain from extracting there, and so its unwitting construction of a relational divinity is at the same time the capture of the relation it has built. The advance is real and must be granted in full. The limit is a weakness of the capital form itself rather than a fault of execution, and it deepens the inequality it works within, drawing off from the many who generate the value the surplus that accrues to the one who owns the field.

15 CONCLUSION

The argument has moved from a domain to a mechanism to a limit. It began by locating, among the regions in which the symbolic crisis bears most heavily, the relational domain, in which value is lodged in a bond rather than in the scarcity of a sign. The crisis reaches such a domain by a route of its own. It strips the outer shell of the sign, the credential, the ticket, the persona, of its credibility, and exposes the relational core the shell had covered. In the terms of the guarantee, the symbolic site of the excess is voided and the guarantee is pressed toward its relational lodging, so that the relational core of a cultural form comes into view as the value that remains.

Upon that exposed core capital works, and the manner of its working is the alienation of the structure of desire. Capital does not reach drive, which lies in the Real and circles *das Ding*. It seizes the mediation through which drive is structured into a livable form, which is culture, and reroutes that structuring from its course toward generation within a relation onto a course toward a commodified object. Drive is demoted to desire, the non-possessable relational core misrepresented as a purchasable thing, and the product of a relational generative activity is appropriated and set over against the subject as an alien power that governs and draws upon its desire. The demotion stated in the Lacanian register and the alienation stated in the register drawn from Marx are one movement, and this identity is the claim the title carries.

The mechanism meets a limit that belongs to the form of capital itself. Capital arose from the relational activity it later comes to mediate, and taking the form of ownership it turns back upon that field and holds it as an object. It can organize, coordinate, and occasion relation from without, and it cannot enter relation as a co-generating member of the whole. Read in the terms of generative justice, this inversion of a product of relation into a holder of relation is legible as the interruption of the return of value to those who generate it in common, the systematic failure of the captured circuit at co-reproduction, at non-exploitation, and at the restraint of power. What capital meets, in an age when value comes to rest in relation, is a problem in the philosophy of the subject rather than a problem in economics, and it is not one that a better arrangement of the same form resolves, since the obstacle lies in the form of ownership.

The analysis advances no proposal, and closes on the questions it has made it possible to ask. Who holds the mediation through which a cultural form structures the drive of those who pass through it. Whether the relational core of a cultural form can circulate without being alienated, its surplus kept by those who generate it rather than drawn to an owner of the field. Whether the value a relation generates can return to those who generate it in common, and under what ownership of the field such a return becomes possible. These are posed in the manner of a generative pedagogy, which sets the problem before those who hold the case in view and does not dictate its solution. The paper states the mechanism and the limit, and leaves to the reader the recognition of where, in a given cultural circuit, the relation stands and to whom its value returns.

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