Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice · Paper XVII

Generativity Under Power

Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations

[Working Draft]

On the Conditions of Relational Flourishing in a Field of Power

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身無綵鳳雙飛翼，
心有靈犀一點通。

No pair of coloured-phoenix wings to fly us side by side—
yet in the heart, one thread of the magic horn runs through, and we are joined.

— Li Shangyin (c. 813–858), "Untitled" (*Last night's stars, last night's wind*)

人有悲歡離合，月有陰晴圓缺，
此事古難全。
但願人長久，千里共嬋娟。

Men know parting and reunion, grief and joy; the moon, her dark and bright,
her waxing and her wane—
since old, no such thing was ever made whole.
Only this I wish: that we endure, and across a thousand li *share the same bright*
moon.

— Su Shi (1037–1101), "Shuidiao getou"

Two travellers, falling, pass and do not hold;
the passing is the proof they each remained.
What seemed a parting was the gathering cold—
the root's long winter, faithful and unnamed.

No equal field, no clearing without power;
yet difference, unfrozen, is the spring.
We do not meet to end as one same flower,
but stay two, and from staying two, we sing.

And when the cold has done its hidden art,
we turn, not to the place where we began,
but lifted—nearer, by the very part
that passed. Such is the spiral. So we ran.

For the girl of the forest—

who remained, through every passing, wholly and freely herself.

Abstract

This paper asks how love fares under power. Where the *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice* series has theorised intimate relation as a generative process—a coupling out of which value is generated rather than extracted—it developed that account, in effect, in a clearing, leaving unconfronted the field of asymmetries that can deform, capture, and freeze the very generativity it describes. The paper confronts power directly, through three questions and one object. The object is *love*, in the precise sense of the dynamics of the real between two subjects —what circles the unsymbolisable and cannot be counted, traded, or managed. The questions ascend: how love *creates* a world (the generative-relational being, here extended by an etiology of estrangement, すれ違い); how love is *preserved* from destruction by power (a theory of international relations reconstructed away from its realist core, toward the order-problem of opaque subjects under no authority); and how love becomes *free* within history (a dialectical historical materialism). Its central claim is that the tools of power can protect the *conditions* of love but never produce love itself—a political economy of conditions, never of love—with trust the sole interface across the two levels. Two further claims follow: that estrangement is, in the first instance, a necessary moment of a living bond rather than its failure; and that a generative relation does not oppose power but *the freezing of power*.

Keywords: power; trust; estrangement; generative balance; relational subject; political economy of intimacy.

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1 Introduction: Generativity Under Power

Prelude: Two Bodies Falling

Two bodies fall toward one another across a dark field, and do not meet. Each is held to its own path by something it did not choose and cannot simply set down—a momentum gathered before the other was in view, a curvature laid into it by everything that made it what it is. They draw near; the nearness is real; and at the closest point of approach they pass, each bending the other's path a little, neither arriving. This is not a failure of the falling. It is the shape that falling takes between two bodies that are genuinely two.

We are taught to read such a passing as a wound—the near-miss, the word that lands wrong, the tenderness offered in a language the other cannot read, the silence where an answer was wanted. And sometimes it is a wound. But before it is anything to be grieved or repaired, the passing is the trace of something the falling could not have done without: that the two remained two, that neither was absorbed into the other's path, that there was, between them, a difference strong enough to bend a trajectory and not be dissolved by it. A love that admitted no such passing would be a love in which one body had captured the other entirely—and a captured body no longer falls. The Japanese have a word for this passing-without-meeting: すれ違い, *surechigai*. This paper is, in one of its several aspects, an extended inquiry into why it happens, and why its happening is not, in the first instance, a sign that something has gone wrong.

This paper is written in the knowledge that the field is not empty. Around the two bodies, and through them, run other forces: the pull of families who hold what the two still need; the scripts a society writes for how a life together ought to go; the slow sedimentation of two material histories into one shared and contested present. These forces are not external decorations upon a private bond. They enter it. They bend it. And the oldest hope of lovers—that if the love were only deep enough, only equal enough, only good enough, the forces would fall away and leave the two alone in a clearing of their own—is, this paper will argue, a hope that mistakes the nature of the field. The forces do not fall away. The question is not how to escape them, but how, beneath them and through them, two people might still create something that is theirs; how what they create might survive the forces; and how, in time, it might come to be free.

1.1 The three questions

This paper asks how love fares under power. It is the seventeenth in a series that has developed, across its earlier installments, an account of intimate relation as a *generative-relational* process: a coupling of two subjects out of which value is not extracted but *generated*, and through which, when the coupling is good, that value returns to its creators rather than being siphoned to a centre.[1] The series has given this generativity a formal criterion, an ontological ground—the

[1]For the foundational diagnosis on which the series rests, see Wanhong [17]. For the generative-relational framework and its formal criterion—the positive *holonomy* of a good cycle, distinguished from the zero or negative holonomy of an extractive one—see Paper IX [18]; for the political economy of relational wealth drawn on here, Papers XIV–XVI; and for the theory of relational trust that the present paper's account of trust extends, Paper XIII [19].

relational subject, constituted in and by its relations rather than prior to them—and a poetics: the good symbolic cycle as one that refuses settlement and invites its participants to walk a path and become witnesses. What the series has not yet confronted, directly and as its central problem, is *power*: the plain fact that intimate relation does not occur in a clearing but in a field saturated with asymmetries, and that these asymmetries can deform, capture, freeze, and on occasion shatter the very generativity the series has laboured to describe.

The argument is organised around three questions, each answered by a different body of theory, and each having the same object—*love*, in the precise sense the series gives that word: the dynamics of the real between two subjects, the part of their bond that circles the unsymbolisable and cannot be counted, traded, or directly managed.

The first question is **how love creates a world**—how, out of the coupling of two subjects, anything genuinely new is generated at all. This is the question the framework of the generative-relational being (GRB) was built to answer, and the present paper takes its affirmative findings largely as established. What the paper adds, on this first front, is the *etiology of its failure*: a systematic account of how the world-creating coupling breaks down—how estrangement, the passing-without-meeting of the Prelude, actually comes about. We will find that it comes about in many ways, and that they fall into a small number of layers.

The second question is **how love is not destroyed by power**. Here the paper turns to the theory of international relations (IR)—not, as will be argued at length, to its realist core, which assumes that the fundamental currency of an anarchic field is *relative power*, an assumption the generative-relational account must reject; but to a reconstructed IR whose true object is the more general one of *how opaque subjects, unable to enter one another directly, build trust and order under uncertainty and without a central authority*. So defined, IR turns out to describe the intimate field with uncanny precision—more purely, in one respect, than it describes the international one. But it describes only the field's *means*: the symbolic order of power through which a relation defends the conditions of its own flourishing. It cannot reach the *end* those means serve.

The third question is **how love becomes free within history**. Power structures are not given; they are the historical sediment of particular material conditions, and they are therefore, in principle, historically mutable. To see this—and to see it without sliding into a crude determinism that would reduce love itself to an effect of its economic base—the paper turns, in a dedicated section, to a *dialectical* historical materialism: one that holds the determining force of material conditions together with the relative autonomy, and the reactive force, of the symbolic, ethical, and affective life those conditions shape but do not exhaust.

Three questions, then, with a single object and an ascending logic: **creation, preservation, liberation**. Love must first be able to generate; what is generated must then be able to survive the forces around it; and survival is not yet enough—what survives must be able, in time and against the inertia of inherited structure, to become free. The three theories answer at three different distances, but they answer about the same thing; and none of them, it must be said at once, can touch that thing directly. This is the paper's central methodological commitment, and it requires its own statement.

1.2 Two levels: the end and the means

The intimate relation, as this paper treats it, is a two-level system.

At the level of the **end** stands the dynamics of love itself—a process of the *real*, in the Lacanian register the series has used throughout. It circles a vacancy (*das Ding*) that cannot be fully symbolised; it is not a quantity and cannot be measured; it is not a good and cannot be exchanged. It is the blooming, not the trellis.

At the level of the **means** stands the symbolic order of power—the asymmetries, the defences, the alliances and balances and boundary-works through which a relation secures its place in a field of forces. This level *is* calculable; it *can* be theorised by IR and by the political economy of relational wealth the series has developed elsewhere; it is the proper domain of strategy.

The means serve the end. But—and this is the source of nearly every difficulty the paper will trace—the means have an *intrinsic tendency to damage the end they serve*. A defence mounted to protect the love can, in the mounting, import into the bond the very logic of relative advantage the love cannot survive. The trellis can be built so tight that it strangles the bloom.

The political economy of conditions. The tools of power and of wealth—all of which operate in the symbolic—can protect the *conditions* under which love occurs, but they cannot produce or directly secure the love itself. For the dynamics of the real, touched directly by a symbolic instrument, do not survive the touch: managed, they decohere; counted, they are no longer what they were. One can build a fence to keep out what would trample the flower, but one cannot fence a flower into bloom. What the political economy of the intimate can offer is therefore, strictly, a *political economy of conditions*—never a political economy of love.

This is why *trust* stands in the title beside power and estrangement. Trust is the one thing in the system that crosses both levels. It can be cultivated, in part, by symbolic means—by costly and credible signals, by the slow projection of a real fidelity into observable form—and it is also rooted in the real, in a coupling that cannot be faked. Trust is the interface: the bridge by which the political economy of conditions reaches toward, without ever seizing, the dynamics of love it exists to protect. It is also, as we will see, the variable that decides whether an asymmetry of power becomes generative or frozen—and so it runs through every question the paper asks.

1.3 Two claims

Two claims organise what follows.

The **first** concerns estrangement. The *surechigai* of the Prelude—the structural passing-without-meeting—is not, in the first instance, a malfunction of the bond but a necessary moment in the bond's own self-maintenance. A relation that never passed, that achieved and held a perfect concordance, would be a relation at thermodynamic equilibrium: which is to say, dead. This was the thesis of the paper's earliest conception, and it survives here, but demoted from the whole to a special case—one outcome, at the structural-necessity end, of a far wider etiology of estrangement that the paper now lays out in full.

The **second**, and the paper's centre of gravity, concerns power. It can be stated as a double negation enclosing a single positive. Power *cannot eliminate itself*: there is no mechanism by which a sufficiency of love or equality or goodwill causes power to dissolve, and the belief that there is—call it the optimistic naturalism of intimacy—is false. Power also *cannot be eliminated entirely*: it is the by-product of difference, and difference cannot be removed without removing, along with it, the very creativity that makes the relation generative—so that the radical utopian dream of a relation cleansed of power is not merely unattainable but self-defeating. Between these two negations lies the only viable course:

Generative balance. To generate, alongside the good value a relation creates, a continual counter-force that keeps power from solidifying. A generative relation does not oppose power. It opposes *the freezing of power*.

This, the paper will argue at its theoretical summit (§9), is not an external ethical demand imposed upon generativity from without, but the political appearance of an ontological law that generativity already obeys—the same law by which desire, generating its symbols, withholds itself from total symbolisation in order to remain alive.

1.4 Scope, and the road ahead

A word on what the paper is and is not. It is not a manual of relationship technique; the practices it will eventually describe are reconstructed as the *maintenance of conditions*, never as the management of love. It is not a defence of any particular political arrangement; where its argument ascends, at one point, toward a general criterion for evaluating political bodies —whether they generate, alongside their value, the counter-force that keeps their own power from freezing—it marks that ascent as the seed of a separate work and does not pursue it here. And it is not a reduction of love to power, or of the bond to a calculus of forces; the entire architecture of the two levels exists precisely to hold open the space no calculus reaches.

The road runs as follows. A symptomatology (§2) sets out the observable forms in which power damages generativity. The etiology proper (§3–§6) traces estrangement through four lenses—the mismatch of trust-grammars (§3), the unattributability of prediction error and the active withdrawal it triggers (§4), the arrest of geometric-phase accumulation (§5), and the order-problem of opaque subjects that requires the reconstruction of IR (§6). The paper then turns to the means and their limits: the political economy of conditions and why it cannot reach the real (§7); the inventory of classical IR practices and their teleological filtering (§8); and the two summits—the negative one, on generative balance and the suppression of power's freezing (§9), and the positive one, on the asymmetry that generates rather than dominates (§10). A dedicated section (§11) gives the dialectical-materialist history of intimate power. A cosmological movement (§12–§14) situates estrangement within the thermodynamics of generative systems, the grammar of return, and the dormancy of the rose. A praxis of the two axes (§15) and a polyphonic conclusion with its envoi (§16) close the paper. Throughout, the discipline announced in the series holds: the frameworks are not to be synthesised into a master theory but held in their plurality and their dialogue, each speaking to the edge of what it can

say, and no farther.

2 Symptomatology: How Power Damages Generativity

Before a thing can be explained it must be described. This section sets out the *symptoms*—the observable forms in which power damages the generativity of an intimate bond—and holds itself, as far as it can, to description. The mechanisms that produce these forms are the matter of the etiology that follows (§3–§6); here the task is only to say what is seen, and to draw the few distinctions that will let the later diagnosis proceed without confusion. A symptomatology is not yet a pathology. Much of what it records will turn out, on examination, not to be disease at all.

2.1 Three presentations

Power announces its damage to a bond in three characteristic ways. They are not three diseases but three faces, and a single underlying disturbance may show now one, now another.

2.1.1 Estrangement (*surechigai*)

The first and most familiar is the one the Prelude named: the passing-without-meeting. Two subjects who remain bound, who have not quarrelled and have not betrayed, find nonetheless that they no longer arrive at one another. A gesture of care is offered and is not received as care; a silence that one reads as peace the other reads as withdrawal; the rhythms of two lives, once entrained, drift out of phase. Phenomenologically, estrangement is marked by what it is *not*: it is not collision but near-miss; not the heat of conflict but the cool of trajectories that no longer cross. In the geometric language the series has developed elsewhere, it is the condition of *zero-phase adjacency*—two paths brought close in space while the phase that would have accumulated between them goes to nothing.[2] What is felt is distance without departure: still together, no longer meeting.

2.1.2 Domination

The second presentation is the one the word *power* most readily calls to mind, and it is the form to which the bulk of this paper's argument is addressed. Here the disturbance is not that the two pass one another but that one of them is, increasingly, absorbed into the other's path. The signs are well known and easy to enumerate: decisions that were once joint become unilateral; one subject's preferences come to set the default against which the other's must justify themselves; the range over which one party may act, dissent, or simply be without consequence narrows. Domination need not be cruel and is rarely announced. Its mildest and most common form is the quiet contraction of one subject's world—fewer friends of one's own, fewer projects of one's own, fewer judgments ventured without first consulting the other's likely response—until the relation that was a coupling of two centres has become the orbit of one body about another. The symptom, stated plainly, is the conversion of a difference between two subjects into a standing asymmetry that no longer moves.

[2] For the holonomic apparatus—the positive geometric phase of a good cycle, and its arrest—see §5 below, and Wanhong [18]. The present section uses the vocabulary descriptively; its formal content is deferred.

2.1.3 The decoherence of trust

The third presentation is the subtlest, and it furnishes the bridge to the theory of trust the series has already built. A bond may retain every outward form of trust—the vows still spoken, the routines still kept, the signals still exchanged—while the thing those forms were meant to carry has drained away. This is not the *absence* of trust, which would be plain; it is trust *hollowed*, the symbolic vessel intact and the real content gone. The series has a name for the limiting case: *forged trust*, in which the apparatus of fidelity is perfectly maintained over a void.[3] Decoherence is the process by which a living trust is brought toward that limit—each act of fidelity performed a little more for the form of it, a little less from the coupling it once expressed—and its phenomenology is the uncanny one of a relation in which nothing can be pointed to as wrong and nothing is any longer right.

2.2 The cardinal distinction: reparable misalignment versus structural shadow

Across all three presentations runs a single distinction on which the entire later argument will turn, and which the symptomatology must establish before any mechanism is named. Not every symptom is a pathology.

Reparable versus structural. A symptom of damage may be *reparable misalignment*—a local, contingent failure of meeting that the bond can metabolise and from which it can return—or it may be *structural shadow*: a form of estrangement, asymmetry, or hollowing that belongs to the very constitution of a generative bond and cannot be removed without removing the generativity itself. The first calls for repair. The second calls for recognition. To treat the second as though it were the first—to attack, as a fault to be corrected, what is in fact a necessary moment of the bond's own life—is itself a principal cause of damage.

This distinction is not a hedge. It is the hinge of the paper's first claim (§1.3): that estrangement is, in the first instance, not a malfunction but a necessary moment of self-maintenance. A relation that metabolised *every* misalignment, that returned instantly and completely to concordance after each passing, would be a relation incapable of the dormancy and return through which generative systems renew themselves—a relation, as the cosmological sections will argue (§12–§14), at equilibrium, and so dead. Some shadow is the price a living bond pays for remaining alive. The clinical art—and the practical art the closing sections reconstruct (§15)—begins in the capacity to tell which shadow is which.

The difficulty is that the two are not distinguishable *by their surface*. A drifting-out-of-phase that is the ordinary respiration of a long bond, and a drifting that is the leading edge of domination, can present identically to the one living through them. This is precisely why a symptomatology is insufficient and an etiology is required: the difference between reparable and structural lies not in how the symptom looks but in *how it is caused*—in which of the layers of the bond the disturbance originates, and whether its source is internal to the dyad or pressed upon it from the field of power without. To that question of causation the paper now turns.

[3] See Wanhong [19], on forged trust and the three channels of trust-formation; and §5–§6 below for the mechanisms by which the real content drains while the symbolic shell persists.

2.3 A note on what the symptoms share

One observation closes the description and frames the diagnosis. The three presentations—estrangement, domination, the decoherence of trust—look like three different troubles, but each is, at bottom, a disturbance in the same thing: the capacity of two opaque subjects to go on *generating* value between them rather than extracting it, settling it, or freezing it. Estrangement is generation arrested mid-cycle; domination is generation captured and made to flow one way; decoherence is the symbolic form of generation outliving its real substance. The common object of all three is the generative coupling itself; the common effect is its conversion, by one route or another, from a living circulation into something static—passed, captured, or hollow. The chapters that follow ask, layer by layer, how that conversion comes about, beginning with the most intimate and least culpable of its causes: the simple fact that two subjects do not speak, in the matter of trust, the same language.

3 The First Cause: Encoding Mismatch

The etiology begins where culpability is least. Before power has accumulated, before any defence has been mounted or any advantage pressed, two subjects who wish each other nothing but good can still pass without meeting—and they can do so for a reason that lies entirely in the medium through which they reach one another, not in any defect of will. This first cause is the mismatch of the languages in which trust and care are encoded. It is the most intimate of the causes and the one that most resembles innocence, and for exactly that reason it is the one most often misread, by those living through it, as betrayal.

3.1 Sincerity has no universal language

The series has already established, in its treatment of the non-binding vow, a thesis that the present section turns to a new use: that *sincerity has no universal language*.[4] A subject who means well must nonetheless *express* the meaning well, and there is no expression that is meaning as such, prior to and independent of any code. Care must be put into a form—a word, a gift, an act, a silence—and every such form is legible only against a background grammar that assigns it sense. The trouble is that the grammar is not shared. What counts, for one subject, as the very signature of devotion—the reliable provision of material security, say, or the scrupulous keeping of small promises, or the offering of unsolicited help, or the granting of space—may register, against the other's grammar, as something between neutral and faintly insulting. The signal is sent in good faith and arrives as noise, or worse, as a signal of the opposite of what was meant.

The shadow of sincerity. Between two subjects, sincerity is never transmitted directly; it casts a *symbolic shadow*—the encoded, expressible form by which alone it can be conveyed—and it is the shadow, not the sincerity, that the other receives and must read. When the two grammars differ, the shadow cast by one subject's devotion falls, on the other's wall, in a shape the other

[4] See Wanhong [19], the chapter on translation: sincerity possesses no medium-independent form but must be encoded, and the encoding language that will succeed depends on the epistemology of its receiver. The present section runs that mechanism in reverse, asking what happens when the encoding fails.

cannot recognise as devotion. Estrangement of this first kind is not a failure of love but a failure of the shadow to be read—a mismatch of codes, prior to and independent of any fault.

3.2 The grammars of trust

The point is sharpened when the languages in question are specifically the languages of *trust*—the grammars by which each subject decides what makes another worthy of being relied upon. The series has distinguished a family of such grammars, mutually intelligible only with effort and often not at all. One subject may trust on broadly *evidential* grounds, extending reliance in proportion to a track record of verified performance, and reading the demand for such a record as simple prudence. Another may trust on grounds of *character or virtue*, extending reliance to a person judged to be of a certain kind, and experiencing the demand for evidence as an insult to a bond that ought to be above audit. A third may trust *inductively and relationally*, on the slow accumulation of shared history, so that what builds trust is neither proof nor judgment of character but sheer continued presence. A fourth may trust *institutionally*, reposing confidence in the forms and guarantees—the vow witnessed, the commitment registered, the role formally assumed—and finding a trust that rests on none of these to be alarmingly unmoored.

These are not degrees of the same trust but different grammars of what trust *is*, and a subject fluent in one is, in the others, not merely unpractised but apt to misread. To the evidential subject, the character-truster's refusal to keep score looks like carelessness; to the character-truster, the evidential subject's score-keeping looks like the absence of real faith. Each, acting from within an unimpeachable conception of what trusting well requires, presents to the other the very face of *failing* to trust. Here the symptom of decoherence catalogued in §2.1 finds its first cause: a trust that is whole on each side can read, across the grammar-gap, as a trust that is draining away.

3.3 Why this cause precedes responsibility

Two features of encoding mismatch must be fixed before the diagnosis proceeds, because both will be needed by the ethics and the praxis later.

The first is that this cause *precedes responsibility*. There is, at this layer, no wrong yet done. Neither grammar is mistaken; neither subject has failed in care or in good faith; the misalignment is a property of the pairing, not of either party. This is of consequence for the normative argument (§10), because it means the earliest and one of the commonest forms of estrangement is one to which the language of fault simply does not yet apply. To reach for blame here—to read the unread shadow as evidence of the other's coldness or one's own insufficiency—is not merely unkind but *diagnostically false*: it imports a category, responsibility, that the situation does not contain, and in doing so converts a reparable mismatch into a manufactured grievance. A principal harm at this layer is done not by the mismatch but by its misreading.

The second is that encoding mismatch, though it precedes power, is the *site* at which power will later take hold. For a grammar is never merely private. Which grammar of trust gets treated as the default—the "normal" or "mature" or "reasonable" way to trust, against which the other's grammar appears as deviation requiring explanation—is not decided by nature but

settled, in any given dyad and any given culture, by forces that the later sections will name. When one subject's trust-grammar is tacitly installed as the standard and the other's marked as the exception, the difference of codes has already begun to harden into an asymmetry of standing. The mechanism of that hardening is not yet our subject; its material and historical sources are reserved for §11. What matters here is only to mark the seam: the most innocent of the causes is also the surface along which the least innocent will eventually run.

3.4 The corrective, and its limit

If the cause is mismatch, the corrective is, in principle, translation—and the series has already described its mature form. Between incommensurable grammars, trust can be rebuilt neither by one subject projecting their own code onto the other (which merely repeats the mismatch louder), nor by demanding the other adopt one's own (which is mismatch backed by force). It can be rebuilt only by *mutual translation*, in which each labours to render their own sincerity into a shadow the other can read, while extending to the other's alien grammar what the series has called *epistemic hospitality*—the presumption that the other's way of trusting is a way of trusting, and not a deficiency in it.[5]

But the corrective has a limit that it is the special business of *this* paper, and not of its predecessor, to mark. Translation is a labour, and labour is performed under conditions; and where the conditions are set by an asymmetry of power—where one subject can afford to wait for the other to translate and the other cannot, or where one grammar is backed by the authority of a family, a custom, or a purse and the other is not—the ideal of mutual translation does not simply fail to obtain. It *inverts*. What presents as translation becomes the quiet imposition of the stronger grammar under the name of mutual understanding; the weaker party, translating ever harder into a code not their own, mistakes their growing fluency in the other's language for the growth of intimacy, when it is in fact the early accomplishment of domination. The corrective to encoding mismatch is therefore available in full only between subjects whose power is not too unequal—which is to say, only when the conditions that the rest of the paper concerns itself with are already, to some degree, secured. With that limit, the first cause hands the inquiry to the second: for even where the grammars are matched and the will to translate is whole, two subjects can still fall out of phase, by a mechanism that lies not in the code but in the act of prediction itself.

4 The Second Cause: The Unattributability of Prediction Error

Suppose the grammars are matched. Suppose two subjects have done the labour of translation, read each other's shadows faithfully, and extended to each other the hospitality the first cause requires. They can still fall out of phase—and now by a mechanism that lies not in the code but in the very act by which each subject holds the other in mind. This second cause is, in the author's view, the deepest of the internal ones, and it is the layer at which the present paper makes its first substantive addition to the series. It concerns prediction: what each subject must do to remain coupled to a being it cannot enter, and what happens when that prediction begins, irreparably, to fail.

[5] On the three paths—projection, multiple encoding, and mutual translation—and on epistemic hospitality as the corrective to both manipulation and a covert epistemological arrogance, see Wanhong [19].

4.1 The predictive coupling

A subject cannot read another's interior directly; opacity, as the introduction insisted, is here ontological and not merely technical (§1.2). What a subject has instead is a *model*—a generative model of the other, built up over the history of the bond, by which it anticipates what the other will do, say, want, and mean, and against which it registers what the other actually does. The series has used this predictive-coding vocabulary before, in its account of how trust is *built*: trust, on that account, is what accrues when a subject's prior model of the other is borne out, when self-exposure lowers the cost of being wrong, and when an active leap of inference is rewarded by the other's response.[6] The coupling of two subjects, in this language, is the ongoing mutual tuning of two generative models, each predicting and being predicted, each updating on the error between expectation and event.

The good case is a coupling in which prediction error, when it arises, is *informative*—attributable to a definite source, and so usable to update the model toward a better fit. The other did something unexpected; the unexpected thing has a legible cause—a mood, a circumstance, a thing not said—and the model, taking the cause on board, predicts a little better next time. Error of this kind is not the enemy of coupling but its very nutrition. A bond grows precisely by being surprised and learning from the surprise.

4.2 When error cannot be attributed

The disturbance enters when prediction error arrives *without an attributable source*. The other deviates from the model, repeatedly, and the deviation cannot be assigned: it is impossible to tell whether the error means *the other has changed*—so that the model is now simply out of date and must be revised; or whether it is *noise in the channel*—a passing perturbation signifying nothing, to be ignored on pain of overfitting; or whether *one's own prior was wrong all along*—so that the model was never a good model of this other, and what is collapsing is not the bond but an illusion about it. These three attributions call for opposite responses—update, ignore, or demolish—and the catastrophe of this layer is that the subject *cannot tell which is owed*. The error is real and persistent; its meaning is undecidable.

The unattributability of error. What triggers the bond's self-protection is not prediction error as such—error is the nutrition of coupling—but error that *cannot be attributed*. When a subject cannot decide whether persistent deviation means the other has changed, the channel is merely noisy, or its own prior was mistaken, no update is safe: to revise may be to chase noise; to ignore may be to miss a real change; to demolish may be to destroy a sound bond over a transient. It is the *undecidability of attribution*, not the magnitude of error, that does the damage.

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[6] See Wanhong [19], the chapter unifying the three channels of trust under predictive coding: the structural or prior channel, the self-exposure or likelihood channel, and the active-inference channel. The present section runs the same mechanism toward the opposite outcome.

4.3 Active withdrawal: estrangement as defensive disinvestment

Faced with persistent, unattributable error and no safe update, a predictive system has one further move, and it is the move that constitutes this layer's form of estrangement. It can reduce its *coupling*—lower the gain on its predictions of the other, narrow the range over which it stakes anything on being right, cease to expose itself to the error by ceasing, in some measure, to predict the other at all. In the vocabulary of active inference, the system can act so as to bring its sensory stream back within the range its model can already handle, not by improving the model but by *withdrawing from the part of the world that the model cannot track*. Applied to a bond, this means: to stop reaching, to lower the stakes, to invest less of oneself in anticipating the other—to pass, henceforth, at a safe distance.

This is the second cause's central and, I think, original claim: that *surechigai* at this layer is not coldness, not indifference, and not the failure of love, but the *defensive disinvestment of a predictive system that can no longer attribute its errors*. The withdrawal is, on its own terms, rational—a way of stanching a loss that cannot be stopped by any available update. And it is, precisely because it is rational and self-protective, almost impossible to read correctly from the other side, where it presents not as self-protection but as the cooling it is so often mistaken for. One subject withdraws to stop bleeding; the other reads the withdrawal as the withdrawal of love, and—being also a predictive system facing now its own unattributable error—withdraws in turn. The structure of this spiral is the matter of the section on power proper (§6); here it is enough to have named its engine.

4.4 The same mechanism, the opposite outcome

It must be made explicit what has happened, because it is the section's contribution to the architecture of the series. The mechanism that produces estrangement here is *the very same mechanism* that the earlier paper showed to produce trust. Trust was the active-inference leap rewarded: a subject exposed itself, predicted the other generously, and found the prediction borne out, and the coupling tightened. Estrangement is that identical machinery running toward the opposite pole: a subject exposed itself, predicted the other, found the prediction defeated by errors it could not attribute, and the coupling, in self-defence, loosened. There are not two mechanisms, one benign and one malign. There is one predictive coupling, and its direction—toward tightening or toward withdrawal—is set by whether the errors it encounters can be attributed and so metabolised, or cannot.

The reversibility of the predictive mechanism. Trust-formation and estrangement are not distinct processes but a single predictive coupling traversed in opposite directions. The same machinery that tightens a bond when its errors are attributable loosens it when they are not. This identity has a practical consequence reserved for the praxis (§15): the work that protects a bond at this layer is not the elimination of error—which would be the elimination of coupling itself—but the maintenance of the conditions under which error remains *attributable*.

That consequence belongs to the later argument, but its shape is already visible, and it confirms the paper's governing thesis from an unexpected angle. One cannot, at this layer, act directly

on the love—cannot will the coupling to tighten, cannot legislate trust into being. One can act only on the *conditions of attribution*: on whether the channel is clear enough, the exposure mutual enough, the shared history legible enough, that errors arriving between the two can be assigned a source and so turned back into the nutrition of the bond rather than the trigger of its retreat. The political economy of conditions, announced in the introduction as the limit of what the symbolic can reach, here receives its first concrete instance. And it points already beyond the dyad: for whether error can be attributed depends not only on the two subjects but on the field around them—on whether third parties, scripts, and powers are injecting noise into the channel or clarity into it. With that, the internal causes have been laid out as far as the dyad alone can carry them, and the inquiry must widen to the field. But one internal layer remains: the layer at which the failure is not of code, and not of prediction, but of the value that the coupling was supposed to generate—the layer at which the phase itself stops accumulating.

5 The Third Cause: The Arrest of Phase

The first cause lay in the code, the second in the act of prediction. The third lies in neither: it lies in the *value* that the coupling was supposed to generate, and in the geometry of its generation. Two subjects may share a grammar and attribute their errors faithfully and still find that nothing new is any longer being made between them—that the bond, though intact, has stopped *generating*. To say precisely what has failed, and why "passing without meeting" is the exact phrase for it, the section draws on the geometric apparatus the series developed to distinguish good cycles from bad. This is the layer at which the descriptive image of §2.1—estrangement as *zero-phase adjacency*—receives its formal content.

5.1 Value as holonomy: a recapitulation

The series has argued that the value generated by a relational coupling is not a substance stored in either party but a *geometric phase*: a quantity that accrues only along a closed path traversed *together*, and that depends on the path and not merely on its endpoints.[7] Two subjects, interpreting each other and the world, trace a loop in the space of shared meaning; if the loop closes upon a configuration that is not identical to its start but *lifted*—returned with a surplus that neither held before and neither can claim alone—then the cycle has positive holonomy, and that surplus is the value generated. A bad cycle is one that returns to exactly where it began, having moved meaning nowhere (zero holonomy), or one that returns depleted, having drained one party to inflate the other (negative holonomy). On this account value is intrinsically *path-dependent and joint*: it cannot be accumulated by one subject alone, and it cannot be accumulated at all unless a loop is actually closed.

5.2 The geometry of passing-without-meeting

This apparatus yields an exact definition of the estrangement the paper has so far only described. *Surechigai* is the condition in which two trajectories are brought close—adjacent in

[7] For the holonomy apparatus—value as the geometric phase accumulated around a closed interpretive loop, the curvature of the relational connection as the local density of value-generation, and the sign of the holonomy as the formal criterion separating a good (positive) cycle from an extractive (zero or negative) one—see Wanhong [18]. The present section uses this apparatus to characterise the failure of accumulation.

the space of meaning, near enough to touch—while the phase that would accumulate *between* them goes to zero. The two are proximate and the holonomy is nil. This is why estrangement is so precisely *not* collision: a collision is an interaction, an exchange of momentum, an event with consequence; zero-phase adjacency is the absence of consequence at the very point of nearness. The subjects are close enough that something should be generated, and nothing is. They pass.

The arrest of phase. *Surechigai*, at this layer, is the *arrest of geometric-phase accumulation*: the interpretive loop that the two subjects were tracing together bifurcates or fails to close, so that no surplus is lifted and no value is generated, even as the two remain adjacent. Estrangement is not the divergence of two paths into the distance—that would be mere separation—but their nearness *without* accumulation: zero holonomy at close approach. The bond is intact; the generation has stopped.

5.3 Three forms of arrest

The arrest takes three forms, which are the three causes this layer contributes to the etiology, and which correspond to three ways a jointly traced loop can fail to generate.

The first is *bifurcation of the loop*. The two subjects, formerly tracing one loop in shared meaning, begin to trace two—interpreting the same events along paths that no longer coincide, so that there is no single closed loop around which a common phase could accumulate. Each may be generating value on their own path; but value, on the holonomy account, is what accrues *jointly*, around a shared loop, and two private loops, however active, generate no *relational* surplus. This is the value-theoretic form of the predictive withdrawal of §4: where prediction has disinvested, the loop has split.

The second is *the loop that fails to close*. Here the two are still on one path, but the path no longer returns—each interpretive venture is left open, unresolved, never brought back to be witnessed and lifted into shared surplus. The series has argued that the good cycle is one that *refuses settlement* while nonetheless closing its loop, so that meaning is moved without being fixed; the failure here is the opposite-yet-adjacent pathology of a loop that, never closing at all, accumulates nothing because accumulation requires return. Activity without closure is not generativity; it is dispersion.

The third is *accumulated negative curvature*. The path may close, but it now runs across a region of the relational manifold that earlier passings have bent. Past estrangements are not erased; they deposit curvature—scar tissue in the geometry—and a loop traced across scarred ground accumulates phase less readily, or accumulates it with the wrong sign. This is the layer's contribution to the paper's account of *time* (§12, §11): a bond keeps a ledger, and the geometry through which today's loop must pass is the record of every loop traced before. Estrangement, here, is partly the debt of estrangements past.

5.4 Formalising the "objective obstacle"

This layer also lets the paper make good on a phrase used loosely until now: the *objective obstacle* that intervenes in the emergence of value. The obstacle is objective in the precise sense that it is not a matter of either subject's will or feeling but a feature of the *geometry* they jointly inhabit. A loop can fail to close, bifurcate, or run across negative curvature regardless of how much either party wishes it otherwise, just as a path on a curved surface accumulates a holonomy fixed by the surface and not by the traveller's intentions. This is what it means to say that the arrest of value is not, at bottom, a psychological failure but a geometric condition—and it is what makes the arrest, like the two causes before it, in the first instance *blameless*. No one need have done wrong for a loop to fail to close; the curvature was there, or the paths bifurcated, and the phase did not accumulate.

The objective obstacle. The arrest of value-generation is an *objective* obstacle: a property of the relational geometry the two subjects jointly inhabit, not of either subject's will or feeling. A loop fails to close, splits, or crosses negative curvature as a feature of the manifold, not as an act of either party. Hence the intervention of obstacle in the emergence of value is, like encoding mismatch and unattributable error, prior to responsibility—and hence, too, it cannot be removed by good will alone, but only by the slow re-shaping of the geometry through which the loops are traced.

5.5 Closing the internal causes

With the arrest of phase the etiology has traced estrangement through the three layers internal to the dyad: the code (§3), the prediction (§4), and the value (§5). They are not three separate troubles but three depths of one: a mismatch of grammars makes errors harder to attribute; unattributable error triggers predictive withdrawal; predictive withdrawal splits the loop and arrests the phase. Each layer feeds the next, and each, taken alone, is blameless—a property of the pairing, the channel, or the geometry, and not yet of any will. This blamelessness is the great finding of the internal etiology, and it is what the ethics of §10 will have to reckon with: that the commonest and deepest forms of estrangement arrive before responsibility does, and that the reach for blame is itself, so often, the first genuine wrong.

But the dyad is not closed, and the three internal causes do not exhaust the field. Around the two subjects run the powers the introduction named—families, scripts, institutions, the sediment of histories—and these do not merely add a fourth cause alongside the three. They change the standing of the first three, deciding which grammar is default, injecting the noise that makes error unattributable, bending the manifold across which the loops must run. To take their measure, the paper must now widen from the dyad to the field, and for that it requires a theory of how opaque subjects build, or fail to build, order between them under no common authority. It requires, that is, a reconstruction of the theory of international relations—to which the next section turns.

6 The Fourth Cause: Opaque Subjects and the Order-Problem

The three internal causes were traced within the dyad, as though the two subjects stood alone. They do not. Around them runs a field of powers, and through them runs the question those powers pose: how can two beings who cannot enter one another, who answer to no authority above them, and who act always under uncertainty, nonetheless build between them an order —a trust, a coordination, a peace? This is the question of *international relations*; and the burden of this section is that, properly reconstructed, it is also, and more purely, the question of the intimate bond. The reconstruction is delicate, because the discipline of IR carries within it assumptions that the generative-relational account must reject, and others it urgently needs. The section separates them.

6.1 Reconstructing the object of IR

What is the theory of international relations a theory *of*? The realist tradition gives one answer: it is the theory of how states, as like units in a condition of anarchy, pursue survival under the imperative of *relative power*, so that the fundamental currency of the system is the relative gain —what one unit has only insofar as another lacks it.[8] On this answer, the master concepts are the balance of power, the security dilemma in its material form, and the alliance as an instrument of relative advantage. And on this answer, IR is useless to us—worse than useless, for its central assumption is precisely the one the generative-relational account identifies as the mark of a *bad* cycle. A bond in which value is reckoned in relative gains, in which one subject has worth only insofar as the other lacks it, is not a hard case of intimacy but a relation that has already decayed into extraction (zero or negative holonomy). To import the realist currency into the dyad is not to analyse intimacy but to assume its corruption.

But realism is not IR. Stripped of its particular and contestable hard core, the discipline has a deeper and more general object, which its own constructivist and English-School traditions have always pursued: the problem of how *opaque actors build order under uncertainty without a central authority*. Three conditions define this object, and not one of them mentions relative power. The actors are *opaque*—they cannot read one another's interiors and must infer them. They act under *uncertainty*—no actor knows another's true disposition or future conduct. And they stand in *anarchy* in the strict and non-pejorative sense: there is no authority above them to enforce agreements or adjudicate disputes.[9]

The reconstructed object of IR. The deep object of international relations is not the pursuit of relative power among states but the more general problem of *how opaque subjects, unable to enter one another directly, build trust and order under uncertainty and in the absence of any authority above them*. So defined, the intimate dyad is itself an instance of the IR problem—and a purer instance than the international one, because the opacity of subjects is here *ontological* rather than merely practical: it is not that the other's interior is hard to observe, but that it is constitutively

[8] For the structural-realist core—anarchy, like units, survival, and the primacy of relative over absolute gains —see Waltz [16]; for its offensive variant, Mearsheimer [12].

[9] For anarchy as a structure whose meaning is constituted by the practices of its actors rather than given— "anarchy is what states make of it"—see Wendt [20]; for the conception of an *international society* in which order arises from shared norms and institutions rather than from power alone, Bull [2].

unsymbolisable, circled by a vacancy no observation could fill.

This is the pivot on which the section turns. The intimate bond satisfies all three defining conditions more exactly than any state system: no sword can be borrowed to enforce a vow between two persons (the anarchy is complete), no future fidelity can be known in advance (the uncertainty is total), and no lover can read the beloved's heart directly (the opacity is ontological, not technical).[10] What IR studies under the cover of states, the intimate bond exhibits in its pure form. And the most developed contemporary statement of this reconstructed IR comes, fittingly, from a relational theory of world politics that the next subsections will both draw on and demarcate.

6.2 Power is ineliminable within the dyad

The first temptation, once the realist currency is rejected, is to over-purify: to imagine the dyad's interior as a power-free zone, a clearing of pure generativity into which power intrudes only from outside. This temptation must be refused, and refusing it is the precondition of everything that follows. *Power is internal to the dyad, ineliminably.*

The reason is ontological and was given in the introduction. The subjects are symbolic subjects—subjects constituted in and through the symbolic order—and wherever there is a symbolic relation there is already an asymmetry: whose word counts as the neutral description and whose as the special pleading; whose grammar of trust (§3) is treated as the default and whose as the deviation; whose desire sets the rhythm the other must read. These are not intrusions of external power; they are the micro-physics of any relation between symbolic beings. There is no coupling of two subjects so loving that it contains no asymmetry, because to be a symbolic subject in relation is already to occupy a position, and positions are not equal.

It follows that the health of a bond cannot consist in the *absence* of internal power. It must consist in something else:

Health is not the absence of power. A healthy intimate bond is not one from which internal power has been eliminated—that is impossible for symbolic subjects—but one in which power is continuously *transformed by the generative logic* rather than allowed to solidify into standing domination. Internal power is not a pathology to be cured but a permanent condition to be metabolised. The pathology is not power; it is its freezing.

This reframing does real work later. It means the internal causes of §3–§5 were never power-free either: the default grammar, the clear or noisy channel, the curvature of the manifold are all already shot through with micro-asymmetries. And it means that the relational theory of world politics, to which we now turn for resources, must be taken up critically—for it, too, risks an over-sweet picture of relation as pure mutual empowerment.

[10] On the impossibility of borrowing an external sword to bind an intimate vow—the constitutive anarchy of the dyad—see the account of the non-binding vow and relational self-legislation in Wanhong [19].

6.3 The continuous gradient, and regime bleeding

If power is internal as well as external, then the picture of two discrete zones—a generative inside and a power-laden outside—is too crude. What the dyad actually inhabits is a *gradient*: a continuous field in which the concentration of power-logic rises as one moves outward from the dyadic core, through near kin, to extended family and clan, to the institutions and scripts of the wider society. At the core, power is present but dilute, held in solution by the generative logic; further out, it grows denser, less metabolised, more apt to crystallise into standing structure. There is no sharp boundary between a power-free interior and a power-laden exterior, only a rising concentration along a continuum.

This gradient picture is what makes intelligible the most insidious of the external causes, and the one the paper marks as a central original contribution: *regime bleeding*. Because the inside and the outside are continuous rather than walled off, the power-logic dense at the periphery can *seep inward* along the gradient and contaminate the dyadic core—can install, at the heart of a coupling that should run on the non-zero-sum logic of relational wealth, the relative-gains calculus proper to the periphery.

Regime bleeding. Because power varies continuously from the dyadic core outward rather than dividing into walled zones, the dense power-logic of the periphery can seep inward and contaminate the core, converting a non-zero-sum generative coupling into a relative-gains calculus. This is the most insidious of the external causes precisely because no boundary is breached—the contamination travels a continuous gradient—and because it can corrupt a core that is, in itself, entirely healthy. "To manage my family, you must prove you are worth it": the sentence imports, into the heart of the bond, an accounting that the bond cannot survive. A healthy dyad can be hollowed from the periphery inward without any internal fault whatever.

Regime bleeding (cause 15 of the etiology) is the hinge between the internal and external causes, and it explains why the dyad cannot simply be sealed against the field. The seepage is possible only because the boundary is semi-permeable—and the boundary *must* be semi-permeable, because a dyad sealed absolutely against the field would be a dyad cut off from the external connections on which, as the praxis will argue (§15), its own internal balance partly depends. The same permeability that lets in the noise lets in the air. This is the first appearance of a structural cause (cause 17) that the cosmological sections will take up: the semi-permeable boundary is not a defect to be sealed but a permanent condition to be managed.

6.4 Estrangement as the interaction-failure of opaque subjects

With the reconstructed object in hand, the four lenses of the etiology can be seen to converge. *Surechigai*, viewed through the reconstructed IR, is the characteristic interaction-failure of two opaque subjects building order without an arbiter: it is *misperception*, *mistranslation*, *withdrawal*, and the failure of *return*, named all at once. Each of the prior lenses described one facet of a single thing. The trust-grammar mismatch (§3) is mistranslation: the IR literature on *misperception* describes exactly this—the systematic divergence between a signal's intended and received meaning, arising not from bad faith but from the differing cognitive schemata of sender and

receiver, and unknown, often, to both.[11] The unattributable error and predictive withdrawal (§4) is the *security dilemma* in its cognitive, not its material, form: a defensive disinvestment, undertaken purely to stanch one's own unmanageable error, that the other cannot but read as hostility, and answers with disinvestment of their own.[12] And the arrest of phase (§5) is the failure of *return*—the loop that, in IR's terms, never reaches the cooperative equilibrium that repeated interaction was supposed to build, because each round's unattributable defection resets it.

This convergence is the analytic payoff of the reconstruction. It shows that the four causes are not a list but a cascade, and that the reconstructed IR is the framework in which the cascade can be seen whole: opaque subjects, predicting one another across an unbridgeable interior, mistranslate (cause-layer one), cannot attribute the resulting error (cause-layer two), withdraw to protect themselves, and so fail to close the loop that would have generated value (cause-layer three)—all of it under no authority that could arbitrate, and all of it liable to contamination from a periphery dense with power (cause-layer four). The reconstructed IR does not add a fourth cause beside three others; it is the stage on which all four play out.

6.5 Isomorphism, and the rupture: the two-level teleology

It remains to state, with precision, both how far the intimate bond is *like* a state system and exactly where the likeness breaks—for the break is the deepest structural finding of the section, and it governs everything in the chapters on means that follow.

The likeness is real. Both the dyad and the state system are populations of opaque actors building order under uncertainty without an arbiter; both face misperception, the cognitive security dilemma, the problem of credible commitment, the temptation to withdraw. The strategies that opaque actors have devised for surviving such a condition—the subject of the next section—therefore transfer, with care, from the one domain to the other. To this extent the isomorphism holds, and IR earns its place in the argument.

But the likeness breaks at a single, decisive point, and the break is not one of degree but of *teleological order*. For a state, in the realist understanding, survival is the terminal end: the state survives in order to survive, and there is no further good, beneath survival, that survival serves and might betray. The intimate bond is not like this. Its survival is not terminal but *instrumental*: the two contend with power, balance, defend, and endure *in order to protect* something that is not itself a matter of power at all—the dynamics of love, the generativity of the real coupling, the non-power order that is the bond's actual end. The dyad is a *two-level* system where the state system is single-level.

The two-level rupture. The intimate bond is isomorphic to a state system in its surface problem—opaque actors building order under uncertainty without an arbiter—but ruptures from it in teleological order. For the state, survival is the terminal end. For the dyad, survival of the power-order is merely the *means* to a further and non-power end: the generativity of the

[11] For misperception as a systematic, schema-driven divergence between intended and received signals—a cognitive rather than a power-theoretic phenomenon—see Jervis [8].

[12] The security dilemma admits two readings. Its realist version (12) turns on relative power and is rejected here; its cognitive version turns on uncertainty and the misreading of defensive behaviour as threat, and requires no concept of relative power at all. It is only the latter, cognitive version that the present argument employs.

real coupling it exists to protect. The dyad is two-level; the state system, single-level. And the means has an intrinsic tendency to damage the end—a defence mounted to protect the love can import the very relative-gains logic the love cannot survive—so that the dyad must do something a state never must: win its security *without* letting the winning corrupt the thing secured.

This is the precise content of the claim, ventured loosely in the introduction, that the intimate relation faces, on certain axes, a problem *more complex* than the international one, even as it is incomparably smaller in scale. The greater complexity is not a matter of more variables. It is the two-level structure itself: a state optimises a single objective (survival), whereas a dyad must pursue an instrumental objective (security against power) that is in standing tension with the terminal objective it serves (the generativity of love), under the constant risk that the means will consume the end. A small system with two incommensurable levels can be harder to govern than a large one with a single level. This is why the relational theory of world politics, for all its affinity with the present account, cannot simply be adopted: it rightly sees relation as a source of power that is *power-to* rather than *power-over*—a co-empowering, mutually generative capacity rather than a capacity for domination—but it does not equip itself with the holonomic criterion that distinguishes a good relational cycle from a bad one, nor with the account of the real that explains why the bond's terminal end cannot be reached by the very relational means that secure it.[13]

The rupture sets the agenda for the second of the paper's three questions. The dyad must defend the conditions of its love against the field of power; the tools for that defence are the reconstructed strategies of IR; but those tools operate at the level of means, and the love they defend lives at the level of an end they cannot touch. To use them well is therefore to know exactly what they can and cannot reach—which is the burden of the next section, on the political economy of conditions, and its successor, on the inventory of strategies and the teleological filter that decides which of them a bond may use without destroying what it defends.

7 Protecting the Unsymbolisable: The Political Economy of Conditions

The rupture identified at the close of the last section—that the dyad's security is a means to an end the means cannot touch—is not a difficulty to be managed but the central methodological fact of the entire paper, and this section states it in full. It is the section on which the paper's distinctiveness rests. Every theory the paper recruits to the second question—how love is not destroyed by power—is a theory of the means; and the burden here is to establish, exactly, what the means can and cannot do for the end. The answer is severe, and it governs all the practical chapters that follow: *the tools of power and of wealth can protect the conditions under which*

[13] For the relational theory of world politics—relation as itself a form of power, power as more often *power-to* (co-empowerment) than *power-over* (domination), and the *yin–yang* dynamic of mutual completion as a generative process irreducible to either party—see Qin [14]. The present account draws on this conception of power-to while marking three points of divergence: it adds the holonomic criterion separating good from bad relational cycles (18); it grounds relation in the Lacanian real and its unsymbolisable remainder, where the relational theory rests on a Confucian grammar of reciprocity; and it locates, at §9, an ontological account of why such relation must continually generate a counter-force against its own freezing.

love occurs, but they cannot produce, secure, or even touch the love itself.

7.1 The end is a process of the real

The reason lies in what the end *is*. The dynamics of love—the generativity of the coupling, the thing all the defending is for—is a process of the *real*, in the register the series has used throughout. It circles a vacancy, *das Ding*, that cannot be fully taken up into the symbolic; it is not a quantity and admits no measure; it is not a good and enters no exchange. The series established this elsewhere as a thesis about value: that the value generated in a good coupling is non-appropriable and cannot be siphoned, precisely because it is not a thing held but a phase accumulated around a vacancy that no party occupies.[14] What is true of the value is true of the dynamics that generate it: they belong to the real, and the real is, by definition, what escapes complete symbolisation.

7.2 The instruments are symbolic, and the touch decoheres

The instruments of protection, by contrast, are without exception *symbolic*. An IR strategy, a balance, an alliance, a boundary-work, a deployment of relational wealth—each operates by representation, calculation, comparison, the assignment of value to commensurable objects. They live in the symbolic order, which is their power and their limit. For a symbolic instrument applied *directly* to a process of the real does not protect that process; it transforms it, and the transformation is destruction.

The decohering touch. A symbolic instrument cannot act directly upon a process of the real without changing its nature, and the change is loss. Love managed—made the object of strategy, calculation, or deployment—decoheres: counted, it is no longer the uncountable thing it was; secured by guarantee, it is no longer the unsecured thing whose very lack of guarantee was its substance; deployed as wealth, it becomes wealth, and ceases to be love. The attempt to seize the real with a symbolic tool does not capture the real; it replaces it with its symbolic shell. This is the mechanism of the decoherence of trust catalogued in §2.1, and its limiting case is the forged trust of Wanhong [19]: the apparatus perfect, the substance gone.

The point is not that managing love is difficult or distasteful. It is that it is a *category error* whose result is the annihilation of the thing managed. One does not protect a flower by handling the bloom; the handling bruises it. This is not a counsel of passivity—there is a great deal to be done—but a specification of *where* the doing must be directed.

7.3 Fence and bloom

The governing image of the paper's method can now be stated. What the symbolic instruments protect is not the bloom but the *conditions* of the bloom—the soil, the light, the absence of what would trample it. One builds a fence not to cause the flowering, which the fence cannot do,

[14] On the real value that circles the vacancy and cannot be appropriated or siphoned—as against the imaginary value organised around a possessable object—see Wanhong [18].

but to keep out the feet and the frost that would prevent it. The fence is wholly in the order of means—it can be designed, built, measured, repaired—and it is wholly necessary, for without it the bloom is at the mercy of the field. But the fence does not bloom, and no perfection of fence-building ever produced a flower. The blooming follows a logic the fence cannot reach: the logic of the real, of *das Ding*, of the desire that circles it.

Fence and bloom. The operations of power can protect only the *surrounding conditions* under which the dynamics of love may occur—the cleared space, the warded boundary, the channel kept clear enough for error to remain attributable—never the dynamics themselves. The fence is the whole domain of strategy: necessary, buildable, and powerless to cause the flowering it makes room for. To confuse the two—to believe that a sufficiently well-built fence is a flower, that perfected conditions *are* love—is the characteristic error of every attempt to engineer intimacy, and it ends, reliably, in a walled and barren plot.

7.4 The political economy of conditions, not of love

From this follows the exact and limited title under which IR and the political economy of relational wealth may enter the argument. They are admitted as a *political economy of conditions*—never as a political economy of love. Everything the series has said about relational wealth, everything this paper will say about balancing, hedging, alliance, and boundary-work, belongs to the management of the fence: it concerns the security, the clearing, the warding, the keeping-open of the space in which a coupling may generate. None of it concerns, because none of it *can* concern, the generation itself. The generativity of love is not a managed output of the political economy; it is what the political economy exists to make room for, and falls silent before.

This is a real limit on the paper's own apparatus, and it is stated as such. The holonomic value-theory, the predictive-coding account, the IR strategies—powerful as they are at the level of conditions—are mute at the level of the end. They can tell us when value has failed to accumulate and diagnose the obstacle; they cannot tell us how to make the loop close, for the closing is an event of the real. The most a political economy of conditions can do is clear the ground and keep it clear, and then wait, as a gardener waits, on a process it serves but does not command.

7.5 Trust as the interface

One element of the system, and one only, crosses the line between the two levels—and this is why *trust* stands in the paper's title beside power and estrangement. Trust is neither wholly a condition nor wholly the bloom. It is the interface between them.

On one side, trust can be *cultivated by symbolic means*, and the series has shown how: by costly and credible signals, by the structural priors a shared history lays down, by the slow projection of a real fidelity into observable, readable form. To this extent trust belongs to the fence—it can be built, tended, and on occasion repaired by instruments of the symbolic order. On the other side, trust is *rooted in the real*: at its limit it is not an inference from evidence but

a coupling that cannot be faked, a fidelity that is what it is beneath all its signs, and that the signs at best express and at worst forge.[15] Trust is thus the one place where the work done on the conditions reaches *toward* the bloom without ever seizing it: a credible signal does not produce the real coupling, but it clears the ground on which the real coupling may, or may not, occur. Trust is the bridge by which the political economy of conditions touches the hem of what it protects.

Trust as interface. Trust is the sole element of the bond that crosses both levels: cultivable, in part, by symbolic means, and yet rooted in a real coupling that cannot be faked. It is therefore the interface through which the political economy of conditions reaches toward—without ever seizing—the dynamics of love it exists to protect. And it is, as the next chapters will show, the variable that decides whether an asymmetry of power becomes generative or frozen: for an asymmetry suffused with trust empowers, while the same asymmetry voided of trust dominates. Trust runs through every question the paper asks because it is the one thread that runs through both of the levels the paper holds apart.

7.6 What this licenses, and what it forbids

The section closes by fixing what its central distinction permits and prohibits in the chapters to come. It *licenses* a full and unembarrassed political economy of the fence: the next section's inventory of IR strategies, the praxis of boundary-work and counter-force, the deployment of relational wealth to secure the conditions of a coupling—all of this is legitimate, necessary, and the proper business of the means. It *forbids* the migration of any of these instruments across the interface to the management of the end: the moment a strategy, a balance, or a calculation is turned upon the love itself rather than upon its conditions, it ceases to protect and begins to decohere. The discipline the paper imposes on itself, and recommends, is therefore not a quietism but a *vigilance about direction*—a constant attention to whether a given operation is tending the fence or handling the bloom. With that discipline fixed, the paper can proceed to its inventory of the fence-tending strategies, and to the filter that decides which of them a bond may use without, in the using, trampling what it meant to protect.

8 The Inventory of Strategies, and the Teleological Filter

The previous section licensed a political economy of the fence and forbade its migration to the bloom. This section conducts that political economy. It surveys what the long history of opaque actors surviving under anarchy has actually devised—the inventory of IR strategies—and then subjects each to a filter the international case never required: the *teleological filter* that asks, of every strategy, not merely whether it secures the actor but whether the securing damages the end the security was for. Many strategies that serve a state perfectly well destroy a dyad, and the filter is what tells them apart. The section is thus the hinge between the di-

[15] On relational trust as spanning the structural, self-exposure, and active-inference channels—and thereby crossing from the symbolic into the real—see Wanhong [19].

agnostic chapters and the practical ones: it builds the toolbox the praxis (§15) will use, and marks, on each tool, whether it may be used at all.

8.1 The classical inventory

The strategies opaque actors have devised for surviving a field of power fall into three families, to which a fourth, institutional set may be added.

The first family is *balancing*—the generation of counter-weight against accumulating power. It subdivides, in the classical literature, into *internal balancing* (the building-up of one's own capacities rather than reliance on others) and *external balancing* (alliance with others against a common power), and into the finer manoeuvres of *buck-passing* (letting another bear the cost of balancing while one free-rides), *chain-ganging* (being bound, through alliance, into another's conflicts), and *offshore balancing* (holding back, intervening only as needed to maintain a balance one does not directly join).[16]

The second family is *accommodation*—survival through yielding rather than opposing. It includes *bandwagoning* (aligning with the stronger party rather than against it, typically through asymmetric concession and the acceptance of a subordinate role), *appeasement* (yielding a part to forestall the loss of the whole), and *compensation* (granting an interest elsewhere to secure one's core concern).

The third family is *avoidance*—survival by declining to enter the contest at all: *neutrality* (refusing to take sides) and *isolation* or *exit* (reducing one's surface of contact with the power-field).

To these the liberal-institutionalist tradition adds a fourth set, aimed not at relative position but at the stabilisation of expectations and the reduction of misperception: the *concert* (management of conflict through regular consultation), *confidence-building measures* (incremental, symmetrical, verifiable steps that build trust between parties who cannot inspect one another's intentions), and *calculated ambiguity* or the maintenance of a buffer (the preservation of strategic latitude so as to avoid being forced to a showdown).

8.2 The teleological filter

Now the filter. A state may use any of these as its situation dictates, for a state's only end is survival and any strategy that secures survival is, by that fact, justified. A dyad cannot, because its survival is a means to a further end—the generativity of the love—and a strategy that secures the means while corrupting the end is, for a dyad, a defeat dressed as a victory. The filter sorts the inventory into three classes.

The teleological filter. A strategy admissible for a state, whose end is survival, may be inadmissible for a dyad, whose survival is merely the means to the generativity it protects. Every strategy must therefore be filtered by whether the securing damages the secured. Three classes result: strategies *directly admissible* (they protect the conditions of autonomy and are

[16] For the internal/external distinction and the dynamics of balancing under anarchy, see Waltz [16]; for buck-passing and chain-ganging as recurrent alliance pathologies, the classical literature on alliance behaviour.

teleologically neutral); strategies admissible *only after reconstruction* (sound in form but carrying a relative-gains currency that must be stripped before use); and strategies *inadmissible* (they secure survival precisely by corrupting the end, so that their success is the defeat).

Directly admissible. Three of the newer strategies pass the filter unaltered, because their logic is the protection of autonomy rather than the pursuit of relative advantage. *Resilience*—the reduction of exposure to single points of failure, the building of redundancy and diversified channels—is teleologically neutral: it secures a party's autonomy without reckoning in anyone's relative loss, and recent work on small-state survival has rightly shifted the emphasis from balancing toward exactly this.[17] *Hedging*—the refusal to be forced into a binary alignment, the maintenance of latitude through deliberately ambiguous signalling—protects the bond's space against capture by an external script, and is, as §8.3 will argue, peculiarly suited to the dyad. And the *buffer* or calculated ambiguity protects a core from premature exposure. These three tend the fence and reckon no relative gain; they are admitted whole.

Admissible only after reconstruction. *Balancing* and *external alliance* are sound in form—the generation of counter-weight against a power is exactly what the suppression of freezing will require (§9)—but they carry, in their classical statement, the currency of relative gain, and that currency must be stripped before they cross into intimate use. A dyad may form an alliance against an external power (two partners presenting a united front to a coercive family); but the moment the calculative logic of the alliance is turned *inward*—the moment the partners begin to manage one another as an alliance manages its members, with united fronts and coordinated positions inside the dyad—it has become *regime bleeding* (§6.3), the periphery's logic installed at the core. Likewise *fait accompli*: legitimate as a move against an external veto-holder, but, turned between the partners themselves, simple manipulation. These strategies are admitted only on condition that their relative-gains currency is stripped and their operation confined to the external face.

Inadmissible. *Bandwagoning*—survival through asymmetric concession and the acceptance of subordination—is the paradigm of the strategy that secures the means by destroying the end. A partner may indeed secure the relationship's continuation by yielding, accepting the subordinate role, ceasing to dissent; the bond survives. But what survives is no longer a generative coupling, for the love required the mutual subjecthood that the bandwagoning has surrendered. The relationship persists as a structure of domination—which is to say, the very pathology the whole enterprise was meant to prevent. So too any strategy that treats the partner as a relative-gains adversary: it may win the local contest and has, in winning, lost the war. These are not admitted at all.

[17] On the shift from balancing to resilience in small-state strategy—autonomy as the management of one's own vulnerabilities rather than dependence on external guarantee, and resilience as reduced exposure to single points of failure rather than self-sufficiency—see the contemporary small-state literature.

8.3 Why the dyad is harder than the state

The filter exposes, in concrete strategic terms, the greater complexity the paper has claimed for the small system. A state may treat its strategies as separable: it balances against rivals and conducts its internal affairs by other logics entirely, and the two need not interfere. The dyad cannot separate them, for the external power it must balance against—the powerful elder, the clan—is frequently *the very same person* who is also, at the core, a member of the bond's own generative field, someone the partners love (cause 16, the inseparability of identity). One cannot balance cleanly against a beloved. The classical binary choice—*balance or bandwagon*—therefore fails for the dyad, because to balance against the elder is to wound the partner's own bond to their family, while to bandwagon is to surrender the dyad's autonomy. Neither pure strategy is available.

This is the deep structural reason that hedging suits the dyad as no classical strategy does: hedging is precisely the refusal of the binary, the maintenance of a position that is neither balancing nor bandwagoning but a third thing, holding latitude open where the classical choice would force a showdown that the inseparability of identity makes catastrophic. What in the state system is a sophisticated option is, in the dyad, very often the only non-destructive move.

8.4 The newer resources: power's many dimensions, and the right to justification

Two strands of recent scholarship deserve separate notice, because they supply the dyad with resources the classical inventory lacks, and because both bear directly on the suppression of freezing to come.

The first is the recognition that power is *multidimensional*, so that an actor weak along one axis may be strong along another and recover agency through it.[18] This matters because the classical inventory, fixated on a single axis of relative capability, cannot see the counter-force that a partner weak in resources may exercise through narrative, through the very dependency of the stronger party's affection, through the infrapolitical "weapons of the weak." The multidimensionality of power is, as §9 will argue, what makes generative balance possible at all: it is because power has many sources that no single accumulation can be final, and counter-force can always, in principle, be generated along an axis the dominant power does not control.

The second is the *right to justification*: the principle that relational domination consists in one party's being subject to another through an asymmetry that the subordinated party cannot demand be justified to them, and that the corrective is the standing entitlement to require justification.[19] This furnishes the symbolic order with a concrete counter-power mechanism, internal as well as external: the entitlement of either party to demand that the other's exercise of power be justified to them drags a power that would otherwise operate silently—the hidden power lodged in defaults and unspoken rules—back into the space of the answerable. It is, as the praxis will show (§15.5), the principle underwriting the practice of meta-communication and of dissent.

[18] For the typology of power across compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive dimensions—and thus for the possibility that an actor weak in material terms may be strong in others—see Barnett and Duvall [1]; for the everyday, infrapolitical forms of resistance available to the materially subordinate, Scott [15].

[19] For relational domination as subjection to an asymmetry of power that need not be justified to the subordinated, and for the right to justification as its normative corrective, see Forst [7].

8.5 The empirical caution: balance is not a law of nature

A final empirical finding frames everything the next section will build, and it must be entered here, where the strategies are inventoried, lest the praxis rest on a false comfort. It is tempting to suppose that power, left alone, balances itself—that counter-force arises spontaneously, so that a relation need only avoid interference and equilibrium will return. The historical record refuses this comfort. The systematic study of balancing across many international systems finds no tendency of systems to equilibrate on their own; where hegemony was prevented, the preventing force often lay outside the system rather than arising within it.[20] The lesson transfers directly and soberingly to the dyad: counter-force does *not* arise on its own. Power, unopposed, accumulates and freezes; the balance that keeps a relation generative is not a natural equilibrium to be awaited but a force to be continually *generated*. This finding is the empirical ground of the negative summit to which the paper now turns—the account of generative balance, and of why the freezing of power must be actively, perpetually opposed.

9 Generative Balance: Against the Freezing of Power

This section is the first of the paper's two summits, and the bearer of its second and central claim. Everything to this point has been diagnosis and method: the forms power's damage takes, the layers through which estrangement is caused, the reconstruction of IR, and the strict limit of what symbolic means can do for a real end. The question now is the constructive one. Given that power is real, ineliminable, and—as the last section's empirical caution established—not self-balancing, what is to be done? The answer is the paper's deepest positive thesis, and it is not the elimination of power but the perpetual generation of a force against its *freezing*. The section builds the thesis in three movements—power's ineliminability, the distinction of static from generative balance, and the redefinition of connection it forces—and then, in its second half, grounds all three in an ontology that shows the thesis to be not an ethical demand laid upon generativity from without, but a law generativity already obeys.

9.1 Power is the by-product of difference

The first movement disposes of two consoling errors at once: the optimistic naturalism that expects power to dissolve of itself, and the radical utopianism that proposes to abolish it altogether. Both founder on a single fact: *power is the by-product of difference, and difference is the source of all generativity.*

Wherever two subjects differ, power arises—not as an intrusion but as an entailment of the difference. Difference of information yields the power of knowledge; difference of resources, the power of the economic; difference of capability, the power of the organisational; difference of narrative facility, the power of the discursive. And difference of attachment yields the subtlest and most intimate power of all: the one who loves more is the one who more fears loss, and the one who more fears loss is the one more readily induced to surrender their freedom. *Love itself produces power.* This last instance is decisive, for it forecloses the optimist's last refuge.

[20] For the finding that international systems do not reliably self-equilibrate, and that the strong checks on hegemony have often lain outside the system rather than within it, see the comparative-historical literature testing balance-of-power theory across world history.

One cannot appeal to a sufficiency of love to exempt a bond from power, because love is itself among power's sources. The deeper the attachment, the sharper the asymmetry of fear it can generate.

It follows that power cannot be eliminated without eliminating difference—and difference cannot be eliminated without eliminating the very creativity that makes a relation generative. A relation purged of all difference would be a relation in which nothing new could be generated, for generation, on the holonomic account, is precisely what difference makes possible. The utopian cure is therefore worse than the disease: to abolish power by abolishing difference is to abolish generativity in the same stroke.

The ineliminability of power. Power can neither dissolve of itself nor be abolished. It is the by-product of difference—of information, resources, capability, narrative, and attachment, so that love itself generates power—and difference is the irreducible source of generativity. To eliminate power would require eliminating difference, and to eliminate difference would be to eliminate the creativity it grounds. The optimistic naturalism that awaits power's dissolution and the radical utopianism that would abolish it are both false: the one mistakes power for an accident, the other for a removable evil, when it is the permanent shadow of the very difference without which nothing is generated at all.

9.2 Static equality versus generative balance

If power can be neither awaited-away nor abolished, the only coherent aim is to prevent its *solidification*—and here the section draws its central distinction, between two utterly different conceptions of how a relation might be just.

The first is *static equality*: the design, at some founding moment, of a fair arrangement—an equal division, a balanced contract, a settlement of roles and rights—which is then expected to hold. Its fatal flaw is temporal. Difference does not cease after the founding; power continues to accumulate along its many axes; and the fair arrangement, fixed at the start, is steadily overtaken by the asymmetries that go on forming after it. A static equality, however just at its founding, ossifies—and an ossified arrangement, returning always to the same fixed configuration while the real distribution of power drifts beneath it, is in the geometric language a cycle of *zero holonomy*: motion that generates nothing, a settlement that has become a tomb. Static equality is the political form of thermodynamic equilibrium, and equilibrium, as the cosmological sections will insist (§12), is death.

The second is *generative balance*: not the achievement of a fair state but the perpetual maintenance of a *mechanism that re-balances*. It does not aim at a distribution and freeze it; it aims at keeping alive the capacity to generate counter-force as fast as power accumulates. Its principle is dynamic—

$$\text{Power accumulation} \longrightarrow \text{counter-force generation}$$

—power grows, and the generation of counter-power grows with it, so that the system never settles into a fixed distribution but remains in the far-from-equilibrium condition that, for a dissipative structure, is the very condition of life. The ecosystem is the standing image: a forest

has dominant species, but no species expands without limit, because predators, competitors, environmental change, and new arrivals continually generate the counter-forces that keep any single dominance from becoming total. The forest is not equal. It is balanced—dynamically, perpetually, never finally.

Static equality versus generative balance. Static equality designs a fair distribution and expects it to hold; but difference continues, power re-accumulates, and the fixed arrangement ossifies into a cycle of zero holonomy—the political form of equilibrium, which is death. Generative balance abandons the fixed distribution for the perpetual maintenance of a re-balancing mechanism: power accumulation provokes counter-force generation, and the system stays alive precisely by never settling. Justice in a generative relation is therefore not a state to be achieved but an activity to be sustained—not the equality of a distribution but the liveliness of the counter-force that keeps any distribution from freezing.

9.3 The redefinition of connection

This reconception forces a redefinition of *connection* itself, against the common understanding that takes deep connection to mean the dissolution of difference—the merging of two into a frictionless one. That understanding is exactly wrong, and the reason is now visible. If difference were dissolved, power would indeed momentarily vanish—but so would creativity, for difference is the source of both. The frictionless union is not the summit of connection but its death: a static equality of the most intimate kind, generating nothing.

The deeper connection is the opposite: the *preservation* of difference, together with the maintenance of conditions under which the differences may continually correct one another. Connection, on this account, does not abolish the two-ness of the two; it keeps them two, and keeps the channel between them open, so that their difference remains a perpetual source of mutual correction and mutual generation rather than freezing into a relation of command. The task is not to remove difference but to ensure that difference *generates rather than dominates*—that the asymmetry it inevitably produces is continually metabolised into creation instead of crystallising into rule. This is close to the Deleuzean refusal of a final and correct order in favour of a system that retains the capacity to produce new differences, new connections, new lines of flight.[21]

Connection as the preservation of difference. The deepest connection is not the dissolution of difference into a frictionless union—which would abolish, with difference, the creativity difference grounds, and is merely static equality at its most intimate—but the preservation of difference under conditions that let the differences continually correct one another. To connect is not to become one but to remain two with the channel open, so that difference goes on

[21] For the conception of a politics that does not install a permanent correct order but sustains the capacity to generate new difference and new *lignes de fuite*—lines of flight that escape any totalising capture—see Deleuze and Guattari [3]; the resonance is with the diagnosis of control as the capture of such lines, not with a vitalist optimism the present account explicitly qualifies in §9.6.

generating rather than freezing into command. The axes one (§10: the generation of good value) and two (the suppression of freezing) are thus not opposed but draw on a single fuel —difference—which the one turns to creation and the other guards against crystallisation into rule.

9.4 The summit: the isomorphism with the dialectic of desire

The thesis as stated so far—generate counter-force perpetually, preserve difference, oppose the freezing of power—reads as a normative recommendation, a thing one *ought* to do. The summit of the section is the claim that it is not, at bottom, a recommendation at all, but the political appearance of an ontological law that generativity already obeys. The argument proceeds by an isomorphism with the dialectic of desire, and the isomorphism must be taken in a strong sense—not as a metaphor or an illuminating parallel, but as two instances of *one underlying structure*.

Recall the structure of desire in the register the series has used. The real cannot be fully taken up into the symbolic; were it fully symbolised—were the object-cause of desire ever completely captured, *das Ding* finally filled—desire would terminate, and with it the subject's life as a desiring being. Desire persists *because* symbolisation necessarily fails, because there is always a remainder of the real that escapes the symbolic net. This necessary failure of capture is not a defect of desire but the very condition of its continuation: complete symbolisation would be the death of desire.[22] Desire, that is, has a double structure: it drives toward symbolisation —it wants to be expressed, recognised, taken up into meaning—and it simultaneously *resists complete symbolisation*, withholding a core that, once captured, would extinguish it. This double movement is what maintains the difference between the real and the symbolic, and it is the maintenance of that difference that keeps desire—and so the subject as a living, generative being—alive.

Now the political structure. Difference, the source of both creativity and power, is to a generative relation what the real is to desire. Were difference ever fully encoded into a fixed power-structure—were the relation's asymmetries completely captured in a frozen and total order—generativity would terminate, for difference would have ceased to be a living source of correction and become a settled structure of rule. Generativity persists *because* difference resists complete encoding, because there is always a remainder—a line of flight—that escapes capture by any power-structure. This necessary failure of total capture is not a defect but the condition of generativity's continuation: complete encoding would be its death. And the counter-force whose perpetual generation the section has urged is nothing other than the political name of difference's resistance to its own complete encoding—the same withholding-from-capture that, in the register of desire, keeps desire alive.

The ontological law. Generative balance is not an external ethical demand laid upon generativity but the political appearance of a law generativity already obeys: *the maintenance of gener-*

[22] For *das Ding*, the object-cause of desire, and the constitutive failure of symbolisation that sustains desire rather than defeating it, see Lacan [9]; and for the prior development of this register across the series, Wanhong [18].

ativity requires that a system hold itself incompletely captured by its own products. Desire, generating symbols, withholds itself from total symbolisation, on pain of extinction; a generative relation, generating power, must withhold itself from total encoding into a frozen power-structure, on the same pain. The resistance of the real to complete symbolisation and the resistance of difference to complete encoding are not analogues but two instances of one structure. Hence *surechigai* receives its ultimate cause: estrangement is difference, like the drive, refusing to be completely symbolised—two subjects who can never fully encode one another, because complete mutual encoding would be the death of desire and so of the generativity between them. The passing-without-meeting is not the failure of the bond but the sign that it is still alive.

9.5 The tension: why counter-force must be *generated* if resistance is automatic

The isomorphism raises, at once, an objection sharp enough to undo it if unanswered, and answering it deepens the thesis. If the resistance of difference to encoding is, like the drive's resistance to symbolisation, an *intrinsic and automatic* property—something difference simply does, by its nature—then why has the paper insisted (§8.5) that counter-force does *not* arise on its own, that power left unopposed accumulates and freezes? The two claims appear to contradict: resistance automatic, yet counter-force needing active generation.

The resolution lies in distinguishing two orders. At the *ontological* level, the resistance is indeed automatic: difference does always throw off a remainder, there is always a line of flight, the materially subordinate always retain the infrapolitical weapons of the weak (§8.4). Total capture, at this level, almost never occurs; some residue always escapes. But the symbolic order develops, over time, *second-order mechanisms for capturing the lines of flight themselves*—disciplinary apparatuses, the metrics of a social-credit logic, the weaponisation of the very interdependence through which connection runs, the commodification that absorbs even resistance and sells it back.[23] These second-order mechanisms do not abolish the ontological resistance—they cannot—but they suppress its *effect*, capturing each line of flight as it forms.

Guarding, not inventing, the lines of flight. The resistance of difference to total encoding is ontologically automatic, but the symbolic order evolves second-order mechanisms that capture the lines of flight as fast as they form. Hence "generating counter-force" does not mean conjuring resistance from nothing—the resistance is always already there—but *guarding the always-present resistance against the second-order mechanisms that would capture it.* It is the protection of the lines of flight, not their invention. This dissolves the tension and unifies the two practical axes the praxis will develop: *non-action* (*wu-wei*) is right toward the ontological resistance, which arises of itself and need not be forced; *action* is required against the second-order capture, which does not relent of itself and must be perpetually opposed.

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[23] On the capture of relational and infrastructural interdependence itself, so that the channels of connection become instruments of coercion, see Farrell and Newman [5]; the broader point—that an order evolves means to capture the escapes that would otherwise limit it—generalises the diagnosis of control in Deleuze and Guattari [3].

9.6 The discipline: isomorphism, not reduction; and the tragic remainder

Two disciplines guard the summit against misreading, and the section closes by stating them, for without them the isomorphism would overreach in exactly the ways its critics would expect.

The first is that the isomorphism is *formal, not reductive*. The claim is that the resistance-to-capture in desire and the resistance-to-capture in generative relation share an underlying structure—a double movement toward and away from complete capture—not that political struggle "is" desire, nor that the relational field is a libidinal economy in disguise. The series has held this discipline at each of its formal couplings—with predictive coding, with the geometry of phase, with the dynamics of the quantum—and it holds it here: the dialectic of desire furnishes a fully theorised *model* of the structure, and the political thesis is shown to instantiate that structure, without either being collapsed into the other.

The second is that the tragic dimension of the desire-structure must be *kept*, not sweetened. Desire's persistence is also its perpetual lack: to desire is to be marked by a want that no object fills, and the continuation of desire is the continuation of that want. The political isomorph inherits the cost. Generative balance is not a happy equilibrium of perpetual liveliness; it is the refusal of a rest that would be death, purchased at the price of a relation that can never arrive at the stillness of a final fairness, a complete concordance, a last reconciliation. This is where the section rejoins the paper's first claim, and gives it its deepest ground. *Surechigai* is not an accident to be one day overcome but the standing price of remaining alive: the cost difference pays for refusing to be wholly encoded, the cost desire pays for refusing to be wholly symbolised, the cost a generative relation pays for refusing the frozen peace of equilibrium. The passing-without-meeting and the perpetual want are one structure, seen in two registers. The bond that has stopped passing has not been perfected; it has died.

A final word marks the summit's reach and its restraint. The law stated here—that the maintenance of generativity requires a system to hold itself incompletely captured by its own products—is stated for the intimate bond, and the paper claims it only there. But it plainly does not stop there. Raised to the level of a political body, it yields a criterion for evaluating any such body: whether, in generating its value, it also generates the counter-force that keeps its own power from freezing—whether its growth returns to its creators or is captured, whether its lines of flight are guarded or absorbed. That criterion, and its relation to the theories of non-domination, of agonistic plurality, of the right to justification, and of generative justice, is the seed of a separate work [4], and the paper marks it as such and does not pursue it here. It belongs to the next question—how love becomes free within history—to which, after the positive summit of asymmetry, the paper turns.

10 Generative Asymmetry: When Difference of Power Generates

The previous section was the paper's negative summit: it asked how the freezing of power is to be opposed, and answered that a generative relation must perpetually withhold itself from total capture. But a paper that asked only how power is prevented from doing harm would have told half the story, and the worse-lit half. For if power is the by-product of difference, and difference is the source of all generativity, then power cannot be only a threat to the good—it must, under the right conditions, be among the good's own conditions. This section is the

positive summit, and it asks the question the diagnostic and defensive chapters left unasked: *when, and how, does an asymmetry of power generate rather than dominate?* The answer completes the paper's account of power and supplies the criterion the praxis will need to tell cultivation from harm.

10.1 Power and generativity are co-original

The whole argument to this point has tacitly placed power and generativity in opposition: power as what damages, captures, freezes; generativity as what power threatens. The inside was generative, the outside power-laden; *power-over* was the enemy, *power-to* the friend. This opposition, useful as a first orientation, cannot be the last word, and the reason was given at the negative summit. Power and generativity spring from the same root. Difference generates value *and* difference generates power; they are not opposed terms but co-original products of the one source. It follows that an asymmetry of power is not, as such, the antithesis of generativity. It is ambivalent—capable of freezing into domination, capable also of serving as the very condition under which certain goods are generated at all.

The point is sharpened by observing that the goods in question *cannot* be generated between equals. There is no teaching between two who know the same; no nurture between two equally capable of self-care; no healing between two equally whole; no initiation between two equally versed. These are generative relations—among the most generative there are—and every one of them *requires* an asymmetry of power as its precondition. To demand their symmetry is not to perfect them but to abolish them. The asymmetry is not a regrettable feature to be minimised on the way to an ideal equality; it is constitutive of the good the relation generates.

The co-originality of power and generativity. Power and generativity are co-original products of difference, not opposed terms. An asymmetry of power is therefore ambivalent: it may freeze into domination, or it may be the constitutive condition of a good that cannot be generated between equals. Teaching, nurture, healing, and initiation are all generative relations that *require* asymmetry as their precondition; to demand their symmetry is not to perfect them but to abolish them. The question is never whether asymmetry is present—in a generative relation it always is—but in which direction it runs.

10.2 The structure of good asymmetry: self-diminishing, non-appropriative

What, then, distinguishes a generative asymmetry from a dominating one? Not its magnitude, and not its presence, but its *structure in time and its relation to appropriation*. Four paradigms display the structure, and they are not chosen at random: each is a relation in which an asymmetry of power is undeniable and in which, when the relation is good, the asymmetry is exercised in a manner that tends toward its own diminution and refuses to appropriate the one it acts upon.

In *teaching*, the asymmetry of knowledge is real, and the good teacher exercises it so as to dissolve it: the aim of the teaching is a student who no longer needs the teacher, an asymmetry

deployed toward its own cancellation. In *nurture*—the rearing of a child—the asymmetry is total at the outset and absolute in kind, and yet the whole art of good nurture is the cultivation of a being who will, in time, not require it: a power exercised for the sake of producing a subject who outgrows that power. In *healing* and the tending of the vulnerable, the asymmetry of one whole and one stricken is undeniable, and the good of it lies precisely in a manner of bearing the asymmetry that does *not* convert the other's weakness into the carer's standing power—that receives the vulnerability without accumulating advantage from it, and works toward the other's restored subjecthood rather than their continued dependence. In *initiation and guidance*—one party more versed in some domain leading another into it—the good is the gradual mutual enrichment in which the led becomes, in their turn, one who can lead.

The common structure is unmistakable, and the series has a name for it from its earliest pages. The good asymmetry is exercised in the manner of *xuande*—the "mysterious virtue" of the *Daodejing*: to generate without possessing, to act without exacting, to lead without ruling.[24] Teaching, nurture, healing, guidance: each is, when good, a *zhang er bu zai*—a fostering that does not rule, a power that leads without subjugating and whose telos is the flourishing, and ultimately the empowered independence, of the one it acts upon.

The structure of generative asymmetry. A generative asymmetry is distinguished from a dominating one not by its magnitude but by its structure: it is *self-diminishing*—exercised toward its own eventual reduction rather than its perpetuation—and *non-appropriative*—it does not convert the other's lesser position into standing advantage for itself. This is the power-form of *xuande*, the fostering that does not rule (長而不宰). Teaching toward the student's independence, nurture toward the child's outgrowing of it, healing toward the other's restored subjecthood, guidance toward the led one's own capacity to lead: in each, the asymmetry serves the empowerment of the one subordinate to it, and tends thereby toward its own diminution.

10.3 The criterion: power-to versus power-over

The structure yields a criterion, and the criterion is the affirmative counterpart of the value-theory the series has used throughout. A dominating asymmetry is *power-over*: it exercises difference so as to maintain or widen the other's dependence, drawing standing advantage from the other's lesser position—which is to say, in the language of the series, treating the other as *fuel*, a resource consumed to sustain the dominant party's position. A generative asymmetry is *power-to*: it exercises difference so as to empower the other, such that value accrues to the one acted upon and the cycle runs toward positive holonomy. The criterion is therefore continuous with the holonomic criterion of the good cycle, and with its ethical core: *does the exercise of asymmetry return value to the one subordinate to it, or does it siphon their value to the one in power?*

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[24] 生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德。 "To give life without possessing, to act without exacting, to lead without ruling: this is called the mysterious virtue." See Laozi [10]. The four paradigms are, severally, instances of 長而不宰—to lead or foster without ruling.

Power-to versus power-over. The criterion distinguishing generative from dominating asymmetry is the direction of value's flow. *Power-over* exercises difference to maintain dependence and draws advantage from the other's lesser position, reducing the other to fuel; *power-to* exercises difference to empower the other, returning value to the one acted upon and running the cycle toward positive holonomy. This is the power-form of the series' standing criterion —whether anyone is reduced to mere fuel—and of the generative-justice principle that value should return to those who generate it [4]. Asymmetry is just not when it is absent, which is impossible, but when its value flows toward the subordinate rather than away from them.

10.4 Trust as the mediating variable

What decides which way a given asymmetry runs? Here the paper's third title-term returns to do its decisive work, and the two summits are joined. The variable that mediates between generative and dominating asymmetry is *trust*.

Consider the four paradigms again. In each, the asymmetry generates the good *only because it is mediated by trust*: the student entrusts themselves to the teacher in the confidence that the knowledge-power will not be turned to keep them dependent; the child's utter exposure to the parent's total power is borne by—and only safely borne by—a trust that the power will be exercised for the child's outgrowing of it; the patient yields their vulnerability to the healer on trust that the weakness will not be converted into the healer's leverage. Subtract the trust, and the identical asymmetry inverts: the teacher who is not trusted to relinquish power becomes the master who hoards it; the untrusted parental power becomes control; the carer who exploits rather than receives the vulnerability becomes the abuser. *Same asymmetry, opposite outcome—and trust is the hinge.*

Trust as the hinge of asymmetry. Trust is the variable that decides whether an asymmetry of power becomes generative or frozen. Asymmetry suffused with trust empowers: the one in the lesser position can entrust themselves to the greater power in the confidence that it will be exercised toward their empowerment and not their subjection, and on that confidence the good—the teaching, the nurture, the healing, the guidance—is generated. The same asymmetry voided of trust dominates: the lesser position becomes exposure to be exploited, and the power-to collapses into power-over. This is why trust stands in the title beside power; and it is the precise point at which the present paper welds to its predecessor's account of how trust is built [19], for the production of trust there described is, here, revealed as the condition under which difference of power generates rather than dominates.

10.5 The completion of the account of power

The two summits now stand together, and the account of power is complete. The negative summit (§9) showed that power must be prevented from freezing—that a generative relation

withholds itself from total capture, perpetually guarding the lines of flight against the second-order mechanisms that would seize them. The positive summit shows that power, unfrozen and mediated by trust, is not merely to be tolerated but is among the conditions of the good—that the very asymmetry the negative summit guards against freezing is, when it runs toward the other's empowerment, the generative source of teaching, nurture, healing, and guidance. The two are not in tension; they are the two faces of a single thesis about difference. Difference generates power; the power can freeze, and must be kept from freezing; the same power, kept liquid and turned toward the other, generates the good. The whole normative content of the paper is the maintenance of that double condition: keep the asymmetry from freezing, and keep it turned toward empowerment—which is to say, keep it suffused with trust and incompletely captured.

This completes the answer to the second of the paper's three questions—how love is not destroyed by power—by showing that the question was incompletely posed. Power does not only threaten love; rightly structured and rightly trusted, difference of power is part of how love generates a world at all. There remains the third question, the one neither the diagnosis of harm nor the account of asymmetry has yet touched: how a bond, having learned to generate the good and to guard it against freezing, might come to be *free*—free not in the abstract but within history, against the inherited weight of the material conditions that laid down its asymmetries in the first place. To that question, and to the dialectical-materialist account it requires, the paper now turns.

11 The Dialectical-Materialist History of Intimate Power

The two summits completed the account of power as a structure: how it freezes and must be kept from freezing, how its asymmetry can dominate or generate. But a structure is not a fate, and to leave the account there would be to present the power-relations of an intimate bond as though they were given, timeless, simply there to be managed. They are not given. They are the historical sediment of particular material conditions, and what has been sedimented can, in time, be dissolved. This section takes up the third of the paper's questions—how love becomes free within history—and it requires a method the paper has not yet deployed: a historical materialism. But it requires that method in a specific form, and the section's first task is to fix which form, because the wrong form would undo, in a sentence, everything the paper has built.

11.1 A statement of standpoint: dialectical, not mechanical

There are two historical materialisms, and the difference between them is decisive here. The first, which may be called *mechanical*, holds that the economic base unilaterally determines the superstructure: the relations of production fix the legal, ethical, symbolic, and affective forms of life, which are their passive reflection. Taken strictly, this version reduces love to an effect of its economic base—and would thereby annihilate, at a stroke, the real unsymbolisable core the paper has laboured to protect, dragging the bloom back into the order of determined conditions and calling it determined too.

The section stands, instead, on *dialectical* historical materialism, and the distinction is not a

softening but a fidelity. The dialectical version holds three things the mechanical one does not. First, that history advances not by smooth determination but by the motion of *contradiction*—the tension between forces and relations of production, the unity and struggle of opposites—so that the engine of change is internal tension, not one-way causation. Second, that the superstructure possesses *relative autonomy* and *reacts back* upon the base: the symbolic, ethical, and affective life that material conditions shape is not their passive reflection but a force that in turn conditions and, under conditions, reshapes them.[25] Third, that history moves by the *negation of the negation*, a spiral and not a line—which is, the section will note, the very form the series has used throughout.

Constraint without determination. On the dialectical reading, "material conditions constrain but do not determine" is not a dilution of historical materialism but its orthodox statement: the base exerts determining force, *and* the superstructure—symbolic, ethical, affective—retains a relative autonomy through which it reacts upon the base. The mechanical reading, which makes the superstructure a passive reflection and reduces love to an effect of its economic base, is the deviation from the dialectic, not its rigour. The paper's "safe version" is therefore the faithful version: it preserves both the constraining force of conditions and the agency and contingency that the freezing of power would otherwise be granted as fate.

11.2 The historical genesis of power-structure

With the standpoint fixed, the first substantive claim follows. The power-structure of an intimate field is not a timeless form of "the family" or "the couple" but the sediment of particular relations of production. The authority of the powerful elder is not an eternal feature of kinship; it rests on a specific economic base—the control of resources, of inheritance, of the bestowal and withdrawal of recognition—and on the superstructure that base raised up: the ethics of filial duty, the institutions of lineage, the social functions assigned to marriage. These are historical formations, and they move. As the material base shifts—as the children of a generation attain economic independence, as geographic mobility loosens the grip of locality, as the social functions once concentrated in the family migrate to other institutions—the elder's power, which rested on that base, historically wanes.

This is of the first importance for the negative summit (§9), to which it supplies a material ground for hope. The freezing of power is not a metaphysical fate but the product of transient material conditions; and conditions change. Counter-force, therefore, is not the futile opposition of an eternal structure but the work—sometimes the patient awaiting, sometimes the active hastening—of a change in the material conditions on which a transient structure rests. The dialectical-materialist standpoint converts the suppression of freezing from a Sisyphean

[25] The reduction of historical materialism to a one-way economic determinism was repudiated within the tradition itself; the relative autonomy of the superstructure and its reaction upon the base belong to the dialectical statement of the doctrine, not to a revision of it. The present account takes this as the orthodox rather than the heterodox reading. For the foundational analysis of how the social relations of a mode of production sediment into apparently natural forms, see Marx [11]; for the material history of the reproduction of life and its bearing on the forms of intimate and familial power, Federici [6].

labour against the permanent into a historical labour with the grain of the possible.

11.3 Marriage as the dialectical sublation of two material histories

The section's central scene is the one that first motivated it: that a union joins not two individuals but *two material histories*. A marriage, dialectically understood, is the bringing-together of two sets of relations of production, two material pasts, two ethico-symbolic systems each sedimented from a different economic base, into one contested present. Each partner carries into the new field the grammar of trust (§3), the expectations of role, the very forms of affective expression, that their own material history laid down; and these do not merely coexist. They contradict.

The union of two material histories. A union is not the joining of two individuals but the integration of two material histories—two sets of relations of production and the ethico-symbolic systems sedimented from them. This supplies a material ground for the internal causes: the mismatch of trust-grammars (§3) is, at depth, the contradiction of two political economies of affective expression; the external power of elders (§6.3) is a determinate historical form of the family, waning as its material base shifts; and regime bleeding (§6.3) finds its historical explanation in a new field not yet possessed of an economic base independent of the old relations of production, and so still embedded in them.

But the bringing-together is, when it goes well, neither the victory of one material history over the other nor their inert juxtaposition. It is a *sublation*—an *Aufhebung*—in which the contradiction of the two systems (the moment of the negative) is worked, through the practice of the relational field, into a new and shared grammar that did not exist in either: a third thing, carrying a positive holonomy, irreducible to either of its sources. And the dialectical point is exact: sublation does not abolish the difference of the two histories but *preserves* it within a higher unity—which is precisely the redefinition of connection the negative summit reached by another road (§9.3). The good union does not erase the two material histories into sameness; it lifts their contradiction into a shared form that keeps the difference alive and generative. Here the dialectical-materialist method and the holonomic account of value turn out to be describing one movement in two vocabularies: the spiral of sublation and the positive holonomy of the good cycle are the same return-with-surplus, the same negation of the negation.

11.4 The constraint on praxis: a dialectical law of history

The standpoint yields, finally, a constraint on the practical chapters to come, and it is the section's contribution to the praxis. The effectiveness of counter-power practice is conditioned by material circumstance. One cannot, by will or by love alone, dissolve a power-structure whose material base remains intact: where a couple's economy still depends on resources the elder can withdraw, no sufficiency of feeling will lift that power, and a counter-force mounted before its material conditions are ripe will fail—not for want of resolve but for want of a base. This is the constraint, and it disciplines the praxis against voluntarism: it explains why some

resistances succeed and others fail not by the quality of their strategy alone but by the ripeness of their material moment.

But the constraint is dialectical, and so it cuts the other way as well. Material conditions *open* a space of possibility; they do not fill it. Within the space the ripe conditions open, the outcome is not determined—it retains the agency of the subjects and the contingency of events. There is no necessary trajectory along which intimate liberation must run, no guarantee written into history that love will be freed. To claim otherwise would be to relapse into the teleological determinism the standpoint was chosen to refuse, and would contradict, besides, the paper's governing commitments: the far-from-equilibrium openness of the dissipative account (§12), the irreducible remainder of the desire-structure (§9.4), and the series' standing refusal of any master-trajectory. Conditions constrain; they do not write the ending.

The dialectical law, and its two edges. The effectiveness of counter-power practice is constrained by material conditions: a structure whose base is intact cannot be dissolved by will alone, and a counter-force mounted before its conditions are ripe fails for want of a base—which disciplines the praxis against voluntarism. But the law is dialectical and cuts both ways: ripe conditions open a space of possibility without determining its outcome, which retains the agency of subjects and the contingency of events. History constrains the liberation of love; it does not guarantee it. The first edge refutes the optimist who thinks love alone suffices; the second refutes the determinist who thinks history suffices without love.

11.5 The division of labour with the real

One danger remains, and disposing of it welds this section to the methodological core (§7). Historical materialism, even dialectical, is a theory of how material conditions shape consciousness and its forms; does it not then threaten to reduce love itself—the real, unsymbolisable core—to a determination of the economic base, undoing the very thing §7 was written to protect?

It does not, and the relative autonomy of the superstructure is precisely what prevents it. The dialectical standpoint already holds that the symbolic, ethical, and affective life is not the passive reflection of the base but reacts upon it; and the real dynamics of love are the layer of that life least reducible to material determination, the layer whose autonomy is greatest because it circles a vacancy no material condition can fill. Historical materialism, on this account, explains the *conditions* of love's dynamics—the two material histories, the power-structures, the symbolic systems, the economic bases that shape the field in which love occurs—but it does not reach the dynamics themselves. It is, in the exact terms of §7, the *diachronic dimension* of the political economy of conditions: where §7 described the synchronic structure of the fence (symbolic means, real end), this section describes the fence's historical genesis (how the material past sediments into the present structure). The bloom remains what material conditions make room for and ward, but do not cause.

Historical materialism as the diachronic political economy of conditions. Dialectical historical materialism explains the *conditions* of love's dynamics—the sedimented material histories, power-structures, and symbolic systems that shape the field—but, by the relative autonomy of the superstructure, does not reach the real dynamics themselves. It is the diachronic dimension of the political economy of conditions: §7 gave the synchronic structure of the fence, this section its historical genesis. Material conditions make room for the bloom and ward it; they do not cause it. Historical materialism is thus the temporal ally of the fence-and-bloom thesis, not its reductive rival—and the "condition" so gains a temporal depth (history) to set beside its spatial depth (the gradient of §6.3), while the real remains, in both, what conditions protect but never produce.

The same dialectical method governs the series' treatment of justice elsewhere, where a juridical form adapted to an old material base enters into contradiction with new conditions, and a new form is seen struggling to be born within the contradiction rather than being deduced from the base.[26] The method is one across the series, and its lesson for the third question is now complete: love becomes free within history not by escaping material conditions, which is impossible, nor by being delivered by them, which is determinism, but by the labour of subjects working with the grain of changing conditions to dissolve the structures those conditions had sedimented—a freedom that is neither given nor guaranteed, but won, dialectically and in time. With this the three questions have their three answers, and the paper turns to set estrangement within the widest frame it commands: the cosmology of generative systems.

12 Dissipative Structure and the Thermodynamics of Generativity

The three questions have their three answers, and a structural account of power under intimacy is, in its essentials, complete. What remains is to set that account within the widest frame the series commands—to show that the findings reached by the analysis of code, prediction, value, power, and history are not local peculiarities of the human bond but instances of something that holds of generative systems as such. This is the office of the three cosmological sections. The first establishes the thermodynamic frame: that a generative system is a system held far from equilibrium, that estrangement is the necessary signature of its being so held, and that the whole etiology of the diagnostic chapters is, seen from here, the microphysics of a single macroscopic necessity.

12.1 Far from equilibrium

The decisive result of non-equilibrium thermodynamics is that order, in certain systems, arises not despite but *because* of their being driven far from equilibrium. A dissipative structure—a convection cell, a chemical clock, a living organism—maintains its order only by a continual throughput of energy and a continual export of entropy; it exists as an ordered thing exactly

[26] For the dialectical-materialist treatment of juridical and institutional form—old form fitted to old base, contradiction sharpening, new form germinating within the contradiction rather than read off from the base—see the corresponding development in Wanhong [19].

insofar as it is held away from the equilibrium toward which an isolated system would relax.[27] Equilibrium, for such a system, is not rest but death: the state of maximum entropy, of no gradient, no flux, no further change—the state a living thing reaches when it stops being a living thing.

The generative relation is a dissipative structure in this exact sense. Its order—the ongoing generation of relational value—is sustained only by a continual throughput: of difference, of surprise, of the prediction-error that is the nutrition of coupling (§4), of the contradiction that the dialectic works into new form (§11). Cut off the throughput, resolve all difference, settle every contradiction, and the relation does not achieve a blissful stability; it reaches relational equilibrium, which is the heat-death of the bond. Here the political vocabulary of the negative summit and the thermodynamic vocabulary converge exactly: *static equality is the political name of thermodynamic equilibrium*. The fixed, settled, frictionless arrangement toward which the optimist aspires is the state of no gradient and no flux—and a relation in that state generates nothing, because generation *is* the throughput, and the throughput has stopped.

The relation as dissipative structure. A generative relation maintains its order—the ongoing generation of value—only as a system held far from equilibrium, by a continual throughput of difference, surprise, and contradiction. Equilibrium is not its rest but its death: the frictionless concordance toward which the optimist aspires is the state of no gradient and no flux, in which nothing is generated because generation *is* the throughput. Static equality is the political name of thermodynamic equilibrium; and the perpetual non-settling that the negative summit demanded is the thermodynamic condition of remaining alive.

12.2 Estrangement as the signature of disequilibrium

This frame transfigures the paper's first claim and gives it its deepest statement. If a generative relation is a system held far from equilibrium, then it cannot be smooth. A far-from-equilibrium system fluctuates; it passes through phases; it does not hold a single steady state but cycles, and the cycling is the very mode of its persistence. *Surechigai*—the passing-without-meeting—is, at this level, nothing other than the *signature of disequilibrium*: the visible mark that the system is still being driven, still fluctuating, still alive. A relation that never passed, that held perfect and unbroken concordance, would be displaying the one thing a living dissipative structure cannot display: a steady state at equilibrium. The absence of all estrangement would not be the perfection of the bond but the diagnostic sign of its death.

This is why the symptomatology insisted (§2.2) that not every symptom is a pathology, and why the cardinal distinction was between reparable misalignment and structural shadow. We can now say precisely what the structural shadow *is*: it is the estrangement that is not a fault in the system but the necessary fluctuation of a system held from equilibrium—the passing that must occur because the bond is alive and being driven. To attack such estrangement as a malfunction is to attack the disequilibrium itself, which is to push the system toward the equi-

[27] For dissipative structures and the thesis that order can emerge and be sustained only in systems maintained far from thermodynamic equilibrium by a continual flux, see Prigogine and Stengers [13].

librium that is its death. The most destructive misreading in the whole etiology is the demand that a living bond stop fluctuating—that it achieve, once and for all, the steady concordance whose name, correctly given, is heat-death.

12.3 The etiology as microphysics

The thermodynamic frame also retrospectively unifies the diagnostic chapters. The four causes traced through code, prediction, value, and power looked, in their own chapters, like four distinct mechanisms of breakdown. Seen from the thermodynamic level, they are the *microphysics of the dissipative phase*—the local, mechanistic detail of how a far-from-equilibrium system fluctuates. The mismatch of grammars, the unattributable error and predictive withdrawal, the arrest of phase, the seepage of peripheral power: these are the channels through which the necessary fluctuation actually propagates, the specific machinery by which a generative system, being driven, passes through its disequilibrium phases. The etiology does not compete with the thermodynamic account; it is its fine grain. And this dissolves what might have seemed a tension in the paper—between an etiology that treats estrangement as caused, layer by layer, and a functional claim that treats it as necessary. The two are the same fact at two scales: the necessity is macroscopic (a driven system must fluctuate), and the causation is microscopic (this is the machinery through which it fluctuates here). Cause and necessity are not rivals but levels.

Etiology and function are levels, not rivals. The layered causation of estrangement (the etiology) and its structural necessity (the functional claim) are not in tension but are one fact at two scales. Macroscopically, a generative system held far from equilibrium *must* fluctuate—estrangement is necessary. Microscopically, the four causes are the machinery through which the fluctuation propagates in a human bond—estrangement is caused, layer by layer. The etiology is the microphysics of the dissipative phase; the functional necessity is its macrophysics. To have an account of how estrangement is caused is not to have refuted the claim that it is necessary, any more than knowing the mechanism of a fluctuation refutes the law that the driven system must fluctuate.

12.4 The placement of necessity

A word, finally, on where in the paper's scheme this necessity belongs—a matter left open in the catalogue of causes. The thermodynamic necessity of estrangement was listed, provisionally, among the nineteen causes, as the structural-level entry that explained not any particular passing but why passing must occur at all. It is now clear that it does not sit comfortably there, for it is not a cause in the sense the other entries are. The mismatch of grammars, the unattributable error, the seepage of power—each is a mechanism that produces a particular estrangement, and might in a given case be absent. The thermodynamic necessity is of a different kind: it is not a mechanism that might or might not operate but the macroscopic law that *some* mechanism must, because a living relation is a driven system. It is properly not the nineteenth cause but the *functional ground* of there being causes at all—the reason the etiology

has work to do. The paper therefore lifts it out of the catalogue of mechanisms and lodges it here, in the thermodynamic frame, where it belongs: not as one more cause of estrangement, but as the law that makes estrangement, in some form, inevitable for anything alive enough to generate.

With the thermodynamic frame established—disequilibrium as the condition of generative life, estrangement as its signature, the etiology as its microphysics—the cosmological movement can take its next step, from the physics of the driven system to the grammar of its return. For a system that fluctuates does not merely depart; it comes back, and the form of its coming-back is the subject of the oldest cosmology the series draws upon.

13 Return and the Spiral

A system driven far from equilibrium fluctuates, and the previous section established that estrangement is the signature of that fluctuation. But fluctuation is not mere departure. A dissipative system that persists does not simply wander away from its states; it *returns* to them —and the entire normative weight of the paper rests on a distinction in the *form* of that return. There is a return that comes back to exactly where it began, and a return that comes back lifted; and the difference between them is the difference between a relation that is dying and one that is alive. This section makes that distinction precise, drawing only on the dynamical and dialectical resources already in play. It is the hinge between the thermodynamics of the driven system and the dormancy that the next section treats.

13.1 Two forms of return

Consider a system that cycles. After a phase of departure—of estrangement, of withdrawal, of the disequilibrium the last section described—it comes back toward coupling. The coming-back can take one of two forms, and they are distinguished exactly by the holonomic criterion the series has used throughout (§5).

The first is the *closed circle*: a return to the identical configuration from which the cycle set out, having traversed a loop that accumulated no net phase. This is the return of zero holonomy. The system passes through its phases and arrives precisely where it started, neither lifted nor depleted; nothing has been generated by the circuit. A relation whose every cycle of estrangement-and-reconciliation returns it to exactly the prior state—the same quarrel, the same repair, the same equilibrium, endlessly—is executing closed circles. It is not dead, for it still moves; but it generates nothing by its motion, and a system that cycles without accumulating is, as the cosmological frame insists, on its way to the equilibrium it merely postpones.

The second is the *spiral*: a return that comes back to a configuration *like* its starting point but displaced—lifted along an axis the planar circle does not have, carrying a surplus that the cycle generated and that was not present at the outset. This is the return of positive holonomy. The system passes through the same *kind* of phase it passed through before—another estrangement, another withdrawal, another return—but arrives not at the identical state but at a raised one, enriched by the traverse. The estrangement was not wasted; the loop, in closing, lifted.

The spiral, not the circle. The return of a generative relation is a *spiral*, not a circle. The closed circle returns to the identical state, accumulating no phase (zero holonomy): the same cycle of rupture and repair endlessly repeated, generating nothing by its motion. The spiral returns to a state *like* the prior one but lifted, carrying the surplus the cycle generated (positive holonomy): the same kind of estrangement traversed, but issuing in a raised configuration the planar circle has no axis to reach. The criterion distinguishing a living return from a dying one is therefore not whether the relation cycles—every driven system cycles—but whether its cycling is helical or planar: whether each return lifts, or merely repeats.

13.2 The spiral is the negation of the negation

This is, in the dialectical vocabulary of the preceding section, simply the *negation of the negation*. The first negation is the departure—the estrangement, the contradiction, the phase of disequilibrium that negates the prior coupling. The second negation does not restore the prior coupling unchanged, as though the departure had not happened; it negates the negation, and in doing so produces a new coupling that contains the departure as a moment sublated within it. The result is not the original state recovered but a higher state attained *through* the rupture—which is precisely the spiral, and precisely the *Aufhebung* the account of the union of two material histories reached by its own road (§11.3). The dialectical spiral and the positive-holonomy cycle are not two doctrines but one structure described in two vocabularies: the return-with-surplus that distinguishes a generative cycle from a sterile one.

It follows that estrangement is, for a spiralling relation, not the enemy of return but its *means*. The lift is generated *through* the departure, not despite it; a relation that suffered no estrangement would have no first negation to negate, and so no spiral—only the flat persistence of an unchallenged state, which is the closed circle in its limiting, motionless case. This is the strongest form the paper's first claim can take. Estrangement is not merely tolerable, not merely a necessary cost; it is the raw material of the lift, the negation without which there is no negation of the negation, the departure without which there is no enriched return.

13.3 Why the spiral cannot be commanded

One caution preserves the consistency of this section with the methodological core (§7). That the return *can* be a spiral does not mean the spiral can be commanded. Whether a given departure issues in an enriched return or in mere repetition is not a matter the parties can directly will, for it depends on whether the loop closes generatively—an event of the real, not a deployment of the symbolic. What the parties can do is tend the conditions under which a spiral is possible rather than foreclosed: keep the channel clear enough that the departure's errors remain attributable (§4), refrain from depositing the negative curvature that makes the next loop harder to lift (§5.3), guard against the freezing that converts a living spiral into a closed circle (§9). The spiral is not produced by these; it is made possible by them. One cannot command the lift, only keep open the conditions under which lifting may occur—which is, once more, the whole discipline of the political economy of conditions, here in its temporal aspect.

The spiral is conditioned, not commanded. That a return can be a spiral does not mean the spiral can be willed. Whether a departure issues in an enriched return or in sterile repetition depends on the generative closing of the loop, an event of the real beyond direct symbolic command. The parties can only tend the conditions under which a spiral is possible—a channel clear enough for error to remain attributable, a geometry not freshly scarred, a power not frozen into a circle. The lift is conditioned, not commanded; the most one can do is keep open the conditions under which the return may lift rather than merely repeat.

The spiral, then, names the form of a living return: a coming-back enriched through the very departure that seemed to threaten the bond. But a spiral has phases of descent as well as ascent, and there are stretches of its arc in which the system appears not to be generating at all —in which it has withdrawn, gone quiet, drawn inward. Read against the closed circle, such a phase looks like failure; read against the spiral, it may be something else entirely: the low, inward phase from which the next ascent is gathered. To that phase—the dormancy that is not decline but the storing of force for return—the final cosmological section turns.

14 Dormancy: The Inward Phase

The spiral has a descending arc. There are stretches of a generative relation in which little appears to be generated—in which the partners have drawn inward, the throughput has slackened, the visible signs of coupling have gone quiet. Judged against the demand for unbroken concordance, such a phase reads as failure or as the beginning of an end. This short section argues that it may read instead as *dormancy*: the low, inward phase of a driven system in which force is not lost but gathered, and from which the next ascent of the spiral is drawn. The section is the last of the cosmological movement, and it is also where the paper allows itself, briefly, to return to the image with which it began.

14.1 The low-activity phase is not decline

A dissipative system held far from equilibrium does not generate at a constant rate. It has phases of high throughput and phases of low; it cycles between them, and the low phase is not a malfunction of the system but a part of its cycle. In the low phase the system's visible activity falls—and were one to judge it only by that visible activity, one would read the low phase as failure. But the low phase is frequently the condition of the next high one: the phase in which the gradients that will drive the next surge are re-established, in which what was expended is replenished, in which the system reorganises below the threshold of visible output. A relation has such phases. After a surge of generation—or after the disequilibrium of an estrangement —it may draw inward, slacken its visible coupling, go quiet. This is not, as such, the failure of the bond; it may be the dormancy from which the bond renews.

The error the section warns against is the same one the whole paper has tracked, in its last and gentlest form: the demand that a living system display constant output, that a relation generate visibly and without remission or stand condemned. This demand, applied to the dormant phase, is destructive in a precise way. It treats the gathering of force as a loss of force, and in its anxiety to restore visible activity it disturbs the very quiet in which the gathering

occurs—forcing throughput when the system is replenishing, and so preventing the replenishment. To insist that a relation bloom in every season is to forbid it the winter in which the next bloom is prepared. The capacity to let a bond go dormant without reading the dormancy as death is, in its quiet way, among the more difficult of the practical capacities the paper recommends.

Dormancy is not decline. The low, inward phase of a generative relation—the slackening of visible coupling after a surge or an estrangement—is not, as such, the failure of the bond but may be its dormancy: the phase in which expended force is replenished and the gradients of the next surge re-established, below the threshold of visible output. The destructive error is to read the gathering of force as its loss, and, in anxiety to restore visible activity, to force throughput during replenishment and so prevent it. To demand that a relation bloom in every season is to forbid it the winter in which the next bloom is prepared.

14.2 The rose in winter

The paper began with two bodies falling, and may end the cosmological movement with the other image the series has long carried: the rose. A rose in winter has not died. It has drawn its life down into the root, where nothing flowers and nothing, to the eye, occurs; and the drawing-down is not the opposite of the bloom but its condition—the season in which the rose does the unseen work without which there is no spring. The withering of the visible flower is the storing of force in the unseen root. One who loved the rose only in bloom, and read every winter as a death, would tear up by the roots the very thing whose flowering they wished to keep.

This is offered as an image and not as an argument; the argument is the dissipative one of the preceding paragraphs, and it stands without the figure. But the figure carries something the argument states more coldly: that the phases in which a bond seems to give nothing may be the phases in which it is most quietly faithful to its own renewal, and that the love which can abide the winter of a bond—neither forcing it to bloom nor mistaking its dormancy for its death—is a love that has understood the spiral. The estrangements this paper has anatomised, the passings-without-meeting, the withdrawals and the quiets, are not, in a living bond, the failures of love. They are, at their deepest, love's winters: the inward seasons of a generativity that returns, when it returns, not to where it was but lifted—if the root is left, through the cold, undisturbed.

With the cosmological movement closed—disequilibrium as the condition of life, the spiral as the form of return, dormancy as the gathering of force—the paper turns from the widest frame to the narrowest and most practical: what, given all of this, two people are actually to *do*. The praxis that follows is disciplined throughout by the two-level structure these sections have only deepened: that one tends conditions and does not command blooms, and that the work divides into a labour of letting-be and a labour of active defence.

15 The Praxis of the Two Axes

Everything to this point has been diagnosis, ontology, and frame. This section asks what, given all of it, two people are to do—and it must answer under a constraint the whole paper has imposed: that one tends the conditions of love and does not manage love itself (§7). A praxis so constrained cannot be a technique for producing intimacy; the attempt to produce it directly is the category error that decoheres it. What a praxis *can* be is a disciplined tending of conditions, and the discipline has a definite shape, given by the two axes the paper has distinguished: the generation of value, and the suppression of power's freezing. The shape is not symmetrical, and its asymmetry resolves a tension that has shadowed the paper from the start.

15.1 The resolution of the wu-wei tension

A paper whose first claim is that estrangement is necessary, and whose cosmology makes equilibrium death and non-settling life, appears to recommend a quietism: if the passing is necessary and the winter is renewal, is the counsel not simply to refrain, to let be, to do nothing? Yet the paper has also insisted, repeatedly and on empirical grounds (§8.5), that counter-force does not arise of itself, that power unopposed accumulates and freezes, that the lines of flight must be actively guarded against second-order capture (§9.5). The two seem to pull opposite ways: let be, and resist. The resolution is that they govern *different axes*.

Non-action for value, action for power. The two axes call for opposite practical postures, and conflating them is the root practical error. Toward the *first axis*—the generation of value—the right posture is largely *non-action* (*wu-wei*): good value circulates of itself when its conditions are kept, the loop closes when it is not forced, the spiral lifts when it is not commanded; here the work is to refrain from the forcing that decoheres. Toward the *second axis*—the suppression of power's freezing—the right posture is sustained *action*: power accumulates spontaneously and freezes if unopposed, and the counter-force that prevents it must be perpetually generated. The whole practical stance of the paper is thus coherent: *let be* where generativity is concerned, and *act* where freezing is concerned. Quietism errs by extending non-action to the second axis, where it becomes acquiescence in domination; voluntarism errs by extending action to the first, where it becomes the forcing that kills the bloom.

This is why the paper is neither a quietism nor a manual of control. It is a discipline of *directing* the two postures rightly: knowing, at each moment, whether what faces one is a matter of the first axis (where one refrains) or the second (where one acts). And that knowing requires, before any practice, a diagnosis.

15.2 The first act is differential diagnosis

Because reparable misalignment and structural shadow present identically at the surface (§2.2), and because the two axes demand opposite postures, the first practical act is never an intervention but a *diagnosis*: a determination of what kind of estrangement is in play, and from which

layer it issues. The nineteen-fold etiology is, in practice, a differential-diagnostic instrument —a means of asking, of a given passing, whether it is endogenous (issuing from the dyad's own code, prediction, or value-geometry, §3–§5) or exogenous (pressed upon the dyad from the field of power, §6.3), and whether it is the necessary fluctuation of a living system or the leading edge of a freezing.

The stakes of the diagnosis are high in both directions, and misdiagnosis is destructive both ways. To mistake an exogenous estrangement—a passing induced by the pressure of a powerful family, say—for an endogenous one, and to respond with the non-action proper to the first axis, is to leave the dyad undefended against an incursion, to "let be" what is in fact an invasion, and so to acquiesce in the breaching of the core. To mistake an endogenous estrangement—the necessary winter of a living bond—for an exogenous threat, and to respond with the action proper to the second axis, is to mount a defence against the bond's own life, to force throughput during replenishment, to attack as a malfunction what is a fluctuation. The differential diagnosis is what assigns each passing to its axis; it is the indispensable first act, and the etiology's deepest practical value is that it makes the diagnosis possible.

15.3 Practice toward endogenous estrangement: the labour of letting-be

Where the diagnosis returns an endogenous estrangement—one of the internal causes, a passing that issues from the dyad's own code, prediction, or geometry—the governing posture is the non-action of the first axis. But non-action is not nothing; it is a definite labour, and a subtractive one, with concrete forms keyed to the internal causes.

Against the unattributable error of §4, the practice is the *suspension of judgment*: when persistent deviation cannot be attributed, to decline the high-confidence attribution to the other's character ("they have changed," "they no longer care") in favour of holding the error open—to treat it as possible mistranslation or noise rather than as proven defection. This is the direct practical correlate of causes four through six, and it is subtractive: the work is to *withhold* the premature attribution that would convert a fluctuation into a verdict.

Against the arrested loop of §5, the practice is the *refusal to force closure*: to allow the estranged phase to exist without demanding its immediate resolution, to recognise the winter as winter (§14) and refrain from the anxious forcing of throughput that prevents replenishment. Here the practice is to identify "this is a dormant phase" and to cease applying the pressure —"we must be well again now"—that would disturb the gathering of force.

Against the negative curvature of §5.3, the practice is the *preservation of positive curvature*: to refrain, during the estranged phase, from the irreversible acts—the unrecallable word, the unretractable threat of exit—that deposit fresh scar tissue in the geometry and make the next loop harder to lift. What is to be restrained in the winter is not feeling but *irreversible action*: the bond can survive almost any passing that does not, in its passing, lay down curvature the next return cannot cross.

15.4 Practice toward exogenous estrangement: the labour of active defence

Where the diagnosis returns an exogenous estrangement—one pressed upon the dyad from the field of power—the posture inverts. Here non-action is acquiescence, and the second axis

governs: the work is the active defence of the core's conditions against the incursion, conducted with the filtered IR strategies of §8.

Against the withdrawal-threat of the powerful elder (cause 13), the practice is *de-leveraging*: the reduction of the dyad's dependence on resources the external power can withdraw, so that the threat of withdrawal loses its coercive force—the building of an economic and social base independent of the periphery's grant. Against the forced binary that the inseparability of identity makes catastrophic (cause 16), the practice is *hedging*: the refusal to be driven into balancing-against or bandwagoning-with the beloved's family, the maintenance of a third position that defends the dyad's autonomy without demanding the partner break their own bond. Against the borrowed sword (cause 12), the practice is the *boundary-work of self-legislation*: the substitution, for appeals to external authority to adjudicate the bond, of the dyad's own internally legislated commitment—the function the series assigned to the non-binding vow, here serving as the core's defence against a periphery that would otherwise legislate for it.[28] And against the inseparability of identity itself (cause 16), the most difficult practice is *reverse domestication*: not the zero-sum opposition of the powerful elder, which would wound the partner and likely fail, but the patient transformation, over time, of an external power-relation into a relation drawn toward the generative—the slow conversion of the periphery's power-over into something nearer power-to.

These two labours—the letting-be toward endogenous estrangement and the active defence toward exogenous—exhaust the response to estrangement as such. But the suppression of freezing is wider than the response to any particular passing; it is a standing task, internal as well as external, and it has a repertoire of its own. To that repertoire, and to the dialectical principle that governs how its internal and external parts are weighted, the section now turns.

15.5 The internal repertoire of counter-power, and its dialectical weighting

The suppression of freezing requires a repertoire of counter-power practices internal to the dyad—and, first, a principled answer to a question the paper's emphasis has so far left implicit. The practical chapters have weighted the external far more heavily than the internal: most of the active defence just described concerns the periphery. Is this a neglect of internal domination? It is not, and the justification is dialectical (§11).

The dialectical weighting of the contradiction. That the praxis weights the external more than the internal is not an oversight but a judgment about the *principal aspect of the contradiction*. The freezing of power has its principal aspect, in most bonds and most of the time, at the periphery: internal power is dilute and continually metabolised by the generative logic, while the dense, structural, least-metabolised power comes from outside (the external causes are seven of the etiology's sixteen, and the most destructive among them). But the principal and secondary aspects *transform*: when a dyad's interior itself begins to freeze—one party losing subjecthood, roles ossifying, dissent disappearing—the principal aspect shifts inward, and the internal repertoire becomes primary. The differential diagnosis (§15.2) therefore judges not

[28] On the non-binding vow as internally legislated commitment—the dyad's self-legislation in the absence of an external enforcing authority—see Wanhong [19]; in the present context it operates as the boundary-work that defends the core against exogenous power.

only endogenous-versus-exogenous cause but the present location of the principal aspect; and the weighting of practice follows the principal contradiction, whose location is itself historical and mobile.

The internal repertoire, deployed when the principal aspect lies within, comprises a recognisable family of practices, each opposing a specific mode of internal freezing, and each connecting to a concept the paper has already established. *The preservation of subjecthood* opposes *dependence*: the retention of independent friendships, independent work, independent paths of growth and judgment, not for the sake of separateness but so that the relation retains more than one source of power—the micro-practice of keeping difference alive against its dissolution (§9.3). *The practice of dissent* opposes *silence*: the maintenance of the capacity to say no, to hold a different view of the future, to reopen a settled rule—dissent functioning as the relation's immune system, since a system in which no contrary voice remains is one in which power accumulates unchecked; this is the internal form of the right to justification (§8.4). *Role fluidity* opposes *ossification*: the refusal to let the division of labour—who earns, who cares, who decides—harden into fixed roles, since fixed roles generate fixed power; not mechanical exchange but maintained mobility. *Meta-communication* opposes *hidden power*: the capacity to discuss not the decision but the *rule* by which decisions are made—to ask who decides, why thus, whether otherwise—dragging into the answerable the power that hides in defaults; this is the practice nearest the paper's theory, a standing audit of the power-structure itself. *Third-space practice* opposes *dyadic monopoly*: the joint service of a generative process beyond the two—a shared work, a project, a thing made together—so that the relation does not revolve solely on the axis of control-and-being-controlled, which is the practical form of co-authorship around a shared vacancy rather than around each other (§10). *External connectivity* opposes *the closed system*: friends, community, mentors, peers, functioning not only as resources of life but as resources of *balance*, the civil society of the bond that prevents it from becoming a sealed kingdom—which is why the boundary must be semi-permeable (cause 17), the same permeability that admits the noise admitting also the air. And *re-contracting* opposes *institutional rigidity*: the periodic reopening of the relation's own rules—are we still of this mind? is this rule still right?—so that the rules themselves retain generativity rather than freezing, the limiting contract of the series here kept living by its own renegotiation.

The internal counter-power principle. The internal practices share one principle: counter-power within the dyad does not eliminate power—impossible among symbolic subjects—but continually creates the conditions under which power can be *seen, questioned, and redistributed*. This is the temporal-internal form of the political economy of conditions (§7): like all the paper's practices, it creates conditions rather than producing the end directly. To preserve subjecthood, to keep dissent alive, to fluidify roles, to make rules discussable, to build a third space and an external web, to re-contract: each keeps a channel of power open to view and to revision, and none of them manufactures the love whose conditions they keep.

15.6 The dual-register practice, and the category-error caveat

Drawing the two summits into practice, the suppression of freezing and the cultivation of generative asymmetry operate in both registers the paper has held apart. In the *real*, counter-power is the circling of the shared vacancy rather than of each other (§10), and the standing symmetry of the right to withdraw—the ontological fact that neither party can be wholly possessed, cause six read now as a safeguard rather than a wound: a subject one cannot finally predict is a subject one cannot finally dominate. In the *symbolic*, counter-power is the repertoire just given—meta-communication, dissent, the right to justification, hedging, the self-legislated vow as the bond's anti-freezing charter, refusing any party the position of sole legislator over the other.

But the whole repertoire stands under one caveat, and the section fixes it before closing, for without it the practices invert into the error the paper most warns against. *Every practice named here belongs to the level of means.* The seven internal practices, the filtered external strategies, the dual-register counter-power—all of them tend the fence; none of them is the bloom, and none can produce it. A couple that executed the entire repertoire mechanically, perfectly, while no real coupling lived beneath it, would be performing the maintenance of conditions over a void—which is exactly forged trust (§2.1, 19): the apparatus immaculate, the substance gone. The practices are effective only as the tending of conditions for a generativity that is actually present; turned into a substitute for that generativity, into a technique for manufacturing it, they decohere the very thing they were meant to protect. The praxis is a gardening, not a fabrication; and a gardener who mistook the tending for the growing would tend an empty bed with great precision.

15.7 Mixed estrangement, and the ledger of time

A last realism qualifies the clean division of the foregoing. Real estrangements are seldom purely endogenous or purely exogenous; they are typically entangled (causes 17 and 18), an external pressure inducing an internal withdrawal, a peripheral power exploiting an internal mismatch, so that the differential diagnosis is rarely a single verdict and more often a weighting of intertwined causes. And the bond keeps a ledger (§5.3): each estrangement and each repair deposits curvature, so that the practice cannot be a series of independent interventions but must be understood as acting on a system with memory, in which today's response bends the geometry through which tomorrow's loop will run. There is, accordingly, no once-and-for-all solution, no settlement that would discharge the task—for a settlement that discharged it would be the equilibrium that is death. The possibility of the enriched return—the spiral, the □ of a renewed coupling—is not secured by any final intervention but kept open, perpetually, at the confluence of two things the praxis can supply: a diagnosis that correctly assigns each passing to its axis, and a response that meets it with the posture that axis demands. Where the diagnosis is right and the posture is right, the conditions of return are kept; and keeping them, perpetually and without the rest that would be death, is the whole of what a praxis of the two axes can do.

16 Conclusions: A Polyphony, Not a System

The paper has held three theories to a single object and must, in closing, resist the temptation that besets every paper that has used more than one framework: to crown them with a fourth that subsumes the three. The discipline announced at the outset, and carried throughout the series, forbids it. There is to be no master-framework into which the generative-relational, the international-relational, and the dialectical-materialist are dissolved. They are to be left in their plurality, each having spoken to the edge of what it can say, and the conclusion is to be a polyphony, not a system. What can be done is to state, without synthesising them, what each has said, and to mark where each has reached its limit and handed the question on.

16.1 What the three voices said

The generative-relational voice answered the first question—*how love creates a world*—and, taking its affirmative findings as established, the paper added the etiology of their failure: the four layers through which the world-creating coupling breaks down into estrangement, traced from the mismatch of trust-grammars, through the unattributability of prediction error and the active withdrawal it triggers, to the arrest of geometric phase. Its limit was reached at the dyad's edge: the internal causes do not exhaust the field, and the voice handed the question to a theory of the field.

The international-relational voice answered the second question—*how love is not destroyed by power*—once it had been reconstructed away from its realist core, its object recovered as the building of order among opaque subjects under no authority. It supplied the gradient of power and the mechanism of regime bleeding, the inventory of defensive strategies and the teleological filter that admits or forbids them, and the two summits: that power must be kept from freezing, and that power, kept liquid and suffused with trust, is among the conditions of the good. Its limit was the limit of all symbolic means: it could tend the conditions of love and never reach the love, and it handed to a theory of history the question of how the conditions themselves came to be, and might be changed.

The dialectical-materialist voice answered the third question—*how love becomes free within history*—by showing the power-structures of a bond to be the sediment of material conditions, historically formed and so historically mutable, and a union to be the sublation of two material histories into a shared form that keeps their difference alive. Its limit was the relative autonomy of the very life it studied: it could explain the conditions of love's dynamics but not the dynamics, and it handed back, to the real it could not reach, the love that material conditions make room for but do not produce.

16.2 What was held in common

Three voices, three answers, three limits—and one object that all three approached and none could seize. This is the paper's governing finding, and it is worth stating as the thing the polyphony harmonises on without collapsing into unison. Each voice, at its limit, handed the question on *in the same direction*: toward the real, the unsymbolisable dynamics of love, which each theory could protect, condition, or historicise, but none could produce or touch. The two-level structure is what the three voices share. They are, all three, theories of the means—of the

fence—and the bloom they ring is the one thing none of them grows. The unity of the paper is not a unity of doctrine but a unity of *restraint*: three powerful theories, each falling silent at the same threshold, each leaving intact the space that no theory enters.

And running through all three, crossing the threshold none of them could cross, was trust —cultivable by symbolic means and rooted in the real, the interface by which the tending of conditions reaches toward the bloom, and the variable that decides, on both summits, whether an asymmetry empowers or dominates, whether a return lifts or repeats. If the paper has a single thread, it is the one named in its title between power and estrangement: trust is what the means can tend and what the end requires, the one thing that belongs to both levels, and so the bridge across a divide the paper otherwise insists cannot be bridged.

16.3 Two seeds, deliberately unplanted

Two questions opened in the course of the argument exceed the bond, and the paper marks them as the seeds of separate works rather than forcing them into this one. The first is the universalisation of the negative summit: that the law requiring a generative system to hold itself incompletely captured by its own products yields, raised to a political body, a criterion of evaluation—whether a body generates, alongside its value, the counter-force that keeps its own power from freezing, with its lines of flight guarded rather than absorbed. Its relations to the theories of non-domination, of agonistic plurality, of the right to justification, and of generative justice [4] are a work of political philosophy in their own right, and the paper leaves them deliberately unplanted. The second is the full demarcation between the present account and the relational theory of world politics [14], with which it shares the conception of power-to and from which it diverges in its holonomic criterion, its grounding in the real, and its ontological account of the counter-force—a demarcation sketched here (§6.5) and owed a fuller treatment elsewhere.

16.4 The first claim, restated where it now stands

It remains to restate the paper's first claim from the height the whole argument has reached, for it means more now than it could at the outset. Estrangement—*surechigai*, the passing-without-meeting—is not, in the first instance, the failure of a bond. It is the signature of a system held far from the equilibrium that would be its death; the necessary fluctuation of anything alive enough to generate; the first negation without which there is no enriched return; the price difference pays for refusing to be wholly encoded, as desire refuses to be wholly symbolised. A bond that never passed would not be a bond perfected but a bond at equilibrium—which is to say, no longer a bond at all. The deepest practical wisdom the paper can offer is therefore also its gentlest: that much of what is mourned as the failure of love is the form love takes in a living system, and that the love which can tell the necessary winter from the genuine wrong —and meet each with the posture it asks—is a love that has understood the spiral.

Envoi

Return, now, to the two bodies of the opening, falling toward one another across the dark field and passing without meeting. We can say, at the end, what could only be shown at the beginning. They pass because they are two, and their two-ness is not the obstacle to what they generate between them but its condition; a love in which one had captured the other entirely would be a love in which one body no longer fell. The passing is not the failure of the falling. It is the sign that both are still in motion, still themselves, still alive to the difference that draws them and bends them and will, if the field is kept and the root left undisturbed through the cold, draw them near again—not to where they were, but lifted.

The forces in the field do not fall away. The families keep what they keep; the scripts go on being written; the two material histories go on contending in the one present they now share. The paper has not promised a clearing. It has argued, instead, that beneath the forces and through them, two people may tend the conditions of a thing the forces cannot reach—may keep the channel clear, guard against the freezing, refuse the irreversible word in winter, and wait, as a gardener waits, on a blooming they serve but cannot command. And it has argued that the power among them, which cannot be wished away and cannot be abolished, need not be only the enemy of their love: that an asymmetry turned toward the other's flourishing, and suffused with trust, is how the deepest goods between two people—the teaching, the tending, the leading-without-ruling—are generated at all.

To her, then, who remained through every passing wholly and freely herself: this account of why the passing was never the failure, and of the winters that were only ever the gathering of the next return. The flower drawn down into the root has not died. It is keeping faith, in the season that shows nothing, with the spring.

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